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Women of New France 2: Needle Arts

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Clothing Production and Repair

All classes of women in New France had to master sewing and needle arts. People ordered many garments "ready made" from Europe or from tailors in the cities of Montreal and Québec, but these items required fitting and finishing. Women usually made household linens, undergarments and children's clothing at home and embellished clothing with embroidery, beading and quilting. Common people owned only a few articles of clothing because of the high cost of both clothes and fabric, so they often needed to repair what clothing they owned. They also remade garments to reflect the latest European fashions.



Braided sash

Weaving

Both the English and French governments restricted the development of commercial weaving in the New World, so nearly all fabrics were imported from Europe. Women wove cloth at home on a limited basis. The spinning of wool and flax remained important for the yarns they produced. Women in New France knit yarn hats, mitts, and stockings and braided them into the finger-woven sashes and garters particular to residents of New France and Native Americans.



Re-enactor spinning



Re-enactor sewing

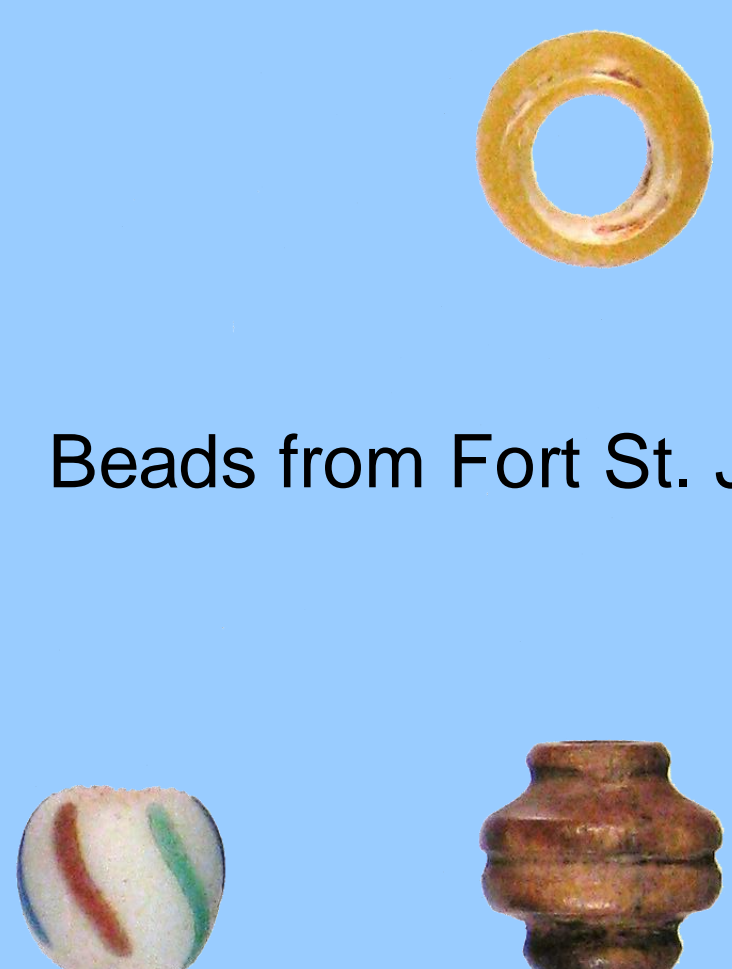
Sewing

Girls in the 18th century learned to sew at a young age. Hemming pillowcases and sheets served as easy and practical first tasks. Later on, girls learned the skills of embroidery, quilting, and perhaps even lace making. Only natural fibers were available in the 18th century. Linen and wool were the most common cloths, but cotton and silk were also available. Archaeologists have found pins, needles, thimbles, beads, and scissors at the Fort St. Joseph site that testify to these daily activities.



Embroidered pocket

Beads from Fort St. Joseph



Needles and thimbles from Fort St. Joseph