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## The Pie Safe: As Useful Today As A Century Ago

For country furniture purists, a pie or milk safe is a treasured acquisition.

These simple cupboards were used in place of refrigerators. Some had pierced tin panels in the doors, sides, or both. Some had wire screening.

The screening and pierced tin allowed ventilation but kept out the flies. Fresh from the oven baked goods were placed in the pie safes to cool and keep fresh until used.

The earliest date from the 1820s but they were used through the Civil War and until the turn of the century.

Some were hand made and some were factory made. The pierced tin sheets were available in general stores as replacement panels or to finish up the handcrafted variety.

**PATTERNS** in the tin vary. Early ones had swirling swastikas and flowers. Later on stars, circles, tulips, birds and diamonds were popular. According to antique dealer Eleanor Lowell of Northville, horses and eagles are the most valuable patterns in the antique trade.

We asked Miss Lowell, "How do you tell a pie safe from a milk safe?"

"The pie safes are higher but narrower than the milk safes. Shelves in the pie safes are closer together, four or five inches apart, while the milk safes' are about seven inches

apart," she explained. "Usually the milk safe was more crudely made than the pie safe."

The pie safe usually had a drawer, a long one above the doors, or one below the doors, or, rarely, two side-by-side above, and two, side-by-side, below. Most milk safes had no drawer.

How did they cool the milk in the safes?

"They poured the milk into pottery bowls, three or four inches deep and up to 14 inches in diameter," Miss Lowell said. She didn't have one on hand to show us but told us they were made of Rockingham or Yellow ware. They too are collectors' items.

**ALL KINDS** of woods were used in the safes. Poplar, pine, walnut, cherry and chestnut seem to have been the most popular although some were made of a combination of woods.

Most pie safe owners agree that the pie and milk safes were used only in the Midwest, Pennsylvania and Canada.

How much does a pie safe cost today?

It depends on the condition. Miss Lowell had a Canadian poplar pie safe that she had spent countless hours taking off old paint and varnish and refinishing. It had a \$140 price tag. Milk safes usually run for less because of the cruder construction.



JACKIE JOHNSON of Plymouth removed six or seven coats of paint from this poplar and white wood pie safe before it took up residence in her dining room. The round ventilation holes in the side panels were covered originally with wire screening.