

## WCWA Mission

The Washington Civil War Association (WCWA) is a nonprofit organization established to honor America's past by reenacting the War Between the States. Our objective is to interpret and present the daily life of Confederate and Federal soldiers, and their families and associates, for the public through living history, reenactments, first person characterizations, and education. To this end, our member units portray military and civilian organizations from all theaters of the Civil War during the period of 1861 to 1865.

## Living History Committee Statement

The **Living History Committee** shall process requests and coordinate presentations for school and living history programs; develop educational materials and lesson plans; develop materials for educating members and the public about authenticity; when necessary, convene a temporary task force to examine authenticity issues and make recommendations to the Board of Directors. Since our member units portray companies with widely divergent backgrounds, the authenticity of the individual units is the responsibility of the individual unit commander or leader. Questions about the authenticity of any unit's clothing or equipage should be directed to that unit's commander or leader. If unsatisfactory answers to questions about authenticity are provided by the unit commander or leader within a reasonable period of time, the Chairman may ask the Living History Committee to convene a temporary task force. The purpose of the task force is to examine the issues present and make recommendations (if any) based on the best information available. This task force's sole purpose is to gather information. It has no power to enforce or punish. This task force shall report its findings to the Board of Directors upon completion of its investigation. Members of the Living History Committee shall include the WCWA Vice Chairman.

### **The Reenacting "Day" and Experience**

Period Camps are open for public display and touring typically starting from 8:00 or-9:00am, and are generally open until the conclusion of the last battle of the day, which ranges from 3:00pm to 5:00pm (this is event/day dependent—defer to event schedule for these times).

It is the expectation that WCWA members actively participating in living history and battle scenarios, as much as possible accurately portray the military and civilian lives of the people of the Civil War time period, 1861-1865 during the reenacting day during posted and established public hours.

At the conclusion of the reenacting day, it is at the discretion of the unit commander or leader to set expectations for remaining in period dress and persona. While it is the strong suggestion of the Living History committee that people try to live as life was in the 1860's as much as possible, it is also understood that due to health, comfort, and other factors that this is not always possible for everyone to achieve. It is the responsibility of the unit commander or leader to properly describe the expectations of the camp/area to the members under their purview.

## CIVILIANS

## WOMEN

Whether new to re-enacting or a veteran, you will need to have a progressive mind set from where you start today. It is important to know what and how things were done as well as the items used. There are usually one or more period correct options which will usually fit your situation or needs.

While a piece of clothing or an item may have existed at the time, another thing to consider would be was it a common place, everyday typical item or would it be applicable to only a certain location, situation or individual. Being specific is a process and takes learning and research. Remember that garment accuracy isn't just on the outside garment, it is important to be accurate underneath also. Though it can seem like a long and drawn out process, research will help you from making items or purchases that you will be unable to wear and will save you time and money in the long run. Again, don't be afraid to ask questions of others, your unit leader and or Civilian Coordinator.

Clothing is the first thing that public sees and recognizes as being of the period. That is why it is very important to pay close attention to the details of the clothing that was worn during 1861 to 1865. Historically accurate clothing is our first opportunity to educate the public.

## LADIES UNDER PINNING'S

**Stockings:** Stockings were worn over the knee and depending on how finished might require a garter. Younger ladies were more likely to wear stripped stockings while older ladies wore solid colors.

**Drawers:** "knickers" of the later 1800's and long pantalets of the early 1800's *are not* appropriate for the time we represent. Drawers should be constructed to have an open crotch seam and are generally two tubes of fabric that overlap and are sewn to a waistband. The open crotch is a necessity when using the "necessary" (bathroom) as it is very difficult to pull down underwear while wearing all the necessary layers and keeping your garments off the less than clean necessary floors. While some women balk at the thought of wearing an undergarment with an open crotch, if made correctly there should be no drafts or feeling of being exposed.

**Chemise:** This garment protects the dress and corset from dirt and body oils. It should be fairly full through the bust waist and hips as well as having at least a small sleeve to protect the armpit area of the dress. While most underpinnings were constructed of cotton, this is one garment that could be made from a good linen. Benefits of using linen for a chemise, such as feeling cooler against the skin and it has better wicking qualities.

**Corset:** No matter how accurate your other garments are without a corset, you will not be period correct unless you are wearing a loose-fitting garment. Corsets were worn to control the torso, support the bust as well as providing a foundation to support the weight of the petticoats.

**Corset Cover:** These were designed to protect the corset from staining should the dye of the garment fabric bleed color. They were usually darted to fit closely to the corset and are optional.

