

Historical Clothing Reconstruction as Research

By Katherine Stefl

For thousands of years, clothing and textiles have carried stories. Historians, designers, genealogists, general enthusiasts have strived to understand these stories and keep them thriving. At the heart sits the vehicle of our understanding and interpretation; sewing. The ancient art form of individual clothing creation hasn't changed much in the past few thousand years. Needles are still generally the same shape and materials such as cotton and wool are still available. Individual clothing creating or more commonly known as couture sewing is still a highly personal art form. Although most people don't make their own clothing anymore, the art of dressing oneself is inherently intimate and expressive. The average person spends an awful lot of time with their clothes. Even if they aren't made at home, people often add to their clothes or have a favorite pair of jeans that are worn out in the knees. Studying clothing can help acquire an understanding of individuals throughout history. This is perhaps the most prominent reason why I chose to study and recreate three garments from The Collection of Historic Dress at UVA. The collections team is unsure where these garments are from or who they belonged to because these garments were donated by community members without documentation. Through some analysis, I wish to gain some insight into the story of these garments. The chosen pieces are from the 19th century because access to anything before that is limited, and the garment industry became more influential and innovative around that time. This meant the materials became easier to obtain therefore encouraging people to produce more clothing.

I: This project includes the historical reconstruction of three gowns. The garments I have selected are a blue mid-19th century evening dress, a cream bodice from the 1840s, and a brown bustle dress from the 1880s. Each garment has a special element I wish to study and I believe I can better understand these elements by historical reconstruction.

The blue gown is heavily pieced together. It appears this garment was taken apart many times and put back together in different styles suited to the time period and size of the wearer. The skirt is dropped in back and there are inserts added into the side seams of the bodice implying growth or a dress passed down. The size is another interesting element. It's small, as if made for a child or teen. The waist itself measures around twenty inches.

The cream bodice I found without a skirt. It is in remarkable condition and made from a type of fabric that is not in production anymore. Moire silk also known as water silk, has a strategic water pattern stained on it. As it moves in the light, it makes a ripple effect mimicking the effect of water. Upon further examination, the bodice presented patterning questions. The shapes of the fabric pieces were cut off grain and the sleeve

shape had gathering towards the elbow instead of at the shoulder. Whether or not this was typical for the era, I wanted to try it.

The chestnut bustle dress was found in a state of construction. The condition of the silk and velvet fabrics are good, but the dress looks like someone had stopped in the middle of finishing the skirt or worse, it was taken apart to be used on stage. I wanted to work with this garment because I wanted to see if I could figure out what it was originally intended to look like. The bodice is in almost perfect condition, but the skirt is half put together.

Before I started patterning these garments for reconstruction, I wanted to find out as much about them as possible. I took some time to learn about the Victorian textile industry in Europe as well as America. I also spent time looking at fashion plates from each era to get a better understanding of the exact years with which they were associated. Since all of these garments were either missing pieces or not in their original form, it was important to be diligent in looking at detail, especially in trimming or decoration styles. My original intention was to try to figure out where these textiles were made in hopes of dating the garments and associating them with a location. Ultimately I discovered that I do not have the resources or the funding to dive that deeply into the origins of the garments through this method. Instead, I examined illustrations and photographs.

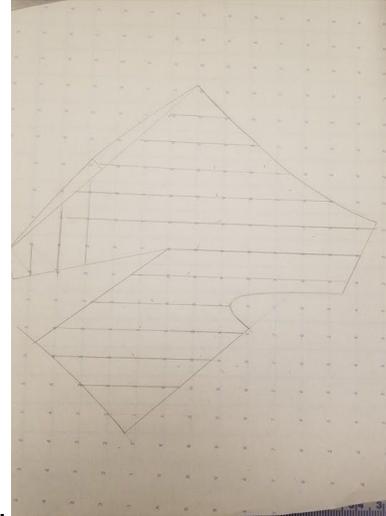
The next challenge was to figure out how to pattern off of historical garments without taking them apart or damaging them. In order to protect the garment, I used basic conservation skills I had learned from my internships at The Valentine Museum and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello like the importance of a clean environment. Antique textiles are extremely delicate and can be damaged easily. Handling a garment without clean hands might not immediately show signs of deterioration, but over time, the natural oils of the hands that transfer to the garment will weaken and discolor the fibers.

Most of the garments I patterned were cut on the straight of grain which made it easier to measure and follow the lines throughout, but the cream bodice was cut on the bias. Bias cut means that the vertical direction of the garment is cut diagonally on the weave of the fabric. This is usually done to give the garment some give and stretch. Bias cut garments are harder to pattern because the weave of the fabric is diagonally crossing the edges of the fabric piece.

