

From "Provincial Pride" No 17, August 1971

For the Junior Members

## Wash Day when Grandma was a Girl

by GRAND-DAD

Before 1900, people did not have the many household appliances such as we have in most homes to-day. Water cisterns, electric ranges, "fridges", vacuum cleaners, washing machines and spin-dryers were unknown. Every home had its wash-house equipped with a couple of wooden tubs and a wringer fitted to the partition between them. In the corner was the "copper" mounted on a brick support with a fireplace below and a chimney at the back. The copper was so called as it was a vessel made of copper and shaped like a half orange but capable of holding about sixteen gallons of water.

Monday was the regular wash day. Some people instead of a built-in copper had a movable one in the form of an iron drum with the copper let into it at the top, and with a fireplace below and an iron chimney at the back. Others again placed a 4 gallon kerosene tin over a fire to get the necessary hot water. These portable coppers were much used at picnics to boil water for making the tea.

The washing was carried out in a tub, use being made of a scrubbing board with ridges and grooves, on which mother used to claim she wore her knuckles bare. As hot water was essential, the first duty was to "light the copper". Sticks had to be gathered and chopped into suitable lengths to boil the water which was then transferred to a tub by means of a wooden or iron bucket. The wash-house was by some people known as the boiler house and the "copper" as the boiler.

After the clothes had been washed, they were "put through the wringer" to remove as much water as possible. The wringer had two rubber rollers which moved in opposite directions causing the clothes to pass through between them when the handle was turned. To-day a spin-drier does the "wringing" much better and with less effort. The clothes were then hung out on the clothes line to dry just as is done to-day.

When the clothes were sufficiently dry they had to be taken inside and ironed. There were of course no electric irons. Two irons were usually used, one to be heating on top of the coal range while the other was in use. The ironing blanket was usually kept for that purpose only.

The soap used for washing was often home-made, but the commonest soap was sold in the shape of a square ended bar about a foot long and three inches wide. Thin strips were cut off and used in the wash tub.

Once or twice a year the blankets had to be washed. These were usually placed in the bottom of the bath, and covered with water carried in a bucket from the boiler. Then someone had to undertake to "tramp the blankets". Boots and stockings were removed and the next ten or fifteen minutes spent in tramping up and down the blankets occasionally stopping to turn them over. Enough soap was used to produce a good lather. Then the bath was emptied and the blankets were rinsed in clean warm water. Finally two persons bunched the ends of the blanket and proceeded to roll the blanket into a long coil and by twisting it in opposite directions most of the surplus water was removed. Each blanket was then hung on a line to dry, and the whole process was repeated till the whole of the blankets had been washed.

Once a year came the annual "spring cleaning" when the whole house was given a special clean. The curtains and drapes were washed, the carpets were hung on a line or placed on the grass and beaten with a supplejack to remove the dust which had collected in the pile of the carpet, the books and pictures were dusted, and the windows given a special clean. To-day the carpets are commonly a fixture, and do not need to be beaten, as the carpet cleaners are capable of sucking up the dirt from the pile of the carpet. When washing the clothes many people added Reckitt's blue to the rinsing water. Stiff white collars were much in vogue at this period and these had to be starched and ironed every week. Grandma's life was a busy one but she rarely complained, her usual remark as she threw herself into a chair at the end of each wash-day: "Phew ! I'm glad that's over for another week".