

Clothing for Adults in Iowa, 1850-1899

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In completing the research for the following study, I visited thirty museums and historical societies in Iowa, photographing and making detailed descriptions of 215 garments of adult women and men. Museum records often provided the name of the donor or original owner of individual garments, the most useful of which had an assured Iowa connection. Dates assigned to garments by donors or museum staff were corroborated by reference to fashion plates in such periodicals as Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, Demorest's Monthly Magazine and Mme. Demorest's Mirror of Fashion, Harper's Bazar [sic], and The Delineator.

WHO were those ancestors who stare solemnly at us from fading tintypes and photographs? What were their resources, physical and spiritual? How did they use those resources? Some possible answers to these questions can be learned from careful, systematic examination of clothing that survives in Iowa museums. Century-old dresses, suits, and bonnets hold clues to past standards of beauty, concepts of hygiene, levels of prosperity, and development of tools and skills.

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The following descriptions and suggested interpretations of late nineteenth-century Iowa clothing may be useful to professional and amateur historians alike. Professionals may find the data supplement and correct general descriptions of costume from 1850 to 1899; such accounts usually concentrate on the clothes worn by rich and fashionable people living in the cities of the United States and Europe. People living in small towns and on small incomes are seldom mentioned. To curators working in county and regional museums (often as volunteers), the descriptions of clothing designs may provide guidance in assigning dates to clothing donated with no information about the original owner. Many towns in Iowa celebrate centennials and other anniversaries. This information may help costume committees to reconstruct "historic" garments for pageants and parades. Last, family historians may be led to sources of information for dating photographs and clothes that have been preserved as family treasures.

The balance of this essay summarizes the cut, fabric and trim, and construction of women's and men's major outerwear. For the reader's convenience in visualizing the clothes, the description proceeds by decades, beginning with the 1850s. This is an artificial system, because changes of style seldom coincide exactly with the "turn" of the decade. Most museums do, however, label their costumes by decade or fraction of a decade and it can be argued that each decade has a predominant style. An account of men's suit styles for the years 1860 to 1890 follows the summaries of women's styles of dresses, ensembles, and occasional wraps and hats. Far fewer men's garments survive in collections and much less attention was given to them in the periodicals of the late nineteenth century. This may be partially due to the slower and smaller changes made in the design of men's clothes during the fifty years spanned by this research.

ONLY A FEW dresses of the 1850s have survived to reach Iowa collections. These dresses have very full skirts of bell-like shape and tightly fitted bodices. For the most part, the fullness of the skirt is produced by evenly gathering several complete widths of fabric (23¼", 59 cm) in a technique called "cartridge pleating," in which the fabric is drawn by the gathers into tiny pleats

and secured by hand stitches to the waistband or bodice edge. One dress was gathered by drawstring in a narrow casing. Bodice fronts were shaped by pairs of vertical darts pointing up to the fullest part of the bust. In back, the design was created by deeply curved "princess" seams, extending from waistline to armhole (armhole). (See Figure 1) Bodice waistline hems were usually sharply pointed in centers front and back.

Sleeves were quite decorative: wide, flaring styles; designs of the "bishop" type, gathered to a cuff; and slim sleeves that had small caplike additions at the top. All sleeves were set into armhole seams that dropped low onto the upper arm. Shoulder seams did not lie along the middle top of the shoulder as they do today, but were placed toward the back by several centimeters. Necklines were usually cut to the base of the throat, although some necklines curved lower in front. Bodices fastened in center front or center back by hooks and eyes or, rarely, by lacing through eyelets.

Thin fabrics such as printed wool challis, silk taffeta, and printed plain weave cottons may well have predominated in the clothing of the 1850s, if extant garments are a representative sample. Deep reds and blues seemed to have been popular colors, but several light colors and a grayish brown were also worn. Tiny cording reinforced the seams of these dresses and provided an inconspicuous trim. Ribbons were shirred around the necklines and sleeve edges, adding contrast of color and pattern to the garment design. Fringes made from the fashion fabric were also favored as trim.

