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Article Summary: The first American-born generation, eager to be all-American, rejected European foods except as part of holiday celebrations. Pioneers chose the more widely-available Indian foods only during times of famine, usually eating dried and preserved foods and relying heavily on corn.

#### Cataloging Information:

Names: Emerson Purcell, Everett Dick, Mari Sandoz, Elizabeth C Sargent, Berna Hunter Chrisman, Roy Sage, Warren Fairchild, Estelle Chrisman Laughlin, Gertrude Eubank Worley

Nebraska Place Names: Custer County

Sources Quoted: Emerson Purcell, ed, *Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska*; Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890*; Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules*; Berna Hunter Chrisman, *When You and I Were Young, Nebraska*

Photographs / Images: Nelson Potter farm on Lees Creek, Custer County; wind-irrigated farm, 1925; postcard titled “Hope and Contentment on the Claim,” 1900; bachelor homesteader, 1886 (Solomon D Butcher photograph)

## “SORRY CHUCK”— PIONEER FOODWAYS

By ROGER L. WELSCH

If there is any accuracy to the German proverb “*Man ist was man isst*” (one is what he eats), knowing more about the Plains pioneer’s food would help us understand him. Indeed, a knowledge of the homesteader’s menu may be necessary to an understanding of his home life, literature, and folklore. Contemporary songs contain frequent allusions to pioneer foods—rarely complimentary:

I am looking rather seedy now while holding down my claim,  
And my victuals are not always of the best . . .

Yet I rather like the novelty of living in this way,  
Though my bill of fare is always rather tame.”

—from “*Little Old Sod Shanty*”

Oh, they churn the butter well  
In Kansas.  
They churn the butter well  
In Kansas.  
They churn the butter well  
And the buttermilk they sell  
And they all get lean as hell  
In Kansas.

Oh, potatoes they grow small  
In Kansas.  
Potatoes they grow small  
In Kansas.  
Oh, potatoes they grow small  
And they dig 'em in the fall  
And they eat 'em hides and all  
In Kansas.  
—from “*In Kansas*”

Of course, the entire song and its title, “Starving to Death on My Government Claim,” is a comment on the scarcity of food.<sup>1</sup>

Food is an essential and continual element of life, so it does find constant mention in pioneer accounts. Opinions regarding the fare’s quality, quantity, and ingenuity are frequently expressed and offer us a broad and fairly accurate view of pioneer foodways.

Interviewers for the Federal Writers Project during the Depression years sought out recipes from still-living pioneers. Regional and county biographical sketches, like Emerson Purcell's *Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska (Custer County Chief: Broken Bow, 1936)*, contain many references to foods. Finally, historians like Everett Dick have included diet as a part of historic description.

A predominant feature of the early Plains frontier-years cuisine is, of course, immigrant foods. Naturally, the first settlers, predominantly European, continued to cook insofar as possible in keeping with the traditions of their homelands. But the key words here are "insofar as possible," for in a very short time whatever European supplies that had been brought along had been exhausted and seldom was there sufficient money to establish importation.

Furthermore, social pressures discouraged the day-to-day use of immigrant foods; it was important to become "American" in language, costume, and custom as soon as possible. Only rarely did pockets of cultural conservatism persist. The results were: (1) a disappearance of native foods and foodways; (2) substantial variance of basic ingredients, which resulted usually in a basic variance of the foodstuffs themselves; and (3) relegation of immigrant foods to a ceremonial or ritual status, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Classification of pioneer foods is very difficult. Should categories of food be based on preparation? Or ingredients, or intent (in the case of substitution foods), or source? If, therefore, my description of the specifics of pioneer foodways seems undifferentiated, it is because I have not been able to answer that question myself.

