

## A HISTORY OF THE BUILDING AND FURNISHING OF A WEST VIRGINIA LOG HOUSE

### Background of Builders and Purchase of Land

After completing a year-long round the world trip in 1960, completing a Ph.D. at Indiana University and taking a teaching position at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, in 1962, I was ready for a new adventure. While in high school I built a five-room house and helped my parents and sister build their houses. From an early age I was interested in building things with wood—I always liked to think my family tree was connected to John Goddard, America's premier furniture builder.

After scouting out several mountain and river properties in Greenbrier County, W. Va., I purchased a two-acre river front on the Greenbrier River about six miles downstream from the Greenbrier Resort in August, 1969. The property rises from the river to a flat plain—house location—and has a steep tree-covered mountain side at the rear. A paved state road crosses the property between the plain and the mountain side. The property has a beautiful small stone building which I drew plans to expand into a summer retreat.

My father, C. R. Goddard, who had worked in the lumber industry among other things for many years was recently retired and took an immediate interest in the project. Since I was teaching I had vacations and some summers free for travel and work on the project. My father and I had an agreement which defined our responsibilities. It was my job to make all major decisions, and he would offer advice and assistance whenever needed. This arrangement worked out perfectly, and he continued working on the house until he was in his eighties.

## Collection of Building Materials

As we began to develop plans for the expansion of the stone building, we settled on the idea of using antique logs and lumber. My father had worked on many such projects and was skilled in log construction. Since Lewisburg—my home town—is near the West Virginia-Virginia line, we began searching for materials in about a hundred mile range. Our first find was two log buildings in the Renick, W. Va., area. The logs were beautiful—chestnut, poplar and oak—some hand hewed and some round and in sufficient number for the expansion. We bought the logs and had them delivered but soon learned that there were two large log structures for sale—20 x 20 feet and two stories high—in Minnehaha Springs, W. Va. about fifty miles north. Upon inspecting the hand-hewed logs which were red spruce (a species that no longer grows in the area) we made the purchase. The seller whose family had lived in the area for generations told us the buildings were over 175 years old (1970). The buildings were carefully dismantled and hauled to the property location the following summer where they were professionally treated and stored. Many more materials were collected during the construction period and will be discussed later.

## Design and Construction of the Log House

With so many materials collected we decided to ditch the expansion project and design a new building around them—the stone building would become the storage building.

The design of the log house was built around the length of the logs so that all logs would be full length—no splicing of logs. A structure of nearly 3,000 square feet—20 x 60 feet long with two wings emanating at the center point forming a cross 20 x 46 feet—was the result. All areas are two stories except the living room which is one story with a 20 foot ceiling. The four roof gables are the same dimension and intersect at the center of the building. Four rooms have

cathedral ceilings—three bedrooms have 12 foot ceilings and the living room as previously mentioned has a 20 foot ceiling. Heavy beams form the rafter and truss system for the cathedral ceilings. The master bedroom, entrance, hall and dining room have massive aged hand-hewed beams.

The river property had an abundance of stone—river rock as well as layered rock—which were used for the foundation and the chimney. The building was completely built by hand the old-fashioned way including the digging of the foundation and the lifting of the logs. Two tripods made with long chestnut poles with a hand operated ratchet lift at the top of each provided the means for lifting the logs—some twenty feet long and 8 x 24 inches. Many of the old notches in the log ends were used but most needed to be recut for a perfect fit. The process sometimes resulted in lifting the logs several times for a precise fit. The foundation and chimney each required one full summer and part of another for completion. During the construction additional materials were acquired; on Sunday afternoons during summers we would take long drives in the country searching for materials. Another log house was found at Friars Hill, W. Va., and still another on Greenbrier Mountain. Log beams for the entrance ceiling came from a building in Auto, W. Va., and the ceiling beams for the kitchen came from two early houses—one in Friars Hill, W. Va., and one in Union, W. Va.

The entrance and kitchen floors and the sidewalk are made from slave-made brick (slightly larger than modern brick and pink in color) from an 1820 house in Union, W. Va. The bricks contain slave symbols and animal tracks and were originally laid with a sand-lime mortar which was very difficult to remove.

