

June, 2014

Dear Reader,

I want to tell you the story of a precious legacy, a special little house built by a good man.

As children, my two sisters and I would spend a few weeks in the summer with our Cassidy grandparents who lived in New Brunswick. We would often go for country drives and picnics, and one of our fondest destinations was to Cassidy Lake and the Clover Hill homestead. This property had been in the family since our Irish ancestors settled there in the early 1800s.

In our time, the Cassidy home, which sat on a hill overlooking the lake, was empty and in disrepair; the farm's barns and workshop gone. But the tiny family chapel, built and named for our great great grandfather, and the cemetery where our ancestors were buried, were still intact and we would sit on the steps of the house's sagging porch while our grandfather told us stories of life at "Clover Hill" and the people who had lived there.



The porch stretched across the front of the house, divided in the middle by the house's entranceway. The entranceway was three-sided, mirroring the shape of the bay window above, having a door on either side from the porch, and the main door to the house in between.

Entering this way one arrived in a small front hall which divided the house in the middle. A staircase straight ahead anchored by a turned newel post lead to the second floor. To one's left was the parlour and to one's right a sitting room. Stepping into the parlour, there were two sash windows on one's left and two on the wall opposite. To one's right were two doors, the nearest leading into the kitchen/dining room, and another which opened into a small bedroom.

Returning to cross the hallway, one would enter the sitting room, a less formal space, but with the same configuration of windows and doors as the parlour. Both rooms at one time had little pot bellied stoves for heat. Standing at the entrance to the kitchen/dining room, one was greeted by a large area in which dining table, dressers, and in the winter, a Starr step-stove resided. Looking from left to right at this vantage point, one would see a built in china cabinet, next to which was the root cellar door, and the door from the parlour. A small projection across from this way in hid a steep turning back staircase up to the second floor. On the far wall was the entrance to a pantry, and to the right, the summer kitchen

to which the cast iron wood burning stove would be moved for the hot months. It is thought that this area was the original part of the Irish ancestors' first home, and indeed it did have a semblance of an Irish cottage layout.

Going across the kitchen, and heading up to the second floor via the back stairs, one would arrive a hall with a door to one's right, two on the left and a door ahead flanked by a window. This window did not face outside, but was for sharing the light from the master bedroom's bay window with the hallway and stairwell. There were four bedrooms on this floor, though the room on the right was latterly converted to a bathroom (rarely used as it was considered too "modern"). Prior to the bathroom conversion, the room had also been known to house my great aunt's chickens. None of the rooms had closets; clothing was hung on nails in the walls. Heating came from the chimneys of the pot bellied stoves below.

On what turned out to be our last visit to the house, we persuaded our grandfather to take us inside to "rescue" any artifacts that might be there. Grandpa managed to get the front door open, and we gingerly explored the dusty broken down rooms.

Vandals had struck multiple times. The floor of the parlour was caved in revealing the root cellar below, the staircase banisters were splintered like broken teeth. There was dirt and bits of wood everywhere. We carefully made our way upstairs and after some persuasion, Grandpa removed a few brown china doorknobs for me, reluctantly as he thought the home should be left as is. As he worked with his ever ready pocket knife, I looked for any other artifacts, and was able to find and pocket a scrap of linen. We were all saddened by the destruction around us and left subdued.

The visit turned out to be our only chance to see inside, as shortly thereafter, the home was burned to the ground.

A hundred and fifty years earlier, William and Jane Cassidy, emigrated from Ireland in shortly after they were married. They originally settled in Saint John, NB, but within a few years decided to carve out a homestead at what was then known as Deforest Lake, approximately 50 km northeast of Saint John. With two small children, they began life in the area on the south side of the lake and in 1823 William purchased 150 acres of land on its north side. "The contract price for the property was £40 in New Brunswick currency, equivalent to about \$5,000 in today's dollars, payable in carpenter's work over six years at an annual rate of £6 15s (6 pounds 15 shillings)."¹ In order to gain title to his land, William walked to the province's capital, a 160 km away, making the journey in the winter to take advantage of easier going across frozen lakes and rivers.

