There are twelve log houses, the Rutledge Tavern, ten workshops, stores, two mills and a school where church services were also held. The first half of the village was reconstructed by the English Brothers Construction Company. The Civilian Conservation Corps took up reconstruction in 1932. Before that the Old Salem Lincoln League had erected several log buildings. Those buildings deteriorated and were rebuilt. The Lincoln League was formed to research and keep the spirit of New Salem alive.

The furnishings and many articles used by the New Salem people in the 1830’s were gathered and donated by the Old Salem Lincoln League. The collection includes wheat cradles, candle molds, wool cards, dough and cornmeal chests, flax hackles and early American pewter.

New Salem settlers built strong substantial log houses intending to stay. They had moved several times before, so they knew how to construct log houses.

“Research has proven that the details of cabin construction in this town as well as in this section of Illinois, were more workmanlike, and carried to a greater degree of refinement than in southern Illinois, southern Indiana and Kentucky.”

Poorer homes were given puncheon (logs flattened on only one side) floors and better houses were built with sawn board floors.

Several features of the Onstot home, for example, show that it was built by one of New Salem’s prosperous craftsman in 1835, when the village was at its peak of prosperity. It had two rooms and a frame addition, and is larger than most of New Salem’s poorer homes. Of the two rooms, one room was used for day use was built on the east (the house’s warmer side).

Other features illustrate its finer craftsmanship. The floors are sawn boards rather than puncheon. Fireplaces, chimneys and mantles are of stone with brick hearths while poorer homes had chimneys made of wood and clay. “The hardware in a home of a wealthier family was made of iron, whereas poorer families had to use wooden latches to hold their doors closed.”
Traditionally people in the South built their homes with the chimneys on the ends of the home, whereas people in the North, particularly New England area put their chimneys in the center of the home.

The homes of the New Salem settlers were small and crowded. They lived a simple life. The more ambitious people made money at their trades and were able to build nicer homes in spite of their surroundings. Poorer families just barely got by with simpler homes and meager furniture, supplies and necessities. “It appears that the people who settled in New Salem were energetic and ambitious. The homes in New Salem were neat and tidy and more than just shelter from the weather. The logs of the homes were squared on both inside and out. After the logs were “chinked” with split pieces of wood, wedged in place and “plastered” with clay or lime, the cabins were weatherproof and trim. The log corners were fitted together by means of neatly chopped or sawn notches and the logs were cut off at the corners, leaving no ugly protruding ends.” ³ As the town grew and people began to make money, expert help was hired to assist in creating better constructed homes and businesses.

“Nails gradually replaced wood pegs, wrought iron handles were used instead of wooden latches, and the creation of the saw-mill saved many hours of cutting with an ax. Eventually the settlers made contact with Springfield and Saint Louis where they could purchase window glass, nails and other supplies. Stone and clay were found near by. Hand molded bricks were used for fireplace mantels and hearths.” ⁴

References

1. Booton, Record of Restoration, p. 20 Interpreters Guide of Onstot Residence
2. Booton, Record of Restoration, p. 54
4. Ibid.