

# Steelville couple restores 1830s log cabin at Shaw Nature Reserve

By Karen Cernich  
*Washington Missourian*

STEELVILLE, Mo. (AP) — Woodworkers Jeff and Sherry Owen are protecting a piece of Franklin County history on their 47-acre property in Steelville.

Nearly three years ago the couple began dismantling an 1830s log cabin at Shaw Nature Reserve in Gray Summit to relocate and restore on their land.

They succeeded and were living in the cabin while Sherry operated their custom woodworking business out of a temporary shop on the property and Jeff worked building them a new home just up the hill. Then a flue fire a couple of weeks ago nearly destroyed everything.

Now the cabin is charred and damaged — all that's left inside is the twisted wire that once was their mattress — but the Owens haven't written off the historic structure.

"He's not giving up on those," said Sherry Owen, pointing to a stack of old logs that had been part of the original cabin. They had rebuilt only a portion of the cabin on their property, so now Jeff plans to use the remaining logs to repair the damage.

Now they want to save the cabin, again.

Jeff Owen first spied the cabin a few years ago when he was scouting out property at Shaw Nature Reserve as a possible location for an event for a historical re-enactment group he belongs to, the American Mountain Men. The cabin was located on property south of the Meramec River on a part of the Reserve that is not open to the public, said John Behrer, of Shaw Nature Reserve.

"In the 1980s the cabin was used by the Reserve for overnight education programs mainly for schoolchildren," he said.

Although the Dana Brown Center is made up of historic log and timber frame structures, the reserve decided not to use this cabin for the new project because it didn't "fit the bill" for what was needed for Dana Brown, said Behrer.

The Owens began dismantling the cabin Jan. 1, 2005. What they discovered was that the cabin had been added on to several times over the course of a century. The original cabin was simple and small, Sherry noted, just a corner of what it looked like before they took it down.

"We'll have to replace some of the logs and the entire roof," said Sherry. "And now, because of the fire, we'll have to cover the inside with pine so it will look more like a lodge."

They are committed to saving the cabin because they feel a connection to it, said Sherry. From the time the Owens began dismantling the cabin at its original location in Gray Summit, a number of coincidences have convinced her they were meant to save it.

"When we were taking down one of the additions on Feb. 5, 2005, we saw on one of the boards the date Feb. 5, 1955," she said. "They had been there 50 years earlier putting that up, and we were there on that same day taking it down. It was really special."

The couple also came across a piece of newspaper that had been used as insulation for the house. The paper was from 1920 and featured an ad for a trip to Florida for \$100. Again, they noticed a coincidence.

"The travel agent's name was

Detgen, which was Jeff's mom's maiden name," said Sherry. "We called her to tell her his name and she said, 'Are you kidding? That was my uncle!'"

"It breaks our hearts that the cabin burned, that we lost some of that history." The Owens make their living as woodworkers. They run their own business, Homestead Woodworking, off of their property in Steelville. Before going into

business for themselves, the couple worked for high-end companies like Gravois Planing Mill in St. Louis, Kirkwood Stair Company and Sawyer and Son Woodworking in Hazelwood, where they met in 1995. After the couple were married, they began their plans for building a new house on the property - Sherry was running the woodworking business while Jeff built the house.

"We were working nonstop,"

said Sherry. "We were working our eight-hour job, plus overtime. We were also remodeling our home in St. Louis so we could sell it and on the weekends, we were taking the cabin apart and transporting it down to the property."

By August 2006, the Owens were ready to take the plunge. They quit their jobs and began a life of self-sufficiency.

"We started our own work-

ing business in January, and we haven't had to do much advertising," said Sherry.

"And all the calls we've gotten for jobs are from word-of-mouth (advertising)."

They have had jobs all over the area and as far away as Belleville, Ill. They craft the pieces on their property in a temporary workshop they've built and then transport them to the customer's location.

## A mind unlike a steel trap; in shock at the strip mall

Dear Dr. Brothers: I've been dating a very sweet and wonderful man for the past few months. I am far more educated than he is; nevertheless, we seem to enjoy each other's company very much. This week we were at my house and I decided to bring out a simple party game in which you have to have a good vocabulary and analytical skills. I was surprised to find out that my friend can barely spell, and his reading and thinking skills -- on this "test," at least -- were not nearly as good as mine. It makes me wonder if I should keep seeing him. What would you do in my place?

— J.D.

Dear J.D.: It's too bad that we can't usually find the perfect mate, one with all the qualities we desire wrapped up into one delicious ball. Let's face it, that rarely happens. This fellow seems to fulfill many of the requirements you have for making your life happy. It is interesting to me that in your everyday dealings with him so far, you had no feeling of mental superiority, but now you do, based on a game.

You are going to have to decide what is most important to you



Dr. Joyce Brothers

### • Ask Dr. Brothers

and your relationships. It may be that being on such unequal footing upstairs will lead you to move on to someone more in keeping with your educational level. On the other hand, your friend's heart of gold should be worth a great deal, for this is not always easy to come by. And the fact that you didn't really notice his lack of education until this game came along might suggest that, although he's unschooled, he could be smarter than you think. Only you can solve this dilemma by being scrupulously honest with yourself. If you decide he's a keeper, why not help him finish his education? He's already had a good start by hooking up with you. Good luck.

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Dear Dr. Brothers: Please help me

figure out what to do, because right now I am not thinking too clearly. I will get right to the point. Last night I went to the local deli, as I do frequently, for a sandwich. This time the high-school boy working behind the counter (whom I have known for years, and his parents too) said something very shocking to me. He basically asked me if I would go to bed with him! I didn't answer but ran out, and he just laughed. Should I tell his folks? I don't know if he was serious, but he seemed to be. I'm just flabbergasted. I am 43, and I guess he is 17 or 18.

— S.A.

Dear S.A.: Kids today don't seem to feel the same sense of boundaries we all knew as teenagers of an earlier generation. That's what really makes us feel such a sense of wrongdoing

when we're approached like you have been. The fact that you are acquainted with the boy's parents makes it even more ghastly, doubling the sense of violation. The fact is that you -- as the adult -- already are carrying a burden that is unfair, for unfortunately there is the sense of something vaguely sinister about being the "older woman" in this encounter, as unexpected as it was.

Ever since Mrs. Robinson seduced Benjamin for her own selfish purposes, older women have gotten a bad rap. And though May-December romances are in fashion now, they also threaten the status quo -- the way things "should" be -- and people just don't like that.

So you are right to be alarmed. By all means, speak to the young man, and if he continues with his aggressive behavior, tell his parents promptly. This seems to be more about power than sex (much less anything approaching a real romantic relationship), and it's important that you keep the upper hand.

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