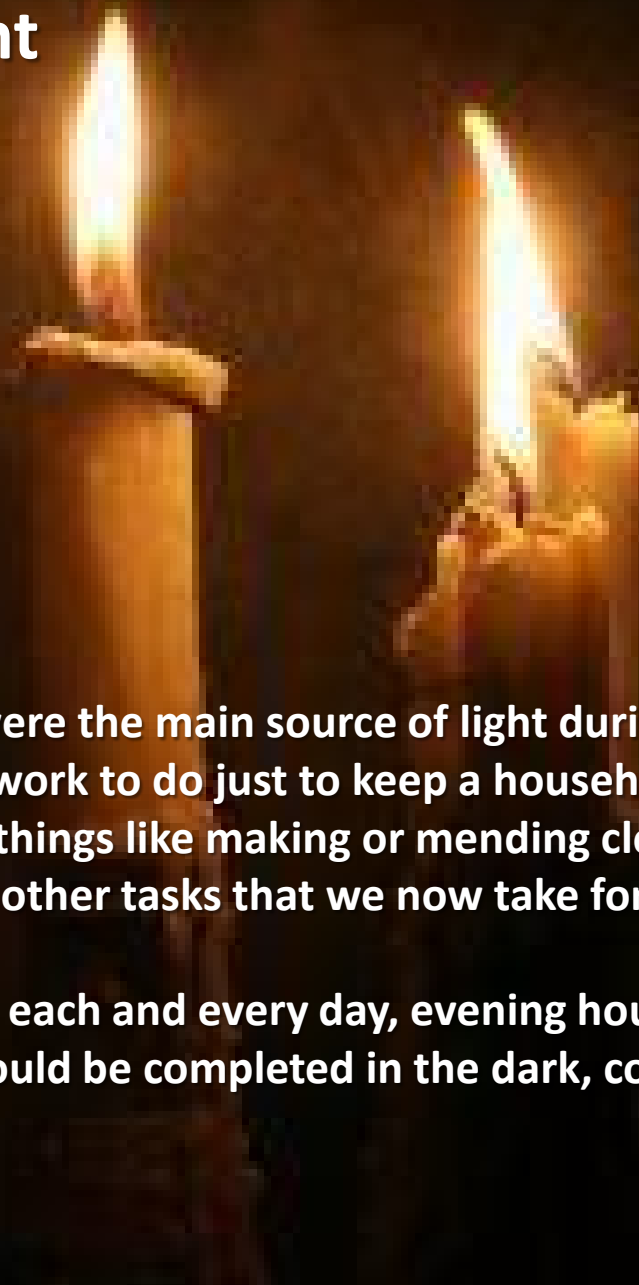


A woman in a red dress and lace gloves is lighting a candle in a brass holder. The scene is dimly lit, with the candle providing the primary light source. The woman's hand is in the foreground, holding a matchstick to the candle. The background is dark, with the woman's dress and the candle holder being the main focus.

By Candlelight

Candle making in America

Illuminating the Night



During colonial times, candles were the main source of light during the long, dark, nighttime hours. With so much work to do just to keep a household running, women had to work into the night hours on things like making or mending clothing and linens, preparing and storing food, and other tasks that we now take for granted.

With hours of work to complete each and every day, evening hours became precious commodities. Since no chores could be completed in the dark, colonial women relied on candles to light their homes.

Tallow

Colonial people, like the generations before them, made candles by first rendering animal fats into a substance called tallow. Tallow can be melted and dipped to make fat taper candles, but the resulting tapers are much softer than the wax candles found today. They also tended to smell bad, and drip excessively. Because of the softness, tallow candles tended to burn with a low light, and they didn't last very long.

Still, tallow was readily available and the candles could be made in large batches at home. During the fall, when the weather was cool enough to store these soft candles, women gathered to make enough tallow candles to last their households through the long winter months.

Beeswax

The image shows two beeswax candles lying parallel to each other on a dark, textured wooden surface. The candles are a warm, golden-yellow color and have a faceted, tapered shape. The wood grain is visible, running vertically through the frame.

For those with some extra money to spend on candles, beeswax candles were available. Beeswax smells great, produces more light and lasts a lot longer than tallow, but it was expensive.

The Whithall family raised bees for the delicious honey and the beeswax for making candles. They would either make their own candles or they would sell the beeswax to the local candle makers in Philadelphia.