Sewing machines were not widely available to households until the late 1860s; therefore, most of these dresses were sewn entirely by hand. In the fineness of her work, the seamstress often surpassed present-day sewers. Thrift, as well as fine stitching, is evident in the clothes of this period. Small pieces of fabric different from the dress material were used to face the hems of skirts and the openings of bodices. Some dresses had as many as six different types of "scraps" used for such purposes. The fact that selvage-to-selvage widths of fabric were used in skirts also testifies to a desire to use fully the expensive fashionable fabrics.

Beauty-before-comfort seems to have been a precept of this

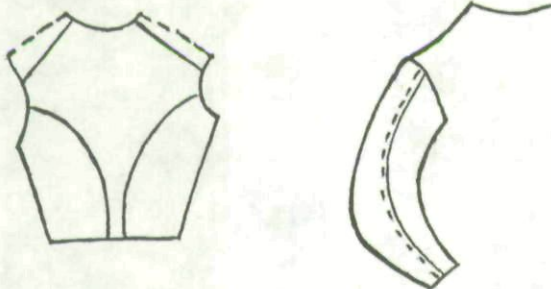


Figure 1 (left): *Bodice back, 1850s-early 1860s.*

Note the princess seams and dropped shoulder seams.

Figure 2 (right): *Coat style sleeve, 1860s.*

The front and back seamlines were curved, as shown.

decade. Tight waistlines and dropped shoulder seams can hardly have contributed to convenient movement but, imitating the fashion plates, produced a dainty-waisted, slope-shouldered woman. She must have been strongly admired to endure the attendant torments.

Practical considerations contributed to this silhouette, too. The thin fabrics used during the 1850s could be gathered compactly into cartridge pleats and shaped into sharply curved (and sometimes false) princess seams. These shapes would no longer be practicable when heavier cloth came into vogue.

CHANGES in the design of dresses during the 1860s included the increased use of two-piece dress styles, the concentration of fullness in the center back of the skirt, and a slightly raised waistline. Soft pleats sometimes substituted for the cartridge pleats of the 1850s.

Pointed bodice waistlines yielded to slightly curved waist seams, set off with sashes or belt-like trims. Darts in the bodice front remained unchanged, but the princess seams of the back were less deeply curved. A few separate bodices had flared extensions at the bottom, called "peplums," in the back or all around. This design feature recurred in fashion through the 1880s.



Left: The pointed, tightly cinched waist and two-part wide pagoda sleeves of this dress are typical of Iowa women's costumes of the 1850s. Right: Simpler by contrast, this 1860s costume features V-shaped bodice trim that emphasizes the popular slope-shouldered figure.

Extant dresses from the 1860s often had narrow band collars, flat collars of lace, or deep, cape-style collars, pointed in front and back. Armscyes and shoulder seams kept their former positions but new designs for sleeves were used. Two-piece coat sleeves were quite curved in outline, from top to wrist. (See Figure 2) Other sleeves were narrow in the upper arm but flared from elbow to wrist.

Although the thin fabrics of the previous period continued to be used, heavy wools and mixtures of wool with silk also appeared. Novelty textiles included fabrics "shot" with contrasting yarns and fabrics in gauze (leno) weave, in which vertical yarns cross each other in a "figure 8" pattern. Because of the invention of coal tar (aniline) dyes in 1856, colors in fabrics were quite vivid. Bright blues, oranges, and pinkish-oranges enlivened the taffetas of the era; these were often plaid patterns.

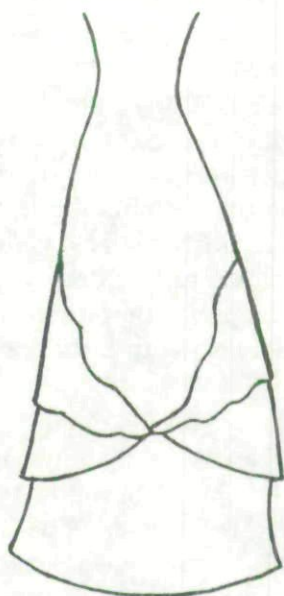
A cape seen in one Iowa museum had bright blue and white plaid wool lining, contrasting with the tomato red of the outer fabric. No hats definitely datable to the 1860s were found in museums in the state.

