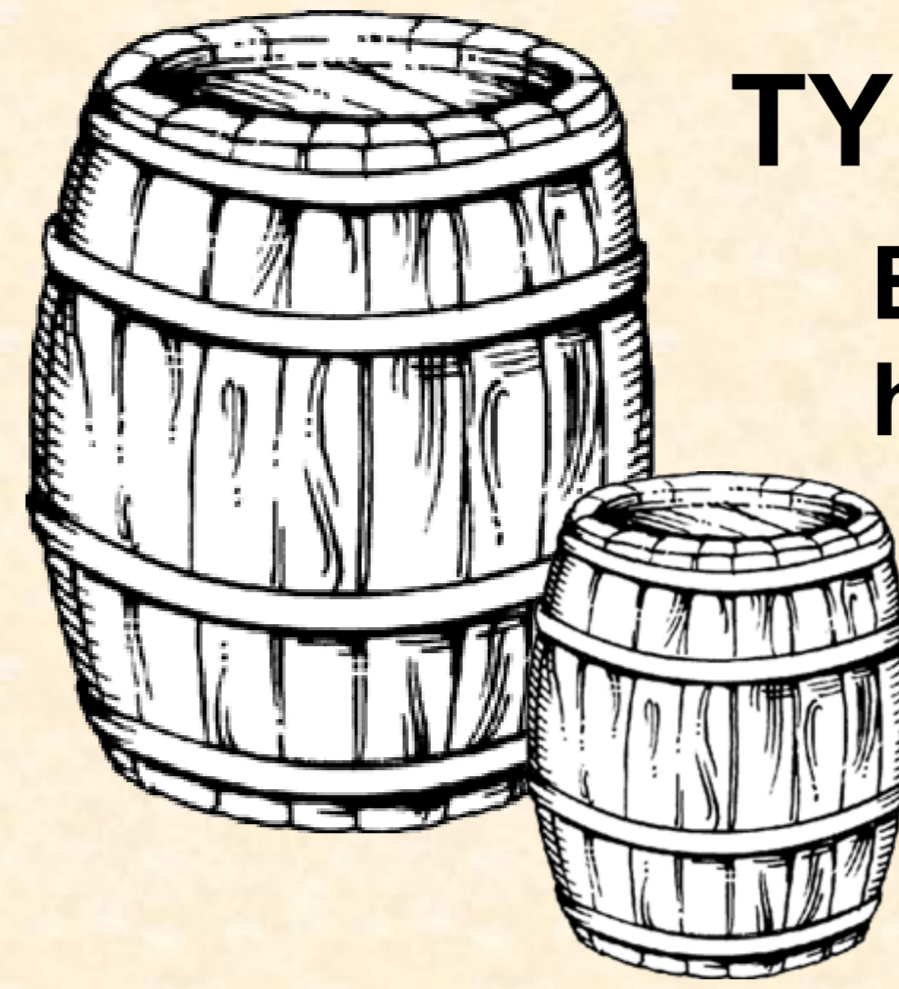
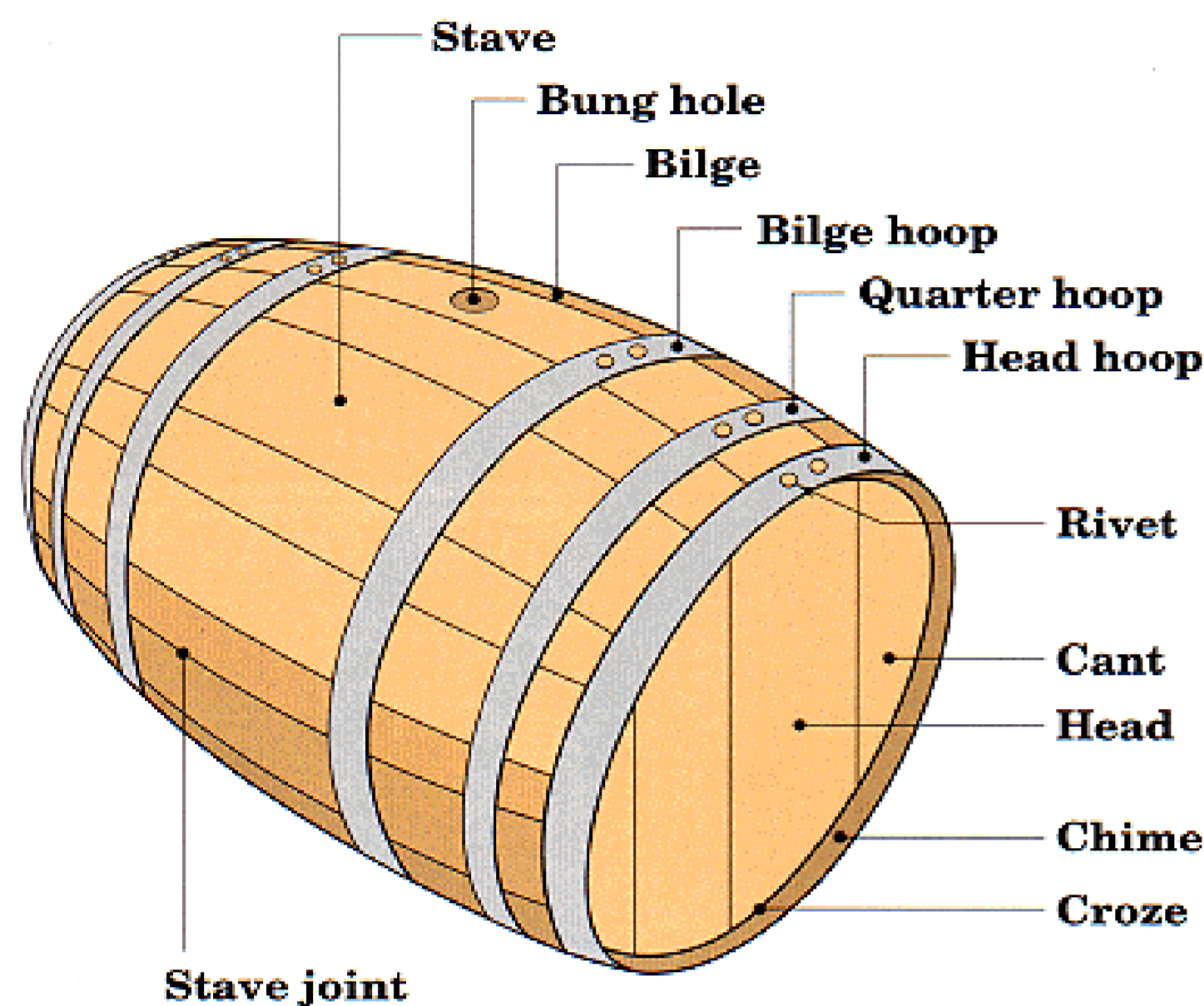


