

FUN ON THE FARM

Goal: Introduce students to the leisure activities of farm families at the turn of the century.

Objectives: At the end of the lesson, students will understand that:

Despite the fact that farm families had to work very hard, they also found time to have fun.

Times have changed our ideas about what is fun, but we do still enjoy some of the same things as early Kansas farm families.

When farm families had large jobs to accomplish, they often combined forces with their neighbors to do the work more quickly and have fun doing it.

Vocabulary: Social (noun) Hobby
Schoolhouse Quilting Bee (as in Spelling, or Husking)

From the trunk: Pictures #27 - 33
McGuffey's Reader (book)
Husking Peg

Family Fun

Make a list of the things you do for fun-- games, hobbies, TV. Could a farm family in 1900 have done any of these things?

Picture
#27 - 33



-What are these people doing for fun?

-Are their activities done alone or with other people?
How does this compare with the students' lists?

Read Arthur Grube's description of some of the things he did for fun while growing up in Kansas in the late 1800s. How many things does Mr. Grube mention that also appear on the children's lists?



Ice cream socials were a big event of the church. Ice cream and cake. Sometime an oyster supper. These were events not to be forgotten, especially if we got to take a girl to supper. In the winter we had lectures at the church by outstanding orators... Or the late summer revival services were held at camp meeting at Bonner Springs -- lots of tents -- good eats but a lot of religion too....

There was a large pond about 1/4 mile from the schoolhouse and in the winter when the ice was thick, we would grab an apple or sandwich and run to the pond to get in all the skating we could....

The first phonograph I ever saw, an Edison with little round discs, was at an entertainment at the schoolhouse. The admission charge I believe was 10 cents. Punch and Judy shows were also popular.

We had a literary society on Friday nights during the winter months. There were recitations, debates, musical selections, singing and a literary paper which was anything but gossip about everything and everybody -- no one was exempt -- Truth or lies -- This was what everyone waited for and it was the last thing on the program.

The school had a library which was available to all the children as well as the grownups. The books were acquired by having box suppers at the schoolhouse. The girl, taking a box, filled with delicious food and decorating it as pretty as they were ingenious. The boxes were auctioned off to the highest bidder. Since the boys were usually tipped off whose box it was and of course, he didn't want someone else to eat with his girl, the bidding was spirited. Sometimes, a box would bring \$5.00. The price of a good calf in those days and it was all profit for the library...

The fourth of July was picnic time, usually there would be a picnic within a mile or two of our home. A good baseball game was one of the main events between two rival neighborhood teams....A big chicken dinner, family style, was usually the custom.

One year I drove to Tonganoxie to a big barbecue. They always had some orator, who loved to talk (but said nothing) but the barbecue was plentiful and free and delicious. They would dig a deep hole, burn firewood, usually hickory until it was hot charcoal, put the beef and pork on top of green poles and cook it for hours. This was really good eatin'....

The parlor was the best furnished room in the house, was seldom used except for visitors or if one of the girls had a beau. We had a fine organ and oft times this was used on Sunday afternoon for a sing. We would sing hymns and the popular tunes of the day....

--Arthur W. Grube, *Live with me: My First 20 Years, the 80's and 90's*, Kansas City, Missouri, 1963.

Community Fun

The school and church were places where people gathered for fun. Does your community ever use your school for special events?



Schoolhouses as Centers of Community Life in Cowley County

From the beginning the schoolhouses were the religious and social centers of the various communities and in front of each school building were built hitching racks or posts to "hitch" the teams while the people gathered on the Sabbath day and listened to a sermon by the preacher, visited with their neighbors and invited someone home with them for dinner, or accepted an invitation to some other home for the day.

The community social affairs were spelling schools, singing schools and literaries. The spelling schools were held in the schoolhouses and the teacher of that particular district was usually master of ceremonies. The captains were chosen by him and the old accepted custom of "choosing up and spelling down" was the favorite method of procedure. Some of the pioneers were exceptionally good spellers and were eagerly chosen by the captains, and excitement reached a high peak when all but two or three "spelled down." The individual who succeeded in spelling everyone down was a person of distinction. Some of the old timers pronounced each syllable as they spelled it, and such words as in-com-pat-i-bil-i-ty and sim-ple-fi-ca-tion were the ones they liked best. It was a rule that the speller must pronounce the word before he started to spell it, or he "went down" for that omission. McGuffey's speller was the most popular text book.