With the coming of heavier cloth came changes in the cut of women's dresses. Soft, unpressed pleats in skirts slowly replaced the formerly ubiquitous cartridge pleats. Shallower princess seams consisted of two edges of heavy material fitted together; the older style of deeply curved princess was often "faked" by overlapping one fabric edge on another, something easier to accomplish with a thin fabric than with a thick one.

HEAVINESS and complexity characterized many of the dresses and ensembles of the 1870s. Two distinct silhouettes developed during the decade. The bustle or "tournure," as it was then called, featured swags and puffs of fabric concentrated in the upper back of the skirt. Asymmetrical arrangements of cloth were popular. The bodice was comparatively simple in style and rather "short-waisted," that is, the bodice indented above the "natural" waistline of the body. About 1876, the full-blown bustle began to deflate and the back draperies were pulled lower on the figure. The end result of this evolution was slim-bodied gowns with draperies tied back at the level of the lower leg. (See Figure 3)

Bodice fit continued to be effected by pairs of darts in front, sometimes with an added horizontal seam at waist level. Back fitting relied on two shallow princess seams, sometimes supplemented by a center back seam. During the last years of the decade, one pair of princess seams extended to the shoulder seam rather than to the armhole. Usually the bodice flared into a peplum, which became longer as the decade progressed; by 1878, the so-called "cuirass" bodice hugged the figure to below hip level. The bodice generally buttoned at center front, as often in a left-over-right as right-over-left direction. (At present, women's wear designers rigidly observe the latter convention.) Small band collars were nearly universal on dresses in the 1870s. They were adorned with ruffles and bows, according to the photographs and periodicals of these years; only one of the

Figure 3: *Skirt back, 1877-1880. By the end of the decade bustles had subsided to tie-back draperies, caught low on the skirt.*



surviving dresses had such neckline trim intact. Sleeves followed the two-piece coat style but were less curved in shape than were the designs of the 1860s. Cuffs became quite elaborate as the decade progressed; they were created by pleats, ruffles, ribbons, and folded-back "revers," all in fabrics that matched or contrasted with the dress fabric.

Skirts were of a complexity that challenges summary. Multiple layers of fabric were used, either in portions of the skirt or as complete overskirts. Shirring or released tucks often caused the fabric to fall in soft horizontal folds. Extra panels were sometimes looped up and secured to produce swags of drapery. Usually at least two types of fabric, such as patterned and plain silk, were used in such skirts, adding to the complexity of the design. In the late 1870s, draping was often limited to pulling back some sort of extension of the side front panels and tying or stitching it in place in the lower back. The front skirt was usually fairly plain, fitted with a type of princess seam that extended from the bodice to the hem.

Many fabrics of the decade were rib weaves, including crisp taffeta, supple poplin and "drap de soie," and a group of wool

or wool-and-silk fabrics called "empress cloth." Black and dark colors came into prominence during the 1870s. Many dresses were all black, but grays, browns, and bottle green were also worn. Bright or light touches of color were sometimes provided by ornate buttons or by contrasting fabric in trims of knife pleats, ruffles, ruching, or ribbons.

Understandably, the most ornate designs were reserved for weddings and parties. Many women must have worn plainly cut "Sunday best" dresses of silk or silk-and-wool, with little elaboration of trim or skirt drapery. Surviving examples of cotton dresses with full-cut skirt backs but no bustle or overskirt might well represent the housedresses of the decade. For real comfort, however, women wore loosely cut wrappers; these served during pregnancy as well as for doing household chores. Wrappers had the same types of collars and sleeves as the other dresses of the decade, but were cut in one length from shoulder to hem, often falling in generous folds. Some wrappers had sashes that could be used to gather the fabric at the waist.

