

Later Ukrainian Log Houses (1915-1940)

Once the economic progress of the settler permitted (usually within eight or ten years) the initial house was replaced with a larger more carefully constructed house. In cases where the new structures were built prior to the 1920s, particularly in the older districts in the R.M. of Gimli, outside influences were minimal and traditional forms were common. The buildings were still south-facing, single storey structures of log construction with a two or three room plan and they still had white mud plastered walls and thatched roofs. Many even retained the traditional homemade clay oven and chimney during the early 1920s.

The new houses differed, primarily, in their size and the sophistication of their construction (Figure 13). For several years prior to construction, large, carefully selected trees would be cut and hauled to the site of the new house, where they would be peeled and allowed to cure or dry to prevent later shrinkage or rot. During construction, the help of a local carpenter was usually acquired to help face or square the logs and to cut the notches. In the Eastern Interlake, the dovetail notch was by far the most popular joint for new homes. These later houses were more likely to have a white lime or coloured finish applied to the mud plaster than the original homes and decorative bands or designs were also often painted on the walls. Other improvements included a properly thatched roof, lumber floors and ceilings and manufactured doors and window frames.

Towards the 1920s, as communication with other areas improved, new construction methods and innovations began to be adopted by the Ukrainians in the Eastern Interlake. In the new houses being constructed, and the older homes being renovated, traditional characteristics began to disappear and the buildings took on a transitional hybrid appearance. The earliest deviation from traditional elements was the replacement of the thatch roofs by wooden roofs, first with vertical planking and later with split shingles. As rapid runoff of rain was no longer critical, this was usually accompanied by a lowering of the roof line and slope. A further alteration was the replacement of the homemade wood and clay chimneys and pich ovens with iron pipe and cast-iron cook stoves. Horizontal wood siding, which eliminated the regular maintenance traditional mud plaster-coated walls required, also began to appear on many exterior walls.

There are several surviving examples of this type of home in the planning district. One of the better ones, located in the Shorncliffe district, at section SW 27-24-3E is Galician in style, and is part of a very well preserved set of farmstead buildings (Figure 14).

The house, situated at the top of a small hillock, and resting on a foundation of loose stone, was constructed of logs cut, shaped and fitted entirely by hand (Figure 15). The tight fit of the logs precluded the need for the usual thick mud plaster coating. The walls were simply chinked and then coated with the usual whitewash finish.



Figure 13

The second homes built by the Ukrainian settlers in the Interlake were larger and much more carefully constructed than the initial structures. This example was photographed in 1918 in the Gimli area. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)



Figure 14

The Stelmach house, SW 27-24-3E. This residence is a typical example of the homes being built during the 1920s. Although no longer occupied, the house and property are well cared for and the site is probably the best-preserved Ukrainian farmyard in the entire planning district.



Figure 15

Stelmach house: sidewall - interior wall connection.

By the late 1920s, major changes in building styles appeared and the traditional Ukrainian log house began to lose some of its cultural distinctiveness. A large Bukovynian log residence several miles northwest of Gimli features a number of transitional features, (Figure 16). Interior changes include wallpapering of the walls, and beneath the siding and the presence of thin rail rafters suggests that the structure originally had a white mud plaster finish to the walls and a thatch roof.

By the 1930s, frame construction was becoming more affordable and pattern book frame lumber houses devoid of any ethnic character were replacing the early log homes (Figure 17).

This transformation was slowed during the later thirties by the Great Depression, but by the early 1940s log construction and traditional designs had virtually disappeared. The old homes were relegated to use as storage facilities or poultry sheds. Many were simply demolished.

The majority of the 40 or so Ukrainian log houses remaining in the planning district are of this transitional type. They likely had many of the early traditional elements originally, but in the course of later improvements to the structure these were removed or were covered over. There is not a single example where the traditional thatch roof, clay stove and chimney or much of the interior furnishings have survived. In several examples the original mud plaster finish has remained uncovered by wood siding with the result that only the protected areas under the eaves have not been washed away.



Figure 16

The former S. Cherniak residence, SW 11-11-1E. By the late 1920s, wooden roofs, siding, and rear additions could be found on many of the Ukrainian log homes in the Eastern Interlake.



Figure 17

Wood frame homes such as the one on the left began appearing during the 1930s. The structure on the right is the earlier log home. These examples were found in the Dnister area near Gimli.