

Drying fruit beats today's lid shortage

by Bruce Jennings
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MANTI-How to cope with the shortage of lids and the high price of sugar?

Mrs. Nellie Rymer, 85, has an answer that she's practiced since her girlhood days in Caineville, a five-mile string of ranches between Hanksville and Capitol Reef.

The answer is drying the apricots, apples, peaches and plums that grow on their lot in Manti.

She's used the same dryer for 20 years: a screened cabinet with seven shelves that stands in the sunshine beside the house. When the pitted apricot halves are ready, after a few days in the dryer, they go into bottles or other containers for storage.

A lot of those apricots, or apples or peaches, are consumed by the family. Some become gifts for relatives, or neighbors, or the "visiting sister.

"The grandchildren love the dried fruit," Nellie Rymer says. "Dried apples or peaches are much better to munch on than the goodies they buy in the stores.

"I learned about drying fruit from my mother," she explains. "In those pioneer days in Wayne County, everything was saved. When the fruit was ripe in the Caineville orchards, the women dried fruit, even the grapes, on sheets spread out to the sun. The fruit was pitted, quartered or halved, then covered with muslin to keep off the flies. After a few days the dried fruit, or sometimes vegetables like corn, were put in sacks and stored for winter. A good supply of dried fruit was like having a couple of pigs in the barrel."

Nellie Rymer is the oldest of the eight children of Walter Ernest Hanks and Mary Ellen Hanks.

"I was born in Salt Lake City," she says, "but my parents grew up in southern Utah and I guess the deserts and the rocks and the silences were in their blood. When I was three they moved to the Floral Ranch in Wayne County. A year later father was called to be the first bishop of the Caineville LDS Ward. That's where we grew up."

The long, narrow valley was ideal for growing fruit and the "cane" from which molasses was manufactured.

"During the harvest, some of the fruit was canned or dried," she recalls, "and all the children pitched in with the picking and pitting. But much was taken by wagon through Capitol Wash-considered a dangerous journey because of the flash floods that sometimes poured off the rocks-to Bicknell and Lyman and Loa and the other towns in Rabbit Valley. There was peddled from the wagons or traded at the stores for flour and cloth.

"Caineville mothers dried great quantities of fruit for winter use. They canned some, too, in jars that took rubber rings, placing a spoonful or two of molasses in each bottle for sweetening. Sugar was scarce and expensive.

The molasses was produced from the large fields of cane that were planted in the valley. "In the fall the children would go down the rows of cane, knocking off the leaves with sticks. The men would follow, cutting off the seed tops and the canes close to the ground, then gathering up the canes into bundles which were hauled to the mill."

Manufacturing the molasses, she remembers, was a slow and laborious process. "I remember," she says, "the horse-drawn mill that ground up the cane and the bubbling syrup boiling in

the kettles and the big wooden barrels in which the molasses was stored-and the taffy pulls.

"Most of the molasses was hauled away for sale. The orchards and the molasses were the lifeblood of Caineville."

What was life otherwise like in this long, narrow valley cut out of the rocks and desert?

"Looking back through the years, the memories are gentle. But the reality must have been hard. We were far from a doctor and diphtheria and typhoid took many of the children-five in one family. The number of little graves kept growing.

"Sister Liza Rust was our doctor. She was called 'the cold water doctor' because when there was fever she soaked the bed clothes in the ditch and wrapped her patient in them. I still remember the cold, wet feeling of the clothes she put around me when I had typhoid. But she-or the Lord-must have saved me."

Later on Nellie taught school, but marriage to Sidney Rymer ended that. The years that followed brought her 11 children of her own.

Those years also brought the Rymers to Manti in 1946 for employment, work in the temple, a new home. But Nellie Rymer agrees, in her 85th year, that she has never quite left the old home and its values. That's why she can be found, almost any day, preserving fruit in the dryer by the kitchen door.



Ellen Josephine Hanks (Nellie Rymer)