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White savages in hunting shirts : the rifleman's costume of national identity and rebellion in the American Revolution

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WHITE SAVAGES IN HUNTING SHIRTS:
THE RIFLEMAN'S COSTUME OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND REBELLION
IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by Byron C. Smith

For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

University of Richmond

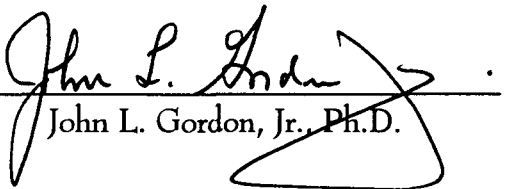
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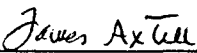
Dr. John L. Gordon, Jr.

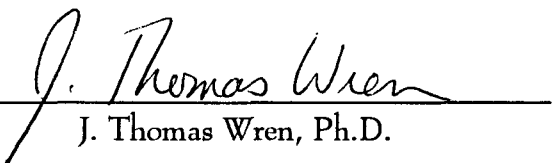
This thesis relies on primary sources to address the significance of clothing and accoutrements worn by backwoods riflemen during the era of the American Revolution. As North America's rebellious colonies became a nation, they struggled to find cultural symbols that distinguished them from their European cousins. As Europeans often identified America symbolically as the "noble savage," in turn some Americans looked to the Indian for inspiration in their new search for national identity. During the Revolution many Americans from backwoods regions of the middle and southern colonies, wearing uniquely American garments called hunting shirts, openly rebelled against their European heritage by taking on Indian ways. The resulting cultural amalgam of frontier customs rejected the effete civility and class deference of Old World society in favor of a new egalitarian and rugged ideal. In so doing, the frontiersmen became part of American cultural mythology and a symbol of the Rebellion.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.


John L. Gordon, Jr., Ph.D.


James Axtell, Ph.D.


J. Thomas Wren, Ph.D.

WHITE SAVAGES IN HUNTING SHIRTS:
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IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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B.A., Grove City College, 1991

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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INTRODUCTION

Historians who study the eighteenth century in the West need only look at the tartan-clad Jacobites in Britain or the "sans-culottes" of revolutionary France to realize that clothing had both political and cultural meanings in European society during that period. American Revolutionaries also used clothing and accoutrements to set themselves apart in their rebellion against Britain. The most obvious example of this is the hunting shirt-clad American rifleman. This essay is an analysis of the American rifleman and the significance of his mode of dress during the era of the American Revolution.

Clothing and accoutrements have long been used by both individuals and groups to communicate ideas about their national politics and culture. Thus, it is an accepted axiom among anthropologists and costume historians alike that a nation's clothing can reveal more than just a superficial national affinity for certain aesthetics. In fact, many scholars are coming to the conclusion that national costume mores can reveal a great deal about a nation's collective subconscious and self-image. The examination of clothing and accoutrements falls under the broader discipline of material culture studies. Perhaps it is a desire to better understand early America's collective subconscious and its material realities that has led some historians into this realm which was formerly the domain of anthropologists and museum curators. As publications like St. George's *Material Life in America 1600-1860* and more recently Martin and Garrison's *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field* illustrate, this area of the historical inquiry is fertile ground for

scholars.¹ The relevance of the new discipline is shown by the fact that celebrated historians such as Rhys Isaac and David Hackett Fischer have employed material culture studies to support their conclusions about American cultural history.² The conclusions drawn in this essay about the clothing and accoutrements worn by American riflemen during the era of the Revolution will also rely on the discipline of material culture studies.

Scholars of material culture have used a combination of traditional primary sources as well as some that may seem unconventional to the orthodox historian. In addition to the standard textual sources, material culturists have employed the study of extant objects and contemporary images in all the available media. Those who study periods before the advent of photography depend on artistic renderings of subjects that include the objects in question. Just as a vague text can be the source of conflicting interpretations among historians, imperfect depictions can lead to disagreements among those who study material culture. Extant objects can also be controversial because they often carry with them erroneous stories about their provenance. These problems require a series of checks and cross-checks between all the available primary sources. For example,

¹See Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), and Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, eds., *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field* (Winterthur, Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997).

²See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), and David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) as examples.

a common garment featured in a period painting should be represented in other primary sources dating from the same time. In short, unless a primary non-textual source is a record of a one-of-a-kind object, or there is a concern that the primary sources themselves are forgeries, scholars should feel confident as they search to find confirmation of their theories in both textual and non-textual sources.

Authors who have published works related to the subject of this essay have employed the principles of material culture studies and used textual and non-textual sources to explore the costume mores of early American frontier riflemen. The most notable example of this kind of study can be found in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* by Rhys Isaac. Isaac presents this topic by first including a watercolor drawing in a series of illustrations that introduced the general thesis of his work. This watercolor of an American rifleman in Washington's Army on his way to the Battle of Yorktown was painted in 1781 by a young French officer named Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger. (See Figure 1.) Isaac explains the illustration in the following manner: "Defiantly they discarded the style of dress worn by soldiers of their king and donned hunting shirts in the fashion of the ancient inhabitants whom they displaced."³ As we will later see, Isaac's attribution of the hunting shirt to Native American fashion may not be correct, but the spirit of his point is well taken. Later in this work Isaac addresses the

³Isaac, xvii.



Figure 1: Watercolor drawing of an American rifleman made in 1781 by a French officer named Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger. He wears a black hat with blue, black, and white feathers. His black neck stock contrasts with his white hunting shirt, and his overalls are brown. This rifleman wears shoes that are black, and they do not appear to be moccasins. His hunting bag is complemented with a powder measure, powder horn, and tomahawk. (Photo courtesy of the Brown University Library, Ann S.K. Brown Military Collection.)

subject of frontier riflemen's costumes in a section of his eleventh chapter entitled "A People Armed." Employing numerous quotations, Isaac explains how at the beginning of the Revolution patriotic Virginians, from the rebellious members of the House of Burgesses to the common soldier, donned hunting shirts and other items of frontier dress as their uniform of revolt. He points out that many anglophiliac Virginians, who had formerly looked down upon these rough American frontiersmen in their unrefined dress, began to appropriate these backwoodsmen as cultural icons. "Now suddenly," writes Isaac, "the riflemen from the west were the 'heroes in huntingshirts,' to whom even the most cosmopolitan gentlemen looked for protection."⁴ After reading this section, scholars should have little doubt about the cultural importance of these shirtmen in the transformation of Virginia during the Revolution. Unfortunately, Isaac's readers may not get a sense of the significant role these shirtmen played in the other rebellious colonies, or how these shirtmen would be regarded as icons of American nationalism during the Revolution and the era of the new Republic. These and other topics are the subjects of essays by historians Linda Baumgarten and R. Scott Stephenson.

Martin and Garrison's *American Material Culture* includes an essay entitled "Leather Stockings and Hunting Shirts" by Colonial Williamsburg costume and textiles curator Linda R. Baumgarten. In this study Baumgarten explores the possible origins and

⁴Ibid., 258.

symbolic meanings associated with male costume fashions of the early American backcountry. As one might expect, she employs the writings of James Fenimore Cooper to introduce and illustrate the points of her thesis. While she touches on the role of the hunting shirt and Indian leggings as symbols of American culture during the eighteenth century, she dwells more on their meaning during the years of the early Republic as well as their practical value for woodland warfare. Like other authors, she does not come to any firm conclusions about the origins of the hunting shirt, nor does she identify the critical roles of the Seven Years' War and Revolution in the development of these garments as national cultural symbols. Instead, Baumgarten is ultimately concerned with debunking some of the romantic myths perpetuated by Cooper and his brand of nineteenth-century cultural fiction.

By far the best work that addresses this subject was a paper presented as a lecture by Dr. R. S. Stephenson during the March 1998 Tidy's Symposium on eighteenth-century American costume at the University of Delaware. In this essay entitled "'To Ape the Manner of Savages': The Origins of American 'Rifle Dress,'" Stephenson examined primary sources that record the genesis of this genre of material culture. His numerous references, both compelling and impressive in their scope, defined how European colonists living in frontier regions of America were taking on Indian habits of dress as early as the second quarter of the eighteenth century. In addition to his main focus on the historical origins of "rifle dress," Stephenson called attention to previously ignored primary textual

evidence and challenges the currently held popular belief that the American hunting shirt was initially derived from a traditional Native American garment. He also briefly touched on one of the central issues addressed in this essay when he observed that the rebellious colonists "quickly embraced the image of the American rifleman" because they were "seeking an image that embodied their emerging national identity as a people distinct from both their European cousins and the indigenous inhabitants of the continent."⁵

I did not attend the 1998 Tidy's Symposium, nor was I aware of the content of Stephenson's paper until a friend informed me about it. Ironically, I had already independently come to many of the same conclusions on the subject through my own research. I have since spoken with Stephenson, and since he may have plans to publish his work in the future, this essay will not focus on the historical origins of "rifle dress." Instead, it concentrates on the era of the Revolution and explores the reasons why this rustic and non-European way of dressing appealed so much to American popular culture during the rebellion.

As we will see, part of the appeal this mode of dress had was its resemblance to Indian costume of the day. In his work *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria argues that from as early as the 1730s to the present, many Americans of non-Indian descent have attempted to distinguish themselves from their European cousins and to establish a national identity

⁵R. S. Stephenson, "'To Ape the Manner of Savages': The Origins of American 'Rifle Dress,'" Paper presented at the Tidy's Symposium, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, 21 March 1998.

by dressing up as American natives. He writes that one of the "paradigmatic moments" in American history that encouraged "the practice of playing Indian" was the Revolution, "which rested on the creation of a national identity."⁶ Deloria points to the Boston Tea Party as just one of many instances when Americans donned Indian costume to express this national identity. He challenges the standard interpretations of this incident and draws his readers away from the simplistic ways of understanding this complex cultural event. He writes:

Mohawk Indian disguise adopted by Tea Party participants has usually been explained as either an attempt to maintain secrecy and anonymity or as an effort—almost laughably transparent—to cast blame on a third party. Neither explanation will suffice. As an attempt to deflect blame, dressing like an Indian had, at best, a limited rhetorical use. Few took the mammoth leap of imagination necessary to believe that a band of Mohawk raiders had traveled hundreds of miles through now-foreign territory solely to deprive Boston of its tea. The claim of anonymity is equally dubious. . . . Boston knew its popular street-gang leaders, and guessing the identities of many of even the disguised offenders was not an impossible task for informed observers.⁷

In fact, Deloria asserts that "Mohawk disguises allowed Bostonians not only to articulate ideologically useful Indian identities but also to perform and experience them."⁸ In other words, Deloria says that when Bostonians "first imagined and then performed Indianness together on the docks of Boston, Tea Party Indians gave material form to identities that

⁶Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 7.

⁷Ibid., 6.

⁸Ibid.

were witnessed and made real." He then concludes that the "performance of Indian Americanness afforded a powerful foundation for subsequent pursuits of national identity."⁹

Deloria calls our attention to other incidents in early American history when European Americans donned Indian costume and "savage" manners. He also discusses the way America was frequently represented as an Indian princess or warrior in cartoons and map cartouches of the day. The fraternal St. Tammany and Red Men Societies, who required their members to dress in Indian costume during annual meetings, are also considered by Deloria; but in all of his analysis of these traditions, customs and incidents of misrule, protest, and carnival, Deloria focuses mainly on urban manifestations of this American phenomenon during the Revolution and after. These urban Americans put on Indian costume for an event, then went home and washed off their war paint, took off their costumes and resumed wearing European-style clothing in their daily lives. American frontiersman not only wore Indian costume and imitated Indian manners for events, but they could also be seen wearing Indian costume and practicing Indian ways on a daily basis. Deloria never mentions the backwoods riflemen or the "white savage" folk culture of the early American frontier. Instead, since he concentrates only on those who dressed as Indians for fraternal organization events, protests, and costume carnivals, he

⁹Ibid., 7.

misses one of the richest sources for the study of this cultural phenomenon. This paper will address the early American frontier rifleman as a pseudo-Indian and as a cultural icon during the Revolution. As we will see, it is the rifleman, with his unique blend of Indian and European modes of dress, who projected a rugged and unambiguous American identity.

Other authors have dealt with the subject of the frontier rifleman and his manner of dressing without analyzing the role they played in the formation of America's national identity. One of the best works is *Colonial Riflemen in the American Revolution* by Joe D. Huddleston. While Huddleston states that the aim of his book "is to trace the use of the rifle in the Revolution for the purpose of evaluating any effect it may have had on the outcome," he does not ignore the material culture of these warriors nor the fact that they have been "an integral part of our American national heritage since the time of the American Revolution."¹⁰ Even so, he does not make the connections that this paper will present. Another work that might more accurately be called a source book for modern reenactors is *The Frontier Rifleman* by Richard B. LaCrosse, Jr. LaCrosse asserts that his purpose "is to correct preconceived ideas about the American Rifleman; to destroy certain stereotypes and myths that the general public has accepted as truth over the last one hundred and fifty years, and present to those who wish to re-enact or interpret the

¹⁰Joe D. Huddleston, *Colonial Riflemen in the American Revolution* (York, PA: George Shumway Publisher, 1978), 11.

rifleman's role, a compact conglomeration of his clothing, arms and equipment."¹¹ The strength of LaCrosse's work is in the extensive quotation he includes of contemporary accounts in primary sources on the subject of frontier riflemen. While it can prove frustrating for a scholar to track down the origins of some of these quotes in their primary sources, LaCrosse's work has been a great help to this thesis. No one else writing on the subject simply presents a compilation of the primary textual evidence and allows readers to draw their own conclusions.

Other recently published titles that touch on the material culture of the American frontier rifleman are *The American Backwoods Frontier* by Terry G. Jordan and Matti Kaups and *Sons of a Trackless Forest* by Mark A. Baker. In *The American Backwoods Frontier*, Jordan and Kaups put forth the highly controversial thesis that the Savo-Karelian Finns of the seventeenth-century New Sweden Colony in the Delaware valley were the "principal agents of diffusion" for the American frontier sub-culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹² While the possible cultural influences of these Savo-Karelian Finns should not be ignored, they were not the primary source of American frontier culture during the eighteenth century. Jordan and Kaups also assert that "*the next most significant contributors to the backwoods pioneer adaptive system were the eastern*

¹¹Richard B. LaCrosse, Jr., *The Frontier Rifleman: His Arms, Clothing and Equipment During the Era of the American Revolution, 1760-1800* (Union City, TN: Pioneer Press, 1989), 7.

¹²Terry G. Jordan and Matti Kaups, *The American Backwoods Frontier: An Ethnic and Ecological Interpretation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 36.

woodland Indians of colonial America" [italics as in the original].¹³ I will argue that they had the greatest impact. Even so, I also agree with Baker's perspective that it was the "seasoned combination of European and Indian cultures embodied in the colonial woodsman" that has captured the imaginations of "historians, novelists, travelers and modern-day entertainment specialists."¹⁴ In other words, these riflemen and their clothing were powerful symbols because they were neither Indian nor European but American.

Finally, to properly interpret these riflemen and the identity they projected, we must first define a few important terms. The word "frontier" should be distinguished from the word "backcountry." Historian David Weber defined a frontier "as a social phenomenon, representing an interaction between man, his institutions, and the physical and spatial environments of an area of low population density where two cultures or two nations meet." In other words, Weber sees a frontier as an area of cultural exchange, and he rejects the "decidedly ethnocentric" view of it being an empty wilderness waiting to be taken up and improved by Europeans.¹⁵ I agree that these are outdated Turnerian definitions. The word "backcountry" denotes a later stage of settlement after the frontier becomes a sparsely settled rural area. Though these two terms are often conflated by

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Mark A. Baker. *Sons of a Trackless Forest: The Cumberland Long Hunters of the Eighteenth Century* (Franklin, TN: Baker's Trace Publishing, 1998), 5.

¹⁵David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1840: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 277.

historians, they are two separate stages of westward expansion in American history. For an example of the proper usage of these terms we can turn to the "Introduction" to *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775 - 1776*, written by Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Leonidas Dodson. In the following passage Albion and Dodson define the true nature of the Shenandoah Valley during Fithian's missionary travels of there in 1775 and '76.

The term 'frontier' is used in connection with Fithian's travels only with qualifications. The outer fringe of settlement was already, by 1775, far beyond the westernmost point which he visited, for Daniel Boone was by that time active in Kentucky and the contemporary journal of Nicholas Cresswell shows the conditions around Fort Pitt. The Shenandoah Valley by 1775 could be called a 'second generation frontier.' . . . This immediate region, therefore, had passed beyond the tree-felling, Indian-fighting stage. There were rich farms, for the soil was unusually fertile, and some well established towns like Winchester and Staunton, with churches, stores and taverns. There had been Indian raids in the Shenandoah, however, as late as 1766 and the region was still decidedly 'back-country.'¹⁶

As this passage illustrates, the distinction between frontier and backcountry was being made by scholars as early as 1934. Even so, long before Albion and Dodson wrote, eyewitnesses to early American western settlement described the breakdown between frontier, backcountry, and what might be called "frontcountry." In 1797 an Anglo-Irishman named Isaac Weld traveling through the Genesee Valley in western New York recorded an excellent description of the cultural and socio-economic divisions in these three distinct stages of early American settlement. Weld wrote that

¹⁶Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Leonidas Dodson, eds., *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775-1776 Written on the Virginia-Pennsylvania Frontier and in the Army Around New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934), x-xi.

the first settlers on the frontiers in general . . . are men of a morose and savage disposition, and the very outcasts of society, who bury themselves in the woods, as if desirous to shun the face of their fellow-creatures; there they build a rude habitation, and clear perhaps three or four acres of land, just as much as they find sufficient to provide their families with corn: for the greater part of their food they depend on their rifle guns. These people, as the settlements advance, are succeeded in general by a second set of men, less savage than the first, who clear more land and do not depend so much upon hunting as upon agriculture for their subsistence. A third set succeed these in turn, who build good houses, and bring the land into a more improved state.¹⁷

He goes on to add that these "first settlers, as soon as they have disposed of their miserable dwellings to advantage; immediately penetrate farther back into the woods, in order to gain a place of abode suited to their rude mode of life."¹⁸ Here we see the three stages of settlement described in the late eighteenth century by a patrician who was obviously contemptuous of those whom he imagined beneath his level of education and cultural refinement. Other contemporary observers made similar distinctions between the different groups.¹⁹ Their observations suggest that those who lived on the frontier were culturally distinct from those who would eventually take their place during the later stages of settlement. The importance of these cultural and economic differences will be addressed in part as they relate to the broader significance of the American Rifleman and his dress

¹⁷Isaac Weld, *Travels Through the States of North America, and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada During the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London: John Stockdale, 1807; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 2:326.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Jordan and Kaups, *American Backwoods Frontier*, 4-5.

during the Revolution. In short, we will be tracing how this mode of dress moved from the middle-colony frontier to the backcountry and then to the national frontcountry. As we will see, the inevitable cultural conflicts between the people of the frontier and those who lived in the frontcountry would portend the ultimate fate of the rifleman's costume as a national symbol in American popular culture.

CHAPTER 1

"WHITE SAVAGES"

On October 16, 1777 a Hessian officer writing from Philadelphia to a superior back in Marburg, Germany recorded an intriguing observation of American popular culture during the Revolution. In his letter the Hessian officer complained of a particularly rebellious clergyman who was encouraging his flock to acts of sedition against the crown by assuring them that God favored the American cause so much that His angels were "dressed like riflemen."¹ This assertion may seem insignificant to a modern reader who does not know how an American rifleman's mode of dress contrasted with the clothing worn by other soldiers during the Revolution. Indeed, to understand why this rebellious minister was using the image of God's angels "dressed like riflemen" to incite disloyalty and rebellion, one must first understand who these riflemen were, as well as why their way of dressing was inspirational to the American cause.

During the era of the Revolution, American riflemen were recognized by both their weaponry and style of dress. Their long-barrel rifles, tomahawks, and scalping knives

¹Lieutenant Colonel du Puy to Lieutenant General von Dittfurth, 16 Oct. 1777, as translated by Ernst Kipping in *The Hessian View of America* (Monmouth Beach, NJ: Philip Freneau Press, 1971), 29. The original unpublished German manuscript is held in Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, Germany and reads "Reiffelmaner mantirung." See Staatsarchiv Marburg, Best. 4h Nr. 3155 in *Militaerberichte und Relationen von den Operationen der hessischen Korps im amerikanischen Kriege, 1776-1782*.

contrasted with the weaponry used in Europe, and their quintessentially American mode of dress tended to remind European observers of the costumes worn by Eastern Woodland Indians in that time. Their zeal for the revolutionary cause and the demoralizing effect they had on British troops helped to insure the rifleman's status as an American cultural icon. But to understand how these riflemen became the great warriors of the Revolution and why they dressed like Indians, one must go back to the second quarter of the eighteenth century when Anglo-European settlement began to expand into the Appalachian backcountry. It was during this period that we start seeing European Americans on the frontier and in the backcountry living, dressing, and fighting like Indians.

Long before this period there were European settlers who, after being taken captive by the Indians, chose to live like their captors instead of returning to their former "civilized" way of life. While there may have been a few of these "white savages" living in the frontier regions of the colonies, there were others who were never taken captive who embraced Indian ways. It is this group that needs our attention. These frontier folk were a mixed lot who came by their ways of pseudo-Indian dress and behavior through a variety of contact experiences with native Americans. Whether it was for religious or commercial reasons, many Europeans had a great deal of peaceful contact with Indians. As Stephenson has pointed out, some of the earliest accounts of whites adopting Indian modes of dress can be found in runaway ads describing men associated with the Indian

trade. On 12 February 1734 "a Servant Man named Tho. Bently, aged eighteen years," is said to have "[r]un away from Henry Smith's Plantation above Tulpehocken" wearing, among other things, "Indian Shoes and Stockings." In addition to wearing moccasins and leggings, Bently also took "Goods belonging to his Master" that clearly indicate that Bently's master Henry Smith was involved in the Indian trade. In fact, Bently also left with "a hired Man" named "Wm. Mark," and it was thought that the two men were "pretending to go Indian Trading" with the goods that belonged to Bently's master.² Perhaps Bently wore "Indian Shoes and Stockings" for the same reason that a "Servant Man, named Arthur Millholland" was "shav'd on the Forehead" in the fashion of some Eastern Woodland tribesmen. Millholland was also "an Indian Trader" who "[knew] the Country very well" when he ran away from his master on 31 July 1739.³ In January 1741 the lure of striking out on his own in the Indian trade led another one of Henry Smith's servants named Benjamin Hicks to run away from his master. Hicks took off wearing typical European servant's attire as well as "white half thick Indian Stockings" and "Indian Shoes." The ad goes on to say that "His Master [Henry Smith] sent him to

²*Pennsylvania Gazette*, 27 February 1734 as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio I, Accessible Archives CD-ROM, (Malvern, PA: Accessible Archives, 1991).

³*Pennsylvania Gazette*, 6 September 1739. For another example of a European taking on this Indian hair fashion as well as "Indian Leggings," see "ON the 9th Instant, the Store-house of John Read . . .", *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 24 December 1735 both as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio I, Accessible Archives CD-ROM.

Allegheny to the Indians with a Horse load of Goods, . . . all which he took with him."⁴

It is likely that these men were all running to Indian communities where they could enjoy more of the freedoms they craved as servants in white European society. In any case, all these men had commercial ties with Indians that encouraged cultural exchange. One of the obvious manifestations of this cultural exchange is the adoption of Indian modes of dress, and in the case of Millholland, even an Indian hairstyle.

