

Army Women

In July of 1775, the Continental Congress passed a resolution to form an army hospital corps. This was to include one nurse for every ten men. Though it does not state that these nurses are to be female, it seems to be common practice throughout the war to employ women where possible. Assigning nursing duty to men necessitated taking able bodies away from the front lines.

The Connecticut soldiers at Ticonderoga in the late fall of 1775 were both sick and homesick. They had returned to New York from Canada and were waiting out the last month of their enlistments. Writing from the Fort on November 20th, General Phillip Schuyler described their eagerness to depart the Northern Army in a letter to the Continental Congress.

Our Army in Canada is daily reducing; about three hundred of the troops, raised in Connecticut, having passed here within a few days; so that I believe not more than six hundred and fifty or seven hundred, from that Colony, are left. From the different New-York Regiments, about forty are also come away. An unhappy home-sickness prevails. Those mentioned above all came down invalids; not one willing to re-engage for the winter service, and unable to get any work done by them, I discharged them, en groupe. Of all the specificks ever invented for any, there is none so efficacious as a discharge for this prevailing disorder. No sooner was it administered, but it perfected the cure of nine out of ten, who, refusing to wait for boats to go by the way of Fort George, slung their heavy packs, crossed the lake at this place, and undertook a march of two hundred miles with the greatest good-will and alacrity.



There were certainly a number of military women here at Ticonderoga in 1775. Captain Marinus Willet lists four women with his company of the First New York Regiment at Ticonderoga in November. These women likely found employment working as nurses, laundresses, sewing work, or working as servants for officers. It also included selling goods such as food, soap, and alcohol to the troops as petty sutlers. These jobs paid a wage, and meant that the woman could draw rations independent from those allotted to her husband. There were also many women at Ticonderoga in December that were not associated with the army. The involvement of civilian and military personell brought more sickness to the army in 1775. Colonel James Holmes' orders on December 11th 1775 indicate that all the women were ordered out of camp:

The Commanding Officer being informed from Good Authority that almost Every women, on this Ground hath the Veneral Disease and that they have Communicated it, to a Considerable Number of this Garrison who are thereby rendered unfit for duty, and the Public Service Suffers for want of their Service The Adjutant of the 4th Regt now doing Duty at this post to Cause all the women on this Ground who have not Husbands to be, Notified that it is my Orders they Depart this Place within Twentyfour Hours, and on failure thereof the Serjeant of the Guard to take them into the Custody of the Guard and keep them Confined not Suffering them to have Communication with any of the Garrison till an Opportunity offers to Send them over Lake George.

Such a statement indicates a fairly large presense of women at Ticonderoga at the time of Knox's arrival in 1775.



Women's clothing for this event should resemble the clothing of every-day New England and New York women in the mid-1770's. In this era, England still set the fashions in the New World, and so styles common to Great Britain would have prevailed in New England as well. Because of the season, this clothing will need to be quite warm. Pictorial evidence suggests however, that women continued to dress stylishly, even in colder months, simply layering up beneath their gowns with extra petticoats, and stockings. They might also choose to wear under-waistcoats for core warmth. On top of their gowns they layered wool or silk cloaks, hoods, tippets, muffs, mitts, or gloves. Perhaps because many of these items were reserved for the upper classes, or just because they were too small to mention, runaway ads from the winter months rarely list much in the way of specifically winter clothing. They are most likely to indicate cloaks of various colors, and a profusion of petticoats in warm materials:

Newport, October 31, 1774. Ran away from the subscriber on the 26th inst. an apprentice girl, named Jane Fontena, about 19 years of age: She speaks French, and had on when she went away a red stuff damask gown, green stuff quilted coate, a long brown cloak, and a black bonnet. Whoever shall take up said Jane Fontena and convey her to the subscriber at Newport, shall have one dollar reward, and all necessary charges paid by William Selby... [Boston Evening Post, 14 November 1774]



Six Pence Reward.

Run away from the subscriber, a servant girl, named Catherine Keeler, about 17 years of age, well grown; had on, and took with her, a short green baize gown, a brown worsted quilt,, two lincey petticoats, two pair of stockings, one check apron, one flag handkerchief, 3 ditto spotted and check linen; she has been lame in one of her big toes, and wore a red flannel on it. Whoever takes u p said servant, and secures her in any of his Majesty's goals, shall be intitled to the above reward, and their labour for their pains. Robert Tomkins.

