Household Technology of the Western Frontier

By John Geise

The history of political events does not tell the entire story of human development. The history of wars and rebellions also fails to be inclusive of all the phases of human activity. Furthermore, either is liable to be misleading, for the unthinking reader—and there are many such—frequently fails to take into consideration the changes in manners and equipment that fifty or more years bring. The types of action change but little; the means employed change much. To read of the election of the first President is most often to read a record of the number of votes cast and their distribution; it is not told how the election was conducted, nor how the ballots were made up, nor what kind of campaign literature was used. Generally we are left to conjecture such things. Again, to know that the Revolutionary War was won by the colonists and to know something of the military tactics used, is not sufficient. We must know something of the types of munitions, of the rifles and the artillery, and of the soldier's equipment, in order to appreciate the real meaning of Revolutionary warfare. I believe that these random examples serve to make clear my point.

My point is this: to understand the sequence of events—political, social, economic, religious or cultural—in any country during any time, one must have some acquaintance with the material civilization of that period. Such acquaintance goes far to produce a feeling of sympathetic understanding of the people whose work is being studied. To know what food they ate, what kind of clothes they wore, how they traveled, the types of their houses, the products of their handicrafts, is to know how they lived. It is also to appreciate partially some of their evaluations of things desirable and undesirable.

It is the purpose of this paper to give a descriptive account of the household technology of the western frontier during the period from 1780 to 1800, and by so doing,

Paper, an abstract of which was read before the Historical Society January 25, 1927.
to provide a background for the study of the political and social history of that period. It is assumed that by describing characteristic frontier processes and customs in the technological field, a general idea of frontier life may be had. No attempt is made to definitely localize the study, although most of the sources used are from the Pittsburgh district, from the West of the colonial period. Throughout the paper, suggestions revelant to the household technology of Pittsburgh itself will be found.

In 1780, Pittsburgh was a small frontier settlement, consisting of perhaps forty or fifty houses. (1) The passage of fifteen years saw but slight increase in the population, for various estimates of the size of the town in 1796 to 1797 indicate that there were here approximately one hundred or more houses; the population is estimated by different authorities to have been from eight hundred to fourteen hundred people. (2) Meanwhile, the territory west of the Alleghenies was being settled more or less rapidly, so that in the spring of 1786 the number of taxables in the counties of Bedford, Westmoreland, Washington and Fayette was 11,234. (3) The immigrant population, drawn from the eastern colonies and from the European peoples, found many things in common, the chief of which were the necessity for combating the original holders of the land, the Indians, and the building and equipping of homesteads. The white population was relatively small for so large a territory. Communication was infrequent and unreliable. Consequently, dependence upon the mother-colonies of the East was relatively slight.

There grew up on the frontier an independence of spirit and a certain uniformity of life-habits which characterized the people of the frontier as unique members of the newly-formed Union. As the population increased and the frontier line moved westward, the ruder customs advanced with the vanguard and more polished manners and practices took their place. In this paper, I am more interested in the ruder customs of the frontier life proper, in so far as they had to do with technological activity.

1 N. B. Craig, History of Pittsburgh, pp. 267-8.
2 W. G. Johnston, Life and reminiscences, pp. 21-2, note.
3 Pittsburgh Gazette, 14 Oct. 1786.
The two main routes to the Pittsburgh district from the East prior to the building of a State highway in 1789-94, were the roads known as Braddock's Road and Forbes's Road. The chief thoroughfare during the early period was Braddock's Road, which was the southern route coming from the Potomac. Forbes's Road, which was farther north, went from Pittsburgh to Bedford by way of Bushy Run, Hannastown and Fort Ligonier. At Bedford it separated into two branches, the one going through Carlisle and Lancaster to Philadelphia, and the other following the southern route to the Potomac. (4) The western parts of these roads were very rough. During the period prior to 1785, Forbes's Road "lay through an almost unbroken wilderness. . . . The thoroughfare was originally a wagon road, but as it received no attention or repairs, it soon fell into a bad condition and was so overgrown with bushes as to be impassable except for pedestrians and horsemen." (5)

During the years 1789-94, a State highway was built from the Juniata to Pittsburgh, following a more northern route than Forbes's Road. It was doubtless a very rude road, but it served as the main line of communication between the eastern part of Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh district for many years. (6)

Practically all transportation during the period 1780-1790 was by pack-horse. (7) The emigrant families as a general rule had no wagons, but carried all their goods on several horses. The description by Judge Wilkenson, of Buffalo on the Ohio, of his family's trip to the western country, may be considered characteristic of that of the average emigrant family.

