

Guide for Civilian Impressions

The basic time period that the Fort was in operation is known as the Regency Period. The Regency Period denotes a period of fashion. This is the time era of Jane Austen. Looking at movies of her works like "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" will give the interpreter a good idea of the general outline of fashion of the period. There are also a good number of hobbyists who belong to the Jane Austen Society. This is a group that dresses in the appropriate period clothing and holds dinners and dances. A quick Google search of "Jane Austen Society" will bring up a number of webpage's that have good descriptions of both men and women's clothing. What we have to remember is that we were located on the Frontier. A lot of the high fashion of the period would not have made sense to folks who lived and worked outdoors a lot. While the general overall look of the Regency is what we are trying to accomplish, our impressions should be a little rougher around the edges - more like Country Folk who would have not had access to the finest fabrics used in the big cities.



Being on the Frontier, the Fort was at the end of a very long supply chain. Everything had to be imported into the area and that drove up the cost. People probably made their clothing of more durable fabrics than seen in the city, and they probably wore their items of clothing longer and patched them up to maintain their usefulness over a longer period of time. People also had fewer clothes than we are used to. Most period houses that survive do not have closets. Looking at wills and inventories of the period, it is easy to surmise that most people had only 2 to 3 sets of clothing. In many larger cities there were thriving second hand clothing markets where lower class citizens could get hold of clothing that was no longer at the height of fashion, or that had started to show some wear. There were distinct class separations in society, and this was a time period when one's occupation could probably be guessed by how one dressed.

Some authors have maintained that the social stratum of regular society was a bit more relaxed on the Frontier, simply because there were so few people. In a garrison the size of the Fort most people probably knew or knew of most of the other people. However, being that it is a military post, there were still clear distinctions between officers and their families and the rank and file. Clearly one could identify an officer and his family members by the way they dressed in comparison to everyone else. So the first thing to identify in building your impression is who are you? This question may take some time to answer and requires a little research on your behalf. However, this is a pretty fun and interesting activity. Trying to figure out your back-story, such as where did you come from, what you did, what are you doing now, will all help to generate a better impression when you interact with the public.



Painting by John Lewis Krimmel

The above painting depicts travelers grabbing a very hurried and impromptu dance on the road in early 1810's America (in rural Pennsylvania), and so shows practices that would have been considered rather inelegant in genteel circles in England at the time (such as smoking in the presence of ladies, smoking indoors, taking off one's tailcoat in the presence of ladies -- leaving a man wearing only waistcoat and shirt, not taking off one's hat indoors -- and holding onto one's horsewhip while dancing!). Note that even the poor musician is wearing a tail coat and round hat, even though his clothing is obviously of a cheaper grade and patched.

Notice that the men's hair is longer and is brushed forwards, also notice their sideburns. What we would consider "Elvis" style sideburns were extremely popular during the time period. Most men did not wear beards during this time period. The man on the left appears to be wearing a kerchief around his neck with no necktie or stock. This is also a practice of the poorer rural folk. Also notice the "keyhole" pattern of the cut of the men's vests and coat. Patterns are available for this time period from various historic pattern makers. Just look for the term "Regency" when searching.

The women's dresses are still very high waisted, maintaining the profile of the earlier "Empire" period. One woman wears a hat to cover her head. Most women wore a head covering outdoors, but the older style mobcap was out of fashion and only worn by older women at this time. Bonnets and straw hats were popular, as well as women wrapping material around their heads to make a turban. On the Frontier it would also have been acceptable to wear a scarf. Younger women might even go out bareheaded.



Painting by John Lewis Krimmel

This one shows a farm family having a wedding in 1820. We still have the same basic outline in Regency fashion, but in a simple and sturdy form used by country folk. The dresses are high waisted. Some of the women are wearing bonnets and caps, and the men all have vests and tailcoats. Even the children are dressed as miniature adults with the same articles of clothing. This painting represents what the middle class of farmer's merchants and the like would have looked like in the period. The girl holding the door has gathered her outer petticoat. This was often done to ease movement, or when one got warm. The bridesmaid on the right appears to have gathered her outer petticoat behind herself as well.

