

Clean Floors

By

Clara Mack 1950



Grandma Seward had a clean kitchen

These days, when manufacturers are constantly burning the midnight oil in an effort to turn out kitchen floor coverings of rubber tile, hardwood, highly-polished linoleum, slate, terrazzo and imitation marble, are a far cry from the time when our grandmothers proudly spread rag rugs on their softwood kitchen floors. Grandma must have had a tough time. It required pails of steaming suds, a big heavy mop, sometimes a stiff brush and as much elbow power as an eight-cylinder engine to keep those old wood floors in condition.

My own Grandmother Seward was a diligent floor cleaner. She hated dirt. In sickness or health, in sadness or gladness, in summer or winter, her own little house was spotless from

the darkest corner of the cellar to the sunniest spot in the "sitting room". She wore out brooms by the dozen and used brown soap by the case.

Grandma Seward was big, nearly six feet tall, and she weighed around the 200 mark, but neither her size nor her lameness (I can't remember when she didn't limp slightly) kept her from being energetic. First, she shook the round, braided rug that lay in the doorway. Then she swept the floor thoroughly, not forgetting to swish the broom along the tops of the baseboards. She heated "scrub water" in a copper boiler on top of the kitchen range and poured it into a big wooden pail. To this she added sal soda or ammonia and about a cupful of homemade soft soap. Into a second pail she poured more clear hot water which was for rinsing. She also had a scrub broom, a mat made of discarded cotton stockings and a can filled with sifted wood ashes.

Grandma Seward wore long, full dress skirts and two petticoats - one short outing flannel, and on top of that a long, white, rebuffed, starched one. Of course, she couldn't let the bottom of her calico dress skirt and the starched petticoat drag on the wet floor, so she picked the two outside layers of clothing up by their hems, brought them around her waist, apron-fashion, and fastened them in the back with a big safety pin. Her high laced shoes and the short outing flannel petticoat looked comical from the front, and the clumsy wad of assorted skirts looked ridiculous from the rear.

She dipped the broom into the bucket of hot suds, sprinkled little puffs of wood ashes here and there on the floor and began to scrub. I mean, she really scrubbed - a vigorous pushing motion, back and forth, back and forth, until the pine boards began to look white. Occasional grease spots were given additional applications of wood ashes and some extra hard brushing.

The perspiration stood on Grandma's forehead, her glasses got steamed and her hands got red, but she never stopped until every inch of that kitchen floor had been well cleaned. Then she polished off the job with the stocking mop and a second pail of clear water, and believe me, it was downright dangerous for a grandchild to set foot on that floor before it was dry!

Yes, Grandma Seward hated dirt. She had to fight it the hard way, with homemade soap, homemade lye and homemade energy, but she didn't seem to mind these methods and took great pride in the results of her labor. To her dying day, she believed that kitchen floors ought to be scrubbed with a broom dipped in

boiling suds every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Clara Mack

Editor's Note: Clara Mack wrote a column for the Wayland Register between 1935 and 1950. She published her articles in a book called "Thoughts by a Country Woman" in 1950. In 1938, she won second prize in a national contest for the selection of the best country newspaper correspondent for the year.

*Use of all photos and/or text in this article have been approved and granted use courtesy of
www.HemlockandCanadiceLakes.com and www.ConesusLakeNY.org*

Click on or copy and paste the link below to go to the page that was referenced.

http://www.hemlockandcanadichelakes.com/hcl_column_mack_clara_thoughts_by_a_country_woman_1950_clean_floors.htm