

all the original interior, but its days are numbered. I don't know what an architectural historian would say about that."

He continues. "I would never advocate moving a house that could be restored and preserved where it is, but that's so often not the case." Besides, he says today's client is picky. "We want it now, and we want it where we want it, when we want it. And that's just the way it is. Unless there is something that ties it up, people are going to have their way."

There is an ugly side to the salvage business; some people go into perfectly savable homes and strip them of mantels, doors and floors, and then put the building to the torch. "I don't like the way it's done a lot of times," agrees Craig, "I could never do that; pick it." But still, if the wrecking ball is poised, it's better to save what you can, than nothing at all. And like he said, once the roof goes, the rest will shortly follow. "The roof is what saves it. It keeps that water out. It keeps the bugs out, because as soon as that wood gets damp, then it will get infested with powder post and termites. They don't eat it if it's dry. That's why they infest the first floor, because it's damp."

This business of saving these old houses and their contents goes back to Craig Jacobs' childhood when his mother would take him to country auctions on Saturdays. "I've always liked old things," he shrugs.

Then, when he went to Western North Carolina for a degree in natural history, he met and worked with Peter Gott, "the best traditional log builder in the world...So that got me on the traditional tools and traditional techniques." In fact, just this past October, he had a chance to build a log hen house inside the National Building Museum, which at 130 feet, has the tallest columns in the western hemisphere. "We were out there hewing right on the rug. It was pretty neat," he grins.

Anyway, after college, Craig worked as head of grounds at Woodberry and partnered with his brothers-in-law in the tire business before taking a job with Noah Bradley and Blue Mountain Builders. "I guess that's where I really saw what could be done; taking apart, moving, using old materials."

And then he struck out on his own. He remembers the first building he disassembled and moved like some of us remember our first date. It was a corner post, two-story log structure in Pennsylvania. He and a former business partner were frantically bidding on it on E-Bay. Cell phones and the Internet were a relatively new thing. They were driving home from Pennsylvania and talking to the partner's wife by



Craig Jacobs' right hand man is also his son in law, Stephen Nash, right, who with Devin Bigler and Paul Crocker round out the Salvagewrights team. Below, at Salvagewright's retail location, clients can see finished samples of salvaged lumber to help them make a choice.



cell phone. Every time they made a bid, she'd have to disconnect the phone, connect the computer, make the bid, then disconnect the computer and plug in the phone again. "And we lost the signal between Criglersville and Madison, and we finally got the signal on our cell phone in the parking lot at Yoders. And we lost the bid. And we just went 'Ugh.' It was bad," shudders Craig. His shoulders slump.

But as luck would have it, the original high bidder backed out and they got the building. This new old house was built by Swiss immigrants. How do they know that? The logs were mortised into corner posts, not notched to each other. Jacobs says old construction techniques varied regionally. "A lot of it was whether the Germans settled, whether the English settled, where the Scottish settled." But he quickly adds that some practices, such as numbering timbers with roman numerals, were universal, "whether we're in Illinois or Georgia."

Here's another old timber-frame construction detail, a mysterious notch in a diagonal brace. Craig says it's "a cut out for a foot, so you can climb up the diagonal." In other words, it's built in scaffolding. And often, as in the case with a house near Lahore, builders left a board inside the walls listing their name and date of construction and the names of the slaves who helped them.

Log structures came first, and interestingly, even they have considerable variation. "Whether it's a half dovetail or square notch or V-notch will tell you a lot about who built it, when it was built." Then, builders transitioned to timber framing. "There's not a clearly defined line between timber frame and log. But it's a pretty clear line between timber frame and balloon construction," which is the "stick built" technique of today. The changeover, "had more to do with the availability of saw mills, transportation and the number and location of sawmills."

Litchfield was timber-framed. "That timber probably didn't come from too far. And you know, it was not only the timber, but you had to split all the shakes for the roof, split the lath for the walls, you had to burn the limestone, gather the sand to make the plaster. You had to get a blacksmith to make the nails. It's a huge process. That's why it would take so long."

How long for this new old house? "I would guess that it would have taken..." he pauses for almost a minute... "four years to build Litchfield." Then his eyes crinkle in mirth. "We've got it down to two and a half." Big laugh all around.

But of course, most of the hard work had already been done on this new old house.

# This new old house



Although Craig Jacobs has been in the architectural salvage business for 15 years, he only recently opened his retail location on Madison Road.

Craig Jacobs was walking around Litchfield's framing timbers fashioning pegs to hold mortise and tenon joints together, when he saw it... the distinct mark of an axe used to...well...do exactly what he was doing! "I looked and right there," his finger jabs the photograph, "the guy in 1820 sharpened the peg to drive it in ...the ...same ...hole." His eyes open wide. "I got a little bit weak in the legs on that one."

For a moment there, Craig Jacobs traveled back in time 185 years to the original Litchfield home site where the current Orange County Thomas E. Lee Industrial Park is today. Except for a house clearing, all around lay virgin forest. Route 15 was a mere dirt track in the shallow valley below. The closest neighbor lived at Woodley.

If he had been that 1820s carpenter, he might have felled the tree from which that timber came. He would have hewn it square out there in the woods and dragged it by oxen to the house site. Would he have been down in the pit or up on top, alternately pulling and pushing the saw, carefully following the ash line as he ripped timbers from this massive squared log?

And when it came time to make the mortise and tenon joint, he would have chiseled the matching roman numerals in both as he pre-assembled them on the ground, because every joint is unique when you're using hand tools; you can't just cookie cutter this stuff with a Skil saw. And then, once the timbers were raised he would have hand-drilled the hole through both mortise and tenon, taking a small axe to fashion the peg that would connect the two. And to shave the peg to fit the hole, you would have stood it up on its end on the timber and struck it right...there.

Back to the future.

Craig Jacobs has had plenty of these 'OMG' moments. How about the doll with the china head and feet and straw sun hat they found hidden in the wall of

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The process in pictures: Litchfield, when it was at the Industrial Park; disassembly; transport by flat bed truck; reassembly (note the spiral staircase being lowered through the roof), and the finished product in its new setting.

PHOTOS COURTESY CRAIG JACOBS AND THE SALVAGEWRIGHTS WEB SITE

the Kemper slave quarters in Madison. How did this white man's children's toy get there? "They seem to think it was hidden there deliberately," says Craig enigmatically. Or what of the pieces of eight found under the floor boards of a 1793 house, or the infant's footprint forever preserved in a sun-dried brick in Spotsylvania. The imagination runs wild.

Over the past 15 years or so, Craig Jacobs has meticulously taken apart and reassembled historically significant buildings piece by piece. If he can't save the entire building, he'll at least rescue its architectural details before it falls, either at the hand of the bulldozer or the powder post beetle. He has moved these new old houses from North Carolina to Spotsylvania, from Fredericksburg, PA to Chestertown, from the Orange Industrial Park to Jones Mill Road. He is currently building a new old house in Highland County from local stone and the remains of a log cabin from Roanoke and a timber frame structure out of Victoria.

His company, Salvagewrights Ltd., was founded in 2001, but it only became publicly visible on North Madison Road right across from the light at Spicer's Mill, this past August. Its signature piece is the log smokehouse that stands in the middle of the parking lot.

On this particular day, Craig's righthand man and son-in-law Stephen Nash and helper Devin Bigler are working on a bigger job than a smoke house. They are assembling a 32-foot span for one of three architecturally authentic slave duplexes they are building for Montpelier, along with two smokehouses and a kitchen. They are doing it just like that carpenter did 190 years ago at Litchfield, albeit with power tools. Each mortise and tenon joint is unique. Stephen says they are laying it out on the ground, just like they did back then, "because... there could be a quarter-inch discrepancy."

Craig looks appreciatively at his son-in-law. As the father of "five lovely daughters; all of them just beautiful; they take after their mama," Craig realizes how lucky he is to have this young man in his family. "He's the heart; I'm the soul. Or if I'm the heart, he's the soul," he comments, a tad confused. Later he clarifies, "If I'm the bones of this, he's the sinew... He loves it. I don't have to do anything. I don't have to suggest anything. He just takes off."

Stephen gives Craig breathing room, allowing Craig to step back and focus on things like going on building missions for Orange Baptist Church. He and his brother have constructed homes and churches in places as far away as South Africa, Nicaragua, the hurricane-ravaged Mississippi coast and the Navajo nation. Craig's eyes twinkle. "I just love knowing my surroundings; keeping abreast of what's afoot."

Inside the building that used to be F and R Equipment and later Gibson Rental racks and racks of doors, paneling, balustrades and mantels stand at attention. Clawfoot tubs crowd and crab across the floor. Carefully cataloged door knobs, hinges, locks, and hardware nestle in cubby holes. Mirrors and lamps stare down from shelves.

