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Pioneer Life in Iowa

Interesting Glimpses

Recipes & Poems

You ask what land I love the best--
Iowa, 'tis Iowa!
The fairest state of all the west--
Iowa, 'tis Iowa!

From yonder Mississippi stream
To where Missouri's waters gleam,
O fair it is as poet's dream,
Iowa, O Iowa!

--Major S. H. M. Byers

LEGISLATIVE LADIES LEAGUE -- Organized 1909

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This book was prepared as a Memento of Pioneer Day, April 5, 1973.
Items were collected by Mrs. Wm. N. Plymat, Des Moines, Iowa, and
Mrs. Charles F. Strothman, New London, Iowa. Assistance was given
by Mrs. Lida Lisle Greene, Librarian, Department of Archives, State
Historical Building, Des Moines, Iowa. The picture on the cover
appeared on the front of Gleason's Pictorial in 1854. Lettering
on the cover is by Amy Plymat.

The inspiration for this booklet began when I was asked by Charlotte Turner, President of the Legislative Ladies' League, to serve on the committee for the organization's "Pioneer Day" (April 3, 1973). This is an annual event of the League held at the time of the Legislature's annual recognition of pioneer lawmakers of the State.

Thinking about what I might contribute, I first dug out my old copy of the History of Keokuk County, Iowa, published in 1880, and began reading. My paternal ancestors were farmers who settled near What Cheer in that county. We all know in general what early pioneer life was like, but it may do our souls good to read about it again. It did mine. I thought--how little we appreciate or understand what they went through, considering the paradise of convenience we live in now.

Then I remembered a little book which had belonged to my mother. The frontispiece read:

"THE HOUSEHOLD GUIDE or DOMESTIC CYCLOPEDIA. Home remedies for Man and Beast; A COMPLETE RECEIPT BOOK. Home Nursing and Home Treatment; Insect Extermination; Prof. Henkel's Illustrations of The Effects of Alcohol & Cigarettes; CARE OF CHILDREN; How to Cook for the Sick, etc. By Prof. B. G. Jefferis, M.D., Ph.D., Chicago, Ill., and J. L. Nichols, A.M. Also, A COMPLETE COOK BOOK, by Mrs. J. L. Nichols. Thirteenth Edition. Published by J. L. Nichols, Naperville, Ill., To whom all Communications must be addressed. Sold Only by Subscription. 1894."

Such a wealth of information in such a little book! And it's dilapidated condition was mute testimony of the extent of its use. The picture on the back of this booklet is a loose page from that book. The back of the page was badly stained. From cooking? Some blood, I think. Tears, perhaps? I had not looked inside it for years. It was fun, enlightening and heart-warming. I longed to share its mystique with others.

Next I took a week-end trip to the home of my sister, Mrs. Alva Bohrofen at Keota. She's the historian of my family and is now hard at work on the "book" for the Keota Centennial, July 12-14, 1973. She produced for me her collection of "Good Old Days" Magazines and then I was knee-deep in nostalgia. So many bits and pieces of interesting information from the past!

A look at the past helps us, as women, appreciate the liberation we've already achieved. Then as now, women still bear the responsibility of putting food on the table. We all love recipes but our pioneer grandmothers must have had to make up their own, depending on what they had to work with. Just for the sake of curiosity I thought of preparing a book of old recipes.

After Mrs. Lida Lisle Greene spoke at one of our League meetings I told her what I was thinking of doing. She said she would look up some material for me. Doris Strothman, Chairman of the Pioneer Day Committee also provided some material.

This collection is the result of my delve into the past. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive study of pioneer life or early cookery. Just a stimulating and amusing glimpse. Also a thankful one. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed preparing it. And that the men will like it, too.

Ruth Clubb Plymat

The following excerpts are from "The Story of Iowa," Vol. 1, by William J. Peterson, published 1952 by Lewis Historical Publishing Co., New York. We begin with "Food of the Pioneer":

Eating was always the great problem in the pioneer cabin and the housewife of those days struggled with utensils and materials so scanty and poor as to be beyond belief of her great-granddaughter. In the early days bread was baked in a Dutch oven or bake pan which was set close to the fire and covered with coals and hot ashes. Cornbread or pone might be cooked in a covered skillet laid atop the coals or else plastered on a board tilted before the fire and cooked by radiation. Meat and flap jacks were usually fried in a long handled skillet held over the fire, while a turkey, a quarter of venison, or a ham might be roasted by hanging it above the blaze on a twisted cord. As the cord untwisted, the meat revolved and so browned evenly. The fat dripped from the meat into a dripping pan below. If the cook was not careful the grease in this pan sometimes caught on fire, hence the term for trouble, "the fat's in the fire."

In the prairie sod huts, where wood or coal were luxuries, stoves were employed for cooking and heating as soon as they could be obtained in order to conserve fuel. Often the household used twisted hay or cobs for fuel, while ears of corn were burned when hay ran out.

While the menu was limited there was usually no scarcity of food, save perhaps towards spring when winter supplies ran low. Usually there was plenty of corn meal and flour for bread, plenty of pork to be fried and, usually, butter and eggs enough, if they had not been too optimistically bartered at the store for tea, coffee, sugar and textiles.

From the woods and the wild prairies came deer, turkey, and other game, while in the streams there was always a sufficiency of fish. During the summer, fall and early winter, there was a rich abundance of corn, potatoes, squash, and other vegetables as well as wild fruits and berries. The lack of cellars made it difficult to keep food very long, however, unless like pork it was salted or smoked. Vegetables were sometimes buried in pits outside or in holes dug into the cabin floor. In hilly sections, root cellars were dug and these would keep vegetables perfectly until spring. Some fruits and berries were dried, and when sugar was not available, wild honey or sorghum molasses served as a substitute. Corn was shelled, washed in lye from wood ash, and hulled, and this hominy was cooked and eaten as a change from corn meal mush. In the spring the pioneers delighted in messes of greens, such as mustard and dandelion leaves and the other edible herbs then so plentiful.