**Petticoats, Supportive Skirts and Underskirts:** Second to the corset, these are required to achieve the period silhouette. Worn in layers, they create the soft bell shape of the mid 1860's look.

The basic petticoat is worn over the drawers, chemise, corset, corset cover (if worn). This petticoat is hemmed shorter than other petticoat layers and will be hemmed to be between mid and lower calf. It

should be from 90" to 120" in circumference and gathered onto a waistband that fits comfortable over the other layers of underpinnings.

Supportive skirts were either corded, hooped or cage. Cage supportive skirts were most common after 1857. In our case, it makes sense to purchase one that is round and adjust the petticoats and skirt fullness to the back to mimic the correct shape as the war continues. The length of these supportive skirts stops about mid-calf.

Over petticoats were designed to be worn over the supportive skirts to soften the "rungs" so that the dress drapes over the supportive skirt without showing "hoop" marks. The dress fabric will dictate how many over petticoats are needed. These petticoats were often embellished with tucks, white work and insets.

## DRESSING

When first starting, do not go to the sutler's alone. Ask your unit leader, the Civilian Coordinator or an experienced re-enactor to accompany you. This will save you from purchasing items that are not period correct, do not fit your body shape, are not period appropriate or are not made well.

We bring respect and honor to our Victorian predecessors that we seek to portray, as well as giving an accurate impression to the public when we invest the time and effort in clothing ourselves accurately for this period in time.

The overall universal construction of dress of the time created a specific silhouette. The period correct silhouette is broader shoulders, a small waist and full skirts to make hips appear larger. This was the basic design of all dresses no matter if they were for working, daytime dressing or evening. Most of the design elements of the lady's garments were employed to make the waist appear small.

Armholes should fall to the back of the bodice instead of resting on the shoulders as they do today. This visually widens the shoulders and creates a long-rounded look.

Long vertical darts or placing gathers in the center front and back on fitted dresses also helped provide the illusion of a smaller waist. Side seams were placed in the back instead of directly under the arm as we do today. This made the back look narrower.

Skirts on working dresses would be less full than all other dresses but they would still be pleated and have some fullness.

These elements must be present in your garments whether they are purchased from a sutler, made to order or sewn by yourself.

**The Bodice:** There were two basic styles of bodices, either fitted or gathered. Research shows that the fitted bodice was the most common and that the gathered bodice was typically used for dresses sewn from lightweight fabrics such as lawn that we have available today.

**Fitted:** A corset must be worn under a tight fitted bodice to get the accurate silhouette. Raw edged seams were finished by hand with an overhand stitch. Stays would also be used in the side seams as well as at the back seams. Most of these bodices are finished with corded piping. Most closed with hooks and eyes though some were closed with buttons and button holes.

**Gathered:** These have loose fitting dress fabric supported by a fitted lining. Stays were utilized in this type of bodice too. The closure of gathered bodices could be hooks and eyes or button and button holes though the lining and the garment fabrics would close independently of each other or the garment fabric would close with a pin at the neck. Gathered bodices were usually finished with a band at the bottom.

Work and day dresses usually closed in the front. With the exception of the Garibaldi blouse, the bodice right side overlaps the left. The Garibaldi waist was patterned after a man's uniform which why the left overlaps the right. An overlap of  $\frac{1}{2}$ ' to  $\frac{3}{4}$ " will insure that there is no gapping which would allow underpinnings to "peak" through.

The predominate neckline for day was a jewel neckline. It could either be finished with corded piping or a small standup collar. Most piped colors would have a small white collar whipped stitched in to protect the neckline from body oils and dirt. These would be changed daily to provide a clean look though the dress may be worn every day.

**Sleeves:** Appropriate day sleeves would be long. Though all are long, there are several varieties of sleeves that were fashionably worn such as the bishop, coat, pagoda or modified pagoda. Most sleeves were lined with the exception of the bishop sleeve which can be left unlined. Sleeves are sometimes seen adorned with fabric ruching or pleated ribbon.

**Skirt:** Skirts were wide and that added to the appearance of a slim waist, fitting the period silhouette. Skirts of the time were pleated in different ways to remove the fullness from the waist and suspend it below the waistband allowing the fullness to flair over the hip. The length of the skirt varied depending on the use of the dress. A skirt that falls around an inch and a half off the floor is a good place to start. A work dress should be shorter, and around ankle length to not inhibit the wearer. The skirt could be a little lower in the back to accommodate for the natural movement of the skirt riding up when walking and also allows for balance during activities when wearing a hooped petticoat, or crinoline.

