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The Styles of Clothing Worn by Women in Minnesota from 1870 to 1880

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The Styles of Clothing Worn by Women in Minnesota from 1870 to 1880.

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In the Department of Theater

by
Katrina Dolezal
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The Styles of Clothing Worn by Women in Minnesota from 1870 to 1880

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Introduction

When I first started this project I knew only that I wanted to study women’s clothing in Minnesota during some part of the nineteenth century. At first I thought this would not be a suitable topic for a thesis, but after encouragement from Kaarin Johnston, my thesis advisor, I decided to pursue the idea by choosing a more specific time period in Minnesota’s history and looking at how women’s clothing varied among people of different economic levels.

Eventually, I narrowed the period to the 1870’s. This decision was made because I did not want to study the era of the Civil War, and I believed that there would be relatively few surviving photographs and garments for me to examine from the years before the Civil War. The line of clothing from the 1870’s appealed to me more than the clothing worn in other decades after the Civil War. I decided that although the focus of my project would be Minnesota, looking at surrounding areas would be a worthwhile undertaking because conditions in other Upper Midwestern frontier states were often not that different from conditions in Minnesota.

I started this project with the idea that I would be able to compare how different styles of dress in Minnesota were related to differences in the economic status and/or social position of the women who wore them. However, after I began to look at the clothing and pictures available for study, I realized this would not be possible. Some pictures from this time period
have names on them, and it is possible to learn the status of the women in those pictures, but the majority of them are pictures of unknown women, whose status can only be guessed. This is also true of surviving clothing. Sometimes the donor knew who wore the dress and told the museum, but more frequently no information about the original wearer or her social status is known. After encountering this difficulty I talked to another professor, Annette Atkins. She suggested I revise my idea and write on the range of clothing that was worn in the Upper Midwest during the 1870's.

This paper, therefore, has developed into a study of the different styles of women's clothing worn in Minnesota during the 1870's. I have discovered that one problem encountered when studying history is that major events rarely happen in easy-to-split sequences. In the same way, fashions do not suddenly change when the calendar year does, nor do they remain the same throughout a decade. Fashion usually evolves rather than suddenly changes, making it difficult to divide one era of fashion history from another. The decade of the 1870's can be divided into at least two clothing periods, one from 1870-1875 and the other from 1875-1880. Because fashion is not static, some of the dresses and styles worn at the beginning and end of the decade may also have been worn in the late sixties or early eighties.

The paper focuses on the overdresses worn by women in this period. But it would be impossible to study the overgarment without understanding that 1870's fashions were shaped by the women's undergarments. The same skirt worn over two different shapes of bustle would have resulted in two distinct styles. Therefore, I have included a section on foundation garments. Undergarments themselves, however, are not the desired focus of my paper, so I have touched upon them only briefly.
As I was beginning my research, I learned that the Minnesota History Center (MHC), in St. Paul, Minnesota, has a clothing collection which it is possible to view upon request. This collection became my greatest non-print resource. In addition, the MHC became my primary resource for photographs, although I have also used information from the Stearns Country Heritage Center and photographs found in books. Information which I gathered about specific dresses from the Minnesota History Center, is included in Appendix A. When I discuss one of these dresses in my paper I will refer to it as "dress number __," or just by number, directing the reader to the appendix for more information.

I was originally challenged by the prospect of finding other primary sources, but after getting started I realized that many were available. I requested fashion journals from the 1870's through interlibrary loan, and I looked at reprints of fashion journals and pattern magazines which have been published by Dover books. I also looked at a Demorest's pattern catalogue which is housed at the MHC. Some store ledgers which I examined, dated from 1868 to 1880, contained information on the type and prices of fabric which was sold, but because I do not have the practice necessary to decipher the handwriting in many of the ledgers and other handwritten papers, I discovered that a more accessible resource was the advertising and articles on fashion which were published in Minnesota newspapers from the 1870's.

I have had two basic purposes for the study reported in this thesis. I hoped to provide an understanding of the clothing worn by women in Minnesota during the years 1870-1880 and have sought an understanding of the influences that affected women's clothing during this period. I also desired to assemble an illustrated record of typical women's fashion during this period. I wanted to show that pioneer women, who settled even in remote corners of the state, still tried to keep up to date with the fashion prevalent in the rest of the nation, but that
concessions to fashion were made because of lack of money and the harsh working conditions on the frontier.

The words "fashion" and "style" can be confusing because they are so often used interchangeably. I have used the definition of fashion as the prevailing style of dress among the people generally considered to be leaders of society. I have then defined style as the characteristics of the clothes worn; aspects such as the fabric, cut, decoration, and general line of the garment. There are other words which are common to the discussion of nineteenth-century clothing, which may be unfamiliar to people who have not studied this subject. For this reason I have included a glossary with the appendixes. Words that are in the glossary will be marked with an asterisk(*).

It is important, when examining the clothing woman wore in the 1870's, to understand what forces were acting on women's lives to shape their clothing choices. First it is important to understand what was influencing clothing styles throughout the country. Fashionable women's clothing in Minnesota generally followed the styles on the East Coast. Those who could afford to subscribe to ladies magazines did so, and fashion news was also distributed through the newspapers. It is also important to look at how conditions specific to Minnesota affected fashion and styles throughout the state.
Culture and Fashion in the United States

In order to understand women’s fashion from the 1870’s it is important to know something about the culture which shaped the fashion. The 1870’s was a decade of growth and change that was reflected in the style of women’s clothing throughout the United States. The position of women in American society was becoming more public, and their fashions were becoming more elaborate. The “women’s sphere” of previous decades was still present, but it was expanding outside the home. The primary status of married women, however, still came from their positions as wives and mothers. It was not considered proper for a married woman to work for wages outside the home, but she could take in boarders and sewing, as well as volunteer outside the home. Unmarried women gained the freedom to work outside the home at jobs that seemed related to the women’s sphere, or at least were not in direct conflict with it.

The heroine in Louisa May Alcott’s Work, was typical in that her work was irregular and interchangeable. “Christie was one of that large class of women, who, moderately
endowed with talents, earnest and true hearted, are driven by necessity, temperament, or
principle, out into the world to find support, happiness, and a home for themselves” (Alcott
245). Domestic work was still the most common form of employment throughout this
decade, but other possibilities included jobs related to the manufacture of cloth, clothing,
food products, and tobacco products (Wolloch 231, 232). Jobs making cloth and sewing
were often easy to find, and women stayed involved in the production of clothing in this way.
Women also worked as nurses, office workers, sales clerks, switchboard operators, and in
other similar occupations. In general, women were given the non-skilled jobs in any
profession they entered. This was because it was expected that a woman would stop working
when she married and society still expected women to marry. Those women who did not
marry and had to support themselves often held many jobs in succession. Like Christie in
Work, they might find work in a series of jobs as a maid, a teacher, a nursemaid, and/or a
seamstress.

