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MAMA'S BUTTER

By Inez Schneider Whitney

When I have hot biscuits, I often long for some of the good butter Mama used to make. She not only made it for the family but took it to the small pioneer town of Custer three miles from our Oklahoma farm. There at the general store run by Jeff Wilson and his two sons, Devert and Bus, she traded the butter for groceries. The Wilsons always had requests for Mama's butter from many of the town folks.

The first churn I remember was the dasher type. The churn was a tall wooden cylinder, larger at the bottom, encircled by several metal bands to hold it together. The dasher was a wooden stick with a round blunt end like a wooden potato masher. It went through a hole in the lid. Mama would fill the churn half full of cream she had skimmed off the milk that Papa had brought in from our cows. Then the dasher was plunged up and down until the butter came. I was too small to help very much, but I used to watch Mama, Papa, or one of my grandpas at the task.

In Mama's scrapbook, there's a poem titled "The Old Dash Churn," whose content is very true:

*"'Twas a lesson of patience I had to learn
To pound for an hour that old dash churn.
An hour I said — 'twas sometimes near three
E'er the white butter specks round the dash I'd see."*

Then came the rotary churn. What excitement when Papa brought it home. We were the only family in the neighborhood that had one, and friends were always dropping by to have a look.

It was a large wooden barrel with metal bands. It fitted on a frame and was operated by a crank that turned the churn end over end. By then, I was old enough to help; it was fun at first, but the novelty soon wore off and the task turned into drudgery. It would seem hours before I would hear the cloppity-clop of the butter.

A verse from "The Rotary Churn," another poem in Mama's scrapbook, describes exactly the way I felt:

*"It's the strangest contraption that I've ever seen,
An' they call it a great labor-savin' machine.
But I'm tired of workin' the dasted old thing
That just keeps my hand goin' round in a ring
An' I'm willin' to trade off its turnity-turn
For the up-and-down dash of the old-fashioned churn."*

What memories I have of Mama's butter making! ❀

INEZ SCHNEIDER WHITNEY, during these WESTVIEW years, has enriched our journal and our lives by sharing pioneer memories. Mrs. Whitney, whose formative years were spent near Custer City, has lived in Arlington, Virginia, since 1943.



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