Storied Structures

Log Cabins in South Dakota

Chris Nelson

American culture venerates the log cabin. It is embedded within the national subconscious as deeply as the Stars and Stripes or fireworks on the Fourth of July, stirring emotions related to the country's identity and story. It is Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett carving out the greatest republic the world has ever known, one ax stroke at a time. It is the birthplace of Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and scores of pioneer sons and daughters. For many South Dakotans, the log cabin evokes the gold-rush days of the Black Hills or the arrival of homesteaders on the Dakota prairies. Though sod houses, dugouts, and wood-framed claim shanties outnumbered them by the tens of thousands, log cabins have endured far better than their ephemeral counterparts. The histories of these structures and the stories of the people associated with them opens a window on the state's early years, shedding light on who these settlers were, why they came here, and why their stories are worth remembering.

Any discussion of log cabins and their significance to South Dakota requires some perspective. For hundreds of years, people have defended the humble log cabin as a shining symbol of the hard work and stick-to-itiveness that made the United States a great nation. This narrative resonates with many Americans whose ancestors came from meager circumstances to achieve material success. To many African Americans and American Indians, however, log cabins represent a different history. The universally deplorable log slave quarters found on southern plantations represent an undertold chapter of this story. Likewise, log cabins denote an abrupt end to the traditional lifeways of American Indians. The arrival of the United States Army and settler society obliterated the centuries-old bison-hunting lifestyle of the Oceti Sakowin—the peoples historically called the Sioux who spoke Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota—within a matter of decades. The wood cabins typical of white culture replaced their portable hide tipis on reservations.

These African American and American Indian histories help balance the dominant pioneer narrative and expose the complex legacies of these humble constructions.

In most of South Dakota, the log cabin is celebrated. Cities, historical societies, and preservationists take great effort and care to maintain them. These structures strike a chord with communities; much like old railroad depots or one-room schoolhouses, the log cabin belongs to a rare class of architectural resources that people are afraid to see vanish. Instead, their preservation receives almost universal support, and many communities provide funds to protect these buildings associated with their past.

The Rufus ("Pap") Madison Cabin in Rapid City is a prime example of such commemoration and preservation. Built in 1876, it is the oldest building in town and one of the earliest constructed in the Black Hills. When Madison moved away in the 1890s, Rapid City's founder, John R. Brennan, acquired the cabin. His wife donated it to the city in 1926, and it was restored following relocation to Halley Park. After sitting there for nearly a century, the cabin was moved to The Journey Museum grounds in 2012 and rehabilitated again.[1] With nearly one hundred years of preservation invested in it, the Pap Madison Cabin is clearly important to Rapid City residents.

The Girl Scout Cabin in Pierre also holds a special place in the community. Built in 1883, three years after the town's founding, its initial owner, a man called Swede John, sold it to "Long" Frank Caldwell in 1889. Caldwell was a tall, skinny man—hence the nickname—who collected driftwood from the Missouri River and caught catfish for a living. By 1928, he had disappeared from historical accounts, at which time the city of Pierre took possession of his home. The Girl Scouts took it over the following year and have owned it ever since.[2] Having under-

1. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Pap Madison Cabin, Rapid City, S.Dak.," sec. 8, pp. 2–4, South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), South Dakota State Historical Society (SDSHS), Pierre.

2. "Girl Scout Cabin," historical marker text, Pierre Girl Scout Cabin, Historic Structures Research Files, SHPO; Robert Hipple as told to John H. Hipple, "Early Pierre and Its Newspapers," unpublished manuscript, State Archives Collection, SDSHS; "Girl Scout Cabin" *Pierre Weekly Press*, 8 July 1976; *Pierre Times*, 1 Apr. 1999; Harold H. Schuler, *Pierre Since 1910* (Pierre, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1998).

One of the oldest buildings in Rapid City, the "Pap" Madison Cabin stands as an example of early log construction in the Black Hills.

gone several restorations, the cabin is still a source of civic pride and a throwback to Pierre's early years.

Some communities treasure log cabins enough to reconstruct them decades after they were lost. In Vermillion, for instance, a replica of a replica of its first schoolhouse stands on the grounds of the historic Austin-Whittemore House. The First Dakota Cavalry built the original log building in 1864, but it was destroyed in the Missouri River flood of 1881. In 1939, the community erected a replica that eventually sat at the bottom of Dakota Street. Over the years, that building deteriorated, and in 2013, the city tore it down and constructed a second reproduction.[3] Obviously, a building on its third iteration has significance for the citizens of Vermillion.

Although South Dakota is part of the quintessential American story that the log cabin symbolizes, it is a later footnote, almost a conclusion,

3. "Early Historic Preservation in South Dakota: The Old Log School House," website post, Vermillion Log School, Historic Structures Research Files.

Built only three years after the founding of Pierre, the Girl Scout Cabin remains a physical reminder of the state capital's early days.

in the lore. The story of the log cabin begins several millenia ago and half a world away in a European forest. The log building tradition European colonists eventually brought to North America began during the Bronze Age between 3000 and 1200 B.C. This practice evolved into the familiar horizontally stacked log walls with interlocking corners. Cultural geographer and ethnographer Matti Kaups, an authority on vernacular architecture, suggests this type of construction expanded from forested regions of central Europe (parts of modern-day Germany, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic) to northern Europe (Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden) via the Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia). The theory contends that Baltic-Finnic peoples embraced the technique and spread it to Scandinavians, who traversed wide swaths of Europe during the Viking era and dispersed a variety of

cultural traits.[4] By the time of North American colonization in the early 1600s, log building traditions flourished across northern Europe and, to a lesser degree, central Europe where deforestation due to agricultural expansion caused it to slow.

Horizontal log construction did not arrive in the Americas with the earliest settlers. Rather than constructing log buildings, the English colonists who founded Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 built timber-framed dwellings with laboriously split clapboards familiar to their homelands. Log cabins did not appear in Jamestown until a century after its founding. The Pilgrims in modern-day Massachusetts similarly built timber houses with wood clapboards and thatch roofs like the homes they left behind.[5]

Clinton A. Weslager, author of the seminal monograph *The Log Cabin in America*, contends that horizontal log construction first reached North America in 1638 with the founding of New Sweden (modern-day Delaware) on the Delaware River. Over six hundred Swedes and Finns immigrated to that colony between 1638 and 1665. At that time, Sweden's population, which included some Norwegians and Finns, had a strong wood-building tradition due to the country's timber-rich environment, a contrast to much of the rest of Europe where forests had been cleared for farming. Weslager's idea became known as the Scandinavian theory. Its proponents note similarities between Swedish and Finnish log construction methods and American techniques, notably corner notching parallels.[6]

Countering the Scandinavian theory is the German theory, which hypothesizes that Moravian Brethren settlers brought a robust log build-

4. Kaups, "Log Architecture in America: European Antecedents in a Finnish Context," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 2, no. 1 (1981): 134, 137–38; U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Log Cabins in America: The Finnish Experience," pp. 12–13, nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/upload/TwHP-Lessons_4logcabins.pdf, accessed 26 Oct. 2020.

5. Clinton A. Weslager, *The Log Cabin in America: From Pioneer Days to the Present* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969), pp. 99, 104, 119–20.

6. Ibid., pp. 150, 153; Jonathan Fricker and Donna Fricker, "Log Construction in Louisiana Historic Context," p. 4, Louisiana Department of Culture (March 2012), crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/nationalregister/historic_contexts/Log_Construction_in_Louisiana.pdf, accessed 26 Oct. 2020. *See also* Bruce D. Bomberger, "Preservation Brief 26: The Preservation and Repair of Historic Log Buildings," p. 2, U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Heritage Preservation Series.

ing custom to the colonies in the early eighteenth century. German theory adherents point to the longstanding practice of log construction in central Europe and the relatively small size and short duration of New Sweden as limiting factors to the Scandinavian theory. Another plank in the German theory is the cohabitation of German and Scotch-Irish immigrants in the 1700s. The Scotch-Irish, Scottish people who settled in Ireland in the early 1600s and later immigrated to America, are largely credited with adapting and spreading these techniques from the eastern seaboard into Appalachia and the interior South.[7]

More recently, historians theorize that multiple ethnic groups introduced various log construction methods in a disjointed fashion over a three hundred-year period, including from Mexico in the southwest, Russia along the west coast, and the Scotch-Irish and German settlers of the trans-Appalachian West. These multiple ethnic traditions, along with the varied climate and environment of the United States, produced new techniques and characteristics that spawned an "Americanized" log architecture.[8] Scholars still debate the uniqueness of this "American" tradition. As of today, none of these theories have disproven the others.

While the genealogy of log cabins in the United States is vague, their development in South Dakota is clearer. The log buildings used for human occupation in the state fit into two categories: log cabins and log houses. In seventeenth-century England, the term cabin denoted either a closed room on a ship or a simple hut of twigs, perhaps similar to an American Indian wickiup or wigwam. Shelters built of horizontally laid logs notched together at the corners did not exist there. Using "cabin" to describe log dwellings in the New World was, according to Weslager, "strictly an American use of an old English word given a new meaning."[9]

7. Fricker and Fricker, "Log Construction in Louisiana Historic Context," pp. 3–5; Ron Chesesiuk, *The Scotch-Irish: From the North of Ireland to the Making of America* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000), p. 130; Weslager, *Log Cabin in America*, pp. 223–27.

8. Kaups, "Log Architecture in America," p. 131; Cathy Bickenheuser, *Dovetails and Broadaxes: Hands-On Log Cabin Preservation* (Missoula, Mont.: United States Department of Agriculture, National Technology and Development Program, 2015), p. 11.

9. Weslager, *Log Cabin in America*, p. 53.

Perhaps due to its English connotation, early settlers on the eastern seaboard often made a distinction between smaller one-room log "cabins" built at the time of settlement and larger log "houses" with multiple rooms and upper floors erected in later years. Size rather than architectural features distinguished the two forms.[10] Another criterion pioneers and their contemporaries used to differentiate between a cabin and a house was appearance. A temporary dwelling comprised of unhewn logs with interstices—gaps between the logs—packed with mud, moss, and straw that lacked windows or a chimney was often referred to as a cabin while a dwelling built of hewn logs with windows, chimney, and shingle roof was often called a log house. Under these definitions, most true log cabins no longer exist because they were impermanent and most of what we call cabins today are houses.

The use of cabin to describe any log structure, however, dominates popular culture. Numerous properties in South Dakota historically known as cabins, such as the Herman Luce Cabin at Lake Herman State Park, are actually log houses. Larger log structures, such as the American Legion Cabin in Pierre, are better classified as lodges. Although many pioneers would have been insulted had their fine log houses been called cabins, the log buildings discussed here are referred to by their historic or popular names.

Fur traders erected the first log buildings in what became South Dakota. One early account records that Jean Baptiste Truteau, a French-Canadian trader from Saint Louis, built a log trading post in 1794 in present-day Charles Mix County.[11] Truteau did not provide a description other than noting that his men "cut down trees for our winter cabin," which was probably a one-room dwelling.[12] Evidence suggests it was well-built, however, as Lewis and Clark noted it still stood in 1804. In 1796, fur trader Registre Loisel built a post on an island below the mouth of Chapelle Creek in Hughes County. Constructed within

10. William J. Macintire, *The Pioneer Log House in Kentucky* (Frankfort: Kentucky Heritage Council, State Historic Preservation Office, 1998), p. 5; Weslager, *Log Cabin in America*, p. 57.

11. C. B. Nelson, "Notes on the Fur Trade" (unpublished manuscript, SHPO, 2010), p. 138; Jean Baptiste Truteau, "Trudeau's Journal," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 7 (1914): 434.

12. Truteau, "Trudeau's Journal," p. 434.

a picketed square, Loisel's house contained four rooms and measured thirty-two-and-a-half-by-forty-five-and-a-half feet. The post was still there when Lewis and Clark passed in 1804, but it burned in 1810.[13]

Trader Joseph LaFramboise built a post near the confluence of the Bad and Missouri rivers in 1817. Lone Dog, a Yanktonai Dakota, recorded this event in his winter count, which depicts a cabin of horizontally laid logs. Log cabins appeared in other American Indian winter counts as well. Battiste Good, a Brulé Lakota, registered the burning of the white trader Little Beaver's house, which Good portrayed as a log structure, in 1809–1810. In his winter count of 1815–1816, American Horse, an Oglala Lakota, documented a log house for the first time by drawing a man wearing a hat inside a square that represented a white man's log cabin.[14] The appearance of log cabins in winter counts hints at the impact a small number of white traders had on Northern Great Plains culture in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

By the 1850s, the fur trade was petering out in South Dakota. Instead of leaving, many traders, often of French or French-Indian descent, settled along the Missouri River. They engaged in woodcutting, farming, and ranching as well as operating country stores, saloons, and lodging establishments. In addition to a unique culture, an economy developed in the river corridor that depended on passing steamboats, wagon trains, military detachments, and the stealing and reselling of government annuities provided to the tribes by treaty.[15] A population of rough men with little respect for the law inhabited the river bottom throughout the mid-nineteenth century.

One of these men was Cuthbert Ducharme, a French Canadian born to a prominent Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, fur-trading family. Ar-

13. Ibid., p. 410; Doane Robinson, ed., "Lewis and Clark in South Dakota," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 9 (1918): 560.

14. Candace S. Greene and Russell Thornton, eds., *The Year the Stars Fell: Lakota Winter Counts at the Smithsonian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 2007), pp. 147, 158. Pierre Dorion, Sr., and Pierre Dorion, Jr., were fur traders on the northern plains at this time. This winter count may be referring to them or to another son of the elder Dorion.

