

Gaylord Atkinson remembers his mother's (Amy Neiswanger Atkinson's) work week schedule,

Mother's schedule on the farm

Background: We had no electricity or running water. We had a cistern that collected water from the barn roof. A pipe ran from the cistern to a hand pump in the kitchen. Occasionally "leathers" that formed a seal between the piston and the cylinder wall of the pump would dry and the seal would be lost and you could pump and get no water. You then had to prime the pump by adding some water to wet the leather so it would expand and reform the seal.

Cistern water was used for washing our hands, washing dishes and clothes. It was used for everything except drinking and cooking. Drinking and cooking water was obtained from a shallow well about 100 yards from the house, or later from a well at my grandparent's house about a half mile from our house. We had a 90 feet deep well, and windmill near the house but the water from that well contained a lot of iron and other minerals and tasted bad. It never ran out of water and was used for livestock and irrigation. This well was also our refrigerator. It was about 18 inches in diameter, deep and cool. Food items were placed in a pail, and with a rope tied to the handle, lowered into the well.

Mother had a weekly schedule.

Monday was laundry

Tuesday was ironing

Wednesday was baking

On **Monday** mother (with help) did laundry, so Sunday evening water was pumped from the cistern and poured into a wash boiler which on the wood burning cook stove. The water may have been heated some Sunday evening. Early Monday morning it was heated to a very hot temperature. The washing machine was made ready. We had a 4 horse power Cushman engine that was used for various things, like grinding chicken feed, but on Mondays it provided the power for the washing machine. The engine, very much larger than a present day 4 HP engine and probably weighed about 200lb so it was a task to move it. The washing machine was located in a screened in porch connected to the kitchen. Buckets of hot water were carried from the kitchen stove to the washing machine until the boiler could be carried. The porch was not heated but in the winter the screen was covered with a semi transparent "oil cloth". There was a small opening in the east wall near the floor to allow a belt to run from the washing machine to the engine.

The washing machine had a dasher extending down from the lid into the bowl of the machine. As I remember, the dasher consisted of three or four wooden pins about 6 inches long extending down from about a 10 inch round board that, when the lid was closed, extended down into the water and rotated back and forth.

Two rinse tubs were positioned next to the machine. The washer had a wringer. The wringer consisted of two rubber coated cylinders about 3 inches in diameter and about 12 inches long. They were firmly pressed together with a spring. When a load was finished washing, the lid was opened and the wringer was positioned between the washer

and the first rinse tub. The clothes were pulled up from the washer with a wood rod about an inch in diameter and three feet long and carefully inserted in the wringer. Things often went wrong. The most common was that the clothes wrapped around one of the cylinders. A lever then had to be quickly pushed to first, stop the wringer rotation, and then, to reverse the rotation.

Wringers were dangerous. A hand could get caught in the wringer resulting in injuries ranging from bursae to broken bones or torn skin. There was an emergency release bar above the wringer, but sometimes it was not reached in time and the individual tried to pull their hand out which could tear skin from their hand or arm. Or if a woman bent down to get clothing from the tub, a dress could be caught in the wringer and apparently breasts have been caught in the wringer. This led to the often used expression "getting your tit caught in the wringer" for any very difficult situation.

You may know of the Watergate story. Katherine Graham was the owner of the Washington Post and the Post was publishing the Woodward-Bernstein articles on Watergate and President Nixon. I found the exact quote on Wikipedia: "In conjunction with the Watergate scandal, Graham was the subject of one of the best-known threats in American journalistic history. It occurred in 1972, when Nixon's Attorney General, John Mitchell warned reporter Carl Bernstein about a forthcoming article: "Katie Graham's gonna get her tit caught in a big fat wringer if that's published."

Back to washing. The clothes were first run through the wringer from the washer to the first rinse tub, then through the wringer to the second rinse and then through the wringer to a cloth basket to be taken outside to a clothesline to dry. I remember that I often ran the wringer operation at an age of about 10 to 12. We were instructed to be very careful in running this dangerous operation. None of our family were ever injured by a wringer since we were taught to respect it.

Tuesday was ironing day. As I remember she had three irons. I have one of them. She kept two of them on the stove to be heated while she ironed with the third. When it cooled she put it on the stove and took another one. At some time she got a gasoline heated iron that she used in the summer when the stove was not hot. I think Tuesdays also included mending any damaged clothing, including "darning" socks, where holes were mended by adding new yarn.

Since **Wednesday** was baking, we always had mashed potatoes Tuesday evening. Potatoes were boiled and the "potato water" was needed to add to the bread "starter" The starter was a yeast solution used in making bread. The starter that mother used had been obtained at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

The starch in the potato water was nutrient for the yeast. It was added to the starter Tuesday evening and placed in a warm place overnight. In the morning part of the starter was used for bread making and part saved for the following week. Mother kept that started well into the 1970s. The 1893 starter was shared with most of the farm families in the region. At times a neighbor "lost their starter" and came to mother to get a replacement. I do not remember that mother ever lost her starter.

She baked six large loaves every Wednesday. It was the best bread I have ever had; fresh out of the oven it was wonderful.

Flour was purchased in 48 pound lots, contained in cloth sacks. In the 1930s the cloth of flour sacks (and chicken feed sacks) were made with pre-printed patterns. The sacks were then used to make clothing. It was easy to recognize a “feed sack” garment and it was not good to wear a shirt or blouse made from sack cloth to school.