

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, November 21, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "AMERICAN PIONEERS OF 1940" - Information from the Farm Security Administration. U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today is Thanksgiving. The first Thanksgiving was held back in 1621 you know three hundred and nineteen years ago. On that day a little handful of Americans sat down with some friendly Indians to have a feast, and to give thanks for their first harvest in a strange new world. They had a kind of "basket dinner" that day and everyone brought something to eat. The colonists brought cakes and pies and vegetables, and the Indians brought wild turkeys. But turkey wasn't a luxury to the Pilgrims - it was just what they could get.

The Farm Security Administration reports today, and says there are a lot of American pioneers still living - sort of twentieth century versions of our early forefathers who ate simple food in simple homes and led simple lives. Farm Security invites us today to take an imaginary trip to ^{the} home of one of its borrower families. While it will be an imaginary scene for us, it will be very real to thousands of American families whose wealth is in resourcefulness rather than cash Since it's just an imaginary trip, we'll be there in a jiffy.....

We're there NOW, and the family is sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner. There are no Indians around, but the children are giving a war whoop as the turkey comes in..... Father is all hemmed in by platters of turkey and turkey trimmings, and is preparing to attack with a carving knife.

Incidentally, the table has a pretty centerpiece of autumn leaves and red berries. Naturally it's getting mussed up with the hullabaloo of passing plates and "Me next, Daddy!" But it's eating time anyway..... Here are potatoes baked in their jackets, sliced red tomatoes, cooked yellow carrots, wild mustard greens, and a big

salad bowl of raw diced apples, mixed with slaw and hickory nut meats. It's a pity we're not present in person because we'd be sure to get asked to eat..... Now somebody's passing the wild honey - father must have cut a bee tree. And there's a jar of wild blackberry jam for those who don't like honey. The bread looks good and is made from cracked whole wheat grown on the farm. Mother washed the wheat and ground it herself in a little hand gristmill..... Big brother keeps pouring milk for the milk drinkers in the family. He has a big pitcher going all the time.....

What, so soon? Sister is taking away the plates for dessert. My, how that food disappeared! The table is a mere shadow of its former self, and that ex-turkey gobbler is nothing but a skeleton..... Dessert is pumpkin pie, of course, and it's deep in whipped cream. Mmm--mm-m! 'Looks good!

Well, Farm Security says every bit of this dinner was home-produced, turkey included. Producing their own food is part of every Farm Security borrower family's live-at-home program..... Now the crowd is leaving the table, and we'd better leave too or we'll get roped in on the dishwashing..... Somehow I never liked the looks of after-dinner dishes, even in imagination.

The living room is neat and attractive. A cozy little wood fire is burning in the grate, and one of the children is brushing up ashes with a turkey wing ~~duster~~. Several of the chairs have been re-seated with plaited cornshucks, and two little stools have new cane splint bottoms. There are homemade rag rugs on the floor and the doorstep is a neatly covered brick.

Over there in the corner is a spinning wheel. It's old but it's active. Both mother and daughters spin. They wash and card home-produced wool and spin it into thread. All of the girls andsssh! two of the boys can knit. They've knitted warm caps and sweaters and even suits. Each has a little handwoven white oak knitting basket.

In one of the bedrooms - where we're exploring now - is a baby cradle made from a barrel. The barrel is small and half of it has been cut away lengthwise to

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make the cradle. Heavy wooden rockers have been added and the whole cradle has been whitewashed. It is lined with soft cloth and contains a little mattress stuffed with goosefeathers. The goosefeathers were traded by a neighbor who wanted turkey feathers for feather dusters.....

The mattresses on the big beds are made from oat straw and shredded cornshucks, and each bed has a hand-pieced quilt and homemade wool comfort on it. Two beds have hand-crocheted spreads. At the foot of one bed is a homemade cedar chest - one of the girl's hope chests no doubt.

It's hard to pull ourselves away, isn't it? But it gets dark early these days and we want to take a look outside. The first thing we notice outdoors is that part of the house is old and part new. Father has added two rooms since his family got larger, and underpinned them with piles of flat sandstone. The big chimney is new too. Father and the boys made it this summer from native rock near the creek. The flagstone walk is of limestone.

In the smokehouse - what a sight! Big shoulders of meat, sugar-cured hams, and hickory-smoked bacon. Bins of potatoes, apples, pumpkins, and squash. Dried beans, dried peas, dried corn, and dried apples. Sacks of shelled corn to be ground for cornbread, hominy, and cornmeal mush. Strings of dried peppers, piles of black walnuts, and stacks of hickory nuts. A big can of homemade lard. A box of laundry soap made from meat scraps and wood ashes lye.

If this is plain living, all I can say is it's no wonder people say "Plain living is conducive to high thinking." There must be a lot of tall thinking going on around this family to make it get along so well. Or would you call it common sense and hard work?

Anyway, Farm Security says it's glad you took the little trip today, and hopes you may have picked up a useful idea or two from seeing some American pioneers a la 1940.

