

Doing Laundry in the 1930's

I remember the Montgomery Ward, one-cylinder gasoline-powered washing machine that sat in the corner of the kitchen. There was no other place to keep it. While the machine was in use, a semi-flexible metal hose about 10 feet long was extended out the window for the exhaust of the engine. My mother would start the job by first checking the oil in the engine and then filling the gas tank.

After getting the machine ready, the next thing was to put water in it that she had heated on the wood/coal stove. Bringing the water in from the windmill had been one of the first tasks of the morning, giving the water time to heat.

There was a folding stand that would support two tubs or baskets. She would place a tub on one side and fill with water for rinsing, and on the other side a basket that would hold the laundry to carry to the clothesline located in the backyard near the house.

It looked like everything was ready, the next question: would that engine start? The engine was located underneath the machine with a foot pedal extended along with a choke lever. Mom would first pull the choke lever and hit the foot pedal a couple of times. Pushing the choke to the off position and giving it a couple more kicks it would start. Well, most of the time, but sometimes it became flooded and would then require more kicks. Sometimes quite a few, enough to tire her out, and while I don't remember her use of her vocabulary, I'm sure she had some thoughts.

While the first load of clothes that she had put in the machine before starting it was washing there was a bit of break as she got the next load ready. The wringer was located on top of the machine, powered by the same engine, and it ran continually. It did swivel on its mount to be over either the machine or the rinse. The clothes were run individually through it to get the wash water out of them. They were put into the rinse tub, sloshed by hand, run through the wringer again, and then placed into the basket.

Mom had a "solar dryer" four clothes lines that she hung the clothes on to dry in the sun. This worked well in the summer, but I remember times in the winter when the sheets came into the kitchen frozen solid and hung on a temporary line to thaw and dry so we could make the bed.

I've called this the 1930's but I'm sure it was the last part of that decade. There was no money in the first part for washing machines or most anything else. In those days washing was done on a wash board. One of those hangs in the laundry room of this house. My wife, Helene, hung it up there. I don't know where she got it, but I'm sure she put it there along with many memories.

These are memories from a kid less than 9 years old. I have forgotten some of the facts and lament the fact that there is no one to ask. Memories have faded but I still remember the washing machine in the corner of the kitchen.