[Pennsylvania Gazette, 25 January 1775]

Two Dollars Reward.

Ran away from the subscriber, an English servant girl named Amelia Way, about five feet two or three inches high, middling thick, has light coloured hair, a little on the dark complexion; had on and took with her when she went away, an old English lincey petticoat, a bird-eye yellowish stuff ditto, a brown camblet ditto, a Mecklenburg redish ground short gown, green flower much faded, a purple and white India ditto, a pair of leather stays, a pair of leather high-heeled shoes, an old red short cloak, and a black silk bonnet; talks in the West country dialect, and stoops forward in her walk; was seen crossing Rudolph's Ferry, in company with a young lad about sixteen or seventeen years of age. Whoever secures said servant so that her mistress may have her again, shall be entitled to the above Reward, and reasonable charges, paid by Mary Magee.

[Pennsylvania Packet, 15 January 1776]



Shift

Best: hand-stitched in white linen or white wool flannel with sleeves gathered into narrow cuffs at the elbows. Cuffs should close with sleeve buttons, or ties threaded through buttonholes. Neckline should be large enough that the shift barely shows if worn with a gown or jacket.

Acceptable: Machine-stitched (ideally hand-finished) in white linen, flannel, or cotton with elbow length sleeves.

Unacceptable: Long sleeves, obvious machine sewing, gathered neckline, neck or sleeve ruffles longer than 1.25 inches.

Stays

Best: Hand-sewn, fully boned stays with worsted or linen exterior fabric, the most common colors being dark green, blue or white. Stays should create a proper 1770's silhouette, which is to say a smooth conical torso. Most stays in this period are back lacing.

Acceptable: Machine-sewn stays which produce the correct silhouette. Partially boned stays, leather stays. No stays, if worn with a bedgown, or other loose-fitting garment. This is acceptable only for women doing serious manual labor, those portraying the ill, or those in a state of undress early in the morning, or after retiring for the evening.

Unacceptable: Unboned bodices.



Upper body garment

Best: Hand-sewn, stomacher-fronted or center-front closing English style gown in worsted, stuff, linen, or printed cotton. Printed cotton textiles must be well-documented to the period. By the 1770's gowns are far and away the most common wardrobe choice for Anglo-American women. Other choices, however, include bedgowns, shortgowns, jackets, and even riding habits.

Acceptable: Hand-finished gown, fitted jacket, bedgown, or shortgown.

Unacceptable: Sleeveless bodices. Fitted garments such as gowns or jackets worn without stays. Garments made of printed cottons with designs not documented to the period, such as modern calicos, and cabbage roses.

Apron

Best: Hand-sewn, white or checked. Most aprons are linen, or wool for work. Aprons should be long enough to cover a majority of the petticoat, and at least a yard in width. Checked linen seems to be particularly common among women of the Connecticut river valley.

Unacceptable: Very short or very narrow aprons. Wildly colored aprons. Aprons longer than the petticoats they accompany. Decorative aprons with ruffles or lace (unless portraying an officer's wife).



Petticoats

Best: 2-4 hand-sewn petticoats; striped, or matching a gown or jacket. Petticoats can be made of worsted, flannel, lindsey-woolsey, serge, or linen. Quilted petticoats are also extremely common. Length should be between low-calf and ankle. (Petticoat length varies to some extent - generally shorter petticoats are more suited to physical labor.) Circumference should be 2.5 to 3 yards. Petticoats should be pleated to waistbands and have pocket slits at the sides. Hems should be small. Alternately, the bottom edge can be bound with wool tape. Under petticoats can be shorter, or less decorative, as their function is to provide warmth and fill out the silhouette.

Acceptable: Two or more hand-finished petticoats of the proper length.

Unacceptable: Modern skirts, petticoats without sufficient fullness, or shorted than mid-calf.

Pockets

Worn underneath the petticoats and accessible through the pocket slits, most period pockets are quite large, and are used to store all sorts of women's personal items. Some pockets were beautifully embroidered, but most of the time pockets will not show. Pockets should absolutely be worn beneath another layer of clothing.



Neck Handkerchief

Best: Most depictions from the era show white linen or cotton cut in a triangle, or a square folded into a triangle, large enough to be draped around the shoulders and cover the bosom. Examples of “flag” silk handkerchiefs, and checked wool handkerchiefs also exist. Colored and printed cotton handkerchiefs are likewise documentable. Neck handkerchiefs can be worn under the neckline of the gown or pinned to the front of the gown.

