

Introduction:

There are many common stereotypes about Victorian clothing - that it was uncomfortable, restrictive, stuffy, prudish, and even oppressive. In women's fashion, the corset has been the focus of numerous attacks by generations of revisionist feminists, who frame it as a weapon of male oppression. At the same time, many of the men's fashions popularized during the Victorian period, such as the top hat, have become instantly recognizable icons of elitism and social oppression — such as on the Monopoly board. In fact, it is telling how many of the negative perceptions and beliefs modern people have about the Victorian period have been mapped onto the clothing. The clothing worn by the Victorians does indeed tell the observer a great deal about the society that created and wore all of these items. However, to really understand these garments and by extension the people who made and wore them, it is important to look beyond the stereotypes, and see what these artifacts really have to say for themselves. In closely examining, researching, and especially wearing these historical garments, we have come to a far better understanding of the complex world in which they originated.

We are amateur collectors of Victorian clothing, and we hope to describe some of the items in our collection and tell about what we have learned through our research. All but a few components of the outfits we collect, exhibit, and wear are original, period garments - which means that they are between 90 and 150 years old, and some of them have required a great deal of time-consuming restoration and stabilization work in order to be worn at all. Even those gar-

ments we have restored still have damage - much of it the simple result of many years of wear by multiple owners, followed by even longer years of often improper storage. We like to think of these imperfections as evidence of the long and interesting journey these garments have been through in finding their way into our collection — and we can learn interesting things even from the wear and damage.

We have seen historic fashion shows before which utilize reproduction outfits, and focus on an overview of the changing styles in clothing. These shows most often just rehash the same stereotypes that everyone already ‘knows’ and expects, while effectively holding up the clothing of the past to ridicule by the modern audience. These impressions are reinforced by attempting to fit the clothes to models with modern posture, body shape, and norms, without trying to understand or communicate the all-important social context. Without this understanding, that the clothing must be viewed not through our modern stereotypes, but according to the value system and social world they represent, it is difficult to learn anything substantive beyond reinforcing existing misconceptions. We would like to take a different tack, and focus on what we think is most interesting to understand: what these clothes truly meant and how they actually worked for the people who wore them, how they fit into the true history of the society that created them, and, whenever possible, the details of the history represented by these specific garments in their current role as windows into the past. In our experience, these pieces of clothing - small fragments of everyday life which

have survived for a century or more - have more impact on the observer than any replica could engender. They have real authenticity, and researching their small details can lead to fascinating insights about the society and the people who made and wore them.

1. 1860s Men's Linen/Wool Frock Suit

A fairly heavyweight linen/wool blend, this green three-piece suit has a wonderful, if possibly apocryphal, provenance. The antique dealer from whom it was purchased said that it was originally owned by an itinerant preacher in Ireland in the decades following the Potato Famine. The heavy all-weather weight of the suit, as well as the characteristic blend of linen and wool, the gold silk lining decorated with shamrocks, and the excellent state of preservation (given the 150-year age of this piece) incline us to lend some credence to the tale. However, certain other features indicate otherwise: preachers almost exclusively wore black (even in Ireland), and their suits typically had high collars and single breasted fastenings rather than the peaked collar and double-breasted design of this suit. Without firm evidence, it is impossible to know for sure - but it certainly is fun to study and speculate. At the very least, this *story* has become part of the history of the suit. It is extremely difficult to find any mens clothing of this age, and this suit is therefore one of the jewels of the our collection - an excellent place to begin!

All of the features of this garment are wonderfully characteristic of mid-Victorian menswear: the cuffs are transition-

al, with a line of trim to denote where much older suits might have had an actual turned cuff, while they also include the decorative buttons present on later (and even on modern) suits. The double-breasted frock coat, with a straight front and square-cut corners, was first popularized in England by Prince Albert, and became standard business-wear in both Europe and America by the 1860s. Later in the century, especially in America, this style was considered more formal. In this time and place, it was primarily associated with stodgy, conservative types, and was generally avoided by young men unless they aspired to a career in banking, business or similar serious professions. The more modern alternatives were variations on the cutaway coat, which is a part of some of our other outfits. There are no pockets on the exterior of the coat, since they would mar the closely fit lines and would only encourage slouching, but there is a set of deep pockets hidden inside the long tails of the coat. These originated on earlier frock coats in the 18th century, and were nicknamed 'lover's pockets,' since it was easy to slip letters into them unseen behind the back, and their contents tended to be invisible since they were designed and placed so as not to interrupt the lines of the coat. Of course, their original, true purpose was to contain the man's gloves - which were required, given the lack of exterior pockets.

