

[Private Instructions and Hints Regarding the Building of the House] John MacDonald

Date: 1784/04/29

Author

John MacDonald

Publication Format

Manuscript

Type

Construction

Ingredients

wood
stones
mortar
lime
plaster palace stone
glue
calf skin
sheep skin
fish
nails
paint
glass

Places

Tracadie
St. John's Island
Prince Edward Island
London
Winter River
Pictou
Malpeq
Malpeque
Nova Scotia
Canso

Source: Macdonald Family (St. Peter's) Papers

Institution: Prince Edward Island Public Archives | **Reference:** Acc2664

Description

This item is catalogued as Acc. 2664, no. 154. A letter from London by John MacDonald, dated 29 April 1784, to his sister Nelly describes this book: "I send with this a little stitched book with a white paper cover marked No. 1 untitled Private Instructions & Hints regarding the building of the House, & procuring Materials, which are not to be shewn to any one" (PAROPEI Acc. 2664, no. 9, p. 2). He wants to the house to be built at Tracadie on the plan of Mr. Callbeck's house (p. 1).

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Transcription

Private Instructions & Hints

regarding the building of the

House, & procuring the

Materials, which are not

to be shown to any one

or

General Observations &

Hints

Number 1--

1st Page

General Observations & Hints

In building the House much will

depend on taking Judicious Methods to carry on

the work of providing Materials & using them.

If you understand Mr. Callbeck

has agreed to restore Lot 35 to General Maitland

then you may safely take upon you to cut on that

Lot whatever timber for the Frame, Logs, Joists

and Couples for the roof &c: may be necessary,

and I should hope you may find them somewhere

about **Winter River** or where we used to make

Boards on the little river that falls into the head

of the Bay -- But if M^r Callbeck has determined to

refuse restoring the Lot, I am sure I will not

desire that or any other favor to be asked of him
in my name, on the contrary I shall break off
every connection & Intercourse with him --

But in that case you may try
what you can make of M^r. Lawson: perhaps he
will permit you to take off his Lot on the side of
the River what may be sufficient -- If this will
not do I know not how you will manage it
unless you may think proper to take it off Lot 21,
for I know M^r. Clarke will have no objection
to let me have what I want -- in this case to float
it round in good weather -- You will need some advice now &
then, nor do I know to whom on the Island I would
recommend you to apply for any: Perhaps M^r Lawson
or M^r Burns or any other yourself knows, may give

2nd page

you some useful hints --

I know not who your principal
carpenter may be -- I hear Richardson is dead, and
I am ignorant who else, that is capable, is on the
Island, but you will endeavour to get a good one
-- I should imagine one good Carpenter should be
engaged from first to last for the work by the day
or by the Month, making the best bargain you can,
but so as not to put it in his power to impose on
you by bad work or by losing time, for you should
reserve a Right to yourself to discharge him

from any farther work or wages when you
think proper -- Another point you should guard
against is not to permit[^][him] to run you into any
Expences without your Consent --

Some principal one being
engaged in this Manner, I think you had better
employ all other hands from time to time only
as you want them --

When your Carpenter shall
have marked the proper trees to be cut, I should
think some of the french would be good hands
for assisting him to cut, square, float & bring
them to the spot, & also for helping him to make
the frame, lay the Joists[^][&Logs] & bind the roof couples
-- one or two of them would be enough at a
time, for a number of them create confusion and
Idleness only -- your own bullocks & any common
hired man may draw the timber to the water
side, & up from the shore to the spot --

At the same time that you hire
the Carpenter you will need to think of the best
way to get boards, claps boards, or feather edged boards

3rd page

and shingles -- I should think you would need
from six to ten thousand feet of boards of different
length & thickness -- from ten to twelve thousand
shingles, & I cannot guess how much clap boards
or feather edged boards & Lathing -- Pictou

is the only place I can think of where you
might get their materials -- and

I suppose you will have to
send some one there to order them according to
the sort, length & thickness, which the Carpenter
will give you after consulting with him, &
to hire a vessel for bringing them to you at once
when they are ready, but not till then, for I
fancy You will not get them just as you call
for them, but only sometime after Commissioning
them -- so great Cheats are they that they will
endeavour to throw some sad stuff on your hands,
but you should give directions that none be
received but according to Agreement --