The subject of education for women was still controversial. It was considered by
some to be dangerous because, “as Edward Clarke's influential Sex in Education (1873)
explained, mental activity drew blood from the nervous system and reproductive
organs”(Wolloch 278). Another objection to women’s education was that it was a waste of
time and money to educate women who would just get married and spend the rest of their
lives at home. An advice book in 1869 suggested that, “A woman, when she becomes a
mother, should withdraw herself from the world” (Cott 106).
However, the woman’s sphere was expanding. Teaching, librarianship, and various forms of social work were three professions which women began to enter in this decade. Because these jobs expanded the role of women as mothers, moral guardians, and guardians of culture, they became acceptable occupations for women (Woloch 247). As women moved into the business world, a specific form of dress, one that was of plain fabric, without much trim, was recognized as appropriate for work. This style was promoted in etiquette books and fashion magazines which described appropriate attire for different activities (Hecklinger).

Becoming a professional woman could be a lifelong career or a step on the path to marriage. It was an option many women seemed happy to have, as between seven and eight percent of women born between 1835 and 1855 never married. This was due in part to a drop in the number of eligible men which was caused by the Civil War, but it was also due to the higher expectations held by women (Woloch 274). Even if there were men available, it did not follow that these men would be suitable for marriage. Magazines and public speakers warned mothers to train their daughters in some skill, such as the construction of clothing, which would be useful for self-support in case it became necessary.

A married woman was dependent on her husband after they married. The death or business failure of a husband or a father could cause dire consequences for the family. While most people, women as well as men, accepted this division of society, a few began to ask for more equal treatment of the genders. During the 1870's the National Women’s Suffrage Movement started to gain attention. The movement gained some supporters, but most women and men did not believe that the women’s sphere needed changing (Woloch 115).
The suffrage movement was accompanied by an attempt to change fashions to a more “natural form,” but this movement did not have any marked influence on fashion (Hahn 128).

In addition to changing social roles, new and changing technologies influenced women’s fashions in the 1870’s.

“Nineteenth century industrialization and urbanization led to a fragmentation of social relations between classes and between men and women, transforming the form and content of women’s roles. From the natural association of the family within pre-industrial farm life, American women passed to newer and more specialized relationships with each other through the situation of factory labor and the growth of political and social organizations.” (Cott 45)

The mills and factories which produced fabric and clothing had started the changes in previous decades. In the 1870’s sewing machine and paper patterns were the new technologies that had the greatest influence on woman’s fashion.

During the 1870’s, women’s clothing became more tailored and elaborate than ever before. Perhaps as a reaction to women’s new sphere, “The style of overcoats, jackets, and sleeves required a kind and a standard of cutting and fitting which changed the art of dressmaking considerably and demanded more skill and patience” (Young 104). The elaborate cut and drapery were time consuming and difficult to achieve, yet more women than ever were dressing in fashionable clothing, imitating the styles set by the leaders of the fashion world. Two major technological innovations contributed to the general availability of these new styles -- the sewing machine and the paper pattern. The sewing machine was the most important of the two and it had both a direct and an indirect influence on the availability of fashionable clothing.
The first practical sewing machine was invented in England between 1789 and 1790 by Thomas Saint. It took another sixty years before someone tried to design a machine that could be successfully mass marketed. In 1846 Elias Howe registered his original patent for the sewing machine that was the forerunner of a large variety of machines in the following years. During the Civil War, sewing machines were put to use constructing clothing for the many soldiers who needed uniforms. The machines passed this ability test and by 1870 there were many machines marketed for home use. Some were treadle machines, others were hand-turned, and a small hand held machine could be purchased for sewing light fabrics. Some machines did chain stitching and others sewed a running stitch. The many attachments which were available varied from machine to machine. Attachments could include a narrow hemmer which doubled as a feller,* a wide hemmer,* tucker,* quilter,* gatherer,* binder,*corder,* a braider,* and an embroidering foot.* (Domestic) One or two of these attachments might come with a machine, but the others would require a separate purchase.

Because sewing machines cut the sewing time of a garment almost in half, the ready-made garment industry spiraled. For the most part, the ready-made garment industry catered to men. The availability of ready made men’s clothing freed women from the construction of these clothes at home, allowing more time for other tasks. The ready-made industry took advantage of the power of sewing machines to construct some women’s garments, especially corsets, which were then mass marketed. Wrappers,* crinolines*, cloaks, and wraps were other garments made _en masse_ for women and marketed across the country by the 1870’s. (Hollander 107)
Dressmakers also made use of the sewing machine. Having machines available meant that more detail could be sewn onto a dress and it still could be finished in less time than a simpler hand sewn dress. The extra attachments for a machine would most likely be purchased by a dressmaker to make trim and decoration. According to Byrde, machines could also be used to attach large amounts of trim to the dresses. Even if the extra attachments were not purchased, and the trim was attached by hand, having a machine became something of a necessity for a dressmaker.

While the sewing machine was a great help to dressmakers and tailors, patterns were an important invention for housewives. Previous to the invention of paper patterns, many women would fabricate a new pattern from an old dress, either picking it apart or tracing around it. The availability of patterns made it easier to see how a dress was cut to create the elaborate drapery used throughout this decade. Interestingly, pattern magazines often sold patterns for pieces of a garment, rather than for the entire outfit. In the April, 1871 Metropolitan magazine, a pattern for a plain waist,* a common term for a bodice,* sold for between 15 and 20 cents. The pattern which included both the trimmed and plain version cost between 75 cents and $1.00. A plain apron pattern cost 25 cents, and the trimmed version cost $1.25. A walking skirt pattern cost 35 cents plain and $2.00 trimmed, while the overskirt cost 25 cents plain and between $1.25 and $1.50 trimmed. The fashion magazines of the day also commonly included a pattern which could be enlarged and deciphered by the readers. (Fig. 1) Since many women received and shared these magazines with one another, patterns became widely available.
In 1870 Harper's Magazine included foldout supplements of life-size patterns. Instructions indicated which figures to trace for a complete pattern.

Figure 1
The availability of aids for the construction of clothing combined with the availability of low cost fabrics (especially calicos) to influence the new dress styles. By 1872, large calico printing establishments in New England made calico a material that was affordable to almost everyone. Homespun, an inexpensive homemade fabric of linen and wool, which was usually a heavy fabric wasting away. Heavy fabric would not drape well into the folds of the new styles. Calico dresses, on the other hand, could be used to sew the new fashions since calico would drape like silk, allowing for the folds and poufs of these styles. (Fig. 2)

In addition to the changes in construction techniques and fabrics made possible by new technologies, changes in the European world of fashion influenced the changes in women's clothing in America. Americans had been drawing their ideas about fashion from European fashions since the formation of the United States. During the 1860's and 1870's the French were the leaders of fashion. American magazines would copy the French fashions approximately a year after they appeared in France. In the 1860's, an Englishman named Worth became dressmaker to the French Empress Eugenie and began setting fashions throughout Europe and America. In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War put an end to the trend-setting court, and for a time many French couturiers fled their country. Some went to Brussels where they continued to work, but others soon returned to France, and Paris resumed dictating fashion. Worth survived the transition in Paris, and it was soon apparent that his influence was greater after the war than before. The name of Worth became synonymous with Paris fashion (Nunn 137).
This two-piece printed calico polonaise dress (early 1870s) demonstrates well the fact that a pattern could be used for a simple calico as well as for a fancy silk—its degree of elegance depending upon the trim.

