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calendar

september 12:

Registrations for the AIA Vermont 2003 Design Awards Program due at Chapter Office.

october 31:

Submissions for Design Awards Program due at Chapter Office.

aiaVT welcomes

Matthew Wheaton, Assoc. AIA, of Burlington

aiaVT welcomes back

Mark Behr, Assoc. AIA, of Burlington

This sense of continually unfolding human possibilities, which was evoked by the landscape of the New World, gave a special lift to Thoreau's line: "Who would not rise to meet the expectation of the land?" That New World utopia took many forms, but by the nineteenth century it had come to rest on three implicit assumptions. The first was the biological premise that man's life is closely attached to nature and can be lived fully only by entering into an understanding and loving partnership with nature. The second was the mechanical premise that the exploitation of nonhuman sources of energy, through science and invention, is essential toward increasing man's mastery over his physical environment and breaking down the purely physical barriers to further human cooperation and communication on a planetary scale. Finally, it rested on the human premise that the goods of every culture, both spiritual and material, must be offered freely to all its members, and eventually to all mankind.

The Lewis Mumford Reader
 Donald L. Miller ed.
 (p.290: 1986)

**the adirondack rustic style:
 great camps of the adirondacks**
 harvey h. kaiser

During the period from 1870 to 1930, a style of domestic architecture evolved in the Adirondack region of northern New York State. The building complexes in this style were most comfortably set on a lakeshore or river, against a background of forests and mountains. They are characterized by the use of natural materials – indigenous logs and stone – and shingled roofs with broad overhangs and porches with simply proportioned window and door openings.

Adirondack rustic lodges, or Great Camps, as their wealthy owners called them, were built as summer vacation homes. Local craftsmen built the lodges of native materials on a scale matching the "cottages" of Newport and the spa of Saratoga. Similar in construction and design, the camps have a self-sufficiency of structure and intentions that mirror perfectly the personalities of the builders.

Whether or not the earliest Adirondack camps were actually designed by architects cannot be determined. But there is little doubt that they shared the same influences as developments in natural settings elsewhere in the world. What the camps did was express individual spaces – such as bedrooms, dining rooms, libraries – as distinct, bold forms by grouping them in separate buildings, rather than have these spaces conform to a floor plan in a single building.

Although the versatile Adirondack Guide was adequate for simple structures of the early camps, owners seeking grand hunting and fishing lodges in the Adirondack Rustic style needed professional architectural skills. In building Santanoni in 1988, the Pruyn family turned to Robert H. Robertson; in 1991, William Seward Webb engaged the same architect to design his Forest Lodge at Nehasane Park.

The architects who designed Adirondack Great Camps received national attention through the publication of plans and photographs in architectural journals and mass appeal magazines. The Style became accepted as appropriate architecture for vacation homes around the country, and similar construction appeared in the foothills of the Appalachians, the North Woods of the Great Lakes states, southern Canada, and the Rocky Mountains. Through the influence of the National Park Service, beginning in 1916, lodges and camps on the National parks adopted the Style. A generation of landscape architects were trained and employed in the use of rustic work through depression era public works programs.

The Adirondack Rustic style was a logistical achievement as well as an esthetic accomplishment – in some cases, survive. Access was by dirt trail after

ment. The private summer camps were set in remote locations – in some cases, surrounded by tens of thousands of acres or private pre-trips by stagecoach, steamer, and private railroad car.

The camps were difficult to get to, to provision, and to maintain. This very difficulty may have motivated the builders, who were rewarded less by public acclaim than by personal satisfaction in taming a hostile environment and creating a civilized mode of living exclusively by one's own means.

From the earliest camps, the Adirondack Rustic Style is a unique vernacular architecture. Construction is solid and expressed precisely limited. Form largely because building resources were limited. Form largely depended upon the lengths of available logs, the basic building blocks, that had to be either cut on site or transported across the lakes and through the surrounding forests.

