

WALLPAPERING THE OUTHOUSE

One summer day, we kids helped the folks move the furniture out of the living room. Dad and Grandpa set up sawhorses with long, wide boards across them, forming a flat surface. Dad brought in a bundle of wallpaper rolls while Mom gathered the long shears and brushes for pasting. Grandma hummed a jolly tune while she stirred a bucket of paste.

We kids pestered everyone for a chance to help. The twinkle in Grandpa's eye led us to believe that maybe we could. But we soon learned of their special plan to keep us from being underfoot, and out of the house, while the big folks were busy putting fresh wallpaper on the walls.

"There's a special job that needs doing, and you four kids can do it." Dad said.

"What's the job?" we all chorused.

With a smile on her face Mom held a stack of old magazines, pretty border paper from last year's wallpapering, and a pair of shears.

She said, "Follow us and see. The outhouse needs decorating. You get to choose the pictures and where to put them."

"Wow, all by ourselves?"

"Yes, we think you can do a beautiful job."

We all trooped past the colorful trumpet vines and down the path to the outhouse. There Dad had put a pail of wallpaper paste and brushes, ready for us to use. We could choose the pictures we liked, and turn the outhouse into a real art gallery. Our "three-holer" would be fancier than it had ever been!

The Ladies Home Journal, *McCall's*, *The Delineator*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* were in the stack of magazines Mom gave us. First we saved some of the covers. Then we girls found pictures of flowers, landscapes, scrumptious looking cakes, and fancily dressed ladies. Little brother John set about finding pictures of animals and cars to paste on the walls near the lowest seat.

It wasn't long before we were all covered with paste and in each other's way. So we sat down and helped John get his pictures on the wall, then asked him to help us decide where to put our choices. Margaret was the tallest and could reach higher, so Alice and I put paste on the pictures before handing them to her to place on the walls.

One by one, the flowers framed a wall with pretty ladies in its center.

Copies of Norman Rockwell pictures were pasted on the front wall. They were special ones that the folks would like to see. The third wall was a cook's delight with cakes, colorful vegetables, fruits, and picnic pictures. The back wall became an assorted mix of the rest of our choices. Strips of wallpaper border covered the two-by-four framework of the outhouse. The *Montgomery Ward* and *Sears Roebuck* catalogues stocked our redecorated "Consumer Ed" classroom.

We hurried in and told the folks to come see our work. Still papering, they told us to go back and make up stories about the pictures we chose. This led to hilarity as we each tried to tell wild stories about pigs, cakes, fancy ladies, cars, and flowers.

When the folks came out, they told us what a wonderful job we'd done and then burst into laughter at our preposterous stories. Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa told us that the stories took away their weariness. It was one very good day!

Two years later when the bedrooms were being papered, we redecorated the outhouse with maps of Iowa and nearby states. Uncle Dewey brought us a map from his state, Illinois. He marked the road from our farm to his home.

Uncle Sam brought maps from Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas that he picked up when driving to visit us. The state of Missouri bordered our farm, so Dad got one of those for us. Our outhouse now had maps of the heartland of our country. We used crayons to mark the towns we visited and where our relatives lived.

Mom pulled the World Map from the National Geographic Magazine, that we pasted on the back wall. We loved learning about foreign places, and the outhouse became our geography classroom.

LIFE WITH CHICKENS

When we were young, the southeast room of our farmhouse was the coziest place to be. This is where the chicken incubators were set up. The heater that kept the eggs at proper temperature for hatching also made the room warm for us kids. It was here that we played, studied, or just read.

A Kaleidoscope of Memories

We gathered many eggs and placed them in the flat incubator chests to hatch. Opening the incubator doors on the front, we removed the inside trays and carefully filled them with eggs. Those eggs were turned daily, and every week Dad candled them. He held each one up to a strong light and looked for shadows- a clear sign a chick was forming.



Margaret helping Dad build a pen for the chickens

After three weeks, we watched excitedly as the chicks pipped the shell with their egg-tooth, and eventually emerged, all moist and peeping! In the warmth of the incubator, they soon dried to soft downy fluffs. We loved to cradle them and listen to their peeps.

They were soon ready to be put into the brooder house, where they could scratch in the straw and keep warm. The umbrella-shaped tin hood hung over a lantern to spread its circle of warmth. They huddled there like a blanket of yellow fluff until disturbed; their little black beady eyes would open to our delight. We kids spent a lot of time there, cuddling the chicks and making sure they had plenty of dry rolled oats and wheat kernels for food, fresh water, and some grit.



Margaret and Dorothy feeding the chickens

We filled a mason jar with water, screwed the self-watering cap on, turned it over and watched the chicks gather round and drink. Since chickens don't have teeth for chewing, we gave them grit and crushed oyster shells that stayed in their crops and gizzards to grind their food. Living in the Midwest, we were fascinated with those glittery shells from the far away ocean. We were glad that we had teeth for chewing and were not dependent on a crop full of grit and oyster shells. We kids often took a handful of their dry rolled oats or fresh wheat kernels and chewed them like chewing gum. I guess we were easy to please.

