

3514 PEMBINA HIGHWAY

McDOUGALL HOUSE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

May 1988

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Early settlement patterns provided a distinctive character to the development of Lorette, or Notre-Dame de Lorette de la Petite-Point-de-Chenes as it was first called in 1874¹, and the Rural Municipality of Tache in which this village is located (Townships 8 and 9, Ranges 4 and 5E).

Tache, like other areas in south-central and south-western Manitoba in the last quarter of the 1800s, experienced the arrival of young Ontario farmers and subsequently European immigrants drawn by the availability of land and the Dominion government's efforts to solidify Canada's claim to the Northwest of the continent through agricultural settlement.

Unlike many of the other areas, however, Tache had begun to develop long before the arrival of these new pioneers. Its distinctive character was due in part to a large concentration of French-speaking Métis. Prior to the formation of the Province of Manitoba in 1870, these mixed-blood families of Indian and French, Scottish or English descent moved out along the Red, Assiniboine and Seine rivers as the population of the Red River settlement grew. They staked out land for use as a "pied-a-terre", a place to leave the family during extended absences. Most of the male population was engaged in the pursuit of fur-bearing animals and hunting² and did little to "improve" their land holdings for agricultural purposes.

In the case of Tache, however, the Roman Catholic Church based in St. Boniface was successful in attracting a number of farm families from Québec. The objective was to populate much of the area south of St. Boniface and St. Vital with French-speaking Roman Catholic settlers.

New forms of land division which accompanied establishment of the province created problems for

¹ J.C. St. Amant, Histoire de Notre-Dame de Lorette. (St. Boniface-1951). p. 5.

² R.R. Blom, Tache Rural Municipality 1880-1980. (Steinbach-1980). p. 8.

the Métis. Their land holdings rarely coincided with official surveys and this often led to conflicts between surveyors and occupants. The Métis came to be known as squatters. As well, their idea of land use was far removed from the Dominion government's conception. Nonetheless, many Métis families were compelled to seek legal protection of their traditional land from the advance of new settlers who held legal documents to the property.

After years of dispute, the problem was addressed by an Order-in-Council from Ottawa (dated February 25, 1881) that provided for a grant of 64.8 ha. (160 ac.) of land for any squatter and the subsequent selling of additional land at \$1/0.4 ha. (1 ac.). In this way, unofficial landowners were given the same rights as other homesteaders in the province. After certain conditions were met, they could own the land outright in three years.

The McDougall family was among many Métis who relocated from St. Boniface-St. Vital to Lorette and other areas in Taché during the troubled years of 1868-70. Daniel McDougall, 27, found property to his liking south of the Seine River in 1869, staked his claim (8-5E-11), and began ploughing his field³. By 1871, McDougall and his family had built a 6.1 x 7.6 m (20' x 25') log house and taken up permanent residency⁴. However, McDougall died on May 28, 1880, shortly after a train accident in St. Boniface in which he lost a leg⁵. He left his wife and two sons⁶ with lot 11 (136.8 ha. or 338 ac.), two buildings and some cultivated land⁷. He also had bought lot 59 from another squatter in 1870⁸ (80.9 ha., 200 ac.) and claimed part of lot 60 (13.0 ha., 32 ac.), both on the north bank of the Seine. Three years after her husband's death, Mrs. McDougall and her teenage

³ From Statement made by Marguerite McDougall dated April 24, 1885 (below as Statement). See Appendix I for document.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ J.-C. St. Amant, Histoire de Notre-Dame de Lorette op. cit., p. 40.

⁶ A daughter, Marguerite, was born in 1869 but had died by the mid-1870s.

⁷ River Lot Survey of February 16, 1878, in Map Room, PAM.

⁸ "File-Lot 59" in Manitoba Land Branch Records - Parish of Lorette. PAM RG 17, D 2, Boxes 66-68.

sons moved across the river and built a sturdy log house 5.8 m x 6.4 m (19' x 21') on lot 59.⁹ This house now stands on a new site in St. Norbert.

STYLE

The McDougall House is a one-and-a-half storey log building with dovetail corners, considered "by many to be the ultimate in log building construction."¹⁰ Because of the great care needed in making these corners, usually only "an expert axeman"¹¹ would choose the style. The fact that the joints still fit snugly on this 105-year-old house shows the remarkable workmanship involved.

