



*Garibaldis, Engageantes & Cages:  
American Fashions of the  
Civil War Era  
1840-1870*

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**Dr. Karin J. Bohleke**

**with additional entries by  
Kevin Bowman and Martha McCain**

**Shippensburg University Fashion Archives and Museum**

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# Acknowledgements

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**Front cover illustration:** 1/6 plate ambrotype of unidentified woman dressed for winter weather in a magnificent silk velvet mantle trimmed with watered silk ribbon. Fur cuffs provide added warmth. Velvet bonnet trimmed with roses and black Chantilly lace; striped silk ribbon ties deliberately arranged to display jewelry to advantage. White eyelet, known as broderie anglaise, dress collar laid over the mantle. Plaid dress, possibly wool or a silk-and-wool blend. Gold-tinted rings and broach. Circa 1855-1858, photographer unknown.

**Back cover illustration:** Hand-tinted carte de visite photograph of unidentified young man, no backmark. The young gentleman represents the standard in professional and middle- to upper-class attire of the early 1860s: a well-fitted frock coat of fine black wool with a subtle sheen and dark trousers, usually black, with a loose and comfortable cut. Although not visible, he would also be wearing a waistcoat. His white shirt has a standing collar; fold-down collars were also fashionable at the time. His cravat is quite small: such was the trend after the oversized excesses of the late 1850s in which cravats could stretch from shoulder to shoulder. A discreet pin adorns the cravat. Square-toed black leather boots. At the young man's feet, one can see the base for the neck clamp, designed to help the sitter remain perfectly still.

All catalog ambrotypes, cartes de visite, daguerreotypes, stereoviews, etc. courtesy of K. and B. Bohleke unless otherwise indicated.

# Preface

## Introduction

The American Civil War represents one of the most engrossing and debated periods in our country's history. Endless analyses of the politics, battles, and their consequences focus on civilian and military leaders, often minimizing or overlooking the ordinary citizen. Furthermore, the limited color range of surviving sepia-toned and gray-scale photographs, so many of which are anonymous, can unintentionally create the impression that the civilians were equally as bland. The actual situation was dramatically different. The clothes on the pages that follow reveal a lively and intensely colorful life in which vivid beauty is of essential importance, even in the most practical and everyday items. The exhibit takes the viewer on a life journey, beginning with courtship in that most social of places, the ballroom. Marriage, pregnancy, and children follow, with the changing garment fibers for different seasons marking the rhythms of daily life, and ending with mourning attire's public display of inner sorrow.

It has been my pleasure to prepare for you this journey through Civil War life as illustrated by its clothing, and I hope that you will come away with a fresh appreciation for the styles worn by the vibrant people who suffered through such turbulent times. They were the United States' other "greatest generation."

Dr. Karin J. Bohleke  
Director



# The United States: United No More

By Kevin Bowman



*Cartes de visite photographs of Second Lieutenant Thomas B. Webb (1839-1868) of Cincinnati, Ohio. Above: Webb's frock coat fits so perfectly that it is most likely custom tailored. It includes an 1851 regulation high-standing collar. His sword is non-regulation, but is nonetheless clearly based on the M1850 foot officer's sword and may be a contract*

*item or European import. He is holding a M1858 Hardee hat with the ostrich plume visible on the left side; his black or blue hat cord is not distinguishable. Webb's patent leather sword belt gleams even brighter than the bullion embroidery on his shoulder boards. He may be wearing an Ohio State buckle, but high magnification resolves no additional details. Note the officer's piping on the leg of his trousers. Below: Webb has changed his wardrobe slightly and is holding a M1861 McDowell forage cap. He has retained his M1851 line officer's frock coat (worn by lieutenants and captains only).*

*His shirt features a turn-down collar and a natty black silk cravat.*

*S1982-32 Cree*



The rumble of cannon fire in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina on April 12, 1861, marked the beginning of an unprecedented four-year onslaught in the United States. The conflict would change forever the lives of millions of Americans, as well as disrupt the social, economic and political structure of the young nation. The ensuing alliances that split the country into Union and Confederate states caused former United States Army comrades and brothers-in-arms to face one another as enemies on the battlefield. In some instances, brothers fought brothers and fathers even met sons as enemies. Nearly ten percent of the American population—three million men—fought as soldiers in the Union and Confederate Armies. By the time the last shots were fired, over 650,000 of those soldiers had perished from diseases or battle wounds.

Economically, the nation would be changed forever. The southern economy crumbled before the Union Navy's overwhelming stranglehold on southern cities, ports and trade routes. Farms stripped of resources and labor forced southern land owners to start anew. Sherman's infamous "March to the Sea" destroyed the remaining southern infrastructure. In sharp contrast, the Civil War launched a multi-decade rise in industrialism in the North that was fueled by a seemingly inexhaustible labor supply of both citizens and continuing waves of immigrants.

Throughout the war, many towns in both the North and South suffered a near-depletion of the adult male population after they had mustered multiple regiments that were frequently decimated by disease and battle. As a result, women suffered on the home front as circumstances forced them to take over the roles of caretaker and supporter of the family in the absence of their husbands, fathers and sons. Consequently, the war also fostered women's limited entrance into a more public sphere of social activity through voluntary and mutual aid societies. Women enjoyed greater opportunities for patriotic activism though a variety of nursing and military support groups.

African-Americans experienced the most significant and dramatic change as a result of the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and thereby eventually freed over four million enslaved African-Americans in the South, drastically altering the economy and society of the southern United States. By the close of the war, approximately 180,000 freed African-American men had fought as American soldiers, defining—since these men lacked US citizenship—the highest achievement of manhood. The Reconstruction Amendments—the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth, respectively establishing

freedom, citizenship and the right to vote for male African-Americans—were hard-won rights in the struggle for full equality.

The war brought many technological advances and policies to the American military. The Civil War, as a result, has frequently been termed the “war of firsts:” the first use of repeating firearms, the first successful submarine, the first use of railroads for massed military mobilization, the first ironclad ships, and the first awarding of Medals of Honor. One of the most striking aspects of the war was the first published photographs capturing scenes of battlefield dead, shattering romantic and heroic delusions about the nature of war and exposing the nation and the world to its horrors and brutality.

The first and most significant capitulation of the Confederate armies occurred on April 9, 1865, when General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. With this admission of defeat, President Abraham Lincoln, who had called for “a new birth of freedom” in November 1863, witnessed one of the first assurances of his nation’s reunification. Tragically, he was mortally wounded five days later by assassin John Wilkes Booth. America therefore entered the Reconstruction era lacking the leader who for four years had struggled for its unity.

The American Civil War sowed misery for virtually all, from the President to the most ordinary American families. The conflict not only cost the nation 650,000 individuals, but it also returned countless other maimed and psychologically damaged Americans to homes disrupted by four years of division, hardship and war. Arguably, unlike any other event in American history, the Civil War fully involved and forever altered this nation.