15. [Herbert T. Hoover], "Missouri Valley Culture," in *A New South Dakota History*, ed. Harry F. Thompson (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 2005), pp. 71–72.

riving in Charles Mix County in 1857, he established a roadhouse constructed of hewn logs and pine boards along a well-traveled road fifteen miles north of Fort Randall. This structure, soon named Papineau's Post, is both the oldest surviving log building and the oldest surviving permanent structure in South Dakota.[16]

16. Charles F. Hackett, "Along the Upper Missouri in the '70s," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 8 (1916): 31; Ken Stewart, State Archives, SDSHS, to author, 10 July 2018; U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Geddes Historic District, Geddes, S.Dak.," p. 3, SHPO. Fort Randall was about two miles inland from the future town of Wheeler.

Lone Dog's depiction of Joseph LaFramboise's trading post (second row, fourth from left) is among the earliest records of the first indications of log construction in South Dakota. Two years later, Lone Dog noted the erection of a second log trading post near present-day Fort Pierre by a trader known as La Conte (second row, second from left).

Papineau's Post typifies the "Wild West" image associated with frontier cabins. Ducharme, known colloquially as "Papineau" or "Old Pap" in reference to the bad whiskey called "Pap Water" that he sold, was as wild as the steamboat hands, soldiers, and drifters he served.[17] Described as "a man of fine physique, exquisite as a French dandy and a most gracious host but when intoxicated a veritable devil," Ducharme represented the typical spirited element who lived and prospered along the Missouri River in the 1860s and 1870s.[18] Soldiers boarding in his roadhouse one night awoke to find Ducharme beating his wife, who was trying to stop him from shooting one of their sons. The soldiers tackled and restrained him, averting a potential murder. He also feuded with his neighbor, General Charles Campbell, who operated a competing roadhouse at the mouth of nearby Campbell Creek. The two men often

17. [Hoover], "Missouri Valley Culture," p. 81.
18. Hackett, "Along the Upper Missouri," p. 31.

Cuthbert ("Old Pap") Ducharme ran a typical frontier watering hole in this clapboard construction, which travelers called Papineau's Post.

took potshots at each other from the front doors of their neighboring establishments.[19]

Ducharme died in 1903 at the Dakota Hospital for the Insane in Yankton. The Exon family purchased his trading post in 1885, and in the 1930s John Knudson bought it to use as a granary. His son Bernie, however, realized its value and donated it to the Geddes Historical Society. In 1972, the post was moved to Geddes and restored. It now sits in the city park among other historical buildings, including Governor Peter Norbeck's boyhood home. Though Ducharme is no longer around to pour whiskey into a dishpan and charge customers twenty-five cents to dip a cup, his story lives on through the town's annual Fur Trader Days.[20]

Another fur trader-turned-settler was Samuel ("Old Spot") Mortimer, who appeared in Vermillion in 1859. Little is known about Mortimer's early years. By the late 1860s, he lived at Fort Thompson along the Missouri River, undoubtedly part of the same river valley culture as Ducharme. In 1869, Mortimer relocated to the Oakwood Lakes chain in what became Brookings County. Between the two largest lakes, he built a one-and-a-half-story log cabin into a gently sloped hillside. The land he settled was heavily wooded, and, beginning in 1871, he started to sell off parts of his claim for one hundred dollars an acre. When his wife died around 1874, Mortimer moved away but retained ownership of some of his property. Although it is unclear where he settled afterward, Mortimer returned to his original homestead in 1877 with his new wife Catherine and her children. In 1885, the Mortimers sold their remaining acreage to Solomon Walters, and Old Spot seems to disappear from the records.[21] His cabin still stands and is now the focal point of Oakwood Lakes State Park. Visitors will notice that the logs for the walls

19. Ibid., p. 32; Adeline S. Gnirk, comp. and ed., *Epic of Papineau's Domain* (Geddes, S.Dak.: Geddes Historical Restoration Society, 1986), p. 21.

20. Stanley E. Votruba, *Upper Missouri and Charles Mix County Reminiscence* (n.p., 1970), p. 21.

21. Samuel and Catherine Mortimer to Soloman Walters, warranty deed, 11 Oct. 1886, Brookings County, S.Dak., Mortimer Cabin, National Register Files, SHPO; Gustav O. Sandro, "History of Brookings County" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1936), p. 8; U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Mortimer Cabin, Brookings County, S.Dak.," sec. 8, pp. 21–22, SHPO.

As one of the earliest white settlers in Dakota Territory, trader Samuel ("Old Spot") Mortimer used local timber sources to construct his cabin.

are hewn roughly square and have visible marks from an adze, a type of cutting tool, and are joined with simple square notches.[22]

As the fur trade ended, an era of permanent non-Indian settlement in modern-day eastern South Dakota began. The 1858 Treaty of Washington between the federal government and the Yankton Dakotas transferred eleven million acres of land sandwiched between the Big Sioux River and the Missouri River into the public domain while relocating Yankton tribal members onto a four hundred-thousand-acre

22. *Arlington Sun*, 25 June 2015; *Brookings County History Book: In the Year of the South Dakota State Centennial* (Brookings, S.Dak.: Brookings County History Book Committee, 1989), p. 34. An adze is similar to an ax and is used to shape logs. It has a cutting edge that runs perpendicular to the handle and looks much like the "claw" of a standard hammer.

reservation in present-day Charles Mix County. This action is generally acknowledged as the first treaty to open a large portion of South Dakota to white settlers just ahead of a flurry of federal legislation designed to do the same throughout the Trans-Mississippi West.[23]

In 1862, the Pacific Railway Act facilitating construction of the transcontinental railroad and, most significantly, the Homestead Act changed the landscape of South Dakota. The Homestead Act decreed that any adult male or unmarried woman who was a citizen of the United States or declared their intention to become one could receive 160 acres of free land. This law required settlers to complete certain tasks, such as occupying and cultivating a percentage of the land for five years and building a dwelling. After satisfying these requirements, the homesteader owned the land upon paying a small registration fee. The draw of free land tempted many Americans and immigrants west. Before long, both groups began trickling into the eastern portions of Dakota Territory.[24]

Two of these land seekers were Inglebrigt and Syrena Severson. After living in Dickson City, Nebraska, the couple moved with their baby daughter to Spirit Mound Township in Clay County. Around 1869, they constructed a one-and-a-half-story cabin of hewn logs on their homestead. The cabin, with its complicated dovetail corner notching, scribed log walls secured with wooden pegs, and horizontal logs in the gable ends, demonstrates the craftsmanship of a skilled builder and exhibits typical Scandinavian traits. Later, the couple added dormers with sunburst patterns in the gables. These represent the Seversons' desire to fit in with their American neighbors by adapting their architectural style.[25]

23. James Steeley, et al., *The History of Agriculture in South Dakota: Components for a Fully Developed Historic Context* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, 2013), p. 5. The 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux opened a smaller portion of land seven years earlier.

24. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 170–73; "Homestead Act (1862)," in *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, ed. Howard R. Lamar (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 492.

25. *Guide to the National Register of Historic Places in Clay County, South Dakota* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, 2007), pp. 22–23; Lloyd R. Moses, ed., *Clay County Place Names* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Clay County Historical Society, 1976), p. 114.

The Seversons received patent to their land in 1870. In 1889, Inglebrigt sold half of the farm to his daughter Gurina and her husband John Rice. The Rices raised eight children in the log house. Two of their sons, Harry and Johnny, lived there until the 1960s. Ellis and Mary Ellen Jensen stabilized the house in the 1970s, and Norma and Jerry Wilson performed conservation work in the 2000s.[26] The Severson Cabin is one of the finest log dwellings in eastern South Dakota and a prominent example of immigrant construction.

Another log cabin in Clay County belonged to Danish immigrants Calle and Marie Johnsen. Calle came to the United States around 1867 and worked on the Union Pacific Railroad for three years before returning to Denmark for Marie. The couple married and settled on a relinquished homestead thirteen miles northwest of Vermillion. The original cabin there had a sod roof, but in late 1870 or 1871, the couple erected a sturdier log structure. It is not known whether Calle constructed the cabin or purchased it from a homestead in Myron Grove, just over a mile to the west. His daughter, Mary Sorenson, recollected in 1959 that he spent his first winter in Clay County cutting trees for a new house along the Missouri River bottom.[27]

Ten of the eleven Johnsen children were born in the log cabin, which was enlarged with a lean-to. The family remained in the cramped quarters even after they constructed a large brick barn. Substantial barns were often built before better human dwellings because they provided the economic lifeblood of homesteading families. Giving credence to the saying "the barn builds the house," the profits made off livestock housed in a barn provided the income to construct and improve buildings on the homestead in the future.[28]

Researcher Jim Stone discovered the Johnsen Cabin while investigating the brick barn before its demolition in 2013. Siding and lean-to additions hid the cabin's original exterior. On the interior, however, Stone noticed the square-hewn log walls and dovetail corner notches. Without the invitation of the landowner allowing him inside, Stone would

26. *Guide to the National Register of Historic Places in Clay County*, p. 23.

27. Jim Stone, *The Documentation of the Danish Brick Barn and the Log Cabin* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, 2014), pp. 69–71.

28. Ibid.

Inglebrigt and Syrena Severson built this log house to help fulfill the requirements of the Homestead Act. The structure underwent restoration in the 1970s.

have had no idea the structure was a cabin.[29] One wonders how many other log cabins and their stories remain hidden by modernity.

The Herman Luce Cabin in Lake County dates to the same period. Luce was a man of local importance, serving on the committee to form Lake County and as a district attorney. In 1870, Luce and his small party from Fillmore City, Minnesota, applied squatter's rights to a timbered spread on the lake's east side. After planting a few acres of rutabaga,

29. Ibid.

Constructed in 1871, the Herman Luce Cabin took on multiple roles in the early years of Lake County, including service as the local post office.

Luce returned to Minnesota. In the summer of 1871, his neighbors William Lee and John Walker, who moved from Wisconsin, built a cabin for Luce and his family.[30] This gabled cabin with roughly square hewn log walls, square corner notches, and board infill in the gable is more typical of Americanized log cabin construction, which often failed to match the technical and aesthetic qualities of immigrant-built structures. The cabin served as the area's first post office and land office. In 1887, Luce sold his farm for four thousand dollars to a California syndicate intent on developing the lakeshore as a resort. Along with the cabin, he left behind a small adjoining family cemetery that contained the graves of his wife, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and eight-year-old daughter.[31]

30. *History of Lake County* (Madison, S.Dak.: Lake County History Book Committee, 1995), pp. 18–20, 43–44.

31. Ibid., pp. 45, 69; U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Herman Luce Cabin, Madison, S.Dak.," sec. 8, p. 1, SHPO.

Like the Mortimer Cabin, the Luce Cabin is now the centerpiece of a state park.

Throughout the 1860s and early 1870s, white settlers began filling in Dakota Territory east of the Missouri River. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 reserved the lands west of the Missouri for the Lakotas as part of the Great Sioux Reservation. The treaty included an article that prohibited white intrusion into the region except for military purposes. This exemption opened the door for Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer's 1874 reconnaissance of the Black Hills.[32] When news broke that the expedition discovered gold near what became Custer City in the southern Black Hills, the rush was on.

By 1875, the Hills were filled with prospectors trespassing on Lakota lands. The United States Army mounted a halfhearted effort to expel the intruders. Captain Edwin Pollock, under General George Crook's

32. Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 243–47.

The interior of the Luce Cabin shows the simple living conditions of early settlers in South Dakota.

command, was posted to Custer City and tasked with ejecting miners. While stationed there, Pollock finished a front-gabled log cabin started by Dr. D. W. Flick, whom the army expelled in early 1875, and used it as his residence. When Pollock left, he gave the cabin to his friend John Wallace ("Captain Jack") Crawford, a man who came to be known as the "Poet Scout" of the West.[33] In spring 1876, Flick returned and was angered to see someone living in his cabin. He promptly deposited Crawford's belongings in the muddy street. When Crawford returned, confrontation was inevitable, and this dispute over the cabin's ownership led to Custer City's first lawsuit. A jury of five men awarded the cabin to Flick, who settled into a successful career as Custer City's first physician.[34]

33. *Custer County History to 1976* (Custer, S.Dak.: Custer County Historical Society, 1977), p. 23.

34. Ibid., pp. 23, 180; *A Brief History of Custer County, South Dakota* (Custer, S.Dak.: Custer County Centennial Committee, 1961), p. 10.

Dr. D. W. Flick's dispute with Captain Jack Crawford over ownership of this cabin resulted in one of the first legal cases in the Black Hills.