Neither the Province nor the City has inventoried or studied many log houses since these largely have been demolished in favour of more modern buildings. Dovetailed structures are even rarer because the most prominent building styles in early Manitoba were Red River Frame and saddle-notched construction. It is unknown how many contemporaries of similar construction to the McDougall House still exist, but it must be very few.

CONSTRUCTION

The nearly square structure contains logs that are rough planed on the inner and outer sides and range in diameter from 12.7 cm. to 24.4 cm. (5"-10"). Spaces between the logs would have been filled with mud or similar substance. Doors and window were cut after the walls were completed. The building's original roof could have been made of sod, logs or milled lumber (although family finances probably would have precluded the third possibility).

No metal or wooden nails appear to have been used, making the structure's excellent condition even

⁹ Statement.

¹⁰ B. Allen Mackie, Building with logs. (Prince George-1971). p. 52.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 52.

more remarkable. Joists for the second storey of the house protrude slightly from the walls of the structure.

The use of dovetailing instead of the more common Red River Frame or saddle-notched styles gives an indication of both the builder's heritage and capabilities and the planned use for the building. Firstly, a study of Métis communities in Saskatchewan found that 82% of all identified log structures used dovetail joists.¹² It is not strange then for the McDougall House to be built using this familiar system. Secondly, the McDougalls were looking to build a house that would last. The dovetail joint is known for its durability in weather extremes because all joint surfaces slop downward and therefore create self-draining corners. This solves the problem that occur during freezing and thawing periods when moisture can enter joints.¹³

DESIGN

The original building was without a basement and likely sat on no foundation or one of wood. It originally included a front veranda. The interior was divided into three bedrooms on the second level and one room on the ground floor. This simple design was perfectly suited for a frontier situation and was often repeated throughout the west because of its ample interior space, warmth, low construction cost, and possibilities for expansion. (It should be noted, however, that the Red River Frame house more easily accommodated additions).

INTERIOR

The second-storey flooring has been removed and the interior is empty.

¹² Historic Building Technology of Métis Communities. (Ottawa-1985). p. 88.

¹³ J.I. Rempel, Building with Wood. (Toronto-1980). p. 51.

INTEGRITY

The building now sits in an historic park in St. Norbert, a good distance away from its original site in Lorette. The building has undergone several changes over time, including the addition of wood siding and stucco. It has now been taken back to its original state which is remarkably intact after over one hundred years of use as a private residence. The building is in excellent structural condition.

STREETSCAPE

None.

ARCHITECT

The builders of the house are unknown but likely were relatives, friends and/or neighbours.

PERSON

François-Daniel (usually named in documents and Municipal Rolls as Daniel, the eldest child of Daniel McDougall), eventually took over the 1883 house. His mother moved into the nearby village of Lorette and opened a general store that lasted several years. Alexandre, the second son, also moved out to establish his own farm.

Letters patent for lot 59 were given to the three McDougalls in 1885; two years later, the westerly two chains of lot 60 were added. Of these 93.9 ha. (232 ac.), 10.1 ha. (25 ac.) were under cultivation and the family owned assorted livestock.¹⁴

By 1889 the family also held letters patent for the westerly 94.7 ha. (234 ac.) of lot 11. (They had

¹⁴ Assessment Rolls for the Rural Municipality of Taché. (below as AR) 1888. p. 15.

sold 42.1 ha. or 104 ac. of this lot in 1890.)¹⁵ Mrs. McDougall and her two sons had received lot 11 through the procedure laid out in the 1881 Order-In-Council, including a grant of 64.8 hectares and purchase of the remainder at \$1/0.4 hectares. In total, the entire 136.8 ha. (338 ac.) cost the family \$210.¹⁶

By 1892 16.2 ha. (40 ac.) of lot 59/60 were under cultivation but lot 11 appears to have been left untouched.¹⁷ The 1897 Municipal Rolls show François-Daniel (age 30) living with his wife and children on 32.4 ha. (80 ac.) of land (easterly three chains of lot 59 and westerly two chains of lot 60) with 12.1 ha. (30 ac.) of cultivated land.¹⁸ His brother Alexandre (age 29) had taken up residence with his wife and children on the remaining land in lot 59 (58.3 ha. or 144 ac.) of which 10.1 ha. (25 ac.) was cultivated.¹⁹ Both men had livestock; both also had part ownership of the westerly part of lot 11 although it remained unused. It appears that their mother did not have ownership of any of her husband's land.

