

3 Women's Clothing

Overview

Women's clothing had a lot of variety. Women were seen wearing clothes left over from the 1880s, and clothes from the beginning, middle, and end of the decade. Throughout the decade, clothing emphasized the back of the body and the bust. The back of the skirt was full, and the front of the bodice was decorated. Sleeves were long and collars were high or were turned down. Trimming was used to make women look tall; vertical lines were emphasized from the hat to the bottom of the skirt.



1890

From about 1890 to 1892, skirts were narrow and straight in front. The bodice was long waisted. Sleeves were narrow to medium width with peaks at the shoulders. From 1892 to 1896, skirts were bell shaped and gored; leg o'mutton and balloon sleeves became very large. These sleeves were full above the elbow and straight and narrow below the elbow. The waist was normal length. After 1896, sleeves started to deflate. By 1898, fashionable sleeves were very narrow with a slight puff at the top and the skirt was narrow at the hips and flared below the knee. Any of these styles would be appropriate at the farm.



1895

The great clothing development for women was the popularity of the blouse (also called a shirtwaist, waist, or shirt) and skirt combination. This combination along with a man-tailored jacket became the American woman's uniform. It was worn by all classes for work, play, informal, and some daytime formal activities. It could be very plain to very fancy depending on the wearer's wealth and the occasion. The blouse and skirt combination allowed women to mix and match separates just like we do today. I highly recommend the skirt and blouse combo as an simple and inexpensive means of making a costume and allowing yourself flexibility. For example, start with a simple dark skirt and a plain blouse. When you have more time or money you can add a fancy blouse for special occasions, a fancy skirt, or a jacket and tie. You can also use accessories to change the look of the outfit. For example, you can add a tie, a lace jabot, an apron, or a vest.

Middle and upper class women did not work (unless they were helping to run a family business) and they had at least one servant. Middle and upper class women were involved in home and community activities (such as charities, cultural clubs, church events, temperance societies, and suffrage meetings). Lower income women worked in factories, stores, and offices, worked as teachers, maids, or dressmakers, or helped out with home and farm chores.

The first part of this section summarizes the clothing options for women working in the different areas of the farm. Use the summary to find items you would like to wear, then continue on to the second part of the section. The second part provides detailed information on each item, on accessories you can use to change your outfit for different occasions, and on appropriate fabrics and colors. The section concludes with illustrations of clothing.

Summary by Farm Area

Here's a summary of women's clothing by area of the farm. Use these recommendations when creating your outfit. For further details and illustrations, refer to the other parts of the section.

- Farm:** Simple dress, wrapper, or skirt and blouse made of cotton or wool. Sunbonnet or plain straw hat. Button or lace up walking boots. No trimming except for ruffles made of the dress fabric. Dress follows the outline of the current fashion or is less current. Ethnic clothing ok.
- Crafts:** Like farm women. Aprons. Sleeve protectors. If you are demonstrating more genteel crafts like lace making, hat making, and sewing you can dress more fashionably.
- Garden:** Like crafts. Straw sun hats. Basket for flowers or vegetables.
- House:** From very dressy daywear to simple but stylish. Maid can wear an apron and cap over somber clothing; housekeeper would wear a conservative dress or blouse and skirt. Special costumes: sports clothes; tea dresses and dressy wrappers for women "at home" and receiving guests. If a woman is visiting she wears a hat in the house.
- Store, Food:** Up to date clothing. Skirt and blouse or a nice but not very fancy dress (unless you're a member of the owner's family or the manager). Don't wear a hat indoors.
- Train:** For safety's sake, you can wear a calf-length skirt with bloomers underneath or a split skirt, and boots to cover the leg. A blouse with or without a jacket. Blouse, jacket and hat should be masculine looking. A man's tie around the neck and leather gloves finish the outfit.
- Carriages:** Same as for the train but more formal. Wear a jacket and tie.
- Wagon:** Same as the train but no jacket. Instead of a tie, wear a bandana or casual scarf.
- About the Grounds:** All of the above. Wear hats. Stylish women and women going visiting or shopping should also wear gloves.