Figure 2
The interruption of fashion news from Paris during the Franco-Prussian War caused some differences in style between the way women dressed in Europe and America. The urge for invention and improvisation had created variations in dress in America for years, and with the break in fashion news, Americans were able to try setting the pace in the fashion world (Shuman 26). The panniers,* which Worth tried to introduce just before the Franco-Prussian war broke out, never gained popularity in America, and the fullness in skirts moved to the back with a small bustle* or crinoletta, rather than to the sides, as in France. This style was adopted and modified throughout the western world.

During the 1870's, members of the aristocracy throughout the western world were losing their place as the leaders of society. Female actors and "professional beauties," such as Lili Langtry, became the focus of fashion magazines and were admired by their readers. Theater companies started touring in the United States. Stars and full companies brought "culture" in the form of theater and spread examples of fashion throughout the country.

Another manner in which fashion information was disseminated was fashion magazines. Several women's fashion magazines were published in America during this period. They were distributed throughout the country, including in the upper midwestern states, such as Minnesota. These magazines included Peterson's Magazine, Harpers Bazaar, and Godey's Lady's Book. Fashion publications pictured the present trends and anticipated new ones. These magazines contained short stories and poems, advice, recipes, and music. They also included discussions of materials, trimmings, and the general style of women's clothing. Craft patterns and ideas were common in these magazines, and patterns for dresses
were eventually printed in each issue. Each issue of all three of these magazines also had a printed frontispiece showing a sentimental scene which could be removed and framed for household decoration. (Fig. 3)

Of these magazines, *Godey's Lady's Book* is perhaps most associated with the Victorian era. According to Finley, Sarah Hale started to publish the *Lady's Magazine* in Boston in 1828 as a literary magazine rather than as a fashion journal. In 1830 Louis Godey followed Sarah Hale's lead and began publishing his own *Lady's Book* in Philadelphia. These magazines merged in December of 1836 when Godey bought Hale out for the purpose of acquiring Hale as an editor. With the first issue of 1837, the readership lists of the *Lady's Book* and the *Ladies Magazine* were combined. The book was edited in Boston and published in Philadelphia until 1841, when Sarah Hale moved to Boston. She remained the editor until 1877. Hale kept up the literary quality of the magazine and was considered an authority on any subject related to the home. Under her editorship the *Lady's Book* attained the largest circulation of any monthly published during her time.

While Sarah Hale concentrated on the literary aspects of the magazine, Louis Godey introduced the hand colored prints for which his magazine would later become famous. (Fig. 4) After the introduction of the fashion plate to the *Lady's Book*, Sarah Hale wrote frequently about the superiority of American taste over French ideas and expounded on the need for moderation in women's dress. Louis Godey claimed that the plates used for his color pages were "engraved and colored especially for *Godey's Lady's book*," (Daves 166) but that has been recently contested.
At least one authority on nineteenth-century fashion history attributes the original designs of Godey’s plates to Paris artists working for French magazines. Vyvyan Holland, author of a carefully documented work on fashion plates in the nineteenth century, says that the early Godey’s plates were identifiable copies of French plates, re-engraved in America with the original captions erased and American captions substituted. (Daves 166)

Throughout the 1870’s, until 1877 when the magazine ceased publication, the fashion editor of Godey’s offered a buying service for readers who lived at a distance from large cities. Bonnets, material for dresses, children’s clothing, jewelry, hairwork*, and other items could be purchased and would be sent anywhere in the country upon request. Detailed information about measurements and the specific goods desired, as well as a desired price range was requested from the buyer. The magazine included a disclaimer that the sale was final when the goods were sent, and that the publisher of the magazine had no interest in, or knowledge of, the transactions (Hale 565). This service did not provide women with ready-made clothing for themselves. Rather, it was a way to acquire fashionable materials with which to make one’s own dresses.

Peterson’s Magazine, published monthly, shared the same format as Godey’s, but it lacked Sarah Hale’s individuality and commitment to publish the best writers of the period. It did, however, have color plates which many considered better than those offered by
Godley's. "The plates were titled in French and probably printed directly from French plates" (Daves 168). Although Peterson's reached its height of circulation in 1870 and never matched Godley's circulation, it did not cease publishing until 1898.

Unlike Peterson's and Godley's, which were beginning to decline in the 1870's, Harpers Bazaar was just getting started. Organized in 1867, it was a weekly publication different from any others of the time. It was printed in black and white and was simpler than the colorful French magazines. In contrast to the other American magazines, it addressed itself mainly to ladies whose households were staffed with servants. Most of the fashions shown were impractical for any sort of housework and "many of the gowns were so constructed that it would have been impossible for a woman to dress herself without assistance" (Blum, Bazzar vii). (Fig. 5)

Some of the engravings in Harpers were taken directly from carefully selected European fashion plates, while others were drawn specifically with American tastes in mind. Patterns were offered for many of the dresses pictured. Sometimes the patterns were printed in the magazine, and sometimes they were available by mail-order. These patterns were so complex that they are now difficult for anyone but experts to decipher (Mills 92).

Demorest's Magazine and The Metropolitan were two other popular publications during the 1870's. These magazines sold patterns. Demorest's began as a pattern quarterly in the early 1860's and was published monthly by 1866. Throughout the 1870's, this magazine offered written material including advice, recipes, and music. There were pattern pages and French fashion plates in every issue. Patterns were sold by the piece, an overskirt
for one price, the sleeve for another, and the bodice for a third (Daves 169). The magazine also offered the service of shopping by mail for subscribers who lived at a distance which was similar to the service offered by *Godey's*. Fabric, bonnets, mantles, and other such items could be ordered and shipped for a small fee. By the 1870's, *Demorest's* included fashion plates and written articles similar to those in the fashion magazines, but its main focus was still the sale of patterns, and pages of pattern plates appeared in every magazine. Mme Demorest translated French models to an American style and insisted that her designs were more elegant than the originals (Daves 138).

Ebenezer and Ellen Butterick started producing paper patterns with graded sizes in 1860. Eight years later they had six million patterns in their annual output. Most of these patterns were for women's clothing and were sold through the Butterick catalogue, called *The Metropolitan*. Although the Butterick catalog did not gain quite the circulation of Mme Demorest's magazine, they sold more patterns annually, and the company still exists. Another company which has lasted over a hundred years is McCall's, which started publishing a pattern journal in 1873.

These pattern journals and fashion magazines enabled women from different areas of the country to develop a similar sense of fashion. Those women who could afford to would subscribe to at least one such magazine and would share them with their friends and neighbors. Eagerly anticipated and thoroughly pored over when they arrived, these magazines clearly showed the changing fashions throughout the decade. They served much the same purpose as magazines and televisions do in the present time; they gave women a
chance to see what cut and style of dress was being promoted as fashionable. The cut of the
bodice, the sleeves, the skirt, and perhaps an overskirt created the variations in style. The cut
that was worn by leaders of society and promoted in ladies magazines was considered
fashionable and was imitated to some degree by most women.

