

# Curator's Choice

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## “Large and Elegant, with apparatus and conveniences for boiling and frying meat”: Cast Iron Cookstoves\*

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Cast iron cookstoves, fueled by wood and later by coal, began to appear in the United States in the early 1800s. They became a more common household appliance starting in the 1830s as the stove industry began to flourish. In addition to having an oven and reservoir for heated water, a cookstove could have as many as eight stovetop holes to seat pots for frying and boiling (Groft 2005:24). Purchasing a cast iron stove was a substantial financial investment, but by the mid-nineteenth century, their price had fallen enough that it was within the financial means of most families (Brewer 1987).

Cooking on these stoves required significant adjustments for the cook as the mechanics of preparing food with scientifically designed stoves replaced long-held methods of open-hearth cooking (Brewer 1987; Ellin 1985). Stoves provided more intense and longer-lasting heat than an open hearth. Stoves made it possible to bake bread, meat, and pies more easily and fuel-efficiently, although the general consensus at the time was that meats roasted over an open fire and bread

cooked in a bake oven were superior to those prepared using a stove.



Figure 1. JPPM archaeologist Scott Strickland holding a piece of a New Emerald cast iron stove from the Elizabeth and William Gross site.

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### STOVES! STOVES!! STOVES!!!

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Figure 2. 1880 advertisement for B.C. Bibb & Son's New Emerald cooking stoves in the official program for the 150th anniversary celebration of the founding of Baltimore (Anonymous 1880).

Archaeologists from Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum discovered this New Emer-

ald stove at the home site of Elizabeth and William Gross (Figure 1). The stove was manufactured in Port Deposit by B. C. Bibb & Son of Baltimore, Maryland. New Emerald models were among the first made by B. C. Bibb & Son after they purchased the old Armstrong & Company foundry in Port Deposit in 1879. The Gross family stove was manufactured around 1880 (Figure 2), fitting with the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century residency of the family. Being a somewhat common design, the Welcome cookstove (Figure 3) manufactured by the Armstrong foundry in 1874 was very similar in appearance to the New Emerald stove. This New Emerald stove was one of two cast iron cookstoves found in the destruction debris of the house, which had been abandoned by the late 1930s. It is possible that one was used inside the house and the other was used outside for preparing meals in the warmer months of summer.

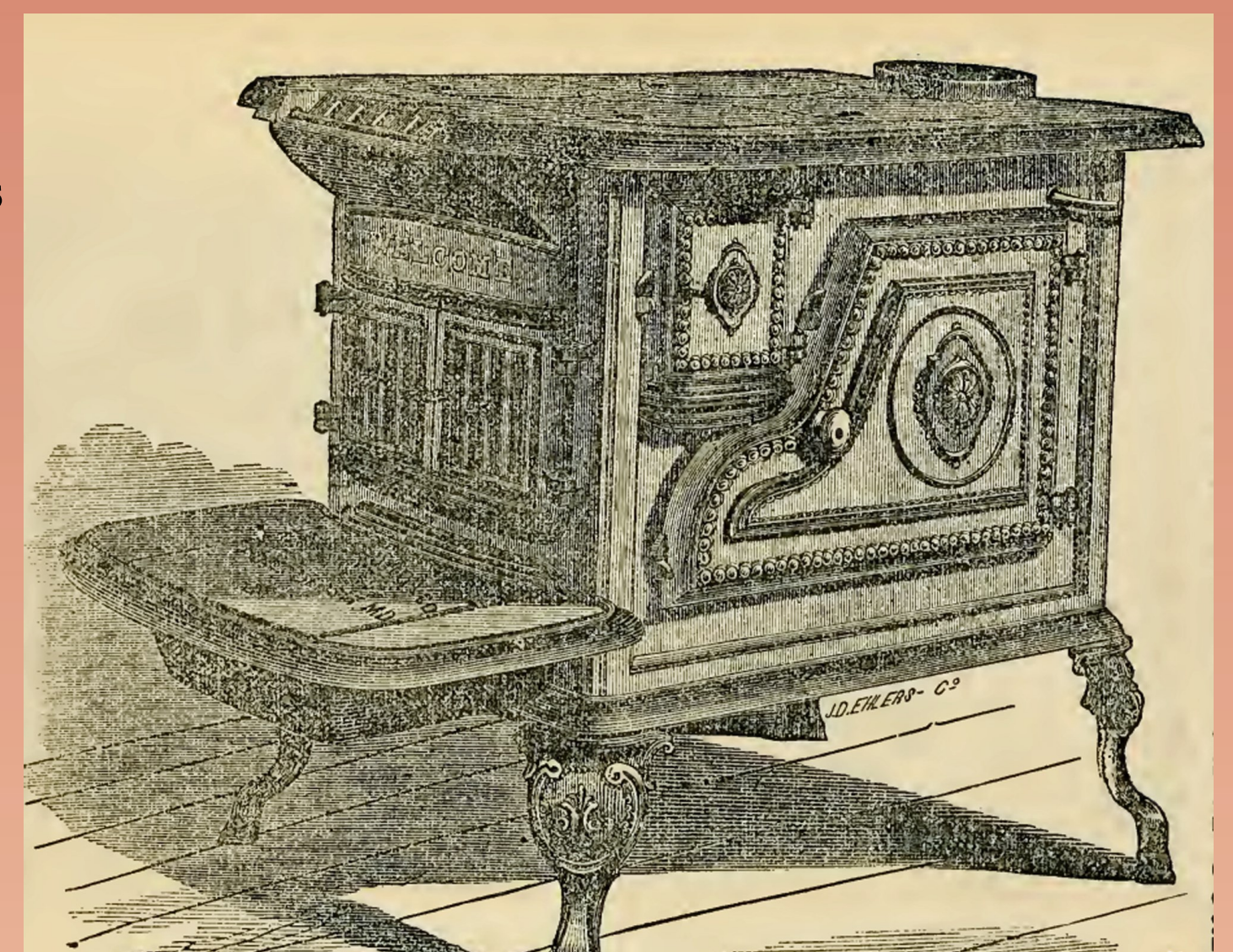


Figure 3. Advertisement for the Welcome model cookstove from the Guide to Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (King 1874). The Jas. Armstrong Foundry that made this stove also produced the New Emerald model cookstove.

\* The title is a quote taken from an 1812 advertisement in the Franklin Herald.



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Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum is part of the Maryland Historical Trust, an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning, Baltimore.

