

# History Of Architecture Baltimore County, Maryland

## *LOG HOUSES*

For a very long time, the term “log cabin” has been a part of the folklore and mystique of our earliest American and cultural history. Through the years, devotion bordering on reverence for the “log cabin” as the epitome of the most sacred of American virtues has been handed to each succeeding generation. In actual fact, the myth of the log dwelling was essentially a creation of presidential campaign rhetoric of the first third of the 1800s to help foster the image of the candidate as a champion of great American ideals in the eyes of the voters. From that time on, the public was barraged with a monumental public relations effort on behalf of the “log cabin” and the myth that still surrounds it today was born.

To begin to debunk the myth, one must understand that there is actually a two-part consideration to be examined. Myth I concerns itself with the actual existence of log structures in our early American history at all; Myth II addresses the etymology of the terms used in any discussion of log construction.

Log structures have an early history in America but not in the manner that popular culture would have one believe. Log construction was not indigenous or original to the Americas. It did not appear here until its introduction by the Swedes of Delaware in 1638. These settlers had a background of log dwellings as part of their native culture. But it seems that these people did not provide for the dissemination of their craft of building log houses to the English settlements of the New World. Their techniques did not reach others for a variety of reasons. They were few in number; they settled only in one area at that time; they were, due to lack of support from the mother country, not well organized.

English immigrants, who came to the New world without a background of log construction, did not reach the shores of New England and Virginia and immediately set up log buildings. Their houses would have been of wood, of stone, and of brick but they certainly were not of horizontal log. As Lewis Mumford states:

The people who came to the Americas did not magically transform their personalities as soon as their feet touched the earth of the new continent.

Part of their personalities certainly included the habits of housing to which they were accustomed. It would be totally unrealistic to credit Anglo settlements in the Americas and in Baltimore County in particular with the knowledge or desire to create something that was completely foreign to their culture as soon as they debarked their ships. Indeed, the paucity of references to early log sites is remarkable. A Dutchman, Jasper Danckaerts, in his journal of 1679-80, recorded his travels all through the East Coast. He commented on only one log house in Burlington, New Jersey, "being made in the Swedish mode .... of hewn logs nothing else, wide but low and always very tight and warm." Another reference, to a location that was then in Baltimore County is found in the Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, II, 224:

Be it enacted...that there be a log [sic] house prison 20 feet square built at Augustine Harmans [sic] in Baltimore County.



*French Property Log House*

This was actually a structure built at Bohemia Manor, now Cecil County, on Augustine Herrman's land. Where did he come by knowledge of log construction, one might inquire. Some research has determined that he was related by marriage to Swedes in Delaware.

Weslager in *The Log Cabin in America* mentioned three Baltimore County structures. The earliest reference was in a deposition of 1694 by Katherine Lomax, a runaway servant who had taken refuge in the log house of Thomas Heath in the fork of the Gunpowder: that is, within the territory between Great and Little Gunpowder Falls anywhere from Bradshaw to Fork.

William B. Marye had supplied Weslager with the mention of a log kitchen 16 by 12 feet at Aquilla Hall's property on a tributary of the Gunpowder and also its nearby old log smoke house, 20 by 16, and log corn house, 16 by 12 feet, all recorded in a document of August 12, 1774. A resurvey of land at Dixon's Neck between Middle River and Back River, possibly near Breezy Point, reported "an old log house 15 foot long and 12 foot wide" in 1744 (Weslager, 1969, pp. 143, 147).

There is really no proof that small, cozy "log cabins" dotted the landscape of colonial America. The notion of the "log cabin" as early housing is a myth.

Yet, one can not deny that there was building of log homes and other buildings in America and in Baltimore County. While the settlers did not come with the knowledge of log building, they certainly learned it from others, from a source that was explainable. By the first third of the 1700s, the source was obviously the influx of German immigration into the middle Atlantic region. Baltimore County itself had become the home of many German families. Having grown from the 1600s milieu of Indian attacks, garrison patrols, and land grants with the intriguing names of "Poor Jamaica-Man's Plague" and "Young Jacob's Choice," the area entered the 1700s with increasing population, rising economy, and rapid and increased growth.

By the mid-1700s the existence of German immigration can be demonstrated reviewing the surnames found on early atlases: Hoffman, Zouck, Stieitz, Weis, or Wise, and Wilhelm. By this time, too, German influence could be seen in housing construction. Baltimore County residents, of German background and otherwise, were using the techniques of horizontal log construction that were not available or evident at an earlier time in the county.

In 1989, Terry G. Jordan and Matti Kaups argued forcefully for the Karalean Finns as the folk who introduced log construction into New Sweden and they stated that German migrants saw the style, adopted it, and "amplified" it all over the frontier of that time. Those authors had visited Finland and found log houses of the same type that peppered early America. They stated that most of the settlers in New Sweden were actually Finns who were unwelcome in Sweden itself because of their habits of slashing and burning forests to clear land for grain to turn into vodka. Jordan and Kaups published a map showing that by 1695 the Swedes, or more likely Finns, were settled in Cecil County on the east bank of the Susquehanna, only 30 miles from present Towson. The next generation of these enterprising people could easily have settled in the backwoods of Baltimore County without leaving a legal trace because the Finnish method was squatting on unclaimed land and clearing by deliberate burning of the timber. The name "Peterson's Run" for a stream near Loch Raven, reflects a squatter who lived there as a trapper before any of the Northampton estate was surveyed or patented. That placename could easily be of Swedish origin (see Jordan and Kaups, 1989).

At this point, one may move to the second myth concerning log housing. The term log cabin is one that was coined in the early to mid-1800s in American culture and is one which has “stuck.” In reality, our early settlers would not readily recognize the use of the words together. The linking of the words “log” and “cabin” is historically incorrect. The confusion over the perception of the widespread early use of log homes and other buildings by settlers other than the Swedes is then compounded by the actual vocabulary error. Words that have a recognized meaning in 20th century America did not have that same meaning in earlier decades or centuries. The “wigwam” of the Hollywood western and the “wigwam” of the native Americans were not the same. The “hall” of the 1920s white colonial revival house with the standard hall closet, center staircase and umbrella stand is not the “hall” of the early colonial two-room floor plan.

Likewise, the “cabin” of the 17th and 18th centuries, of ships’ captains, and of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* was not the building of the birth of humble yet great men and of Vermont maple syrup. A cabin on a ship was a place to sleep; it may have been a booth elsewhere. To Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* it was a “willow cabin at your gates.” Some readers saw it as a flimsy structure of vertical stakes held with mud or other adhesive. Nowhere does one find the combination of log and cabin until the use of the two in early presidential campaigns. Until that time, cabin seems to have meant a relatively small structure designed for protection of a human. This cabin could have been built of a variety of materials — stakes, willows, saplings, mud, wattle and daub, and other materials. The term cabin was not linked with the word log. The word cabin itself may be traced to Middle English, “cabane” and to earlier Latin, “capanna.”

To find a revealing primary source for the research of the terms related to housing in Baltimore County, one needs only the 1798 Particular Federal Tax List. The language and semantics of that list do not support the myth that log and cabin were terms used together. While the form of horizontal log construction appears in over 80% of all the listings in the “hundreds” researched, the term “log cabin” does not appear once. Quite conversely, when the term cabin is used, it is used for the construction of buildings that one would not construe as typical of the traditional “log cabin” image. One reference to a springhouse that was assessed includes the term “cabin built.” It seems reasonable to assume that a springhouse would not be a good candidate to be built of wooden logs.

A myriad of other descriptive and telling terms can be found on the 1798 list. In just two hundreds, Upper Gunpowder and Middle River, the following phrases were found:



*Log House, Warren Road*

- log house
- log dwelling house
- hewn log dwelling house
- round log dwelling house
- new addition — log
- log house — weatherboarded
- log house — stone chimney in middle
- log house — thatched with straw
- log house — indifferent finished
- log house — hip roof 9' pitch
- log house — four dormers
- barn — log earthen floor
- log house with piazza
- log house — cabin built

The last term “cabin built” is the only way in which the terms log and cabin were used together.