The Basics

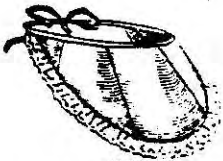
The basics are: underclothes, dresses, wrappers, skirts, blouses, split skirts and bloomers (for women working with the horses), vests, jackets, and capes.



Ladies' Petticoat:

Underclothes

Women wore a chemise, corset, pantaloons, and 1 to 3 petticoats, and a small bustle. The smallest corset size was 17 inches, but most young women strove for a 21 inch waist. You don't need to wear a corset or a chemise. However, every woman should wear at least one petticoat. Petticoats give shape to your skirts. In addition, when women bent down, went up or down stairs, or got into a carriage, their petticoats showed. Yours should too. Petticoats were lace trimmed and some were made of taffeta so that they would rustle when the woman moved. Petticoats came in all colors. Women working outdoors can wear a simple petticoat without trim and made of cotton. Middle and upper class women should have a nicely trimmed petticoat. There are patterns available for petticoats (see Appendix B) or you can wear a wedding dress slip (cost about \$30.00 new; also found used in thrift stores).



9879

LADIES' BUSTLE

Fashionable women should wear a small bustle. The bustle can be a small crescent-shaped pillow attached at the small of the back or some other form of padding. The bustle was used to support the fullness at the back of the skirt and to make the hips appear well rounded (see illustrations).

Dresses and Wrappers



Many stylish dresses were made in two pieces: a bodice and a skirt. These dresses usually had heavily decorated bodices that emphasized the mono-bosom look and the shoulders. Many bodices had a V-shaped insert in the middle. Some bodices had a bright solid color covered by lace or chiffon matching the dress. Bodices never had any "see-through" areas. Lace as part of the bodice should have a solid backing of fabric. Lace jabots and frills "cascading" down the front were popular additions. Wide lapels were also popular.

Bodices fastened with hooks and eyes, usually in front or on the side. The bodice was trimmed with a high, upstanding collar. The collar was finished with ruching at the edge of a large bow at the back. Sleeves were wrist length. Towards the end of the decade sleeves started to cover half of the hand with a ruffle, lace, or points.

Dresses were often made of two differently colored fabrics. Trims included: lace, braid, embroidery, beads, ribbons. Day dresses in America did not have trains.

Skirts were gored (4-8 gores). They were pleated in the back for fullness and were worn with a small bustle to hold up the skirt back. Stylish skirts were never gathered. Skirts were untrimmed, or trimmed below the knee. In the middle of the decade skirts were 4 or more yards around at the hem.

Work dresses were one-piece dresses made of cotton or wool. Work dresses were often made in the shape of the fashionable dresses. Work dresses were not trimmed. They often buttoned down the front. Skirts of work dresses were gored, or gathered around the belt, with more fullness at the back than front. Bustles were not worn with work dresses. Sleeves were wrist length.

A special type of informal dress was the wrapper. The wrapper was only worn at home. It was loose fitting or slightly fitted. Some styles were mother hubbards. Wrappers were made of cotton (usually calico), had fashionable sleeves and collar, box pleats in the back from the neck to the hem, buttons down the front of the chest, and sometimes ties on each side of the waist that tied in front. Most wrappers were trimmed only with ruffles of the same fabric; however, wealthy women who wore



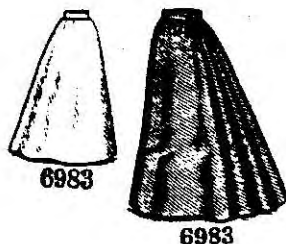
wrappers often added trimming. When a woman became pregnant, this dress served as a maternity dress. Wrappers are suitable for women doing farm chores, and women in the house receiving close friends and family on an informal basis.

All dresses could have large pockets in the side seams and a watch pocket in the waistband seam.

See the illustrations for ideas of stylish dresses, work dresses, and wrappers.

Skirts

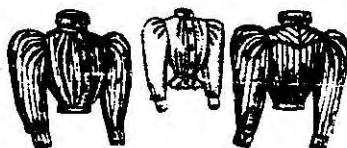
Skirts worn as part of a tailor-made outfit (a suit) or with a blouse and no jacket were always gored, with pleats at the back for fullness and a small bustle to hold up the skirt back. Fashionable skirts were 4 or more yards around at the hem. The hem was trimmed with binding to protect it from wear and tear and to stiffen the edge. They often had a watch pocket in the waistband seam and large pockets in the side seams. The large pockets held a change purse, handkerchief, keys, and anything else the woman needed. Skirts were often worn with a belt. The belt was used for decorative purposes. (The skirt did not have belt loops, so belts were held in place by belt pins.)



