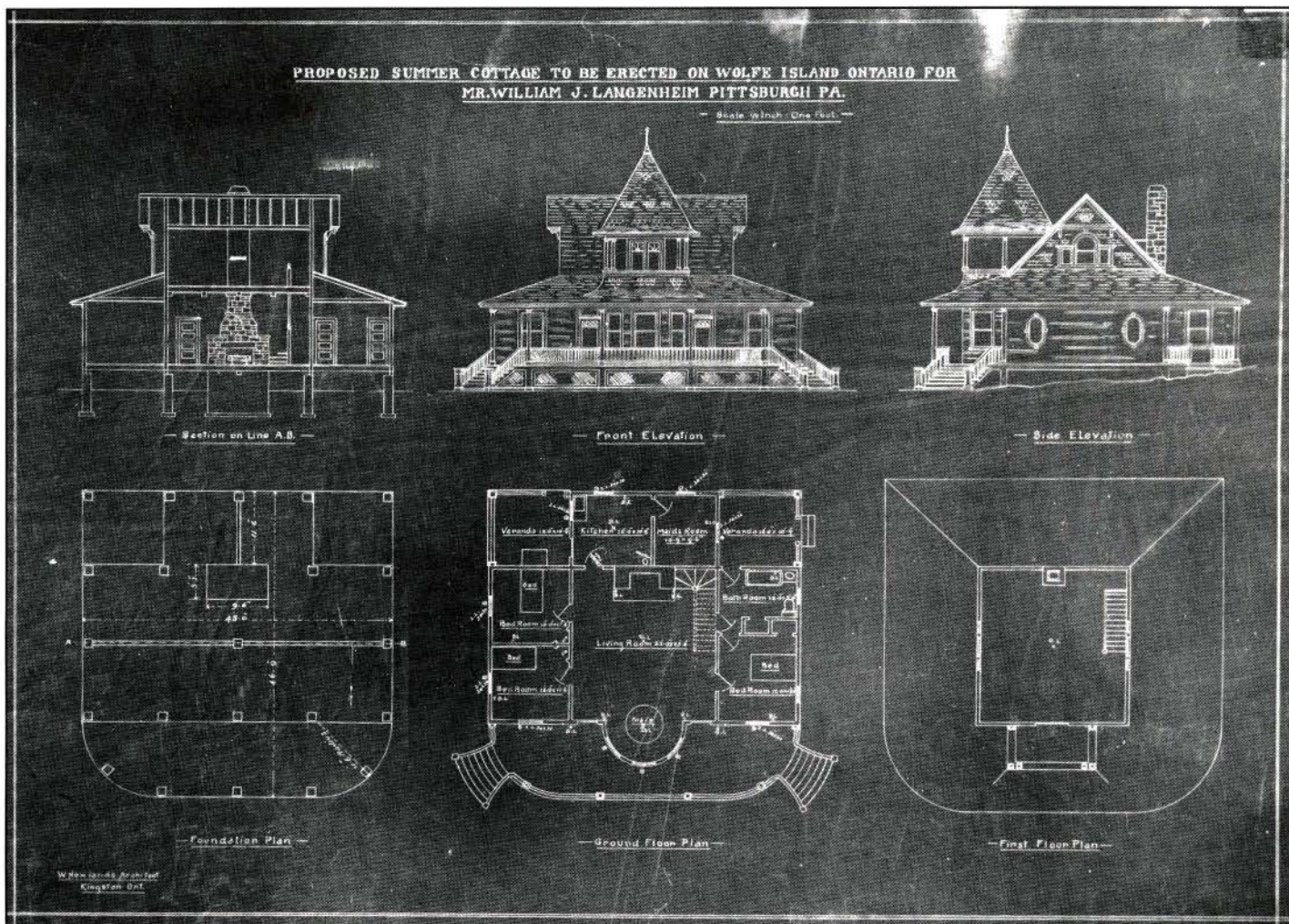


Building for the Outdoors: Two Early Twentieth-Century Kingston-Area Cottages



The Langenheim cottage on Wolfe Island in the Thousand Islands region and the Richardson cottage on Thirteen Island Lake are two Kingston-area cottages which, although built under different circumstances, are grounded in the cultural value of the “outdoor experience,” evident in aspects of their commission, design, and construction. Through these two very different cottages we will investigate building for the outdoors: we will discuss attitudes held in the late 19th century about the value of city-dwellers’ activities in the outdoor environment; and, after looking at these two buildings’ histories, we will analyze the rustic and the primitive allusions present in these cottages.¹

