

Amonett Family Newsletter
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May 10, 1994 by Glen Amonett

Last week Marjorie said Red was in the hospital so I drove over to Lubbock to see what was going on. He had a knee replaced with an artificial joint. He was doing well.

In our conversation we discussed the big wagon loads of bundles that we used to haul from the field and stack in the stack lot for winter feed, more than sixty years ago. The livestock needed lots of winter feed. Each stack was bigger than the barn.

Pull up a chair and let's discuss the farm activities of that time. Our way of life was a lot different then.

At that time the eggs were in the henhouse instead of a grocery case. Pork chops were on the hoof instead of at the meat counter, and milk was in the pasture until milking time. Farm chores were assigned to youngsters fairly early. Do you remember the chores of those days?

I suppose the younger generation considers that we are yearning for the "good old days." I think the young folks understand that.

The days work was stopped a little while before night and the mules unharnessed and fed. They would roll on the ground when unharnessed. That was their way of relaxing after a hard days work.

The milking was usually done before dark. Our cows were good about coming to the pen about milking time, but if we wanted to milk early we went to the pasture after them. The cows were free to graze in the daytime and the calves were penned. At night the cows were penned and the calves were out to pasture.

To encourage the cows to stand still and give down their milk they were fed a gallon of cotton seed at milking time and the calf could nurse briefly. The calf would nurse fast to try to get as much milk as he could before a rope or chain was dropped around his neck and he was pulled away to the nearest post. The farmer got most of the milk. Our Jersey cows gave rich milk and we drank it three times a day.

Did your family have one old cow that would often kick over the milk bucket? Most farmers had at least one cow like that, and sometimes she would pick up a big foot and put it in the bucket of milk.

By the time the milking was done, it was usually dark. When we got to the house with the milk the supper was on the table and the milk pails sat on the cabinet until after supper, then the milk was strained into the separator. The

cream would rise overnight. Late in the thirties we got a crank type separator. It would separate the cream even if the milk was very fresh.

During milking in the summer when the flies were biting, the cows would swat you across the face with a bushy tail as she swatted at a troublesome fly.

In helping drive the cattle one time the dog (old Kelly) grabbed the bushy part of a milk cow's tail and broke it off. Shorty (now known as Red) wasn't troubled by being swatted with a bushy tail anymore but the cow would swing the stub like a club and whack him alongside the head.

We kept both milk cows and beef cows and we sometimes butchered a calf for fresh meat. The chickens also provided meat and plenty of eggs. There wasn't any electricity, and when company came a fried chicken was a good available dish.

Butter was churned two or three times a week. Do you remember those churns that were shaped like a nail keg? They had a dasher about three feet long. Finally we got a "Daizy" style that was faster and required cranking.

Until 1935 everybody at our rural school of White Star provided their own transportation. The saddle horses of the kids were tied near the school ground where they stood patiently all day. When school was dismissed in the afternoon the kids scattered like a covey of quail on their horses, or on a family cart like the Titus kids had, or on foot until next day.

Most farmers had meat, eggs, and milk even during the depression but money was almost non-existent, we were "depression kids". At that time the national unemployment rate was 25% and that probably didn't count the women because very few women were in the work force.

Hog killing came with the first hard freeze in the fall, before cotton harvest started. The meat was salted down to preserve it for winter. It would last until hog killing time the next year. To preserve the meat we would put it in a large wooden box with a layer of salt between each layer of meat. Thick hams and pork shoulders required extra care. Meat on a rack would also keep if it was rubbed down several times with salt. The ground meat like sausage was seasoned and stuffed into a washed hog intestine, until mother started making a long narrow cloth sack for the purpose. The sacked sausage was dipped in melted hog lard to seal it, and then it was hung in the smokehouse until needed. The sausage was eaten before other cuts of meat because it wouldn't keep as well.

Our meat storage was in a "smokehouse", but we never used the smoke method of curing meat. My Granddad was from Tennessee where they used the smoke cure.

When darkness came we would strike a match and light a kerosene lamp. The amount of light from a coal oil lamp wasn't great but we spent many an hour by the light of a lamp, reading and doing school work.

Shopping wasn't a problem in those days. If you had money to spend, you could shop as long as the money held out by the light of a coal oil lamp after supper on the dining room table from a Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward catalog. The selection was great and postage was cheap at that time.

The mail service was used often and it was widely admired. Maybe that's why some of us still write letters when we could talk on the phone. There were no rural phones in our area.

Only the towns had electricity at that time. In the late thirties Granddad bought a wind charger and they had electric lights. They were really bright. I was amazed when I came home from World War II and found utility lines across the country and the farms wired for electricity.

