**Resource Guide for Homemaking: Cleaning in Kentucky**

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**Introduction:** This resource guide is designed to provide you with tools to help people engage with the past and connect with others. There are images to share with your clients, information about household appliances and cleaning supplies, and articles related to cleaning house in Kentucky.

**Images:**

-Encourage your audience members to look at the image of the woman with the vacuum cleaner and through the images in the *Women in Lexington* book. The specific images related to housekeeping, cleaning, and dishes can be found on the following pages of *Women in Lexington*: p. 13, 20, 65, and 113. As your group members look at the images, ask them to share about the types of cleaning products and equipment they used. See the keyword list for terms you can use with the questions.

The image of the woman with the vacuum cleaner, titled, “Interior of bedroom, woman with vacuum,” is from the University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center. The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives received permission to include the photograph within this kit. Additional inquiries about the photograph should be directed to the https://libraries.uky.edu/libpage.php?lweb\_id=1118&llib\_id=13

Some conversation prompts can include:

* What do you want to say about what is going in this picture?
* What do you think is happening in this picture?
* What day did you do the wash?
* What washing equipment did you use? Lye soap, tub, wringer washer, etc.
* What did you do when the weather was bad and you couldn’t hang up the clean laundry outside?
* If you had a dishwasher, when did you first get one?
* Did your family have a vacuum cleaner, and if so, what was the brand?
* What were your favorite cleaning chores?
* What were your least favorite cleaning chores?
* Did your children have specific cleaning responsibilities? What were they?
* What brands of cleaning products did you use? What did you like about these products?
* Did you ever make your own soap? What was that process like?
* Did you use baking soda, vinegar, bleach, or ammonia to clean with, and on what items did you use them?
* What worked the best to get stains out of clothes?

**Keywords and Phrases:**

Ammonia

Baking soda

Bleach

Broom

Carpet cleaner

Clothesline

Deodorizer

Detergent

Dishwasher

Dust pan

Duster

Dusting

Dusting powder

Electrolux

Furniture

Garbage

Garbage disposal

Gloves

Hoover

Housekeeping

Iron

Laundry

Lye soap

Mop

Mopping

Scrub brush

Sponge

Stain remover

Starch

Sweeping

Tidy up

Vacuuming

Vinegar

Wringer washer

**Book to share:**

*Women in Lexington* by Deirdre Scaggs (2006).

*Women in Lexington* is a celebration of Kentucky women at work, in the home, at play, in society, and as part of the larger fabric of women's equality. Women in Lexington were active during World War II: they fought for women's rights, experienced changes within the family, and took advantage of or created new opportunities in the workplace. The 200 vintage photographs featured in this volume were drawn from collections housed in the archive of the University of Kentucky. (Book summary provided by Amazon.)

**Oral History interview:**

-Share some clips from the following oral history interview, which is available from the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries. After playing clips or the entire interview, encourage your audience members to share their own memories. Use the keywords and phrases listed above to help generate conversation too.

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After listening to the interview ask the group members to share if they ever made homemade soap. What was the process like?

Interview with Sallie Morton, January 29, 1992 (cleaning/making soap)

Family Farms of Kentucky: Farm and Farmstead Oral History Project

Interview Accession 1992oh019\_ff204

https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7vhh6c5g7f

(at the 1:49 point there is a description of making soap and the process)

**Articles:**

Share one or more of the articles below and ask your group questions about them. You can read the articles to your audience members or have them take turns reading the articles you select. You may want to just select portions of the articles to share with your group, too.

Questions or prompts:

* What do you find interesting about what the article discusses?
* Which story do you like best? Why?

Article 1:

Let's do laundry

Casey County News (Liberty, KY) - April 13, 2021

Author: Joberta Wells

I was sitting in my living room the other day listening to my washer doing its thing in the utility room. Yes, sitting. Back in my grandmother's time, which I actually remember, you didn't sit down while you were doing laundry.

Out in my back yard is a big iron kettle that belonged to my grandmother. She made apple butter in it, she made lye soap in it, and she did laundry in it — not all at the same time, mind you. It is unfortunate that the kettle now has a crack in it or I could be doing my laundry out there. Yeah, right!

