

GOOD TIMES OF YOUNG PIONEERS

FUN AT HOME

Pioneer cabins were full of boys and girls. Ten or twelve children in one family were not unusual in the early days. There was work for all of them, but they had their fun, too.

Their few simple toys were homemade. A dried gourd, its seeds loose inside, made a good rattle for the baby. An ear of corn became an amusing doll. The yellow cornsilk made pretty hair, and the husks were shaped into clothes. Sometimes a rag doll was made by cutting a doll out of cloth and stuffing it with rags or sawdust. Scraps of yarn and cloth were used for doll clothes. The doll's cradle was carved from wood.

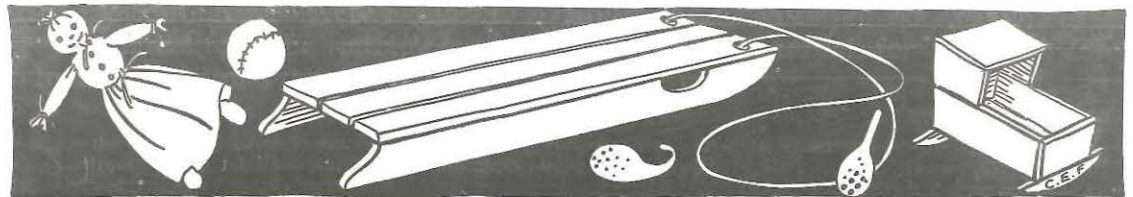
A top was easily whittled out of wood with a good sharp jackknife. Wood sleds and carts were homemade, too. The boys made whistles of pawpaw wood or willow. Hard balls were made by wrapping a stone with yarn and then sewing deerskin around it.

Girls strung seeds and berries for necklaces. Young girls learned to sew and knit as soon as they could hold the needles. The children played "house" as little girls still do. Broken china and stoneware, acorns, and shells were dishes. Potatoes and turnips, with sticks for legs, made funny animals.

Pioneer children often had live pets. Every family owned a dog. The men took him hunting with them and the children claimed him for a lively playmate. The children tamed squirrels, raccoons, opossums, and even crows. Sometimes they kept a fawn or a bear cub for a pet until it grew big.

On winter evenings around the fire, young and old were busy at some task. While they worked, the children told riddles, old rhymes and tongue-twisters. They sang hymns and ballads and said verses from the Bible. Corn was popped in the fireplace, and apples were roasted in the hot ashes. No one minded the long winter evenings.

Sometimes a traveler stopped at the cabin to rest, or the preacher who came every few weeks was a guest over night. Then the children sat wide eyed, listen-



ing to tales of the world beyond their cabin door. They heard about their distant neighbors in the next clearing, about raids and dangerous wild animals in the forest. They liked to hear about far-away cities and great men in Washington, D. C., and the East. Visitors were always welcome in the pioneer homes of Indiana.

FUN AT SCHOOL

After harvest and before the winter snow, school was held, or "kept," in one of the cabin homes or in a one-room log schoolhouse. At recess the children marched, sang and played games. The games they played were often hundreds of years old. The first settlers who came to America from lands across the sea had brought these games with them. Some of the games are still played today. "London Bridge," "The Farmer in the Dell," and "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" were among the games they liked best.

The big boys ran races and wrestled. They pitched horseshoes, played ball, and had high jumping contests. Anything to prove that they were strong and nimble! If a wild grapevine grew near the school, it made a fine swing for the younger children. Boys and girls joined in games of Crack the Whip, Prisoner's Base, and Hide-and-seek.

Fox and Geese was played in the snow. At Christmas the pupils expected the schoolmaster to provide a "treat" of some kind — apples, stick candy, or an orange. If he did not, the big boys played tricks on him. Sometimes there were "spelling bees" in which pupils and their parents took part. It was a proud child who was able to "spell down" men and women three times his age.



A spelling bee at school.

In winter the children enjoyed coasting down hill on their homemade sleds, just as you do. When the rivers and lakes froze over they skated on the ice. Very lucky was the boy or girl who owned a pair of homemade wooden skates.

Boys took pride in catching mink, muskrats, beavers, rabbits, and other small animals in traps. They earned money by selling the furs. The boys went hunting with their fathers to get meat for the table. They knew how to shoot pigeons, quail, wild turkeys, deer, and rabbits.

Sometimes a boy's best friend was an Indian lad. The Indian boy taught his white friend how to set a trap, how to imitate the calls of birds, and how to recognize the tracks of animals in the snow. He taught him the secrets of the forest.



Maple sugar time. Boiling down the sap, and making candy on the snow.

On fall and winter nights the older boys went on coon and possum hunts. They carried lanterns or blazing knots of wood. Their hunting dog found the animals and chased the coons and possums until they ran up the trees. The boys followed and killed the animals.

