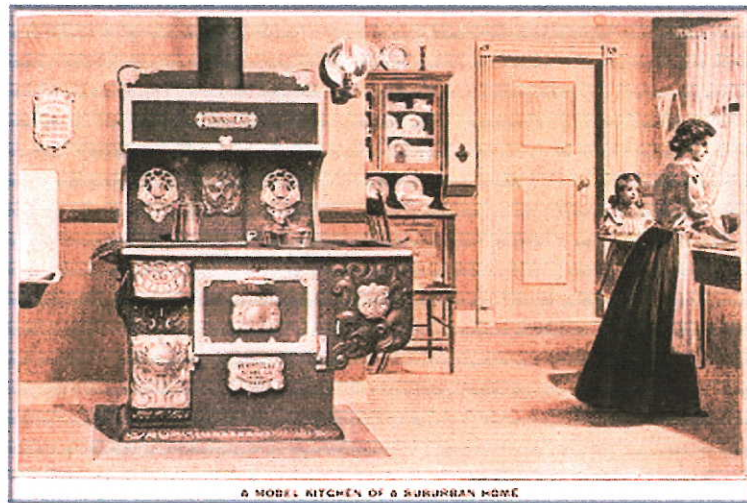


# A Wood Stove Cooking Workshop



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The character and quality of life changed dramatically in Wisconsin during the 1920's and 30's. The effects of technological change were most obvious in the cities. By the 1920's most small cities had paved streets, municipal electricity and water systems, telephone systems, streetlights, and sewage systems. The homes of most urban Wisconsinites had running water and indoor plumbing. Electricity appeared in homes on a grand scale during the 1920s, at first for illumination but by the end of the decade for washing or sewing machines, irons, toasters, mixers, and vacuum cleaners. Refrigerators began to replace iceboxes for short-term food preservation, and electric fans began to cool hot summer days.

Change came more slowly for country people, who would wait another decade or two for electric appliances. Their lives were more profoundly transformed by the gasoline-powered automobile and truck, where effects were especially acute in sparsely populated agricultural states such as Wisconsin.

In actuality, Wisconsin had done a better than average job of electrifying its farms. Already in 1931, before the creation of the REA, just over 20% of Wisconsin's farms were electrified, almost double the national average and the third highest number in the Midwest. From past expense lists we can tell that the Schumachers got their electricity in 1926. Some of the original knob and tube wiring is still visible in the white barn. Electricity would have been installed in the barn before the house, as the barn was the "economic engine" of the farm.

And sometimes the women themselves made choices that rejected the adoption of modern household equipment. In the 1920s, the choice was often made to acquire communication and transportation technology. "After all", one woman said, "You can't go to town in a bathtub." Telephones, radios, and automobiles could all assist women in their roles as farm producers and lessen their sense of isolation. Midwestern farm women were comparatively well off when it came to modern transportation and communication technology. In 1919, 73% had access to an automobile, and 85% had telephones. The Schumacher's got their phone line in 1917, nine years before they had electricity.

The Schumacher's never did have an ice box, and there was no such thing as an electric refrigerator. Rather, they had what Marcella called a "drop" or sort of an insulated dumb waiter that went from the pantry down into the stone basement to keep the food cool. The Pantry was where the bathroom is now. With no modern furnace to keep the basement warm, thick stone walls, a gravel floor and a window open to the outside on cool days and nights, the cellar was probably as cool as a period icebox. There is a cistern underneath the kitchen floor that was used to collect rain water from the roof. On a windy day the windmill in the yard brought up water, and you brought it into the house in a bucket, winter or summer. On days when there was no wind you could pump it up by hand, or use the water from the cistern. A hand pump was used to bring the water from the cistern to the sink, and then it drained out the north wall into a cess pit, no septic system here! You had to be careful not to pump the cistern dry or there would be no soft water for washing, and that meant going out to pump well water regardless of the weather!

Regarding the menu, it's all about the seasons. When speaking about food preparation throughout any period of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the very first thing to consider is the season. No matter one's ethnic background or economic standing, the season of the year will determine the meal being served. Food preservation techniques may have been improved, but the season must still be considered. Fall is the time of abundance. The cellars are full of preserved fruits and vegetables, root crops are packed in damp sand for a long winter's storage. The hogs have been butchered, and the hams hung for smoking, the scraps and scrapple are cooked and packed in lard-



filled crocks in the cellar, or jarred and put on shelves. All the bounty of the Summer that can be preserved has been, and the family will eat well this winter if they have planned properly.

While they did have the stores in town, they were usually only used for staples that couldn't be produced or stored, sugar, flour, baking powder, yeast, salt and the like. Merchants in the community had their goods shipped in by train, in boxes, kegs and barrels, in heavy cotton or hemp bags. There were no prepackaged goods, you went to the store and bought a pound or two of what you needed. Butter was churned as needed and packed in crocks in the cellar. Bread was baked weekly, or more often in large families, and was generally an all day affair. You can see from the attached lists that there were many prepared products added to store shelves in the 20's and 30's. In larger cities most definitely, but in rural Wisconsin and other parts of the country, these were rarely available.

