

# MORNING REPORT

of Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers.

Being the ramblings of a Soldier who has smelled too much of Congress's Gunpowder  
and king George's Lackeys.

## AUGUST, 2009

The renderings of this Instant include –

**CALENDAR: 12-13 Sep; Ti**

**JIM'S JAWINGS:** What's happened so far this year.

**READINGS:** A fancy magazine.

**TWIRLING THE DISTAFF:** Basic info and a nasty one.

**RESEARCH:** French-Canadians.

And MUCH, MUCH more! Well, at least much more.

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**12-13 Sep: Ti.**

Yet another gathering at what is something of a "home base" for us. Jim will be serving as quartermaster for the weekend and I will be serving my last year in a command role – thank God. In case you haven't heard, the camps will be set up 90 degrees from where they have been in the past putting the fly line down the row upon which we usually set up and putting the primitive camp – including the hovel – along the road. That means you need to take extra care in keeping our area authentic and relatively neat. It also means that we will be interacting with visitors much more than usual and that someone – preferably two someones--will have to be there at all times. I would suggest we add that presence to a duty schedule. One last reminder: when you visit the museum, be sure to leave all weapons – including blades – in camp.

The fort is looking for folks to do public presentations of any sort. For some ideas, go to <http://fort-ticonderoga250th.org/index.htm>. If interested, contact Mark Turdo directly – not me, not Jim – at [Mturdo@fort-ticonderoga.org](mailto:Mturdo@fort-ticonderoga.org).

### Recent Invites

**29-30 Aug: Founder's Day; Chester, VT.**

A small junk-on-the-bunk kind of event with a parade, rededication of Rev War and Civil War gravesites, and fireworks Sat. Our part of the show is being set up by Horst Dressler of unripe loyalist fame. There is a rather nice Scottish pub just down the street from the camp area.

**20 Sep: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; Minute Man National Historical Park, Concord, MA.**

Details at <http://www.friendsofminuteman.org/gala/reenactors.htm>.

**24 Oct: Barton's Campaign; Millis, MA.**

Here's a one-day wargame to help promote the CL event being held next year in central Mass. There will be three scenarios involving scouting, patrols, foraging, and raids. Registration due by 20 Sept.

**7-8 Nov: Whitmarsh Encampment; Hope Lodge, Fort Washington, PA.**

**7 Nov: Battle for Red Horse Tavern; Wayside Inn, Sudbury, MA.**

One-day wargame event. Lunch provided.

### Next Year

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## PERSONALS

Regarding Austin’s fire at their home, I talked with Austin and they are living in another house for the duration. Because of smoke, the house will have to be stripped nearly bare and they probably will not be able to move back in until October. Regrettably, Austin did lose his library – not directly from fire but as a result of the heat. Some of his reenacting clothing and equipment did survive – he just doesn’t know where it is at this point. He again commented that their greatest loss was one of their cats.

Jim – well, actually, his guns – took a first and second place in the military category at the Dixon gun show.

Brian Mahan is looking to move to VT – Champlain valley is first choice. He would like a small apartment and be able to pay rent, at least partially, through work. He has been buying and selling antiques and is willing to give a finder’s fee in the form of some of his items. Anybody know of anything that would suit his needs?

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## JIM’S JAWINGS

I’ve been thinking about this year’s campaign season and we’re heading toward the end of a fairly busy and varied schedule. The officer training weekend hosted by Warner’s Regiment was a good blend of new ideas and reinforcement of old and filled the gap, for some, left by the absence of the Ti Command School. The School of the Soldier in Danvers, MA, centered on the amalgamation of units and Wayne and I got to play the bad guys in the afternoon field exercise. Jerusalem Mills, oh well. Opening weekend at Ti got a bunch of us back together for drill and such. Ethan Allen Days, although small, was interesting in that it was like a mini History Expo, which also didn’t happen this year. Did some recruiting and drilling of a couple of new members and an old one. It took a good week for my boots to dry out from Hubbardton but the field work was done well and the ladies did a great job under less than ideal conditions. Dinner time was very cozy. There were some firsts at this event, a first event, a first walk from Mt. I, and a first instructional video. I can’t say much about the next three events, Mt. I, Sturbridge, or Fort Lenox, but the first was newsworthy, and I hear folks had fun at the others. I don’t feel good at all about missing three events in a row. Besides the fact that I would have liked to be there, it doesn’t say much for leadership and example. Sometimes life gets in the way. We’ve got three dates left on our schedule. At Fort Ti next month we have the opportunity of setting up a more period correct camp up by the road where it can be seen. The Battle of Crane Brook in Danvers MA is the only Northern Department Line event this year, and Schoharie is a site we used to annually visit but haven’t for years. So, thank you for your efforts so far and I hope to see many of you at the upcoming events. Jim

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## MIKE’S MEANDERINGS

*Article I. Basic Objectives Outlined*

- A. *To perpetuate the history of the ranger in the American Revolution through participation in historical reenactments, pageants, and other sundry historical and educational activities.*

So reads the very first entry in our organization’s by-laws. Reading this sentence, one can see that we definitely accomplish the first element – individuals do attend several reenactments every season. However, reading on, one sees that we do not carry out the remaining elements – we do not, as a unit, participate in anything but those reenactment activities. Sure, individuals do represent the organization in various other events but, as a group, we do not take part. For example, I just did an educational show at Lennox and Austin, Sherman, and I regularly do the VT History Expo. But, it is always a struggle to get most folks to support such activities.