"He, when young, started with his father's family from Carlisle, Pa., in the spring of 1784, to settle near the Ohio, in company with other families. . . . His family consisted of his father, mother, and three young children, with a bound boy of fourteen years of age. The road to be traveled in crossing the mountains was scarcely practicable for wagons. Pack horses afforded almost the sole

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4 T. J. Chapman, Old Pittsburgh days, p. 181.
5 Ibid., pp. 98-9.
6 Ibid., p. 183
means used for transportation then, and for years after. They were provided with three horses: on one rode the mother, carrying her infant, with all the table furniture and cooking utensils; on another was packed the store of provisions, plough irons, and agricultural tools. (Even the irons for constructing mills were carried on horseback.) The third horse bore a pack saddle and two large creels, made of hickory withes in the manner of a crate, one over each side of the horse, in which were stowed the beds and bedding. In the center of these creels there was left a vacancy, just sufficient to admit a child in each, laced in, with their heads peeping out therefrom. Along with this company were one or more cows, which furnished them with milk night and morning.” (8)

Travel was slow and, in the mountains, very dangerous, for the roads were very poor. There were no bridges. And yet this was practically the only way by which the settlers could reach the new territory.

The merchandise that was brought from the East to supply the wants of the frontier people was brought on pack horses. The trips were made by professional carriers or by the frontiersmen themselves. Two months or more were required to go East and return. (9)

The professional carriers, or traders, as they were called, used trains of from twelve to fifteen horses. Such trains were cared for by two men. Each horse carried about two hundred weight. When the first wagons—the "Conestogas",—were introduced during the late “eighties, they met with the sharp antagonism of these traders. (10)

Each fall, the settlers themselves, having gathered together the peltries that they had secured during the past year, would make up a pack train, place it under the charge of one of their number, and send it East to secure the needed merchandise. (11) This was a community undertaking. In the East, the skins and furs were bartered for such things as salt, iron and manufactured goods. (12)

8 Ibid., II, 145-6
9 Ibid., II, 144-5
10 Ibid.
11 Chapman, Old Pittsburgh, pp. 96-7.
12 Joseph Doddridge, Notes on the settlement and Indian wars of the western part of Virginia and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1788, inclusive, pp. 120-1
In 1786, the carriage from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh was sixpence per pound weight. (13) Thus it was that articles brought from the East were very expensive. Consequently, the Pittsburgh district and the western frontier in general were required to be in great part self-sufficing. This condition lasted until the early years of the nineteenth century.

Notwithstanding the fact that the use of wagons in western transportation was slight, there were some wagons to be had in Pittsburgh during this period. In the Gazette for 30 September, 1786, Stephen Porter advertised for sale, among other things, “horses, ___a light waggon and harness.” In the same paper for 3 March, 1787, G. Fowler and E. Butler advertised for two “good careful Waggoners.” In the issue for 15 December, 1798, the following advertisement is found:

“Coach-Making, &c.
Joseph White,
Respectfully acquaints the inhabitants of Pittsburgh and the public, that he has commenced Coach and Waggon Making, in Third Street, opposite Gen. Gibson’s where orders will be received and executed with dispatch. ___Pittsburgh, November 15, 1798.” (14)

Another indication of the growing tendency of the people of Pittsburgh to supply themselves with the needed aids to transportation is the advertisement of Thomas Chambers in the Gazette of 13 December, 1788. He “begs leave to inform the public and his friends that he carries on the Saddler business in its different branches.”

