The Stow Minutemen

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Captain's Notes

...the view from the front

The Next Step – Creating a "persona"

So you're a reenactor… but what does that mean and where do you go from there? The first step in that process is to start thinking about how you would feel, what you would have experienced if you were living in the 1770s instead of today. The easiest start to that process is to consider your age. For example, I am 45 years old currently so in 1775 terms:

- I *was born in 1730…*
- *In 1745 I was 15 years of age and learned of Massachusetts provincial troops capturing the French Fort at Louisburg.*
- *I was 26 years old in 1756, when the French and Indian War started – old enough to have most likely served in the Army.*
- *The Stamp Act affected me in 1765 when I was 35 years old*
- *The news of the Boston Massacre reached me in 1770 when I was 40.*
- *Three years later the Boston Tea Party was the talk of the Colonies.*
- *I will be 46 this July, but for now all I can think of is the recent events of 19 April where I was involved - as were friends, relatives and neighbors - in the events of the day.*

The way to grow and find new excitement in the hobby is to create a "persona" - the use of the term here is referring to a character, either real from history or someone based on people from that time and place. Basing it loosely on yourself will make the fit easier and you will be more comfortable in the role. You shouldn't expect to build the character completely all at once, however it will help a lot to have a basic idea of who you are and then clothing choices will become easier if you have a person in mind and the "back-story" to go along with that person.

At minimum, consider:

- Name: _____- (remember many modern names weren't around then)
- Your age: ___ / Date & Year of Birth: ___
- Are you male or female? (in your portrayal) ____
- Single, Married, Widowed: ___ / Children: ____
- Socio-Economic status: _____
- Occupation / Trade / Craft: _____
- Residence: _____Why you live where you do:_____

(For those that have played "*Dungeons and Dragons*" or another RPG this should be easy I will put up on the Members section of the website a more complete "Character Sheet".)

As you think about the above questions remember that the story behind your character should be believable. It will work better if it fits your concept of who you actually are, instead of who you would like to be. Also when deciding on who (or at least the general sort of person) you "are", you should remember that everyone can be John Adams or even one of the squires of the town. Ordinary people, with ordinary lives, are a much better "edutainment" tool than those few who lived in the uppermost levels of society.

The Second Step – Knowing the Historical Background

When you have you decided who you are, or who you represent, you should consider what this person knows; what has happened during this person's life, what would a person like yourself know of the world and current events, how do you feel about them? This takes a little bit more work and it is time for reading, research and referrals. You need to have some knowledge of the times – not only "today" but the history of the world around you up until this day _____, 1775.

To help you with this background history books are an invaluable resource. But they only give you the facts, not the personal, first person level of experience. Autobiographies, memoirs, letters and studying the artifacts (actual or pictorial) of the things that people like "yourself" would have used in their daily lives can reveal many insights that will enrich both your knowledge and your enjoyment. Visit museums and check books to get a feeling for how they looked, worked and what they were used for. When you begin to understand how your character lived and what they felt about big and the little things in his/her life, then the character will seem more real.

Source material used - John Newell's *Battle Road 1998 Pickett & Interpreters Guide*

I remain your most humbled and obedient servant,

Rick Lawson, Capt.

Upcoming Events

(more details can be found on our website - www.stowminutemen.org)

JUNE/JULY

Sat. June 17 - Boxborough, MA - Boxborough Fifers Day
Sat/Sun June 17/18 - Lincoln, MA - Hartwell Tavern Encampment
Tues. July 4 - Needham, MA - Parade

Quartermaster's Notes

By Linda Stokes, Sergeant Quartermaster

The company would like to thank the Brenches for donating a boy's shirt to the company.

With many encampments coming up, as you start to acquire camp equipment, I would strongly recommend against tin. It rusts terribly! Stainless steel can be used as a substitute, since it looks close enough to tin, or use wood or ceramics.

Here is a short synopsis of the most common woman's clothing worn by re-enactors. Most of us from Stow typically portray middle or lower class farmwomen. Her clothing would be comfortable and nonrestrictive.

The basic undergarment was the shirt or chemise, if you were an elegant Bostonian. It was typically knee length, with a low, scooped neck and sleeves ending below the elbows. Be careful, or be prepared to alter, when purchasing this on-line: a couple of web sites have shifts with long sleeves. Shifts were typically made with no patterns. See Beth Gilgun's book, Tidings from the Eighteenth Century or Clothing for Ladies and Gentlemen of Higher and Lower Standing prepared by the Minute Man National Historical Park. Sleeves could be finished with cuffs, or drawstrings, or ruffles. The neck would be closed with a drawstring and you could also add a ruffle here.

