

# Sausage--"link" to the past

by Lydia Lovell

On a fine spring morning, when Aunt Olivia was a little girl, there would be a commotion in the lane as the pigman came along with his flock of piglets for sale. Anyone who wanted to raise a pig over the summer for butchering in the fall would go out and pick the piglet that looked most promising, make his deal with the pigman, and grab the animal by its hind legs and steer it squealing and struggling to its new home.

The Lovells didn't keep pigs, but not far from the homestead stands a house where the Bearses lived. The Bearses raised hogs. They also raised a large family. Cousin Florida was the mother of sixteen children, and they all lived to adulthood. Aunt Olivia tells of visiting the Bearses with her father, and seeing an enormous black and white sow lying on her side in the pigsty, nursing a dozen or more pink and white piglets.

Like most of the rest of the neighbors, at butchering time in the fall the Lovells bought a supply of pork from the Bearses. Part of every butchered pig was pickled. To pickle pork meat, the hams and shoulders were rubbed all over with a combination of one pint of salt, four pounds of sugar, and three ounces of saltpeter, then laid on boards on the cellar floor for 24 hours.

The next day clean stones were placed in the bottom of a barrel, and sticks laid across the stones to hold the meat above the liquid that drained. The barrel was packed in layers, each layer of meat strewn with two quarts of salt.

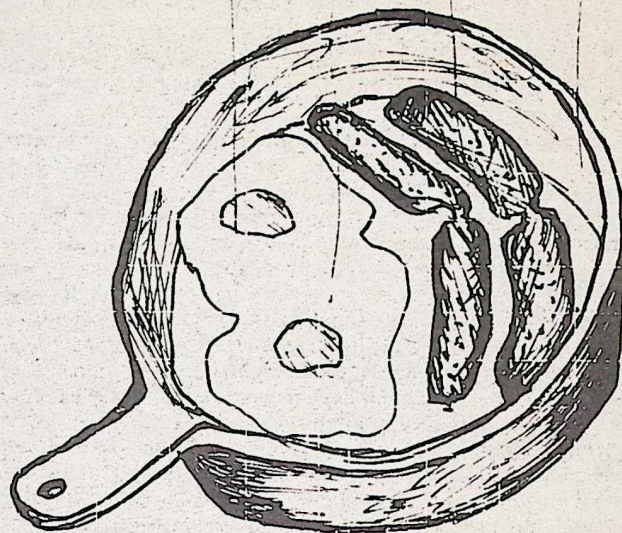
Every day for the next two weeks, the liquid that drained from the meat was drawn off from a bunghole at the bottom of the barrel and poured back in over the meat.

At the end of a fortnight, each piece was removed, rubbed with dry salt, and returned to the barrel. If not enough brine had formed to cover the meat, a fresh brine, made from two pounds of salt, a quarter ounce of saltpeter and a quart of water, boiled for 30 minutes and cooled, was added. Finally, a round board was placed on top of the meat and weighted with stones. Pickled pork would keep up to two years in a steady cool temperature.

Fresh pork was used for sausage meat, and in Aunt Olivia's day, people made their own. The first step was to let the Bearses know how much fresh lean pork was wanted (usually about six pounds), how much fresh fatty pork (about three pounds), and also that a few yards of hog intestines for casings would be needed. Aunt Olivia stored the meat in the ice box while cleaning the casings and putting them to soak in salt water for 36 hours.

On the second day the casings were rinsed, turned inside out and soaked a day longer. That same day, Aunt Olivia put the pork through a meat grinder and mixed the following pieces together:

2 t. powdered sage	2 t. powdered mace
6 t. black pepper	2 t. powdered cloves
6 t. salt	1 grated nutmeg



Seasonings were sprinkled over the meat and thoroughly worked into the ground meat with her hands. Squeezing the meat and spices through her fingers until evenly mixed was the best way, Aunt Olivia believed, and before packing the meat into a bowl and putting it in the ice box until the next morning when the casings would be ready, she always fried up a bit to make sure it was seasoned properly.

On the third day, the casings were given a final scraping, a final rinsing in soda water, and were cut into 15-inch lengths and wiped dry. One end was tied with twine. Aunt Olivia blew into the other end as though into a balloon to check the membrane for strength. Then she stuffed each length with sausage meat, packing evenly and not too tightly, and tying off the filled casing with another piece of twine. These sausages would keep in the icebox for up to ten days, but were ready to eat immediately. Seldom did sausage last longer than a week, for early every morning Aunt Olivia would take one out, dip it in beaten egg, roll it in cracker crumbs and bake it in a hot oven for 45 minutes. She had no need to call the family to breakfast. The aroma of baked sausage was rallying cry enough.

Aunt Olivia used two methods to preserve sausage meat. It could be packed in sterilized jars, sealed with melted lard, and stored in a cool place; or it could be stuffed into long narrow bags made of stout sheeting, each one large enough to

hold enough meat for a family meal, or about the same size as the casings. The bags were dipped into melted lard and then hung from rafters in the cellar where they would keep for many weeks.

Making sausage is not in the least difficult, but it takes a little time. Your butcher can order casings; they will come packed in salt, and you'll need to rinse them thoroughly. You may take a page from an old book and soak them in water to which you've added some baking soda.

Before you make up your mind to make sausage, look around in gourmet shops to find a small inexpensive tool called a "sausage horn;" it resembles a little funnel with a broader-than-usual base. The horn makes filling casings very simple. You insert the smaller end in the casing, gather the length of the casing around the funnel and, as you stuff meat into the horn, the casing fills evenly from base to top without danger of puncturing the membrane with a spoon or other tool.

Your butcher will grind your meat, or you can use a meat grinder or a food processor, if you have one. For a basic sausage, use one part fat to three parts lean meat. You may use all pork, or a combination of pork, beef and veal. For every pound of ground meat, allow:

- 1 t. ground sage
- 1/2 t. each of salt, pepper, marjoram
- 1/4 t. each of paprika and coriander

For variety, use the same seasonings with either chicken or seafood, but as soon as the casings are stuffed and the ends tied, poach the sausages in gently simmering water for 30 minutes, cool, refrigerate, and use the next day. These sausages do not keep as well as ones made from meat.

Once you've become proficient at sausage-making, you may like to try some different flavors. For an excellent sausage that freezes well, ground two pounds of lean pork, two pounds of lean veal, and two pounds of beef suet. Combine the grated peel and juice of one lemon, 1 t. each nutmeg, black pepper and cayenne pepper; 5 t. salt, 3 t. sweet marjoram and thyme (mixed), and 2 t. powdered sage. Mix the seasonings into ground meat. Before filling the casings, refrigerate the meat overnight to allow spices to saturate the mixture. Fill the casings; twist and tie ends.

These sausages may be used immediately, may be frozen or, like all sausages, may be smoked to preserve them for long-term storage.

While it's not probable that you'll buy your piglet from a pigman driving a flock along the lane, nor is it likely you'll purchase fresh pork from a neighbor who butchers his hogs every fall, there is no reason you can't make your own sausage meat. Anything Aunt Olivia could do, you can do. And modern equipment, in most cases, makes it easier.