

The Virtual Costumer

A monthly publication of the Silicon Web Costumers' Guild

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A message from the President of the Silicon Web Costumers' Guild

Labor Day has come and gone; the summer is past. It has been a summer of many events. Our membership has attended costumed events in various places, or has gone to places far and near and noticed displays and exhibits that feature or include costumes. How's about sharing with the rest of us what you have seen?

If you have pictures, they can be included in the Newsletter. All you have to do is send them by email with a message to Sharon. If you have comments, but no pictures, you can just write to all of us via the SiW list.

Throughout the year, notice of events you have heard about, or productions or movies you have seen that relate to any of the multitudes of variations of costumes and costuming would be deeply appreciated, again, in either venue.

There are new costume-oriented films coming out all the time. Some are big ones with heavy PR, and some slip by with little fanfare. I for one do not get to a lot of films. I would consider it a kindness if you would send the SiW a note about any you would recommend, or a warning if you see one on which we should not waste our money. (A word of warning would have spared me the atrocious waste of time and money on Legally Blond 2.)

The message here is that communication is good. SiW wants to hear from you; all of you. With whatever costume related thoughts, events, experiences, fantasies, or projects you have to share. Start us thinking, start our creative juices flowing.

Thank you,
Dana (aka President, SiW)

Women and Dress Reform in the 19th Century

by Sharon Trembley

In contrast to my article in the last issue of *The Virtual Costumer* (men taking an interest in ornamental clothing in the 14th century), male attire during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century emphasize cut and fit, whereas color and ornamentation was left to the females.

Gayle Fisher in her introduction to *Pantaloon and Power* says that with the sobering of male apparel, there came an increased sexual stereotyping of male dominance with lack of ornamentation and bifurcated (pants with two legs), and females continuing to wear flamboyant fashions. Women's dress became associated with domestic responsibilities and feminine frailty.

While at the time, frailty was considered fashionably feminine and a major occupation to discuss various illnesses and weaknesses with your lady friends, tales of deformation, illness and even death due to constrictive clothing were widespread. Some ladies were rumored to take a morning dose of opium to help her endure the physical stress of her corset-lacing.

This idea has led some historians to believe that the Victorian-style corset oppressed women, and showed their willingness to conform to men's ideal of beauty. It's only natural that the dress reform movement was part of the women's rights movement and ridding themselves of corsets was women's first step towards emancipation.

The mid-19th century was an era of reform in America. Among the proposed solutions to society's ills was women's dress reform. This was not a single organized group with an agenda, rather it was different reform groups advocating dress reform on the basis of utopianism, religion, health, women's right, and aesthetics. It's important to note that these groups did not join together, just had an oddly similar fashion sense.

The goals of this article is to list some of the various reformists that incorporated seemingly similar dress reforms, and to shed a little light on the facts of normal corset wear.



Utopian Community
The Oneida colony in Oneida, NY formed in 1848, and they regarded clothing as impure. Their later goal was to become nudists, but for the time being, women dressed as children with an outfit of pantalettes and shortened frocks to show their subordination to men, since men were not dressing as children.

Oneida women were

also encouraged to cut their hair short into a bob style.

Since the Oneida colony's goals extended to much more than fashion and included such things as selective breeding and community marriage, their attire became acquainted in the public's eye with free love, polygamy and prostitution. Therefore, Oneida women wore long dresses when out in public, and reserved their girlish attire for life within their cloistered community.

The collapse of the Oneida colony came about when their leader, J. H. Noyes, had to flee to Canada to avoid arrest.



Religion

Two branches of the Mormons also advocated a similar costume of the short skirt and bloomers for their female followers: the more widely known Utah branch headed by Brigham Young, and the Strangite Mormons, led by James Strang, who settled in Wisconsin.

