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THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

When summertime was even more unbearable

Window screens were a post-World War I development and were not universal until after World War II. Many people can recall attending church and finding a hand fan alongside the hymnal.

The fan, which usually carried an advertisement of a local business or a funeral home, was intended to help the person stay cool and to keep away the flies and other insects that flew through the open windows.

Before this century, ice was another luxury, at least in the South. Refrigerators did not exist before the 1920s. Before that, every town of any size was likely to have a business that sold ice in the summer and coal in the winter. The ice was sold in blocks and might be delivered to regular customers.

Country stores sometimes had "ice houses" in which large blocks of ice brought from town in insulated trucks were covered with great quantities of sawdust to keep the ice from melting too rapidly. The blocks of ice were grooved so that deft handling of an ice pick would separate the ice into blocks of 25, 50 or 100 pounds. The ice was taken home and stored in an "icebox" designed to keep milk and other items cool, if not cold.

Before this century, folks around here did not have ice cream parlors, soda fountains and such in the summer. They grew watermelon and ate watermelon at Fourth of July picnics — but the melons were not cold.

Cooking was done on wood stoves that only added to the oppressive heat. Even kerosene lamps throw off heat.

Air conditioning is a recent invention if one thinks historically. Stuart W. Cramer, a cotton mill owner in Charlotte for whom Cramerton, N.C., is named, first suggested the term "air conditioning": in 1906. Cramer, a relative of the Springs family of Fort Mill, in-

vented a spray-head that controlled humidity inside cotton mills.

The first public building in the United States to be air-conditioned was a movie theater in 1922. Some railroad coaches had air conditioning as early as the 1930s. It was after World War II when air conditioning became a feature in new buildings such as hotels, restaurants and department stores. Even then, most people could hardly imagine that homes would some day be automatically cooled.

Anyone who died in the summertime might not be buried in his "home" cemetery. John Hawkins Rooker, a native of York County and son of the Rev. John Rooker, founder of Flint Hill Baptist Church north of Fort Mill, is a good example. He was living in Georgia when he heard about the (never ratified) Treaty of Nation Ford of 1840 between the Catawba Indians and the state of South Carolina. An experienced surveyor, Rooker returned to take part in the "Great Survey" of 1841-42.

While surveying, Rooker died at the home of his niece, Clarissa Spears Morrow, in the Indian Land community of Lancaster County. A family story is that the reason Rooker lies in an unmarked grave beside his niece in Six Mile cemetery is that the weather was too hot to send his body in a wagon to Flint Hill Cemetery.

A major problem during the Civil War was preserving the bodies of the dead long enough to get them from the battlefields to their home communities. In 1862 the Charleston Tri-Weekly Mercury published a method of preserving bodies that it said had been used for 30 or 40 years: Take two pounds of common salt, two pounds of alum, one pound of saltpeter — dissolve in six gallons of water and keep the shrouding wet with the mixture.

Were they really the good old days?

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