The housewives had considerable trouble keeping the house clean. The dirt floor might be wet or dusty and the puncheon floor was usually rough and filled with cracks and knot holes. There were no carpets; sometimes dried hay was used on the floors as were rushes in the Middle Ages. There was, however, little furniture to bother cleaning. The chief trouble was that the cabins and sod houses were ordinarily just one room so it was combined bedroom, living-room, kitchen, and laundry--and when the need arose, a hospital.

When the housewife needed soap, she made it--leaching wood ashes to make lye, collecting grease from cooking meats, and then boiling the two together to form soap--hard or soft. It was not kind to the hands, this soft soap, and smarted painfully when suds got into the eyes, but it was useful. There were no bathtubs and in winter streams could not be used--nor were there any toothbrushes. Possibly in very cold weather the mother was content if the boys washed their faces and

hands before eating. Mother cut the hair for her husband and the boys and frequently used a fine-tooth comb on her own hair and that of her daughters--not for looks, either.

Household pests were a common nuisance and little could be done about them. Rats and mice were everywhere, and so were flies, mosquitoes, bedbugs, and lice. Cooking aside, the greatest chore of the housewife was probably clothes. Store-clothes were virtually unknown even if there had been money to buy them. Indeed many women had to start back with the raw material, flax and wool, and by various and tedious processes produce the final shirts, coats, and trousers as well as dresses and underwear that the family wore. Everything was done by hand. Even after dark, the housewives had no time for idleness; there were always socks and stockings to be knitted or mended, and even hats to be made from pelts or woven from wheat straw. It seems strange but even in such rude and self-sustained times, the women insisted upon being fashionable. These were the days of hoopskirts. They would have been both dangerous and a nuisance when working before the blazing kitchen hearth or going out to milk the cows and were discarded except on special occasions. For light, the household used tallow dips--which were simply wicks of cotton or linen, braided tightly and dipped repeatedly into molten tallow until the resulting candle had successive coats enough to stand upright. In some houses candle moulds were used--if they had been brought along from back East.

Some families brought good furniture with them, but beds were usually bunks made from a frame of logs fastened to the walls on two sides and held up on the outside corner by a single post. The "springs" were lengths of poles or slats or sometimes woven cords or ropes. In summer the mattress was of hay or straw covered with a homespun sheet. In winter a feather bed was used either as a mattress or a cover or both. Under this stationary bed was kept a trundle bed which, pulled out at night, served the smaller children. For a cradle a hollowed out log might be used--and it was seldom empty.

Vitamins, sulfa drugs, and other antibiotics were, of course, unheard of then, as were such things as balanced diets. A well-filled stomach was the only important thing. Fortunately the pioneers lived outdoors most of the time and the rude cabins provided plenty of ventilation at night. The pioneers had to be rugged. If not they died off like flies. Disease and accidents took a heavy toll, however, and the average life expectancy was not much beyond 40, if that much. Doctors were scarce, poorly trained, and inexperienced. There were few good medical schools and anyone could practice medicine who wished to do so. In maternity cases, the neighbor women helped each other.

For most illnesses, the mother of the family was usually the doctor and nurse. Indian herb medicine lore supplemented the herbal lore of the East and most illnesses were treated with teas of burdock, sassafras, plantain, pennyroyal, boneset, camomile, and the like. Most of the doses were harmless; some were of value. The two most persistent ailments of the frontier were ague and the itch. Herb poultices relieved the latter, but there was little to do for the former. Of the ague a steamboat captain told a New England emigrant to Iowa: "Cure it? No madam. No cure for it; have to wear it out. I had it a year when I first came on the river."

Sulphur and molasses were widely used as a spring tonic to "thin the blood," a remedy which received credit for the blessing of the warm spring sunshine and the better diet of greens, vegetables, and more milk and eggs. Many remedies were sheer superstition--as an asafetida bag hung around the neck. Such things as blood stones, snake stones, and mad stones were commonly carried for protection from disease and the foot of a rabbit was supposed to bring good luck. Among men whisky was a sovereign remedy; it was good for just about all troubles, including snake bites.

In the "Centennial History of Washington County, Indiana," by Warder W. Stevens, published 1916, B. F. Bowin & Co., Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, we read:

Corn and pumpkins were the staple crops on the pioneers' farms. Corn fodder was about the only roughness that was laid up for wintering stock, and it required less labor to cut it up and save it than hay, with the crude implements they had for mowing and handling the same. The fodder could stand afield with very little damage all winter, the pioneer's sled bringing in from day to day what was needed for his stock. Wheat, oats and rye were raised in small patches. A few sheaves of the rye were always cut a little green, for hat making. The straw was soaked till it was pliable, when it was braided and sewed into the "fashionable" shape desired for hat or bonnet. Every woman was her own milliner, and fortunate indeed was she who could scrape up a piece of ribbon to bedeck her straw bonnet.

Fruits were scarce for a good many years after first settlements were established. Of wild grapes, strawberries and blackberries there was an abundance. But it took considerable time to get an apple orchard in bearing. Peaches were started from the seed and bore fruit the fifth or sixth year after planting. But the seedling apple tree was very slow in maturing, ten or twelve years being required to bring fruit of any consequence, and even when seeds were planted and trees cultivated till they were large enough to bear, it was a question whether the fruit would be worth the picking, for in a large orchard there might not be more than a half-dozen trees that bore luscious fruit. There was but one variety of pear grown, the old "sugar" pear. It was not a bad pear to eat out of hand, but it was no larger than a good-sized hen's egg. It began ripening at the core, and if allowed to hang on the tree till it fell of its own accord, was so soft that it mashed itself flat when it struck the ground.

