

Chapter 7

Dress For The First Maryland Regiment Distaff Camp follower

Those who “follow along” with the Revolutionary Armies (on both sides) are often referred to as Distaff or Camp Followers. The purpose of this section is to present information regarding basic clothing worn by these women. Our “dress code” should take into consideration what research shows ordinary women wore every day and should be accurate to the best of our knowledge.

The dictionary first defines Distaff first as the stick or spindle onto which wool or flax is bound for spinning. The second definition refers to women: Relating to, or being, the female line or maternal branch of a family, relating to women and girls; female. Work and concerns traditionally considered important to women. (Perhaps this meaning relates to the fact that women usually were the spinners?)

A Camp Follower is defined as a CIVILIAN who works in or is attached to a military camp. But, while we tend to use the word “camp follower” as a female description, it wasn’t a female job necessarily. Many were men - civilians who followed the army - offering sutler services which included supplies, liquor, and sometimes “other services.”

We think of them as the wives and children of soldiers, who follow their spouse or parent's army from place to place. As we know, camp followers contributed to the daily responsibilities of maintaining the army by performing traditionally domestic tasks. One such role was serving as washerwomen, critical for the hygiene and prevention of disease for enlisted men and officers. Another was nursing. Lots of stories abound about “sexual services” – not so true, as we have come to find out.

Our “Camp Follower” role, in the 1MR, is to portray these women – wives, mothers and children - who followed men in the army and performed domestic chores or nursing duties. During the 18th century, there was great disparity between the elaborate clothing of the wealthy/gentry class and that worn by the middling or lesser sort of women. Camp Followers could ill afford or maintain the more fashionable clothes of town or city life; their clothing is more “rustic” or “rural” in origin. Note that the conditions under which Camp Followers lived allowed them to take greater liberties with their mode of dress that what was socially permitted otherwise.

Two books which are very helpful in assembling a Camp Follower’s kit:

Women’s Dress During the American Revolution – An Interpretive Guide published by Brigade of the American Revolution reissued in 2004. Available from the BAR webpage or Amazon. If you have money to invest in a “clothing book,” buy this one.

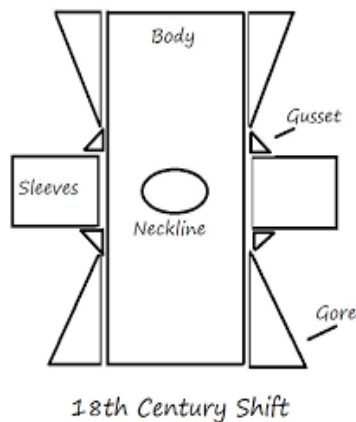
Whatever Shall I Wear? A Guide to Assembling a Woman's Basic 18C Wardrobe, Mara Riley, 2002

Available on Amazon.

If you are planning on making items yourself, check on the “history” of the fabric you plan to use. Is it 18th Century? Or 19th Century? Or is it Victorian? There are distaff members who will be willing to help you make a choice.

The following pages will take you through what you need to “dress with success” as a 1MR Camp Follower. Remember...our “rule” is to be the best we can be, given information we have.

The Shift



This garment was the basic underpinning of any 18th century woman regardless of station. It was low necked; some had a casing and drawstring at the neckline but the majority of extant garments do not. Sleeves came below the elbow and could be finished with ties, sleeve buttons or a cuff. Gussets under the sleeves and gores along the bottom give the wearer ease of motion. The length varied, but normally reached to the knee or mid-calf. The shift was almost always of bleached or unbleached linen. These are easily constructed and patterns and diagrams are available. Do not call this item of apparel a "chemise" unless you are French; that term post-dates the Revolutionary war era!

Stays



Stays are an essential part of a woman's underpinnings; without them, 18th century garments will not fit properly. There is ample evidence that 18th century women of all stations wore them. They are worn over top of shift, and *under* an upper body garment. Stays assure that the wearer is in the proper 18th century “mode” – that one’s upper half is in an inverted cone shape. Stays are NOT a bosom enhancement, but rather a device which actually compresses the bosom, making the waist the smaller end of the “cone. Stays can be full boned or half boned.

Contrary to general opinion stays are not uncomfortable if they fit properly and they are actually a great support to the back while working over a fire! Stays are a highly individual garment and should be fitted to the wearer. There are patterns available and also sutlers/milliners/mantua makers who specialize in their construction.

