

Nuggets of History

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A TALE ABOUT STOVES FOR HEATING AND COOKING by Hazel M. Hyde

It was burning brightly in an enclosed porch and giving a very comforting warmth: "A Franklin stove? Really?" Our hostess was Jean Babbitt. Her husband, Harry, came in and stood with his back to the stove, "Sure, how do you like it? It's a wood burning stove and we have been fortunate this year to get our fuel free from some trees that had to be cut down," he continued.

Susan Katzman of Gannett News Service wrote in Penny-whistle Press for Children, Saturday, February 18, 1984:

"Here's a little about the history of stoves and ovens in America.

The first cooking invention--the Adam and Eve of ranges and ovens--was fire. Early people relied on open fire to cook food. (Some Indians cooked food by placing it in hot sun, but basically, for centuries, campfires were the only "stoves".)

The early colonists of America continued to cook over open fires, but they brought the fire indoors and put it in the fireplace.

Most fireplaces were fitted with hanging pots and spits for cooking and some even had side compartments (ovens) for baking."

The Franklin stove was only one of many inventions of Benjamin Franklin. The Franklin stove served well the people of his day. He arranged the flues in his own stove in an efficient way and could make his sitting room twice as warm with one fourth as much fuel as he had been using. Early Franklin stoves made use of the fireplace, but warmed the room better because of its greater radiating surface.

Susan Katzman's story continued:

"Benjamin Franklin is credited with inventing, in the early 1740s, the granddaddy of modern American ranges. Essentially, he put the fireplace in a cast-iron box that could fit into a room. This basic stove was refined and eventually became a real cooking appliance--a wood--or coal-burning cast-iron range with an oven below and holes on top for pots."

A recent talk given to Rockford Chapter DAR and the Rockford Colony of New England Women which celebrated the Anniversary of the Treaty of Paris, 1783, led to my re-reading of Carol VanDoren's: Benjamin Franklin, where VanDoren relates:

"When Franklin invented the stove that has since been named after him, he declined to patent it and turned his model over to Robert Grace to manufacture at his furnace in Chester County. To promote the sales Franklin wrote An



Account of the New-Invented Pennsylvania Fire Place, 1744, and published it, but Grace paid for the printing. His stoves were on sale at least for a time at Franklin's post office. When Grace was in difficulties in 1749, Franklin helped him."

Another book that I read was The Private Franklin by Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia W. Herbert. These authors told of Franklin's appeal to women's ideas of economy and comfort, telling in articles about his Pennsylvania fireplace, commonly known as the Franklin stove:

"Economy in use of wood, better distribution of heat, reduction of drafts and smoke -- all these were selling points for Franklin's new product. When he launched it on the market, however, he simply did what most advertisers do today; He appealed to women's desire to keep their looks. "Women, particularly from this cause, cold air, as they sit much in the house get colds in the head, rheums, and deflurions... Great and bright fires also do very much to contribute to damage to the eyes, dry and shrivel the skin, and bring on early the appearance of age."

"Philadelphia women had come a long way from the original settlers who had to make do in sod caves along the Delaware. Franklin's stove was widely sold in New England by his brothers John and Peter. It later made the Clammy Winters of Monticello more bearable for Thomas Jefferson, who hated the cold."

The interest in stoves and the changes made in them over the years has been with me for years. Even Franklin's stove underwent changes. VanDoren tells:

"Some time during 1767 Filippo Mazzei consulted Franklin about the stove which he had invented but which the English makers changed from the original design. Franklin helped him look for a true model and had two made for him to send to the Grand Duke Leopold."

Franklin's scientific interests, we are told, are the rather casual results of his almost universal curiosity.

The first stoves were probably built in Europe, according to WORLD BOOK. These stoves were built of brick and tile. The Erlander Swedish Museum in Rockford has a tall circular stove of a type we saw in palaces in Vienna, Austria. There was no handy way of getting rid of the ashes. Many early stoves were little more than a fire in a box. The first stoves produced in the United States were made in Lynn, Massachusetts.