At about the same time the western edge of settlement moved rapidly from the Great Valley of Pennsylvania along what would come to be known as the Great Wagon Road. This flow of European settlement moved westward and southward through Maryland, across the Potomac, and on into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Germans, Scotch-Irish, and English in search of affordable wilderness lands, and perhaps the freedom that comes with them, pushed farther into regions that many Indians still considered as their own. As early as 1726 a group of Germans had settled on the south branch of the Shenandoah River, and they would be followed by many others, including Scotch-Irish and English who would establish settlements by the mid-1730s in what is now Augusta County, Virginia.⁵ This cusp of European settlement was the middle-colony

⁴Ibid., 2 April 1741 as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio I, Accessible Archives CD-ROM.

⁵For more analysis of the early settlement of the Valley of Virginia by the Germans and Scotch-Irish see James G. Layburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 200-210, and Klaus Wust, *The Virginia Germans*, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969), 29-42.

frontier during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. It was along this frontier that we find some of the most interesting recorded examples of Europeans adopting Indian ways of dress and behavior. At the top of this list we have the account of two Moravian missionaries who traveled through this region in the late fall of 1749. On 30 October "some twenty miles up along the Potomack," in lands that might be considered backcountry, they "came to a German house, where [they] found the whole family clothed in Indian fashion." The remoteness of this family's situation is illustrated by the fact that the mother of this household "complained that they had not heard a sermon for five years."⁶ Farther south, after swimming across the James River in the upper Valley of Virginia, they "came to a house, where [they] had to lie on bear skins around the fire like the rest." The account continues as follows: "The manner of living is rather poor in this district. The clothes of the people consist of deer skins. Their food of Johnny cakes, deer and bear meat. A kind of white people are found here, who live like savages. Hunting is their chief occupation."⁷ In fact, this was the frontier, the very edge of European settlement at that time. These white people who lived "like savages" had Indians as their immediate neighbors to the west and south. By imitating their Indian neighbors they had become better able to cope with their remote situation. Indeed, it is unlikely that these

⁶Leonhard Schnell and John Brandmueller, "Moravian Diaries of Travels Through Virginia," trans. and ed. by Rev. William J. Hinke and Charles E Kemper, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 11 (Oct. 1903): 117.

⁷Ibid., 123.

"white Indians" came to this way of living without following the examples set by their brown neighbors. In turn, they also became great woodland hunters. Since hunting was "their chief occupation," these frontiersmen, like their native neighbors, obtained the European and colonial consumer goods they needed not by farming but through the fur and deerskin trade network. White men such as Henry Smith and his runaway servants, as well as Arthur Millholland with his shaved forehead, were the middlemen of this trade network that was fed by animal skins.

The importance of hunting to these American frontiersmen should not be underestimated. While many of these people were engaged in the Indian trade network (some additionally performing crude survey jobs for land speculators), hunting was "their chief occupation." This sort of vocation was largely unknown in eighteenth-century Europe where hunting privileges were tied to land ownership. While there were exceptions to this rule for legitimate gamekeepers and estate wardens whose duties allowed them to hunt on their masters' lands, the common man in Europe was not allowed to hunt. In Britain an elaborate system of laws was established by the eighteenth century to ensure that only the nobility, aristocracy, and landed gentry held the rights to hunt on the lands they alone possessed. In England deer were legally considered private property, and the uninvited hunter who killed a doe or buck on an estate could be prosecuted as a thief by the landlord. If convicted, the "thief" could be transported to the colonies to serve an

indenture for seven years.⁸ There were no such laws on the early American frontier. In fact, many of the first settlers on the frontier were squatters, and they, like their Indian neighbors, had no European-style legal claim to the lands on which they hunted or lived. For the early American frontiersman who could not or elected not to pay for the land on which he had built his cabin, there was no incentive for him to make farming his primary occupation. Thus commercial hunting was the one occupation on the frontier that insured a modest income and did not bind its participants to the financial challenges of land development and ownership. Even those who did intend to take on these financial challenges and seek a land patent relied in some measure on commercial hunting to help make ends meet while they cleared their lands and built their farms. A privilege for the elite in the Old World became a prerogative and even a necessity for survival in the New World. Hunting on the American frontier and in the backcountry helped to level the economic playing field. It insured a degree of independence in this period that someone working for pittance in an urban factory back in England could only dream about.

As big-game hunting was so important to the frontier economy, rifles were the preferred gun in the region among both whites and Indians. A rifle is a shoulder arm that has multiple grooves cut in a uniform spiral through the length of its barrel's bore. In this period the twist would range from one turn in forty to one turn in eighty inches so as to

⁸P. B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws, 1671-1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3-5.

impart a gentle but effective gyroscopic spin on the bullet that averaged out the air pressure around the ball and the imperfections in the ball. Accordingly the projectile flew straighter and could hit a target at three to four times the maximum effective range of a smoothbore gun. Contrary to popular notions, the longer barreled rifles are not necessarily more accurate. There is a slight increase in velocity, pressure, and muzzle energy with longer barrels.⁹ Even so, there is a lot more to achieving accurate marksmanship than simply having a longer rifled barrel. Indeed, if all that was needed to make a rifle more accurate was a longer barrel, we would see a lot more long-barreled rifles today. Aside from its value as a fashion statement, a longer barrel is easier to load if you are standing, while a shorter barrel is easier to load from a sitting position. Virtually all rifles in this period were muzzle-loading guns and would require a great deal of effort to drive the tightly fit ball down the barrel so as to insure that it would properly spin on its way out. In other words, a hunter on horseback might prefer the shorter rifle barrel, while the tracker on foot might choose the longer variety. Standing behind a tree, the man can set the butt of his gun on the ground and the top end of the barrel against the front of his shoulder. This allows him to keep both hands free during the loading process.

On the other hand, smoothbore guns with long barrels were also used in frontier regions. The most common of these smoothbore guns were the so-called "trade guns,"

⁹C. Kenneth Ramage, ed., *Lyman Black Powder Handbook* (Middlefield, CT: Lyman Publications, 1975), 88-89, 114-15.

"Indian trade guns," or just "traders." (See Figures 2a & 2b.) These cheap, imported smoothbore guns were made with as little effort and as few materials as possible. By the time of the Revolution many trade guns were being sold with inferior and even dangerous barrels. In a letter dated 26 November 1776 from Montreal, British officer Thomas Anburey described the business methods and lifestyles of the Canadian merchants who traded with the Indians of the Great Lakes region for animal skins. He recounted how many of these fur traders had been put to death by Indians "to revenge the death of some of their nation, who had been killed by the bursting of a gun that has been sold to them, which is frequently the case, they being by no means proof."¹⁰ Anburey referred to the fact that many of these Indian trade guns were not proof-tested — as other commercially made guns were — with four times the normal amount of gun powder to make sure their barrels were safe. Consequently they would sometimes blow up. Anburey observed that "the guns which are sold to the Indians are fitted up in a very neat manner, to attract the notice of these poor creatures, and frequently, after having been fired five or six times, they burst, and the unfortunate purchaser is either killed, or loses an hand or an arm."¹¹ Despite their inferior quality, the advantages these smoothbore guns had over the rifle were twofold. First, unlike the rifle, they had the ability to be loaded with multiple balls of

¹⁰Thomas Anburey, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America*, 2 vol. (London, 1791; reprint, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution, New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, Inc., 1969), 1:127-28.

¹¹Ibid.



Figures 2a & 2b: Indian Trade Gun, mid-eighteenth century. Its lock is marked "Bumford" and is of low quality. The butt plate and trigger-guard are sheet brass instead of cast brass. The stock is beech, a secondary wood in European firearms. It is painted with a floral design instead of carving. As noted by Thomas Anburey, these sorts of guns were "fitted up in a very neat manner, to attract the notice of these poor creatures." (Photos courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

various sizes smaller than the diameter of the bore. These smaller balls called shot would be used just like they are today in modern shot guns. They spray out in a cloud or pattern and hit fast-moving smaller game at close ranges and are thus ideal for bird hunting. The second advantage of the smoothbore gun is that it can be loaded more quickly than the rifle gun. Because it does not need a tight fit inside the barrel to work properly, a smoothbore gun can be loaded quickly from the muzzle with a loose-fitting single ball and hit larger targets at ranges up to seventy yards. It is for this reason that the standard European military shoulder arms (called "muskets" in the period) were smoothbore guns and not rifles.

Despite its advantages of versatility and a faster loading time, the smoothbore gun was not as prevalent as the rifle in the backcountry and frontier for the simple reason that commercial hunting was for larger game like deer, and deer do not always let hunters get within smoothbore range. The advantage of long-range accuracy is best summed up by Edward Shippen when he explained the pros and cons of the rifle gun back in 1756. While the rifle "might require a minute to clean, load and discharge" compared to a smoothbore gun which he "could discharge three times in ye same space [of time]," he could use a rifle "at 150 yards distance" to "put a ball within a foot or Six Inches of ye mark." He continued, adding that with a smoothbore he could "Seldom or ever hit the

board of two feet wide & Six feet long."¹² As we will see, this advantage of long-range accuracy the rifle offered the hunter would also prove quite valuable in the type of frontier woodland warfare that would soon erupt between whites and Indians.

During the same period that American backwoodsmen displayed a preference for the rifle, they also exhibited a fondness for a new American style of rifle that differed from those used generally in contemporary Europe. (See Figures 3 & 4.) On 15 March 1753 the estate of a man named Robert Tryer was appraised in Augusta County, Virginia. This inventory recorded: "One Long Rifle Gun & Shotbag & moulds," valued at £2/6/0, and right below it "One Short Rifle Gun & wipers," valued at £1/0/0. Following this estate appraisal inventory is the record of Robert Tryer's estate sale. As one reads down the list of items sold, it is clear that the items listed above in the inventory are being sold in a different order than they were listed above, and that they were going, as one might expect, to the highest bidder. The second item sold was "one Rifle Gun" to a Daniel Ritcheson for £4/1/6. This seems to have been the long rifle listed above because Daniel Ritcheson later bought the other "Rifle Gun" for £1/4/0.¹³ If we assume that the short rifle did not quadruple in appraised value at auction, and the long rifle did not lose half of its appraised value at auction, this entry could be interpreted as evidence of how much frontiersmen

¹²Samuel Hazard, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives*, vol. 2, First Series (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns & Co., 1853), 643.

¹³Augusta County Court Records, Staunton, Virginia, Will Book No. 1, 489.



Figure 3: Rifle, German, signed Johann Wagner, 1723. This is a fine example of the short continental rifles of the period that are considered the forerunners to the American-style long rifles of the second half of the eighteenth century. While this piece was made in its day for a wealthy nobleman, it is still much like the guns that would have been made by American gunsmiths of German ethnicity during the 1730s and 1740s. It is also like the guns that would have been imported from the continent to America. (Photo courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)



Figure 4: Long Rifle, Northern Shenandoah Valley, third quarter of the eighteenth century. This gun is a fine example of an early rifle from the period of the Seven Years' War or shortly thereafter. Many elements of its design can be traced to the short German rifles of the period. (See Figure 3.) Even so, its long graceful stock and barrel are indicative of the new American styles that will become more pronounced in the years to come. By the time of the Revolution, wood patchbox doors were being replaced by decorated brass doors on hinges. (See Figure 5.) (Kindig Collection. Photo courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

were beginning to value the longer version of the rifle over the shorter variety. This inventory and estate sale record contains the first known obvious reference to a long rifle in Augusta County, Virginia. Tryer's long rifle was certainly not the first of its kind in Augusta County or America. According to Jordan and Kaups, the first long rifles came to America with the Savo-Karelian Finns who settled in the colony of New Sweden during the second quarter of the seventeenth century. There was a fashion for long-barreled rifles in Sweden during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹⁴ Even so, it is the German settlers who came to the Delaware Valley during the first quarter of the eighteenth century with their shorter version of the rifle who are credited with being the first makers of the American long rifle.¹⁵ Current scholarship continues to support this, since many of the gunsmiths credited with making long rifles during the eighteenth century were ethnically German.¹⁶ Ultimately, whether it was the Germans or the Swedes who should take the credit is of little consequence since the long rifles that were carried by white frontiersmen like Robert Tryer would eventually be recognized as a uniquely American style of arm.

¹⁴Kåa Wennberg, *Svenska Geurssmeder* (Stockholm: Mälartryckeriet AB, 1982), 25,27, 149, 216, 217, 221.

¹⁵Joe Kindig, Jr., *Thoughts on the Kentucky Rifle in its Golden Age* (York, PA: George Shumway Publisher, 1960), 25-26.

¹⁶See George Shumway, *Rifles of Colonial America*, Vol. I & II (York, PA: George Shumway Publisher, 1980).

Tryer seems to have been a bit of a nomad, as there are no real estate or household goods listed in his inventory. He was more than likely one who made his money by hunting and Indian trading. Besides his rifle guns he owned two horses, two saddles, and one bridle. For clothing he owned "2 Linnen Shirts and one pair of Leather breeches and one Silk handkerchief & one pare of stockins," all valued at 0/2/6. He also owned "One Narrow falling ax," valued at 0/5/0. The appraised value of his estate was £10/19/3, and the auction value of his estate was £15/19/6. One third of both Tryer's appraised and auction estate values were in his rifle guns.¹⁷

Robert Tryer was not alone in the way he invested money in rifle guns. On 30 November 1756 an Indian agent named Daniel Pepper wrote from Ockchoys, Upper Creeks to Governor Lyttelton of South Carolina. He advised against trying to fine frontiersmen for selling rifles to the Indians because "the People who sell them to the Indians are generally very poor, their Gun being the greatest Part of their Estate." Like Robert Tryer and his fellow frontiersmen, Indians were also investing their income in rifles. Pepper's advice was preceded by the warning that the Indians were "daily geting in to the Method of useing Riffle Guns instead of Traders." He went on to point out that rifles could be used to "kill point Blank at two hundred Yards Distance" and thus "puts

¹⁷Augusta County Court Records, Will Book No. 1, 489.

them [the Indians] too much upon an Equality with us in Case of a Breach."¹⁸ Similar concerns were being voiced hundreds of miles to the north near the other end of the Great Wagon Road. Just seven months earlier on 24 April 1756 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania Edward Shippen wrote that "[t]he Indians make use of rifled guns for the most part, and there is such a difference between these sort of Guns and Smooth bored, that if I was in an Engagement with the Savages, I would rather Stand my chance with one of the former Sort."¹⁹ These concerns did not stop the Indians from obtaining rifles. By the time of the Revolution, tribes like the Delaware would "use no other than rifle-barrelled guns."²⁰

Engagements with the "savages" only increased in number as the Seven Years' War escalated in America. It was during this war that the rifle-packing frontiersman distinguished himself and adopted the mixed mode of frontier dress as a military uniform. Even Virginia's aristocracy began to see the value of this rustic way of dressing. For instance, in 1753, while traveling in the wilderness with his scout Christopher Gist, young George Washington decided to change his clothes. Perhaps leggings, moccasins, and a breechclout are what Washington refers to when he records in his journal on 23 December

¹⁸William L. McDowell, Jr., ed., *Documents relating to Indian Affairs 1754-1765*, Colonial Records of South Carolina (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 296.

¹⁹Hazard, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 643.

²⁰David Zeisberger, *David Zeisberger's History of the Northern American Indians*, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert, and William Nathaniel Schwarze (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, [1910]), 85.

1753 that "I put myself in an Indian walking Dress."²¹ While readers are left to wonder what articles this "Indian walking Dress" included, it appears in this instance that practical concerns rather than aspirations for national identity were at the heart of Washington's choice of apparel. When Washington was in the service of his king as a young colonel leading Virginia forces during the Seven Years' War, he knew that traditional European-style regimental uniforms were impractical for American-style woodland warfare. Knee-length breeches and stockings would afford little protection for the lower legs of his men. On 1 May 1758, writing to David Franks in Philadelphia, Washington requested "as much green half-thick's, as will make indian-leggings for 1,000 men."²² Writing on 28 May 1758 to John Blair, Washington explained that he purchased these "Indian stockings" because, as he put it, they are "better to equip my men for the woods."²³ On another occasion, 3 July 1758, Washington wrote the following in a letter to Colonel Henry Bouquet:

My Men are very bare of Cloaths (Regimentals I mean), and I have no prospect of a supply; this want, so far from my regretting during this Campaign, that were I left to pursue my own Inclinations I wou'd not only order the Men to adopt the Indian dress, but cause the Officers to do it also, and be the first to set the example myself. Nothing but the uncertainty of its taking with the General causes me to hesitate a moment at leaving my Regimentals at this place, and

²¹George Washington, as cited in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-40), 1:28.

²²*Ibid.*, 2:190.

²³*Ibid.*, 2:207.

proceeding as light as any Indian in the Woods.²⁴

Bouquet responded to Washington's proposed change in costume with approval as did General Forbes.²⁵ Bouquet had written to Washington eight days later on 11 July 1758, probably before he received Washington's letter, and acknowledged the arrival of "Major Lewis with the two hundred men under his command" from Augusta County, Virginia. Bouquet announced that "their dress should be our pattern in this expedition."²⁶ Lewis's men were also dressed in the Indian style. It is unclear if this "Indian dress" mentioned by Washington included breechclouts because it is doubtful that his men came to fight without their own breeches, and he does add that he meant they lacked "Regimentals" or uniforms. Wearing leggings over breeches afforded even more protection to the areas of the upper thigh that would have been otherwise exposed by wearing a breechclout. Even so, on 16 July 1758 Washington wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Adam Stephen and included this passage: "The Quarter Master brings you all the stuff he has for Breech Clouts: if the quantity falls short you must purchase more, and charge the Publick with the cost"²⁷ The evidence seems to indicate that in addition to leggings and

²⁴Ibid., 2:229.

²⁵Washington to Bouquet, Ibid., 2:235, and Washington to Halkett, Ibid., 2:239.

²⁶Henry Bouquet to George Washington, *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, vol. 2, *The Forbes Expedition*, S.K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, & Autumn L. Leonard, eds., (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1951), 183.

moccasins, many of the provincial troops were also clad in breechclouts. But even if the majority were not, it is clear that the early American practice of going to war in Indian costume had its origins during the era of the Seven Years' War.

Washington and his fellow campaigners were not the only ones adopting leggings, moccasins, and breechclouts as their uniforms during this period. On Saturday, 24 April 1756 a group of forty-one refugees from a frontier region of Maryland made their way into Baltimore-Town. Six men, five women, and thirty children were fleeing their homes because of Indian raids. On Thursday, 29 April 1756 *The Maryland Gazette* printed the following news that one of these men brought with them from the frontier: "Thomas and Daniel Cresap (Sons of Col. Cresap) went out about three Weeks since, with sixty People, dressed and painted like Indians, to kill the Women and Children in the Indian Towns, and scalp them, while their Warriors are committing the like Destruction on our Frontiers."²⁸ The next week the same paper reported the news that Thomas Cresap, one of the leaders of this "Party of Men painted and dress'd like Indians," had been killed on 23 April. It also reported that the Indian who had killed him "was shot thro' the right Breast, but was not dead when they [the members of the Cresap party] came up to him,

²⁷Washington to Stephen, as cited in Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, 2:240.

²⁸*Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 29 April 1756: 3.

and so they dispatch'd him with a Tomahawk, and scalp'd him."²⁹ As we will later see, dressing up and acting like Indians during times of war became a Cresap family tradition. In the meantime, these passages inform us that the men in Cresap's party were not just dressing like Indians. They were also painting themselves and taking on customs of Indian warfare by tomahawking and scalping enemy victims. While it might be argued that their costume and face paint were a disguise to help them appear less conspicuous as they invaded Indian lands, it is clear that these white frontiersmen seemed to be taking things a step further than Washington and his "Indian walking Dress."

Two men who took things a little too far for their own good during this period were hunters James Cox and John Lane. Cox and Lane were killed by Ensign Coleby Chew and his patrol because, as Washington put it, they appeared "Both in dress, disguise and Behavior, to be no other than Indians."³⁰ Cox and Lane had shot at a party of Virginians the previous day, and before Cox died of his wounds he reportedly absolved Ensign Chew and his men of guilt by confessing that the accident was their own fault and blamed no one else but themselves.³¹ Earlier in November of 1757 Cox and Lane were deer hunting

²⁹*Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 6 May 1756: 3.

³⁰Washington to John Blair, as cited in Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, 2:117.

³¹See "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Winchester, dated April 18, 1758," in *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 27 April 1758, and in *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 4 May 1758 as well as the letter to Washington "From James Baker" dated "Patterson's April 10th 1758", as cited in W. W. Abbot, Ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series

on the south side of the Potomac River when they came upon three Indians resting on a log. They each shot and killed one while the other one ran away and brought back six or seven other Indians who promptly fought back against the two white hunters. During the skirmish Lane was captured, but Cox got away. Lane later escaped while his captors were sleeping by cutting himself loose with a piece of broken glass from a bottle he had found along Braddock's Road. He then returned to the grave site of one of the dead Indians and dug up the body for its clothes and scalp.³² In short, Cox and Lane were not Indian sympathizers. As one newspaper correspondent of the day wrote: "It is not easy to assign the Reasons that induced those unhappy Persons, who had acquired great Reputation by their signal Services, to act in the Manner they did."³³ Indeed, we will probably never fully understand the logic Cox and Lane were using before this disastrous event in their lives. What is important for this study is that they represent a level of Indian impersonation well beyond the norm of early American white frontier culture. As a correspondent from Winchester put it: "They were both painted and dressed so like Indians, even to the Cut of their Hair, that their most intimate Acquaintances could not

(Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 5:120-21.

³²See *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 8 Dec. 1757, *Ibid.*, 16 February 1758, and *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 2 March 1758 as cited in footnotes to November 1757, Enclosure I, Robert McKenzie to Robert Stewart, as cited in Abbot, *The Papers of George Washington*, 5:61-62.

³³"Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Winchester, . . ." in footnote of Baker to Washington, as cited in Abbot, *The Papers of George Washington*, 5:121.

distinguish them."³⁴ Cox and Lane were not just dressing and painting themselves as Indians like Cresap and his men, they were also sporting Indian hair cuts. As we will see, white frontier culture had a tradition of mixed dress with occasional theatrics involving war paint but they did not want to look too much like Indians unless it served a military purpose. Perhaps it was for an unknown military purpose that Cox and Lane were dressed and groomed as they were when they were killed. In any case their final episode illustrates the dangers of looking too much like an Indian on the frontier during this period.

Meanwhile, many miles away to the northwest another white man was dressed and groomed like an Indian. His name was James Smith and he had been captured by a "Canasatauga" and two Delawares near Bedford, Pennsylvania in the late spring of 1755. He ran an Indian gauntlet at Fort DuQuesne and witnessed there the triumphant return of the Indians and French after Braddock's defeat. He was shortly thereafter adopted into the Caughnewaga nation and given the name Scoouwa. By the time Cox and Lane were breathing their last in April 1758, Smith had spent enough time with his adopted Indian family that he had begun to feel his "heart warm towards the Indians" and was living with his adopted brothers, an elderly warrior named Tecaughretanego, and Tecaughretango's son somewhere in the Ohio wilderness.³⁵ By May they reached Detroit and heard of

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵James Smith, *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Col. James Smith, During His Captivity with the Indians, in the Years 1755, '56, '57, '58, & '59* (Cincinnati, OH: Ohio Valley Press, Robert Clarke & Co., 1870), 40, 95.