A few rows of broom corn were always planted in one corner of the field, for brooms those days were all made in the home. In their absence, the "scrub broom" did service. This was made from a small, tough white oak or hickory sapling. With the bark removed from the stick, which was probably an inch and a half in diameter, small slivers of the wood were stripped up from the butt end with a pocket-knife, about ten inches in length. The lower end, being thus finely shredded, the stripping process was reversed, and beginning up about a foot above the part already made fine, the wood was peeled downward, until the stick was reduced to the size just right for a handle. The shreds were then bound together, the bottom squared off, the upper part of the handle shaped down, and the broom was complete. It wasn't a bad broom for dirt or puncheon floors.

Ordinarily of meat there was always an abundance. There was seldom a day during the fall and winter that a nice flock of turkeys was not ranging close about the fields where grain had been grown the previous season. It was only a short time after the first settlers came in until the country was full of wild hogs that kept fat all winter through on acorns and nuts. The honey bee has always been said to be the forerunner of civilization, and they were here in advance of the first settlers, how long before no one knew. The bee tree was located by preparing a sweet bait and placing it on a fallen tree or stump. If any bees were within a half mile, or even more, of the bait, they would soon find it, after which it was an easy matter to get the direction of the bee tree, and by moving the bait a few times, to locate the tree. When a colony was located, the tree was marked, and the mark was respected the same as marks on hogs, cattle or sheep. After the flowering season was over the tree was cut, and the supply of honey was carefully husbanded, some always being laid by for company, the year round. Not unfrequently, when the hollow tree was a large one, as much as a barrel of honey would be taken.

Old timers usually sat up late of nights. The men had leggings to repair, ax handles to finish up, shoes to patch and many little jobs to claim their attention, while the women had to knit, sew, darn and sometimes run the little spinning wheel. The children had their games, fox and geese, checkers, jack straws, tit tat too and the like.

Our early pioneers engaged in many pleasures to relieve the monotony of life incidental to their isolated conditions. Of course there were no "dime shows," ball games, fairs, circuses and the like to which we are accustomed today, but there was no lack of fun and frolic. Even in neighborhood tasks and undertakings, the work was entered upon with a frolic-some, jovial spirit that robbed it of its slavishness, no matter how burdensome. A hard day's labor usually wound up with some sort of social stunt. Among other things that brought settlers together were log-rollings, corn-huskings, house and barn raisings, wood-choppings, apple-parings, quilting-bees, shooting matches, spelling and singing schools and public meetings.

We could go on and on with quotations from this particular history--word pictures of corn-husking bees, sports, amusements and games, gander pulling contest, country dances, weddings, how they dressed, etc. Here next are two interesting bits from "The Founding of Newcastle, now Webster City, Iowa, 1848" by Harriet Bonebright-Closz:

The women-folk, in addition to the regular routine of water carrying, cooking, churning, sausage making, berry picking, vegetable drying, sugar and soap boiling, hominy hulling, medicine brewing, washing, nursing, weaving, sewing, straw plating, wool picking, spinning, quilting, knitting, gardening and various other tasks, found time to exchange work with the neighbors and to search the fields and woods for herbs, roots and fruits for sale or home consumption.

Salt-risin and soda-biscuit were a better culinary success when baked in the cook-stove. For the biscuit, a new rolling-pin--a smooth peeled stick--was needed nearly every day. It had a way of disappearing known only to the smaller children. When it could not be found the biscuit dough was rolled with a fresh ear of corn--or mayhap, the cob.

The History of Keokuk County, published in 1880 when many other county histories were also published by the Union Historical Company gives this glimpse of one psychological effect of pioneer life. Remember that in 1880 when they talked about the "pioneers", their thinking covered a span of only 40 or 50 years:

One of the peculiar circumstances that surrounded the early life of the pioneers was a strange loneliness. The solitude seemed almost to oppress them. Months would pass during which they would see scarcely a human face outside their own families. The isolation of these early days worked upon some of the settlers an effect that has never passed away. Some of them say that they lived in such a lonely way when they first came here that afterward, when the county began to fill up, they always found themselves bashful and constrained in the presence of strangers. But when the people were once started in this way the long pent-up feelings of joviality and sociability fairly boiled over, and their meetings frequently became enthusiastic and jovial in the highest degree. It seems singular to note bashfulness as one of the characteristics of the strong, stalwart settlers, but we are assured by the old settlers themselves that this was a prominent characteristic of the pioneers. And some of them declare that this feeling became so strong during the early years of isolation and loneliness that they have never since been able to shake it off.

But there were certainly some occasions when the settlers were not in the least degree affected by anything in the nature of bashfulness. When their rights were threatened or invaded they had "muscles of iron and hearts of flint." It was only when brought together for merely social purposes that they seemed ill at ease. If any emergency arose, or any business was to be attended to, they were always equal to the occasion.

On occasions of special interest, such as elections, holiday celebrations or camp-meetings, it was nothing unusual for a few settlers who lived in the immediate neighborhood of the meeting to entertain scores of those who had come from a distance. There was a grove on Mr. Searcy's claim, and this was a favorite place for holding camp-meetings. It was no unusual thing for Mr. Searcy and his estimable lady to feed hundreds for days in succession during the progress of these meetings, free of charge. This circumstance is given to illustrate the boundless generosity which prevailed in those days. Scores of other instances could be adduced, showing that at least in this particular we live in degenerate days.

If life in 1880 could be referred to as "degenerate days" what do you suppose that author would have to say if he were here today?

We quote next from a small book entitled "Indian Corn as Human Food," written by Mary S. Scott and published at Nevada, Iowa, in 1889. We find first the following quotation from C. F. Clarkson:

"If the women of the present day would learn anew the processes of cooking corn bread, it would become fashionable, the family would be more healthy, and there would be great satisfaction in ministering to the better appetite and condition it would bring to each member of the family."

