

About REACH

On opposite banks of the Eleven Point River in northwest Randolph County two territorial period log houses are telling us about us. These structures form the foundation of Black River Technical College's (BRTC) historic preservation project entitled Project REACH – *Researching Early Arkansas Cultural Heritage*. As architectural, archeological and historical discoveries are uncovered during the restoration of the 1828 and 1833 structures corresponding layers of educational opportunities continue to emerge revealing enormous educational potential across the academic and age spectrum. These opportunities are as diverse and as exciting as are the findings themselves. This multiplicity of discoveries addresses the central theme of Project REACH – *telling us about us*. The discoveries are being utilized to link the past to the present. As participants are drawn into the past they will be challenged to make comparisons to the present. From such exploration learning takes place.

The two donated structures were brought to the attention of BRTC as a result of the *Early Arkansas Settlement Study*. This study was funded in part



Left to right, Jack and Christina French, Jean Upshaw, Dr. Jan Ziegler, Vice President of Development and Richard Gaines, President, of Black River Technical College



Public meetings are held periodically to keep area residents informed of the discoveries and the progress of restoration. Numerous descendants of both Anglo American and African American pioneering families continue to reside in Randolph County.

by a grant awarded to the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas with funding provided by the Arkansas Humanities Council and the Department of Arkansas Heritage. In the course of this study, conducted in 2003-2004, the Rice-Upshaw House (built 1828) and the Looney-French House (built 1833) were both identified by dendrochronology to have been constructed during the Arkansas territorial period. Each structure was identified as a unique Arkansas example of early log building traditions.

Both houses, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, were donated, along with significant items of material culture, to BRTC by descendants of the families who built them. The generosity of these families has enabled this visionary educational project to come into focus. Funding for the restoration of





both structures has been provided through grants from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council. The planning for this multi-disciplinary preservation project began in 2006 and the sites are expected to be ready for public visitation by the fall of 2011.

Both of the builders of these unique one-of-a-kind structures, Reuben Rice and William Looney, were exceptional log craftsmen. Rice was also an artisan and merchant. Looney was a merchant and business leader. Both were civic leaders who helped to establish the county governments for this area of northeast Arkansas during the early settlement period of the nineteenth century.

Rice and Looney were part of a migration of interconnected Scotch-Irish-English yeoman farmers who brought their African American slaves with

them to the Eleven Point River Valley prior to 1815. The interconnections have made it impractical and ill-advised to extricate only the two builders of the structures from this group. Therefore, the entire settlement of historic Davidson Township, the first governmental division of the area where they settled, has become the boundary of the study associated with this restoration effort.



BRTC chemistry class conducts an analysis of early samples of mortar from the Rice - Upshaw House chimney and foundations for composition evaluation



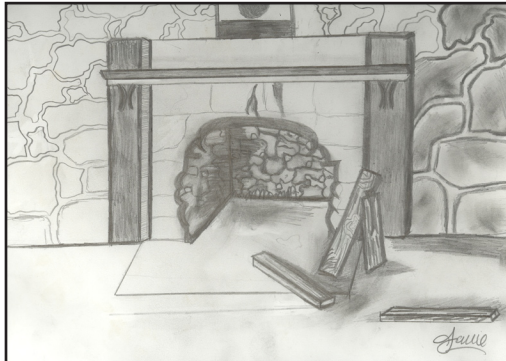
A comprehensive and multi-disciplinary *Historic Structure Report* in three volumes will be forthcoming at the close of the project. Twenty-first century technology is being employed to bring the discoveries to students local and distant. In the meantime these two silent educators on either side of the Eleven Point River are, as Dr. Jan Ziegler, BRTC Vice President for Development states, *telling us about us.*

Exceptional caution has and is being employed to protect the rare historic fabric of the Rice and Looney structures. The 'before' photographs show the structures at the time of donation. The restoration photographs show the same structures with restoration work in progress.