BY KAREN M. FRASER AND CHRISTINE O’MALLEY

Figure 1 (previous page). Design for a summer cottage for William J. Langenheim on Wolfe Island, Ontario; William Newlands, architect, c. 1907-1909. (Newlands Collection of Architectural Drawings, Queen's University Archives; reproduced with the kind permission of the Newlands family)

The growth in popularity of the cottage during the late 19th century can be attributed, in part, to an increase in leisure time for the middle and upper-middle classes, and to the creation of a leisure culture.² The growth of the Thousand Islands as a popular tourist destination was a result of these phenomena. The islands dotting both sides of the American-Canadian border first captured the attention of the general public in 1872, when George Pullman, of sleeping-car fame, hosted United States president Ulysses S. Grant at his Thousand Islands summer cottage, "Castle Rest."³ Members of the press who travelled to the region to report on the president's stay also focused attention on an area formerly visited primarily by avid anglers and hunters. These outdoorsmen had stayed in simple hotels and rooming houses in Alexandria Bay and Clayton, New York.

Pullman was not a disinterested vacationer in this region. A comfortable railroad system was a precondition for the promotion of an accessible tourist region, and Pullman was ideally positioned to profit from the sale of his sleeping cars to the railroad companies pulling out of cities such as New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. By the end of the 19th century, the Thousand Islands had been connected to major American and Canadian cities through an extensive rail and steamship network. Companies such as the New York Central Railway and the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company were instrumental in promoting the area through their own brochures and souvenir guidebooks.⁴ The mansions of the wealthy, such as Castle Rest on Pullman Island, were featured prominently in travel guides intended to attract middle and upper-middle class patronage.⁵ Features such as the plentiful fishing, the varied, scenic landscape, and the restorative powers of nature were also proclaimed in tourist pamphlets. For example, in *Chisholm's All Round Route and Panoramic Guide of the St. Lawrence*, published in Montréal in 1872, the author wrote of the region:

It is a famous spot for sporting: myriads of wild fowls of all descriptions may here be found; and angling is rather fatiguing than otherwise, from the great quantity and size of the fish.⁶

Of the healthful benefits of a summer vacation, an 1884 guide book for the Thousand Island House in Alexandria Bay, New York (which had over 12,000 guests in the 1882 season) noted that:

There has been of late years a great annual increase in the number of those who saw the wisdom of laying down their burdens for a time, with the assurance that when again taken up it would be with renewed energy, through which they might not only accomplish more of their accustomed labour, but would at the same time add to the term of their lives.⁷

A popularly accepted notion was that the natural or uncivilized land was of healthful value, as suggested by the labels "unspoiled" and "wilderness" commonly found in the promotional literature. Wilderness is, of course, a culturally determined concept, not a feature of physical geography. According to Roderick Nash, the application of the label "wilderness" to a landscape is a description of the viewer's emotional response to that landscape.⁸ Wilderness was a catchword for a type of experience with an uncivilized and therefore "wild" nature, a result of the urban dweller's recognition of a landscape which was opposite to the city's. Insofar as the outdoors is understood to be a site of human happiness or well-being, this cultural construct is a descendant of 18th-century ideas about the ideal state of humankind. In the 19th century, however, it became a much more pragmatic conception. As William Wicks, a popular exponent of the outdoors, stated in his 1889 book *Log Cabins: How to Build and Furnish Them*:

If in the desire for a return to the woods you discover elements of an uncivilized condition, that is no reason why you should go to the woods in a barbaric fashion. The modern representative of city life must not dream of going to the woods and living like a savage "in caves and dens of the earth," nor must he attempt to assume the remoter "arboreal habits" of the "hairy biped." As man has brought with us from barbarism to civilization traces of our original condition, so he must take back to "the forest primeval" some traces of civilization.⁹

CEDAR CLIFF, THE LANGENHEIM COTTAGE

When William J. Langenheim of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, decided to build a cottage on Wolfe Island, there was already an extensive transportation network in place, and the area had been well advertised for a quarter of a century; in fact, the Thousand Islands were reaching the end of their heyday as a tourist destination. The industrialization and urbanization which fuelled the cottage trend were often themselves causes for individuals' desires to leave the city. This was most likely the case with the Langenheim family, which lived in the heavily polluted city of Pittsburgh. In the 1870s and 1880s, members of Pittsburgh's elite, including the Carnegies, Mellons, and Fricks, were already escaping the city for hunting and fishing holidays,¹⁰ and by the early 1900s, some Pittsburgh residents — including Samuel Vandergrift

- 1 The two cottages which are the subject of this paper were first investigated in a seminar with Professor Pierre du Prey at Queen's University, Kingston. We are grateful to the Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montréal and to Research Services at Queen's University for sponsoring the attendance of Karen Fraser and Christine O'Malley respectively at the SSAC Conference in Kingston.
- 2 See David Strauss, "Toward a Consumer Culture: 'Adirondack Murray' and the Wilderness Vacation," *American Quarterly* 19 (Summer 1987): 270.
- 3 Pullman purchased the island in 1862, and had first constructed a smaller cottage on the site.
- 4 See the New York Central Railway's map for *The Thousand Islands: St. Lawrence River, Rideau Lakes, Ottawa River* (Chicago, 191-), and the annual brochures of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company from the early 20th century.
- 5 See, for example, plate 24 in *The Thousand Islands and the River St. Lawrence: Views ...* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: James Bayne Co., 190-).
- 6 *Chisholm's All Round Route and Panoramic Guide of the St. Lawrence* (Montreal: Chisholm and Co., 1872), 53.
- 7 *Guide Book of the Thousand Island House on the St. Lawrence River, Alexandria Bay, New York* (New York: Leve & Alden, 1884), 4.
- 8 Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 1.
- 9 William S. Wicks, *Log Cabins: How to Build and Furnish Them* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Co., 1889), 7-8.
- 10 Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 36.



(the vice-president of Apollo Iron and Steel), who had built his cottage “Long Rock” on Long Rock Island in 1901 — were now making their way to the Thousand Islands region.

Between 1907 and 1909, Kingston-based architect William Newlands designed a cottage, often referred to as “Cedar Cliff,” for the Langenheim family. Their cottage was a much simpler summer home than the luxurious residences on the American side of the Thousand Islands. Wolfe Island, largely a farming community at this time, was not overrun by the numbers of vacation homes found up the river, which may have been part of the appeal of the site. Newlands’ design for a wooden cottage included classical elements such as unfluted Tuscan columns on the veranda, Palladian windows, and symmetrical facades (figures 1, 2). Some elements of the cottage appear to have been derived from popular pattern books such as Comstock’s *Modern Architectural Designs and Details* (1881) and Palliser’s *New Cottage Homes and Details* (1887), which featured plans, elevations, and details for wooden houses.¹¹

Originally, the cottage was painted a dark mustard brown. Attached to the square wooden pedestals located on either side of the bottom of the veranda staircase are flat miniature Tuscan column designs outlined in wood (figure 3), in keeping with the use of the Tuscan order on the rest of the cottage. By using the Tuscan order, often regarded as the most primitive order of architecture,¹² Newlands suggested the association of this order and this cottage with the primitive origins of humankind in the state of nature. Thus, there is an allusion to the parallel between this state of nature and the site of the cottage as a retreat where one can get back to basics. With the use of the Tuscan order, the lightness of the wood-frame construction, and the original earth-tone colour scheme, Newlands had highlighted the primitive or elemental aspects of the cottage.

Inside, the central chimney was constructed of large, roughly hewn stones and a large rock lintel.¹³ Newlands’ original proposal for the fireplace was an Arts-and-Crafts-inspired brick fireplace with a Rideau stone lintel and terra cotta egg-and-dart mouldings, but this was rejected for the more rustic version currently in place.¹⁴

The location of the cottage was also of primary importance. Wicks addressed this issue in his book, advising his readers to study the site of the cottage “as you would a painting.”¹⁵ He emphasized the importance of a view:

Love lovely scenery, and in selecting your camp site pick out a commanding position. You should be able to see long distances over water as well as over a succession of hills and mountains.¹⁶

Although the view from the verandah of the Langenheim cottage does not include hills and mountains, it certainly provides a pleasant prospect of Lake Ontario and Kingston in the distance. The type of sweeping verandah found at the Langenheim cottage provided an area for rest and contemplation. This feature can be found on many cottages, including “Nokomis” on Howe Island, an early-20th century cottage designed by a contemporary of Newlands, Frank Lent.

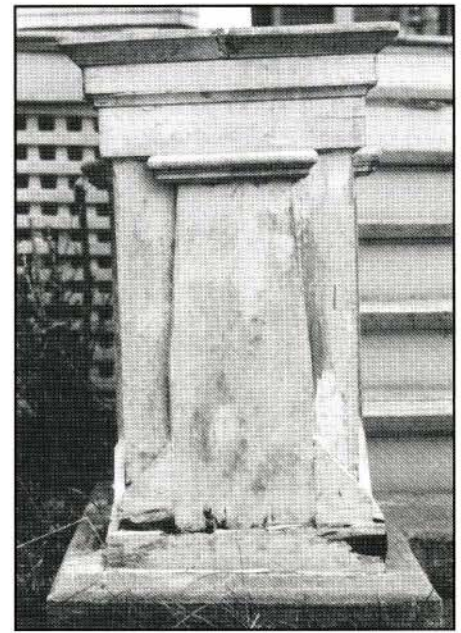


Figure 2 (left). The Langenheim cottage, Wolfe Island, Ontario. (K. Fraser and C. O’Malley, 1989)

Figure 3 (above). Detail of the flat miniature Tuscan column attached to the pedestal at the base of the verandah staircase, Langenheim cottage. (K. Fraser and C. O’Malley, 1989)

11 *Modern Architectural Designs and Details* (New York: William T. Comstock, 1881), and *Palliser’s New Cottage Homes and Details* (New York: Palliser, Palliser and Co., 1887). The latter shows a cottage with an oval window similar to those at the Langenheim cottage.

12 See J. Douglas Stewart’s essay in Gerald Tulchinsky, ed., *To Preserve and Defend* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1976), 44.

13 This was similar in design to a fireplace design found in *Summer Homes and Camps* (Boston: Tremont Building, 1899), by architect Frank Lent, a contemporary of Newlands.

14 Curiously, an almost identical fireplace to the original design was built in 1901 by Robert Findlay at “Mississagua,” the Benson family of Montréal’s summer cottage in the Thousand Islands. This seems to indicate that the fireplace design came from a brick or fireplace supplier’s own pattern book.

15 Wicks, 9.

16 *Ibid.*

Figure 4 (top). The rear elevation of the Richardson cottage at Thirteen Island Lake, Ontario, in the late 1920s or early 1930s. (Courtesy Gillian and Robert Little)

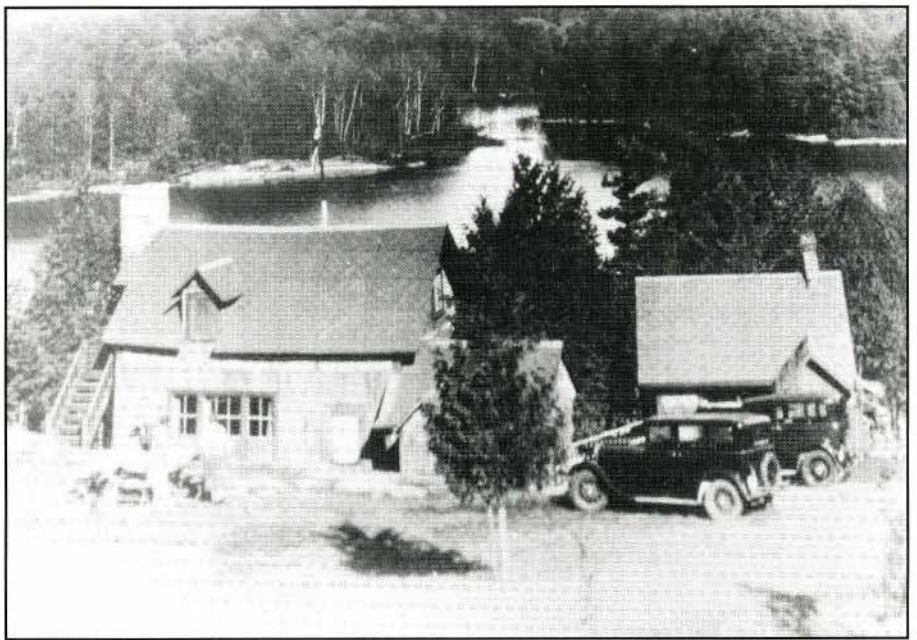


Figure 5 (bottom). The lakeside elevation of the Richardson cottage, showing the veranda's decorative woodwork. (Courtesy Gillian and Robert Little, 1989)



