

# Changing Identity Through Material Culture: Folklore, the Fur Trade, and the Internet

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Résumé de l'article

*À un moment ou à un autre de leur vie, de nombreuses personnes éprouvent le besoin de devenir quelque chose ou quelqu'un qu'elles ne sont pas. Dans le monde entier, des groupes de gens désireux de revivre le passé se constituent en communautés de reconstitutions historiques pour se lancer dans l'histoire vivante. La méthode par laquelle ces gens changent d'identité est celle d'une culture matérielle aux fondements historiques diffusée en grande partie par Internet. Cet article se penche sur ceux qui font revivre le mode de vie des trappeurs de la traite des fourrures dans les montagnes Rocheuses, en particulier en se penchant sur un groupe prestigieux dénommé les « Hommes des montagnes américaines » (American Mountain Men), et montre de quelle façon le folklore se diffuse à travers la culture matérielle, tant physiquement que sur un plan immatériel.*

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**Changing Identity Through Material Culture: Folklore, the Fur Trade, and the Internet**

*Résumé*

À un moment ou à un autre de leur vie, de nombreuses personnes éprouvent le besoin de devenir quelque chose ou quelqu'un qu'elles ne sont pas. Dans le monde entier, des groupes de gens désireux de revivre le passé se constituent en communautés de reconstitutions historiques pour se lancer dans l'histoire vivante. La méthode par laquelle ces gens changent d'identité est celle d'une culture matérielle aux fondements historiques diffusée en grande partie par Internet. Cet article se penche sur ceux qui font revivre le mode de vie des trappeurs de la traite des fourrures dans les montagnes Rocheuses, en particulier en se penchant sur un groupe prestigieux dénommé les « Hommes des montagnes américaines » (American Mountain Men), et montre de quelle façon le folklore se diffuse à travers la culture matérielle, tant physiquement que sur un plan immatériel.

*Abstract*

Many humans, at some point, have the desire to become something or someone they are not. Across the globe, groups of people who want to relive the past form re-enacting communities to engage in living history. The method by which these people change their identity is through a historically based material culture, disseminated in great part by the Internet. This article focuses on those who re-enact the lifestyle of the trappers of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, specifically examining a prestigious group called the American Mountain Men, and demonstrates how folklore is spread through material culture both physically and intangibly.

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The ability to imagine is a uniquely human psychological process (Vygotsky 1978). This capability develops during childhood and manifests itself most often while at play. According to Vygotsky, “play seems to be invented at the point when the child begins to experience unrealizable tendencies” (1978). Taking Vygotsky’s theory into adulthood, this article argues that adults also “play” when they experience unrealizable tendencies. Some individuals fantasize about being of a different race, gender, or culture (Mullen 2008). Others use their imagination to change their identity through adopting a material culture that is not their own.

An example of this is re-enacting communities, where participants engage in living history by reliving the past as if they were born in a previous era. The method by which these men and women change their identity is through a unique, historically based material culture. This article focuses on those who re-enact the lifestyle of mountain men and trappers of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, specifically shadowing a prestigious group called the American Mountain Men, more commonly known as the AMM.

The AMM have become well known in the re-enacting community as a period-correct international group of men dedicated to the

preservation of the traditional mountain-man way of life by emulating the material culture of the past. With great detail, scrupulous research, and hours of craftsmanship, these men assemble historically accurate clothing and accoutrements. Ironically, the AMM relies heavily on modern technology, especially the Internet, to make this possible. The Internet facilitates the human desire of “changing identity,” and connects far-flung people who would otherwise never have communicated. In his work *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*, Trevor Blank summarizes it as such: “As the Internet developed as a communications facilitator, folklore emerged as recognizably on it as it did in ‘the real world’” (2008). Barry Wellman, quoted in Howard Rheingold’s work, says the Internet allows people to “shop at specialized boutiques for needed resources instead of casually dropping in at the general store.” (2000: 363). In other words, people can go online to find others with similar unique interests, and in the case of the AMM, people re-creating the same material culture. The virtual communities in which these historical interpreters participate, whether they are digital immigrants or digital natives, broaden their relationships and strengthen their offline communities.<sup>1</sup> These virtual communities have a shared space, a shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal relationships (Baym 2010). The Internet strengthens the material culture of the AMM.