We usually raised Rhode Island Red and Plymouth Rock chickens. Within days, real feathers began appearing on the wings and soon the chicks feathered out- no longer small and fluffy. When they were a few weeks old and spring grass had appeared, we opened the brooder house door and all the chicks rushed out merrily chirping. It was fun watching the chicks peck at fresh green spears of grass and nab an occasional crawling bug.

By summertime, we moved them into the henhouse with the older hens. Here, straw-filled nest boxes and roosts awaited them. At night-time they perched on the roost; their soft, sleepy murmurings gave a soothing sense of peace.

We gathered eggs every day, sometimes reaching under a hen to take her egg. Our hens weren't allowed to brood a clutch of eggs, so whenever a hen persisted on staying in the nest to sit on her egg, we had to drag her out and carry her to the "breaking-up coop." This was somewhat like a jail with bare boards for its base. Putting a squawking, flapping, clawing hen into that coop was my least favorite job! The broody hens didn't like it either. Sometimes they escaped our grasp, leaving us with scratched, bleeding arms.

A Kaleidoscope of Memories

We kept a few roosters with the hens to ensure fertile eggs. The roosters strutted around the yard, crowing and vying to be head boss of the flock. The worst of the lot, “Old Feisty”, chased us all around, nipping at our bare feet. We took to carrying a long switch to shoo him away. Often, when a pesky rooster bothered us too much, he soon became soup.

We sometimes heard the saying “It’s hot enough to fry eggs on the sidewalk.” One very hot day, after gathering the eggs, our sister Alice suggested that we fry a couple on the cistern’s cement cover. We cracked two eggs onto it, and the hot cement really did fry them. We ate them for lunch.

Our family earned a nice income from selling all those eggs, although our grandpa frequently joked that we couldn’t afford to eat eggs ourselves. Either their price was too high for us to use them, he claimed, or else the price was so low that we had to sell all of them to make any money.



Grandpa at the Henhouse

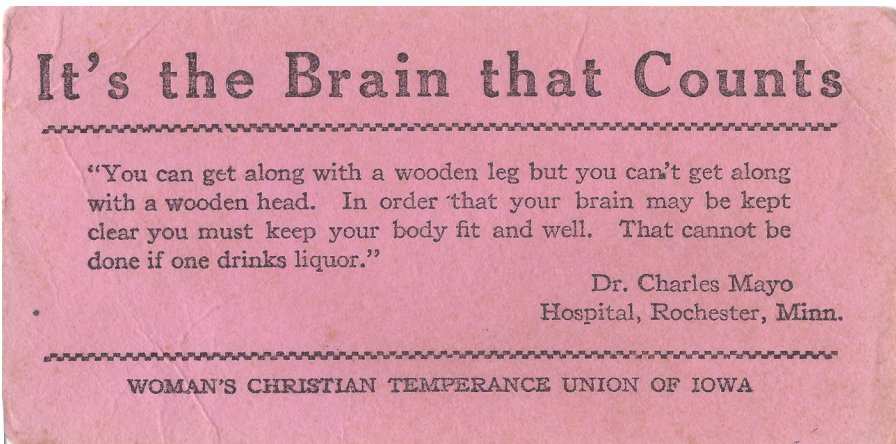
Nevertheless, eggs were a mainstay of our diet, as were the chickens, which we ate fried, roasted, and in soup. Scrambled or sunny-side up eggs with bacon and fresh buttered baking powder biscuits were a breakfast favorite. We all agreed that a meal with Mom’s fried chicken was the best! As we listened to it sizzle in the hot bacon fat, our mouths watered in anticipation of those crisp, tender pieces savored by all. And of course, getting the wishbone was always a treat.

Custard puddings and meringue pies were frequent desserts. Grandpa often asked for an Angel Food cake which I liked to do because I loved whipping those egg whites, and it usually meant we were celebrating something special.

There were many shortages during the Depression. However on a farm, we had food. We kids knew that the work we did on the farm was really appreciated, especially feeding the chickens and gathering eggs each day.

PROHIBITION DAYS

Growing up during prohibition days, our parents and grandparents stood firmly with the ban on alcohol; they made it very clear to us kids that drinking was not acceptable. Our Mother and Grandma Adair belonged to "The Woman's Society of Christian Service (WSCS)" and "The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)," both dedicated to upholding prohibition. These organizations held events at schools and churches to speak about the evils of drinking. They distributed pamphlets, buttons, and ink blotters. We kids were influenced by a WCTU ink blotter with a quote of Dr. Charles Mayo:



We couldn't imagine someone with a wooden head, and hoped people wouldn't drink liquor. In the early 1900s, Carry Nation was noted as a dedicated fighter for prohibition. She went from one saloon to another with her hatchet, smashing liquor bottles while she gave the patrons a fiery lecture. Sometime before the 18th Amendment was passed, Ada Ullery invited Carry Nation to meet with the WCTU in our town of Redding, Iowa. She was met at the train depot by a group of admirers; this was a notable event.