

## *Historical notes and Care information:*

### **Chemise or Shift:**

Like a modern undershirt, this garment served to protect the body from one's clothes, and the expensive outer clothes from the oils of the body. It is made to be simple to produce and easy to wash, since undergarments were the only articles of clothing that were regularly washed. White or off white was the preferred color, since those can be bleached to remove stains, and since un-dyed fabric can't bleed out its dye with repeated washing. It is constructed simply of rectangles and triangles, which can be arranged on fabric and cut out in a very economical way. A woman of the house or a seamstress might cut out as many as 12 or even 20 shifts at once from a piece of fabric, aided by the ease of fitting rectangles and triangles together on the yardage. The fullness created by this method of construction provided a little padding underneath a lady's corset, which was close-fitting enough to make things a little sweaty, especially in the summer. A woman would usually have at least 6 chemises in her wardrobe, and rich women had as many as 12. Of course, they often got worn several times before washing day came around.

**Care for it:** Machine wash and dry. Bleach if you like. Iron if you want.

### **Petticoat:**

Petticoats were worn under dresses for modesty, for warmth, and for shape. This petticoat gets its shape from many many tucks in the fabric, and from a padded hem, which is stuffed with wool (yarn, in this case). Padded hems and padded trims were used in the 1820s on outer dresses to emphasize the triangular skirt shape. Quilted petticoats (imagine if a thin quilt were made into a skirt) had been used in the late 1700s but I don't actually have hard evidence for a padded hem on a petticoat. It doesn't seem too far-fetched to me. The stiffness in the hem of this petticoat achieves the very particular silhouette of the 1820s.

**Wearing this:** Pull on so that the slits are at the sides. Tie one half of the skirt from the front to the back, and the other from the back to the front.

**Care for it:** Theoretically machine wash and dry, delicate cycle. It probably won't need anything, honestly. If the hem gets muddy, try to wipe clean. If you decide to wash, be aware that the padded hem and the tucks will stubbornly hold water and it will take a long time to dry.

### **Indoor Cap:**

Caps like this were usually worn by married women all the time – by itself indoors, under a bonnet outdoors, and replaced by a night cap for sleeping. This traditions was motivated by religious belief when it originated in the middle ages, but by the early 1800s it was dictated only by tradition and fashion. During the highly greek-inspired fashions of 1800-1815, many women cut their hair short and day caps went out of favor (since, after all, greek statues never have hats on). However, as fashion began to move back towards a hourglass (“womanly”) shape, caps came back into fashion, with more frills and ribbons than before, and covering much more of the head. This is at least partly because women who had cut their hair were now growing it out, but it was at that awkward stage that growing-out hair gets to where it won't do anything quite how you want it. Therefore, cover it completely with a cap, and use copious frills to frame the face in the way that hair had done in the 1810s. This cap is closely reflective of the fashionable shape from about 1820.

**Care for it:** Surface clean or hand wash gently; dry clean if you really want to. The issue here is the silk ribbon. It is unlikely to get particularly dirty.

**Fichu:**

This fichu is just a hemmed triangle of cloth, but fichus could be embroidered, trimmed with lace, or made of all kinds of sheer materials. These originated in the 1700s to modestly cover a woman's décolletage and to protect that area from sun. When worn under the gown, they also served as an extension of the shift, protecting the gown's neckline from the body (which will be an issue familiar to anyone who has seen the yellow-gray stains that develop inside the collars of men's dress shirts). Poor women usually wore them opaque, for better sun protection, while rich women liked to wear sheer filmy materials, to show off their assets while paying lip service to modesty.

**Care for it:** Machine wash and dry. Bleach if you want. Iron if you want.

**Bonnet:**

The bonnet has been made over from a very enormous 1780s to something a little closer to the fashions of the 1810s. Not all bonnets in this time had ribbon ties for under the chin, which came into fashion in the 1830s. The bonnet was worn outdoors for modesty and to protect the face from the sun. But bonnets were not as 100% required between 1800 and 1810 as they would be later in the century (further proof that this part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a mystifying fashion anomaly).

**Care for it:** Surface clean if it has an accident with a bird or a mud puddle. Try not to get caught in a downpour - neither the silk nor the straw understructure of the brim will like that very much.

**Reticule:**

A “reticule” is a sort of small purse. Women began carrying purses only in the late 1790s. Before that, women wore “pockets” inside their dresses – large bags tied around the waist under the clothes and accessed through slits in the side of the skirt. When fashionable dresses became sheer and clingy around 1800, these pockets could be seen through the dresses and totally spoiled the whole effect of the look. Thus women began carrying purses. When the fashion for purses began they were a bit on the large side and critics thought they looked silly and labeled them “ridicules”. One can even find period fashion literature which un-ironically refers to a purse in a fashion plate as a “ridicule”. This word morphed then into the word “reticule”.

**Care for it:** Spot clean, or dry clean if you're really concerned about it. Don't carry liquids or cosmetics in it unless they are very firmly sealed.

**Dress:**

This dress is a “best dress” that bridges the time between about 1795 and 1825. The straight sleeves which are slightly too long were most fashionable in the early 1800s, since in the 1820s the shoulder part of the sleeve began to grow larger, eventually resulting in “mutton” sleeves. The waist is slightly above the natural waist point, a transitional waist position seen in the late 1790s and early 1820s. The neckline is neither extremely high or extremely low, a kind of transitional level most popular in the 1820s. The skirt is relatively simply trimmed, in a manner which could be seen throughout the era (although the tucks would be most fashionable around 1815).

**Wearing this:** (You will likely need help with this.) Put on with the opening in the back. Close the hook and eye sets along the back. Pull tight the waist and neckline drawstrings, and tie each in a bow, then tuck the ends inside the dress.

**Care for it:** Spot clean or dry clean. If possible avoid wearing in situations where the skirt will be in prolonged contact with dirty or wet ground (ie outside). This kind of dress is designed to be worn at indoor functions, with little outside jaunts to the carriage in order to travel from place to place.

**Styling this dress for different periods:**

**1820s:** This is the period the dress is designed for. Put on the shift, the petticoat, the dress and the cap. A fichu or shawl may be worn under or over the dress. Wear uninteresting shoes.

To wear a fichu under, drape it around the shoulders over the shift. Tuck the ends into the petticoat waistband to help keep them in place. Maybe even add a couple of safety pins if you want. Then put the dress on over the top.

Like so:

To wear the fichu over the dress, drape it around the shoulders, cross the ends over the chest, and pin or tie them together behind your back.

Like so:

**1800-1810s:** The regency style is smooth and columnar. Put on the shift, then the dress, without the petticoat. Leave the indoor cap off, or replace it with a small mob cap. Wear uninteresting shoes. Drape a long shawl over your arms loosely.

Like so:

**1790s:** This decade had a round silhouette, with extra poof over the backside. Put on the shift and the petticoat. Now take a large T-shirt and fold it into thirds. Tuck the neck end of the shirt into the waistband of the petticoat at the back. Arrange this extra fabric over the backside. Add another if a more intense shape is desired.

Like so:

Put on the dress over this strange rump. Tie or pin a wide ribbon around the waist. A fichu may be worn over the dress. Large bows or buckles may be worn on the shoes. Top with a large mob cap, and a straw hat to go outside.

Like so: