

Dad's Broom Machine: A Symbol of "The Old Place"

by Ray Kimmel

My Dad, George Edward Kimmel, was born and raised on a farm in Pulaski County, near Crocker, as was I. The following is an account of my family, "the Kimmels", coming to the Ozarks, our pioneer farm life, and the story of Dad's "Broom Machine".

Dad's grandparents, John Phillip and Barbara Ludwig Kimmel, immigrated to the United States from Prussia. Sailing from Bremen, they arrived in Baltimore, June of 1844. A tailor by trade, John Phillip's journal is a cherished keepsake. Settling in St Louis, their son, William Christopher, was born March the 25th, 1838.

Dad's father, William Christopher, and mother, Mary Elizabeth, were married January the 17th, 1859. Mary Elizabeth, a "southern belle", had been born in Alabama, December the 19th, 1835, to Peter and Elizabeth Lipscomb Bonnet.

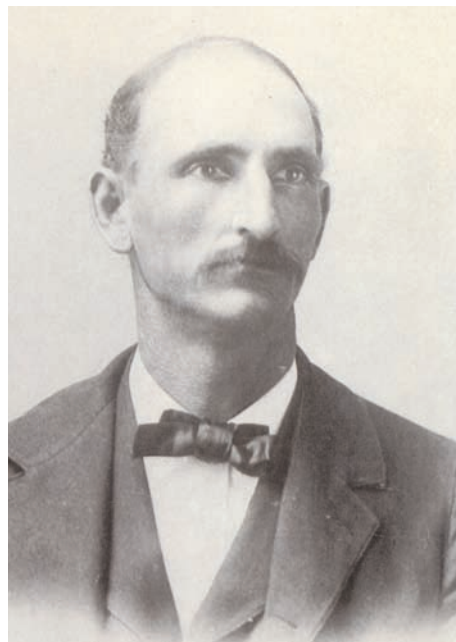
Several years prior to the Civil War, William secured substantial land in the Crocker area from the railroad. Railroads, anxious for folks to settle down in areas where tracks ran, were selling land at rock bottom prices. Therefore, it was in Crocker that William and Mary made a home. My dad, George Edward whose birth date was July the 5th, 1860, was their first child. William fought in the Civil War, with the Union's 32nd Missouri Infantry, Aug. 1862-July 1865.

When dad, George Edward, and his three sisters, were "of the proper age", their father, William, deeded each of them approximately one hundred and sixty acres of land, in the Crocker area. Barbara, "Aunt Kate", married Jonathan Crews, and Mary and Martha each married a Holtsman, George and William. William Kimmel had met the Holtsman brother's father on a Civil war battlefield. Becoming friends, William described the opportunities and splendor of the Ozarks. The reply was, "when this war is over I'll take my family there!"

Anxious as a young man "to spread his wings", my dad, George Edward, labored first at the Limestone Rock Quarry in Springfield. Upon hearing of the Broom Factory and of its benefits, he sought it out and was hired. It was in Springfield that dad met his first wife, Maggie Simmons. George and Maggie were married December of 1878. Feeling that it was the ideal time to return to the land that was now his and begin a family, the

Broom Factory generously gifted him a complete set of iron parts, which were the assembly for a "Broom Machine". Dad had been employed there a good two years.

Returning to his land, two and a half miles northwest of Crocker, Dad built a home, a barn, pens, a smoke house, and a special building, approximately 12 x 24', for broom making, which he named "The Broom Shop". Dad reassembled his "Broom Machine", using heavy timbers he cut from an oak tree for the frame and stand, and the iron pieces he'd been given. Soon he was skillfully crafting brooms for neighboring farm homes.



George Edward Kimmel, age 20-30.

Dad was a "jack-of-all-trades"! When he wasn't farming oats, wheat, corn, sugar cane, or the "broomcorn plant", he was either tanning hides, soap making, crafting brooms, or building houses and barns for neighbors. Dad even pulled teeth! Folks, driven by pain, would ride, would ride up at any hour. Giving his patient an anesthetic, "a good swig of whiskey", he would then pull their infected tooth with his tooth puller. The charge: one dollar.

