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Coastal Maine Cooking: Foods and Equipment from 1760

MISSION

Building on the legacy of its founding family, the Wilson Museum uses its diverse collections and learning experiences to stimulate exploration of the natural history and cultures of the Penobscot Bay region and the world.



A well-equipped kitchen hearth was an important component of the home in early times. Whether the home had one or many rooms, it was here that the family most often congregated, drawing warmth from the fire's glowing embers, partaking of meals and amusing themselves in the evenings and on long winter days. One can only imagine how busy this area of the house would have been in the late 1700s to mid 1800s when Phebe Perkins and her nine daughters cooked for themselves, their father, brother, cousins, friends and their father's business acquaintances. We can chuckle at the old saying, "Too many cooks spoil the broth!" But, as the family grew, Phebe would welcome her daughters' help in the many tasks

required to keep the household running as "many hands make light work." Today, Phebe's kitchen hearth is an integral part of the guided tours of the Perkins' home where visitors may glean an understanding of how foods were prepared and enjoyed by these early settlers. This window into the past was Ellenore Wilson Doudiet's vision for the Perkins' house when it became a part of the Wilson Museum campus in the early 1970s. The following paper, presented at the IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, is an example of Mrs. Doudiet's research prepared for the living-history program in the John Perkins House.

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Until 1760 the lands east of the Penobscot River (central Maine) were wilderness. Then, peace being established, fear of Indian attack diminished, and when the area was ceded to England, families from the towns near Boston began to move there to settle.¹

At this time cooking was done in a large open fireplace and in the adjacent brick oven (Gould 1965:48-52). We may guess that the first thing built in the new home was a chimney of some kind—clay for bricks was available locally. The new kitchen must soon have been the equal of the old. The iron crane, which was an American invention, was not only safer than the old wooden lug pole, which frequently charred and broke (Earle 1893:130), the crane was more convenient, as it swung forward, allowing the cook to hook her pots on it and to dish out the food in comparative ease. S-hooks were used with the crane and large kettles in which “All the vegetables were boiled together...unless some very particular housewife had a wrought iron potato boiler to hold potatoes or any single vegetable in place with the vast general pot” (Earle 1898:56-57). Long-handled frying pans, waffle irons, and skillets (Gould 1965:76-79) and long-handled forks, spoons, stirrers, and ladles were needed for cooking over a hot fire. Frying pans, skillets—“a kettle or boiler” (Webster 1970[1806])—toasters, etc. had three legs, so that they could be stood in or near the coals; the large iron kettle which hung from the crane usually also had short legs. Trivets, toasters, and other wrought-iron items could be made by the blacksmith to the housewife’s order.

Small bakings were done in an iron kettle with a rimmed flattish cover on which coals were placed, the kettle itself also being placed in the coals. Today such a kettle is frequently called a Dutch oven; it was then known as a baking kettle.² Large bakings were done in the brick oven. This usually had a flue which joined the fireplace flue a few feet or a few yards up. A hot fire was built in the oven, and, when it was thoroughly heated in an hour and a half or two hours, the carbon which adhered to the rounded top burned away, leaving the bricks clean. The coals were then raked out and the food put in; that which was to remain the longest—beans, for example—was put at the back.³ In baking bread, sometimes “oak leaves or cabbage leaves were placed on the oven floor to hold loaves...in lieu of a pan...The shovel was sprinkled with corn meal, the loaves put onto it and slid into the oven, and with a quick snap of the wrist the loaves slid off onto the leaves” (Gould 1965:75). Cabbage leaves were also used in the fireplace, and we read “wrap...in a green cabbage leaf, lay...in hot embers and cover as you would to roast an onion: (Rawson 1927:107).

