

118th NY, Adirondack Regiment
Handbook for Civilian Women's and Children's
Dress



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This handbook has been created to help both old and new members meet a ***minimum standard*** of authenticity for the 118th NY Adirondack Regiment Civil War re-enactor group. It is intended to be a guide to help us present a general mid-19th century impression during Civil War reenactments and living history events. Though individual impressions may differ, and are encouraged, many of the events to which you go will have their ***own standards*** of authenticity. They may be more lax or more restrictive. We ask that each member of our unit adhere as strictly to the basic guidelines as possible. In doing so we will be able to present a good representation of the people and times we portray and present ourselves as both knowledgeable and diligent re-enactors at any event.

In this document you will find descriptions and images to help us make choices as close to the period garments as possible. Some of the illustrations are ideal and others are very basic. Most of us will be somewhere in the middle.

Here is a brief list of the expectations for all civilian re-enactors.

- Wear period correct outfits, including correct fabrics.
Cotton, wool, silk, rubber. There are many variations on these.
- Use period correct containers, dishes etc. outside your tent.
- Hide the non correct stuff out of site in the tent or in your vehicle.
- Tie the tent closed at all times if it is not period correct inside.
- Use only period correct accessories if they had them such as watches, jewelry, hair pieces, cosmetics, dishes, utensils.
- Use period correct behavior for adults and children. Great place to teach and practice good manners.
- Have period correct activities for kids and adults. Games were very popular: Checkers, Parcheesi, Pick-up Sticks, Nine Men's Morris, Chess, Tag, Ring Toss, Baseball... dolls, toy guns, whistles, music games

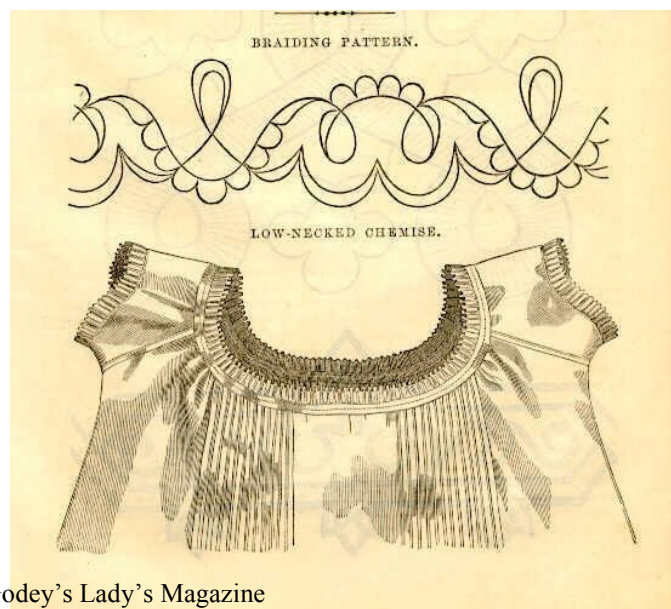
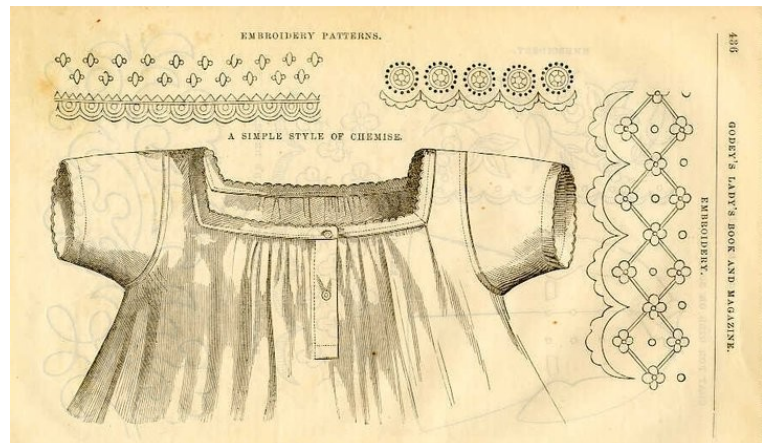
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Women Bare minimum for a good impression Underneath It All

Foundation garments will improve your look. Like the majority of 21st century American women, 19th century American women wore foundation garments of some kind. The stays of colonial times morphed into the corset, and by the mid 1850s, everyone was wearing some kind of drawers. Petticoats of colonial days had become actual underwear not a part of the outer skirt covering.

