Historic Treasure

FULLER LODGE

Social gathering place for Los Alamos since 1928
2132 Central Avenue, Los Alamos, NM

Los Alamos
where discoveries are made
The Start of the Ranch School...

A principal character in the story of Fuller Lodge is Ashley Pond Jr. (1872-1933) who, prior to 1900, moved from Detroit, MI, to New Mexico for his health. He had contracted typhoid while serving as a Rough Rider in the Spanish-American War. Pond’s first enterprise in New Mexico was a ranch school for boys near Watrous that was supposed to open in 1904. Just before the first semester, there was a flash flood, and the school project was abandoned.

Pond and his family, including his young daughter, renowned New Mexico poet and author Peggy Pond Church (1903-1986), relocated to the Los Alamos area. In 1914, Pond and four backers from Detroit opened a Sportsmans’ Club (The Pajarito Club) located a few miles south of Fuller Lodge in Pajarito Canyon (now on Los Alamos National Laboratory property). Pond ran the club until 1916, when he hired H. H. Brook as manager. Determined to establish a ranch school for boys, Pond bought the homestead of H. H. Brook, the Los Alamos Ranch (in Spanish: cottonwoods or poplars), located where Fuller Lodge now stands. On this property Pond founded the Los Alamos Ranch School in 1917, and hired as school director A. J. Connell, a young Santa Fe National Forest ranger. Soon thereafter, Connell hired Fayette Curtis as the school’s first instructor and headmaster.
A Vigorous, Outdoor Life...

Less than a year after announcing the school’s opening, Ashley Pond departed to drive an ambulance for the American Red Cross in WWI, leaving Connell and Curtis to chart the direction of the new Ranch School. Incorporating the structure of the Boy Scout movement, the Los Alamos Ranch School fused Pond’s and Connell’s ideal “outdoor life” with the “vigorous life” then being advocated by Theodore Roosevelt, and added rigorous academic standards. Students of the boarding school, 12 to 18 in age, became members of Boy Scout Troop #22 (the first mounted troop in the U.S.). In addition to academic instruction, the school program included horseback riding, camping, skiing and hiking. Students slept on screened porches year-round, except when camping. Enrollment at the school peaked at 47 students, and they and the staff were accommodated in a growing inventory of buildings, several of which remain.

Building the Lodge...

Fuller Lodge was constructed as a memorial to Edward P. Fuller, a Ranch School staff member who died in 1923. His father, wealthy Michigan lumberman Philo C. Fuller, paid for the construction of the Lodge and donated it to the Ranch School (as well as refinancing the Ranch School mortgage). Built in 1928, the Lodge was designed by Santa Fe architect John Gaw Meem, who, along with Ranch School Director A. J. Connell, personally selected the 771 massive pine trees used in the predominantly vertical-log structure. Meem designed the hanging lanterns that are still seen in the Lodge, incorporating the Ranch School logo, designed by woodcut artist Gustave Baumann. The Lodge housed the school dining hall, kitchen, rooms for guests, staff, and the nurse. It was also where social events for the boys and graduation ceremonies were held.
Living in the Lodge...

The main interior feature of the ground floor was a two-story dining hall. The 19-foot ceiling, highlighted by exposed, non-structural trusses, became a Meem trademark. Because of the two-story dining hall, the second story of Fuller Lodge proved more of a mezzanine than a “floor”, which was lined with nine rooms and decorated with Navajo rugs.

On the mezzanine level, Connell included a small suite for the matron on the south end. Next was Headmaster Lawrence Hitchcock’s suite. On the other side of the stairway leading to the third floor, a small suite served as the nurse’s quarters. The infirmary sat above the main lobby at the north part of the building.

When the Army arrived in 1942, Fuller Lodge became housing for visiting scientists, as well as the cafeteria for post and technical personnel. Starting in February 1943, the Lodge was managed as a hotel by H. M. Archer, a contractor with the Corps of Engineers. The Pajarito Room served as a cafeteria, and bachelor staff members and distinguished visitors were housed in the Lodge.

