Trivia Time

Dedham Historical Society & Museum

**Question:**

**Insert photo**

Do you know what these objects are called and their importance to communities?

**Answer:**

The items in the photograph are stitched leather Fire Buckets that date to the early 19th century—before the days of local fire departments and when people relied on their neighbors to come to their aid. The risk for catastrophe from fire was great. A single stand-alone house could be consumed in minutes and fire in densely populated neighborhoods could quickly result in the destruction of dozens of buildings.

Residents of many towns were required to have at least two fire buckets kept near the entrance to their home. Each of the two vessels had painted on them the owner’s name, the year, and the number 1 or 2 representing the two required buckets. Each bucket was then identifiable should they become lost in the chaos of a fire. The fire buckets were sealed with pitch, waxes and oils and often had a rounded bottom, which resulted in a strong, directed stream of water when thrown at the fire.

When the fire alarm sounded, everyone would come running with their buckets to form a bucket brigade from the closest water source to the fire. One line of people passed filled buckets from the water source to the fire and the second line passed empty buckets back to the water source to be refilled.

Research indicates in some communities when the fire alarm sounded, citizens were expected to throw their buckets into the street to be picked up by able bodied persons who then formed part of the bucket brigade.

Research and image from published resources at Dedham Historical Society & Museum.

Information about the DHSM is available at [www.dedhamhistorical.org](http://www.dedhamhistorical.org).

For inquiries, call 781.326.1385 or email [info@dedhamhistorical.org](mailto:info@dedhamhistorical.org).

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