

An excerpt from
“THE NEW INN”

From “Enos A. Mills of the Rockies” by Esther Burnell Mills and Hildegard Hawthorne.
Copyright © Enos Mills Cabin Museum & Gallery. All Rights Reserved.

How happily trees have mingled with our lives! From cave to cottage, the forest has been a mother to our good race. If we should lose the hospitality of the trees and the friendship of the forest, our race too would be lost, and the desert's pale, sad sky would come to hover above a rounded, lifeless world. Friendship is the spirit of the forest.

--Enos A. Mills

Mills was lecturing at the Biennial Convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in St. Paul, June 4, 1906, when he received a telegram, “Long's Peak Inn burned to the ground.”

He hastened home to inspect the ruins of the main building, including the new additions he had made the year before. One or two outlying cabins had escaped, but the loss including almost an entire edition of *The Story of Estes Park*, a quantity of table silver and supplies that he had purchased for the coming season, and a large collection of valuable negatives of animals and birds that could not be replaced. There was no insurance.

It was a serious calamity and may have raised some question in his mind as to whether he would continue in the hotel business. The thousands of people who enjoyed his hospitality during the years to follow may well be grateful that he decided to rebuild and start anew.

Borrowing heavily, he at once engaged all the available workmen the community afforded to speed up the work of construction. While the gang brought in the timbers he sat down and drew his plans, which were original in every sense. Instead of using ordinary logs he utilized the fire-killed trees standing on the near-by mountains in such

abundance. He selected the most interesting and unusual of these, trees weathered by wind and erosion, twisted and gnarled trees that nevertheless made excellent building materials. The fire that had killed them had also boiled the resinous sap and given them a preservative treatment. Mills had drawn his plans, but carrying them out presented difficulties not anticipated, as he tells in *Sunset Magazine*, May, 1921, after numerous requests had been made for the story:

“I determined to build a house of these timbers, but in getting this done I obtained new and unexpected views into human nature, especially as expressed in carpenters. I enthusiastically led the boss carpenters and his five neatly dressed and capable assistants out to this pile of logs which they were to shape into a worthy house, a piece of architecture to which they would refer with pride.

“But they did not enthuse. They did not think of me as crazy—they were too astonished to think. With silent amazement they gazed at these blackened, rough logs. To me their silence was not eloquent. Their pride and long formal experience told them they must not lower the dignity of their craft by using scrapped material. All returned to the city on the noon stage.

“Another head carpenter arrived who had been schooled in smooth surfaces and straight lines. He was heroic and endured for nearly two days. A third came; he felt not only degraded, but also that he would be disloyal to the profession by using these unsawed, unsmoothed tree-trunks.

“Nearly every carpenter slighted the joints; they thought that in uniting two logs of different sizes and colors with a poor joint they were doing rustic work. The uncouth is neither rustic nor artistic. Many of the better-colored and weather-carved logs were ruined. Some ideas had to be sacrificed and numerous compromises were inevitable.

“Before all, save honor, was lost, an old man arrived who saved the structure.

He was not a carpenter, but as a young man had been a boss timberman, had used square sets and stulls, in the old Comstock mines. He knew how to handle timbers. Having an imagination he enthused over the possibilities of these sculptured building timbers.

“Little by little the building took on form. We avoided conspicuous craftsmanship. Joints were neither concealed nor emphasized. We mortised, inset and spiked, pinned, bolted, and clamped. There were no frills nor freaks, no striving for effect, and the simple lines produced substantial and pleasing results. We did not follow a carefully thought-out plan, but constantly readjusted and experimented. The finished structure was a good combination of the rustic and the artistic. We builded far wiser than we knew.

“Perhaps the split-log stairway was the most striking object in the living-room. Its brown, angular, broken-topped newel post, with heavy broken roots, appeared ancient and substantial. The steps of split logs, banisters of brown, smooth poles, and the spindles of rough, dwarfed timber-line trees, all united without a jarring note. These small trees were carried three miles down the mountain on the back of the timberman-artist. The newel posts, though not so aged as some of the timber, had been killed in a forest fire of 1781. Many fire-carved, fire-colored, round timbers—columns—were used in the living-room to support the beams of the ceiling. Most of these were varying shades of brown.

“One day after the force had become interested, we asked all to drop tools and follow us into the woods. Two miles away we arrived at a gigantic, upturned tree-root. It was about twelve feet in diameter and all agreed that it much resembled a spider-web. But it was sound, and its interlaced roots gave an open, artistic screen effect.

“We sat down and discussed it with interest. All heard with astonishment that it was to have a place in the living-room. It was too fragile to stand hauling. With care

and enthusiasm all hands carried it home. It was placed near a window where it projected webs of shadow upon the floor. This ‘spider-web screen’, the stairway, the score of tree columns, the rustic furniture grouped in one room were effective. It was primeval—the heart of the ancient wood, and suggested restful forest aisles.

“There were two rough stone fireplaces—not too rough. The stones used were the smoothest that we could find among the broken masses of granite cliffs. These stones showed the chemical stains of time and carried decorative touches of lichen colorings. One fireplace was like a broken ledge of a square-footed cliff; the other had a mantel of granite and on each side two heavy, deeply fire-carved log columns.

“A waste-basket made of small poles resembled a log cabin with the roof left off. Injured trees with bent or curved limbs furnished material for chair arms, settee backs, and rockers. A rustic chair that I had made out of small poles sat on my front porch for three or four years. It was not only a comfortable rocker of simple design, but it attracted much attention.

“One day an Eastern woman called to see me. She had shown me many kindnesses, and on departing I asked if I might give her a present. She gleefully went to the rustic chair on the porch. I do not know how much she paid to get it to New England, but three or four of her friends have written me for duplicates. Two poles that had grown with just the right curve formed the rockers, and another furnished the arms.

“Most of the furniture was made of pine and spruce, although aspen was used for a child’s high chair. Neither paint nor stain was used. A clear, light, invisible oil was applied to the spruce flooring, and clear shellac made a transparent enamel on the polished table-tops.

“Outwardly the structure was substantial and unobtrusive. It did not frighten the peaks and scenery of the near-by mountains. Slightly totem-pole effects, with most of the outer logs standing vertical, had here and there a corner post piercing the roof-line.

The subdued rock or granite color harmonized with the tones of the surroundings. Both the lines and color of this structure allowed it to stand in the little high mountain valley, as though it were a cliff that had been shaped by the same slow-acting elemental forces that had shaped the region.”

The first meal was served in the new dining-room the Fourth of July, a month after the old building had burned. Work went on throughout the summer, for there were some twenty bedrooms on the second floor to be finished and furnished, but guests were taken care of, even better than before. The abundance of windows was a striking improvement, allowing manifold views of the mountain scenery. In many respects, Mills felt the fire had not been so bad, after all. It had made it necessary for him to start from the beginning, on his own improved plan.

One day a man drove up in a hurry, and Mills met him at the steps, as was his custom with arriving guests.

“I’ve been told you have some fine scenery up here,” the man remarked. “Where is it?” as his indifferent glance took in the landscape.

“I think you have been misinformed,” Mills answered.

Purchase [“Enos Mills of the Rockies” Book](#) or
[“Enos Mills of the Rockies” for Kindle](#) and read
the rest of this story and more great stories at the
Enos Mills Cabin!
www.enosmills.com