

Donation of the Month

Candles

Donors: Frances Mills; Karen Russell Burks
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Due to their use as a light source candles have been around for centuries. With the use of kerosene in lamps and then the invention of the light bulb, candles as a light source diminished. However, candles are still popular for their ambiance and decorative uses. Even as the use of candles has changed the way they are made has changed very little.

Candles have been made of various materials over the centuries. In the 13th century candle makers called chandlers made candles from fats saved from the kitchen or sold their own candles from within their shops. More common were candles made from animal fat, called tallow. The Tallow Chandlers Company of London was formed in about 1300, and by 1415, tallow candles were used in street lighting. Tallow candles had an unpleasant smell so candles made from beeswax were used indoors. By the mid-1850s paraffin wax, made by distillation of coal, became commercially available. Paraffin wax burned cleanly, and left no unpleasant odor, unlike tallow candles. Due to a low melting point, by the 19th century stearin acid was added to the mixture to create a higher melting point allowing the candles to last longer.

The process of making candles has changed very little over time. Tapered candles, long narrow candles, are made by dipping the wick in a vat of hot wax and then pulling it out again and allowing the coating of wax to cool before dipping it again. This process takes a lot of time. In order to speed up the process long wicks were used and draped over a long rod, allowing several candles to be dipped at one time. The dipping method is still used for making decorative carved candles. Pillar candles or votives are made in molds. History records the first candle mold was used in Paris in the 15th century. Molds allow the wax to be poured into a pre-sized and shaped cavity, thus ensuring each candle was the same size. The use of molds also allowed the candle maker to get rid of the large vats of hot wax and allowed several candles to be made in a shorter period of time.

Candles today are not used exclusively for light, but more often for the ambiance or just for decorative purposes. Many companies produce decorative carved candles. These candles can be found at most candle shops, but the highly carved candles featuring swirls, bows, and various colored wax can only be found at specialty candle shops. In the 1970s, there was a renewed interest in the arts and this included the making of candles. To cater to this interest Helen and Blanche Stire opened a candle store on South 6th Street in Rogers. They carried locally made candles featuring Early American cut and pressed glass patterns. Their shop wasn't open for very long, but the interest in decorative candles hasn't wavered. Candles have been around for centuries and it appears they are here to stay for several more centuries.