

Living History Participant Guide For the Spirit of Vincennes Rendezvous

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Burn Test

When a burn test is applied to fabric, the following characteristics should be noted; manner of burning, odor, and character of residue. The burn test should be conducted with a one inch wide strip of the material in question.

Fabric	Manner of burning	Odor	Character of residue
Wool	does not support flame	odor of burning feathers	ash forms into firm, but crushable, black bead or ball
Silk (unweighted)	spits and sparks; burns slowly	odor of burning feathers	ash forms soft crushable beads
Silk (weighted)	does not burn; chars	odor of burning feathers	black ash
Cotton	burns readily	none	small amount of soft fluffy ash
Linen	burns readily	none	small amount of soft fluffy ash
Rayon	burns readily	none	small amount of soft fluffy ash
Acetate	fuses or melts	vinegar-like odor	forms black hard ash
Nylon	melts	distinct odor	melted mass of tan or brown
Polyester (and other man-made fabrics)	melts - tall flame with black sooty smoke	burning plastic	melted mass or droplets that are black or brown

girls, should be dressed in white linen or cotton shifts. A dress may be worn over the shift. Caps, similar to women's caps, were used on both boys and girls. Unlike women's caps these were sometimes made in colors (though a white cap typically was worn under a colored one).

Since children quickly outgrew clothing many families would keep children in dresses till sometime between three and five years of age. At some point, the children would begin dressing in clothes similar to adult clothing. Wealthier families probably started using adult style clothes at an earlier age.

Soft leather booties (similar to moccasins) would have served as footwear for growing children or the children would have run barefoot.

Further research

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Before you purchase clothing

Guidelines

The following guidelines are just that, "**guidelines.**" They are intended to help participants and volunteers of the Rendezvous present a better and more accurate appearance at the fair.

It is the Spirit of Vincennes, Inc's goal to present the most accurate living history program that can be reasonably accomplished.

Time frame

The Spirit of Vincennes, Inc. Rendezvous (SOVR) targets the Revolutionary War era. This period is 1775 - 1783.

Fabrics

Use only natural fiber fabrics. Synthetic fabrics are inappropriate and will not be allowed.

- ◆ *Cotton* - Cotton was gaining popularity during this era. It was widely available in the colonies/states, but probably less so within the French communities.
- ◆ *Linen* - Probably the most common cloth during this period. Though today, if linen can be found, it tends to be rather expensive. Be aware of stores which sell "linen" or "linen look." Many of these are a blend and may contain as little as five percent linen with the remainder being man-made. Check the fiber content label on the end of the bolt. Linen/cotton combinations are wonderful for period clothing and are comfortable to wear.
- ◆ *Wool* - Though many reenactors are leery of wool clothing during summer, it actually is a good choice. Wool was worn year-round, even into the 1900s. Wool is an insulator and can actually insulate from the heat. Wool is durable and will outlast several cotton garments.
- ◆ *Silk* - This fabric often was used by the wealthy but would have been less common among the lower classes. Silk should be smooth shiny silk. The coarser silk, often referred to as "raw silk," did not exist. (It will be allowed as a natural fiber, but its use is discouraged.)

When people think about the color of clothing of the 18th century, they often believe that everything was earth tone, dull, and

home-dyed. However, commercial dye operations were quite common. In fact, most any color available today could be made then. Some colors would be more expensive than others and some more difficult to achieve than others. Some colors also would have been short-lived, fading rather quickly. The French especially enjoyed bright colors. French citizens (before the British took control in 1763) were prohibited from making their own cloth. As subjects of France, they were required to buy French cloth which was often colorful and of fine quality.

- ◆ *Black* was available and used frequently, especially among the affluent.
- ◆ *Blue* was widely available, but a more expensive dye than some other colors (use it sparingly for frontier personas).
- ◆ *Brown* was widely used and easy to dye even in the remote frontier.
- ◆ *Green* was a difficult dye to make during this period, but was available. No single dye could make green. Green was achieved through a double-dye process by first dyeing yellow then dyeing blue (see notes on blue above).
- ◆ *Grey* was widely available; mouse grey descriptions appear frequently in period documents.
- ◆ *Pink* was available.
- ◆ *Purple* was available (but not overly common, and more expensive than blue).
- ◆ *Red* was more difficult to dye but was available. Similar to blue it would be a little more costly.
- ◆ *Brick red or Madder red* was easier to achieve than true red and was more common. Most British uniforms were this color and not true red.
- ◆ *Rose-tan* was a common color.
- ◆ *Tan* was extremely common.
- ◆ *Yellow* was one of most widely available colors. There are many natural dye recipes for yellow.
- ◆ *Orange* was also available.



Correct material, color, and fiber content are essential to a good historical impression

working around fires and firearms. There is little documentation for wool aprons, however, wool will not support burning on its own and may be a wise choice for anyone working around the fire. (See burn test information at the end of the document.)