In order to keep these garments safe while patterning them, I began sewing a grid of basting stitches into the linings with a thin needle and fine silk thread, so as to not damage the garment as seen in image A1. I could then measure my sewn grid and plot it on pattern paper seen in image A2. The silk thread is soft and thin so when it passes through the weave of the antique fabric, it won't damage the threads.



A1.



A2.

Typically historical sewing techniques are used strictly when sewing a historical garment because much of it involves hand sewing. Hand sewing requires copious amounts of time. A garment like this is usually produced by museums for reconstruction purposes or reenactors who come in close contact with their audiences, therefore requiring more detail. The purpose of historical reconstruction largely is based around education. Either learning from constructing the clothing or using it to teach others in close proximity, therefore needing more detail than a theatrical costume that is seen from a distance. Historical sewing techniques are reserved for construction projects that are only producing one copy of said garment. Theatrical costume shops usually do not produce costumes that have been entirely hand sewn because they are under a budget and time constraints. Many productions also require duplicates of costumes and small historical sewing details won't be able to be seen from stage anyway. Theatrical costumes also have to last through an entire run of a show where actors are possibly dancing or doing a variety of movements that aren't possible in a historical garment. Theatres also have to consider the amount of time an actor has to change. Many theatrical costumes made to look historical from a distance are built in a way that reduces the amount of layers an actor would have to wear, as well as the time it would take to get it on and off. These ingenuities are important for smooth wardrobe changes, but also can eliminate historical elements that are important to creating a historical garment.

There are also places that mix both techniques. Living history museums often have the nearly impossible task of clothing their many interpreters in historical clothing. How do they do it? They analyse what parts of clothing requires more durability as well as what would save time and not show on the outside of the garment. Creating historical

garments for a large amount of people comes down to compromise. For example, the vertical skirt panels are sewn by machine while the eyelets of the bodice are sewn by hand because they are not internal. Stitching that is seen on top of the garment (or topstitching) is done by hand in this case instead of being done by machine.

Although I am trained in theatre, I have been able to apply theatrical techniques to my work in museums. I was surprised to find there was overlap in both communities when it came to interpreting a historical figure. To design a costume in theatre, there is a long script analysis process helping the designers to understand the play and the characters. When designing a costume, it's helpful to remember clothing is highly personal when doing research. Each person spends a great deal of time with their own clothing, therefore making clothing choice an important decision regarding how the character wants themselves to be seen by the world, as well as how the design team wants to portray them to the public.

Research is vastly important to both design in theatre and design in museums, but generally what is used as research differs. In theatre, designers are often working from a script with fictional characters. Even when those characters are based on historical figures, there's room for interpretation. Designers are allowed a variety of research images. There are few rules about historical accuracy when interpreting a script with a time period. Theatrical design considers it's modern audience and creates a cohesive visual picture including all design elements while museums typically design in stricter parameters centering around primary research.

The purpose of the garment is also to be considered. In theatre, garments are made to be costumes. They are made to follow the designers artistic vision to reflect the message of the play to a modern audience. For example: even though caps were worn by women of all ages for centuries, a modern audience isn't going to see a cap as fashionable because of our modern associations. The same thing goes for corsets and stays. Entertainment designers have the general population believing that corsets are the equivalent of a torture device while that is simply not true. Studying and recreating historical clothing provides a stronger base of knowledge when trying to understand the function of a corset. Sewing a garment historically is often seen as a luxury because it takes more time than it would if it was being made with modern technology and the creators generally have more time to dive into research as well. Creating historical clothing values the understanding of the garment. Wearing historical recreations also leads to a deeper understanding of the garment. Creating historical clothing is about learning by doing and creating a garment the way it was done in the past to the best of our ability. Garments in theatre and museums serve different purposes.

What happens when a museum lacks information on what a specific historical figure wore? This is where having theatrical design experience helps. As a theatrical designer, my experience with character analysis has helped me to interpret historical

figures and clothing throughout history. I was taught how to interpret color, silhouette, and line. All of these elements inform an audience as to who the character is. This can also happen in reverse. When studying an original garment, considering these elements can help interpret who the original owner was or what possible missing pieces look like. Sometimes garments are donated in pieces or a museum only receives one element of an entire outfit. I experienced this with the cream bodice I decided to recreate. The bodice is in good condition and covered in details I wanted to recreate. I knew that my design training would help me interpret what the skirt looked like.

Why replicate historical garments? Constructing a garment the way it was made centuries ago provides a whole new way of thinking. Studying these garments wasn't enough to understand the construction. By looking at a historical garment, one can interpret the material, the style, and maybe the origin, but these garments have so much more to say than that. The way pattern pieces are shaped helps interpret undergarments. Studying bone placement shows structure. The hem shows the length of the skirt in proportion. By recreating these garments, one can better understand the time it takes to create in this art form with intricacies of detail. Recreation in historical clothing is essential in understanding the full function of these garments.

