Dear Educator:

Thank you for choosing the Mercer Museum as your field trip destination. We hope it will be both educational and fun for your students. The Frontier Trading Program allows students to explore the way people lived in early American communities and went about obtaining the goods they needed. The students will develop an enhanced understanding of the challenges those people faced as well as an appreciation for the convenience of their own lives. It encourages students to consider the relative “wealth” of their situations and enhances their appreciation for the way things used to be. The students will have opportunities to take on the roles of pre-industrial era farmers, artisans, and tradesman.

The following are suggested pre- and post-visit activities for students visiting the museum. These activity suggestions were created to make their field trip to the museum more meaningful and focused.

We would be interested in any feedback you can provide us as to how to make your visit, and these materials, more valuable and useful. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Jay

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**Tinsmith**

The tinsmith in early America was the person who made and repaired things made of tin-coated sheet iron, a light-weight, brightly-finished metal.

Tinsmiths are still in existence today. They have been plying this trade in America since 1720. Colonial tin products were made of imported tinplate. England banned the production of tinplate in the colonies, thus restricting the amount of goods the colonists could produce.

Tinplate is thin sheet iron that has been dipped several times into molten tin.

When tinplate was finally being produced in America, in the early 1800’s, the products of the tinsmith became more widely available. This brought about the development of many hand-powered machines, which helped speed up production and allowed the tinsmith to meet the heavy demand for his products.

**Blacksmith**

A blacksmith is a person who creates objects from wrought iron or steel by forging the metal using hand tools to hammer, bend, cut, weld and otherwise shape it in its plastic, non-liquid form. Usually the metal is heated until it glows red or orange as a part of the forging process.

Blacksmiths worked wrought iron into house and vehicle hardware, lighting fixtures, tools, cooking utensils, weapons, and decorative items. Blacksmiths also produced shoes for horses and oxen, though these smiths were sometimes called “farriers.” Prior to the industrial revolution a blacksmith was a staple in every town.

The forge is the fireplace in a blacksmith’s shop. The anvil is a large block of steel or iron. Over time it has been refined onto a rounded horn to facilitate drawing and bending. Often the top surface is flat and made of hardened steel and the body is made of tougher iron. A blacksmiths’ hammer tends to have one face and a peen. The peen is usually a ball or a blunt wedge. The tongs are used to handle the hot metal. Swages (hardies) and fullers are shaping tools.

**Sugar**

Trade of many products from South America and the Caribbean brought much wealth to North America in the 18th century.

Sugar became an important commodity and was actually the earliest foundation upon which capitalism began to develop in America.

**Weaver**

Weaving is an ancient textile art and craft that involves placing two sets of threads or yarn on a loom and interlacing them to create cloth. In early America weavers used wooden looms to create fabric for clothing, bedding, etc.

In preparing wool for weaving, colonists would first shear their sheep. Sheep shearing was done in the spring so that the fleece would re-grow in time for the winter.

After shearing, wool would be washed in hot water to get out the dirt and grease, and then carded. Then it would be ready to use as spinning yarn. The process of carding helps loosen, fluff, and straighten the fibers.

After spinning, the yarn might be colored with dyes made from berries, bark, flowers, herbs or weeds.

With the yarn, home weavers would prepare their own loom or take the yarn to the local professional weaver. A plain weave was what most people liked in Colonial times.
Printer

Stephen Day was the first to build a printing press in North America at Massachusetts Bay in 1628, and helped establish the Cambridge Press.

Early print shops were run by "master printers." These printers owned shops, selected and edited manuscripts, determined the sizes of print runs, sold the works they produced, raised capital and organized distribution.

Usually between the ages of 15 and 20, apprentices worked for master printers. Apprentices were not required to be literate, and literacy rates at the time were very low, in comparison to today. Apprentices prepared ink, dampened sheets of paper, and assisted at the press. An apprentice who wished to become a compositor had to learn Latin and spend time under the supervision of a journeyman.

A broadside is a single-sheet printed document, usually eighteen to twenty inches high by fifteen or sixteen inches wide, that was suitable for posting on walls or carried, rolled up, to distant places.

The subject matter of broadsides is diverse, ranging from governmental communications and political election notices to poems, memorials, odes, and addresses, and even commercial advertisements.
Pre-Visit Activity -

Where is it from?

Ask the students to look around the classroom for things that have “marks” on them, for example the name of the person who made the item. The students can also bring in items from their homes that are marked. Split the students into groups. Have each group examine their items. Use the images on the following page as examples of marked objects.

Ask:

♦ Where do you think the object is from? Does it have a location marked on it?
♦ Where was the object made?
♦ Why do these objects have marks and other objects do not?
♦ Are they made by hand? By machine?
♦ Is their a person’s initial or name marked on it? A date?
EXAMPLES OF MARKED OBJECTS

School Programs
At the
Mercer Museum

PRE-Visit Materials: The Frontier Trading Program

Andrew Headman, Rockhill Township, Bucks County Plate, 1808

John Drissel, Bucks County Salt Box, 1797
Activity 1-
Let’s Barter!

- Have a “Bartering Day” in your classroom. Ask the students to bring in some objects from home that they are willing to barter, or trade for other items. On Bartering Day, have each student set up their objects in a designated area on a table, or desk (This activity may work better if the cafeteria or a large group space is available). The students should have an opportunity to walk around and look at the other goods available from their classmates. Then the bartering can begin. The students ask each other to barter items from each other, just as Colonial-era artisans, tradesman, and farmers did as a part of their daily, weekly, or monthly routine.

Activity 2-
Design your own trademark

- Each student can design their own personal trademark, sign or logo. Here are some examples of tradesmen’s or companies’ marks from the Mercer Museum collections:
Bibliography for Teachers:


