

Log Cabins

F.A. Michaux



OVERVIEW

Wooden and brick houses could be found in towns along the Atlantic coast, but the pioneers who settled the land west of the Appalachian Mountains in the early 1800s, often lived in log cabins, built from the abundant forests of the countryside. A traveler—F.A. Michaux, a French botanist—described what these simple houses looked like in 1802.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Where do families sleep in log cabins?
 - How might the following description have been different if it were written by someone who lived in a log cabin?
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It is not useless to observe here, that in the United States they give often the name of town to a group of seven or eight houses, and that the mode of constructing them is not the same everywhere. At Philadelphia the houses are built with brick. In the other towns and country places that surround them, the half, and even frequently the whole, is built with wood; but at places within seventy or eighty miles of the sea, in the central and southern states, and again more particularly in those situated to the Westward of the Alleghany Mountains, one third of the inhabitants reside in *log houses*. These dwellings are made with the trunks of trees, from twenty to thirty feet in length, about five inches diameter, placed one upon another, and kept up by notches cut at their extremities. The roof is formed with pieces of similar length to those that compose the body of the house, but not quite so thick, and gradually sloped on each side. Two doors, which often supply the place of windows, are made by sawing away a part of the trunks that form the body of the house; the chimney, always placed at one of the extremities, is likewise made with the trunks of trees of a suitable length; the back of the chimney is made of clay, about six inches thick, which separates the fire from the wooden walls. Notwithstanding this want of precaution, fires very seldom happen in the country places. The space between these trunks of trees is filled up with clay, but so very carelessly, that the light may be seen through in every part; in consequence of which these huts are exceedingly cold in winter, notwithstanding the amazing quantity of wood that is burnt. The doors move upon wooden hinges, and the greater part of them have no locks. In the night time they only push them to, or fasten them with a wooden peg. Four or five days are sufficient for two men to finish one of these houses, in which not a nail is used. Two great beds receive the whole family. It frequently happens

that in summer the children sleep upon the ground, in a kind of rug. The floor is raised from one to two feet above the surface of the ground, and boarded. They generally make use of feather beds, or feathers alone, and not mattresses. Sheep being very scarce, the wool is very dear; at the same time they reserve it to make stockings. The clothes belonging to the family are hung up round the room, or suspended upon a long pole.