

WOMEN'S CLOTHING OF THE 1880s.



A GUIDE TO CLOTHING ACCESSORIES, AND RESOURCES.

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What is the Purpose of Period Clothing?

For many people who are new to the world of living history, the concept of wearing wool or long dresses in the summer seems like a strange idea. On the other hand, some have the concept of it being fun to “dress up”. But what is the real purpose of period correct clothing at a living history site?

The whole concept of living history is to recreate the past to interpret in the present. This is accomplished through both verbal information and visuals. A very strong visual for a visitor is period correct clothing. In order for the interpreter to convey to the public that they are experiencing life in the past, period clothing can help set the scene. An interpreter who is accurately dressed can present quite a picture for the average visitor. This visual automatically lets the visitor know that they have been taken back in time, thus, successfully accomplishing part of our mission as a living history site. Period clothing can also encourage questions from the public, this helps satisfy some of the basic concepts of effective interpretation. We all wear clothing, and this is something that you and the visitor have in common. So, they will naturally be curious why yours looks so different.

In addition to this, it can convey quite a bit of information on our own social and economic history as well. Different period outfits can help educate the visitor on social classes and styles of the time. Thus, as a visual, a period outfit can interpret itself at times. For example, an old worn-out pair of bibbed overalls will reflect a working-class individual and a beaver skin top hat will stand out as being upper class.

In retrospect, historic clothing is part of the overall picture for the site. It helps create a period ambience and at the same time interpret everything from class to fashion.

Now that we have answered that question, we must reflect upon one more point. How accurate should we be with clothing?

Historic clothing is simply an extension of one's own interpretation. When you wear historic clothing, it becomes part of your interpretation whether you are aware of it or not. For this reason, clothing must be absolutely correct. Incorrect period clothing is no different from providing false information. For example, the battle of Gettysburg was fought in 1922! Wearing an 1830s dress with a zipper in the back! Either way, they are both incorrect. For this reason, we must make sure that our historical clothing is accurate, just like our historical information we provide. This also presents the question, “Will the visitor really know?” That is not the point, we are providing the public with correct information and they are taking our word on it. Thus, we must make sure it is true. Also, you never know, visitors will pick up on things that are not historically accurate and comment on them. Thus, wearing accurate clothing can save one from the embarrassment of a visitor pointing out that something is not period correct.

One last point to make about authentic period clothing is that sites who adhere to wearing only those garments that are accurate present a picture to the public that they are professional and take what they do seriously. The more accurate the clothing the more that this is evident.

Women's Clothing of the 1880s

Women's clothing of the 1880s saw quite a period of change. In a sense, the 1880s was a period of revolution for women's clothing. Due to the restrictiveness of fashion, a reform movement resulted. However, the real difference during this decade was the overall change in status in everyday clothing. During this period, the work dress followed the fashions to a degree and was thus given a status never before attained. Both in the paper patterns and in ready-to-wear, working dresses were available in a multitude of acceptable styles at very little cost, and those styles altered along with the high fashion, even if only in a modified manner. In this respect, the 1880s did truly usher in the modern era in women's dress.

Due to the introduction of women into the job market in office jobs, factory jobs and other positions, a woman's dress had to be adapted. There was a tremendous demand for acceptable clothing styles for working women, styles that were less complicated, easier to wear, and simpler to care for. Thus, everyday dresses became simple yet fashionable in design. Clothing styles differed in their uses and not by class distinction.

The rise of mass production and ready-made clothing and kits also made the production of clothing an easier matter. Ready made clothing was available and provided an easier way to obtain clothing. In addition, the production of dress kits greatly helped the home seamstress. These kits included the fabric, pattern, buttons, thread and accessories. The price of these kits was also quite acceptable and reasonable. Together with the number of sewing machines available, the production of fashions at home was greatly enhanced. Even women without detailed sewing skills could still find seamstresses in their town who would produce the items at a minimal cost.

Thus, fashionable yet practical clothing was readily available whether it was factory produced or sewed from a kit. This helped contribute to the changes in the women's clothing industry in the 1880s.