BRTC Student Projects



Student Jamie Taber at Rice-Upshaw House before restoration



Jamie's drawing of fireplace



Jessica Hausman's drawing of pier foundation of Rice-Upshaw House before restoration

Connecting Student Learning to Historic Preservation: REACH Enhances College Experience*

By Dr. Jan Fielder Ziegler

Community Colleges in rural settings often fulfill roles that expand beyond the traditional. Though unique and seemingly outside the normal scope of activities of the small community college, the role may in fact dovetail squarely with the mission of the college, offering creative possibilities to enhance the learning and engage students and staff in ways that are unique, meaningful and productive. This is exactly the case with Black River Technical College's Project REACH (Researching Early Arkansas Cultural Heritage), an ongoing project of historic preservation and student and staff engagement.

BACKGROUND: Standing about a mile distant on opposite sides of the Eleven Point River in the gentle, sloping hills of northeastern Arkansas are two painstakingly restored historic log structures, structures which came alarmingly close to vanishing forever from the fertile river valley where they have stood sentinel for nearly 200 years. Their disappearance would have meant not only the loss of the physical structures, the vernacular architecture, and the built culture and many artifacts represented by their presence, but also the loss of the unseen elements of history. The demise of these two log structures would have included the loss of the stories of those early settlements and of the people—Anglo Americans and enslaved people—who left their homes in North Carolina and in the Holston River Valley of Tennessee to make the trans-Mississippi West journey into a virtual but verdant wilderness area in the wake of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

The two structures, the (Reuben) Rice-Upshaw House and the William Looney Tavern, carry the names of the pioneers who built them in Arkansas' territorial era....BRTC first became aware of the structures (when participating in) the Arkansas Humanities Council-funded Early Arkansas Settlement Study (EASS), which included investigation of these and other properties.....BRTC (responded to) an invitation: serve as an educational partner in EASS....As an adjunct faculty member in the English Department, I understood how such a partnership could be beneficial to students, and agreed to the participation, which required no college funding support, but merely the involvement of participating faculty and students....(S)ubsequently the class spent an entire day...at the sites. While there, they actually were able to observe and talk with dendrochronologist Dr. Dave Stahle and other investigators, even as they carefully clamored about the fragile old houses, reading the yellowed newspapers covering the cracks in the attic and negotiating the rickety "winder stair."

*Excerpted from a paper for presentation at the Higher Learning Commission in Chicago, April, 2011

Their enthusiasm was remarkable. They...completed.... essay assignments in which they were to write about the structures, demonstrating the rhetorical modes of cause and effect or comparison-contrast...I was struck by the outcome; in fact, excerpts of those early essays continue to enhance our grant application or other publicity materials concerning the project. Their engagement was unmistakable, and it clearly enhanced the quality of their work. And in the ensuing years, many of those same students have maintained contact and continue to follow the project. Clearly they feel a sense of ownership.

This study accomplished many things, but a couple of them were major feats: for one thing, the study determined that the structures were indeed as old as the families' oral traditions had held them to be: dendrochronology confirmed the Rice-Upshaw House was built in 1828, and the William Looney Tavern in 1833. This means that both structures are among the state's oldest extant log structures. Their ages, coupled with the fact that so much of the history of the structures and of the settlement has been preserved since the family descendants retained ownership of the structures, meant that further study and restoration were clearly not only "needed" but now, by virtue of the singular historical significance of the structures, a mandate. And secondly, the study confirmed that linking classroom theory to a project of historic preservation is not only possible, but highly positive and desirable.

