

# Perry Cabin

Historic American Building Survey  
State Level II Documentation

Rocky Mountain National Park  
Building 0573 (5LR.1859)

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## Table of Contents

Summary..... 3

Narrative Description..... 4

Narrative History..... 7

    Historic Context – Rustic Architecture..... 7

    Historic Context – Early Resort Industry..... 10

    Site History..... 12

Location Map..... 18

Site Map..... 19

Architectural Drawings..... 20

Photograph Log..... 24

Sources..... 25

## Summary

Name and Alternative Name	Perry Cabin; Perry Cabin at Sprague's Lodge; Glacier Greek Livery Residence
Reference Numbers	Building Number 0573, 5LR.1859, Tract 07-105, LCS Number 22015
Location	UTM: 13Z-448348E-4463370N County: Larimer Legal Location: NW ¼ of the SW ¼ of the SE ¼ of Sec 7, T4N, R73W Elevation: 8700 feet
Present Owner	National Park Service
Site Description	The Perry Cabin is located to the north of a parking area situated off the Bear Lake Road along the western shore of Sprague Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park
Date of Construction	ca. 1921
Architect and Builder	Architect: None Builder: Abner E. Sprague
Ownership History	Purchased by the NPS in 1932 from Abner E. Sprague. The Sprague family operated the lodge under contract with the NPS until its closure in 1957.
Historic Use	Guest cabin at Sprague's Lodge until 1957; concessionaire living quarters after 1958
Present Use	Vacant
Alterations and Additions	In 1958, the park service moved the cabin 300 feet from its original location replacing a wooden pier foundation with a cinder block one. The new foundation caused the building to sit much higher off the ground and a board and batten siding was added at some point to enclose the foundation. Before its relocation, the cabin featured a two-step stone stairway leading to the entryway. Due to its new distance from the ground, the park service added a four-step wooden stairway with vertical log half-walls to create an open porch railing. The original design lacked exterior paint, but the current cabin is painted brown. On the rear of the cabin, three shed roof structures were added under which a washer, dryer, and refrigerator sat during the cabin's days housing concessionaire employees. On the interior, a bedroom has been converted to the kitchen. In doing so, the door to the room was removed and a square section of wall cut out to allow an open view from the kitchen into the living room. Also, a door that originally led from this room to a bathroom is now covered over with in-wall shelving.

## Narrative Description

The Perry Cabin is a one-story, rustic log structure located in Rocky Mountain National Park near Estes Park, CO. Built in 1921, it retains many of its original features including its construction of round logs with square corner notching, wood shingles in the gable ends, and exposed rafter ends. The interior of the house has been modified due to its change from a guest cabin to concessionaire housing. In particular, the original plan called for four bedrooms and no kitchen as resort guests would have taken their meals in the main lodge. When the Perry Cabin transitioned to park housing in the late 1950s, the park service modified one of the bedrooms to accommodate a kitchen space, diminishing the bedrooms to three. Today, the cabin sits to the north of a parking area in Rocky Mountain National Park along the western shore of Sprague Lake. The cabin originally sat at a spot approximately 300 feet to the southeast of its current location.<sup>1</sup> The surrounding area includes visitor parking, a trailhead to the Sprague Lake Trail, and other park related structures not associated with the Perry Cabin's significance.

The Perry Cabin is a cross-shaped building measuring 53'-1" x 32'. The roof is side-gabled with a shed roof to the front extending over the porch; both are covered in wood shingles. An additional rolled asphalt shed roof appears on the rear of the structure. The roof features 2"x6" exposed rafter tips made from dimensional lumber. The chimney is brick, painted green. There is a single brown painted metal gutter over the shed roof on the porch. The walls are log with stacked corners painted dark brown. Wood shingles line the gable ends. The porch is dimensional lumber with log brackets and a half log balustrade. The wood windows are divided into 12 and six lights and include both sliders and double hung. The one exterior wood door is painted white and features five panels. The interior doors are also wood paneled and of similar make. The interior has log walls, some of which are covered with wood paneling.

Located just below a paved parking area at Sprague Lake, the front of the cabin faces east (SE) and is surrounded by a small fenced area. The cinder block foundation is covered by a painted brown board and batten siding around the entirety of the cabin. A four-step wooden stairway leads to a centrally located porch on the east (SE) elevation. Vertical log half-walls create an open porch railing. The lowest step is broken and has been strengthened with a cinder block underneath. The porch floor of wood planks has brown outdoor carpet that has begun to deteriorate over the years, exposing a green carpet underneath. The wood shingled shed porch roof features log knee brace supports. The porch leads to a center section of the cabin that protrudes 4'6" from the rest of the structure. Within this section is the structure's only entry way, which has a white-painted wood paneled door with five cross panels and no lights. The door surrounds are made of wood and also painted white. A wood-framed screen door protects the main entry. The wooden portions of the screen door are painted brown. Two 6x6 horizontal sliding windows are located at either end of the east facade. The window nearest the south (SW) elevation has been boarded over. Two bands of three, 12-light fixed windows surround the entry door. Two of the glass panes centrally located on the northernmost (NE) window have been broken out.

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing of Sprague's Lodge, ca. 1957, Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO

The north (NE) and south (SW) elevations are nearly identical and very lightly ornamented. The foundation on both elevations is covered by a brown board and batten siding. Two 6x6 horizontal sliding windows opening into two of the cabin's bedrooms are located on each elevation. The window on the south (SW) elevation has wood surrounds painted white and a metal screen, while the one on the north (NE) elevation has wood surrounds painted half-green and half-white with no screen. On a section of the cabin that extends from the front there is a single 12-light fixed window facing to the north (NE) and south (SW), respectively. Both have wood trim painted white. On the south (SW) elevation of the rear extension, there is a metal tube extending above the shed roof. The section of the tubing below the roof is painted brown; the section above the roofline is painted green. The upper gable ends on the north (NE) and south (SW) elevations have decorative square-butt shingles that have been painted brown.

Like the other three elevations, a board and batten siding covers the base of the cabin on the west (NW) elevation foundation. Near the center of this elevation, a section protrudes 6'3" from the rest of the structure and houses one of the building's bathrooms. This extension features a single, 6-light casement window covered with a metal screen and a green painted wood surround. Next to this window is a brown, metal tube extending up the side of the building past the roofline. On either side of the protrusion, there is a 6-light casement window and a 6/6 sliding window. The extensions southern wings have wood surrounds painted half white and half green. The southernmost (SW) window has a metal screen and the other has a metal screen that has been duct taped in place. The windows to the north (NE) of the protrusion are similar except the 6/6 sliding window has wood surrounds painted entirely green. Aside from the tubing on the center protrusion, three other similar pipes appear on this elevation. A metal exhaust stretches off the roof from the kitchen. Three wood shed roofs extend off the back of the structure just below the window line to the north (NE) of the protrusion. The centermost has metal exhaust tubing extending from the top. These shed roofed structures housed a washer, dryer, and refrigerator when the cabin was used as a concessionaire residence.

The single floor interior plan consists of five main rooms: three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. The dwelling has five small closets: three in bedrooms and two in the kitchen. There are three small bathrooms, all accessed through the bedrooms. The interior flooring is wood tongue and groove board covered with brown indoor/outdoor carpeting or linoleum. The interior features exposed log walls or wood partitions. The ceiling is wood paneled tongue and groove. All six of the interior doors are wood, painted white, with five cross panels, and brass hardware, except for the closet doors (in bedrooms on the north and east only), which are wood tongue and groove with brass hardware. Doors access the entrance to each bedroom (3) and to each bathroom (3).