I’m not sure how we got away from doing those sorts of things but, for much of the group’s existence, we regularly took part in parades, junk-on-the-bunk shows, and various other educational and public exposure sorts of events. I know all the reasons for not being able to attend such activities – I’ve thought of and probably used most of them: 1) things one HAS to do – work, family things, etc.; b) things one should do – Joyce usually lets me

know about any that have “slipped my mind;” and iii) things one wants to do – shopping, ball game, nothing, etc., etc., etc. Nothing can be done about the first set – those things should be a priority. However, priority alterations in the second and third sets (particularly the third) can be made that would allow one to attend a group activity.

I know this is a hobby, it’s all voluntary, and we all have our own priorities but I would hope the members of the organization would re-think their reasons for being in this hobby and begin to take part in a wider variety of events. For one thing, many events can serve as fund-raisers to help pay for insurance, food, powder, whatever. They can also attract folks to the hobby and, maybe, to our group. More importantly, they allow us to educate the public about the time period. Lastly, to explain my selfish reasons for doing other types of events and in an effort to maybe beguile some others to participate, I quote from the oft-mentioned but seldom-seen *Ranger Manual*:

*[W]hat we are doing is paying some sort of homage to those who believed in the concept of a group of disparate states uniting to form a country in which the individual played an important role. It should be constantly in our minds that we are representing a group of common folk who lived and died over two-hundred years ago. Each of us wishes to be remembered once we have left this plane of existence. The people we represent were no different and, by doing what we do, we have given them a level of immortality. In so doing, I often wonder just how close we are to doing things as they really were. I also wonder what those we represent think of what we are doing and of us. I hope they judge us well.*

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## READINGS

A new glossy magazine dealing with the American Revolution has recently been introduced. It’s cleverly called, *American Revolution*. The publisher is “the American Revolution Association” and the first 74-page issue is available on-line at [www.americanrevolutionassociation.com](http://www.americanrevolutionassociation.com). The plan is to publish an issue five times a year and subscription can be had by joining the association for \$36.00/year.

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## TWIRLING THE DISTAFF

Since we have picked up some new members lately, I thought it quite proper to include some basic information on the look and kit of the working class women who might have been with Whitcomb’s Rangers (keep your comments to yourselves). The following comes from the BAR’s *Women’s Dress during the American Revolution*.



The working class woman illustrated wears a plain linen gown and petticoats that reach a manageable length. The gown is cut with more room in the sleeves and shoulders appropriate to the working class. A checked handkerchief fills in the low neckline of her gown. A simple cap and cast off felt hat are worn on her head. The tow apron covers the front of the petticoats. Her plain black rough-out leather shoes are tied with linen tapes, sparing the extra expense of metal buckles.

- ❖ Gown (basic cut with fitted back, no trims), bed gown, jacket, or short gown of linen, worsted, or woolen serviceable or coarse fabrics. Working women’s garments would be slightly looser than fashionable clothing to accommodate movement during work. Garments close at front with pins or lasing through hand-stitched eyelets.
- ❖ Shift, stays or jumps, pockets, stockings, garters.
- ❖ Petticoats: two of medium- to heavy-weight linen or medium-weight worsted or woolen fabrics. Worsted quilted petticoats with a simple diamond pattern are also appropriate.
- ❖ Hip improvements: go without or possibly wear a small bum roll, especially if your persona likes to ape her betters.
- ❖ Handkerchief: choose lightweight linen or cotton in solid colors, checks, figured weaves, or narrow stripes. White was popular.
- ❖ Apron: choose durable linen, wool, or linsey-woolsey fabric. A working class apron is meant to be serviceable and covers most of the petticoat.
- ❖ Cap: lightweight linen. Often a ribbon or fabric tape was used to decorate or tie the cap around the head.

- ❖ Shoes: working women's shoes were similar to soldiers' shoes, of black leather with the rough side out, closing with fabric tape ties or plain white metal buckles. [Note from other sources: French-Canadian women – and men--also wore wooden shoes.]
- ❖ Straw hat or silk bonnet optional, minimal trim.
- ❖ Short cloak (optional) between fingertip and knee length of sturdy, well-fulled wool.
- ❖ Accessories (optional): redware or horn mug or cup, wood plate or bowl, knife, horn or wood spoon, cooking pot or kettle, housewife (sewing kit), scissors, spare clothing, blanket, bag or basket in which to carry things.

The following is taken from the *Records of the Council of Safety and Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, v.1; date of 28 May 1778.

