



# Old Hickory Cabins & Church Camps



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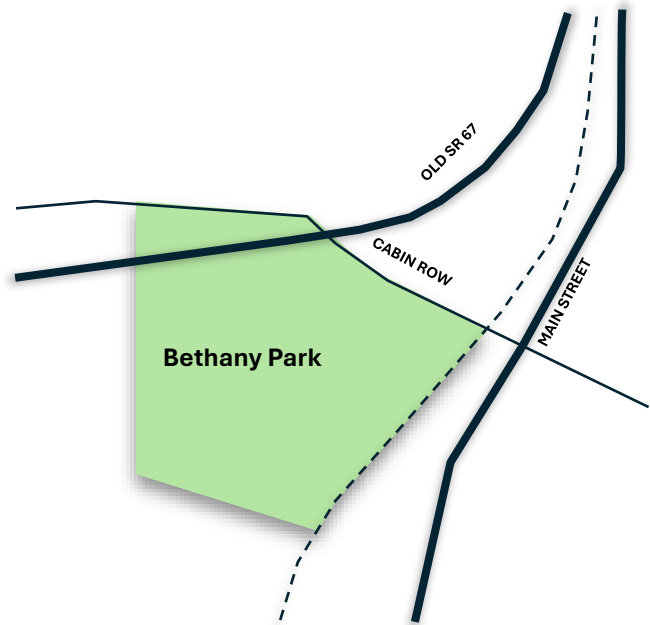
Survey work has a way of bringing unique elements of local history to light. Whether it is an unexpected and exceptionally beautiful home of a local entrepreneur or something of less grandeur but equal historical importance, there are always exciting finds. The log cabin homes that line Cabin Row Road in what is now known as Bethany, Indiana are a great example of the latter.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of tumultuous change in American society. The Industrial Revolution and the shift from a primarily rural society after the Civil War had sparked several social movements that fed on American's nostalgia for a less complicated past. The Temperance Movement, Christian Spiritualist Movement, and the third Great Awakening were all part of this fervor in American society. Even though these movements were social in nature they influenced the material culture and the historic landscape of the country.


One of the most intriguing and enduring elements that manifested during this time was religious camps, where people could get away from the hustle and bustle of city life and become closer to God and nature. Though many of these places were ephemeral in nature, some elements still exist in the historical landscape. Commonly, the land associated with these camps was later gifted to either local governments to become public parks or to more secular entities such as fraternal organizations or Boy Scouts of America. This was due in part to declining membership and economic issues associated with upkeep.

The former Bethany Park located in Morgan County just south of Brooklyn was one of these religious gathering places that holds an interesting connection to local manufacturing. Established by the Disciples of Christ Church around a manmade lake in the late 1880s, Bethany Park was the site of many types of summer gatherings. According to an article in the *Martinsville Republican* dated Aug. 6, 1891, Bethany Park was billed as the "Queen of western religious resorts".

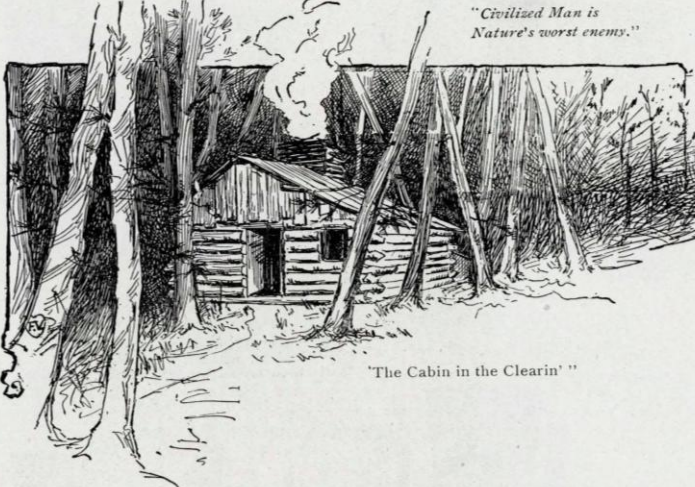
By the 1910s, the park was hosting firework shows, plays, and Chautauquas, boasting cabins and cottages for those needing a spiritual rest and retreat. Even though several buildings at Bethany Park burned in the 1950s, a handful of cabins remain. Though they have additions and changes, the original log structures remain intact. Those log structures look like cabins pictured in the catalogs of the Old Hickory Furniture Company. Old Hickory was a local manufacturing company based in Martinsville, ten miles away from Bethany Park. These structures were customizable and could easily have been shipped directly by rail from Martinsville to Bethany. The catalog states the ease of shipping the disassembled structures and the ease of reassembly upon arrival at their destination.



