

**Smith-Taylor Cabin:
Shelter Island, NY**

3.0 ARCHITECTURAL DATA

3.1 General remarks

3.1.1 Taylor’s Island

The Smith-Taylor Cabin is located on Taylor’s Island, formerly known as Cedar Island, which is a small land body situated in Coecles Harbor (Shelter Island, NY) that measures 1.188 acres in size. The island (Section 20/Block 02/Lot 01) is located in the southeasterly section of the Town of Shelter Island, and is owned and maintained by the town as an integral part of the Coecles Harbor Marine Water Trail. It is accessible at low tide from the main land, where a row of private homes (Mashomack-Coecles Harbor Association) fronts the harbor’s edge. The island is surrounded by the large and environmentally significant, 2100-acre Mashomack Preserve (The Nature Conservancy).

Taylor’s Island rises approximately eight feet above sea level and is surrounded by cast concrete sea walls and bulkheads. It preserves an authentic, “Adirondack” style log and cabin-sided building as well as a rustic, rubble stone wellhead. Other former improvements to the island, now lost but preserved in archival photographs, included a log-built wellhead and two cabin-sided guest cottages, one of which is believed to have contained a generator.

3.1.2 Smith-Taylor Cabin

The one-story, Smith-Taylor Cabin is the only habitable structure that remains standing on Taylor’s Island today. It is irregular in massing and measures approximately 50 feet by 43 feet overall. It is distinguished by a central tower measuring approximately 7 feet square in section that rises three stories to a narrow, two-sided balcony overlooking Coecles Harbor. The ground floor of the building incorporates two distinct living areas, the largest of which is a rectangular, multi-purpose space constructed of logs dating c. 1900. The adjoining rooms extend to the east and south of this room – including a new “front” entryway on the west façade, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen dating c. 1940 – and preserve exterior “cabin siding” that simulates the appearance of the original, authentic log building. (Non-historic vertical planking is employed in areas where the siding has been repaired.) The rooms that were added c. 1940 appear to have been built at the same time and correspond to the date in which the original building was enlarged, winterized and transformed into both a seasonal and year-round dwelling.

The architectural integrity of the entire building is high, both inside and out, despite the renewal of roofing material, conversion of two banks of windows, and the replacement of cabin siding on the south and west façades with vertical wood siding.

Ample physical and photographic evidence is preserved that documents the historic appearance of these façades, and investigation of the interior of the rooms confirms that their architectural detailing is virtually unaltered.

The transformation of the original log recreational building into a dwelling included the construction of an observation tower that took advantage of the island's spectacular site. It also introduced a small cellar to contain the boiler for a heating system, necessitated in part by the existence of running water and plumbing that were included in the expansion of the building. The additional rooms greatly increased the inside dimensions of the building; the cabin, which had measured only about 480 square feet, was increased in size by over 610 square feet to a total of 1,090 square feet, or more than double its original footprint. In addition, the construction of the three-story tower introduced an architectural feature that enabled its occupants to enjoy more extensive views of Coecles Harbor and the surrounding landscape.

The additions of c. 1940 converted a simple, unheated building into a dwelling that could be occupied overnight for extended periods of time. The additions were undertaken in such a way that the original building retained much of its integrity and overall appearance, and considerable effort was made to ensure that the new work blended with the old, or detracted as little as possible, in terms of both scale and architectural detailing. Thus, where authentic logs had been used in the original building, cabin siding was employed in the new work to simulate the effect of the old. Similarly, diamond-paned lights were used in doors and windows, emulating the original design. In short, the additions were relatively modest in scope and scaled in such a way that the original picnic shelter remained the predominant element in the massing of the cabin.

3.2 Description

The Smith-Taylor Cabin, which preserves features dating from two primary stages of construction (c. 1900 and c. 1940), is an unusual building that combines architectural fabric associated with the turn-of-the-20th-century, rustic Adirondack style with additions that were designed to harmonize with the original design. In its present configuration, it incorporates a wealth of surviving detail from each of its construction periods. The c. 1900 log building, conceived essentially as a recreational structure, remains largely intact as built, incorporating both exterior and interior features significant of its style and date of construction. These include its authentic log wall construction, cedar pole and branch porch components, three “twig” style doors, and an over-scaled stone fireplace. The c. 1940 additions, which respected the architectural style of the original building while enlarging it and changing its use into that of a habitable dwelling, employed cabin siding that simulated the original log walls and other details typical of the construction period. These include knotty pine paneling, diamond-paned windows and batten doors, and simulated 18th century style hardware and lighting devices. Non-historic fabric such as the replacement vertical board siding on sections of the later additions, and the remodeling of several windows, does not detract from the overall integrity of the building.

