

THE GREAT DEPRESSION FOREVER CHANGED LIFE FOR THOSE IN GILFORD

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The Roaring 20's came to a screeching halt with the crash of the stock market on October 29, 1929, a day forever known as, "Black Tuesday". The dire conditions of the Great Depression affected almost every American and caused unthinkable hardships for the majority. The human spirit has always triumphed over negativity, and the way in which the people of our country dealt with the Depression was no exception to that rule.

Today's modern "Go Green" campaign pales in comparison to the determination of yesteryear's Americans, who, armed with the catch phrase, "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without", recycled everything until it could be recycled no more.

Our country's optimism began to dim as its financial crisis deepened throughout the 1930s. The entire country had to deal with not only money problems, but also with extremes in weather conditions. The middle section of the country struggled to deal with the Dust Bowl after years of drought. New England had its share of summer droughts, with heavy snowfalls and blizzards during the winters. The Hurricane of 1938, which ripped its way through New Hampshire, was not what weary and worn-out residents needed to contend with while having to deal with other extremely challenging issues.

Conversations with Gilford residents who grew up during the Depression give us the most accurate description of what life was like in Gilford and the surrounding towns during those tough years. It can be said that even though people had to face hard times, they did so with as much dignity as they could muster. The hardships brought out people's talents, and it taught lessons about the true necessities of life. Families pulled together and were extremely close; they had to in order to survive.

During the 1930's, many of Gilford's farms were abandoned by frustrated farmers. Those who remained were dedicated to their farms and family homes and were generally a very talented bunch.

Even through the dry summers and snowy winters, their families fared very well overall. Lack of food wasn't an issue for them. They grew all their own food required to keep their growing families fed and their pantries stocked.



Photo: The Great Depression of the 1930s created frugal housewives who came up with ingenious ways to save money. Women were extremely proficient at home canning and cooking without the usual, necessary ingredients such as eggs. The recipe for the egg-less spice cake pictured here was invented to solve the problem of a shortage of eggs during the Depression.

Clothes were made by the ladies of the family, who typically would take apart a piece of used clothing and remake it into another required clothing item. Feed sacks became a great source of material for clothing. Until feed sacks eventually were made from colorful printed fabrics, housewives would

dye plain-colored sacks with natural dyes in order to create a little more color and variety for clothing.

Home canning took place as a standard method of preserving food for the winter. Root cellars, usually located in the cellars of farmhouses, kept carrots, onions, squash, and even eggs fresh all winter long.

Life in Laconia was slightly more urban, and therefore, more of a challenge. Automobiles were sold, not because fuel became unaffordable, but because there just wasn't the gasoline available for a hungry gas tank. Walking replaced autos as the standard mode of transportation.

Many families kept a few chickens in the backyard, as well as a small vegetable garden, although not enough food was grown in those gardens and some food items still had to be bought. Nature provided many free, nutritious additions to meals, such as dandelion greens and blossoms, and centers of milkweed plants.

For those who worked in the mills of Laconia, seam trimmings from stockings were items that were saved, pulled back, and then knitted into winter hats, mittens, and scarves. Knitting needles were never bought but were made from such things as coat hangers.

Regular visits to the doctor did not happen, and that cleared the way for many home remedies such as: a combination of molasses mixed with a little melted butter for a sore throat, or hot milk mixed with sugar and ginger for a feverish cold. Many home remedies seemed to have worked quite nicely and are still used today by those who remember the recipes used by the wise women in their family

Entertainment took the form of card and board games, and if a family was fortunate enough to own a radio, there were many delightful and popular shows on the air. The board game, Monopoly, invented by Charles Darrow, first appeared during the Depression, and ironically, the sales from his board game made him a millionaire. Many families, however, did not run out and buy Monopoly; they made their own board, tokens, cards, and paper money.

The holidays also changed drastically. As families became more oppressed, even the Christmas tree

became just a distant memory. Instead, cardboard and paper decorations replaced traditional decorations. Toys that could be obtained were duplicated by the carpentry skills of fathers so that siblings could also receive presents.

Parents took the time to explain to anxious children the reason for change, always trying to keep the life of the family as normal as possible. For most children raised during the 1930s, a life-long frugality came from those difficult years. Living through the time when our nation struggled through the worst financial crisis in its history gave them a different and cautious outlook on life.

The need for self-sufficiency was required more than ever during the lean years. Since lack of food was one of the major challenges, housewives became adept at stretching their family's meals with delightfully creative recipes such as cakes that required no eggs. The recipe that follows hails from one Gilford family that baked this great-tasting cake during the 1930s and has made it many times since as it has become a family favorite.

GREAT DEPRESSION EGG-LESS SPICE CAKE

1 cup sugar
½ cup shortening
1 cup milk
2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. cloves
1 tsp. nutmeg
½ tsp. salt
1 cup raisins (opt.)

Cream shortening and sugar together. Add sifted dry ingredients alternately with milk. Add raisins. Bake at 350 degrees, 50 to 60 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.