The Los Alamos Historical Society, with support from Los Alamos County, has turned Room 234 of Fuller Lodge into a museum exhibit, showcasing items that might have been used by one of the Ranch School masters.
The Ranch School, still being run by A. J. Connell, held its final graduation ceremony on January 28th, 1943, after an abbreviated semester. The Ranch School and surrounding homesteads had been purchased by the U.S. Army Manhattan Engineer District for a secret WWII Laboratory site. During the Manhattan Project, the Lodge served as a dining and meeting hall for project staff. A number of the other Ranch School buildings were turned into housing for the leaders of the soldiers and scientists who came to work in Los Alamos. These elite homes, located on Bathtub Row, were the only ones in wartime Los Alamos with bathtubs. Some of these are now private residences; however, the Hans Bethe house is part of the Los Alamos History Museum Campus, and can be visited daily.

The role of Fuller Lodge in WWII was symbolically brought to a close when the U.S. Army and Navy presented an Award of Excellence to Project Y participants on its eastern patio on October 16, 1945. The ceremony’s date was chosen to coincide with J. Robert Oppenheimer’s last day as Laboratory Director.
Fuller Lodge... Then & Now

1. Ranch School students relax in Fuller Lodge, 1930s
2. Ranch School Trading Post (no longer standing)
3. 1932 Ranch School student body
4. Fuller Lodge renovated and operated as “The Lodge” by the Atomic Energy Commission
5. Fuller Lodge east patio, 1950s
6. Fuller Lodge sign, 1951
7. Ranch School Tennis Team, 1930s
8. Ranch School students enjoy Ashley Pond Park, named for the school’s founder.
9. Lodge dining room, 1945
10. The historic Memorial Rose Garden
11. Community events often center around the Lodge.
12. The Fuller Lodge Art Center Gallery
13. The Pajarito Room is used for exhibits, concerts, meetings, weddings and more.
14. The History Museum (former Guest Cottage)
15. Fuller Lodge Art Center Annual Arts & Crafts Fair
16. In 1966, Fuller Lodge was placed on the United States National Register of Historic Places and registered as a New Mexico Cultural Property.
Center of a New Community...

Operations of the Los Alamos townsite and the Laboratory were transferred to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in 1947. The AEC quickly added three two-story wings extending north, south, and west from Fuller Lodge, so it could function as a hotel for official visitors. Los Alamos remained a closed city until 1957, when the gates and guard towers were no longer used. This decline in secrecy began a lengthy process of transferring land and structures to private and municipal ownership. Through all these phases, Fuller Lodge has continued to serve as the social center of the community, witnessing generations of weddings, funerals, parties, concerts, town meetings, receptions, conferences and other social events. The nearby Memorial Rose Garden was established in the early 1950s by the Los Alamos Garden Club, because no local cemetery existed at that time.

Preserving our Past...

The Lodge has received a series of sensitive upgrades and careful, but partial, restorations, since being acquired from the AEC by Los Alamos County in 1974. These projects have always been well supported by the public. The tender loving care given the Lodge includes the restoration of the windows, logs, lighting, curtains, east patio elevation and stairs, and more. Fuller Lodge is listed on the United States National Register of Historic Places and registered as a New Mexico Cultural Property.

Left: The original light fixtures have been restored and continue to hang above the back patio just as they always have. Right: A new elevator was installed in 2016 to ensure everyone has access to the second floor.
Artwork in the Fuller Lodge includes period lighting, furniture, and drapery accents, as well as historical artifacts and original wall art. The work represents a variety of local and regional artisans in a wide range of media. The current selection of artwork is drawn from the collections of Los Alamos County and the Los Alamos Historical Society, as well as specific commissioned pieces. The Fuller Lodge Art Center, housed in the south and west wings, adds an additional element of art with over one hundred local and regional artists, and nine juried exhibits yearly.

Weavings...

Several traditional Northern New Mexico-style weavings compliment the vertical architecture of the spacious Pajarito Room. Two additional weavings are located in the stairwell to the gallery above the Pajarito Room, and in the second floor Throne Room. The weavings were predominantly commissioned by Northern New Mexico artisans, specifically for the Lodge, during a careful renovation and redecoration in the 1980s. Northern New Mexico has a deep history in the cultivation and processing of wool, and a strong tradition in the fiber arts. These rugs exemplify the style and skill of some the best known Chimayo, Tierra Amarilla, and Truchas artisans. The drapes throughout the Lodge were commissioned from the Ortega weavers out of Chimayo.
Variety - over the years...

