

Civil War: What To Sew . . . And What NOT To Sew Part II

I must say response from other reenactors when they find out I'm doing a pattern review has been amazing! And I have been inspired to continue with Undergarments Part II. Goodness knows I could never review ALL the patterns out there, my fingers and bank account would never allow that, but I have tried to review as many as I can.

For those of you reading this who are new to my articles, I am trying to give my honest opinion of patterns out there for beginner reenactors, so that YOU don't waste your hard earned money on bad patterns or ones that are too difficult to understand, like I did when I first started reenacting. I have enlisted the help of close friends I call my "Secret Sewing Society" and together we sew the patterns, compile our findings and the review gives you our honest opinions.

What specifically will the reviews tell you?

Pros & Cons: any detail we think you'd need to know before buying the pattern. Plus what you may need to alter to make the pattern work better for you.

Sewing Level: No sense buying a totally authentic pattern if you can't understand the directions. None of us are professional seamstresses, if we can't understand the directions we'll tell you about it. We'll categorize Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced.

Sizing: Are the size charts accurate by today's standards. I know size is a big issue with most women, so let me reassure you, I am no size 0 and all of the friends I have enlisted to help are over a size 10.

Documentation: Are the patterns based on original garments or would they be categorized as costumes.

Overall Satisfaction: We will rate each pattern

- ★ Not worth your time
- ★★ Not so great
- ★★★ Average
- ★★★★ Good
- ★★★★★ GREAT!

I have divided my series into several sections as Civil War Women have lots of layers. The categories are: Undergarments Part I & Part II, Work Dresses & Aprons, Day/Best Dresses, Evening Dresses & Ball Gowns and Outerwear. * Note: *Corsets will be reviewed later in the season after our wear and tear testing.*

Depending on your impression and what social class you will be portraying, you may not need clothing from all the categories listed.

Here is a list of what I would suggest for the bare minimum to start out for an event weekend.

Work Impression:

- 2 drawers
- 2 chemise
- 2 pairs wool/cotton stockings & garters
- 1 modesty petticoat
- 1 corded / quilted petticoat
- 1 corset / work stay
- 1 work dress
- 1 apron
- 1 pair dark colored boots
- 1 hairnet
- 1 hat / slat bonnet / bonnet

For colder weather -- I would suggest buying/making a sontag. They are a working woman's best friend.

Mid-Upper Class Impression:

- 2 drawers
- 2 chemise
- 2 pairs wool/cotton stockings & garters
- 1 modesty petticoat
- 1 hoop 4 bone if under 5'6 6 bone if over 5'6
- 1 corset
- 1-2 day dress / best dress
- 1 evening dress / ball gown
- 1 pair dark colored boots
- 1 pair dance slippers
- 1-2 pair white cotton gloves
- 1 hairnet
- 1 bonnet

For colder weather -- I suggest a cape or palatot.

If you join a unit, they may have a "kitty" of spare clothing for you to borrow to start out. Many times when a lady gains or loses weight their dresses no longer fit. There's nothing wrong with them so they go into the unit's kitty for new members. If you don't join a unit, that's ok, just puts a little more pressure on you to get sewing!

Ok enough chatter, let's get on with Undergarments: Part II -- Chemise, Drawers, Petticoats, and Hoops.

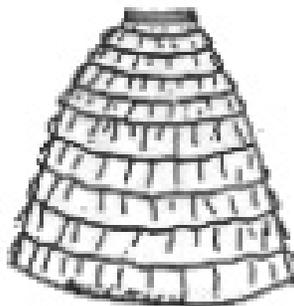
UNDERGARMENTS: PART II

Undergarments are important for the same reasons today as they were in the 1860s. You need to protect your garments from your skin and body oils. Undergarments should be comfy, and preferably white so you can clean them often. In my book, undergarments encompasses a lot of articles of clothing: Chemise, Drawers, Modesty Petticoat, Corded Petticoat, Quilted Petticoat, Corset, Hoop/Cage and Over Hoop Petticoat. Be sure to sew with a high quality cotton or muslin, and by all means pre-wash your material. If it's gonna shrink, it's better the fabric shrinks before you sew. Remember **COMFORT** is a top priority. If your undergarments don't fit & feel right you'll be as uncomfortable as the public thinks we are.