A. Hair:

To briefly describe some of the typical hair styles of the day, I am using an example out of *Peterson's, January 1882*. "In the matter of coiffure, the hair will be worn a good deal lower on the neck than it has been for some two seasons past, being arranged in loosely-looped braids, sometimes intermixed with curls. The style of dressing for the front hair remains unchanged (in curled bangs)."

When looking at the typical hair styles of the time, one will find the style mentioned above quite often. Typically, hair can be parted in the center or the natural part and pulled back. The simple parting of the hair was seen from the 1830s all the way up into the 20th century. On the back, hair was either curled, braided or coiled and tied up. If you have short hair, you can still accomplish this feat, by buying a hair attachment that matches your own, or making one to pin up in the back. I will gladly provide you with more information on either one. As for the bangs, there were many different ways in which they were fixed. The easiest and probably most appropriate way to fix one's bangs was to simply pull them back with a part. However, if one was to fix the bangs in a period style of the time, then you could curl them in small tight curls, which would be layered on the forehead. Quite often bangs were simply brushed up and curled with the hair on the top of one's head.

When wearing one's hair at Carriage Hill, please study the period photographs and find a style that you like. Who knows, you might find out that your hair style is already period. However, for cases of short hair, it is still possible to have a period look. You can still part your hair or do small tight curls on the front. Prepare your hair in the same manner described above. But when it comes to the back you have several options. Through some stores or wig shops, hair attachments are available. Find one that closely resembles your hair color. A hair attachment can be easily braided and prepared ahead of time. Next take a fine hair net and make a fake "bun" by filling the hair net with the coiled braid of hair. When you are done, you should have a round hair net filled with the artificial attachment. Finally, this bun can be pinned to the back of ones hair to give a look like your hair is braided and covered. It may take some work to get it to look realistic, but it will be worth the effort. Another option for older women is a simple day cap, which we have patterns for.

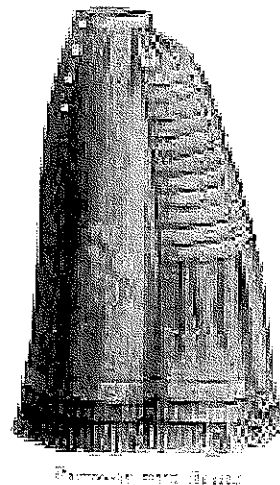
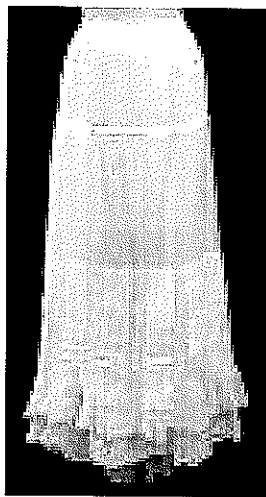
All of these different styles are easy to accomplish and will help convey that 1880s look. This in turn, will help provide a better glimpse, for the visitors, as to what a woman of the 1880s would have looked like.



B. Petticoats:

Once clothing item that was ever present was the petticoat. A petticoat was made to be worn over the bustle in order to conceal its structure and smooth the lines under the dress. Petticoats, having been for so long narrow and unstarched, became fuller and more important during the middle of the decade, and those intended for wear with trained dresses often also had trains and arrangements of flounces down the back. Thus, the petticoat had to be made much longer in back, even for wear under “round” skirts, because the huge bustle structures took up so much length. The box pleats and flounces at the back developed in 1883, into the “crinolette petticoat”, the plain front breadths of which buttoned on to the corset, while the flounced back breadth was tied round the waist outside it.

Two petticoats were still generally worn, or one with combinations; in winter the usual one of colored flannel, or one of quilted satin or sateen edged with lace. Most were still of white cotton, though drab cambric or colored flannel were at times used for everyday, and colored silk ones matched evening dresses.



C. Shoes and Stockings:

Shoes were made in many different styles in this decade, but the ankle boot is most frequently seen in the photographs. The boot now rose quite high on the ankle and was generally buttoned on the outside with a scalloped edge. Heels were generally low, quite wide, often even flat, but small 1 and 1 ½" curved heels were also worn. Boot toes were basically oval and narrow, or a bit squared off at the tip with rounded corners. A flat-heeled, unglazed kid boot not differing substantially from that worn by boys and men is frequently documented as having been worn by women who lived and worked on agricultural homesteads in the newly settled west. Even coarser adaptations were necessary in terribly cold, snowy, or even muddy weather.

