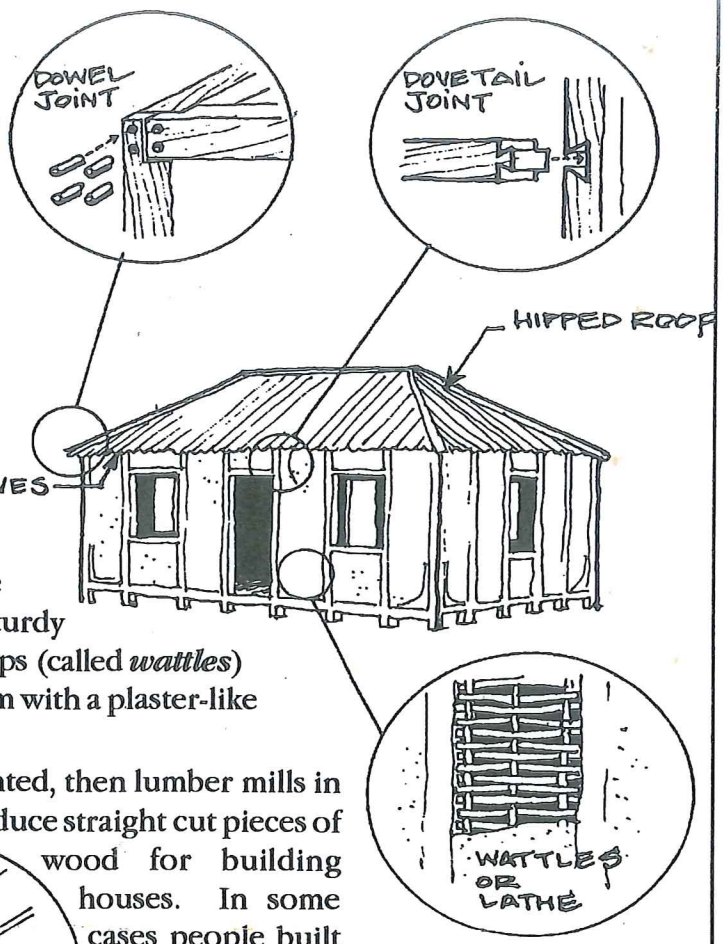
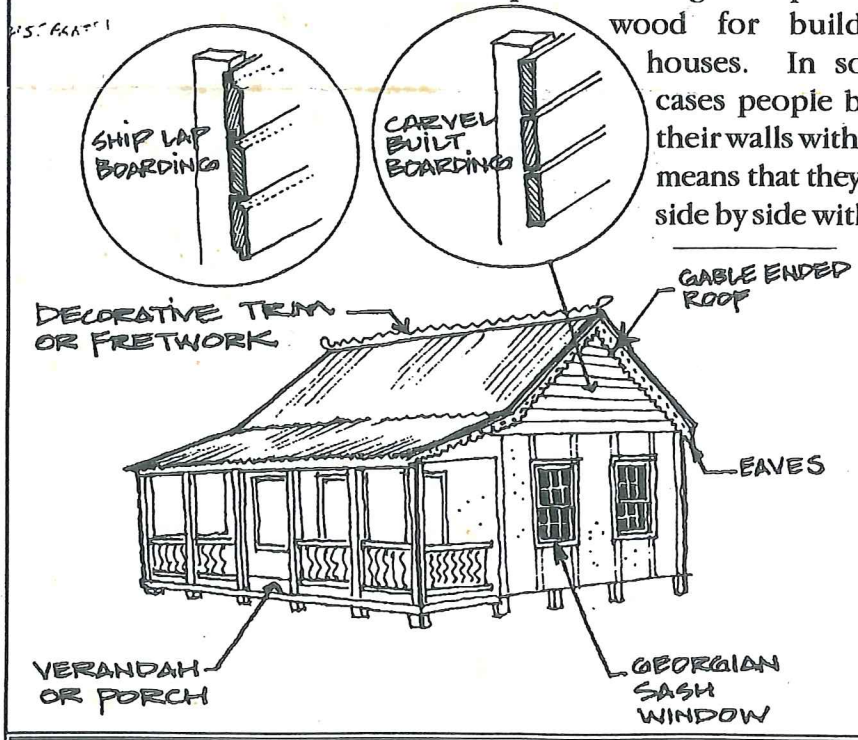
In the old days...

Can you imagine building a home from ironwood, cabbage trees, mahogany, thatch and coral rocks? Well, your ancestors did. There are even a few examples of these early houses still standing today. There were no home centres or lumber yards to purchase materials from. In fact, nails were rare and if you could find them, they were iron and rusted. People used ***dowel joints*** and ***dove-tail joints*** for joining wood instead. (See diagram) Because commercially made materials were not at hand, people found local materials that worked. Sturdy walls were made from weaving wood strips (called ***wattles***) from the cabbage tree and covering them with a plaster-like substance (called ***daub***).