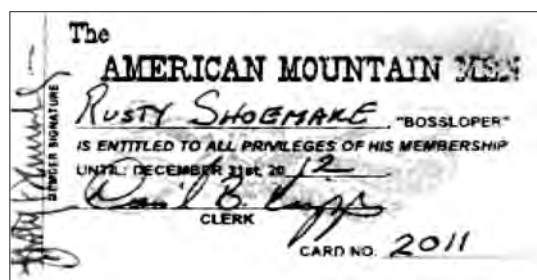
The AMM website serves many purposes. Individuals interested in fur trade history will find the “Mountain Men and The Fur Trade Virtual Research Project” very useful. Scores of primary source materials having to do with the Rocky Mountain fur trade can be accessed with the click of a button—from the journals of Jedediah Strong Smith to the letters of Narcissa Prentiss Whitman (Smith 2012; Whitman 2012). AMM objectives and codes, membership requirements, and past issues of their newsletter, *The Moccasin Mail*, and magazine, *The Tomahawk & Long Rifle*, can be found. Each resource is designed to facilitate its members’ desire to change their identity by mimicking the material culture of the past. The objectives of the AMM, as found on their website, are important in understanding this concept:

The specific and primary purpose is to establish and maintain a permanent association for research into and study of the history, traditions, tools, mode of living, etc., of the trappers, explorers, and traders known as the Mountain Men.... To establish and maintain a permanent museum and research center to house and make available books, artifacts, films, speakers, etc.... To provide a continuous program of living history. To teach the skills and help develop the abilities which were actually needed and used by the original Mountain Men.... To help preserve our native wilderness and wildlife by teaching and practicing realistic conservation. To help establish brotherhood and trust between our members. To help our members find deep affinity with nature that is a basic and necessary trait of all true Mountain Men. (2012)

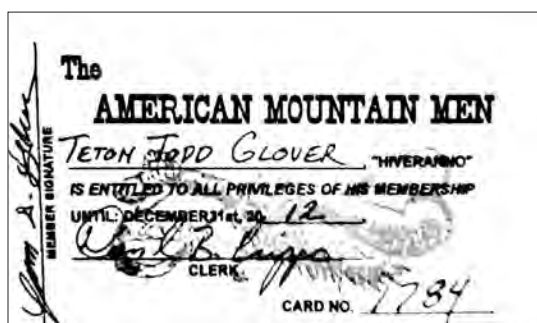
The objectives of the AMM stress the importance of brotherhood and community, while promoting self-reliance, individuality, and privacy. Also important are the ideals of ethical conservation, wilderness survival, and the study of history. Membership requirements promote the same ideology. They are rigorous, and must be completed in a timely manner, not exceeding two years. Invited pilgrims<sup>2</sup> must learn and experience what mountain men contended with two centuries ago. Ten requirements from a list of fifteen must be completed. The amount of time and skill necessary to complete such requirements varies. Pilgrims must sew their own clothing and accoutrements by hand, spend time in the wilderness under primitive conditions during different seasons of the year, travel under primitive conditions, prepare adequately for travel by horse, boat, and on foot, and demonstrate competency in primitive survival, hunting, tracking, skinning an animal, cooking a meal, and Indian sign language as used by natives in the Rocky Mountain region (American Mountain Men 2012).<sup>3</sup> Once a member, the degree of “Bossloper,” meaning trapper or hunter, is obtained (Hayward and McDade 1997).

