

Now I lay me down to sleep

I have stayed in some really unusual places on my travels, but none odder than the capsule hotels in Tokyo, Japan. Capsule hotels offer coffin size spaces that are only big enough to lie down in, and maybe sit up at about a 30-degree angle. The capsules are placed right next to each other, and are usually stacked two deep. The hatch to crawl in and out is made of glass, and there is a screen to pull over that part for privacy. There is a control panel to operate the air conditioning/heat and a small TV.



JOANNE WILKINSON
Home and Abroad

It is not possible to dress or undress in the capsule; that must be done in a communal bathroom where you can store your clothes in a locker and put on a robe for sleeping. The price is very reasonable at about \$30 a night and the capsule hotels are usually booked solid. You just have to make sure you do not suffer from claustrophobia, as that would be a real problem.

Tarantulas

When I was traveling around Central America, I stayed with the Cuna Indians on the San Blas Islands off the coast of Panama. I actually shared a local family's hut, and was given a hammock to sleep on. An older woman was moaning softly when I arrived, and I went over to say hello to her. A tarantula had bitten her the night before and her entire thigh was swollen and back and blue. You can imagine my dreams as I waited for the sting of some horrible insect to get me in the night.

On the same Central American trip I stayed at a rundown hotel in Panama City. I did not have a lot of money to spend on accommodation, so anything under \$10 suited me. The room I was given seemed perfectly adequate, but I did notice the lock on the room door was very flimsy. Around 2 a.m. I heard the doorknob rattling, and within seconds someone was in my room. As I was on the ground floor, I sprinted out the window with my money and passport and ran to the office. The man on duty laughed when I told him my problem.

In a disinterested sort of way, he got the keys to all the rooms, escorted me back to my room (where the door was wide open, but no one was there), and set me up in another room with a much better lock on the door. I don't even remember being that frightened. I think I was just annoyed that my sleep had been interrupted.

Bites and rats

Then just a few weeks later, I stayed in a flea-bitten place in Guatemala. All night long I felt itchy, and when I woke up in the morning I had bed bug bites all over my arms and legs — and I mean hundreds of bites. They itched terribly, and the bites stayed red and horrible looking for about two months. I did not realize it at the time, but I probably had bedbugs in my backpack as well.

Another sleeping misadventure happened in Nur Eliya, Sri Lanka. The hotel we stayed at was perched right at the top of the mountain and at night it got very cold. There was no central heating, but we paid extra to have the fireplace in our room lit. It gave off virtually no heat so Mark and I huddled together. Then we started to hear loud scratching noises in the rafters, and in the walls of the room. The place was alive with rats.

Speaking of rats, my worst sleep adventure happened when I lived in Sumatra, Indonesia. In the middle of the night I woke up because I felt a sharp pain in my left little finger. I looked down and a medium sized rat was on my bed and had just bitten my finger. I screamed, jumped up, and knew I had to catch the rat. I was afraid it probably had rabies and needed to be tested. I chased the rat around my little house and finally cornered him behind my stereo speaker. Then my courage ran out, so I called my neighbor, an older gentleman who lived one house away from me. He came over with his golf club, bopped the rat on the head, and then we put the rat in a large container. The next day I delivered it to the hospital, and they sent it away to be tested. About a week later I received the report, which stated, "You will be pleased to know that the brain mouse did not have rabies."

I now confine my sleep adventures to my own bedroom, or if I have to go somewhere, I do my best to find a decent hotel that does not have bedbugs, rats or creatures that fall from the ceiling!

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BEACON of UNITY

From shambles to shining star

photos by Bruce Newman



(Above) The Burns-Belfry Museum and Multicultural Center, just west of the Square on West Jackson Avenue, opens to the public this weekend after an 11-year restoration effort. (Left) A video history of the former church, featuring interviews with local members, plays above the pulpit podium with the push of a button.



Museum-style panels of text and images comprise the first phase of what is to be a permanent installation on local African-American history. Future stages call for a horizontal reader rail connecting the vertical panels and featuring touch-screen digital archives. The windows are double-paned replicas of the original ones, with tinted film to match the stained glass as closely as possible.

