
CANDLE MAKING STATION

General

Candlelight and Oil Lamps were the only source of light available at the Fort in the 1850's. The pretty tapered ones were used when entertaining, while the less uniform candles were used for every day use.

Candle making was usually done in the autumn. Housewives spent long hours boiling down the fat of newly slaughter beef and sheep into tallow. The job was hot and sweaty and the product was far from perfect. Candles burned too rapidly, buckled and bent in warm weather and gave off fumes and smoke.

Other sources of wax were bayberry and beeswax, and in the early 1850's, paraffin was discovered. All of these produced much nicer and longer lasting candles that provided bright, steady smokeless illumination. At the Fort today, we use beeswax and paraffin wax.

Besides dipping candles, candle molds or forms were used. The forms are how the special occasion candles were made. Wicks were strung through each candle form and held with stick when hot wax was poured in. After the wax was hardened the form was briefly dipped into hot water to loosen the edges and the candles were gently pulled out two at a time.

Candle Making Policies

Please note that there are two separate cauldrons, one for wax and one for hot water for the laundry. Over the years we have had a lot of problems with adults mixing the wax into the hot water for the laundry. Please don't do this as the molten wax is hard to get out of the clothes that are washing in the hot water that has become contaminated with molten wax.

Please do not mix wax from the wax cauldron with the hot water of the washing cauldron.

The Candle making and Laundry Stations are run together. During the 45 to 60 minutes allocated to each squad at each station, squads arriving at the laundry and candle making station will be split in two groups or can work all together at the laundry and then rotate to candle making. The adult assistants assigned here will be responsible for timing at this station.

The Candle making station is located south of the Officer's Quarters and right next to the Laundry Station. The Candle making Station is designed to show students how candles were made and to relate their importance in daily life.

Each student will make one hand dipped candle and each squad will make one set of molded candles. Each student may take his/her hand dipped candle home. The molded candles will be used at night in the Barracks to light the class's evening.

Candle making equipment supplied by Fort Tejon

1 large cast iron cauldron	tri-pod	Wax, paraffin or beeswax
double boiler set	wick	small container for dipping
small pails of water	hot pad or mitt	

Candle Making Procedure

Before starting the dipping process, explain the safety rules. Do not get too close to the fire, the containers with the wax are hot, dipping in the big kettle is dangerous due to the fire.

- a.* Have each student find 3 to 4 inch sticks to tie their wick to.
- b.* Give each student a wick, cut just slightly longer than the depth of the dipping container. Tie the wick to the stick with the longer portion hanging down.
- c.* In small groups of 2 to 4 sit in a small circle, away from the fire.
- d.* Place a container of water and wax within reach of each student.
- e.* Taking turns dip the wick into the wax then into the water. The water is cooling each layer of wax as it adheres to the wick or previous layer. Explain the importance of removing the wick between each dip. If the wick is left to sit in the wax the necessary build up will not occur, the wax needs to harden between each layer.
- f.* Continue dipping until candle is the desired size. Try to keep replenishing the wax in the dipping cans, this helps maintain a uniform size. If the candle starts to develop a curve the wick is longer than the depth of the can, just try to not dip so deep. If little nubs form on the bottom, pinch off and flatten on palm of hand. Return nubs to the large container of melted wax.