

# Silverton Country Historical Society

Museum and Office 428 South Water Street



## The Coolidge-Parkinson House

By Fred A. Parkinson

(Thanks to Tracy Duerst for use of 1924 era photos)

Silverton is a town of contrasts, especially when observing the state of its architecture. Long established neighborhoods, such as one in the Geiser addition off James Street, contain few homes newer than eighty years old. Conversely, the neighborhood bordered on two sides by Ike Mooney Road comprises homes that are mostly less than ten years old. Most areas have generally older buildings with newer dwellings sprinkled about, as evidenced on South Water Street. This diversity insures that Silverton will retain its small town charm. Much of this allure revolves around the stately old homes that still exist in town. Two fine examples of this include the Adams house on West Main Street and the Allen house on Pine St. Another noteworthy home is celebrating the centennial of its construction. This home is the residence at 301 West Main St., constructed by Eva Coolidge in 1912 and, for the last forty-five years, owned by Fred and Nola Parkinson.

At its most basic level, a house is merely a mixed collection of construction materials thrown together in a



House soon after construction.

certain pattern at a fixed point in time. A house becomes a home when viewed through the eyes of the numerous families who have lived in it over the years. The Coolidge/Parkinson house, identified as such here to commemorate the original builder, as well as the family that has lived in the house for close to half of its existence, is a home with a distinguished past. In its early stages it housed those instrumental to the economic development of Silverton and in later years it housed an ever-expanding family. It is large enough to remain a central gathering place at holidays and other family get-togethers, yet it is eminently livable for two people. Construction began in 1912 and concluded in 1913. It was built by Eva Coolidge,

daughter of Ai Coolidge, a pioneer Silverton businessman for many decades. It occupied three lots just east of the large farmhouse occupied by her father. He was a co-founder of Coolidge and McClaine Bank, an intrepid financial institution which occupied a place of prominence at the corner of First and Main Streets for many years. Mr. Coolidge passed away in 1908 and shortly thereafter, his daughter Eva became president of Coolidge and McClaine Bank, the only woman bank president in Oregon at the time.

The house is quite large, rising two and a half stories on the corner of West Main and Coolidge Streets, and also includes a full basement. The first floor contained the kitchen, powder room, formal dining room, living room (which spans the entire depth of the house on the east side), and a sun room, located off the living room, with a unique coved ceiling and windows that extend around three sides to let in an abundance of light. The sun room also had a set of French doors that opened directly to the front porch. The second floor contained four bedrooms, including the master bedroom with bath, and another bath. The third (attic) floor housed the maid's quarters. It contained a main bedroom, a small sitting room and a full bath.

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The house contained many unique amenities, including a butler's pantry, a preparation and storage space, between the kitchen and dining room. This small space contained a dumb waiter that could carry wood between the basement and first floor. A laundry chute ran from the second floor to the basement, with a stop at the butler's pantry. A central vacuum cleaning system was also added.

The formal dining room had a beamed ceiling and contained a foot operated bell control that, when pressed, would summon the maid from the kitchen. The room also featured a unique curved buffet, built-in under a bay window. The ornate three-sided bay window was comprised of hundreds of small panes of leaded, beveled glass that would split the afternoon sun into a prism, casting colors of the rainbow through the dining room and into the living room. Between the living and sun rooms were two leaded glass features. The first was an inside window and the other was a set of French doors, opening from the living room into the sun room. Back-to-back fireplaces graced these two rooms as well.



The kitchen, typical of its day, was an average sized room tasked primarily with food preparation and storage. Noteworthy off the kitchen was a so-called "cold room", a pantry with extremely thick walls containing two or three plywood layers with sawdust in between each layer for added insulation. Before the days of refrigeration, blocks of ice for cooling would be brought into the cold room through the window on the porch just off the kitchen. The pantry door to the kitchen was about six inches thick.



Dining Room Buffet.

All four bedrooms on the second floor had closets with built in drawers and three of those closets had mirrored doors and outside windows in them, a unique touch. Also on the second floor was one of the most distinctive, yet perplexing, features of the home. It was an uncovered porch, running along the entire width of the house at the rear. It is unknown why, in light of the damp Pacific Northwest climate, this open-air porch was included in the initial design. This porch is identifiable in the photo below (L).



West side of house during Woodard years-1924.



