

The Salem Preservationist

Reporting historic preservation developments in the greater Salem area

"Looking backward and forward to a Greater Salem"

SALEM PRESERVATION INC.

Roof Restoration Completed at Pioneer Village



Pioneer Village, showing newly thatched buildings. September 2006.

Photo courtesy: <http://www.salemweb.com>

by John Goff

Master thatcher William Cahill of Ireland and Ohio did a very fine job re-thatching four buildings at Pioneer Village in July and August, 2006. Scenery Houses 2, 3, 4, and the English Wigwam all received new crowns, and the English wigwam was also rebuilt substantially inside and out. A combination of Phragmites (water reed) and cat-tail stems were used for the re-roofing projects, water reed being used for most areas where stiffness and strength was required, and cat-tail used where flexibility was required—such as on the ridges of the pitched roof cottages, and the exterior of the curved English Wigwam. SPI volunteers Erik Smith and David Goss assisted Mr. Cahill with the local harvesting of cat-tail reeds, and with the erection and dismantlement of rented steel scaffolding. A special Open House of the Village was held in early August to showcase Mr. Cahill at work. William Cahill, with his brother Michael, had earlier re-thatched all the roofs at Pioneer Village in the late 1980s, so returning to the place was like a small homecoming for the thatcher. Hats off, and a great many thanks to William Cahill for a repair and restoration job very well done!



Pioneer Village's Governor's House

Photo courtesy http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/17house.html

SPI Re-Opened Pioneer Village for Fall Open Houses

Salem Preservation opened Pioneer Village to public viewing, with a blacksmith and First Period costumed interpreters, on four dates in August, September and early October, 2006. The Village was opened in early August to view the thatching, and then on three consecutive Sundays in the Fall: September 24, October 1, and October 8. The weather was good on three of the four days, and over 100 people attended the Village on each of the three sunny Open House days.

Coinciding with the Village re-openings, new discussion threads were started on the www.salemweb.com Message Board to promote the open houses, and allow people to report upon their experiences. Many were impressed with the Village. Lisa Johnson, for example, on September 24th, wrote:

“Wow - my husband and I checked out the Village today and were very impressed! The whole place was really intriguing, with some great examples of thatchwork. There was a blacksmith interpreter who was fascinating, and the buildings were all a little different with a number of interpreters on site to help explain what we were seeing. I can't wait until the place is up and running 100%. WELL WORTH the \$5 admission.”

Bonnie Hurd Smith of Salem helped design special posters to promote the Village as “Salem in 1630” and a great many volunteers, SPI Board members and others, enabled the Village to come back to life on the Fall 2006 Open House days. Many thanks to all who participated, who visited, and who made donations to help finance the restoration of the Village.



Pioneer Village Thatched Roofing

Photo courtesy http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/17house.html

Salem News Reports Pioneer Village “Shows Signs of Life”

On Saturday , December 9th , Salem Preservation re-opened the Village to allow Salem’s City Councillors to tour the City-owned and recently restored site. The early December re-opening was supported by the excellent work completed in the roof restoration project, and the Fall Open Houses, and was done mostly in response to City Council President Jean Pelletier’s request to have his fellow Councillors be able to see the place. The Salem News reported on the following Monday that Pioneer Village was very positively showing “signs of life.” Reprinted here with permission from The Salem News:

December 11, 2006

Pioneer Village shows signs of life

By Martina Brendel , Staff writer Salem News

SALEM - Smoke billowed from the long-dormant chimneys at Pioneer Village Saturday as city councilors met with local preservationists to discuss the future of the replica village.

The purpose of the meeting was to show the council the progress made since Salem Preservation Inc. took charge of the site three years ago and obtain a commitment to completely restore the living history museum by 2026, in time for Salem's quadricentennial celebration.

"We're looking for a longer-term lease to justify running with a more aggressive campaign," said John Goff, president of Salem Preservation Inc., a group of preservationists that formed to save the site.

City Councilors Jean Pelletier, Matt Veno, Lucy Corchado and Paul Prevey and state Rep. John Keenan, D-Salem, enjoyed a tour of the site led by Salem Witch Museum owner Biff Michaud. Amid freezing temperatures, Michaud shared with them the organization's vision for the museum, which would feature a trail showing the evolution of the pilgrim's dwellings from wigwams to timber-frame houses.

"We talk about this at the Witch Museum. Now kids can experience it," said Michaud, who pledged to steer visitors to his museum to Pioneer Village.

Pioneer Village was built in 1930 for the tricentennial of the landing of the Winthrop fleet in Salem and is among the country's first living history museums.

Over the years, however, it fell into disrepair and became the target of vandalism. When Salem Preservation Inc. took control of the site in 2003, three of the roofs had caved in and the dwellings were infested with rodents, said Goff.

This summer, the group mended the site's three thatched roofs as well as the English wigwam and has been working with the Parks and Recreation Department to clear debris. It has also partnered with the theater departments at Gordon and North Shore Community colleges to staff the museum. It held three open houses this fall and will open to student groups in May under a new name, "Salem in 1630: Pioneer Village."

