

Cold weather memories of Hamilton

The recent cold weather has brought back memories of my boyhood in Hamilton. I don't remember ever being bothered too much by the cold, as up in the valley we didn't have strong winds, which adds to the chill factor. As I have mentioned in past columns, we did seem to have much more snow 60 years ago, and it was common to have snow on the ground from mid-December through January.

Heating in homes in those days was much different than now. I don't believe there was any insulation in the walls of our house, and I know there wasn't any above the ceiling in the attic. The heat in our house came from two sources — the fireplace in the living room and the wood cook stove in the kitchen. The cook stove served as more than a place to prepare meals and produce heat. It had coils in the firebox and these coils were connected to the water tank in the bathroom. Therefore, if no fire in the stove, no hot water in the tank. So, you can imagine, the hot water was used frugally.

I can remember having slab wood from the mills hauled in by the dray load and dumped in the back, by the alley. Then it all had to be stacked in the woodshed, with an extra supply piled up outside. I don't know how many cords of this wood Dad burned each winter, but I know the wood box next to the kitchen stove had to be filled every day, plus what was used in the fireplace. (I was supposed to keep the box full.)

Finally, the day came when electric stoves were invented and the power supply was adequate for such a convenience. However, when we got our electric stove it didn't mean the old kitchen range was a thing of the past. It was just as important as ever as a means of heat and a source of hot water. So the electric range was installed alongside the wood range, and as I remember, Mom still used the wood range more than the new-fangled contraption.

As the fireplace was in the front room, this was where we spent our evenings. I remember Dad had his

favorite Morris chair, and Mom had her rocker. I don't remember just what I did on the long winter evenings, as we of course didn't have radio or TV in those days.

I do remember when it was time to go to bed I didn't take much time getting from the warm part of the house to my bedroom, which was at the end of a long hall. There, of course, was a door where you entered the hall from the front room, and I always had to open this and close it as quickly as possible. Then a run to the bed, which in the winter had cotton sheets rather than the regular ones, as the cotton was warmer. Same thing in the morning, a quick exit from bed for the warm part of the house.

Other houses had different types of heat, but wood was the main source. I always marveled at the heating system in the home of my future wife's parents in Lyman. They had a basement which you entered via a hinged door on the floor of the back porch. (We didn't have a basement in our home.) Down in their basement was a wonderful heating system — a coal furnace. There was a large register right in the center of the floor and the house was heated through this outlet.

So when we talk of the good ol' days, compared to things today everything wasn't so good. But apparently we survived okay, and none of us missed what didn't exist then, such as electric baseboard heat and fully insulated homes, plus thermopane windows.

Slipper's Soliloquy

By Fred Slipper