

Pioneer Manner of Living

The manner of life of the pioneer is hard to conceive of at the present. It is as if he lived a millennium ago. He came into the new country walking, riding, in a sled, or with a wagon or cart. He had few things to bring along with him. Our first settlers came mostly from Virginia and the Carolinas. Some came directly from Europe. The racial stock was mostly Irish and Scotch, with a sprinkling of English, Welsh, German, French, and some others.

The first thing on arrival was to clear a piece of land, canebrakes covering the richer land, and then to build a house. The usual house was built of logs, hewn with a common ax, although a broad ax was not unknown. The floors were made of puncheons, except where the flooring, joist, wallplates, and doors were made with a rip-saw, a man being under the log, another man above, with a saw, not unlike a cross-cut saw, the man above lifting the saw, the one below doing the sawing. The first frame house in Hickory Valley was built by William Wallace in 1824. It collapsed in 1932. Tables, stools for chairs, cupboards, benches, etc., were hewn puncheons. Bedsteads were hewn posts with railings of wood and corded each way, from end to end and side to side, with ropes made of flax, cotton, or the inner bark of the linn tree. The fire-place was large, usually six or more feet wide, made of rock where the fire was located and with logs in the outside, six or eight feet high, then sticks and clay the rest of the way to the top. So large were some of these that panthers tried to come down the chimneys, being prevented often by the wife burning the straw in a bed tick. There were usually two doors and a window sixteen by eighteen inches each way opening into the chimney corner. One door was usually left open for light. Sometimes the window was covered with a greasy cloth or paper to admit the light. Sometimes the mattress was made of grass or leaves. The lights were made by grease lamps; but the most fancy ones were made in a kiln. Sometimes a saucer was used. Candles were also used, being run from tallow poured into a candle mould. A few near accidents happened when coal oil came into use, and a man attempted to burn it with a rag wick as in the case of the grease burner. Pine knots were sometimes used for making light.

The fire was well covered at night before retiring. If it went out, the man took a flint and struck fire on punk with a little powder on it, or he shot a cotton rage out of his gun, or flashed powder in the pan of his flint lock gun, or worse still, sent one of the children through a three or four-inch snow to borrow a chunk of fire from one of the neighbors two miles away. There was usually a pole across the fire-place three or four feet above the fire to which a potrack was hung. It had a hook at the bottom on which a pot could be hung and swung over the hottest of the fire for boiling. Not all families had chinaware dishes. Some had wooden plates, called "trenchers," wooden spoons, and knives made of steel, wood, or cane, and forks of cane. There were usually two butcher knives in each family, an ax, an

augar, chisel, saw and drawing knife. From the railings of the bed there hung a curtain of cloth, a frill, reaching to the floor. Under this bed were found boxes made of thin sheets of buckeye wood about eighteen inches tall and bottomed with the same material and fastened on with strings through holes. A large gourd, called a peck gourd, held the powder. In box or gourd was the knitting, for the women knit sox for the family, crochet needles, quilt pieces, and rags for patching. Medicine, such as blue mast, ipecac, sulphur, asafetida, - the latter two were often used in a little bag around the children's neck to prevent them from catching contagious diseases. Children were often made to eat sulphur and molasses for health, after molasses came into use. A good supply of herbs was dried and laid away. Over the fireplace was a stick or two placed horizontally for drying pumpkin, meat and the like. Meat was kept without salt until a salt spring was found. The meat was killed, cooled, washed, then dipped into hot water, hung over the fire and dried. Red corn cob ashes were used for soda.

The men cleared the land, broke it up with a bull tongue plow, or bullikin, which was a kind of a twisted shovel or a crude kind of turning plow. Those who had no horse dug up the land two feet across and planted the corn in the middle, then tended it with a hoe. The tinker came along before our country was very old and made the housewife pewter plates, dishes, basins, and spoons. If a man came with nothing, his neighbors supported him until he could raise a crop. If sick, they worked his corn. They had plenty to eat. Vegetables, tame or wild meat, honey from the woods, dried fruit and nuts for the children. Fruits rarely ever failed. Wild animals made their depredations on cattle, sheep, hogs, and poultry of the farmer, and some of them were dangerous to human life. Tomatoes were grown for their beauty, being planted in boxes, and were called love apples. They were supposed to be poison. Potatoes were kept in holes in the ground, sweet potatoes were kept in cellars. Turnips were kept in holes. Pumpkins, beans, apples, peaches, and pears were dried.

Woman's work was sometimes strenuous. Families were usually large. Those who claim that women killed themselves early by too profuse childbearing will have to go out of White County, TN for the facts. Numerous instances could be given, the tombstone record of the County being sufficient. A woman of White County, TN, Mrs. Seals, after bearing eleven children, was so old and emaciated over the ordeal that she could lift but two and one-half bushels of wheat onto her shoulder while standing in a half bushel measure. Women's work was cooking, caring for the children, making linen or cotton or woolen clothes for the whole family, spinning, weaving and making the clothes, knitting the socks of woolen yarns, and sometimes they worked in the fields. Then they would perhaps dance on a puncheon floor until midnight to the music of a gourd banjo and a gourd fiddle. The woman of that day needed no cosmetics to give her a glow of health. She dressed in clothes of her own making, she made her sundown's of oat straw, plaited four plait and sewed together, then the rims on each had a ribbon sewed to it, the ribbon then was drawn, bringing the rims down, and was tied under the chin. Men made moccasins, or shoes, the leather being tanned in a trough.

