

Want a special Rifle gift for Christmas? Watch on Facebook for the dates when our gift shop will be open for Christmas shopping.

Rifle Heritage Center

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Rifle, Colorado

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“Voices in the Darkness”
A ghost walk in the museum on
October 29 and 30. Call or stop by

Canning Jars History

Researched by George Pearson

Winter has always been a hard time for humans in the Rocky Mountains. The ground is frozen and snow covered, days are short, and nights are long and bitter cold. Just trying to stay warm is a day to day struggle. The only good thing about winter for early settlers was that the big game they hunted would freeze in the cold and so it would not rot or spoil as it would during the summer. This allowed them to feast off a deer or elk for many days before they would need to hunt again.

The Native Americans developed a method of using the sun and the cold to dry out meat and preserve it in the form of jerky. They also ground

the dried meat and added seeds, salt, and dried berries to form what today we call pemmican. As early as 14,000 years ago, salmon were being dried and ground into a powder at The Dalles in Oregon. This dried fish was very valuable and was traded over a wide area. The need for preserving food for the winter months was the reason the “three sisters”, corn, beans, and squash, were so important to Native Americans. Not only did they grow well together, the dried seeds were eatable and could last for years in a dry storage cave.

In 1806 due to the interest of Napoleon in developing a way to feed his army and navy, a French man by the name of Nicolas Appert

developed a method of canning that allowed food to be preserved in a jar. His method was widely used by the French Navy and soon caught on in different regions throughout the world. The only problem was that if certain temperatures and/or pressures were not met during the canning process the food would spoil or introduce pathogens/toxins into the person ingesting it which could be deadly. It would take until 1864 when Louis Pasteur discovered the relation between microorganisms and food spoilage to understand the role of temperature/pressure and air-tight sealing in the canning process to protect the food.

Many attempts were made

Canning History: When Canning Encouraged Patriotic Preserves

Jessica Stoller-Conrad August 3, 2012



Recently, [home canning](#) has seen a rush in popularity, and even upscale retailers like Williams-Sonoma want a [share](#) of the idea that a pint of home-canned jam is a fun gift idea. But during both world wars, canning saw another surge, this time prompted by col-

orful propaganda sponsored by the United States government. During wartime, American and British citizens were encouraged by their respective governments to start "[victory gardens](#)," reducing their reliance on limited food rations. The natural next step—canning their newly-grown produce.

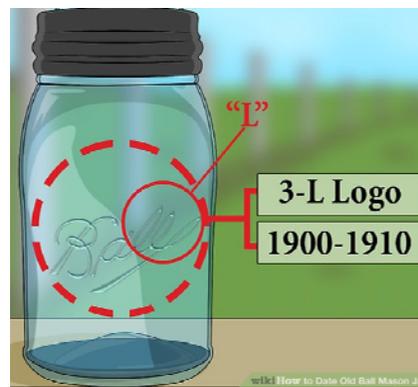
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at developing an economical and safe container to use in the canning process. In 1884 the Ball brothers in Buffalo, New York began making glass home canning jars. In 1887 they moved to Muncie, Indiana to take advantage of abundant natural gas used in the manufacturing process. Millions and millions of jars later their product is still available. By the middle 1880's every mercantile store in the country carried supplies of canning jars along with other accessories such as lids, seals, racks, and tubs. The beauty of the jars was that they were reusable as long as they did not get chipped or develop a crack. Every household in the area had a supply of jars filled with fruit, vegetables, meat and fish. For many of us today it's easier to go to the grocery store and buy items off the

shelf instead of canning them ourselves but many of us have old canning jar around that we keep for storage or just to look at and remember our family history. So how old are our jars?

The easiest way to date the age of a jar is to identify the label formed into the glass on the jar. A wikiHow article published on March 29, 2019 is easily accessed at [How to Date Old Ball Mason Jars](#) and is very informative. They say "Ball mason jars are a type of home canning jar made by the Ball Corporation. The company started making mason jars back in 1880, and many people today still use these for canning, or collect the jars as a hobby. There are many ways to date old Ball mason jars, and one of the easiest is to

look at the logo. Along with the logo, you can sometimes use the color, size, and other distinguishing marks to help date a mason jar."



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Getting folks to can at home was a way of "relieving pressure on the canning industry that was needed to preserve food for soldiers," says [Anne Effland](#), a U.S. Department of Agriculture social scientist and former food historian with the agency. So naturally, the government called on a few good artists to help it gin up a propaganda poster campaign to make canning seem patriotic. Check out our slideshow above for some samples of the posters, many of which live on today in the special collections at the [National Agricultural Library](#). (Pictures included on page 1 and 3 with this copy of the article are from the slideshow.—RHC newsletter editor's note)

The commissioned posters featured brightly colored artwork and slogans like "Can All You Can" and "Of Course I Can" — puns that recall a simpler time and perhaps a simpler sense of humor. "The posters were used as a rhetorical device to bring the public together around the common need to support the armed forces," says Effland.

It All Started With.....

It all started with [John Landis Mason](#), a New Jersey-born tinsmith who, in the 1850s, was searching for a way to improve the relatively recent process of home canning. Up until then, home canning involved using wax to create an airtight seal above food. Jars were stoppered with corks, sealed with wax, then boiled. It was messy, and hardly foolproof. Before canning, people in cold climates relied largely on smoking, salting, drying and fermenting to keep themselves fed through winter.



In 1858, a 26-year-old Mason [patented](#) threaded screw-top jars “such as are intended to be air and water-tight.” The earliest mason jars were made from transparent aqua glass, and are often referred to by collectors as “[Crowleytown Jars](#),” as many believe they were first produced in the New Jersey village of Crowleytown. Unfortunately for Mason, he neglected to patent the rest of his invention—the rubber ring on the underside of the flat metal lids that is critical to the airtight seal, and made



wax unnecessary—until 1868, a full decade later. By this point, mason jars were being manufactured widely. Mason tried to regain control of his invention, but after various court cases and failed business partnerships he was edged out. He died in 1902, allegedly penniless.

Excerpt from [A Brief History of the Mason Jar](#) by Emily Matchar on August 26, 2020



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Today, canned foods, from mass produced to small-batch artisanal products, are readily available around the country. But modern home canning has taken on a new purpose, carrying the message that canning is good for your health and the environment because you can control it. If you need a jump start, you can still get information on how to start canning from the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#). And though the popularity of canning might go through ups and downs over the years, these vintage posters remind us that the purpose and importance of canning to American culture will continue to be “preserved.”

