Survey No. CH-377

Magi No.

DOE __yes __no

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic N/A

and/or common Thomas Brown Log Dwelling (SEE VERTICAL FILE FOR ADDITIONAL INFO)

2. Location

street & number N/A ___ not for publication

city, town ___ X ___ vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland county Charles

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	___ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
_X_ building(s)	_X_ private	_X_ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	_X_ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	_X_ not applicable	___ no	___ military	_X_ other: vacant

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Banyan Management

street & number MD Route 5 and St. Charles Pkwy. telephone no.: (301) 870-9211

city, town Waldorf state and zip code MD 20604-0719

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. liber 1371

street & number Charles Street folio 424

city, town La Plata state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title N/A

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ loca

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	___ original site
___ good	_X_ ruins	___ altered	___ moved date of move _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

See continuation sheets.

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE COUNT: 2

Description

The Thomas Brown Log Dwelling is an abandoned structure situated on a 25-acre parcel south of Indian Head Road in the western portion of Charles County, Maryland. The dwelling is located in a densely wooded area, approximately one mile inland from the Potomac River. Two other nineteenth century farmsteads, consisting of a 15-acre and a 20-acre parcel, were located along the eastern edge of the Thomas Brown parcel. The Thomas Brown property is historically and physically linked to these adjacent properties through a network of historic roads, abandoned fields, treelines, and fencelines. All three parcels were subdivided from a larger agricultural estate owned by the Brawner family.

The main block of the Thomas Brown dwelling represents two phases of construction. The oldest portion of the structure was constructed during the mid- to late-nineteenth century as a one and one-half story log structure. A full, wood-frame second story was added to the log structure ca. 1890. During the twentieth century, two additional wood-frame additions were constructed along the north and west elevations. These additions, however, have collapsed; only structural debris remains.

In its current state, the dwelling consists of a two-story structure terminating in a side-gable roof sheathed in corrugated metal. The dwelling's primary entrance is centered on the south elevation. Two window openings are centered above this main entrance at the second floor level. The rear, north elevation is punctuated by a central door opening on the first floor. A second floor door opening is positioned off-center. The east gable end is dominated by an exterior brick chimney; the upper portion of the chimney has collapsed. A single second floor window is located on the north side of the chimney. The west gable end is defined by a window opening slightly off-center on the first floor. A second floor door opening, located in the wood-frame addition, is aligned with this window opening. All window sashes and doors have been removed throughout the building.

The topographic, vegetative, and cultural features of the Thomas Brown property show that the land was used for farming during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An 80-year-old open growth American beech and a line of 70-year-old cedar trees with imbedded barbed wire comprise the vegetative signatures associated with the most recent occupation of the dwelling. A 40-year-old cedar supporting ingrown hardware (probably gate hinges) and a cherry tree also were identified on the Thomas Brown property. The arrangement of these landscape features indicate that the log structure served as the main dwelling of a small nineteenth century farmstead.

A chicken coop survives as the only other extant building on this 25-acre parcel. The structure is situated northeast of the log dwelling and is largely overgrown. The chicken coop is a small wooden structure terminating in a front-gabled roof. The front gable is punctuated by a single door opening. Other associated architectural features include a well, located north of the log dwelling, and collapsed pole barn.

Original Configuration

The original form of the Thomas Brown dwelling represents a common house type associated with slaves, freed slaves, and tenant farmers ca. 1800 to ca. 1870. The building originally was constructed as a one and one-half story, single pen, log structure measuring 16'-9" by 14'-8". The walls were constructed of large, square-hewn logs with plaster chinking in between the logs. Half-dovetail notching was used to interlock the log corners. V-notch corner joints were more commonly used in Charles County, however, half-dovetail corner notching was not atypical to southern Maryland. The original roof most likely adopted a gable configuration; the roof was replaced subsequently to accommodate a second-story frame addition. With the exception of the roof and rafters, the original log portion remains virtually intact.

The primary (south) elevation originally was defined by a central doorway and a single window on one side. The small proportions of the dwelling are evident by the size of the doorway, which measures only 6'-1" in height. The rear (north) elevation consisted of a single door opening centered on the first floor and aligned with the front entrance. The west end was punctuated by a single window opening located slightly off-center. The east end was dominated by an exterior chimney centered on this elevation. The existing brick chimney, possibly a later addition to the dwelling, measures four feet wide at its base and is chamfered at its sides.

The interior plan of the original log house survives intact. The plan consisted of one room downstairs and one room upstairs. Typically, the first floor functioned as the main living quarters, while the second floor loft space served as sleeping quarters. A doorway was centered on the south and north walls. A central brick hearth occupied the east wall. A quarter-turn, boxed staircase located in the southwest corner provided access to the upper sleeping loft. Evidence suggests that the interior log walls were exposed and whitewashed. Corrugated cardboard covers portions of the interior walls. These were added by later residents and may have been provided extra insulation. Tongue-and-groove floorboards are keyed into the original log walls at the second floor level, indicating that the original second-story floorboards are still intact. These tongue-and-groove floorboards measure roughly 4" to 5" in width. Floorboards on the first floor consist of narrower boards, perhaps indicating a later addition.

Subsequent Alterations

The one-story log dwelling was enlarged through the addition of a full second story side-gabled, wood-frame addition during the late-nineteenth or early twentieth century. This frame addition is distinguished from the original structure by its use of two-by-four framing with diagonal bracing. Machine-cut nails also are found in this frame section. The change in construction methods marks the transition from traditional log construction, which utilized locally-available materials and labor, to a lighter frame technique that relied on commercially purchased materials.

Two additional wood-frame sections were added to the main block; one extended from the north elevation and the other projected from the west gable end. These additions may have been constructed between 1910 and 1920 as indicated by tax records that show a significant increase in value between 1916 and 1923. During this span, the assessment value of the buildings rose from $325 to $510. Following this increase in valuation, the assessed value of the buildings remained unchanged until the early 1940s (Charles County Tax Records, 1912-1941).

Although both of these wood-frame additions have collapsed, site investigations provided some insight into their overall configuration. Door openings at the second story of the north and west elevations of the main block suggest that both additions were two stories in height and capped by a gable roof. The ghost of a gable roof is still visible along the north elevation of the dwelling. Remnants of the north addition consist of a pile of structural debris and the remains of a brick chimney. The brick chimney was located at the far gable end. Some of the timber members are charred, suggesting that fire was responsible for its collapse.

Resource Integrity

The Thomas Brown log dwelling currently is in an advanced stage of deterioration. The building has remained vacant since the 1950s, exposed to the natural elements. The north wall is experiencing structural failure, as evidenced by the log portion bowing inward and causing the building to sag. Most of the horizontal wood siding on the main building is no longer intact and the majority of the window frames are missing. Exterior doors and windows also have been removed throughout the building. The upper portion of the exterior end chimney has collapsed, and the interior brick hearth has fallen.

Although the building stands as an architectural ruin, the structure still retains its essential building form. The original single-pen log structure survives largely intact and the upper wood-frame section remains untouched. Very few exterior and interior modifications have been made to substantially alter these two building campaigns.

8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion	
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science	
___ 1500–1599	X agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture	
___ 1600–1699	X architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian	
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater	
X 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation	
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	X other (specify) ethnic heritag	
		___ invention			

Specific dates ca. 1860–1930 **Builder/Architect** unknown

check: Applicable Criteria: X A __B X C X D
and/or
Applicable Exception: __A __B __C __D __E __F __G

Level of Significance: __national __state X local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

See continuation sheets.

Summary of Significance

The Thomas Brown house is locally significant for its association with the agricultural transition period that occurred in Charles County during the post-Civil War period (Criterion A). The acquisition of this 25-acre parcel by Thomas Brown, an African-American, in 1877 illustrates the general shift in land ownership from plantations to small family farms. The property is representative of a distinct building type historically associated with African-Americans (Criterion C).

The Thomas Brown Log Dwelling also is locally significant for its architectural information value as it pertains to postbellum African-Americans (Criterion D). As a building form, the single-pen log dwelling portrays the modest lifestyle of free blacks in rural southern Maryland during the post-Civil War period. The expansion of the Thomas Brown dwelling, from a simple log dwelling to a larger, more complex dwelling that incorporated frame construction, illustrates the typical way this building form evolved as African-American families grew more financially independent into the twentieth century.

The Thomas Brown property is related to a larger multi-component resource that encompasses archeological sites associated with other parcels involved in tenant farming activities. Information on the archeological component is recorded on a Maryland Archeological Site Survey Form (Site Number 18CH379).

