



# The Log Book

## What's New at the Snickersville Academy & Bluemont

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### The Mystery of the Tilted Cabin

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A fact of life in restoration work is that — regardless of extensive consultation and careful planning — restorers cannot know for certain what the structural problems are until they actually dig in. The Snickersville Academy held a mystery to solve: Why did the log cabin — which stands 100% upright in the photo on a 1905 postcard — slant 4-6 inches towards the north?

We had some clues. The south wall was in much worse shape than the others. Although the great stone chimney stood plumb straight, there was a long, stretched-out V-shaped infill of cement and bricks at the south wall. There was some charring above the fireplace inside. The floor on the north side of the Academy bounced unnervingly as we stepped across it. Clay drain tiles peeked out from the east foundation and, at the northwest foundation corner — a big bulge.

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Mark your calendar and save the date, September 14-15, 2013. Visit the Snickersville Academy during the Bluemont Fair. Bring the children and see our restoration progress.

But relatively new stone work around an iron firebox — that had been fitted inside the original fireplace at some point — hid any view of how the cabin joined the chimney. And there was no entry into the crawl space.

**So the Snickersville Academy, as we received it, completely concealed the story of its own past traumas.**

Last summer Eric Westergard, experienced in restoring historic log structures, tackled the heavily damaged south wall. He expertly braced the Academy with iron-pipe scaffolding, driving wood wedges to re-brace it at every step.

His skillful, meticulous approach — thinking through any possible structural consequences of each move — suggests a nickname: "the Log Whisperer." Eric cut into the floor planks at the northwest corner, opening a sort of trap door.



"The Log Whisperer" pounds in braces to support cabin to remove & replace 3 logs, repairing several others.

What did we find out? We uncovered a charcoal-encrusted hole in a log behind the fireplace. Eric suggested that someone had once tried to vent a cast iron stove through the chimney, overheating the log. Thankfully, the fire must have gone out before it burned down the whole cabin, but the stress seriously weakened the south wall, letting in the weather.

Climbing down into the crawl space, we found that a column of large stones that originally supported the floor joists under the northwest corner had collapsed. The north wall sill (bottom) log was severely bowed. Eric and stonemason Ed Ashby believe that the intermittent stream, Butchers Branch, had sometime risen with a depth and force capable of undermining and moving the foundation stones. Indeed, the visiting grandchildren of long-time Academy resident Susie Neal recall how, at times, water flowed beneath the cabin. The bulge an attempt to bolster the unsupported corner with new layers.

In the spring of 2013 — by using jacks, rollers, braces, and winches — we will carefully shift the historic structure in stages on its foundations toward the south, finally back upright. □