It is important to note the inclusive nature of a unique material culture. Most of the requirements are spattered with items of the material world necessary to be a part of this organiza-

tion. After ten of the fifteen requirements are completed, documented, and submitted to the pilgrim's sponsors, paperwork and annual dues of \$25 are turned in, at which time a card and member number make membership official, providing a physical symbol of acceptance.



**Fig. 1**  
AMM Membership Card – Bossloper. Courtesy Rusty Shoemaker, member #2011 of the American Mountain Men.



**Fig. 2**  
AMM Membership Card – Hiveranno. Courtesy Todd Glover, member #1784 of the American Mountain Men.

At this point, members can still progress inside the organization. Bosslopers can continue to fulfill requirements, and to become a “Hiveranno,” or experienced mountain man.<sup>4</sup> This is the highest position in the AMM. These requirements are not posted publicly online, but can be accessed only by members with a login and password on the AMM website or with a subscription to the *Tomahawk and Long Rifle*. The 2014 winter issue listed the remaining five Hiveranno requirements:

16. Must have at least three full years of membership in AMM.
17. Must be able to properly skin an animal and prepare the skin for market.
18. Must have served as a Booshtway<sup>5</sup> for at least two activities of the AMM.
19. Must spend three days and two nights totally alone under primitive conditions and *aux aliments du pays* (“off the nourishment of the land”).
20. Must have made a study of the lifestyle of the mountain man, frontiersman or

American Indian before 1840 and must submit a report of this study to the association Capitaine. (Hall 2012)

As with requirements one through fifteen, these too are mingled with material culture. Requirements sixteen through nineteen focus on wilderness survival through experiential learning, and requirement twenty focuses on the academic study of history through research and writing, again reverting back to the objectives and code of the association.

Other information accessible only to members is the latest membership roster, the probationary application form, the Bossloper application form, the articles of incorporation, the by-laws, the standing rules, a map of AMM property, directions to AMM land, past issues of *The Moccasin Mail*, meeting minutes, and museum committee quarterly reports. Also on the public website are the subgroups, or “brigades”<sup>6</sup> of the AMM. They are listed with connecting websites easily accessible with information on individual members and activities, complete with photographs, biographies, personal recollections, experiences, and more.

Many forums about the fur trade exist on the Internet, including the AMM website. This allows for what Caron and Caronia call *delocalization* and *multilocalization*. Forum users have the ability to be delocalized; that is, to be physically present in public spaces while engaging in private communication, or completely isolated physically while being solicited by the public. Users can also be multilocalized, or in two places at once; physically occupying one space, while mentally occupying another (Caron and Caronia 2007). Technology and wireless networks make this possible.

Through e-mails, the website, and “in real life” (IRL) activities (Baym 2010), AMM folk spread their own unique lore around the United States, as well as internationally.<sup>7</sup> The most significant lore in this community consists of the dress and accoutrements of each individual participant—their material culture. Through online resources and IRL, AMM members share ideas about clothing, accoutrements, and the techniques to make or acquire said articles, at times losing the primary source that inspired the items in the first place. Even when an item can easily be documented historically, many members



of the AMM and other re-enactor groups do not know the origins, yet regularly perpetuate the styles, the patterns, and the ways to make specific fur-trade goods. The folk of the AMM, “like the rest of folks, may become tradition bound” (Bascom 1954: 333). Folk material culture such as the wolf cap, *gage d’amour*, leggings, moccasins, and knives are examples of accoutrements and dress whose styles are passed on from one person to another. These items are functional, hand-made, and the craft often learned by observation as well as trial and error (Roberts 1972: 233-52; Glassie 1982:).

**Fig. 3 (right)**

Manikin wearing a brain-tanned wolf cap, sewn with waxed linen thread with a red wool welt, the front adorned with red glass trade beads. These hats serve the same purposes of other types of hats, keeping the head warm and out of the sun. Courtesy Rusty Shoemaker, member #2011 of American Mountain Men.