Over the shift, usually at least two petticoats would be worn. These were very full, usually ended above the ankles, and were gathered at the waist with a drawstring. In winter, many petticoats would be worn for warmth. The winter petticoat would frequently be quilted. The best petticoats would be embroidered and trimmed with lace and ribbons. A petticoat can be made very easily. Use about 4 yards of 45" fabric, sew a side seam, gather with the drawstring, and hem to the proper length. Although drawstrings were most common, waistbands did exist. Fabric is usually cotton, muslin, or linen in white or off-white.

On top, the most commonly worn clothing would be the short gown or the bed gown. These were sleeved jacket bodices, usually

fairly loose fitting and sleeves cut full for ease of movement. The bed gown was the longer of the two, usually below hip-length, mid hip or longer. Both would have sleeves coming to below the elbows. They could be closed with hook and eyes, laces, or simply wrapped and held by pins, brooches, or by an apron. The bed gown was usually held closed with an apron. There are still a lot of questions about what is appropriate in our New England locale and more research needs to be done.

Under the top jacket, a woman would wear stays over the shift. This was a corset stiffened with whalebone, wood, or metal. Without stays, you will never create the eighteenth century posture or shape. Stays were laced in front or back and created the cone-shaped upper body. They pushed up the bust into a high, rounded shape. Working-women would wear stays for support. They would not be laced as tightly as the fashionable woman. Jumps, essentially a sleeveless bodice, have less boning or none, and could be worn when a less stiff garment was needed. Jumps or stays should not be worn in place of a sleeved jacket top or gown.

The neckerchief was a square of fabric, cotton, silk, linen, or wool for warmth, worn around the neck. It could be over or under your sleeved bodice or gown, tucked in or left out.

The woman's outfit is finished with an apron. Aprons would use a drawstring or waistband. It could have a top bib that was typically pinned on. Aprons were practical, but also symbolized that one was a hard-working woman carrying out one's housewifely duties. Aprons can be cotton, linen, or wool. A wool apron was very useful around a fire since an ember landing on it would not cause it to catch fire. The apron would be used as a tool around the farm, for gathering herbs or vegetables or lifting hot pots at the hearth.

On the top of the head, a cap is an essential piece of clothing. The "classic, gathered mobcap" was not worn at this period. But there is a large selection of styles to choose from, including many close fitting caps, finished with ruffles, lace, or ribbons. On top of the cap a wool hat or straw hat could be worn.

Another useful item is the pocket. These could be worn singly or on both sides. The most popular shape was the pear shape, with a vertical slash for entry. It was usually worn under the top petticoat, reached through the slit in the petticoat, and tied around the waist. If it was embroidered or decorated, it could be worn on top. Cloaks were very popular, especially scarlet cloaks (sometimes called cardinals or red riding hoods) worn by farm or merchant women.

See web pages listed in the previous newsletter.

References:

Eighteenth-Century Clothing at Williamsburg by Linda Baumgarten

Tidings from the Eighteenth Century by Beth Gilgun

Clothing for Ladies and Gentlemen of Higher and Lower Standing prepared by Minute Man National Historical Park

www.18cnewenglandlife.org an 18th Century New England Life web page

Member Notes

In mid-May, the four **Littlefield** children - **Malcolm, Lincoln, Eliot** and **Julian** - participated in the Summit for the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Mobilizing Communities for Ratification, in Washington, DC. Malcolm and Lincoln have been involved in the Campaign for US Ratification of the CRC since 2002, thanks to a Model UN group event that motivated them to find other ways

of making a difference in the world. Over 350 people from 13 countries and 30 states attended the summit, including members of Unicef, International Social Services, Save the Children, and the American Bar Association. The Littlefields contributed to the writing of a Declaration and Plan of Action, and they performed a theatre piece based on "A World Fit for Us," a document written by child delegates to the United Nations Special Session on Children in May 2002. And Julian even had "Happy Birthday" sung to him, started by CRC Campaign Chair Tom Kennedy of Covenant House, New York City. Great job, Littlefields! Your caring and enthusiasm is a model for all of us.

Notes from the Stow Tavern

By John Willoughby

…But what shall we drink?

In the last article from the Stow Tavern we took a look at where the colonials drank, and the multi-faceted role that taverns played in colonial society. And while we did see that the tavern filled many roles, the key attraction was always, first and foremost, the drinking. In this article we'll take a look at what they drank.