In her book *Sex and Suits*, Hollander writes, “Most fashion in dress is adopted with
the conscious wish not to look fashionable, but to look right” (11). Most women who were
not in the extreme upper classes of society would not have been comfortable wearing “high
fashion,” but their clothing would generally reflect the line and styles of such fashion at a
more moderate level. Women in the 1870’s did not contradict this rule; they chose their style
of dress based on what they thought looked proper, considering the fashions shown in
magazines, their social status, and what other women around them were wearing. A
fashionable woman of the late nineteenth century would need, “gowns for the morning hours,
for afternoons at home, for visiting, for dinners, or for receptions and balls . . . . There were
costumes for promenading and costumes for traveling” (Blum, *Bazaar* vi). Family income
determined the number of dresses a woman would own, but it was considered important to
have a minimum of three dresses; one for work such as laundry and other messy tasks, one
for everyday, and one for Sunday and company. Advice books on what a woman should have
in her trousseau listed six different types of dresses a woman should own; “morning-dresses,
walking-suits, carriage-dresses, one traveling-dress, one very handsome suit to return bridal
calls, and last but not least the bridal dress.” These dresses were in addition to a number of
skirts, wrappers, undergarments, and other such items.
Throughout history, clothing has reflected one's place in society, and emphasized the differences between the upper and lower classes. The quantity of clothing a woman owned and how fashionable it was, were good indicators of the level of a woman's social status. With the industrial revolution, and the invention of such products as the automatic loom and the sewing machine, fashions became more similar among different classes, but some differences remained. In the city, "Although female servants wore clothes similar to their mistresses, there was no danger that one would be mistaken for the other. . . . Somber colors, poorer fabrics stripped of trimmings, along with a maid's or nurse's headdress would indicate the servant's station in society" (Blum, Bazaar vii). Costly materials, large amounts of trim, frills that would get in the way of work, and clothing that took large amounts of time to make were all representative of a wealthy life style. (Fig. 6)

Because of the high cost of silk, a middle-class woman often owned only one silk dress. Wealthy women, in contrast, would often own only silk. This did not limit their wardrobes considering the many types of silk fabrics available, ranging from supple silk satin and velvet to the stiffer fabrics such as taffeta and grosgrain. Corded silks were especially popular, as was poplin, a fabric with silk warp and worsted weft. Other fabrics used during the 1870's, especially by rural and poorer women, included printed cottons (especially calico), printed flannels*, cambric, * light woolen twills and other woolen fabrics.

During the early 1870's it was common to have an elegant dress made entirely of one fabric, all the trim being self-trim*, perhaps with some lace edging. This practice started to change during the decade. The invention of aniline* dyes in 1856 created a wide variety of
new colors, and in the later 1870's it became common to use either two colors of fabric or contrasting colors in a dress.

It would be impossible to list all the colors used in dresses during the 1870's, but some of the deeper colors included dragon green, greenish grey, red mahogany, mauve, prune (almost black), sphinx grey, navy blue, royal blue, and black. Lighter colors included buff, lilac, maize, salmon, pale green, pale blue, violet, pale brown, and ecru. An alternative to using two colors to provide contrast in a dress was to use two types of fabric of matching or contrasting colors. One fabric could be used for the bodice and a second for the skirt with the fabric of the bodice used to help trim the skirt and the fabric of the skirt used to trim the bodice.

The trim was an important element of the dress. (Fig. 7) Lace was common for trimming. It was added in flat bands, used to edge velvet, mixed with the ruching* of the materials of the dress, and gathered to make cuffs and collars. Other trimmings included pleats, fringe, braid, cording, smocking, flounces, or a combination of these. Some flounces were gathered and applied in large ruches. More often they were pleated. Trimmings of silk fringe were widely used, and bows, plain or piped, were also popular. Early in the decade trimming was used in copious amounts, but later in the 1870's trimmings became simpler.

The outermost layers of a garment are the most visible elements, but during the 1870's the foundation garments were at least as important to the overall look of the dress. The shape of women's clothing throughout the 1870's was created and supported by undergarments.
Figure 7
There were three basic types of undergarments considered necessary to a woman’s dress: 1) the clothing worn next to the skin (a chemise* and drawers* or a combination made in one piece); 2) the corset and its cover (called either a corset cover or camisole); and 3) skirt supporting garments (petticoats and the bustle, crinoline, or crinolette*). Other undergarments which were not necessary but could be worn included pads of cotton or wool used as bust enhancers, a long or short sleeve vest which could be made of silk, merino,* or flannel, and, after 1878, elastic suspenders for stockings which attached to a waist band which fit over the corset.

The drawers and the chemise were worn next to the skin. In 1874 they were also marketed in the form of “combinations” in which the drawers and chemise were combined into one garment. The combinations could be made of linen, merino, calico, or nainsook,* and sometimes included buttons to which the petticoats could be attached. Petticoats were also a necessary part of any wardrobe in the 1870's. They were made in various solid colors (black and white being the most common) and were highly decorated with lace and ruffles. Petticoats followed the shape of the outer skirt creating a smooth line over the supporting structure used to shape the skirt.

The one constant element in fashion throughout the 1870's was fullness in the back of the skirt. The changing size and shape of the skirts in the 1870's was in large part due to the changes in the supporting structures worn underneath the skirts of this decade.(Fig. 8) By the end of the 1860's, the hoop, which had been worn to hold the fullness of the skirts away from the body, was quite small, but a large amount of material was being draped behind
the skirt, creating fullness in the back. This back fullness lasted throughout the 1870's. To help achieve this fullness women wore many variations of an underskirt, or part of an underskirt, stiffened with boning, horsehair, or starch. The metal cages which many people think of when they hear the term bustle, did not make their appearance until the 1880's.

In 1870 and 1871 dresses were still worn with crinolines that had hoops in the back, but by 1872 the crinoletta or bustle, both often referred to by the French name *tournure*, had replaced the crinoline. These bustles and crinolettas were made of whatever appropriate materials were available. The first bustles were “a matter of down-filled pillows or puffs or of a few steels or whalebone inserted into the top of the petticoat behind and pulled into half hoops by means of tapes attached to the inner side” (Cunnington 113). Throughout the seventies horsehair bustles and petticoats slowly replaced the steel lined crinolines. Women who could not afford to purchase a crinoletta used whatever was available to create the bustle silhouette. One woman who was without a bustle in 1871 describes how her problem was solved by a friend, “She found me a piece of white goods, filling it with newspapers and putting strings to it and I put it on” (Severa 296). After 1877, the fullness started to move down the back, and was reduced in size; the bustle worn with this style of dress was frequently a small pad, which sometimes had steel support.