When the circular saw was invented, then lumber mills in the United States were able to mass produce straight cut pieces of wood for building houses. In some cases people built their walls with ***carvel built boarding.*** This means that they would lay the wooden planks side by side with a small space to allow for air circulation and wood expansion when it rained. An even better method was then developed patterned after ship building. It was called ***ship lap boarding***. In this method, the boards were pre-cut in the factories to fit tightly together in an overlapping style so that rain would run off and away from the building. This method is still used today.



Special Thanks

The information and illustrations in this issue are based on research and drawings from architect John Doak who is Chairman of the Historic Sites and Buildings Committee.

A.C.E. VOCABULARY

If you want to be an A.C.E., you've got to know all these terms and what they mean. Read them carefully. Then underline each of these words that are used every time they are used in this issue. By the time you finish this newsletter, you will really know them.

PITCH - the steepness of a roof.

GABLE - the vertical triangular ends of a house from the eaves to the top.

HIPPED - all four sides of the roof were angled back towards the centre.

CARVEL BUILT - planks of wood were laid side by side with a small space to allow for wood expansion when it rained.

SHIP LAPPED - planks of wood were overlapped so that rain would run off and away from the building.

DOWELS - a wooden pin for joining two boards.

DOVETAIL TYPE JOINT - a method of joining two pieces of wood, often corners, by making a kind of triangular shape at the end of one piece and carving out a matching shape from the other piece - just like a puzzle.

VERANDAH - an open porch or gallery along the side of a house, often with a roof.

LATHS - thin narrow slips of wood woven between main support posts which support plaster.

BALLOON FRAMING -a concept still used in house building today, where a frame or skeleton of the entire house and roof is erected and then the sides and top are fastened to the frame.

COOK-RUM - a kitchen or room for cooking, usually found as a separate building.

WATTLE - thin strips of wood, cut from a cabbage tree, woven together to support plaster or daub.

DAUB - a locally produced plaster made from the ash of burned coral rocks.

SYMMETRICAL - balanced, both sides exactly alike.

ASYMMETRICAL unbalanced, each side is different in shape.

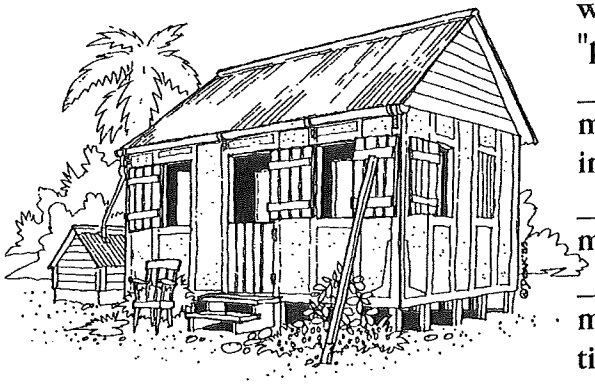
Making do with what you've got !

In days gone by Caymanians had to be clever enough to build homes without all the imported luxury items we have today. Can you unscramble these words and match these natural materials to their uses?

NORI DOOW ***CHATTH MAPL***
LOACR SRCOK ***YANMAGHO ERTE*** ***GABABCE TERE***

_____This natural material was used to make floor planks because it was so hard and strong.

_____This natural material was used to make wattles to be woven between the wall posts onto which the "plaster" was put.

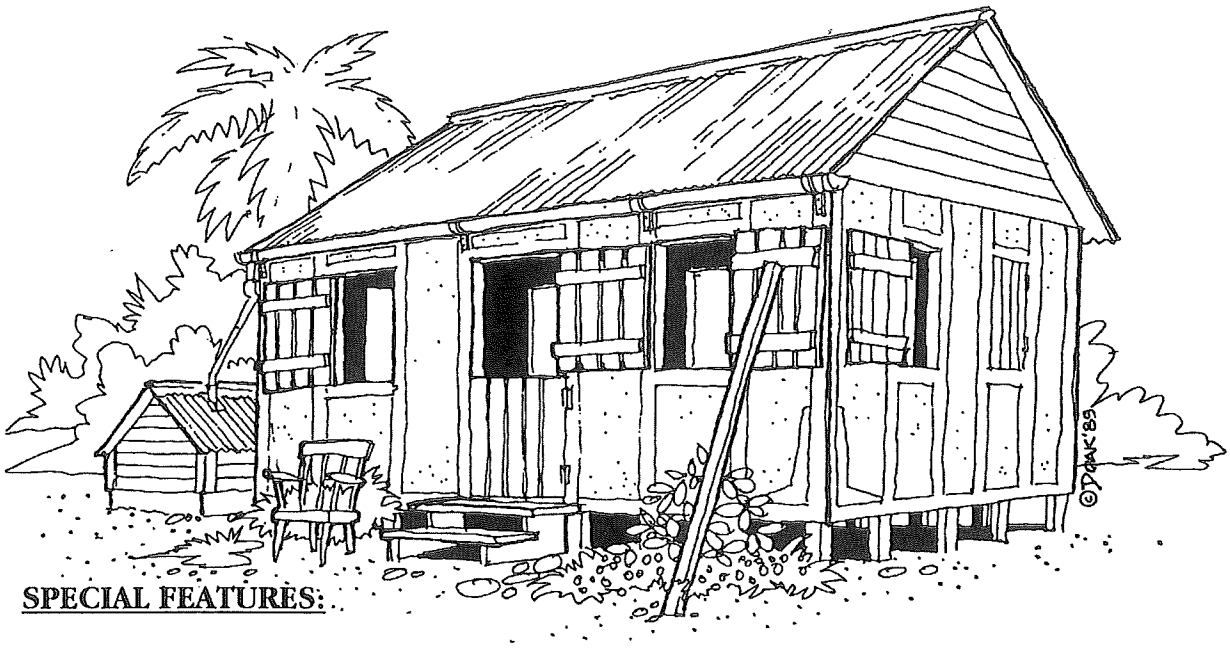


_____This natural material was used to make posts that were set into the ground to lift the house off the ground.

_____This natural material was used to make plaster and paint.

_____This natural material furnished leaves which were woven tightly into a water-proof roof.

THE WATTLE AND DAUB HOUSE



SPECIAL FEATURES:

Period: 17th Century through early 19th Century
Construction materials: mahogany,ironwood, wattles, daub, thatch
Construction method: made by hand with minimal tools
Shape: rectangular
Entrance location: on the centre of the long side
Plumbing: kitchen and bathroom facilities outside
Style influence: European and African creole and nautical influences

The Wattle and Daub house was the first type of permanent dwelling built by early European and African settlers as far back as the 17th Century up through the 19th Century. This easy to construct, rectangular house was made from materials Islanders could readily find, like mahogany, ironwood, thatch and lime. The entrance was usually in the centre of the long side. Because of the influence of seafaring men this Wattle and Daub house was used much the way a ship's cabin was, that is mainly for sleeping. Hammocks were hung inside much the way they were in a ship. The work and activity of the day really went on outside. The kitchen, cookrum and buttery facilities were in a separate building at the back.

The walls were made from wattle and daub. The space between wall posts was filled in with wattles from post to post. This basket-woven network of thin wood strips, often cut from a cabbage tree, provided a base for the daub. Daub is a lime-based plaster, made by burning coral rocks with various woods in a lime kiln. This combination provided a very strong wall some 4-6 inches thick. House timbers were often joined by dowels or dovetail joints because iron nails rusted, and were difficult to obtain.

The roof was often made of thatch which, if pitched right, would keep the house cool and dry. More wattles were loosely woven between the roof rafters. Leaves from the thatch palm trees were loosely woven on wattles laid between the roof rafters. Leaves from the thatch palm tree were then tied in place in overlapping layers and frequently hipped. Later roofs were gabled. These gables were often carvel built to allow for cooler air circulation.

