

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1 Name of Property: Pioneer Log Cabin
Location: Warren County, Kentucky

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Narrative Description:

The Pioneer Log Cabin (WAB 1085) is a one-story log-revival building, which was completed in 1939. It is rectangular in shape and is similar in plan to a traditional double pen house. The walls are constructed of log, the foundation and chimneys are stone, and the gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The deliberately rustic look continues in the interior, with wide board floors, unfinished log walls, exposed wooden beams, and massive stone fireplaces. The cabin sits on a large lawn on the campus of Western Kentucky University. The longer sides of the cabin face east and west, and the shorter gable ends face north and south. The front door faces east, and the nearest road is Kentucky Street. The cabin is in excellent condition and has experienced only minimal alterations.

The cabin's grassy yard is approximately one fifth of an acre in size. The yard is bordered by a service road and the Kentucky Library and Museum to the east, dormitories to the south, University Drive to the west, and Kentucky Street to the north. Remnants of the old chestnut split-rail fence that once enclosed the cabin's yard still remain along portions of the yard's northern and eastern sides. A stone walkway runs from the service road to the eastern door. Reminders of the cabin's museum origins remain in the yard, including a stone stile-block and an iron tripod for hanging a large wash-kettle.

The cabin has a continuous foundation made of fieldstone. A newspaper account from the 1930s claims that the foundation stones were recycled "from a dilapidated cabin in Allen County."¹ Due to a slight slope, the visible part of the foundation varies from one foot in height at the northeastern corner, to two feet at the southwestern corner.

The walls are constructed of poplar logs. The sides of the logs are hewn flat, and the tops and bottoms of the logs vary from flat to slightly curved. The logs are double notched at the corners. They vary in height from eight to eleven inches, and in width from six to seven inches. The longest logs, found on the east and west sides of the cabin, are approximately forty-four feet long. The logs on the north and south sides are approximately twenty-six feet at the longest, becoming increasingly shorter in the gable section. According to numerous accounts, the logs were cut on or near the birthplace of then-college President Henry Hardin Cherry.² The space between the logs is filled with small pieces of wood and daubed with concrete. The exterior wall logs have been stained or painted light brown.

The cabin has an asphalt-shingle gable roof which was installed in the 1960s. Originally, the roof was made of white oak boards laid over a wooden sub roof.³ The overhang of the roof extends about two feet on all sides of the building. The underside of the overhang is covered with beadboard in some places and plywood in others. On the eastern and western sides, round cedar rafters extend to the edge of the overhang. A rustic wooden gutter, constructed out of two long boards joined together to form a v-shaped trough, is attached to perpendicular boards which are attached to each of the cedar rafters. On the gable ends, the overhang partially envelops the chimneys. Regularly spaced thick round poles extend about six inches out of the gable walls just below the roofline. It is unclear whether these are merely decorative or structural.

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The eastern side is visually divided into four even parts. A door is located in the center of the wall. There are two sixteen-light, casement style windows. They are located on either side of the door, roughly halfway between the door and the end of the wall. The panes of the southern window have been cut to accommodate an air-conditioning unit. A small raised masonry platform constructed of randomly sized rectangular stone blocks serves as a porch.

The northern and southern gable ends are mirror images of one another. They both have an asymmetrically placed exterior chimney on their eastern sides and a window to the west. The massive chimneys are constructed of rectangular blocks of rough cut stone. Iron tie rods anchor the chimneys securely to the house. The window on the southern gable end is a sixteen-light casement window. An opening in the foundation on the southern gable end, covered by a wooden door, provides access to the crawl space underneath the house. The window on the northern side has been altered. It has three lights, is fixed rather than casement style, and holds an air-conditioning unit.

The western side of the house is pierced by six openings. Two doors are placed close together slightly to the south of the center of the wall. A small six-light casement window flanks each door. Larger sixteen-light casement windows are found near the ends of the wall. A platform similar to that on the western side is reached by a broad stone masonry step.

The cabin's interior is divided into three sections. The northern half of the house is taken up by one large room. A small kitchen, a bathroom, and a back hall make up the central portion of the house. The southern end is bisected into two rooms by a north-south wall. The kitchen was carved out of the southeastern room in 1967 by erecting a new east-west wall.

The interior of the cabin conveys an intentionally rustic feeling. The four exterior walls are unfinished log. The interior walls, which divide the house into rooms, appear to be log, but are actually hewn boards, approximately two and a half inches thick. Unlike the exterior wall-logs, these boards have regular and exaggerated axe or adz marks. Both the exterior and interior walls are chinked with concrete. Wide-board wooden floors and exposed hand-hewn beams further contribute to the rustic feeling.

Fireplaces are found on the end walls of the northern and southeastern rooms. Hearths made of blocks of stone extend out about two-and-a-half feet into the room. The fireplaces are lined with firebrick. Although the fireplaces themselves are not especially large, they are made to look massive by a facing of large blocks of finely cut stone. This facing extends about two feet on either side of the fireplace and approximately six feet up the wall. The stone of the facing varies in color from light grey to dark brown. A 1936 newspaper article suggests that these stones, or other stones used in building the cabin, might have come from another campus building that was torn down during the cabin's construction. This building, referred to in the article as "the old building on the Hill," was most likely Recitation Hall.⁴ Constructed in 1889, Recitation Hall was torn down and replaced by Henry Hardin Cherry Hall in 1936 – 1937.

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Integrity statement

The integrity of the building's design, materials, workmanship, and location allow the cabin to convey its significance as an example of New Deal-era log-revival architecture.

The exterior design of the cabin has seen little change. On the interior, one of the cabin's rooms has been subdivided, but this alteration in the house's floor plan is outweighed by the integrity of materials and workmanship in the interior. The cabin's materials remain mostly unaltered. The most significant replacement is the cabin's roof. It was originally a shake or board roof, and has been replaced with an asphalt shingle roof. The university plans to remove the window air-conditioning units and restore the two altered windows to their historic appearance. The workmanship seen in the rough foundation stones, finely dressed mantel stones, the corner timbering, and hewn logs and beams all help convey the building's significance.

Although the cabin's setting has been altered – its grassy lawn was once surrounded on two sides by a garden of native trees and old-fashioned flowers and shrubs – the cabin's other elements evoke the feeling of the aesthetic sense of New Deal-era log-revival construction.

¹ Paul Ferren. "Log Cabin to Be Realistic Copy of Pioneer Dwelling," *College Heights Herald*, 26 April, 1935.

² See for example, "The Pioneer Log Cabin," *Teachers College Heights*, (December 1935), p. 41; Elizabeth Durham, "Description of All Buildings on Campus 1935-1936." Unpublished research paper, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, 1936, p. 43. University Archives, Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky; "Log House Now Being Finished: Landscaping Rapidly Nearing Completion," *The Students' Weekly*, 15 May 1935.

³ Joyce Reels. "Cabin Reflects History," *Park City Daily News*, 20 February 1967; Gayle Carver, transcript of interview with Miss Tyler, 1973. Pioneer Log Cabin Vertical File, University Archives, Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

⁴ "Work on Cabin Is Halted by Bad Weather," *College Heights Herald*, 7 February, 1936.