

GLACIER PARK VILLAS, EDNA SEARS GRAHAM CABIN  
(Roberts Cabin)  
Glacier National Park  
South of Lake McDonald Lodge on Lake McDonald Lodge Loop Road  
Lake McDonald  
Flathead County  
Montana

HABS MT-117-A  
MT-117-A

HABS  
MT-117-A

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
INTERMOUNTAIN REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
12795 West Alameda Parkway  
Denver, CO 80228

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## EDNA SEARS GRAHAM CABIN

HABS MT-117-A

### I. INTRODUCTION

**Location:** The Edna Sears Graham Cabin is located on Lot 3, Block 17, Glacier Park Villa Sites subdivision in Glacier National Park, Flathead County, Montana. The cabin is just south of Lake McDonald Lodge on the Lake McDonald Lodge Loop Road. It is located on the shore of Lake McDonald.

**Quad:** Lake McDonald West

**UTM:** 12/287719/5388563 NAD 83

**Date of Construction:** c.1949

**Present Owner and Occupant:** U.S. National Park Service, Glacier National Park

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** The Edna Sears Graham Cabin is a representative example of recreational camp development on Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park, Flathead County, Montana. All recreational camp on the lake evolved from patented homesteads. Homesteaders devised several schemes to develop their properties, including construction of tourist facilities, the sale of individual cabin lots, and platting formal subdivisions. The cabin is located on a lot within the Glacier Park Villa Sites subdivision.

The Edna Sears Graham Cabin is a representative example of recreational camp architecture on Lake McDonald. The cabin's plan and materials are typical of frame cabins constructed after the devastating Half Moon Fire of 1929, when cedar logs were no longer readily available, and milled lumber became the material of choice. The cabin also is an unusual example of cabin construction using pre-fabricated building materials.

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## HISTORY

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Edna Sears Graham Cabin is located in the Glacier Park Villa Sites subdivision. The subdivision is south of a point projecting from the east shore of Lake McDonald occupied by the Lake McDonald Lodge in Glacier National Park, Flathead County, Montana (figure 1). The cabin is one of four recreational cabins in this area.

The Edna Sears Graham Cabin occupies a single lot with Lake McDonald frontage. Access to the cabin is by way of the Lake McDonald Lodge Loop Road, which runs behind the cabin. The road is an original portion of the Going-to-the-Sun Road and became a secondary entrance after the main road was re-routed to the east in the 1930s. The cabin, placed at an elevation several feet below the road, has a small parking area at the road grade with a series of steps leading from it down to the cabin.

The cabin is flanked by single recreational cabins. Small footpaths lined with cobblestones link the Edna Sears Graham Cabin with its southern neighbor, which was owned by Cornelia Timmons Clack. The entire area is heavily wooded, mainly with conifers framing the cabins and coming right down to the edge of the pebble beach, where the trees give way to deciduous shrubs.

### B. EDNA SEARS GRAHAM CABIN HISTORY

Particularly numerous among the enclaves of summer residents in Glacier National Park were prominent residents from Havre, Montana. Just 200 miles to the east, they found easy access to Glacier National Park via the Great Northern Railway, and respite from the hot, dry central Montana summers. H. Earl Clack, a successful oil business man from Havre, bought a six-acre tract at the head of Lake McDonald in 1933. Among others, Clack was followed by the Broadwaters, a Havre business and banking family, who bought a cabin north of Lake McDonald Lodge in 1935 and Jane Buttrey who purchased lots in the Glacier Park Villa Sites in November 1944. She and her husband Frank Buttrey were innovative chain grocery store retailers.<sup>1</sup>

Jane Buttrey sold her cabins to friend and fellow Have resident Cornelia T. Clack, in 1947. Cornelia's husband, Phillip, and H. Earl Clack were brothers. Soon after acquiring the property, the two cabins on the lot were joined into a single frontal gable cabin still on the site today. The cabin eventually passed down to the Clack's children---Worth M. Clack, John Raymond Clack, and Cornelia Clack Graham. Daughter Cornelia had married Robert Graham, Jr. in 1943.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Graham, Jr.'s mother, Edna Sears Graham, purchased the adjacent lot from James and Cena Lee in 1949. Edna and her husband, Robert Sr., operated the Monarch Lumber Company in Great Falls, Montana. In an oral interview in 2006, Cornelia Clack Graham remembered the Graham's constructing a pre-fabricated cabin on the lot shortly after purchasing it. Mary Agnes Roberts, the Grahams' daughter, received the cabin in the distribution of her mother's estate in 1970. She sold the property to the government in 1975, with a reserved right-of-occupancy until 2000.<sup>3</sup>