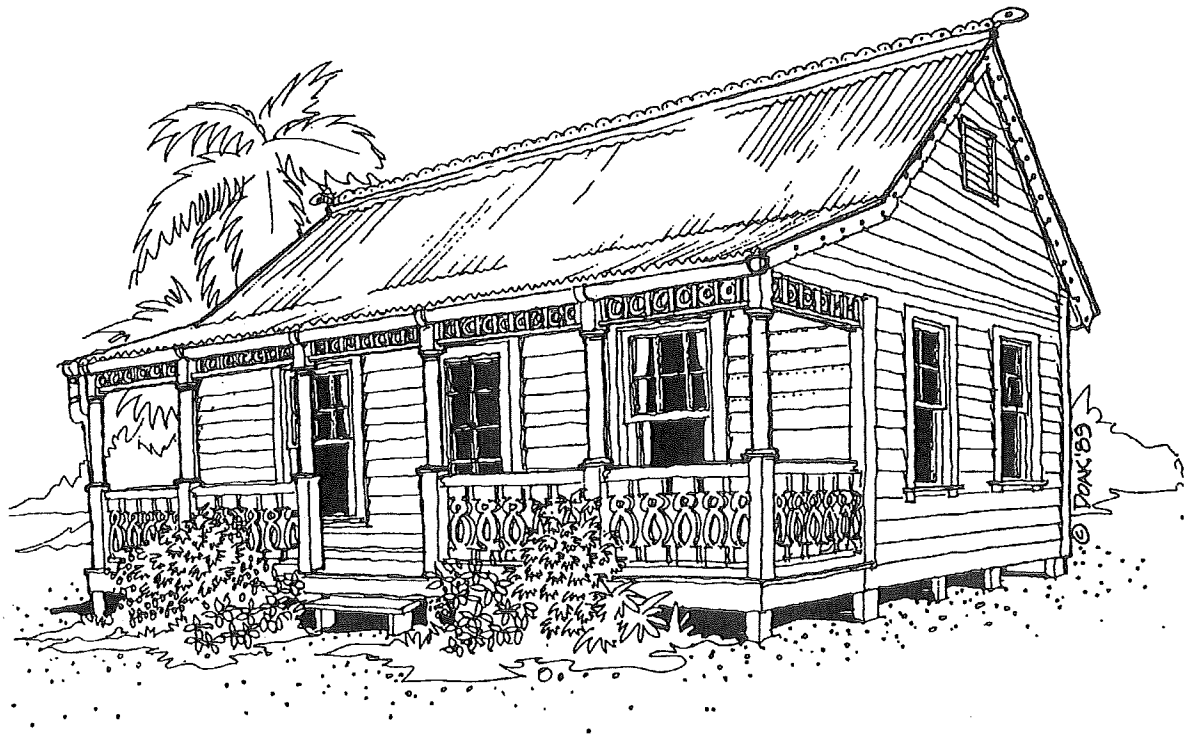
THE TIMBER HOUSE

SPECIAL FEATURES:

Period: Mid 19th Century to 20th Century
Construction materials: pre-cut timber and nails, generally imported
Construction methods: used ship building skills and tools to assemble pre-cut, imported materials
Shape: rectangular
Entrance location: on centre of long side
Plumbing: outdoor/attached kitchen and bathrooms
Style influence: idea brought by men who sailed to America
Other: intricate fretwork

With the invention of the circular saw in the United States, lumber mills could produce pre-cut wooden planks. A new style of building called balloon framing was invented at the same time.

Caymanians who sailed the seas saw this American style "cabin" and brought this new style of building home because they could order all the parts needed from a builder's catalogue. They also began to use nails to join wood, which was much faster and more efficient. These rectangular houses were made entirely of wood, often with a porch or verandah down the long side of the house, decorated by intricate fretwork. The roofs were gabled as corrugated iron became popular roofing material. The kitchens and bathroom facilities were generally in separate buildings, but became attached in later buildings.

