THE SAGA OF THE FLOOR

During the period when we were stripping the building of its modern layers to find what was original, we were elated to find that under six other layers there was an original wooden floor. It was of pine like the rest of the building, tongue-and-groove, hand planed- a treasure! It was badly worn away (from 1 ½" thickness to about ½" except for the knots) and much of it had been cut up to accommodate later vents, wires and pipes, and so was fragmentary. But we salvaged enough to provide a floor in the big room, laid over a new sub-floor because of its fragility. It was carefully scraped and washed free from a century and a half of compacted dirt and installed. Margie Zeidler donated enough flooring for the other two rooms, but this was not hand planed, and the tongue-and-groove component was different. From the surface, the differences could not be seen. The floor was finished and covered with plastic to keep it clean during the plastering process which, after being started, got delayed by two years because we ran out of money. When the plastering was finally finished, we lifted the plastic sheets, only to discover that the entire floor had been attacked by dryrot and was collapsing.

Our architects were away, so we consulted others and found that dealing with the problem was going to be complex, time-consuming, and expensive – more so, if a company was hired to deal with it. So we began by collecting all the information we could, from architects, consultants, and suppliers as well as the internet and published sources. The work began with Dave Hanna physically removing all of the damaged wood (flooring and joists) right down to the bare concrete pad. This required hiring a dumpster twice. Dave purchased a proper respirator to do the work while others helping him wore fibre masks. What remained were the perimeter sills and a sill across the centre of the building holding up a wall with two doorways; sills could not be removed because they held up the whole building. All loose damaged wood had to be scraped away and carefully swept up.

We made a trip to Minesing to purchase a bucket of boric acid in powder form, a box of boric acid rods, and learn how best to use these materials from the expert there. We purchased a sprayer from Lee Valley, and mixed repeated batches of the powder with water, and sprayed the solution on the remaining sills, the bottom of the great planks as they met the sills, and the lowest strips of lathing. The first such application was left to dry with the heat turned up and two auxiliary heaters brought in to help dry out the whole building. The boric acid was to kill the dryrot fungus which was extensive, and we were keenly aware that its spores were all around us, inside and out. When this application had dried, Roberta O'Brien brought her power washer and the whole concrete floor was power washed and left to dry. Then a second spraying with boric acid was done and left to dry. When everything was sufficiently dry, holes were drilled every eight inches into the sills and boric acid rods inserted (to deal with moisture and any recurrence of the rot) and plugged with wood dowelling of exactly the right size. Replacement joists were ordered from the Century Mill and periodically tested for their moisture content; these were delivered to the site and covered with tarps. We made a trip to Millbrook to purchase Clear Penetrating Epoxy Sealer and began the mixing and process of painting the treated sills and bottoms of the great planks. We had to reorder this sealer as the wood was slurping it up. The same thing happened when we painted the joists, but here the ends had to be painted once they were carefully cut to size. The cross braces too were painted with the sealer. Once all of this smelly stuff has cured and the joists are ready, replacement flooring will be installed. To prevent groundwater and runoff from reaching the buildings, a new trench four feet deep will be dug around the entire site on the side of the hill, with weeping tile and gravel installed to carry water to dry pits away from the buildings.