To make more easy communication and transportation in Pittsburgh itself, a ferry was opened in October, 1786, by Hugh Ross, crossing the Monongahela just above the Point. (15)

As the territory in western Pennsylvania became more and more thickly populated, the newcomers pushed down the Ohio to Kentucky and nearby lands. These settlers traveled by water and by land. The following reports, taken from the Gazette, indicate the number of people

13 Gazette, 26 Aug. 1786.
15 Gazette, 14 Oct. 1786.
who passed through Pittsburgh on the trip westward during the late 'eighties:

"Since the 10th of October, 1786, to May the 12th, 1787, there has passed down the Ohio river for Kentucky, 177 boats, 2689 people, 1333 horses, 766 cattle, 102 wagons and 1 phaeton. This account is taken from a journal kept by the adjutant at Fort Harmar, on the Muskinghum. A number passed in the night unobserved." (16)

And again:

"Account of the number of boats, and the persons in them, which have passed down the Ohio, for Kentucky and elsewhere, from October, 1786, to December, 1788. Taken from the register kept at Fort Harmar, viz,

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<table>
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<tr>
<td>Boats</td>
<td>857</td>
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<td>Souls</td>
<td>16,203</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>7,190</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Cattle</td>
<td>1,811</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>1,258</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wagons</td>
<td>563</td>
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These statistics indicate the rapidity of the westward movement. They warn us that the characteristic frontier conditions were not to be found permanently in any one locality of western Pennsylvania during this period. They suggest rather that the frontier moved gradually westward and that we must consider our description of frontier life during this period as applicable to the entire region in general, but to particular parts for only short periods of time.

These boats used for the trip down the Ohio were crude affairs, built without iron in their structure and, in fact, very similar to rafts in construction and appearance. As a general rule, they were from thirty to forty feet long and about twelve feet broad. A framework was held together by wooden pins, and to it were fastened floorings which were later caulked. The boats drew very little water. (18)

Many, if not most, of these boats were made in Pittsburgh. The *Gazette*, of 8 February, 1788, contains the ad-

16 *Gazette*, 2 June 1787.
ertisement of a boat yard on the Monongahela, owned by John Perry. In time the boat-building trade became very prominent among the industries of early Pittsburgh.

The first problems that the emigrant family had to solve were the selection of a homestead and the building of a home. One of the most favored locations for a frontier home was a small amphitheatre-shaped tract, where the house would occupy a position at the foot of the small hills, "that every-thing comes to the house downhill." The tops of ridges and water courses were dividing lines between farms. (19)

The building of the frontier home was most often a community problem, especially in those districts which already possessed a settled population. The work was done with a few crude implements. Little iron was used in the construction of the building. All homes on the frontier were made of logs. Indeed, many of the frontiersmen knew of no other kind of building. (20)

The description of a house-raising on the frontier given by Joseph Doddridge in his Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars of the Western Parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania is so good as to make any other description based upon it unsatisfactory:

"a day was appointed— for commencing the work of building the cabin. The fatigue party consisted of choppers, whose business it was to fell the trees and cut them off at proper lengths. A man with a team for hauling them to the place, and arranging them, properly assorted, at the sides and ends of the building, a carpenter, if such he might be called, whose business it was to search the woods for a proper tree for making clapboards for the roof. The tree for this purpose must be straight grained and from three to four feet in diameter. The boards were split four feet long, with a large frow, and as wide as the timber would allow. They were used without planing or shaving. Another division was employed in getting puncheons for the floors of the cabin; this was done by splitting trees, about eighteen inches in diameter, and hewing the faces with a broad axe. They were half the length of the floor

19 Doddridge, Notes, p. 104
20 Ibid., p. 111.
they were intended to make. The materials for the cabin were mostly prepared on the first day and sometimes the foundations laid in the evening. The second day was allotted for the raising. In the morning of the next day the neighbours collected for the raising. The first thing to be done was the election of four corner men, whose business it was to notch and place the logs. The rest of the company furnished them with the timbers. In the meantime the boards and puncheons were collected for the floor and roof, so that by the time the cabin was a few rounds high the sleepers and floor began to be laid. The door was made by sawing or cutting the logs in one side so as to make an opening about three feet wide. This opening was secured by upright pieces of timber about three inches thick through which holes were bored into the ends of the logs for the purpose of pinning them fast. A similar opening, but wider, was made at the end for the chimney. This was built of logs and made large enough to admit a back and jams of stone. At the square, two end logs projected a foot or eighteen inches beyond the wall to receive the butting poles, as they were called, against which the first row of clapboards was supported. The roof was formed by making the end logs shorter until a single log formed the comb of the roof; on these logs the clapboards were placed, the ranges of them lapping some distance in their places by logs, placed at proper distances upon them.

The roof, and sometimes, the floor were finished on the same day of the raising. A third day was commonly spent by a few carpenters in leveling off the floor, making a clapboard.

