



The Kalamazoo Valley Heritage

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The Common Soldier

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The world of "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution" was the topic of the September 17, 2007 meeting of the KVGS. Bob Myers, curator of the History Center at Courthouse Square in Berrien Springs, presented a fascinating program focusing on the clothing and weapons of that era.

Bob was dressed like a typical eighteenth-century citizen, complete with buckled shoes, knee britches, stockings, a shirt, a waistcoat, a kerchief, and a cocked hat. He entertained us with detailed stories - - from the construction of the garment to the reason for the style -- for every article of clothing in the presentation. In addition to explaining the characteristic garments for men, Bob did not neglect the attire of the women as he illustrated how the typical woman's outfit consisted of a chemise, petticoats, a corset, a bodice, and a bonnet.

We learned that the people of the eighteenth-century used clothing to flaunt their wealth. For example, a wealthy man would wear a beaver felt hat rather than wool, and the more petticoats a woman wore, the higher her status. We also learned that the men of those days wore long sleeves, even in the summer, and "respectable" women never appeared in public unless they tucked up their hair under their bonnet.

Bob also displayed reproductions of the weapons carried by a common soldier of the Revolution, which consisted of a flintlock musket and a bayonet. He demonstrated the laborious procedure for firing the musket, and discussed the battlefield strategies used during that war. Along the way, Bob debunked many of the myths that we have heard about the era.

After Bob's talk, it was easier to picture our ancestors from that era, to understand their daily lives, and to understand the war that occupied our country for eight years.