

RINGSIDE IN HOOVERLAND

P 13c 4-6

# Hickory Oil on Settler Tables

By WAYNE GUTHRIE

Did you ever hear of or see hickory nut oil? I never did until the subject was presented to me the other day by Ernest O. Asher, New Augusta.

His attention was drawn to it by a letter written years ago by Thomas Jefferson.

In that missive Jefferson said that hickory nut oil was marketed at a good price at New Orleans, La., and Mobile, Ala.

Asher wrote that the product was made by early Indiana settlers and by the Indians.

Nevertheless not one of Asher's local elders ever heard of that product.

"Perhaps some source in your acquaintance will come up with some interesting comments regarding this income producer of Indiana pioneers," he added.

Asher's curiosity would not leave him so he wrote to Miss Caroline Dunn, librarian of the William Henry Smith memorial library of the Indiana Historical Society.

From her he received some reference to a product known as hickory milk but none to hickory nut oil.

One writer spoke of hickory milk as being sweet and rich as fresh cream. He continued:

"To make it they first pounded the nuts in a mortar or on a flat stone and then cast them into boiling water

served the most oily part of the fluid.

"It was used as an ingredient in most of their cooking especially in hominy and corn cakes, as well as furnishing an agreeable drink. Sometime they skimmed off the oil and left it in gourds or earthen vessels, using it as we do butter on their corn cakes or to give body and flavor to their broth when meat was scarce."

### HICKORY MILK MADE BY INDIANS

Another writer described hickory milk as "a whitish oil obtained by Indians from crushed hickory nuts."

Still another authority quoted spoke of the shagbark, which the Indians called "kiskitomas," as standing highest among the hickories. It continued:

"They pounded up the nuts, shell and all, in water and poured off the emulsion allowing it to ferment. The drink was then called pawcohickora, so far as the drink was concerned. History does not tell us the pronunciation after subsequent drinks.

"This hickory milk added to venison broth or employed in making nice hot cornmeal cakes doubtless put the Indians in a kindly mood favoring the trader.

"Roasted sweet potatoes

sweet emulsion partly evaporated and stored in earthen jars made a thick rich cream which had excellent keeping qualities when hidden in a safe place.

"Hickory nut oil pressed from seasoned shagbarks was a staple article of diet among the Virginia colonists."

Still another described hickory milk as "an oily, tough thick white substance, called by the traders hickory milk and by the Indians the flesh or fat of hickory-nuts with which they eat their bread."

Miss Dunn found some references in one of the works under oil nuts but added that most of them indicate it to be a common name for buffalo nut and the butternut.



Guthrie

*Indiana native foods*