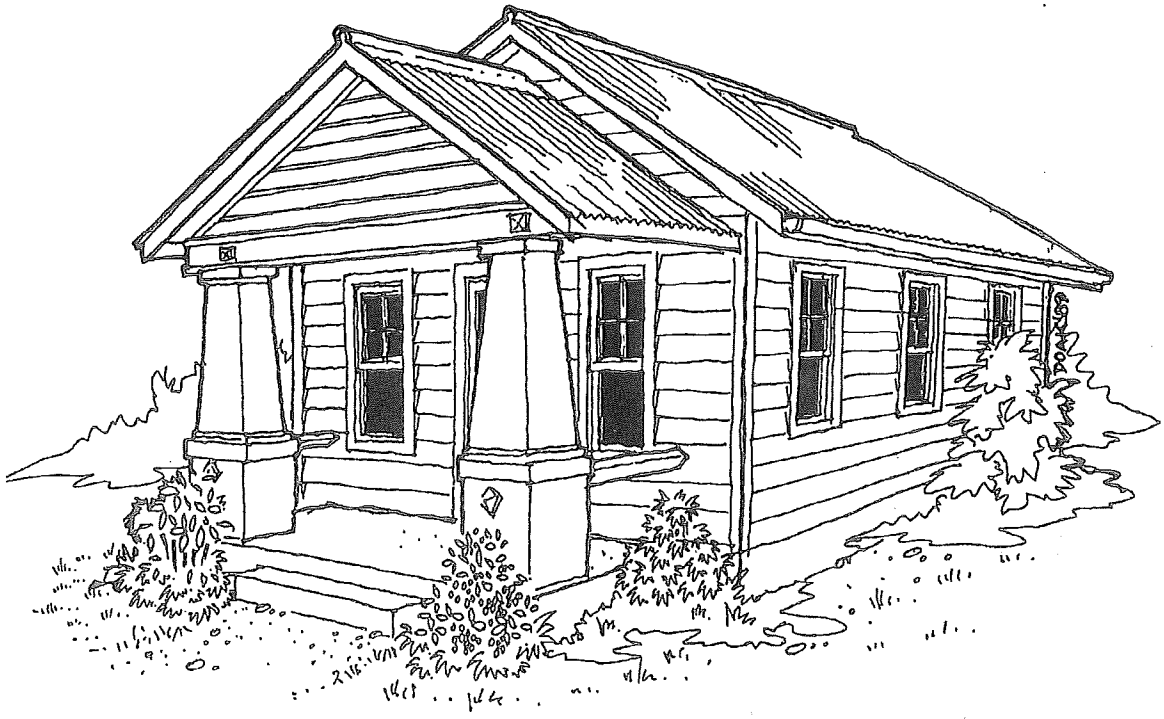


THE BUNGALOW

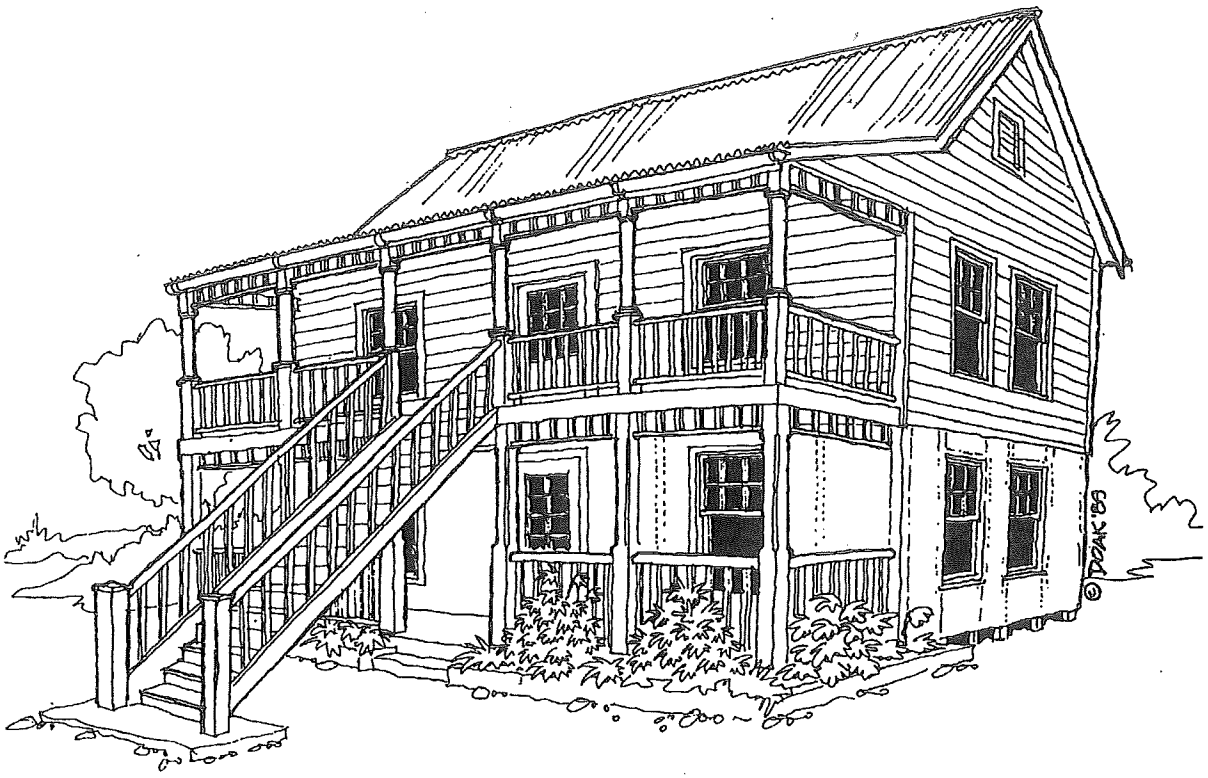
SPECIAL FEATURES:

Period: Early 20th Century to present
Construction materials: pre-cut timbers and later cement and blocks
Construction methods: used pre-cut, imported materials and more sophisticated tools than the Wattle and Daub house
Shape: often asymmetrical, interconnected spaces, more spread out
Entrance location: often on centre of short side with wide porch
Plumbing: built-in bathrooms and kitchens
Style influence: American origin and influence
Other: bold, oversized wooden columns, low wide roofs

The traditional bungalow is rectangular with the entrance and gabled porch generally on the short side facing the road. The roof was shallower in pitch, giving the house a much more horizontal look. These wide low roofs gave the owner/builder more freedom to arrange rooms and include bathrooms and kitchens which were by then a fashionable requirement for modern living. Many of these homes have bold, oversized wooden columns, supporting the porch gables as you can see in the picture. But the main difference between the wattle and daub houses and the timber houses and the newer style bungalows was the shallower pitch in the roof. Some bungalows are built of wood but after the 1930's others were built of cement block.