Wood was in the most common use until the development



of the base-burner, patented in 1833 by Jordan L. Mott of New York. The base-burner was fed by coal from the top and only a small amount of coal reached the flame as needed.

In the last seven decades there has been much change in stoves, both for heating homes and for cooking. As a child I watched my father, Shannon Mortimer, start a fire. One method was to use kindling wood, cut fairly fine, with some loosely wadded newspaper placed under it. Then my father would use a wooden match and blow gently on the small flame. Another was to use corn cobs and a small amount of kerosene. Naturally my mother considered this way dangerous, but my father always controlled it. When making an out-door fire where a grate or brick semi-fireplace was provided, he would use dry grass and small sticks set in a kind of peak before adding larger wood. In the days when he was selling coal we had a large coal-burning stove with a splendid brown jacket around it. But my father really preferred cutting his own wood, neatly stacking it in ricks and banking the fires with ashes at night. We often enjoyed popcornpre-

pared by shaking a wire popcorn popper over the fire when it had burned down to a bright bed.

Aunt Ellen Mortimer and Aunt Elvira Newland both used wood burning stoves with about 4 lids for regular cooking, oven in the center of the stove, and a water reservoir at the end for their cooking.

Along the way there were a number of interesting stoves. In our grocery store we used a large pot-bellied stove. It was a general merchandise store and stayed open at night to accommodate the farm customers. We always had a group of what my mother privately called "loafers" in a circle around the stove. That's where I first heard about Poncho Villa. Also I am sure my love of local history developed as I slipped into the circle to sit beside a favorite older man we all called "Uncle Billy Cline".

Although we lived in a natural gas producing area when I was very young, we had, beside the gas burning kitchen stove, a four-burner kerosene stove.

Susan Katzman pointed out: "In the early 1860s the first practical gas ranges came into public use." The gas stove my maternal grandmother, Clara Powell, used was very different from the one we had in our home. The oven was underneath the four burners and the cast-iron stove was square. The legs of her stove were squat in appearance.



An extra oven is a feature of this kitchen stove at John Deere Home in Grand Detour. (Used by permission of John Deere Home.)

Mother's stove had the oven at the side and color was used on the door, whereas Grandmother Powell's stove was all black. She used a big black iron pot for cooking beans and a heavy black iron skillet for fried foods.

Our next gas stove was all white and was my mother's "treasure". One of our stoves was called Quick Meal and our last gas stove was a Magic Chef. Although some accounts date electric ranges as first appearing in 1909, my mother never owned one. My father was always updating equipment both for our home and his own work.

Natural gas was fed into a burner ring that had tiny holes. Gas-flame heat was quick, clean, and fairly cheap. Modern improvements in the gas range include pilot lights that start the stove without a match; automatic shutoffs that turn off the stove when the food has cooked long enough; controls to provide the right cooking temperature for particular foods; insulated ovens that hold the heat; a broiler, and a storage drawer below the ovens.

In 1936 when I first came to Rockford, it was astonishing to learn that Roper Stoves were made in Rockford. My mother had owned and liked a Roper stove. The Roper concern later moved from Rockford, which was quite a loss to the city. It was a concern with a long, distinguished reputa-

tion for high quality.

Robert Monahan in Sinnissippi Saga wrote: Roper Industries, Inc., Commerce, Georgia, whose division, Roper Pump Company, can trace its history to the old Trahern Pump Company, established in the "Water Power" district in 1857, relocated in Georgia in 1959. But in 1961 Roper Industries acquired a whole new subsidiary here, incorporated in 1910..