During time periods in which the dresses I'm recreating were made, most dye colors were available as evidenced in period dye books like Elements of the Art of Dyeing by Claude-Louis Berthollet published in 1791. The Frenchman details the dyeing technology of the time over a variety of different fabrics using a variety of different materials many of which we still use today.

As to the origin of the fabric of these dresses, I can't be certain, or as to where they were made. I can guess that because the University of Virginia receives clothing donations from locals, these pieces have a higher likelihood of being American as well as being made up in western styles, but it's inconclusive.

The Blue Gown

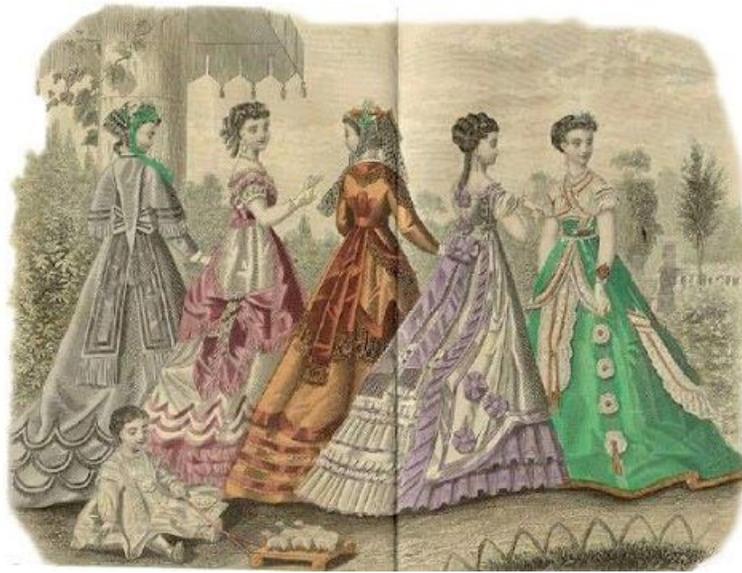
I was surprised to find, under the gorgeous, blue, paper thin, damask silk was an entire story. I found piecing inserts in the side seams of the bodice as well as in the lining of the bodice back and several in the skirt. Compared to other decades in the 19th century pertaining to bodice shape, this bodice had simpler lines. To date this gown, I looked at American lady's magazines that were popular at the time.



B1.

In this image from Godey's Lady's Magazine in 1867.

Although the dress in study is not heavily ornamented, it does share similarities in silhouette. The majority of skirt fabric has made its way to the back of the silhouette with the front skirt panel seeming flat against the body. The bodice style has a wide neckline and small puffed sleeves as well. Those same elements are seen in fashion plates throughout the next few years.



B2.

This image is from Godey's Lady's Magazine 1868.

The skirt and bodice silhouette are still similar. I found it difficult to place this dress in a specific year because it embodies a time of transition. Fashion gradually changed every decade or so in the 19th century. This particular time in fashion history, women were transitioning from the cage crinoline to the first style of bustle which is another reason why the gown I'm studying might have been in another style before being made up into its current state.



B3.

This final fashion plate from Peterson's Magazine in 1869 still has the majority of the skirt fabric in the back, but the top near the waist back is becoming more rotund and is the beginnings of the first bustle period. The blue gown could have passed in this year, but would have started to be going out of style.

The bodice has two front pieces as seen in B4, two side front insert pieces, and one back. Both bodice fronts have two darts which is another element reminiscent of 19th mid-century fashion. The bodice fronts have their raw edges folded under to support the closures. Closure hardware was typically hooks and eyes or would lace up the back. The internal seams have raw edges, but have casings sewn into their seam allowance for bones. Bones are used to add structure and support to a garment. The bones have been taken out of this bodice, but they were typically made from steel or baleen which was a material made of keratin found on a whale's jaw bone. Fortunately now synthetic options are available. Around the top and bottom of the bodice as well as around the arm holes, we can see very thin strings. This string is known as cording or piping. This gave the garment a clean finish while also allowing the garment to be adjusted. For example, thin cotton string running through the neck line can be tightened slightly like a drawstring for a better fit seen in B4.



B4.

Bodice front with two darts.



B5.

This is the insert piece in the side of the bodice under the sleeve.



B6.

There's no insert piece cut in the lining. The front pieces remain whole.

The inserts in the skirt are what lead me to believe this gown was used throughout the 1860's. The original maker of this gown had sewn a large crescent shaped insert to the top of the skirt panels in back. This allows the skirt to have a train. If the dress had been remade, the skirt would not have had the train originally. The crescent shape would have been added to create the train. Accompanying the train is a

dust ruffle. It was common for gowns to include something to protect the hem. Also, the skirt gathering resides in the back which follows the evolution of fashion in the late 1860's, but the added panel makes me think it was added later because purposely placing a seam across the bustle seems like awkward placement even when conserving fabric and piecing. However, my modern dressmaking education could be getting in the way of realising another possibility. The front bodice lining pieces are cut as one whole piece for each side rather than mimicking the fashion fabric being cut into two on each side.



