

3514 PEMBINA HIGHWAY – MCDOUGALL HOUSE
Architect Unknown, 1883



Originally located on the north bank of the Seine River near Lorette, Manitoba, this 1 1/2-storey log house now stands in a St. Norbert heritage park as a legacy of both the province's agricultural settlement and one of its earliest building types.

The house was erected in 1883 for Marguerite McDougall, a widow, and her sons, Francois-Daniel and Alexandre.

The McDougalls were among a number of Metis families who moved from St. Boniface-St. Vital to areas further south along the Red and Seine rivers in the troubled times which accompanied formation of the Province of Manitoba in 1870.

This was a period of major transition for the Red River Settlement as the Hudson's Bay Company relinquished its jurisdiction over the North-West to the Canadian government. The semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Metis, centred on the fur trade and buffalo hunt, came under pressure from new settlers, new forms of land division, and a shift in the economic base to agriculture.

Daniel McDougall first established a homestead on the south side of the Seine near Lorette in 1869-71. He also obtained land on the north bank of the river prior to his death in 1880. Mrs. McDougall and her sons relocated to this latter property three years later.

Their new house, consisting of dovetailed spruce logs, probably was built by relatives and/or friends. Its design and materials reflect contemporary shortages of milled lumber and the need of settlers with limited financial means to use indigenous resources from cleared land. The design's ample interior space, warmth, low cost and possibilities for expansion made it popular throughout the West.

Use of dovetailed joints was a common log construction technique because of its durability and relative simplicity compared to the skills required to build a Red River Frame structure. The technique involved cutting close-fitting joints with downward-sloping surfaces to allow water to readily drain off. This reduced the chances of moisture entering the corners during periods of freezing and thawing.

The logs of the nearly square McDougall House are rough-planed on both the inner and outer sides. They range in diameter from 12.7 to 24.4 centimetres. There are mortise pegs between some of the logs, while wedge-shaped shims appear between other logs near various openings. Mud or other similar substances would have been used to close spaces in the walls.

Doors and windows were cut after the walls were completed. The roof initially may have been of sod, logs or, less likely, milled lumber. There was no basement; at most, the original building may have rested on a wooden foundation. The ground floor held a single room while the upper level was divided into three bedrooms.

Several changes subsequently were made to the building, including removal of a front veranda;

replacement of the second-floor joists; and the addition of wood siding and stucco, preceded by a heavy coating of lime whitewash to minimize insect penetration. More recently, the building has been stripped of its exterior sheathing and the second-storey flooring has been removed. The wall logs and overall structure are in good condition.

Through grant and purchase procedures established by an 1881 order-in-council, the McDougalls gained letters patent for their land-holdings on both sides of the Seine, although it was the land on the north bank that was cultivated and used to support livestock.

Mrs. McDougall eventually moved to Lorette where she operated a general store for several years. Francois-Daniel remained in the 1883 house while Alexandre established a home on adjacent property. Francois-Daniel died in 1902 but his descendents continued to use the log home. A daughter, Mrs. Alexina Manaigre, lived in the house until 1965 when she moved to St. Norbert. In turn, the structure recently was relocated to an historical theme park under development in that community.