A BARN RAISING

How the Berks County Farmers Make It a Day of Fun and Feasting.

WHEN you see a hundred Pennsylvania Germans at an old-fashioned barn-raising, climbing on mid-air and erecting beams and joists, you will no longer wonder why it is that Berks county boasts of such excellent soldiers. You can comprehend why they are like cats among the rafts.

A barn-raising in rural Berks county is a rollicksome event. While it does not come around so often, as does the old-fashioned apple-butter party and the husking-bee, when it does come there is nothing that will prevent one hundred or more neighbors within a radius of three or four miles being on hand and showing their neighbor the courtesy of helping him out with his great work, or, failing short of sickness or a funeral in the immediate family will keep the neighbors away, says the Springfield (Pa.) Leader in the Philadelphia *Record*.

Barn-raising is not easy, neither is it all frolic. Before the first stone is laid, a 100-foot structure, like the Swiss barns nowadays, in those sections where farmers make money like hay, has to be quite as long," is no sinecure. The preliminary work is done by the countryside carpenter and his assistants, when, weeks in advance, they prepare every beam, purline and rafter, fitting them together and numbering and marking each piece, so when the time comes to erect all the timbers, the mechanic can fit them together and frame them expeditiously. Sockets are chiseled into the ends of the beams to fit other pieces and even the floor joists are made so as to fit certain holes at these sockets and to hold the beams, purlines and rafters in place when erected.

By the time the carpenter and his crew have finished the job, the barn is covered with all kinds of lumber for the barn-raising, and you can be sure that when the last rafter is placed there will remain not a single piece in the field.

No Laggards There.

By this time everybody is ready for the barn-raising. The farmer has even supplied a keg of beer, or two old Berks county applejack, a gallon of good rye whisky, and the women folks have filled the larder to overflowing. If, in the morning when the carpenter boss cries out "Krick del heim" (Get the poles"), the poles are picked up by willing hands and the men walk to the bedecked field of lumber, where a dozen or more of these poles were placed under a 50-foot beam, and all hands get busy, as 25 or 30 men carry the first piece of lumber to the site for the new barn. The carpenter boss goes ahead, like a great general marching his army to victory, feeling proud that not a single neighbor is absent. The marching is kept up for half an hour, and the woodwork for the entire first floor is laid. Soon there are others carrying planks and boards, and within half an hour more the first floor is laid (temporarily, of course), and you will have room to work ahead, erecting the timbers, up, up, up, to the very rafters.

The work of erecting the sides, ends or the end framework of the barn is undertaken slowly. First the upright joists are hoisted, the temporary floor then the crosswise sections are fitted into the sockets and the pins tightly driven. Then comes the last load. You hear the carpenter boss yell: "Nuf, nuf" ("up," up), and with up-and-like points, 40 men grab the sturdy cleats fitted framework for the end, and as the boss keeps yelling "Nuf" the framework goes up, up, up, with outstretched arms, 40 men stand on tiptoe, their brawny muscles expanded to the utmost. Then there comes a crash, the boss cries "Schtop!" and they all know that every joist has slipped into the socket of the beam lying on the foundation. Then comes a rush for half a dozen hammers, and twice as many wooden pins are driven, and the first real job is done.

A hundred-foot barn requires at least four or five such operations, and the center ones are not any harder than the others, for they contain the ladders, made of heavy joists, where the farmers are often in the third story, raising the "them "overlords." As soon as all the sides are erected the longer and heavier wooden beams are placed along the length of the structure, and with farmers in mid-air, with one hand hoisting their heavy timbers, and the other pulling with all their might at a rope, while others below are pushing, pounding, pushing and tugging and pulling in position as easily as if they were laying them on the level.

A Dinner to Remember.

The work goes on until the sun stands directly overhead, when there comes and then a minute or two of rest, to tap the applejack keg or pull the cork from the rye demijohn. There is no overindulgence of these liquors, for the barn weather not only demands an appetiser, but a good stimulant, and the men know it. Besides, a man who will drink no more than they feel they can carry and erect their neighbor's best building. It is a point of honor that keeps them jolly. But then comes the call for dinner. Oh! such a dinner! If you would know the art of cookery at its best go a Pennsylvania German farm, you must simply drop in on a crowd of 100 men at a barn-raising. Here is everything the good housewife can think of. Her neighbors help her all the week, and, of course, those men who do not get sick from hanging in mid-air, or from the applejack, are quite lucky if they do not carry home overloaded baskets.

They can't help themselves, however; they just eat. There is the delicious turkey, the fat chicken, the toothsome mince pies, the smoked sausage, the leberwurst, the pondhase, tripe, and, if it makes a man giddy to mention it, the other things these farmers have to eat on such an occasion.

After a generous smoke from their corncob and clay pipes, the farmers and carpenters feel refreshed, and start in just in the order of the day, and assist in completing the framework of the good fellow's barn. The hardest task is still to come, however, when the long pieces of timber, firmly fitted together, have to be raised along each side of the framework, and placed where the rafters must rest. The farmer calls: "Der dach stood," and upon this the sturdy roof timbers are put in position at each of the entire job, and the farmers work like sailor boys until it is in place. As it is now the largest piece of timber in the entire structure, it is also one of the heaviest, and before it is in place everyone on the ground is in perspiration, and there nearly always happen minor accidents. The long timbers are in place, at last, however, and the rafters are put in, placed upon the foot stools and the long beam, and before the sun sets the farmer's barn skeleton stands complete in mid-air.

There is no cost for the work of erecting a barn for a Pennsylvania German farmer. Every neighbor does the work willingly; but if there should be one mean enough not to be present or send his farm hand, why he can rest assured that the farmer will have "a return compliment" ready for him.

Why Streams Are Disappearing.
The Independent.

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