

THE PALIMPSEST

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A Pioneer Home

A one-room house, built of logs with the bark on, roofed with clapboards — this is really the first home I can remember, and since it was my home for several years it is as fresh in my memory as though I had seen it but yesterday.

At first there were stumps near the house and very large, tall hazel bushes. The house had two windows with twelve "lights" or panes of glass in each. This glass was so defective that objects seen through it were much distorted: one person might appear as two, or perhaps twice as broad or tall as in reality. The one door, which was on the south side, was made of upright boards held together by "cleats" or cross pieces. It was called a "battened door". The door, window frames, and floor were the only parts of the house that were made of sawed lumber, and no nails were used except in the windows and door.

The logs had been chopped with an ax in proper

lengths for the sides and ends, and a notch cut near each end. These notches held the logs in place at the corners of the cabin. The wide cracks between the logs were filled with "chinks" or pieces of wood hewed out and driven in so as to fill the crack as tightly as possible. When the cabin had been completely "chinked", a batch of mortar was made by mixing clay with sufficient water to produce the right consistency. This clay mud was taken up by handfuls, thrown with force into the cracks, and afterward smoothed over with a piece of wood used as a trowel.

In making the roof, small logs were used for rafters and fastened in place with wooden "pins". Clapboards, about three feet long and six inches in width, were split from logs and laid on the rafters in courses as shingles are now. These clapboards were held in place by poles laid over them, parallel to the rafters beneath, and fastened at the ends with wooden pins.

Our door had iron hinges, though in many early homes the doors were hung with wooden hinges. I distinctly remember that our door fastened with a wooden latch on the inside, to which a leather string was fastened and passed through a small hole cut in the door. When the family was inside and wished to keep intruders out, the "latchstring" was pulled in, leaving no way of "raising the latch" from the outside. In those primitive times it was common to wel-

come a friend by saying "the latchstring is always out to you."

Several years later father built "the new log house" which had a shingle roof and doors with locks and hinges. This was a larger house, built of hewed logs and with the cracks filled with lime mortar. There was an "upstairs", reached by a ladder for a stairway. Altogether this was considered a very comfortable home.

The cellar was like all cellars in that part of the country at that time — a hole dug in the solid ground with no walls except the smooth, hard earth. A trap door in the floor and a ladder furnished the means of getting up and down. This ladder was made from two poles of good strong timber cut to the desired length. Holes were bored in each at equal distances, the rounds shaved smooth, and the ends nicely fitted to the holes in the poles. Oak or hickory made good ladder rounds. Such a ladder properly constructed of strong wood made a very substantial means of getting upstairs, down cellar, or to the top of a haystack. But there were many ups and downs in those pioneer days which no visible ladder could reach, just as to-day when no polished and carpeted stair with ornamental balustrade can help us surmount our difficulties.

In those times a man would go into the timber with an ax, a saw, a hammer, a jack knife, and possibly a

few other very ordinary tools which a carpenter of later times would consider altogether inadequate. He would build a cabin home and take his bride to live there away from the old home in which perhaps she had been reared in comparative luxury. It might be that this new home was far from neighbors, and where there were no schools or church. But it was their home.

Now I have built my log cabin but have made no provision for a fireplace or a stove. I never had the novel experience of living by a fireplace, for my parents had a stove at the time my memory began. A Premium stove, I think it was called, and I well remember spelling out the name of the maker, "Woodruff", and the place where it was made, Cincinnati, Ohio. A hole for the stove pipe was cut through the upper floor and the roof and large nails were driven in the edges of the boards to prevent the pipe from getting too close to the wood and causing a blaze. It seems strange that this did not often occur, for in cold weather the stove was frequently red hot. Rain and snow came through the hole in the roof and the water ran down the pipe making it red with rust. That was before the days of Rising Sun Stove Polish.

In homes where a fireplace was built it was usually placed in the middle of one end of the room with stone for the back wall, jambs, and hearthstone. Some fireplaces were so large that a log four feet long could

be placed in them. This back log was sometimes eighteen inches thick.

The walls of the fireplace were gradually drawn in to make a throat, then the chimney built up. This "chimbly", as many called it, was commonly built of sticks and thoroughly daubed inside and out with mud. Upon the crane which extended over the fire was hung the kettle or the big black three-legged pot in which dinner was cooked.