First of all, what they drank was alcohol. Lots of it! Life was hard, work was thirsty, and by all accounts our ancestors drank a lot. But the alcohol itself wasn't the only reason people drank and, strangely enough, alcoholic drinks were healthier than alternatives like water. Water in colonial times, especially back in Europe, was generally very polluted. Streams were used to dump everything imaginable and wells were often located right next to outhouses and animal dung heaps (all conveniently near the house). Drinking such polluted water could indeed make someone very sick and people had discovered that alcoholic drinks did not make you sick (until you had too much).

The "health" of alcoholic drinks was actually not because of the alcohol content but because of how the drinks were made. Beer is boiled during its production, which kills bacteria. Wine and cider are made directly from undiluted fruit juice and avoid tainted water that way. Spirits like rum are also boiled during production, sterilizing them as well. This made the alcoholic drinks safe, and the water dangerous. Back then they didn't realize that all they had to do was boil the water as well, but experience showed them that beer was good, water was bad, and that's all they knew.

Beer deserves its own article and we will save our coverage of beer for the third article in this series. In this article we will take a look at the other drinks including cider, wine, and rum.

Cider was an easy drink for the colonials to make. It is made from apples which, although not originally native to New England, were plentiful long before the time of the Revolution. Apples grew wild in abundance and were also extensively cultivated. A single apple tree produced a large crop of apples for both eating and pressing and so it was a very useful thing to maintain. In the old days almost every farm would have at least a few apple trees in the yard and a cider press in the barn. Many small villages had cider mills before they even had a general store!

An interesting note is that apple trees do not grow true to their seed. That is, the specific type of apple tree that grows will have no relationship to the tree that produced the seed. This means that once a strain of apples was identified that was particularly desirable the only way to get more was to take cuttings from the tree and graft them onto the roots of new apple seedlings. All named apples are propagated from cuttings, not by seed. While most new wild apple trees do not produce desirable fruit, this does also mean that there endless variations available to try from. Many standard apple varieties eaten today were discovered in early New England, like the Roxbury Russet, Baldwin, Macintosh Red, Rhode Island Greening, and others.

Producing hard cider is extremely easy. After the fruit is first crushed and then pressed to extract the juice, you just need to wait. Apples come with their own yeast that resides on the skin of the apple, and the apple provides its own sugar to feed the yeast. In colonial times without refrigeration and modern preservatives it was actually difficult to keep non-alcoholic cider available except during the fall when it was fresh. Left standing at room temperature cider will begin to ferment in less than a week.

The hard cider that the early colonials drank was generally very “dry” and fairly low in alcohol content. The sugar that was present in the apples was completely consumed during fermentation leaving the resulting drink unsweetened. Because the natural sugar content was not high in cider, the yeast would run out of food (sugar) before the alcohol content was particularly high. This resulted in a drink that was about 2~3 percent alcohol (4~6 proof). As sugar and honey become more widely available during the 18th century this was often added to the cider to increase the total sugar content resulting in a finished product that was sweeter and had a higher alcohol content. By the time of the revolution standard tavern-served cider had an alcohol content of 7~8 percent.

Hard cider was sometimes fermented a second time by adding raisins and sugar or honey to the cider. The raisins provided a source of yeast (also from the skin) as well as some added flavor, and the sugar or honey provided food for the yeast. This produced a product referred to as “Apple Wine”, or “Cyser” when honey was used to sweeten the cider. This would typically raise the alcohol content further to 12 percent. Another way to increase the alcohol content was to make “Apple Jack”. Unlike other stronger drinks that are made by distillation, Apple Jack was made simply by leaving a barrel of hard cider outside in the winter. The water content would freeze and create a layer of ice that can be skimmed off the top leaving a more alcoholic mush behind. The colder the temperature, the more ice that would form and the higher the alcohol content of the remains.

This process - fractional crystallization - could produce a result typically of 15 to 25 percent alcohol but again that is highly dependant on how low the temperature goes. 0 degrees F, for example, is needed to yield about a 15 percent alcohol result. The only problem with this method is that, unlike distillation, it also increases the level of impurities and helps contribute to a painful morning after any overindulgence. Apple Brandy, by contrast, was distilled hard cider and produced a cleaner result with even higher alcohol content but required more work and equipment.
While apple cider was the most common drink, other fruits were used to ferment as well including pears (the result was called “Perry”) and, of course, grapes for wine. When the Europeans came to America they found the forests teaming with native grapes of the species Vitis Labrusca. Unfortunately, these were different from the Vitis Vinifera grapes that they were used to for wine production. The taste of wine produced from the native Vitis Labrusca grapes was considered inferior in taste, having a pronounced musky or fruity taste to it. There followed a long history of endless failed attempts to grow European grapes in New England. The European grapes simply did not do well in our climate and suffered from a number of pests and diseases that the native variety was immune to. While the “inferior” taste of wine made form local grapes kept it from appearing on the tables of the upper classes, wine was wine and the common folk were less picky. Compared to beer and cider, however, wine was consumed in smaller quantities. New England weather does not produce a grape that is as high in sugar content as the European products, and unless sugar was added to the grape juice the wine that was produced was dry and lower in alcohol content than typical wines.

