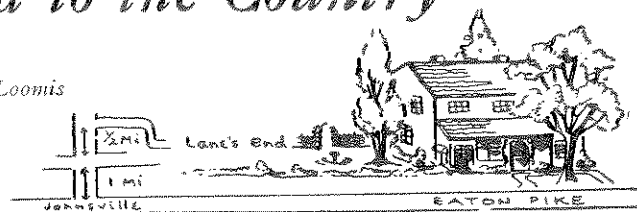


I Moved to the Country

By Mildred Jensen Loomis



GIANT MOTORS, belt-line factories, skyscrapers and mammoth cities have been the theme of most world fairs. And news reels, newspaper feature stories, and many writers of fiction contribute to this promotion. As a result many people believe that highly specialized industry brings the greatest good to the greatest number of people; that urban magnificence is an attainment toward which man and society should strive.

The "glory that is industrialism" stamped my own otherwise rural childhood and adolescence with the urban-specialist pattern. Most of my generation hurried off to city universities to specialize in law or medicine, or in the very popular new fields, advertising and selling. I chose teaching, and in various large cities exchanged my services for food, clothing and shelter. Many of my associates did likewise; some went into offices and some into that profession created out of the very disintegration of society, social work. On Saturdays we regaled ourselves at the opera or art institute, "with all things rare and beautiful." Occasionally we made a fleeting visit back home, pretending that the farm

and family were still important to us.

That went on for fifteen years, during which time I moved into religious education and social work. But a kind of weariness settled upon me. I began to wonder if life shouldn't hold more than I was getting from it. Then I came across a book, *Flight from the City*. It advanced the philosophy that all human capacities should be developed within the individual, and was, of course, critical of modern industrial urbanism. It showed a new kind of country living, not the old drudgery of farm life. Its author, Ralph Borsodi, had founded a School of Living. I spent a summer there and stayed on to work in the School. I found there demonstration of the first of their significant tenets—"that a good living pattern is the primary need and logical aim of every individual."

The School of Living is a model productive living plant in a natural rural community, where faculty and students together do all that goes with directly producing one's own food, clothing and shelter. At the same time, hours on end are spent analyzing the meaning in the physical, mental, emotional, artistic and spiritual experiences

which accompany such integral living. I joined in the gardening, dairying, weaving. New zest grew steadily in response to demands on my hitherto dormant energies. I observed the busy, resourceful families at work on their homesteads adjoining the School and did not need seminars and statistics to prove that here the "family" was free—no longer the victim of urban and industrial centralization.

NOW I LIVE on a small farm, married to a man who, in spite of some urbanization, has stayed close to the soil. He shared my convictions and desires in regard to a home, and together we set out to create it. For several years he worked in a near-by city to obtain the additional income necessary to more speedily pay for the land, and to buy the equipment for farming it. Now we enjoy not only independence but security. Last October the celebration of John's release from a city job was a festive occasion. We were past forty, but life was really just beginning!

Our homestead comprises thirty acres of crop fields and eight of woods. This simple fact alone sets me all aglow. In the days when the country was merely a geographical area through which one passed in getting from one city to another, this fact would have seemed inconsequential. Now it means good black soil, full of living bacteria which we nourish with organic matter and protect from the offense of chemicals. Now it means awakening to the mystery of life, to

the joy of watching green shoots glisten in the sun. It means quickening to the ritual of harvest, kinship with weather, understanding and love of animals, responding to the slow movements of the Earth itself, and a whole set of intangibles which add vitality to life.

We have twelve sheep, a team, several cows, some pigs, and their young, a small flock of chickens and turkeys and a few hives of bees. These are the requisites, for us, for production of practically all our needs. Only the surplus of wool, lambs, cream and eggs, some grain and occasionally a calf are sold, but the cash income is adequate for electricity, gasoline, taxes, education and travel. Since, primarily, we do not produce for sale, land, equipment and labor costs are kept at a minimum.

We produce practically all our own food—vegetables, fruit, cereals, meat, lard, milk, eggs, cheese, flour, molasses, honey. Everything is processed at home: butchering and storage of meat in a freezing unit, canning, churning, cheese-making, grinding of flour and cereals, soap-making, baking, weaving, sewing, and even tailoring of our clothes. Our wool is spun at a near-by mill (though spinning is on our schedule), and we dye and weave it at home into blankets, drapes, garments and rugs.

My husband and I did much of the refashioning of our 100-year-old log cottage. Our living room, with its pine-paneled walls and cooperhood fireplace, has more than thirty items of

furnishings from our own or friends' hands. The kitchen, however, is replete with modern labor-saving *tools*, and drudgery is eliminated by electricity. (A tool is anything which helps you do *your* work. A machine is something which *you* help.) A heavy-duty kitchen mixer, with various attachments, processes food, churns butter, prepares juices, grinds meat. Flour is ground as we need it, in a \$15 kitchen mill. Cooking, washing, ironing, pumping, grinding, are done electrically for about \$5 a month. Recently a visiting friend, helping me in the kitchen one day, exclaimed, "I'm from the city. I'm not used to all these conveniences!"

Almost everything we have is produced at home or is a tool to assist in that production. Our tools remove us almost entirely from the exploitation of the "machine." At our house, it's just ten minutes, from the wheat kernel to the oven, for a tasty and nutritious batch of muffins containing home-ground flour, our own lard, eggs, buttermilk and honey. For a total of 15c, we bake three two-pound loaves of whole-wheat bread, and this cost includes every item—materials, equipment, overhead and depreciation. At the store, the equivalent in nutrition could not be had for 66c.

