

Doing the Laundry

By Mike Harris

The subject suggested for the coming Monday was "Laundry" and my first thought was my mother's mantra, "No woman will curse my memory because I raised a cripple." The next thoughts were of scraped knuckles, the smell of harsh laundry soap, and extra chores. I wonder what the others here will remember, but I am sure I will become well informed on the following Monday.

Extra chores. In a shed just outside the mud room there was a pit in which a special laundry fire had to be made, old ashes long removed, a fire made so that a good bed of hot coals would last to keep the laundry water hot for the time needed to soak and make the wash. A frame was then set over these coals to hold the large tin tub filled with hot water and soaking laundry. The rest of the equipment set against the wall of the shed, a wringer in a frame, a stand containing a dish with laundry soap, and a scrub board leaning against the stand. There was also a large wooden paddle for stirring the mess in the tub where it soaked while waiting to be scrubbed

When all was in readiness and duly inspected, we (my mother and I) proceeded to do the laundry. Never to be left idle while Mom stirred with the paddle I fetched a bag containing a hank of laundry line and wooden clothes pins. I set the line on four poles over a specially prepared area on a sunny mild slope, twenty by forty, where all the turf had been removed to a depth of six inches and filled with medium to large gravel. It never got muddy. While setting up the lines for drying, the soaking clothes were now ready for scrubbing, rinsing, wringing and hanging on the set-up lines, secured with wooden pins, the sun and breeze doing the drying. Does anyone recall the name of the laundry soap? As I recall it was yellow-orange in color, about five inches long, two inches wide, and one and half inches thick, and was called "Octagon" laundry soap.

In the process of scrubbing every laundry day my knuckles became raw and my hands smarted as from a burn. Mom did the hanging of the clothes. Together, with me on the handle of the wringer, and her feeding and rinsing, we would get the laundry done. I all the time complaining, "This is girls work!" And she repeating her mantra, "No woman will curse my memory because I raised a cripple."