

XXII. PIONEER LOG CABINS.

The first real emigration to Marshall county began in the early spring of 1836. Many of those who came early, following the customs of the Indians, built temporary domiciles of poles and bark, similar to wigwams, into which they moved their household effects, and lived after a fashion, until log cabins of more pretentious designs could be erected.

In a discussion on the subject a number of years ago between two of the "oldest inhabitants," it was quite satisfactorily settled that the first log cabin built in the county was erected by Abel C. Hickman on the Michigan road, two and a half miles south of Argos. It was built of rough, unhewn logs, covered with clapboards, had an outside chimney made of sticks and "daubed" with mud.

It wasn't a very palatial residence, but it was fitted and furnished so as to keep out the wet and cold, and was considerable of an improvement over the Indian wigwams in the neighborhood.

At that time the Michigan road was not passable. The contractors had

only commenced opening the road and only in patches could it be traveled over, and there was little or no travel in either direction here at that time. Mr. Hickman cleared off a small patch of ground near his cabin, on which he raised vegetables in sufficient quantities to supply the wants of his little family.

There wasn't a great deal of comfort living there at that time. For weeks at a time no human being would be seen. Wild animals of almost every kind were numerous, and it was no trick at all for Mr. Hickman to take his trusty rifle down out of the pegs from over the door and kill a deer, turkey or other animal in an hour or two sufficient to supply food for days at a time.

At night, from the time the sun went down over the treetops until it came up again in the morning, the wolves made the night hideous with their barking and yelping. When morning came they secreted themselves in their dens and hiding places, and during daytime seldom was one seen. In that region and for a few miles northwest all along down Wolf creek, which took its rise not far from here in Tippecanoe township, wolves were as thick as fleas on a dog's back. It passes through a portion of Walnut and Green townships and empties into Yellow river near the northeast corner of Union township. It is skirted for some distance with broken lowlands, marshes, cat swamps, etc., and was a safe and sure retreat for wild animals of all kinds. Black wolves were numerous from one end of the creek to the other, and from this fact it took its name. The Indians called it Mack-kah-tah- mo-may, the Indian name for black wolf. In 1835, when the lands were made subject to entry, Mr. Hickman secured a piece of land and moved off west of the road to the farm owned by Adam Bixel. Here he erected another log cabin of a more pretentious order of architecture, taking the trouble to hew the logs and otherwise adorn it in more modern style. "

Here, according to the best authority, the first society for religious worship was organized by an itinerant preacher of the Methodist Episcopal church by the name of Owens. Here the society continued to meet for several years, until 1844 ; it is stated by the same authority, a house of worship, or a "meeting house," as it was called, was built on this farm, being the first building exclusively for church purposes erected in the county.

During the year 1835-6 there was quite an addition to the population. The first thing the newcomer had to do was to select and enter a piece of land, decide on a building location, and without unnecessary delay erect a cabin in which to live. There was no lumber or brick here at that time, and the only material out of which these dwellings could be built was logs chopped from the trees. Axes, adzes, cross-cut saws, hatchets, augers and drawing knives were the implements used in their construction. In the earlier cabins such articles as nails, door hinges and iron latches or window glass were not known. Everything was made out of wood.

He who had decided to build a cabin ground his ax, went to the woods and, having selected trees of the proper size, proceeded to chop them down. He measured off the length of the logs according to the size the house was to be, and cut an equal number for the sides and ends. Of course, a yoke of oxen was necessary to haul the logs in place, and men enough to assist in raising them into the building, so the neighbors were invited, and one of

brought along Broad and Berry, and in a few hours a cabin in the had been erected. The rafters on which the roof was to be were made of small poles fastened to the top logs and the gable rafter by means of wooden pins driven into holes bored with an auger. The roof was of clapboards. These were generally "rived Out" of oak logs sawed the proper length with a cross-cut saw. A maul and wedge were used to split it into small blocks, after which a "fro" and mallet properly applied by the "horny-handed son of toil" produced a fair substitute for shingles that came into use later. These clapboards were fastened on by binding them down with heavy poles laid on them along the where they were joined together.

