

# 2001 Restoration of a Colonial Home



by Lois Groshong

# INTRODUCTION

Architecture is the snap shot of place and time past and present. As good stewards to our environment, our duty is to establish, where needed, and retain practices that will allow us to enjoy the heritage of those who have come before us. As a sovereign nation we are young. Asian and European societies have preserved their past, often blending with the present in harmony.

We, at Historic Restorations, believe that restoration of our vintage homes is a necessity if we are to thrive as a nation. This country was settled by people looking for a better and a new way to live. We are a nation of immigrants. Some came to worship their personal God. Some came to escape famine. Other were driven from their homelands. Still others were brought onto these shores unwillingly. All have made contributions to this nation - leaving their imprint on humble dwellings, churches, shops, mansions, and skyscrapers. Our homes tell our story. We celebrate the past, it is our legacy to the future.

Lois Groshong

.....**BEGIN EXCERPT**.....



Historic Restorations received a phone call from the current homeowners on November 22, 2000. Their son had visited our web site and suggested to his parents that they contact our company to solve their problem of replacement windows that had been installed in a c. 1725 structure. The question posed to Charles Groshong was, “Is it possible to recreate eleven windows, drames, sash, and glass into eleven different size openings in one house?” And make it look to have always been kept intact. What a challenge – this just scratched the surface of the “modernizing” remodels that the home had undergone over its nearly three hundred-year life. December 5, 2000 Mr. and Mrs. Homeowner drove from Salem, New Jersey to Lancaster, PA to meet Charles and Lois Groshong and see the cabinet/mill shop where their windows would be created.

The home sits within eight acres, mostly unkempt and overgrown with wild grass and reed in the low marshy spots. Original brick on the house has a glaze pattern common in the making of brick in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. An addition from the Victorian era sits under a shed roof enclosing a kitchen. On the East wall is the only redeemable unit, a built-in cupboard with what appear to be a dumb waiter inside. The piece was made with paneled, inlayed doors, eight total – four uppers and four lower cabinets. This will be taken out carefully and saved for the homeowners. In the Main room there is a fireplace with a simple mantel above the brick floor and firewalls. To the right of the fireplace is a closet, the staircase to the second floor is on the left and to the left of the stairway is a hallway. There is a hump in the floor like a ramp, leading to the rear room, a bedroom with another fireplace, an exterior door, and another small closet. Walls on the first floor are brick-covered with plaster, panels and several layers of wallpaper and paint. Original floorboards are intact and range from 12 inches to 16 inches wide, Heart Pine.

A curve in the narrow stairway to the second floor suggests that the stairway is not original to the house. At the top of the stairs is a door with “German” door hardware. Turning left in the hall, the approach leads to a bedroom, directly above the Main room on the first floor. A fireplace rests above the location of the fireplace in the Main room. Down the narrow hall is the second, second floor bedroom that originally was a room that occupied two-thirds of the second

floor. A small bathroom introduced during a remodel in the Mid-Victorian era is squeezed between the bedroom and the staircase to the attic.

The current shutters on the windows are Victorian with a two-panel design that allows the raised panel to be exposed on the inside when the shutters are closed. Not bad, but not original to the house. We will explore options to reinvent the essence of the design in 1725. Three exterior doors, Victorian era, have been matched with aluminum storm doors, c. 1950's.

A load of White Oak was purchased from an Antique wood dealer - raw material taken from an old building that had been demolished. 3"x8" beams that range in length from three to sixteen feet. To begin the process of transformation, the wood is run on the planer, making all sides straight and smooth. Sections are measured, cut, and sat aside. Cracks and imperfections are filled with "Bondo" and sanded smooth to the touch. Next, the ends are mortised or tendoned, depending on if it is a vertical or horizontal section of the window frame. Side jambs are tendoned to fit the head and sill mortise. The pieces are sized and glued together. Historic Restorations also uses steel clamps to insure that the fit is as square and tight as it can be. Clamps are kept on for 24 hours, there will be no movement that can be detected in any unit. After the window frames are all together an oil base primer coat is applied to all surfaces to seal the wood; this is also an effective method to prepare for the finish coat to be applied on site. Sash size varies because the window openings are all different. There are five twelve over eight windows on the first floor, three eight over eight and three twelve over eight windows on the second floor. Old glass is purchased for the "new" old windows. Each pane is measured, cut and glazed to fit each section of sash. The effect is complete, newly made window frames and sash complement the 276-year old house. Upon the installation of the windows in Mid-March 2001 the exterior of the house takes on renewed life.

The walls are covered with paint, layers of wallpaper and plaster. The ceilings are covered by plasterboard, resembling a seven and one half-foot modern flat ceiling. Upon removing the added on coverings the walls revealed the original brick badly deteriorated from the years of settling and time had weakened portions of the interior structure. A 12"x15" Chestnut Summer Beam spans the length of each room on the first floor. The joist system for the second floor 5"x4.5" is at right angles to the beam. Originally these exposed rafters were white washed. The lye used in the white wash prevented infestation of insects as well as supplying a finished look for the wood. Our next project was to strengthen the walls in the two rooms on the first floor. Old brick was carefully taken out and relayed in an interlocked pattern, three deep, modeled from

existing brickwork. This is similar to putting a giant jigsaw puzzle together. Concrete lintels have been installed above the doors and windows. Wire mesh is nailed to exposed brick to prepare for a new layer of fresh plaster.

