WOMEN'S DRESS
DURING THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

An Interpretive Guide

Brigade of the American Revolution

WOMEN'S DRESS
DURING THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

An Interpretive Guide

Brigade of the American Revolution

Women's Dress during the American Revolution: An Interpretive Guide

Original 1975
Revised 1979
Revised 1980
Rewritten 1993
Rewritten 2004

Published by the Brigade of the American Revolution Press

The ***Brigade of the American Revolution, Inc.*** is an historical-educational organization incorporated under the ***Statutes of the State of New Jersey (Revised)*** and is recognized as a non-profit organization by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service.

Front cover illustration: *View near the Serpentine River During the Encampment 1780* by Thomas Sandby. The Royal Collection, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Images from *A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, Manufacturing and the Technical Arts in Plates Selected from "L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers" of Denis Diderot* and *Old English Cuts and Illustrations for Artists and Craftspeople* are used with permission from Dover Publications, Inc.

Printed in the U.S.A.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data ISBN 0-9708965-8-1

Brigade of the American Revolution
www.Brigade.org
1-888 GO REV WAR

Table of Contents

About the *Brigade of the American Revolution*

The *Brigade of the American Revolution* (hereafter the *Brigade*) is a non-profit living history association dedicated to recreating the life and times of the common soldier of the American War for Independence, 1775-1783. Members represent elements of all the armies then involved: Continental, Militia, British, Loyalist, German, French, Spanish, and Native American forces as well as civilian men, women and children.

Since its founding in 1962, the *Brigade* has recreated a broad spectrum of the 18th century. Its activities include military encampments, commemorative observances, battle recreations, tactical exercises, firelock shooting competitions, music performances, craft demonstrations, and social activities. An important part of the *Brigade*'s program is the portrayal of women of the era. Whether a camp follower, officer's wife, refugee, sutler, or other witness to the founding of the nation, women's roles are integral to *Brigade* programs, seminars, and publications.

From the organization's very beginning, research and public education have been at the center of the *Brigade's* mission. The *Brigade* publishes a scholarly journal, the *Brigade Dispatch*, a regularly scheduled newsletter, the *Brigade Courier*, and instructional booklets and recordings. The *Brigade* also conducts annual educational seminars for the membership and the public, featuring experts from several fields of 18th century study.

The *Brigade's* nearly 3000 members authentically recreate over 130 Revolutionary War military units and numerous civilian impressions and come from all of the 13 original states and many more, nationwide. In addition, there are member units in Canada and Great Britain, making the Brigade an international organization. Membership is open to all persons. For more information about *Brigade* membership, please visit www.Brigade.org or call 1-888-GO REV WAR.

Acknowledgments

In 2000, a committee was formed under the direction of former Civilian Membership Superintendent Ingrid Schaaphok to revise the *Brigade of the American Revolution's* ***Basic Clothing Guide for Women,*** the last version published in 1993. That committee included Angela T. Burnley, Gerry Ferris, Rebecca Fifield, Cathy Johnson, Amy McCoy, Deborah Peterson, Faith Rice, Ticia Robak, Ingrid Schaaphok, Vivian Lea Stevens, Nancy E. Watt, and Gabrielle Wright.

In addition to the current writers, reviewers, and illustrators, many other people have contributed to the body of knowledge that comprises this volume. Those who prepared the original editions of the *Brigade's Basic Clothing Guide for Women* paved the path for today's research. A number of independent scholars have proffered their findings through consultations, seminars, and publications. Others have shared useful information and suggestions through casual conversation and internet discussions. To all these generous researchers, we extend our thanks for advancing the authentic interpretation of 18th century women's clothing in the *Brigade*.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the core committee responsible for the final assembly and editing of the guide: Amy McCoy, Ingrid Schaaphok, and Vivian Lea Stevens. Original contributors include Sue Felshin, Gerry Ferris, Rebecca Fifield, Cathy Johnson, Ticia Robak, Ingrid Schaaphok, Vivian Lea Stevens and Nancy E. Watt. Lisa Candage provided Adobe Photoshop assistance. Paul Ackermann organized the publication and printing of this edition.

Many thanks go to the reviewers. From the *Brigade* membership were Angela T. Burnley, Sue Felshin, Don N. Hagist, Heather Tennies, and Nancy E. Watt. Special thanks are extended to Katherine Brown and Sally Queen for their objective reviews of the manuscript.

Our thanks are also due the illustrators: Albert Lopez, Steve Otlowski, and Gabrielle Wright. Consult **About the Illustrations Used in this Guide** for more information.

We would be remiss in not thanking the *Brigade's* Board of Directors for their generous support and encouragement during this endeavor.

Lastly, we extend our sincerest thanks to conscientious living history interpreters who strive to build authentic Revolutionary War-era impressions. They make creating this guide worth the effort.

Rebecca L. Fifield, Editor

Using this Guide

Clothing is an instant representation of an era and it earmarks a costumed interpreter as a source of knowledge. Since clothing is such an integral material component when interpreting history, it is worth constructing as authentically as possible. Much of the research undertaken by the members of the *Brigade* focuses on the subject.

Assembling an authentic wardrobe for another era may seem like a daunting task. Discerning what to wear, what fabrics and materials to use, how construction methods vary from modern sewing, and ultimately, how these period garments fit a body accustomed to today's clothing and movement, is a challenge. This guide will provide the basics, allowing you to get started in living history programs while you expand and refine your 18th century wardrobe. Museums, historic sites, educational programs, and theater costumers may find this resource useful for their own programs.

Begin with **Building an Impression.** This will provide a general historical context and will help you determine your role within *Brigade* programs. Initially, you may choose a generic character, whose clothing consists of the basic garments worn by women of the period. As your knowledge increases, you will begin to understand how class, geography, and societal role are reflected in your attire.

A Woman's Basic Wardrobe introduces the garments worn in the 18th century, with sketches showing how they should be worn. This overview summarizes the complete look of the period.

Subsequent sections include guidance on appropriate fabrics, information on construction or procurement, and advice on how to wear the garments. Use **How to Measure Your Body** to become more familiar with the custom fit and proportionate measurements of 18th century clothing. For information on fabrics and sewing techniques, refer to the **Construction Guide.**

Consult the **Quick Guide** charts when planning your new wardrobe. Garments are sorted by level of difficulty so that you can gain skills on easier projects before tackling those that are more advanced. Standard yardages and sewing notes are included, making this a useful section to take with you when shopping.

In addition, the information included throughout this volume is meant to provide a resource with which you can make informed choices when purchasing ready-made garments. Merchants of historical garments often carry clothing that is sketchily documented or constructed of inappropriate fabrics. By being able to tell the difference, you will extend your historic clothing budget by not having to replace inauthentic garments at an even greater expense.

Continuing research changes how dress is used in living history interpretation. As the study of Revolutionary War-era clothing will continue past this volume, readers are urged to continue to enhance their impressions through further research. Start by perusing the **Reference List**, with its titles on social history, clothing, textiles, and women's studies. Consult *Brigade* periodicals for new information and attend clothing workshops and seminars. Seek advice and learn how to improve your 18th century impression by contacting the *Brigade's* Women's Clothing Advisor or Civilian Membership Superintendent with questions. Most importantly, support *Brigade* living history events where your skill and hard work becomes the public's window to the past.

Building an Impression

During the American Revolution, large numbers of civilian men and women supported the Continental and British Armies. In the camps of the armies on campaign, women were seen in a variety of roles. They were camp followers, refugees, officers' wives, petty sutlers, local vendors, and occasionally visitors from nearby towns. It is the life and times of these men and women that the Civilian Members of the *Brigade of the American Revolution* seek to recreate.

Determining a Role

Before you begin constructing your wardrobe, it is helpful to determine who you are and what your relationship is to the army. Outlined below is some basic historical background on the common roles of Revolutionary War-era women. For more in-depth study of this topic, please consult the *Brigade Dispatch* articles upon which the following summary was based; these are listed in the **Reference List.**

Camp Followers

In her book *Belonging to the Army*, historian Holly Mayer defined camp followers as . "...those people who live and work with the military and accept, willingly or not, its governance of their affairs."[1] They could be male or female, young or old, and were of all socio-economic classes. They made no commissioning or enlistment vows and were non-combatants. They could be civilian employees of the army, who were maintained at public expense and performed duties that might otherwise fall to soldiers. Most female camp followers might be classified as retainers, a legal term encompassing dependents, servants and volunteers-- all those who "followed the army because of personal inclination, pleasure, or the possibility of provisions and paying positions."[2]

Women "followed the drum" for a variety of reasons. While some may have done so out of a sense of patriotic or personal duty, many women became followers in an effort to stay near their husbands. Widows and unmarried women forced from their homes sometimes chose to throw their lot in with the army. Some indigent women followed the army as a means of subsistence. Camp followers often brought their children with them and sometimes gave birth while on campaign.

Army returns show that the ratio of female camp followers to soldiers was usually quite low. For example, while the overall average number of women in the Continental Army was approximately 3 percent, the range varied from none at all to as many as 8 percent listed on the rolls. The typical ratio in British Army was 12 women to 100 men, although some regiments may have had as many as 20 women to 100 men.

Women who were listed "on the Rolls" were expected to work for their rations and pay. Laundry was the most common duty for female camp followers. Recognizing the men's tendency to ignore this necessary chore and the health risks involved in that neglect, the armies regularly called for women to earn their keep as laundresses. These duties included washing, patching, and mending of the clothes, and perhaps even ironing. Men of both armies were required to pay for laundry if they did not do it themselves.

When nursing services were needed, camp followers were required to provide them. While this duty often earned pay and additional rations, it exposed nurses to the filth and infectious diseases often rampant in army hospitals. It also entailed performance of menial chores, since nurses did not actually treat the sick in medical terms, as they do today. Instead, they laundered and repaired clothing, washed floors and bedding, cut linen and rolled it for bandages, emptied chamber pots, and brought water and food to the sick.

While women in both armies were usually paid for their work as laundresses and nurses, some women earned supplemental income by cooking for the officers, taking on extra mending or sewing, or by selling liquor or food—activities that were often sanctioned by the army. Desperate or immoral women sometimes gambled, stole, or prostituted themselves, although if caught, they were punished and often turned out of camp.

While regulations differed between the armies and various regiments, sometimes camp followers were required to camp and eat separately from the men. Generally, camp followers marched with the baggage train, which was the best protected part of the army. General Washington ordered on August 27 and again on September 17, 1777, that "No Woman under any pretence whatever to go with the army, but to follow the baggage."[3] When the army was traveling quickly, the baggage train might be left behind and the camp followers with it.

Despite their usefulness to the armies, camp followers caused many problems for commanding officers. They rode on the baggage wagons illegally, marched with the men, ate soldiers' rations, distracted soldiers from their duties, sold liquor without authorization, gambled, stole, refused to work, and refused to leave camp when evicted. Repeated orders concerning the regulation of Continental Army camp followers indicate that previous orders were routinely ignored. Washington's comments on August 4, 1777 give a clear view of women's tenuous position during campaign:

> "In the present marching state of the army, every incumbrance proves greatly prejudicial to the service; the multitude of women in particular, especially those who are pregnant, or have children, are a clog upon every movement. The Commander in Chief therefore earnestly recommends it to the officers commanding brigades and corps, to use every reasonable method in their power to get rid of all such as are not absolutely necessary."[4]

Refugees

By definition, refugees are persons forced to flee their homes due to the upheaval of war, taking refuge with the army. They are not paid members of the army with duties. Armies protected refugees and provided them with some food. Refugees were supposed to camp separately from the troops. They were most commonly engaged in temporary travel to safer environments. Many Loyalists traveled with the British Army en route to government administered refugee camps in Canada.

Officers' wives

While most officers' wives stayed home, a few joined their husbands. In garrison, they often stayed in private homes or in towns near the army's encampment. Some wives sewed shirts or knit stockings for the men. Others toured the camps or hosted dinners and entertainments for their husbands and his colleagues.

Sutlers

Women are not known to have been licensed as grand sutlers (purveyors of food, alcohol, and other needed provisions), but they sometimes were petty sutlers, selling any small goods, such as soap, food, or tobacco. Women often ran businesses for their husbands when their husbands were away, disabled, or deceased.

Other Civilians

When the armies passed through a town, local farmers, craftsmen, and townspeople sometimes came out to see the spectacle and sell their wares. This was one of the major sources of fresh food for the armies. Some locals might visit the camps out of curiosity, while vagrants, prostitutes, pickpockets and other marginal types might show up in hopes of exploiting the concentration of possible targets.

Crafting an Impression

When you are getting started, you only need to determine a *general* role for yourself (i.e. soldier's wife, local townsperson, refugee, etc.). As you assemble a wardrobe for that role, keep in mind the factors that might individualize your clothing. For example, in portraying a camp follower, consider how a women's clothing and equipment would depend on her pre-war circumstances, whether she lived in an urban or rural setting, how she became a camp follower, and how long she has been with the army.

Before joining the army, a follower's station in life might have been anything from indigent to comfortably well off. Upon leaving home, she might have had time to choose what to bring or may have had to leave hurriedly, with only the clothes on her back. A sensible woman might bring warm clothing, some cooking gear, some money, and whatever precious possessions she might carry without overburdening herself. While following the army, her clothes would inevitably become worn and stained and she would find it difficult to obtain new garments.

In recreating a refugee's wardrobe, remember that a women of any class or station might find herself displaced or dispossessed. Think about how she became a refugee and how long she has been homeless. She would likely have had to leave her home quickly and might not realize she could not return immediately. A refugee might wear her best clothing for traveling, but would soon find them impractical. Precious possessions which could not easily be carried were soon lost to theft, abandoned, sold, or bartered for needed money and provisions.

In contrast, an officer's wife would most likely have had the advantages of home, even in camp or garrison. She might wear traveling clothes, such as a well-tailored riding habit. In a domestic setting or entertaining, she would dress in finery suited to both the occasion and her elevated station.

Contemplating the women behind the clothing can guide your choices as you create not only an 18th century wardrobe, but an 18th century impression.

Developing a Persona

As you progress in living history interpretation, you will start to examine the person behind the clothes. To really hone your impression, you may want to create a specific persona. In living history terms, a "persona" is defined as a specific personality or role that one assumes or projects in public.

This might seem like an overwhelming process at first, but once you know *who* you are and *why* you are in camp, choosing clothing, accoutrements, and activities is actually made simpler. Speaking to the public becomes easier as well, because you need to be familiar with only one person's realm of experience and knowledge. Choosing a persona allows you to focus your research, which can result in a richer interpretation.

Developing a persona does not mean you must "act the part" by using 1st person interpretation when you speak with the public. You can have a persona and use 3rd person interpretation. The difference between the two is the viewpoint of the person speaking. In 1st person interpretation, the speaker says "I saw the army march by" while in 3rd person, she would say "women watched the army march by." Both techniques can be effective educational tools, when used in appropriate situations.

It is not necessary to chose a single portrayal, but make sure that the selected components are consistent. It is better to do a single persona well, than to have multiple portrayals supported by shallow research.

If you have joined a specific military unit, you should start by studying that unit's history and how you might be associated with it. If you are part of the Civilian Membership of the *Brigade*, you should begin your research with the suggested *Brigade Dispatch* articles in the Reference List to determine why you have been caught up in the war's progress. Research family history or period diaries or runaway advertisements to get some ideas of what your character may have endured in the course of her life.

Examine the elements that make your character an individual. Model them on your own interests, skills, and life experiences, in order to create a natural 18th century character. Consider how every facet of your persona can be an opportunity for research and exploration:

- Name. Use your given name unless it is inappropriate for a person in the 18th century. A chosen name should match the cultural background of your selected persona.
- Date of birth. This will change every year. Remember that the period we are recreating remains relatively constant, but we age.
- Place of birth.
- Societal class. Lower sort? Middling sort? Gentry?
- If living in the colonies, what is your ethnic background? African? Dutch? English? French? German? Irish? Native American? Scotch? Welsh?
- Parents' background. Include places of birth, education if any, occupations, siblings—are they still living, how did they die?
- Education, if any. Can you read? Write? Cipher?
- Married, widowed, betrothed? What is your spouse's background?

- Do you have children? If so, how many, how old are they, when and where were they born, what are their names, where are they, are they all still living?
- Where do (did) you live? City or rural setting?
- Occupation, if any (seamstress, fishwife, tavern keeper, rag picker).
- Any other sources of income?
- Religious convictions.
- Political leanings. Patriot? Loyalist? If a servant, how do your political leanings contrast with those of your master? If you are a wife, do you agree with your husband?
- Particular skills and abilities. Good seamstress, herbalist, known for being a bad cook, resourcefulness? Other interests?
- Habits. Smoking a pipe, drinking, gambling, cursing, having a sharp tongue?
- Health problems. Smallpox, missing limbs, bad eyesight, weak heart?
- Fears and concerns, expectations, hopes.
- Consider the details of your daily 18th century life. What are your favorite 18th century foods? What chores do you detest? What is the story behind a favorite piece of clothing? What are your greatest sorrows and joys?

Researching and incorporating even a few of these components to form a character can make for a well-rounded and meaningful interpretation. You may wish to speak with the *Brigade*'s Civilian Membership Superintendent and the Women's Clothing Advisor. They can provide guidance on what resources to use in crafting a persona and building a wardrobe.

