

## **My Mother Washing Clothes**

My mother, Minnie Steward Cox, was born in Erath County in 1891. There were 10 children in her family, and of course, her parents made it 12 people to wash clothes for, to starch and iron white shirts for all of the boys, and each of the girls in her family had to have starched petticoats, maybe three or four, to wear at a time. So, she learned at an early age how to wash clothes, iron, and how to make lye soap to use in the washing of the clothes.

My mother was clean, clean, Washing clothes in the back yard. My daddy would carry buckets of water to put in the big black wash pot, build the fire under it and have it getting ready for washing clothes early in the morning. Mama had two or three wash tubs sitting up on the long kitchen bench that was usually on one side of the long dining table and we kids sat on the bench. to eat, and also to get our lessons by the kerosene lamp at night.

Mama would have one tub with cold water in it, and she put her dirty clothes in the cold water, she would wring them out by hand and put them in the hot water in the wash pot that had lye soap bubbling and boiling away. She had an old ax handle that she used to lift out the hot clothes from the wash pot and put them in another tub on the bench. This was warm water, and had the rub board sitting in it, and either bars of creamy lye soap that she had made, or maybe, later, bars of P & G soap, used for washing clothes. She would rub some soap on the dirty spots, pick the piece of clothes up, rub them on the rub board, and this was hard work. She had another tub with cold water, and this is what she put her clothes in, and she would wring them out by hand and hang them on the clothesline. She always took a wet cloth and wiped off the clothes line before she hung her clothes out so she wouldn't get dirt on the clean clothes. For her white clothes, she would put a few drops of bluing in the cold water, put the white bedding and the white shirts in it, wring these out and hang them on the line. Then came the starching, and the sprinkling down of shirts and clothes to be ironed.

(One year at the Steward Reunion at Lake Proctor near Comanche, Texas, three of Aunt Lillie Nichols boys were there. Lillie was an older sister of my mother. There was Bob, Buddy and Wendell. Wendell had come from Kansas, and he and I hit it off really well. I had been writing down some memories of my childhood, and I showed him what I had written about Mama washing clothes. When he got to the part about washing off the clothes line, he started crying. He said his mother had done the same thing. I told him the reason that Mama and Aunt Lillie did that was because their mother had washed her clothesline the same way).

Lye soap is the cleanest of smells. It was used to wash our hair, and was an all purpose soap. After mama finished washing the clothes with the hot water in the wash pot, she would bring in the lye soap water in buckets to the kitchen and scrub the kitchen floor with it. That floor was bleached out and clean enough to eat off of it. No problem with the water, it just drained through the cracks in the wooden floor.