

*The Bark Covered House* by William Nowlin  
Excerpt Eight -- Making space for crops

“Our next **clearing** (job) was the little **ridge**. Father (began) around the edge, cut the brush and threw it from the ridge all around it to form a brush fence. Then all the trees that would fall into the line of the fence were next **felled**, also all that would fall over it. Then we trimmed the (tree branches), cut the logs and piled the (branches and logs) on the fence. I felt very much interested in clearing this piece. When father took his ax and started for work I took mine and was immediately at his side or a little behind him. In this manner we soon had the two acres cut off and surrounded by an immense log, tree-top and brush fence.

Now came the logging and burning. Father worked with the oxen and his **handspike**, I with my handspike. Some of the large logs he swung around with the oxen and left them by the fence. Others (we wanted to pile up). (So) father took his handspike and rolled the log (part way up a pile), I held it with my (handspike) until he got a new hold. In that way I helped him roll hundreds and thousands of logs. We soon had them all in heaps (and tried to burn them), but some would not burn at all then. We scratched round them and put some seeds in every spot. We could do but very little with a plow.

In raising our summer crops we had to do most of the work with a hoe. Sometimes where it was very **rooty** we planted corn with an ax. We struck the blade into the ground and roots about two inches, then dropped the corn in....

**Vocabulary:** clearing = removing trees and bushes from land; ridge = high stretch of land; felled = cut down; handspike = a long, thick, iron nail, attached to a leather band which tied around the middle of the hand; rooty = filled with roots

Questions to think about and answer:

1. How did William's father begin clearing the ridge?
2. Who could father count on to help him with the clearing?
3. How much land did William and his father clear?
4. How did they try to get rid of the cut trees to make space for crops?
5. What tool did they both use to roll the logs into piles?
6. Do you think you would be able to roll logs like William did?
7. What did William and father place in spots around the piles of logs?
8. What tool did they use to plant corn in places where there were many roots?
9. Where did the many roots in the ground come from?
10. Why was it necessary to clear trees and brush to plant crops?