William and Jane built a home on their property, expanding it and a barn and workshops, while raising 12 children. They had to be self-sufficient, as the nearest supplies were 50 km away. They raised animals and crops for food; flax was grown from which some of the family's clothing was made. William was also a carpenter and a master craftsman in the making of hand looms.

A story of the Cassidys' self-sufficiency has been passed down through the generations: One day smoke from a large forest fire some 200 km to the north, covered Cassidy Lake with such dense fog that Jane, attempting to return from the pasture on the opposite shore of the lake became lost. William was able

¹ www.cassidys.ca

to guide her safely back home by trumpeting on a conch shell. (Perhaps a lucky memento from the days of living at an ocean port.)

Of William and Jane's life, at least two artifacts still exist: a green and white china cup and saucer which came with them from Ireland, and one of the shuttles William carved.



William and Jane's house witnessed the comings and goings of five subsequent generations, both living within and nearby. Carpentry skills were handed down, as were a love of Clover Hill and its family history. The house was expanded and improved, and in 1883, Francis Edward Cassidy, William and Jane's son, added a tiny chapel on the lakeside below the house. In 1890 the chapel was donated to the Methodist Church, and in 1949 the first of annual family gatherings at the church was held at its dedication to Francis Edward. Pictures from this event paid a large part in what comes next.

The house was burned down by vandals in the 1970s. In 1979 I proposed a project to my grandfather: could he build a 1/12th scale replica of the house? I was at that time starting a collection of 1/12th scale miniatures. I longed for a dollhouse in which to put my growing collection, and then it occurred to me: no one could live in the house at Clover Hill anymore, but perhaps we could bring it back to life another way. Grandfather embraced the idea wholeheartedly.

At the time, I lived in Halifax, NS and my grandfather lived in Fredericton, NB. The house took a year to build, and we corresponded throughout, planning, brainstorming with each other, researching and sharing progress reports and more family stories. Though I don't have copies of my letters, I do, more importantly, have Grandpa's. Excerpts from these letters follow.

From the first, as we embarked on our plan:

"Knowhow as a carpenter & one who has touched the hand of those who have gone before, will (have to) fill in the blank spaces and it will, for when my pencil, pen & carpenters tools are laid down it is doubtful if anyone else will duplicate the project."

One of the most useful guides in building the replica was a collection of photographs my grandmother had: one of the house circa 1912, one later in 1952, and ten photographs from the first family reunion. Close examination of these photos prompted letters full of interesting observations and comments about the times and construction of the "real" house.



It is thought that the house's beginnings were as a small cottage, which later evolved into the summer kitchen and dining room of the expanding home. In the 1912 picture, it does not yet have a verandah: *"There is no roof over the piazza (a Latin word) Dad built the roof sometime between 1910 and 1914. The roof of the house is covered with wood shingles and notice the lines (vertical) at the joints of the pediment roof. That is a shingled hip, commonly called a Boston hip. I put on many of them."*

"Large trees at each end of the house are willows (not weeping willows). The one on the left is the whip that Grandfather Francis Edward "C" used to drive to St. John and when he came home it was stuck in the ground and grew to a tree."

"The pole in the foreground is for the telephone. Note the wood bracket on the top right side. There was 11 miles of wire to Sussex while the road is 16. The line went the short way through the woods."

"The time of year is just before haying quite likely June 15 or thereabouts...the house could use a coat of paint. The driveway is narrow and low in relation to the adjoining ground due to constant washing from rainfall. As I look at the old shop door it seems that Grandfather should come out wearing an old battered black felt hat."

