



Old House Journey

A Young Family Embarks on an Ambitious DIY Rehab

Everyone's old house journey looks different. Whether you're a hardcore do-it-yourselfer (DIY-er), prefer to leave it all to the pros, or fall somewhere in between, we are here for it! And we want to share your journeys so that we can learn from one another, celebrate the hard won victories, and commiserate over the challenges. If you have an old house journey that you'd like to share, e-mail us at info@landmarksociety.org.

In this issue, we visited with Rochester-area natives, Amy Moir and Doug Templeton. Amy and Doug are the proud owners of a c.1832 cobbleshed house in the Finger Lakes. A little over two years ago, they became the first owners of this 190-year-old Federal style house who aren't related to the original builder (we love that!) and embarked on an ambitious rehabilitation project.

Q: *Tell us a little about yourselves and your family.*

Amy has loved old homes since watching "This Old House" in her elementary years. Doug grew up studying art and completed his undergrad in Art Education. After working in the field for a few years, he decided to switch gears and complete his graduate degree in Architecture at RIT. In 2019 we had our little boy, who has known nothing but restoring old houses his entire life.



Q: *Tell us about your cobbleshed house.*

The house was built in 1832 by James Herendeen. It's a five-bay Federal style house with a central hall. The walls are about eighteen inches thick at the base. Something that's unique to our house are the "plugging holes" on the exterior. These are holes that scaffolding was placed in when the house was built. Usually these are filled in with stone when the house is finished, but for some reason they left them exposed on our house, which has been a really interesting feature for those familiar with cobbleshed homes. Large timber beams span the interior and hold it all together. The stones came from the fields around the house. If you dig a hole today, you'll hit many more stones!

Over the years porches have been added and subtracted and barns have come and gone. Luckily, we've got about a five-inch thick binder of the history of the house compiled by the previous owner, so we've been piecing together the chronology of some of the changes over the years. A cobbleshed porch was added in 1932. There was an Italianate style covered porch on the south side in the late 1800s. In 1938 the home received a State Historic Marker from the state education department.

Family photo at left credit: Lauren Rock Photography. All other photos, including the current exterior photo of the home above, courtesy of Doug & Amy Templeton.

Q: What drew you to this house in particular?

Our love for 5-bay/central hall style houses started with our wedding, which Amy Linehan graciously allowed us to hold at the Reed Homestead in Livonia, NY. Amy did a fantastic job restoring the historic home and now lets it out as a short-term stay. Seeing the hard work and care she put into the Reed was more than inspiring.

After our wedding we went down a real estate rabbit hole and searched for every stone and brick home in the Finger Lakes. As luck would have it, we found the Herendeen Homestead shortly after it was listed, but it was way out of our price range (at this point this was just a lofty dream). More than a year later during an early morning home search I saw the homestead was still available with a reduced price, and so I quickly ran some numbers. Surprisingly it was within our reach and that's when the ball got rolling.

What made us so set on this house in particular was the amazing woodwork throughout, the original hardwood floors, the original basement kitchen, and most importantly, the history that the prior owners had collected and put together to tell the story of the home. We have original photos dating back to 1888, a steamer trunk full of antique wallpaper rolls, and numerous spinning wheels - one with a partially finished spinning project. The house was just dripping in history and we couldn't let that get away from us. Another very intriguing

piece is that the homestead has been in the same family since it was built in 1832, and we are the first owners outside of the Herendeen family. We feel an intense sense of stewardship as a result and are doing everything we can to make sure this incredible home will last another couple of centuries at least.

We were also very excited to own a Cobblestone as there are so few in existence, only about 700 in New York. More than 90% of these structures are in Western New York, and the majority are located within 75 miles of Rochester! It's really something to own such a unique piece of history.

Q: What's your grand vision for the house? How long do you think it will take to completely rehab?

We are nearly 2.5 years into the renovation and we are finally at the point where we can see the end of the tunnel. Projects are starting to wrap up and we are getting closer and closer to interior finishes with every hour of work we put in. The really big items should be completed in the next 6 months, and then smaller items will work themselves into our daily lives for the next 5 years or so. Plus, annual maintenance that all homes need.

We want to eventually build custom wood storms for the windows (we have some originals in a barn to template off of), repair the wood windows, and repoint any spots that need it on the exterior. We also have plans to restore the wood frame addition off the back of the house.



Vintage wallpaper and tools that Amy and Doug discovered in the antique steamer trunk.

Q: *Tell us how you're approaching the DIY process. How much are you doing yourselves vs. hiring out and how do you make that decision?*

We have hired out all the jobs that really should be done professionally for safety reasons. Things like the solar and geothermal, new gutters, large plumbing projects, and new electrical projects; we will generally rely on the pros. Small plumbing/electrical projects (like new supply lines or installing new outlets) are things we feel comfortable tackling ourselves.

For the bigger projects that are more complex, we reach out to professionals - their expertise and suggestions are well worth the extra cost. Plus they are fully dedicated to their field and can work so much quicker than we can, which is a huge plus. With this in mind, we are only comfortable working with pros that respect our overall vision for the house, and the historic nature of the home. If a professional doesn't understand/respect that an old house cannot always have the same building materials applied as a modern house, then we cross them off our list. For example: We wanted to prevent critters from getting into the house and the few companies we interviewed insisted that it was fine to use portland cement on our lime mortar. If you know old houses, you know this could be detrimental to the home's structure over time.

