

From a Windsor Star Article, May 30, 2014 by Julie Kotsis.

Restored Boblo Island blockhouse a labour of love for retired school teacher

Although he never taught history, retired elementary school teacher Bill Brundage's deep appreciation for the past & profound sense of obligation to preserve it led him to devote the past four years to restoring a local landmark for future generations. Bill Brundage has devoted the past four years to restoring the last remaining blockhouse on Boblo Island, built in 1839. The building was in danger of complete collapse.

Brundage took his son-in-law over to the island to see the historically designated site in Sept. 2010. "I was appalled at its condition," Brundage, 66, said of the derelict structure. The roof was caving in and the walls were starting to collapse and the second floor and staircase were gone.

"It was all falling down and I thought, someone's got to save it," Brundage said.

Although he couldn't save most of the structure, it has been rebuilt as close to the original design as possible. "I wanted it done the way it was in 1839," Brundage said. "We built it so it will last 100 years, so our grandchildren will be able to see it."

The blockhouse is located at the south end of the island near a historic lighthouse owned by Parks Canada. The blockhouse is owned by Dominic Amicone, who owns most of Boblo, a residential island located in the Detroit River across from Amherstburg.

"We've committed to ensuring that the building, the structure itself remains, so that visitors... who have the desire and the interest to come learn about it, we want that to be preserved (for them)," said Gena Boschin, sales and marketing manager for Boblo Island.

Boschin said last season a resale event was held by the residents of Boblo and more than \$5,000 was raised. That, along with additional private donations, is paying for the last of the structural work — the cedar shake roof that is being installed this weekend. Boschin said it is Amicone's intention to turn the blockhouse over to Parks Canada once it is completed. Amicone was unavailable for comment.



Boblo Island Blockhouse



Brundage sought help and advice from a number of sources in his quest to save the building after he got permission to proceed from Amicone. Many days spent researching the history of blockhouse structures and untold volunteer hours spent working on rebuilding the structure were logged by Brundage and many others. But he credits engineer Norm Becker's support, both financial and professional, as the main reason the project proceeded.

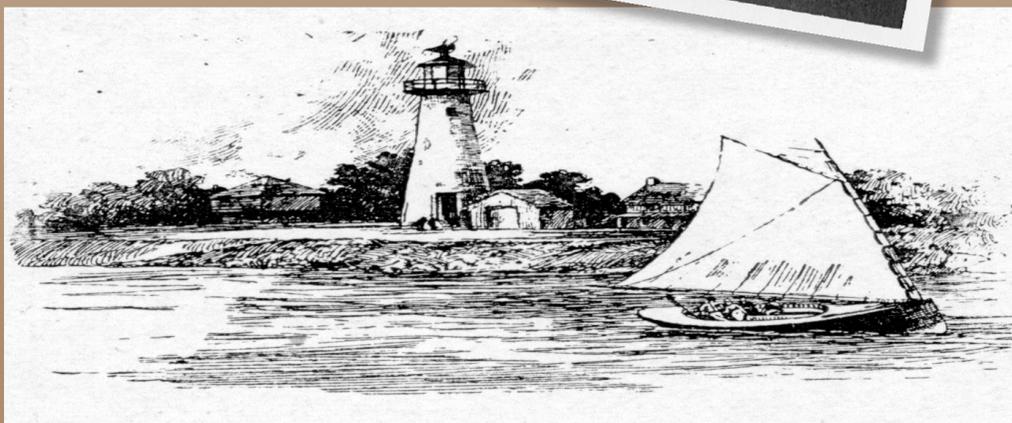
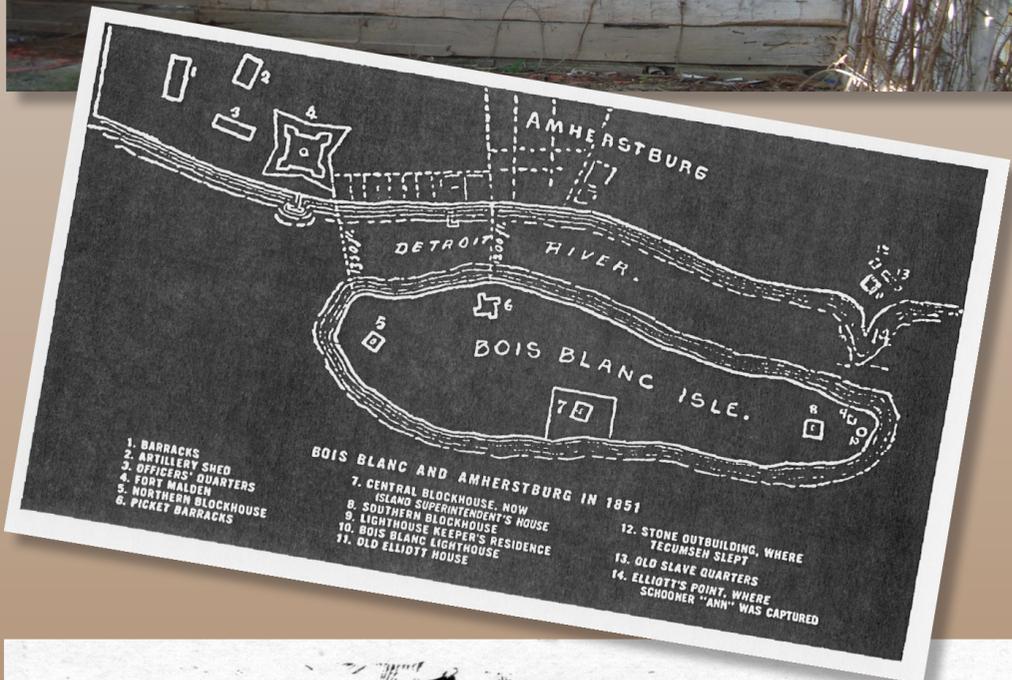
"If it weren't for him, it wouldn't have got done," Brundage said. Brundage gathered the historical data while Becker drew up the engineering drawings and located a northern Ontario company that could provide logs to replace the rotted ones.

The blockhouse was originally built out of white oak, square-cut logs. Gun slits were cut into the walls on all four sides. A second floor housing and sleeping quarters had machicolations (murder slits) cut into the floor, allowing the occupants to shoot down at intruders.

Two underground storage shelters were constructed — one to hold gun powder and the other for food storage.

Concrete footings were poured for the renovated building, raising the structure 18 inches to keep it "high and dry." Brundage said log floors were reinstalled underneath. Rough cut pine floors cover them. Cedar shakes cover the now solid roof and a new four-inch thick door with hand forged iron hardware will be installed soon.

There are displays of broken pottery, cutlery, pipes, arrow heads, rifle flints, buttons, bone needles, slate pencils, glass bottles and square nails all found during excavations near and under the blockhouse. A photo display shows the rebuilding process as well as a copy of the original drawings for the building.



Bill Brundage received an Essex County Historical Society award for his efforts in the blockhouse reconstruction project.

