



Architect's drawing of the way a 127-year-old house donated to the Overland Historical Society will look if reassembled.

Overland History Society To Get Site For Log Home

By Virginia Hick
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Bob Bartram used to play with Lincoln Logs when he was a child. But he never dreamed that someday he would be in charge of the biggest "Lincoln Log" project of them all — a real 127-year-old, four-room, two-story log house.

Bartram is vice president of the Overland Historical Society and chairman of historical projects. The house was donated to the society three years ago, and Bartram has been looking for a site for it ever since. Right now the house is "three big piles of logs" stored in the old Overland city garage.

If all goes as planned, on Monday, the Overland Board of Aldermen will turn over the deed to a lot on the northeast corner of Lackland and Gass avenues to the society for a site for the house.

"The house will be situated on the old Overland Trail," said Overland Mayor Norman A. Meyers. When completed, it will be "a good point of interest for citizens of Overland and visitors as well, to give people some idea of life then," he said.

Bartram and fellow society member Ron Edwards, an architect, discovered the house in the spring of 1977 off Wild Horse Creek Road near Babler Park. The property and the house belonged to Myldred Link, whose great grandfather, Absalom Link, settled in the area of Link and Ashby roads in Overland in 1802.

The log house was built by Alexander McElhinney in the late 1850's. McElhinney moved his family from St. Louis to the spot overlooking the Missouri River because, the legend goes, he thought it would be safer, some say from Indians, others say from the coming Civil War.

The McElhinney family was joined on the bluff later by some of the Link family (related to them by marriage). The house was sold to the Links when Alexander's son John moved to Clayton.

(John McElhinney, who died in 1927, was a St. Louis County Circuit Judge for 28 years. His son, Robert, also a county circuit judge, died last year at the age of 89.)

The house's design is a common one of the time, with two rooms upstairs, two down, separated by a

"dogtrot" in the middle. Bartram explained that often settlers would build a one-room cabin first. Then as they got more prosperous, a second cabin would be built about 10 feet away, to be connected by an entryway in the middle, known as the dogtrot. Stairs might then be built in the dogtrot, and a second story added.

Bartram is not sure whether this particular house was constructed in stages, but the pattern was a common one at the time, he said.

The McElhinney house was further "fancied up" with the addition of clapboard siding about 10 years after it was first built. The siding helped preserve the white oak logs, Bartram said, which might not have lasted this long otherwise.

Some of the hardest work on the project is already completed. It took Bartram and fellow historical society members two years to remove the siding, mark the ends of each log, dismantle the house, and move it to Overland.

They carefully preserved much of the siding, old square nails, handmade chimney bricks and old window glass. Some of the siding will be used inside the house, Bartram said, and the society is considering cleaning up the nails and selling them as souvenirs.

The society plans to furnish the house with furniture and memorabilia from the 1850's and 1860's. Bartram said local school officials have already expressed interest in bringing children on field trips to the site when it is completed.

The house has not always been so popular. First attempts by the society to locate it in Norman A. Meyers Park or Canterway Park were met with strong opposition from nearby residents. The city bought the property on Lackland in order to lease it to the society for the house. But city officials and the society disagreed over terms in the lease agreement.

Finally, last month, the city's offer to donate the land was endorsed by a resolution of the Board of Aldermen, and accepted by the society's board of directors.

Bartram said excavation will begin after the deed is formally handed over, and he hopes to be finished with the house next summer.