

Corn

Corn in early Iowa was both mystical and practical. To the Indian, maize was manna of the gods. A symbol of blood was the red corn, whereby the seed was fertilized. But to both the Indian and the white man, corn was also practical. Iowa's coat-of-arms might be a well-filled ear of corn. — The Editor.

Green corn harvest was charmingly idyllic. "Roasting ear time" it was called. "From all directions came squaws staggering under masses of fagots and leading ponies likewise laden down. With the fagots huge fires were built. Then from out the corn patches poured children bearing unhusked ears. The fires were allowed to sink to red-hot embers and on the embers were thrown the ears in the husks. The atmosphere was everywhere saturated with the appetizing odor of roasting corn".

The way of the pioneer with green corn was that of the Indian. "Julys, Augusts, and Septembers of the first few years", writes a Des Moines Valley settler, "found the grain supply very low. . . . So at the maturing of that first crop of corn I shall never forget with what satisfaction father was met when he came in

with the first arm load of 'roasting ears'. . . . The milky ears were stripped out of their husks, these tied back, and the silks removed, and all strung on the jerk-stick over the fire: hot, crisp, and brown we munched it off without stopping for seasoning".

When the Indian made corn into meal, he did so by pounding the kernels in a wooden mortar or by breaking them between two stones. The pioneer took his ripened corn to mill. But if the season were winter he would perhaps be forced to grind on his own account. He might own a hand mill, like the mills of Judea of old: two circular stones with a staff let into the upper stone, the top of the staff pivoting in a joist or board overhead.

But in Iowa the more usual home contrivance for grinding was the common coffee mill. "The grinding of the flinty corn in the coffee mill", says a settler, "was a slow process and hard work". The mill had to be set so as to grind coarsely the first time, and when set closer the grist was run through a second time before it was fine enough to use. The time required to grind a one-meal grist for a family of four was three-quarters of an hour, and the head of the family was glad the family wasn't larger. In default of a mill an inverted carpenter's plane could be made to serve as a grater; or there might be pressed into service a perforated tin pan.

Corn bread and corn mush! Corn mush and corn

bread! Corn bread and corn mush! Morning, noon, and night — corn bread and corn mush! Day in and day out, week in and week out, corn bread and corn mush!

“Be still, my Muse”, exclaims the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* in the late eighteen thirties, “be still and hush, Apollo tunes his lyre to Mush!” Wheat bread was a luxury; the flour, costing seven, eight, or ten dollars a sack, was indulged in only when the preacher or some other company came. “It was longed for by the children”. And not only so. The Indians themselves longed for it, sometimes refusing to accept in its stead the all prevailing corn meal or corn bread.