Creating an accurate and engaging portrayal of an 18th century person is a rewarding pursuit. By studying the women of this important era of history, we in the *Brigade* help ensure that their existence is not forgotten. By interpreting the role these women played, we can help the public gain deeper insight and appreciation for America's Revolutionary War heritage.

A Woman's Basic Wardrobe

Introduction

A woman's basic garments and silhouette were remarkably universal. While regional, ethnic, economic, class, and personal considerations affected what an individual woman chose to wear, the standards of what was considered decent, fashionable, and acceptable were consistent. Below are brief descriptions of the essential elements of the typical woman's outfit, in roughly the order a woman would don them. This introduction includes more advanced garments for which construction information is beyond the scope of this guide, in order to show the complete wardrobe.

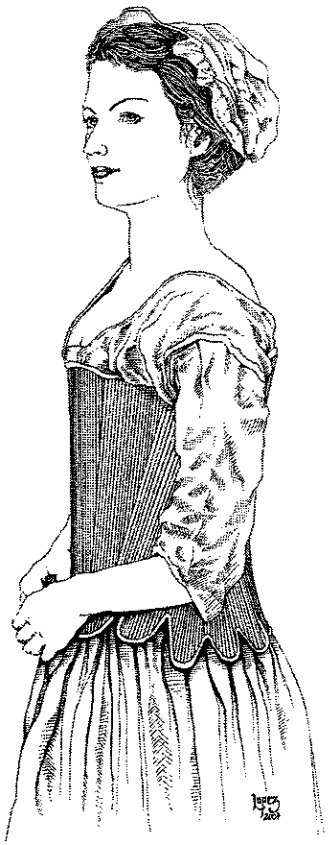
Shift: The shift was a linen A-line undergarment worn next to the skin. The length usually fell just below the knees and the sleeves covered the elbows. Earlier shifts had voluminous sleeves; over time, these narrowed to accommodate the tighter sleeves of the Revolutionary War period. The low scooped necklines of gowns and jackets of working class women occasionally revealed a narrow margin of the shift neckline around the edge.

Stockings: The term "stockings" was used to describe sock-like garments that reach up over the knee. These usually were knitted of worsted, linen (also called thread), silk, or cotton. Fine stockings often had decorative designs called "clocks" at each side of the ankle, either embroidered or knitted in the stocking design.

Garters: Garters were used to hold up stockings. Common types included worsted or linen tape either tied or buckled around the leg, leather straps with buckles, or knitted bands tied around the leg. Padded, embroidered silk garters with ribbon ties or silk bands with wire spring mechanisms were among garter choices for the wealthy.

Cap: Made from linen, caps were worn indoors and out, under a hat or bonnet, and while sleeping. As well as being the style of the day and part of a modest appearance, they kept the hair from getting dirty and protected clothes and hats from being soiled by dirty hair.

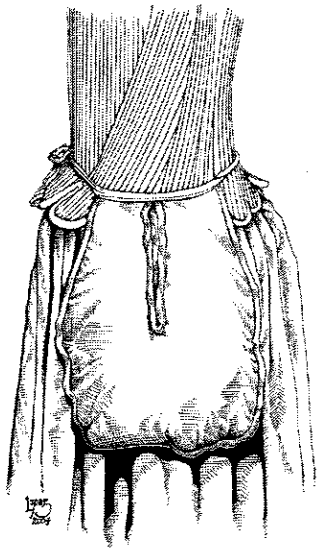
Stays and Jumps: Stays and jumps are critical garments for achieving the 18th century look. During the third quarter of the 18th century, the silhouette of a woman's torso was somewhat conical, with the waist brought in and the bust flattened and moved upward. To achieve the correct look, women wore stays beginning in childhood. Stays molded the body into the desired shape. They laced closed in the back or sometimes in both back and front and were stiffened with pieces of whalebone, cane, or wood splints. Fully-boned garments, like stays, had these stiffeners placed edge to edge in stitched channels around the garment. Jumps used less boning. They might be worn by women laboring, equestriennes, the physically infirm, or for "undress."



Bum Rolls, Hoops, and other Hip Enhancements: To achieve the desired silhouette, hip enhancements were sometimes worn. During the Revolutionary War-era, fashions began to change from fullness over the hips, supported by side hoops, to more fullness in the back, supported by a bum roll. Hoops were made in various styles. Bum rolls were stuffed with wool, cork, or sawdust.

While it is clear that upper class women regularly used hip enhancements, it is difficult to ascertain how far down the social ladder they were worn. The artwork of the period suggests middle class women often wore enhancements. House servants and other workers who were attempting to emulate higher fashion occasionally wore them as well.

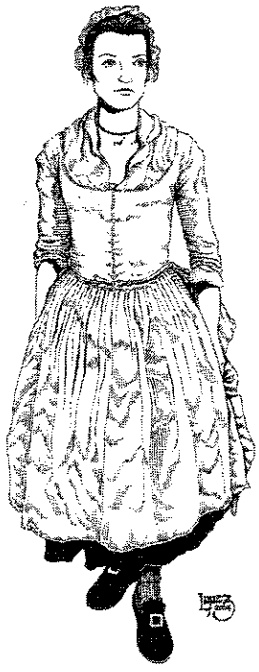
Pocket(s): Women's clothing in the 18th century did not have sewn-in pockets like modern garments. Instead, pockets were separate flat bags that hung from a tape around the waist, either singly or in pairs (one over each hip, accessible through slits in the petticoats and gowns). They were used for carrying various items, including keys, money, needlework, pocket handkerchiefs, snuff, and other personal belongings.



Petticoats: The petticoat is what we would call a skirt today. The 18th century woman usually wore multiple petticoats. Not only did this provide protection from the elements, it gave a desirable fullness to her silhouette. The circumference of the petticoat could be from 90 inches to more than 140 inches, and was pleated to fit the waist. Length of petticoats reached from the mid-calf to above the ankle. Longer petticoats were worn by women of leisure. Petticoats worn by elegant women were often specially shaped to accommodate side hoops or other hip enhancements.

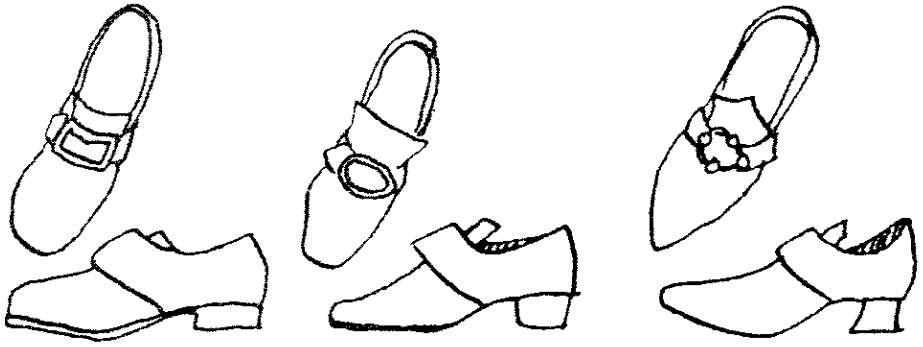
Gown, Bed gown, Jacket, and Short gown: Over stays and petticoats, a woman wore a garment with sleeves, such as a gown or a jacket. The most common garment among women of British extraction was the gown (left). These garments fitted the torso closely, had 3/4 length sleeves, and had a full skirt pleated at the waist. The skirt either opened at the front, revealing the petticoat underneath, or closed all the way around in a style called a "round gown." Contrary to its modern connotation, a gown was not necessarily a fancy item, but was worn daily by all classes. The quality of the fabric and the amount of trimming applied distinguished gowns worn by the elite from those of working women. Jackets, like gowns, were closely fitted to the stayed body but were short and sometimes cut in one piece from shoulder to hem (right). Bed gowns and short gowns were cut more straight through the torso, with sleeves cut in one piece with the body. These garments were easier to construct, requiring less fitting.

Handkerchief: Not to be confused with a pocket handkerchief, these were squares or triangles (sometimes referred to as "half-handkerchiefs") of narrowly-hemmed linen, cotton, or silk worn about the shoulders by all classes of women. They could be pinned closed at the neck, knotted, or tucked into one's gown or apron at the front. They often were white, but were occasionally woven with figured designs or small checks or stripes, printed with floral motifs, or embroidered. Neck handkerchiefs were worn for fashion, modesty, and protection against the elements. Pocket handkerchiefs were for the nose and face.



Apron: Women from all walks of life wore aprons. It was a practical item of clothing that protected the petticoat while working. While the common woman wore an apron of serviceable and durable fabric, elegant women wore aprons of finely embroidered sheer cotton, linen, or silk as a decorative accessory.

Shoes: Working women wore shoes that were nearly indistinguishable from men's common shoes. They were often of stout leather with the rough side out and low heeled. Shoes made with the leather rough side out would be polished or blacked to smooth the surface. Tying shoes closed with twill tape was a common cheap substitute for metal buckles. Below, from left to right, are coarse working woman's shoes, more elegant shoes worn by house servants or on a daily basis by the middle class woman, and an elegant upper class ladies shoe.



Hat, Bonnet: Straw hats with short crowns and moderately wide brims were worn by all classes of women. These were often shaped in some manner, with the front and/or rear brim turned up or down for decorative effect. Hats were held on the head with tapes or ribbons attached under the brim and tied either at the nape of the neck or under the chin. Bonnets were often worn by common women. They had a very different appearance from those worn in the 19th century. Bonnets worn during the 18th century often had a wide brim and a puffed crown. Black silk was used most often.

Cloaks: To keep warm outdoors, women donned cloaks. These often had hoods, but sometimes had only a collar and were worn with a bonnet. Length of cloaks varied from hip length to below the knee. The fabric of the cloak hung around the body from gathers around the back neck. It was often tied closed at the neck with tape or ribbon. Slits for hands were not common in this period.

Cloaks were made predominately from dense, fulled wool cloth. The body was usually not lined, though the hood might be lined with linen, wool, or silk. The densely fulled wools used to make cloaks would retain a firm edge when cut, so the edges of cloaks were left raw and not hemmed. Red was a popular choice for cloaks, but brown, blue, black, and white were also used.

Miscellaneous Accessories: Most gowns and jackets of our period had sleeves that ended just below the elbow, so gloves, mitts, and mittens were often worn to protect the forearms from sun or cold. Mitts were fingerless gloves of varying length. Surviving examples are usually fine silk and/or kid leather, but linen or worsted ones are also occasionally documented for working class women.

Portraiture rarely, if ever, depicts women wearing spectacles, yet there is evidence that they were not uncommon among the English. Eyeglasses from our period had round lenses roughly 1 1/2" in diameter, with folding temple bars that ended in loops behind the ears.

Taking Persona Into Account When Building an 18th Century Wardrobe

The following guidelines reflect how a woman's circumstances during the Revolutionary War affect what she might wear or carry with her. What is worn and carried at any given time should match one's impression. During the 18th century, clothing was a sure indicator of social class. The working woman clothed herself in fabrics very different from that of a lady, though the cut of her garments might try to mimic fashionable styles. Depending on a woman's circumstances, her clothing might be dirty, worn, torn, patched, lost, used inappropriately (a worn and soiled fancy apron used as working apron), or worn in multiple layers as a way of carrying extra clothing. Women who were city dwellers were influenced by fashion trends more rapidly than rural farm women. For working class impressions, simplicity can be difficult to achieve and maintain. Choose your persona's possessions carefully, limiting superfluous ribbons, trims, and jewelry. If a camp follower, the best option is to go without extra garments in order to maintain a worn, simple appearance. It is highly unlikely a camp follower would have had all of these items. Remember that she would have to carry all her possessions when the army marched, and she would likely have kept any small valuables out of sight for fear of theft.

Working Class Women

The working class woman illustrated wears a plain linen gown and petticoats that reach a manageable length. The gown is cut with more room in the sleeves and shoulders appropriate to the working class. A checked handkerchief fills in the low neckline of her gown. A simple cap and cast off felt hat are worn on her head. The tow apron covers the front of the petticoats. Her plain black rough-out leather shoes are tied with linen tapes, sparing the extra expense of metal buckles.

- Gown (basic cut with fitted back, no trims), bed gown, jacket, or short gown of linen, worsted, or woolen serviceable or coarse fabrics. Working women's garments would be slightly looser than fashionable clothing to accommodate movement during work. Garments close at front with pins or lacing through hand-stitched eyelets.
- Shift, stays or jumps, pockets, stockings, garters.
- Petticoats: two of medium- to heavy-weight linen or medium-weight worsted or woolen fabrics. Worsted quilted petticoats with a simple diamond pattern are also appropriate.
- Hip improvements: go without or possibly wear a small bum roll, especially if your persona likes to ape her betters.
- Handkerchief: choose lightweight linen or cotton in solid colors, checks, figured weaves, or narrow stripes. White was popular.
- Apron: choose durable linen, wool, or linsey-woolsey fabric. A working class apron is meant to be serviceable and covers most of the petticoat.
- Cap: lightweight linen. Often a ribbon or fabric tape was used to decorate or tie the cap around the head.
- Shoes: working women's shoes were similar to soldiers' shoes, of black leather with the rough side out, closing with fabric tape ties or plain white metal buckles.
- Straw hat or silk bonnet optional, minimal trim.
- Short cloak (optional) between fingertip and knee length of sturdy, well-fulled wool.
- Accessories (optional): redware or horn mug or cup, wood plate or bowl, knife, horn or wood spoon, cooking pot or kettle, housewife (sewing kit), scissors, spare clothing, blanket, bag or basket in which to carry things.

Middle Class Women

Women of the middle class strived for a fashionable appearance, approximating the look with less expensive materials than their upper class counterparts. The woman illustrated to the right wears a simple but well-fitted gown. The skirts of the gown are pulled up decoratively in a polonaise style. Fine muslin flounces are tacked at the ends of her sleeves. A fine handkerchief covers the flesh at the decolletage, and she wears a silk ribbon as a necklace. Her straw hat is fashionably shaped and trimmed with ruched silk ribbon around the crown and a bow. She wears plain but well made shoes shaped in a ladies style with metal buckles. Altogether, the elements of her dress are tasteful and fashionable, befitting her status.

- Gown or fashionable jacket: basic cut, but maybe simple trim and flounces at sleeves of same fabric or light muslin. Fabrics include finer worsteds, wools, linens, and appropriate cottons. Upper middle class women might wear silks for nice day wear. This includes striped or plain silk taffetas in simple cuts with self-fabric trims.
- Shift, stays, pockets, stockings, garters.
- Petticoats: two or three. Quilted petticoats of fine worsteds or silk with decorative motifs quilted around the hem and visible through the open skirt front were very fashionable.
- Hip improvements: small pocket hoops or a bum roll was often worn by middle class women.
- Neck handkerchief: fine white linen, cotton, or silk. These could be finely patterned with figured weaves, checks, and embroidery.
- Aprons: may include working aprons as well as finer linen or cotton aprons for special occasions.
- Cap: fine linen. Ruffle(s) and ribbon trim likely, possibly trimmed with appropriate lace.
- Shoes: more defined walking heel, better styling, of higher quality leather or fabric.
- Straw hat with moderate amounts of silk trims or silk bonnet.
- Cloak or short cloak (optional): sturdy, good quality well-fulled wool. Also woven or knitted mitts or mittens (optional) of silk, linen, or wool.
- Accessories: eating utensils carried by middle class women would be made with finer materials, such as glass, some stoneware or porcelain (though these materials may not survive long during arduous travel), and pewter. If the woman is a refugee, she might have bedding, dishes, books, letters, money, jewelry, a cart, animals, or servants. Whether she could keep these items for long on campaign would be uncertain. Things would wear out, break, or be sold or stolen.

Upper Class Women

The illustration shows a lady dressed in a silk faille gown and satin petticoat appropriate for day wear in the early 1780s. The gown is trimmed with a bow-like breastknot at the center opening, with ruched silk around the neckline, and with pleated and pinked silk sleeve flounces with sheer batiste flounces underneath at the cuffs. The skirts of the gown are tied up in a polonaise style through a system of hidden linen tape ties. The silk hat is fashionably shaped and trimmed. The French-heeled shoes have latchets that wrap over the top of the foot and buckle.

- Riding habit, gown (fitted back or sacque) with trim, or stylish jacket for undress wear. Fine wool meltons for riding habits. A wool habit serves as traveling clothes and is appropriate even if a lady did not ride a horse. While dressed in a riding habit, a woman maintained more masculine trappings and would have eschewed her feminine cap, apron, handkerchief, headgear, and jewelry. She would have still worn stays or jumps. Gowns of silk satins, taffetas, brocaded silks, fine wools, and appropriate printed cottons.
- Shift, stays, petticoats, pockets, and hip improvements. Stockings were usually white silk.
- Apron and handkerchief: very fine white linen, cotton, or silk, often with embroidery.
- Cap: unless dressed in a riding habit, a woman would wear an elegant cap of fine linen, silk gauze and/or appropriate lace, trimmed with ruffles and ribbon. In lieu of a cap, dressed hair decorated with ribbons, pearls, feathers, and/or swaths of fabric is appropriate in certain circumstances.
- Shoes: fabric or fine leather of a fashionable style with high curved heels and buckles of embellished metal or paste (glass mounted in a foil-back mount to simulate jewels).
- Hat: often covered with silk and heavily trimmed with silk ribbon, or a calash.
- Cloak or mantle: fine wool or silk. Fine silk or linen mitts, or a small muff.
- Accessories: an officer's wife might travel with anything she might use at home, but most goods would likely be left at her lodgings in the closest town and would not be seen in camp. An elite refugee would be affected by the same limitations as a middle class woman, but her distress would be more conspicuous in the elegance of her trappings while surrounded by the disorder of losing her home. She might have fancier jewelry, furniture, paintings, and other goods, if she could retain a servant to assist her in transporting these items. Her belongings would be vulnerable to theft. An upper class woman sightseeing in an encampment would bring anything she would normally take on an outing, which she might give her accompanying servant to carry.

