

WINTER ACTIVITIES OF AN EARLIER TIME IN THE AREA

Late November, if it was good and cold, or early December, signaled the time of butchering. Much preparation was necessary. Often several families would combine resources, working together and trading days of labor.

Several animals were slaughtered during the day. After killing them the hogs were dipped into a barrel or large kettle of water which had been brought to near the boiling point by a hot fire beneath. After this scalding they were scraped clean of hair and dirt. To know just how long to leave them in the hot water required experience. Cattle were skinned and the hide made into a warm cover or sold to a tanner for making into leather goods. Other equipment included knives, a means of hanging the carcass for easier cutting, containers for the organs, fat and viscera, meat saws and axes.

Ham and bacon cuts were usually smoked. Most farmers had a smokehouse among the outbuildings. Some meat was cut up and canned or ground and made into sausage. The sausage usually was forced through a funnel attachment on the meat grinder into casing made of thoroughly cleaned intestines. Beef might also be cut into strips and dried. Some of the meat was salted in crocks, barrels and kettles.

The butchering, skinning, eviscerating, etc., were, of course, completed outdoors. Often the women helped until some meat was ready for preparation in the kitchen. Fat, cut into small pieces, was tossed into a large kettle, over an open fire outdoors and rendered into lard. This lard, poured over the salted meat in the crocks kept air and insects out. The pie crust made with lard has a special taste and tenderness. Soap making could follow once the lard was rendered. The 'cracklings' remaining after the rendering made very tasty and crunchy eating. Depending on the ability of the homemaker, the squeal was the only part of the pig which wasn't used.

As a community became more settled, often a locally recognized butcher evolved. He usually had some experience before coming to the area and his reputed ability at the trade determined how many farmers requested his services. He could be hired to come to your farm when you were ready to 'lay in' a supply of meat and direct the operation. Again, neighbors could be counted on to help out. The various organ meats, which would not keep since there was no refrigeration, were usually distributed to those helping that day. A piece of pork or beef was often included. Trading of meat with the local market proprietor enabled the farmer to acquire needed items not produced by himself. (Can someone tell us of a local butcher?)

When we next peruse the selection available at the meat counter perhaps we'll give a thought to what the folks back then had to contend with in order to put a piece of meat on the table. (Marieanna Bair. To be continued. The writer would appreciate additions or comments to this series. 229-6402)

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