The author includes lines from Longfellow's "Hiawatha" and the following poem:

Sing, O Song of Hiawatha, - - - - -	There, richer than the fabled gift Apollo showered of old.
Sing the mysteries of Mondamin Sing the blessing of the Cornfields. - - - - -	Fair hands the broken grain shall sift And knead its meal of gold.
And the maize-field grew and ripened, Till it stood in all the splendor Of its garments green and yellow, Of its tassels and its plumage. And the maize-ears full and shining Gleamed from bursting sheaths of verdure.	Let vapid idlers loll in silk Around their costly board Give us the bowl of samp and milk By homespun beauty poured. Then shame on all the proud and vain Whose folly laughs to scorn The blessing of our hardy grain, Our wealth of golden corn.
	--Selected.

In her introduction to this book the author says the following:

The most abundant food product of America is Indian corn. In the State of Iowa alone there were over 300,000,000 bushels raised in 1888. The crop of the entire country was over two thousand millions of bushels in the same year. This crop in Iowa would average to each man, woman and child in the State about four tons: or enough to furnish bread for forty millions of population. When we consider that this vast amount of food is produced upon less than one-fourth of the acreage within her boundaries, and under very primitive forms of culture, it is seen that the amount may be doubled, and that the real bread producing capacity of the state is sufficient for eighty millions of people.

To bring the attention of American housewives, economists and philanthropists to the possibilities presented in this immense food supply is the object of this unpretentious book. It is commended to their attention as offering variety easily obtained, toothsome dishes on short notice, and a diet, when discreetly combined and varied with other foods, that is eminently suited to our climate and conditions. That the judicious use of it will add to the comfort and health of the well-to-do is no less true than that the knowledge of its proper use may be a boon to such as wish to exercise due economy.

Noting with interest that 300,000,000 bushels of corn were grown in Iowa in 1888, we called the Marketing Division of Iowa's Department of Agriculture to learn how many bushels were grown in Iowa in 1972. The figure: 1,212,200,000. We think the Corn Growers Association of Iowa (if there is one) might well publish an up-dated version of this little book. The complete history of corn as food for man would be very enlightening. In her book Mary Scott tells us:

According to our most eminent botanists the plant is a native of South America. It is claimed that Columbus found it in cultivation when he first landed in Cuba. It is certain that the early settlers at Jamestown and Plymouth found it in use by the Indians, and that by its cultivation in a manner similar to that of the savages it became a very important portion of the food of the white men. At the present time it circles the globe in a belt that comprises not less than four-fifths of its entire surface, and is more widely cultivated than is any other grain.

Then follows a description of how corn is used in Mexico in tortillas, in Ireland and in Italy; how our grandmothers roasted green ears on the hearth, or cut the grains from the cob and dried them by the fire or in the sun; how they parched and ground it, made hominy from it with a strong lye made from wood ashes. We will not go into the methods for grinding, as these were many and varied, nor the methods and problems attached to storing and keeping the grain and the meal. The book points out the importance of freshly ground corn and says this is probably why Indian corn has not yet become popular as human food in Europe. She says:

The liability of heat from being stowed in large quantities in the holds of ocean vessels, and to absorb unpleasant odors on the voyage, if not guarded against by very great care, would necessarily consign exported corn to baser uses. To what extent ordinary heating may be avoided by kiln-drying, and freshness still be preserved, could be known by experiment. But the importance of using freshly ground sweet meal in the preparation of human food indicates the necessity of shipping corn in the ear, or if shelled, with all possible precaution against heat and taint.

A far different story today! Mary Scott would be surprised, wouldn't she. She says:

The earliest and most popular dish following the introduction of mills was pudding or mush from corn meal. The meal was stirred into boiling water, seasoned with salt, and served with milk, sometimes with butter, molasses, maple sugar or syrup. Sometimes a bowl of this constituted the only food for one or all of the meals of the day.

A primitive bread was called the corn-dodger. It was a carefully mixed and seasoned dough made from corn meal and water, wrapped in wet corn husks, pressed into a flat form, and baked in the hot coals and ashes. They were eaten with butter or hot gravy from fried ham. A later version was baked in iron skilletts, but without the flavor of hickory ashes. The dodgers were also called ash-cakes.

These cakes were also baked on a board slanted before the open fire. Other versions were called johnny cake, hoe cake or pones, corrupted from the "paune" of the Indians.

Corn meal mush was sometimes called Hasty Pudding from the custom of making it just as wanted, and bringing it to the table with about fifteen minutes cooking. In this way the meal was not thoroughly cooked, and therefore was said to disagree with many persons. A cast-iron pot with feet, lessens the tendency to burn and is therefore the best vessel to use. It's best to double the quantity needed, and put away half to become cold for frying. Oiling the mush on the top prevents the formation of a crust by drying.

In Mary Scott's book are recipes for baked mush, fried mush, croquettes of mush, corn meal gruel and boiled wheat and Indian gruel, pork scrapple and beef scrapple and various ways of using hominy; eleven recipes for corn bread, some using sweet milk, sour cream, sour milk, buttermilk, molasses, eggs beaten separately, cream of tartar, etc.; six recipes for brown bread combining corn meal with other flours and various muffin and waffle recipes; corn starch puddings; many recipes for green corn, corn omelet, corn chowder. She says "parched corn is corn browned in the oven or on the top of the stove. It was the food of the Indians, and is loved by children. It will sustain life on long marches. Sweet corn parched and ground coarsely and eaten in milk with or without sugar is a dish much enjoyed. Corn meal may be used to good advantage in place of soap for washing the hands." She quotes the following:

"The discovery of a new dish does more for the happiness of the human race than the discovery of a planet."

