

WOMEN AND THEIR HOMES - PART II

In our last article we went back in time and described how women, probably mothers, endured their times of preparing meals for their families.

Assuming that women and mothers are considered the caretaker of their homes of today's time and are proud of their homes and how they keep them, I would then ask all of us to look back into history and think about the homes of women and mothers then.

If the house of the pioneer was rough and crude, its furniture was in keeping with it. Everything was homemade, direct from the forest. Beds were made by utilizing one corner of the room. Holes were bored into two logs of the wall at the proper height from the floor, and into them sticks were driven horizontally and at right angles, the ends of the sticks being supported by an upright stake driven into the floor. Sometimes cracks in the walls obviated the necessity of boring holes. Upon the framework was woven a bottom of withes, bark or deer-skin thongs to support the bedding, crude framework often made of brush covered with skins of animals.

On this bed was generally found the proverbial three-figured "coverlid" of Carolina, Tennessee, or other states from which they had come. Any deficiency in bed clothing was supplied by bear and deer skins.

Guests were usually given this bed, while the family provided for themselves in another corner of the room, or in the loft. When many guests were on hand at once all slept in the center of the floor. When bedtime came, the men were requested to step out of doors while the women spread out a broad bed upon the mid-floor and put themselves to bed. Then the men were called in. The sleepers were generally so crowded that they had to sleep "spoon fashion" and it was necessary for all to turn together. When anyone wished to turn over he would say "spoon" and the whole company would turn at once.

Three legged stools often took the place of chairs. Some of the more prosperous settlers possessed hickory chairs with splint bottoms, but stools and benches rived out of logs ordinarily served for seats, especially at the table. Even the backlog of the fireplace served as a seat. Tables were often made in the same way as the beds-in a corner of the room. For tops they had thick boards made smooth with an axe. Over the cabin door was the gun rack, made usually by fastening prongs of deer antlers into augur holes, or simply of forked cleats. On this the trusty rifle and powder horn rested. Hooks on which to hang clothes and other articles were fashioned from the forked or crooked branches of trees.

Above the fireplace was a shelf called the mantel which was often colored deep blue with dye of indigo. On this stood a candle stick or lamp, some table ware, possibly an old clock, and perhaps a few books. Often in the summer two or three crocks planted with morning glories were placed on the shelf, and when the vines fell downward, their leaves and blossoms hid the old fireplace as effectually as a curtain would have concealed it.

In the fireplace was an old fashioned crane, sometimes of wood, sometimes of iron, and pots were hung for cooking on them. Forked sticks with pins stuck into the longer arms made pot hooks, which were caught over a pole or "cross tree" that was fixed in the fireplace a safe distance above the fire, the pots

being hung on the pins. An improvement on this was the “trammel hook” formed of flat bar iron hooked at the 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 holes that were drilled along the bar.

With the advent of the brick chimneys, of course came the swinging iron cranes. These, set in iron eyes embedded in the masonry, could be turned freely, the long arms carrying the pots out over the hearth when desired.

Each of the four corners of the one-room (early houses/cabins) houses was usually occupied by some essential article of furniture. In one corner stood the large bed for the old folks, with a trundle bed under it for the children; in another, the heavy table, generally the only one on the house; in another the rough cupboard which contained the tableware, consisting of a few cups, saucers and plates standing on edge against the back to make the best display possible; in the fourth, the old fashioned spinning wheel, whose continual hum made music for the busy family.

It was good to live in one of these simple homes. If the house itself was limited in its capacity, the hearts of the occupants were large and kindly. The following quotation fitly describes them: “These simple cabins were inhabited by a kind and true hearted people. They were strangers to mock modesty, and the traveler, seeking lodging for the night, or desirous of spending a few days in the community, if willing to accept the rude offering was always welcome. As to how they were disposed of at night the reader cannot easily imagine; for, as described a single room was made to answer for kitchen, dining room, bedroom, sitting-room and parlor, and many families consisted of six or eight members.”

In conclusion of this story think about these facts. There was no electricity, no phone, no restrooms, no running water, no computers, no cell phones, no cars or trucks, not many neighbors close by, no big schools or big churches, no concrete roads—nothing which we all take for granted in our today's time.

Yet our great-grand mothers and great-great-grandmothers made their homes ones to be proud of.

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