HISTORY: Surprise, Missouri formed around the nearby Turner’s Mill, which milled locally-grown grains (primarily wheat and corn) and operated from the late 19th century to the beginning of the Great Depression. The town was named Surprise because its community members were surprised when their request for a US post office was granted. The mill’s water wheel was kept in motion by a nearby spring, and remnants of the native rock channel that used to direct the spring water can still be found. The “surprising” beautiful scenery has been described as Tolkienesque.

The building that housed the mill has since been torn down or deteriorated, and the only thing that remains is the water wheel. Surprise School, however, was added to the National Register of Historic Places, and was thus saved from demolition. Several families once lived and farmed in Surprise, and the local school provided an education to this rural town for several years. Now almost a century old, the school is leaning on its foundation.
SCOPE OF WORK: Volunteers worked with expert HistoriCorps field staff to learn and improve their skills at the following preservation tasks:

1. Stabilize school building with interior and exterior bracing: 20%
2. Repair/replace deteriorated framing and flooring: 10%
3. Repair existing masonry foundations: 20%
4. Install new concrete piers within foundation to anchor building: 20%
5. Move building and anchor onto foundation: 20%
6. Replace damaged siding: 10%

WHERE: Surprise School is located in southeastern Missouri, near the historic Turner’s Mill (map). We worked near the banks of the scenic Eleven Point River!

AREA TOURISM: Mark Twain National Forest is especially loved by paddlers, anglers, and sportsmen and women. Missouri’s forested hill country is home to the 44-mile-long Eleven Point National Scenic River, Glade Top Trail National Scenic Byway, and preserved wildernesses.

HistoriCorps is a service learning partner of the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture committed to the preservation and stewardship of significant resources on public lands.