



The Story Behind the Historical Society's Log Cabin Museum

For many, many years, a white two-story farmhouse stood at the corner of Veteran's Memorial Parkway and Highway K. A typical, unassuming midwestern style farmhouse, it was known in recent decades as "the Patton Farm." Up until the 1990s when O'Fallon's growth rate exploded, the Patton Farm stood at what was then the edge of economic development in O'Fallon; beyond it lay miles and miles of pasture land, wheat and corn fields.

In 1974, the O'Fallon Historical Society was organized, largely due to the good-natured prodding, cajoling and relentless urging of Raleigh Jessup. Raleigh was a member of the Board of Aldermen at the time, and became an advocate for preserving the city's history. Aware that the nation's Bicentennial was two short years away, Raleigh began interviewing some of O'Fallon's longtime residents and copying their treasured photographs in preparation. If the nation's history was to be honored, Raleigh was determined that O'Fallon's history should have its own moment in the sun.

The Society started with approximately 300 charter members who met in the Fellowship Hall of the Williams Memorial Methodist Church. Its first officers were installed on July 4, 1974. As the Society's first president, Bill Westhoff used a gavel that he himself turned out of a post from the old Krekel house.

The following year National Super Markets, Inc. purchased the Patton Farm to build a new grocery store. When they began demolishing the old farmhouse, they discovered a log cabin underneath the siding. It wasn't uncommon for settlers to build a log cabin and then apply siding over the logs years later as materials, and money, were more available. To their credit, they halted demolition and contacted the folks at City Hall, who in turn contacted Raleigh Jessup. National Super Markets agreed to donate the cabin to the Historical Society if they would agree to dismantle and move it.

The newly formed Historical Society was eager to take on the log cabin as a project for the nation's Bicentennial. They formed the O'Fallon American Bicentennial Committee and appealed to the entire community to join in. Bill and Kathryn Westhoff had some previous experience in renovating a log cabin on their vacation property so Bill headed up the project and chaired the Bicentennial Committee. On April 16, 1975, representatives from the Historical Society and National Super Markets, Inc. gathered as the old Patton House changed hands for the last time to become the property of the O'Fallon Historical Society. At the first Bicentennial planning meeting, also held in the Fellowship Hall of Williams Memorial Methodist Church, on April 24, 1975, Bill said, "All the organizations in our city,



planning and working together, will make the O'Fallon celebration in 1976 one of the best in the nation—but we must get started, and soon!"

The Origins of the Cabin

The earliest records of the property date to 1840 showing that Samuel Keithly and his wife Nancy owned the 73-acre property, filing a deed with the St. Charles County Recorder of Deeds on October 1st of that year. Having received it from the United States Government Land Office, possibly through a land grant, they then conveyed ownership of the property to Marvin Keithly the same day. On March 27, 1886, Marvin Keithly then deeded the property to Appleton Bradley and he and his wife Jennie held the property for four years, deeding it in turn to Henry Kirchoff and his wife Mary Ann on March 15, 1870. On March 22, 1884, the Kirchoff's deeded the property to J. M. Woods through a quit claim deed. From J. M. Woods and his wife Eliza, the property then went to W. W. Pitman and his wife Ellen on April 15, 1887 and then to Bernard and Mary Menne on November 21, 1891.

According to Bill Westhoff who supervised the project, the log cabin was built in the mid to late 1860s though we cannot now be certain of the source of this information. If he's correct, it was probably Marvin Keithly who built the log cabin. During the demolition, Bill Westhoff encountered a piece of the weatherboard siding with a long-ago carpenter's note dating the siding of the log cabin at 1892. Therefore, it is likely that it was Bernard and Mary Menne who put the weatherboard siding over the log cabin.

Larry Lindemann, whose parents Bill and Mabel, ran a café on Main Street in the 1940s, recalled when his family moved here from Nebraska during the Depression. Said Larry, "It was 1935. We had two travel trucks that moved us down here—horses, farm machinery, furniture, husband and wife, four kids and two drivers." The William Menne family lived on the property at the time and encountered the family as they arrived in town via the old highway. Despite having thirteen children of their own, they took all six members of the Lindemann family into their home for the night.