The house contains many early ornamental iron pieces such as room dividers, stair railings, newel posts, fireplace crane and mantel and ceiling ornaments. The medicine cabinets are made from frames and doors from early cast iron stoves. All the main rooms have three log

walls and one paneled wall made from weathered wormy chestnut (some boards are 24 inches wide) precisely fitted. All the flooring was made in our workshop and is variable width oak, chestnut and cherry. Both paneling and floors as well as door and window casings were installed with recycled antique square nails.

Three bedrooms and the dining room have antique chandeliers and the living room has a massive chandelier and fireplace screen made by Frank Hedgecock, resident blacksmith at Tamarack, West Virginia Craft Center. Interior doors are antique raised panel solid walnut with antique hardware. Kitchen cabinets are made from native cherry with raised panels and have Ball & Ball solid brass knobs and "H" hinges. The Pella windows are wood (aluminum clad) with thermopane glass and wood muntin bars. The front door was constructed in our workshop from 2 1/2 inch antique chestnut and has full-length antique strap hinges and pintles and shutter dogs. The antique hardware was collected from several states with most of it from Pennsylvania and dates from the 1780s.

The 4 x 10 foot stone chimney sits on a 6 foot solid concrete foundation and is approximately thirty feet tall. The chimney is designed for fireplace cooking (fireplace crane) and comes with a complete set of antique cast iron cookware and utensils. The chimney cap, flashing, valleys, and eave troughs are all solid copper.

My father and I were the sole designers of the project with the exception of the electrical, plumbing and fire box construction of the Franklin-style chimney.

### Design and Construction of Workshop

In 1988 I built a 26 x 34 foot workshop with stone foundation and board and batten siding. The shop contains the power tools used in the construction of the house and houses a

large assortment of native softwoods and hardwoods for furniture making. The upstairs of the shop has a large floored storage area for lumber.

### The Antique Furniture and Accessories

I grew up in Lewisburg, W. Va., a town filled with historic homes and antique furniture and during my years as an undergraduate student in Kentucky I lived in a historical house with priceless antiques so my love for antiques was a natural outcome of my association with them. My acquisitions began in 1963 and continue to the present. During that time I collected (and restored where necessary) over 200 pieces of furniture and accessories—enough to furnish two large homes plus several pieces remain in storage.

The furniture for the log house was collected in many states over a forty-year period and is in the American Country style—1760-1840. Many of the pieces are from historic structures and some of the pieces were made by well-known local cabinet makers from native cherry, walnut and tiger maple woods. Numerous prints and paintings in antique frames decorate the walls and the floors are adorned with authentic oriental carpets, antique hand woven carpets, plus antique hooked and braded rugs. Ohio and West Virginia antique quilts provide a special dimension to most of the antique beds.

### Property Entrance

The property has a double post and rail entrance fence with a gate fabricated from a collection of antique cast iron farm equipment wheels arranged inside a heavy steel frame. Graduated wheels starting at each end of the gate come to a center point on top of the steel frame to form an apex. The gate project required several years from design stage to collection of wheels to fabrication by a local blacksmith. The entrance leads to the workshop, garage, and house and then completes a circle to the exit.

## A Final Word about the Quality of Construction and the Condition of the Antiques

A well-respected contractor looking over the house after its completion remarked that it could be the best constructed log house of its kind in America. While I can't confirm that opinion, I can say that only the finest quality materials (many unavailable today) were used and the precision of the carpentry work was uncompromised. Only the finest antiques related to the style and period of the house were collected and the restoration (when needed) and finish were based on time-honored materials and methods. The furniture is sturdy, durable and ready for use.

## Sale of the Property

Why? Why would anyone after spending half a lifetime ever consent to parting with such a treasure? There are several reasons, but perhaps the most important are:

- I am 81 years old, still in excellent health, and find the 800 mile roundtrip trip to be getting harder to make.
- I grew up in the area and my wife and I have made many friends over the years, but all of our closest friends here have recently passed away or have serious health issues.
- I have another large home which was built around a collection of American Country antiques, so it's time to settle in one location.