During the 1870's the dress began to mold to the figure in front and around the hips. As the corset grew longer and more rigid, a homemade corset was no longer sufficient to create the fashionable body shape, and for the first time, ladies’ magazines began to advertise corsets on a regular basis. The exaggerated curve of the bust and hips in proportion to the
small waist could cause whalebone to break at the waist, and steel became the common substitute. In 1873 a new shaped steel busk*, called a “spoon busk,” was on the market. (Fig. 9) The new steel busks, more boning and cording, and the use of steam and starch to mold the finished shape made the corset “a much heavier and more restricting garment” (Waugh 83). During the 1870’s it was commonly believed that corsets provided a moral function because they reminded the woman to exercise self-restraint. This was considered an important reminder as woman moved out of the private sphere, and while a woman might not wear a corset in the privacy of her home, it was always expected in public. Although “tight lacing” was frowned upon by members of the health profession, properly laced corsets were seen as healthy. According to Anne Hollander, tight lacing was not commonly practiced among the middle and upper classes. The grip of corsets was supposed to be firm, but not excessively tight. “It was often described as reassuring rather than troublesome” (Hollander 141).

By 1870 most men’s clothing could be mail-ordered, but there was no easy way to make well-fitting standardized women’s clothing. Undergarments were among the few items of women’s apparel that could be mail-ordered, ready-to-wear. Other women’s garments that could be purchased ready-to-wear included hats and bonnets, as well as wrappers, mantles, cloaks, and capes, all garments which required no fitting at all. Dresses were made to fit closely over the corseted figure, and the “superior cut and fit of dresses, not just the richness of their surface, had come to be what demonstrated their superior elegance” (Hollander 107).
Figure 9
Even for those who were not as concerned with fashionable fit, dresses were still more likely to be made at home because of cost.

During the 1870's, some dresses were made in one piece, but a separate skirt and waist was becoming a common style. Although throughout the decade interest was "centered on a woman's waist, and the bodice, by its mere plainness and perfect fit, [was] accentuated firstly by the vast amount of trimmings and drapery which enfolds the figure," the shape of the bodice and skirt was changing (Bradfield 228). Fashions changed from a short-waisted bodice and a skirt that had a high bustle during the first half of the decade, to the long cuirass bodice with a low bustle and drapery at the end of the decade. (Fig. 10) Skirt styles can also be divided between these two periods, which conveniently split the decade in half, with general styles shifting about 1875.

A common style of dress throughout the 1870's was the polonaise. This was a two piece dress which consisted of an underskirt, and a bodice with a connected overskirt. (Fig. 11) Early in the decade the bodice was tight-fitting, short-waisted, and buttoned down the front. Toward the end of the decade the drapery and poufs were likely to have been replaced by a straighter cut down the back (Byrde 72). The buttons might have stopped at the waist, or continued down the front of the overskirt. The sleeves of an early polonaise were loose, unadorned and tended to widen slightly from the elbow to the wrist, where they finished with a ruffle or cuff. Latter in the decade sleeves became tighter fitting. There was no waist seam between the bodice and the overskirt. The fabric continued straight down. There is an
excellent example of a polonaise from the late 1870's in the Minnesota History Center collection (dress 61.97.1).

The back of the polonaise was fitted to the waist. At the waist, the fabric was cut to add an additional six to twelve inches of fabric at a right angle to vertical center back seam. These panels were then joined at the center, folded in at the waist, and sewn together at the top, forming a large box pleat. This extra fabric was then gathered, bunched, puffed, and trimmed, creating an enormous bustle. In front, the overskirt would usually drape to form an apron effect, or curve down and out from the waist. The polonaise bodice was worn over a small bustle and an underskirt which was trimmed with pleated or gathered flounces, gauged sections, tucking and/or ribbon bands. The underskirt would sometimes have a train, depending upon the purpose of the dress. It was the draping of the fabric of the polonaise which provided the majority of the bulk in the back of this style dress.

Although some fashions, such as the polonaise, lasted throughout the 1870's, there is a noticeable difference between the cut of clothes in the first and second half of the decade. The style of the earlier part of the decade, from 1870 to 1875, was more massive than the latter half which extended from 1875 to 1880. In the first half of the decade, skirts were larger and there was obvious bulk to the dress. During the later half of the decade, fashions moved closer to the body, skirts became narrower, and bodices more form fitted.

During the early 1870's, a bodice and skirt, possibly with an overskirt, was the general style. Bodices, commonly called waists, were short basques* which were tightly fitted with seams from shoulder to waist. Bodices were lined and in most cases boned. Whalebone,
actually baleen cut into strips, was used for boning bodices in this decade. The type and quality of the dress determined how much boning was used. For the most part boning was light and short, but the more formal the dress, the more boning was used. An evening dress could be lined in satin and boned at every seam, but day dresses for at-home wear were frequently lined in muslin and left unboned. (Fig. 12) Boning could be placed at the center front or back, at any of the seams, and, as was common, at the darts in the bodice.

In the early 1870's a jacket bodice with a peplum* was popular. Although some ball gowns fastened up the back, the bodice for day dresses fastened in front. During the first half of the 1870's the bodice became more short-waisted as the bustle in back caused the peplum to move higher in the back. If the bodice was not a polonaise, it frequently had a small peplum in front which grew larger and flared in back, often being cut in the same manner as the back of a polonaise, but on a smaller scale. The peplum spread out in back and rested on top of the bustle, often with a bow to add further bulk at the bustle. Many examples of different syles of peplums can be found in appendix A.

Most bodices had a horizontal waistline, but evening bodices might come to a point at the bottom. Necklines were high, and were commonly trimmed to match the sleeves. Sleeves, which were usually cut in two pieces, fit loosely. They tended to widen slightly at the wrist and had decorative cuffs which were often edged with ruching or lace. Standing band collars were common. They were often trimmed to simulate a square or a deep v-shape with revers.* The lower necklines for day wear were commonly filled with a chemisette of muslin, net, or lace. Evening dresses could have a low square neckline in front and a high
neckline in back. Ballgowns had low, square necklines and sleeves that were little more
than a band crossing the shoulders.

During this time skirts were still full in front, although the bulk of the fabric was
toward the back. From 1870 to 1875 the fullness in front lessened and the drapery in back
increased. Beginning in 1870, and continuing throughout the decade, the skirt fastened in
the back. If the skirt was attached to a bodice that fastened in front, the skirt would
occasionally fasten in front to the left of the center, but a back opening was still most
common. The most typical style of skirt had an overskirt and an underskirt, and those dresses
which did not have overskirts were frequently trimmed to look as if they did. One example
of this is dress number 8419.2 from the MNHC’s collection. This dress has a row of fringe
sewn on around the skirt following the lines an overskirt frequently would follow. The
double skirt could be formed in three basic ways. It could be separate, attached to the
waistband of the underskirt, or it could flow from the bodice as a polonaise. The overskirt
could be open at the front or closed and it had many variations. Evening dresses often had
two to three overskirts of different lengths. (Fig. 13)

At the beginning of the 1870’s, most skirts were set into the waistband at the front
with tucks and small gathers. From 1870 to 1875, the front of the underskirt flattened until
finally it was sewn in flat. In order to add a bit of fullness near the hem it was gored at the
bottom. The back of the underskirt was generally gathered or pleated to the waistband. If
there was a pocket in the skirt it was most likely to be on the right side. Woven bands of
elastic had been introduced in the 1830’s and were in use by the 1870’s to keep large drapings
of fabric at the back of a skirt, and to keep the skirt tight to its supporting garment. The overskirt started as simple draping of extra fabric to the back of the skirt. It was generally looped up in the back, held in place by stitching and ties, pleated into the waistband and trimmed symmetrically. This style remained until the middle of the decade.

