

Gables upgrade project serves needs of disabled at library site

By Elizabeth Whitney



Photo by Elizabeth Whitney

Inverness Library patron Barbara Whitt recently enjoyed the fully retrofitted Gables building which now meets the American for Disability Access standards.

THE GABLES EXISTS IN THE HEART of Inverness in more ways than one. It is the historic building a block off Sir Francis Drake that houses the Inverness Library and the Jack Mason Museum exhibit room. Inverness Garden Club volunteers lovingly tend the grounds around it and the Museum mounts regular exhibits in the reading room adjacent to the library. And, as of this month, the building meets federal, state and county ADA (Americans with Disability Act) requirements for handicapped accessibility. All this is because the Inverness Association and Foundation has made the Gables an all-important project since 1985.

In 1985 the Inverness Foundation, the non-profit wing of the Inverness Association, created a capital campaign to purchase it from the Jack Mason estate and created a plan to remodel it to accommodate the Inverness Library. At the time, the conversion from a home into a library space was challenging enough, and on December 7, 1986, the Gables new life as the home of the Inverness Library was celebrated as “An achievement of the

Inverness Foundation, the Marin County Public Library and the Citizens and Friends of the Inverness Community.”

In 2006 came the news that in order to continue with the library as its tenant, the building would have to comply with federal, state and county ADA regulations. A parcel tax had passed giving the county funds to improve its libraries and disability access was a priority. The responsibility for improving the building belonged to the landlord and the responsibility for the interior to the tenant.

The IA/IF Board began the task of shepherding this project. Board members came and went as the project inched along through various stages, including changes in county personnel and refinements of ADA regulations. Retrofitting the Gables for ADA compliance was a challenge for an historic building that everyone valued for its charm and integrity.

Early on, an architect was hired to draw up plans, but by the time the work was looming on the “to do” horizon, these plans were revealed to be inadequate to the task. In 2006 Inverness Park contractor Terence Jevitt of Staar Design Services was hired to commence the project in earnest with new plans and a sophisticated understanding of how to work with the various overseers at the county. At the same time, input from the library staff, particularly veteran librarian Nancy Hemmingway, added other more personal elements to the process.

The kitchen nook and bathroom needed to be redesigned for handicapped access but also had to remain a useful and pleasant hospitality center for all users: the library, the Sunday Serenity Group and the Jack Mason Museum’s events and openings. Jevitt proved to be the brilliant wizard who forged everyone’s needs into one coherent plan and physical activity began in earnest in August 2012. As of mid-March 2013, Phase I, the retrofit to the physical building, is complete. Phase II, remodeling the internal space, is the responsibility of the tenant, the county library, system, and once again Jevitt will be on the job, this time for a new boss.

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Photo by Elizabeth Fenwick

The newly improved driveway/parking/access area at the rear of the library, with Baily’s Cottage (museum archives) seen at left.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

AFTER YEARS OF PLANNING and a superb effort by our contractor, Terry Jevitt, and our building coordinator, Julie Monson, the ADA retrofit of the building housing the Inverness Library is complete. The successful remodeling of the Gables is another wonderful chapter in the continuing IA legacy of forging a better future for the Inverness community. The list of similar accomplishments by far-sighted Inverness residents is long and extraordinary. It was Inverness residents who saved Shell, Indian and Heart's Desire beaches from development. It was the vision of Inverness residents that led to the Point Reyes National Seashore and the saving of Chicken Ranch Beach. It is the Inverness Association that maintains the wonderful network of trails and bridges that winds through town. And it was the efforts of Inverness residents that brought fruition to Jack Mason's vision to save the Gables and have a museum. We hope Jack would be proud of what his house has become.

One of the most amazing things in this endeavor is that the Inverness Foundation had the money to do this work. But these funds need to be replenished. There are troublesome

maintenance topics in the Gables that were not addressed. We will need a new roof at some point, and that will assuredly reveal additional repairs.

It is not just the Gables that needs an infusion of energy. The Inverness Association has a declining membership and a growing budget. We need an infusion of new support. We wonder how many residents know what the Inverness Association does? How many folks know that the Inverness Foundation owns three public parks, a library and museum? We need a serious outreach and information campaign. To that end we have received a generous grant from the West Marin Fund to help us in our fundraising/outreach efforts. (Thank you, Mike Durrie for your grant writing.) We have hired Elisabeth Ptak to help us modernize and focus our outreach efforts. We hope to have an attractive informative website and an up-to-date way to contact and involve the wider Inverness Community in maintaining the wonderful community assets the Inverness Association and Inverness Foundation oversee. Be prepared... we will be calling on you soon!
—Nick Whitney

The Gables *continued from first page*

That's the good news. A long and challenging journey from plan to physicality has been completed with much credit due to Julie Monson of the IA/IF Board who valiantly dove into the thicket of complications and financial oversight during her years as IA President (2010-2012). What started out as a supposed fait accompli with a plan in hand, turned out to be, in her words, "quite the learning experience." In the December 2006 issue of the Bagpiper the IA had reported: "We hope to be able to submit our bids to the county and call for bid from contractors by the end of the summer." It took five years for that to be realized.