The little girl setting on the bench appears to be wearing what is called a "bed jacket." This is a high waisted cover that was often worn over the dress to add extra warmth and protection. A similar garment with high waist and long sleeves was called a "Spencer Jacket."

WHO AM I? WHAT DO I DO?

You are interested in becoming a civilian, but what do you do at the Fort? What is the purpose behind you being here? You may feel lost at this point, but don't worry. There were tons of civilians here at the Fort, and they all had one reason or another for being here. The following civilian roles have all been documented as having been here at the Fort. So let's look at a few of the roles that civilians played at the Fort to see if one of them is interesting to you.

Female Civilian Impressions

Laundress: One laundress was appointed for every 17 men at the Fort. These were respectable women who were married to soldiers. There must have been a lot of soldier's wives at the Fort. Every time a laundress is discharged or removed from the roles, there is someone else ready to take her place.

Hospital Matron: Three women were detailed to the Surgeons to work as hospital "matron" or nursemaids. They were Mary Stanton, Sarah Mead and Catherine Otis. Mary's husband George Stanton was the Hospital Steward.

Officers Wives Many of the Officers brought their families along.

Soldiers Wives: The wives of the enlisted men.

Cooks or Domestics for the Officers. Many of the officers hired cooks and Nannies for their families.

Native American Women: See Native American Impression section.



Officer's Cook (Courtesy Julie Ashton)

We know that a number of women were at the Fort. They were the wives of soldiers and officers. Many served in the role of Laundress. Laundresses were not loose women or camp followers. At a stable post they generally were the wives of enlisted men who were busy raising families and working for the military establishment.



Mending (Courtesy of FOFA website)

If you are unsure of what impression to start with, a Laundress is a good place to "get your feet wet." Laundresses could be doing anything from cooking to cleaning to chopping firewood to mending clothing. The clothing of the laundress would have been a simple work dress with sturdy shoes and an apron of some sort to protect the dress. Patterns are available for either Empire or Regency style dresses. Just remember to look at the simpler "Day Dresses" and not the lavish ball gowns. Stick with simple cotton prints or solids. Remember we are portraying the working class. Most women wore a head covering of some kind, but mobcaps were out of style by the Fort period and would have only been worn by an older woman. Laundresses worked outside and probably would have worn wide brimmed hats, turbans or scarves on their heads. Women's shoes of the period were not very sturdy. So Women would have probably worn more of what was called a walking boot.



Laundress (Courtesy of FOFA website)

The position of Laundress became official in the US Army in 1802. Any women aged 13 or older who could handle the physical work could be a Laundress. Laundresses were appointed by Company and the Company Captain was the one who appointed them. The Council of Administration set the number of Laundresses per man and the rates the Officers, Non Commissioned Officers and Enlisted Men paid to have their laundry done.

At the Fort, one laundress was appointed for every 17 men. With a Garrison of about a 1,000 men there would have been about 58 official Laundresses. Laundresses also received a full ration of food and whiskey per day just like the soldiers. A laundress received 50 cents per month for every Non Commissioned Officer and Enlisted man and 75 cents per dozen pieces for every Officer (if she supplied the soap) and 62 and a half cents per dozen if the Officer provided the soap. Soap was in short supply at the Fort, and the COA put out a bounty of 4 cents per pound for any saved grease that could be used to make soap. This rate of pay puts the Laundress significantly ahead of the private soldier in pay. A private got 5 dollars per month. The baseline of a laundress was 8.50 per month if she only laundered for her 17 enlisted men. Of course, she could make more per month for mending and doing the laundry of Officers and their wives.