In the meantime masons were at work. With the heart pieces of timber of which the clapboards were made, they made billets for chuncking up the cracks between the logs of the cabin and chimney, a large bed of mortar was made for daubing up these cracks; a few stones formed the back and jambs of the chimney.” (21)

Such, in brief, was the typical method of building a house on the frontier. The house itself, a mere log-cabin, was not large. Such windows as were provided—and they were very few, except in the towns—possessed no glass.

21 Ibid., pp. 134-7.
In most cases, they were protected by oiled paper. (22) The clapboard doors were hung upon massive hickory hinges and were secured by wooden latches. Latches were raised by a leather thong which passed through a small hole in the door just above the latch. When the thong was pulled in, the door was effectually locked to all outsiders. In the construction of these cabins, a nail was never used. (23)

Many of the cabins possessed a loft under the eaves, access to which was gained by a rude ladder or by wooden pegs driven into the wall. The loft was used as sleeping-quarters or as a place for the storage of goods. (24)

As a general rule, the fireplace was very large. It was built of stones on the outside of one end of the cabin, but opened into it and took up the greater part of that end. The chimney was made of smaller logs well-daubed with clay. (25)

The bed was built with the house and formed part of it:

"a single fork, placed with its lower end in a hole in the floor and the upper end fastened to a joist served for a bed stead, by placing a pole in the fork with one end through a crack between the logs of the wall. This front pole was crossed by a shorter one within the fork, with its outer end through another crack. From the front pole, through a crack between the logs of the end of the house, the boards were put on which formed the bottom of the bed. Some times other poles were pinned to the fork above these, for the purpose of supporting the front and foot of the bed, while the walls were the supports of its back and head." (26)

A substantial, but hardly a very comfortable bed. And yet it served for the majority of the early settlers.

The furniture and other fittings of the cabin were of the same rude nature. A table was made of a split slab with four sticks set in augur holes for legs. Three-legged stools made in the same manner served as chairs. The fam-

ily ward-robe hung upon pegs driven into the cracks in the walls, announcing to visitors the social status of the people of the house. (27)

Taken all in all, the home life of the early frontier was hard, and yet it was very real, for the family was thrown together in close intimacy with one another.

The houses of Pittsburgh of the period 1780-1800 were of varying types. At first the unfinished log cabins were the most numerous. Weather-boarding made its debut in the late 'eighties; it was followed by the building of many stone and brick houses. (28) Two-and three storied houses were to be found in Pittsburgh during this period, (29) while on the plantations near the town large and well-built houses of wood and stone were numerous. Staircases were used as early as 1788. (30)

As stated before, the furniture of the frontier home was rude, in keeping with the building. So far as tableware was needed, a few pewter dishes, supplemented by wooden bowls, trenchers and noggins, and some pewter plates and spoons were used. Gourds and hard-shelled squashes served to hold water. (31) The hunting knife was often called into use at the table, and fingers played an important part both in the preparation and the eating of food. (32) Delft ware was not considered desirable, for it dulled the edge of the hunting knife and also was too fragile. (33)

Practically the only fuel used was wood. Hickory was considered to be the best, and white and black oak were regarded as next in quality. (34)

"Once started, the fire was kept indefinitely, being carefully covered at night and piled with peat; above the blaze swung the soot-blackened crane, with its various pots and kettles." (35)

The crane and the iron kettles, when used, were brought

27 Ibid.
30 Gazette, 12 Jan. 1788.
32 Chapman, Old Pittsburgh, p. 96.
33 Doddridge, Notes, p. 112.
from the East. The fire-sets consisted of a pair of and-irons, a long-handled shovel, and a pair of tongs. These were found only in the exceptional frontier home and were also brought from the East. The poker was rarely if ever included in the fire-sets until after the introduction of coal as fuel. (36)

Although the Franklin stove was invented in 1745, it did not make its way westward with any great rapidity until the first years of the nineteenth century. (37)

