

THE PALMER-EPARD CABIN
Homestead National Monument of America, Beatrice, Nebraska

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT, PART II

Historical Data Section

by

Lenard E. Brown

DIVISION OF HISTORY
OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
June 1968

National Park Service

Department of the Interior

INTRODUCTION

The research on the Palmer-Epard Cabin was performed RSP Home-H-3 to provide a historical background report on the cabin for use in interpretation and preservation of the structure. Most of the research is based on two short reports done by Superintendent Clarence Schultz in 1953 and made available to the writer by the staff of Homestead National Monument of America. I would like to thank them for the help and friendship extended to me while working on this project.

L. E. B.

Washington, D. C.

July 15, 1968

The Palmer-Epard Cabin

Signed into law on May 20, 1862, by President Abraham Lincoln, the Homestead Act became effective the following January 1. Some people took immediate advantage of the opportunity to acquire 160 acres of land for a small fee and five year's residence. With the end of the Civil War the number of claimants grew fantastically as ~~the~~ population began ^{To} ~~the~~ move west once again. One ~~such man~~ ^{of these emigrants} was George Washington Palmer. A native of Ohio, Palmer had served as a Private in Company B, 23rd Wisconsin Volunteers during the Civil War. Upon discharge he returned to his home and began to make plans to sell his land and move to Nebraska to homestead. From his wife's half brothers, John B., Jacob, and Ismay E. Mumford, he had heard of the rich soil, mild climate, and excellent crops of southeastern Nebraska. In the fall of 1865 he left his family and traveled to the territory, entering at Nebraska City. He settled on the Northwest quarter of Section 9 in T4N R7E located on Bear Creek in Logan Township, Gege County. The 160 acre tract was surrounded by land claimed by the Mumfords in sections 3, 4, 8, and 9. Family tradition has it that the quarter section had been entered by J.B. Mumford as a homestead claim, and relinquished to his brother-in-law, Palmer, in 1865. He in turn, held it by squatter's right until May 26, 1868, when he filed his homestead application in the Land Office at Brownville, Nebraska.

During the first two winters George W. Palmer lived in a dugout on the west bank of Bear Creek fifty yards from the site selected for his cabin. In the spring of 1866 he planted his first crop of corn and pumpkins, and in the fall of the next year erected his cabin with the help of his neighbors. Measuring 14 x 16 feet the cabin was constructed of mixed hardwoods chiefly white and red oak, hackberry, ash, locust, walnut, and elm. Sawn lumber was used for the rafters, the gable end studding, and the roof boards. Finished lumber for the attic floor, the door, window frames, and window sash was purchased in Beatrice, Nebraska. The roof was shingled with what may have been cedar. The space between the gable ends was filled with brick burnt by Palmer along the creek bank and set in a lime mortar. Two windows provided light for the attic and windows were placed in the north and south walls of the main cabin. A door was located in the center of the west wall.

In the spring of 1868, Palmer brought his wife and children to the homestead and they moved into the cabin. On May 26, 1868, George W. Palmer filed application # 2614 in the Brownville Land Office for the 160 acres and paid the \$14 fee. In 1875 he filed an affidavit swearing

1. From logs brought to the Beatrice steam mill by Epard. The existing practice was for the mill to keep 1/3 of the lumber as payment for services. Most of the information on George W. Palmer is from a report by Clarence Schultz, "The Account of G.W. Palmer's Entrance on his Homestead," File H30 Palmer-Epard Cabin, Homestead National Monument.

that he had lived on the claim since "about the 20th day of September, 1868, to the present time. "The same day, March 5, 1875, Palmer made the final \$4 payment which entitled him to a patent on the northwest quarter of section nine in T⁴N, R7E. By March, 1875, he had plowed and cultivated 45 acres of his claim, set out about fifty fruit trees, planted an acre in forest trees, built a stable, a granary, a cattle yard, a corn crib, and dug a well. All this, plus the notation that Palmer was the head of a family consisting of a wife and five children, was sworn to by William T. Brown and Charles B. Mumford for the "Final Proof required under Homestead Act May 20, 1862."²

ok-ha/
RK

During the five years after 1875 Palmer added a 10 x 12 foot lean-to on the rear of the original cabin, a double doorway was cut in the east wall of the cabin to provide access to the lean-to, which served as a kitchen. At the same time a double hung window was placed adjacent to the main door. These two improvements were the only ones made by the Palmers during the period they owned the cabin. In 1895 they sold the farm to Eugene Mumford and William Foreman, their nephews. Within a few years the farm was resold to Lawrence Epard and his wife Ida Mumford Epard.³ The Epards lived in the cabin for nearly 40 years and

