

Preserving Our Historical Spirit

The storied and picturesque Log Cabin stands proudly above the shores of Phoenix Lake on Marin Municipal Water District's Mount Tamalpais Watershed. Built in the late nineteenth century using local redwoods, it may be the only log house of its kind remaining in Marin County.

The cabin was originally built for the Porteous family who once owned the land (see below, right), but it has most recently served as a gathering and meeting place.

It has been renovated several times over the years, and additional improvements to the grounds including accessible paths to the house and the adjacent restroom were made in the late twentieth century. Today, the building is no longer in use and suffers from a lack of human presence, and the resulting insect infestation, woodpecker damage, and rot.

A recent Historic Structure Report summarized the cabin's historical significance, important architectural details, current condition, and a range of options for what might be done with the building and surrounding grounds. The Marin Municipal Water District is currently considering four of these options: 1) rehabilitation; 2) partial rehabilitation; 3) temporary stabilization; and 4) removal of the cabin and restoration and re-use of the site (see back side for additional details).



This photo from the late 1890s shows the newly built Log Cabin

A REMNANT OF MARIN'S HISTORY

Like many well-off San Franciscans of the day, Scottish immigrants James and Janet Stoddard Porteous bought property in the then rural Marin countryside in 1883. Called Hypolite Ranch, the 1,000-acre property was primarily used for ranching, though there was also a fifteen-room, two-story house, a stable, a winery, a chicken house, and other typical farm structures.

Although James died in 1887, Janet stayed on the ranch. The log cabin was built in 1894 as the ranch caretaker's house. Its redwood logs are from the Deer Park section of the property, and the curly redwood trim around the windows and doors are from a fallen tree on the southwestern side of Shaver Grade. It appears to be the only remaining log structure from this phase of building in Marin County.

Janet passed away in 1904. The Marin Water Company constructed Phoenix Lake in 1906, and formally acquired the property from the Porteous estate a few years later.

The building's distinctive curly redwood window and door trim were made from wood from a fallen tree on the property



RESTORATION ALTERNATIVES - REHABILITATION

Although badly deteriorated, it is possible to rehabilitate the building and surrounding landscape in a way that reflects their historic character. This would require rebuilding the cabin and roof, removing an asphalt path, replacing an existing wooden wall and split rail fence, and regrading to improve drainage. It could also include accessible trail and parking improvements, and native plant landscaping.

The front and back porches, steps, and railings would be replaced

or rebuilt, the front roof gable restructured, brick chimneys salvaged, and some of the ornamental facades removed. Inside, non-historic walls and finishes would be removed and the newly exposed underlying log work repaired.

Two new restrooms, a picnic area, interpretive signs, and pedestrian access would make the site an ideal gathering space for small groups of volunteers, students, and staff, in keeping with the Marin Municipal Water District's Board Policies.



Full rehabilitation would bring the cabin back to as close to its original condition as possible

RESTORATION ALTERNATIVES - PARTIAL REHABILITATION



The Log Cabin is in a such a state of severe disrepair, it may not be possible to rehabilitate it in its current form

A partial rehabilitation would require many of the same actions as a full rehabilitation to make the site safe and usable. However, it would also entail removing rather than repairing parts of the cabin that are particularly badly damaged.

Under this scenario the front porch, living room, hallway, and part of the dining room would be removed. All reusable logs, windows, doors, framing, and fireplace and chimney bricks would be salvaged and used to repair the remaining structure,

including the kitchen, bath, closets, and part of the dining room.

The rear porch would be repaired, and the floors of the former dining and living rooms rebuilt as exterior decks with a new set of entry steps and railings. Some of the roof, eaves, and gables would be repaired or rebuilt to replicate the original cabin's basic roofline.

TEMPORARY STABILIZATION OR REMOVAL

If rehabilitating the building is delayed, proves too costly, or public opinion is strongly against these options, the Marin Municipal Water District may decide to just secure the cabin against the elements and prevent access until a determination is made about how best to proceed.

They could also choose to remove the building entirely and restore the site. Restoration options could include creating an open terrace for picnicking and gathering, replacing

the existing sinuous asphalt path with a more sustainable and accessible trail, and adding a water fountain.

Another option would be to regrade the land to what it was before the cabin was built and restore it with locally collected native plant species. Under either restoration scenario, interpretive signs would take on the role of sharing the history of the cabin that once stood there.



Another option is to remove the cabin and restore the grounds

FUNDING NEEDS

TO BE DETERMINED

Detailed costs will be developed as the project design is further refined

The Tamalpais Lands Collaborative is a partnership of the Marin Municipal Water District, National Park Service, California State Parks, Marin County Parks and Open Space District, and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

Lend a hand! To find out how to volunteer or donate, contact Matt Leffert at mleffert@parkconservancy.org, or (415) 561-3069 or visit onetam.org



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