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### A CABIN THAT'S NOT FOR THE BIRDS!

By Tom Taggart

There is a spot in the “woods” on my Claddagh Valley Railway that seemed the perfect place for some enterprising local residents to set up a still. Needing a building for the “shiners” to store equipment and produce, I began looking for a back woods cabin. The plastic kits available at local hobby stores were too expensive for my budget and none were quite what I was looking for. So, I decided to try my hand at scratch-building a log cabin. I had plans for a “lobsterman’s shanty” I found in a back issue of Garden Railways magazine that came close to what I wanted and I thought I could base my cabin on those plans. While I was looking for materials and thinking about how to go about constructing “log” walls for minimal investment, I found a birdhouse in a local Michael’s store. This building already looked like a log cabin and with a little modification would look perfect next to a still. Besides at only \$4.95 I didn’t think I could pass it up!



The first order of business was to remove the door and perch from the front of the building. To do this I first had to remove the top of the building and the porch roof. This was an easy enough task and gave me free access to pry off the offending door. I didn’t like the looks of the wooden chimney so I removed that as well. I also trimmed the base on the sides so it was flush with the walls.

Using the window and door patterns from the lobsterman’s shanty I cut the frames and sashes from strip wood. I used CA cement to glue the small pieces of the window frames together. Everything else on the cabin is glued together with Liquid Nails. I glued clear plastic



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“glass” to the back of the windows and, since I did not plan to put a light in this building, painted the backs of the windows flat black. I glued the windows and door in place after I made the “gaps” between the logs deeper using a gouge from an X-acto tool set.

The stone chimney was constructed by first making a rough form from scrap Styrofoam. I had planned to glue small pieces of gravel on this form one at a time. However, my wife suggested putting the gravel in a shallow pan and, after coating the form with glue, pressing it into the gravel. This actually worked quite well and saved a lot of time. The chimney was made in two pieces that I glued together after the stones were attached. I did this because I wanted to have the chimney larger at the base where the fireplace would be. I filled the gap between the pieces with individual stones and also glued stones around the top to extend it above the Styrofoam.

I scribed the porch floor and roof to simulate planking and glued the porch roof to the edge of the main roof using the supports that came with the building. Actually I had to replace one with a piece of dowel as I broke it when I removed the roof. I added a front step and footings around the building made from scrap pieces of the base I cut off and strip wood.

To simulate weathered wood, I gave the building a coat of thinned down gray paint and painted the spaces between the logs with white to represent the chinking material. I painted the window frames prior to attaching the “glass” and gluing them in place.

Without a doubt, the most time consuming part of this project was the roof! I wanted it to have a cedar shingle look and intending to spend as little as possible for materials, I hit on the idea of cutting the shingles from craft sticks I already had and gluing them on individually. So I did...all 385 of them! I used some stain left over from a non-railroad related project to color the shingles after they were glued in place. (Note to myself: next time, don't be such a cheapskate and spring for some commercially made shingles!)

The final step was to add some details and “weathering” to give the cabin character and spray the whole building with a couple of coats of matt clear Krylon paint to protect it from the weather. The shotgun next to the door (to discourage revenuers), washtub, and apple-barrel also came from Michael's.

I really enjoyed converting this birdhouse into a useable structure for my garden. In fact, before I completed this cabin, I had purchased a couple more birdhouses that I intend to convert into a school and a church. It was fairly easy, inexpensive, and a whole lot of fun. Try it sometime.