We agree, Mary Scott! Here are a few of her recipes:

CORN BREAD

Two cups Indian, one cup wheat,
 One cup sour milk, one cup sweet,
 One good egg that well you beat,
 Half cup molasses, too,
 Half cup sugar add thereto,
 With one spoon of butter new.
 Salt and soda each a teaspoon;
 Mix up quick and bake it soon.
 Then you'll have corn bread complete,
 Best of all corn bread you meet.
 It will make your boy's eyes shine,
 If he's like that boy of mine.
 If you have a dozen boys
 To increase your household joys,
 Double then this rule I should,
 And you'll have two corn cakes good.
 When you've nothing else for tea
 This the very thing will be.
 All the men that I have seen
 Say it is of all cakes queen,
 Good enough for any king
 That a husband home can bring,
 Warming up the human stove,
 Cheering up the hearts you love;
 And only Tyndall can explain
 The links between corn bread and brain.
 Get a husband what he likes
 And save a hundred household strikes.

--Old Rhymes

Indian Pudding came to our attention at the Howard Johnson Restaurant. This is the only place we've ever encountered it in public. Here are four versions of Indian Pudding from Mary Scott's book. All of them seem large. Below that is one of ours from "the paper" which has been tried and is guaranteed to please you!

Baked Indian Pudding

1 qt. of milk or water
 1 tea cup of corn meal
 1 small cup of butter
 1 small cup of molasses
 1 lemon, juice and grated rind
 6 eggs, well beaten

Boil the milk or water, and add to it the corn meal, wet with a little milk reserved for that purpose; and let it simmer with the steam shut in for an hour. Then mix the other ingredients, and bake about half an hour in a good oven.

Indian Meal and Apple Pudding

1 c. of Indian meal
 1 c. of molasses
 2 quarts of milk
 2 tsp. of salt
 1 small cup suet, chopped fine
 1 quart of apples, pared and quartered
 1 tsp. of ginger
 1 salt spoon of mace, or 1/2 a nutmeg

Put the milk on to heat, and when it boils, pour in the corn meal, which has been mixed with some of the cold milk, reserved from the two quarts. Cook this half an hour, stirring often. Add other ingredients and pour into a deep pudding dish which has been well buttered. Bake slowly three hours. Eat with cream.

Today's Indian Pudding

3 cups milk
 1/4 cup cornmeal
 2 eggs, beaten
 1/2 cup dark molasses
 1/4 cup sugar
 1/2 tsp. salt
 1 tsp. cinnamon
 3/4 tsp. ginger
 1/2 cup wheat germ

Moisten cornmeal with a bit of the milk. Scald remainder of the milk and gradually add cornmeal. Cook over medium heat 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat. Combine eggs, sweetenings, salt and spices. Add to milk mixture and stir in wheat germ. Pour into lightly greased 1 1/2 quart bake dish and place in pan of hot water. Bake at 325 degrees for an hour and 15 to 20 minutes or until silver knife inserted in center comes out almost clean. Serve warm or cold with cream, whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Indian Pudding without eggs

7 heaping tbsp. corn meal
 1/2 tsp. salt
 2 tbsp. butter
 3/4 c. molasses
 1 tsp. ginger
 1 tsp. mace
 Pour into these 1 qt. of boiling milk.

Mix well, and pour into a buttered dish; just before closing the oven door pour in 1 c. cold water. Stir quickly and close the oven. Stir two or three times to prevent the meal from settling. Bake three-fourths of an hour.

Indian Pudding

1 scant pint of corn meal
 2/3 cup of bread crumbs
 1 cup of molasses
 2 tbsp. of brown sugar
 1 quart of milk
 2/3 pint of cold water
 2 eggs
 1 cup of raisins or not as liked
 1 tsp. salt
 1 heaping tbsp. of butter

Bake 3 hours in a slow oven.
 Serve with cream only.

The last recipe we bring you from Mary Scott's little book is one for Corn Chowder. This is not unlike other recipes we've seen except for the quantity and for the boiling of the cobs. We thought it would be fun to include it here:

Corn Chowder

1 quart of raw sweet corn or 1 quart of canned corn
 1 pint sliced potatoes
 1/4 pound fat salt pork
 1 large onion
 1 pint tomatoes, either canned or fresh sliced
 1 tsp. salt
 1 salt spoon pepper
 1 heaping tablespoon of butter
 3 heaping tablespoons of flour
 1 pint rich milk

Cut the corn from the cob. Boil the cobs twenty minutes in water enough to cover them, then remove the cobs, skin the onion and slice one half and fry with the salt pork. Pare and slice the potatoes, slice the remaining half of the onion; and pare and slice the tomatoes. Mix pepper, flour and salt together. Now put corn, potatoes, tomatoes and onion in the kettle in layers, sprinkling each layer with the mixture of pepper, flour and salt. Strain the fat from the onion and pork into the kettle, also the water from the cobs, cook till the corn and potatoes are tender. Then add the butter and milk, bring to a boil, and serve very hot with fresh, crisp crackers. If canned corn and tomatoes are used fully one quart of water must be supplied in place of the water from the cobs.

While we are still on the subject of corn, here is a recipe for Corn Pudding from "Primitive American Cookery" by Noah Julian, published by Hudson Valley Publications, New York City, which was advertised in the New York Times. We think this would be especially good if the extra-sweet sweet corn were used:

Corn Pudding

3 well-beaten eggs
 3 cups corn kernels (from 6 large ears)
 1 cup milk
 1 cup cream
 1/4 cup sifted flour
 1 tsp. salt
 1/2 tsp. black pepper
 1 tbsp. sugar
 2 tbsp. melted butter

Mix thoroughly. Pour into buttered casserole and bake in preheated 350 deg. oven for 1 hr. Use a knife to test if it is done. Serve hot.

