

Methodist Parsonage to get a major renovation - 1/11/2013

Workers to revamp lighting, wiring in 1841 structure



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The Willamette Heritage Center's Methodist Parsonage is about to get a four-month, \$125,000 makeover.

The building will close after Saturday so workers can revamp the lighting and wiring and add educational panels in the 1841 frame structure.

The work is part of a three-year push to update the pioneer houses on the campus at 1313 Mill St. SE. The 1841 Jason Lee House was renovated last year; the 1847 John Boon House will get similar treatment next year.



The Methodist Parsonage at the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill will close after Saturday, Jan. 12, for major renovations. / DANIELLE PETERSON / Statesman Journal

The project is funded by a major grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and from matching donations and grants.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how kids in particular interact with the new space," said museum curator Keni Sturgeon. "Also that visitors come away with a better understanding of diversity and historic preservation in Salem."

The Parsonage was the second frame structure built in Salem. It housed Methodist missionaries involved with the Oregon Mission Manual Labor School. Classes may have been held there until the school building was ready.

Despite the building's local significance, it hasn't offered visitors much beyond period furnishings. The hope was that docents could tell the story, but there haven't been enough volunteers to consistently do that, Sturgeon said.

When the renovations are complete, visitors will find downstairs exhibits on life for Native Americans, children and women in the late 1800s. Upstairs rooms will cover Salem history and historic preservation. Another room will be available to community groups that wish to organize history exhibits.

A grand reopening is planned for 11 a.m. on May 11, during the heritage center's annual "Sheep to Shawl: Hand-made Heritage" event.