



INSIDE: TRAVELING SEASONLESS Caves, waterfalls and rock formations fill Ohio's Hocking Hills with beauty. **Page F8**

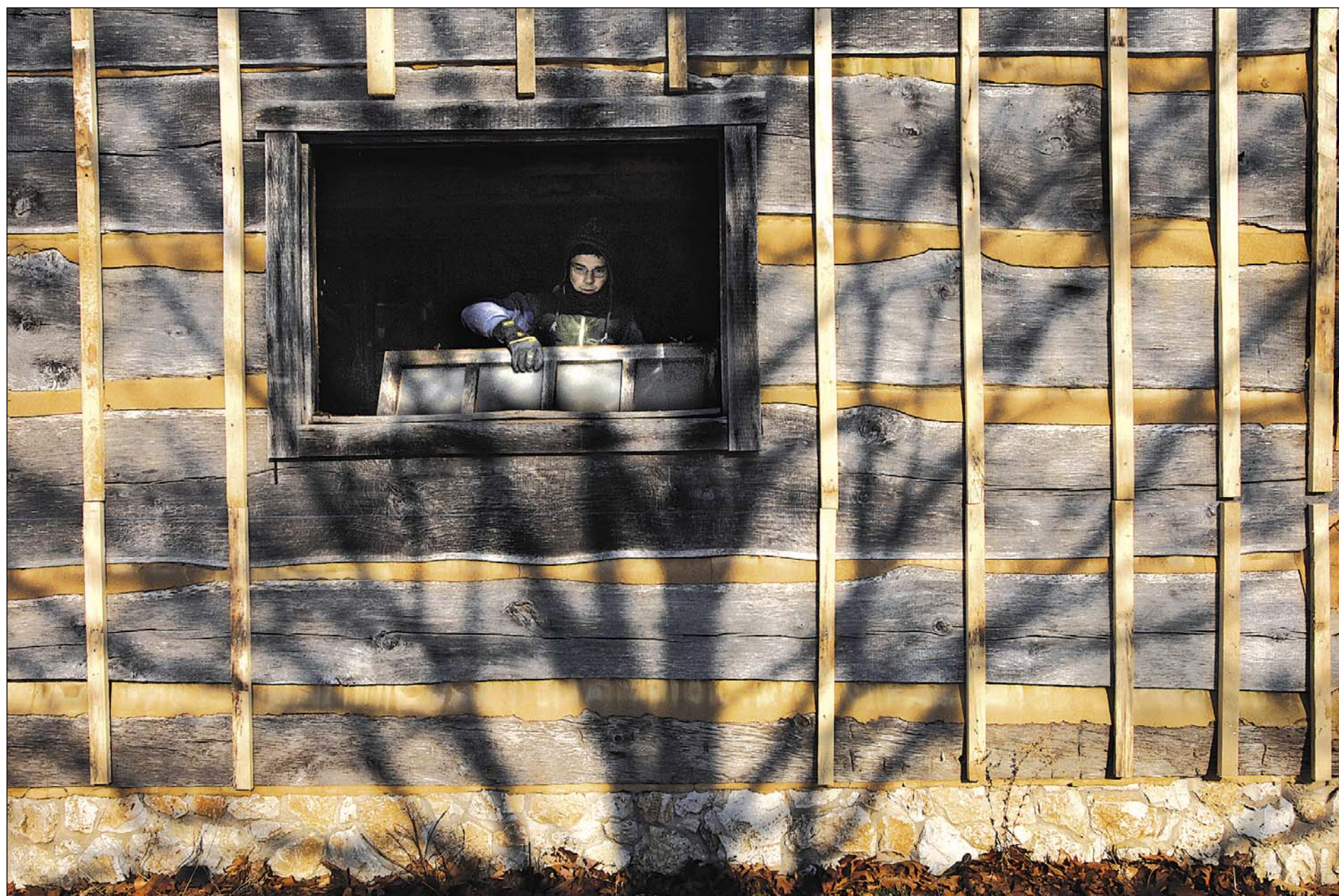
HEARTLAND

IN TOUCH
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SECTION F



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Trillium Dell Timberworks carpenter Tim Narkiewicz removes an old window from the wall of the pioneer cabin at Sommer Park. The vertical furring strips will bear the clapboard siding that park superintendent Tom Miller says will place the cabin in its correct historic time period. Narkiewicz heads the historical restoration division of Trillium Dell.