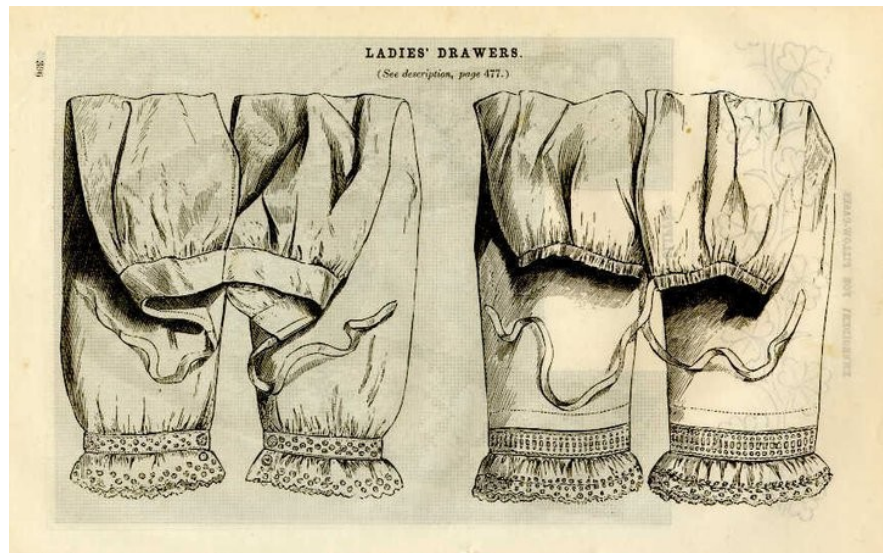
Unless we are doing an undergarment fashion show, our unit will not inspect your underwear. Should you wish to dress in period correct undergarments here is the **minimum** that you will need:

Chemise - worn against your skin. You can also sleep in this. The sleeves protect your dress from perspiration stains. Your corset will be worn over this garment to keep clean and from chaffing your skin. Cotton fabric.



Images from Godey's Lady's Magazine

Bifurcated Drawers (split crotch) Very handy really! The image at the right is 1859 Godey's Lady's Magazine. The legs can be straight without gathering or a lacey, flouncy cuff. Many did not have drawstrings, but buttoned in the front, at the waistband. Drawers in the Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History collection often feature a triangular yoked piece attached to the waistband both front and back. Thus fitted to the individual's waist, a great deal of bulky fabric is eliminated from beneath the shift and corset. White cotton fabric is most prevalent for underwear.



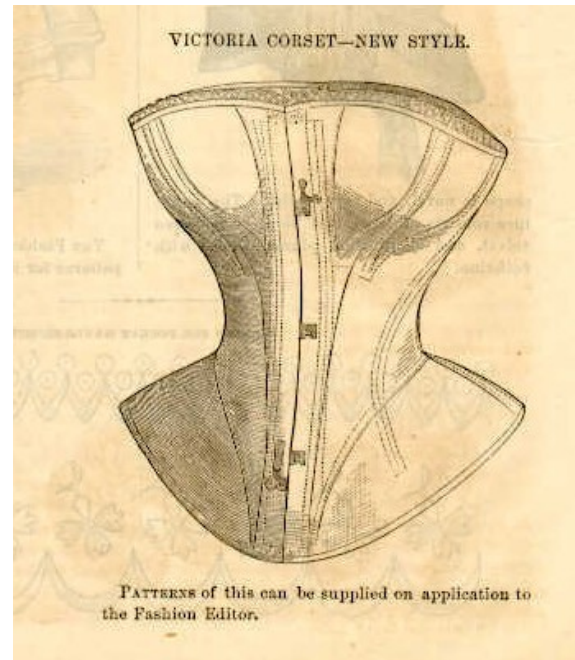
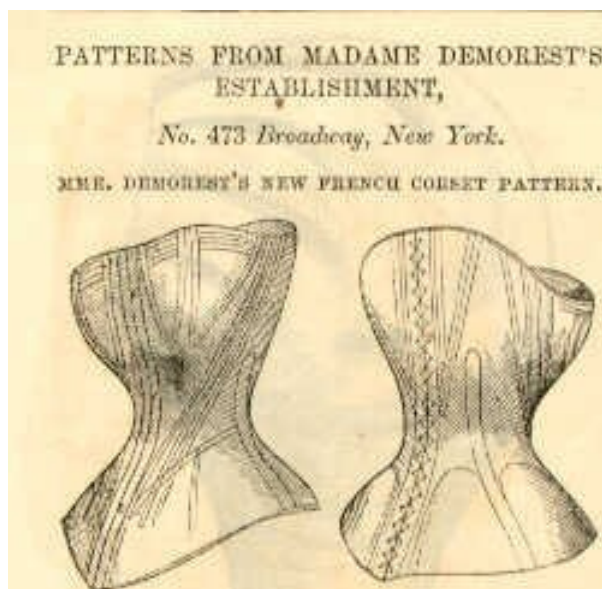
Hoop skirt, or cage crinoline.

