



THE WORKING DAY RESOURCE

A resource in support of: The New Zealand Social Studies Curriculum.
Strands: Social Organisation , Economic Resources

This '*Working Day*' has been prepared by the Howick Historical Village Education Department while under LEOTC contract to the Ministry of Education.

The resources was researched and written by Pru Lees, Education Assistant, Howick Historical Village.

The '*Working Day*' was submitted to the Howick Historical Village Education Department External Review group for approval before being made available as a resource. The '*Working Day*' relates broadly to the Victorian period 1837 - 1901 and could be used with '*The Evening*' resource.

Related activities and resources.

- This resource is complimentary to The Victorian school lesson, rag rug making, butter making, unpacking the trunk and washday, all activities available to visiting school groups
- The '*Working Day*' resource links with '*The Evening*,' '*Boys pockets*,' '*Customs and Superstitions*,' and '*Wit and Wisdom*' resources.

Items mentioned in this resource can be seen by students visiting the Howick Historical Village. For example: butter making stamps, water pumps,dolly and tubs, wells, cooking fires and cast iron range. .

Teachers wishing to book should contact the Co ordinator at: (+64) 09 5769481 or e-mail fencible@ihug.co.nz

The Working Day.

Family life in early Colonial New Zealand was a time when all members of the family contributed to the daily chores. Tasks were usually divided between male and female roles. Many of the outdoor jobs were performed by men and boys, whilst the indoor tasks were shared amongst the women and girls, the greatest load falling to the housewife. During the early days of settlement in the new country there would have been few idle hours. In 1850 it was legal for girls to get married at twelve years old. Childhood was over all too quickly, although it was unusual for many girls to marry at this age.

For the housewife the day would start early; the kitchen fire, where all the cooking would be done, was kindled and the kettle filled, a pot of porridge put on to heat. The house cow would need to be milked, a warm job on a chilly morning. The milk then poured into settling pans to wait until it was ready to be skimmed.

The daughters of the house would be expected to help prepare breakfast. Stirring the porridge, slicing bread, making a pot of tea, as well as helping the younger members of the household to wash and dress.

Hens would need to be fed and eggs collected by the younger children before they had their breakfast.

Boys had the wood box to fill, water to collect and wood to chop before they left for school. Many families used dried cow dung for fuel, this would be collected and left in the sun to dry before being put in a basket by the door ready for use on the fire.

The trip to the well would be a long one if the well was shared by a few families. Each member of the family would need about two pails of water per person per day, the water being drawn from the well, carried home on a yoke, then poured into a barrel by the back door. The fortunate family would have their own well with maybe a pump to ease the backbreaking task of hauling the buckets up by hand using a knotted rope.

Many tasks were done on certain days of the week. Monday was washday. In many areas it was a very social time. Washing was frequently done outside, close by a water source i.e. a well or stream. A copper or large pot would be set up outside with a fire lit beneath it, soap added, water boiled until the clothes were clean, then everything rinsed in the fresh water. A final rinse in 'blue' for the white items before they were hung out to dry. Often surrounding bushes were used to drape the washing over to dry it. Many families combined to make the work easier, children often being kept home from school to help with the family wash, the job would take all day.(1)

Mangles and Wringers enabled women to press their linen flat and extract all the excess water, but these cost a great deal of money and for the majority of households the tried and trusted methods of their mothers and grandmothers prevailed, twisting and pulling the sheets and large items to remove the water.

Starching usually with home made starch enabled special items to have the extra finish that was preferred at the time.

Many women had two irons or more. One to use whilst the others were heating in front of the fire. Ironing was done on the kitchen table using a blanket covered with an old sheet to provide a smooth surface.

Washing and ironing were just two of the many jobs that filled the day of the 19th century woman.