In 1875 the line of the bodice began to grow longer and the skirts grew narrower (Byrde 72). The fashions began to push the bustle downward in the rear, and dresses were more form fitting than before. In 1875 an article in Harpers Bazaar reported, “The ideal at present is the greatest possible flatness and straightness: a woman is a pencil covered with raiment” (Blum, Bazaar 77). Princess lines* grew popular, and a new longer bodice, known as the “cuirass bodice,” became common. Princess form dresses were cut in one piece from neck to hem without a waist seam, and they followed the lines of other fashions.

The cuirass bodice, first introduced in 1874, was a longer bodice, especially in front where it extended over the hips. It was fitted with five seams at the back, which slanted from the top of the shoulder to the waist, and with short darts in the front which were close together (Byrde 71, 72). The neckline was usually high and round, but a V-shape neckline was also worn, “filled in with a chemisetta or material to match the dress” (Byrde 72). Cuirass bodices usually had close fitting sleeves of a contrasting color to the bodice (Nunn 153, Byrde 72, Buck 54 others). This gave the dress a sleeveless appearance (Buck 54, Byrde 72). The sleeves were long and narrow, usually plain, with a simulated cuff at the wrist.
Around 1875, just after the introduction of the cuirass bodice, skirts began to lengthen and tighten. The bustle shrank. It became small and low. This smaller bustle extended into a fall of drapery that frequently continued into a train. Although skirts did become narrower than they were in the first half of this decade, the transition did not happen all at once. Even when the skirts were at their narrowest, the typical fashionable skirt would still use at least three and a half yards of material. These skirts had ties on the underside to hold the concentrated fullness in back, and to pull back and flatten the front.

Asymmetrical fashions were introduced in 1875 to "provide variety" to skirts (Blum, Bazaar 77). Elaborate pockets were extremely popular and became a common addition to fashionable dress. They were even incorporated into the asymmetrical design of the skirt. An asymmetrical design would often include one pocket moved so low and so far back that it was rendered impractical and reduced to pure decoration. From 1878 through the early 1880's horizontal trimming and drapery were seen on skirts that were tight all the way down, sheath-like and trained.

Throughout the 1870's, women of all classes who were not expecting company wore a house dress called a wrapper. (Fig. 14) A wrapper was less fitted than other types of dresses. It could be worn without bustles, hoops, or corsets and was relatively easy to make. The bodice was usually lined to the waist, but was left unboned. It usually had fullness pleated into a yoke in the back, and sewn flat across the front. The back was frequently made Watteau* style. Extra fullness could be gathered around the waist with a belt. This was a practical dress for the active woman, because it allowed freedom of movement not offered
by any other styles during this period, and could therefore be worn for lounging around the house or strenuous work. This dress was also important because of its adaptability for maternity wear. The MNHC collection contains at least two examples of silk wrappers from the 1870's. Dress number 8429.2 has fullness set into a yoke, while dress number 8428.10 has the fullness set into the collar. These dresses both have short trains and are simple, but elegant.

These styles were the fashion throughout the country, but fashion had more hold over style in cities and populated areas. Minnesota did not have many cities. In fact, much of the state was just emerging from frontier status. This created some influences on clothing styles which were not present elsewhere in the country. Having achieved a basic understanding of the society and technology which influenced women's fashion in general during the 1870's, it is now possible to look at the specific influences on fashion and style in Minnesota during this decade.
Women's clothing in Minnesota in the 1870's

In the 1870's Minnesota was a land of opportunities, but also of hardships. As the state grew so did the availability and influence of fashion. Minnesota women's clothing were influenced not only by the fashions which were popular on the East Coast, but also by Minnesota's available resources. The clothing worn by women in this state was also directly related to the increasing availability of transportation and the changing economic conditions. The development of farms and cities, the presence of a wide variety of immigrant cultures, expanding railways, entertainment options, technical advances, and the availability of goods and services are specific ways transportation and economics affected clothing.

Travel was faster in the 1870's and 1880's than in previous decades. "Horses and mules predominated for pulling wagons, rather than the oxen so relied upon in earlier migrations" (Holmes 7). Railroads were also growing. "More than two hundred miles of steel had been laid at the close of 1865, and by 1873 that number had multiplied tenfold. . . When the new decade dawned, Minnesota had more than three thousand miles of track, and its major trunk lines were virtually completed" (Heilbron 188). The Midwest was now linked to the East by a network of rivers and railways which played an important role in bringing fashion information to the state.

As travel became easier, the number of people coming into the state increased. People had many reasons for moving to Minnesota. Some had left their homeland to join
friends. The state attracted others who wished to improve their health because the climate of Minnesota was touted as a cure-all for various ills. Still others came because land was cheap, and it was possible to make a new start (Census). Life in Minnesota was not, however, always as easy as promotions made it appear to be.

From 1873 to 1877 the western two-thirds of the state, which was predominantly rural, faced a grasshopper plague and economic hard times. The summer winds of 1873 brought hordes of "grasshoppers," actually Rocky Mountain locusts, from the southwest. In the first year the locusts are said to have "destroyed fields that would have yielded more than two million bushels of wheat" (Heilbron 165). When eggs the locusts had laid hatched the following spring, there were more of the locusts than ever. The plague meant that many farmers could not make a living off of their farms. Some gave up and went back East, but many others stayed. There was not a formal relief system in place and although people tried to help their neighbors, not everyone was taken care of. The governor and legislature received many letters requesting food and clothing from people throughout the affected areas (Meier 116). The plague lasted for three years, then suddenly ended in 1877. In its aftermath many families struggled to survive.

The grasshopper plague was one hardship among many which life on the plains presented. Rain, hail, floods, and drought combined with harsh winters to endanger crops and livestock. "The women whose accounts survived showed courage, determination and an amazing ability to adapt to their environment" (Bartley 27). Keeping warm, using clothing or blankets, was a priority. Winters could be so cold that "water froze in breakfast mugs, and bread had to be thawed, a slice at a time, by the fire. Snow fell through leaky roofs inches deep, soaking the furniture and bedding. Blizzards were even worse" (Bartley 24).
When lumber and railway construction picked up again after the depression, many men left women and children on the farm and went to work on the railroads or as timber men in Minnesota's great northern forests. Others did not wait for the industry to provide support. They headed further west, either leaving their families behind as they went to search for gold, or bringing them west once again looking for a new homestead and a new start (Belegen 346). As finances improved for those who remained, one of the first purchases was frequently new clothing.