François-Daniel married Virginie Flamand (born 1869). They had two sons and four daughters (although one of the sons died soon after birth). In 1902, François-Daniel died at the age of 35 of smallpox, but his descendants continued to use the 1883 log home. A daughter, Alexina, lived in the house until 1965 (two years after her mother's death), then moved to St. Norbert (only to have the house follow her there!).²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹⁶ "File-Lot 11" in Manitoba Land Branch Records op. cit.

¹⁷ AR, #61 and #121/1892.

¹⁸ AR, #366/1987.

¹⁹ AR, #370/1897.

²⁰ Much of the more recent family history was obtained through personal interviews with Alexina (now Manaigre) and her assistance was greatly appreciated.

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this structure.

CONTEXT

The McDougall House exemplifies the type of life-style experienced by many of the Red River/Manitoba settlers during the 1860s through to the 1880s. Small, yet durable and adaptable houses built of inexpensive and readily available materials dotted the countryside as new settlements and farms were created. That this well preserved example remains is due largely to the fact that the survivors of the original owner were not in a position nor had they the need to drastically change their living arrangements.

LANDMARK

In its present setting, the McDougall House receives a great deal of attention, given that it is so close to a major thoroughfare and in an historical theme park.

R.R. Rostecki
Historic Resources Branch
August 1988

McDougall House
3514 Pembina Highway
St. Norbert, Manitoba
(Prepared as a supplement
to a report by Murray Peterson,
Historic Projects, City of Winnipeg)

Construction

There are three major construction types among log buildings in Manitoba. These are Red River Frame (or piece sur piece); saddle notch, and dove-tailed construction. Of these, the first is often associated with the pre-1870 era of Manitoba's history and was used very infrequently after that date; the second was sometimes used in post-1870 construction, but has, by and large, been associated with late twentieth-century log houses.

Of the three, the final grouping, that of the dove-tailed log, is still the most commonly found. Although no building survey has been undertaken of this specific building type by the Historic Resources Branch, the Branch has recorded over 185 dove-tailed log structures throughout Manitoba. The four surveys of heritage buildings in planning districts undertaken by Historic Resources, identified the following numbers of log houses of all varieties:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Brandon Planning District | 0 |
| Eastern Interlake Planning District | 64 |
| M.S.T.W. Planning District | 20 (includes 13 Mennonite house barns) |
| Selkirk Planning District | <u>35</u> |
| Total | 119 log houses |

There are, as yet, an untold number of unrecorded log houses, some of which will be difficult to identify due to exterior sheathing.

The reasons for the very high numbers of the dove-tail type are easily explained. First, this form of construction required less skill and construction talent than Red River Frame, and therefore, made for an easily built structure. This made it possible for individuals with fairly limited construction experience to quickly gain the knowledge and erect modest dwellings.

Second, the dove-tailed type was cross-cultural in nature — that is, a variety of ethnic groups used the dove-tail, thereby ensuring its spread across the province by various pioneering groups. Some

groups imparted their ethnic mark upon their structures by using their own traditional types of gable, roof and fenestration systems. Nonetheless, dove-tailing on the bodies of these buildings was remarkably similar in appearance.

Third, many log structures still exist because they were covered over by siding or sheathing. The lifespan of an exposed log is a lot less than that of a covered log, and this is evident from recorded examples of both kinds of buildings.

Fourth, like other popular construction types, dove-tailing was used for many types of structures — barns, granaries, shanties, coops and houses. Therefore there are many dove-tail log buildings remaining. Indeed, long after the log houses have been replaced by more modern dwellings, many farms still use old log out buildings. Frequently log houses subsequently were used as out buildings and were thus preserved.

Fifth, the dove-tail as a system was in use for a very long time. Existing examples, where dates can be assigned, range from the late 1860s through to the early 1940s, and possibly later, depending upon where the structure was built and the materials at hand.