DEVELOPMENT OF REACH: Given the outcomes of the EASS to confirm the significance of the structures, and with the limited but successful outcome of student involvement in this project, (the) next steps were to persuade both BRTC and the property owners that restoration would be possible if both were in agreement on moving forward toward that goal. This would require that BRTC seek grant funding for further historic, architectural, and archeological research from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council. To be eligible for an ANCRC grant, the college would have to own the properties. The families who had for so many years stewarded the structures, the home of their ancestors, would now have to relinquish ownership in order to save them

College administrators were skeptical, but not totally unresponsive of the concept; the significance of the properties locally as potential sites for heritage tourism was emerging as a major realization. In small communities such as ours, where manufacturing jobs were long in steep decline, the significance of BRTC as a driving force for economic development through tourism was worth considering. But more compelling, at a time when state revenues for higher education funding were declining, was the administration's concern that undertaking such a project not become a financial drain, pulling funds away from the institution's core purpose of educating students for jobs... (T)he college agreed to accept ownership of the properties, contingent upon grant funding, and to use the properties as an educational lab setting for students and other visitors. For their part, the family owners agreed to deed to properties to the college for that use...

... (T)he college has held small dedication ceremonies to mark the event and to honor and celebrate the vision and generosity of the families who made the sacrifices of gifting the structures to BRTC, and also to acknowledge the foresight and support of the college administration in Project REACH. After all, they, and our president in particular, have to respond to the public, most of whom are enthusiastic and appreciative of the project, but some of whom may say, "You spent how much money on those houses?"



The old reference to Pride of Place can have no greater meaning than here at the Rice-Upshaw House. It was just after the Civil War that Lydia Rice married Andrew Jackson Upshaw and joined the two family names together as if one. Through the years thousands of descendants of the interconnected Rice, Looney, and Stubblefield families count their connections back to Revolutionary War veteran William Stubblefield. William lived near Reuben's father John Rice, Sr. in North Carolina and they moved together to the Holston River Valley before the state of Tennessee was created. William Stubblefield's daughter, Rhoda, married William Looney. Above, a group of descendants of these early families gather at the restored Rice-Upshaw House. Dorothy Jean Upshaw, third from the right on the first row, and her children gifted the house to BRTC.

The project officially then became REACH, or Researching Early Arkansas Cultural Heritage.... ANCRC grants are funded by the state's property deed tax; these funds also are in a downward trend; the agency, under the umbrella of the Arkansas Department of Heritage, consistently receives grant applications that greatly exceed the amount of dollars available...BRTC feels extremely grateful to have received a total of \$1.7 million for REACH...A fine balance exists, as ANCRC's purpose is funding historic preservation, not to supplant higher education dollars; BRTC's challenge is to satisfy their requirements, even as we maintain our own emphasis on the educational aspects of this project.

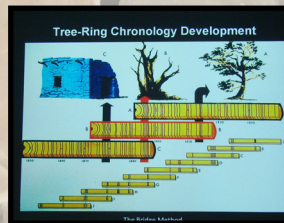
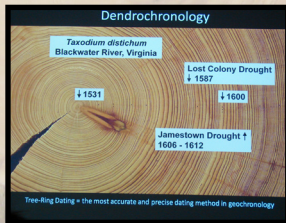
If one were to calculate the square foot cost associated with the restoration, the figure is absurdly out of proportion, obviously. However, the restoration cost funded totally by ANCRC to this point covers far more than the actual physical work; it includes extensive historic, architectural, and archeological research. As for the actual restoration, this process required craftsmen, most notably contractors specializing in preservation projects and log specialists, whose labor and fees cannot be compared with traditional tradesmen. The restoration includes the discovery of hundreds of artifacts: pottery shards, building materials, bottles, buttons and other items recovered through archeological investigation and through careful observation in the repair and replacement of logs. Many other artifacts have been acquired, as in the case of the hanging beater loom stored for decades on the rafters of the Rice-Upshaw House, and reported to have arrived on an 1812 wagon train... Other acquired artifacts include a rope bed, a spinning wheel, and a corner cupboard, items that convey the lives of adventuring sojourners who followed the call of opportunity to a new American wilderness.

...And so the question properly shifts from cost to value: how much worth can one place on history, on the discovery of knowledge and the resulting understanding of and maintaining of cultural heritage. The question also, in the case of REACH, is how much value can one place on the expansion of educational opportunity to students of all ages; how can one calculate the worth of empowering students and staff to see the connection between their work in the classroom and the authentic world they inhabit? What is the value of the type of student engagement that occurs when a student applies what s/he has learned in theory with an authentic problem, and does so on a project whose continued development holds promise for the entire community, state, and nation?

