

Construction of sod houses

Section 1, Pages 1 - 30

This collection consists of correspondence, plans, and specifications on the construction of sod houses. In 1932, the Kansas State Historical Society put out a call for information about and instructions on constructing a sod house, in order to create one in the museum when it was located at the Memorial Building in Topeka. The collection includes all correspondence received from this request, handwritten and typed reminiscences from around the country from men who built and lived in sod houses, as well as some of the standardized responses sent by the Society's secretary.

Date: 1932

Callnumber: Kansas State Historical Society, Sod Houses, Plans and Specifications on Construction, Boxes 1-2

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 228755

Item Identifier: 228755

www.kansasmemory.org/item/228755

KANSAS
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

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Norcatatur, Kansas.
April 11th 1932.

Dear Sir:

Replying to yours of the 8th, I truly wish that we were so situated that I could build our sod house for you for historical purposes. I am sure I could do a good job. As to the sod part I believe that I can even answer that though the haul would be long. The best sod that I have ever seen used is the alkali sod to be had in Cheyenne Co., north east of St. Francis. Old houses there now that have stood for twenty years could be torn down and rebuilt, and I presume places could still be found where it could be broken fresh.

John Ramsey, St Francis Kansas, Rural Route, is a farmere in that neighborhood if you cared to write him. Some good "blue stem" sod is still to be found there but we would have to hunt for it.

About the photos: I am somewhat handicapped in placing them as our negatives went through a fire, the records were burned and many negatives lost or damaged. I am writing on the cards what I can remember of each, and returning them as you request. I could not furnish any of these pictures in the 6 1/2 X 8 1/2 size. When they were taken nearly every one had them made in one size or the other so the photos are different ones in the different sizes. I have none printed up now in the 6 1/2 X 8 1/2 size, but in quality they run about the same. I could finish you some in this size later at 50 cts. each mounted on a heavy 8 X 10 card. There is considerable extra work about this as with no records I must hunt over a whole lot of filed away plates to find the kind

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wanted.

Please write me again if I can be of any further use.

Sincerely,

O. E. Furman.

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April 1st 1932.
Loreley, Maryland.

Dear Sir:

I am enclosing clipping which will tell you why I am writing. There ought to be lots of men living in Kansas today that ought to be able to tell you how to build a sod house. There are two youngsters at Oxford Kansas that ought to know, a Mr. Buffenton and J. D. Krell. They are men in the 80's and pioneers of that section.

I did not go to Kansas until 1884 but saw quite a few sodys, later I helped to build them in S. Dakota. First it is necessary to have prairie sod, plow your furrow as for breaking prairie, cut into lengths that can be handled without breaking and laying them like brick. The walls are about 2 feet thick. Set in your window and door panes as you build up, all that I have seen are only one story. They are generally lined with lumber to make them clean. I saw one that was plastered on in side. The roof can be made with either shingle boards or sod, put plate on wall and then rafters with board to hold sod, hay sod, grass down, side by side, end to end without lapping. Then put about an inch of clays over the surface and filling in the cracks tightly by tamping it will not leak. Of course they are not durable like wood or stone. There ought to be some sod houses in the new parts of the State. It does not make much difference what time the sod is gathered so it is not too wet.. It must be prairie sod, no other will do

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pieces about two feet long are the best.

You will probably have lots of letters telling you about sod houses. The two men at Oxford, Sumner County, can tell you all about it.

Yours truly,

Frank Dreyer,

Loreley, Md.
Baltimore Co.

P.S.

Any further information will gladly be given.

F.D.

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Puebelo, Colorado.
June 16, 1932.

Dear Sir:

In reading over the Denver Daily Record Stockman, last week, I saw a request for data on Kansas old Sod Houses, and as I have lived as a child where that was about all the houses there were at that time and in that locality. In the year 1878 my Father left Michigan for Kansas; first located at Beloit, then a year later moved by wagon to North Western Kansas, 15 miles South of Oberlin, in Decatur County. At that time it was a new country, the Indians having raided it the Fall before and killed many whites. Most all the new settlers lived either in Dugouts or sod houses. My Father being a stone mason, our dugout was built of stone above the ground, with a sod kitchen and bed room. The sod from Buffalo grass, the land was plowed with an ordinary plow, many used oxen to plow with; as I remember cutting it 3 or 4 inches thick and about 12 inches wide, plow and turn sod over as smoothly as possible, then cut the strips in convenient lengths, with a spade, then turn the sod back over a board to carry it to place where you build the wall, then break the joints as in laying a brick wall., Your wall will be the thickness of the width of your furrow. Use heavy boards over doors and windows to hold the weight of sod above. They had small windows and I suppose home made doors and usually dirt floors; and for the roof, a long pole on top of center, called the Ridge Pole, then smaller limbs were used from center to sides of wall, put close together, then willows, hay and then dirt, some were plastered altho most of them had just sod wall and if the house is long, it was

