



PIERCED TIN LANTERNS

For as long as there have been candles, there have been candle carriers. A candleholder is a type of candle carrier. What happens when someone picks up a candleholder and walks quickly across a room? You may have to relight the candle. We would relight the candle using a lighter. Lighters didn't exist and matches were rare on the frontier. They had to be more careful to keep the candle lit. They used lanterns as candleholders to protect the candle.

A typical lantern is a metal box or tube with side panels that you can see through. It also has a ventilated cover or top. This way the candle was protected and the candlelight can pass through the side panels. A mineral called Mica was first used for the side panels. Why do you suppose they used Mica? As glass became easier to find and cost less, glass panels became the standard for lanterns. What if a pioneer couldn't afford glass or couldn't find it? People used what they had and created what they needed.

Pioneers solved the problem by using tin instead of glass or Mica for the side panels on the lantern. In North America, tin was cheap and easy to find. Tin could be easily worked into different shapes. They cut a door in the lantern and punched holes in the tin so they could use it for side panels in the lantern. Why do you suppose they did that?

The door and the tin sides of the lantern made the candlelight really bright. It wasn't bright enough to light the whole room. It only lit a small work space.

Homesteaders and miners created their own open-sided lanterns from just about any material they could find. By the end of the 1800s, tin cans were very easy to find. They were everywhere! Many people turned them into punched tin lanterns. Miners called their lanterns "shadowgees."

One of the best examples of punched tin lanterns is the Towle's Log Cabin Syrup can. The can was shaped like a log cabin. The miners placed a handle over the top of the can. Then, they removed one end of the can so that they could get the candle in and out. This also helped focus the light so it shone brighter. Punched holes in the sides made sure the can didn't get too hot and the candle flame had plenty of oxygen. "Shadowgees" provide an excellent example of ingenuity, innovation and adaptation.