

Historic Furniture of Paradise Inn

A Self-Guided Tour




Rainier Guest ServicesSM

Introduction

Imagine you are waking up in 1916. America is inching closer to entering WWI, Charlie Chapin and Mary Pickford are big stars in moving pictures, Einstein's paper of the General Theory of Relativity is published and James Kraft invents processed cheese. Babe Ruth is making history playing for the Boston Red Sox, the Star Spangled Banner is sung for the first time to start a baseball game and Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs opens a stand at Brooklyn's Coney Island. A bill is signed incorporating the Boy Scouts of America, and President Woodrow Wilson signs legislation creating the National Park Service. These are remarkable times! You are a resident of Washington state, so there is local interest in the fact that William Boeing incorporates Pacific Aero Products (later to be renamed Boeing Company), liquor prohibition starts and a group of prominent Tacoma businessmen form the Rainier National Park Company to operate visitor services in Mount Rainier National Park. You are seeking work and have heard that this new concession operation in Mount Rainier National Park is building a great lodge to be named Paradise Inn. Your name is Hans Fraehnke, born in Luebeck, Germany and your trade is carpentry. You are hired to create distinctive furniture for this new Inn and so the story begins...

Hans Fraehnke, sporting a walrus mustache and wire glasses, would hike through the snow each March for seven consecutive seasons beginning in 1916, staying at the Inn until November when accumulating snowfall and freezing temperatures forced him back to his shop and home in Fife, Washington. December through February, Hans sold wares from his workshop and constructed furniture for local residents. Trudging through the snow, Hans would make his way back to Paradise Inn each year to start on another piece of furniture. Early accounts note the wood used for the building's construction and its furniture was Alaskan cedar from the Silver Forest, located just a few miles below the Paradise area (the name "Silver

Forest" came after a fire raged through this area in the late 1800's. Although the exterior of the trees had a ghostly silver color to the trunks, the interior cedar was unharmed and fully useable). Hans also contributed to the interior decoration, including the prominent woodwork around the front desk. His craftsmanship has been referred to as "rustic style" and "Gothicism reminiscent of woodwork from the Bavarian Alps". During these early years of Paradise Inn, Hans Fraehnke worked by lamplight using an adze (a tool similar to a small ax with an arched blade) to fashion the iconic furniture now gracing the lobby. His legacy includes the front desk, throne styled chairs, massive cedar tables (14 feet long and over 5 feet wide), 14 foot grandfather clock, mail stump, cedar tables with matching benches and the rustic encasement around the old Schmoller and Mueller of Omaha upright piano.

When Paradise Inn opened in 1917, the remarkable cedar crafted furnishings were accompanied by distinctive hickory chairs, tables and settees. These pieces were purchased from the Old Hickory Company of Martinsville, Indiana, the largest dealer of rustic furniture at the time. Old Hickory advertised handmade rustic furniture for country clubs, lodge rooms, summer camps, golf clubs, hotels and parks throughout the country. The catalogs emphasized the simplicity, durability and rustic charm of each piece created with pride and care. Young hickory saplings were gathered in winter when the sap was down and the bark would bond closely with the wood. The wood was dried in a kiln, treated for insects and soaked in very hot water. The soaked wood could then be bent around steel molds shaped into the desired component. The dried shapes were then drilled, fitted together and nailed at the joints. Once the framework was in place, the seat and seat backs were assembled using rattan or flat reed weaving material. These hardy chairs can still be found in the lobby and mezzanine area of Paradise Inn. Even now, replacement furniture is purchased for the Inn through the Old Hickory Company, almost 100 years later.

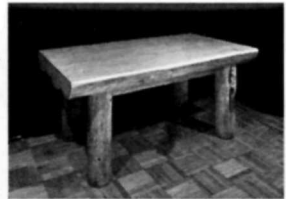
3. Large Rustic Alaskan Cedar Benches with Matching Tables



The rustic benches have smooth varnished seats fashioned from two tree sections with rough cedar posts and seat back "stretchers". The benches are 36" x 32" x 48.5" high from the top of the rear post. The posts measure 7" to 8" in diameter. The tables are 30.5" high with the tops measuring 38"

x 69.5". The golden-colored table tops are made of four split cedar logs, planed and varnished on the surface and ends.

On the sides and underneath, the logs have been left in their natural state. These historic pieces are attributed to Hans Fraehnke, circa 1917 to 1923. Today, these tables and benches provide a quiet respite to look out the lobby windows while playing board games or visiting with family and friends.



4. Piano

This upright piano, manufactured by Schmoller and Mueller of Omaha, is encased in a rustic framework of cedar paneling. The main rectangular section



is surrounded by Alaskan cedar posts on all four corners. A lid, fashioned from three log pieces, rolls back to reveal the keyboard. The internal mechanism is covered by a hinged panel with two knobs decorated by pairs of applied log strips on either side. The back of the piano opens like a cabinet to display the original instrument. It was delivered unadorned in 1919 to Paradise Inn. The rustic encasement was added by Hans Fraehnke over the next few years to match the other cedar furnishings he created by hand. He also made the hinged piano

bench from three pieces of varnished Alaskan cedar and four rough cut legs. In 1945, President Harry Truman visited Paradise Inn and played this same piano for his entourage and admiring guests. It is recorded he played "The Tennessee Waltz" which was his daughter's favorite tune.

5. Throne Chairs

There are four oversized Alaskan cedar chairs hand crafted for the Paradise Inn lobby by Hans Fraehnke. Almost six feet tall, the majestic throne chairs are formed by four cedar posts, the tops of which are whittled to a point and varnished to reveal golden wood. Several cedar planks have been joined to form the seat and seat back, which are also varnished and golden-colored. The seats are cut to accommodate the front posts. The rectangular seat back is rough bark on the sides and culminates in a traditional double wave design. These chairs are approximately 69.75" high, 35.75" wide and 27" deep. In its size and simplicity, these chairs are meant to diminish the visitor and accent the immense, natural landscape.