In looking at the excerpt from the **Old Hickory** catalog and comparing it to the extant resources, there are two distinct features that stand out as denoting these buildings as possible Old Hickory rustic cabins. First are the actual logs, which are of varying sizes and have the bark still on them. This was a signature of the Old Hickory manufacturing style and process. The Old Hickory catalog states that their wood was chemically treated to destroy germs and insects.



*"Civilized Man is Nature's worst enemy."*



*"The Cabin in the Clearin' "*

### Log Cabins of the Pioneers

*We build them to suit your ideas, any size or shape; tear them down and send them to you.*

*Fine timber is plentiful in our locality. We carry a large stock of selected timbers, clapboards, and old fashioned doors with wooden hinges and latchstring latches.*



*Prices consistent with first-class work and selected material.*

*While log cabins cost more than frame houses, they last longer, and the expense of keeping them up is very small. They attract and merit attention and are an everlasting source of comfort and pleasure to their owners.*

*No house too big for us to build. Write us for plans and estimates on your own ideas.*


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**Above and Right:** Old Hickory Furniture Company catalog pgs. 24-25. Indiana Division, Indiana State Library





**Our Popular \$125.00 Log Cabin**  
Size inside, 14 x 16 feet, with rustic veranda, 6 x 10 feet. Slab roof. Complete except flooring. Old fashioned latch string door with wooden hinges.

Showing construction of gable ends




Corners plainly marked as shown above and full instructions sent with each cabin, so any ordinary carpenter can re-erect in a few hours.




Showing openings and construction of roof.

**No. 340 Price, \$125.00**  
Old stick chimney and modern rustic veranda railings. A durable, handsome and unique summer house, snuggery or fishing lodge.

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**No. 342. Shed Cabin Price, \$110.00**  
Size, 12 x 14 feet. Complete except floor, platform and chimney. Details same as No. 340. Veranda supported on natural forks.



**No. 344. Two-Room Cabin with Veranda and Stick Chimney Price, \$300.00**  
Size of rooms, 12 x 12 feet, and 16 x 22 feet. Veranda, 8 x 22 feet.

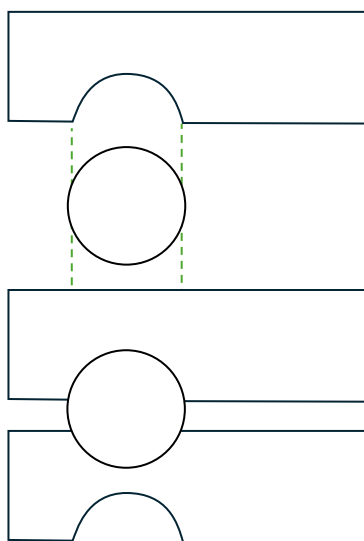
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The second clue comes from the joining process of the logs at the corners of the buildings. The logs are saddle-notched, which is the cheapest and easiest way to fit logs together. This type of notching is not seen on older hewn log buildings that were meant to be more permanent and often became incorporated into larger homes or outbuildings. The older hewn logs were usually either V-notched or dovetail joined to make the building sturdier, especially if they were double-pen saddlebag or dog-trot homes that would later have upstairs rooms added.



*Above: Unlike the cabins in Bethany Park, this older log house displays sturdier, dovetail joints.*

The saddle notching was prone to twisting under stress, thus making it less desirable for anything but temporary, expedient buildings. Even though Old Hickory boasted of the lasting quality of their work, the makers seemed quite unfamiliar with actual log construction. It seems they were taking their references on this 'pioneer style' from a more romanticized vision of early settler life.



*Above: Saddle Notch  
Right: Cabin in Bethany Park*

This romanticized vision of returning to a simpler life of our ancestors was exactly the ideal that Bethany Park and the third awakening movement espoused. Thus, these log cabin buildings were ideal for a Christian camp, and they may have been sold to many such camps throughout Indiana and even the Midwest. Without the sales records of the Old Hickory Company, we can only speculate on the number of these cabins that were sold and where they ended up.

Old Hickory offered these log buildings for at most ten years, according to their catalogs. The 1912 catalog shows only open-weave summer houses, pergolas and gazebos made from sassafras wood. The log buildings were either out of favor, or the supply of suitable materials had been exhausted. Given the transient nature of the offering and the expedient construction, the fact that even a handful of these buildings have survived over 100 years is amazing.



*Above: Cabin in Bethany Park*

Please compare the pictures provided in this article from the [Old Hickory 1906 catalog](#) and those gleaned from our field survey work and see if you agree that these are one and the same. Also, if anyone knows of any possible Old Hickory cabins that have survived in other locations, please let our office know so these can be documented for further research.

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