On Monday morning Mammy would fill the kettle with clean water and lye soap shavings then would make a roaring fire around the kettle. When the water was hot and the lye soap dissolved, she would add white items like sheets, tablecloths, towels, and clothing. She had an old broom stick that she used to stir the items and woe be unto any grandchild who wanted to play with that broom stick! I will spare you the rest of the process that included rinsing, bluing, starching, wringing, and hanging on the clothesline. Next came the dark clothing that went through the same process minus the bluing. It's no wonder laundry took all day! Ironing took several more days because Mammy believed in ironing everything except towels. She used heavy old sadirons that had to be heated on the wood stove in the kitchen.

When I was a little kid, Mom did laundry using an old Maytag washer with an attached wringer. I remember her carrying clean water to the washer and to the tubs used for rinsing and starching. At one point she had a health problem and my father hired a young man to carry the water on washday.

The most exciting thing I can remember when I was a teenager was when Liberty's first laundromat was opened. We made good use of it. How exciting it was to be able to wash and dry everything in a matter of a few hours instead of days. It is a shame that we no longer have a laundromat. Why is that? I still need one with the big washers and dryers when I have comforters, blankets, and other large heavy items to launder.

Ironing is an art as well as a chore and I am guessing that people under the age of 40 don't know how to do it properly. I loved to iron. I can remember sprinkling clothing using a Coca-Cola bottle with a special sprinkler head, rolling the sprinkled items, and placing them in a damp pillowcase. This was placed in the refrigerator to keep the sprinkled clothing, especially the starched things, from mildewing or souring. You would get out one item at a time and leave the rest in the refrigerator until all the ironing was done. I loved the smell of the steam that escaped during ironing. Nothing ever smelled so fresh and sweet.

Another great revolutionary event was the invention of spray starch. I loved it! It had a tendency to stick to the bottom of your iron, though, and you had to do a lot of iron cleaning. Nevertheless, it was much easier than putting clothes through a tub filled with starch water.

By the looks of the clothing on people I now encounter, nobody irons these days. I don't even iron these days. I have had my ironing board and iron out only one time in the last year and that was to iron mending tape on a rip in a shirt. I am liberated! What a hoot!

Article 2:

The Best of Bena Mae “Simple Pleasures”

No More Washday Blues

The News Journal (Corbin, KY) - July 1, 2020

Author: Bena Mae Seivers

Section: News Page: B1

Ladies of my generation may remember when Monday was washday. If Medals of Honor were awarded for hard work in those days, they surely would have gone to our mothers.

Long before the invention of the wringer washer and later the automatic washer. there was no task more arduous and laborious that came around the day after Sunday, as sure as the sun set and the moon rose.

So, ladies, every time you think you’ve got it tough and housework is taking its toll on you, read the following recipe for doing the family laundry in an era that is thankfully long gone. It was written in a bygone era by a Kentucky grandmother to a new bride.

RECIPE FOR WASHING CLOTHES

“Build fire in backyard to heat kettle of rain water. Set tubs so smoke won’t blow in eyes. Shave one hole cake of lye soap in boilin’ water.

Sort things, make three piles, one pile white, one pile colored, and one pile work britches and rags. To make starch, stir flour in cool water to smooth, then thin down with boilin’ water .

Take white things, rub dirty spots on washboard, scrub hard and then boil. Rub colored but don’t boil, just rinse and starch.

Take things out of kettle with broomstick handle, then rinse. Hang old rags on fence, tea towels on grass. Pour rinse water on flower beds. Scrub porch with soapy water. Turn tubs upside down.

Go put on clean dress, smooth hair down with hair combs. brew cup of tea and rock a spell and count your blessings.”

Recently my trusted old washer gave up the ghost. For the three weeks it took to replace it, I went into a deep funk. When the new one was delivered and set up, I thought about calling in a priest to bless it with Holy Water.

Personal Note: When I was a kid, Mama would keep one of her children out of school to help her on wash day. The load of laundry was so heavy she couldn’t do it by herself. This was accepted by the school because many families found it necessary to keep a child at home to help with the chores when they became insurmountable

I remember scrubbing clothes on a washboard until my knuckles were raw.... not a happy memory.

