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Appalachian Heritage, Volume 15, Number 4, Fall 1987, pp. 3-5 (Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aph.1987.0043>



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This Side of the Mountain

by

Sidney Saylor Farr

Growing up in the hills of southeastern Kentucky, I was very close to things of the natural world—trees, rocks, streams, wild flowers and herbs. I loved the seasons of the year and the changes each brought to my environment. I especially liked late fall and winter months.

The starkness of winter highlights features seldom seen in other seasons. When leaves, flowers or fruit have gone one notices the bark and the filigree of branches against the sky. The smooth skin of the beech, the pebbled bark of the dogwood, the dark gray mingled with white of oaks, silver birches along with the hawthorns splotted with taupe and rust, and red maples standing gray against the tawny woodland—all varieties are beautiful—and there are the cardinals and blue-jays to add a splash of bright color in the winter sun.

Every year as the days got shorter and the nights longer, we began to think of Thanksgiving (and hog butchering time) and Christmas. We never had a Christmas tree until I was big enough to go out and bring one in. Our only decorations might be hard candy in cellophane bags on the mantel, my mother's peppermint or apple stack cake sitting on a shelf in the cupboard, a basket of walnuts by the fireplace and perhaps a bushel of corn waiting to be

shelled and taken to the gristmill to be ground into meal.

When I read about Christmas trees and how people in towns and cities decorated for Christmas, I wanted to be like them. We lived in a three-room log house and space was limited so Mother would never let me bring the tree inside as long as we lived there. I put the tree beside the front door, tied securely to a nail driven into one of the logs. I tied on the decorations to keep them from blowing away. I used what I could find: pine cones, sycamore balls, milkweed pods, red berries, and strings of popcorn and strong paper chains.

When I grew older I learned to really appreciate the natural beauty around me, the treetops on the mountains looking like white lace with the early morning frost sparkling on their branches, evergreens against dark gray rocks and silver-gray trees, and the ground strewn with brown leaves.

When Mother baked sweet things for the holidays, she had to use honey or molasses because we could not afford refined sugar. We had molasses at our house because Father or one of his brothers or Grandfather always planted a patch of cane and there would be a cooperative stir-off and each one would carry away a year's supply of molasses for his family.

Recipes

I want to share some favorite molasses recipes with you.

Molasses Cookies

1 cup lard or butter
1 cup buttermilk
1 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon ginger
2 cups molasses
1 teaspoon cinnamon
3 teaspoons soda
Flour

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream lard and brown sugar. Add molasses, soda dissolved in buttermilk, ginger and cinnamon sifted with flour to make a stiff dough. Let stand overnight, roll out, spread with sugar, cut, and bake in hot oven. This is a never-fail recipe.

Egg-Butter

1 1/2 cups molasses
1 egg
1 cup milk

Put molasses in a heavy skillet and place on burner. Beat together egg and milk; when molasses comes to a boil, pour in egg mixture. Cook until mixture is thick. This egg-butter is good served with hot cornbread or hot biscuits.

Shoofly Molasses Pie

Filling

1 cup sugar
2 cups water
1 cup light molasses
4 teaspoons flour
1 teaspoon vanilla

Topping

1/2 cup lard or butter
2 cups flour

1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon cream of tartar

Mix sugar, water, molasses, and blend in flour slowly to avoid lumps. Boil together for 5 minutes, then set aside and add vanilla. With fingers work together lard, flour, sugar, soda and cream of tartar for the topping. Pour the filling into two unbaked 9-inch pie shells. Sprinkle topping over the top of each pie and bake at 350 degrees until filling is set and crust is nicely browned.

Buttermilk Gingerbread

1/2 cup shortening
1/2 cup sugar
1 egg, beaten
1/2 cup molasses
1 3/4 cups sifted flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon soda
1/2 cup buttermilk

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream shortening and sugar. Add egg and molasses. Sift flour, salt, and spices. Dissolve soda in buttermilk. Add alternately with flour mixture to molasses mixture. Pour into greased and floured 8-inch square pan. Bake for 45 minutes or until done. Cut into squares and serve warm.

Ginger-Molasses Biscuits

1 pint molasses
1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup melted lard or butter
1 cup hot water
Flour

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix the ingredients in a bowl, sifting in enough flour to make a stiff dough. When it is stiff enough to knead, turn out on a floured board and knead a few times. Pinch off a wad about the size of a walnut and roll in your hands until it is round and smooth. Put biscuits slightly separated in a greased bread pan. When

the pan is full, take the backs of your fingers and flatten out the biscuits. Bake until done. These will have a golden brown crusty top but the inside will be flaky and light.

Gift Subscriptions

It is again that time of year when the days have become shorter and colder and thoughts turn toward winter and the holiday season and the need to plan for and get Christmas presents for family and friends. We want you to consider gift subscriptions to *Appalachian Heritage* for some of the people on your list. In December, we will send those people a gift announcement

card along with a copy of the fall issue. Then for three more times—February, May and August—the recipients will be reminded of your thoughtful gift as they receive the winter, spring and summer issues of the magazine.

Best Wishes

I want to invite you to take time to look at the beauty all around you. Observe the trees, their starkness, their realness, their promise, their ability to change with the changing seasons of the year. May your changes within the seasons of this year be beautiful and real and filled with growth.



Poverty

Kate's pantry
was motherlode
to cookstove
and tabletop,

Its treasures
transformed
appetites
from ravenous
to gorged;

But she
never dug up
a recipe
to fill
an empty purse.

—Glenn McKee