A corn patch was important in our farm operation. It provided tender corn for the table in growing season, and the mature corn was harvested for winter use. Shelling corn to make meal was a chore but it could be fun. Two or three times a year we would replenish our supply of cornmeal. One afternoon that I remember, several of us kids and three adults gathered in the shade of the barn for corn shelling. The corn crib was nearby; it was a picket fence built in a circle and filled with corn still in the shuck. It was topped by bundles to shed the rain. The supply of corn was for both people and hogs. On that particular afternoon the corn huskers were my mother, Derwood and I, Grandma, Aunt Pearl, John, Kay, Dane and Nelda. The work seemed like fun if Aunt Pearl was in the working crew. Maybe Dorothy Lane, Roy and Eldon were there but they would have been small.

John and Derwood and I would fill a tub with corn and drag it to the shucking crew in the shade of the barn. Shelling corn usually leaves a few blisters. There is an art to it. One time someone loaned us a mechanical corn sheller. That was the dawning of the machine age for me. The sheller only weighed five or six pounds but it would do the work of a dozen people, and only required one person to turn the handle. The shucks must be removed before dropping the ear of corn in the sheller. About fifty years later I noticed a corn sheller at a market for old farm machinery. I bought it for just a few dollars. It had shelled many bushels of corn in its day but it will still shell an ear of corn in a jiffy.

When we had shelled two large sacks of corn, the pile of shucks was the size of an automobile. We threw the shucks over the fence to the outside cows.

On the next trip to town the shelled corn was taken to W.D. Graves Blacksmith shop at Flomot, where it was ground into cornmeal. His charge for grinding was one third of the meal. Corn grinding was available at most blacksmiths in those days. He often had meal to sell as well as a supply for his family.

W.D. Graves was the best blacksmith this side of Ft. Worth. The characteristics of a blacksmith shop are smoky old fires in the forge and coal dust

on everything, and big hammers clanging on metal, but somewhere in that grimy building was a clean corn grinder because the meal was good.

Let's look at the art of growing corn in the thirties, because few people are around who did it like the farmer of that time. In the spring the farmer would choose well filled ears of corn from his crib for planting seed. He would flake off any small, misshaped or insect damaged seed. He would shell the corn and take it to the windmill where he would "float" the seed in a tub of water. Any light grain that floated would be discarded. The grain that settled to the bottom would be heavier seed with good germination. The seed was then spread on a clean flat surface to dry. This method of seed selection seems to have been used for centuries. I saw a reference to this procedure in a history book. This process is still used in less developed countries.

Planting was with a two row planter, powered by a span of mules at a speed of about three miles per hour. Farmers took pride in having a riding planter. That was as modern as you could get in those days.

In the fall, crops were hand harvested two rows at a time by a farmer who tossed the corn into a wagon as mules pulled it down the row. The mules would stop and go at the farmers command while he worked alongside the wagon. The same method was used in heading maize. That's a similar story. At the end of the row the farmer took the reins from a peg on the wagon and turned the team around and put them on the right row for another trip through the field. As a preschooler in the late twenties I sometimes rode in the wagon during the corn or maize harvest. There were usually two and sometimes three wagons in the field. I preferred to ride with Willis as the wagon went back and forth. He had a steel wheeled wagon pulled by Streak and Charlie.

Perhaps this view of early farming would be incomplete without mentioning the changes that have taken place. Machinery has steadily grown larger over the years. Most farmers now use eight row planters. (Mine has been idle several years because of changed cropping patterns). The speed of planters depends upon the tractor, but they are about three times the speed of mules, and with more rows. The farmer doesn't save his own seed anymore. The seed has been treated with several chemicals for insect resistance, wilt tolerance, and resistance to soil borne diseases. A weed control chemical is sprayed over the ground before plant emergence. It is irrigated three or four times during the growing season. At harvest time a large combine sails through the field, dropping stalks, shucks and cobs behind it as it puts a large stream of grain into a hopper. When the hopper is full a truck pulls alongside as the combine continues down the rows. A large auger swings out over the truck. The combine operator turns on the auger and a stream about the size of a basketball pours into the truck. After two or three hoppers are

loaded on the truck it heads for the elevator. Several trucks are required to keep the grain hauled away from one of those big combines.

In this manner a friend cut a million pounds of grain in one day. He was cutting maize, or milo as we call it now. That's one thousand times the speed of hand harvesting, when on a good day a man with a pocket knife used to cut and unload a ton of maize per day with a wagon and team.

Time has called home the senior member of our family. Aunt Mart Margaret (Crockett) Amonett passed away at Bangs Texas on February 3, 1994.

Truman Irwin, who moved to the Ft. Worth area a dozen years ago, passed away February 19, 1994.

Billie Jo (Amonett) Hughes passed away in Lubbock on January 14, 1994.

Sincerely Yours,
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