6. Mezzanine Area Above Lobby – Old Hickory Tables and Chairs

Paradise Inn opened to the public on July 1, 1917. From the very beginning, Old Hickory chairs and tables have been a mainstay of the mezzanine furniture. More delicate in size and appearance to the grand cedar lobby furnishings,



these tables and chairs compliment the rustic theme of the Inn and the park surroundings. Purchased from Old Hickory Furniture Company of Martinsville, Indiana, the chairs and tables vary slightly from each other. The tables generally have a polished, dark stained top constructed of four to six slats, which form a rough square with rounded corners. The slats are screwed to perpendicular wood strips on the underside of the table. The legs are

pegged into individual blocks rather than complete strips. Four horizontal elements span the legs a few inches below the table top. These are narrower at the ends where they enter mortise holes in the legs. (Cont. next page)

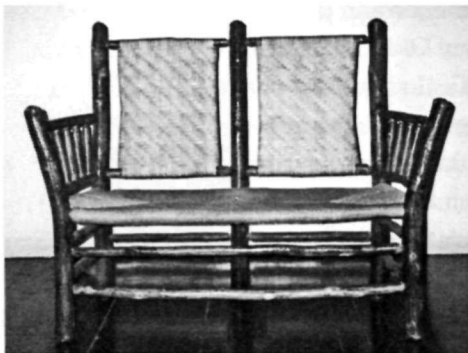
6. Mezzanine Area Above Lobby – Old Hickory Tables and Chairs (Continued)

Additional pieces extend from the legs at a diagonal to meet a cylindrical chunk of polished, bark-covered wood that serves as a central hub. The four hickory legs appear most rustic, the upper horizontals are more refined and the central diagonal elements are machine finished. The tables are approximately 30" high and 30" square.



The chairs are for the most part simple and unadorned. The hickory frame is mortise and tenon construction with finishing nails at the joints. Most chairs have rattan seat backs, but some are made of woven reed material. Some of the chairs have armrests, but most are without. Underneath the seat, pairs of rungs connect the legs on the front and sides, while a single rung is centered in the rear.

The ends of these are tapered to fit mortise holes in the chair legs. Mortise and tenon construction is reinforced by finishing nails. The chairs are approximately 30.25" tall, 17" deep and 24" at its widest point. There is one settee included in this collection. Today, wicker styled chairs, tables, bed frames, desks and chest of drawers are ordered from Old Hickory to furnish the guest rooms.



7. Grandfather Clock

This enormous cedar grandfather clock is composed of three sections; a clock face, a middle portion that opens like a cabinet and a base. The square clock face, a middle portion that opens like a cabinet and a base. The square clock face has plain roman numerals, is under glass and framed by cedar log posts. The top has a broken pediment design with a central finial culminating in a spherical point. Each side of the clock is decorated with an unbroken pediment. The middle portion of the clock is like a cabinet, complete with keyhole and once contained brass works, striker and 36" pendulum. This internal mechanism was removed sometime after 1950. The door is outlined in applied log trim. The panels on either side are chamfered panels. The wider base of the clock is surrounded by five cedar log wedges on each side. It is said that the tree sectioned clock was constructed in Hans Fraehnke's Fife workshop and transported by truck to the Inn circa 1918-1919 and assembled on site. The old clock stands 14 feet high. The base is 46" x 37". All the polished cedar ornamentation is simple, but precise, resembling colonial furniture of refined proportions. Today, the hand hewn clock is a sentinel, standing guard over the lobby as it has for almost 100 years. All internal mechanisms have been removed and the clock runs simply on a 9 volt battery.



8. Settee

Although resembling the oversized cedar throne chairs in material and style, the smaller settee has continuous front and rear posts. Planks in the seat bottom have been cut to fit around them, eliminating the need for bolted internal frame that is part of the larger chairs. Stretchers between the rear posts are carved out to accommodate two separate rectangular seat backs. The posts terminate in varnished angle cuts similar to the throne chairs. Hans Fraehnke created this settee without embellishment. It is 37.5" tall, 26.25" wide and 49" long.



9. Mail Drop

The mail drop stump was hand crafted by Hans Fraehnke circa 1917. It is made of ten Alaskan cedar board sections pegged together into a central core. A slot has been cut into one of the log sections, with a small door cut directly opposite to remove mail placed into the stump. It is 47 inches tall with a base of 50 inches in diameter. It has served as the mail drop for the Inn for almost 100 years. In 2014, the US Post Office station at the Inn was closed. The stump continues to house mail posted by Inn guests and is picked up daily.



10. Registration Desk

As the Inn opened to guests on July 1, 1917, the registration desk was plain wood and not distinctive in craftsmanship. By 1918, Hans Fraehnke had covered the front and sides with cedar log trim and built a wood framework above the desk, creating separate areas for each hotel clerk. The clerks' windows were divided by cedar posts with triangular wood caps over the tops that gave them an alpine appearance. The ends of the horizontal beams just under the desk surface were varnished to set off the golden cedar. Only one of these remains on the registration desk today. Computers now fill the space to expedite the check-in process.



Sometime after 1930, the lobby and registration area were painted in a forest and icicle motif with rings of yellow-orange stripes, blue stripes and green tree shapes outlined in brown. The story is told that boy scouts were enlisted to paint these posts and decorative areas.

Acknowledgements

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Author of Text

Text taken from

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National Park Service Curatorial staff

Appraisal: Rustic Furnishings Mount Rainier National Park, Timothy Gordon, I.S.A. Assoc., 1999.



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