

## Heritage Planner's Statement of Significance

### **DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE**

The 1958-59 Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin is a one-storey log structure with a side-facing gable roof with two intersecting gable roofs on the front elevation – one over the entrance and one over an addition on the north east corner.

### **HERITAGE VALUE**

The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin, associated with the Old Timers Association and built of logs, is significant for its association with the theme of historical myth making in Alberta.

### **CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS**

- saddle-notch log construction;
- side-facing gable roof;
- front-facing gable roof over the central front entrance;
- cedar shingle roof cladding;
- stone cladding on the foundation;
- fieldstone fireplace and chimney;
- projecting logs underneath the eaves;
- wood multi-pane windows;
- wooden window frames and casings;
- exposed saddle-notch spruce log interior;
- poplar flooring; and
- wagon wheel light fixtures in the main floor social room.

### **Further information**

Another log structure associated with the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Association is the 1926 Exhibition Cabin, located at Northlands Park. It is on the Inventory of Historic Places in Edmonton. It is owned by the Association but is on land owned by Northlands. It has been moved to different part of the Northlands site multiple times since 1960, and there has been no interest from Northlands in its designation.

### **Construction**

The logs of the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin are saddle notched with an axe, and form a tight weatherproof wall without aid of chinking or plaster. The building is constructed of spruce logs obtained from a stand near the Pembina River in the vicinity of the bridge at Drayton Valley. They were

assembled at Pigeon Lake, each log fitted and numbered so the building could be dismantled and reassembled in Edmonton at its current location. The floor of the cabin was planed poplar that was obtained from the municipality of Leduc. The large, bungalow style cabin has a stone-faced basement. The window frames are regular spruce casing and are painted. The roof is clad in cedar shingles. The windows are the original frame windows with small panes that have smaller top windows that open outward. Excavation for the site was done free of cost by contractor Gordon McDonald. The building was begun in 1958 and completed in 1959. The cost was \$75,000.

## **Designer/Builder**

### **Hobart Dowler**

Hobart Dowler was known across Canada for his log and stone buildings. He homesteaded in the Edmonton area as early as 1900. His own home, made of logs, was built overlooking Pigeon Lake where he assembled many of the other ones he built, including the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin. From 1935-1960 he and his crew built between 80-100 stone and log cabins from material in the area. His buildings all showed the same style by using logs, notch and saddle style connections, split field stone foundations and the massive stone fireplaces in which only igneous rocks were used. Other clients for whom he constructed log buildings include the Central Alberta Pioneers, the Southern Alberta Pioneers Lodge, Rundle's Mission Camp, Camp Wohelo, Camp Maskepton, the Alpine Club of Canada, and cabins at Glacier, Jasper and Yoho National Parks.

## **CULTURAL HISTORY**

### **Historical Importance**

#### **Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendents Association**

The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendents Association began as a men's social club, receiving its charter as a society in 1894, and was at the time called the Old Timers' Association. The membership roll read like a who's who of early Edmonton society, with members like Donald Ross, J.A. McDougall, Frank Oliver, Alex Taylor, Rev. D.G. McQueen, John Walter, Malcolm Groat and several Members of Parliament.

Early activities included dinners and balls, and the organization was an active part of Edmonton's social scene until 1914, when activities stopped. The organization was reorganized in 1924, at which time women were given membership rights and the group was renamed the Edmonton Pioneers and Northern Alberta Old Timers' Association. The social activities were revived, and soon were augmented by other goals, including the preservation of history through the collection of artifacts

and biographies of members, the provision of cemetery plots for members without family or friends, and social calls for sick members.

In 1926, a permanent home for the group was built at Northlands, called the Old Timers' Roost, later renamed the Exhibition Cabin. The log structure provided a home for the growing historical collection, and served as a permanent gathering place until 1941, when it was rented to the RCAF and converted to a home for the RCAF Commanding Officer.

In 1944, the RCAF discontinued use, but the Edmonton Pioneers and Northern Alberta Old Timers' Association continued to rent the building out until 1959, using it themselves only one week a year during the Exhibition.

Because the Exhibition Cabin was too small to hold social gatherings other than afternoon teas, and was only available during Exhibition week from 1942-1959, it was decided that a building large enough for social functions and meetings was necessary.

The sod was turned for the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Association Cabin on July 15, 1958, by Tracy Long, a Vice-President and the first white child born in the Namao area. The first executive council meeting was held February 3, 1959, and the building was officially opened November 16, 1959. Premier Ernest Manning and Mayor Elmer Roper both attended the celebrations.

Since its construction the cabin has been used as a meeting place for members, for annual meetings, afternoon teas, council and committee meetings, and social events. It has also been rented out to a variety of community and corporate clients. In 1963 the cabin was used for four weeks by the City to give polio immunizations.

The Association's mandate is now to preserve the history of Alberta and the contribution made by the pioneers who settled here, although social events are still an important aspect.