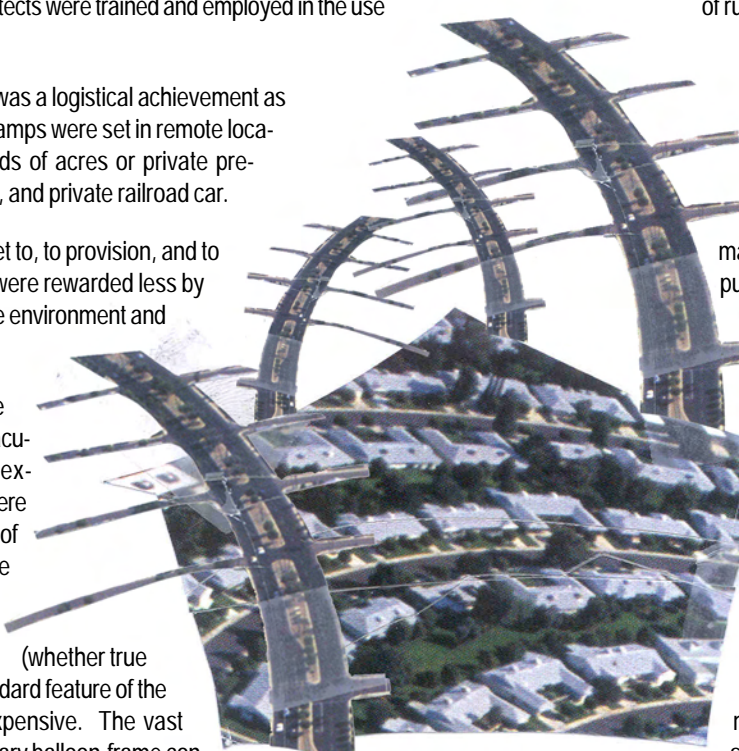
The use of log construction (whether true or simulated) is one of the elements that can be considered a standard feature of the Great Camps. Such construction was time consuming and expensive. The majority of contemporary country majority of contemporary country construction. But the Great Camps had struction. But the Great Camps had had poles became decorative elements.

The wealthy owners who built the Great camps chose logs not only for their local availability, but also for their appropriateness to the natural settings. They could have used conventional building materials and construction, but logs fit the romantic notion of the simple life in the unspoiled wilderness. Life in the Adirondack camps was hardly simple, but elaborate pains were taken to make it seem so.

Rustic work has been seldom used as an integrative style. Previously, it was confined primarily to 19th century garden gazebos and summer-houses and their furniture, or to country fences and gateways. But in the Adirondacks, rustic work, was used to create imaginative, ornamental patterns and unique architectural embellishments. Building exteriors boasted the decorative application of peeled-bark sheathing and elaborate twig and branch work patterns on porch railings and gable walls. Magnificent walls and monumental fireplaces of native stone combined the skills of mason and carpenter in the hands of the adept Adirondack Guide.

The Rustic style was often continued in the building interiors; designs were complete with decorative trim and imaginative woodland furniture produced on the site. The furniture and accessories of the Great Camps added to their character. Beds, cupboards, tables, chairs, and decorative pieces of peeled logs, twigs, and birch bark were works of art created by guides and caretakers over a long winter and presented to owners upon arrival the following summer.

The tradition of individual buildings for separate functions is another distinguishing feature of the early Great camps. Guests were lodged in cabins or perhaps on the second floor of the typical lakeside boathouse, separate from the camp owner's living unit. The dining room was often housed in an individual building, while the social gathering place variously called the "casino," the game room, or the trophy lodge, was also a separate unit. Covered boardwalks or enclosed passageways. Affording some shelter from the elements connected the buildings.



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Separate buildings were particularly well suited to expansions that continued through successive summers. As camps grew with each season, they took on the appearance of small settlements. The staff quarters – kitchens, icehouses, barns, workshops, carriage houses, and storerooms – became the service complex, a self-sufficient community sometimes several miles from the main camp.

