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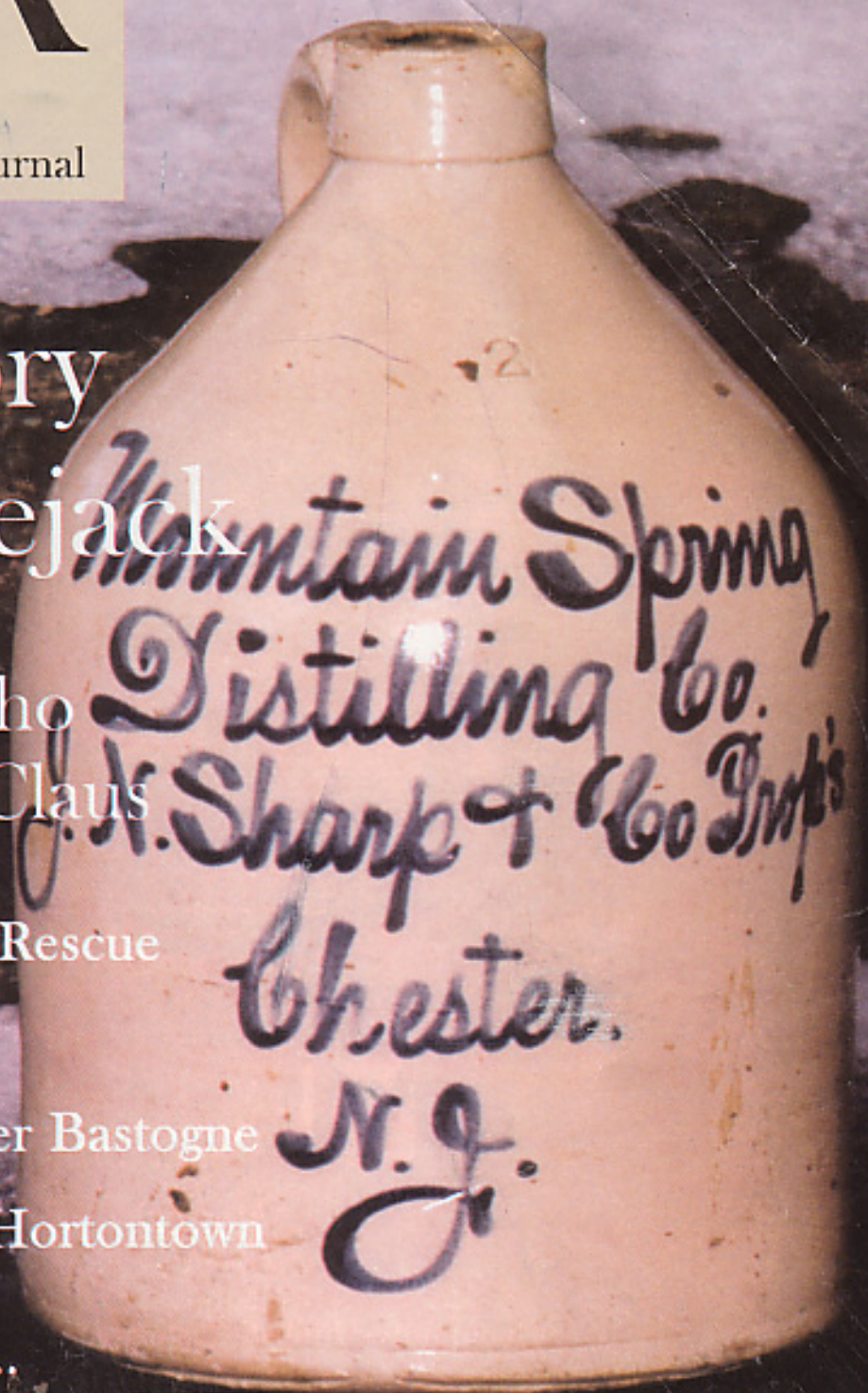
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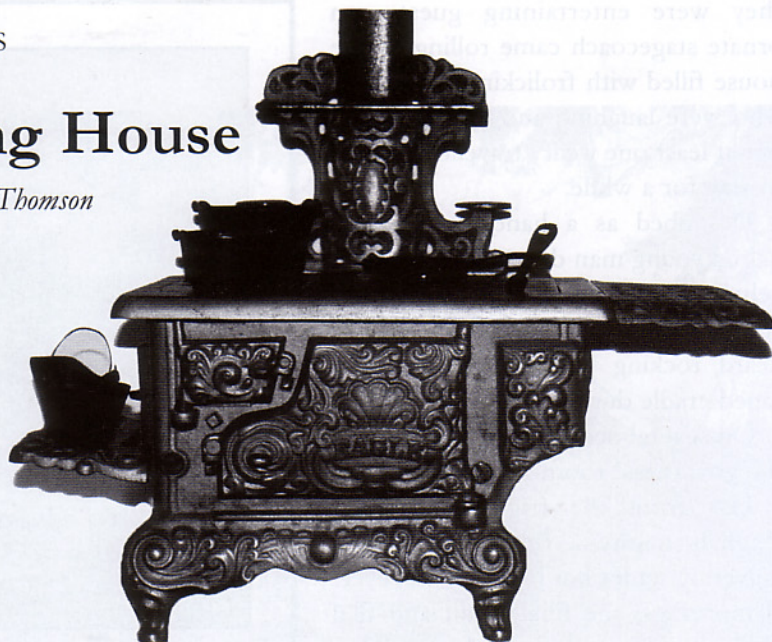
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TRADITIONS

Playing House

By Ruth Hill Thomson



All of us probably remember one very special gift that Santa left under the Christmas tree when we were young. One that I recall was a small cast iron cook stove about six inches high and ten inches across. Believe it or not, I still have it after 75 plus years, along with all of the iron pots, pans, and coal scuttle. It is no worse for wear except for a repaired leg. It sits quietly on my bookshelf and is just a conversation piece today but it was well used by me, my sons, and my grandchildren.

Quoting from a yellowed newspaper article by antique experts Ralph and Terry Kovel, "Playing house has been a popular children's game for years. Toy makers have been making small versions of household items since the 18th century. Commercially made stoves, sinks and even toy graters and pots were made in Germany by the 1830s. Stoves were very popular in America in the 1880s and after. Some were copies of actual stoves."

Growing up in the early 1900s, my toy stove did look just like the real one that sat in our large family kitchen on Main Street in Gladstone. My older sister tells me that my mother used to bathe me on her lap in front of the

open stove door. The hot water for the bath was heated in a special cut-out section of the huge stove. On each side of the stovepipe were little platforms on which we put our wet mittens, hats, and scarves to dry after a day of sleigh riding. The fire in the stove was ignited with crumpled newspaper and kindling. Then pieces of coal from the iron scuttle were added to keep it going. The warmth of the stove was very comforting and even warmed up two baby lambs that had been born prematurely on our farm. That afternoon the six of us sat down at the dining room table to dine on a leg of lamb my mother had cooked and all the while we could hear the tiny "baa-baas" from the lambs lying in a pasteboard box in front of the stove. It was a bit disconcerting, but such was life in the country then.

Some of these toy stoves had fanciful names such as "PRIZE" - mine was "EAGLE." Though it doesn't cook up imaginary meals anymore, it still holds many warm memories.

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