Music, Dance, and Diversions
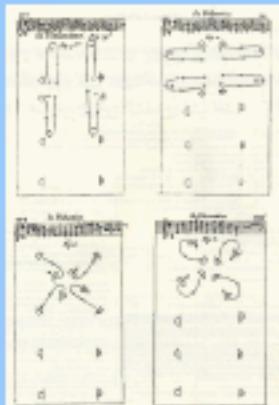

Québec

FORT ST. JOSEPH ARCHAEOLOGY

Music

Music was an important part of a young woman's education in the 18th century. Society frowned on wind instruments for ladies – they looked too disagreeable with puffed out cheeks – but approved of string instruments and vocal music. If a young woman's family had the financial resources she would learn to play the harpsichord. Violins or fiddles and guitars were far more common.

Re-enactors demonstrating 18th century dancing

18th century dancers

18th century dance steps

Dance

Dancing was very popular in New France. Even at frontier posts like Fort St. Joseph, the *habitants* wanted to learn the latest dances of Europe. In Europe and the larger towns in the New World, wealthy people hired dancing masters to teach themselves and their children the proper dance steps. Frontier settlers acquired books detailing the latest dances and how to perform them. For example, the *habitants* at Fort Michilimackinac held dances at least once a week. Priests throughout New France railed against the French love of dancing, all to no avail.

Mouth harp and bone gaming pieces found at Fort St. Joseph

"[The men were] engaged in drinking brandy by the full bowl from which they were all drunk together, that during this debauchery Boudor had been gambling against Guilhebaud [who lost] ten packs of beaver…he had good reason to judge that Guilhebaud had drunk to excess…because of the error that he had noticed that Guilhebaud made in the way he played his trump [card]…"
~ Witness testimony, Fezeret v. Boudor, 1700

Diversions

Games were popular pastimes that women and men enjoyed. Gaming pieces made of bone, similar to those used by Potawatomi women well into the 20th century, have been recovered from Fort St. Joseph. Archaeologists surmise that these were left by the wives of French fur traders from neighboring tribes. Card games were also extremely popular and, at the fur trade posts, were often accompanied by drinking and gambling.

PARIS PATTERN
French playing cards