

***Pioneer Life***  
***Discovery Box and Guidebook Index***  
*(updated April 2011)*

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1. Essie Ward Pamphlet
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## ***Pioneer Life***

### ***Description of Discovery Box Contents***

**1. Clay marble.** Playing marbles was a favorite pastime for pioneer boys. When the store-bought variety was not available, marbles could be made by polishing stones into a round shape. Ceramic was also used to make early marbles. The rules to the game would vary but most involved a circle drawn in the dirt and a boy on his knees “shooting” the marble between a thumb and forefinger while trying to knock another marble out of the circle with their own.



**2. Sample of raw wool.** Wool, cotton, and flax were used by early settlers in making clothing, blankets, and other textiles. Most pioneer women were skilled in using cards, spinning wheels, and looms, all necessary for home production of cloth. Many pioneer farms had a handful of sheep and a small cotton patch. This wool sample is ‘fresh shorn’. It has not been washed or carded.



**3. Deerskin.** Some pioneer clothing, blankets, and rugs were made from the skins of wild animals. Deer, bear, beaver, and other animals were used for these purposes. This deerskin has been “tanned” which is a process used to make the skin softer.



**4. Buckeyes (3).** Among pioneer folklore in the Ozarks were many superstitions and good luck charms. Buckeyes were carried as a pocket charm for good luck and to keep away rheumatism.



**5. Sample of unginned cotton.** When cotton is picked from the plant, it is in small balls, called bolls, which have a hard, sticky bottom with hard seeds. The seeds have to be removed. Early settlers had to pick their cotton by hand and often had their fingers cut while separating the boll from the kernel.



**6. Sample of ginned cotton.** The seeds had to be removed from the cotton boll so the cotton could be carded and spun into thread. Some were lucky enough to afford having their cotton ginned at a mill by a cotton gin. The cotton gin (short for cotton engine) is a machine that separates the cotton fiber from the seeds and husks. The cotton gin was patented by Eli Whitney in 1794.



**7. and 8. Corn cobs (2).** Ozark settlers grew and used a lot of corn for themselves and their animals. Empty corn cobs were used for many purposes, including making dolls and other toys, starting fireplace fires, and as toilet paper. Corn was one of the main foods in a pioneer family’s diet.



**9. Sassafras root.** The bark and roots of the sassafras tree were used by pioneers for medicinal purposes. Sassafras trees are common in the Ozarks and are easy to identify because they have leaves with three different shapes. Bits of sassafras were steeped in boiling water and made into a tea, especially helpful as a “spring tonic.” Sometimes sassafras chips were burned in the smokehouse to add flavor to curing meat. Though children today may not know it, they are familiar with sassafras as the flavoring used in root beer.

**10. . Lye soap.** Lye soap was used on humans, animals, clothing, and anything else that needed to be cleaned. Soap making time was often done in the autumn when they would butcher hogs for meat. At that time most people made enough soap to last the year. The ingredients of lye soap were animal fat (mainly pork fat), water, and the lye. To make lye, pioneers would put their wood ashes in a wooden structure called an ash hopper, and then water was dripped through wood ashes to make lye. When the lye was cooked with the animal fat and water, it changed to soap.



**11. Button on a string.** This toy was also known as “buzz saw” or “moon winder”. In the past, fun was something folks had to make for themselves and they took advantage of any resources available to them. For example, scraps of fabric and gourds were used to make dolls and old buttons were used for necklaces, the eyes of a rag doll, or threaded on a string to make a “button on a string”. Hold one end of the string in either hand and wind it up by twirling it until the string is well twisted. Now, pull the ends and relax them rhythmically. The button will spin and the string will make a buzz saw noise



**12. Wheat sample.** Corn, wheat, oats, and other grains were important crops to early settlers. Corn and wheat were the main foods in a pioneer diet and served as feed for their livestock at times. To cook with, the corn was ground into corn meal and the wheat was ground into flour. When a pioneer family could afford to pay to have their grains ground, the family would load bags of the corn and wheat into a wagon and travel to the nearest mill. These local water-powered grist mills became important places for the pioneers to gather and do business.