The wide legs of these trousers were known as 'stovepipes,' and were less fitted than was the case in later 19th century suits. You won't see any wider ones in mens' outfits until the 1920s and 30s. The trousers have a built-in buckle in the back, to snug up the waist and provide a more

flexible fit. Belts were not worn by men during the Victorian period - suspenders were really the only acceptable way of holding up the trousers. Note that they actually come up to the natural waistline, rather than sitting low on the hips, as do modern men's trousers. The suspender buttons are metal, and on the exterior of the waistband, as was characteristic until the 1920s, since a vest was always worn to hide them - a man was considered to be 'undressed' without a vest, and shirts were actually classed as underwear! Fly trousers had only become popular in the 1850s, and this is a nice, early example of the style, with original metal buttons.

The whole suit is edged, beautifully tailored, and the high armholes and narrow shoulders emphasize the fully erect posture which was expected of middle- and upper-class men in this period. Tailoring manuals differentiated between the fit required for a laborer, and that for the higher classes — and they were substantially different. In order for someone raised in the modern world to be able to comfortably wear these suits for any length of time, extensive exercises of the upper back muscles are required in order to tighten the area between the shoulder blades - rowing machines work well for the purpose. There were many reasons for this significant contrast to modern posture, but the most important ones were the lack of everyday tasks which required men's arms to be held forward for long periods of time (driving cars, typing, etc.), and the importance which was placed on correct posture in the middle and upper classes from an early age. This postural difference is reflected in the common Victorian man's rest posture (hands

clasped behind the back, rather than crossed in front of the chest), and the prevalence of standing writing-desks for both home and the office. Arms cannot be raised above the head when wearing the coat, and heavy labor could not be contemplated. Men's clothes not only emphasized these positions, but required them - in their way, they are more confining than women's clothes of the period, and they did require preparation in order to wear them, either in the form of gradual training during childhood, or in Gabriel's case a crash course in good Victorian posture and lots of time on the rowing machine. However, no one at the time would have seen these features as restrictive or oppressive. Their viewpoint might be, why shouldn't clothing encourage good posture? Posture was not only a signifier of class, but the Victorians correctly associated it with good health. Many modern complaints of back problems, limited flexibility, and the like could be remedied by paying attention to Victorian manuals for posture development. Likewise, why design a suit, which is really intended to display the figure to advantage, to allow for labor while compromising the style?

Accessories that we usually pair with the suit include a silk cravat tie (the color of which matches the lining of the suit), and a vertical starched linen button-on collar on a simple white cotton shirt (linen would have been another common option, but they are much harder to find, and hence more expensive). The shirts required a number of pieces of hardware to fasten them - this one uses cufflinks, for the french cuffs, and two different collar-buttons. Both are gold-filled in this case - a cheaper option, and the standard

for everyday, middle class wear. For the upper classes, of course, these small accessories could be much fancier. Finally the ensemble is usually topped off by a beaver-skin top hat made in York, Pennsylvania. The top hat is actually an 1890s piece, but closely approximates the style which was popular in the 1860s. Believe it or not, the 1860s version would likely have been even taller!

2. 1880s Women's Mourning Ensemble

This lightweight two-piece cotton dress is typical of a mourning outfit for the late Victorian period. All-black ensembles were socially required for those who had recently experienced a death in the family. This custom became especially prominent during and after the Civil War, for obvious reasons. Because of the short notice required by a death, these dresses were some of the first examples of off-the-rack, ready-made clothing sold by catalogs, shops and department stores. The requirements of various stages of mourning, and the manner of indicating relationship with the mourned, were lengthy, detailed, and complex.

