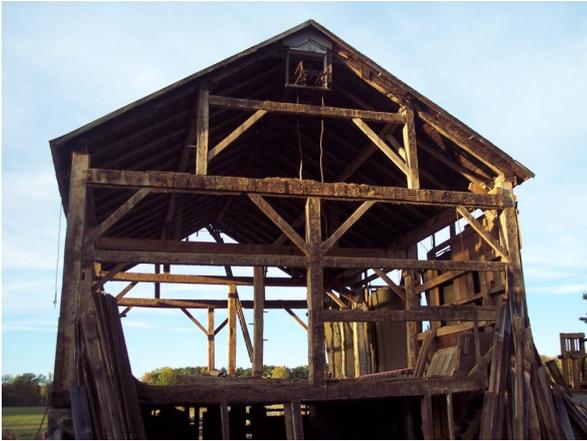


# If I Had A Hammer



When looking at history, we can often gloss over the details and in doing so, fail to grasp the full impact of events that occurred. I never before thought of what kind of housing the original settlers of America were able to build.

On the Mayflower, qualified woodworkers were scarce. Of the 102 people on board, only three had carpentry skills. There was a cooper, a sawyer, and a house builder... all too young to have had much experience. And the sawyer died in the first winter.

As a result, the first settlers wound up living in casks, caves, tents, "English wigwams," even trenches, lined and covered with planks. Subsequent expeditions to the New World made sure to put out the word that qualified carpenters were much in demand.

But the conditions in the New World called for innovative measures. The traditional scribe rule method, used in Europe for centuries, was a labor intensive system in which no piece of timber is interchangeable with another. It also required special scribe joints to connect the irregular timbers to be constructed by skilled craftsmen with years of apprenticeship under their belts. Early settlers, looking to quickly build structures in which to live, largely abandoned this time-consuming and impractical (for their situation) practice and

instead developed the square rule system of framing which was based on exact measurements and the cutting of uniform planks of timber. This methodology, which may not have resulted in structures as attractive as the scribe-built, did meet the needs of the colonists who were in a race against the elements.

I came across this little detail while reading some of the history of Oliver Watson, the 5th great grand-uncle of my brother-in-law. Born in 1736, he settled in Great Barrington, Massachusetts where he worked as a carpenter... the first in the fledgling community to build houses by using the square rule method.

*Michael Ondrasik and Home Video Studio specialize in the preservation of family memories through the digitalization of film, videotapes, audio recordings, photos, negatives, and slides. For more information, call 352-735-8550 or visit our [website](#).*