Restored Burns-Belfry debuts Saturday

Historic church to host meetings, events

By **LUCY SCHULTZE**
Senior Staff Writer

Every fixture and surface may be brand new, save the brick façade and three ancient pews. But within those sanctuary walls, an immutable soul still lingers.

"You can just feel a whole lot of people, across history, saying: 'Job well done,'" beamed Cynthia Parham, admiring the transformation of the former Burns Methodist Episcopal Church.



Parham

Nearly lost to time's decay and developers' ambitions, the 103-year-old building has been fully restored as a gathering

place for the community and a physical home for the heritage of Oxford's black community.

The public will get its first chance to explore the Burns-Belfry Museum and Multicultural Center following a special dedication event set for Saturday at 5 p.m.

The center's debut caps more than a decade of work by the Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation, a local preservation group, and the Oxford Development Association, a historically black community organization.

"We have held hands and walked through this together," said Parham, president of ODA and a board member for the Heritage Foundation.

"Can you imagine how God has put all these people together?" she said. "I pray that everyone would appreciate it as much as all the hard work that's gone into it."

New life

Situated prominently on West Jackson Avenue, just a few blocks off the Oxford Square,



A panel on Religion and Education highlights the story of Burns church and the contributions of local leaders.

the Burns-Belfry was home to the congregation now known as Burns United Methodist Church until 1974.

The current structure was built in 1910, on the site where Oxford freedmen first built their own house of worship after the

Civil War.

The church served an important role for many in the local African-American community.

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Church: Bell returned

Continued from Page 1B

Those who came of age during the civil rights era knew it as a sanctuary in the most literal terms.

"It was a place of security," Elsie Pugh said in a video about the building's history. "It was a place where you could come in and feel perfectly secure — whereas the world outside was not a very pleasant place most of the time."

Pugh was among several church members from that era who share their remembrances in a 10-minute video, which plays, with the push of a button, on a screen above the pulpit.

Along with the pulpit podium and three original pews, a painting of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane recalls the building's former life as a house of worship. The chancel is flanked today by a set of bathrooms and a kitchen.

The bulk of the former sanctuary is open space, bookended by soaring panels of text and images meant as a first phase of a permanent exhibit on local African-American history.

The space is designed to be flexible, with a pair of roll-out display cases that can provide a showcase in the center of the room or be tucked away to accommodate tables and chairs. A screen opposite the pulpit allows the chair arrangement to be oriented in either direction.

Outside, the former church parsonage has been recreated as office and storage space. A gracious patio connects the two buildings and suggests outdoor receptions.

Sharing a story

Creating the museum-style



PHOTOS BY BRUCE NEWMAN

(Above) Pews original to the ca. 1868 church building, which preceded the current one at the same site, were found within the former parsonage and returned to Burns-Belfry. The parsonage was moved from the church property onto private land in the county when the building was converted to office space in the mid-1970s. (Right) The building's history as a house of worship is evident from the historic pulpit to a painting of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, both original to the 1910 church.

installations that now define the interior space has been no simple process — and it's one that will continue, said Darlene Copp, project manager for the museum portion of the project.

"We have many more local resources to be tapped," said Copp, describing the current exhibits as a preview of what's to come.

