

The Bark Covered House by William Nowlin
Excerpt Seven -- Life in our House

“(Our house at first) had but one room. Now I (see) it in my mind’s eye. Ah! There is the door with its wooden latch and leather string. (Next) to the door is a window, and under it stands a wooden bench with a water pail on it; at the side of the window hangs the tin dipper. In the center of the east (wall) burns a cheerful fire. On the crane (over the fire) hung two or three hooks, and on these mother did most of her cooking. As we had no oven, mother had what we called a bake kettle. In this kettle, she baked our bread. When (the bread was baked we ate it heartily, for) we were favored with what we called “Michigan appetites.” Later, mother bought her a tin baker, which she placed before the fire to bake her bread, cake, pies, etc.

“Under (another) window stood a table with its board top, as white as hands and ashes could scour it. Farther on, in the corner stood mother’s bed. On the foot and front of the (bed) frame were pinned calico curtains with roses and rosebuds and little birds. These curtains hung, oh, how gracefully, around that bed! In (another) corner stood the family cupboard. The top shelves were filled with dishes, which mother brought from the state of New York. In another corner stood the ladder, the top resting on one side of an opening through which we entered the (attic to sleep).

Before that cheerful fire often sat (mother) making and mending (clothes). This she did with her own hands, never having heard of a sewing machine, as there were none in existence then. She had to make every stitch with her fingers. Mother made a garment for father to work in which he called his frock. It was made of linen cloth...and was like a shirt only the sleeves were short. This he wore, in place of a shirt, when working hard in warm weather.

Questions to think about and answer:

1. How many rooms did William’s house have at first?
2. How many windows does William mention?
3. What kinds of things did mother do in front of the fire?
4. What did William mean by saying they had “Michigan appetites?”
5. What separated mother’s bed from the rest of the room?
6. Where did mother store her dishes?
7. Where did the children sleep?
8. How was father’s frock different from his other shirts?
9. How much work would it be to take care of this house?
10. What kinds of work do you think mother did to keep her busy?