

If These Buckets Could Talk

Tales from the Museum Collections



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Fun Facts

Prehistoric trails, mule trails, and wagon roads crossed through Cajon Pass and into the San Bernardino Valley. These historic routes are commemorated by California Historical Landmarks No. 576 (the Santa Fe and Salt Lake Trail Monument, in honor of the 1849 pioneers), No. 577 (the Mormon Trail Monument, recognizing the 1851 Mormon pioneers who established San Bernardino), No. 578 (Stoddard-Waite Monument, the western extension of the Santa Fe Trail traveled in 1849), and No. 963 (The Mojave Road, developed by Mojave Indians to cross the Mojave Desert and used in 1826 by Jedediah Smith to reach the California coast through Cajon Pass).

Pioneers on the Santa Fe Trail used Conestoga wagons: large, heavy freight wagons with a floor that sloped to the middle so barrels wouldn't roll out. On the trail they were pulled by teams of mules or oxen because long distances and scarce water made horses impractical.

Once considered a desperado and the "last villain of the West," recent research on "Willie Boy" suggests his reputation was due to false press and, in fact, that his love Carlota fled from her home with him willingly and that she was killed by a bullet from the posse chasing them.

The Great Fire in London burned for three days in 1666, destroying 13,200 homes, 88 churches, and hundreds of hospitals, libraries, and other buildings. As the city was rebuilt, 1600 leather "fire buckets" (3-gallon cowhide buckets reinforced with a wooden hoop at the brim) were distributed throughout the city for use by fire-fighting volunteers. The buckets were filled and passed along a line in "bucket brigade" from a water source to the fire and back again. "Bucket Brigades" actually existed in the American colonies before this time.

Insurance companies began issuing plaques, or "fire marks," in 1752. These fire marks were displayed as an incentive for volunteer fire fighters to save insured buildings; the insurance company would often pay a bonus to such fire fighters. As a result, rival volunteer fire companies often fought each other for the chance to save a building, even as the building burned.

Domestic cow horn was used for spoons, combs, dippers, scoops, message horns, blowing horns, small cups, book covers, and hundreds of other items during the 18th century.

A powder horn was a companion to the musket, fowler, or Kentucky rifle or pistol. It carried black powder needed to fire the weapon. A well-made powder horn was tough, lightweight, spark-proof, airtight, and waterproof.

Fibers from the flax plant are used to make linen, or "flaxen cloth." Linen cloth dates back 10,000 years or more. The fiber comes from the inside of the flax plant's woody stalk.

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San Bernardino County Museum

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Fun Facts (continued)

To prepare flax for linen thread:

1. Sow flax seed in the spring; harvest in late summer. Pull the plants up by the roots to help insure that fibers don't break.
2. Thresh or "ripple" the stalks to strip seeds from the plants. An iron comb with 18-inch teeth called a "ripler" can be used for this deseeding.
3. "Retting" loosens the flax fiber from the woody stalk. In cold-water retting, the flax straw is soaked in ponds, lakes, or streams. Flax spread on fields are subjected to rain, sun, and dew is called "dew retting." Dew retting takes a long time but the linen fibers are strong, soft, and lustrous.
4. The retted flax is dried, crushed, and scutched. Scutching removes the fibers from the woody stalk.
5. Scutched fibers are hackled through a series of combs or "hackles," much like cotton is carded and combed. Hackling prepares the fibers for spinning into thread. Short flax fibers that stick to the hackles or drop to the floor are called "tow" and are used in irregular yarns found in cheap table linens and dish cloths. Long regular fibers, called "line," make up fine damasks, handkerchiefs, and sheer fabrics.

The American Red Cross was a small organization when World War I began in Europe in 1914. Within weeks it dispatched the SS Red Cross, or the "Mercy Ship," to Europe to provide medical relief to combat casualties. The effort ended in about a year due to lack of funding.

The U.S. Surgeon General asked the American Red Cross to organize base hospitals for the military in 1917 as the United States prepared to enter World War I. Their Nursing Service enrolled 23,822 Red Cross nurses during the war.

Red Cross nurses and nurses aides fought the battle against the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918.

Carbide lamps burn acetylene gas that is produced by water dripping into calcium carbide.

Carbide lamps, which burn with a diffused glow, were used in mining and caving. Larger carbide lights served as motorcycle headlamps, bicycle lights, and military searchlights.

Carbide cap-lamps for mining and caving became popular in the 1920s, although they were manufactured as early as the 1900s. By 1984 the last Justrite carbide lamp was manufactured in the United States, replaced by battery-run electric lamps and LED lighting.

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