

Likely Clothing for Settlers and Miss River militiamen along the Tensaw/Mobile River Delta in the summer of 1813

Informal discussion Sat afternoon, May 14 at Mims Fort

Notes typed by SL Thomas

This was just advice—not to state that this is the only way to go or anything else is dead-wrong. The advice was mostly offered to persons asking for it, to either assemble their first period clothing or to replace older items leading up to 2013.

Mims settlement was not a military post (at least not till the last week of July 1813), therefore you'd see a greater variety of clothing. All sorts of people were Forted Up at Mims: Upriver planters, station traders/merchants, teamsters, physicians, farmers, trappers, idlers, volunteer militia from the surrounding area, formal militia from the Miss River towns, poor freemen, bondsmen, slaves, well off families, university trained gentlemen some with their families, and people that had never seen the inside of a school.

Mims is the near-frontier. A backcountry settlement, but at the hub of the crossroads between New Orleans, Mobile, St Stephens, the Tenn Settlements, the Choctaw villages, the Creek towns, Pensacola (Spanish Capital of W. Florida), Georgia and The Carolinas. It is not cut off so far from ship & river trade like Boonesboro 1775. Pantan and Leslie in Pensacola was a mere two days walk away over flat ground & was the WalMart of the Gulf Coast, St Stephens a short ferry ride & walk, and the town of Mobile just a day's float downriver.

Mims Reenactment. For many this is the one and only annual 1813 era reenactment that you do. My advice was geared to not break the bank. Affordable items that will work for a hot weekend, but still fit the time and history. Linen, Tow/hemp and Wool were the most common cloth used at the time, besides some buckskin. All of this is now more expensive than cotton muslin today (cotton was very expensive in 1813). I would recommend simple cotton for most items to keep costs down. Muslin looks enough like flat linen to be a visual substitute—and it is still a 100% natural material. Plain colors are best if you're unsure of the pattern or print.

I recommended "Smoke and Fire" and the "JAS Townsend" catalogs for some patterns and some ready made clothes. There are many other suppliers, BUT these two have the best prices I've seen and work like Land-End in that you call them and have your stuff in three days. You may wish to acquire their catalogs.

Clothing for women in 1813 America. Typically the ideal is a high-waisted, simple, straightline dress of practical material. This has been common in Europe AND America for almost 20 years. Think a candlestick with wax melting to the rear. It is no “new” fashion. Shirts and skirts were not that common. I’m not saying it wasn’t worn—just that it takes more effort and fasteners for a lady to construct her own shirt and skirt combo than the common daydress of the time. The upholstered look of the American Revolution (1770s) or the much earlier Colonial (F&I 1750s) period has dropped away—happily for the Mims Reenactor of Late August on the 31st parallel—the common day-dress of 1795-1827 is very cool to wear. Top that with an apron and a hair cap and maybe a straw hat—you have a distinctly 1813 visual appearance that is still practical for the piney woods of the Tensaw.

From ladies in the past I’ve heard that’s French, that’s English, that’s whatever. In reality French/ English/ Spanish is all European-American (paleface). Think TIME not COUNTRY. Catalogs can be misleading in their titles so look to the era more than the country. Remember Spanish America is only 10 miles to the south of Mims in 1812 & Pensacola is the closest trading center by land. Consider that.

For ladies that really want the shirt and skirt look, especially with bright colors and lots of patterns & adornment, might I suggest a Choctaw or Creek female look—as so many of the settlers were mixed marriages or mixed blood themselves. See Woodlands-Indian lower in these notes.