And neither were the uses of log dwellings confined to main housing for human beings. A variety of other uses could be found on the list:

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| dwelling house | spring house |
| barn           | cutting room |
| Negro quarter  | blacksmith's |
| stable         | milk house   |
| kitchen        | apple house  |
| granary        | loom house   |
| corn crib      | still house  |

Some of the buildings were as small as 190 square feet; some were as large as 1300 square feet. Some were two stories; some were listed with porches and dormers. Some were listed as old and some as brand new. Baltimore Countians, after learning the techniques of log construction, using the natural resources at hand, were very active in building horizontal-log edifices. In the Middle River Upper Hundred, 92.7% of the sites assessed were of log (dwelling houses). There were 34 outbuildings listed as log. The Gunpowder and Mine Run Hundreds together had about 80% log sites, with 237 outbuildings of log. The chart below compares the use of the log construction with other forms of building materials (for three hundreds combined):

Construction Material	Stone	Brick	Frame	Log
Dwelling Houses	29	2	30	188
Outbuildings	not listed	27		

The 1798 tax list showed that the ca. 1794 Curfman's Mill near present Parkton was a log building with one set of grinding stones, much out of repair, in spite of its newness. In Soldier's Delight hundred, Thomas Worthington owned 32 log structures on 5,058 acres, occupied by himself, 32 slaves, and five tenants.

Tax records made after 1798 fail to provide specific information about the type of material used for construction of houses and outbuildings. Only by seeking data in journals and newspapers can additional data on log houses in this county be found. For example, Constable James B. Wilhelm published an advertisement in the *American* of August 15, 1834, offering Jesse Pocock's "good log house" at New Market: that structure, which eventually became the Methodist parsonage for Maryland Line, was a weatherboarded house, probably put up in the building season of 1831 (Baltimore County Deeds, WG 210:693; AI 220:120). Before Samuel Miller came to Monkton in 1847 to start his many enterprises, only one log house was standing there as the county paper recalled a decade later (*Baltimore County Advocate*, October 8, 1858). The present Halcyon Farm at Dover and Butler Roads was advertised in 1851 as a 150-acre parcel with a log house, property of the late Benjamin Fort (*Baltimore County Advocate*, February 1, 1851). Dean A. Wilson in the 1982 issue of the *Quarterly of Vernacular Architecture* quoted a young soldier of the Civil War who wrote that he had seen log houses in other states that were "every bit as neat as the ones we have at home." (1:89)

Even as late as 1861, trustees continued to advertise in the county weeklies mentioning the construction of log houses and log outbuildings (*Baltimore County Advocate*, May 4, 1861).

In a letter in the *New York Times* of March 15, 1998, Warren E. Roberts quoted Dell Upton's "Three Centuries of Maryland Architecture," which stated, "As late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the one-room house characterized the accommodations of 80 to 90 percent of the white population of much of the Chesapeake and, of course, all of the black population."



*Ensor Log House*

A complete specification for building an early 19<sup>th</sup> century log house near Granite was discovered by William Hollifield:

Agreement of August 20, 1823, between John Elder of Baltimore County and Marcella Worthington [of Granite], whereby, for \$270, John Elder was to build a log dwelling house on her property. The dimensions were to be 21 ½ by 19 ½ feet, and it was to have 1 ½ stories. It was to be constructed of chestnut logs, hewed on both sides, chinked with stone, filled in with lime and sand outside and inside; floors tongue and grooved; window in each side of 12 lights; batten doors on each side on the first floor; plank partition downstairs with a door in same, a stone cask with a closet under the same; outside chimney of stone; two fireplaces, one of which was to be four feet wide; all the doors to have good hinges and iron fastenings; the plank to be of the best cullings; flooring not to exceed six inches in width downstairs and 12 inches upstairs; all the doors and windows to have casing inside and outside (Worthington Collection, MS 924 (box 1) Maryland Historical Society).