House showing enclosed upper porch and 1994 addition

In connection with the porch is perhaps the most unusual feature found in any house at any time. A bedroom on the opposite side of the wall at the east end of the porch contained a Murphy bed that, when lowered into the room, could then be slid out through the wall to the open porch on the outside. The person using it could decide to sleep either inside or "under the stars" depending on his or her whim. The bed was on rails so it could be slid quickly back into the bedroom in inclement weather.

Eva Coolidge never married, so why did she build such a large house for one person? The answer no doubt is because, being from a wealthy family, she could. Another, perhaps more notable reason, is she wanted room for all the extended family who would visit from time to time. There are accounts of her

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sister's children and other relatives spending time at "Aunt Eva's" house. Miss Coolidge died suddenly in 1919, of a brain aneurism, a couple of months prior to her 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Interestingly enough, her obituary in the Silverton Appeal indicated her funeral was held at her home on West Main and not in a church.

The house was ultimately sold to the Myron Woodard family in 1920. Myron Woodard was the founder and President of the Silver Falls Timber Co, which was a leading economic engine for Silverton in the 1920's, 1930's, and into the 1940's, before it shut down in approximately 1945. It was during this time that the home underwent the first of two major exterior changes. The upstairs back porch was enclosed and a roof put on to make it weatherproof. It then became known as the sleeping porch. The slide-out bed was undoubtedly removed at this point.

Mr. Woodard relocated his office to Portland around 1937 and thus the house he had lived in for seventeen years, went, in a partial real estate trade, to his Silver Falls Sales Manager, H.W. Preston. As the Woodards had already relocated to Portland, the house they traded for, at 206 Coolidge Street, was then rented to a local family.

For the next seventeen years the Preston family occupied the home. It turned into a sort of neighborhood hangout. There are stories of kids from the neighborhood socializing at the Preston house while playing cards, playing pool, or just listening to the radio. They were able to do this because of a major interior alteration to the house. The basement contained a large open area that the Prestons framed in and enclosed in knotty pine paneling, creating a game room of sorts. Combine that new space with easy access down to the basement from the outside, without bothering parents upstairs, and one can visualize how the place turned into the social destination it became. According to Preston's son, Tim, his dad once said words to the effect "if it weren't for the kids being able to come to our house to meet, many of them would have ended up in prison....." As it turned out, Tim sometimes went up, rather than down, to avoid bothering the parents. He related recently that when he would be out late with friends "socializing" (our word, not his), he could get back into his bedroom, unnoticed, by climbing up the large wisteria vine that led to a window on the sleeping porch.

In 1954 the house was sold to the F.E Chalfan family, who lived in it for six years. Mr Chalfan worked in the timber industry as did Woodard and Preston before him. During this time the Coolidge Street neighborhood was filling with young families. While not necessarily the intense social hub the Preston house was, neighborhood kids regularly played with the Chalfan kids. Several residents of that era remember the Chalfan's Doberman Pincer dogs that would regularly greet them through the window as they walked by the house.

The home sold for the fourth time in 1960. The first six years of the 1960's included two more owners, the David Holmes family and the Paul DeShaw family. Dave Holmes was a local physician and the DeShaws were restaurant entrepreneurs.

Finally, in 1967, the house was sold to Fred and Nola Parkinson, who have lived in the home for forty-five years, as of this writing. Parkinson was a pharmacy owner on Oak Street for over forty years and was elected both mayor and state representative during the 1970's and 1980's.

The mid-1990's saw the second major exterior change to the house. As the twentieth century matured, kitchens evolved from a purely functional part of a house to becoming more of a social hub. In 1994, to make the kitchen more livable, a major addition to the house was built on the west side, constructed to match the style of the sun room on the opposite side of the house.



Coolidge-Parkinson House—2012

The butler’s pantry between the kitchen and dining room was removed and the whole area expanded out to form a large kitchen, eating area, and family room, with a wooden deck attached. This addition also included a full basement, complete with another outside entrance, which provided additional storage.

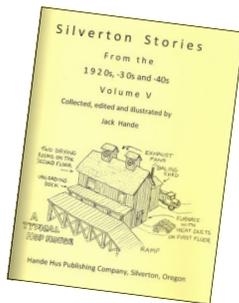
One question often asked is “what architectural style is the house?” At various times, the house has been referred to as Craftsman, Colonial Revival, California Cottage, and Edwardian. The most likely style is American Foursquare. This style includes many design elements found in the home: full two-story mass in a boxed shape; low pitched, hipped roof with wide overhangs; center hipped dormer; full width front porch with wide overhangs and wide stairs; short square porch columns on massive piers; and grouped window placement with either a centered or an off-centered entrance. The confusion perhaps stems from the fact that a foursquare design often incorporates, to varying degrees, design elements from other styles. For example, the house has a pediment over a small portico at the center of the front porch, obviously a colonial revival influence. It also has strong horizontal lines, influenced by the Prairie style. Also, in addition to mixing design elements, there is some controversy as to whether “foursquare” is an architectural “style” or just a “type,” which could be considered as one element, among several, that make up the various styles.