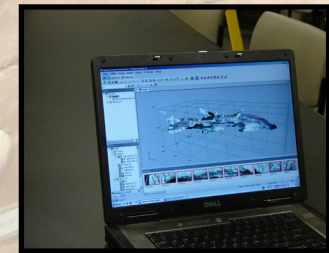


The colorful shard of mocha ware found by archeologists at the Rice-Upshaw House site serves as the inspiration for BRTC art students at the potter's wheel.

Understanding Wood



The multi-disciplinary studies related to restoration activities provide BRTC students with exposure to a variety of educational professionals such as Dr. David Stahle, Director of the U of A Tree-ring Laboratory, top left; Rick Parker, Arts Conservator, lower right.



Archeology- Buried Stories

The staff at the Arkansas Archeological Survey, above, demonstrated conservation and laser mapping techniques as well as artifacts found at the REACH sites including a piece of a hand-crafted barrel stave. The students were members of Dr. Linda Moss's science classes.

Stewardship through Education

This project provides educational opportunities obviously for students of all ages: already BRTC has sponsored an educators' in-service session(s)... (w)ork continues on a website and video segments designed to enhance and expand the learning experience.

REFERENCES:

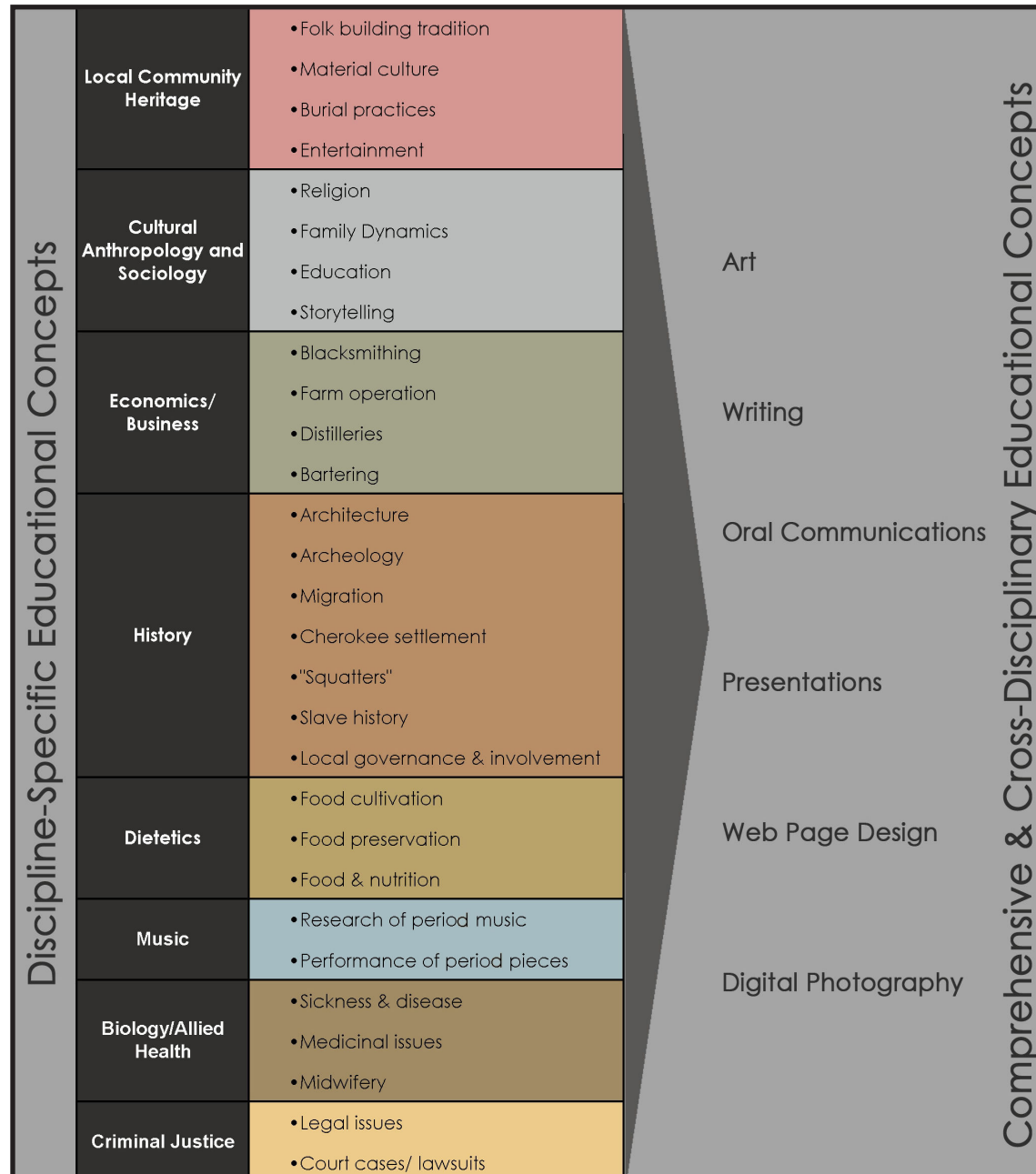
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CURRENT AND FUTURE REACH - RELATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES: From its inception and at the insistence of both the donor families and the college, Project REACH was designed to provide educational benefits. This purpose has remained at the center of numerous activities and experiences during the restoration phase: students in **English, Art, Community Heritage, Machine Shop, Nursing, Music, and Chemistry** classes have already engaged in activities or assignments through which they link their work or apply skills gained in the classroom with some aspect of REACH. Many of these and other groups of students, including those in **Welding, Painting, Desktop Publishing, Criminal Justice, Oral Communications** and **American Government** are involved in REACH-related activities currently. The activities range from Art students sketching the structures to Welding students building security gates; from Community Heritage students conducting oral interviews of family descendants to Choir students performing music written by "Aunt 'Zella," one of the early family members; from Art students painting and producing a replica of the mocha ware pottery unearthed by archeologists to Science students running chemical tests to determine the origin and composition of a dark residue permeating the roof of the east pen of the Tavern. Is it possible this dark stain is actually a black mold that forms from "the Angel's share," the portion of the vapor given off by distilled liquor during the aging process?

