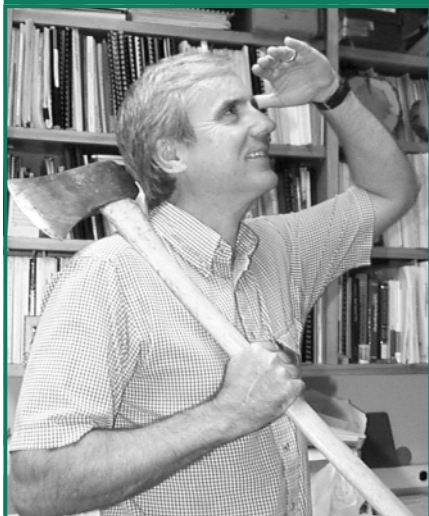


By Steve Leavitt



The Walls Come Tumbling Down

In August of this year, the department lost an old friend—the Berkowitz Apartment building, better known to people associated with the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research for the last 30 years as the “White House.”

It served faithfully by providing much-needed space variously for faculty, staff, researchers, graduate students, and storage, including the departmental library. Our humble introduction to the White House was through rental of one of its four units around 1972 when it was privately owned.

By 1975, the LTRR was occupying three of the four units, and not long thereafter the University owned it and LTRR had the whole enchilada, driven in large part by the rapidly expanding research programs of Professors Hal Fritts, Chuck Stockton and Val LaMarche. The new space

demanded furnishings, some of which were purchased new, and others of which were hand-me-downs from the Optical Sciences Annex and the Administration Building.

By 1984, however, LTRR Acting Director Bill Robinson was actively seeking new space for the lab and wondered if it could be found in time for us to “abandon the (White House) before it abandons us.” By that time, door and window security issues and termite problems were already recognized, and not long thereafter problems emerged with the ailing roof, floors and climate control (evaporative cooler and furnace). Estimates within the last two years indicate it would have cost \$50,000 to \$100,000 for repairs necessary to bring it up to standards, which most agree would be the epitome of throwing large-denomination bills down the flea market rat-hole coin toss.

The White House had been living on borrowed time. Its fate was further sealed over the last 15 years as this little island of squalor was encroached on by construction of the shiny new Recreation Center, parking lots, and a Parking and Transportation field compound.

The proud and mighty building did not go down without a fight, and it held out for a surprising number of nanoseconds against the onslaught of incessant blows by the wrecking ball (actually big shovel). The result was never in doubt, however, like the inevitable outcome to the overconfident young man impressing his girlfriend by accepting the barker’s challenge at a flea

market elephant-wrestling promotion.

Yes, the White House seemingly had its insurmountable problems, but there were startlingly few complaints by the actual occupants. Now it can be revealed that the benign outward appearance of that building belied its ostentatious amenities, of which our brethren departments throughout the egalitarian University of Arizona can only dream.

For example, the White House had an underground parking garage with free valet parking for all faculty and staff. For those who chose to walk or ride bikes, there were showers with gold-plated fixtures and redwood hot tubs in the basement.

The attic had a fully stocked faculty club to encourage recreation, camaraderie and informal interactions. Its revolving rooftop restaurant provided spectacular panoramic views of the city over the course of each gourmet meal and looked down on the lowly stadium skyboxes.

Campus planning might do well to take a page or two from these White House amenities, but then again, some may not be worth perpetuating. I never did take a liking to the White House complaint desk to which I was referred many times, and for that matter, why was I seemingly always the only one to be directed to the wine cellar?

Come to think of it, my brusque treatment at that dump at times can only be compared to that given a health inspector at the flea market gravy and pie buffet. ●

