

## Bremner House: Changes made by private owners

In May 1886, shortly after his arrival the previous October, J.C.C. (Charlie) Bremner builds a log shack with a shingled roof on his homestead at NE 30-53-22-W4. Not long after, in 1889, Bremner is reported to be building “a large dwelling,” his second house on his homestead. This 1-1/2 storey house has a central gable. In 1892, Bremner refers to his home as “The Mount”. Ernest Brown, Edmonton photographer, took a number of photographs of the Bremner home in September 1910. In 1906, Bremner has a telephone installed in his second house. His number is R3911. It was probably 1912 or 1913 when Charlie built a third larger house that we know now as Bremner House. Then in 1922, Charlie Bremner hires carpenter Jack Karran to tear down the “old house,” presumably it was his second house.

### The big house that Charlie Bremner built

Soon after the visit by photographer Ernest Brown, Charlie Bremner built another house on his homestead; it was a three-storey, red brick Arts and Crafts—5,400 square feet in size. This, his third house, is believed to have been built in 1912 and/or 1913; the timeframe is surmised given that the bricks used in the living room fireplace are stamped “PA” for brick maker Peter Anderson of Edmonton. Anderson closed his brickyard in 1913.

The [Statement of Significance \(SOS\)](#) highlights many features of both the interior and exterior. Other than those listed in the SOS, the interior of the house featured:

- two bathrooms, a two-piece on the main floor and a three-piece on the second floor
- a main-floor office with a separate exterior door
- two bedrooms on the main floor (a small bedroom in the northeast corner is thought to be the bedroom of the Bremners’ live-in maid)
- three bedrooms on the second floor, including the large master bedroom
- an eating area (possibly for food preparation, as well) on the east side of the main floor, with a large cast iron sink in a counter under the window; there may have been cupboards on either side of this window
- a brick interior wall separates the office and the food preparation (later possibly laundry) area
- a maid’s calling system, in the kitchen and the master bedroom, activated by a foot button located on the floor under the dining room table

Bremner uses the third floor for entertainment area; it is left unfinished and unheated. He has a pool table on the third floor. There may have been a small closet on the third floor.

The house has electricity powered by a generator, indoor plumbing and running water. It also has a coal furnace and steam heat. A wood stove is hooked up to the chimney flues in the brick wall. There is a coal chute on the east side of the house, and two wells in the basement.

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## **Changes to Bremner House under ownership of Schroter family**

In 1929, William and Nellie Schroter buy the Bremner estate from Royal Trust for \$36,000. This includes the big house, the outbuildings and two quarter-sections of land. They raise a family of 10 children in the house. The house is under Schroter ownership until it is sold in 1988.

### **Changes made to the house by the Schroters**

- At some point in the 1930s, a well is dug on the north side of the house. The water is softer than that found in the other wells but has sand in it. The pressure is low. The water has high iron content.
- In the 1940s and 1950s, at some point, the water reservoir in the coal furnace cracks and the Schroters switch to propane to heat water. The propane tank sits on the north side of the house yard. Eventually, a natural gas pipeline replaces the propane.
- They put in a doorway to connect the second-floor master bedroom to the bathroom next door.
- The living room walls are painted a light mauve colour. The wainscoting in the office has a greenish stain.
- At some point, some unspecified renovations are done to the kitchen, main floor bath and main floor bedroom. The kitchen is renovated by a carpenter; he installs cupboards along the east wall.
- At some time, probably in the 1940s or 1950s, swing doors are installed between the dining room and the present kitchen and possibly another set between the main floor hallway into the kitchen.
- Between 1956 and 1959, there is no railing around the outside veranda. The upper floor exterior shingles are painted a dark brown.
- The walls of the master bedroom are a peach-dusty rose colour, and there is an “Axminster” area carpet on the floor.
- In 1956 or prior, a portion of the second floor was renovated as an apartment; the second floor suite included a kitchen. At some point before the 1970s, the upstairs kitchen is completely removed.
- Sometime in the 1960s, the maid’s calling system is disconnected.
- In 1972, the house is connected to city water.
- Sometime between 1966 and 1976, aluminum windows are installed in the kitchen and on the second floor.
- Sometime in the early 1970s, lightning strikes the house and they have to chop a hole in the roof to put out the fire.

### **Changes made by renters from 1976 to 1980**

- In 1976, Alex Schroter, who owns the 80 acres where Bremner House is located, rents out the old house. Giving the renters a free hand to renovate the house, he deducts the renovation costs from their rent. Taking a whole year to do the renovations, the renters hire an interior designer from Woodward, so that the décor is coordinated.
- Because of the high maintenance demanded by the hardwood floors, the renters lay a “Hunter Green” broadloom in the living room, foyer and main hallway, the dining room and the two main floor bedrooms. They run the carpet up the stairs and in the upper landing. They lay blue carpet in the master bedroom on the second floor. They lay linoleum in the kitchen, maid’s room, bathrooms and laundry areas.

