

The Hoosier Farm Wife Says:

## Don't Forget Sorghum As Tourist Attraction

In Indiana's energetic bid for tourists, an advertisement calls it "the state of surprises" in which "traditional delights" (such as saffras tea and persimmon pudding) are available.

Another traditional delight is "sorghum molasses" (usually referred to as a "they" instead of as an "it"). A tourist would be pleasantly surprised to watch this being boiled down in some small farm shed along an Indiana road.

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In Indiana's early, agrarian cultural childhood, sorghum was one of the staples for farm people, as important as the hard-boiled apples, canned peaches or tomatoes, hulled walnuts and bread-and-butter pickles.

One of my gifted correspondents, Mrs. Greenlee, born in the late 1880's and now living on a farm near North Salem, remembers it pleasantly. When I was a child on my father's farm 7 1/2 miles north of Greenfield my father would say, just before frost or start of school, "Time to get the sorghum ready to cut."

The cane patch was probably in the cornfield, because her father believed the kind of soil determined the flavor of the sorghum, and so preferred a spot of well-drained clay, which was usually also the cornfield. The children dropped and covered the cane with round seeds by hand. The plants were later thinned to 3 or 4 to a hill. The cane was plowed when the corn was plowed.

Before frost, the children stripped off the blades, putting them aside to feed the cattle later (to the cattle's great appreciation). Then the father came and used his corn-entire



Mrs. R.I.D.

## HOOSIER SCRIPBOOK

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# Salt Was Precious Item In State's Pioneer Days

By EDWARD A. LEARY

Today we take salt for granted, but in pioneer Indiana it was a precious commodity, high in price, scarce and often used only at the risk of lives. Salt also was the best product to be mined in the Hoosier state.

Salt, as it is now, was important for the sustenance of men and animals and for preserving meat and hay. In a day in which much food was unsavory, seasoning with salt made many dishes palatable.

One of the earliest of the mines which provided salt for the settlers of Southern Indiana was the Ohio Saline Springs near what today is Shawneetown, Ill. It was the principal salt source for many Hoosiers for 25 years.



Leary

SALT MINES and springs also were known as "licks." Hoosiers usually found the salt in the first and their continuous "digging" would uncover the salt. At the Ohio Springs the animals had removed the dirt to the depth of 6 to 10 feet over an area of several acres.

But in those long ago days when an Indiana still was a territory and the War of 1812 was to be fought, the trip to the Ohio spring was fraught with danger. Indians lurked in the region along the "Salt Route" and murdered travelers and robbed them of their salt.

AS COMMERCE began on the Ohio River and with the advent of the steamboat, salt came to Indiana from Kanawha and salt wells in Western Virginia. Salt for the northern part of the state came by way of the Ohio River.

SALT continued in scarce supply and at high prices for many years. In fact, it was often used in place of money, which also was scarce in pioneer Indiana.

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of the lakes from New York. Meanwhile, other springs and "licks" were found. A widely known source for salt was Salt Creek in the hills of Monroe County. In Brown County, Jackson's Lick and Howe's Lick provided salt in the 1830s. These wells, it was reported, produced as much as 2,300 bushels a year, some of which sold for \$6 a bushel.

Eventually, salt was found in nearly every county of Indiana and some of the springs or "licks" became famous. These included French Lick and West Baden where the waters were said to "contain medicinal properties of great value."

In Vanderburgh County on Big Pigeon Creek in 1822 a salt well was sunk to the depth of 300 feet, but the water mixed with other properties which spoiled the salt. The water, however, was used for its medicinal properties and, for many years, was sold as Evansville Mineral Waters.

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Acting on petitions of settlers, Territorial Governor William Henry Harrison ordered all men going to the prongs to travel in parties and request his office for an escort of rangers. This practice was followed for several years.

**WITH NO local source of supply,** settlers kept an eye out for evidence of salt "licks." In 1815 William McFarland, owner of a trading company and founder of New Lexington in Scott County, dug a 400-foot salt well, which furnished salt to the neighborhood. Salt prongs also were found by miners in Fulton Township, Scott County, and exploited in the 1820s.

The importance of salt is mentioned in the Congressional Enabling Act of April 19, 1820, which paved the way for Indiana's statehood. A provision of the same year gave a key item in the bid for the territory: "The salt wells and prongs within its boundaries together with such other lands as may be deemed necessary."

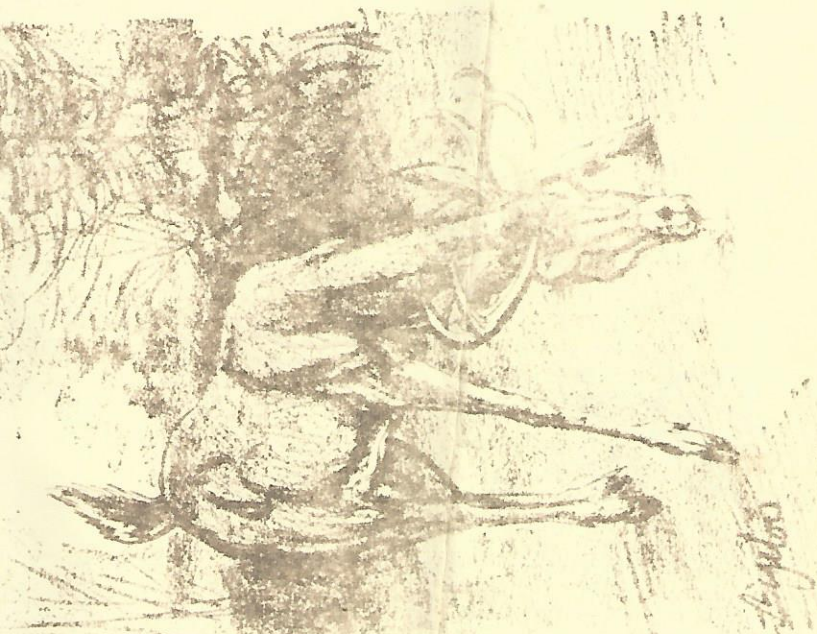
and stored them to feed the poultry later." Then, as now, the cane was put through a press which extracted the juice; the juice was boiled down to proper thickness, being skimmed as it boiled and finally "run off" into clean containers. In some places, even now, the press is turned by a mule and this would be a happy surprise for a tourist to observe, before buying a gallon of molasses to take home.

"When I married in 1818 and lived near Coatesville in Hendricks County," continues Mrs. Greenlee, "my husband's family raised cane and had sorghum made at a factory in Putnam County, near the town of Liberty. There was one near Cummins Road 4 1/2 west of Cloverdale.

Sorghum was delicious on his ribs or pan-breads or in gingerbread but to a boy would it could not be holed down into sledge or taffy.

"I've seen my mother make taffy when she was baking," says Mrs. Greenlee, "and we had a corky recipe we used. Take 1 cup of sugar, 1/2 of sorghum, 1 teaspoon of ginger if you like it, 1 cup of water, 1 teaspoon soda and enough flour to make a stiff dough. The cookies baked when the oven of the oven softened it kept in a tin in a closed jar.

"Slow toough" taffy is made with a slow," she adds, "and you can use a crock of sorghum or a crock of molasses. A thermometer would be a good idea. The butter, had on two-thirds of a pound in the head. Old brown sugar, 1/2 pound, old brown molasses, 1/2 pound, and 1/2 pound of and leave it — B. R. L. D.



ANIMALS FOUND IN SCOT FIRST