The sources of illumination of the old frontier homes were chiefly the fireplace, candle-wood, rush-lights and candles, with a few lamps during the latter part of the period under discussion. The fireplace was most used to light the cabin after sundown, and, in fact, was long very popular. Candle-wood was merely pieces of resinous pine which were stuck into cracks in the walls or in the floor; it burned with a smoky flame. The wood was cut and dried during the winter. (38) The piths of cane or similar reeds were soaked in fat or grease and then burned for light, being held by tongs or clips. (39) The candle, however, became very popular as a means of supplying light. Generally the candles were home-made, although in time there grew up a class of men who specialized in making candles and devoted all their time to the trade, traveling from house to house. There were two methods of making candles, dipping and molding, both of which required a considerable amount of skill in execution. The latter method was the least used. (40)

The candle had its several appurtenances—the candlestick, the snuffer and the extinguisher. Candle-sticks were of many types and were made of many different materials. Snuffers were the scissors-like instruments for trimming the wicks, which at that time were not made so as to be entirely consumed when burned. Extinguishers were cone-shaped pieces of metal attached to handles, used to put out the flame. This method was preferable to blowing out

36 Ibid., pp. 66-7.
37 Ibid., pp. 72-3.
38 A. H. Hayward, Colonial lighting, p. 10
39 Ibid., p. 87.
40 Ibid., pp. 71-2
the flame, for candles, when blown out, gave a disagreeable smoke. (41)

Very few lamps were found on the western frontier during this period, if the advertisements in the Gazette may be taken as indicative of the importations from the East, where all the lamps were procured.

Up to the year 1837, the only means of securing fire was flint and steel. (42) The tinder box was a part of the equipment of the home as well as of the equipment of the frontiersman. It was a small box, made of metal and filled with charred linen or some other substance which would easily ignite; to the top of the box was attached a bit of flint having a sharp edge, so arranged that it could be easily struck against the steel lid to produce sparks. These would fall on part of the tinder, placed for the purpose in a small depression in the top of the box, igniting it and producing the desired flame. (43)

From the point of view of the frontiersman himself, the most important piece of the household equipment, even more important than the cooking utensils, was the rifle. It was a piece of household equipment, in the strict sense of the word “household.” Each family possessed at least one gun and practically every member was trained in its use. The type of life led on the frontier demanded that the rifle be as efficient as possible. It was not only the principle weapon of defense, but also the means of procuring a large part of the food and materials for clothing. It was all-important during war and scarcely less important when the frontier was nominally at peace. Consequently, the rifle was chosen with care and was given careful attention at all times.

The guns used during this period were flint-locks and were either rifles or smooth-bore muskets. The flint-lock came into use about 1700 and gave good use for about a century and a half thereafter. (44) It was so named from the method of ignition employed. A small pan of metal, placed just behind the rear sight and above the end of the barrel, was connected with the barrel by a very small

41 Ibid., p. 95.
42 Northend, Colonial homes, p. 170.
43 Hayward, Colonial lighting, pp. 76-7.
hole. This pan contained the priming powder. Attached to it and sloping down into it was a piece of rough-faced steel. In the final form taken by the flint-lock, this piece of steel became a part of the cover which protected the powder in the pan from wind and dampness. It was pushed up by the flint as the latter came down. The flint was a small piece of stone attached to a lever. When sprung by the trigger, the lever caused the flint to strike sharply on the steel over the priming charge. The ignition of the priming charge was communicated to the charge in the barrel by means of the small hole in the bottom of the pan. (45)

It is evident that there were many opportunities for a misfire unless the greatest care was used in charging the gun.

During the Revolution, the majority of the men in the colonial armies, and practically all of the men in the British armies of the earlier period, were armed with muskets, i. e., with smooth-bores. (46) Although the invention of rifling was made in Europe during the sixteenth century and brought to a fair stage of perfection by the middle of the eighteenth, the rifle did not supplant the old smooth-bore musket until the nineteenth century. The reason for this was the great difficulty attending the loading of the rifle. While the musket was less accurate and had a much shorter range, it was more readily loaded and consequently could be fired the more often. (47)

The loading of the rifle was a process which required time and a certain amount of ingenuity. To start the bullet down the barrel of the rifle, a wooden mallet frequently was carried, and a heavy iron was always necessary to jam the projectile down into place. (48) About 1700 a method of facilitating the loading of the rifle was devised and in time came into quite general use. The bullet was made just a shade smaller than the bore of the rifle and was wrapped in a bit of well-greased rag, called a patch. It could then be slipped into the barrel with greater ease. Another advantage derived from the use of the patch

46 Ibid., pp. 122-3.
48 Ibid., pp. 115-7.
was that the burned cloth prevented the leakage of gases at the time of the explosion of the charge and so gave greater force and range to the shot.

