



# BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

## DRAFT ANIMAL CELEBRATION:

### HORSEHAIR FIBER



Horse hair from horse tails

Horsehair was often woven with another fabric like cotton when it was being used for clothing. Men's suits were one place where horsehair was particularly sought after. The stiff horsehair fabric was perfect for the front panels of men's jackets. Horsehair has also been used to make fabric for upholstering furniture. The chairs in the parlor of the 1890 Farm Manager's House at Billings Farm & Museum have fabric made from horsehair.



Horsehair shaving brush

Horsehair comes from the manes and tails of horses. Any breed of horse can be used to gather horsehair but specific breeds are used for certain products. Horsehair is not as common now as it was in the last few hundred years, but it is still used today. It has been used to make fabric for clothing and upholstery, paint brushes, fishing line, musical instrument bows, wall plaster, and more.



Blue Chairs in the 1890 Farm Manager's House Parlor made from horsehair fabric.

Horsehair was and is a common material for paint brushes. The hair has the ability to hold a lot of paint which means the artist has to stop and reapply paint less often. It is still used today in shaving brushes used to apply shaving cream.

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String instruments use horsehair in their bows. There are some artificial substitutes, but horsehair is widely considered the best. The type of hair used can depend on the instrument. Violin and viola players prefer white horsehair because it has a smoother texture and makes a cleaner sound. On the other hand, bass players prefer dark or black horsehair for their bows because it is grabbier. In both cases, hair from horses that live in cold climates is preferred due to its strength and thickness.



White horsehair used to string a violin bow



Horsehair plaster

Horsehair plaster, sometimes called lath and plaster, was a way of finishing interior walls of houses. Created in the early 1700s and used until the mid-1900s, horsehair plaster was eventually replaced by drywall. Horsehair plaster is a combination of lime, aggregate, water, and horsehair. The hair acts as a binder, keeping the plaster together and attached to the lath walls. In the 1890 Farm Manager's House at Billings Farm & Museum, the walls were originally made with horsehair plaster. They have since been renovated to a more modern plaster.