

## Vanleer Cabin

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### Quick Facts:

- Built between 1800 and 1820
- Dimensions: 20' long, 15' wide, 21' tall
- Two Stories with two rooms on each floor
- Stout stone chimney for two fireplaces
- One cellar (cemented shut)
- Last know renovations:
  - Conrad Wilson and his American Heritage class, Conestoga High School (1960)
  - Bob Mohanty (1993)
  - Rick Mohanty (1998)

The first mention of the Van Leer family in the United States dates back to 1697, when the Hon. John George and Mary Von Loeter emigrated to this country. These are the original ancestors of the Van Leer family and are of German and Swiss decent.

Their only son was eleven years old when they came to America. His name was Bernhardus, and studied to be a doctor, having returned to Germany and graduated from the University there. He was very well educated and is also remembered by the fact that he lived to be 104 years old.

Bernhardus' family settled in Chester County, which became the homestead. Dr. Bernhardus Van Leer married Mary Branson in 1734, and had seven children. After his first wife died, he married again to Christiana Fuls, and had several more children. His 160 acre Tredyffrin and Easttown township holdings were left to the children of his second marriage.

In 1786 Bernhardus' son, Isaac received all 160 acres. He lived on this tract of land for only thirteen years, dying at the age of 45, in 1799. Isaac had been a private in the Revolutionary War, and in his company was his brother-in-law, General Anthony Wayne. In Isaac's time he had bought five acres to add on to his tract from John Christie in 1797. As of today, the Van Leer log house sits on these five acres.

Many records contradict when the cabin was actually built. Some newspapers say in the 1700's, while others say it was built in the early 20th century. Tax records prove that the cabin was not built before 1800. On the tax records for Isaac Van Leer's tract in 1798 say, "on the old Lancaster Road, adjacent to Abel Resse's Lot... 1 log house, 21' x 21', valued at \$100..."

Drawings of the tract show clearly that the cabin is quite far from the old Lancaster Road, and on it. Also the house's dimensions are 21' x 15', not "21' x 21".

Another fact that proves the cabin was not built before 1800, is the presence of the nails in the structure. The nails are machine made, and all nails prior to 1800 were man made.

In 1834 George Van Leer had obtained most of the farm land. Records show that the cabin was worth \$50, which is an accurate amount for log houses in the first third of the 19th century. The cabin was built sometime from 1800 to 1820.

Thus this cabin, with its garden and farm, was the last holding in Tredyffrin of the Van Leer Family who had settled in this area in 1759. They had owned several homes, among them this cabin. The cabin is also the last of the dwellings on this specific tract, and perhaps the least of them all. But still it is a memory of the life experienced here.

Now the cabin sits approximately 45 feet from the gymnasium at Conestoga High School. In the early 1960's a Conestoga American Heritage teacher named Conrad Wilson, organized a renovation and archeological dig of the cabin with his students.

In the mid 1980's, Conestoga added a new gymnasium, that when built would stand around 40 feet next to the cabin's walls. The T/E school district had thought about moving the whole structure to Waynesborough, to help preserve it. In the end they decided not to, and Rittenmayer gym towers over the cabin today.

Conrad Wilson's class was the last known renovation until 1993, when Bob Mohanty, a student at the high school organized a project to waterproof and patch up holes in the masonry.

Now in 1998, Bob Mohanty's brother Rick, has organized a project to renovate, preserve, and raise awareness about the log house. (Henceforth this page)

Life therein was simple; no historic decisions were made across its dinner tables. Still it is a symbol of past life in our community. As that symbol, it is also a lesson on the social life of the area.

References from the Tredyffrin/Easttown Historical Society archives:

--T/E History Club Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 2, Oct. 1960

--T/E History Club Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 2, Jul. 1983