

Ardenwood Historic Farm Docent Costume Guidelines

Your costume is an important of your role as a docent here at the farm. By striving to be as authentic as possible in our clothing, we gain credibility with the people who come to learn about life on a farm in the late 1800's.

It is not necessary to spend considerable amounts of money on your costume. Many components can be found at thrift stores and there are web sites that sell quality period clothing at reasonable prices. There are some costumes for loan in the Volunteer Office. Take what you need and make any necessary alterations, but please return what you use clean and in good repair when you are done.

Finally, remember that a perfect costume, while worthwhile to strive for, is not as important as being helpful and welcoming to our visitors. Please do not sacrifice your safety or comfort for the sake of authenticity. It's hard to be friendly when your feet hurt!

When should I wear a costume? Period costume must be worn on Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays and the following Special Events: July 4th, Art & History, Rail Fair, Harvest Festival, Christmas. Costumes are not required on Saturdays *except* if it is one of these Special Events. Costumes are optional on other Special Events.

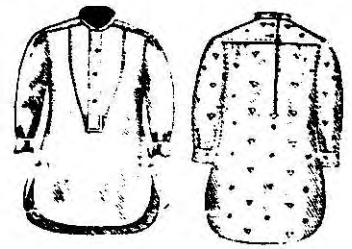
Men: Men can wear overalls, wool pants or Levis 501 jeans with belt loops and left rear pocket removed. Wear suspenders with all pants. Shirts can be woven material with a band collar or knit with a button placket (a henley shirt – looks like the top of old-fashioned long johns.) Long sleeves are required. You can roll them up. Vests are also appropriate.

Women: Should wear long, full skirts and long sleeved, high-necked blouses. Blouses should be loose and opaque (not see-through). It's OK to unbutton the top button. Skirts should be at least mid-calf length, and loose, especially in back. Wear a petticoat under sheer skirts so your legs do not show. Also avoid showing bare skin between shoes and skirt hem. Wear long stockings or knee socks if your skirt is short. Women and girls over age 16 should put long hair into a bun and wear a hat when outdoors. Farm women may wear *loose* overalls with a long sleeved shirt.

Footwear: Shoes for both should be leather. Hiking boots are OK, but not too bright in color. Above all, make sure your shoes are comfortable!

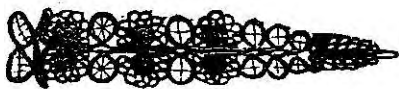
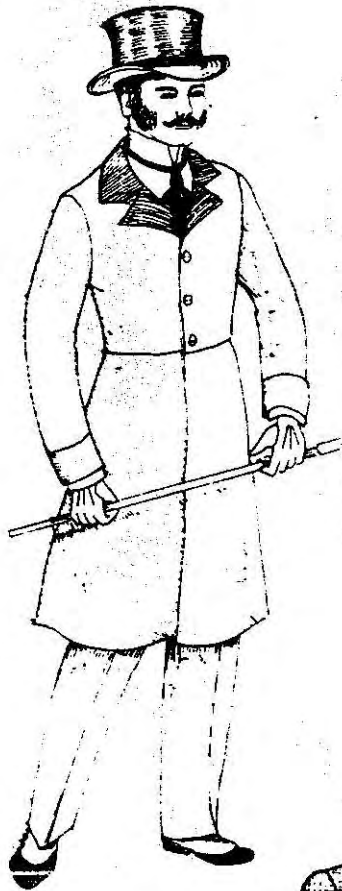
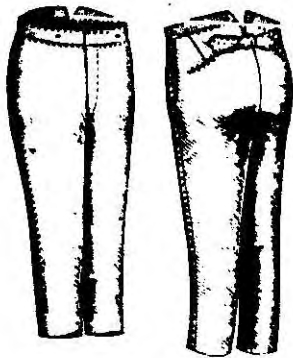
Misc: Natural-looking make up is OK, but avoid bright make-up, nail polish and trendy jewelry. Ears were pierced in the 1800's, but other body parts were not. Cover tattoos. Hats are preferable to sunglasses, but wear them if you must. Cell phones, I-Pods, pagers, etc. should be kept out of sight if you must carry them. Pocket watches are the most authentic time pieces. (Wrist watches weren't worn until after World War II.) Try to be as authentic as possible in your costume. Wear natural fabrics; avoid polyester.

When not in period costume, Farmyard Docents should wear casual clothes that appear neat and presentable. For example, jeans and a plain t-shirt, or khaki shorts and a polo shirt. Please avoid clothing with obvious logos, slogans or modern graphics. There are some Docent vests available in the Volunteer Office as well.



Dressing for Ardenwood

By Sharon Fingold



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Preface

About This Paper

Creating an outfit for Ardenwood is a lot of fun. It gives you a chance to rummage through closets, take on another personality, design your own clothes, and be creative. *Dressing for Ardenwood* provides information that will help you successfully create an appropriate and authentic outfit to wear at Ardenwood Historic Farm. This paper provides:

- ☐ Information about; and illustrations of 1890s clothing
- ☐ Guidelines for selecting a type of dress that suits your activities at Ardenwood and fits within your budget
- ☐ Descriptions of men's, women's, and children's clothing that can be worn at Ardenwood (including suggestions for people involved in farm, crafts, train, store, and house activities)
- ☐ Tips on putting together an authentic outfit
- ☐ Information on where to go to obtain clothing, accessories, and materials for creating an outfit

Who Should Read This Paper?

