

Shinnin' Times

E A R L Y A R K A N S A W R E E N A C T O R S A S S O C I A T I O N

Save The Date

March 2-4—White Oak State Park Colonial Event, Ed Williams 501-944-0736 or ed_laurine@juno.com

March 10-18 Southwest Regional Rendezvous—Nacona, TX

April 6-8 Sulpher Fork Days Doddridge, AR Contact Sam Bumgardner 903-824-3105

April 14-15 - Colbert's Raid at Arkansas Post. All come to celebrate the last battle of our Revolutionary War against Great

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History of the Blanket Capote in North America

The capote, or long greatcoat, has long been closely associated with the fur trade in North America. It is not surprising that the wide-scale harvesting of furs for European markets coincided with the development of this uniquely Canadian garment. Indeed the capotes, or more specifically the wool blankets from which they were sewn, became one of the most sought after trade items, replacing furs as the typical winter clothing for both the native and European trappers and traders alike.

Origins of the Capote

The capote came to be associated with the Hudson's Bay Company and is sometimes referred to as the "Hudson's Bay coat." But it is also more generally associated with the French habitants and voyageurs, as it originated in New France. The term "capot" or "capote" comes from the French word for cloak. "Capote" is a term used in North America since the early 1600s when French sailors were trading their coats with the Micmac on the Atlantic coast. Pierre Radisson (1636-1701) mentions wearing a "cappot" or "capot" in his autobiographical journal long before any Hudson's Bay Company records mention such an item.

These popular style coats were standard issue during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution and many times were made by the soldiers from issue blankets. By the mid-19th century, the popularity of the Capote had spread westward with the fur trade and it was commonly seen in use by the Indians of the Northern Plains, Rocky Mountains and Columbian Plateau. There were also many commercially made Capotes available. For instance, in 1824, a St. Louis newspaper carried an ad from an outfitter listing "Red Blanket Coats for Sale".

Types of Capotes

Since many capotes were "home-made", they varied greatly in cut, style and decoration, with the Indian models being decorated with beadwork, sequins, hawk bells, binding of contrasting color, etc. Some Capotes even contained a cotton lining of calico or similar print fabric; however, most examples were hardly decorated other than having fringe at the shoulders and hood.

On occasion the term capote was used for greatcoats made from various types of hide or leather. Some descriptions suggest that the earliest capotes may not always have been hooded. Others claim that the early Canadian-made capotes resembled the aristocratic “justaucorps” coats – tight fitting above the waist and flared below to the knee. While originally referring to a variety of coats, over time the term capote came to refer specifically to the hooded blanket wrap coat widely worn by European fur traders and native traders. There were variations in style and fabric, but mostly capotes are described as being made from some form of wool blanketing or heavy woven cloth, such as the homespun “etoffe du pays” made in New France. From the late 1700s on, capotes were most commonly made from “point blankets,” (woollen blankets marked on one edge with dark lines or “points” denoting their size). The most common capotes were simply tied shut with attached ribbon ties or with a long woven belt called an Assumption sash. Some capotes, particularly in later years, were closed with buttons or some form of toggle.

Capotes Patterns

The most common capote pattern was very plain, without fringes or tassels, and with a simple cowl-like hood. More complex patterns for fancier coats can also be found. The Royal Ontario Museum, for example, published a pattern for a blanket capote with some decorative fringing on the hood based on a late 19th century capote in the museum’s collection.

With the variety of materials available, it is not surprising that capotes were made in many different colors and decorative patterns. Early capotes made from locally-woven cloth in New France would have been primarily grey, whereas coats made from point blankets or manufactured and sold as ready-made capotes came in many colors and stripe patterns.

Fur traders from Montreal, the Nor’Westers and others, adopted the capote very early. After 1821, when the Hudson’s Bay and North West companies merged under the Hudson’s Bay Company name, the use of capotes became, if anything, even more universal. Throughout the 19th century, at sites such as Rocky Mountain House, Fort St. James, Lower Fort Garry, York Factory and Churchill, capotes would have been the most common type of winter coat.

Many surviving photographs show capotes that were locally-made from trade blankets. A high proportion of these photos show coats made from white point blankets with colored stripes. Blankets in any of the available colour and stripe patterns would also have been sewn into capotes. The strong preference for native hunters was white, as it provided camouflage in the snow. In the 19th century ready-made capotes were also available. The Hudson’s Bay Company purchased capotes from several manufacturers in England for sale to its employees and Aboriginal customers.

C o n t i n u e d o n p a g e 4

2018 Event Calendar

January 12—12th Night Christmas Party, Scott Connection Contact Teresa "Miss Hattie" Lafferty at 501-247-6466 for info.

January 26-28—Colonial Event, Cadron Settlement Park, Ed Williams 501-944-0736

February 16-18—5 Trails Voo, Historic Washington State Park (School day Feb. 16) Contact Teresa "Miss Hattie" Lafferty at 501-247-6466 for info.

