



## What's Cooking?

The 19th century kitchen and hearth was the heart of the Victorian home. Cooking, food preserving and other kitchen activities were much more extensive than they are today. In addition to daily meal preparation, meats were also smoked and salted at the hearth. Vegetables were pickled, fruit was dried and even laundry was done in the kitchen in the winter months. Sometimes the kitchen served as a sitting area in the evenings if the rest of the house was cold.

Before the advent of the kitchen stove in the middle of the 19th century, cooking pots and pans were designed for use on or in the hearth. Cast iron pots were made with handles to allow them to be suspended over the hearth fire, or with legs so that they could stand up in the fireplace. In addition to Dutch ovens, a commonly used cast iron cooking pan called a spider had a handle and three legs used to stand up in the coals and ashes of the fire. Open fire cooking was very labor intensive. Wood or coal had to be carried in and ashes later removed, and someone had to rise early to light the fire and tend it during the day.