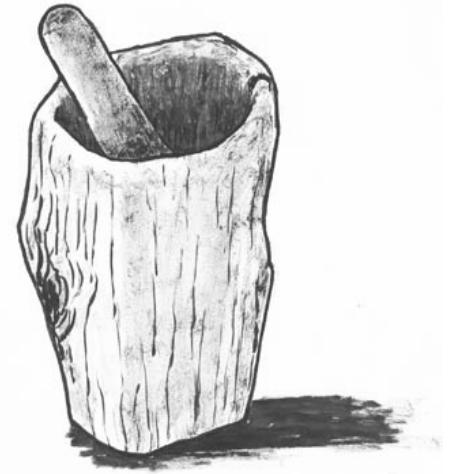


Plate 1. Mortar and pestle used in Penobscot in 1760s for grinding corn.

1. The area being considered includes the present towns of Bucksport, Penobscot, Castine, Brooksville, Deer Isle, and Sedgwick.

2. A Castine ledger, D 2, now in the Wilson Museum, Castine, has on page 2:

Nov. 2, 1815		John Lee Dr.	
Bak'g Kettle	9/	Spider 5/	2.34
Tea Kettle	5/	Bed cord 3/6	1.42
Sett Knives	8/6	pr. Blankets 18/	4.58
doz Pots	4/6	½ doz. Tumblers 4/6	<u>1.50</u>
			9.84

On November 10 of the same year another “Bak'g Kettle” is listed, such entries continue through the ledger. Another ledger, D 1, has on page 166, for June 1818, “1 Baking Kettle.”

3. On Deer Isle, beans are still baked in an old brick oven; the fire is kept one and a half hours. For bread baked in a (rebuilt) 1780 oven in Castine a two-hour fire is adequate. In another part of Maine the oven heat was gauged by the amount of “oven wood” used.

Until grist mills became available, meal was ground at home.⁴ There are two mortars and pestles in the Wilson Museum, Castine, which were used here in the eighteenth century. One mortar and pestle, said to have been “used for pulverizing corn etc. by the first...family to settle in the town of Penobscot,” is hewn from soft wood and could easily have been made locally, though it is thought to have been brought from York, Maine (Plate 1). The other set is lathe-turned and well finished. Both show use.⁵

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, plain, square slabs of wood (trenchers) were used, replacing the thick slice of bread (tranche) which had served as a plate, and which, “being eaten at the end, saved trouble” (Kerfoot 1924:14; Pinto 1949:7). In the sixteenth century circular wooden plates were introduced (Pinto 1949:7), and in the seventeenth century pewter appeared. Early in the eighteenth century pewter was being substituted for wood in the average English home; America, however, was far away, and trenchers continued in use here until after the

American Revolution (Kerfoot 1924: 15, 36). As late as 1775 wooded trenchers were advertised in Connecticut (Earle 1893:138).

Hash, porridge, and stews were eaten with a spoon and roasted meat with the fingers or a knife. Table forks were rare in the seventeenth and the first part of the eighteenth centuries—not until 1750 to 1780 did forks come into general use in England—(see Figure 1A; cf. Baily 1927:14; Graham 1973: 32).⁶

These then were the cooking and dining utensils that the settlers brought with them from Massachusetts—kettles large and small, mortars and pestles, long-handled pans of various sizes, iron trivets, and pots and pans with three feet, knives, skewers (Figure 1B),⁷ long-handled forks and spoons, wooden plates and bowls, some earthenware and chinaware, some pewter,⁸ and

cherished silver teaspoons (Plate 2).⁹ Inasmuch as the settlers came by boat from coastal towns near Boston and landed on the coast or on navigable rivers, they were not restricted in the amount or weight of their goods.[continued on page 6]

