



A Day in the Life: Growing Up in mid-19th Century New York

What was it like growing up in the mid-1800s in upstate New York? Our Harvest of History website can help you learn what it would have been like growing up in the mid-1800s. Go to harvestofhistory.org to learn about a child's life during this time and to answer these questions.

Most families in upstate NY during this time period lived on farms. In fact, nine out of ten families were farm families, so chances are if you were kid during this time, you would have lived on a farm. Start your day in the [Lippitt Farmhouse](#). You would have been one of nine children in the family. You would have been sleeping in one of two rooms upstairs, one for boys and one for girls, where you would have shared a bed with one or more of your siblings. How does this compare to your bedroom?

Morning comes early on the farm, so head on downstairs to the kitchen. The kitchen is right at the bottom of the steps. This room is where you would be spending most of your time when in the house because the parlor was for company, and if it was winter, the kitchen was the warmest place with the large fireplace. To learn more about life in the [Lippitt Farmhouse](#), look at the pictures and watch the videos on the website. How does this compare to where your food comes from now?

Off the kitchen was your parents' bedroom, where your baby brother or sister would sleep, and a room that has a sink and is unheated. Food growing and food preservation were both very important for the family's survival. What foods do you think you would store in the unheated room? Which foods would you keep in the kitchen? Why? How do we preserve and store our food now?

Time for some chores. Head out to the [Poultry House](#). What do you think your chores here would be?

Now head to the [Sweet Marble Barn](#). It's time to milk the cow! What tools or items do you need to do this? Be sure to look at the objects found on the Sweet Marble Barn page in our virtual village.

Time for school! Walk to [Filer's Corners Schoolhouse](#) for school today. Your school day depended on the season. If it was summer, you'd go to school from about 8am-5pm, but in the winter, you would go from 9am-3pm. In the spring and fall, you are needed back on the farm to work. Take a look at the pictures of the Schoolhouse. What do you notice? What are the kids using? How big is this schoolhouse? How is the school heated? Where does the light come from? How is this the same or different than your school?

Students learned reading, writing, arithmetic, some geography, spelling, morals, and some science. The school had a very tiny library, but you can't check the books out. Paper was too expensive, which is why kids have slates and slate pencils or chalk. Students got recess time and if the weather was nice, ate outside. What do you think you have for lunch today? Do you think you'd rather be in [Filer's Corners Schoolhouse](#) or in your school? Why?

School is done for the day, but your mother wants you to make a few stops in town for her on your way home. First, stop by [Todd's General Store](#). What do you see when you go in the store? Last time you were here, you brought 2 dozen eggs, 10 pounds of apples, and 10 pounds of seed potatoes, so you have a credit on your account. Your mother needs some salt and coffee. The shop keeper likes you, so he gives you a penny's worth of rock candy. When you bring items in from the farm in exchange for

items you can't grow or make, it's called bartering. What do you think costs more: eggs or coffee? Why?

Next, stop by [Dr. Thrall's Pharmacy](#). The Pharmacy is like a CVS or Walgreens. Here, you can get medicine but also other dry goods. Your father's stomach has been hurting, so the pharmacist is making some ginger pills for you to take home for him. The pharmacist combines the ginger powder, gum Arabic (a tree sap), and some powdered licorice root for sweetness. He rolls this combination into something that looks like a Play-do snake, cuts it, and rolls it in the pill maker to create little ginger pills. When you have a stomach ache, what do you do to make it feel better?

Your last stop is [Field's Blacksmith Shop](#). You stop to pick up a shovel that the blacksmith repaired for you. This is your favorite place. You love to watch the blacksmiths work at the forge. You dream of being a blacksmith one day, but you know you would have to be chosen to apprentice when you are probably about 14 years old. Then, you would live with the blacksmith for seven years, learning each part of the trade. At first, you would just clean the shop, but then you would learn to make nails—thousands of them. Finally, you would start to work on other things. Read about blacksmithing on our virtual village blacksmith page. What are some of the things you would make?

After seven years, you would become a journeyman and have made your own set of tools. You could stay and work with your master or start your own shop. After watching the blacksmith work for a while, you reluctantly start home. Your father will drop off a ham later to pay for the work.

Back at home, it's time to get to work. Not homework—farm chores. Your father needs your help threshing. Go to [Brooks Barn](#) to learn about how to turn wheat into grain. Then, take your grain and store it in [Brooks Granary](#). How does this compare to what you do when you get home from school?

Time to eat! Mother has made ham and potatoes, vegetable soup, and your favorite, apple fritters. After dinner, you head to the [Turkey House](#) to put the turkeys away and the [Poultry House](#) to put the chickens away. You check for eggs at each stop. Which eggs do you think are bigger?

Time for bed. Tomorrow is Saturday, baking day! Your mother will spend the day baking the bread and other baked goods for the week. You fall asleep after a hard day's work dreaming of fresh bread and maybe an apple pie.

Now that you've spent a day as a kid in upstate NY in the mid-1800s, do you wish you could travel back in time?

Want to learn more about growing up on a farm in upstate New York? Read *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder.