
LAUNDRY STATION

General

The Army authorized four laundresses for each company at Fort Tejon. Laundresses were allowed at the Fort only if they were married to a soldier. They were entitled to the same quarters, fuel and rations as a soldier. They most likely lived in a long five room wood building next to the creek or tents with their husbands. The laundress made good wages (\$2.00 from each soldier per month). If there were 80 men in a company and there were four laundresses, each would wash for 20 men, thus making approximately \$40.00 per month, per laundress. In comparison, a private at this time would have been making about \$13.00 per month.

The purpose of this station is to show the students how laundry was done at Fort Tejon. The Post Laundry is setup at the fire pit next to Candle Making Station south of the Barracks.

Laundry Policies

Please note that there are two separate cauldrons, one for wax of the Candle Making Station and one for hot water for the Laundry Station. 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 Laundry and Candle Making Stations are run together. During the 45 to 60 minutes allocated to each squad at each station, squads that arrive 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 do timing at this station.

Laundry equipment supplied by Fort Tejon

1 large cast iron cauldron	tri-pod	3 large tin wash tubs
2-4 washboards	lye soap	clothesline
iron pegs	4 clothes line poles	4-5 water buckets
clothes pins	lemons	clothes for washing
sadiron	firewood	shovel, hatchet, hammer
clothes for washing	heavy gloves	

Laundry Procedures

- a.* Both cauldrons for laundry and candle making will already be set up on the tripods. You will need to fill the empty Laundry cauldron with water and move some burning wood underneath it with the shovel. Continue adding wood underneath both cauldrons for hot water needs. **NOTE: Never place an empty cauldron on a fire. FIRE SAFETY:** Always leave at least one bucket filled with water near the fire pit. There is a **FIRE EXTINGUISHER** located inside the Laundry Shed. Use the heavy gloves to handle hot objects. Tuck dress between legs when working near the fire. Gently pour water on the fire to extinguish it when cleaning up after the last rotation. Be careful of hot steam when doing so. Park Staff will put away cauldrons and tripods.
- b.* Set up clothesline by crossing 2 poles together and another 2 poles approximately twenty feet from the other. While two people hold these in place (get help from another station leader), run the line between the two pairs and over the tops. Then take iron pegs, tie the ends of the line to them on each side, and pound them into the ground with the hammer.
- c.* Place warm water in the two outer tin wash tubs (wash water), and cold in the middle tub (rinse water).
- d.* Explain the use of the washboard and then using lye soap (explain how the soap was made), demonstrate the washing process.
- e.* Demonstrate how to ring out and hang the clothes.
- f.* Have a couple of students at a time try each step. For fun, split the group up into two teams and time them to see who can go through the process the quickest (make sure they get them clean in the rush).
- g.* Explain what a tedious, hard job this was especially during the heat of a summer's day. For fun, have each visitor put on a bonnet, in order to prevent sunstroke.

Laundry Questions

a. How was the ironing done?

(A sad iron was used. The iron was heated on a trivet over hot coals. Two to three irons had to be going at once, in order to have 1 hot iron available at all times.)

b. What was the most common way to remove stains?

(With salt and lemon juice. Grease spots were removed by rubbing over with yellow soap and then rinsing in hot water. Fruit and wine spots were removed by dipping the fabric in a solution of ammonia or spirits of wine and rinsing.)

c. What was lye soap made from?

(Animal fat, most likely from cows, and ashes from hard woods.)

d. How was lye soap made?

(Lye was made first by placing ashes in a wooden container shaped like a square funnel with small slits at the bottom. Water is poured over the ashes daily and allowed to drain through a drainage piece into a bucket slowly by drips. At this point it becomes lye. Lye is very caustic and will burn the skin off the hands and has been known to cause blindness and lung damage. To each gallon of lye, add 3/4 pound of clean grease and boil the mixture fast and stir frequently, a few hours should be adequate for boiling. When you can place a little on a plate and it is the consistency of thick jelly, and no grease appears, add salt in the proportions of one pint to three gallons then let boil a few minutes and pour into tubs to cool. The next day, cut out the soap, melt, and cool it again in order to take out all the lye and keep the soap from shrinking.

e. If lye is caustic, how can we use the soap?

(The fat neutralizes the lye.)

f. Was soap ever bought?

(Yes, it was sometimes brought up on the supply wagons)

g. Was soap ever perfumed?

(Not laundry soap, however hand soap was and consequently very expensive!! Perfumed soap was made with flowers, oils, and other natural products.)