One needn't read very many accounts of migrants to the Plains before it becomes evident that the foodstuffs in the wagon box were notably regular inventory:<sup>2</sup> a sack or two of flour (perhaps the last wheat flour that family would see for many seasons), a side of bacon, a keg of molasses, or carton of loaf sugar. A cast iron Dutch oven was the most common and often the only cooking equipment, serving as a pan, pot, and oven. Thrust into the lonely and barren Plains environment, many adventurers became suddenly and acutely aware of their

own inadequacies in the "kitchen": "After being initiated into the art of constructing biscuits in a Dutch oven, in the heroic act of eating them soaked in bacon fat and syrup, washed down with strong coffee, I achieved the sleep of exhaustion."<sup>3</sup>

Mari Sandoz, always a sensitive and accurate observer of pioneer temperament, commented on the preeminence of foods in *Old Jules*: "This year there were more women, not many, but more, and some of these were single. Whatever their status in Indiana, or Iowa, or York state [*sic*], where competition was keener, here they were all sought after as heiresses, or, more to the point, good cooks."<sup>4</sup>

A good many Plains foods were familiar to all comers and could be eaten out-of-hand—for example, wild plums and grapes. Others were new, and certainly the housewife's mode of preservation had to change to suit the conditions of the Plains. In *Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska*, Mrs. Elizabeth C. Sargent could write: "In the summers my sisters and I were kept busy gathering wild fruit of which there was an abundance. We were fortunate in having brought with us a supply of glass jars since they could not be bought here."<sup>5</sup>

But not many settlers shared that foresight. They had to adopt new ways of food preservation. Drying was certainly the most common method: "If store fruit were to be had at all, the staple was dried peaches or apples. In fact, everything was dried that possibly could be. Green beans, corn, rhubarb, berries, and even pumpkins were dried."<sup>6</sup>

In an effort to bring some variety to their family fare, women searched about to find new ways to make dried fruits savory:

We had plenty of red plums, sweet and delicious and father brought them to the house by the pailful. The Indians had dried the wild fruits, then pounded their flesh into the meat to make *pemmican*. Father had learned how to do this, and we "jerked" dried some wild meat, then dried it that fall and beat the sweet plum fruit into the meat, then dried the powdery substance again. It was a real treat and would tempt any palate today. The plums were sweet when ripe and fresh, but it took their weight in sugar to put them up as fruit. However, since we had no fruit jars, and the canning process was only half-understood at that time, we spread the plums out on blankets or a wagon sheet on the ground and as they dried they shriveled into hard-as-stone form, in frosty blue colors. But they kept well, and it took only an overnight soaking to restore their juicy goodness. . . .

The wild plums could be pitted and cooked to a thick mass. Spread thinly in pans, and dried in the sun like the others, they became a thick, tough, chewy fruit that we called "plum leather."

Mother thought the yellow-orange plums made the best plum leather, but they were few and hard to find. The really small plums that grew best on the stunted bushes in sand draws we called "sand cherries." They were sweeter than the plums of orange-yellow coloring. Then there were wild gooseberries that made excellent pies, but would make you wrinkle your nose if eaten without sugar. And the grapes from the canyons made wonderful fruit dishes when sugar could be added. But like other fruit, we generally dried them with the seeds left within. Even the livestock ate these grapes that hung on the vines that were festooned over the smaller plum bushes.<sup>7</sup>

Chrisman and many other journalists (for example, Roy Sage, in *Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska*) mention robbing the six-foot-high stick nests of pack rats for their content of dried fruit. It was a simple matter to tear the nests apart, and, according to these accounts, forty or fifty pounds of clean, neatly dried fruit — grapes, chokecherries, and plums — could be gathered.

The pioneer housewife would be astonished to see the price tags on dried fruits today, and certainly the pioneer homesteader who made it through a hard winter on dried apples would find it hard to believe that today such fare is nearly considered a delicacy. In those days dried apples were tough and leathery, tobacco-brown and fly-specked. A pioneer poet in Gage County penned: "Spit in my ears and tell me lies, but give me no more dried apple pies."<sup>8</sup>

Meat too was dried, especially game like elk, antelope, and venison, which profit considerably from drying. Although smoked meat was common fare in European and eastern United States homelands, smokehouses were unusual indeed on the Plains, where wood was far too rare to be squandered by burning! The settler who resigned himself to cooking over a smolder of cow chips considered it a substantial step lower to smoke meats over the same fuel.