The south (SW) bedroom is a 15'x16' rectangle with a bathroom and closet. The floor is covered with a brown, shag carpet. Three of the walls are log, while the fourth wall and the ceiling are wood tongue and groove. A single light fixture is centrally located within the room. The bathroom has log walls and a linoleum floor. All of the fixtures have been removed, but a light switch remains. The closet is rectangular measuring 3'-8"x4' with a wood tongue and groove floor. The side walls are wood tongue and groove and the rear wall is log. A metal bar extends across the space for hanging clothing.

The west (NW) bedroom is an 11'3"x12'6" rectangle with a bathroom and closet. The floor is covered with a thin, brown carpet. All four walls are log, but a small section of the north (NE) wall near the closet is wood tongue and groove. The east (SE) wall has a rectangular wood section painted white backing up to shelving in the living room. The ceiling is wood tongue and groove and has a single, centrally located light fixture. The bathroom has log walls and the toilet, sink, and some shelving wood remains. The bathroom floor covering has been removed. Inside the bathroom, a rectangular white painted wood section backing up to shelving in the kitchen appears on the east (SE) bathroom wall. The closet is rectangular measuring 3'-8"x4' and has painted white wood surrounds. This closet is void of a door. The side walls are wood tongue and groove and the rear wall is log, while a metal bar extends across the space for hanging clothing.

The north (NE) bedroom is also a 15'x16" rectangle with a bathroom and closet. The flooring is wood panel without carpet or other covering. Three of the walls are log, while the fourth wall and the ceiling are wood tongue and groove. A centrally located single light fixture hangs from the ceiling. Metal tubing protrudes from the western (NW) wall near the ceiling. The closet is identical to the one in the south (SW) bedroom. The bathroom has log walls and a linoleum floor. The toilet, sink, shower and some shelving remain.

The living room is located on the east (SE) side of the cabin and measures 23'x12'4". Each of the other four rooms opens up to the living room. The wood tongue and groove flooring is covered with a thin, multicolored carpet. All four walls are log. The ceiling is wood paneled and has three light fixtures. On the west (NW) wall, a rectangular white painted shelf is set in the wall. A similarly shaped wall cutout opens into the kitchen. Between these two spaces, a stove previously stood connected to the cabin's central chimney.

Originally another bedroom, the kitchen is an 11'3"x12'6" rectangular room. The flooring is covered with linoleum similar to that of the south (SW) bedroom bathroom. Sections of the flooring near the north (NE) wall have been cut out and discolored by the appliances that sat there during the cabin's concessionaire occupation. The walls are log with wood shelving painted white set in the west (NW) wall. A centrally located light fixture hangs from the ceiling, while a rectangular florescent light fixture is attached on the ceiling near the north (NE) wall. On the south (SW) wall, there is a pantry with a wood paneled door and four horizontal shelves. A rectangular space next to the pantry previously housed the building's water heater.

## Narrative History

### *Summary*

Constructed in 1921 by pioneer Abner Sprague, the Perry Cabin is significant for its rustic design and connection to the early resort industry in the Estes Park area and Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). The log construction, wood shingles, and exposed rafter ends reflect the rustic aesthetic that gained popularity in the 1920s and 1930s during the Arts and Crafts movement. This style arose concurrently in national park construction under the moniker NPS Rustic. Sprague and his family operated the lodge from its beginning in the 1910s until the National Park Service (NPS) purchased the property in 1957 and razed all the structures except for the Perry Cabin, which it moved 300 feet to the northwest to house the concessionaire workers at the Glacier Creek Livery. In 1994, the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office determined the cabin eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

### *Historic Context – Rustic Architecture*

The Perry Cabin is an example of rustic architecture, a style adapted from subsistence pioneer forms where homesteaders built simple structures with the materials found locally. The rustic log cabin style had its American precursors in the midland tradition along the Atlantic seaboard during the colonial period. Beginning in the middle colonies (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland), Germanic immigrants – having lived in heavily wooded regions of Northern and Central Europe – introduced a means of constructing buildings with “logs hewn square and then placed horizontally, one on top of the other, to make a solid wooden wall.”<sup>2</sup> This construction, which used interlocking corner notches to attach each wall, differed greatly from New England and Tidewater South timber frame structures that used far less wood. According to Virginia and Lee McAlester, this contrast resulted from the immigrants’ place of origin: immigrants to the north and south arrived from Western Europe, where the forest had been cleared by the late Medieval Period.<sup>3</sup>

In Pennsylvania and the adjacent colonies, the core area of early log building, Germanic settlers constructed large, square houses with three rooms and a central chimney. This tradition moved westward toward the Appalachian Mountains, where Germanic pioneers mixed with Scotch-Irish and English immigrants who adopted the simple building style. Two major changes resulted in the mixing: the three room plan changed to a one room linear plan and the chimney departed its central location for one along the exterior of the structure. With the changes, pioneers carried the Midland log house tradition across the Appalachians as it became the dominant housing style in the pre-railroad era.<sup>4</sup>

There is a major distinction between the log houses discussed above and log cabins. Colonists used square-hewn logs with careful corner notching, while the log cabin utilized timbers left round and often joined using saddle notching. The walls of log cabins were difficult to chink because they did not fit as snug as those with square-hewn logs and were thus used in the East

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2006), 82.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 82-84.

for temporary shelters most often. In the mountains of the West, structures of rounded log construction became popular in the nineteenth century and continue to be constructed to the present day.<sup>5</sup>

The early pioneer log structures in Colorado date as early as 1858 and continued to be built into the 1930s, while the later rustic design associated with the Perry Cabin did not begin until 1905. Mostly found in the mountainous regions in Colorado, pioneers constructed their cabins from round logs, hewn logs, or log slabs with alternating tiers notched at the ends to fit. Cabin constructors filled the gaps between logs with a variety of materials including wet moss, clay, animal hair, straw, stone, or wood strips. These log cabins featured front or side gable roofs in most cases and were a single story. Homesteaders also utilized a plethora of materials to cover cabin roofs including canvas, earth, shingles, wood boards, sheet metal, and tree limbs.<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-1850s, the log cabin became “an object of curiosity and antiquarian interest” in eastern cities and towns where it had begun to vanish.<sup>7</sup> For many, the log cabin signified a temporary abode for families looking to rise above their impoverishment. Yet, log cabins simultaneously symbolized a possible escape to solitude in small doses, it appealed to the fast-paced, urban, and industrial life of much of the eastern U.S. Eventually, the log cabin became a symbol for the American experience when politicians like Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Abraham Lincoln connected themselves to the structure as a democratic dwelling that exemplified virtues of manliness, honesty, and fair-mindedness.<sup>8</sup>

Over time, resorts, mountain camps, and guest ranches realized the potential of the log cabin and rustic architecture. For many, the log cabin accommodated the popularly held belief of the time that “vacations should not be an extension of one’s home in another place but a wholesome and revitalizing alternative in proximity to nature.”<sup>9</sup> By the 1830s, residents of the Catskill Mountains, and later in the Adirondacks, began opening their homes and cabins to summer boarders to bring in extra cash to supplement their incomes from farming and logging.

By the 1850s, architects and landscape architects such as Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmstead, and Calvert Vaux advocated the use of log cabins as a viable architectural style both more American and more in harmony with the surrounding environment. For example, Calvert Vaux, co-planner of Central Park along with Olmstead, wrote in an 1857 issue of *Villas and Cottages* of the ability of a log cabin to be simultaneously refined, yet still primitive. Alexander Jackson Davis, in his creation of the first planned garden community at Llewellyn Park in New Jersey, designed buildings with rustic detailing following the principles of Vaux. Around the same time, J.J. Ramee published one of the first professional designs for a log house.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 84-86.

