



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Klondike Gold Rush
National Historical Park
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Jeff. Smiths Parlor Museum Operations Plan

History

One of the most important acquisitions in the George and Edna Rapuzzi Collection donation from the Rasmuson Foundation is the Jeff. Smiths Parlor Museum. The building began life as the First Bank of Skaguay [sic] (1897–1898) and soon became Jeff. Smith's Parlor, the base of operations for notorious swindler Jefferson "Soapy" Smith and his gang. After 1900, the building housed the city's volunteer fire department. In 1935, Martin Itjen took over management of the building and converted it into the Jeff. Smiths Parlor Museum, a homespun tourist attraction featuring animatronic mannequins created by Itjen and a wildlife diorama centered on two moose locked in combat. After Itjen's death in 1942, Itjen's friends Jack Grelsbach and George Rapuzzi assisted Martin's widow, Lucy, with the museum's operations. The museum was closed in the 1950s after Grelsbach and Lucy Itjen's deaths. In 1963, Rapuzzi moved the museum from its original location on 6th Avenue to its current location on 2nd and Broadway. George and Edna Rapuzzi re-opened the museum as a tourist attraction in the mid-1960s and it was available in varying degrees to the public until George's death in 1986. The building and its contents are a note-worthy addition to the park's resources, as they represent not only Gold Rush history but also the development of early Alaskan tourism, fueled by the folk mythology propounded by Martin Itjen and his contemporaries.

Preservation

The park formally received the building in 2008. At that time the building was in poor condition with a leaking roof, rotted floor, no foundation, and melting into the ground. The NPS has lifted the structure, 12 foot by 72 feet, above the ground and installed a new concrete foundation and wood floor. The building was then lowered onto this new floor system. The interior/exterior walls have been reinforced with new 2"x4" wood studs, and a new cedar shingle roof has been installed over the existing reinforced rafters. The building restoration will follow the recommendations of the NPS Sustainable Checklist that will provide an energy efficient building. The exterior siding is currently being repaired and restored then re-installed over the high tech wall structure. A Historic Structure Report was completed in 2010 to assist with the restoration of the building (available online).

Exhibit planning for the interior of the building was completed in 2012. The park plans to restore the exhibits to the 1965–67 period to reflect George and Edna Rapuzzi's influence on the museum as well as Martin Itjen's original displays. The poor condition of the building in the decades prior to NPS acquisition also had a negative impact on the building's contents, resulting in the need for a multi-year conservation effort to prepare the interior for the museum's planned re-opening in 2016. The conservation effort began in 2008 with the removal of the Gold Rush-era newspapers and documents that covered approximately two-thirds of the interior walls. During the removal, paper conservator Eileen Clancy carefully recorded the placement of each document in order to facilitate their re-installation after treatment for water damage. Artifacts requiring significant treatment have been shipped to the Harper's Ferry Center conservation lab and will be treated in 2013 and 2014. However, many of the artifacts require only minor cleaning and stabilization treatment.

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Plan

Public tours begin in May, 2016. Although the Jeff. Smith Parlor offers an extraordinary resource and opportunity for visitors to understand and connect with the Skagway's gold rush past, the building size and artifact security present several challenges. The building's small size limits access to no more than ten visitors in one of two rooms at a time. Furthermore, artifacts displayed within the building are directly accessible which require NPS presence and close monitoring for collection security. These factors limit visitor access and create a staff intensive operational burden on the park. Operating the Jeff Smith Parlor with the current funding and staff will reduce the park's overall visitor service capacity as programs, operational hours, and facilities would have to be reduced in order to operate the Jeff. Smith Parlor.

In order to maintain the current array of free visitor services including daily operation of a visitor center and museum, Junior Ranger Activity Center, historic Moore Homestead, and dozens of daily interpretive historic walks, and Dyea town site tours, the park proposes to utilize 1A2G authority to charge an admission fee to the Jeff Smith Parlor Museum. Tickets will be sold at \$5.00 per person via www.recreation.gov. Children under 6 will be free. Tours will be 30 minutes in length, begin outside the Jeff Smiths Parlor front door, and conclude on the west side of the building. Using the cruise ship schedule as a guide, the park will provide 27 tours each day Monday – Thursday at 10 visitors per tour for 270 total visitors. On Fridays, the park will provide 14 tours for 140 total visitors. On much slower Saturdays and Sundays the park will provide 7 tours each day for a total of 70 visitors. This tour schedule will provide about 27,070 visitors with access into the Jeff Smiths Parlor Museum. Plans for 2016 include 19 free ticket days with over 3,800 free tickets available.

Interpretive Themes

- **Jefferson Smith, from man to myth** (presented outside before entering building)
- **Martin Itjen, building the legend** (presented inside room 1)
- **George and Edna Rapuzzi, saving the legacy** (presented inside room 2-3)
- **National Park Service, preserving for the future** (presented outside after exiting)

Revenue

The park estimates that ticket revenue will generate about \$102,340. These funds will be used as follows; \$27,140 spent towards estimated building upkeep, utility costs, fire and intrusion systems, and artifact preservation costs. \$75,200 will be spent towards hiring and training additional staff to provide tours of the Jeff. Smiths Parlor. Ticket revenue will enable the park to provide exciting tours of an iconic Skagway building while maintaining existing free visitor services, and preserve the building for the future.

Contact

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