It will be some time after agreeing
for them before the Boards &c: will be ready to be
sent for, and therefore You would need to sett about
them at the same time that you send to cut the
Frame logs & roof &c:---

At the same time also you
would need to get the cellar dug, which three or
four hands will do in a few days -- Then there will
be the stones to get, thereafter the Mason, & one
to work mortar for him will be sufficient -- see
that the Mason binds the wall well with proper stones
& that he packs it well with smaller stones, & only
uses the mortar, where it may be proper without filling
the spaces between the stone with mortar alone --

4th page

If you proceed to build the chimney, which after all I fancy will be the most advisable, care should be taken to use good stones only for it -- The stones at the back of the chimney should be placed with their ends to the fire -- The stones at the cheeks & on the out side to the lobby should be as well fitted as can easily be --

When you shall have got the cellar dug, the stones collected, & the timber of the frame, Logs, & couples, brought to the spot, as well as the Boards, clapboards, shingles & Laths, the greatest part of your troubles will be over, & the Most uncertain part of the Expencc too --

After this period you will only have the Mason & his Man, building the Cellar & Chimneys & making Mortar, & your principal Carpenter, & one or two other rough Carpenters of the french, or some such to make the frame, lay the joists and flooring, to put up the roof -- to shingle, to put on the clap boards &c: and it will be lucky indeed if you can cover it fully before December --

Once you get it made wind &

water tight, you May be going on with finishing
it on the Inn side as easily as you can, only
if possible keep it a going --

5th page

From the Idea I have I should think
geting Boards, shingles, & clap boards, so quickly
as you could wish, will be the most difficult
parts of the materials, besides the Expence &
distance from Pictou -- But there is no help
for it --

After all, from six to ten thousand
feet of Boards is not a very great Quantity.
If you find a difficulty of getting them from
Pictou, what if you would get a parcel of
the french to saw them for you at the Winter
River, if there is wood there & that M^r Callbeck
restores Lot 35 -- If the wood is good & if the
french would undertake it, four good sawyers
would not be long sawing ten thousand feet,
-- There would be this Advantage in it that
the Boards might be sawed of the exact length
& thickness that the Carpenter would order,
so that there would be less waste & refuse
stuff than by geting them from Pictou, And
as they would be near at hand it might be
very little dearer upon the whole than those
from Pictou would be with freight & refuse stuff.

If you cannot get them in

this manner perhaps the french at Malpec
would engage to deliver you the Boards at a
certain price the thousand feet at Tracady:
They have wood there, & also Schooners for carrying
them to your place, and perhaps they would also

6th page

undertake for the shingles, clap Boards & Laths,
or that you might get them made at the
Winter River -- or it would be an ease
if you had only shingles to get from Pictou --
or in case you could not get the french at
Malpec to do it, perhaps you could get them
or some others to make the Boards shingles
clap Boards & Laths on M^r Clarks Lot 21
where there are plenty of the best timber
& he would not begrudge me any thing
for we have been hand in glove this while

Whatever time you get the
Boards, it would be right to lay them in a
covered airy place, at least as much so as
possible, to dry & season until you have
occasion to use them -- But particularly
the Boards & Posts for the doors, windows
& the chair high boxing of the Rooms ought
as soon as possible to be got & laid in a
drying place ---

I should like that, as soon

as your other hurry would permit, some twenty
or thirty thick logs, from Eight to twelve feet
long of the best black Birch, & half that
number of the best large white poplar, and the
like of beech & maple were cut, & by degrees
brought to a seasoning place, for we will
by & bye find use for them for chairs & other
uses; & it will be fine to have seasoned to our hands

