

Barn Raising Meant High Old Time in Early Days; Jealousy Among Carpenters

Keg or Two of Beer and Big Dinner, Followed by Dance, Rewarded Builders.

An art all but lost to the present generation is that of framing heavy timbers for barns at farm homes.

Forty and more years ago "barn raisings" were events of much importance to rural communities. They attracted large numbers of people because of their spectacular features, their opportunity for sociability, their occasion for rejoicing and, sometimes, for their hilarity. The eighteenth amendment then, of course, had not even been dreamed of. But in some communities kegs of beer were not permitted to be tapped even after the frame of the barn had been erected. The Orange township settlement was one of these.

Carpenters say it required a particular training to frame a barn of heavy timbers and have it done right, where all the joints would "squeeze a hair."

Wooden Pins Instead of Nails.

People born in the past 40 years know little of what it meant to frame a barn and have all the parts fit perfectly on the day of the raising. If even one joint was out of plumb or misfitted the carpenter would lose his prestige as a builder.

Barns in those days were built of heavy timbers, some of them 12 by 12 inches or even of larger dimensions. The carpenter would lay out his plans. He was obliged to vision the barn as it would appear when the frame work was up ready to receive the rafters and the siding. The frame was fitted with mortises and tenons—the base timbers, the beams, the posts, the plates and the braces. The joints were secured by use of wooden pins, no spikes or nails being employed.

The larger joints were made secure by use of two wooden pins and the smaller ones by one pin. The frame work was of pine, such pine as one does not ordinarily see in the lumber yards today.

Everyone Had a Task.

After all the framing had been done preparations were made for the "raising." Word would be sent out to neighbors and a great crowd would gather. All the strong men would be given a definite task. Each would handle a pike pole. For the enlightenment of such moderns as may not know what a pike pole was it may be explained that it was a pole at the end of which a spike, or sharp piece of iron, was secured. Each bent would be put together on the ground and then each raised separately. The bents consisted of posts and cross beams.

When a bent was raised a few feet above the ground men with pike poles would lift it higher, the feet of the posts being held close to the tenons, into which they would slip when the bent was upright. The master carpenter had full charge of the "raising." He

gave his commands like a captain at sea, and everybody was expected to execute his orders. If any would fail it might mean a casualty.

"Heave-o-heave" was the phrase used as men would lift the bents with their poles.

The Celebration.

After the frame was up and every joint fitted perfectly there was much rejoicing. The master carpenter naturally would swell a little with pride. The owner of the building and his friends would congratulate him. At some of the "raisings" where competing carpenters would be present they might look around slyly to see if any of the joints were not "pinching a hair." It was a mean thing to do, but they sometimes did it. Items in the Courier of 40 or more years ago indicate that there was considerable feeling among these competing master barn builders.

When the "raising" was completed the wife of the farmer, aided and abetted by neighboring women, would set up a big dinner. As stated before, at many places there would be liquid refreshments on the side, usually in the form of beer in kegs that had been lowered into the well for refrigeration. When the bungs were driven in and the foaming amber fluid would be drawn thru a spigot, there would be the lifting and clinking of mugs and glasses, songs and laughter, light banter and hilarity.

Dancing Was Popular.

At no "raising" of which local carpenters have any remembrance was there ever any beer drunk until after all the work had been done. The work of lifting the heavy timbers required clear brains and steady muscles.

Young people would usually have their fun in the evening following the "raising." A floor would be laid, a "fiddler" engaged, and a barn dance held. There has never been any institution quite like a barn dance. Everybody "shook a foot." Young and old would jump around early in the evening, but the younger, stronger, more vivacious young men and maidens would cry, "let the dance go on." Sometimes they would be tripping the light fantastic until the morning's sun. Then they would wend their weary ways to their homes on foot, in lumber wagons, on horseback and in buggies.

Sweitzer Master Builder.

Those framed barns, with heavy timbers, are still standing and will continue to stand for generations to come if the exteriors are protected by paint. Usually they were erected upon heavy stone foundations, and they will endure like the wooden bridges and the buildings in Pennsylvania described a few Saturdays ago by A. W. Haffa.

J. N. Sweitzer, municipal court bailiff, who spent his early years as a contractor and builder, was one of the master barn builders of the early days in Black Hawk county, and his joints always met the supreme test of art and efficiency—they always "squeezed a hair."