Nailing the era

Sommer Park cabin gets transformed to make it more historically accurate



The log cabin at W.H. Sommer Park stands ready for the addition of clapboard siding. Park historians say the time period represented by the cabin dictates an upgrade from log to siding, which became prevalent as transportation and materials became more readily available.

The pioneer cabin at W.H. Sommer Park informed 1,300 school children last year about the sights, smells and history of 1855 life in rural Peoria.

Trouble is, the cabin was a myth. "It was 'Little House on the Prairie,'" said Dale Goodner, supervisor of environmental and interpretive services with the Peoria Park District. "Give us accuracy. Who are we and where did we come from?"

In April, when school groups once again start visiting Sommer Park for pioneer programs, the myth will be gone, replaced with accuracy and truth.

After three years of study by an ad hoc committee of volunteers, the park board assessed the costs of simply repairing the log cabin versus the cost of an authentic historic renovation. At \$13,000, the cost of making the cabin historically accurate was more affordable, in part because the vulnerability of log cabins to weather created ongoing maintenance costs.

This winter, in rain, snow and frigid temperatures, a team of craftsmen from Trillium Dell Timberworks rewrote the cabin's historical narrative.

Rather than logs, a homestead on the outskirts of Peoria in 1855 would have had clapboard siding and dovetailed windows.

As soon as railroads came through central Illinois and transported building materials, cabins in this region were covered with clapboard to seal out stiff prairie winds that penetrated log structures.

Project manager on the Sommer Park site for the Trillium Dell team was Tim Narkiewicz, head of the company's historical restoration division.

"Cypress clapboard was a real common siding with a V dovetail notch for log cabins," Narkiewicz said.

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LEFT: Sommer Park volunteer Jerrie Ruck adds a notation to the furring strips before the siding is installed. ABOVE: Tremont Nail, a Massachusetts business that has cut nails for nearly 200 years, supplied the historically accurate nails.



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DAVID ZALAZNIK/JOURNAL STAR

Josh Morrissey makes a cut in the foreground as the rest of the Trillium Dell Timberworks crew attaches siding to the Sommer Park cabin.

CABIN

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The crew used old-fashioned cut nails from Tremont Nail, in business cutting nails in Massachusetts for nearly 200 years.

Narkiewicz, who has researched and worked on historic structures across the country, said log cabins require constant maintenance. The log cabin would have been one of the first structures constructed when land was cleared. By the 1850s, people would have either constructed a new home or sided a log cabin.

"Our quaint notion of living on the frontier was not typical for settlers in the 1850s. Settlers wanted more comfort and less maintenance," he said. "The original cabins were often turned into corn cribs by removing the chinking."

In Illinois and throughout the midwest, the log cabin was not considered a desirable or maintainable structure, so very few authentic cabins are still in existence.

Narkiewicz said by 1837, literally thousands of cabins in the Midwest had already fallen by the wayside.

Goodner, volunteer Lee Slider and park manager Tom Miller contend work on the cabin was necessary not only to preserve the building, which was badly deteriorating, but to distinguish truth from fantasy.

"It was an old-timey building. Nostalgia. It had no basis in historical fact," said Slider, who retired from the Macon County Conservation District. "A log

cabin was a temporary structure. Like a trailer. Early settlers either rehabbed the structure or built a new house.

"Why is it important to be historically accurate? Let me give you an analogy. If you knew that snakes couldn't dig holes, would you continue to say that's a snake hole? If you know germs can mutate and change over time, would you continue to put down the theory of evolution? If you try to tell a story of a family or a period in history, would you continue to tell a lie?"

Slider said an "old timey" building may legitimately be preferred by some people.

Not legitimate, he said, is to perpetuate a myth in the context of telling history.

"We in America base history on myth," Slider said. "We have to learn to recount history from the bottom up, not the top down. Looking at everyday life gives a closer representation of truth."

Miller, whose work at Sommer Park is as both history teacher and naturalist, said Jacob and Christina Koerner acquired 320 acres, which remained in the Koerner family from 1849 to 1964, when Forest Park Foundation donated the land to the Peoria Park District.