Skirts were made of cotton, wool, taffeta, or silk. Skirts were often solid but you can also make them in a check, plaid, dots, moire, or stripe. Skirts were usually of a darker material than the blouse. When worn as part of a tailor-made, skirts matched the fabric of the jacket or were of a contrasting color. Skirts were usually plain; though, when worn with a bolero jacket, stylish and wealthy women had them trimmed below the knee to match the jacket.

Calf-length skirts can be worn by women on the wagon, carriage, or working on the train (with bloomers underneath).

Blouses



Blouses were plain or very fancy. Plain blouses had sleeves that matched the current fashion, but they usually ended in a cuff with a button. The blouses buttoned down the front from collar to hem. The collar was like today's turndown collar, or the woman added a mannish starched collar and tie (see "Men's Clothing" for info). A blouse with a masculine collar and bow tie or four-in-hand tie was considered very "smart." The blouse was fitted in the back and sides. The front had gathers, pleats, or was plain. The blouse was tucked under the skirt. Blouses were made of cotton or wool flannel. Patterned fabrics were popular, including: stripes, flowers, dots, and checks.

Fancy blouses were made of more expensive materials (such as sateen and silk) and had lots of frills, lace trim, bead trim, insertion, or braiding.

Another type of blouse was worn over the skirt. A belt surrounded the waist, and the blouse below the belt formed a peplum.

See illustrations for collars and shirt styles.

Vests



Vests were worn with or without an accompanying jacket. Vests were double- or single-breasted, with or without collars, and had watch pockets, and 5 or more buttons. The waist was pointed in front or cut straight across. The pointed look was popular from 1890-1895. They were worn by some women as part of a tailor-made. They were made of silk, fine wool, or fine cotton for the upper and middle classes, coarser materials for the less well off.

Split Skirts In the 1890s, women wouldn't have worn split skirts or bloomers except for sports. But the women at Ardenwood who work on the train, wagons, and carriages need something to wear that is safe. So, if you are one of these women, consider either a calf-length skirt or a split skirt (like culottes). Split skirts were calf length and very full. To cover the leg, wear calf-length boots and stockings, or shoes with leggings and stockings. See illustrations for ideas.

Jackets and Capes There were a variety of jackets and capes. Here are the most common ones:

Tailor-made jacket:



Worn by all classes for most activities, including sports and informal outings. The most popular jacket and style and the predecessor of the modern suit jacket. Masculine. Made of wool or heavy cotton. Had wide lapels, several buttons, and was fitted. From 1890-1893, the jacket ended at mid-thigh or at the knee. Afterwards, was hip- or waist-length. Fastened at the waist or worn unfastened. The sleeves were plain and were as wide or narrow as the fashion of the day. Worn with a stiff collar, tie, shirtwaist, and skirt. Vest was optional. Some tailor-mades were trimmed with braid or binding.

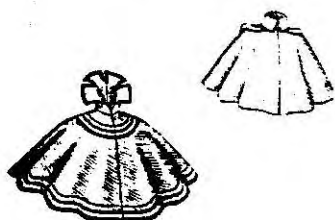
Masculine hats such as boaters, homburgs, and sports caps were worn with tailor-made suits.

Some jackets were softer and more feminine. These often ended in a peplum.

Bolero jackets:

Worn with a fancy blouse and skirt, or princess-style dress, and a lacy jabot. The bolero was trimmed and the skirt was trimmed to match. A very stylish outfit.

Capes:



Lace and silk, cotton, or wool flannel capes were worn in the summer, and wool, plush, and velvet capes were worn in cold weather. They were short to long, had high collars, and were cut so they would fit over the sleeves (they were not gathered, they were cut in circular pieces so they'd flare out). Fancy capes were trimmed with beads, braid, or fur. Capes had one or more layers and were lined.

Special Costumes

The following paragraphs describe special costumes that can be worn for special events or activities: mourning, tea dresses (in the house and for teas only), ethnic clothing, and sports clothes.

