

Saving a Blacksmith Shop

Contributed by Hallmark Art Glass

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Back in 1990, when we purchased the old blacksmith shop in Kasota, we made a massive effort to keep the building from collapsing on itself. We had to deal with rotted studs, crumbling brick, broken windows and bulging walls... not to mention more than 100 years of dirt and soot. When we look back on the project, we are still amazed at how we pulled it off despite having no apparent experience. It was pure will, determination and hard work that got the job done.

Our first task was to clean things out and see what we had. It didn't take long to realize we had our work cut out for us. The place had been boarded up for as long as anyone could remember. Every window needed work...good thing we're glass folks. There was such an incredible lean to the place that the south wall had to propped up from the outside just to keep the entire structure from falling over... nearly every stud had disappeared due to rot, as had the sill beneath them. We would need to figure out a way to rebuild the structure of the wall, all the while trying to keep everything intact.

We began by creating a system that would allow us to support the weight of the entire wall while we replaced the sill with railroad ties and sistered new studs in alongside the missing ones. It was delicate work performed with large beams, bolts and brawn. The other part of our problem was how to correct the lean and the bulging that had become the norm for this old building. Trying to fight time, gravity and Mother Nature can be a daunting task. Our solution involved heavy duty chains, large beams, come-alongs, our 1946 Ford truck, some creativity and a certain amount of naivety. We pulled the old truck inside the building and used her to anchor come-alongs hooked to heavy chains we had run through each of the two windows. These were secured around a large beam on the outside of the structure... and then we cranked. Over the course of several days, we continued to pull the wall closer to vertical. Success! The saving of the blacksmith shop took us three months, working every day, to get to the point where we could begin using it as our studio. Since that time, we have added a more user-friendly entrance as well as a couple of small additions for storage and a gallery space. We hung our shingle out on the front of the building later that year and are very proud to be able to call it the Hallmark Glass studio.