Both were worn. You may substitute a corded petticoat for work wear. (Hoops are not allowed when cooking around fires.)

Prior to the caged crinoline which came into fashion in France in the late 1850s, women wore corded petticoats or layers and layers of flounced petticoats to make their skirts take a bell shape. The invention of the cage crinoline and later

the hooped skirt gave the same options for the big skirt without the multitude of petticoats. However, an over petticoat which covers the construction of the cage was standard dress. As the years progressed, the shape of the cage went from bell-like to ovate to the straight front with bustle back by about 1870.

Corset - Front closing for day wear. A wide variety of period correct corsets are available from sutlers, from re-enactors, kits, and online sources. The most important thing to remember is that your corset does not have to be tightened to a tiny waist! You should be comfortable. Also, your bosom should not appear to be resting on a shelf on the front of your body.



Nor should you strive for generous cleavage! The two corsets pictured here are from Godey's Lady's Magazine June and July, 1862. Try before you buy is the best advice when getting a corset.

Corsets may be made from a variety of materials including satin, heavy

wool and of course, cotton was probably the most common. If you choose to wear a modern corset because you have one, make sure it will not show under your period dress. You may wish to wear a **corset cover** over any corset to cover the lines that might show through your outer garment. Have some smelling salts ready incase you pass out from the layers you are wearing! This May 1864, Godey's Lady's Magazine shows an elaborate corset cover.





Stockings - Over the knee, or just below the knee, cotton, silk or wool. Again, please choose an appropriate stocking to go with your outfit. Striped socks were a novelty. Plain white, ribbed, white on white embroidered decorations are very delicate and lady-like. Winter wear - keep your feet warm with wool. Hand or machine knit. Seamless or seamed on the back. The illustration is from a knitting pattern in Godey's.

Ladies' Shoes or Walking Boots- Square toes were *the* fashion. Shoes are one of the most difficult pieces with which to comply. Fortunately, women's long dresses should cover the feet and cover footwear. But do not count on it! Try your best to at least wear black slip-ons like the pair on the top right row. Please **no corks, flip-flops, modern sandals** or pointed toe boots or shoes.

Popular Women's everyday footwear.





The Dress

There are many misnomers for the clothing women wore, especially in reenacting. There is no such thing as a "camp dress" in 19th century speech. The common day dress is just that and every woman re-enactor should have one. It is the best basic impression you can have and some events require that this is what you wear! Pictured here is a good basic dress. (formerly owned by Susan Peden) Over the years the trim was added to spruce it up. Some things could be different on this garment. And here they are: The piping should have matched the fabric of the dress. The hem should have been faced instead of turned up. The skirt should have been gauged, or cartridge pleated as was the fashion. However, no one should really complain about this dress at any event.

The important features are these:

- Front closure with either buttons or hook and eye.
- 100% cotton (could be wool or silk depending on the season and place)
- One piece, meaning not a separate skirt and blouse or jacket.
- Drop shoulder style to lengthen the look of the shoulder line.
- Two piece sleeves with the upper and lower, not one seam under the arm.
- Can be darted or gathered at the bodice waist.
- Detachable white cotton collar or brooch at the neck.

The fabric choices are really endless but should be confirmed with some research for authenticity or close to it. There were hundreds of colors and patterns! But that does not mean all were appropriate for any time of day. Modern prints can fool us so do your research.