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necessary to put a pole in center of room to support the ridge pole.
My Father got his roofing from a small creek, then called the
Prairie Dog, at that time there was still Buffalo Wallows, chips and
bones, also the Buffalo.

Hope this helps you to build your sod house.

Respectfully,

MRS TOM R. WATSON.

I hope I made this plain to you.

My first attempt as an Architect.



Anadarko, Oklahoma.
April 11th 1932.

Dear Sir:

Seeing your notice in the Oklahoma News about a sod house, I think I can give you some information. A way back in 96 I was out in Trego County, Kansas, and built a 3 room sod house; three fourteen feet rooms by 12, one after the other, and maybe it is still there and maybe not as it is 27 years since I left. The walls are shaved down straight and white washed. I made doors out of flooring, my rafters were 74 inches long. All windows were 1/2 sash, if you cut openings in partition make frames 6-5 X 2-g in clear, set frams and build to them. Cut sod in June, I think is the best time as the roots are stronger. I have run my plough 160 rods many a time and did not break the sod. Well my dear sirs, if you want any more information, kindly write me and I will do all I can for you.

You may have lots of answers by this time. This is from one who actually built and lived in a sod house.

H. C. Rooney.

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Chicago Ill.
April 25/1932.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed clipping from the Chicago Tribune of April 23rd. Wish to say I have pioneered and homesteaded in Montana, have built and lived in sod houses, in fact both house and barn were made from prairie sod and would give very satisfactory service for a period of fifteen to twenty years, the walls were about 3 feet thick at the ground tapering to about 2 feet at the top, the taper being on the outer side of the wall. Late in May is the best time to cut the sod, use a 14" prairie breaker, upland sod is most suitable, heavy clay soil is much to be preferred. A sharp spade and a hatchet, a hammer and saw are the tools required for the job.

Yours respectfully,

Edward F. Peterson.

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Mrs I.N. Carver
Route #3
Oakley, Kansas.

WHAT THE CARVER SODDY CONTAINED.

Bedroom:-----Cheap oak bedstead, with slats and coiled springs::
home made corn-husk mattress with striped blue ticking cover;
white cotton mattress pad; two feather pillows, with pillow cases
and sheets of unbleached muslin; two brown and red figured
German calico comforts; one pieced comfort; one quilted quilt;
two pieced comforts made of wool scraps and tied with yarn;

New Howe sewing machine; folding spring cot against the
east wall of bedroom to be set in living-room if needed; little
lamp in the window; curtain to protect clothing hung under the
high shelf shown on floor plan enclosed.

Living-room:-----Besides the things illustrated on floor plan
enclosed, there were three brown kitchen chairs, with red
stripings, one dark red Boston rocker, one little low chair
painted like the woodwork and padded with blue-gray canton
flannel like the curtain between the rooms. This curtain was in
two strips gathered at the top, and was trimmed across the
lower end, with a wide strip of figured red canton flannel
put on with heavy embroidery stitches in coarse wool yarn.

The rocker had a cushion and back pad of wool "crazy-
patch work" embroidered in all colors.

The cedar water pail with shiny brass hoops contained
a dipper, and stood on a stand having three broom-stick legs,
crossed in the middle and wired, with a top made of a wooden
barrel head; this stand was painted dark red.

The wash stand had a gathered curtain of soft blue-gray
figured cotton material

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Contents of House

and the wash-bowl and pitcher were white with gold bands;
above the wash stand hung a homemade comb case and a mirror.