Acceptable: Any sort of neck handkerchief properly worn. The vast majority of images show everyday women wearing some sort of handkerchief covering.

Unacceptable: Handkerchief tucked into the sides of the gown neckline, exposing the bosom.

Hat/head covering

Best: Flat, shallow-crowned straw, felt, or fabric covered hat with a diameter no more than 18”. Black silk bonnet with flat brim and gathered crown. Winter images of this period also often show women in hoods, either attaches to cloaks, or separate. At times, poor women, and soldier’s wives following the army can be seen wearing men’s felt hats.

Unacceptable: Hats folded down over the ears. Straw hats with rounded modern crowns.



Cap

Best: There are a wide variety of cap styles in use in the 1770's. In general, cap and hair styles have some height and volume in this period. Caps should be hand-sewn out of fine white linen or cotton organdy. Most cap styles have a gathered or pleated ruffle around the face. Caps which tie under the chin may prove more practical than other styles in December. Caps may be trimmed with silk ribbon. Caps should be starched if possible.

Unacceptable: Mob caps (circular caps consisting of one piece of material gathered to create both caul and ruffle). Caps worn down over the forehead. No cap.

Hair

Best: This will depend on social class. That said, hair styles in the 1770's are fairly large. Even women camp followers are probably attempting to follow fashions. Hair should be put up under a cap, with most of the volume on top (not at the back) of the head. Some hair should show above the forehead, and this hair may have some volume to it. Dressing hair with pomade and minimal powder is encouraged.

Acceptable: Hair pulled back or pinned up on top of the head and covered with a cap.

Unacceptable: Hair worn in a bun at the back of the head. Hair down, or left completely undressed. Large, elaborate high fashion styles.



Outerwear

Best: Wool cloak, most commonly red, closed with ties. Most images of cloaks show them being mid-calf- to waist-length. Black silk cloak or hood. Wool, silk, linen, or leather mitts for forearms. Leather gloves and fur or padded fabric muffs for the upper-middle class.

Unacceptable: Celtic-style or fantasy cloaks. Cloaks closing with decorative metal clasps.

Stockings

Best: White, blue, or natural wool yarn or worsted stockings with back seams, ending above the knee. Stockings should be held up with leather or cloth tape garters tied above or below the knee.

Acceptable: White, natural, or colored stockings of wool yarn, worsted, linen or cotton.

Unacceptable: Striped stockings, polyester stockings, athletic socks, modern tights. Though stockings with decorative “clocks” were occasionally worn in the period, few modern reproductions are accurate.

Shoes

Best: Reproduction high-heeled shoes with buckles, with fabric exterior, especially hardwearing worsteds.

Acceptable: Reproduction black, brown or red leather heeled shoes with buckles or low-heeled shoes with buckles, mules.

Unacceptable: Modern shoes.

Jewelry

Best: No jewelry, outside of officer’s wives impressions.

Acceptable: Small period earrings, non-obtrusive studs in non-earlobe piercings.

Unacceptable: Obvious modern jewelry, especially in any non-earlobe piercings

Transporting Goods and Personal Items:

Best: Pockets (hidden), appropriate baskets,



market wallets.

Unacceptable: Haversacks, modern baskets.

Staying Warm:

This is a winter event, and we encourage you to dress warmly because of that. Some strategies for staying warm in period clothes include:

-Wearing wool and silk, in place of linen and cotton. This means wearing worsted gowns, or flannel bedgowns; flannel, serge, or Lindsey-woolsey petticoats; thick yarn stockings; and even wearing wool flannel shifts.

-Layering up – wearing 3 or even 4 petticoats, multiple pairs of stockings, and laying multiple handkerchiefs. This last is especially effective if the handkerchief next to the skin is silk, which has insulating properties. Wearing a cloak also counts. Images exist of cloaks being worn inside, so do not shy away from wearing “outerwear” indoors.

-Wearing specifically winter style garments. This could include quilted petticoats; mitts or gloves; cloaks, hoods, or mantles; ladies under-waistcoats (most commonly quilted); Brunswick jackets or riding habits. These last are, unfortunately, probably restricted to middle- and upper-middle-class women.

