

The following article is from the 2003 Pfantz news-letter----

LIFE ON THE FARM - 1930 - 1940

Following Aleta Pfantz's and Christopher Wilkening's wedding October 6, 1915, she moved into the house on the farm where Chris had been born and raised. This farm was located a little south and west of State Center, Iowa.

The house has three bedrooms (2 upstairs), a living room, dining room, kitchen and a large enclosed porch. The four children of Chris and Aleta also were born and raised in this home. In 1954, the Wilkenings built a new house north of the original homestead. They moved in the next year.

The following random thoughts are from Kathryn (Wilkening) Dull - life on the farm.

"having been born in 1925, I do remember some of the ways we had lived on the farm especially through the Depression years. I have three older brothers."

++ Everthing was done by hand. All water had to be pumped from the well and carried, whether it be for the house or for the animals. Fortunately we had two wells and another one was dug later.

++ We had an iron cook stove with a reservoir on one side for water. It burned ear corn, corn cobs, wood and coal.

++ There were only two sources of heat, the cook stove in the kitchen and a wood and coal furnace in the basement. Every fall, we carried wood and coal into the basement.

++ Our home had many "cracks", especially around the windows. We folded wet newspapers and packed them into the cracks.

++We shelled our corn which was harvested on the ear. Then it was ground once a week and given to the livestock.

++The outdoor privie (toilet) was supplied with old newspapers and catalogs. These were used as toilet tissue!

++ All milking was done by hand twice a day. A hand-cranked machine called a separator was used to separate the cream from the milk. Following this process, the separator needed to be washed.

++ Livestock barns, sheds and the chicken house were cleaned out by using pitch forks. This manure was pitched into the manure spreader and then spread on the fields for fertilitzer.

++ Another tedious task was gathering eggs by the basketsfull. Mom always had between 300-400 laying hens.

++ Cleaning all the chicken feeders and water holders by hand for baby chicks and laying hens.

++Culling hens. we had to determine whether they were laying eggs or not.

++ Candling eggs to find out which ones were fertilized. The fertile eggs were placed in the incubator in the basement. The incubator was heated by light bulbs. Our home was fortunate to have a generator in the basement that provided some light for the house, although I do remember using candles and lanterns prior to that. As the baby chickens grew, they were placed in the corner of the kitchen (by the stove) and from there to be moved to an outside building.

++ We experienced some bad snow storms in those days. Any snow removal was done by shoveling.

- ++ Snow Ice Cream. Mom would beat eggs and sugar together. We kids would go out and scoop up fresh snow and it would be stirred into the egg and sugar mixture. Delicious!
- ++ Butchering of hogs and beef was done in the winter. The meat either canned, smoked or preserved by hand. Cooked sausages were preserved in large crocks.
- ++ The lard (fat) from the meat was fried out. Homemade soap was made from it.
- ++ Our butter was churned from the cream of the milk. Cottage cheese was homemade.
- ++ Saturday was baking day, Mom would prepare dough for 6-8 loaves of bread plus doughnuts, cinnamon rolls and kuchens. I always had to bake a cake each Saturday.
- ++ I also had to clean the house on Saturday and had to carry all water in from the pump to heat for our baths on Sat. night. In the winter the kitchen was well heated and a galvanized wash tub was placed in the kitchen for the baths. Two people would bathe in the same water.
- ++ We all went to town Saturday night and to church every Sunday morning. When we were younger, we had one car and Dad was the only driver.
- ++ No work on Sundays, except chores. The town of State Center was closed except a gas station and restaurant.
- ++ Sunday eve, I had to carry all the water needed to fill the rinse tubs, also the boiler which was placed on the cook stove to heat water for Monday wash day. In winter the washed clothes were hung on a rope strung around the dinning room. We had a clothes rack placed over the floor register so the heat from the furnace could dry the clothes. Coveralls and overalls & jeans were hung outdoors and froze. All wash water was utilized to wash the privie and cement walks.
- ++ Summer. Every morning brother Gene & I had to weed the garden, which was BIG. We raised all our own fruit and canned it. Every fall we dug a wagon load of potatoes for the basement. These had been planted on the edge of a corn field.
- ++ One year Mom canned 800 qts. of fruit and vegetables. Saurkraut was made in a 20 gal. crock with a grape leaf pad placed on top. We made our own "root beer" - only pop we had.
- ++ Threshing days and corn silage days were busy. Neighbors brought wagons & machines to help with the work. The ladies prepared several meals for approximately 30 people.
- ++ After the corn was picked in the fall, we would clean the fields by burning the cornstalks.
- ++ Every school day morning I would prepare lunches for we kids. No after school activities! The chores at home came first.
- ++ In the winter we would need to ride a horse drawn bob-sled to get to school.
- ++ "Hand me down" clothes. If clothes fit, you wore them. Mom ordered clothes from Montgomery Wards and Sears catalogs. Foot wear was ordered also. She traced our feet on a piece of cardboard and sent it with the order to indicate the size of shoe needed.
- ++ Dad would buy chicken feed in 50# bags. The bags had colored floral or pattern designs on them. Mom would sew several together for dresses or aprons. They made great dish towels. (I'm still using some today!).
- ++ Mom never discarded anything that was useable. She would tear old overalls into approximately 2" strips and sew them onto a backing made of denim. These made great rugs to wipe your feet on after

