

The *romance* of the log cabin

By Jim Cornelius
Editor in Chief

It is the quintessential American home — the birthplace of iconic presidents like Abraham Lincoln. The log home may be a piece of classic Americana — but it didn't originate here.

Log houses were common in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe from the Bronze Age — and remain so to this day. The first log cabins built in North America were constructed in the 17th century by Swedish immigrants to the colonies of Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

As HistoryReader.com notes, “By the time William Penn arrived in Pennsylvania, in 1682, there were already numerous log-cabins in the region. Penn’s English followers copied them, believing them to be the indigenous style, as did Scottish and Irish immigrants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who saw them on their way south and west.”

The frontier backcountry was heavily forested, with the building materials for log cabins close to hand and available for anybody with an ax and a strong back. The log cabin became the typical frontier abode from the Appalachians to the Mississippi and from the Great Lakes to Texas. And it jumped the Great Plains to become an icon of the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Northwest.

The early log cabins were crude affairs, tiny with dirt floors and chinked with creekbed clay and straw. But in the late 19th century, as Americans celebrated the “closing” of the American frontier, the log cabin became a grander thing, and great lodges were built in that style to evoke a rugged, close-to-the-land heritage that was passing into history.

A shelter of necessity and convenience became a vision of romance and adventure.

It’s that sensibility that makes a log home an aspiration for many folks today. Rebecca Richardson of Richardson Log Homes sees that with the company’s clients.

“With a log home, oftentimes it’s something they’ve dreamed of since they were a kid,” she said. “It’s something that’s been in their hearts for years.”

That’s the experience of Phil and Kris Rerat of Swiss Mountain Log Homes, too. People of all ages are chasing a particular dream in

building a log home.

“We get younger people and people who are retired realizing that dream,” Kris Rerat said.

Swiss Mountain Log Homes, as the name suggests, evokes the European roots of the log home, with “Old World craftsmanship and New World ingenuity.”

Rerat says that the signature “feel” of the log home is “cozy, enchanting, and familiar.”

Folks who gravitate to the log home tend to be “folks who have an appreciation for nature and for the wood,” Richardson said.

Rerat notes that, “It’s definitely an environmentally friendly product — and very natural.”

However, even people who have a “modernist” bent have done amazing things with log homes, bending the tradition in new directions.

Richardson Log Homes builds barns and creates accents, and they’ve built all sizes of structures, from tiny cabins to lodges.

Swiss Mountain Log Homes builds stairs and railings, mantles and entry gates as well as houses, and on January 1, 2019, they will mark their 20th year in business.

The warmth of a log cabin, evoking the image of autumn nights before a roaring fire with a glass of wine or spirits may be a far cry from the ramshackle dirt-floored shelter of the early frontier — but the Euro-American heritage that has traveled unbroken across centuries and across oceans, mountains and prairies remains as compelling in the 21st century as it was practical far back in the mists of time.



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An 18th century cabin in Ohio. The log cabin is an American tradition.

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