

Build Now or Wait?

By P. S. Lovejoy, in Country Gentleman

It would be a safe bet that grandfather thought quite a lot about it and did considerable worrying before he built the big red barn, and that grandmother found several occasions to remark that it was a wonder to her how a man could figure out that he ought to build a big red barn when his wife didn't have anywhere near enough pantry shelves or even an inside pump.

But it was a noble red barn, with hand-hewn frame of white oak timbers hauled up from the creek bottoms and mortised and pinned together. Outside, the barn was finished with twelve-inch white-pine boards sixteen feet long—hardly a knot showing. The floor was of heavy oak plank and the shingles were of white cedar from Wisconsin.

When the frame went up I suppose the neighbors came over and had a "bee," and later on there must have been a barn dance and "husking," with red ears judiciously mixed in with the rest.

As the barn got down to business, with the stock in their stalls, the survey house alongside the demerol wagon and the buckboard, and the loft full of hay, no doubt grandfather heaved him a sigh of relief, thought how lucky he was, wondered how he could manage to get the bills paid without stalling on the mortgage, at this regretted his haste in building, and finally got to wondering if it wasn't about time to shape up for another barn or so. Perhaps he compromised with grandmother on a new hay shed and the inside pump.

When the red barn was built I suppose wages were about a dollar a day. Maybe the boss carpenter got two dollars. The oak frame and floors were cut locally and cost only the wages that went into them.

The cost of construction increased between 1902 and 1914 by about 20 per cent and since then has increased at least 25 per cent, so one of 45 or 50 per cent, so one can get a line on prospective present costs by adding a half to the figures quoted. Of course any such figures are only averages and cannot well be accurate for every different combination.

In spite of the very great increases in construction cost, it is likely that one can buy more for the price of a bushel of corn or beans or wheat right now than he could ten years back; like enough, more than he can in years hence. There are other things to figure on besides the total bill in dollars. For instance: a shed which keeps \$1500 worth of machinery out of the weather is a more valuable shed than the one which protects only \$200 worth of machinery. It may be the same old shed and the same old machinery, but isn't the state ment above true?

Figure it out on a pile. A 90-ton rig cost \$200 in 1914 and now costs \$400. That's a 50 per cent increase. Looks high? But figure it out on the basis of Chicago produce quotations for 1914 and 1919 and it looks like this:

Value of Farm Produce.	
	Jan. 1914 Jan. 1919
Wheat	\$6.80 \$ 2.25
Corn	3.50 1.41
Hops	8.00 13.00
Beet	9.25 20.00
Amount of Produce to Buy Sheds	
	Jan. 1914 Jan. 1919
Wheat	327 bu 178 bu

Corn 161 bu. 284 bu.
Hops 3247 lbs 2000 lbs
Beet 3756 lbs 2222 lbs
Ever hear of the "Lumber Trust?" Sure. Everybody has. Well, there isn't any. The Bureau of Corporations and the Department of Justice turned the lumber industry inside out and found a lot of astonishing things, but no "trust." It was found that timber supplies were even more limited than anybody suspected; that there was a very great concentration in the ownership of timberlands which had the makings of monopoly, but no general control of lumber prices.

We have gotten ourselves into rather a jam. Until about twenty-five years ago nearly everybody had the idea that we had "enough timber to last the world forever." So we gave away millions of acres of it to the transcontinental railroads, sold millions of acres more for \$2.50 an acre or less, and then let the rest go to whoever was willing to lie a little in making out the papers. When about 85 per cent of all the good forest in the country had passed into private hands, we salvaged the remnant, after a big fight, and made them into the National Forests. Most of the National Forests are back in the Western mountains behind broad belts of privately owned timber, and, therefore, hard to get at or the until after the private timber is gone. Pretty soon we are going to be exceedingly glad we have those National Forests, and a few years from now the kids will not be able to understand why we did not get more of them while there was time.

It's a fool sort of a jam we are in, but it's real enough. With timber easy to get and the price going up fast, speculation in timber went loco and was wild about 1907. Then came the panic and pricked the bubble. People had been dealing in timber the way they deal in oil when a boom is on. They borrowed money to buy timber and then bonded the timber to buy more timber. But as soon as they were bonded, they simply had to have money to pay their interest. The only way to make the property pay that interest money was to build a mill and cut and sell lumber. So everybody was doing it, and things were lovely until 1907. All over the country construction stopped. The lumber market was shot to pieces. But the bonded mills had to keep on peddling lumber to a falling market. The bottom fell right out of things. In 1912 I saw perfect fir flooring lumber offered on the docks for \$12 a thousand feet!

Our Forests Shamefully Butchered. Taxes always go up rapidly in a timber country, because lumbering goes over a region fast and later development comes slowly. So for a long time timber is about all there is to tax. But the faster the timber is cut, the less there is left to tax and so the tax rate jumps. Soon it gets up to the point where the timber owner must cut faster, so as to keep taxes from confiscating his property. The faster he cuts, the less there is left to tax and the faster the rate goes up.

