

Builder restores the past

Crew working to repair cabins

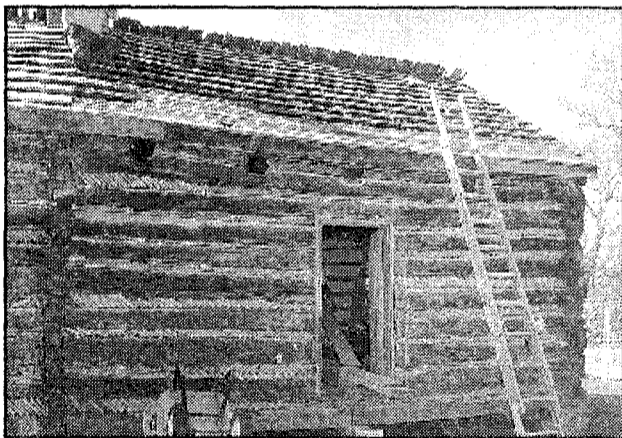
By GREG MENZA
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Gary Grau has a passion for history and for preserving the structures in which history has been made.

As the founder of Grau General Contracting, LLC in Williamsport, he brings the construction techniques of the past and the future together. Grau has surrounded himself with a team of skilled craftsmen who have a unique range of experience and who also appreciate the opportunity to help preserve Tennessee's historic structures. The team pursues opportunities to build and/or repair new structures using time-honored construction techniques.

Grau Construction's latest project is the restoration of three cabins at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. The team is currently working on Alfred's Cabin, the slave cabin of one of Jackson's most loved and respected slaves.

"We are working closely with Tony Guzzi, the Hermitage director of restoration," Grau said. "It's been a wonderful experience working with Tony. He's almost like a history private investigator — attentive to every single detail."



Courtesy photo

Cabin "chinking" replaced by Grau Construction team members can be seen in this photo of "Alfred's Cabin" at the Historic Hermitage in Nashville.



Courtesy photo

Grau Construction Co. workmen replace shingles during the restoration of a 19th century slave cabin at the Historic Hermitage Plantation.

Guzzi is equally enthusiastic about working with Grau.

"We've worked together on several projects. I like working with Gary because he is very conscientious, and he truly enjoys being at the Hermitage and takes pride in his work here," Guzzi said.

Guzzi has supplied Grau with pictures from the 1860s through 1880s depicting the period the restoration project is aiming to duplicate.

"There is a lot of work to be done, but it is without doubt a labor of love for each

of us," Grau said. "The buildings suffer from years of wear and tear, insect damage and the inevitable consequences of age."

Grau and his team have begun the process of patching up the centuries-old buildings. They are replacing the chinking and dobbing (wood blocks and masonry) — a process which includes replacing some of the wood with vintage logs that have been collected over many years from many sources throughout the country. Wood shingles are also replacing those which have not been able to stand up to time's testing.

Grau Construction has had plenty of experience at historic preservation over the years. Some of their projects include work on the Historic Croft House, Pruitt Library, Nashville City Cemetery, Historic Morgan House, Two Rivers Mansion, Brentwood Hall and The Hodge House in Warner Parks for which they received the 2009 Historical Commission Commendation.

The company also builds homes and does restoration work for many private individuals, sells vintage and reclaimed materials that include timbers, flooring, doors, rock and limestone and more. More information may

be found at www.graugeneral.com. or by calling (931) 682-0099.