

## WHITE WATER RESTORATION EFFORTS



**Meeting house.** The 1827 brick meeting house – the only extant brick example in any Shaker community – has undergone significant structural work since our first visit in 2009. The trusses, joists and more were brought up to code so the building is safe for visitors, and the 1950s windows have all been replaced with period reproductions in walnut to match the originals, a job that cost \$36,000.



White Water Shaker Village, in the southwest corner of Ohio about 25 miles from downtown Cincinnati, has 20 or so extant buildings remaining of what was at its height a 1,400-acre community that was active from 1823-1916. Today, it comprises the largest collection of Shaker buildings still standing in Ohio.

When we first visited in 2009, restoration efforts had just begun on the “North Family” site to erase the changes wrought in the years during which the buildings were privately owned – including such travesties as a gaping maw in a ceiling that was ripped out to get a hot tub up to the second floor.

Today, the buildings that were part of this little-known Shaker community are owned by the Hamilton County Park District, which has granted a long-term lease of the North Family site to a group of dedicated volunteers, Friends of White Water Shaker Village, that includes

craftspeople and scholars who are committed to restoring the structures and opening the site as a museum.

The first building that will be completed is the meeting house (also the first structure built on the site); it’s the only remaining Shaker brick structure of its kind. Despite the unique construction, it features the usual twin entrances and staircases to the second floor (one entrance and staircase for women, the other for men) that still has some of the iconic peg rails intact. The open first floor, with no support posts to break up the space, provided ample room for the singing and dancing that typified Shaker meetings; that space is made structurally possible by an incredible truss and hanger system in the attic (restored by volunteer Ken Frederick).

Now that significant structural work has been completed on the building to bring it up to modern code, and 30 replica windows with period glass as well as many feet

of missing wainscoting have been installed, volunteers Joe Grittani (vice president of the Friends) and Dave Coleman are hard at work replacing the poplar flooring that was torn out on the second floor. Next, they will reframe the missing second-floor walls in their original locations after which the rewiring can be completed, then plaster will be applied. They'll also rebuild the original staircase to the attic.

With the Meeting House work complete, Dave, Joe and other volunteers will move on to the adjacent brick dwelling. While it won't require as much structural work as the Meeting House in order to be safe for visitors, the structure does need to be completely rewired, parts of the floor are missing and the plaster walls are in need of repair, along with other comparatively minor fixes.

But the structure that Joe is most excited about working on is the Milk House – a curious gem unlike any other he's seen. The frame building atop a brick and stone foundation has no stream running through it as would a typical spring house, but there's a pump outside that directed water through a pipe into troughs

around three of the walls on the lower floor. "We think that when community members walked by, they pumped the pump a few times," he says. Overflow was directed through a pipe out the back, perhaps into a watering trough for livestock in the field behind. "The Milk House is going to require a ground-up rebuild, but I want to make sure that one is saved," Joe says.

But the efforts must go well beyond building restoration – and in fact, that's the most expensive and time-consuming part of the entire effort. "In order to open, we have to have handicapped-accessible restrooms and parking areas, exterior lighting and walkways, and a septic system," says Joe, all which all-told will cost around \$250,000. "We have some of that in hand, but nowhere near enough." Once that infrastructure work is done and paid for, Joe is confident that the rest of the work can be achieved through volunteer work, donated materials and smaller fundraising efforts.

The blanket chest shown in this article is but a very small part of the effort. The wood for the build was donated by Lost Art Press, much of



**No spring.** Unlike a spring house that would have water running through it, the Milk House at White Water has a pump outside that directed water through a pipe into troughs inside. Presumably, cool water was pumped into the structure by passers-by.

the time building it was my own, and the magazine is donating the completed project to the future museum. The Friends may choose to auction it off, or use it as a display in the museum when it opens.

Your help is needed, too, whether it be time or money (and any donations are tax deductible).

For more information on the restoration efforts, the history of the White Water Shaker Village and to help, visit [whitewatervillage.org](http://whitewatervillage.org).

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**Wainscoting.** Volunteers Joe Grittani and Dave Coleman made and installed replication poplar wainscoting to replace the many missing sections on the first floor of the meeting house. At the back of the picture, you can see original panels; the unpainted sections are new. Notice, too, the open ceiling; all the plaster had to come down to rip out old wiring and to install joist hangers that support 100 pounds per square foot.



**Flooring.** By the time this is printed, Joe and Dave will be finished installing custom-milled poplar planks that match the original flooring. The plan is to wash the old floor then use the dirty water to "stain" the new floor so that they more closely match.