



Jonathan D. Woods/The Gazette

The sun sets behind the Ox Yoke Inn Restaurant sign in Amana on Wednesday. The 1950s sign is going to be taken down because of new sign regulations.

No more neon guidance from Ox Yoke Inn sign

By Dave Rasdal
The Gazette

AMANA — No neon will light the way to the Ox Yoke Inn after next week. That's when the huge "Ox Yoke Inn Amana Food Family Style" sign goes the way of the automobile tail fin.

"It's bitter-sweet," said Bill Leichsenring Jr., president of Ox Yoke Restaurants.

The sign, erected by his late parents, William and Lina Leichsenring, around 1950, is older than Leichsenring.

"It has always been there,"

said Leichsenring, 52. "It's all I remember."



Bill
Leichsenring
Jr.
Ox Yoke
Restaurants

And he remembers it well. From long ago, when his parents took him Christmas shopping in Cedar Rapids, returning to Amana after dark.

"Coming home on Highway 149 (today's Highway 151), a mile or two out of Amana, you could actually see, over the rooftops,

► SIGN, PAGE 6A

Sign/ Going into storage

► FROM PAGE 1A

our neon sign," Leichsenring said. "To me, that meant Christmas. It was red."

But an Amana Colonies sign ordinance adopted in 1996 forbids neon. Signs like the red, white and blue neon sign at Bill Zuber's Restaurant in Homestead have come down. A much smaller sign advertising The Colony Inn in Amana, as well as the Ox Yoke Inn sign, must follow suit this year, after receiving an extension.

"We got a five-year variance," Leichsenring said. "Now it's time to comply with the powers that be."

As a member of the committee crafting the ordinance, Leichsenring sees both sides. Neon signs from the '50s, like his, represent the entrepreneurship of Amana residents following the Great Change in 1932 after they abandoned a communal lifestyle. But these signs also contrast with the Amana Colonies' designation as a national historic landmark.

So next week, this landmark becomes history. The steel pole holding it will be cut. The 11 1/2-foot wide, 9-foot tall sign will be lifted by crane to a trailer. It will be hauled away, leaving in its stead a simple 6-foot wide by 3-foot tall white wooden sign with black letters and the Ox Yoke Inn logo.

Opened by the Leichsenring family in 1940 down the street where the Ronneburg Restaurant now operates, the Ox Yoke Inn began without a name. Longtime friend and antiques dealer Ernest Curtain suggested Ox Yoke Inn based on the settlers' use of oxen to clear the land. His additional suggestion to display old ox yokes continues today.

In 1950, the restaurant relocated to its present 1856 building, a former communal kitchen. The neon sign, built by Nesper Signs of Cedar Rapids, went up shortly thereafter.

The original red background was eventually painted blue to enhance the neon. Leichsenring later painted it brown to match the building. But there was never any doubt of the neon, bright and red, a beacon in the night.

At one time, Leichsenring said, a historic interest was expressed about preserving the sign. But that waned, probably because of its size.

Still, the sign may be coming down but it's not being destroyed.

"I've asked the Amana Society if they can give us some storage space," Leichsenring said. "Some weatherproof storage space, until we decide what we can do with it."

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DIMENSIONS:
LENGTH 11 1/2'
HEIGHT 9'
DEPTH 2'

September 15, 2008

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Text size:

AOL  travel

Neon sign to be removed from Amana Colonies

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CARS

AMANA, Iowa - A neon sign that's been a landmark in eastern Iowa since 1950 will become history next week because of an Amana Colonies ordinance.

JOBS

REAL ESTATE

The steel pole holding the "Ox Yoke Inn Armana Food Family Style" sign will be cut down and the 11 1/2-foot wide by 9-foot tall sign will be lifted by crane onto a trailer. It will be replaced by a 6-foot wide by 3-foot tall white wooden sign with black letters and the restaurant's logo.

APARTMENTS

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Ox Yoke Restaurants president Bill Leichsenring Jr. said the sign was erected by his parents.

"It has always been there," said Leichsenring, 52. "It's all I remember."

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The Leichsenring family opened the restaurant in 1940 at a nearby site where the Ronneburg Restaurant now operates. It moved to its current site in 1950 in a former communal kitchen built in 1856, and the neon sign went up a short time later.

A friend suggested the Ox Yoke Inn name in honor of settlers who used oxen to clear the surrounding land.

The sign must be removed because of an Amana Colonies ordinance adopted in 1996 that forbids neon signs.

Leichsenring said his sign was given a variance for some years, but "now it's time to comply with the powers that be."

Amana Colonies officials have said that neon signs contrast with the area's designation as a national historic landmark.

Leichsenring said he's asked the Amana Society for storage space for the sign until he decides what to do with it.

Information from: The Gazette, <http://www.gazetteonline.com/>

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