Any projects we are taking on ourselves such as repairing cracks in the lime plaster on stone walls, refinishing the floors, and installing original wood trim are all things we have done loads of research on. We have found professionals in all the above areas and have either paid for consultations (so worth it) or reached out to suppliers with questions and received terrific guidance. We feel confident enough in our ability to learn new skills, new materials, and new tools; that the jobs will turn out beautifully.

Q: *Are you doing all this work while having full time jobs? How do you make that work?*

Weekends are the name of the game. Doug works full time and Amy stays at home with our son, while taking on small interior design projects. We start work first thing in the mornings on the weekends and put in two full days of work. Sometimes we can put a few hours in during the week but with a toddler sometimes that just isn't feasible.

Q: *Are you teaching yourselves as you do the work?*

We are teaching ourselves for the most part. In our previous home Doug learned how to plaster a wall, down to installing new lath. The work turned out beautifully and when the room was painted it was impossible to tell where the patch was. There are so many great people on social media who are doing old house work themselves and we are always on the lookout for resources they share. There are many hours of research behind any new job we take on at the homestead, and sometimes it is trial and error until we figure out just the right technique. We are very thankful for the internet and people who are so willing to share old building techniques. We are also extremely thankful for the pros we have hired - they have all been more than willing to answer our questions and teach us how to do certain things.

Q: *What's been the most exciting find and/or project on this house?*

Amy: My most exciting find is three fold - the antique steamer trunk full of wallpaper was really really exciting! When we were clearing out the attic we found an old holophane glass light shade, and I am working with a lighting company to have a custom light fixture made for the shade. I am so excited to see this come to fruition and be used in the house again! And lastly, not really a find but more of an uncovering - the sanded wood floors. They are the original floors and were protected under a very orangey finish. We sanded last month and it exceeded all expectations - they are beautiful ash floors. We are refinishing them with a water based commercial finish that won't amber over time, so the true beauty of the wood will always be on display.



Vintage wallpaper that Amy and Doug discovered in the antique steamer trunk.

Doug: My most exciting part of this house is the layers of history we've unfolded since purchasing it. Part of that comes from the album of history. Every time I look at the photos or letters that are in it, I get a better picture of how the house has changed over time, how barns have come and gone, different appraisals giving handwritten reports of the condition of the buildings, who rented what room for how long and for how much. It's fascinating. The other side of this is when we're doing a repair and you find remnants of what was there in the past. Things such as newspaper clipping from the 1930s, paint marks showing that a door and trim was removed, and then you go out and find that door sitting in the barn. It's just so cool to do some "forensic architecture" and put the pieces together, and then have so much preserved and stored for reuse, it's really quite special.

Q: What's been the most frustrating or difficult part of renovating your house?

Scope creep (when the scope of work grows unexpectedly larger) for sure. We originally thought we'd just need some new paint, and mostly cosmetic updates. But once we started doing some "exploratory" demo, we found that our project was just going to continue to grow. I wouldn't say it was frustrating, because we knew everything the house told us it needed would only help to keep it standing for a few more centuries. It was only difficult in that we needed to adjust our course and plan a bit differently than we had initially expected.

Q: Has anything brought you to tears yet?

Surprisingly, no! We have had a lot of really intense days of "why did we think we could do this?" and "what did we get ourselves into" but after a solid talk and looking back at how far we have come we find ourselves motivated to keep going. We also always keep in mind the finish line - how beautiful and functional this house will be once we are done.



Oldest known photo of the house, dating to the 1880s. Amy and Doug believe the woman in the image may be Amy Ann Herendeen, the daughter of the original builder, James Herendeen. Amy took ownership of the property in 1873.



Current photo of Amy and Doug's cobblestone house.

Finally, we asked Doug & Amy for their advice for others considering starting on a DIY old house journey:

- 1** Get comfortable with research! And don't be afraid to learn new techniques, pick up new tools, and ask questions. We have found that so many in the online old house community are more than willing to answer questions, share their experiences, and provide resources they have found to be helpful.
- 2** Old homes are special and can't have just any modern building technique applied without making sure it is compatible with the historic structure. Take your time to find an age appropriate solution for the home, sometimes it takes longer but ultimately bigger issues down the road will be avoided!
- 3** Don't forget your respirator and safety glasses when doing any kind of demolition! Beyond lead hazards, you could find who knows what hiding in the walls. Always better to be safe than sorry.
- 4** When looking for a contractor of any kind, really make sure they will respect YOUR thoughts and opinions/the needs of an old home. There are plenty of one-track minded contractors out there who don't think outside the box. Old houses require flexibility and a contractor who respects that will be so much more enjoyable to work with.
- 5** Finally, the big box hardware stores are great in a pinch - but there are much better materials available online* from specialists who focus solely on historic building methods/products. Take your time to do your research on what kind of paint is truly best for plaster walls/masonry construction and learn how to repoint with period appropriate materials if that's a job you will be needing to do. There are some great companies out there who are more than willing to teach the customer how to do the work themselves.

* Editor's Note: Small, locally owned hardware stores can be great sources too!

You can continue to follow along with Amy and Doug's cobblestone journey. Follow them on Instagram: @circa1832 and @douglasjtempleton and check out their blog: circa1832.com