<sup>6</sup> *Field Guide to Colorado’s Historic Architecture and Engineering*, contributors Mary Therese Anstey, Virginia Bennet, Thaddeus Gearhart, Chris Geddes, Lyle Hansen, Dale Heckendorn, Erika Schmelzer, and Holly Wilson (Denver: Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 2008), 127.

<sup>7</sup> Craig Gilborn, *Adirondack Camps: Homes Away from Home, 1850-1950*, (Syracuse, NY: The Adirondack Museum/Syracuse University Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 11-2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 12.



Despite these recommendations, a coalescence of these design principles did not find a grand audience until the emergence of mountain camps in the Adirondacks, and later, national parks in the West.<sup>10</sup>

In the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York, Americans first produced this rustic style in a large-scale resort setting. In using picturesque rustic style in natural and wilderness areas, the camps in the Adirondack region adapted the naturalistic design principles espoused by landscape design forefathers such as Downing and Olmstead. In the Adirondacks, structures usually sat alongside lakes where designers grouped them by function and sited them to the natural lay of the land. This took advantage of scenic views of mountains, lakes, and forests and provided for recreational activities such as boating and fishing.<sup>11</sup> Adirondack camps featured cabins, boathouses, and lodges following the suggestions of Downing, who recommended “twisted, unpeeled trunks, and branches.”<sup>12</sup> Designers placed log structures on high, stone foundations “battered to shed rain and snow” and thus prevent dampness on the interior, which could lead to rotted logs.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Adirondack resort builders fashioned overhanging roofs to stop ice and snow from accumulating around cabin walls or foundations.<sup>14</sup>

In some of the first national parks, such as Yellowstone, Sequoia, General Grant, and Yosemite, architectural styles did not initially reflect the rustic aesthetic. Rather, these parks, being under the administration of the U.S. Army, included buildings constructed to Army standards “by an organization concerned primarily with park protection and administration rather than scenic values.”<sup>15</sup> For early parks like Crater Lake, Rainier, and Glacier that were not under the administration of the War Department, park officials often established crude cabins and shacks only, leaving visitor accommodations to concessionaires, who the parks allowed to erect buildings with little design supervision. When railroads increased park visitation by the turn of the century, the railroad companies expressed their interest in park tourism by developing hotels and lodges to house their patrons.<sup>16</sup> These buildings generally mixed picturesque European prototypes (such as the Swiss Chalet style) with the Adirondack style and “an imagery of form and detail suitable to the West.” Historian Linda Flint McClelland considers Yellowstone National Park’s Old Faithful Inn (1903), built by the Northern Pacific Railroad, the first rustic hotel in a national park.<sup>17</sup> However, the use of rustic architecture as a stated design principle would not come about until the late 1910s, when an NPS “Statement of Policy” included certain guidelines for park facilities. By 1921, the park service’s Landscape Engineering Division had

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12-8.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 94.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> William C. Tweed, Laura E. Soulliere, and Henry G. Law, *National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942*, (National Park Service, Western Regional Office, Division of Cultural Resource Management, 1977), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Flint, 111; Tweed, Soulliere, and Law, 5.

erected its first NPS-Rustic buildings.<sup>18</sup> Yet, by then, pioneers like Abner Sprague had already made a living from opening their rustic structures to the tourist industry.<sup>19</sup>

One of the major influences on the rustic style was the Arts and Crafts movement. Beginning in Great Britain in the late nineteenth century, this movement arose from the rejection of Victorian mass production, which the adherents of Arts and Crafts believed “degraded the worker and resulted in ‘shoddy wares.’”<sup>20</sup> Inspired by the teachings of John Ruskin, a British writer and social reformer, the movement quickly moved to the U.S., and its popularity and quick dissemination in the states came in large part because of Gustav Stickley. A furniture-maker, Stickley found inspiration from a trip to England in 1898, when he met with Arts and Craft designers. The following year, Stickley began his own artisan guild, United Crafts. Through a mail order catalog, he made a wide range of Arts and Crafts products – from furniture to bungalow home designs – available to Americans. More importantly, his magazine, *The Craftsman*, spread not only the Arts and Craft product, but also its philosophies.<sup>21</sup>

Arts and Crafts architecture tended to follow three general principles. First, architects considered a building’s function above all else. Second, they believed that buildings must relate to their surrounding landscapes. Finally, Arts and Crafts constructors carefully selected natural materials, often requiring these materials be local. Philip Webb built one of the first examples for his friend William Morris in Kent, England. Said to “represent a stunning collaboration between” Morris and Webb, Red House features an L-shaped, red brick exterior with steep gabled roofs meant to appear as a scaled-down Gothic. Designing from the inside out, Webb wanted to enhance functionality while creating a building that seemed to rise naturally out of the landscape.<sup>22</sup>

In England, the Arts and Crafts practitioners based their works on “a strong love of England and all things English,” but in the states, local vernaculars influenced the architecture of Arts and Crafts.<sup>23</sup> For example, Spanish mission styles permeated the Southwest, while Prairie houses reigned supreme in the Midwest. Aside from Stickley, the most influential members of the American movement were Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, the brothers Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene, and Henry Hobson Richardson. These architects often used natural materials – most often unadorned wood or stone – and designed buildings that harmonized with the surrounding environment.<sup>24</sup> From these architects, rustic style developed in the mountain resorts of the West.

### *Historic Context – Early Resort Industry*

Following Major Stephen H. Long’s 1804 expedition into lands near present-day Rocky Mountain National Park, hunters and trappers arrived with the lure of beaver pelts. Eventually,

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<sup>18</sup> Tweed, Soulliere, and Law, 23-31.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>20</sup> Pamela Todd, *The Arts and Crafts Companion* (New York and Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 95, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 115.

an even more lucrative endeavor than animal furs attracted a flood of people to the area: mining. By 1859, gold and silver miners scattered across either side of the continental divide. Joel Estes, Estes Park's namesake, arrived with his son in the fall of 1859 to mine and eventually established a cattle ranch. Within a few years, Estes had left along with much of the mining boom. In its wake, ranching remained, and with it came a burgeoning tourist industry.<sup>25</sup>

The developing resort industry in the Rocky Mountain West related closely to the cattle ranching industry. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, pioneers realized the potential for dude ranches, and these resorts increased in popularity by the early twentieth century. For many, the rising demand for nature-related activity came in response to growing industrialization and urbanization, but it also had roots in an emerging middle-class with both time and money for leisure. While dude ranches boomed during the strong economic times of the 1920s, they suffered greatly in the Great Depression of the 1930s. During World War II, dude ranches rebounded somewhat as travel restrictions in Europe forced tourists to stay within U.S. borders, but their popularity only truly reemerged after 1945.<sup>26</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, Griff Evans operated one of the first dude ranches near the Estes Park area, welcoming guests such as the English Lord Dunraven and the world-renowned traveler Isabella Bird. Impressed with both the hunting opportunities and immaculate scenery near Estes Park, Dunraven planned to purchase land in the area following his stay with Evans and another with the Sprague family. He intended to create a massive private hunting reserve by first purchasing Evans' holdings, followed up by the acquisition of thousands of additional acres. His efforts, though, were met with numerous legal claims. Frustrated, he left the area for good in 1880, selling off most of his holdings to Theodore Whyte, who in turn sold them to F.O. Stanley.<sup>27</sup>

The dude ranching and resort industry played a particularly critical role in the establishment of Rocky Mountain National Park. By the height of dude ranching in the 1910s, many ranch, lodge, and campground owners lobbied hard for the establishment of a park knowing that a federally funded and managed natural area would draw more visitors to their resorts. Among those at the head of the movement was Enos Mills, proprietor of the Longs Peak Inn. Mills argued that the federal government needed to establish a park before other industries such as mining and timbering could take hold in the area. Mills joined forces with leaders in the Estes Park community, such as F.O. Stanley, to form the Estes Park Protective and Improvement Association in 1906. Its spokesmen claimed that the U.S. Forest Service could not provide the type of security the area's scenic landscapes required, a national park could do. In addition, the group also argued that the founding of a park would attract more tourists, which would aid the local economy.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Carl McWilliams and Karen McWilliams, "Multiple Resource Nomination for Rocky Mountain National Park," (Denver: National Park Service Rocky Mountain Regional Office, 1987), 8:1-2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:5

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:4.

