



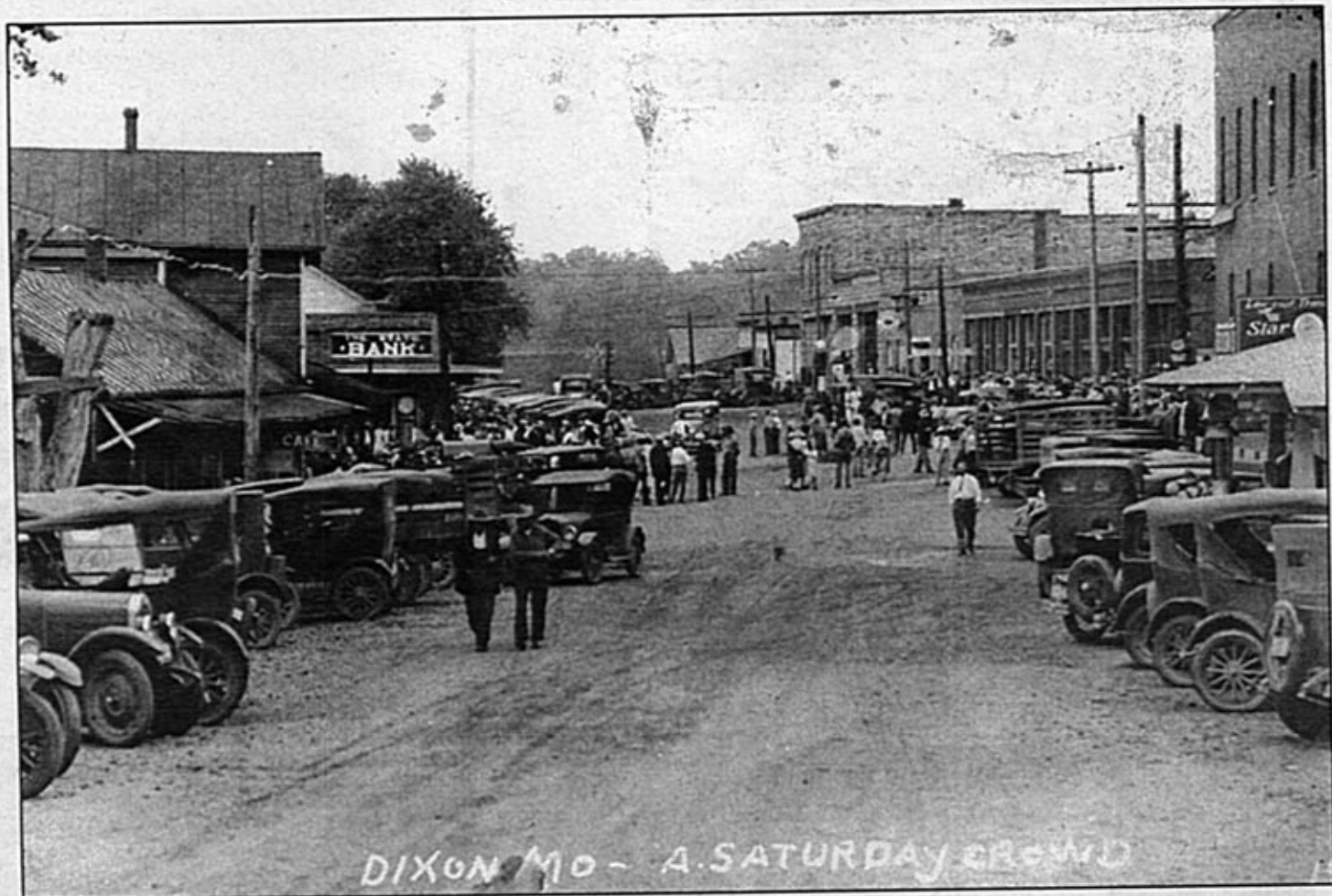
# Old Fashion Meat Smoking

By Gary Knehans

Lacking modern conveniences like refrigerators and supermarkets, Pulaski County oldtimers, like other rural contemporaries, practiced tried and true ways of preserving produce. Fruits and vegetables were harvested, prepared through the canning process, and stored for future consumption. Pork could be made into sausages, but another popular way to prepare both beef and pork for storage was through a hickory smoking process that proved not only practical but also very tasty.

Pork especially was popular to smoke. After butchering the meat and cutting it up in different portions, the oldtimers first would rub brown sugar on the raw meat surfaces. Salt then would be put on the meat not only as a flavoring but also as a preservative. The various cuts of meat next would be hung on scaffolds for a number of weeks to allow both the sugar and the salt to absorb into the tissues of the meat. When the meat had cured in this manner for the right amount of time, oldtimers took it to the smokehouse, made a small fire out of hickory wood, and then snuffed the fire out when the blaze was really going well. The hot charred wood would smolder for a long period of time. The meat would absorb not only the distinct flavor of the smoke but also its preservative powers as well.

Autumn was a very ideal time to cure meat. When the smoking process was over, the prepared meat could be left hanging in the smoke-



Old time street scene looking west from Second Street and Elm, Dixon, in pre-automotive days. Courtesy of John F. Bradbury.

house, where the cold of winter would add another level of protection against spoilage. The warming days of late winter, which promoted the emergence of pesky insects, prompted another step in this preservation process. The oldtimers then took the meat out of the smokehouse and scalded each piece in a boiling kettle of water to kill any bugs or green fly eggs. They aired the meat until it was dry, cut it up into pieces, and wrapped the pieces in brown paper or in large flour bags.

Each person apparently had his or her own storing method. Some covered the smoked meat with ashes, but there were other preferred ways as well.



Menfolk prepare for walnut log rolling in Richland. Courtesy of John F. Bradbury.

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