Dad inherited a farm in Idaho from his half brother, Henry. He and Maggie had nursed Henry through TB until his death in 1892. Excited to claim his land on the western frontier, Dad moved his family to Idaho. Having ridden the train to Idaho, they returned to Missouri in 1894, just two years later, with wagon teams and their belongings. Maggie had grown homesick for Missouri. The journey back took a grueling six months. Son

Walter, walked behind the wagon train, "every step of the way". The farm, near Crocker, had been rented out for the two years; thus, the "Broom Machine" had remained intact in the Broom Shop!

Dad and Maggie had had seven children, between 1879-1895. Two infants died, Ethel in Idaho and another in Missouri. After giving birth in 1895, Maggie became ill and died in 1897. Dad, a widower, survived with five children to raise, Walter, Daisy, Cora, Nora, and Golda.

Dad met my lovely mother, Silvildia, ("Vildia"), at a 4th of July Waynesville picnic. Having been advised Vildia would be at the picnic, Dad showed up and waited almost all day before "tipping his hat" to her, introducing himself. Sitting behind the disguise of a newspaper, he had spent the day observing Vildia, a widow with two small boys. Dad took note of the wonderful way she attended to the boys, as well as seeing her beauty.

Mother and her first husband, Ervin Kerley, had had four sons. Two of their sons died as toddlers. Losing her young husband, Mother survived with sons Bob and Tom. (Birth dates: 1891 & 1897).

Mother's (Silvildia) birth place was in Green County, Indiana with the birth date of February the third in 1873. Her parents, William Hedrick and Ellen Harris, were of Dutch descent. At age two Silvildia traveled, in a covered wagon, to Missouri from Indiana. Her family and her father's brothers and their families were headed for Texas to "help tame the west"! Reaching the Ozarks, they were in awe of its peaceful beauty, so traveled no further and settled down.

My parents, George Edward and Silvildia, were married on September the 10th of 1899. Mother was now "Mama" to Daisy, Nora, and Golda as well as to her two boys., Bob and Tom. Walter had married. Cora was soon wedded to Mother's brother, Adrian (Ade) Hedrick. When Dad married, he requested Ade's help. "Ade, if you'll ride back to the farm with me to get a horse for Vildia, I'll give you one of my daughters!" Ade courted Cora and they fell in love.

My parents together had thirteen children: Ronald, Dottie, Mary, Gladys, Unibell, Swiftus, the twins (Ruby and Rebie), Ethel, Isel, Ray, Rubin, and Harold (birth dates 1900-1917. Of the thirteen, ten of us survived early childhood. Dottie and

Rubin died as infants and Rebie died at four years. With these thirteen children, plus Dad's seven from his first marriage, plus the four from Mother's first marriage, they had had twenty-four children.

Zion Methodist, the little white church on the hill, was where our family worshiped. Grandfather William had given the land, that the church might be built, and Dad had in 1880 hand hewn the pews, which remain. Dad escorted his family to church and at home, often by the light of "coal oil", he would read the Bible to all of us. Christmas was a festive time with carol singing at church and a multi-strand berry and popcorn decorated farm tree at home.

Dad continued to craft brooms through the years, supplying local merchants with brooms as well as selling brooms at the farm. The brooms were high quality, strong and sturdy, in sharp contrast to the crude homemade type.

The Broom Machine consisted of two stands. Stand #1 was for attaching and wrapping the wire around the broomcorn, to form a desired shape. It was 4' high by 4' wide, six legs, with a "barrel" which was a hollow tube to place the broom handle, a bottom second rod, a long pulley, a foot treadle, and a large spool of wire. Stand #2 was for combing, sewing, and cutting. It was 4' high by 2'4" wide, one leg, with two arms which tighten as a clamp to flatten the broom.



Silvildia Hedrick Kimmel, age 2

Talented and clever, Dad provided that spring water be piped into our yard! Using a 3/4 inch iron pipe, he placed one end at the spring, about a fourth of a mile from the house, and the opposite end near the house. Dad built a box, 3' x 5', "The Spring Box", to cover, protecting the last section. Our milk was always tasty cool as Mother would set it on some flat rocks near the cold water. Having the spring water was a welcomed addition to our well drinking water and rain water caught for washing.

