

"Manure-Making in 1872"

Carroll County Times article for 25 March 2001

by Jay A. Graybeal

Recently, while skimming through the first issue of *The American Farmer and Rural Register*, published in Baltimore in January 1872, I chanced upon an article entitled "Manure-Making." Thinking I generally understood the process, I wondered what the editor found to write about so I read on. As it turned out, the editor was advising his readers to make compost:

"It is useless for the farmer to expect success, whose lands have been reduced by injudicious cropping without suitable return to the land of the sources of supply for the very essence of fertility which has been extracted from it and sold off the farm in the crops which are placed upon the markets of commerce.

It must be thoroughly understood, and science daily demonstrates the fact apparently so little appreciated or availed of by many farmers, that the land, like the animal system, must be fed to keep up its vigor and even its life. We will not here discuss this subject, as we shall find ample opportunities hereafter to impress its importance upon the attention of our readers. What we now wish to do, is, during the present season, when time may be better afforded than in the more genial months of the year, to urge the gathering into the barn yard of every particle of vegetable substance that ever had life, from which to make a compost to furnish in the spring the necessary plant food for the crops. Every wood and fence corner, the scrapings of ditches and the mud from creeks and rivers, around and about your premises, the dung of poultry, as well as the marl and peat deposits wherever they are at hand, can be made to furnish a large amount of manure which by a proper combination with that from the horse and cow stables, will be really more valuable than that which so many are expending heavy amounts in cash to purchase. Depend upon it, that whatever else you apply to the land, you cannot dispense with that which can alone be made on your own premises, for the mould is mainly formed therefrom, upon which all commercial manures can act beneficially, and thus combined, a permanent improvement is the more readily secured. The carcasses of animals which may happen to die, can be added to your heaps with great advantage—the flesh and other parts should be separated from the bones, and mixed with the vegetable materials. The flesh contains more nitrogen than the bones, and this is the most valuable of all the fertilizing materials supplied to the crop. To every three loads of the materials gathered as advised above, mix one load of stable manure, and for every 20 loads add to the mass a bushel of plaster of Paris, to prevent the escape of the ammonia, which otherwise being of a volatile nature, would escape into the air, and, if your neighbor has been more provident than yourself, and put plaster upon his fields or his dungheap, he may unintentionally rob you of the most valuable constituents of your own barn yard manure. Gather your materials and dispose of them as directed; and we will hereafter give further hints upon their management."

*The American Farmer and Rural Register* was one of a number of farming journals that appeared in the late nineteenth century. The magazine encouraged progressive farming techniques, clubs and farmers and agricultural fairs and provided a variety of useful hints for farm families. The editor also included his view of the farmer: THE FARMER--A farmer more than most men, needs pluck, faith in himself and in nature, and, above all, patience. He must wait for results; and, while doing so, it is important that his surroundings should be as pleasant as he can afford to make them. A cheerful, healthy location is of more value than a fine house.



*Female members of the John D. Kauffman family posed in front of the Peter Royer farmhouse and outbuildings near Westminster, c.1920. The neat yard and freshly whitewashed foundation, fences and outbuildings obscured the large manure pile that likely stood near the barnyard. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Robert A. Erb, 2000.*