** Special Notes for choosing a style of Petticoat. A Flounced petti is much heavier weight than a plain one, remember you're adding layer upon layer. My "Secret Sewing Society" suggest the flounced only for over hoop petticoats allowing the hoop to carry and distribute some of the weight of the petti itself. Others save their fancy flounced pettis for showing off at fashion shows (as shocking as it is that they show off their underwear!)

HEIDI MARSH 60 FLOUNCED PETTICOAT

Average Cost: \$ 8.00
Sewing Level: Beg. / Int.
Sizing: Good



Pros: Directions were pretty clear and to the point.

Cons: This petti got mighty heavy with all these layers. Probably best kept for those special occasions and fashion shows. This one requires a bit more time as well, getting all these layers together.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★

HEIDI MARSH 63 BASIC PETTICOAT

Average Cost: \$ 6.75
Sewing Level: Beg. / Int.
Sizing: Good



Pros: Directions were pretty clear and to the point. Simple design.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★

** Special Note: Both the above patterns are also available in an elliptical version; for those ladies with an elliptical hoop.

HOME SPUN CHEMISE

Average Cost: \$ 9.00
Sewing Level: Beg. / Int.
Sizing: Good

Pros: Like the overall design, good width on shoulders making it good for under a ballgown. Has underarm gussets. Neck band can be made either yoked or straight, directions tell how to do both.

Cons: Most of our secret sewers shortened the length just a bit. And some didn't like the underarm gussets.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★

HomeSpun Patterns are not available in Big Name Stores but can be found at your nearest sutler or online at www.jamescountry.com

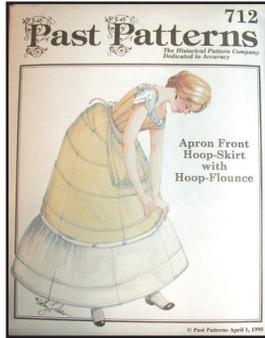
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Heidi Marsh Patterns are not available in Big Name Stores but can be found at your nearest sutler or online at www.fcsutler.com or www.jamescountry.com

UNDERGARMENTS: PART II cont.

PAST PATTERN 712 APRON FRONT HOOP- SKIRT WITH FLOUNCE



Average Cost: \$ 20.00

Sewing Level: Int./Advanced

Sizing: Good

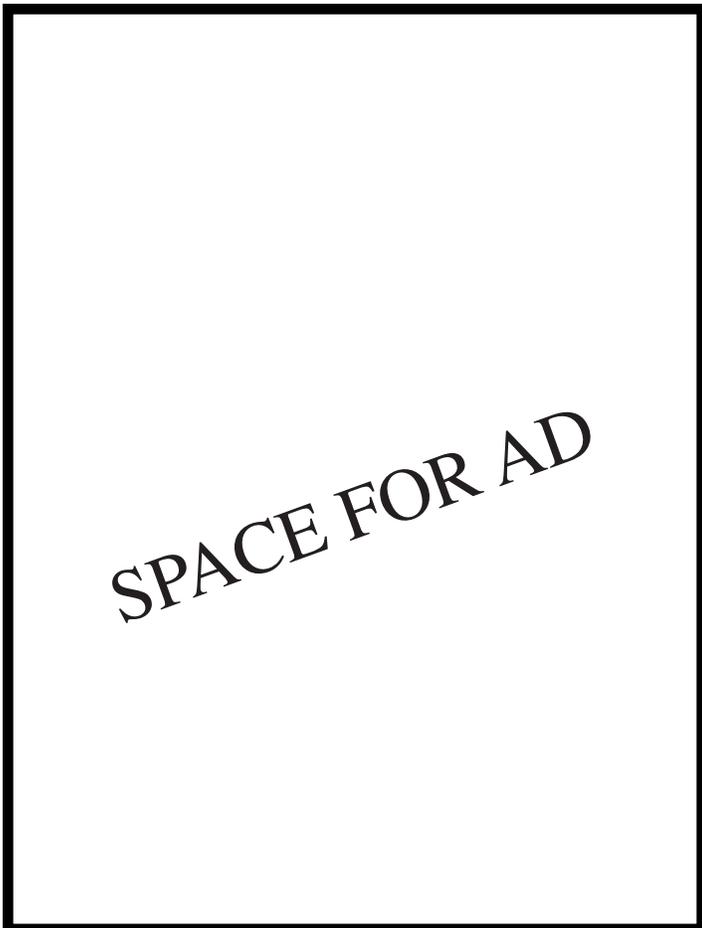
Pros: Pattern & directions were easy to read and not too hard to understand.

Cons: Pattern is slightly advanced so it's definitely not for beginners.

Documentation: Based on an original in the collection of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. Original was made of medium weight glazed cotton doobby weave of white or cream.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

** *Special Note:* A kit to make this pattern including all supplies except the fabric is available for \$55.00 plus postage.



PAST PATTERNS 706 MID 19TH CENTURY PETTICOAT & DRAWERS



Average Cost: \$ 15.00

Sewing Level: Beginners

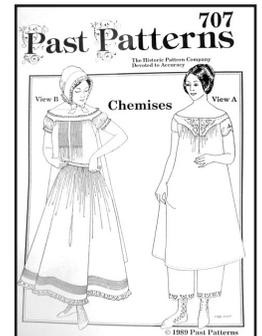
Sizing: Good

Pros: Pattern & directions were easy to read and understand. Simple design for beginners. This pattern even gives reproduction method and modern method sewing instructions including gauging on the waistband.

Documentation: Both items are based on originals from the collection of Betty Hughes.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

PAST PATTERNS 707 CHEMISES



Average Cost: \$ 12.00

Sewing Level: Beginners

Sizing: Good

Pros: Pattern & directions were easy to read and understand. Simple design for beginners. This pattern even gives reproduction method and modern method sewing instructions.

Cons: The only con we could find is that the ink on the pattern was a bit smelly. So if you have a sensitive nose, let the pattern air out for a day before starting.

Documentation: View A is based on an original chemise from the collection of Betty Hughes. View B is based on an original chemise from the collection of Beth Turza.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

Past Patterns are not available in Big Name Stores but can be found at your nearest sutler or online at www.pastpatterns.com

UNDERGARMENTS: PART II cont.

ELIZABETH STEWART CLARK DRAFT YOUR OWN DRAWERS

Average Cost: FREE!

Sewing Level: Beg. / Int.

You will need butcher/pattern paper to draw on.

Pros: Did we mention it's FREE!!! And because you're measuring your own body, it'll fit perfectly?

Cons: This particular pattern makes you draft your own pattern, so beginners might have difficulty. The pattern drawing process is slightly labor intensive, but hey you're making a pair of drawer that will fit perfectly.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

ELIZABETH STEWART CLARK DRAFT YOUR OWN PETTICOAT

Average Cost: FREE!

Sewing Level: Beg. / Int.

Pros: Did we mention it's FREE!!! A very simple design and good instructions.

Cons: This particular pattern makes you measure your own height, so you'll need to enlist the help of a buddy. (While you're at it, measure one out for her too.) You'll need a calculator to determine how much fabric you'll need. (unless you're good at math)

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

FREE ElizabethStewartClark Patterns can only be found online at www.ElizabethStewartClark.com

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ELIZABETH STEWART CLARK DRAFT YOUR OWN CHEMISE

Average Cost: FREE!

Sewing Level: Beginner / Intermediate

****Beginners might have difficulty with the drafting part, so be as patient as you can, and you will get through it!*

Pros: Did we mention it's FREE!!! Well written instructions. This is a very simple design with flat felled seams to create a smooth finished garment, inside and out. You can even choose the length of your sleeves. And she gives instructions on how to make tucks on the front instead of gathering. AND period instructions on how to eliminate the bulky areas in the back.

Cons: This particular pattern makes you draft your own pattern, so beginners might have difficulty. The drafting is the absolute hardest part, but most critical. Enlist the assistance of a friend to help measure. If you are a plus size gal, add a bit to the sleeve area as it tends to come out tight.

Documentation: Suggestions are given on how to make the back "not too bulky" from advice originally offered in Godey's Lady's Book June 1859.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

*** Special Note: Ms. Clark has gone to a lot of trouble to simplify these patterns so that you can make them yourself.*

Our absolute favorite part is when she out-right tells you not to fudge, fiddle, or in any other way LIE about your measurement numbers! Seriously that is a vital step in the sewing process. Don't lie about your size, or your clothing will never fit!