B7.

The top back of the skirt cartridge pleated into the waistband and the top crescent shaped insert.



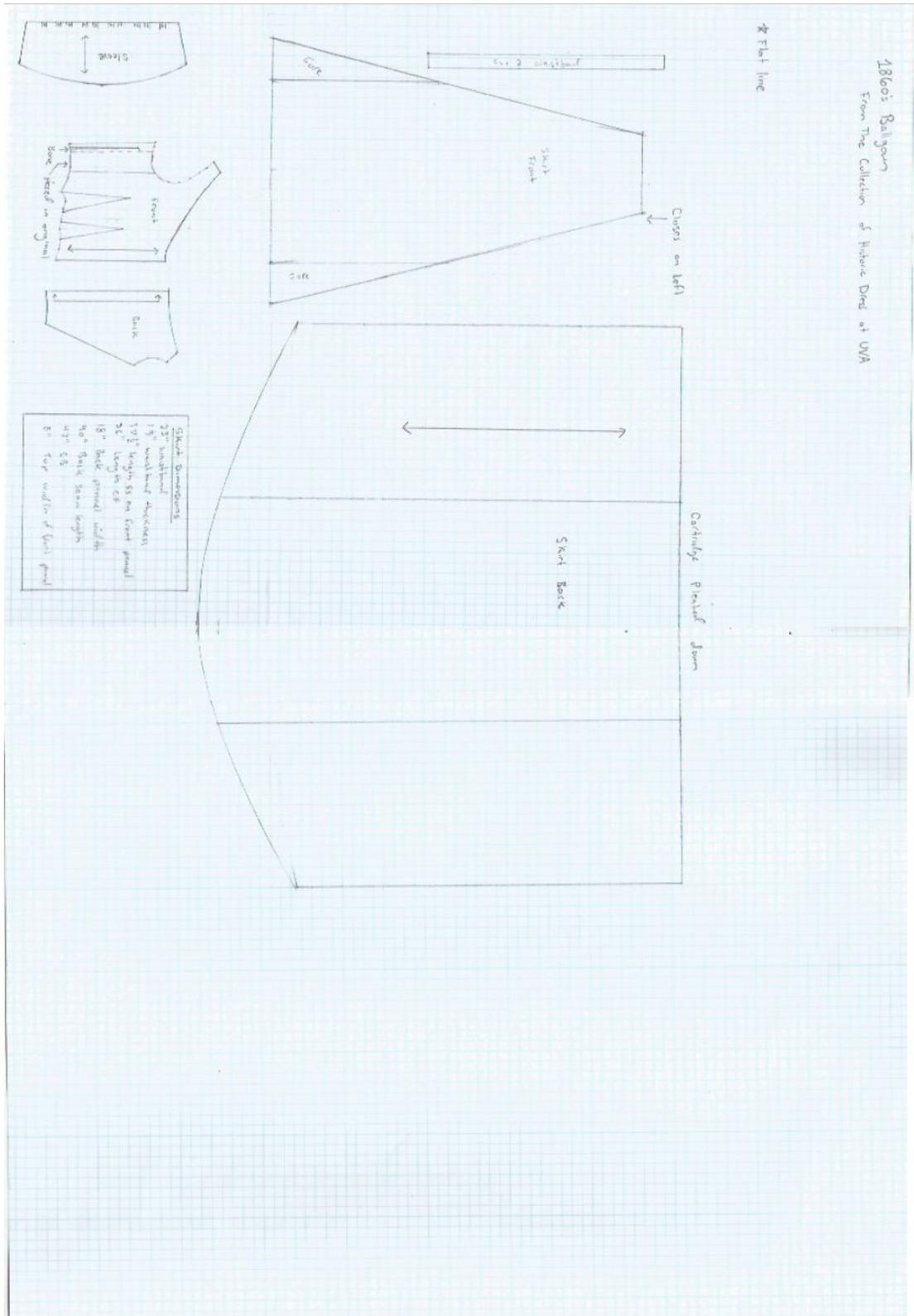
B8.

This is the underside of the skirt hem. This solid blue pleated piece is a dust ruffle. It is meant to protect the hem of the dress from dirt and wear.