**Fig. 4 (middle)**

Tobacco bag or *gage d’amour* (“token of love”). This particular piece is made of brain-tanned deer skin, pillow-ticking cotton cloth, trade beads, and waxed linen thread. The inner heart is made out of alum-tanned beaver tail. Photo courtesy the author.



**Fig. 5 (far right)**

Leggings used to cover the lower legs from the feet to above the knees. They serve as protection while riding on horseback or walking through rough terrain. These particular leggings were constructed from brain-tanned elk skin, waxed linen thread, and red wool cloth. Photo courtesy the author.

Oliver McCloskey and Scott “Doc Ivory” Olsen are both members of the AMM and are highly respected in the re-enactor community because of their intense involvement in mountaineering. Oliver brain-tans animal hides for a living and can be found on his Cedar City homestead dressed in buckskins<sup>8</sup> as he works and dresses deer skins to produce beautifully cured and smoked hides.

His riding partner, Doc Ivory, can be found in buckskins on his homestead outside of Dillon, Montana, or in his dental practice—hence the nickname “Doc Ivory”—or even at his local church, on a daily basis. Both men have integrated historical interpretation into their everyday lives. They have adopted and applied permanently 19th-century material culture. It is not uncommon for these men to go on horseback excursions for weeks on end; in some cases for over a month. Their intense involvement has put these men on a pedestal, at times creating a jealous attitude among members, or a stronger desire to become further immersed in the material world of the past. This popularity, for better or worse, makes their personal clothing and accoutrements as good as any primary source document of the fur-trade era. Other re-enactors have emulated the items Oliver and Doc Ivory use, make, buy, and sell, spreading their influence throughout



the re-enacting community. The material culture of re-enactors disseminates in this manner and therefore is a form of folklore, as original source materials become lost to the traditions of the AMM.

Furthering their notoriety and ability to influence the material culture of the AMM



was a television show put on by the National Geographic Channel. The reality series “Hard Riders” (2012) included McCloskey and Doc Ivory. The synopsis reads:

The wilds of the American West draw a certain kind of men: ones who are hell-bent on leaving the modern world behind. They may be able to survive the wilderness, but surviving each other is a whole different challenge. Using the same equipment as the pioneers had 200 years ago, greenhorn Jamie must prove to Doc and Oliver, seasoned adventurers with decades of experience, that he can tough it out with them in grizzly country. (National Geographic Channel 2012)

Although the show received mixed reviews by members of the AMM, it is apparent that many were able to watch, internalize, and interpret its message about AMM material culture (Poison River Party members, personal interview, January 25 and 26, 2013).

Gatherings where material culture is disseminated often occur at local rendezvous and historical re-enactments. Every year these gatherings take place throughout the United States, with the rendezvous mostly in the West. Public gatherings, like the Fort Bridger Rendezvous in Fort Bridger, Wyoming, are held annually over Labor Day weekend. The Fort Buenaventura Rendezvous in Ogden, Utah, is held biannually during Easter weekend and Labor Day weekend. The Cache Valley Rendezvous is held every May in Blacksmith Fork Canyon in northern Utah, and the Rocky Mountain National Rendezvous happens each summer at a location designated the previous year. The information about these public rendezvous are advertised through local newspapers, but are more commonly found on social network sites such as Facebook and other online forums. One such invitation was posted by mharmon on Wednesday, September 5, 2012, at 2:02 p.m:

Living history groups—military and civilian—of all American history periods (exploration/colonial to the late 20th century) are invited to participate in the 3rd annual Living History Timeline during the 41st annual Old Canal Days Festival in Lockport, Illinois [sic] on Saturday, June 15, 2013, from 10:00am to 6:00pm.

Fig. 6  
Centre-seam pucker-toe moccasins. These are made of brain-tanned deer skin, waxed linen thread, and red wool cloth. Photo courtesy the author.

