

# Housewife felt drudgery of pioneer farm life

The History of Halton, written by Ben Case of the Silverwood area, continues at highly irregular intervals. This week provides another instalment, after several months when there just wasn't space in the Free Press columns.

## WOMEN'S WORK

In regard to the woman's sphere of activity on the farm during the so-called "horse age", there have been vast changes over the years in every department. Let us commence with the dairy. During that period she probably had to do the milking, or assist at it. Until more recent times this was done by hand. The milk was at one time carried to the house and poured into shallow pans in the cellar. After setting a few hours the cream was skimmed off and the skim milk carried back to the barn for the calves or pigs. An innovation came with the advent of milk cans which were set in water at the pump house. A tap at the bottom and a glass gauge allowed for the separation of milk and cream. Later still the cream separator proved a great boon, especially with the coming of the electric motor to take care of the turning. Then on dairy farms milking machines put in an appearance, thus relieving the housewife of some of the drudgery of life on the farm.

An old time household chore was churning once or twice a week with an old-fashioned dash churn. Many an anxious half-hour would be spent waiting for the butter to come, especially in summer when it was difficult to lower the temperature of the

running back and forth for supplies, dishes and cooking utensils. This waste of effort was intensified in the summer when the range was moved to the summer kitchen and there were possibly two or three steps to be negotiated as well. Water had to be carried in from the well and the pail rested on the side table with the tin dipper close at hand with which to fill the kettle or quench the thirst. On wash days the water was either carried from the well or dipped from the cistern and heated in a boiler on the stove. The washing was done in tubs with the aid of a wash-board for rubbing the clothes. When a reservoir was made available, attached to the back of the stove, for heating the water, it was thought that man's inventiveness had gone as far as it could go. On Saturday nights the tub was set beside the stove for the weekly family bath, the water being changed periodically according to the size of the family and the squeamishness of the bather.

There were many other jobs around the house other than those mentioned, which have either been eliminated or made easier with modern appliances. Ironing was done with flat irons heated on top of the stove and constantly switched. Preserving of fruit and

motor and the gasoline engine great changes have taken place around the farm from the days of fifty or a hundred years ago. Around the house water pressure systems have been installed with hot water tanks, bathrooms, refrigerators, deep freezers, washing machines, modern designed kitchens and the rest. One never knows but what automatic dish-washers, clothes dryers and such may be the rule rather than the exception in every farmhouse.

In the man's world around the farm there have been just as many far-reaching changes in recent years. As mentioned previously, the man-power shortage during and following World War Two and the inventive genius of farm machinery manufacturers have spark-plugged a virtual revolution in farming since 1840. Previous to that the coming of the automobile gradually forced the driving horse (with buggy in summer and cutter and bells in winter) off the

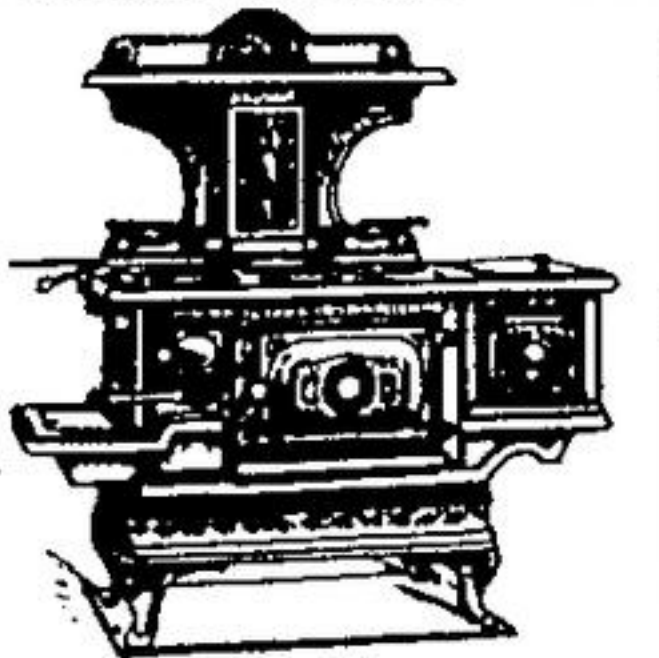
road, but the work-horse on the farm held his own up to the '40's. By today he has been almost completely supplanted by the tractor, truck and combine and there is now hardly a work team to be seen. The hay-baler has done away with most of the hard work of haying. On the dairy farm, milking machines and the milk cooler have displaced the milk can, so that milking is no longer the formidable chore it once was. Corn is harvested and blown into the silo without being