Everything is labeled; everything has its place. Today, it is made slightly more cluttered by the last-minute addition of DuPont-era items from Montpelier. Here's Marion DuPont Scott's drapery ironing board, basically a long farm table with layers and layers of muslin tacked to it. Every single staple and tack has to be removed before they can plane it down, sand it, and maybe re-sell it. "Very labor intensive; lots of time; many man hours go into that," observes Jacobs. And this is just a taste of what Salvagewrights has. Stored in turkey barns elsewhere in the county are 900 more doors, a half-acre of flooring.

Ah flooring. "I get \$10 a square foot for this." He points to wide boards that in the mid-19th century would have

been in the attic. This spurs a discussion about modern day building material preferences. "Log houses, they used to cover them up because if you live in a log house, you're poor. Now they can't get the siding off of them quick enough. Now they're going to the attic to get the flooring." He shakes his head in mock confusion. "That was their plywood at that time. It was kind of lower grade

and it was wide, it went down fast. You put that in the attic." Now you put it in your entrance hall and pay a premium for it.

Still, Craig Jacobs will tell you the salvage operation is not the main thrust of his business; taking pre-Civil War houses apart, moving and reassembling them is. "I can't make a living selling door knobs, so this is all to attract

work." He waves vaguely at the collection of stuff.

In one room at Salvagewrights, attached by clothespins to a clothesline, are dozens of photographs showing the metamorphosis of these buildings from the brink of ruin to resurrection. Take this new old North Carolina house. "We started disassembling it, and we took three months and every part, every piece of flooring, every piece of trim has a number and we code it by the different colors. Yellow is the first floor; red is the second floor; blue's the third floor and then it goes to its destination and we start reassembling."

Well, it's not quite as simple as that. Dismantling a house without damaging it is tricky. "It's slow; it's very slow, and you have to be very careful," cautions Craig. There are no secret special tools, "just more the use of the tool; listening to the wood, knowing when you have to stop and get the Sawzall and cut some fasteners. It's experience. And once you've broken something and then you have to take the time to put it back together? Ugh, that's no good."

On a disassemble/move/reassemble job, the first thing to go is the plaster. They dig it out with grubbing hoes and mattocks. Do they save the laths? "You know most people don't, but we do," confirms Craig. "We donated all of it that they used at Montpelier." He picks up one made from extraordinarily even-grained yellow pine. "That's hand-split. That's just as clear; I mean there're no knots. You know it's a different tree at that time, much different tree."

Next to come out is the flooring, "and then the siding comes off, and then the roof comes off and then just take it down from there." They even save foundation stone and brick. And then they truck it to its new site in pretty much the reverse order in which it was disassembled: last out is first in.



PHOTO BY GRACIE HART BROOKS

Craig Jacobs introduces a young lady to old building techniques during a Taming of the Wilderness demonstration at Ellwood in 2008.

Litchfield was moved from the Lee Industrial Park to a site on Jones Mill Road. They even saved a spiral staircase that they lowered into the reassembled house through the roof using a crane "all the time keeping that finished floor dry." That job took two and a half years.

Craig Jacobs is quick to point out that, although they usually do just one job at a time, Litchfield's owner, Andy Hutchison "was nice enough to let us break off for a week or two and do a salvage job. Some things come up that 'the loader's in the front yard; either get here or it goes in the pile.' So, we do things like that as well."

Herein lies an interesting discussion. It would seem that disassembling a threatened historic structure and reassembling it elsewhere, where it will not be in the way of "progress" is a win/win situation for both preservationists and developers. Take Litchfield, for example; it was smack dab in the middle of an industrial park, for heaven's sake. Besides, it was "well on its way," to falling down, says Jacobs. "It had holes in the roof and was taking on water. That kills them. When the metal starts to peel off, it's all downhill from there." But instead of being bulldozed or falling over, it was saved. It is truly a new old house.

However, Craig points out that some architectural historians don't approve. "My voice goes up about three octaves and I get a little sweat on my brow and I start shaking because the alternative is, and I have seen it so many times, they rot into the ground. So, I understand that it has the most historic significance in its original situation, but if you can save it, save it!"

He tells a story about a house in Essex County. "It's going to get whacked," he says matter-of-factly. "It's going to get pushed up in a pile. Architecturally and historically, it's a very important house because it's a gambrel roof like a barn roof and they were few and far between. It has