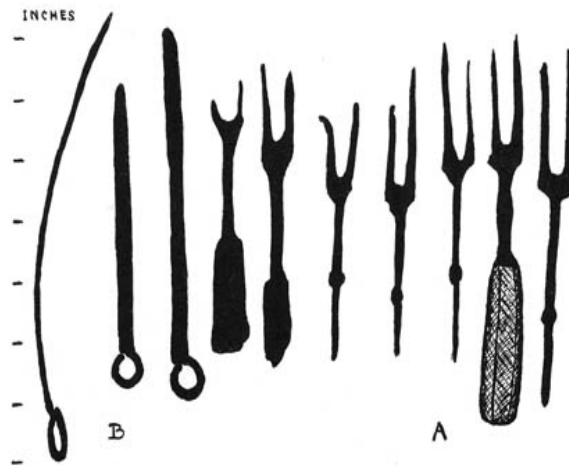


Figure 1. Found during excavation at the Perkins House site. The John Perkins House, built 1763-1783, is now restored on the grounds of the Wilson Museum, Castine. A. Table fork with bone(?) handle and fragments of similar forks. B. Wrought iron skewers.

4. At about this time in western Maine, “the early settlers endured much hardship and had many fatiguing jaunts on foot to carry their corn to mill, going five, ten and at one time thirty miles with a bushel of corn on their shoulders. Boys of fourteen had to carry half a bushel” (Allen 1876:272)
5. The hewn mortar varies from 9½ to 10½ inches in height; the other is 7½ inches high.
6. “When the use of the fork became general the pointed knife was not needed for spiking the food, and from the latter part of the seventeenth century onwards we find most of the knives with rounded ends. In France the fashion of the rounded blade was supposed to have been started by Cardinal Richelieu owing to the disgusting manners of the Chancellor Seguier, who for reasons of State, was a frequent guest at his table. According to Tallement des Reaux, the Chancellor not only washed his hands in the sauce, but also had a nasty habit of picking his teeth with the point of his knife. This became a cause of annoyance to the Cardinal, who took definite steps to prevent its recurrence by giving orders to his maitre d’hotel that all his knives were to have their points ground down. In 1669 a royal edict of Louis XIV, probably issued with a view to discourage assassination at meal-times, made it illegal for anyone to carry pointed knives, for cutlers to make them, or for inn-keepers to put them on their tables; it also commanded that any existing knives with pointed blades should have their points rounded off. During the eighteenth century the blades were curved and widened out at the ends so that they could be used for eating peas and similar food that would be likely to slip through the wide-pronged fork of the period” (Bailey 1927:8-9).

Fragments of over twenty such wide-pronged forks were found during excavation at the site of the John Perkins House (circa 1763), Castine; other material from the same site has been dated 1790-1850.

“It was not for a long time—not until the 1780s—that the ordinary working Englishman adopted the new device. In the meantime, he ate off his knife; and if he emigrated across the Atlantic he took the old way with him... By 1784, the fork was ‘in’—except among a few diehards who considered it an affectation. (Eating peas with a fork, said one, was as bad as ‘eating soup with a knitting needle’)” (Graham 1973:32).

As late as 1910 and 1920, individuals in Brooksville and in Penobscot ate peas from their knives—and very neatly.

7. “Skewers...were indispensable in preparing a roast...wrought by hand on the anvil [they] are thin and sharp-pointed with small eyelets by which they could be hung...” (Gould 1965:72-73). This describes three found at the Perkins House site.
8. Two small pewter beakers and a tankard remain in the Hutchins family, early settlers of Penobscot. A pewter basin with the bottom melted out was found under the eaves of the Perkins House.
9. A very small silver teaspoon, one of a set that Lydia Hatch Perkins of Castine put in her pocket when she fled, with her children, from the British in 1779, and two similar spoons found in the ground near an old house in Penobscot, are in the Wilson Museum, Castine.

Kitchen Traditions Series



Explore some traditional recipes with Wilson Museum Director Patty Hutchins in the kitchen of the John Perkins House at 1 p.m. on selected Wednesdays. Admission of \$5 includes a guided tour.