**13. Shoe last.** Many Ozark pioneers had to make their own shoes and clothing. Some were able to buy shoes from a cobbler, a person who makes shoes to sell. To make shoes, leather had to be cut to the right size and shape. A shoe last was used as a guide for shaping the pieces of leather so they could be cut and sewn into a shoe. Lasts came in different sizes so shoes could be made to fit different lengths and widths. At first shoes were shaped the same for the left and right foot. They were sometimes worn on one foot and then the other so the shoe would wear more evenly.



**14. Sadd iron.** The sadd iron was heated on a bed of coals or a wood stove and then used to press the wrinkles out of cloth. Women often had more than one iron so one could be heating near the fire while the other was being used. When taken off the stove, a sadd iron cooled quickly, so having more than one meant a woman could do her work more quickly. Some sadd irons had wooden handles that could be taken off one iron and clipped to another. If the iron's handle was made from metal, like this one, fabric had to be wrapped around the handle or a hand could be badly burned.



**15. Drop Spindle:** A simple device for spinning yarn or thread from raw fibers. To use a supported spindle, place the end of the spindle in a small bowl to allow it to turn easily. Using fiber that is already in a roving (carded and rolled into easy to handle lengths) you can begin spinning. While holding the fiber in your left hand, use your right hand to rotate the spindle clockwise. The fiber will wrap around the spindle, causing it to twist.



**16. Wooden top.** This is a modern example of an old-fashioned toy. In fact, tops have been popular toys since the days of ancient Greece. Set the top on the table and pull the string to make it go. Pull up the handle and watch the top spin! An old Ozark man described a game with these in which boys drew a ring on the ground and set their tops inside it. They'd stand outside the ring and start the tops spinning. Whoever was closest to line got to go first. "We'd make tops out of everything," said the man who described this game. It sounds similar to the old game "peg in the ring," in which a child would start one top in the ring and then other kids would send their tops spinning into the ring, trying to knock the first one down.



**17. Fiber cards.** Fiber cards were used by pioneer women to brush the twisted and tangled cotton and wool fibers into soft tufts which could then be easily spun into thread. To use fiber cards, small amounts of cotton or wool was placed on one card, then the two cards were pulled in opposite directions combing the fiber until it was smooth and free of knots.



**CAUTION: FIBER CARDS HAVE SHARP "TEETH" AND NEED TO BE HANDLED CAREFULLY.**

**18. Woven coverlet.** Hand woven coverlets were used in many pioneer homes. Mostly, linen was used for the warp (length-wise yarns). Wool or cotton was used for the weft (filling yarns). Pioneers raised sheep for wool. The wool was cleaned, carded, spun, and woven. Plants, nutshells, and tree bark, and other things were used to make dye to color the spun yarn. Blue came from the indigo plant, red from the madder root. The patterns for weaving came from many sources, and were often handed down from generation to generation. Coverlets are only one type of textile that the pioneer woman produced for her family and their home. Clothing, household linens, and floor coverings were also homemade in the pioneer days before factory produced textiles.



**19. Gourd dipper.** During the early days of Arkansas, many fences just outside the kitchen had a gourd vine growing on it. Like Native Americans before them, pioneers in Northwest Arkansas used gourds to make many different things. Pioneers made salt shakers, bird houses, ornaments, toys, containers, and ladles from gourds. A gourd water dipper was commonly kept by the well or on the back porch with a bucket of water to use as a ladle for drinking water. Some gourds were cooked and served as food.



**20. School bell.** Loud enough to be heard for miles around, this type of bell was used by the teacher to announce the beginning of the school day or end of recess. At many country schools, the boys formed one line and the girls formed another to file into the school house. Boys and girls were usually not allowed to play in the same area at recess.





**21. Slate & slate pencil.** Paper was a precious commodity to the early settlers, so most school children did their lessons on slates with slate pencils, using their sleeves as erasers. Typically the one-room school houses were attended by children in first- through eighth-grade with one teacher. The older students would help the younger students with their lessons. Pioneer children learned reading, writing, math, geography, and many subjects that students learn today. The children were taught subjects that their teacher had the most knowledge of, since early teachers were not required to go to college or follow a specific curriculum.



**22. Woman's slat bonnet, child's bonnet.** Female pioneers wore bonnets in all seasons as protection against the weather and sun. By wearing a bonnet, a girl could ensure that her hair stayed clear of the fireplace, and out of her way while doing her chores. A bonnet also helped reduce the need for frequent hair washes. At that time, many people believed that washing your hair too much could lead to illness. Some pioneers were from cultures who believed it was not proper for women or men to go without a head covering of some kind.