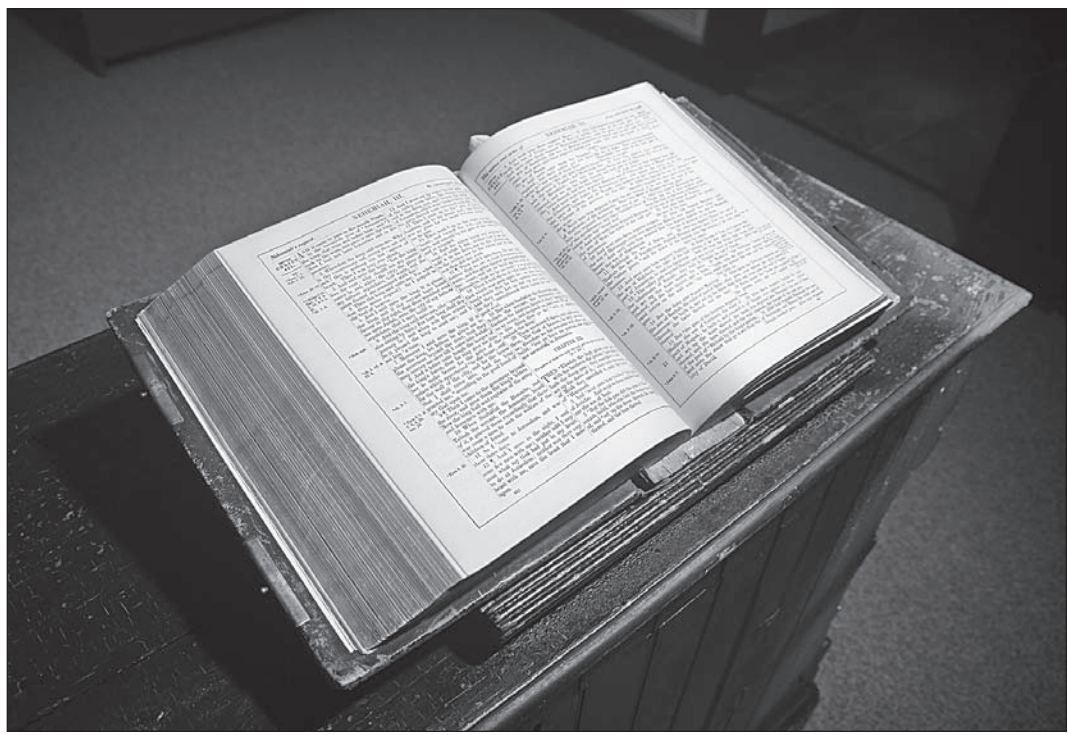
"While there are indications of Lafayette County in the exhibit right now, we will have a full-blown exhibit that will highlight our local heroes," she said.

Copp has led the development of the installation, working first with a diverse

group of community members to determine how best to interpret the story of the building and to create overarching themes. Next, an exhibit team began working to create the display panels.

The project has now engaged four doctoral students at the University of Mississippi to research and write narratives for the four historical themes — Slavery, Emancipation, Jim Crow and Civil Rights — to inform future phases of the exhibit.

Design plans include waist-level reader rails running laterally across the main vertical panels, as well as a touchscreen database of archives



Dedication and more

The community is invited to celebrate the opening of the Burns-Belfry Museum & Multicultural Center at a dedication ceremony Saturday from 5-6 p.m. in the center's parking lot. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the doors will be opened for tours. In case of rain, the ceremony will be held across the street at Second Baptist Church.

Other upcoming events at Burns-Belfry include a series of programs commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Deirdre Cooper Owens, assistant professor of history at the University of Mississippi, kicks off the series Wednesday at 6 p.m. with "Slavery in Mississippi."

The building is available for meetings and events. For more information, call Pryor at 234-4087 or visit burns-belfry.com.

from the local black community. Among priorities: Digitizing the collection maintained by the alumni of pre-integration Oxford Training School and Central High School.

"We don't have room to display everything," said Jim Pryor, Burns-Belfry project leader for the Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation. "But if we digitize materials, they can be available for everyone to access."

The next generation

Among those whom project leaders hope will most benefit from the Burns-Belfry restoration are children in the local community. It's the kind of

place to which Parham took pride in bringing her grandson earlier this week.

"Our kids need to know our heritage," she said. "Our kids don't know about where we came from. They know the history from the books, but there are so many people in Oxford who have contributed."

The themes of education and community run throughout the Burns-Belfry's story. For those who came of age at Burns during the civil rights movement, trusted teachers such as the late Della Davidson provided a continuum of loving support and high standards from church to classroom.

The church bell, which for years was displayed outside Oxford Elementary School, has now been returned home to the Burns-Belfry tower.

