

# Historically Speaking

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## 'Memories Are Made of This'

By Julie Spilinek

*This issue of Historically Speaking will be somewhat different from those previously published. There are no pictures as I would hope the items mentioned may bring up your own mental pictures.*

I wasn't sure what topic to pursue for this issue, until my coffee percolator quit working and I couldn't find a new one in any store. True, there were coffee makers with all kinds of technological settings. I wanted a simple pot for making coffee. Not too simple; I did want an electric one. My mind went back to the way my grandmother first made her coffee nearly seventy-five years ago. I still remember a rather large enamel coffee pot that did not have any filter; she just dumped the required amount of grounds in the water and boiled it on a wood burning cook stove. My own mother also used this method, but I remember her pot as a small cream colored one with red trim. There was nothing fancy about the thing; it had a handle for carrying, a spout for pouring and a lid. Then came a "new and improved" kind. It had a basket that held the grounds, a stem that connected to a flat piece that sat on the bottom of the pot and utilized the heat source. By this time that heat source might have been an electric stove. The heat

caused the water to rise up the stem, spilling over the grounds in the basket, thus creating coffee, ready to drink. My mother once owned a glass type that she only used for company; I'm not exactly sure how it worked. And then came the electric percolator, also known as the coffee pot. Now we have coffee makers that can be set to start and stop, even a setting for the desired strength. Some contain separate hot water reservoirs; some made to do one cup at a time—changing flavors at will.

As I begin this, preserving of the seasons garden produce is a top priority in American kitchens, either by canning or freezing. Back to my grandmother, who did not have the luxury of freezing her summer's bounty. She did have the convenience of a wash house, also known by some as a summer kitchen. She fired up that same wood burning stove and boiled her jars of vegetables for hours to be ready for winter's use. Meat was often boiled down and placed in the fat or some people dried it. Placing it in a cold room was often enough; my mother used our unheated attic. Now, dehydrators and pressure canners make this task much easier and less time consuming. I understand there are newer models that make the job even

## A Message From the President *Jessie Kiser*

*The Howard County Historical Village took part in St. Paul's Christmas opening weekend December 5th. We have some great people that decorate the village. Another fundraiser by the local members was a bake sale on that day. There was a service in the church, besides a visit from Santa for the children at the village.*

*We continue to update the village with new siding on the church. The cement is done for the new building.*

*Thanks to all the volunteers during the year. We appreciate your efforts in helping to make 2015 a successful year.*

*Merry Christmas and have a great New Year!*

easier, with less chance of accidents. Since we are discussing the kitchen, the refrigerator replaced the ice box that required constant replenishing of the ice, either by purchasing at a business that sold ice or from a personal ice house. Now that refrigerator can dispense cold water and ice.

In addition to the kitchen, the homes of today are arranged in a somewhat different manner. A hundred years ago a home may have had a parlor as well as a living room and dining room. And, of course, they contained two, maybe three, bedrooms. If there were several children in the family, the boys usually shared a room, and the

girls shared one. Today, we have family rooms or recreation rooms. More elite homes may have had a special room designated as a library; today these may be a home office. In that office will be a computer, printer, copier, fax machine or a one does all component. For a time we heard about dens; now we have "man caves."

When television first came out, a family would most likely have had it in their living room; there would have been just one and its picture would have been in black and white. Those early viewers would have had the choice of three, maybe four stations to choose from. The earliest viewers were limited to evening programs only. Gradually, daytime programs were added. Of course, the next improvement was the color TV. Now we have surround sound, a multitude of channels to choose from and can watch something at any hour of the day or night. If one reads an ad for these high tech sets, it requires a high tech person to understand the description. Today's families may well have a set for every member.

Entertainment in the home has gone through enormous changes from entire families listening to a single broadcast on a cabinet style radio run by batteries to smart phones that allow all kinds of listening and viewing pleasure. In between these extremes were phonograph record players, 8 track, cassette, and CD players. The advent of the VCR made it possible to watch movies at will—anytime, and one did not have to leave the house to do so.

Communication, too, has been drastically transformed from that box-like affair

that was affixed to the wall. Each household was one of several other families using one line, thus, the term, party line. Each individual on that line would have their own "ring", or signal that a call was for them. These were relayed by short and long rings. My own family answered to a long, two shorts, and a long. Of course, others on the same line could hear each one's ring and could listen if they wanted to. Most people did not have the time to do this, but occasionally a lonely widow would spend some time doing this. The dial phone eventually replaced the wooden box and consequently, the switchboard jobs that provided the service. Then came direct dialing eliminating more operators. The bag phones allowed calls to and from locations other than a residence or business. The cordless phone also gave individuals freedom to move around while carrying on a conversation. And then came the cell phone which really revolutionized communication. Now it's the smart phone as I already mentioned. Both the cordless phone and cell phones were welcome improvements but they continually found their way under couch cushions, in a pants pocket or any number of "hiding" places. The cell phone has even replaced the camera for some people. It, too, had a rather humble beginning, with a boxlike apparatus that could only be used outside during the daytime. The addition of the flash bulb allowed indoor photos. For a time there were numerous types of cameras to choose from, including the short lived Polaroid, which eliminated the need to send a film into a special processing place to have prints made from the film. And

then came the digital camera that is so popular today.