Indeed, in considering pioneer cookery, the whole concept of fuels must also be examined. The cook obviously had to accommodate her calculation to the kind of fire she had: from the gunpowder flash of twisted-grass "cats" to the slow smolder of cow chips. The accommodations *were* made, however, and excellent angel food cakes could be made in a Dutch oven over a corncob fire. Elaborate formulas were developed and a recipe might contain such instructions as: "Stoke the fire until you can hold your hand in the oven no longer than the count of five, then add five cobs everytime the fire dies down."<sup>9</sup>

During hard, hard times, when the corn was selling for a few cents a bushel, the pioneer family wound up eating the corn crop and little else but the corn crop. The irony was honed sharper by the fact that, since they couldn't sell the corn to buy other foods, they also couldn't sell it to buy coal. Hence, they had to burn corn in the stove to cook the corn for supper. Next to drying, perhaps the most common method for the preservation of both meats and fruits was pickling in a strong brine:

The process of canning was not in use on a large scale during the frontier period, and, hence, the only other method of preserving food was by means of salt brine and boiling sweets. Tomatoes were placed in a barrel of strong brine, and kept submerged by weighted boards. When the housewife desired tomatoes for a meal, she took a few from the barrel and soaked them in cold water, changing the water frequently. When the brine was finally soaked out, the tomatoes were cooked.<sup>10</sup>

Meats were preserved in the same way: "These birds [field birds: prairie hens, quail, grouse] frequently found their way into mother's stone jar of heavy salt brine, and we could eat two or three birds at our table in one meal."<sup>11</sup>

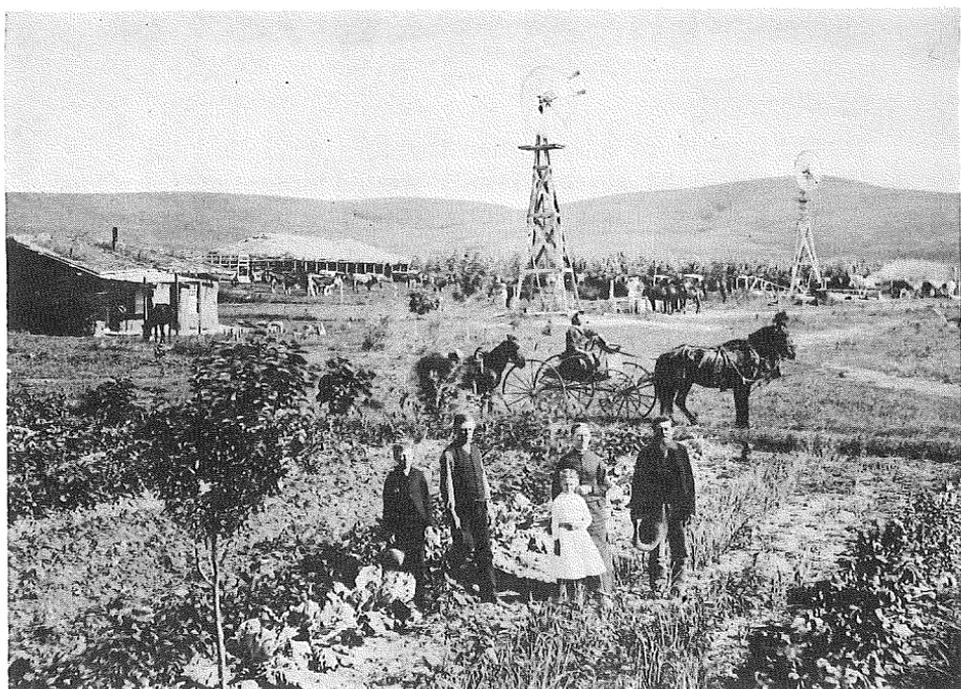
Several sources also mention merely packing meat in a barrel with a heavy interlarding of salt; this included poultry and, especially, pork. Pork was also preserved by boiling it down ("trying") and then packing the well-cooked pieces of meat in the barrel in a matrix of the rendered tallow.

