

About the Cover Illustrations

Reminders of a Once Thriving Industry

As I write this, it's the coldest weather so far this winter; so it seems appropriate to discuss the Vermont Historical Society's stove collection. There are thirteen full-size stoves in the collection: One is a cook stove; the others are parlor stoves. All are cast iron and manufactured during the heyday of the iron industry in Vermont, from the early to mid-1800s. Towns where they were made include Middlebury, Brandon, Pittsford, Poultney, West Poultney, Hartland, and Plymouth.

These stoves represent many different aspects of life in Vermont during this time period. Historians of technology, decorative arts, and labor history have written about Vermont's iron industry and the practical and often beautiful stoves made in their foundries. In his book, *200 Years of Soot and Sweat: The History and Archeology of Vermont's Iron, Charcoal, and Lime Industries* (Manchester Center, Vt.: Vermont Archeology Society, 1992, pp. 42-43), Victor Rolando lists thirty-seven different cast iron stove manufacturers that operated in Vermont from 1810 to 1890.

The two largest areas of iron mining and production in Vermont during the nineteenth century were the Tyson Furnace located in Plymouth and the iron mines and foundries in the Brandon area. Tyson Furnace was started in the mid-1830s by Isaac Tyson, Jr., who ran it until 1855. During that time, up to 170 men worked there and many lived in housing provided by the company. The VHS library owns several account books from the company, including volumes containing work contracts, records of the company store, and inventories of the iron products they made and sold. Men were employed as molders, remen, charcoal burners, coal men, founders, ore roasters, and blacksmiths, among dozens of other occupations. Some men brought along their wives and families, and women were hired to do cooking, washing, and cleaning. Little survives today of the once bustling industrial village.

In the Forest Dale section of Brandon stand the remnants of the blast furnace operated by the Forest Dale Iron Works. This tall stone struc-

ture was built in 1824 and was in full production until 1855, melting iron ore into pig iron for use in making stoves as well as cooking pots, tools, and decorative architectural components. The furnace sits on ten acres of property that also includes remnants of machinery, foundations of shops, and workers' housing. Now owned by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, the site is not open to the public.

The decorative aspects of the stoves from this time period are often what capture the interest of collectors today. The earliest stoves in the VHS collection, from about 1825, are in the Franklin style, with very little decoration, mirroring the architectural and furniture designs popular at that time. As stoves became centerpieces of living spaces, and as new technology allowed, the stoves became more elaborately decorated, resembling the suites of furniture from the mid-1850s. Ornate gothic designs decorated many box stoves, and the two- and four-column parlor stoves were covered with three-dimensional flowers, trees, and floral ornamentation.

Much of the iron industry in Vermont was out of business by the 1850s, the manufacturers being unable to compete with other markets because of transportation costs and the decline in local resources. A small revival during the Civil War did not last long once war production ended and as people began to use central heating systems in their homes. The energy crisis during the 1970s spurred a revival of the wood stove industry in Vermont. Hearthstone and Vermont Castings became two major manufacturers started in the state; but although their products were highly efficient, they never could match the beautifully and whimsically decorated stoves from the mid-1800s.

Jacqueline Calder,
Museum Curator

Front cover: Green Mountain Parlor Stove No. 3, Made by A. J. Ruggles Company, West Poultney, Vermont, circa 1850.

Back cover: Tyson Furnace (VHS-A-80). Painted by Myron Dimmock of Plymouth, Vermont, in about 1900, showing the furnace complex in about 1900.

