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Searching for the Pioneer Log House From a talk with Brian Preston. Curator of Archeology. Nova Scotia Museum We first really got involved in this about 10 years ago--almost exactly 10 years ago. And at the time I wasn't specifically looking for log structures, log cabins, but happened to find this (see photos, page 71), in the course of other more general investigations in terms of early settlement patterns. Because at that time it was obvious that any kind of a surviving log structure was very much a rarity anywhere in Nova Scotia. (And yet we always talk about log houses regarding pioneer settlement in Nova Scotia.) And there's no questioning the fact, if you read through a variety of contemporary sources, this is the kind of structure they refer to. This is what the pioneer built, at least initially--this was his first reasonably permanent shelter. Some have questioned this, because of the lack of (physical) evidence. On the other hand, there's a lot of written evidence. First of all, you had your, perhaps, very primitive shelter, then you had your log cabin. Then, the first generally accepted sign of real advancement was the establishment of mills--sawmills. Then you got framed structures. This is the perceived general method of progress. But that is being questioned. So this particular example (the building pictured here) was probably the first candidate for a "pioneer log structure." There are a few other examples known in the province, but not quite in the same category. This is quite a small (building), very modest--basically one storey with an attic. And it has been abandoned since about 1970. And in 1978--oh, for about a year before that, I'd been doing a little research and I'd underneath these shingles is a pioneer log house--the first example found in Cape Breton poking around in the neighbourhood, asking questions about surviving older buildings, etc., sites of older buildings. As sometimes happens, it was quite some time before this particular place was mentioned. And it had been added to--a little piece had been added onto one end. And of course, it had been sheathed and shingled, and (had) a relatively modern asphalt roof. (Sheathed and shingled means?) Boarded. (Over the logs?) Over the logs. (And then shingled over the boards.) And then shingled over the boards. (So, to the eye--would you know, just passing it, to the average eye, that this was a log house?) No. Not at all. It is quite distinctive, in that it is relatively modest, being basically a one-storey structure. It is quite different from most other domestic structures you'll see in Cape Breton or Nova Scotia in general. But outwardly, it appears very similar to any other structure--any other wood-frame structure. However, since it had been abandoned, obviously, it started to fall into disrepair. As I said, one end had had an addition. And the other end, a porch had been erected at some time in the 20th century. And in 1978, that porch collapsed, tearing off a large part of that gable end--tearing off the sheathing (and) the shingling. And revealing, lo and behold, underneath, the log structure: horizontal logs, undressed, some still with the bark on, and with quite substantial moss chinking in between the logs. And when you go up inside, up into the attic, you can see the top log of the original log structure. Now, the other gable end