

Hollow Stabilization Summer 2007 Report 1, 15 August 2007

by Architectural Historian & Local Project Manager Cheryl Hanback Shepherd

Edward Ashby's stonemasons started this year's stabilization in June with promised pointing of the chimney he and his artisans constructed on the west gable end last year. They reconstructed their scaffolding and covered it with a black breathable landscaping cloth which offered some protection from the rain and hot sun so the mortar could slowly dry. The mortar contains no clay, but is composed of three parts graded sand to one part lime putty. Alejandro points the chimney at right.

Charged with multiple repair and restoration responsibilities on the roof system toward the ultimate goal of applying new split oak shingles to the gable, APVA carpenters Mike Adams, Karl Newago and John Miano arrived at The Hollow on July 16th. They first removed the circa 1980, standing-seam metal from the roof and replaced the rotten laths. Most of the pit-sawn and wrought-nailed, oak laths remain in good condition. Several campaigns of roofing were evident in the mix of nails used since 1763-64, including one covered with wood shingles and two standing-seam-metal applications in the twentieth century. Although the lean in the main structural system was corrected in 2005, a rack in the roof remained for straightening once the metal was removed. The carpenters used straps and muscle to move the roof framing to a satisfactory level.



The slippage in the roof before leveling is visible on the left. However, the restored chimney rises straight. The wide, short sheathing on the ends of the gable dates to circa 1980 when the Friends of The Hollow decided an overhang would provide more protection for the weatherboards. Karl and Mike are pulling the strap taunt in the northwest corner of the garret. The knee wall was temporarily removed to lessen the tension on the framing. It was reattached with the original wrought nails.

Seated on the scaffolding in the picture to the right, Karl is using consolidates to fill in deteriorated parts of the false or raising plate and rafter tails. This south false plate was too badly split to save entirely and had to be spliced at the east end. The rafter tails attach to this plate. John straddles the ridge to cut off the overhanging lath. Wider than traditional roofing lath, the bottom horizontal board at the eave is called the shingle starting board. The one on the north rear was deteriorated, recycled, poplar with a beaded edge. Both were replaced with solid oak boards, so the carpenters could start shingling on a solid base.



Also before the roof shingling could begin, the boxed cornice with crown and bed molding on the rear elevation required patching and repair, while the front elevation's no longer existed and had to be entirely restored. One might think that the cornice is a decorative detail that would follow the wood shingling of the roof. Contrarily, the boxed cornice with a crown molding provides a stop for the starter board and a foundation for the one-and-one-half-inch overhang of the first wood shingle course. Mike, Karl and John did a splendid job of patching and splicing the rear cornice members to save as much authenticity as possible. The original moldings, fascia and soffit became the template for the replacement members made in the Jamestown workshop. Initially fooled by the weathered and discolored grain, we ordered cypress for the replacement members that eventually turned out to be the similarly-grained pine.



John, Mike and Karl are pulling up the 15'-1/2" foot-long poplar starting board on the north rear roof slope that had two rose-head nails fastening it. A half-inch bead finished the board, indicative of a possible trim band under a cornice. The original boxed cornice above and left display the use of Abatron and West System wood consolidation products to preserve as much of the materials as possible. New timber is spliced in to the west-right end of the cornice which was largely destroyed by carpenter bees, water and rot.

Here's the front elevation with the cornice and starting board restored. It's the first time the team has seen a cornice on the front. Notice that even with the tarp on the roof, the racking no longer appears. Likewise, the body of the dwelling stands proudly erect since its straightening and stabilization involving lifting, inserting a new sill, patching framing and foundation work in 2005.

The next major step in preparation for the roof shingling involved creating the cornice end which we could have designed with more ornament, yet, the original did not survive. Without solid evidence to follow, we'd rather err on the plainer side than falsely design embellishment without precedence. Therefore, we determined to go

with a cornice end trim that simply follows the profile of the cornice (pictured below). It still takes patience and skillful craftsmanship to cope the trim board and the end of the beaded rake board to match the crown and bed moldings.



John has drawn the crown molding profile on the poplar rake board for the northwest slope of the gable and is cutting the pattern with a modern jigsaw. At left, John, Karl and Mike together fasten the rake board. Room still remains underneath to remove the protective plywood and apply the weatherboard later. Because the rakes came warped, Mike had to plane them after attachment to perfectly achieve the eighteenth-century characteristic taper to the ridge.

At right, Mike planes the northwest rake with Karl's assistance, and John begins tooling the rake end to match the cornice and end boards. The finished cornice, end trim and rake on the southwest front corner is shown below. Marshall descendants have long been embarrassed by the neglected appearance of the great Chief Justice John Marshall's one-and-one-half-story, frame, boyhood home. Yet, our years of evaluation have proven that the house was far from shameful when constructed. Now,



Thomas and John Marshall's finely-finished, 1763-64, Virginia house is returning to its original stateliness, thanks to Dr. and Mrs. David Collins, the Friends of The Hollow, the APVA and dedicated APVA and local craftsmen.



By week four, the tradesmen were ready to begin shingling the roof. Thomas Marshall's house had split shingles as expected and discovered in the garret in 2005. Traditionally, they should be four-to-six-inches wide and eighteen inches long. While we could have chosen to use sawn shingles to distinguish current workmanship, we wanted the split look, and they will last longer. Water has no channel on sawn shingles, but the split shingles have hand-made grooves that better drain the water off of the roof. Eighteenth-century craftsmen were wise to this. The starter course begins with an eight-inch long squared off shingle, followed by a twelve-inch-long squared shingle. The eighteen-inch-long, round-butt shingle is laid above the first two to begin the pattern and create a one-and-one-half-inch eave overhang. The eighteen-inch-long shingle then continues up the roof in varying widths cut to the artisan's preference to overlap for water tightness while still allowing necessary breathing ability.



These APVA artisans are extremely particular to have a perfect fit for the longevity of the roof. Karl further planes a twelve-inch-long shingle. We are in the process of working with the cooperative supplier to improve the quality of shingles since more fail to meet superior standards in size, thickness and straightness with minimal flaws that Mike, Karl and John expect for traditional shingling.



At left, Karl lays the twelve-inch-long second layer on the starter course, and Mike places one-and-one-half-inch marks on the middle course where he wants the overlay edge to fall.



The eight- and twelve-inch starter shingles are set in the left picture, and Mike has applied two of the top shingles. His one-and-one-half-inch space shows on the middle shingle. The carpenters are leaving 1/8" to 1/4" between the shingles for breathing and swelling. With six courses fully attached in the lower photograph, the wood-shingled roof is taking on a colorful chronochromatic look in the shade and features Thomas Marshall's round-butt or scalloped pattern.



The work continues four days a week at The Hollow, Monday - Thursday through the summer and probably into the fall. The carpenters and Cheryl (540-349-0118) welcome visitors. We are delighted to discuss the techniques and preservation of John Marshall's Boyhood Home. Some of the poplar weatherboards on the west gable and possibly a corner board or two will be applied during this season as well.