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family photo courtesy of Bob Warren

from cabins to mansions

by bob warren

THE “AMERICAN DREAM” IS TO OWN A HOME. Through time the size of that dream home has grown from a cabin to a mansion.

Recently a friend told me her son had married and was building a 5000 square-foot “starter home” in Frisco. If that’s a “starter,” how big will their “dream home” be? Then I learned the average sized home built in Frisco in the year 2003 was over 3900 square feet. Those amazing statistics set my time-warped brain racing to thoughts of the shanties our forefathers called home. Some of the log cabins in this area were only 324 square feet – with kids.

Let’s look at the evolution of housing since the early settlers came to this part of the country. We find that size is only one of the many changes in our homes. Technology, the economy and the desire to improve our living conditions have brought us from dirt-floored cabins to mansions filled with luxurious amenities.

When Frisco was founded in 1902, the surrounding land was dotted with small farms. Although the more affluent farms afforded two story Victorian houses liberally decorated with elaborate, “ginger bread,” most of the farm homes of that day were modest one story, often unpainted, frame structures. One popular style was the “dog run” house with a large, open-air hall down the middle and rooms on each side – often one or two bedrooms on one side and the kitchen on the other. I’m told dogs slept in the cool shade of the hall; however, halls served primarily as a breezeway at a time when the only cooling came from open doors and windows.

Typical houses of that era rested on bois d’arc blocks tall enough to invite chickens, pets and even children to play in the cool shade under the house. Most homes had porches, some of which wrapped around the front and sides of the house. Porch

swings and rocking chairs were a popular place to rest, chat with the neighbors and to shell peas. Large kitchens functioned as a place, not only to cook, but also to dine, visit – and, before indoor plumbing, to bathe in a big washtub on Saturday night.

Some farmers built a small house for “hired hands” or a family of “sharecroppers” (tenant farmers who gave a part of each crop as rent). My wife, Ann, lived part of her childhood in a three-room sharecropper’s house. She said, “No dustpan was needed. We just swept across the floor boards, and the crumbs fell through the cracks to the hungry chickens below.”

Early-day Frisco homes were similar to those on surrounding farms. About fourteen houses were moved in, rolled from the Lebanon community on logs. Dr. I. S. Rogers, the town’s first mayor, owned the first two story home built here and Frisco’s first brick residence, the J. R. Newman home, was completed in 1918. Most of these early homes have been preserved or restored and are occupied today.

The 1920’s and ‘30’s brought electricity, city water and sewer service to Frisco. Many of the homes were modest two bedroom, one outhouse, frame houses with one naked light bulb dangling from the ceiling of each room. I grew up in such a house. It was called a “California Bungalow”. Houses could actually be ordered from the Sears, Roebuck catalogue to be built on your lot.

The 1950’s and ‘60’s introduced more masonry construction with low, rambling ranch style homes. Some had hardwood floors, three and four bedrooms, multiple baths and attached garages. Lower ceilings came with the advent of central air.

House prices have increased dramatically in the last eighty years. In 1925, our house was built at a cost of \$2.40 per square-foot. In 1960, \$10 per square-foot was average for a new, four bedroom, brick home. According to a local builder, the price of luxury homes built in this area today is more like \$125 per square-foot, plus the lot cost. Why such an increase? Much is due to inflated costs of material, labor, land and development; however a great deal has to do with our move from a very simple to a luxurious life style in the way our houses are equipped.

So, tonight as you press a button to open your garage door, drive into your multi-car garage, heat your dinner in the microwave, then settle into your media room to watch a movie, think how far we have come from the cabin days. Pause a moment, and be thankful you have a comfortable home, ‘cause it wasn’t always that way in Frisco’s early days.



Frisco native Bob Warren is a humorist, historian and former Frisco Mayor.