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By Nancy Jenner - North Bennet Street School's preservation carpentry program offers students hands-on training

September 15, 2011 - Construction Design & Engineering

For the third year, a lucky few North Bennet St. School (NBSS) preservation carpentry students enjoyed Summer internships at Mount Lebanon Shaker Village in New Lebanon, N.Y. For students, the opportunity to work on historic buildings in the museum setting is exhilarating...especially when the work is at the roof level as it was for most of this summer.

William Burns, Frank DiFrancesco and Jared Lodge were the interns this year. The work is overseen by Peter Smith of David E. Lanoue, Inc., the company responsible for a major preservation and restoration project on the Brethren's Workshop. Smith is a 2004 graduate of the NBSS preservation carpentry program.

Reports from the crew outlined an ambitious and impressive list of repairs focused on the front half of the roof structure of the Brethren's Workshop. Projects undertaken included work to the rafters, top plate, sheathing, slate roofing, the plaster cove cornice and gutters. Once the roof was opened and investigated, the scope of work expanded as further areas requiring repair were discovered. A principle objective of the work involved the stabilization of the plaster cove molding; as a result, repairs had to be made to all elements of the roof structure at the eaves. Setting up staging, timber frame rafter repair and replacement (including cutting joinery), consolidation and repair of roof sheathing boards, masonry repair and the mixing and application of lime mortar, painstaking stabilization of plaster and injection of plaster repair adhesive, and the replacement of a significant portion of the slate roof were part of the work. In addition, the crew worked on the construction of lead-clad copper gutters using 19th Century machines.

In addition to Smith, master craftsman Michael Fountain, a metal worker and roofer who specializes in the restoration of slate, cedar and metal roofs, and Don Carpentier, a nationally renown preservation expert, worked with the interns on restoring the slate roof and recreating 19th Century gutters.

"The internship was a unique opportunity to participate in a large variety of preservation work far beyond what I expected. I was able to apply what I had learned in my first year at school, and gained valuable real world field experience while working with very skilled and knowledgeable professionals such as Mike Fountain and Don Carpentier. This internship was a great transition to my second year of school and more than I could have hoped for in preparing to enter this field after graduation." said DiFrancesco

Lodge said "I enjoyed the opportunity to take a holistic look at building preservation and understand how the work needed to be well-organized and well-communicated for the team to function properly. My favorite experience was the slate roofing - waterproofing, replacing damaged slate with recycled slate and the installation of new slate along the eaves. I learned many new skills and enjoyed working with such a professional crew. Watching professionals problem-solving and troubleshooting

tricky parts of the work helped me get better at thinking on my feet."

The preservation carpentry program is one of eight full-time professional programs offered at North Bennet St. School. Carpentry, bookbinding, cabinet and furniture making, jewelry making and repair, locksmithing, piano technology and violin making and repair are the other programs. All the programs focus on hand-skills training and several of the programs include internships and on-site work.

The value of the experience was made particularly relevant for Burns, who, after graduating from NBSS in June and completing the summer internship program, began a new job as the preservation carpenter at Canterbury Shaker Village in New Hampshire.

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