

The Los Book

What's New at the Snickersville Academy & Bluemont February 2013, Vol. 12, No. 1

# The Mystery of the Tilted Cabin

BY MARK ZALEWSKI & SUSAN FREIS FALKNOR

A fact of life in restoration work is that regardless of extensive consultation and careful planning — restorers cannot know for certain what the structural problems are until they actually dig in. The Snickersville Academy held a mystery to solve: Why did the log cabin —which stands 100% upright in the photo on a 1905 postcard — slant 4-6 inches towards the north?

We had some clues. The south wall was in much worse shape than the others. Although the great stone chimney stood plumb straight, there was a long, stretched-out V-shaped infill of cement and bricks at the south wall. There was some charring above the fireplace inside. The floor on the north side of the Academy bounced unnervingly as we stepped across it. Clay drain tiles peeked out from the east foundation and, at the northwest foundation corner — a big bulge.

#### *Visit Us at the 2013 Bluemont Fair* Mark your calendar and save the date, September 14-15, 2013. Visit the Snickersville Academy during the Bluemont Fair. Bring the children and see our restoration progress.

But relatively new stone work around an iron firebox — that had been fitted inside the original fireplace at some point — hid any view of how the cabin joined the chimney. And there was no entry into the crawl space.

# So the Snickersville Academy, as we received it, completely concealed the story of its own past traumas.

Last summer Eric Westergard, experienced in restoring historic log structures, tackled the heavily damaged south wall. He expertly braced the Academy with iron-pipe scaffolding, driving wood wedges to re-brace it at every step.

His skillful, meticulous approach — thinking through any possible structural consequences of each move — suggests a nickname: "*the Log Whisperer."* Eric cut into the floor planks at the northwest corner, opening a sort of trap door.



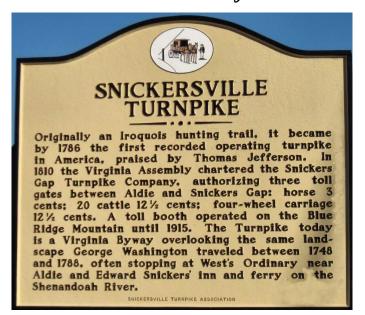
*"The Log Whisperer"* pounds in braces to support cabin to remove & replace 3 logs, repairing several others.

What did we find out? We uncovered a charcoal-encrusted hole in a log behind the fireplace. Eric suggested that someone had once tried to vent a cast iron stove through the chimney, overheating the log. Thankfully, the fire must have gone out before it burned down the whole cabin, but the stress seriously weakened the south wall, letting in the weather.

Climbing down into the crawl space, we found that a column of large stones that originally supported the floor joists under the northwest corner had collapsed. The north wall sill (bottom) log was severely bowed. Eric and stonemason Ed Ashby believe that the intermittent stream, Butchers Branch, had sometime risen with a depth and force capable of undermining and moving the foundation stones. Indeed, the visiting grandchildren of long-time Academy resident Susie Neal recall how, at times, water flowed beneath the cabin. The bulge an attempt to bolster the unsupported corner with new layers.

In the spring of 2013 - by using jacks, rollers, braces, and winches - we will carefully shift the historic structure in stages on its foundations toward the south, finally back upright.





#### Recent "Buy-ins" for Bluemont

A lot of folks have been putting their resources and efforts into Bluemont lately. Here are a few examples.

**New Historical Markers.** Snickersville Turnpike is coming into its own as a self-guided historic byway. Through a grant from the Loudoun Preservation Society, the Snickersville Turnpike Association (STA) put up two informative markers in 2012, one near Middleburg and the other at Hibbs Bridge.

**Bluemont Community Center.** The remodeled Bluemont Community Center re-opened in 2012, with a new code-compliant kitchen, elevator, geo-thermal heat pump, fire sprinkler system, and wheelchair access. Onehalf again its original size, it still feels like the original Bluemont Elementary School (c. 1921).

**Bluemont Cell Tower**. New fiber optic cable was laid in December and Roadstar Internet customers gained a big boost in reception, and Verizon & AT&T following suit.

**E.E. Lake Store.** Over the past few years, Bluemont Citizens Association efforts won

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an infusion of highway funds to the landmark E.E. Lake Store (c. 1901). In 2011-2012 a new well was drilled, electricity upgraded, & rehab needs determined. Next step: County contracts for planned repairs & handicapped-code toilets.

**Boulder Crest Retreat for Wounded Warriors.** Ken and Julia Falke will welcome their first veteran families this summer to this new retreat for seriously wounded warriors and their families to "reconnect and recover" during the long stays in rehab hospitals.

**Bluemont General Store.** Broad Run Veterinary Services' Lani Newcomb & Kathy Broaddus keep the Bluemont General Store (c. 1846) alive with specialties like homemade soup, fresh sandwiches, hand-dipped ice cream cones, fresh eggs, organic milk, and harness bells.

## ~Our Vision~

Snickersville Academy Park. A self-guided visitor's destination with interpretive signs.
A window on Bluemont's beginnings.
Bluemont's first school and church (c. 1825).
A link to Bluemont's Black history. It lies at the start of the Old Mountain Road, leading to a post-Civil-War Free Black community.

♦A new space for small classes & events. □

## On the Culture Front

Modern dancer and yoga teacher Jen Stone (see picture) recruited a talented troupe of neighbors



to perform her own "Earth Dances" to enthusiastic crowds on October 20 and 21. Through a happy combination of holding down expenses and beautiful weather, the 2012 Bluemont Fair made a profit of about \$20,000. ◆Bob McCann of Iron Gate Antigues shouldered

co-chairing the Bluemont Fair with Patti Pettit in 2012, and they will continue in 2013. ◆Betty Potter is investigating reviving Art in the Foothills, Friends of Bluemont's showcase for local artists, this year. ◆Bluemonters now look forward to Lucy and Ron Wright's scarecrows & pumpkins yard display, followed by an illuminated manger scene at Christmas. ◆Christmas-wreath crafts-woman Joy Peltier decorated the E.E. Lake Store with evergreens and red bows this year. □