

Farm to Factory Production: Making a Grilled Cheese Sandwich

Life on a Farm

The Industrial Revolution was the time in our history during which huge changes took place in the way people lived and worked. 200 years ago most people lived on farms. They couldn't go to the store and buy things like they do today, everyday items needed to be made at home, by hand, by the family. Each family member had jobs to do that changed with the seasons.

There was work to do throughout the day and little time for school or play. Farmers grew rye and corn for flour. Vegetables were planted in the spring, cared for during the hot summer months and harvested in early fall. They preserved food for the winter so the family could eat even when nothing was growing. Farm families stored beans, squash, pumpkins, and apples in a cool, dry root cellar. Men cut wood year-round for the fires that kept the house warm and cooked the food. Animals that provided milk, eggs, and meat needed to be cared for. Cows were milked and the cream turned into butter and cheese. Farmers cut and gathered hay so the horses could eat all winter.

The families took rye and corn to the gristmill where the miller ground it into flour so the family could have bread. Often, farm families had no cash and had to barter or trade for goods and services. To pay the miller a farmer may trade wool, vegetables, or a day's work on the farm. Families also had to barter for other items that they could not make, like cooking pans and horse-shoes.

The family made all their clothing by hand. Making cloth took a lot of time and effort: farmers sheared (shaved) sheep, and then they cleaned and straightened the wool, before spinning it into yarn and weaving it into cloth. Women and girls spent a lot of time throughout the year making cloth and clothing for the family.

Some things did not exist back then. There was no electricity, no cars or phones. Plastic had not been invented yet and houses did not have running water. Think about how different your life would be if you lived on a farm 200 years ago.