

Brick Store Museum overhaul

This is building's first major renovation



The Brick Store Museum on Kennebunk's Main Street is undergoing a \$750,000 structural renovation, the most visible aspect being the repointing of the brick chimneys and outer walls. *Dana Pearson*

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KENNEBUNK — It's been a general store, rooming house, auditorium, library, IGA, fraternal lodge, and the office that received Kennebunk's first telegraph. Since 1936, though, 117 Main St. has been known primarily as the Brick Store Museum, housing artwork, artifacts, photographs, books, and records that collectively tell the history of a unique Maine town.

The brick building, constructed by William Lord in 1825, plus the three other 19th century Main Street structures that form the museum, underwent their first comprehensive structural engineering study in 2003-'04. The results, in layman's terms: the buildings were hurting, to the tune of \$750,000. Hence the museum's \$1.5 million fundraising campaign, half earmarked for the current renovations, the other half for the endowment fund to give the organization financial security and the ability to hire back additional staff that was let go several years ago. To

its credit, the museum has received \$930,000 in pledges and actual donations.

Because it would be the most visible manifestation of the campaign, the museum started with the chimneys and exterior walls, which have been partially shrouded in scaffolding and plastic since the winter, when Dick Roy began re-pointing the brickwork.

"They had done patch jobs [on the bricks] for so many years, and had used caulk and tar to replace the mortar," says Roy, clearly indicating that such practices are frowned upon. "The old building needed some rehab."

Forsaking a pure Portland cement mixture, which is generally regarded as too rigid and unforgiving for older, softer bricks, and carries the risk of subjecting those bricks to frost heaves and fractures, Roy's crew has used a more pliable, lime-based recipe.

Museum Director Tracy Baetz says many people, seeing the stripped down version of the museum, are convinced that the bricks out front are naturally white. Not quite. The original red bricks were first painted white by William E. Barry in the early 20th century. By the time Roy's crew got to work, several layers had to be removed; however, to remove the oldest layer, one would have to power-wash or sandblast — two high-pressure operations the museum was not willing to risk.

What the public may not see — yet is far more crucial to the continued use of the buildings — is the sill work, dehumidification, creation of solid floors in the four different cellars, and the insertion of support beams that will allow materials to be returned to second-floor storage rooms that today, thanks to previous owners' ill-informed decisions to remove supporting walls, have a decidedly bowl-like feel to them.

Though much work is being done at the Brick Store Museum — as well as the former Libby building next door, which is being gutted and rebuilt — programs and exhibits are still being planned. "Wild Things: Selections from Kate Manko's Collection of American Folk Art Animals" opens this month, and next month sees the unveiling of "Kennebunk's Big Leaguers: The Baseball Legacies of Colby Jack and Bobby Coombs." Also, master carvers and storytellers Nakwesee and Augustus of OtterBear Studio lead a storytelling session for families June 22 at 6:30 p.m. For information, visit www.brickstoremuseum.org.