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March 10-18 Southwest Regional Rendezvous—Nacona, TX

April 6-8 Sulpher Fork Days Doddridge, AR Contact Sam Bumgardner 903-824-3105

April 14-15 - Colbert's Raid at Arkansas Post. All come to celebrate the last battle of our Revolutionary War against Great Britain. Contact Ed Williams at 501-944-0736 or ed_laurine@juno.com

April 20-21 Woolly Hollow Voo, Tom Reedy 501-679-1636

April 27-29 Scott Rendezvous, Contact Ed Williams at 501-944-0736

May 12—Territorial Fair, Historic Arkansas Museum Ed Williams 501-944-0736

May 18-20—Saline Crossing Voo Doyle Richey/Marsha Kimmerly 501-860-3686

June 1-3 —Fort Bennett "Wildcat" Voo Contact James "Nonose" Thompson 501-269-5833

July 4—Territorial 4th of July, Historic Arkansas Museum Ed Williams 501-944-0736

August 4—Ice Cream Social Carol Fritt's Place, 501-350-1706

August 25—EARA Picnic Woolly Hollow? Teresa Lafferty 501-247-6466

September 7-9-- Calico Rock Voo Billy Bennett 254-718-7410 /870-297-2269

September 15-17—Soggy Bottoms Voo Lori Bennett 903-949-8842

November 21-25—Petit jean Voo, Petit Jean Mountain State Park, Glenn Cook 501-941-7917/501-350-6640

December 2—Christmas Frolic, Historic Arkansas Museum, Ed Williams 501944-0736 ed_laurine@juno.com

Changes and additions, once more information comes in, will be noted in future issues.

In Their Words . . .

The following represents references to capotes from the historical journal of Robert Michael Ballantyne (1825-1894). He joined the Hudson's Bay Company as an apprentice clerk in 1841 at the age of 16. During his six years in the fur trade, he served at Upper Fort Garry, Norway House, York Factory, and Tadoussac(

Description of the arrival of a fur brigade at Norway House in the spring of 1843.

(p151-152, 2nd pg: "As I said...of the interior.")

There were seven or eight boats; and ere long as many fires burned on the green beside the fort, with a merrry, careless band of wild-looking Canadian and half-breed voyageurs round each. And a more picturesque set of fellows I never saw. They were all dressed out in new light-blue capotes and corduroy trousers, which they tied at the knee with beadwork garters. Moose-skin moccasins cased their feet, and their brawny, sun-burned necks were bare. A scarlet belt encircled the waist of each; and while some wore hats with gaudy feathers, others had their heads adorned with caps and bonnets, surrounded with gold and silver tinsel hat-cords. A few, however, despising coats, travelled in blue and white striped shirts, and trusted to their thickly-matted hair to guard them from the rain and sun.

Description of the trading room or store at York Factory.

The store at the York Factory supplied the needs and wants of both the Company's employees and their Native trading partners. This description could also be applied to almost any Hudson's Bay Company trading room in Rupert's Land. p185, 2nd pgh: "The trading-room... box of shot."

"The trading-room – or, as it is frequently called, the Indian-shop – was much like what is called a store in the United States. It contained every imaginable commodity likely to be needed by Indians. On various shelves were piled bales of cloth of all colours, capotes, blankets, caps, etc.; and in smaller divisions were placed files, scalping-knives, gun-screws, flints, balls of twine, fire-steels, canoe-awls, and glass beads of all colours, sizes, and descriptions.

Capotes Today

This blanket capote is as popular with today's Buckskinners and Indian Enthusiasts as it was in previous times. No doubt this is due to the great versatility of the garment as well as it's colorful style. When made from a heavy Rocky Mountain Blanket, it will shed light rain or snow, can be worn over several layers of clothing in extreme cold weather and can double as an extra blanket if needed. This light, warm and comfortable Capote, complete with hood is a pleasure to own and use.

The article also provided a link to another article about point blankets. <http://www.crazycrow.com/site/point-blankets/>

This article was provided by Crazy Crow. <http://www.crazycrow.com/site/blanket-capote-history/>

Thanks to James "Nonose" Thompson for the submission.

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EARA Flags and Stickers are now available get with Teresa Lafferty to purchase one. misshattie1234@gmail.com 501-247-6466 or 269-5388

**E A R L Y A R K A N S A W
R E E N A C T O R S
A S S O C I A T I O N
O F F I C E R S**

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Liability Insurance: To be Covered by our insurance you need to sign the book or, if not available, a sheet of paper needs to be signed and sent to Teresa Lafferty or Glenn Cook. All volunteer events are covered whether in the state or not. If in doubt always sign a sheet and send to Teresa Lafferty at 210 W. 21st Street, Little Rock, AR 72206

To submit information for the events, recipes, tips and resources and any other items for the newsletter contact Editor April Goff at april.goff@arkansas.gov or call 501-590-2583

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