Butter making was done two or three times a week. The milk would be left in the dairy or a cool place, in a settling pan while the cream floated to the top. A skimmer or fleeter (a small shallow pan with drainage holes in it) would be used to skim the cream from the milk. When enough cream had been collected churning could begin. Another job for women and older girls as a certain amount of strength would be required. A number of different methods would be used to churn the butter. The simplest would be a large bowl

and wooden spoon, the cream agitated continually until butter came. A wooden butter churn helped make the job more efficient, these came in a variety of shapes and sizes either plunge churns or churns with handles that turned paddles inside.

Whatever method was used, butter making became an important part of a woman's work. Once the butter 'turned' the butter milk needed to be poured off, then the butter would be washed many times to remove all traces of the butter milk, if left the butter rapidly became rancid. Butter would not be handled once it had formed. Wooden butter hands would be used to work the butter, folding and pressing to remove the last traces of liquid, then salt added to improve the flavour and help preserve the butter.

Butter was marked with the individual stamp of the maker to identify the butter when it went to be sold, and was often packaged in wet cabbage leaves to keep it fresh.

There were a number of methods of preservation used. (2)

Cheese making was another dairy task that involved women and girls.

Bread making was a skill vital for the colonial housewife, and an endless job!

Yeast would often be made at home. Compressed or 'German' yeast was available in towns, but not used by many women. (3) The recipes for making yeast are as varied as those for making bread, every woman would have a tried and trusted method often passed down through the family.

The daughters of the family would be involved with all the processes of bread making, the making of the yeast or the collecting of the balm, measuring out of the flour, often using a 'peck' measure. Mixing the dough, kneading the mix, setting to rise, knocking back and forming of loaves. Then the baking, a skill that was essential so that the carefully tended dough was not spoiled by careless handling. Many women baked their loaves in a three legged pot with a domed lid surrounded by a gutter to keep hot embers on top of the pot as the bread baked within. The baking time depended on the size of the dough, but the smell of the bread would tell the experienced housewife when the bread was baked through. Children would be brought up with these sights and smells around them, unconsciously assimilating the knowledge that would be with them for life.

Other jobs could be fitted around bread making. Scrubbing floors, washing dishes, mending clothes, plucking a chicken, preparing the next meal.

Chickens were carefully looked after. Feeding and gathering of eggs were children's jobs. Building the hen house and run, a job done by the father and older sons, as was slaughtering a fowl when it was needed for the table. Catching the chicken often turned into a family affair as the bird tried to evade its pursuers. Once caught, father would take a firm hold of the bird to wring its neck.

Plucking the bird was often done by children, feathers carefully set aside for stuffing pillows. Once clean the chicken could be cooked.

Chicken was not the only item of meat on the family table. Pork was popular and often reasonably cheap.

Great care had to be taken with pork both in its preparation and cooking. Pigs that were not in good condition could harbour many parasites that could cause illness if the meat was not well cooked.

Families often combined to slaughter a pig so that meat could be shared around. Before the days of refrigeration meticulous attention had to be paid to all stages of meat preparation to try to ensure that nothing was wasted.

From the slaughtering of the animal to the scraping of the bristles, cleansing of the carcass, cutting into joints, the male members of the household and neighbours helped with this job. It all needed to be completed as quickly as possible to preserve or cook the meat before it turned bad. No part of the animal was wasted. Intestines were used to make sausage skins, bacon and hams prepared and preserved, joints set aside for roasting. Slaughtering a pig often became a social event. (4)

Bee keeping was often undertaken by families to supply both honey and beeswax. The weight of dealing with the hives often meant that men dealt with the day to day work whilst women were involved in candle and polish making from the wax.

Some families made their own straw 'Skeps' for keeping their bees in, these often had straw 'hats' to keep the rain off them. Others made wooden hives for their bees. Bees were a valuable commodity that required care to maximise the honey yield.

The wide range of outside work that had to be done each day necessitated the labour of all male members of the family. Digging the vegetable garden, making or mending fences, chopping wood, maintenance of the home, making basic furniture, brewing beer, mucking out the animals, taking the horse to the farrier to be shod. All members of the family would be involved for much of the day, especially the children when they were not at school.

