

# Candle Making and Molds

By Judy Haynes

Candles have been made since before records were kept for it was one of the earliest methods of providing light. Basically, it is a mass of wax or some other fuel through which is embedded a wick, and when lit, produces light. Chandlery, the occupation of dealing in candles, would have been a necessary and thriving business in an age prior to electricity.

Sources have evidence of candles made by dipping in tallow by the Romans beginning about 500 BCE. While in China during the Qin Shi Huang era candles were being made from whale fat 403-221 BCE. In the *Jizhupian* dictionary of The Han Dynasty (202BCE -220 AD), it “hints at candles being made of beeswax.”<sup>1</sup> These were likely molded in paper with a wick made from rolled rice paper tubes. In India candles could be made from a wax residue from boiling fruit of the cinnamon tree. This and the beeswax emitted a far more pleasant odor than tallow, which was found to be so offensive in odor that tallow candles were banned at royal palaces in Europe and at church events.

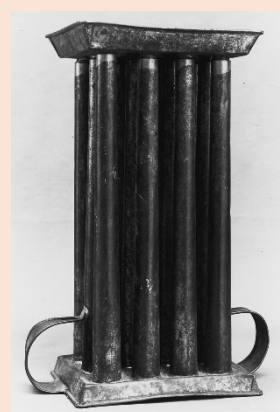
In the 19<sup>th</sup> century stearin was patented by Michel Chevreaul and Joseph Lussac in France, but while it derived from animals, it had no glycerine; thus, it burned with a better aroma. It was hard, durable and burned cleanly, and is said to still be popular in Europe today. When paraffin was introduced in the 1850s, it created another clean wax that chandlers could work with, though its low melting point required adding some of the harder stearic acid.



**'Colonial-style' Tapered candle molds**  
Photograph by Victor Grigas  
from Wikimedia Commons

Clearly one would use what is available in one's area. Tallow from the fats of animals was certainly available on New England farms. Here in New England, it would be common then to make candles from the more noxious smelling tallow, caused by glycerin, since there were many farms with farm animals in this area. It was said to be the cheapest way to make candles from a fifty-fifty blend of sheep's and bullocks' fat during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> For those able to obtain whale oil, it was the cleaner and less offensive wax made from spermaceti whale oil. Whaling was big business then and no doubt was available in the New Bedford or other whaling ports in this area during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It produced a brighter light, but was also more expensive to use than the common tallow candle. Fine candles could be made from bees wax, but that was and still makes the more expensive candles. American colonists found that the “grayish-green berries of bayberry bushes could be used to make a sweet-smelling wax that burned cleanly, but the yield was very poor. Fifteen pounds of boiled bayberries would provide only one pound of wax” thus its production did not last.<sup>3</sup>

The candle was produced by dipping wicks into vats of hot wax, or it could be made by pouring a wax in a tin or iron mold. Earlier wicks were made of twisted cotton, but in 1825 a “Frenchman named Cambaceres invented a braided wick impregnated with a mineral material that helped to make it self-consuming and much more stable.” Our museum holds a tin mold with clusters of six tapered molds terminating on a rectangular, spread-collar foot base. The tin mold we have is 10 ½ inches tall with 1-inch holes at the top of each of six candle sections that tapers to a point at the bottom. This was donated by Virginia French Helton and was used on the French family farm in Boylston, Massachusetts. Apparently, we are fortunate to own a tin mold as “they rarely survive intact” ... but deteriorate by rust as “the six or dozen rusted cylinders are often too fragile to be salvaged.”<sup>4</sup>



**Candle Mold**  
1800-1830

Candles were used not only for light in homes, but were particularly important for religious services, festivals, and even signals in warfare. They are important in ancient festivals of lights such as Chanukah and the Emperor Constantine is reported to have called for the use of candles during an Easter service in the 4<sup>th</sup> century; thus, candles are still used to evoke a special ambience and can be found today not only in a synagogue or church, but as a source of decorative art made of many colors and infused with fragrant scents in home decorations.<sup>5</sup> Candles provide special soft lighting and are very much a part of the Christmas season.

From the Boylston Historical Society and Museum to all of our readers out there, enjoy the lights of the holiday season. May this time of year bring you peace, joy, and family good times.

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia: History of Candle Making

<sup>2</sup> Hume, Ivor Noel, A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America, Alfred A. Knopf, 1970, N.Y., P. 97.

<sup>3</sup> www.waxmelters.com/tradition-history-development of candles

<sup>4</sup> Hume, Ivor Noel, A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America, Alfred A. Knopf, 1970, N.Y., p.98

<sup>5</sup> www.waxmelters.com/tradition-history-development of candles-s/53.htm

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