

Spanning the Gap

Garris House: a Preservation Investigation

The quiet roads of Millbrook Village are disturbed by the occasional whir of a power saw this summer, as the National Park Service's Preservation and Design crew continues restoration work on the Elias Garris House, built in 1859. Preservation technicians stripped peeling paint and replaced rotting beams to save the National Register structure from further deterioration. Work began on the house last summer, but as each layer of board was removed, yet another layer of rotting wood appeared. The house needed restoration because moisture, a common cause of structural deterioration, had crept into the wood as the grounds around the building rose over the years. In accordance with principles of historic preservation, as much as possible of the original structure is preserved to maintain the historic integrity of the house while stabilizing it.

Preservation work not only restores the historic structure, but also reveals how the building was constructed. The Garris family made periodic improvements to their home, adding a parlor and placing new siding on some of the walls. Paint samples indicate that the Garrises painted their home a vivid mustard yellow, with a dark green trim. Archaeological digs around the site also uncover clues about the Garris family which shed a new light on historical records. As shown by the archaeological evidence, the Garris family used fine china dishes and pressed glass ware, something rather at odds with land and tax records which indicate that the family was not especially prosperous. The Garris House indicates that the sleepy town of Millbrook may have had a more



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Garris House in 1980.



Preparing a new sill beam.



Exterior of kitchen area under restoration in 1998.

complex economy than previously suspected. Like all historical investigations, the restoration work raises further questions which pose a new challenge to answer.

Editor's note: Historic records show both spellings of the family name: "Garis" and "Garris". The recreation area is now using the spelling "Garis".



Detail of kitchen wall before restoration.