
◇ The General Store ◇

Make Soap Like Grandma Did In Only 3 Basic Steps

The recipe is simple. Make the wood ash lye, render or clean the fats, mix the fats and lye solution together, boil the mixture to make soap.

Making Wood Ash Lye:

To make soap, the first ingredient required was a liquid solution of potash; commonly called lye. Lye solution was obtained by placing wood ashes in a bottomless barrel set on a grooved, lipped stone slab. The stone, in turn, rested upon a pile of rocks. To prevent ashes seeping into the solution, a layer of straw and small sticks were placed in the barrel, and the ashes were strewn on top. The lye was then produced by slowly pouring water over the ashes until the water, now a brownish solution of potash lye, oozed out from the bottom of the barrel. The lye solution was collected by allowing it to flow into the groove around the stone slab, then drip down into a clay vessel stationed at the lip of the groove.

An ash hopper was used for the making of lye as well as the barrel method. The hopper and ashes were kept in a shed to protect the ashes from being leached unintentionally by rain fall. Wood ashes were added on a regular basis. Water was then periodi-

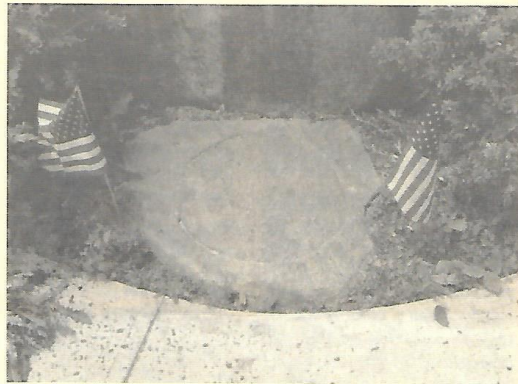
cally poured over the ashes to insure a continuous supply of lye. The liquid lye solution dripped into a collecting vessel located beneath the hopper.

Preparing the Fats:

The preparation of fats or grease to be used in forming the soap was the second step. This consisted of first cleaning the fats and grease of all impurities. Cleaning the fat for soap making, referred to as rendering, was the most unpleasant aspect of soap making, for it imparted a foul stench. However obnoxious the job might have been, in order to make a satisfactory soap, the fat removed from the animals during butchering had to be rendered. The rendering process removes all meat tissues remaining in the fat sections. Fat obtained from cattle is known as tallow; while the fat obtained from pigs is commonly called lard.

If soap was being made from grease saved from cooking fires, it was also rendered to remove impurities. Waste cooking grease, saved over a period of time without benefit of refrigeration, usually became rancid. This cleaning step was important in order to

(continued on page 2)



This stone, located near the entrance to the Mendham Township Library in Brookside appears to be a grooved, lipped stone slab used to make soap.

RHA Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of and plans for this year will be discussed. The trustees nominated for the Class of 2007 are Russell Buchanan, Margaret Hogan and Wilma Sagurton. The 2004 museum season began on Monday, May 27.

Trustees and officers will be elected and a review of last year's accomplishments through mid-October.

Please consider making a donation to the 2004 -5 Building Fund.

Making soap in 3 easy steps

sweeten the grease, for a sweet grease produced a more pleasant smelling soap. Rancid fats or grease would have made soap just as well as the sweet and clean fats, but the finished product would certainly have not been as obliging to use.

To render, fats and waste cooking grease were placed in a large kettle. An equal amount of water was added. The kettle was then placed outdoors over an open fire. Soap making was truly an outside activity, for the odor from rendering the fats was too strong to wish in anyone's house. The mixture of fats and water were boiled until all the fats had melted. After an even longer period of boiling to insure completion of melting the fats, the fire was stopped. Into the kettle was placed yet another amount of water, about equal to the first amount of water. The new solution was allowed to cool over night. By morning, the fats had solidified and floated to the top of the water, forming the soap making layer of sweet clean fat. Any impurities, being heavier than fat, sank to the bottom of the kettle.

You have very likely observed a type of rendering in your own kitchen. Place a warm meat stew into your refrigerator. After it has become cold, you will see the very same fat layer Grandma boiled to the top of her rendering kettle.

Making Soap!

