

Teacher Resource Information: **Children on the 1917 Farm**

Parents depended on their children to help out on the farm and in household work in 1917. Parents needed help to accomplish the many tasks that had to be done, and children knew that their work contributed to the family income. Generally, boys would help their father in the fields doing the farm work while girls would help their mother with household tasks. However, boys would oftentimes help their mother and girls would help their father.

Children had many chores to do and these tended to be things that took time away from the major tasks the adults were required to do. As children grew older, they were given more responsibility. Boys would help with fieldwork, care for the horses, and harness/work the horses. Girls would be given a more active role in the cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Childhood chores served as training for the roles they would assume as adults.

From interviews with Elizabeth (Beth) Wyatt Winn in 1986, we learn many of the chores the Wyatt girls helped out with on our 1917 Farm. The following is a list of chores the Wyatt girls performed:

1. *Cows:* The Wyatt girls milked and fed the cows and drove them to and from pasture. Before their younger sisters were old enough to help milk, Beth and her sister Carol milked eight cows apiece, morning and night. They would get up at 5 am each morning to milk the cows before breakfast and have time for the milk to cool.
2. *Loading Hay:* During haying season, the girls sometimes rode the hay wagon out to the field to help load hay. One led the horse on the hay derrick [a hoisting apparatus] to unload the hay from the wagon to the haystack. The horse had to be controlled at all times so the man on the load of hay and the men on the haystack wouldn't be injured by the Jackson Fork. These men couldn't see each other, so the girls had to see that the loaded fork was lifted high enough and held there until the stacker shouted, "Dump it!" It would then be lowered slowly until the man on the wagon grabbed the tines of the fork. Leading the horse was Beth's favorite job.
3. *Irrigating the garden:* Beth also liked making ditches in the garden for irrigation. She said, "There was a thrilling reward in seeing the plants revive and grow faster soon after each watering." Besides irrigating the garden, they irrigated the potatoes and helped in sugar beet irrigation. They rode the cultivator to row up the sugar beets and potatoes. They made rows in the garden with a hoe.
4. *Fruit picking and canning:* Picking the fruit from the orchard, canning the fruit and drying the apples were jobs Beth and her sisters enjoyed doing with their mother.

5. *Housework, feeding*: The girls also did housework—like cleaning the kerosene lamps daily—and fed the chickens, calves and pigs.
6. *Fencing*: Occasionally their father needed to mend the fences. He didn't like to work alone and needed to have someone hand him tools. Beth said, "I have precious memories of hours spent with my father. He always made me feel that my help was very important."

Other chores children helped out with on a farm:

- Food preparation, peeling potatoes, snapping beans, shelling peas, etc.
- Bringing in wood and cobs; carrying out ashes
- Bringing in clean water; carrying out dirty water
- Fetching food from the cellar, garden, and smokehouse
- Disposing of garbage; slopping the pigs
- Setting and clearing the table; washing dishes
- Churning butter
- Helping with laundry (haul water, shave soap, use scrub board and agitator, and hang clothes on line)
- Caring for lamps
- Sweeping floor and shaking rugs
- Babysitting
- Grinding coffee
- Feeding and watering livestock and poultry
- Gathering eggs
- Herding livestock
- Bringing the cows in
- Milking
- Cleaning the outbuildings
- Shelling corn
- Hoeing the crops
- Riding the harrow and corn planter
- Picking up stones
- Taking food and water to the fields
- Weeding and hoeing the garden
- Watering and harvesting the garden
- Acting as a scarecrow

Source: Notes from Elizabeth (Beth) Wyatt Winn, 24 April 1986. Life on the Wyatt Farm interview by Charles Peterson, 12 August 1973, pages 1-2. List prepared by Jeannie Thomas