Inventory

An inventory is defined as a list of objects in one’s view or possession. In past centuries, people took inventories of their homes when the head of a household passed away. Today historians use these inventories to learn about what types of things people owned, what was in fashion, and how they used the different rooms of their houses. Look at the inventory of the Pierce House on the next page with your students. Can they determine what activities took place in the different rooms? Are there any surprises? What kind of work did Samuel Pierce do?

Explain to students how to take an accurate and detailed inventory using the method described on page four. For homework have them inventory their bedrooms. What does their inventory say about them? As a follow-up assignment, have them discuss their inventories with an older relative, comparing what they have in their rooms today to what their relatives had when they were the same age. What has changed and what has stayed the same?
Selections from the 1768 inventory of the Pierce House
Samuel Pierce (1702-1768)

East Chamber:
Best bed & Furniture with China Curtains
The 2d Bed and Furniture
Seven Sheets
Bed and Furniture

East Lower Chamber:
a Bed and Furniture
a Desk
a large round Table
Six blk Chairs
a Chest with two draws
looking Glass
Five Table cloths
Six best pillow cases
eight small spoons
a side Saddle
a clock or Time piece
Three brass Kittle
three iron skillets
two brass Candlesticks

Out door Moveables:
Broad ax and adze
Two Hoes & Spade & Shovel & Iron bar
Chain Yokes & Horse Tackling the Shop Tools
Carts & Wheels & Plows
a Canoe
a Horse saddle & Bridle
a Yoke of oxen
Five cows 4 Young Cattle
Four swine £5:10: a Grind stone
The Mansion House
The Barn Corn House and Shop
Hay in the Barn
The Home lot containing twenty acres

West Lower Room:
Spear & large Iron Spoon
Andiron, three trammels, Gridiron & chafin dish
Bread Toaster
five Iron Potts, one kettle
Stone Ware, Earthen Ware, frying pan
Trays, Pails, churns, & cheese press
Inventory Method

1. Choose the boundaries of the space to be inventoried.

2. Enter the room through a doorway and look to the right. Record every object that rests directly on the floor. Be descriptive. Remember that someone reading this inventory a hundred years from now should be able to understand what the object is. For example: do not write "rug" instead, write "dark blue and white striped area rug."

3. Continue to move around the room, listing this first layer of objects, until you are back at the beginning point. This first "loop" often includes rugs and large pieces of furniture.

4. Once you are back to the beginning point, move around the room a second time recording the things that sit on the objects you just listed. The second loop often includes tablecloths and things on shelves.

5. Once you return to the beginning, list everything hanging on the walls, or things above the things that rest on the floor. This loop often includes curtains and pictures.

6. Finally, list the things that hang from the ceiling.
Inventory

Historians can learn a great deal about people’s lives by studying the things they owned. Carefully survey your bedroom, or another room of your house, and record as many objects as you can. Start at one side of the room and move around until you are back at the beginning point.

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