2. National Archives, Record Group 49. Palmer's Final Certificate was # 1980.

3. The relationship of the Mumfords, Palmers and Epards maybe of interest to the reader. George Washington Palmer married a half sister of John B. Mumford and his brother-in-law's property surrounded his homestead claim on Bear Creek. Ida Mumford, who later married Lawrence Epard was a niece of G.W. Palmer and the daughter of J.B. Mumford. The

during that period had the cabin exterior sided, the interior lathed and plastered and a double window placed in the north wall. They also removed the stairway to the attic and closed the opening. All these modifications were done about the turn of the century. The farm and buildings were inherited by J.B. Epard upon the death of his father in 1936. His mother had died two years earlier. From then until 1950, when it was donated to the government, the cabin was used as a corn crib and granary.

In the fall of 1941 Superintendent Clarence Schultz learned of the existence of the cabin on the farm of J.B. Epard and in the spring of 1942 he examined it carefully. At that time Mr. Epard wished to sell the cabin for \$1000. Investigation of other surviving homestead cabins in Gage and Jefferson Counties showed that Epard's was the best preserved such structure. Because Mr. Epard refused to donate the cabin and there was no money available to purchase it, the project lagged. In May 1950 Mr. Epard offered the cabin to the National Park Service under the condition that it be off his farm before "corn listing time." On May 9, 1950, the Director gave his approval and the same evening the Board of the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce authorized the expenditure of \$200 to be paid for moving the structure. A

owner of the cabin when it was donated to the National Park Service was John B. Epard, son of Lawrence and Ida Epard and grandson of J.B. Mumford.

4. The Beatrice Chamber of Commerce was willing to finance the move of the cabin to the Monument if the cost did not exceed \$100.

Fairbury contractor agreed to do the job for \$295: \$200 to be paid by the Chamber and \$95 by the Federal government.

After the interior flooring, wall plaster, and exterior siding were removed by the Superintendent, the building was moved to Homestead National Monument in June. A concrete foundation 10" wide and 4' deep, reinforced with 3/8" iron rods had been prepared and the cabin was placed on it the 15th of June. The physical condition of the cabin was sound. Rehabilitation of the structure was aided by a supply of logs from a contemporary building which was used in closing up the cabin openings. Lumber removed from the cabin and from a building of the same age on the Mumford farm was given for use in construction of window frames. Window sash, cut nails, and weathered shingles were donated from two buildings erected by the Mennonite colony in 1876. Most of the rehabilitation was done by Superintendent Schultz, the monument laborer Cornelius Franz, and a local high school teacher. They removed the modern windows and replaced them with window sash of the correct era. The enlarged openings on the east and north walls, where the door to the kitchen lean-to and the double hung window had been, were closed with logs cut to fit the openings and bolted in with 6" log screws driven diagonally. Schultz, in his detailed narrative of the restoration, admits that the workmanship was crude and unskilled, but that it conformed to the methods of

the pioneers and "suggests the hardships and severity of pioneer life in the region."⁵

Once the rehabilitation was completed, there developed a need for maintenance and preservation of the building. The architectural staff recommended the use of pentachlorophenol in an oil medium to prevent decay. This has been applied to the building nearly every year since 1951 and has arrested the deterioration of the logs. Because the cabin is subjected to wide variations in temperature and humidity, the interior whitewash flakes off continuously and the chinking between the logs tends to loosen and fall out. The interior of the cabin is whitewashed each summer and the chinking is replaced as need arises. The effect of temperature and humidity on the cabin and its furnishings is compounded by the earthen floor.⁶ It is hoped that some remedy for this can be devised. The final problem, which so far has not been solved, is the presence of mice. The best and most feasible suggestion to control the mouse population is the presence of a resident cat.