Flick moved to Rapid City in 1911, and after a series of occupants, Judge Harry Way purchased the cabin, which he later donated to the city of Custer. In 1999, restoration workers raised the cabin and found several hollowed-out logs, which hid an 1858 Remington .44 Army Revolver, an 1862 Colt .36 Police Revolver, and an 1860s 16-gauge shotgun. It is not known who owned the weapons, but the fact that Flick was a renowned wing shooter suggests they may have been his. The Custer County Historical Society houses these artifacts at the nearby 1881 Courthouse Museum. Today, the cabin, with its square hewn walls and dovetail corner notching, is open to the public and furnished with period artifacts.[35]

In the same year Flick reestablished ownership of his cabin, another Black Hills pioneer, John Thomas ("Buckskin Johnny") Spaulding, built a similar structure eighty miles north. Spaulding was a hunter, guide, and scout who earned his nickname from his wardrobe of self-tanned leather clothes. Spaulding's story is one told countless times across the West. Born in Wisconsin in 1849, Spaulding was engaged to his sweetheart, Nettie Dodd, before venturing west seeking to build a life before entering into matrimony. In 1874, he moved to Nebraska and tried farming but realized buffalo hunting was more lucrative. While he was away, Nettie married another man. Heartbroken, Spaulding pulled up stakes in 1876 and headed for the Black Hills.[36]

Late that year, Spaulding claimed land on the Redwater River southeast of present-day Belle Fourche and erected a log cabin with the help of his brother-in-law Thomas Davis. The one-and-a-half-story structure had hewn log walls joined with V-notches, and rifle portholes built into the walls in case of Lakota or Northern Cheyenne raids. Spaulding hauled freight, logs, and trailed livestock for a living. He roamed the West and Southwest for many years before enlisting in the army at age forty-nine during the Spanish-American War. After his discharge, Spaulding settled in California. In 1927, he rekindled a romance with his recently widowed childhood sweetheart, Nettie. They married later

35. Gary Enright, "The 1875 Dr. Flick Cabin-Custer," South Dakota Public Broadcasting, sdpb.org/blogs/images-of-the-past/the-1876-flick-cabin-custer, accessed 27 Oct. 2020.

36. Pat Engebretson, et al., *A History of Butte County, South Dakota* (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media, 1989), pp. 7–8; Brian Gevik, "The 1876 Johnny Spaulding Cabin-Belle Fourche," South Dakota Public Broadcasting, sdpb.org/blogs/images-of-the-past/the-1876-johnny-spaulding-cabin-belle-fourche, accessed 1 Sept. 2019.

"Buckskin" Johnny Spaulding's cabin remained at its original site until 2007. It appears here before its restoration.

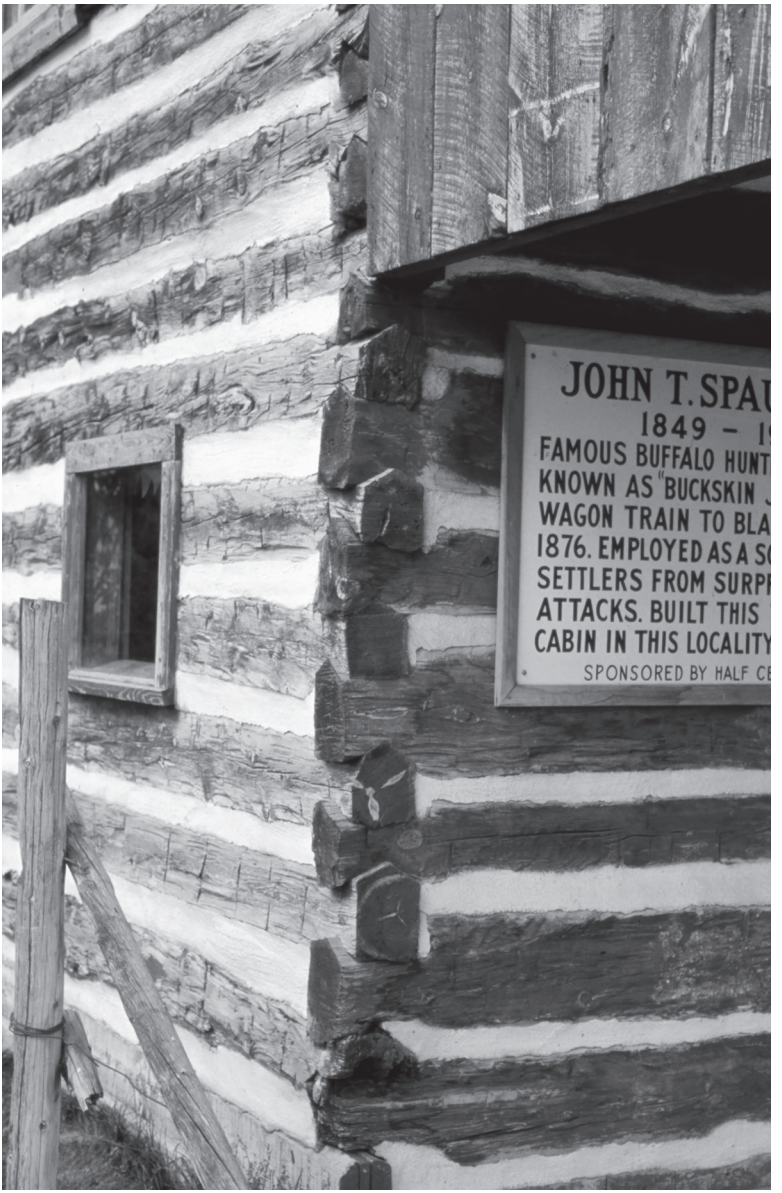
that year and lived out their remaining years on his California ranch.[37]

William and Alma Helmer purchased the land Spaulding's log cabin resided on in 1946 from a family partnership, but it was in poor condition by the 1950s. In 1960, they donated it to the Tri-State Museum, and the local Lions Club relocated it to Belle Fourche. In 2007, Spaulding's cabin was moved to the museum grounds where the roof was reshingled, logs stained, and the porch rebuilt. The local Questers Club outfitted it with period-appropriate furnishings. It is now one of the city's most popular attractions.[38]

Spaulding and Flick represented typical early Black Hills settlers in many ways. Gold, land, and other financial draws, along with a desire

37. Gevik, "The 1876 Johnny Spaulding Cabin-Belle Fourche."

38. "Johnny Spaulding Cabin," Tri-State Museum and Visitor Center, thetristatemuseum.com/johnny-spaulding-cabin, accessed 6 June 2020; Larry Helmer, Belle Fourche, S.Dak., to Chris Nelson, personal correspondence, 18 Nov. 2020, Johnny Spaulding Cabin, Historic Structures Research Files.



Spaulding's cabin featured V-notching to connect the walls, a common element among Finnish log constructions as well.

for adventure, brought thousands of individuals like them to the Hills. Yet, it was not just the opportunist and hopeful capitalist who saw potential in the great "unsettled" West. Soldiers involved in the Plains Indian wars also perceived a chance for a better life in these burgeoning settlements and joined the migration.

