

BUNK HOUSE PROJECT

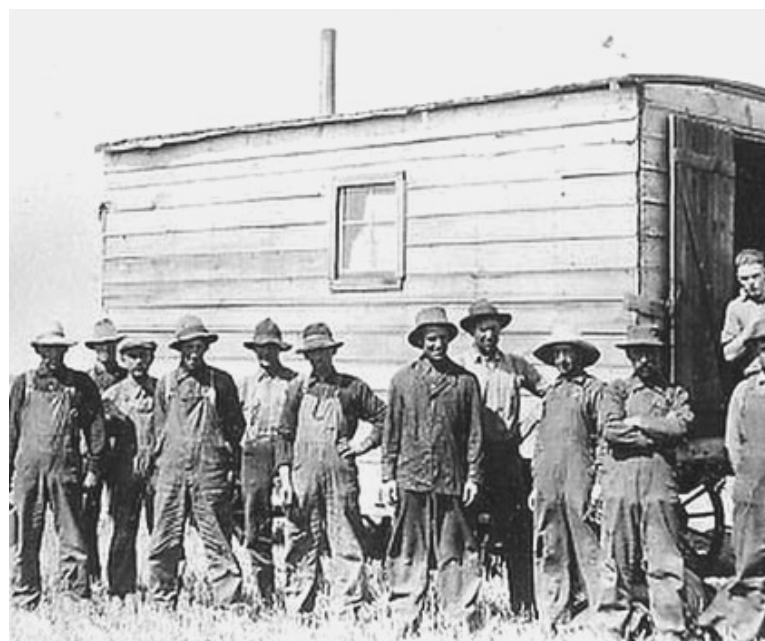
WRITTEN BY FORREST HAGEN

LAYOUT/PHOTOS BY GENEVA BAST (HAGEN)

The “Bunkhouse Project” was conceived in November 2015, before the LaPrairieaire Ecotourism vision had fully materialized. I took a series of pictures and recorded the dimensions (8’X16’X7’ height), and left the idea to incubate.

The original function of this bunkhouse was to house men employed on threshing crews as they moved from farm to farm during the fall harvest, with each crew comprised of 10-12 men whose role ranged from firing the boiler of the steam powered tractor, to loading bundles onto a horse drawn wagon for delivery to the threshing machine. I am told the wagon did not require a driver as the horses would move from one row of stooks (stack of bundles) to the next and stop without supervision.

The original function of this bunkhouse was to house men employed on threshing crews



Source: Glenbow Archives (c. 1914)



**Above: The beginnings of the restoration
Below: Camrose County Councillor, Jack Lyle
& Forrest Hagen mid-restoration**



Each bunkhouse, depending on it's size would accommodate 6 to 8 men in over and under bunks, plus some bunkhouses being configured as cookhouses to feed the crews several meals and lunches during the course of a working day.

This bunkhouse was utilized by my father, Palmer Hagen (1915-2004), as winter feed storage and a feeding station for his range cows. When I returned to the farming operation in 1999, the bunkhouse was replaced by a steel bin c/w with electric auger, and was stored away from potential harm - parked in a safe location where it's future could be contemplated.

A bit more background based on my limited knowledge of bunkhouses: the LaPrairieaire bunkhouse, and one other I have seen, clearly shows that at least these two followed identical design, which may support the theory that some were custom built for threshing, lumber camp, or road construction crews. Both structures began with non-parallel (trapezoidal) horizontal beams attached to the bolsters on which were attached perpendicular floor stringers on 18" centers, which formed the foundations for the wall studs. On top of the floor stringers were 12" rough slabs laid the length of the structure. On top of this was 1"X4" t&g fir flooring laid perpendicular to the long axis. All diagonal wall bracing was done by notching the studs on the outside. These were not insignificant structures -they were very thoughtfully built.

THE VISION

Fast forward to November 2018, with three years of contemplation and the evolution of LP Ecotours, the bunkhouse made the 1-1/2 mile journey to LaPrairieaire home-base with the vision of restoring it for use as unique guest accommodation.

So, with encouragement from many and skilled assistance from son Bennett, the restoration began. Some of the challenges encountered were that through 100 years of use, the structure was no longer (or never was) square as well as much of the skeleton being in need of replacement. The second significant challenge was sourcing replacement fir flooring - enter Brad Ellis.



Above: windows sourced from historic buildings in Alberta



Brad, a family friend who was raised in the Fraser Valley of BC, located a building in Chilliwack that was being redeveloped and the original fir flooring being replaced. So, my summer vacation began - a road trip to Chilliwack! Thanks to Brad, the floor was replaced with ample surplus for another project. Another supportive friend offered ship lap from an obsolete granary to complete the exterior walls.

Left: Fir flooring sourced from Chilliwack, BC

bunkhouse

noun [buhngk-hous]

a rough building, often with bunk beds, used for sleeping quarters, as for ranch hands, migratory workers, or campers.

Finally, refinishing the flooring, installation of a wall to create a separate sleeping space and wiring a few lights and circuits, the space was ready to be simply furnished.

While time did not permit, the walls and ceiling will be insulated and panelled at a later date. Rome wasn't built in a day!

Thank you to everyone for their support and encouragement.

Forrest Hagen



La Prairieaire