

John Harrower and his Clothing
1773-1776
Neal T. Hurst

John Harrower is one of the most unique insights to life as a servant in Virginia. Harrower leaves him home in Lerwick, Scotland penny less and was "obliged to engage to go to Virginia for four years." Once in Virginia his indenture was purchased by Colonel Daingerfield of Belvidera, located about 7 miles south of Fredericksburg. Harrower's diary gives the reader great vision into life as a servant and particularly into his clothing. Extracted here are the references he makes to his clothing within his diary published by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1963.

Tuesday December 14th 1773

"In the evening gave out some shirts &ca to wash."

Thursday December 16th 1773

"In the forenoon gave out my short coat to mend and kept the hosue all day it being heavy rain and blowing very hard all day. In the evening received my short coat from the Tailor and paid him 6d for mending it, at the same time bought from him some old silver lace at 6d."

Saturday December 18th 1773

"...sold my lace I bought 16inst at 1/ and bought 1 Cart. Sleeve Buttons at 9d and one Cart. At 4d.

Tuesday December 23rd 1773

"Bought 2 pair pinchback buckles at 10d per pair, 1 pair steel plated with silver at 1/6d per pair and 1 pair pinchback plated with silver at 1/10d per. Same day sold the steel plated pair at 2/1d Str. and 1 pair of the pinchback at 1/6 Str. to a passenger bound for London."

Wednesday January 19th 1774

"This day I shifted my cloaths and put on a clean ruffled shirt, clean Britches, and waistcoat and my brown coat. I not having any other cloaths on ever since I left Lerwickbut my blue jacket and Bigg coats above it and a plain shirt."

Tuesday March 1st 1774

"This day I bought one cotton napkin for three biscuits and a silk napkin for five biscuits, both napkins half wore."

Tuesday March 8th 1774

"Bought one pair of trousers for seven biscuits...and a muslin stock with a pretty pinchback stocke buckle for 4d and three biscuits."

Wednesday April 6th 1774

"I have wore no britches nor stockings since we got into the trade winds only a pair of long trousers down to my buckles. And this day having on a shorter pair until my longest pair was wash'd, I got both my ankles burned by the sun, it is so very hot here."

Friday May 10th 1774

Recd. Two pair fine new brown thread stockings

Below is an inventory of the Cloathes &ca I brought to Belvidera with me viz:

One Superfine Brown Cloath Coat full mounted

One Do. Vestcoat

One flowered silk do.

One fine marsyled do

One brown duffle do

One pair new black stockings breeches

One pair new doe skin breeches

One pair flannen drawers

One pair osnaburg drawers

Six ruffled shirts

Five plain white do

One cheque do

One blue cloath jacket

Seven muslin stocks

One black silk cravat

One pair ribbed cotton stockings

Ten pair worsted do

One new hatt and one new wig

Five pocket napkins

Two hand towels

Two pair trousers

One pair shoes with pinchback shoe, stock and knee buckles

One trunk with fine lock and hinges.

Friday June 7th 1774

This day received two pair new Russia drill britches and two new short coats of brown Holland.

June 14th 1774

My Dearest Life...They was here the whitest that ever I seed for they first Boyle all the Cloaths with soap, and then wash them, and I may put on clean linen every day if I please....as for myself I suppose you wou'd scare know me know, there being nothing either brown, blew, or black about me but the head and feet. I being dressed in short cloth coat, vest coat, and britches all made of white cotton with any lynning, and thread stockings and wearing my own hair curled round like a wig. At present a suite of Cloaths cost five and twenty shillings here of making which I really think very high.

Sunday October 23rd 1774

This day I carried home a westcoat with a silver sprig through a striped white satine & Padasoy silk, which I had formally bought made as it was being northing worse than new for 8/6 Virginia currency.

Sunday November 26th 1774

Recived from Colonel Daingerfield New coat and veastcoat of claret coloured duffel.

December 6th 1774

My Dearest Life...About 20 days ago I only laid aside my summer dress and put on a suite of new claret coloured duffle neatly mounted but no lnying in the coat only faced in the breasts.

Monday December 26th 1774

I went to town and dined in a private house and after buying 1 ½ dozen mother of pearle buttons for my white morsyld Vest I returned home in the evening.

Sunday May 21st 1775

This day I had sent me a present from Mrs. Porter in Fredg. Two silk Vestcoats and two pair cotton britches all of them having been but very little wore my Mr. Porter.

Saturday June 24th 1775

This day I went to town at noon and paid 5/ for mending the sett stock buckle I had from Colo. Bought from Mr. Porter 2 hanks brown silk at ½ to my accott. Bought from Mr. John Glassel 1 yard black Ribbon for my hair at 1/ and 2 yards figured do at 1/ per yard to give to Nancey Beck for Altering my 2 vestcoats for me, my pocket expense this day 1 ¾ curry. Red from Mr. Fultoun Taylor in Town 3/8 yard buckrum in a present.

Saturday July 1st 1775

At noon I went to Frederickg. And bought 15 big Double Guilt buttons at 4/9, one hank silk twist at 1/ and one ounce brown thread at 6d my pocket expense.

Friday July 14th 1775

This evening I recived my brown coat I brought to this country with me new mounted and turned by one Kid: Beck a taylor for doing which I paid him six schillings as per agreement before he began to do it.

Monday August 28th 1775

My Dearest Life...I have the pleasure to have given the parents such satisfaction that I had sent to me in a present two silk vestcoats and two pairs of britches ready to put on for changes in summer.

Saturday December 2nd 1775

I bought from Mr. Porter a Black Silk Handkerchief at 5/.

Saturday December 3rd 1775

After breakfast I went and found out Miss Molly White and left with her cloth to make me two winter stocks and a stock to make them by.

Sunday March 3rd 1776

This day I recd. a pair silver sleeve buttons with my name on them for some burred lace I formerly gave to Brown the silver smith.

Tuesday April 23rd 1776

At noon rode to Town got the Newspapers and settled with Mr. Porter for teaching his two sons 12 months, when he very genteely allowed me 6/0/0 for them, besides a present of two silk Vests and two pair of nankeen breeches last summer...

Friday May 31st 1776

I sent my hatt to town by Jacob to be dressed cut round and trimmed with binding.

Saturday June 22nd 1776

At noon carried 4 yards Cotton Jeans (I had spun and wove here) to Mr. Becks to make me a short coat for summer wear...

Wednesday June 26th 1776

At 5pm I went to Mr. Beck's and hade a short coat cut out of cotton cloth wove jeans.

Sunday July 3rd 1776

...same night recd. my short coat made and paid 5/ for doing it.