

Treadwell – Yesterday and Today

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Most people with a passing knowledge of Juneau history know that the Treadwell Mine on Douglas Island played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Juneau-Douglas community.

A little more than a century ago Treadwell was the site of the largest gold mining operation in existence. In its time, the Treadwell Mine had no equal in terms of state-of-the-art mining technology and annual yield. Today, the passage of years and intensive vegetative growth allow only a glimpse of the staggering scale of this historic enterprise.

The Treadwell Historic Preservation and Restoration Society, Inc., established in 2008 to stabilize and preserve the existing structures and foundations on the Treadwell site, revels in telling the Treadwell story.

Our first historic preservation project, completed in 2013, stabilized the iconic salt water pump house, anchored in the Gastineau Channel at the end of the long-gone wooden wharf. Our second – and final major preservation project – the office building - is currently underway.

If walls, floors and roofs could talk...

The Treadwell Mine's original office was located inside the company store which opened in 1886. Because of cramped and outdated conditions, planning for a new office building began in 1912. Constructed in 1914 adjacent to the store and its two concrete vaults, this "new" office building was a two-story 72' x 24' concrete structure that cost about \$15,000. It housed a drafting room and mine management offices for twenty-five employees – engineers, accountants, clerks and bookkeepers and in 1915, one woman – the mine manager's secretary.

The office building was just one of about 144 structures in Treadwell in 1915. Thanks to its concrete construction, it, along with the salt water pump house were the only built structures to survive the inferno of 1926. (Remember, Douglas burned three times - in 1911, 1926 and 1937.)

Many historic sites are plagued by three conditions: overgrown vegetation, vandalism and deterioration. It was inevitable that the abandoned office building would eventually fall victim to both adverse weather and vandalism. Taku winds regularly roar through the former townsite and over the years, pieces of rusted roofing would tear free from the failing structure, posing a danger to trail users.

In 2012, the Treadwell Society realized we could no longer neglect to address the safety concerns of a deteriorating metal roof in an area of high winds. After much discussion the Treadwell Society developed a plan to preserve and re-purpose the historic structure.

The Treadwell Society invested \$13,680 on a structural analysis of the then 100-year-old building and through the efforts of Rep. Cathy Munoz was awarded a \$25,000 Legislative grant that funded the engineering, final design, and bid-ready plans to preserve the structure.

Treadwell trailblazer

One of the Treadwell Society's original incorporators was local mining historian David Stone. David's passion for local mining history was legend and played out in his volunteer slide show presentations and walking tours of Treadwell. Prior to his unexpected and untimely death in 2012, and in the last few months of his nine years of service on the CBJ Assembly, David secured \$150,000 from the 2012 one-percent sales tax vote for Treadwell. That money, combined with a Rasmuson grant for \$125,000, has funded the bulk of the preservation work on the office building. Other major contributors include Hecla Greens Creek and Holland America Line, as well as many other local donors.

The project to date – December 2017

The roof has been replaced and the second floor removed. The interior walls will be repaired as the structure is converted to an open-air shelter suitable for public use. Large weatherproof panels will be installed on the inside wall, complementing historic signage already in place in the Park. Plans include a 1915 map of the townsite and historic photos – a few just recently discovered.

The perimeter of the building has been cleared to facilitate preservation work and restore the area to its original non-vegetated state. Now, sunlight streams in, giving our walking tour guides an opportunity to point out where other prominent structures – the assay office, company store, school and boarding house - once stood in the shadow of the office. While the majority of the work is expected to be completed in the spring, the interior panels will likely be installed in late summer.

Derelict no more

Yes, we could have chosen the path of “demolish by neglect.” Instead the Treadwell Society opted for “wise reuse.” Our goal has been to ensure the building’s safety and functionality and provide it a new purpose in keeping with the historic area and the educational and recreational needs of the community. After preservation efforts are complete, minimal maintenance will be required.

This historic preservation project will increase awareness of Treadwell’s rich history for current and future generations. It will provide a venue for school field trips and attract those interested in local history to visit the site. It is a fitting honor to the pioneers who lived in Treadwell and whose families stayed on to build the Juneau Douglas community.