

Amy Stubbs Ross 'Grandma Remembers'

Amy Prudence Stubbs Ross wrote a series of articles called 'Grandma Remembers' for the Minnetonka Herald in late 1941 and early 1942. These are a few of the articles reprinted from a scrapbook kept by her sister Mary Etta Stubbs Grave.

Grandma Remembers- - From The Pages Of Yesterday

This is one of a series of short stories of homey events that took place on a Minnesota pioneer farm forty-five and fifty years ago. The stories are written by "one who remembers." Grandma Remembers - When Back in the nineties, along about this time of the year, when the winter snows would be melting and yet each night there would be some freezing, father would get out the wooden buckets and the spiles, made of sumac, and the spring maple syrup making would commence.

The spiles were about one inch in diameter and for a short length were whittled round so they could be inserted in the tree while the rest of the length was sliced in half to make a sort of spout that the sap could run in.

As long as there was snow the faithful old horse, hitched to a crude sled on which was placed a barrel to hold the sap, was used to haul the "sugar water", as we called it.

Some people used a large iron kettle for boiling but we mostly used a large pan which resulted in more rapid evaporation. The earliest I can remember having syrup made was on a March 12th though I can't remember what year.

The finish off of the syrup, or the "sugaring off", was usually done in the house and it was a common event in the evening for the neighbors and friends to drop in to join us for maple taffy or wax, the term used then. The syrup was boiled on the kitchen range until the right consistency and then poured into pans of clean snow. This wax quickly hardened and then was eaten with a fork - a delicacy that can't be beat and that makes my mouth water yet, as the saying goes, whenever I think of it. And this is not copied from Virginia Safford's article about Earle Brown's sugar camp in Vermont - I had this written before that issue of the Star-Journal came out. I will say, however, that maple sap in Minnesota usually takes about 1 barrel to make 1 gallon of syrup. I can't say what Vermont sap would produce but certainly 1 gallon of sugar would be a big yield.

Next week - an Easter story.

Grandma Remembers- - From The Pages Of Yesterday APRIL 10, 1941

Back in the early days before Easter we had fun on the farm of hiding Easter eggs. In this fun our father always shared and we children always tried to beat him in getting more eggs. Many and many were the trips made to the hen house to get the eggs ahead of each other so that we could hide them. We sometimes found each other's nests and, of course, took the eggs for our own hiding.

Sometimes mother would want an egg to stir up a cake and none could be found. Then one of the children would be called on to produce one for mother knew we had them hid.

I remember one time just before Easter father sold a load of hay out of the barn. I suppose we children were in school and unaware of the disaster that that might mean. Anyway, one of the men ran a pitchfork into a fine nest of eggs, producing a very messy raw omelet.

On Easter morning we were up bright and early and each brought in his hidden eggs and they were counted to see which child had the most. Then slices of home-cured ham were cooked in an iron skillet and eggs were afterward cooked in the same pan. That was a breakfast dish that can't be produced to taste the same with our modern cured meat and our new stoves and kitchenware.

We didn't have any colored eggs at that early day; later mother sometimes did color them with onion skin which produced a lovely yellow brown egg. But we always enjoyed the hiding of the eggs and the one day of the year when we could eat. Much to our regret we never could eat as many as we thought we could.

Next week – “Making Soap”.

Grandma Remembers- -

From The Pages Of Yesterday APRIL 17, 1941

Grandma Remembers - when -

Back in the early days another spring time job was the making of soft soap.

The rinds on fat scraps of pork, ham and bacon had been carefully saved all through the winter. These were put in a large open iron kettle, hung in the back yard, and all the grease cooked out. I believe the rinds were cooked in water and then when allowed to cool, the grease could be skimmed off and used for the soap.

Concentrated lye was not on the market in those days so we made our own lye in the following manner: A flour, salt or sugar barrel was secured – we never see such barrels any more, they only held dry products, and were made of wooden staves and wooden ends. Naturally one end had been removed. Farmers bought them of storekeepers. Holes were bored in the bottom, the barrel set on a board slanted to drain and wood ashes, preferably of maple wood, were saved in them to make the lye.

Water was poured on the ashes and the lye was formed, which was carefully drained off in a metal or iron kettle.

To make the soap the lye and the grease were mixed in the big iron kettle and cooked. A slimy soft soap was the result. To be a good soap maker a person had to judge just right what proportion of each to use and how long to cook it.

The soap was kept in jugs or crock and oh! how the dirt would fly when this soap was used. Needless to say we used tubs and a washboard when doing the family wash – also plenty of elbow grease, if you know what I mean.

Next week – Spring Flowers.