How to Measure Your Body

The following guidelines for finding measurements necessary for women's 18th century clothing construction are intended to accommodate varying body types. Garments during this period were based on proportional body measurements. To ensure accuracy, have an assistant measure you.

These measurements should be taken while wearing 18th century undergarments. When measuring for outer garments, wear a shift, stays, and underpetticoat for these measurements. If you have not yet procured stays, take measurements while wearing a shift and petticoat.

Bust: The bust is pushed slightly higher by 18th century stays, creating a flatness where the bust normally rests in modern clothing. Stays are worn with all outer garments; they should be worn when measuring for them. If wearing a bed gown without stays for a beginning look, measure the bust around the fullest part, as you would for modern clothing.

Waist: The waist of 18th century garments is measured at the natural waist, 3 – 4 finger widths above the hipbones.

Hips: Under the full petticoats of the 18th century, this measurement is not as vital as it is for more fitted modern clothing. However, petticoats should be amply full to cover them, no matter what size.

Nape to waist: This measurement is taken along the center back. Measure from the nape bone to the natural waist.

Shoulder width: This measurement is vital for armscye placement on shifts, gowns, jackets, and other garments. Stand straight with arms at sides. Find the joint of your shoulder. For shifts, place your flat palm on your upper arm, with your index finger at the bottom of the shoulder joint. Measure from the joint three finger widths of your hand down onto the arm. This is where the armscye of your shift should sit. For gowns and jackets, the armscye sits to the outside of the shoulder joint, rather than the modern style of having the armscye sit directly on it.

Elbow to elbow: This measurement is important for sleeve length and shoulder width of less fitted garments. Stand with arms straight out at your sides. Bend your arms forward at the elbow to a 90° angle. Measure 3 finger widths below the elbow joint, using your own hand as a gauge to find where sleeve ends should rest. Take the measurement from this point on one arm, across the back, and to the corresponding point on the other arm.

Shifts

The shift is the basic 18th century underwear. Most commonly cut from white linen, the shift is a simple, loose-fitting A-line garment with elbow-length sleeves and a deep neckline that is worn next to your skin. Economically cut from a 3 to 3.5 yard piece of fabric, the shift is constructed from rectangles, squares, and triangles. Together with stockings, the shift was the innermost piece of clothing in the 18th century woman's wardrobe, functioning as a liner between the body and the layers of clothes worn over it.

Fabric

Linen fabrics were the most prevalent choice for working women's shifts during the Revolutionary War-era. White linen was a standard choice, although poorer and lower class servant women often wore coarser tow linen shifts. These might be "brown," an unbleached tan color, or "half-bleached," in which the linen is slightly sun bleached to a lighter tan color.

Anna Rosina Wenseling, a German woman, ran away on October 12, 1776 from her master John Zell in Lower Merion, PA. She wore a coarse tow shift. This shift of coarse material matches her other garments in their low quality: a striped yellow and black flannel jacket and petticoat, a green worsted under jacket, two tow aprons, a single checked handkerchief, an old hat, and no shoes or stockings.[5] While wealthier women would wear finer, softer materials next to the skin, most working women used less expensive and probably less comfortable fabrics.

There were variations on the basic shift design. Sleeves were made in different widths and they were occasionally constructed of finer fabric than the body. Fullness might be gathered to a narrow cuff band that tied with linen tape or fastened with sleeve buttons, devices similar to cufflinks. In February 1771, Elizabeth Williams ran away from her master in Concord, PA, wearing "a tow shift, with flaxen sleeves."[6] This shift used better materials ("flaxen sleeves") where they would be seen. The coarser tow fabric was used for the hidden body.

For a first shift, choose a sturdy, medium-weight white linen that will withstand frequent washings.

Construction

A few options are available for obtaining shift patterns. A cutting diagram for average sizes is also included in this chapter. Simple rectangles, squares and triangles compose a shift. While the construction requires diligent seaming for durability, the shift pattern is not complicated. For those most comfortable using a pattern, commercial patterns are available. Copying another woman's reproduction shift is another way to acquire a pattern.

The measurements illustrated here should be adequate for the average 21st century woman. Those women who are significantly smaller or larger will want to customize the measurements to better suit their body shape. The shift should be slightly loose around the torso, but should not be voluminous. Around the chest, the shift should not constrict movement, or slide too easily off the shoulders. Cutting the length to the upper-calf will allow enough fabric to keep the shift from riding up during wear. Sleeves should extend to just below the elbows.

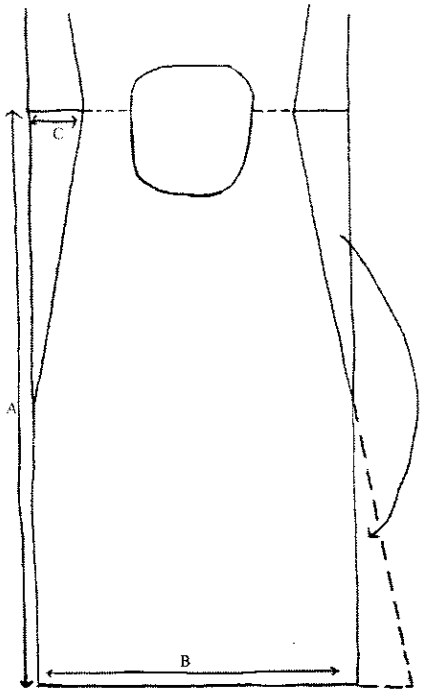
Wash and iron the fabric first before laying it out for cutting. This step will pre-shrink the fabric and remove any sizing.

Cutting and Fitting

Use a 60" width of fabric, 4 yards long, to cut 2 shifts at once. This length will work for women of an average build, 5'7" and shorter. Extra fabric can be used for bandage linen, children's shifts, patches, caps (if the correct weight linen is used), linen bags, or other projects.

1. The cutting diagram should work for the average woman; slight adjustments to three integral measurements will allow customization of fit. Most important are the length, shoulder width, and largest body circumference (hips, bust, or stomach). First, measure body length from the nape bone to the back of the knee. This will be the length of the shift (Measurement A).

2. Place your flat palm against your upper arm, with your index finger against the bottom of your shoulder joint. Have an assistant measure from shoulder joint to shoulder joint, plus 3 finger widths on each side. Add 1" for seam allowances This is Measurement B.



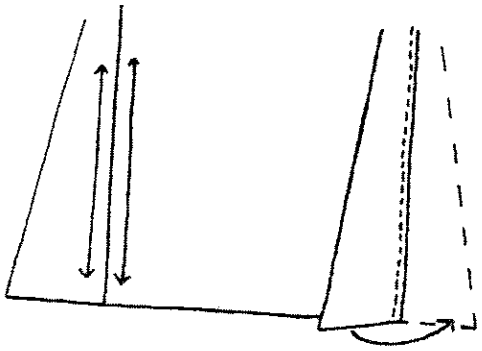
3. Place your palm against a flat surface and measure across it, including thumb. This is Measurement C, the width of the gussets that will be cut from the top of the body panel and added to the bottom.
4. Check to see that the shift panel will provide enough material to fit your body. Measure around the largest body circumference. Make sure that the given width allowance will fit the body, with a slight amount of ease. If it does not, add extra width to the panels.
5. As shown in the diagram, cut away the two slanting, triangular sections from the upper sides of the rectangle, resulting in four acutely triangular gore segments. Cut them apart along the fold line. These will be seamed along the sides of the body panel to widen the shift at the hem, as shown by the dotted triangle on the right side of the diagram.
6. Find the size of the square that will make up the sleeves. With arm held out to the side and elbow bent forward, measure from 3 finger widths below the shoulder joint to 3 finger widths below the elbow joint, around the outside of the arm. Take this measurement (generally between 10-16"), add 1" for seam allowances, and cut 2 squares of this measurement.
7. Cut two 6" square underarm gussets.
8. OPTIONAL: Cuffs require two 1 1/2" wide rectangles that are long enough to go around your upper forearm (three finger widths below the elbow). Add enough extra to this measurement so they are comfortably loose, in addition to the seam allowance. Eighteenth century shift cuffs joined with linked buttons (like cuff links) or were tied with tape, so they should not overlap.

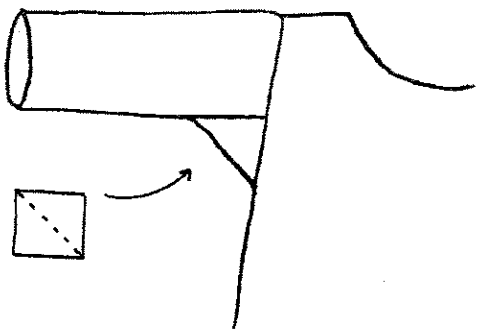
9. Cut the neckline. Follow the diagram and start small - first make cuts along the shoulder fold and along the center front and center back lines, just big enough to get the unassembled fabric on over the head. Make sure to do this when not wearing other clothing around the neck and chest, so the shift will lay correctly. With the center fold line running across the shoulders, observe the neck and chest in a mirror, and think about what outer 18th century garments will be worn over the shift. The shift neckline, which is slightly squared, should be wide and deep in front, but should not be too loose on the shoulders. Follow the look of the illustration. The neckline should dip slightly below the nape bone in back. Have an assistant mark the cutting line – remember to include enough seam allowance for a narrow hem. For personal issues of modesty, age, or susceptibility to cold, remember that a handkerchief can be draped generously and securely over the bosom.

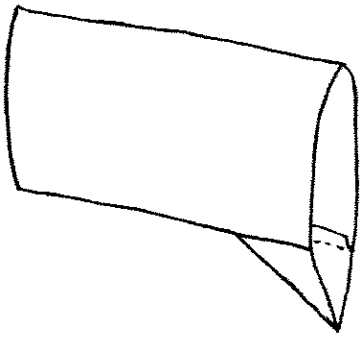
Sewing

Hand-stitching the entire shift is authentic and neatly finishes all the raw edges, preserving the garment during laundering. However, preparing a wardrobe for its first wearing can be hectic. If time-saving measures are necessary, machine-sew the interior seams that do not show. Flat-fell seam all the interior seams by hand for durability. While this might be an odious task, it will greatly increase the life of the shift. Smoothly finished seams also prevent chafing. Importantly, the neckline and sleeve edges must be hand-finished as they are visible during wear.

1. Sew triangular gores to side edges as shown in the cutting diagram - one to each front side and one to each back side, totaling four seams.
2. Fold the square sleeve piece into a rectangle. Seam the long side up to 6" from the end. If attaching cuffs, leave 1-2" open at the sleeve end.
3. The two 6" square gussets become diamond-shaped pieces in the underarm area, lending ease to the sleeve-body junctures. In the 6" opening left on the sleeve, insert the two adjacent sides of one of the folded gussets (right sides together), pin, and stitch. Repeat with the other sleeve and gusset.

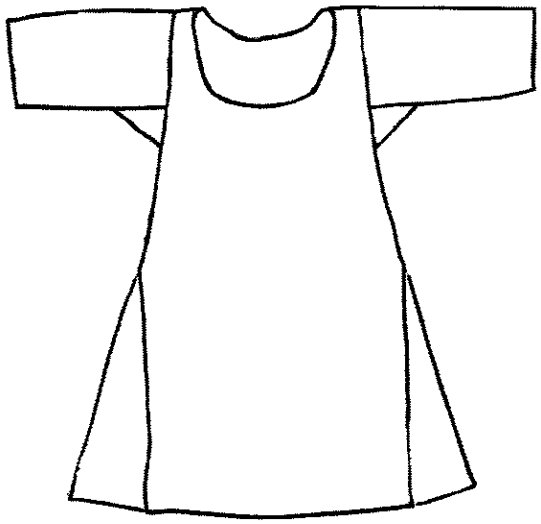






4. Fold the long body of the shift in half along the shoulder line. Match center top of each sleeve with this crease and pin sleeve in place (right sides together.) Sew each sleeve/gusset combination into the upper sides of the shift body.
5. With right sides together, stitch the bottom edges of the gussets to the shift body. Stitch the side seams of the shift body.

6. Turn up and stitch a narrow hem (not more than 1/2" deep) along the bottom edge of the shift.
7. If not using cuffs, narrowly hem the two sleeve ends. If using cuffs, stitch the short sides, right sides together. Trim the seam allowance, turn, and press. Fold the long edges inward 1/4 – 1/2" and press. Whip gather the fullness of the sleeve. Place the long edge of the cuff flush with the gathered edge of the sleeve and join with a running stitch. Fold up the cuff and press. Cover the inside of the raw whip-gathered edge with the inside edge of the cuff and hemstitch closed. On each end of the cuff, make a buttonhole (for a total of 2 holes per cuff).
8. Fold under twice a narrow hem around the neckline and hemstitch. This edge may also be turned under once and faced with narrow, 1/4" linen tape or a strip of the shift linen by sewing a line of running stitches along both edges of the tape. If using tape, make sure to wash and dry it first to prevent uneven shrinkage.
9. RECOMMENDED: Flat fell all raw seam allowances. This is more comfortable against the skin than raw seam allowances and more durable.



Wearing the Shift

Adding authentic details can personalize this garment. Try creating the body out of coarser material, while using finer linen for the sleeves. For elite impressions, finely whip-gathered neck ruffles and sleeve flounces or fancy-ironed creases in full sleeves are appropriate. For all classes, marking the center front neckline with your initials was part of good household economy. See **Construction Guide**.

It is most authentic to wear the shift with nothing underneath. Modern bras create inappropriate lines. Even if stays have not yet been acquired, it is better to go without a bra, if possible. For beginners, it is natural to wear modern underwear underneath 18th century clothing. Some might find this uncomfortable while negotiating outhouses, during hot weather, or while changing clothes on one foot in a straw-filled tent while wearing stays. The 18th century method was not to wear any underwear under the shift. Women did not wear drawers or bloomers, as in the 19th century. This can be liberating when using the privy. If chafing is a problem, try wearing cotton bike shorts, or pulling the shift fabric between the legs. It will stay in place on hot days, absorb moisture, and prevent rubbing of the flesh. A little experimentation will result in a personally comfortable solution.

Petticoats

Whether a laundress or a lady, petticoats are an integral part of an 18th century woman's wardrobe. Selecting the right fabric and adjusting the garment's length and fullness to fit the body are essential to developing an appropriate look.

A petticoat is a period term for a skirt, regardless of whether it was visible during wear or if it was worn underneath an outer petticoat. Generally, at least two petticoats were worn at all times, except by the extremely destitute. Some petticoats are described in period documents as "underpetticoats." For the middling and upper classes, underpetticoats might be a specific garment, such as a shorter, white linen garment. Lower classes would wear any of their petticoats underneath, regardless of fabric.

Length of the petticoat varies according to the character portrayed. The most common error is making petticoats too long. Petticoat hems of the working class tended to fall around mid-calf. This prevented having to pick up one's skirts when ascending stairs or doing chores. This length was safer around fires as a woman cooked or did laundry. A woman 5'6" tall portraying a low to middle class woman, for example, might make her petticoats 30-34" long. As many paintings show, the fashionable lady let her petticoats grace the instep of her foot.

Width or fullness of the petticoat can affect comfort and appearance. Think about a walking stride when considering petticoat width. Women doing laundry, tending to the wounded in the hospital, or marketing should have a full range of motion while walking. Extant garments measure between 90" and 130" in circumference around the hem. In a survey of petticoats by Sally Queen, garments often reflected a ratio of 4:1 between circumference of the hem measurement and circumference of the waistband. For example, a woman with a 30" waist should wear a petticoat with a hem circumference equal to 120". When purchasing fabric, keep in mind this waist-to-hem ratio in order to achieve the period fullness.

Establishing a general length and width helps create a personalized standard length of fabric to buy when making petticoats. For example, 2 to 2 1/2-yards of 60" wide fabric is enough for most women, allowing a little extra for shrinkage during pre-washing. If plain linen or linen tape is used for the waistband, extra fabric for this component is not necessary.

Fabric

Petticoats during the late 18th century were made of many different fabrics and could either match or contrast with a gown or jacket. Generally, common classes did not wear coordinating petticoats with their gowns, jackets, and bed gowns. Fabrics used for petticoats that were worn more often by the working class typically included worsteds, woolens, linens, and blends like linsey-woolsey in solid colors and vertical stripes. Glazed and calendared worsteds were also very popular, but modern manufacturers of these textiles are practically non-existent. Stripes were most often vertically oriented, symmetrical, and came in either narrow or wide widths. Be aware that some striped materials are woven with the stripes in the weft direction (across the grain, rather than with the warp/along the grain). Those fabrics will have to be cut *along the grain* in order to get the stripes in the correct vertical direction, possibly requiring the purchase of more fabric.

