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NOV 17 REC'D

November 13, 1941

Approximately 850 words

Subject: (America Eats) Montana Turkey
Source--Si Stoddard, Anaconda, Mont.

700.074

MONTANA TURKEY

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Back in the days that followed the advent of the prairie schooner in Montana, dad couldn't go to the butchershop in the morning to purchase a day's supply of meat for his family. Instead, he would shoulder his old Henry rifle, or the muzzle-loading shotgun and start for the timber, hoping that before darkness set he he would have an opportunity to line his sights on some sort of game.

As a rule game was plentiful in those days and elk, venison, goat, sheep, antelope and bear became common staples. Upland game birds and ducks often became the filling for the steaming pot or bake pan, but the meat that was in vogue day in and day out, was the peblican rabbit or hare. The rabbit was common from one end of the state to

and was much easier and cheaper to take than the larger species. He was seldom shot in the pioneer period, but captured in snares.

The only true rabbit in Montana is the cottontail, coney and rock. The big jackrabbit and the snowshoe rabbit are actually hares. However, there is not much difference in the taste of the trio, and while they differ in size, they are all built along similar lines. Hence they are all dumped into the rabbit catagory and are known as such.

The cottontail and his mates, the rock and coney are not partial to any part of the state. The snowshoe shows a preferecce for the heavy timber, while the jack has a partiality for the sagebrush wastes. The jack, it was, that gained the destinctive name of "Montana turkey." In the central and eastern range country of the state he furnished the piece de resistance for many a meal. Some idea of the part he really played on the rangeland table can be gained from a story related years ago by an old-time resident of Fallon county.

"I was snowed it that winter, twenty-eight miles from Baker," he said, "About the old fresh meat available were the jackrabbits, which were plentiful. I had rabbit, boiled, roasted and fried, and ate it on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and almost every day in the week. By the time the snow began to disappear in the spring, I was so full of rabbit, that every time the dog barked, I used to crawl under

the bed and hide."

And at that ~~that~~ the much abused jackrabbit isn't bad eating, especially when a cook takes pains in preparing the carcass. In the cow country the method most favored is baking. The rabbit is skinned, cleaned and hung in a shed to freeze. At the end of several days it is taken inside, thawed out and stuffed with a heavy onion dressing. Strips of fat bacon are wrapped about the outside, and the whole placed in a covered baking pan. Between the bacon on the outside and the onion dressing within, much of the natural taste of the meat is improved upon.

What is known as the Hungarian style way of preparing rabbits is a general favorite among the citizens of foreign birth and ancestry. This applies to all rabbits in general. The usual meal consists of two rabbits, which are dressed and cut up in fry-size pieces. These are par-boiled. Bacon and butter are placed in a deep skillet and as soon as all grease is out of the bacon, five onions are sliced into the hot grease and allowed to cook until the assume a deep brown color. Care should be taken not to let the onion burn. The pieces of rabbit are now dumped into the dish. Salt, pepper and enough water to keep the meat from burning are added, and the skillet placed on the back of the stove and covered. Allow to simmer until tender. A pint of sour cream is then addeded and the whole thing allowed to come to a boil. Some folks prefer sweet cream to the sour.

Do not allow the sour cream to boil any lenght of time or it will lose its flavor. Serve piping hot.

But to the lover of rabbit meat, especially if he is of Teutonic birth, but a one tonic man, there is nothing to compare with"hasen pfeffer." This dish is typicaly German and is said to have been introduced into the United States by the Hessian soldiers, who were brought to the colonies during the Revolutionary War to fight for the British. When hostilities ceased England failed to return them to their own country, so they settled in Pennsylvania where they are now known as the "Pennsylvania Dutch." In reality they should be "Pennsylvania Deutsch," as they came from Germany instead of Holland.

Here's the way the dish is prepared in Montana. The rabbit meat, usually cottontail or snowshoe, is placed in a jar and covered with equal parts of vinegar and water. Some people prefer wine instead of vinegar. Add one large sized sliced onion and salt and pepper, cloves and bay leaves. Some also put in lemon peel. Soak the meat in the solution for several days, then remove the meat. Brown it in hot butter, turning regularly to prevent burning or excessive browning. Gradually add some of the pickling sauce in which the meat was cured. Let the meat simmer until tender. Just before serving stir a cup of thick cream into the sauce.

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