

“Peter Ege Pine Grove” nine-plate stove, circa 1835-1836

One of a pair of wood-burning stoves originally installed in Christ Church Episcopal Chapel on Main Street (Route 94) in York Springs, Adams County, Pennsylvania.

Donated in September 2022 to the Friends of Pine Grove Furnace State Park by the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania (former owner of Christ Church Episcopal chapel) and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in York Springs (new owner of the chapel in late 2022).

Theme: “Be Liberty Thine” with angel, trumpet and 13 stars representing the original U.S. States, a common motif in castings from Pine Grove Furnace well into the 19th century.

Christ Church chapel in Petersburg, Adams County (later renamed York Springs) was consecrated on November 4, 1836. It seems likely that the paired “Peter Ege Pine Grove” stoves in the front corners of the building were cast in 1836 or perhaps the year before (though it’s not impossible they were made earlier). By the late 1830s, stoves of this type were antiquated and being phased out in favor of new designs that sometimes separated the function of *heating* from that of *cooking*. Moreover, stove casting in that period started to be done at free-standing iron foundries in population centers, not at remote blast furnaces such as Pine Grove.

1836 was near the end of the Ege family’s ownership of Pine Grove Iron Works. Peter Ege (1776-1847) retired as ironmaster in 1835 to avoid debts, and sold the iron works to his sons Michael Peter Ege (1803-1853) and Joseph Arthur Ege (1805-1861). They went bankrupt in 1838 in connection with the national economic downturn called the Panic of 1837. The furnace and forge were sold by the county sheriff in 1838 to Judge Frederick Watts (1801-1889). Watts was connected to the Eges by marriage and he did not kick his wife’s uncle and aunt and cousins out of their home: Peter Ege’s two sons managed the iron operation for Watts, while multiple Ege generations (Peter and Jane Arthur Ege and their sons and grandchildren) continued to live in the Ironmaster’s Mansion here.

Compare this stove to the very similar one in the center of the room. Note the lack of bake oven doors in the middle of the stove, not installed since the stove was intended only to keep the congregation warm and not for cooking. Can you find small differences in the artwork such as the small flowers?

The two stoves displayed here seem to have been cast using the same underlying pattern but with small alterations. Cast iron like these stove plates was produced in a furnace’s casting house by pushing carved wood moulds into sand in frames (flask casting), leaving a hollow space after the mould was removed. Workers then poured molten iron at almost 3000°F into the hollow space; after it cooled and solidified, they removed the iron casting which was finished by breaking off any sharp edges and smoothing rough spots. The basic shape of a mould might be modified with extra pieces made of wood, plaster, or lead attached as needed, for example to refresh small details of the artwork if they eroded from repeated use of the wood mould, or if fashions changed.

Also notice the differences in the small doors and handles, suggesting they were not finished at the same time by a single local blacksmith (or, the customer might have selected a different style of handle due to cost or stylistic choice).

When counting plates that make up a stove of this type, we count only the large cast iron plates, not the wrought iron doors. Though such stoves are often called “ten platers” they commonly only have nine plates, cleverly arranged to allow hot gas from the wood fire to circulate below, behind and above the bake oven in the middle before exiting into a chimney pipe at the top.

Here are the paired stoves in their original location in the church building in York Springs. Notice the tall metal pipes to carry smoke to a chimney hidden above the ceiling. The stove donated to Pine Grove Furnace is on the left.



It is not known how this particular stove (or the other stove in the middle of the park museum) were sold. Typically a furnace such as Pine Grove would cast disassembled stove plates and sell them to a merchant such as David Little shown in the newspaper advertisement below. (Gettysburg is about 13 miles south from the village of York Springs.) When a customer bought a stove, the merchant would transport and assemble the cast iron plates and its stand in the customer's chosen location. The heavy metal plates fit together in their own interior grooves: the entire stove is held together only by the long bolts at the four corners, plus its own weight -- this stove is estimated to weigh 250-300 pounds. The merchant would add doors and handles made by a local blacksmith, as indicated in the advertisement which informs customers that the stoves are "shod in the best manner."

Alternatively a furnace might sell stoves directly to local customers but this is less likely.

STOVES,

DAVID LITTLE would inform his friends and the public, that he has just received from Pine Grove Furnace,
A Large & Handsome Assortment of
STOVES,
which he will have already shod in the best manner, and will sell on reasonable terms for Cash or Country Produce.
Call at his Coach-factory in Baltimore-street, Gettysburg.
Oct. 14. 31

Adams Sentinel [Gettysburg], October 13, 1834