Besides taxes, and interest on investment, came fires which cost a lot of money to fight and, which wiped out one investment after another.

Now we do not need to shed any tears over the sad plight of the lumberman. Lumber prices have been low, and for years and years we have had the benefit. But now we need to look sharp on our own account. For the lumberman, with prices down, has been forced to butcher his forests shamefully, taking only the best parts of the best trees and leaving the rest for the flies. He has been forced to work our forests as a miner does his mine—taking whatever promised some profit and caving in the rest, regardless.

Don't blame the lumbermen; they can't do anything else the way things stack up. And still, with less than a generation of timber left in America, our forests are being stripped at a rate of round 200,000 acres a day.

Timber mining leaves what? Why cut-over land, of course. And what sort of land is that? "A picture of desolation calculated to discourage the hardest pioneer," says the Secretary of the Interior in his last report. "Perhaps you will get the idea if you look at some of the pictures of former European forests shattered by artillery fire," he explains. And he has been inquiring as to the amount of such land, and it comes to about 225,000,000 acres. That would cut up into ten good-sized states.

Some of that country is fit for farming or grazing right now. In the long run, quite a lot of it will be profitably worked in agriculture, but it will be a long run. How much money and how many men would it take to make going farms at the rate of 200,000 acres a day, year in and year out, and thus keep pace with the lumbermen? A whole lot of that cut-over land will pay out, and pay out well, at raising timber and not pay out raising any other crop—save, of course, the perennial sucker-crop harvested by the land shark.

Nobody is doing much of anything about these things. If all the trees planted for timber production were today ripe and in logs at the saw mills, they would not keep the saw going more than sixteen seconds.

Today the world is short on lumber. Everywhere building has been pretty much stopped for four years. Europe needs more lumber than ever before to get the invaded regions going again, and she looks to us for a lot of that lumber. Our lumbermen rejoice in the prospect of getting all their mills to work again. If they do, that brings us that much closer to the ragged end of no lumber at all.

England had some woods, but used most of them for deer parks. Today she hasn't much of any wood at all, but is planning to spend millions in getting some as quickly as possible. France had a lot of carefully hand-made forests, and if it hadn't been for those forests probably the Germans would have been in Paris long ago. The forests stopped them, but there isn't much left of the forests today. By the time Germany gets settled up with France, there will be a hole in the prize German forest, also hand made, which a century will hardly fill up again. For years past about half of all the lumber used in the world has been cut in the United States.

Last summer the War Industries Board fixed the price of most lumber. Southern yellow pine was fixed at a base price of \$25 a thousand feet, f. o. b. mill. To get that price some items were listed as high as \$55 and some as low as \$15. The

average of all grades and sizes, the entire mill output, was supposed to figure out about \$25 a thousand. Probably the mills had never gotten such prices before, but they claimed the base should have been \$30 at least. The Federal Trade Commission replied that Southern pine producers were profiteering, having made 17 per cent in 1917 against five per cent on investment the year before. The lumbermen retorted that five per cent is less than a living profit, and that nobody could profiteer on an average of the two years. Considering that the cost of manufacture at one of the best mills rose from \$13.07 in 1913 to \$21.34 in 1918, it would seem that there is room for argument.

The city consumer often has paid \$1.50 a bushel when potatoes were selling on the farm for 50 cents, and, with the farmer, wondered why. Just so, many a farmer has paid \$35 a thousand for lumber which the mills were glad to sell for \$18. Where does the difference go? Freight and the middlemen, of course. It is easier to check through and find out about lumber costs than in the case of farm products. The Bureau of Corporations, the Federal Trade Commission, the War Industries Board and the Forest Service have checked back and forth until the whole situation is plain enough and pretty much beyond question. Of recent years the lumbermen have been anxious to be investigated, just as are farmers when the fair price of milk or wheat is in question.

Follow Your Best Hunch. There are some brand-new things in the lumber world, and the new sort of them is trade-marked stock, every board and scantling branded. Why not?

And there is the "ready-cut" house too. That's very recent. A carpenter, saving up and fitting to get a pile of lumber to make a new building, naturally has to wait some.

Besides that, the carpenter's time, while he does the sawing, must be paid for, and that probably costs more than the waste lumber. And then there is the probability that the job suddenly gets tied up while somebody makes a hurry-up trip to town to get something previously forgotten. The ready-cut building saves a lot of those troubles.

A big buyer can cut better prices than a small one. It can make sure that the cheapest satisfactory lumber is used for each part of the building. It can know that the lumber is properly seasoned and ready for use. It is no end of a worry saver to be able to get lumber and nails and shingles and paint and glass and everything all in a bunch and to know what the cost is going to be right from the jump-off. If you have to pay a little more freight on a ready-cut house, you don't have to pay any freight at all on what the carpenter would waste on the other kind.