CONCLUSION: REACH is thus an evolving and rich venue to engage students in authentic learning. While not typically the purview of two-year colleges, such endeavors can bring immense and valuable learning opportunities, engaging students and their teachers by allowing them to make the connections between theory and reality, between their skills and authentic problems and needs. Educational research (Lumina Foundation 2005) clearly shows a strong link exists between student engagement and student success. Best practices for student engagement include spending time on group projects and education-related activities outside the classroom, as well as instructor contact beyond the classroom setting. The Center for Community College Survey of Student Engagement agrees that students learn more and are more likely to persist when actively involved in problem-solving and when they reflect on and apply the learned material in different settings (CCSSE 2010.) Noted Syracuse University educator Vincent Tinto (2003) concludes involvement does matter. Respected brain-based research studies agree, suggesting that students learn best when the information is connected in authentic ways (Caine and Caine 1994), rather than existing merely as discrete pieces of information. Given current state and federal insistence on performance-based funding which will link college funding to improvement in student retention and completion, institutions of higher education should be open to the potential and the value of unconventional but worthwhile projects such as REACH.

Lesson Plans

Students and visitors will be challenged to make cultural comparisons through suggested lesson plans provided to classrooms and on the internet. In considering life without modern conveniences, the following sampler of questions assists in grasping early-19th century lifestyles:



Could you walk from Tennessee managing teams of oxen and herds of livestock?

Can you find stories at the courthouse that will tell you more about who you are?



Looking at the head of a hand-forged cobbler's hammer found by archeologists, could you make your own shoes?