Many units recommend distaff wear back lacing stays. Back lacing stays are fine if you have an assistant to help you get dressed. They are difficult to get into without lacing assistance. Front lacing stays are much easier. Front and back lacing stays are excellent. Upon removal, only front lacing is undone. NOT A COMMERCIAL HERE BUT – Jas. Townsend Sutlers has already made stays for sale. While they are not the glorious stays people manufacture, they will do. Not fancy – just “reliable.” (Middle picture above – white canvas)

The Pocket



The term ‘pocket’ refers to a little cloth sack that hung from a band tied about the waist that were popularly pear-shaped and had a vertical slot for an opening. Pockets were worn over top of stays and under the petticoat, either singly or in pairs and accessed by the pocket slits in the petticoat. Images do exist of “vendor” women having pockets on the outside, but they are selling things. Pockets were made of linen, wool, cotton, and silk with some being plain and some being embroidered. They were a forerunner of the modern-day pocket book.

Suggestion: Double pockets give an opportunity to hide away modern equipment (i.e., car keys, phones, chapstick, etc.) For easy access, put all your 18 century stuff in one pocket, 21 century in the opposite side.

The Petticoat



Women in the 18th century wore at least two, and frequently more, petticoats. Petticoats are very full; they should have a circumference not less than 100 inches and 120 or more is preferred. They should reach to between mid-calf and ankle, but no longer. Some Camp Followers construct petticoats on a drawstring waist; however, there is no evidence that petticoats were made in this manner during the 18th century.

Ideally, petticoats should be pleated on to a tape, with a large box pleat in the front and smaller pleats radiating to each side and around to an inverted box pleat in the back. Tying the petticoat on with the front tape tied in the back and the back tape tied in the front supports the petticoat on the wearer. (Please note: Cartridge Pleating is NOT appropriate to the 18th century.) Petticoats can be made of linen or wool in any color appropriate to the time; quilted petticoats are appropriate for winter wear. Petticoats should be plain or striped fabric. Some plaids are also acceptable. Flowered materials are used for jackets/gowns - not petticoats.

Petticoats should be an inch or so above the ankle. Remember: Female camp followers are NOT mounted troops. They are marching behind the army - in mud, fields, dusty roads and fording rivers.

Jacket/Bedgown/Shortgown



The 18th century woman wore a sleeved upper garment (over stays) as a matter of course. These are called jackets, bedgowns or shortgowns. Note that the bedgown (on the right) extends to a length almost to the knee. There are other types of garments (pet en lair, caraco for example) that are perfect for 18th century interpretation. It is better to stay with the above types of garment, especially when first starting out.

These garments can be fitted or unfitted. There is limited documentation that the term “short gown” is used for a short jacket in Pennsylvania, in Quaker regions. Linen or wool are appropriate fabrics. Although research has shown cotton was much more prevalent and much less expensive than originally thought during the third quarter of the 18th century, its use in camp is discouraged for safety reasons. Patterns are available for a variety of bodices and many sutlers and seamstresses (mantua makers) sell them in period appropriate textiles. Garments should be made from linen

or wool.

The so-called “English Bodice” and “French Bodice” are *not* documented and may not be worn in camp.

Gowns



Gowns were the most common women’s garment at this time and worn by the majority of 18th c. women. They are, however, under represented in the reenactor community. Some of the “under represented” status comes from expense, facility, and ease of manufacture of shortgowns/bedgowns/jackets. If you have the opportunity to purchase, sew or acquire a gown, please do so! Linen and wool are proper fabrics.

Aprons



These are a mandatory part of female reenactor’s kit. For women in the home it was a very essential part of their lives. The same holds true in camp - great cooking mitts and catch-alls. Berries, vegetables, small packages, firewood/sticks and the like can be carried in them, and when sewing, an apron serves as a neat place to put things. They can also be worn ‘tucked up’ when on the march – a useful means to carry things.

Aprons are simple to construct. Length should be from knee length/ mid-calf to waist. The apron should be pleated onto a waistband with ties long enough to be crossed behind and brought to the front to fasten. While research shows that “pinner aprons” were generally not worn by British women, one can argue that the colonies began the “Mixing Pot” of cultures, which could include the use of a pinner apron. Because of its flame-retardant properties, wool makes the best aprons; however linen is appropriate, and used more than wool. Aprons can be white, colored or plaid linen. Embroidered aprons are not appropriate for camp for “daily life.”

