



## LAKE ELSINORE: Tank house could become historical landmark



ANDREW FOULK/FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Joyce Hohenadl, with the Lake Elsinore's historical society, smiles as she shows off the inside of the newly rebuilt tank house on Wednesday, May. 10. It was originally constructed in 1880.

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After falling into ruin and languishing in obscurity, the old Lake Elsinore tank house has proudly claimed an honored niche in the city's history.

The board of supervisors is expected to accord the 132-year-old structure landmark status after the county's historical commission later this week approves its nomination.

Eventually, the goal is for state and national protection, said Joyce Hohenadl, an historical commissioner for Riverside County's District 1 and a driving force behind saving the tank house.

"Anything historical preserves something for future generations," she said.

Until two years ago, the tall, skinny building on 116 Lakeshore Drive was nothing more than blighted curiosity, a sort of Hobbit house down on its luck, headed for demolition.

But the community rallied to its rescue after documents showed that the slender, 8-foot-by-20-foot building was part of a health spa. Volunteers moved, rebuilt board by board and preserved intact the structure originally constructed in 1880 to house equipment to pump hot mineral water from nearby sulfur springs to bathers.

Now, the beneficiary of restoration, the 580-square-foot tank house stands tall, no longer listing or sagging at its new home at 132 W. Graham St. Hohenadl will admit visitors by reservation only.

It sits in the parking lot behind the Lake Elsinore Valley Chamber of Commerce's downtown office at Graham Avenue and Spring Street. Both buildings look like cousins, their clapboards painted the same shade of tan.

Hohenadl applauds the historical compatibility: The chamber is housed in the old depot established in 1886 for the Santa Fe Railroad. Although lacking proof, she and other residents suspect that the tank house once supplied water to coal-powered locomotive engines that steamed into town on tracks that vanished long ago.

What the archives do support is the pump house's role in Lake Elsinore's heyday as a health mecca, when tourists flocked to the city for its 300-plus wells and hot springs. Beginning in the late Victorian era, bath houses and spas sprung up around these mineral-laced waters, prized for what many believed were their healing and medicinal benefits.

The building's first face-lift — literally — happened in 1930, with a ground floor added and the original first floor hoisted, becoming a two-story structure. The tank house fed water first to the Panacea Resort & Health Spa and later, Leemon's Motel Resort, which featured a swimming pool, round tub and solarium for nude sunbathing, Hohenadl said. She's not sure when the spa bubble burst, but records show that the tank house served as an office for H & R Block Income Tax Service in the 1980s.

As the building aged and cracked, its legacy faded, too. Rumors that the property owners wanted to raze it prompted Lake Elsinore's Historical Society to dig into archives. There members learned of the structure's glory days.

Once the City Council blessed relocating it next to the chamber building, the problem was how to finance its transport and rehabilitation. Professional movers wanted to charge \$9,500, with restoration costs estimated at \$20,000. Donations and a volunteer work crew made it happen.

A team from Lamb's Fellowship Church in Lake Elsinore and the Daughters of the American Revolution Luiseno chapter dismantled the tank house, numbering, color coding and storing every slat and nail.

In nine months, the old redwood building with its low-pitched gable roof was reassembled on a new foundation. Hohenadl turned it into a museum with daguerreotypes and antiques and artist Robin Golden is painting a mural for the exterior. For safety reasons, the second story is off-limits to visitors.

The Riverside County Historical Commission will vote on the tank house's nomination for landmark status at the group's next meeting on Thursday, May 17, in Redlands.