There is conflicting information on the Utah women's adoption of the costume. There are reports of Mormon women

of Utah wearing it, including historical journals from the time, but there are a variety of reasons given with the predominate one being frontier practicality. There are also opposite accounts stating that Mormon women retained their attire of long skirts, petticoats, ribbons, bows, and white aprons in response to a passage from the Bible (Deuteronomy 22:5) - "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man ... all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God." (Heritage Gateway)

James Strang's second wife, Elvira Field, is said to have been a national advocate for the rights of women, according to Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints, and therefore implemented a style of pants that was consistent with the Mormom belief of plain dress. Strangite women were wearing these pants by 1849 within their settlements.

The Strangite faction wound down after James Strang's adoption of polygamy, marriage to a quite young lady (frequently disguised as his male secretary), declaring himself 'king' to his sect, and eventual murder. However, it continues to exist today.

Seventh-Day Adventists also adopted this style of feminine attire, however their pants were starched or stiffened so they would not cling to the limbs. Ellen G. White sold patterns of their dress to promote uniformity of their version of this healthful and modest apparel.

Health

Women's health was regarded as universally poor in the mid-19th century. Many ailments were attributed to corset-wearing – consumption, collapsed uteri, fallen wombs, overheated reproductive organs, cancer, scoliosis, hunchback, hysteria, melancholy, epilepsy, shortness of breath, and unhealthy babies.



The leading group in the health movement were believers in hydropathy. Water cures practiced at private spas, where women wore modest outfits with trousers and shorter than ankle-length skirts.

*To breathe, or not to breathe; that's the question
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fashion,
Or to bear the scoffs and ridicule of those
Who despise the Bloomer dresses.
In agony,
No more? – and, by a dress to say we end
The side-ache, and the thousand self-made
aches,
Which those are heir to, who, for mere fashion,
Will dress so waspish.*

Water-Cure Journal, June 1853

Dr. James C. Jackson helped found the National Dress Reform Association (NDRA) that promoted a healthful pantaloons outfit, later called 'The American Costume'. Many of the future members of the NDRA had suffered an illness prior to joining, and had worn a version of the American Costume during their recovery.

The basic American Costume consisted of a short skirt and pantaloons modeled after men's wear rather than Turkish trousers. The outfit was worn to "secure sufficient warmth to every part of the body" and to leave "every muscle and organ free from restraint."

The NDRA began accepting members in February 1856, and first met at the Glen Haven Water Cure in New York State. Although Amelia Bloomer was elected one of the ten vice-presidents, Bloomer never attended any meetings.



At the first meeting of the NDRA, President Charlotte Austin Jay stated during the opening address, that they were meeting "for the purpose of modifying the style of

dress of woman so as to improve and benefit her health."

The total membership of the NDRA was estimated to be between 6,000 to 8,000 with members representing 19 states. White, middle-class women were the largest portion of the NDRA's membership. The NDRA met annually until 1865 with attendance between 200 and 400 people.

Without being able to change to a more healthful outfit overall, the Dress Reform Movement began to promote Emancipation Waists to replace corsets during the 1870s. A waist was a short-sleeved undergarment that supported the upper body and also had buttons along its lower edge to attach petticoats, and to transfer some of the weight of the skirts from the waist to the shoulders. A fashionably dressed lady of the time would be wearing around 25 pounds of clothes. Many authors of dress reform literature compared the unnatural shape of a corseted woman to the epitome of natural feminine beauty, the Venus de Milo, to illustrate the unhealthiness of corset wearing.

In 1859, the NDRA started to incorporate slave images in their rhetoric, borrowing from abolitionists and suffragettes.



Suffragettes

The suffragettes began a Dress Reform Movement beginning in the 1850s, encompassing among other things the right to vote, temperance and various health reforms. Their first new fashion was christened the Bloomer, named after Amelia Bloomer, editor of the temperance magazine *The Lily*, which promoted the style. Amelia Bloomer was not the first to wear this outfit, however, her

advocating it in *The Lily* associated it with her name, although she had suggested alternate names like 'Camilia' or 'freedom dress'. It consisted of Turkish-style



trousers worn under a shorter than ankle length skirt.