Grandma Remembers- -

From The Pages Of Yesterday APRIL 24, 1941

Grandma remembers - when

In the early days, as soon almost as the snow was gone, and before it was all melted away from the hills, the early flowers would peep through.

After a long winter snowed in as we were, the first flowers, the bloodroot, looked very beautiful to us and we children picked them in handfuls, unmindful of the stains on fingers and clothes.

Soon after, and sometimes at about the same time, out came the trailing arbutus or mayflower. They came the last part of April or early May back in the eighties and nineties. Evidently our seasons have changed somewhat for the mayflowers are gone now by May but in the early days they were oh! so plentiful and we picked them in handfuls and basketfuls.

There were no movies, no public parks, no autos for Sunday driving and we followed simple pleasures. Many a Sunday afternoon neighbors would gather in groups and pick flowers and I am sure some times there were twenty or more young people and often elders too in our father's woods on Sunday afternoons picking mayflowers.

But watch out for the lowly garter snake that likes to come out in the warm sun. Often the woods would resound with the screams of some of us girls when we met snakes.

Later we would gather the willow [willow? -- pussy willows?] balls, the Dutchman's breeches, the yellow and blue violets and the beautiful moccasin flower commonly called lady slipper.

Simple country pastime, gathering wild flowers, but we enjoyed our neighbors and we learned much of nature and who shall say but what we gathered, unknowing perhaps, but yet really gathered and learned much that would help us in future years.

To me yet, I get more inspiration from a walk in nature's woods than from sitting through a movie on a Sunday afternoon. Last Sunday I had the pleasure of gathering a large bouquet of mayflowers even though I wore my winter coat and a hood to keep out the April wind.

As to flowers, we know that Minnesota has chosen the moccasin flower for the state flower while Massachusetts has the mayflower, Wisconsin, Illinois and New Jersey have the violet and many other states have chosen wild flowers for their state flower.

Next week - How we got the mail and what we read in the early days.

Grandma Remembers- -

From The Pages Of Yesterday THURSDAY, MAY 1, 1941

Grandma remembers - when

The very earliest mail west of Wayzata was taken by horseback to a point about two and a half miles west of Long Lake where Henry Stubbs, a Quaker from Indiana, lived. The postoffice there was called Tamarack.

This perhaps was in the late 60's. After four or five years it was moved to Long Lake where one John Coleman kept it for a short time - it was still called Tamarack.

When the railroad went through (about 1878) the name was changed to Long Lake and I believe Mr. Christlieb was one of the first postmasters.

This was before I really remember but I know when I was a child the mail was from Long Lake and we didn't get it every day either. Occasionally some of us children walked several miles to get the mail.

In the nineties for a short time a postoffice was established at Stubbs Bay. It was first called Hulda but was changed to Bederwood because of the confusion with a postoffice in Southern Minnesota named Fulda. The mail was brought from Long Lake by horse and buggy.

Rural Free Delivery first started in the U. S. A. in 1896 but I believe it was near 1900 before it was established in Minnesota.

Besides the family Bible and a few books reading matter was scarce in those early days. There was a Minneapolis paper, the Farmer's Tribune as I recall, which came three times a week. This

we had at our home, also the Farm, Stock and Home from St. Paul, the standard for farmers in the Northwest for many, many years. It is now combined with another and called The Farmer. I believe Mr. Owen, the publisher is still living.

We had the Harper Bazaar, a monthly magazine - published in the east, Massachusetts, I believe (how I wish we had saved even just one copy). We also had the Youths Companion, a weekly and a regular visitor at our home and we saved our pennies, many times wanted for other things, so we might continue our subscription. We were quite a large family, at least these days we would be called a large family, and there were not many pennies for anything but necessities.

Our mother was an excellent reader and she often read aloud in the long winter evenings. I think we all learned to be good readers and to enjoy reading from her early training.

Next week – Something about our Homes – Let's talk about our Kitchen.

Grandma Remembers- -

From The Pages Of Yesterday

Grandma remembers -- when

In our kitchen in early days the main item of interest was, of course, the kitchen stove, generally a cook stove. Most of them had four lids, or covers, and the oven usually had two doors, one on each side. Some of the stoves had a reservoir in the back for heating water.

There was a small door in front of the firebox on ours and here was where we made our toast - with live coals raked to the front and slices of bread held on a fork.

Later the cook stoves were replaced with wood ranges. These had six lids or covers and the oven had a front door that let down on hinges. Here the family food was prepared – kettles on top of the stove, long pans of bread, pies, cakes, cookies, pots of beans and so on.

I believe it was near 1900 before any kerosene stoves were used – the first oil stoves.

Most kitchens had dropleaf tables, straight wooden chairs, some homemade cupboards which held the needed dishes and some glassware, though glassware wasn't too plentiful in the early day pioneer home.