The variety of work collected throughout the history of Los Alamos gives visitors a glimpse of the land and peoples of the Pajarito Plateau. The artwork spans decades, including original fixtures from the Ranch School era. The collection continues to represent work by local artists from the beginning of the Los Alamos County Art in Public Places program through present exhibitions in the Fuller Lodge Art Center. Several oil paintings from the Frank Harlow collection are on display throughout the Lodge. An oil landscape by local artist James Messimer is on display in the Fuller Lodge reservations office. Anita Brookins, an early Los Alamos art instructor, and Joan McConnell, an early Los Alamos art advocate, both have masterful ink and watercolor landscapes in the Nambe room, and the entranceway stairwell houses a relief woodcarving by Joseph T. Sanchez of the Arts and Craft house, located on Bathtub Row.

Frank Harlow Collection...

In 2006, Francis “Frank” Harlow, a long time resident, scientist and self-taught artist, donated 22 paintings to the Los Alamos County collection. Several pieces can be found in Fuller Lodge, clustered in the Nambe, Zia, and Throne rooms. The paintings range from landscapes and pottery to regional customs and faces, and are painted in oil on gessoed masonite boards. Harlow is well known for his extensive work depicting Northern New Mexico Pueblo pottery. His paintings can be found in many collections worldwide, and have been exhibited in a number of regional galleries.
Oppenheimer, a world-class physicist and professor at the University of California at Berkeley and Cal Tech, was selected by General Groves in the fall of 1942 to be the Laboratory Director of Project Y of the Manhattan Project, while Americans were fighting against Fascism in Europe and Imperialism in Asia. The Laboratory Director, through the force of his intellect, persuasion, dedication, and unfettered scientific inquiry, guided the researchers to success.

**GENERAL LESLIE R. GROVES (1896-1970)**

Groves, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, after steering the construction of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., was assigned the biggest Allied secret project of World War II, code name “Manhattan Project.” His unexpected choice of Dr. Oppenheimer, and Groves’ direct command of the growth of the town for an ever increasing workforce and its research needs, were crucial to winning the wartime race to build the atomic bomb.

Together these two men selected Los Alamos, remote for secrecy, but naturally beautiful, to become the home of exceptional scientists, engineers, and support personnel for the war duration.

This commemorative plaque is on permanent display at the sculpture site on the south lawn of Fuller Lodge overlooking downtown Los Alamos.
Suggested Reading Available Locally...

“When Los Alamos Was a Ranch School”  
by Fermor and Peggy Pond Church  
A first hand account of the Ranch School by a former headmaster and his wife, daughter of the founder, Ashley Pond.

“Oh Logs and Stones: The Buildings of the Los Alamos Ranch School and Bathtub Row”  
by Craig Martin and Heather McClanahan  
The authors, both historians and preservationists, present the history and detailed descriptions of the oldest remaining buildings in Los Alamos County.

“Los Alamos: The Ranch School Years 1917-1943”  
by John D. Wirth and Linda Harvey Aldrich  
Wirth, the son of Ranch School master Cecil Wirth, and historian Aldrich have compiled a comprehensive history of the elite prep school’s existence.

“The House at Otowi Bridge: the Story of Edith Warner and Los Alamos”  
by Peggy Pond Church  
The story of Edith Warner, a remarkable woman who lived on the bank of the Rio Grande and came to be admired by Indians and scientists alike.

Museums & Shops...

LOS ALAMOS HISTORY MUSEUM CAMPUS  
Adjacent to Fuller Lodge, this award-winning museum showcases the history of the area from Ancestral Pueblo times to the present, and includes a book and gift shop. The museum is also the starting point for the Historic Walking Tour, a 1.5 to 2-hour, self-guided, leisure walk through historic downtown Los Alamos. The professionally curated museum archives are located in the Municipal Building at 1000 Central Avenue.  
(505) 662-4493 - www.losalamoshistory.org

FULLER LODGE ART CENTER  
The Fuller Lodge Art Center, located in the building since 1977, is the home of a superb art gallery, classrooms, and a gift shop of fine arts & crafts by local and regional artists.  
(505) 662-1635 - www.fullerlodgeartcenter.com

Published by the Historic Preservation Advisory Board, the Art in Public Places Board, and Los Alamos County Communications and Public Relations Division. Visit us anytime at www.losalamosnm.us!

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