The skirt had the same puzzling construction techniques as the bodice. At the top of the back of the skirt in the fashion fabric, there is a crescent shaped insert. At first it

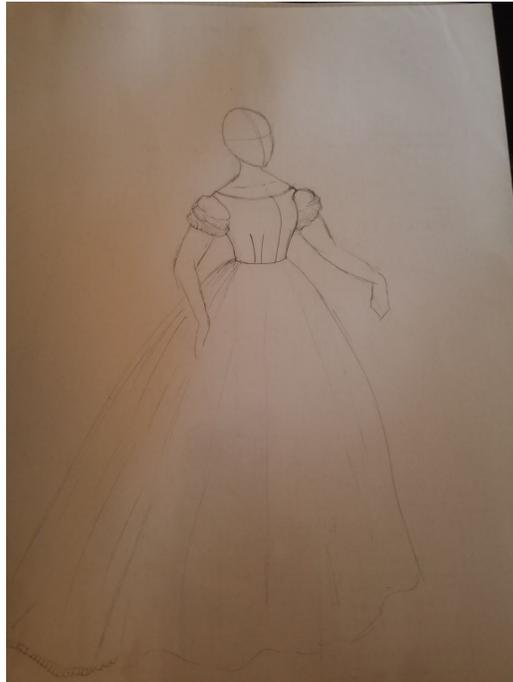
looked to be put there for the purpose of lowering the back length of an already existing skirt to create a train, but when the lining doesn't have the same crescent insert. Is this insert here because the dress was altered or because it was pieced? The lining could have been added or replaced with an alteration. Cotton was much less expensive than silk therefore relining a skirt wouldn't be as costly as buying new silk fabric to make a new dress. Both explanations can be justified by studying victorian clothing. Piecing was common practice because textiles and clothing held value, especially a silk dress. It took time to sew an entire gown by hand and with adding the expense of silk, none would have been wasted. But remaking of garments was also common for the same reasoning. The measurements of this gown are also rather small. The waist measured to around twenty inches leading me to believe this dress was made for a young, growing teenager. This reinforces the idea that this garment would have been remade and altered as she was growing or as it was passed down to her.

When recreating this gown, I decided to forego adding the inserts because I wanted to create a smooth, clean silhouette without unnecessary seams.



B9.

All patterns were drafted on 1/8" graph paper and then brought up to actual size.



B10.

With my design knowledge combined with research, this is what I thought it might look like.



B11.

Skirt front meets the skirt back.



B12.

This is the recreation of the front without the side insert.



B13.

This is the inside of the sleeve. The original had long threads that were attaching the seam allowance to the sleeve cuff. This was used to keep the sleeve puffy.



B14.

The inside of the front bodice with the bone casings in the seam allowance.



B15.



B16.

This image is of the recreation of the pleated dust ruffle on the inside bottom of the skirt that protects the hem.

The Cream Bodice

The cream bodice is made up of two front bodice pieces cut on the bias with a corded center front seam and one dart on either side. The back is made up of two pieces, one on either side. The line you see going across the back of the bodice appears to be a seam, but it is a topstitched piece of corded trim. This same style of trim also top stitched onto the top part of the sleeves. The collar or berthe is only a front piece and does not continue around the back like in later periods. The berthe, in two pleated front pieces is sewn into the center front seam with a piece of bias cording. When I found this bodice, there were no bones left in it, but there were bone casings in the side seams. The neckline, armholes, side seams, center front seams, and cuffs are all corded. The waistband is finished with binding and the back is secured with hooks and eyes.

This bodice was donated without a skirt, but when I was deciding what to recreate, I wanted the challenge of finding a similar fabric and executing this type of sleeve. The fabric of this bodice is moire silk, a popular choice for a victorian lady, although it is not made anymore. However, moire is still made with other types of fiber content. I happened to find a cotton moire in a similar color.



C1.



C2.

I dated this garment somewhere between 1835 and 1840. The fashion plates from this era match up with many elements of the bodice. The fashion plates show the low neckline, berthe collar, dropped shoulder seam, and a unique sleeve shape specific to this time period. Although the bodice and these fashion plates share similarities, the proportions look off. In terms of proportions, the figures in the fashion plates look kind of like modern fashion ads, small upper bodies and extremely long legs. When examining the proportions of the cream bodice, it looks like the waistline has been raised an inch or so.



C3.
Godey's Lady's Magazine January 1838



C4.
Godey's Lady's Magazine March 1840

To determine proportions, I looked at originals in well known historical clothing collections. Looking at images C3 and C4, they have slightly raised waistlines. When drawing a figure, it is generally known that the waistline should line up with the bend in the arm. It's difficult to tell with these images because of where the puff is on the sleeve,

but if the curve of the sleeve is examined, it shows that the elbow rests slightly below the waistline of the dress.



C5.

Victoria and Albert Museum. Dress origins: England 1835-1840



C6.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. Dress origins: America 1837-1839

Another image that helped me date the cream bodice was this detail of a painted silk gown from around 1835-1840. The two lines that look like princess seams are in fact the same type of trim used in the cream bodice. They are actually not seams, but just corded bias that has been top stitched on the back to give the illusion of seams. It also gives the illusion of perfect pattern matching.



