



Search uncovers secrets of Manitou

By LINDA DuVAL - THE GAZETTE

Attics, basements and garages in Manitou Springs recently have yielded hidden historic treasures.

Findings include boarded-up jail cells excavated beneath what is now The Hemp Store; a mysterious, untouched cache in the attic of the Shoshone Spring; and an almost unbelievable discovery of original town plats stored in someone's garage.

"We were looking everywhere, doing a survey of what exists along Manitou Avenue," says Kitty Clemens, director of economic development for the city.

"All this research is necessary in order to develop a construction plan we need so we can go to work" on a four-year, \$4 million downtown revitalization project approved by Manitou Springs voters in November.

Phase 1 of the project, which starts this spring, will be the development of the Shoshone Spring into Shoshone Park, which will be the project's focal point.

Shoshone is one of Manitou's original natural springs, and some say the most bitter and the most healing, according to Chuck England, who owned the property and donated it to the city.

Its estimated worth is \$200,000 — most of it being frontage property on Manitou Avenue.

The Spring house is a round red sandstone building with a distinctive conical roof, built about 1900.

It was donated to the city by General Motors, which owned an automobile-testing site there for years.

England discovered "old things" are sitting in the attic of the Spring house, but it's not safe to go up there because the ceiling may not be structurally sound.

"We can see a shoe and some other stuff," he says. "It could just be junk. Who knows?"

The survey also turned up what's thought to be old jail cells under The Hemp Store, 724 Manitou Ave.

The cells apparently were excavated beneath the store during the early 1900s.

They're boarded up and haven't been seen in years. The owner of the building lives in California and hasn't given permission for the area to be explored.

A vacant lot next door once was a fire station, so the cells actually might have been excavated beneath it.

Speculation by several Manitou residents is that a former police chief, who lived and ran a business on that block many decades ago, used them to house prisoners so he wouldn't have to run down to the jail all the time.

The third and most significant find happened in a roundabout way.

Shawn Richards, a senior surveyor with Nolte, the engineering firm that's preparing the redevelopment plans for Manitou's main business district, needed to explore the history of the street.

He asked everyone he could think of — including the City of Manitou Springs and the Colorado Department of Transportation — for the original town plats.

No one could help him. So he went to the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, and the staff suggested he try the Manitou Springs Historical Society at Miramont Castle.

"By this time, I had very little hope of finding anything," Richards says.

He found Bob Yager, a member of the historical society who said he had an old plat book.

Richards went to see Yager, but the plat book wasn't too helpful. Then Yager told him he had a bunch of boxes in his garage with old documents someone had donated to the museum about five years ago.

Pay dirt.

In the boxes were original town plans dating to the 1850s, in badly decayed documents recorded on linen, cotton and vellum, waterdamaged and vandalized by mice and squirrels.

"He called me and he was so excited, he could barely talk," says his boss, Roger Miller of Nolte.

They found right-of-way plans from 1902, as well; exactly the kind of information they needed to complete their survey.

"Before we can do anything, we need to know what obstructions we might find," he says of the project, which will widen sidewalks and make the town more pedestrian-friendly.

They also found drawings for the original plans for Camp Carson, as Fort Carson originally was called, and for other towns in Colorado.

"It's a rare find," he says. "This stuff all belongs in museums."

Yager can't believe he had something so valuable sitting in his garage.

He says the boxes of documents were donated to the museum by Frank Imhoff, who bought them with some surveying equipment at an auction.

"I guess all that stuff was worth keeping," Yager says.

They're still looking for tunnels purported to be under the street, connecting buildings from one side to the other.

Anyone who knows about the history of Manitou Avenue as it pertains to the redevelopment — that is, of underground obstructions or tunnels and such — is asked to contact the redevelopment committee.

Call Kitty Clemens at 321-8561 or visit www.manitouspringsahead.com; or call Shawn Richards at Nolte, 268-8500.

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