

Park log home near completion

By Amy Smith, Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, August 29, 2014 9:10 am

With completion of the Mason log home only about two months out, the annual Mason Jar Jamboree will be held Saturday, Sept. 6.

The event, slated for the east entrance to Dorothy Carnes County Park, just outside Fort Atkinson, originated in an effort to raise money to restore the 160-year-old log home that was discovered within the walls of an old farmhouse on the site in 2004.

With reconstruction now nearly completed, Jefferson County Parks Department officials say they believe the \$70,000 project will come in underbudget, thanks to the help of hundreds of volunteer hours.

The project was funded largely through donations from the public, as well as a grant from the descendants of the Mason family, who still reside in Fort Atkinson. One year ago, just before the inaugural Mason Jar Jamboree, the Masons pledged a \$25,000 matching grant, hoping to raise enough money to restore the cabin without dipping into county funds.

The two-story log home, estimated to have been constructed between 1850 and 1854, originally was owned by Elias Mason and his second wife, Lois, who settled northwest of what today is Fort Atkinson. The Mason family resided in the home until 1868, when Jeremiah, one of Elias' sons, moved to town. Jeremiah later would become mayor of Fort Atkinson. His diaries were handed down in the Mason family for generations, and now are catalogued at the Wisconsin Historical Society and available online for public reading.

However, nobody, including Mona Mason and her family, knew that the original log home was still standing, preserved by the farmhouse built around it.

Jefferson County acquired the property as part of its parks system and discovered the log structure while dismantling the farmhouse. It was decided to restore the home and turn it into a museum of sorts, showing the way some of Jefferson County's original settlers would have lived.

The house now is about five to six weeks from completion, according to Jefferson County Parks Department operations supervisor Kevin Wiesmann.

Earlier in the week, a parks crew and volunteers were working to finish chinking the hand-hewn logs to provide insulation and seal the cracks and spaces between the logs. With the exterior work wrapping up, windows, doors and shutters will be the last step.



CABIN COMPLETION

CABIN COMPLETION — Restoration of the Mason log home, located at Dorothy Carnes County Park, is about five to six weeks from completion, according to Jefferson County Parks Operations Supervisor Kevin Wiesmann. This week, parks crew and volunteers were working to finish chinking the logs, which provides insulation and seals the cracks and spaces between the logs. For more photos click [here](#).

The doors and shutters are being made by Mike Engelhart of Fort Atkinson and Jim Lemke is making the hardware to attach them. Baker Glass is making the windows with donated time period-appropriate wavy glass and materials recycled from old buildings in Fort Atkinson. Midwest Masonry also donated its time to place the stone foundation on the exterior of the cement foundation.

Over the course of the project, volunteers have spent about 500 hours in time just on reassembling the house, Weismann said. Volunteers also helped early on in the project when the house underwent the painstaking process of being catalogued and rebuilt.

Donated period logs were hewn to the correct shape, combined with the original logs to fill in the holes in the structure, then fit tightly together, all using historically-accurate tools. The logs were numbered, only to be dismantled again before being rebuilt on the original site, like one giant, precise set of Lincoln Logs.

The Mason family and parks department now plan to use the annual event to continue to raise money for additional improvements to the Mason farm site.

“I think our dream is to be able to rehab and restore the older outbuildings and save them, and have them be usable for the public in some way,” Jeff Mason said. “And that’s going to take a lot of money; that’s not going to be a small deal. Compared to even what we’re doing now, that’s a big step beyond that.”

Weismann said the county’s next goal would be to restore the barn on the site and make it accessible to the public.

“I think the hope of the department would be to incorporate the other buildings on the site for the enjoyment of the public,” he said.

Jefferson County has applied for a grant that would help fund the addition of a park trailhead at the Mason farm site, including a parking lot, bus turnaround and restroom facilities. The site currently has no designated parking area and provides only a portable toilet. The department hopes to hear word on the grant within the next few weeks.

Mason also touched on the idea of a future orchard and other plans “to continue to make (the site) an eco-friendly and family-friendly space for the public.”

At the upcoming jamboree, the Masons hope to continue to raise funds for the Mason Farm efforts and other projects down the road. The Jamboree on Sept. 6 will bring them one step closer to the ultimate goal, as the farm’s site at Dorothy Carnes County Park will play host to an afternoon of family activities, taking advantage of the history and natural wealth. All proceeds from the event will go to future restoration projects at the site.

Originally named for the plethora of Mason jars found in the home’s basement, not to mention the original settlers’ surname, the jamboree will begin at 11 a.m. with a guided nature walk led by Tom Belzer, followed by demonstrations of traditional blacksmithing and log-building techniques accurate to the home’s time period.

Jim Lemke of J-N-L Wrought Iron in Fort Atkinson, who volunteered on the Mason home restoration project, will lead the blacksmithing demonstration with a portable forge.

“Jim is a craftsman,” said Mason. “He’s been commissioned by the county to do hinges, latches and various hardware that we’ll need in a period style.”

Craig Roost, who helped reconstruct new walls where the structure was falling apart, will demonstrate traditional log hewing and timberframing techniques using period tools.

From 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., University of Wisconsin-Whitewater art history professor Julia Ince will give a presentation on the history of the log home and the original Mason family.

“She’s a wonderful speaker and really makes things come alive,” Mason said. “She has a real knack for uncovering history.”

Live acoustical music from folk band The Merry Horde, local singer-songwriter Bill Camplin and Milwaukee-based musician Peter Mulvey will run from noon to 4 p.m., along with the chance for children to construct their own log cabin with a set that resembles a giant collection of Lincoln Logs.

Hotdogs, beverages and pie will be available for purchase, along with a silent pie auction from noon to 2 p.m.

In addition, attendees will have the chance to experience the nearly completed Mason log home, though they will not be able to go upstairs for safety reasons, Weismann said.

To attend the Mason Jar Jamboree, enter Dorothy Carnes Park’s east entrance at W6509 Jones Lane, Fort Atkinson. Take Banker Road a mile or so north from Fort Atkinson off Banker Road; the entrance will be on the left.

For more information on the Mason home or jamboree or the project overall, contact the Jefferson County Parks Department at (920) 674-7260.