The property passed from the Menne family to the Patton family when Bernard



and Mary's daughter, Emelia, and her husband Thomas Patton helped their son Richard purchase the property on February 8, 1939. Richard C. Patton and his wife, Rose Emge Patton, raised their family in the home and were the last ones to occupy it. Richard is pictured here in front of the house with sons Paul and Harlan and daughter Pat.

Richard and Rose Patton had thirteen children of their own; two sons died young—Norbert at age eight and Harland at age seventeen. It was Carl and Pat who discovered the log cabin. The home's two front rooms, the living room and dining room, were the log cabin portion of the house and Pat recalled that they'd always been curious

about the fact that those rooms were always cooler than the rest of the house. Pat recalled that her mother had said many times how much she wanted the doorway between the front two rooms to be an arch. One day Carl decided to cut the doorway into an arch for his mother and using a simple crosscut saw, Carl and Pat soon found themselves up against the solid oak timbers. They'd discovered the log cabin and now knew why those front rooms were cooler—the oak logs provided excellent insulation!

The Project Gets Underway

In May of 1975, Bill Westhoff approached the Board of Aldermen to obtain permission to locate the log cabin museum in Civic Park, proposing the high ground on the south side of Civic Park Drive across from the Civic Hall building and the swimming pool. Though Mayor Del Peters favored the idea, city superintendent, Emil "Ducky" Ohmes, pointed out that there was no water or sewer to that area, the closest service being a thousand feet away at the swimming pool. The issue was tabled for the time being but the circle drive behind Civic Hall was soon decided upon as the best location.

Several other issues regarding the Bicentennial were discussed at the same meeting and finally Mr. Westhoff got around to asking the Board to appropriate money to the Committee to help move the log home. The newspaper coverage read, "Although sympathetic to Westhoff, Mayor Peters urged the historian to seek financial assistance from civic groups. With that, Major M. E. Gorris, police administrator, offered to donate \$50 from the police department slush fund. Westhoff stated, 'Good. We'll know where to go when we need money.'" Later on, in December of 1976, the O'Fallon Lions Club donated a very generous \$500 toward the log cabin's restoration.

A groundbreaking was held in Civic Park on July 4th, 1975 at the site where the log cabin was to be reconstructed. The goal was to have the log cabin museum open for visitors on July 4th of the Bicentennial year. Volunteers then began the knuckle-skinning work of stripping the weatherboard siding from the house. Once stripped, the logs were tagged with numbered metal tags to ensure the accurate placement of the logs at their new site.

In November of 1975, two trucks from O'Fallon Lumber and Supply, complete with long-reaching hydraulic hoists, lifted the roof off the log home and set it adjacent to the house, allowing the volunteers to dismantle the walls which, as one newspaper article said, "retain traces of the plaster and whitewash they carried when Lincoln was president."



The concrete foundation for the log home's new location in Civic Park was poured early in 1976 and assembly soon began on the walls. As July 4th approached, however, the project was showing signs of delay due to



hot weather and a shortage of manpower needed to complete the job. The target date for completion was moved to October of 1976.

On April 11, 1976, the trucks from O’Fallon Lumber were again called into service to move the roof from the original site to the new location in the park. As Joanie Pieper closed out the Arbor Day Celebration in Civic Park, attendees looked on as the truck bearing the roof rolled across the parking lot, headed in their direction. A Sunday was chosen for the move in order to minimize the disruption of traffic. The truck brought the roof straight down Main Street to the Park and electric lines were moved along the way to allow passage, disrupting service to homes along the route for a short while. The hydraulic hoists lifted the roof off the flat bed truck, and driver



Kenny Lang carefully maneuvered it into position over the walls of the log cabin. Slowly and cautiously it was lowered and—miraculously—fit in place perfectly!

