

## Later Log Houses (1885-1905)

During the 1880s, as the economy of New Iceland improved, with the development of the fishing industry, a better form of log house appeared. These structures, though remaining simple in design, were larger and displayed a much greater degree of care and workmanship in their construction than those built during the initial was of settlement.

Most of these structures appear to have been consistent in size and appearance throughout the colony. Generally, 1 1/2 storeys high and gable-roofed, these buildings had up to two rooms, whitewashed walls, and likely an attached storage shed (Figure 9).

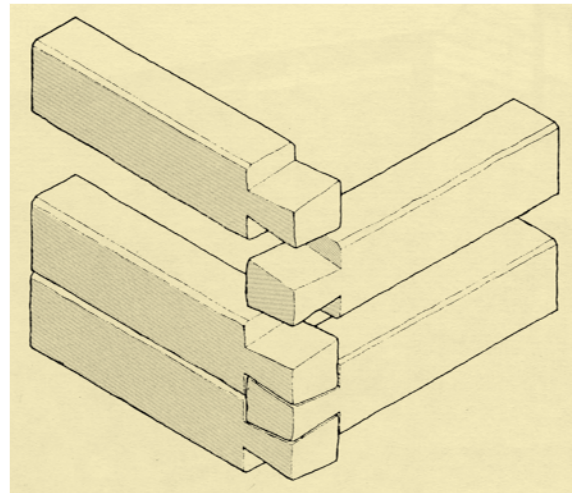
The logs used in their construction were hewn, generally on two sides and dovetail notching was used at the corners (Figure 10).

Rough-cut lumber and wooden shingles, available from a sawmill, which started operation in 1882 at Riverton, were commonly used for the floors and roofs of these buildings. By the mid-1880s, doors, windows, construction paper, latches and other fixtures could be purchased in Gimli and Riverton as both communities had regular lake freighter connections with the Town of Selkirk.



**Figure 9**

Settlers pose for a photograph in front of a typical circa 1890 house that features dovetailed log construction, whitewashed walls, a single stove-pipe chimney and an attached shed at the back of the house. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)



**Figure 10**

Dovetail construction entailed cutting a wedge-shaped joint at each end of the squared logs. The logs were lapped at the corners and joined in an interlocking system that created a strong net corner and ensured a waterproof joint.

For the first few years, the interiors of these structures were as simple and spartan as the exteriors. The ground floor comprised the main kitchen-work area; the sleeping quarters were in the loft above. The cook stoves were positioned in the centre of the room and iron stove pipe chimneys allowed an even heat distribution. Small root cellars, accessible through a trap door in the floor, were often dug beneath the houses. Furniture was sparse and usually handmade. There was little decoration other than whitewash on the interior and exterior walls to produce a clean appearance and to help preserve the wood.

Over the years, as their economic situation improved and the size of their families grew, a number of improvements were usually made to the settler's homes. The first of these was the construction of a lean-to addition; initially these were of log but were later more frequently of wood frame (Figure 11).

This addition typically became the new kitchen area, freeing the original section to be used as a bedroom or living area. At this time, the cookstove would have been moved into the new kitchen and a brick chimney constructed. In a few cases more substantial additions were made; entire full-sized wings of frame construction were added to the original structure (Figure 12).



**Figure 11**

Many of the early Icelandic log homes were improved in later years with wood siding on the exterior walls, brick chimneys, and lean-to kitchen additions (Provincial Archives Manitoba)



**Figure 12**

Although the shed-roofed lean-to was the more common addition, some settlers constructed full storey-and-a-half wood frame wings when the original log cabin became too small. (K. Magnusson)

Another typical improvement was the application of wooden drop siding to the exterior walls and wallpaper to the interior walls. Sometimes the interior walls were first covered with a layer of flush board siding before wallpaper was applied. New tongue and groove flooring was often installed over the original rough planking in many of the homes.

Settlers who could not afford new wood frame houses or who were new arrivals from Iceland built log structures as late as 1915. They were generally similar in appearance to those in the older areas, and it was noted that on at least one occasion, an old log house in the Hnausa district was dismantled, transported by team and wagon to the Vidir area, and reconstructed on the new site. However, in the older areas of the colony along the lakeshore, and the Icelandic River as far as Geysir, the era of log construction was generally over by the early 1900s.

Only two log structures from this period of settlement are known to have survived to present day; one is near the village of Hanusa and the other near Arborg. The Hanusa structure closely resembles the descriptions and early photographs of later log homes and is in good condition despite its age (Figure 13).



**Figure 13**

Sniefeld house, SW 17-22-4E, circa 1890. Originally constructed near the lakeshore on SE 8-22-4E, this building was recently moved 1 1/2 miles north where it now stands unused. It is one of only two surviving log homes from the 1883-1903 period of Icelandic settlement.

The logs are roughly squared on four sides and are joined at the corners with well-cut dovetails. The spaces between the logs are filled with a sand and lime mortar, and there are traces of whitewash on both the inside and outside walls. The roof is constructed of rough-cut lumber and the roofing material is rolled asphalt. Sometime after the house was built, a single storey, gable roofed log addition was constructed along the west wall and, in later years, a wood frame extension was added to this. At this same time, the entire structure was sheathed with horizontal drop siding, most of which has since been removed.

