

Harrison Heritage News

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HOG DAYS

George D. Slade

[Introduction: Today, there are numerous reminders of the days when butchering hogs was commonplace, including black iron kettles, stone jars, and smokehouses. (Illustrating this article are several examples of Harrison County smokehouses.) The hog killing process described here was handed down through generations, and probably changed little from colonial days through the mid-1900s. Editor.]



(Above) This large ante-bellum frame smokehouse is still standing on the former estate of Col. George W. Berry, on a hill overlooking Berry, Ky. The interior contains tiers used to hang hams or other meat to be smoked or cured. Holes along the eaves where the smoke emerged can be seen. Photo, 2001, Wm. A. Penn.

After I was asked to write a story about butchering hogs and the activity associated with same, I realized that it has been at least seventy-five years since I last witnessed this activity. If my memories of hog killings from the late 1920s do not agree with yours, please do not judge me too harshly. I was too young to be of much help with the work. It was definitely a man's job.

Preparations were begun at least a day in advance. It was usually a community affair. Neighbors would drive their meat hogs into a barn lot near where the hogs were to be butchered. If there were two trees twelve to fourteen feet apart with limbs six to seven feet from the ground, a tier pole

would be brought from the barn and suspended between the trees resting on the limbs. No trees being available, tier poles would be used to form tripods which would support the horizontal pole. More about this later.

A scalding box was a necessity. As I recall, the one our family used looked something like a flat-bottomed row boat, about four feet wide, eight feet long, and two feet deep. It was made of metal so as to hold water and withstand heat. The box was placed on iron pipes supported by large

limestone rocks at a height of about eighteen inches from the ground. A goodly supply of long firewood was hauled and placed near the scalding box. The area under the scalding box was filled with kindling and wood. The box was filled a little over half full with water which had been hauled in a barrel from the cistern or well on a one-horse sled. Sleds were very important to the hog butchering operation.

By this time, an ample supply of coarse salt had been laid in as well as black and red pepper, sage, brown sugar, and so forth. Knives were sharpened until they would "shave the hair from your arm." All the wash tubs on the place were scrubbed clean. The smokehouse was also cleaned and made ready. If there was going to be more meat than could be laid in the smokehouse, tier poles might be used to make a table in the barn. Sausage sacks were sewn from material taken from cotton sugar or feed sacks or from new unbleached cotton muslin. Now that preparations had been made, we retired

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Harrison County Historical Society

Jane Adams Whitehead - Secretary

Cynthiana Boy Scouts Was Topic of July Meeting - Jim Swinford Speaker

At the, July 15, 2004, Harrison County Historical Society meeting, members and guests welcomed back Jim Swinford, who presented the fascinating story of the Boy Scouts, their history, the scouting movement in Cynthiana, and the current Boy Scout troop. Thanks, Jim, for your presentation, and for your work with the Boy Scouts.

AUGUST MEETING TO FOCUS ON GRIFFITH HOUSE RESTORATION August 19, 2004

Melinda Boyd is returning to speak on the Griffith house and farm, or the Silverlake Place, near Broadwell, presently being restored by the University of Kentucky. The meeting is open to the public at 7 pm in the Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library. Be sure to attend for an update on this important project.

New Book: Historic Battle Grove New Book: Historic Battle Grove Cemetery - Self-Guided Tour

A thirty-page, spiral bound guidebook, by Charles Feix, which describes 22 monuments and includes a guide map, is \$5.00 at the cemetery office. To order by mail, send \$7.00, which includes postage and handling, to: Battle Grove Cemetery, 531 East Pike Street, Cynthiana, Kentucky 41031.

HANDY HOUSE MEETING

The Committee to Save the Handy House will meet August 26, 7 PM at Cynthiana Christian Church. The public is invited to make suggestions.

Harrison County, Ky., History on the Internet:

- www.cynthianaky.com - Harrison Heritage News back issues are archived on the "Historical Society link found at cynthianaky.com." (Internet search engine www.google.com searches these back issues.) Church photos, history and other information is on this site.
- Battle of Cynthiana Reenactment Information - www.battleofcynthiana.org
- Hinkson and Ruddle Station Historical Society: www.ramsha1780.org

Please contact the editor to list your link to Harrison County, Ky., history.