Mother excelled in the art of pioneer crafts. Using a spinning wheel to spin wool, she would then, on the loom Dad constructed, weave it into warm wooly blankets. Intricate quilts were delicately hand stitched. Mother

molded "beeswax" candles and with Dad's help, made "hog fat" lye soap. Steamy hot biscuits with homemade apple and peach butter or molasses was one of the many yummy favorites Mother served us! What with gardening, food preparation, housekeeping, wash board clothes scrubbing, her crafts, as well as nursing babies and lovingly raising them, Mother's energy and sense of duty to family was endless.

Praying, she concocted marvelous "home remedies". Two country doctors pronounced, "it was just a matter of time" when my sister, Ethel, had had severe abdominal problems. Mother crying, "I'm not giving up on her!", proceeded to apply hot onion poultices until Ethel was completely

recovered. My nephew, Everett, contracted measles but the rash was slow to appear, resulting in a dangerous fever. Mother instructed my brother, Bill, and I to go to the neighbor's sheep field, follow the sheep, and collect fresh "sheep stools". Mother brewed Everett a tea with our "find" and soon, in "full force", the rash appeared and his fever broke. Later, Everett informed, took it in good humor! In the spring, for several weeks, Mother dispensed to each of us, each day, sulfur mixed with molasses, "to clean the blood".

As a youngster, I was the oldest son still "in the nest". Mother did not want Dad to be left alone, as he was prone to strokes; therefore, when Dad was in the Broom Shop broom mak-

ing, I was with him. I sure did like being near him! Being a lad, I would curiously watch the great care and meticulous steps Dad took to craft each broom which sold for a dollar. He would first remove the seed, with a special hand too, from the "broomcorn", a plant that looks like corn plant but at the top it grows a mass of long small stems called "grass". Dad would place the broomcorn in a tub of water to soak so that it would be pliable and easy to work with. After placing the broom handle in the barrel, he then placed the broomcorn at the end of the barrel two to three inches across, evenly, to begin the "broom crafting" process. Dad had been crafting brooms for half-a-century!



Kimmel homestead, ca. 1914. The Broom Shop is on the extreme left, behind the horses. In the center of the picture is the covered haystack and the house is on the right. Pictured, left to right, are: Ronald (on wagon), George Edward (at plow), Gladys, Unibell, Silvidia, Ray (baby), Isel, Ruby, Ethel, and Swift "Bill" Kimmel.



Silvidia and George Edward Kimmel standing at the spring water box.

Although mother intentionally sent me with Dad bee hunting and squirrel hunting, to watch after him, those outings remain a part of my fondest memories. Dad and I would stroll along streams, as bees nest near water, to scan out which trees the bees were nesting in. Tavern Creek, between Zion Church and the Crews, my cousin's farm, was just great for bee hunting. Dad marked the hollow trees, where bees had been honeycomb busy. Shortly we returned with a wagon and needed vessels, to saw down a particular tree and collect the honey. Tavern Creek was also a great place to take "a dip".

I was eleven when Dad went to be with the Lord. Reverend Hinkle gave the service at Zion Methodist and

eulogized, "he was a kind and loving father and husband, he lived a faithful Christian life." Dad's body was laid to rest in the church's little cemetery. My dad's date of death was April the 8th, 1925.

My heavy grief soon gave way to heavy responsibility. Overnight, I became a man! I worked hard to help Mother with our household of five, mending fences, tossing hay, selling eggs, and waking at four to check the rabbit traps I'd set, before walking two and a half miles to school. Older, the depression at its height, I searched for work on larger farms. Two years, I labored through wheat harvest in Kansas and off season I would come home to cultivate my own small farm.

In 1946, after serving in WWII, my boyhood dream to become a locomotive engineer truly became a reality, with the Southern Pacific Railroad. As a boy, I had lingered excitedly, after school, to watch the mighty steam engine roll into Crocker! February the 11th, 2004, my wife, Juanita, and I will celebrate sixty-four years of marriage. If I had looked the world over I could not have found a better wife. Coincidentally, Juanita's family, Vann and McCombs, had roots in Miller County, near Crocker. The Lord has blessed us with a wonderful long life.

