

The Pioneer Log House in Kentucky

By

William J. Macintire



Kentucky Heritage Council
The State Historic Preservation Office

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Cover photograph: Cook's Cabin, early 19th Century, Franklin County.
Cover drawing, for "Pioneer Experience in Kentucky," 1998 State Fair Exhibit, by William Macintire.

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Design and Layout by Joseph E. Brent

Funded by The Kentucky Heritage Council

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Forward

The preservation of Kentucky's historic resources begins with research and an understanding of the important role historic buildings and sites play in helping us interpret our past. The Kentucky Heritage Council, the State's Historic Preservation Office, has been gathering information on Kentucky's historic resources for over 30 years, and currently has data on more than 50,000 sites in the Kentucky Historic Sites Survey. Many of the most significant sites have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Survey and the National Register serve as planning tools and as an archive of our architectural heritage. The Heritage Council is pleased to have an opportunity through this publication to make some of its research more available to the public.

This article grew from research conducted for the Pioneer Experience in Kentucky exhibit at the 1998 State Fair. With the theme of the fair focusing on the eighteenth century, a period from which so few buildings survive, we soon found it necessary to expand the data available in our survey files with some documentary research. Examining early descriptions of log cabins in such resources as pioneer narratives has broadened our understanding of the log architecture that survives to the present day, helping to round out the story of its origins and development. Our intent is for this booklet to serve as a companion volume to the recreated log cabin and the log architecture exhibit shown at the State Fair. Long after the Fair is over, we hope it will continue to provide a useful introduction to early Kentucky log houses.

David L. Morgan
Executive Director and
State Historic Preservation Officer

Frontispiece: Old Wilkerson Homestead, Hart County, Photograph Circa 1890-1900. The Wilkerson House is a mid-nineteenth century dogtrot.

Acknowledgments

This article would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of the staff members of the Heritage Council, especially David Morgan, Richard Jett, Julie Riesenweber, Marty Perry, Donna Coleman, David Pollack, and Joe Brent, who did the layout. Special thanks to Stephanie Darst with the State Fair Board, who organized the Pioneer Experience in Kentucky exhibit and edited drafts of this article. Thanks also to all the field workers who have documented Kentucky's historic buildings over the years, and to the owners of log houses who have so graciously provided access to their properties. Others who deserve credit for their assistance include the staff of the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, the Kentucky Historical Society, and the Kentucky Department of Parks. And, as always, thanks to Lori.



The "Old Brown Place," Early 19th Century, Hart County.



Staircase, Sullivan House, Franklin County, Circa 1810-1820. Note the chinking, plaster lath, and pegged door jamb. For another view of the Sullivan house, see figure 7.

Introduction

The log cabin is as much an image as it is a building. It evokes thoughts of maple syrup and the American frontier. It is an important setting in the stories of real and fictional people such as Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Boone, and Uncle Tom. Perhaps because of this, people give the log cabin a status no other type of house enjoys. Demolitions of 200-year-old houses suddenly stop when logs are discovered. The reality is more complex than the popular image of the log cabin in a small clearing. Log houses range from crude huts to fancy plantation houses. City houses, churches, jails, and courthouses were also built of logs. This essay addresses the complexities of the log cabin through a focus on the earliest log houses in Kentucky, and serves as an introduction to the origins, construction, forms, finish, and furnishing of log houses in the frontier and early statehood period, about 1770-1800.

Sources for the Study of Early Log Houses in Kentucky

Very few of the earliest log houses in Kentucky survive. The log houses we see now tend to be the best built ones, and those of later dates. Because house builders had long careers, and house types change slowly over time, later log buildings do offer us some information about the earlier houses. We can also learn more from archaeological investigations. Finally, we have documentary sources such as letters, drawings, contracts, and memoirs. A lot of research remains to be done, but with current knowledge, we do have some pretty clear ideas about the early log house.

The Origins of the Log House on the Kentucky Frontier

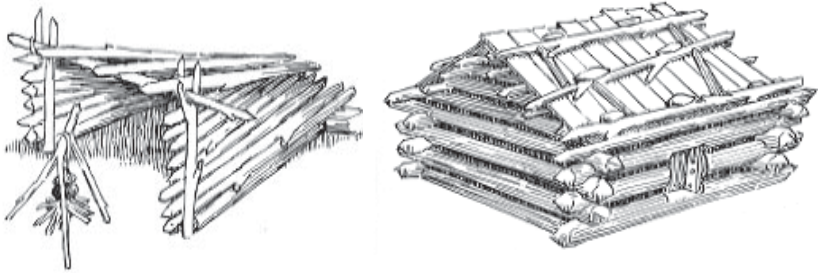
By the middle of the eighteenth century, the lack of available land in the colonies prompted people to look West towards territory occupied by Native Americans. Explorers began entering Kentucky in the 1750's, and by the late 1770's, European Americans, and to some extent, African Americans began moving to the area in large numbers. These colonists brought their ideas of what a house should

be. These ideas varied depending on their backgrounds. In a similar way, the immigrants who colonized America in the seventeenth century brought house concepts from their countries of origin with them to the New World. However, house types had already changed in the colonies as people adapted to their new surroundings. Swedes, Finns, Germans, and other Continental Europeans brought over log building technology. The English, who didn't build in log at home, quickly adopted the technique. Log building was well established by the time homesteaders began migrating to Kentucky in the 1770's-1790's, and was most common in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, the source regions of most of Kentucky's pioneers.

