

XXXI. PRIMITIVE BRICK MAKING.

But there were other things than those which imply the drudgery of farming connected with farm life. Those who tell of the pioneer days are too apt to present the dark side of the picture, the toils and privations and sufferings that all the early settlers were compelled, by force of circumstances, to endure.

As years went by, other industries than chopping down trees and plowing up and planting the ground, and cultivating and harvesting the crops occupied the time of the people, and so it came to pass in the course of time that many diversified occupations sprang up that furnished less laborious, and more congenial employment to many who were unable to do the work required in clearing and preparing the thick timbered lands for cultivation.

Brick making was a necessary industry that was early established in two or three places in the county. The first one that is remembered was located on what is now the Berlin farm, a short distance north of the present village of Rutland. All that region was settled as far back as 1836, and among the first inhabitants were Platt B. Dickson, and his sons, John, Bayless, Elias and Hugh; William Thompson, and his sons, Lewis, John, Eleazer and Ed; Thomas and Samuel McDonald; Daniel Hulst and his sons, Joseph and Uriah; Tivis Porter, Vincent Brownlee, David Voreis, Hiram Lish and several others. The brick yard referred to was on the farm of Platt Dickson, to the west, in front of and across the road from the present residence of Thomas Berlin. A clay bank had been opened a mile west on the farm of John Dickson, out of which it was found fairly good bricks could be made. In excavating in this clay bank, when at a depth of ten or twelve feet from the surface, in breaking off a large lump of firmly cemented clay, a tree toad was found solidly embedded therein. It was removed from its imprisonment and placed on a board in the warm sun. In less than half an hour it came to life and hopped off as lively as if nothing had happened. How it came to be there and how it could retain the life principle, possibly for ages, and then again come to active life, is a conundrum which is respectfully referred to those who know more about it than the writer.

The writer has a very vivid recollection of that primitive brick yard. He was quite young, only having just entered into his teens, and his employment there off bearing bricks was the first labor, other than doing "chores" around the house, he had ever performed. About an eighth of an acre of ground was scraped off until the soil was removed, and leveled down to the smoothness of a floor, when it was given a light coating of fine dry sand. The hollow trunk of a large size beech tree, about ten feet in length, sawed square off at each end, was procured. A shaft was placed in the center; fastened at the top in a hole made in two cross-bars, and at the bottom in a wooden socket. At the bottom of this shaft were four iron paddles shaped something like the screw paddles of a steam propeller, for the purpose of grinding the clay into mortar. On the top was fastened a crooked beam, which projected out and down a sufficient distance so that a horse could be handily hitched to the lower end. Into this beech gum hopper the dry clay was thrown until it was partly full when water was thrown upon it to give it the proper consistency, when the horse was

started to grinding. A square hole and a pit was made at the bottom, into which the mud was forced, and from here it was taken on wheelbarrows up a gang plank, and dumped on a large square table, where it was worked up by the molder into bricks and carried off in molds by the "off-bearer" and laid down on the yard in rows to dry. It was considerable of a trick to fill the molds properly and expeditiously. An expert could usually fill up the molds as rapidly as three or four men or boys could carry them away and deposit them on the yard. Each mold was made to hold three bricks, the weight of which would probably, be six or eight pounds. The molder stood at the table, mud before him, and a pile of sand near by. Before laying his mold on the table the off bearer sanded it by dipping it into water and then into a box containing dry sand, so that the mud would not stick to the molds. The molder cut off with his right hand a chunk of mud which he supposed was sufficiently large to fill one apartment of the mold, rolled it in the sand to the shape of an old-fashioned "corn dodger," and slammed it into the mold with sufficient force to fill the apartment and make a perfect brick. The other apartments were filled in the same way. The surplus mud on top was cut off with a sharp, smooth wooden knife, and the mold was ready to be carried off by the off-bearer. The first were carried to the farthest part of the yard, the mold laid down on the lower edge and, with a quick motion, turned over and the mold removed, leaving the bricks to their fate. And so the process was continued until the yard was full of green bricks laid out in the sun to dry.

It was a very easy thing for one who couldn't get the hang of off bearing to spoil more bricks in a day than his wages would come to. If he laid his mold down too close, he was sure to spoil the bricks in front by turning his mold over on them, and mashing them out of shape. In that event they had to be removed, and that took time in addition to spoiling them. If the weather was warm and dry, a yard full of bricks could be made and taken care of in two or three days. After drying the first day, all hands had to help turn them bottom side up to the sun to dry. Sometimes a gathering cloud would indicate a sudden rain and then everyone went to work carrying in the dry or partly dry bricks and piling them up in ricks under sheds built for that purpose. Frequently the rain would come up so suddenly that a whole yard full of green bricks would be drenched and entirely spoiled. Then the mud would have to be shoveled up and carted away to the dump, the yard scraped off and resanded, and work commenced again as before.