June 22 - English Plum Pudding

June 29 - Leaf Lard, Cracklings and Salt Pork

July 6 - Tutti Frutti (Brandied Fruit)

August 24 - Sour Pickles, Mustard Pickles & Pickled Eggs

August 31 - Spiced Crabapples

From Peas on Your Knife to Peas on Your Fork



Most of us expect to eat dinner with our own place-setting of plate, knife, fork, and spoon; and we expect a roasted chicken to have its claws and head taken off before it is presented on a platter. Dining wasn't always like this in early America. On Saturday, July 30, 2011, Sandy Oliver, Maine food historian and author, will trace the story of how we learned more genteel ways of eating and cooking.

Summer Exhibit



Knead to Know:

Bread-making through the Ages

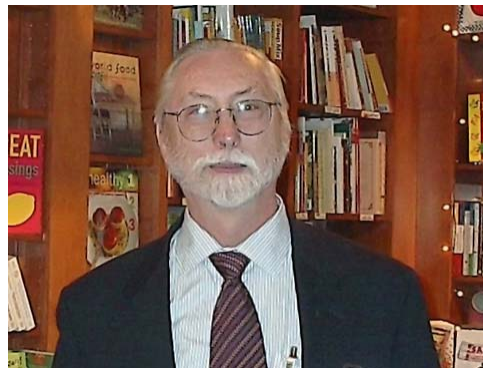
All breads need three ingredients - flour, salt and water. And yet, as simple as these needs are, the breads of the world differ widely. Most of these differences evolved from the availability of grains and equipment, for processing and cooking. While we may be amused by the statement "Bread is older than man," bread-making is definitely ancient. There is evidence the Neolithic culture made a form of bread from the seeds of wild grasses. This exhibit will whet your appetite for further exploration into the ageless process of bread-making.



Music, Music

Strawberry Jam

July 6th, 6:30 p.m. A music jam with a food theme. Play an acoustic instrument? Bring it - participation is encouraged including listening, singing, toe tapping, and especially hand clapping. This event will be held outside, weather permitting; bring a chair or blanket and enjoy!



Wilson Museum is pleased to exhibit *Early American Cookbooks* from the renowned collection of Joseph Carlin. Mr. Carlin, from Ipswich, Massachusetts, is a culinary historian; author; and nutritionist with the U.S. Administration on Aging, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services. He is also the founder of Food Heritage Press, which markets scholarly books on food and cooking.

June 11th, 6 pm – Members' Reception

Guest speaker: Joseph Carlin

From Rum Punch to Cosmopolitans: The Story of how America Invented the Cocktail

June 12th, 3 p.m. Exhibit Unveiling

Illustrated lecture by Joseph Carlin

A Short History of the American Cookbook



Paleonutrition

We are what we eat, and what our ancestors ate for millennia. Kristin Sobolik, Professor of Anthropology and Climate Change at the University of Maine will return on August 19th at 3 p.m. with a lecture focused on what is known about our ancestor's past dietary practices and how that has had a profound influence on human evolution. Her talk about prehistoric diet, health, and nutrition will have an emphasis on techniques and discoveries such as ancient DNA, the pre-biotic diet and vegetarianism.

DISCOVER WITH DARREN:

THE SUMMER SERIES

Education Coordinator Darren French has created a weekly summer series of activities for children of all ages on a wide variety of subjects which will take place on Thursdays from 2:30 – 4 p.m. Food related programs are listed below. More fun and interesting activities in this series are listed at www.wilsonmuseum.org/calendar.



July 7 – Incredible Edible Minerals

July 14 – Farm Animals

July 21 – “Cocoa Ice” Cream

August 18 – Eat Like a Civil War Soldier

Please pre-register for these programs at info@wilsonmuseum.org or 207-326-9247. Young children will need adult supervision.



FOOD

Have you guessed? Food is our theme this summer.

For more information on any of our programs, visit our calendar of events at: www.wilsonmuseum.org/calendar.html.

