



*Black-on-red plaid pattern Mackinaw style cap by Métis women*

## Fashion trend 1812-2012: The Mackinaw Coat

Captain Roberts of the British Army in Fort St. Joseph (on an island near Sault Ste. Marie) hated to see his 10th Royal

Veterans go through another winter without great coats. When in November, 1811 the last hopes faded of the schooner *Hunter* arriving from Amherstburg, Captain Roberts took matters in his own hands. He wrote to his superiors in Quebec, "I am, this day, obtaining, upon my requisition to the store-keeper of the Indian department, a consignment of heavy blankets, for the purpose of making them great coats, a measure the severity of the climate strongly demands and one, I trust, the commander of the forces will not disprove of when he is informed that not a remnant remains of the coats served out to them in the year 1807 and that they have received none since." The design and sewing was accomplished by the talented Métis and white ladies of Fort St. Joseph and of neighbouring Mackinac Island—women such as Elizabeth Mitchell and her daughters.



1812 style



1942 style



2012 style

The majority of the first 40 coats were made from 3.5 point Hudson Bay blankets in colours of blue and red with a few black on red plaid. They were expertly trimmed with brass buttons, shoulder straps and fancy

pockets. When orders poured into Fort Mackinac where Roberts had moved after capturing the island in the first battle of the War of 1812, a shorter coat was designed for deep snow. The jacket was thick, double-breasted and blue at first. Very soon orders came from as far north as Port William and as far east as Penetanguishene; they were for the plaid version—a Canadian fashion statement had begun. It's never really died out since. Has it?

*Photos:*

*Mackinaw Coat 1812c [www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/on/stjoseph/plan/bulletin/02.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/on/stjoseph/plan/bulletin/02.aspx)*

*Mackinaw Jacket 1942C [www.olivedrab.com/od\\_soldiers\\_clothing\\_combat\\_ww2\\_mackinaw.php](http://www.olivedrab.com/od_soldiers_clothing_combat_ww2_mackinaw.php)*

*Mackinaw Coat 2012C in red and black plaid, [www.canadianoutdoorequipment.com/store/filson-double-mackinaw-cruiser-wool-jacket.html](http://www.canadianoutdoorequipment.com/store/filson-double-mackinaw-cruiser-wool-jacket.html)*