In addition, women from all classes wore quilted petticoats. Elegant women wore quilted petticoats of silk quilted in fanciful patterns around the hem, including flowers, animals, and other motifs. These were often imported from England, where professional quilters produced quilted petticoats for retail. Working women's "quilts" were more serviceable. They were often of worsted fabrics in blue, black, brown, green, and gray, and were simply stitched with diamonds. Machine-woven quilted fabrics called Marseilles or

marcellas (modern equivalents are marketed today as "matelassé") were also specially woven for petticoats in silk, linen, worsteds, and cottons. These were worn by all classes.

Most extant garments used full loom widths of cloth to create the panels of the petticoat, incorporating the selvages into the seam allowances. Silk and fabrics woven in narrow widths would be vertically oriented and seamed together at the selvages, requiring no further finishing once constructed into a petticoat. Because of the narrow fabric, many panels (about 4-6 on average) would be used to create fashionable fullness.

Coarser common fabrics were woven in broader widths, allowing the occasional use of one, horizontally placed panel to create a petticoat. Two red and blue striped wool petticoats at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston are both made of single lengths of 34-35" wide weft-striped fabric with one seam, encasing the selvages in the waist and hem treatments (43.546 and 43.575). A blue and white striped petticoat with a Connecticut provenance in the Colonial Williamsburg collection (1991-444) is also made in this manner. Raw seam allowances in serviceable petticoats were often flat-felled for durability.

Hem Binding

Binding of hems with cloth tape is present on many extant garments with original hem finishes. They are visible in paintings and prints and are mentioned in period runaway advertisements. Tapes of worsted or linen appear to be the most prevalent binding material for working class petticoats. For silk garments, lightweight silk grosgrain ribbon or plain weave tape was applied. Tape width varies from 3/8" wide to 1" wide; 5/8" seems to be the most common width used.

In choosing a binding color for working women's petticoats, matching the petticoat color was generally not a consideration. In *Der Herbst*, by Johann Christian Fiedler, the woman wearing a red petticoat at the left has a hem bound in a dark tan tape. A runaway advertisement from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 6, 1773 promises a 40 shilling reward for servant Jane McDole, who wore a yellow underpetticoat with red binding.[7] Striped petticoats might have binding that nearly matched one of the colors, but contrasted with the other colors in the pattern. For a working class impression, generally choose serviceable colors such as blue, tan, brown, and gray in tones from light to dark.

Extant garments that retain their original hem finishes often display some sort of binding method. At the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, green worsted twill tape binds the embroidered hem of a linen underpetticoat (50.3175). Linen plain weave tape was applied to the hem of a French grayish green printed cotton gown from the 1780s (43.1620). Silk quilted petticoats in the collection are almost always finished with silk grosgrain or plain-weave ribbon, which binds the layers.

Worsted twill tape, plain-weave 100% linen, and linen/cotton blend are available in a few different widths from various merchants of historical goods. Choose tightly woven tapes. They will be less likely to snag on shoe buckles or other hem-height hazards.

Before applying a binding, decide how the petticoat will be laundered. Treat binding material in the same fashion as the petticoat fabric, whether this includes washing or dry cleaning. This will prevent the petticoat and its binding from shrinking at different rates. Washing and dyeing binding tapes may easily be accomplished in an old pot on the stove.

Construction

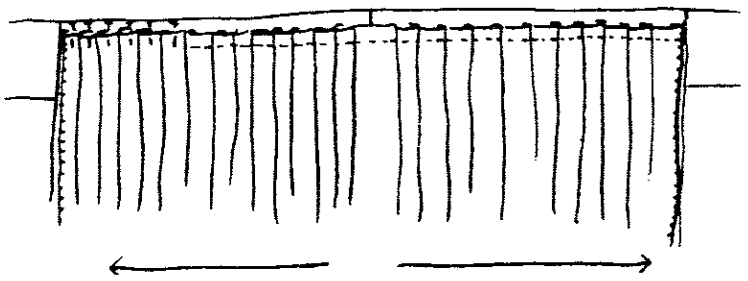
The petticoat is essentially a circular tube made from rectangles of fabric, with a pleated waist edge. The bottom edge is bound in tape to create the hem. The following method creates a petticoat with front and back panels that ties at both sides of the waist. Petticoats may also close at the center back.

1. From a 60" width, cut two panels of the desired petticoat length by cutting across the grain. Narrower widths of fabric can be pieced together to create the desired panel width.
2. Seam the two (or more) panels together at the sides, leaving the top 9" open at the side seams. These openings will become pocket slits when the front and back panels are tied closed.
3. Fold the pocket slit edge under twice and hemstitch to finish. Petticoats with center back closures may have pocket slits inserted by slashing and hemming the fabric at the appropriate points over the hips. Quilted petticoat pocket slits are bound with fabric tape as the quilted material is too thick to fold for hemming.

Waist Pleating Technique

Eighteenth-century seamstresses moderated the length of petticoats by folding over pleated fabric at the top of the skirt, not by sloping the hem. The hem was finished straight, regardless of the final length. Most extant petticoats that have not been altered show a standard method of waist pleating.

1. Take a waist measurement while wearing stays. Add 8" to this number and divide by 2 to find the average width that each panel should measure after pleating. Adjust your panel widths depending on body shape. Extra fullness in the hips, buttocks, or stomach may lead you to adjust the panels in those areas. Make sure that, when closed, the pleated front panel sides cover the sides of the back panel by about 1-2".
2. Find the center front and create a box pleat about 2-4" wide. Common petticoats seem to have a narrower box pleat than the petticoats worn by richer, silhouette conscious women.
3. Pleat the remaining fabric on the front panel in 1" wide or smaller knife pleats, with the folded edges of the pleats facing the pocket slit over the hips. In order to produce the predetermined panel measurement, make the pleats deeper or shallower as needed. Extant garments have varying pleat widths; it is apparent that a ruler was not strictly used.



4. To pleat the back panel, find the center and create an inverted box pleat approximately the same size as the front pleat.
5. Knife pleat the rest of the fabric with the folded edges of the pleats facing the center back.

Attaching the Waistband

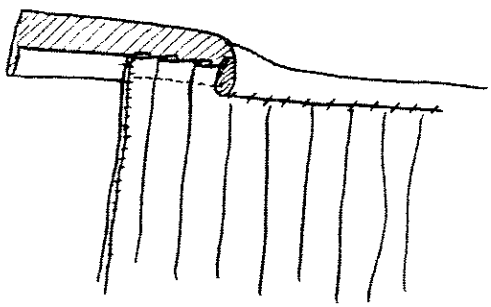
Linen tape and narrow strips of fabric were used to create the waistband, which was usually 1" - 1 1/2" wide. It served as more of a binding for the top pleated edge, rather than a stand-up waistband, so it is not interfaced like modern waistbands.

1. Pre-wash, dry, and iron all waistband materials (including linen tape ties). Both front and back panel ties will be tied in front, so ties attached to the front panel must go around the body and back to the front; they will be longer than the ties on the back panel. Allow sufficient lengths for tying.

a. When using linen tape, use 5/8" – 1" wide tape and cut a sufficiently long piece so that the tape will bind the front of the petticoat and create tape ties at the sides of the panel.
b. Alternately, a narrow fabric waistband can finish the waist edge, with separately attached ties. Cut a strip of fabric (either matching the petticoat fabric, or of plain linen) 2"-3" wide and 1"-1 1/2" longer than the width of the pleated edge of the petticoat panel. This will allow for 1/4" – 1/2" seam allowance, plus a little extra for ease in attaching the waistband – it is all right if the waistband hangs over the end of the panel slightly. Stitch the short ends and trim the seam allowance. Turn and press.

2. Attach the waistband:
   a. Continuous linen tape waistband and ties. There are two methods.
      i. Technique A: Align the center of the tape with the center of the panel. Place the long edge of the tape flush to the petticoat edge on the *inside* and running/combination stitch the seam 1/4" – 1/2" from the edge. This seam is hidden, so machine stitching may be used. Fold the tape to the front, over the seam allowances, press. Hemstitch the free edge of the tape to the front of the petticoat, finishing the waistband edge.
      ii. Technique B : Fold the tape in half lengthwise, press, and center it over the panel's top edge. Hemstitch the tape along its long edges to the front and back of the pleated waistband edge.

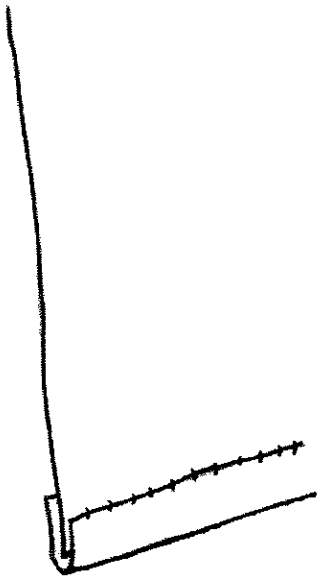
b. Narrow fabric waistband. Place raw edges of the waistband flush with the pleated edge of the petticoat on the *inside* and center it. Pulling the top edge of the waistband out of the way, stitch a 1/2" seam, connecting one layer of the waistband to the pleated edge. This seam will not show, so use machine stitching if desired. Fold the waistband up and over the seam allowance, so the loose waistband edge is now on the *exterior* of the petticoat. Press.



Fold under and hemstitch the free edge of the waistband to secure it. The fold of the waistband should rest on the encased pleated edge of the petticoat, or slightly rise no more than 1/2" above it. If there is a little extra waistband at the edges of the panel, overcast the bottom edges of the waistband closed. Attach ties to narrow fabric waistband by folding under twice one end of a tape tie and stitching it to the *outside* of the waistband, 1/2" from the short edge. This keeps the ends of the panel smoothly against the body when tied closed. Use a double row of running stitch or cross-stitches to insure security of the tie. The loose end of the tie should be left raw, as it was traditionally.

Hem Binding Technique #1

This may be done before or after the waist treatment. Technique #1 is the most prevalent for all petticoats and is the method most used on quilted petticoats.

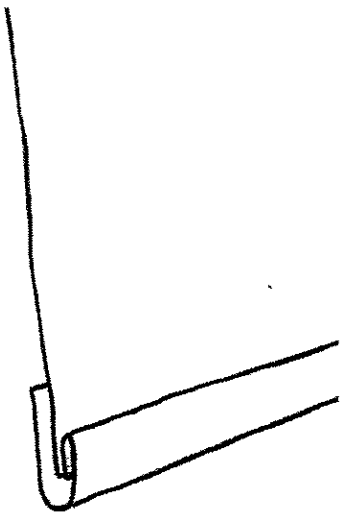


1. Begin by placing the tape below the raw edge at the bottom of the petticoat, right side of the petticoat fabric up. Move the tape up so that its top edge covers 1/8" to 1/4" of the petticoat. The remainder of the tape should be folded to the back of the petticoat fabric, encasing the raw edge. Pin if desired. Press the folded binding tape edge if a stiff tape, such as linen, is used.
2. With the right side facing out, hemstitch the top edge of the tape to the petticoat, making sure to go through the 2 layers of tape with the petticoat fabric sandwiched in between. These hemstitches are very shallow, hardly rising above the edge of the tape on the front and appearing as small running stitches on the back. This requires placing the stitches close together.
3. If using tape wider than 1/2" secure the loose tape edge on the reverse with a second line of running stitches along the top. These stitches should show through to the front side of the garment. Not all extant garments have this top edge stitched down, so this is a matter of preference. Keep in mind that wider tapes have more excess that may hang down, wear more quickly, or snag on buckled shoes.

Binding Technique #2

This method can incorporate machine and hand sewing if time is in short supply. The finished appearance conceals the machine stitching.

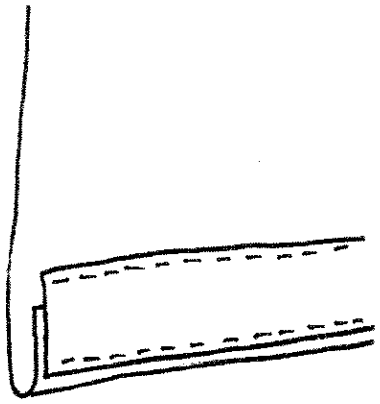
1. Begin by placing the tape on the right side of the petticoat fabric, right sides together, with the bottom edge of the tape flush with the raw hem edge of the petticoat.
2. Make a narrow running stitch seam 1/8" to 1/4" deep around the bottom of the petticoat. Machine-sewing can be used to create this seam.
3. Pull down the tape over the seam and press. Fold the excess of the tape to the back of the petticoat fabric and press again to create a sharp bottom edge.
4. Using a running stitch (by hand this time), attach the top edge of the tape to the wrong side of the petticoat. The stitches will show through to the front.



Binding Technique #3

More of a hem finish than a true binding, this technique is used on upper class gowns and petticoats, with the exception of quilted petticoats. The binding tape does not show on the outside of the garment, but the securing stitches do.

1. With the wrong side of the skirt facing out, fold up 1/4" of the fabric and press.
2. Over this folded raw edge, lay the binding tape on the fabric, with the bottom edge of the tape covering the raw edge and laying almost flush with the bottom hem fold. Pin if desired.
3. Using a running stitch, secure the bottom edge of the tape to the skirt fabric, going through all layers.
4. Secure the top of the binding tape to the garment with another row of running stitches. Two rows of running stitches should be visible on the outside of the garment.



Accommodating Hip Enhancements

The 18th century silhouette emphasized the hips and/or a large rounded posterior. Fashionable women wore side hoops or bum rolls to achieve this look. Common people and those "aping their betters" may have worn either hip enhancements or extra petticoats to emulate the look. Not all garments will allow the wearing of hip enhancements. While they are appropriate under full-skirted gowns, bed gowns and short gowns will not look correct with a bum roll or hoops. Additionally, the destitute were most concerned with keeping themselves clothed, rather than trying to look fashionable.

If this is a desired addition, investigate what improving garment is desirable. Try on different styles used by others. Be aware that hip enhancements will lift the petticoat hem in areas, making it uneven. For bum rolls, tying the petticoat back panel lower over the bum roll may even the hem, or adjust the length of the petticoat permanently at the waistband by shortening it in the front. Petticoats worn with very wide side hoops need more fullness at the sides to accommodate them, so the front and back must be made shorter.

Technique

Folding over the petticoat fabric to the inside along the top edge was the technique used to control petticoat length, rather than shaping the hem. An assistant can hold the petticoat in place and gauge the evenness of the hem after adjustments are made. When working alone, use a full length mirror and hold the unfinished petticoat in place around your waist with a long piece of twill tape tied over top.

1. Pleat the petticoat fabric according to the above directions. Machine-baste the pleats in place and remove the pleating pins.
2. Wear a shift, underpetticoat, stays, and hip enhancement of choice. Tie the petticoat in place with a long piece of twill tape, as if wearing it. Notice that the hip enhancements may pull the hemline up, making it uneven. Those areas not lifted by the bum roll or hoop will appear to droop.
3. To even the hem, pull upward on the section that appears to droop until it is even with the "enhanced" sections.
   a. Bum roll - When wearing a bum roll that enhances both the sides and back, only adjust the front.
   b. Side hoops or small hoop – These devices enhance only the sides, so make adjustments to both center front and back.

4. Fold the fabric inward, toward the body, and pin in place. When complete, the petticoat hem should be even.
5. Attach the waistband to the folded edge. Sections of it may be folded slightly, deeply, or not at all. The raw edge was left inside the petticoat and was left unfinished.

How to Wear Petticoats

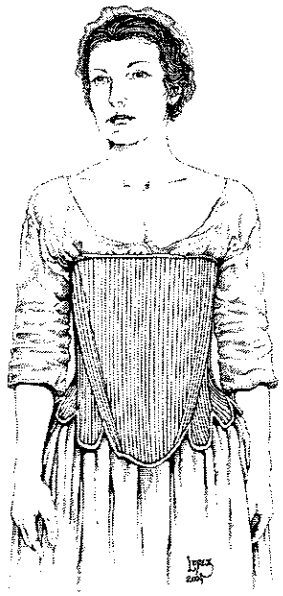
There are nuances to wearing petticoats that may not be realized until donning 18th century clothing for the first time. Where does the petticoat intersect with other garments? How are the panels secured on the body? How many are worn? These aspects are hard to document using period sources, which usually do not reveal such personal information. Living history interpreters usually find their own personal method that is comfortable and effective.

The correct 18th century silhouette requires at least 2 petticoats. A truly destitute woman might wear only one, but it should be extremely ragged looking in appearance. While some women wear stays directly over the shift with petticoats tied over top, others find it comfortable to wear one of the petticoats underneath the stays. Soft underpetticoat fabrics are often the best choices as these fabrics can often be felt through the shift.

How petticoats close is a matter of personal preference and not something that is easily documented. Petticoats tied together at the sides (back right and front right tied at the side, same for the left side) can become loose. While not visually documented, many have success by tying their petticoat panels like aprons. Some extant petticoats appear to have ties that would have functioned in this way, although ties on these garments wore quickly and were often replaced. This requires the front panel tapes to be longer than those on the back panel.

