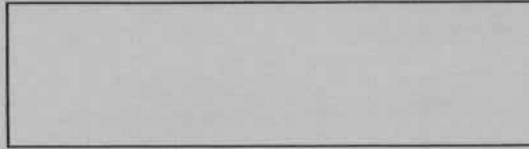


BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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WINTER COMES TO EARLY BRIGHTON

As winter approached, the 19th century farmer in the Brighton area (and often home owners in town) packed straw around the foundation of the farmhouse in an attempt at insulation. The parlor, and other unneeded rooms, were closed in order to conserve the heat provided by the round, pot-bellied stove in the middle of a room (central heating?). This stove usually had isinglass (mica) windows, which at least gave the appearance of warmth from the view of the glowing fire. Second floor bedrooms might have had a grated opening in the floor to receive heat but a variety of bedclothes and coverings were indispensable. One didn't take a glass of water up there – it would be frozen by morning.

The kitchen, often the only room that was warm, held the stove for cooking/baking. This stove usually had a reservoir (that did not fill automatically), which held water pumped from the cistern built under the kitchen floor into which rain water from roof was conducted. The fire box was on the left, the oven in the middle with the reservoir on the right, with a flat, black, iron surface over all providing varying degrees of heat for the iron skillets and pots. Round openings in the flat surface were fitted with lids, which could be removed depending on how much heat was required by the cook. When not used for baking, the open oven door provided a welcome place to warm cold feet or dry wet mittens. The firebox, with its ash pit below, was periodically fed with split wood. Nor did the wood appear automatically. The tree had been cut, sawed into proper lengths, split with an ax and wedge, brought from the woods and piled near the house to keep the wood box full. (Often the task of a young boy.)

In those early agrarian times, as soon as a male child was large enough to work the handle of the water pump, pick up a pail of water, pitch a fork full of hay or walk a freshly plowed furrow planting corn, or potatoes, his spring and fall days at the nearby one-room school were numbered. Not until crops were harvested and stored would the farmer's sons have time to acquire a formal education. To assure the family's survival, every able-bodied person labored during spring and fall (including women wrestling a plow or wielding a sickle). It was often difficult for a youngster, accustomed to being personally responsible for an income-producing task, to sit quietly while being instructed in the three Rs. It was assumed the number of students during the winter term would be increased by several 10-16 year old boys. Male teachers were often hired as they might be more physically able to 'encourage' their students' good behavior; students who'd rather be spending any free time skating, sledding or at a sleigh ride party. In fact, they often found Saturdays occupied with dad along the fence line clearing brush to connect separate fields or cutting trees for firewood.

Deeply snow-drifted roads were not quickly cleared by county plows. Each farmer graded and plowed the road, usually two tracks wide, fronting his property. Often one drove the cutter or sleigh around the drifts through the field. However, to even get to that point, took much prior preparation. The horse had to be corralled, then a harness tossed on its back to be properly fitted before hitching to the cutter. Even though one was properly clothed against the cold, the heated soapstone and a blanket were welcome. Then one might be ready for fun or to make the once-a-week (usually Saturday) shopping trip for needed items: sugar, coffee, flour, boots, dress material, etc. (Certainly not for a box of hamburger helper or frozen entrees.) It was never convenient to 'run into town'. However, one could be assured of no power outages due to wind or ice. Ah, for the good days!

(Compiled by Marieanne Bair from various and sundry clippings, memoirs and journals. Additional memories and experiences solicited. 810/229-6402)