In the Artisan woodworking shop of Historic Restorations a staircase made from Poplar, for risers and Antique Pine as treads is made ready. The staircase that had been taken out was not original. That stairway had narrow treads and curved away for the room. The handrail system was square posts and a Bull Nose on the bottom thread. Chuck determined that originally the stairs were a straight run between the fireplace and a door that opened into the room from the hallway. Paneling made in the Historic Restorations shop from Poplar, was stained and included in the delivery. Jonathan has found evidence of paneling as being part of the earliest home décor. Custom paneling will be used in the more formal first floor room. A Colonial handrail is purchased; to be taken apart, refinished and fit into the stair and rail system.

The Denn House was designed with a central chimney. A popular style in the late 16th Century Europe, it supports the ventilation system for the four fireplaces in the original house. The two fireplaces on the first floor sit back to back directly below the two fireplaces on the second floor. Over the years the fireboxes on the first floor have been decreased in size. One fireplace on the second floor was hidden behind a wall. A gem uncovered when Jonathan demolished the bathroom that had been added early in the 20th Century. This fireplace has an arched opening with a “keystone” center top. Chuck loved the look of this discovery so much he wanted to duplicate it in one of the first floor fireplaces.

First floor first, both fireboxes are taken apart exposing the original dimensions for reconstruction. Brick are place on the hearth and back in a Herringbone pattern. The decision to do this was arrived at by searching local homes to observe the style of the tradesmen when this area was first settled. The Herringbone pattern is seen repeatedly in sidewalks, courtyards and driveways. A definite eastern seaboard occurrence.

Meanwhile back at the shop. Mantel surrounds are made and primed for installation. Panels have been constructed to echo the patterns of panels that had been removed from the rooms. These new panels will create a doorway, closet and a headpiece for the fireplace in the Main room. A four-pane transom, with old glass, is ready to go into place above the front door. All trim with a Colonial profile was made in the shop, Windows, Chair rail, Exterior Doors, Baseboards. Woodwork is stained or primed and brought to site for installation. An original exterior doorframe is reused on the Denn House where the original exterior brick will remain exposed. Just below the ceiling, four

beam-ends are applied to the wall, Jonathan's handy work. This treatment gives the wall a very old look and it speaks in explanation that it belongs. A time capsule.

While researching the Denn House at the Salem County Historical Society a question is raised about the possibility of a Stair Tower. A Stair Tower would have been used to access the second floor on the exterior from the riverside. Some kind of deck/balcony area would span for ten to fifteen feet. Looking at the interior walls on the second floor and the exterior brickwork we are inconclusive. There appears to have been a door on the second floor that now has a window in the space. On the outside the brick course seems to have been interrupted. Pictures to confirm the existence of a Stair Tower have not surfaced. Uncovering the truth to this mystery is still waiting to be discovered.

Second floor ceiling is insulated and planks are installed, made from S4S boards of Hemlock and Yellow Pine. A light coating of white wash was done in the shop before installation. Ceiling planks are then nailed with exposed Rose head antique nails. Similar nails had been found on this site reflecting mid-eighteenth century building practices. Rose head nails were only available from the United Kingdom and having exposed nails indicated the family's loyalty to the King as well as an expression of wealth. The entire house will have plaster to finish the walls. A brown coat is first applied with a veneer plaster covering. The decision to leave the finish coat unpainted gives the impression of "old" plaster, white on taupe antiquing.

Woodwork is nearing completion on the first floor. Four exterior doors are made in the Historic Restorations Artisan shop, loaded onto the trailer and delivered to the Denn House. Hardwood solid core doors built to represent the original entrances into Colonial homes. One door, facing the road, is a "Dutch door" to mirror the style of door in this opening when Historic Restorations first visited the site. All of the exterior doors have  $\frac{3}{4}$ " skins on the inside applied to the six panel face, increasing the width of the doors to a total of  $1 \frac{1}{4}$ ". Two doors have sash, eight light, and old glass. During the demolition process a door was found inside the wall at the top of the stairs on the second floor. This door was taken to our shop and refurbished and hung at the attic entrance on the second floor. A winding staircase to access the attic was designed by Chuck with treads and risers made from Antique Yellow Pine, with an invisible suspension system. No stringers were used, just risers and treads holding themselves together. Paint grade Poplar is used to produce the mantels for the two downstairs fireplaces. A profile from an early 17th century Philadelphia mantel is used as a model. Two different looks are achieved using the material run in liner feet. Formal and delicate for the front room, voluptuous layers in rear panel room.

On the second floor the original paneling style, found in an upstairs bedroom, has a double beaded shiplap pattern. Every other board is set back ¼” inch creating a relief effect. Once more nails are left exposed as the hallway, fireplace surrounds and closets are put together. The space that appears to have at one time been an exterior door opening in the hall is framed out to be even with the rest of the hall wall. We had a challenge with how to cover the air returns in these two upper rooms. A modern purchased product was a poor solution. Jonathan created two vent covers, one from Antique Yellow Pine and the other from Mahogany in the shop. The work is perfectly beautiful and very believable.

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## EPILOGUE

Our clients did not have a Scope of Work defined when Historic Restorations was chosen to work on the house. As work progressed the project evolved into a Design/Build project. The elements of the house gave us clues as to the original layout of rooms and their use. Our clients offered suggestions and personal preferences. Historic Restorations brought our knowledge of Colonial building, structural engineering, and sensitivity to the geographical location.

In conclusion, the restoration of this historically significant home will allow the structure to stand for another two or three hundred years. As a monument to all the families who have occupied the home. European settlers in the New World, land owners establishing communities, farmers, fishermen, and the family who loved the house and their community enough to preserve this dwelling for the future of us all.