General Forbes's advance on Fort DuQuesne. Smith's account of what happened next among his Indian captors is a powerful witness of how effective frontier riflemen had become as warriors. It also seems to contradict the revisionists' perspective and support the traditional view that British soldiers were largely unprepared for the irregular style of woodland warfare practiced by American Indians.³⁶ He wrote of the reaction his Indian brother Tecaughretanego had to the defeat of Colonel James Grant and his Highlanders on a hill outside Fort DuQuesne:

He said as the art of war consists in ambushing and surprizing our enemies, and in preventing them from ambushing and surprizing us; Grant, in the first place, acted like a wise and experienced officer, in artfully approaching in the night without being discovered; but when he came to the place, and the Indians were lying asleep outside of the fort, between him and the Allegheny river, in place of slipping up quietly, and falling upon them with their broad swords, they beat the drums and played upon the bag-pipes. He said he could account for this inconsistent conduct no other way than by supposing that he had made too free with spirituous liquors during the night, and become intoxicated about day-light.³⁷

Smith included this anecdote because he knew that his readers would understand that Grant was following standard eighteenth-century European conventions of war by posturing first and then fighting overtly with the accompaniment of martial music. As one might expect, these conventions often proved useless if not fatal for European soldiers in the American woodlands against the Indians. As Smith recounts, Grant held his men

³⁶Peter Russell, "Redcoats in the Wilderness: British Officers and Irregular Warfare in Europe and America, 1740 to 1760," *William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, Vol. 35, No.4 (October 1978):629-52.

³⁷Smith, *An Account*, 104-5.

in close ranks and the Indians surrounded them and scattered themselves "and concealed behind trees, they defeated him with the loss only of a few warriors:—most of the Highlanders were killed or taken prisoners."³⁸ In contrast, Smith also wrote of the events that followed Grant's defeat that effectively ended French rule of the Ohio Valley:

After this, the remainder of the Indians, some French regulars, and a number of Canadians, marched off in quest of General Forbes. They met his army near Fort Ligoneer, and attacked them, but were frustated in their design. They said that Forbes's men were beginning to learn the art of war, and that there were a great number of American riflemen along with the red-coats, who scattered out, took trees, and were good marks-men; therefore they found they could not accomplish their design, and were obliged to retreat. When they returned from the battle to Fort DuQuesne, the Indians concluded that they would go to their hunting. The French endeavored to persuade them to stay and try another battle. The Indians said if it was only the red-coats they had to do with, they could soon subdue them, but they could not withstand *Ashalecoa*, or the Great Knife, which was the name they gave the Virginians.³⁹

Of course, the Indians then left, and the French burned Fort DuQuesne, leaving the forks of the Ohio to the British and Americans. These Ashalecoa, or Long Knives as they would also be called, included frontier riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Carolinas in addition to Andrew Lewis's men and the other Virginians who where dressed in the Indian fashion. These riflemen "were beginning to learn the art of war" from their Indian neighbors, and Smith was proud that these American riflemen had not been trained as professional soldiers for the gentlemanly art of war on the deforested battlefields

³⁸Ibid., 103.

³⁹Ibid., 104.

of Europe.⁴⁰ Smith also liked their mode of dress because five years after the fall of Fort DuQuesne he would be dressing himself and his associates in a similar fashion as they again went to war against the Indians.

By early 1760 Smith had quietly left his Indian family and joined other British and American prisoners of war in Montreal. In November of that year he was exchanged at Crown Point, and by early 1760 he was again with his family in Conococheague, Pennsylvania. Three years later, during the opening stages of Pontiac's War, Smith was appointed captain of a company of rangers and given the commission to protect his community. He selected his subalterns from among those "who had also been long in captivity with the Indians."⁴¹

As we enlisted our men, we dressed them uniformly in the Indian manner, with breech-clouts, leggins, mockesons and green shrouds, which we wore in the same manner that the Indians do, and nearly as the Highlanders wear their plaids. In place of hats we wore red handkerchiefs, and painted our faces red and black, like Indian warriors. I taught them the Indian discipline, as I knew of no other at that time, which would answer the purpose much better than British. We succeeded beyond expectation in defending the frontiers, and were extolled by our employers.⁴²

Shortly thereafter Smith accepted an ensign's commission in the Pennsylvania line, and in 1764 a lieutenant's commission in Bouquet's campaign. But by 1765 he was running

⁴⁰Ibid., 150-61.

⁴¹Ibid., 106.

⁴²Ibid., 106-7.

afoul of the law by participating in a vigilante action against a convoy of wagons carrying Indian trade goods to Fort Pitt. Smith and his neighbors believed that the trade goods would be used only to make war on frontier whites. Once again Smith and his fellows used "the Indian way" and "as usual" they "blackened and painted" themselves before attacking the wagons. Smith and his warriors, whom he called "the black boys," ran off the traders and burned "blankets, shirts, vermilion, lead, beads, wampum, tomahawks, scalping knives, &c."⁴³ The traders then appealed to the Highlander garrison at Fort Loudon, and before long there was a standoff taking place with Smith at the head of three hundred riflemen who were encamped near the fort. Before it was over, things "got entirely out of the channel of the civil law, and many unjustifiable things were done by both parties."⁴⁴

Smith was joining a host of others who wore Indian dress while committing acts of vigilante violence and civil unrest. Indeed, there was more to all this than simply the Indian clothing and war paint. In 1764 the Paxton Boys were also described as wearing Indian fashions as well as carrying rifles and tomahawks when they advanced on Philadelphia with the intention of killing Indians who were under the protection of Pennsylvania's Quaker-led government.⁴⁵ Philip Deloria asserts that the practice of

⁴³Ibid., 109-10.

⁴⁴Ibid., 111.

⁴⁵John R. Dunbar, ed., *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 44.

wearing Indian costume during acts of misrule and vigilante violence was a uniquely American cultural phenomenon. He cites incidents that occurred in New England. The first one took place in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1734, when a group of men, dressed in Indian costume and using war whoops, terrorized and clubbed a company of government officials who had been sent to enforce the Mast Tree Law. Another occurred in 1768 when another band of white Indians drove a home builder off disputed lands and tore down the house that had been built on the property.⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Boston Tea Party was a prime example of how this American tradition became directly associated with the political protests of the American Revolution. The key difference between these examples cited by Deloria and the incidents associated with frontier and backcountry groups such as the Paxton Boys and James Smith's "Black Boys" is in the way these men dressed after the violence was over. While the New Englander would go home to change his clothes and wash the paint off his face, the borderlander might only wash off the paint because his regular attire was very similar to the Indian costume of the day. It is beyond the scope of this study and unfortunately impossible to know all the psychological motives and effects this practice had on those individuals who participated in these acts of pseudo-"savagery." Perhaps it was, among other things, an attempt to draw on the power of the Indian warrior to terrorize and intimidate his foes. In any case, one

⁴⁶Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 11-12.

common denominator in all these incidents of "white savage" vigilantism is the way they are protesting the established European civil order of the day. And though this sort of behavior is largely unjustifiable when held up to the light of civil ethics and morality, it was often simply dismissed by some observers as a form of unprincipled lawlessness. Nowhere in early North America was this charge leveled more often than against the European inhabitants of the middle and southern colonial frontiers. It is in this region that the material culture of the rifleman emerged in conjunction with ways of thinking and acting that were largely unknown in Europe. These American ways of thinking and acting harmonized well with the political and cultural rebellion that accompanied the Revolution.

Long before the Revolution, life in these regions of frontier settlement offered freedoms from the social constraints that shaped the cultures of the American frontcountry and Europe. During his travels through the middle colonies in 1759 and 1760, Anglican minister Andrew Burnaby passed through Winchester, Virginia while it was still a frontier town. After a short visit to the area, he described the mostly German inhabitants of the northern Valley of Virginia as living "in perfect liberty" and "acquainted with but few vices."⁴⁷ Burnaby, however, was in the minority of those who viewed frontier folk in such a positive light. In 1766, the year after James Smith turned his Black Boys

⁴⁷Andrew Burnaby, *Travels Through the Middle Settlements in North-America In the Years 1759 and 1760 With Observations Upon the State of the Colonies*, 2d ed. (London: T. Payne, at the Mews-Gate, 1775, reprint Ithaca, NY: Great Seal Books, Cornell University Press, 1963), 40.

against the king's troops at Fort Loudon in Pennsylvania, and settlers in the Cheat River region of modern West Virginia were shooting British soldiers sent to enforce the Proclamation of 1763,⁴⁸ another Anglican minister was leaving Charleston, South Carolina to minister among the inhabitants of the backwoods of that colony. His name was Charles Woodmason, and his journal gives modern readers a biased, yet detailed account of the peoples who inhabited the southern colonial backcountry and frontier. It is to Woodmason we turn for an understanding of how this lawlessness was manifested in daily behavior that was anything but refined or genteel. His first experiences with the people of the backcountry settlement of Pine Tree Hill (the future Camden, South Carolina) led him to record the following under his entry for Sunday, 21 September 1766: "The People around, of abandon'd Morals, and profligate Principles—Rude—Ignorant—Void of Manners, Education or Good Breeding—No genteel or Polite Person among them. . . ." He went on to add that these settlers were "of all Sects and Denominations—A mixid Medley from all Countries and the Off Scouring of America."⁴⁹ As time passed, Woodmason began to compare his neighbors to Indians when they failed to live up to his standards of civility and morality. When he offered to

⁴⁸Glenn D. Lough, *Now and Long Ago: A History of the Marion County Area* (Morgantown, WV: Morgantown Printing and Binding Company, 1969, reprinted Parsons, WV: McClain Printing Company, 1994), 154-56.

⁴⁹Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant*, ed. Richard J. Hooker (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 6-7.

open a school for boys in December 1766, he recorded that only three wanted to become pupils "out of 2 or 300 that run wild here like Indians."⁵⁰ For Woodmason it seemed inconceivable that young white men would turn down an opportunity to be "properly" educated. It is possible that Woodmason's failure to attract pupils was similar to the reasons why Indian tribes did not jump at the chance to send their young warriors off to be educated in colonial schools. According to one possibly apocryphal account, the chiefs of the Six Nations were invited in 1744 to send some of their young men to be educated at the College of William and Mary's Brafferton School. Despite the questionable authenticity of the chief's following response letter, it does articulate why both whites and Indians who lived in the frontier regions of America did not always want to be "properly" educated.

Several of our Young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods, unable to bear either Cold or Hunger, knew neither how to build a Cabin, take a Deer, or kill an Enemy, Spoke our Language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less oblig'd by your kind Offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take care of their Education; instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them.⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid., 11.

⁵¹"The Indians of the Six Nations to William & Mary College," cited in Andrew Carroll, ed., *Letters of a Nation: A Collection of Extraordinary American Letters* (New York: Kodansha America, Inc., 1997), 240.

In short, the young men in Woodmason's environs valued many of the same skills their Indian neighbors did. Like Iroquois to the north and other whites along the American colonial frontier, these boys who lived around Pine Tree Hill had no desire to sacrifice their ideals of manhood for things that seemed impractical. Unable to understand them and their rustic sensibilities, Woodmason used these frontiersmen as fodder for his biting commentaries.

Not even the women and children were safe from his critical pen. At a place called Granny Quarter Creek on New Year's Day 1768, he referred to the people as a "Tribe" and wrote the following of them:

They are the lowest Pack of Wretches my Eyes ever saw, or that I have met with in these Woods—As wild as the very Deer. . . . How would the Polite People of London stare, to see the Females (many very pretty) come to Service in their Shifts and a short petticoat only, barefooted and Bare legged—Without Caps or Handkerchiefs—dress'd only in their Hair, Quite in a State of Nature for Nakedness is counted as Nothing—as they sleep altogether in Common in one Room, and shift and dress openly without Ceremony—The Men appear in Frocks or Shirts and long Trousers—No Shoes or Stockings.⁵²

In March of that same year he again wrote: "No Shoes or Stockings—Children run half naked. The Indians are better Cloathed and Lodged."⁵³ On Tuesday, 16 August of the same year, at a place called Flatt Creek, Woodmason recounted how "a vast Body of People," many of whom had "never before seen a Minister," assembled to hear him preach.

⁵²Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 31-32.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 33.

He went on to describe what happened next:

After Service they went to Revelling Drinking Singing Dancing and Whoring—and most of the Company were drunk before I quitted the Spot—They were as rude in their Manners as the Common Savages, and hardly a degree removed from them. Their Dresses almost as loose and Naked as the Indians, and differing in Nothing save Complexion—I could not conceive from whence this vast Body could swarm—But this Country contains ten times the Number of Persons beyond my Apprehension.⁵⁴

Woodmason commented further on the way white women in the region were imitating the Indian women of the day by "Rubbing themselves and their Hair with Bears Oil and tying it up behind in a Bunch like the Indians—being hardly one degree removed from them . .

. ."⁵⁵ While there can be little doubt that Woodmason was occasionally guilty of exaggeration, there is also little doubt that what he was saying was generally true. He, like other observers in other frontier regions, consistently recognized the cultural similarities these white settlers had to their Indian neighbors. It is also clear that he was using the idea of the American Indian as the antithesis of British upper-class etiquette.

Civilized manners and the class-bound rules that characterized them could socially make or break a person in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or Charleston just as they could in London or Paris. Eighteenth-century British and American frontcountry societies were largely ruled by elite grandees. These aristocrats in their endless search for refinement and class distinction helped to make up and enforce these rules to ensure their

⁵⁴Ibid., 56.

⁵⁵Ibid., 60.

places above those with fewer economic privileges. And despite their "good breeding," these elites could not always agree among themselves what these rules were.⁵⁶ Justified in part on principles of Christian morality, customs of etiquette often only served to segregate and stratify society along economic and racial lines. Because proper courtesies were largely ignored by those who first immigrated into Appalachian Indian lands, observers like Woodmason tended to base their concepts of "savagery" on the absence of elitist manners. Thus Woodmason and those of his class spent little time noting the distinct differences between Indian "savages" and white frontier folk. Even so, as an eloquent spokesman for the Regulator Movement, he wrote a compelling explanation for why the people of his backwoods region behaved in this fashion. He asserted that it was because of their "unsettled Situation" and described their predicament when he wrote that "the Bands of Society and Government hang Loose and Ungirt about Us."⁵⁷ But as we look into some of his other writings, we see that things were more complex than a simple lack of frontcountry-style government and cultural influence. Indeed, in Woodmason's satirical writings he clearly implied there was an ethnic and cultural foundation to this sort of behavior.

⁵⁶Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1994), vii-xii.

⁵⁷Woodmason, "The Remonstrance: 'We are Free-Men—British Subjects—Not Born Slaves'," as cited in *The Carolina Backcountry*, 226.

Woodmason's "Burlesque sermon" was written in 1769 as an insult to a Scotch-Irish American backwoodsman named John Chesnut. Supposedly written in Chesnut's own "Quohee" dialect of Ulster Scots and offered as a translation of another sermon that had offended Chesnut and his mother, it is a satirical commentary on the segments of backwoods culture that Woodmason detested.⁵⁸ In it he gave his despised Scotch-Irish Presbyterian listeners advice on how to avoid confrontations with potential enemies: "Let me entreat You Brother Countryman not to be in a Passion— . . . Especially when You get among any of the Virginian Crackers—for they'l bluster and make a Noise about a Turd—And they'l think they have a Right because they are American born to do as they please and what they please and say what they please to any Body."⁵⁹ Here through the filter of Woodmason's humorous sarcasm we glimpse the rise of American nationalism in backwoods culture. He implied that these frontiersmen were proud (to a fault) of being American born and thus free to break the rules of European civility. We also see how Woodmason, like the Indians defeated near Fort Ligonier in 1758, associated this segment of middle-colony frontier culture with Virginia's backwoodsmen. This was perhaps because the majority of those whites who settled in the frontier regions of North and South Carolina were emigrants from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. By the end of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, many of them were second- or third-

⁵⁸Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 150n.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 154.

generation frontier Americans and were thus steeped in the woodland culture of that region. Woodmason also noted as others that these people "will talk to their betters the same as to one another."⁶⁰ He also addressed the excessively cruel way of fighting these people engaged in: "I would advise You when You do fight Not to act like Tygers and Bears as these Virginians do—Biting one anothers Lips and Noses off, and *gowging* one another—that is, thrusting out one anothers Eyes, and kicking one another on the Cods, to the Great damage of many a Poor Woman."⁶¹ This passage from the Burlesque sermon would seem most incredible except for the fact that this sort of grisly fighting was a well-documented phenomenon in the backwoods of early America.⁶² It is behavior like this that led some observers to regard white frontiersmen as being more "savage" than the "savages."

These so-called Virginians also had a reputation in the North as well. In November 1772, the same year that Woodmason finally gave up on his mission efforts in the backwoods of South Carolina to accept an offer from an Anglican parish in Culpeper County, Virginia, the New York Indian agent Sir William Johnson wrote to the Earl of Dartmouth about the concerns of Indians in the Southern Great Lakes region. In this

⁶⁰Ibid., 157.

⁶¹Ibid., 158

⁶²Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review*, 90, No. 1 (February, 1985): 18-43.

letter he mentioned the frontier folk who were causing problems with these Indians and, as he wrote, "particularly those who daily go over the Mountains of Virginia." Johnson said that these immigrants from Virginia "employ much of their time in hunting" and "have a hatred for, ill treat, Rob and frequently murder the Indians, that they are in generall a lawless sett of People, as fond of independency as themselves, and more regardless of Governmt owing to ignorance, prejudice, democratical principles & their remote situation."⁶³ In the same year a young missionary named David McClure was proselyting among the Indians of the Ohio region. He wrote the following in his journal:

These [Shawnee Indians] have always shown great opposition to christianity, and have great hatred of the *Long Knife*, which is the name given by them to the *Virginians*. The Whites on the extensive frontiers of Virginia, are generally white Savages, and subsist by hunting, and live like the Indians.⁶⁴

Thus we see that the middle-colony frontier culture these observers described was advancing westward along a broad line. While there may have been regional differences, it is clear that they all shared certain traits that were observed on the eve of the Revolution by another writer named John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth.

In 1763 Smyth emigrated to Virginia from Scotland where he had been educated as a physician at one of the Scottish universities. In his book entitled *A Tour in the*

⁶³Sir William Johnson to the Earl of Dartmouth, as cited in E.B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York*, Vol. 8 (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers, 1857), 316.

⁶⁴*Diary of David McClure, Doctor of Divinity, 1748-1820* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1899; reprint, Waterville, OH: Rettig's Frontier Ohio, 1996), 93.

United States of America, he claims to have traveled through Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and on down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. He made his way back to Virginia via the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. He also claimed to have fought with Lewis's Augusta men at the battle of Point Pleasant during Dunmore's War in 1774, and when the Revolution broke out he joined the Loyalists. As an agent of Lord Dunmore he was captured with John Connolly and his fellow conspirators at Hagerstown, Maryland by a company of riflemen. Connolly and his party were on a mission to raise the Indians and British garrisons of the West against the rebellious colonial frontiers. After escaping and being captured once again on the Youghiogheny in January 1776, Smyth spent the next year in captivity before he finally escaped to join the British forces at New York in 1777. He then helped to raise a corps of Loyalist men named the "royal Hunters" and accepted a captain's commission in a troop of Loyalists called "Simcoe's Queens rangers." He served until 1779 when he was dismissed for reasons that are unclear but stemmed from charges made against Colonel Simcoe over enlistment bounty money. The problem with Smyth's book is that parts of it do not agree with the facts that were uncovered by The Royal Commission on the Losses and Services of American Loyalists in 1784.⁶⁵ While the findings of this commission do not necessarily reflect on the passages quoted in this essay, they do expose Smyth as a man of lesser means with

⁶⁵Hugh Edward Egerton, ed., *The Royal Commission on the Losses and Services of American Loyalists 1783 to 1785 Being the Notes of Mr. Daniel Parker Coke, M.P.* (Oxford: Printed for the Roxburghe Club, 1915; reprint, New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1969), 127-32, 143-44.

aristocratic pretensions who was not as zealous for the Loyalist cause as he had claimed. As one reads Smyth with this knowledge, these affectations become evident in his immodest obsessions with his social class and in the telling of his unwavering loyalty to the king. The findings of this commission also bring into question the dates of his wilderness journey. In any case it is clear that the author of the account had become quite familiar with the riflemen of both the frontier and backcountry. Like Woodmason, Smyth was harshly critical of these "white savages" and their impolite ways, but he also showed a degree of admiration towards them for their skills in the American wilderness.

Writing and publishing his memoirs in 1784 just after the Revolution, Smyth devoted large sections of his work to describing these frontier riflemen. He even devoted an entire chapter to a description of their "strange Dress and peculiar Sentiments."⁶⁶ Like Woodmason, Smyth saw these frontier and backcountry folk as demi-Indians who had little in common with Europeans. In an area of North Carolina backcountry near modern Charlotte, he, like Woodmason, characterized the women he saw as "little better than beautiful savages." Later he even seems to have fallen in love with a backwoods girl named Betsy, whom he said was "quite in a state of nature."⁶⁷ At the same time, he was not as kind to the men. At one point he distinguished them as being "little better,

⁶⁶John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America* (London: G. Robinson, 1784; reprint, New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1968), 1:178.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 1:131 & 1:252.

perhaps much worse, than savages."⁶⁸ He said that the men's "extreme rudeness and brutality . . . would scarcely appear credible to the civilized part of the species."⁶⁹ But as we read Smyth's writings we can see his ambivalence towards the people of the Kentucky frontier. On the one hand, they, like those in the Carolina backcountry, "are in reality a rude, barbarous and unpolished set of men," but on the other he goes on to say, "yet you will frequently find pleasure in their conversation." He characterized their ideas as being "bold and spirited," while "their sentiments" were "not liberal." Despite these criticisms, we find the following sentences among his kindest compliments to these American frontier folk: "However, they are certainly a sensible, enterprising, hardy, unpolished race, yet open, free and hospitable." He added: "Pusillanimousness, cowardice and mean spirit appear not there [in Kentucky]; hitherto they have not reached so far, and as yet are generally confined on the east of the mountains."⁷⁰

Smyth also records one of the great contradictions he perceived among the people of the Carolina backcountry. He asserted that "they all, especially the women, profess an avowed partiality for Britons, whom, notwithstanding, they call outlandish folks, ignorant and unpolished, thinking themselves the only polite, knowing people in the world."⁷¹ This

⁶⁸Ibid., 1:247.

⁶⁹Ibid., 1:132.

⁷⁰Ibid., 1:331.

⁷¹Ibid.

attitude made little sense to Smyth, who saw his Britishness as inextricably connected to his polite civility and upper-class manners. He had difficulty understanding how these American backwoodsmen could see themselves ethnically as people of British descent without wanting to copy Britain's class-based system of deference and cultural refinement.

Smyth expected deferential treatment because of his social class and education. He was disappointed to find that America's backcountry and frontier were not like what he had grown to expect in Britain and Europe. When he recounted his experiences in the Kentucky territory, he recorded this observation on the subject: "I have observed that throughout all the back country, indeed I had almost said throughout all America, there seems to be no such thing as any idea of subordination, or difference of ranks in like; excepting from the weaker to the stronger; and from the slaves to the whites." He went on to write the following:

This total want of subordination renders the whole country particularly disagreeable to strangers, such especially as have been accustomed to the polished intercourse of Europe; for in the back-woods, and frontiers especially, there is no degree of insolence, impertinence and rudeness but they think themselves justifiable in practising, either to one another, or towards such as may come among them, and in a manner, as well as to an extent, that could not be credited by Europeans, had not so many seen and experienced it.⁷²

Smyth illustrated his point further in another passage. During his travels through the mountains and woods to Kentucky, as well as during his trip down the Ohio and

⁷²Ibid., 1:330.

