

Documenting Your Clothing for Inspection

North West Territory Alliance

By Kathleen Ward Rhoden and Linnea M. Bass, Department of the Inspector General

DOCUMENTING CLOTHING IS AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3

Here are the basics for each article of clothing:

- 1. Find a construction source** (match the configuration of yours to something from the period)
- 2. Find a fabric source** (match your fabric type, i.e. linen, wool, etc., to something from the period)
- 3. Find a fabric color and design source** (match your fabric color and design, i.e. plain, stripes, or prints, to something from the period)

What counts as something from the period? Any of the following from the Revolutionary War period (1775-1783): an original garment, a written source, or a painting. Try to match garment to garment (i.e. document a linen shift to an original linen shift...not an original linen cap). This kind of information is called a “**primary source.**”

Then, you can get more detailed if you want...use more than one primary source for construction, fabric, and/or color, add sources for taping, cuffs, buttons, etc.

The NWTa asks its members to fill out an [**IIF \(Individual Inspection Form\)**](#) to provide this documentation for their clothing and equipment. For an example of what a completed IIF with simple documentation looks like, view our [**Basic IIF Example**](#).

Read on for more information on why we do this in the NWTa, what to use for documentation, and how to record your source information.

For an idea of how to approach the subject of authenticity and documentation, see our [**The Good, Better, Best Mentality: A Suggested Way to View Clothing Choices for Reenacting**](#).

NWTA MISSION STATEMENT: "The Northwest Territory Alliance is an educational organization composed of volunteers who strive to present, as accurately as possible, a realistic portrait of military and civilian life during the American Revolution."

WHY WE DOCUMENT

The clothing and accoutrements worn by NWTa members are a vital part of that portrait of life during the Revolution. To ensure that we meet our own standards, NWTa units stand inspection every five years. Inspection is intended to be a quality check, a reminder of our mission, and a teaching/learning experience, rather than a stressful “test” for members. No one is truly an expert in all areas, since more and more research is consistently available to us. Therefore, the inspection process is intended to confirm that you are sticking to *your* research, whether that’s personal or regimental. It’s also a chance for the inspector to share new research with you (and vice versa).

Our members are sometimes surprised when items that passed inspection 10 or 15 years ago are questioned a few years later. Please remember that the state of knowledge about 18th century clothing has changed a lot since the NWTA began in 1974. There were a few books on military uniforms of the American Revolution, and even fewer on civilian clothing of the 18th century. Now we have online access to garments in museum collections, and there are specialty websites and Facebook groups created so that researchers can share knowledge with one another. This is all very helpful, but it also means that we know a lot more now than we did in the past. And that means that some of our older, and perhaps cherished, items of clothing really need to be retired and replaced.

NOTE: The NWTA recently began a program of asking its members to document camp equipment and other personal items (such as sewing boxes and contents) that are visible to the public during the day. That process is very similar to what we are describing here, but this document will concentrate on the documentation of clothing.

Documentation for Soldiers in Uniformed Regiments

Items issued to the soldiers in the NWTA military units are documented and described on a form called a [GIRF \(General Impression Reference Form\)](#). Even though most of a uniformed soldier's clothing and gear will be documented in the GIRF, personal items will need to be documented as well. So, soldiers are expected to provide individual documentation on an IIF for these personal items such as pocket watches, eyeglasses, and pocket knives that were not issued by the military.

Documentation for Everyone Else

Women and all other non-uniformed persons should document each item they wear or carry obviously on their person (haversacks, etc.) on an IIF. Ideally, each person should be able to show, using 18th century sources, that his or her garments and accoutrements are accurate re-creations of originals, and are appropriate to the persona he or she is portraying

Make sure to read your unit's GIRF, even if you are not a soldier in uniform. The first part of the form describes a number of important things, including the date you are recreating, how and when your unit was formed, where it served during the American Revolution, and the kind of people who were part of it.