Stockings



The standard fashion is the same stocking as worn by the men – wool or cotton stockings that reach to the mid-thigh and are held up by garters made of ribbon, leather, tape, or a strip of cloth. Newspaper ads offer a variety of ready made stockings for sale. The stocking frame (knitting machine) was invented in the 1590's. Frames were available in the colonies – Germantown/Philadelphia and Connecticut were homes to stocking making factories. Stockings were available ready made from stores/sutlers. Some were knit at home. If you're a knitter – go for it! Remember, though, stripes are NOT period to our time. As a camp follower, you should not be wearing silk stockings – those are for the more effete ladies. Most popular colors were blue and white.

Footwear



Although right and left last shoes were known in the 18th century, they were more commonly straight-lasted. Accurate footwear is sometimes difficult to find. Rough out leather is preferred, but smooth leather is permitted if it suits your persona. Bare feet, while period correct, are not recommended for safety reasons.

Buckles should be as plain as possible. Black or dark brown are the most practical colors, but shoes do come in a variety of color. But, when buying...remember your 'station' in life! Safety advisory! Shoes generally come with a leather sole. Leather soles are SLIPPERY and don't wear well, given the terrain that we (and our 18th century ancestors) travel. Upon purchase, take your shoes to a shoemaker/repair shop and spend the money to have rubber soles put on them. No one will be looking at your shoe soles. Be safe.

The above shoes, on the right, are acceptable; however – remember where these camp followers marched. On foot, in the mud – and consider shoes like this prior to purchasing. If there is a problem “orthopedically” with shoes of this sort, small black flats with no decoration may be used.

Caps



Respectable women wore some sort of head covering nearly every moment of the day. This was considered proper. Caps were made in a variety of styles. These are NOT the circle-with-a-drawstring caps sometimes seen at historic sites or on some reenactors.

Again, there are a wide variety of cap styles in use in the 1770's. In general, cap and hair styles have some height and volume in this period. Caps should be hand-sewn out of fine white linen or cotton organdy. Most cap styles have a gathered or pleated ruffle around the face. Caps may be trimmed with silk ribbon. Caps should be starched if possible. Unacceptable: Mob caps (circular caps consisting of one piece of material gathered to create both caul and ruffle.) A number of sutlers also sell authentic caps; feel free to ask for guidance. There are any number of suitable caps. There are also a number of patterns available for period-appropriate caps should you choose to make one.

Hats



The caps, in turn, could be topped with a straw bonnet or hat, tricorne, rifleman's hat, or liberty cap. The latter could have been plundered or obtained from a man in the line. To simply change the "outline" of your straw hat, and mold to your desired shape.

Market caps have become very popular today. These market caps/bonnets are mentioned frequently in runaway advertisements and probate inventories. The brim is a fabric covered made of pasteboard or buckram. The brim and crown are covered with fabric. Black was the most used fabric, but, other colors were included.

Accessories

Gloves and Mittens

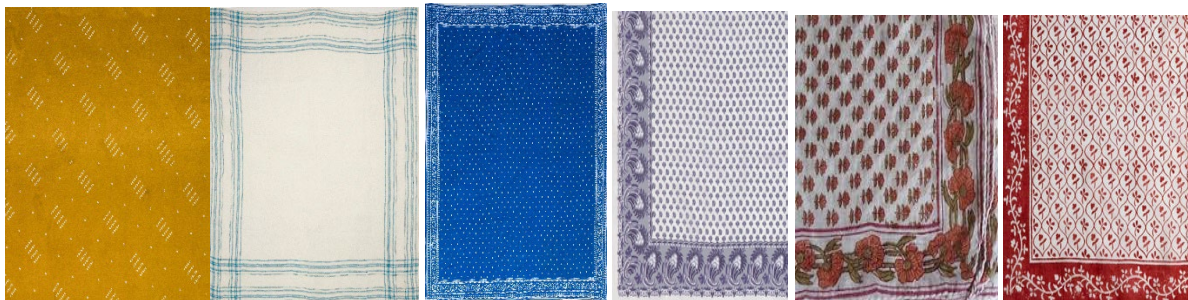
The fashionable 18th century woman wore mitts, but wool mittens and gloves were worn for one reason—warmth! Wool mittens are an excellent choice and easily

obtained in period colors. Deerskin gloves are acceptable if they present the correct appearance. However, roughly wrapped rags are more than sufficient and surprisingly authentic.

