

Large Laundry

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Laundry required great effort. In general, it was done two times a year, but common small laundry items and baby wash were done all the time.

The well on the farm had iron-bearing water and the supply was irregular. The old well in the back yard was not good water. It could be problematic at times. One winter, I think it was in 1941, we had so little rain that the wells ran dry. I was then 15 years old and I collected snow and melted it down in a large pot to produce water for the cows. The little that was in the well, we needed ourselves. I also remember that water was taken from the river. My father had great tubs on the sled with rugs to help keep the water from splashing out. At the time, we had a horse called Freya, a good workhorse.

Well, it was the laundry I would tell you about. All the white wash and color wash was put to soak in *lutvatten*, as I remember it. There, it would remain a few days. Then we began to scrub it against a washboard of boundary glass or metal. The glass washboard was nice to work with, I thought. It sounded so nice.

Russian soap, *Ryssän saippua*, with a rather pungent odor, was used extensively. It came from Russia by way of Finland. We bought it in bits and in kilos that you would cut yourself into the appropriate pieces.

After some time, when all was scrubbed, the laundry would be cooked in the big iron pot. To scour the rusty iron pot clean was a sterling effort. We rubbed it with sand and soap until our hands bled. Then we rinsed it innumerable times. Finally when Mother took a dry white cloth and dried the pot, no rust would get stuck on the fabric.

Now you had to light a fire under the pot. It was certainly a few hours before it started to bubble. Then you would boil the laundry in it. We stirred and agitated the laundry while it simmered. Clothing which would not resist fading was cleaned with less soaking.

We used to rinse the laundry in the river 1 kilometer away. If the ice was low, father stabbed a hole in it, where the women would then be on their knees on some carpets to rinse the laundry. Poor women!

On beautiful late winter days it was great to see the dazzling white laundry waving in the wind, and the effort was almost forgotten.

Small laundry items were handled in the barn, or later when the cows were sold and it was winter, in the sauna. During the summer, of course, there was no problem drying, but in winter we had to hang laundry in the summer kitchen. From there the garments were later taken into the winter kitchen to finish drying. It felt scary to take up the rigid garments, frozen in the unheated summer kitchen, to take them to the winter kitchen.

When Mother gave birth to a new family member, and it happened about every three years, there was the daily baby bath, if it was winter, in the cabin.

There are also diapers to dry on a gadget hanging from the ceiling. Only three of the children were born in the summer.

Rag rugs were washed in the river as early in summer as possible. Drying weather was best at midsummer. The carpets were hung to dry on fences at the cape. It was fun to pick up the fragrant mats and lay them on the floor.