touched by human hands. Cattle are not tied up to the same extent as formerly and the movable feeding rack is another labor-saving device.

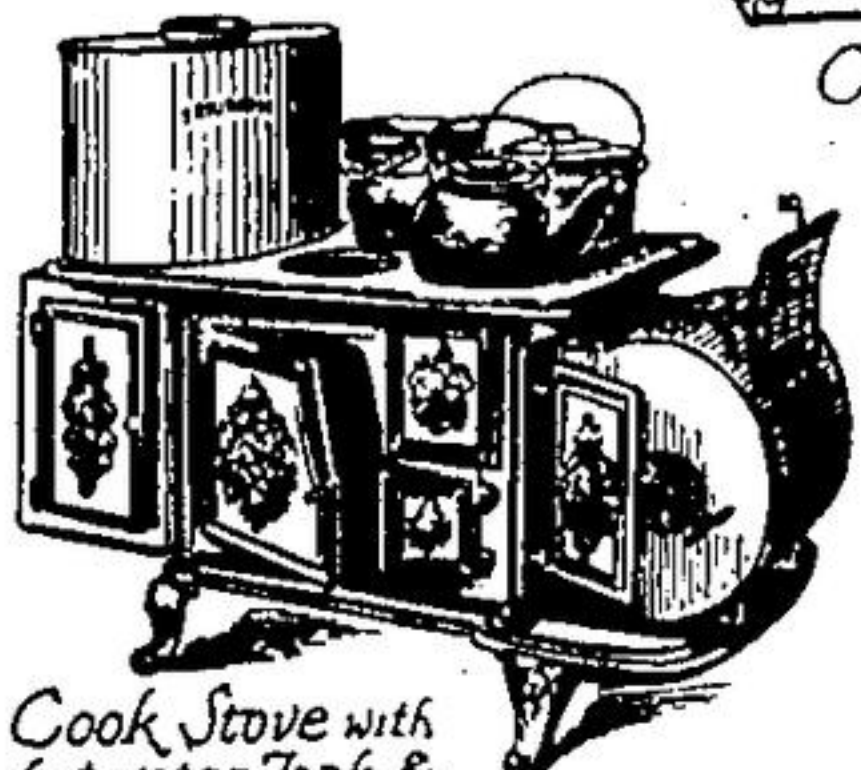
Today's farmer stands at the crossroads and the small farm is fast becoming an un-economic unit. The factories of the "Golden Horseshoe" with their unionized wages and shorter hours have eliminated the hired man of yesterday, and have attracted the younger farm generation to the town and city. The farmer is

forced to resort to high-priced machinery and since these machines are only in operation for a fraction of the year, it is more practical to use them on a larger farm which thereby absorbs one or two smaller units. Educational costs have risen astronomically with a consequent rise in taxes and here again the farmer is at a disadvantage since he is assessed on his whole property for school purposes, and has to pay taxes in proportion. Again, the price for farm produce fluctuates according to supply and

demand. It has been found impossible to organize and unionize the farm population as has been done with the factory employee and, as a result, too often the price received for produce is not commensurate with the cost of production, especially if time and effort are taken into consideration. As a consequence the small 100-acre farm, the working and managing of which has been a "way of life" since early days, is fast disappearing and the future alone will tell whether the result will be for the better.