Neck Handkerchiefs



Neck Handkerchiefs (they are NOT kerchiefs, fichus, or modesty pieces) were worn by women of all classes. They are triangles of linen (or cotton or silk or wool) worn over the shoulders and tucked into the bodice front or closed at the neck. White is always appropriate. Some samples are below:



Outer Garments



Keeping warm is essential. Outer garments can be a cloak, mantle, cardinal, capuchin, etc. These garments should be constructed with ties instead of a clasp. Patterns for these are available and they can also be procured from sutlers. Kinsale cloaks are not documented for our time period!

While red was the most popular color for a woman's cape in the 18th century, grey, blue, and brown were also worn. These were generally unlined except for the hood and are best made of wool.

Suggestion: If you are making a cloak, it should not touch the ground. Do not cut holes for hands to go outside cloak – they create a cold spot!!

There is no evidence of knitted shawls in the 18th century, and crocheting is NOT documented until the 19th century. Consequently, if you choose to wear a shawl, it must be a folded square of unfringed wool.

Scarves

Scarves are sections of cloth, mostly scrap or knit, which were worn about the neck.

Laundry!



We all want to throw everything in the washer when we get home. For a real “aura,” don’t! Try NOT to iron your clothes! Hang them up when wet, or when they first come out of dryer. Women who sleep in tents, under wagons, or out in the fresh air are rumped. They are likely wearing their clothes for days on end.

Miscellaneous

Please, no modern jewelry (wrist watches, engagement rings, etc.) or modern make-up! Wedding rings can be worn. Earrings should be simple – if one finds oneself dashing through the woods on a run from the Brits, earrings can be a danger.

Children

Until children were four or older, boys and girls were dressed identically in gowns. After a boy was "breeched," his clothing duplicated that worn by his father. Girls remained in frocks until they reached puberty, at which time they assumed adult attire. We suggest you follow the same practice in clothing your children, using linen, wool, or fustian.



Good, Better or Best?

Good – shift, stays, pocket, petticoat, jacket/shortgown. Machine done

Better – linen shift, stays, pocket, petticoat, jacket/shortgown/gown. Inside seams machine done, outside seams hand sewn

Best – shift, stays, pocket, petticoat, jacket/shortgown/gown. All handsewn.

The First Maryland Regiment has been in business since the 1960's. Each person – male or female – contributes to our interpretation and the public's interpretation of the past. As stated before, our goal is to be the best that we can be given information that we have. Always remember – sometimes that information changes! Many ladies have been part of, and are still part of, this organization. Need help? Want to make a purchase and you're not sure? Call on one of them to help you. They will be happy to do so. We were all new once, too!!!!



Where to Buy?

Jas. Townsend

<https://www.townsend.us/collections/womens-clothing>

Townsend's garments are all machine sewn. They sell a decent pair of stays – also machine done. Fit is generally ok. Do not buy either English or French bodices. They are inappropriate for us. Shifts are linen or cotton. Linen preferred.

Samson Historical

<https://www.samsonhistorical.com/collections/womens-shoes-18th-century>

Samson's garments are all machine sewn. They offer linen and linen/cotton shifts. Prices for shifts are lower than Townsend. Their stays are more expensive than Townsend.

Joyce McDonald

7117 Pony Trail Lane
Hyattsville, MD 20782
301-779-5825

Ms. McDonald's garments are hand sewn, authentically researched for both design and fabric. She generally has an inventory of jackets/short gowns, petticoats and shifts. She does not do stays.

Burnley and Trowbridge

144 Tewning Rd., Suite J
Williamsburg, VA 23188
757-253-1644

<https://burnleyandtrowbridge.com/>

Fabric, ribbons, buttons, shoes, books, and more...

April Thomas

www. FashionsRevisited.com or www Etsy. com/shop/FashionrevisitedUS

Smoke and Fire

www. FashionsRevisited.com or www Etsy. com/shop/FashionrevisitedUS
All machine sewn

Websites

www.larsdatter.com Super research info!

<https://blog.americanduchess.com/2021/06/fabrics-for-the-18th-century-and-beyond.html>

<http://people.csail.mit.edu/sfelshin/home-page.html>

Patterns

<https://www.townsend.us/collections/patterns>

<https://www.jpryan.com/ladiespatterns.html>

Fabric:

Important to remember: what we now call “toile” (large scale scenic designs with people, places, trees, birds, farming, and buildings printed in one color in red, blue, green or brown on a white or ecru background) was used for furniture (not clothing!) These beautiful fabrics were made in Europe (Jouy, France) starting in 1760, using copperplate printing. Not for your kit!!!!

