



Somerset County Historical Trust **Tribune**

Preserving the Legacy of Somerset County

SOUTH TEACKLE GATE HOUSE

Restoration work is underway !

**WE'VE GONE FROM
THIS TANGLED MESS ...**



**AND UNEARTHED
THIS !!**



Follow our progress
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GATE HOUSE ACQUISITION

Littleton Dennis Teackle built this structure and its matching across-the-street neighbor as servants' quarters and to mark the entrance to the Teackle Mansion estate. They were also thought to have served as gate houses at one point, and as such, we are calling our newest project the **Teackle South Gate House**. Warner Sumpter is the current owner of the adjacent North Gate House.



After Mr. Teackle's death in 1848, the entire estate was divided and sold off to private owners. The South Gate House changed hands through many owners and had numerous additions and renovations primarily on the south and west portions of the house.

After many months of negotiation, the Trust finalized the purchase of the property on July 17, 2024 and is in the process of restoration.

WE'VE RECENTLY ...

Demolished the 1950's South Wing

The entire south wing of the Gate House at the back of the property, which was added in the 1950's, was in very bad shape due to extensive structural termite damage and was falling apart. The lower floor had previously been used as a kitchen.

The additional space provided by this section was not considered significant, and the cost to repair the extensive termite damage would have essentially required a total rebuild of all exterior walls and floor joists.

Based on these factors, the Trust made the decision to demolish it and restore the remaining dwelling to its earlier configuration. This work has been completed and the backside temporarily closed off, awaiting placement of windows and doors.



HOW TO PATCH PLASTER

Extracted from article by Bernard Gladstone in American Home June 1966

Anyone who owns a home with plaster walls and ceilings should know how to repair the cracks and holes that appear in that material. Cracks are generally caused by settling of the house, expansion and contraction of the wooden framework, shrinkage of woodwork and trim, or holes left when pictures or fixtures have been removed or after plumbing and electrical repairs.



Generally speaking, you'll use **spackling compound** or similar crack filler for small holes and cracks. For larger holes and cracks more than one-eighth inch across, **patching plaster** is usually used.

Spackling compound is sold as a powder mixed with water before use. It looks like plaster, but is slower drying and easier to apply. If properly used, you'll find that little or no sanding will be required after the patch is dry. There are also ready-mixed spackling compounds that save you the mixing job.

The best tool for patching most jobs is a 3 or 3-1/2 inch flexible putty knife, even for small holes. This width helps feather the edges of the patch so your repairs won't show.

For fine cracks & small holes

Brush away loose dirt or dust, then open the crack slightly with a pointed scraper or a beer-can opener.

With your spackling knife, scoop up a glob of the compound and smear it over the crack. Stroke back and forth across the crack until it is filled, then remove excess material by running the knife along the length of the crack while pressing lightly.

For small holes, pack the compound in and smooth it off at the same time by crisscrossing your strokes. Press hard enough to wipe all excess compound off the wall with your last stroke.

Larger holes & deeper cracks

Larger holes or deeper cracks more than 1/8" across are best filled in two stages. Use patching plaster rather than spackling compound.

Start by chipping away all loose material, then undercut the edges of the opening on each side to make the inside of the crack wider. This helps bond the patching plaster in place.

Mix only as much patching plaster as you can use in about a half hour. Mix to a stiff but workable consistency and wet the edges of the crack or hole thoroughly before applying the first coat.

Fill the depression about halfway, then let this dry hard before proceeding. Wet it down again, then apply a second coat to bring it flush with the surface. When fully dry, sand lightly and use spackling compound to fill any minor depressions in the patch.

HOW TO PATCH PLASTER

For **persistent cracks** that reopen year after year (usually in corners and above doorways), a new type of flexible patching material often gives a permanent repair. It consists of a heavy-bodied, oil-based compound used with a special fiberglass tape.

- ◆ You brush a coat of the compound onto the wall on each side of the crack, then smooth a strip of the tape into this without actually pressing the material into the crack itself.
- ◆ A second coat of the compound, troweled over the tape, hides it completely. Since the compound remains pliable when dry, it “gives” with expansion and contraction of the wall without cracking or chipping.

Here's **another method** for deep, persistent cracks:

- ◆ Pack tightly with spackling compound in the usual matter, leaving the compound slightly higher than the surrounding wall surface. Then press a strip of gauze tape, available in paint stores, over the crack.
- ◆ Bury the tape with another layer of compound. Use a wider 5 or 6 inch putty knife for this job, to feather the compound out to a thin edge.
- ◆ When dry, sand the patch lightly and apply additional compound if necessary.

Another tricky job is the problem of **filling a hole that goes right through the wall**, like an electrical repair.