Sweeping the chimney was a dirty and dusty job that every woman loathed. A time when soot got into every crevice in the house, shelves, cupboards, walls, floors, curtains and covers needed a good wash to remove the grime. A method common in English Villages at the time was to use a large bunch of holly to sweep the chimney. Once the fire was out and the chimney cold, the holly would be tied to the middle of a long rope. Father would climb onto the roof of the cottage dropping the end of the rope down the chimney; the housewife would take hold of the rope pulling down until the bunch of holly appeared, usually accompanied by a cloud of soot. Father would then pull the holly back up the chimney, sending more soot down into the fireplace. Pulling the holly up and down would be repeated until the chimney was clear of soot.

When the dust and soot had settled then the task of cleaning the kitchen would begin. Finally the fire would need to be kindled, using a flint, striker and tinderbox. If the housewife was skilful she would be able to have a fire started within five minutes.

At harvest time, when a pig was slaughtered or at times when many hands were needed, school might be set aside for the day so that the job could be completed.

Girls found themselves just as busy as their brothers. Endless cleaning, mending, darning, spinning, knitting, sewing, were some of the jobs to keep them occupied inside the home, as well as tending younger siblings. Looking after the vegetable garden, a vital source of food for the family; and learning how to preserve and provide a family with food from their own land were skills that girls learnt as they grew up.

Candle and soap making were important jobs for women. As with many tasks, what was made one year could not be used until the next, so forward planning was important to guarantee a supply of necessities.

Animal fat was kept, rendered down and poured through a cloth to make it fine. Then it was mixed with lye. (This was obtained by pouring water through a barrel of wood ash that had been kept from the cooking fire.) Lye and fat mixed with a little salt could be boiled then left to cool over night, the solid part that formed on the top would be soap. This would be used to wash clothes. (5)

Tallow candles (made from fat) were usually dipped, the fat being at a temperature that would allow the fat to adhere to the wick, gradually building up the layers. If the fat was too hot it would run off the wick.

The housewife was constantly preparing food, cooking food or cleaning up after a meal, especially when visitors called. All aspects of bottling, salting, making jam, preserving food were skills daughters needed to aspire to. Many families in the New Colony found themselves many miles from the nearest store, a competent wife would be able to plan ahead to meet the needs of her family.

Evening time would be a chance for the family to exchange their news of the day. The clock quietly ticking on the mantelpiece would be wound by father, either daily or once a week, on Sunday evening.

The flickering light of the tallow candle would enable father to peer at the latest newspaper, reading aloud interesting pieces of news for the family to hear. Mother might be sewing new clothes for the family whilst the girls mended garments, darned holes in socks, or shared the making of a rag rug from pieces of outgrown clothing. Boys too would be expected to learn how to darn and mend their clothes, the time would come when they would be working away from home and would need to be able to look after themselves.

Father might be whittling away at a piece of wood making a toy,(A) or carving a butter mould for his soon to be married daughter. Younger daughters also had their sewing samplers to work on in idle moments. These pieces of handwork displayed examples of sewing stitches demonstrating the skill a girl had with her needle. When courting, a young man might view a well sewn sampler as a positive skill in a prospective wife!

The early settler family would be occupied from sun up to sun down, each member with their own allotted tasks. Fishing, trapping and hunting for food provided time away from the endless chores, but was a woman's work ever done?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE SUPPORT.

(A) Consider downloading the following resources which link with this resource *Thaumatrope, Skipping rhymes, and The Evening resource*

FOOT NOTES

(1) 136/149 A Woman's Work is Never Done by Caroline Davidson

(2) Brett's Colonists' Guide and Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge.P.488

(3) Brett's Colonists Guide P.601

(4) Brett's Colonists Guide. P. 576

(5) Brett's Colonists' Guide. P 515 -524