First, tie together the two tapes from the back panel, making a bow in front. Next, pull up the front panel over the ties of the back panel. Have a friend check that the hem of the two panels are even, and then wrap the ties around the back and pull them around to the front and tie. Lastly, push this knot underneath the petticoat waistband to create a smooth look under a gown or jacket.

Stays



In today's era of Spandex®, the most constricting thing about modern undergarments is the underwire in brassieres. It may be difficult to believe that a completely boned garment can be comfortable. Stays and corsets received a bad reputation during the 19th century, when these garments intentionally reduced the waistline, using metal eyelets in order to "tight-lace" the wearer for the smallest possible fit. Novels like *Gone With the Wind* would have us believe that the main goal of wearing stays was to pull one's waist in as tightly as possible. Eighteenth-century stays are very different in construction, wear, and purpose. While there are a few 18th century satire prints that ridicule the elite's attempts to reduce the waist, it was not common or practical among the lower and middle classes.

Simply described, stays are a torso encasing garment made of several layers that provide shape and support the bust and back. For common women, the exterior layer would usually be unbleached linen canvas or worsted fabric. The interior may have 1 or 2 inner linings of canvas or buckram, with a backing of unbleached linen canvas. Channels were stitched down the length of the stays around the body and boning was inserted for support. Boning materials included whalebone, cane, and wood splints. Kid leather or worsted tape bound the top and bottom edges. A loose linen lining was then stitched around the edge of the interior, making it easily replaceable when it became worn.

Stays are necessary in creating the socially-accepted woman's appearance of the 18th century. Eighteenth-century prints and paintings show women from all classes attempted a fashionable silhouette, based on a long, conical torso. The pronounced bust was flattened and pressed upward. The breasts were meant to mound gently above the stays, without obvious cleavage between them (though lower class, unfashionable, or immodest women often failed in this attempt). This look was emphasized by carrying the shoulders pulled back and low. The effect was pronounced in upper class women who wore strapped stays, which forcibly held back the shoulders. Working women needing more mobility wore stays without straps that freed their arms and shoulders. Stays were not designed to pinch the waist as in the 19th century.

Women today are often pleasantly surprised when they find stays can be comfortable. When standing for long periods or sitting on stools, stays provide support for the back. They help support the heavier weight of historical clothing. Stay length is key to comfort. Stays that are too long can dig into the flesh, while those that are too short do not stay in place, moving up or down on the frame. Be aware that lacing stays too loosely can be just as uncomfortable as lacing them too tightly. Stays must be snug in order to provide support and not chafe.

Half-boned stays or jumps can provide some 18th century shaping for those with medical conditions that prevent the wearing of stays. Whereas typical stays are constructed by placing bones all the way around

the body, a half-boned pair of stays uses considerably less bones, and jumps use even less. If no supporting undergarment can be worn, wear a loose outer garment such as a bed gown that does not require stays or jumps (though 18th century women would have worn them under all garments). Wearing a gown or jacket makes an 18th century foundation garment a necessity.

Construction of stays may seem complicated, but is well within the ability of a seamstress with intermediate skills. An assistant makes fitting stays easier. Commercial stays and jumps patterns are available. There are also merchants who make custom stays; these can be expensive, but are a good solution for those short on time or patience. When trying to prepare a new 18th century wardrobe, stays may seem to be a difficult hurdle. However, they are an essential part of an authentic impression.

Gowns, Jackets, and Other Garments – An Introduction

Women of the Revolutionary War-era wore a sleeved garment over their shifts and stays when appropriately dressed. Most often, this was a fitted garment such as a gown or jacket. While this garment might have been removed to perform hard labor, this was done in the context of a domestic or private setting.

The following sections introduce the most prevalent outer garments worn during the late 18th century. Descriptions and instructions for constructing two types of less-fitted working garments, bed gowns and short gowns, follow this section. These garments are an appropriate beginning option until stays and a more fitted garment can be constructed.

Gowns

Gowns are fitted garments consisting of a sleeved bodice and a skirt section. They are most often full-length, reaching between low calf and the floor. The sleeves often end in cuffs or shaped flounces. Like most 18th century upper body garments, gowns are cut with the curved side seam set toward the back, rather than at the natural side. The shoulder seam does not sit along the top of the shoulder, but toward the back. A few commercial patterns are available for gowns. Sewers with intermediate to advanced skills should consider constructing this typical garment.

Gowns, worn over stays, are the most documented garment worn by all classes during the Revolutionary War. There are two major variations on this basic theme.

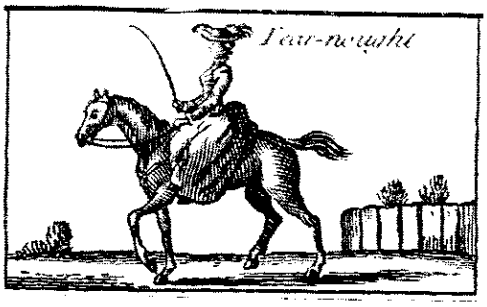
The English gown (also known as a "nightgown" or *"robe à l'anglaise"*) is fitted at the back by two different methods: 1) by stitched-down pleating in the center back section that continues in one long piece into the skirt (called *en fourreau*), or 2) by separately cut back pieces that are seamed to the skirt at the waist. The first style is earlier, though it remained popular throughout the Revolutionary War period. The pieced style started to become common in the late 1760s.

The "sack" gown ("negligee", *"sacque"*, or *"robe à la française"*) is distinguished by the full, loose pleats that fall from the back neckline to the bottom of the skirts. The loose swath of fabric over the back covers a bodice lining that is pulled up against the body with lacing. This style, popular among the upper classes through the first half of the 18th century, was starting to fall out of fashion by the Revolutionary War era. The ample amount of fabric required for a sack generally prevented their wear by the lower class.

Jackets

Jackets are fitted to the stayed body with seams similar to those on a gown. They have set-in sleeves, which sometimes end in cuffs. During the Revolutionary War period, jackets have short, full skirts below the waist, which end anywhere from high on the hip to mid-thigh. Most jackets have set-in waists like those of gowns, but some, like *caracos*, have the skirts cut in one with the body. Jackets are nearly always cut with the side and shoulder seams toward the back, as on gowns.

Riding Habits



Riding habits are influenced in cut and trim by men's coats, though they retain feminine detailing. The skirt fabric of the habit usually matches the coat. They are worn with a waistcoat or faux waistcoat front stitched into the coat. Underneath these visible layers, the equestrienne wears stays or jumps over a habit shirt, instead of the everyday shift. Riding habits were worn almost exclusively by upper class women for riding and traveling.

For My Persona, Should I Wear a Gown, Jacket, Bed Gown, Short Gown, or Riding Habit?

The right clothing supports your selected persona and provides interesting material to discuss with the public. A working woman traveling with the army might wear a worn, soiled, and faded linsey-woolsey gown or jacket. An officer's wife visiting her husband could ride into camp in a smart woolen riding habit with an elegant hat. A range of social impressions can better illustrate the strata of society to the visiting public when appropriately portrayed.

Lately, research has focused not just on which garments existed, but also on which garments were most common in specific areas and cultural groups. Throughout the classes, the gown was the most commonly worn garment (left, with skirts pulled up *à la polonaise*. It was a standard covering for the accepted female silhouette. What visually differentiates the gown wearers among various social classes is the fit, fabric, presence and type of trim, and accessories worn and carried with the outfit. For example, probate inventories show gowns to be the most common garment throughout the American colonies. These inventories do not address the absolute lowest economic levels, but even runaway indentured servant advertisements in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* show a preponderance of gowns worn by the working class. An 18th century impression might require strenuous labor, as for those women performing laundry or working in a garden. These women might wear a less fitted garment, such as a gown of coarse material, bed gown, or short gown.

Be aware of what garments were common in your impression's geographical area and cultural region. Runaway African-American slaves documented in *Purdy and Dixon's Virginia Gazette* and later in *Dixon and Hunter's Virginia Gazette* were commonly observed wearing jackets with their petticoats (right). Women living in the New England colonies were more likely to wear worsted and woolen fabrics year-round, compared to their southern counterparts, who wore more linen and cotton.

The first step is to assemble a basic, authentic 18th century look. After that, you can begin to examine what is common for women of your selected persona. Ethnicity, geography, social station and personality are a few of the factors you might consider as you fine-tune your interpretation. To discover how these factors affected clothing choices, it is especially helpful to examine primary sources. For example, probate inventories are useful for discovering what a middle or upper class woman in a particular location might have in her wardrobe. Advertisements in period newspapers give an idea of what kind of wares local merchants offered for sale. Notices that describe runaway servants and slaves offer a glimpse of the usually anonymous working class woman. Period paintings and prints can provide visual clues to the clothing preferences of various classes.

Historical research can be an exciting, but formidable venture. There are many people who can assist you in this journey, both within the *Brigade* and without. While there is rarely any "final answer" to a particular line of research, the process itself can be very satisfying. Remember to share your findings with the rest of the living history community.

Bed Gowns

The bed gown is a simple, comfortable, utilitarian item of clothing, making it an excellent choice for the beginner. Gowns are a more standard garment for 18th century women, but women new to Revolutionary War-era dress will find bed gowns a time-efficient alternative until a gown can be constructed. Generally worn over stays, the unfitted design of the bed gown makes it a choice for those women unable to wear stays due to modern medical conditions. While it is true that the short gown (a similar garment explained in the next chapter) also meets these criteria, the bed gown is accurate for a wider range of personas, including Americans, British, and Europeans alike.

Extant garments incorporate a variety of details as individual as their wearers, but all follow a basic T-shape. The bed gown covers almost two-thirds of the body length. It was made from a continuous length of cloth from the front hem, over the shoulder, to the back hem. A box pleat along the center back fits the garment to the back, while allowing fullness for the bust in front. Among extant garments, the fullness of the garment, sleeve end treatment, and how the neckline is finished vary. The bed gown was worn loosely over stays, wrapped closed in front, and held at the waist by tying an apron over top. Most extant bed gowns are fully lined.

Documentation indicates that bed gowns were worn for many physical tasks in the home and its outdoor surroundings. There is also evidence of more elegant bed gowns as part of layettes for the lying-in period after giving birth. Several bed gowns existing from the 18th century can be found in English and American museum collections. Further information about bed gowns is provided in diaries, journals, runaway servant advertisements, and inventories. In 1775, Ann Cook wore a bed gown striped blue, red, green, and white, when she ran away with her husband from Warrington Township, Pennsylvania.[8] Elizabeth Gerry and Jane Senter, both of Londonderry, New Hampshire and of varying wealth, had bed gowns listed in their probate inventories at the time of their deaths in 1777.[9] A period diagram of bed gown construction by F.A.P. Garsault provides evidence of this garment among the French. Several illustrations by Denis Diderot show laboring women wearing bed gowns in his *L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers.* Bed gowns, with their simple construction and adjustable fit, were worn by many different populations as a garment for working or informal undress.

Fabric

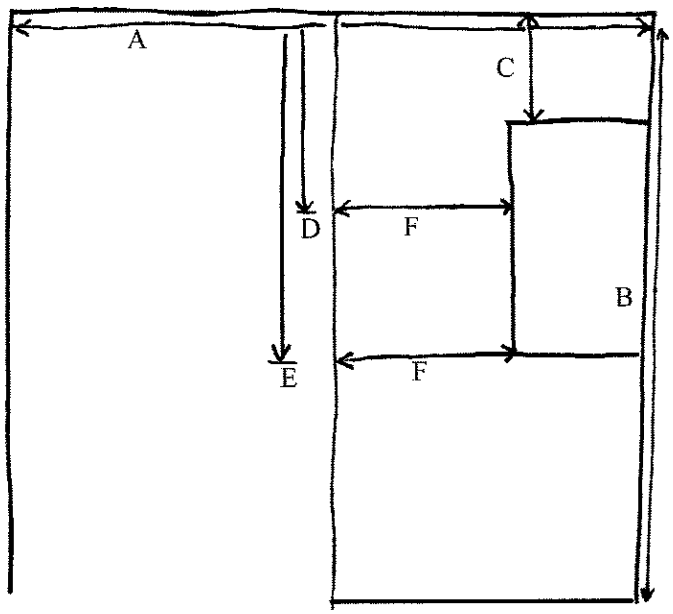
Choose an appropriate fabric for the period and selected persona. Linen, wool, linsey-woolsey, and cotton were used for bed gowns during the period. Common colors include blue and black (which were often striped with white), solid white, and brown. Many extant garments are white. Woven vertical stripes, solids, a few checks, and specific prints were used. Beginners should choose documented solids and vertical stripes. For lining fabrics, choose a simpler linen fabric than the exterior. Agnes Mackey, serving in a home in Lancaster, PA in 1770, wore a bed gown of black and white calico, with a striped linen lining.[10]

Developing a Pattern

While there are many varieties in the cut and structure of bed gowns, the following instructions will allow even basic sewers to develop a custom pattern for one type of these garments. For those more comfortable following a pattern, there are commercial patterns available and the following information can help you fit that pattern to your body.

Use the below directions to create a custom pattern using inexpensive fabric, which allows you to try it on and make adjustments. Once finished with the drafting process, take this test piece apart and transfer these markings to muslin or non-woven fabric for a pattern that can withstand repeated use. Ask a friend for fitting and construction help. During the fitting, wear a shift, underpetticoat, and stays, if they have been acquired.

1. Hold arms out straight from the shoulder, with elbows bent forward at 90° angles, and have someone measure from just below the elbow (3 finger widths) on one arm to the same spot on the other (see How to Measure Your Body). Add 15-20" to this Measurement to allow extra for the center back fitting pleats, seam allowances, and ease. This is Measurement A, which runs along the shoulder line fold. The center of Measurement A is the center front of the garment.
2. Determine the desired length of the bed gown. Measure from the nape down to the preferred length (often mid-thigh to knee length). Add seam allowances to this measurement for hem seam allowance - approximately 1/2". This is Measurement B.
3. The bed gown sleeve is cut square and full. Measure 10-12" down from the shoulder fold line to create Measurement C. This will create a roomy sleeve for all except those with very full arms.
4. Measure from your shoulder to your bust line. Keep in mind that the bust line is elevated when wearing stays. This is Measurement D.
5. Measure from your shoulder to your natural waistline. This is Measurement E.
6. Measure around the widest part of the body above the hips, whether this is the bust or stomach area. Add 10 to this number (or slightly more for a more roomy fit) and divide by 4. This is Measurement F. Measure out on both sides of the center front line at the bust (if lower than the sleeve line) and waist and mark this on the pattern.
7. Inverted box pleating along the side seams below the waist accommodates hip fullness. Following the diagram, draw a horizontal line out from the waist at least 10", then down straight to the hem.
8. Connect these measurements to create a combined underarm and side seam on the pattern. Start at the end of the sleeve, travel toward the armpit, down the torso to the natural waist, then out to accommodate the hips.



Cutting & Construction

Before beginning construction, make a muslin test garment (or use your pattern) and try it on to verify the pattern before cutting into more expensive fabrics.

1. Take the pattern and place the shoulder line along the fold of the cloth. Cut around the outside edges. Cut the center front opening, making sure not to cut the back panel. Repeat steps 1. through 4c. with lining fabric, if lining is desired.
2. Cut a 7" x 6" rectangle of the outer fabric. This is the neckpiece. Women who have fuller necks may need to lengthen the 7" side of the neckpiece and should coordinate this with the back shoulder slit (see Instruction 7 below).
3. Cut two 4-6" squares for the underarm gussets.
4. Underarm/side seam:
   a. Place the underarm gusset (follow gusset instructions in the Shifts section). If using a lining, the gusset seam allowances do not need to be flat-felled; otherwise, flat-fell the seam allowances to prevent raveling.
   b. Stitch from the gusset to the sleeve end. Stitch the side seam from the bottom of the gusset to the waist, above where the garment widens to accommodate the hips. Stitch from the hem upward (do not turn the corner toward the waist across where the pleat will be located).
   c. There will be an opening between the two seams. Evenly push this fullness flat against the side body seam to create a box pleat or pleats stacked on top of each other, measuring approximately 3-4" wide, centering the fullness over the seam. With a running stitch or hemstitch, stitch the top of the box pleat(s) to the wrong side of the body. Press all seam allowances to one side. Repeat with your lining fabric. If you do not intend to line the garment, cover the pleat edge top with a piece of fabric tape stitched around all sides.
5. With wrong sides together, insert the lining into the bed gown.
6. Create 6" slits along the shoulder fold from the center front toward the sleeve hems on both sides.
7. The bed gown should be slightly fitted to the body with a box pleat at the center back from neck to waist, releasing to provide fullness for the hips. Have an assistant help you adjust the pleat appropriately. Make a box pleat from the neck to the waist, approximately 3" wide when pressed flat. Make sure that the back neck slit is no larger than 6" after creating the center back box pleat. If you have altered the size of the neckpiece, make sure the back neck slit is no larger than the length of the long edge of the neckpiece minus 1".
8. With right sides of the bed gown and neckpiece together, center one 7" side of the neckpiece along the shoulder slit, matching centers. Stitch, ending the stitching ½" from the end of the neckpiece.
9. Align one raw side edge of the neckpiece with one front slit edge, right sides together; stitch. Repeat with other side.
10. Even the seam allowances between the neck piece by trimming the front edge, if necessary.
11. Fold the neckpiece fabric in half, wrong sides together and parallel with the shoulder fold. This will create a natural inward rolling of the center front edges.
12. Press all neckpiece seams toward the center of the rectangle. Turn under the raw edge of the neckpiece 1/4", press, and hemstitch the folded edge to body.
13. Finish the garment by joining outer fabric and lining at sleeve ends, hem, and center front opening with edge stitching.

