

# NUCK FAMILY HOME AND PIONEER INFORMATION

## *PORCH*

The Nuck family left their home in Elmstein, Germany the first part of May, 1841. The family consisted of parents Joseph and Margaret, Mary (16), John (14), Mathias (11), and Catherine (6). The Nucks decided to emigrate to America because they did not want their sons to be inscripted (drafted) into the Hessian army. Margaret's brother, Sebastian Kiser, had gone to America in 1833 and lived in the area we now know as Huntington, Indiana. For several years Sebastian had encouraged his sister, through letters, to come to American, writing of the rich and plentiful farmland in Indiana.

They completed the entire trip by water: the Rhine River in Germany to LeHavre France; across the Atlantic Ocean to New York City; they took a boat up the Hudson River to Albany, New York; on the Erie Canal they went to Buffalo, New York; from there they went across Lake Erie to Toledo, Ohio; there they went down the canal to Providence and from there they took a canoe on Maumee River to the Ohio state line; and then they took a canal boat down the Wabash and Erie Canal which brought them to Huntington, sometime around the first of July 1841. It was a long and difficult trip; the Nucks' son John died on route and was buried along the canal in Ohio.

After a few months in Huntington Matilda Nuck was born.

When they first came into this area they worked for Chief Lafontaine. Joseph and Mathias cleared the land near the Wabash River while Mary worked in the Chief's home as a servant.

By 1847 they purchased from Chief Lafontaine an 80 acre tract of land approximately four miles northwest from here and built this log house. The structure is a log house, not a cabin. Log houses are two stories high.

The building skills of Joseph and Matt are still evident today. Despite the fact that the house has been moved twice: once onto the site of the Chiefs' house and then again to this current location, the notches of the corners of the house are still intact and tight fitting.

## *PARLOR*

The tools in the tool box belonged to Matt and are believed to have been used to build this home.

The frame hanging from the ceiling is a quilting frame. Women would have worked all winter on

quilts and coverlets for the family. During the summer months, when other household chores were more important, the frame would have been dismantled or stored (often times hanging from the ceiling) to put the frame out of the way.

The curtains are far less decorative than those in the Chiefs' house. The Nucks could have purchased muslin in the local stores, but the more ornate fabric would have been too expensive for their budget.

The wall between the kitchen and the parlor may not be original to the construction of the home. At this time, people were taxed on the number of rooms in their home. To have two rooms would mean more taxes. This is also the reason that homes of this time period did not have many closets. According to tax laws, closets were considered rooms.

### ***KITCHEN***

You may notice that there is no fireplace in this house. Historical research has found no indication of there being one in the home. Pioneers were no different than we; they wanted the most modern, up-to-date things they could afford and were available to them. With the canal nearby and commercial goods being transported on the canal boats daily, it would have made small stoves readily available to the Nuck family and others living in Huntington. These small stoves were much more efficient for heating and cooking; not requiring as much wood or wasting as much heat. The stovepipe furnished some heat to the bedrooms overhead and the heat of the one in the kitchen kept the barrel oven ready for use at all times.

The more direct heat cooked the pots of food much quicker than placing a pot on a crane that swung over the fire in a fireplace or by burying the pot in some hot ashes at the side of the fire. It also made the baking of bread much easier. Instead of heating a fireplace oven for several hours in order to bake several loaves of bread to meet their needs for the whole week, one or two loaves every day could be baked in the barrel oven.

Baking many loaves made it difficult to keep them fresh until eaten. An even bigger problem was safe storage from ants, bugs and rodents. Those small stoves made it possible to cook less food at one time without wasting wood or heat.

A v-shaped wooden bin, with a small opening bottom, was built outdoors for holding the wood ashes. Several layers of burlap or a similar fabric were nailed across the bottom opening and as ashes were cleaned out of the stoves or fireplaces, they would be placed into the bin. A shallow, slightly tilted tray under the opening be placed under the hole. A bucket would be placed underneath this tray. As it rained or snowed into the bin and ran through the ashes, the liquid draining out into the tray and bucket, would be a strong alkali substance. That would be mixed with grease, frying or lard and some water and cooked to make soap.