Skirts were sewn in panels that were either straight or gored at the top. Work skirts should be about 100 inches around to accommodate a 90-inch corded petticoat. If the dress is to be worn with a fashion hoop, the circumference would be at least 10 inches larger than the support skirt. Unlike today, the skirt is hemmed before it is set on the waistband. A hem facing was used to protect the skirt in many cases. This protection is seldom seen in sheer fabrics such as lawns. If you wish to protect the hem of the dress, you will want to apply a wool or cotton flat tape to mimic the wool or horse hair tape our Victorian predecessors would have used. The period term for this is brush braid. The tape can be applied by wrapping in the hem so that it covers both the facing and the garment fabric or it can be applied flat. This braid can be replaced as needed if it becomes worn. Now that the hem is finished, all changes in length will be made at the top of the skirt before it is sewn to the waistband.

Once the necessary amount of fabric is pressed down at the top to leave the desired finished length, the fullness is taken up by pleats. Knife and box pleating were used most often for taking up the fullness of the skirt before attaching it to the waistband at the time of the Civil War.

## **HEADWEAR**

Bonnets of the Era were to frame your Face. Not all Bonnet's were for shade: It's all about the look. Vails were not just for Mourning. Bonnets were made of Sheer Silk or Straw for summer wear. Sometimes straw was covered with silk or cotton velvet and others made of wire and Buckram covered in silk or cotton velvet for cooler months.

Lots of flowers, feathers and silk ribbon decorations adorned the bonnets. You never left Home without your bonnet or hat.

Head coverings depended on the clothing/dress (Work, Sunday, Dinner, Tea, Summer, Winter and Ball Gowns) also your Status (Farmer, City living and Money), Mourning and also the time of year.

## **HAIR STYLES FOR LADIES**

Hair was always parted down the middle. Ends are always confined during the day. Ends were usually exposed for dinner and evening entertainment. Look at books and CDV's for examples.

## **FOOTWEAR**

Thanks to Queen Victoria, walking boots were very commonly worn during the day. There are good sources of reproduction boots that can be purchased.

## **ACCESSORIES**

**Parasols:** Were only to provide shade. Since the bonnets of the time were only for looks, parasols provided the shade. Ladies should be pale to show that they didn't have to work in the fields.

## **THINGS NOT TO WEAR OR MAKE SURE DO NOT SHOW**

No modern blouses paired with a skirt.

Makeup should not be worn during the day. If your foundation is also your sunscreen, that is fine but make it look as natural as possible.

Remove any modern piercings. Ladies did have one piercing in both ears as earbobs were definitely worn.

Tattoos should be covered so they do not show.

Do not wear sunglasses. If you have prescription glasses, wear them. If at all possible, do not wear.

No polish on finger nails. Period!

## **TIPS FOR STARTING OUT**

If not able to make or purchase proper period underpinnings, wear what you have and a wedding hoop can be substituted for an actual hoopskirt or crinoline.

Corsets were worn by most classes. If unable to start out with a corset, a decent temporary solution is a sports bra. Just make sure it is not visible.

No tube socks or bare legs. Instead wear knee high or over the knee socks.

No obviously modern footwear such as tennis shoes, flip flops, etc. Instead wear dark or neutral tone flats, non-speed lace up boots are best, if at all possible. Goodwill is a source for such boots

Hair should at minimum be in bun if long. If you can get your hair into a low ponytail, there are buns that you can attach over the ponytail. If hair is not long enough to pull back, part it down the middle, place it behind the ears and make or purchase a hairnet from a sutler to hide the fact that you do not have a bun.

## **CHILDREN**

### **BOYS**

During the 1860s, there were a variety of outfits designed for the growing boy. Each style had a specific purpose and a specific age requirement.

Both boys and girls wore dresses for the first three to five years. Boys wore full skirted frocks over-starched petticoats and drawers until they were able to go to the bathroom without assistance. To differentiate a boy from a girl, often a front buttoned fastening rather than the usual back closing was designated for boys, in addition to diagonal trimming and pleats. In the summer, materials such poplin or challis in large patterns were used. Boys in winter wore dresses of velvet and woolen materials.

Bolero suits consisting of a jacket and skirt were in vogue for little boys up to the age of five. The short jacket, falling open from a single fastening at the neck was worn over a box pleated skirt. Applied twisted braid was popular for embellishing the ensemble. Typically, the trim edged the collar and cuffs of the jacket with a matching design following the hemline of the skirt.

For boys too mature to dresses yet too young for suits, a transitional play costume was a front buttoned blouse worn with loose trousers. Variations of this outfit were worn for everyday wear in rural areas and cities during the mid-nineteenth century. Both women's and men's fashions were reflected in this apparel. The blouse had the same drop shoulder found in women's dresses while the trousers were loose and ankle length like the men. Practical fabrics such as calico or gingham were used for summer. A winter version would be made of wool. The shirt often had buttons sewn along the waistband to attach to the trousers. The buttons were lowered as the young boy grew. The trousers would have either the old-fashioned side button panel or the new front button fly.

