



historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 27

January 2021

NUMBER 1

Because of the virus pandemic, social distancing requirements and the closing of the library there have been no public meetings of the Cass City Historical Society. We hope to be back in business before too much longer

From The Home Ice Box to the Modern Day Super Market

Years ago, before and during the Second World War, people didn't have the conveniences that we enjoy today. There were grocery stores such as the A & P, Tates, Hartwicks Dupree's and Frieburger's. There were also meat markets, Reed & Patterson and Gross & Maier, but they didn't have the facilities to keep the various meats cold in order to preserve them for very long. People went daily to purchase meat, poultry



The home Ice Box

and fish. Milk was delivered every day to your house as were the cakes of ice to keep it cool.

Ice had to be cut from the river or the lake in the winter and stored in ice houses, packed in sawdust for insulation to

keep it frozen through the warm months. The ice box would keep the food in it cold for about a day as the ice slowly melted and dripped down into a pan in the bottom that had to be emptied each day.

Obtaining and preparing meals for growing families was much more work and required more time than you can imagine today.

Many families living in town had garden plots and some even raised chickens. Baby chicks could be purchased and sent through the mail.



During the war home Victory Gardens were encouraged by the government because there were

shortages of food due to the war effort. Many foods were rationed as well as many other necessary supplies.

Foods raised in the growing season had to be preserved, and many of them were canned. Neighbors would pool their resources, drive to Romeo to buy peaches from orchards there by the bushel, bring them home and the next day can them. They pooled their resources because cars, tires and the roads were no where near the quality of today, and tires and gasoline were rationed. This was a long, hard and messy effort, but necessary in order have food for meals in the winter time. The vegetables raised in their gardens were also canned and stored on shelves in the basements which were usually



unheated. The stoves used for heating in the canning process were not the modern electric or

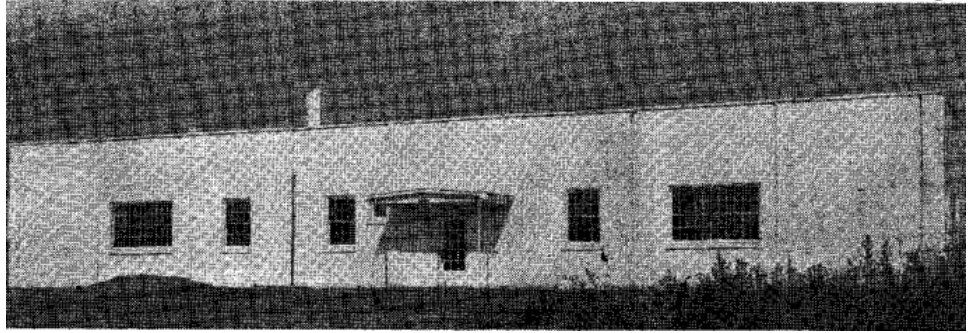
gas stoves we have today. Many were ranges that were heated with coal or wood, and other stoves were fueled with kerosene. The stoves were also used to heat the water as electric water heaters were just coming into use.

Preparing foods for the winter months was often a family and sometimes a neighborhood sharing and trading affair. String beans, tomatoes, sweet corn, pickles, sauerkraut, peaches and apple sauce all went through the process. Potatoes and apples could be kept in basements if it was cool there, or kept in root cellars.

In late 1946 something new came to town. A new frozen food locker plant was built on Church Street just east of the Nestle's Milk Plant, which was still in operation. Anyone could rent a personal keyed locker of the 700 available and store their food, especially meat, in it for retrieval at any time needed. The locker company had it's own slaughter house, and they would sell you a half, or a quarter of beef or pork, cut it, wrap and label it and then store it frozen in your private locker for you.

In 1951 a new store, the Food Town Super Market was built where Revive Store is today. It included a walk-in cold room where several sides of beef or pork could be hung. It also had a large refrigerated show case where cuts of meat and deli-like foods could be displayed. With refrigeration the grocery store and meat market were brought together in one place. That store was later moved into a building on the west end of town, and called the IGA Foodliner.

In 1953 Henry and Estella Cooklin traded the Locker Plant to the Erla Family of the Lapeer area for their farm. The Erla family's members took the



Cass City Frozen Food Lockers

responsibility for the various departments of the store and grew the business into a modern supermarket for its day. The store underwent continuous remodeling and expansion over the years. This included special meat processing for hot dogs, the finest bratwurst anywhere, smoked hams and other specialties with wholesale sales to other stores in the thumb area. A fine bakery was added, and a very popular deli where customers would line up to buy a convenient, tasty lunch for take out

After years of service to the community the Erla family sold their business to a firm that didn't last too long. It takes a lot of talent and experience to run a multi dimensional business like that, which the Erlas had developed within their family.

The IGA Foodliner had also ceased operation and two Dollar stores moved in, the Family Dollar and Dollar General with Walmart chain stores in both Caro and Bad Axe price competition was very strong for other companies, and Cass City was left without a super market for several years.

Finally, just recently, Ben's Fresh Market opened its newly remodeled super market in the former Erla's location, and Dollar General built a new store which includes an expanded line of frozen foods.

Now we can go to our local markets and purchase complete frozen dinners of tasty and

nutritious recipes from all over the world for a reasonable price. Some even come in their own microwaveable bowls that you toss into the recycle box when you're through with them.

If you are one of us that had many a meal of side pork, mashed potatoes and milk gravy when you were growing up, you should appreciate our modern day supermarkets more than any of those who didn't have the



"Now, what will we have for dinner tonight?"

experience. Life is much easier, our nutrition is better, our kids are taller than we are, three score and ten doesn't mean as much anymore, and we have more time to read and exercise.