

## Attire, Accoutrements and Equipment for the Cecil County Militia

A primary focus of the events the Cecil County Militia sponsors and participates in is the education of the public. It is therefore important that our portrayal be as authentic as we can make it and that the information we present is accurate. In an effort to improve the authenticity of our personal appearance, we submit the following suggestions and requirements:

The following is an attempt to help you to present a creditable portrayal of a citizen of Cecil County during the War of the American Revolution. It only scratches the surface of what a working man might have worn at the time. It is by no means all inclusive or definitive and is an ongoing work. It is the individuals responsibility to research the authenticity of items when questions of authenticity arise. We encourage you to research items that are not known to be authentic before the item is put into use.

It could be a great help to you, give you focus, and save you money to portray a person who lived in Cecil County during the revolution or develop a character who logically would have lived here and acquire your outfit accordingly. While you should make your portrayal interesting, you should avoid the spectacular and fantastic.

When outfitting yourself as a Cecil County Militiaman, keep in mind who it is, you are portraying. With few exceptions militia service was mandatory so all walks of life were represented on muster day. The average militiaman in the ranks was probably a farmer, tradesman or laborer. Being situated at the head of the bay, occupations related to the water, sailors, fishermen, etc. would have also been represented. And since Head of Elk was an important supply depot during the war, teamsters were in demand and no doubt well represented in the ranks. The militiaman's clothing varied with his occupation, but some items were common to almost every man.

Shirts were cut much the same for everyone, the main difference being the coarseness or fineness of the fabric. "Gentlemen" would routinely wear a ruffled shirt of fine white linen. Even a workingman, if he could afford it, would wear a ruffled shirt, along with his best suit of clothes, on special occasions. The everyday shirt of the workingman was a plain linen shirt, with one or two buttons at the collar. It probably was homespun and may have been a natural color, bleached white or even checked. It was long-sleeved unless perhaps the owner had cut the sleeves off an old shirt to wear for working in hot weather.

Over the shirt a waistcoat or jacket was almost universally worn when work permitted, at least when out of doors. A frock could answer the purpose also. It was considered indecent to be seen on the streets in shirtsleeves alone. When walking about town a coat was usually worn, even in summer, much as today's three-piece business suit. In cold weather a greatcoat or cape was worn as an overcoat.

A man was seldom seen outdoors without a hat. Hats came in a variety of styles, again depending on the wearer's occupation and station in life. A farmer would most likely choose a broad brimmed felt or straw hat that would protect him from the sun while out in the open fields. He might wear that same hat on visits to town. If he were prosperous, he may have worn "town clothes", complete with a more stylish hat when he came to town. A townsman might opt for a three cornered hat. When working indoors or where a

brim was unnecessary or cumbersome, a simple brimless linen work cap was commonly worn. This cloth work cap was often used by soldiers when doing their chores in camp.

Of course knee breeches were the most common form of pants. They were made of linen, wool or buckskin. These along with woolen stockings held up by garters and leather hard sole shoes with either buckles or ties finished off the wardrobe of the 18<sup>th</sup> century working man.

The most common fabrics for working mans clothing were linen and wool, often home spun or locally produced. A combination of the two fibers, linsey-woolsey was used also. The clothing would have been mended as needed and used as long as it decently could be, the fabric often being reused to make other garments. Second hand clothing was often the only choice for the poorer classes and discarded clothing no doubt was used to clothe slaves.

All this, of course, depended on financial circumstances and social standing. Keep in mind too, that many patriot women had vowed not to use imported British fabric, so it was a point of pride for some women who could otherwise afford to buy ready made fabrics, to spin and weave their own cloth or buy locally produced fabrics. Cotton and silk, while available, were mostly imported items and therefore seldom used by common folk.

Since clothing was expensive to buy, time consuming to make and therefore difficult for the common man to replace, it was protected. Farmers, laborers and teamsters commonly wore a frock over their clothing to protect it. A frock was most often just an oversized shirt. A tradesman might have worn a frock or a leather or linen apron to protect his clothing, depending on his trade. A neck cloth was often worn to keep dirt out and for warmth in cooler weather.

What did the militiaman wear to muster or while on duty? In 1775 the Maryland Assembly passed regulations for the militia. Among them was a regulation concerning uniforms, stating that no uniform would be worn except hunting shirts. There is no record that the militia was issued these hunting shirts and neither the style or color of the shirts was specified. It could be assumed that those who could, furnished hunting shirts for themselves. A man who routinely wore a frock in his occupation would no doubt let that suffice. The officers probably made some effort to comply with the regulation but as with all other things in the militia, compliance with regulations was difficult to enforce. Enthusiasm for militia service was lacking in many individuals so it is doubtful that every individual had the required hunting shirt.

Head of Elk was not on the frontier, it was a small, but well settled village on one of the most heavily traveled routes in the middle colonies. The folks living here would have been aware of fashion trends and the latest Philadelphia styles, however the average man couldn't afford to keep up with the Hollingsworths, Rumseys and other well off families in Cecil County.

So, where do you start? If you are just beginning, invent a character who interests you and who obviously would have "fit in" at Head of Elk and vicinity in 1775. Do some research. Acquire your outfit accordingly. If your budget is limited, recreate a person from the lowest classes, second hand and suitably worn clothing is very appropriate and the wardrobe you are recreating will be limited. This is an evolving process, so your character can become more prosperous as you do. (If you already have lots of money to spend, after you make a huge donation to the unit treasury, talk to me, I'll let you take me

shopping and make sure that you buy us some really nice clothes.) If you've been in the hobby for some time and already have clothing and equipment, you may have all that you need to outfit your character. You may need to change a few details to make your character more authentic to our time and place. Be careful if you are inventing a character to fit what clothing and equipment you already have, if you find yourself struggling to explain what your character was doing in Cecil County in 1776 or why he was wearing a particular piece of clothing, you should re-think you character and outfit.

Stay focused when acquiring your outfit or you may find yourself in possession of a vast quantity of clothing and equipment, most of which you use very little or not at all. We are recreating the American Revolution, that is, 1775 - 1783 so you need items that are 1770's or earlier

The minimum you need to be suitably attired and equipped to enjoy participation in an event is:

A shirt – can be “homespun”, white linen/cotton or checked, a fairly easy, inexpensive item to make about \$30-35 to buy off the shelf in cotton or \$60–70 in linen.

Knee Breeches – or some documentable alternative - linen/cotton, wool, and buckskin – more difficult to make about \$60 in heavy cotton

Stockings – cotton stockings in various colors can be had for \$8, wool for \$12-15. A garter is needed to hold them up - a leather lace will suffice.

Shoes – get comfortable ones, they start at about \$85. Shoes can be tied with a leather lace, buckles cost from \$20-35. While we encourage you to procure proper footwear, half gaiters, about \$35, over many varieties of modern black shoe will work also.

Frock or hunting shirt - Can be a plain frock “big shirt” pull over type affair or a fringed version, either pullover or open in front the entire length and held closed with a belt. Cotton is good, a linen/cotton blend is better, linen is best this is a very easy to make item and suitable cotton fabrics are inexpensive and easy to find. A fringed hunting shirt in cotton is about \$60-70 and in linen about \$90 and up. This is a great item to make in wool for winter wear.

Waistcoat - nice to have, not absolutely necessary if you're wearing a hunting shirt or frock over your shirt, about \$80 in wool.

Hat – a felt hat blank, which you can shape to suit, is about \$18, a three cornered hat goes for about \$35-75

You will also need a few equipment items so that you will be able to eat without holding your soup in one bare hand and your drink in the other. While camp is open to the public all non 18<sup>th</sup> century items (soda cans, plastic wrap, Styrofoam cups and paper plates to name just a few) must be kept out of sight. You'll need a plate or bowl, and a cup.

A sharp knife is handy, as is a spoon. A fork is optional but nice to have sometimes. Tin bowls, plates and cups are lightweight unbreakable and easier to clean than wood. Wooden bowls and plates are easily found in second hand shops and are pretty tough and lightweight. A tin cup sells for less than \$5 and a tin bowl or plate can be had for \$10 each.

To carry this mess-kit around, a haversack is most useful. This can be made from linen or cotton. In cotton it can be purchased for about \$10. This is even easier to make than a hunting shirt.

These are the basics, as you can see this is not an inexpensive endeavor. You can of course spend vast sums of money on this hobby. (see above reference to having lots of money to spend, I can help) If you have even a hint of talent with a needle and thread or sewing machine, you can make many items yourself. There may be opportunities to borrow some items while you acquire your outfit and there are often people selling used clothing at events.

More about fabrics: As stated before, linen and wool were the most commonly used fabrics at the time. We encourage you to use these fabrics, however there are inexpensive cotton fabrics available that are a reasonable replacement for linen for many purposes.

Synthetic fabrics on the other hand may not be used. Neither the Continental Line nor The Brigade of the American Revolution allows the use of synthetic fabrics for clothing worn at public events, not only for reasons of appearance but because natural fibers are generally safer around fire. As we typically work around fires at events synthetics cannot be permitted.

As a new member of the Cecil County militia we don't expect you to go out and buy all this stuff all at one time. We do ask you to understand that you may not be able to participate in some events until you are suitably equipped and attired.

If you are unsure about the appropriateness of an item please do some research, ask one of the more experienced re-enactors before you purchase or make an item that you can't use.

Unit requirements: The Cecil County Militia requires members who participate at events to be properly attired and equipped as stated above. We do not require our members to participate at events however.

Please notice we do not require you to have a firearm. We do however require that firearms, other weapons and their accoutrements be of the correct period. Also that they are safe and in good working order. Safety requirements are covered elsewhere.