CYNTHIANA-HARRISON COUNTY MUSEUM

112 S. Walnut St., Cynthiana, Ky. 41031 Hrs: 10-5 Fri-Sat

Martha Barnes

All of us at the museum are hopeful that the fine readership of this outstanding newsletter, having read last month's issue, are inspired to become a museum volunteer/ supporter/worker/cheerleader. We are proud of our ten years of preserving and sharing the history of Cynthiana and Harrison County. We feel successful - however, our goals and dreams are lofty. The museum and its annex are filled to capacity. Moving the entire museum collection to the annex - the old Rohs Theatre building - is under serious consideration. Indeed, there are so many things to consider. We want to "do it right." Therefore, additional money and manpower/womanpower are essential. May I reiterate that your support, your promotion, your time, your talent, and or/your treasure are vital for this dream to be fulfilled.

The Cynthiana/Harrison County Museum is this community's # 1 tourist attraction. Although we are open only on Fridays and Saturdays, our visitor sign-in ledgers affirm this contribution to tourism. Of course, if we have more volunteers, we could expand our hours of operation. The museum is the property of the citizens of this community. The museum exemplifies the community's efforts to preserve its history - the museum demonstrates the community's awareness of needing to know the way we were to better understand and appreciate the way we are, where we are going, and what we desire for future generations. Please join us.

As we reflect on preservation, I feel compelled to mention the house on the Handy Farm (the site of our proposed park). The house still stands! Our leaders must be applauded for at least thinking before bulldozing. I truly understand that funding is an issue - I understand that quite well. However, let's have something special here in our community. Let's be proud of our preservation efforts. The house does not have to be restored to a certain historical time period - just saved - a place for a welcome center, receptions, art shows, history displays, craft sales, etc. etc. - the focal point of our new park! Officials would be better remembered for preservation of this house than construction of a modern building.

I revisited a book about Whitehaven - a wonderful restored house near Paducah - a welcome center. Yes, government funding was available - but the house actually was saved because of the wisdom of the officials and leaders.

On a recent trip to the Horse Park, we walked near the administration building. That building is a simple 1866 farmhouse - which was preserved on site. The list goes on and on! Ever onward, citizens of Cynthiana and Harrison County!

(*Hog Days, continued from page 1*) early knowing that the next day was going to be a long one.

We arise long before daybreak. Dad goes out and douses the wood under the scalding box with coal oil and starts the fire. He milks the cows, feeds the horses, and eats breakfast. After breakfast, he gears two horses and hitches each to a sled. By this time, the neighbors have weather predictions so forecasts had to be made on the spot. Each person who cared to do so would give his opinion as to what the weather would be for the next forty-eight hours. After all, a whole year's supply of meat might depend on the weather for the next two or three days. Warm days with rain could be a disaster. Zero degrees the first night might be nearly as bad.

Usually, there was an individual in the neighborhood who was considered to be an expert at shooting hog humanely. You might hear someone say, "I've seen old Joe shoot twenty hogs in a row and not even one did squeal." The hogs to be slaughtered were kept in a lot back of the barn and driven out one at a time. At this time, everything was slow and easy. An excited hog could cause havoc. After the hog had entered the lot, a few grains of corn were thrown on the ground for the hog to eat so as to get its head down. The appointed marksman steps up with his .22 caliber rifle, take aim, and fires. The hog drops to its knees and falls over. A person with a razor-sharp knife sticks the hog in the throat and makes a slit for the blood to drain.

The temperature of the water in the scalding box has been checked to make sure that it is just right. If too hot, it will cook the meat; not hot enough, it will not loosen the hair. More wood is added to the fire as needed. The hog is loaded onto the sled and it is pulled alongside the box. It is removed from the sled and into the hot water, then turned over and over until a test determines that the hair is ready to be scraped from the carcass. The hog is returned to the sled and all hands begin scraping away the hair with bell-shaped scrapers made for the purpose or with dull butcher knives. Sometimes it was necessary to put more water onto stubborn spots to get the hair loose.

After all of the hair has been removed from the hog carcass, a slit is cut in each back leg just above the hoof and between the tendon or hamstring and the leg bone. The sled with the hog is the moved to the previously mentioned horizontal pole. One person stands ready with a hickory stick about two inches in diameter and twenty inches long, sharpened on both ends. This is called a gambrel stick. Other people lift the hog until the rear legs straddle the horizontal pole. The gambrel stick is inserted through the slits in the legs and the hog is left hanging. [see photo below].