The little table had a runner to match the washstand
curtain and on this table were a black glass bottom lamp
with No. 2 burner, books on end against the wall, writing materials
a work basket, a family Bible, a red plush-covered album, and
reading matter which consisted of a weekly news paper, Standard
Fashion Magazine, The Ladies Home Journal, some Teacher's
journals and The Cosmopolitan, which we subscribed for before
the first issue was published.

The little corner shelf over the table held a pretty
little clock, a blue vase bought at the Centennial, and a silver
bud vase. This shelf had a lambrquin of brown crochet macramé
cord, with fringe across the lower edge.

The upper part of the cupboard had a two piece
gathered curtain of red oil-calico, embroidered in white--
three owls sitting on a limb, and the words beneath "Two is a
company, three is a crowd", and a fancy stitch all around the edge.
In the cupboard was a 56 piece tea set, brown pattern---I have
the sugar bowl, cream pitcher, and two plates left---a glass
pitcher and plate, and a few other glass dishes; six 1847 Rogers
tea spoons; six Mexican silver table spoons; six steel knives
and forks, with black handles, two red and one white linen
tablecloths and napkins for every day, and better ones for
company.

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Contents of House.

There was a gathered curtain across the shelves in the corner back of the stove,. This curtain was long enough to hide cooking utensils hung under the lower shelf.

On the floor in the corner was a home made coal box, so constructed as to provide ease in using a shovel to lift the coal. This too was painted. Under the stove was a square of floor oil cloth about 42 inches square.

All the windows had gathered curtains of white cheese-cloth, hung even with the walls, and reaching the base boards.

Every window in the living-room was full of potted plants in tins of various kinds, all painted dark green;--a beautiful cala lily in the south window--parlor ivy in the east one.

(Nothing in the house ever froze.)

There was a large wreath of wheat heads, wound on a wire barrel hoop, which hung in the living-room, above the curtained opening to the bed room.

There were a few pictures, including a small oil painting on satin, and a home made paper holder.

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Grafton, West Virginia.

R.F.D. #6

Dear Sir:

I notice in the Washington Herald that you wanted some one who can build an old fashioned sod house, now I have helped build several and lived in one for four years in Southwestern Nebraska close to the Kansas State line. Would be glad to communicate and supervise it for you this summer for my expenses. I was raised in the middle west. I am now 59 years old. My father had taken a homestead out there and about all the houses were built of sod. We used Buffalo sod or sometimes grass sod which was very tough for instance, you might drag a piece of twenty feet or more without pulling it in two. Now with a sod plow turning sod about 12 inches wide and about 3 inches thick, then with a sharp spade cut 2 feet long, now lay two rods side by side, then every other layer cross ways, grass side down. Making wall 2 feet thick, do not need to dig in the ground except just enough to level. Make rough window and door frames, set up and build around same as building brick. Fit in windows afterwards. When the walls are about 3 feet high use a sharp spade and trim wall smooth both sides. Now build up the gable and place a good sized ridge pole, do not make roof very steep. Now go to the woods and cut rafters 3 or 4 inches in diameter, long enough to extend from ridge log and from an eave a foot or so. Lay about 18 or 20 inches apart, next go down to the Creek or somewhere you will find some of those willows which grow up about 10 or 12 feet high, now lay cross ways of the rafters a good thick layer. Next find some tall bluestem grass, lay thick layer on the rafters or cross ways of the willows. Now use

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about two layers of sod around the eaves to hold the dirt from sliding off roof. Now get the best and slippest clay you can find, something that will pack and cover the whole roof about 18 inches or more with it. Some then would use canvas to cover over head inside of the house, sometime they were plastered inside right direct to the sod, using a certain kind of clay which was to be found in canyon banks there. Most of them using the natural with or you might say dirt floors. The doors were made just out of any kind of rough boards. Windows were bought and fit in the home made frames. The frames were set near the outside of the wall, leaving wide space inside as a kind of shelf. The dirt floors became very hard and smooth and perfectly dry. The walls were perfectly dry. Now I do not know if you could find tough sod there now or not. I could tell if I could see it turned over with a sod plow.

I will be glad to give any more information I can or will come out to help.

Yours truly,

Herbert M. Wolf.

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Mrs. I. N. Carver.
Route #3
Oakley, Kansas.