Cooking Range 1885



Cook Stove with hot water tank & oven for roasting in front 1862

cream to the proper degree, and in the winter to raise it. The Daisy churn was an improvement consisting of a revolving drum or barrel turned by hand. The butter was then worked up in a big butter bowl and put into crocks or made up into pound prints. The finished product would be taken into town along with the eggs and traded for household necessities not raised on the farm. The farmer's wife was generally given control of the "butter-and-egg" money and well she might as she was the person responsible for their existence. With the passing of time, creameries came into existence and the cream was collected at the door, with the resultant elimination of a tedious household chore.

The old-fashioned farm-house was a poorly designed workshop for the housewife. The family practically lived in the big kitchen, the focal point of which was the old wood-burning range which the mistress of the house had to continually stoke with wood from the nearby woodbox. The pantry in which the dishes and food supplies were kept was apt to be at the far end of the kitchen while everything of a perishable nature had to be taken down cellar after each meal. Meals were prepared and dishes washed at the main dining table in the centre of the kitchen, or at a side table, with a great deal of

vegetables entailed endless hours of standing over the hot kitchen stove in sweltering weather. The coal oil lamps had to be cleaned daily and the wicks adjusted. Eggs had to be preserved in isinglass against the winter days when the hens refused to lay. Meat was corned for protection against spoiling. Gardening was generally considered woman's work as the men were generally too busy with more important matters to bother with such petty chores.

However, with all the inconveniences about the house and yard, life on the farm was just as enjoyable then as today. On a winter's night with the chores all done, a good fire going in the kitchen stove, the red table cloth on the table and the coal-oil lamp set in the centre for the children to do their homework, with a pan of apples convenient and games being played that are seldom heard of today, there were few more comfortable or pleasant places. Possibly a neighbor would drop in unannounced for a game of euchre or a friendly chat. Before the days of telephone, radio and television, neighborly visits occupied a more important place in the life of the community and conversation was not a lost art, as it is fast becoming today.

