

# ? What is It? ?

This activity contains photographs of items that were commonplace in the nineteenth century but are generally no longer in use today. Have the students look at the pictures of these everyday objects from long ago and guess what they are and what they were used for. The list below provides the name, description and time frame of use for each object.

## **Item 1 - Bread Trough 1800-1850**

In pioneer kitchens bread was kneaded in troughs. Some troughs had legs; others, like this one, were used on a tabletop. After being discarded from kitchen use, this trough was sometimes used by a child as a doll cradle.

## **Item 2 – Wool Spinning Wheel 1820-1840**

Mary Holt Bond used this spinning wheel in Marion County in southern Illinois where she had moved from Virginia with her husband James B. Bond after their marriage in 1827. While spinning wool, the spinner stepped forward and back, turning the wheel by hand and pulling the wool fibers from a soft "roll" as it twisted into yarn. Mary Bond's wheel has typically Midwestern spokes, which are weighted at the outside to add momentum and make spinning easier.

## **Item 3 – Candle Mold 1800-1860**

Candles were an inexpensive way to light a home. Candles could be purchased or made at home by dipping or molding. Dipping was a tedious process of repeatedly dipping wicks, attached to a thin pole, in hot tallow until the desired thickness was reached. Molded candles required less time. A wick was placed in the center of each tube and then tallow or wax was poured in and left until it was hard. The mold was then plunged into cold water to remove the candles.

## **Item 4 – Milk Pan 1800-1850**

Shallow milk pans with flaring shoulders were common household items until the mid-1800s. Milk was allowed to sit until the cream had risen to the top and could be easily removed with a shallow spoon or skimmer. Glass pans were advertised as "preferable to all others" because they were "non-conductors" and therefore kept the milk "uninfluenced by storms or climate."

## **Item 5 – Grease Lamp 1800-1850**

Grease lamps, or Betty lamps as they were also known, used fat from the kitchen as fuel. While they burned slowly and were very cheap to operate because they did not require expensive fuel, they did not give good light and produced a black, smelly, greasy smoke unless all of the impurities were removed from the fat.

### **Item 6 – Clay Marbles 1850-1900**

These marbles were rolled by hand from dark green, yellow and white clays. Afterwards they were painted, and traces of red and purple paint remain. Games of marbles were highly popular during the nineteenth century, and clay marbles such as these were made in great quantities.

### **Item 7 – Sadiron 1830-1880**

Irons were usually sold in sets of two or more because while one iron was used the other was left to heat on the stove. They often weighed as much as ten pounds, thus the name "sad," an old term meaning heavy. Each time an iron was heated, it was tested to be sure it wouldn't scorch the clothes. The change from hearth to cook stove made the daunting task of ironing easier because women no longer had to worry about ashes and soot collecting on the iron and being transferred to the clothes.

### **Item 8 – Butter Churn 1875-1900**

The task of churning cream to butter required time, patience and arm strength. A dasher (long wooden pole with crosspieces at the end) was steadily pushed up and down inside the churn. A cover over the dasher minimized the splashing of cream. By 1900 Illinois was second in the nation for production of ceramics, and the Macomb Pottery Company in western Illinois was one of the larger potteries in the state. The average potter at the Macomb Pottery made \$1.25 for a ten-hour day, and a churn such as this cost about \$1.

### **Item 9 – Pitcher, Basin and Chamber Pot 1885-1895**

Ironstone toilet sets and a wide variety of ironstone dinnerware were made in abundance by English and American potteries. This "white granite or "thresher's china" as it was commonly called, was affordable, hardy and well suited to Illinois farm homes. It was very popular from the mid-1800s until around 1910, when many pieces were discarded or recycled as yard planters and watering pans for the chickens. Numerous remnants of ironstone are found today at archaeological digs throughout the state.

### **Item 10 – Rushlight and Candle Holder 1800-1850**

A rushlight, or poor man's candle, held a grease-soaked rush, a common grass-like marsh plant that has been stripped of three-quarters of its outer covering. This rushlight was also made to hold a candle.