A far cry from the humble, possibly mean, picture of the “log cabin” was the use of that type of construction in Baltimore County. From the mid- to the late 1700s and through the end of the 19th century, log construction was an important part of the housing and building aspect of the county’s life.

## **LOG HOUSE CONSTRUCTION “NUTS AND BOLTS”**

The term “nuts and bolts” is meant only to be a catch phrase, for in reality, one of the great assets of log buildings is their ease of construction and simplicity of material and tools. In the research already existing, there is an adequate body of work, which discusses the methods of construction and the use of materials. Douglass Reed of Preservation Associates in Sharpsburg, Maryland, conducted considerable research on log construction, particularly in Western Maryland. While the 1798 Federal tax records for that area have been lost, Mr. Reed has been able through other documents and actual physical inspection of remaining log structures to draw some very important observations concerning the importance and methods of the early log house.

One significant log house which Mr. Reed and this author, too, visited is the Morgan log house near Bunker Hill, West Virginia, built about 1730. The house was built out of the wilderness after Morgan Morgan’s arrival there with his family from Christiana, Delaware. One may surmise that he had not a great deal of time to build a “fair house” for his family before the winter came, and so he and his son tossed together a sloppy hovel that would meet the most disparaging definition of the misnomer “log cabin.” While the exterior is plain with only one door and one window, undoubtedly without glass at first, the house would be more finished than the lay person might expect. The gable ends have riven boards; the chimney is of stone; the one-room house had a loft; the fireplace is of a fine size and more than adequate for the family. More importantly, on the interior, the house has a floor system of joists and finished floor. The ceiling beams were finished on four sides; parts of the interior wood were hand-planed and some tongue and groove joining can be found.

The refinements that Morgan used in his construction may not have been typical of every log house constructed in the period, as may be said for any frame or masonry construction comparisons, but there is no reason to assume that his construction or finishing was atypical of log building.

By looking into the construction of the Morgan log house — one of the more well known — one may then proceed to houses of Baltimore County and study a few of them in detail. Several factors facilitated the proliferation of log construction in the county: availability of the material required and simplicity of tools needed. An additional factor was the arrival by the first third of the 1700s of settlers who knew the techniques of log construction.

The abundance of standing timber in the county provided not only the natural resource but also created the need to utilize that resource which would otherwise have stood in the way of housing construction. By clearing a place for its house, a family also created its construction materials. Several types of trees in the County proved to be excellent for log construction. Chestnut was a good wood to use because it was sturdy, available, and relatively light for a father and young son or a husband and wife to move and lift. Oak had a pleasing look on the exterior when it aged and was very sturdy and heavy. Tulip poplar and some pine were also found in the County.

