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Top Stories

A Piece of History

Masons rebuilding the train station discover an inscription not seen in over 100 years

Melinda Williams, *Staff Writer*

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The rebuild of Pulaski Train Station uncovered an unexpected bit of history that hasn't seen the light of day for a century.

In the process of rebuilding one of the three chimneys in the station, a master brick mason discovered a brick that apparently had been inscribed by a brick mason who originally constructed the east chimney more than 100 years ago.

But the uniqueness of the find doesn't end there. Contractors and town officials were also intrigued by the similarity of the masons' names. The mason who made the discovery was Chuck Baugher (pronounced like Boyer). The mason who inscribed the brick so many years ago was either J.J. Bower or J.J. Bauer.

Town Engineer Bill Pedigo said the brick had been salvaged from the east chimney and, originally, was turned so that the inscription wasn't visible. Although this kept it well preserved, making out some of the inscription still is a little difficult.

In addition to the mason's name, it appears to read "Nov. 3, 1905. C.G. Loudinger, Roanoke."

Pedigo speculated C.G. Loudinger was the company that employed the brick mason when the train station was added onto after the turn of the century. Although it was the west section that was added to the original building, he said the east chimney must have also been added at that time.

The town wanted to make sure this bit of history is preserved so the brick has been moved from the east chimney to the primary, or central, chimney.

According to Pedigo and Jeff Gallant, restoration superintendent for masonry sub-contractor Wasco Inc., the brick now fills a former stovepipe hole in the main chimney. The brick will probably have to be coated with something to preserve the inscription now that it is exposed to light and the elements.

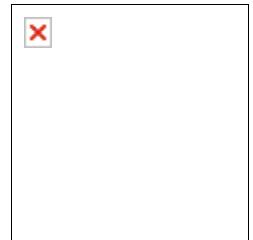
Gallant said Baugher recently retired from Wasco, with more than 50 years experience as a brick mason.

Pedigo sang the praises of Wasco and the main contractor, South End Construction. He said employees with both companies have been "great" to work with and are "absolute craftsmen." Despite all of the rain and snow over the past few months, the construction project has only been delayed one day due to weather. Even if the train station doesn't get completed in time for a hoped-for June dedication, Pedigo said it should be far enough along for a celebration to be held there.

One of the aspects of this restoration job that most construction jobs don't entail is insuring

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construction materials match as closely as possible to those contained in the original building. Pedigo said the town is fortunate to have Wasco to redo the stonework because the company is one of the few that still does the type of stone masonry that was used when the station was originally constructed.

“Stonework is a lost art,” Pedigo said, adding that few companies do “keystone” work in the door and window arches.

Gallant also pointed out that the edge of the stone door and window openings was chiseled away to make a sort of frame appearance.

“We call it tinkering the edges,” Gallant said. “We have to do it the old fashioned way, with a hammer and chisel. You can’t do it with a machine.”

Pedigo noted that much of the stone along these edges also had to be repaired where it broke apart when the water from fire hoses hit the hot stones. A special mixture is applied to the stone to rebuild it, then Gallant and his co-workers reshape it with the hammer and chisel. Other than the areas that had to be rebuilt, the stone used in the rebuild is original. However, Pedigo said the upper portions of the walls that had to be rebuilt are constructed with cinderblocks and a stone façade.

When the project is complete, Pedigo said he doubts the average person will be able to tell the building was reconstructed.

Porch column supports that had to be specially molded to match the original posts recently arrived and a large stack of porch roof beams are awaiting installation, as well.

DeBusk Originals in the old tinning building off East Main Street (Route 99) is doing all of the wood work, including the porch beams, and wood panels for the walls and ceilings.

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