

'Log cabins are worth rebuilding'

History Kept Alive

A stone mason by trade, Brandon Traylor sees restoring log cabins as his calling.

BY CHRISTINA NIFONG

Brandon Traylor knows his way around a set of tools. He was raised in Augusta County, Virginia, at the knee of his grandfather, a carpenter who taught Traylor everything he knew. After high school, he worked for his father, a long-time stucco wall installer.

By 21, Traylor had opened his own stone mason business. He's worked on projects as far away as Mammoth Cave

National Park in Kentucky and as stunning as the tasting room at Ecco Adesso Vineyards in Fairfield, Virginia.

But in 2015, a new interest began to tug Traylor in a different direction. It was then that he began spying log cabins a breath away from collapsing and asking himself: Can I save this piece of history? Can I bring it to life again?

Soon, he found a well-preserved cabin that he took down, moved and rebuilt as the tasting room of Halcyon Days Cider Company in Natural Bridge, Virginia.

The success gave him confidence. Over the years, he would find, store and reconstruct another three log buildings. Three others are awaiting their next chapter. For Traylor, these rescue projects have become his passion and his mission.

He wants people to see the value in handmade goods that have endured for centuries. He wants to do everything he can to make sure they live on for centuries more.

"It's just that I love them and I think that they are worth taking down and rebuilding and restoring," Traylor says.

For 12 weeks last summer, Traylor and his long-time co-worker (and cousin) Devin King set up shop on the edge of Wilbourn House Orchard in Brownsburg, Virginia, a tiny community that time forgot.

This travel-back-in-time feel was what attracted orchard owner Regina Donald to the Rockbridge County crossroads. She and her husband Paul moved into their home — built in 1885 — 12

years ago. She established the orchard shortly after.

"I have always wanted a log cabin she says. "It's a lifelong dream for me."

In 2019, Traylor was driving when he saw a bulldozer, a heap of rubble and, at the top edge of a house, layered under siding, just a few logs. He pulled off the road to take a closer look. When he got home, he checked the address online and contacted the owner. "A day later and the old cabin would have been pushed into a burn pile by that dozer, I am sure," Traylor says.

When Traylor returned to the cabin he found the logs on one side were rotting. Originally a two-story structure, only the top floor could be rebuilt. He removed each log, labeling it with a blue tag, and then photographed the log's end for backup identification. Then he hauled it away to land he owns in West Virginia. There it sat, waiting for its future.

In 2024, Traylor built a stone wall for Donald. He mentioned he had a cabin he was trying to find a home for. A match was made.

It was important to Donald that the cabin be intact, not rebuilt from a collection of reclaimed logs. "You can think of all the people who lived here," she says standing on its front porch. "That makes it very meaningful."

The history is important to Traylor too. "Wanting to save the old buildings," he says. "That's what I'm in it for. I want to make them last for another 150 years."

In 2017, Traylor was hired to turn an 1800s-era, two-pen sheep barn into



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FACING PAGE: Brandon Traylor has rescued six log cabins. He has three in storage he's hoping to find new owners for.

ABOVE: Last summer, Traylor transformed an 1850s log home into an educational building at Wilbourn House Orchard in Brownsburg, Virginia.

a rustic chapel in West Virginia. After that renovation, he remained, working other construction projects at Lodestar Mountain Inn, a Christian retreat center. Soon, he moved a large log home dating from the 1840s to the property, turning it into a five-bedroom guest home.

Those months were a baptism by fire, requiring Traylor and King to work at a scale they hadn't before. Traylor purchased the equipment he needed to

be self-sufficient on a restoration job. Through trial and error, the team taught themselves how to create a thing of beauty from what many see as junk.

Of the three cabins Traylor is hoping to connect with buyers, one is still standing, the Bumgardner Distiller's cabin, located in Greenville, Virginia. It's a large log home, with a rich history. He is hopeful that he'll find someone interested in paying for its move and restora-

tion. "I've just got to put it in front of the right person," Traylor says.

Until then, Traylor says he'll keep working his stone mason and construction jobs — and scouting for other log cabins hidden in the hills of Virginia that will be lost to time if someone doesn't rescue them.

"These cabins are rich in history," he says. "It is important to me to rebuild the legacy they once had." ▲