"The firms are an outgrowth of the industry developed by George D. Roper, who bought an interest in the Van Wie Gas Stove Company of Cleveland and moved it to Rockford in 1888. Roper, who consolidated a number of firms-Eclipse Gas Stove, Trahern Pump, American Foundry and Rockford Vitreous Enamel Companies-into the George D. Roper Corporation, saw his firm become an undisputed leader in the production of Gas Ranges at one time. The gas range firm was merged with Florence Stove Company and moved to Kankakee in the late 1950's."

After I was married in 1964, I learned to use the electric stove. The microwaves were introduced in mid-1950's and my sister-in-law first began using one when they moved out of the family farm-house into a new home.

The old Mortimer mansion I visited in Fredericksburg had a beautiful fireplace in every room. These were the source of heating the home. The kitchen was a detached house with a large cooking type fireplace similar to the kitchens in Williamsburg.

Charcoal as a fuel or furnace heat were outside my experience until we came to Rockford in 1936. It was strange to change from fireplace and small gas burning stoves to a furnace that heated the entire house.

My friend, Barbara Driebelbeis, has a Country Flame Heater, (wood burning) which to me seems quite unusual. Her Siamese cat loves sitting on top of it when there is no fire in it. This stove is in keeping with the antique furnishings of this home near Roscoe.

When you hear discussions of radiant heat, the development of nuclear energy, and the speed of microwaves, give a second of thought to the women of the past who cooked without temperature regulators or who had a difficult time even keeping the stove filled with fuel. Their homes were often too hot near the fireplace and too cold in the farthest corners of a room.



Another interesting stove in the John Deere Home at Grand Detour

WHERE THE VIOLETS GREW;
LIFE AT THE COUNTY FARM

By Eva Smith Bahrman Sanborn

The Smith family consisted of Mabel who married
Clinton Glenny
Edith who married George Black
Eva who married first Blaine Bahrman and second
Walter Sanborn
Nellie who married Edwin Kjellgren

This is the story of how these four Smith Girls grew at up
Winnebago County Farm.

My earliest recollection of hearing about the Winnebago
County Farm, located on North Main Road and to the north of
the present River Bluff Nursing Home, was one evening in
1908. Some men, I think County Supervisors, came to our
home to interview my father, George Smith, a farmer living
on Tate Road. There was an offer for my father to become
Superintendent of the County Farm. Since my father had
worked there as a hired man in the early part of the 1890's
and my mother had worked there as cook, where they met and
subsequently married, it was deemed that their experience
and ability to run the farm would qualify them for the
job.

Our life on Tate Road had been a simple one. My oldest
sister Mabel was away earning her room and board while she
attended high school at Rockton. Next in line was Edith
who helped on the farm while attending the one room school.
Nellie and I also went to that school and being younger
we had lighter chores to do. My tasks might have included
helping watch the cows as they ate the succulent grass
along the one lane country road. At the crossroads the
neighbor children tethered their horses and visited while
the cows grazed. At that time I was not allowed to ride
a horse by myself, but was hoisted up behind my sister as
she rode old Dolly bareback. One day I decided I would
climb upon Dolly's back by climbing on the fence. I had
untied the reins from the fence post but at that precise
moment the horse took a notion to head for home--not at
her usual slow pace--for she was an old horse-- but at a
full gallop. I clung to her neck desperately and as we
charged into the yard, my mother questioned me as to why
I came in thusly to which I replied, "Dolly wants a drink".

Another chore which I was often called on to do was to
carry cold drinks to those working in the fields. We had
no ice in those days but my father always used to say that
the coldest drinks came from "the north end of the well."
One time when the oats were being put into shocks I was
delegated to bring the drink. When I demurred my father
replied, "We don't eat oats, do we?" Of course we did
eat oats--not the instant kind but the slow cooking kind
which might have been prepared the night before and
reheated in a double boiler the next morning.

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WINNEBAGO COUNTY POOR FARM.

Some afternoons I would go across the road where an
unmarried neighbor lady and I played backgammon, dominoes,
or old maid. My granddaughter won't believe I played
backgammon at the age of eight or younger.