DOCUMENTATION BEGINS WITH YOUR PERSONA

In order to provide a framework for making decisions about what clothing to wear, each member is asked to create an 18th century persona. Non-uniformed members need to write a brief biography, including the place the person lives, socio economic status, ethnicity, reason for being in or following the army (if applicable), etc. Biographies should be consistent with the information provided in your unit's GIRF, such as the dates your unit portrays, your unit's location, etc.

This biography doesn't have to be overly complicated. The biography sample we use for Jane Doe in our Basic IIF Example is:

“Jane Doe, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a camp follower of English descent. She travels with her husband, John, with the Continental Marines, Dean's Co'y at the beginning of 1777. Currently garrisoned in Morristown, New Jersey, she pays her way as a laundress, and works hard to make sure the unit sees her as a valuable asset, rather than another mouth to feed.”

Your garments should be consistent with your persona/biography in terms of:

1. 18th century construction and style
2. Fit
3. Fabric
4. Socio-economic status
5. Regiment
6. Ethnicity or nationality

Therefore, your goal in documenting each item of your clothing is to provide the following:

- **Proof that the item is constructed like something in the 18th century before 1784.** Ideally the time period should be that of the regiment or group with which the person is associated.
- **Proof that fabrics are similar to those that existed in the 18th century before 1784.** This is especially true for printed, striped, and checked fabrics.
- **Indications that a person like the one you portray could have had access to garments like yours.**
 - Consider country and ethnicity. If your portrayal is American or English, avoid using sources from other countries as documentation.
 - Consider location. If your persona lived on the frontier, find out what sorts of goods were available in that area.
 - Consider socio-economic status. The lower and middle classes tended to ape their betters. So styles might have been very similar, although choices of fabric would have been more limited.
 - Consider availability. The fact that a garment existed in Siberia in 1776, doesn't mean it could have been worn by the person you are portraying.

This doesn't need to be as complicated as it sounds. Again, see "Documenting Your Clothing Is as Easy as 1, 2, 3" at the beginning of this document.

It's also less complicated if you avoid deciding what you want to look like first and then try to find documentation to prove it. Instead, find descriptions or drawings of a typical person in your location, situation, social class, etc. and try to look similar.

NOTE: You may find more than one piece of documentation about an individual item. That's fine. In fact, it's good. The more proof you have, the better. So if you find both an original garment in a museum and an 18th century drawing of a person wearing a similar garment, you may use both as your documentation.

KEEPING TRACK OF WHAT YOU FIND

The sources you gather are your documentation for your clothing and equipment. As you begin collecting those sources, you need to find a way to keep track of them all. We can't stress this enough! Even though you believe you can easily find something again, it's best if you record and save the information the first time you find it.

Ideally, you should look for documentation for each item before you make or purchase it. Whenever you find good documentation for something, try to file it away in a place you'll be able to find it when you need it. You can keep the documentation in digital files on your computer or in paper files in a notebook or folder. Format doesn't matter. Just be sure to get all the information and save it in an organized fashion.

Since you may need to revisit a source, the most important thing is to make sure you record ALL the information you need to be able to go back and find the original book or internet site again later.

Instead of keeping your documentation in a file, you may want to enter the information into your IIF right away so that it's already done and ready. Read on to find out how to do that.

NWTA INDIVIDUAL INSPECTION FORM

To help its members organize their documentation, the NWTA created the Individual Inspection Form (IIF). This form asks you to list all your clothing and accouterments and provide some sort of proof that the items existed during the time period and are correctly constructed.

The basic format of the IIF asks you for a description of the item and then the sources that document it. It looks like this:

	DESCRIPTION	INSPECTOR'S COLUM
Item:	_____	
Source:	_____	
Item:	_____	
Source:	_____	

Your **biography** should be attached to the IIF to help the inspector understand what type of clothing would have been available to that person.

Attached to the IIF and biography, you may choose to have a **bibliography**, or list of all the sources you used to research your clothing and persona. This should simplify the process of entering your sources into the IIF, reducing the amount of times you need to enter the full bibliographical information of your sources. See "How to Record the Source Information" below for further instructions.