Though the Society wanted to recreate the log home as accurately as possible, some concessions had to be made. For starters, the foundation and basement were not historically authentic but necessary for preserving the integrity of the structure for many years to come. The original log home was a two-story structure, but limitations in manpower and funding meant that only a one-story building would be feasible. The Society also opted to add a fireplace and chimney that wasn’t present on the original structure, though stones from the original foundation were used to build both.

While work on the cabin proceeded, the Bicentennial Committee selected a theme for O’Fallon’s Bicentennial celebration: “A Bit of Yesterday for the Kids of Tomorrow.”

From the beginning, Bill Westhoff wanted the log cabin to be the combined effort of all organizations, individuals and businesses so as work neared completion, another newspaper article (date unknown) appeared giving credit where credit was due. The following people were listed as having helped with the demolition, moving and reconstruction of the log cabin:

- The City of O’Fallon furnished equipment and Bill Leverett, city employee, dug the basement.
- The Society paid for the concrete but the labor on the forms, footing and foundation were courtesy of Gene Cokley Construction Co.

- O'Fallon Lumber Co. furnished equipment for moving the cabin. Driving and labor were by Lee Bauer, Ken Lang and Trip Koechner.
- Bill Holder of AAA Plumbing donated and installed bathroom fixtures, hot water heater and plumbing supplies.
- Mo-Con donated the concrete for the basement floor and Jerry Dames, Rick Fohr and Leo Nanney donated their time finishing the basement.
- Marlin Broeker assisted with digging the sewer.
- Don & Jerry's Water Proofing water-proofed the basement.
- O'Fallon Garage made their fork lift available on many occasions, as did O'Fallon Lumber.
- Electric boxes were provided by Bill Steiner.
- O'Fallon Firemen, O'Fallon Police Department and O'Fallon Asphalt Paving donated labor and equipment.
- Mel Schneider Construction put on sheeting and repaired the roof.
- G. & P Ditching did the grading around the museum.
- Keeven Sod put down sod around the museum once it was completed.
- Roof shingles, materials and labor, were donated by Frank Forst.
- Back roof was installed by Bob Besselman; shingles were purchased by Society.
- The concrete chinking was completed by Jerry Dames.
- The doors were hand made by Bill Westhoff. He obtained the windows from an old house in St. Peters.
- The furnace was furnished and installed by Bob Schulte.
- The electricity was done by Glennon Schulte.

Many individuals were given credit for their volunteer work as well. They included:

Raleigh Jessup	Ralph and Joan Pieper
Mark McMahan	Gary Stephens
Bill and Lynn Orf	Al Toland
Matt McMahan	Corinne Becker
Joey and Ricky Wilder	Rosie Moorhead
Jimmy Pieper	Kathryn Westhoff
Jim Ballmann	Gerald Dowler
Conrad Kuester	Whitt Schamma
Deen Krattle	Don Sanger
Jene E. House	Rick Moore
Scott Woelfel	Stacey Woelfel
Bob Phillips	Marty Henderson
Nancy Miller	Tom Wilder
George Dames	Clyde Ebersmeyer
Dick Flecke	

With celebrations long over, the O'Fallon Bicentennial Committee dissolved and at the March 7, 1977 meeting, chairman Bill Westhoff presented the O'Fallon Historical Society with a check for \$1,347.50 representing proceeds from the committee's activities.

The log cabin's targeted completion date of October 1976 was long past, and though the log home was assembled, a lot of work remained to be done. A workday was held in March and volunteers hauled rock and brick out of the basement of the old log home to move to the new site for construction of the fireplace. The workers included George Dames, Bill Westhoff, Raleigh Jessup, Al Knobbe, Paul Weston, Bill Leverett, Bob Englehart, Ron Cypret, Dan Krattli, Glen Samek, Gavin Samek, Gerald Dowler and Rhoe Pipes.