Much work remains, however, before the village can return to its former glory, said Goff. The dwellings, which have sustained years of water damage from flooding and storms, need substantial repairs, he said, and a significant amount of branches and brush need to be cleared.

Salem Preservation Inc.'s lease with the city is up in May, at which point Goff said it will request a five-year lease with four renewals. A longer lease will help attract bigger donors, he said. Keenan said such a lease would require special permission from the state, but pledged to do all he could to support the project.

"This is part of what makes Salem great. This is part of what makes Massachusetts great. I give you my commitment. I think this is a great project," he said.

While Goff does not expect the city to directly funnel taxpayer money into the project, he says it can help by making Pioneer Village a priority for the Parks and Recreation Department and by ratifying the Community Preservation Act, a 3 percent property surtax that provides matching state grant money for the preservation of historic buildings.

Pelletier said he thought the project would benefit the city and urged Salem Preservation Inc. to approach the city's leadership early next year to set the project in motion.

"This is a long-range plan and it needs long-range planning. Substantial fundraisers are not going to give when you have a short-term project," he said. "... It still needs a lot of work but I think with fundraising efforts and the effort of all the volunteers, I think we can get it open."

The tour stirred up many memories for the councilors, who recalled visiting Pioneer Village as children.

"It's amazing," said Corchado. "It's so interesting, but also a little sad as well, the condition the area is in, the deterioration of the buildings and land. It's an educational site definitely worth preserving."

Essex National Heritage Commission starts First Period Educational Initiative

After 10 years of operations, in 2006 the Essex National Heritage Commission commenced one of its most exciting new undertakings: a new First Period Educational Initiative. Annie Harris, Executive Director of the ENHC, has long had a special interest in protecting the most historically priceless First Period (ca. 1630-1730) properties and archival resources and museum collections within Essex County, Massachusetts. Consequently, in the Fall of 2006, she directed the ENHC to begin to establish a new First Period educational initiative, maintained on the ENHC web site(s). Bonnie Hurd Smith, developer of Salem's Women's Heritage Trail, along with Bill Steelman and Jeanne Pickering of the ENHC have all been working on this exciting new project. Fine new web sites and educational resources are being developed. Stay tuned for further developments.

John Goff publishes new "Preservation Perspective" column in Salem Gazette

Between October 1 and December 30, 2006, Salem Preservation, Inc.'s President John Goff commenced publishing a new "Preservation Perspective" column in Salem's free weekly paper, the Salem Gazette. The newspaper, just over one year old, has been reprinting many historic Salem images preserved by the Peabody Essex Museum, and is currently searching for new writers. Goff began producing new "preservation Perspective" columns with the concurrence of Editor Lisa Guerrero in order to expand the newspaper's coverage of topics relating to history, and historic preservation, in Salem. During the three months of October, November and December, over a half dozen new columns were written and printed, many designed to focus new attention on Salem's First period history, and the significance of Salem 1630: Pioneer Village. Articles were printed on Archaeology Month, The Pickering House, the new Friends of Forest River Park group, the Arbella Replica, Shallops in early Salem, Salem's Early Multicultural Heritage, Fishing, Salt and Saltworks in Early Salem, the CPA and Funding Salem's Preservation and George Francis Dow. Public support for the new column has been strong, and further pieces are anticipated. For more information on the Salem Gazette, contact http://www.townonline.com/salem/homepage/contact_us.html



18 Crombie Street, September 2006
Photo courtesy <http://www.salemweb.com>

18 Crombie Street Restoration Completed

On Saturday December 10th, one of Salem's most prolonged preservation struggles concluded in a very happy ending, with Habitat for Humanity holding a dedication ceremony for its newly restored historic house at 18 Crombie Street in Salem. For over 15 years, residents of downtown Salem had struggled with corporate owners to keep the small gambrel roofed house from being torn down for parking.

Finally, under the Administration of former Mayor Stanley J. Usovicz, an innovative preservation solution was engineered by attorney John Keenan and others which allowed the city to trade exclusive daytime use of certain city parking spaces to the owner, in exchange for title to the house. The house ownership was then transferred to the Salem Redevelopment Authority (SRA) which in turn put the project out to bid for restoration and conversion to affordable housing. Habitat for Humanity (HFH) won the right to restore, own, and re-transfer the restored property to a needy homeowner. HFH also contracted with Historic Preservation and Design of Salem to prepare restoration drawings and plans, and to oversee the initial work done on the property. The project included the installation of a new roof, restoration of historic wood clapboards, re-introduction of several removed windows, demolition of a small rear ell, replacement of an old wood property line fence, and restoration of appropriate historic colors to the landmark house.

Many extra benefits were enjoyed beyond the saving of one small house. New affordable housing was created for the City of Salem. An important downtown historic district was preserved. A neighborhood was revitalized and a State's Most Endangered Historic Resource was totally restored. Finest congratulations are in order for Ruth and Rob Wall, David Pelletier, Joan Lovely, Warren Sawyer, Bunnie Pasternak and the Habitat for Humanity, and all others who played key roles in the saving and preservation of 18 Crombie Street, "The Little House That Could."