*Cartes de visite photographs of Lieutenant Webb’s family. Top right: his wife, Mary Gordon Webb, in full-length winter coat with pagoda sleeves. Velvet bonnet trimmed with grasses, ribbon bows and striped silk ties. Mary is carrying a fur muff.*

*Lower right: Mary’s sister, Anna Belle Gordon, is very fashionable in a checked Garibaldi blouse that has the sheen of silk. Note that the sleeves are cut on the bias. Detachable collar and cuffs, long ribbon cravat, and neat ribbon belt. Her skirt, probably wool, has a set-in band of the same bias-cut silk as her Garibaldi. Her skirt hem, approximately 2 inches off the ground, is protected by a wool hem braid. Both photos ca. 1861-1863.*

*S1982-32 Cree*



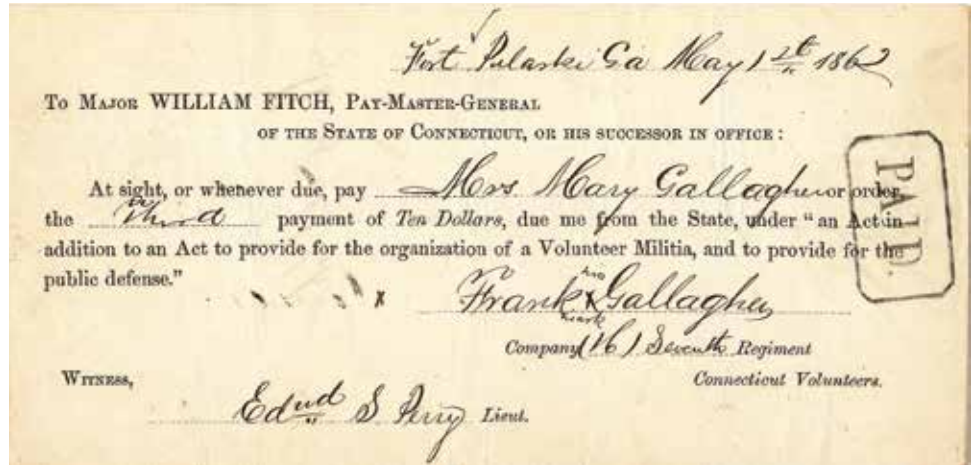


***“I hope you will come out square with the Gov and get all your pay for you need it.”***

Sarah Barrett King in a letter to her husband, Gettysburg master tailor William T. King, December 19 [1863]. King enlisted in Company B of the Adams County Cavalry, which later became Company B of the 21st Pennsylvania Cavalry. He mustered out in 1864.

*King family file, courtesy of the Adams County Historical Society.*

Soldiers could arrange for their wives to receive their pay, as was the case for Mrs. Mary Gallagher (right). But as Sarah King indicated, bureaucratic error could leave soldiers and their families bereft of income, often for lengthy periods. Commentary on King's efforts to receive his pay occupies many of Sarah's surviving 1863-1864 letters, as do her financial struggles. In the same December 19 letter cited above, she writes in an unpunctuated rush: “I am afraid we will have a dull Christmas at our house unless I get the money I expect I would like to have a turkey I suppose that is out of the question. we [sic] have nothing good since you were home living on a small allowance you speak of losing your appetite which I think is a fine thing especially if you come home as every thing is so dear and scarce that people can hardly live.”



Above left: Alfred W. Converse of Company C, 25th Conn. Infantry, which mustered in on November 11, 1862 in Hartford, CT (where this photo was taken), and mustered out August 26, 1863. Converse is a 1st sergeant in the photo; he earned his first promotion to Second Lieutenant February 11, 1863. By the end of his service he had been promoted to First Lieutenant. He was wounded May 28, 1863, at Port Hudson.

Above center: Two friends are photographed together in New Haven, CT. Charles B. Andrews (right) of Groton, CT joined Co. C of the 21st Regiment Connecticut Infantry on August 9, 1862. He was wounded May 16, 1864, at Drewry's Bluff, VA, and subsequently died on June 8. William Brown (left) of Derby, CT enlisted in Company K of the 9th Regiment Connecticut Infantry on June 2, 1862. He enlisted as a private and by 1863 he had been promoted to sergeant. He died on active duty on May 11, 1864.

Above right: An unidentified and confident first sergeant poses while in Hartford, CT.

Photographs and receipt of pay courtesy of B. Bohleke

# Slaves, Fashion and Fashion's Slaves

The question of slavery was a key issue fueling the “States’ Rights” debate that ultimately led to the Civil War. In the world of the fashion and clothing press, such heated debates rarely disturbed genteel readers. The two leading Philadelphia fashion journals for women, *Peterson’s Magazine* and *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, avoided such unpleasant topics as much as possible, focusing instead on light fiction, informative and factual articles, sewing projects, recipes, household and childcare hints, and the latest fashion news from Paris. In copying plates directly from the French journal *Les Modes Parisiennes*, *Peterson’s* left the uncomfortable topic of slavery out of its fashion plates altogether, as the French plates did not depict extraneous figures. *Godey’s*, however, combined multiple images from different French journals, created anecdotal scenes, thereby “Americanizing” them: consequently, African-American slaves/servants appear in rare engravings.



*Godey’s published this hand-colored plate in February, 1859. Each outfit is described in its essential detail, including that of the little girl in the white dress holding a valentine. Conspicuously absent is a description of the neatly-dressed African-American boy delivering a note to his mistress, who reaches for it while utterly ignoring him. Whether he is a free black in the North or a slave in the South is left diplomatically unspecified. But in either case, the noticeable silence and his diminutive stature both reflect his low social position.*

*Fashion plate courtesy of B. & K. Bohleke*





Godey's published this steel-cut engraving in October, 1852, and entitled it "Oh Dear! Oh Deer!" The accompanying description reads: "We would call attention to the artistic and picturesque grace of this whole engraving, making it quite as valuable as picture as a representative of tasteful fashions [. . .] the half shy, half delighted air of the child, the admirable figure of the negro nurse in her striped Madras handkerchief, and the pleased interest of the young mother, make a charming group. As it is, it combines, with this grace, southern fashions for October." The nurse's suitable attire warrants the following summary: "The nurse has a brown stuff dress, white apron and neck-handkerchief, with a brilliant Madras twisted about her head." By referring to her uniquely in terms of her specialization, Godey's successfully dodged the question of whether or not this southern nursemaid was enslaved or free. Her clothing is entirely utilitarian, which is expected for the time because of her job, and it clearly lacks the expense and fashionable qualities of the mother's clothing.

Fashion plate courtesy of B. & K. Bohleke

African-American Sarah A. Emory, born ca. 1844, was photographed by J. H. Bostwick of Bristol, PA, sometime between August 1864 and August 1866, as determined by the revenue stamp on the back of the photo. The 1880 census indicates that she was born in Pennsylvania, like her mother, but that her father was from Delaware. Like many of her peers, both white and black, her occupation was "Keeping House," in other words, a housewife. In both the 1870 and 1880 census records, she resided in New Castle, DE. Although well dressed, Sarah is not up-to-date by the general standards of the mid-1860s. The buttons on her bodice fronts had been a staple trim throughout the 1820s, 30s, and reappeared in 50s; this decoration finally fell out of favor during the war years. It would have been a simple matter to update the gown by removing them, leaving the non-functional decorative buttons down the center front. Interestingly, the bodice center front closure has the unusual feature of a contrasting piped edging. Sarah's sleeves are also out of date: the generously-cut sleeves of the late 1850s and early 1860s had become obsolete by the war's end. They were replaced by the narrower and more tailored two-piece coat sleeve. It would not have been difficult to remove the sleeves, pick them apart, restyle, and reinsert them, yet she chose not to do so. A wonderful cage crinoline supports her generous skirts, but neither is of the fashionable elliptical shape. She wears a beautiful brooch, a belt with a light printed design, a collar, and a lovely set of undersleeves. Perhaps sentimental, not financial, reasons prevented her from restyling her gown; unfortunately, we will never know.

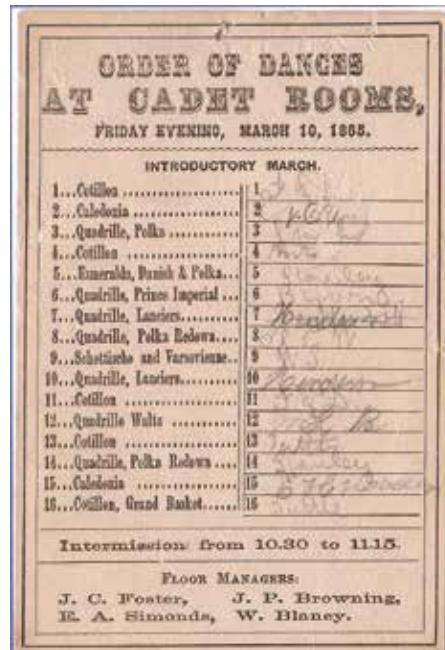




# On With the Dance!



Dancing was an American pastime in which all classes of society—rich and poor, slave and free—participated. Only certain conservative religious groups forbade dancing; for the rest of society, balls, hops, dancing parties, frolics and carpet dances were an essential ingredient for having fun and even courting. The international polka craze of the mid-1840s had finally legitimized the closed ballroom position, thereby opening the door for the acceptance of other couple dances such as the waltz, schottische, and mazurka, especially among the younger generation. Beloved group dances could still occupy anywhere from one to two-thirds of dance cards. Quadrilles in particular were extremely popular, but reel and circle formations also made frequent appearances. Balls were organized throughout the Civil War years to raise funds and soldiers' morale. Soldiers even danced with each other to pass the time and maintain their skills for those moments when they would have the opportunity to "trip the light fantastic toe" with a young lady. Appropriate formal masculine ballroom attire limited a civilian male's options to black tails, a white or black waistcoat, a white or black cravat, black trousers, and white or lemon-colored gloves. Women had far greater possibilities: light colors were generally preferred, particularly for young ladies, as they gave a light and airy appearance suitable for dancing.