Mississippi to New Orleans, Smyth employed a young backwoodsman as a guide and "servant." Realizing his association with this American backwoodsman was not like the typical relationships that existed in Europe between a servant and his master, Smyth wrote the following about this man:

However, although I now call this man my servant, yet he himself never would have submitted to such an appellation, although he most readily performed every menial office, and indeed any service I could desire; yet such is the insolence, folly, and ridiculous pride of those ignorant backwoods men, that they would conceive it an indelible disgrace and infamy to be styled servants, even to his Majesty, not withstanding [sic] they will gladly perform the lowest and most degrading services for hire.⁷³

Like many modern Americans, these backwoodsmen did not see physical work as dishonorable. Unlike the British aristocrat or gentleman who would forfeit his social rank by engaging in any kind of manual labor for pay, American backwoodsmen did not see their station in life as having anything to do with such things. Again like modern Americans, the backwoodsman's aversion to the title of servant was simply a way of rejecting the inferiority that such a label would imply.

Despite these negative sentiments, Smyth had great appreciation for this unnamed frontiersman. Smyth realized that it required "the experience of several years" if one wanted "to become a good and experienced wood's-man."⁷⁴ Since Smyth had no intention of serving such an apprenticeship, he hired this man to make up for his own lack of

⁷³Ibid., 1:356.

⁷⁴Ibid., 1:140.

practical education. Following his journey he wrote this tribute. Smyth asserted that while he had "travelled at least four thousand eight hundred miles, and undergone a multitude of dangers and extreme fatigue," he was, as he wrote:

accompanied, and attended almost the whole way, much to my convenience and satisfaction, by my faithful backwood's man, whom at first I considered as little better than a savage, but from whom I found more assistance than I could possibly have received from the most complete professed servant in Europe. For these American back-wood's men can perform a little not only almost in every handicraft, or necessary mechanical trade, but they possess a fund of resources, more serviceable on such occasions than money; for in many places money could not procure them, nor supply the wants which are furnished by their ready and indeed singular contrivances.⁷⁵

After settling into plantation life on the Potomac in Maryland, Smyth claimed to have continued to employ this "faithful back-wood's man" as an overseer, much to Smyth's continued satisfaction. This sort of practical independence and self-reliance would become recognizably American characteristics and ideals of the nation's mythological self-image.

Smyth also claimed that he fought alongside American frontier riflemen at the Battle of Point Pleasant during Dunmore's War. At that battle against the Ohio Shawnee, he maintained that he commanded a company of men from Augusta County, Virginia, whom he called "a set of white savages."⁷⁶ After the battle Smyth credited these "white savages" with showing "more dexterity and skill than the Indians, which" he thought

⁷⁵Ibid., 2:108-9.

⁷⁶Ibid., 2:160.

was "indeed very unusual."⁷⁷ Shortly thereafter the Revolution would begin, and Smyth would naturally choose to be a Loyalist. Thus, his last experiences with backwoods riflemen would not be pleasant. During his ill-fated mission to Detroit, he was arrested and held captive by a Hagerstown, Maryland rifle company composed of "rude unfeeling German ruffians, fit for assassinations, murder, and death."⁷⁸

When the war officially began in the spring of 1775, the frontier rifleman was ready to take his place as a symbol and as a warrior of the Revolution. His costume had its beginnings in the second quarter of the eighteenth century with clothing worn by men like Henry Smith's runaway Indian trading servants. He also traced his roots to the white families living like Indians on the Potomac and in the Shenandoah Valley who relied on big game hunting with long rifle guns. The costume was combined with military prowess in the uniquely American blend of Native and European cultures seen in the Long Knife warriors who helped to turn the tide of the Seven Years' War near Fort Ligonier. The defeated Indians, from whom the whites borrowed and stole so much, served unwittingly as inspiration and as teachers of their own war craft. After this war was over, many of these frontier riflemen with their strange way of dressing found themselves living and hunting illegally on lands that were beyond a boundary set by a remote British government. As we can see in the writings of men such as James Smith, political and

⁷⁷Ibid., 2:170.

⁷⁸Ibid., 2:252.

cultural rebellions against British authority began very early in the frontier and backcountry. They began as vigilante actions carried out by "white savages" in war paint. In Woodmason's journal we see the beginnings of a form of American backwoods nationalism and cultural rebellion against the Mother Country. In Smyth's writings we also see more evidence of this cultural rebellion in Indian dress as well as the rise of egalitarianism, independence of thought, and self-reliance. As Smyth put it, the frontier rifleman was one who found "all his resources in himself."⁷⁹ In contrast, the Indians who served as an inspiration to these new American nationalists were losing their political and cultural independence. As they grew more and more reliant on European-style goods, they lost their abilities to stand against these frontiersmen who were taking away their lands and way of life. American frontiersmen were also dependent on European-style goods, but they were less dependent than their cousins in the frontcountry. This fact helped to fuel the myth of the homespun material lives of the American backwoodsman. This pseudo-independence, coupled with their attitudes of cultural rebellion, nationalism, and egalitarianism, made these backwoodsmen ideal American revolutionaries. It is, therefore, not hard to see why the backwoods riflemen were among the first non-New England troops to respond to the battle cry of the Revolution. In fact, the first ten units of the Continental Line were riflemen from the backwoods regions of Pennsylvania,

⁷⁹Ibid., 1:182.

Maryland, and Virginia.⁸⁰ It is to the "uniforms" of these men and the frontier material culture associated with them that we turn next. As the rebellious Philadelphia minister mentioned at the beginning of this chapter recognized, the uniforms worn by the impolite backwoodsmen would take on a different meaning to the peoples of the frontcountry during the course of the ensuing rebellion.

⁸⁰Huddleston, *Colonial Rifleman*, 19.

CHAPTER 2

"APING THE MANNERS OF SAVAGES"

Among the riflemen who marched to Cambridge that summer in 1775 was a young man from the backcountry named John Joseph Henry. Henry was a member of a Lancaster County, Pennsylvania rifle company that later accompanied the forces sent to take Quebec during the autumn of 1775. His account of this campaign and his experiences in it were first published in 1812, a year after his death. In this account he described the clothing and accoutrements that he and his fellow riflemen wore in the context of explaining regional differences between the New Englanders and the rifle companies of the middle colonies:

The principal distinction between us, was in our dialects, our arms, and our dress. Each man of the three companies bore a rifle-barreled gun, a tomahawk, or small axe, and a long knife, usually called a scalping-knife, which served for all purposes, in the woods. His under-dress, by no means in a military style, was covered by a deep ash-colored hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins, if the latter could be procured.¹

Almost as an afterthought, Henry then commented on the costume worn by these backcountry soldiers: "It was the silly fashion of those times, for riflemen to ape the

¹John Joseph Henry, *Account of Arnold's Campaign Against Quebec and of the Hardships and Sufferings of That Band of Heroes who Traversed the Wilderness of Maine from Cambridge to the St. Lawrence in the Autumn of 1775* (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1877; reprint, New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1968), 11 (page references are to reprint edition).

manners of savages."² J.F.D. Smyth also recounted that the riflemen he saw had a way of dressing that was "very singular, and not very materially different from that of the Indians."³ Writing forty years later, retired Episcopal minister Joseph Doddridge recalled that the dress of the Revolutionary War frontiersmen in his region of southwestern Pennsylvania was "partly Indian and partly that of civilized nations."⁴ The questions raised by comments like these are not easy to answer. What exactly was it about these clothes and accoutrements that mimicked the fashions of the American Indian in that day? Which of these items of apparel were "of the civilized nations?" Were there any of uniquely American origin? Was Henry just speaking of the outfits like the other commentators, or was he also talking about the riflemen's behavior? We can also ask if the decision to wear these woodland costumes in an urban setting like Boston was not a form of cultural rebellion. In any case, to answer these questions we will explore Henry's writings as well as other primary sources to examine the facts as they survive. Indeed, if we go back and consider the inventory of items worn by Henry and others when they described the clothing and accoutrements of the middle-colony rifle companies, we can begin to understand why they were sources of patriotic inspiration to people like that

²Ibid.

³Smyth, *A Tour in the United States*, 1:179.

⁴Joseph Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars*, (Pittsburgh: John S. Ritenour and William. T. Lindsey, 1912; reprint, Parsons, WV: McClain Printing Company, 1989), 91.

rebellious Philadelphian minister who claimed that God's angels were dressed in these same backwoods fashions.

John Joseph Henry was no stranger to American Indians and frontier material culture. He was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1758 to a family that made their living as gunsmiths. As a child in 1763 he and his older brother witnessed the Paxton massacre.⁵ Later, in 1772, he accompanied his uncle John Henry, who made his living as a gunsmith and an Indian trader, to Fort Detroit. John Joseph returned the next year through the wilderness with the help of a guide who died during the trek. John Joseph made it alone to a relative's home in Logstown on the Ohio River and then returned from there to Lancaster after regaining his health.⁶ When the Revolution broke out, he decided to join the rifle company that was forming in his county, and his mother made him "his rifleman's uniform."⁷ In this chapter we will be examining this "uniform" to see how it "aped the manner of savages," but we will also focus on the accoutrements that set Henry and his fellow riflemen apart from other soldiers during the period. Chief among these accoutrements was the long rifle gun.

The first item listed in Henry's description of things that distinguished the troops of the middle colonies from those of New England was the "rifled-barreled gun." (See

⁵Henry, *Arnold's Campaign*, v.

⁶*Ibid.*, vi.

⁷*Ibid.*, vii.

Figure 5.) Many Indians and whites along the frontier preferred American-style long rifles over the smoothbore fowlers and muskets of the day. In this respect, our demi-Indians differed little from the real natives of the American forests. This preference for long rifles by the time of the Revolution led these backwoodsmen to an unrivaled proficiency with these guns, and even the guns themselves were revered for their quality. One British officer by the name of George Hanger put it this way after the war: "I never in my life saw better rifles (or men who shot better) than those made in America." He then went on to prove his point by recounting an incident that occurred during the war on a windless day when an American rifleman shot at a "full four hundred yards" only to miss Banastre Tarleton and himself but kill a bugler's horse which was standing mounted behind them.⁸ In all likelihood this shot was intended for Tarleton or Hanger, but the horse became the unlucky recipient of the ball. Even so, as Hanger knew, hitting anything with a shot like that at four hundred yards using open sights demonstrated abnormally good marksmanship. Hanger also recounted that when he asked American riflemen about their maximum range, they replied that "they were generally sure of splitting a man's head at two hundred yards," and "by only aiming at the top of his head" they could hit a man or "shoot very near him" at four hundred yards.⁹

⁸George Hanger, *Colonel George Hanger, To All Sportsmen and Particularly to Farmers, and Gamekeepers*. (London: J. J. Stockdale, 1814, reprint, Richmond, Surrey: The Richmond Publishing Co. Ltd., 1971), 122-24.

⁹*Ibid.*, 144.

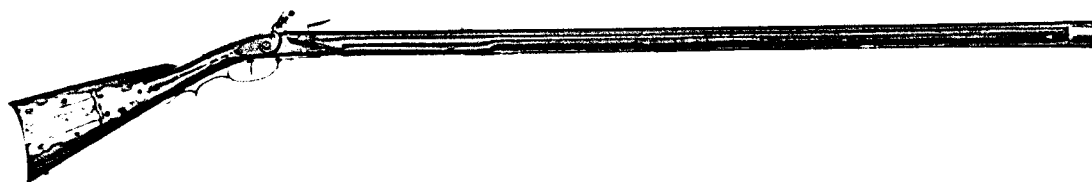


Figure 5: American long rifle, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, possibly made some- time near the end of the third quarter of the eighteenth century. This is the kind of American long rifle that was popular during the era of Revolutionary War. It is the kind of civilian big game rifle that would have been carried to war by men like John Joseph Henry. Its uniquely American hinged brass patchbox and decorative carving set it apart from the other civilian smoothbore arms that were being imported from England during the period. This gun was made to impress the American big game hunter of the day. (Photo courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

For the common man of that day to achieve this level of skill he would need to live in a society where hunting with rifles began at an early age. In Britain, unless he was the son of a gamekeeper or a poacher, the common soldier of the period would only pick up a gun for the first time when he joined the army. On the other hand, as one American Loyalist explained to the Earl of Dartmouth in 1775, things were different in America: "In this country, my lord, the boys, as soon as they can discharge a gun, frequently exercise themselves therewith, some a fowling and others a hunting."¹⁰ J.F.D. Smyth, speaking of backwoodsmen, stated that they "habituate themselves constantly to carry [a rifle] along with them every where."¹¹ While a prisoner of war near Charlottesville, Virginia, Thomas Anburey wrote the following anecdote in a letter to a friend on 4 August 1779:

On my return from Richmond, I witnessed the mode that renders the Virginia rifle-men so expert in the use of arms—as great numbers were assembled, shooting at marks, and which I understand, long before the commencement of the war, was the constant diversion in this country; so certain are they of hitting, that they are not fearful of holding the board at arm's length; nay, some are so little apprehensive of danger, that they will place it between their legs for another to fire at.¹²

These are just some of the many accounts that testify of the marksmanship of these men.

¹⁰A Minister of the Church of England to the Earl of Dartmouth, 1775, as cited in LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 82.

¹¹Smyth, *A Tour in the United States*, 1:179.

¹²Anburey, *Travels*, 2:414.

A number of the other narratives attest to how common the practice of shooting at a board held between the legs of a fellow marksman was in the day.¹³ These men trusted each other and their rifle guns.

Few items of backwoods material culture had as much practical impact on the war as the rifle gun. These backwoodsmen used their long rifles to profoundly demoralize British troops and to target the officers of George III. Thomas Anburey gives us an excellent account of what it was like to be in Burgoyne's army fighting against these "white savages" with their rifles during the Saratoga campaign. Among the greatest American victories of the war, the Battle of Saratoga was won in large part because of the contributions of Daniel Morgan's riflemen. Morgan's men had mastered the art of sharp shooting, and their targets were often gentlemen officers of the British line. "The officers who have been killed and wounded in the late action," wrote Anburey, "are much greater in proportion than that of the soldiers, which must be attributed to the great exertions of the rifle-men, who direct their fire against them in particular."¹⁴ One British officer who was doing an exceptional job of leading his men during the battle was General Simon Fraser. The highest ranking officer killed at Saratoga, Fraser was shot by one of Morgan's men named Timothy Murphy. Murphy, one of Morgan's "best shots," was using a swivel-breech rifle that allowed for two quick shots, one after the other. His first shot

¹³LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 76-77.

¹⁴Anburey, *Travels*, 1:429.

missed, but his second mortally wounded the general.¹⁵ This event, in combination with "the galling fire of the riflemen" which was kept up dawn till dusk from "the most lofty trees," led to Burgoyne's capitulation.¹⁶

Anburey and others were not used to seeing such high casualties among men of rank. Little did Anburey and his fellow British officers understand the contempt the American riflemen had for them. Privilege and rank were in large measure earned in the backwoods of America and not purchased as one could a commission in the British Army. Neither were they used to being shot at by an enemy who was so far away and who would not hesitate to fire at them long after battles had ended. "This war is very different to the last in Germany;" he observed, "in this the life of an individual is sought with as much avidity as the obtaining a victory over an army of thousands."¹⁷ This targeting of individuals seemed out of the ordinary because generally rifles were not used in contemporary European wars. The volley fire from smoothbore muskets utilized by European armies did not target individuals. Instead, the lines of men firing their pieces were often shooting into clouds of thick smoke, and the inaccuracy of their smoothbore guns loaded with undersized balls were largely incapable of hitting man sized targets at

¹⁵Don Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 73-74, 170-71.

¹⁶Anburey, *Travels*, 1:459, 2:14.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 1:331.

distances greater than eighty yards. While this method created the lethal eighteenth-century equivalent of a machine gun spraying an enemy line, it did not carry the personal element of carefully aimed rifle fire. Thus if you were hit in a battle it was often not the result of someone taking aim at you as much as it was that a bullet had found you through dumb luck. Being shot by a rifle during or after a battle was quite different. To the genteel European officer it seemed personal, like assassination.

Another incident that illustrates this point occurred later in the war at Fredericksburg, Virginia. In it one can see the contrast between the deferential sensibilities of European warfare and the newer ways of the Americans with their rifles. In his pension application Pennsylvanian James Johnson recounted what happened when the British General William Phillips and the traitor Benedict Arnold were spotted on a beach across the Rappahannock River reconnoitering the American positions under the command of Lafayette:

Immediately after, there was a bustle at the door occasioned by five riflemen in hunting shirts and moccasins who eagerly solicited permission to steal down to a point from which they felt sure they could pick off these officers. The marquis refused his sanction, declaring that he would meet the enemy openly in the field but would authorize nothing like assassination. This refusal excited great dissatisfaction, which was expressed among the rest by his aide Major McPherson.¹⁸

Lafayette did not understand American riflemen or the newer style of warfare they

¹⁸John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 405-6.

practiced. This newer style of warfare was inspired by the Indian ways of fighting, and it relied on stealth, surprise, and terror. The rifle guns used by these backwoods soldiers made this new style of warfare possible. Thus it is not hard to see why the long American rifle and the men who carried them were so highly prized by British officers as war trophies.

One of Daniel Morgan's riflemen named George Merchant was captured during the siege of Quebec. "Merchant was a tall and handsome Virginian" who was sent "hunting shirt and all" to Britain "as a finished specimen of the *riflemen* of the colonies."¹⁹ During the same period an English collector named Sir Ashton Lever had a "Rifle-barrelled Gun, from North America" and the "dress of a Rifle-man" on display amid other curiosities of the world in his London museum.²⁰ George Hanger brought one of these long rifles back to England with him after the war. On its cheek piece was a thirteen pointed-sun with the words "UNITED STATES" circling the center where the words "WE ARE ONE" appear. (See Figures 6a & 6b.) This feature leaves little doubt about the political feelings of its original owner. Hanger eventually gave it to the Prince of Wales, who had a London gun firm alter the piece to fit the tastes of the future king.

¹⁹Henry, *Arnold's Campaign*, 84.

²⁰J.C.H. King, "Woodlands Art as depicted by Sarah Stone in the Collection of Sir Ashton Lever," *American Indian Art Magazine*, Spring 1993, 34.

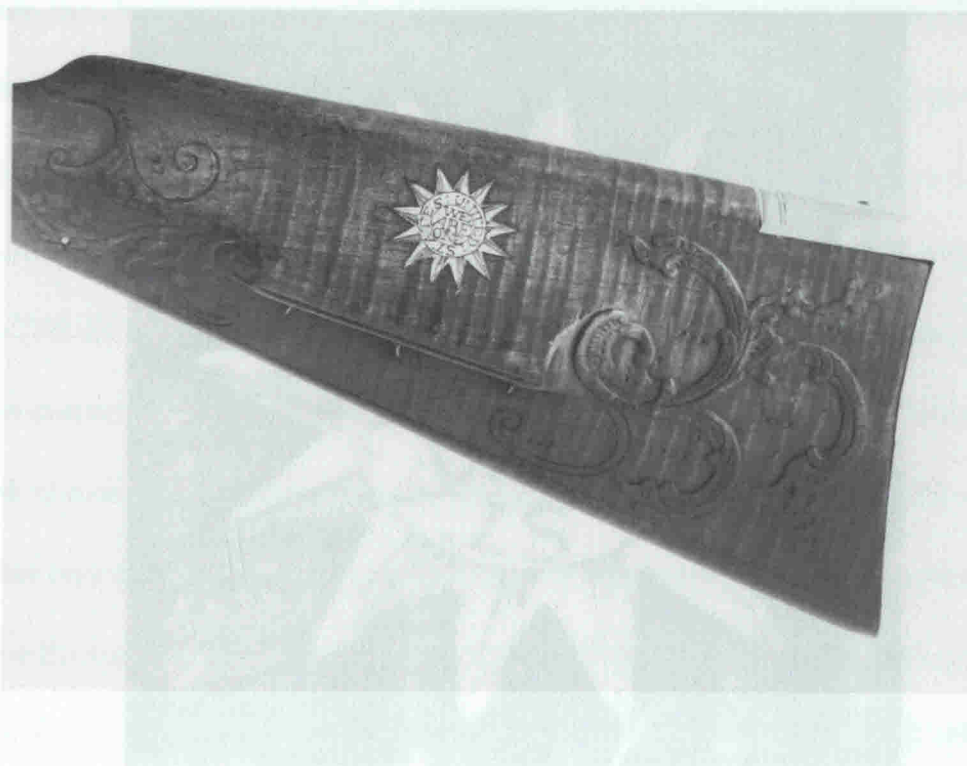


Figure 6a: This is a photo of the cheek piece of the so-called “John Thomas’ Rifle” with its thirteen-pointed star inlaid into its curly-maple stock. It was brought back to England by George Hanger and was later given to George IV while he was still the Prince of Wales. By far, this is one of the most obviously patriotic decorations on an extant rifle that dates to the Revolutionary War. (Photos Courtesy of Wallace Gusler, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.)

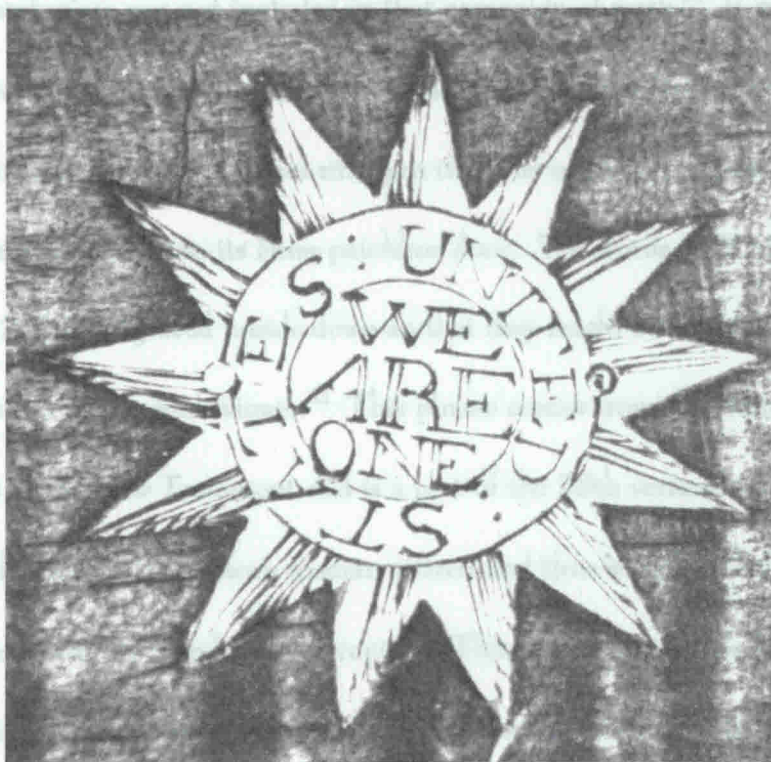


Figure 6b: This is a detail of the thirteen-pointed star of the so-called "John Thomas' Rifle." In this photo one can see the craftsmanship in the engraving on this patriotic hunter's star. (Photo courtesy of Wallace Gusler, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.)

Fortunately, the cheek piece was not included in that campaign of work.²¹ It remains today in the royal collection at Windsor Castle. In fact, antique collectors continue to find these war trophies in Britain. Another rifle gun that was in England until recently carried another patriotic epitaph on its brass patchbox door. The words "I WAS FREE BORN ACTS 22 28" are engraved upside down so that they might be read by the person holding the gun instead of the gun's viewer.²² This phrase comes from the 22nd chapter of the book of Acts in the New Testament and is a part of the 28th verse where the Apostle Paul says that he was a free born Roman citizen and thus worthy of being treated as such by a Roman centurion who held him captive. This inscription makes little sense on this gun if it is taken out of the context of the American Revolution's political culture and specifically the culture of the backwoods riflemen. Given what we know about this era and the men who carried guns like this, the inscription does not seem out of place. But rifles like these were not the only weapons carried by these "white savages."

The riflemen whom Henry described were also carrying tomahawks. From the time Jamestown was settled in 1607, the word tomahawk has had a number of meanings. Originally, for the Algonquian-speaking tribes of the middle colonies, it was simply a tool for cutting. Eventually small hand axes or hatchets of iron or brass, with or without steel

²¹Shumway, *Rifles of Colonial America*, 2:526.

²²*Ibid.*, 2:496-99.

blades, were being called tomahawks by those involved in the Indian trade.²³ War clubs and stone-bladed axes were, in large measure, replaced by these European-style hatchets. By the eighteenth century these trade hatchets, or tomahawks, had taken on a distinct form. By the mid-eighteenth century, they were clearly designed as weapons, and not as the wood hatchets used by the women in the Woodland Indian cultures during the period. Recent scholarship has shed more light on the origins of the most popular style of tomahawks. In his yet unpublished paper, Timothy J. Shannon of Gettysburg College cites the work of another unpublished scholar named Corinna Dalley-Starna. Dalley-Starna's translation of a German Moravian record indicates that by the 1740s, in addition to hammer heads and spikes, tobacco pipe bowls were added to the pole sides opposite the blades, thus making it possible to smoke a tomahawk.²⁴ By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, these pipe-tomahawks along with the other varieties, were in common use by both white frontiersmen and Indians.²⁵ As Smyth recounted, these backwoods riflemen "always have tomahawks in their belts; which, in such situations and

²³Harold L. Peterson, *American Indian Tomahawks*, Contributions From the Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, Vol. 19 (Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, 1971), 4-5.

²⁴Timothy J. Shannon, "Queequeg's Tomahawk: The Pipe Hatchet as an Artifact of the European-Indian Encounter, 1750-1850" presented at the Winterthur Museum Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Material Life, Winterthur, Delaware, Oct 1997. 8-9.

²⁵Peterson, *American Indian Tomahawks*, 40-43.

circumstances, are more useful than any thing, except the rifle-barreled firelock."²⁶

Smyth described the tomahawks he saw these riflemen carrying as the hammer pole type, but one of the finest surviving examples of a rifleman's tomahawk is of the pipe variety.

(See Figures 7a-e.)

Tomahawks are material examples of the way Indian and European cultures met and mixed in America. While the technology and origin of their manufacture are European, their name and ethnic associations are obviously Indian. Not only would they be used in hand as a cutting weapon, they were also thrown by both white frontiersmen and Indians. Anburey's writings provide the following description and explanation: "This instrument they [the Indians] make great use of in war, for in pursuing an enemy, if they find it impossible to come up with them, they with the utmost dexterity throw, and seldom fail striking it into the skull or back of those they pursue, by that means arresting them in flight."²⁷ Doddridge recounted how white youths would learn this art of throwing a tomahawk. "Throwing the tomahawk" he wrote, "was another boyish sport, in which many acquired considerable skill. . . . A little experience enabled the boy to measure the distance with his eye, when walking through the woods, and strike a tree with his tomahawk in any way he chose."²⁸ But they were more than toys or accessories to a rifleman's costume.

²⁶Smyth, *A Tour in the United States*, 1:179.

²⁷Anburey, *Travels*, 1:402

²⁸Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement*, 123.

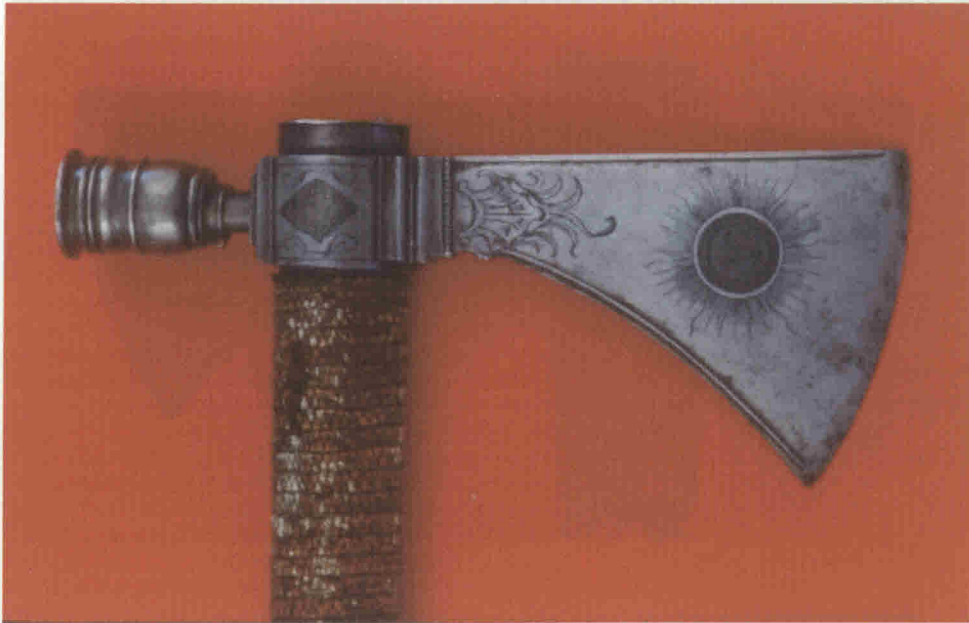


Figure 7a: The Richard Butler Tomahawk, third or early fourth quarter of the eighteenth century. The quillwork on the haft has led many to think this was an Indian tomahawk. This view shows the sunburst inlay than some have speculated had Masonic meaning to its original owner. (Gordon Barlow Collection. Photo courtesy of Wallace Gusler.)

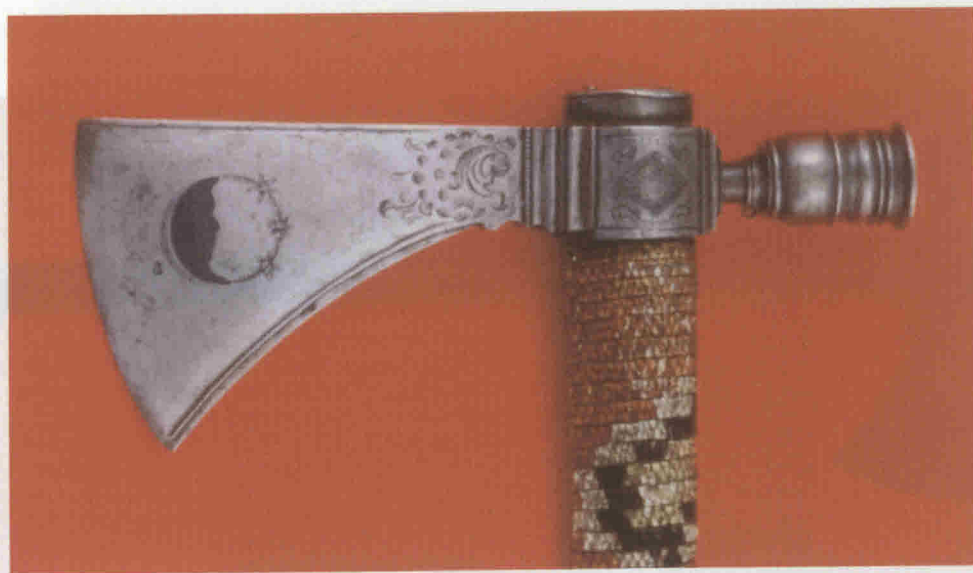


Figure 7b: Richard Butler Tomahawk. This view shows the side opposite the sunburst inlay, and again many have speculated that this moon-and-stars motif has Masonic meaning. The tiny eyehole under the pipe bowl once held a metal chain. It was not uncommon for presentation tomahawks to use the physical metaphor of a chain to represent the Indian concept of a covenant chain of friendship. (Gordon Barlow Collection. Photo Courtesy of Wallace Gusler.)



Figure 7c: This view of the Butler tomahawk shows the quillwork and the band on the haft that held the other eye-hole for the now missing chain. At the bottom of the haft is a discoloration where a mouthpiece cap once was but is now missing. (Gordon Barlow Collection. Photo courtesy of Wallace Gusler.)

Figures 7d & 7c: Richard Butler Tomahawk. It is believed that "Richard Butler" is none other than the Pittsburgh Indian trader and gunsmith Richard Butler who served under David Morgan at Saratoga and later commanded the 9th Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment. (See Figure 16.) The current owner of this piece believes that "Lt. MacCallan" is Lt. John MacCallan of Thompson's Pennsylvania Rifle Battalion who died during the Canadian Campaign of 1775. For years this tomahawk was in the Warwick Castle Collection and mistaken for an Indian piece. The current owner believes it came into the possession of the Earl of Warwick when it was acquired at Quebec by MacCallan's brother-in-law and inherited it after Lt. MacCallan died in the wilderness of Maine. (Photo by Gordon Barlow Collection.)



Figure: 7d & 7e. Richard Butler Tomahawk. It is believed that "R. Butler" is none other than the Pittsburgh Indian trader and gunsmith Richard Butler who served under Daniel Morgan at Saratoga and later commanded the 9th Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment. (See Figure 16.) The current owner of this piece believes that "Lt. Maclellan" is 1st Lt. John McClellan of Thompson's Pennsylvania Rifle Battalion who died during the Canadian Campaign of 1775. For years this tomahawk was in the Warwick Castle Collection and mistaken for an Indian piece. The current owner believes it came into the possession of the Earls of Warwick when it was surrendered at Quebec by McClellan's brother who had inherited it after Lt. McClellan died in the wilderness of Maine. (Photo by Author, Gordon Barlow Collection.)

They became associated with a custom known on the middle-colony frontier as the "tomahawk right." Simply put, one would use a tomahawk to mark the bark of trees in the area of an unofficial land claim. Those who violated these tomahawk rights were subject to the lighter forms of frontier vigilante justice which took the form of what was called "*a laced jacket*" or "a sound whipping."²⁹ Tomahawks were even favored by frontiersmen as a means of execution for both whites and Indians as they were during George Rogers Clark's Illinois campaign.³⁰ Thus both Indian and white frontiersmen used this weapon in a similar manner, and it is difficult to say who was imitating whom during the era of the Revolution.

Another weapon Henry listed was the "long knife, [which was] usually called a scalping-knife." (See Figure 8.) He added that these knives "served for all purposes, in the woods," but their more common name is clearly a strong statement about how these weapons were being used against foes of the frontier riflemen. Both frontiersmen and Indians carried knives that were used for this grisly act of mutilation. Contrary to current conventional wisdom, the practice of scalping was not introduced by the European

²⁹Ibid., 81.

³⁰George Rogers Clark, *Col. George Rogers Clark's Sketch of His Campaign in the Illinois in 1778-9*, (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1869; reprint, Ohio Valley Historical Series, Number Three, New York: Arno Press Inc., 1971), 60, 73.

invaders of America, and its pre-Columbian origins are well-documented.⁴¹ Therefore, scalping was closely a case where the white settlers were imitating the "savages." When American frontiersmen named these knives and employed them in scalping their enemies, they crossed a line that the Boston Tea Party participants would never transgress during their evening of acting like Indians. As with the use of the tomahawk, settlers were purposefully choosing, naming, and using their scalping knives "to ape the manners of savages."



Figure 8: Long Knife, American, steel blade, pewter hilt, and antler handle. This piece dates from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The blade is forged from an old file blade. (Photo courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

⁴¹James Artell and William C. Sturtevant, "The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping?" *Willow and Mary Quarterly*, 34 Ser. 27, 3 (July 1980): 461-72.

⁴²Arthur Woodcock, "The Long Knife," *Indian News* [Horn Foundation], 31 (January 1928), 64-79.

invaders of America, and its pre-Columbian origins are well-documented.³¹ Therefore, scalping was clearly a case where the white settlers were imitating the "savages." When American frontiersmen named these knives and employed them in scalping their enemies, they crossed a line that the Boston Tea Party participants would never transgress during their evening of acting like Indians. As with the use of the tomahawk, riflemen were purposefully choosing, naming, and using their scalping knives "to ape the manners of savages."

There is some controversy among scholars about the origin of the Indian name for the Virginians. James Smith recounted how the Indians of the Ohio territory and Southern Great Lakes called Virginia's frontiersmen (as well as others like them) "Ashalecoa or the Great Knife." Other variations of this name were "Knifemen," "Big Knives," or "Long Knives." Some current historians join with the traditional interpretation and assert that this name referred to swords instead of knives.³² In his book on Daniel Boone, the early twentieth-century frontier historian Reuben Gold Thwaites wrote of how he believed it was the knives rather than swords carried by colonial Indian fighters that

³¹James Axtell and William C. Sturtevant, "The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping?" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser. 27: 3 (July 1980): 451-72.

³²Arthur Woodward, "The 'Long Knives'," *Indian Notes* [Heye Foundation], 5:1 (January 1928), 64-79.

inspired the name.³³ Although we may never know for sure how this tradition developed among the Indians, it is clear that the white frontiersmen of the Revolutionary era believed that their name referred to the long scalping knives they carried as riflemen. Evidence for this can be found in the way Henry and others called their scalping knives "long knives." We can also see the evidence in the iconography of the frontier whites' material culture. For instance, there are at least four known tomahawks that have survived into the present that are decorated with silver inlay of long scalping knives, three of which have known white men's names engraved on them. (See Figure 9.)³⁴

After cataloging their weapons Henry listed the costume worn by the riflemen. Among the items in this list were "leggings and moccasins." Benjamin West's famous painting entitled *The Death of General Wolfe* depicts an American ranger in the left foreground wearing a green coat. Conspicuously, in addition to the wampum-beaded straps on his shot pouch that are obviously of Indian design, he is also wearing a pair of leggings and moccasins. (See Figure 10.) One does not need to be an anthropologist to recognize the cultural origins of these items. As we have seen, the practice of Europeans wearing Indian leggings and moccasins predates the Seven Years' War. Contemporary

³³Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Daniel Boone* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1913), 111n.

³⁴See William H. Guthman, "Frontiersmen's Tomahawks of the Colonial and Federal Periods," *The Magazine Antiques*, March 1981, 659, 661 & 662. Also see James R. Johnston, *Accouterments*, (Ashley, Ohio: Golden Age Arms Co., n.d.), 85.



Figure 9: Daniel Smith Tomahawk. This is one of two known to exist with "Dan Smith Opost" silver knife inlays. In short this is a tomahawk made for a 'Long Knife'. (Guthman Collection, Photo courtesy of William Guthman.)



Figure 10: *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1771 by Benjamin West. Representing America in this epic painting is the heroic ranger of the Lake Champlain wilderness in his Indian leggings and moccasins. Note that he is not wearing a breechclout but wears his leggings over breeches. This painting is one of the most famous depictions of a white man wearing leggings and moccasins. Ironically, it was the middle-colonial rifleman to the south who would eventually become more famous for wearing these Indian fashions. Even so, it should not be forgotten that the northern backwoodsman of the Seven Years' War period also dressed in mixed fashions much like the Long Knives did in the South. (Photos courtesy of The National Gallery of Canada.)

descriptions of these items indicate their practical value in the Eastern Woodlands of early America. Smyth wrote of them in his description of the riflemen he knew:

On their legs they have Indian boots, or leggings, made of coarse woollen cloth, that either are wrapped round loosely and tied with garters, or are laced upon the outside, and always come better than half way up the thigh: these are a great defence and preservative, not only against the bite of serpents and poisonous insects, but likewise against the scratches of thorns, briars, scrubby bushes, and underwood, with which this whole country is infested and overspread.³⁵

Leggings, which were also made from elk or deer skins, could be worn with European-style shoes. As we will see, when shoes could not be obtained or an effort was being made to save them, moccasins were the common substitute. The word *moccasin* is of Algonquian origin and denoted the same style of footwear that Europeans were copying when they made their versions of these Indian articles. Doddridge even went so far as to say that "a pair of moccasins answered for the feet much better than shoes." He went on to describe them as follows:

These [moccasins] were made of dressed deer skin. They were mostly made of a single piece with a gathering seam along the top of the foot, and another from the bottom of the heel, without gathers as high as the ankle joint or a little higher. Flaps were left on each side to reach some distance up the legs. These were nicely adapted to the ankles and lower parts of the leg by thongs of deer skin, so that no dust, gravel or snow could get within the moccasin.³⁶

Doddridge added that in cold weather they "were well stuffed with deer's hair, or dry leaves, so as to keep the feet comfortably warm; but in wet weather it was usually said that

³⁵Smyth, *A Tour of the United States*, 1:180-81.

³⁶Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement*, 91-92.

wearing them was 'a decent way of going barefooted;' and such was the fact, owing to the spongy texture of the leather of which they were made."³⁷ As Smyth wrote, leggings and moccasins "are by far the most convenient for travelling" in the woods of America. These practical reasons must be considered when we look at why Euro-Americans were wearing these Indian clothing items. Even so, it is clear that there were other less practical reasons for dressing in these fashions, which are most apparent when we examine the frontiersmen's practice of wearing breechelouts with leggings.

A frontier rifleman's "under-dress" consisted of a simple pullover common shirt with a button collar and, if the frontier warrior wished to wear them, a pair of breeches. If he did not wear breeches he would cover himself as the Indians did—by wearing a breechelout. His legs below the belt that held the breechelout would be covered from the mid-thigh down to his feet by "leggings and moccasins." In the following passage, Doddridge gave an excellent account of this fashion as it was practiced in his region of the frontier:

In the latter years of the Indian war our young men became more enamored of the Indian dress throughout, with the exception of the matchcoat. The drawers were laid aside and the leggins made longer, so as to reach the upper part of the thigh. The Indian breech clout was adopted. This was a piece of linen or cloth nearly a yard long, and eight or nine inches broad. This passed under the belt before and behind leaving the ends for flaps hanging before and behind over the belt. These flaps were sometimes ornamented with some coarse kind of embroidery work. To the same belts which secured the breech clout, strings which

³⁷ibid.

supported the long leggins were attached.³⁸

Doddridge explained that because of this "the upper part of the thighs and part of the hips were naked."³⁹

For those who argue that this mode of dress was purely for the practical reasons associated with woodland warfare he went on to comment: "The young warrior instead of being abashed by this nudity was proud of his Indian like dress. In some few instances I have seen them go into places of public worship in this dress."⁴⁰ While Doddridge also added that this immodest Sabbath attire "did not add much to the devotion of the young ladies," it should not be thought that this sort of outfit was merely designed to shock or draw the attentions of the opposite sex. This is apparent in the anecdote Henry recounted about Daniel Morgan. During their trek through the wilderness of Maine, when they were miles from the attentions of the opposite sex, Morgan met up with Henry's unit in the woods. Henry wrote of this meeting in the following passage: "He wore leggins, and a cloth in the Indian style. His thighs, which were exposed to view, appeared to have been lacerated by the thorns and bushes."⁴¹ Thus we see one of the drawbacks to this method of covering the body while in the wilderness. The practical advantages of wearing such a

³⁸Ibid., 92.

³⁹Ibid., 93.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Henry, *Arnold's Campaign*, 48.

light garment while hiking or running in the woods are obvious, but they came at a price. Perhaps Morgan was enduring the pain of these lacerations simply to save his breeches from wear. Henry did something similar when he wore his moccasins instead of his shoes during a hike through a bog near the Dead River in Maine. "My feet," he says, "were pained and lacerated by the snags of the dead pines," but he insisted on saving his shoes "for severer service."⁴² Even if Morgan was trying to save his breeches by wearing a breechclout, he chose this mode of Indian dress while serving as an officer in a military insurrection against the British Empire. Whether Morgan intended it or not, he was, according to Henry, projecting "a commanding aspect" in this costume usually worn by the Indians. Indeed, like Doddridge's young warriors, Morgan was probably "proud of his Indian like dress" because it allowed him to celebrate a new national identity while he rebelled against an old one. But there was more to the rifleman's material culture of national identity than leggings and moccasins. In fact, just as the American rebel patriots were fighting red-coated British soldiers, they were also fighting Indians on the frontier. These militant tribes were supported by British Indian agents who also seem to have been proud of their Indian dress.

The best example of this can be seen in the portrait of Sir John Caldwell entitled "Soldiering for the King, 1780" by an unknown artist. (See Figure 11.) Caldwell, while

⁴²*Ibid.*, 24.



Figure 11: *Soldiering for the King, 1780*, (Artist unknown.) An inscription reads: "Portrait of Sir John Caldwell, Bart.—8th The King's Regiment—who Col. de Peyster sent from Detroit to Sandusky to require of the Shawnee, Delaware, Mingoes and others to bury the hatchett at the Preliminaries of Peace, which was signed between Great Britain and the United States 1782." Here Sir John Caldwell displays a part of his Indian souvenir collection. Among other things he wears an Indian shirt, breechclout, leggings, and moccasins. He also holds a pipe tomahawk in his left hand. (Photo Courtesy of the King's Regiment Collection, Merseyside County Museum, Liverpool, England.)

stationed at Fort Detroit during the Revolution, was sent to live among the Ojibwas as an agent for George III. After his return to England in 1782, he put on much of his souvenir costume to have this painting made. Clearly, this was a man who was loyal to Britain at the same time as he was proud of his American Indian dress. Another example of British loyalism combined with leggings and moccasins can be seen in the portrait of another Indian agent identified by many scholars as Colonel Guy Johnson. (See Figure 12.) In this painting we see an obvious and purposeful mixing of the clothing of the Indian nations and Europe. He wears leggings, moccasins, and a match coat over his European-style red coat, waistcoat, breeches, and black cravat. There is little question about his Indian sympathies. He sits next to an Indian warrior holding a calumet pipe in his right hand. Here we have the "noble savage" and his white British- American benefactor who was also proud of his Indian dress. These men were fighting against American frontier riflemen who had little or no sympathies with the Indians. Clearly, there was more to the rifleman's costume of national identity than his leggings and moccasins. In fact, the most important item of clothing that set these men apart from the frontier riflemen they were fighting was the hunting shirt, a garment that neither of these men wore in his portrait. Indeed, the only times that British soldiers or Loyalists would wear them was when they were trying to pass as American soldiers.

On the other side of the frontier there were others who clothed and painted themselves as Indians to wage war on the British and their native allies. In June 1777,



Figure 12: *Colonel Guy Johnson and Karonghyontye (Captain David Hill)*, by Benjamin West, 1776. Yet another example of an American Loyalist wearing Indian clothing mixed with European garb. The key thing to note is that this aristocratic backwoodsman is not wearing a hunting shirt. (Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.)

