

Housekeeping, Pioneer Style

As we press the button on the microwave, pop laundry into our electric washing machines and dryers and purchase food from supermarkets, it is worth sparing a thought for the pioneer women of the district. Their many housekeeping tasks were undertaken without the benefit of electricity and labour saving devices.



Women had to cook for a workforce hungry from hard physical labour. In the very early period before houses were built, families camped in tents, water was fetched from creeks and food was cooked in the open. Later, wood-fuelled stoves, usually in a detached kitchen at the back of a house, made cooking a hot task during the long summers. The stoves also heated the cast iron pressing irons.

Magee descendants say that in the very early days, water for laundry was collected in nearby streams and waterholes. For many years afterwards, washing was undertaken outdoors, the women requiring considerable strength. Hercules Sinnamon wrote 'With a heap of wood under a copper or drum in the back yard the clothes would be boiled with soap and soda, lifted out with a broomstick into big tubs of water where they would be rinsed, squeezed up and down on a washing board and then hung to dry'.

Most farmers grew their own fruit and vegetables, the home garden usually tended by the women. The women also made preserves and chutneys. The Maurer family's double-walled dairy was lined with 15-inch shelves on which preserves were stored. Mrs Sarah White's large pantry with its shelves filled with bottled fruits of many kinds left a lasting impression on her young nephew, Hercules Sinnamon.

The family poultry provided eggs and chicken meat as needed while dairy cattle provided milk from which butter and cheese were made. Some families such as the Maurer and Ziegenfusz families also raised, killed and dressed their own beef and pork. The Maurer family had a separate smokehouse at the back where meat was hung and smoked.

For more details about various aspects of pioneer lifestyle, see our book 'When River Was Roadway' (details at www.cshsoc.org.au/publications).

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