

With a little frost on the grass and at least some cool days, it is the time of year again when I begin to think about a fire in the wood burning cookstove. Our summer was cool until late August, and there were mornings when we had a small fire in the stove. Now that fall will soon be here, the old Monarch will be the focus of life on cold mornings.

Our cookstove was not always a part of the cabin. When we built our little house, we had a Rumford style fireplace on that wall. We heated the cabin completely with heat from the fireplace for two winters. It did a good job, except that when the fire went out, the heat in the room went quickly up the chimney, and I would find the dish cloth frozen in the sink in the winter mornings.

We didn't like giving up the fireplace. There is nothing like the warmth and glow of an open fire on a cold evening. Runo had forged a crane that could swing over the fire, so we cooked many meals in that way, too. But, in the end, practicality won out. We took out the fireplace and put in the old cookstove.

I had remembered that my mother's cousin's wife had used a cream colored Monarch cookstove when I was small. Later, when we visited their house, she was cooking on an electric or gas stove. I wondered if that old cookstove had been sold, or if they might still have it.

We called Johnny Pete and he said that the stove was in an outbuilding, and he was happy to sell it to us, knowing that it would be put to use again. I am sure that Gertie had fond memories of the Monarch, but she was probably very happy to be able to bake on a hot summer day without a fire in the kitchen stove.

So, out came the fireplace. Runo used its red bricks to make a base for the cook stove. He put up a brick wall behind the stove, too, and the final design was and is very appealing. There is space for a couple of armloads of wood on the brick floor under the water reservoir, and on the firebox side a similar area makes a good place to sit with a good book or a cup of tea on a cold evening. I have a cushion on that spot, and a black sheepskin lies on top of the cushion, so, in reality, I almost never get to sit there--it is fully occupied by one of the cats.

In the winter, we have fire in the cookstove most of the time. I do

much of the cooking on the wood stove, and the oven is a good baker. There is always a large teakettle singing on the stove, too, and the steam adds a little moisture to the dry winter atmosphere in the cabin.

I am particularly fond of the stove poker that lies on the reservoir side of the stove. It is always there, ready to use when we need to stir up the fire or put in another stick of wood.

There is nothing fancy about the stove poker. It is heavy steel, about fifteen inches long and an inch wide at the widest part. It narrows to half that width at the business end. That end is shaped to make it easy to lift a lid on the stove, and there is a camber about a third of the way from the end. On the "handle" part of the poker, about half an inch from the end is a hole, so we could hang the stove poker on a hook if we wished.

I don't suppose that anyone else would become attached to this stove poker. But, there is a reason beyond its obvious usefulness. This stove poker was forged right here where it lies now. Our cabin sits on the footprint of the log house my great-grandparents built a few years after homesteading this place. Years later, my grandparents built a white frame farmhouse closer to the road, and the old log house was used as a blacksmith shop for farm smithing. Sometime during those years, my grandfather or one of the boys--my father or an uncle--made the stove poker in the forge. After installing the cookstove in our cabin, we brought the old stove poker back and put it to use again.

Today, though, the sun is shining through the east window, and the house is warming up nicely. There will be no need for a fire in the wood burning cookstove today, and no reason to pick up the stove poker and stir up a sluggish fire. It can lie and wait for a colder day.