When they first arrived, most homesteaders kept their shelter expectations low. Establishing a farmstead on the frontier required a carefully planned and executed strategy. Building a fancy house was rarely the first thing they did. After arriving, preferably in the early spring, the pioneers began work to "improve" their land. The first task was to cut down trees, both to clear land and provide building materials. They chopped down the trees with axes (a vital tool) or *girdled* them (cutting a ring through the bark to kill the tree). Then there were fences to put up, fields to plow and plant, domestic animals to raise, and a house to build and furnish. The first dwelling on a site was often a simple lean-to or hut of stacked logs that could be partially dug into a hillside, or built quickly with a *post-in-the-ground* frame (figure 1a). Some of these structures may have been covered with bark or animal skins, taking cues from Native American dwellings. Homesteaders used such lean-tos for short periods while surveying or clearing land and building a better cabin. After they built a more substantial cabin, the old shelter could be dismantled or kept for an animal pen or storage shed.

What little we do know about the early temporary structures comes from brief descriptions in documentary records. These shelters are similar to those the first colonists built when they landed in coastal areas a century and a half earlier. William Sudduth, interviewed in the 1840's, remembered two such structures. The first "was a cabbinn raised & covered at Maysville without either being

chinked, daubed, or a fire place in it,” where the family stayed for a short time at their point of entry into Kentucky. This was probably much like the log cabin in figure 1b. The second building Sudduth describes is the “camp,” a lean-to structure typical of first shelters on a homestead, which he says was “about 8 feet wide and 10 feet deep, covered over with puncheons & built up on three sides with logs.” This was similar to the lean-to shown in (figure 1a). *Puncheons* are thick, hand-split and unfinished boards.



Figures 1a and 1b: Lean-to Cabin and Crude “Improvement” Cabin. The lean-to would be a typical temporary structure for a short stay while surveying land or while building a more substantial structure. The improvement cabin could serve for a longer stay, although as its name implies, it was sometimes built more for the purpose of staking a claim to a piece of land than for actual occupation. Both of these structures could be built by non-professionals with a minimum of tools. Illustration by Clay Lancaster, from Antebellum Architecture of Kentucky.

Settlers usually built a *single-pen* log cabin for their first shelter after a lean-to. This would be one square or rectangular box (figure 1b) of stacked logs with a gable roof. Pens could be square or rectangular, and could range in size from 12 feet square to 20 x 24 feet. It typically had no weatherboarding or window glass, but may have had a stick and mud chimney. The poorest quality ones would have round logs and a dirt floor, with no fireplace like Sudduth’s cabin in Maysville. The pioneers could build such rough cabins themselves with a few simple tools. They lived in such cabins for the first year or two.

As soon as possible, the homesteaders built a more substantial structure with hewn logs and a wood floor, such as the cabin shown in figure 2. This house could be improved in the coming years through additions of siding, windows, interior plaster, and enlargements such as a porch, *lean-to*, *ell*, (ells are rear additions perpendicular to the main building) or the attachment of another pen. The first crude log cabin could be retained as an attached or freestanding kitchen, slave house, laundry, barn, smoke house, or a workshop.



Figure 2: Single-Pen Log Cabin, Bullitt County, Circa 1830-1850. This single pen cabin was one and a half-stories tall with a loft room and a large fireplace at one end. It has three doors, but no windows. At one time there were lean-to shed additions to the left and at the back. The foundation and two or three logs have rotted into the ground. The cabin was still

lived in as recently as the early 1950's.

The popular image of the settler building a house with an ax and no nails probably has its origins in the crude first cabins. The typical house, however, required the labors of a professional builder, and possibly a mason as well. These builders used an extensive array of tools, and manufactured articles such as nails, glass, hardware, and bricks. Period records of professional builders are scant, but we know that pioneers set up varying professional trades as soon as possible. Builders looking for work saw the fast-growing frontier as a land of opportunity, as did the farmers looking for quality land. The best evidence of the building profession is in the buildings themselves. The average farmer did not have the skills or the tools needed to make window sash, join a mantle, dovetail corner joints, or frame a staircase. So he turned to the skills of carpenters and masons, paying in several forms of currency or cash equivalents (such as tobacco or whiskey) or even bartering for their services. The farmer, his family,

and slaves all could contribute labor to the project of building a house, but the builder took responsibility for its design and construction.

In many cases, the first professionally built house was also replaced once again after some time by a more substantial dwelling, preferably one of frame or masonry construction. The first house could be incorporated into the new house, or left freestanding for use as an outbuilding or slave house. In some cases, it was demolished for building materials. Where very early log houses do survive to the present, they are usually enclosed within the later additions of a larger house or even a barn.

Cabins Versus Houses

The pioneers often distinguished *cabins* from *houses*. The difference is in quality of the building. A cabin is actually a type of house: it's a smaller, cruder, more temporary one. Slave dwellings were often called cabins. "Improvement cabins" were built for the purpose of staking claim to a piece of land, and sometimes were not inhabited at all. Cabins were not necessarily log buildings, although log construction was strongly associated with the term by the early 1800s. Thaddeus Harris, a travel writer, noted in 1803 that "the temporary buildings of the first settlers are called cabins." He explained that cabins "are built with unhewn logs, the interstices between which are stopped with rails, calked with moss or straw, and daubed with mud." This is something like the cabin with no fireplace William Sudduth described. In contrast, according to Harris, "if the logs be hewed; if the interstices be stopped with stone, and neatly plastered; and the roof composed of shingles nicely laid on, it is called a log house."

Spencer Records described a more substantial sort of cabin in his memoir recounting his family's move from Delaware to Kentucky. Records says that the "sixteen feet square" cabin he built in 1790 was "the outside cabin west," where the danger of Indian attacks was still present:

After raising to the necessary height, a large log was laid across the middle, and overlaid with split logs. Two of the pieces at one corner were cut out, to make a hole to go up above; then built up, so as to have room to load & shoot, with port holes above and below. The door was made of strong puncheons, pinned with a two inch pin, and barred with a strong bar, so that it could not possibly be forced open.

Records' cabin was really another type of frontier dwelling: the *garrison* or fort. It may have lacked a fireplace like Sudduth's cabin. They could build a fire on the floor of the drafty structure, allowing it to draft through a hole or smoke hood overhead, or may have had their fire outdoors.

More like a real *house* is the building General James Taylor described at Leitch's Station, in Campbell County:

Major Leitch built a "snug hued-log house" on a handsome rise from the stockade near the second falls of that river. The house was still standing in 1847 about 150 yards east of the stockade and block-house. The logs of the house were hewed down inside, had a stone chimney, the house was one and a half stories high, they had a good garden and lived comfortably with two colored servants and several white men Major Leitch had brought with him to clear the land and one man to kill game for the settlement .

Calling this house "snug" suggests that it was tight to the weather, dry, and probably had a wood floor. He describes his house as being near a *fortified community* or *stockade*. Stockading (tall vertical log fencing) surrounded such an enclosure, and *blockhouses* guarded the corners, often with portholes for firing upon intruders, much like Stephen Records' garrison house. It's clear from this description that Major Leitch had a readily available labor pool of men (some of whom must have had carpentry skills), both black and white, to assist in the construction of the house. This would probably have been similar to the house now known as Cook's Cabin, in Franklin County, built in the early years of the nineteenth century (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Cook's Cabin, Early 19th century, Franklin County. Cook's Cabin would most likely have been considered a "house" when it was built, although from today's perspective it looks like a cabin. It is an unusual survival of a relatively unaltered single pen log structure that may have originally been a kitchen

(also sometimes called a "cookhouse") or a dwelling. One unusual feature of the house is that the logs were left round on the exterior and hewn flat inside. The house was weatherboarded sometime in the early to mid 1800's.

Today, the distinction between "house" and "cabin" remains to some degree, but has changed over time. Buildings, such as Cook's cabin, which would have once been called houses, are often called cabins now. Today, we no longer build cabins for survival. Instead,

we build them for hunting lodges, vacation houses, or wooded retreats. Such buildings, often equipped with plumbing and electricity, are far from the crude pioneer cabins of the 1700s.



Vacation cabin photograph from Popular Science's, How to Build Cabins, Lodges, & Bungalows, 1946.)

House Plans

In the eighteenth-century Kentucky landscape, single-room log houses such as those shown in figures 2 and 3 probably formed the majority of the housing stock. Single-pen houses could be square

or rectangular. A larger rectangular pen could be divided by a log or board wall into two unequal sized rooms, to make what is known as a *Hall/parlor* house (figure 4). The basic *Double-pen* house (figure 5) has a chimney at either end. Other double-pen plans include the *Saddlebag* house (figure 6), where two log pens straddle a central chimney, and the *Dogtrot* house (figure 7), where the two pens are separated by a space between, sometimes left open, and sometimes framed in as a central hall.

The dogtrot house became fairly common by the early years of the 1800's, and examples such as the Sullivan House (figure 7) can be found today. The basic dogtrot technique was also used to build a form known today as an *I-house* type. I-houses are center hall plan houses of a single room depth, usually two stories in height, and frequently with a service wing or *ell* attached to the back. A typical example is the Watwood house (figure 8).

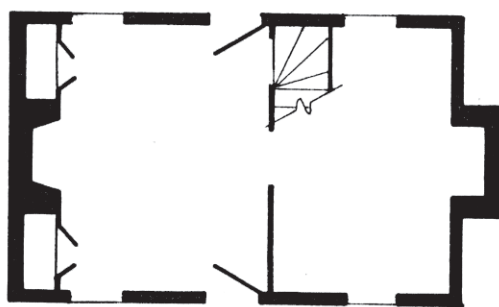
Masonry houses, those built of brick or stone, probably started to appear at least by the 1780s. The earliest examples that survive to the present date to the 1790s, such as the William Whitley House in Lincoln County, from about 1794, which has a modified hall/parlor plan. Whitley built this house to replace an earlier log structure.



William Whitley House Circa 1794, photograph courtesy of Kentucky Department of Parks.



