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Lamps for Homemakers

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Lamps for Homemakers

by Marian Weinel

IF you see a Betty lamp do you immediately think of Home Economics?

Betty lamps are of special significance as the emblem of the American Home

lamps were Betty Lamps made by the Dutchmakers, having been brought by the Pilgrims when they came on the Mayflower. They were of iron, either forged from a single piece of cast or coarse, gray iron. The earliest of these lamps were known as the open Betty or "slot lamps." Then followed the Betty with a top, which was usually hinged.

Before 1680 all lamps used in the American colonies were imported, usually from England. In that year a tinsmith of Newbury, Massachusetts, began the manufacture of Betty Lamps. Some years later a few pewter and brass lamps were made in Salem and Providence, Rhode Island. These were extremely heavy to carry.

Until 1742 candles were in general use in the American colonies, the iron Betty lamp being used in comparatively few families. Betty lamps have been found all over the eastern part of our country, left over from the pioneer days, and as the art of casting iron was well developed several hundred years ago many of the cruder forms were made of that metal. Others more elaborate, and some really artistic ones have been made of wrought iron. Henry Ford has a notable collection in his Museum of Americana. There are other notable collections in museums which have American made lamps and those from Europe.

The body of the Betty Lamps is a pear-shaped, shallow receptacle with a spout or opening at one end for the wick to go through, and some form of handle at the other end. It may hold from a half pint to a quart of oil. Some have a top cover and hinged lid through which to fill the lamp. A swivel or spindle was attached to the handle and chain was used to hang it from rafters or wall brackets. Often there was a small chain with a "pick" on the end for freeing the wick when it became crusted with carbon.



Economics Association. They are used as symbols of learning and of the first American homemakers of early Colonial days. The Colonial homemaker used a Betty lamp to light all her tasks.

The derivation of the name Betty lamp is very interesting. It is thought that it came from the German word "besser", meaning "better". This new type of lamp with its shallow, somewhat triangular pan, covered with a hinged top that had an opening for the wick, was much better than the older type of oil lamps. Even our small replicas have a chain and hook attached to the graceful handle. These chains are essential because they allow the lamp to be hung up at any desired place for illumination.

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