In Spring 1851, women's rights advocates Elizabeth Smith Miller, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Amelia Jenks Bloomer wore their short skirts and Turkish trousers on the streets of Seneca Falls, NY. Eventually they convinced Susan B.

Anthony to try wearing it.

By 1854, the Woman's Rights Convention in Albany, NY returned to wearing long skirts. One thought on why dress reform became less important to them is the introduction of lightweight wire hoops replacing layers of petticoats. The freedom dress also alienated the women's rights groups from the other women to whom they were trying to appeal, along with detracting from their real issues of employment, education and suffrage "as the average mind can grasp but one idea at a time." (Susan B. Anthony)

Public Opinion

The public did not differentiate the groups adopting this outfit and could not be bothered trying to interpret which message was being sent – much to the dismay of the wearer.

When wearing this outfit, women were denied admittance to many venues, such as church, and were harassed by men and children on the streets. The costume was also linked with the suffrage movement which pretty much equated to the downfall of civilization, if women were given rights equal to men. Also, loose clothing leads to loose morals, if they didn't go as far as to associate Turkish trousers with harems.



Not even the common sense regarding the long skirts dragging on the ground through all sorts of rubbish in the streets to then be brought indoors with the wearer, allowed fashions to change. Godey's Ladies Book speculated that the Bloomer-style costume did not catch on since it did not originate in Paris. It wasn't until women started engaging in physical activity such as bicycling, golf, or ice skating, that skirts shortened for women at large when they were participating in these activities.

Corset Fact-finding



The corset was an integral part of a woman's wardrobe that created the figure necessary to enhance the look of a well-developed, slender-waisted figure. Although the corset enhanced the female characteristics of the body, it was perceived as morally

correct since a woman without a corset was considered either loose or in a state of undress.

Valerie Steele feels that tight-lacing was more of a myth than a reality (p. 162). Most women laced tight enough to reduce their waist by two to three inches, and probably loosely laced while at home and more tightly for a formal affair, like a ball. The tightness of lacing was largely dictated by the wearer's age, the social occasion, and the style of the dress.

The small waists sizes that were spoken of were legend and extremely rare. From advertisements, the standard corset was sized 18" to 30", though there is occasionally one as small as 15". According to the booklet on *The Dress Reform Problem*, published in 1886 by E. Ward of Co. of Bradford, which made hygienic corsets and rational dress:

A distinction should be made between *actual* and *corset* measurements, because stays, as ordinarily worn, do not meet at the back ... Young girls, especially, derive intense satisfaction from proclaiming the diminutive size of their corset. Many purchase 18 or 19 inch stays, who must leave them open two, three, and four inches ... 15, 16, and 17" inch waists are glibly chattered about, as though

they were common enough ... [yet] we question whether it is a physical possibility for women to reduce their waist measure below 17 or 18 inches.

(quoted by Steele, p. 163)

Steele also contacted museum curators with period clothing. Using the collection at the Leicestershire Museum and Art Galley as a sample, one corset from the 1890s measured 18" when laced closed, 11 or 5% of the collection measured 19", and most of the remainder were 20-26", with the heaviest concentration at 21 and 22". (p. 163)

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By Sharon Trembley

My chosen web site this month is the Elizabethan Costuming Page at <http://costume.dm.net/>

It's a fantastic site for anyone interested in recreating this time period, even outside of England.

The site's author Drea Leed seemingly has everything to get a costumer started on Elizabethan styles for women, men and children from all walks of life, including yardages needed.



from <http://costume.dm.net/overview.html>

Besides the clothing, there's headwear, footwear, make-up, jewelry, and public opinions of the time with instructions and hints on what to use and where to get it.

For example, there are links to seven different pages on how to make a ruff – my biggest downfall in the Elizabethan era. Don't worry, I laughed at how easy they made it look while remembering the Mary Tudor's neck



goopiness of fabric stiffener and the drinking straws all over. Since none of their recommended methods go this route, they probably work a lot better.