Note the detailed pin-tucks in the blouse, along with the hook-and-eye fastenings. It was taken in from its original measurements in order to fit Mrs. Chrisman's waist, and repairs were made to both the skirt and the blouse. The extent of the damage was due in part to the extremely lightweight fabric. This airy, flowing cloth indicates that this dress was almost certainly intended for summer wear. In the initial stages of mourning, a long veil would have accompanied the outfit, attached to the bonnet. However, very few of these gossamer pieces have survived. Note the

beautiful detail and jet beads on the small velvet bonnet, which is a typical style for the period.

3. 1889 Men's Three-Piece Felted Wool Suit

The most upper-class and highly tailored of the suits in the Chrisman's collection, this three-piece suit is also one of the few for which there is traceable provenance. The tailoring label indicates that the suit was tailored (using a combination of machine- and hand-stitching) by an S. J. Ryan in Fremont, Ohio on November 10th, 1889, for a man named M. N. Bauer. Some research led Gabriel to identify the tailor as one Stephen J. Ryan. This tailor's family has left a collection of archival documents and photographs at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center (he was related to the 19th U.S. President by marriage through his wife's family), and this brief description of his life has been compiled as part of the archival finding aid:

“Stephen J. Ryan was born in Cleveland, Ohio, Dec. 25, 1857, to Patrick H. and Julia Peters Ryan [both parents were born in Ireland according to the 1880 census]. After attending St. John's Cathedral School in Cleveland, Stephen went to work in his father's tailor shop. Ryan went to New York City for several years where he received additional training as a tailor before returning home to work for Alfred Ayers, one of the city's leading tailors. Ryan came to Fremont, Ohio, on December 8, 1884, by way of California to work for Dryfoos & Bach, a local dry goods store [run by German Jewish immigrants - this suit was made by him while he worked in this store]. In 1892, he severed his association with the firm to open his

own tailor shop, remaining in business until the time of his death.

Ryan married Catherine F. Hayes, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Hayes of Cleveland, Ohio, on November 27, 1879. They were the parents of three children: Marguerite E., Vincent Earl, and a son William who died in infancy. Stephen Ryan was a member of St. Ann's Catholic Church, Knights of Columbus, Woodmen of America, and the American Cutters Association. He also was an active participant in the local Elks Lodge, where he was both a charter and honorary member of the organization and served in the capacities of past exalted ruler and trustee.

The Ryan family resided at 412 S. Park Street in Fremont [Ohio]. Ryan died of pneumonia at his home on August 15, 1934. His wife Catherine passed away six years later on November 19, 1940. Vincent Earl Ryan, a WW I veteran, died in 1936.”¹

It is wonderful to find an example of the geographic mobility of even middle-class tradesmen during the 19th century. Gabriel hasn't been quite as lucky in finding information on the customer who purchased the suit. Partly, this is due to a great tragedy in American archival history - the loss, due to neglect and fire, of the 1890 census data. Since the suit was tailored in November of 1889, the closest available census data in time is now the 1880 census - but almost ten years is a long time, and people were fairly mo-

¹ <http://www.rbhayes.org/hayes/mssfind/285/ryansfamilywebpage.html.htm>

bile in the late 19th century (as the above example demonstrates). One strong possibility for the identity of M. N. Bauer is the eldest son and heir of a successful greengrocer, who lived about 140 miles south of Fremont in 1880, and would have been in his mid-thirties in 1889 - a thoroughly believable customer for this suit. I even found a photograph of their family grocery taken several years before the suit was made, in which the grocer stands in front of the store with his son. It is fairly sure that the customer was not a long-term resident of Fremont, as county and city genealogies published in the early twentieth century don't list anyone by that surname living in the area. However, there is no conclusive proof, and more research will be needed. Not that Gabriel doesn't enjoy it!