Despite the local push to create Rocky Mountain National Park, the National Park Service's (NPS) arrival presented the most serious threat to the dude ranching resort industry. In 1918, the NPS called for an administrative policy to purchase all private holdings in national parks. During the 1920s and 30, an increase in federal appropriations and a goal of returning park's to a more natural setting led to the purchase of many of the resorts in the park. A similar effort to eliminate landholding occurred a few decades later during the modernization and development era of Mission 66. The NPS bought many of the most popular dude ranches in the park, including Sprague's Lodge, Wood's Cottage Camp, and the Brinwood Guest Lodge in 1932, Forest Inn in 1953, and Fall River Lodge in 1955. Eventually, other celebrated resorts including Deer Ridge Chalets, Horseshoe Inn, Bear Lake Lodge, Bierstadt Lodge, and Moraine Park Lodge all met a similar fate. Thus, only a few remnants of the private dude ranching period remain in Rocky such as the Moraine Park Lodge (converted to the Moraine Park Museum) and the Holzwarth Historic District.<sup>29</sup>

### *Site History*

In 1864, 14-year-old Abner Erwin Sprague moved with his family from the Midwest by covered wagon to a homestead claim east of Loveland. The family eventually moved further up the Big Thompson River to provide their children better educational opportunities, enrolling Abner and his two siblings in the county's first school. In 1868, Abner first hiked into the Estes Valley, and only 6 years later made his first claim there. Along with Clarence Chubbuck, Abner established a claim on two quarter sections west of Estes Park named Willow Park (now known as Moraine Park). When Chubbuck died soon after the purchase, Abner's father Thomas took over deceased's share and moved his family into the valley.<sup>30</sup>

The Spragues established a homestead, originally operating it as a cattle ranch. They constructed the first building on the land – a fourteen by sixteen cabin with a flat roof supported by a single pine log post – in the year following the claim. Hoping at first to farm, the Sprague's abandoned the endeavor due to the



ABNER SPRAGUE FAMILY

Sprague Family ca. 1890, photo courtesy of the Estes Park Museum

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8:9-10

<sup>30</sup> Henry Pedersen, *Those Castles of Wood: The Story of Early Lodges of Rocky Mountain National Park and Pioneer Days of Estes Park, Colorado*. (Estes Park, CO: Self-Published, 1993), 253-5.

struggles of high altitude growing and constant crop destruction by the area's wildlife. In its place, the family elected to engage in the tourism trade; however, the career, according to Abner, was more a result of coincidence than conscience decision-making. Years later, Sprague wrote that "the hotel business was forced on us. We came here for small ranch operations, but guests and visitors became so numerous at first wanting to buy eggs, milk, and other provisions, then wanting lodging, and finally demanding full accommodations, that we had to go into the hotel business or go bankrupt from keeping free company."<sup>31</sup>

In 1878, the Spragues expanded their operation in reaction to pressure to accommodate new company. That year, they constructed additional cabins, a main log house with guest rooms, a dining room, kitchen, and larger living quarters for the family. They initially named the new resort the Sprague House, but in 1880, changed it to the Sprague Hotel. Soon after, the family added ten sleeping rooms to the main house and expanded it to three stories. While the recently constructed Estes Park Hotel catered to the financially well off, Sprague's Ranch (like other area ranch resorts such as MacGregor's, Ferguson's, and James's), pandered to those seeking minimalist accommodations in a setting meant to feel like a home away from home.<sup>32</sup> A 1900 resort brochure promoted this message. It read: "It is the desire and aim of the proprietors of Sprague's to conduct a home-like place, as far from hotel life and as home-like as possible."<sup>33</sup>

In 1882, Thomas Sprague died leaving the hotel's operation under the watchful eye of the Sprague Brothers, Abner and Fred. When Fred departed the Estes Valley in 1893, he left the business in the hands of Abner, their mother, Mary, and Abner's wife, Alberta. Shortly thereafter, Abner constructed a mill "propelled" by water from Mill Creek to produce milled lumber for the construction of new cabins and additions to the existing structures. With a growing ranch, in 1902 the Spragues decided to take in partners, a decision that ultimately proved unfortunate. James and Eudora May Stead of Illinois, cousins of Abner and Fred, entered into a partnership with the Spragues. The relationship quickly soured, forcing Abner to sell his shares to Stead for \$20,000. Sprague's Hotel became Stead's Ranch.<sup>34</sup>

In 1904, Abner and Alberta moved to Loveland, where Abner opened a civil engineering and surveying business. Only four years later, the urge toward mountain living returned, and Abner secured a lease from the Department of Agriculture for land in the Colorado Forest Reserve that would one day become Rocky Mountain National Park. That same year, Abner and Alberta's brother-in-law, John Stopher, erected a cabin on the leased land about eight miles southwest of Estes Park at 8700 feet above sea level. At first, the Spragues and Stophers used the cabin strictly as a summer residence, making improvements each year during their vacations. In the matter of a decade, Abner Sprague, with some reluctance, returned to the tourist trade.<sup>35</sup>

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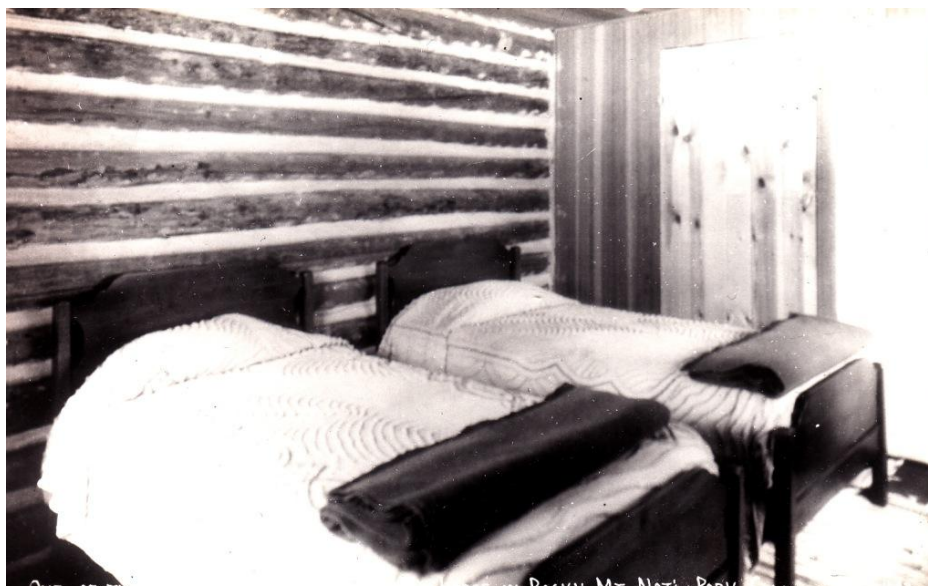
<sup>31</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-8.



Guest Sleeping Quarters at Sprague's Lodge ca. 1930, photo courtesy of Bobbie Heistercamp

On April 14, 1914, the Forest Service granted permission for the Spragues to expand their holding from 60 to 95 acres to operate a tourist attraction. On the south bank of Glacier Creek, Sprague modified the original cabin into a two-story lodge that opened in 1916. A year later, Sprague built a two-story cottage known as Stopher's Cottage

meant to house Mabel Stopher (following her husband's death) and her two children during the summer, while guests simultaneously occupied the second floor. The following winter, Sprague and two others stayed in the Stopher Cottage while enlarging the main lodge to three stories and increasing the size of the dining room.<sup>36</sup>

Many of the early visitors to Sprague's Lodge enjoyed the great fishing opportunities, and Sprague acted quickly to further accommodate these interests. In summer of 1914, Sprague hired John Griffith and Frank Grubb to dam Boulder Brook thereby forming two lakes: the smaller of the two was known as Lower Lake or Cabin Lake; the larger was known simply as Sprague's Lake.<sup>37</sup> Sprague stocked his lakes with Eastern Brook and Rainbow Trout purchased from a western slope hatchery. Sprague also provided steel boats for free to use on the larger lake. The two lakes totaled 20 acres, with Sprague Lake encompassing about 15 acres of the total area. After the NPS purchased the property in the 1930s, it removed Lower Lake, while Sprague Lake has grown smaller and shallower over the years.<sup>38</sup>

Before Sprague could fully expand operations, he had to deal with a new entity: Rocky Mountain National Park. When Congress created the park in 1915, officials granted Sprague only 20 acres of his previous 95 acres, although they promised he could keep his local fishing rights. Unhappy with the deal, Sprague attempted to retain the land the federal government had originally promised him. Owning property near Mills Lake and Loch Vale, Sprague agreed to donate this coveted land to the park in exchange for an increase of his property at Glacier Creek. On March 20, 1925, after assessing the deal park administrators had agreed to, Congress granted 160 acres to Sprague. A critical part of the agreement relied on park superintendent Roger Toll's

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 268-9.

<sup>37</sup> Edgar Stopher, "Introduction" in Abner E. Sprague, *My Pioneer Life: The Memoirs of Abner E. Sprague*, (Estes Park, CO: The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, 1999), xxvii.

<sup>38</sup> Pedersen, 273.

assurances that the agency could draw Sprague's boundaries in such a way to make the property virtually invisible from the park's proposed Bear Lake Road.<sup>39</sup>

Depending on the source, Sprague constructed the Perry Cabin either a few years before or just after he acquired the new land. According to Henry F. Pedersen's *Those Castles of Wood*, workers lived in Stopher's Cottage during the winters of 1925-1927 while they constructed two cabins to the west of the main building.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, Edgar Stopher, the son of John and Mabel Stopher, claimed that workers constructed the Perry and Middle Cabins several years earlier than Pedersen claims, perhaps as early as 1921.<sup>41</sup> The earliest photograph of the structure housed at RMNP is presumably from 1923, giving further credence to the earlier date.<sup>42</sup> Sprague named the structure closest to the Stopher Cottage the Middle Cottage; the other he named the Perry Cabin after Lee Perry, the wealthy owner of Vesta Battery Company of Chicago, an avid fisherman and the first occupant of the cabin. Perry spent several successive summers at the cabin while fishing in the area's lakes and streams. For the cost of \$12,000, both cabins were



built with four sleeping rooms, three baths, and a central sitting room. Guests could stay for \$6.45-7.50 per person per day or \$32.50-42.25 per week.<sup>43</sup>

By 1927, Sprague's Lodge grew again. That year, the main lodge increased in size to 70'x42' and included dining facilities, a lounge with stone fireplace, the kitchen, a butler's pantry, bathrooms, laundry room, store room, 7 guest rooms on the main floor, and 10 upstairs. Only five years later, the NPS purchased the lodge for \$35,140, but granted the family a 20 year lease to continue to operate the lodge. In 1940, Abner transferred the lease from his name to his nephew, Edgar Stopher.<sup>44</sup> In the late 1940s, Stopher built a laundry building and new quarters for staff, moved in four Quonset huts behind the Stopher Cottage, and remolded them for guest space. Around 1950, Stopher also erected four tent houses to increase guest space to 85. At this time, the resort had 11 buildings in

Perry Cabin ca. 1923, photo courtesy of RMNP Archive



Middle Cabin (left), Perry Cabin (right), photo courtesy of RMNP Archive

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>41</sup> Stopher, xviii.

<sup>42</sup> "Sprague's Lodge, Guest Cabin," 23 Sept 1923, RMNP Photograph Collection, Cat. #10-C-1-P, Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO.

<sup>43</sup> Pedersen, 271.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 275.

addition to the four tent houses and a converted former chicken house. The staff numbered in the 20s during this time.<sup>45</sup>

In 1951, the NPS extended concessionaire contracts made with Sprague's Lodge, Brinwood Ranch-Hotel, Wood's Cottage Camp in 1932 for an additional two years to study concession needs of potential visitors. The 1951-53 study showed that private development outside of the park's boundaries did not yet meet visitor growth. With this evidence, the NPS decided to extend Sprague's contract an additional five years, but made it clear the service would give no further renewals. The NPS issued a contract beginning January 1, 1954 that lasted until December 31, 1958.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the new terms, Stopher decided to close down operations and asked the park service to terminate his contract at the end of 1957.<sup>47</sup> Stopher cited the increased costs of running the lodge coupled with a lack of return on his investment as reasons for the early closure of Sprague's. A spokesperson for the park service also included the longstanding policy to eliminate private inholdings recently affirmed through Mission 66 as a reason for the early elimination of Sprague's Lodge. Following the announcement, the Stophers set about to auction off the furnishings inside the lodge buildings.<sup>48</sup>

With the structures of the former Sprague's Lodge under its administration, NPS officials prepared a special report to provide recommendations for the future of the structures within the park. The report noted an immediate need for "major rehabilitation" on the main lodge and annex, although the sleeping cabins, included Perry Cabin, appeared to be in good condition on the interior. To continue using the building, the NPS needed to completely rewire the buildings and fix the badly sagging floors and foundation of the main lodge. According to the report, the NPS would have to spend approximately \$30,000 to continue using the structures of the former resort. Despite the condition of the sleeping cabins' interiors, the report stated that external work would be required on all buildings.<sup>49</sup> With mounting expenses, the park service decided to raze all the structures in 1958 except for the Perry Cabin, which it moved 300 feet to the northwest to house the concessionaire workers at the Glacier Creek Livery.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Perry Cabin survived the initial round of demolition in 1958, it again faced its demise less than 10 years later when NPS staff discussed eliminating it from the park. In 1967, the NPS Deputy Director recommended the cabin for removal claiming that it did not have either historical or architectural value worth the expenditures to maintain it, and he gave his permission to the park superintendent to remove the building from the historic structures list and plan its

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>46</sup> "Report on Concessionaire Operations East Side Rocky Mountain National Park," 5 September 1958, Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "Sprague's Lodge Ends Long Park Regime This Fall," *Estes Park Trail*, 23 August 1957, Vol. XXXVII, No. 20, 1.

<sup>49</sup> "Special Report Prepared by Rocky Mountain National Park for the National Park Service Study Team: Sprague's Lodge," 1958, Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO.