Other food programs include:

July 3rd, 3 pm – Poetry Reading
Poems to Tickle the Tummy

August 8th, 5 pm – Harry Kaiserian
The Role of Food in Film & Literature

September 25th, 2 pm –
Tim Seabrook & Leslie Cummins
Historic Heirloom Fruit Trees

≠ Not related to food ≠

Blacksmith Joe Meltreder and
Woodturner Temple Blackwood
Wednesdays & Sundays in July & August

Music, Music

Castine Town Band



July 15th, 6 p.m. The picturesque grounds of the Wilson Museum on the shore of Castine Harbor, will be the location of an outdoor concert (weather permitting) by the Castine Town Band. Bring a chair or blanket and enjoy this free concert!

Stephen Sanfilippo holds a Ph.D. in history and is a retired secondary and undergraduate history teacher. Susan Sanfilippo is a retired museum education director and certified Maine Master Gardener whose interest in herbs has inspired her work with historic sites. Together, Susan and Stephen have been researching and performing traditional songs of the maritime trades since the mid-1970s.



August 15th, 7 pm –
Stephen & Susan Sanfilippo
*Sea Fare: Songs of Food & Drink for a Shore
Dinner & a Ship's Mess*

August 16th, 10 am – Susan Sanfilippo
*Powder, Potion, Poultice & Pill: Identifying,
Prescribing and Administering Medicinal Herbs
in Historic Maine*

August 16th, 2 pm –
Dr. Stephen Sanfilippo
*What Shall We Do With A Drunken Whaler?
Songs and Poems of Drinking & Temperance in
the Whalefishery of the 1840s*

2011 Summer Programs

Nor were they then isolated—all traffic was by water, and boats were built almost as quickly as homes. A ledger of the 1760s lists frequent sales of rum and molasses, probably brought from Boston, though possibly directly from the West Indies. Other items may have been produced locally. Frequently listed are Indian meal, corn, coffee, pork, fish, cider, flax, cloth, salt, tobacco, nails, knives, moose meat, and, during 1766, gingerbread. Only one mention of tea has been noted. In 1768 Captain Joseph Young bought a “case knives follkes.”¹⁰ Shoppers apparently enjoyed their trips to the store, as entries for mugs of “tody,”¹¹ flip,¹² and rum are frequent. The impression remaining with the reader is of gallons of molasses and rum and of bushels of Indian meal sold.¹³

Life was precarious in the mid-eighteenth century, “a bad harvest meant death for many,” even in England (Pinto 1949:39). Here in 1775 the weather was so cold that little grain was raised, and some children died of starvation (Buck 1857). A family in Penobscot

...were often so scantily supplied with food that...the children would go to the woods and gather herbs which they would steep and mix with their (Indian) meal...When they found themselves without anything...for breakfast, they would...dig a mess of clams...(Hutchins n.d.).

In Brooksville, when fishline was unobtainable, a family went into the cedar swamp, stripped bark from the trees, and fashioned it into cod lines and, fishing with these lines in the bay, filled their boat with fish (Limburner, et al. 1936:10).

Indian corn was THE important crop, as it could be raised at once, before the land was ready for other

crops. A number of cellar holes on a hill in Penobscot¹⁴ testify to the truth of the tradition that early settlers moved there because it was free of frost longer than the river valleys, and corn could mature, though it was an inconvenient distance from the water. “New settlers raised corn at first in all places, and lived on it two or three years...” (Allen 1876:271). Corn was served as a vegetable, both fresh and dried, with beans and perhaps salt pork as succotash, or parched and broken as hominy and samp.¹⁵ Corn meal was baked into hoe-cakes¹⁶ and bread, or made into Indian pudding which “was served twice a day in every home” (Gould 1965:89).¹⁷

Beans and pumpkins were among the first and the most useful vegetables grown. “Children lived on hasty pudding; and when the corn was cut off by frost they lived on beans. It was ‘bean porridge hot and bean porridge cold’ with them with little else” (Allen 1876:271). Pumpkins were served as a vegetable, in pies, with corn meal in bread, and to flavor and sweeten many dishes (Phipps 1972:112-114). Corn, pumpkins, and beans were Indian crops adopted by Europeans, and here the settlers also grew rye in place of wheat, as rye could be grown further north (Anderson 1952:162; Earle 1969[1900]:125).

