

Gertrude Tallman - Making Butter

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Gertrude Tallman
born 1873
died 1905

(Photograph by
John K. Nagle, c. 1888)

One of Gertrude Tallman's jobs on the farm was making butter with the cream from the family's cows. After skimming the cream from the milk it stood in the churn all night to clabber (sour). In the morning the cream was churned.

There are many demonstrations on the internet on how to make your own homemade butter. The following is the version submitted by Gretchen Sullivan Sorin and Dr. Judith Wellman when they created this unit in 1986. (Work together with an adult to ensure safe food handling.)

"Try making your own butter using this modern method. Buy 2 containers of whipping cream and pour them into a jar with a tight fitting lid. Let the jar stand in a warm place overnight. Take turns shaking the jar until the cream forms butter. Scrape the butter into a wooden bowl. Press a little bit of salt into the butter if you wish. Chill and serve on homemade bread or crackers."

Do you think that making butter by hand was a lot of work?

The Gertrude Tallman unit was initially developed as part of a unit titled "A Portrait of Nineteenth Century Women in Oswego County"; ©1986 Oswego County Historical Society; Developed by Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, Dr. Judith Wellman, and the OCHS staff. Funded by the NY State Council on the Arts, Price Chopper Supermarkets and the OCHS.



Woman making butter, p.34 in The Growth of Industrial Art, NYSHA Library.

Rules for Making Gilt-Edged Butter.

These rules were recently printed in the Rural New Yorker, and are so excellent and concise that we re-print for the benefit of our readers.

FEEDING.

Select your cows with reference to the quantity and richness of the milk produced. The best cows are the cheapest for butter, so get the best you can of whatever breed you select. Give them good pasturage in the summer, and plenty of pure water, with frequent access to salt. In winter, feed sweet, early-cut hay, well-cured corn fodder, roots, cabbages, etc., and a ration of bran, corn-meal, ground oats or middlings.

IMPLEMENTS.

Use the best implements, and keep them scrupulously clean, well-scalded, and often exposed to the sweetening influences of the sun. The milk pail and pans should be of the best quality of tin. A reliable thermometer is a necessity to every good dairyman.

MILKING.

The milking should be done quietly and at regular times, and the utmost cleanliness observed. Nothing is tainted quicker than milk by foul odors, and surely at times with nearly all cows there is enough animal odor to it, without adding any more.

Mexico Independent,
March 19, 1879, page 2.

SETTING.

Strain the milk slowly into the pans, four to six inches deep. It is an excellent plan to strain the milk into a large can set in cold water, and cool down to 60 degrees before putting into the small pans. The milk must be set in a pure atmosphere, at such a temperature as will permit the cream to rise in from thirty to thirty-six hours after setting. In order to do that the room should be kept at about 60 to 65 degrees, and not allowed to vary much either above or below.

In hot weather keep a large piece of ice in a tub in the room. Cover it over with a thick blanket, and, if arranged so that the water will run off, it will keep a long time, and keep the room very uniform.

In cold weather some arrangement for warming the milk room should be adopted.

SKIMMING.

Skim as soon as the milk begins to turn sour. Do not neglect this rule, as it is impossible to make good butter from cream that has become old and sour. When you pour your cream into the cream jar, splash as little as possible. Stir the cream every time you add more to it, and wipe the sides of the pot. Keep the temperature at 60 degrees, and the cream pot in the coolest part of the house, covered with a fine gauze netting strained on a hoop, not with a tight cover. If covered too tight, fermentation is often too rapid.

CHURNING.

Churn often, as there is nothing gained by long keeping. Bring the temperature of the cream in the churn to 58°, and not allow it to rise above 64°. Churn early in the morning, while it is cool. First scald the churn, turn the paddles a few times; then pour off, and pour in cold water, and turn the paddles; pour off, and pour in your cream. In churning revolve the paddles with an easy, regular motion, not too fast nor too slow.

The butter should come in about forty minutes, a little more or less if the temperature of the cream when put in was about 58°, ascertained by the thermometer.

COLORING.

When likely to be deficient in color add a sufficient quantity of The Perfected Butter Color (made by Wells, Richardson & Co., Burlington, Vt.) to keep it up to the June standard.