HOW TO BUILD A SOD HOUSE

Break sod 4 inches or more deep, depending upon depth of grass roots, using a breaking plow which cuts a furrow 10 to 14 inches wide-- any 10 to 16 inch plow may be used-- the wider the sod the heavier to handle; use a rolling cutter on the breaking plow.

Sod for the Carver house was cut on the side of a swale and was partly wiregrass partly buffalo and some little grama sod; either or all of which may be used, or any grass having close root fibers, would I believe be satisfactory. We used what we had.

Cut sod in two feet lengths, using a sharp spade, and lay them cross ways of the wall, breaking joints, with each layer. lay all sod grass side down, including that on the roof.

In staking out ground for the building, allow two feet all around for the walls and two feet for partitions.

The Carver house was 16 feet wide and 26 feet long outside. I think it was the smallest, and also the best built sod house for miles around.

Have window and door frames ready before beginning to build, and set in place, when a sufficient height is reached to hold them, and building around them as work progresses.

Build walls 4 inches above the frames, before putting on planks, over doors and windows, to allow room for settling of walls.

The West window in the Carver house was a half window, larger than the others.

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It was set the same distance from the top as the other windows.

The cement on the roof was put on the second year after the sod had time to settle.

The floors were soft white pine 1 1/2 inch boards, and the base boards, corner shelves, tables, cupboard, and wash-stand were made of pine and painted a soft blue-gray, except the floors, which were covered with home woven rag carpet, laid over a sprinkling of straw and tacked around the edges.

The walls inside were plastered with native lime and sand. The walls and ceiling boards white-washed with lime, the bedroom finish tinted pink, with Diamond dye.

A square chimney opening was left in the partition wall and a sod chimney built up on the outside.

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Princeton, Minnesota.
April 12, 1932.

Dear Sir:

Having seen an ad in the Nyls Tribune that you wanted to build a sod house and could find no one that knew how. What type did you wish to build, one of the type of 1850 or 1860 and how large did you wish to build. Those types of houses had no windows of glass, the doors were built out of logs and hewed down thin, there was no lumber those days in Kansas. That would make a great sight for the young folks of today. The windows were thin cloth greased to keep out the wind. The walls were 3 feet thick at bottom and 2 feet at top. September is a good time to build one. The sod should be from some low ground where the grass roots are thick and tough. I was born and raised in Kansas, had to help build a few, and could give instructions how to build one now if I were there to do so for my native state.

Will close for this time, hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours truly,

Thomas Bastow,
Princeton, Minn.

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Marseilles, Illinois.
April 25, 1932.

Dear Sir:

Cut sod in May. Use Blue joint sod. Plow with 8 inch plow, cut sod 18 inches long, 8 inches wide, lay first row lengthwise, two 8 in X 16 side by side, the next row crosswise, and so on up eight feet high. Make door and window frames out of 2 X 10 beams, set frames so as to flush with side of wall when trimmed, use sharp spade to thin wall. When finished lay all sod with grass side up. Lay ridge poles lengthwise, use 1 X 6 boards. Six inch centers, cut roof sod two feet long, 12 inches wide, 2 inches thick and break joints same as wood shingles. Windows, 8 X 10, 12 light. Door, 2 feet- 8 X 6 X 8. Can use round ridge poles if so desired, if not use 6 X 8 timbers. Use your own judgment according to size of house. Can plaster inside wall, on sod use Gypsum plaster.

Please let me know if you use this plan.

The last sod house I built was in 1884.

John Sigler,

405 Ill. St.



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Seattle Washington.
5/20/32

Dear Sir:

In reply to the enclosed clipping from the Seattle Times of the 18th, I am going to send you what information I can concerning sod houses. My parents moved to Kansas from Penn. in the year 1878, locating in Barton County. My Mother whose name was Jennie E. Shadrach, taught school there for a number of years. At that time quite a number of people still lived in sod houses and as to the style of them and method of making depended largely upon individual taste. As to the thickness of walls depended also on individual judgment, but I would say anywhere from 18 inches to 20 or 24; the sod at that time was cut from the natural Buffalo grass and cut in squares and laid similar to brick, and cut any time in the summer time. The roofs were covered with poles cut from the cottonwood which grew along the creeks and rivers, this then was covered with sod, and some instances the sod in time covered with straw. As to windows and doors, usually windows were just small single sash in each opening and in some instances no windows, and doors were made of whatever kind of slaps could be cut for them. Some of the old houses were constructed partly on the dugout plan, say about half the depth dug out and about half on the ground. The floors were dirt. As time advanced and people still lived in sod houses would make them more attractive by whitewashing inside and out. I never saw one plastered. I believe that is the best information I can offer you, and if it will be of any help will be glad.