In the case of the McDougall house, while the spruce logs of its walls are not as straight or as closely fitted as other known buildings, the quality of its dove-tail joints is quite good. This gives one a good idea of how tight such joints could be made. On the other hand, however, the large gaps between the logs, the lack of chinking, and the excellent state of preservation of the logs indicates that the McDougall house was covered by some sort of weather boarding at an early date. Before the walls were enclosed, however, the logs were heavily coated with a lime whitewash in order to minimize insect penetration. The McDougall house also features mortise pegs between some of its logs, and wedge-shaped shims between some logs near the various apertures.

Integrity

Some loss of integrity has taken place with the stripping of original exterior sheathing components and the removal of the interior elements. It is evident, however, that the second floor joists which remain are of a later vintage, (possibly 1920s), and these quite likely replaced the original joists which were probably poles flattened at the end to fit the wall slots. These may have been similar in nature to the present roof rafters which appear to be the originals. The wall logs are in very good condition because of their long encasement behind the various wall coverings.

Context

The Métis were one of many ethnic groups in Manitoba which used dove-tail log construction in pioneer buildings. The use of log technology had much to do with area shortages of milled lumber, the necessity to clear land for agricultural use, and limited pioneer financial resources. Generally speaking, however, such buildings are representative of the advancement of permanent agricultural

settlement in Manitoba.

At the time the McDougall house was built, the Roman Catholic Church was encouraging the Métis to give up the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the buffalo hunt in favour of agrarian pursuits. The McDougalls appear to have adopted such a lifestyle, which may be the reason why the building was finished in siding at an early date. This gave the house a more permanent and refined appearance than the uncovered log houses used by the Métis who continued to follow the life of the buffalo hunt.

According to his daughter, Mrs. Alexina Manaigre, by 1900, François-Daniel McDougall planned to construct a new home for his family. These plans were thwarted by Mr. McDougall's untimely death two years later. As a result, the structure which was to have been replaced continued to serve as the family home until 1965.

Dove-tailed log buildings that have been recommended for commemoration by the Manitoba Heritage Council are the Emerson Customs House (Paul Laronde house, 1868) and the former Emerson Jail (1879). Both the old Lutheran parsonage (1897-8) now at the Erickson Museum, and the former Goulet House (1900), a Red River Frame dwelling that was reconstructed from a dove-tail house, have been municipally designated. As well, some twenty-six Manitoba museums have recalled pioneer life through their acquisition of various log structures. These include such dove-tailed dwellings as the Mooney (Nellie McClung) house (1878), now at La Riviere; and the Dyck house (1876) at the Steinbach Mennonite Village Museum.

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Plate 1 – McDougall House, 3514 Pembina Highway, 1988. (M. Peterson, 1988.)

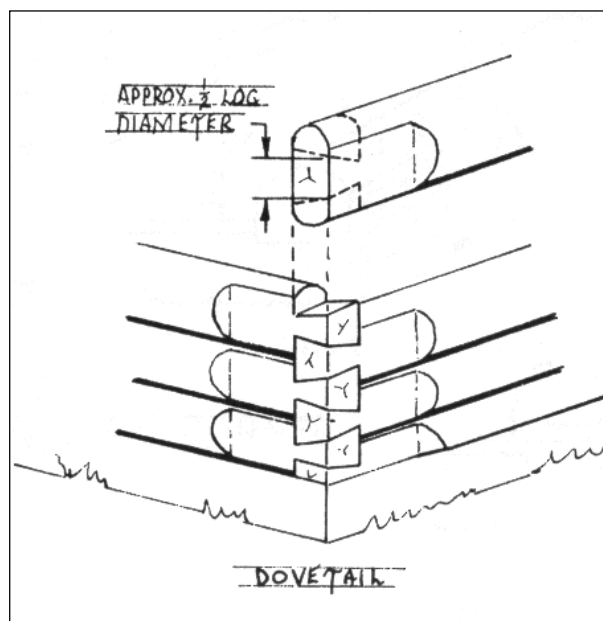


Plate 2 – The dovetail joint. (Illustration reproduced from B. Allan Mackie, Building with Logs (Prince George, B.C., 1979), p. 51.)