Like so many tasks that are done in the kitchen, the actual process of cooking and/or baking has evolved from that old wood burning cook stove. The arrival of electricity prompted many of the changes. With an electric stove, one could set the exact temperature for an item. Later, timers were added so one could start and stop a certain process at will. Then came the microwave that really revolutionized the way people cooked. I say people, because, the microwave allowed men to fix food that was almost exclusively the woman's job. Other appliances, such as the mixer, blender, toaster, and that coffee pot I mentioned earlier, made cooking and baking more enjoyable. The dishwasher was another labor saving device that many welcomed. Along with the automatic washers and driers. The old wringer washer was soon replaced.

Now, let's move out into the yard. One hundred years ago, town dwellers may have had a small yard which may or may not have had a well kept lawn. A few chickens may occupy a small pen near the house. A dog and a cat or two may occupy the premises. A cow or horse may have been visible in the backyard. Further out in the country small farms would feature a menagerie of animal life. Chickens, possibly ducks and geese would be ambling about. A barn and a couple of smaller sheds would be seen and around these would be pens that might be occupied by horses, cows, and/or pigs. By the late 1940's electricity and running water were available on the farm as well as in town

and farms were increasing their cattle herds. The milking machine was a boon to the dairy herd. Chickens and cream were sold as a way to make extra money. However, by the 1960's, milk cows were disappearing as well as flocks of laying hens. By the turn of the century large operations took over the small dairy, beef, hog and chicken business. The barn and out buildings have been replaced by huge metal buildings that serve as a shop and a haven for the huge tractors and machinery that are used to produce the crops. As combines replaced the corn picker, steel bins replaced the corn cribs. Silos have been abandoned or dismantled.

Irrigation has been part of the farming scene since the mid 1950's but those first fields were watered by a ditch and tubes or gated pipe. Although pipe is still prevalent, the pivot system is prevailing. Even that is emerging as a technological wonder as it becomes possible to control it by that ever popular smart phone. New combines and tractors are equipped with all kinds of computer components that indicate bushels per acre, even when to turn onto the next row.

By the time you read this, the Christmas season will be well upon us, and like so many facets of our lives, the holidays have seen some dramatic changes over the years. Halloween and Thanksgiving were recently observed; Thanksgiving was most recently observed by many with the traditional meal of turkey, dressing, cranberries, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie. In a bygone era the meal would have been followed by the women visiting while they cleaned up

after the meal; the men would have retreated to a separate room or area to discuss the weather, politics, and other recent events. Today the women may well have been poring over all the advertised sale items to be featured for the next day's shopping frenzy, known as Black Friday. The men most likely retreated to the nearest big screen TV to watch as much football as possible. The young people were most likely playing games or texting a friend on their smart phones.

Halloween, on the other hand, has become as commercialized as Christmas as stores offer a menagerie of costumes for people from 1 to 100 and enough decorations to turn one's house and yard into a regular "haunted hollow." If you are 75 or older, the only decorations you had were probably made at school from construction paper. A mask, also handmade, or possibly purchased, would have been your only costume. If you are 45 or older your costume was probably a little more elaborate as your mother, or another relative, created something from materials already at hand. One of my sons was PacMan one year. There were the usual ghosts and witches all fashioned from clothes and accessories found nearby. Today, children want to dress up as one of the movie or TV characters currently popular. The adults have entered the Halloween foray with all kinds of costume parties for them. The food served at these events is often exotic—or at least the name is. One positive aspect of the holiday is the decreased amount of mischievous acts such as smashing pumpkins, strewing stuff in the streets, soaping windows, etc. Of course,

there are no more outhouses to upset or farm animals to occupy the local school building. I understand St. Libory has their share of pumpkins littering their streets.

And now we approach Christmas, which has definitely succumbed to making it a holiday of spectacular decorating and gift giving. Once again the decorations used 75 years ago would have been simple, and most likely homemade. The local stores did not feature Christmas specials until at least the first of December; now they stock their shelves before Halloween. Christmas catalogues arrive as early as August. The day itself used to be spent with a Church service, or program, the night before on Christmas Eve. Schools presented a program sometime during the week prior to Christmas. Most schools still do this, but they are often advertised as holiday events.

Speaking of schools, technology has given education a whole new dimension; no more slates or chalkboards—or chalk. Smartboards have replaced these. No more film strips or educational films shown on a projector; computers can bring up any kind of information needed for any subject at any time. In some cases students are not using a textbook, but instead each student has an iPad which contains all the material needed for an individual subject. Assignments can be completed on it and sent to the teacher. Even the youngest students are using them. Children are now entering school at a younger age than in the past. Three and four year olds start their education in a preschool program prior to starting kindergarten. When I taught kindergarten in the 1970's, I was

teaching what I learned in the first grade almost 30 years earlier. Thirty years later, preschoolers are being taught what was once kindergarten material. While yesterday's teachers demonstrated fractions by cutting up an apple—or something—today all kinds of commercial items are available. Good penmanship was stressed by lots of practice; today's students don't even recognize the Palmer method and are no longer taught cursive.