Women at Quartermaster's Stores (Courtesy of FOFA website)



Portrayal of Seamstress and Soldier's Wife (Courtesy of FOFA website)

The regulations of 1802 allowed the following items to be issued to each 4 laundresses: 1 Common tent, 1 hatchet, 1 camp kettle and 2 mess tins.

The job of laundress was a tough physical job. The laundress had to cut up her own firewood, start the fire, fill the wash boilers with water (2 boilers, 1 for soap and 1 for rinse) and had to make the soap ahead of time before she could even begin to wash clothes. The laundry was washed by hand, wrung out by hand as no ringers were available at this time period, then it was either hung up or spread on the ground to dry.

Laundresses probably ended up getting married pretty quickly. They were most often married to Non Commissioned Officers (Corporals, Sergeants and above ending right below Lieutenant, who was a Commissioned Officer). This group would have been their social equals in pay and social strata inside the post. Enlisted men were not allowed to marry as it was thought that their pay was too low to support anyone but themselves.

Makeup During the Fort Era

The trend in women's makeup during the Empire and Regency periods was a swing back to a more natural look after the heavy makeup of the Georgian period. Cosmetics were available in the cities and were worn by middle and upper class women. Fair complexions with rosy cheeks were the fashion in this time period. Powders and pomade (grease paint) were available to even out the complexion, and rouge was available for the cheeks. Burnt cork or soot (lampblack) was used to darken the eyebrows, a form of lipstick was available and numerous books and recipes were available to instruct women on how to make cosmetics at home. Eye makeup was not fashionable, and women took great care to preserve their complexions by wearing bonnets and hats and carrying parasols to protect them from the sun.

However, the question is how much makeup made it to the Fort? The nearest large city was St. Louis, and everything would have had to travel by keelboat, upriver, to the Fort. The next question is of cost, who could afford it if it did in fact make it here?



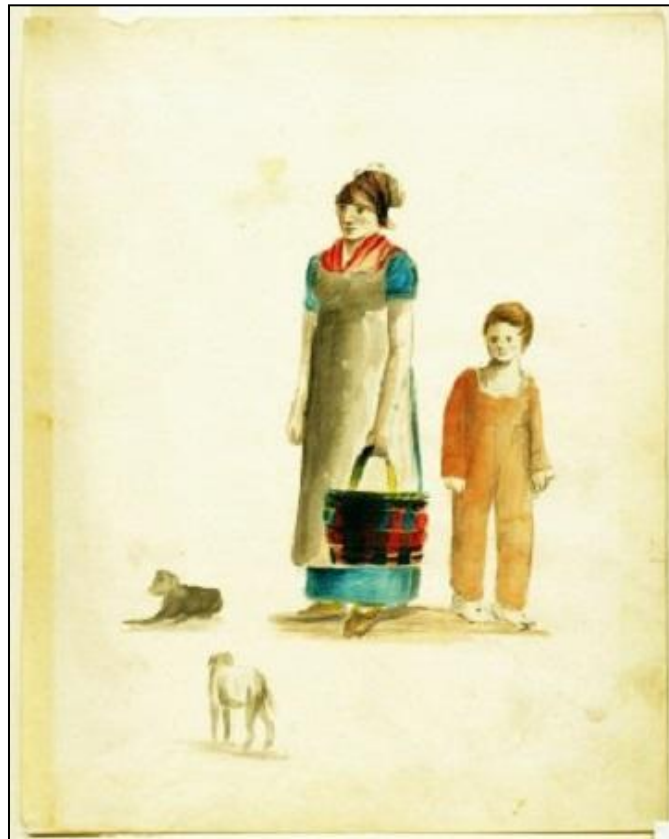
Portrait of 2 young Ladies, St. Louis, Anna Maria von Phul, St. Louis 1818.