3.2.1 Exterior

The cabin’s hipped roof incorporates two triangular windows facing east and west and set at opposite ends of the upper ridge line, thus forming the effect of clerestory lighting when viewed from inside. The roof is covered with composite tabbed shingles. The logs that make up the wall construction measure approximately 10” in circumference and are joined with vertical pegs chinked with mortar. Corner joints employ a technique of half-notching or coping that locks the logs into successive courses, allowing approximately one foot of each log to project beyond the corners. The condition of the log construction is relatively good; one small area at the north end of the east façade has deteriorated from exposure to water, however, revealing its internal system of assembly.

The porch incorporates a system of rustic cedar posts and braces, cedar rafters, and wood plank roof and floor boards. The cedar posts have been cleaned of their bark and are left undressed, preserving their irregular contours and the stumps of branches. The smaller braces that support the roof plate are also cedar branches that retain their rough, irregular surfaces. Several of these appear to have been replaced, although the present configuration of the roof frame is essentially identical to the original, as-built condition. The shed roof is supported on cedar poles that function as rafters, and sections of the roof planking also survive. The floor boards of the porch appear to date from the c. 1940 era.

The fenestration of the log building also dates from its alteration and enlargement as a house c. 1940. While the front door appears to remain as originally built, the windows flanking it were changed and the side entrances on the east and west facades

were widened to incorporate sidelights flanking pairs of glazed, multi-paned doors. Despite these alterations, the rustic character of the original “Adirondack” style structure is preserved and detailing such as the diamond-paned windows seen in the original building was carried into the design of the new additions. The front door, which appears recessed due to the projecting window bays that flank it, is of traditional panel construction although its three lower triangular panels are inset with bark-faced branches that emphasize the rustic design of the building, while its two upper glazed panels incorporate diamond-paned window lights.

The side doors are paired and glazed with twelve lights set above panels that match the narrow flanking sidelights. The original side door or window configuration is undocumented; inasmuch as the log wall construction on either side of the sidelights is undisturbed, it may be concluded that the doorways were widened c. 1940 and that the original openings accommodated single doors. Further confirmation of this hypothesis may be seen in the use of cabin siding set vertically on either side of the door openings, the use of which links the construction of these openings with the alteration of the house itself. Each of the paired multi-paned doors preserves hardware associated with its date of installation, including specialized drop bolts (“cremones”) identified by the manufacturer’s mark (“Russwin”) and further identified as model no. 229.

The bay windows flanking the center door appear to date from the c. 1940 alteration, and provide built-in seating for the interior living-dining area. When compared with the narrower, paired diamond-paned casements that are documented to have been the original window type, it may be concluded that the alteration was prompted by the need to introduce more light into the room. It is interesting to note that parts of the original porch roof frame are incorporated into the construction of the bay windows.

The exterior of the additions now combines fabric that is original to the c. 1940 construction period as well as later repairs and alterations that are not historic. Ample evidence, both architectural and photographic, exists to discern the difference between the two and to ascertain the appearance of the building after its enlargement in the 1930s.

The additions are supported on a poured concrete foundation that encloses both a full cellar and crawlspace. This differs considerably from the original building, which is supported directly on the ground with large rocks. Construction of the additions utilized conventional balloon frame technology, not logs to match the existing building, and the new work was therefore covered with cabin siding to simulate the original. This siding is preserved in several places despite its more recent replacement: on the north wall of the east bedroom, on the third floor of the tower, and on the exterior wall of the new entry foyer. As described above, the siding is also evident on both sides of the multi-paned doors leading to the original building where it was utilized as wall infill. In areas where it has been replaced, on the east and south facades and on the second story of the tower, it is apparent from surviving physical and photographic evidence that it covered these walls as well.

The cabin siding measures 7 ½” wide by 1 ¾” thick and incorporates a ½” rabbet

for overlapping successive courses. This specification conforms to illustrations of the material from trade catalogs of the 1930s and is considered typical of the period.

The three-story tower, constructed when the original one-room log building was enlarged with bedchambers, bathrooms, kitchen and new side entry, provides the building with an observation deck with expansive views of Coecles Harbor, the adjoining “mainland” (now Mashomack Preserve), Little Ram and Big Ram Islands, and beyond. The tower is only roughly seven feet square at each level, and rises to a third story in which a narrow balcony is integrated into its design on two sides. A steep staircase distinguished by fret-sawn balusters resembling fish in profile is intact as built. Other architectural features of note include the hexagonally framed roof structure, diamond-paned windows on the second story and nautical porthole windows on the third story.

The tower preserves its cabin siding on the third story. Physical and photographic evidence supports the fact that this original siding type was also utilized on the second story where it has since been replaced with vertical board planking. Paint evidence observed elsewhere on the site confirms that the c.1940 cabin siding was originally painted red and that the earlier log building was painted red to match the additions.

3.2.2 Interior

The interior of the log building preserves important original detailing, including an imposing rubble stone chimney centered against a long wall opposite the front entry, and a rustic ceiling constructed of cedar log rafters supporting board roof planking. Other features dating from its original, c. 1900 construction period include two interior doors that flank the chimney. These doors incorporate a unique configuration of bark-faced branches that infill the upper and lower panels in a chevron design. While the doors are unquestionably associated with the c. 1900 construction period, close examination of their rails and stiles reveals them to have been reduced in size and re-hung with hardware associated with the c. 1940 alterations, indicating that the original doorways were reconfigured. Inasmuch as the doors are located on the back wall of the building, it may be surmised that they were originally closet doors and required only minimal alteration in the later period to function as entryways to the adjoining rooms.

