

History of Lanterns

History of Lantern Lights

Mankind's earliest sources of light depended on what was available as it evolved over the years. When ancient men were living in caves, a form of light source was to burn handfuls of moss, soaked in animal fat, in hollowed out rocks; ancient African societies burned oily nuts in clay saucers for light. During the Iron Age and days of King David, the Canaanite Oil Lamp saucer lamp was used from 1500 BC to 600 BC.

Documentation of terra-cotta Herodian oil lamps from 50 BC to AD 50 showed it was used during the ministry of Jesus. Until the 1700s, oil lamps, or oil lanterns, and candles were the only source of light until petroleum was developed. After that, not only did the kerosene lamp, or kerosene lantern, light up an area more, but lasted longer than earlier light sources. All during history, the trial-and-error of developing efficient light sources have been a goal of humanity, with many markets still available for these historical lighting sources.

The non-electric lanterns used for light were discovered thousands of years ago, and are still used today in the form of [candle lanterns](#), oil pots, kerosene lanterns, or oil lamps. The oil lantern was developed as an alternative to candles and is considered a historical forerunner to modern day electricity. Used for homes, temples and public buildings, these early lanterns are considered the oldest industries of mankind.

Early lantern wicks were located in an encased form of many types, dipped in a combustion material such as oil or kerosene that would light up when lit to form light. Many types of wicks showed the age of each early lanterns – papyrus, ordinary rush, linen, and flax. But always the lanterns' developments were connected to a strong need for more efficient sources of lighting. Striving to improve on the candle lanterns and oil lamps which emitted lots of smoke and fumes, mankind also worked on a product that would put out more light. Because of this, oil lamps and kerosene lanterns were developed.

Ancient Roman Lanterns

Around 509 B.C., the Roman Civilization was established with its basic units consisting of the family. Roman households produced Roman lanterns which could be filled with olive oil on lanterns designed with Roman motifs on the lamp bodies. The design of winged-Cupids playing a flute while riding a dolphin was part of the original Roman lamps later found in Fishbourne, England. (Reproduction Ancient Roman Lamps - Early Rome) Made of terracotta and fueled by olive oil, the Roman lanterns were used for

artificial lighting in homes, funerals and ceremonial purposes, considered a main light source for many years.

Whale Oil Lanterns

The first human use of whale oil was in oil lamps and for candle wax. Whale oil was considered a liquid wax, even though it was not true oil in the normal sense. It had the advantages of a clear honey golden color and an ability to flow easily. Over time it was found that whale oil from the sperm whale burned brighter and much less odor than of the right whale oil.

One large whale was able to produce three tons of whale tallow from which the whale oil was processed. The whale oil and blubber was originally used by the aboriginal people of the Northwestern Pacific, considered the first animal product to be used commercially that was easily affordable to the masses. (Whale Oil, 2004)

Candle Lanterns and Paper Lanterns

Both [paper lanterns](#) and [candle lanterns](#) are known to throw off a very dim light during the evening or night time, with paper lanterns made from rice paper, paper bags, collapsible bamboo, metal hoops covered in paper, or bamboo sticks with a candle inside. The candle lanterns were made from a metal box or a round cylinder with glass panels, with a fitted candle inside. The top of the box has small opening or ventilated cover to allow the candle's flame to remain lit. Both types of lanterns are known to be designed with geometric shapes and go back a long ways in history. Ancient Chinese were known to capture fireflies in transparent containers for use as lanterns for a short time.

The [candle lantern](#) was seen as far back as ancient Asia, with the Asian pagoda candle lantern considered one of the most sacred objects in Asia. The pagoda was built as part of the Buddhist temple or monastery, a place to worship or as a shrine for holy objects. (Pagoda Lanterns, 2010) Inside the pagoda was a candle or votive while the pagoda was made of rice paper about 18" by 11".

[Paper lanterns](#) are part of American history and seen in many styles and forms. Early farmers used paper lanterns when checking cattle at night or tavern owners would use them to greet travelers when coaches would pull up at late hours. Soldiers in the Civil War had nothing but candle lanterns to use, designed specifically so the wind would not blow out the candle light when the men were in the open. (The History of the Candle Lantern) Light at its best was still in the primitive form by the end of the 17th century, but

paper lanterns were considered a mainstay for society at this time.

Decorative [paper lanterns](#) are traditionally used for cultural celebrations and festivals such the Chinese New year. Today, paper lanterns are used for almost every occasion, from weddings to parties, as paper lanterns now come in almost every imaginable colors, shapes, and sizes.