*Whereas it has been represented to this Council that the wife of Jeremiah French late of Manchester (now in arms with the Enemy) is very turbulent & Troublesome where she now is, & refuses to obey orders – ordered to be sent to Rutland then taken to the lake & given to the British.*

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## RESEARCH

My trip to Isle aux Noix/Fort Lennox--and likely return next year--prompted me to get back to work on a couple pieces of French-Canadian clothing and, in the process, came across some notes written up by Suzanne Gousse of *La Fleur de Lyse* – a former sutlery – fame.

The *engagé* is a man paid by a merchant (who had bought a permit) to go west and trade for furs with the Indians. ... The *engagé* could put on a striped cotton shirt (more expensive than linen shirts) or a linen shirt, wool breechclout, wool leggings and moccasins. ... The leggings (inspired by Indian wear) are cut in a piece of melton, because wool is a lot more comfortable than deerskin, especially when wet. He also wears a belt and a *tuque* (knitted and well-fulled woolen cap). This type of cap is not typical of New France. But the word *tuque* is particular to Canada. These garments are made to run in the woods. (Take note that the famous *coureur des bois* might have been dressed the same way. But he was trading illegally and there has not been that many of them in New France after the first quarter of the century.) At night and on cold days, the *engagé* would wear his *capote*. (See the militiaman.)

The militiaman is the habitant of a *seigneurie*. He is healthy and aged between sixteen and sixty years of age. He can have to leave anytime to fight in the frontier of New France, side by side with Indian allies and military troops. To travel in the woods, he wears a natural or white linen shirt, a breechclout (instead of his everyday breeches), leggings and moccasins. He has a silk (often black) or a muslin neckerchief, a red *tuque* and his *capot*. The *capot* is THE coat of most Canadians. Most of the capots are either blue or brown. Canadian men wear it not only during the winter but also to go to church on Sundays. It is their best dress. (See Mr. Francis Back's article in the Fall 1991 edition of *The Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*. Vol. 27, No. 3)

The *habitant* is the peasant of New France, the average man. *Canadien* means that he has French ancestors but that he was born in Canada (part of New France). To work in his fields, the *habitant* puts on his linen shirt and his breeches. He probably wears the same shirt as a nightshirt; it is more than a yard (47 inches) long. We know for sure that the priest have complained that the men go to work in the fields wearing nothing, but their shirts. (We can't tell you if they were wearing the breechclout underneath, because it would not show.) When it is a little cold, he puts on a vest with sleeves called a *mantelet*. He wears shoes made much like the moccasins from cowhide (*souliers de boeuf*), because leather is stronger than the deerskin used by the Indians. Like his wife, the habitant might wear wooden shoes to protect his feet from water and mud. The Swedish botanist Peter Kalm has seen men wearing those wooden shoes during his trip in North America in 1749. He has also noted a lot of red *tuques* and some blue ones. And he mentioned that the ordinary men are wearing their long hair loose or tied in a tail or braided.

The artisan, earning a little more money, wears a white linen shirt and a black silk neckerchief. He puts on breeches and the sleeved waistcoat called *mantelet* in New France, like the women's waistcoat. (This sleeved waistcoat is worn underneath the coat by gentlemen.) For warmth or *chic*, he could wear a *gilet* (waistlength version of the waistcoat); when worn under the shirt and made in a very soft wool, it is called a *camisole*. He wears French leather shoes and a *bonnet* (cap) in his shop. A leather or linen apron (depending on his job) protects his clothes. To go out, he will put on his *capot* and *tuque*, typical Canadian dress.

The merchant could wear a fine ruffled linen shirt, a muslin stock, a waistcoat, a pair of breeches and a *surtout*. The *surtout* is a sort of *justaucorps* or coat with buttons only to the pocket level. He could decide to wear a *volant*, a coat worn on less formal occasions. Only one button at the neck, no pockets, sometimes a collar. To go out, the merchant takes his hat and a cape, if it rains.

The gentleman and, on times, the merchant, like all the nobles of France and Europe, wears the *habit à la Française*. This suit is a sleeved waistcoat (*veste*), a pair of breeches (*culotte*) and a coat (*justaucorps*). A fine ruffled linen or cotton shirt, a muslin stock, fine silt or wool stockings, buckled leather shoes, a walking stick and a hat (*tricorne*) complete the look. The gentleman could wear less formal clothing. *Surtout*, *volant*, *redingote* are only a few choices. At home, with friends, *Monsieur* would wear a nice silk dressing gown over his *gilet* or his waistcoat.

While reading some period newspapers, I came across the following in *The New London Gazette* for 4 Oct. 1776:

*Watertown, September 30. Extract of a letter bro't by the last Saturday's Ticonderoga Post, dated Sept. 22*

*"The Fleet is well – Lieut. Whitcomb is this moment arrived from St. John's, with an officer and corporal as prisoners; They are out of humour. We shall gain some intelligence from them, I expect but have not examined them yet."*

"They are our of humour." That's a bit of an understatement considering these two had been captured and drug through the Canadian wilderness, thrown on one of the American boats on Champlain, and brought down to Ti and the sick, festering American army there. Classic bit of 18<sup>th</sup>-century phrasing.



*"Why, I could have stayed home and done this."*

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# *Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers*

A non-profit corporation established in 1975 to re-create the life style of the Rangers in the War of Independence, 1776-1781.