

Donation of the Month

Gasoline Powered Iron

Model 4A, 1929-1933

1975.185.1

Donor: Roy Guilliams



Ironing clothing has historically been a part of everyday life. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Monday was traditionally wash day and Tuesday was ironing day. Even with wrinkle-free fabrics and electric dryers, ironing is still a fact of modern life and almost every home has one. The iron has changed in form and material over the years as new technology brought the iron from a very hot and heavy primitive non-mechanical apparatus to the cool lightweight sleek electric powered machines of today.

Early flat irons were actually made from iron and usually ranged in weight from five to seven pounds; a few weighed up to fifteen pounds. These irons had to be heated on a stove and several were used at one time to insure at least one was heating while you used another. It took some skill to iron as one could not allow the iron to get too hot as to scorch the clothes, but it had to be hot enough to get the wrinkles out.

Self-heating irons soon appeared using coal, gasoline, and kerosene, which were better but could still be messy and dangerous. Irons heated with kerosene, alcohol, whale oil or natural gas were an improvement over the charcoal burning irons, which could leave a sooty residue. Our model

manufactured by the Coleman Lamp and Stove Company was advertised as a “genuine instant-lighting iron... quickly ready for use” with the added bonus of an even heating surface. Every gasoline powered iron contained a canister mounted at the back which held the fuel and was attached to the base of the iron with a valve to keep a steady stream of gas into the heating coils. This model contains a pretty blue ceramic coating and art deco stylizing. These improvements while not functional, did allow one to purchase a stylish functional machine that did not need to be hidden when not in use.

Electric irons were a welcome change but took longer to reach rural areas until electricity spread out from cities. In 1927, a thermostat control was available to adjust the temperature of an electric iron and a couple of decades later, steam electric irons could be found. Today’s irons have come a long way and each improvement made the task of ironing easier and faster than the previous model. The iron hasn’t changed much in the last few years and with the advent of better wrinkle free technology in today’s clothing we may have seen the last improvement of the iron.