WORKING AND SALTING.

When it has "broken" and there is a difficulty to make the butter gather, throw in some cold water and give a few more turns. Some, and I think a majority, of the best butter-makers of today wash their butter with cold water before removing from the churn. Gather your butter with the paddle and lift it out into the tray, press it gently and incline it, and let the butter-milk run off. Work it gently with the paddle, with a cutting, gentle pressure, but not to mash it; or, better, put into the butter-worker.

Salt it about an ounce to the pound, or to the taste of good customers; only with the best salt, and free from lumps and coarseness. Work the butter only so much as to expel the butter-milk, but not to work it too dry. This can be done by the use of a weak brine prepared for the purpose. Put the bowl away in a cool place. After standing twelve or twenty-four hours, gently press out with a ladle or machine, the remaining butter-milk, and any brine that will flow out with it, care being used not to work it too much. If this is done the butter has lost its grain and becomes salvey, and its keeping qualities are greatly injured.

PACKING.

Pack in vessels which will impart no impurities to the butter. Fill within half an inch of the top. Place a thin cloth wholly over the butter. Over that pour cold brine as strong as can be made of hot water and the purest salt, or cover with a layer of fine salt. The whole process of making the butter, from drawing the milk to the placing of the butter in packages, should be hurried, as milk, cream and butter are going to decay every moment when exposed to the air, however pure it may be. Such butter is ready to keep or to sell. If to be kept long before selling, surround every package with coarse salt, by placing them in boxes prepared for the purpose. This process keeps the butter cool and hard, and free from sudden changes of air. When all these things are attended to promptly, and with as much uniformity as is under the power of man to control, there will be a near approach to uniformity in color, richness and purity. If the new beginner follows these rules, and keeps doing so, he will soon command the highest figures.

Cleanliness and common sense applied from the beginning to the end are absolutely necessary to insure good butter that will bring the highest price in the market.

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Mexico Independent, March 19, 1879, page 2.

Questions for further research and discussion:

1. How different is today's butter making compared to butter making in the 1800's?
2. Why go into so much detail about the butter making process in this article?
3. Which step do you think is the most important part of the process?
4. How much would a butter maker get if he sold a pound of butter in the 1890's?
5. How much does a pound of butter cost today?
6. What part of the butter making process in this article most impressed you? Explain why.

'Tis Hard to be a Farmer's Wife.

In all pursuits there is much toil,
'Tis hard for men to till the soil;
'Tis hard to lead a farmer's life,
And hard to be a farmer's wife.

The farmer's wife, of all mankind,
To labor round is not confined;
For her there is no rest in life—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

Three times a day she cooks our victuals,
And washes plates, pans and kettles;
Then scours the spoons and every knife—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

She churns the cream and makes the cheese,
Then scours the floor upon her knees;
Digs out the cracks with some old knife—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

Then she must sweep and make up beds,
Wash the children and comb their heads;
And when they fight must stop their strife—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

From early morn till late at night
She works away with all her might;
Say not she spends an easy life—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

When out of health, and in much pain,
She works away, and don't complain;
Then on she goes, toils on through life—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

Her husband comes to do his chores,
And brings in mud upon the floors;
He only thinks of cash through life—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

He hoards his cash, she wears old clothes,
And heelless shoes with minus toes;
Dear girls! for farmers cease your strife—
'Tis hard to be a farmer's wife.

Mexico, June 5, 1867.

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Mexico Independent,
June 13, 1867, page 1

This poem was written in 1867 about the struggles of being a farmer's wife.

1. From this poem, select the most difficult aspect of being a farmer's wife and explain why you think it's hard.
2. What does the farmer do compared to what the farmer's wife does during the day?
3. Write a poem about someone you know who works hard.

For Further Research and Discussion:

1. Often you would find poems in the newspapers in the 1800's. Find another poem and explain the topic.
2. Why would newspapers in the 1800's contain poems?
3. Where can people submit poems today to be submitted for everyone to see?
4. The tools and appliances used in the homes in the 1800's are very different from today. Research items that would have been used in an 1800's household and compare them to those you can find in today's homes that make life easier for everyone in the 21st century.