The following are some of the recipes for use on the chuck wagon.

Grant-Kohrs Ranch was established to tell the story of the frontier cattle era of the late 1800s. Airtight—canned foods—were just becoming available on roundups and trail drives, therefore our recipes use few canned goods and dairy products. The early use of canned tomatoes, peaches, and canned milk can be documented during this time period. Fresh milk was not available. Even though ranches had thousands of cows, they were beef cattle, not dairy, also, the cattle ran wild. Milking a wild cow would require the efforts of four to six men and was simply not worth the effort.

Most chuck wagon cookbooks give recipes using milk, eggs, and all kinds of ingredients, claiming these to be authentic chuck wagon recipes. They are right for the chuck wagons operating in the 1920s to 1940s, but not true for the period before the turn of the twentieth century. During our period—1880s to 1890s—the menu consisted of beans, beef, biscuits (sourdough type), salt pork, lick (molasses), rice, dried fruit (mainly raisins, apples, and prunes), and of course, coffee. Canned tomatoes, canned peaches, and canned milk slowly became available on the northern range—Montana, the Dakotas and Wyoming—in the late 1880s; while the southern range did not start importing airtights until the late 1890s. Various spices and herbs were available and used by many of the range cooks, even in the very early days, to give variety to the meals.

The ingredients in the following recipes reflect what we know for certain were used on most chuck wagons in the northern range during the 1880s and 1890s open range cattle era.

The ingredients for all the following recipes are suggested and approximate, allowing the cook freedom in the preparation of the recipe.

**CHUCK WAGON BEANS**

1 lb. dry pinto beans  
Bacon or salt pork (optional)—a handful or several strips cut in small pieces  
1 can tomatoes  
1 teaspoon garlic powder (or to your taste)  
2 tablespoons chili powder  
Salt to taste  
½ cup rice (optional)

Pick through the beans to remove rocks or dirt then wash in cold water; at this point the beans should be in a pot for cooking. Cover the beans with water; the water should be two knuckles above the beans. Some let the beans soak overnight then cook them, while others cook the beans without the soaking. Cook the beans until they are soft, if salt pork is used, put it in with the
beans at this time—anywhere from 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours—then add the rest of the ingredients and bring to a boil then simmer for 30 to 40 minutes for the flavors to blend. For a bigger crowd, you can use 2 lbs. beans and increase the other ingredients to suit your taste.

TOMATOES AND RICE

1 cup rice
1 can tomatoes
1 tablespoon minced onions
1 teaspoon garlic powder
Salt and pepper to taste

Place all the ingredients in a pot and add about 2 cups water; put on the fire, bring to a boil, stirring frequently until the rice is soft.

SPOTTED PUP

This is a great dessert for any meal and so easy to prepare.
1 cup rice
Handful of raisins
¼ cup molasses or sugar
Cinnamon to taste
1 tablespoon vanilla

Put everything in the pot and bring to a boil; stir frequently until water is absorbed by the rice. Good by itself or add a topping.

PEACH COBBLER

This is best prepared in a Dutch oven so it can be baked—or bake it in an oven at about 350 degrees until done. If a commercial biscuit mix is used, then follow the directions on the box.

2 large cans of peaches
Cinnamon to taste
1 teaspoon vanilla
Sugar, if needed

Crust
2 cups flour
½ cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup butter
2/3 cup canned milk
Melt a little butter in the bottom of a Dutch oven; then pour the peaches in and add the cinnamon and sugar.

In a mixing bowl, put the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Mix it all together, then add the butter—either melt the butter or put it in cold and mix it into the flour, just as if preparing biscuits—then add the milk and stir into the dry ingredients to form a soft ball. The dough can then be dropped on the peaches in small balls like dumplings, or rolled out in a thin sheet and laid over the top. Sprinkle a little sugar and cinnamon over the dough. Cover and bake in the fire for about 30 to 45 minutes—but it is wise to lift the lid occasionally to check on the progress.

Note: other spices can be used, if available.

SOURDOUGH STARTER

Hundreds of recipes for sourdough starters exist and all are wonderful to work with. For our purpose, a simple recipe is to take 2 cups flour, 2 cups warm water, ¼ cup sugar, and stir together. Set the mixture in a warm corner and stir daily for 4 to 5 days. The mixture will bubble and double in size as it ferments; it will produce a strong odor. If the mixture is not stirred or used for several days, a dark liquid will form on top—this is known as hooch, and is a alcohol, drunk by many of the old miners—but the mixture will become fresh again by simply stirring and possibly adding a small amount of flour and water.

The thing to remember about using sourdough is when some of the starter is removed to make biscuits, replace the amount taken out with the same amount of flour and water. For instance, if 1 cup of starter is removed, then put 1 cup flour and 1 cup water in with the starter in the crock.

SOURDOUGH BISCUITS

2 cups flour
¼ cup butter or shortening
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 ½ to 2 cups starter

Place the flour in a mixing bowl, add the soda, baking powder, salt, and butter—the butter or shortening can be melted and stirred into the dry ingredients or added cold then cut into the flour mixture with knives or fingers until the mixture resembles coarse cornmeal. Finally add the starter—if it is liquid enough the starter will serve to form a soft ball of dough. Break the dough in small balls about the size of eggs and place in a warm Dutch oven with melted butter, flatten the dough to biscuit size. Cover the Dutch oven and let stand for about 10 minutes before baking.