

## FARMING IN THE EARLY DAYS

Sometimes the corn was cut, shucked in the field, and then hauled home during the winter, as needed, husked by hand on the barn floor. The grain was ground for feed and the stalks were fed to the livestock, and what they would not eat was used for bedding. By 1900 silos came into use, and a great amount of the crop went into the silo.

Threshing the small grains was a neighborhood affair. A dozen or so farm crews would work together and the housewife may well have about 20 hearty neighbors to feed, a mid-morning lunch, dinner, afternoon lunch, and supper.

We can hardly appreciate or realize the amount of physical work done by our forefathers to sustain themselves. They were a noble, strong, courageous people who fought nature and worked hard and long. Their footprints in the sands of time were made with their work shoes. Labor was an important part of farming. As soon as children were old enough they were taught to chip in and do their share, be they boys or girls. If the oldest child was a girl she would often be expected to do the work of a male child, and as she grew into adulthood she would be able to do the work of a man. Teenage girls and young wives were as adept at driving a team of horses, milking cows, shucking grain or husking corn as they were at baking bread, canning, and preserving food or sewing their own clothes.

Bread was baked several times a week, five or ten loaves at a time depending on the size of the family. The housewife learned by trial and error how to adjust the damper on the wood-burning stove to get the desired amount of heat.

Almost every householder acquired four to six acres of woodland in a nearby forest, and during the winter months the men folk would cut a year's supply of firewood, to be used for cooking and baking. The wood was then stacked in the famous wood shed. Wood ashes were saved for making soap. Later when coal was used for fuel, the ashes were carefully sifted to salvage any unburned coal, and the fine ashes were often used for scouring pots and pans and for polishing silverware.

Drinking water, also for cooking, was in a bucket somewhere in the kitchen with a dipper nearby to help yourself. Lamp chimneys for kerosene lamps had to be cleaned at least once a week. To have soft water available, every home had a cistern to store the rain water from the roof of the house for use in washing clothes, dishes, and for bathing. The supply of water was never plentiful; therefore, it was used sparingly.

These immigrants were their own butcher, baker, and candlestick maker. The food may have been plain and coarse, but there was enough for all. A visitor at mealtime was expected to stay and break bread with the family while his horses were watered and fed. Every family had a large garden and fruit trees to grow a year's supply of fruits and vegetables, which were canned in quart and half-gallon jars. Some apples and pears were peeled, quartered, and dried in the sun, to be used later. The apples for apple pies and the pears were cooked together with dried prunes and apricots.

Pickles and sauerkraut were packed in brine in five- and ten-gallon crocks. Altogether there would be hundreds of jars of beans, peas, beets, carrots, tomatoes, cherries, applesauce, raspberries, ground cherries, plus an assortment of jams and jellies. Some particular varieties of apples and pears were individually wrapped in newspaper and stored in the cool basement, to be eaten fresh as bedtime snacks or to be served to evening visitors, besides some home-made wine or cider which had been made by the barrel. Potatoes and other root vegetables were stored fresh, some of them covered with dirt or sand. These would keep for most of the winter in their cool, dirt-floored, furnace-less basement. During the winter some homes would have straw piled around the foundation to keep the frost out of the basement and help keep the house warm.

In the spring, any leftover cider would be made into vinegar by inserting some 'mother' from an other barrel of vinegar, or by inserting a piece of wrapping paper soaked in molasses. In a month or so, the cider turned into vinegar.

A necessary adjunct to every home was the smokehouse. Hams, slabs of bacon, summer sausage, and a few other cuts of meat were salted and smoked to conserve them for later consumption. Nothing was wasted. To utilize every piece of meat a variety of sausages were made. Ears, tongue, and scraps of meat from the head and feet were made into sultz or combined with the blood, which had been carefully saved and cooled, and made into blood sausage or wolken brod. Cracklings, the residue from rendering lard was used as spread on bread, waste fat was saved to use in making soap. Rinder wurst, now known as oatmeal sausage, was made by the hundred pounds, some stuffed in casings, some packed in two- or five-gallon crocks. Duck and goose fat was used in baking or as a spread on bread.

The hides of horses were made into fur coats or lap robes, both were essential when riding on the open wagons or buggies in the winter. Down from ducks and geese were used in stuffing pillows and making feather beds. This was the coziest bed covering ever made. Teenagers made pocket money killing skunks and a few other wild animals and selling the fur. Early American shoes were built straight; they were neither left nor right, so they could be worn on either foot and were often interchanged to even out wear.

Frugality and hard work were the only virtues recognized; very little was spent on outside show. A man's character was of more importance than the size of his bank account.