The fashion scene has seen numerous changes through the years but the most dramatic changes can be best documented by checking out high school yearbooks as teens were notorious for creating fads that became popular, then faded. If you attended school during the 20's and 30's you likely wore overalls with a button up shirt—cotton with short sleeves in the summer; flannel with long sleeves in the winter. And most likely long underwear under it. If you were a girl, you wore a rather long dress over a petticoat. That dress would likely have been made from feed sacks if you lived in the country and attended a rural school. And you sported long stockings during the winter—brown for school, white for Sundays and special events.

During the 40's and 50's, blue jeans replaced the overalls for many of the boys; girls still wore dresses but the long stockings pretty much disappeared by 1950. If she still wore them only to please her mother, she often rolled them down once she arrived at school. Leotards replaced the long stockings. If it was quite cold, a girl might wear slacks under her dress and take them off after arriving at school. The

50's brought some unusual "fads" onto the fashion scene. Very full skirts worn over several can cans were the rage. Neck scarves worn with sweaters or blouses were popular or they were worn around their pony tails. Tee shirts were replacing button up shirts for boys. (Is it button up or button down shirts?) Their hair styles were somewhat perplexing to the parents as they often spent a great deal of time getting their duck tails just right. They required more hair care products than in the past. Remember brylcream where a little dab will do you. Fortunately, they were somewhat short lived.

By 1960 the skirts were getting shorter until they became known as miniskirts in the 1980's. Also by this time, girls were allowed to wear slacks and jeans to school. Women in general were wearing them in the workplace, even to church. During this same time period, the pants legs for both males and females were getting longer and much wider. Teens wore out the bottoms of the legs before getting worn out in other places. Boys were starting to wear their hair much longer—again against parents wishes. Men's hairstyles

remained pretty much traditional; women, however, were wearing what was commonly called the beehive. Teen girls had their own unique style.

The 1990's brought in the prewashed and stonewashed jeans and a much higher price tag. Then came those that were not only prewashed but looked very preworn as they were purchased with holes already in them. Again the price tag increased. Sweatshirts and hoodies appeared in every classroom. Since about 2010 those holes are disappearing and most of the teens have rather sensible wardrobes. Shorts are a common sight in school, even on some of the coldest days. They aren't the short shorts that created dress codes a few years ago. Camouflage seems to be quite the fashion statement these days.

I wonder how fondly today's young people will remember their youth and what will their world be like.

## **Moments to Stir Your Memory**

The following items are tidbits from the past that you may or may not remember—depending on your age. If you remember all of them, you are definitely a

# ***Dues Are Due for 2016***

**Check your address label, those with a 16 have paid their dues. Thanks.**

**Dues are \$10.00 a year.**

**Send to Howard County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, St. Paul, NE 68873.**

“senior citizen.” They are not listed in any particular order.

Photo booths

Coffee sold in glass jars

Penny loafers

Pedal pushers

Cisterns

Armistice Day

Decoration Day

The Omaha Livestock Yards

The Bobbsey Twins

Dick, Jane and Sally readers

The Rexall 1 cent sale

Hobos

Beatniks and Hoods

Polio

Insane asylum

Whooping cough

Dr. Jonas Salk

Camel cigarettes

Mimeograph machine

Phone booths

The Charleston, twist, jitterbug

The iron lung

Pin ball machines

Pac Man

Drive-in movies

Outhouses

Shine on Harvest Moon

Ma Perkins; The Second Mrs. Burton

Frances, the Talking Mule

Charley Chapman

The Little Rascals

Shirley Temple

Roy Rogers

Hippies

Life Buoy Soap

Toni Home permanents

Cellophane

Ising glass

Zerox copiers

Marble games

Mrs. Beasley doll

Poodle skirts

Car hops

High School Pep Clubs

Furbys

Ma and Pa Kettle

## Gifts for Christmas

“Entering Howard County” books are the perfect Christmas gift. They are available for the low price of \$25, plus \$1.63 tax.

Books May Be Purchased at  
**The Phonograph-Herald, and  
St. Paul Chamber of  
Commerce**

or by mail from the  
**Howard County  
Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1  
St. Paul, NE 68873**

Add an additional \$6 for postage and handling.

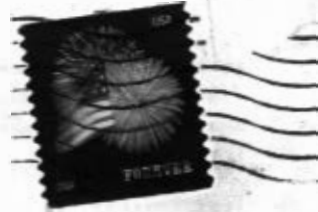
## Accepting Donations For Building

The Howard County Historical Society has launched a campaign to raise funds to construct a building on the historical society grounds north of the present Agricultural Building. The 40'x100' building will cost around \$200,000.

Donations of \$100 or more will be recognized on a donor board. Donations may be sent to the Howard County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, St. Paul, NE 68873. Earmark your check “Building Fund.”



HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 1  
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INSIDE: Julie Spilinek takes readers down memory lane with her article entitled: "Memories Are Made of This."

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