When the soap began to thicken, it would be poured into shallow wooden trays that were lined with a thin fabric and allowed to complete the hardening process. After a time it would be cut

into bars to use for bathing and hand washing. For laundry or dish washing use, it would be shaved into slivers and placed in the container of water as it heated, causing it to dissolve.

### ***UPSTAIRS***

The Nucks had three children that lived in this home: two girls and a boy. They shared the first bedroom.

On the beds were straw-filled mattresses, commonly called ticks. They had to be emptied, laundered and refilled each summer. This was done as soon as the grain was threshed out of the stalk, so the stack of straw would still be bug, rodent and snake free. If they did not have enough straw to fill all the ticks—remember they also used straw as bedding for the animals in the winter time—they would use dried grasses, leaves or corn shucks. Many believe they were filled with feathers, but that is not very realistic. It would take many chicken feathers to fill even one tick, much less enough for every bed in the household. Pioneers would not have had enough chickens to accomplish this feat, as their flocks were small and often fell prey to other animals. A chicken's eggs were more essential than the feathers and most chickens were kept as long as they produced eggs.

Many of our common expressions come from these rope bed and straw ticks. "Sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite" comes from this era. "Sleep tight" meant that your rope should be strung tight. Loosely fitting ropes would cause you and your mattress to sag, an uncomfortable night's sleep. "Don't let the bed bugs bite" was a good luck expression that you would not find snakes, rodents, or bugs in your stuffing.

### ***PARENTS BEDROOM***

This was before indoor toilets and bathing facilities, so each bedroom and the kitchen had a washstand. It would contain a washbasin and pitcher or bucket of water for washing the hands and face. In the bedrooms would also be a chamber pot, or often called a slop jar, to be used after dark as the toilet. The chamber pots and washbasins created a daily job that was usually done by the younger children. Both needed to be emptied, cleaned and returned to their proper place, so they were ready for use again that day.

Toilet paper was not available at this time. Most likely, pieces of old, worn-out clothing would have been used, saved and laundered at the end of each wash day session, so they could be re-used as pioneer "toilet paper."

### ***NOTES***

The Nuck family became American citizens in 1847. Joseph lived to be 86 years old and Margaret lived to the age of 69 years. The Nuck children all

lived to an old age. Mary lived to be 91 years old. She first became the wife of Jacob Zahn; Mary's second husband was John G. Gelzleichter. Mathias was the husband of Catherine Baker. He lived to be almost 89 years old. Catherine Nuck married Nicholas Dages. She lived to be 95 years old. Matilda married John Rausch. Matilda lived to be just a few days short of 99 years.

It was because Joseph bought a "Haunted" house that he was able to pay the expenses of moving his family to America. Joseph heard of an elegant house in Elmstein which was being sold for a very small sum of money because it was "haunted" and no one wanted to live there. Joseph did not believe in ghosts and was not afraid to own the property. One night hair raising cries and moans were heard in the attic. When Joseph investigated, he found that cats climbed a tall pear tree, crawled through a small opening in the attic, and then cried and moaned. Joseph quickly got rid of the cats, plugged up the hole, and there was no more trouble from ghosts. When he convinced the townspeople that he had solved the spook mystery he found no trouble in selling the house at a handsome profit. Then he was ready to sail for America.

Many farmsteads had a small flock of sheep and the wool sheared from them had to be picked, washed, carded and spun into yarn to be knitted into socks, caps, mitten and scarves. Sometimes the wool was spun very fine and taken to someone who had a loom to be woven into fabric for coats and jackets. Often there was an unmarried sister of the man or woman of the household living with them, and she earned her "keep" by doing many of the necessary chores. One that was very time consuming was the wool preparation and spinning. It is thought the term "spinster," meaning an unmarried woman, probably came from the fact that this husband-less woman often did much of the spinning, thus she was a spinster and the term took on a new meaning in describing her status.

Strip of wool was salvaged from worn out clothes and braided together, then sewn into shapes to make warm rugs for the cold, bare floors or woolen scraps would be cut into squares and sewn together to make heavy, warm comforters for their beds.