- The renters rent a steamer and steam off many layers of wallpaper on the main and second floors.
- They wallpaper the office in the northwest corner of the main floor. The wallpaper has a burgundy rose pattern on a cream background to give the room a Victorian look.
- They paint the main floor hallway. They paint the kitchen a soft yellow and install “Harvest Gold” appliances including a dishwasher.
- They have cream-coloured, textured, semi-sheer draperies with tiebacks made for the dining room and living room.
- The renters do not remove any walls or partitions, nor do they make any changes to the interior woodwork or the house exterior.
- They replace all the bathroom fixtures in the downstairs bathroom and install a shower. It is used as an ensuite to the guest bedroom, the former office, in the northwest corner.
- They use the other downstairs bedroom as an office.
- The renters cover the brick wall that separates their guest bedroom and the laundry area with cedar panelling because the bricks were in bad shape.
- They keep the single-swing door that leads from the main floor hallway into the laundry area.
- In the small kitchen adjacent to the dining room, they have a cabinetmaker install a butcher block island with an attached eating area.
- The same cabinetmaker installs wainscoting to mimic that found throughout the house but they do not stain it dark like that in the rest of the house; they keep it light pine. They paint the kitchen cabinets.
- The renters buy all new light fixtures. In the dining room they install a stained glass light fixture over the dining room table.
- They make no changes to any of the woodwork.
- On the second floor, they install new bath fixtures in the large master bedroom ensuite, with cedar around the bathtub where towels can be stacked.
- Their cabinetmaker installs a new dressing room counter in the ensuite.
- They have blue sheers and white blinds made for the master bedroom windows.
- No changes were made to the other two second-floor bedrooms or to the third floor.
- They had no trouble with the second floor balcony leaking.
- In 1977, the renters sign a three-year lease agreement. The renters put in a large fence between the side door and vegetable garden as a run for their two dogs.
- In 1978, the renters drop in a cedar hot tub at the north end of the veranda.
- These renters move out August 1, 1980, and new renters move into the house. No known changes are made to the house during this term.
- In 1986, the house is again rented to new renters. No known changes are made to the house during this term.
- It is undetermined who had a swirl plaster done to many of the walls and some of the ceilings.
- It is unknown who took out the sets of swing doors between the kitchen and dining room, and between the hallway and the kitchen area.
- In 1988, Alex Schroter sells house and 80 acres to Sten and Kirsten Nielsen; he sells the rest of the 240 acres to Rita and Dick Jackson.

## Changes to Bremner House under ownership of Sten and Kirsten Nielsen

Sten and Kirsten Nielsen purchase Bremner House in 1988 and move in on August 1. The Nielsen family run a mixed farm, raising chickens, geese, ducks, sheep and cattle. They utilize the various outbuildings. The Niensens, together with their neighbours the Jacksons, start a tree farm—mostly Colorado and white spruce. They start in 1989 planting six acres of seedlings.

Through the 1990s, the Niensens make several improvements on the house.

- They re-shingle the roof, and put inserts into the three chimneys.
- They replace the cedar shingles on the second and third floor exterior walls.
- They replace all the windows on the second and third floor. This was done at the same time they replaced the cedar shingles on the upper exterior walls.
- They insulate the outside of the second and third floors with one-inch plastic foam.
- On the third floor, they open up the ceiling, and drywall. They install a kitchen sink and counter. They refinish the original hardwood floors.
- They put in a small bathroom on the third floor.
- They install a small “furnace,” most likely a space heater, on the third floor.
- On the second floor, they put a roof over the balcony since it was leaking into the office on the main floor.
- They put gas inserts in all the fireplaces.
- They wallpaper the dining room with a burgundy stripe pattern.
- They open up three small rooms on the west side of the basement to make one large room. They build a wine cellar in the basement.
- They put in an outside door to the basement on the east side of the house.

In the mid-1990s, the Niensens undertake major renovations to the kitchen.

- They remove the interior walls in the kitchen areas, making the original three rooms (Bremner’s maid’s small bedroom, eating area and food preparation area) into one room.
- They insulate the kitchen walls, remove the linoleum and refinish the original floors.
- They remove the cedar covering the brick wall and drywall the entire space.
- They re-install the wainscoting that the first renters put in the kitchen areas.
- They retain the original light pine and do not treat the wainscoting with a dark stain.
- They remove the small window in the kitchen and enlarge the opening to match the windows on either side.

They also take out the closet in the main floor bedroom and put in a door to connect the bedroom to the bathroom next door. They build a closet in the bathroom and lay carpet in the “blue room.”

They remove the hot tub from the veranda.

They install the old kitchen sink and cupboards in the basement that they now use as a mudroom.