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Grandmother's *Heirlooms* of the Kitchen

*From pioneer days, Nancy Fifield brings
time-worn recipes and food customs*

STREAMLINING—the one word which seems to cover all modern trends, but had you ever thought of it in connection with today's recipes? Modern recipes have become so shortened and concise that masters in the art of cooking of 100 years ago would ponder long over them.

Likewise old recipes seem queer and hard-to-use to the modern homemaker. Old recipes were long, being filled with many unnecessary adjectives and phrases. Found in an old file was this recipe for cheese cakes: "Take twelve quarts of Milk warm from the Cow, turn it with a good spoonful of Runnet. Break it well, and put it into a large strainer, in which rowl it up and down, that all the Whey may run out into a little tub; when all that will run out, wring out more.

"Then break the curds well; then wring it again, and more whey will come. Thus break and wring till no more come. Then work the curds exceedingly with your hand in a tray, till they become a short uniform paste. Then put together the yolks of eight new-laid Eggs, and two whites, and a pound of butter.

"Work all this long together. In the long working (at the several times) consisteth the making them good. Then season them to your taste with sugar finely beaten; and pat in some Cloves and Mace in a subtle powder. Then lay in thick Coffins of fine paste and bake them."

Modern methods indeed have had a vital part in the shortening of the recipe. Among these methods is the standardization of measurements, which are decidedly more accurate than in the days of "butter the size of an egg" measurements. Today's utensils, needless to say, are greatly improved.

Science has come a long way in the preservation of foods, thus making possible the exchange of produce over long distances. Before the vogue of food preservation and extensive food exchange, the art of cooking included the production of the ingredients as well as the mixing of them.

The foods the modern housewife prepares do not differ greatly from those her grandmother, great-grandmother and so on down through the generations set on the table before their families. They are heirlooms handed down through the years with perhaps a little more finish, for moderns have time to give more thought to achieving that end than did the homemakers of several generations back.

In Iowa 100 years ago wild turkeys and prairie chickens were abundant, and it was not uncommon to go to the meal table and find deer meat. During the winter venison, beef and other meats were dried near the fireplace to be used in the summer time.

Among the pastry products cream pies, "crumby" pumpkin, green tomato, ground cherry and vinegar pie are heirlooms handed down from years back. Vinegar pie was an ancestral favorite.

The vinegar was made at home from the vinegar plant, which had been brought with the earlier settlers from the East. A pioneer woman in telling about the

making of this vinegar says, "Rain water and the late runs of maple-sap which became stringy were used for vinegar-liquor, and this was enriched by sugar-pot scrapings, sorghum settlings, 'worked' preserves and discolored honey. In this congenial bath the vinegar plant grew thick and tough and covered the upper surface of the sap." To make the pie this sweetened vinegar was thickened with flour.

Wild honey was common in the pioneer days. It was found in hollow trees along the streams. In the southern part of Iowa, a trail was once made by "bee hunters"—people who valued the honey; locating a bee-tree was truly an adventure. A smooth surfaced stump was smeared with honey and a bee-bread smudge was started. The odor of the smudge would attract the bees. When filled with honey they would make a bee-line to their storehouse. The hunters trailed the bees and took the honey from the trees or else marked them as a future source of honey.

Other sweets of the day included maple sugar which could be had for the taking and later sorghum and sugar cane. The two latter products were not as easily obtained as the first for it took hours of labor to get the desired light brown residue.

In general, Sunday dinners were nothing like our present Sunday meals, for all the ordinary activities were set aside on this holy day. Tea or coffee might have been served but aside from these hot drinks all other food was cold—cold rice, cold baked apples with lots of milk and cream, large slices of bread and butter, cheese and meat might be found on our forefathers' Sunday menu.

In sharp contrast to this severity were the wedding feasts of their day. The wedding dinner of an early Iowa bride included two turkeys, pound cake, fruit, pickles and mince pie.

