

Preservation History of Glen-Isle

Research compiled by Larry Bell

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Like so many, we are fascinated by the history of Glen Isle, and stumbled across some descriptive history in a report from 2008, when the lodge was going through some preservation/upgrades. I thought some others might enjoy reading it....

“Platte Canyon has served as a gateway from the plains to the mountains of what is now Colorado for thousands of years as both animal herds and humans followed the seasons to and from the high country. During the gold rush of 1859, many of the newly settled ranchers set up bed and board for travelers heading to the gold fields and beyond. However, it was the advent of the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad through the canyon that triggered a booming business of hosting hunters, sightseers, fishermen and those seeking a respite from the hot Front Range cities. The railroad constructed resorts all along the line through the Platte Canyon to increase their revenues. Soon other investors quickly followed suit, setting up tiny rail stations in front of their hotels and resorts so guests could disembark and stroll to the shady, comfortable accommodations awaiting them.

Ten Denver businessmen saw the potential of Platte Canyon and, in 1899, met to form the Glen Isle Land Company. While the individual names of the investors have long passed out of knowledge, the result of their vision, Glen Isle on the Platte, still stands virtually unchanged beside the North Fork of the South Platte River, and continues to welcome visitors.

The Glen Isle on the Platte lodge, designed by a now-unknown architect, is a two-and-one-half story wood shingled building in the rustic style that had become popular on the East Coast and quickly spread to the West. It is easily recognizable due to the large turret on the northwest corner of the building facing the highway. The building boasts covered porches on the east, north, and west sides of the building to allow outdoor spaces that were out of the summer rain that frequently occurs during the afternoons in the Colorado mountains. While encompassing the feeling of a return to nature, the resort offered the best accommodations, complete with a Delco electric plant, which powered the tiny electric lights around the lodge, along the bank of the river, and the bridge from the waiting station to the wide front porch - until the generator was turned off at 10 pm. Running water was supplied by a gravity system from a reservoir high on the rocky ridge above the lodge.

The lodge at Glen Isle has always been a seasonal facility, with the only heat provided by four fireplaces served by one central chimney system. There has never been air-conditioning in the building.

The resort encompasses not only the anchoring lodge, but also a number of rustic cabins scattered around the 160-acre heavily forested property. Glen Isle was completed and ready for business by the start of the season in 1901, quickly becoming a gathering place for locals as well as travelers.

While the property changed hands five times in the course of the next twenty years, when Sarah Belle and Arthur Baldwin purchased it from a struggling J. D. Hitch in 1923, the property came into its own. They operated the resort through the decline in railroad tourism and the surge of the automobile travel industry, until their granddaughter and her husband, Barbara and Gordon Tripp, purchased it in 1944. Barbara was born the year the Baldwin's purchased Glen Isle and grew up playing and working in the resort. Gordon, who did most of the maintenance on the place passed away several years ago, but Barbara continues to run the business.

In 1985, the Glen Isle lodge, and a small area encompassing it, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, though the entire property is eligible for designation. Glen Isle is also designated as a Park County Historic Landmark.

Changes – The only major changes to the lodge have been the introduction of conventional electric service in about 1937, and a new well to supply a longer season of water service, unaffected by freezing of the reservoir, installed in 1945.

Routine maintenance kept the building unchanged to the present time. The original cedar shingle roof has been covered with what appears to be six successive layers of rolled roofing and composite shingles, which has allowed moisture to collect and hold between the layers. Over the years this has caused some moisture leakage into the building and has damaged some of the plaster on the ceilings. It does not appear to have caused any serious damage to the framing system of the building however.

Trees, planted close to the lodge in 1923-24, are now intruding on the foundation and are providing too much shade for the building, keeping it from drying out after heavy rains or snows.

Other changes to the original features of the property include new metal roofs for a number of cabins (not in the area of historic designation,) and the filling in with earth of a small fountain in which a young child drowned in 1922.

On the interior, about one third of the dining room was partitioned off in 1945 to accommodate the installation of a small gift shop and a “study” or reading area. The study has since become the second room of the gift shop.

It is Mrs. Tripp's intention to continue to operate the resort. Guests are lodged in the cabins, with the main lodge serving as a gathering place and gift shop. Since the passing of her husband Gordon, she no longer serves meals on a regular basis, but the dining room does serve as a meeting place upon occasion by local clubs or groups of friends. She has maintained the lodge guest rooms with furnishings of the early 1920s and 30s for guests to view, and the lobby/great room still has much of the original furniture and décor. Mrs. Tripp would like to see the Lodge house guests once again but she is not certain whether this will happen in her lifetime or if this will have to be the next owners task.

With proper maintenance, Glen Isle will continue to stand as an important and unchanged example of the golden era of railroad and later, automobile, tourism in Platte Canyon, and will continue to host travelers and locals as a gathering place and retreat from the cares of the city life to the woodsy hiking trails and casual relaxation overlooking the Platte River.