Important details for women

It often is the details of an outfit which show the true colors of the reenactor. If an accurate representation is desired, then attention must be paid to the details.

The easiest way to ruin an otherwise good 18th century appearance is by using makeup or jewelry. Eighteenth century women simply did not use makeup -- so leave it at home. Fingernail polish of any color is unacceptable.

Jewelry of the 18th century was very simple with teardrop shaped earrings being the most common. Many items sold by vendors at events are not correct for the period. Simple necklaces may be worn; crosses were a common adornment. Velvet bands or silk ribbons may be tied around the neck as well. If you are not sure of the jewelry, then leave it off. While beads are very appropriate for Native American impressions, they should not be used for European settler representations.

Buttons are uncommon on women's clothing. Some upper class garments such as riding jackets do utilize buttons. Women's clothing typically was closed by the use of straight pins, lacing, or ties. It is acceptable to use safety pins for this function, so long as the pins are used from the inside and are not visible.

There are examples of women wearing men's clothing; however, this would be a very uncommon practice and should not be overly used.

Children's clothing

Infants often were placed in linen shirts then wrapped (swaddled) using a long narrow piece of cloth. This bound the arms and legs, thus restricting the infant's movement. Today, swaddling is not recommended for health reasons. A simple shift and flannel or wool blankets are acceptable. Toddlers, both boys and



A shift and dress were worn by both boys and girls.

settlements.

Fichu (a kerchief type cloth) was also called a modesty cloth. These were worn by most women and simply were a square or triangular piece of cloth. This cloth would be tied around the neck or tucked into the top of a gown or jacket. They were typically made of linen or cotton. Many were made from silk and may have represented a woman's most prized article of clothing. Many were as much as 36 inches wide. An unfinished edge should be avoided as most would have a fine rolled hem around the edges.

Stays and jumps are the 18th century equivalent of a bra. They hold some characteristics in common with a corset. The purpose of the garment, however, was somewhat different. A corset was designed to change and alter a woman's appearance giving her a smaller waist and an hourglass shape. A stay, on the other hand, is a support garment providing support for the breasts as a bra does. It also provided back support as a woman's life was not easy and involved much hard labor.



Stays and jumps

Stays are an undergarment and should never be worn in such a manner as to be visible to men in the area.

Pockets are small cloth bags attached to string and tied around the waist. Pockets may be plain or elaborately embroidered. Pockets are to be worn *under* the petticoat and are not an outer garment.

Aprons were worn by most women during the 18th century. It is useful to wipe hands, handle a hot pot, carry items, and much more. It also was a sign of a good woman willing to work. The suggestion of a good woman was so strong that small apron-like appendages show up on gowns and other upper class garments. Every woman should wear an apron!

Aprons should be linen or cotton. The vast majority seem to have been white, though other solid colors can be used as well. Stripes and checks also may be used, with the majority of these being blue and white.

Safety tips for women

Skirts, aprons, ties, strings, and other dangling or loose items all are potential fire risks. Please be conscious of this risk when

Fabric designs and patterns can be harder to get correct. If one looks through paintings, drawings, descriptions, and surviving garments from the period, a preponderance of plain colors would be noted. Most people wore garments made of a single color. However, color coordination was not important. It would have been perfectly acceptable to wear orange breeches, purple socks, a green waistcoat, and a red overcoat.

After solid colors, stripes would be the most common design. Stripes would have been wide strips at least 1/2" (smaller stripes did exist but are less common). Two- and three-inch wide stripes would not have been uncommon. Narrow stripes should be used sparingly. If using striped material, look for material with stripes woven into the fabric rather than printed onto the fabric. Look at the back of the fabric -- if it is woven, a similar design will be seen on front and back.

Printed cloth was available. Printing was accomplished by using a wooden block cut with the design. It would be hand-dipped in paint and applied to the fabric. As can be imagined, this is a very slow and labor-intensive process. This method made the cloth quite expensive. Printed fabrics were typically two colors. The first color would be the color of the fabric. The second color would be the color of the paint. Patterns or designs which used more than one color compounded the problems -- not only was it necessary to do all the work by hand, but the second color had to be lined up and applied in coordination with the first printing. This also compounded the price.

Most printed fabrics during the pre-1800s were made in India. The blocks to do the printing also were made in India. For this reason, there is an obvious connection between the patterns and India. Flowers would represent flowers of India. Roses were extremely rare on printed cloth prior to the Victorian period of the late 1800s and are best avoided in garments at the Rendezvous. When choosing patterns for printed material, the best advice is to keep it simple. Small intricate floral prints should be avoided. As stated above, most prints were only two colors and contained designs that were rather large (at least one-inch). Prints also tended to have space between the printed objects. Avoid materials with overlapping designs or continuous designs. The small multicolored "calico" of today would simply have been impossible to make during this period.