The most difficult task in connection with brick making in the olden times, and even yet, was placing them in a kiln in such a way as to permit the heat to penetrate all parts of the structure so that the bricks would be burned evenly throughout. Arches every three or four feet, extending through the kiln from one side to the other, into which it was necessary that fire should be kept constantly burning, had to be carefully constructed, and after the whole was completed it was tightly incased with bricks, and plastered over with soft mud all around. Air holes, and smoke holes were made in the top to regulate the smoke and heat, and when all was ready, fire was started in the arches, and the burning process was

begun. The heating was gradual at first, until the bricks were sufficiently hot to prevent breaking or cracking. Then the poplar rails and kindling of various kinds were shoved into the arches the full length and everything was kept red hot for a fortnight when the fires were allowed to go gradually out, and the burning process was at an end.

It was necessary to keep the fires up night and day, and so the brick yard hands were divided off into two gangs, one to work in the day time, and the other to worry through the night. If the fires were allowed to go down, the effect was to injure the quality of the bricks; or, if they were made too hot, it was liable to result in making clinkers of those near the arches, twist them out of shape, and thus render them unfit for use.

The writer was left in charge of the red hot kiln one night, and directed to keep the fires going steadily. Between two and three o'clock in the morning, overcome by exhaustion and many nights of broken rest, he sat down by a post near one of the arches, and in spite of every effort to keep awake he dropped over, sound asleep. As good luck would have it, one of the proprietors, living near by, happening to awaken earlier than usual, came on the scene in time to prevent the fires from going out. When the sleeper awoke about seven o'clock in the morning, he found himself lying flat on the ground, his trousers legs full of straw, and a bouquet of dog fennel adorning his manly bosom. To say that he was frightened on account of the probability that, by his failure to keep awake, he had more than likely ruined the whole summer's work, and that he was ashamed of the sorry plight in which he found himself, would not half express the utter ridiculousness of the situation. After ascertaining, however, that no serious damage had been done, he gradually regained his equilibrium and all went well thereafter.

Those who composed the night forces during the burning of kilns were generally reinforced during the evenings by some of the neighboring boys, and a detail was usually designated to forage the chicken roosts, apple and peach orchards, corn fields and melon patches in the neighborhood, for provender for the night's meal. If the family dog did not make too much noise and arouse the lord of the household, but little trouble was ever encountered in securing everything necessary to provide a banquet fit for a king.

It sometimes happened, however, that old bowser, a little more wakeful than usual, kept up such a yelping as to arouse the man of the house, and in that event the forgers took to their heels and ran away as fast as ever they could go. They didn't always get away without the discovery being made as to who they were, and in that event it didn't require much of an effort to effect a compromise, it being generally understood in all the country round about that the brick burners were privileged characters. On one occasion the dog caught the forager by the coat tail just as he was climbing the fence. The struggle was sharp, short and decisive. The forager tore himself loose and made his escape, but left a large section of his coat tail on the other side of the fence.

The chickens were killed, dressed and roasted by holding them on sharp sticks before the red hot arches, and those who were detailed to do the cooking soon learned the art of roasting them to perfection, and, with the other articles which went to make up the bill of fare, a supper was spread

such as is seldom provided in these days of advanced civilization. One that is remembered consisted of roast chicken, roast squirrel, baked sweet and Irish potatoes, old-fashioned corn pone, baked green apples, "roastin ears," new cucumbers and onions, sweet milk, new sweet cider, hot coffee, cherry pie and fried cakes. After that came the soothing corncob pipe and the delicious chew of pigtail tobacco. More relishable banquets at \$50 a plate may have been partaken of at Delmonico's, but it wouldn't be believed by any of those who sat down to that midnight banquet nearly fifty years ago.

It was while here that the typhoid fever prostrated the writer to such an extent as to come near sending him to the sweet by and by. The summer was hot, the surface water full of malaria, and medicines and medical aid was almost impossible to be had. Dr. White, a long, lean, lank, cadaverous looking specimen of the genus homo, who had but recently located in Plymouth, was sent for. Of course he felt the pulse, looked at the tongue, and the first thing- he did was to administer a dose of "calomel and jollup," strong enough to have killed an elephant. He said it was intended to do divers and sundry mysterious and marvelous things. It was to act as a purgative, and by producing salivation, would break up the disease and cure the patient. It did pretty much everything he said it would do, and a good many more, except cure him. It salivated him beautifully. His gums became a canker sore; his teeth loosened, and some of them fell out; he was parched and burning up with fever, but not a drop of water would they give him to drink. For several days his life hung on a very slender thread, al1fl the doctor, looking wise and dignified, said he didn't believe he would ever recover. One night, however, after he had gained a little strength in spite of the doctor, when the watcher had dropped to sleep from exhaustion, he managed, in some way, to get out of bed and crawl to the water pail where he drank three or four tin Cupfuls of water as fast as he could pour them down. When the watcher awoke and found what had happened, he aroused the household and immediately sent for the man of the saddle-bags, supposing, of course, that the patient would die within a short time. But he didn't. From that very minute the fever was broken, and in less than a week he was up and around, and in a short rime had fully recovered.