The Vegetable Garden was critical to the family's survival as it produced an astonishing amount of food. Carrots, potatoes, turnips, beets, and rutabagas could be eaten during the growing season, and then easily stored over the winter in damp sand in the basement or root cellar. Onions could be enjoyed as spring onions, and then when mature, tied in bundles and hung from the rafters. Tomatoes, green beans, peas and a variety of greens such as spinach and kale could be jarred and processed and stored on shelves almost indefinitely. Cabbage was converted into Kraut, and cucumbers into any number of styles of Pickles, kept under brine in crocks in the cellar. Corn was dried and ground into meal for humans and animals alike. Shell beans could be dried and stored indefinitely, and made delicious stews and hot pots all winter long. Any number of types of winter squash and pumpkins could be easily and prolifically grown and then stored in the cool conditions of the cellar. There was always pumpkin for the Thanksgiving pie!! Seeds of successful varieties were always saved for planting the following Spring.

While glass canning jar technology had been around since the 1880's much preservation was still done in large stoneware 2 or 5 gallon crocks. Fruits were heavily sugared and packed in crocks, sauerkraut and pickles were weighed down in brine. Apples were stored in barrels in the cellar. When Marcella's mother did start using glass jars, we know she would put up hundreds of quarts of Rhubarb, Mulberries, Cherries, Strawberries and Plums to feed her family all winter. A hog was butchered usually in the Fall, and the neighbors would come to help as it was a several day project. The Hams would be salted and smoked and hung in the oat bin until they were eaten. The rest of the carcass was cooked down and packed into crocks. Cooked meats could be layered in crocks with rendered fat and pieces pulled out as desired.

After the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and in mid-1930 with a severe drought ravaging the agricultural heartland of the USA, the Great Depression settled in until 1937, with the lingering effects staying until WWII started in 1941. People who grew up during the Depression said, "No one had any money. We were all in the same boat. We really didn't know we were poor all of a sudden because we had nothing to start with." Neighbors helped each other through hard times, sickness, and accidents. Farm families got together with neighbors at school programs, church dinners, or dances. Children and adults found ways to have fun for free – playing board games, listening to the radio, or going to outdoor movies in town. Farm families in general were less affected than City Folks because of their self-subsistence. Times were always hard on the farm, depression or no. My grandfather mortgaged the farm every Spring to buy seed, and paid the note back every Fall with the sales of his crops. He always worked a second job just to have a little actual cash on hand, usually logging or in the saw mills.

The stove was purchased by the Marcella Schumacher Pendall Trust in the mid 1990s in anticipation of restoring the 1906 farmhouse. The original stove had long been removed as the



house was modernized over the years. The new stove stood in the kitchen until May 1998 when it was installed by Ernest Bingham of the Great American Chimney Co. He rebuilt the chimney above the roof top and installed copper shield behind the stove to ensure that the stove met with modern building standards.

The stove is a model 8-20D Riverside, blue porcelain, manufactured by Rock Island Stove Company, Rock Island, Illinois. While we do not have an exact date of manufacture, we can be certain that this model was manufactured during the 1920s because that's when the Rock Island Stove Company began producing porcelain enameled stoves in a variety of colors. These stoves were designed to be functional and decorative.

A 1925 article in the Rock Island newspaper states:

"In 1920, the company built a complete plant for doing porcelain enameling, and have since finished their cookers and heaters with this beautiful material in blue, brown, gray and white."

The Rock Island Stove Company was started in 1868 and likely went under in 1929 when the market collapsed. There is no newspaper record for the company after 1929.

Cooking on a wood stove has a bit of a learning curve as the heat can best be described as uneven. It is a continual dance of moving pots and pans on the stove top to find the best temperature for what you are cooking. The area over the firebox will always be the hottest, and the further away you go, the cooler the surface. This particular stove has a damper that you can use to shift the heat more to the surface, or more to the oven, depending on where you are cooking. We are fortunate to have a temperature gauge on the front of the oven which seems to be fairly accurate. Still, it takes almost 40 minutes of intense burning to get the oven into the cookable range. The oven does not heat from the bottom, it heats primarily from the top, so cooking must be done on the floor of the oven as opposed to the center rack, or everything will be burned. Once the volume of cast iron that is the stove and oven compartment are heated to temperature, it will retain its heat for a long time.

There is a warming oven on the top of the stove that will do exactly that, keep one course warm while you finish the other items. There is also a water reservoir on the side of the stove that would have been used for domestic hot water, but is cracked, and no longer functional.

The other learning curve is building and managing the fire. Open the dampers wide, fill the firebox with newspaper and kindling and light the fire. Never use an accelerant as it can burn too hot too quickly and stress the metal. Build the fire by adding progressively larger pieces of wood until the fire is brightly burning. Adjust the dampers back to about half and continue to build the fire. The fire needs to be fed about every 10 minutes until the stove is heated up, then you can slow down and bit and cook on the embers. The oven temperature gauge is your guide when the stove is ready to cook. If all you are using is the stove top, a much slower fire can be built and maintained. Remember, all surfaces are hot, always have a potholder or pad in your hand when working at the stove!!