Garment construction changed to handle all of the elaboration of cut; but the converse is also true: available sewing machines and mass-produced fabrics helped to make possible the ornate styles. Boning (rigid rods or strips) in bodice darts and the use of heavy skirt underlining were two common devices that supported the structure of the dresses in the 1870s.

In order to accommodate the protruding skirts of the early 1870s, wraps had to flare in the back but were free to fall straight in the front. Some wraps were cut evenly across the front, but others had elongated front panels. In the back, princess and center back seams flared or were made fuller by inverted pleats. Capelike sleeves were snugly fitted over the shoulders but flared to give room at the back for the puffs and sashes of the tournure. These uncollared wraps were made of medium weight wools, quilted silk lined with calico, and heavy ribbed silks such as faille and ottoman. Lace and bead trims were sometimes added to the front and back and to the hem edges.

Hats and bonnets of the decade kept an almost toylike scale while the dresses and wraps of the era became bulky. What headwear lacked in size, however, it gained in elaboration.

Many examples had five or six different trims, such as lace, beading, artificial flowers, ribbons, and veiling. All of this decoration was heaped on a small, shallow crown and brim, typically measuring about 11 inches or 28 centimeters at its widest diameter. These diminutive hats were worn either slightly back on the head, flat on the top of the head, or tilted over the brow; the position rotated forward as the decade advanced.¹

Canons of taste in the 1870s clearly differed from those of the 1880s. Elaboration was apparently considered necessary to successful designs; one fabric and one type of trim may have been considered a "poor show." Elaboration was possible because of the growing availability of mass produced fabrics and trims at costs which many people could meet. Simplicity, under these conditions, may have signified poverty or lack of imagination. Symmetry was likewise avoided in many costume designs. Perhaps people were seeking a contrast to the relative symmetry of the human body. Given the number of hours needed to produce such complicated garments, and the consequent cost in materials, if not labor, only the wealthy woman could afford to own more than a few garments at a time.

Wearing a bustle or tied-back dress must have imposed restrictions on movement. Great care in sitting and rising would have been needed. Historians cannot know for certain the real "look" of the past, but they can imagine that women's gestures might have been slower and more restrained than those used in our own times. However, the styles were not barren of advantages. Bulky clothes could provide some warmth in unheated carriages and inadequately heated buildings.

THE MODES of the 1880s seem to be models of restraint after the complexity of clothes in the 1870s. The period opened with only slight modifications of the princess styles of 1877 to 1879. One change was the sharper definition of the waistline, often achieved by downward-pointing V-shaped seams joining bodice and skirt at front. Another notable modification was the return of puffy drapes of fabric over the hips; the lower part of the

¹One cartoonist suggested that the next position of the hat would be *under* the chin, after which the whole sequence would begin again.



Elaborate cuffs and yards of ornate machine-produced trim combine to decorate this typically gaudy 1870s garment.

underskirt remained slim. Overall, a species of hourglass silhouette was produced. About 1884, the second silhouette of the 1880s emerged. The bodice was snugly fitted and elongated into a point at center front, in continuation of the previous bodice shape. However, the skirt returned to a dome shape, with the fullness generally controlled by pleats. To this pleated underskirt was added an overskirt that fell to its lowest point at center front and was caught up on the hips. In the back, the overskirt became a cascade of fabric, falling from a shelflike support. Unlike the "tournure" of the years 1870 to 1876, this "bustle" did not have an all-around puffiness of cloth. Instead, it jutted sharply, almost at a right angle, from the waist-level of the bodice back. Even the catenary of draped overskirt in front was comparatively flat. This silhouette remained in fashion, with minor changes, until the beginning of the 1890s.