Ironically, when the native Phylloxera insect eventually made its way to Europe from America in the mid 1800’s it almost completely wiped out the European vineyards. The Phylloxera eats the roots of the European Vitis Vinifera, but the American Vitis Labrusca is immune to it. The European wineries only salvation was to turn to the much maligned Vitis Labrusca for root stock and graft their own grape varieties on to the more hardy roots. Today most European vineyards feature grapes that grow on American root stock.

We would certainly be remiss in our coverage of popular drinks if we did not also include distilled spirits, particularly rum. While other spirits like whiskey, brandy, and gin, were available, it was rum that was the staple in any colonial tavern. Rum required quantities of molasses to ferment and a still to produce, and so was not something that the colonials

typically made at home. Fortunately for the colonials, New England was the leading rum producer in the 18th and 19th century and New England Rum was generally considered the best. By the mid 18th century there were over 20 rum distilleries in Rhode Island and over 60 in the Boston area. Small wonder that rum was such a local staple. Rum also helped fuel economic growth in New England and much of the money was reinvested in the growing local textile industries.

Sadly, rum was also a cornerstone in the growing slave trade and was a key link in the famous “slave trade triangle”. Molasses, a by-product of sugar production, was shipped from the Caribbean to New England where it was fermented and distilled into rum. The rum was sent to Africa where it was traded for slaves. The slaves were then sent to sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean where they helped make more molasses, and so on.

We have touched on a number of the more popular drinks in this article, withholding beer for the moment, but there were many more drinks that were made. Anything that could be fermented was fermented in varying quantities. Honey wine, known as Meade, was also a popular drink. If the honey was fermented with fruit added (apples, currants, blackberries, raspberry, etc.) it was called “Melomel”. If spices were used instead, it was called “Metheglin”. Mead, Melomel, and Metheglin were consumed either hot or cold and a hot mug of Metheglin on a cold winter night was believed to be a safeguard against chills and fever.

Join us in our next article in this series when we will look at the history of beer in colonial America, and also examine a number of popular drink recipes of the time.

Music Masters Notes

By Amelia Rogers and Matthew Brench

Having survived the cold and wet spring at the Bedford Pole Capping), broken in our marching feet with the Concord Trail March, debuted our new stand piece at the William Diamond Muster in Lexington, and honored our Veterans and citizens with parades in Boylston, Newton and Stow, the fifers and drummers of Stow are warmed up and ready for the summer!

With the return of college students and easing of extracurricular activities of our numerous school-age participants, we now number at least 13 fifers and 10 drummers! This summer we look forward to polishing the new pieces we have learned this year and adding harmonies to already familiar pieces. With a strong contingent of youth in the dramatic arts there is an interest in expanding the choreography and streamlining our marching techniques, so we will be adding regular marching practice into the music rehearsals. We will send out notices to our regular membership regarding marching practices so that non-musicians can participate as well.

The Stow Musicians will also be attending and providing music for several encampments this summer including Glover's in Marblehead in July and the Hartwell Tavern in Lexington on June 17.

The summer is a great time to check out all of our activities, and for families to join the fife and drum group. We rehearse on Thursday evenings from 6-8 pm in Stow. Please feel free to contact us through the website (www.stowminutemen.org) for further

Adjutant Notes

By Jenn Siegel, Sergeant Adjutant

Thanks again to all those who made the last newsletter such a success, and more thanks to those who have contributed to this one! I hope to have these newsletters be as informative and entertaining as possible, and for that I need your contributions. So put your thinking tricorners on, and send me articles!

Future Events

JUNE

Sat. June 17 - Boxborough, MA - Boxborough Fifers Day
June 17/18 - Lincoln, MA - Hartwell Tavern Encampment

JULY

Tues. July 4 - Needham, MA - Fourth of July Parade
July 7-9 - Marblehead, MA - Glover's Regiment Encampment

AUGUST

August 5-6 - Sturbridge, MA - OSV's Rebels and Redcoats weekend

As always, more details can be found in the Calendar section of the website: www.stowminutemen.org

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