

# Donation of the Month

Stove Top Steamer  
1975.202.1  
Donor: Russell Bowen



Traditional family meals take a lot of time and energy to make. This time and energy begins with the stoking and maintenance of the fire and ends after several hours of pot scrubbing and

dishwashing for every female house hold member. There was energy used during the cooking process as it took a lot of wood or coal to keep the whole cast iron stove hot for the duration of the cooking process. Patented in 1907, the Conservo stove top steam set out to revolutionize the art of cooking.

The steamer was made of heavy tin and was a simple appliance for home cooking or canning. It was designed to fit over one single burner of any type of range, gas, oil, coal or wood. The copper bottom held several quarts of water to provide steam. It was so well insulated that only the slightest heat escaped into the kitchen. If the pan ran out of water a whistle would sound, and water could be poured down a small tube to refill the pan. One could cook the entire meal in the steamer cutting down on the amount of fuel burnt and pans to clean.

The Conservo steamer was also good for canning. The large interior could hold 22 pints or 11 quart jars at once. Canning was a necessary process for preserving fruits and vegetables. With home canned items you could always have healthy fresh fruits and vegetables year around. Much like the steamer revolutionized the art of cooking, the art of canning was improved with increased capacity and efficiency.

Stove top steamers are still popular additions to any kitchen appliance collection. Many purchase them for the health benefits of steamed vegetables over the canned varieties; however, those that remember the hard work of hand washing every dish may still purchase them for their one “pot” cooking advantage. Next time you visit the museum and take a Hawkins House tour ask your guide to point out the Conservo stove top steamer.