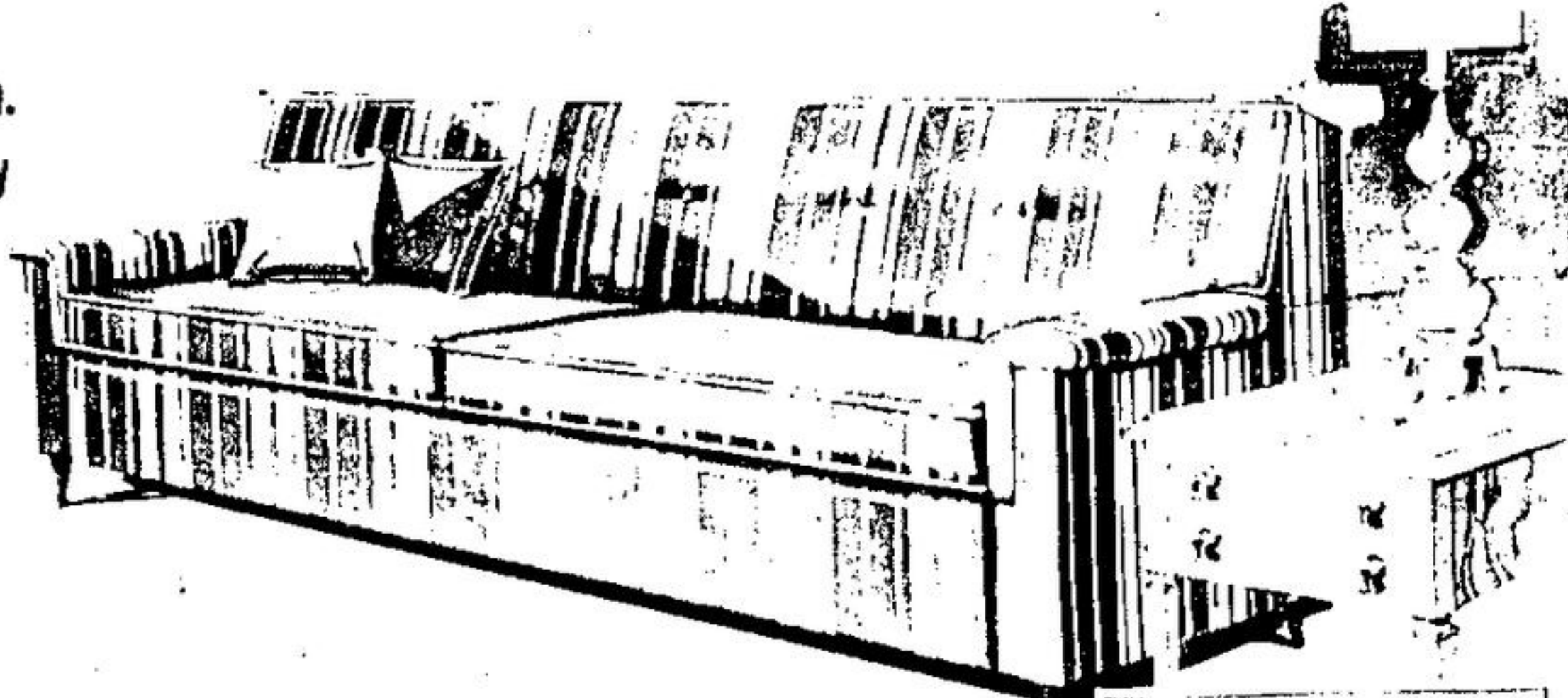
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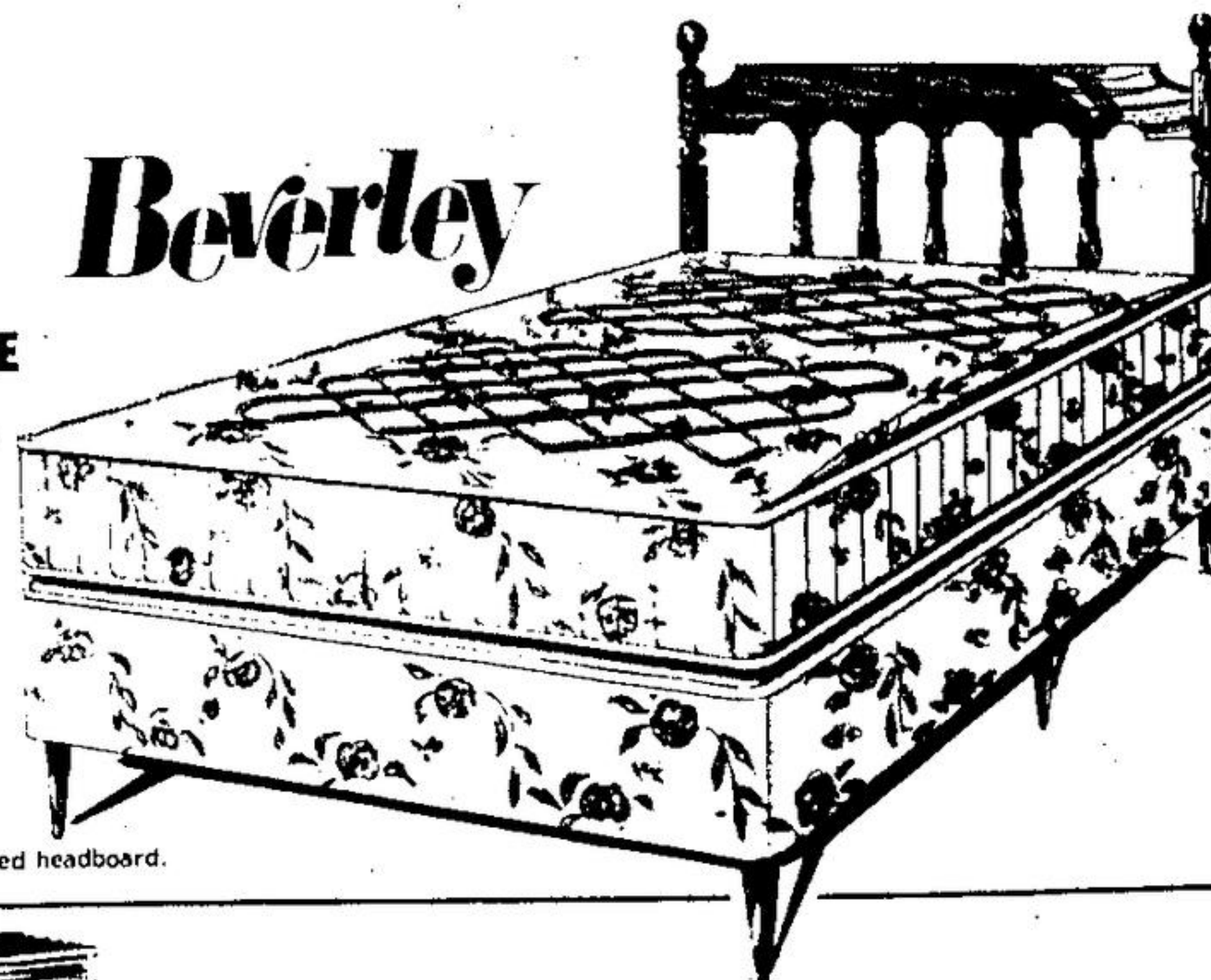
