

The Summer Kitchen

The summer months are notorious for the heat they bring, making everyday life uncomfortable. Before air conditioning and electric fans, special care had to be taken to keep a house cool. The worst activities for contributing to overheating the house were baking and cooking. While these were advantageous during the winter months to keep the house warm, they only added to the stifling heat of the summer. The solution to this problem was a summer kitchen.

Summer kitchens have been in use for over 200 years, though the term itself only came into being in the mid-19th century. It was a room used during the summer months for cooking, baking, and other chores that produced a significant amount of heat. They were either located at the back of a home or completely detached in order to keep the house from overheating. Typically, they were fairly small rooms with many windows to improve ventilation. Meals were often prepared over an iron cook stove or an open hearth, and there would be a large wooden table for the women to work at.

Though the summer kitchen was primarily for preparing food, it was also an excellent place for washing and ironing laundry and occasionally bathing with some amount of privacy. It was also a popular place for women to gather and teach each other different skills or share stories. Other chores undertaken in a summer kitchen included making soap and churning butter.

Canning was another important practice for the summer that also contributed heat to the house. Canning was a method of preserving food that became popular in the late 1800s. It involved cooking food thoroughly, then placing it into a heated jar or can and sealing it tightly. The heating process helped to kill bacteria to avoid food spoilage, but also produced a significant amount of heat. A summer kitchen would have been invaluable for this process, which helped preserve certain foods for the winter months.

During the winter months, summer kitchens were typically used for storing firewood and food. They worked very well as cold rooms, as they were often less insulated than the rest of the house. In the transition between seasons, kitchen tools were often moved between

the summer and winter kitchens. In some cases when it was necessary, the men would also have to move the heavy iron cook stove between the two rooms.

In the Fultz House, the summer kitchen is located at the back of the house, just off the back door and across from the winter kitchen. It is one of the house's original rooms, dating back to when it was only 20' by 20'. Unlike a typical summer kitchen, it only has two small windows, which would only provide a limited amount of ventilation.



Pictured above is an antique washer and ice box, types of which you would have found in many historic Sackville homes.