Their Sunday suits were made of linen, the flax being raised on the place, coat, vest, and pants being immaculately white. Their hats were of coon skin or fox skin, with the tail hanging behind, or, sometimes a fox tail was substituted for the coon tail, or, perhaps the man had a century hat made of buckeye splits.

Sometimes old men wore their hair bobbed and falling to their shoulders. They drank water from a gourd, out of a pail, a piggin being a miniature pail. A person could come to a home and stay all winter and on leaving would be asked to come again. Maple trees furnished the sugar. Women of the best type went barefoot to church, putting on their shoes just before arriving at the church. Roads were muddy and almost impassable half the time. Women wore their hair in a knot on the back of their head. A Grecian band was worn on the back and above the hips, a bundle making the dress at the hips out several inches at right angles to the body. They wore bonnets a foot and a half long, coming from the head at an angle of forty-five degrees. Then there were hoopskirts. It took only about twenty of them to fill a church. On getting into a carriage a woman pressed the hoops together on opposite sides until she could get in. An old settler described the hoopskirt as the "running gears of a partridge nest." It was common to see the best of women going barefooted at home. Women at home, if they wore headdress, wore common bonnets.

Ashes were poured into an ash hopper and lye leached from the ashes. Then the grease scraps were thrown into a kettle of lye and boiled at the time of a waning moon to prevent the soap from boiling over a frequent intervals. Soap made in this manner served for washing clothes, hands, and face. Women washed clothes under difficulties. A kettle in the open, smoke flying, children crying, because the oldest who cared for them was helping wash. Washing was done on a flatblock, which was a block of wood eighteen inches square set up on legs. The manner of washing was this, the clothes after being boiled were thrown out on this block and a child using a paddle beat the clothes until they were clean. An old song ran, "The devil's in women on wash-day."

Harness was made of raw hide, also bridles and clevises. Collars were made of platted shucks. The people cut their wheat with a sickle, a sharp hook cutting about an acre a day; then came the cradle with which a man could cut three or four acres a day. The wheat was treaded out with horses or oxen, then help up and poured while the wind blew the chaff out of the wheat. Sometimes they used a flail, which was a hickory pole beaten with an az eighteen inches or two feet from the large end to made that end work as if on hinges. With this they thrashed out the wheat. If the wind were not blowing, two men would take a sheet, a corner in each hand, holding their hands high then with one hand moving one corner and the other corner rapidly up and down the wheat was separated form the chaff. This was called, "winnowing." Cotton was usually hand-seeded and carded with a pair of hand cards. It was then spun, reeled, warped, and woven. Wool was used to make winter clothes. Negroes and poor whites wore clothes of tow. Men early wore leather breeches. While hunting

they wore a hunting shirt over their other clothes. While hunting they wore a hunting shirt over their other clothes. It was something like a night shirt. Corn was cultivated more with a hoe than with a plow. Midwives more than doctors attended childbirth. That there was a great deal of malpractice is pure assertion. A woman named Lydia Seals attended 1,753 cases without a mishap.

When company came, they usually came wagon load at a time, and usually stayed from Saturday evening until Monday morning. At bed time the men would go out for a walk while the women retired and blew out the lights, then the men came in and retired. Hogs were kept on the mast which never failed. One man located near the mountains at one time kept 400 head. It was necessary to take a trained dog along to round up the hogs. While the man approached the herd cautiously, the dog would sit about fifty yards away and the hogs would rally around the dog. This frequent round-up kept the hogs from going wild. In those days the customary price for hogs was two cents a pound, the owner often driving them fifty miles to market. Hogs were of the razor back variety and were not killed until they were two years old or over. A drove of hogs could be driven from two and a half to ten miles a day. The money of that day was often Spanish, Mexican, or English. People beat their corn into meal in a mortar or in a hollow rock, Indian fashion until a Mill was erected. Some times before corn became hard they grated the corn into meal with a grater made of a piece of tin. Turkeys were driven to market in droves of five hundred or a thousand, two or three men being required. Men often gathered corn in sleds, especially if the corn grew on a hillside. Gathering nuts was great sport for the children. Fighting was not uncommon, drinking being vastly more common, some fistfought encounters. Helpfulness was the golden rule. Corn huskings, log rollings, and house raisings were occasions when if you did not invite a neighbor, he regarded it as an insult. These were the great social occasions. Quiltings were often held by the ladies at the same time as the workings, then a social or dance was held at night, the champion lifter being lionized by the ladies.

Corn meal was baked in a skillet, oven, or on a board turned up to the fire. A cake cooked on such a board was called a johnny cake. Sometimes a hoe was used instead of a board. Such a cake was called a hoe cake. There was an old song of the time ridiculing a greenhorn coming courting which had two lines which ran thus, "The first thing he said when he sat down was, "Girls, I think your johnny cake is most too brown." A steer sold for ten dollars, a horse for fifty. Land of the best kind could be bought for one bit an acre. In 1840 one thousand acres of almost level land was offered for one horse. People bought their supplies from the states from which they came. Later from stores set up in the area.