One of these soldiers was Johannes Flaigg. Flaigg emigrated from Switzerland in 1865 and enlisted in the army under the name John Flaigg. He was sent west and soon saw action. In August 1867, he narrowly escaped death in the Hayfield Fight near Fort C. F. Smith in present-day Montana when Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota warriors attacked a hay-cutting crew during Red Cloud's War (1866–1868). After his discharge in 1869, Flaigg lived in Nebraska before setting out for Deadwood in 1878 with his wife Martha. Once in the Black Hills, Flaigg worked as a cook, including stints at the Overland Hotel in Deadwood and the Homestake Hotel in Lead. In 1883, the Flaiggs homesteaded on Horse Creek near Newell. Around 1890, the family built a one-room log cabin where they raised six children.[39]

Flaigg continued to cook in Deadwood, where he and Martha moved in 1903. They sold their Newell cabin to rancher Carl Gardner who relocated it for use as a blacksmith shop. Julius and Elaine Viken later owned the cabin, eventually selling it to Glen and Sandra Boggess, who donated it to the Newell Museum in 2004. It was moved to the museum grounds in 2005 and restored soon after.[40]

The Flaigg Cabin is built of hewn logs with dovetail notching, characteristics often indicative of immigrant-built structures. Flaigg possibly hailed from northern Switzerland near the edge of the Black Forest of southwest Germany, an area that some suggest was the birthplace of horizontal-log construction. He may have learned to build with logs before immigrating to America. In fact, several log structures with central and northern European construction traits are found in the Black Hills, though little is known about most of them.[41]

Reliable information does exist, however, about the Solomon and Martha Hann log house near Nemo in Lawrence County. Solomon Han-

39. "Flaigg Family Coming to Dakota Territory," Flaigg Family History File, Newell Museum Archives, Newell, S.Dak.

40. Ibid.

41. Fricker and Fricker, "Log Construction in Louisiana Historic Context," p. 5.

nu and his wife Martha Keskitalo Hannu were born in Finland and immigrated to the United States in 1889 with their son Oscar. At that time, they shortened their name to Hann. Little is known of their early years in the United States, but the Black Hills likely were not their first destination. Newly arrived immigrants often settled in existing enclaves of their countrymen before setting off on their own. In South Dakota, Finns settled in two areas in the eastern part of the state. The first enclave, largely made up of immigrants from Oulu Province in northern Finland, was established in 1878 at Poinsett in Hamlin County. The second was settled in 1882 at Savo in Brown County. Many Savo Finns had previously resided in Michigan and Massachusetts.[42]

In the 1880s, Finns started migrating to the Black Hills. Men found work in the mines around Lead, and women worked as domestic servants. Multiple factors, including a mining slump in 1890 and the failure to unionize the Homestake Gold Mine, caused Finnish settlers to leave Lead. These ex-miners and their families started a slow resettlement onto ranches in Lawrence, Harding, and Butte counties. Solomon and Martha Hann were probably part of this trend, homesteading near Finnish enclaves at Roubaix, Dumont, and Custer Peak in Lawrence County.[43]

Built around 1889, the Hanns' log house reflects its Finnish immigrant origins. The hewn log walls with narrow interstices, dovetail notching, horizontal logs in the gable, and hewn joists are building traditions commonly seen in Finnish settlements. In addition, the house is located within a late-nineteenth-century Finnish enclave. The Hanns' neighbors were three Finns surnamed Maki, Martimo, and Tammi, and one Swede surnamed Jatko, some of whom may have helped build the structure. Yet, without a written historical record of the house or the recovery of artifacts on the homestead—such as a *vara*, a tool Finns used to scribe logs—it is impossible to say with certainty that the house is a Finnish immigrant product.[44]

42. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Solomon and Martha Hann Homestead, Dumont, S.Dak.," sec. 8, p. 19, and "The Architecture of Finnish Settlement in South Dakota," sec. 7, pp. 1–4, both SHPO.

43. "Solomon and Martha Hann Homestead," sec. 8, p. 19; "Architecture of Finnish Settlement in South Dakota," sec. 7, pp. 1–4.

44. "Solomon and Martha Hann Homestead," sec. 8, p. 27; U.S., Department of the In-

The Hann Homestead near Dumont reflects typical Finnish log building techniques from the period.

The Henry Buskala ranch sits a few miles west of the Hanns' house. When surveyed in 1985, the ranch contained one of the state's best collections of Finnish immigrant log architecture. The twelve log structures on the ranch display eight characteristics of Finnish folk construction, including dovetail, V, double-vertical, and saddle notching, along with the use of square-hewn and round logs. One structure, a two-and-a-half-story log house, was built with exterior stairs in one gable end to access the second story and exterior ladders in case of fire, common features in Finland at the time of Buskala's immigration in 1890.[45]

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terior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Long Valley Finnish Structures, Cascade, Idaho," sec. 7, p. 2, National Register of Historic Places Digital Database, npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/88ec385f-f9bd-40a9-ba42-3d4cb159e8d7; Alice Koskela, "Finnish Log Homestead Buildings in Long Valley," Log Buildings in South Dakota, Historic Structures Research Files.

45. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Henry Buskala Ranch, Dumont, S.Dak.," sec. 1, p. 4, SHPO.

Born Henry Ypparila, Buskala married Anna Piiola in Raahe, Oulu Province. He changed his name after immigrating to northern Michigan. Later, he sent for his family and relocated to Lead. In 1901, they moved to a ranch at the Finnish settlement near Dumont in Lawrence County. Like many of his neighbors, Buskala supplemented his income by logging and making wood tools and buckets. The Buskala family moved to Florida in 1918 but returned to the Hills in 1923. Anna died in 1937 and Henry in 1943. Their children continued living on the ranch for many years.[46]

46. Ibid., p. 5.

This side view of the main house at the Buskala Ranch shows some of the features common to Finnish log house construction, including exterior ladders (left) and stairways.

Of course, immigrants were not alone in erecting log structures in the Black Hills. Plenty of American-born settlers constructed log buildings with craftsmanship matching that of the Finns, Scandinavians, Germans, and Bohemians. For instance, Jerome Harvey came to Dakota Territory with an oxen train in 1882 at the age of fourteen. He worked at area ranches and sawmills before signing on with Sam Fish, who had timber contracts with the Homestake Mining Company and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. While working at a sawmill camp, he met a Norwegian dishwasher named Jonetta, and they married three years later.[47]

The Harveys bought two cabins at one of Sam Fish's timber camps. The land, however, was within the Black Hills Forest Reserve and not available for purchase. In 1906, Harvey received patent to the land when federal officials opened portions of the reserve to settlement. He then built a larger, two-story log house using trees from a nearby stand of ponderosa pine. Harvey hewed the logs square with his broadax. While working, he placed metal stovepipes on his legs to prevent injury should the ax slip. Once he finished hewing, he used a drawknife to cut the intricate dovetail notches. Along the bottom rows, however, he opted for square cuts. Logs joined with square notches are easily disassembled and replaced, which is especially important for the bottom courses since logs in contact with the ground rotted faster. This feature indicates that Harvey had previous experience building log structures.[48]

Harvey and his family lived a life common to many Black Hills homesteaders. They raised cattle, sheep, chickens, and pigs and planted a garden. Jerome worked for the McLaughlin Tie and Timber Company cutting timbers for Homestake Mine and the railroads. He guided hunters in his spare time and shot deer and turkeys to feed his family of ten children. The Harveys lived on the ranch until 1949.[49] The log house

47. *Some History of Lawrence County* (Deadwood, S.Dak.: Lawrence County Historical Society, 1981), pp. 197–98.

48. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Jerome and Jonetta Harvey Homestead, Lead, S.Dak.," sec. 8, p. 3, SHPO.

49. Ibid.; *Some History of Lawrence County*, p. 198; "Supplementary Listing Record," Harvey Homestead, National Register Files, SHPO; "Jerome and Jonetta Harvey Homestead, Lead, S.Dak.," sec. 8, p. 3, SHPO.

is currently abandoned, its windows gone and the interior deteriorated. While its structural integrity remains, giving hope of future restoration, it may slowly return to the earth like so many of its contemporaries.

Several log structures become ruins every year. When a smaller log cabin was no longer used as a residence, numerous owners converted them for other purposes, such as blacksmith shops, granaries, and chicken coops. As technology evolved, ranchers and farmers could not justify putting money into repurposing these buildings, and many were destroyed and burned; others slowly wasted away.

Not every little homesteader's cabin met this fate. Consider, for instance, the Richards Cabins on the Dutton Ranch in Perkins County. Pioneer siblings Caroline and Frederick Richards built the structures—one for each of them—around 1894. Typical of prairie log construction, they have slightly gabled roofs supported by round ridge poles.

Numerous log structures met an unceremonious end, as seen in this crumbling cabin from the Edward H. Isben Homestead in Custer County.

A lack of timber on the prairies and plains restricted the size of log buildings to squat structures, such as the Richards Cabins in Perkins County.

The roofs are clad with smaller timbers and covered with a thick layer of sod. Similar to most cabins on the timber-sparse prairie, these two buildings have low walls and entrances on the gable ends.[50]

After Frederick was shot and killed during a dispute with his father-in-law in 1913, settler Frank Stillwell bought his land. In 1915, Hiram and Mary Dutton purchased Caroline's property and Frederick's cabin and barn. All three structures were moved to the Dutton's ranch nearby. Their son, Harold, repaired the roofs in 1982, helping to ensure their preservation today.[51] The Richards Cabins survive because someone thought they were important. Without people like Harold Dutton, these

50. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Richards Cabin, Faith, S.Dak.," sec. 8, p. 2, SHPO; Jon T. Kilpinen, "The Front Gabled Log Cabin and the Role of the Great Plains in the Formation of the Mountain West's Built Landscape," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Winter 1995): 21.

51. "Richards Cabins," sec. 8, p. 2; *Bison Courier*, 12 Mar. 1986; Harold Dutton, Faith, S. Dak., to Chris Nelson, personal correspondence, 24 Feb. 2002, Richards Cabins, National Register Files.

pieces of Perkins County history would be no more than a rubble pile.

While log cabins are typically associated with white settlers, Lakotas living west of the Missouri River were some of the most prolific log cabin builders in South Dakota. The federal government supplied windows, doors, locks, nails, and other supplies while agency officials supervised construction. Agent Valentine McGillycuddy of the Pine Ridge Agency reported that in 1885 residents there occupied 848 log houses. McGillycuddy noted that these structures housed over two-thirds of the agency's families. Proliferation of log cabins on the Great Sioux Reservation continued after the federal government split it into five smaller reservations—Cheyenne River, Rosebud, Lower Brule, Standing Rock, and Pine Ridge—in 1889.[52] Forced to live under government control without bison to hunt for food and shelter, tribal members built log cabins out of necessity.

Early cabins on reservation lands throughout the state were crude, consisting of earthen roofs and unhewn logs with wide interstices. Yet, many of these homes were no better or worse than those constructed by white settlers. Still, sanitary conditions were dire. As anthropologist Ella C. Deloria, who had lived in one of these cabins as a child on the Yankton Indian Reservation, recalled, "The houses [were] small, one room affairs, low and dark—and dank, because of the dirt floors. Germs lurked everywhere." Deloria went on to say that construction techniques improved, however, resulting in "larger houses—neater, too, with logs planed so as to fit closer and requiring less mud chinking. The doors and windows fitted better, there were [wood] floors, and the roofs were of boards."[53] With experience and time, Dakotas and Lakotas learned to build durable log cabins.

A significant difference exists between log cabins built on and off the reservations, due to financial prospects and cultural factors. Lakotas lived with fewer economic opportunities than white settlers did, making it difficult for them to construct larger, wood-frame homes as re-

52. James Legg, "A History of Native American Housing Types and Funding on Selected Reservations: Yankton, Rosebud, Pine Ridge, Crow Creek, and Lower Brule" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1998), pp. 52–57; Louis Berger Group, Inc., *Reconnaissance-Level Survey Shannon/Oglala Lakota County Survey Report* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, 2015), p. 17.

53. Ella C. Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (1944; reprint ed., Vermillion, S.Dak.: Dakota Press, 1979), pp. 59–60.

placements for cabins. Other Lakotas opted to reside in tipis during the summer and their log cabins in the winter. In 1956, the South Dakota Indian Commission estimated that around 60 percent of residents on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River reservations lived in log cabins. A 2015 architectural survey that included Pine Ridge indicated that several of these cabins were still occupied.[54] Indeed, a deep legacy of log cabin history exists on American Indian reservations that someday must be researched and told in full.

The stories of two log cabins, one on the Pine Ridge reservation and one formerly on the Cheyenne River reservation, offer a starting point for such an examination of Lakota log cabin history in South Dakota. Sitting Bull (Tatanka Iyotanka) was a Hunkpapa Lakota born along the Grand River in north-central South Dakota around 1831. He began fighting against the United States Army in the 1850s. By 1867, he was a prominent leader who went on to participate in the Great Sioux War of 1876–1877, including the Battle of the Little Bighorn, or Greasy Grass. After that victory, he and his followers fled to Canada.[55]

In 1881, Sitting Bull returned to Dakota Territory, where he was arrested and imprisoned. Released a few years later, he joined William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody's Wild West show but quit after four months. No fan of white society, Sitting Bull returned to his birthplace on the Grand River and lived with his family in a log cabin.[56] Based on images of the structure, his cabin appears to have been built of roughly hewn logs and composed of two rooms joined by a single roof, known as a double pen. The corners were double-notched with crown ends—the part of the log extending beyond the notch—of varying sizes. A slightly side-gabled roof, which would have been covered in sod, was a common prairie adaptation.

54. U.S. West Research, Inc., *Indian Housing in South Dakota: 1946–1975* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, 2000), pp. 44–45, 68–69; Shannon/Oglala County Architectural Survey, Box 1, Survey Files, SHPO.

