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Oldest House study precedes its restoration

The Old Island Restoration Foundation, with the Center for Historic Preservation of Middle Tennessee State University will conduct a study of the Wreckers Museum/Oldest House.

Such a study is deemed necessary to ensure that any future restoration preserves the historical authenticity of the building.

The proposed study will discuss the historical context of the building, analyze the architectural style, provide an analysis of exterior and interior paint history, and develop and interpret appropriate time periods for restoration of the house.

The study will be supervised by James K. Huhta, a member of the faculty at Middle Tennessee State and founder of the MTSU Historic Preservation Program. He will be assisted by Edward A. Johnson, research coordinator for the center.

The Old Island Restoration Foundation operates the structure at 322 Duval St. as a home museum of the wrecking trade and early Key West life. Director Nancy Jameson and her staff of volunteers are at the house from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. Admission is \$2 for adults and 50 cents for children.

The Wreckers Museum/Oldest House was moved to its current location, according to some sources, from the corner of Whitehead and Caroline Streets. Built of pine and cedar and showing the influence of the early shipbuilders, the house was the home of Captain Francis B. Watlington and his family for many years; he and his wife raised nine daughters while living there. The only complete outside kitchen in the Keys is located at the rear of the main house.

The Old Island Restoration Foundation has received a \$15,000 grant from the state, which must be matched locally, to fund the historical study and architectural design drawings of the structure. The OIRF has scheduled a benefit dinner Feb. 19 to raise the necessary matching funds.

The first priority for the Wreckers Museum/Oldest House is to replace the roof on the building. The present roof is old and has developed some leaks, endangering the interior of the building. As funds are raised, further restoration will be undertaken.