The one other surviving log house of this type, now found near Arborg, was constructed by Gester Oddliefson in 1890 and originally stood near the banks of the Icelandic River in the old Geysir settlement (Figure 14).

This location was immediately to the east of the Borgford homestead depicted in Figure 15, and had the appearance and situation of the structures in this 1903 painting. Although slightly smaller, it is very similar in form and construction to the Sniefeld house. In this case, however, logs extend up the gable end walls to the peak of the roof, and an earlier type of roofing material, split wood shingles, was used (Figure 16).

A typical shed-roofed lean-to of frame construction, added to it in later years, was used as the kitchen. This addition has since been removed and stands a short distance north of the building's present location.

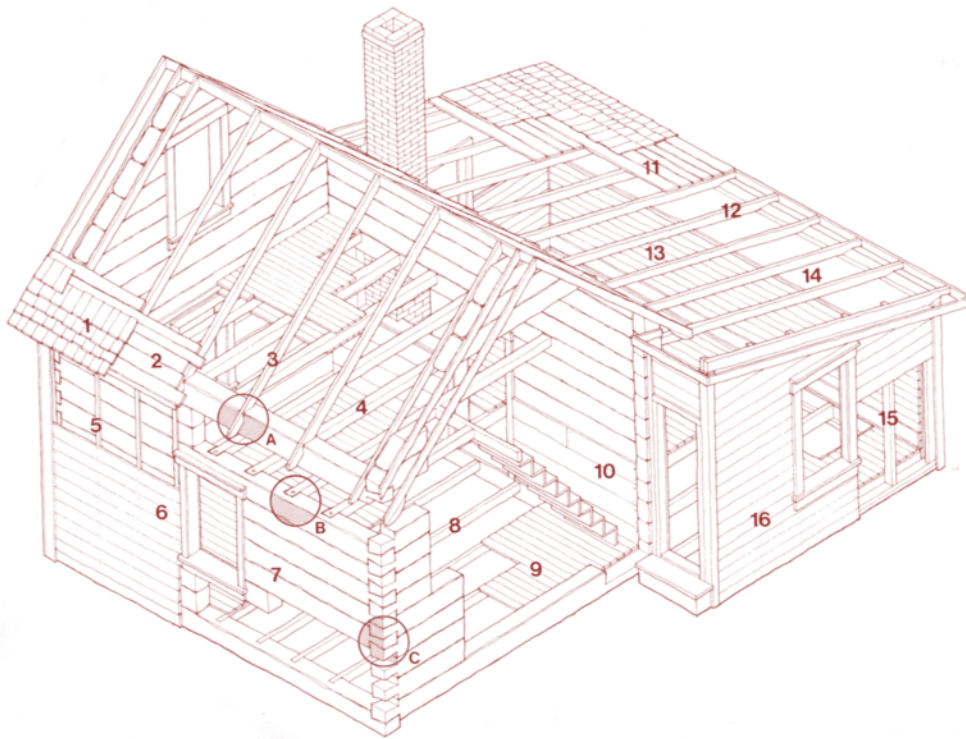


Figure 14  
Oddliefson house, SE 19-22-3E, 1890. Later improvements to this log structure included a wood frame shed-roofed kitchen addition, wood siding on the exterior walls, flush board siding on the interior walls and two layers of construction paper on the walls and roof of the upper level.



Figure 15  
The Borgfjord family homestead in the Geysir settlement, as it appeared around the turn of the century. For 12 years these homes marked the western fringe of settlement along the Icelandic River.





Dimensions

Cabin

Length: 4.7 metres (15½ feet)  
 Width: 4.1 metres (13½ feet)  
 Ceiling Height: 2.0 metres (6½ feet)  
 Total Height: 4.7 metres (15½ feet)

Shanty

Length: 5.6 metres (18½ feet)  
 Width: 3.0 metres (10 feet)  
 Ceiling Height (rear): 1.8 metres (6 feet)  
 Ceiling Height (front): 2.6 metres (8½ feet)

Building Materials

- 1) Roofing: split wooden shingles
- 2) Roof sheathing: 25 mm (1") unplanned lumber; 125-350 mm (5-14") widths
- 3) Rafters: 65x95 mm (2½x3 ¾") unplanned lumber
- 4) Ceiling joists: 100 mm (4") square sawn timbers
- 5) Nailing laths: 25x50 mm (1x2") strips
- 6) Exterior sheathing: 150 mm (6") drop siding
- 7) Walls: 200 mm (8") logs, hewn on two sides
- 8) Floor joists: 50x150 (2x6") planks
- 9) Floors: 115-165 mm (4½-6½") tongue and groove planking
- 10) Interior sheathing: 225 mm (9") ship lap
- 11) Shanty roof sheathing: 25 mm (1") planks; 100-200 (4-8") widths
- 12) Shanty rafters: 50x100 mm (2x4") planed lumber
- 13) Wall finish: 90 mm (3½") tongue and groove; over paper and sheathing
- 14) Wall paper: patterned; over paper and sheathing
- 15) Shanty wall studs: 50x100 mm (2x4") unplanned lumber
- 16) Shanty exterior sheathing: 150 mm (6") drop siding

Connections

- A) Rafter seat notched into top plate
- B) Ceiling joists notched and dowelled into side walls
- C) Corner joint: dovetail

**Figure 16**  
 Oddliefson house: construction details.