Fish, both fresh and salt, salt pork, molasses, and rum were usually available, and, with corn, beans, pumpkins, and rye, formed the basis of the diet during the early years.



Plate 2. Bottom, one of the teaspoons Lydia Hatch Perkins saved when the British occupied Castine in 1779. Next, two similar spoons found in the ground near an old home in Penobscot. Top, spoon which belonged to Phebe Perkins (1745-1811), stamped B. Mead (Benjamin Mead was a Castine silversmith)

10. This “case” was probably a container for a knife and fork or for more than one set of knives and forks (Earle 1893:137).
11. Toddy, a mixture of spirit and water sweetened...” (Webster 1970 [1806]).
12. Flip, a spiced sweetened spirituous drink with addition of eggs (Brown 1966:156), or “made of home-brewed beer, sweetened with sugar, molasses, or dried pumpkin, and flavored with a liberal dash of rum, then stirred in a great mug or pitcher with a red-hot loggerhead or hottle or flip dog, which made the liquor foam and gave it a burnt bitter flavor” (Earle 1893:178).
13. Ledger of the Wescott store of Castine, now in the Wilson Museum, Castine; the earliest date is 1765.
14. Wallamatogus Mountain.
15. Hominy—hulled maize, dried and coarsely ground. Samp—coarse hominy, cooked like hominy by boiling.
16. Hoe-cakes were made wherever corn was grown; a recipe from South Carolina is very like the following early nineteenth

- century one from New York State: “To a quart of meal add a teaspoonful of salt and hot (not boiling) water to make a stiff dough, cool with sweet milk, spread on a greased griddle and bake until brown on both sides.” Fried in bacon fat, these hoe cakes are quite good.
17. Indian pudding (hasty pudding) was corn meal and milk or water—sometimes sweetened and boiled in a bag, sometimes cooked as mush or supawn.

“We set a dish on the hearth holding Injun meal, and from this we took small fingerfuls, and dropped the meal into the boiling pot, a few grains at a time. It took us generally half an hour to get the meal dropped. Then mother always wanted we should stir it for the hour that it cooked. So you see it was quite a long task after all.

“When it was done we turned it into a nappy, and served it from that, with milk” (Rawson 1927:23).

By 1800 families were well established and, although the early crops remained the staples, other crops were also cultivated—peas, beets, turnips, cabbages, carrots, onions, potatoes,¹⁸ and Jerusalem artichokes (*Helianthus tuberosus*)¹⁹ Tomatoes were unknown.²⁰ Samphire (*Salicornia europaea*) and goose grass (*Plantago maritima*)²¹ were picked on sand

or gravel beaches. Milk, butter,²² cheese, eggs, fish, clams, and lobsters²³ were available most of the time, and fresh meat occasionally.²⁴ Every farm had an apple orchard, and many grew plums, cherries, currants, and gooseberries.²⁵

second half continued in next Bulletin...