Fig. 7  
John Nowill (a company established in 1700 and still in business today) butcher knife manufactured in Sheffield, England. The knife is made of steel; the handle is made of hardwood. Behind the knife is a rawhide sheath and a buffalo hide belt. Photo courtesy the author.



Please note that non-U.S. units are also welcome. The Timeline is organized by the Gaylord Building, a site of the National Trust ofr [sic] Historic Preservation. For greater details, please email mharmon@gaylordbuilding.org or call 1.815.838.9400. (2012)

Other gatherings are private, for members only. The AMM has monthly gatherings in which only members are allowed to participate. One such example was sent to AMM members of the Poison River Party (PRP)<sup>9</sup> by the party's Booshway.



**Fig. 8**  
Oliver McCloskey, equipped with a handmade trapping basket woven out of willow branches, a flint-lock long rifle, a wide-brimmed beaver felt hat, a hunting shirt, knee breeches, leggings lubricated with animal grease, and moccasins, all made from brain-tanned deer skin (McCloskey and Oliver 2009: 86).

Hello The Camp,

Please mark your calendars for January 25th-27th for the annual planning camp for the PRP. The camp will be at Fort B[uenaventura] in Ogden. You will be able to set up camp on Friday and stay through Sunday if you choose. There will be a Park usage fee associated [sic] with this site so we will pass the hat to cover this. Usually this is \$5.00/ea so be prepared for this. The planning meeting will take place at approx. [sic] noon on Saturday 26th. Please pass the word along if you notice I've missed anyone. I'm using the latest [sic] updated party list. Come prepared to discuss proposed camp dates of 2013, review activity from 2012, and we will have Party Booshway elections for the 2013-2014 term.

YMHOS, [Your most humble and obedient servant]

Mike Powell  
AMM #1769 Hiveranno  
Poison River Party Booshway  
"Aux Aliment Du Pays"<sup>10</sup> (2012)



**Fig. 9**  
Scott "Doc Ivory" Olsen, posing in front of the reconstructed stockade at Fort Bridger, Wyoming. His brain-tanned clothing and buffalo cap are but a few items handmade in an effort to accurately portray trappers of the 19th-century West (McCloskey and Olsen 2009: 162).

In “traditional kinds of communities,” such as re-enactor rendezvous or gatherings such as the 3rd annual Living History Timeline, participants are “accustomed to meeting people, then getting to know them,” says Howard Rheingold, quoted by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Yet, “in virtual communities, you can get to know people and then choose to meet them. In some cases, you can get to know people who might never meet on a physical plane” (2012). Re-enactors are involved in these virtual communities.

When members of the AMM or other re-enactors go to the Internet for information, various online bulletin boards, sometimes referred to as forums, are used. Two examples are Frontier Folk and Historical Trekking. Frontier Folk is a general re-enactor board with sub-forums containing numerous topics of historical interest. These sub-forums deal with 18th-century frontier trekking and re-enacting, announcements and memoriams, colonial New France, the military, 18th-century frontier women, and recipes, among other topics. Historical Trekking, like Frontier Folk, has many sub-forums, one of which deals with the fur trade. Members using these two sites are expected to maintain a certain etiquette, some of which are unwritten social norms of Internet culture—in other words, folklore. Ironically, whatever forum is being used and whatever online etiquette is expected, the purpose is to accumulate goods or ideas for creating items that more accurately reflect a historically authentic material culture. To understand this concept, it becomes necessary to understand Internet vernacular.

Part of the interpersonal etiquette on Frontier Folk and Historical Trekking requires that no one “hijack” another’s “thread.” A thread is a series of conversations about one specific subject. Hijacking is the act of asking an unrelated question in someone else’s thread. If a thread is hijacked, users will often ignore the intrusive question and answer the original inquiry that precipitated the thread in the first place. If the ignorant user who hijacked the thread posts his frustration, knowledgeable users will simply tell him to start his own. Because most regular users are aware of this, actual examples are hard to find, although this does occur from time to time (Jason Vilos, personal communication, 2012).

