

THE SPECTATOR

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If these timbers could talk

The 300-year evolution of the Sinclair Inn

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The Spectator

The Sinclair Inn is not bashful in the least. With its bare beams showing and foundation exposed, this unique museum proudly displays its architecture, which spans 300 years. The concept for the museum was to leave the building somewhat unfinished, allowing parts of the skeleton to remain visible. To create this effect, glass flooring is being laid so visitors can see what lies underneath the floorboards. Rather than plaster the walls, the timbers and ceilings have, for the most part, been left bare.

In light of the numerous changes to the structure that have occurred over the past 300 years, the Sinclair Inn Museum committee decided to make its architectural evolution a focal point of their exhibit. The overall experience is like that of walking into an archaeological site, still freshly unearthed.

Heritage Society chair, Ryan Scranton, says a lot has been going on at the Sinclair Inn during the past two years. After receiving funding from ACOA, under their Strategic Community Investment Fund, the committee was able to develop the space.

One of the finished projects entailed building an entire interior skeleton to support the original timbers that had become subject to dry rot. In



RYAN SCRANTON

A group of dendrochronology students from Mount Allison University were at the Sinclair Inn Museum on St. George Street to collect core samples on March 5. Dendrochronology is a method of dating wood using the variance in the size of growth rings. The core samples were taken using a hand-powered auger. Through this work the Annapolis Heritage Society is hoping to gain more knowledge about the date of construction and various additions to the Sinclair Inn Museum.

doing this, Scranton says they were able to prolong the life of the building significantly.

The new skeleton is made of pressed wood and is said to be stronger than steel. Scranton explains that there are no attempts to hide the additional support structure, which simply signifies yet another phase in the inn's architectural evolution.

Still in the works is the construction of new interior signage and educational displays. Four new touch screens are being installed, each ex-

plaining a different aspect of the museum.

One of the most prominent displays is on the clay walls, the inn being one of the few buildings left in the province with this kind of insulation. The Acadians used a mixture of sand, clay and marsh grass to wrap around a timber frame. The clay mixture absorbed heat from the air, keeping the warmth inside. The timber frame was constructed of wood "waddles," almost like dowels, that run between the beams horizontally, like the steps on a ladder.

The museum showcases a section of the clay wall that is original to the house, a section of wall taken from another house in town, as well as a section that was recently built by local craftsman Jef Achenbach. One of the touch screens shows a film of Achenbach demonstrating the technique used by the Acadians.

Ghostly visitors

When the museum opens for the summer, it will be visited by ten ghosts, each with a story to tell about the inn and its history. To create the effect of a perceived ghost, an image from a hidden TV will be bounced off a transparent screen. Because the figure will appear to be floating in mid air, like a hologram.

Visitors will be able to make the ghost appear and deliver their monologue by selecting from a control panel. Several local residents have worked on this project, including archivist Ern Dick, and Young Company director John Brown. The 10 characters were also played by local actors, although Scranton says that because of their costumes, some will be unrecognizable.

Dendrochronology

The Sinclair Inn has gone through many reincarna-

ferent sections of the building.

Dendrochronology is the study of annual growth rings of trees or timber in comparison to the climate changes that have occurred over time. In looking at a piece of timber and measuring its rings, it is possible to cross-date the wood with a sample of reference material from the same period in time.

Mount Allison Biogeography professor Andre Robicheau, says if his students are successful, they will be able to date the samples of timber they gathered from the Sinclair Inn to within a year or less of when they first became part of the building. They will use samples taken from Christ Church in Karsdale, which dates back to 1791, as reference material.

In addition to dating the samples, the students will have to determine the species of wood. Robicheau says a scanning electron microscope will be used to look at the molecular structure of each timber.

Robicheau says the project began after Mount Allison's Dendrochronology lab had its inauguration in January.

Sinclair Inn Museum committee chair, Wayne Morgan, heard about the event and contacted the lab. Robicheau had just received funding from Leadership Mount Allison to conduct special projects with his class that would be of benefit to the community as well as foster student leadership. A study of the Sinclair Inn fit the bill for such a project and has already proved to be a rewarding experience for the 11 students in his class. Robicheau is also pleased that it is a multidisciplinary assignment, combining their scientific research with historical research.

In order to determine the architectural chronology of the building and date the various changes and additions that have been made to the structure over time, Biogeography students from Mount Allison University are using Dendrochronology techniques to determine the age of the timbers from dif-



CAROLYN SLOAN

Heritage Society chair, Ryan Scranton, stands beside an exhibit on clay walls at the Sinclair Inn Museum. The inn is one of the few buildings left in the province that still have this kind of insulation used by the early Acadians.