Although the majority of Minnesotans lived in rural areas in the 1870's, the cities were expanding. The two largest cities in Minnesota were Minneapolis and St. Paul. It was in these cities that the wealthy, those who could afford to dress richly in fashion, lived along with multitudes of others. St. Paul, the largest city in Minnesota by the 1860's, was located below a stretch of un navigable water known as St. Anthony's Falls, where steamboats had to stop and unload their cargo. This led to St. Paul's development as a commercial center. As railways gained dominance in transportation, St. Paul developed as a transfer point for the railways as well.

During the 1870's Minneapolis, which earned the name "Mill City" because of its many mills, emerged as the world's flour-milling center because of inventions which made milling good flour from Minnesota's hard spring wheat a possibility. In Minneapolis, flour mills were important to the economy, but so were the saw mills and, to a lesser extent, fabric mills (Heilbron 209). The city of "Minneapolis started [growing] later [than St. Paul], but after absorbing St. Anthony in 1872, it passed St. Paul in the next census and went on to become the state's leading commercial and industrial center in the . . . 1880's" (Gilman 249).
Other developing cities were Rochester, Duluth, and St. Cloud. All of these cities had access to the developing railway system. Rochester was a city that had been trying to grow, but until the railroad came through in 1864 it was bypassed in favor of cities on the river. By 1870, after a grain elevator was built near the railway, it became a thriving community. Duluth was important because it connected the railway lines to the Great Lakes. St. Cloud had started to grow on the river, but made the switch to railroads as they came through. Along with St. Paul and Minneapolis, these cities were in the process of developing a wealthy social class. Fashion, including what was worn, how it was worn, and fashion accessories and trims became an important status symbol for wealthy women living in these cities.

Rural areas as well as cities built up as the railways developed an extensive transportation system. Those who came with families most often came to take advantage of the free land offered through the Homestead Act or to acquire land which the railroads were selling at low prices. In 1880 "Farmers and Planters" was listed as the occupation of 96,648 people in the state (Census). This number does not, however, include the wives or children who lived on the farms. If they did not come to farm, families usually set up in a town or city to run the same trade or business they had been involved in prior to their move.

Immigrants came from the Eastern United States and almost every part of Europe, especially Germany, Sweden and Norway. In 1870 the aggregate population of Minnesota was 439,706. By 1880 the total population of Minnesota had increased to 780,733. In 1870 the percentage of foreign born to those born in the United States was 57.6 percent. In 1880 the percentage had dropped to fifty-two percent, but nineteen percent of the population was second generation American and 302,371 of the state's residents had been born in the state (Census).
Railways, which had been given large amounts of land by the United States government, advertised overseas and then sold land along their tracks to the immigrants who came in response to the ads. In order to attract immigrants to the large tracts of land they had available for sale, railways hired agents in Europe to sell "tickets for the entire journey from the point of embarkation to Minnesota"(Heilbron 161). This was a popular practice because it avoided the possibility of the immigrant making a mistake in destination. People could leave at different times, and still be sure they would arrive in the same area.

Communities frequently emigrated in groups. When this occurred, they were more likely to incorporate their native dress into their pioneer clothing. Often they modified the clothing, tools, and skills they brought along with them to fit their new environment. However, where immigrants settled helped determine how soon they became "Americanized." The immigrants who moved to cities generally dropped their native customs and dress and adopted American styles and manners more quickly than those who lived in rural areas (Cunningham 102).

Traveling to Minnesota had one large drawback. It was expensive. Railroads did offer reduced rates for immigrants, first for passage on the ships and then on their railways. Some railways "let travelers deduct the price of transportation from the cost of land they purchased from the company"(Heilbron 161). When immigrants arrived in Minnesota they were often greeted by another representative of the railway at a reception house where they, "could lodge and even buy food and clothing at cost while selecting a piece of land to buy"(Heilbron 161). The deal offered by the railway companies to those who wished to emigrate from their native countries helped mitigate the cost for some, but even so, a family could end up in debt to the railroad company.
One woman, Mary Carpenter, wrote to her aunt, who lived somewhere further east, about the dilemma she faced in Marshall, Minnesota on July 10, 1873. The freight charge on their goods was $50.00 and they had been trying to find the money to pay the last $30.00 since arriving. Mary mentioned that most of their clothing was with their freight being held at the railway station and she was afraid it would be auctioned off to pay the freight charges. She told her aunt that if she had "any old things that you don't think worth sending, they would do us tons of good. I am adept at using old things up, have served a good apprenticeship" (Meier 128). Like Mary, many women who found themselves without their clothing and other goods made do with whatever was available to keep their families and themselves housed and clothed.

While some families, like the Carpenter family, found themselves in dire straits, wealthy families, who generally lived in or near larger cities, were able to use the extensive transportation system to their advantage. The decision to move to Minnesota was not as final as it had been in previous years. Better transportation meant a return to the East would take a number of days, rather than a number of weeks or months. Because train travel had reduced the time it took to make the journey between Minnesota and the East, women with money for the train fare could easily visit friends or relatives back east once or twice a year. Women whose husbands had jobs with the United States government could also join their husbands in Washington more easily than they could have in the past. This provided an opportunity for the direct transmission of fashion between the East and Minnesota. These women, who traveled back and forth, brought fashion information with them when returning to the state. Dresses made by dressmakers in the East usually reflected the latest style. When the wealthy woman returned west, the middle and poor class woman copied their dresses.
Besides carrying people, the rail and water network carried information. Even those travelers who didn't take the trains "often followed the Union Pacific line westward. Communication along the route was greatly improved, and the travelers could often send and receive mail at stopping places" (Holmes 7). The transmission of information by mail concerning clothing styles and other fashion trends was especially important to those who lived in rural Minnesota.

Many women throughout the state read magazines such as *Godey's* and *Peterson's*. Evidence of these publications being read in Minnesota is provided by letters to the editor of these magazines from people located throughout the state (Suman). One sure example is a letter full of praise for the magazine which appeared in the Feb., 1870 issue of *Godey's*, where it was reprinted from an earlier article in the Chatfield, Minnesota paper, *The Democrat*. "It is full of freshness, life, and vigor. By those who have taken this household favorite, the question is often asked; 'who can do without Godey?' [sic] Children love it, gentlemen admire it because it is the favorite of the ladies, and the ladies cannot do without it; therefore every family should have it." (197)

The cost of a one year subscription to *Godey’s* was normally $3.00 a year and the additional cost of postage was 24 cents a year, or 2 cents for each issue. *Godey's* offered special club rates with other magazines and encouraged readers to form clubs within their own towns. For instance, a combination subscription to *Godey's* and the *Children's Hour* cost $3.50 annually, and a combined subscription to *Godey's* and *Harpers* cost $5.50 for one year. A combined subscription to *Godey's* and a magazine called *Arthur's Home Magazine* cost $4.00, and a combination of *Godey's*, *Arthur's* and the *Children's Hour* would only cost
$5.00. (Godey's 475) Organizing a club within a community cut down on the cost of magazines for all members.