I was an avid reader and consumed all of Horatio Alger
books, those fantastic success stories about boys who had
made good although starting out poor or orphaned. One of
these might have been written about my father as he was
partially orphaned at an early age and spent early years
fending for himself. Now he accepted the offer to become
superintendent of the County Farm and went there in the
fall of 1908 and remained there until 1925.

From then on life for all of us changed drastically.
One of the biggest changes for me was from a one room
school to a graded school. I had skipped two grades in the
country school as was often done to simplify matters for
the teacher who could thus combine classes. Because of this
I was thrown into the intricacies of algebra at an early
age, but somehow managed to get through the next two years
and entered Rockford High School in the fall of 1911.

My first impression of the County Farm as we drove in
the long oak-lined driveway heading up to the home was that
of an enormous castle-like building of white brick with two
wings jutting out on either side forming two elms. However
there the likeness ended as my fantasy of a moat surround-
ing the building proved in fact to be a division of the
driveway which encircled the home. At the beginning of the
driveway was a carriage block made of cement with iron
rings for tying horses. Horse drawn vehicles were our
only mode of transportation in those days. The posts at
each end of the block were known as hitching posts.

A wide cement walk flanked by flower beds led to
broad steps, an open porch all the way across the front of
the building and the double door entrance. Around the
entire porch was an iron railing. The spacious front yard
and lawn must have covered three acres and lent itself to
the nurture of many old trees. The branches of many of the
oaks were outflung as if made for a swing or shade for a
summer picnic, particularly the annual one when all of the

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Mrs. Eva Pearl (Smith) Sanborn, who was honored at American Heritage Meeting of Rockford Chapter of NSDAR, with Hazel M. Hyde, Associate Editor

supervisors and their families and ours enjoyed an outing and luscious dinner on the lawn. After this a picture of the whole group was taken underneath a mammoth oak tree, which I liked to think of as the father of all the oak trees. To one side was a weeping willow and there may have been a maple here and there but I remember the oaks as being predominant.

In the time my folks spent at the County Farm the landscaping was improved from year to year. But the open spaces on each side of the graveled driveway nearer the road produced wild flowers. In the spring they were carpeted with purple violets and occasionally one would find crocuses here and there. There must have been clover of various kinds as my father with seemingly no effort would stoop and find a four leafed clover. He had a knack for doing this all of his life and could come into the house holding several at a time. We would press these just for "good luck".

The flower beds along the entrance contained old fashioned flowers such as zinnias, marigolds, nasturtiums, petunias, asters, and verbenas, bordered by rose moss, sweet alysium, and candy tuft. The els each contained a round bed of cannas which I never particularly liked but which had huge red blooms each year.

Around the porch and sides of the front wing were bushes of various kinds including forsythia, honeysuckle, bridal wreath, barbary, Indian berry and others. Tall stately hollyhocks finished the border. In each el was a handpump which provided water for the flowers and was reminiscent of the days when all water was pumped by hand or windmills and carried by hand. However, now there was a pumphouse run by an engine or motor which supplied running water for the building. Around the platforms of the pumps were hollyhocks and morning glories.

Coming around to the back of the building one noted another longer wing extending back so that the entire

building was in the shape of a cross. At the rear of the house was located a root cellar where vegetables were kept in winter, the smoke house which took care of hams and bacon and exuded a sweet hickory smell when in use, while other farm buildings extended to the north. There was a building for pigs, a barn with a silo, a corn crib and a tool house. In fact the County Farm was just that--a farm in every detail. In the early part of the century farming was done by horse power and man power. So there were work horses in addition to those to provide transportation. Cows, sheep, chickens, pigs, ducks, and sometimes geese were raised for the food which they could provide.

Next to the pumphouse was an icehouse where ice cut from the river in the winter was stored in layers of sawdust. Of course it could not be used in drinks but it was used as a cooling agent for meat, in iceboxes, and perchance crushed and with added salt used in making icecream in an old fashioned hand turned freezer.