Four or five feet in length of as many logs at one end were cut out for a fireplace, which was walled up outside with niggerhead stone and plastered over with mud. The chimney built of small sticks was continued a foot or two above the top of the house. At one side a door was cut out, in the same way, and a door made out of hewn poplar timber, fastened together with oak pins was hung on wooden pegs with rawhide straps. The latch was of wood which was fastened in the inside of a slot. A leather string attached to the latch on the inside hung through a hole on the outside. To latch the door from without all that was necessary was to pull the string, the latch would be raised out of its socket, and the door swung open. Locks had not reached this part of the country at that time. There was no need of them, anyhow. There were no housebreakers then, probably because there wasn't anything in the houses worth carrying off. A window was cut out near the door. and, prior to the advent of glass, greased paper or white muslin served to admit all the light that was deemed necessary. The floor was made of puncheons hewn out of small poplar logs. As a general thing they were a little rough, but they served to keep the pioneer feet off of the ground. There were no brussels carpets in the market then, and so a split broom made out of a small hickory sapling and some soft soap and water vigorously applied served to keep it reasonably clean. The furniture was scanty and was of the most primitive kind. Bedsteads, tables, stands, benches, chairs, shelves, etc., were made by hand "on the spot," by the man of the house. Bed clothing, cooking utensils and dishes had mostly been brought with the emigrants. In case of a young married couple, the parents of the bride and groom usually set them up in housekeeping by dividing with them their household goods. A few years later, after the boys and girls grew up, and the "courting" had been gone through with and the marriage ceremony had been performed, the young people moved into and began housekeeping in apartments very similar to the one above described.

The household furniture and equipments, except such as the pioneers had brought with them, were primitive and rude in the extreme. The following is one among many plans for Constructing beds which was common in those days: "Holes were bored in a log of the wall at the proper height from the floor, and into these sticks were driven horizontally, the other ends being supported by upright stakes or posts. Upon the framework thus provided was woven a bottom of withes or bark or deerskin thongs, which formed a support for the bedding. Privacy was sometimes secured by making the outer supporting posts high enough to be furnished with a concealing curtain.

Hooks on which to hang clothes or other articles were fashioned from the forked or crooked branches of trees, and forked sticks with the addition of pins inserted in the longer arm made pothooks which were caught over a pole or crosstree that was fixed in the fireplace a safe distance above the fire, the pots being hung on the pins. An improvement on these was the "trammel hook," formed of a flat bar of iron hooked at one end, while at the other an adjustable hook could be raised or lowered as desired and secured by means of an iron pin inserted in the holes that were drilled along the bar. With the advent of brick chimneys came swinging cranes of iron. These set in iron eyes imbedded in the masonry, could be turned freely, the long arm carrying the pots out over the hearth when desired.

The common cooking utensils were first of all the rotund bulbous iron pot constructed with a flare at the top so the lid would sit in safely. And then there was the iron oven for baking pone, not forgetting the long handled frying pan. The baking oven was a vessel of perhaps three or four inches deep set on legs and provided with an iron lid turned up around the edge. In it the thick loaf of corn bread was baked by setting it on a bed of coals with more coals piled upon the lid. Many who read this will call to mind the long thin slices of corn pone, heavy and clammy, and the bowl of sweet milk which was frequently all one had for the "frugal meal".

In this same iron kettle was also stirred up and cooked the pot of cornmeal mush, which with the fresh milk from the family cow was made to satisfy the evening repast.

The "johnnycake" board was also one of the most important cooking utensils belonging to the kitchen department of the old log cabin. It was usually made out of an oak clapboard, the sides dressed smooth with a drawing knife and the ends rounded. Cornmeal was made into dough and spread on one side of the board and smoothed along the sides and ends. It was then set up before the log fire close enough so the heat would gradually bake, but not burn it. It was allowed to remain there until it was browned. When eaten warm with nice fresh butter and sweet milk it was a dish that a king might relish.