- ◆ One method is to wad up several large sheets of newspaper and stuff the paper in the hole until it starts to catch on the opposite side of the partition and forms a backing that will stay in place inside the hole.
- ◆ You can also use pieces of copper or plastic screen wire as a backing. Fold a piece of the mesh into a bowl shape, then push this into the hole so that the open end catches against the opposite side of the wall while the flat part presses against the back side of the hole you want to patch.
- ◆ After the newspaper or wire backing is in place, wet it down with water, then pack plaster around the edges with your putty knife to gradually close the hole. Let each application dry before you apply the next one. Allow to dry overnight, then trowel on additional layers of plaster until the hole is filled level with the surrounding wall surface. For the final smoothing, spread on a thin layer of spackling compound.

On some plaster-patching jobs, you will want to get a stippled or textured finish to match the surface on the existing plaster. Tear up a piece of sponge and use it to pat the spackling compound or patching plaster while it is still wet. For a finer stipple, pat with a ball or cheesecloth or with the tip of an ordinary paintbrush.

If the surface has a sand finish, buy some sand-finish additive at your local paint store and work some of it into the final coat of patching compound. Or finish it smooth, then apply a little sand-finish paint.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

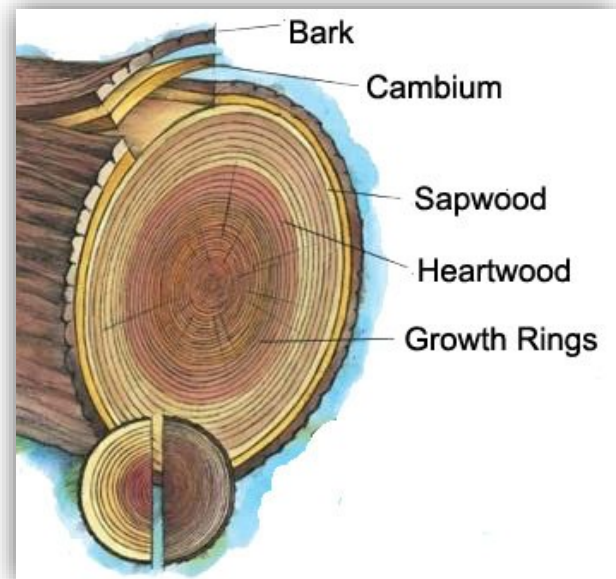
For centuries, scientists have been intrigued by the information to be gained from the growth rings of trees. As living organisms, trees set down layer-by-layer a record of their lives and the environment where they grow.

When trees become larger, they do so by rising in height, but they also increase their diameter by growing new outer layers of wood in an annual cycle. The layer just below the bark is a vascular cambium whose cells multiply and expand depending on ambient conditions, including temperature, humidity, windiness, but especially precipitation.

In the springtime, growth is faster and new cells are less dense (called “new wood”) but as summer comes on, growth slows down and the rings become darker and denser (“late wood”). In winter, growth comes to a stop, leaving a single year’s ring as a lasting remnant.

READING THE RINGS

In temperate climates, annual rings are laid down virtually every year though occasionally rings are missing, as during insect defoliation. Uncommonly, a second or false ring may be deposited in a single year.



Today, there are so many hundreds of records available for a particular tree species and for a particular region that these oddities are easily identified as aberrations.

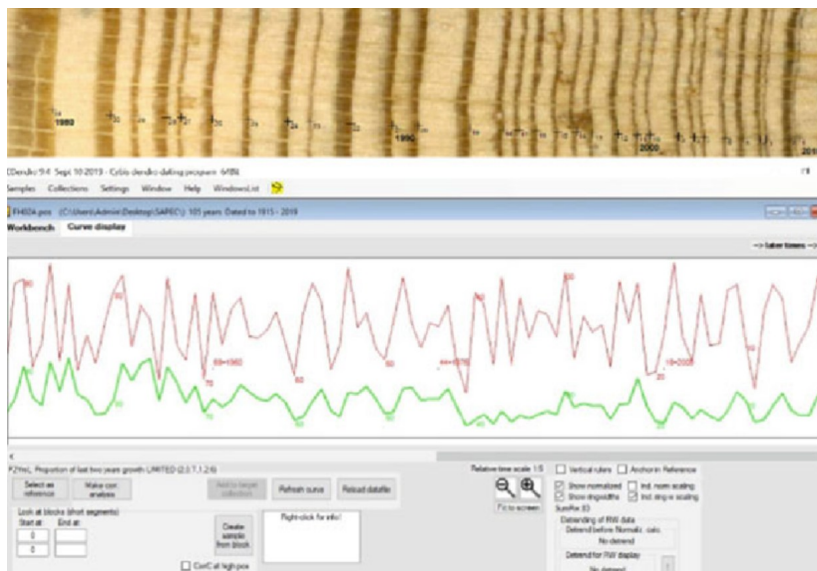
Each tree species behaves uniquely to its environment, but, for a particular climatic region, the fluctuations in ring size and density become a singular record of the past. Since each ring is very slightly different from the next, a record of these changes for a long series of years provides a template against which new samples can be matched.