Very truly yours,

MRS E. B. KUELLMER

Navado, Ohio.
May 19, 1932.

Gentlemen:

I saw in our County Daily Paper that you were at a loss to know how to build a Sod House. I spent 4 years in the West, Kansas, Nebraska and S. Dakota and lived in sod houses and also built them. This is the time of year to cut to build the sod houses, if you have the regular Blue Grass Sod, I have made them 2 feet and 3 feet walls, that is just as you like.

Respectfully,

C. H. Kuenzhi,

Navada, Ohio.

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Harry E. Keith 2705 S. A St.,

Elwood Indiana,
May 23, 1932.

Dear Sir:

I see through the column that you are desirous of knowing something in regards to the Sod House of the Prairies and it may seem strange to you that you might hear from one living in Indiana, but I will briefly state that I had the pleasure of building and living in one in Kansas in the 80's and will briefly state that to build a good sod house I would have to take you with me back to South Western Kansas several years back to obtain sod suitable for a sod house because of the fact it has to be built of the first prairies which we call Buffalo sod. I can only give you the plans and specifications for building one so here it is. First you want your sod broke with a Prairie Breaking Plow that the sod needs to be plowed uniform which can be easily done if your plow is working good, cutting sod about 1 foot wide and 2 1/2 inches thick. Cutting your sod one foot wide that would be the thickness of your walls in cutting the sod for the walls cut some one foot long some 2 and 3 and 4 feet, that you might break joints well, laying the sod close together on the wall and keep your wall plumb as in brick or stone as in masonry, yes your plaster can be of sod as in regards to door and windows

(THE REST OF THIS LETTER IS MISSING, E.S.)

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Topeka Kansas.
March 14, 1932.

Dear Sir:

I read with interest the article by Mr. Hubbard in the Sunday Capital so as I witnessed the building of a Sod House that was my home for several years I will attempt to describe it for you.

The sod of the prairie was chosen because of the level tendency of the ground. The plowing was done with a regular sod plow and they turned furrows from 12 to 14 inches wide, and from 2 to 2 1/2 inches thick. These were cut into strips about a foot in length, then laid one on top of the other flat ways with the grass turned down, this made a wall from 12 to 14 inches thick and they were usually about 14 feet wide by 16 to 20 feet long. Ours contained two windows, one on each side containing 4 panes. The roof contained a ridge pole through the center about 2 or three on each side and was covered with a sheeting lumber made from either native lumber rudely finished or old boxes torn up and then covered with sod on top. Floors consisted of two kinds, the bare clay covered with woven rag carpet as my Grandmother's was or a real aristocrat like ourselves who had a floor of boards from the goods boxes in which the things called "household Gods" were packed. Ours was plastered inside which made it much lighter, cleaner, and also was so much easier to see the centipedes who were our worst enemy at that time.

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Mrs. J. W. D-2

For furnishing one cook stove, we could burn wood or famous cow chips which fuel I and my brother gathered for the family use. One large wooden bed and a trundle bed that was pushed under the big one in day time. A pine table Father made and a real cupboard with tin covered doors, some chairs and the other necessary article of daily use. Most of us had a good box in a corner that contained the treasures such as pillows and things the young wives had clung to as a part of the past they had left behind to help build a new state. Those were happy days for us children, two and three miles to school, then home, the neighbors friendliness, always answering the distress signal of a white rag on a high post for illness or any call of real need. Then the parties when they moved out the bits of furniture and put in an un-split log with a board for seats and if by any luck an organ such as we had, singing and sometimes the violin and the young people dancing a waltz or polka. Yes the sod house is a symbol of Kansas and all it stands for and was the home of a race of men and women who still carry on and up.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. W. J. Draper.

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Oakland, California,
April 4th 1932.

Dear Sir:

In answer to an article read in the Oakland Tribune, April 4, in regard to building a sod house, I am glad to give you what information I can, having lived in one from 1880 to 1891, in Oberlin, Decator County, Kansas.

