The Art of Historic Fuller Lodge

Artwork in the 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 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 several juried exhibits yearly.

Weavings

Traditional northern New Mexico 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 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 of 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 collection 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 Reservations Office. Anita Brookins and Joan McConnell, an early Los Alamos art instructor and artist advocate, both have masterful ink and watercolor landscapes in the Nambe room, and the entranceway stairwell houses a relief woodcarving by Joseph T. Sanchez depicting 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 the Lodge, clustered in the Nambe, Zia, and Throne rooms. The paintings in the Lodge 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.

Plan Your Visit

Stop by the Los Alamos Visitor Center and the Los Alamos History Museum to learn more about the history and experiences of the Pajarito Plateau.

LOS ALAMOS VISITOR CENTER
475 20th St., Suite A, Los Alamos
Hours: Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sunday: 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
800-444-0707 | 505-662-8105 | visitlosalamos.org

LOS ALAMOS HISTORY MUSEUM & SHOP
1050 Bathtub Row, Los Alamos
Hours: Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sunday: CLOSED
505-662-4493 | losalamoshistory.org
The Start of the Ranch School
A principal character in the story of Historic Fuller Lodge is Ashley Pond Jr. (1872-1933) who, prior to 1900, moved from Detroit, Michigan, to New Mexico for his health. He had contracted typhoid fever 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 son, renowned New Mexico poet and author Peggy Pond Church (1903-1986), relocated to the Pajarito Plateau. In 1914, Pond and four backers from Detroit opened a Sportsmen’s Club (The Pajarito Club) located a few miles south of the 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 H. H. Brook homestead, the Los Alamos Ranch (translated in English: cottonwoods or poplars), located where the 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 United States). 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
The Lodge was constructed as a memorial to Edward F. Fuller, a Ranch School staff member who died in 1923. His father, wealthy Michigan lumberman Philip 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 is a two-story dining hall (the Pajarito Room). The 19-foot ceiling, highlighted by exposed, non-structural trusses, is a Meem trademark. Because of the two-story dining hall, the second story proved more of a mezzanine than a “floor,” which is lined with nine rooms and decorated with Navajo rugs.

On the mezzanine level, Connell included a small suite for the master 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, it used the Lodge as housing for visiting scientists, the cafeteria past, and technical personnel.

Purpose in a Time of War
The Ranch School, still being run by A. J. Connell, held its final graduation ceremony on January 28, 1943, after an abbreviated semester. The School and surrounding homesteads had been purchased by the U.S. Army Manhattan Engineer District for a secret WWII Laboratory site.

Starting in February 1943, the Lodge was managed as a hotel by H. M. Archer as a contractor with the Army Corps of Engineers. The Pajarito Room served as a cafeteria, and bachelor staff members and distinguished visitors were housed in rooms of the Lodge.

A number of the other Ranch School buildings were turned into housing for the leaders of the project who came to work in Los Alamos, including J. Robert Oppenheimer. Those elite homes were the only ones in wartime Los Alamos with bathtubs. Now private residences, and museum attractions, these homes can be viewed from Bathtub Row, the street running north from the Lodge.

The role of Historic 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.

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 the main Lodge so it could function as a hotel for official visitors. Los Alamos remained a closed city until 1957, when use of the gates and guard towers were determined to be no longer necessary. This decline in secrecy began a lengthy process of transferring land and structures to private and municipal ownership. Through all these phases the Lodge has continued to serve as the social center of the community, witnessing generations of weddings, funerals, parties, concerts, town meetings, receptions, and other social events.

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, and more. In January 2017, Los Alamos County celebrated the completion of a $2.4 million renovation of the Lodge and Historical Museum. The project included installing a new elevator, renovating the first and second floor restrooms, second floor entry to the elevator, reservation office and west entry-way, and remodeling the patio. During the project, the original stone stairs on the east patio were found and lovingly restored for visitors to enjoy today. Historic Fuller Lodge is listed on the United States National Register of Historic Places and registered as a New Mexico Cultural Property.

Historic Fuller Lodge hosts countless community celebrations and distinguished visitors, including President Truman’s greengrocer, Clifford Truman Daniel, seen here speaking at the Grand Reopening Celebration of the Los Alamos History Museum in December 2016.