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Topic: Interview with Mrs. S. C. Raburn
about foods of pioneer days. Also clothing.

People didn't use to dress like they do now,
or eat the same things either (Mrs. Raburn said). We lived
closer to home, raising nearly everything we had to eat and
wear. I'll tell you about the food first.

I married when I was sixteen and I am eighty-three
now so you can see that I am really a pioneer. My husband
and I moved to the Indian Territory down around Poteau in
1890, before that we lived in Hackett City, Arkansas. I
have seen some pretty hard times and had to manage like
everything to make both ends meet, I can tell you.

Nearly everyone in those days had plenty to eat
even if it might be a little rough at times. Even when
prices were low on farm produce and the cash crops like
cotton--we raised and put away plenty to eat.

We didn't can much in those days. That we put up
was usually either dried or pickled. Most any vegetable
can be dried or pickled either. We pickled cabbage

different altogether from kraut. Peas and beans were put down in a keg or jar with salt.

We pickled all kinds of fruits, too. We put up peaches, apples, pears, and anything else that we could get, using mostly vinegar for the fruit of course.

Then we dried a lot of stuff. We dried all sorts of fruits (that we had) vegetables and meats. We ate a lot of venison then; we'd hang strips of the meat over smoke and dry it that way. We'd salt a lot of the pork.

You see there were plenty of hogs. People often let them run wild in the woods near their houses. We could kill a hog anytime we wanted to even in summer and eat it before it spoiled because we had such a large family. Including my husband and me there were eleven of us. A small family could divide with neighbors. I remember one year, that was about 1895 when we lived near Enterprise, that we killed a hog in August and made it up into sausage. We took the sausage to McAlester and traded it to a storekeeper for groceries.

People usually had plenty of cows; they had milk and butter and cheese. And there were chickens,

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turkeys, ducks, geese and guineas for meat and eggs.

The point I want to make is that we didn't buy anything much then, we raised it all. About all we bought was coffee, soda, salt and sugar. We didn't know about baking powder then. We bought our coffee green and parched and ground it.

And people used molasses quite a bit in place of sugar. We raised cane and made it up into molasses; some people back in Arkansas had maple trees and made their own sugar that way.

Take flour for instance, most of us raised the wheat to make our flour. When we needed flour we just took wheat to mill. Going to mill was usually a pretty good journey though, it might take from all day to over a week. So we usually had enough flour ground after harvesting time to last all winter.

We raised corn and made lots of hominy and grits. We took corn to mill and got meal for corn-bread. Sometimes when we were out of meal and it wasn't convenient to go to mill we would make our own meal. We had a hollowed-out stump or block of wood, and there was a swinging wooden beam over it.

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We put our corn in the hollowed-out stump and pounded it with the beam. Then we sifted the meal; the finer parts made bread, and the coarser parts made grits.

We made our own lye by putting wood ashes in a big wooden hopper. We saved ashes all winter, and in the spring we poured water through the ashes to make lye. Then with this lye we made our soap. We kept the "cracklings" when we killed hogs, and saved grease and scraps of meat to make the soap with. We washed our hands and faces with this soap, too.

People didn't cook then like they do now, either. I cooked nearly all my life in a fireplace with big iron cooking vessels. I'd let the fire die down, and cook on the coals or just hang the pots over the flames. We had iron ovens. Food certainly tasted good cooked that way; biscuits puffed up so light and good they would make your mouth water.

It seems to me that folks were more hospitable then than they are now. I remember going to a wedding forty years ago right here in Hartshorne. A man named John Morris was getting married. There were at least fifty people there; more than could squeeze into his two-room house. They

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cooked meat for that wedding dinner in a wash kettle out in the yard. They ate in the yard, too; there were plenty of coffee, cake, meat, bread and the like for everyone.

People didn't dress as fancy then as now, but the clothing was better made, and it lasted longer. You take shoes; there was usually a shoemaker in each settlement and he made the shoes for his neighbors from leather he tanned himself. We never got more than one or two pairs of shoes a year; usually we got a pair around Christmas time, and those shoes were supposed to last until next Christmas.

Then there was a wheelwright who made spinning wheels and furniture, though almost any man could make rough tables and chairs when necessary.

Around the turn of the century we got to buying our clothing at stores, but before that I made practically everything we wore. Just to prove my point I will tell you a story. One year my husband's cotton crop was a failure, and we didn't have anything to market for cash. We had plenty to eat but no money to buy clothing. Nowadays that would mean that a family would have to go without enough to wear but not then.

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I had a spinning wheel and I could spin--almost all pioneer women in those days could spin. I sent to Fort-Smith and got a five-pound bale of cotton thread for warp. I sent to a cloth factory and got two gunny sacks full of assorted wool "flyings"-- odds and ends of wool swept up off the floor. If we had owned sheep I could have used my own wool. The cotton thread cost \$1.00 and the wool cost \$3.00.

I spun and wove the wool into cloth, using the cotton thread as warp. I made jeans cloth and made a suit for my husband and trousers for the two boys. Jeans cloth, I remember, took three treadles. I wove some linsey cloth which took only two treadles and made dresses for the girls and shirts for my husband and the boys. I wove some plain cotton cloth and made underwear, table cloths and the like. I knitted sweaters and socks. Our winter's clothing that year did not cost over six dollars not counting shoes.

A body couldn't use flour or feed sacks to make towels or underwear out of them because we got our flour in barrels.

I always made all our bed clothing. I have woven many a counterpane for myself and to sell. I wove sheets

and pillow cases. Counterpanes were heavy and warm, having a wool "filling" but the sheets were woven with plain cotton warp and filling.

All pioneer women knew how to quilt. I bet I've made enough quilts to fill a house. I still quilt a little, as old as I am. Frontier women used to visit each other and quilt all day and swap patterns. I ran a dairy here at Hartshorne from about 1900 to 1912, getting up at four in the morning and not getting to bed until maybe nine or ten at night but I still managed to make my own quilts. I have set up a quilt after supper many's the time, and had it half done before bed time.

I've woven lots of carpets, too. Carpet weaving called for a special loom, bigger than the looms used for cloth. I sold some of them; I'd get ten cents a yard. Of course I've made rags into rugs, sewing the rags together or using a big hook something like a crochet hook but a woven carpet is different and better.

I feel that the old times were best even if maybe harder and not as convenient as now. People had to work hard and manage closely for what they got. They were a strong, hardy breed and I believe they were happier.

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They were content with simpler things. As I say, everyone had to work hard but even in our "hard times" there were plenty to eat and wear.

Mrs. Raburn lives at Hartshorne, Oklahoma.