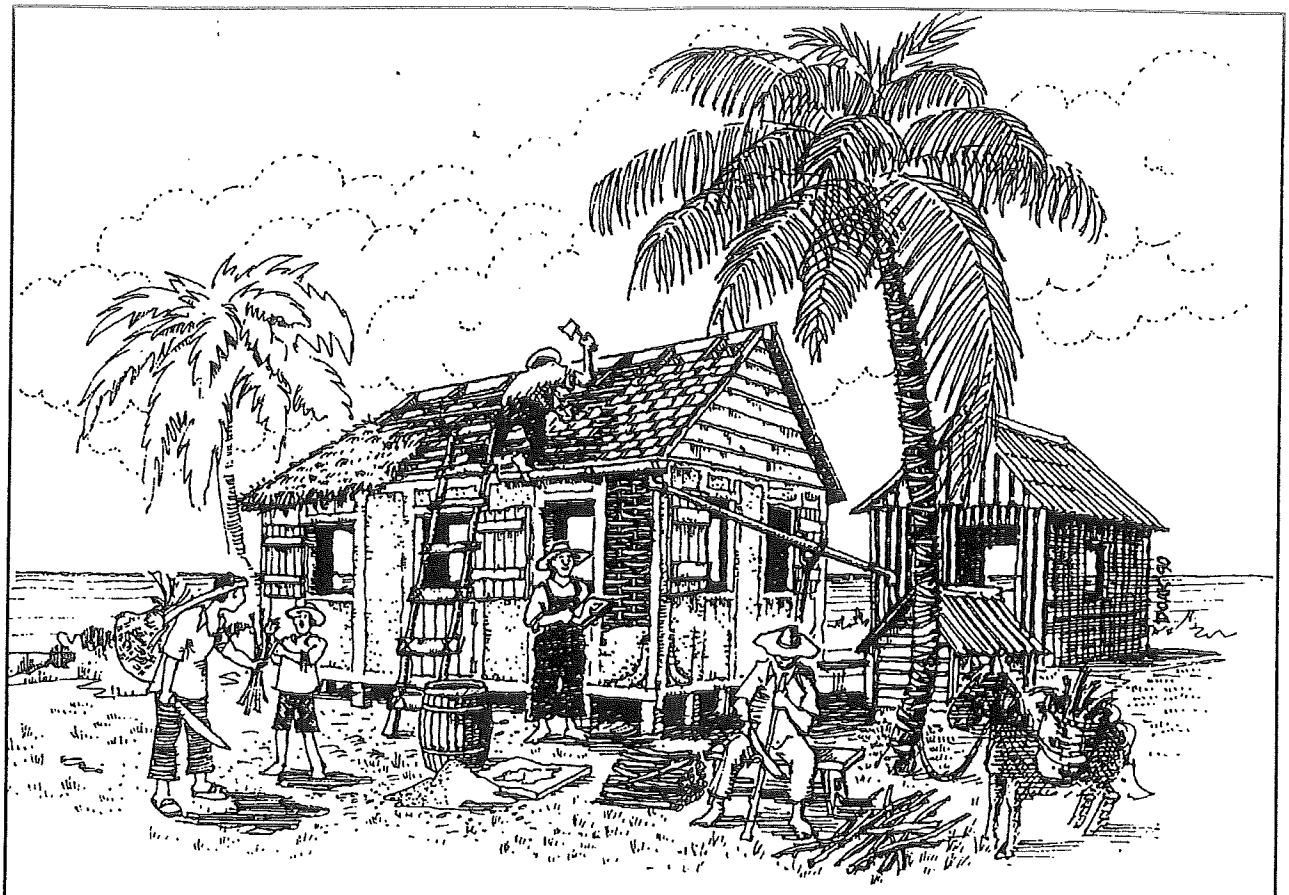
THE MANOR HOUSE



SPECIAL FEATURES:

Period: Mid 19th Century to present
Construction materials: often a combination of wattle and daub and imported lumber
Construction methods: The bottom storey often wattle and daub or originally a standard wattle and daub house with the top storey added on top at a later date.
Shape: rectangular, and symmetrical
Entrance location: entrance on centre of long side
Plumbing: built-in kitchens and bathrooms in later examples
Style influence: American influence

The Manor house, commonly referred to as an "upstairs house" is a two storey building reflecting one of the other styles but generally built by wealthier people. Manor homes were symmetrical and had an exterior single flight of stairs at the middle of the roadside facade going up to living rooms or family rooms with cool breezes and pretty views. Sometimes the bottom storey was built of wattle and daub, but the top floor was always made of wood. The second floor most often took the shape of the first floor. When a second floor was added to the bungalow style, however, a freer, less symmetrical style was taken.



HOW GOOD A DETECTIVE ARE YOU ?

Study the picture on this page carefully. Then answer the questions below.

