

Developing the Progressive Family Impression

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Developing a family impression is no different than creating one for yourself; it takes time, research, and some imagination. Careful event selection will lessen the difficulty, and with a bit of pre-planning, you and your family can maintain first person as frequently and as deeply as you like.

Children are masters of make-believe. Craft your impression well, and they'll recall all the details that slip your mind. Keep your family impression close to the details of your modern life, and the process is simplified for the children.

If you attend mainly battle events, you will need a reason to have your family so close to the front, or to a military camp—both of which are contrary to a Mother's Logic in the time period. War fronts pose obvious dangers; citizens headed the other direction as quickly as possible, whenever possible. Camps pose myriad health threats, and offer no real safety for a woman with children. Instances of families visiting while husbands were bivouacked nearby do occur, but they are not common, and should not be used as documentation for hanging out in the military areas.

Your family need not be a farm family—though large portions of the population were agrarian, there were hundreds of thousands of town and city dwellers as well! If your family tends toward the agrarian life, undertake an agrarian impression; if you tend to be city-dwellers with an industrial livelihood, prepare impressions to coordinate with that. Good “urban” impressions are under-represented in many area for which they would be appropriate; do some research and find out what is most appropriate for your given area and circumstance.

Mothers and fathers need not necessarily undertake the same impression. If Father is a soldier in a Federal unit, and the event is held in Georgia, it will be better for Mother and the children to be local residents, unrelated to their modern father. This relieves the family of inventing a reason for a Federal family to be in the deep South, in the middle of the war. As a local family, they have more reason to be near, and can undertake a rural or urban Southern impression for the event. Father might join them in civilian clothing for a portion of the activities.

Immersion events will typically give out impression profiles in the months leading up to the event. Though your family's impression may be selected for you, to reflect the actual citizens of the area at that time, you can conduct research together, and hone the impression as a cooperative group. (You may, however, find yourself loaning older children or babies to other “families” for the event, to get the right mix of family dynamics!)

Involve your children (especially those over six years old) in the planning of family impression details. Together, read books written from a child's perspective on the era (Anne Rinaldi is an excellent author for the pre-teen set); ask questions

and listen to the answers. You may be surprised by what topics fascinate your children.

The boy who adores video games may become obsessed with the telegraph; that interest can be worked into a family impression, with a boy who dreams of running off and working as a telegrapher for his favorite “side” of the war.

A boy who follows baseball stats closely may find a useful translation of that skill in keeping counts of “who's winning the war” after each battle, and the campaigns and actions of various Generals.

A girl who enjoys animals may be fascinated with the day-to-day chores of a farm child, or with cavalry horses.

A young lady who finds the army romantic might organize a sewing or knitting circle to help the soldiers, or participate in a Girl's Patriotic Chorus to inspire the surrounding community to support “our boys.”

Small children might enjoy gathering their friends, and a set of sticks, and holding “drill” and “parade.”

All children can provide an appropriate accent to historic settings simply by engaging in the natural play of childhood. Its forms have changed very little over the ages, and many games (like tag, racing, wrestling, and mud pies) seem to be instinctive.

Children, given the chance to be children in an historic setting, with the proper historic gear, will quite naturally do an excellent job of “first person” impressions. Given the background research and information, they can communicate some of the most stirring and engaging educational moments, all the while enjoying themselves tremendously.

Considerations for the Family Impression

- What is your proposed economic level?
- What does “Father” do for a living?
- Where does your historic family live?
- What is your day-to-day life like?
- How has it changed due to the war?
- Where are you currently?
- Why are you there?
- Where are you going, and what are you doing next?
- As a parent, what are your worries?
- As a child, what are your favorite and least favorite things?



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