Not surprisingly, building construction and the Rustic Style in the Adirondacks evolved along lines similar to timbered northern regions elsewhere in the world. Vernacular log and native stone styles as they are found in Alpine and Scandinavian Europe, northern Russia, and Japan bear resemblance to the Great Camps.

The terrain and weather of the Adirondacks also influenced the selection of sites and orientation of the earliest buildings. Rivers and lakes served as highways, and so locations accessible by the shortest haul were favored. Heavy snowfall covered the ground for almost half the year and extended the spring and summer wet periods; this dictated the construction of connections between units and determined other building forms and structural details.

Generations of experience taught builders to use oversize timbers – whole logs – to support roofs that carried ten feet of drifted snow. Roofs extended far beyond exterior walls, thus preventing a buildup of ice and snow pressure against foundation walls. Logs were flattened and joined tightly, then chinked with caulking, or hemp to keep out the wind-driven rain and cold.

Knowledgeable builders would “float” the buildings on stone piers to prevent dampness and rot of the superstructure, and metal shields discouraged carpenter ants and termites. Rustic skirting prevented the entry of animals beneath the buildings, but allowed the free movement of air to keep the building dry during the long period of vacancy. This technique appears in early camps and hotels, and may have been introduced by local craftsmen as a solution for non-winterized buildings.

Dread of swift-spreading fire inspired other features that became part of the Adirondack Rustic Style. To prevent chimney sparks from landing on a dry roof, stonework was raised well above a roof ridge; stone caps, placed on short corner posts of a chimney, trapped the sparks. This unique device became a typical detail. Smaller single-purpose structures were often separated from each other to prevent the spread of fire. This practice, first instituted by early vacationers using tents on wooden platforms, was later translated into permanent log buildings.

The most successful Great Camps in the Adirondack rustic Style followed the rule that building materials possess certain inherent qualities of the forest. This eliminated such materials as plaster, wallpaper, and paint – either on building interior or exterior. The esthetic point depended on the natural color, figure, and grain of the wood for decorative effects. Spruce, pine, hemlock, tamarack, or balsam was the best for structure; hardwoods were too heavy to handle. Spruce was best for roof boards; pine and spruce for ceilings; pine, cypress, spruce and gumwood for wall and paneling; and beech, birch, maple, and fir for the floors and stairs.

Popular journalists romanticized the Great Camps in late 19th century America. Publication of Log building plans in “how-to” books used Adirondack great Camps as models. The popularity of these buildings and their suitability to a wilderness setting stimulated similar construction throughout North America. Later, this same style was translated into the grand lodges of Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks; it became synonymous with National Park Service architecture.

Adirondack rustic architecture, however, was not adaptable to the post-Victorian need for pre-cut houses, low in cost, and small in scale. The achievement of the Rustic Style was its “fit” with the natural environment. As suitable as it was for second homes in woodland settings, it was seen as unsuitable for urban and suburban settings – and rightly so. Using logs or other natural materials in a residence requires self-confidence and esthetic judgment, qualities often lacking in the tract builder or private-home builder.

But the Adirondack Rustic style never lost its romantic appeal, and it is currently in a major revival. As a form of rebellion against the sameness of available housing, there is renewed attraction for the traditional values, the beauty, and practicality of the Rustic style. How-to-do-it books abound and a booming market in kits for prefabricated logs is evident in the United States and Canada. But the beginnings of the Rustic style was on the remote mountain lakes of the Adirondacks, barely a decade after the end of the Civil War.

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AIA Vermont reserves the right to edit articles for available space and determine appropriate content prior to inclusion. Submissions must be received by the 5th of the month prior to publication.



Tom Cullins Wins 2003 Photography Competition

Tom Cullins, AIA, of Truex Cullins & Partners Architects received a Judges Special Commendation Award for his photograph "Olympic Stadium in Athens, Greece." Cullins was one of fifteen selected out of over a thousand entries and will be exhibited at the 2003 AIA National Convention in San Diego as well as appear in the 2005 AIA Engagement Calendar. He has won eighteen photography awards from AIA Architectural Photography Competition since 1987.

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