You can download the entire IIF from the NWTA web site:

- For a pdf copy, go to http://www.nwta.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/NWTA_IIF.pdf.
- For a copy in Word 2003, visit <http://www.nwta.com/for-members/documents/> and click on the link "Word Document (2003) Format" for an auto download.
- The official instructions are available as a pdf document here: http://www.nwta.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/NWTAInspectionInstructions_20170220.pdf.

You may print the pdf version of the IIF and fill it out by hand, or download the Word version and fill out the information on your computer.

WHAT TO USE FOR DOCUMENTATION

Use Primary Sources if at all Possible

Ideally, you want to base your clothing on something that existed during the time period you are portraying. It might be an original (or “extant”) garment, an original pattern for making a garment, a period written description of a fabric or garment, or a period drawing that illustrates a garment.

You can use modern drawings and descriptions of an existing garment, but they are not primary sources. These are called secondary sources, because they were not created by people alive during the Revolution. It pays to be careful when using secondary sources, because misinterpretations can creep in. Caution must also be used when relying on eyewitness descriptions written several years after the fact.

The NWTA has attempted to provide a definition of a primary source in **Reg. #01-02:3**

SOURCES: "A primary source supersedes a secondary source. A written primary source is preferable to a pictorial one.

- A. Definition of a Primary Source: Material generated prior to November, 1783, and writings or paintings produced by participants from the period based on their first hand observations and/or experiences, i.e., contemporary materials."
- B. Definition of a Secondary Source: Material generated after October, 1783, pertaining to the time previous, using or citing primary source materials (see above definition of primary source)."

Primary Sources Contained Within Secondary Sources

Many modern books about 18th century clothing contain primary sources. You can use these, BUT it's important to provide full information so your inspector knows you are referencing a primary source, rather than a modern author's opinion.

Here's an example. Beth Gilgun's book *Tidings from the 18th Century* is a secondary source. She gives her opinions about what's correct and has also created some patterns for basic garments. But there are primary sources within the book, even though the book itself is a secondary source. An example is page 45, which includes the image of an 18th century pattern for a bedgown. If you have a bedgown made from this pattern, you can document it using Beth Gilgun's book. The listing of the source of your information should be something like the following:

- Bed gown pattern from Description des Arts et Metiers, Paris, 1769, by M. Garsault, as reproduced on p. 45 of Gilgun, Beth. *Tidings from the 18th Century*. Texarkana, TX: Rebel Publishing, 1993.

Sometimes, however, it may be easier to track down the primary source provided by a modern author, rather than use this double citation method. Larkin & Smith, for example, provide the primary construction source for their pattern, *A Pattern for an 18th Century Bed Gown c. 1760s-1770s* as “Gown and Bedgown” from the Manchester Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1972.110. You could enter a primary source within a secondary source in your IIF. Or you can do a quick search for Manchester Art Gallery's website, enter the Accession Number into the collection search, and use the original garment as your primary research. The latter means you only have to source the original garment on your IIF, rather than both the extant garment *and* the modern pattern.

For More Help on What Constitutes as Primary Research:

Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/8/>

For more tips on researching clothing, equipment, personas, etc., see [*Researching and Wearing Your Revolutionary War Clothing with Confidence*](#). It also includes additional suggestions for finding primary sources.

For help finding primary sources, see the NWTAs bibliographical list, [*Recommended Books and Websites for Clothing Research: The Era of the American Revolution*](#), organized into topics of interest.

HOW TO RECORD THE SOURCE INFORMATION ON YOUR IIF

1. Bibliography

Create a bibliography, or list of all the sources you used. There are several accepted styles for creating bibliographic citations (APA, MLA, Chicago). Don't worry too much about the format, since you will NOT be graded on whether you put the commas in the right place! But we suggest that you consult one of the standard styles, because it will guide you toward recording all the necessary information in an organized fashion.

