



Collection Corner: Corn Husking

Corn evolved from a plant that existed thousands of years ago called Teosinte which was found in Mesoamerica. The cobs produced were much smaller than the ones that were later produced on corn crops. Teosinte evolved into the corn plants recognized today by the Mesoamericans' process of replanting crops. The ancient people would replant the best seeds from the crops each year until slowly the cobs became bigger and resembled the ones seen on corn plants today.

When the Native Americans still lived freely across the American continent, they grew and used corn for a multitude of reasons. While it was a main part of their diet, they also fed it to animals. They even kept the parts they didn't eat. The leftover cobs were used to start fires, and the husks were transformed into dolls that were given to children or were even turned into a form of paper.

These items are pictured below...

A **husking peg** is a simplistic device that a farmer used to husk corn. It was made of wood, metal and several other materials. The peg was typically about a half of a foot long and came to a flat, sharp point. At the opposite end of the point there was usually some kind of strap that a farmer could place a few fingers through to keep their grip on it. When the farmer went to husk the corn, he would squeeze the end of the corn husk between his thumb and peg and pry the husk away from the cob. This allowed the farmer to husk the corn in a shorter amount of time than it would take for him to peel the husk away without any tool.

Corn knives were used in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Some corn knives had hooked blades while other had a more machete-like appearance. The main function of these knives was to cut down cornstalks. The purpose of cutting down corn stalks was so that farmers could tie the stalks together so they could dry out in what is known as corn shocks. These corn shocks were then prepared for harvest.

Corn husk gloves first appeared around the 1870s where they remained a consistent tool for many farmers until the mid-1900s. While many corn picking machines had already been invented by the early 1900s, many farmers did not possess this high-tech equipment and still picked by hand. The corn husking gloves helped farmers husk quickly since the sharp hook located near the palm of the glove easily cut the cob from the husk.





Husking Items from the Collection

These items are part of the Carroll County Farm Museum's collection and are on display in the Corn Husking Exhibit. They have been donated throughout the years from members of the community.





Corn Cakes Recipe

Sometimes these cakes were cooked on a gardening hoe and were called hoecakes.



Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ cups cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ½ to 1 teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups boiling water
- 2 tablespoons bacon drippings or cooking oil of your choice

Instructions:

1. Add cornmeal, sugar and salt to a bowl. Mix to combine.
2. Gradually add the boiling water, mixing with a spoon until everything is moistened. The consistency should be thick (not runny) but should still be able to slide off a spoon. You may need more or less boiling water to achieve this consistency.
3. Heat oil or bacon drippings in a cast-iron skillet or non-stick pan.
4. Spoon the batter into the pan, using one large spoonful for each cake.
5. Once the edges begin to brown and become firm, flip over to cook the other side. If needed, you can add a couple of drops of oil to the top of the cake before turning it over.
6. Cook until the other side is done. You can press them down to keep an even thickness.
7. Move them to a platter lined with paper towels to drain.
8. Serve your corn cakes with butter or syrup. Refrigerate any leftovers.