George Roush, a native of Hampshire County, Virginia enlisted at Fort Pitt "as an Indian spy" under the legendary Indian hater Samuel Brady. In Roush's military pension application he recounted the following:

Declarant states that in obedience to the orders of his said Captain Brady, he proceeded to tan his thighs and legs with wild cherry and white oak bark and to equip himself after the following manner, to wit, a breechcloth, leather leggings, moccasins, and a cap made out of raccoon skin, with the feathers of a hawk, painted red, fastened to the top of the cap. Declarant was then painted after the manner of an Indian warrior. His face was painted red, with three black stripes across his cheeks, which was a signification of war. Declarant states that Captain Brady's company was about sixty-four in number, all painted after the manner aforesaid.⁴³

These were clearly instances where Indian costume and paint were being used to deceive the eyes of their Indian enemies. Nevertheless, it is also clear that these American frontiersmen were keenly aware of the things they needed to do to change their appearances so that they might pass for Indians when they were in Indian country. One does not detect any burlesque attitude in these attempts to imitate the native tribesmen of America. In other words, they were not "aping the manners of savages" in the way that an obviously non-African American Al Jolson presented himself in blackface to play the role of a jazz singer. These "Indian spies" are working very hard to look like real Indians instead of white men dressed as "savages." It is also important to note that none of these accounts of Indian spies mention hunting shirts as part of their costume. Some have,

⁴³Dann, *Revolution Remembered*, 258-59.

however, speculated that Washington's "Indian walking Dress" included a hunting shirt. Perhaps so, but was it the same kind of hunting shirt worn by riflemen at the beginning of the Revolution? Indeed, as we will see, Henry's "deep ash-colored hunting-shirt" is really one of the most un-Indian articles of clothing listed in his catalogue of frontier attire. Nevertheless, before we address the hunting shirt there is another article of backwoods attire that we should deal with.

After recounting the march to Boston and then on into the wilderness of Maine, Henry told of his travels in his rifleman's costume of the middle-colony frontier. He recounted that with winter approaching his wardrobe consisted only "of a roundabout jacket, of woolen, a pair of half worn buckskin breeches, two pair of woolen stockings (bought at Newburyport), a hat with a feather, a hunting-shirt, leggings, a pair of moccasins, and a pair of tolerably good shoes, which had been closely hoarded."⁴⁴ Contemporary readers would understand this passage to mean that Henry was not prepared for the Canadian winter that he was about to experience. To the modern student of material culture this description of his wardrobe also reveals that he was wearing, in addition to other European-style garments, "a hat with a feather."

American Indians of the Eastern Woodlands during this period rarely wore hats. In surviving accounts and images, Indians are described and depicted as treating their hair

⁴⁴Henry, *Arnold's Campaign*, 34.

and things tied into their hair as their primary head ornaments.⁴⁵ Other than those who purposefully chose to "become civilized" and to dress according to the customs of whites, there were rare instances when warriors wore hats as war trophies.⁴⁶ On the other hand, riflemen were almost always described as wearing hats. Smyth wrote that the riflemen he saw wore "on their heads a flapped hat, of a reddish hue, proceeding from the intensely hot beams of the sun."⁴⁷ Another account dated 1773 described a party of backwoods hunters as wearing "many sorts of fantastic caps of skins or of linsey woolsey, each fashioned according [to] the whim of its owner."⁴⁸ Some decorated their hats as Henry and Yankee Doodle did with feathers. (See Figure 1.) But among the decorations on riflemen's hats, the buck's tail is the one that seems to have held the most meaning.

On 6 June 1775 in Winchester, Virginia, after the news of Lexington and Concord, combined with tidings of the Gunpowder incident in Williamsburg, reached town, a young itinerant Presbyterian missionary named Philip Vickers Fithian recorded the following scene:

⁴⁵See James F. O'Neil II, comp., *Their Bearing is Noble and Proud: A Collection of Narratives regarding the Appearance of Native Americans from 1740-1815* (Waterville, OH: Rittig's Frontier Ohio, 1995), see listings in Index under "Hair."

⁴⁶See Smith, *An Account*, 13, and Peter Kalm, *Peter Kalm's Travels In North America*, trans. Adolph B. Benson (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1964), 377-78.

⁴⁷Smyth, *A Tour in the United States*, 180.

⁴⁸"Anonymous Description of a Party of Long Hunters, 1773" as cited in LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 74.

Mars, the great God of Battle, is now honoured in every Part of this spacious Colony, but here every Presence is warlike, every Sound is martial! Drums beating, Fifes & Bag-Pipes playing, & only sonorous & heroic Tunes—Every Man has a hunting-Shirt, which is the Uniform of each Company—Almost all have a Cockade, & Bucks-Tale in their Hats, to represent that they are hardy, resolute, & invincible Natives of the Woods of America.⁴⁹

Here we see the nationalistic overtones of this interpretation of the buck's tail and how it signified a claim to the rugged ideal of American nativeness. This claim of nativeness was formerly the exclusive right of the Indian, but the pseudo-"savage" rifleman was displacing the Indian and coopting his aboriginal position on the land. Years before the Revolution and to the east in the frontcountry cities like Annapolis and Philadelphia, the buck's tail was worn by Euro-Americans "in their hats or in some conspicuous situation" on May 1st, St. Tammany's Day, in honor of the Delaware Indian chief named Tamenend.⁵⁰ The peaceful Tamenend, or Tammany had granted William Penn hunting rights back in the seventeenth century and thus eventually became the fabled patron saint of America. Just as Saint Patrick represented Ireland, and Saints George and Andrew England and Scotland respectively, Americans chose an Indian as their mythical mascot. Thus the buck's tail was associated with American nationality in the frontcountry as well as it was in the backcountry of the northern Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. At the other end of the Great Wagon Road in the frontier regions of North Carolina, it was also worn as a

⁴⁹Fithian, *Journal*, 24.

⁵⁰See Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 13-20, and William Eddis, *Letters from America*, Aubrey C. Land, ed., (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 58-59.

symbol of defiance against British rule. In addition to the black hunting shirts "with a motto across the breast in large white letters 'LIBERTY OR DEATH,'" Surry County, North Carolina militia also wore "a buck's tail" in their hats. Other backwoodsmen from North Carolina wore these "deertails" as a token of rebellion "in defiance of Mr. [Alexander] Cameron," the British commissary to the Cherokees who was responsible for enforcing the 1763 Proclamation Line and preventing white hunters from infringing on Cherokee tribal gamelands.⁵¹ It is possible that a buck's tail signified a successful hunt beyond the '63 Proclamation Line wherever it was worn in the backcountry, but I have found no other documentation to support such a generalization.

While the buck's tail was a decoration for hats worn as a token of American nationalism, and after the Revolution began, a symbol of political rebellion against British authority and rule, it was not the most commonly recognized symbol of rebellion worn by American Revolutionary citizen-soldiers. The rifleman's leggings, moccasins, tomahawk, scalping knife, and long-barreled rifle had parallel uses in Indian culture. They did set him apart and distinguish him as an inhabitant of America, but because these articles were also used by British soldiers and Loyalists on the frontier, they did not serve as the ultimate symbols of American nationalism and rebellion. Indeed, of all the articles worn or carried by John Joseph Henry and his fellow riflemen it was their hunting shirts that

⁵¹William Lenoir, "Rutherford's Expedition," and Henry Stuart, "Account of His Proceedings," as cited in Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of Revolution* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 201.

held the distinction of being the most celebrated fashion statement of the Revolution.

CHAPTER 3

HUNTING SHIRTS

The hunting shirt was the only garment worn by riflemen that found general use among other rebellious American citizen soldiers during the Revolution. It was also one of the most enigmatic items in the early American revolutionary wardrobe. Its very name implies its primary use in a culture that was heavily dependent on hunting. Currently, the earliest known reference to a hunting shirt I have found is in the probate inventory of a John Smith who lived in Augusta County, Virginia. The inventory of his estate was taken 18 October 1759 and probated 20 May 1760. It included, among other things, a reference to "1 pair of Legins" as well as a line that listed a "hankerchif" valued at one shilling, "four Shirts" valued at five shillings, and "one hunting shirt" that was appraised at two shillings.¹ There is also a story recorded in the Lyman C. Draper manuscript collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society that was told to Draper by Dr. R. C. Prunty, a son-in-law of Nathan Boone. Nathan was one of Daniel Boone's sons, and thus it is thought that this story came to Prunty through the folk hero. The narrative recounts the time Daniel Boone was courting his future wife, Rebecca Bryan, in their Yadkin Valley settlement of western North Carolina before their marriage on 14 August

¹Augusta County Court Records, Staunton, Virginia, Will Book No. 2, 381.

1756. In this story Rebecca was making fun of Daniel's greasy, dirty hunting shirt, and Daniel returned with the quip, "You, like my hunting shirt—have missed many a good washing."² If this story is true, and Daniel Boone did have a hunting shirt back in the summer of 1756, it would follow that other specific references to these types of garments will eventually be found in documents dating to that time if not earlier. So far I have found none.

The lack of documentary evidence relating to the origins of the hunting shirt has left scholars with little choice but to speculate on its pedigree. One author, Mark Baker, presents the following observations on the subject which characterize most of the conclusions drawn by modern scholars on the hunting shirt:

Perhaps more than any other single piece of clothing, the hunting shirt symbolized that unique blend of European and woodland Indian dress, plus the reliance of the frontier family on a variety of homemade, yet durable fabrics. And whether the origin of such a handy, sturdy garment was strictly European or Woodland Indian is not clear, nor is the exact time and place of the shirt's introduction along the Middle Colony frontier. Unfortunately, time has hidden most of the clues concerning the origin and development of this once very common, North American woodland garment.³

Linda Baumgarten also sees the roots of the hunting shirt tradition in both Indian and European traditions but points out that this "story is not as simple as one group adopting

²Draper: 6 S 17 as cited in Mark A. Baker, *Sons of a Trackless Forest: The Cumberland Long Hunters of the Eighteenth Century* (Franklin, TN: Bakers Trace Publishing, 1997), 165; also see John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1992), 45-46.

³Baker, *Sons of a Trackless Forest*, 158.

the modes of another, for the dress of Native Americans in eastern North America was itself an amalgamation and adaptation of styles influenced by contact with Europeans and their trade goods."⁴ This reasoning would lead one to conclude that the hunting shirt tradition has its roots more in European culture than in Indian culture, since the textiles and basic shirt designs did not originally come from Indian sources. Even so, further examination of primary source evidence is required to expose more of what this article of clothing may have meant to the people who wore it and the people who saw it being worn.

Doddridge asserted that the hunting shirt "was universally worn," but he was speaking only of those whites he knew as settlers in western Virginia and Pennsylvania.

He described it as

a kind of loose frock, reaching half way down the thighs, with large sleeves, open before, and so wide as to lap over a foot or more when belted. The cape was large, and sometimes handsomely fringed with a ravelled piece of cloth of a different color from that of the hunting shirt itself. The bosom of this dress served as a wallet to hold a chunk of bread, cakes, jerk, tow for wiping the barrel of the rifle, or any other necessary for the hunter or warrior.⁵

One hunting shirt that dates from the end of the eighteenth survives today, in the very region Doddridge wrote about, fits this description very well. (See Figures 13a-d.)

Another source that fits Doddridge's description is the earliest known depiction of hunting

⁴Linda R. Baumgarten, "Leather Stockings and Hunting Shirts," in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, ed. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Inc., 1997), 266.

⁵Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement*, 91.



Figure 13a. This hunting shirt is in the collection of the Green County Historical Society in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. It belongs to the Crow family that has resided in Green County since the late eighteenth century. According to family legend their ancestor Michael Crow wore this shirt during the Revolution. Family legend also maintains that Michael's bride Nancy Agnes Johnson made it for their wedding. It is unlikely that this shirt was worn during the Revolution, because, according to a family genealogist, Michael Crow (1769-1852) was only 14 years old by the end of the war, and his wife Nancy (1781-185?) was too young to do much sewing at that time. They were married in 1799 when the style of this shawl collar was in fashion. The author added the fabric belt to show how the garment was worn in the period. (Photo by Gary Eifert. Genealogical and object provenance information courtesy of the museum.)



Figure 13b: The Crow shirt without a belt just as it survives today in the collection of the Green County Historical Society. The outline of the wallet pocket sewn into the left breast is more visible in this image. (Photo by Gary Eifert.)



Figure 13c: This view of the Crow shirt shows the shoulder and sleeve design. (Fabric belt added by author. Photo by Gary Eifert.)



Figure 13d: This is the back view of the Crow shirt. Note how large the cape is. (Photo by Gary Eifert.)

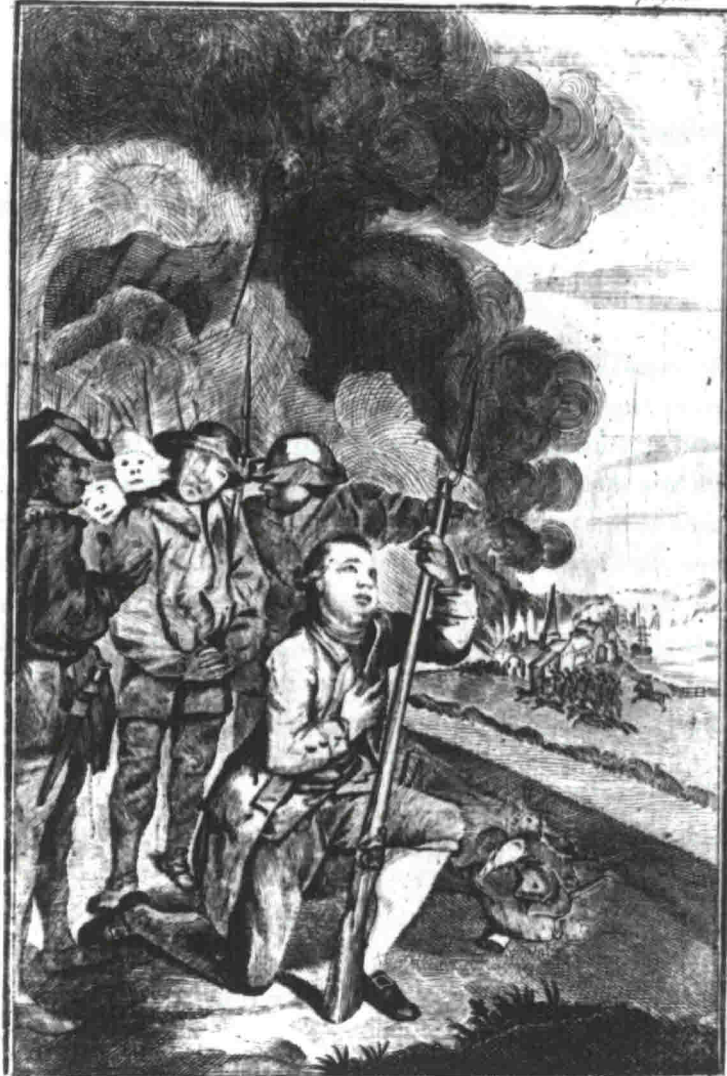
shirts worn by soldiers and comes from a frontpiece entitled "The Death of Warren" in the 1776 published text of a play by Breckenridge called *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill*. (See Figure 14.) Other descriptions agree in large measure with Doddridge's account. In his military pension application, Simeon Alexander of Northfield, Massachusetts remembered the arrival of Daniel Morgan's regiment at Cambridge in 1775. He said that the "uniform of Morgan's regiment was a short frock made of pepper-and-salt color cotton cloth like a common working frock worn by our [Massachusetts] country people, except that it was short and open before, to be tied with strings . . ."⁶ Continental Congressman Silas Dean wrote to his wife on 3 June 1775 and described the uniforms of the troops who were amassing in Philadelphia. He included a description of the hunting shirts worn by "a body of irregulars, or riflemen, whose dress it is hard to describe." He wrote the following:

They take a piece of Ticklenbergh, or towcloth, that is stout, and put it in a tanvat until it has the shade of a fallen dry leaf. Then they make a kind of frock of it, reaching down below the knee, open before, with a large cape. They wrap it around them tight on a march, and tie it with their belt, in which hangs their tomahawk.⁷

All three of these descriptions make the point that it was not a pull-over shirt like those made for the Indian trade but "open before," and thus put on like a coat or jacket. Smyth

⁶Dann, *Revolution Remembered*, 106.

⁷Silas Dean to his wife, as cited in John R. Elting, ed., *Military Uniforms in America: The Era of the American Revolution* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, Company of Military Historians, 1974), 104.



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THE 'DEATH OF WARREN

Figure 14: Etching called "The Death of Warren" in the 1776 publication of a play by Breckenridge entitled *The Battle of Bunkers - Hill*. Behind the heroic dying figure of Warren are three figures wearing fringed hunting shirts that reach down to their mid thighs. They also appear to be wearing moccasins. It is unlikely that there were any men dressed in hunting shirts and moccasins at the Battle of Bunker Hill as the middle colony rifle companies were yet to arrive in the Boston area. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

recorded that the hunting shirts he saw were "somewhat resembling a waggoner's frock, ornamented with a great many fringes, [and] tied round the middle with a broad belt . . ." ⁸

Around 1780, John Trumbull wrote these lines in a personal letter:

You expressed apprehension that the rifle dress of General [Daniel] Morgan may be mistaken hereafter for a waggoner's frock, which he, perhaps, wore on the expedition with General Braddock; there is no more resemblance between the two dresses, than between a cloak and a coat; the waggoner's frock was intended, as the present cartman's to cover and protect their other clothes, and is merely a long coarse shirt reaching below the knee; the dress of the Virginia riflemen who came to Cambridge in 1775 [among whom was Morgan] was an elegant loose dress reaching to the middle of the thigh, ornamented in corresponding style. The officers wore the usual crimson sash over this, and around the waist, the straps, belts, etc. were black, forming, in my opinion, a very picturesque and elegant as well as useful dress. ⁹

Trumbull would paint hunting shirts on his subjects a number of times in the years to come (see Figures 15, 16, & 17a-b), and here in this quote Trumbull begins to touch on the significance of the hunting shirt as it was seen by other European Americans who did not live in the backcountry or on the frontier. He also contrasts it with the wagoner's frock which may have been like the "common working frock" of the day spoken of by Simeon Alexander. (See Figure 18.) Even in modern times this "common working frock" has often been confused with the hunting shirt. Baumgarten believes the garments are related, but as Trumbull wrote, "there is no more resemblance between the two dresses, than between a cloak and a coat."

⁸Smyth, *A Tour in the United States*, 1:179-80.

⁹John Trumbull, "Personal Letter, circa 1780," as cited in LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 73.

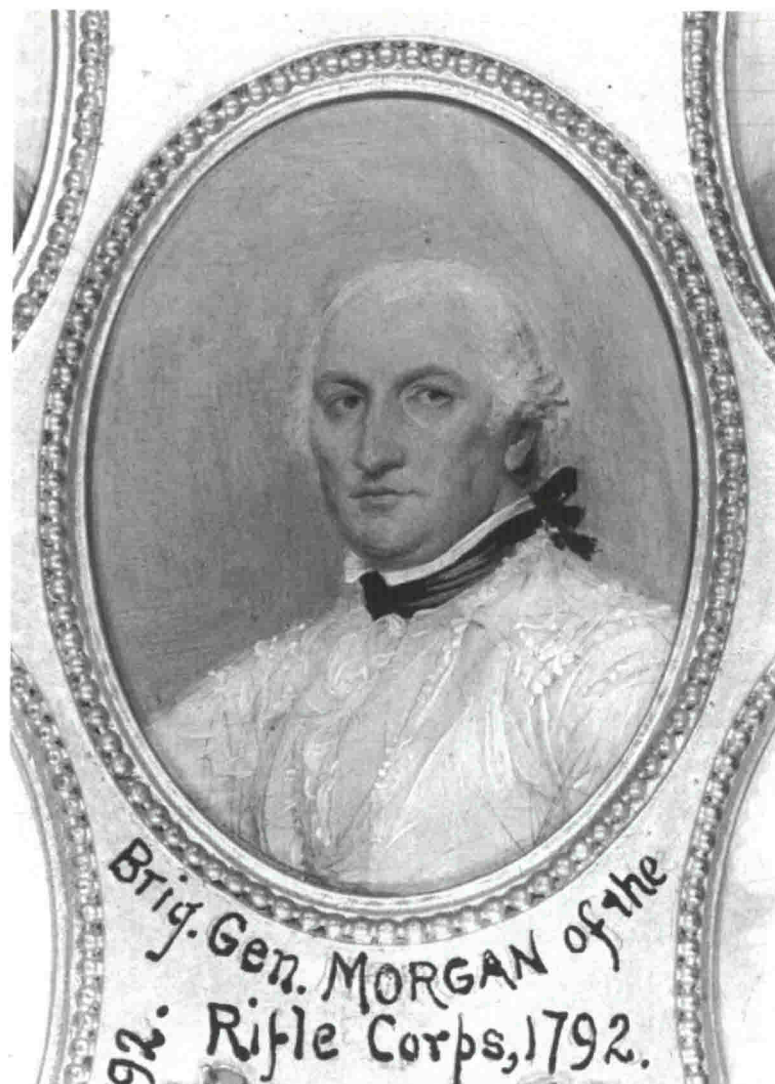


Figure 15: *Daniel Morgan*, by John Trumbull, 1792. He is pictured here wearing a white hunting shirt. An inscription indicates that this painting was made “from an original by Mr. C.W. Peale.” As one art historian noted “the only known Peale portrait of Morgan dates from c.1794, and does not resemble Trumbull’s miniature.” [See Helen A. Cooper, *John Trumbull The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 137.] In that Peale portrait Morgan wears a regimental coat instead of a hunting shirt. It is probable that Trumbull used a now lost Peale portrait of Morgan in which he was wearing a hunting shirt. This portrait by Peale may have also been the inspiration behind another famous rendition of Morgan done by Alonzo Chappel in the mid nineteenth century. (See Figure 26.) (Photo courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery; Trumbull Collection.)

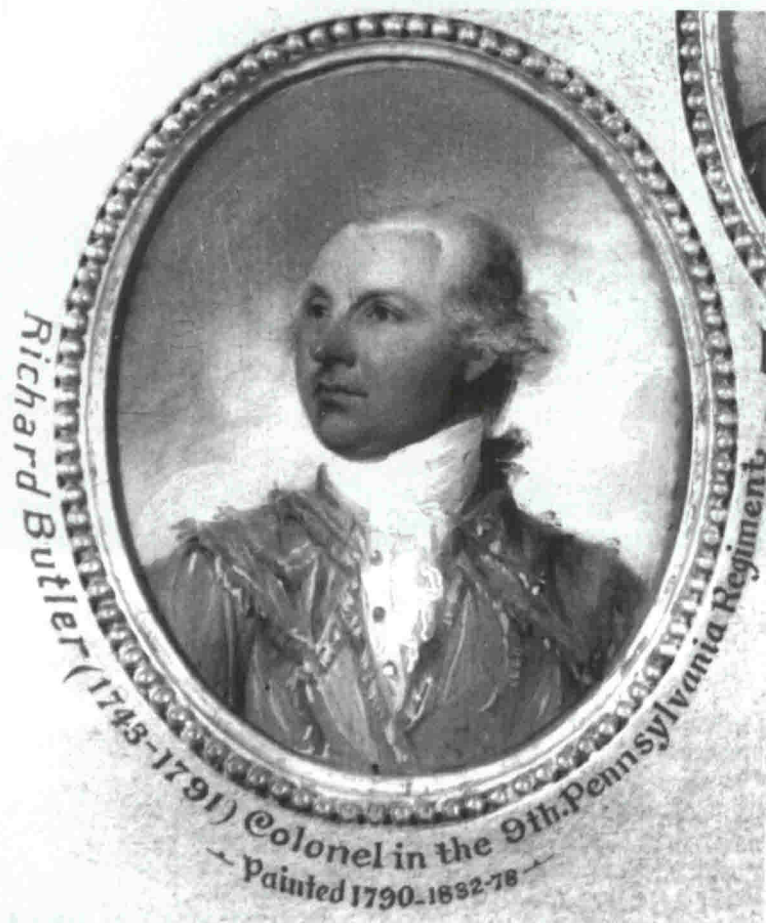


Figure 16: *Richard Butler*, by John Trumbull, 1790. Here Trumbull painted Butler wearing a hunting shirt. According to Joseph Plum Martin who served under him Butler “was a brave officer, but a fiery, austere hothead.” Martin went on to add the following: “Whenever he had a dispute with a brother officer, and that was pretty often, he would never resort to pistols and swords, but always to his fists. I have more than once or twice seen him with a ‘black eye,’ and have seen other officers that he had honored with the same badge.” (Martin, 136.) (Photo courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery; Trumbull Collection.)



