

*Memories of Canadice NY**A Farmhouse Pantry*

By Mina Preston Oliver - The Canadice Chronicle

July 1996



Most farmhouses in Canadice had a pantry. Pantries were handy rooms, even with the large country kitchens available. They were a necessity when the house did not have an ice box. Nothing took the place of the pantry.

**The Preston's Pantry**

Our pantry must have had my mother's approval when my parents rebuilt the house at 6657 County Road #37 back in 1924. A door at the northeast corner of the kitchen led to the pantry. It consisted of a room about 8 by 10 feet with shelves of twelve inch boards taking up the space on the west and east walls. They started two and a half to three feet from the floor, up to within a foot of the ceiling. The top shelves were used for articles that my parents didn't want us children to reach.

Tall bottles containing camphor, rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, pain kane and bitters occupied that shelf. The bitters disappeared from the shelf promptly when Mama and Papa found out it contained alcohol.

**The Medical Book**

On one end were some books. One book fascinated me when I finally managed to climb the stool and sneak into the other room to gaze at its pages. I don't think I was very old and the book was heavy. The printed matter wasn't interesting to me. It was the pictures that were fascinating. I imagine it was a book that would be helpful to my father. It dealt with various diseases and injuries pertaining to animals. The pictures of the various animals unfolded.

The horse looked like our horses, but a part of the picture could be turned up, another part turned down. There stood a horse without its outer skin. A layer of under-skin with blue veins all over then appeared. The next uncovered picture showed the insides of the horse. It was remarkable. A cow, pig and sheep were also pictured.

**Secret Reading**

I checked them all out, but didn't dare look too long for fear Mama would find me. I can't recall how I lifted the book back up to the shelf, but she didn't see me. When I became older I checked that book out several times. I never did look at the other books.

### **Other Materials**

The shelves on the west wall held confectionary sugar boxes, brown sugar, oatmeal, cream of wheat, corn flakes, coffee and Postum. Salmon was cheaper than tun fish back then. Mama usually kept a can of that on the shelf.

A window centered in the middle of the north wall provided light. Electricity came down our road around 1935-36, so when we went to the pantry at night we carried a kerosene lamp. The window was a great advantage. Under it, a wide board shelf ran from the west to the east wall. Cupboards underneath the shelf provided a place for baking pans, salt, a ten pound bag of sugar and various baking utensils. In each end of the cupboards an opening allowed for storage of tall containers. Above the work place on each end, a series of narrow shelves reached to the ceiling. On the top one, Mama stored the medicine for the family. There she placed any bottled medicine the doctor prescribed - iodine, salves for cuts (one being wolverine salve), peppermint - all out of our reach.

The Watkins name appeared on many of the spices placed on the lower shelves. The Watkins man came every few months, giving Mama the opportunity to pick up all sorts of seasonings. There was also the Jello boxes and at one end the root beer mix. On a hot summer day, some of that mixed with water would quench our thirst. There was also an old baking powder can that Mama used to put some coals and wool in. That was used to heal deep wounds such as nails going into our feet.

### **Mama's Durable Tea**

A small bag of green tea leaves sat on the shelf over the work place in the pantry. It was especially for Mama. She loved her green tea.

When World War II erupted, she no longer could purchase green tea. She had some on hand and it lasted through the War. Sometimes I could see only two leaves in her cup of hot water.

The broad shelf held about anything you would want - crocks of lard rendered from the pigs that were butchered in the winter, crocks of sausage and headcheese, pitchers of milk Papa brought in each morning, containers of cream Mama had skimmed off the milk, and in the fall, crocks of sliced and whole cucumbers in various degrees of pickle making.

In the summer the shelf held pans of huckleberries, blackberries, strawberries and other fruits waiting to be made into deserts or be canned. On one of the east shelves sat egg scales. Mama wiped the eggs with a damp cloth when Papa brought them in, weighed them and packed them in egg crates.

When I was young she made her own butter, and she took butter and eggs to Wheaton's grocery in Springwater to trade for groceries. It was in the pantry that Mama rolled out dough for bread and biscuits and made pie crusts and cookies. There were sacks of Daisy flour, a bag of split beans, jugs of molasses and vinegar, colanders, strainers, and a can of sardines for Papa.

The pantry was cool even in summer and the window was open in all seasons. Later on, the south wall was the place for our electric refrigerator.

What wonderful things were stored in our pantry! In it we had the makings of many fine meals, down on the farm!