Everyone who works or volunteers at the farm while the farm is open to the public should read this paper, including people who:

- ☐ Work with concessions
- ☐ Work for the park district and City of Fremont
- ☐ Volunteer in all areas of the farm

How This Paper is Organized

This paper contains 5 sections and 2 appendixes. Section 1 provides an overview of the 1890s and how the period influenced clothing. Section 1 also provides guidelines for selecting a style of dress.

Sections 2, 3, and 4 describe men's, women's, and children's clothing respectively. Each section starts with an overview and a summary of appropriate clothing for people in each area of the farm (farm, crafts, house, train, store, etc.). The summary can help you quickly pick out clothing that is appropriate for your activities. After the summary, each section provides a detailed description of clothing items, fabrics, colors, and accessories that were worn in the 1890s. The detailed information will help you make sure that the clothing you wear is correct in color, fabric, and line. Finally, the section concludes with illustrations of 1890s clothing so that you can see what the clothing looked like, what items were worn together, and what some of the options are.

You can read the section from front to back, or you can go through the summary, pick out the items of interest to you and then find descriptions of those items in the second part of the section.

Section 5 provides suggestions for shopping.

Appendix A provides a bibliography of sources used in research for this paper.

Appendix B provides a list of patterns available in fabric stores that you can use to create authentic clothes and accessories.

**Do You Have
Comments or
Questions?**

Dressing for Ardenwood is intended to help you. Please let me know if you have questions about any of the information in this paper, or questions about the authenticity of items you're interested in wearing. If I can't answer your questions, I'll help you track down the answer. I'd also be happy to receive any suggestions for improving the paper. You can contact me at home (408) 255-5216 or at work (408) 725-6053.

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1 Introduction

Influences on 1890s Clothing

Clothing of the 1890s was influenced by many things:

- ☐ **New technologies.** The sewing machine and mass production created great changes in clothing. The sewing machine allowed women to make stylish clothes at home which reduced the cost of their clothing. The sewing machine also led to mass production of clothes. Men had ready-made clothes since the late 1840s, but women's clothes weren't ready made until the 1880s and 1890s. Because of the sewing machine and other technologies, fashionable clothing became more available to women outside of the upper classes.
- ☐ **Economics.** The 1890s was a time of prosperity based on factory and immigrant labor. Prosperity led to a happy and carefree era for those in the middle and upper classes. These people also had more free time. With more free time, more people of both sexes participated in sports and sports clothes developed.

More women entered the work force in the 1890s. For working women, simpler shirtwaist (blouse) and skirt combinations became popular. This fashion was accepted by wealthy women and became an American "classic."

- ☐ **Class levels.** The clothing worn depended on a person's income level and class in society. The wealthier the person, the better the fit of clothes, the higher the quality of materials, and the more fashionable the outfit. The wealthy bought some ready-made clothes from the best stores and had many clothes made to order by the best designers available.

The middle class bought many clothes ready-made, made some of their own clothes, and had some clothes made to order by local dressmakers and tailors. The middle class wore fashionable clothing that was less expensive and not as stylish as the clothing worn by the wealthy.

The lower-middle class made most of their clothes, bought some clothes secondhand, and bought some clothes ready made.

The poor wore cast-offs, secondhand clothes, and made their own. Clothing was plain and often patched. Many of the poor were immigrants.

People of all classes would have been found at Ardenwood.

- ☐ **Transportation.** Increased transportation allowed people to easily access department stores in metropolitan areas. Women from the Ardenwood area could take the train and ferry to San Francisco or Oakland to go shopping. The larger the city the greater the choice and the more stylish the items.
- ☐ **Better communications.** As communications improved, mail-order businesses were started and catalogs were sent to all parts of the country. These catalogs allowed people to order ready-made clothing of good quality and the current (but conservative) fashion at a reasonable price.
- ☐ **Values.** Clothes often reflect the values of people. Men were supposed to be industrious and serious, so their clothes were dark and serious. Women were supposed to display the wealth of their husbands by wearing fashionable and

bright clothes. How neatly you dressed also reflected how good a character you were. It was a woman's moral duty to look neat and clean in public.

Selecting a Style of Dress

When deciding on a costume to wear, it is important that you select an outfit that looks like something worn during the 1890s and that is also appropriate to your age and activities.

Authenticity and Appropriateness

Creating an authentic and appropriate outfit is particularly important since you set an example for the public. The public believes that you are wearing something that is not only typical of the period but also typical of clothing worn for particular activities and by particular age groups. By observing you and others at the farm, visitors learn how different people dressed in the 1890s.

Knowledgeable visitors notice errors in dress. When they notice errors, they may question the correctness of other areas of the farm. For example, they may think: "If the dress is wrong, perhaps the decorations in the house are wrong for the period," or "Perhaps the facts we heard on the train ride aren't correct." The more correct we all are in our dress, in the facts we present, and the activities we demonstrate, the more real the 1890s experience becomes and history comes alive.

Examples of inauthentic dress include: hoop skirts; modern cowboy boots and hats; and small, "Scarlett O'Hara-style" parasols. Examples of inappropriate dress include: a dress with lace or bead trim for a woman who is shucking corn; denim overalls (jeans) for a man who is greeting visitors in the guest parlor of the house; a fancy tea apron for a woman churning butter; or a man in top hat and tails who is acting as conductor of the train.

Time and Budget

The type of clothing you select also depends on your budget and the amount of time you want to spend on creating an outfit. You can spend as much time and money or as little as you want to create an authentic and appropriate outfit. If you don't have the time or money to create your dream outfit, start with something simple; you can always add to it or change it later just as people of the 1890s did. Throughout the paper, you will find tips on saving money and time in putting together an outfit.

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