The large, twenty-four by twenty foot room continues to function as an all-purpose living and dining space consistent with its original design. Its side walls are vertically paneled, perhaps a c. 1940 alteration, and it is still dominated by the colossal rubble stone chimney centered on the long back wall opposite the front door. Tapering as it rises through the roof, the chimney measures nearly six feet in width at its base and its firebox is nearly 4 feet wide. The hearth is flanked by two large, round stones that seem to function as seats, whereas the chimney itself incorporates smaller local fieldstones of various shapes and colors including a quartz stone that is featured as the keystone above the firebox. The floor of the firebox is constructed of fire bricks bearing the maker’s mark, “FJD.”

The ceiling of the room is the exposed underside of the roof, composed of symmetrically spaced cedar poles functioning as rafters supporting a layer of roof boards that preserve an application of green paint. The upper portion of the ceiling is lit by the triangular windows positioned at each end of the ridge.

The interior of the new additions appears intact as built. The consistent use of knotty pine paneling and the uniformity of the hardware on doors and windows indicate that this fabric is original to the 1940s. In addition, the enameled porcelain kitchen sink, corner bathroom wash basin and enameled steel kitchen cabinet are all intact from this period.

As stated above, the exterior envelope of the original all-purpose building was greatly enlarged to incorporate the spaces considered necessary for weekend or year-round living. Inasmuch as plumbing and heating were introduced into the scheme, a full cellar was dug under the east section of the additions and a poured concrete foundation constructed in which the heating plant was installed. (The second bedroom, bathrooms and kitchen are supported on poured concrete footings above crawl space.) The heating unit is a coal-fired boiler located beneath the east bedroom, situated in such a way that it discharges heat into the base of the tower above it, as well as into the adjoining spaces via ductwork located within the crawlspace. The full cellar is accessed via an outside stair against the south wall of the east bedroom. There is no access into the cellar from inside the building.

Unifying the spaces added in the 1940s is the consistent use of door hardware and lighting devices that are characteristic of the period. The hardware style is intentionally “rustic” or “antique” and reinforces the overall effect of the building and its site. Iron “H” and “H-L” type hinges that simulate the wrought iron hardware of 18th century hand-manufacture are utilized on the interior doors, whereas bolder strap hinges with simulated hammered finishes are employed on the exterior doors. Door latches are consistent with the hinges and are reproduction “Suffolk” type latches inspired by 18th century designs. (Matching door hardware is also utilized on the re-hung interior doors of the original cabin as well as on its front, exterior door.)

Lighting fixtures, primarily sconces, are intended to look “old-fashioned” as well and carry the “rustic/antique” theme to its logical conclusion. These are placed in each of the bedrooms and in the entrance foyer.

3.3 Alterations & repairs

The primary alterations to the building occurred about 1940 when the original picnic shelter was enlarged and transformed for use as an overnight cabin. This major architectural program is treated in this report as a major stage in the building's evolution, however, and not as an alteration. Subsequent to this renovation, the cabin underwent a number of minor alterations and repairs, none sufficient in scope to change the massing of the building or compromise its architectural integrity. The following section outlines these alterations and repairs.

3.4 Doors, windows & hardware

The Smith-Taylor Cabin has eighteen doors (six exterior, twelve interior) and thirty-two windows, a comparatively large number of openings for a building of only about 1,000 square feet in size. Its spectacular setting with commanding views of Coecles Harbor and distant land masses explains its large window area, and its origin as a recreational building retaining a porch that wraps three façades accounts in part for the number of outside entrances. Only one original exterior door (D3) remains, however; two exterior entrances (D2 & D4) were altered and two additional doorways (D1 & D5) were created when the building was enlarged c. 1940. Only two interior doors (D6 & D7) appear to survive from the c. 1900 period; the majority of the interior doors were introduced to serve the new rooms added c. 1940.

Doors D3, D6 and D7 appear to survive from the original structure; their rustic “Adirondack” or stick design is characteristic of the period. The remaining doors are either stock designs of “Colonial” or “Tudor” type or simple batten doors representative of mid-20th century design and construction.

Only the triangular windows at opposite ends of the roof ridge in the large living room survive from the c. 1900 structure. The other doors, including those that flank the original front door (D3), date from the later period. Diamond-paned window sash and casement windows were evidently selected for the expansion of the building because they matched the windows that flanked the original front door. A majority of these second stage windows survive; only those in the east bedroom, now replaced with banks of non-historic sash, and the four tower windows on the second story, have been removed.

The hardware is original to the doors and windows, much of it “Tudor” in style matching the period of the architectural unit.