Shoes for dressier wear all had higher heels, and many were made with several straps over the instep, as in the late seventies. A rather plain pump was also fashionable, and strap shoes with huge buckles and tongues were affected with formal dress.

Stockings came in many colors and were meant to match or blend with an outfit: "The finest hosiery is exhibited in plain colors, such as blue-green, india red, the olive shades, heliotrope, pale pink, garnet, pearl, blue and brown. These are in thread clocked with silk, and also in solid silk." (Demorest's, March 1881). In addition to silk, cotton or even woolen stockings would still be found quite frequently on the average working woman in the factory or farm.



THE COMPLETED SHOE

D. Day Dresses:

The 1880s marked a period of changes in women's dresses. The idea was that fashion and function could be combined. From the beginning of the decade, inexpensive alternatives were available and readymade in stores or catalogs. Sewing kits were also available that included fabric, a pattern, buttons and thread. In the 1880s working women were provided with several choices of everyday wear for housework and labor. The most common styles of dress were the typical three-piece style, though with a somewhat shorter basque, and the two-piece walking dress. With the advent of readymade clothing also came the one piece house dress with the bodice fullness gathered into a waistband, with gathered skirts and a flounce of varying width at the hem. These dresses made in summer cottons have rather narrow bishop sleeves with narrow self-cuffs and very slight gathering at the shoulder, and often plain neckbands and yokes of self-fabric, sometimes with frilled trimming. Dark wash dresses, possibly of wool, are even more plain, with simple round necklines, tight sleeves set very high on the shoulder, round waists, and plain, rather skimpy, gathered skirts, sometimes cut at ankle length for mobility. Thus, there were two to three alternatives for common dress throughout the decade, with stylistic changes evident even in work dress as fashions dictated.

However, as time moved on, there were always going to be stylistic changes in clothing. In 1882, the skirts became wider and the puff at the back became larger. Changes also occurred at this time in fabrics and colors. Nice fabrics such as silk, velvet and wool became popular. Rich dark colors, even for calicoes, were also greatly favored at this time. A rich claret, or deep purple or copper was quite the rage. In addition to the popularity of dark colors, matching colors also became quite fashionable. While they did not have to be matching fabrics, it was quite fashionable to have ones wrap, dress, and bonnet match.

By 1883, the look of broadened hips replaced the slender frontal silhouette. Stylish dress during this period featured a variety of shorter and shorter basque bodices that conformed to this line—all very tightly fitted, some cut up in a curve at the hips, some short all around, and some pointed, but most had long rounded points at front. Many bodices of this period had tight sleeves cut short on the forearm and featuring cuff or half-cuffs.

Beginning about 1887, the huge bustle seemed simply to deflate and fall back in on itself, forming a drooping set of deep folds down the back and causing the skirt to hang straight from the hips as seen from the front. The overskirt was at this time frequently set on as a separate length of material with one straight edge hanging free. The front was pleated into the side seam high at one side and draped diagonally across the body to a low set of hip tucks on the other side, and the back was arranged in several low hanging puffs. Some of these skirts omitted the drooping puffs and took up the fabric with box pleats at center back. The free straight edge of this kind of overskirt, as often seen in photographs, fell straight down behind the opposite side seam. This style appeared in everything from wool and light, printed fabrics to the cheapest gingham. Many common "round-waisted" day dresses had this kind of skirt, as evidenced by a number of photographs, and it was also common in two-piece costumes of better material.

By 1888 many daytime and walking dresses featured long, box pleated skirts that hung straight, not flared, but with plenty of material. The apron drape, still often present and

frequently shown over such a box pleated skirt, rose to a band of flat folds high across the belly, often with the outer edges pleated into the waistband at side fronts rather than into the side seams. In the back there were long drooping folds and still some bustle support. And at the end of the decade, a new kind of skirt-one that was so narrow as to interfere with walking to some extent and that had its weight tied back behind the thighs-was highly fashionable. The skirt had an interior arrangement of steel and tape for handling the back fullness, which was a fashion necessary. A formal style, its materials were usually fine wools or rich satins and brocades.

