

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## HEATING STOVES

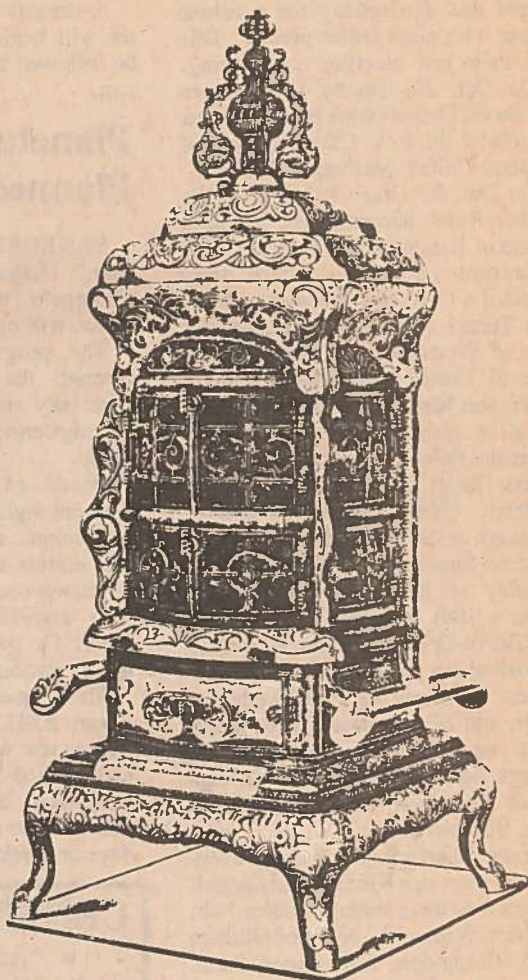
The one particular household item which had more effect on the lives of Americans during the 19th century as the castiron heating stove. Not only in the home but on canal boats and pullman cars alike stoves helped to increase mobility. Likewise, stoves helped to decrease the amount of labor necessary to heat a house. Prior to the 1830's the options for heating a dwelling were almost limited to the traditional fireplace. Houses heated by fireplaces were often quite cold as 90% of the heat went up the chimney with the smoke. Fireplaces also consumed great quantities of wood.

By the 1830's there was a greater requirement to heat households, businesses and public buildings. This also demanded a cheaper form of fuel as forests were beginning to be depleted. By the mid 19th century coal began to replace wood. Locally, coal was shipped in on the canal and railroad. Thus with the shift to coal for heating, the popularity of castiron stoves greatly increased.

The first stove invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 was not much more than a fireplace which he called the "Pennsylvania Fireplace". From this crude idea many technological improvements came about. In 1816 James Wilson of Poughkeepsie, N.Y. patented a stove similar to Franklins which he called the "Franklin Stove." It radiated more heat, and used less wood than the traditional masonry fireplace. Consequently, by the 1830's stove-making had begun to flourish in America. This was due in part to improved smelting furnaces which yielded a more highly refined iron. This allowed for thinner stove plates and tighter-fitting joints. Naturally, the less leakage of air, the greater the fuel efficiency. Stoves could be moulded in a variety of designs which reflected American styles and aesthetics. During the early 19th century the box stove was very popular. It was constructed of six plates, stood on detachable legs and was easily placed wherever you wanted it. The stovepipe itself was often used to heat bedrooms in upper stories of the house by simply having the pipe run through the ceiling above and then into the chimney on the second floor level.

One local stove maker was Norman Bedell who built a foundry along the canal in Albion in the late 1820's. By the late 1830's he was in partnership with a Richard Berry and in 1848 Richard G. Berry, the son and son-in-law of Norman Bedell was also involved. By 1851 the Bedell and Berry Company had reached a production level of twenty castiron stoves per day at their foundry. This business enterprise also employed twenty men that year. By the mid 1850's 75 to 100 men were employed annually and their stoves were shipped as far west as Detroit. Naturally, it was easy to ship in pigiron on the canal, cast it and then ship out the finished merchandise.

It is interesting that although the kitchen fireplace and brick baking oven was taken over with a cooking range, home designers still kept the traditional fireplace in the parlor for aesthetic reasons.



Albert Bolles wrote in his 1879 Industrial History of the United States "The open fire was the true center of the home life, and it seemed perfectly impossible to everybody to bring up a family around the stove."

In the mid 19th century foundrys were producing stoves in a price range from \$5 to \$25 not unlike the one shown here. While this doesn't seem like much, we must remember that a common laborer in that time period was earning \$1.00 a day. Records of the Universalist Church at Childs indicate that in 1877 they bought three cords of dry wood from Mr. Comstock for \$1.50 per cord. Their cord was also a true cord of 4x4x8 feet.

Setting up the stove every fall was quite a chore and a test of patience. Many people years ago, would take down the pipe to clean it and move out the stove for the fair weather months. Putting it all back together again was not an easy task. After World War II people didn't want to bother with several stoves in various rooms to heat their homes and consequently central heating became normal. Locally, we do find central heating being used in the mid 19th century in finer churches and the homes of the well-to-do. One example is our very own County Court House which was originally heated with two furnaces in 1858.

Ironically, with the energy crises in the 1970's, we saw a revival of the stove and its acceptance by even the well-to-do.