

Diary of September, 1947

I recently had cause to check my mother's diaries for some obscure bit of information and realized that 1947 was 60 years ago. As we get older, these little jolts about the passage of time become more common. I tend to think that 1950, for example, wasn't all that far in the past, only to be reminded that it was well over a half century ago!

1947 was a benchmark year of sorts for Beech Hill and most of North Colebrook, as we had just gotten electricity the year before, and still lived for the most part the way all of us did in the mid-nineteenth century in many of our daily endeavors.

My father wired our house (no building codes in those days), and the first thing we had was electric lighting. I can remember that you only had to buy a light bulb once, because when it blew out, you took it down to the CL&P store on Main Street and exchanged it for a new one; one for one, no money changed hands. The second thing was an electric refrigerator, followed soon after by two freezer lockers. The old gasoline powered washing machine, with its three silver suction cup agitator followed close behind on the road to the dump. The dump, by the way, was an old cellar hole, in our case, that never did get totally filled; we didn't have that much to throw away back then. Heating and cooking lagged behind several years. Our first fuel oil furnace came from Montgomery Ward (Usually referred to as "Monkey Ward"), and again my father assembled and installed it. The wood cooking stove was the last major item to be replaced by an electric stove, and did my mother hate that new stove! She would have gladly taken the old "Oakland" back in a minute if it had been possible. The main concern was with the oven temperature. In a wood stove, different types of wood were used to achieve different temperatures, and if you were baking apple pies, for example, you would start out with a moderate oven, gradually increasing the temperature by changing the type of wood or regulating the damper. It took all good cooks a long time before they worked out the kinks in electric cooking.

Another thing that was more mid-nineteenth century than mid-twentieth century was the fact that farms were nearly self sufficient; most of the food that went on the table came out of the garden or was raised in the barn or was hunted in the woods. We had quite a few fruit trees; apple, several types of pear, peaches, plums, blueberries and raspberries. The surplus was bartered, usually at Nichol's Store for commodities we could not produce, such as sugar, flour, spices and molasses.

The amount of work that farm people did back then was enough to boggle the mind when compared with what the average person does today, and yet diaries such as my mothers, and most letters that may have touched on the subject seldom contain complaints; it was just the way things were done.

My mother, as did most farm people, was quite conscious of the weather, and she hated the heat! You have to remember that Beech Hill has an average temperature several degrees lower than Winsted or Torrington, and nearly ten degrees lower than Hartford, and yet any time the temperature ventured above seventy, she would complain how unbearably hot it was. My father and I, on the other hand, loved the warmth, and as soon as we began to feel as though life was becoming livable, my mother would begin to suffer with the heat. It was just like a see-saw.

Monday, Sept. 1, 1947 (6 a.m. temperature 50 degrees) Cool, beautiful day, I did the largest part of the wash, but I'm way behind on my work. [She then mentions that she had for visitors a family of three, three neighbors, (not together) and another couple for dinner.]

Sept. 2 (44°) Electrical showers during the night, which continued off and on all day. It rained most of the time, and two really bad storms – wind took down one of our old apple trees. Paul (my father) got caught in one and the car drowned out and Walt Gray gave him a ride home.

Sept. 3 Beautiful day, cool & bright. Got after the last of the wash and cleaned it up. School opened. Middle west still burning with heat and drought.

Sept. 4 Time out for a few general observations: This has been a hot summer, and far too dry most places. We seem to have had adequate rain, but that hasn't been the rule. I recorded storms for Tuesday, but what we got wasn't a patch on most of the Northeast section. Worse than the '38 hurricane in some sections of New England and a great deal of damage done. Crops took a licking. Middle west still dry and terribly hot. Condition seems to exist almost everywhere. Papers report same thing happening in Europe. Radio said this a.m. butter is going to \$1.00 a pound; eggs already \$1.00 a dozen & prospects are bad for the winter, especially meat and dairy.

Sept. 6 Canned shell beans.

Sept. 8 High 70s all day. This weather agrees with tomatoes, they are wonderful this year. Canned more this morning and more shell beans in p.m. and baked bread, made a cake and a pie this evening, but no more until it cools off.

Sept. 9 It's still too hot during the day – about 75, but the sun was hot. Tried my hand with the scythe cutting grass for the cows. Mrs. Z here 11 – 1:30 and nearly drove me frantic. The cows brought relief by getting out. Canned more tomatoes; a few each day seems easiest way. Wrote a long letter [to her aunt; "long" usually meant 6-8 pgs.].

Sept. 10 A little cooler today, but not much. I just plugged along at my canning; tomatoes & shell beans, but am not going to do any more of the latter.

Sept. 11 This has been a big day. Didn't do any canning, but cleaned the place up. Paul and I met Aaron [Dr. Aaron Levy] at 7:30 in Winsted and we went down to Litchfield to see [John] Carradine in Hamlet. Had a wonderful time, too; even Paul enjoyed the play.

Fri. Sept. 12 Last night did me good, canned 16 quarts of tomatoes and got some letters written. Too hot for comfort, though. Picked the sickle pears and champion peaches, the latter are beautiful and delicious. One of our calves died today, evidently because of heat.

Sept. 15 Queer day – one sudden shower without sound effects, then electrical storms all afternoon with heavy rain, which we needed badly.

Sept. 16 Overcast, but not hot and I canned tomatoes. It grew quite cool toward night and feels more normal. Fire felt good.

Sept. 20 Coldest day so far and fire in the stove felt good. Baked bread, pie and gingerbread, canned tomatoes, too. Picked all ripening tomatoes (2 bu.), covered plants and exposed squash. Cold enough for frost tonight. Rest of peaches and pears seem very slow ripening.

To be continued.