Surviving dance cards and related ephemera provide a wonderful glimpse into social life and customs and even the engravers' art in the mid-nineteenth century.

Courtesy of B. and K. Bohleke





*From left to right:*

*Sheer aqua wool gauze and silk-satin ballgown, ca. 1860-1865, courtesy of B. Manifold*

*Black wool tailcoat ca. 1860s, courtesy of B. McIntosh, shown with black dotted silk vest worn by Mr. S. Rambo ca. early 1860s, S1985-83-110 Stewart*

*Pink silk taffeta, net and lace ballgown, ca. 1866-1868, courtesy of B. Manifold*

*Black wool tailcoat ca. 1870, courtesy of B. & K. Bohleke, shown with ivory silk tambour-embroidered man's vest ca. 1848-1852, S1982-64-282 Wm. Penn*

## Here Comes the Bride

When Queen Victoria married her cousin Prince Albert on February 10, 1840, her simple cream silk-satin wedding dress made a wedding in white every young nineteenth-century woman's dream. However, factors such as economy, haste, necessity or practicality often encouraged young women to set aside the ideal and to choose a colored wedding gown which could be worn on other occasions afterwards. In the midst of preparing their trousseau, brides-to-be often used their needle skills to embroider a fine article of clothing for their intended: braces/suspenders were a common gift, and husbands frequently preserved their wedding vests with care.



*White did not photograph well in the mid-nineteenth century and photographer F. Gutekunst hand-tinted the portrait of this lovely 1860s Philadelphia bride with a sure, yet fine touch.*



*John N. Furber wore this beautifully hand-embroidered silk waistcoat for his wedding in 1857.  
S2004-01-074 Thompson*



*Above, left: A Maryland bride wore this sumptuous silk-satin gown ca. 1870. The elaborate confection consists of a trained skirt, an overskirt, a belt supporting a large bow at the center back, and low front-button closing bodice. Imitation orange blossoms and netting trim all the pieces. The illusion veil survived in surprisingly good condition.*

*Above, right: Records indicate that Helen Virginia Hanson Hart wore the brown warp-printed silk plaid dress for her wedding on July 10, 1860.*

*Below, right: A mid-1860s wedding party poses before a church door. Frequently, bridesmaids wore dresses nearly identical to the bride's, leading many today to the false conclusion that the photo documents a double- or triple-wedding.*

*Ivory wedding gown courtesy of B. Manifold  
Brown silk taffeta wedding gown S1991-45-001 Darnell, on exhibit with taupe wool mantle ca. 1857-1860, S1982-64-043 Wm. Penn, and broderie anglaise undersleeves courtesy of B. Manifold*





## Unmentionables



*The white underpetticoat was deliberately left off this mannequin to show the chemise and to provide a full view of the corset.*

*Knitted socks ca. 1850-1870 courtesy of M. Wells*

*Ivory kid leather shoes ca. 1840-1860, S2004-01-001 Thompson*

*Chemise ca. 1860s, S1982-32-003 Cree*  
*Corset ca. 1850s-1860s courtesy of K. Krewer*

*Covered sprung-steel cage crinoline ca. 1857-1863*  
*courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park*

*Hand-embroidered broderie anglaise overpetticoat ca. 1850s-1860s courtesy of B. Manifold*

*Undersleeves ca. 1855-1862 courtesy of B. Manifold*

For men, underwear was a simple matter in the mid-nineteenth century: a shirt absorbed bodily oils and perspiration, and they were cut quite long, frequently reaching almost to the knees. This generous length makes more sense to modern minds once it is understood that cotton, linen or flannel drawers (long johns are the modern descendant) were entirely optional for the nineteenth-century male. Calico shirts are well attested, and white shirts were also ideal because they could be bleached and starched as needed without fading. Collars were often detachable; thus an element that soils more can be washed separately. Furthermore, as a collar wears out more quickly than the rest of the shirt, it is easier to replace.

For women, underpinnings were far more complex. An off-the-shoulder chemise next to the body was the first and absolutely essential layer, and had the same function as a man's shirt. Women made or purchased them literally by the dozen, and they could be quite simple or exquisitely embroidered and trimmed. They survive in large quantities and are often mistaken for nightgowns. Split-crotch drawers were optional for women also; they were a relatively recent innovation in the feminine underwear department, and many women who had grown up without them did not wish to begin wearing them. They were far more common among younger women. A corset or stay was worn over the chemise; in this way, the more expensive corset remained cleaner longer, and the chemise kept the corset's lacings from digging into the wearer's skin. The corset created the required neat waistline and had the same supporting function as a modern bra. It also supported the waistbands and additional garments. A white calf-length underpetticoat was worn over the corset; in cold weather a wool flannel or quilted underpetticoat of similar length would be worn over the white one. As of 1857, sprung-steel cage crinolines liberated women from the weight of several layers of overpetticoats which were worn to create a fashionably full skirt. One or two full overpetticoats would then be worn over the cage. Corset covers, also known as "petticoat bodies" had come into usage, but were not considered essential as they were only truly necessary under unlined sheer summer dresses. Other common underwear items included detachable collars and cuffs, chemisettes (their modern descendant is known as a dickey), and detachable undersleeves (held to the arms by elastics or strings or basted to the dress sleeve linings). Ready-made stockings were widely available: they were machine-knitted and finished by hand. Of course women still hand-knitted stockings. In either case, garters fastening either above or below the knee held up a woman's hosiery.



Above: Benjamin Herr of West Lampeter Township, Lancaster, wore this fine linen shirt to his wedding in 1844. S1987-37-003 Herr and Moyer

Right: A bridal trousseau often contained matched sets of lingerie: in this case, the chemise, nightgown and drawers, all with the same beautiful embroidery pattern, survived together—a very rare occurrence. Courtesy of M. Wells



Below, left: Ca. mid-1860s corset with purple flossing. The corset shows no signs of wear and is in fact so diminutive that it may be a half-scale merchandise sample. Courtesy of B. Manifold



Below, right: Hand-embroidered cuffs show the exquisite needlework of the mid-nineteenth century. S1981-14-060 Bohrer-Hosfelt





## Baby Makes Three and Comfortable Attire

When in the course of natural events, a nineteenth-century woman found herself in “*delicate health*” and needed to “*conceal the figure*” without being “*dowdy*” (to use the euphemistic terminology from the April 1867 issue of *The Lady's Friend* magazine, whose accompanying illustration showed a young woman from the back only), her clothing of course needed adaptation. Extensive alterations on surviving dresses show that they were routinely resized: darts were let out or eliminated altogether, panels inserted into side seams, and so on. Such changes could easily accommodate the early stages of pregnancy and eventually allow a woman back into the dress after giving birth. Intimate topics such as pregnancy and ensuing wardrobe needs were avoided; however, surviving dresses known as “wrappers” show that they could be and were easily adapted for maternity wear. Loose-fitting and adjustable via internal linings, wrappers were actually comfortable morning, invalid, and relaxed at-home wear for women of all social classes and marital status. It was possible to wear them with or without a corset and throughout all stages of pregnancy and recovery. Nineteenth-century men, too, had their comfortable undress equivalent: the dressing gown and smoking cap. Typically made of wool or cotton, the brilliant colors and exuberant patterns are a clear illustration of the narrow acceptable color range and style palette for men of the twenty-first century.