A Laundress by definition is someone who works outside in all kinds of weather. Laundresses had to split and haul their own wood, build their own fires, carry water to fill the pot, make their own soap, and then came the job of actually doing the laundry. Common sense says that they probably did not carry a parasol to protect their complexion. Cost and conditions were probably the main factors in putting most readymade cosmetics out of reach for the common laundress. However, an Officer's wife might have been able to afford these purchases and very well could have worn readymade cosmetics.

One form of makeup that would have been readily available on the Frontier was vermillion. Vermillion is a paste about the consistency of modern lipstick and was very bright red. This was a popular trade item for the Native Americans, was widely available at trading posts and quite possibly as part of the presents distributed to the Indians by the Indian Agent. If applied sparingly, vermillion could have answered as rouge and lipstick. Vermillion was readily available and relatively cheap, so even a laundress would have been able to afford it. As mentioned earlier, burnt cork or lampblack was also readily available to darken the eyebrows, and was probably used by laundresses as well.

So did the ladies at the Fort wear makeup? The answer is probably that the majority of the women wore some makeup, most likely homemade or cheaply available and common items like vermillion, lampblack and burnt cork. They strived to look as fashionable as they could given their economic station. Laundresses and working class women were probably more tanned and exposed to more weather conditions than their paler counterparts who were Officer's wives who did not have to work outdoors and could carry a parasol.

Just remember to take off your modern mascara and eye shadow!



French Creole Woman and boy, St. Louis, by Anna Maria von Phul 1818

Male Civilian Impressions

Teamsters: The army utilized teamsters to haul its freight in wagons and carts and by horseback. Lt. R. Holmes, making a report on the condition of the Fort and livestock to the Quartermasters office in St Louis in September of 1826 noted the presence of Teamsters.

Army Contractors and Vendors: Many supplies were bought and brought up from the settlements. Herds of pigs and cattle were brought to the Fort. Many Vendors are mentioned in the records. Ashael Savory, who helped drive up a herd of cattle, stayed on at the Fort in charge of the cattle herd.

Interpreters: Michael Burdeau was listed as an interpreter for the Omaha.

Riverboat Men: Many keelboats and other river traffic docked at the Fort. The keelboat men were largely French from St. Louis. However, some were of American stock. Mike Fink, a well known American keelboat Captain, passed through the Fort.

Trappers and Mountain Men: Almost all of the famous ones passed through the Fort, either coming up or headed down.

Hunters: One documented hunter was Mr. Paine. He hunted and killed wolves in the area of the Fort.

Native American Men: See Native American Impression section.

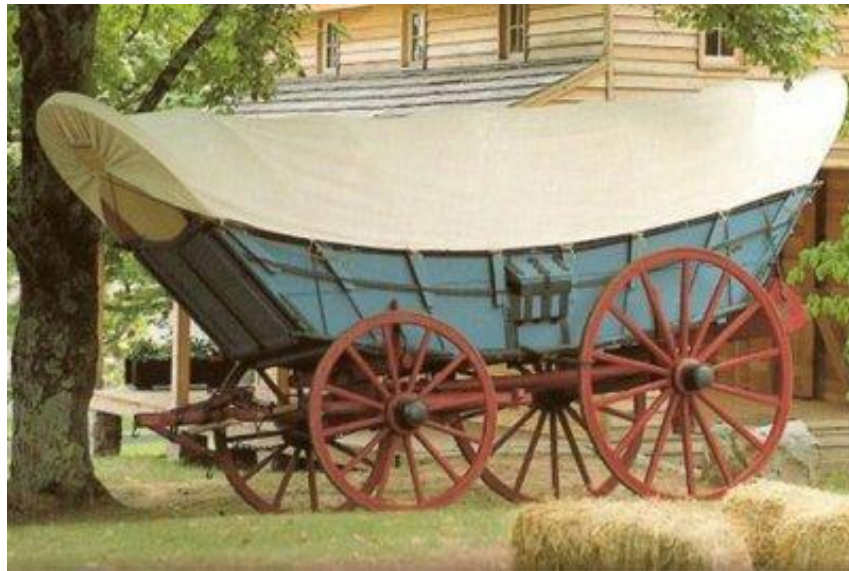


An early Mountain Man headed west (Courtesy Dennis Leonard, American Mountain Men)

Teamster

In 1780 the Army organized the office of Wagon Master, organized under the umbrella of the Quartermaster, to hire wagons and teams and drivers to transport Army goods. It was thought that the average soldier did not have enough knowledge to care for and operate a team of horses or mules, or a yoke of oxen, and to look after the wagons. Therefore, civilian Teamsters were hired to drive Army wagons. The Fort records mention Teamsters, and we know that a number of oxen were kept at the Fort.

Bullwhackers and muleskinners already had established reputations back East along the National Road hauling freight. They generally hauled freight in "Conestoga" wagons. Conestoga's were the large covered wagons with upswept ends that could haul 4 or 5 tons of freight. The reputation of the men who drove these wagons was one of hard fighting, hard drinking, swearing and smoking. In fact the nickname for a cigar, a stogie, is a shortening of the word Conestoga. These men were experts with the bullwhip, which was used to make a cracking sound and urge the animals forward. However, they were also used to draw blood from the animals when they weren't very cooperative.



Conestoga Wagon (Internet image)

Contractors brought goods to the Fort either by pack train or by wagon, as well as the goods that were delivered by keelboat. Teamsters would also have driven the wagons used to move items around the Fort and to the various locations like the farms and warehouses. Teamsters who drove mule teams generally rode the near mule (driver's side, closest to the front wheel) and were commonly called "muleskinners." Teamsters that drove oxen generally walked alongside the yokes of oxen and drove them with a whip, these men were called "bullwhackers."



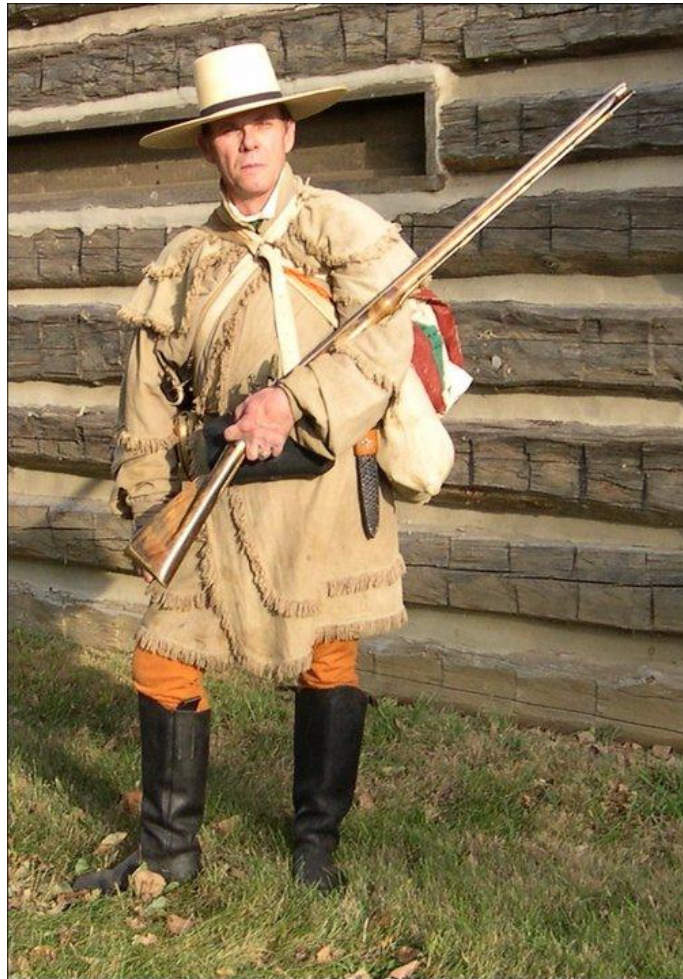
Teamster (Courtesy, Pam Dumler)

