

Pioneer women faced hardships

Imagine that you are living in Indiana 200 years ago. You are alone in your log house, located in a clearing at the edge of a dark forest, with the nearest neighbor 10 miles away. Suddenly, you hear the sounds of something trying to break in. What would you do?

This situation is one of many that pioneer women faced while trying to survive in Indiana, according to Kathleen McLary, Curator of Education at the Indiana State Museum. She spoke to a group of homemakers at Purdue University.

Those who came to Indiana found a land of dense, dark forests and swamps. In many areas, McLary stated, a person could walk for miles without seeing the sun. Malaria was a common problem due to the cold, damp conditions.

"The weak didn't settle in Indiana," she said.

The settlers usually came in the early spring, giving them time to plant enough crops to get them through the harsh Indiana winter. They first built three-sided lean-tos to shelter them for the summer. Once the crops were in, the men built log houses.

Living in a loghouse, with its dirt floors and dark interiors, was similar to living in the woods, according to McLary. Pioneer women did everything they could to brighten up

their homes, including whitewashing the walls and hanging curtains.

Some brought furniture and trinkets from their previous homes, but this was quite expensive.

"Women had to make a value judgment on everything they took. Some couldn't part with Grandma's hope chest, and others just had to have their fine china. This is why we find evidence of expensive furniture and household goods in early Indiana."

One of the most serious problems a pioneer woman faced was the lack of companionship. With the nearest neighbor sometimes 10 or more miles away, visits were infrequent. Occasions such as a house- or barn-raising and harvesting became community events. All families in the area would pitch in to help. The men would work while the women cooked meals or had a quilting bee.

In early pioneer cooking, the fireplace hearth served as home base. Most pans had legs called "spiders" attached to the bottoms. When a woman wanted to bake, for example, "she simply dragged coals out to the hearth underneath the pan. By adjusting the amount of coals she could regulate the heat."

Candlemaking was an important but time-consuming task which women performed only once or twice a year. It took over 100 dips in tallow to make a

medium-sized candle, so they were used only on special occasions. Families normally found no need for artificial light, rising and going to bed with the sun.

In addition to her household duties, McLary said, a pioneer wife was expected to help hunt, plow, and harvest the crops. She also took care of the family's vegetable and herb gardens. Her herb garden was very important, because it provided both spices and a source of medicine.

Children were given chores as soon as possible, helping in the house and the fields. From an early age girls learned to cook, sew and clean while the boys hunted and took care of the animals with their fathers. Often, children had special chores such as churning the butter or carrying water from a nearby stream.

A girl began to sew almost as soon as she could hold a needle. By sewing samplers she would learn the alphabet, numbers, and various types of stitches. She always signed each sampler with her name and the date.

As she grew older, she learned to quilt, a popular pastime. Hundreds of different patterns existed and, by varying the pattern slightly, women could personalize their quilts.

"All women were expected to be proficient quilters," McLary said. "In fact, a proper bride had to have at least 13 quilts before her marriage!"

The key word in clothing for the pioneer woman was "practical." She rarely wore a coat; instead, she owned a shawl which could be worn over the shoulders, pulled up over the head, or used to wrap and carry something. Contrary to popular belief, a woman did not wear floor-length dresses. Her dresses stopped a few inches from the ground, to keep her from tripping as she milked the cows, helped in the fields, or worked in her home.

Women never went outside without wearing some kind of hat.

"They believed," McLary said, "that if the sun hit your head either all your hair would fall out or you would catch brain fever!"

Examples of clothing, furniture, and other articles of pioneer life may be found in museums throughout Indiana, McLary stated.

Care of garden critical now

With one eye on the calendar and another on the vegetable garden, Julie Chamberlain, Purdue University extension assistant in horticulture, says that care deserves major attention this time.

Weed control is a better than sharp

bloom, they can be placed indoors or by you front door.

Chamberlain also reminds that miniature roses are susceptible to spider mites. Mites are almost invisible to the eye but cause leaves to have tiny, yellow spots. One way to discourage mites is to spray the underside of the leaves frequently with hard jets of water. A Kelthane spray can also be used. Climbing roses should be pruned flowering, she adds. Simply cut canes which bore flowers and canes to grow.

make attractive In full sun, plant vine, petite canivtalia. bran-