

IMAGES

... then and now

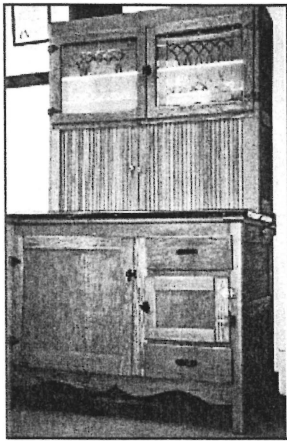
from The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Hoosier Cabinet

Ensnconced in the kitchen at Buckingham Lodge is a relic of earlier times – a Hoosier Cabinet. In the early 1900's numerous U.S. homes were equipped with them. Packed with laborsaving features, these work centers helped housewives a century ago; and they were called "Hoosier" because they originated and were made in Indiana.



Hoosier Cabinets were modifications of the baker's cabinets of the late 1800's, with upper and lower sections separated by a worktop. The upper section was a shelf area with at least 2 doors and contained the materials needed for cooking; and the base section had utensil cabinet on one side and drawers on the other. The work surface ranged from wood to sheet metal, aluminum, and porcelain.

The typical housewife of the Hoosier Cabinet era was expected to spend a great deal of time in her kitchen domain baking bread, cakes, and pies, and making meals for her family. Most homes had electricity, running water, and refrigeration in an icebox. Kitchens were sparsely furnished; and the Hoosier Cabinet was said to "save miles of steps, save hours of time, save supplies, save money, save nerves, and save health" for the homemaker.

The Hoosier Manufacturing Company of New Castle, Indiana, was founded in 1898. Early cabinets were built one by one by a cabinetmaker; but by 1903 standardized interchangeable pieces were machine made for assembly line production. By 1920, more than 2,000,000 Hoosier Cabinets had been sold, and the Hoosier name was known nationwide. Other large Indiana manufacturers (Sellers, Napanee, Boone, and MacDougall) made similar products, as did at least 9 other smaller companies.

Modified over time as housewives suggested improvements, Hoosier Cabinets provided about 40 inches of counter space, an array of conveniences, and storage areas. Most had sugar and flour bins, roll drawers, tin bread drawers, sugar and spice jars, pull out bread boards, cutlery drawers, sifters, and sliding racks. Optional embellishments included the "ant proof caster," cookbook holder, swing out mounted dispenser jars and bins, built in coffee mill, electric socket, built in mirror and alarm clock, knife sharpener, desk section, hidden ironing board, and attached swinging stool. Stylistic features included etched glass in the upper doors, fancier hardware, colored finishes, colorful stenciling on the enamel models, highboy style, and glass drawer pulls. Still, the classic style of the Hoosier Cabinet is as easily recognizable today as it was popular yesteryear. Subtle differences did not diminish the handsomeness of this piece of furniture.

During the heyday of Hoosier Cabinets in the 1920's they were advertised in The Saturday Evening Post, Better Homes and Gardens, and Ladies' Home Journal. U.S. furniture dealers sought to be exclusive agents for various companies, and the Hoosier Company even had a representative in England. Cabinets (costing \$15 - \$95) were often sold through the club plan: \$1.00 down and \$1.00 a week until fully paid. Promoted as "The Woman's Work Bench", the cabinets appealed to housewives who wished to "make kitchen work a joy" with a cabinet of "lustrous beauty, sound oak sturdiness, and rare utility combined – a brightener of kitchen appearance, lightener of dreary routine".

Though Hoosier Cabinet sales flourished through the '20's, many of the manufacturing companies did not survive the Depression years. Also built-in kitchen cabinets became more fashionable in the 1930's and 1940's; and the Hoosier Cabinets that once had been revolutionary were relegated to the barn. Nowadays this American icon can be found at antique stores and flea markets, and in a few 21st century kitchens, restored and used as freestanding cabinets for curios, bread making centers, or coffee bars.