The dress of the Teamster would have followed the fashion of the time, but the clothing would have been made of heavier, rougher cloth for wear and tear in the outdoors in all kinds of weather. The Teamster in the illustration wears a shirt and thick pants. Instead of shoes he has chosen boots to walk along beside the team. He also wears a fashionable top hat (called a round hat during the Fort era) made of cheaper felt, but it is a little worse for wear from exposure to the outside. Over the top of everything he has chosen to wear a Hunting frock. This garment was first made popular during the Revolutionary War. Notice however that styles do change, and the frock is tailored longer than the ones during the revolution. The frock resembles those worn by the men of the Rifle Regiment in its cut. The hunting frock was almost universally worn by men on the Frontier, and was so popular in Frontier states that it was often prescribed as the uniform wear of militia.

For this impression get yourself a whip and learn to make it crack. There are plenty of instruction videos on YouTube that are very helpful.

Contractors and Vendors

Items for use by the Military were purchased back in the States. Hogs and cattle were driven to the Fort from Chariton and Liberty Missouri. Goods were also brought up to the Fort. A letter written by Benjamin O'Fallon describes that a wagon train bringing goods to the Fort from Chariton, Missouri in 1821 was attacked by the Otoe and the goods and stock were taken. In 1824 James Erickson was contracted from Liberty, Missouri to bring in 70,000 lbs. of hogs on the hoof. Assistant Commissary Z.C. Palmer noted the completion of the contract on December 3, 1824. The Volunteer in the illustration is dressed for the trail. He is carrying his bedroll and personal gear on his back. He wears a broad brimmed hat to protect himself from the sun, and has chosen sturdy boots for the trail West. He wears the ubiquitous Hunting Frock, a common garment worn to protect the clothing. He is armed to protect against the hazards of the trail. For this impression, carrying contracts for goods to be delivered to the Fort would add to the authenticity.



Army Contractor, Vendor (Courtesy Dan Watson)

Boatmen

The crews of the keelboats that plied the Missouri were almost totally manned by men of French-Canadian extraction. These men made a living plying the waters of the North American Continent for over 200 years. In the Summer of 1823, the Assistant Quartermaster's office in St. Louis made an assessment of keelboats used in the trade and determined that the necessary crew of the keelboat consisted of 1 Patroon (Captain), 15 hands, 1 Bows man, and 1 Cook. The boat could haul between 28 to 35 tons of goods with 8 tons of that weight being subsistence for the crew.



Riverman/Boatman (Courtesy Pam Dumler)

The French culture was quite colorful, and French boatmen could be recognized solely on the basis of the clothes they wore. The crewman generally wore a brightly colored scarf on his head. He also wore a shirt and most often a breech cloth with either woolen or buckskin leggings. A finger woven sash of a bright color was traditionally worn about the waist. Footwear consisted of moccasins, or more regularly going barefoot. These men dressed in light weight clothing that would easily dry since they were in and out of the water on a regular basis. The boatmen were noted for wearing peacock feathers, trade silver and other colorful items in their headscarf's. In cooler weather no boatmen would be without his blanket coat (called a Capote) and his stocking like cap (called a toque - pronounced tuke). For a Riverman, a clay pipe or a period game of cards or dice, with a boiling pot of rubaboo stew (a common Canadian stew) would be appropriate to the character.

Spanish Delegation

During August and September of 1824, a delegation of men from the newly independent country of Mexico came to the Fort. Coming from Santa Fe, these men were here to sign a treaty with the Pawnee Indians to stop the Pawnee from raiding down into New Mexico territory. New Mexican clothing at the time was very flamboyant and easily recognizable. Flat top hats or "sombreros," sashes, short jackets called "chaquetas" and leather leggings called "botas" were in common usage.



