

EARLY DAYS IN THE OZARKS

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Life in earlier days amid the Ozarks was meager and often grim. Food was limited to what could be produced on the land. Each farm home had its small flock of chickens, usually as varied in color and species as a crazy quilt. The eggs from said flock were treated as nuggets of gold because with the returns from them were purchased such items as sugar, coffee and a bit of "chawin tobaccer." Cooks were even known to omit eggs from corn bread except on holidays in order to accumulate eggs more readily.

Fortunately the woods and fields yielded wild berries of different varieties and in abundant quantities. These were industriously gathered by the women and children and from every home, when these fruits were in season, were wafted delectable odors as they were canned or made into jellies and jams. One might add that blackberry cobbler continues to remain a food specialty of the Ozarks.

The only form of refrigeration was natural springs, and the location of this source of fresh water determined where many farm houses were built. Some sort of box or spring house was built just below the mouth of the spring and here were kept the dairy products. With the cool water constantly flowing through, cream, thick and golden, formed on the crocks of milk and butter remained sweet and held its molded form.

A trip to the spring was to a child, sheer delight. It afforded him a chance to wade in the murmuring stream, whose bed was covered with colorful stones and whose banks were lined with over-hanging fern fronds. There was also the zesty water cress to be nibbled at, which only heightened a young appetite for the meal ahead. These trips must be made before and after each meal and often over rugged paths. Springs have a way of being tucked back in rough secluded terrain to fulfill their natural purpose, instead of for man's convenience. If the harried housewife sometimes pressed

her husband into service to fetch the butter and milk, he did not complain at the task. Instead he emitted his gratitude in the form of a lusty, melodious whistle, that he should be so favored by providence in this phenomenon of nature.

The meat supply consisted of pork, augmented by wild game and fish, which were plentiful and varied. The call of the wild turkey was an ordinary, though pleasant, sound, and many an unsuspecting gobbler provided holiday fare for special dinners.

Sanitation left much to be desired, and, because of this, food was only cooked in warm weather as required to prevent spoilage. One visiting minister was said to remark that some of the best fried chicken he had ever eaten, had met him on foot a short time previously. Houseflies were combatted with little success, because many homes could not afford screens. Sticky fly paper was the only means of dealing with them; then later came fly traps and poison paper. In summertime when the table was laid for a meal plates were always inverted so this household pest would not contaminate them. At meal time two older girls would be assigned, one to each end of the table, shooing away the invaders with leafy branches or clean dish towels.

These courageous people did their best for the health of their families that conditions would allow and with available methods.

Because the mode of travel was slow and the miracle drugs were unknown, illness and death often struck with sudden swiftness before help could be summoned. There were no telephones, and the family doctor would have to be notified by a messenger on horseback. Then by the time the kindly doctor had covered the same route with his trusty steed, he often found that death had been a previous caller.

Clothing was bought only when it became necessary and not because fashion trends decreed a change. The women sewed their own dresses plus the children's, plus all under garments and sometimes coats and suits as well. A pattern often went the rounds of the neighborhood, for sharing was one of the virtues of Ozark life. Shoes were the most precious of all apparel and must last a year for adults. Hence it was necessary for teenagers to carry their shoes in warm weather until they were within sight of the church or school house before putting them on. Rough stones in the road or path could work havoc with shiny new shoes.

Despite the rugged life they led, these hill folks were a happy lot. There was never time to be bored and furthermore: did not the Good Book state that man should live by the sweat of his brow? Since God's word was their guide and yard stick, they accepted this fact without question. Each community had its own social life, and for them it was ample. There was prayer meeting each Wednesday night at one of the homes. This was attended by

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