C7.

Victoria and Albert Museum. Dress Origins: England 1835-1840

These research images also helped me to figure out what the skirt would have looked like, but it was important to make the distinction between the ideal of the period and what was actually accomplished, fashion plates vs. original garments. When looking at fashion plates and originals, it surprised me to see that both had little to no skirt trimming. I decided to keep the skirt simple in reconstruction and pleat it into the waistband.

Patterning this bodice was a challenge because of the front pieces being cut on the bias, but the sleeves gave me particular trouble. The sleeves are one piece and not having sewn anything fitting into this time period, I was unfamiliar with the general pattern shapes. I used the same technique for the puffs of the sleeves that I used in patterning the fronts of the bodice. I gently sewed in a grid to get an idea of the pattern shape. The sleeves were also cut on the bias. It took me a few tries to get the pattern correct considering how low the armhole sits on the arm compared to where the cap of the sleeve sits in modern clothing. As the armhole is dropped down, movement of the arms becomes more restricted. Note the diagonal placement of the bodice pieces within the pattern in image C8.

An incredibly important aspect of costuming and recreating historic clothing is adapting historic patterns. For this particular dress, I used my own measurements to see the challenges of an 1830s-40s dress on a human. Luckily I had access to the proper undergarments so I could fit the bodice on their intended understructure. When corseted, the bust becomes drastically raised thus creating an unflattering dip that appears between the bust and the armpit. Historically, the way to fix it would be to add padding. This was done throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century. The function of the padding is to smooth the bodice over the bust whilst creating the desired silhouette. The padding was frequently made out of horsehair or wool stuffing.



C9.

Here the padding is clearly visible.



C10.

The bodice back detail that is just trim and not in fact a seam.



C11.

Sleeve detail with the same trim made to look like cord, but isn't.



C12.

This is the pleating of the Berthe collar and the cording going through the center front seam.



C13.

The completed dress was worn with the correct underpinnings.

The Brown Silk Gown

When looking at original garments, sometimes they are in pieces either because they weren't completed, they were taken apart to restyle, or they were taken apart by a theatre with the intention of it becoming a costume. I believe that might have happened to the brown silk gown. I think it was taken apart for a theatre show and then never completed because of its intricacies. There are parts of the skirt that are crudely basted together and when looking at the details and stitching of the bodice, it's inconsistent.

The bodice is very shaped and made up of eight pieces. There's a velvet collar and velvet detail going down the sides of the bodice. There is a little pointed vent on the back of the bodice that is meant to sit on top of a bustle. The bodice is highly structured and there's a bone in almost every seam.

Dating this gown was tricky because the bodice was clearly from the 1880's because of its length and front trim, but the skirt was not in its original state. I could tell there wasn't enough fabric in the skirt for a large bustle. Only the back panel would provide an area for a smaller bustle. This dress could have ranged from as early as 1880 into 1884. This was a transitional time for the bustle. In image D1 the bodice length is still rather long coming off the stylish silhouette from the 1870s.



D1.

Godey's Lady's Magazine August 1882

Looking at fashion plate D2, the middle image is the one that most closely relates to the brown silk gown. It has a vertical piece going down the center front of the bodice, along with an apron piece (which is the draped fabric on the skirt in the center front), and heavy pleating on the skirt.



D2.

Peterson's Magazine August 1883

D3 shows that same bodice style which becomes more prominent, but by this time the bustle is starting to become more exaggerated.



D3.

Peterson's Magazine March 1884

When I laid the skirt pieces out, they were half sewn together and it was unclear what the intention was. I examined the skirt and attempted to figure out how the skirt draped. I positioned the pleated panels in a variety of ways and eventually landed on the design that made the most sense.

When I patterned this piece, the skirt pattern ended up not being exactly what was in front of me because I had to design a skirt based off of one that wasn't complete. I kept the proportions as close as possible. The original skirt had a cartridge pleated back piece, one box pleated panel sewn to the side of the base skirt, an apron piece, and a knife pleated panel sewn under the apron piece making the skirt asymmetric. The bodice showed no signs of asymmetry therefore reinforcing my thoughts that it had been reworked.



D4.

Bodice Front



D5.

Bodice Back



D6.

Bodice back vent detail.



D7.

Inner bodice detail with bone casings in seam allowance.



D8.
Skirt Front with pleated front panel and apron.



D9.
Skirt back with inside detail. Skirt back is not attached to the waistband and hanging loops have been sewn in which is not something that would have been done in the 19th century.