In eighties photographs all bodices appear corset-fitted, many with very high standing collars. Similarly, sleeves are set very high, with the armhole cut somewhat in from the point of the shoulder in the back, and are extremely tight-though at times there seems to be some release in the sleeves of dresses meant for active wear- and still cut short of the wrist bone. In the last year or two of the decade, an applied shoulder cap is frequently seen. Looser, sometimes even puffed, upper sleeves occasionally appear after 1887. By the 1890s, this puffed sleeve became the trademark of women's dresses and blouses.

Lastly, it is important to discuss period buttons for the 1880s. Buttons were commonly made of the following materials: glass or porcelain, jet, ornate metal, mother of pearl, cloth covered, or horn.



E. Wrappers:

More than ever throughout this decade, a wrapper was worn over the uncorseted, or lightly corseted, form as acceptable dress, even for mixed company. Wrappers made of calico, seersucker, cashmere or wool flannel and ready-made wrappers were among the first items available through mail order catalogs. The wrapper itself was a full-bodied garment that was loose and worn as a dress for hot weather comfort. However, it was not long before it was worn farther and farther from the front door.

One wrapper, the “Mother Hubbard” style, featured the familiar square yoke and gathered bodice of the true Mother Hubbard; but rather than falling free, it was fitted to a snug waistband or belted. The typical mother hubbard was a free-falling, long sleeved cotton frock gathered into a yoke. Photographs taken in the eighties show a similar type with the front fullness taken into long tucks that reach below the waist. These styles were typically worn unbelted around the house, especially for pregnancy. The Mother Hubbard was acceptable in the eighties as morning dress, but for the house only; its use as dress for hot weather comfort, however, was almost universal.

Typically, a wrapper was made out of either a solid color such as white or a calico. They were also sometimes trimmed with colored embroidery or an embroidered ruffle. The following page shows some good examples of typical wrappers.



F. Bonnets and Hats:

For those of you ladies who are interested, the following information is being provided about the topic of head coverings. Some sort of period correct head ware should be worn when one is outdoors. Head ware for ladies was both unique and diverse in the 1880s. Essentially there were two different classifications during this time period, bonnets and hats.

A bonnet was basically any kind of hat that was missing a back or a brim. The most popular style bonnet of the time was the capote. The capote was a small fancy bonnet that came in either felt or straw and could be decorated with whatever the wearer chooses. The most common bonnet was decorated with or without strings, it was extremely narrow and vertical, had no appreciable brim and had trimming high at the center front only. This style ran throughout the entire decade and became exaggerated in height toward the end.

The other most popular item worn was the hat. Hats came in all shapes and sizes and had varied brim widths. Brims range from quite wide in the summer to narrower and with one side or the back turned up in the winter. Sizes range from the modest top hat shape to the flat-topped pork pie and miniature derby.

Decorations for either type of hat were quite lavish for the 1880s. Ribbons, feathers, flowers, and plumes were all commonly seen. Ribbons were quite frequently tied or puffed and placed on one side or the front center.

One item that did exist in the 1880s was the day cap. A day cap was usually a small white cotton cap worn around the house during the day. However, the nick name for caps such as these was "Grannie Hats" as they were usually only seen on elderly ladies and were quite out of date and out of fashion.

However, it should be noted that the above items were the height of fashion for the time, and probably would not have been seen on an average farm wife. More or less, some sort of work bonnet would have been used. A simple work bonnet would have been both practical and comfortable. The most common type of work bonnet, or everyday bonnet was the slat bonnet. A slat bonnet was worn from the 1850s up through the turn of the century. A slat bonnet consisted of a long narrow front with a small veil hanging down on the back. A slat bonnet was made with stiff wooden or paste board "slats" sewn into it. Thus, it could retain its shape. Slat bonnets were a very common item and were worn by middle to lower class women when outdoors or working in the garden.

