



Fairfield Museum

EXPLORE *the past*, IMAGINE *the future*
370 Beach Road, Fairfield, CT | 203-259-1598
www.fairfieldhistory.org

American Revolution & Colonial Life Programs **Pre and Post Lesson Plans & Activities**

Colonial Life and the 1750 Ogden House in Fairfield, CT

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Ogden House is a typical mid-18th century farmhouse, providing a glimpse into the life of a middle-class colonial family. This saltbox house was built in 1750 for David Ogden at the time of his marriage to Jane Sturges. For the next 125 years it was home for the Ogden family in the farming and coastal shipping town of Fairfield.



In 1750, 22 year-old David Ogden married Jane Sturges, who was 20 years old. David and Jane moved into their saltbox house. They were lucky, they came from families that provided the land and the means to live in their first and only house together. David's family gave them the house and land, and Jane's family gave a large **dowry**, which is money, goods, or property that a bride brings to the marriage. Members of the Ogden family lived in the house for the next 125 years.

By 1756, Fairfield was the fourth-largest town in Connecticut with a population of 4,455 people. **Most people were farmers**, including David and Jane Ogden. They had over **75 acres** of farmland in the Mill River area of Fairfield; their land reached all the way to present-day Riverfield Elementary School. Jane's parents and David's brother also lived close by.

The **saltbox house** is a special type of house found mostly in New England. It is called a saltbox house because it looks like a saltbox, which was a small wooden box with a lid that was used to store salt during colonial times. The lid on the box slants downward, like the roof of a saltbox house. Sometimes a small structure called a lean-to was added on to the house after it was built. It made an extra room that could be used as a closet or small bedroom. A lean-to built on the second floor was called a garret. The Ogden House has a garret that shows how the house was built. It was built with small strips of wood that were glued together with plaster. In this area, because it is close to the beach, the plaster often contained crushed seashells.

In 1775, when David Ogden was 48 years old, he died. We do not know how he died; there are no letters, diaries, or other artifacts that explain what happened. But many of David's papers, including his **will** and his **estate inventory**, can tell us what life was like for him and his family. A will is a document that someone writes before they die to tell their family what to do with their belongings. An estate inventory is a list of a person's belongings, including land, buildings, and animals.



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David Ogden had a house, a barn, outbuildings, animals, and over 75 acres of land. Because of his property, David's family was considered "well-to-do", which means they had more than most people but were not rich.

David and Jane had 10 children, but only seven of them lived to adulthood. Two of their sons fought in the Revolutionary War for the Patriots. After David died, Jane never remarried. She worked as a nurse after she was widowed and died in 1807.

The Garden

There is an eighteenth-century style herb garden behind the Ogden house that grows herbs which were typically used in colonial times. The garden is maintained by the Fairfield Garden Club.

More about The 1750 Ogden House

View a 360 degree photo of the interior and exterior of the Ogden House:

<https://www.fairfieldhistory.org/visit/ogden-house/>

The Ogden House, located at 1520 Bronson Road, is open to the public on Sundays in the summer.

MINI LESSON PLAN: The Ogden House Gazette

Objective:

Students will learn what life was like for colonists in Fairfield during the 18th century through studying the Ogden family and their home. At the end of the lesson, teachers may also project a panorama view of the Ogden House from the Fairfield Museum website:

<https://www.fairfieldhistory.org/visit/ogden-house/>

Materials:

- Ogden House Teacher Guide
- The Ogden House Gazette newspaper (11 x 17" double-sided, 1 per group)
- Questions for the Ogden Gazette (1 per student)

Activity:

1. Provide background knowledge about the Ogden House by either reading the Teacher Guide to the students, or distributing it and having students read it individually.
2. Divide students into 10 groups (pairs if necessary) and assign each group one article from the Gazette.
3. Give each group a copy of the Gazette and the question worksheet.
4. Students will work with their group to read their assigned article and complete the questions about their specific article.
5. Each group will share with the class a brief summary of their article and the answers to the related questions. Students will review the questions together for each article.
6. Conclusion: Ask students to share if they would have liked to live in Fairfield during colonial times, and explain why or why not.



Questions for the Ogden Gazette

1. According to the article “Mr. Ogden Dies”, what is the cause of Mr. Ogden’s death?
 - a. Heart Attack
 - b. Old Age
 - c. Flu
 - d. It is unknown.
2. According to the article “Mr. Ogden Dies”, what were Mr. Ogden’s possessions worth?
 - a. 2,365 pounds
 - b. 4,455 pounds
 - c. 1,515 pounds
 - d. 985 pounds
3. According to the article “The Ogden Family,” how many of David’s and Jane’s kids lived to adulthood?
 - a. 10
 - b. 7
 - c. 5
 - d. 2
4. According to the article “The Ogden Family”, what are five things that farmers grew in Fairfield?

5. According to the article “The Ogden’s Saltbox House”, what was used to build the Ogden’s house?

6. According to the article “The Ogden’s Saltbox House”, what kind of style of house did the Ogden’s live in? _____
7. According to the article “The Kitchen Garden”, what chores did the Ogden children have to do in the garden? _____
8. According to the article “Colonial Air Freshener”, how often did the Ogden family take baths?
 - a. Once a week
 - b. Once a month
 - c. Every day
 - d. Almost never



9. According to the article “Colonial Air Freshener”, what did the Ogden family make to help their house smell good? How did they make them?

10. According to the article “Beekeeping in the Colonies”, why were bees important in colonial times?

11. According to the article “The Ogden Animals”, what animals did the Ogden family own?

- a. Chickens, pigs, sheep, oxen, ox, bulls, steers, horses,
- b. Goats, chickens, sheep, dogs, horses
- c. Pigs, sheep, ox, goats, lions
- d. Sheep, goats, cats, dogs

12. According to the article “Wool is from Sheep!”, how many sheep did it take to make one piece of clothing?

- a. 5
- b. 1
- c. 2
- d. 10

13. Describe the process of making clothes from wool.

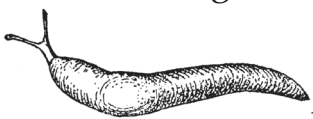
14. According to the article “Flax Makes Linen”, why was the plant flax important to the town of Fairfield?

The Kitchen Garden

by Thomas Bennett

The kitchen garden was important to every colonial family. They planted vegetables, fruits, and herbs. They tended to the garden spring, summer, and fall. They needed a lot of vegetables to store during the cold winter.

Jane Ogden and her children began to garden in April. They would plant vegetables like lettuce, spinach, radishes, parsnips, and turnips. The children had to weed the garden every day.



They also made sure that the animals that lived on the farm did not eat the plants. They would have to take off bugs like snails and slugs that were on the plants.

The plants that Jane and her family grew in the garden were used for food, to dye linen or wool and to make medicine. The plants that were used as medicine were called **simples**. Examples of simples are cabbage, garlic, mint, and thyme.



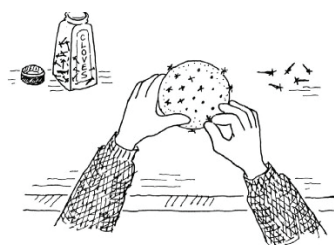
Colonial Air Freshener

by Virginia Wiley

Colonial people were very smelly. They almost never took baths because they believed sweat and dirt stopped them from getting sick. They also believed that water was unhealthy. They each had only two or three outfits to wear. It was not easy to keep them clean. Usually they did not clean laundry in the winter. It was too cold to heat up water. The river outside was frozen, too.

The Ogden house smelled of smoke and cooking odors. They used **tallow** (beef or sheep fat) to make candles. It made the house smell like burning bacon! Since the Ogden House was dusty and smelly, they would make air fresheners called Pomander Balls. Below is the recipe, it's easy! You can try it at home.

Ingredients:
5 - 7 Oranges
One jar of cloves

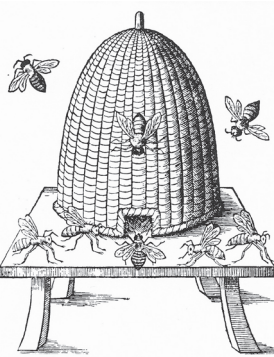


Take the orange and with the end of a **clove**, poke it into the orange. Continue to poke the cloves into the orange until there are about 30-40 cloves in it. You can make fun patterns or swirls with the cloves. Then leave it out until it dries. You are done!

Beekeeping in the Colonies

by Edward Cornelius

Many colonial families had bees. The colonists brought bees from England to help **pollinate** fruit plants. They brought seeds, apples and other plants on their long journey across the Atlantic. Bees did not live in America until then!



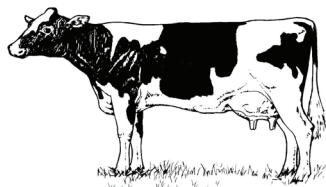
Families kept bees in their garden in **bee skeps**. A bee skep is a house made out of straw. This is where the bees live and make honey.

Honey was used as a medicine or mixed with other herbs for different **ailments**. The bees also produced beeswax that was used to make candles. They also used it to make leather waterproof. Honey and beeswax were valuable. They were used instead of money to trade or barter for things the family needed.

The Ogden Animals

by Grace Collins

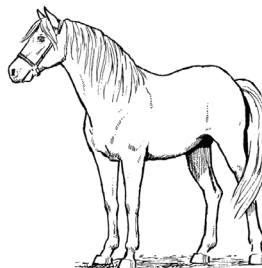
The Ogden family needed many animals to help with the farm. They had chickens, pigs and sheep. The Ogden family had **a pair** of oxen, an ox, a bull and steers.



They used the oxen to pull heavy plows made out of metal. Plows made the land ready to plant different vegetables and grains.



The family also had an old red horse, a brown horse, and a gray baby horse. The horses pulled buggies for the family to attend church and to get around the town.



The Ogden family also had cows. They used them to get milk to make butter and cheese.

Flax Makes Linen



Cotton was rare and **expensive** in colonial times. Clothes were made from wool or **linen**. Wealthy people also wore **silk** clothing. Linen was made from a plant called **flax**. Flax was a very

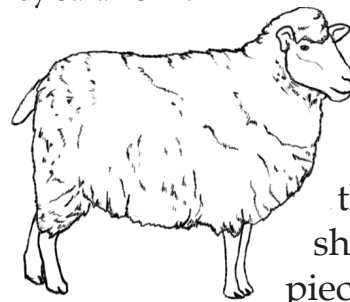
important crop in Fairfield. Very early in Fairfield's history, families were required to grow flax or hemp. It became very **valuable** and was even used to pay taxes instead of money!

In a very long process, the inside of the plant was removed. The soft, inner fiber was made into linen thread with a special flax wheel (smaller than a wool wheel). People did not own a lot of clothes. All types of wool or linen clothing, towels or blankets were very valuable.

This important crop was also used to **export** linen seed. Before the plant flowered, it was collected to extract the seeds from the plant. The seeds were used in Ireland to grow more flax or to make **linseed oil**.

Wool is from Sheep!

by Sarah Smith



The Ogden family had 16 sheep. It took the wool from two sheep to make one piece of clothing.

In the spring, the sheep would be **sheared**. The process of making clothes from wool took a long time. The wool was washed in water. Then the family members picked out the grass and bugs. It was **carded** with two brushes. Then the wool was **spun** into yarn



Yarn was used to weave together big pieces to make blankets or clothing. This was done with **a loom** which were very large! The **width** of the loom made the same size width of the cloth. Since a loom was very big, many people did not have one in their home. Instead, the yarn was sent to **a weaver**.

Mr. Ogden Dies

by Abigail Brewster

David Ogden of 1520 Bronson Road in Fairfield passed away on August 21, 1775. He was 48 years old. We do not know how he died, but many guesses can be made, such as an illness. We do know that he left a **will**. A will is a list of someone's things (such as property, money, clothes, animals and furniture) with details about what happens to everything after their death.

Mr. Ogden wrote his will only fifteen days before he died, so he must have known that he was not well. Mr. Ogden owned a house, a barn, animals and over 75 acres of land. Inside the house was a lot of furniture things such as clothing, blankets, plates, cups, forks, knives, and spoons. After his death, his large family still lived there and he left his house to his two oldest sons.

