

By Nova

The Community Cooker

I was recently talking with my mother when she mentioned using the community cooker. I was instantly curious, as I'd never heard this term before. Mother explained that communities, back in those days, had a community cooker that each family got to use for three days when it was their turn.

Possibly the county home demonstration agent was in charge of the cooker. This lady would come by or send word to let you know when your three days were scheduled. She then delivered the cooker to your house and picked it up when your time was up.

It just happened that my dad had worked picking apples for a neighbor a few days before. When the neighbor paid him, he also gave him several tow sacks of apples.

Mom and Granny (Dad's mother) usually just canned in their own pots. But this community cooker would allow them to get more canning done in much less time. They made plans to put up jars of apple butter.

Mom laughingly said, "Oh, Lord, we spent the day before the cooker got there—washing, peeling and slicing apples. We worked on them until around nine o'clock that night. I had to stop and put the children to bed before we finished."

They placed all the apple peelings in a large churn and tall crock, weighting them down so they were under water, then put a cover over them. These would be used to make apple jelly later.

That first morning they put the apples on to cook. To the apples they added five pounds of sugar and a big tin of McNess cinnamon. No liquid was added, as the apples and sugar would make sauce. Now they got busy washing the jars, lids and rings, rinsing them with boiling water.

Soon the apples were soft and could be mashed with a long spoon while still in the pan. Dad worked close around the farm house those three days, so he could lift the heavy cooker on and off the stove.

Using a large funnel, Mom and Granny filled the jars. Dad tightened the rings over the lids so they would have a tight seal. The jars were wiped clean and set aside to cool.

They had made apple butter—lots of apple butter. Mom said she thinks they made something like fourteen to sixteen quarts.

The last day they used the large cooker to make apple jelly from the peelings they had saved. When the peelings were cooked down, they tied a clean corn meal sack over a large crock and drained the juice through it. Mom explained that they used corn meal sacks because they had a looser weave than other sacks. After letting the peelings drain a little while and cool a bit, they wrapped the top of the sack up over the peelings and squeezed until they had collected all the juice.

Now they added some brand of Sure-Jell and sugar to the juice in the cooker, bringing it to a boil and keeping it at a boil until they knew the jelly was done. They poured the hot liquid into jars they had ready. The liquid would jell later in the jars.

Mom said when they were finished jelly making, they both stood looking at the many pints of fresh apple jelly. Granny looked at Mom and said, "We are a sweet mess!" Jelly making is one of the more sticky canning chores.

Of course they made more apple butter, apple jelly, and also canned apples whenever apples were available. But it was never as handy and fast as in that big *Community Cooker*



The Cellar

Mom always had plenty of canned apples in the cellar. For many years I ate her wonderfully soft canned-apple pies. When I ate my first apple pie where the sliced apples were firm, I thought, "Why didn't they cook these apples?" I, of course, was amazed to learn that people actually bought hard firm apples to make slices found in most pies.

Mom would send one of us kids down in the cellar to bring up jars of vegetables, fruits, and fruit juice. She had so many canned foods stored that she could turn out the best meals ever.