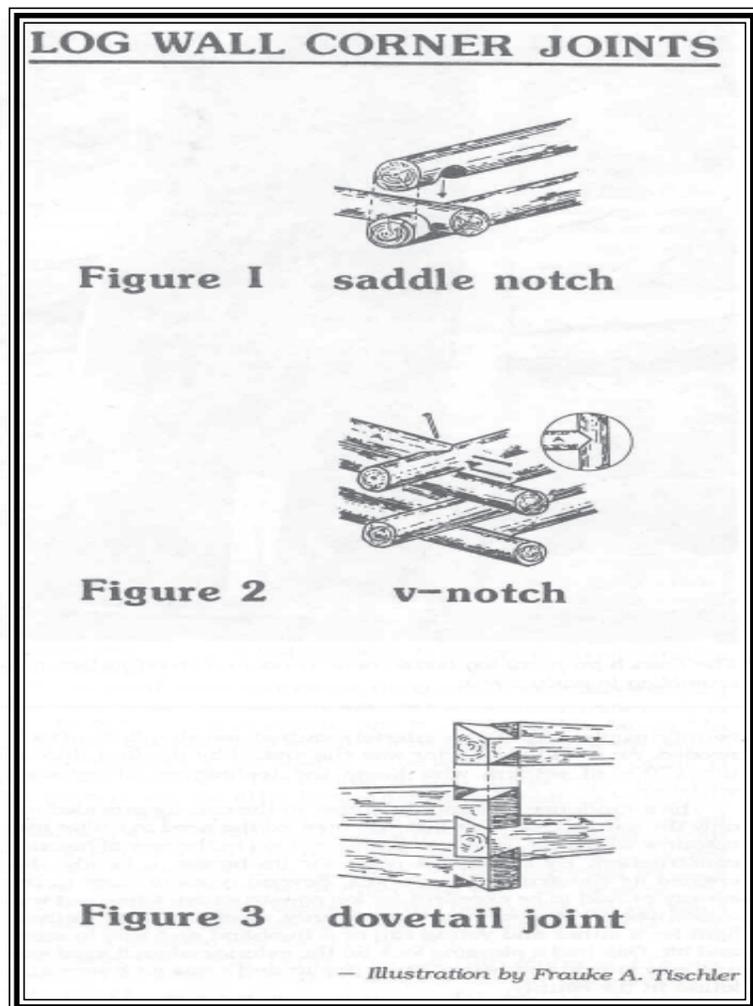
## NOTCHES, NOTCHES, NOTCHES

Great effort has been expended on the study of the notches used in the construction of log buildings. Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie have mapped extensively the types of notches that were used in construction and followed the movement of the use of particular notches. Baltimore County falls within what Kniffen and Glassie call the “Pennsylvania stream” which meant that the knowledge held by the Pennsylvania Germans was transmitted by migration of peoples to northern Maryland (among other places). They found that log construction dominated through the 1850s in our area. They also note that the notching used in our area was the V notch (Kniffen and Glassie, 1986).

There are several different types of notches that could be used for holding the logs together at the ends. The figures shown are rough sketches of three prominent types. However, the only type found in northern Baltimore County so far is the simple V- notch. It was possible to have no discernible notch at all. This would create a very hastily built structure and one that possibly was not meant to last very long. It is understandable that none of these have been found because it was highly unlikely that buildings with no notches at the ends of the logs would have held together very long. The V-notch found in our area was one that required some effort in workmanship and time. It indicated a building that was not a hastily formed shack. The saddle notch was another reasonable type to use but was not considered as sturdy or demanding as the V- notch. The full dovetail was a more intricate notch, which required yet more finesse and skill.

There is probably no simple explanation for the differences in the type of notches used in any given building or in any given area. Time and tradition certainly would dictate the type of notch used. Kniffen and Glassie show that the Pennsylvania stream that brought log construction to the north county flowed down from Eastern Pennsylvania and from the areas of the German settlement.

As research for this study of log houses in Baltimore County is continuing, the following houses are by no means a definitive list of the log houses in the County. However, the houses investigated so far represent an appropriate sampling from which important information can be drawn.



## **GOTT'S HOPE LOG HOUSE, TOWSON**

This structure sits on land known as Gott's Hope, one of the last of Towson's early land grants. By 1753, it was owned by Richard Gott. Lot 1 of this land was called Gunnars Range. The 1798 Federal Tax List shows Richard, Samuel, and Edward Gott owning houses there. In particular, "Edward Gott — part of Gunnars Range, 225 acres, frame dwelling, log stable 12 x 24, log house 14 x 14" was found on the list.

Built in two parts of chestnut logs found on the land, the house has V-shaped notches and an interior chimney, which now serves both sections. It is likely that the smaller section was the earliest, and it is this section, measuring 15 by 15 feet, which actually may have been Edward Gott's pre-1798 house recorded as 14 by 14 feet on the tax list. It was not unusual for a difference of a few inches to be found in measurements of early houses and other buildings. The larger of the two sections features a fireplace retaining its crane. To the right of the hearth is a narrow chimney closet with a winder staircase to what may have been either a second floor or simply a loft. Alterations to both sections have obliterated evidence of many architectural features. It is impossible to find any of the original features of the smaller original section. It is not possible to know what the original floor (if any) was like or what other interior features existed. The fact that this house was enlarged at some point in its life raises the supposition that persons who built log houses did not build them simply as a stop-gap measure until they had time to "do better." If this were the case, why not add on in another form of construction? Frame or stone could easily have been added to this log house. There could be a variety of reasons such as existence of materials and ease of construction for the continued use of log, but the reason could just as well have been that the owners preferred a log home.