In a clean large kettle or pot, the rendered fat was now placed along with which ever amount of lye solution was

determined to be the correct amount; the determination of that amount being far easier said than was done. The pot was placed outdoors, over a fire, and boiled until soap was formed. Soap was deemed to have been made when the mixture roiled up into a thick frothy mass; and when a small amount of the mixture, placed on the tongue, caused no noticeable "bite" or sting. The boiling process could take up to six to eight hours depending on the volume of fats and lye, and the strength of the lye solution itself.

Old Fashioned Soap making has been edited and re-written from an original article by Marietta Ellis.



Wilma Sagurton Receives Alumni Citation Award

Wilma Sagurton, recording secretary of the Ralston Historical Association was recently honored with an alumni citation award from Montclair State University for her contribution to teaching and historic preservation. Wilma was instrumental in obtaining National Historic Register designation for the Combs Hollow section of Randolph, NJ. She served for 16 years on the Randolph Landmarks committee and as a docent for the Museum of Old Randolph. She has published books, produced four videos and transcribed historical documents, lectured, and made gifts to and consulted with several regional museums.



Paula Duer (top left), Ralston General Store Museum docent, is pictured in this photo with her fifth grade class from Whippany. The class was treated to a tour of the museum by Paula in period costume and persona—that of Mrs. John Ralston.

Summer Housekeeping and other Household Advice

Ladies Home Journal July 1904

Summer Housekeeping Without Ice

Partly fill with water a shallow granite ware pan. Place it in an open shady window where there is a good draught of air. In this put bottles of water, milk, cream (sealed) wrapped with wet cloths reaching into the water. Put bottles in an earthen dish deep enough to prevent water getting in. Over this turn an earthen flower pot wrapped with a wet cloth reaching in to the water. The pan should be fixed every morning and evening. With several of these pans one can easily keep house very comfortable without ice.

Artificial Violet Perfume

Quite sweet and inexpensive scent may be made as follows: drop twelve drops of genuine oil of rhodium on a lump of sugar, grind this well in a glass mortar and mix it thoroughly with three pounds of orris powder. This will, in its perfume, have a resemblance to a well-flavored violet. If you add more rhodium oil, a rose perfume instead of a violet one will be produced. It should be bottled in the usual way.

Detroit News-Tribune

When there is no shoe polish to be had, lemon juice makes an excellent substitute. A few drops sprinkled on black or tan shoes and rubbed briskly with a soft duster will give a brilliant polish.

To Extinguish Blazing Chimney

To the Editor of The American:

Sir—I wish The American would spread the knowledge that a fire in a chimney can be instantly extinguished by throwing sulphur into the stove, range, furnace of other source of the fire, so that the fumes of the sulphur can go up the flue. No fire can live in the fumes of sulphur.

Every fire engine should carry a supply; every housekeeper should have it on hand; a few ounces is enough.

Thomas Scott.

Baldwin, N.Y.

Loose Tile

If a tile is loose in the fireplace or floor, do not let it remain or it will be broken or lost. Mix a little plaster of Paris with vinegar to make a paste and set the tile in place with it. Do not step on it until quite firm.

My Neighbor Says: -

A lump of sugar will prevent any unpleasant odor which arises from the water in which thick stalked flowers are placed.

When mixing mustard add a teaspoon full of salt, the same quantity of moist sugar and

mix with boiling water. Mustard prepared this way will keep moist much longer than usual and have a better taste.

If you want your kerosene lamps to give a good light, the wicks should be changed every three months at least. The old wicks, if cut into two-inch lengths and stored in a tin, make excellent fire-lighters.

A slice of bread in the doughnut box will keep your doughnuts soft and light.

Successful cakes are baked in the middle of the oven, the shelf being placed about four inches from the bottom.



RHA trustees Rose and Owen Carlin, Margaret Hogan and Paula Duer helped spruce up the General Store for the opening day of the museum's 2004 season.