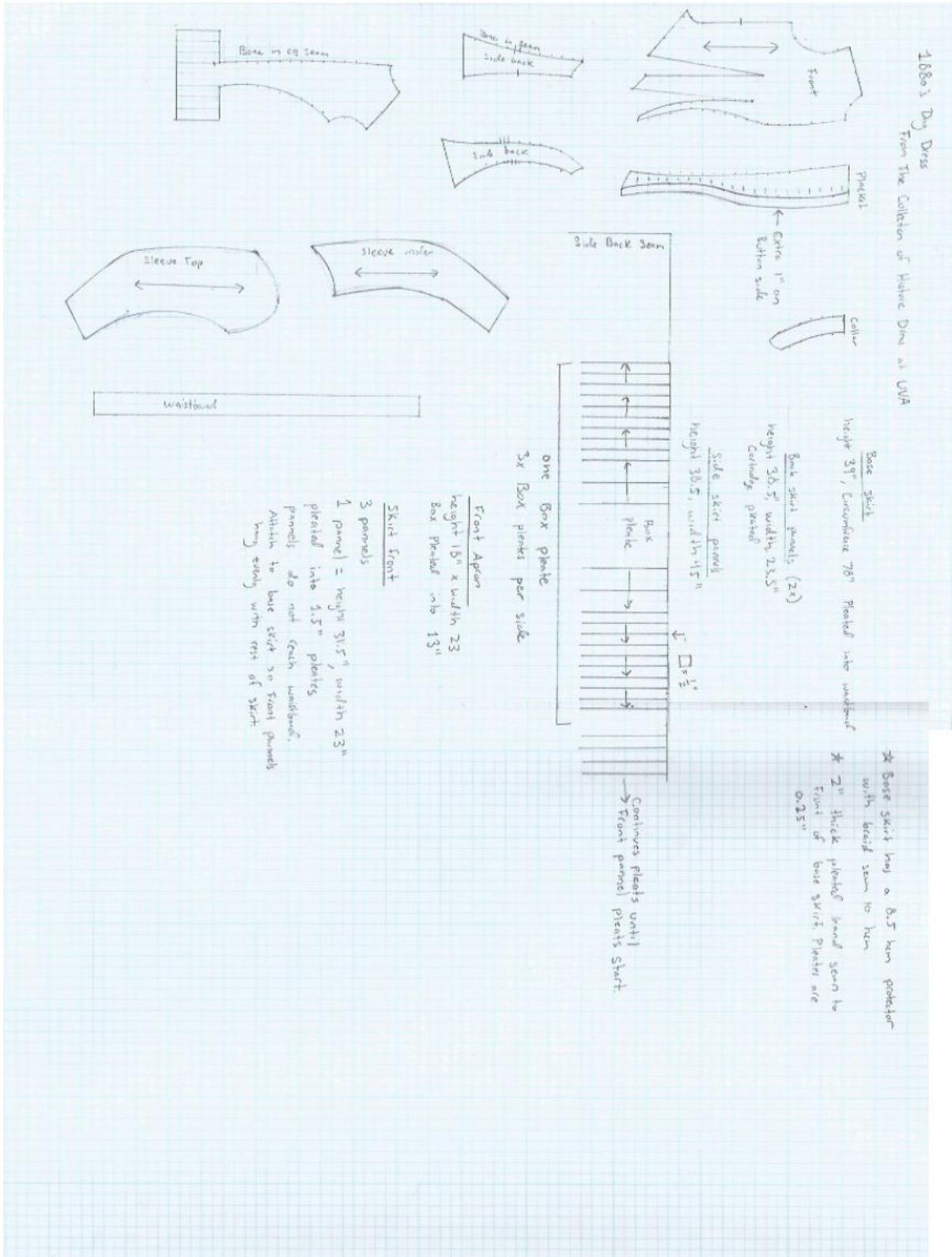
D10.

Skirt side panel.



D11.

Inner front skirt panel. Here we can see the base skirt and how the pleats of the front panel were secured with cotton tape. We can also see the white seam allowance.





D13.

Bodice front.



D.14

Bodice back.



D.15

Inner bodice.



D.16

Pleated side panels going into the waistband.



D17.

Completed skirt front with pleated front panel, apron, and pleated side panels.



D.18

Pleated side panel detail.

This work in general has more theatricality than one may think. Yes, it is for a museum, but it is for the purpose of bringing history to life, to be a tangible tool for educating the audience and/or the people that come to the museum to experience the

exhibit. This work is a performance, but not in the traditional sense. It is a designed piece meant to be interacted with. But regardless of what we call it, theatre or museum, I think it is agreed upon that both endeavor to make a significant impact on those who come in contact with art and artifacts. Throughout this project, I hope to bridge the gap between these two communities. I find purpose in using my craft in an educational setting. I want to make educational programs that are more immersive. I want people to feel more connected with the past and with the world. The way the general population is taught history is passive when history is, at its core, so involved. It connects all of us. It equalizes all of us. It affects all of us. It should be taught thus.