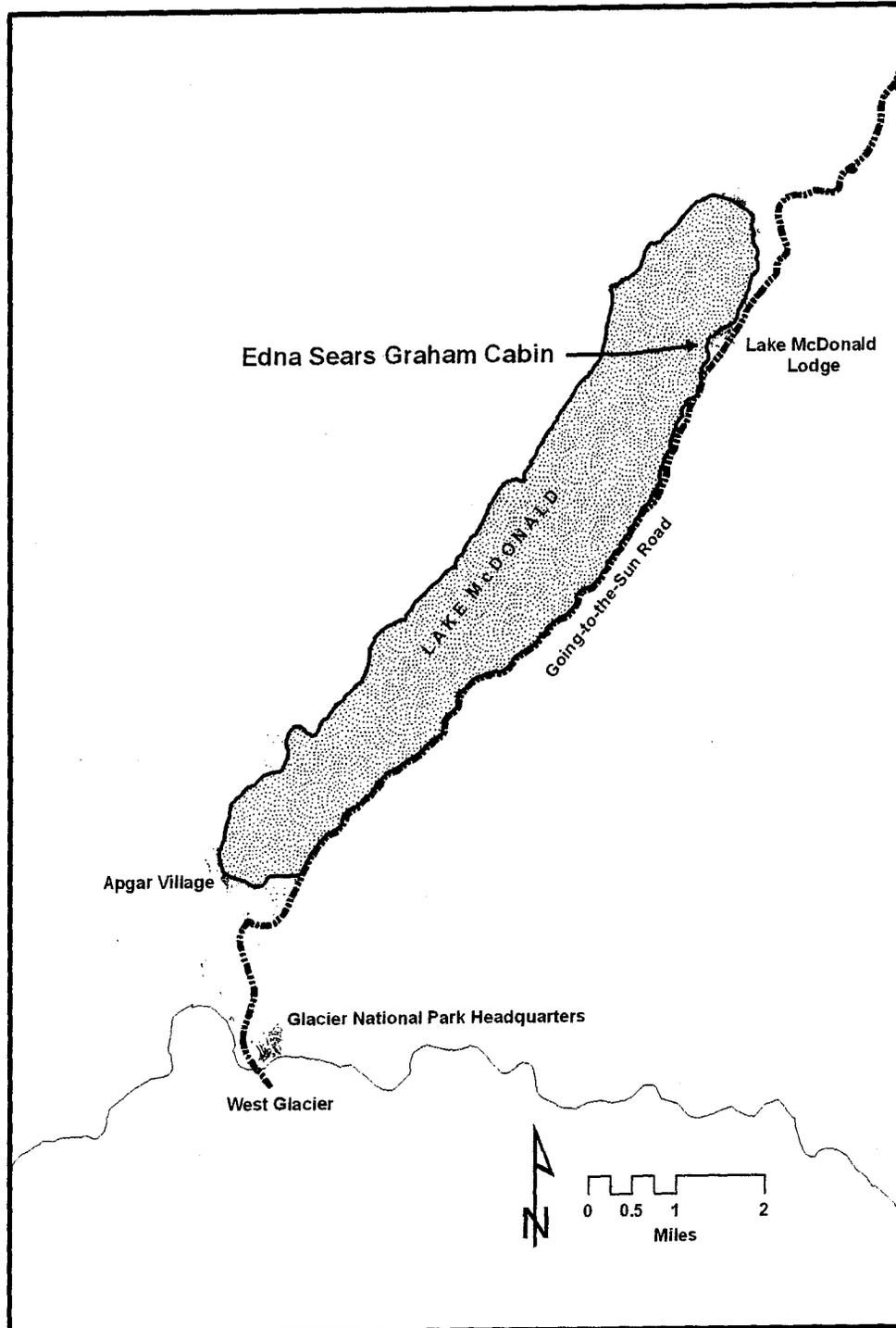


Figure 1. Location Map

### C. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Edna Sears Graham Cabin is representative of the simple recreational cabins championed in Popular Science Monthly's 1934 (reprinted in 1946) book titled *How to Build Cabins, Lodges, & Bungalows: Complete Manual of Constructing, Decorating, and Furnishing Homes for Recreation or Profit*. The authors defined a cabin as "a simple structure primarily intended for recreational purposes and part-time occupancy. It will be one story high, in most cases, will consist of one, or at most three or four, rooms; seldom will have a foundation other than a few stones or concrete piers, and will be capable of being built by the amateur." While recognizing American's long tradition of log construction for rustic environments, the "modern log cabin" also could be constructed of manufactured siding imitating round or hewn logs in areas where logs and log craftsmen were no longer readily available or expensive to obtain.<sup>4</sup> Such was the case on Lake McDonald after the devastating 1929 Halfmoon wildland fire, and with minor exceptions, wood frame construction was the norm for post-fire recreational cabin construction. Probably just as influential, though, was that the popular taste emerging in domestic architecture during the late 1940s and early 1950s which favored more modern materials and building methods.<sup>5</sup>

*How to Build Cabins* encouraged cabin owners who did "not want to spend much time and effort in playing the part of carpenter or contractor" to consider sectional or pre-cut construction.<sup>6</sup> The Edna Sears Graham Cabin's is an example of the latter.