

Allegheny Portage Railroad



Work in progress at the Lemon House

Repointing Work

The Lemon House is part of the Allegheny Portage Railroad, the first railroad constructed over the Allegheny Mountains. This inclined plane railroad operated from 1834 until 1854 and was considered a technological wonder in its day. The railroad played a critical role in opening the interior United States to trade and settlement.

Samuel Lemon, local businessman, first built a small log tavern at the top of the Allegheny Front in 1826 to take advantage of the turnpike traffic. In 1831-32, in anticipation of the railroad's opening, he replaced the log building with a larger one constructed of sandstone. The Lemon House, featuring elements of the Federal style, was an impressive sight in this still sparsely developed area. Situated next to the engine house and just yards from the rail line, its construction reflected the optimism sparked by the railroad's promises of trade and commerce.

The exterior of the Lemon House is structurally sound. No glaring settlement cracks or displacement of stone tell the story of the ravages of time and weather. The pointing, or mortar between the stone blocks of the house, is in fair to poor condition. The mortar joint in a historic masonry building has often been called a wall's "first line of defense." Good repointing practices guarantee the long life of the mortar joint, the wall, and the historic structure. A good repointing job is meant to last at least 30 years, and preferably 50 - 100 years.



Who is Doing the Work?

The Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC) serves as preservation specialists for the work. All preservation work and practices comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation. Temporary trades people were hired from the local area and are trained, directed, and supervised by HPTC masons.

What Is the Historic Preservation Training Center?

The HPTC was founded in 1977 to meet the need for craft skills development for National Park Service (NPS) employees preserving the thousands of historic structures within the National Park System. In 1995, the Center joined the NPS Training and Development Division to become one of four NPS Training Centers.

What Work is Being Done

The overall object of this project is to repair, stabilize and preserve the extant masonry walls of the Lemon House by providing comprehensive preservation maintenance of the mortar joints. This will require the removal of the majority of the Portland based mortar and placement of a lime based mortar consistent with that taken from historic samples.

All open or failing mortar joints will be raked to an appropriate depth and repointed with the approved mortar. The traditional manner of removing old mortar is through the use of hand chisels and mash hammers. Though labor-intensive, in most instances this method poses the least threat for damage to historic masonry and produces the best final product. Mechanical methods may be employed only when guarantees can be made that adjacent stonework will not be damaged.

When is the Work is Being Done

This two year project (2010-2011) will be performed according to seasonal aspects. Wall temperatures between 40 and 95 degrees F will prevent freezing or excessive evaporation of the water in the mortar.

For more information:

Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site
110 Federal Park Road
Gallitzin, PA 16641
(814) 886-6150

<http://www.nps.gov/alpo>