Copperplate print So as not to confuse:



Also...bear in mind....we are representing the time frame from ca. 1770-1785.
Prints should not be from after 1785 (No Jane Austen/Laura Ashley prints!)

<https://shop.colonialwilliamsburg.com/crafts-sewing/reproduction-fabrics/>
https://www.etsy.com/market/18th_century_fabric
<https://burnleyandtrowbridge.com/>
<https://www.wmboothdraper.com/product-category/historic-fabrics/cotton-prints/>
<http://demodecouture.com/cotton/>

Fort Frederick Market Fair

Ft. Fred is most assuredly the place to buy anything colonial. There are a number of sutlers selling women's garments. Be careful about fabric – sometimes things for sale are not correct fabric. Remember, petticoats should be linen or wool. Also, good buys can be made off blanket traders. Just be careful about the appropriateness of your purchase.

Chapter 8

Camp Safety

A certain degree of safety around camp must be adhered to not only to protect the visitors to our historical portrayal but also the adult and child members of the camp. The 18th century life we portray does have an increased potential for accidents, so the following is a list of recommendations.

1. The unit's officer-in-charge or senior distaff member should appoint an event safety officer from among the members present at an event. This member will be in charge of camp safety for the duration of the event.
2. The unit's officer-in-charge should have a reasonably good idea of any member's health needs or restrictions, allergies, or necessary medication. It is up to the member, however, whether or not to inform the unit's officer.
3. A full bucket of water should be kept by the campfire at all times.
4. No flammable liquids should be used to start the fire.
5. Due to the potential for distaff petticoats to catch fire while cooking, at least one additional member should be present in the unit's camp area when distaff are cooking or tending the fire.
6. A campfire must not be left unattended, even if only live coals are left. Someone must be appointed to watch over it.
7. The unit's camp should not be left unattended. Someone must be appointed to watch over it. This person can also be the fire watcher.
8. No smoking, fires, or open flames are permitted in the tents. Should a tent catch fire, unit personnel will immediately drop all adjacent unit tents flat to the ground to reduce the chance of additional fires.
9. Spent cartridge papers should be placed in the trash bag and not in the campfire where they could flare up.
10. No loading of cartridges in camp. Among other reasons, visitors often carry cigarettes.
11. DO NOT let the public handle any firearm or other weapons or cartridges. Don't give away or sell the lead musket balls, especially to children.

12. Do not feed members of the public.

13. Perishable food items must be kept either on ice or in appropriate containers. Cover any food left exposed to reduce its attraction to bugs.

14. Suitable potholders or pot tongs should be used at the campfire site to reduce the potential of injury from burns.

15. A first aid kit should be readily available and should contain burn ointment along with the normal necessities.

16. Don't give medications (aspirin, allergy pills, etc.) to children. This is their parent's responsibility.

17. Keep an eye on the unit's young children even when their parents are around. They are known to disappear fast and get into things they shouldn't, especially the campfire. However, each parent is ultimately responsible for their offspring.

18. For improved safety, only one person should be chopping firewood at a time. There should be a 10-foot safety zone around the person with the axe at all times. If there are tourists or children in camp, the ax-yard might be roped off. When finished with the axe, stick it in a log. Don't drive an 18th century axe into a log with another axe or sledge - these style axes generally have no poll so will easily split at the eye if so struck. Do not allow children to use hatchets or axes, or to play in the area where wood is being chopped.

Chapter 9

Responsibilities of the Camp Coordinator

In the Continental Army, the soldiers rotated the cooking duties among their mess group. They were issued one small kettle and such delightful rations as beans, rice, flour, vinegar and salt pork. As a reenacted unit, we find it is difficult to give a portrayal with that degree of authenticity. The First Maryland has a system of rotating camp coordinators to distribute the burden of preparing for an event and also to free people up to think of creative ways to use food in our educational portrayals.

