

2-20-99

Odds and Ends

Here are some odds and ends of the past which may not deserve a story but are such a part of the past that they should be mentioned:

1. Milk in clear glass quarts and cylindrical bottom graduating into a narrow neck, topped with a tabbed lid fitted into a slight recess in the tope, all capped with a pleated paper cover to protect the entire rim. Cream, either light or heavy, came in similarly shaped pint or half-pint bottles. A milk man driving a horse-drawn square wagon delivered the household order very early every other day, at some houses placing the bottles on the front steps near the door and at some going to the back and entering the back porch where the ice box was stored. Occasionally in the winter, milk left on the front porch would freeze before it could be brought into the house. The cream would emerge from the neck of the bottle, forming a cream-colored cylinder wearing the lid and the cap.



2. Ice for the back-porch ice box came in a somewhat larger wagon, again horse-drawn. The wagon contained large 500- and 1,000-pound blocks of ice. The ice man would delicately chip through the appropriate seam to obtain the size block the householder ordered by way of a square sign placed in a front window. The sign had numbers in the corners, 25, 50, 150, 200. The number uppermost in the window ordered the size ice for the day, depending on the size of the householder's box and the needs for the next two days. The ice man wore a heavy leather cover to protect his back and shoulder. With sharp-scissored tongs, he would hoist the ice block to his shoulder and carry it to the back porch ice box. If he made his rounds in the late morning or early afternoon, he might be pursued by a number of boys and girls seeking chips of ice to suck.



3. The yellow cardboard quarantine sign affixed to the front door of a household with a child with a communicable disease, red measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever among others, but not chicken pox, German measles, or mumps. During the quarantine period no one outside the family or the doctor was supposed to enter. If the disease was a serious one like scarlet fever, meningitis, or polio, special rules prevailed: anyone beside the doctor and the caretaker (usually the mother) was forbidden entrance. Sickroom dishes and linens were isolated and carefully sterilized.
4. On May 1, May Day, May baskets made of pastel construction paper filled with a few spring blossoms were placed on the doorknobs of a few favorite neighbors.
5. A nickel or dime offering for Sunday School tied in the end of a handkerchief and clutched in a hot little hand. Untying the knotted coin sometimes challenged the child or her teacher.