<sup>7</sup> Some link can probably be made to the Grahams' Monarch Lumber Company, but whether the company manufactured pre-cut cabins, or purchased them from somewhere else is unknown. The hewn-log manufactured siding is a full one-and-one-half inches thick. The eight-foot lengths are stacked one atop the other and held in place by a T-shaped vertical spine or stud with the cross bar of the T holding the siding in place. How the spline is attached to the floor's rim joist at the bottom and plate at the top is unknown at this time. The interior knotty pine boards back up to the siding with roofing felt between them. The lack of insulation (there was not space for it) suggests the owner's intent to use the cabin only during the summer season.

The four-room, Edna Sears Graham Cabin is a single-story, rectangular building with a front-facing gable roof. A later, two-room, frame addition with a gable roof is located on the north side of the original cabin. The original cabin measures 24 feet by 40 feet 3 inches, including an eight-foot-wide porch beneath the gabled roof. The cabin rests on large concrete piers. The exterior walls are comprised of eight-foot-long panels of manufactured hewn log siding with a 7-inch exposure. To reinforce the cabin's log appearance, alternate siding boards project beyond the corner giving the appearance of traditional log notching. The gable ends are sided with vertical boards with the lower corners cut away providing a scalloped appearance. The roof has minimal eaves and is covered with green three-tab asphalt shingles. A square brick chimney projects from the ridgeline.

The front (lakeside or northwest) façade is spanned by an eight-foot-wide, full width porch. Four-by-four-inch posts at approximately four-feet on center support the building's roof and provide frames for permanent screening. The porch is accessed by a five-panel screen door. The front of the cabin, behind the porch, is somewhat symmetrical with a centrally placed door flanked by windows. The rustic-style front door is constructed of one by six inch vertical, v-grooved boards. A small square