There's also a compendium of proper colors and their historic names matched up to DMC numbers (embroidery floss available in hundreds of shades). For example, the color referred to as Dying Spaniard that is a light gray with a greenish tinge that is comparable to DMC 3023.

So you don't feel alone in your recreation efforts,



Caul (hat) by Drea Leed

Drea has included photos of other recreations, including hers, and other costumers' diaries so you can peer over their shoulders while they work on their costumes.

Drea also includes links to other sites in order to view portraits on-line, such as Queen Elizabeth I or Venetian women of the 16th century, so the research conscious costume recreationist does not need to go far.



Madame Tussaud's, London, copy of the Pelican portrait gown



Member Spotlight



This month's volunteer is Carole Parker.
(Interview completed June 6, 2003)

Photo by Ed Falk

ST: Do you have any pets?

CP: Two cats both males. One is a manx (stump for tail) and a shorthair who always looks surprised or stupid.

ST: Do you have a spouse or significant other?

CP: Husband, Bill Laubenheimer.

ST: Any children?

CP: Nope.

ST: Where are you currently living?

CP: Sunnyvale, CA in Silicon Valley

ST: Do you consider that your hometown?

CP: Current home town. If you're talking about birth place, then no. I was born in Los Angeles, CA and grew up in the Santa Monica/Palms Mar Vista area.

ST: Do you have a favorite vacation destination?

CP: Nope. I love to travel when I can afford it.

ST: Do you have a favorite costume movie?

CP: No favorite movie at this time. I've been watching the Japanese historical dramas (with captions) on the local foreign station. They've serialized the Samurai Trilogy, and the costuming is gorgeous.

ST: Do you have a favorite author or book?

CP: So many authors and so little time! I find myself going towards the women authors more than the men.

ST: What are you currently reading?

CP: I'm currently reading an XHTML book to make my skills better.

ST: What are your favorite costuming topics (photography, research, storage hints, sewing ...)?

CP: Helping to spread accurate information where I can. I seem to be the one to help people answer their questions.

ST: Are you currently working on any costumes?



Photo by Dana MacDermott

CP: I should be. I'm going to try and enter at TorCon. If everything goes right, I'll be a Redwood Fairy.

ST: Are you currently learning any new costuming techniques?

CP: I'll be experimenting with new dye and/or painting techniques. I'll let the group know when it happens.

ST: What costuming techniques would you like to learn?

CP: Japanese tie-dye techniques and resist methods.

ST: Do you have a favorite historic period?

CP: Not historic period, more cultural. I'm interested in Japanese garments, and I hope to do some kimono in time for the 2006 WorldCon. I believe that Japan is bidding on the 2007 WorldCon, so I want to get that one done before then.

ST: A favorite color?

CP: Blues.

ST: A favorite food?

CP: I'll eat most anything as long as it's not poison or excessively deep fried.

ST: And your current education or career?

CP: Bachelors degree in Journalism with a specialization in magazine writing. I may be going back to school full time in the fall. I have to do some research on that, though.

New question from Carole for all future volunteers: How did you get involved in costuming?

While I did Halloween as a kid, I didn't really get into costuming until I joined the S.C.A. as an adult. Of course, I wanted to have my own costume and not have to borrow someone else's. While in the S.C.A., I met people who were fannish, so I started going to conventions in the early 1980s. I've done mostly hall costumes, but I'm hoping to change that soon.



ICG President's Message

July 9, 2003:

Hello Everyone:

Sorry about being a little late this month. Well, this letter is not what I had planned. The last few weeks have been filled with many things going on in both my personal life and the with the ICG.

Getting the personal item out of the way, first, I will be entering the hospital to have eye surgery on July 10. During that that time your Vice President, Nora Mai, will be running the show until I

return on July 25. Nora is up to speed on all that is happening and I know everyone will give her all the help she needs.

Now down to the matters at hand. Later this month, Dora will be publishing the budget (i.e., how much we spent) this year and where we stand dollar-wise. I want to thank all of the chapter treasurers for their help in bringing the books up-to-date, and for their great assistance to the board while we work on the ICG and chapter treasurers' needs. Their help has done wonders in solving the little day-to-day problems we face, and I might add they did it quickly. We now have a better understanding of how each chapter works in regard to their members and dues.