Figure 17a: *The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, 31 December 1775*, & 17b: detail of *The Death of General Montgomery . . .* by John Trumbull, 1786. This hunting shirt clad soldier is Capt. William Hendricks of Thompson's Pennsylvania Regiment who was mortally wounded during the siege. [See Theodore Sizer, *The Works of Colonel John Trumbull: Artist of the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), "Key" for "Figure 153."] He wears a rusty red colored hunting shirt. This picture is the earliest known realistic depiction of a hunting shirt and fits Trumbull's written description well. It is difficult to say what Hendricks is wearing on his legs and feet but it seems to be Trumbull's stylized version of leggings and moccasins. (Photo Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery.)



Figure 18: R. Sayer and J. Bennett, *A Scene near Cox Heath; or, The Enraged Farmer*, London 1779. This is the “common working frock” to which the hunting shirt may be related. At the same time the differences are clear. This garment lacks a cape, fringe, ruffles, and it is not “open before.” (Photo courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

By examining the written descriptions and the surviving contemporary images as well as the actual extant garment, we can define what hunting shirts looked like during the Revolution. (See Figures 19a-c.) The key elements of this garment can be divided into several main components. First, these shirts or "frocks" were generally considered outer garments to be worn over the common shirts of the day. In other words, they were generally not worn next to the skin, although it is difficult to say if the men pictured in Figures 20, 21a, and 21b have any shirts on under their hunting shirts. Second, they were made of sturdy cloth or leather, but as Doddridge pointed out the leather ones "were very cold and uncomfortable in wet weather."¹⁰ (See Figures 22a & 22b.) Third, the main fabrics of the garment came in solid colors unlike the Indian shirts that generally came in various prints and checks. In other words, the hunting shirt might be "pepper-and-salt color," but I have never found any descriptions of them as multicolored other than the instances when they were described with fringes or ruffles that differed in color from the main body of the garment. Fourth, unlike the common worker's frock and Indian shirts, the hunting shirt had a large cape that was sometimes, as Doddridge wrote, "handsomely fringed with a ravelled piece of cloth of a different color from that of the hunting shirt itself." And finally, the hunting shirt was a garment that would, as Doddridge, Alexander, and Dean wrote, "open before" unlike the common pullover

¹⁰Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement*, 91.



Figure 19a: This is the only known surviving hunting shirt that dates in style and provenance from the Revolution. It is called the Duryea because it is believed to have belonged to Capt. Abraham Duryea an officer in a New York Militia unit who is said to have worn it at the Battle of Long Island in August of 1776. It has been in the Enoch Carter collection associated with Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, New York since the end of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It has been photographed here with the front pinned together so that the decorative fringe pattern can be discerned but would have been worn belted with one side overlapping the other. Its left sleeve is a modern conservation repair. Note the similarities it has with the shirts portrayed by John Trumbull. (See figures 13, 14, & 15a-b.) (Photo and object history courtesy of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Bureau of Historic Sites.)



Figure 19b: A view of the Duryea with its one original sleeve toward the camera. This sleeve is pleated from top to bottom and cuffed with ruffles. It is also fringed at the top and at about half the way down to the cuff. This is fine work and not the kind of stuff one would wear for utilitarian purposes or to simply protect other clothing from dirt and stains. It might even be characterized as the artist John Trumbull put it: "very picturesque and elegant." (Photo courtesy of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Bureau of Historic Sites.)



Figure 19c: The back of the Duryea. Note the fabric from the center of the right half on over to the left is a modern conservation repair. This repair is a full two thirds of the back of the shirt under the original cape. As this portion of the back of the garment is missing and there is no record of what the original design of that missing portion looked like, we can only speculate as to whether the back of the shirt was originally plain as we see the repair. As noted with the front view the left sleeve is also a modern conservation repair that is not pleated or as detailed as the other original surviving sleeve. (Photo courtesy of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Bureau of Historic Sites.)



Wahrheitliche Abbildung der Soldaten des Congreßes in Nordamerika, nach der Zeichnung eines deutschen Officiers. Die Mütze ist von Leder, mit der Aufschrift Congress. Die Bekleidung ist überall mit weißem Franzen besetzt. Die Brunkleider gehen bis zu den Knöcheln hinunter. Die meisten laufen barfuß. Ihre Feuer-gewehr sind mit sehr langen Bajonetten versehen. In letzter Zeit sind auch seitliche gewehr-gebräuchen in Gebrauch.

Figure 20: This is one of the surviving images that illustrates the use of the hunting shirt as part of the uniform worn by soldiers of the Continental Line. A translation of the inscription reads: "An accurate illustration of soldiers of Congress in North America after a drawing by a German officer. The hat is of leather with the inscription 'Congress.' Their entire clothing is made of ticking trimmed with white fringe. The trousers extend to the ankle. Most of them go barefoot. Their muskets are equipped with very long bayonets, which they also put to use as side-arms." By comparing this engraving with Figures 21a & 21b Huddleston believes they are related to the same drawings. (Huddleston, p.66) There are some obvious key differences. (Photo courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library.)



Figure 21a: A translation of the inscription under this engraving by M. Will of Augsburg, (c. 1778) reads: “An accurate representation of an American soldier, by a Bavarian officer presently in the English service in America, drawn and sent from there. Their clothing is of ticking, they have long guns with bayonets, and are very rugged and healthy.” (See Huddleston, 64.) This is another image depicting a soldier of the Continental line wearing an unbelted hunting shirt that apparently ties together at the fore. He wears a mitre hat inscribed “Congress” and pants called overalls that combine gaiters and trousers together with garters just under the knees. His gun is a smooth bore musket fixed with a bayonet. This is yet another testament to the persuasiveness of the hunting shirt uniform among members of the Continental Line. Obviously one did not need to be a rifleman to dress like one. By comparing this engraving with Figure 20 Huddleston believes they are related to the same drawings. (See Huddleston, p.66.) (Photo courtesy of Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek, Berlin.)



Figure 21b: The side view of the “Americaner Soldat” engraved by M. Will from drawings done by the same Bavarian officer in America. This side view shows the same uniform as the front view except for the addition of buttoned lapels at the fore. Huddleston surmises that the engraver “had difficulty dealing with the hunting shirt, showing it with lapels of the type common to military coats of the day.” (See Huddleston, p. 65.) The hunting shirt was not a garment known in Europe. It is likely that the engraver had difficulty accurately interpreting the Bavarian officer’s drawings of these American soldiers because he had never seen a hunting shirt. There is no other known depiction of a hunting shirt with lapels like this one. By comparing this engraving with Figure 20 Huddleston believes they are related to the same drawings. (See Huddleston, p.66.) (Photo courtesy of Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek, Berlin.)



Figure 22a: Members of Virginia's Boykin family donated this buckskin hunting shirt to Richmond's Valentine Museum in May 1932. According to the donors it belonged to Jean Pierre Le Mayeur, a French dentist who immigrated to America before 1785, and later performed operations attempting to transplant teeth into George Washington's troubled mouth. As with other surviving garments of this type it is difficult to date this shirt with any degree of certainty. If it did belong to Le Mayeur, he died in 1806. While its "rise and fall" collar is a fashion feature that does not appear with any regularity until the late 1780s, these collars continue to be used long after Le Mayeur's death into the first half of the nineteenth century. The corduroy breeches that were donated with it date from the first quarter of the 19th century. This shirt does not appear to have seen much hard use. Instead, it appears to be more of a costume item than a practical utilitarian garment. (Photo and object provenance information courtesy of the Valentine Museum.)



Figure 22b: This is the back side of the Le Mayeur hunting shirt. Note the embroidery on the back of the collar which indicates that it is meant to be worn up on occasion. Looking at this frock it is not hard to see how in the white man's imagination this is a traditional Indian garment. (Photo courtesy of the Valentine Museum.)

working frock or Indian shirt. Some have speculated that there were pullover hunting shirts, but the evidence for them is weak.¹¹ In short, the hunting shirt was a distinctly different garment that could not normally be confused with other garments of the day.

The hunting shirt's symbolic value as a garment of American Revolutionary patriotism is also evident in the primary sources. It quickly became the favored garment of the rebellion in the frontcountry. The Princeton, New Jersey, Committee of Safety "for the sake of distinction and convenience" chose to clothe their "Minutemen" in "hunting frocks, as near as may be similar to those of the Riflemen now in the continental service."¹² As we have already seen, the hunting shirt even found its way into the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. Up in New England it was causing quite a stir. Writing from Cambridge, Massachusetts on 13 August 1775 to the Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Committee of Correspondence, the commander of a rifle company by the name of Robert Magaw wrote the following:

You will think me Vain should I tell you how much the Riffle men are esteemed their dress their arms their size strength and activity but above all their great eagerness to attect the enemy entitle them to the first Rank—the hunting shirt here is like a full suite at St. James's. A Riffle man in his dress may pass sentinels and go where he pleases while the officers of the other Regiments are stoped.¹³

¹¹See Appendix.

¹²*The Pennsylvania Gazette*, (Philadelphia), 6 September 1775 as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio III, Accessible Archives CD-ROM..

¹³Robert Magaw to Carlisle Committee of Correspondence, Dickinson College Library, Founders Collection, 13 August 1775, as cited in Tandy Hersh and Charles Hersh, *Cloth and*

Smyth also stated that the frontiersmen he saw esteemed themselves in their hunting shirts and accoutrements to be "of equal consequence, more civilized, polite, and more elegantly dressed than the most brilliant peer at St. James's, in a splendid and expensive birth-day suit, of the first fashion and taste, and most costly materials."¹⁴ These quotations clearly illustrate how the frontier rifleman's hunting shirt was becoming a powerful symbol of American regional culture and patriotism during the era of the Revolution. Words such as "elegant," "full suite at St. James's," and "of the first fashion and taste" are in many ways ironic commentaries on a piece of clothing that was considered rustic or of "savage" origins. It is obvious that Smyth, as a refined anglophile, made his comments with a note of sarcasm, even a hint of contempt. On the other hand, Trumbull and Magaw, who were patriotic Americans, were clearly proud of this uniquely American garment. Contrarily, its association with the Revolutionary cause made it distasteful to those who fought to keep America British.

Unquestionably, the hunting shirt was a target for anti-revolutionary sentiments among both the British and American Loyalists. One London periodical referred to riflemen "with their cursed twisted guns" as "shirt-tail men" who were "the most fatal

Costume 1750-1800: Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (Carlisle, PA: Cumberland County Historical Society, 1995), 103.

¹⁴Smyth, 1:181-82.

widow-and-orphan-makers in the world."¹⁵ In this era when underwear was rare, a man's shirt was properly tucked into his breeches to serve as the only substitute for underpants. Exposing one's shirttails in public with their accompanying bodily stains was considered very bad form. The author of this line was probably unaware that hunting shirts were not the kind that one was supposed to tuck in. Even so, the negative connotation is obvious. In America the social class and family backgrounds of American officers were mocked in conjunction with hunting shirts. A popular Tory ballad written by J.F.D. Smyth while he was serving as a captain in Simcoe's Queen's Rangers and sung during the period went as follows:

With loud peals of laughter, your sides, sirs, would crack,
To see General Convict and Colonel Shoe-black,
 With their huntingshirts and rifle-guns.
See cobblers and quacks, rebel priests and the like,
Pettifoggers and barbers, with sword and with pike
All strutting, the standard of Satan beside,
And honest names using, their black deeds to hide,
 With their huntingshirts and rifle-guns.¹⁶

Thus the only time British soldiers and Loyalist troops donned hunting shirts was when they were trying to pass as Americans. In an "Extract of a letter from Long Island," dated 28 August 1776, the following account appears:

On my way back I discovered as I thought our battalion on a hill coming in,

¹⁵"London Newspaper, 1775" as cited in LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 81.

¹⁶Frank Moore, ed., *Songs and Ballads of the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1855, reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1969), 197-98.

dressed in hunting shirts, and was going on to join them, but was stopped by a number of our soldiers, who told me they were the enemy in our dress – on this I prevailed on a serjeant and two men to halt and fire on them, which produced a shower of bullets, and we were obliged to retire.¹⁷

Some time before March 1782 the North Carolina Loyalist David Fanning "had Ordered and collected 25 men to have a certain Dress made—which was Linen frocks died Black, With Red Cuffs D° Ellbows and sholders cape also, and Belted with Scarlet." Though he was unwilling to call this garment a hunting shirt, it certainly answered the description of one. He went on to add that this garment "was a total Disguise to the Rebels" who apparently wore hunting shirts "fringed with Large white fringe."¹⁸ A hunting shirt was even worn by a British deserter who stole some clothes from Ezekiel Letts at "the United States Beer house" on the night of 23 October 1778.¹⁹ No doubt it was the appropriate garment to be wearing in such an establishment. Even so, not all American patriots liked these hunting shirts.

In an article published in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on 22 April 1777, someone who identified himself only as "R" (could it have been Dr. Benjamin Rush?) laid out "DIRECTIONS for preserving the HEALTH of SOLDIERS." In this article "R"

¹⁷*The Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 4 September 1776 as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio III, Accessible Archives CD-ROM.

¹⁸*The Narrative of Col. David Fanning*, ed. Lindley S. Butler (Davidson, N.C.: Briarpatch Press, 1981), 71.

¹⁹*The Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 31 October 1778 as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio III, Accessible Archives CD-ROM.

laments the fact that America's situation had obliged them to clothe soldiers "chiefly in linen." "It is a well known fact," he wrote, "that the perspiration of the body, by attaching itself to linen, and afterwards, by mixing with rain, is disposed to form miasmata, which produce fevers. Upon this account I could wish the rifle shirt was banished from our army."²⁰ Apart from the medical concerns of this author, there was an incident at the beginning of the war which demonstrated how the hunting shirt's popularity was greater in the backwoods of the middle colonies than it was along the coasts of New England. Israel Trask was a boy who volunteered as a cook and messenger in a Massachusetts regiment during the Boston campaign. The following is his account of what happened when New England sailors saw riflemen in hunting shirts for the first time in Cambridge. Sometime in the winter of 1776

a rifle corps had come into camp from Virginia, made up of recruits from the backwoods and mountains of that state, in a uniform dress totally different from that of the regiments raised on the seaboard and interior of New England. Their white linen frocks, ruffled and fringed, excited the curiosity of the whole army, particularly to the Marblehead regiment, who were always full of fun and mischief. [They] looked with scorn on such an rustic uniform when compared to their own round jackets and fishers' trousers, [and they] directly confronted from fifty to an hundred of the riflemen who were viewing the college buildings. Their first manifestations were ridicule and derision, which the riflemen bore with more patience than their wont, but resort being made to snow, which then covered the ground, these soft missives were interchanged but a few minutes before both parties closed, and a fierce struggle commenced with biting and gouging on the one part, and knockdown on the other part with as much apparent fury as the most deadly

²⁰*The Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 22 April 1777.

enmity could create.²¹

Trask claims that "a thousand combatants" were fighting before Washington personally broke up the fray by seizing "two tall, brawny, athletic, savage-looking riflemen by the throat," to get their attention; and by "alternately shaking and talking to them" he brought an end to the fratricidal combat.²² Rivalries between New Englanders and those from the middle colonies were common throughout the war. New Englander Joseph Plum Martin commented about his own regiment which "was made up of about one half New Englanders and the remainder were chiefly Pennsylvanians." He said they were "two sets of people as opposite in manners and customs as light and darkness."²³ However, Trask's story illustrates the way these hunting shirts served as a catalyst for this regionalism.

It therefore might seem strange that Washington would desire more of them to be issued to the troops of the Continental Line. In a letter to Congress dated 10 July 1775 from Cambridge, Washington outlined the needs of his army. Making reference to the difficulty of obtaining the necessary clothing for his men "and particularly the troops raised in Massachusetts Bay," Washington was

of Opinion that a number of hunting Shirts, not less than 10,000 would in a

²¹Dann, *Revolution Remembered*, 408-9.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Joseph Plum Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, ed. George F. Scheer (Washington, D.C.: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, Eastern Acorn Press, 1962), 135.

great Degree remove the difficulty in the cheapest and quickest manner. I know nothing so trivial in a speculative View, that in Practice would have a happy Tendency to unite the men and abolish those Provincial distinctions which lead to Jealousy and Dissatisfaction.²⁴

Perhaps Washington would not have made such a request if he had known what was going to happen between the Marblehead men and his fellow Virginians in the winter of 1776.

But even after the incident that Trask described, Washington still wanted his men in hunting shirts. In his "General Orders" issued from his headquarters in New York on 24 July 1776, Washington had the following relayed to his officers:

The General being sensible of the difficulty, and expence of providing Cloaths, of almost any kind, for the Troops, feels an unwillingness to recommend, much more to order, any kind of Uniform, but as it is absolutely necessary that men should have Cloaths and appear decent and tight, he earnestly encourages the use of Hunting Shirts, with long Breeches, made of the same Cloth, Gaiter fashion about the Legs, to all those yet unprovided. No dress can be had cheaper, nor more convenient, as the Wearer may be cool in warm weather, and warm in cool weather by putting on under Cloaths which will not change the outward dress, Winter or Summer—Besides which it is a dress justly supposed to carry no small terror to the enemy, who think every such person a complete Marksman.²⁵

The advantages of these rather practical reasons are undeniable. Washington was also trying to cash in more on the British fear of the American riflemen's ability to kill at up to two-hundred-plus yards. Perhaps Washington also reasoned that if those Marblehead men were to be issued hunting shirts, they would be less likely to pick fights with those who

²⁴Washington to The President of Congress, in Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, 3:325

²⁵*Ibid.*, 5:336.

were already wearing them.

Washington had tried earlier to get New England troops into hunting shirts. On 4 August 1775 he wrote to the governors of Rhode Island and Connecticut requesting help in clothing his men. In his letter to Jonathan Trumbull, the governor of Connecticut, Washington wrote: "My last Letter from the Honble. Continental Congress, recommends my procuring from the Colonies of Rhode Island and Connecticut, a Quantity of Tow Cloth, for the Purpose of making of Indian or Hunting Shirts for the Men, many of whom are destitute of Cloathing."²⁶ Washington's letter to Governor Cooke on the same day also used the term "Indian or Hunting Shirts."²⁷ These are the only instances where hunting shirts were given such a direct association with Indian costume. In all the other references to these types of garments, no one called them anything but "hunting shirts," "hunting frocks," and, after their specific association with riflemen was solidified by the time of the Revolution, "rifle shirts" and "rifle frocks." Indeed, after these two letters in August 1775, Washington never called them anything but "hunting shirts" in his writings. Washington's words in these instances raise the possibility that the rifleman's hunting shirt may have been like one or more of the garments worn by Eastern Woodland Indian tribesmen during the seventeenth and

²⁶Washington to Trumbull as cited in Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, 3:389.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 3:387.

eighteenth centuries here in America. Nevertheless, we must also consider other evidence.

Just seventeen days after Washington wrote these letters mentioning "Indian or Hunting Shirts," Nicholas Cresswell was at Pittsburgh writing in his journal. Cresswell was a young Englishman who had come to America in 1774 to seek his fortune. For the last four months he had been traveling in the frontier regions of the middle colonies, believing that land speculation was the key to his financial future. By 18 August he decided to embark on another business tour of the Indian towns of the Ohio territory with a man named John Anderson. Cresswell was largely unaware of what was going on in Boston. Earlier in his travels he had bought a hunting shirt. On Saturday, 19 August he had hired an Indian woman to make "a pair of Mockeysons and Leggings" for his trading journey.²⁸ On Monday, 21 August 1775, he recorded the following: "Mr. Anderson informs me that the Indians are not well pleased at anyone going into their Country dressed in a Hunting shirt. Got a calico shirt made in the Indian fashion, trimmed up with Silver Brooches and Armplates so that I scarcely know myself."²⁹ If Indians were wearing hunting shirts, then why were they "not well pleased" when someone came into their territory wearing one? Why was Cresswell going to the trouble of having "a calico shirt made in Indian fashion" if his own hunting shirt was the same thing that

²⁸Nicholas Cresswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell 1775-1777* (London: J. Cape, 1925), 102.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 103.

Washington had, just three weeks earlier, called an "Indian" shirt. Perhaps the Indians of the Ohio Cresswell referred to were cautious of white men in hunting shirts because of an incident recounted by a chief named the White Mingo at the Fort Pitt Treaty conference in September 1775. The White Mingo asserted that an Indian had recently been fired on by "two Men Cloathed in White hunting Shirts."³⁰ It is also likely that the Indians of the Ohio region were like the Indians of the other regions in eastern North America. They knew that the land speculators and settlers of the American colonies were continually pushing to dispossess the Indians of their lands. The Indians of eastern North America also knew by now that most of these speculators and settlers were wearing hunting shirts on their incursions into Indian lands.

In fact, there are only two known eighteenth-century references to Indians wearing hunting shirts or garments like them, and they all date to the 1790s. In the account of his 1781 captivity among Indians of the Ohio Valley Jonathan Alder mentioned that years later in 1794, during the battle of Fallen Timbers, a warrior he knew by the name of Big Turtle was wearing a hunting shirt when he was shot.³¹ Isaac Weld described the dress of Indians he saw in the Great Lakes region during his travels among them in 1796-97. He wrote that over their common trade shirts "they wear either a blanket, [a] large

³⁰Reuben Gold Thwaites, Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The Revolution on the Upper Ohio, 1775-1777*. Draper Series, Vol. II. (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1908) 32-33.

³¹Orley E. Brown, *The Captivity of Jonathan Alder and His Life With the Indians* (Alliance, OH: O. E. Brown, 1965), 75; as cited in O'Neil, 55.

piece of broad cloth, or else a loose coat made somewhat similarly to a common riding frock."³² It is difficult to say, but this garment seems to be what he is talking about later when he described the clothing worn by the famed Mohawk chief Joseph Brandt. Weld wrote that "he wears a short coat, such as I have described, similar to a hunting frock."³³ These late references are complemented by the tradition associated with a leather hunting frock that is in the collection of the Moravian Historical Society in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. (See Figures 23a & 23b.) This frock, also dating to the early nineteenth century, is said to have belonged to another famous Indian chief named Red Jacket of the Seneca tribe. As these are the only known recorded instances of Indian warriors wearing hunting shirts, and since they occurred almost twenty years or more after Cresswell made his visit to the Ohio Indian towns, it is possible that Indians had begun to wear this once-hated symbol of white aggression. Another explanation could be found in the fact that it was also not uncommon for Indians to put on and wear the clothing of their dead foes as war trophies. Whatever the case may have been in 1794, the fact remains that in 1775 evidence shows that Indians were not wearing hunting shirts.

As noted earlier, Indian impersonators and spies did not list hunting shirts among their costume items. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Eastern Woodland Indians were wearing ruffled trade shirts like the one Sir John Caldwell wore in his

³²Weld, *Travels Through the States of North America*, 2:234.

³³*Ibid.*, 2:283.



Figure 23a: Red Jacket Hunting Frock. Said to have been worn by Red Jacket during the Black Hawk War. This frock is remarkably similar to the one in the Valentine Museum's collection (see Figures 22 & 23). (Photo and provenance courtesy of the Moravian Historical Society.)



