

Farm Women, Early 19th Century

19th century American women were crucial domestic labor, supporting families in subsistence & commercial agriculture. They:

1. Cooked, cleaned, and provided childcare
2. Produced, preserved & gathered foodstuffs (vegetables, poultry, milk products)
3. Usually provided 1/3 to 1/2 of family's food supply
4. Earned money or barter credit through goods they produced
 - a. Often lived near towns or close to Missouri or Mississippi rivers
 - b. Opportunities increased after 1820's = steamboats – wider distribution of goods
 - c. Expanding population
5. "19th century farming ...would have been unprofitable & unsustainable if families had not had the unpaid work of farmwives and mothers" P. 188
6. Hard physical labor
7. Taken granted of by men
8. Most settlers in antebellum Missouri – survived by hunting & growing corn & garden vegetables
 - a. Usually set aside about an acre for kitchen garden
 - b. After plowed, cultivation & care on the woman
 - c. Usually cared for poultry and cows
 - d. Henriette Bruns, German farmwife living in the village of Westphalia in central Missouri, cared for her garden; stayed busy with washing, sewing, and making soap: and managed one hundred chickens, sixty to seventy pigs, two cows, as well as geese. She wrote, "It is no fun to represent cook, nursemaid, and housewife in one person."
 - e. Gender division clear – home, garden & barn
 - f. Work never ending
 - g. Women preserved & pickled foods, made candles & soap, blankets & quilts
 - h. Bore & cared for children, three meals per day, cleaned, and washed, ironed, and mended clothing
 - i. Assisted men with labor in fields, barns, & forests.