

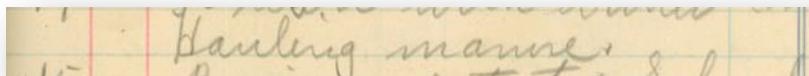
• The "Smell of Money" •

It may be hard to believe but of the five human senses, our sense of smell is the most powerful. Smell is closely linked to our memory and helps us to recall many events from our past, taking us back to times and places that we may have tucked away in our memory. When we are again exposed to those smells, we often find ourselves revisiting those times and places. They are reminders of days and events gone by.

Tonie wrote often about an array of activities of farm life that associate us with a range of smells. And although she wrote about the activities, she never elaborated on any emotional sensation which those activities must have generated. Was it clean and fresh or rancid and foul? Was it earthy and woody or stale and pungent? We could only imagine. Those smells trigger memories that while forgotten, link us to times past.

Depending on the sensitivity and memory of the smeller, those smells of the farm could be pleasant or offensive. I scoured Tonie's journals for some memory-invoking activities. The smells associated with those activities take us back in time and conjure up some of the most intense memories. It might have been helpful if you grew up on a farm or at least took part in farm chores. But even if you were just a visitor to a farm, you might recall some of these smells. If I could include some farm smell "scratch and sniff" stickers, it might help you. But in the absence of such smell-invoking aids, just use your imagination. So here are some of them.

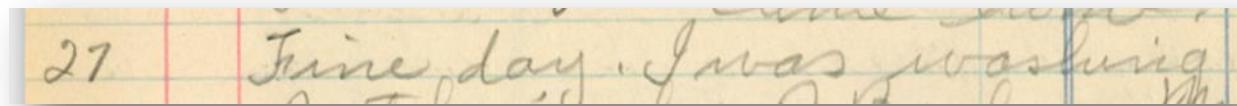
Manure, in any state of freshness or consistency



January 14, 1930 - "Hauling manure."

Perhaps you have had the experience of driving along a country road and suddenly finding yourself overwhelmed by the smell of a barnyard. There is no doubt that animal waste is a necessary but unpleasant part of the business of all farm operations which involve animals. Harry Claas' city cousins might have suggested that smell was "stinky." Harry would have said that aroma was "the smell of money." That smell of manure was unmistakable. The manure of each animal species had a separately identifiable smell. And if it was the odor coming from hog waste, it could be overpowering. It wasn't just a scent or an odor. It was a smell, one that one just couldn't get anywhere else.

Wash day



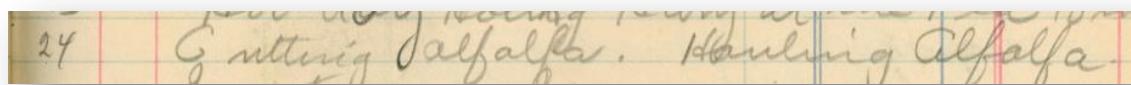
27 Fine day. I was washing.

January 27, 1930 - "Fine day. I was washing."

In Tonie's shorthand, this "fine day" was laundry day. Tonie used her own soap, not any commercial variety. It was a homemade concoction. After a hog was butchered, she rendered the fat removed from the carcass. She combined the liquid fat, lye, water and salt and cooked it until it started to thicken. She poured the mixture into wooden frames and left it rest until it hardened into small blocks. On wash day, she shaved off pieces of this soap into the wash basin and like magic, the laundry came out clean.

But the best part came next. There was something about the smell of freshly washed laundry, hung outside to dry in the fresh cold air of a "fine day." Once collected and brought inside the warm house, it gave off a scent which generated a natural high, a feeling of euphoria.

Freshly cut hay, particularly alfalfa hay

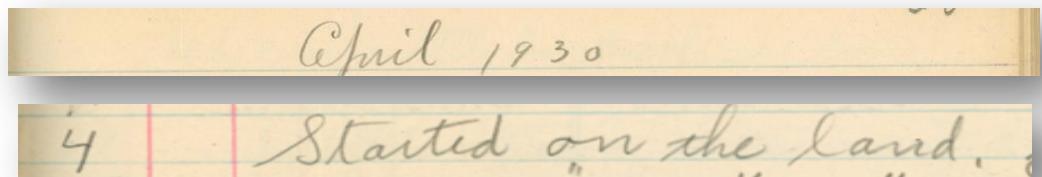


24 Cutting alfalfa. Hauling alfalfa.

June 24, 1930 - "Cutting alfalfa. Hauling alfalfa."

The job of "haying" as Tonie called it, was a big job which involved hard work, seemingly always done on a hot summer day. But the fragrance created in the cutting of hay, particularly alfalfa hay was full, rich and earthy. It was like the smell of the first fresh cutting of a lawn in springtime. For everyone in the Claas Family, it had a sweet smell. It was intoxicating, almost perfume-like.

Freshly-turned soil in springtime



April 1930
4 Started on the land.

April 4, 1930 – “Started on the land.”

This shorthand phrase meant only one thing: springtime had arrived. The fragrance of freshly turned soil permeated the countryside. It was rich and moist, as soil-dwelling bacteria were coming back to life in the warming sun. After a long, cold winter, the smell of the land was almost intoxicating.