Although period documents list calico as a cloth, do not confuse this listing with modern calico. The word calico comes into usage via the town of Calicut, India, where much of the printing was performed. The term calico was first applied to only fabric from this region but, by the late 1700's, the word began to mean any material which was 100% cotton.

Checks and plaids were available; theoretically any pattern which is woven could have been made. While kilts and other Scottish items sport plaids, there is little evidence that they were used elsewhere. Checks, on the other hand, were fairly common. Be careful picking checked material: checks, for shirts, should be at least three-fourths-inch with one-inch being preferred. Do not use checked gingham (standard three-eighths-inch squares)! Smaller checks appear in other garments, most notably, women's aprons. Blue and white being the most common check colors for these garments.

The bottom line - the best design is no design. Plain colored cloth is right for any period. The modern eye often is drawn to pretty prints and colors, thus, these often are overrepresented in the reenacting community. Consider using simple plain colors when possible.

European settlers and militia

Men's clothing

Knee breeches were all the rage during the 18th century. These garments tended to fit tightly around the knee and thigh, but were extremely baggy in the rear. (If they fit tightly around the knee, the material of the leg could not rise when the wearer sat down. The extra room in the rear allowed the user to sit without tearing material.) Knee breeches should have ties or buckles at the cuff below the knee. Buttons on the cuff of the leg were military issue and were not common among civilians.

Breeches and trousers should be drop front style -- receiving this name from the flap which buttons up the front.

Trousers (long pants) are OK, but were typically a sign of the lower class. Trousers may have been more common among the French. Similar to breeches, trousers should be drop front style.



Women in cloth caps, short gowns, and petticoats. Aprons should be worn by most women. Straw hats were common, but would be worn over a cloth cap

A petticoat (skirt) Though original garments utilized fitted waist band a drawstring allows a variety of people to use a particular garment. As this detail of the petticoat typically is not visible, this type of garment (with drawstrings) will be allowed.

The petticoat often was made from as much as five yards of material and then gathered or pleated around the waist. A typical petticoat will contain at least three yards of material. Petticoats of less material tend to look flat rather than full. Part of the reason for bunching so much material around the waist was to make the hips look bigger. Women often wore small padded pieces under the petticoat in the rear and on the sides to further add to this illusion.

Petticoats of the English/Americans were typically long, extending below the ankle, while French women were observed with petticoats which came to just below the knee (which was appalling to the Americans).

Footwear includes leather shoes either with ties or with buckles. Fabric shoes of similar design were common among ladies. Most women's shoes had a somewhat pointed toe and a low heel one- to one-and-a-half-inches. Ties may be of cord, leather, or ribbon. Center-seam or pucker-toed moccasins also would be correct for frontier women. Wooden shoes were common in



Shoes tied with ribbon

Indians. However, fancy bead work should not be carried by the average reenactor.

Women's clothing

Hats/caps were worn by all women older than age 15. Mob caps are not the best choice. A simple cap would be more appropriate for most women. The mob cap was considered an indoor hat or may have been worn under more fancy hats. The snood, a net for holding hair at the back of the head, did not exist during the Revolution. Other head coverings, such as using a neck cloth, are appropriate, though less common.

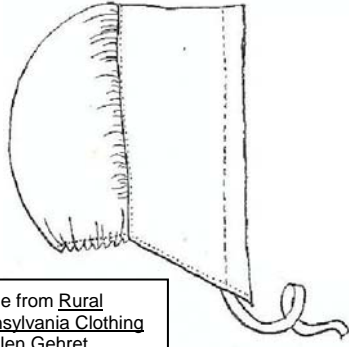


Image from Rural Pennsylvania Clothing by Ellen Gehret

A shift (chemise) is the basic undergarment. These were universally white and only occasionally were off-white.

Colored or printed shifts will not be allowed! Sleeves MUST cover the elbow! Shoulders must always be covered! Sleeves and neck both may utilize drawstrings to adjust the size. (Avoid ribbon! Use cotton cord or linen tape instead.)

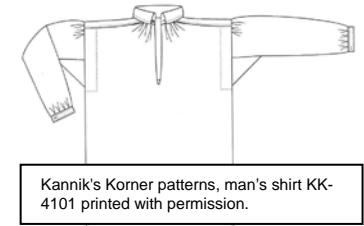
Be careful about using lace as it was extremely expensive during the 18th century and only would have been available to the wealthy.

The shift is an undergarment and a woman would never appear in public while wearing only this garment.

A bodice (vest) are not appropriate for this period of history and should not be used.