THE RICHARDSON COTTAGE

The Richardson cottage is an early example of a vacation home built in the Canadian Shield north of Kingston.¹⁷ Smaller than the Langenheim cottage, it was built more along the lines of a hunting or fishing cabin, which, given the interests of the owner, may have been the initial idea. Henry Wartman Richardson (1855-1918) “was a famous hunter, and every year spent a portion of the autumn months in his favourite haunts He loved to indulge in fishing and spent many hours on the best waters both in and about the city.”¹⁸

Probably built during the first decade of the 20th century, the cottage by 1915 was being used as a summer-long vacation home for this prominent Kingston family. There is a strong contrast between the Richardsons’ lifestyle at the rustic cottage and at their neo-classical home “Alwington” on King Street West in Kingston. Alwington was built in 1834 and enlarged in 1841 by George Browne, who added a neoclassical portico.¹⁹ The cottage’s size and simple, open plan would have given it a relaxed atmosphere, in contrast to the more formal arrangements at Alwington. The early history of the cottage is not clear, but it is tied to a nearby feldspar mine which gave access to the site. The centre of Frontenac County was opened up in the 1870s, when the Kingston and Pembroke Railway began laying tracks north of Kingston toward the Ottawa River valley.²⁰ At this time, lots were being purchased and leased as people speculated on the possibility of mining operations.²¹ In 1901, H.W.

17 We gratefully acknowledge the assistance offered by Gillian and Robert Little, the present owners, who permitted us to study the cottage.

18 Biographical information on H.W. Richardson is from unsourced clippings in the Richardson Archives, Richardson Greenshields, Winnipeg, with the kind assistance of Ms Celia Richardson and Ms Sheila Berthon.

19 Alwington was destroyed by fire in 1958.

20 Brian S. Osborne and Donald Swainson, *Kingston: Building on the Past* (Westport, Ont.: Butternut Press, 1988), 177ff.

21 Aaron Hoppins was involved in land speculation over ownership and mineral rights in several lots in Bedford Township, including Lot I, Concession II, which is the site of the cottage (property ownership documents for Lot I, Concession II, Township of Bedford Abstract, Frontenac County Court House Registry Office).



Figure 6. A rustic bench on the site of the Richardson cottage. (Courtesy Gillian and Robert Little, 1989)

Richardson and his partner signed a mineral lease to mine for feldspar next to Thirteen Island Lake in Bedford Township.²²

It seems likely that the cottage was constructed between 1901, when Richardson first became involved with the property, and 1910, when oral testimony suggests that it was built.²³ The cottage site was beside the tramway which carried the feldspar down to Thirteen Island Lake, to be barged across to the train at Glendower.²⁴ The cottage was probably designed by a local builder/craftsman; the awkward mix of the stylistic features (rustic motifs with “bungalow” dormers) suggests that the services of a professional architect were not involved (figure 4).²⁵ The imaginative use of local building materials is the most striking feature of the cottage. The main building, containing a living room and bedrooms, was covered on the exterior with vertical cedar slabs with the bark left intact. In the living room, feldspar from the mine was used to construct the chimney.²⁶ The veranda overlooking the lake was supported with cedar poles forming Y-shaped braces, and these braces, as well as the central gable on the veranda roof, were both filled in with decorative woodwork (figure 5).

Complementary to this work is the rustic furniture: at least two existing chairs and two benches appear to be contemporary with the cottage (figure 6). The use of local building materials is understandable, considering the remote location of the site. While “rustic” traditionally meant artificially roughened, the term was also used for stylistic motifs best known through their association with the great camps of New York’s Adirondack Mountains, where the building materials were shaped to recall their natural state. For example, bark was left on the wood, and stones were left in somewhat irregular shapes.

