


The Fisher family worked all day to make two hundred candles.

# Making Candles, Colonial Style

By Rebecca S. Fisher



**A bayberry is half the size of a pea.**

Abigail Fisher plopped bayberries into her bucket. It was late summer in 1750 in the Colony of Maryland. Abigail and her brother, George, were gathering bayberries to make candles.

Many people made candles with beeswax or animal fat. People near the Maryland coast preferred bayberries. Bayberry candles burned longer, didn't smoke, and had a sweet scent.

Picking the clusters of tiny gray-green berries was long, hard work. Abigail and

George picked bayberries for weeks before they had enough.

## Collecting Bayberry Wax

Mother boiled the bayberries in water. Their waxy coating floated to the surface. Mother skimmed it off and put the wax in a *starter pot*. Every day more wax was added to the starter pot.

While the berries boiled, Mother spun threads from the fibers of milkweed stems. Then she twisted the threads together to make candlewicks.

It was autumn before the starter pot was full of wax. Now the Fishers could make candles.

## Candle-Making Day

Early in the morning, Father took the candle poles and rods down from the beams of the kitchen ceiling. George placed two chairs in front of the fireplace, about four feet apart. He put the two candle poles across the backs of the chairs.

Mother and Abigail tied four foot-long candlewicks to the rods. Then they tied small stones to the ends of the wicks. The stone weights would keep the candles straight.

Father placed the candle rods across the poles, like the rungs of a ladder. Mother heated the starter pot until the hard wax melted into a clear, green liquid.

Candle molds were scarce because they were very expensive. Most colonial families made their candles by dipping.

A candle rod with a row of wicks was dipped in the liquid wax. Each wick would make a slender candle called a *taper*.

As Abigail slowly dipped the candle rod, wax stuck to the wicks. Then she put the rod between the candle poles to dry. George dipped the next rod.

The Fishers took turns

**It took ten  
quarts of  
bayberries  
to make  
one candle!**

dipping the rods. When all the rods had been dipped once, the family started over. Abigail dipped the first rod again, adding another layer of wax.

With each dip, the candles grew. After the rods had been dipped ten times, Mother cut off the stone weights. Each rod had to be dipped at least forty more times before the candles were done!

## The Finished Candles

By nightfall, the Fishers had made two hundred candles. All but ten candles were packed in wooden boxes. The family put away their candle-making things until the next year.

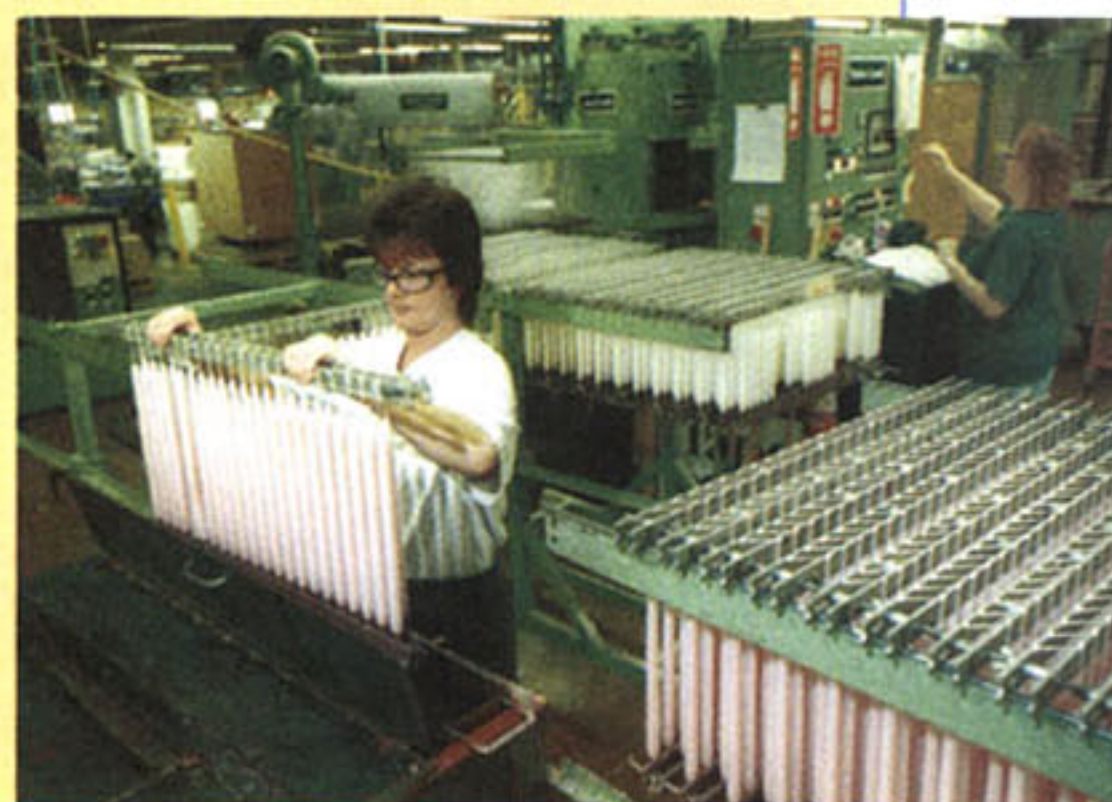
Next summer, bayberries would once again grow along the Maryland coast. And Abigail and George would start picking them again.

## How Candles Are Made Today

Computers and machines make the candles in many candle factories. Machines dip the candles in wax again and again.

Animal fat is no longer used. A type of wax called *paraffin* is often used instead.

But even today, some people still like making their candles by hand. And many people still think bayberry candles are the best.



**A worker checking candles in a modern candle factory.**