

Silicon Web Costumers' Guild

Silicon Web Staff

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President's Message

Dana MacDermott*

This new issue of the Virtual Costumer is theme oriented around American Costume. As you can see, by perusing the table of contents, this is a broad field, indeed. These are scholarly articles on topics of historical interest. But the history of clothing does not stand alone.

History can be a very dry subject, or it can be truly fascinating. When I was a Jr. High and High School student, I loathed history. Even the best teachers were presenting the past in terms of military conflict and the business of nations. It was dates and wars and large scale conflict. Some of it was important, but much was excruciatingly boring.

In 1970 PBS released the Wives of Henry VIII. I was fortunate enough to watch

it at the time. The political moving and shaking of the world suddenly assumed a personality, an intimacy. For the first time, I found myself curious about what was going on elsewhere at the time, what life was like, and what the politics meant to the lives of real people.

This was visual, as well; the opulent fashion was part of the story. I discovered that there were other ways to approach history. Each aspect, each thread as it were, is linked to the cultures to the politics to the religions to the world views of the individuals and to comprehension of the past as a whole. This was the beginning for me of a reappraisal of the study of History.

I was in my first stint as a graduate student (working on an Architecture degree) when I took a class on the Visual History of the Theatre. The final project had profound effects on my worldview. We each selected a play from an earlier period and delivered a presentation that discussed the cultural and social milieu at the time the play was written, and presented a design concept for a production of that play. We also looked at the history of the original production. It is a testimony to an effective professor when the final exam or project is not just a rehashing of the material presented in the class, but constitutes a tying together and expansion of the concepts inherent in the course. As a result of this project, I began to understand

the interrelationships of the music, literature and political reality of the time.

When I was in graduate school the second time, studying Costume Design, I was a teaching assistant for a costume history class. Part of my responsibility was to deliver a lecture to the class. I recall specifically working on making the connection between the classic history of the era and the clothing. In one case it was how the crusades not only took the military might of Europe into the middle east (with the resultant blood and horror all the way around), but also brought back fabrics, fashions and other cultural elements from the Middle East, and, as a result, altered the cultures from which the forces came.

It is true that ultimately everything is linked to everything else. The study of historical costume is one approach that can feed into this comprehension. Architecture changed with the Pannier - doors got wider. Pantries are back because of Costco. WWII brought pants to the American women's fashion. International trade took dyes and fabrics to parts of the world that had not seen them before.

Sumptuary laws were political and religious and influenced clothing. Counter cultural resistance to the dominant social paradigms were, and generally are, illustrated in alternative styles of dress



which frequently become themselves issues of conflict.

Technological advances of an industrial society or of scientific research appear as new fabrics, or dyes, or styles. The breakdown of cultural barriers is often illustrated in the migration of styles.

Kathe Gust's article in this issue on Quilting in American costume ends with a discussion of the cultural myth exemplified by the film *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. Thank you for that, Kathe. It is an example of how the very idea of a history of clothing can ripple through a society. (It is a thoroughly enjoyable discussion, as well!)

When we try to explain our interest in the history of clothing to anyone outside the group of impassioned costumers, this intimate interaction of clothing with the rest of society and history can help them understand.



From the Editor *Philip Gust**

Welcome to the first issue of VC for 2012. This issue marks VC's 10th year of publication. I'd like to thank past editors Sharon Trembley and Dana MacDermott, and all the authors who have shared their knowledge through the pages of VC over the last ten years.

This issue on "Americana" covers costuming, accessories, and related culture that is quintessentially American, from

native American attire, to iconic historical costumes, to contemporary clothing.

Everyone has some sense of what "Americana" is in terms of costuming, but trying to actually define it seems like a hopeless task because the American tradition of clothing and costumes is as diverse as the people who have lived here over the last several centuries.

This issue will not try to answer the big question. Instead, it offers a small sampling of clothing and accessories from across both place and time that showcase the diversity of what people who live here have worn, and what it says about the American character.

The issue leads off with my review of an 1886 article from the *Scientific American Supplement* on how to build a carpet bag. It provides easy to follow instructions for creating this iconic accessory from the post U.S. Civil War Reconstruction era.