*Because it was such intimate clothing, women were rarely photographed in wrappers that are clearly identifiable as such. The folds in the contrasting bands clearly show that her ribbon belt controls the loose fabric at the waistband; this is typical of wrappers. These long vertical bands were a particularly common trim on such garments; in this case the wrapper is most likely printed wool trimmed with velvet. Carte de visite photograph, no backmark or identification.*



*Man's dressing gown, ca. 1850s-1860s, printed wool with machine-quilted contrasting cuffs and lapels. Striped printed cotton lining.*

*Courtesy of C. Schmitt*





*The splendid blue silk gown began its existence ca. 1859-1860 as a day dress with a slight V-neckline. When the round or jewel neckline became more fashionable, Mary Traut filled in the space, carefully matching the fabric to make the alteration less noticeable. The dress may have also had large sleeves, such as the popular pagoda form, when it was first made. Then Mary transformed her day dress into an adjustable wrapper: she let out the darts and removed the boning and waistline piping. Next she created casings in each bodice front waistline into which she ran two cords, allowing the gown to be loosened or tightened readily. She also basted in two internal white cotton support bands that could be overlapped and pinned in place over the abdomen as needed. The tailored coat sleeves date the final incarnation of the dress to ca. 1864 or later, when this narrow sleeve style dominated the fashion scene.*

*Courtesy of O. MacMillan*

*When this bold 1840s printed cotton wrapper was purchased, it still had internal lining lacings to adjust it for pregnancy.*

*Courtesy of C. Schmitt*

# COTTON WRAPPER OR BREAKFAST DRESS - EARLY 1840'S

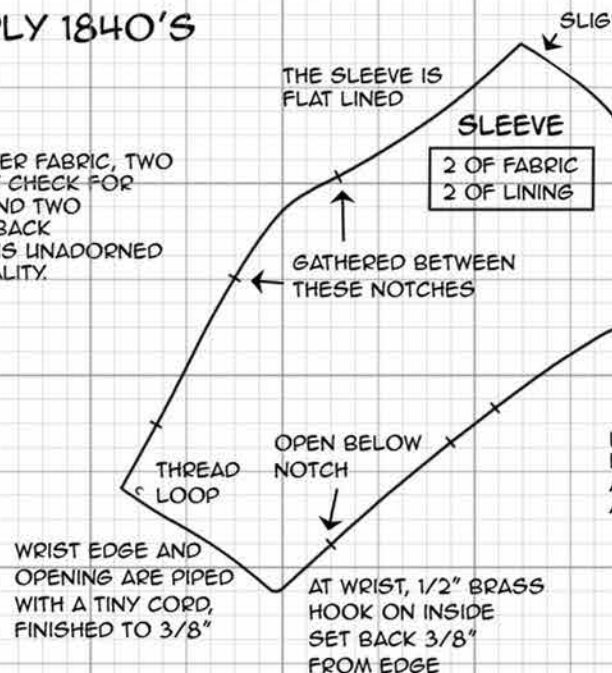
SHIPPENSBURG UNIVERSITY FASHION ARCHIVES AND MUSEUM  
S1991-4 5-352 DARNELL

THIS SIMPLE COTTON WRAPPER IS MADE OF SEVEN DIFFERENT FABRICS - THE OUTER FABRIC, TWO DIFFERENT COTTON PRINTS (BOTH OBVIOUSLY PRE-USED) AS HEM-FACING, A TINY CHECK FOR SLEEVE LINING, A PLAIN WHITE FABRIC PIECED INTO THE LINING OF ONE SLEEVE, AND TWO OFF-WHITE FABRICS - ONE A TWILL WEAVE AND ONE A DOBBY - TO MAKE UP THE BACK BODICE AND BELT LINING. EVEN THE PIECES ARE PIECED - AND THEN MENDED. THIS UNADORNED GARMENT WAS MADE FOR WORK AND ITS UNSEEN PARTS ARE A MARVEL OF FRUGALITY.

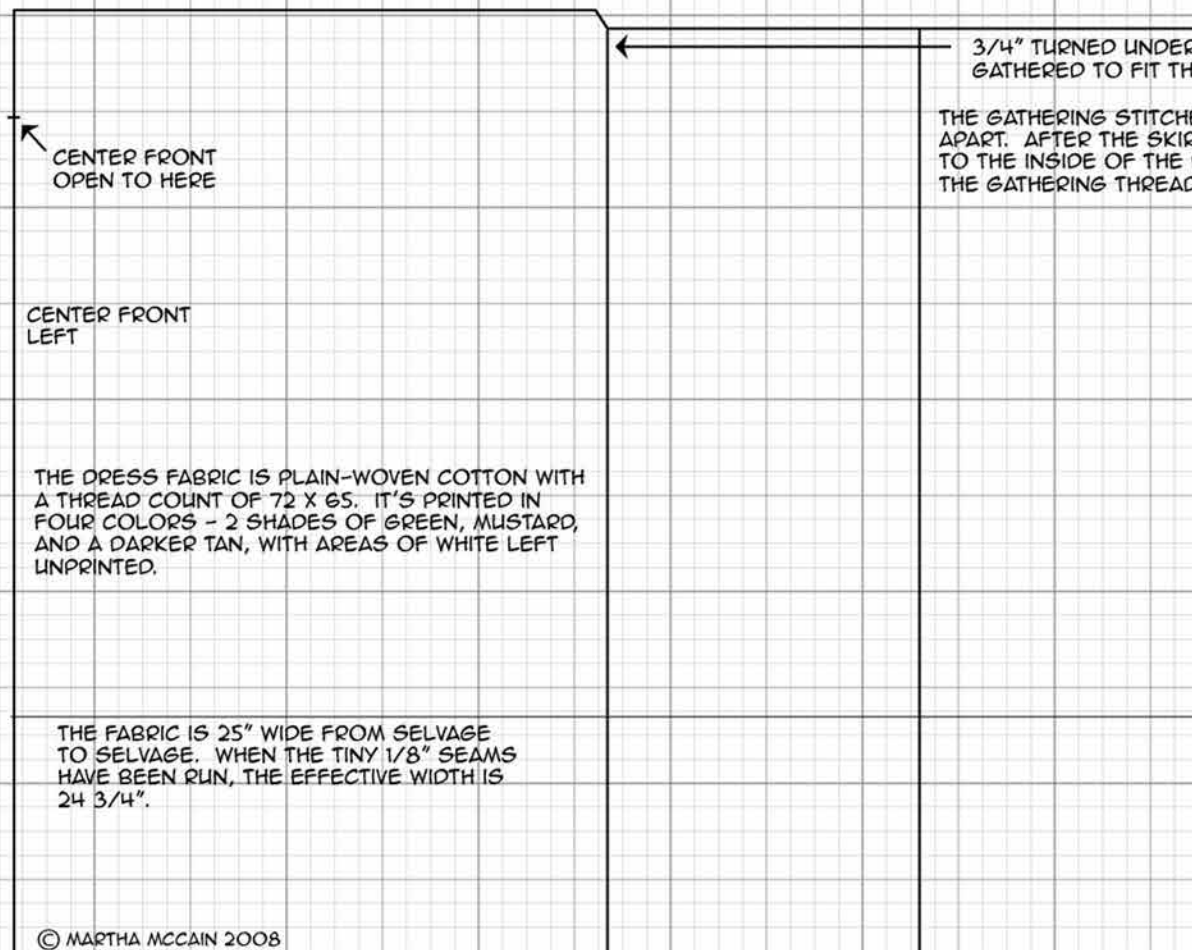
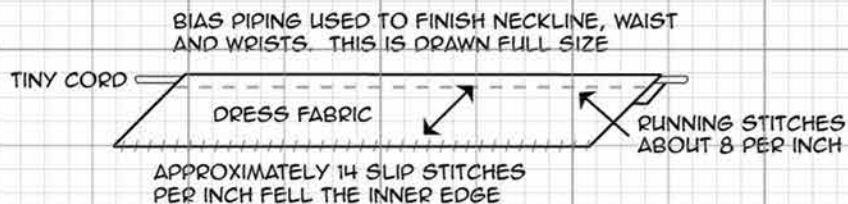
KNOWN AS A MORNING WRAPPER, MORNING ROBE, MORNING DRESS, BREAKFAST DRESS OR ROBE DE CHAMBRE, AN UNBONED GARMENT OF THIS SHAPE - WITH A FITTED BACK AND FLOWING FRONT - WAS MEANT TO BE WORN AT HOME. IT COULD BE THROWN ON WITHOUT A CORSET, AND WAS A STAND-BY FOR INVALIDS AND THE EXTREMELY PREGNANT.

THIS PARTICULAR WRAPPER IS UNUSUAL IN THAT IT HAS A HALF-BELT BUILT INTO THE STRUCTURE OF THE GARMENT. THE LONG POINT OF THE BELT MADE A NOD TO THE SHAPE OF STYLISH BODICES. THE BELT, BEING LACED, WAS HIGHLY ADJUSTABLE. IT ALSO CONTROLLED THE VOLUMINOUS FOLDS OF FABRIC FALLING FROM THE SHOULDER GATHERS, ADDING TO THE GARMENT'S PRACTICALITY.

THOUGH THE BASIC SHAPE OF A WRAPPER REMAINED THE SAME FOR MANY DECADES IN THE 19TH CENTURY, THE LONG TIGHT SLEEVES WITH GATHERS AT THE ELBOW, THE LENGTH OF THE CENTER BACK SEAM AND THE LENGTH AND PLACEMENT OF THE SHOULDER SEAMS DATE THIS "BREAKFAST DRESS" TO THE EARLY 1840'S.

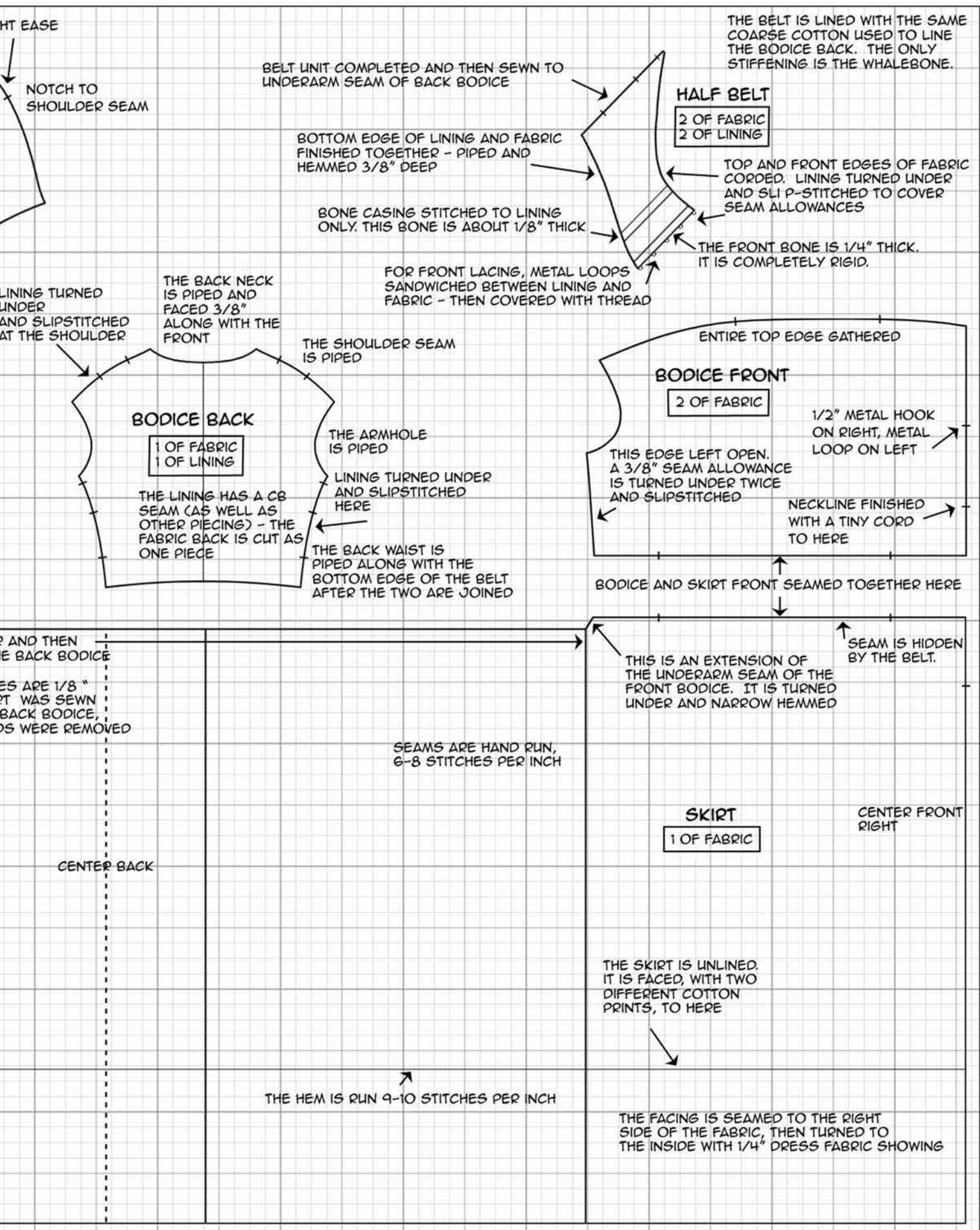


SCALE: 1/8" (ONE SQUARE) = 1"  
NO SEAM ALLOWANCES INCLUDED



© MARTHA MCCAIN 2008







# An 1840's Wrapper — Pretty But Practical

*By Martha McCain*

Starting the day was no simple matter for a lady of the 1840's, as previously discussed. This is the era before the invention of the front-closing busk, so she had to lace a corset through up to 36 eyelets all located in the back. No wonder the wrapper was a beloved garment. This unstructured "breakfast dress" was acceptable without a corset. Many elaborately trimmed wrappers were shown in the pages of fashion magazines, but the busy housewife was glad to pull on a serviceable model such as this example. She could cover her uncombed hair with a starched cap and then, suitably attired, dash to the kitchen to get breakfast ready for the family.



*See centerfold (pages 18-29) for the wrapper pattern.*



## Made At Home, To Be Worn At Home

This wrapper was made by a busy, frugal woman with an eye for style. Its attractive silhouette and snappy fabric catch our attention 170 years after its maker felled the last piece of piping. Only on careful examination can we see that this seamstress composed the inside of her wrapper with scraps we would use for dust rags. Portions of the hem facing show creases and stitch marks from a former garment. The lining of both cuffs is a small blue check. Only when you turn the garment inside-out do you see that most of one sleeve is lined with a totally different fabric. The visible part of the back bodice is cut decidedly at an angle. Was this somehow making a pattern fit on the fabric or was the dressmaker just exhausted and cross-eyed from so much piecing?





## Boy or Girl?



Throughout much of the nineteenth century, there was little to distinguish by gender the attire of children under the age of four, particularly to the modern eye. Infants were dressed in long white gowns frequently misidentified as christening gowns today. The length kept an infant's feet and legs covered and warm, no matter how much the child wriggled. As in the case of adult underwear, white was the practical choice as it could be bleached as needed, but surviving calico dresses show that babies did have some colorful clothing. Once the child became mobile, the dresses were shortened. Little boys wore stays and dresses until the age of about four or five. Then they were breeched and began wearing trousers or knickerbockers which were buttoned to their shirts to maintain as neat an appearance as one can achieve with an active little boy. Since little fingers could be clumsy with the buttons when in a hurry, a convenient opening was concealed in the fly placket. Little girls wore dresses all their lives; as they grew up, the hemline was progressively lowered until they eventually wore long dresses like their mothers. Little boys shed their stays when they were breeched; little girls, in contrast, continued to wear stays with progressively more cording and boning until they were in fully boned figure-shaping corsets upon reaching full development. The children above are all unidentified: from left to right, the first is a boy, the second is a girl from Reading, PA, the third is a girl, and the fourth is a boy from Boston. Their hair is the most distinguishing characteristic in determining their gender: little girls' hair was parted in the center, little boys' on one or both sides.



*Above, left: Red printed cotton child's dress, ca. 1850s. S2004-01-0088 Thompson (left) and purple and black plaid cotton child's dress, ca. 1860s. S1988-51-005 Zimmerman (right).*

*Above, right: Child's printed wool dress, ca. 1850s, with original combination chemise and split-crotch drawers, hand-embroidered. S2004-01-090 Thompson*





*Child's silk-and-wool skirt and bodice trimmed with black velvet, back button closure, ca. 1865-70. Courtesy of B. Manifold*



*1/6 plate ambrotype of a girl holding a basket. Note the large tucks in her skirt: they could be let out as the child grew, but also helped create the desirable fullness. Ca. mid-1850s*



*Young girl's wool challis bodice trimmed with green box-pleated silk and black silk cord, ca. early 1860s. S2004-01-122 Thompson*



*Above: This bodice began as an adult woman's garment: darts that were carefully picked out have nonetheless left their marks on the silk. Such careful reuse of fabrics is common throughout the nineteenth century. Note the mismatched fabric piecing on right bodice front and the watch pocket concealed in the left bodice front ruffle. Ca. mid-1850s. S1984-03-003 Shippensburg High School*



*Right: Boy's cotton calico summer waistcoat with calico glass buttons, hand sewn. Single layer back, front lined with ivory cotton. Ca. late 1840s-early 1850s. S1988-13-003 Friends of the Fashion Archives*



*1/6 plate ambrotype of a young lady in her plaid silk taffeta dress. While she still wears a young girl's off-the-shoulder neckline, she is also becoming more grown-up in her accessories. Note the wonderful trim on her vandyked (pointed) sleeves.*

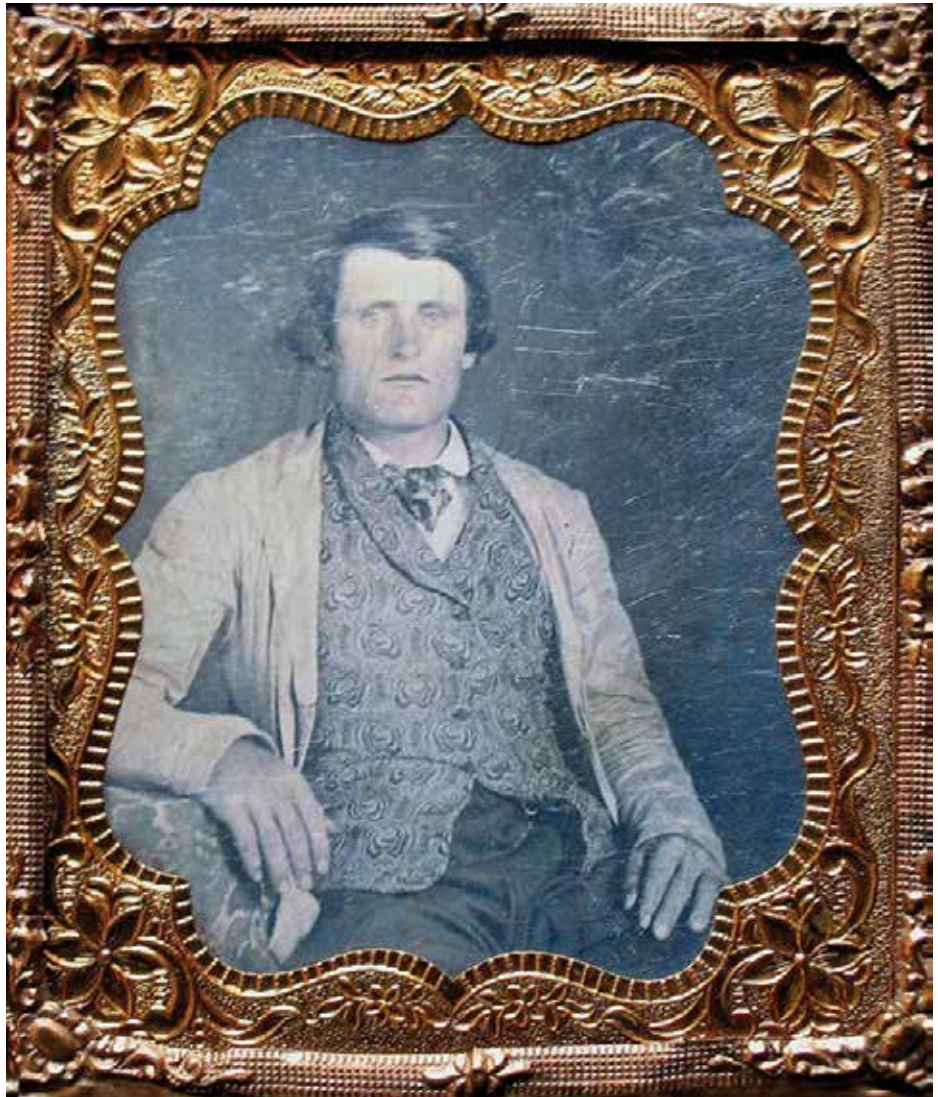


## King Cotton

*We pass now to cotton goods. The time has been when such a transition would have been thought a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. But every one knows that, at least as far as price is concerned, there is nothing ridiculous about cotton goods now” (Godey’s, April 1863).*

The South withheld its cotton crops from the weaving mills of Great Britain, hoping thereby to cripple the British textile industry and make England an ally through economic pressure. The financial consequences were severe in both Britain and the Union states, and prices increased drastically for what had once been affordable to all. However, Britain did not respond kindly to strong-arm tactics, and instead began rapidly to develop cotton cultivation in Egypt and India. Emmeline Lott, an English governess serving in a royal Egyptian harem during the Civil War commented in her memoirs that the investments were so great that “[...] the cotton mania has sent such heaps of gold into the land of the Pharaohs [...]” (*The English Governess in Egypt: Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople*, [Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1867], 303).

*Below: Nineteenth-century men and women enjoyed wonderful lightweight summer clothing that exploited both cotton’s and linen’s versatility to the fullest. Below, left: Factory-made man’s summer linen trousers, machine-sewn and hand-finished, 1860s. S2004-01-076 Thompson.*



*1/6-plate daguerreotype of an unidentified man in linen summer frock coat and abstract floral vest, ca. early 1850s.*



*Above, right: Almost sheer blue and white cotton dress printed à disposition, which means that the fabric was deliberately woven in such a manner that specific portions were predesigned to assume certain shapes on the finished garment. In this case, stripes allowed the skirt and sleeve flounces to create a harmonious contrast in the dress design. To keep the wearer cool, the bodice features a half-lining on the lower portion of the bodice which helps conceal the corset.*

*Courtesy of B. Manifold*

*Above, left: Semi-sheer white-on-white striped dress, black glass buttons and applied braid design ca. early 1860s, exhibited with black cotton Chantilly lace shawl ca. 1855-1865. Dress courtesy of B. Manifold, shawl courtesy of B. & K. Bohleke*

*Right: Brown cotton work dress ca. 1864-1870 with standing collar, piped armscye and waistline, hook and eye center front closure, and gauged skirt. Narrow bishop sleeves. The wearer of this dress did not have much of a figure: there are no darts and no indication that there ever were any, and there is no difference between the waist and bust measurements. S2004-01-027 Thompson. Black and purple wool plaid shawl measuring 118" x 57" excluding fringe. S1980-1980-05-007 Cummings*





## Wool: A Fiber for All Seasons

Wool was the most commonly used fiber in the Civil War era, as it absorbs dye extremely well and can be spun as fine and sheer as cotton for summer use. Durable and hard-wearing, it is also particularly practical in that a wool garment is perfect for fall, winter and spring weather.



*A black wool frock, ca. 1860s, was an essential staple in the mid-century man's wardrobe, ca. 1860s. Courtesy of B. Manifold*

*White cotton pleated bib front shirt, ca. 1860s. S1991-45-807 Darnell*

*Black silk satin pre-tied stock, adjustable spring fit, ca 1840s-1850s. S1987-67-12 Diehl*

*Double-breasted printed silk velvet waistcoat worn by Daniel Hamaker of Chambersburg. S1981-20-10 Hostetter*

*Top hat from the Shultz Brothers of Queen Street, Lancaster, who occupied the premises from 1857 to 1884. The style is typical of the late 1850s-early 1860s. S2007-06-001 Schell*



*Bright lightweight wool magenta bodice with black and white braid trim and ivory cotton lining. The square buttons and white-edged braid were particularly popular 1863-1864. Courtesy of B. Manifold*



*Child's orange wool dress with applied braid trim. Note the delightful sleeve construction and the fabric insertion to increase the skirt's length and extend wear as the girl continued to grow. Ca. early 1860s. S1982-64-112 Wm. Penn*

*Right: Printed brown wool challis dress with bishop sleeves. Contrasting velvet cuffs and velvet-covered buttons on bodice and sleeves, ca. early 1860s.*

*Courtesy of M. Wells*

*Hand-embroidered white-on-white cotton collar, ca. early 1860s.*

*Courtesy of B. & K. Bohleke*

*Left: Bright green novelty-weave wool dress, ca. 1865-1867. This deceptively simple dress is an excellent illustration of occasional problems with textiles at the time: the wool shrank, but the glazed brown cotton lining did not. Thus the bodice is now two inches shorter than when it was made; panels in the skirt shrank between two and five inches each. The wearer simply gave up on her dress after just a few wearings, and her early surrender and probable fear of reusing the fabric elsewhere preserved the dress in almost-new condition. S1990-09-008 Ehrhardt shown with lace collar, ca. early 1860s courtesy of B. Manifold*



*Printed wool challis, cream with blue flowers and bright blue silk taffeta trim, ca. mid-1860s. The dress has two bodices: this one is probably the later of the two, as it is the largest. The wearer let out the waist darts as well as the skirt. In addition, she shortened the bodice in a curved seam at the front only, possibly to accommodate a pregnancy or other weight gain. The other bodice is a sleeveless jacket, also trimmed with blue silk, is cut with a longer shoulder seam and is the smaller original size. The jacket is an excellent illustration of the revived interest in bodices with basques (a shaped peplum below the waist) that first appeared in the 1850s, fell out of favor, and then saw a restyled resurgence ca. 1865-1875. Courtesy of B. Manifold*





*Bright wool plaid mantle ca. 1860-1870 wadded with wool batting hand-quilted to ivory silk-satin lining. Green silk velvet ribbon trim. S1990-36-042 Smay*



*1/6 plate daguerreotype, ca. 1853, of a woman in her treasured wool paisley shawl and silk taffeta bonnet.*



*Child's wool sack coat with applied self-fabric tabs edged with wool braid, ca. 1860s.*

*Courtesy of B. Manifold*



*Woman's wool sack coat with black silk taffeta trim and large black buttons fastened with brandeburgs (cords), ca. 1865-1870.*

*Courtesy of B. Manifold*





*Above, left: Brown wool tattersall check dress with pleated bodice and skirt, ca. 1859-1864. Shown with fine Brussels point/point de gaze lace collar, ca. early 1850s.*

*Above, right: Vivid black and red wool check bodice and skirt. Bodice features two-piece tailored coat sleeves with black wool braid trim and black glass buttons with faceted cut-steel ornaments. Standing collar has retained its original fine white frill. The skirt was let out and restyled for reuse in the twentieth century and has lost its original waist treatment.*

*Dresses courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park  
Lace collar S1981-11-018 Edwards*



*Right: Older woman from Columbus, PA, in a bodice similar to the brown dress above.*

## Sumptuous Silks

Silk was available in far more weights and grades in the nineteenth century than it is today. In addition, the irregularities and slubs that tell the modern consumer that the fabric is indeed silk were in fact an indicator of sub-standard quality in the nineteenth century. The American silk industry was slow to develop, with relatively few mills producing quality yard silk (as opposed to silk sewing thread) at the time of the Civil War. Large-scale production and development of profitable quality silks did not begin until later. Thus Americans were largely dependent upon British and French imports for the best quality. Silk was highly prized for its versatility, its capacity to absorb and retain dyes, its warmth (the tight weave forms an excellent windbreaker), and of course, its intrinsic beauty. While wonderful prints and plaids abounded, women often chose a solid color for practical reasons when making a new dress: British dressmaker Mrs. Pullan explains, *"The class of silks which it is least advantageous to buy of first-rate quality are those with eccentric designs, the fashion of which is likely to pass away speedily, while on them their present beauty depends"* (*Beadle's Dime Guide to Dress-Making and Millinery* [New York: Beadle and Adams, 1860], 63-64). A beautiful solid-color silk taffeta that flatters its wearer's skin tone can be restyled and retrimmed ad infinitum; the same cannot be said about a large plaid or floral pattern when small checks or tiny flowers are in fashion.



*Oral history associated with this dress indicates that Janet Reid wore it to meet Queen Victoria in 1850 at Sterling Castle during a voyage to England. However, this is not possible as this style of deep basque bodice appeared only later on the fashion scene ca. 1855, and there is no sign that fabric was added to the smaller, earlier basques. It is also made to fit over a curving corset, which had appeared only in 1853. The beautifully embroidered collar is also of later vintage: its style represents fashion's ideal ca. 1857-1858. The dress was updated in the mid-1860s in two significant ways: the skirt was repleated to have a smooth panel in the skirt center front, which would remain the style from 1865-1870. The sleeves also must have been changed from an earlier pagoda sleeve, for they are now the tailored two-piece coat sleeve which would also dominate women's styles from 1864-1870. With these updates, the dress was fashionable ca. 1855-1858 and again from ca. 1864-1870, with a few years at the end of the 50s and beginning of 60s in which it may have slumbered in a trunk. S1981-008-003 Beck, shown with black silk taffeta mantle, ca. 1855-1865, S1988-39-009 Malvern Monday Afternoon Club (MAC)*



*“Skirts are all made with a train and very full at the hem, the fullness, however, decreasing at the hips” (Godey’s Lady’s Book, February 1866).*

*“Crinoline is far from being abandoned, but is by no means carried to the same excess in Paris as in this country. For evening wear, unless very many stuff skirts are worn, large hoops are required to sustain gracefully the long trains and fully-trimmed skirts” (Godey’s Lady’s Book, July 1866).*

*Right: Blue silk evening dress ca. 1865-1867 with low square neck trimmed with dyed-to-match silk-satin ruching on the bodice and sleeves. The silk-satin also forms a bow trimmed with gold silk fringe on the lower right skirt front. The skirt fits smoothly in the front. Although hoops for daytime wear were becoming steadily smaller, those used for evening wear remained large, but with a decidedly elliptical shape. S1982-64-281 Wm. Penn*



*Below, left: Ivory silk-and-wool dress, also ca. 1865-1867, with crystal bead and silk velvet trimmings. Beads became explosively popular as of 1864 and appeared on many different types of garments. Here, a simple dangling trim, designed to move and scintillate beautifully, is used simply but effectively. Courtesy of the Gettysburg National Military Park*

*Below, right: Carte de visite photograph ca. 1866-1867 of an unidentified young woman from Hanover, PA, wearing a stunning trained silk dress, black Chantilly lace shawl and light summer bonnet. Note the ornamentation on her parasol.*



