

"As her father and brother constructed the simple, sturdy shelter that might house generations after her, a young girl at her mother's knee would work her own Log Cabin. It became the quintessential American quilt"¹ Sandi Fox

History of Log Cabin Quilts

The earliest existing documented Log Cabin quilt was made in 1869 but it is unknown how much earlier quiltmakers used this block pattern. It is thought the pattern might have become popular during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. More likely it became a favorite pattern after the assassination of the "log cabin president" in 1865. During the post Civil War years Lincoln became a folk hero as the person who freed the slaves and prevented the country from splitting apart.



Log Cabin doll quilt by Judy Breneman

Many early Log Cabin quilts were made from dress materials especially the popular lightweight wool blends of the mid 1800s. Quilt historian, Barbara Brackman, tells how this changed over time, "In the 1870s, as cotton prices dropped and the Calico Craze was at its height, women began piecing cotton Log Cabins. In the 1880s, when the price of silks dropped and the fad for show quilts raged, [Victorian era](#) seamstresses stitched silk log cabins. Observation indicates that silk and fine wool log cabins pieced over foundations became passé about 1900. Twentieth-century log cabins are either of cotton or heavier wools and, after 1920 or so, of rayon, acetate and other artificial silk fabrics." ³

Log Cabin Quilt Construction

Quilt collector, Stella Rubin, observes, "There seems to be an infinite number of variations on the Log Cabin quilt. In all examples, though, the basic block is a square surrounded by rectangular strips of fabric. The center square is usually red, which in quilt lore represents the fire in the cabin's hearth. The rectangular strips are meant to represent the logs from which the cabin was built." ²



Log Cabin quilts were put together in a specific way. Each block is created on a square of fabric, often muslin. First the central square is put right side facing up in the center of the muslin. Then each "log" is sewn on with the reverse side facing upward. After the seam is sewn the strip is pressed outward before the next one is applied. Names for this technique are "foundation patchwork" or "pressed work".

Foundation pieced quilts were often tied. Decorative quilting would hardly be noticed on such a busy pattern as the Log cabin. They were tied either to the front or on the back depending on how much the quilt maker wanted her ties to show. When they were quilted it was often done in the ditch or with a simple utility pattern.

Making Your Log Cabin Doll or Crib Quilt



For the purpose of reproducing a child's quilt with modern materials I suggest using reproduction cottons from the latter nineteenth century with a thin batting. First check with your local quilt stores to see if they carry fabric typical of this period. Many do and it's nice to be able to pick out fabric from the bolt as well as to support your local quilt stores.

I've designed patterns for a crib and doll quilt. I've used the sawtooth border. Quilt historian, Sandi Fox, tells us, "No other border was applied with greater ingenuity and diversity than the Sawtooth. It could be applied in one of three methods to a perfect turn and direction, but it is in its less precise applications that it often assumed its greatest charm." ³ So don't be concerned if your sawtooth border doesn't come out perfectly. Part of the delight of making reproduction quilts can be in the imperfection. Sometimes Log Cabin quilts were made with a solid border or with no border at all so go without the sawtooth border if you prefer. That would be best if you are helping a child make this quilt

Detailed Instructions for Making Your Log Cabin Quilt

If you are inspired and ready to try your own Log Cabin doll or baby quilt go to [Instructions for the Log Cabin Doll & Crib Quilts](#)

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References:

¹ p74 & ³ p132 "[Small Endearments: 19th Century Quilts for Children](#)", by Sandi Fox

² p108 "[Treasure or Not? How to compare & Value American Quilts](#)", by Stella Rubin

³ "Foundation Piecing, Log Cabins & Delaine", "Barbara Brackman, The Quilt Detective: Clues in the Needlework, 2005, digital newsletter # 19.

Related Websites:

[Log Cabin Quilts ~ Inspirations From the Past](#)

[From the Sawtooth Border to the Bear's Paw Quilt](#)
A bit of sawtooth history.



This page gives the instructions for a log cabin doll and crib quilt. **Be sure to read the information at [Log Cabin Quilts for Children](#) before beginning.** There you will find the history of the Log cabin quilt, the foundation piecing method and the fabrics used. This way you can do more than just follow the log cabin quilt patterns. You will be able to imagine yourself making your quilt during the late nineteenth century.



Scrappy or Not?

I've planned these quilts to be scrappy reflecting a mother or grandmother making the quilts from left over shirt and dress fabric. Quilts varied then as the do now so feel to either make the quilt scrappier than I have done with the doll quilt or to choose fewer fabrics and make it less scrappy. If your local quilt shop doesn't carry reproduction fabrics a good place to look for period fabrics is [ReproductionFabrics.com](#).

The doll quilt is made with just 4 log cabin blocks and measures about 17" square when finished. The crib quilt has 5 blocks in each direction resulting in a total of 25 blocks. With the sawtooth border is is about 35" square when done.

Cutting Your Fabric

Estimated yardage for the logcabin crib quilt.
For the doll quilt get a fat quarter of each fabric.

Fabric key	Number of patches	Yardage estimate	Fabric key	Number of patches	Yardage estimate
	5	1/8		70	3/8
	86	3/8		73	3/8
	78	1/2		77	1 + 1/4
	4	1		25	1/8
	83	1/2			

- 1) Cut an 8" square of muslin for each block you will be making.
- 2) Cut a 2" square of the fabric you want to use for the center, one for each block.
- 3) Cut a variety of 1 1/4" wide strips of light and dark fabric. If you are using scraps the smaller lengths can be used for the middle logs. Long strips can be used for more than one log. If you find you need more as you go just cut more.
- 4) You will cut the fabric for your borders later.