Memo: (This column is a condensed reprint from the Bena Mae archives.)

Article 3:

My Mom's happiness: The answer was the ringer

The Ledger Independent (Maysville, KY) - September 4, 2019

By: Rick Houser

From our very first recollections to our very last recalls for the most part form what we think and how we act throughout our lives.

We don't realize that this is a huge part of us but it is. What is odd to me is that the smallest item or act delivered such an impact on us when major events in our lives probably didn't. Oh how our memories can impact us.

One example is that from my earliest years forward I can see my mom in the utility room with a pile of dirty clothes lying beside her Maytag wringer washer. The first one I remember was a 1937 Maytag that she used almost always on Mondays. It was gray and the paint was chipping some as it took a lot of beating as it worked its magic of turning soiled clothes into clean ones and now ready for the clothes line. Mom would load the washer up with buckets of water that she had to carry from a faucet originally not close, and dump in several buckets per load. She then would take a bar of homemade lye soap and cut it up from a 4-inch-by-8-inch bar into several cubes so that the agitator could help dissolve the soap into action. Next mom would take the clothes she had sorted into items for a load and slowly dump them into the washer. The next part I never really understood and that was just how long the clothes stayed in the washing cycle. My guess is mom watched the clothes and when they looked clean enough to her standards the cycle ended.

The next step was to stop the washing cycle to a halt and one item of clothing at a time would be inserted into the wringer. Now the wringer was not only the part that gave the washer its name but was a dangerous part to say the least. To remove the water from the clothes so as to reduce the item to a point where the air could finish the drying the wringer had to be able to squeeze with a force that if a person were to get their hand in could break that persons fingers badly. I doubt that OSHA was around yet as there wasn't one safety or override device to stop this from occurring and there didn't exist any safety shields to protect the operator. My mom wasn't a person to be patient or cautious when it came to this machine as she would get in a hurry and before you could say Maytag mom would have one or more fingers jammed in her wringer. Most times she would only stove her fingers (this was probably from all the times she had been caught in the wringer.) She learned but never got onto when to stop. She would just hit the stop lever and slowly reverse the wringer so she could remove her digits.

Many times all of us at the house would lecture mom to be more careful to which I think she was trying but as she had other chores to do she would try to hurry up the process. No matter how much she would get hurt she always bragged on how good her Maytag washer was and you just can't beat a wringer. But in about 1962 her 1937 Maytag bit the dust. When the repairman from A&P Appliance told her the bad news I could have sworn there were tears in her eyes as she had lost a dear friend. So with the strong encouragement from dad, Peg and Ben they convinced mom to buy a new automatic washer and dryer. To this day I have wondered how they did that but she did. Dad once said he thought it would pay for itself by mom not having to be going to Dr. Barbers to get her hands wrapped so much.

The truth was mom never liked her new washer as it took longer in cycles and she had to begin buying store-bought laundry detergent and stop using her dependable lye soap. Also I can't really remember her using the dryer unless it was to freshen up wrinkled clothes. I think she wasn't going to give up two traditions at one time. A few years later mom and dad bought a home at the edge of Bethel and when they moved my cousin Walt and me who were farming at that time moved into the house they left. Mom decided it was better if she left her washer and dryer for Walt and I to use. In reality this gave her the opportunity to buy a used Maytag wringer washer. Also dad built her a new clothes line. So along with a new home mom got a new lease on how she felt clothes should be washed. To say the least she was in laundry heaven. Also she was back into taping her fingers or ace-wrapping her fingers. We would get on her and how dangerous the wringer was but she defended the ringer and said it isn't the washer's fault if a hand gets too close. At that point I could go further and say the obvious as to who was careless or use my common sense and drop the topic. The topic was dropped.

As a matter of fact, that wringer washer gave out as it wasn't a 1937 model that she said was made to last. But she and dad went to Dietz Furniture where mom bought a brand new Maytag and paid over 450.00! That was higher than a new automatic at that time but a happier person there wasn't. She would show it off to anyone she could get to go into the basement and look at it. Proudly she pointed out the added safety features such as the automatic release of pressure that allowed the wringers to stop and open automatically. This feature I was shown often as I felt she was saying back off to me. (And I did.)