Everything that Mr. Ogden owned equaled 1,515 pounds (about \$150,000 U.S. dollars). He had more money than other people in the neighborhood, so he was **prosperous**. Usually, a family in this area only had about 400 to 500 pounds of personal items, such as a house, barn, animals, and land. Mr. Ogden's brother **Jonathan** (1735-1775) lived down the street. He left an estate worth 1,539 pounds (\$150,000 U.S. dollars). Sister **Abigail** married the very wealthy John Hide of Greens Farms; his estate was worth 3,988 pounds (\$255,000 U.S. dollars) at his death in 1792. He had 605 acres!

DID YOU KNOW?

1.03 acres = 1 soccer field
1.32 acres = 1 football field

The Ogden Family

by David Jennings

David Ogden was 22 years old when he married Jane Sturges, who was 20 years old, in the year 1750. They had 10 children born between 1751 and 1770. Three of them died while still infants. There were four girls and three boys that lived to adulthood.

By 1756, Fairfield was the fourth largest town by population, with 4,455 citizens. Farming was a way of life for many people in Fairfield. Eight out of ten people were farmers in Fairfield and the Ogden family had over 75 acres of farmland to take care of. They grew plants such as **flax**, that was used to make **linen** for clothes. Farmers in Fairfield grew wheat, corn, oats and vegetables. Animals were also important and farmers had chickens, sheep, pigs and oxen, who helped with planting or working the fields.

What did kids do?

by Harriet Williams

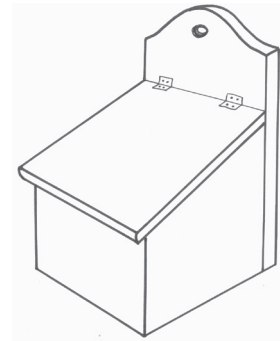
Colonial children had to spend most of their time working, just like the adults. Girls usually worked with their mothers learning things like cooking, sewing, and taking care of their younger siblings. The boys worked with their fathers, who taught them how to do farmwork. Education was important to the colonists because they felt that teaching children reading, writing, and religion would help them become good citizens. If their families could not afford to send them to school, they would be educated at home. When they did have time to play, they did not have many fancy toys. Instead, they used leftover household objects to make toys, like dolls made from scraps of fabric or corn husks. They also played games that children still play today, like marbles and jump rope.

The Ogden's Saltbox House

by Mary Sherwood



Mr. and Mrs. Ogden's house was an example of a unique house style in New England - a saltbox house. During these times salt was very valuable. It



was used for many purposes, including preserving meat. It was kept in a wooden box with a lid that was hung on the wall near the fireplace.

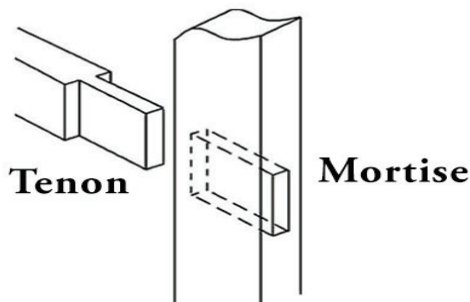
The fire helped to keep the salt from caking into a solid block.

A saltbox house is named after this shape. It was different from other houses because the back of the house is longer and the roof slopes down in the back. The sloping roof created additional space on the first floor. Children could sleep here next to the fire or sometimes a sick room could be located here. The second floor had space for storing things like food and blankets. This part of the house is called the **garret**. If a family had slaves or servants, they would sleep in this part of the house, as well.

Building a House with No Nails

by Elizabeth Banks

The Ogden House was made without nails! Instead, something called mortise and tenon joints were used. The large pieces of wood that held the house together were fit into place perfectly, almost like Lincoln Logs. When the pieces were perfectly together, a small round hole was drilled through them and a treenail was used to "lock" the pieces of wood in place. A treenail is like a nail that is used today, except it is made out of wood instead of metal. In the children's bedroom, a treenail is sticking out of the wall. This is interesting because usually these treenails would not be seen.



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