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Skeleton Keys

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In the mid-1940s I lived in Hartsville, South Carolina, in a Victorian style house that once belonged to my great grandparents and was probably built by them in the mid-1800s. The outside doors were locked from the outside by inserting a key in an iron box. When the key was turned an iron bar slid across the doorframe into a smaller iron box. We had two keys. The smaller key fit only our door. The larger key was a skeleton key, a master key made to fit all similar locks. It would have opened almost all of the houses in our neighborhood. Skeleton keys were common and easily bought by the general public, maybe even at the local Dime Store.