

KITCHEN

Lessons from an Old Manse #2

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Fire Worship," 1846:

"It is a great revolution in social and domestic life, this almost universal exchange of the open fireplace for the cheerless and ungenial stove."



HISTORY & LITERATURE

250 years ago, builders shaped this home around its two chimneys and eight hearths. In the home's early days, open hearths kept the Emerson and Ripley families warm and cooked their food, while also serving as the glowing, lively center of the Old Manse.

This kitchen was a busy center of the house. The kitchen work often extended outdoors, where the family kept chickens, washed laundry, minded small children at

play, and drew water from the well. An herb garden just outside the kitchen door provided fresh flavoring, as well as medicinal plants.

When author and artist couple Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne moved to the house in 1842 they updated the home by installing air-tight iron stoves, bricking up the open hearths. While Nathaniel preferred the convenience and reliability of the stoves, he did miss the beauty and history of the open fire. In *Mosses from an Old Manse*, the collection of short stories he wrote in this home, Hawthorne mourns the transition from hearth to stove with his essay "Fire Worship." Describing an open hearth fire in almost human terms, he writes:

With how sweet humility did this elemental spirit perform all needful offices for the household in which he was domesticated! He was equal to the concoction of a grand dinner, yet scorned not to roast a potato or toast a bit of cheese. How humanely did he cherish the school-boy's icy fingers, and thaw the old man's joints with a genial warmth which almost equalled the glow of youth And then, at twilight, when laborer, or scholar, or mortal of whatever age, sex, or degree, drew a chair beside him and looked into his glowing face, how acute, how profound, how comprehensive was his sympathy with the mood of each and all!

FOR CONTEMPLATION OR DISCUSSION

Heart of the Home

- What room in your home is the busiest? What activities happen there?
- Do you like being at the center of activity in your house—or do you prefer a quieter space? Why?

Cooking

- What is your favorite snack or meal to prepare?
- Do you prefer to cook alone or with company? Why?
- Do you prefer to cook from a recipe or improvise? Why?
- Which modern appliance are you most grateful for?
- Which household job would you like to try the 1840s way?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a fictional journal entry of a day in the life of one of the Emerson children, born in the 1770s. Be sure to include visits to the kitchen and time with siblings, animals, and neighbors.
- Take inspiration from “Fire Worship” and write an essay celebrating a household appliance or tool.
- Write an essay evaluating the use of medicinal herbs in colonial New England.

CONNECTIONS

- Read Hawthorne’s “[Fire Worship](#)” from *Mosses from an Old Manse*
- Curious about the food that was made in this kitchen? Check out the popular 1828 cookbook [The American Frugal Housewife](#) by author and abolitionist Lydia Maria Child. Read and enjoy but think twice before trying these at home – any book that advises you to brush your teeth with honey and charcoal should be viewed with caution!

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This is part of the *Lessons from an Old Manse* series. For more lessons and other educational materials, please visit [The Trustees At Home](#).

