

Iron Thumb

On 18 March 2017, LWC Member Julie Schott and her husband Lloyd hosted a mountain man/trapper recreation by Iron Thumb, a.k.a. Jan Manning of Iron Thumb Productions. Iron Thumb presents "performance history" which recreates a character/composite character from a specific period with authentic clothing, tools, vernacular, and perspective. Attendees enjoyed good food, beverages of their choice, and an engaging, informative, entertaining, and humorous re-enactment of a mountain man/trapper from the historic west.

Many thanks to Julie and Lloyd for hosting this event and to Jan for his performance.





An enthralled audience of club members and guests enjoying Iron Thumb's presentation and Julie's and Lloyd's beautiful home.



Among the interesting facts that Iron Thumb provided. . .

Mountain men were trappers and explorers who lived in the wilderness and were most common in the Rocky Mountains of the American west from about 1810 through the 1840's.

Virtually all trappers were after beaver pelts. Indeed, mountain men often referred to themselves as "beaver hunters". Pelts of other animals had little market value.

French trappers, i.e. trappers who came to the US from France, did not actually exist. "French trapper" referred to trappers from French-speaking parts of Canada.

The primary market for beaver pelts was for making beaver skin hats.

Trappers sold pelts at rendezvous where they used the proceeds to purchase supplies for the next trapping season. Some trappers were independent, working only for themselves, but many worked for fur companies. Individual trappers rarely became rich, but fur companies often did.

A muzzle-loaded , black powder rifle was an essential part of a trapper's gear. Iron Thumb pointed out that rifles of the era could be loaded the correct way, which involved measuring the amount of powder to be poured into the muzzle, or the wrong way—the way often shown in westerns wherein the powder is poured directly from the horn.

Rifles were loaded via the muzzle during the trapper era as bullets were not introduced until the early 1900's, well after the end of beaver trapping.

Other essential equipment included, but is not limited to: powder horn, powder, striker, knife, traps, something to provide shelter during inclement weather, tomahawk, "possibles" bag.

Making hats of beaver skin involved extensive use of mercury. Exposure to this toxic element affected the nervous system of hatters, and they developed trembles and behaviors that made them appear to be insane. The exact origin of the phrase "mad as a hatter" is not clear, but the best known mad hatter is the Hatter character in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

Trapping as a way of life diminished and eventually ended altogether as the demand for beaver skin hats died with the introduction of silk hats. Thus ended an important and colorful era in the Mountain West.



A beaver, a beaver skin hat, and a silk hat

Iron thumb with a beaver skin and a
beaver skin hat. . .



And modeling the hat.





Above: The wrong way to add gun powder to a rifle—pouring directly from the powder horn. A sure path to disaster but the “preferred” method in “authentic” western movies.

The right way to load—powder is measured using a hollow, brass tube before being poured into the musket. This process ensures that the correct amount of powder is used.



Again, thanks to Julie and Lloyd and to Iron Thumb.



IRON THUMB PRODUCTIONS

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST IN PERFORMANCE

Performance history is the art of creating a first person character to provide an interactive bridge to a specific period of history in an informative and entertaining way. Through extensive historical research and interpretive application, Iron Thumb Productions offers the finest in performance history for any audience.

Iron Thumb Productions cast of characters will carry you into the life and the life style of that character and that period of history in a manner which is at once entertaining and educational. The personal experience truly brings history alive!

Each character is carefully researched and created to provide a unique view into the world in which they lived. Period clothing, tools, vernacular and perspective give you the feel of actually transcending time.

The performance is done in character, in costume and in period. For approximately one hour you will have the experience of meeting someone from another time and experience. Questions are welcomed and photography either still or video is acceptable.

Let Iron Thumb Productions introduce you to history in a way you never had in school!

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