Fruits and berries might also be boiled down into a "butter," so that the heavy sugar content and sterilization would prevent spoilage. Jellies — preserved juices — were also very popular, especially because they provided much needed vitamins and variety during the long winter months:

Where the silvery buffalo-berry bushes were solid clumps of yellow-orange, the tiny, shot-like berries in round clusters all along the thorny stems, Mary held the bushes back while Jules chopped them off, to be threshed with broomsticks over the sheet.

Dishpans full of berries were taken to the river for preliminary washing, the worm-lightened fruit floated away, until all the pails were full. Then there was a day of jelly making in the big copper boiler and the wine press, until six- and eight-gallon stone jars were filled with the wine-red liquor to cool and set into firmest jelly for winter.<sup>12</sup>

As suggested by several allusions in the Sandoz passage above, wine too was an important way of preserving the nutritious elements in wild fruits and berries for the winter months, and, incidentally, of providing nostalgic memories of lost days in a European homeland where the civility of a glass of wine was considered a matter of course.



*Gardening was an essential part of almost every homestead – and the especial province of the farmer's wife. In 1888 the Nelson Potter family on Lees Creek, Custer County, posed in their garden for a photograph.*

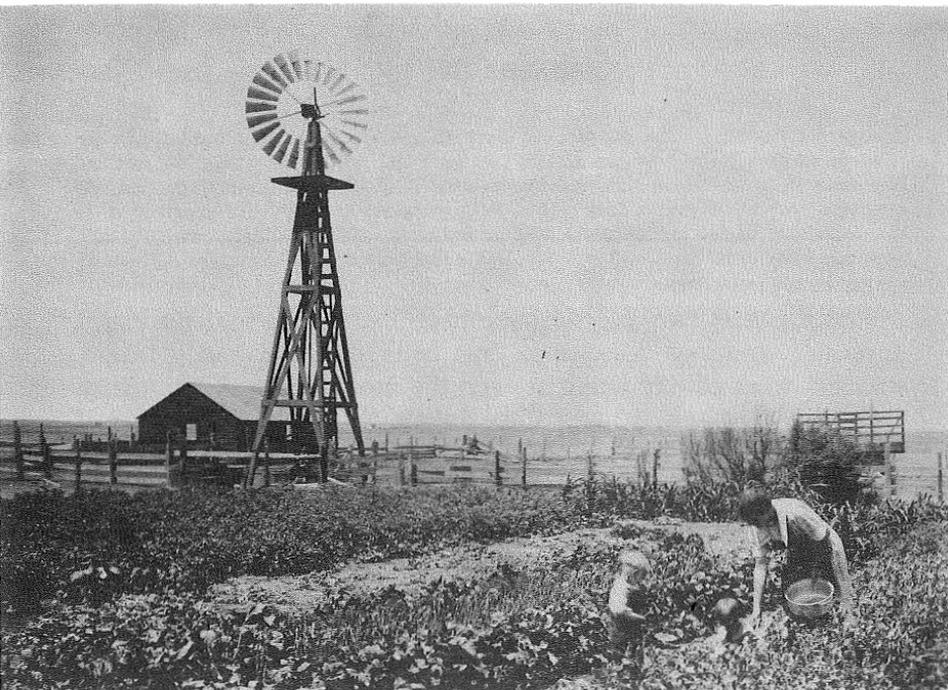
Another paragraph from Mari Sandoz's work, *Old Jules*, mentions her father's home-made wine and other matters of pioneer foodways: "And as they planned they ate young prairie chicken flavored with wild garlic and roasted to the point of disintegration in the army kettle. And with it they drank deep red wine of the black currants from along the river."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, when Jules Sandoz was first examining this new land, he was impressed by the wealth of wild fruit and its potentials. "Upon seeing a bush covered with plums and draped with burdened grape vines, Jules says, 'Fruit enough for a whole village, plum jell [*sic*], grape wine.'<sup>14</sup>

The saddest tales, however, are those that come from times and places when there was not much concern about how to preserve food – because there was not much food to preserve.