The suit is made of 100% tightly felted wool, in a gorgeous deep black, and has a tan silk geometric-patterned lining. The jacket's overall style is typical, if somewhat on the modern side for its time, with a short length, dramatic cutaway, high placket, and four buttons. No lover's pockets - the tails aren't really long enough, and the bulges of the gloves would show in such a tightly fitted jacket. The vest has a stylish matching cut to its collar, and a belt at the back to tighten the fit. The trousers also demonstrate Mr. Bauer's modern taste, with no belt at the back and a snug fit. These are indications of either his faith that his bodily proportions would stay consistent, or of a budget that would allow for replacement or alteration if such became necessary. Another interesting detail is the material used for the pockets in the trousers: this is the heaviest sailcloth canvas the Chrismans have ever seen used in a garment.

Clearly Mr. Bauer had worn through pockets in his previous suits, and wished to have these made more durably. Is this the pragmatic thinking of a greengrocer's son, hidden beneath the stylish and modern exterior? Despite all of the attention to detail and individuality that this suit represents, it seems to have not been worn at all - it shows none of the wear that is typical in other mens garments. While this is occasionally the case for wedding suits, and some ceremonial garments, it is extremely rare for an everyday suit such as this. Quite a mystery, and the source of endless speculations.

The same posture is visible in the tailoring, and if anything, the shaping is even more visible than for the 1860s suit, since the trousers are more fitted, and the short coat can also be fitted more closely. Accessories include a Chicago-manufactured western-style bowler hat, which dates from sometime between 1900 and 1930 (this style stayed the same for a long time), a rolled collar and black ribbon bow tie, as well as a gold-filled watch chain. The shirt is a classic style from the early 1900s, with silk stripes woven into the cotton, and is fastened with collar-buttons and cufflinks similar to those used for the 1860s suit.

4. 1880s Women's White Lawn Summer Bustle Dress with 1880s Parasol

Summer clothes for Victorian women were less structured than their heavier winter counterparts, but no less attractive or interesting. This extremely light and airy ensemble has a very long bodice that doubles as an overskirt, with ties below the waist to secure it to the skirt. The lawn fabric is es-

essentially see-through, so the outfit relies on multiple layers to keep the wearer modest! This would have been an outdoor, all-day dress for the summer months in a warm climate, and is paired with a parasol to protect the woman's skin.

The rear of the dress is shaped with a crinoline and a bustle, to give the fashionable silhouette, while the bodice is tightly fit over the lines of the corset. No boning in this unstructured, lightweight top, but this doesn't prevent the outfit from being very tightly fitted. The fitting seams in the bodice are mostly handsewn, while other portions of the dress have machine stitching.

5. 1890s Men's Twill Winter Suit

In the Victorian era, clothing served to clearly and immediately identify one's social standing, income bracket, and communicate many things about the individual personality of the wearer. One of the reasons this was possible was the individual tailoring of garments - frequently by professional tailors or seamstresses for the upper and middle classes, and by family members for the lower classes - though upper class women did a great deal of sewing as well. Materials were comparatively expensive, and clothing was valued as a longer-term possession than we now consider it to be - clothes were washed carefully and infrequently by hand, repaired repeatedly and skillfully whenever necessary, and passed down to other family members, servants, or charity organizations (or even sold) when outgrown or outmoded. Even though the Victorians had the manufacturing capabilities to mass-produce clothing, their social

organization would have made it very undesirable for most of the potential consumers - you'll note that in the photo of Stephen J. Ryan's tailor's shop, no actual clothes were displayed, just bolts of cloth, and a few fashion plates to offer ideas for the customer. Accordingly, most exterior garments were individually hand made or hand-altered until society itself began to change...more on that later.

This suit is actually a combination of pieces not originally intended to go together, but which are close enough that they look correct. Overall, the suit is roughly 1890s, though the trousers are a little bit earlier than the rest of the outfit. The jacket is a heavy twill winter-weight fabric, and is from a small town in Wisconsin. All I know about the provenance beyond that is that it was owned by a Mr. M. Weber - his identity revealed only by a handwritten, yellowing scrap of paper in one of the internal pockets. The jacket is worn, but not worn out - it is made of highly durable fabrics. It has the full complement of internal details and pockets, including the lovers' pockets in the mid-length tails. The vest, while almost a perfect match in material, is actually from England. Again, it is worn, which is especially visible in the shoulders. The original owner (or his wife or daughter - not a tailor, judging by the apparent skill with which it was executed) added a vertical buttonhole in the vest to attach his watch fob - it works wonderfully well for the purpose, and was a common addition or modification. Both garments are solidly middle-class, if on the slightly lower end - which makes them all the more interesting, since so little mens clothing of this class has survived. The trousers are the least well-matched part of the