The Hair



Illustrations and photographs from the mid 19th century are good references for hair styles. The average lady wore her hair long, parted in the middle and pulled to the back. That is the minimum for which to

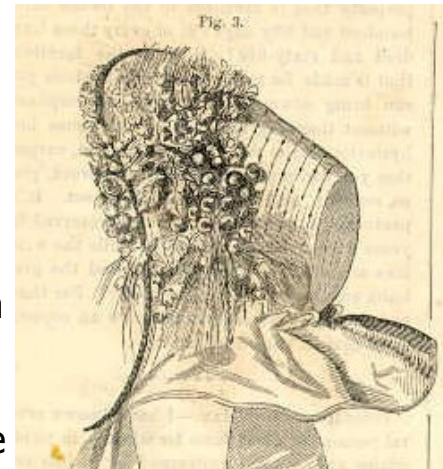
strive. So, no loose tresses for those of us over about the age of 12! If you have short hair, wear a hair net or bonnet. The straw hats at the right are from Godey's 1861 styles. Silk flowers, dried botanicals, feathers, faux berries decorated for the season.



Hair nets can be worn outside or inside. For those of us who have crazy hair that just does not behave, or cannot abide a bonnet that comes close around your face in hot weather, hair nets are a viable option. Pay attention to the type of material from which the

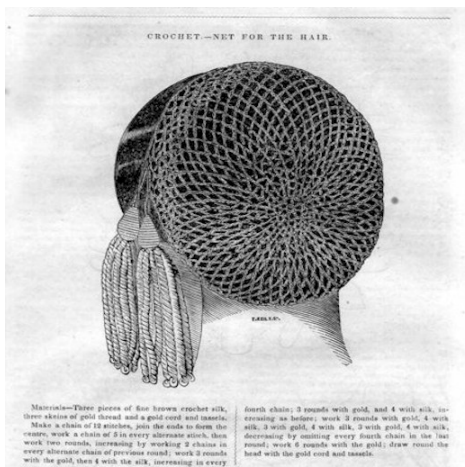


Fig. 13.—Net made of thick chenille.



net is made.

Cotton crocheted nets, real silk chenille, or fine netting which resembles the fine silk netting they used are the best. Avoid the elastic, polyester chenille, shiny ones from the sutlers. There are also many lovely little head pieces and hats. You can also use your old slat bonnets if you have one. Felt hats are winter wear, and the modern straws you get are iffy. Godey's does have images of wide brim straws, contrary to the popular belief that those are all farby.



MATERIALS—Three pieces of fine brown crocheted silk, three skeins of gold thread and a gold cord and tassels. Make a chain of 12 squares, join the ends to form the crown, work a chain of 2 in every alternate stitch, then work two rounds, increasing by working 2 chains in every alternate chain of previous round; work 3 rounds with the gold, then 4 with the silk, increasing in every

fourth chain; 3 rounds with gold, and 4 with silk, increasing as before; work 3 rounds with gold; 4 with silk; 3 with gold; 4 with silk, 3 with gold; 4 with silk, decreasing by omitting every fourth chain in the last round; work 4 rounds with the gold; draw round the head with the gold cord and tassels.

Clothing for the Morning, not Mourning!

The problem of remaining in the 19th century is not difficult for most men reenacting. Many of them sleep in their uniforms or some portion of their outfit, arise and just put on more clothes. For women re-enactors there are more options. Given the goal to stay in period dress for the entire event, here are some ways to make it from your first crack of dawn until you suit up in whatever you will wear for the day and evening.

Have a wrapper and period footwear handy to put on when you come out for the initial potty break in the morning. A wrapper is the 19th century version of our sweatpants and sweater. It is a garment in which you could receive visitors or have breakfast, do your housework or get your hair done. Wrappers could be plain, plaid, paisley, cotton, pink with embroidery (yes, I have handled that one) ugly or pretty. They could be made narrow of skirt or to go over your crinoline. This wrapper is again from Godey's 1861 and it only takes seven yards of fabric. (wink, wink)

Another acceptable option is to have a cape, great coat and trousers, or man's outfit handy for the morning time. Smash a slouch on your head and make your morning rounds. Then get into your finery at your leisure.

This goes for the kids too. They can get by with long night clothes and a shawl or wool blanket if you don't have all the outfits. Put a big shirt on over their sweats until you can get them dressed. Keep the modern stuff in the tent 'n' out of sight. Make them put on their shoes.



Outer Wear

Paletots, Shawls, Capelets, Capes, Rubber Boots



Fig. 1.—Walking-dress and jacket for the approaching cool weather; the jacket is of a woollen stuff ribbed in diamonds; the trimming Astrakan plush.