Ultimately, the architectural style of a house is really doesn’t matter. It’s the numerous interesting families who have occupied the house for the last one hundred years that have made it almost a living entity. In fact, the house today contains a placard in the family room that reads: “If these walls could talk.” Let’s see..... banker, timber men, physician, entrepreneur, pharmacist.....hmmm.....



(Left) Gus Frederick signs copies of his publication, *Cartoons by Davenport*, 2nd Edition, at the Museum during Homer Davenport Days. There are still a few copies available at the Museum. Price \$20.

Local Historian and SCHS member, Jack Hande has published his 5th volume of *Silverton Stories from the 1920’s, -30’s and -40’s*. The publication, the largest in the series, contains the writings of 81 different local authors from Silverton sharing their stories of growing up in Silverton. The Museum will have copies for sale for \$22.



What keeps our Museum going? Volunteers like Carolyn Hutton, Robin Anderson and Shelly Vandehey work on preserving items for the Museum’s collection. Norm English paints the front steps of the museum. You can join us!! Contact us at (503) 873-7070 or [silverton.museum@live.com](mailto:silverton.museum@live.com)



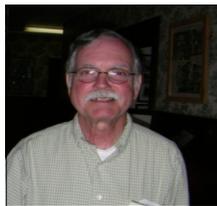
Volunteers Opportunities at Your Museum.....

- Hosts to serve **one 3-hour session** a month at the Museum
- Members willing to serve on the Museum’s Program Committee

No experience required—just a desire to share the story of Silverton with anyone who cares.

Contact the Museum at 503-873-7070 or [silverton.museum@live.com](mailto:silverton.museum@live.com)

Thank you!!

*From The President. . .***Something old, something new...**

Our museum is an effective combination of old and new. Not only does our display contain many, many items that have a basic historical flavor or a definite Silverton connection, but we've incorporated a number of modern touches to our facility, such as the following:

- A] The recently added accessway that connects two very historical structures from the early 1900's into one very useable facility for most of our display,
- B] The current re-painting of the depot and the replacing and painting of the front steps,
- C] Landscaping of the grounds,
- D] New signage, including the elevation sign on the front of the depot,
- E] Computer technology and software programs to keep track of our collection and to produce a really great monthly newsletter,
- F] Alarm and camera system to help protect our facility and collection.

These are just some of the 'new' items that help make our 'old' facility a great place for those in the larger community to celebrate a piece of their heritage, where one has the opportunity to look in on Silverton's first 150+ years of existence. Where it is possible to view photographs and stories of:

- 1] Polly Crandall Coon, who had her late husband's donation land claim on the banks of Silver Creek surveyed and laid out as downtown Silverton back in 1854;
- 2] Homer Davenport, born on a farm outside Silverton in 1867, who became a renowned political cartoonist for Hearst newspapers and helped elect presidents and expose the corruption of his day through his drawings from the 1890's until his death in 1912;
- 3] Silver Falls Timber Company, the very successful logging and lumbering operation, that was in business from about 1916 through the end of World War II;
- 4] Fischer Flouring Mills, whose facility was located on Silver Creek from about 1854 through 1932;
- 5] Local photographer June Drake, who captured the life and times of nearly all things Silverton and the immediate surrounding area for close to 60 years.

Our Traveling Museum Display in August was in front of Radio Shack, where Tom & Marsha Worthen greeted interested folks on First Friday, showcasing Homer Davenport. In September, we were set up at the Green Store, and items from our schoolroom were on display. If any of you are interested in volunteering to host future displays, please let me know.

Norm

*Silverton Country Museum - History in the Making*

(L) Volunteer Ruth Kaser helps host SCHS's Coin Toss Booth at Homer Davenport Days in Coolidge-McClaine Park this past August.

(R) Ray and Kathy Hunter at the Booth encouraging a customer at the August festival.





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And **Thank you** for this additional donation!  
Ed Sumpter (Sequim, Washington)

**If you received an overdue notice with your newsletter, we appreciate your prompt response.**

**Thank you!**