Creating clothing that is replicated gives life back to the garments that would otherwise be kept behind glass or in storage. This clothing gives the opportunity for interaction. This clothing can be worn, washed, and touched which adds to the immersive quality of living history. Human instinct reinforces the intimacy of clothing. We relate to it. The clothing we adorn ourselves with is on us all day. We interact with it all day. Therefore, the audience having the ability to interact with historical garments whether that be touch or seeing it worn by an interpreter, makes the experience personal and inspires empathy which I believe is really the goal of storytelling. Empathy is the mode in which we understand the message of the story. It inspires the ability to take fact and create insight.

Seeing the clothing in a functional way whether that be worn or a touchable replication, also takes the emphasis off of the object itself, putting value into the craftsmanship and the people wearing it or making it. Many of the techniques used to make clothing centuries ago are still used and known. If we are to gain any true understanding of the people that came before us, we need to understand their way of living.

This project was supposed to be accompanied by a hands-on exhibit. I was going to display the original garments with their replications. The guests with guidance, would be given permission to touch and interact with my replications. Because of the pandemic of spring 2020, that was unfortunately cancelled. Luckily, a few weeks before that I had the opportunity to speak at the Virginia Association of Museums conference about a historic dress I had designed for a museum in Michigan. My presentation was equal in history and design. Through my own fault, it was met with a lack of understanding. The discussion that proceeded when the presentations concluded centered largely around audience experience and greater purpose. The historians in the room were discussing how to get their message across in exhibits without directly telling their visitors or displaying large amounts of writing. They observed that museums are not neutral in opinion and therefore need to decide what stance to take; a purpose. They went so far as to say pushing the activist perspective was “experimental.” This

was shocking to me, because as an artist, this is what I'm trained to do. It comes naturally now to think about the purpose and focus of an experience. Before I even begin a project, I have to know my purpose and take on an activist role. I have to ask myself why this work is important now. My job is to get my point across visually with clothing. At the conference they also discussed their problem with being able to keep a guest in their exhibits longer than twenty minutes which demonstrates a lack of focus and their ability to grab attention. Again this was shocking because keeping the focus of an audience is part of my training.

Replication and historical sewing are vastly important because they do all of the things that museums have been struggling with. Interaction speaks to a person's humanity and empathy. Audiences are forced to step into an environment where they must experience an interpretation of the past through objects placed in context throughout the exhibit. An interpreter dressed in period clothing answering questions and helping guests along the way, only enhances that experience. By the audience seeing historical clothing as part of the exhibit, they gain an awareness of its function without anyone saying a word.

I've had the privilege of being able to experience and participate in living history. This is the single most powerful art form I experienced growing up. My ability to retain historical facts and information improved drastically. As a child, I voluntarily started learning about history. I wanted to understand and connect with the people of the past. I wanted to experience true stories and gain perspective. Seeing people wearing and recreating historical clothing was powerful for me as well because these seemingly average, normal people were creating these amazing works of art and wearing them. That proved to me I could do it too. As I became more involved with the living history and theatre communities, I was able to be on the performing side. I was able to help people learn and guide them through enriching experiences. I found the general public fascinated with historical clothing and willing to ask questions.

When it comes to interpreting clothing in an academic sense, how are we to truly understand the function of clothing without going through the experience of making it and wearing it? We have to look at the shapes that make up the clothing patterns and put historical sewing to practice if we are to ever truly understand how material culture influenced the people of the past and all of us today.

This project has solidified my philosophy of learning by doing and experiencing. I have learned more by replicating and wearing historical clothing than I ever would have just by studying the garments alone. By replicating garments, the experience of learning by doing is also given to the public. They can interact with historical clothing without the restrictions of a typical museum exhibit display, behind glass. These practices bring new light and perspective to history and humanity. Our understanding of our history is vital to

how we see ourselves and grow. We must connect and learn from our past if we hope to shape a better future.

Bibliography

Claude-Louis Berthollet. *Elements of the Art of Dyeing*. Printed by S. Couchman and sold by J. Johnson, 1791, <http://archive.org/details/elementsartdyei02bertgoog>.

“Dress | V&A Search the Collections.” *V and A Collections*, 7 Apr. 2020, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O356263>.

“Dress | V&A Search the Collections.” *V and A Collections*, 7 Apr. 2020, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O356253>.

“Dress | V&A Search the Collections.” *V and A Collections*, 7 Apr. 2020, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1304908>.

Godey’s Lady’s Book 1830-1898.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/80769?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=american+dress+1860s&offset=20&rpp=20&pos=37>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2020.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/159499?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=american+dress+1860s&offset=40&rpp=20&pos=41>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2020.

Peterson Magazine. Philadelphia: C. J. Peterson, 1842-1898.

Photography and Patterns By Katherine Stefl