In the 1952 picture, we see changes:



"...someone did paint the house and shingled the roof with Arrow-lock asphalt shingles. I helped put on quite a number of them. Cost in 1938 was app. \$2.60 per square (10" x 10")...Note the piazza roof is covered with corrugated galvanized roofing, quite likely over the wood shingles. A common thing for that period. This picture was taken after haying time and the mowing leaves something to be desired. Note the streaks of dried hay left by the mowing machine." Grandpa was quite particular

about mowing, and he had previously recounted to us stories of when he used to help mow the property with a scythe, not a machine!

"Note lightening {sic} rods (so called) on the roofs. White ball on shop and blue on roof of house and the braided wire app. 5/8" coming down the left end of the house roof. Note it carries {sic} down the end of the house and is embedded in the ground app. 10" as a ground. Lightening rods were common for that period."

From the pictures of the 1949 reunion, further detail that would ordinarily have been overlooked by the unobservant eye:

(Picture #3) "Note the wallpaper, the hewed beam over doors, the different width of the head casings...note beam covered with wallpaper on back wall of kitchen. Note heavy hewed post going up to ceiling to carry the weight of the rafters, roof, snow load etc."



(Picture #5) "Note casing around door so narrow on one side and wide on the other. This is not a mistake, but is due to a wall being on the opposite side and between the sitting room and stairway. Note in the extreme right part of a casing that reaches to the ceiling. This is the left casing of a built in china cabinet. This wall is all doors except for the cabinet. The other two are to parlour and cellar."



(Picture #6) Some kitchen detail: "Note wall paper, real clear, rolled up curtain, right wall. See sissors {sic} on summer kitchen wall and last on the left an old fashioned pot cleaner with rubber preserve jar ring on same hook or more likely a nail."



(Picture #9) Installation of a tin ceiling: "Note ceiling. These are pressed metal mouldings and sheets (of) what was called Mettalic Ceiling. There are two mouldings, note large one on wall and ceiling. Note the section between mouldings shows a pattern one dimpled. This part is important as the center panels were about 2'-0" square. Two are partly shown in extreme top left of picture. To carry out the work one would measure ceiling width and length then figure the number of 2' panels and moulding sizes that were required and the difference would quite likely vary in measure between side and end. This is where the dimpled sheet called a Diaphragm comes in. The carpenter could cut it to width to suit as the dimpled part did not show a cut and would always match...The area was strapped with 1"x3" and the metal applied with special nails. These nails used to skid on the metal and then one got bruised thumb and fingers, after a few days it really hurt as I found out."



In later correspondence, discussion of the model's potential size and finishing took place:

"...one inch equals one foot, it is not small by any means. Height is 28 1/2" and that includes the chimneys which are 2 1/2" high. It will be heavy as I intend to use 1/2" plywood for the main floor and the outside walls. The drawings are just about ready. Stairs (3 sets), windows, doors, walls, etc. I drove down to the old farm and for the third time measured the foundations which are 50% covered."

At the time, I was more focused on the project than on the occasional hint of things to come that were sometimes tucked within the house notes: *"Feb. 5 at 2 p.m. finds me at Dr's office as he is the one who will operate at a time as yet unknown to me..."*

Later in the same letter: *"The job could start soon we hope. Stan Cassidy (owner of the property at the time) was in for a chat and we talked the project over and gave me some good advice such as don't forget the sliding opening between the pantry and the kitchen etc. I will make the model as near as I can to what the house was such as the Dining Rm with wide and narrow head casings on drs to pantry and kitchen."*

The footprint of the house caused some issues as to how the interior would be accessible. It was essentially a rectangle, with a rectangular projection off the back containing the summer kitchen and part of dining room. At first, consideration was given to making the model in two pieces which would slide apart, the front from the back. Ultimately, however, it was constructed as one piece, with the roofs of the main portion and the kitchen removable, as well as the side walls of the main part of the house which were held on with magnets. The upper floor of the main part could also be lifted off, with a specific maneuver, and its walls removed for ease of painting and wallpapering.