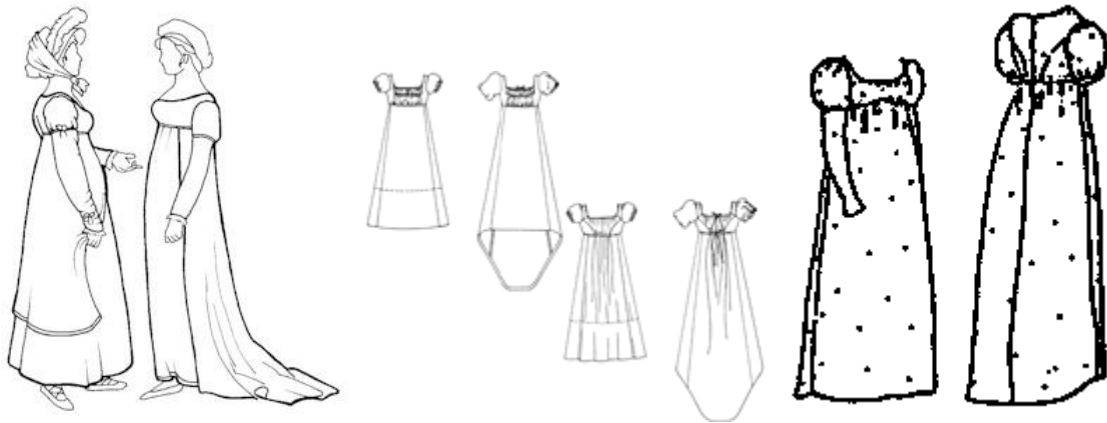
Patterns that work to this time:

1809 Daywear dress	PI-460 cat# Smoke&Fire
Front Closing Empire gown	P-031 cat# Smoke&Fire
(don’t let the word gown throw you—that’s 1800 lingo for dress—almost any dress)	
Bib Front Gown	RHF-191 cat# Smoke&Fire
Gown w/ Overdress	RHF-188 cat# Smoke&Fire

Most of these patterns are about \$15 and could be shared among several ladies. Some of the participants already must own the pattern as I’ve seen them on at least 3 volunteers in the past. Smoke & Fire (1-800-766-5334) has the 1809 dress offered as Ready-Made for about \$140 if you’d rather not sew.

JAS-TOWNSEND.com offers NO LADIES CLOTHING really suited to the 18teens except caps, simple ladies’ straw low-crown hats, shoes and aprons (pinner apron). They have been mostly geared to 1750s for decades and have been slowly expanding toward Rev War and the 1812 era. For women, they are not past the accessories yet.

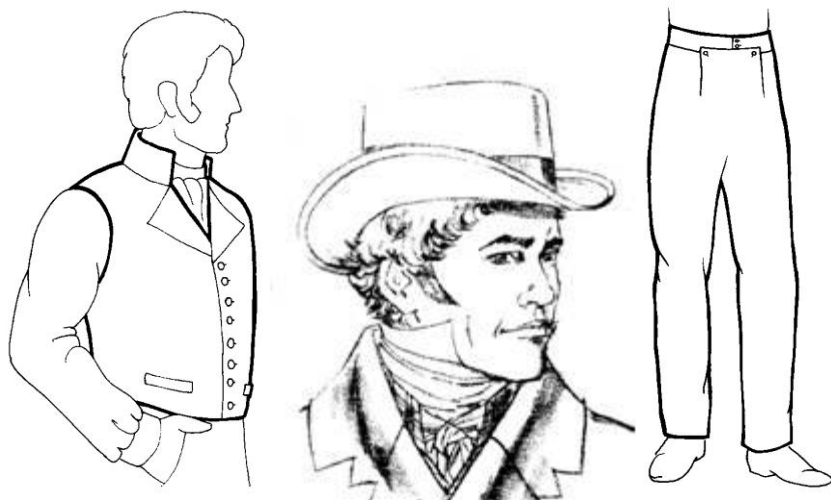
Shoes or Mocs: see end piece of these notes for all. Modern dept store shoe substitutes for ladies. Probably ballet slippers or plain ballet slipper street pumps are best. Simple colors black, brown, white (dirty) or tan.



Ladies: High in the front (ankle length), and a longer train or NO train at all

Children's clothing: Is much less time-specific than adult clothes. Think inexpensive and a little old fashioned for most smaller children. Little girls in sack dresses and boys may still be in knee breeches (probably no socks/stockings & no shoes in summer). Older girls in a simpler version of Mom's dresses and boys old enough to work or hunt in work and hunting clothes—like Dad.

JAS-TOWNSEND.com :: see younger boy's costume Trousers (\$22), Boy's Workshirt (\$28), boy's costume hunting shirt (\$35) –OR- boy's costume waistcoat (\$24), linen work cap (\$12 if you can get him to wear it) and bare feet (free). At those prices it isn't worth sewing for them—just buy it. \$50 – 80 and you're little boy is covered. 2G has a copy of that catalog. Again, no dress options for 1813 girls in the Townsend catalog.



