

News from Nan

NAN'S WRITINGS

NAN'S REMINISCENCES: MODERN CONVENIENCES

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This post is part of a series of reminiscences that Nan wrote about her childhood in Minden City, Michigan. Most of the pieces were written sometime between 1990 and 1995.

The "modern conveniences" that Nan describes below were ones her family had in their home, which was often referred to as the "Red House." It was built in about 1900, and Nan was born there in 1906.



The Riedel "Red House," Minden City, Michigan

This nice, new modern cozy house did not have most of the "modern conveniences" that you take for granted.

No electricity

There was no electricity as yet, so there was no refrigerator. In summer there was an ice box, which was like a refrigerator but not nearly so cold. In winter they would cut ice from the frozen lake and carry it by big bobsleigh to Minden [locals often refer to the town as "Minden" rather than "Minden City"], where it was stored upstairs in the barn, covered with clean sawdust to keep it frozen. Then it had to be hauled

out, washed clean, and carried in to be put in the compartment for it. As it melted, water ran into a pan underneath, and that had to be emptied and cleaned. That kept foods cooler, but not really cold. So milk had to be boiled before it was drunk. Foods were different because they had to be made safe to eat. In summer butter melted, and lukewarm milk didn't taste very good and soured quickly. You may be glad you have a modern refrigerator!



Nan's dad, Louis Hermann Riedel, standing in Lake Huron ice, some of which might have been destined to be transported to the barn for food refrigeration

No running water

Upstairs there were four bedrooms, a long connecting hall, and a bathroom. There were no electric lights, and no running water. There was no flush toilet, either! There were china potty chambers that had to be cleaned every morning, and kerosene lamps that had to be filled and trimmed every week. There was a tub, and before plumbing there was a chemical toilet.

To take a bath you had to pump the water and bring it into the house, heat it in the reservoir on the back of the kitchen range, and then dip it out and carry it up to the tub. After your bath, you had to dip out the tub and carry it down again. Eventually they put in a drain to let it run out, and finally came plumbing so it also ran in, HOT! I'll bet you had no idea that taking a bath could be so much work! Before that, we used a big washtub that was set up on chairs next to the kitchen stove, and everybody got a turn on Saturday!

No washing machine

Now, besides all that that, there was no washing machine, either, and all the water for washing clothes had to be pumped and carried in and heated and dipped out. Then the wet clothes were carried up from the basement and pinned to lines for drying. In winter they froze stiff. When they were carried in the long-legged underwear looked like frost men!

*The old red house*

Clothes on the line and chickens on the driveway

All that water to be pumped, and the wood chopped and carried in for the fire in the stove, and the ashes carried out. You can begin to see how busy the mothers and fathers were.



Hand pump (this one at the cottage)

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