Actually, food was never so abundant that there was not room for improvement. Even when there was plenty to eat, it rarely existed in variety:

If frontier food was unhealthy it was not because of its richness and high seasoning, but rather on account of the sameness which made the menu monotonous



*In this windmill-irrigated garden (c. 1925) little had changed from the days of the sod house, but the farm improvements were better. Mother and children are picking peas.*

and unappetizing. Corn was the staple article of diet. In the *Nebraska Farmer* of January, 1862, thirty-three different ways were given for cooking corn.<sup>15</sup>

As was later the case during the Great Depression of the 1930's, children ate whatever there was to eat, and usually lots of that, so that whole generations were produced with unmitigated hate for corn bread or oatmeal, or, later, peanut butter:

That winter we lived for six weeks on cracked wheat raised along with the rosin weeds. This wheat had to be washed and kiln-dried in the oven, then taken by sled to the river across the channel on a willow raft, carried one and one-half miles down the river to Ben Griebel's corn crusher, and back home the same route, but at the end of six weeks this food still tasted 'rosin.' My lunch on my woodhunting trips was mostly this cracked wheat bread and I even belched 'rosin.'<sup>16</sup>

And, of course, even sadder than the tales of times when there was only one kind of food were those when there was no food at all:

We got to John Applegate's the night of April 17. We asked him if we could stay. 'You bet you can, if you have anything to eat,' he said. We told him we had meat and provisions with us, so we furnished the grub and Mrs. Applegate cooked our supper. Mr. Applegate had a wife and three small children, and that night at supper he gave his children some meat and they seemed to relish it hugely. They wanted more, so he gave them a second helping. Then they wanted more, and he said, 'No, you have had

enough for tonight.' After supper, we were all outside and I told him to give his children all they wanted to eat, and he said he could not do it as they had not had any meat since last November and this was the 17th of April. Everything that was eatable in the house was a half pint of little potatoes and a pint of shorts meal [a by-product of wheat milling consisting primarily of chaff, bran, and coarse meal], nothing of any other kind, and Mrs. Applegate had lived on Indian turnips dug out on the prairie for three days.<sup>17</sup>

For the past two years I have been examining pioneer Plains humor<sup>18</sup> and my conclusion has been that the hardy homesteaders were able to laugh at even the most trying of hardships, and that perhaps it was this ability to laugh that made it possible for them to endure the hardships. Neither did the scarcity and monotony of food escape their wit — although, one must remember, the laughter was never without a tinge of bitterness:

While they [Verna Chrisman's father and his friend] were gone on this trip, mother had nothing in the house to eat but corn meal. So she set up a menu that went something like this for the following four or five days:

Breakfast: corn meal, fried

Dinner: corn meal, boiled

Supper: corn meal, baked

Breakfast: corn meal, fried

Dinner: corn meal, boiled

Supper: corn meal, baked.<sup>19</sup>

During my study of pioneer humor, I found that two of my favorite stories from Nebraska's past dealt with the scarcity of food during hard times. One was told to me by Warren Fairchild of Lincoln and dealt with a pioneer circuit-riding minister who stopped by a settler's dugout for supper:

The meal was not elegant, but it was nicely served and there seemed to be plenty of ears of roasted corn to go around.

"Say," said the preacher, "I see this fine corn you've been serving and I wonder if the crops are as bad this year as I've been hearing."