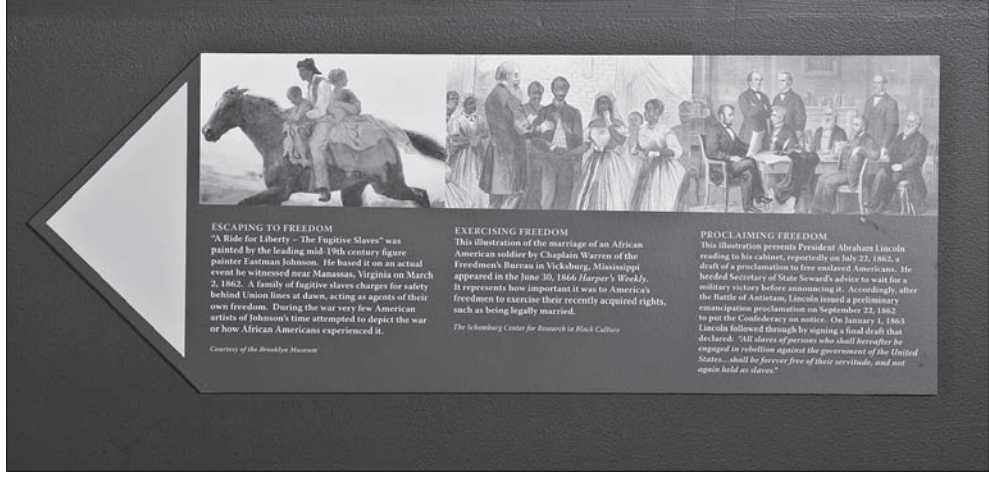
While the leather-bound Bible which sits atop the podium doesn't actually have a historic connection to the building, it has perhaps a spiritual one.

"I just brought it down here and put it down, and look where it opened up to," Pryor said, inviting Parham to read as his finger traced down the page.

It's Nehemiah, asking to lead his people home and rebuild the crumbled walls of Jerusalem.

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BEACON OF UNITY



A team of community members and University of Mississippi professors has been working to design the museum installations.

From dream to reality

For the individuals whose will helped bring the Burns-Belfry back to life, its opening this weekend testifies to the strength of many and the power of a few.

It was both the \$10 contributions of local supporters and a handful of large gifts that allowed the restoration to be completed, over the course of 11 years and three construction phases.

"I'm used to projects that take a long time," said project leader Jim Pryor, an Oxford native who retired from the oil industry.

"It takes eight to 11 years to bring in an oil field," he said. "You just don't give up."

Making the appeal

Pryor's commitment to the project helped earned him the honor of Citizen of the Year from the Oxford-Lafayette County Chamber of Commerce in 2008.

For him, the effort started with a key connection: His sister, Penny Pynkala, had served as secretary for the building's last private owner, author John Grisham.

Grisham used the Belfry as an office and had planned to renovate it himself. Ultimately, though, he moved to Virginia, leaving the building empty as it continued to deteriorate.

Its prime location made it appealing to developers during the height of Oxford's building boom. But a group of preservation-minded citizens, black and white, came together to appeal to Grisham to donate the building and allow the community to restore it.



Pryor

ing at the home of Maralyn Bullion included Pryor, Patricia Young, Gerald Walton, Susie Marshall, Elsie Pugh and Preston Taylor.

"We started raising money, but we didn't get much on the front end," Pryor said. "We were able to fix the plumbing one time, and to put a sign out front to say we were going to do something."

Piecing it together

Working together over the years, the Oxford-Lafayette County Heritage Foundation and Oxford Development Association were able to secure grant funds from local, state and federal government sources, as well as some \$100,000 in individual contributions.

The first phase was simply to stabilize the building, which faced serious structural issues from the studs to the rafters. Second and third phases completed the restoration inside and out.

Propelling the project to completion was a late-coming benefactor — a part-time Oxford resident who took notice of the Burns-Belfry while riding by on his bicycle. Ray Neilson, former chairman of Ameristar Casinos and current chairman of the Craig H. Neilson Foundation, was inspired by the building's history and the effort to preserve it. He has so far donated \$220,000 toward the project.

In total, some \$1.27 million has been raised; an additional \$150,000 is needed to complete the project.

Beyond the restoration itself, a campaign to provide ongoing support for the building's operation and maintenance will follow.

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