

Wisconsin Historical Society: Pendarvis additional documentation listed on the National Register of Historic Places

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Mineral Point, WI. – The Wisconsin Historical Society announces the update of the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Pendarvis in Mineral Point, Iowa County.

Originally nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971, the recent approval brings the nomination up to current documentation standards and provides a more complete history of the site and all of its buildings.

The 1971 nomination focused on three buildings: Pendarvis House, Polperro, and Trelawny. Built in 1845, “Pendarvis,” a simple stone cottage, reflects cottages typically found in Cornwall, England. The front is faced with carefully fitted local limestone and the walls are 18” to 20” thick. The interior is covered in plaster. The circa 1842 “Trelawny” is a two-story, gable-roofed cottage with a “saltbox” profile and a rear lean-to built into the rock hillside. The roof continuously slopes from the two-story portion to the one-story rear wing and resembles the shape of an old salt storage box. The cottage is constructed of the same local limestone. The Polperro is a three and a half story building with a first story stone base surmounted by a two and a half story log structure. It has a stone lean-to addition set into the rocky hillside at the rear. Like the other two houses, this was also built in the mid-1840s, but, unlike the other two, the stone is laid without the careful fitting of the face stones on the front side. The less formal treatment easily ties in with the log construction of the upper floor walls.

A century later, Robert Neal, a Mineral Point native of Cornish ancestry, and Edgar Hellum, a visitor seeking to salvage building material, met and decided to save these exceptional immigrant buildings from ruin. Beginning with the restoration of Pendarvis, these pioneering Wisconsin preservationists soon acquired and restored Trelawny and Polperro in the first phase of their project. The update to the nomination also recognizes the other buildings on the site. The district documentation now includes Tamblyn's Row, a collection of three buildings constructed from the 1840s to the early 1850s; three buildings constructed from salvaged materials by proprietors Bob Neal and Edgar Hellum during the period of 1941-1948 and 1960; two historic privies; and various stone terracing and boundary walls also built by Neal and Hellum.

In 1971, the Wisconsin Historical Society acquired the property and began operating the restored historic site interpreting the history of Cornish settlement and Wisconsin's lead-mining days.

Today, Pendarvis is recognized as a pioneering example of a historic outdoor museum environment in the U.S.—albeit at a small scale—that cannot be separated from the efforts of its creators, Neal and Hellum. The concept of the outdoor museum was new in the 1930s and the two men's efforts to combine historic preservation with the creation of a tourism site celebrating Cornish heritage was unique. Neal and Hellum pursued a variety of interventions at Pendarvis including restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction; all of which were tackled through experimentation in the absence of established professional standards for such work. Their work was undertaken with an overriding desire for historical accuracy, based on hands-on observation, research, and consultation with professionals.

It is no exaggeration to state that the historic customs and recipes of the Cornish people in southwestern Wisconsin, and most of their extant stone houses on Shake Rag Street in Mineral Point, would likely be lost if not for Neal and Hellum. These two men were able to reclaim the nearly forgotten songs, traditional foods, dwellings, mining tools, furniture and historic photographs of this enterprising immigrant group, and in the process, preserve their legacy as expert miners of lead, zinc and stone. Neal and Hellum engaged in a remarkable array of educational and advocacy efforts during the 35-year period that they served as proprietors of Pendarvis (1935 to 1970), all aimed to recognize and celebrate the contributions of the Cornish people to the history and settlement of Territorial Wisconsin.

The National Register is the official list of historic properties in America deemed

worthy of preservation and is maintained by the National Park Service in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Wisconsin Historical Society administers the program within Wisconsin. It includes sites, buildings, structures, objects and districts that are significant in national, state or local history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture.

Additional information for this property is available at <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/NationalRegister/NR1806>

About the Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.