Spring Pioneer Cabin:
A Historic Report

Erika Prado
Jackson County Historic Society
12/3/2018
Contents:

The Spring Pioneer Cabin.................................................. pg. 3
Log Cabins in America...................................................... pg. 4
History of the Pioneer Cabin............................................. pg. 4-9
Bibliography........................................................................ pg. 10
The Spring Pioneer Cabin

The Spring Pioneer Cabin formerly known as the “Brady Cabin”, has been receiving close attention lately. The log cabin is located in Independence, Missouri and is believed to have been built during the mid-nineteenth century. Originally constructed at 130th E. Walnut St, the cabin currently lies at 187th N. Dodgion St, having been moved during the 1970’s as part of a preservation and restoration project lead by the Independence Study Club and volunteer citizens of Independence. At the present moment, the problems surrounding the Pioneer Cabin is the lack of a clear understanding of the historical background of the cabin’s construction history and ownership; with historical records only pointing out to the tenure of the land where it was built, but making no reference to the building. Likewise, the cabin’s history has a misconstrued narrative based on local folklore stories that have both mythicized the cabin’s history and generated skepticism towards its background. The following historical report gathers a formal and thorough data base that presents the available facts regarding the historical background of the cabin.

The Spring Pioneer Cabin has limited and scattered historical documentation. The available information on the cabin’s history come from primary and secondary source material including records of deeds, newspaper clippings and books found at the Jackson County Historical Society (JCHS). Census records were also consulted through the Ancestry online database. Additionally, some miscellaneous information was gathered after consulting the archives at the Missouri Valley Special Collections, the National Frontier Trails Museum and the Midwest Genealogy Center. Nonetheless, because no documentation was found on the property’s ownership or construction history, the only factual information this report is based on are the record of deeds and census records found at the Jackson County Historical Society (JCHS) and the National Historic Preservation Society.

This final report attempts to clarify the myth surrounding the Spring Pioneer cabin. In the past couple of months, the sources mentioned above plus additional information gathered, has helped in presenting an in depth narrative not only of the cabin’s history but of its symbolism and significance for the community of the city of Independence.
Log Cabins in America

The history of log cabin construction in America begins with the arrival of the early European colonists, particularly those who came from North and Central Europe. Finnish and Swedish settlers are credited with first introducing the horizontal log building technique in the colony of New Sweden (current day Pennsylvania) in 1638. Consequently during the eighteenth century, the new incoming wave of Eastern and Central Europeans, including Swiss and Germans arrived bringing their own log construction techniques. As more land was cleared in the East and the Midwest, the bigger the increase in log cabins. While the cabins were constructed as temporary shelter, the log construction technique was also applied for the building of commercial structures, schools, churches, barns and a variety of other buildings.¹

Archaeology professor Brain Coffey states that early nineteenth-century traveler accounts and guides for emigrants are in general agreement when describing the typical sequence of pioneer house construction. “First, a crude temporary log structure termed a "shanty" was erected. Then a more expansive log house was built were a family would stay for about six years. Finally a building frame out of stone or brick would replace the log dwelling.” Although this optimistic estimate is questionable, a non-log house was the ambition of most colonists and pioneers, when finances finally permitted its raising, usually the log house was converted into a barn or other out building.²

History of the Spring Pioneer Cabin

The city of Independence Missouri was founded on March 29, 1827. Located on the edge of the American frontier, the town was the trailhead for covered wagons heading across the plains for the dreamed-of and unsettled lands of Oregon and California. Settled by pioneers and immigrants who dreamed of building a life in a new place, nineteenth-century Independence - as much as the rest of America - presented a unique opportunity for the incomers: the prospect of occupying unclaimed territory.

Throughout this period, Independence not only welcomed the pioneers who settled, but embraced their different cultures, lifestyles and flourished with them. The arrival of these forerunners influenced many aspects of the political and socio-economic lifestyle of the early

nineteenth-century. They reflected their ancestry and culture not only through the many customs they spread through the American territory, but particularly through the material culture they left behind. As previously mentioned, log cabin construction in the United States took place with the arrival of European pioneers from Northern Europe. However, the influx of these immigrants during the mid-nineteenth century boosted the construction technique and turned it into a staple architectural characteristic of the frontier towns. For example, in the city of Independence most of the early houses constructed by pioneers were made out of hewn logs (roughly shaped logs). The first courthouse and the first jail-house of Independence are some of the earliest examples of public hewn log house constructions. While residential log house construction took place since the city’s foundation, it peaked during the mid-1830’s-1860.