Historic Overview: Acquisition of Property

From the close of the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century, the acreage encompassing the Thomas Brown Log Dwelling was owned by the Brawner family, a prominent Charles County family. The Brawner's property, like most of the land within the region, was used to support a plantation economy throughout the 1700s and early 1800s.

Following the Civil War, the Brawner family's involvement in farming gradually diminished. This was most likely due to the abolition of slavery and the resultant inability to retain a steady, cheap labor force. By the late 1870s, the Brawner family began to sell off portions of their estate. Thomas Brown, an African-American, was one of the earliest purchasers who acquired a 25-acre parcel from Eugene Hyland Brawner in December 1877 (Deed BGS 2:453). Two additional, contiguous tracts of land were sold by Eugene Brawner during the 1890s; one of the parcels was acquired by an African-American.

Thomas Brown was listed in the 1880 Census for Charles County as a 38-year old African-American. He was listed as married to Emma, with seven children under the age of 15. Thomas Brown was identified in the Agricultural Census of 1880 as owning 10 acres of improved land and 15 acres of unimproved land. In addition to raising livestock, Brown cultivated five acres of wheat and one acre of tobacco (1880 Census; 1880 Agricultural Census, 44th enumeration district, p.11).

Thomas Brown's family retained ownership of the parcel until 1929 when it was sold at public auction to James W. Brown (Deed WMA 51:3). Two years later, the 25-acre parcel was transferred to Burley, Marie, and Carrilean Brown (Deed WMA 54:461). The parcel remained within this family until 1981 (Deed 770:142).

Agricultural Context: Transition from Large Plantation to Small Family Farm

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, patterns of land ownership in Charles County and southern Maryland underwent a dramatic transition from plantations, which supported a predominantly tobacco economy, to small tenant farms. The Thomas Brown property illustrates this agricultural transition period.

Agriculture, specifically tobacco farming, had been the lifeblood of Charles County since the time the county was established. By 1840, Charles County produced 3.25 million pounds of tobacco, comprising 13.2 per cent of the total output of the state (Wesler et al. 1981: 124). Tobacco crops consumed large expanses of prime agricultural land and required a substantial year-round source of labor (Camp 1974: 50). As a result, this monocrop economy was largely dependent upon a large slave population. Slaves first became an important part of the labor force in the Tidewater region during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. From that time until emancipation, the proportion of slaves steadily increased. In 1790, the slave population accounted for approximately 44.5 per cent of Charles County's population. By 1860, the percentage increased to 58.4 per cent (Wesler 1981: 126; Klapthor and Brown 1958: 68; Kulikoff 1986: 340).

The abolition of slavery during the Civil War served as the precipitating factor in the demise of the tobacco plantation economy. Since Charles County landowners relied heavily on a steady slave labor force to cultivate their tobacco, the loss of slave labor temporarily devastated tobacco production until a system of sharecropping and tenant farming was established (Wesler 1981: 128). During the 1860s, Charles County entered an economic depression. A large amount of previously prosperous, slave-cultivated farmland remained untended due to shortages of funds and labor. A number of the larger landowners were forced to sell portions of their landholdings. Tobacco plantations were divided into smaller tracts of farmland comprised of as few as five to ten acres (Camp 1974: 51). By the early 1900s, many former landowners became absentee landlords. Tenant farmers assumed the responsibility for cultivating the land. These residents shared with the owner the profit from the crop and received a portion as their pay (McDaniel 1982:20).

Although many former Charles County residents emigrated to more urban areas during the postbellum period in search of better job opportunities, many African-Americans remained in the area. Freed slaves who remained in Charles County sought to escape tenancy by buying land and establishing their own homestead. Following the Civil War, a principal objective for most former slaves was the acquisition of land, since property ownership symbolized an important and highly valuable safeguard of liberty (McDaniel 1982:189).

Typically, the land sold to free blacks during this period was purchased from former slaveowners, and consisted of small parcels of the least desirable, least fertile land located along the edge of white-owned farms. This land often was sold at nominal prices, providing a strategy on the part of white farmers to retain a nearby labor force to work their tobacco fields (McDaniel 1982:191).

Although freed slaves had gained freedom to own property and establish a family home, changes in their lifestyle were severely limited. In place of slavery, wage tenancy and

sharecropping developed. Such an economic system restricted most African-Americans from rising out of poverty. During the antebellum era, the African-American population constituted the majority of the population in southern Maryland. However, both the economic and political system continued to be controlled by whites (McDaniel 1982:131-132).

The 25-acre parcel sold by Eugene Hyland Brawner to Thomas Brown reflects this shift In agricultural practice and land tenureship. While it was not determined whether Thomas Brown was associated with the Brawner plantation prior to his acquisition of the property, it is probable that Brown was from the local area since it was unlikely for white landowners to sell land to African-Americans who were not familiar to them. Moreover, there was a history of slaveholding in the Brawner family, constituting a large proportion of the Brawner family's wealth. James Thaddeus Brawner, Eugene's father, possessed 22 slaves at the time of his death in 1853, which constituted over 90 per cent of the value of his personal property. At the time of his death, James Brawner bequeathed all real and personal property to his son Eugene (Will JS 17:115; Inventory, 1853, p.392). While this information does not indicate that Thomas Brown was a former slave of the Brawners, it does suggest that the Brawners relied heavily on slave labor.

Among African-Americans during the 1870s, Thomas Brown was in the minority as a landowner. According to the 1880 census, only 3 per cent of African-Americans in Charles County owned land (Fields 1985:177).

The arrangement of the Thomas Brown parcel and the two contiguous farmsteads is similar to other black communities that were established following emancipation (McDaniel 1982:189). Ben's Creek in Calvert County, although a much larger community, exemplifies this trend. Established by a group of freed slaves during the 1880s, community members owned their own property, but participated in many joint activities, such as house-building, farming, and education (McDaniel 1982:198-200). This tendency towards cooperative living could explain the interest on the part of Thomas Brown and the adjacent property owners to establish farmsteads in the same vicinity.

Architectural Context: Evolution of Log Construction

An analysis of other documented log structures in southern Maryland revealed that single-unit log houses were established as the norm for slave quarters and tenant housing by the early nineteenth century. Other documented examples of this building form in Southern Maryland include the Brooks Log House, built ca. 1870 in Calvert County; the Bourne House, constructed ca. 1865 in Calvert County; and Abraham Medley's House, erected ca. 1850 in St. Mary's County. The four nineteenth century log structures identified in Charles County included the Irvine House, Hawkins Log House, Hancock-Ross, and the Scott Log House (Maryland Historical Trust 1983). All of these houses originally were built to house slaves or free blacks.

Log construction had a number of advantages, including the availability of building materials, inexpensive cost, ease of construction, and durability. Log dwellings typically were built as small, one and one-half story gabled-roof dwellings. Plaster chinking in between the logs provided insulation against the winter climate (McDaniel 1982:44). Houses averaged 16' to 20' in length and 14' to 16' in width (McDaniel 1982:41,56). The front elevation typically occupied the long side of the building, with the door centered on this elevation. Often, an exterior chimney was

constructed on the gable end. Windows were characterized by their small size and wood shutters, as opposed to glass panes, were a common fixture (McDaniel 1982:72-73).

A number of corner joinery techniques were employed in log construction to interlock the alternating tiers, thus eliminating the necessity for pegging or nailing. Six methods of corner notching were employed in the eastern United States: saddle notching, V-notching, diamond notching, full dovetailing, half dovetailing, and square notching (Glassie 1986: 165,169). The Thomas Brown log dwelling utilized half-dovetail notching, a method that was less common in southern Maryland. V-notch corner joinery was more widely adopted by freed slaves after the Civil War era (McDaniel 1982:64).

Previous studies of nineteenth century African-American housing in southern Maryland suggest that slave houses of the 1850s are hard to differentiate from free black and tenant houses constructed in the 1870s (McDaniel 1982:135). Free black houses built during the postbellum period closely resembled earlier slave quarters in scale, plan, and material (McDaniel 1982: 56). This fact can be attributed in part to the lack of educational and economic advancement of blacks after emancipation, but also to a sense of familiarity with this building form. It is likely that blacks were, by this time, culturally bound to this building type. The Thomas Brown dwelling typifies this house type.