But there are disadvantages about the ready-cut construction too. You have to unload the cars promptly. Then you must lay the material out at the building site, so that you can find what you want when you want it. It's easy to locate the sills, at least, under all the shingles and most of the sheathing. And flooring and casing needs to be good and dry when it goes in. A few hours in the damp may mean open joints all over the new house.

Besides these possibilities, you have a more or less limited choice of plans and materials, and one does

like to have a new place fixed up according to his own notions. The rapid growth of the ready-cut firms indicates that lots of people are finding the disadvantages of such building less than the advantages. It is sure that the new method is here to stay and it is certainly well worth tipping out about.

So build now—or wait. Go over the entire proposition in a scientific manner and then follow your best hunch, as usual. Figure on labor and crop prospects. Balance land values against the mortgage. Look longingly at the days that are past and remember that your grandfather probably did the same thing. If your place really needs the improvement and you can see your way to paying for it, chances are you will be sorry if you wait. But if you build, prepare yourself for a period of strain and mental anguish.

The Bookworm

There has been an unusual demand at the library for books on house plans and architecture. Not all the books contain practical plans, but nearly all have useful suggestions for the prospective builder. The back numbers of the "House Beautiful" and the "Craftsman" are also on file.

"The Livable House" by Aymar Embury, shows illustrations of various correct styles of architecture, with text on materials, styles, etc.

Two pamphlets of interest are published by the Ladies Home Journal, entitled "Journal Bungalows," and "Journal Houses." They also publish "What you should know when building a little house," by C. E. White, Jr.

"Domestic architecture," by Robinson, is by an Oregon author.

The National Lumber Manufacturers' association also issues pamphlets on various types of farm buildings, such as "Grain Storage Buildings," "Implement Sheds," "Ice-houses," "Dairy and General Purpose Barns."

Books on interior decoration are "The New Interior," by Adler, "The Furnishing of a Modest Home," by Daniels, "Interior Decoration," by Parsons, "Art and Economy in Home Decoration," by Priestman, "Interior Decoration for the Small Home," by Rolfe.

A great number of books, maga-

zines and other materials were examined by the staff of the Neighborhood club under the direction of Mrs. E. P. Mossman, in preparing the entertainment recently given at the high school. This thorough research work required many more volumes than the few which are here listed, that may be of general interest:

Architecture—Lethaby.
Architecture and the Allied Arts—Brooks.
The Substance of Gothic—Cram.

Some French Cathedrals—London Times.
Cathedrals of France—Wilson.
Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres—Hunt, Adams.
Churches and Castles of Mediaeval France—Larned.

During July and August the library will not be open on Sundays.

Butter Wrappers printed at the Observer office.

Only Good Custom Tailoring Can Produce that Assured Sense of Being Well Dressed

Having your suit made to order, from a pattern that you select, is the most satisfactory way for any man who is particular about the clothes he wears. One of our custom made suits will be far more economical because it will hold its shape and style as long as you care to wear it. It's the finer hand workmanship and unseen parts that give this result, as well as the finer materials. We guarantee the materials as well as the fit and style.

You'll be glad to have some one of our attractive new patterns in worsted cambric or chevrons. Possibly you will want to select one of the zephyr-weight hot weather two-piece styles. They are very modish and pleasing. We can please you in price as well as in style and pattern.

Let your next purchase be made to your measure. You will find it vastly more satisfactory.

Wilson Bros. Tailors



Try This on Your Piano

In Summer hot, when sidewalks steam, and our desire is more ice cream, and comes the coal man, beastly brute, with truck and shovel COAL and chute, and wakes us from our blessed dream of lemonade and more ICE cream; our passions rise, our one desire, to chuck that COAL man in the fire. But lo! when comes December's sleet and our desire is much more heat, and comes old Jack Frost, heartless, bold, with blizzard, snow storms, bleak and cold, assails in vain our home, complete with every comfort comes with heat; our ego swells—We are immune WE FILLED OUR COAL BIN UP IN JUNE.

CHORUS
Everybody Join

For WOOD and COAL in winter,
LYNCH will be in line;
We want LYNCH for our ICE MAN
In the good old summer time.

WE FURNISH THE MUSIC—

THE
J. D. LYNCH CO.
FUEL, ICE, FEED, STORAGE, TRANSFER

A Duplex Alcazar Range

TWO RANGES IN ONE

The Duplex Alcazar Range burns Oil and Coal (or wood), either separately or both at the same time. If you are using one of the old style of cooking stoves, right there is an opportunity for a saving of labor, a saving in fuel and a saving in food.

Designed for steady, faithful, efficient service, and with such splendid appearance, it is easy to keep clean.

Really a Range That You Will be Proud to Possess

Oregon Hardware & Implement Co.

La Grande, Ore.

Walla, Ore.