By June, 1977, the stone fireplace was completed. Although a stonemason had been contracted to build it, for reasons unknown, they simply left the job unfinished and as of this writing, members could not remember the reason for their exit, nor whether or not they were paid for the job. Ralph Pieper and his son, Jimmy, finished the top two feet of the chimney. According to a Society newsletter, the fireplace was "topped by a mantle of an authentic Fort Zumwalt log!" Only a few logs remained on the site of Jacob Zumwalt's Fort and, determined that the few that remained would be somehow preserved, Raleigh Jessup conspired with O'Fallon's mayor, Del Peters, to claim them. At that time, the park was the property of the State of Missouri, which denied Raleigh's request to remove the logs. Undaunted by a ruling from the State's Parks Department (which had long had an adversarial relationship with the City of O'Fallon where Zumwalt's Fort was concerned) Raleigh and Mayor Peters borrowed a truck and made a moonlight visit to the park to "rescue" the remaining logs. As told, one was installed as the mantle above the fireplace.



Three workdays were scheduled for October and the following people were thanked in a newspaper article for their dedication:

"A crew comprised of Jerry Dames, Lawrence Huber, Jim Menne, Ted Kiefer, Jim Weeks and Ed Marshall completed the plastering of the logs. Also helping on these workdays were Bill and Kathryn Westhoff, Raleigh Jessup, Rosie Moorhead, Joan, Ralph and Jim Pieper, George Dames, Janet, Jim, Tim and Julie Wies. The doors, frames and windows were installed so the building is closed in for the winter. Bob Schulte of Schulte Heating donated a furnace for he basement to keep the pipes from freezing. Glennon Schulte roughed in the electric and furnished the materials. The city of O'Fallon donated the sand to mix the plaster. Joe Wolf Jr. and son sawed the extra logs for use in the fireplace. Mrs. Paul Westhoff donated two live trees: one for the Christmas tree inside the Log Cabin, and one to plant outdoors."

The November 30, 1977 edition of the St. Charles Journal announced the completion of the log cabin and the Historical Society's plans for the organization's

Christmas party. The first Christmas Party was held On December 5, 1977. Thirty-eight “brave souls” showed up despite blowing snow and extreme cold, made all the worse by the fact that the log cabin was as yet heated only by the fireplace. After enjoying a traditional Christmas feast, small gifts were exchanged, and members took turns placing a traditional ornament on the tree. A newspaper article described the festivities:



“Rosella Moorhead read the Christmas story from Luke: 2-1.20 from a Bible given her from Susie Keithly who was her Sunday School teacher in 1925. As Mrs. Moorhead read passages, Betty Jessup, Joan Pieper, Emily Schamma, and Lynn Orf sang Christmas songs to the accompaniment of Twila Harshbarger on the old pump organ purchased by the Society from the E. A. Keithly estate.”

In November of 1978, Boatmen’s Bank of O’Fallon, originating in 1903 as the Bank of O’Fallon, contributed \$500 to the Historical Society. Senior Vice President Orville Maher presented the check to commemorate the bank’s Diamond Jubilee and to “emphasize the bank’s role in the community over the years.” The funds were earmarked for the construction of the log cabin’s front porch. Once the porch was built, members of the O’Fallon Lions Club volunteered their time to shingle the roof.

All the while, the Society had begun collecting antiques and collectibles for display in the log cabin. Some items were donated from the members’ own collection; some were purchased at auctions and estate sales; some were loaned to the Society for display. It soon became obvious that if the log home were to serve as a full-blown museum for the display of O’Fallon artifacts, it would have to be expanded.

Over the next few years, supplies were accumulated that would allow an addition to be built in a way that would be aesthetically compatible with the log cabin. Various notes throughout the Society’s minutes mark the acquisitions. In May of 1981, lumber was obtained “from the barn on the John M. Keithly property.”

The June, 1982 Newsletter announced another financial windfall:

“The addition (to the log cabin) looks as though it may finally become a reality as the O’Fallon Historical Society has received over \$1,900 from the now dissolved Hub Organization. That organization was formed in 1966 to serve high schoolers in the area with wholesome recreational and service activities. Hub had property on Pieper Road (now the Penrod Rest Home) and sold it in 1976 when the organization discontinued operations. The members of Hub’s board felt that the young people of the O’Fallon area as well as future generations would be served well by their donation to the O’Fallon Historical Society. We thank them!”