Figure 23b: Back view of Red Jacket's Hunting Frock. Again, note the similarities with the Valentine Museum frock except this garment does not have embroidery on the back of the collar or a matching belt. (Photo Courtesy of the Moravian Historical Society.)

portrait. Isaac Weld described these shirts as "short" and "loose at the neck and wrists, generally made of coarse figured cotton or calico, of some gaudy pattern, not unlike what would be used for window or bed curtains at a common inn in England."³⁴ Indeed, these Indian trade shirts were very different from the caped hunting frocks worn by American riflemen. As the following newspaper passage shows, the frontier riflemen knew this.

On Friday evening last arrived here, on their way to the American Camp, Captain [Michael] Cresap's Company of Riflemen, consisting of 130 active, brave young fellows; many of whom had been in the late expedition under Lord Dunmore, against the Indians. . . . At night a great fire was kindled round a pole planted in the courthouse square, where the company with the Captain at their head, all naked to the waist and painted like savages (except the Captain, who was in an Indian shirt), indulged a vast concourse of the inhabitants [of Lancaster, Pennsylvania] with a perfect exhibition of a war dance, and all the manoeuvres of Indians holding council, going to war, circumventing their enemies, by defiles, ambuscades, attacking, scalping, etc.³⁵

As this account illustrates, Cresap and his compatriots purposefully chose not to wear hunting shirts when they were presenting their Indian show but instead wore no shirt or, as in the case of Captain Cresap, an "Indian shirt." Also, back in 1755 when James Smith was captured by the Indians, he was given "a new ruffled shirt" along with "a pair of leggins done off with ribbons and beads" and other items one would expect Indians to wear.³⁶ He did not receive a hunting shirt. In other words, there was an Indian's way of

³⁴Ibid., 2:234.

³⁵*Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), August, 1775, as cited in LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 76-77.

³⁶Smith, *An Account*, 15.

dressing and a rifleman's way of dressing. Though they were similar, they were not the same. This is further demonstrated by the way Washington reacted to James Smith when Smith proposed in March 1777 to offer his services as a leader of a band of riflemen who would fight using "the Indian method" and "be dressed entirely in their fashion, for the purpose of annoying and harrassing the enemy in their marches and encampments."³⁷

When Smith presented Washington with his credentials, his letters of reference, and his idea, Washington "did not fall in with the scheme of white men turning Indians."³⁸

Smith was offered a major's commission in a company of riflemen but declined because he did not like the man he would be serving under, and he would not have been able to keep his chosen men. Smith then went back to where he "would be of more use" as an Indian fighter on the frontier.³⁹ Just three months later Washington had apparently changed his mind about dressing his men as Indians. In a letter to Daniel Morgan dated 13 June 1777, he wrote: "It occurs to me that if you were to dress a company or two of true Woods Men in the right Indian Style and let them make the Attack accompanied with screaming and yelling as the Indians do, it would have very good consequences especially if as little as possible was said, or known of the matter beforehand."⁴⁰ Washington's

³⁷Ibid., 132.

³⁸Ibid., 134.

³⁹Ibid.

ambivalence aside, these episodes took place long after the rifleman's dress has been accepted as a proper uniform among men of the Continental Line. It seems that even Washington was beginning to know the difference between the rifleman's way of dressing with a hunting shirt and the Indian's way of dressing without one.

Thus, now that all the evidence has been considered, and this evidence seems to differentiate between "Indian shirts" and "hunting shirts," there must be another explanation for Washington making his reference to "Indian or Hunting Shirts." One possible answer may be found among the descriptions of riflemen who were taking things one step further than their peers. Indeed, there were pseudo-Indians who marched to Cambridge during the summer of 1775 who also wore hunting shirts to set themselves apart from the real Indians to the west. One witness recounted this in a letter to a friend:

. . . I have had the happiness of seeing Captain Michael Cresap marching at the head of a formidable company of upwards of one hundred and thirty men, from the mountains and backwoods painted like Indians, armed with tomahawks and rifles dressed in hunting shirts and moccasins, and though some of them had traveled near eight hundred miles, from the banks of the Ohio, they seemed to walk light and easy, and not with less spirit than at the first hour of their march.⁴¹

Appropriately, Michael Cresap was carrying on the Cresap family tradition of dressing up like an Indian and going to war; except that on this occasion he was wearing a hunting

⁴⁰Washington to Morgan as cited in Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, 8:236-37.

⁴¹"Extract From a Letter to a Gentleman in Philadelphia, 1775," as cited in LaCrosse, *Frontier Rifleman*, 71.

shirt. Earlier in their march, when Cresap and his men had done their Indian show at Lancaster, Pennsylvania mentioned above, they were not wearing their hunting shirts. After the show was over, when they were no longer portraying Indians and instead marching to fight the British in Boston as American riflemen, they wore hunting shirts. There were others who went to war with Britain in 1775 who also added war paint to their standard riflemen's attire. Mary Morgan, the wife of a Philadelphia doctor, writing in June 1775 from Philadelphia to her sister in Baltimore, described the same review of troops that Congressman Silas Dean had witnessed. Unlike Dean, Morgan included more information about the appearances of the riflemen who were wearing hunting shirts.

Then their [sic] is the Rangers . . . Their uniform is tanned shirts with a cape fringed. A belt round their wastes with a Tommy hawk sticking in it. Some of them paint their faces and stick painted feathers in their heads, in short their aim is to resemble Indians as much as possible.⁴²

Those who saw these troops were not fooled any more than those who watched Al Jolson do his blackface routine. It was obvious that they were not real Indians. In addition to their skin color, hunting shirts were the article of clothing that set them clearly apart from the real natives of the American forests. White riflemen did not want to be Indians. Many of them felt that the only good Indian was a dead one. Instead, they just wanted people to think they were as fierce and tough as real Indians. For these reasons, a pseudo-Indian riflemen was a powerful symbol to white Americans who were searching for a new

⁴²Morgan to her sister in Baltimore, as cited in Elting, *Military Uniforms*, 104.

national identity that distinguished them from their over-civilized cousins in Europe.

While it is possible that Washington was associating the hunting shirts worn by riflemen masquerading as "savages" with an article of clothing he had once seen Indians wearing out in the Ohio Valley back in the 1750s, the fact remains that Indians were not wearing them in the 1770s. Ultimately we may never know just what Washington meant when he wrote of "Indian or Hunting Shirts." It may also be that Washington was unconsciously playing with the hunting shirt as a cultural symbol. Worn by riflemen whose other attire was obviously Indian in origin, the hunting shirt helped to incorporate a fierce native American identity within a new American national image. In other words, like his fellow American Tea Party "Mohawks," Washington and his frontier riflemen considered Indian identity as an *American* identity. Thus perhaps because the hunting shirt helped to link the two identities, it was perceived by some as an Indian garment because of its association with riflemen who wore other clothing that was obviously Indian in origin. Whatever the case may have been, the fact remains that part of the appeal of the hunting shirt was its association with the rugged world of the American frontier. As its popularity grew, it was increasingly worn by those who had nothing to do with the backcountry or the frontier.

On 6 September 1777 the Continental Congress authorized the Clothier-General to supply each man who had not received his "bounty of clothing" from a previous

allotment at least one hunting shirt.⁴³ Thus, the hunting shirt began officially to find its way into the general ranks of American Continental Line. American soldiers from New England to Georgia were soon seen wearing this garment that was once worn only by the impolite backwoodsmen and the commercial big game hunters of the middle-colony frontier. Obviously, it would be imprudent to assume that the hunting shirt was worn by all the American infantry thereafter. In fact, military uniform historians have documented many different varieties of European-style regimentals worn during the Revolution.⁴⁴ In de Verger's depiction of the American soldiers he saw during the Yorktown campaign, the rifleman is the only one wearing a hunting shirt. (See Figure 24.) Nevertheless, as Figures 21, 22a, & 22b illustrate, the hunting shirt was worn by the common musket-carrying foot soldier of the Continental Line from the beginning to the middle years of the war. It was also at this time that the rebellious Philadelphia minister mentioned in the beginning of the first chapter gave his political sermon about the angels being dressed like riflemen. In fact the hunting shirt had become so common that by 1778 it was being lampooned in political cartoons. (See Figure 25.) As one might expect, hunting shirts might have seemed ridiculous when they were worn by certain people in some situations. Indeed, when an African American slave or a man from the

⁴³*Pennsylvania Gazette*, (Philadelphia) 10 September, 1777 as cited in *The Pennsylvania Gazette. 1728-1800*, Folio III Accessible Archives CD-ROM.

⁴⁴See Elting, *Military Uniforms*, and Philip Katcher, *Uniforms of the Continental Army* (York, PA: George Shumway Publisher, 1981).



Figure 24: Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger, watercolor, 1781. This is the rest of de Verger's depiction of American Soldiers during the Yorktown Campaign. Figure 1 is obviously the second from the right. At the far right is an artilleryman and on the left are Infantrymen. (Photo courtesy of the Brown University Library, Ann S.K. Brown Military Collection.)



A VIEW IN AMERICA IN 1778

Figure 25: "A View in America in 1778." This political cartoon is a challenge to interpret. It is the unfortunate African American in the foreground with his wounded rump exposed to view that concerns us in this study. This man is clearly wearing a hunting shirt. The man with his back turned in the wide brimmed flop hat at the upper right background seems to also be wearing a hunting shirt. Here the hunting shirt is a prop in a lampoon. As the hunting shirt became the garment of the common soldier it became the garment of heroes and fools alike. (Photo courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

frontcountry who knew little about the backwoods or how to fight like a rifleman wore hunting shirts, it may have eventually been seen by some as a comically pretentious way of dressing. Accordingly, it is not surprising that by the end of the war it is the European-style regimentals that were generally worn by soldiers who did not carry rifles.

As one modern Revolutionary war uniform historian put it, Washington may have requested the hunting shirt initially for the practical reasons we have already addressed, but it was "regimental coats which he and the entire Army wanted."⁴⁵ While this is a gross overgeneralization, the point is well-taken. White Americans of the frontcountry—and even parts of the backcountry—during the Revolution may have initially flirted with the wild image of the frontiersman; in their heart of hearts they wanted to be Americans who were culturally European. Nevertheless, the American frontier rifleman during the Revolution, with his uniquely American hunting shirt, Indian leggings, moccasins, and other accoutrements, was the rebel soldier who best embodied one aspect of this new American national identity. This identity did not consciously look back to Europe for its cultural signs. Instead, it looked to America and to the true American natives in the trans-Appalachian West for its ethnic emblems. As these riflemen described by Henry and others "aped the manner of savages," they gave their new country a pseudo-native identity, which Americans were proud of. Thus, with God on their side and the angels

⁴⁵Katcher, *Uniforms of the Continental Army*, 11.

dressed as riflemen, America's psychology of national identity was established in rebellion against Britain and her old European ways. Eventually, Americans like John Joseph Henry would leave these riflemen and their hunting shirts behind in their search for a more refined national identity. But before that happened, many Americans did not think it "silly" to wear hunting shirts and dress like riflemen.

CONCLUSION

As early as 1776 American military commanders and government officials were complaining about the "superabundance of riflemen in the army" and wished to leave rifles in the hands of "Real Marksmen," while the rest would exchange their arms for muskets with bayonets.¹ Obviously the American backwoods rifleman, despite his elite military abilities and fighting prowess, would not have been able to win the war by himself. Backwoods riflemen played key roles in battles such as Great Bridge, Saratoga, Cowpens, and King's Mountain as well as in countless other skirmishes on the frontier against militant Indians, but they often proved ineffective when pitted against disciplined European troops with bayonets at close range.² But this was not the reason John Joseph Henry would later characterize his rifleman's costume as "silly."

Aping "the manner of savages" by dressing like a rifleman fell out of fashion because Americans embraced the goddess Columbia as their symbol and laid aside the rustic Indian Princess who had formerly held the post.³ She would eventually be relegated

¹Secretary of the Board of War to the Maryland Council of Safety, October 1776, and Anthony Wayne to the Board of War, June 1777, as cited in Huddleston, *Colonial Riflemen*, 17.

²Huddleston, *Colonial Riflemen*, 17-18, 34-35.

³Deloria, *Paying Indian*, 51-53. Also see John Higham, "Indian Princess and Roman Goddess: The First Female Symbols of America," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 100, pt. 1 (1990), 45-79; Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 138-160; and E. McClung

to tobacco stores. Americans wanted respectability, which was not Indian but European. As the lands of Tecumseh and Daniel Boone became the lands of people like Henry Clay and William Henry Harrison, America refined her manners and material culture. In 1826 John J. Jacob a veteran rifleman of the Revolutionary War and the last man to wed Michael Cresap's widow, wrote the following commentary on the early days of the frontier rifleman and the Revolution he helped to win:

There was one peculiar circumstance in our Revolutionary War, that I believe has not been noticed by any historian: I mean that remarkable Providence that restrained and suspended the uplifted arm of vengeance from falling upon us until we were prepared to meet the stroke and repel its force; We were, moreover from habits and manners, prepared and fitted for the tented field. Our young men were vigorous, athletic and active; inured to fatigue, privations and plain living from their infancy, they were prepared to suffer more and complain less than the dandies of the nineteenth century, if placed in similar circumstances. Those days of bacon and cabbage, of hominy and pone, milk and mush, of hunting-shirts, leggings and moccasins, have passed away; we are now, please your honors, a refined, polished, polite people.

Jacob went on to ask if this refined, polished, and polite America of the early nineteenth century, "so much older in vice and effeminacy," would have been able to win a war against Britain if his generation had not done it forty years earlier.⁴ In spite of Jacob's generational chauvinism, we can see how the rifleman's costume was associated with the

Fleming, "The American Image as Indian Princess 1765-1783," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 2 (1965), 65-81.

⁴John J. Jacob, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life of the Late Captain Michael Cresap* (Cincinnati, OH: Jno. F. Uhlhorn, Steam Job Printer, 1866; reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1971), 19-20.

rugged, patriotic living of the unrefined early American frontier. Jacob and his fellow "white savages" were tough, and they knew how to fight. They had in large part learned these traits from the Indians whom they had displaced on the land.

James Smith wrote his opinion on the matter almost twenty years earlier. Like Jacob, Smith was also convinced that riflemen had played a crucial role in winning the Revolutionary War, but Smith credited the Indians with teaching these riflemen how to fight.

May we not conclude that the progress we had made in their art of war, contributed considerably toward our success, in various respects, when contending with great Britain for liberty? Had the British king, attempted to enslave us before Braddock's war, in all probability he might readily have done it, . . . but after fighting such a subtil and barbarous enemy as the Indians, we were not terrified at the approach of British red-coats.—Was not Burgoyne's defeat accomplished in some measure by the Indian mode of fighting? and did not Gen. Morgan's rifle-men, and many others, fight with greater success, in consequence of what they had learned of their art of war?⁵

Smith believed that Americans would continue to profit by mixing Indian and European ways. "We may learn of the Indians what is useful and laudable," wrote the former captive, "and at the same time lay aside their barbarous proceedings." Here Smith articulated the cultural ideal of the American frontiersman. Unfortunately, Smith and others were in the minority as they tried to be *civi*/ "white savages:" "It is much to be lamented that some of our frontier rifle-men are prone to imitate them [the Indians] in

⁵Smith, *An Account*, 156.

their inhumanity."⁶ As an example he cited the massacre of the pacifistic Moravian Delawares at Salem and Gnadenhutten, Ohio in March, 1782 at the hands of Colonel David Williamson's men.

Unquestionably, the idea that the only good Indian is a dead one originated with these riflemen who wore hunting shirts. This kind of savagery against the so-called "savages" was the inevitable result of years of brutal fighting with atrocities being committed on both sides. It was also the result of the freedoms enjoyed on the frontier where social constraints were discarded with both good and bad results. This lack of social control produced men who were great revolutionaries but poor subordinates to the rules and laws of religion and civilization. This lack of propriety was obvious to those like Smyth and Woodmason who considered themselves to be civilized observers. These observers sometimes noted the way this lawlessness was manifested in the physical appearances of these American backwoods riflemen. The Hessian officer who wrote from Philadelphia in October 1777 and described that rebellious minister who claimed that the angels were dressed like riflemen went on to explain that these riflemen were the Americans' "sharpshooters," and that they all "shoot very well, but look like crooks."⁷ Americans may have wanted a revolution, but they generally did not want to look like

⁶Ibid., 159-60.

⁷du Puy to von Ditfurth, Staatsarchiv Marburg, Best. 4 h Nr. 3155. transl. Dr. Werner H. Baur, Western Springs, IL. The line in question reads as follows in the original: "sehen aber alle aus wie die Spitzbuben."

crooks.

"In the eighteenth century," wrote one modern costume historian, "dress was considered a crucial part of good manners, and contributed to civilized behavior."⁸ This same historian went on to say that "many contemporaries—both French and English—linked the events of 1789 with a general decline in manners and standards of dress, as men rushed to wear garments which were in origin working class, such as the trousers or pantaloons."⁹ Americans during their Revolution were like the French in theirs. Americans wanted to alter the political structure of their world, and to do it they had to break some laws, as well as some rules of fashion and etiquette by "aping the ways of the savage." In other words, like the French revolutionaries who wore trousers and associated knee-breeches with the corrupt and effete rule of the aristocracy, Americans, for a time, saw their hunting shirts, leggings, and moccasins as a symbols of their rugged resistance to British oppression. Still, the average American Revolutionary ultimately did not want to be seen as a "white savage" devoid of a civil conscience even if he wore a hunting shirt and had once dressed up like an Indian and broke the law by dumping tea into Boston harbor.

Indeed, Americans wanted to use savagery in the right measure to achieve the military goals of the revolution. When George Rogers Clark undertook his successful

⁸Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986), 96.

⁹*Ibid.*, 112-13.

campaign in the Illinois country against the Indians and British based at Detroit and Vincennes, he equipped his men "after the Indian fashion."¹⁰ When he reached Kaskaskia he took delight in the news that the French who lived there believed Clark and his Long Knives "to be more savage than their neighbors, the Indians," and he "resolved to make capital of this."¹¹ After frightening them, Clark successfully endeavored to win them over by demonstrating his generosity and civility.¹² Perhaps the strangest example of Clark's use of "savagery" during this campaign was on the march he and his men made to Vincennes. After slogging through the mud and shallow waters west of Vincennes, Clark faced the possibility of losing critical time in transport: "To men half starved the loss of so much time was a serious matter and I would now have given a good deal for a day's provisions or for one of our horses." Clark then went on to describe the following scene:

I returned but slowly to the troops in order to gain time for reflection. On our arrival all ran to hear our report and every eye was fixed on me. Unfortunately I spoke in a serious manner to one of the officers and without knowing what I had said all were thrown into a state of alarm, running from one to another and bewailing their situation. For about a minute I stood looking upon their confusion and then, whispering to those close by to do as I did I quickly scooped up some water with my hand, poured some powder into it, and blacking my face, raised the war whoop. I marched into the water. The party gazed at me for an instant and then like a flock of sheep fell in, one behind the other, without saying a word. I ordered the men who were near me to strike up one of their favorite

¹⁰George Rogers Clark and Henry Hamilton, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, ed. Milo M. Quaife (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1927), 52.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 55.

¹²*Ibid.*, 63-64.

songs. It soon passed down the line and all went cheerfully.¹³

Apart from his incredible charisma and leadership skills, Clark also understood the inspirational value of the Indian to the American frontiersmen he was leading. The white American "savage" mustered courage by thinking on the Indian warrior whom he feared and admired. He imagined himself to be as tough and fearless as they were. The American Indian was also used by Daniel Morgan, to inspire his men when he led them into battle at Cowpens. According to Morgan, the Redcoats "Raised a prodigious yell, and came Running at us as if they Intended to eat us up," but Morgan defused the situation: "They gave us the British halloo, boys," he bellowed, "give them the Indian whoop."¹⁴ Like two teams with their respective mascots and cheers, the Americans were the Indians.

Daniel Morgan continued to inspire Americans well into the nineteenth century with his hunting shirt and Indian stockings, long after national fashions had become more refined. (See Figure 26.) But before the days of Morgan's hunting shirts, leggings, and moccasins had completely passed away and America had become "so much older in vice and effeminacy," Americans found confidence and a new national identity by aping the perceived manners of the Indian warriors they wished to displace. Americans and their riflemen did not want to look too much like Indians, so they wore the non-Indian hunting

¹³Ibid., 127.

¹⁴Morgan to Snickers, 26 January 1781, Gates Papers, N. Y. Historical Society, as cited in Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan*, 137.



Daniel Morgan

Figure 26: *Daniel Morgan*. This engraving of Morgan in his rifleman's uniform is one of the best known images of the war hero. Unfortunately it is also problematic as a document because it is a copy of a now unknown painting by Alonzo Chappel. Chappel was born 26 years after Morgan died of old age. As long as Chappel's source for his version of Morgan's portrait remains a mystery it will be hard to trust this image as an accurate depiction of Morgan's rifle costume. Even so, it does seem to bear a strong resemblance to the miniature portrait of Morgan done by Trumbull (see Figure 15) which was a copy of a portrait done from life by Peale. (Photo courtesy of the New York Public Library.)

In 1792 when Washington was asked by Congress to give his opinions on the general officers of the army who might be named to the highest command in the armed forces he said the following, among other things, about Morgan: "It is said he has been (if the case is not so now) intemperate . . . and it is not denied that he is illiterate." (Fitzpatrick, 31: 509.) Indeed Morgan as a backcountry warrior was not the ideal gentleman of Washington's caste but he was a great leader for the common soldier, and by far one of the best combat generals America ever had.

shirt and other articles to set themselves apart from the true natives of the land. This ensured a national peculiarity that was neither wholly European nor Native American. In the end, Americans looked back to Europe for their cultural cues but not until they had used the Indian and his lands to break away.

APPENDIX

In a book entitled *The Private Soldier Under Washington* by Charles Knowles Bolton that was published in 1902, a picture of a pullover-style hunting shirt is included opposite page 160. The caption reads: "Hunting Shirt (made from a model of the Revolutionary period) of home-spun linen."¹ The whereabouts of this copy are unknown. The original which Bolton says was owned by a man named James F. Kelly is also missing. Until the original surfaces the photograph of the copy is intriguing but useless. Indeed until the original can be examined there is no way to tell if it is in fact genuine, or if the copy is a correct interpretation of the original. Despite all this there are those who claim they see pullover hunting shirts being worn by subjects in images from the period. I see these images as ambiguous at best and remain unconvinced.

¹Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 160.

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Growing up in a suburb of Chicago during the 1970s and early '80s, I had little exposure to the subject of this paper or the related topics that fuel my current scholarly interests. Nevertheless, I began to feel an interest in early American frontier history while I was yet a boy when I learned of my own family's history in America. My fifth Great Grandfather, James Smith, was an early settler in Hampshire County, Virginia (now West Virginia) during the 1750s or '60s. He had come from New Trenton, Jersey, where he had associations with the Society of Friends. His son Aaron Smith settled in a valley north of what is now Clarksburg, West Virginia and stole his lands from the Indians by virtue of a tomahawk right claim in the early 1770s. These ancestors have always fascinated me, and I attribute my preoccupation with this subject to them.

I received my BA in literature cum laude from Grove City College with the intention of going on to study folklore in graduate school. Instead, I took a greater interest in museum work and received a graduate level Certificate in Museum Studies from Harvard. My curiosity for the material culture of the Revolutionary War and the early American frontier induced me to pursue an unpaid internship at Colonial Williamsburg's Gunsmith Shop where I eventually found employment. I currently live in the James Moir House at Colonial Williamsburg with my wife Kathryn and my daughter Hannah, and look forward to continuing my career in the museum field.