

Smoke Houses

From the time Israel Baxter homesteaded west of Malone in the 1820's and continuing until the mid 1950's, a primary source of meat for the early farmers was pork. Due to refrigeration not being available, it was common for the first cold weather to be allocated as butchering time. Considered a somewhat social event, neighbors would join in and assist one another in the butchering and meat preparation. A selected group of swine would be penned up and fed a special diet in preparation for slaughter. Before butchering, the process of removing the hair was necessary. Large syrup cooking kettles were alternated as dipping troughs. A small amount of pine rosin or kenneling splinters was boiled in the water. This additive created a hair releasing agent effect. After submerging in the hot water the hair could be removed by scraping with an edged instrument. After the meat was dissected the salting processes begin. Salt was used as a seasoning as well as a preventive to ward off skipper flies. The meat would be thoroughly hand rubbed with salt and placed on tables. A bed of pine straw was used to facilitate these salting tables. The meat would be rotated several times during the 7 days of curing. Any discharge of liquids would filter through and be absorbed in the pine straw. After a week of curing the smoking process begin.

Smoke houses played an important roll in survival. A typical smoke house was usually about 10 feet wide and 15 feet long. Construction material could be logs or lumber with no windows and only one door for egress. A two foot wide – one foot deep pit was excavated through the center. Fresh meat was hung above the pit and thoroughly smoked. The smoked meat would remain hanging until used. It was not uncommon to see a small room attached to each side of the smoke house. One side would be used for syrup storage and the other side filled with jars of canned vegetable. As late as 1950 smoke exiting from the top of a smoke houses was not uncommon. Sausage casings were created by boiling for sterilization, reversing the surface side and scraping the

swine intestines until they were silk thin. The sausage casings would be stuffed with sausage meat, smoked, pre cooked, placed in a container and covered with hot grease which would jell into lard. Grease/lard was produced by cooking the skins of the pork. This encapsulation process would preserve and provide fresh sausages for several months. Using these primitive methods, a pioneer family could have a continuous meat supply with no means of refrigeration.



A typical Smoke House with storage shed.