Mourning

The average life span for white men and women was 45 years, the life span for black men and women was about 35 years. Half of all children died before the age of 10. The Victorians developed rituals of dress for mourning. The period of mourning depended on who had died. Women and children wore dull black. Widows wore small bonnets with long veils in back. Only dull jet jewelry was worn. Mourning was most strictly observed by the wealthy because they could afford to buy new outfits and all the accoutrements. If you go into mourning, don't forget your smelling salts, handkerchief, or a locket with hair of the dear departed.

Tea Dresses and Jackets



Worn only in the house by the hostess. Similar to a wrapper but much fancier. Made of expensive fabrics and trimmed with lace, ribbon, feathers, beads, and anything else you can think of. They can be as simple or as fancy as you like. Usually a princess style dress with no waist seam. Loose fitting styles had watteau pleats in back and gathers in front. More fitted styles were fitted to the waist, sometimes open in front. Tea dresses had a high neck, fashionable sleeves (some only elbow length), and a train (only daytime outfit worn with a train). See illustrations for ideas.

Tea jackets were fancy, loose fitting, shirtwaist blouses. Had lots of lace and ribbon trim and made of fine cotton, flannel, silk, or cashmere, in "delicate" colors. Worn over a regular skirt. See illustrations for ideas.

Ethnic Clothing

There were many immigrants working as laborers on the farm and a Chinese cook working in the house. If you'd like to portray someone of your ethnic background it would be appropriate if you are working on the farm or with crafts. If you decide to "go" ethnic, be sure the items you pick are authentic.

Sports and Informal Wear

The tailor-made suit and the blouse and skirt combination served as basic all around informal and sports wear (complete with tie). Masculine hats such as boaters, homburgs, and sports caps were worn with the suit. Sports clothes were usually made of dark colors, and heavy fabrics.

Special sportswear did develop for women. For bicyclists with money to spare split skirts (like culottes) were available (they were considered very "anti-feminine" and rather shocking). The split skirts were calf length and very full. Full bloomers were worn by the avant garde (they were very rare). However, most women just wore a blouse, full-length skirt or calf-length skirt with leggings covering the calf, tie, belt, and hat. Leggings were made of jersey in black, blue, tan, light or dark gray. Bicyclists also wore leather gloves, stockings, and lace-up high-heeled shoes.

Swimwear consisted of bloomers with a knee-length skirt, short sleeve bodice, sailor-styling, a bonnet, stockings, and canvas shoes. Bathing suits were usually made of alpaca, serge, or flannel in dark blue or black and trimmed with white braid.

Norfolk jackets were popular for hiking, and golf. The Norfolk jacket had a low belted waist, an inverted pleat at the back, and two box pleats at the front. See illustration.

Women who rode horses usually road sidesaddle. The riding outfit consisted of a suit jacket, blouse, tie, and skirt, or a bodice and skirt. The skirt was long. Underneath the skirt, women wore riding knickers and boots. Riding outfits were made in a sturdy, dark fabric.

Tennis and yachting wear consisted of a light colored skirt and shirtwaist. Wool flannel, canvas, denim, and linen were used for sport suits in summer (croquet, tennis, yachting).

Fabrics and Colors

Working class women wore hardy woollens, less delicate cottons, linen, gingham, printed cambric, corduroy, homespun, and denim. A working class woman usually had one good silk dress for special occasions.

Wealthier women wore all types of cottons; denim, tweeds, oxford cloth, and canvas for sports attire; velvets, alpaca, bombazine, brocades, silk, satin, taffeta, tulle, lace, and fine woollens for dressier outfits.

Usually serge and sturdy cloth was used for dresses, coats, and skirts. Thin woollens and printed or plain cottons were used for informal blouses and summer dresses. Dresses were usually made of two differently colored fabrics.

Colors were vivid and bright. Yellow, white, black, and all shades of purple were very popular. Working class women wore darker colors since these colors didn't show dirt and could be mixed and matched more easily. Dull black was used for mourning. Sports outfits were somber: dark blue, brown, gray.

Fabrics came in many patterns: large and small flowers, flowers with stripes, stripes, checks, plaids, abstracts, dots, paisleys.

Buttons were made of bone, ivory, metal, wood (used by the poor), mother-of-pearl, or were covered in fabric to match the clothing. Buttons were functional or decorative and came in all sizes.

Dress trims included: glass bead appliques (usually black), fabric appliques, lace, embroidery, frogging, braid, machine stitching, bands of velvet or satin, and trims you find in the upholstery section of fabric stores.

Hair and Headwear

Hair was parted in the middle and drawn up into a chignon on top of the head or at the back. The ears were exposed. Fringe bangs were popular. Towards the end of the decade, small pompadours in front with a chignon in back were popular. Combs, pins, and pads were used to keep the hair in place. If at all possible, put your hair up. Even if you have to use 20 bobby pins to do it. Those with long hair can braid it and then put it into a bun if they wish. If you have very short hair and can't put your hair up, then you can pretend your hair was cut because you had a fever (brain fever is always fun). An appropriately styled wig or hair piece is fine for those so inclined.

There were many types of hats. Hats had small crowns and came with or without a brim. Brimless hats were called toques. Brims were medium sized and usually turned up in back, some were turned up on one side. Hats were perched straight on the head; they were not tipped forward. Hat trims were used to emphasize vertical lines. Trims

included ribbons, flowers (the most popular were violets and roses), feathers of exotic birds (e.g., paradise plumes, ostrich feathers, aigrettes), birds, beads, buckles, lace, and tulle. These trims were placed on the hat so they stood up (see illustrations). Hat pins were used to hold hats in place. Here are descriptions of other hats:

Panama straw hats: A popular outdoor hat made of straw. Worn for informal occasions and when working outdoors.

Straw sun hats: Used to work outside to protect the complexion.

Sunbonnet: Prairie style bonnet worn by women working outside. Appropriate for farm and crafts workers.

Bonnets: Small brimless hats that sat at the back of the head and had thin ribbons that tied under the chin. Bonnets became less popular as the decade progressed.

Boaters or Sailors: Hat worn for sports, informal wear, or with suits. Made of coarse straw with a colored ribbon around the crown. Became very popular for women.

Hats with Veils: Some 1890s hats had face veils they were tied at the back of the hat. These hats were usually worn with fancy dresses and suits.

Top Hat: Worn by the wealthy as a riding hat.

Bowlers: Some women wore a bowler as a riding hat.

Deerstalkers: Sherlock Holmes style hat. Worn for sports such as hiking and hunting.

Tam O'Shanter: Just like today. Round hat with a pompom in the center. Worn for sports.

Caps: Parlor-maids wore white caps that were perched on top of the head. Elderly women wore black lace caps. Frilly caps were also worn in bed.

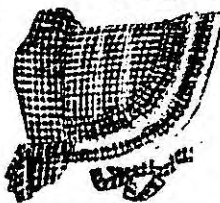
Sports caps like the men's sports cap were worn for informal outings and for sports.

Homburg or Fedoras: Felt hat similar to today's version, but with a smaller, rolled brim. Worn with suits and for traveling and for bicycling. The women's homburg was much smaller than the men's. The hat didn't go around the head, it just perched on top.



"25c LEADER" LADIES' SUNBONNET.

A specially good value that you can use as a trade helper.



113020. Black and white checked percale in ass'd large, medium and small check. 2 fluted ruffles around front with fancy lace edging. Cambric front with 2 rows fancy stitching, head band, string, and bow. 1 doz. in box, nestle, each.

Doz. \$2.25

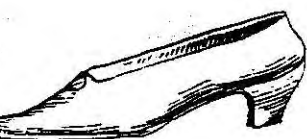
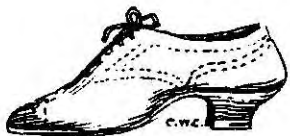
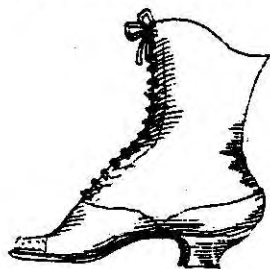
Footwear and Socks

Boots and shoes had pointed toes (though if you want to be slightly out of date, round or square toes are ok), french heels, and were usually black. Boots were worn by most women for walking and working. Boots were laced or buttoned and covered the ankle. An inexpensive boot can be made from used ice skates. Just take the blade off and you have your boots (you can find used ice skate at flea markets and garage sales).