suit, since they are from the late 1880s, and are a felted wool instead of a tweed. They have all of the traditional features, however, including a back-belt, and external suspender buttons. The slightly lower waistline is appropriate for an 1890s fit, and overall the effect is similar to the fashion plates of the period. For the lower-middle classes, a suit could very well be assembled from elements of different outfits in exactly the same way. In keeping with this type of assembly, the pieces are not as good a fit on Gabriel as the higher-end, complete suits.

6. 1890s Women's Tea Gown

Style 850 [X]. The style number is in the wrong format for a Sears & Roebuck number, so we're not sure where this early off-the-rack tea dress originated. It is a medium-weight flannel cotton - extremely comfortable and practical for low-key entertaining at home, which was the purpose of dresses like this one. Unlike some of the more complex outfits you have seen today, this one is one piece.

7. 1910s Teenage Boy's Everyday Clothes

8. 1890s Women's Wool & Silk Winter Visiting Dress with Beaver Fur Accessories

This dress was made in approximately 1895 by Barnard, Sumner and Putnam - a large dry-goods manufacturer and importer based in Worcester, Massachusetts. A period ad from this company claims "this store can never be the receptacle for poor, or old, or second-hand stuff, no matter how low the price. We stand by what we sell, and we request you not to keep anything that does not suit you."

Their reputation rested on guaranteed quality, and up-to-date style. Worcester was an important textile center for most of the 19th century, and this dress gives you an idea why. The main fabric of the dress is a highly textured wool with a pattern intended to hide dirt and wear, and you can see the pleated silk brocade fabric which makes up the decorative front of the bodice. This highly decorative and brightly colored fabric was probably treated with some of the newer category of industrial, chemical dyes. These additives often included heavy metals, and originally gave the fabric a heavier, more luxurious 'hand' and a brilliant luster, but the passage of time has given these chemicals ample time to corrode the structure of the fabric - if you look closely, you'll see the extensive shattering that has begun. The colors remain far more intense on the inside because they have been protected from the light. Luckily, these panels are not at all structural: the bodice and the skirt are both lined with a much tougher cotton base, and this layer takes the strain of the many hooks and eyes that hold the bodice and skirt closed. The bodice lining also includes separately cased steel boning, to ensure smooth and clean lines, even over the corset. The skirt connects to the bodice through a special belt and loop system, as well as hooks and eyes, in order to keep the bodice snugly in place over the waistband. Everything is intended to contribute to creating a put-together look, even after a trip across town to visit with friends, or when out on a shopping expedition.

The sleeves are one of the several styles which together defined the new fashionable silhouette of the 1890s. The extra width created by puffed shoulders emphasized the slen-

derness of the waist, though they are less extreme than the 'leg o' mutton' sleeves that were another common version. These slimmer versions would have been more practical around town, and were probably cheaper since they used far less material. They are also short enough that the cuffs wouldn't get dirty as easily during errands and outings. The bottom hem of the skirt is stiffened with horsehair in order to give it added fullness, and the shape is also more fitted than in previous decades, requiring less of a crinoline or bustle, and revealing more of the woman's figure.

The accessories we usually pair with the outfit date to the same period, and were originally a set worn by a teenager or a very small woman. It is extremely rare to locate an intact set in such good condition! Most of the sets have long since been broken up, or one or another item has been completely worn out. This set is in excellent shape, and the fur is amazingly soft - Victorian fur treatments seem to last far better than modern ones. The hat is an interesting and original style that stores flat, unlike most Victorian hats - this would be a nice, practical feature for winter hats intended for visiting, since they would have to be removed when the woman reached her destination. Both the muff and the tippet have matching decorative tassels, and such warm accessories make a good match with this New England winter outfit!