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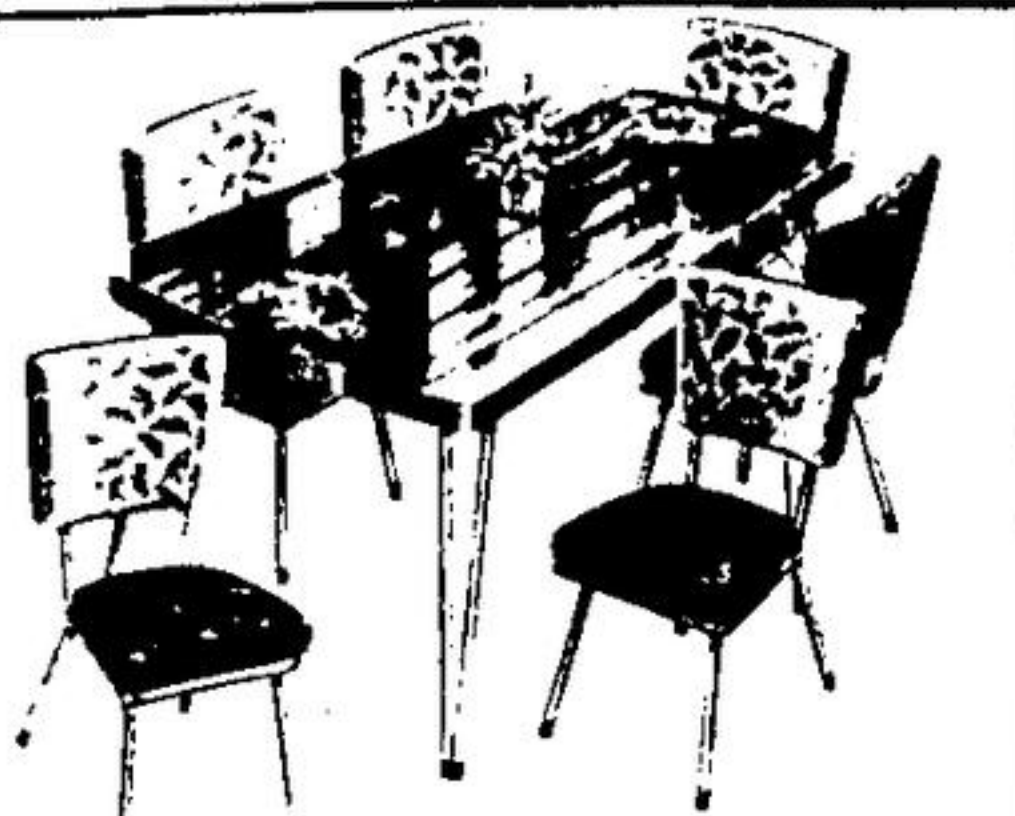
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