

GRAND MARAIS STONE FEATURES

Given the abundance of stone at Grand Marais, it is not surprising that so much of it has made its way into a variety of construction projects. Stone is a traditional and reliable element that would be readily exploited by any builder looking for a sturdy material for common building features – foundations and chimneys especially.

But Grand Marais stone was so abundant, comparatively easy to use (there are nearly eternal small pieces of appropriate sizes), and people with lots of time on their hands, that it did not take long for other building features to receive the same level of attention – and creativity: steps with their decorative balusters, pathways and the occasional fence.

It is these kinds of features that help make Grand Marais such a special place in comparison with other Lake Winnipeg cottage communities, where the stones either were not so abundant (Gimli and the Winnipeg Beach-area communities) or where they were not so regularly used (Victoria Beach).

The following exploration of Grand Marais's stone heritage will mainly focus on the best or most interesting or unusual examples to give a sense of how much is really still here. The entry on fences will include all of the six that remain, given that these are the features that many people call to mind when they think of the physical reminders of the history of Grand Marais.

FOUNDATIONS

Many Manitoba cottages and cabins were built with modest wood foundations, in which a stout set of short posts was placed on stone or poured concrete pads. This was often the case at Grand Marais as well, but the abundance of readily available and easily transported stone also allowed for the construction of more durable and impressive stone foundations as well.

With the passage of time, many of the original stone foundations at Grand Marais have been replaced, often with concrete footings and pony walls. It was often the case that the original stone foundations, built up of smallish granite and limestone rocks set in mortar could not withstand the tough climatic conditions, especially the freeze-thaw cycle, and eventually failed. But there are still enough around to give a sense of what these unassuming features looked like.



A typical Grand Marais stone foundation, heavily mortared.



A handsome flared stone foundation. Notice how the log base of the superstructure of the cabin rests on the stone.



An exquisite stone foundation. Here the granite blocks are set up into thick white mortar that makes the whole feature visually pop.

STEPS

It often appears that people constructing stone foundations also came to see the potential for the stone also to be used for exterior stairs, as well as balusters (the side features of a stair block). It even appears that many people copied a distinctive curving feature at the end of the baluster that could be used for a planter or other functions – perhaps to hold a nice bottle of cold beer.

There is quite a legacy of these features still standing in Grand Marais, and it is to be hoped that these fanciful and sculptural elements are preserved – they are a distinct part of our architectural heritage, and help define the whimsical and creative energies that often went into local cottage designs.

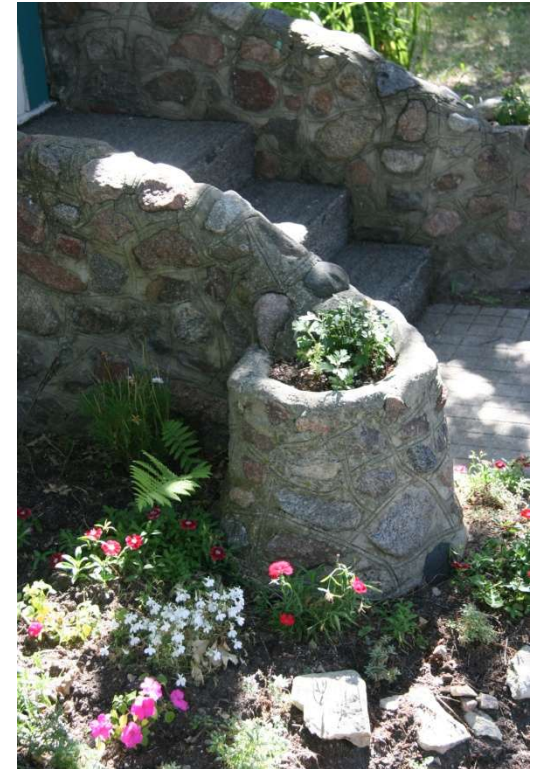


This cabin displays the distinctive “Grand Marais” exterior stair baluster – here curving from top to bottom and also along its length, and culminating in the distinctive planter feature that gives the feature such character – a sense of whimsy but also completely functional.



Four examples of "Grand Marais" steps. Each shows flare in design and construction.





The "Grand Marais" stair once again. The planter has a sculptural quality, wrapping back around as a flourish to the whole staircase feature.



An exceptional example of the “Grand Marais” stair, here with stones finely picked out with white-painted mortar – very elegant.