See our [*Basic IIF Example*](#), which includes a simple bibliography. You can use this style format for your own IIF and Bibliography. Feel free to copy and paste any sources that fit your impression, or change them to match your own.

For additional help writing footnotes and bibliographies in one of the accepted styles (APA, MLA, Chicago), visit **BibMe** at <http://www.bibme.org>, or **Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)** at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>.

2. Recording the sources for individual garments or other items

As you put together your inspection form, you should have documentation listed for each item. Once you have created your bibliography, you can use a short form of the source when you refer to it to document an item of clothing in the IIF. That information (the citation) will be similar to a **footnote** in a term paper.

Here's an example from a book source. Should you decide to use the brown linen stays on page 17, 18, and 19 of *Fitting and Proper* to document your stays, your bibliography should include this source in the list:

- Burnston, Sharon Ann. *Fitting and Proper*. Texarkana, TX: Scurlock Publishing, 1998.

Then, your source entry in the IIF under the item name (for example, "Brown Linen Stays"), can simply be this citation (similar to a footnote):

- "4. Woman's Stays, c.1765" in *Fitting and Proper*, pg. 17-19.

Here's an example from an internet source. Should you decide to use the Manchester Art Gallery's linen shift with the accession number 1969.237 (which can be found at <http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1969.237>) to document your shift, your bibliography should include this source in the list:

- Manchester Art Gallery: <http://www.manchesterartgallery.org/>

Then, your source entry in the IIF under the name (for example, “White Linen Shift”), can be this citation:

- "Shift and Chemise" from the Manchester Art Gallery. Accession Number: 1969.237. Retrieved September 19, 2016.

For recording a primary source within a secondary source, see page 5 above.

Note on Citing Items in Museum Collections

For an item in a museum, include the name and location of the museum, the accession number, description of the item, original date of creation of the item, and the URL for the website where the photo of the item is available. If the item is not on the website, but something you saw in person, get all the information from the sign accompanying it (especially any numbers, which are probably the accession number which specifically identifies that item). You should also record the retrieval date, meaning the day you last saw it online or in person. Sometimes your sources will be removed from the website collection or museum archives, and your retrieval date proves when you found it so that you don't lose that source, even after it's no longer available at the museum. (For the same reasons, you should record the date that you found something anywhere on the internet.)

NWTA INSPECTION PROCESS

When your unit is due for inspection, the NWTA Inspector General will contact your unit commander, who will then arrange a time and place convenient to the inspection staff and the unit members. Often, the inspection will take place at a reenacting event.

After reading through your unit's GIRF (General Impression Reference Form), the inspector will be familiar with your unit's history and will be aware of the documentation for items issued to individual soldiers by the military. Uniformed soldiers will be inspected primarily from the information in the GIRF, but the inspector will probably look at each soldier's documentation for personally owned and acquired items as well.

Non-uniformed members of the unit need to be inspected individually, because every one of them will have different clothing and equipment. Your NWTA inspector can't possibly be familiar with every documentable garment or accessory. That means that, ideally speaking, you need to be able to show the inspector the documentation for each item, such as photographs or photocopies of all the sources that you used. Bringing copies of your documentation to the inspection will make the process much easier, since you and the inspector will be able to compare the primary source with the items you are wearing. Your inspector will want to see the following:

1. IIF (Individual Inspection Form)

List each item of clothing with a brief description, and the documentation for the construction of the garment and the fabric.

2. Biography

3. Bibliography

List of sources you used for your clothing documentation.

4. Copies of the documentation.

You can bring books, create a notebook with your sources printed on paper, or bring a laptop with digital images. The important thing is to have this available at the inspection and for it to be organized well enough that you can find the documentation for each item you are wearing.

THE REALLY GOOD NEWS

Remember that you can't fail inspection! The worst case scenario is that you will be asked to either provide documentation for an item or replace it with something else. And when inspection time comes around, you might even find yourself sharing information and swapping tales of ridiculous 18th century styles you found with your inspector. After all, this is a hobby. So have fun with it!