18. Potatoes were not considered wholesome, and were little cultivated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Earle 1893:153-154). Nor would cooking methods have made them attractive: "To fry Potatoes, Cut them into thin slices, as big as crown pieces, fry them brown, lay them in the plate or dish, pour melted butter, sack, and sugar over them. These are a pretty corner dish" (Carter 1802:50).
19. Artichokes growing wild were mentioned in 1832 (Williamson 1966 [1832]:129), and were cultivated in Bucksport in the 1830s—"Jerusalem artichokes along the border of the cabbage patch" (Brooks 1901:66). They are not now cultivated, and I have found one person who is familiar with them.
20. The tomato was thought, by Europeans, to be poisonous, although in pre-Columbian times it was used as a food in Mexico and South America. Webster's dictionary of 1806 gives no hint that it is edible, identifying it as "the love apple, a species of solanum," whereas Webster's of 1868 describes it as "a garden plant and its fruit." Mrs. Gardiner in 1763 had eleven receipts for ketchup—but no tomato ketchup (Gardiner 1938:66-71). The introduction of the tomato to one family in the nineteenth century may be typical: "...a new kind of seed...they produce a vine that bears a beautiful red fruit larger than a plum or an apple,—not at all like either,—but very nice, stewed for sauce or eaten raw. The city folks set great store by them. They call them tomatoes..." Initially thought to be too acid, the family "learned to dry them, to make catsup of them, to seal them up in bottles; and, in short, the tomato was from this time an institution" (Allison 1877:258-259).
21. These are not now generally known.
22. In view of current thinking concerning butter, it is interesting to read that in the 1830s "It was the custom of the village (Castine) to bribe boys to forbear the use of butter, at the rate of two cents per week; butter, it was held, was bad for a boy's blood..." (Brooks 1901:281).
23. In the first half of the nineteenth century, children in Brooksville waded in the waters of the rocky shores picking up lobsters, which were cooked, shelled, and dried for winter use (information from the granddaughter of one of the children).
24. As there was no way to keep meat except in cold weather, a butchering was shared with neighbors, who reciprocated in their turn. Most of the meat was dried, smoked, or corned.
25. Dr. Joseph Stevens of Castine wrote, probably at the time of planting: "Names and situations of Apple Trees set out in our garden—April 24th, 1826. Early Harvest—between the local (?) Old Apple Tree and the Old Cherry Tree. Baldwin—7 paces N.W. of Great Apple Tree. Ribstone Pippin—7 paces N.W. of Baldwin—14 N.W. of Great Apple Tree. A fine fall apple. Pumpkin Sweet—7 paces N.W. of Ribstone—21 of G.A. Tree. Early Harvest—7 paces N. W. of Pumpkin Sweet—28 of G. A. Tree—Baldwin—7 paces N.W. of old early apple Tree—N.E. of Baldwin before mentioned—between old early and old Crab—R. Island Greening—7 paces N. W. of Baldwin—14 of old Early—N.E. of Ribstone—very fine apple—Keep till January. Hubbardstown Nonsuch—In the lower part of garden—10 paces S.E. of Black Horse Plumb. Long Island Pippin—S.W. side of the bottom of the Alley. York Russetting—S.W. side of Alley on a line with Ribstone Pippin and R.I. Greening—Early Harvest—about 7 paces N.W. of York Russet. S.W. side of Alley— —Baldwin—7 paces N.W. of Early Harvest last mentioned—S.W. of the Top of the Alley. Pear Trees— —Jarganelle—between the sumac and the small old cherry tree (black mazzard). St. Michael—between the Jarganelle and an old apple tree—N.W. of Jarganelle 7 paces. St. Germaine—7 paces S.W. of Nonsuch (apple) in lower part of garden – St. Michael—S.W. side of Alley—on a line with two Baldwins—between York and Russetting and a young native plumb Tree— — —Plumb Trees—White Horse—6 paces S.E. of Jaganelle—Black Horse—5 paces S.E. of white Plumb— — —Cherry Trees—May Duke—between native plumb and cherry trees on S.W. side of Alley—Mazzard—in front of yard— — —Peach Trees—Early Anne—in front yard—N.E. side of steps—Red Rarripe—in front yard—S.W. side of steps— — —" (Stevens 1826).
F. W. Bakeman wrote in 1905: "It is now just about one hundred years since my grandfather and grandmother went into the then new house...The fields were in high cultivation and the orchards of apple, plum, cherry &c were luxuriant. Even in my day currants and English gooseberries were in great abundance."

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