Figure 4: Hall/Parlor Log House, Collom/Owen House, Near Winchester, Clark County. The original house is the two story section to the left, constructed by 1812, with a hall/parlor plan. The single story log wing to the right was added sometime later. The weatherboards and front porch may also be later renovations



Hall and Parlor floor plan

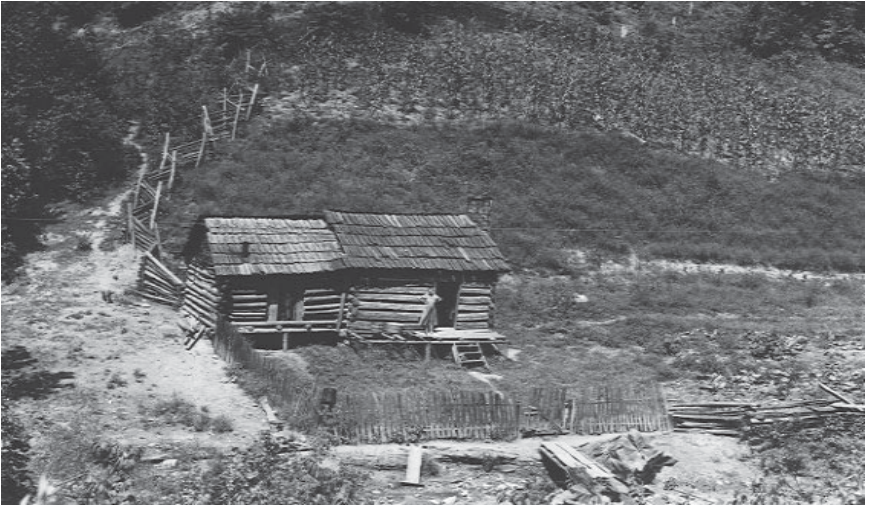
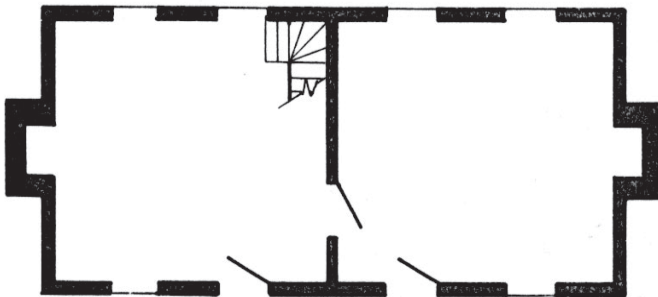


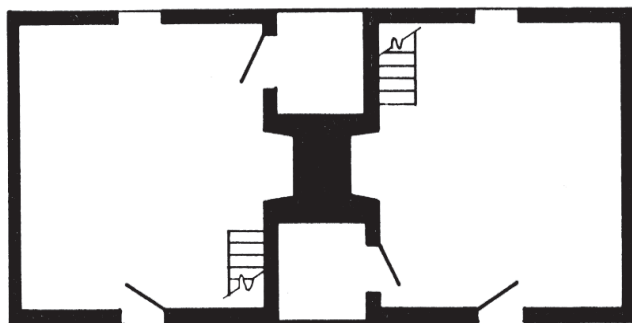
Figure 5: Double-pen Log Cabin, near Jackson, Breathitt County; photograph by Marion Post Wolcott, September, 1940. The right hand pen of this log cabin is probably late nineteenth century, and the left side, saddle-notched round log pen, is early 20th century. This image comes close to conveying something of the appearance of a pioneer homestead, in spite of modern amenities such as a stove in the newer pen, and the galvanized buckets. Note especially that split rail fencing is confined to the back and side yards, while the better pale fence distinguishes the front yard.



Double-pen floor plan



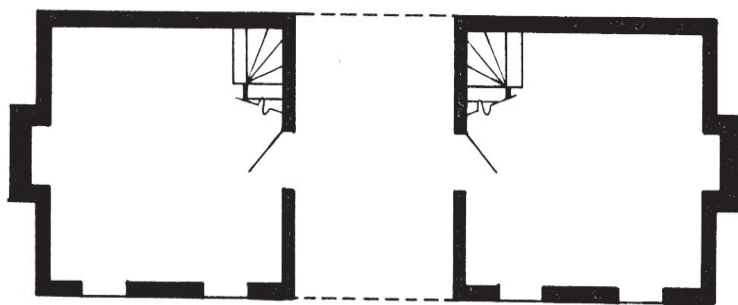
Figure 6: Saddlebag House Type, John Shell House, Leslie County, Circa 1825 & 1840. The Shell house began as a single-pen, two story dwelling on the right hand side of the chimney. Later, the shorter wing was added to the left, incorporating the original chimney of the house, adding a new fireplace on the back of the chimney stack. The stairs are accessed through the center door. A single story porch probably once ran across the front, connecting the three exterior doors.