"Parson," replied the homesteader, "You just et two acres of corn."<sup>20</sup>

A story related by Estelle Chrisman Laughlin again underlines the way everyday things could become precious in a time of little: "Another story I recall concerned the shortage of potatoes one year, being used as company fare only. On an occasion when Aunt Bettie Chrisman of Ansley ate dinner at our home she remarked to my father, 'My law, Genie, you all better save these potatoes for dessert!'"<sup>21</sup>

Much to their credit, many pioneers (and many of today's young people) discovered the food value of what are commonly called weeds:

During the summer months weeds contributed much to our table. As in most countries, weeds – vegetables out of place, as some people call them – grew in profusion, creating lots of problems and entailing lots of work in their eradication or control. But in the O’Kieffe home our slogan was: “If you can’t beat ’em, eat ’em.” The names of three of these helpful little pests come to mind as I write, “pigweed,” “Lambsquarters,” and “pussley” [purslane]. . . . Mother had a way of slipping a small hunk of salt pork in the pot with the cooking weeds and, brother, that made the difference.<sup>22</sup>

Berna Hunter Chrisman gives virtually the same description of her mother’s recipe for “weeds,” and anyone who has tried “greasy greens” made of pigweed, purslane, or lambsquarters will agree heartily with these pioneers’ descriptions. Sheep sorrel is a common green eaten in the East and the South, but Gertrude Eubank Worley’s description of sheep sorrel pie is, as far as I know, unique. She says, however, that it took so much sugar to sweeten the sour herb that it was prepared only rarely in their pioneer home.<sup>23</sup>

Sweetness was, in fact, one of those things that Plains homesteaders had to forego for a few years or improvise. On the eastern edges of the Plains there were enough maple trees for tapping and bee trees for robbing, but for most persons, when sweetness returned to their diets, it was in the form of sorghum molasses, which was welcome enough at first but its strong flavor soon palled and eventually the very smell of sorghum molasses was enough to turn a meal – or a day – into disaster.

Substitutions were attempted, probably, for every scarce commodity. Recipes were common for apple pie without apples, and anything that would turn brown under heat was roasted for coffee. Grains like corn, wheat, oats, and rye were especially common, and not always unpalatable: “[The Schreyer family] invited us to eat and for a drink they had coffee made of rye, which they had parched in the oven and ground in a coffee mill. It was the first rye coffee I ever drank and with cream it certainly tasted good.”<sup>24</sup>

Eggs were frequently such precious commodities that the families that kept the hens could not afford to eat the eggs, instead taking them into town to trade for more necessary items and less valuable foods. Game bird eggs were gathered and when boiled served especially well as travel fare.

Butter too might be carried to town for trade while the family had to be content with the buttermilk. Berna Chrisman

tells a story about butter that touches on the still-human nature of our frontier heroes and heroines. It was a common occurrence, she writes, that a mouse might fall into the butter churn if the lid was not firmly seated overnight. The housewife had to decide whether she would grit her teeth and serve the butter to her family (remembering that mouse all the while) or whether she should take it to town to trade off.

A Custer County sod house dweller suffered this unfortunate dilemma and decided to take the butter into town and trade it for some "unmoused" butter. The storekeeper obviously knew what was going on when she wanted to trade her butter for someone else's, but, as she explained, the next purchaser could scarcely be hurt by what she didn't know. The grocer agreed, took her butter to the back room, trimmed it, stamped it with his mark, took it back out to the counter and gave it back to the woman as her trade, smugly thinking to himself that she could scarcely be hurt by what she didn't know.<sup>25</sup>

Many accounts, on the other hand — especially later ones — wax eloquent about the groaning tables at happy occasions during the good years:

A spot in some outlying part of the grove was selected as the meeting place for dinner. Then began the loading of pans and crocks containing great quantities of fried chicken, baked beans, potato salad, sandwiches, brownstone front cake and gooseberry and raspberry pie, the contents of the pies having been diligently gathered from canyons and creek banks by us children in happy anticipation. Lemonade was made with cold spring water in a huge tin tub brought along for that purpose. Sometimes a foresighted one who had ice put up brought a large chunk wrapped in straw and gunny sacking. The chunk of ice gradually diminished through the day, but our thirst never did.<sup>26</sup>

Even when meals remained humble and home-grown, they often made impressions on children that remain with them until today:

I can't call up adjectives to describe the super quality of [corn] bread when eaten with 'cow butter' or ham gravy, with a glass or two of rich milk or buttermilk made in the old wooden churn. It was simply 'out of this world,' as the youngsters today would say. So, while we did not have frosted cakes, pies with two inches of meringue, and many other 'musts' of today, we had food which met the needs of growing, healthy bodies and we did not have to keep a bottle of vitamins from A to Z to keep us in good health.

