

# Feeding harvest crews kept women busy back then

By LIZA DEINES

Kansas in June. The sky turns hot blue, the wheat turns golden and the entire focus of the breadbasket of the U.S.A. turns to harvest.

All of life in northwest Kansas revolves around this day, as it has for generations.

When I was a preteen in the 1940s it was an eagerly awaited day because I knew my aunt would send in a message by the rural postal carrier and I would be on my way to the farm to help cook for the harvesters.

It was before the days of rural electricity, so dozens of trips a day were made to the yellow stone milkhouse, that sat beside the horse tank near the corral. Within the cool dimness a deep concrete trough ran along a wall and through that trough ran a continuous stream of cool water pumped by the windmill outside.

Stoneware crocks with eggs, cream, butter and other edibles were set into the cool water, that served to keep these perishable foods cool.

Trips down, of course, necessitated trips back up, carrying whatever supplies were needed for preparing the meals when "cooking for men" was on the agenda.

Buckets of water and baskets of kindling and cobs were also carried to the kitchen off and on all day. These were the backbone of my job.

I have no clear memory of how many men we cooked for during the month-long harvest season,



While the machinery has changed, harvest is still a time-consuming job and many women still provide meals for the extra help, which is usually hired to bring in the crop.

but I do remember the incredible amounts of food we prepared daily.

Upon rising in the morning my cousin and I would find Aunt Florence already in busy in the kitchen making pastry and filling for half a dozen pies. Our job was to set the oilcloth-covered table, keep the coffee mugs brimming, pop pans of biscuits in and out of the Kitchen Queen, stir the gravy and fry enough ham and eggs to get

the men fed and out to the field. Next we washed the cream separator and the breakfast dishes and started the butter in the big glass Daisy churn. Aunt Florence went to the chicken yard to butcher several fryers for dinner.

Water was set to boiling to scald the feathers and my cousin was soon helping dress and cut up chickens while I churned. When the Daisy's crank began to turn hard and the butter "came", we all

took a break for a big glass of cool buttermilk and perhaps a cold biscuit topped in sorghum.

Bread dough was made with sourdough starter was quickly mixed, kneaded and set to rise.

Early on it was time to roll the chicken in flour and heat the huge cast iron skillet of lard, which had been fetched up from the milkhouse when the crock of butter was taken down.

Potatoes were also brought up

from the root cellar and I set to peeling and quartering while my cousin went down to the garden to pick green beans and cucumbers and pull a few carrots and onions.

Meanwhile, Aunt Florence punched down dough, formed loaves, tended the frying chicken and supervised.

Potatoes boiling, chicken frying, dough rising, we all turned to snapping beans to make a combination pot of tiny carrots, string beans and little onions cooked with a chunk of fatback bacon from another crock in the milkhouse.

Pies came out of the oven and the bread went in. The house filled with enticing aromas.

Toward noon my cousin grabbed a tea towel and ran out to the west hill to wave in the harvest crew while I set the table and helped take up the now-crisp chicken and start cream gravy.

Florence mashed the potatoes with lots of cream and sweet butter and we dished out vegetables, sliced bread, set out dishes of homemade dill, beets and bread 'n' butter pickles, jellies and jams and a big bowl of hard-boiled eggs along with fresh sliced cucumbers and onions in sugar and vinegar.

Commotion on the west side of the house heralded the arrival of the men where they crowded around the water buckets and wash basins set on an old wooden bench.

Then, cleaned up for dinner and ravenous — here they came. And 30 minutes later the food was all gone and so were they — back to

the combines and trucks with full stomachs and new ambition.

Not all the men stayed for supper, so it was a little more relaxed affair.

If we were fortunate enough to have leftover fried chicken from dinner, it was served along with the sandwiches and potato salad and often we opened a jar of last summer's corn relish, after a trip to the root cellar, of course.

All finished off in the glow of a coal oil lamp with warm gingerbread, leftover pie, home-canned fruit and coffee. Once in awhile someone was still hungry but they just had to make do with home-made bread and butter with sorghum molasses.

Supper over and the dishes washed, we went out to feed the chickens, gather the eggs, fill the corn cob and kindling box, feed the contents of the slop buckets to the hogs and investigate the garden to see what would be ready to pick tomorrow when the meal marathon started all over again.

