

Dark, Dirty & Dangerous

Although everyone's life was different, in the days before reliable electricity, you would have been MUCH less comfortable and worked MUCH harder.

Light

Before your family had electricity, you probably got up with the sun and went to bed not long after it did. You had to carry your small circle of weak candle or lamp light around with you. You might have helped make candles, or had the messy job of cleaning the kerosene lamps.



Reading by a candle or lamp was hard on the eyes.



A kitchen in Freeport, N.S., 1950.

Heat

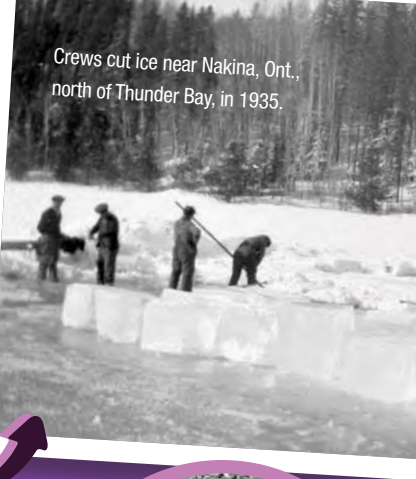
Your house would have had one stove that burned wood or coal (or both). Some might have had a smaller second stove in another room. Few had one upstairs. The stovepipes threw off a bit of heat, but if your bedroom was upstairs, it was cold in the winter.

To help warm up a chilly bed, people would heat a stone or brick on the stove or fill a rubber bottle with hot water.

Food

You wouldn't have had many choices (or many leftovers), since food had to be eaten before it went bad. Kids helped with the slow, hot work of preserving summer's fruit and vegetables in jars for the cold months. Your family might have used a root cellar, where things like potatoes, carrots, apples and turnips were stored in earth over the winter. Some families had an icebox to keep food cool. Crews cut big blocks of ice from frozen lakes. Icemen stored them in straw or wood shavings and sold them in chunks that lasted a few days in the icebox.

Crews cut ice near Nakina, Ont., north of Thunder Bay, in 1935.



For generations, Indigenous people have dried, smoked or frozen food so they didn't need refrigeration. At right, an Inuit woman sets out fish to dry, 1951.



A boy takes a bath in a metal tub near Mannville, Alta., 1949.

Water

Whether you lived in the country or the city, your toilet was outside. (If you've used an outhouse in a park in the summer, just imagine doing it in January!) You might have had a chamber pot under your bed for doing your business — emptying it in the morning was also your job. You likely would have had a bath once a week, using water heated on the cook stove and shared by the whole family in turn.

Risky Times

Candles and old-fashioned lamps look pretty, but if you dropped or forgot one, you could burn down a house or barn in no time. Chimney fires were common. Spoiled food could make people terribly sick. Unclean water carried diseases. Electricity helped make life much safer.



In English, an outhouse is sometimes called the back house. That word became "bécosse," which many francophones use for the same thing.