

# THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR SOCIETY LTD

## GUIDELINES FOR PORTRAYING A CIVILIAN ROLE

ACWS is a family orientated organisation and actively encourages men, women and children to portray civilian roles as well as military ones. With the Internet widely accessible, there is a wealth of information available to research the subject. There are also some excellent books available for civilian re-enactors, a few of which are listed at the end of this document.

Civilians in the Civil War were camp followers or refugees who followed the armies around and set up camp near to the army lines. Behind every major army camp was a second force: the laundresses, sutlers (pedlars), seamstresses and others who felt they had a service to provide to the armies.

Officer's wives and children might have joined their husbands in camp particularly during the winter. The presence of women in the camp helped to raise morale.

As a general rule as a civilian you should try and justify your role on the authentic camps. When members of the public visit the camps you do not want them going home with the view that you are not doing it properly, they very often know as much as you do. Basic common sense should prevent you from wearing modern spectacles, wrist watches and footwear. Ladies wearing modern hairstyles, jewelery and too much make-up, young girls wearing bridesmaids' dresses and trainers ruin a period impression and should be avoided at all costs. If you are portraying a working impression, you need to look plain and simple. There are plenty of patterns available if you are handy with a sewing machine or needle and thread, and sutlers where you can buy clothing ready-made. You can even adapt a 21<sup>st</sup> Century garment to look like a passable 19<sup>th</sup> Century one with a bit of imagination!

If you are not sure, then just ask someone who has been doing it longer than you have. Study original photographs and if you can work towards looking like the men, women or children in them, then you are on your way to achieving a truly correct 1860s impression. You will find your impression will improve as your knowledge increases, but above all enjoy learning and share your knowledge and ideas with other re-enactors – it's what keeps the hobby alive!

### References

#### Websites

1. Fanny & Vera's Helpful Hints and Timely Tips for Civil War Re-enactors: <http://www.shasta.com/suesgoodco/newcivilians/index.htm>.
2. Miss Ellie's Emporium <http://www.misselliesemporium.com/articles/why.shtml>
3. Sandra Ros Altman's: Past Patterns: <http://www.pastpatterns.com/>
4. James Country Mercantile patterns: <http://www.jamescountry.com/patterns.html>

#### Books

1. Book: An introduction to Civil War Civilians by Juanita Leisch.
2. Who Wore What?: Women's Wear 1861-1865 by Juanita Leisch.
3. Book: The War Was You & Me Civilians in the American Civil War by J.E. Cashin.

Jayne Olden, Head of Civilians (2008)