Grandpa paid close attention to how the doors themselves were built. Some had two panels, some had three, some panels were horizontal, some were vertical, but at the time, tiny hinges were the bigger issue. He manufactured them himself from galvanized sheet iron and brads, taping a sample in one of the letters.

"The stairway is complete...treads and risers in place, and quite a bit of work on the railing. I designed a newel post (the big one at the bottom of the first floor) and got a local chap to turn one to my drawing and it is ready now. Mother and Nicola are excited about it, but it is old hat to me for I designed it quite some (time) ago as I wanted the post at the front of the stairs to be like I remembered it." Later the story also came out that when Grandpa went to see the "local chap" about turning the post, and the fellow said, yes he could do it and to bring the wood in. Grandpa then pulled the piece of wood out of his pocket, much to the great surprise of the woodworker!



In the last letter of the collection the house is near completion. It had been decided after some debate, that the clapboard siding would be replicated using thin strips of vinyl. *"The two sides of the house, dining-kitchen and dining-pantry are all made with windows and trim complete exterior and interior as are partitions from dining to pantry/kitchen and these have shelving in pantry 3 sides and hatch from pantry to kitchen complete with sliding door that really works and all door trim, even the support for the kitchen stove chimney. ..last but not least I broke the rules and made the china cabinet of the very best walnut. It*

looked so nice. This unit is ready except for the doors. Hinges were the problem then. I will try a brass set now made by Cassidy."

Meanwhile, I had been researching and ultimately commissioned scale models of two pieces we knew had been in the original house: a Starr Stove, and a bureau.

The Starr Stove intrigued me, as it was a wood burning cast iron stove, with its main surface only about two feet off the ground, presumably to aid in lifting the heavy cast iron pots on and off. The style, I later learned, is a "step stove." I happened across a real Starr Stove at Uniacke House, part of the Nova Scotia Museum complex, not far from Halifax. I took photos and presented them to a retired architect friend who made models as a hobby. Could he build me one of this stove in 1/12th scale? Indeed he could, and he did, complete with four removable cooking lids, opening warming oven doors, and removable ash bin.



He also replicated a small dresser, the original of which was at a Cassidy cottage. Part of this dresser's appeal was its dovetailed joints, though we don't know who built it (perhaps another Cassidy carpenter). Amazingly the miniature also has dovetailed joints and when photographed looks exactly like its full scale version.

In 1980 I eagerly drove to Fredericton to receive the special gift of the replica house. True to my Grandfather's abilities, it was exquisite. Every detail was there, from the door panels, to the crooked beams, to the built-in china cabinet, to the newel post. The interior remained without decoration, leaving it to my imagination, though Grandpa penciled in on some of the floors what he remembered of furniture positions. He had carved his name, the date, and his navy service number in one of the roof panels. We took pictures, shared more stories, and the usual wonderful visit, then I brought the model home. My own work had just begun: I now had to decorate!



I still have the house and my Grandfather's letters, and the model is undergoing its second "renovation" being re-decorated as if I was living at Clover Hill. I look at it still and think of the stories of those who went before: my Great Aunt Edythe keeping chickens in the upstairs back bedroom; my grandfather and

his cousins as boys jokingly peeing down the parlour stove pipe from upstairs; my mother being chased by geese in the yard; my sisters and I sitting with our grandparents on the steps of the verandah

It took my grandfather a full year, working every day, to build the replica. During that time, unbeknownst to me, he was diagnosed with cancer, and died shortly after giving me the house. He was a loving person, a strong believer in family heritage, a proud Canadian, honoured to serve as a Chief Petty Officer in our navy, and as a carpenter thereafter for the government. The highest praise he could give someone was "he is a good man" and he was definitely that.

William and Jane's descendants include nurses, pilots, lawyers, carpenters, farmers, and an Order of Canada honoree. Their legacy touches us all, and is remembered each time I look at the little house.

"Yours to a cinder"

Anne L. Renwick, a Cassidy Granddaughter

