

# THE EARLY KITCHEN

*As Seen At The Rocanville Museum*

They used to say that an army moved on its stomach. To some, these words may conjure up visions of a number of soldiers crawling across a parade ground or rough battle field, but this is not what was intended. The metaphor was meant to infer that an army moved and fought on well organized meals. If this was the case in a military sense, it was ever much so when applied to the pioneer days when men struggled to open up and cultivate the prairie west.

As many will recall, the kitchen was - possibly still is - the main room in the home. Not only was it where all were fortified with good, wholesome meals, but it was the central area where the family met, discussed the activities of the day, shared in delights and pleasures and aired the many problems, knowing that solutions would be at hand.

Children did their homework there after all the chores had been done and it was in this setting that they received not only physical sustenance but also the courage and morale to go about the many arduous tasks.

The kitchen on display at the museum is small, as many were in pioneer homes, but in spite of it's size, it is complete and well equipped.

The range is an old familiar "Home Comfort" with the usual warming closet above, an enameled reservoir at one end and plenty of ornamental scroll work throughout. It is mounted on what was known as a full skirted base. It has no legs. The first difference one will notice when comparing to the modern range is that the oven is not equipped with a thermometer or other temperature adjusting device.

Such was not needed. The expert homemaker of the day could extend her elbow into the oven, determine the temperature to within a few degrees, and add just the right amount of wood to the firebox, and set the drafts to maintain heat 'till the baking was done.

On top of the stove, back from the covers, are found one or two sad irons, always on hand

and warm in case a hurried ironing job is needed before children leave for school. Last, and possibly most important of all, is the ever present copper kettle full of water and just below the boiling point, to sing continually. Many will recall the pleasant sound of the singing kettle always heard in the kitchen.



A vital part of any farm in the past was the dairy activities and these were again carried on in the kitchen. The expression, "Skimmed Milk", still seen on milk cartons today had it's origin in the early times when milk was carried from the barn and placed in shallow pans, where it was allowed to settle. Then the cream was skimmed off the top and hurried to the well for cooling, before it turned sour.

Later a cream separator was added to the list of kitchen equipment. This provided a job for the farm boy. It was often his first opportunity to assume responsibility.

The next stage in the process took place when the cream, at just the right temperature, was placed in the churn - we have two types on display - and the butter making procedure began. The most common churn used was the old dasher type in which a form of cross, or dasher, attached to a round handle, was extended through a hole in the cover and moved in an up and down motion until a portion of the cream was turned into butter. The remaining liquid, known as buttermilk, was a delightful treat always to be enjoyed following the butter making job. Here again, the churning job usually fell to some of the younger children.

You will see on hand the butter bowl with wooden spade which was used to mix and press the last of the moisture from the butter and thoroughly distribute the salt and coloring, before the finished product was pressed into the one pound measuring device, known as a butter mold, from which it was



Some of the butter making utensils, including two churns and a butter mixing bowl.

forced out in a square block onto waxed paper and prepared for market.

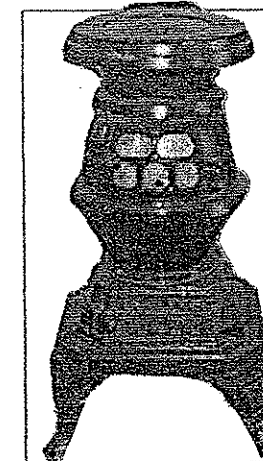
The expression "Blue Monday" must have been coined within a small prairie kitchen with a pile of soiled clothing in a corner, a washstand complete with tub and bar of greasy home made soap and the washboard ready for action. Just another task to be performed in the kitchen. The water, carried from the well, or maybe in winter the result of an afternoon spent in melting snow on the range, was brought to a boil in a huge copper tub.

The question uppermost in many minds as one sees the quaint washing facilities, is how the housewife accomplished so much with nothing but the most primitive tools with which to work. There were few roller type wringers available until later. Wringing out the wash was done the hard way, with one or two children holding one end of the dripping garment while mother twisted the other.

From here the damp clothing was placed on a rack near the stove or in some cases, carried to the outside line. It was a frustrating



Cistern pump



Coal fired laundry heater

## Why I Love Saskatchewan in the Winter.

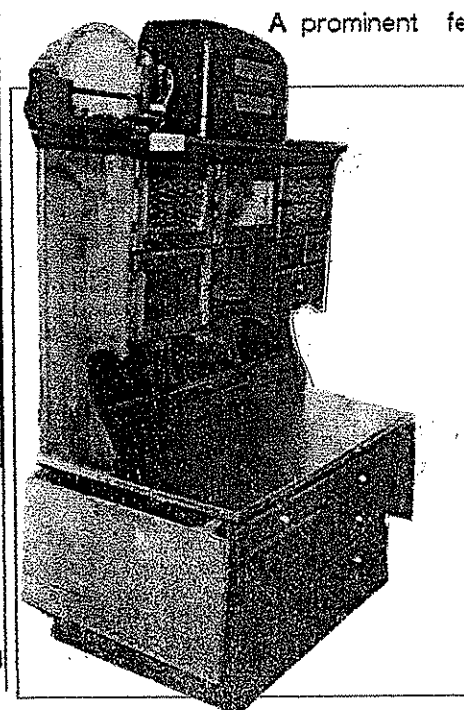
How do I love you, let me count the ways:  
I love you to the depths and breadth and height.  
My feet can reach, when almost out of sight.  
I walk your crystal-crusted snows,  
Your frigid fields  
Bathed in sparkling sun or wrapped  
in cool moonlight.  
I love your people, small or tall or multicultural.  
Your independent, searching, resilient and  
generous beings,  
Who criticize, belabor, approve and rejoice,  
In heat and cold, in wet or dry,  
The challenge of each day.  
Their lives unrecorded except on  
graveyard stones.

I love you with a love I seem to lose  
Under your big-sky dome,  
Your crisp and sparkling star-filled nights.  
Your lonely empty spaces or crowded cities,  
Reaching to my very soul.  
In spite of cold and snow,  
Your winds caressing or breathtaking  
I shall but love you better  
When buried 'neath your breast.

*Jean Pask, 1991*

(With apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

experience bringing the frozen garments back in. Feature struggling to get a huge pair of frozen combinations through the kitchen door. Equally astounding was to find that the kitchen was cleaned and dinner served as usual on time.



A prominent feature found in any early kitchen was the old type cabinet. There were many furniture companies building these units but they were basically the same. The one we have to show you is typical. On the lower left hand side is found the flour drawer, usually lined with metal to keep out mice