San Diego Costumers' Guild past President Jody Regan writes about the uniforms worn by the Harvey Girls, from their inception in the 1880s through the late 1950s. She illustrates her narrative with numerous photos and descriptions of how the uniform has evolved. This is a must-read for those who want to try their hand at this piece of contemporary Americana.

Avid early-California living historian and Civil War re-enactor Andrew Crockett describes his beautiful recreation clothing of an Alta California Don in the early 1800s. Its style, materials, and vivid colors provide

a backdrop for a fascinating story of how such rich materials made their way to California in its days as a Spanish outpost.

Kathe Gust's article on quilted clothing in America describes how Americans adapted a centuries old technique to the needs of a growing country, from before the American Revolution, to its expansion westward, and even the depiction of quilted clothing in the costumes from a classic Hollywood musical.

Lynn Duffield, a member of the Cherokee tribe of Oklahoma, describes her incredible journey to research and recreate the ceremonial attire of a Blackfoot woman c. 1910. A novice costumer, her stunningly beautiful workmanship, impeccable documentation, and haunting performance received many well-deserved accolades for bringing the past to life in the Costume-Con 28 historical masquerade.

Military historian and 1996 ICG Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Byron Connell tells the surprising story of how a World War II hero and future U.S. President personally designed a classic article of clothing that continues to have a strong influence on both men's and women's fashion over sixty years later.

Civil War era historical costumer Lisa Ashton is fascinated by Lizzie Borden, who was exonerated of the gruesome 19th century murders of her father and stepmother. Although Borden burned her blood-stained dress and no photos of it exist, Lisa picks up the thread and recreates what she may have

worn on that fateful day. Lisa's recreation was recognized for authenticity in the historical masquerade at Costume-Con 24.

For those who grew up in the 1950's and 1960's, nothing said "Americana" like the raccoon skin hat that actor Fess Parker wore playing frontier legends Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone. Professional hat maker Rosemary Greene offers some surprising historical background and step-by-step instructions for creating one of your own.

Here is a quick preview of what is upcoming in VC. In May 2012 we'll be "Stepping off the Stage and Silver Screen," celebrating costumes and costume designers of Broadway and Hollywood that have had such a major impact on costuming, our sense of fashion and our concept of "glamor." The theme for the August 2012 issue is "Haunting and Horror." Just in time for the Halloween season, this issue will provide ideas and techniques for costuming in the supernatural and horror genres and look back at some your favorite characters and the people who created them.

I'm pleased to announce that the November 2012 issue explores "Costuming and Technologies." From basic techniques and materials, to useful devices, and even some truly whacky inventions, this issue will pay tribute to the technologies that have made today's practice of costuming possible.

See the [Upcoming Issues](#) page of the SiW web site for details. Now is a great time to start writing for VC, and share what you know and love with your fellow costumers.

From the ICG

The International Costumer's Guild (ICG) annual members' meeting takes place in May at [Costume-Con 30](#) in Arizona. If you will not be attending the meeting, please print, fill out, and sign a copy of the proxy form below, and give it to a member who is attending. You must fill in the form completely and sign it. ***Incomplete or unsigned forms will not be accepted.***

This Proxy Statement is for ICG members who will not be attending the Annual Meeting at Costume-Con. If you want to vote, complete the form and give it to someone who will be attending.

International Costumers' Guild 2012 Annual Meeting Proxy Assignment Form

On this _____ day of _____, 2012, I, _____,
assign my vote to _____,

and authorize the above- named member of the International Costumers' Guild, belonging

to _____ Chapter, to represent me in all business coming before
the 2012 Annual Meeting of the International Costumers' Guild.

Assignee Name*: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Province: ZIP/Postal Code: _____

Assigner Name**: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Province: ZIP/Postal Code: _____

Signature: _____

**Who you are authorizing to vote on your behalf. **Your name.*

Your Vote Counts! Check the [ICG Web Site](#) or [Yahoo Group](#) for the latest slate of Officers.