




Riverside Revival

The Daly Mansion,
also known as Riverside,
is in the Bitterroot Valley.



A work in progress,
the Daly Mansion has a
steep financial hill to climb

STORY BY BETH JUDY | PHOTOS BY KRISTI HAGAR

Turning off the Eastside Highway onto the grounds of the Daly Mansion near Hamilton is like entering another world. Slowing to pass between pillars, you move toward white columns at the end of a long row of graceful trees. More lofty trees—many more—shelter an expanse of lawn and keep the mansion secret till the last moment. There it is, with the Bitterroot Mountains for a backdrop: “Riverside,” once the summer home of Butte copper king Marcus Daly and his family. Huge and elegant, with seemingly hundreds of windows, it’s a grand reminder of the incredible wealth generated by Montana’s mineral riches.

But old-timers remember a different scene: the mansion sitting empty, boarded up, for 40 years. Livestock wandering beneath the trees. A child’s ideal haunted house; a daring teenager’s destination. In fact, during the time the family closed it in 1946 until the state of Montana forgave descendants’ steep taxes and bought the mansion in 1986, “it’s a wonder it didn’t burn down,” says Kim Morris, executive director of the Daly Mansion Preservation Trust.

Daly, who founded both Anaconda and Hamilton, never lived in the grand white-columned house. Designed by Missoula architect A. J. Gibson, the mansion was finished in 1910; Daly died in 1900 at age 58. Yet Daly enjoyed summers in two earlier versions of the house built on the same spot. At Riverside, surrounded by family, servants, and farmlands, Daly especially loved raising the racehorses he adored. After his death, his wife Margaret and their children continued summering at Riverside, and shared it with others. The house has 56 rooms; one summer, the family entertained the same number of guests.

The current restoration work on the house began with a dream, volunteer coordinator Darlene Gould explains. While the state bought the property, it offered no further money for the project. Instead, a group of individuals stepped forward and founded the Daly Mansion Preservation Trust. “They had such vision, hopes—stupidity?” laughs ▶



Architect Jim McDonald, left, has been largely responsible for the restoration efforts. The dining room at the mansion is one of the rooms that has been restored. Below: The bathroom is a reminder of all the work that needs to be done.

Gould. “They said, ‘OK, we’re going to restore this.’ If it weren’t for them, we wouldn’t have the mansion.” Today, after years of fundraising and repairs, the trust founders’ dream is real. From May through October, the mansion hosts 8,000 to 10,000 visitors from around the world. Two and a half permanent staff and at least 60 volunteers keep it running.

During the quiet winter months, executive director Morris concentrates on money. Operating costs are \$240,000 a year. While recent restoration efforts have included energy efficiency improvements, in a cold month, heating alone can cost as much as \$5,000. Morris shrugs, “It’s lath-and-plaster.” Fortunately, membership donations, ticket sales, and scheduled events like weddings largely sustain operations (brides especially love the arbor off the sun porch). Volunteers work constantly at raising money, and even tap the property’s maples for syrup to sell in the gift shop. In addition, five years ago the state historical society, formerly the mansion’s official steward, transferred that role to the University of Montana. Now UM holds satellite classes and occasional functions in the house—another revenue source. But restoration is expensive. It takes much, much more.

Since the 1980s, Jim McDonald has led restoration efforts. He works with A&E Architects, a Missoula firm specializing in historic renovation and preservation. The first priority, he remembers, was the leaky roof, and restoring the front porch, which is completely gone in photos of the boarded-up manse. The roof was the source of major damage to the house, especially in the area of Mrs. Daly’s bedroom, where the bathroom, built over a sagging sun porch, pulled away from the main structure, opening it to the elements. The hole in the ceiling is still there. You can peer into the attic; torn lath-and-plaster spills down. Remnants of pretty paper on the walls look melted. The tub and basin are full of rust and debris.

The trust isn’t sure what to do about the bathroom. Darlene Gould votes for leaving it this way to show how



the house was. Indeed, that’s getting increasingly hard to remember. But the group places “before” photos in several rooms to remind us—the living room, for example, with its gleaming ornate ceiling. In the photo, the ceiling is half-shrouded in plastic. “We had to do that,” Gould explains, “it was falling down in chunks.” In the most recent rounds of significant repairs to the mansion, a Missoula firm took molds of the undamaged side and reproduced the ornamentation on a new side. “I asked whether they were going to put horsehair in the plaster, like the old stuff,” Gould quips. “Apparently there are ▶

better additives now.”

Recent renovations also address wallpaper. McDonald searched for originals or reproductions. An elegant paper found in many of the rooms is actually a woven natural fiber called grass cloth. McDonald was able to replace damaged and worn areas with similar cloth still being made in China. Other papers proved more difficult. Fortunately there are companies that specialize in reproduction wallpaper, and Mrs. Daly kept extra rolls. With excitement and pride, Darlene Gould lays out digitally reproduced rolls and notes deficiencies. “The color’s not right yet on this one,” she frowns. She admits it can be hard adjusting to new, bright colors. “The living room was gold, but when we moved the light fixtures, we saw the paper had actually faded from green.”

Kim Morris says the most recent renovations have cost \$1.7 million. In addition to wallpaper and plasterwork, the building was brought up to code with new wiring and an elevator. The trust estimates repairs totaling \$500,000 need to be completed. From her office in a former servant’s bedroom, Morris works to raise renovation money through an Adopt-A-Room program, grant applications, legislative lobbying, and of course, donations from individuals. She tells the story of one: “A guy sent us the admission fee plus years of interest for the time he snuck in when it was boarded up.”

With a recent federal grant of \$262,000, the trust is shoring up the laundry house. That’s only about half of

what restoring the outbuilding will take. “Sadly, after a certain stage of decay, renovation costs even more,” says Morris. Other outbuildings, including a playhouse, patiently wait their turn.

Morris and architect McDonald both say the mansion is 85 percent restored. Morris hopes for completion in five years, but she’s already looking beyond that. She wants to create an endowment “so when the well pump goes out, we don’t have to worry. It’s like any house: every day, something doesn’t work or needs replacing.” She shakes a handful of bills on her desk for lawn mower oil and fuel. Last winter she concentrated on grants for the trees. “They’re a Montana treasure,” she says, gesturing out the window. “There are over 450 of them, of 36 different species, including sycamore and black locust.” More than 100 years old now, many of them need to be trimmed, removed for safety reasons or replaced. “To lots of people, the grounds are as important as the house.”

It’s true. People come here to walk. Montana Shakespeare in the Parks performs here. Volunteers trim the lawn, tend the flowers and brush on paint. Students learn about art and history. Bird watchers peer into the trees, including researchers studying hummingbird migration. The mansion seems to have something for everyone. “It’s become a focal point for the valley,” Morris says. “The mansion belongs to the community now.” **M**

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