"Viselike" would accurately describe the fit of bodices in the 1880s. These retained the same combination of front darts and back princess seams. The back peplums had inverted pleats set into the princess seams, an arrangement that allowed the peplums to fan over the outcropping of skirt drapery. Bodice fronts acquired vest-like insets of contrasting fabric, decorative revers, or both features. Band collars continued to be popular, but were taller than the bands of the previous decade. Sleeves, too, showed a tendency to elongation; the armhole seam assumed a vertical position, just as it does in present-day clothes. Sleeve caps were raised or puffed; simple, slim cuffs often consisted of just a band of contrasting cloth. In the late 1880s, one bodice style had a back that extended into a full-length or almost full-length skirt. The front bodice stopped just below waist level. "Polonaises," as they were called, were probably fairly popular, since several examples appeared in Iowa museums; cotton prints, wools, and silks were the fabrics used in polonaises.

Skirts have been described in the section on silhouette; variations among styles were mainly in the depth of the pleats of the underskirt, the precise arrangement of the drape of the overskirt, and the presence or absence of decorative panels, called "tabliers," falling straight from waist to hem.

Luxurious, heavy fabrics came to the fore in the 1880s. The use of rib weaves, such as faille, bengaline, and wool poplin,

continued. To these were added heavy satins, velvets, and plushes, all characteristic of the period. Small figure weaves (damassé) and pebbly textures referred to as "granites" were also worn. Numerous cotton prints and one white cotton piqué appeared in Iowa collections, showing that light weight, washable cloth was often used for everyday work.

Except for prints, many costumes were of one color, with purple, wine red, brick red, copper, bronze, and rust brown being frequently chosen. In some ensembles, monochromatic harmonies—variations of one color—appeared. Fewer trims were combined in one costume in this decade, but those trims exemplified an increasing taste for (and ability to pay for) luxury. Velvet collars and cuffs and velvet ribbon trims on skirts were often used. Plush and velours also offered textural and visual contrast. Buttons became more ornate, being made of combinations of glass, metal, bone, shell, and other materials. With twenty or more buttons being used to close a typical bodice, the potential dazzle of such trim should not be underestimated.

Many of the bodices of the 1880s showed meticulous inner finish. Seams were often cut in scalloped sections to make them lie open despite their deep curves. Silk ribbon binding kept the edges from raveling; a less expensive technique was to overcast the seams of the "fashion fabric" and the underlining together with tiny hand stitches. Either broad or narrow, ribbonlike inner belts in the bodice helped to enhance the smoothness of fit.

Women's outer wraps of the 1880s retained the basic shaping of the preceding decade, except that they became more snugly fitted to the body in back and developed more prominent caps on the sleeves. One innovation was the dolman wrap, a garment whose sleeves were really extensions of the back panels. They confined the arms more than would a set-in sleeve, but they created a smooth fall of cloth over the bustle. In addition to the sorts of fabrics used in wraps of the 1870s, plush and figured velvets were often worn. The latter fabric had raised patterns made of cut and uncut loops of silk pile. Often these wraps had edges trimmed with velvety chenille fringe.

Headwear in the early 1880s consisted mostly of small bonnets whose shallow, round crowns continued into brims that flared



The woman pictured here on the left wears an outfit characteristic of Iowa in the middle to late 1880s. The skirt with its swag drapery and the vest-like effect of the bodice trim are especially representative of the period.

away from the face. Whereas most of the bonnets of the 1870s were entirely black, an 1883 bonnet of brown and cream-colored velvet, decked with multicolored embroidered ribbon and gold sequins, was part of the collection of a southwestern Iowa museum. Headwear of the years 1884 to 1889 did not seem to be represented in Iowa's public collections. Contemporary periodicals showed hats and bonnets with deeper crowns and diminishing brims, compared to the early years of the decade.

