

CHAPTER 5

Jarjus planted fruit trees east of the yard. Although he kept them watered, they just would not do well, and eventually died. Therefore, he gave up the idea of having any orchard.

Then, years later, a nurseryman from Arlington stopped in to sell some fruit trees. Jarjus was not interested, saying: "No, it's no use. I started some but they wouldn't grow." He showed the man where he had planted them. The nurseryman fervently said: "You have the best place in the world to have an orchard. Southwest of your house, on the east side of the hill, is ideal for them to get the full morning sun. That is like medicine for fruit trees." As a result, Jarjus ordered eight apple, four plum, twelve cherry and two pear trees. The next year he added an order for grapevines and berry bushes. Later, he planted six peach trees. Everything grew so well.

It was a bit difficult to get the cherries picked when they were ripe. The older boys were busy with the field work. That left Mathilda and the younger children to do the picking. It wasn't so hard while the trees were small, but as they grew larger, more cherries appeared. One cherry tree had died. Eleven trees were growing every year and trying to outdo the production of the year before. Every year, at cherry-picking time, relatives were enlisted to help pick. It was tiring to pick cherries all day and then "can" them in the evening. Mathilda usually canned approximately one hundred quarts of cherries every year. One year there were too many cherries to preserve, and she did not want them to go to waste. She sold some to neighbors and friends even though her husband didn't want any sold. He had said: "I planted those trees for our family's use." Nevertheless, she sold extra cherries in the ensuing years; which proceeds helped Jarjus buy three new colts at about ten dollars apiece.

When the apple trees started to bear, it wasn't so difficult to cope with. First, one would pick up the "Drop" apples from the ground. They were good for making "apple butter" (jam) and for drying. Sometimes Jarjus fed them to his hogs. He would help with the peeling for the drying process. After slicing and placing them on a screen with a piece of a worn-out bed sheet laying on it, a second screen was placed on top of them in order to keep the flies off. This was, then, placed on the flat roof of the cob shed for drying in the sun. They had to be turned over for drying on the other side; sometimes it took several turnings when

there wasn't much sunshine. When the apples were completely dry (in 3-4 days) Mathilda put them in cloth bags and hung them in a cool place. They would keep very well for all winter's use. Every fall the apples, picked from the trees were enjoyed. The winter apples were stored in the cellar. Some were sold in the winter season. Mathilda canned apples in two-quart jars. A large shelf held the apple-filled jars and other canned fruits and vegetables.

Years later, Jarjus planted another apple orchard, which bore fruit for about four to five years and then died. The pear trees did poorly in bearing, and died shortly after planting.

It was possible for Jarjus to raise his own sugar cane and process it to make syrup. There was a plot of ground west of the cottonwood grove and north of the apple orchard. He planted about three acres of the cane for a number of years. It grew tall and the stalks became very juicy. He cultivated the cane during the summer to keep it clean from weeds. Towards fall, shortly before the cold weather set in, the boys had the task of stripping all of the leaves from the plants with a stick and cutting off the seedtops with a corn knife. The seeds were, then, saved for planting the following year. Since the juice is extracted from the stalks, the next step was to cut the stalks. They were piled on a double wagon box and hauled to the press which belonged to a friend.

It took about three or four people to do the processing of the syrup. As the stalks were run through the press, the juice was extracted into a large kettle. It was cooked over an open fire, using wood that had been gathered from the grove. One person had to constantly stir the juice with a large wooden paddle to keep it from scorching. The cooking process took a long time until it thickened and became syrup. The syrup was taken home in a large barrel and poured into jugs and jars for storing and use all year round. It was delicious as a spread on bread, and better tasting than the sorghum we buy in the store. Mathilda used it for sweetening some of her homemade plum jam. Sometimes the supply did not last until the next fall when the process would be repeated.

In the early nineteen hundreds, or a little later, the farmers in the neighborhood called a meeting for signing up to have a telephone line built and a telephone installed in each home. They agreed to do the work, mostly, by themselves. Everybody was to share the labor and expenses. It took a few meetings before

there were enough signers. Three people were selected to order all of the materials to be used. Every farmer was to furnish a worker, as poles had to be set up and wires fastened to the poles, etc. Jarjus' son, Otto, had the job of climbing the poles and fastening the wires to them.