The best time to get the sod is a month or six weeks after the frosts is out of the ground. The sod is the first plowing from the uncultivated ground, with the original grass upon it, which was known as buffalo grass. The sod was cut two or three feet long, ten or twelve inches wide and two to two and one half inches thick. The sods were laid for the walls by starting at a corner and laying as with brick and in filling in cracks with crumbled sod, making the walls three feet thick. The inside walls were finished with lime we got from the hills mixed with sand from from the creeks and plastered over with sod.

The window and door frames were built of two by six wood. The sod was built up leaving spaces for windows and doors. The frames were set toward the inside making deep window sills. The protruding sod over the finished frames was held in place by small branches of trees.

The roofs were built with enough pitch for the rain to run off, by sheering off the end sods. There was a ridge pole made with a tree eight or ten inches thick that ran the length of the house. The rafters were made from small trees four inches thick and placed about two feet apart. The rafters were thickly covered with willow branches and over the

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branches was a layer of coarse straw and over this was two layers of sod, the cracks filled with crumbled sod.

The chimneys were also made of sod.

The houses were usually just one room, but if a partition was wanted it was made of sod as board..

The floor was the ground, leveled off and sprinkled with water. The windows raised up or down and were held open by a stick.

Hoping this information will be of some assistance un your efforts to perpetuate the memory of the sod house.

Yours sincerely,

Emerson P. Doty,

3898 Coolidge Ave.,

Oakland, Calif.

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Terre Haute, Ind.
May 20, 1932.

Dear Sir:

The enclosed newspaper clipping came to my notice today, and I thought I might be able to help you in the matter of sod house. My father, the late P. B. Garrett, of Atwood, Kansas; Kentuckian by birth, Kansan by choice, was a very good friend of Old Aunt Mary Mason, who lived in a sod house built some seventy years ago and still standing in Rawlins Co., about nine miles from Atwood, on R. R. 1.

It was my pleasure a year ago this passed Feb. to go to inspect this house, with its two foot walls, window sills deep enough to make a bench, and I assure you a trip to Mrs. Mason's home would be well worth your while. Anyone in or near Atwood can direct you, and Mrs. Mason, tho about eighty eight years old could give the details of construction in a manner most amazing considering her years.

I hope that this may be of some assistance in your work, and would be glad to help further if possible.

Sincerely,

MRS. HARRY L. DAVIS.

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Santa Maria, California.
April 23, 1932.

Dear Sir:

I read with interest the appended clipping, and perhaps I may be of some assistance, since I have lived in a sod house, and have regretted the passing of this picturesque home.

In 1878 my father built a sod kitchen and though I was but twelve years old, I have a clear recollection of the work. As soon as possible after a rain the ground was plowed and left a few days to dry. A "twelve inch" plow was used and he was careful and he was careful to choose a plot that was covered with a dense mat of buffalo grass.

It was next cut into 24 inch lengths with a sharp spade, and hauled as needed. Most walls were 4 feet thick, and some even more. As they were built about 2 or 3 feet high, small sharp sticks were driven into the ground through the "sods" this helped to keep the walls firm. Door and window spaces were left as desired and boards, usually of packing boxes were placed at top and bottom of spaces. Windows were set about half way between inside and outside walls, but doors were always flush with inside walls.

The former were usually half sash or merely wooden shutters. At top of walls, boards or timbers were laid to anchor the roofs, which was of boards, covered with tar paper and sods. Some used poles from the creeks and sodded on top, then covered with earth.

The sod roofs were laid grass side up, and flowers often bloomed there. The sods used in the walls were laid grass side down.

Some buildings were only "shed roofed" others had gables. A board was often placed about 6 feet from floor on the inside and this was used to drive nails into to hang clothing. Others used long wooden pegs. I have seen many lined entirely with bleached flour sacks sewn together and fastened to walls and ceilings. Some were fortunate enough to find a "gypsum" bed or discovered it while digging the well and used that to plaster the walls.

The floor was dug out below the grass roots and wet thoroughly, pounded and smoothed, making a floor easy to sweep. I think your difficulty will be to find any buffalo sod worthy the name, but heres wishing you the best of luck.

Yours truly,
(Mrs) Gertrude Connaway,
320 E. Church
Santa Maria, Calif.

P.S.