The decade of the 1870s may have been a "high water mark" of complexity in women's clothing. In the 1880s and 1890s, there was a greater restraint in the number of fabrics and trims combined in one garment. Color schemes tended to focus on one hue, uniting garment fabric and trimming materials in a coherent design. There was exaggeration, but it was confined to tightness or amplitude of cut, rather than excrescences on the garment. Perhaps all excesses of fashion invoke their opposites. Photography may have hastened this change in taste, because it showed women how they really looked "at a glance" in such clothes. Anne Hollander,² an art historian of fashion, believes this to be the case. She holds that the process did not really begin until the early twentieth century, but evidence of change in the 1880s exists in Iowa museums. Another practical force for the simplification of clothes would have been the drive to make womenswear amenable to mass production. That goal began to be realized for outerwear in the 1890s.

AFTER TWO DECADES of sporadic popularity, the bustle passed from the fashion scene in the 1890s, although the deep inverted pleats in the center back of the skirt continued in fashion for several years. Skirts were usually cone shaped, fitted by gores that grew wider from waist to hem. By the end of the century, a sort of trumpet-shaped skirt had emerged.³ The upper two-thirds of this skirt followed the contours of the body, but the

²Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 328.

³Except for occasional use of inverted V-shaped inserts to produce flare, there was little piecing of dresses at this period. Possibly people could afford to be less frugal with cloth or possibly the fabric was slightly wider to accommodate pattern pieces. Widths of 24-35" (61-90 cm.) were found in the Smithsonian Institution's collection.

lower third was a wide-flaring section sewn to the upper skirt by diagonal seams of different types. Tucks, flounces, and velvet borders were popular skirt trims, but most of the elaboration in dresses was lavished on the bodice.

One of the most prevalent bodice treatments was the addition of a blouse- or vest-like inset called a "plastron," which was sewn permanently to the rest of the bodice but gave the effect of a separate layer without adding any extra bulk. Another design innovation of the 1890s was the asymmetrical, side-fastening bodice; some of these closings extended artfully into the back of the bodice or into the tall band collars that remained in fashion.

All of these changes pale, of course, beside the imposing sleeves of the decade. What began innocently as a slight puff at the top of the sleeve in the late 1880s grew to be a full-blown "gigot" sleeve in the early 1890s. This sleeve had a large, gathered upper arm section attached over a fitted undersleeve, the lower portion of which was visible. Eventually, this sleeve yielded to a true leg-o-mutton sleeve, with one piece cut to fit snugly from wrist to elbow, then fan into an enormous shape that was gathered or pleated to fit into the armscye. (See Figure 4) Flounces of lace and flaring collars or wide-sweeping yokes on the upper part of the bodice enhanced the top-heavy look. By the end of the century, the sleeve puff had dwindled to a modest scale; attention had begun to be directed to the shaping and trim of the bodice proper.

In order to support the aggressive shapes of 1890s clothing, very heavy, rich fabric was used. Velvets and velours held pride of place, followed by ribbed, "water marked" moiré, iridescent taffeta, and a host of striped and figured wools of heavy weight. Dark colors dominated the early years, with an emphasis on black, brown, and purple. Small touches of vivid colors, such as shocking pink and chartreuse, were added to the costumes as trim or as small figures in the fabric weave. Light colors returned to favor in the closing years of the century, a foretaste of the preponderance of white and pastels in the early 1900s.

Foremost in the styles of wrap worn in the years 1890 to 1899 was the cape. Tiny shoulder capelets ("storm collars"), tailored hip-length capes, and magnificent full length opera capes, crowned with multiple cape collars, all were represented in

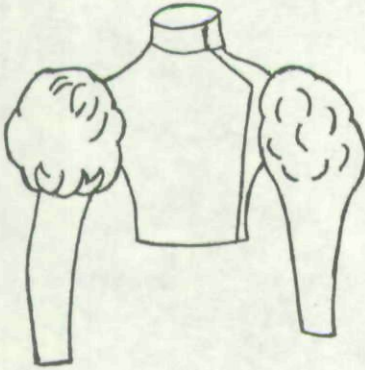


Figure 4: *Bodice, middle 1890s. The two-piece leg o' mutton sleeve (left) and the one-piece "gigot" sleeve (right) were the most distinguishing feature of women's dresses in this decade. Note also the high band collar and the side closing.*

museum collections in Iowa. Capes of sober black had vividly colored linings and silky pleated collars; a pink wool cape was trimmed in pale gray fur. True tailored jackets also must have been worn in this period. They were cropped at waist level and were probably worn with matching or coordinating skirts. Both capes and jackets bore labels of tailoring firms in New York, Chicago, and Paris, evidence of the growing availability of good quality women's ready-to-wear in the Midwest.

Hat shapes of the decade were possibly the jauntiest aspect of costume. They had shallow crowns and flat, circular or nearly-circular brims. What gave them their dash was the display of feathers, bows, and lace standing at the back, almost at right angles to the brim. They were intended to be worn flat on a cushion of upswept hair, ideally the wearer's own, but sometimes supplemented by purchased switches of hair or wire rolls.

Perky women's styles of the 1890s seem to be compounded of exaggeration and crisp tailoring. In order to suggest luxury when overtrimming was shunned, designers turned to emphatic shapes and sizes of sleeve, which would have put large quantities of costly satin, velvet, and novelty wool on display. Tailored techniques in clothes and the adoption of vest-like designs and short jackets smack of a desire to mimic masculine styling at a time when women were becoming steadily more vocal about their rights in society.



These shallow crowned hats with erect feathers and bows exemplify the jaunty women's headgear of the 1890s. The coats with mammoth sleeves and oversize buttons are also typical of the decade.

MEN, it must be admitted, cut rather tame figures in the late nineteenth century. Suits were carefully, often professionally, tailored of good quality materials. Missing were the color and textural interest available to women. Masculine vanity could find little outlet except the vicarious pleasure of seeing one's female relatives trussed up in the height of fashion.

Suits for men consisted of straight cut or tapered trousers combined with one of two types of jacket. The "sack" shape had an even hem length all around and no waistline seam, the "frock" coat had a waistline seam but, at this period, very little flaring to the skirt. Fitting of the body of the frock style was often accomplished by small darts extending up from the waistline seam. In back, curved, vertical seams, like princess seams, might also be used. These seams extended from center back waist to armscye. Often, the lower ends of the seams terminated in pleats that flanked the center back vent, a standard feature of men's suit jackets. Pockets were usually concealed in the breast of the jacket lining.

Sleeves were loosely cut, two-piece types, set into the armscye with no appreciable gathering. By the 1880s a slimmer sleeve was in style, paralleling the change in women's sleeves. Another similarity in the cut of clothes was the setting back of the shoulder seam for men as well as for women. Collars changed perceptibly in cut from the 1860s to the 1880s. They began the period with broad, long, oval revers overpowering a small, rounded or straight notched upper collar. By the 1880s the revers, too, had shrunk because it had become fashionable to button the jacket high on the chest, often leaving the remainder of the garment unbuttoned.

Jackets were frequently trimmed with braid or binding, usually in the color of the jacket itself; two exceptions were black braid on a dark maroon suit and green binding on a black suit. Topstitching was another popular trim, sometimes used to make a "false cuff" on the sleeve. Buttons were seldom decorative, being fabric-covered or matching the jacket in color; left-over-right was the universal system of buttoning.

Vests closely followed the cut of the jackets, with shawl collars replacing the notched revers collars of the jackets. Vests had welt pockets at waist level and sometimes also at chest level. Although some suit jackets were double breasted, vests in the museums were uniformly single breasted. A few really luxurious vests survive, including a brown velvet with gold buttons and a blue satin with matching silk embroidery. Vests were seemingly men's main opportunity for color and elegance, although colorful nightwear was available: a paisley robe and a red flannel nightshirt both appeared in museums in the state.

Day shirts, on the other hand, were mostly white, with exception of a blue and white striped one and a black and white striped example. Loose-bodied and long of tail, shirts opened at front or back, had smooth or pleated sleeve caps and small bands at the neck to which a collar might be buttoned. Not all men, of course, tolerated the stiff collars; there are photographs of men with neither collar nor tie to impair their comfort. Ties were of many styles, according to fashion periodicals and some photographs of more formal gentlemen: four-in-hand, string, and bow ties were shown or described; but Iowa collections had none definitely datable to this period.