<sup>50</sup> Pedersen, 277.



removal.<sup>51</sup> The Regional Director of the Midwest Region provided further explanation to Rocky's Acting Superintendent. He stated four specific reasons for his agreement that the Perry Cabin be removed. First, NPS officials reasoned that the cabin had little significance to the "park story" because it represented a sleeping cabin rather than a pioneer homestead. Second, they believed that the cabin had "been greatly modified by modernization through the years and would be difficult to restore to original appearance." Next, the service argued that it would be difficult to continue to protect the structure from vandalism if restored because of its distance from the Moraine Park visitor center, and its lack of significance hardly justified stationing an employee there. Last, the NPS, in the heart of Mission 66's educational and interpretive ambitions, believed the only way to properly utilize the cabin required building a parking area and interpretive trail in the area.<sup>52</sup>

Though the park recommended its removal, Rocky continued to use the Perry Cabin continued as lodging for the wranglers at the nearby Glacier Creek Livery throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. In 1994, Cultural Resources Historians, Inc. from Fort Collins, CO prepared an evaluation of National Register eligibility for the park service. The firm determined that the building could be significant under criterion A for its association with the resort industry theme and also possibly under criterion B for its association with Abner Sprague. However, the historians believed the building should not be eligible under criterion C because it did not relate specifically to NPS-rustic style. Ultimately, the group concluded that the Perry Cabin was ineligible for listing.<sup>53</sup> Despite these recommendations, in 1994 the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office found the building eligible under Criterion C only.<sup>54</sup>

In 1999, the NPS planned to remove the Glacier Creek Livery buildings with the hopes of restoring the surrounding wetlands to a natural state. As part of the relocation efforts, the park aimed to move the Perry Cabin and place it in one of three proposed locations south of the Rocky Mountain National Park Utility Area Historic District. Since the SHPO determined the cabin eligible under criterion C only, the park claimed that its movement would constitute a no adverse effect action. Park officials also noted that the building had been moved once already.<sup>55</sup> Today, the Perry Cabin remains in the same spot it has stood since 1958.

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<sup>51</sup> NPS Deputy Direct to Regional Director, Midwest Region, 4 May 1967, Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO.

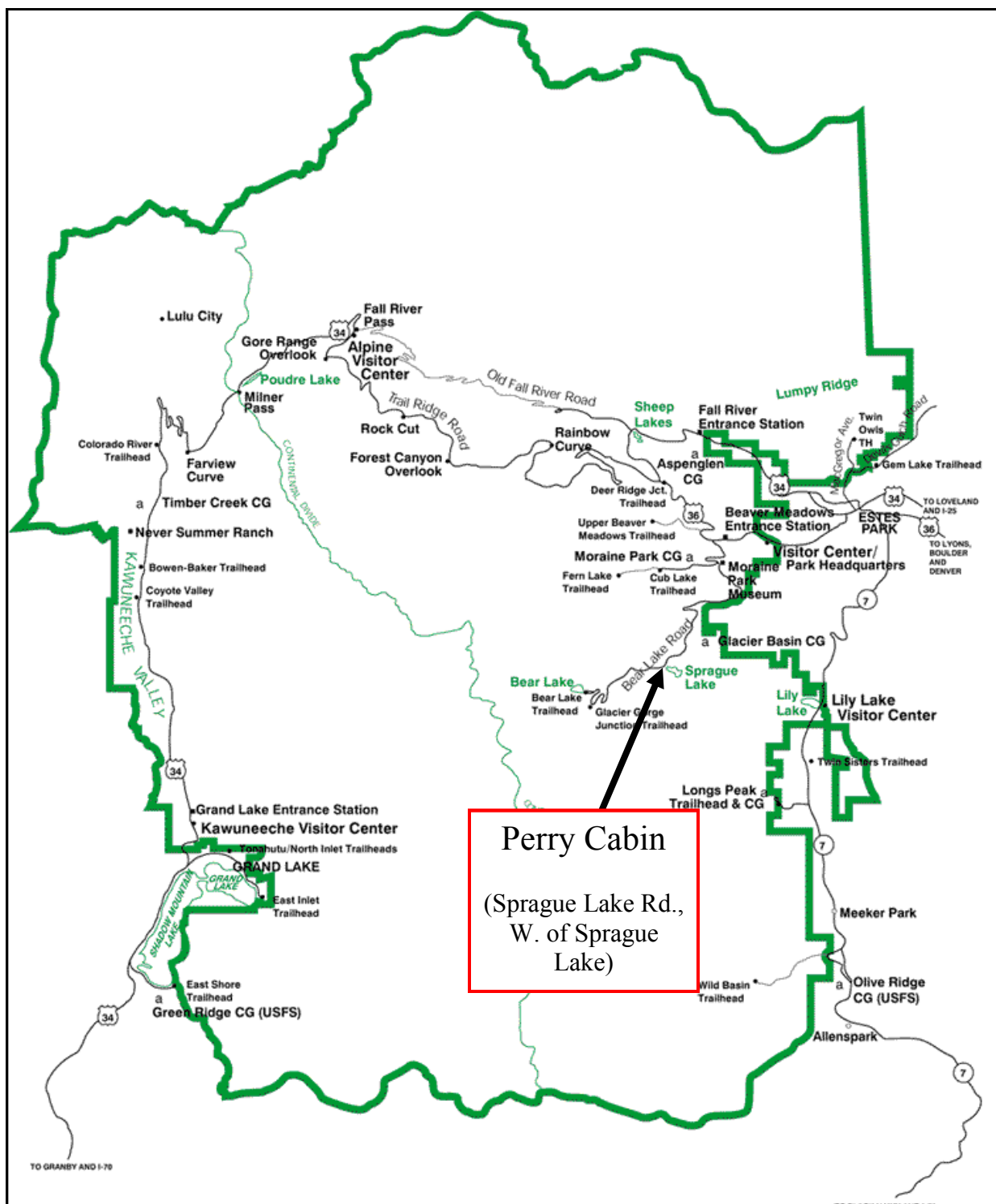
<sup>52</sup> Regional Director, Midwest Region to Acting Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, No Date, Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO.

<sup>53</sup> McWilliams, Carl and Karen McWilliams, "Sprague Lake Livery Residence: Evaluation of National Register Eligibility," September 1994, Rocky Mountain National Park Cultural Resource Office, Folder HS-573, Estes Park, CO.

