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Log Cabin

In going through an old file recently, I found an article entitled "How The Log Cabins Were Built." This may well have been written by Joseph Achilles back in the 1950s when he was the Orleans County historian. It is as follows:

"They were as a rule, 12 x 15 of 12 x 20, made with logs with the bark on, rolled in place and held by notches on the corners, thus they were held close together until the proper height was reached, and the spaces between were chinked in with clay. Poles were laid for an upper floor and this was reached by a movable ladder. A ridge pole and rafters supported the roof, which was made of splints or elm bark. This bark, peeled in June, was laid in 4 ft. strips in courses, and held in place by heavy poles secured by strips of bark. An opening in one end of the roof made a place for the smoke to find its way out. The floor was made of bass-wood logs hewn to a flat surface. In case window glass could not be obtained, oil paper was made to do service. Like Solomon's Temple, the log house rose without the sound of a hammer, for no nails were used, all fastenings were made with wooden

pins or withes. The furniture was as primitive as the house. Hemlock boughs on the floor, covered with a blanket made the beds and if a better one was wanted, poles were inserted in holes in the logs and secured to upright posts in the room. To a cross pole over the fireplace, kettles were hung by hooks, the frying pan had a handle long enough to permit the wife to hold it over the fire while the meat was cooking. The table was generally a board on a barrel or a chest cover and blocks of wood or rude benches served as chairs. Spoons were homemade out of pewter, but blue-edged plates and a black earthen teapot were considered indispensable."

The accompanying photo shows a log cabin which was built by Alexander Coon in the town of Shelby at a very early date. The picture was taken in the 1880s. By this period of time, houses such as this were considered very old fashioned. In fact, they were rapidly disappearing from the local landscape. So much so that the Orleans County Pioneer Association voted to erect a replica of one in 1882. This was built on the old Orleans County Fairgrounds and was used as a museum for around 20 years.

