

Early Housekeeping



Symbol of Canada of 1850

Most housewives, particularly mothers of a young family, find their days full. It is therefore hard to imagine the extra chores that were piled on the shoulders of a Walkerton housewife one hundred years ago.

After the baby had been breast-fed and changed, the fire had to be tended to provide heat for warmth and cooking. Breakfast might have been porridge and pancakes with maple syrup. While the porridge cooked, the copper wash boiler was filled to provide hot water for the day.

After breakfast, while the water heated, the cloth diapers were soaked, then the lamps were filled, cleaned and the wicks trimmed. Then the bed chambers were emptied into the outhouse. Of course, all water used for the daily household chores had to be carried from the well or a nearby spring.

Each day brought its own special duties. If it was washday, an extra quantity of water had to be carried in and heated to fill, first the copper boiler and hot water reservoir on the stove, then the washtubs. There, the clothes were scrubbed on a washboard and then hung to dry. Of course, extra basins were used for bleaching, blueing and starching. All of these were laborious tasks that made wash day an all-day chore. After the wash was all finished, the hot wash water was then used to scrub the

floor. Bake day was important too, baked goodies had to be prepared to last several days and as the supply of bread and the lard for baking was home-rendered.

The housewife had to hope the dough would rise, even if the kitchen was draughty, although a dough box was often used to rise the bread in. It was often suspected (and still is) that weather conditions affected the rising of the dough.

Many early settlers in Walkerton kept a cow and some hens and the housewife usually helped with the chores and milking, gathering eggs and churning the butter from the thick cream that was skimmed from the top of the milk.

All perishables had to be stored in the cool earth cellar. In the fall, the produce from the housewife's large garden (that she had tended all summer) had to be put down, either by pickling, or preserving.

Saturday night was bath night, when the wash tub was filled from the copper wash boiler on the stove. First the children were scrubbed down, then more hot water was added so that mum and dad could sponge off the week's sweat and toil.

Even the sopa used for washday was made from wood ash, lye and lard, properly combined and rendered.

Cheer up girls, — things aren't as bad to-day after all!