Day caps and slat bonnets are an easy one-night project for those of you with some sort of sewing experience. They are both practical and nice to wear on a sunny day. If you are interested in either one, please contact me and I can provide you with a pattern or direct you to where one can be had.



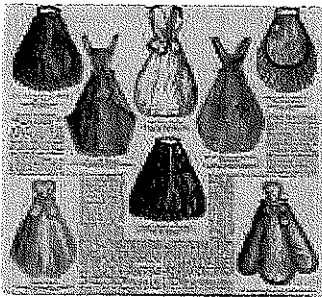
G. Aprons:

The most practical and common everyday item for women was the apron. An apron was a very common item that could be found in every household. The whole purpose for the apron was to protect and to prevent dirt, water, etc. from soiling one's dress. Aprons were used for many different reasons as well. They were a multi-functional item that could be used for carrying goods, cleaning, and other logical uses.

The most found apron of the 1880s was the simple tie apron. This apron would be commonly found throughout the nineteenth century. This would be a simple apron made of muslin or cotton with strips to be tied behind ones back. Most often these aprons were simple in construction and design. However, with the advent of fashionable influence on practical clothing, some variations do appear. Some of these tie aprons do appear with scalloped edges all ways around, various tucks at the middle and bottom, and lace trim at the pockets and hem. Embroidery with the tucks was also quite common. These aprons are also found with either one or two pockets or no pockets at all. The pocket could be trimmed in lace and embroidery as well.

Also found in the 1880s were longer aprons that extended above the waist. The most common was the pinner apron which was found all throughout the 1800s. This apron would have a square of fabric attached at the waist that would pin to the dress above the chest area. However, aprons which extended around the neck were becoming more prevalent. Some of these aprons buttoned around the neck, pinned at the shoulders, or extended to the back of the waist (either by buttoning, or as one piece).

Most often an apron would have been made of muslin or cotton and would have been made out of white, colored, or printed fabric.



Period Clothing and Sewing Resources

This is a compilation of sources for period clothing, fabrics, patterns and goods. I am not endorsing the quality or workmanship of any item or materials or recommending any particular supplier or manufacturer over another. However, the following merchants have been listed for your convenience.

Suppliers of Fabric, Patterns and Textiles:

Amazon Vinegar and Pickling Works/Dry Goods (a wide variety of items)
1-812-852-1780 <https://www.amazondrygoods.com/>

G. Gedney Godwin, Sutler of Mount Misery
P.O. Box 100 Valley Forge, PA. 19481 (215) 783-0670 <https://www.gggodwin.com/>

Kannik's Korner, Fritz and Kathleen Kannik-Books on Plain Sewing
<http://www.kannikskorner.com/>

Past Patterns (a wide variety of period patterns)
Dayton, Ohio <https://www.pastpatterns.com/>

P & B Textiles (colonial, 1830s, and 1880s reproduction fabric lines sold)
www.pbtex.com

Vintage and Vogue- Carries a full line of historic fabrics. Check the fabrics for the Cochecho Line from P+B Textiles.
<http://www.shopvintageandvogue.com/>

Ready Made Goods

Blockade Runner
1027 Bell Buckle/Wartrace Rd. Wartrace Tn. 37183 (931-389-6294) <http://blockaderunner.com/>

Dirty Billy's Hats (reproduction hats)
<http://www.dirtybillyshats.com/>

Jas. Townsend and Son (ready made goods)
<https://www.townsend.us/>

River Junction Trade Company
312 Main Street, McGregor, Iowa. 52157 1-866-259-9172
<https://www.riverjunction.com/>

Smoke and Fire Trading Co.(ready made goods and books)
<https://www.smoke-fire.com/>

Gentleman's Emporium (Wide variety of clothing and accessories)
<https://www.historicalemporium.com/victorian.php>

Period Shoes

Fugawee (Men's and Women's Shoes and Boots)
<https://www.fugawee.com/>

Period Buttons and Accessories

Wooded Hamlet Designs (ribbons, thread, trims)
<http://www.woodedhamlet.com/>

Burnley and Trowbridge (Historic reproduction notions)
<https://burnleyandtrowbridge.com/>

