

HOUSE WARMING – MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

“I will proceed to state the usual manner of settling a young couple in the world. A spot was selected on a piece of land of one of the parents for their habitation. A say was appointed, shortly after the marriage, for commencing the work of building their cabin. The fatigue party consisted of choppers, whose business it was to fell the trees and cut them off at proper lengths. A man with a team for hauling them to the place, and arranging them, properly assorted, at the sides and ends of the building; a carpenter, if such he might be called, whose business it was to search the woods for a proper tree for making clap-boards for the roof. The tree for this purpose must be straight-grained, and from three to four feet in diameter. The boards were split four feet long, with a large furrow, and as wide as the timber would allow. They were used without shaving. Another division were employed in getting puncheons for the floor of the cabin; this was done by splitting trees about eighteen inches in diameter, and hewing the faces of them with a broad-axe. They were half the length of the floor they were intended to make.

“The materials for the cabin were mostly prepared on the first day, and sometimes the foundation laid in the evening. The second day was allotted for the raising.

“In the morning of the next day the neighbors collected for the raising. The first thing to be done was the election of four corner men, whose business it was to notch and place the logs. The rest of the company furnished then the timbers. In the meantime the boards and puncheons were collecting for the floor and roof, so that by the time the cabin was a few rounds high the sleepers and floor began to be laid. The door was made by sawing or cutting the logs in on one side, so as to make an opening about three feet wide. This opening was secured by upright pieces of timber, about three inches thick, through which holes were bored into the ends of the logs for the purpose of pinning them fast. A similar opening, but wider, was made at the end for the chimney. This was built of logs, and made large to admit of a back and jams of stone. At the square two end logs projected a foot or eighteen inches beyond the wall to receive the butting poles, as they were called, against which the first row of clapboards were supported. The roof was formed by making the end logs shorter, until a single log formed the comb of the roof; on these logs the clapboards were placed, the ranges of them lapping some distance over those next below them, and kept in their places by logs placed proper distances upon them.

“The roof, and sometimes the floor, were furnished on the same day of the raising. A third day was commonly spent by a few carpenters in leveling off the floor, making a clapboard door and a table. This was made of a split slab, and supported by four round legs set in auger holes. Some three-legged stools were made in the same manner. Some pins stuck in the logs as the back of the house supported some clapboards, which served for shelves for the table furniture. A single fork, placed with its lower end in a hole in the floor, and the upper end fastened to a joist, served for a bedstead by placing a pole in the fork, with one end through a crack between the logs of the wall. This front pole was crossed by a shorter one with the fork, with its outer end through the another crack. From the front pole, through a crack between the logs of the end of the house, the boards were put on which formed the bottom of the bed. Sometimes other poles were pinned to the fork, a little distance above these, for the purpose of supporting the front and foot of the bed, while the walls were the supports of its back and its head. A few pegs around the walls, for a display of the coats of the women and the hunting shirts of the men, and two small forks of buck-horns to a joist for the rifle and shot-pouch completed the carpenter’s work.

“In the meantime the masons were at work. With the heart pieces of timber of which the clapboards were made they made billets for chunking up the cracks between the logs of the cabin and chimney; a large bed of mortar was made for daubing up those cracks; a few stones formed the back and jam of the chimney.

“The cabin being finished, the ceremony of the housewarming took place before the young couple were permitted to move into it.

“The house-warming was a dance of the whole night’s continuance, made up of the relations of the bride and groom, and their neighbors. On the day following the young couple took possession of their new mansion.”