

**Report on the Heritage Value of the "Settlers' Cabin"  
North Lanark Museum**

**I. Property Identification**

*Location and Name of Building:* Settlers' Cabin, East half of Lot 4, Concession 10, Ramsay Ward, Town of Mississippi Mills

*Owner/Address:* North Lanark Historical Society (NLHS)

*Type of Property:* Museum

**Photograph 1 ( present site of the pioneer log cabin)**



Photograph 2 (east gable end)



## II. Physical Description of Property

### *Design Value*

#### (i) Architectural/Design Style of Building

This building is typical of early pioneer log homes. It is small—roughly 21' long and 18' wide—and simple, providing only the basic essentials in terms of shelter. A common feature of these 1½-storey buildings was a large front door and a few small windows. The gable roof has a medium pitch, allowing for a small attic area that could serve as a bedroom. The design of the building, while dictated by available materials and the constraints of time and money, shows a desire for symmetry. The front door is approximately centred, as are the windows on the gable ends. (See photos 1 and 2. The lean-to at the side was added much more recently.)

Although simple, the early log cabin was the forerunner of an Upper Canadian/Ontario rural vernacular, one that spoke to the character and circumstances of the pioneer settlers. One can see how this basic, symmetrical design evolved into what became known as the Ontario cottage style, with its 1½ storeys, centre gable, symmetrical bays and largely horizontal lines.

#### (ii) Construction Technique and Materials

The walls consist of cedar logs of varying dimensions, with the curve of the tree trunk still apparent in some of them. They are roughly hewn and joined at the corners with a dovetail notch. The original chinking has been covered over. At present, the outer layer is cement. The original roofing material has been replaced with metal sheeting. The eaves project only a short distance from the walls; there is a plain fascia board but no soffit.

The three fixed, single sash wooden windows are not original, but it appears that the window openings have not been altered. There are two small windows (upper and lower) on the east gable end and one upper window on the west gable. The ground floor window is 30 inches wide by 21 inches high. The gables are covered in board and batten of varying dimensions.

The only entrance to the cabin is centred in the front façade and protected by a small roof covered with cedar shingles. The door's dimensions are 42 inches wide and 75 inches high. The current door, constructed of beveled, tongue-and-groove pine boards, is not original.

That the cabin still stands and maintains most of its original integrity attests to the skill of the builders and the longevity of locally available building materials, such as cedar and pine.

### *Historical/Associative Value*

#### (i) Direct Association with a Historical Theme

The first settlers into the area now known as Mississippi Mills came in the early 1820s. At the time of arrival on their allocated plots, they had to clear some land and build a small cabin to provide at least temporary shelter for the first few difficult years of settlement. Buildings similar to this one would have dotted the countryside. Over time, however, many would have fallen into disuse when a more substantial house was built, or been adapted for use as a shed or other form of outbuilding. That one of

these early cabins has survived, in part through the voluntary effort of a small group of local people, provides us with an important example of the standard shelter in the first days of settlement.

The land on which this cabin was erected was acquired on June 1, 1836, through Crown Patent, by Patrick O'Keefe. The 100-acre property was designated as the West half of Lot 15, Concession 11, Ramsay Township. About one year later, O'Keefe sold the land to William G. Wylie for \$200. (No close connection has been found between this family and the prominent Wylie family that moved from Perth to Almonte and built the Burnside residence in the mid-1930s. James Wylie, born in 1826, spent many of his formative years at Burnside and later owned the grist mill located on Main Street by the railway tracks.)

In all likelihood, the log cabin on Concession 11 was built by the Wylie family. They retained the property until 1853, when it was sold to William Lockhart for \$400. The Lockhart family had ownership of the property until 1898.

It is not known how the building was used over the entire 140 or so years between the time it was built and 1980, when the Thurston family offered it to the Town of Almonte for potential use as a tourist information centre in Gemmill Park.

When the Town of Almonte did not act on the offer to purchase, a group of senior citizens in the Almonte area formed the Pioneer Home Project Group in 1982-83 with the purpose of purchasing the building, preparing a site on the grounds of the North Lanark Regional Museum, moving the building to the site and making necessary repairs to the building for use as a museum to house period artifacts and demonstrate pioneer-era activities. The group applied for and received a grant from the federal government in the amount of \$9,000 to cover most of the costs for the purchase and relocation. The successful move to the grounds of the museum occurred in 1983, with its official opening on July 21, 1983.

### *Contextual Value*

#### *(i) Link with Property's Surroundings*

As the building has been moved from its original site, it no longer has a direct association with its surroundings. It is now a museum piece, housed on museum property, and maintained by the North Lanark Historical Society. That said, it is relatively close to its original location and is in a semi-rural environment on the edge of the village of Appleton. The current location therefore retains some semblance of the early architectural landscape.

#### *(ii) Social and Cultural Value*

It is fortunate that this settlers' cabin still exists. An example of the building techniques of early pioneers in Ramsay Township, Upper Canada, the building also provides insight into the conditions in which the early settlers lived. Their initial housing was utilitarian and simple by necessity, but it was also sturdy and perhaps not quite as primitive as some might have thought.

Mississippi Mills has not listed or designated a building of this age and type as having significant heritage value. That the building is now on the property of the North Lanark Regional Museum means that the cabin will be open to the public.

### III. Present Status of Building

The building has been maintained since being acquired by the Museum. The roof looks in good shape and the windows and door provide adequate protection from the natural elements and break-ins/vandalism. Two problems need to be addressed. The main need is to raise the building and replace the foundation logs that are rotting. Raising and moving the building a short distance on the existing site would allow for the construction of a more suitable foundation. Moving the building opens up another difficulty, however, as a large, heavy, stone fireplace was built in the interior after the cabin was brought to the museum site. (When the stone fireplace was added, a large hole had to be cut in the back of the cabin, thereby marring somewhat the integrity of the original building.) Moving the building with the new fireplace would complicate the physical move, putting additional strain on the structure. The museum members have made enquiries with contractors and begun discussions about options for remedies.

### IV. Recording Information

#### (i) Sources

##### (a) Documents

Records of the Land Registry Office for Lanark County  
Ontario census of 1871 (accessed through ancestry.com)

##### (b) Reference Books

Thomas F. McIlwraith, *Looking for Old Ontario: Two Centuries of Landscape Change* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, Buffalo, London) 1997, 400 pages.  
Steven J. Phillips, *Old-House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Domestic Architecture 1600 to 1940* (John Wiley & Sons Inc.: New York) 1994, 237 pages.

##### (c) Meetings

Ed Wilson, North Lanark Museum

#### (ii) Recorder and date of submission

John Hannigan prepared this report and submitted it to the Heritage Committee of the Town of Mississippi Mills on December 15, 2010.