

Report by Scott Otis, Robert Preston House
Committee Member Project Manager

Work on the exterior of the Preston House commenced again at the end of April 2015. The next large project of Phase I (exterior work) was the installation of new cypress custom-milled weatherboards ordered from Bannish-Rickard Lumber Co., Bristol, TN. When the weather was warm enough, these weatherboards were all pre-primed with an oil-based Benjamin Moore primer which was donated by Godsey Supply Co. LLC, Bristol, TN. Before the new weatherboards could be installed, work had to be completed on replacing missing and rotten exterior trim pieces around the doors, windows and corner boards. Ben Addison of Wallace Bros. Construction, Glade Spring, VA custom-milled and installed the trim pieces on the house. The pre-primed weatherboards were then installed on all four sides of the house with galvanized cut nails, which matched the existing nails, special ordered from Tremont Nail Co. Mansfield, MA. Any of the existing weatherboards that could be salvaged were left in place.

Ben Addison of Wallace Bros. Construction Co. also built wooden storm window frames for all of the first floor windows. Whicker Glass Co., Bristol, TN, installed 3/16" thick Plexiglas in these frames. The storm windows were installed with the appropriate storm window hangers special ordered from House of Antique Hardware, Portland, OR. The purpose of the storm windows is to protect the hand-blown glass that was installed in the new custom-made window sashes in 2014. The restoration glass, made in Germany and imported by Bendheim Ltd., Passaic, NJ, is the same glass used in the restoration of Monticello, Poplar Forest, Mount Vernon and the White House.

The plywood covering the two transoms over the front exterior doors was removed and the sashes taken out of their openings. Scott Otis, Bristol, VA-Lead-Safe certified, stripped all of the chipping paint from these transoms and made repairs to the muntins using a wood consolidant and epoxy putty. The sashes were primed and the hand-blown restoration glass was installed and glazed. These two sashes were then reinstalled above the two front exterior doors.

Wallace Bros. Construction, a Lead-Safe certified firm, scraped loose paint from the existing weatherboards, windows and trim, then primed all of these areas with an oil-based primer. All the joints around the windows, doors and corner boards were caulked. Nail holes and other imperfections were filled with wood putty. The entire outside of the house was sprayed with a second coat of primer, and a final top coat of Benjamin Moore's PM-19 White Dove Aura exterior latex paint, purchased from Godsey Supply Co. LLC, Bristol, TN, was applied.

Ben Addison of Cedar Bluff, VA, a finish carpenter, built two new six-panel exterior doors that matched the existing door on the second floor front entrance. These two doors were primed and painted with Benjamin Moore Aura paint, color CW-255 Palace Arms Red. Ben took the existing door from the second floor entrance back to his shop and disassembled it so he could replace damaged sections. He then reassembled the door, primed and painted it. Ben also built four new interior doors to replace the original doors that were stolen from the house years ago. Jan Rainero, Committee Chair, had pictures of the original doors so the design was based on those pictures. The two first floor doors are six-paneled. The two second floor doors are five-paneled to match the one original door upstairs that was not stolen. These doors are primed and

will be painted when the rest of the interior of the house is ready to be painted.

A talented local Blacksmith, Greg Shaffer of Three Springs Forge, Bristol, VA, hand forged all new hardware for the interior and exterior doors. The design of the strap hinges and thumb latches was based upon the photos of the original doors. All of the original doors were installed with strap hinges that hang on spike pintles driven into the large posts behind the door trim that forms the doorways. All the new doors will be hung this coming Spring. The three exterior doors will have large cast iron Carpenter rim locks with brass knobs. These locks were special ordered from Signature Hardware, Erlanger, KY.

Wallace Bros. Construction made repairs to the two chimneys from inside the garret. The rubble stone chimneys had mortar missing in several different areas. New mortar filled in these voids. Insect screening was placed over the area directly behind the chimneys where the new weatherboards did not extend. This allows for ventilation through the garret but prevents insects and bats from entering the space. Metal flashing was also installed in this same area to prevent blowing rain or snow from entering the garret. Wallace Bros. also removed the concrete steps that were attached to the front porch that was a later addition to the house. The porch was removed several years ago, but the stairs remained. To prevent any future damage to the house from nearby trees, Garland Stone of Stone's Tree Service, Bristol, TN, cut down several small trees next to the house that were dying. He also trimmed back other limbs that were hanging over the roof of the house. Several large limbs were removed from the large walnut tree in the front yard to increase visibility of the house from Lee Hwy. Several small saplings that were also blocking the view from Lee Hwy. were cut down. Garland also cleaned out both gutters and installed gutter guards.

A common feature around old homes is a perimeter of brown pea gravel which served to prevent mud and debris from splashing up against the house during rain storms. Scott Otis removed the grass sod two feet out from the house and around the entire perimeter. Scott spread two tons of pea gravel around the house, and this has protected the new paint job, especially in the rear left corner of the house which sits at grade level. This gravel helps with drainage next to the house. The water flows through the gravel and into the perimeter drain installed in 2014.

In October of last year, the Preston House was broken into. Someone kicked in the basement door breaking the hasp. They ripped off the plywood covering the back door opening and removed the second floor entry door from the opening and leaned the door on its side in the opening. Every bottom window sash was propped open and one of the Plexiglas storm windows was broken. Fortunately that was the only serious damage to the house. The Washington Co. Sheriff's Office was contacted, but the Virginia State Police responded to the call, and report was filed. We suspect bow hunters broke into the house. An arrow and a bulls eye drawn on a piece of plywood in the front yard were discovered. Following this break-in, four "No Trespassing" signs were installed as well as a trail camera. A 1000-watt light was installed by BVU on the existing light pole in the front side yard. This light illuminates the front and east side of the house at night. The broken storm window was replaced by Whicker Glass.

The Preston House does not have its own private road access to the house. The neighboring property owner has allowed BHA to use the bridge and road access that originally went with the

house. This is a dirt road on uneven ground, and when it rains, the road becomes swampy and muddy. BHA had Boulder Look Stone Co., Bristol, VA, spread a total of 17 tons of gravel on this roadway so workers could get their vehicles up to the house.

In December 2015, Wallace Bros. Construction completed an interior demo of the house. This involved removing anything that was not original to the house including paneling, drywall, electrical items, old duct work, wallpaper, trash, construction debris and furniture. The house was completely vacuumed and is now ready for the interior restoration. Before any new work can be completed inside the house, the Washington County Building Official required an asbestos test of materials that could contain asbestos after the interior demo was completed. Taft and Frye Co., Inc. Bristol, VA, conducted a survey of the house and collected multiple samples of various materials that could contain asbestos. Those samples were sent to a lab, and the results came back negative, so restoration work can now begin on the interior of the house.

A note from Amy Hopper, Newsletter Editor

Thanks for your article and pictures Scott Otis. We have come a long way! Thanks to all for reading about the progress of the restoration of the oldest wood framed home in Washington County, VA, and most likely one of the stops Lewis and Clark made on their expedition that began in 1804. Robert Preston was a surveyor representing Thomas Jefferson who was the governor of Virginia in 1779. The house is now listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register of Historic Places. Hopefully, the interior of this historic home will be completed within the next two years, and it will become a major tourist destination for our area. For more information read the brochure designed by Amy Hopper, Susan Long, and The Preston House committee led by Jan Rainero. The brochure can be found on the Welcome Page of the BHA web site: www.BristolHistoricalAssociation.com or simply click [HERE](#).