After a night of sound sleep we would be awakened in the morning to the tune of the coffee mill grinding the coffee for breakfast, or Mother sharpening her butcher knife on the stove pipe or a stoneware crock as she prepared to slice ham, bacon, or venison for breakfast as an accompanist to hot buttermilk biscuits, potatoes, or fried mush, which made a real meal on which to start a strenuous day. . . .<sup>27</sup>



Perhaps because of his cheerful countenance the homesteader above found himself the subject of a postcard (c. 1900), the title of which was "Hope and Contentment on the Claim." The bachelor at right (c. 1886), while less ebullient, seems well satisfied with his simple evening meal. (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)



Viewing the whole body of data, from which the above passages have been selected, leads to some interesting and curious conclusions, the most obvious (and perhaps most surprising) of which was the ease with which immigrants adopted "American" foods and the tenacity with which they maintained them in an uncooperative environment.

Native European foods quickly diminished to a ceremonial status, as did also the native languages, especially in the first American-born generation. They were eager to be all-American and therefore rejected non-American foods and languages — *except in a very important ritual sense*. This is still obvious today, where communities made up almost totally of one ethnic extraction or ethnically oriented families prepare ethnic meals and, perhaps, offer a meal prayer in, for example, Norwegian for special holidays like Christmas or festivals celebrating their ethnic origins.

In addition to sociological pressures motivating such foodway changes there was of course the lack of the basic ingredients necessary for the preparation of such food.

On the other hand, migrants with roots in American culture and migrant European families that had accepted American foodways clung tenaciously to them in spite of all manner of reasons to abandon or alter them. Note, for example, that the homesteader refused to turn from coffee to some more available potable — for example, herbal teas from native prairie grasses, weeds, or shrubs.

To me, the most surprising feature of pioneer Plains foods, however, is the nearly total absence of foods borrowed from the Plains Indians. There are references to borrowed Indian foods, of course, but they are inevitably foods borrowed many years before the Homestead Act — like turkey, corn, squash — and carried much earlier to the East Coast and even Europe. Foods borrowed by Plains homesteaders from Plains Indians are virtually nonexistent.

The occasional references to Indian foods like pemmican, *wasna*, Indian turnips, and dried chokecherry patties nearly always underline the role of these foods as emergency survival foods. They were abandoned as soon as something "better" (that is, anything to which the settler was accustomed) was

available. The few complimentary comments about these foods come from children, who obviously didn't know any better.

The frontier had exhibited a long history of borrowing from the Indians in other areas and at other times, of course. Indeed, many concepts and materials that facilitated westward movement had been borrowed from the Indian. Corn, squash, the canoe, snowshoes, and jerked meat had been borrowed early. It is even a possibility that the sod house, so intimately associated with the settlement of the Plains, was a borrowing from the Plains-Woodlands Indians encamped along the Missouri River.<sup>28</sup>

Place names were continually borrowed from Indians, names that today are often the only evidence of mangled, dislocated, or erased tribes: Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Nemaha, for example.

There can be no question of the advisability of borrowing such foods. These immigrant people, so used to wild arborial crops, teeming greenery, reliable supplies and communications, *had* to eat, and what they were used to simply could not be found here. On the other hand, even discounting the buffalo, Plains Indians had developed a thorough knowledge of edible plants that are available nearly the year around.

The prevailing hostilities and resultant lack of communication between the settler and the Indians might explain the anomaly in certain cases, but in Nebraska the Ponca, Omaha, and Pawnee were non-belligerents who had a long record of generosity in sharing their bounty and its sources.

Finally, one is further mystified by the pioneers' reluctance to adopt Indian foods as a permanent part of their menu after they had sampled them during times of famine and certainly discovered upon such experimentation that the foods were not inferior to those of the Anglo-American-Western European tradition and were not simply lesser substitutions but were in most cases admirable for reasons of their own individual savor and, in some cases, were delectable, needing apology to no chef.

