

Local students build on

Colony cabin fever



STEVE HOOPER / Sentinel Staff

YOUNG BUILDERS — From left, student Tylor Brunell of Winchester, Timothy J. Albers, project assistant and an Antioch New England Graduate School student, Antioch teacher Brandon Olson and student Patrick Bokum of Hinsdale are restoring the Horatio Colony cabin as part of a project for the Monadnock Community Connections School, which is located on the Antioch campus in Keene.

Keene school project focuses on refurbishing of historic house

By CECILY WEISBURGH
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Last week, the pounding of hammers joined the calls of birds and the occasional whoosh of traffic from nearby Route 9 at a cabin in the Keene woods.

Inside the 10-by-35-foot building, 15- and 16-year-olds pried off window casings and baseboards and hammered out nails from the hard pine wood, careful not to splinter it.

Half a century before the teenagers were born, Horatio Colony built the three-room wood cabin as a getaway from the hustle and bustle of Keene; a secluded spot where he could write poems and short stories.

Today, students from Monadnock Community Connections School are nearing the end of a year-long process to restore the historic cabin, after vandals punched gaping holes in many of its wallboards.

Early Wednesday morning, five boys gathered near Brian J. Gallien of Marlow as he explained how to delicately remove the woodwork from around windows and floors, so the students could replace the damaged walls.

"Remember, when we're done, it's supposed to look like we were never here," Gallien told them.

The cabin sits just off the entry trail in the 415-acre Horatio Colony Nature Preserve, land conserved for years by the prominent Colony family of Keene.

Since they started the physical work about a month ago, students at the school, which emphasizes independent learning, have rebuilt the 1938 cabin's stone foundation, developed educational displays being readied for professional sign makers and labored on the damaged walls.

They've worked with their teachers, Brandon S. Olson and Robyn Filliman, staff at Antioch New England

Graduate School in Keene and professionals such as Gallien of Ironwood Restoration, who specializes in historic restoration, and stonemason David N. Quimby of Harrisville.

They've presented their designs, plans and a \$3,579 budget for the project to the preserve's trustees and advisory board, garnering approval for everything.

"I thought it would be fun to do," said Nate Hardy, 16, of Swanzey, wearing thick gloves and a pencil tucked under his baseball cap as he worked the casings off a window on Wednesday.

"It turns out it has."

Like Nate, many of the students who chose the cabin project have a love of carpentry and a chance to indulge it here once a week.

Kyle Croteau, 15, of Swanzey, has done carpentry around his house; Tylor Brunell, 16, of Winchester, recently remodeled the deck at his house with his father; Pat Bokum, 15, of Hinsdale, worked in construction with his father last summer.

"We've done most of the work ourselves" on the cabin, Kyle noted.

The school, based at Antioch and run by the Monadnock Regional district, has a nontraditional component called a trek, where students pick a project and run with it outside the school walls.

"I love getting out of the classroom with these guys," Olson said at the cabin Wednesday. The treks, he said, take students' interests and discover "how can they use that to their advantage."

This project couples you-are-there learning with community service, something not lost on the boys, or Gallien, who's been volunteering his expertise.

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Students restore Colony cabin

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"When I'm older I can show my kids" the cabin, Nate said.

Gallien grew up in Keene, spending much of his boyhood roaming the woods in what's now the preserve.

"I'm honored to be part of this project," he said. He'd been looking to become more involved with the community; opportunity arrived when he was asked to help the students, something he'd never done before.

"It's a wonderful concept and I'm proud to be a part of it," he said.

The idea for the restoration project came from Paul M. Bocko of Antioch, who's also the preserve's project director. The preserve usually hosts an education project each year.

"To be able to learn and become intimate with a local place is important," Bocko said. "It leaves a lasting impression on kids. They're learning from their local environment."

THE GROUP VISITED HENRY DAVID THOREAU'S RESTORED CABIN AT WALDEN POND FOR INSPIRATION.

Students have been itching to get to the physical work since the project first began about a year ago.

Months have been spent on researching historical buildings and even reading Horatio Colony's poems. The students — about eight in all this school year — have each concentrated on one area of the restoration.

The group visited Henry David Thoreau's restored cabin at Walden Pond for inspiration and toured the preserve to get a feel for the area.

"You can definitely see the sort of excitement of a year's worth of plan-

ning showing itself in the actual product," said project assistant Timothy J. Albers of Antioch.

The students' charge has been to get as close as possible to the original cabin materials — not to recreate it, but to fix it and design it to be an educational tool.

To rebuild the crumbled foundation, the students, working with Quimby, spent two days selecting stones in the preserve's parking lot. Then, they learned how to stack the stones for a perfect fit to stabilize the cabin — almost like the video game Tetris, Tylor said.

The inside work, expected to take four class days, includes removing most of the pressed wood fiber wallboards and replacing them with a similar material called homosote.

They hope to complete the project by June 4, when a celebration is planned to launch a part of Keene history into its next 66 years.