In the 1980s, the park district construct-

ed an 1855 pioneer village on the site with a blacksmith shop, school house, pioneer homestead cabin, barn and corral.

Goodner said over time, it became increasingly difficult to integrate the cabin into the history of 1855. With Peoria hoping to develop more ecotourism, it became more important to recount an authentic experience of this place.

"Ecotourism is birds, wildlife and history. Tell your story and why this place is important," Goodner said. "This is the most significant agricultural history in the country right here, in the middle of tallgrass plains."

"What is the cost of ignorance? What is the cost of not knowing our own history? Sommer Park is a wonderful opportunity for Peoria to interpret itself."

Goodner said understanding the history of agriculture in central Illinois would show us that organic farming is nothing new. It's old. Accurate narratives of history give us the tools for understanding the world today.

"Ultimately, what we are teaching is respect. Respect what people experienced and how they dealt with their surroundings," he said. "Cultural knowledge gives us a sense of place and understanding so we can become better citizens and fit into our part of the world."

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Peoria Park District employees Tom Miller, Tim Varvil and Dale Goodner look over the clapboard siding and new windows installed at the Sommer Park cabin.

Clapboard siding covers the outside walls of the Sommer Park cabin. Workers covered the log walls with the clapboard to illustrate the time period when settlers began to upgrade from log homes.



Want to learn more?

- Schools interested in scheduling pioneer programming for class trips can call Tom Miller, park manager, at 691-8423.
- Pioneer days are from 1 to 4 p.m. on April 27, May 18, June 29, July 27, Aug. 31, Sept. 28 and Oct. 19. The cost is \$2 per person. Experience the daily life of rural Peorians in the mid-19th century. Activities at the park often include hand-dipping candles, blacksmithing, school lessons, woodworking, heirloom vegetable gardening, hands-on children's activities, pioneer cemetery tours, hayrides, wool spinning and more.
- W.H. Sommer Park is located at 6329 N. Koerner Road, Edwards.

SINGLE FILE

Women claim to be independent but disappear when the bill arrives



SUSAN DIETZ

DEAR SUSAN: Responding to your column about who should pay for a date — this has been a sticking point of mine for years. I've written to you about it. My philosophy is "you ask, you pay," but I've noticed that just as most men need to be dragged into helping women with housework, women have to be dragged into sharing dating expenses.

If women are to be true to this philosophy, they'll never ask a man for a date, which is just another denial of equal social responsibility. For most women claiming to be independent, independence

stops at their purses. It's hypocritical! The costs of dating should be shared from the first date. (This doesn't necessarily mean 50-50 sharing because men often earn more money than women.)

The thing is, many women still view men as economic saviors and gauge a man's commitment by the amount of money he spends, when the truth is, a man's commitment comes from the heart — not the pocket. Thanks, Susan, for your usual evenhandedness dealing with relationship issues. — Jesse J., Long Island N.Y.

DEAR JESSE: Hey, fairness is the

name of the game. In single life, in life in general. Not too many issues raise my blood pressure as much as the backing and filling of my sisters (some, not all) when it comes to paying their way. Women who do quite well financially, who don't think twice about paying for a business lunch, suddenly morph into poor little match girls when a man is at the table and the check arrives. That small piece of paper is her cue to push back her chair and, purse in hand, go on a nose-powdering expedition. The nose may or may not glisten, but rest assured this is not her shining moment.

He knows the routine all too well, and so do most women. It's a classic turnoff moment that makes men seethe (quietly), never to call again.

Whatever our earning power, it costs so little (and makes such a huge impression) to offer to pay something, perhaps the tip. The man across the table may refuse, but the resonance of your gesture is incalculable.

BENEFITS? The latest wrinkle in our relationship world is something called friends with benefits. It's a hybrid, spawned by platonic relating between the sexes.

According to The New York Times, close relationships in which friends begin having sex come with their own brand of awkwardness. The first study of this new phenom found they tend to have little romantic passion, but bring on the same sort of fear as romances: that one person will love more than the other. The hybrid becomes a travesty, neither friendship nor romance.

My take on the newcomer? Thumbs down. Way, way down.

Write to Susan Dietz in care of the Journal Star, 1 News Plaza, Peoria, IL 61643.