Barrel Making

Someone who was skilled at making barrels was called a cooper and was considered a very important person in the 1800's. A keen eye was needed to assure there were no knots or weak grain in the wood used. Each stave needed to be strong and well made. It took a lot of experience and a knack for selecting the right tree to do the job correctly.



TYPES OF BARRELS

Because barrels were used to hold almost everything during the Colonial period, coopers produced barrels according to their intended use, and often specialized in making one type of barrel.

A dry cooper, or slack cooper, made barrels to hold dry goods such as nails, tools, apples and lard. His barrels and containers didn't need to be watertight, nor did they require high-grade wood. A wet cooper, or tight cooper, produced barrels that held liquids such as milk, beer, and wine. His barrels had to be watertight and were made from the highest quality wood.

Many goods were shipped and stored in barrels. Fish, meats and some vegetables were dried and salted then stored and transported in them. Most any item that could be stored for a length of time would be stored in a barrel to keep out vermin. Fragile items such as eggs would be packed in them among layers of straw to keep them cooler as well as to keep them from breaking.

Barrels were great – they could be rolled down ship gangplanks; have wheels and handles attached to them so a man could cart them about; be mounted onto a pack animal; be strapped together to float behind a raft down a river. One could bury them in a stream or cool earth as refrigerating units. They were cut in half to feed or water stock, made into a cradle for a child, or used as a large mixing bowl for any number of reasons. Modified, they became butter churns, buckets and wash tubs. They were made of any tree that could be worked. Oak was preferred for wine and whiskey casks as the grain is fine and the containers could more easily be made waterproof.

One of the biggest uses for barrels was in the turpentine industry for producing “naval stores.” Different sized barrels were necessary for the storage and shipping of the pitch, tar, and turpentine used in building and maintaining wooden ships.