Short Gowns

Another simple working garment worn by many American women was the short gown. This garment incorporates a scooped neckline, flared skirts, and back pleats for fitting.

In 1766, servant Weanever Carbrite ran away from her master James Torbert in Newtown, Bucks County, PA. She took three short gowns with her, described by Torbert as "one light colored Chintz, two linsey, one straight bodices, the other loose."[11] "Straight bodices" alludes to the tight body hugging fit of the first linsey short gown. Apprentice Massey Doyl ran away from John Barkley in Bedminster, NJ in 1778 with "three striped short gowns, one of linsey, the other two of tow and linen."[12] Children's short gowns in the collections of the Connecticut Historical Society (58.25.1) and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (44.353) are made from utilitarian blue and white vertically-striped fabrics, as are many worn by runaway indentured servants in the mid-Atlantic region. For the working classes, short gowns were an alternate garment to the more typical gown. Their simple construction makes the short gown an excellent first garment for women with American personas.

Fabric

The most common fabrics used for short gowns included linen, linsey-woolsey, and cotton. It is important to avoid modern cottons for a first short gown as most are inappropriate in texture or design. Woolen fabrics are documented for winter short gowns, though it appears to be a distant fourth to the other textiles mentioned in period sources.

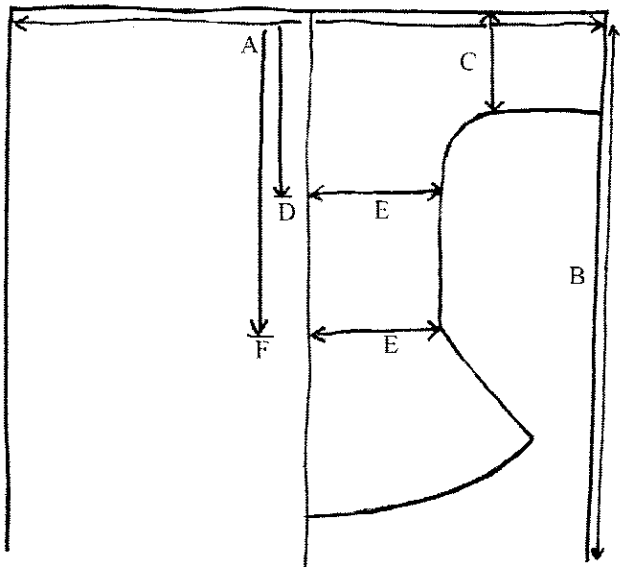
Runaway servants commonly wore short gowns of blue, brown, black, and red, often striped with white. Other colors mentioned in advertisements of the period, include brown, gray, solid white, unbleached linen, and purple, which was generally mixed with white. Rarer colors include yellow and green. Solid-color and striped fabrics were most prominent, with a smattering of prints, checks, and stamped fabrics.

Developing a Pattern

The short gown is basically T-shaped when laid flat, as the sleeves are cut in one with the body. Usually made without a waist seam during the Revolutionary War era, the garment was most often fitted to the body with a series of inverted pleats in the back. These fitting pleats were stitched down only to the top of the waist, releasing to provide fullness over the hips. The front and back were cut almost symmetrically. The overlap at the center front opening allows adjustability in this less formal garment.

Drawstrings at the neck and waist, long sleeves, and elevated waistlines are details that indicate a short gown may date later in the century. The expense of textiles during this time led period seamstresses to piece ends of sleeves, skirt points, and other areas in order to make less fabric go further. The short gown's neck was usually cut in a gently-squared low scoop to mimic the fashion of finer garments; this was filled with a handkerchief for modesty. Straight pins closed the front opening and an apron tied over the short gown closed the waist.

Designing a personal pattern is an easy option for sewers with basic to advanced skills. Diagrams for a variety of short gowns from the 18th and early 19th centuries appear in Claudia Kidwell's article "Short Gowns" from *Dress, the Journal of the Costume Society of America*, in Sharon Ann Burnston's *Fitting & Proper*, and in Beth Gilgun's *Tidings from the 18th Century*. For those more comfortable following a pattern, there are commercial patterns available. The following instructions can help you better fit a garment constructed from a pattern. Ask a friend for fitting and construction help. During the fitting, wear a shift, underpetticoat, and stays.



1. Have an assistant take an elbow to elbow measurement (see How to Measure).
   a. Hold arms out straight from the shoulder and bent forward at the elbow. Have someone measure from 3 finger widths below the elbow joint on one arm to the same spot on the other.
   b. Add approximately 5" to this measurement. This is Measurement A. The additional length provides room for pleating at the back and seam allowances on the sleeves.
   c. Note: If fuller hips are an issue, you may need to add more than 5" to the width. The back pleats will allow a better fit above the waist, but the width of the panel determines fullness for covering hips and bust.
2. Determine the desired length for the short gown – this is generally 4-8" below the hip bone.
   a. Measure from the top of the shoulder to the desired length. Be aware that fullness of the bust will shorten this length somewhat.
   b. Add 2-4" to the measurement for this fullness and seam allowances to the total length. This will vary depending on body type. Full-figured body types may need to add more to this measurement. This is Measurement B.
3. Transfer these measurements to a folded piece of muslin. The fold line represents Measurement A (the shoulder line). The length of the folded section represents Measurement B. On modern fabric, Measurement A will probably run perpendicular to the selvage. Measurement B will run parallel to the selvage.
4. To create the neck opening:
   a. Fold the test piece in half lengthwise, dividing Measurement A (the shoulder line), to find the center line of the body. This is the front opening on one side of the shoulder line – mark it on the pattern from the shoulder line to the hem on the front side.
   b. Cut along Measurement A from the center point and along the front opening just enough to squeeze your head through. These cuts will resemble a "T".
   c. Put the test piece on, aligning the fold line (Measurement A) along the top of the shoulders.
   d. Draw a squared, scoop neckline onto the pattern (use an assistant to facilitate this task). This neckline should be similar to a shift neckline. In the back, the neckline should be approximately 2" below the shoulder line, framing the nape bone. The front neckline should be approximately 7–8" below the shoulder fold at its deepest

point. Be sure to leave enough fabric to turn under twice for a narrow hem around the neckline.

e. Remove the test piece and connect all measurements. Cut the neck hole. Later, after the back pleats are stitched, the neck hole will be widened. This provides a starting point for the neckline during fitting.

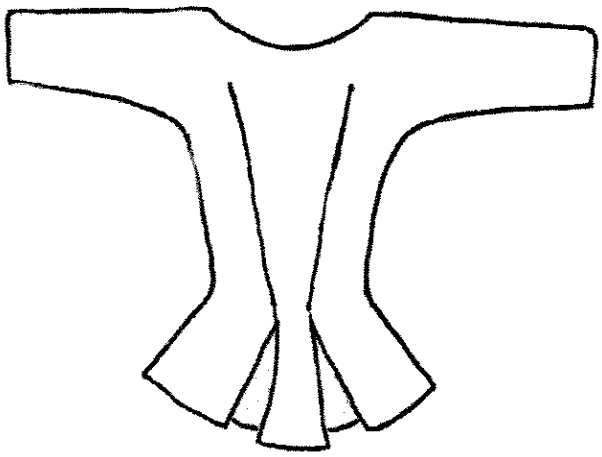
5. Lay the pattern out flat. Cut along the center front line from hem to the shoulder line, creating the front opening.
6. Measure for the sleeve:
   a. Fold the pattern in half at the shoulder line again (Measurement A), as shown.
   b. Measure around the largest part of the arm, add 3-5", then divide by two to find Measurement C. The additional inches control the looseness of the sleeve.
   c. From the shoulder fold line at the sleeve end, measure straight down by Measurement C and mark it on the pattern – this is the underarm cutting line.
7. Measure for the bust:
   a. On the front of your body, measure down from the shoulder to the bust line. This is Measurement D.
   b. Take a bust measurement and add 8". Divide this number by four. This is Measurement E.
   c. Measure that amount out at bust level on both sides of the center front opening. Make sure this is below the underarm cutting line. This should allow enough room for seams, fitting pleats, and a slight overlap for closure at the center front.
8. On the front of your body, measure down from the shoulder to the waistline. This is Measurement F. Mark this on the pattern at the same width as Measurement E.
9. Connect the measurements to create the underarm/side seam.
   a. Draw a continuous line from wrist, along the underarm seam line, curving through the underarm area. Curving through the underarm allows ease of movement; do not curve this too closely to the body.
   b. Travel down through the bust and waist measurements.
   c. At the waist, flare the line out below the waist at a 45–90° angle, as shown in the diagram. Curve the hemline as shown in the diagram. Unevenness along the hemline will be corrected after stitching the side seam.
10. Cut out the pattern along the side seam lines.
11. Fit the short gown pattern by basting the side seams. Put on the basted muslin inside out (with seam allowances to the outside) and pin the front closed with a slight overlap. This allows easy adjustment of seams and back pleats. The side seams should follow the side of the body, unlike other 18th century garments, where the side seam sets further back. Remember, the garment will be somewhat full before making a pleat(s) at the center back.
12. Back Pleats:
   - Test pleating methods on the test piece so overall fit will be apparent. Have someone assist in fitting the back pleats as shown below.
   - Usually, short gown fitting pleats consist of one or more inverted box pleats. When more than one pleat is made, those pleats create an angled V from shoulders to the waist. Other short gowns were made with parallel pleats straight down from neck to waist along the center back.
   - The arrangement of pleats is somewhat dependent on body shape; a particular arrangement may suit certain body types more than others. Have an assistant create the pleats in order to fit the short gown smoothly to the body.

- Baste the pleats and test the pattern again for fit. They are not like darts, so the stitching line will not taper. Mark any adjustments to seams and the depth of the back pleats on the muslin pattern.

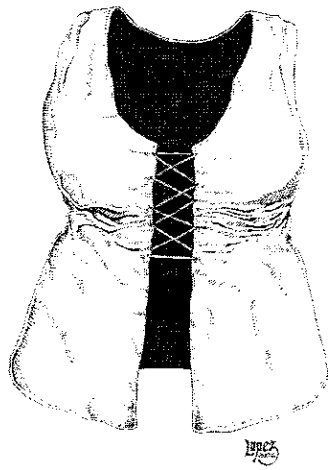
Remove the basting lines. The muslin test piece can now be used as a pattern.

Construction

1. Fold fabric along the shoulder line with right sides together. Pin, then sew the side seams, from sleeve end to garment hem. If necessary, even the hem at the side seams by trimming.
2. Press seam allowances to one side, then finish the underarm/side seams.
   a. For unlined garments, flat-fell seams are best for linen and other fabrics that fray. Fell the continuous underarm/side seams.
   b. Another seam finishing option includes lining the short gown with a similar material. Create a second short gown of lining material (natural linen is a basic choice). Slip the lining into the outer fabric piece, wrong sides together. Finish the hems and neckline with edge stitching.
3. Fit the back pleats as on the muslin test pattern. Lined short gowns handle the two layers as one in creating back pleats. Stitch the seam on the interior side. Press pleat fullness flat against the garment.
4. For unlined garments, finish the edges by stitching a narrow hem along all raw edges, including the neck, front opening, hem, and sleeves. Press.



The Mythical Bodice



Over time, the modern concept of 18th century dress for women has changed. New research has allowed us to better recreate what common women wore during the Revolutionary War. Unfortunately, poorly documented, inauthentic garments have also become identified with the period—one of these garments is referred to as the "bodice." Sometimes called an "English Bodice" or "French Bodice," it is sold by various vendors as a pattern or a ready-to-wear garment. It is a sleeveless vest-type garment, terminating at either the waist or over the hips with tabs.

This garment is NOT appropriate for use at *Brigade* events.

Many seasoned living history interpreters have owned one of these incorrect garments due to a lack of information or the influence of merchants. There are many theories on the modern origins of this garment born of reenactor myth, but like all myths, its beginnings are obscure. Even the late British costume authority Janet Arnold found it a mystery. She could not understand reenactors' obsession with a garment that could not be documented *because it never existed.*

Observing the "bodice," it does not conform to 18th century clothing construction norms. The typical neckline of the period is a wide and deep squared line. On "bodices," the neckline might shockingly scoop below the breasts or has thick shoulder straps, resulting in a narrow dipping neckline. The mythical "bodice" looks more like a modern vest, rather than an 18th century women's garment. Those sold off-the-rack often are constructed of inappropriate fabrics.

There are garments similar to the "bodice" that are period appropriate, but are worn incorrectly by some reenactors. One example is an undergarment called jumps. They are a lightly-boned alternative to stays. As they shape the body like stays, they should be worn as an undergarment. The incorrect "bodice" somewhat resembles a woman's waistcoat. Quilted waistcoats were sometimes worn for warmth under a gown or jacket. Wear both jumps and waistcoats *under* a gown, jacket, bed gown, or short gown. If a woman was engaged in strenuous activity outdoors, like laundering clothes or working in the garden, she might remove her outer garment. This was not acceptable in public areas. Stays and jumps were somewhat analogous to today's sports bra. They were appropriate in a few public settings, but were essentially intimate garments.

Bodices acquired in a flush of initial exuberance may be adapted to look like jumps, but may only be worn *under* a proper garment. They must be tight enough to mold your body and the shoulder straps must conform to a correct neckline. Otherwise, the use of the bodice is **not documented**. The best solution for an outer garment is to select a documented garment, such as a gown, jacket, bed gown, or short gown.

Aprons

While the modern apron is used to keep clothes clean while cooking, if worn at all, it was an integral part of being dressed in the 18th century. The apron was practical. In addition to protecting one's clothing, it made an instant pouch for carrying things. Loose-fitting garments, like bed gowns and short gowns, were secured at the waist by tying the apron over them.

Most often, the apron was a rectangle of fabric that was whip-gathered or pleated along the top edge and fell within inches of the petticoat hem. At the waist, the apron fabric covered the entire front, often reaching around to the back hipbones. For work aprons, a sturdy fabric was chosen to withstand heavy wear and washing.

The women in the below images are portrayed with long and full aprons. Notice that the woman in "Buy a Crabb" wears a regular apron, with a double-pocket apron worn by pedlars tied over top. Working women and those of leisure both loop up their aprons, as does the woman in "Poll Dab's Accident" and "Polly Peachum."

Bibbed aprons, which have a panel that is pinned up over the chest, were **not common** for adult British women or colonists, even though many living history interpreters have worn them in the past. They were occasionally worn by those in certain trades and by continental Europeans.

Aprons worn by upper class women incorporated diaphanous fabrics, plain weave silk, or fanciful concoctions of silk chenille and metallic cording. They were often ornamented with embroidery and were sometimes rounded or scalloped, in comparison to working women's large rectangular aprons. At the right, a better-dressed lady receives a bird's nest into her apron.

Fabric

Newspaper runaway advertisements, paintings, prints, and probate inventories record the few references about materials used for working class aprons. Often, color or fabric for the many aprons listed in these sources is not described, which points toward the apron's universal utilitarian appearance. When fabric is mentioned, linen and tow were popular for aprons; these would most typically be white, a natural unbleached tan color, or the in-between "half-bleached." Wool aprons are also found, although they are possibly more prevalent in the Northern colonies.

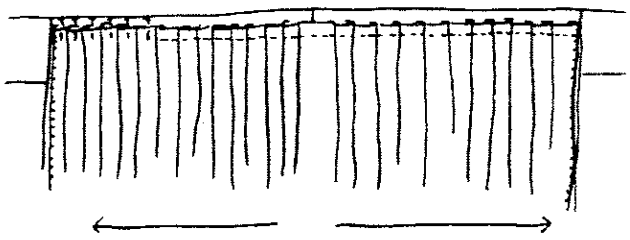
"Checked" describes almost 1/3 of apron fabrics in period references. Sarah Clark wore a checked apron on her flight from a Philadelphia household in 1776.[13] These fabrics are often of a single color, like blue or brown, combined with white. An example of a common blue and white checked apron is found in Colonial Williamsburg's collection (G1999-225). Typical of clothing and linens of the period, this apron is marked with the wearer's initials near the waistband at one side, as well as the date of manufacture, 1776. The checks are approximately 1/8" in size. Checks used in clothing were generally smaller than 1". Large checks were used for upholstery and furniture slip covers; they are generally inappropriate for clothing.

Construction

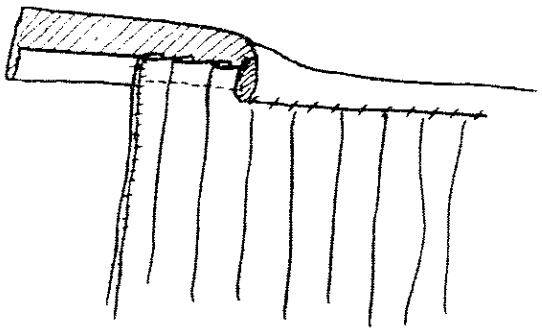
Approximately 1 1/2 – 2 yards of 36–45" material is required for an apron. For a basic working class apron, choose a medium-weight linen. This can be solid-color, checked, or vertically striped. The apron panel is narrowly hemmed on the sides and bottom. At the waist, the fabric is either whip-gathered or pleated. This fullness is then sandwiched in a long length of linen tape that serves as both waistband and ties. This method is described below. Another method encases the gathers or pleats in a half inch wide waistband of fabric, with the tape ties attached to the sides of the waistband. This method is used on the checked apron in the Colonial Williamsburg collection.

