



Early home of George Vandertie family was a log cabin
Two sons were born and raised in this small cabin a short distance south of Brussels



Laura Vandertie poses with the twins
Grandchildren are identical twins, Curt and Cory, the children of Lloyd and Joyce Vandertie

Door Peninsula's

Little House on the Prairie

By JIM WARD
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Door Peninsula has its own Little House on the Prairie.

It's a small log cabin located just south of Brussels on what is now Pine Road, only a stone's throw from Hump Road where its owner, Mrs. George (Laura) Vandertie, now lives with her son Lloyd and family.

After clearing 40 acres in this area almost entirely populated by Belgians, Laura's father-in-law, Louis Vandertie, built the cabin in 1898.

With one exception between 1898 and 1947, it served various Vandertie families well as a shelter from Door's rugged winters and a place to play a card game called patuh (phonetic Belgian spelling for the English word 'pot') or cooyah, the partner version of patuh.

Though vacant since 1947 when the George Vanderties moved to another but larger log cabin on Hump Road, which Lloyd has long since added onto and modernized with horizontal white siding, the

old log cabin still stands as something of a monument.

So strongly built, it could be lived in today, but the Vanderties are content to utilize it as storage for bales of hay. The adjacent barn has long since been demolished. The water pump is still there. It replaced an open drop-bucket well 20 feet deep.

Exterior measurements of Door's Little House on the Prairie are 16 by 20 feet. The cabin contained two bedrooms, kitchen and living room at the front, and a loft used only for storage of clothes and other belongings.

It has four windows downstairs, two for the kitchen area and one for each bedroom, and two very small windows serving the loft, one at each end of the house. It is significant of Belgian practicality that none are on the north side, from whence those strong north winds came off Green bay.

Logs used varied in size but all are neatly hand-hewn and beveled, notched and dovetailed so perfectly in such a way that even

now it would take a good strong winch to pry one loose. With typical ingenuity, sand mortar chinking was simplified by nailing pieces of wood between the logs before applying mortar.

Another interesting feature is a curved brick chimney which oddly angles up from the stove through the roof. My first reaction was that the house was settling and the chimney was going into a sharp lean, but Lloyd quickly corrected me. "No, it was built that way," he said.

The family lived in this interior area of about 14 by 18 feet (that's 252 square feet of living space) from 1923 to 1947. Sons Lloyd, 51, and brother Pat, 44, were born there. Pat lives on Grandpa Louis Vandertie's farm nearby. They are a close family, as are all Belgians in what is known to be one of the largest concentrations of Belgian-Americans in the United States. . . Northeast Wisconsin, primarily Door, Brown and Kewaunee counties. Most of them are Walloons, the name for those from south of Brussels, Belgium.

Belgians are a hard working people, and most Belgian homes down through the centuries are known to be small but comfortable.

"Our home, though small, was comfortable," Mrs. Vandertie said. "Oh, we had lots of good times there; company (neighbors and relatives) almost every day, and at night we'd play cards until about 11 o'clock and then have coffee and something to eat and some would play cards again until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning.

"When not playing patuh or cooyah, we would just visit and talk, and, of course, the house was used for birthday parties and other special occasions. It was always a good time; maybe better than now because every family was so close in those days.

"Everybody was the same in those days, helping each other out, borrowing each's farm equipment when needed, whatever was needed at the time. We sold eggs for 7 or 8 cents a dozen, and milk was so cheap I don't remember what it was."

Laura said farm crops were hay, dried peas, oats, barley, rye and wheat, which, incidentally, are Belgians' traditional crops in Belgium's sandy soil, similar to the soil in the Door Peninsula.

"The men used to harvest their own crops," she said, "and then one threshing machine would go around to thresh each harvest with 10 to 13 farmers helping each other out." Mrs. Vandertie, who will be 74 years old December 1 (husband George died in 1969 at the age of 70), recalls that they had five horses and used a walking plow.

If the oldtimers of the community, now deceased, could see the modern machinery and the way

life has changed, "they wouldn't believe it," Mrs. Vandertie said.

It was interesting to note that when Lloyd and his mother talked to each other in their now modern kitchen, reminiscing about the old days for the writer, they unwittingly switched from English to French-Belgian. Flemish is the language for North Belgium, and French is the language for South Belgium.

"Yes, we talk Belgian when alone without even thinking about it," she said.

I had asked Lloyd certain things about the log cabin structure. He said "I could tell you in Belgian but not in English." So I resorted to my own terms like chinking, notching, dovetailing, etc.

Lloyd and wife Joyce have four children, Christine 17, Christopher 13, and identical two-year-old twins, Curt and Cory, all living with "grandma."

He wholeheartedly reiterated his mother's comments about how they lived in those days. . . the

good times playing cards, visiting and everyone lending a helping hand without question. All were farmers and all worked hard. No neighbor was left without help.

"No one had much money but we always had food on the table," Lloyd said.

The cabin was built 16 by 20 feet because that was the length of the logs on the cleared-out 40 acres that were available. If they'd been longer, the house would have been longer, but the family obviously needed a home and shelter in a hurry.

Lloyd pointed out that his family home had an inside stairway to the loft. His father's grandpa and grandma, the Charles Vanderties, who lived nearby, had an outside stairway to their loft. They had to

use it for sleeping, he said, because they had eight children in a cabin not much bigger than Louis had built.

The Louis Vandertie cabin, built in 1898, changed hands several times, they said. After Louis, his brothers Adolph and William occupied it with their families, alternating until 1916 when Louis bought it back. This is borne out by the abstract which Mrs. Vandertie and Lloyd produced from the family archives.

Louis apparently required it because he needed another 40 acres to farm to go with the two 40s he already had. The cabin itself was vacant from 1916 to 1923 when George and Laura moved in to have and raise their two boys.

The original abstract included the name Vangindertalen. That was the old world spelling of the name. It was shortened to Vandertie, but at least one Vangindertalen can still be found in the Brussels-Namur area of the Door Peninsula.

The old Vandertie home came to light through the efforts of a team from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Area Research Center, seeking data in its Belgian Community Archive Project.

Lynn C. McAuley, principal investigator in the project, said a study of Belgian architecture in the area led to the discovery of Mrs. Vandertie's old cabin home.



Hand pump was 'modern' addition
When first occupied, Vandertie cabin near Brussels had only an open well

design
for living



Lloyd reminisces about his childhood days
Cabin home contained two bedrooms and kitchen-living room area