By this time, a second live hog has been brought from the pen behind the barn and the process repeated. In the meantime, some folks have begun to work on the hanging carcass. With the use of a very sharp knife, the hog's head is removed and set aside. A large wash tub is placed on the ground under the carcass. Starting at the very back end and being careful not to pierce the intestinal membrane, the stomach is slit open all the way. To prevent leakage, the large intestines are tied off at the end. All the "innards" are then deposited into the tub below. The liver is removed and the gall bladder cut free from same. Other "off-alls" saved are heart and kidneys, and for some folks, the lungs, stomach, small intestines, and bladder. In fact, very little is wasted. By this time, yet another hog is hanging and the process goes on until the last hog carcass is hanging. After the "innards" are removed, buckets of water are brought and, (continued p. 4)

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(Right) Frame smokehouses like this one near Rutland were common in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Photo, 1987, Wm. A. Penn.

(Left) Hog dressing scene showing hog carcass on a gambrel stick. Iron pot for boiling water at right. Photo, "Slaughtering Hogs," The Foxfire Book, (1972).



(HOG DAYS Continued from page 3)

(Right) This early brick smokehouse is on the former Coleman-Desha plantation behind The Oaks, built c. 1812, on Oddville Pike, Cynthiana, Ky. Inside were two hollowed out salt logs used to cure meats. Although smokehouses were generally locked to prevent theft, during the Civil War, some of Lucius Desha's slaves broke into this one, took all the hams, bacon and shoulders, and fled. The house is now owned by Mr. Wesley Newkirk. (Penn, *Rattling Spurs and Broad-Brimmed Hats*, p. 96). Photo, 1987, Wm. A. Penn



the water is sloshed into the cavity until it is rinsed clean. The carcass is then taken down and placed on a table or sled. The leaf fat which held the intestines is removed and saved for the lard kettle. On the inside

of the carcass, a cut is made from one end to the other, all the way to the middle of the backbone. The backbone is removed, next the tenderloins and then the spareribs. By this old-fashioned method, you will not have porkchops. Each side is then "blocked," or cut, into three sections - ham, "middlin'", and shoulder. These blocked sections are then laid out on tables or shelves in the smokehouse to "cool out" overnight. The neighbors usually take their hog carcass home in halves to "work up" there.

The next day is going to be a busy one working up the "off-alls." You can be sure we are going to have a variety of hog meat menus for awhile. If many hogs were slaughtered, there is going to be a lot of liver; some of which might be made into "liver pudding" or fried with onions. Much of it was given to other families who did not have hogs. The heart was cooked, cut up, and pickled along with feet, tail, ears, and snout.

Sweet breads (pancreas) were usually fried the first day as these would not keep for long. Brains were soaked in salt water, membranes removed, scrambled with eggs and fried. The tongue is dipped in boiling water, scraped, cooked, allowed to cool then sliced for sandwiches. Skins were roasted until the grease had drained, then salted for snacks. I do not recall that we ever did, but some folks made "chittlins." This was accomplished by taking the stomach and intestines, washing them thoroughly, cutting into small pieces, soak four to five days in salt water, rinse, drain, dip in a cornmeal batter, and fry. Tenderloins were not cured, but sliced and fried. Backbones and spareribs were usually boiled, then baked in the oven, and served with sauerkraut. Some folks ate the "lights", or lungs, but we did not. We either gave them away or we fed the to the dogs. There was another use for the small intestines which I do not recall that we did. The intestines were washed very clean, stuffed with sausage, and hung in the smoke house. As I mentioned earlier, one of the things we saved was the bladder. Why? Well, we washed it, blew it up tight, tied a string around the opening, and we had a balloon.

The hog's head furnished a variety of dishes besides the ears, snout, and tongue previously mentioned. The jowls, or jaws, were removed and cured with the bacon. After the eyes were cut from the face, it was cut in half, soaked in cool water overnight, rinsed, then cooked in salted water until the meat was loose from the bones. The meat was separated from the bones and the bones discarded. From here, there are a variety of uses. Just about every one you talk to did something different and has a different name for it.