Saddlebag floor plan



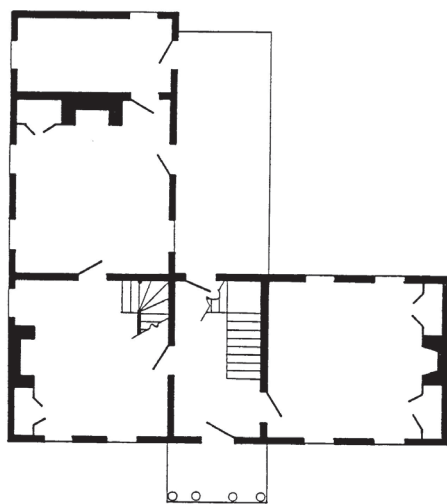
Figure 7: Dogtrot House Type, Sullivan House, Franklin County. This house was constructed Circa 1810, and had an exposed log exterior. The central passage, or “dogtrot” was not open as seen here, but had doors framed in and was enclosed with siding. The south facade, shown here, was originally the front of the house. Around 1830, the house was extensively remodeled - the interior was plastered, new trim was added in the hall, an addition was added to the south facade, the exterior was sided, and the old front of the house became the back of the house. Some of this renovation was apparently planned in the original construction, as some of the interior spaces seem to have been left unfinished until the 1830’s period



Dogtrot floor plan



Figure 8: Watwood House, Log Center-passage I-House, Ballard County, Circa 1850. By the middle of the nineteenth century, log building had evolved to the point where the construction method could be almost entirely hidden. This log house has much the same appearance as frame houses of the same era. The exterior was weatherboarded, and inside walls were plastered downstairs and covered with beaded boards upstairs so that all evidence of log construction was entirely hidden from view. The logs and furring strips are exposed where the siding has come off to the right of the chimney.



I-House floor plan

Foundations

One of the features that distinguished a cabin from a house was the foundation. The simplest foundation was just log sills laid flat on the ground, or, somewhat better, on a single course of flat stones. Such a low foundation was called for when there was a dirt floor, as in an improvement cabin. Better quality houses had sills raised on wooden blocks or stone piers, with wood flooring inside, laid on wood joists. The best foundations were of continuous masonry, usually of stone, and sometimes included a basement for food storage. Higher foundations kept the house drier and freer from pests. Stone could be either dry laid, like stone fences, or mortared.

Floors

The crudest cabins often had dirt floors, which were common as late as the Civil War. Many log houses had *puncheon* floors. Puncheons were long, thick slabs of wood, *riven* (split out along the grain) and/or hewn approximately even. Puncheon flooring is often mentioned in period accounts. One account mentions an Indian attack in the 1780's on "a new Log house on uneven ground" that "hadn't been underpinned all along. Was open except at the corners." *Underpinning* refers to the foundation: the house stood above the ground on corner piers. The account says that a man, crawled under the

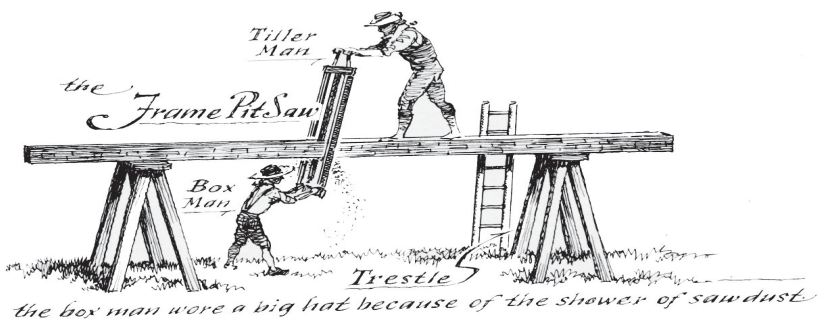


Figure 9: Pit Sawing, here using trestles, from Eric Sloane: [A Museum of Early American Tools](#).

house and his “wife took up a puncheon and let him up from under the floor.” The ability to easily raise a puncheon suggests that they were not nailed down in this case, or perhaps one was left unattached as an escape hatch.

Better floors would have been made of sawn and planed wood, usually poplar, oak, or ash. Wood was most commonly sawn in those days by means of a *pit saw* (figure 9), where two men, one above and one below a log, coordinated their efforts with a long saw blade with handles on each end. The carpenters planed the top surface smooth and left the bottom surface roughly sawn. They then *gauged and undercut* the floor boards. They scribed a line along the edges of the floor boards (gauged them) an even distance from the top of the board. Then, they cut out the bottom of the boards (undercut them) where they passed over a joist to the thickness of the gauged line so that they would fall level. The boards for the upper floor, however, were often treated more carefully, as the overhead floor joists were usually not plastered in this period. Since the undersides of the floor boards were exposed, they planed the bottom of these boards as well as the tops, often *beading* (planing a groove) along the edges of the boards to emphasize the joining lines. Such treatment was reserved for the best rooms in better houses.



Worker hewing a log for a “modern” cabin. Illustration from *Popular Science’s, How to Build Cabins, Lodges, & Bungalows, 1946.*

Walls

In log building, walls are constructed by stacking the logs horizontally, joining them at the corners of each *log pen* through one of several *notching* techniques (figure 10). The notches are generally half-dovetail, V-notch, or saddle notch. The logs can range from large to small and from relatively unaltered, unbarked poles to carefully hewn rectangular planks. The most common surviving log buildings have logs hewn flat on the interior and exterior faces, with the tops and bottoms left round. Spaces between the logs, called *interstices*, are filled in with *chinking*. Chinking generally consists of some type of rough filler such as short riven boards, flat rocks, straw, or rags, covered over with river clay or lime mortar plaster, often mixed with animal hair. When the logs were exposed, the chinking was finished as smooth and white as possible, and in many cases the faces of the logs were whitewashed or painted. If the builders covered the logs right away with weatherboards outside and plaster inside, the chinking would be left rough.



