

Rural Life in North Carolina 1800 to 1900: Some things change and some stay the same



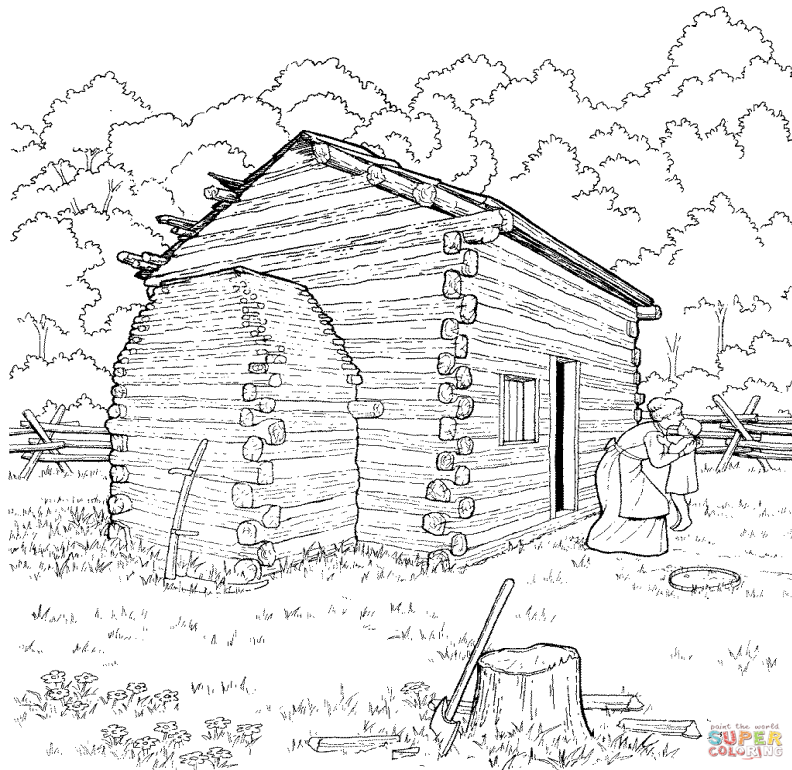
Take a look at the photo on the left. Do you have an idea when it was taken? What types of clues or evidence do you see in the photo that helped you decide?

The photo shows a family living in the rural countryside of eastern North Carolina. They made a living off the land, providing for themselves as best they could on the family farm. Life for many rural people across the state was at times changed little from the earliest days of settlement of the region's first peoples and its colonial settlers into the early 20th century. Many people lived a hard life and often struggled to provide the most basic necessities.

Many families lived in small houses. Some homes were log cabins or simple wood frame buildings. Sometimes the entire

family lived in one or two rooms. And sometimes houses didn't even have windows. This type of life was common for some people living on farms throughout the state from the 1700s to even into the 1900s in North Carolina. Most of the state's rural residents did not have electricity until the 1950s and 1960s. And in the 1940s only about 8% of the state's rural residents even had flush toilets. That began to change in the 1950s when the state worked to extend utilities to rural areas.

The photograph was taken some time around 1900. Based on what you know, does that surprise you? Why or why not? What story could you tell about the life of this family? Do you think they had electricity or running water? The drawing below shows a log cabin that was a common type of home that people built beginning in the 1600s. In fact, it's based on the home where Abraham Lincoln lived as a young boy in the early 1800s. How does it compare to the cabin in the photograph? What do you think are basic necessities in life?



Find this activity sheet in NCpedia: https://www.ncpedia.org/sites/default/files/print_pdf/ncpedia_activity_sheet_ruralife.pdf

Read the full article on Living off the Land: Life in Rural N.C. in NCpedia: <https://www.ncpedia.org/rural-life-settlement-student>

Log cabin coloring page credit: <https://www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/abraham-lincoln-log-cabin>

Activity page created by Kelly Agan, State Library of North Carolina, 2020

Photograph of a farming family and home in eastern N.C., ca. 1900, from the Albert Barden Collection, State Archives of North Carolina