Fig. 2.—Light walking cloak or mantle of brown cloth, with stripes of velvet, and edged by a fringe.

Wouldn't it be great if we all could have lovely jackets like these? Unlike the combatants most women re-enactors are not set up for the cold with their daily clothing. Short capelets that come to about your elbows, and crocheted and knitted coats are totally correct! Some kind of paletot, a coat that covers your dress part way down and is fitted or loosely fitted on the top with buttons, hook and eye, or frog closures, or a shorter cape (no hood) or a shawl are also correct. If you only have a colonial style cape, long and hooded, then wear it when you are cold. You can also wear a period correct woollen blanket folded like a shawl. Be cautious when purchasing from sutlers. Just because it is sold does not mean it is correct. It is a good idea to try on garments with the dress you will be wearing to see how it fits.



Godey's February 1861 shows this sweet Knitted Spencer. Worn over your dress inside or under your cape or coat, you will be toasty! Similar knitted jackets without the large ball buttons were made to wear under dresses.

The knitted undershawl from Godey's December 1862, is also worn under a cape or jacket for extra warmth.



The knitted petticoat on the left, from Godey's Lady's Book, December 1864, provides an alternative to the quilted petticoat worn under your

hoop or crinoline for extra warmth.

Gloves, mittens, purses, glasses cases, sewing boxes, food baskets and much more will enhance your impression. Keep it simple and sweet or go all out. The best authentication comes from researchers, museums and 19th century publications like Peterson's and Godey's magazines.. Online sutlers will vary in their authenticity.

Leather boots were most common, but Charles Goodyear began making rubber shoes in c. 1857. In 1860 this article was published in the *Weekly Vincennes Western Sun*, Vincennes, Indiana. It gives hints for keeping warm and does not extol the virtues of the rubber shoe!

Collection: The Civil War

Publication: THE WEEKLY VINCENNES WESTERN SUN

Date: December 29, 1860

Title: Seasonable Hints.

Location: VINCENNES, INDIANA

A thin shawl may be made warm by folding a newspaper inside of it. The paper is impervious to the wind and cold air from outside, and prevents the rapid escape of the warm air beneath it. Every one knows that the heat of the body is carried off much more rapidly in a high wind than in a calm. The wind blows away the heat evolved from the body, but in a perfectly still air this heat remains, and constitutes an atmospheric envelope so nearly of the same temperature with the body itself that the latter is not so quickly robbed of its natural heat.

A piece of silk oil-cloth, stitched in the folds of a shawl, is more flexible than the paper, and will last a whole winter. It has the advantage of securing inward warmth without the additional weight of a thicker garment.

When you set out on a winter journey, if you are liable to suffer from cold toes, which many people do in spite of "**rubbers**," fold a piece of newspaper over your stockings, which you can readily do, if your **boots** or shoes are not irrationally tight. This is better than "**rubbers**," which are, in fact, very cold comforters in extreme, while they make the feet sweat in moderate weather. The main use of India **rubber** overshoes is to keep out water, and for that they are second only to a stout, water-proof, first-rate calf-skin **boot**. There is not a more villainously unwholesome article of wear made than the high-topped **rubber -boot**. It makes the foot tender, especially in children, gives an ugly gait, and when left off in any weather the wearer is liable to "catch cold." Saint Crispin is the best friend of the human foot, when his leather and stitching are honest."



Given the warning about how cold rubbers are, you are still given the green light to wear rubber overshoes. Period correct, of course.

For the Children

It is equally important that the young re-enactors in our camps learn how to represent their 19th century counterparts. Whether you reenact because you want to honor those who lived in that time period or you just like dressing up and playing with your friends, we need our kids to complete the picture for camp visitors. In general, children were dressed like adults, with smaller clothing. Somewhere between 6 and 8 years old boys got pants. Toddlers' shirts had buttons on the hem and their skirts or pants button holes that corresponded with the tops. Leather boots, stockings, cloth home made shoes, knitted or crocheted slippers covered their feet.

The photograph of this young Mom and her kids is one of the sweetest ones I have seen for our time period. It is perhaps more realistic for most of us than so many of our favorite outfits and coveted accessories. From the sublime fashions in Godey's Lady's Book, to the common used clothing that the original folks wore and we strive to copy, in this hobby the clothes make the woman (or man, or kid, or dog.....)

