

Hog Killing Time on the Rocky Hill

By George Evans Taylor, Jr.

I grew up during the 1930s and 1940s on a Rocky Hill in the Cooper Community which is about five miles north of Malvern, Arkansas. On the farm were many chores to be done, some were seasonal in nature.

One of those annual tasks was to have a hog killing day. This provided the Evans Taylor family with meat on the table for a full year. We always killed two or three hogs each year and had some meat left over at end of the year.

We would fatten the hogs with shorts and slop then top them out the last six weeks with corn for a good meat taste. Just feeding the hogs each day was a dirty, stinking chore itself.

The day's work for the entire family took place in early winter in the south yard on the Rocky Hill. Actually much work and some planning proceeded the big day as we prepared all needed items. We must preserve the meat we worked for all year. Remember that we didn't have a refrigerator or freezer. We didn't even have electricity!

We had to haul water from the spring across the road and down the hill. It was hauled in a fifty-five gallon drum mounted on the front bumper of our family car, a 1931 Model A Ford. The water was transferred from the barrel to the wash pot with a bucket, the same way the water was transferred from the spring to the barrel. We needed much wood to heat the water in the old black wash pot. Around the hill we could scrounge enough to do the heating of the water. As we also looked for wood to heat each Monday's wash water I had usually already spotted enough for this special job. We also had to have good hickory wood to use in the smoke house to preserve and flavor the meat.

We cleaned the big wooden salt box and added the necessary amount of new salt for the year. We prepared an old fifty-five gallon drum and mounted it on a framework at an angle. This barrel was used to submerge the dead hog, hind end first, into the hot water for hair removal. We provided several heavy boards across our saw horses and used this for a cutting board. Sometimes an old door was used for this purpose.

Now with everything ready we wait for the big day as it must be very cold weather so the meat will not spoil. While working we would nearly freeze due to the cold weather and the moisture from the water and from the meat. We had to wear many clothes but the cold still seemed to penetrate to the bone!

On the big day dad would get up very early to start the fire to heat the water in the pot. Once the water was hot it would be transferred to the "hog" barrel. We would get the hogs, one at a time, in position near the barrel. We would then shoot them in the head with a .22 rifle and slit the throat with a knife to bleed them. We would shoot them at a point between their eyes and up just a bit. In slow action the hog's legs would give way and it would drop straight downward, not to it's side. As this happened the throat was slit. This seems cruel now but then it was a normal farm function. I remember having feelings for the hogs that I had nurtured from the day they were born and would then have to shoot them in the head.

The killed hog was man-handled into the drum of hot water and rotated in the barrel and pulled up and down to get all hair/skin hot enough for hair removal. A few handfuls of hair was pulled to see if all of the hair would be easily removed. If the process was continued without the water being at the correct temperature then the hair would "set" and would need to be removed by scrapping with a large knife. It is best to get the temperature correct!

After hair removal the naked carcass was pulled from the barrel and placed on the cutting board. The belly was cut open and the entrails were rolled into a wash tub so we could remove fat from them. Later the entrails were hauled to the back field for disposal.

Dad cut the meat containing bones with an axe and used a butcher knife for the rest. We didn't eat the entrails, eyes, sex organs, etc. The pork chops, liver, and brains were separated and put aside. They would be eaten over a period of several days, also some would be given to neighbors. Neighbors helped each other sometimes and shared fresh meat each time. Dad was a good butcher and helped neighbors with many jobs.

Sausage making was a job that always lasted into the night. A hand turned sausage grinder was used. As it was turned the pieces of mixed meat were hand fed into the grinder's mouth. The grinder outlet was placed over a dishpan and the ground meat would drop into the pan. Crushed hot, dried pepper and salt were added to the heap and stirred with a stick every few minutes. The sausage was made into patties by hand then dropped into a large, hot frying pan on the wood burning stove. After frying, the sausages were put into canning jars and hot fat grease was poured over them, then the jar was sealed. This process enabled us to have "fresh" sausage all of the year! After marriage, my wife, Betty Sue (Tillery) was a big help to mom and would help grind sausage and what ever else she could do. She, being a city girl, was fascinated by all of these goings-on in the country! To me it was all hard work.

The hams, shoulders, and sides of meat were rubbed down with course salt and placed in a big wooden salt box. This removed all moisture and tends to preserve the meat. The meat was hung in the closed smoke house for two weeks with hickory wood smoke doing it's job on the meat. The fire to keep the smoke going was my job, I tended to it each day. We had cured ham or shoulder meat all year. Those breakfasts that mom cooked on the old wood stove were something to talk about.

Hog killing was like an assembly line because each hog was processed as the previous one was finished. The workday was a cold, stinking job from daylight to after dark by coal oil lights and lanterns. It was very long day but the fruit of our labor was good eating all year long! My mom and dad worked very hard to feed themselves and their children, may God keep their life and sacrifices in our memory as long as we live.



Betty and Evans

City girl to the country.



L-R: Gladys and Evans Taylor,
Children:

Evans Taylor, Jr., Dorothy Hobbs,
Wilma Huckelby, Pauline Guyse

The Rocky Hill
Taylor Family

For The Heritage Oct. 22, 2005, George Evans Taylor, Jr.
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