

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Cast Iron Stove Book**

"To those of us who were not born yesterday, it will be amusing to reminisce along with Edgar Guest as he recalls those frigid mornings of other years when youth was bestirred from its early morning slumbers and from beneath wooly blankets. 'When Father Shook the Stove.'"

The above is one of the amusing paragraphs in "Fire on the Hearth" or "The Evolution and Romance of the Heating Stove," a book published several years ago by Pond-Ekberg of Springfield, Mass. Josephine H. Peirce is the author and Robert W. G. Vail, director of the New York Historical Society, wrote the introduction.

On any crisp chilly evening, a very comforting hobby undoubtedly shared by many people is an active interest in stoves. The stoves may range from the quaint and artistic to atrocious examples of the iron workers craft, but they have one thing in common – a comforting, heart-warming heat.

The introduction tells us that it seems most appropriate that the first authoritative book on stoves should come from Worcester County, Mass., the center of the inventive genius of our 18th and early 19th Centuries. From this county came such inventions as the sewing machine, the cotton gin and modern textile machinery, the machine for making shredded wheat biscuits and the steam calliope, and we are also indebted to Worcester for our first book on stoves where, Alice Morse Earle began and completed her interest in stoves and completed her book.

For her information, lectures and folk lore on stores Mrs. Earles research carried her through newspaper and magazine files, trade magazines, advertisements, business records, letters and diaries and files in the patent office, to discover information on American stoves made from the late 18th Century to the 1880's.

In Casa Soberanes we have a small cast iron stove in our "sittin' kitchen" (except for the electric modern stove). Across the front above the two openings, the name "Bertha" is cast in the iron. This nice little stove does not appear among the 145 illustrations which appear in "Fire on the Hearth," much to our disappointment. There are five openings in this tiny stove, one at the top for the kettle, one on the side for the wood or coal

entrance and two to open to watch the fire and another at the very bottom to remove the ashes. The top opening of course has a very fancy cover ending in a decorative ornament at the top

Stoves used in meeting houses are talked about and illustrated as well as stoves used in public places. One illustration shows a Station Agent stove or pot-bellied type, foot stoves and hay-burning stoves. The latter used mostly fuel fashioned from hay twisted into convenient form. A great deal of the twisting was done by hand, and the twists themselves were known as "cats."

Children were early taught to do their stint, and large piles of cats were nearby the house, with so much more inside there was little room for inmates or visitors.

A review of "Fire on the Hearth" would not be complete without a reference to Mrs. Peirce's account of Benjamin Franklin's contribution to heating. It was not really a stove, but a cast-iron fireplace in which he combined the descending flue of Prince Rupert's fireplace with the caliducts of another inventor, to make a stove "for better warming of rooms."

The oldest known Franklin stove, a modification of the original pattern, probably made about 1750, is in the Bucks County Historical Museum, at Doylestown, Pa. This has a wide hood which keeps smoke from entering the room and is decorated with a sun face with 16 rays, surrounded by a branching leafage and streamers with the motto ".ALTER IDEM" (Another like me).