Inside, log walls could be treated in several ways. If they were to be exposed, the carpenters would hew the logs flat and square, smooth out the chinking, and finish with whitewash or paint. Fancier buildings or later improvements could include plaster, vertical boards, and *paneling* (planed and molded wood). Paneling is usually confined to the hearth wall. Builders applied plaster by nailing on pieces of riven *lath* (long narrow and thin strips of wood) diagonally across the logs, and then plastering in several layers to create a smooth white surface.

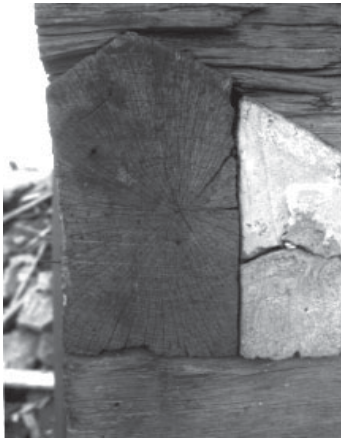
Figure 11: Clapboard Siding, from a Colonial Williamsburg reconstruction. Photograph from Carl Lounsbury, An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape.

Figure 10: Corner Notching



Half-Dovetail Notching, Bullitt County. Half-dovetail notching is considered to be the best cornering technique, as the cut angles shed water out of the notches and away from the building. This is particularly important when the logs are exposed.

Square Notching Single-pen Log Cabin, Muhlenberg County, Circa 1820-1840. This house was a slave dwelling and later an outbuilding. The foundation sits on stone piers. The cabin was never covered, but it did have one glass window and a door.



V-Notching, log house, Franklin County, Circa 1810-1820. The clean chinking here indicates that the house originally had exposed logs. It was covered with weatherboards as part of an extensive 1840's Greek Revival remodeling.

Saddle Notching, Log Barn, Circa 1880-1900, Hart County. Cruder notching is most often found on outbuildings today, but is probably quite similar to that used on improvement cabins. The log pen is surrounded by frame additions.



Siding log houses

Owners of log cabins and houses had the choice of leaving the logs exposed or covering them with siding. There was a lot of labor and expense involved, but benefits of siding included lowered maintenance needs and a warmer interior. There is evidence that siding had a status value as well. People felt that log houses were more attractive when covered. Siding, in fact, helped to distinguish the house from the cabin.

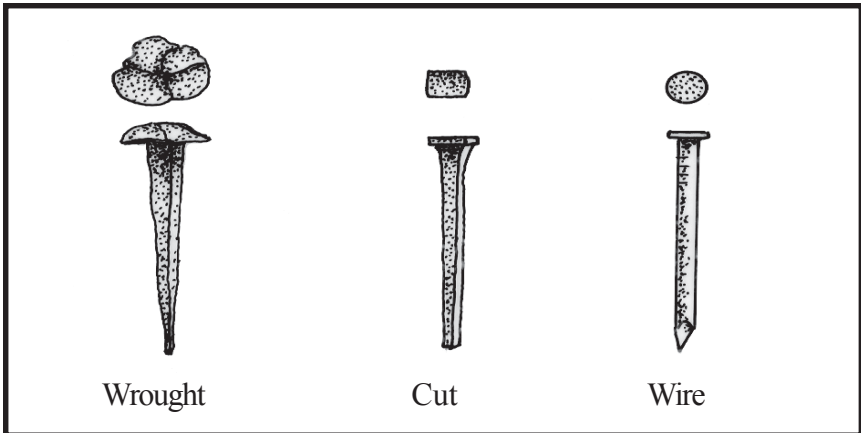
Exterior Siding Materials

Clapboards and weatherboards were the most common sorts of siding. Today, the words “clapboard” and “weatherboard” mean the same thing, but our ancestors made a distinction between the two: weatherboards were sawn, while clapboards were riven. Clapboards (figure 11) were cheaper than weatherboards. Since they were riven, they were made of woods that split well such as oak, ash, and cypress, and they were quite short, usually four feet long. They were slightly wedge-shaped in cross section, because wood split along the grain divides along radial lines like pie slices. Weatherboards came in long lengths, sometimes wedge-shaped and sometimes not. The best ones had a beaded edge to create a decorative line. To side a log house, the carpenter would first nail on vertical *furring strips*, long thin pieces of wood, shimmed out where needed, to provide level nailing surfaces. Then, he nailed on the siding, attaching it with the wider edge downward, overlapping the narrow edge of the piece below.

Since people usually used clapboards on lower-quality buildings such as outbuildings and cabins, surviving examples are rare, usually found underneath later additions. Weatherboards are frequently found on surviving log houses, and in many cases are original. Often they are an early improvement to a formerly exposed log house. Most log buildings that exist today survive because the logs have been covered, protecting them from the elements.

Nails

The nails in use before 1800 were *wrought* nails, individually hand-made by a blacksmith. Wrought nails are square in cross section and taper on all four sides to a point. The head of the nail was hand-forged with hammer blows, and wrought nails are often called *rose-head* nails because of the floral quality of the heads. *Cut* nails, formed mechanically from sheet iron, were invented in the 1790's, but their use is not common until about 1810. Cut nails also have square shanks, but these are wedge shaped, tapering on two opposite sides. Cut nails have square heads. The modern *wire* nail, or round-shank nail was invented in the middle of the nineteenth century, and its use became common after the Civil War.



