

## **It Takes a Village to Raise a House**

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A traditional timber-frame house raising took place last weekend on a 10-acre site off South Royalston Road in Royalston.

The oak and hemlock frame of the new home of a young married couple, Lydia Musco and Josh Doub, rose from the ground up in just one day. By the end of the next day, much of the house was already sheathed with unique energy-efficient walls called structural insulated panels.

The couple, currently renting a house in Athol, plans to move this fall into the 31 x 24 ft. house.

Lydia's father, Tom Musco, owner of Royalston Oak Timber Frames and an experienced creator of timber frames throughout this region and beyond, was in charge of the primarily volunteer work crew.

The participants, who put in long work days both Saturday and Sunday, included people involved directly in the erection of the frame as well as those who prepared food, took photographs and offered moral support.

An amazingly collaborative, intensely committed and surprisingly quiet group of family members, friends and neighbors made up this crew, leading one member, Jon Hardie of Royalston, to quip, "It takes a village to raise a house."

The hard-working "villagers" were: Josh Doub, Lydia Musco, Tom Musco, Taj Musco, Deb D'Amico (Tom's spouse), Karen Ambrose (Deb's sister), Ron Doub (Josh's father), Gabriel Doub (Josh's nephew), Joe Musco (Tom's brother), Penny Musco, Al and Linda Gallant, Rebecca Krause-Hardie, Kevin Krause, Jon Hardie, Scott Hardie, Tom Kellner, Joshua Morris-Siegel, Larry Siegel, Glenn Freden, Tom Kohlmeyer (Glenn's brother-in-law), Rene Lake-Gagliardi and Peter Gagliardi, Ruth Suyenaga, Mark Shoul, Jim Putney and Tony Cooper.

The process was reminiscent of house- and barn-raising that has taken place in New England since the Colonial era. Timber-framing was the

predominant method of construction in Massachusetts in the 17th and 18th centuries, and it has never been completely abandoned.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, carpenters associated with the "back to the land" movement in this region helped resurrect timber framing. My own house and the homes of several neighbors were built under the tutelage of Warwick carpenter Steve Striebel, who now lives in Gill. Other local home-builders who used the timber frame method are Tony Palmieri of New Salem, Chris Ryan of Warwick and Jim Slavas and Bob Vincent of Wendell - and there surely are others.

The popular 1985 film "Witness," starring Harrison Ford, depicts this kind of collaborative construction in an Amish community in Pennsylvania. Nowadays, most homes throughout the U.S. are made in the "stick built" fashion, using dimensional lumber (2 x 4s, 2 x 6's, etc.) often imported from Canada.

The timbers in the Musco-Doub house were milled on Tom Musco's property, North Fitzwilliam Road, Royalston, from logs harvested in Royalston, either donated by friends and neighbors, cut from the house site, or logged from Tom's wood lot. Doub used his own portable saw mill for this purpose.

The logs were sawed and planed into beams, including 8 x 8 posts and 6 x 8 joists. The beams were notched, prepared with joints (mortise and tenon), and later secured with oak pegs. The beams had been transported from the Royalston Oak yard to the building site in trucks and trailers.

While a block and tackle, winch and a variety of hand tools would have been used to erect a timber-frame structure in the past, power saws and an on-site crane (O'Brien Tree Service of Putney, Vt.) were part of the process. Diagonal braces give the entire structure stability. A sprig of pine was affixed to the top of the house in accordance with an old tradition, often seen as a tribute to the trees that are the source for all lumber.

Commenting on the project while looking up at the completed frame last Sunday, Lydia Musco said, "Yesterday we had a pile of beams on the ground, and suddenly it's a standing structure."

Work on the house continues, and before long, local roofer Dan Pepperdine will do his part with asphalt shingles.

Lydia noted that broadwing hawks were observed flying above the site and pointed out that Mass. Wildlife conservation land abuts the property on three sides. A timber-frame barn was constructed nearby last year.



**COMPLETED FRAME — All the beams in the frame were prepared over several weeks, then connected and put into place in a single day. A sprig of pine was affixed to the top of the house in accordance with an old tradition. Photo by Jon Hardie**