nan: Looks like you've been consulted. ACK

a book or vault made also reviewed to me. 11

Seven years after the cabin was transferred to Homestead National Monument it was necessary to rethink the structure to prevent water from

5. Clarence Schultz, "Report on the Palmer-Epard Cabin," File H30 Palmer-Epard Cabin, Homestead National Monument. Information on the acquisition and rehabilitation of the cabin was taken entirely from this report dated November 23, 1953.

6. From September 1966 until August 1967 a Belfort Hygrothermograph was located in the cabin to measure the range of temperature and humidity. A complete record is in the files at Homestead N.M. Some of the extreme variations are shown in a condensed chart in Appendix I.

seeping between the old mortar and the logs. All the old material was removed and the cabin rechinked with a mixture of cement, lime and sand. EAD
R
Ten years later in 1967 it was necessary to rechink the cabin again and also to reshingle the roof. These have been the only major repairs performed on the structure during the 18 years it has been the property of the National Park Service.

Since 1950 the cabin has also been moved twice. In 1954 Nebraska highway 4 was realigned and the road fill came within a few feet of the rear of the cabin. From its first location just west of Cub Creek and south of the monument boundary, near the northeast corner of the present parking lot, the cabin was moved to an area east of the present utility building in July 1954. On July 23, Fred Dickison, Acting Superintendent, reported the completion of the move. The cabin was placed on a concrete footing similar to the foundation poured in 1950. The Palmer-Epard Cabin remained on this site for more than seven years and then was moved again to the present location behind the visitor center dedicated in the summer of 1962. what is the
(Palmer-Epard)
now?
R

The Palmer-Epard Cabin was built in the fall of 1867 and during the next 68 years served as a home: for the George Washington Palmers first and later for the Lawrence Epards. Then for a period of fourteen years was a corn crib or granary. In 1950 it was brought to Homestead National Monument to fill the need of an interpretive feature at the Monument. Since then it has served this function very well and under the

care of the National Park Service will continue to provide visitors with a glimpse of life on the homestead frontier in the first years after the Civil War

###

Appendix I

A SELECTION OF EXTREMES IN TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY AS RECORDED IN THE PALMER-EPARD CABIN

<u>Temperature</u>		<u>Humidity</u>	
High and date recorded	Low and date recorded	High and date recorded	Low and date recorded
68 - 10/14/66	36 - 10/17/66	99% - 10/13/66	21% - 10/10/66 <i>4/10/66</i>
55 - 11/7/66	23 - 11/10/66	88% - 11/9/66	48% - 11/7/66
48 - 12/6/66	01 - 12/10/66	100% - 12/6/66	40% - 12/6/66
52 - 12/19/66	12 - 12/24/66	90% - 12/21/66	35% - 12/19/66
39 - 1/16/67	02 - 1/19/67	100% - 1/19,21,22	60% - 1/16,17/66
49 - 3/2/67	21 - 3/6/67	82% - 2/27/67	28% - 2/27/67
47 - 3/10/67	11 - 3/7/67	96% - 3/10/67	48% - 3/7/67
62 - 4/20/67	36 - 4/23/67	92% - 4/20/67	26% - 4/17/67
80 - 5/18/67	46 - 5/15/67 <i>on floor</i>	89% - 5/20/67	23% - 5/18/67
75 - 6/28/67	61 - 7/2/67	93% - 6/27/67	38% - 7/2/67

During July and August of 1967 the high and low temperatures for each week varied less than 20° and the range in weekly humidity readings was about 40%.

An average of the difference between the high and low readings for temperature and humidity during the 49 weeks the Belfort Hygrothermograph was in the cabin shows the following:

There was an average difference of 24° between the high and low temperature each week.

The humidity variation averaged 46.9% on the weekly graph.

*I don't think
humidity average
about "average"
R.*