This building form adopted a simple plan known as "one up, one down", which consisted of a single living space on the ground floor with a half-story loft space above. The first floor served as a multi-purpose space, including kitchen, dining room, work room, and bedroom. The upper loft space generally was used as a sleeping quarter (McDaniel 1982:52). The interior walls frequently were left exposed, or whitewashed if lime was readily available (McDaniel 1982:80-82).

As African-American households grew more financially independent towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, these log dwellings were typically expanded. As a result, the traditional form of the log house form changed. These changes also were reflected in the interiors of dwellings. Houses built or updated at the end of the nineteenth century incorporated interior partition walls to provide more privacy for families (McDaniel 1979:26). Less time was spent in shared spaces. The changes to the building form and construction techniques reflects the ongoing changes in the social and economic status of rural blacks in southern Maryland.

The enlargement of the Thomas Brown Log Dwelling illustrates this change. The wood-frame additions to the Thomas Brown dwelling most likely were undertaken during the first two decades of the twentieth century as indicated in increases in the tax assessment records (MSA, Charles County Tax Records, 1916-1941). These frame additions reflect the transition from the use of local resources and community labor, to a reliance on mass-produced, commercially-available materials that required a payment in cash. Most of the other log dwellings identified in southern Maryland underwent similar expansions (Maryland Historical Trust 1983).

Summary

Although the Thomas Brown dwelling is presently in an advanced stage of deterioration, the building still retains sufficient integrity to convey its period of significance. The Thomas Brown

property is indicative of the shift in agricultural trends and patterns of land ownership that occurred during the post-Civil War era (Criterion A). Prior to Thomas Brown's acquisition of the 25-acre parcel, the land was part of a larger landholding owned by a prominent Charles County family. In addition, the Thomas Brown dwelling is architecturally significant as representing a common building type historically associated with African-Americans during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The building illustrates a scarce building type extant in Charles County, as well as throughout the state.

As a building form, the structure survives as a relatively intact example of a mid- to late-nineteenth century single-pen log dwelling that is indicative of the modest lifestyle of freed slaves and tenant farmers during the postbellum period (Criterion D). Evidence of the expansion of the Thomas Brown Log Dwelling illustrates how this traditional building form evolved as the period of slavery grew more distant.

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Western Shore

Chronological/Developmental Periods:

Agricultural-Industrial Transition (1815-1870)
Industrial/Urban Dominance (1870-1930)

Historic Period Themes:

Agriculture
Architecture, Landscape Architecture
Social/Educational/Cultural

Resource Type:

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Rural

Historic Function: Farmstead

Known Design Source: None

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. CH-377

See continuation sheets.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 25 acres

Quadrangle name Indian Head

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A				B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheets.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eliza H. Edwards and Brooke V. Best, Architectural Historians

organization R. Christopher Goodwin & Assoc., Inc. date November 15, 1994

street & number 337 East Third Street telephone (301) 694-0428

city or town Frederick state Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
DHCP/DHCD
100 COMMUNITY PLACE
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-202
301-514-7600

PS-274

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Charles County, Maryland: Wills (Available at the Charles County Courthouse, La Plata)

Charles County, Maryland: Tax Assessment Records, Seventh Election District (Available at the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis)

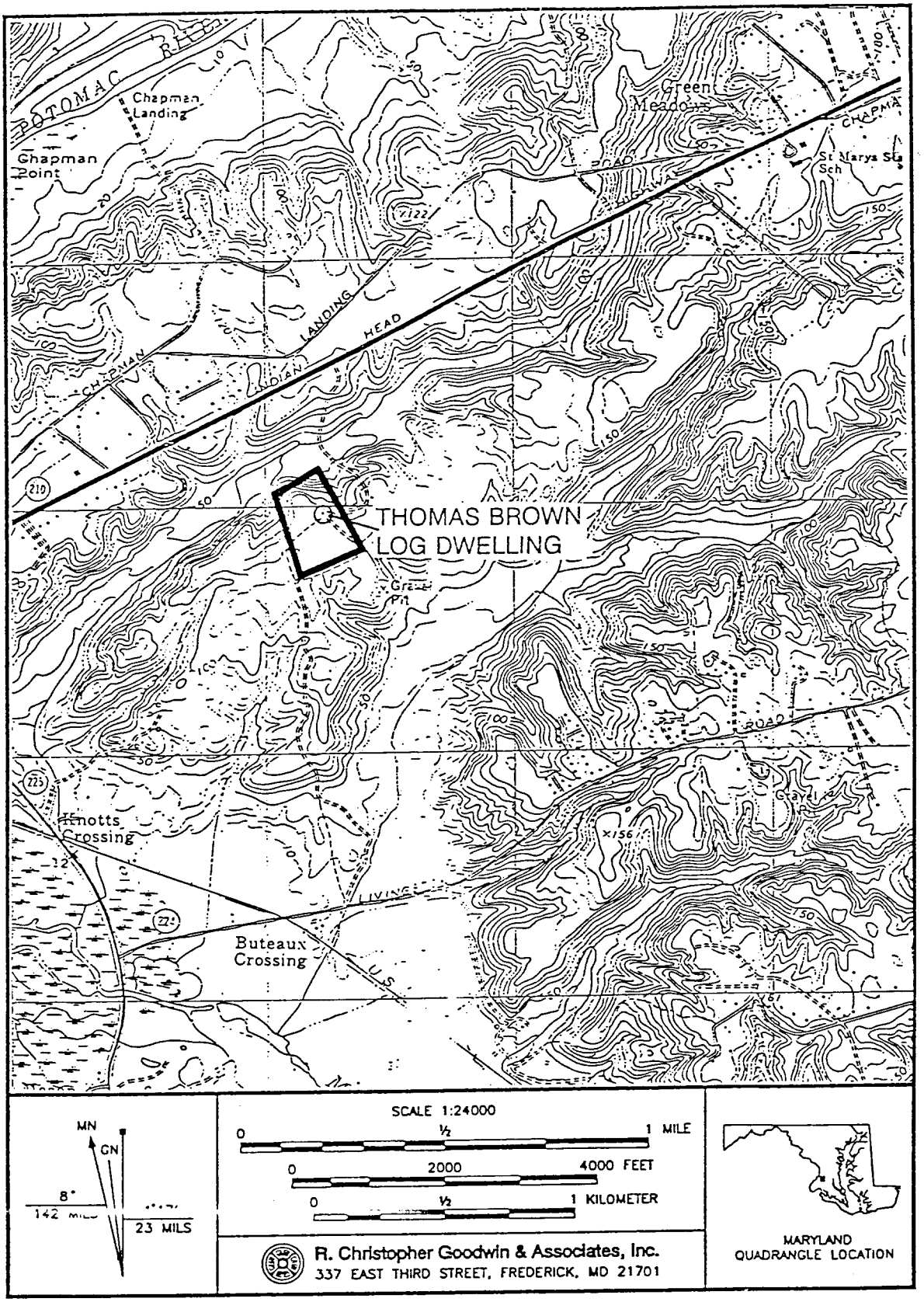
Charles County, Maryland: Deeds (Available at the Charles County Courthouse, La Plata, and the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis)

Charles County, Maryland: Death Records (Available at the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis)

Charles County, Maryland: Land Patent Records

The Thomas Brown property is comprised of a 25-acre parcel located south of Indian Head Highway, approximately one mile inland from the Potomac River. The 25-acre parcel defines the historic boundaries of the property when Thomas Brown acquired the land from Eugene Hyland Brawner in 1877. The 25-acre parcel contains two structures, a two-story log dwelling and a wood-frame chicken coop.