Spanish Interpreters (Internet images)

New Mexico was rich in horses, and the Militia out of Santa Fe generally went on patrol with 6 horses per man. The Spanish were always well mounted, and no doubt they brought a large number of horses with them to the Fort. Of course no self respecting Spaniard went anywhere without his fighting knife, called a "belduque." This is a very rich and colorful impression to do. Learn a few phrases in Spanish and the public will think you are a native speaker!

Fur Trappers and Mountain Men

Most of the famous, infamous and largely anonymous Fur Trappers came through the Fort during its existence. William Ashley's first overland expedition to supply the first Rendezvous left from the Fort in November of 1824 with 25 men and 50 packhorses. William Ashley and his partner Alexander Henry owned one of the first American fur companies to penetrate the Rocky Mountains, and developed the Rendezvous system to resupply the trappers that worked for their company.



In the Mountains (Courtesy of Brad Bailey, American Mountain Men)

A lot of research in recent years has come to light about how the Trappers and Mountain Men dressed. They did not wear the chrome tanned pumpkin orange leather that you see at many of today's modern Rendezvous events. A number of fur trade ledgers, lists and journals have been digitized and are available on line. This is well documented. Most trappers wore at least a cotton shirt, maybe a vest, a buckskin coat and either pants and leggings or breechcloth and leggings. Buckskin should be of the type that resembles brain tan in color and appearance if you cannot afford real brain tanned leather. Also the skin garment should be made rough side out to resemble true brain tan which has no smooth side. This impression would also require some knowledge of traps and trapping, as that was the job of the mountaineers. The Mountain Men also carried practical knives for skinning and guns for hunting, plus all the assorted horse gear that goes along with being mounted. They traveled light and would not have had tables, chairs or cast iron cookware. You can easily spend a lot of time and money putting together this impression. There are many knowledgeable people at the Fort that can help you with specific questions.

Do the research first to avoid costly mistakes. Some of the common mistakes to avoid are:

- Chokers
- Beaded necklaces
- Beaded hatbands,
- Yarn whip stitching on wool, like modern rendezvous capotes
- War shirts
- Fur drape "road kill" hats
- Leather "hippy" hats
- Bright "yellow" chrome tan leather,
- Leather 'skins' with the smooth side out
- Candy stripe Hudson Bay Company (HBC) style blankets (or items made from them)
- Shirts that button fully down the front
- Creased crown felt hats
- Three color pattern or flowery calico shirts, etc.

Interpreting a Mountain Man or Trapper may be the most expensive impression. Be sure you get it right!

Native Americans at the Fort

Native Americans official business at the Fort was to negotiate treaties between the Government and the Tribes, as well as between other Tribes. The Indian Agency was headquartered at Fort Atkinson. Hundreds of Indians were here to speak with Benjamin O'Fallon (Chief Indian Agent) or John Dougherty (the Sub-Indian Agent).

Although negotiations were the official reason for coming to the Fort the Tribes were very curious, as this was their first exposure to the Americans. Many visited the fort to talk with the Indian Agents or just to hang out.

The mission of the Fort was largely diplomatic, and entering into relationships with the various Native groups was part of that mission. Many officers and enlisted men interacted with the Native peoples. Surgeon John Gale was married to an Omaha woman named Nicomi, and had a daughter by her named Mary Gale.

Indian Agent (Courtesy, Doug Kuony)



