

Denhart building makes national historic registry

By Tom Batters
Times Newspapers



The old Denhart building on the square, which Tom and Judy Gross are converting into a coffee shop, restaurant and inn, was recently placed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

The building was built in 1874, and many of its original features are intact, but that did not guarantee that it would get placed on the national registry.

It took months of research and paperwork to successfully complete the application process.

“Judy researched the architecture and I researched the history,” Tom Gross said. “It was a long process, but it was worth it.”

Gross said he learned a lot during his research.

“I learned how important the newspaper is to a small community,” he said. “I found most of my information in old newspapers. If I didn’t have those, it would have been next to impossible to find information that far back.”

He learned that Abraham Lincoln used the building two doors down from the Denhart building as a meeting place when he came to Washington.

“He met with other politicians and planned his political future in that building, right up to his nomination,” Gross said.

Richard Smith’s Dry Good Store occupied the building back then. When Lincoln won the nomination for president, he appointed Smith postmaster general.

Smith sold his building to Charles Anthony and Henry Denhart, who opened Denhart Bank in 1866, one year after Lincoln was assassinated.

In 1874, they moved Denhart Bank to the building two doors down.

“They made a lot of money right after the Civil War,” Gross said. “People were just coming back from the war, and they were finding places to settle. The bank did a lot of business.”

The original safe is still in the lower level of the building.

The Grosses said they will preserve much of the building’s history as they turn it into a coffee shop, restaurant and inn.

The coffee shop, for example, Judy Gross said, will look a lot like the old bank.

“We’ll have the old teller window and the old radiators that were in the bank,” she said.

Tom Gross said the outside of the building will look very similar to the way the building looked in 1900.

“The earliest picture we have is from 1900, so that’s what we’re basing the look on,” he said.

He said the original sandstone and other elements of the architecture will remain intact.

The building will also feature modern attributes, including geothermal heating and 15 new bathrooms.

The Grosses said they hope to have the building open for business by Dec. 1.