

# Paine House Museum gets 1830s replica well cover



Lauren Knight•Daily Times

David Sevigny, 16, Gene Dufault, the technical education teacher at Coventry High School, and Michael Boisvert, 17, put together a colonial replica well house cover for the Paine House Museum, constructed by a class of 10 students.

# Students use mortise and tenon to build the well

LAUREN KNIGHT

lknight@ricentral.com

COVENTRY—Over the past school year, carpentry students at Coventry High School have been learning about the ancient art of mortise and tenon through hands on experience, according to Gene Dufault, the technical education teacher.

Dufault explained that after Norma Smith, the president of the Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society, requested that the class build a colonial replica well house cover for the Paine House Museum, the students got to work.

"A couple years ago, my class built a pole for the Paine House," said Dufault. He explained that the pole was symbolic and the students had carved "may peace come to the world" in six different lan-

guages.

Dufault said that he was happy to begin another project at the Paine House Museum because of its historical value for the community.

"It could be the oldest structure in Rhode Island," said Dufault. "Even the earliest Newport houses are dated about 1704 and this could be 50 years earlier."

The historical society is currently working to determine a definite date but suspect the building was constructed in the 1640s, according to Dufault.

"It's a great thing for my students to be connected to the museum and museum-quality work," he said. "It's an honor."

The replica of the colonial well house cover was built by a group of 10 students in Dufault's elective carpentry course at the high school.

The project was designed based on a 1830s inspired replica at Sturbridge Village, Dufault stated.

According to him, a docent from Sturbridge Village came to the high school and showed the class how to construct the well using pre-electricity tools.

"In colonial times, they didn't

use nails," he said. "They cut joints into wood, using mortise and tenon, and would secure the joint with a big wooden peg."

During this time period, nails were too expensive since they were obtained through a blacksmith, said Dufault. Most often, people had used this process to secure wood.

"So that's how the well was constructed," he said. There are, however, parts of the well that the students used screws to secure because of the convenience and security, according to Dufault. The screws cannot be seen, he said.

After the students learned about the process of mortise and tenon, they refused to use electrical equipment and cut everything by hand, explained Dufault.

"The well has some rough spots on it but it was more fun to do the real way," he said. "It takes you back to the origins of carpentry in America."

The project is near completion but has about two hours left of work to be done, said Dufault.

"The work you see there is a three to four week build if you

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# Replica built by hand while educating students to old world craftsmanship

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have a lot of time," he said.  
"But I have my students for one hour a day every other day."

"Teaching an art like that is time consuming," he said.

The remainder of the work

will be completed by Nick Shoemith, who will be entering the eleventh grade, and David Sevigny, who will be entering the twelfth grade.

They will put shingles and add a trim around the roof, said Dufault.

"They really loved it," said Dufault of the students' participation. "They learned the origin and picked up an incredible amount from it."

He expects the project to be complete within the next couple of weeks.