The apron should be long, covering the front of the petticoat and coming within 2-4" of the hem. Cut one piece of tape, which encases the apron in the center of the tape length, plus extra on each side of the apron to create the ties. Several period prints and paintings depict apron ties that often tied in the front after wrapping around the body once.

1. Narrowly hem the bottom and sides of the apron fabric.
2. Mark the center of the top edge. Evenly whip-gather or pleat the fabric along this edge. If pleating the fabric, pleat it in the same manner as a petticoat, with a narrow box pleat at the center front and the folded edges of the knife pleats facing the hips.
3. Take the length of linen tape and mark the center. Press the tape in half lengthwise. Matching centers, baste the gathered edge of the panel flatly to the back half inside the folded tape. Make sure there are no any loose pleats escaping at the back. This extra basting step prevents slippage of the fabric from inside the tape during stitching.



4. Fold down the free tape edge and hemstitch through all layers of the tape and apron fabric. Press.



How to Wear an Apron

Wearing an apron seems straightforward. Examining several period illustrations and the long ties present on unaltered extant garments suggest that apron ties were often wrapped around the back and tied in front. The bow can then be pushed beneath the apron waistband or left visible.

When wearing an apron with a short gown or bed gown, wrap the garment closed and then secure the waist by tying the apron over it. Aprons worn with gowns can be placed over or underneath the waist of the gown.

Other Tips for Aprons

- Look at period prints to see how women wear their aprons during different situations. Pulling up the corners of the apron creates a pouch for carrying items. After depositing goods in the apron, hold up the corners for short trips. Alternatively, thread the bottom corners of the apron panel through the waistband. Or, tie the corners of the apron together behind the back (creating a pouch at the front).

- An apron's appearance says much about overall status and character. A torn, patched, or soiled tow apron tells of hardship. A sparkling white apron implies that its wearer is a woman of leisure who does not handle food or tend to the fire. An apron worn loosely or askew lends a careless, unkempt air to the overall appearance. As with any reproduction garment, consider your impression within the 18th century when choosing fabrics for the apron.

- Apply appropriate patches of closely matching fabric when the apron fabric wears.

- To rapidly age an apron, set stains with an iron before laundering (for hygiene, do launder aprons used to handle foodstuffs or to wipe hands). This will make the apron look older, lending a worn overall appearance.

Handkerchiefs

Gowns, jackets, and short gowns during the period had low, squared necklines, like that of fashionable women's dress. During the day and while working, it is neither appropriate nor practical to show this expanse of flesh. Uncovered flesh around the neck is very delicate and susceptible to severe sunburn. A large square of fabric, called a handkerchief, covered the neck and bosom. "Half handkerchiefs," or triangles of fabric, were worn in the same way.

How a handkerchief is worn affects overall appearance. Compare the two below images. The neatly tucked handkerchief of Mr. Fitzwarren's cook implies that she is a modest and mindful woman (below, left). Slovenly, immoral women might wear their handkerchiefs askew, untucked, or barely covering the chest, such as this woman in a depiction of Gin Lane (below, right). Most handkerchiefs are worn showing a triangle of flesh at the throat, which is covered more as a woman ages. The older woman in Johann Christian Fiedler's *Der Winter* (1760) tucks in her handkerchief at the top of her jacket, but also pins it together at the neck to cover her chest.

Mr. Fitzwarren's cruel Cook beating Whittington.

Fabric and Construction

Popular fabrics for common handkerchiefs included lightweight linens that were white, checked, or occasionally woven with narrow stripes or figured weaves. Checks were most often a single color, like blue or brown, alternated with white, and tended to be smaller than 1/2". Solid-color and figural-printed silk and cotton handkerchiefs were popular for all classes, but appropriate patterns may be difficult to obtain today.

The weight of the fabric, stiffness, and size of the fabric square used to make the handkerchief will affect the overall appearance. More buoyant fabrics will create a pigeon-breasted look, while softer fabrics will drape over the shoulders with less bulk.

To find the right size handkerchief, cut a square of scrap muslin 40" in size, fold it in half diagonally, and drape it around the shoulders. Try wearing the test piece in different ways: tuck the front ends into an outer garment, the front of your apron or tie the front corners together. Cut down the square until reaching the desired look. A typical handkerchief is 30-36" square. Narrowly hem all four edges by hand. Period hems are often 1/8" wide or less. To personalize the handkerchief, stitch your initials into one corner. See "Marking" in the **Construction Guide**.

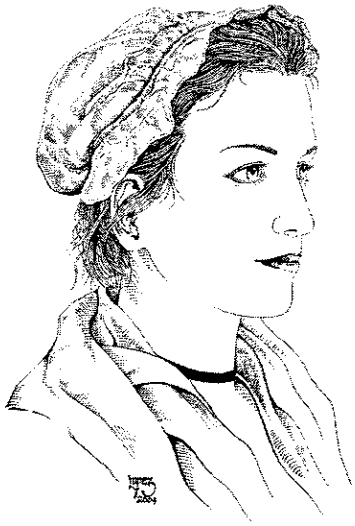
Once hemmed, handkerchiefs are folded in half from corner to corner, and worn around the shoulders like a small shawl. The front points can be tucked into the front of a sleeved garment or apron, knotted together and left to dangle in front, or secured with a pin threaded through the fabric. The back point of the handkerchief was often worn outside the outer garment. Tucking it in during the winter provides extra warmth around the neck.

The Lovely Spinner

Caps

Caps were worn for modesty, respectability, and cleanliness. Sewing skills were most highly visible on this shaped piece of linen that adorned the head and framed the face. The style and fabric of the cap spoke volumes about the wearer's personality, life, and circumstances. A plain cap that covers most of the hair gives the wearer a harder look than a small, flirtatious cap trimmed around the face with pleated double ruffles. It is a garment that most prominently emphasizes overall character.

Choosing a becoming cap style requires some experimentation. It may take a few attempts to discover what type of cap best suits specific facial features. Make a basic cap to start, and then try on others' caps, to find a desirable look.



Hairstyles underneath affect the outward appearance of the cap. Long hair pulled into a bun at the crown is versatile for all cap styles. Short, modern hairstyles and unusually dyed hair require a cap with more coverage. This might require choosing a larger cap worn farther forward on the head. Bangs were extremely rare during the Revolutionary War period and should be pulled back.

There are cap styles to avoid because they are not documented. Waitresses in colonial-themed restaurants often wear floppy cotton "shower-caps", or circles of cloth, gathered near the edge by a drawstring in a casing. These "caps" often engulf the head. While you may see them in movies, at colonial-themed restaurants, in some merchants' tents and on some women at reenactments**, they are not correct for our period and they should NOT be worn.** Caps depicted in prints and paintings of the period are constructed with a separate caul (the gathered crown worn over the back of the head) and brim (a flat portion over the ears between caul and ruffle). Whip-gathered or pleated ruffles often trimmed the brim, framing the face.

These illustrations portray a number of styles worn by English women. There are slight variances in cap design worn by women of different classes, ethnic groups, and ages. These line drawings are crude, but they still give us vital information about cap construction.

The three standard parts of a cap are visible in this illustration, including the caul, brim, and ruffle. This cap has a shaped ruffle that is narrow over the forehead and wide over the ears. The brim was sometimes trimmed with ribbon, or a ribbon might be tied around the head over the cap. Working women's caps were generally made of slightly heavier linen than the sheer fabric elegant women could afford, but still had fashionable details.

This pedlar's cap, visible underneath her hat, ties underneath her chin. The ruffle frames her face. This style is often depicted on older women, but is not exclusive to them. Lappets, or brims that hung away from the caul past the chin, were prevalent before the 1770s. These may be left to dangle, tied under the chin, or pinned up on the outside of the cap with straight pins. Young women during the Revolutionary War probably wore them more infrequently than their mothers and aunts.

Fashionable women in the 1770s dressed their hair high, which pulled up the caul of the cap. In the illustration on the left, the ruffle sits high over the woman's face and the brim is ornamented with a ribbon. This cap style is indicative of a woman interested in fashion, with the finances to support her wardrobe. For most women on campaign with the Army, this would be an unlikely style.

Scalloped trim was often tacked to the brims of caps as ornamentation. This is created by gathering crosswise a strip of ribbon at regular intervals to create scallops. The finished trim is tacked to the cap.

Prints and paintings must serve as a record of styles as it is difficult to find a documented 18th century cap today. Most museum collections saved only the finest things from wealthy people who could afford to save heirlooms. Common clothes were worn to the point of disintegration, leaving researchers to reconstruct garments using the few documentary sources that exist. It is also hard to date plainer caps saved in collections, as common people's fashions did not quickly change.

Fabric

The caps of most women were made of plain-weave white linen. The weight of the linen affects the cap's final look. Caps of fine, airy linen appear more frivolous and delicate than those of more utilitarian cloth. A middle-class refugee trying to hold some essence of dignity while following the Army might wear a lightweight linen cap in a stylish design. If it is worn, lightly soiled, and delicately patched, this cap then becomes a symbol of hardships experienced during campaign. A poor woman who could have never afforded finer fabrics might wear a plain cap of coarser linen. The frugal but fashionable woman might make the caul and brim of her cap from more serviceable linen, saving the expensive, fine, airy linen for the delicate ruffle framing her face.

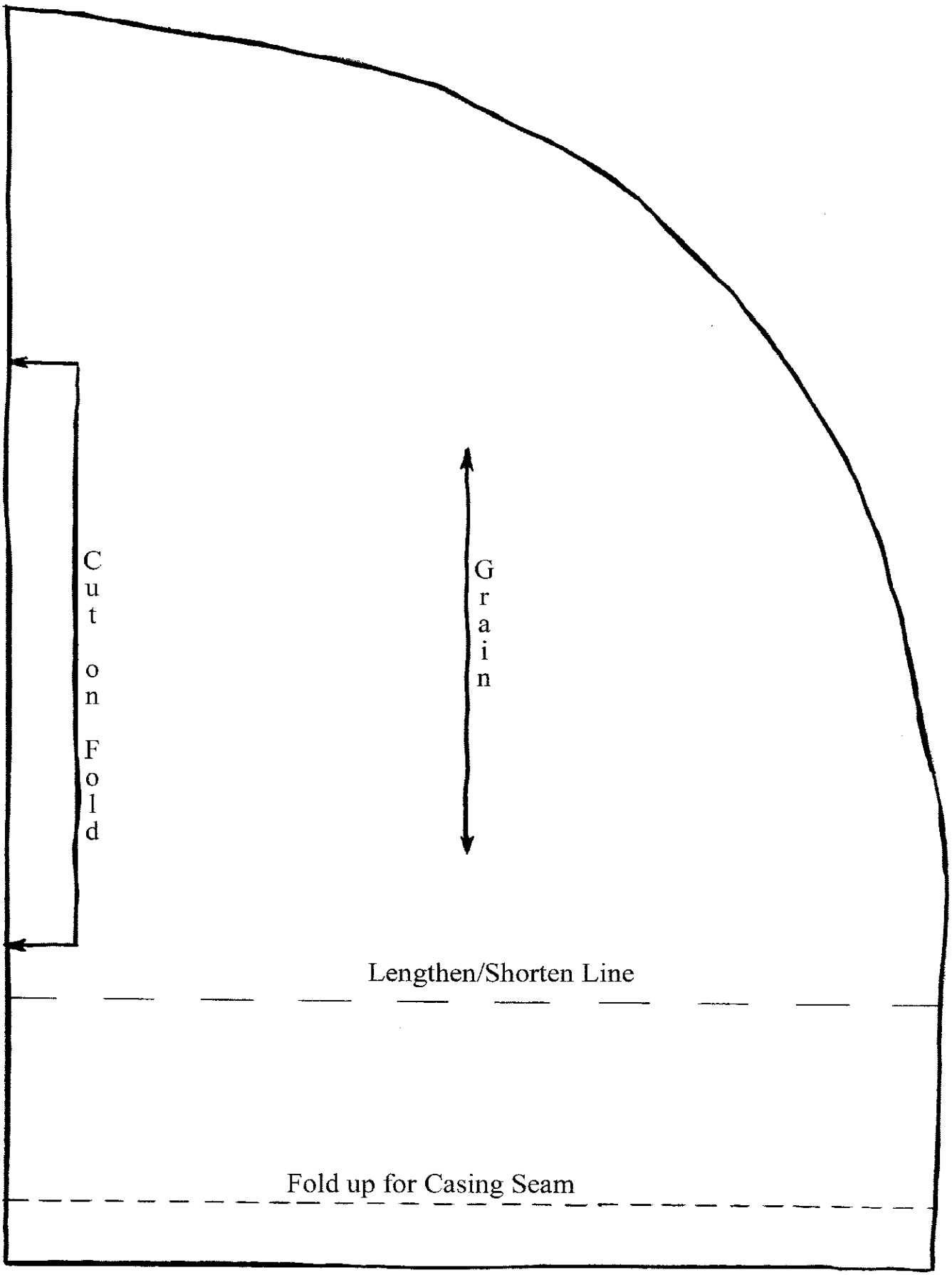
Construction

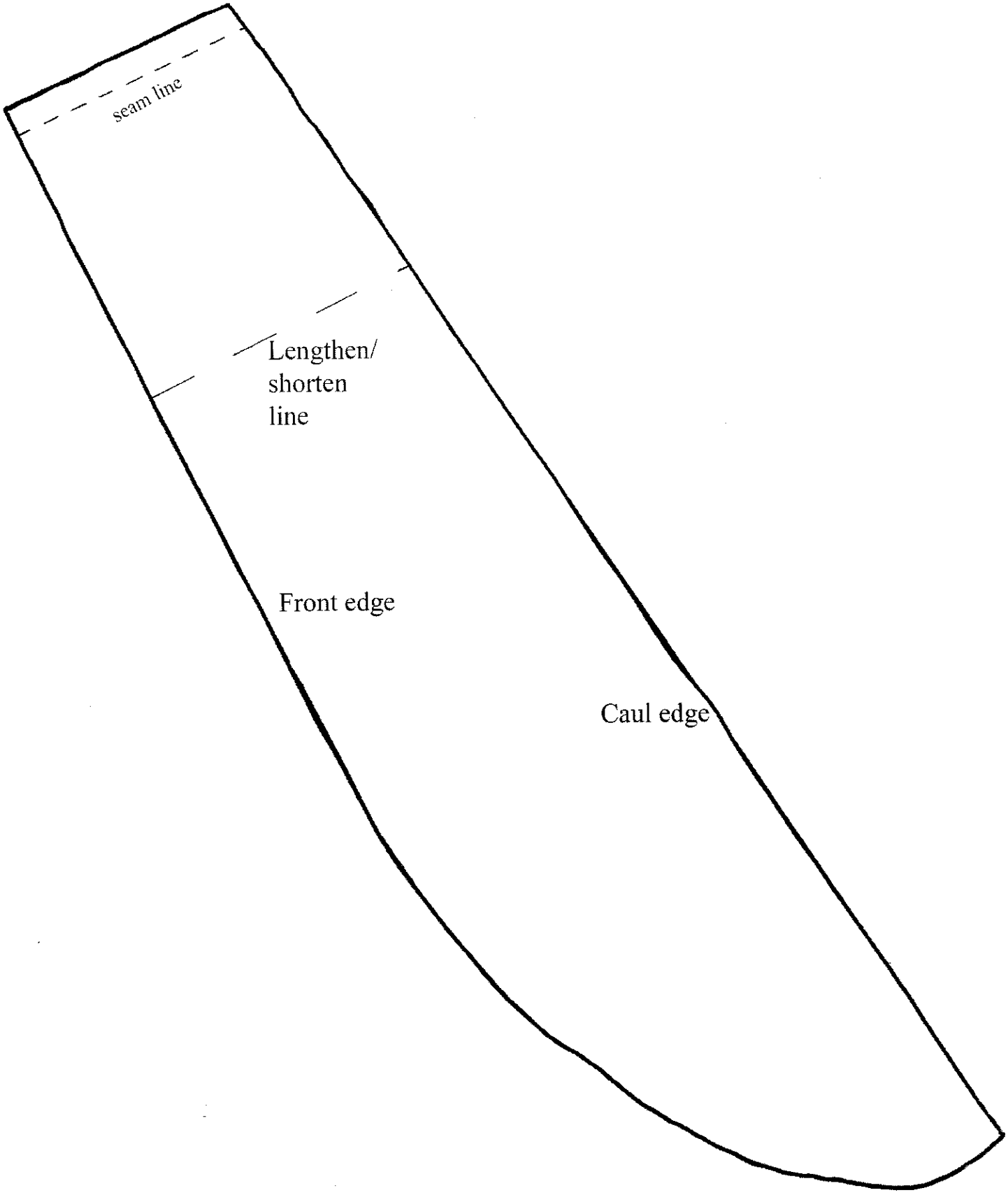
Caps consist of three main components, many of which can be mixed with other cap pieces to make different style caps. From the below patterns, cut a brim and caul, and select a ruffle style to create a small basic cap. Adjustment lines are marked on the patterns for lengthening and shortening the brim and caul. This simple adjustment can radically alter the appearance of a cap and how it looks on the wearer. Use a photocopier to resize the pattern. Use the above pictures and other period prints to guide the style of the cap. If you see an appropriate cap in a visual resource, try to reproduce it using muslin or other scrap fabric.