## **DEEP RUN LOG HOUSE, BROOKLANDVILLE**

The 1850 Sidney map of Baltimore County places a small square for a building of some sort on the approximate site of this log house and shows the owner as R. Jones. The 1877 *Atlas of Baltimore County* shows a building at the same site and shows J. W. Zink as owner. Mr. Zink had been a gardener in the county since 1840 and was also listed as having 10 acres there. It is not known when he took over the land from Jones or if there were other owners in between. At some point in its history, the house was moved 50 feet to the east and back from Falls Road. This action undoubtedly aided in its preservation. The Zink family owned it through the first third of the 20th century; in 1936 it was transferred to Grace Ober Palmer, a relative of the Emerson family, who owned other lands in the area.

The Deep Run House, named for the stream that passes it, has simple V-notches and a gable-end chimney. It was expanded with a full second story from its original one-story size, and dormers were added later. The land on which this house was located, a parcel known as Hellemore's Addition, was owned in 1798 by John Cockey of Thomas. The house may have remained true to original specifications until the 1930s when changes were made including raising the roof to create the second story, adding dormers, and creating new rooms using timbers from an old barn on the site. The parlor paneling came from a row house on Cathedral Street in Baltimore, which was demolished (perhaps for the construction of the Enoch Pratt Free Library).

## **COCKEY LOG HOUSE, WORTHINGTON VALLEY**

This log dwelling house has been moved piece by piece to a new location from its original site on the same property. The land was originally Cockey property and the main house on the property was and is known as Melinda. Unfortunately, it is not known if this log house was a home that was superseded by the large brick Melinda, or if it was an outbuilding of some sort. Evidently, if it were an outbuilding, it was one that needed to be far from the main house because the site from which it was moved was set back far from the road and the main house. This has led some owners to speculate that it was slave quarters. There is no substantiation for this theory except for the fact that the Cockey family was known to own slaves. However, there is also the possibility that this could have been an outbuilding used for any of several farm purposes: apple house, loom house, etc. On the other hand, it indeed could have been a dwelling at some point.

The exterior of this house differs from others in that, when it was rebuilt, the ends were sawn off to a nub, and all traces of the type of notch used were obliterated. In its present configuration, it boasts a front porch with shed roof. They may or may not have been part of the original house. Other log houses found in the 1798 tax list and in the same hundred were listed as having porches, some of which were the full width of the house. The term that was in vogue for the porch at that time was “piazza,” creating in incongruous mental picture of an American dwelling with Germanic roots embellished with a pseudo-Italianate feature.

The interior of this house may have been altered beyond what could be imagined, although the gable-end fireplace remains with its crane. No evidence of loft or second story is visible, although the use of space inside indicated that there certainly could have been a loft. Several doors and windows now exist in the house. The author feels that there would not have been as many in its original construction. The structure is now northeast of its original position, facing a pond, and is now being used as a home.

## **THE GEORGE ENSOR LOG HOUSE, SPARKS**

The George Ensor house is one log house that is easily documented. The 1798 tax list mentioned this structure as the dwelling of the George Ensor family. It was located on the tract “Hit or Miss,” surveyed for George Ensor in 1796. The Ensor family of northern Baltimore County settled in the Sparks area in the early 1700s. The line probably started with three brothers: John, Thomas, and George. The grandson of the first George was the patentee of the “Hit or Miss” tract. This George (1771-1827) married Sarah Smith, and their son George (1806-1865) was presumably born in the house. At his death, George the grantee willed to his wife Sarah 50 acres of “Hit or Miss” and 0.31 acres of “Addition to Hit or Miss.”