--By Mrs. Edith Collins, Winfield *Daily Courier*,
February 25, 1952.



Activities

Spelling Bee

Use the *McGuffey's Reader* as a source of words for a spelling bee. You may wish to make it a social event by serving refreshments and inviting parents or other classes.

Husking Bee



HUSKING PEG: Ears of corn are surrounded by leaves called husks which must be removed before the corn is used. This can be done by hand, but with a husking peg and some practice, husking can be done much faster. If you have access to dried ears of corn with the husks still attached, you may wish to try your hand at husking.

The husking peg was used for both work and play. Read more about husking bees.



The Husking Bee

The husking bee has gone out of style; but years ago it used to be a weekly occurrence.

The only husking bee that I ever had the pleasure of attending was held near Auburn, about sixteen miles southwest of Topeka some four years ago (1888).

Joe Birnborner, a Dutchman, had one of those old fashioned stone barns; the mow was filled with hay, but the lower floor was cleared of cultivators, plows, mowing machines and a few more farm implements which a careful farmer will put under shelter when through their summer's use. In the center of the floor was piled about five wagon loads of jerked corn -- that is, corn with the husks still on. Every family for miles around was invited, and Mrs. Birnborner was busy all day long baking pies and cakes.

It was about this time of year. I guess a little earlier. About seven o'clock the farmers commenced to come, some in farm wagons, some in spring wagons, but nearly all the young fellows came in buggies.

The barn was lighted with lanterns, and at one end was a large headlight that must have come from an engine. (Farm threshing machines were driven by steam engines in those days.)

All the men and boys went to husking corn and looked for red ears while the girls and their mamas sat around on chairs brought from the house, and visited.

Well sir, it was a merry crowd and no mistakes, for when a red ear was found there was a hurrah and a rush, 'round and 'round the barn and sometimes out the door. In a minute or two the lucky fellow would come back with the red ear in his pocket and his face covered with smiles, while the unlucky girl would follow, her face almost red enough to set the hay on fire.

Then things would go on as before, with the exception that the red ear would be stolen inspite of the young hero's watchfulness. But it must be remembered that was not the only red ear. Oh, no. There were an exceptionally large number of red ears in that corn pile, or rather in the coat pockets of the ambitious youths. I remember the boys coming to our farm looking for red ears before the dance.

When the center of the pile was reached a great shout arose, for one of the huskers pulled out of the pile a three-gallon jug of cider. At the same time Mrs. Birnborner was seen coming from the house with a large tray filled with pumpkin pies and cakes. Glasses were produced and the pies, cakes and cider were placed on a long board table and then began a feast which lasted until everybody could eat no more pie or cake.

Then the old people visited with each other 'til about 11, while the boys and girls went buggy riding in the bright moonlight and got home sometime between then and sun-up the next day. So ended the never to be forgotten husking bee.

--By E. L. Forsyth, Shawnee County Historical Society,
December, 1950, pp. 53-54.

-Besides husking bees, what are some other times that people gathered to share work in early Kansas? Why do you think people did this?

-How did the husking bee make work more fun? Does work get done more quickly when many people help?

-Do we do things in groups today to make large jobs more fun and get done more quickly? (Car washes, fundraising suppers, school grounds cleanup)

Christmas

Picture #33



This photograph shows three children with their Christmas tree. Describe the tree and the toys the children have received. Do the ornaments on their tree look like ones we hang today?

Compare the way your family celebrates holidays to the Christmas described by Samuel W. McComb.



Christmas Dinner in 1878 was an Event

....As dinner time grew near grandma said that she wanted some help to fix up a table, as the table which we had been using all summer was only a dry goods box. We looked around to see where we could find a place and as the day was very fine and there not being much wind we spread the cloth out in the shade of the wagon.

...There was roast antelope, fried venison and roast chicken with dressing and brown gravy -- the boys got started to eating and they could hardly stop because it was so good. After we had had a real old time visit and helped the women wash up the dishes, Rube got out his fiddle and he and Sam Tedford furnished the folks some fine music.

--By Samuel W. McComb, Stafford County
Republican, December 21, 1911.