The telephone line was a great help in time of need, especially during threshing time. There were about fourteen families on the same line. Each family had its own ring, a variation of a short and long ring. A "very long ring" meant a call for help and everyone hearing it should listen in for the message. It was a general policy for neighbors to listen in on another's conversation. The children had fun on "April Fool's Day". They would call other children, say "April Fool" and hang up the receiver.

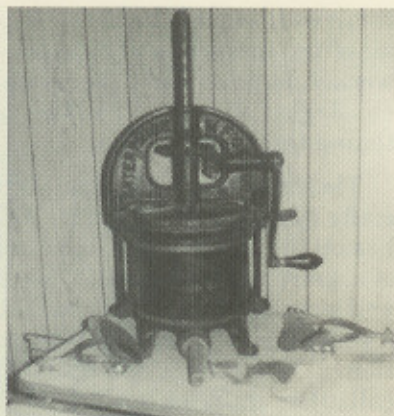
The telephone box, with its voice piece in front, was fastened to a wall where it would be convenient for the family to use it. It had the receiver hanging on one side, and on the other side was the crank for turning in order to make it ring on the line. If you wanted to call someone on another line, you had to call "Central" at Pierce, Nebraska. That was done by pushing a button, which was on the side of the box, and holding it in while you turned the crank. Central would ask for the number and then connect you with the party you wanted.

A telephone meeting was held twice a year. Dues were paid for paying all expenses. Two men were appointed to keep the line in repair. After stormy weather the line needed repairing. They were paid for the time spent doing the work.

It seemed like a lot of meat was consumed at Jarjus' home as there were always a great number of meal-time guests. He seldom bought fresh meat from the butcher shop because they butchered their own beef and pork.

In the late fall, when the weather became cooler, Jarjus butchered a two-year-old beef. He hung the hindquarter in the north room of the cellar for cutting fresh meat off and preparing as desired. The front quarter was cut up and canned in jars. Mathilda canned about fifty quarts for the following summer's use. The boney pieces were salted down in brine to be cooked later. Toward mid-winter, Jarjus butchered a two-year-old beef and two hogs for sausage making. The butchering took several days and was very tiring. Nevertheless, there would be satisfaction when they saw all the meat that there was to eat. Sometimes a neighbor family or relatives would help make the sausage.

Jarjus saw to it that the meat was cut just right. He liked the cured meat when cooked, so Mathilda made sure that he did not put too much of the meat in the salt brine. The hams, shoulders and bacon were cured in this manner for a certain length of time, then hung on a heavy rod in the smoke house. A great deal of meat was ground up and seasoned for sausage. The heart, tongue and hog's head went into the red sausage. The liver and a lot of the fat meat made up the liver



SAUSAGE STUFFER

(Note the spurs on either side and the cornhusking hook in front)

sausage. The meat from two shoulders was ground for "smoked sausage". The sausage stuffer was a deep pot which held about ten pounds of the ground meat. As one person pressed the handle, an attached plate as a lid, pushed the meat downward. Someone held a casing over a small opening at the side of the stuffer near the bottom. As the casing filled with sausage, care had to be made that it would not be stuffed too tightly. Heavy string was tied to both ends of the sausage and brought together for hanging on the heavy rod in the smoke house.

The smoking process varied as to length of time. The sausages smoked through in four to five days, whereas the hams, bacon and shoulders took much longer. A lit, smoldering rotten stump in an old deep kettle provided the proper smoke. Jarjus took care that the fire would not touch the meat as only the smoke was needed. The old smoke house was an important building on the place for many years.

Usually roads were icy to travel over during the winter, and it was imperative to have a team of horses properly shod so that they would not slip and fall while pulling loads of feed. Otto took a team to the Hadar blacksmith to be shod. It was interesting to him to watch the smithy work. He asked to be shown how to trim out the inside of the hoof, clip it and fit the shoe, which the blacksmith was willing to do. From then on, he did most of the blacksmith work at the home place. He would shod some of the horses that were to be used during the icy weather. Only the front feet were done. There was a reason for that.