CH-377



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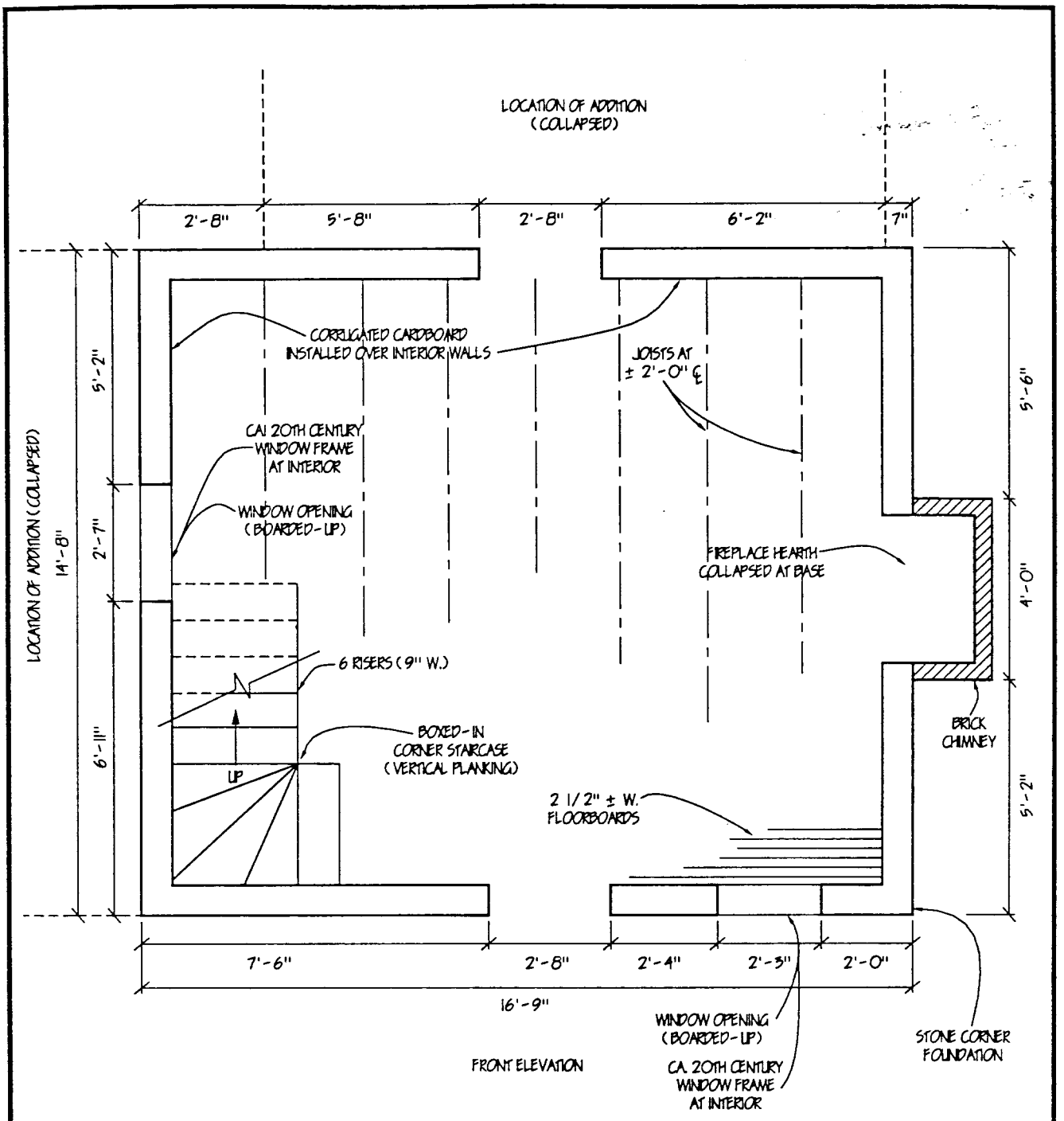
CH-377



Thomas Brown Log Dwelling
First Floor Plan

DATE: 6/7/94	PREPARED BY: LB

PROPORTIONAL – NOT TO SCALE

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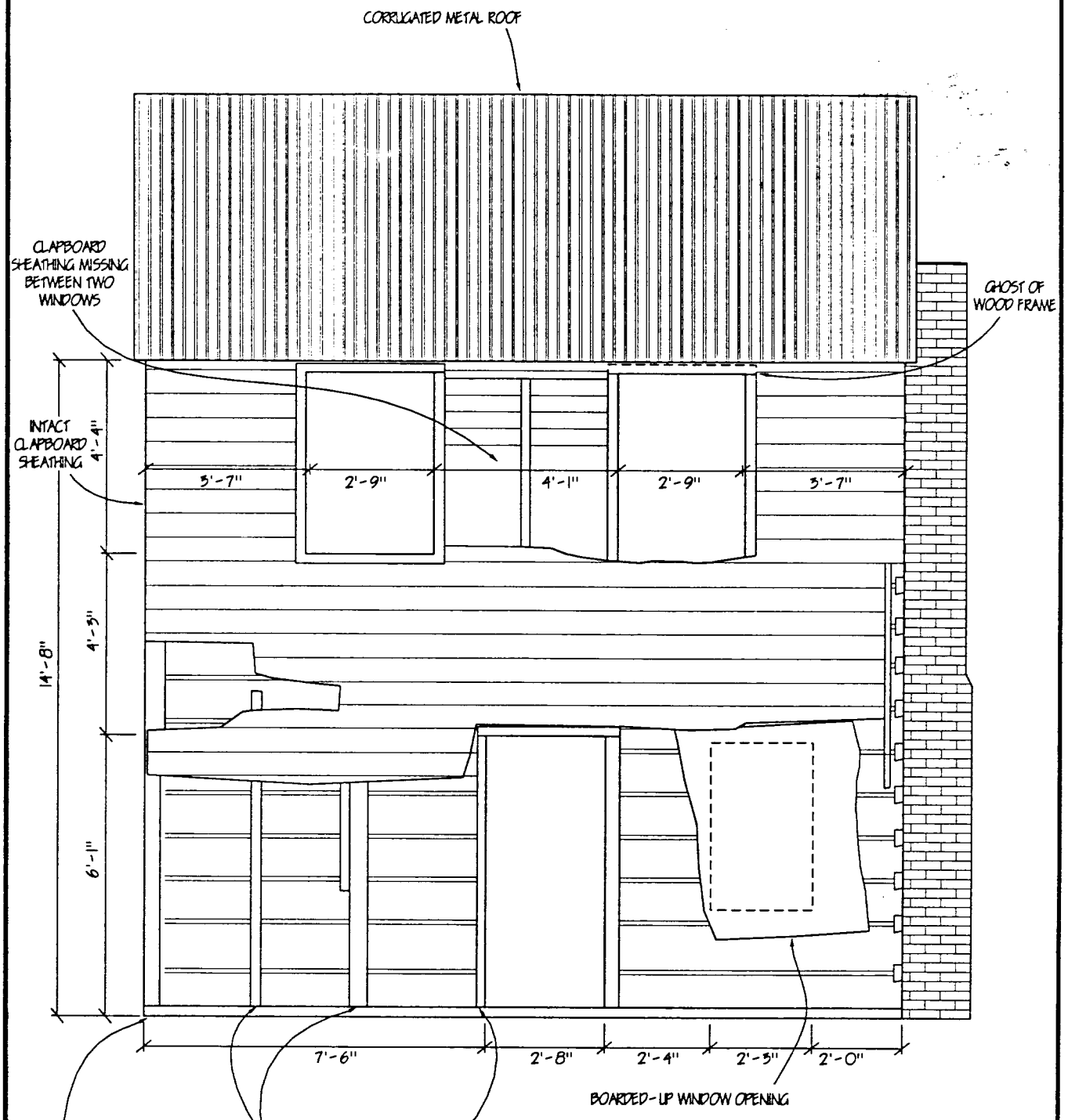