The rifle, when so charged, kicked hard. The bullet used weighed about a half-ounce. (49)

It was in America, and there, on the frontier, rather than in Europe, that the rifle was first used to any great extent. The frontiersman's first demand of his gun was that it be accurate. Speed in loading was desirable but was sacrificed to secure range and accuracy. On the other hand, the Europeans, living and fighting under different conditions, demanded neither range nor accuracy, but rapidity of fire. Their fighting was done in the open. (50) It was this difference in usage which contributed greatly to Braddock's defeat in 1754. Braddock placed great confidence in the idea that his solid ranks, firing smooth-bores at short range, could defeat the French and Indians, who were armed with rifles and fought from cover. The colonial sharpshooters, armed with rifles, prevented the defeat from becoming a massacre. (51)

Breech-loaders did not become common until the middle of the nineteenth century. (52)

Besides the ramrod, the rifleman was equipped with a powder flask or powder horn, and a small priming flask made of metal or horn, as well as a leathern shot-bag. Powder horns were made of the horns of cattle, of which the larger ends were closed by wooden discs about a quarter-inch in thickness. These were kept in place by closely fitted metal brads or broad-headed nails. The tips of the horns were cut off about a half-inch from the end, to provide openings for the flow of the powder. Small metal caps were used to close the ends when the powder was not in demand. The horn was slung over the shoulder by leather straps, which were often ornamented. The horns themselves were in many cases carved and painted. (53)

The rifles used on the western frontier during this period were manufactured in the East. We find records

49 Ibid., pp. 119-21.
50 Ibid., pp. 117-8.
51 Ibid., p. 123.
52 Ibid., pp. 139-74.
53 Seen in the Carnegie Museum collection.
showing that in 1796 rifles were sold for prices ranging from fifteen to twenty-five dollars each, according to the style of mounting. (54) Rifles were repaired on the frontier itself, however. Certain men devoted all their time to such work. The work of repairing must have been crudely done, as this quotation from Doddridge's Notes shows:

“A small depression on the surface of a stump or log and a wooden mallet, were his instruments for straightening the gun barrel when crooked. Without the aid of a bow string he could discover the slightest bend in a barrel. With a bit of steel, he could make a saw for deepening the furrows, when requisite. A few shots determined whether the gun could be trusted.” (55)

With all its imperfection, however, the rifle was a fairly efficient and most useful piece of the frontiersman's equipment.

The rifle was used to secure food, as well as to defend the frontier folk against their enemies. The food came from wood, field and stream. Every family, besides having a small garden in which vegetables were cultivated, had another small enclosure, of about a half-acre in extent, which they called a “truck-patch”. Here were raised corn, beans, potatoes, pumpkins and squashes. These vegetables, with the fish and pork, the venison and the bear meat, made up the greater part of the family's food supply. The diet was characterized by the phrase “hog and hominy.” (56)

“Johnny-cake and pone were at the outset of the settlements of the country, the only forms of bread in use for breakfast and dinner. At supper, mush and milk were the standard dish. When milk was not plenty, which was often the case, owing to the scarcity of cattle, or the want of proper pasturage for them, the substantial dish of hominy had to supply the place of them; mush was frequently eaten with sweetened water, molasses, bears oil, or the gravy of fried meat.” (57)

Sugar and whiskey were made from the sap of the maple tree. (58)

55 P. 146.
56 Doddridge, Notes, pp. 109-10.
57 Ibid.
58 Chapman, Old Pittsburgh, pp. 96-7.
Salt was not found in the western country and consequently had to be imported at great expense from the East. It was very valuable; great care was taken of it. When salt was measured out for sale, no one was allowed to walk across the floor, for fear of disturbing the person who was doing the measuring and so causing some of it to be spilled. A common price for a bushel of salt was a good cow and a calf. (59)

Practically all the work connected with the production and preparation of food was done by the members of the family who ate it. Corn and hominy mills, worked by hand, were to be found in almost every home. They were crude affairs, made of wood. Some few were larger and permitted the preparation of large quantities of meal at one time. (60) In time stone mills were made and put into use, and finally the professional miller took over the previously domestic function. This later development, however, was dependent on the increased growth of population.