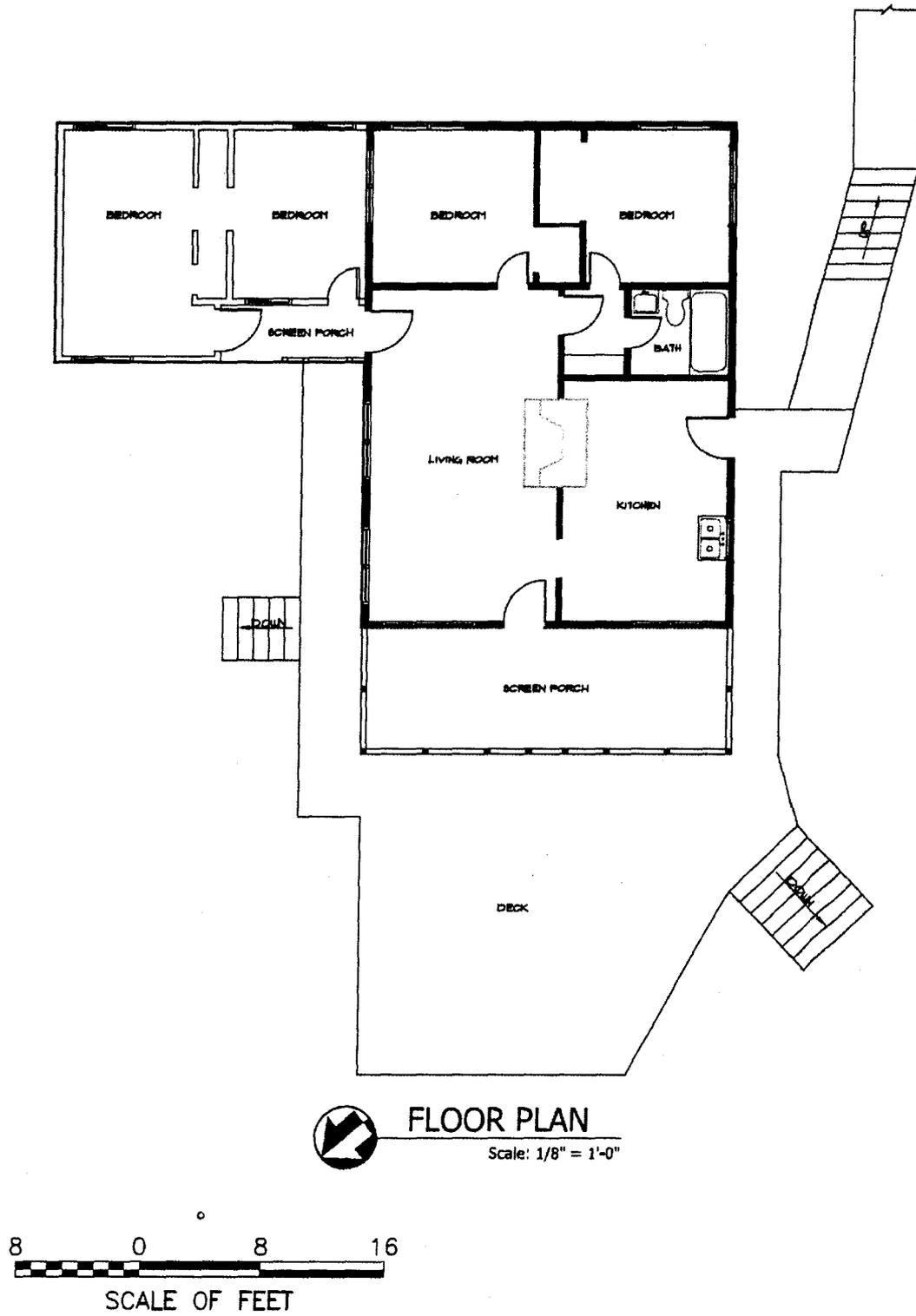


Figure 2. Cabin Floor Plan

light is located in the upper one-half; the hardware is an ornate Craftsman-style entrance handle with a matching cylinder lock. To the right of the door is a pair of double-hung windows and to the left is a tri-partite window with fixed glazing.

On the southwest side of the cabin, a pair of double-hung windows opens into the rear bedroom, and shorter double-hung windows provide light to the bath room and kitchen. The northeast side has two pair of double-hung windows opening into the living room and another pair originally opening into the bedroom, but now blocked by the later addition. The rear façade has two double-hung windows placed horizontally, one in each bedroom.

The later addition on the northeast side of the house contains two bedrooms connected to the house by a screened hallway. It is sided with one-by-six, V-grooved boards placed vertically. All windows are mill-finished aluminum sliders. The addition's fascia is comprised of vertical boards with the corners cut off, mimicking the original building's gable end details. The interior of the addition is unfinished with the exterior wall framing exposed.