Another note, not dated, relayed another workday:

“On Sunday, Jan. 29, twenty-one members of the O’Fallon Historical Society met to remove the cedar paneling from the old Dorato’s restaurant now belonging to the City of O’Fallon. The city fathers agreed to allow the society to remove the paneling for use as the ceiling in the Log Cabin, “as well as paneling for the walls of the meeting room.” The following were present: Bob, Jean, Tim, Jerry and Jeff Besselmann, Bill & Kathryn Westhoff, Raleigh and Betty Jessup, Ralph, Joan and Jim Pieper, Jim, Jan, Tom and Julie Wies, Bill and Lynn Orf, Whitt and Emily Schamma and Eugene Trussell.” Interestingly, this cedar paneling was never used—at least not in the log cabin. While the workers went off to retrieve their trucks to load up the paneling, someone evidently decided they could put it to good use because when the workers returned, it was gone.

The Society’s Happy New Year letter for 1977 included the following note: “The utility room and bathroom in the basement have been enclosed with lumber from the shed at the original site of the log cabin. It is hoped some of the old lumber from the chicken house can be used to finish the basement. The front windows have been installed.”

In April of 1984, a newspaper article announced the Society’s plans to finally expand the log cabin by 600 square feet to house a museum of O’Fallon area memorabilia. To stimulate donations, the Society created a plaque, to be affixed to the museum upon the completion of the expansion, containing the names of all those who donate \$50 or more to the project. As of the time of the article, the society had donations of \$50 or more from thirty individuals and organizations.



At the March 1984 meeting it was decided to accept a bid to build an addition to the log house. Mike Liston Construction Company’s bid was accepted for the 20 x 30 foot addition, which included a full basement, plywood on the exterior walls (to be covered with old barn wood at a later date) and a roof with wood shingles, matching the roof on the existing cabin. The cost of the project was \$10,526.23. To pay for the project the Society used \$1,500 savings account and used its five certificates of deposit valuing \$6,345 as collateral for a loan. Upon their maturity the following November, they were used to pay off the loan and raised an additional \$2,500 for the balance of the loan.

Over the next few years, The Society continued holding fundraising events: quilt raffles and craft fairs, book fairs, bake sales, and attic sales. All the while, members kept out a sharp eye for appropriate and, perhaps just as importantly, free materials. The Society’s July 1984 newsletter stated that they “have some old barn wood from this area and have a promise of more. This is to be added to the exterior walls of the museum to make it blend in with the log house.”

With the main structure of the addition in place, work continued on the interior of the museum. The March 1987 newsletter announced the following progress: “Raleigh (Jessup) and Whitt (Schamma) have been busy putting down the flooring in the museum

addition. The boards came from the old Rothermich home on Guthrie Road. Whitt saw it being torn down and he and Raleigh helped to remove the boards we needed.”

The ceiling boards in the basement meeting room came from Vic and Al Westhoff’s home out on Hoff Road. The scavenging went beyond just the building materials, however. Raleigh secured the tall glass-enclosed cases from the Bushnell Country Museum, located on the south side of Highway 70 between St. Peters and St. Charles, when it closed. He and another member managed to get the cases loaded on to the back of a pick up truck and though they bounced in the back all the way to O’Fallon, none of the glass doors were broken.



The large oak display cases came from Westhoff Mercantile and the shorter painted cases came from the space that a jewelry store once occupied, the southernmost rooms of Westhoff’s, now McGurk’s. They may have originated with another jeweler in town, Gil Shephard.

The entire time the log cabin and its addition were being built, members solicited furniture and collectibles of all kinds from O’Fallon’s citizens. However, people were understandably reluctant to relinquish their treasures and donations came in very slowly. Many of the items in the front rooms of the log cabin were purchased at auctions and estate sales. The collection continued to build, however, as O’Fallon’s native sons and daughters passed away and families donated some of their personal affects, perhaps as a way of keeping their memory alive.