Ultimately the growing boy would enter into the masculine world wearing a vested suit and frock coat resembling his father's. A costume suitable for a boy of ten or eleven years of age would consist of long trousers and a jacket open at the waist to show a vest.

### **GIRLS**

On the face of it, children's Civil War clothing for girls looks very like what their mothers were wearing.

Girls were expected to wear layers under the skirt of their dress to make it appear fuller and wider. This could be accomplished with cotton petticoats.

Dresses came up to the neck and were distinguished from older women's dresses by buttoning up the back, rather than the front. Sleeves were commonly long even in summer, although the fabric would then be a lighter cotton. Skirts fell to just below the knee and these would be gradually lengthened until the girl was eighteen.

The dress of a 12-year-old ended an inch or two below the knee then was lengthened an inch or two each year to gradually reach just below the ankle by age 15 to 18.

## **MEN**

### **Drawers**

Drawers serve the function of underpants. Drawers have a button fly. A man would tuck his drawers into his socks to help keep his socks up.

### **Shirt**

Shirts were now a little shorter than in the past as they no longer served as underwear or nightshirts (as they did in the 18th century). Shirts usually buttoned part way down from the neck.

### **Socks**

Men now wore socks rather than long stockings.

### **Trousers**

Pants made by a tailor were called trousers whereas those made in a factory were called pants. Trousers or pants have a button fly - the modern zipper was not invented until the twentieth century. Creases would not become popular in pants until later in the 19th century.

### **Braces**

Suspenders were called "braces" and were used for holding up trousers. Belts existed as part of special outfits (for firemen and other services), but were not otherwise common.

### **Shoes**

Men's shoes came in a variety of styles and could be made of cloth or leather. "Congress Boots" were made with elastic sides. Elastic was a fairly new invention and like the zipper of the early twentieth century, was originally used as a shoe fastening before being introduced into other clothing.

### **Vest or Waistcoat**

Vests were a common part of everyday wear. They might match just the trousers or just the coat or all three pieces might match. A man might wear his vest with any number of his vest buttons fastened or left open.

### **Stock – neck tie**

A stock opens in back and fastens with hooks and eyes, but a buckle and strap were another common fastening. The bow on the front is permanently tied.

### **Frock Coat**

Men did not appear in public in their shirtsleeves, even if wearing a vest. Frock coats were popular. A frock coat was fitted to the body above the waist and had a loose skirt of fabric below. They could be made of extremely fine wool, most often black, for fall or winter, or of cotton or linen for summer.

### **Hat**

Straw top hats are appropriate for summertime. Top hats were considered common everyday wear and could have been made of wool felt but might also have been made of a felt made from beaver fur.

**Gloves**

Kid (goat skin) gloves were more common than cotton. Stylish gentlemen wore gloves when they went out in public.

**Coat**

While a frock coat or sack coat was proper outerwear, an overcoat or cloak could be worn in cold weather. The "Inverness cloak" special feature is that, while it does not have sleeves like an overcoat, the short outer cape provides protection to the arms of the wearer.

**Cane**

Stylish men liked to carry canes when they went out in public, whether they needed them for walking or not. Canes were usually small and lightweight.

*Note: This information is from the still under construction Civilian Handbook as well as tips from other reenactors.*

**Military:****Men****Headwear**

Conforming to typical civilian purchase or military purchase, and military issue headwear. Examples include but are not limited to: civilian: wool or wool-felt caps. Military, caps known as a Kepi, Forage Cap, Shako, Hardee hat, wheel-cap, or other period-correct headwear with appropriate documentation. All caps would be made of cloth such as wool or cotton and may also be made with leather or other natural products (with the exceptions of buttons and decorations).

**Shirts-** Typical shirts for men of the period were solid colors (neutral white or cream), lighter solid colors with earthen tones and natural dyes. Other fabrics such as patterns, checks, or plaids are also appropriate. These shirts typically button in the front with 2-4 buttons to extend halfway to 3/4ths down the front. Full-button down dress shirts are not period correct. Fabrics would only be made of cotton or wool, other natural fibers, or blends of each. Modern fabrics like nylon, rayon, etc, are not period accurate.