The main duties of a camp coordinator are to plan out menus and purchase the food for an event. How elaborate or how simple a menu plan is for an event is up to the coordinator. Here are some guidelines:

- ❖ Try to think seasonal. If you want fruits or vegetables that are out of season, think about using them in another form (like dried or preserved) or replacing them with more accurate choices. Some importation of citrus, pineapples and other exotic or out of season foods did occur, but would the army travelling in the middle of North Carolina in 1781 (our preferred presentation) have such delicacies? There are no firm rules on this, so try things, but be prepared to explain it to the public if they ask. They will **always** ask about pineapples, for example, and that can be a way to start a dialogue about its symbolism and about sailing ships, etc.
- ❖ Go for whole loaves of homemade looking breads. Don't spend weeks baking (unless you like to, of course); most large groceries will have good-looking, whole loaves. Once it's been through a slicer, there's no way to make it look quite right even if presented in a wooden bowl. In a similar vein, go for blocks of cheese over the individual slices. The slicing is prep work that looks nice to the public anyway. Deli meats are less noticeable but, again, go with hunks of meat when you can.

- ❖ Try to get a good head count. Members are supposed to contact the coordinator prior to an event. This may or may not happen. Ask people or contact the officers if you're not hearing from members up to the week before the event. At some point, you have to shop with the numbers you have.

So the menu is planned and the food purchased...what now?

The coordinator need not do the cooking or even attend the event as long as the coordinator or the officers have arranged for it. The menu plan should be written down. This way, the members assigned to the various duties can carry them out without needing the coordinator. Here are some helpful tips on food preparation:

- ❖ It is desired that all foods be removed from modern containers before they are taken from the kitchen tent. All foods that are completely modern (Can you say pop tarts?) should be consumed inside a tent or away from the camp when the camp is open to the public. Sodas, beers and such should be put into mugs and not left in cans.
- ❖ Roasting over the fire is a good and very attention-grabbing way to cook, but start it early in the day! This method uses the cooking irons and spit, or you can tie the food to the irons with twine (natural fibers, please!). Watch the fire, both for safety and for Epicurean reasons. A steady, low fire is needed for most of your cooking needs.
- ❖ The large kettle can be used in many ways, such as boiling, stewing, browning and poaching. Using its lid will speed things up slightly.
- ❖ The Dutch oven can be used as the kettle, but is also good for baking. Clear a place beside the fire and place ashes in a small circle; set the Dutch oven with its lid on tightly upon it and mound more coals on top. It is a versatile cooking tool.
- ❖ Foods can be cooked directly in the fire, This is a very accurate, though very unpredictable, way to prepare many

vegetables. It's best to soak the vegetables prior to roasting them directly in the coals.

- ❖ The frying pan is used just like the ones today, but can also be used for sautéing as it does have nice high sides. The regiment also has a very fine grill and many recipes can be found that make use of grilling.

Other sundry tasks of the coordinator:

- ❖ Keeping the kitchen tidy is a joint effort, but the coordinator has the responsibility to see to it that a trash bag is available and that coolers and other 21st century items remain covered. The regiment has 2 blue, wooden boxes that disguise small coolers. Members and the coordinator often bring their own as well, but the coordinator and the officers may decide to limit the number allowed in the kitchen. Stocking up on ice is a great use for any excess cooler!
- ❖ Plan to bring bottled water, even to those events where water is provided. Water buffaloes have been known to run out and the quality of water provided by some sites has been below par.
- ❖ Make certain that the people washing dishes know not to mix the bleach with dishwashing detergent. Toxic fumes result. Overuse of bleach can cause some people's hands to peel for about a week afterwards, so just use a few drops in the rinse water to help keep the dishes sanitary. Wooden utensils and implements should *not* be immersed in bleach water!
- ❖ When washing the ironware, don't use soap; just use water, heat and the reed scrubbers. Then re-season them with mineral oil and reheat them gently by the fire. This way they don't lose their (slight) non-stick properties. At the end of an event, make certain that the knives and cookware get a coat of oil to prevent rust during storage.
- ❖ Block oil can be used on the wooden bowls, implements and

knife handles, but be sure to follow directions. Excess oil should not be left on the wood as it can go rancid.

- ❖ The first aid kit is kept in the kitchen, so the coordinator should be acquainted with what is in it. If anything is missing or expired, mention it to the officers so the items can be purchased before the next event. Try to make certain a cell phone is available in or near the kitchen for emergency call-out situations. Having it ring during an event is a bad idea, so keep it either powered off or turn the ringer off.

Try to keep a sense of humor about you. Things won't go as planned. Menus will be changed and lessons learned. At the end of the weekend, if you're willing to ever do it again, you've done a good job!