

Log cabin builder

Modern approach to pioneer art

By Dave Owens

The early pioneers would have been proud to live in a cabin built by Eric Brooks.

The 31-year-old Greely resident is in the process of constructing an impressive three-room log home that would have taxed the axe of even the most skilled pioneer.

Mr. Brooks, a landscaper by profession, finds time during his off-season every winter to undertake special projects. Last winter he rebuilt a car and this winter he decided he'd like to build a log

home.

He began construction of the house in Greely in February, thanks to the unseasonably mild winter. Perhaps ironically, the buyer of the home, Lloyd Simms, is employed by a major Ottawa house builder.

A background which includes 10 years of commercial landscaping and carpentry as well as 12 years of chainsawing in British Columbia proved invaluable to

Mr. Brooks. He is combining modern technology with traditional log building techniques in his project. He is using two highly specialized Swedish chainsaws which, along with a double level scriber similar to a compass, allow for exact precision in fitting logs into notches. A great deal of eye judgement is still required in construction as no log is absolutely straight. In addition, the logs are aligned to look best on the exterior of the home.

Despite all the knowledge he gained from reading a half dozen books on the art of log construction, a large amount of the work is done by trial and error. "There are also little tricks," he says, "which you would never read about

in a book."

Logs for the project, all solid white pine from northern Ontario and Quebec, were purchased from a lumber mill in Pembroke where they were mechanically peeled of their bark. He feels the removal of bark creates a more attractive, professional-looking job appropriate for a permanent, year-round home.

All of the logs being used in construction are winter cut and green, making them easier to work with and less likely to split to any significant degree. Cutting logs green can prove to be a problem for an inexperienced builder. Because the logs will shrink as time passes, he allows one half-inch for every foot of the structure

for shrinkage. In the three years before shrinkage is completed, windows could be crushed and the ceiling lifted if proper procedures are not followed.

Most of the cabins built by pioneers were of the chinked variety, meaning a coat of mortar was used to seal spaces between logs. Due to the higher degree of precision allowed by Brooks' tools, chinking will not be required. Instead a thin layer of fibreglass, which will not be visible, will be used between logs.

When all logs have been fitted, the entire structure will be dismantled and coded. It will then be shipped by truck and trailer to Pakenham, 50 miles away, where it will take two weeks to re-erect.

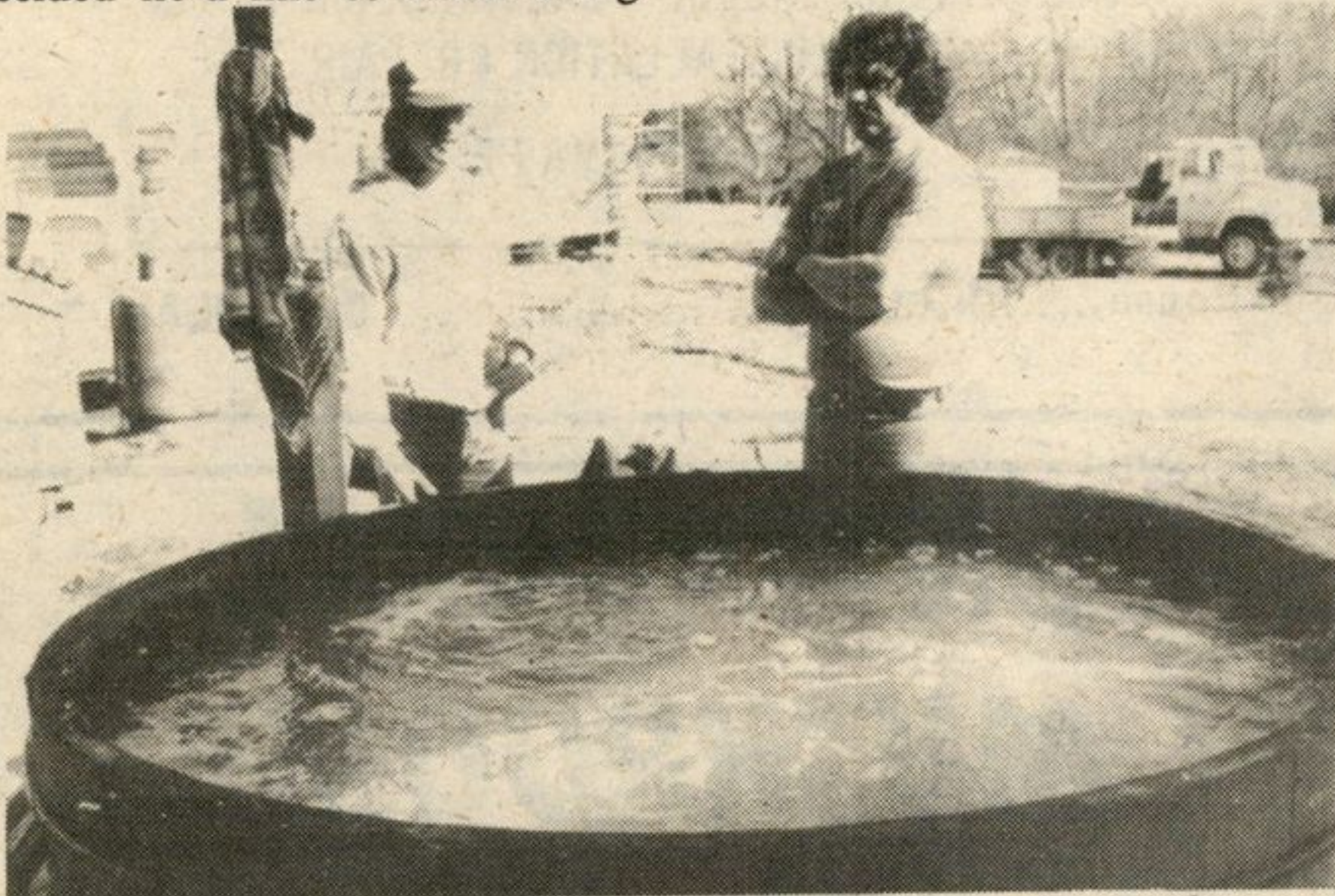
Between Mr. Brooks and his assistant, Cam Tatonetti, approximately 500 man hours have gone into the job. As much as three hours can be spent working on a single log to make it fit perfectly into the puzzle.