Most posts on these forums deal with the material world; for example, how-to questions, where inexperienced users request help from seasoned veterans in that same field, and spread ideas about material culture. It is expected that any user who is interested in asking such a question check previous or archived information for answers prior to posing the question on a live or current thread. This saves users from rehashing the same questions and answers, and allows new information to be introduced in live threads. The recycling of old information is frowned upon. Experienced users who field a recycled question will often post a link for the ignorant user or newcomer, leading them to the archived answers. However, questions regarding the use of the search engine are welcomed. It is perfectly acceptable to ask for help finding archived information, and knowledgeable users gladly accommodate those requests. Because users are aware of this etiquette, specific examples are rare (Vilos, personal communication, 2012).

When a user posts a question or opens a new thread, they are expected to identify their “persona,” which is the person or time period they portray in their re-enactments. Members of certain groups, such as the AMM, may identify themselves as such. If a question is posted without doing this, a user may get a reply that asks “time, place, persona?” In other words, the answer to their question cannot be given unless they specify their personal interests. By doing this, those fielding questions can give specific answers (Vilos, personal communication, 2012). One such example was posted on Frontier Folk on Thursday, October 18, 2012, at 11:31 a.m. The user Birdwatcher was interested in buying a tent authentic to the period he interpreted. He first listed two style options he had been considering, “either a lean-to (‘diamond shelter’) or wedge, the go-to folks at this point being Panther Primitives [sic].” Then he went on to list the “Sunforger Boatshrunk, 10.38 oz Sunforger w/flame retardant, 13 oz Sunforger w/flame retardant, 10 oz water, flame and mildew resistant, 8 oz dark brown oilskin.” Finally, after stating that price was no object, he posted “Any thoughts/preferences appreciated” (Birdwatcher 2012). Later that same day, Mad Gerald posted, at 4:48 p.m., the following response: “Mr. Birdwatcher sir, [r]espectfully; Although we do not know your purpose for the



tent, whether we want a period tent for personal use, or for use in a public educational program, we might also consider what is actually a period form of tent” (2012).

This post was a polite reminder to Birdwatcher that in order for anyone to properly respond to his question, they had to know his persona—the era and person he interpreted. At 5:42 p.m., Birdwatcher replied, saying “Anyhoo ... down here the period is Texian ie. 1820’s-40’s.” With this information, users felt better prepared to give Birdwatcher the answer he had been seeking.

On Frontier Folk and Historical Trekking, users are expected to be free with information whenever possible, meaning personal knowledge such as construction techniques and historical source documentation should be shared rather than withheld. If, for example, Oliver McCloskey was involved in a conversation in an online thread dealing with braintanning, he, being a professional, would be expected to field questions using his own background knowledge and experience. These forums’ purpose is to disseminate knowledge, a process of folklore. Because Oliver tans hides for a living, he carefully guards his techniques and does not participate on online forums, although he can be found on Facebook. Generalized reciprocity of information is expected. These forums are set up for the purpose of sharing and spreading knowledge through inquiry and free expression. Without generalized reciprocity, the forum is for nought (Vilos, personal communication, 2012).

Finally, users are also expected to know the slang commonly used in threads and on these forums. Robert Glenn Howard describes this phenomenon, saying that “there is a class of online discourse that is properly termed ‘vernacular’ because it invokes characteristics that are recognized as distinct from those that are recognized as ‘institutional.’” New technologies have made possible the “inextricably intertwined nature of public and private, personal and commercial, individual and group” communication (Howard 2008: 195). This melting pot of communication is evident in online re-enactor forums such as Frontier Folk and Historical Trekking, most prevalently in the taglines of users. These taglines are essentially advertising the personal or institutional (or a combination of the two) beliefs of the person posting on a thread. For instance,

