

# BROWN'S RAID WOMEN GUIDELINES



Women were essential to the operation of the British Army and its German auxiliaries. Soldiers' wives earned a living as laundresses and served as nurses, both vital to the health of the army. Women were also contracted to help produce necessary clothing for soldiers, including making breeches and trousers from old tents, to prepare the British Army in Canada for campaign in the spring 1777. In May 1777, the British army in New York records a ratio of 8 to 1, soldiers to women. The number of children was also recorded and their numbers were nearly as great as those of the women. Among the German troops, the ratio was 30 to 1. Along with their children, women officially drew rations from the army. In the British army, women were allotted a half ration and children a quarter ration until the age of ten. In June of 1777, the orderly book of the 40<sup>th</sup> regiment of foot records the number of women allotted to each company:

*"Four Women Pr Compy of Companys of 50 & 8 Women Pr Compy of Companeys of 100 are Allowed to Embark with their Respective Regiments and to be Victuald According to the Former Regulations the Remainder of the Women and Children of their Corps will be sent to NYork where A proportion of provisions & Qrs or Old Camp Equipage will be provided them."*

While laundry, nursing, and sewing important and encouraged by the British Army, the unlicensed sale of liquor by women acting as, petty sutlers was discouraged. An orderly book from the British Grenadier Battalion Orderly Book recorded orders from Three Mile Point, north of Ticonderoga, on July 2, 1777.



*"As much evil is like to Arise from the Intemperance and irregularity of Savages, it is positively Ordered that no Officer should give them Liquor, and that no soldier, Soldiers Wife, Suttler, or follower of the Army should presume to sell them any."*



General Orders on July 23, 1777 repeated the prohibition against this uncontrolled sale of liquor within the army and its allies. As General Burgoyne's Army advanced south towards Saratoga, the ranks of women following the British army swelled dramatically with the arrival of loyalist refugees. By October of 1777, the army was purportedly trailed by two thousand women, though just three hundred women were officially attached to the army's companies of British & German soldiers. Hannah Winthrop of Cambridge, Massachusetts described the women following the captured British Army of General Burgoyne in a letter to Mercy Warren in a letter on November 11, 1777.

*"Last thursday, which was a very stormy day, a large number of British Troops came softly thro the Town via Watertown to Prospect hill, on Friday we heard the Hessians were to make a Procession in the same rout; we thot we should have nothing to do with them, but View them as they Passt. To be sure, the sight was*

*truly astonishing, I never had the least Idea that the Creation produced such a sordid set of creatures in human Figure—poor, dirty, emaciated men, great numbers of women, who seemd to be the beasts of burthen, having a bushel basket on their back, by which they were bent double, the contents seemd to be Pots & kettles, various sorts of Furniture, children peeping thro the gridirons & other utensils, Some very young Infants who were born on the road; the women with bare feet, cloathd in dirty raggs such Effluvia filld the air while they were passing, had they not been smoaking all the time, I should have been apprehensive of being contaminated by them."*

Most women with the British 53<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot and the Brunswick Prinz Friedrich Regiment at Ticonderoga were spared the worst privations of General Burgoyne's captured, "Convention Army," though women were captured by Colonel John Brown's raiders along with 4 companies of the 53<sup>rd</sup>. Regardless, when the army was on the move these women had to carry all of their personal possessions with them. Gear might be carried in packs, baskets or market wallets. Blankets were tied to bags, or carried tied around the body. When encamped, this equipment could be left in barracks or shelters, but should camp be struck for march, all could be packed quickly, and easily carried by these camp followers.

By the 1770's every-day clothing for British women consists of a gown, worn over a shift, stays - which provide the correct fashionable conical silhouette, pockets, and two or so petticoats. One's skirt front is protected by an apron, most commonly of an easily-laundered material such

as white or checked linen. The bosom is covered – for fashion, sun protection, and modesty – by a neck handkerchief, and the hair is dressed, then covered by a white cap – once again this is fashionable, but also practical, as it helps keep rarely-washed hair free of dust. When outside, a hat or bonnet helps keep off the sun. The style for women's shoes of this period is for high-heels, with fabric uppers, closing like men's shoes with buckles.

Images of camp followers show them following the current fashions wherever possible. Despite the challenges of life on campaign, like all people, they strived to maintain their identities by dressing as they might in civilian life. In this era self-identity and self-respect are largely tied up with self-presentation. They were defined by their clothing, and therefore strived to dress respectfully and fashionably. That said, these were hard-working women, and on campaign they had minimal access to consumer goods. At times they wore more relaxed working garments, and occasionally adopted pieces out of their husband's military wardrobes, especially essentials like shoes and hats.

The American force which attacked the British garrison at Ticonderoga in September of 1777 almost certainly had no women with them. A female presence seems unlikely due to the nature of the raid. That said, despite political upheaval, Britain was still the inspiration for colonial fashion. American women of this period dressed in styles almost identical to those worn in Britain at the time.

## Shift

**Best:** Hand-stitched in white linen with sleeves gathered into narrow cuffs at the elbows. Cuffs should close with sleeve buttons, or ties threaded through buttonholes. Neck opening should be large; with a gown or jacket on, the shift should only barely be visible around the neckline.

**Acceptable:** Machine-stitched (ideally hand-finished) in white linen 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 or linen. 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 British women. To that end, the majority of reenactors portraying English women should be dressed in gowns to accurately simulate the period.

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

**Unacceptable:** Sleeveless bodices. Fitted garments such as gowns or jackets worn without stays. Short gowns (a uniquely American garment, unlikely to be worn by European women). Garments made of printed cottons with designs not documented to the period, such as modern calicos, and cabbage roses.



## Petticoats

**Best:** Multiple hand-sewn petticoats in wool or linen, solid-colored, striped, or matching a gown or jacket. Length should be between low-calf and ankle.

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

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

## Pockets

**Best:** Pockets of linen or cotton worn under petticoats, plain quilted or embroidered.

**Unacceptable:** Pockets worn over petticoats.

## 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.

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

## Neck kerchief

**Best:** 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. Less commonly: checked material, colors, or printed cotton. Neck kerchiefs can be worn under the neckline of the gown or pinned to the front of the gown.

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

**Unacceptable:** Anything Else.



## 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 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.

## Hats or Bonnets

**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. Some soldier's wives (perhaps especially German wives, who are depicted doing so) likely wore their husband's black felt hats.

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

## Cloaks

**Best:** Wool cloaks, mostly commonly red, closed with ties. Most images of cloaks show them being mid-calf- to waist-length. Wool, silk, linen, or leather mitts for forearms. German camp followers are occasionally depicted wearing cast-off regimental coats.

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



## Stockings

**Best:** White or grey 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:** Wooden-heeled women's shoes with buckles, with fabric exterior, especially hardwearing worsteds.

**Acceptable:** Black, brown or red leather heeled shoes with buckles or low-heeled shoes with buckles, or men's shoes.

**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



## Carrying Goods and Personal Items

**Best:** Pockets under petticoats, appropriate baskets, market wallets, military packs. Wheel barrows along with baskets, for petty-sutler impressions.

**Unacceptable:** Haversacks, modern baskets.

## Blankets

**Best:** White Handwoven British Army Issue blanket with white or brown stripes and Government Stamp, 2-3 Point, Dutch, or Rose blankets.

**Acceptable:** Plain white blankets.

**Unacceptable:** Civil War grey blankets, or modern olive drab blankets.