

BROWN'S RAID BRITISH AND GERMAN WOMEN'S CLOTHING GUIDE



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 40th 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 Companys of 100 are Allowed to Embark with their Respective Regiments and to be Victualud 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 sor-did 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 53rd 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 53rd. 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 women of the army.

In regards to clothing, women covered the front of their petticoat with a wide apron, most commonly of an easily laundered material such as white or checked linen. For fashion and sun protection women covered their bosom with a handkerchief. Women covered their dressed hair with a white linen cap - once again this is fashionable, but also practical, as it helps keep powdered hair free of debris.

A pin or decorative ribbons secured the cap in place. Once the cap is secure, when outside, a hat or bonnet should be worn over the cap. The style for women's shoes of this period is high heels, with fabric uppers, closing like men's shoes with buckles. Although worsted wool shoes are most common, some women wore heeled leather shoes or men's common shoes.

Images of women of the army show them following the current fashions wherever possible. In this era, self-identity and self-respect were largely tied up with an individual's clean appearance and presentation. Having clean, white linens including the cap and shift were a social expectation and an avenue for having respect within a regiment.

That said, these were hardworking women, and at times they wore more relaxed working garments such as bedgowns or simply worked in their stays and shifts. Conversely, images of British soldier's wives frequently showed them wearing a soldier's coat, often under a cloak in cool weather. This coat became a soldier's property after a year and by law, soldiers' widows were entitled to their husbands property.

Shift

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

Acceptable: Machine stitched main seams, with hand finished elbow length sleeves in white linen.



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

Stays

Best: Hand sewn, fully or half boned stays with worsted wool or linen exterior fabric, the most common colors being dark green, blue or brown. Stays should create a proper 1770's silhouette, which is 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 wool 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 re-enactors portraying English women should be dressed in gowns to accurately simulate the period.

Acceptable: Hand finished gown, bedgown or jacket.

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).

Handkerchief

Best: White linen, black silk 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. Checked material, colors, or printed cotton are also common. Handkerchiefs can be worn under the neckline of the gown or pinned to the front of the gown. The back, or point, of the handkerchief should be worn hanging out.

Acceptable: Any sort of handkerchief 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: Even women of the army were attempting to follow fashions and hair styles in the 1770s which were relatively tall and large. 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 bonnets with a flat brim and gathered crown are most common.

Acceptable: Bonnets of other documented colors and materials are acceptable. Some soldier's wives 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.

Acceptable: Wool broadcloth British regimental coat of madder red wool conforming to the 1768 warrant, laced, lined with white bay or serge lining with minor visible machine stitching. Short, unlaced fatigue jackets or second coats, with regimentally appropriate facings.

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 cloth tape garters tied above or below the knee.

Acceptable: White, natural, or documented 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 hard wearing 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.