

Some Things Never Change

... But Prices Usually Go Up

(1982)

How do you and your family prepare for the cold winter months? You probably bring out your warm coats, mittens and hats from where they were packed away last spring, put up storm windows, and either add to your wood pile or turn up the thermostat on your oil, gas, or electric furnace. In much of Vermont wood is still the chief fuel for home heating. This is nothing new. Vermonters have been heating with wood since before Vermont was a state, sometimes burning 30 or more cords of wood a year.

The price of oil, gas, and electricity has brought many persons back to using wood heat. Vermonters living in the 1790's would have had a hard time believing that a cord of wood now costs somewhere around \$75.00. At that time, a cord cost 67¢. The price has steadily gone up, reaching almost \$3.00 in 1900. The biggest jump in price has been in this century with our current price now 25 times greater than the 1900's figure.



Londonderry, VT - 1902

Those prices seem pretty cheap to us today, but what we have to consider is that a day's wages have also gone up since the 1700's. An average salary for a farmer in 1790 was 49¢ a day, going up to \$1.11 in 1900. Now compare that with today. Our minimum hourly wage is three times greater than the full day's salary of 1900!

Different persons burned different kinds of wood depending on preference and what types grew locally. Of course some woods burn hotter and longer than others. Here is an English poem that describes the different heating qualities of various woods:

*Beechwood fires are bright and clear
If the logs are kept a year.
Chestnut only good, they say,
If for long 'tis laid away.
But ash new or ash old
Is fit for queen with crown of gold.*

*Birch and fir logs burn too fast,
Blaze up bright and do not last.
It is by the Irish said
Hawthorn bakes the sweetest bread.
Elm wood burns like churchyard mold,
E'en the very flames are cold.
But ash green or ash brown
Is fit for queen with golden crown.*

*Poplar gives a bitter smoke,
Fills your eyes and makes you choke.
Apple wood will scent your room
With an incense like perfume.*

*Oaken logs, if dry and old,
Keep away the winter's cold.
But ash wet or ash dry
A king shall warm his slippers by.*



And you know what they say? He who cuts his own wood is warmed twice. Keep warm this winter.

A **cord** is a unit of quantity for cut wood measuring 4 feet high x 4 feet wide x 8 feet long.