To the right of the building, on the south, was a huge garden space and orchard where almost every kind of vegetable was grown to be used as fresh or canned, dried or stored in the root cellar for the winter. The pure delight of eating a juicy red tomato from the vine could only be equalled by biting into a crisp cucumber.

As for the fruits, the fresh cherry pie or the strawberry shortcake (real old fashioned biscuit kind) with gobs of fresh whipped cream were my delight. If we didn't have enough strawberries at home we might sally forth to a neighbor's place, for he was in the business of raising them and we could pick for a stipend of one and one half cents per quart, meanwhile eating our fill directly from the vines. From the large grape arbor came fruit to eat, juice to drink, jams and jellies, and an occasional grape pie. Currant bushes, gooseberries, black and red raspberries and blackberries were also used. Pie crusts were made from lard rendered after butchering.

If my mind runs to food you will have to overlook it-it has always been so-even in these later days of packaged and convenience foods none of which can measure up to that grown on the farm and used therefrom. The thoughts of succulent ears of sweet corn, big baked potatoes served with real country butter, and meat grown, butchered, and prepared on the farm still have my taste buds tingling.

A tour over a stile and beyond the fence by means of a path down the hillside takes us towards the river. Sheep are grazing in this area and over the hill towards the right are the woods where in the spring one gathered wild flowers such as Jack-in-the-pulpit, shooting stars, Dutchman's britches, snowdrops, anemones, tiger lilies and mandrakes. There were edible mushrooms scattered about the place and my father knew which ones to pick for a smothered juicy steak.

High on the hill overlooking the bluff was the "pest house" as it was known in those days. Those who had contagious diseases were detained there in this outpost along with a trained nurse--the duration of the stay depend-

ing on the nature of the disease. Having contracted scarlet fever later in life I knew quarantine time was six weeks. Food was carried over daily to the pesthouse by one of the inmates of the county farm home. The food was from the common table, and could be called a first "meals on wheels" in this part of the country. The trip over the hill was pleasant in summer but hazardous in the winter with drifts piled high. Then horse drawn sleds had to be used.

Proceeding down the hill and over another stile we encounter an embankment which proved to be the railroad tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway. There was a small shelter house with the word Jonesville painted on it. This indicated that it was a station where the train could be flagged down and a ride to town might be had for five cents. This trip the hired help and the younger generation often took as there was an afternoon train for the return trip. That really was a big deal when the horse and carriage was the only way to the street car line two miles away. Our black horse Prince was reputed to have been a race horse at county fairs and carried the buggy with the same speed that he brought the sulky to the finish line.

As we clamber over the tracks, looking out for a train rushing around the sharp curve below the bluff and over a trestle, we come to the "flats", a level pasture land when it was not flooded as it was sometimes in the spring. Here the cattle grazed under more large trees. The more adventurous would often accompany my father in his motor boat usually tied up at the dock. I was seldom among these having been pushed off this pier by a mischievous cousin, and although I landed in knee deep water, I have managed to maintain a fear of water ever since.

Having toured the grounds rather thoroughly, let us return to the building itself and enter by the big front door. A vast hall extending half the length of the building and a stairway to the second floor on the left greets our eyes. On either side were the superintendent's quarters. To the left the first door led to the office with a huge rolled top desk, a swivel chair, a guncase in one corner and a medicine cabine in the other. This latter contained the usual old time remedies such as cough syrup, camphor, witch hazel, laxatives, various rubs, and ointments and a big bottle of pink pills which were sugar coated blank pills, placebos much in demand as a cure for various aches, pains, and illnesses. Often a tap came on the door separating the inmates quarters from those of the superintendent and a request would be made for those pink pills "that did me so much good." A doctor did come once a month and when necessary patients were hospitalized at no cost. The doctor was on call for emergencies also.