Gentleman's summer clothes, working man's clothes simpler and rougher

Men's clothing in 1813: The ideal look is slim and high waisted, high collar for this time. The low slung stuff has drifted back into the older past & the loose fitting stuff is in the future. Men are, however, notorious for wearing clothing that is WAY OUT OF STYLE, but probably not so much back then as they got out a lot more than women did.

Most men don't sew and why bother your wife w/ it when it's easier to buy it from a reasonable cost catalog. Here you can find some good 1813 era, ready made items at www.Jas-Townsend.com for a reasonable cost and that catalog ships quickly. See page 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 or their website. See, they're expanding—they have 19th cen clothes for men.

Workshirt. Simple TEE shaped shirt w/ a one button neck closure. Typically one color but print cloth was around if desired.

Trousers are probably the most common pants of the time. Straight leg, fall front, high waisted.

Waistcoat/Vest. This is when the modern vest really took shape. Typically a high stand collar, but sometimes none. Sleeveless and made of a heavy cloth. Cut square at the waist. Seldom do you see the old Rev War style vests on white men in the drawings of the time. You still see that on Natives and some militia officers though.

Hunting Shirt or Hunting Frock. Heavy cloth or buckskin overshirt for trekking in the woods

This can add up in cost. The more you wear the more it costs. To save money or if this is your first time consider this: **SEE page 14 of Townsend catalog** if you have it or order one. **The men shown there are probably the MOST COMMON LOOK that you'd find that hot Sunday morning at Mims in 1813.** This is the look of working men for decades. The Work Smock for \$50 (OS-123) will cover almost any modern non-period problem you have w/ your shirt or pants. The self cocked straw work hat is \$9 (SH-955). At the bottom of the page you see the work apron (\$30 CA-332). Almost every working man had an apron like this mad out of heavy cloth or leather. It too can cover up CW Trousers or a not too authentic vest or shirt.

Knee britches are still around but on a many fewer grown working men than in earlier times. Gentlemen still wore them w/ boots. More for boys and teens as they hold up better and the boy doesn't outgrow them as fast as trousers. Boys would wear knickers till the 1940s to save the family money. In the Tensaw, probably unbuttoned and no socks or leather shoes on most in August. Therefore, worn like modern shorts. Maybe mocs as much as bare feet.

Slops. This is a river trading settlement and ferry landing. Men working the river are in a lot of slops (loose knee length breeches) about this time.

Hats & caps. Linen caps are simple and cheap. Roundhats are common, straws also. Some men still cock their big brimmed hats, most, however, do not have them formally cocked like a George Washington hat. The brim has been getting smaller and smaller from 1790 – 1813, so those hats don't need to be cocked to get the brim out of the way.

FOOTWEAR ALL:

Low shoes of plain leather is most desired and common by most that work or hunt the hard ground covered in thorns. Boots are expensive and worn by gentlemen, dragoons and officers. Bare feet is as authentic as it was when I was a kid and hated wearing shoes –ANYWHERE--.

Indian Moccasins of the East were typically center seam and looked a bit like Robin Hood or Robin's shoes in Batman. Smoke and Fire catalog offers the most affordable kit cut from good leather—or one could make their own kit. I'm not saying other moccasins weren't around—it is just that center seam is the most accepted by historians and reenactors for our area until the 20th century return from Oklahoma. Usually mocs are not cut into boots, instead the leggings of leather, wool or hemp are pulled on like tall socks over the mocs. That way the mocs can be replaced w/o tossing away all that material used in the leggings that will last a long time in the wilderness. They wasted little in 1813.

Men and boys substituting modern shoes for “period” might wish to consider plain leather Sunday shoes from Goodwill—the ones w/ a real sole and heel not sneaker soles. Cover them w/ mud and scuff em up really good or top them w/ leggings and nobody will notice.

Woodland Indian Dress:

Brien & David have done several talks and work on this over the years. I defer to them. Their look is very good for the time and place. These simple and straightforward items are typically accepted for the Alabama Country in 1813 and appear in the paintings and drawings. The items can be seen in the Smoke and Fire catalog under the “WOODLANDS INDIAN DRESS” page and are offered at a reasonable cost. \$100-180 for a complete simple kit.