

Sharecropping

By Sue Roark

Daughter of Sharecroppers in Tipton County, TN

(Tipton County borders Fayette County to the North West. Its population was different from Fayette County in that its white citizens largely outnumbered its black citizens. However, they were both poor, agrarian based counties with similar backgrounds and cultures.)

Landowners allowed the tenants the use of the land for crops for a share of the proceeds. This allowed the cropper to remain on the land at least through harvest. The owner furnished the equipment, horses, plows, later tractors, etc., to work the land. Sharecroppers were usually poor and their houses were of poor quality. My family sharecropped for the same family from 1944 until the 1960s. We lived in a four room house and had to do upkeep on it. There was no indoor plumbing. We did get running water in the 1950s. We heated with coal and later with propane gas. We had no electricity until the late 1940s or early 1950s. The landowner furnished the seeds to plant for the crops. The fertilizer was paid for one half by landowner and one half by sharecropper. Usually there was enough room around the house to have 1 to 2 cows for milk and butter, hogs for meat, and chickens for eggs and meat. There was also a place for a vegetable garden to raise vegetables to eat daily and to can for use in the winter. If you was fortunate enough to gather fruit and berries, you would have jam, jelly, and marmalade also.