



## HOW DAYS OF THE WEEK UNITED WOMEN IN THEIR WORK

2009

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*Backyards of yesteryear saw clotheslines filled with neatly-pinned laundry being sun dried as it was tossed about by the wind. Decades ago, Monday was traditionally laundry day, and across the country it united women in their daily work.*

“National Hanging Out Day”, an event promoting the environmental benefits of line-dried laundry, was recently celebrated throughout the nation. Started by the New Hampshire-based organization, Project Laundry List, and endorsed by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, it is held each year to enlighten people from coast-to-coast about the energy and cost savings of hanging laundry out to dry in the sunshine rather than merely transferring it from washing machine to dryer.

It is estimated that if every household used a clothesline instead of a dryer, thirty million tons of coal could be saved each year and fifteen nuclear power plants could be shut down. Today, these are things we are required to think about, and we make our choices accordingly. During the simplistic lives lived by previous generations, the luxury of using a clothes dryer was never known, so a backyard clothesline was their only choice on laundry day.

Days of the week all had their assigned chores, and women followed them religiously. Monday was always wash day, logically followed by ironing on Tuesday, and so on. When and where that tradition began is unknown, but the order created by doing the same jobs on the same days each week made lives less chaotic than they are today and ensured nothing was overlooked. We now have to sandwich laundry and cleaning in between things already tugging at our attention, and sadly, some basic jobs are often neglected for much too long.

In the past much could be told about a family just by what appeared on the clothesline on laundry day. Cloth diapers hanging in rows meant the arrival of a new little one, the ages of children could be guessed by the size of the clothing that was pinned along the line, and an empty clothesline for a week or two might hint at the fact that the family was away on vacation. Lifelong friendships were made by neighborhood women hanging laundry and gossiping over the fence. Sending e-mails and texting one another have replaced that face-to-face companionship.

There are still those in Gilford who use their clotheslines, much preferring them to the dryer that sits idle in the basement. Ask anyone who has had their laundry dried outside what the best thing about it is, and they will all unanimously answer, “Oh, that wonderful smell!” Like the smell of hay cut under a hot summer sun, clothes dried blowing in the wind have an intoxicating smell that will never be matched by the manufacturers of dryer sheets. Nature still cannot be beat.

A local woman who has always line-dried her laundry even though she owns a dryer said, “When you bring in laundry that has been outside, you bring in all that fresh air with you. There’s just nothing like it. I don’t even use my dryer.”



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Women often talk about their mothers using “bluing” on laundry day. Even though a lot of us haven’t even heard of the term before, amazingly bluing is still available on-line and is an all-natural product that can be added to the rinse water to enhance the whiteness of the whites. Women took an immense pride in their laundry and always wanted to have the brightest whites and cleanest laundry in the neighborhood; bluing was one way to accomplish that goal. Combining that with the natural antiseptic and bleaching properties of the sun, there was no need for dingy laundry, which was indeed noticed.

Ironing on Tuesday created a bit of competition between women. A tough job, women rose to the challenge, and armed with their hot irons, they left nothing sporting wrinkles. On hand to help produce the best-pressed laundry was always lots and lots of starch, another product that has all but fallen by the wayside.

Unfortunately, clotheslines, too, are falling by the wayside as more and more communities are banning their use. Project Laundry List has gone to work to support legislation to allow each American household to have the freedom to choose how they would like to dry their laundry, a good idea considering just the substantial environment benefit alone of line-dried laundry. Our ancestors would understandably be very puzzled by this current debate.

One woman, reflecting on the days of backyard clotheslines said, “You know, it’s sad, but people have completely lost the knowledge of the proper way to pin clothes onto a clothesline. A properly hung clothesline was always part of our landscape, and it was truly a work of art.”

For more information about the efforts of Project Laundry List, go to: [www.laundrylist.org](http://www.laundrylist.org). Gilford’s Thompson-Ames Historical Society welcomes stories of local history. They can be reached at: [www.thomames@metrocast.net](mailto:www.thomames@metrocast.net).