When all four feet had shoes on and the horse would kick another, it would make a big gash and usually end in an ugly sore. Therefore, those that had shoes on the back feet also, had to be kept in the barn and let out, one by one, for exercising in the barnyard.

That blacksmith shop was also used as a small workshop to repair machinery that had broken down. There was a small forge in which iron could be heated and the pieces brazed together. It was used by other farmers who had broken machinery needing repairs. When the threshing machine broke down while threshing at the Mittelstaedt place, the owner was grateful that the repairs could be done in their shop. Every year when the threshing machine left the place it was in good working condition.

When the boys were old enough to take over the farming, Jarjus began to raise his own horses. He sold some of his "fillies" but kept the "geldings" to use as work horses. The colts were trained to work in the field when they were two and a half to three years old. It was interesting to see how Jarjus and boys went about getting the young horses accustomed to the harness and pulling a machine.

The first thing in the training program was putting the collar on the colt's neck while it was still in the barn. Next, part of the harness would be put on its back just to let it get used to its touch and weight. The colt would buck and try to shed it. This would take several days. Then it came time for it to get used to the bridle. It took a bit of coaxing to get the colt to the place where he would be willing to let them put the bit into its mouth. The boys led the colt out of the barn, with the harness on, to the water tank for him to learn to be led. Finally, the time came to hitch the colt to the wagon. That really was exciting! An older horse, "Barney" was hooked up along side of it. He was gentle and seemed to know what was expected of him. He would walk slowly and take it easy while the colt would jump around and try to stand on his hind feet. Old Barney seemed to enjoy it.

After the colt was broken in to drive on the road, it was hitched to a disk along with three other horses. Jarjus was very particular as to how the horses were treated. He wouldn't let a colt be used long at first; two hours in the forenoon and two hours in the afternoon. Then, the boys would drive it for a half day in order to strengthen its muscles to become a strong work horse. It took years to develop a colt into a good work horse.

Jarjus showed the boys how to treat the horse collars to prevent pressure sores on their shoulders. If a sore would develop,

it showed on the collar. The rough spot on the collar would be softened by pounding with a hammer. They washed the sore spots and applied ointment every evening. In that way the shoulders healed while the collars were being worn for work.

Jarjus was good at treating some animal ailments. Nearly every year the steers would get "lump jaw" while they were being fattened in the feedlot. It was caused by an injury. Jarjus bought a medicine called "Yote Colly" and mixed it with three cups of water. One cup of the medicine was given the sick steer in the morning, another cup in the evening, and the third cup the following morning. By the time ten days, or two weeks passed, the lump jaw had disappeared. This medicine was also good for treating "wooden tongue". He tried to find a cure for most livestock ailments. When one of the horses sprained its ankle, Jarjus told the boys to rub it with liniment. He also requested the hog barn to be disinfected with carbolic acid and the hogs sprayed with a dip solution.

One afternoon they heard a loud scream from a horse. It was one of their beautiful two-year-old fillies running into the farm yard. Somehow she had gotten out of the fence and caught her hind leg in the barbed-wire fence. In struggling to get loose, her right hind leg was nearly torn off with the lower part flopping in the air. "Oh, what a pitiful sight!" Nothing could be done but to destroy her. The whole family felt sick about it. That is one of the things with which a farmer has to deal.

Jarjus had a book of instructions, telling how to make tonics for treating certain ailments. One, in particular, was for the relief of rheumatic pains. Severe rheumatism plagued him during the cold damp weather. Jarjus prepared the tonic by processing dandelion roots which were cleaned, scraped, cut into one-inch pieces and dried thoroughly in the sun. It made about three quarts. After the soaking process, he would have about a pint of the prepared tonic. To that he added a small amount of alcohol to prevent fermentation. Fennel tea was a favorite for treating some ailments. The tea, made of herbs, such as caraway seed, and alcohol and sugar was used for stomach disorders. He also made "Kimmelschnops" with alcohol.

Mathilda once had a swelling on the back of her foot. It was hot to touch and very painful. Jarjus took some wide-leaved plantain leaves that were seen growing in the yard, washed and dried them. He wrapped her foot in a pack of these leaves, leaving them on overnight. The following morning her foot was much better, the leaves having drawn out the fever and pain. Arnica liquid was good for healing cuts and bruises.