The President's Message

By Jeff Purcell

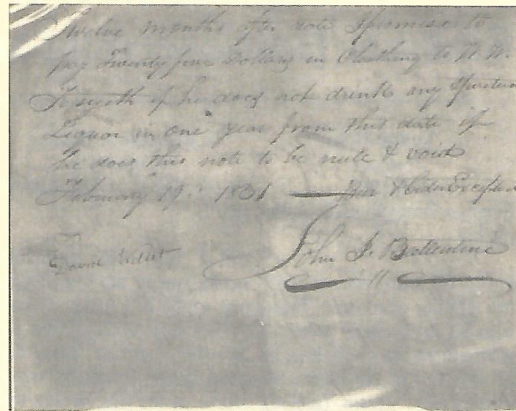
This year the Ralston General Store Museum will celebrate its fourth decade of operation. Although the Association was formed in 1941, it wasn't until 1964, as part of New Jersey's Tercentenary celebration, that the museum was formally opened to the public. Over the past 40 years, the collection has been expanded and the building has been carefully maintained by the RHA trustees using the monies generated by members through their annual dues and contributions to the building fund.

During the past year, the Association completed a number of accomplishments. Proceeds from the building fund were used to clean and preserve the wood shake roof. A TV DVD/VHS player was purchased to improve the presentation of the annual exhibit. We're also taking advantage of the new tech-

nology to improve the historical record of the museum by video recording and orally identifying all of its contents.

At the end of last year we established a subcommittee to look into ways to implement the suggestions made by a consultant who specializes in museum exhibits. As part of our work, it became evident that the Association has a continually growing collection of documents that need to be preserved (The note to the right is just one of many documents that give insight into the past.) To that end, we are exploring ways in which to store the documents that will preserve and keep them available for reference material.

At last year's annual meeting, two long-time members of the Association were elevated to the position of Trustee Emeritus. Both Katherine Emmons and Lucille Hobbie



Twelve months after date I promise to pay Twenty five Dollars in Clothing to W. W. Forsyth if he does not drink any spirituous Liquor in one year from this date if he does this note to be null and void. February 19, 1831.—Beer and Cider Excluded David Willet John Ballentine

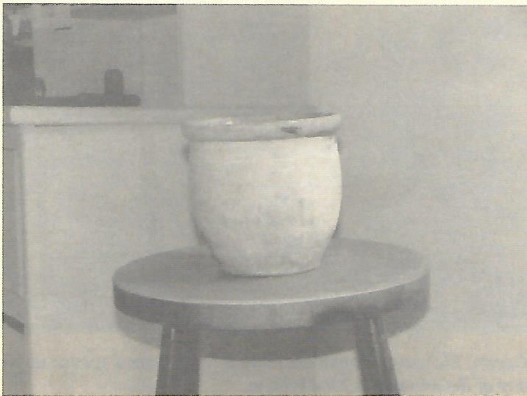
Heimrod have contributed to the success of the museum over many years and this was our way of recognizing their efforts.

If you haven't been to the museum recently, stop by and see our special exhibit "Post Office Artifacts." It includes a number of items from the

time period during which the general store was operated as a post office.

The Ralston General Store Museum is open Sundays, 2 to 5 p.m. and on Holidays. Paula Duer is the docent and she'll be happy to give you a tour of the museum collection.

FROM THE COLLECTION



Indigo Pot

The indigo pot pictured at the left was donated to the museum by Ella Mockridge. It has traces of dark blue on the inside and outside giving an indication of its use. The pot is unglazed on the outside and glazed on the inside. The pot also has a lid to keep the contents from evaporating.

Indigo dyeing is still done today in many countries. The process is as follows: Sow indigo seeds and harvest in the middle of August. Dry the indigo leaves. Then, squeeze the leaves to extract excess moisture. Ferment them from about October to

February in a pot such as the one on display and then wash the mixture. Pound the indigo until it has the consistency of a rice cake and allow to dry once more. Next, soak the indigo leaves in ash and hot water. Then, soak the cloth to be dyed in a vat of indigo for 30 minutes.

Continue re-dipping in this way until you have achieved the color you seek. Repeated dipping and oxidizing will win deeper color than longer immersion times. Finally, wash the cloth by hand.

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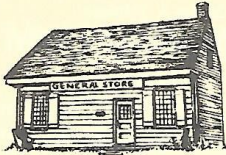
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