

### Mother's Pantry

I have sometimes tried to imagine how mother must have felt when we moved into our new house, after having spent the twenty seven years of her married life in small log house where she had born her ten children, five in Round Valley, two at Otter Creek and three in Laketown.

The new house wasn't much as houses are these days, but it was roomy with four bedrooms and a "front" room, which would be the living room today, a big kitchen and the pantry.

I suppose everyone had a pantry since it was not the custom to build cupboards in the kitchen, however mother's pantry was special.

If she didn't plan it herself then some wise builder planned it for her.

It was situated on the north west corner of the house. In fact it was the northwest corner.

### Mother's Pantry

It was always spotlessly clean and always painted the house pale gray.

On the left as one entered from the kitchen stood the "safe". It would be called a cupboard today, in 1975. But eighty years ago it was a "safe".

The doors were of tin, perforated in a design with holes large enough to let the air in and small enough to keep the flies out.

Mother kept the milk in this safe waiting for the cream to raise for butter and often to clabber for Dutch Cheese. The name now is Cottage Cheese. The product is the same, only mother's was better because she always mixed in a bit of rich cream before she put it on the table.

Next to the safe was the flour bin. Large enough to hold several hundred pounds of flour.

### Mother's Pantry

Folks did all their <sup>own</sup>~~own~~ baking in those days. We were a big family and it took a lot of flour for the bread and pies, the dumplings and noodles, biscuits and roly poly puddings.

The flour bin was built strong and so tight not a bug could get in and when the flour diminished one of the boys would take wheat to the flour mill, a few miles away, and wait while it was ground into flour to fill the bin again.

Above the bin were three shelves which held an assortment of remedies.

You see we were fifty miles from the nearest Doctor by team and buggy, and while my father James did a very creditable job of setting broken bones and extracting abscessed teeth and even on occasion sewing up a bad cut (and I have always thought the good Lord may have guided his hand a little) he had no knowledge of internal medicine.

### Mother's Pantry

Therefore when mother heard of something which was good for something, she acquired it.

I remember some of the things which reposed on those shelves because when I was old enough it was my job to take everything down and wash the shelves periodically.

There was yarrow, for yarrow tea which no one could drink, senna leaves for senna tea - a physic, swamp root for kidneys, a mixture of sulphur and mollasses - a tonic for spring ( ? ), and even a bottle which read - to be mixed with water for drenching sick horses.

Well when I would ask Mother why we didn't get rid of all that junk, she always said, "It might come in handy sometime." Then I would ask her why we didn't ever use any of it she would say, "Well it's been there so long, I think it might be poisonous."

### Mothers Pentry

I couldn't cope with that line of reasoning so one day when she was away from home I put everything from those shelves in a big dish pan and carried the whole mess to an old canal in the field and dumped it. I was careful to break the bottle and bury the pills, just in case, you know, something might be poisonous.

I scrubbed the shelves like they had never been scrubbed before, then waited in fear and trembling. (That was Mother's saying which I think she got from the scriptures.) When she came home she simply said, "well I see you've done it" and when she was satisfied I hadn't left anything to poison any one, I think she was secretly glad to be rid of the "remedies" without thinking she had wasted anything. The shelves held the over flow of dishes from the sideboard in the kitchen.

### Mother's Pentry

On the west wall, near the flour bin, was mother's work table. Made just the right height for her. She was only 5 ft. 3 in. There she spent countless hours working up the freshly churned butter or mixing the bread or rolling out dough for pies. She was an expert pie maker.

Next to that table was a larger one with an under cupboard for pots and pans, and a bread box on top and room for putting the freshly baked bread to cool in a white cloth or maybe pies, or, in the season, rows of bottled pears and peaches. Cooling to be put away in the closet under the stairs.

On the north wall was a window which reached from the ceiling almost to the floor. When warm weather came in the spring the glass would be taken out and screen put in, and always cool fresh air came in.

### Mothers Pantry

From the window we could look down across the fields where often men were at work, to the blue lake and if there had been a stiff breeze there were white caps on the water.

I recall Mother standing at that window many times with a far away look on her face. I often wondered if she was thinking of the children she had lost or of her two oldest boys who gone to Canada and from whom she seldom heard or of the loved ones she had left in Grantsville in 1869. She only saw them once in the 65 years she lived after she left Grantsville.

She had been away 20 years before she went back to see them just before her parents died. She never saw her sisters again. She sang at her work and she had a lovely voice. But one of her songs made me sad.

### Mother's Pantry

I remember two lines.

"I cannot sing the old songs I sang once long ago.  
For heart and voice would fail me and foolish tears would  
flow."

I don't believe she felt sad, more nostalgic, probably. She didn't have much time to be sad, taking care of her family and her church work and helping with the sick, comforting the bereaved.

The last wall of the pantry behind the door was shelved from floor to ceiling where she kept her special jams and jellies, spanish pickles, preserved peaches, mince meat.

There always were jars of red english spiced currant preserves and black english currant jelly and bottles of native currants picked from the bushes which grew along the fields.



### Mother's Pantry

I've told you about mother's pantry, a room I loved.

I went home often after I moved and then the summer before she passed away I spent most of the time there. Chase came every other week end and sometimes Hazel and the children came also.

Mother passed away on September 30, 1934. After the funeral and the burial I went for the last time to the house and stood at the pantry window. There was no one working in the fields that day. I doubt that there was one adult in the town who was not at "Sister" Merlins funeral.

I felt like I was saying goodbye to the familiar things I had known for so long and it was because before I went back again the house and the pantry had burned to the ground.

Mother's Pantry

I have seen from a distance the new house which stands where our house once stood.

It is a nice house but there is not one thing about it which calls me home again.

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June 20, 1975