Interestingly, the mother of George Ensor, patentee of “Hit or Miss,” was Jemima Bond Ensor, the sister of Ruth Bond, who married Richard Gott and lived in the Gott Log House.

The log house of the Ensor family is quite typical of log dwellings found in northern Baltimore County at the turn of the century. It is extremely rare to find one with such an unaltered interior. The two-story house retains its fireplaces on both floors as well as its original six-over-three windows. Along the long walls of the house, the back and front doors were aligned with each other, which was a well known way to provide cross-circulation of air and to allow animals to be brought

into the house when necessary. The present floor is a replacement, but it is fair to say that there had been an original wooden floor, because the cellar survives and there are still remnants of a trap door. Many families dug out small cellars by hand and located them directly under the main room with access by trap door. Contrary to romantic theories, however, the cellar was not designed as a refuge from hostile Indians but was a place to put small animals for protection and to store foods that could be kept for several months.

The owners of the Ensor log house have been carrying out a fine and authentic restoration of the building. Many original wooden members have been retained and repaired, others replaced appropriately. The chinking between the logs on the interior has been restored with an appropriate mortar mix. The roof has been covered with standing-seam tin, which is a material that would have been applied during the later life of the house. The exterior has been covered with cedar shingles. This site is a good example of an 18th century V-notch log home.

The fact that the Ensor log house has been covered in cedar raises an interesting aspect of the study of log houses. Many log structures are found to have been covered with some sort of exterior material at some time in their history. Of course, that provided an excellent conservation method for persons of the 20th century who now wish to study log structures. It also brings into question the builder's original intent. Did he intend the log surface to serve as a merely temporary exterior until a more finished covering could be added at a later date? Many entries in the 1798 tax list mention log houses that had by that time been covered with weatherboard. Many of the log houses researched thus have had exterior finishes of other materials.

Was a log house merely a superstructure for what would be another sort of exterior? Obviously this may have been true in some cases. Many log structures are being discovered in the County that have been completely transformed by different exteriors either early or later in the life of the house.

In an area near Mt. Carmel and Evna Roads, there exist several log houses built by the Spindler Family as early as the mid-18th century; these houses are now covered with frame exteriors. It is almost impossible to identify them as log structures except from the inside. The George Spindler House on Mt. Carmel Road now masquerades as a two-story, three-section, Victorian structure complete with barge board, two-over-two floor-to-ceiling windows, transoms and gingerbread.

In many other cases, log homes and other structures have continued to this day in their original exterior form. Why did their owners never cover them? Why did weatherboarding and other covering such as cedar shake not become part of their features? It is possible that the look of the log and chinking was pleasing and comfortable to the owners. It is possible that the thickness of the logs and the workmanship made the house secure enough, most likely that the owner could not afford to put any other cover on the house. It is also possible that he did not want to change his log house.

In a more philosophic vein, one must consider the fact that a house was the very center of the family's existence. It is also one of the largest single artifacts that we have to view when researching the life of early settlers. It can tell us a great deal of their existence. Is it reasonable to say that the log house was a mainstay of the person's way of life? That he was surrounded by more of the log structures than by any other, and for him and his family it represented a comfortable familiar presence. Many families, especially as milled lumber became more readily available and as family fortunes increased, changed their habits and hence their housing arrangements, but the large number

of references to log homes still being built in the County into the last third of the 19th century indicates that the choice of log homes over any other was not always a function of wealth or innovation for Baltimore County families.

### **BEE TREE MILL**

A primitive, one-story log mill survives on the north side of Bee Tree Road west of York Road near Bentley Springs. It is first found in the 1823 tax list as David Sampson's. When advertised in 1844, it was described as formerly rented by Micajah Freeland. Over its life time, it was known as Sampsons Mill, Simpson's Mill, and Long Valley Mill. In fairly recent years, it was used for making cider and ran on the waterpower of Bee Tree Run.

*Bee Tree Mill*

