

Historical renovations drive roofing company

► **The Durable Slate Co. became an expert in the field due to a demand for quality restoration work.**

By **Diana Blowers**
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Even with modern technology, it's not easy to duplicate the craftsmanship of the homebuilders of long ago.

Historical renovation was not the initial goal of the Durable Slate Co., founded 11 years ago, but the roofing company quickly became an expert in the field due to a great demand for quality restoration work, according to Cheryl Downey, the Columbus-based company's vice president of public relations.

The company recently spent several days in Xenia Twp. replacing the slate roof of the home of Todd and Carolyn Kepler. When the

home was built 125 years ago by Charles Hook, it had a slate roof that was eventually covered with asphalt shingles.

While it would have been easier to find someone to replace the roof with another asphalt one, the Keplers decided they wanted an authentic roof appropriate to the time period of the home.

The Keplers' interest in renovation, not just remodeling, of a historic home is part of a growing trend, Downey said.

"People are becoming more

aware of the value of historic buildings and the contribution that they make overall to the culture," she said.

The company did 2,000 restoration jobs last year, including installing a new slate roof and several new copper roofs on the governor's residence in Bexley.

Its staff of about 70 also did work on a variety of homes, churches and public buildings throughout Ohio and in surrounding states.

Restoring old buildings means

unique problems, Downey said. Not only do they deal with a lot of dry rot in the old wood, but the workers also must try to match materials that are no longer available.

"Wood sizes have changed in the intervening years. For instance, on the Keplers' house, the wood decking on the roof was 14-inches wide. You can no longer go to a lumberyard and buy boards that are 14-inches wide so you have to do some improvising," Downey said.

A family's saga: Romancing a historic home

► **Xenia Twp. couple were attracted to its craftsmanship and architecture.**

The exterior of the old Charles Hook home looks much the same as it did when he built it 125 years ago.

A new touch of authenticity was added to the large two-story brick home when its current owners, Todd and Carolyn Kepler, had a new slate roof, similar to the original roof, installed.

When Hook built the historic Xenia Twp. home at 1209 Hook Road in 1873, he was raising cattle on about 480 acres of land.

In 1991, the Keplers bought the home, along with 10 acres of the land from Hook's great-grandson, Roger Conklin, who still lives nearby on 150 acres.

It is a challenge to find craftsmen who can do the restoration work they hope to accomplish with the house.

"It's very hard to find people that are skilled at doing the kinds of work that were required at that time," Todd said, using the roof as an example.

The original slate roof was still on the house, covered with a layer of asphalt shingles. Several roofing companies were willing to strip the roof and install a new asphalt one but most couldn't offer a slate roof, he said, noting that even more were not familiar with how to restore the wooden boxed gutters, which are a structural part of the house.

The Keplers finally located a firm, the Durable Slate Co. of Columbus, which specializes in historic preservation.

NOW & THEN



Diana Blowers



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In front of the former Hook home, the Keplers (from left) Carolyn holding Michael, Elizabeth, Maria, Todd and Genevieve.

The new roof is of Buckingham slate, a variety mined in Virginia. According to the company, it has a life span of about 300 years.

Now that the roof is done, the Keplers plan to floor the attic to create a storage space, something the house lacks "because they didn't have that many material things back then," Carolyn said.

It pays to have a good sense of humor and a strong commitment if you are going to buy an old house, the Keplers said.

"Nothing is an easy job. You learn that when you have an old house. You start into something and you think it won't be a big deal and it's never that way," she said.

Such was the case with the recent roofing project.

It started out as a roofing project, but then it was discovered the gutters needed repairing. As a part of the project, the chimneys needed repaired and finally it was discovered work needed to be done to the lighting rod system.

"What started out as a one-item project ballooned," Todd said.

They know there will be other challenges, but they are willing to face them because "owning an old house is a very romantic kind of thing," he said.