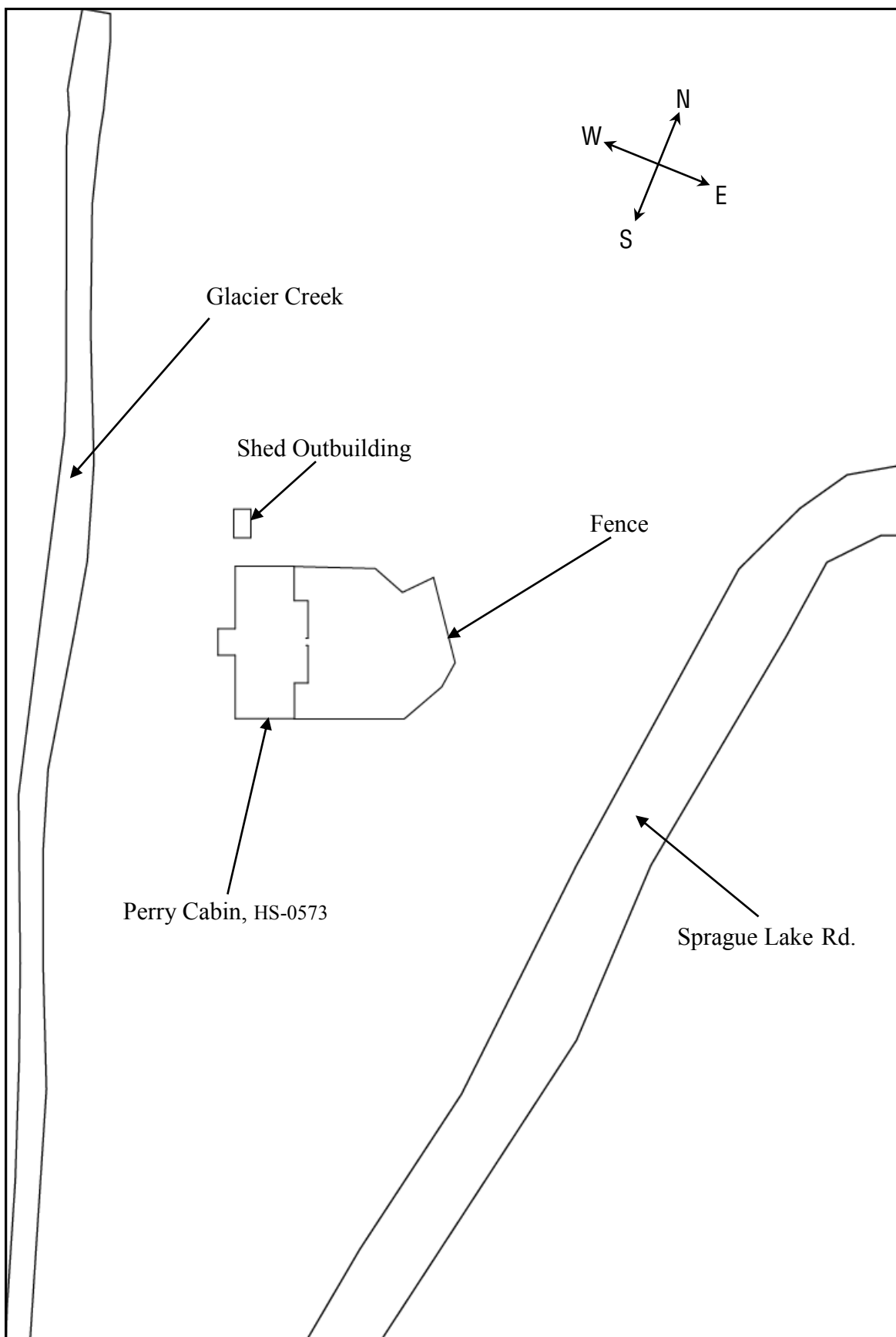
<sup>54</sup> James E. Hartmann to Sheridan Steele, 23 November 1994, Rocky Mountain National Park Cultural Resource Office, Folder HS-573, Estes Park, CO.

<sup>55</sup> A. Durand Jones to Georgianna Contiguglia, 16 March 1999, Rocky Mountain National Park Cultural Resource Office, Folder HS-573, Estes Park, CO.