The Museum Gets a Face Lift

When O’Fallon celebrated its Sesquicentennial in 2006, the Historical Society’s Log Cabin Museum garnered a bit of attention once again. Because portions of the original construction included second-hand materials and was most often done on a shoe-string budget, some areas of the log cabin were showing signs of wear after only thirty or so years.

The stairway from the street to the basement meeting room entrance was still the original dirt and railroad tie steps that were installed in the late 1970s. Badly deteriorated, they presented a safety hazard to the senior members and visitors. Equally hazardous was the front porch, which was now sagging and bounced in accordance with the number of people occupying it at any given moment. In addition, some of the original barn siding on the rear of the museum was in need of replacement.



Funds were obtained from the O’Fallon Convention and Visitor’s Bureau to replace the

damaged siding and rebuild the front porch. The City agreed to have its Parks and Recreation Department rebuild the side stairway—a brick-stamped concrete staircase complete with railing for safe navigation.

Perhaps even more important, the cabin had never been air-conditioned, and precious photos and documents were threatened by variances in temperature and humidity. Tom Ginnever, Jr., son of the gentleman for whom the street is named, arranged for the Society to have new heat and air conditioning units installed at an extremely reduced cost through the generosity of his employer, Trane. Local resident Jim Block completely updated the wiring in the log cabin and Dave Swinger dug the trench and ran a new service wire from the pole to the building. In 2008, the O’Fallon Convention and Visitor’s Bureau again came through for us, providing us with funds for a new roof.



With Sesquicentennial festivities behind us, the Society began revamping the Museum, which had grown quite congested and disorganized in the ensuing years. A committee consisting of Cheryl Hibbeler, Jim Karll, Ann Schulte, Dottie and Herb Schulte, and Lewis and Pat Swinger, spent the winter of 2007-2008 updating the fixtures, inventorying items and completely revamping the displays.

Regular workdays were scheduled for Tuesday evenings and Thursday afternoons when the more senior members of the Society helped by recalling what items had been donated by whom and obtained by what means, information previously undocumented.

A mountain of newspapers that had collected over the years was scanned and relevant articles were clipped for copying and preservation. The Society purchased four second-hand filing cabinets from the St. Charles County Historical Society and quickly filled them with documents and information that had heretofore been scattered throughout corners of the basement and museum. The photo display boards that Raleigh Jessup had originally built from scrap lumber and mounted to the center cases were removed to provide a more open atmosphere. Though the committee at times cringed at the thought of changing anything that had been done through the good works of those original members, they themselves unanimously agreed that the changes were “long overdue.”



Jim Karll, Herb Schulte and Lewis Swinger installed new lighting fixtures in the basement meeting room as well as the museum. Lighting was also installed, fixtures courtesy of Alderman Mark Perkins, in the display cases, providing greater visibility of

the items stored within despite the badly scuffed, but treasured, original glass in the two oak cases.

The displays were rearranged to give increased protection to the more delicate items and to make it easier for visitors to “self-tour” the museum. Photos and relics were grouped according to subject, and text boards were provided in each section giving the visitor relevant information on the items on display.

There are quite a few treasures in the log cabin museum, and something for everyone. Those who are native to O’Fallon enjoy the many photos of our city’s earlier businesses, schools, and homes and the people they so fondly recall. Those who are new to our city enjoy seeing the old bathtub, the bed built to fold up for travel on a covered wagon, and the early music box with its copper, punched-hole discs. Children of all ages love hearing the brass bells that were once draped over the neck of the horses delivering the mail on the rural routes and no one ever seems to miss seeing the permanent wave machine that clearly resembles some kind of early torture device.



Though the Society’s membership decreased in both number and vitality for a while, recent years have seen a renewed dedication to the Society’s mission. The sign that Bill Westhoff, Jr. made in the 1970s still hangs on the log cabin’s front porch, promising to “preserve history for future generations.” We intend to keep that promise.



Compiled by Pat Swinger in July, 2009
Some photos courtesy of Pat Patton Button