55. Bob Bernotas, *Sitting Bull: Chief of the Sioux* (New York: Chelsea House, 1992), pp. 19, 38, 44, 76–77; *The Last Years of Sitting Bull: June 1–September 30, 1984, North Dakota Heritage Center, State Historical Society of North Dakota* (Bismarck: Museum Division, North Dakota Heritage Center, 1985), p. 3; Dennis C. Pope, *Sitting Bull, Prisoner of War* (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2010), pp. 3–4; Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), pp. 14–17, 147–64.

56. Pope, *Sitting Bull*, pp. 8–14, 136–37; Utley, *Lance and the Shield*, pp. 235–37, 264–66.

In this undated image, reenactors stage the events surrounding Sitting Bull's death on 15 December 1890. After public display in Chicago and New York in the early 1890s, the cabin went missing.

Sitting Bull's refusal to accept Christianity and give up traditional Lakota customs made him dangerous in the eyes of the government. When the Ghost Dance—a ritual that promised to rid the earth of white people—reached South Dakota in 1890, Sitting Bull refused Indian agent James McLaughlin's order to stop his people from participating. Fearing Sitting Bull's influence and concerned that he might take his followers and join the dancers on Pine Ridge, Major General Nelson A. Miles ordered his arrest. On the morning of 15 December 1890, Lakota policemen were sent to detain him. During a scuffle, Sitting Bull was shot and killed outside of his cabin.[57]

Even in death Sitting Bull could not escape the reach of white men. In 1891, nearly a year after his killing, North Dakotan P. B. Wickham

57. Pope, *Sitting Bull*, pp. 136–37; Utley, *Lance and the Shield*, pp. 293–97.

and his partner, known only as Thorberg, either purchased the cabin themselves or handled the purchase for an anonymous buyer. It was then hauled to Mandan, North Dakota. One newspaper report claimed the purchasing party obtained the cabin for one thousand dollars, a two-year-old steer, and two dress patterns. In 1893, the cabin and Tall Bull, Sitting Bull's white horse, were shipped to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Wickham and Chris Nordstrom, one of North Dakota's representatives for the event, accompanied the cabin. Their contract with Cody allowed them exclusive rights to sell curios and relics during the exposition.[58]

Newspaper reports suggested that Wickham and Nordstrom planned to take the cabin to London to exhibit it in the Crystal Palace—the enormous plate-glass structure that housed the Great Exposition of 1851—the following year. That trip never happened. Instead, the structure was on display at Coney Island in New York City by September 1894.[59] After that, the trail goes cold. What happened to Sitting Bull's cabin, and to Tall Bull for that matter, is a mystery.

At the time of Sitting Bull's death, another significant Lakota man, Nicholas Black Elk, was living in his log cabin on Pine Ridge some two hundred miles to the southwest. Black Elk (Hehaka Sapa) attained worldwide recognition with the 1932 publication of John G. Neihardt's book *Black Elk Speaks*, in which Black Elk related accounts of his life and Lakota history. Since then, Neihardt's work has been reprinted numerous times and translated into several languages. It is also considered an important work of Lakota history.

Black Elk was born in the Little Powder River country of modern-day southeast Montana and northeast Wyoming in 1863. The son of an Oglala medicine man, Black Elk had visions as a child and became a medicine man like his father. He participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the subsequent Great Sioux War. By 1882, he had settled at Pine Ridge. He left in 1886 to join Buffalo Bill's Wild West and toured across Europe for three years. In 1904, Black Elk converted to Catholi-

58. *Pierre Weekly Free Press*, 19 Nov. 1891; *Rock Island (Ill.) Daily Argus*, 3 Nov. 1891; *Minneapolis (Minn.) Irish Standard*, 18 Feb. 1893; *Bismarck (N.Dak.) Weekly Tribune*, 18 Feb. 1893; "Sitting Bull's White Horse Has a Colorful History of Its Own," unidentified newspaper clipping, Folder 2, Sitting Bull Biographical File, State Archives Collection, SDSHS.

59. *Bismarck Weekly Tribune*, 18 Aug. 1893; *Emmons County (N.Dak.) Record*, 21 Sept. 1894.

During the reservation era, Lakotas began constructing log homes like the building photographed here on the Cheyenne River reservation in the early 1900s.

cism but considered both traditional American Indian spirituality and Christianity as reflections of the sacred. He died in 1950 and was buried at Saint Agnes Catholic Cemetery in Manderson.[60] As of 2020, research is ongoing toward his designation as a saint. His cabin, with its square hewn log walls, still stands on his allotment at Pine Ridge, watched over by descendants. A gable roof with rafter tails under the eave replaced the original roof that Neihardt described as having "weeds growing out of it" when he first met Black Elk, but the cabin still conveys the significance of its owner.[61]

In most of South Dakota, the golden age of the log cabin was short. Homesteaders cut down the few available trees for their houses or fireplaces. Railroads spread rapidly across eastern Dakota Territory in the

60. Raymond J. DeMallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 101; Joan Anderson, "Dakota Images: Nicholas Black Elk," *South Dakota History* 25 (Summer 1995): 157.

61. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being a Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (1932; reprint ed., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

1870s and 1880s, carrying the pre-cut lumber and shingles that settlers desired to build their wood-frame houses and barns.[62] Soon, owners demolished backwoods-looking log cabins or covered them in clapboard siding to modernize their appearance. These environmental, economic, and social factors limited the number of log cabins built across the state, with the notable exceptions of the Black Hills and Indian reservations.

Though small in number, log cabins retain a nostalgic power. Many South Dakotans have recognized their historical value and hesitated to let these structures deteriorate for numerous reasons. For some, the log cabin represents a better, simpler time whose ideals need to be brought back, or at least not forgotten. For others, the log cabin holds no such nostalgia but stands instead as a symbol of entire lifeways and cultures lost.

Behind every log cabin is a story, and the stories, good and bad, offer insight into the region's people and history. To gain a stronger understanding of what they represent, these structures need to be preserved and studied before the opportunity vanishes. As historian Clinton Weslager wrote in 1969, "A day is rapidly coming when the American log cabin, except for the memorial structures, will be extinct."[63] One only has to look at the survey records on file at the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office to realize that this prophecy might soon come true. Today, a log cabin without a benefactor is an archeological site in waiting. By losing its cabins, South Dakotans will lose a history that can never be recovered.

62. Mark Hufstetler and Michael Bedeau, *South Dakota's Railroads: An Historic Context* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, 2007), pp. 8–11.

63. Weslager, *Log Cabin in America*, p. 341.

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On the covers: The Butte-Lawrence County Fairground features a two-and-one-half-story wood-frame octagonal pavilion. Inside, visitors can see the craftsmanship that went into its construction. In this issue, a book excerpt from *Picturing the Past* by Jay D. Vogt and Stephen C. Rogers with photographs by Scott Myers highlights numerous structures and sites important to South Dakota's history.

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