

The Willows History

The Willows Mansion History:



The Madden–McCaskey House

The Willows, now an Orchard Mansion Bed and Breakfast Resort, is one of 75 properties in the Rogue Valley listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Known as the Madden–McCaskey House, the home comes with a rich and varied history.

The original owners, Frank H. and Winifred Madden of Chicago arrived in the Rogue Valley during the first of the “orchard booms” in southern Oregon around 1908. Rumor has it that some of the Madden’s wealth came from the Alaskan Gold Rush, but this has not been substantiated. The Maddens quickly acquired two of the finest orchard tracts in the valley, which soon became known as the Madden Ranch. By 1910, Frank Madden had acquired more than 150 acres surrounding the current home location and had commissioned Henry Farnum to build an elegant “modern and high class” home on a rise overlooking the valley. The original buildings included a main residence, a carriage house, several small outbuildings, and a huge barn (which since was converted to a large home nearby at 3385 Old Stage Road). Madden continued to expand his orchard holdings,

eventually amassing over 1000 acres, which he named "Fairview Orchard" around 1912. "Fairview" presumably referred to the panoramic view of Mt. McLoughlin and the valley afforded from the mansion itself. Fruit from the Madden ranch then became commercially sold under a "Fairview" label.

By 1914, the first "Orchard Boom" in the Rogue Valley went bust. However, Madden's Fairview Orchard seems to have weathered these difficult times with ease and continued to survive. However, documents show that the Maddens decided to move to Seattle in 1917-18, and vacated the mansion. In 1919, the Maddens sold their Rogue Valley orchard holdings to Hiram D. and Mary McCaskey of Washington, D.C.—family members tell us buying the expansive estate was a wedding present for his new bride.

Hiram D. McCaskey was a widely published, world recognized geologist. He met his wife, the former Mary Louise Fuller, on an ocean passage. Before coming to the Rogue Valley they had lived in Washington, D.C. where Mr. McCaskey had been the Geologist in Charge, Mineral Resources Division, U.S. Geological Survey, retiring in 1919. Upon purchase of the orchard estate, the McCaskeys began extensive remodeling, commissioning the famous Medford architect, Frank Chamberlain Clark, to renovate the home and build a library/workroom to support Mr. McCaskey's geological interests. Today we refer to this room as the "Rock Room" in his honor.

Around 1920, the McCaskeys' renamed the estate *Bora Da* (a Welch saying meaning "Good Morning" or "beautiful dawn"). This name took, and the estate was thus referred to, throughout the McCaskeys' ownership (1919-1951). Although Hiram McCaskey died at age 65 in 1936, his wife, Mary, continued on at *Bora Da* until her death in 1951. Over the McCaskey years, all orchards, save the few lone fruit trees near the mansion, were removed and sheep were run on the property. In 1945, over 139 acres of property were transferred to Mary McCaskey's nephew Louis Salade, a long-time resident of the Rogue Valley. Then,

following Mary McCaskey's death in 1951, much of *Bora Da* was divided between the children of Louis Salade.

The Salade family lived at the mansion until 1960, when the house and the ranch were traded to Armin Richter, a local contractor, in exchange for the construction of a new home to be located up the hillside. County records in 1962, show that the home was sold to Dr. Max Flowers; it was then transferred again, in 1973, to Ethel Prusch; and shortly thereafter, in 1975, to Peter and Suzanne Watson. The Watsons operated a Montessori school on the first floor of the mansion from 1975 to 1993, when it was once again sold. The new owners, Fred and Jennifer Johnson, undertook a major restoration of the home, which took the first floor back to its original state; those renovations were continued by Johann and Geraldine de Vos (1996-2003) on the main floor, including the addition of a new master suite in place of the former in-house "orangery"— which is now being used as the inn's conference room.

The two upper floors were recently restored and renovated by the current owners, Joe and Sandy Dowling (2003-). The recent renovations include the addition of 10 private bathrooms added around the estate, along with extensive grounds renovation to better accommodate guests and weddings on the historic property. Renovations also include two bathrooms added to the barn, the addition of ponds and water features, as well as a tennis court and jogging track.