Thomas Brown Log Dwelling
South Elevation

DATE: 6/7/94	PREPARED BY: LB

PROPORTIONAL – NOT TO SCALE

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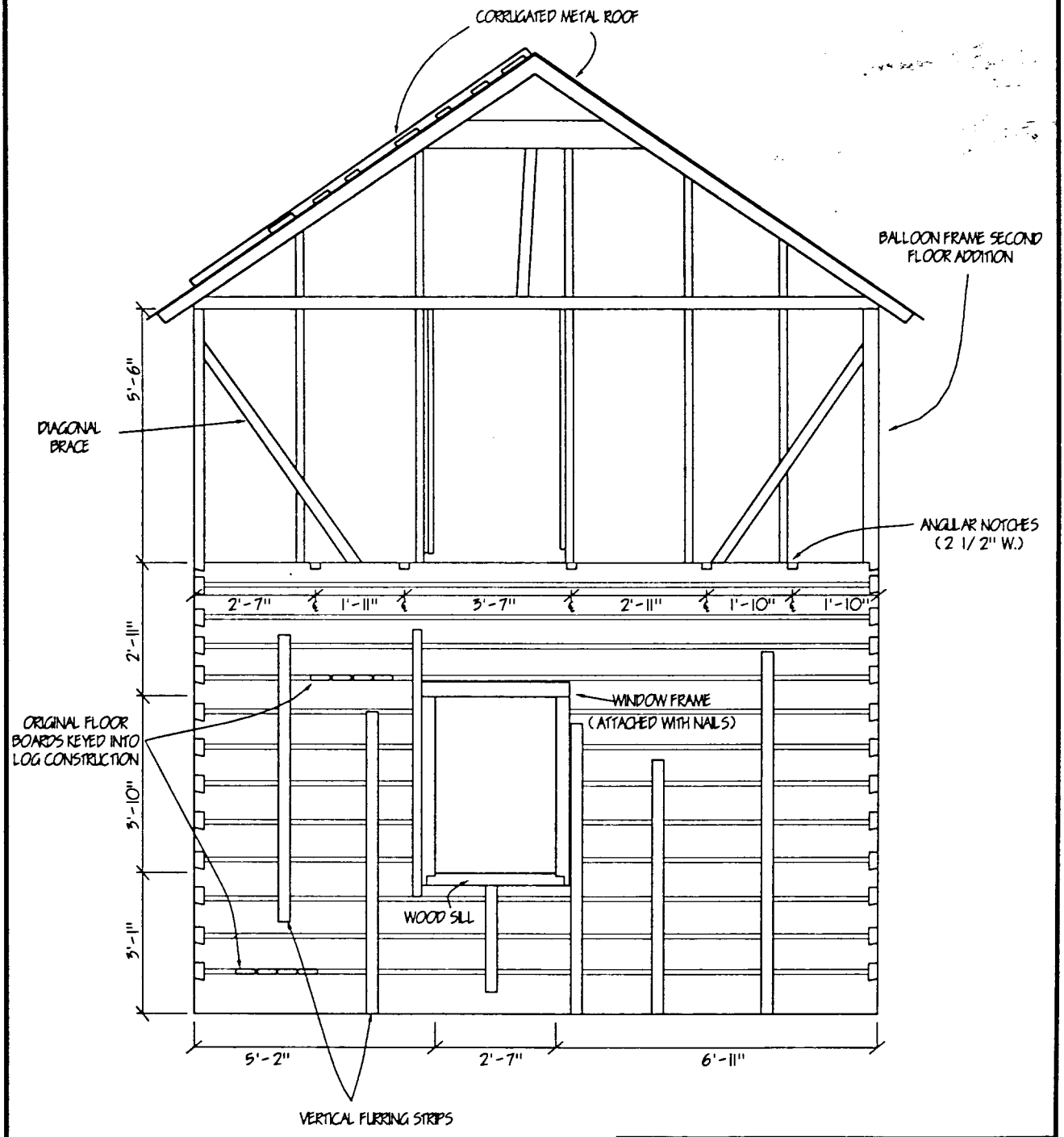

Thomas Brown Log Dwelling
West Elevation

DATE: 11/28/94	PREPARED BY: LB, GF
PROPORTIONAL – NOT TO SCALE	

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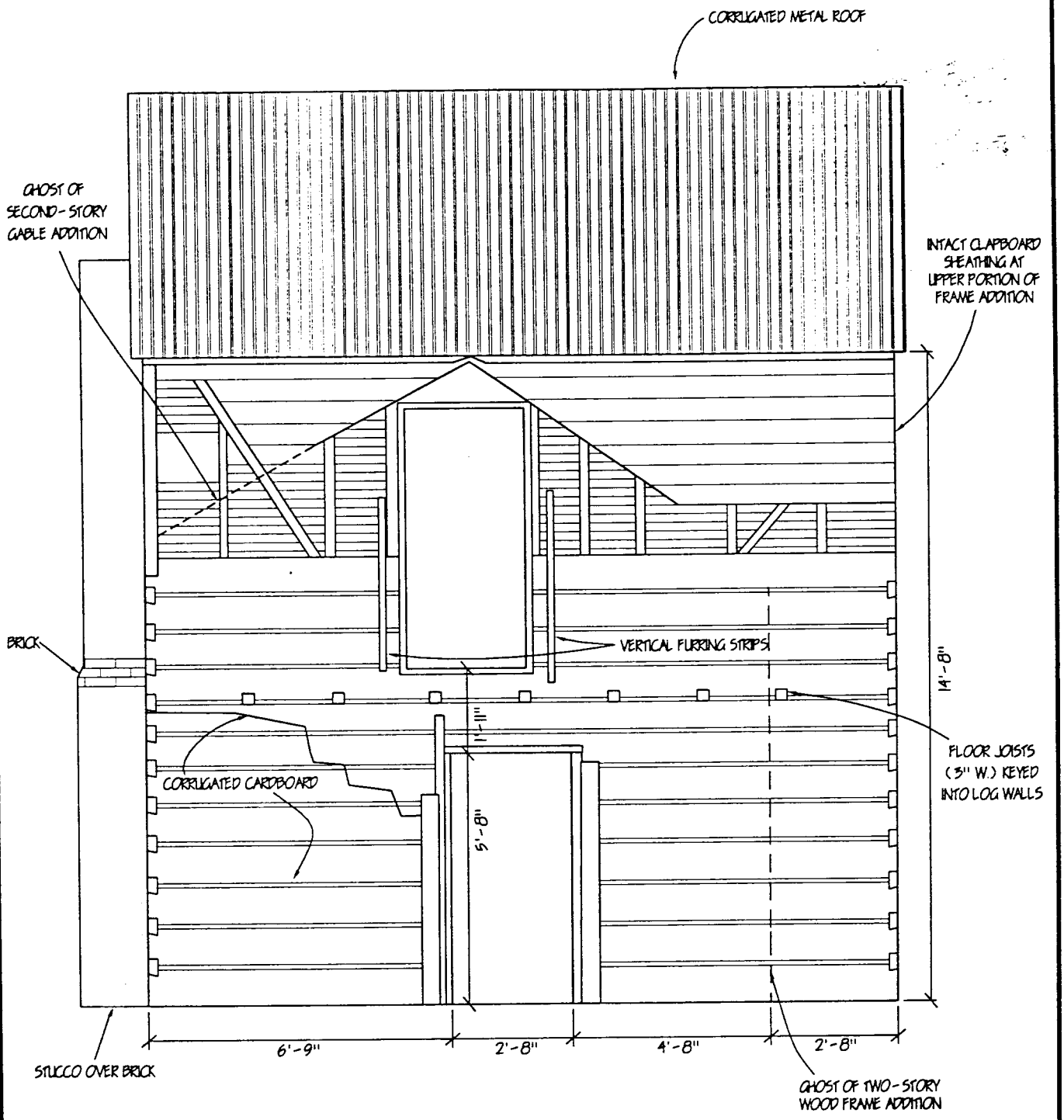
CH-377