As time wore on other devices were invented, among which the "reflector" oven was considered among the greatest. This utensil consisted of a light iron frame, two or three feet in length, mounted upon short legs, to hold the baking and roasting pans. To the back part of this frame a flaring top was attached by hinges, so that it might be turned back when the cooking needed attention. The sides were also enclosed. This flaring top and sides, made of bright tin, presented a large opening toward the open fire which was supplemented by a bed of live coals drawn out upon the hearth and from the hood, sides and back of the tin the heat was reflected down upon the cooking. It served its purpose well, and surely no better light biscuits, bread, cakes or pies have ever been eaten anywhere than those our mothers used to bake in the old "reflectors" upon the hearth of the old log cabin.

When the cook stove made its way into the early homes of the pioneers it was hailed with delight by a majority of the housewives because it afforded such great relief to their faces, hands and arms, that had been so

blistered by the great open fires, but some adhered to the fireplace, old utensils and the old cooking methods as long as they lived.

A many of the more prosperous families used what was called the ovens." These were made of small boulders or bricks and mortar, else of tough clay, wrought and beaten into shape and burned by slow built within. They were usually set upon wooden platforms away from house by reason of danger from fire, and were protected by a shed. They principally used in the summertime. In appearance they were rounded not unlike the old-fashioned beehive. The fire was built in them raked out, and the baking set upon the floor, the body of the oven enough heat to do the cooking.

The woodenware of the household was often made by the pioneer himself. Trays, large and small, were made from the soft poplar, buckeye and these took the place of most of the present-day tin and crockery ware. The churn was sometimes a mere trough and paddle.

The hominy pestle was a solid beech or maple stump with a bowl-shaped cavity burned in the top to hold the grain while being pounded, and a similar stump cut as smooth as possible made the chopping block for meat. The rude trough hollowed out from a short log split in half, that was used to catch sap from the sugar trees, is still a familiar relic from the olden time.

For drinking and dipping vessels," it has been well said, "the common article was the gourd - one of the most adaptable and convenient gifts of nature to man. In an age when manufactured conveniences were hard to get the gourd was a boon, and in every cabin home it played a conspicuous part. Of many sizes and shapes, it served, when properly scraped out and cleaned, a variety of purposes. It hung as a dipper beside the spring or the well with its long sweep, and in the same capacity it was a companion to the cider barrel and whisky jug ; it was used at the table, at the lye kettle or at the sugar camp, for soup, soap or sap; a large one properly halved made a wash pan or a milk pan, or, cut with an opening, it became a receptacle for the storing of divers things; a small one was used by the grandmother to darn the family socks over; the boy used one to carry his bait in when he went fishing, and the baby used another for a rattle. A veritable treasure was the gourd, and it should be celebrated in song."

There were various curious articles used in the pioneer homes that are now quite obsolete. Among these we find metal warming pans which, filled with live embers, were used to warm the sheets of a cold night; lanterns of perforated tin; tinder boxes with their contents of flint, steel, little powder horns and "punk" from rotten logs used to start the fires; candle molds with balls of cotton wicking; long tin horns and conch shells to call the men to dinner, and many other conveniences now considered quaint and sought for relics.

One important piece of pioneer furniture, if so it might be called, unknown to the modern house, was the loom, which in the days of home-made fabrics was almost indispensable. The space this ponderous machine occupied in the small cabin made it a serious encumbrance, and hence a period would be devoted to the family weaving, after which the loom could be taken apart and stowed away, unless, as sometimes happened, one had a separate loom room. The excellence of the work done upon these rude, homemade implements is a matter of wonder now, as one examines preserved specimens.

Not only have those blankets, jeans and various cloths a surpassing durability, but some fabrics, such as coverlets and curtains, exhibit a remarkable artistic taste and skill, both in the dyeing of the yarns and the weaving of complicated figures.

Complimentary to the loom were the spinning wheels - a big one for the wool and the familiar little one for the flax. The skillful use of these was a part of the education of every girl and some of the boys, and in the ears of many an old man and woman the resonant hum of it still lingers as the sweet music of a day that is past.