

Poe Herden / Wilson

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Mansion by the Bay about to turn 100

The owner is asking members of the public to share their memories about the Victorian building.

By JON WILSON

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ST. PETERSBURG -- Here's a rare item for a relatively young city:

A downtown building, still bustling as it approaches its 100th anniversary.

Mansion by the Bay, a lunch spot and reception venue that once was an early St. Petersburg mayor's home, hits the century mark next year.

Owner Midge Trubey wants to mark the occasion with displays and special events. She'll put together scrapbooks. And she is asking the public to share their memories about the Victorian structure.

"We want people with the knowledge to come forward, so we get the history straight," she said.

The building has had several identities: Built in 1901 for Albert Blocker, mayor from 1910 to 1911, the building later was a Shrine Club. It subsequently was known as the International Club, then was transformed into a nursing home and finally housed a school of dance.

Trubey opened Mansion by the Bay in 1989 as a banquet and reception hall, then bought the building in 1993. This year she opened a lunch buffet, which typically serves about 100 people daily Monday through Friday.

A native of St. Petersburg, Trubey has operated Personal Touch catering and florist business since 1977. Her family has memories of the spot dating from at least the 1930s. Her uncle **Poe Herden** performed at the Shrine Club as a member of the YMCA tumbling team.

"When they would leap and roll and land, the floor would spring back and forth and the dishes would rattle," said **Betty Herden**, his wife.

The couple held their wedding reception in the building in 1937. After being tipped that Poe Herden's ATO fraternity brothers were going to kidnap them, the bride and groom went out the back way.

"When we got into the alley, lights came on at both ends of it. We were sure we were trapped," said Mrs. Herden.

"At the time, I was getting ready to teach at the Aiken Open Air School, where Presbyterian Towers is now. We cut across into that yard and stayed in a little playhouse for a long time. We could see cars going around the block."

The Herdens eluded the pranksters, but the episode helped cement their memories of the reception venue.

Trubey welcomes any such recollections involving the building. They don't have to have a humorous side or any other theme. Photos are encouraged and will be returned, Trubey said.

"People say, 'I wonder,' " Trubey said. "And you do, you wonder what went on in this house. What happened here? If people can tell me bits and pieces of history, we can share them with our customers, because we get asked all the time."

Trubey said she will plan several events during 2001 that will focus on the anniversary. Her daughter Melanie Trubey is in charge of the displays and other visual aspects, which may include such things as photo essays on luncheon place mats.

- Mail photos and written material to Personal Touch, 8800 Fourth St. N, St. Petersburg, FL33702. Send e-mail to Mansioninfo@yahoo.com.