The Spring Pioneer Cabin is a typical representation of a traditional nineteenth century one story log cabin. The cabin features a gable roof with shingles, a brick chimney and walls made out of hewn logs. The original floor structure has been replaced by a concrete slab, thus no information is available regarding the original flooring and substructure. The Spring Pioneer Cabin, formerly known as the “Brady Cabin” is believed to have been constructed prior to the Civil War era, and the assertion is corroborated after extrapolating crucial information from records of deeds and miscellaneous documentation found both at the JCHS and the National Frontier Trails Museum. The price increment on land lot 116 (parcel of land where the cabin was built) was compared and contrasted between the decades of 1830-1860, when it was identified that:

The first land lot sale in Independence took place on July 1829. While parcels of land were being sold in Independence since 1827, the first recording of lot 116 being sold appears in 1829 when the county found itself in the need of money. It directed Commissioner Samuel C. Owens, of the seat of Justice of Jackson County, to sell surplus lots. Thus Samuel C. Owens sold Lot 116 in 1829 to Samuel Newton, its first owner. The parcel of land was sold for $10.00 and is noted to have enclosed “eighty five hundredths of an acre” (approximately 37,028 ft²). Samuel Newton resold lot 116 eight years later in 1837 to Henry W. Younger, father of Cole Younger (the famous outlaw of the James-Younger gang). Henry Younger was married to Bersheba Fristoe, a local woman from Independence whose family owned many land lots in the area. Together, they purchased Lot 116 as well as 117, 118 and 119 from Samuel Newton “each containing eighty five hundredths of an acre [...] Also lots 135, 136 containing 2 acres and
twenty five hundredths of an acre more or less”. Early 1970’s newspaper clippings found at the JCHS claim that the Younger’s were the ones who built the log cabin and that “more than likely Cole Younger was born there”. While these claims are not based on factual evidence, in this investigative report, land lot purchases documented in the records of deeds were compared in order to assess if the property price increase between these years can be attributed to inflation and property appreciation in the region, or if it could be attributed to the addition of a building such as a log cabin.

The first group under analysis were the Owens-Newton purchase of 1829, the Newton-Younger purchase of 1835 and the Younger- Kritser purchase of 1847. First, in order to compare the property value of Lot 116 over the years, the property value was normalized on a per acre price. Thus when Samuel Newton purchased lot 116 in 1829 and paid $10.00 for it, it brought the price to 11.76 $/acre. Similarly when Newton sold lots 116 through 119 and 135 and 136 to Henry Younger for $150.00 in 1835, the price increased 2.27 times to 26.7 $/acre. Finally, when Younger sold lots 116 through 119 for $333.33 to Martin Kritser in 1847 the price had increased 3.68 times to 98.3 $/acre. Considering that the average price to build a log cabin in the first half of the nineteenth century was $100.00, a hypotheses can be formulated that the cabin was in fact built during the time the land belonged to Henry Younger. The price increase of the land minus the cabin would have been 2.6 times higher and the difference to the 3.68 increase mentioned above could be attributed to the addition of a log cabin to the property. Furthermore, the 2.6 increase in land price over a period of 12 years is consistent and proportional to the previous valuation of the land of 2.27 times between the 6 years period of 1829 to 1835.

A similar analysis was done with a second group the Kritser- Dougherty purchase of 1847 and the Dougherty- Brady purchase of 1857. On April 19th 1847, Martin L. Kritser, a merchant and grocer who conducted most of his businesses with the Santa Fe Trail trade and his wife Mary Jane Kritser, purchased substantial land holdings in the Missouri area, among these Lots 116 through 119 from Henry W. Younger. According to the National Historic Preservation Society’s documentation on Martin L. Kritser, it appears the couple constructed a brick house on lot 117. The house which is referenced now a days as the “Kritser House” and is listed as one of

---

Independence’s historic buildings, accordingly the brick house should have been built on the lot next to the Spring Pioneer Cabin.

Consequently, after a closer look into the records of deeds, it was discovered that when Martin Kritser and his wife sold land Lot 116 in 1857, ten years after its purchase, only a portion of lot 116 was sold to the new owner Charles Dougherty. The warranty deed of the purchase reads as follows: “Beginning 165 feet West of the Northeast corner of lot 116 […] and running thence West with the South line of Walnut street 82 ½ feet, thence South 165 feet, thence East 82 ½ feet, thence North 165 feet to the place of beginning.”\(^5\) With a purchase price of $400.00, the above mentioned lot encompasses an area of 0.312 acres, bringing the price per acre to $1280/acre. Performing a similar exercise as the ones listed on the previous paragraph, the price per acre increase during this 10 year period was 13.7 times higher. This substantial increase in land value compared to the steadier increments that the three previous owners saw, can be attributed to a number of factors including, but not limited to, the Santa Fe, Oregon and California trails trade that saw a substantial increase of merchandise and immigrant traffic on the eve of the Civil War, naturally increasing the property value on the region. As such, it would be unreasonable to fully attribute this exponential increase in price to the addition of an edifice to the property. However, a second hypothesis can be proposed in which the cabin was already built on the 0.312 acres of land at the time it was sold for $400.00. It can be deduced that a sub lot was an attractive purchase if a cabin was included with the land, thus further justifying the higher price tag of the purchase. Finally, this claim can be supported by the Dougherty-Brady purchase which took place only three months after. Charles Dougherty sold the 0.312 acres of land to Henry Brady and his family, who happened to own this parcel of Lot 116 for the following thirty three years until it was sold to their eldest son Charles. Since the Spring Pioneer Cabin was known as the Brady Cabin prior to its restoration and relocation, it is safe to deduce that the 0.312 acres of land that were sold in 1857 included the log cabin.