Once the project was truly launched it revealed more issues than simply following compliance requirements. The integrity of an historic building was important to all concerned. Rather than replace the front door with a modern door, the original door was taken apart and put back together with the new hardware. Jevitt searched catalogues for hardware that fit the character of an old building. The delicate planning of the back door ramp requiring specified dimensions and turnaround room also had to fit into the new parking plan. There were county personnel at every point looking over the shoulder of the project and new personnel appearing on the stage with fresh oversight enthusiasm. Pretty soon, there wasn't anyone from the original era on the county staff at all, but Jevitt continued his balancing act until all were signed off on the plan.

The issue of budget and scale of project surfaced regularly at meetings of the Inverness Foundation. Soon the ominous words "additional maintenance issues" came up at Inverness Foundation meetings. Sure enough, as remodeling began and the building walls were opened up here and there, vast new problems revealed themselves. A consistent leak attributed to the water heater exposed extensive floor rot in the bathroom/kitchen area. There were roof leaks that rotted sections of the north wall that had to

The Inverness Association and the Inverness Foundation have the same Board of Directors and both meet monthly at the Gables with back-to-back agendas. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and manages the properties it owns among its other responsibilities. Overseeing the Gables upgrade falls under the purview of the Foundation.



Photo by Elizabeth Fenwick

be totally rebuilt along with new windows. Inadequate drainage for the lot as a whole created constant flooding in the basement. Dirt was piled against the north side of the building. The building and the Annex needed new gutters. Now the project had to include critical repairs well beyond ADA.

"No one knew it was as bad as it was, but once you find it, you have to fix it," Julie Monson reported to the Board. With the new work, the bottom line of the original budget of \$75,000 for ADA compliance has become \$140,000 for the additional critical repair issues. The ADA improvements came in within its budget of \$75,000 but the additional critical repairs that came to Jevitt's attention pushed the project to virtually double its scope.

For the present, however, the Inverness Foundation resources are covering the job that Staar construction completed. It meant selling all but \$25,000 of the assets of the Foundation that accrued from the original capital program and community fundraising. As Julie says, "It's time to go back to the community to begin to replenish these assets."

The Gables: an Inverness community center then and now

WHEN ALEXANDER BAILY had his first look at Inverness, it was a wild place. Early buyers of lots for sale beginning in 1889 had started to erect elaborate tents and stamp-sized cabins, while many camped in the grassy valleys by the brooks (Ness and Alder). Baily bought a small lot, built himself a cabin in a pretty meadow and then commenced to build a real house: not of board and batten but with substantial framing and good milled redwood siding. It would become The Gables when he added a parlor and decorated the façade with two additional gables.

Baily is thought to have built The Gables in 1892, with his addition a year or two later. It may have been the first substantial residence in town—perhaps Judge Geary beat him to it across the creek—and came to be a sort of gateway for a period. Baily not only owned and subdivided much of First Valley, he also was the first postmaster, holding court in a tiny log cabin across the dirt road from his house. His long boat pier at the foot of Inverness way was busy all summer.

Relatives and friends made regular pilgrimages to The Gables and all that Inverness had to offer. Baily's descendants continued to come after his death in 1907, and granddaughter Hazel Snell lived in the home full time during the 1940s and '50s. The family sold The Gables to Jack and Jean Mason in 1958 when property was cheap in Inverness. The Masons rented the place out, having other residences that kept them occupied. Both Jean and Jack were old-timers in the Tomales Bay area, she the daughter of the local dentist and with a lifetime of summers spent at his grandmother's on the Mesa.

The Masons moved in for good around 1970, by which time Jack had begun publishing his books on local history. He opened his North Shore Books Museum of Point Reyes History in the Victorian parlor, welcoming guests on weekends who could absorb his ruddy ambiance and sharp sense of humor.

Jack, a widower and in failing health by the mid-1980s, hatched a plan to preserve The Gables after his death. He envisioned a larger Inverness Library—the current one had been noted as perhaps the smallest in the country—and a long life for his beloved museum. With friends at his bedside he got things moving, and shortly after he passed in January 1985 a concerted



The Gables as it appeared in its first form, top, and when finished. (Courtesy of the Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History)

community effort called The Gables Project was up and running.

Eighteen months of fundraising, planning and construction culminated in the opening of the December 1986 new Inverness Library and Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History. Funds included generous local donations, almost \$40,000 from the county, and grants from the Buck Trust totalling \$160,000.

Baily's wild Inverness is a different place today, but his headquarters The Gables continues to serve the community as a busy and irreplaceable "center" 120 years since its construction.

—Dewey Livingston



Photos by Elizabeth Fenwick

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The Inverness Association meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Jack Mason Museum. The agenda is posted in advance on our website:
www.invernessassociation.org

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Celebration was in order this week when Inverness librarian Nancy Hemmingway served long-time patron Barbara Whitt a fresh dose of mystery novels. Barbara found her wheelchair got her easily in and out and throughout the library thanks to the completion of ADA compliance work on the physical building. IA Board member Julie Monson, who shepherded the retrofit project through many hurdles, shared the happy moment. Further rearrangements within the library to be taken on by the county will complete the task. (Photo by Elizabeth Whitney)

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