Thomas Brown Log Dwelling
North Elevation

DATE: 6/7/94	PREPARED BY: LB
PROPORTIONAL – NOT TO SCALE	

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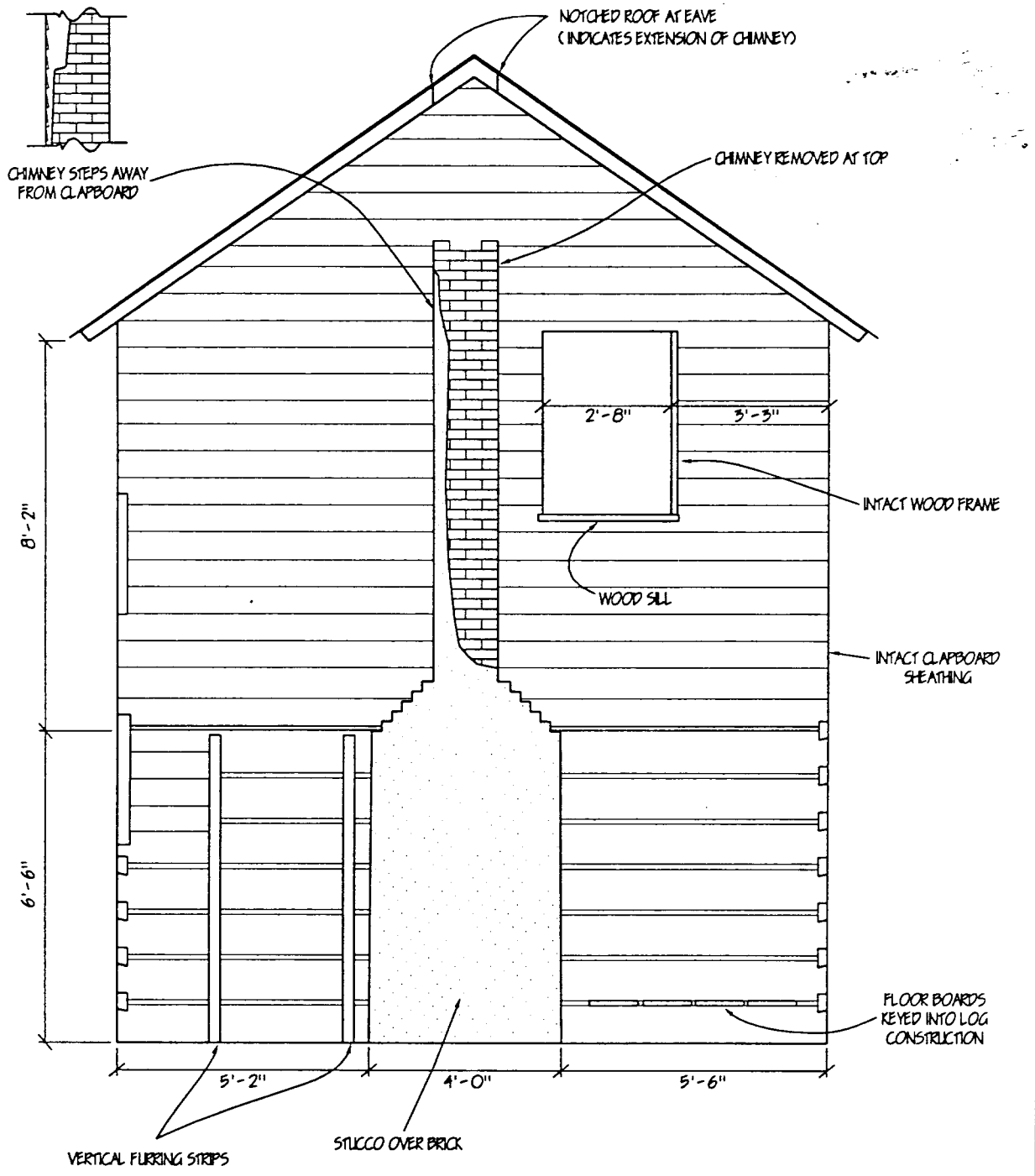
CH-377



Thomas Brown Log Dwelling
East Elevation

DATE: 6/7/94	PREPARED BY: LB
PROPORTIONAL – NOT TO SCALE	

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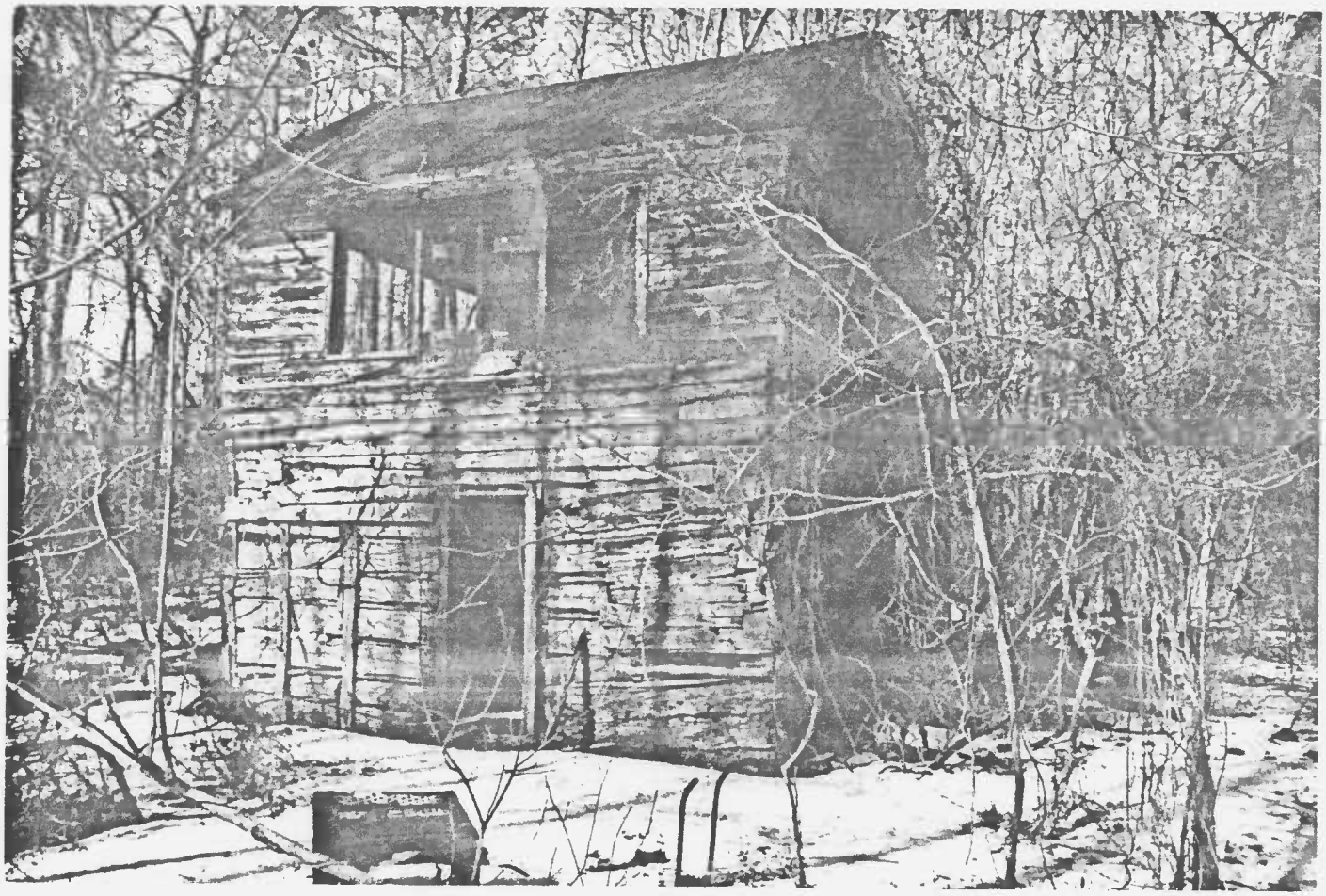

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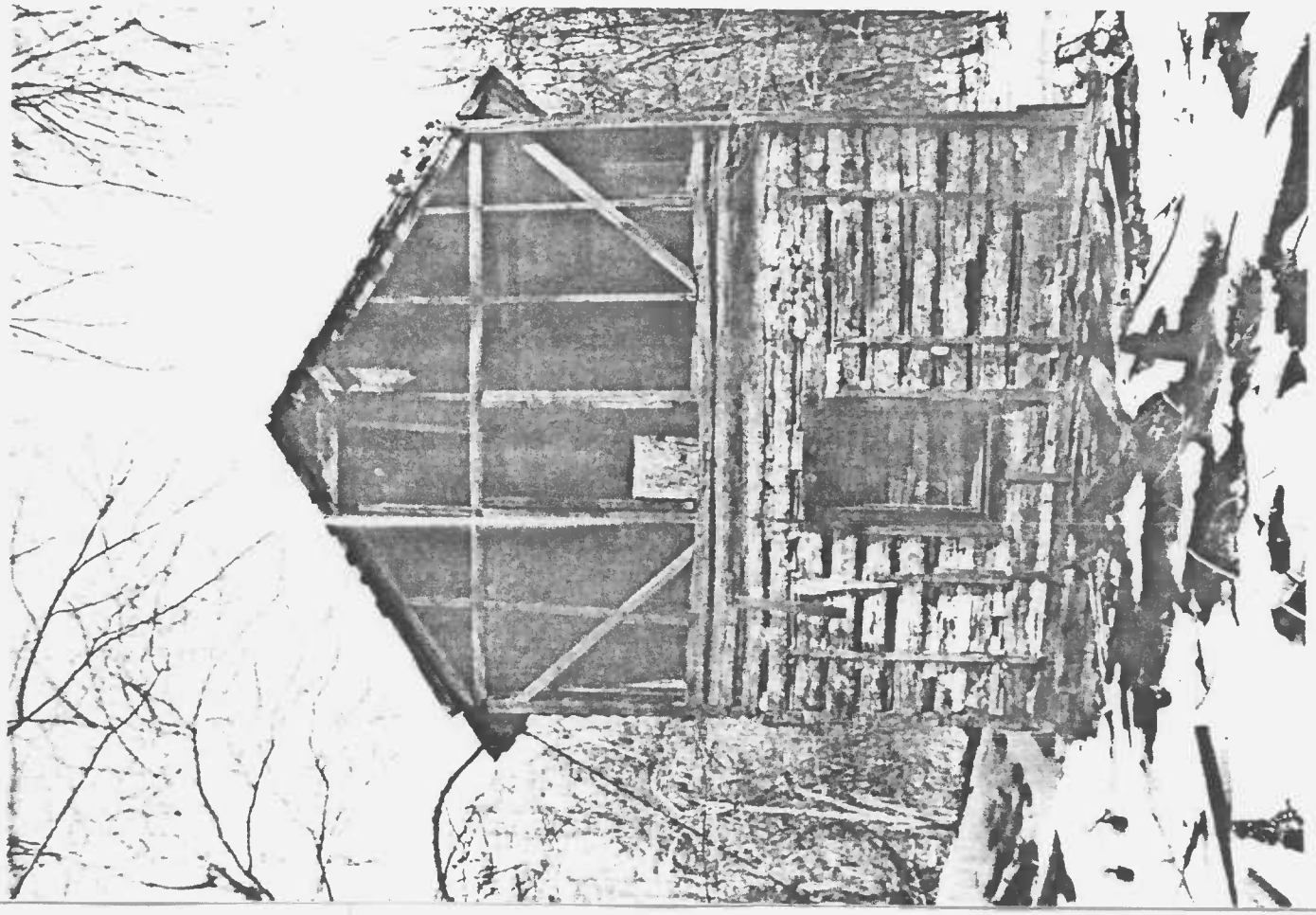