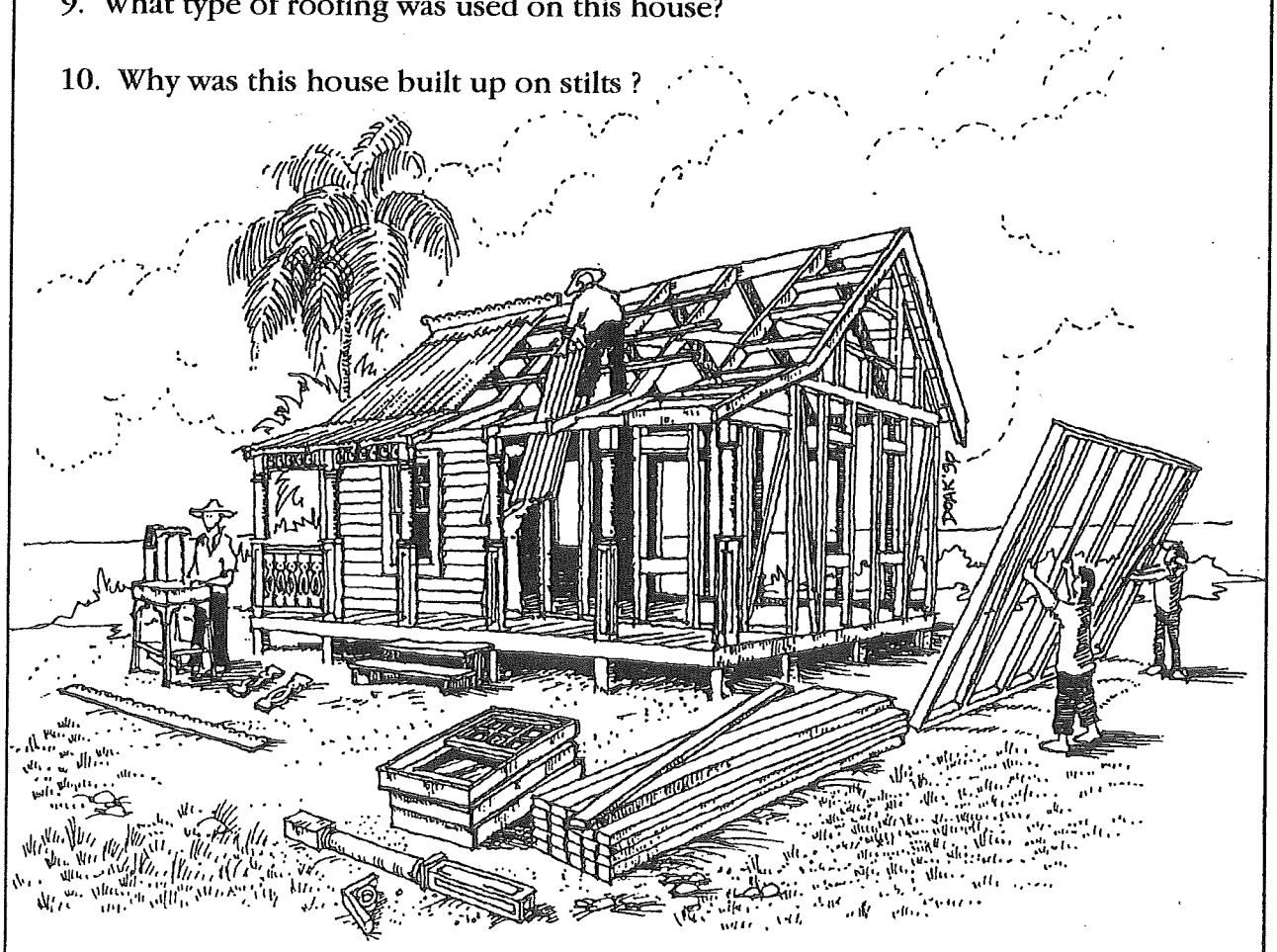
1. What kind of house are the men working on?
2. What is the man in the dark overalls doing ?
3. What is the man on the roof doing ?
4. Can you name three types of roofing materials used in the picture ?
5. What is the larger open building at the rear of the main house ?
6. What is the smaller low building next to the main house ?
7. What is the man with the ground basket on his back giving to the boy ?
8. What is the man sitting with the machete whittling ?
9. Why is the donkey in the picture ?
10. Where is the front door to the main house ?

(Answers inside back page)

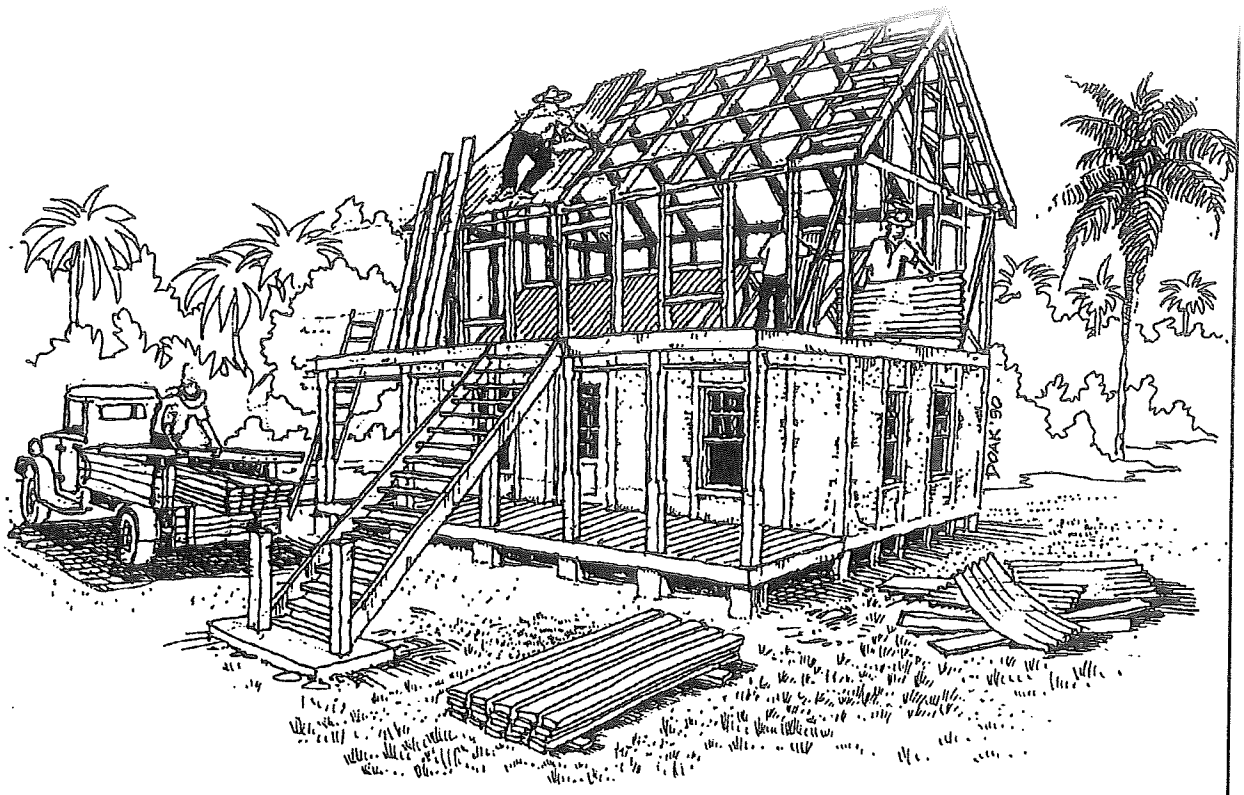
HOW GOOD AN ADVANCED DETECTIVE ARE YOU ?

