

Everyday Crafts

By Sharon Fabian

Crafts made in the colonies had a few things in common. They were made from materials readily available in the area. They were also made when the colonists had time to spare from their main occupation of raising food.

Many colonial farmers took on additional tasks during the seasons when they were less busy with their farm chores. Some colonial men became potters, making useful pottery items from local clay. Others learned to make leather or tin crafts. Colonial women became experts in fabric crafts - spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing. Women passed down their craft-making skills to their daughters, and men passed down their skills to their sons.

Colonial potters often made redware, a kind of pottery made from readily available clay. Redware was porous, meaning that it did not hold water, but a glaze applied to the pottery often took care of that problem. Redware clay was not always red when it was dug from the earth, but when fired, it turned red, orange, or a reddish brown. Potters fired their wares in a wood-burning kiln, since wood was also easy to obtain in the areas where colonists settled. Potters made useful items including jars and jugs. They also made pans, plates, bowls, and chamber pots.



A colonist who was skilled at making pottery could exchange his wares with a neighbor, or sell them. Either way, it helped provide the things that his family needed.

Colonial women made all of the clothing for every member of their household. They cleaned and prepared the fibers, often flax from flax plants or wool from goats. They spun the fibers into yarn. They dyed the fibers using dyes made from plants and other natural materials, even bugs. They wove the yarn into cloth, and they sewed the cloth into garments. Some women became expert at one particular stage of the process, and they exchanged their skills with neighboring women.

In addition to clothing, colonial women also made household linens. Rather than selling or trading their finished products, they often saved linens to pass on to their daughters when they became old enough to set up their own household.

Clothing and household linens took a long time to make, and each piece was considered valuable. Clothes and linens would be repaired many times to get as much use from them as possible. When an article of clothing became too worn to mend one more time, the good parts of the fabric were reused to cut out a new piece of clothing for a smaller person.

Colonial women have often been pictured piecing together tiny bits of fabric to make a quilt. However, quilting was one thing that most colonial women didn't do. They just wouldn't have had the time. Quilt making only became popular years later when women had a little more free time and when commercially-made fabrics became readily available.

The crafts that these men and women made in their homes and on their farms demonstrated the resourceful spirit of the colonists. They used what they had, and they made what they needed.

Name _____



Date _____

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Questions

- _____ 1. Colonial crafts were usually made from _____.
- A. clay
 - B. wool
 - C. locally available materials
 - D. imported materials
- _____ 2. Most colonial potters were _____.
- A. factory workers
 - B. children
 - C. women
 - D. men
- _____ 3. A type of pottery made in the early days of the colonies was _____.
- A. redware
 - B. tupperware
 - C. tinware
 - D. stoneware
- _____ 4. Colonial farmers made pottery _____.
- A. on Saturdays
 - B. late in the evenings
 - C. in the less busy seasons
 - D. in the spring
- _____ 5. Colonial women became experts at _____ crafts.
- A. pottery
 - B. leather
 - C. metal
 - D. fabric
- _____ 6. Spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing are all activities involved in making _____ articles.
- A. pottery
 - B. leather
 - C. fabric
 - D. metal
- _____ 7. Colonists made crafts mainly because they were _____.
- A. beautiful
 - B. worth money
 - C. useful
 - D. none of the above
- _____ 8. Children learned crafts from their _____.
- A. elementary school teachers
 - B. preschool teachers
 - C. peers
 - D. parents

