

Wooden Block Homesteads

by Diane Conroy

When our pioneers first built their homesteads here, it was like playing with blocks. The rooms were built with solid wood walls. There weren't any plumbing problems, with excess pipes. There were no electrical wires to rearrange and reasons to bore holes in the walls. Just solid wood- walls, ceilings, floors and all. Not much foundation or any wimpy walls. So they moved them around. Horses were hitched up to do the pulling and logs or metal "rollers" were put under these square blocks. Many pioneer homes were built this way in this area. In the later 1930's, when the country schools were being abandoned; school houses were often brought to the farms as tool sheds or barns.

John Lorang of White Spring Ranch in Genesee, moved the sections of his Farmhouse as did many other people in this area, but he documented it thoroughly; including the weather at the time. John recorded his daily adventures and also details for the weather "beurar" bureau, with wind conditions and morning and night temperatures.

First, after moving into their well built homestead in 1885, John and Mary Lorang had four boys; but things soon got too crowded for the four growing boys and two parents in that tiny space. The Homestead had been built by a shipbuilder before 1884 and was very solid, but still too small for this big family. So in 1890, John and his older brother Theodore Lorang combined efforts to buy an additional 160 acres just South of the Ranch. This purchase was a big change because the good friends and family that formerly owned the site had a farmhouse. A solid structure built c.1873. We know it was patented by the U.S. government and William White in 1875. There was also a spring on the property named by John's neighbors as White Spring and with this addition we became the White Spring Ranch, in honor of John's old friend, William, who had just passed away. The old farmhouse on the additional acreage was cut in half and transported with horses to create additions to John and Mary Lorang's home. One piece was added to the West side for a washroom. The other side, added to the North end, became the kitchen. The washroom addition was very helpful because it was placed on top of a seepage well, used by the family; so the well was now inside the house. The kitchen addition had a small porch and a new kitchen was a big help to Mary Lorang who had been cooking on a small stove in the main room of the Homestead. This new c.1873 kitchen was actually 10 years older than Mary and John's 1884 Homestead, but it was a much bigger space; a welcoming kitchen for a big family and even until today.

John and Mary Lorang continued to have children. Christine was born in 1891, Amalia in 1892, Bertha in 1895, Martha in 1897, Viola in 1899 and then little Charles in 1902. Charles made the number of boys and girls even and John called them his "Matched set". 10 children and two adults in this tiny home even with the extra additions were too much. Peter the oldest did get sent to college, so that helped. John was adamant about sending his children to college. But times were prosperous for John and Mary in this fertile Palouse soil. The train had arrived in Genesee in 1888, which helped the farmers considerably and the story goes that many farmhouses around here in the early days were quite fancy and elaborate. John decided to build his own elaborate farmhouse.

The big change was made when Charles was out of the crib and almost 2 years old, in 1904. John hitched up the horses again and pulled out the “rollers”. It was a Wednesday, April 6, 1904 and the west wind was up. 32 degrees in the morning and 40 at night. They began to dig up the precious trees around the homestead that John had planted in 1884. After spending two months gathering supplies of wood, sand, bricks “from the old Bank”, paint and rocks for the foundation; on Monday, June 13 a “fine day, 40 morning, 78 evening” John began moving the kitchen addition. It traveled all around the washroom and attached to the south end of this building, until the washroom and kitchen were two peaked buildings, side by side. On Friday, June 17 the weather was “fine all day, 50 morning 82 evening”. John hitched up the horses and turned the 1884 Homestead 90 degrees, so the bay window would, instead of facing the South, would face the road and become part of the front of the new house he was going to build. On Wednesday, June 29th, 1904, it was “50 morning, nice all day, 86 evening” and the professional carpenters began work on the new section. John wrote in his journal “G. Stelz and Forest began to work on the new house at 9:00 in the morning.” John would help with carpentry during this process, building the china cabinet, some floors and ceilings, generally assisting. The new addition was finished in 1904, but it wasn’t until Monday, June 5, 1905 “40 morning, rained all night, 56 evening” when John put down the paintbrush and writes “I finisht work on the house, been to school meeting”.

One time I tried to explain this process to visitors of the Ranch, but just ended up just waving my arms in the air and pointing, saying “it went over to this side, then....”. After the blank stares, I found some children’s blocks and used these to demonstrate the story.

John took several photos of his new 1904 Farmhouse, with his matched set of children. It has been restored and can be seen just off Hwy. 95, 2 miles North of the Genesee junction. We are Open again and welcome visitors, Sundays and Tuesdays, 1 p.m. -Sunset. or by appointment at (208)416-1006.



1890 photograph of Homestead with Bay Window

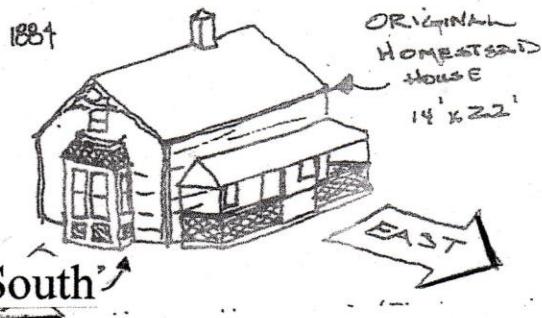


2020 photograph with Bay Window behind tree branches

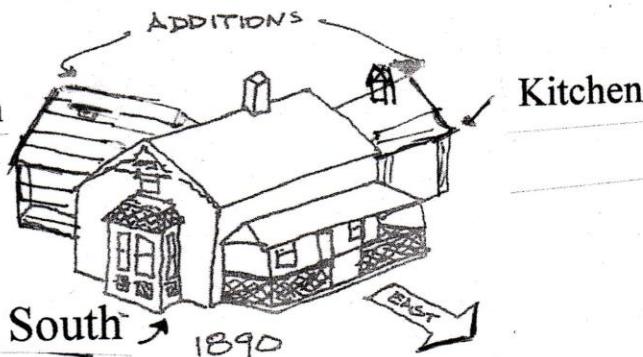


Back of Farmhouse, 2007

1884



1890



1904



Friday April 8, 1904 The Genesee News

-John Lorang has plans drawn for some very extensive improvements about his farm residence. When carried out they will represent an expenditure of about \$2,000.00 and the Lorangs will have one of the finest homes in the country. The proposed additions to the present residence will be 16"x28" and 16"x24", two stories in height.

Friday May 20, 1904 The Genesee News

-John Lorang is hauling lumber out for the erection of his new farm residence.

Drawing by Kurtis Zenner, U of Idaho Architecture student in 1986