Blooming fruit trees

116

Apr. 1931

Boys trimming apple trees

April 6, 1931 – “Boys trimming apple trees.”

I was once told that the best time to trim a tree was when you’re thinking about it. But at least it got the job done. Trimming or pruning the apple trees was a necessary task to help get the trees ready for the growing season.

The “boys” were going about the task of trimming the apple trees correctly. It was early spring, when the warm weather nudged the leaves and blossoms inside the buds to start growing. It was a little early for the apple trees to blossom. But in a month or so, the apple blossoms stirring inside would burst forth in a magnificent explosion of color and a sweet floral aroma.

The woods in the spring, after a rain shower

15

Raining.

16

Making fence in the woods.

May 15, 1930 – “Raining.”

May 16, 1930 – “Making fence in the woods.”

There was something very appealing about the fragrance of the woods after a refreshing rain in spring. There were many helpers ready to spend the day “making fence in the woods.” Some anthropologists believe that people inherit their affection for the scent of rain from their ancestors who relied on rainy weather for their survival.

In some ways, that still holds true for us today. We need rain and revel in its coming. That smell is crisp, pleasant and refreshing. In the woods, the smell of rain was intensified by the essence of cedar, maple, oak, grass and wild flowers. It is a time of awakening.

Butter and beer

"Making butter and beer."

May 16, 1930 - “*Making butter and beer.*”

This day was one of many, many days in which Tonie wrote about “making butter.” And while this was a big part of the farm business, there really was no strong smell associated with the process. Butter had no smell because it contained a lot of water, which washed away most scents. It had no smell, of course, until it was melted on Tonie’s stove as one of the key ingredients of just about any recipe in her cookbook. Ah, the smell of melted butter!

Beer on the other hand had a strong and sweet smell. Prohibition during the early years of the Depression was still the law of the land. So while buying beer was not possible, making beer at home was. Home brewed beer had a definite and lingering sweet smell, especially during fermentation. That healthy smell of barley and hops was mouth-watering.

Sunday dinner, any Sunday, any time of year

20 Cultivating bats.
To church. Annie, Frank and J. Pokora was here and Rotts. Haas from Beaver Dam were here. Very hot day.

July 20, 1930 – “*To church. Annie, Frank and J. Pokora was here and Rotts. Haas from Beaver Dam were here. Very hot day.*”

Most every Sunday dinner was celebrated with guests, whether relatives or friends. Dinner in the traditional observance was the midday meal and Tonie took the opportunity to demonstrate her cooking and baking skills. The main course on that Sunday was probably fried chicken accompanied by some early potatoes and gravy, fresh garden vegetables and topped off with a dessert of cherry pie. Some home brew, cigars and playing some cards followed. What could be finer?

Silage, the fresh cut stuff, a great farm smell

1. *Filling silo. Raining in the evening* Sept.

September 1, 1930 - "Filling silo. Raining in the evening."

Tonie didn't exactly say with what crop the silo was being filled. But this was really her shorthand. She always abbreviated the real meaning. It was, of course, being filled with chopped corn.

After the silo was filled to the top with thirty to forty feet of corn silage, and once the silo was opened up later that fall for the first time to feed the slightly fermented silage to the cows, it was a pleasant, sweet, even fruity aromatic food source that cows loved.

Wild grapes, freshly picked in autumn

Harry pressing grapes Making grape jelly

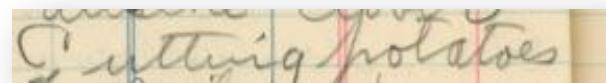
**September 24, 1930 – "Harry pressing grapes.
Making grape jelly."**

There was a bountiful crop of purple Concord grapes, growing wild along the wood line. They required little care, save for some timely pruning. Still, they produced several bushels of fruit, just enough for Tonie to prepare a couple batches of grape jelly.

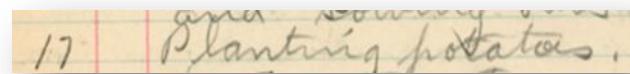


For anyone coming in close contact with those grapes the aroma was unforgettable. Wild grapes, dangling in ripe clusters from low-hanging vines; there was nothing quite like the earthy, foxiness of the smell of wild purple grapes on the vine.

Rotten, decaying potatoes.



April 16, 1931 - "Cutting potatoes."



April 17, 1931 - "Planting potatoes."

Potato planting time was always a "best guess." Too early and there was a chance that a late frost or freeze might damage the new crop emerging from the soil. Too late and it would mean lower prices for a good crop. It was a balancing act. So in preparation each spring, Tonie and the children would tackle the job of preparing the seeds for the new crop. They would slice up the potatoes left over from some of last season's harvest.

Many of the tubers would have begun to sprout, ready to be sliced and planted. It was a good sign of healthy seeds. But invariably, there were some potatoes that just hadn't survived and had rotted. The smell given off by them was hard to ignore. It was hard to believe that something as innocent as a potato could have such a putrefying stench. It had the smell of dead rotting animal flesh, a smell not soon forgotten.