

Aug 1, 1987

# Home built from

By Jill Atkin  
Expositor Staff

HAGERSVILLE — Daniel Smith's heritage surrounds him in more than one way on his property on Sour Springs Road.

Not only is his land part of what was owned by his father before him, but the house he and his wife, Nelle, live in was hewn from that land.

The retired couple live in a cosy log house, constructed with white and red oak logs cut from the woods behind their R6 Hagersville home, not far inside the boundary of the Six Nations Reserve.

Mr. Smith built the house — and some of the furniture inside — himself, when he returned to Canada 17 years ago after working as a veterinarian in New Zealand for nearly 30 years. A mixture of Canadiana, hints from New Zealand homes and modern technology make the house an unusually graceful "log cabin."

## Gracious interior

The rough-and-ready, log and concrete exterior belies the Oriental rugs, exotic artwork, sauna and airy rooms inside. The house has two bedrooms, a den-library, dining room, kitchen and bathroom upstairs.

The basement houses a two-vehicle garage, workrooms (where much of the inside woodwork was done) and the sauna. The sauna's 8,000-watt heater brings the temperature up in a matter of minutes, and a cooling shower and rest bed offer relief to those who venture into its fiery depths.

Constructing a house out of oak logs takes patience and planning, according to Mr. Smith. The extreme density of oak makes the logs heavy, with many of the larger ones weighing two tons.

Because of this, standard concrete blocks could not be used to construct the foundation. To hold the weight, Mr. Smith looked for the biggest concrete blocks he could find, finally locating them in Paris. The 12-by-20-by-10-inch blocks weigh 100 pounds each.

"The bricklayers really earned their money while we were putting in the foundation," he said with a chuckle.

The bricklayers, and an electrician and plumber for hookups, were the only outside help he used. The main construction was done by him, with help from a builder friend visiting from New Zealand.

"I tried to find a contractor that would take on the job, but no one would touch a log house in those days," said Mr. Smith. "I did the job myself because I had to."

The house measures 48 feet by 26 feet, and the top and bottom logs of the walls run through

the building in one piece. Some of the timber started out 60 feet long. Although not precisely uniform, the logs are about 10 inches in diameter.

They were lifted into place for the first five feet by a front-end loader on a tractor. After that didn't reach high enough, the men set up a boom with a two-ton block and tackle and lifted the logs into place one end at a time.

Holding the logs together is a mixture of mortar and cement, which is anchored to chicken wire wound through the wood.

The fireplace, a central point of interest in the dining room as you walk in the front door, was one of the ideas imported from New Zealand where homes which have fireplaces use the system. Called a wetback fireplace, the space behind the firebox is a huge steel tank of water. When the fire burns, the water boils creating steam which is piped to radiators in the den, or to the basement to heat water there. The steel was made to his specifications in Guelph.

When the Smiths are not at their Palm Springs winter retirement home, the fireplace helps to keep the oil bills down.

Mr. Smith conceived the idea for his log home in New Zealand. He had always wanted to live in a log cabin, and explained his idea to a friend who was an architect. His friend drew up blueprints to give him an idea of what would be needed and the idea became a plan.

During visits to Canada in 1967 and 1968, Mr. Smith chose and cut several of the logs to be used in the house, leaving them in the woods until 1970 when he returned to Canada to stay. The rest of the logs were cut that year, and drawn out of the woods to the house's location.

## Unconventional more fun

During the next 18 months, the house was constructed and finished inside. Mr. Smith built much of the furniture from kits he had brought from New Zealand.

"I could have built a conventional house in half the time, with half the labor, but it wouldn't have been nearly as much fun," Mr. Smith said.

The house sits on 200 acres of land, part of the original 1,000 acres accumulated by his father. Each of five brothers in the family of 10 were given 200 acres.

Mr. Smith leased his land while he trained for four years at the Ontario College of Agriculture in Guelph, then for five as a veterinary surgeon. When in 1942, the New Zealand government was desperate for veterinarians because of the war, Mr. Smith and two of his college companions went there to work "for a few years."

For Mr. Smith, that few years turned into 30,