In advertisements and notices found in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* for 27 December, 1788, we find recipes for the making of maple sugar, molasses, beer, wine and vinegar from the sap of the maple tree. (61)

Crops raised near Pittsburgh in 1786 included corn, rye, wheat, barley, oats and flax. (62)

As Pittsburgh increased in size, bakers set up their business. Three men announced the opening of their shops during the years from 1786 to 1788. (63)

The surplus grain was generally made into whiskey. Most often the whiskey was made by the frontier family itself. However, an advertisement for an experienced distiller in the *Gazette* of 18 October, 1788, shows that a distillery was in operation at that time in Pittsburgh.

It is interesting to observe that during this period both the Allegheny and Monongahela were well-stocked with fish, as was also the Ohio. The fish of the Allegheny were harder and firmer than those of the other rivers, due, in all probability, to the greater coldness and purity

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59 Doddridge, *Notes*, p. 121.
63 *Gazette*, 2 Dec. 1786, 16 Dec. 1786, 10 May 1788.
of the water of the Allegheny. The fish most frequently caught were the pike, the perch and the sturgeon. Some of these weighed as much as twenty pounds. (64)

Just as the provision and preparation of food was a family function, the making of clothing was also part of the family's work. Each clearing had its patch of flax and many had a few sheep. The flax and the wool were woven into cloth by the women, who also fashioned the garments. Linsey-woolsey and coarse linens formed the common apparel of the women and children, while the tanned or untanned skins of animals supplied most of the goods which went to make up the male attire. (65)

Linsey-woolsey was made of flax and wool, "the former, the chain, the latter, the filling," and was the warmest and most substantial cloth made. It was woven in almost every home. The looms were very primitive. (66)

Every family tanned its own leather.

"The tan vat was a large trough sunk to its upper edge in the ground. A quantity of bark was easily obtained every spring, in clearing and fencing land. This, after drying, was brought in and on wet days was shaved and pounded on a block of wood, with an axe or mallet. Ashes were used in place of lime in taking off the hair. Bear oil hogs-lard and tallow, answered the place of fish oil. The leather, to be sure, was coarse, but it was substantially good. The operation of currying was performed by a drawing knife with its edge turned, after the manner of a currying knife. The blacking for the leather was made of soot and hogs-lard." (67)

The description of the clothing which was worn by the typical frontiersman, found in Doddridge's Notes, is so well drawn that I believe it best to quote it verbatim:

"On the frontier, and particularly amongst those who were much in the habit of hunting, and going on scouts and campaigns, the dress of the men was partly Indian, and partly that of civilized nations. The hunting shirt was universally worn.—This was a kind of loose frock, reaching half way down the thighs, with large sleeves, open

64 Gazette, 29 July 1786.
65 Chapman, Old Pittsburgh, p. 97.
66 Doddridge, Notes, p. 143.
67 Ibid., pp. 143-4.
before, and so wide as to lap over a foot or more when belted. The cape was large, and sometimes handsomely fringed with a ravelled piece of cloth of different colour from that of the hunting shirt itself. The bosom of this dress served as a wallet to hold a chunk of bread, cakes, jirk, tow for wiping the barrel of the rifle, or any other necessary for the hunter or warrior. The belt which was always tied behind answered several purposes, besides that of holding the dress together—In cold weather the mittens, and sometimes the bullet-bag occupied the front part of it. To the right side was suspended the tomahawk, and to the left the scalping-knife in its leathern sheath.—The hunting shirt was generally made of linsey, sometimes of coarse linen, and a few of dressed deer skins. These last were very cold and uncomfortable in wet weather. The shirt and jacket were of the common fashion. A pair of drawers or breeches and leggings, were the dress of the thigh, and legs, a pair of moccasins answered for the feet much better than shoes. These were made of dressed deer skin. They were mostly made of a single piece with a gathering seam along the top of the foot, and another from the bottom of the heel, without gathers as high as the ankle joint or a little higher. Flaps were left on each side to reach some distance up the legs. These were nicely adapted to the ankles, and lower part of the leg by thongs of deer skin, so that no dust, gravel, or snow could get within the mocassin.

"The mocassin in ordinary use cost but a few hours labour to make them. . .

In cold weather the moccasins were well-stuffed with deers hair, or dry leaves, so as to keep the feet comfortably warm; but in wet weather it was usually said that wearing them was "a decent way of going barefooted;" and such was the fact, owing to the spongy texture of the leather of which they were made.