She even reminds you to add laundry markings (in case more than one women's things are being washed together) so that you can tell them apart.

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what to sew cont.

LAUGHING MOON #100 CHEMISE & DRAWERS

Average Cost: \$14.00

Sewing Level: Beginner

Sizing: Good

Pros: Easy, simple design and everyone loved the pin tucks.

Has a great wide shoulder design for wearing with a ballgown or other low cut bodice. Good use of fabric with little wasted. Gave options on drawers for open or closed crotch seams.

Cons: Some of our full figure sewers had problems with the fitting in the sleeve hole area. If you have muscular or larger arms you may need to widen this area. Our smaller lady found the neckline to be too wide, so you smaller ladies may need to make adjustments there.

Documentation: Chemise is based on an 1880 Harper's Bazaar, and the drawers are dated between 1888-1920, so they are a bit late for CW time period.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★★★★

***Corset will be reviewed later this year after comfort test.



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LAUGHING MOON #112 BELL & ELLIPTICAL HOOP

Average Cost: \$14.00

Sewing Level: Beg. / Int.

Sizing: Good

Pros: Good Directions and easy to follow along.

Cons: View A: Bell-- Shape is very narrow and bottom doesn't flare out enough. View B: Elliptical-- Shape is better, but the back juts out a little too much.

Overall Satisfaction: ★★

***Note: I originally bought this pattern for my 1880's impression, and the bustle patterns are pretty good.



PATTERN REVIEW UPDATE

Our Original Article review is listed on the Laughing Moon #112 pattern. After the article came out, there were some questions. The following was printed two articles later as a revision to the pattern review:

Laughing Moon Pattern #112 Bell & Elliptical Hoops. Seems our secret sewer's opinion of this pattern needs a bit of tweaking. Our "Resident Expert" would like to revise the overall opinion for the elliptical hoop. Our article said "it juts out too far", what should have been said is that it "juts out too far in the back for an 1861-1863 impression." Apparently by 1864 some original hoops have been documented with this elliptical design. With this change, we will also revise our overall satisfaction of this pattern to a ★★★.

Thanks for those of you who brought this to my attention so that I could have our new "resident expert" give her two cents worth on a previously reviewed pattern.

Laughing Moon Patterns are not available in Big Name Stores but can be found at your nearest sutler or online at www.lafnmoon.com

That wraps up Part II of our reviews of UNDER-GARMENTS, we have sewn as many patterns as we could. And boy are we all tired of **WHITE!** We're ready to move on to color. Hopefully you have been able to find at least one pattern that strikes your fancy.

In the next article I will start our reviews of WORK DRESSES & APRONS. These articles will be more detailed and we'll even include pictures of the final product. Something which was "indecent" to do with undergarments. You'll be able to see what the original pattern cover looked like and compare it to what our final dress looks like. We will continue to keep sewing, and look forward to filling our closets with new stuff!

Each review might include new season stuff too, as the major name brands have new patterns due out in Spring/Fall seasons. So if you see a pattern # and cannot find it check EBAY. If a new pattern comes out midseason and I've passed that category, don't fret, one of my last articles will cover "missed patterns".

If you miss one of the category reviews, don't worry, one of my last articles will highlight our top picks from every category.

Please feel free to contact me if you know of a pattern line we are missing. I love new patterns!

MEET CHERI FRY

She lives in a small ranch style house in Jacksonville, IL.

Her new home is much closer to work, and has a fully functional sewing room that is completely filled with fabrics and trims.

Cheri lives with two male cats that she has rescued. They are always near her feet as she sews.

They love playing with any trims or ribbons that may happen to fall off the table.

Cheri has been Civil War reenacting since June 2004. Her main interest is women's clothing. Cheri does both a middle-upper class & working class impression.

Cheri's real life job is as a Graphic Arts Specialist for Bound to Stay Bound Books in Jacksonville, IL. B'TSB specializes in binding quality children's books for schools and libraries. www.btsb.com

Cheri is a driving force behind Veterans Remembered, which honors veterans from all wars. She is also on the General Grierson Days committee. More information can be found on these committees on a web site she designed www.griersonsociety.org