### **Item 11 – Butter Mold and Butter Stamp 1800-1900**

Butter molds were used to form and decorate butter, which was first pressed into the shape of the mold, and then forced out with a decorative plunger. The carved plunger, like a carved stamp, impressed the finished butter with its design. Stamps were carved in a variety of plant designs and, occasionally, with animals or patriotic motifs. They were used often in selling butter to advertise and identify the maker.

### **Item 12 – Clock Reel Yarn Winder 1820-1840**

After being spun, yarn was wound into standardized lengths called skeins. As the yarn was wound around the arms of this reel, gauges inside the reel's box ticked with each rotation and caused a metal indicator to turn around the face of the "clock," painted on the outside. In this way, lengths of yarn could be more easily measured. This yarn winder, like the spinning wheel, was owned by Mary Holt Bond of Marion County, Illinois.

### **Item 13 – Flower Holder and Stand 1882**

This novel little "porcupine" or "hedgehog"--based on a Wedgwood flower holder or bulb pot of the late 1700s--was first wheel-thrown and later cut and shaped by hand. It is one of several unusual pieces created by the Kirkpatrick brothers in southern Illinois. The Anna Pottery, in operation between 1859 and 1896, was noted for its utilitarian stoneware vessels, firebrick, and other common items. Today, however, it is best known for its eccentric and humorous pieces featuring snakes, pigs and other creatures.

### **Item 14 – Sweetmeat and Salt Dishes 1830-1840**

Sweetmeats, which were fruits preserved in syrup or dried and candied, were often served from the sideboard or placed on the table on festive occasions, such as the evening tea party. When a complete meal was served, sweetmeats preceded the main courses. The table was set with open salt dishes for seasoning meats and vegetables. Salts like the one seen here were intended for communal use, and guests took generous pinches of salt with their fingers. About 1850, smaller, individual salts with tiny spoons became popular.

### **Item 15 – Whale-oil Lamp 1830-1840**

Decorative glass lamps were almost unknown in England during the first half of the nineteenth century and were considered an American innovation. The pear-shaped font of this lamp was closed at the top with a cork burner. Wicks, inserted through one or two metal tubes in the cork, dropped down into the whale-oil contained in the font. The heavy "waterfall" base, which is hollow and press-molded, made this lamp relatively safe to place on a table or mantel.

### **Item 16 – Camphene Lamp 1830-1860**

This hand lamp has a small font and a burner with wick caps designed for safety when burning highly flammable camphene fluid. Camphene is a colorless, water insoluble substance that occurs in turpentine and many other essential oils and is still used today in the manufacturing of some insecticides. Metal caps, usually pewter or brass, were placed over the flames to extinguish them because blowing the flames out was considered dangerous. Many individuals placed camphene burners on their old whale-oil lamps when the cleaner and brighter camphene fluid became available. This practice was dangerous because the larger whale-oil fonts accumulated the heated gas produced by the camphene and often exploded.

**Item 17 – Bootjack 1874**

The bootjack was a piece of furniture that made boots easier and cleaner to remove. By pushing their boot through the needlepoint shield from behind and placing the back of the heel in the notch at the base of the bootjack, the wearer was able to slip the boot off without having to use his or her hands.

**Item 18 – Bullet Mold 1815**

Early settlers had to be self-reliant as goods were not easily purchased. They made bullets by pouring molten lead into molds. Once the lead cooled, the bullet was removed and was ready for use in their rifle.

**Item 19 – Neck Yoke**

The neck yoke attached oxen, cattle, horses or even mules together for various uses. The team of animals could be used to pull a plow through the farm fields or they could be hitched to a wagon to take a pioneer family to town or market. Teams pulling wagons were one of the main sources of transportation in pioneer times.

**Item 20 – Tinderbox 1830-1850**

The tinderbox was used to light candles and other fires until well into the nineteenth century. Pieces of flint and rough steel were stored inside the box along with tinder. Tinder was charred linen or some other substance which ignited easily. Striking the steel with the flint created sparks which caused the tinder to catch fire long enough for a candle or split wood to be lit.

