

Final resting place

History buffs keep old cabin from resting in pieces

The little log cabin has a home once again. After narrowly escaping demolition, then languishing in pieces for 16 years, the 160-year-old structure is whole again. Its new site is a peaceful valley near Grafton, where it nestles in the shelter of a limestone bluff. A spring-fed creek runs past, just as it might have in the days when the cabin was built in Alton circa 1820-1830. Tom Thompson of Alton reassembled the one-room cabin at his herb farm to safeguard a piece of the past.

"Somebody took a broadax and hewed these logs out of a tree," Thompson said. "When you run your hands over the ax marks, you're touching history," Thompson said.

"People ask why I went to all this trouble," he added. "Well, I wanted to leave something of historic value here. The older you get, the more you realize it's important to keep the past."

Thompson bought the cabin from Alton preservationist Robert St. Peters, who saved it from destruction 16 years ago.

He happened onto the cabin in 1974, when a clapboard house that had been built around it at 304 Sixth St. was torn down to make way for a parking lot.

The cabin became the center of a bitter preservation fight.

When attempts to keep the structure on its original site failed, St. Peters bought it for \$400 from demolition workers who thought the logs were railroad ties and planned to use them as ceiling beams in a vacation home.

After months of political wrangling, St. Peters was unable to obtain the property and was given 24 hours to remove the cabin.

With the help of wife Helen, family, fellow preservationists and students from SIUE, St. Peters numbered and dismantled the logs in the nick of time.

They lay lashed under plastic in his back yard until Thompson, also a preservationist, expressed an interest in resurrecting the structure.

"I told him, 'If you can put it together, you have a deal,'" St. Peters said. He sold the cabin to Thompson for the \$400 he paid for it in 1974.

Although St. Peters had hoped to restore the cabin on its original site, he's content to have it where it is now.

"I went through a lot of agony and expense to save it," St. Peters said. "I thought it would never be put together again."

As he became older, he realized he was never going to be able to do it himself, he said.

"I didn't have an appropriate place to put it, and it's perfect here," he said, motioning to the clearing where the cabin stands.

"That's why we put it here," Thompson said.

The cabin won't be used, but will be open for viewing so people can peer into the past. And it will be a link between the past and the future.

"I would like to have field trips and school kids," Thompson, principal of Alton High School, said.

Putting the cabin together again was not child's play, Thompson said. "When we first brought it up here, we thought it would be easy. I had one of those log sets when I was a kid. But oh!" he said, laughing.

Thompson's son, David, who manages the Wildflower Farm herb garden, and Thompson's brother-in-law, Paul Stumpf, of Edwardsville did the work, with help from some of



Story by Mary Ann Mazenko ■ Color photo by Russ Smith

Thompson's former students.

It was an experience. The logs were not lightweights.

"One tail log was so heavy, we couldn't hold it," Thompson said. "It fell off our hands and knocked Paul flat. Some of those logs have to weigh 300 pounds."

Most of the logs are oak. "That's why they survived in my back yard," St. Peters said.

The original cabin had a dirt floor, with two plank floors added later. But Thompson put it on a concrete base to protect the wood.

"We didn't want to put the logs on the ground," he said. "We were concerned about their age and condition, and didn't want to risk any more damage."

Because the original roof had already been destroyed when St. Peters bought the cabin, a new roof, front door and window frames were necessary. Thompson used old wood to keep the right historical look.

It took six men to lift the last logs, which had to be held over their heads. "We had no equipment except muscle," Thompson said.

The original mortar contained horsehair, but Thompson had to settle for brick mortar, adding limestone and sand to make it pliable.

Settlers who built the cabin wedged wood chinks between

the logs, then put mortar over them, and Thompson did the same. St. Peters had saved the original chinks in plastic bags.

St. Peters believes the cabin was built by, or occupied early on, by a relative of frontiersman Daniel Boone, who lived 50 miles away in Defiance, Mo.

An 1850 census from the state archives lists a Samuel Boone, 35, and his family as occupants of the house. "After Boone sold it around 1855 or so, Isaac Kelly and his family took over," St. Peters said.

Kelly was great-grandfather to Alton resident Lottie Pendergrass, who was born in the cabin in 1914. "I don't think we lived there too long," she reminisced. "The Kellys built a story and a half house around the cabin."

Her great-grandfather came to Alton from Macon, Ga., a freed slave before the Civil War, Pendergrass said. "I think it's nice the cabin is restored," she said. "Bob St. Peters gave me a small log so I would have a piece of the cabin."

And Bob St. Peters is content that the cabin is whole again. "It's in a historic area," he said, "and I feel my mission is complete. Tom Thompson has brought it to reality."

Thompson will put a plaque near the cabin with the inscription, *Boone-Kelly Cabin, 1836, Dedicated to Robert and Helen St. Peters, Historic Preservationists.*

"This cabin is their legacy," Thompson said.



Kathy Pelletier puts Morgan horses through their paces at the University of Connecticut horse barn in Storrs, Conn. The line of U.S. cavalry horses lives on through a special breeding program at five of New England's state universities.

Cavalry horses fight for survival

By NITA LELYVELD
Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — They are symbols of pride, this small band of horses.

Their common ancestor was named Figure, a smallish, handsome equine, given to settle a debt in the late 1700s, strong enough to plow rocky hillsides or pull a log with three men on it, yet fast enough to win prizes at the race.

Figure's descendants rode and fought from Gettysburg and Shenandoah to Appomattox. One was the only survivor at the Little Big Horn.

They served the U.S. Cavalry until the horse soldiers dismounted in 1943 to take up sturdier chargers like tanks and armored vehicles.

But they survive in New England in a special breeding program at five state universities, including the University of Con-

necticut.

At the UConn horse barn, four Morgan horses originating from U.S. Cavalry lines already have been born this year. Three or four more are expected by year's end.

The Morgan is widely considered to be the first truly American breed, named after Justin Morgan, a schoolteacher, professional musician and tavern owner who moved from West Springfield, Mass., to Randolph Centre, Vt., in 1788.

When Morgan returned to West Springfield in 1795 to collect a debt, he was given two horses in lieu of money.

One was Figure, a 2-year-old Bay colt, an unusually strong, even-tempered and tireless animal.

Figure, later renamed Justin Morgan, died in 1821, having served numerous masters in his 28 years. While the facts and caliber of his own lineage were

unknown, his legacy is priceless.

Morgans are relatively small, averaging about 15 hands and usually weighing about 1,000 pounds. Brown, bay, chestnut or black, they exhibit a sturdy elegance that in the 19th century made them horses of choice either in front of a plow or carriage or mounted in battle.

Today, they have made the UConn horse barn a popular gathering place, especially when the young foals can be seen teetering and tottering near their mothers in the surrounding fields.

The youngest Morgan foal was born on May 5, bred from a 7-year-old Morgan mare named Merwin's Black Beauty and a 5-year-old Morgan stallion, Doc Daniels.

The small bay colt, with his large eyes and already graceful

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