I have no idea why this appliance has stuck in my mind all these years but it has. I think a lot has to do with the fact it made my mother happy when she did the wash. She had a routine down and I think the positive results the washer gave her. Maybe it was as she did this chore she would hum hymns. But most of all she would sing a part of the old days of the week song. "This is the way we wash the clothes wash the cloth wash the clothes, all on a Monday morning. Happy can be found in some of the oddest places!

Rick Houser grew up on a farm near Moscow in Clermont County and loves to share stories about his youth and other topics.

Article 4:

RUBY: Hope springs eternal, or maybe not

The Sentinel Echo (London, KY) - June 12, 2019

By Catherine Ruby

I hate to clean house. That sounds pretty strong. I seldom use the word "hate", at least in the true sense of the word. Definitions include things like "malevolence" and "hostile toward."

Well, I don't feel evil intent toward housework, and I've never (so far) contemplated taking a hammer to my vacuum cleaner. I was just happy a few weeks ago when it quit working and I had an excuse (like I needed one) to not use it.

Anyway, synonyms also include "dislike greatly" and "shrink from." Those I can relate to. So much so that I procrastinate, not as long as I can, but until the inclination just suddenly strikes me. Usually unexpectedly. And inconveniently.

Like today, for instance. I almost ran out of time to write my article (pushing a deadline is another talent of mine), thanks to a sudden cleaning impulse.

I'm expecting my son to come help with some household chores. I guess that was the motivation. Not that he would care if I hadn't cleaned. He'd probably just write me a note in the dust.

Nevertheless, suddenly, cleaning seemed like a good idea.

I wasn't always this way. Not that I ever particularly liked to clean house. But I kept a weekly routine. It seemed necessary while raising my children.

However, it always also seemed somewhat fruitless. Dust everything, and three days later I could see the dust starting to accumulate again. Swab the kitchen floor, and in comes the five year old with the dog, both with muddy feet.

Or scrub the bathtub, and it never failed--my incorrigible children could never figure out how to swipe away the ring when they finished. Ultimately sort of pointless. Made me seriously consider bringing back Saturday night baths in a wooden tub in the kitchen.

Now I am by myself, and I find I can tolerate a lot of dust. A sink piled with dishes. Piles of laundry taking up residence by the washer.

Not that any of these take a lot of time to remedy. Twenty minutes to wash dishes while I listen to the news. Two minutes to load the washer or the dryer. And meanwhile I can read a book as they operate. Or clean house . . .

I have timed this work. Ten minutes to clean both bathrooms; approximately 10 more to dust (I am selective about what that dust-cloth touches).

More time-consuming, vacuuming probably takes 30-40 minutes. All in all, I can clean my house in about an hour. Probably what my mother-in-law called "a lick and a promise", without getting around to the promise. Works for me.

It takes me hours, though, because I stop and start. Clean the baths: go read a book. Dust: take a nap. Vacuum — I can wait and do that tomorrow. Pitiful.

Today, feeling somewhat energetic, I also tackled some of the clutter. That would include the dining room table, my dresser, the sofa and coffee table in the living room.

I didn't get to that last Easter bin. I know — pitiful. But I needed to write my article. I can still do the bin tomorrow in time for my son to drag it to the storage building.

Being neat and tidy is an asset. One I seem to have lost. I blame living alone. No one comes in each evening to look around and say, "So, what did you do all day?"

I certainly don't, because I know. I read. I napped. I worked some intellectually stimulating puzzles. I may have actually sorted out some stuff, like my old school files, to throw away. Then I left what remained in nice, organized stacks--on the sofa and coffee table--and read the newspaper.

I think this is where you, "she's hopeless." Actually, I'm honest enough to say it myself.

That doesn't change much, though. If you unexpectedly drop by to visit, I will be suitably embarrassed. Unfortunately, evidently not enough to reform me.

Like I said — I'm hopeless.