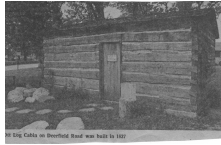


## Once Upon a Cabin 1837—2012



This year, our Ott Cabin is 175 years old. The cabin at the heart of our Historic Village today looks very different from the cabin that was moved there in January of 1971. More than 40 years of restoration and preservation have been lavished on it. **This is really the story to celebrate**—the story of how members and friends of the Historical Society have continued to keep this 1837 reminder of our pioneer heritage alive. Hurrah for the cabin—and hurrah for all of us who have had a part in its survival!

Here are a few highlights of that story.

Back in June, 1968, Rosemary Sazanoff sent a letter to Baxter Laboratories. About 2 weeks earlier, at the very first meeting of the new Historical Society, Irwin Plagge had shared some very interesting information. He believed that two of the buildings recently purchased by Baxter were built around log cabins. Irwin, a retired biochemist, was related to the families who had built the cabins back in the late 1830s.

This photo shows Irwin holding a model of one of four Ott cabins built on Sanders Road, all of which were nearly identical. "Each 1½ story cabin had a loft and a large prairie-stone fireplace for heating and cooking."



In 1836, the land had been scouted by oldest son Jacob Ott for his parents and six brothers and sisters (Caspar, Lorenz, Christian, Philip, Salome, Magdalena) who were still in Warren, Pennsylvania. In 1837, "they settled in a clearing just over the old Indian boundary. That way they could lay out farms to the north but still keep in touch with established white settlements to the south."

In 1849, taxes on Caspar's 60 acres were \$3.88. Four years later, just before he sold to Philip Frantz, taxes had gone up to \$5.88. The property was last owned by the Siljestroms, who ran a pig farm.

Some records identify Philip Brand, a "squatter" who later married Salome Ott, as the cabin builder. His sons Orson and Enoch made the cabin model that Mr. Plagge is holding. Many years later, in 1976, Brand family descendants officially donated the model to the Historical Society.

In 1854, the Caspar Ott family moved west to Geneseo, II. In 1976, Bob Gand visited the great-great granddaughter, Ruby Facett, still living in the original house on Caspar's 60 acre farm. Caspar, who was born in 1812, died in 1876 and is buried in a small rural cemetery with his wife Catherine.

Over the years, additions were made to the cabin. The farm house eventually had 5 rooms, with the cabin, neatly plastered, now a dining room in the center of the house.

Once the existence of the cabin was confirmed, Baxter donated \$1000 for the move. A letter from their attorney set July 1, 1970, as a deadline for the move, but they must have agreed to an extension. On a Thursday morning in January, 1971, Scherf HouseMovers needed just 30 minutes at 25-30 mph to move the cabin to the Kipling site.

But the structure sitting forlornly in the snow looked more like an eyesore than a landmark. No roof, no windows, no floors, gaping holes where doorways had been cut—the Society really faced a challenge.

Donations to a "Save the Ott Cabin" fund had been received from individuals and community organizations as early as 1969. One file lists contributions from the Questers, Rotary Club, AAUW, DAR, the Deerfield Women's Club, and the Garden Club as well as from the PTA's of Cadwell, Walden, Kipling, Shepard Jr. High, and Wilmot Jr. High. No doubt other groups and businesses also contributed.

Society president Don Pfeiffer and Board member Thomas Pinkerton spearheaded a two-year campaign to restore the cabin.

The official dedication of a tall and rather skeletal cabin took place on Sunday, May 23, 1971. When restoration work began, some of the logs from the top of the walls were removed to fill in doorways that had been cut into the original cabin.

In 1972, fundraisers like a barn dance, a tag day, and a folk concert (Bob Gand & Lana Rae) provided funds for a roof and other immediate needs. In the summer, a field-stone fireplace was added. More than two dozen Society members went to Lake County Grading Co. at Il. 63 & 120 to pick stones for the fireplace, which cost \$900 to build.

In 1973, Bob Gand composed the music and lyrics for a song, *The Caspar Ott Cabin*.

By 1974, the final steps in the first phase of restoration were complete—three windows, shutters, chinking, and an oak door with latchstring. The contract with Precision Engineering specified that *All materials to be as rough-cut and out-of-square as possible to provide authentic look*. One wonders what 1837 Carpenter Brand might have to say about that request! Precision Engineering did donate \$1300 of the total \$2550 cost.

Over the years, fundraisers continued—house walks, ice cream socials, and quilts. In September, 1970, Jane Lange and Jo Gourley quilted in the window of the Montgomery Ward store at the Crossroads Shopping Center for several days prior to a tag day fundraiser for the cabin. This quilt, a "Field of Dreams" pattern, is now in the Sack House. A label on the back lists all the quilters who worked on it.

In July, 1974, the Society was invited to join the Bicentennial Planning Committee. "Send Joan Blumenthal," was penciled in the margin of the letter, and during the meeting Joan suggested making a quilt.

In June, 1975, Deerfield needle-workers started stitching. Not just one but **two** quilts were finished by January 6, 1976. They would be raffled on July 4, 1976, to fund cabin restoration. But Joan and Village Clerk Marge Emery were so impressed by the quilts that they wanted them kept as a permanent part of Deerfield. Instead of a raffle, Mrs. Emery launched a drive to raise \$5000 for the cabin. The two quilts are now on permanent display in the Deerfield Village Hall.

Restoration continued. A letter from Norris Stilphen dated May 26, 1977, told the Historical Society that boards from an outbuilding on the Kauke farm site could be salvaged for the floor and the loft of the Ott Cabin. (The Kauke Building with its white siding and exposed log back porch was also donated by Baxter and is now part of the Historic Village.)

In a 1995 article in the *Deerfield Review*, Society president Tom Roth confirmed that the cabin was deteriorating in a big, expensive way. The roof had been pitched toward the fireplace resulting in severe leaks that were rotting the logs. The roof was not steep enough. The slab foundation was buckling the floor, Re-chinking was needed. There was no loft.

Today's cabin is the result of that last major reconstruction project. A project in spring, 2011, replaced the gables and loft windows. Just as in 1970, we are still saving that little cabin.

The cabin, oldest building in Lake County, links us to the pioneer families who first settled here. But it also-connects us to the very beginning of our Historical Society and to the mission which still inspires us.