7th page

Lime should be burt from
Oyster shells -- It makes very good whitening
& Plaister for the roof of the Rooms --
[words crossed out] But **plaister palace stone** will
be the best of any: There is none of it on
the Island, but there is plenty in Nova =
=Scotia, particularly at the gut of Canso
tho it will not be worth your while to
send there for the same, unless you get it
very accidentally --

Some glue may be wanted:
I forgot to order some in proper time, but
you know glue May be made by boiling
calf or sheep skins, as I have often seen
in the highlands -- I believe glue may also
be made of fish & probably the french
may teach you the secret --

I believe it would be a
good way to get certain parts of your

work, & as much as possible thereof, done
by the Job at a certain sum, by which
much misspent time & Imposition would
be avoided, & you would have little farther
trouble with that part, only to see that
it be right done & by agreement --

Thus I believe it is
common enough on the Island to get a
cellar dug so many feet deep, wide & long
at a certain rate --

8th page

After the stones are gathered
you might also make an Agreement with the
mason to build the cellar wall of such
& such thickness & sufficiency & height
for a certain sum, himself or you furnishing
the man to work the mortar --

You might also make an
Agreement with one to cut, square, lead
float & bring the frame to the spot
yourself furnishing the Bullocks to drain
it, to finish & to put up the frame
at a certain price -- But in regard to
the frame care should be taken that it be
well supported here & there at the distance
of a very few feet with proper posts or
perpendicular timber for to enable it to

bear weight without yielding -- The dimensions of the timbers length & width should also be mentioned, & a general clause in every such Agreement specifying that every thing be quit sufficient --

Boards, clapboards, and shingles are likewise bought or sawed at a certain price per thousand feet, & when [^][they] are to be brought home, if in a boat you might agree by the voyage or load

But there are other certain Jobs about it that cannot easily be done by the Piece, & for them there is no other way but daily hire

9th page

But in every agreement by the lump or piece let the party always be tied down to execute it properly, & let the manner in which it is to be executed be described as well as possible which probably will be a bar against Imposition or slights worth -- If any of our people or of the others in the neighbourhood will prove disobliging to you on that or any other occasion, keep an Account of it, till it please God we meet, for it is improbable any one can have a worse opinion of their Justice honor gratitude & regularly than I have of theirs -- I have experienced it all

at their hands, and since no superior motives will operate on them, & that any other method on my part is thrown away on them, I am determined, if I am to live among them, to lay aside my farther method & Regards, & to deal out that Measure to each, which he gives me -- whatever they may think perhaps it may soon be in my power to oblige them more than they are aware of beyond the Bounds of Lot 36 on each side, or to punish them with very little trouble to myself, if they continue disobliging to you or attempt to impose on you on this occasion, & you May

10th page

take your own way of acquainting any of them with this at any time you see it necessary --

I believe there goes out as much Nails, paint, & Glass, by this ship directed to you as May be enough, which will prove a considerable saving to what buying them there would prove.

I am sensible that cash goods & Provisions will be Articles which would prove very convenient & even necessary on an occasion of this sort [...]

13 page

What is in this and in the other paper is all that Occurs to me on the subject, & is all that is in my power to do -- I confess I will be uneasy until I hear from you whether you will be able to goe to work & to proceed, for It runs much in my head that you will have too much difficulty to be able to do any thing -- I only give you the Powers in case you see you may be able to do any thing, in which case it is a very eligible thing.

In all events do not fatigue or fret yourself under any difficulty that may occur in carrying it on -- if you think you may attempt it, do so but do not over walk yourself, or be too early or late out, & by no means in damp or wet weather, & keep your mind perfectly^[easy] -- Whatever happens do not let it hurt your spirits or health --

Annotations

Winter River:

Winter River is in Lot 34.

plaster palace stone:

Plaster stone is gypsum. Antoine Beaumé's *A manual of chemistry*, translated by J.A. (1786), defines "gypsum, or plaster stone": "Those called gypsa, alabaster, and plaster stones, are calcareous selenites formed by nature" (69).

[...]:

Untranscribed is a section on payment.

Private Instructions and Hints Regarding the Building of the House recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes:

<https://emmr.lib.unb.ca/recipes/556>