In the pioneer home of a newly married couple, much of the furniture was probably handmade. Some pieces, such as a bedstead, a chair or two, maybe a half dozen chairs, a bureau, or a chest, may have been brought with them, a gift from father and mother. Very seldom indeed did a newly married pair possess all of these things at first.

A cupboard of those times frequently consisted of a board set on end the required distance from the corner to allow the length of shelf room desired. Cleats were nailed to this board and to the log wall. On these were placed boards for shelves, and a small strip nailed along the back edge of each shelf made a plate rail. The plates and platters, if the happy housewife possessed a platter, were set on edge against this plate rail and rested against the wall, each plate being slipped a little behind the one before it, their shining cleanness making a rather pleasant decoration. Other dishes were set on the shelf in front of these, the tea

cups and saucers being arranged in a pile, three cups turned on edge in each pile of three saucers. Usually they were placed on the table in the same way until the coffee or tea was poured.

Up to about the height of a table the cupboard was wider than the upper part, so that the shelves were deeper. Pots, pans, and kettles were kept below, while "victuals", such as were not stored in the cellar, were kept on the upper shelf of this lower part of the cupboard. A curtain, usually of calico, was hung to the edge of the top wide shelf, hiding the contents from view.

A table had to be made of whatever materials were available. Perhaps a slab split from a large log, with legs driven into holes bored in the underside, was the best that could be obtained. With boards, either pine, oak, or walnut, an "elegant" cross-legged table could be constructed.

Fortunate young wives might have brought one or two tablecloths from their mother's supply of home-made linen. But these had to be carefully cared for until flax could be raised and prepared for the loom, or more cloth brought from the East. Consequently the dinners are served, for the most part, on the clean polished boards.

All of the family sewing in those times was done by the women, be it a heavy overcoat or the wardrobe of the tiniest babe, a wedding dress or a shroud. Stock-

ings, socks, and mittens were knit at home. For many years there were no looms in the new country for weaving linen or linsey-woolsey, as the cloth with linen warp and wool woof was called. There were no carpet looms. Rugs were sometimes made by braiding three strands of rags, cut or torn rather coarser than for carpet. These long braids were sewed together into a round or oval rug. But most homes had no carpet of any kind, so no one felt "out of fashion" with the bare floor scrubbed clean.

The windows were often uncurtained. After a time, paper shades, or "blinds", were common. These were made of heavy paper, mostly green in color, and decorated with gaudy-colored birds and flowers and trees. They were tacked to a strip of wood at each end, and the top one nailed to the window frame. A string was passed over the top in such a manner that the lower end of the "blind" could be rolled to the desired height and the cord tied to hold it.

For many years no home, however wealthy the owner or whether in country or city, had screens at the doors or windows. Yet flies were few in homes where neatness and order reigned, all eatables being put away as soon as the meal was finished and everything washed up at once.

Once a week at least, windows were washed and all "woodwork" and furniture rubbed or washed clean of every speck and finger mark. The floors were

scrubbed with home-made soft soap and sand until, as I have heard said of many a woman, "Her floors are clean enough to eat off of." I think as a rule houses were really cleaner then than they are now with all of our modern furnishings, carpets, rugs, upholstery, and hangings to catch dust and lint. Then there were few carpets and little furniture except table, cupboard, chairs, and beds. With a pretty thorough weekly house-cleaning, everything was spick and span.

After lime was available, the walls were white-washed every spring and sometimes in the fall also. What a sweet clean smell it gave the room! On a bright morning the bedding, table, chairs, and other furniture were carried out doors. During breakfast, or perhaps the day before, the lime had been slacked. This was done by putting the dark-colored, kiln-burned limestone into an iron pot or some such vessel and pouring water on it. Hot water would start the process quicker than cold but either would soon make the contents bubble and boil. Setting out doors on the ground, with no fire near it, the powdered lime heated and kept boiling until it became a smooth, snowy white mass which could be thinned to the proper consistency to apply to the walls.

The lime having been slacked, the room emptied, and the housewife arrayed in an old dress with a cloth pinned over her hair, everything was ready for the whitewashing. This was often done with an old

broom, especially on log walls, but usually a special whitewash brush was preferred. A woman who had no brush of her own would send the children two or three miles to get one from a neighbor. An expert did not splash the floor and woodwork very badly, but when the whitewashing was done the windows had to be washed, the floor scrubbed, and the furniture carried in again. By night everything was neat and a steaming supper was on the table. Housecleaning began and finished on the same day.

SUSAN I. DUBELL