Naturally, a part of my heart never left "the old home place"—the farm near Crocker. How could one fail to remember the warmth and the love of a pioneer farm home nestled among forest laden hills?

A significant part of the home place

is the Broom Machine. Leaving the farm in 1938, it was the last time I saw the old machine. Almost twenty years later, knowing my younger brother, Harold, was anticipating a visit back home, I requested, "If you can find those pieces to the Broom Machine, I sure would like to have them." Incredibly, the Rowdins, current owner of the farm, did have them and they were given to Harold to bring to me. With deep sentiment of yesterdays, I carefully stored, for about forty years, the treasured iron ware.

In 1992, when I was seventy-nine, from memory, I rebuilt the Broom Machine. First, I found an old generator belt on the railroad tracks, exactly

the right size for a pulley and a pipe that was right, as well. Visiting with a friend, who just happened to have some oak, which was precisely the width and amount of heavy timber required, he gifted it to me. Using Dad's original iron pieces and my found materials, I reassembled the old Broom Machine. In a basket, miscellaneous pieces Dad used, including his canvas hand piece for sewing, large sewing needle, and the metal broom comb, are kept.

In spite of the fact it had been nearly sixty years, perhaps through "divine providence", it was meant that Dad's Broom Machine - a symbol of "the old home place" - be restored.



The Broom Machine with Stand #2 on the left and Stand #1 on the right. In the foreground is a wash board carved by George Edward and used by Silvidia.

**A FEW OF THE PIONEER ITEMS
GEORGE AND VILDIA KIMMEL
MADE
AS REMEMBERED BY THEIR
SON, RAY**

Dyes

Obtained from the "center wood" — between the bark and the tree of such trees as the oak, sumac, maple, and walnut. The berries from bushes were also used. The "shoe make" bush was a favorite. The colors were usually yellow, orange, brown, and black.

Tanning Hides

Needed: A hide, ashes, water, alum water, dye, a log

1. Remove the hair by covering the hide with ashes
2. Pour water over it to keep it damp—do this for several days
3. Scrape the hair off and wash the hide well
4. Place in a solution of alum water and dye for several days
5. Take hide out of solution and "work" it until all the moisture is out. Best to do this over a log which is placed at an angle.

The hide made good leather which could be used for shoe soles, harnesses, and other needs for farm life. Special oil may be purchased to keep the leather soft.

Lye

Needed: A large barrel, set on a wide board - 3 ft. long with one end slightly lower, ashes, water

1. Drill a couple of small holes in barrel on low side
 2. Fill the barrel with ashes
 3. Pour water on the ashes from time to time, allowing the water to soak through and to run out the holes - catching it in a jug
- The lye will be strong when the ashes loose strength. The ashes can then be scattered over the field or over the garden.

Candles

Needed: yarn, cans, (tallow, "sheep fat", or beeswax)

1. Place yarn (for a wick) in can (for mold)
2. Melt the tallow and pour into mold

Soap

Needed: grease from hog or beef fat, big iron kettle, lye, an open fire, wooden trays

1. Cook the grease out of the fat
2. Pour grease into kettle
3. Add needed lye
4. Cook outside on an open

fire until "just right"

5. Pour the liquid into the wooden trays to cool

6. Cut into bars or "cakes"

KIMMEL FOOD PREPARATION

Hominy —

1. Pick bad corn kernels out of dried shells
2. Put good corn kernel in vessel, cover with water, and bring to a boil
3. turn off fire, put in some lye
4. Watch closely to see as the husks begin to slip off the kernels.
5. Then quickly pour the lye water off
6. Wash the kernels several times in fresh water

Smoked Ham —

1. In the fall, when it is cool, kill a hog
2. Slice up the meat, lay on a board, salt a lot, and put brown sugar on the meat
3. Hang the mat in the smoke house
4. Build a fire protected by rocks, using chips of hickory or sassafras for good smelling smoke, to smoke the meat
5. Slowly smoke the pork for several days