**Coats and Jackets-** The coats for men who are in military uniform are to be established by each military unit to the documented history and or standards of that unit. Coats are made of wool, cotton, or blends of each are period correct. Coats would not be made of modern materials (such as rayon, nylon, etc.). The description, type, and pattern varies greatly on the unit, theater of war, and the time period of war being depicted. Each unit is responsible for establishing guidelines that are consistent with the civil war period.

**Pants-** The pants or trousers for men who are in military uniform are to be established by each military unit to the documented history and or standards of that unit. Pants are made of wool, cotton, or blends of each are period correct. Pants would not be made of modern materials (such as rayon, nylon, etc.). The description, type, and pattern varies greatly on the unit, theater of war, and the time period of war being depicted. Each unit is responsible for establishing guidelines that are consistent with the civil war period.



**Shoes and Footwear:** Shoes and boots should be consistent with commonly available patterns and types of the civil war period. These items would be made of leather, with some examples being made of cotton, canvas or other natural materials. Typical patterns were the "brogan" also known as the "Jefferson Bootee" or other footwear with proper documentation of issue or purchase of the time period is also acceptable. Period correct socks would be made of cotton, wool, or blends of each. Modern socks with logos and brands and bright bleach

**Military Accoutrements and Equipment:** These items vary greatly depending on the individual unit impression, time frame of war, and other factors. Proper period-correct and documented equipment should be used and utilized when appropriate to portray the period.

### **Other Tips for Men**

No obviously modern footwear (i.e. Tennis Shoes, Flip Flops, etc. If you cannot borrow or purchase period-correct footwear, instead wear dark or neutral tone classic style shoes, that conform to the look as possible boots or brogans.

Do not wear blue jeans. Instead dark or neutral dress pants such as Chinos are much more passable until proper period style pants can be obtained.

Do not wear t-shirts or obviously modern shirts with bold patterns. Instead wear a classic cotton button down shirt, white or plaid with collar removed when possible.

A vest/waistcoat is highly suggested. Try to stay away from vests with "shiny" backs. But most will do temporarily.

Do not wear modern headwear. Instead try to find a "slouch" style hat until a proper period style can be obtained.

Remove any modern piercings IF possible. I.e. nose, multiple ear, lip.

Do not wear sunglasses. If you have prescription glasses that have the progressive lenses and must wear them, that is ok but just do not wear if possible.

### **Ladies as Soldiers:**

Though not common in the war, it has been documented that there were women who masqueraded as men during the Civil War. However, as if these ladies were found out, they would be dismissed from service and sent home or punished as this was done in secret. Modern women should try to reasonably disguise their appearance when portraying a male persona.

Hair-- if you have longer hair, it needs to be pinned tightly on the top of the head and concealed by headwear. Bright hair dyes should be discouraged during the reenacting season, as these did not exist in the period.

Women should wear loose fitting male clothing in an attempt to hide their feminine assets. Further, many women prefer to wear a sports bra to help support themselves and to have a less feminine silhouette. This is personal preference, however.

Make up and piercings should always be removed when portraying a male soldier.

Fingernail polish and other manicure procedures should be removed before a reenacting weekend.

## Camp and Daily Life

### Tents and Shelter:

(Placeholder for future input)

### Other Tips and Suggestions:

#### Leave your cell phone in your tent.

Yes, we can see you using it. If you can't go the weekend without using your phone, please do so in your tent or go to the modern areas. If you have an emergency issue that you need to have your phone during the day, please inform your commander or civilian leader and attempt to be discrete as possible.

#### Tie your tent flaps shut during the day, if you have non-period items in your tent.

If you have non-period correct items, it should be concealed in a period correct box or a bag. Instead, build or purchase a period box (hard tack/"cracker" boxes are great, as well as period reproduction ammunition crates. Baskets with lids, canvas, and burlap bags can be used as well.

Also look at the edges of your tent. Often, blue ground tarps, bottles, and modern sleeping bags can be seen on the sides or back of your tent. Take an extra 30 seconds and be sure these items are covered and out of sight.

**Little things stand out.** Plastic bottles, modern items, and things as small as modern price labels, modern wood mill labels on tent poles, tables, and wood items, and aluminum cookware all take away from the reenactment experience for the public and reenactor alike. Thrift and antique stores have items that while not original to the period, are a close stand in for a variety of items and be purchased at an economical price. Take an extra 5 minutes and sand the modern mill labels off your tent poles. Remove modern labels from items you have purchased.

### Food and Drink:

Plastic wrap and aluminum foil did not exist in the civil war. We don't expect you to all eat army rations, but if you are choosing to eat modern food at a reenactment, it needs to be in a period container (bowl, or cloth bag). The same goes for drinks. While some Gatorade is recommended for hot events, please dump it into a period tin cup or other container for consumption.