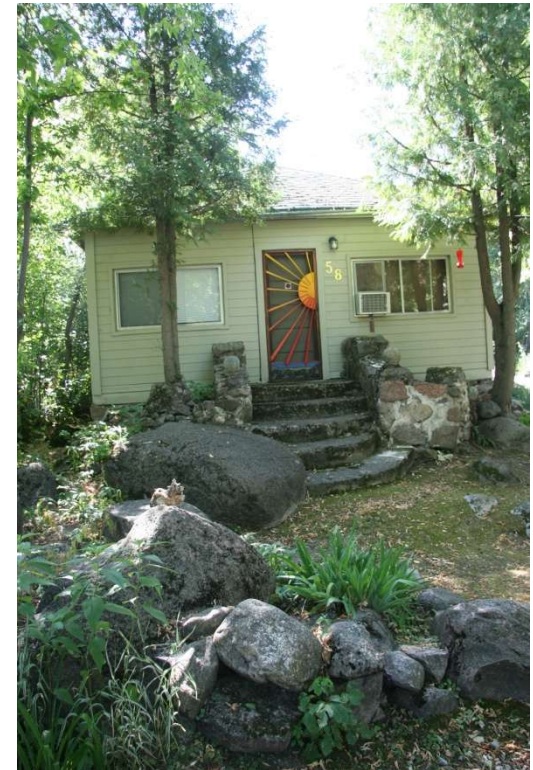
The stairs and support posts are exceptional examples of local stone design and craftsmanship.



Main facade view and close-up of stone steps. Rough and rugged, the steps would have contrasted greatly, at least in earlier times, with the nice wooden features of the cabin above.



Details (left) of the extremely important stone steps (seen below). This carefully designed and crafted feature is a highlight of stonework at Grand Marais.



PATHWAYS

There are still a handful of **Grand Marais sites** that contain at least remnants of old stone pathways, which were usually built up of small rocks set in a bed of mortar.

The best remaining example is at the Christine Stewart Cabin, on Grand Marais Boulevard. This pathway links to the stone stairs and stone fence, and visually as well to the stone foundation. The stones appear to have been selected for a certain flatness, which gives the pathway a slightly smoother walking experience.



Details of the stone pathway at Christine Stewart Cabin.



Details of the stone pathway at Christine Stewart Cabin.

CHIMNEYS

It is presumed that nearly all Grand Marais cabins pre-dating 1940 would have had some form of stone or brick chimney, at least early in their lives – whether rough and leaky, or elegant and water-tight. Sadly very few chimneys remain, like so many of the local stone foundations a result of attacks by weather. But the few that do remain define an important part of our local architectural legacy.

It is useful to have some background about the functional attributes of chimneys in order to appreciate these now-rare features.

By the 1920s through the 1940s, when most of Grand Marais's cabins were put up, chimneys were primarily for heating purposes – not for cooking. And thus they only had to adhere to basic operational requirements to ensure a good draught (allowing smoke to exit via the preferred route) and that they actually gave off sufficient heat. This really only meant that they needed to be of a height to allow smoke to exit effectively, and for embers to be kept away from wooden roofs. And within, they needed to have the configuration and flue/damper to ensure efficient removal of smoke.



The chimney of the Bremont-Wilson Cabin, suggesting what many Grand Marais chimneys looked like before they were torn down.

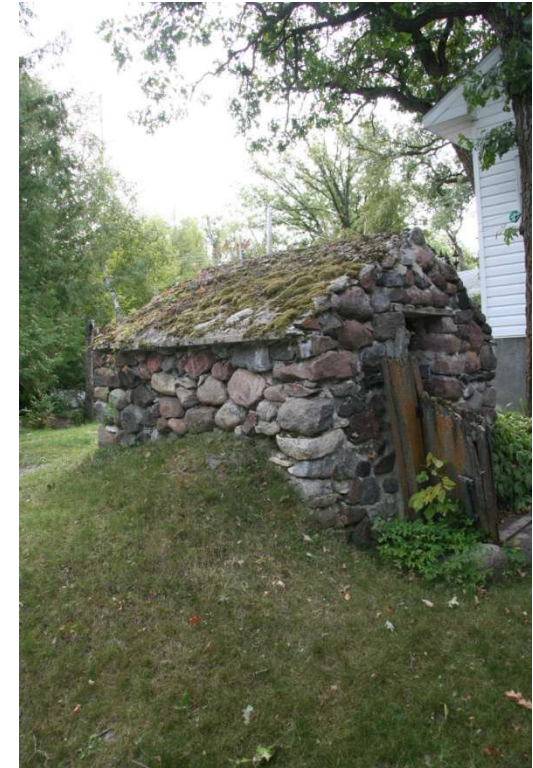


A Grand Marais landmark feature – the beautiful chimney (left) and fireplace (below) at a cabin along Grand Marais Boulevard.



OTHER STRUCTURES

Most of the stone building features at Grand Marais are structural elements on cottages – a foundation, steps, a chimney. But there is one site that is notable for its singular presence. This is a stone root cellar at a cabin on Park Avenue, whose entire stone construction makes it special.



The stone root cellar, with walls built entirely of granite blocks; the thickness of the walls can be observed by looking through the doorway at left.