the tagline “Without documentation, you are just another person with an opinion” demonstrates the forum’s emphasis on documentation, an example of the vernacular, while bowing to the institutional relevance of documentation in scholarly writing, reporting the news, or writing a prescription (Isaac 2012). The tagline, “There is a fine line between a hobby and mental illness” also gives a nod to both the vernacular and institutional. The vernacular is understood by participants—especially by the spouses—who realize that the hobby of re-enactment can consume the re-enactor’s life and excessively permeate their thoughts and mental health. From an institutional perspective, the interpretation relates to modern medicine, where there is most likely a correlation between excess and mental illness (Rod 2012).

Frontier Folk and Historical Trekking users, many of whom are members of both groups, create acronyms for commonly used terms to save time, not unlike spoken and written language contractions. Whether language is written or verbal, a certain evolution takes place as people shorten words. Early in the history of American colonies, Mary’s Land was named after Queen Henrietta Maria of France (1609-1669); today, it is known as Maryland. Charles Town, South Carolina, named after King Charles I of England (1600-1649), is now Charleston. There are simple contractions and acronyms used on a daily basis with which most English speakers are familiar, such as “don’t” and “NYU.” In online forums, however, these contractions and “insider” terminology are less familiar. For outsiders, the online vernacular may be indecipherable.

In order to more fully understand this phenomenon, a few examples are necessary. AxeIP posted the following on Frontier Folk on Friday, October 19, 2012, at 1:10 p.m.:

I would much rather use my farthings for a more period correct gun, than I would for a period correct linen tent. But that again is totally subjective. If you want a pc tent more than you want a pc gun? Go for it. The idea that one is obviously superior to the other is ludicrous. I guess that was my point. (2012)

In this example, two items may be difficult to decipher for new users. The term “farthings” is a term used historically, and in this case is used as

a replacement for “money.” In the same example, the user typed two different times the letters “pc.” This might be more commonly interpreted as “politically correct,” but in this context it means “period correct.” On Tuesday, August 28, 2012, at 5:15 p.m., beaudro posted the following:

I don't think the MOFT ever carried it, but it was listed in one of their quarterly's. They only listed a phone number for Gordon? James D. Gordon, Great Knife Makers of the Early West. <http://www.tublingriver.com/gordon.html#thumb>, Looked like a good one to have. (beaudro 2012)

“MOFT” is not “men of the fur trade” as one might guess, but refers to the Museum of the Fur Trade, located in Chadron, Nebraska. Under the “publications” tab on the museum’s website, a reference is made to the *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, the museum’s academic, peer-reviewed journal that beaudro mentioned in his post. On Friday, August 24, 2012, at 1:22 p.m. user ditmurier posted “Last opossum hide I had, I gifted to Hester Purefinder ☺! I will visit her at her rock soon. Miss that lady” (2012). In this case, referring to Hester Purefinder’s “rock” means her tombstone or grave. Hester Purefinder is deceased. Another post, published on Friday, February 17, 2012, at 7:15 p.m. by DPhariss, gives two examples of this community’s vernacular:

All the modern descriptions of the rifles L&C carried are supposition, the US Army site included. Don 5tith [six] does not even think they were short from what I can see. This goes beyond supposition and into denial. I don't think anyone knows what was going on at HF at the time.... (2012)

“L&C” refers to Lewis and Clark (Meriwether Lewis and William Clark), the great leaders of the Corps of Discovery and explorers of the Louisiana territory (1804-1806). “HF,” or Harper’s Ferry, is a small historic town located in West Virginia at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah

Rivers. It has a rich history that includes events such as John Brown’s raid in 1859 and the Civil War Battle of Harper’s Ferry in 1862 (NPS 2015).