D. H. Connaway is still living in the old claim house built 1884, (merely as a kitchen) and may have pictures that would help. Write him at Dodge City, Kansas.

G.A.C.

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St. Joseph, Mo.
March 20th 1932.

Dear Sir:

I write you in regard to the attached clipping. I lived in Western Kansas from the Spring of 1887 to 1901, in Norton County, in Rockwell Township, which would be Township 2 at the West County line. I have had plenty of experience on sod building. If you will look on the record of the Sons of American Revolution you will see my name there back in those years. If there is any information I can give you will gladly send it to you or anything I can do. We always used the native lime (Magnesia) for plaster, I had to leave there on account of my wife's health. I enjoy listening in on my radio to Topeka of an evening.

Awaiting a reply, I am

Yours truly

Harry B. Clark,
3122 N. 10th St.
St. Joseph, Mo.

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Taholah Indian Agency
Hoquiam, Washington.
May 18, 1932.

Dear Sir:

I have noticed two different articles in the "Seattle Times" concerning your desire to secure information relative to sod houses. This, of course, may be only "newspaper talk", but if you really desire information along this line I may be able to help you to some extent. I lived in a sod house on the plains of Nebraska from the time I was eight years of age until I was about thirteen years old. At that time frame houses were rare in that part of the country, and there were various kinds and descriptions of soddies. Some were "dugouts"---that is, the back side of the house was dug out of the side of a hill and then the sod was placed around the front and exposed sides. Many of these dugouts were floorless; some, I believe had layers of brush and hay over and sod over the brush.

However a real sod house has four walls, a roof and a floor. Buffalo grass sod was, I believe, considered the most desirable sod for this purpose. Spring seemed to be the favorable season for the construction. The sod was, of course, various thickness, but the house I lived in had walls of about 18" thick. They were built brick construction---that is, one layer was laid cross wise and another length wise, serving to hold the wall together. Our house was one story high, although a neighbor built a house two stories high, having no less than eight or ten rooms. Our house had two large rooms, only. There was a heavy beam across the center of it, on which the roof supports rested. Stringers were fitted into the sod, as I recall it,

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to secure it from blowing off, and rough boards were placed on the roof, over which a layer or two of tar paper was tacked. I believe this was fastened by lath tacked over the cracks. Then over this a layer or two of sod was placed, partly to protect it from the elements and partly to make it warmer and more watertight. When my father first built his house he put it up hurriedly and failed to put sod on the roof, which resulted in the tar paper being whipped off during the first heavy rain and hail storm and the place was deluged. Part of us crawled under the beds and my Mother stood under the beam across the center of the house which held up the roof.

The windows and doors are set well to the outside of the walls, perhaps four or five inches in. This makes a wonderful window shelf, where we used to sit and the shelf was used for all manner of purposes. The windows are fitted into heavy wooden frames, and of course the frames must fit closely to exclude wind and cold, also snakes, etc. The doors are fitted in a like manner, and of course, the floor is practically on a level with the ground. Of course the floors were usually of a poor grade of lumber, as could be imagined when the price of lumber prohibited the construction of frame buildings. However the soddies were many times warmer than the frame buildings; also, cooler during the hot weather.

We lived for a time in our house without plastering it; then my father had it plastered and then my mother papered it and it was real neat and cozy.

I notice the question concerning kinds of windows used. They were ordinary windows, two sash. They were built rather low, because of the fact the soddies were usually low.

I might add that my mother, although we hauled water two and

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three miles, bought a bundle of lath and built a little inclosure at one end of the house, and she had the most beautiful flowers there one could imagine, using wash water, etc., to irrigate them. I can smell the fragrance of them still, although that was about the year 1900.

We had tight screens on windows and door. My brother shot two immense rattle snakes, crawling through our door yard---one I believe, had eight rattles and the other five or six.

As I think it over, I believe they must have burned the spot where they plowed the sod, in order to eliminate working with the grass, at any rate they laid the sod grass downward, on the wall.

You may or may not be able to use this information, but I am giving it to you for what it is worth. Would be interested to learn how your house turns out.

Sincerely yours,

MARY E. ISAMINGER.

c/o Taholah Agency
Hoquiam, Washington.

P. S. My father is still living, and I know it would please him greatly to give full information, incase you require more.

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