

LAUNDRY AFTER 1800

After the year 1800, laundry was becoming the spotlight for many different inventions and evolving methods. The metal washboard, handheld agitators, and washing machines were just a few of the new items introduced to the washing world. Many people started washing at home and integrating the use of soap and starch.

Monday as a wash day became a popular occurrence because of the heavy religious values at the time. Sunday was a day of rest for family and a large dinner would have been made. The dinner would have produced many leftovers, which meant that Monday did not have to be spent cooking all day and left time for laundry.

Washing machines started being known to people in the mid-19th century and were a simple evolution of the washtub. Inventors simply added a rotisserie with a lever that spun an agitator when turned. Today's washing machine includes many intricate gears and modes of washing the clothing. It shows how far the evolution of this Victorian era invention has come since its beginning.



Pictured above are some of the irons featured at the Fultz House Museum.

A SHORT HISTORY ON IRONING

Ironing is the act of making clothing smooth and wrinkle free. It is not known when exactly people started to iron their clothes but it is first recorded that the Chinese used hot metal to flatten their clothing before anyone. Early Europeans used flat hand-size rocks to rub over cloth. Tools like the mangle board were other common sights in many households. Paired with a rolling pin, the mangle board was used to push the pin along the laundry to remove creases.

Early irons would have been made of stone while metal irons became widely used later on. Most were made of solid iron with a handle that was welded to the top. These metal handles originally would have required a thick cloth or rag to hold because of the high temperature it would have reached. Wooden handles were also used to prevent burning of the hands. Over the years, more modifications were made and eventually became the irons that exist today that are electric with only a metal plate on the bottom.

A HISTORY ON LAUNDRY



This ironing board is located in the Fultz House kitchen.



**FULTZ HOUSE
MUSEUM**

AN INTRODUCTION TO LAUNDRY

Clothes are a piece of society that has existed for thousands of years. Since clothing has been a part of our daily lives, washing clothes is an activity that has been paired with it. Since the beginning of clothing, washing has evolved in its methods and equipment. Originally and in some places even today, washing clothing in a river was a common practice. Many people would take their laundry to the river and use rocks to remove the dirt. Boiling the clothes was a routine method of cleaning as well. Others might have used special tools to assist them with the washing. Tools may have included a washing board or a bat.



The washing board (as seen to the left) was a flat piece of wood that would be placed on the ground and used to scrub the dirt out of the clothing. The washing bat, known as a “beetle”, was used for beating the dirt out. The dirt that was found on clothes fell into two categories: stains and soil. Stains included the highly visible, localized dirt that one might see after spilling something on the clothing and soil was mostly from the body.

LAUNDRY BEFORE 1800

Before the year 1800, most people would have washed their laundry by hand. Even as early as the 1400's, inventors were trying to come up with new ideas to make washing clothes more efficient.

However, it was not until the mid-1800s that early washing machines were seen. Before this invention, laundry was done solely by hand. Using a washboard would have been the most common method of cleaning. A washboard was different than the washing board and was originally a wooden board with several horizontal notches cut into it. The article of clothing would be rubbed along the notches causing the dirt to come out. By 1833, metal washboards were being made from new materials such as sheet iron, copper or zinc.

Once washed, the next step was drying the clothing. Early settlers in rural communities would have had a rope or a wooden frame to hang the linens on. In the more populated areas, it was common to have a communal drying area where people could go and socialize while putting their laundry out to dry. On days with poor weather, the laundry would have been put on hangers above the stove to dry (as seen below).



When clothing became too stained to wash with the more common methods, the locals often had a “Grand Wash”. This Grand Wash was a day where people would soak their clothes in lye to bleach them and put them out to dry. Using lye was one of the only ways to return the clothing to the original light color.

INTERESTING FACTS

The history of laundry is one that has greatly changed over the years. Most of the new inventions we can still see today. However, most people are not aware of some of the interesting facts and inventions that many people of the past commonly lived with and used.

The end of the 16th century and throughout the 17th century saw the evolution of soap cakes made out of fats, glycerine and fatty acids.

Before running water, one wash, boiling and a rinse would use about 190 litres (50 gallons) of water.

The first synthetic detergent was created in 1916 after a shortage of fats for making soap at the end of World War I. They were not produced for home use until the 1930's.

A spin dry cycle was added to the washing machine to reduce the use of a wringer in the 1950's

Early sea voyagers would put their laundry in a bag and toss it overboard to drag behind the boat to wash.