Roofing

Roofing was generally riven shingle, although clapboard may also have been a common option, and thatch, bark, puncheons, or animal skins were used on cruder temporary structures such as lean-tos. The foundation of the roof was the rafter system of the building. *Rafters* could be round poles or rectangular, sawn or hewn timbers. Rafters were joined in pairs and lapped and pegged at the top. They could be further reinforced with horizontal *collars* and diagonal *windbraces*. For a shingle roof, horizontal nailing strips would be

applied to the exterior surface of the rafters - these could be sawn or riven. The shingles were then applied with nails or, in some cases, wooden pegs.

Furnishing log houses

An extensive study of the furnishing of Kentucky log houses is beyond the scope of this essay, but a few points will help the reader to understand what the interior of a log house may have looked like in the late eighteenth century. The primary sources for such a study are the probate inventories taken by local courts when the head of a family died intestate, without leaving a will. These documents show that the settlers had a range of wealth from very poor to quite well off, from estates of few things to those that include many goods, animals, slaves, furniture, silver, books, and tools. Log houses could be the homes of both poor and wealthy people, so the ways they were furnished were as varied as the ways houses are furnished today.

William Clinkenbeard recalled that in his first cabin:

my wife and I had neither spoon, dish, knife, or anything to do with when we began life: only I had a butcher knife. . . . The first dishes we had were trenchers made by one Terry in the station - a turner. He turned dishes and bowls, and being no hunter exchanged them for meat and tallow to us hunters. A parcel of those dishes out of buckeye, new and shining, and set on some clapboards in the corner of the cabin, I felt prouder of in those days than I could be of any dishes to be had now . . .

Clinkenbeard's account provides us not only with a fascinating glimpse of a sparse log cabin interior, but also of bartering on the frontier. A more established small farm is reflected in the account of Jacob Coleman, Sr. selling to Rosannah Coleman of Jefferson County in 1791 "all goods, household furniture, implements, etc. in his possession: 6 head of cattle, 1 mare, 20 head of hogs, plow & tackling, 2 beds, 2 chests, 20wt. of pewter, 2 small pots, 1 dutch oven, 18 gallon kettle, 1 ax and 3 hoes." We don't know if Coleman lived in a log house or not, or if this really represents *all* of his possessions, but the

inventoried items would have been a typical assortment for a small house.

Some of the homesteaders who came to Kentucky were accustomed to richer surroundings, including fine furnishings, silver, fabrics, carpets, etc., and they attempted to achieve the same lifestyle on the frontier as soon as possible. Such wealth was rare in rural areas before statehood. The account of an Indian attack of 1785 in John Croghan's diary, however, provides evidence that some finer furnishings existed early on. The lives of one Mrs. Elliot and her child were saved in the attack because she "got out of the cabin unobserved by a back door which was concealed by the curtains of the bedstead." Curtained bedsteads are among the most highly valued furnishings in estate inventories, and the presence of one this early is something of a surprise.

Conclusion

For the shelter needs of the pioneers who came to Kentucky, the log house was a logical choice. As they cleared woodland into fields, there was an abundance of wood available. Log cabins could be erected quickly and conveniently for the short term, while log houses were sturdy and warm. The log house was easily expanded into a larger dwelling, suiting the pioneer's strategy of gradual improvements over time.

The frontier period was a relatively short period of time, a half century from earliest exploration to statehood, and only about 25 years of homesteading. In that time, the landscape changed dramatically. The Native Americans were driven out to lands west of the Mississippi River. The buffalo were virtually obliterated. Claims were staked, the land surveyed, and parceled out to owners. The settlers cleared large tracts of forest, built roads, established towns and homesteads. Although history since that time has brought many more changes, a lot of the features we see today were established in the frontier period. A similar history was repeated again as pioneers marched westward in search of new ground. They continued to build log cabins and houses where wood was available, and examples can be

found in Missouri, Kansas, Montana, Texas, Utah, Oregon, California and elsewhere. Even before the United States stretched to the Pacific Ocean, a mythology had already developed about the log cabin and the frontier (figure 12). The cabins and houses that remain are important reminders of that story as they help us to understand both the truths and the myths of the log cabin.

LOG CABIN

NO. 12. PRICE--25 CENTS IN ADVANCE. DAYTON

LOG CABIN.
Friday, September 18, 1840.

LOG CABIN CANDIDATES.

FOR PRESIDENT,
WM. HENRY HARRISON.

FOR VICE PRESIDENT,
JOHN TYLER,
THE INDEPENDENT VIRGINIAN.

FOR GOVERNOR OF OHIO,
THOMAS CORWIN,
THE WAGON BOY.

FOR CONGRESS,
PATRICK G. GOODE.