In early spring boys and girls had fun helping in the sugar camp. The maple trees were tapped for their sugar water, or sap. A spout was fastened in the tree and a pail hung on a nail to catch the sap. Fires burned under big kettles night and day, while the sap was boiled down into maple syrup. Delicious candy was made for the children by pouring syrup on the snow to harden, or into pans to be stirred into creamy sugar.

Spring time was planting time. Flocks of greedy crows flew down into the clearings to eat the corn as fast as the men planted it. The younger children had to play in the fields with noise-makers to scare away the crows. They shouted and blew horns and whistles. They beat pans and rang bells to frighten the crows and black birds away.

Summer was the time for fishing and swimming. Any boy could cut a fishing pole and dig some worms for bait. There were all kinds of wild fruits and berries to gather in the woods. With the cabin door and window open, the family seemed to live out-of-doors. The long summer days made it possible to visit the neighbors, where the children played games together. The Fourth of July was celebrated in the small towns with picnics, speeches, and the shooting of guns.

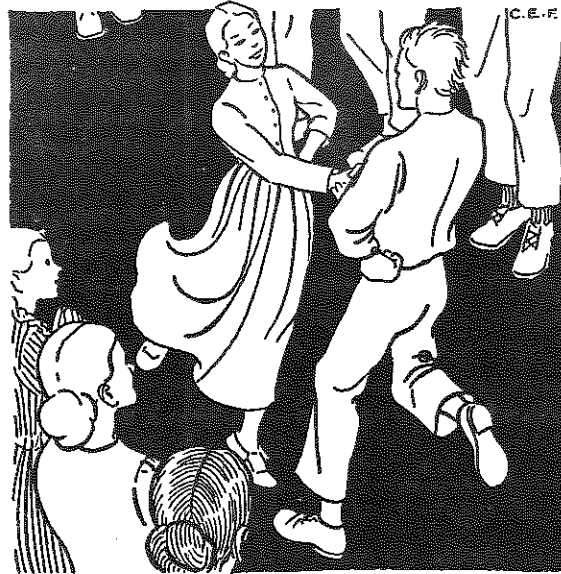
In autumn the grain was harvested. Potatoes and onions were dug. Vegetables from the garden and fruit from the orchard were stored away for winter. Boys and girls gathered walnuts, beech, hickory and hazel nuts. Wild geese started flying south in such great numbers that they were easy marks for young Hoosier hunters. Flocks of passenger pigeons stopped to feed upon the fallen nuts in beech and oak groves. They were easily shot or knocked off their roosts at night.

A trip of any kind was exciting to pioneer children. Even a trip to the mill to have corn or wheat ground into flour seemed important. In later days they went to the crossroads store or blacksmith shop. Sometimes a boy and his father went in a wagon or on a flatboat to one of the Ohio River towns, taking along

some crops and animals to sell. They brought back cloth, tools, salt, coffee, tobacco, pins, and needles. The boy told his sisters and brothers stories of the wonderful sights he had seen in the busy river town.

FUN WITH GROWNUPS

When a rider trotted up to a cabin door to invite the family to a party at the neighbors, the children jumped up and down and clapped their hands. Everyone for miles around, from grandparents to babies, drove across the prairies or through the woods to attend the party. In the best room of a large cabin the young men and women played singing games. There was a gay whirling of skirts and thumping of heavy boots as they sang and acted out musical games like "Weevily Wheat" and "The Miller Boy." The children looked on from the kitchen. They kept time by clapping their hands, and tapping their feet, and imitating the dancers. After



Acting out a musical game.

the games were played, a late supper was served.

Husking corn was turned into a party. Young people were invited to a neighbor's barn. They sat in a circle and pulled the husks from the ears of corn. When a young man uncovered an ear of red corn he could kiss every girl in the circle. When a young woman found a red ear, she could be kissed by every boy. The party always ended with a supper of roasted chicken, baked ham, pies, pickles, preserves, hot bread, and two or three kinds of cake.

The grownups made parties of their quilting bees and log rollings. The women of a neighborhood gathered to help sew and tie a quilt. The children went along and played together. The men helped roll logs for a pioneer who was clearing a field of the trees. The neighbors formed teams and made a game of chopping down the trees, cutting them into logs, and then rolling them into piles for burning. The team that cut and rolled the most logs won a prize. The children were on hand to cheer and dance around the bonfires. A big picnic feast out doors ended the day.

Children loved to attend the shooting matches, where the men tested their aim with a rifle. Weddings also were a time of visiting and celebrating for whole families. The hard life in the Indiana wilderness was made happier for pioneer children by the good times they shared.

Published by the Indiana Historical Bureau, State Library and Historical Building, Indianapolis 4. Compiled by Mabel Leigh Hunt, edited by Professor Joy M. Lacey, Indiana State Teachers College, and illustrated by Clotilde Embree Funk.