


# The Post and Courier

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## Preservation efforts help tell story of historic African American home

BY ROBERT BEHRE

Not far from the site where a former Edisto Island slave cabin was dismantled and eventually moved inside the nation's new Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture stands a different

kind of dwelling that also speaks volumes about our nation's black history. And it's finally, essentially preserved.



Behre

True, the Henry Hutchinson House on Point of Pines Road still looks rough. It's missing its porch and certain exterior flourishes, and the big white tent that has protected it from the elements since 2017 will remain in place for a few more days.

But the house itself, a significant example of a home built by a formerly enslaved African American, is now stable, thanks to the efforts of a large team of consultants and contractors working on behalf of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust, which acquired the historic property in 2017.

Guyton Ash of Artis Construction oversaw the work, which was done largely by graduates and students from the American College of the Building Arts. As work began, a common refrain that was jokingly lobbed around the job site was Ash's instructions, given only half in jest: "We have one job and one job only: Do not knock this over."

The house, built around 1885, two decades after the



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**Guyton Ash of Artis Construction talks about how workers sistered new wood onto the original studs to preserve as much of the Henry Hutchinson House as possible.**

Civil War, was lightly framed, and much of its wood framing was compromised by rot and bugs. If it weren't for its exterior siding and interior wooden paneling, it likely would have collapsed from neglect years ago.

To keep it stable, workers installed temporary interior stud walls just to brace the building while parts were being peeled off.

The American College of the Building Arts' preservation class assessed its condition, as did architect Simons Young and structural engineer John Moore. Young said he gained a unique appreciation for the small house (it's only about 800 square feet) as he began to document it last year.

"It's easy to come up to it and say, 'Oh boy, this is just a



**The Henry Hutchinson House was so structurally compromised that Artis Construction erected temporary stud walls inside to brace it while its structural members were repaired.**

dilapidated structure,' but as you get into it more and more, it's sited in an impressive way," Young says. "It catches the breeze, and the dormers make it feel so much larger on the



**The Edisto Island Open Land Trust erected this tent structure in 2017 to protect the Henry Hutchinson House while it awaited stabilization. That work is largely done, and it plans to sell the tent.**

second floor. The chimneys have a decorative element at the top. It seemed evident to me that it was built to impress, and there was a lot of pride that went into it.”

It stands as a unique survivor of an era between slavery and Jim Crow, when for a brief time, African Americans prospered in a new way, and their future seemed bright. Henry Hutchinson not only built the house but also had the island’s first black-owned cotton gin.

His story is told in part at a small display off Point of Pines Road, a temporary parking area for those curious to see the house.

John Girault of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust says the next step will be raising money to restore the missing exterior details, mainly its missing wraparound porch, and deciding whether to conserve the interior largely as is or to restore it to its late 19th

century look.

Young says that will be an interesting decision. “To me, it has a lot of interest in the condition it’s in right now, but I could see that there would be a lot of value to restoring it and telling the story of who the Hutchinsons really were, and the finishes would reflect that.”

Meanwhile, the trust also plans to create a public path around the site’s 20 acres, and it will pursue grants and other fundraising to complete the project’s next step, a step that Girault hopes would allow the house to open as a part-time museum by 2022.

So there’s still important work to be done, but it’s nice to know the house should survive until then, no matter what the next few hurricane seasons throw at us.

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