

Restoration of 165-year log home complete; named historic landmark

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, September 1, 2015 9:34 am

JEFFERSON — The Mason Farm has been designated an Historic Landmark by the Jefferson County Historic Site Preservation Commission.

Located at Dorothy Carnes County Park East, the two-story log house, which dates back to the early 1850s, was discovered in 2004 by Jefferson County Parks Department employees.

At the time, the property just had been bought by Jefferson County with the intention of

expanding Dorothy Carnes County Park in the Town of Jefferson. When crews began stripping the siding off an old farmhouse on the site, they revealed the log walls underneath.

About two-thirds of the log structure still was intact, which was enough to stop Park Department employees from continuing work until further answers were found.

“There were a couple important facts when we were looking at ‘do we do the restoration or don’t we?’” Kevin Wiesmann, Jefferson County Parks Department operations supervisor, said.

“One was, you’ve got a very important period of time in 1850 when women’s property rights were changing. When Julia Ince, (a historian at the University Wisconsin-Whitewater), did the research on this, she found that the property was deeded to a married woman during a time when (women owning property) was being debated in the Legislature.”

The woman in question was Lois Mason, the second wife of Elias Mason.



ON THE HOUSE

ON THE HOUSE — In 1850, a log house was built by the Mason family on property that is now part of Dorothy Carnes County Park in the Town of Jefferson, shown above left. The Masons’ descendants still reside in Fort Atkinson. Restoration of the house began in 2012, as did the Mason Jar Jamboree. Recently, the Mason farm was declared a historical site and members of the Mason family were presented with a certificate, shown above right. Left to right are Joe Nehmer, Jefferson County parks director; Kevin Wiesmann, operations supervisor for the Parks Department; Jeff Mason, Fort Atkinson, and Jay Mason, Delafield.

“Lois was deeded the property (in 1850) before that law changed, so that makes it really significant in that way,” Wiesmann said. “She was probably the first married woman to be deeded property in Wisconsin.”

It was the late 1840s when Lois and Elias moved to the area, eventually building the log house on Banker Road, northwest of what today is Fort Atkinson. They had followed Elias’ sons from his first marriage, who had arrived from Massachusetts about 10 years earlier following the founding of the Rock River Land and Claim Company that first helped to develop the area.

According to Wiesmann, Elias died shortly after the home’s completion, and his son, Jeremiah took over the farm.

“Jeremiah kept a journal of the day-to-day activities on this farm,” Wiesmann explained. “That journal stayed intact until it went over to ownership at the Wisconsin Historical Society, which still has that on file. That record really talks about what it was like. There are not too many properties that are still intact as this one is that have that type of written documentation on which you can do that type of high-quality interpretation.”

The family lived in the home until 1868, when Jeremiah moved to town, where he would later become mayor.

The process to restore the house began in 2012 and took four years to complete.

“It was disassembled and then, at the county shops, reassembled,” Jeff Mason, a direct descendant of the house’s original owners, said. “Other logs that were donated here from the same area were added. They put it on the foundation and here it is.”

The Mason Jar Jamboree, an annual fundraiser to help pay for the restoration of the property, also began in 2012. The jamboree takes place at Dorothy Carnes park where the farm is located, so attendees have been able to watch the restoration progress. This year’s event is slated for Saturday, Sept. 12.

“The first year, we had the siding stripped off and there was rubble behind it,” Wiesmann said. “The second year, the whole building was gone and there was just the foundation, and then last year, we had the building up as kind of a shell. Now it’s pretty close to done so people will be able to go through.”

Other parts of the property include a barn, which is the next project slated for restoration, and a space where there used to be a shed.

“Kevin wrote a grant and got a roof put on (the barn),” Mason said. “Now we have a metal roof on it, so at least it’ll be preserved. There used to be a shed on the property, but that’s gone. There’s going to be a bus turnaround that is going to put in and maybe 20 or 30 parking spots.”

Dorothy Carnes County Park is open to the public, as is the Mason house.

“It’s an incredible piece of land,” Mason said. “Part of our hope is that, by creating a focal point like the home, it will get people more interested in this park and what we can do here and that they’ll remain supportive of what we’re doing. It’s something that people can come up and go, ‘wow, that’s really neat.’”

Persons who are interested in volunteering or donating toward the restoration for the log home project may contact the Jefferson County Parks Department at (920) 674-7260.