

The Dairy Business

By
Newton Bair

Apple Snitz And Oil On Waters

The evening milking is done. I carried the skim milk from the separator room to the hog pen while Papa fed the hogs and Danny 'slopped' the calves. Mama and the girls had gone to the house to get

supper ready. There were serious plans for the evening, so nobody dallied.

While the girls cleared the supper table, Danny and George started carrying the apples in from

the back porch and dumped them on the big oak table, in easy reach of everyone.

"Jake, put some clean paper in that basket first" — Mama was in charge — "now boys, keep the apples on the table, not on the floor — that's enough for now — here's a bowl to put the snitz in — peel them thin now."

Tomorrow is Apple Butter Time. The apples had been gathered off the ground in the orchard, (the cows having been kept out for the last month or so) and there were plenty. Not perfect specimens as you might find on the supermarket shelf, but good enough.

We hadn't sprayed the orchard for several years, ever since we lost a couple of good cows from too much fruit spray on the orchard grass. The apples had a few inhabitants, but not to worry, they were discarded with the peelings.

Five bushels of clean apple snitz — that's what it would take for a kettle of apple butter. By bedtime we had enough, and the peelings

were set out for the hog's breakfast. Oh yes, the cider. It would be put in the copper kettle at dawn tomorrow, to begin the boiling down over an open fire, near the woodpile.

Papa and I had been to the cider mill at Lisburn yesterday.

That had been a noteworthy experience in itself, because we had to leave right after breakfast and I got out of doing the chores.

Twenty bushels of washed apples and an oak barrel just about filled the two-horse wagon. Old Pete, he was the lead mule, and Jenny on the off side, made a fair team. Papa even let me hold the lines, unless we met an occasional car on the road.

The 10 mile trip took all day, and was made bearable by a stop at the Lisburn store for Papa's tobacco and a half-pint of ice cream for me, the most I ever had at one time.

Hoffman's cider mill was one of the last of the old "hammer handle" presses with a giant wooden screw and a 40-foot long beam for leverage. Water power from the Yellow Breeches creek turned the grinder and screw, and the apple juice flowed like a fountain.

The pumice was dumped into the creek. (The Chesapeake bay was far, far away and had the whole Susquehanna river to digest the sewage.)

It took several pleasant hours at the mill yapping with the neighbors and sampling some of Hoff-

man's "stone fence", until our turn came to move up to the dumping pit. We didn't get home until after dark.

After the cider had boiled down to half its volume, the apple snitz were dumped in and the fire built up. A sheet iron shield around the fire kept the heat close to the kettle, and the pot began to boil in earnest.

Now is the time for real work and close watching. Keep it boiling, but stir like made to keep the apples from burning fast to the kettle.

The wooden stirrer was worn down from years of scraping on the bottom of the kettle, but it had been well attached to the smooth handle, and the steady rhythm of each cycle kept the contents in motion. Stand on the leeward side, out of the smoke. Keep stirring while someone else fetches more wood.

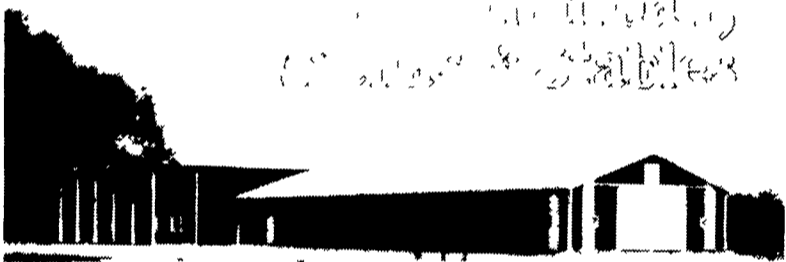
Have a plate of home-made butter handy, to use as a buffer when the kettle threatens to boil over. Papa called it 'oil on the troubled waters.' It never failed to forestall a disaster which might scald someone or worse yet, quench the fire under the kettle.

Just before milking time, Mama scooped a sample with a wooden spoon, and declared the butter done to her liking. The gallon crocks were hauled out and filled with the sweet essence of thirty bushels of apples, condensed into only a few gallons of the nectar we call apple butter.

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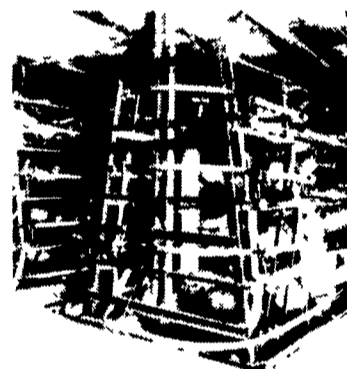
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