**23. Young woman's dress & apron.** Many pioneer women had no more than two dresses, one for work and one for school or church. One dress would be worn every day with an apron worn over them to protect the clothing. Children's clothes were often made from adult clothing which were worn out and cut down to size around the worn spots. Sleeves and skirts were long year round.



**24. Young woman's petticoat.** A petticoat was worn under a woman's dress as underwear. A petticoat is like a skirt, made of lighter fabric than the dress. Although it could be hot wearing more layers, in the 1800s most thought it was not proper for a woman to go without a petticoat. Although some pioneer women went without a petticoat because they were not able to do hard work in all of those layers! There were no closets in a log cabin and any extra clothing would either be put inside a trunk or hung on a peg in the wall.



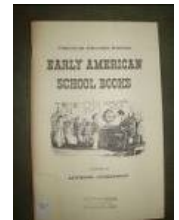
**25. Young man's shirt.** Often made by hand, pioneer clothing had to last as long as possible and was often worn until thread-bare. Buttons and strings had to be used to fasten shirts and pants because zippers, or the "automatic, continuous clothing fastener", were just being invented and were not widely used until the 1930s.



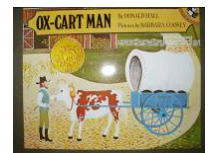
**26. Washboard.** Before the invention of the washing machine, clothes had to be washed by hand. To wash clothes, buckets of water had to be hauled from a stream or a well because there was no indoor plumbing. The water had to be heated in a pot over a fire or wood-burning stove. The hot water was poured into the wash tub. The clothes were dipped in the hot water and rubbed with lye soap, then put back in the hot water and scrubbed against a washboard. The process was repeated several times for each article of clothing. More water had to be hauled and heated on the fire so the clothes could be rinsed in fresh hot water. Clean clothes would then be hung on a rope or draped over bushes. Depending on the size of the family, washing clothes could take all day. Most of the time clothes were washed once a week and most people wore the same clothes every day.



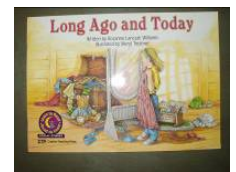
**27. Choice Pages From Early American School Books.** This book provides selected examples of pages used by school children who were learning to read from as long ago as 1785. The pages provide insight into the daily lives and concerns of people from many different eras of American history.



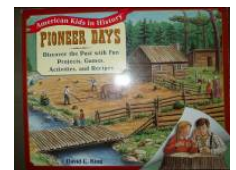
**28. Ox-Cart Man by Donald Hall.** This story is a quick read that describes the chores and their every day impact on the life of a farmer and his family as they try to make a living. Even though this story did not take place in the Ozarks, it is an example of farm life during the early 1800s.



**29. Long Ago and Today by Rozanne Lanczak.** Compares the way people lived before we had electricity to how we live today.



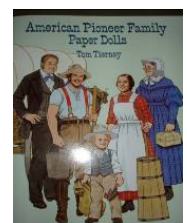
**30. American Kids in History: Pioneer Days by David C. King.** Provides games and projects for kids to do that are very similar to those played by pioneer children.



**31. My Little House Crafts Book by Carolyn Strom Collins.** Learn how to make the crafts described by Laura Ingalls Wilder in her *Little House on the Prairie* books.



**32. American Pioneer Family Paper Dolls by Ton Tierney.** Use these paper dolls to show students an example of the clothes a person living in the 1800s would have had to wear. This is a good resource to show all of the layers they had to wear. **\*\*NOTE: TEACHERS PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW STUDENTS TO REMOVE DOLLS OR PAGES FROM THE BOOK. \*\***



**33. Quilt block with batting.** Quilts consist of three parts; the quilt top, the batting, and the quilt back. Quilt tops were sewn from scrap material and pieces of worn-out clothes which were usually sewn into a pattern. The batting, or middle part, was usually made from cotton or wool. The back could be sewn from scraps or from one whole piece of fabric. Quilting bees were gatherings where pioneer women got to visit while sharing the time-consuming work of quilting. Quilts and other bed covers were needed to stay warm in a drafty cabin on a long winter's night.