This is probably the place for the recipe for Spoon Bread from the same book. Its a delicious luncheon dish:

Spoon Bread

1 tsp. salt
 1 cup corn meal
 2 cups milk
 4 tbsp. butter
 4 well-beaten eggs
 2 tsp. baking powder

Butter a 2 quart baking dish. Mix 1 tsp. salt with 1 cup corn meal. Heat milk, but do not let it boil. Stir meal and salt into heated milk, add butter, mix well. Add beaten eggs and baking powder. Mix and pour into baking dish. Bake at 350 for 40 minutes. Serve hot.

Another idea from "Primitive American Cookery" we thought we'd like to try is this one:

Scalloped Sweet Potatoes and Apples

Boil 6 medium-sized sweet potatoes until they are tender. Peel and slice 1/4 inch thick. Place a layer in buttered casserole. Sprinkle a dash of cinnamon and nutmeg on top. Prepare 2 cups sliced apples. Place a layer on top of potatoes. Continue layering, ending with layer of apples on top. Sprinkle top layer of apples with 1/2 cup brown sugar, some ground mace, cinnamon and little maple syrup. Dot with butter. Bake at 350 for about an hour. Serve hot.

Here follow some recipes which we have gleaned from the pages of "Good Old Days" Magazines, published by The Tower Press, Inc., P. O. Box 591, Lynn, Massachusetts. Some are included only because they are obviously old, curious and interesting. You might not want to try them, but you would enjoy reading them, maybe learning from them. Take the first one below for example. We go to the store and buy "yeast" for making bread. Great grandmother did it differently:

Great Grandmother's Salt Rising Bread

1 cup milk scalded
5 T. cornmeal
2 T. sugar
3 T. melted shortening
1 cup lukewarm water
5-6 cups flour
1 1/2 teas. salt

In earthenware crock scald cornmeal, add sugar and warm milk to which 1 teaspoon salt has been added. Let stand in a very warm place overnight. The "yeast" should be a pulpy mass by morning. Then stir in remaining salt, 3 cups of flour. Let stand till light. Add remainder of flour, knead till smooth and shape into loaves. Let rise till double its bulk. Bake 25-30 min. in moderate oven. Makes a moist loaf, and keeps well.

We had not heard of "rivvels" before. Apparently the word has Pennsylvania Dutch origin. "Rivvel" means "lump" and "rivvel soup" is full of lumps of dough which look like rice. Here is one recipe for it:

Rivvel Soup

1 qt. chicken or beef broth
1 cup flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1 egg, beaten
1 cup whole kernel corn, crushed

Bring broth to a boil. Combine flour, salt and egg until mixture is crumbly. Rub through hands into the boiling broth, add the corn, and cook about 10 minutes. Rivvels will look like boiled rice when cooked.

Great Grandma's Sponge Cake

8 oz. sifted flour
16 oz. pulverized sugar, sifted
10 eggs
1 tsp. lemon flavoring

Beat yolks, stir sugar slowly in beaten yolks and last the stiffly beaten whites. Add flavoring. Bake about 1 hr. in slow oven, 325 deg. in large tube pan.

Navy Bean Pie (Year 1883)

2 cups cooked navy beans, run through a colander
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 stick oleo
1 tsp. vanilla
dash nutmeg
2 eggs well beaten

Mix well and bake as a pumpkin pie.

Legend goes that men loading cotton in Mississippi had no chance to stop to eat, so each carried a chunk of "bosom bread" in his shirt, grabbing a mouthful as he ran to and from the ships on the Mississippi River. This gingerbread recipe traveled from Mississippi to Indiana about 70 years ago. It's said to be very dark and heavy but delicious and stays moist a long time. No directions for baking are given. Experienced cooks would know!

Bosom Bread Small amount allspice and cloves if desired
 2 cups sour milk
 2 cups brown sugar 2 teaspoons soda dissolved in milk
 1 egg About 4 cups flour or less according to
 1 cup heavy molasses kind of molasses used
 1 teaspoon ginger

Pork Cake 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
 1 pint hot coffee 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1 tablespoon soda 1/2 cup black walnuts
 1 pound dates, chopped Scant 1 pound fresh fat pork, ground
 2 heaping pints flour Pour hot coffee over ground meat and mix in the rest.
 2 pounds raisins, chopped Bake almost 2 hours in a slow oven.

Wild Grape Dumplings (From pioneer days)

Take 2 cups wild grapes after stems have been removed. Cover with water and boil about 15 minutes or until juice has been extracted. Remove from fire and strain. Add one cup sugar and enough water to make 1 quart of juice. Bring to brisk boil and add dumplings. To make dumplings: Sift together 2 cups flour, 1/2 cup sugar, 4 tablespoons baking powder (?) and 1 teaspoon salt. Cut in 4 tablespoons shortening. Mix with 3/4 cup sweet milk to make soft dough. Drop from teaspoon (one at a time) dough chunks about the size of a small egg into boiling juice. Cover and simmer for 15 min.

Indian Pickle or Piccalilli

Take one hard white cabbage (sliced), 2 cauliflowers, pulled to pieces, 20 French beans, 1 stick of horse-radish, sliced fine, 2 doz. small white onions, and 1 doz. gherkins. Cover these with boiling brine; next day, drain the whole on a sieve, put it into a jar, add curry powder or turmeric, 2 oz.; garlic, ginger, and mustard-seed, of each 1 oz.; capsicum 1/2 oz. Fill up the vessel with hot pickling vinegar; bung it up close, and let it stand for a month with occasional agitation.

There are many versions of piccalilli or picalilli. The one just given was the most complicated we found. A simpler version comes from our own member and historian, Doris Strothman:

Aunt Ollie's Picalilli

Dishpan of green tomatoes; 1 dozen ripe bell peppers. Coarse grind and salt. Let stand over night and drain. (We always spread it out on big turkey platters.) Add 3 c. sugar, 3 tbsp. mustard seed and vinegar to cover. Bring to a boil and seal.

Grandma's Cookie Recipe (from Doris Strothman)

1 pt. sugar, 1 pt. cream (sweet or sour)
 1 tsp. soda with sour cream, 2 tsp. baking powder with sweet cream
 2 eggs
 1/2 pt. butter or half butter--half lard.
 Flour to make stiff. Roll thin. Sprinkle with sugar

Doughnuts in Rhyme (from Doris Strothman)

One cup of sugar and one of milk,
 Two eggs, beaten fine as silk.
 A little nutmeg, or lemon will do.
 Of baking powder, teaspoons two.
 Lightly stir the flour in
 Roll on pie board, not too thin;

Cut in diamonds, twists or rings,
 Then drop with care, the doughy things,
 Into the fat that briskly swells
 Evenly the spongy cells.
 Roll in sugar, lay to cool--
 Always use this simple rule.

Doris has also given us two items from the collection of "brain recipes" of Jeanne Rose, the San Francisco herbalist. An article about her appeared in the March 6, 1973 issue of the Cedar Rapids Gazette. Such "receipts" were popular in olden days. Whether really effective or not, they are fun to think about:

Headache Pillow: Stuff a pillow with two ounces each of lavender, marjoram, betony rose leaf and rose petal, and 1/2 ounce cloves, mixed all together. Inhale and your headache will be cured. Carry some with you away from home.

Sleep Bag: Mix together two ounces rose petal, one ounce of mint and one-fourth ounce crushed clove. To ease melancholy.

One contributor to "Good Old Days" Magazine sent in her great grandma's recipe for Banana Cake (about 1880), said to be a bread-like cake, and a good way to use up leftover bananas. It was almost identical with one we've used a number of years for Christmas gift-giving. The "cake" called for 1 tsp. vanilla. Substitute some whole wheat flour if you wish.

Banana Nut Bread

1/2 c. shortening
 1 c. sugar
 2 eggs
 Blend well.

Stir in 3 tbsp. sour cream (or sour milk or buttermilk)
 1 c. mashed bananas (2 or 3 bananas)
 Sift together and add: 2 c. sifted flour, 1 tsp. soda,
 1/2 tsp. salt. Blend in 1/3 to 1 c. nuts as desired.
 Pour into well greased medium sized loaf pan or 3 small ones.
 Let stand 20 min. before baking. Meanwhile turn on oven
 at 350. Bake on center rack about 1 hour or until wooden
 pick pushed into center comes out clean. Cool before slicing.

The following is from the American Heritage Cookbook, reprinted in "Good Old Days", Book No. 8. It is said: "The author of Little Women was so fond of this New England dessert that she named her house in Concord, Massachusetts, Apple Slump."

Louisa May Alcott's Apple Slump

6 cups sliced apples
 1 cup sugar
 1 tsp. cinnamon
 1/2 cup water
 1 1/2 c. sifted flour
 1/4 tsp. salt
 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
 1/2 cup milk (about)

Combine apples, sugar, cinnamon and water in a saucepan with a tight-fitting lid. Heat to the boiling point. Sift together flour, salt and baking powder. Stir in enough milk to make a soft dough. Drop from a tablespoon onto apple mixture. Cover tightly and cook over low heat for 30 minutes. Serve warm with nutmeg sauce or cream.

Nutmeg Sauce: Mix together 1 cup sugar and 1 tablespoon flour. Stir in 1 cup boiling water and cook, stirring constantly, until sauce bubbles and thickens slightly. Add 1 tablespoon butter and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in 1 teaspoon nutmeg. Serve hot.

Before we move from recipes to poetry, this final word on cooking: The oldest known cookbook was published in Spanish in 1390. It is interesting to note that in its appendix it dealt with the evils of overeating and ways to overcome them!

Having given you some "corny" recipes, here is a "corny" poem we couldn't resist. It is an "original" sent by Harold Gardner, 105 Clay St., Edinburg, Indiana, and appeared in the October, 1969, issue of "Good Old Days" Magazine:

Corn on the Cob

There's several things in this old life
That fill my soul with joy.
And one is watermelon time,
I've enjoyed it, man and boy.
But nothin' holds a candle to
My favorite kind of job,
Of sittin' by a platter full
Of fresh corn on the cob.

I have patronized the drive-in,
The diner and the bar.
I've eaten at the local clubs,
And places near and far.
I've supped with tramps and hoboes,
And also with the snob.
In fact I'd eat with anyone,
Who has corn on the cob.

I want each ear, in butter soaked,
Salt and pepper near at hand,
And when I take that first big bite,
This is the "Promised Land."
And as I chew each tasty grain,
I feel my taste buds throb.
Eatin' from a platter full
Of fresh corn on the cob.

Now granny takes a paring knife,
Cuts off each tender row.
She's afraid to eat it from the cob,
Her false teeth might let go.
Each year brings pain and misery,
Each year, my youth does rob.
But it also brings a platter full,
Of fresh corn on the cob.

We know that the pioneers made their own soap from lye made from ashes and refuse fats. But did you know how they extracted the lye from the ashes? Maybe this poem from the pages of "Good Old Days" by Mrs. Edith P. Lockyer of Clinton, Tennessee, will help you visualize it:

The Old Ash Hopper

We used to have an ash hopper
On the north side;
The bottom was very narrow
And the top, extra wide.
All through the winter
Fires bright as copper
Made a lot of ashes
Which went to the hopper.
With the hopper filled
With ashes of burnt wood
Water was poured upon it,
And water o'er it stood;
At the bottom of the hopper
Was a little spout
Where lye from wet ashes
Slowly dribbled out.
With lye from the hopper
And old grease within her scope
Mother mixed both with water
And made a pot of soap.
The pot was a kettle
Of enormous size
And soap making then
Was quite an enterprise!

