

The Fainting Couch



No log cabin or early farm house on the Manitoulin would have been complete without this type of couch. They were used mainly by the men, for a nap either before or after meals. The couch was usually located close to the stove where it was warm and cosy. Very seldom would you see the “lady of the house” using it.

History: In the 19th century this piece of furniture was called a “fainting couch”. It had no backrest, or just a partial one, and was usually raised at one end for reclining. The reference or name of a fainting couch dates back to the Victorian period. They were used in upper-class Victorian homes as women needed larger than average chairs to accommodate their fashionable hooped skirts. Ladies of this time also wore very tight corsets to get a tiny waistline. These stylish corsets restricted blood flow and reportedly caused frequent fainting spells. A lady would retire to her room when feeling faint from the discomfort. Of course, she needed a suitable chair to collapse upon. According to Victorian culture, after the beds were made in the morning, it was improper to disturb the beds again until bedtime.

While the term “fainting couch” seems to date from the Victorian era, the style existed in ancient Roman, Egyptian, and Greek times. These fainting couches were made in the Greek style as Victorian society was fascinated with Greek culture, style and fashion.

In the late 1800s, Freud's couch was considered a style of fainting couch and was used in psychoanalysts' offices for years. In the early 1900s through the '40s and '60s, many reproductions of the classic Victorian period styles of fainting couches existed.