A total of 74 logs will be used, with each 35-foot length costing about \$80. In all, costs average about \$40 per square foot for the 1,500 square-foot, three-bedroom home. The price tag, \$60,000, includes fireplace and basement and, says Mr. Brooks, much higher quality of workmanship and materials than in the "matchbox" homes now going for approximately the same money.

He is building the home with energy conservation and heat retention high on his list of priorities. Most windows, including two sliding glass doors, will face a southerly direction for optimum sunlight exposure. The massive stone fireplace will be located in the centre of the home. He points out that most homes lose half of the heat from the fireplace because it is against a wall. A forced air heating unit will also be installed in the home.

Pine's resistance to heat loss (R value) is adequate with six inches having an R value of 12 but it also exhibits a unique quality wherein the R value increases as temperature decreases, meaning it most effectively retains heat in the coldest weather.

Mr. Brooks has enjoyed building the log home and hopes to begin construction on another sometime in August. Several interested parties have approached him. He has one note of caution for would-be builders — and buyers. He feels he underestimated the difficulty of the job, and the price will be a little higher next time around.



Reporter Dave Owens, craftsman Eric Brooks and hot tub. (Jean Lortie Photo)

Castor cool to hot tubs

The latest California craze isn't catching on in the Ottawa Valley. It has, in fact, been a dismal flop.

That's the word from Eric Brooks, Ottawa area landscaper and dealer in hot tubs. Mr. Brooks says he is very disappointed with sales in the region which show none of the dealers in the luxury item are making a profit.

Hot tubs were initially introduced on the West coast and have achieved modest success in the east, notably Toronto and Montreal. Made with either California redwood or British Columbia's western red cedar, a hot tub is filled with 700 gallons of water at 102 degrees Fahrenheit. When full, a six-foot diameter tub four-feet deep weighs four tons.

At \$3,200 per unit today's tight money market, hot tubs have been unable to compete with more essential commodities. In addition to the high price tag, energy conscious consumers may be scared off by heating costs amounting to about \$400 per year.

Mr. Brooks is convinced the conservation clientele in the Ottawa area will prove to be the final nail in the hot tub coffin. "They'd rather buy a pool than take a chance on something new."

After pumping a large number of advertising dollars into unsuccessful promotion he is resigned to the tub's failure. He points to one hot tub company, which went bankrupt after a \$200,000 advertising campaign.

Although the Ottawa market has apparently rejected the project, Mr. Brooks still likes the tubs. Compared to a pool, he says a hot tub is far superior. "Pools cost more to install and operate and you can only use them three months a year. Hot tubs can be used year round outdoors regardless of the weather." He also strongly advocates the therapeutic value of the hot hydro message and the relaxing effect induced by his product.

He does not maintain an inventory of hot tubs but rather places his orders with his Vancouver supplier when a customer comes to him. It means a four week waiting period but he says it is worth the wait because the wood will be fresher than if it had been sitting in stock for months.

Gerry Leroux



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