Beyond the office were the master bedroom and adjoining sitting room or sewing room, and a bathroom and large walkin closet completed the suite. And so we were introduced to inside plumbing and electric lights, although most of the latter were single bulbs suspended from the ceiling by a cord.

To the right of the entrance were three rooms--a parlor,

a music sitting room and a large dining room. The music at first was furnished by a piano and a vitrola with round cylindrical records. Later there was one with a cabinet and the round records such as we use today. Upon playing these one would be apt to hear "Swwet Bunch of Daisies" or "A Bicycle Built for Two", "When you Wore a Tulip and I Wore a Big Red Rose" or "I'm Forever Chasing Rainbows." The dining room was for the superintendent's family and the hired help.

The dining room adjoined the pantry at one end of which were shelves for dishes and cupboard and drawers for various and sundries necessary for serving and dishing up food. A dumb waiter operated by hand brought up food. After a meal all dishes and food were returned in like manner to the kitchen.

The second floor of the superintendent's quarters contained a hall with three bedrooms on each side and a store-room and bathroom. These were occupied by the hired help except the nurse and the family. There was a hired man and three hired girls and at times the daughters of the Smith family. Often we would gather in the evenings in one of the servants' rooms, the older ones doing handwork and we younger ones listening to the conversation.

I remember an incident when one of the cooks was eating a peach, opened her jaws too wide and they wouldn't close. After many unsuccessful tries to remedy the situation a doctor was summoned but meanwhile poor Anna sat with mouth agape until he arrived. As I recall the doctor asked for a broom and with aid of its handle and much manipulation and fingers clutched on Anna's neck, leaving marks which lasted for several days, the joint was relocated.

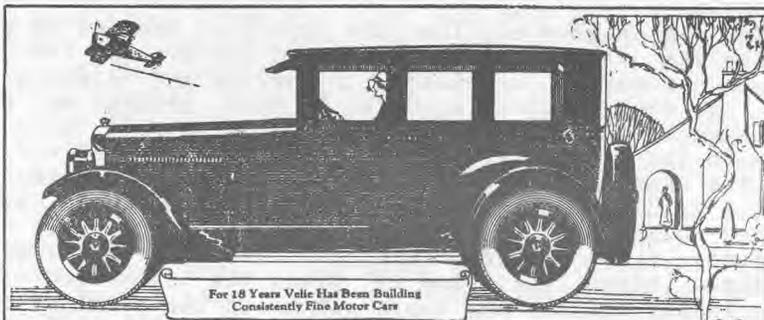
Another incident I remember "upstairs" was to be awakened by loud noises, swearing and sound of things being thrown, in the hired man's room. Someone awakened father who came upstairs in his night shirt and armed with a gun (which he always kept under his pillow), he found Bert, the hired man, flaying his arms helplessly while a huge bat flittered here and there. It took the combined efforts of all but I think my mother's apron finally covered the bat and quieted it down so it could be disposed of.

My sister Nellie was about three years old, as I recall when we two wandered down by the farm buildings. There was a wooden covered horse watering tank. Someone had left one half turned up. We two found something to dip water with and climbed up on the covered half to dip some water. Nellie leaned over too far and fell into the tank. I started to run to the house for help, then I thought, "She shouldn't be in there that long. It's up to me." Nellie always says that proved how sharp I was, even as a preschooler. Also she adds, "I wouldn't be here, if you hadn't taken charge and pulled me out." I don't recall that father got down the razor strap on this occasion. Everyone was more inclined to praise the quick thinking.

Nellie was a bit of a tease. I didn't like any kind

of a bug. She used to pick up some small insect, perhaps an ant, and toss it toward me. She thought that was fun but I still have a strong feeling toward bugs, not quite fear, just dislike. Sometimes Nellie had to sit on a chair for a time to remind her "how a young lady should behave."
 (To be continued in next issue)

Advertisement from ROCKFORD REPUBLIC, May 9, 1925



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