### **New American food introductions:**

[1920] La Choy Food Products, Eskimo Pies, Good Humor ice cream, Baby Ruth & Oh Henry! candy bars,

[1921] Wonder Bread, Betty Crocker (General Mills baking mixes), Land O'Lakes (brand butter), Sanka (freeze dried decaffeinated coffee), Chuckles (fruit jelly candies), White Castle (fast food chain), Lindy's (NYC restaurant famous for cheesecake), Sardis (NYC restaurant of the stars), Quaker Oats quick oats

[1922] Clapp's Vegetable Soup (first commercially prepared U.S. baby food), Girl Scout Cookies, Pep (breakfast cereal), Gummi Bears, Mounds, Charleston Chew, Clark Bars (candy bars)

[1923] Pet Milk (canned product), Macoun apples, Welch's grape jelly, Popsicles, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, Mounds (candy bar), Yoo-Hoo chocolate drink, Sanka Coffee

[1924] Caesar Salad, Wheaties (breakfast cereal), Bit-O-Honey (candy bars), fruit-flavored Life Savers, Beech-Nut Coffee, Stouffer's restaurants (NYC), Birdseye brand frozen foods

[1925] Honey Maid Graham Crackers, Mr. Goodbar (candy bar)

[1926] Good Humor (ice cream novelties), Safeway & IGA (supermarket chains), Hormel Flavor-Sealed Ham (canned), Liederkranz cheese, Milk Duds (candy)

[1927] Lender's (bagels), Gerber's (baby food), Pez (breath mint/candies), Mike & Ike (coated fruit-gel candies), Pez (candy with personal dispenser, Kool-Aid (powdered drink mix), homogenized milk, Marriott's Hot Shoppes (chain restaurant)

[1928] Rice Krispies (breakfast cereal), Progresso (brand foods), Nehi (orange beverage), Velveeta cheese, Peter Pan Peanut butter, Drum Sticks (ice cream cones), Reeses Peanut Butter Cups, Butterfingers & Heath bars (candybars), Barricini Candy (NYC)

[1929] Gerber canned baby food, Columbo Yogurt, Oscar Meyer wieners, Karmelkorn, Snickers (candy bar) Twizzlers (licorice) , 7-Up

---SOURCES: The Food Timeline, *The Food Chronology*, James Trager [Henry Holt:New York] 1995 (p. 426-460), *The Century in Food*, Beverly Bundy [Collectors Press:Portland OR] 2002(p. 68-71) & *Candy: The Sweet History*, Beth Kimmerle [Collectors Press:Portland OR] 2003 (p. 35)



## **American food brands introduced in the 1930s:**

### **[1930]**

Birds Eye Frosted Foods  
Wonder Bread (sliced)  
Hostess Twinkies  
Mott's Apple Sauce  
Snickers candy bars (Mars, Inc.)  
French's Worcestershire Sauce  
Chock Full o'Nuts chain restaurants (New York City)  
Philadelphia Cheese Steak (Pat's)

### **[1931]**

Beech-Nut Baby Foods  
Bisquick (General Mills)  
Ballard Biscuits (cardboard tube packed refrigerator dough)  
Wyler's Bouillon Cubes  
Hotel Bar Butter  
Tootsie Pops

### **[1932]**

Frito Corn Chips  
Skippy Peanut Butter  
3 Musketeers (candy bar)  
Heath bar (candy bar)

### **[1933]**

Nestle Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookies  
Campbell's Chicken Noodle and Cream of Mushroom soups  
Kraft Miracle Whip  
Tree-Sweet canned orange juice  
E. & J. Gallo winery founded

### **[1934]**

Pet Evaporated Milk  
Wild Cherry flavor Life Savers  
Royal Crown Cola  
Carvel (ice cream restaurants)  
Ritz Crackers [Nabisco]

### **[1935]**

Adolph's Meat Tenderizer  
Kit Kat bar  
Five Flavors Life Savers  
ReaLemon Lemon Juice

### **[1936]**

Goya brand foods  
Waring blender  
Betty Crocker (General Mills)  
Elsie the Cow (Borden)

Spry (Unilever)  
Hungry Jack pancake mix (Pillsbury)  
Chunky Chocolate bar  
Mars Almond Bar  
Fifth Avenue (candy bar)  
Orangina (soft drink)  
Howard Johnson's restaurant chain

**[1937]**

Pepperidge Farm Bread  
Kix cereal (General Mills)  
Spam (Hormel)  
Kraft Macaroni & Cheese Dinner  
Ragu Spaghetti Sauce  
Sky Bar (New England Confectionery Co.)  
Rolo (candy)  
Smarties (Rowntree candy)

**[1938]**

Lawry's Seasoned Salt  
Mott's Apple Juice  
Nescafe (instant coffee)

**[1939]**

Lay's Potato Chips  
Cream of Wheat (5 minute)  
Dairy Queen (ice cream stores)

---SOURCES: *The Food Chronology*, James Trager [Owl Books:New York] 1995 & *The Century in Food*, Beverly Bundy [Collector's Press:Portland OR] 2002