At the end of this month, I will be going once again to Costume College, a trip I look forward to. Last year was my first time and I was impressed even as a non-sewer. I was able to see the great value of this event. One of the many happenings offered during Costume College are tours to different locations of costume-interest. They were great. The classes (I must confess I only know a little) were well attended and the teachers were knowledgeable, willing, and able to help anyone. The swath of costumers between professional and amateurs was something to see. No one appeared to leave without learning something new. The Marketplace (i.e. Dealer's Room) was a dream and a nightmare (not ever enough money). There is a saying used in the Civil War when you see something you never saw before "I saw the elephant." Well I saw it and it was indeed a beautiful sight. The Gala (a big dinner/dance on Saturday night of Costume College) was a treat for the eye and the music a delight.

But what made this special was the hotel. For twenty years I have dealt with Con hotels. Most of the time they left a bitter taste in my mouth from bad service, poor food, and overcharging. Not here! This place was great and they like the Costume College and even put on a small show at the Gala when the wait staff began serving dinner. So, if you get the chance, make this a place to be when it rolls around for next year.

C. D. Mami
President ICG



My Fair Lady

A review by Sharon and Madelaine Trembley



This is the Pygmalion story made into a musical – originally starring Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews on Broadway. However, in the movie Audrey Hepburn was cast as Eliza Doolittle, which turned out alright for Julie Andrews because she won the Best Actress Oscar that same year for *Mary Poppins*.

The movie is long at almost three hours, and the two of us saw places where the movie could be trimmed. However, more than half the songs were enjoyable.



A lowly flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, with a heavy Cockney style accent gets swept up in a bet to pass her off as more than a ‘guttersnipe’ at a fancy dress affair by two learned linguists.

After months of lessons, and a try-out at the Ascot horse race, Eliza passes the test at an Embassy Ball. Her teacher, Prof. Henry Higgins, is congratulated for all of his work by his wagering colleague, his domestic staff and most of all, by himself, with no praise given to Eliza.



Both of us felt the lines were written a little over the top to make Prof. Higgins out to be one of the biggest and most pompous horse’s rears, we’ve ever seen on-screen. It is not very believable to us that there is a happy ending.

The Costumes:

For the most part, Prof. Henry Higgins wears tweed suits and hats throughout the movie.

He is not the least bit interesting costume-wise, much like a Ken doll, which leads the two of us to the inevitable reason why Barbie dolls have *My Fair Lady* gowns.



Audrey Hepburn



Barbie in Ascot Dress

The Ascot race is the first scene where there is interesting costuming – flower seller drabness with shawls does not do much for your reviewers.



Initially, the men are uniformly wearing morning suits, top hats and carry walking sticks. The women wear just black and white with dangerously parasols.

I noted an oddity with Audrey Hepburn's hat in this scene – there is a colorfully flowered, cap beneath her chapeau. It almost looks like a mob cap (Colonial or Pilgrim style).



Neither of us is into pink so this dress also worn by Barbie does little for your reviewers.



Barbie



Audrey Hepburn



We had trouble finding a full-length photo of the ball gown. In the movie, it was described as 'French,' but as to how that would be different from 'British' wasn't apparent in the context of the film.

Sharon found Audrey's hair style with the ball gown to be of interest though.



Sharon also liked the jacket that went with this Eliza dress.



Awards:

- 1965 Academy Award: Best Picture
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Director: George Cukor
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Actor: Rex Harrison
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Cinematography Color
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Sound
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Art Direction Color
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Music Score
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Costume Design Color
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Supporting Actor nominee: Stanley Holloway
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Supporting Actress nominee: Gladys Cooper
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Writing Adapted Screenplay nominee
- 1965 Academy Award: Best Film Editing nominee
- AFI: Top 100 Movies
- AFI: Top 100 Passions

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