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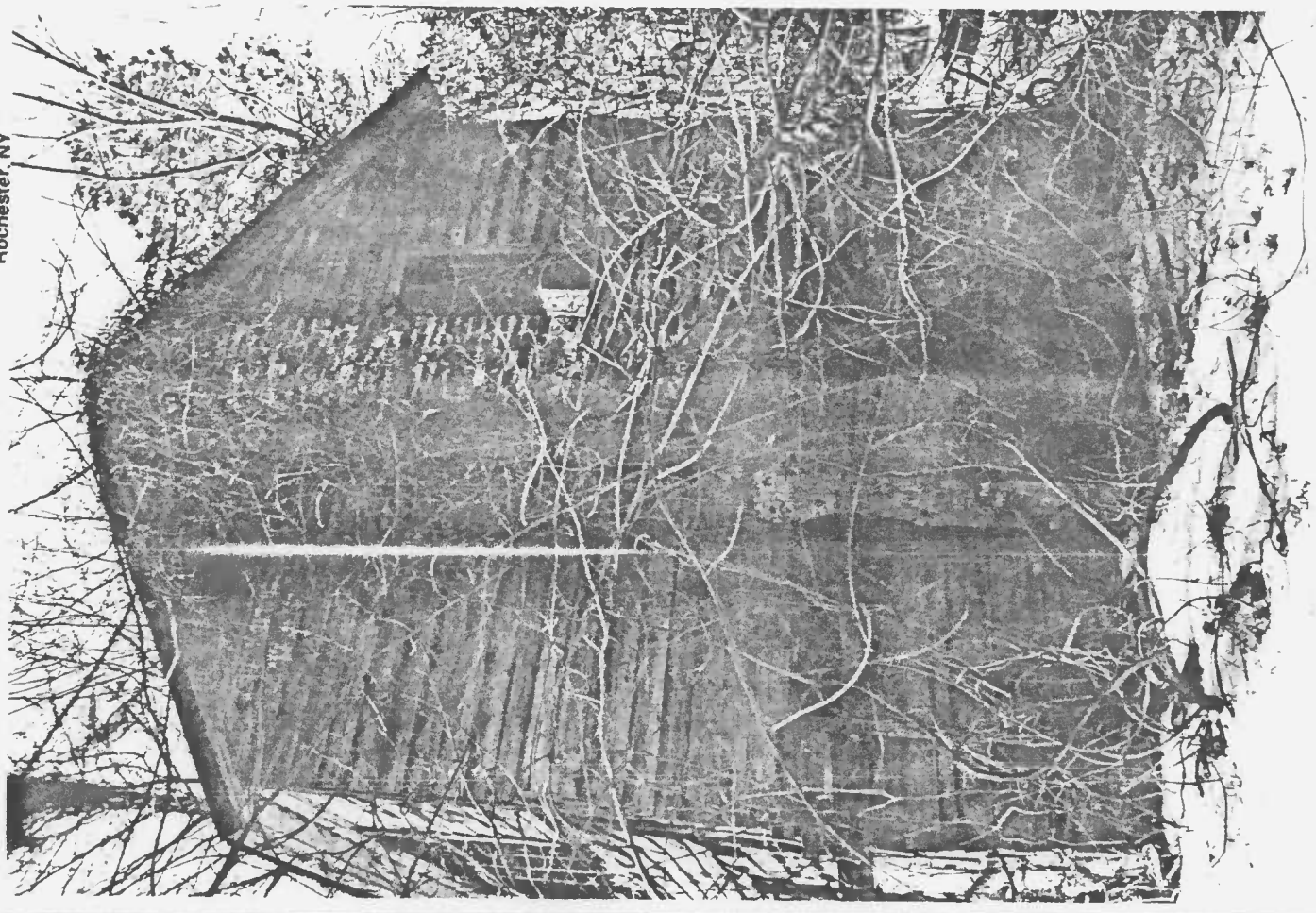

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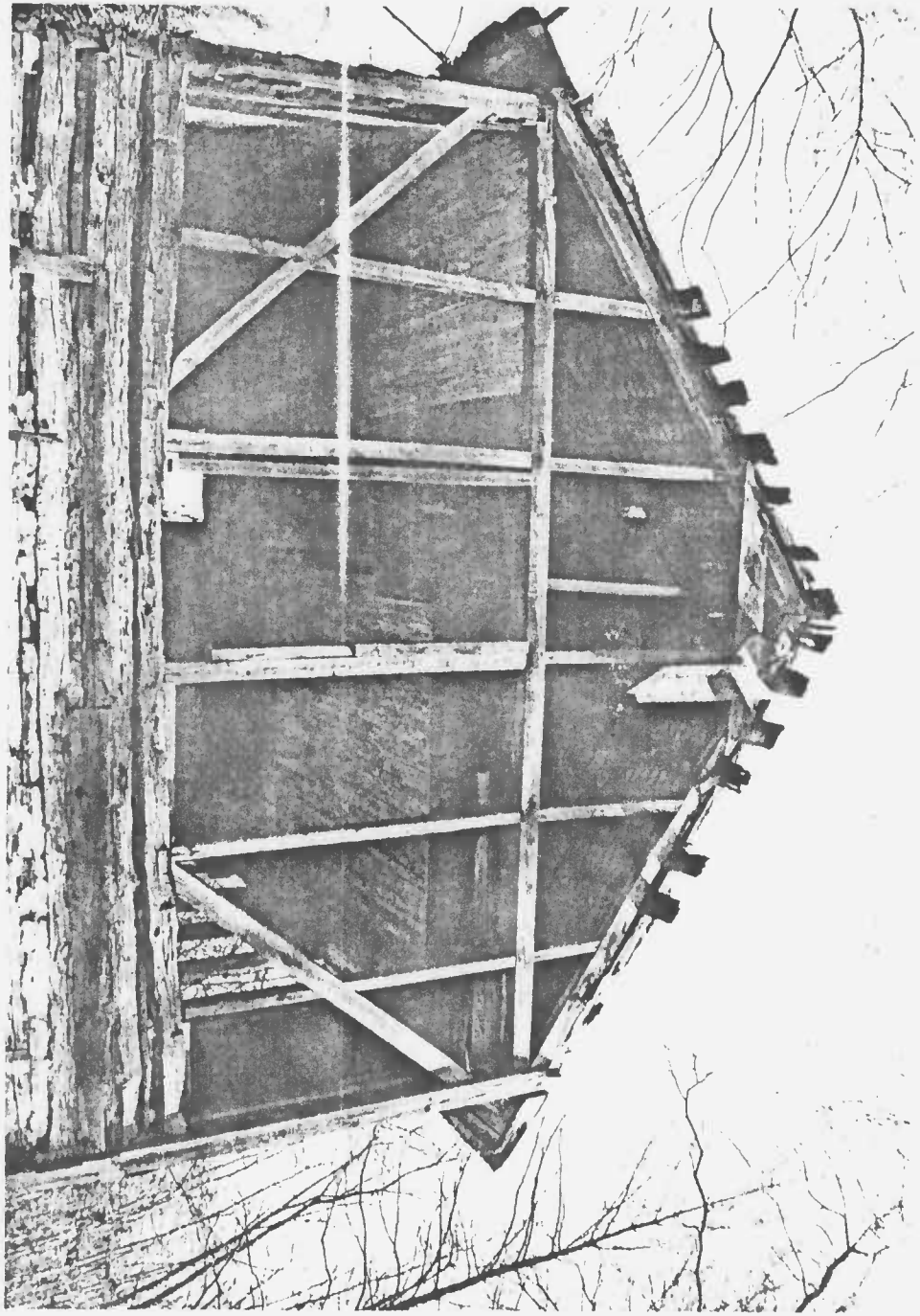