Some ground the meat, then added red pepper, onion, black pepper, vinegar, and meal. We strained the broth; it was cooked to remove any small bones and then reheated. Some of the ground meat was added, then cornmeal stirred in until it was thick. This was poured into crocks and pans and allowed to cool. Later, it was sliced and fried. Some called this "Scrapple." We called it "hog head mush." Other recipes added the ground up ears, feet, and other parts; then it was allowed to jell in a crock or pan and called it "souse." I am sure that whoever reads this will have their own recipe.

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(HOG DAYS - Continued from page 4)

While the women folks were "working up" the hog's head in the kitchen, Dad was in the smokehouse trimming the meat. I should mention here that to some folks the phases of the moon were very important at hog slaughtering time. You must do it during a full moon or nearly so. As the moon is waning, it will push out the grease and you will have more lard.

As hams, shoulders, and bacon are trimmed to shape, the fat trimmings are placed in one tub, the lean in another. After the meat is shaped, it is salted down. Here again, each family had their own method. Some used a wooden box into which the meat was placed, then covered with coarse salt. Others placed the meat on tables and shelves in the smokehouse, rubbed in salt, then leaving it covered with salt. Dad used this method except he made a mixture of salt, brown, sugar, black pepper and other ingredients. He did not stack the meat, thus allowing good ventilation.

Some families liked smoked meat. If this was desirable, after about eight weeks, the meat was taken out of the salt mixture and washed clean. Wires were pushed through each piece, then the meat was hung overhead in the smokehouse. Using green hickory bark, chips and wet corn cobs, a fire is built on the dirt or brick floor, or, if a wooden floor, in a tub. A good tight smokehouse was very important. The meat was allowed to smoke for five to six days. After this, it was dusted with a mixture of borax and black pepper. A brown paper bag was slipped up over each piece of meat and tied tightly around the wire. A handful of borax was then poured around the wire at the bag opening. This was to prevent the "skipper fly" from getting to the meat and laying its eggs.

Back to the meat trimming. Usually, after the meat was trimmed, next on the agenda was sausage making. The lean meat trimmings were cut into strips small enough to feed into the mouth of the sausage mill. Seasoning in proportion to the weight was added and stirred until well mixed. Again, the recipes for seasoning varied among families. One recipe that Hallie Martin gave me was used by her father, Hickman Darnell. It is as follows: 250 lbs. meat, 3 1/2 quarts salt, 1/2 lb. black pepper, 1/2 lb. saltpetre and 3/4 lb. brown sugar. To this was added sage and ground hot red pepper. Then the laborious task of turning the grinder was begun. After a few pounds were ground, a skillet was put on the stove. Some patties were made, fried and taste-tested to determine if the seasoning was right. After the sausage was ground, it was pressed into the cotton bags forming rolls about four inches in diameter and thirty inches long. The open ends were tied and the rolls were hung in the smokehouse to keep cool. When a mess of sausage was wanted, you just sliced the amount needed at the time.

And now for lard making. The black cast iron lard kettles were put to a variety of uses in those days, so before making lard, they had to be scrubbed thoroughly. After rinsing, the kettles were placed on stones which held them about ten inches from the ground. A wood fire was built under the kettle. The leaf, or "gut" fat, was considered inferior to the other fat, so it was rendered separately. As the kettle heated, some of the leaf fat was dumped in and stirred over the interior of the kettle to season the kettle. This fat was then removed and discarded or saved for making soap. A very small amount of water is put into the kettle, then the other fat which has been cut into pieces about the size of an egg is added. Slow cooking and frequent stirring with a wooden paddle is necessary to keep the lard from scorching. Sometimes a little soda was added to decrease smoking and to prevent the lard from tasting strong. When the cooking is finished, many hours later, the water will have evaporated and the "cracklins" fallen to the bottom. The lard is dipped out and strained through a cotton cloth into metal cans or stone jars. (Many a stone jar has been cracked from pouring hot lard into it.) When you get near the bottom of the kettle, the "cracklins" and lard are dipped into a cotton bag and squeezed between two boards hinged at one end. To extract more lard from the "cracklins," some folks had a screw-drive lard press. "Cracklins" were incorporated into making cornbread, salted and eaten as a snack, or for chicken feed.