With today's fast, convenient foods, it's amazing that we all made it through the month it usually took to bring in the crop, yet my memories of those times are pleasant and nothing before or since has ever tasted as good as those harvest meals.

Of course there was a reward at the end. My cousin and I got to ride atop the last load of wheat as it went to the elevator in town and Uncle Jim treated us to the very special joy of a double dip ice cream cone at the local drug store.



Dean Esslinger, Norton, had an idea for a tribute to his Native American heritage. He envisioned an Indian on a pony atop a low hill on Esslinger property, next to U.S. 36, six miles east of Norton. The silhouette, crafted from 1/8-inch steel, is the creation of Roger and Linda Fuller of Rawhide Iron Works, rural Norton. Commissioned by Mr. Esslinger's family as a surprise Christmas present, the Indian and his horse stand as a reminder of the past.

— Telegram photo by Carolyn Plotts

## Widow takes over husband's seat

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After she was selected, Mrs. Clark talked briefly.

"It will be an honor to serve you and the 40th District," she said, adding that she will do her best to represent the people and the area of western Kansas, which she hopes she can do with integrity.

She also thanked everyone for their support and was given a standing ovation.

She said she spent time with her husband in Topeka during legislative sessions and became familiar with his work. She helped in his office and also critiqued his writing.

Rep. Jim Morrison of Colby, who represents the 121st District in the state House of Representatives, said he was pleased with the results.

"It will be almost like working with Stan, working with Ruth," he said, adding he worked with Clark on many projects and working with his wife will allow some of those to continue.

Morrison was also happy with the number of people who showed up.

"It was an excellent turnout," he said. "Interest was great."

Out of 255 eligible precinct or township committeemen and

women, 138 people came to vote, along with more than 30 people who came just to watch the proceedings.

Morrison said there will be a lot of work for Mrs. Clark — caucus and committee meetings in Topeka and other activities.

He said he was glad that the candidates running for the seat kept their names out of the running as temporary replacements.

Republicans Dan Rasure of Goodland and Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell agreed not to submit their

names to fill the seat. The two, along with Democrat Tim Petersen of Monument, are all vying for the seat.

Morrison said by not submitting their names, it took the pressure off the candidates.

"This is the fairest thing to have done," he said, explaining if one of them was elected in November after serving in a temporary capacity, they wouldn't know if they won the seat because of the temporary term or on their own.

"We need a fair race," he said.

## Nex-Tech buys cable system

Nex-Tech a division of Rural Telephone, Lenora, signed a letter of intent to acquire the cable television systems in seven Northwest Kansas Communities from the St. Louis-based Cebridge Connections.

Starting in July, Nex-Tech will assume operation of the Cebridge cable operations in Norton and Alma.

"Nex-Tech is committed to providing advanced, fiber-to-the-door communication services to Norton and Alma," said Nex-Tech Chief Operating Officer Jeff Wick. "Because many of these

customers already utilize Nex-Tech telephone and Internet services, a smooth transition to Nex-Tech Cable Television and Lightning Jack High Speed Internet service should be insured."

"This transaction was a logical and productive move for everyone involved," said Todd Cruthird, regional vice-president for Cebridge Connections. "Nex-Tech is in a great position to continue making improvements and rolling out new services. We extend our best wishes to them, the people and communities they serve, now and in the future."

## School board looks at money needs

(Continued from Page 1)

it could pay for bus driver physicals, which are required every two years for drivers under 65 and every year for those over 65. However, the board made no decision on the request.

In other business, the board:

- Reviewed a bid from Don's Floor Covering of Norton to replace the tile in the hallway between the big gym and the high school building and to carpet the entryway in the Long Island build-

ing. The bid did not include removal or disposal of the tile currently in the hallway. The board decided that cost needed to be determined before a decision on the bid could be made.

- Approved a bid for junior high and high school track uniforms. The money will come from the general fund in the 2004-'05 budget.

- Looked at bids for wireless laptops and a server. No action will be taken and further discussion

will take place at the end-of-the-year meeting on Friday.

- Held closed sessions for two hours and ten minutes for employer/employee negotiations.

- Received a request from Alan Woodside that the policy of barring students from activity participation might need to be reviewed.

He suggested counseling might be considered for students who had reached the three strikes limit instead of banning them from activities.

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