A short gown was a common 18th century clothing item worn by women of all ages of the working class. Similar to the chemise, sleeves should cover the elbows. No buttons, ties, or other such closures were used. Instead the garment was pinned in the front. Broaches, cameos, and other jewelry items are discouraged from use as a pin for this garment. This garment should be pinned all the way down the front. The shift should not show along the bottom front of the gown. The shift, especially if containing ruffles, may show at the neckline and around the arm openings.

Shirts should be long, often coming to the knee. Shirts had a collar similar to modern shirts (typically four inches wide) allowing it to fold down. Shirts should have one button at the collar. Most men's shirts were white. Sleeves are to be full with gathers or pleats at the shoulder and wrist. Wristbands are about two-and-one-half-inches wide. All shirts of this period should have gussets sewn under the arms to allow freedom of movement.



While white was the most common color, just about any other plain color does show up during the period. Stripes and checks also can be documented. Do not use plaids or prints for men's shirts of this period.

A man's shirt should always be covered with one of the following: a waistcoat (vest), a frock (coat), a smock (workman's shirt), or a hunting smock (shirt). A man with an exposed shirt would be rare, even on the frontier. Shirts should be tucked in and never should be visible below the waistcoat. A man should never roll his sleeves up beyond the elbow.

Waistcoats (vests) Were worn at all times -- summer and winter. Waistcoats should be the short-waisted coats of the late 18th century. These typically have a point at the bottom front of each side of the waistcoat which falls just below the waistline (covering the breeches buttons). French-style waistcoats tended to be cut straight across the front at waist level but still long enough to cover the breeches buttons.

A hunting smock/shirt is a longer outer garment made of tougher material and worn over the normal shirt and waistcoat. This garment is designed to take the brunt of abuse during work or hunting. If wearing a hunting frock (long shirt) in public, a shirt and waistcoat should be worn under it.

This garment typically is made just as the man's shirt, being designed to pull on over the head with no front opening. The hunting smock is an outer garment designed to protect other clothing - the waistcoat should never be worn over this garment.

Knee socks were worn with breeches to cover the calf of the leg. As noted above, breeches should tie or buckle at the knee; this helps to hold up the sock without the use of a garter. If a garter is necessary to hold up the socks, avoid leather ones with buckles (see below).

Civilians would use woven garters or simple strips of cloth or leather to hold up their socks.

Shoes were quite common both in civilization and on the frontier. Typical shoes included a buckle in the front or would have some type of lace on the front.

Moccasins were commonly found on frontier people and should be center-seamed or pucker-toed. Dyer (brand name) moccasins are not acceptable.



Buckle shoes

Hats were worn by everyone. No man would leave the house without a head cover. The rather flat slouch hat was worn



Short waistcoat typical of the Revolutionary War period. Also drop front breeches, white shirt, flat hat, neck cloth, and leather belt

throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. During the Revolutionary period tricorns were the fashion trend. A tricorn is simply a flat hat with three sides turned up. A cocked hat has only the left side turned up. The hat should not be cocked on the right or at the back.

All men's hats were commonly made of wool felted. Black was, by far, the most common color. Other, less common, colors include white, brown, and gray. A workman's cap may also be worn and may be a good alternative; these hats are made of cloth and are easily sewn.

Berets and other hat styles are discouraged. Fur caps such as the stereotypical coonskin hat, are period correct. Unlike the stereotype, they tended to not use the face or tail on the hat. Hats of this period also should not have a front bill on them. Appropriate

animal hides include raccoon, skunk, and fox. Avoid coyote and avoid hats which use the animal's face.

French style stocking caps also are acceptable and were worn year round.

Neck cloths were worn by almost everyone. The majority of them were black or white. This simple cloth was a square piece of material, folded into a triangle, and then tied around the neck. Many were made of silk while the common man may have one from cotton or linen. This may also be worn (pirate style) as a head covering.

Leggings were commonly worn by men of all classes. Leggings were used to protect the lower leg and stocking when working or hunting. Leggings for this period were just above knee-length, occasionally being four or five inches above the knee.



Wool leggings with woven garters

Most leggings are wool and constructed as a simple tube pulled on over the foot. Most leggings of this period utilize a seam on the outside with a flap of up to four inches from the seam.



Double-D buckle and belt

Belts for most outfits should be approximately two-and-one-half-inches wide and have a brass single or double D-buckle. (Wider belts with round buckles are from a later period

and are not acceptable.)

Trade silver, copper, other jewelry, or adornments would be extremely rare among European settlers, militia, or other Americans. These are best avoided. Trade silver such as the beaver, kissing otters, or turtle ornaments are more common during the latter part of the 18th century and into the 19th century.

Crosses are the main exception. Pewter, brass, or silver crosses turn up at many archeological digs and were probably common among the average man or woman.

Celtic jewelry, popular among reenactors, should be kept to a minimum.

Beads should not be worn by European settlers. Some French may have utilized the beads which they used in trade with the