Harshman's was arranged by J the Dayton Marshals, and Ch others from Clark. In front w twenty six young men from Cl white horses and each bearing senting one of the States. The in an open Barouche. Then Col. Christie, the former, one c aids. After these, came Gen. sifers followed by citizens in Ca The line thus formed was put i o'clock and moved to the poin junction of the Troy and Spring the General and his escort were cession from town, under the d Anderson, Chief Marshal. T Military, under command of Ca the Dayton Greys, composed Guards of Cincinnati, Butler G ton, Piqua Light Infantry, Da Washington Artillery of Dayton a hollow square and Gen. Harr o'clock, there from five to six thousand strangers in town. A part of the Cincinnati delegation came in by the Centreville Road about six o'clock. The Dayton Greys and Butler Guards, a number of citizens in carriages and on horseback, with the "Dayton Band," met them at the edge of town. A glorious display was then witnessed. Eleven stages in one line led the way, with banners and music, followed by a long line of carriages and wagons. Along with the Cincinnati boys were delegations from Louisiana and Mississippi, each with a banner—"Louisiana, best her who can. Good for 4,500 majority." A noble vessel, with all sails set, in the centre, encircled by the in-

FRIDAY--SEPTEMBER 18.

writer a name in history—"CROW CHAPMAN, in procession, a part of the delegation from Wayne and Fayette counties, Indiana. By 5 o'clock, there from five to six thousand strangers in town. A part of the Cincinnati delegation came in by the Centreville Road about six o'clock. The Dayton Greys and Butler Guards, a number of citizens in carriages and on horseback, with the "Dayton Band," met them at the edge of town. A glorious display was then witnessed. Eleven stages in one line led the way, with banners and music, followed by a long line of carriages and wagons. Along with the Cincinnati boys were delegations from Louisiana and Mississippi, each with a banner—"Louisiana, best her who can. Good for 4,500 majority." A noble vessel, with all sails set, in the centre, encircled by the in-



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10th OF SEPTEMBER, 1840.
DAYTON CONVENTION.

Figure 12: *Log Cabin*, Newspaper Dayton, Ohio, September 18, 1840.

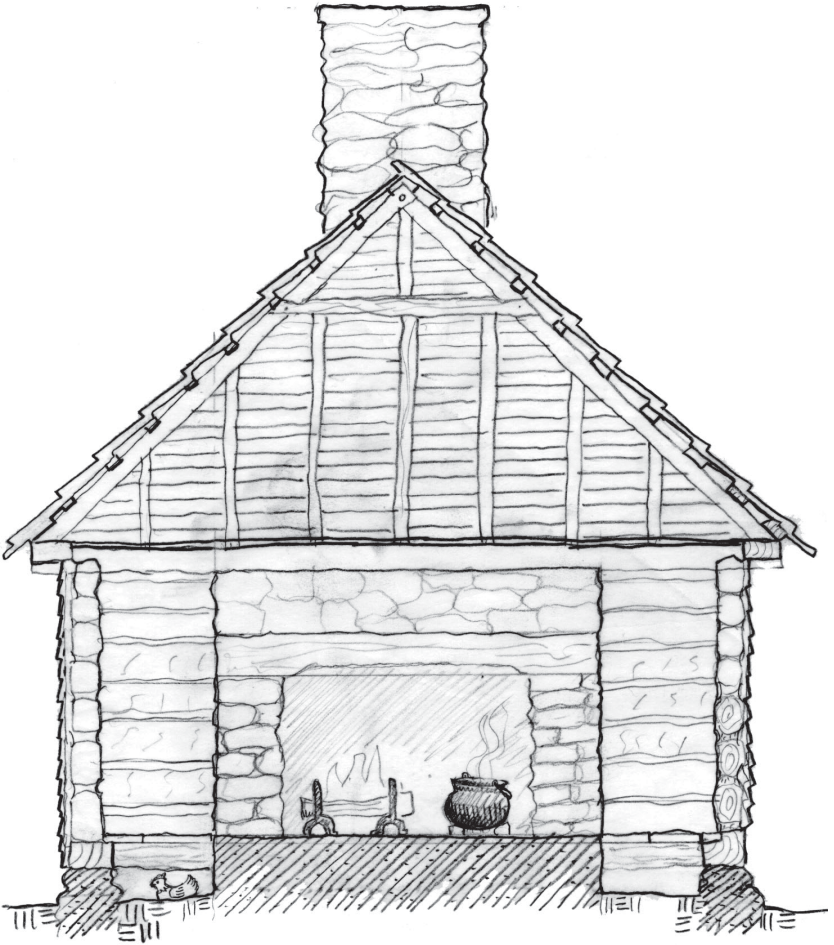
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The primary documentary sources used in the research for this article include the Kentucky Papers of the Lyman C. Draper Collections at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, available at the Kentucky State Library and Archives on microfilm. Specifically, interviews with William Sudduth, General James Taylor, and William Clinkenbeard, the John Croghan Diary, and the Spencer Records memoir provided important quotes. The Thaddeus Harris quote is from *Journey of a Tour into the Territory Northwest of the Allegheny Mountains* (Boston: 1803), as quoted in Lounsbury, *Illustrated Glossary*. The Jacob Coleman Inventory is in the Jefferson County *Power of Bond and Attorney* (Book 1, page 117).



Section of a pioneer log house, design drawing for “Pioneer Experience in Kentucky,” 1998 State Fair Exhibit, by William Macintire.

Kentucky

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This is a publication of the Kentucky Heritage Council, an agency of the Commerce Cabinet. Printed with State Funds. EEO M/F/D