In conclusion the evidence presented above increases the likelihood that the Spring Pioneer Cabin may have been built during the tenures of either Henry W. Younger or Martin L. Kritser in the years spanning from 1835-1857. At the same time, while the evidence does not support the Examiner and Inter City News newspaper clippings from the early 1970’s claiming

that “Cole Younger was born in the cabin”, it does support the claim that Henry W. Younger, may have been built the log cabin.\textsuperscript{6}

The final contribution to the evidence presented above makes reference to the cabin’s original building materials. After a closer inspection at the cabin’s logs and additional reading of secondary source material on log cabin components in the nineteenth century, this research has been provided with a unique resource for dating estimation of the cabin. To begin with, it was found out that the structural lumber used in the walls lack any type of grade stamps typical of manufactured lumber from the late nineteenth-century onwards. Moreover, there are clear visual signs that the lumber was hand cut, as opposed to the more standardized mill cutting processes common in the late nineteenth-century. These simple but tangible assertions support the hypothesis postulated above that the cabin was built in the first half of the eighteenth century.

To conclude this report, it is important to point out the effort that the Greater Women’s Federation Club (Independence Study Club) made to preserve and restore the log cabin during the early seventies. The log cabin’s restoration project took place in 1973 with a funding proposal presented by the Independence Study Club, and the help of local volunteers who made possible the disassembling and later rebuilding of the cabin in its current location. The restoration was documented in local newspaper clippings and a scrapbook made by volunteer ladies of the club. They decided to rename the cabin from \textit{Brady Cabin} to \textit{Spring Pioneer Cabin}, as it was more appropriate considering the fact that it was to be moved next to the recently inaugurated historical pioneer spring. Thus, the Independence Study Club’s intervention on the cabin is probably the most important to date, for it encouraged the community to participate in saving a historical landmark, as well as to try to find out information on the cabin’s background history. At the same time the restoration and relocation project of the Spring Pioneer Cabin brought back many local folklore narratives related to the cabin’s history. While many of these narratives helped boost the interest of local and outside people on the cabin’s preservation, they also generated a loss of credibility on the cabin’s historic authenticity; distorting its background to the point where it became hard to believe that any of these narratives could have been true. For instance as mentioned above, many claimed that Cole Younger was born there, that the cabin was built as a slave quarter, or that a local bootlegger lived there with his family. However, it is

fair to state that while local folklore has the tendency of blurring the line that exists between fact and myth, it also has the ability to keep the citizens and outsiders interest “alive”. The symbolism and significance myth can generate on a particular material culture object can have a profound effect on the relationship it has with the community that surrounds it, as is the case with the log cabin.

Last but not least it is important to state the importance the intervention of the Historic Preservation department of the city of Independence, has on the log cabin. Their assessment of the cabin’s building materials such as the conclusion that the structure retains around fifty percent of the original building materials and the general intention of wanting to preserve the structure, is what has made it possible to date to keep the cabin intact and at its current location. Nevertheless, while their structural assessment has been able to determine how much of the original building still remains, they were not able to reach a conclusion as to the date the cabin was built and who were the owners at the time.

The Spring Pioneer Cabin is likely to remain an ongoing investigation project until some more concise evidence appears. The available primary and secondary source material consulted allow researchers to find accurate information on the parcel of land where the cabin was supposedly built, but do not stipulate any specific information about the cabin itself. Miscellaneous information found at different locations helped highlight aspects of the cabin’s possible history, but once again, it proved to be insufficient.

In all, it is perhaps important to acknowledge that when few factual evidence is found on a particular subject, the approach towards it should change too. Is a structure worth saving because of the historic significance it has? Or because of its relationship with relevant people? Or rather is it important to preserve it because of the significance its presence has contributed to the community. As scholar Wayne Erbsen states in his book Log Cabin Pioneers, “The cabin has stood and stands still, as the very symbol of the frontier. It commemorates the times of a “Simpler America” when the values of hard work, honesty, shrewdness and self-reliance, were adopted by early immigrants and pioneers, as the cornerstone for the materialization of the American Dream.”

Bibliography


Hale, Donald. The Cole Younger Scrapbook. s.n. 2002
