State arts panel to help preserve piece of Pickens

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PICKENS — A once-neglected 200-year-old farmhouse not far from State 11 in Pickens County is getting some much-needed help from the state.

The Birchwood Center for Arts and Folklife will receive $26,000 from the South Carolina Arts Commission for restoration of the frame house on Birchwood Road north of Pickens.

The center has been using money from private donors and Pickens County to begin work on the house's foundation and upgrades to its plumbing. The matching grant from the state will allow that work to expand into refurbishing the exterior and interior.

Local author Dot Jackson joined three other area writers in the purchase of the house and 3½ acres in 2000. A year later, the four formed the nonprofit center with the hopes of restoring the house and turning the property into an education and cultural center.

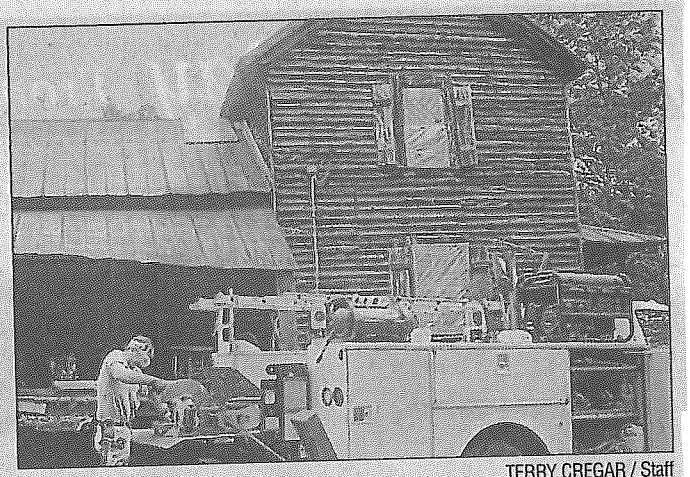
The deed to the property dates to 1813, Jackson said. In its early days, it was a stop on a stagecoach line.

"We just know that the deed was to a 300-acre farm that extended from Table Rock Mountain down to State 288," Jackson said.

The group spent a few years stabilizing the house and clearing the land.

"You couldn't see the house from the road because of all the growth around it," Jackson said.

But that effort, Jackson said, brought thieves and vandals who stripped the house of its doorknobs, hinges and plumbing.



TERRY CREGAR / Staff

Dan Ward cuts rebar being used in the restoration of the 19th-century Birchwood farmhouse north of Pickens.

In 2003, the center bought a used mobile home, Jackson said, and she sold her house in nearby Six Mile to live on-site in the trailer.

Since then, the center has offered educational programs in Pickens public schools, readings and literary fairs at the Rosewood Center in Liberty, all as part of its effort to preserve the area's traditional folklife. The center has also linked with Table Rock State Park, the Pickens County Museum and the Upcountry Museum, Jackson said.

It's also close to completing work on a documentary on the Eastatoee Valley in northern Pickens County that will be offered to local schools and museums, she said.

As for the house, Jackson said the plan is to turn it into a "focal point" for what will also be classrooms, administrative offices and cabins for on-site faculty.

"We're in the business of teaching so that whoever comes here will be able to go out and teach it so that some of the old-time ways of survival will not be lost."