being in the barn yard. (I also have several of these that she had made.)

++ We did our ironing with flat irons that were heated on the cook stove. We cleaned them on newspapers.

++ REA (Rural Electric Association) came through our area round 1938 or 39.

++ Before refrigeration: Butter and cheese were lowered in a box, with a rope, into a well pit. Later we had an ice box that held a large block of ice.

++ No vacuums! We had a carpet sweeper & a rug beater & wet mops.

++ Feather beds. Winter waking up with frost on our noses. (upstairs bedrooms not heated.)

++ Church Confirmation. When we were in 7th & 8th grades, we attended confirmation classes every Saturday, from 9 AM - 3 PM, during the school year. Pr. Kumpf wanted memory work - word for word! On Confirmation Sunday and before the congregation, we were questioned as to what we had memorized. We never knew before hand what we would be asked. Our first communion service followed the questioning.

++ Chicken Dinner! First go out and catch the chicken. Then place the head between 2 nails on a stump - grab the axe and chop the head off. Hold on to it to bleed well. Then plunge in a bucket of boiling water. Strip feathers. Then roll up some newspapers. Light a match to the papers and hold the chicken over it and sear the fine feathers. Next we would wash the chicken and dissect it to remove entrails. Cut up the chicken at the joints. Fry "um" good!

++ Telephones. No private line! We had a 8 or 9 homes on our telephone line. Our phone number was 409 which the operator would ring us with "1 short and 2 long" rings. If you heard 10 short rings, it meant there was an emergency or school cancellation and everyone should answer their phone. One way of finding out what's going on in th town or with the neighbors was to listen in while the others on the line were talking. This was just an option!

Footnotes:

++ The brothers Kathryn mentioned are Melvin, Merle and Eugene. Melvin is still on his farm nearby his childhood home.

++ Candling eggs. To candle an egg, we used a 4 cell flashlight. We held the egg over the lens of the light to see if the egg was fertile. Earlier days Mom raised her chicks from fertilized eggs. Around the time I became a teenager, I remember Mom purchasing the baby chicks from the LeGrand Hatchery. She always ordered around 700 baby chicks plus 150 rooster chicks. The roosters, when grown, became our chicken dinners. Later one, when we got electricity, we could prepare them for the freezer.

++ The cooked sausage mentioned on page 2 were prepared in patties, cooked and then layered with lard in a crock. The lard kept them from molding.

++ Churning butter, There were several ways to churn the cream into butter. We used an egg beater to beat the cream until it formed curds and then we would work it with a wooden paddle till it was creamy.