Ruffles: There are several ways to trim the front edge of the brim. Ruffles were generally 1-2" in width. Single ruffles edged the plainer caps of working women, while layers were used on elegant caps. Occasionally, the ruffle was narrow at the center of the brim, increased in width over the ears, and diminished again near the ear. Allow extra for narrow hems and seams. Below is a selection of treatments to try. Assembly instructions are below.

- Gathered ruffle. Measure the length of the brim. Multiply this measurement by 2. Cut a strip this measurement by 1-2".
- Pleated ruffle. Measure the length of the brim. Multiply this measurement by 2-3. Cut a strip this measurement by 1-2". Add extra length to this measurement, for flexibility in adjusting the pleats. The ruffle can be pleated in wide pleats, 1/2" – 1", or in narrow 1/4" pleats (more successful when the ruffle is at least 1 1/2" wide). If using a pleated ruffle, it is not necessary to hem the brim edge prior to attaching the ruffle.
- Flat ruffle. A seeming contradiction in terms, plain caps often had a narrow strip of fabric attached flatly to the front edge of the brim, using only a few gathers to round the corner near the ear. Measure the length of the brim and add 5-6" for adjustment. These may be shaped as well.

Caul: Cut 1 on fold.⇨

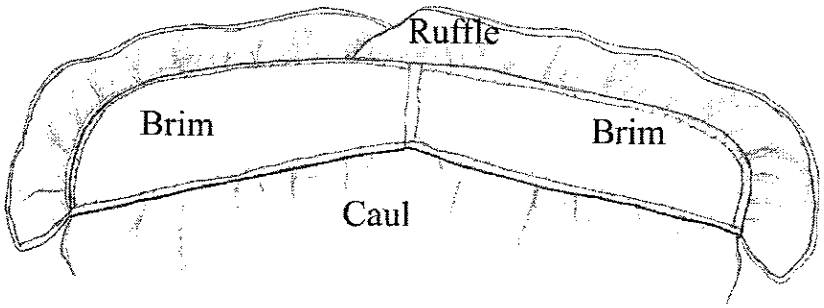

Cut on Fold
Grain
Lengthen/Shorten Line
Fold up for Casing Seam



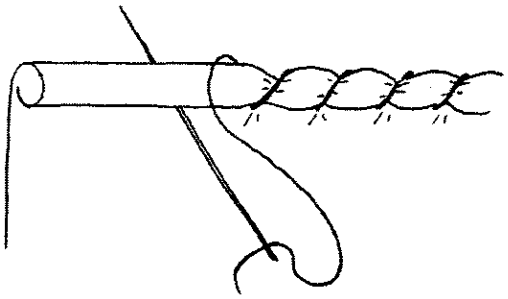
Brim: Cut 2.

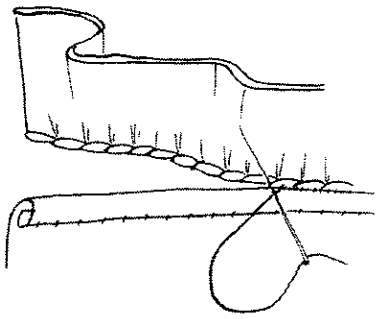
Basic Cap Directions

1. At the base of the crown section, fold up approximately 1/2" and press along the dotted line. Turn under the raw edge at the top slightly and press. Running stitch with small stitches along this fold to create a casing. Make an eyelet at the center of the casing on the inside of the caul (wrong side). Do not catch the outer casing fabric when making the eyelet. Make sure that the ends of the casing opening are neatly finished by tucking in the raw edges into the casing. Later you will insert drawstrings into the casings and stitch these edges.
2. Narrowly hem the brim pieces around all edges (unless you are using a pleated ruffle – then hem all sides except the front edges). With right sides together, stitch the two brim pieces together along the short, center-front edges with a butted seam. Press flat.
3. Mark the center top edge of the caul with a straight pin. With right sides together, pin the center seam of the brim and center of the caul together.
4. Beginning at the center, whip-gather the caul fabric to fit the brim (this action should finish the raw caul edge). Where gathers are not used, narrowly hem the caul piece (generally, this is toward the bottom where the caul has been sufficiently gathered to fit the brim). By having the brim and caul pinned together, the brim is an adjacent gauge to how much to gather the caul.
5. Once the caul gathers and brim hems are finished, verify that the centers are matched and with right sides together, join the caul and brim with a butted seam. Press flat. See the below illustration for layout of the pattern pieces.



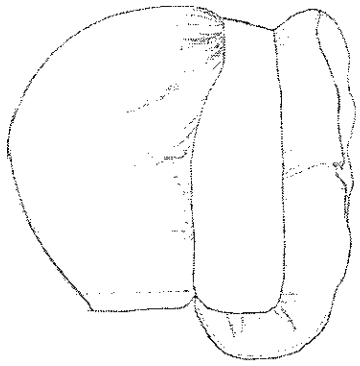
6. Prepare the ruffle by narrowly hemming the front edge.
7. Pleat or whip-gather the ruffle material to fit brim edge as desired. You may wish to make the ruffle narrower at the end, toward the bottom of the brim near the ears.





8. If using a ruffle with a whip-gathered edge, place brim and ruffle right sides together and join with a butted seam. Press flat.

9. If using a pleated ruffle, place right sides together and running stitch. Flat-fell this seam to finish the raw ruffle-to-brim seam allowance.
10. Thread approximately 12-16" of narrow 1/8" tape through the back casing. Make sure you cut a long enough length that the tape does not pull into the casing when you have laid it out flat to iron the cap. Pull excess through the center eyelet, leaving the raw ends of the tape at the edges of the casing. Stitch closed the casing at the edge, firmly catching the tape with a series of stitches. Repeat on the opposite side. Clip the loop of tape sticking through the eyelet, creating two separate drawstrings. Place the cap on the head, draw up the tapes to fit, and tie. When ironing, untie the tapes to flatten the caul.



Wearing a Cap

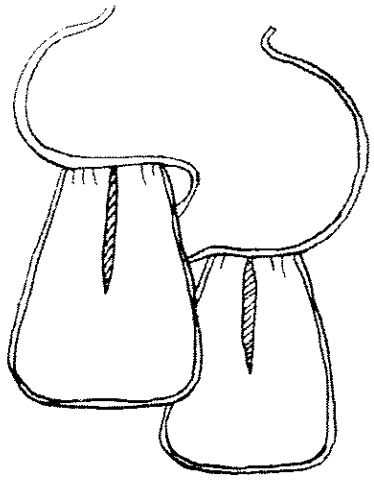
For the average woman, hair was worn in a knot at the center of the back of the head. If the bun is worn too high (not referring to fashionable styles where the hair is piled near the front), it will pull the cap up and out of place. Likewise, the crown of the cap will not conceal hair worn down by the nape of the neck.

Some women find it useful to secure the cap around the head with a ribbon or tie. This method is seen in many paintings and prints, and is mentioned in some newspaper advertisements for runaways. It was a very practical method for holding slippery caps in place. Common women also decorated caps with a short length of ribbon stitched onto the brim. Barbara Abercrombie, a runaway indentured servant from East Whiteland township in Pennsylvania in 1776, was described as "commonly wears a red and white ribbon on a laced cap."[14] Other cap ribbons were ruched or otherwise manipulated and attached for decoration.

Pockets

Women today often gripe when they find their skirt or pants have no pockets. During the 18th century, a woman's pockets were not sewn into her skirts, but were a separate garment altogether. Aligned with slits in petticoats to provide access, pockets were flat fabric bags, suspended from a tape tied around the waist. Pockets were considered underwear and were not meant to be seen.

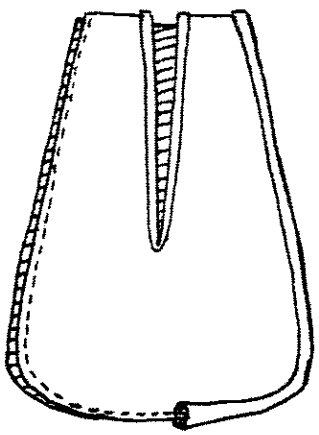
Pockets were made from plain weave linen, figured weave linen, or sometimes from fabrics that were not large enough from which to make other things. Fancy pockets embroidered with crewel flowers were worn by upper class women. Plainer fabrics often backed a more decorative pocket front. Continuous use and storage of potentially heavy objects in pockets required durable fabric. Pockets were worn in pairs with one over each hip, or singly.



The basic pocket shape is visible in the illustration to the left. The length may be altered, but is commonly about 16" long and 12" wide at the bottom, tapering toward the top. The bottom of the pocket should be even with the tips of the fingers when the arms hang at the sides. The front panel of pockets were often gently gathered or brought in with one shallow pleat on either side of the slit to make access to the pocket easier. With the center of the waistband tape at the center back, the pockets will be stitched on at the sides. Paired pockets are often more comfortable because they are balanced when filled. The set will tie onto the body at the front.

1. For each pocket, cut 2 pieces of fabric: one for the front (cut this 1" wider at the top than the back piece), one for the back. Cut a piece of linen tape for the waistband, allowing enough length for tying. At the center top edge, slit the pocket fronts approximately 6" down (or a length that will give the hand comfortable access to the pocket contents).

2. There are two ways to join the pocket front and back panels together around the sides. METHOD 1: Place one front and back panel *wrong* sides together. Bind the outside edges with linen tape or a self-fabric strip, as shown in the illustration. METHOD 2: Place one front and back panel *right* sides together. Stitch around the edge, except the top edge. Trimming excess fabric from the seam allowance, turn the pocket right side out through the top edge and press.



DePauw, Linda Grant and Conover Hunt. *Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815.* New York: Viking, 1976.

Ellet, Elizabeth F. *The Women of the American Revolution, in Three Volumes.* Williamstown, MA: Cornerhouse Publishing, 1980. (Originally published in 1848.)
Evans, Elizabeth. *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution.* New York: Scribner's, 1975.

Galloway, Grace Growden (1778 – 1779.) *Diary of Grace Growden Galloway.* New York: New York Times, 1971.

Hagist, Don N. "The Women of the British Army – A General Overview. Part 1 – Who & How Many." *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 24 No. 3 pp. 2-10.

----------. "The Women of the British Army – A General Overview. Part 2 – Sober, Industrious Women." *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 24 No. 4 pp. 9-17.

----------. "The Women of the British Army – A General Overview. Part 3 – Living Conditions." *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 26 No. 1 pp. 11-16.

----------. "The Women of the British Army – A General Overview. Part 4 – Lives of Women and Children." *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 26 No. 2 pp. 8-14.

Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America.* New York: Norton, 1986.

Mayer, Holly Ann. *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.

Meier, Judith Ann Highley. *Runaway Women; Elopements and other miscreant deeds, as advertised in the Pennsylvania Gazette – 1728-1789.* Apollo, PA: Closson Press, 1993.

Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800.* New York: Little Brown, 1980.

Potter-MacKinnon, Janice. *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario.* Montréal, Québec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.

Radford, Peter F. "Women's Smock Races in England before 1785." *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 27 No. 1 pp. 2-5.

Raphael, Ray. *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*. New York: The New Press, 2001.

Rees, John U. ""... the multitude of women", An Examination of the Numbers of Female Camp Followers with the Continental Army." *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 23 No. 4 pp. 5-17, Vol. 24 No. 1 pp. 6-16 & No. 2 pp. 2-6.

--------. "...the number of rations issued to women in the camp": New Material concerning Female Followers with Continental Regiments *The Brigade Dispatch* Vol. 28 No. 1 pp. 2-10 & No. 2 pp. 2-14.

Diaries, Journals, and Letters

Adams, Abigail Smith (1744-1818.) *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Burr, Esther Edwards (1732-1758.) *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984.

Cleary, Patricia. *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America.* Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.

Doblin, Helga trans. *The American Revolution, Garrison Life in French Canada and New York, Journal of an Officer in the Prinz Friedrich Regiment, 1776 - 1783.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Farish, H.D. ed. *Journal & Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion.* Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1943.

Knight, Sarah Kemble (1666-1727.) *The Journal of Madam Knight.* Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1992.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812.* New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Von Riedesel, Friederike (Marvin L. Brown and Marta Huth, eds.) *Baroness Von Riedesel and the American Revolution: Journal and Correspondence of a Tour of Duty, 1776-1783.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965.

Winslow, Anna Green (1759-1779.) *Diary of Anna Green Winslow: A Boston School Girl of 1771.* Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1996.

Wister, Sarah (1761-1804.) *Sally Wister's Journal: A True Narrative...* Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1995.

Social History and Culture

Berkin, Carol. *First Generations: Women in Colonial America.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.

Berkin, Carol and Leslie Horowitz. *Women's Voices, Women's Lives: Documents in Early American History.* Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998.

Bernier, Olivier. *The Eighteenth Century Woman.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, in association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981.

Brewer, John. *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997.

Carson, Cary, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the 18th Century.* Charlottesville, VA: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994.

Chartier, Roger, ed. *A History of Private Life, Vol. III: Passions of the Renaissance* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Davis, Natalie Zemon and Arlette Frage, eds. *A History of Women in the West, Vol. III: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Deetz, James. *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1977.

George, Dorothy. *London Life in the Eighteenth Century.* Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago Publishing, 1984.

Gillespie, Charles C., ed. *A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, Manufacturing and the Technical Arts in Plates Selected from "L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers" of Denis Diderot, Vol. I.* New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1959.

----------. *A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, Manufacturing and the Technical Arts in Plates Selected from "L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers" of Denis Diderot, Vol. II.* New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1959.

Glass, Hannah. *The Servants Directory, Improved; or House-Keepers Companion.* Dublin: J. Potts, 1762.

Hill, Bridget. *Eighteenth Century Women: An Anthology.* London: Allen & Unwin, 1987.

Hume, Ivor Noël. *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America.* New York: Vintage, 1991.

Johnson, Cathy. *Who Was I? Creating a Living History Persona.* Excelsior Springs, MO: Graphics/ Fine Arts Press, 1995.

Shesgreen, Sean, ed. *The Criers and Hawkers of London: Engravings & Drawings by Marcellus Laroon.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Shields, David S. *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Sprigg, June. *Domestick Beings.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

About the Illustrations Used in this Guide

Images in the text were selected to illustrate general styles of the period by using contemporary sources. Included are woodcut prints from *Old English Cuts and Illustrations for Artists and Craftspeople: Bowles & Carver* (formerly *Catchpenny Prints: 163 Popular Engravings from the Eighteenth Century*), Dover Publications, Inc. New York, originally published in 1970. This is a group of illustrations in circulation during the 3rd and 4th quarters of the 18th century, created by the firm of Bowles & Carver, London. Additional illustrations are taken from *A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry: Manufacturing and the Technical Arts in Plates Selected from "L'Encyclopedie, ou Dictionnaire raisonne des Sciences, des Arts et des Metiers"* by Denis Diderot, edited by Charles C. Gillispie, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, originally published in 1959. Both works are used with permission.

Figure sketches by Albert Lopez are drawn from photographs taken by Ingrid Schaaphok, Amy McCoy, and David Troxell of models in reproduction clothing constructed by Rebecca Fifield, Amy McCoy, Ingrid Schaaphok, Vivian Lea Stevens and others.

Technical illustrations by Steve Otlowski and Gabrielle Wright are based on construction techniques found in extant garments.

Notes

1. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army*, pg. 1.
2. Ibid., pg. 5.
3. General After Orders, Headquarters Germantown, 13 September 1777, Ibid., p.49. Mayer mentions this in *Belonging to the Army*, p. 48.
4. General Orders, Roxbury Farm, 4 August 1777, Ibid., 9:17. Mayer mentions this in *Belonging to the Army*, p. 136 and Blumenthal mentions this in *Women Camp Followers*, p. 64.
5. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 16, 1776.
6. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* February 14, 1771.
7. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* October 6, 1773.
8. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* March 29, 1775.
9. Rockingham County Probate Records, New Hampshire. Inventory of Elizabeth Gerry, October 18, 1777. Inventory of Jane Senter, June 12, 1777. Clothing and textile objects transcribed from Rockingham County, New Hampshire women's probate records, 1760-1789, by Bethany Rutledge for the American Independence Museum in Exeter, NH, Summer 1997.
10. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* June 7, 1770.
11. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* July 13, 1766.
12. *New Jersey Journal*, December 14, 1778.
13. *Pennsylvania Evening Post,* June 1, 1776.
14. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* September 11, 1776.
15. *New York Journal; or General Advertiser,* July 30, 1772.
16. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* February 17, 1773.
17. *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, July 15, 1777.
18. *Dixon and Hunter's Virginia Gazette*, March 11, 1775.
19. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* March 29, 1775.
20. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* October 15, 1776.
21. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* February 18, 1768.
22. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* February 27, 1766.
23. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* March 29, 1775.
24. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* March 29, 1775.
25. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* April 17, 1776.

THE BRIGADE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

ISBN 0-9708965-8-1