

## Unit 9: Video 2 Transcript

**Q9: How did dependence on fossil fuels impact life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?**

**A:** Most households in Canada were heating with wood because we live in a country that happens to have more trees, I think, than any others. We have huge forests in Canada. But in the cities, many, many people started using coal, probably from the 1880s onward.

Coal resembled wood in a lot of ways as a heating fuel. First of all, it involved quite a bit of work. Even after people had it delivered. And many people have told me stories of the sounds and the dirt involved in using coal for heating and for cooking. Sometimes a truck would back into people's garden, or into the driveways, and then tip the coal down a chute into the basement. For many people, they didn't have a driveway, and so they remember the coalmen putting the 100-pound packs of sacks of coal on their backs and trudging over and then, again, usually dumping it down a chute. And women have told me that they couldn't possibly—nobody could do their laundry on the coal delivery day because they would, of course, hang their clothes out on the line because the dryers hadn't been invented yet. So they would do that and if the coal was being delivered, the white sheets or anything would just get covered with coal dust. So also, again, it was a form of fuel and energy that involved everybody in the family. So women didn't tend to—they were more managers of the coal, except when it came to actually putting it into the coal stove itself. The children were very much involved in that, in carrying it. They would have a coal scuttle or sometimes a coal pail. So that they would go—so they would go into the basement and get the coal and bring it up and put it into the fireplace. Some people in cities did have furnaces, coal-powered furnaces. But like the coal stove, it still had to be fed. You still had to go down every—probably three to four hours. Coal burned hotter and it burned longer than wood, so it was an improvement in those ways. It was also more expensive, in most places.

But so it was something, again, very, very different from oil. When oil came along, oil could be automated. So the implications of automation for this generation of historians, I just think it's been so, so underestimated. I have interviewed people who have told me unequivocally that people never could go on holidays, like there was no such thing as going south for a week or let alone a month in the winter because people couldn't leave their houses. If they had indoor plumbing, they couldn't leave their houses because the plumbing would freeze. You just simply couldn't leave your house. Even in rural areas, there was kind of a 12-hour period that you could be away. So for

people who've heard about the barn dances that they used to have, and people would come back really late at night. But they couldn't stay over because literally they had to keep the home fires burning. And it was a really big deal if the wood stove went out. It was an even bigger deal if the coal stove or furnace went out. They were very difficult to light. It was something, for example, that children were really not allowed to do. So the systems of automation that later came just had a profound influence on our daily lives. And, indeed, there are historians arguing that it wasn't until there was running water in houses and until there was electricity or oil that women were able to leave the home to go to work elsewhere. Because their work inside the home in what I would call keeping the energy systems going inside the house was so vital. And nobody else could do it. It was still relying on human muscle power, just muscle power and actions to keep those things going.