In baking bread, my "work" requires ten minutes for assembling materials and washing equipment. In that ten minutes I have saved 51c—or effected an earning equivalent to about \$3 an hour. On cereals we save even more. Fluffy, *devitalised* packaged cereal

sells for from 30c to 60c a pound. From our own whole grain we make both cooked and dry cereals—superior in flavor and food value—at a cost of from 2c to 3c a pound! Our grocery bill is usually but a few dollars a month and rarely reaches \$5. We seldom use ration tickets. *At a store, food equal in amount to our monthly consumption of home products would require from \$50 to \$60 in cash.*

Out of sales of surplus home production we paid for our mill, our heavy-duty mixer, washer and other equipment which make this production possible without drudgery. The total savings from direct production, as against income from some specialized job, substantiate our motto: "Produce all you can for yourself. Buy only that which you cannot produce."

WE SUBMIT THAT while it may be efficient to produce automobiles, refrigerators and typewriters in mass quantities, it does not follow that bread, milk or pork should be so produced. More money is invested in the milk than in the automobile industry! There would be little need for many-storied flour mills if the masses of people realized that bread baked at home is cheaper and more nutritious.

Hauling wheat from Kansas to Minneapolis and eventually shipping the flour to Brookville, Ohio, is more expensive than growing one's own wheat and grinding it in a \$15 mill in one's own kitchen. Even though mass production of flour may reduce the unit *production* cost, this large-scale system

entails an inversely high *distribution* cost, which makes the price of the product to the consumer higher than when produced locally, where distribution is nil.

We need to re-evaluate the *economic* advantages of specialization in such industries. I doubt if even the staunchest advocate of industrialization and mass production, after a week in my homestead kitchen, could successfully defend the thesis that specialized production of flour, cereal or meat can be done at a minimum of friction and loss.

Food is one item that should never have been surrendered to the factory. Yet this is now an entrenched American habit. Even farmers further and condone this trend by depending on outside sources for flour, bread, butter, cereals, meat, fruit and vegetables. Rt. Rev. Monsignor L. G. Ligutti, in *Rural Roads to Security*, states that the Iowa farmer spends annually an average of \$250 for groceries which he could produce in a half-acre garden, with 75 hours of labor. But earning the *net* cash to buy this amount of food requires a 5 per cent profit from a hundred acres of corn and 500 hours of work! Besides eliminating distribution costs, the home producer avoids the devitalizing processes of milling, sterilizing, pasteurizing, packaging and storage.

The toll in health from eating factory food is as serious as is the economic loss to the family. For instance, many health authorities are emphasizing the superior effects of

vitamins native to foods in their whole state. These are obtainable only by home production.

In a significant study, *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*, Dr. W. A. Price compares the health of present day primitive peoples who have maintained their diet of natural foods with that of the same peoples who have, in more modernized settings, adopted the white man's diet, particularly white flour, white sugar and canned foods. He says that in instances where these people have followed such a diet for even one generation "there has been a rapid and outstanding deterioration, noticeable in the teeth and dental arch, and in the narrowing of the facial formation. This is invariably accompanied by tissue degeneration, often including the brain." Dr. Price maintains that the extensive use of devitalized flour, cereals and sweets, is a substantial basis for the increase in degenerative diseases—heart trouble, cancer, tuberculosis, arthritis—as well as for the obvious poor teeth of moderns.

Since coming to Lane's End Homestead, where the foods we consume come direct from our own garden, fields and dairy, we have found improved health. We have been noticeably free from colds, and can watch the course of a flu epidemic confident that it will not overtake us.

The whole quality of living made possible by a modern productive home on the land is infinitely superior to that of any highly revered specialty, such as teaching. On a homestead

the work itself is enjoyable, whereas in most industrial employment it is the pay-check and the spending of it which provide enjoyment.

A productive home offers a more fundamental approach to the arts. Here weaving of textiles, designing of garments, decorating, planting, serving meals—all become functional expressions of artistic living. Working with growing things, and being part of the birth and death cycles of animals and plants, give life a depth and insight that impersonal urban life renders impossible. Responsibility and integrity develop when one tends one's own property and animals, and a new wholeness of living heightens one's religious sensitivity.

No boss nor supervisor can threaten the security of our pattern of living. For us, impending inflation or depression holds little fear. Common things are no reproach, and we can do without the bizarre. We sing, dance and discuss with our neighbors; visitors are numerous; we subscribe to and read twenty magazines of wide range; we have far more time for study and meditation than do our acquaintances in a more commercial environment.

YEARS AGO that great American sage, Henry George, spoke truly in his book, *Social Problems*: "Nothing more clearly shows the unhealthiness of present social tendencies than the steadily increasing concentration of population in great cities. . . . Man must under such conditions deteriorate physically, mentally and morally."

Henry George saw, too, that one of the chief supports of congestion is the private collection of unearned increment in land. Wherever populations congregate, land values are high. And so long as our statutes permit individuals to collect these community-produced values, owners and holders of land will foster great areas of population. They will encourage the increase rather than the decrease of urban centers.

But those who are vitally concerned for the improvement of human beings will work for a culture where the determining majority of people live in the country. They will join forces to free the land. For land, being a gift of Nature, is not a product of labor and should not be subject to speculative purchase and sale. So long as we mistakenly treat land as property—a thing to be monopolized and bought or sold—advancing technological and social improvements will push the cost of land higher; and each generation will be more definitely handicapped in returning to the land.

Only when the individual ceases to profit by the advance in land values, and when monopolies are broken up, can the prophecy of Frank Lloyd Wright come true: "The city of the future will be but a banking house and market center, invaded at ten o'clock and abandoned at four on three days a week. The other four days will be devoted to the more or less joyful matter of living elsewhere under conditions natural to man."