The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Association (as it was renamed in 1983) had a considerable effect on Edmonton's historical consciousness and the creation of the pioneer myth. It should be noted that the term myth is not used in a pejorative sense, but is rather an important element in the creation of identity. Promoting the settlement myth of the pioneers, which is a mixture of historical fact and fiction, gives the audience a sense of belonging, pride, self and place. The myth is a defining feature of how Edmontonians view themselves and see their place in history and the local landscape, and has been very influential over the past hundred years.

The creation of a mythic past began almost immediately after the Old Timers' Association was incorporated. The earliest Old Timers' balls and parades were

decorated with artifacts from the past, such as a red river cart and hunting, mining and traveling implements, communicating to newcomers how some early settlers traveled west and sustained themselves once here. The first ball incorporated a First Nations tepee. Subsequent balls replaced the First Nations' presence with a rustic log cabin, a further representation of the early settlers. When the organization was reorganized in 1924, the construction of a pioneering myth increased one of their new mandates became the celebration of pioneering heritage. The Old Timers took part in the Exhibition parade that year, with a float displaying a red river cart and a stage coach – two well known modes of travel. Interestingly, the stage coach of popular imagination was never used in Edmonton, and though a stage coach did travel between Edmonton and Calgary for a short time before the railroad linked the two cities, it was an open bed wagon, rather than the romanticized coach of Hollywood.

The Edmonton Pioneers and Northern Alberta Old Timers' Association was actively involved in the early preservationist movement in Edmonton. In September of 1925, the group organized the relocation of Frank Oliver's original Bulletin building to the Exhibition grounds (it is now located in Fort Edmonton Park). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, they unsuccessfully lobbied the government to reconstruct Fort Edmonton on its original site below the Legislature. When the reconstructed Fort Edmonton opened at its present location in 1970, the Edmonton Pioneers and Northern Alberta Old Timers' Association were invited to the ceremonies.

The Edmonton Pioneers and Northern Alberta Old Timers' Association was also actively involved in anniversary celebrations in Edmonton – events which are commonly used to reaffirm identity. The Association erected a bust of Frank Oliver in front of the relocated Bulletin building in 1927 in honour of Canada's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The bust is now in Frank Oliver Park in front of the Hotel McDonald. As part of the 1955 Alberta Jubilee the Association helped arrange the Old Stage Coach Tour from Edmonton to Calgary and back. In 1979, the City of Edmonton celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and tea was served at the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin on Scona Road while commemorative scrolls were handed out to Edmontonians born before September 1, 1904. The following year was Alberta's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the cabin was used for the presentation of commemorative medallions for people born in the area before 1905.

The 1958-1959 Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin was a natural continuation of the mythic nature of the Edmonton Pioneers and Northern Alberta Old Timers' Association. The archetypal log cabin was a symbol of pioneering. It was first used by the Old Timers in 1897 when a log shack was constructed for card playing at the annual ball. Since then, log structures were seen at many of the annual events, and even atop the arch erected celebrating Alberta's incorporation as a province in 1905.

## **CONTEXT**

### **Site**

The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin is located in the North Saskatchewan River Valley, just off Scona Road. Mayor William Hawrelak, himself a member of the Pioneers of Northern Alberta, arranged for the organization to lease the site by from the City in the 1950s. At the time, the site was on a hill that was being leveled to provide fill for the Low Level Bridge. The site overlooks the North Saskatchewan River Valley and the downtown skyline.

A lilac bush was moved to the site in 1962. It had been brought to Edmonton from Eastern Canada by John Walter in 1870 and had grown on the Walterdale flats until 1920, when it was transplanted to the home of C. W. Hillas at 11012 - 113 Street. It remained there until it was transplanted to its present location behind the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin in 1962.

### **Neighbourhood**

The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin is located in an isolated northern section of the community of Strathcona. This part of the community contains roughly three dozen houses bordered to the north, west and south by River Valley Walterdale and to the east by Mill Creek Ravine. The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin is the only non-residential building in the collection, and is the furthest south. The homes range from small 1930s bungalows to modern infill development.

### **Visual/Symbolic**

The Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Cabin is in a highly conspicuous location next to Scona Road, a busy traffic thoroughfare. It is made all the more obvious to passers-by because it is one of the only buildings in the vicinity, and a large log cabin is an unusual building in Edmonton. Thousands of Edmontonians have used the building for a variety of reasons. The building has been the site of many club events, and is rented out for weddings, meetings, and special gatherings.

## **INTEGRITY**

The building was expanded with a log addition between 1987-1988 to include a conference room, an elevator, an accessible washroom on the main floor, and a bar, cloakroom and fire proof vault were built in the basement. New sinks and a cooler were added to the kitchen. The addition is located on the northeast corner of the building and is identified by an inscribed black granite cornerstone.

In 1989, new roof shakes were installed and insulation was added. The walls were stabilized with vertical timbers, steel channel beams, and roof supports.

Beginning in 1993, damaged logs began to be replaced. Exterior fire doors have been installed. A deck was added to the rear in the same log theme as the building.