

BRANCHES OF COOPERING

WHITE COOPERING refers to the building of buckets, tubs, churns, and vats used at home or on the farm. White coopering involved straight-sided containers. The origin of the name stems from the use of this type of container to store milk.

DRY COOPERING refers to the building of barrel-shaped containers for dry goods such as grain, flour, nails, etc. This type of cooper is also known as a "dry tight" cooper because the containers had to be tight enough to protect the contained goods from getting wet if left outside in the rain.

WET COOPERING refers to the building of barrels for the storage and transfer of liquids. This is the most highly skilled division of coopering and that works primarily with oak. The containers must be absolutely perfect as to prevent leakage.

WOOD TYPES

Different containers, constructed for different purposes, required different wood types. Coopers tried, as much as possible, to use local wood in order to save money and therefore built less expensive containers.

Dry goods barrels and white coopering barrels were typically made of soft woods. Soft woods were used so that the cooper could build the barrels faster and the final product was lighter in weight than with some other woods. White pine and cedar were the most common soft woods used.

Oak was traditionally the preferred wood used for wet coopering. Oak contains tannin acid that can be neutralized with baking soda and water before storing contents and thus preventing the goods from picking up a smell or taste.



Sackville's Historic Cooperage

Fultz House Museum volunteers worked extremely hard to make sure that the dismantling of the Grace Cooperage in Middle Sackville was done very delicately - even to the point where it was broken down board-by-board and each piece numbered in 1987. The intention was that it be reconstructed with each board being positioned exactly where it was in the original structure.

The W.J. Grace Cooperage opened officially on the date of Canada's national birthday, July 1, 1988. The cooperage was unveiled and opened to the public as a new exhibit that paid tribute to the work and craftsmanship of Sackville's historic connections to the cooper's craft and trade. The cooperage's authentic appearance and popularity in its initial year of operation was attributed to the efforts of the volunteers who displayed with pride what was involved in the barrel-making trade and the tools that accompany such a profession. Ever since its arrival to the Fultz House grounds, the cooperage has attracted the attention of both tourists and history buffs.

To see the **W.J. GRACE COOPERAGE** and to learn more about the cooper trade, stop in and visit the exhibits.

The Art of Coopering



FULTZ HOUSE MUSEUM



AN INTRODUCTION TO COOPERING

A cooper was a traditional profession in cities, townships and villages that carried on for many centuries. The cooper trade was once as common as the commodities in their barrels.

The trade of coopering has a very long history and dates back to approximately 2690 B.C.E.

The roots of coopering are directly related to the development, growth and evolution of trade. Materials and food had to be transported and barrels were one of the common methods to move these goods from one location to another because of the ease of shipment, cost effectiveness and ready supply of material.



Sackville's last coopers Richard & Earl Grace

The reasons for the development and popularity of coopering can be determined by the obvious advantages of using wooden, barrel-shaped containers for transporting goods. The shapes of barrels are structurally sound and proportionately supportive.



The Grace Cooperage & Mill

"The Grace Cooperage and Mill (pictured above – circa the 1950s) was a working cooperage located in Middle Sackville before being moved to the Fultz House grounds in 1987. The family operators built barrels and wooden boxes for the fish and apple industries of Nova Scotia. The site was cleared in the mid 1980s, to make way for a cemetery, Fernwood Memorial Park. Fortunately the old cooperage building, which had been built around 1912, was moved and reassembled on the grounds of the Fultz House Museum with some of its original equipment."

- MICHAEL D. SMILEY, LOCAL HISTORIAN -

The curve of the barrel also allows one person to move the barrel with little or no difficulty. This was a tremendous advantage during the 19th century (and before) when all objects had to be moved by people and not, as they are today, by machines and vehicles.

The wood used to build the barrels could have also been selected to contribute a smell or taste to contents or, likewise, to protect contents from absorbing colour, a smell, or a taste. The containers could be designed and constructed to contain liquids or to prevent liquids from entering and spoiling dry contents.

It was not until the early to mid 20th century (1900s) that the trade was replaced by emerging technologies in factories. As a result, the human component in coopering was reduced. Machinery held boards in place and assisted in placing the hoops on barrels.

Like many other communities in N.S. of comparable age and size to Bedford and Sackville, there were once many coopers that appeared in the community census records. Sackville's last coopers were in fact, brothers Earl and Richard Grace; they retired in 1970.

Barrels are mainly manufactured today for the storage of wines and liquors. There are still companies today that adhere to traditional craftsmen techniques in designing and crafting barrels and abstain from using modernized machinery, and choose to approach their work by constructing barrels completely by hand.