

German-Russian Grandparents

Electronic mail message from Opal White

I was fortunate to know all four of my Russian born German grandparents and spend my childhood in a close German-Russian community where traditions were handed down thru the generations. I loved the bustle of winter butchering time. Lacking refrigeration, processing meat from a couple beeves and several hogs had to be done quickly and took many hands, including we children. We kept the slow fire going under the big iron lard-rendering kettle. That lard made the flaky pie crusts, all the cooking and frying and was also poured over fried meat patties to seal them in crocks; we learned how to cure hams and bacons, clean and scrape intestines for sausage and took turns turning the grinder for the sausage meat.

My maternal grandmother was noted for her delicious head cheese that was packed in cleaned hog stomachs. Tied in neat bundles, strung on a broomstick and suspended in a boiler to cook. The lard that rendered out formed a coating that preserved them all winter in a cold cellar.

Sausage was made last with much input from the Grandpa's of the correct proportions of beef, pork and seasonings. We still have my paternal grandmothers' black iron sausage stuffer that cranked out yards and yard of sausage ready for the smoke-house. Sixty years later, I visited that farm smoke-house and that faint, lingering aroma of German sausage made my mouth water.

I still marvel at their ingenuity and knowledge of food preservation. My Mother always said the only thing they discarded from a hog was the squeal. We no longer need to work as hard as our parents to provide and many of those talents are lost. I'm glad I have them in my memory bank---and I remember how to make pickled pigs feet!