

**Mifflinburg Log House Restoration,
A labor of love
By
Carol Bohn**

The hewed log house on the corner of Market and 5th Streets was built on Lot #1 of Elias Youngman's town layout of 1792. Two years after the lots were staked out Christian Brown bought this lot from Elias and Catherine Youngman. The tax records of 1802 list the structure as an "unlined house." After changing hands approximately 25 times, it was purchased in 1982 by my husband, Jim, and me. While the project was a joint effort, Jim basically paid the bills and I did the "grunt" work completely gutting the duplex rental, etc. until it was "logs and air."



Front façade, showing the asymmetry of the window placement

Additions were added to the north and west sides of the house. These additions were carefully designed to replicate the original structure keeping the wall thickness and the size of windows the same. Most of the plumbing was kept in the new additions and low voltage electricity was installed behind

the moldings of the doorways. This was done because modern electrical boxes could not be put in beaded board walls measuring only 1 ¼" thick.

An unusual aspect of the house is the asymmetric placement of the front door. A common feature in this type of log structure is the alignment of the front door with the back door. However, in *this* house the front door is not centered in the façade. Why? There is no known explanation. In keeping with the Georgian/Federal style, the window placement in the front of this house has two windows on each side of the door on ground level, and windows on the second floor align with the ground floor windows on each side, but the center window does not align with the offset front door.



View from the side. The center and left-hand structures are later additions to the original structure.

Six over six window panes are found in the window frames throughout the house, except for the front windows on the ground floor which are 12 panes over 6. These windows may have been elongated at a later date. All window panes throughout the house, including the additions, are old wavy glass taken out of frames of early houses and farm outbuildings. I became an expert at replacing windows in old chicken coops!

Some of the hewed logs (rounded logs that were flattened by an axe on all sides) spanned the entire length of the front of the house as well as the sides and were dovetailed on the corners. The house appears to be the larger type of two log structures built in the area in this time frame: a larger having a

central staircase and a smaller “central chimney continental log house.” (“central log house” – is a term used to describe a log structure where the fireplace is located close to the center of the building rather than in a corner. Here, it serves as the kitchen and also to heat the house.)

As was common in town log homes, the logs were covered with overlapping clapboards on the exterior as soon as possible. It is my understanding that initially the log frame of the house was built and allowed to settle for a couple of years. Then the windows and doors were cut out from the logs. Next, flooring was then nailed in place on top of the support beams. Lastly beaded board walls were erected to form the various rooms. A substantial tax increase in 1817 from the earlier 1802 records indicates the house was probably finished about this time, including siding on the exterior.



Original hewn logs, left visible here.

The original owner, Christian Brown, was a potter. There is evidence that his shop was in the west section of the house. During renovation, many shards of redware pottery were unearthed. Upon his death in 1826, the house was sold, and survived approximately 25 owners including several Gutelius family members. Sometime in the early 20th century it was converted into a duplex rental property. Many changes were made including an additional staircase, arched doorways and a rear addition to accommodate bathrooms and kitchens. We had the opportunity to purchase the structure in 1982. As avid antique collectors, we were looking for a home built prior to 1850 to accommodate the period antiques we had collected.

“Jim paid the bills and I did the physical work.” It took four years before it was livable. I spent two years gutting it, and carpenters spent over two years completing the additions. I hoped the house would “speak to me”, so I took on the task of gutting it. Any details I may unearth would tell me what was originally there. Old wallboard, lath and plaster, were removed along with the chinking (filler between the logs) until it became “logs and air.” In the process original baseboard was discovered which was black with red dots (in the restoration I omitted the red dots). A large mouse hole along the baseboard in the downstairs hallway was left intact and now sports a tin mouse cookie cutter heading home complete with a free-standing American flag!



“Wavy” glass in downstairs windows.

At some point, narrow strips of fabric, 2” wide, were nailed over the tongue and groove beaded board walls to accommodate “modern” 1890s wallpaper. Thousands of tacks were removed with a kitchen knife, before the holes were tediously filled and then painted over. It was a labor of love, devotion and patience. One wall was left with tack holes to document this feature.