Prejudices we have perhaps inherited from our pioneer forefathers stand in the way of our appreciation of the *sound* of milkweed soup, arrowroot tubers, or chokecherry broth, but the *taste* of such dishes usually dispels any hesitation to "dig in."

Some Plains Indian foods were already cultivated in other parts of the world — for example, Jerusalem artichokes were a staple in England — but found little favor with Plains settlers.

I once studied this cross-cultural phenomenon in another light, the Indians' tenacity to cling to traditional foodways in spite of overwhelming historical, cultural, and economic forces that appear to work against such survival.<sup>29</sup> The conditions seem to be identical despite the difference in the direction of the change being resisted.

My conclusions in regard to Omaha foodways were that the term "soul food" is a very real concept, not simply a romantic-nationalistic (or perhaps better, here, "cultural") catchword, not a figurative use of the term.

Plains Indians had provided me with the foundation for this assertion in their explicit declarations that at boarding schools Indian children surreptitiously prepared and ate simple Indian foods like parched corn specifically to nurture their "Indianness," while other Indians told of school administration and governmental efforts to alter foodways with the expressed and motivating intention of destroying last vestiges of Indianness in their charges.

Implicit support for my contention is found in the survival of Indian foods as ritual and ceremonial objects revered for their importance in maintaining communication with a past, lost heritage.

It seems likely that emotions worked the same way on both sides of the frontier in view of the similarity of evidence and phenomena. For the pioneer, too, foods transcended physical nourishment. It was important to them, I believe, to abandon foods of their European origin (in addition to the reasons of scarcity of basic ingredients) in order to establish themselves as Americans and yet to retain some of the same foods as a ritual communication with the past. To adopt "American" foodways in the face of incredible pressures, because such foods constituted an affirmation of citizenship, was to some non-naturalized Americans abandoning a link to friends and family, civilization, and "normality."

Among the Plains Indian populations it is hard to judge at this point if the changes and their order are analogous. Language,

clothing, and architecture remain but are fading fast *except ritually*, which also appears to be true of indigenous foods. A determination of the differences of degree between the two cultures will require some historical perspective.

## NOTES

1. All song texts are from my *Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore* (Lincoln, 1967).
2. Emerson Purcell, *Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska* (Broken Bow, 1936), *passim*.
3. From H. Lomax's account of his arrival in Nebraska, Purcell, 2.
4. Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules* (Lincoln, 1962), 60.
5. Purcell, 10.
6. Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890* (Lincoln, 1954), 274.
7. Berna Hunter Chrisman, *When You and I Were Young, Nebraska!* (Broken Bow, 1971), 8-9.
8. Welsch, *Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore*, 310.
9. From Joyce Henry, North Platte.
10. Dick, 274.
11. Chrisman, 14.
12. Sandoz, 283.
13. Sandoz, 41.
14. Sandoz, 80.
15. Dick, 270.
16. Harry Gates, in Purcell, 165.
17. John Scott, in Purcell, 109.
18. For a discussion of this study and its fuller conclusions see my article "The Myth of the Great American Desert," *Nebraska History*, 52 (Fall, 1971), 255-265, or *Shingling the Fog and Other Plains Lies* (Chicago, 1971).
19. Chrisman, 24-25.
20. This tale is adapted from Welsch, *Shingling the Fog and Other Plains Lies*.
21. Purcell, 56.
22. Charley O'Kieffe, *Western Story: The Recollections of Charley O'Kieffe, 1884-1898* (Lincoln, 1960).
23. Purcell, 133.
24. Albert Sprouse, in Purcell, 81.
25. Chrisman, 52-53.
26. Chrisman, 25-26.
27. Roger Welsch, *Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House* (Broken Bow, 1968), 146.
28. For an extended discussion of this possibility, see my book *Sod Walls*.
29. In a paper read before the American Folklore Society, Los Angeles, November, 1970, "Traditional Omaha Foodways," later published in *Keystone Quarterly*.