Location Map

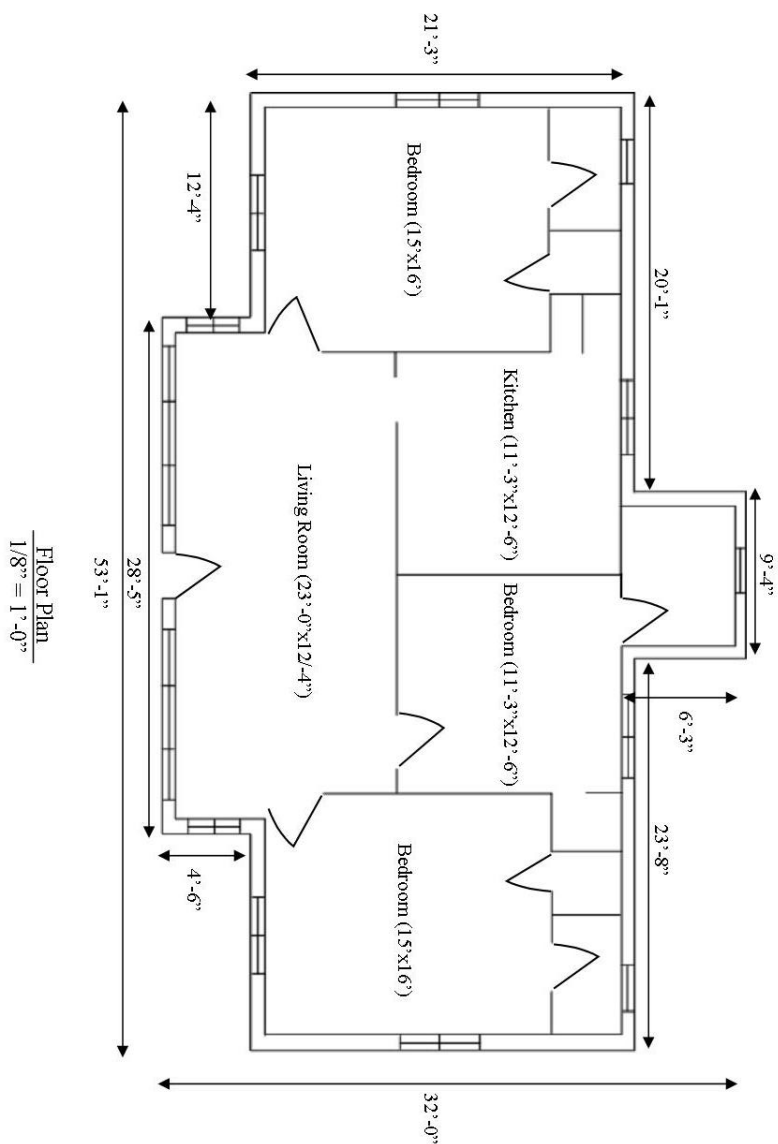


Site Map

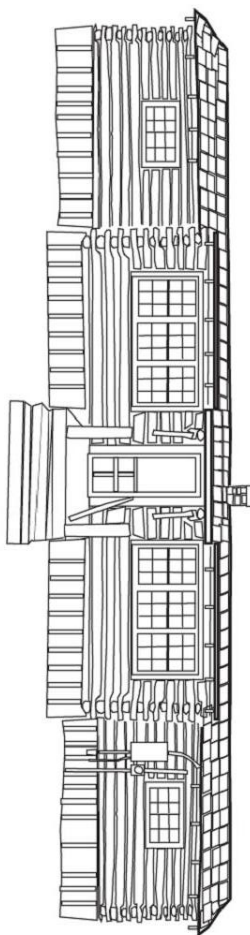


Architectural Drawings

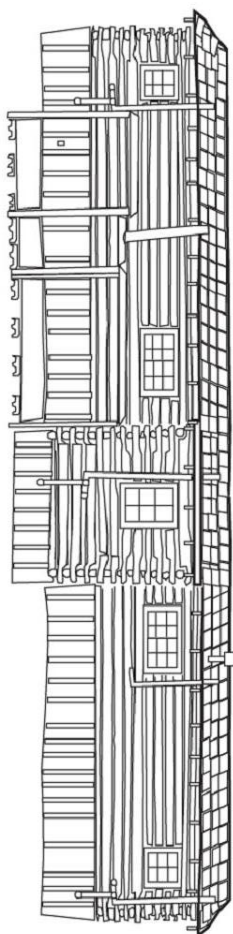
Perry Cabin, HS-0573



Perry Cabin, HS-0573

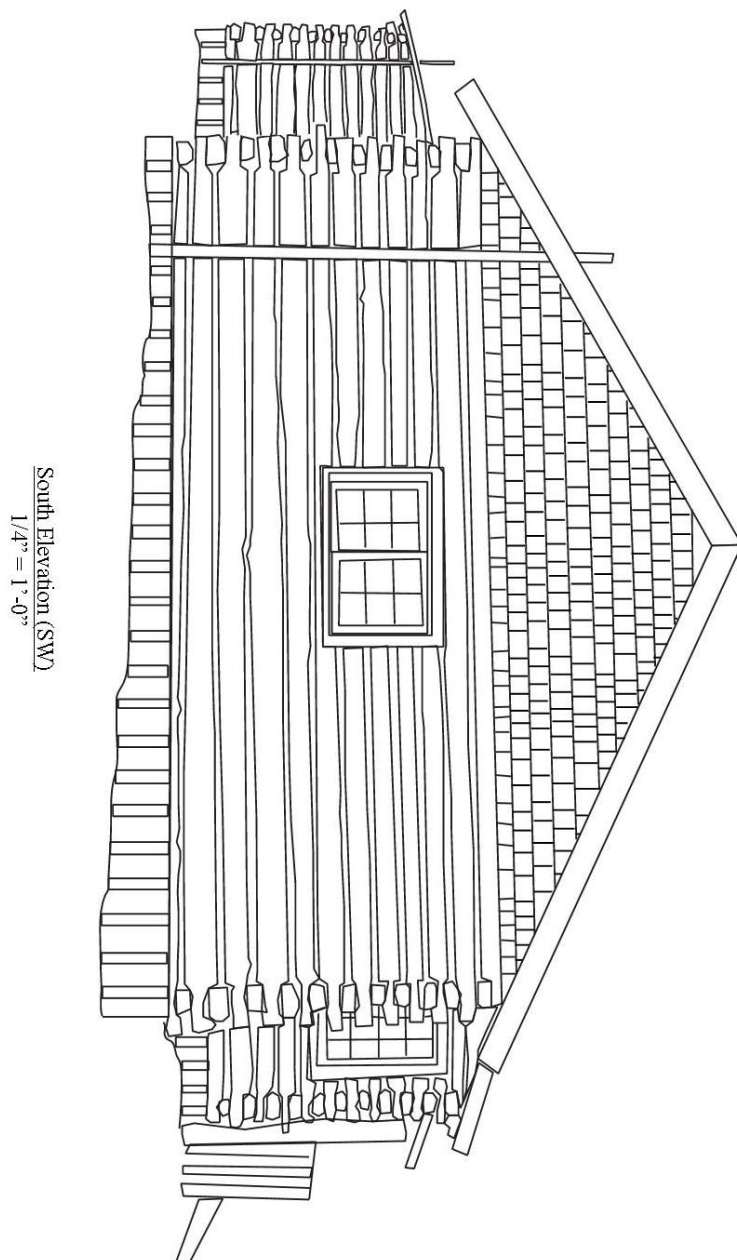


East Elevation (SE)  
1/8" = 1'-0"

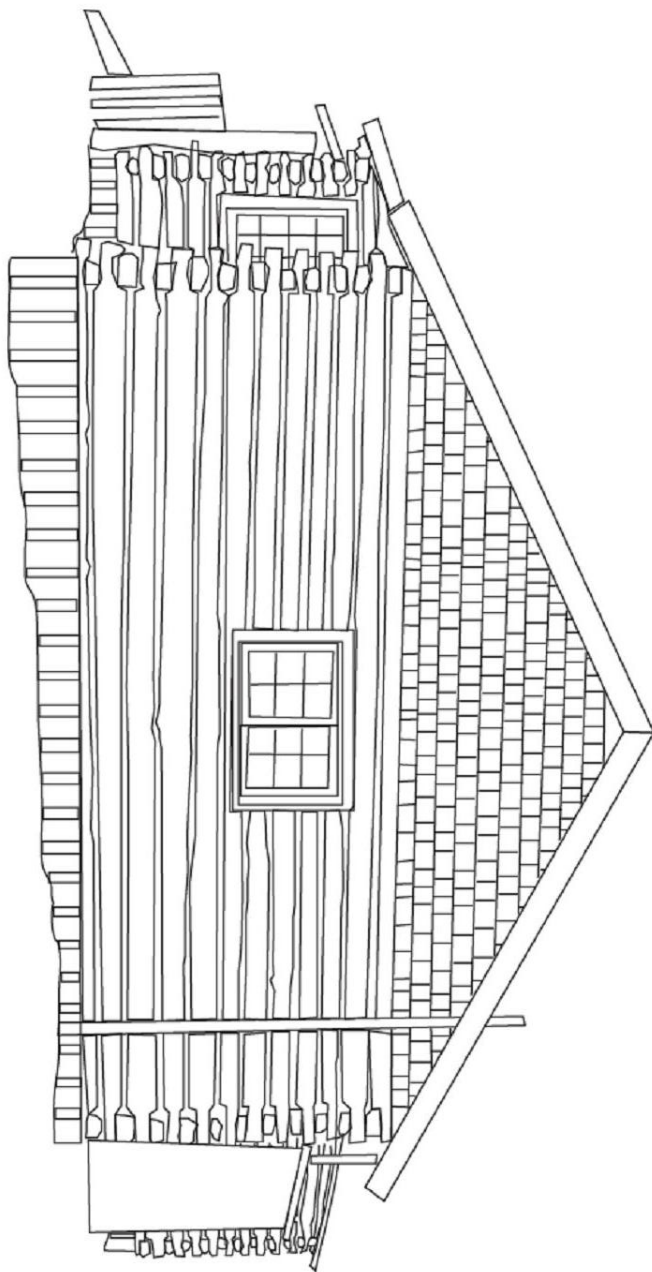


West Elevation (NW)  
1/8" = 1'-0"

Perry Cabin, HS-0573



Perry Cabin, HS-0573



North Elevation (NE)  
1/4" = 1'-0"

## Photographs

### *Photo Log*

Property Name: Perry Cabin

Property Location: Sprague Lake, Rocky Mountain National Park, Larimer County, Colorado

Photographer: Tyler Welch

Date Take: June 3, 2010 and August 4, 2010

Negatives Located at: Rocky Mountain National Park Archive, Estes Park, CO 80517

<u>Photo #</u>	<u>Facing</u>	<u>Description</u>
0001	S	East (SE) Façade and West (NW) Elevation
0002	NE	South (SW) Elevation
0003	SW	North (NE) Elevation
0004	NW	Front of cabin, entryway and porch
0005	NW	Example of board and batten foundation siding
0006	S	Example of log construction corner notching
0007	NW	Example of 12 light fixed window
0008	NW	Example of 6x6 horizontal sliding window
0009	NE	Example of single 12 light fixed window
0010	SE	Example of six light casement window with painted green surrounds
0011	NE	Square butt shingles in the gable end
0012	E	Shed roof extension closest to center on West (NW) elevation
0013	SE	Middle shed roof extension on West (NW) elevation
0014	E	Outside shed roof extension on West (NW) elevation
0015	NW	Shed outbuilding
0016	NE	Living Room
0017	NW	Living Room wall shelving
0018	W	South (SW) bedroom from the entryway
0019	NW	South bedroom interior of closet
0020	N	Kitchen from the entryway
0021	N	Kitchen shelving
0022	SW	Kitchen pantry
0023	W	West bedroom from the entryway
0024	S	Backside of living room shelving from west bedroom
0025	W	West bedroom bathroom from entryway
0026	S	Backside of kitchen shelving from west bedroom bathroom
0027	N	North bedroom from the entryway

Photographs appear at end of report and are printed on archival quality ink on archival quality paper. Original image files are located on an archival quality disc at Rocky Mountain National Park.



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