Making the Log Cabin Blocks

- 1) Place the 2" square right side up in the middle of a muslin square.
- 2) Place a 1 1/4" wide dark strip wrong side up along the right hand edge of the center square.
- 3) Sew a 1/4" seam along the right side.
- 4) Carefully cut the end of the strip off even with the square block.
- 5) Press the strip away from the center square.
- 6) Turn the block left 90 degrees and place another strip of the same fabric along the right.
- 7) Sew the seam and press the strip outward.
- 8) Turn the block and this time place a light strip of fabric along the right.
- 9) Sew and press. the repeat with another light strip.
- 10) Continue to add strips alternating two light and two dark until you have three strips in each direction.



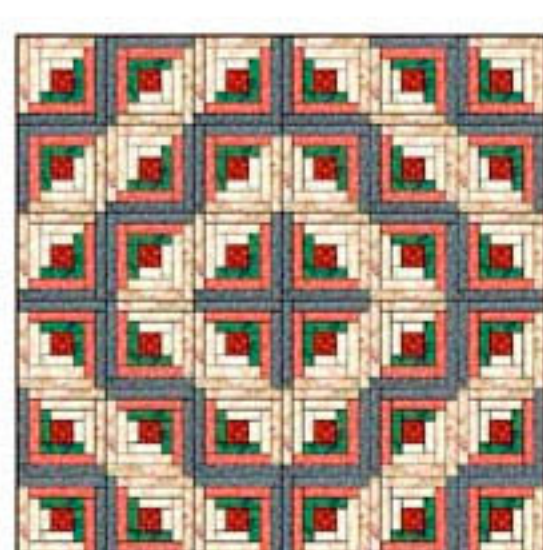
basic Log Cabin



Straight Furrows



Barn Raising



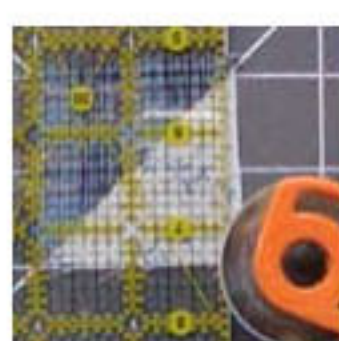
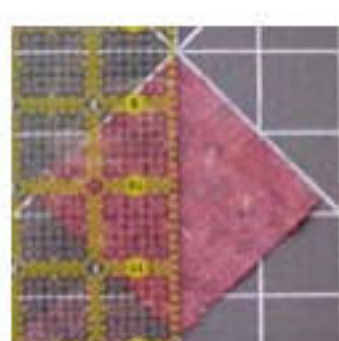
Barn Raising variation Log Cabin



Light & Dark variation Log Cabin

Planning Your Log Cabin Block Arrangement

- 1) Trim the excess muslin. Blocks should now be close to 6" square.
- 2) Look at the variations above to see some possible arrangements. To do the two larger arrangements you will need to add a row of blocks in each direction as they require an even number of blocks.
- 3) Arrange the blocks in different ways and decide which variation you will use.
- 4) Lay out the blocks the way you want them on a design board, table or other surface.
- 5) Sew together in rows then sew the rows together. Your basic log cabin is done.



Making a Sawtooth Border

- 1) Decide how many sawtooth squares you will need. You will need 84 for the crib quilt and 36 for the doll quilt if you use my plans.
- 2) Cut four 2 3/8 " squares, two with dark and two with light fabric..
- 3) Carefully cut the blocks in half corner to corner making triangles.
- 4) Sew together one light and one dark along the long edge making a new square.
- 5) Sew these four squares together and see if they are the same length as one Log Cabin block.
- 6) If it is way off check your measurements and adjust if needed. If the squares are just a little large you may be able to trim the squares to size.
- 7) Once you are sure of the size cut and sew enough sawtooth blocks to go around the quilt.
- 8) Sew sawtooth blocks in 2 strips long enough to go along each side then 2 to go across the top and bottom.
- 9) Next sew them along each side of the quilt. Try to have the seam line hit the end of each point. It won't be perfect but that adds to the charm.
- 10) Cut a 1 1/2" strips for each side of the quilt then sew them on. Your quilt top is now done.



Finishing Your Quilt

- 1) Cut your backing a little larger than your quilt. For an added old time touch you can piece the backing with larger scraps you might have. Many doll and crib quilts were pieced like this.
- 2) Pin your quilt top and backing either with a thin batting in between or if you prefer no batting at all. Log cabin quilts were made both ways.
- 3) Log Cabin quilts were usually tied. Women tied quilts both on the front or the back. I decided to tie my doll quilt to the back as the front was already quite busy but either way would be typical of the times.
- 4) You can tie your quilt with square knots or if you want something a little stronger do a surgeon's knot. It is done just like a square knot but you wind the string or yarn around an extra time as shown above.
- 5)To bind the quilt cut your binding 1" wide. Sew to the front then turn and slip stitch it down in the back. Try to make the binding narrow. A nineteenth century woman would have prided on her narrow bindings.