

Wash Day

Collector: **Gertie Fowler**

Contributor: **John Earle**

Gertie Fowler:

Yes today is January 15, 2009 and John Earle is gonna talk to me today about none other than a wash day.

John Earle:

Yes. Ah....wash day the old tradition was, and perhaps still is, that Monday is wash day. Right?

Gertie Fowler:

Yes

John Earle:

Will the first to be checked would be the amount of water left in the covel barrel, now every heard of that one before?

Gertie Fowler:

What is that?

John Earle:

Covel..... C-O-V-E-L. That's what we always called it.

Gertie Fowler:

Sure.

John Earle:

That's the water barrel. Then in the covel, we didn't call it covel barrel we called it covel. Then several large boilers would be filled and left on the wood stove to hotten. Once that water was hot it would be transferred to the galvanized or wooden wash tub and the clothes dropped in. The woman would then wash each article by hand using a glass washboard to get out tough stains accompanied by lots of sunlight soap. Back breaking work, to say the least.

Gertie Fowler:

Sure.

John Earle :

Cossack parkas, overalls or mitts would be especially hard to wash and get out all the dirt. Once the wash was complete, which usually took all morning. The clothes was then put on the clothesline outside if the weather was fine.

A system of clothes poles, were also used. A half a dozen wooden poles were horizontally fitted on upright poles, lying in special cleats on the vertical poles. Now, I don't know if you can understand that.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes

John Earle:

You'd have to have a diagram for that.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes, it sounds pretty straight forward.

John Earle:

A woman remove one end of the horizontal pole, skivered the shirt or a pair of pants on the pole by the arms or legs and put the pole back in the cleat, once it was full of clothes, this system would be no good for towels etcetera.

Gertie Fowler:

You had to have you had to have something that you could push the pole through.

John Earle:

Yeah something that.....yeah, yeah that's right you had to have something to push the poles in, hey.

Gertie Fowler:

Sure.

John Earle:

Yup. Many times in winter, the clothes when taken in was frozen stiff, it was then placed on a line inside to finish thawing and drawing. The woman must have had cold fingers many times after their clothes was dry, much of it had to be ironed with flat irons, heated on a hot stove. Usually they were three or four flat irons so that there was always at least one hot. I do have a set of flat irons in my position now. I remember, yeah, I do. And I remember on wash day as well as that was one day we didn't get a hot cooked meal but usually warmed up leftovers from Sunday.

John Earle:

And again, I had to refill that covel barrel that evening. (laughs) Yeah. Women with small children must have particularly worked hard and long ... and worked hard and long. Yeah. Because along with the clothes diaper.... cloth diapers rather, there was

childrens clothes, of course, they didn't usually wait for Monday to wash out a bunch of diapers. Napkins we use to call them then.

Gertie Fowler:

Sure.

John Earle:

Right?

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

John Earle:

That's the story on the clothes. (laughs)

Gertie Fowler:

So how did you fill the..... how did you bring the water, now?

John Earle:

Oh. That's another story, hey?

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

John Earle:

Because there's different a....a..... in summer. Well I use to use..... just buckets, two and a half gallon buckets.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmm..

John Earle :

.... And a hoop. And ah maybe....take about maybe about ten take ten trips to the brook. 'Cause we was close to the brook.

Gertie Fowler:

What would.....what was a hoop? What was that?

John Earle:

A hoop was a square....like a like a.... just a square. A wooden square that's all it was. Made out of made out of wood.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

John Earle:

And you just lodge that on the bucket. It made it easier to carry the bucket, see, rather than you know. Just drag the buckets along with nothing.... you.... you.... you get inside the hoop while he..... he didn't have to be square, it could be round too. And you get inside this and you....you lodge that... a part of the square on the bucket on each one and you go on and then....that's in the summer time.

In the winter time then you'd have to get a barrel and put that on your komatik, your big komatik or your small one, well usually the big one. Tie the barrel on so it wouldn't tip over, go to the brook, fill up that barrel with buckets and then bring it back and transferthat....the barrel into your covel barrel.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. Okay.

John Earle:

There we go. Work, oh yes.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. Well John, that was beautiful, we will cherish your memories for ever, thank you very much.

John Earle:

That's good, fine. I'm glad you liked it.