Development of Kerosene

The first kerosene lantern was designed in the 9th century in Baghdad, with the wick lantern and pressure lantern coming out of this discovery. In the United States and Europe, the early days of history showed the majority of people living in small farms or in small towns outside of the larger cities, using candle lanterns, paper lanterns or oil lanterns as their main light source.

The 1846 invention of the kerosene lantern by Abraham Gesner was a huge improvement on lighting as compared to the days when "Indians of the Northwest natives caught and dried oolakan or candlefish, and used them as lamps stuck into a lump of clay, or carried them around in the fork of a stick." (Exposition, 1904) A native of Nova Scotia, Gesner was trained as a medical doctor but was considered one of the primary founders of the petroleum industry when he immigrated to the United States. He had developed and patented a process for manufacturing kerosene, which would lead to the development of the kerosene lamp.

By the time 1860 arrived, the development of kerosene lanterns had improved on the light quality that had been used for hundreds of years. John D. Rockefeller was the first American to consolidate petroleum refining which made kerosene available for everybody in society instead of oil, even though he was considered as "one of the bad boys of late Victorian capitalism." (Bock, 2003)

The road from terracotta clay pots filled with olive oil to kerosene lanterns that are still used today was a long one, but necessary to the eventual development of electricity. Yet when electricity and power goes out today because of storms or power outages, the first thing used is a kerosene lantern of some sort and candles, tools of yesterday for today.

For more information visit <http://www.candlelanternsstore.com/lanternshistory.html>.

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History of Paper Lanterns



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Paper lanterns have long been symbols of joy and celebration, especially in Chinese culture and throughout Asia. It is believed that paper lanterns were first created in China, fashioned from oiled paper stretched on wood or bamboo frames. Paper lanterns heralded happy events like [weddings](#) and births, and were an integral feature of festivals. Taking numerous shapes and forms, they also had pragmatic functions like bringing light to homes and darkened village streets, and sending supplications to heaven. As symbols of joy, lanterns remain an important part of Chinese festivals, keeping alive what began as a cottage industry hundreds of years ago.

Origins

According to the Chinese calendar, the 15th night of the eighth month (usually in September or October) is the Mid-Autumn Festival. It originated as a festival of thanksgiving for a successful harvest, reflecting China's history as an agricultural society. The tradition of Mid-Autumn Festival paper lanterns is said to [date](#) back to the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618 to A.D. 907), when an emperor commissioned the [construction](#) of 30 enormous lantern-towers, each 1,500 feet high, and ornately decorated with gold, silver, jade and precious gems. While most people could not replicate such elaborate lanterns, the lantern tradition took hold in the form of transparent paper on thin silk.

Parade of Lanterns

1. Subsequently, paper alone was used to make decorative lanterns. Mid-Autumn Festival paper lanterns are fashioned in a myriad of shapes and sizes, from crepe paper rabbits and fish to cellophane birds and planes with glitter-covered wings. The evening streets of Hong Kong, among other Asian cities, are quite a sight to behold, illuminated by hundreds of lit lanterns being paraded on hand held sticks by their proud owners, most of them [children](#).

New Additions

2. While traditional lanterns are the mainstay of the Mid-Autumn Festival, some new designs have joined the line-up, including rockets, for instance, which were incorporated in the 1960s when the first moon landing took place. More recently "Miss Kitty" has also become a popular lantern theme. Another change to the traditional Chinese lantern is the introduction of battery-operated candles taking the place of lit candles.

The Lantern Festival

On the 15th day of the Chinese New Year (calculated according to the lunar calendar, and usually falling in January or February), people celebrate the Lantern Festival, a colorful way to mark the formal completion of the new year festivities and to light the way into spring and a new year. The Lantern Festival, also known as the Yuen Siu Festival, traditionally includes displays of beautifully crafted paper lanterns, often made in the shapes of Chinese zodiac signs, as well as lions, dragons and other popular symbols of good fortune. Sometimes lanterns include riddles written on attached strips of paper. Small prizes are awarded to the successful riddle solvers. This was originally a practice whereby scholars could prove how knowledgeable they were, but it has become a popular practice for anyone to try.

Lantern Carnivals

3. Lantern carnivals during festival times provide opportunities for schoolchildren to create special, hand-made paper lanterns and perhaps win a prize as they compete for top honors. These carnivals draw huge crowds that come to admire the innovative lantern creations and special events that might include lion dances, music performances, Chinese opera, and other forms of entertainment (see Resources).

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