As you can see, the hog played a very important role in the days before household refrigerators, automobiles, and supermarkets. I hope that this story will help some of the younger generation more

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thoroughly understand hog days and bring back memories for the older folks. As I said at the beginning, I know some will not agree with all that I have written. That is to be expected. Those involved at the time did not agree, as can be observed by the many recipes and methods. "PASS THE PICKLED PIG FEET, HOWDEE!" ("Hog Days" was written by George D. Slade)

Harrison County, Kentucky, Historical Publications

available from Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum, 112 South Walnut Street, P.O. Box 411, Cynthiana, KY 41031 (859-234-7179); open Fridays and Saturdays 10 AM - 5 PM:

- Boyd, Lucinda, *Chronicles of Cynthiana*. This is a reprint of the rare 1894 edition, which includes family histories, the famous account of David Sheely and his ghost, and other historical sketches and scattered accounts of persons and events connected with Cynthiana and Harrison County. 262 pp. Hardbound. \$20.00.

- June 1896 *Cynthiana Democrat* reprint. This was a special edition with biographical sketches and photographs of prominent men and women; many photographs of buildings; city/county government, church and school information is included. 24 pp. Paperback, 12"x18". \$5.00

- *Cynthiana Since 1790*. Virgil Peddicord (1986). Mr. Peddicord attempted to list the owners/businesses located on each lot from the founding of the city through the mid-1980s, including subdivisions added through 1923. 171 pp. (See separate index below). Paperback. \$20.00

- *Index - Cynthiana Since 1790* (William A. Penn). Mr. Peddicord did not prepare a comprehensive index for his book. This supplemental index contains about 3,500 names and a reference city street map. 30 pp. Paperback. \$3.00

- *Writings of Colonel William M. Moore, (1837-1927)* compiled by Andrew B. "Andy" Peak (2002). Includes 1921-1922 articles he wrote for the *Cynthiana Democrat* about his life. He was born in Harrison Co., but his family soon moved to Lewis Co., Mo.; in 1849 he moved back to Harrison Co., and he wrote much about life in Cynthiana in the early 1850s; he joined the CSA army in 1861 and fought in battles at Lexington, Mo.; Pea Ridge, Arkansas; and Shiloh, Tenn. The book includes several family obituaries and two letters that contain Moore genealogy. 10 family photographs; index; paperback, 71 pp. \$10.00/ \$3.00 shipping. Limited supply.

- *This Old House* by Katherine Wilson. Now back in print, this book tells the stories of twenty-six early Harrison Co. houses and the families who have occupied them. Much material on Harrison Co. history. Exterior and interior b & w photos of each house. Originally printed 1956-1957. 70 pp., new index, paperback. \$15.00 (An index is available for earlier editions, which had no index).

- *Cromwell's Comments*, by John M. Cromwell (1862-1951) is a reprint of Cromwell's 1928-1941 *Cynthiana Democrat* columns on the history of Cynthiana (Harrison Co., KY). A fine writer and historian, Mr. Cromwell covered many topics, including fairs, horses, fires, churches, businesses, cemeteries, government, Civil War, social events, and the Licking River. Sometimes he quoted old county histories, updated the information, and then added his personal reminiscences of interesting personalities from his career as banker and mayor. William A. Penn and George D. Slade, editors. Paperback; preface; 2 maps; 21 photos; 4 illus.; annotated; index; 200 pp. (*Cynthiana Democrat*, 2002), \$10 plus \$3 shipping.

Shipping/handling for above books: Please include a handling and shipping fee of \$4.00 for first book (unless otherwise noted above), \$2.50 for each additional book; you will be notified if special shipping fees apply. No shipping fee on *Index - Cynthiana Since 1790*, if ordered with the book. Make checks/money orders payable to "Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum." No credit cards. Prices/fees subject to change.

Membership - Harrison County Historical Society- Join Today

Send name and address with dues to: Harrison County Historical Society, P. O. Box 411, Cynthiana, Kentucky 41031. Membership fee \$5.00 (includes Harrison Heritage News) due annually January 1.

Cynthiana Civil War Driving Tour Brochure Available

Visit the Harrison County Chamber next to the Old Jail on W. Pike Street or the Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum for a free tour guide brochure. The illustrated guide includes photos of the commanders, an 1862 battle print, and a detailed map. Don't miss the Civil War interpretive sign in front of the courthouse.