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Smokehouses used before refrigerators

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Before proper refrigeration came along in the 20th century, smokehouses were a means by which to preserve meat for an extended time.

Almost each and every farmstead had a smokehouse. The majority were built of stone, either cut, field or cobblestone. Some were built of brick, a few were made of wood and occasionally, one was made from a hollowed-out log.

In past years, when farmers killed and cured their own meat products, such as bacon, ham, hocks, sausage and dried beef, a smoke house was a necessity, not only to help cure and dry, but to flavor the

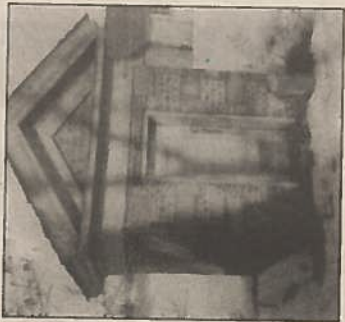
meat. Various kinds of smokes were used, varying from fresh-cut small maple limbs for sweetness, to hickory and corn cobs.

A smokehouse that functioned properly was very tightly constructed with no drafts. A large iron or stone pot was set on the ground floor in the center to hold the fire. This was usually a shovel full of live coals, over which was placed the maple, hickory or cobs. Then the smoke fire was covered with a piece of metal so that the fire would only smoke and not burn or blaze. The product to be smoked was hung above the smoke fire so as to absorb the pungent flavor.

Curing and preserving meat was no haphazard job

in the old days. Pigs were slaughtered in the fall or early winter after cold weather had set in. Some farmers killed their pigs in the new of the moon, because it was generally believed that the meat would not shrink away while being cooked, if slaughtered while the moon was growing.

After the carcass had properly cooled for 24 to 48 hours, it was cut up. The ham, shoulders, hocks and bacon were the choice parts to be cured in a sweet pickle and then smoked in the smoke house. The loins and spare ribs and sometimes a shoulder were cut up and ground into sausage which was packed in crocks or



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pans and sometimes stuffed into links. Properly seasoned sausage could be kept until spring if kept in a fairly cool, dry place.

People who butchered pigs years ago would often say, "They used everything out of the pig except the squeal."