This is not to suggest that the cottage was deliberately modelled after an Adirondack great camp — there is obviously a difference in the quality of work, and, by this date, Adirondack-type features were found in many vacation cottages, including houses outside Montréal.²⁷ The term “Adirondack style” is appropriate, however, since it was in this context that the features were widely published. For example, William Henry Harrison Murray (called “Adirondack” Murray) published *Adventures in the Wilderness or Camp-life in the Adirondacks* in 1869.²⁸ Periodicals such as *Outing*, *Forest and Stream*, *Field and Stream*, and *Town and Country* published articles through the 1880s and into early 1900s on various aspects of vacationing in the Adirondacks. Architectural magazines also promoted the Adirondack style, as did how-to books, such as the previously-mentioned *Log Cabins: How to Build and Furnish Them*.²⁹

Part of the style’s popularity was its perceived suitability for this type of location. Many Adirondack lodges, despite their large size, recalled the log construction techniques which were still being used in some areas for hunting and fishing cabins.³⁰ The lifestyle of the log cabin dwellers — explorers, trappers, adventurers — had caught the popular imagination through the works of James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) and others. Veneration for the ability to live off the land was exemplified by Hawkeye, a scout in Cooper’s 1826 novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, whose descendant is the camp guide in “Adirondack” Murray’s *Adventures in the Wilderness*.³¹ The use of rustic motifs and furniture in the late 19th and

22 E2463 and E2505, Township of Bedford Abstract, Frontenac County Court House Registry Office.

23 Alan D. McGinnis, grandson of H.W. Richardson, believes the cottage was built between 1908 and 1910. (Telephone interview with K.M. Fraser, 9 December 1989). We thank the present owners of the cottage and the Richardson Archives in Winnipeg for the referral to Mr. McGinnis.

24 There has been much speculation on the odd location of the cottage next to the tramway: it has been suggested that the site provided easy access on a rugged state, or that the cottage was originally the mine supervisor’s house. The latter is discounted by Alan D. McGinnis, who remembers the supervisor’s house and recalls that the feldspar cars were not noisy; they ran by cable and made only four trips per day.

25 Also confirmed by the testimony of Dr. Ford Connell (in an interview with the authors during the fall of 1989), Alan D. McGinnis (as above), and Hannah Morey (in an interview with the authors, 1 October 1989).

26 The present chimney stack is a reconstruction dating to 1933; the chimneypiece may also have been reconstructed.

27 See, for example, the James Gardiner log house of 1898 at Sainte-Agathe, designed by Edward Maxwell, in France Gagnon Pratte, *Country Houses for Montrealers, 1892-1924: The Architecture of E. and W.S. Maxwell* (Montréal: Meridian Press, 1987), 115. The importance of Montréal vacation architecture as a model for Ontario architecture is a topic requiring further investigation.

28 William Henry Harrison Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness or Camp-life in the Adirondacks* (Boston: Field, Osgoode and Co., 1869).

29 Articles in architectural magazines included “An Adirondack Lodge for William A. Read,” in *American Architect and Building News* (14 July 1906), and “An Adirondack Lodge,” in *House and Garden* (December 1907).

30 This was the case at Lac Brûlé, popular with several wealthy Montréal families. Pratte, 125.

31 James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826; reprint, London: Dent, [1906]).

early 20th centuries recalled the trapper or guide living in a log cabin — without the inconvenience of actually living off the land in a one-room cottage.

THESE TWO COTTAGES UTILIZED TWO DIFFERENT STYLISTIC SOLUTIONS, the rustic and the classical. Both carry meanings derived from their origins in architectural theory. The idea of building a primitive hut with logs and trees has a long intellectual tradition. Abbé Laugier, who published essays on architecture in the 1750s and 1760s, postulated how early humans seeking shelter built the first building, a primitive hut from the branches of trees in the forest.³² Laugier suggested an origin for the columns in the uprights of temples, which were, in turn, based on the rough tree-trunk supports of the primitive hut. In this context, the rustic can be understood within the classical tradition; both draw meaning from conception of a primitive architecture. Both cottages, therefore, allude to the primitive hut as the original building for the outdoors.

What makes a cottage appropriate for the outdoors experience? While we do not know the intentions of the owners and designers of these two examples, this interpretation, which is grounded in an understanding of architecture as both a social practice and a theoretical tradition, provides a link between the prevailing attitudes about the outdoors with the architectural theory embodied in the stylistic motifs.

32 See chapter 3, "Positive and Arbitrary," in Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), wherein the author refers to Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (Paris, 1753), and *Observations sur l'architecture* (The Hague, 1765).

Karen Fraser is currently pursuing a Master's degree at the University of East Anglia in Britain, and Christine O'Malley is at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in the Department of Education.