Study the picture on this page carefully. Then answer the questions below

1. What is the invention which made this type of building possible ?
2. What type of house is this ?
3. Where did Caymanians learn this type of building from?
4. What was the first thing the workmen put up ?
5. What are the two men on the right lifting ?
6. Name the four items in the foreground.
7. What tool in this picture was necessary to produce these items?
8. Where will the front door of this house be ?
9. What type of roofing was used on this house?
10. Why was this house built up on stilts ?



(Answers inside back page)



SUPER SLEUTH CHALLENGE

If you've made it this far you probably got most of the answers right so far. Congratulations! Now try this Super Sleuth Challenge. (Answer Key on opposite page. Don't peek!)

1. What kind of house is being built in the picture ?
2. What type of room will the stairs lead up to ?
3. What type of house is forming the basis of the new house ?
4. What type of roofing material is being removed from the old house ?
5. What type of roofing materials is being used in the new one ?
6. What did the building of such a house around an older house signify ?
7. What were the downstairs rooms used for?
8. Where were the bathroom and kitchen facilities in these houses?
9. What was the common name for such houses?
10. What is the term used to describe the framing of the house ?

Tings To Do

Here's a list of fun projects you might like to do. You can choose the ones that interest you.

Map your neighbourhood. Draw a map of your neighbourhood and mark the Caymanian style houses on your map. Can you find at least one example of each style in your neighbourhood?

Colour the houses. Colour all the pictures in this newsletter. Try to find out what colours people painted their houses and colour your pictures accordingly.

Photograph your favourite houses. Take pictures of your favourite Caymanian style houses (at least one of each style) and make a booklet with one picture per page and a short paragraph about why you like it.

Build a model of a Caymanian style house. You can use the kit from the National Trust (members got one in the mail) or make your own. Don't forget to make a garden around the house.

Take a walk/drive down South Church Street in Grand Cayman or the Northside Road in Cayman Brac. Keep a check list of each type of house you see. Try to find out the name of the owner, how old the house is and any other interesting facts. Remember to be polite, ask if you can take a picture of the house and send the owner a thank you note. Put the information you have gathered in a booklet with pictures of the houses (either photographs or drawings). Now you have helped to preserve these beautiful old houses and you have helped us to...**Save the Cayman Islands - One piece at a time.**

Answer Keys

GOOD DETECTIVE

1. Wattle and Daub house 2. He is putting daub on the wattles of the house. 3. He is replacing an old thatch roof with cedar shingles. 4. Thatch, zinc and cedar shingles.
5. The Cookrum with outdoor cooking facilities. 6. The cistern. 7. Thatch 8. Wattles 9. Because the donkey was used to transport crops from the land. 10. In the centre of the front, longer side, behind the ladder.

ADVANCED DETECTIVE

1. The table saw because it revolutionized construction methods 2. A timber house. 3. From travelling to Key West, Florida and from catalogues. 4. The floor. 5. The last section of the pre-made balloon frame of the house. 6. Prefabricated windows, pre-cut lumber, "turned" porch posts, fretwork trim. 7. The fret saw or band saw. 8. In the centre of the long side. 9. Generally zinc although some did use shingles. 10. The house was built on stilts to allow for better air circulation and to help keep insects out.

SUPER SLEUTH

1. A manor house. 2. A living room 3. A wattle and daub house 4. Zinc 5. Zinc 6. That the family was prospering 7. Sleeping 8. Mainly located inside the house. 9. Upstairs house 10. Balloon framing.

SCORING

26-30 CORRECT - EXCELLENT
21-25 CORRECT - GOOD
16-20 CORRECT- FAIR
11-15 CORRECT -READ THIS NEWSLETTER AGAIN
0-10 CORRECT - START ALL OVER AGAIN