9. 1920s Men's Morning Suit

A traditional herringbone charcoal wool morning coat and vest, paired with striped grey trousers (referred to in American slang as 'spongebags' - baggy trousers were referred

to as bags in general, but it is unclear where the ‘sponge’ part originated). Morning suits (not to be confused with mourning suits) were originally worn by the upper classes in Europe in the mornings, when they tended to go horse riding. This activity necessitated the cutaway design of the coat in order to allow the knees to come up higher, though it is otherwise the same length as a full frock coat. This particular suit was made by Woolf Brothers, a major Kansas City-based clothing company, sometime during the 1920s. This clothing maker was expanding at the time, and had just built a new 3-story department store on the corner of Market and Douglas streets in Wichita in January of 1923. Newspaper reports during the construction and at the grand opening emphasized how modern the new facility was. It is possible that this suit originated at this new store. By this time, the morning suit had become considered more appropriate for formal wear than ‘morning wear’, and charcoal-colored suits such as this one were especially popular in America for weddings - both for the groom and the groomsmen.

Many quality and style changes had visibly occurred in the intervening years between the Victorian suits and this one. First of all, the buttons are all plastic, and are not covered with matching fabric as the Victorian styles entailed. The lines of the coat, the position of the seams, and the general shape are all familiarly Victorian from a distance - but the vest and coat are mass-manufactured, off-the-rack items, and don’t have the precise fit and close shaping present in the older garments. Also note the single button for the coat - morning jackets in the Victorian era usually had at least

two or three buttons, and a much higher gore for the collar, with much smaller lapels. Both the jacket and the vest lack the internal finishing details of the earlier pieces, including only one internal pocket in the jacket, none in the vest, and much cruder lining with more ease and room left in it - both for looser fit and for ease of construction. Materials are all lower quality as well, compared to the Victorian suits - the wool is both scratchier and lighter weight, and the linings are a rougher fabric as well. The pants have a lower waistline, as the modern 'fashion waist' crept downwards towards the hips and the torso was visually lengthened to enhance the new 'athletic' look popular in America. Accordingly, these transitional pants have both suspender buttons (hidden inside the waistband now), and belt loops for the truly modern.

All of these features were part of the general movement towards larger-scale production of clothing, and along with that, the beginnings of a cheaper marketplace. In contrast to the earlier small-scale or individual construction of fitted clothing which emphasized class distinctions, individual preference, and physical form, the new clothing marketplace in America commoditized clothing, and implicitly emphasized the homogenization created by uniformly less-fitted, increasingly anonymous outfits that conveyed a more universal sense of an externally defined and abstract style. As tailors' prices were severely undercut by lower quality, factory-produced clothes, many went out of business, or else raised their prices in order to be able to support themselves exclusively on the business of their upper-class clientele. As this occurred, the cycle reinforced itself, and

led to more off-the-rack, everyday clothing marketed to all classes but the very highest. It became increasingly harder to visually identify social standing by clothing alone, since the middle classes and the lower classes had access to similar outfits at low cost, and more modern advertising ensured that no stigma was attached to these clothes. In fact, they were made stylish and fashionable, while the older, fitted and tailored clothing was soon perceived as stodgy or stuck-up. Looser, less precise fit also accommodated the increasing activity of society, with an added emphasis on youth, athleticism (or at least the outward appearance thereof), sports, exercise, and the emergence of technology that required different flexibility than older designs - especially the automobile. It wasn't that you couldn't do these activities in Victorian clothing, the new clothing just emphasized different aspects of the physique and the cheaper cost meant that you could get them dirty and not worry as much about it.

Of course, all of these changes and their effects unfolded over a long period of time - the 1920s in which this suit was made mark only the beginning of a long transition. Over the twentieth century, as the sewing skills that were required to produce the fitted and elegant clothing of the Victorian era became less mainstream, and the seamstresses and tailors fewer in number, clothing styles became generally less closely fitted and quality dropped. Now, many modern garments are sized simply small, medium, and large, or even, this concept being taken to the logical extreme, 'one size fits all'.

Back to the details of this outfit: one of the main reasons that this suit survived can be seen on one leg of the trousers. It is a large tea stain, and it must have happened one of the first times the suit was worn. It won't come out - we have tried, and I'm sure that the original owner did as well. At this point it is probably permanent. However, we probably do have it to blame for the survival of the suit - so I am actually thankful for it.