Apple and Peach Butter

1. Peel the fruit
2. Cook until soft where most of the water is cooked out of them
3. Mash and add cinnamon
4. Store the delicious butter in stoneware and cover with sealing wax

Kraut —

1. Shred a head of cabbage (a home-made shredder is a cutter fastened to a board)
2. Place shredded cabbage in a vessel with a little vinegar
3. Cover with a rock weight which can be pushed down a little at a time as the cabbage ferments
4. Remember that the time for fermentation is about two weeks

Cheese —

1. First sour the milk — this takes several days
2. Run the soured milk through cheese cloth thus separating the solid parts (curd) from the liquid (whey)
3. When the liquid is finally out, what is left is cheese

Apple Juice/ Apple Cider

1. Use late apples of winter apples
2. Crush apples and put under pressure in a press to bring out the juice
3. Remember apple juice is unfermented juice
4. Apple cider is fermented or partially fermented juice

Apple Cider Vinegar —

1. Use apple cider
2. Ferment and keep in an oak barrel with holes to permit air circulation
3. The process takes a few months

Molasses —

1. When sugar cane, sorghum, is ripe in the fall, cut it and run it through a horse powered grinder
2. Take the juice and cook slowly in large pan, approx. 4' x 12' and about 10 in. depth, several hours
3. This pan has a hole in one corner, plugged, so remove the plug and allow the molasses to run into a vessel

**SILVILDIA KIMMEL'S HOME
REMEDIES**

To Clean Blood

Sulfur mixed with molasses. Each member of the household was given "a round" every day in the spring for several weeks. It was to clean the blood.

For Congestion in the Chest or
Abdomen

Boil onions until they are soft. Place them in a home made cloth pouch. Place the hot onion poultice on the patient.

Arthritis

One tablespoon of vinegar and one of honey. Mix well in a cup of water. Take twice a day until feeling better, then take two or three time a week.

Colds or Nervous Problems

Drink some diluted quinine. Also fur balsam is good for both colds and the flu.

Diarrhea

Take a teaspoon of black pepper followed by a cup of water.

Measles

If the rash needed for measles doesn't show forth, make a tea from the fresh stool droppings of sheep.

Healthy Teas

Various teas, bark bitters, made from the bark of trees were good for health. A favorite was sassafras.

Cuts and Bruises

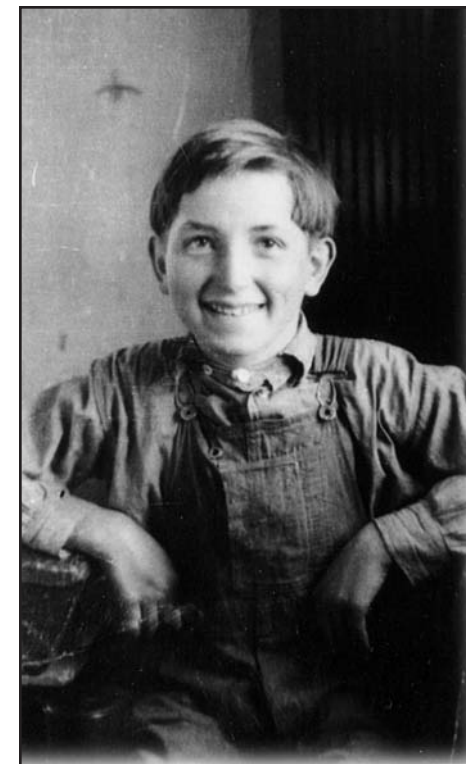
Take a leaf of the Aloe Vera plant and slice it open. Rub the cool juice on the cut.

Smelly/Sweaty Feet

Place powdered alum in shoes. The alum tends to close the pores thus stopping the sweatness.

Stomach Ulcers

Mix Vaseline with honey. Spread on a cracker and eat. Take three times a day to relieve pain and help heal.



Ray Kimmel setting at his desk in Crocker School, ca. 1924.

*Story and pictures courtesy of:
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