1775 British Prisoners of War Womens' Guidelines

As the 26th Regiment of Foot and 7th or Royal Fusiliers served as the peacetime garrison of Canada, many soldiers wives and girlfriends made their living serving alongside the British Army. In this peacetime service, their number was significant. Within the Journal of Connecticut Chaplain Benjamin Trumbull, "The Captives, Provisions, Ordnance and war-like stores taken at Chambly on the 18th of October 1775," included, "Women & Children near 100." On November 3, 1775, Continental troops took possession of, "I suppose …70 or 80 Women and Children," at St. Jean, according to Reverend Trumbull. A September 1776, "Return of the Prisoners of 26th Regiment, taken at St. Johns and in the River St. Lawrence, and arrived at Lancaster," included among the prisoners 247 soldiers, 66 women, and 123 children. Many of these women and children followed the 26th Regiment of Foot from Ireland, to New Jersey, New York City, and Canada before their capture in the fall of 1775. Travelling, even in peacetime was not without its danger. The June 25, 1772, Virginia Gazette, related the brave death of a grenadier saving the life of a drowning child on the trip from New York City to Albany.

Albany, June 1...

On Sunday the 24th Ultimo James Lapseed, a Grenadier of the 26th Regiment (the third division of which was then on their passage from New York to this City) standing on the Gunwale of the Sloop Beggar's Benison, dangling a Child in his Arms, unfortunately fell overboard. The Sloop being then underway, the people could give him no Assistance. He kept the Child above Water, and swam a great Way; but his strength failing, he let the Child go, and immediately sunk. The Child was soon taken up by a Canoe; and, having Blood let, perfectly recovered.

Peacetime women with the British Army earned their living and their sustenance through their labor. General Orders for the British Army in North America, on September 22, 1763 removed rations for, "all Women, and every other Person from whom Stoppages cannot be made." Washing, mending, and making body linings was valuable in the British Army. Captain Bennet Cuthbertson in Chapter VII, Article VII of 1768 *A System of Military Oeconomy for a Battalion of Infantry* directed that sergeants ensure women were paid for their laundering.

> *As it often happens, that the women who wash for the Soldiers are not punctually paid (by which means, they are unable to provide that quantity of soap, the linen must require, and thereby sooner rub out) the Pay-Serjeants should be directed to stop for washing, from those, who are so idle to neglect a punctual Payment, and every week clear off the Women, who, by this method, can have no excuse, for not doing justice to the Linen.*

Though women's service as cooks on campaign has been popularly overstated, in peacetime garrisons, women did earn money as cooks. In the 1773 Crown Point Court of Inquiry, soldier's wife Jane Ross testified that, "I had two Pots for the Men's Dinner…" cooking in the, "Mess Room," on the morning of April 21, 1773, when the chimney fire began. Explaining the size of the meal and the mess, Jane Ross, replied to the court, "It consisted of Nine, in all; and I cooked Pork and Pease." Section VI Article II of the 1781 Regimental Standing Orders for the 62nd Regiment of Foot, listed all the cutlery and appointments for a soldiers' mess in a barracks. It concluded, casually indicating that women could be employed as cooks.

> *No Man to change his Mess, without Leave from his Officer. Each Mess to be furnished with as many Knives, Forks, and Spoons, as there are Men: one Roller, two Towels, two Pegs for each Man, a Looking-glass; and if no Woman, a cooking Frock.*

In the case of Crown Point, false accusations that soap making caused the April 21, 1773 fire were among allegations that prompted the November 1773, "Proceedings of a Garrison Court of Enquiry Regarding the Destruction of His Majesty's Fort of Crown Point on Lake Champlain." Article 2 of the Court of Inquiry stated, "For laying the Accident of the Fire to Negligences of the Barrack-Master, knowing it to be occasioned by two of his Soldiers' Wives boiling Soap." In the course of the court, testimony repeatedly confirmed soap making as a common activity, though dismissed it as the cause of the fire.