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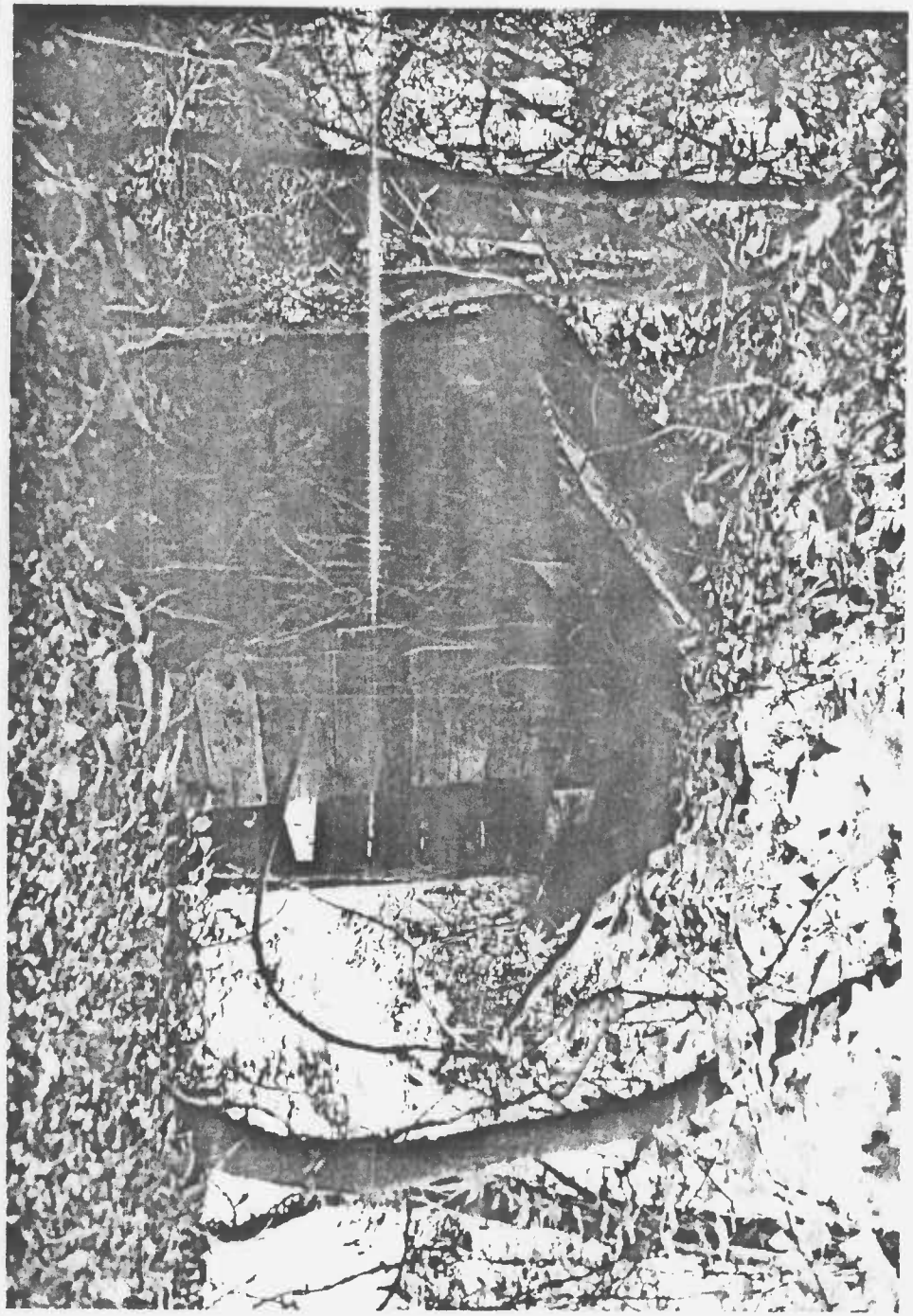

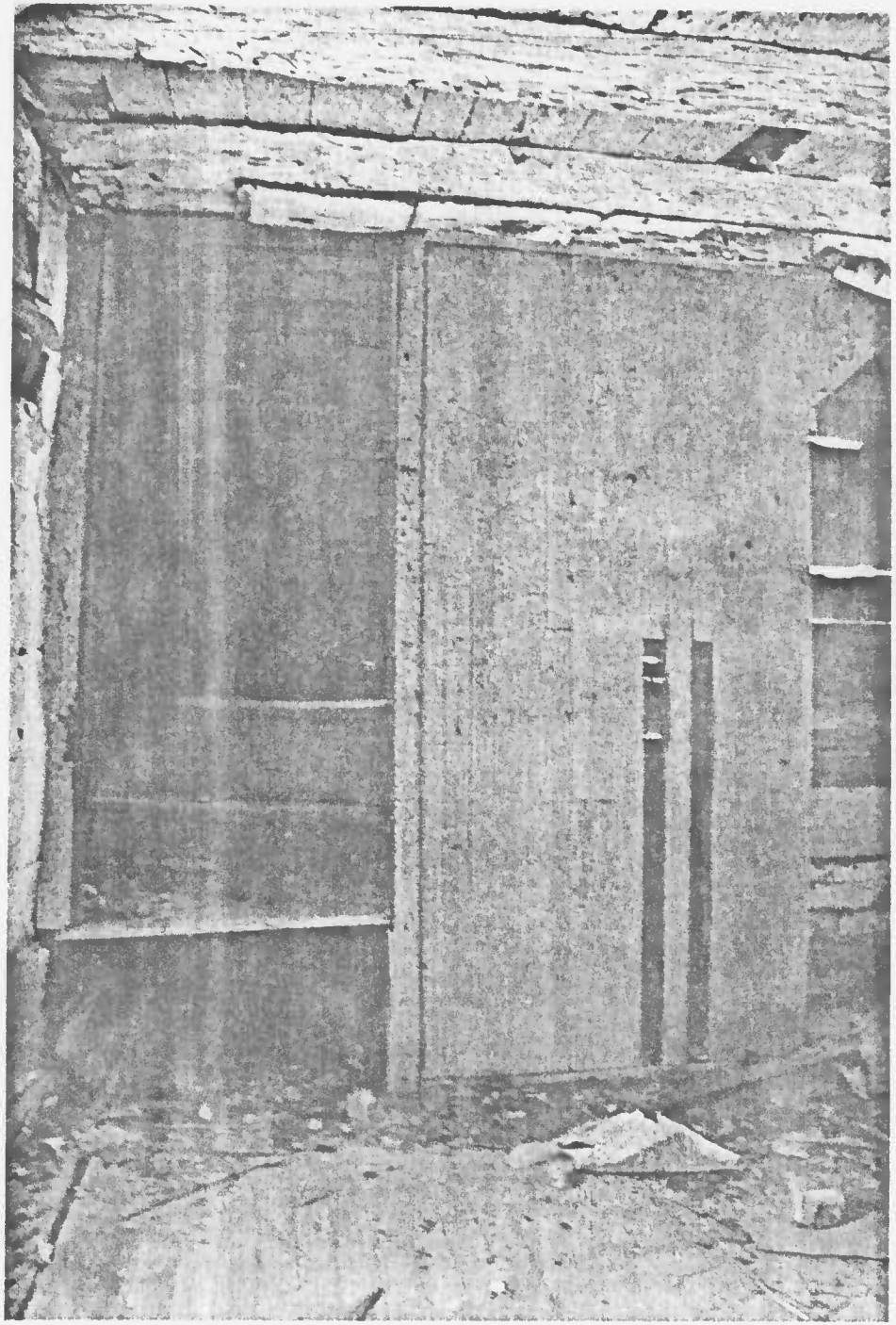

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