10. 1900s Women's Striped Skirt and 1890s Jet-Beaded Cape
11. 1920s Men's Seersucker Suit

This suit is a dramatic example of the radically different styles of the 1920s compared with the Victorian era. Of course, this is also currently our only men's summer suit, so some of these differences are simply due to the intended purpose of the outfit. However, even when compared to a Victorian summer suit, this outfit reveals many changes in both fashion and material culture over the intervening years.

First of all, this suit is a two-piece suit, consisting of a jacket and trousers, with no vest. This was very rarely the case in Victorian outfits, even for summer wear - the vest was simply a required element of a man's outfit, at least for any class above the those doing heavy labor, and even those men commonly wore vests. Both the pants and the jacket are unlined, and this would have been the case for Victorian summer wear as well, simply to keep things cool. The greatest differences are to be found in the cut and the shape of the pieces. The jacket has fewer panels in its construc-

tion, as it is not intended to be a custom or close fit. The back, especially, is of far simpler design and construction - comparing the seams in this suit to those in the 1889 suit, for instance, reveals a very different level of care. The details of the jacket are also substantially different - the long lapels with fewer buttons, and especially the external patch pockets mark this as being much closer to a modern suit in design and concept.

The pants are also very different - the legs are much fuller and wider, and they terminate in cuffs. The waist is lower, still higher than a modern waistline, but substantially lower than most of the Victorian fashions. When comparing the suits from the 1860s all the way through to the 1980s, there is a consistent lowering of the waistline - and the modern 'lowrider' waist is the eventual outcome of the trend. This suit provides an example of the midpoint of this development. Another characteristic element of this era was the inclusion of both suspender buttons (inside the waistband now) and belt loops. As mentioned in the description of the 1920s morning suit, this was the transitional period between these two methods of trouser retention.

Looking closely at the outfit, you'll see that the pants are considerably faded and worn - much more so than the jacket. By this time, it was common for men to go without the jacket, especially when the weather was hot. Vests were no longer required in order for a man to be considered 'fully dressed.' Accordingly, the pants show evidence of much more wear. The rumpled look of the suit is actually intentional - seersucker suits were never meant to be as crisply pressed as more formal, darker suits. The cotton fabric is

light and airy, and the whole suit is very comfortable. Paired with a straw boater hat, this has been Gabriel's favorite summer wedding and Fourth of July outfit for several years. It will probably remain so until he can find an actual Victorian summer suit!

12. 1905 Women's Linen Pigeon-Fronted Dress, 1910 Linen/Wool Jacket

This marvelous dress is originally from Nebraska, and is a natural-colored heavy linen, with intricate but heavy lace sleeves, collar, and neckline. Unlike many of the other women's outfits, this dress is one piece. This style is between the Victorian and the Edwardian, epitomizing this transitional period.

The many decorative buttons are steel covered with fabric, and over time moisture has rusted the steel, and the rust has in turn stained the fabric. The high collar was originally supported with removable celluloid boning, but all but one of the original bones are missing. The celluloid boning is still in place in the back of the bodice, and helps to create a smooth line in this area. The pigeon-front bodice is designed to poof out and form a smooth curve from the chest down to the waistline, in contrast to the more form-fitting Victorian styles.

One of more challenging parts of our restoration of this dress was washing it. When we acquired it, the dress had a strong odor from being stored in an attic for a long period of time, apparently in the open air and subject to everything from tobacco smoke to dust and everything else. When

first immersed in water, the dress gave off successive strong scents in recognizable layers as strata of dirt and the accumulated encrustations of decades were released. One of the more interesting scents was a strong fruit odor, smelling distinctly of apples. It is possible that the dye used on the linen to achieve the natural tan color was based on malic acid derived from apples.

The jacket is loose fitting, has no closures, and was intended to highlight the comparatively small waist. The tone-on-tone soutache braiding was a style that was adapted from military uniforms, and was increasingly popular during the pre-war period (this was especially true in Europe, but in America as well since they tended to copy European styles).