Until the recent past, dendrochronologists have had to track these variations by visual measurements. Today, however, computer algorithms can measure changes more accurately and can integrate them into a huge database of metrics gleaned from prior studies.

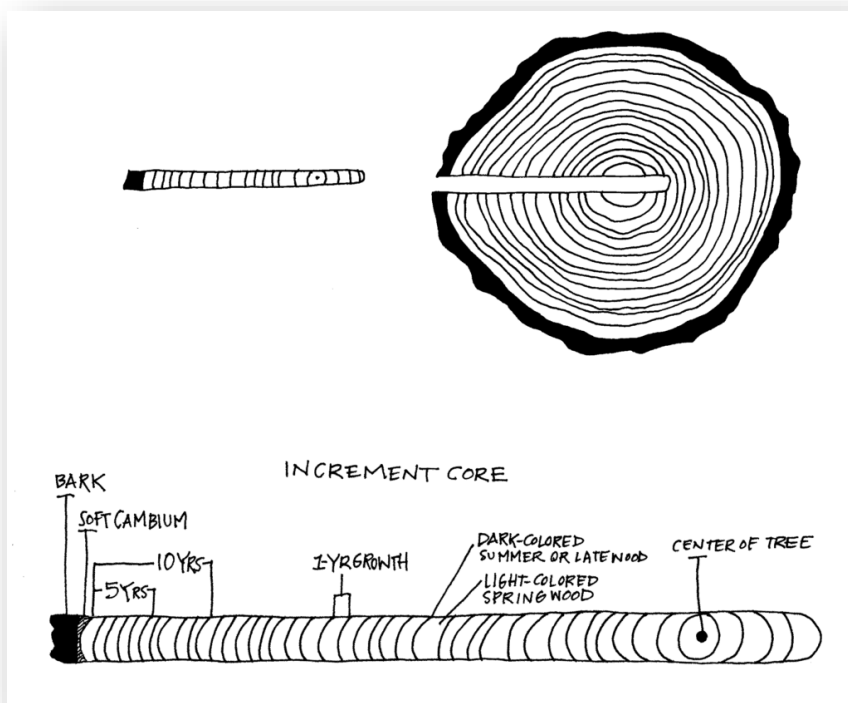
DATING THE WOOD

Architectural historians use dendrochronology to establish when a tree was cut. From this they can estimate the age of structures. But to do so, they must be able to identify the last tree ring in the materials they study. The rounded surface just below the bark is called the “waney edge” and must be identified before core samples of wood can provide an “end date”.



Ideal samples are obtained with a hollowed drill called an increment borer directed perpendicularly from the waney edge toward the wood’s center.

There are now extensive records from samples along the East Coast to which new samples can be compared.



The “end date”, however, tells when the tree was felled and not necessarily when it was used in construction or reused.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY RESULTS FOR THE GATE HOUSE

The Somerset County Historical Trust is particularly interested in telling the story of its most recent project, restoring the South Gate House of the Teackle Mansion. The building was one of two homes traditionally associated with the Mansion. We feel that knowing when each house was built is fundamental to accurately explaining the human history associated with it.

The Trust hired dendrochronologist Michael Worthington of Oxford Tree-Ring Laboratory in Baltimore (www.dendrochronology.com) to analyze and date the wooden structures in the Gate House.

Already, our investigations confirm that the South Gate House was built at different times, in stages, and by different builders. The beams and smaller materials in the front of the house were pit-sawn and adzed, techniques used before the middle of the 19th century.



Pit-sawn floor joist

The lumber used was yellow pine, and dendrochronology has established that the trees were felled in the winter of 1816-1817. This corresponds to the second building phase of the Teackle Mansion around 1818.

The structure attached to the rear of this section remains a mystery. It was certainly built in an early time. Its beams were also shaped by pit-sawing and adze and are of similar size to materials in the adjacent section.

But the material used was not pine! It was poplar. For technical reasons, poplar is more difficult to date than pine, and our dendrochronologist is still compiling data to arrive at a date.

We have good historical evidence that Littleton Dennis Teackle lived in one or both gate houses after he lost his fortune in the 1830's. Tax records show that he lived there with at least 4 "servants" until shortly before his death when the two gate houses and attached land along the Manokin River were sold in 1848. We know that Teackle in his lifetime owned as many as 20 black "servants", and we are early in our attempts to identify their names and relationships to at least some of them.

One must draw from multiple ancient sources to flesh out the humanity attached to these old buildings in our care. The public record has been a rich but incomplete resource. Dendrochronology is one more tool that we can use to flesh out the timeline of the house's story. Walls can't talk, but they can tell us when they were built and by whom. More to come ...



Dendrochronologist Michael Worthington taking sample from Gate House floor beams

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