Finished, the soap was left
A little while to cool,
And the old ash hopper
Need no longer drool.
Then "ma" cut the soap
In irregular bars
And stored it away
In old crock-like jars.
I liked our ash hopper
In the north shade,
And liked to count the bars
That our mother made.
Ash hoppers remind me
Of happy days gone by
When I stood and watched
The dripping of the lye.
This was the time when sun
And flowers and bees together
Bespoke of the coming
Hot summer weather.
'Twas a busy time
When the ash hopper spout
Let the homemade lye
Drip, and dribble out.

Poetry readings from the platform used to be quite popular. Maybe this too, will be revived one of these days. Fortunate is the child whose parents love poetry and read or recite it to them. Parents of old used rhymes and poems to teach their children morals and good conduct. Here is one my mother recited when I was a child. Years later I found it in print and gave it as a musical reading:

What the Choir Sang About the New Bonnet

A foolish little maiden bought a
foolish little bonnet,
With a ribbon and a feather and a
bit of lace upon it;
And that the other maidens of the
little town might know it
She thought she'd go to meeting next
Sunday just to show it.

But though the little bonnet was
scarce larger than a dime,
The getting of it settled proved
to be a work of time;
So when 'twas fairly tied all the
bells had stopped their ringing,
And when she came to meeting, sure
enough, the folks were singing.

So the foolish little maiden stood
and waited at the door,
And she shook her ruffles out behind
and smoothed them out before.
"Hallelujah, hallelujah," sang the
choir above her head--
"Hardly knew you! Hardly knew you!"
were the words she thought they said.

This made the little maiden feel
so very, very cross
That she gave her little mouth a twist,
her little head a toss;
For she thought the hymn they sang
was all about her bonnet,
With the ribbon, and the feather, and
the bit of lace upon it.

She would not wait to listen to
the sermon or the prayer,
But pattered down the silent street
and hurried up the stair
'Til she reached her little bureau
and in a bandbox on it,
Hid safe away from critic's eye
her foolish little bonnet.

Which proves, my little maidens,
that each of you will find,
In every Sabbath service
but an echo of your mind,
And that the little head that's filled
with silly little airs
Will never get a blessing
from sermons or from prayers.

Another I heard from my mother at a very early age was this one called "If You Please." Later I found it in an Appleton's Second Reader, published in 1878. It reflects a perennial problem our ancestors had with pests. And it was probably recited to discourage thefts from the cookie jar!

All dressed in gray, a little mouse
Has made his home within my house;
And every night and every morn
I say, "I wish that mouse were gone!"

But why? A quiet soul is he
As any one need wish to see.
My house is large, my hearth is wide,
With room for him and me beside.

Ah, yes! But when the lights are out,
He likes to slyly peep about,
And help himself to what he sees,
Without once saying, "If you please."

Many, many more bits of nostalgia might have been added to this collection. But that would have made it too long to permit our publishing it. We hope it has served to stir up some memories for you. Now you can turn back to the beginning of the book and sing the song about Iowa you learned in school!

That's all, folks!

Whenever Auntie
moves around,

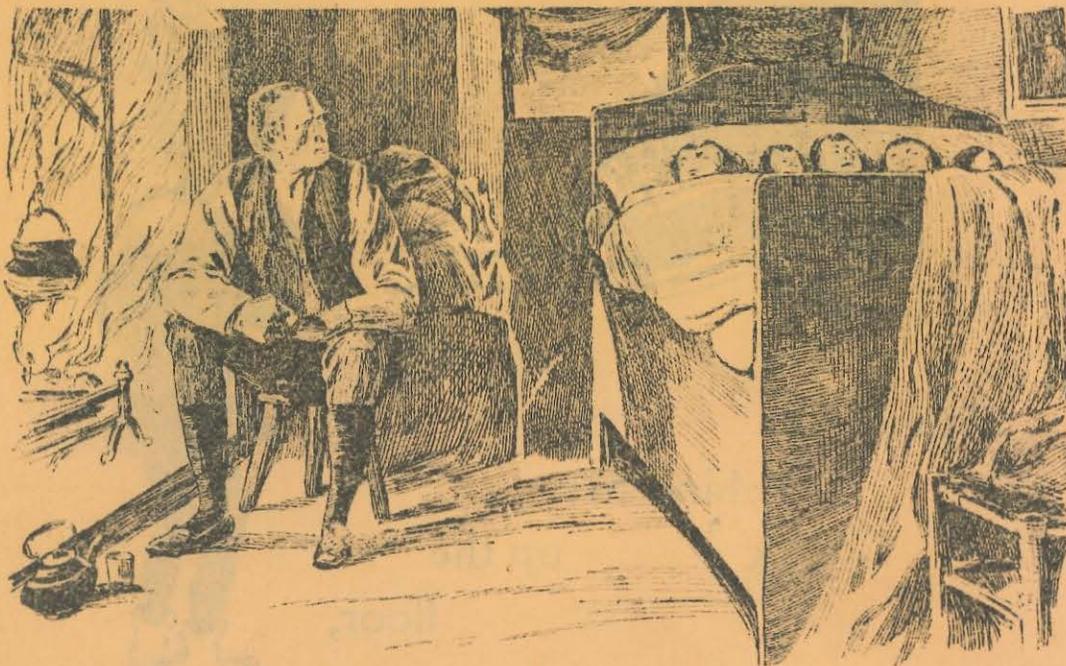
Her dresses
make a
curious sound,



They trail
behind her
up the
floor,



And trundle
after through
the door.



MOTHER AWAY FROM HOME.