



KETTLES

When we hear the word “technology,” we normally think of iPhones, iPads and computers. Technology is part of every culture regardless of time or place. Levers and pulleys helped build the pyramids. Barbed wire helped to tame the Wild West. The automobile changed life forever in the 1920s. These are the best-known technological changes. Sometimes, simpler technologies cause big changes, too.

How did people cook their meals before they had pots and pans? For 1500 years before Europeans arrived in North America, non-nomadic indigenous peoples used clay pots for cooking. Nomadic peoples hung buffalo or elk stomachs filled with meat and grain over their campfires. In these containers, meals cooked unevenly. Cleaning up afterwards was difficult. Clay pots broke easily. Buffalo stomachs punctured easily. When Europeans arrived, they brought new technologies. One of the most important was the cooking kettle.

Cooking kettles transformed Native American life dramatically. Kettles heated quickly and distributed heat efficiently. Kettles cooked their contents more evenly. They were easy to clean. They would dent, but they were hard to break. Because they were sturdy, kettles allowed Native Americans greater mobility as they hunted game. Kettles were so highly prized that they were given as gifts. The Cheyennes and Kiowas sealed a peace treaty in 1840 with the exchange of kettles filled with food. Metal from copper or brass kettles was sometimes used to make weapons or jewelry. The common cooking kettle changed Native American society economically, ceremonially, nutritionally and politically. The metal cooking kettle is an important example of the impact of technology on a society.