

THE MOUNTAIN

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Villager

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JERICHO, UNDERHILL,
RICHMOND, and also
CAMBRIDGE and
JEFFERSONVILLE

"MADE IN THE SHADE OF THE MOUNTAIN"

Historic Stevensville Cabin Sold

by Linda Redfield Evans

An historic pioneer log cabin in the Stevensville area of Underhill changed hands on December 18th.

Sold to Mr. and Mrs. John Marsh of Essex Junction by Mrs. John French of Vineyard Haven, Mass., the cabin had been in Mrs. French's family since 1925.

The cabin was built in the early 1830's and may have originally been the house of a lumberjack or other employee of the local sawmill operating in the area from about 1840 to 1865.

Later, the cabin was purchased by Hiram and Jem-

ima Hicks, and used as a farmhouse up until the early 1920's. At that point, the farmlands in Stevensville were abandoned and reverted back to forest.

The new owners are outdoor sports enthusiasts who plan on restoring the tiny log cabin and using it to "get away from it all".

On a recent walking tour of the area with Carol Wagner, President of the Underhill Historical Society, this reporter got an appreciation for the manner in which the French Log Cabin was built and the era in history it reflects.

"The logs were hand hewn, or squared off on all four sides with a chisel-edged broad axe," Wagner explained as she pointed to the regular markings on the logs.

"This was a standard building practice in those days. The corners were all dovetailed, to create a snug-tight fit. The builder knew something about his trade."

In between the logs, one can still find traces of twigs that were used to "chink" or fill in cracks. The original mud chinking has been replaced with mortar.

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Stevensville pioneer log cabin

Pioneer Cabin is Last of Its Kind- from p.1

Across the Stevensville Brook stands another log cabin built at approximately the same time and now used by Mr. Levi Smith Jr. and family as a summer dwelling. Across and down the road a piece stands a log home that was built at a later date, imitating the rustic style of the pioneer cabin. It was built around 1925 by local builders, including Homer Bogue. All three cabins have been used as summer homes for well-to-do families since the 1920's.

There are only two other remaining pioneer-style log homes in northwestern Vermont...the Hyde Cabin on Grand Isle and the log cabin at Shelburne Museum. Both have been restored. "Both these cabins are built of logs with bark that was merely peeled off, rather than hewn," Wagner commented. "As an example of a log cabin with hand-hewn beams, the former French cabin of Stevensville may be the only survivor in the state of Vermont."

Hidden away behind overgrown brush, the cabin unpretentiously greets hikers of the Nebraska Notch and Mt. Mansfield trails. The exterior looks primitive, but step inside and you will become transported back in time to a previous century. "Basically, the cabin has not been altered much since the days of the early settlers," Wagner said.

There is one main room that served as the pioneer family's living and eating quarters. One of the side walls where a chimney may have been located was replaced with board and batten siding. There is a small addition to the rear of the building, added on later. A narrow, steep stairway leads to a sleeping loft. Underneath the cabin is a stone foundation.

Less than a hundred years ago, the scenery in the Stevensville area was quite different from how it appears today. The entire valley at the base of Mt. Mansfield was covered with a crazy quilt of farms and fields. What once was virgin forest became farmland after the sawmill stripped the land of trees in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Besides the sawmill, there was a school and a general store serving the people of Stevensville. A road through Nebraska Notch was frequently used by Stowe farmers to transport produce, meats and cheese to markets in Burlington. "People were quite self-sufficient back then," Wagner said. "They produced most of their food right on the farm, often made their own clothes, and what they couldn't do for themselves they'd buy at the local general store."

Today the farms are all gone and once again the land has returned to forest. All that remains of the thirty or so homes once inhabiting the area are traces of stone foundations and chimneys in crumpled piles. The Smith and French camps are the last reminders of a settlement and a way of life which