The interior of the house (figure 2) remains almost as constructed except for minor modifications in the kitchen. The plan is divided down the middle with the living room on one side and the kitchen on the other. Two small bedrooms are located at the back, and a hall behind the kitchen provides access to the bathroom and a storage closet. The walls and ceilings are paneled with random width V-grooved tongue-and-groove knotty pine boards placed vertically. Board widths vary from 4- to 6- to 12-inches. A four-inch wide trim board encircles each room at the wall-ceiling junction and base boards also are four-inches wide. Windows are framed with simple two-inch wide boards and four-inch wide aprons. All interior doors are V-grooved vertical boards and floors are one-inch by four-inch softwood.

Unlike most Lake McDonald recreational cabins which typically had a native stone fireplace on an exterior wall, the cabin's fireplace is on the interior wall between the living room and kitchen. The living room side is faced with river cobbles and the hearth is constructed of wide, off-white firebrick. In the kitchen, the chimney box is constructed of red brick providing a fireback for a wood range.

A large, irregular shaped deck, more reminiscent of cabins constructed in the late 1950s and after, projects from the cabin's enclosed front porch. The deck is constructed of dimensional lumber with simple railings. It extends along the north side of the house to the addition and along the south side of the house to the kitchen door. From there, steps and landings climb the hillside to the roadside parking area.

## II. FUTURE OF THE EDNA SEARS GRAHAM CABIN

Glacier National Park has completed an Environmental Assessment and Section 106 Finding of Effect for the demolition of the Edna Sears Graham Cabin. Mary Agnes Roberts, Graham's daughter, sold the property to the National Park Service in 1975, and received a 25-year lease agreement to permit use of the cabin by the family. The cabin was used seasonally by Mary Agnes Roberts' family under this 25-year lease until 2000 when the lease expired. Ms. Roberts sold the property to the federal government with a verbal understanding with then Superintendent Phil Iverson, that the building would be removed and the property restored to its natural state at the end of the 25-year lease. NPS policy at the time of acquisition was to remove non-historic structures in unique natural areas and restore these sites to a natural state. This policy was the justification for the cabin's acquisition in 1975. The NPS did not

require the Roberts family to maintain the building during their lease as the NPS planned to eventually remove the building. The cabin is currently in poor condition and presents a human health and safety concern. Removal of the cabin would restore the natural state of the property, decrease development along the Lake McDonald shoreline, remove human health and safety concerns, and honor the verbal agreement between the park and Mary Agnes Roberts.

A determination of eligibility (DOE) for listing in the National Register of Historic Places was prepared for all recreational cabins on Lake McDonald in 2006. The Glacier Park Villa Sites Historic District, comprised of four cabins, was determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Roberts Cabin was found to be a contributing resource of the Historic District. Demolition of the cabin will have an adverse effect on the historic district.

In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, the park consulted with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to seek ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate the adverse effect. The park and the SHPO have reached a preliminary agreement upon the following measures as a basis for a Memorandum of Agreement to mitigate the adverse effect: To mitigate the adverse effect, the park agreed, among other things, to record the cabin to the Standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey. This historical narrative and accompanying photographs are the products of the HABS recordation.

#### IV. ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Recreational Cabins on Lake McDonald” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form and “Glacier Park Villas Sites Historic District” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, by Jessie Ravage, February 10, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *How to Build Cabins, Lodges, & Bungalows: Complete Manual of Constructing, Decorating, and Furnishing Homes for Recreation or Profit*, prep. by Editorial Staff of Popular Science Monthly (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1934 and 1946), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> “Recreational Cabins on Lake McDonald.”

<sup>6</sup> *How to Build Cabins*.

<sup>7</sup> The pre-fabricated construction of the cabin is supported in an oral interview with Cornelia Clack Graham who stated the cabin was “pre-fab.” Jessie Ravage, Interview with Cornelia Clack Graham, July 25, 2006. Transcript on file in Glacier National Park Archives.

#### V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

*How to Build Cabins, Lodges, & Bungalows: Complete Manual of Constructing, Decorating, and Furnishing Homes for Recreation or Profit*, prep. by Editorial Staff of Popular Science Monthly. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1934 and 1946.

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Ravage, Jessie. Interview with Cornelia Clack Graham, July 25, 2006. Transcript on file in Glacier National Park Archives.