"Owing to this defective covering of the feet, more than to any other circumstance, the greater number of our hunters and warriors were afflicted with rheumatism in their limbs. Of this disease they were all apprehensive in cold or wet weather, and therefore, always slept with
their feet to the fire to prevent or cure it as well as they could." (68)

The women, as a general rule, were clothed with less regard for style or fashion. The linsey petticoat and bedgown were the most common among the few pieces of the feminine wardrobe. The women often went bare-foot in warm weather. (69) The children were universally bare-foot as long as the weather would permit.

In Pittsburgh itself, the fashions were a bit more genteel, the customs a bit more strictly observed. An article in the Gazette of 26 April, 1788, comments with pleasure upon the advances to be expected from the increased use of spinning wheels west of the mountains.

Various men set themselves up in trade to care for the needs of the people for clothing. In 1788, James McKay offered his services as a dyer, (70) while in 1794 Matthew McConn advertised himself as a stocking weaver. (71) On 22 December, 1798, John Hannah offered for sale two stocking looms. (72) The shoe-making business flourished early. In 1789, Thomas Greer advertised for "an apprentice to the Boot and Shoe Making Business, a lad from about 13 to 15 years of age", (73) while in 1794 several journeyman shoemakers were wanted. (74) The prices charged for the products of these workers are to be found in this advertisement from the Gazette of 2 June, 1794:

"The subscriber respectfully informs the public, that he makes and sells Boots and Shoes, at the following prices for cash, viz,

- Best Boots of Philadelphia legs L__2 15 0
- Common ditto ____________2 10 0
- Neats leather ditto ____________2 5 0
- Mens best shoes bound _________ 14 6
- Ditto plain _________________ 13 6
- Neats best quality _____________ 12 6

Ibid., pp. 115-6.
70 Gazette, 19 July 1788.
71 Gazette, 19 April 1794.
72 Gazette, 22 Dec. 1798.
73 Gazette, 21 Mar. 1789.
74 Gazette, 19 April 1794.
Womens ditto bound and lined... 12 6
Common ditto ________________ 11 3
Childrens shoes in proportion and all kinds of mending.
Gentlemen may be supplied with boots at two days notice, and shoes in one day.
The strictest attention paid to all directions. . . .

Thomas White
Pittsburgh, May 28, 1794."
Evidently boots and shoes were made to order.

In June, 1798, Thomas and Samuel Magee advertised the Setting-up of a hatting business, (75) another bow to fashion. Beaver, castor and rorum hats were sold. Earlier, in 1794, a quantity of hair powder and pomatum was advertised for sale, and also a machine for making the same. (76)

It is understood, of course, that the vast majority of the manufactured goods used during this period were imported from the East. They were brought in by pack horses and sometimes by wagons. Most important of these imported goods were clothes and clothing, tools—agricultural, carpenters', shoe-makers', turners' and coopers'—and powder and lead. Among the other frequently advertised articles were kitchen utensils and table ware, desk-furniture, locks, saddles, food-stuffs, spirits, glass and glassware, tooth-brushes, razors, looking-glasses, umbrellas (after 1788) and soap. (77)

The householders most often paid for these goods in kind, and the payment was frequently by no means punctual.

On the frontier itself, especially during the earlier period, each family was to a great degree self-sufficing. In time, however, there arose those people whose natural aptitudes led them to devote their time exclusively to certain occupations. The itinerant cooper, gunsmith, iron-worker and weaver found work to do. (78) In Pittsburgh itself a great number of occupations arose as the

75 Gazette, 30 June 1798.
76 Gazette, 1 Mar. 1794.
78 Doddridge, Notes, pp. 144-5.
town increased in size. Most important among these were those of the mechanic, the smiths, the iron-workers, the miller, the carpenter and the distiller. (79)

With the increased population, the frontier conditions gradually moved westward and Pittsburgh became more and more a city of the East, rather than a frontier settlement. Nevertheless, her frontier life had been long and interesting. It is hoped that this paper has contributed a bit to the better understanding of that frontier life of a century and a quarter ago. If but a little sympathy is aroused for the workers who struggled for existence under the conditions of those days, there will be a better understanding of their political and economic development.

79 *Gazette*, 1786-1800, passim.

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