Normally the upstairs moldings around doors and windows in this type of country home were very plain. But in this house they were more elaborate, determining the form and style to be reconstructed downstairs. The corners

of the upstairs window moldings were deteriorated due to the many nail holes from various curtain rods, all which were painstakingly remolded by hand with wood filler and sawdust.

Fortunately the original doors with raised panels on both sides were recycled and used on closet doors upstairs when the house was renovated...perhaps in the 1920s. We knew these “fancier” doors were used



Paneled doors from downstairs were restored to their positions and given painted graining



Wall boards beaded at the edges

downstairs on doorways into the various rooms because the doors on the upstairs rooms had raised panels on only one side.

Heat guns, scrapers and paint remover became the menu of the day. All interior and exterior paint was removed, and three hours were devoted to every spindle of the winding staircase. Patience and endurance!

The floors are all unfinished---no stain, no polyurethane---simply a natural patina (a gloss or sheen on wood produced by age and polishing). Most of the original flooring was yellow pine and replacement was very costly and hard to find. Consequently, the flooring in the additions is white pine and poplar which was easier to obtain and less costly. This flooring, which was removed from old houses, was re-planed to a standard thickness and the tongue and groove feature was cut off. If the replacement boards had originally been painted, the paint was removed after they were re-laid, a laborious, time-consuming task. Although tongue and groove flooring was the original mode of construction, modern costs prohibited this type of

replication and the floors in the additions were butted together. And, no, we don't get splinters when walking barefoot....it is as though these old boards had passed through a planer many times.



Example of original, unfinished floors

A problem developed with the placement of our antique grandfather clock. The ceilings in the old house, as well as the 8-foot ceilings in the additions, were too low to accommodate our 8' 3" clock. Instead of cutting off the feet or the finials, we raised the ceiling in one small section of the beamed keeping room! (A keeping room typically is an area adjacent to the kitchen. Keeping rooms date back to Colonial times when families would sleep in that area when the rest of the house was cold. Since the area could be heated by the kitchen stove it often provided the only heated place in the house.) It solved the problem and no one ever notices the difference in ceiling heights.

The kitchen in the new section resembles an old tavern with large slated panels that can be raised or lowered to produce the tavern effect. The counter tops are old walnut boards sealed with olive oil and showing the patina of years of use. All modern appliances are disguised. The dishwasher, trash compactor, and refrigerator are covered with wood to match the painted cabinets. There are no cabinets above the counter tops but rather shelves to

display redware, tin and pottery. The cabinetry below the counter top consists of many storage drawers rather than the conventional door and shelving. A curtain on an iron rod swings away to reveal the oven; another



Contemporary kitchen appliances are hidden by sliding covers

swings away to access the microwave. A 2" raised walnut box slides apart to reveal the Jenn-air grill and stove top. A large walk-in pantry with an upright freezer is adjacent to the kitchen area. The keeping room with a walk-in fireplace and bake oven adjoins one side of the kitchen.

A small room in the southwest corner of the old section was designed to serve as a country pantry. It is the only room that has exposed logs and chinking. They can easily be seen through a coat of thin white paint done to resemble the old technique of white washing (combination of lime and water) the walls.

The Bohn home today has 5200 livable square feet. The original log part has a formal living room with a corner fireplace that abuts to a corresponding corner fireplace in the library. This was an instance where the house spoke to me. Both fireplaces were gone and only when removing the wallboard, which covered beaded board walls and ceiling, did I discover



A new corner fireplace replaces an absent original

indications of corner fireplaces (there were no beaded boards, simply gaps which had been covered with wallboard). An exciting discovery! The remaining rooms in the log structure include a formal dining room, country pantry, and a small powder room under the stairway.



Cooking fireplace and bread oven in the keeping room

The house would make a fabulous bed and breakfast or easily function for a home-based business. It is unique, and we hope someone will purchase it one day and enjoy it as much as we have.

Finally, I'd like to express gratitude to my good friend, Joannah Skucek, for her endeavors in helping with the composition of this article and for facilitating the photographs. Thank you!