For the women that followed the 26th Regiment of Foot and the 7th Royal Fusiliers, their respectable everyday clothing consisted of a gown, worn over a shift, stays – which provide the correct fashionable conical silhouette - pockets, and at minimum two petticoats. The Northern Continental Army captured Ann Miller, a woman with the 7th Regiment of Royal Fusiliers along with 30 women and 51 children at Chambly on October 17, 1775. She listed her respectable wardrobe among her February 13, 1776, "List of Cloaths taken… at La Parara in Canada…"

L S d

2 Gounds Value ---------- 2 - 0 - 0

1 Black Cloke ---------- 1 - 0 - 0

1 Silk Hatt ---------- 0 - 8 - 0

1 Peticote ---------- 0 - 7 - 6

4 Aprons ---------- 0 - 12 - 0

1 Pair of Stays ---------- 0 - 12 - 0

3 Shifts ---------- 0 - 12 - 0

Childrens Cloaths -------- 2 - 0 - 0

1 Bead Tick & 2 Pillows -- 0 - 11 - 0

Master of the government sloop Betsy Captain William Friend, his wife and family lived at the north end of Lake George. Geographic isolation was no real barrier for access to good women's clothing. In a 1776 "Memorandom of things the property of William Friend, left at Ticonderoga" lists: "two pairs womens worsted stockings," "one pair womans silk gloves," and "one pair womans shoes."

In this attire, 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 was fashionable, but also practical, as it helped 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 was 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 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 English style gown in worsted, stuff, linen, or printed cotton. Printed cotton textiles must be well-documented to the period. Gowns should have robings, ideally with cuffs or flounces at the elbow. Stomachers or straps across the stomach securing a kerchief in-place are both appropriate.

Acceptable: Jackets, short-gowns or bed gowns in solid or striped worsted, stuff, linen, or small-motif printed cotton, hand-finished or with minor visible machine stitching.

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: Multiple layers of hand-sewn petticoats of striped or plain worsted, linsey-woolsey, linen, or cotton. Length should be between lower and mid-calf with a circumference between 2.5 to 3 yards. Petticoats should be pleated to waistbands and have pocket slits at the sides with small bottom hems or wool tape binding. Under petticoats can be shorter, or less decorative, as their function is to provide warmth and fill out the silhouette.

Acceptable: Two or more petticoats of the proper length with minor visible machine stitching.

Unacceptable: Modern skirts, petticoats without sufficient fullness or excessive length.

Pockets

Best: Hand-stitched, large worsted, linen, or cotton pockets with ties worn under petticoats.

Acceptable: Large worsted, linen, or cotton pockets with minor visible machine stitching worn under petticoats.

Unacceptable: Pockets worn over petticoats.

Apron

Best: Hand-stitched, white or checked linen apron, mostly covering the front of the petticoat, with ties, without a pinner front.

Acceptable: White or striped linen apron, with ties and minor visible stitching. No apron.

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: Handkerchief of white linen or cotton, checked linen, period appropriate patterned cotton or silk, worn covering the neckline of the shift.

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: Hand-sewn caps made of fine white linen or cotton organdy with a gathered or pleated ruffle around the face. Caps may be trimmed with silk ribbon. Caps should be starched if possible.

Acceptable: Caps made of fine white linen or cotton organdy with a gathered or pleated ruffle around the face with minor visible machine stitching.

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: Hair should be put up under a cap on the head. Some hair should show above the forehead.

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/ head covering

Best: Flat, shallow-crowned straw, felt, or fabric covered hat with a diameter no more than 18".

Acceptable: Black silk bonnet with flat brim and gathered crown. Cast-off soldier's felt hats.

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

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 fabric muffs for the upper-middle class.

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

Acceptable: Low-heeled shoes with buckles, mules.

Unacceptable: Modern shoes.

Jewelry

Best: Small period earrings.

Acceptable: No jewelry, 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), market wallets,

Acceptable: Pack baskets, blanket rolls or Tumplines.

Unacceptable: Haversacks, modern baskets.

Blankets

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

Acceptable: British Army, Rose, or Plain white blankets.

Unacceptable: Civil War grey blankets.