Twill wool suits for men must have been almost universal in the 1870s and 1880s. Most of the twills were basic gabardines, but there was one variation, called cavalry twill or tricotine, that had the appearance of small circles lying along the diagonal ridges of the twill. The only plain weave item found in Iowa was a blue and white checked jacket, probably of the 1860s. It appeared to have been made of cotton.

Men's acceptance of a drab, undecorated look may show that color, obvious luxury, and decoration were considered fit for "light-minded" women but not for sober men. They could display wealth in yachts, real estate, art collections, and on their wives' and daughters' backs, but not on their own. Mass production of clothing and the organization of work in custom tailoring firms may have reinforced the desire for simplicity. The time which could be put into mounting rows of pleating was instead invested in the hand stitching that built lasting shape into collars and lapels of unadorned suits.

WHEN ONE STUDIES the women's magazines from 1850 to 1899, one is struck by the change in both physical and, it seems, spiritual "carriage" of women. In the 1850s and 1860s they are presented as slope-shouldered, doe-eyed, passive creatures; they seem helpless and indolent. By the 1890s, women have been transformed. The queenly individuals are erect in pose, engaged in sports and artistic endeavors, and look directly at the reader. When depicted with men, they seem to have the upper hand. How much life imitated art in this respect would be a fascinating topic of study.

In the past, as in the present, there must have been a gap between what was shown in the fashion pages and what ordinary women wore. Even the women in the fiction portion of these magazines were never so fashionably dressed as the ladies of the color plates. Probably, "average" women adopted a conservative version of the mode. That they did not abandon all interest in fashion is evident from the use of fashionable sleeves and collars on the humble wrappers worn for household tasks.

Realistic compromise is also apparent in the use of plain cotton fabric in those parts of a dress that would never be seen,



Single-breasted vested suits buttoned high on the chest were standard for dressy men's wear in the late nineteenth century.

such as the part of the skirt forever concealed by the bodice pep- lum. Thrift did not, however, prevent the seamstresses from making the clothes as voluminous and ornate as was required by fashion. What they did instead was to use the fashion fabric right out to the selvage edge and piece inconspicuous parts of the skirt or sleeve. Even with these economies, huge quantities of cloth were used in the late nineteenth-century clothes: three

to six yards for an 1877 wrap and eighteen to twenty-five yards for an 1871 dress. In part, the volume of fabric was needed because cloth was much narrower than it is today. In order to get maximum use from their clothes, people frequently dressed in black and dark colors: they did not show soil easily;⁴ they could do duty as mourning attire (in the case of black); and they would not be conspicuous if worn for more than one season, perhaps with some remodeling.

Until the late 1880s, the majority of clothing for women was made by the wearer or her dressmaker, who carefully finished the clothes for endurance under hard use. After that time, more manufactured clothes became available from the large cities of the United States and Europe. It is not possible to judge how much of Iowa clothing was bought in those cities, obtained from local merchants, or purchased by mail order. Men, as mentioned earlier, had access to ready-made clothes after the late 1860s.

Iowans of the late nineteenth century were as diverse in their tastes and means as are people today. Although they did not have the range of choices that are available to their descendants, they seem to have used to the fullest those choices open to them. Therefore, a visitor can find in a single museum 1890s clothes ranging from a ragged calico wrapper to a magnificent French gown of silk and velvet. In another museum, two wraps of 1875 to 1885 represent the gulf between a woman wearing silk fringed in velvet, and another clad in careworn-looking gray wool.

⁴Commercial dry cleaning was only widely available after 1910. People in the nineteenth century refreshed their clothing by brushing, spot cleaning, airing, and storage in cedar closets. Presumably, people's standards of personal cleanliness were less exacting than those of 1981.

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