

Continental Army Women

The American army at Ticonderoga in 1777 included a small number of women and children who followed their husbands on campaign. An even smaller number of these women remained at the great camp on the eve of the British capture of Ticonderoga in the first few days of July. While the effective soldiers of the Army marched on foot into Vermont, the camp women left by boat along with the artillery, baggage, and hospital. Massachusetts surgeon's mate James Thatcher, recalled in his journal on the 14th of July, the evacuation eight days earlier.

Our fleet consisted of five armed gallies and two hundred bateaux and boats deeply laden with cannon, tents, provisions, invalids and women.

Less than a day after the evacuation, this entire force was captured by the British. At least one woman escaped the fort on foot, and successfully evaded the British. Eliza Kingsbury recorded her experience in a letter written two years later.

In the commencement of the War [my husband] enlisted as an Artificer, and I accompanied him with two small children and all our effects, (which tho not grand, were decent) to Ticonderoga, tho I am intirely unfit, both by nature an constitution for the fatigues of camp...

nor was I apprised [in July 1777] of the army retreating... I was obliged to leave every comfortable necessary behind and escape with only the Cloaths I wore... My two Children often cryed to me for food, but I had none to give, nor could I procure any from the heard hearted Inhabitants, and when weary with traveling at night, if I gained accep[tance] to any house, I was obliged to lye upon the floor, in the company of their dogs.



In the two years prior to July 5th, 1777, the army stationed at Ticonderoga relied on soldiers' wives and families to perform duties such as laundering soldiers' linens and nursing in the hospitals. Colonel Anthony Wayne, who commanded the Ticonderoga garrison in the winter of 1776 through the spring of 1777, occasionally issued orders pertaining to army women. Though these orders were recorded for his own regiment, they stand none-the-less as evidence for camp followers' work in the Ticonderoga camp more broadly.

December 10th 1776...Any woman belonging to the Regt, who shall refuse to wash for the Men, shall be immediately drum'd out of the Regt, as they are not found in Victuals to distress and render the Men unfit for Duty, but to keep them clean and decent.

December 23rd 1776...All such Women as will wash for the 4th P. B. will be suplied with Wood and Water for that Purpose. The Captains or Officers commanding Companies, will see that it is immediately done, and will also be punctual in paying for all such Washing and make stoppages from the Pay of the Men accordingly.

Women occasional also served as petty sutlers, and others (some of whom were not part of the army community at all, but rather local "inhabitants" sold goods to the soldiers out of the market established at Ticonderoga in the summer of 1776. In the fall of 1776, this market of, "Traders and Hucksters," was regulated by General Orders.

The [Quarter Master General] and his assistants are immediately to regulate the prices to be paid for the several commodities brought to sell, particularly Garden stuff, Venison, cheese, butter, and all other manner of Eatables. For the Future any persons bringing any of the above articles immediately for sale are to carry them to the foot of the glasses of the Old Fort, where the Market is constantly held. Should any persons be detected Monopolizing or Forestalling the Market they will be punished by a Court Marshall and have their Goods seized for the sick in the Hospital. The Market is to be opened every Day at 8' o'clock and to be allowed to continue to sunset.

Fashions in New England in the 1770's followed



British modes. Women traveling with the Continental Army no doubt attempted to wear respectable, and to some degree fashionable clothing. However, they faced the same difficulties that their soldier husbands did: supplies of clothing at Ticonderoga were limited, and the surrounding area did not provide many more options. Many of the men who evacuated the Ticonderoga on July 6th wore the same clothes they had arrived in months before. This reality was likely reflected in their wives' wardrobes as well.

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.

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.



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).

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.



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.



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.

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



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.



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.

Transporting Goods and Personal Items:

Best: Pockets (hidden), appropriate baskets, market wallets.

Unacceptable: Haversacks, modern baskets.

Blankets

Best: 2-3 Point checked, Dutch, or Rose blankets.

Acceptable: No Blanket, or shared blanket.

Discouraged: Hudson Bay blankets.

Unacceptable: Civil War grey blankets.



Cookwear & Eating Utensils

Early on in the campaign Francis' men were deficient of cooking equipment. However, General Gates assured the Massachusetts soldiers of their compliment of cooking vessels on their arrival at Ticonderoga. From Albany on May 17th 1777 Gates informed Colonel Leonard of Massachusetts that "Iron potts, or Camp Kettles, which you tell me arein so much request, ... shall be ready to supply the Necessary Number, upon the Arrival."

Best: Cast iron camp kettles or tinned iron camp kettles, wooden bowls, pewter or horn spoons.

Unacceptable: Modern cook-wear.



Camping and Bedding

Colonel Ebenezer Francis wrote to his wife on May 2, 1777 telling her that “we live in the old Barracks”. They remained there until June 22nd 1777 when Greenleaf recorded in his journal that the Regiment “Recd order to Move out of Barracks Into tents.” Neat, clean, and healthy barracks rooms were regularly inspected by a “barracks master” as stated in General Orders from Albany in January of 1777. Participants are recommended to sleep within the reconstructed barracks of the fort. Bunks will be arranged to accommodate a mess of 5-8 persons. Bunks, mattress ticks, and straw will be provided on a first come first serve basis.

Best: Inside soldier’s barracks of the Fort, 5-8 persons to a bunk with straw-filled, hand-made mattress ticks, or mattress ticks organized on the floor. Inside soldier’s huts with mattress ticks organized on the floor.

Acceptable: Linen or canvas soldier’s tents.

Discouraged: Marquees and dining flies.