As these acronyms and other common terms are used on forums such as Frontier Folk and Historical Trekking, new users learn their meaning and perpetuate their use. Users become so accustomed to seeing this type of verbiage that it becomes part of the vernacular, the origin lost in cyber space. This dissemination constitutes Internet folklore, and can rightfully be categorized under several of Elliot Oring’s eight characteristics of folklore: communal, common, informal, marginal, personal, traditional, expressive, and ideological. Word contractions, acronyms, and slang on these forums are both informal and traditional. They are passed on from one user to another and allow for new versions to evolve, demonstrating that all terminology, to one degree or another, is valid, correct, and acceptable (Oring 1986). As re-enactors spread ideas about material culture, other forms of folklore also emerge. Not only does the material world change because of the Internet, but also the use of language. Re-enactors, including those of the AMM, spread ideas on- and off-line that encourage the use of 19th-century material goods. The forum entries in this article demonstrate this concept, while at the same time introducing a new vernacular and dissemination of folklore.

As new technologies enter people’s lives, changes take place. This social shaping, an idea presented by Nancy Baym, demonstrates the relationship that people have with new technology (2010). Fur trade re-enactors, members of the AMM, and other living-history communities, are influenced by the technologies available to them as they engage in online activities and experiment with the material world around them. In turn, they influence the technology by creating rules, both written and unwritten, norms, etiquette, and expectations that are perpetuated with the help of the Internet. These influences facilitate the human imagination and desire to adopt new identities through material culture.

## Notes

1. For more on digital immigrants and digital natives, see: Marc Prensky, "Digital Native, Digital Immigrants" in *On the Horizon*, Vol. 9, No. 5, published by MCB University Press, October 2001. For more on strengthening offline communities through virtual communities, see: Barry Wellman, as quoted in Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading: MIT Press, 2000), 365).
2. Pilgrim—Usually immigrants; people moving west. The term was also sometimes used by the mountain men to mean any man new to the fur trade. Walt Hayward and Brad McDade, *A Glossary of American Mountain Men Terms, Words and Expressions*, <http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/amm/gloss.html> (accessed November 20, 2012).
3. An exhaustive list of requirements for obtaining Bossloper status can be found on the American Mountain Men website, at <http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/amm/bosloper.html> (accessed October 30, 2012).
4. Hiveranno—An experienced mountain man. One who had lived many years in Indian country. *First Voyageur, Later Mountain Man*. Ibid.
5. Booshway—The leader of a party of mountain men. The word comes from the French *bourgeois*, used by the voyageurs. Walt Hayward and Brad McDade, *A Glossary of American Mountain Men Terms, Words and Expressions*, <http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/amm/gloss.html> (accessed November 20, 2012).
6. Brigade—A keelboat crew. Walt Hayward and Brad McDade, *A Glossary of American Mountain Men Terms, Words and Expressions*, <http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/amm/gloss.html> (accessed November 20, 2012).
7. There are Scandinavian members of the AMM, or SMM, meaning Scandinavian Mountain Men. See: Scandinavian Mountain Men, <http://www.scandinavianmountainmen.se/> (accessed November 20, 2012).
8. Buckskin—Tanned deerskin from which much of the clothing of the Indian and mountain man was made. If Indian-tanned, buckskin was usually a very light color, often almost white. Darker colour was usually obtained by smoking the skin over an open fire. Walt Hayward and Brad McDade, *A Glossary of American Mountain Men Terms, Words and Expressions*, <http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/amm/gloss.html> (accessed November 20, 2012).
9. For more information on the Poison River Party, see: <http://poisonriverparty.homestead.com/> (accessed November 20, 2012).
10. *Aux aliments du pays*—French for "nourishment of the land." All the free trappers and many *engagés* (trappers who worked for a company) were required to live *aux aliments du pays*, surviving by using the provisions of nature. Walt Hayward and Brad McDade, *A Glossary of American Mountain Men Terms, Words and Expressions*, <http://user.xmission.com/~drudy/amm/gloss.html> (accessed November 20, 2012).

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