# Mourning: Outward Show of Inner Suffering

In the nineteenth century, the topic of mourning and mourning attire occupied considerable discussion in the fashion press. How long should one wear full mourning (all black) for which degree of kinship or relationship? How long should one wear half-mourning (shades of gray and lavender)? The advice varies, depending upon whether the editorialist answering the queries is drawing from British or French sources for guidance. Some people chose not to wear mourning at all for a variety of reasons; for some it was purely a question of finances: they could not afford a black wardrobe on short notice. The key elements identifying a widow in full mourning are: a black dress trimmed with black crepe, a black cap or bonnet (depending upon whether she is displaying indoor or outdoor attire in her photograph), a crepe veil on a bonnet, black collar and cuffs/undersleeves, mourning jewelry (often a portrait of the deceased or a black enamelled *In Memoriam* brooch, usually with hair of the deceased), and black outerwear such as shawls or cloaks depending upon the time of year. Due to laundering considerations, a woman continued to wear her usual white underpinnings. She would also eventually exchange her black cap, collar and cuffs/undersleeves for white ones, which were far easier to clean. Some widows, upon reaching this stage of mixing white and black, continued to wear such attire for the remainder of their lives: Queen Victoria is the prime example. However, it was not a social requirement but a personal choice. It seems alien to twenty-first century minds to swath oneself in black after personal loss, but Victorian mourning traditions recognized certain key aspects of grief and the human psyche: firstly, grief is a process or journey that takes time before any kind of “closure” could be achieved, if at all; secondly, mourning attire was an easily understood sign of a person’s emotional state, signaling others that special consideration and treatment were warranted in order not to wound the mourner unnecessarily with careless words or accidental thoughtlessness.



Lieutenant Webb, whose photographs appear earlier, died in 1868; his widow Mary had herself photographed with their daughter Florence while in full mourning, ca. 1868-1869. Note that the little girl is not wearing black: it was thought that, in spite of inevitable loss, childhood should be as sunny and as happy a time as possible, and that dressing a child in black was essentially “death over spring.” Queen Victoria was a noted exception to this view in that she dressed her children in full mourning. S1982-32 Cree



This unidentified couple is mourning someone, as evidenced by the black collar on the woman’s dress. However, the degree of connection does not warrant full mourning, or the couple cannot afford it, and simply show their grief through her affordable collar. The fact that the man’s clothing features no black is quite common for the period. Men put a band of crepe around their top hats or wore a black arm band to show their loss if they wished.





*This unidentified widow from Albany, NY, is dressed for cool weather and is very imposing in her full regalia. The extraordinarily high and fashionable spoon bonnet dates this image to ca. 1862. Carte de visite photograph.*



*The fact that this unknown woman is quite young is shown through her ringlets. Crepe ornaments her hem and sleeves; velvet bows descend her bodice center front, and she wears the requisite black undersleeves and collar. Her watch chain glitters at her waist; interestingly, the chain is fastened to her bodice with a hair broach, perhaps containing her husband's hair. The large pin at her throat features some kind of raised ornament that cannot be identified even under magnification. Carte de visite photograph, no backmark, ca. early 1860s.*

## Accessories: The Finishing Touch

American women of the mid-nineteenth century had a myriad of delightful accessories from which to choose.



*Left: Fancy blue silk tea apron worn by Ophelia Root of Deerfield, NY, the donor's great-grandmother, ca. 1850s. S1986-19-012 Halliday*

*Ivory cotton stockings, hand-embroidered in blue silk, machine-knitted and hand-finished, ca. 1860s. S2004-01-118 Thompson*

*Ivory silk taffeta parasol covered with black Chantilly lace, ca. 1860-70; lavender silk-covered side-lacing boots, ca. 1840s. Courtesy of O. MacMillan*

*Brown silk taffeta spoon bonnet, ca 1862; tan silk taffeta parasol with black Chantilly lace ca. 1850-70; child's red-striped stockings, ca. mid-nineteenth century; black silk satin side-lacing boots, ca. 1860s. Courtesy of B. Manifold*

*Royal blue silk taffeta Swiss or Medici waist, ca. early 1860s; black watered silk and beaded Jenny Lind-style mourning fan, ca. 1860s. Courtesy of B. & K. Bohleke*

*Right: Royal blue silk bonnet, ca. 1855-1857, worn by donor's great-grandmother Myers of Shippensburg. S1982-04-001 Thrush*

*Fanchon bonnet of tan velvet, brown silk satin, red cotton flowers, replacement ties, ca. 1865-1867. Belonged to Mrs. George (Ella Jane) Stewart of Shippensburg. S1985-83-001 Stewart*

*Flat braided straw garden hat with flowers and silk-satin ribbon, ca. 1850s; black cotton net and lace day cap ca. early 1860s; tan felt, silk ribbon and feather hat, ca. 1860s. Courtesy of B. Manifold*





## Faces and Fabrics of the Past

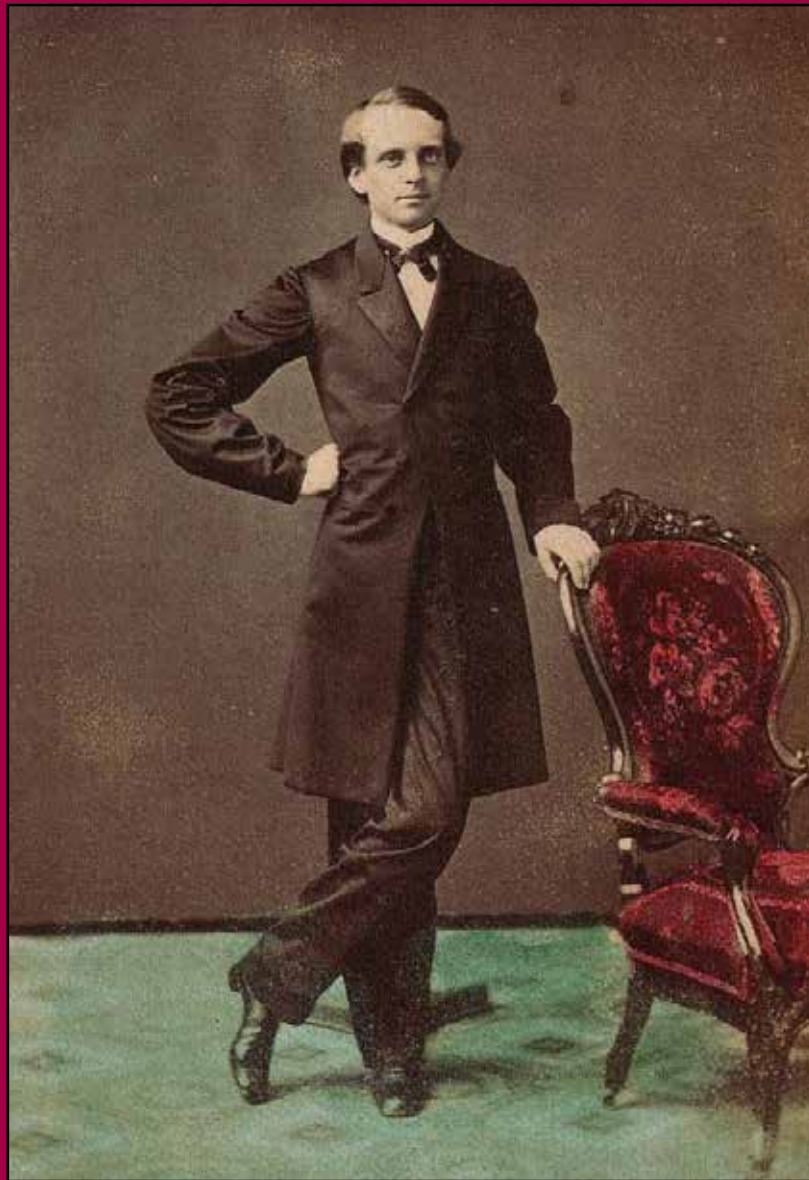




## Faces and Fabrics of the Past







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