Native American Impression

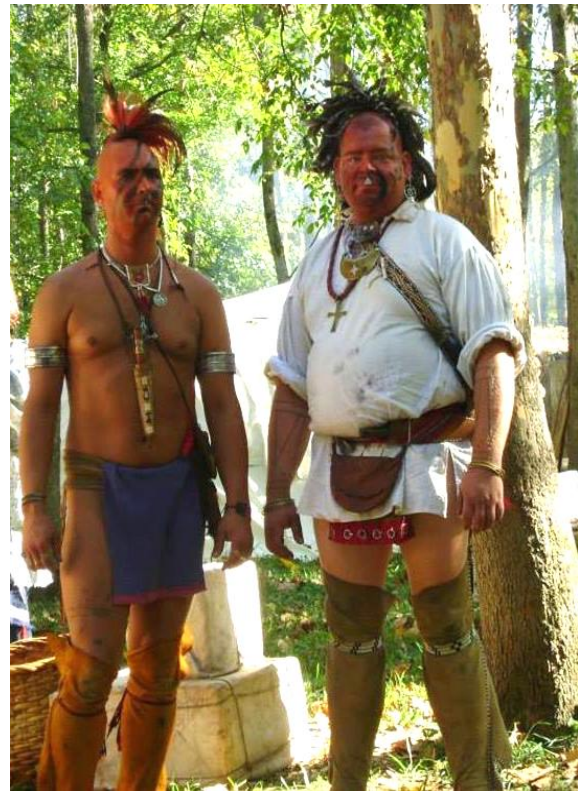
The geographic region we are in is an interesting one for Native portrayals. This area is the transitional area between Eastern Woodland Culture and the more nomadic cultures of the Plains. Most of the tribes in this region: The Omaha, Pawnee, Pottawatomie, Iowa, Missouri-Oto, Sac and Fox, Ponca and others were peoples who lived part of the year in a settled village, and hunted buffalo on the Plains at other times of the year. There was an overlap between their material cultures and this area reflects both.



Native American Men (Courtesy, Ben Smith)

The key to a good Native impression is to select a specific tribe and then begin your research. Learning about the culture, religion, farming and hunting practices along with a few words from the language will really help improve your impression.

A good start for a Native man is a shirt, breechcloth, leggings of wool or leather and moccasins. A female Native interpretation could start with a man's trade shirt, a wraparound wool skirt or a more Anglo styled skirt, leggings of wool or leather and moccasins.



Furs, blankets, eating utensils and weapons are all a part of the Native impression. Many of these items were culturally specific to certain tribes, so do your research. The list of accessories to round out your interpretation is endless, and your research could even lead you into demonstrating Native crafts and skills for the public. Again, there are many knowledgeable people at the Fort that can help you with specific questions.



Native American Women
(Courtesy Pam Dumler-left; FOFA website- right)



A painting of a Native woman by Anna Maria von Phul, St. Louis 1819

Conclusion

The above guide represents just a few of the civilians that have been documented as being at the Fort. The Fort's archive is full of material that is just waiting to be read and researched by anyone willing to spend the time to do so. For a number of years annual visits to the National Archives have produced hundreds if not thousands of pages for the curious to browse through. Muster roles, inspection returns, letters, daybooks, Court Martial records all could contain some reference to a civilian just waiting to be uncovered.

Remember, this is a hobby, it was meant to be fun! Do some thinking and pick a persona close to your own interests, that way you build an impression that not only suits you, but is historically accurate as well. Have fun!

Compiled and written by Wade Davis and Pam Dumler to compliment the Volunteer Handbook.

Sources

"Fort on the Prairie 1819-1827" by Virgil Ney. Command Publications 1978. (This book is available in the Fort's visitor center. This is a must read for all beginning interpreters.)

Fort Atkinson Archives. Available in the visitors center. Make an appointment and bring a notebook,. There's lots of research waiting to be done.

www.northwestjournal.ca/xvii1.htm (The Northwest Journal is a good source for voyageur/boatman clothing and gear. Also see www.frenchinwisconsin.com)

www.armylaundress.com (A site dedicated to army laundresses on the frontier.)

http://bjws.blogspot.com/2013_11_22_archive.html (Paintings of Anna Maria von Phul.)

www.jasna.org (The Jane Austen Society of North America.)

<http://janeaustenfestival.blogspot.com/2012/01/regency-cosmetics> (Site explaining period cosmetics).

<http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/> (Website of the American Mountain Men)