

LOOKING BACK...with Molly



To open the new year of 2021 we are not looking back at a person or an event relating to the early days of our district, but at a necessity of those days...the humble kerosene refrigerator. Many residents of the district will remember doing battle with this household appliance and

discussions will bring forth sighs of frustration at the memories.

However, it kept our food cool and fresh even though we often moaned at its capacity to either freeze food solid or not at all, AND we could make icecream - much to the delight of the children! The first commercially available Australian-made domestic refrigerator to use kerosene as a power source was produced by Edward Hallstrom in 1923 and was promoted as ideal for outback stations. Prior to this, settlers would have depended on the Coolgardie cooler.

For the uninitiated, a kerosene refrigerator has a sealed network of tubes and chambers holding water, ammonia and hydrogen gas. A propane flame heats a chamber holding a solution of water and ammonia until the liquid boils. The ammonia gas rises to another chamber, the condenser, where it cools back into a liquid. The kerosene simply replaces the propane flame - and somehow this results in the operation of the appliance that was such a boon in our kitchens if we could keep it under control!

The kerosene was held in a long, low metal container on the left underside of the refrigerator, and at the back was a wick, housed at the base of a chimney which continued up to the top of the refrigerator and extended several cms above. When the refrigerator was iced up to any extent it had to be defrosted, the wick trimmed and the kerosene topped up. When the wick was lit again the hope was that

the refrigerator would operate and NO smoke would be seen coming from the chimney. However...one could do everything correctly, leave the appliance to do its thing only to return later to observe the tell tale wisp of black smoke from the chimney signifying that the wick needed more attention to ensure good operation. The only solution was to do it all again.

It was certainly a love-hate relationship with this household device and when power was brought to our district, possibly the first purchase was an electric refrigerator!

~Molly Smith

Letters

Farewell, Looking Back

I have enjoyed submitting short articles 'Looking Back' at the early history of people and events of our district for five years now and I have decided that it is the time to bring this segment to a close. I have welcomed the favourable feedback and consider it best to end on this note rather than become boring!

Many thanks to the Weekly for the space and to Don Burton's efforts in supplying photos on behalf of the Historic Society for the articles.

I have all the stories on computer should they be needed.

~Molly Smith

We would like to thank Molly for all the wonderful stories she has contributed to the Weekly over the years. There will be many people who miss them! As a thank you, we would like to present Molly with one of the few remaining Walpole coffee table books. Stay in touch Molly.

~Cherie Smith

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