

Wallowa History Center

Preserving Our Past for the Future

The Wallowa History Center works to save the memories, stories, and photographs that define the history and culture of the places we call home.

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Hog Butchering, a Childhood Memory, by Pearl Alice Marsh



Pearl Alice Marsh, Wallowa
Courtesy Pearl Alice Marsh, PhD, Patterson, CA

One of the exciting events when I was a child in Wallowa, Oregon happened every Fall. That's when our grandfather Joseph Patterson, who everyone called "Pa Pat" but we called Papa, and my father Amos Marsh, slaughtered the hogs we had raised that year.

In very early spring, we went with Papa to buy three or four baby pigs. All spring

and summer, Papa fed them "slop", made from table scraps and corn mixed with water. Then, around September or early October, he fed them just corn so their meat would taste good.

All summer, as the pigs grew bigger and fatter, my sister Kay and I would go "visit the pigs" on the way to pick wild flowers, even though they smelled really bad. As we approached the pig pen they would start squealing and grunting and come running over to see us. The pigs were always looking for something to eat.

By the end of Fall, the pigs were big and fat enough to slaughter. Early on a frosty morning, Papa and Daddy built a fire under a big metal barrel full of water and got the water scalding hot.

My brothers Amos Jr. and Frank, Kay and I got up early and went to Grandma's house to wait for Papa to get his 22-caliber rifle ready. Then, we followed him to the pigpen. Papa put some corn in the feeding trough and as the pigs ate, shot them in that soft spot right behind their ear. The pigs squealed for a second or two, then drop dead quickly.



Butchering Hogs, Alder Slope,

Courtesy of "Lostine, Heart of the Wallowas", by Irene Barklow

After shooting the pigs, Papa and Daddy slit their throats to bleed them, cut them open, pulled out all of the organs into a big tub and gave them to Mama and Grandma to

clean. Next, Papa and Daddy brought the dead pigs in a wheelbarrow to the yard and lifted them over the barrel with a rope pulley set between two pine trees. Then they scalded the pigs in the boiling hot water, scrape off their hair, and readied the pigs for butchering.

They removed lots of fat that Mama and Grandma rendered to make cooking lard and lye soap. We loved the cracklin's that were left after they drained the grease from the kettle.

Papa and Daddy butchered the pigs into parts ready to cook later during the winter -- roasts, ribs, chops, hocks, shanks, neck bones, and feet. The meat was wrapped carefully in thick pink freezer paper to avoid freezer burn.

While Papa and Daddy were butchering, Mama and Grandma got the intestines (called chit'lins), liver, stomach, brains, lungs, and other internal parts. They shared them with neighbors like Ms. Lucy Lowery and Ms. Carrie Powell. Since we did not have indoor plumbing, they spent many hours and hours at the outdoor water pump cleaning the chit'lins and other organs in No. 3 tubs.

Mama and Grandma cooked the liver smothered in onion gravy and served with rice, hot biscuits, and syrup. They boiled the pigs' heads until the meat fell off the bone. They took the meat, mixed it with vinegar and spices and made hog headcheese. Neighbors scrambled the brains with eggs. I do not remember how anyone cooked the lungs (called lights) and other things. Mama stopped at the chitt'lin's and liver.

Papa took the raw hams, ham hocks, and slabs of belly (for bacon) up town and had them smoked. Mama and Grandma ground the scrap meat to make sausage. He then took the meat, after Mama and Grandma had wrapped it in the special freezer paper, and stored it in a rented freezer locker behind Shell's Mercantile store.

Our home-raised pigs' meat would last us through the whole winter along with the vegetables from Papa's garden that Mama and Grandma canned. We also had jars of home-canned jelly and fruits gathered from wild orchards, and frozen deer meat from a successful autumn hunt.