The knives and forks were of steel. We had a scouring brick for keeping them clean and shiny. Two or three times a week these utensils must be scoured - some of the brick would be scraped off and then, with a moist cloth, rubbed on the knives, forks and spoons to brighten them. I well remember when the first silverware came into use.

We used iron skillets and iron kettles or pots as they were called – usually round-bottomed with three legs. They could set next to the fire. Many a kettle of graham or corn meal mush was made in these pots. With milk and homemade bread and butter that often made our Sunday evening meal.

A washstand with basin and soap and a long roller towel close by was a necessary part of every kitchen. Later of course we had sinks but in those early days they were luxuries. There was always a kitchen clock, with a glass covered face with a picture in the lower part of the door to hide the pendulum that ticked off the minutes, hours, weeks and years. These clocks would strike the hour, and sometimes the half-hour also.

We had tubs and washboards and boilers for washing clothes, stout homemade brooms, mops and scrubbing brushes for cleaning. The floors were wood, mostly pine or fir, though some had maple. They were not painted or varnished so they had to be scrubbed and often a housewife was judged, as to her cleanliness, by how white she kept her floor – many hard hours of labor that the

modern housewife never has, thanks to modern floor covering and well it is for, as I often heard said, factories can make new floors or new coverings but never a new back.

Next week -- sitting room and parlor.

Grandma Remembers- -

From The Pages Of Yesterday

Grandma remembers - when

In the early day home the sitting room was the center of the home life. Here prayers were said, books were read and the many topics of the day talked over. Remember, there were no radios, no telephones and news was news even though a day or a week old, and what papers we had were carefully read and talked over along with the neighborhood news.

About the room itself, here again, the stove was the main necessity as wood stoves were used many months of the year. Some had Franklin stoves, some the upright iron stoves and then the new air-tight which were really tight and held fires very well over night especially when good dry hard maple wood was used. We had wood rocking chairs and high-backed straight chairs. Some of the pioneers had some of the early upholstered chairs, the real old style with the red plush seats. Our carpets were the hand-loom woven rag carets. These were made from long stripes of cloth sewed together by hand until we had enough to make a rug wide enough to cover the floor.

Papers were first placed all over the floor, then a light covering of clean wheat straw. Over this the carpet was laid, one end closely tacked down with carpet tacks and the sides and other end tacked when the carpet was tightly stretched. There was a knack of doing this just right so as not to have any lap-over or bulges. When housecleaning was done it was a hard job to take out all those tacks and clean the carpet.

A small square table (sometimes homemade) was mostly used in the center of the room, on which to place our best and largest kerosene lamp. Some had the tall ones and some the lower large flowered bowl and flowered shade. I well remember the first boughten ingrain carpets and the large ray lamp with the round wick. A few pictures on the walls, generally homemade curtains at the windows completed the furnishing of the room.

Those who had parlors usually had some better furniture or carpets, a few choice articles, perhaps lace curtains and most likely enlarged pictures of some members of the family who had died. These rooms were mostly kept closed except when special company was expected when they were opened and heated. This was mostly to save fuel but even more, I think, because of the age old idea that used to prevail that our best was always saved for company. Next week – our bedrooms and our beds.

Grandma Remembers...

From The Pages Of Yesterday

Grandma remembers - when

As a child I heard my mother talk of when she was a girl in Indiana, eleven years of age, and the Civil War of the sixties broke out. She remembered hearing the drums beating and the fifes' shrill notes as the boys went marching away,

My mother lived with her parents in a Quaker settlement and none of the people were in the war. Father's people had already come to Minnesota and some of my uncles were in the Minnesota regiments. Father, being too young, was not in the war, but I remember different stories that they heard and told of that war.

Then, when I was a school girl in 1898, there was the Spanish American war that broke out and some of our neighborhood boys enlisted and served some time in the service. Again, in 1917-18, the World War flared and many of our cousins, relatives and neighborhood boys went overseas or served many months in the service at home.

We lived on a farm at that time and I was a mother with two boys of my own; both were just under the age to go so did not answer their country's call to service.

Now again, in 1942, I still a mother and also a grandmother, live to see the beginning of another World War. In 1918 it was called a World War, but this time it REALLY IS a World War and this month millions of men registered for future service – now my two sons register and a grandson perhaps will need to within a year or two.

How much one lives through in a lifetime. We here in the United States have enjoyed so very many blessings. We can only trust that future generations may enjoy those same blessings – perhaps by the sacrifice of many during these war years, as we have reaped benefits from the sacrifices of our pioneer forefathers. One generation needs must live to benefit future generations.

God grant then that the time may come when "The swords may be turned into plow shares" and civilization reign over all the world.

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