Oxford shoes started to be worn by women in the '90s for walking and informal occasions. They were two-toned or single-toned. They were often worn with gaiters for sports. White buck or black canvas shoes with rubber soles were worn for tennis. Oxfords and canvas shoes are a great alternative for women in the farmyard who don't want to wear boots. High top shoes were worn for biking. Hiking and golf shoes had spikes in the soles.

Pumps were worn with dressy clothing. Stylish women can wear modern day pumps with moderate heels. Pumps, oxfords (with informal clothing) or boots would be suitable in the house or store.

Stockings were usually black. Some stockings had argyle, stripe, or check patterns covering the calf (See illustration). Fishnet black stockings were also worn by the fashionable. Stockings were made of wool, cotton, or silk. Every woman should wear black or appropriately patterned knee- or regular- length opaque stockings. People will see your calves when you go up and down stairs or lift your skirts when walking.



Accessories

- Neckerchiefs:** Bright neckerchiefs (bandanas) can be worn by women working on the train, wagons, or in the fields.
- Handkerchiefs:** A nice handkerchief in the breast pocket of a suit coat was worn by stylish women. Handkerchiefs were also carried in pockets or purses. They can be embroidered or trimmed with lace or colored fabric.
- Belts:** Very popular with skirts and shirtwaist outfits. Belt styles: cummerbund belts; wonder-woman belts (my term, these belts had points and laced up, see illustration); lizard, cloth, alligator, seal, patent leather, black silk, embossed leather, grosgrain, or plain leather with a metal buckle. Belts were wide; many of today's belts are suitable. Some belts had hooks for hanging a purse, fan, or watch.
- Glasses:** Glasses were wire-framed, small, oval or round.
- Collars and Cuffs:** Starched and white. Collars were high (3 inches by the end of the decade). See illustration.
- Arm Bands:** Used by women working in offices to keep the sleeves out of the ink. Took the form of a strap on the upper arm to hold the sleeve up.



Sleeve Protectors: Used by working women to keep sleeves clean. Usually made of a darker color in a sturdy fabric. They completely covered the forearm.

Aprons: Work aprons were made of sturdy cotton or left over material. Aprons were made to cover the skirt or both the bodice and skirt. Pinafores started to be worn in the '90s. Smock style aprons were also worn.

Tea aprons were made of fine white lawn and were trimmed with lace or ribbon.

Ties: Masculine ties were worn with skirt and blouse combinations and suits. Puff (ascot) ties, large loop and small bow ties and four-in-hand ties (like the modern tie) were worn. The ties had small geometric, abstract, or diagonal stripe patterns and were usually made of silk. Ties came in light and vivid colors. See illustrations. See also men's illustrations.

Gloves: Kid, cotton, or suede gloves were worn when shopping, going to an event, or visiting. Gloves were made in a light colors such as fawn, lavender, lilac, cream, yellow, and gray and covered the wrist. White gloves were only worn in the evening.

Makeup: Only worn by fast women. Don't wear any except a little bit of powder. Pinch your cheeks and bite your lips instead. If you are really nervous about appearing in public without makeup, just use a touch of mascara. You'll look so much more authentic without makeup, and visitors will have a better idea of what women really looked like in the '90s and how the idea of beauty has changed over the last 100 years.

Fingernail polish did not exist.

Fans: Fans were large: 14 to 16 inches long. Sticks were made of ivory, wood, tortoise shell. Leaves were made of gauze, lace, silk (sometimes painted with flowers and landscapes), paper. Japanese and Chinese fans also used.

Flowers: Corsages were popular for special occasions. The most popular flowers were violets and American beauty roses (bluish red). Orchids were sent only to actresses and were considered nouveau riche.

Jewelry: Little jewelry was worn. Many women wore a brooch or bar pin at the neck and had a watch. Pins came in many shapes, including: crescents, stars, hearts, birds, and animals. The watch was put in a pocket, pinned on the chest or waist, or hung from a heavy chain that was draped in swags on the bodice. Wristwatches weren't developed until WWI. Don't wear a wristwatch; hide it in a pocket.