Godey's encouraged their readers to "take," or subscribe to, their local paper, (Godey's 475) and there were many local papers in Minnesota a woman could take. According to McClung, in 1870 there were 76 newspapers published in the state. The price of these papers ranged from $.75 to $3.00 per year, but most cost $2.00 per year (294-296). Many of these, including the major papers in Minneapolis and St. Paul, ran regular sections on the current fashions. These newspapers were another source of fashion information for women throughout the state. It was rare that credit for these articles would be given to a specific author. Some articles, such as those which appeared at least once a month during the 1870's in The Minneapolis Evening Journal, are titled, "The Fashions," but are unsigned. Others were untitled but signed with the name, "Fashion."

Another influence on dress styles during the 1870's was the type of entertainment available. Rural women often had one good dress that was saved for church and going into town, but in general rural entertainment did not require special clothing. On the other hand, in the cities women were expected to dress in the height of fashion when they attended cultural events such as performances by the orchestra in St. Paul. During the 1870's, music and drama were important forms of entertainment. "With the development of a dependable audience and the improvement of transportation facilities, top ranking actors and musicians booked engagements in the upper Midwest" (Heilbron 238). Star performers had become leaders of the fashion world, and touring companies brought examples of fashion along with the entertainment they provided. Within the state, the 1880 census recorded twenty-six
women who listed their profession as actors. There were seventy-nine musicians or teachers
of music in Minneapolis alone, and another seventy in St. Paul.

In addition to entertainment, the technological advances that mushroomed during the
1870's had a large influence on clothing. Minnesotans kept in contact with the East Coast
ideas and fashions through new technologies. The telephone first appeared in Minnesota in
1877 in Minneapolis. "A crude switchboard made of old sewing machine parts was installed
in the City Hall in 1877. . . . St. Paul acquired its first exchange a year later"(Heilbron
196). The telegraph was an even more common way of receiving news in Minnesota
throughout the 1870's. Important national happenings, ranging from current stock prices, to
major political events, to fashion news and advice, were also published in local papers.

Eastern technologies had also made their way west, and were being used in clothing
production within Minnesota. Paper patterns and sewing machines were among these
technologies. Paper patterns were available through the ladies journals and pattern
magazines as they were elsewhere in the country. Throughout the country, when women
acquired a pattern, through mail order or from a magazine, it was customary to share it with
others.

During the 1870's, sewing machines were being used in increasing numbers within
the state, but they were expensive. On June 1, 1876 a Wilson Machine "in cheapest style of
table" [sic] sold for $50.00 cash according to the Minneapolis Tribune (4). According to the
same source needles for machines could be sent from the company by mail when payment
was received. Most machine needles cost 60 cents per dozen, but they ranged in price from
50 cents to $1.00 per dozen.
Clothing was very connected to technology in Minnesota in the 1870's, but it can be difficult to see the direct connections. One area in particular where the effect of new technology can be difficult to see is how sewing machines really affected clothing during the 1870’s. They were definitely used, as most of the dresses at the history center are at least partly machine sewn, but the implications of their use are not always clear. The sewing machine, for instance, did decrease the amount of time necessary to sew a seam, but instead of serving to decrease the time it took to sew a dress, a machine frequently raised expectations. As it became easier to sew simple dresses using a machine, dresses became more elaborate. The bodice was more likely to be sewn by machine than the longer seams of a skirt. This implies that sewing machines may have been important because they produced a stronger seam rather than as time savers.

Expanding technology did make farm and household chores easier. Farm technology included threshing machines which had been introduced in the 1860’s. With the invention of the threshing machine, wheat farming became big business in the state as early as the 1870’s (Heilbron 164). New innovations in milling techniques, such as the introduction of the middlings purifier in 1870, and the substitution of rollers for grinding stones a few years later, also stimulated the progress of the local flour mills and the market for Minnesota wheat expanded so much that after 1878 it included Europe (Heilbron 209). These inventions meant farmers had more money to spend on luxury items, including fabrics and notions ordered from the East. Success, however, did not last long.

Farms and industries that were generally profitable in the early 1870’s suffered setbacks across much of the state and nation in 1873. “The financial depression following
the panic of 1873, the deflation of the national currency, and the five-season grasshopper scourge which started in 1873 all helped to stop the wheels of the Minnesota factories" (Gilman 255). Any one of these things alone might not have badly affected so many Minnesotans, but together they posed great hardships. Families found it difficult to find money for food, and clothing was mended and reused long after it would normally have become rags because new garments were not affordable. Farmers were hardest hit, but even the lumber industry had a set back in 1873 and construction of the railroads stopped until 1877 (Heilbron 188).

The depression and other economic factors were an important part of the development of clothing styles in Minnesota. Many families did not have much money left to spend on unessential items after their move to the state. Fashionable clothing was not economically feasible. Often, only a limited amount of cash was available for clothing needs, so styles tended to be practical and material used was the most durable available. In the 1870's the average annual wage in the United States was $500.00 (Severs 294). Those beginning farms and businesses in the new state could easily make much less, and money went first to buy land, shelter, and supplies for the farm or business.

Land could be rented or bought. Small, "improved farms" (land which had already been cleared and had shelter) sold for $4 to $50 per acre, the average being between $10 and $15 per acre (Young 78). Unimproved land was sold for between $2.50 and $30 per acre, except in Hennepin County where the price range was $25 to $75 per acre. Most towns were between one to twenty miles from a railroad or a river, and farms extended out from these settlements. Land was more expensive when it bordered a railroad, waterway, or large city
because proximity to a town meant better access to supplies, easier transportation of crops in the fall, and more interaction with other people.

According to a booklet issued in 1872 by the Northern Pacific Railroad, "Once established on his own farm, the settler could erect a house for about two hundred dollars" (Heilbron 161). By 1871 ready-made houses cost from $100.00 to $500.00 and could be purchased from a Brainerd manufacturer (Heilbron 161). These would have been middle quality homes, but cheaper materials, such as sod, were also used to make houses when necessary.

When settlers moved onto a new piece of land they had to cook over an open fire or in a fireplace until a stove could be procured. This basic lack of technology on homesteads played a large role in practical dress. A woman who had come across the overland trail or who was preparing meals for her family over an open fire would not wear a skirt that was overly full. It would be too likely to catch fire. Smaller pieces of fabric, such as trim, would also catch fire more quickly than the large pieces which made up the bulk of a skirt. Therefore, pioneer women wore clothing that had few frills. Even women who cooked at a stove needed to be careful of fires. This is one reason why woolen fabrics were popular. Wool does not catch fire as easily as other fabrics, nor does it burn as quickly (Hollen 21). Wool, especially homespun, was prized for its durability, as were silks and thicker cottons, such as canvas.

The inhabitants of 1870's Minnesota had relatively quick and easy access to supplies from the East, including fabric. It was possible to buy almost any fabric which was available in the East in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Because goods could be shipped more quickly, it was easier to receive them from distant places. If a special type of fabric was desired which was
not in stock it could be easily ordered. In rural areas fewer selections of fabric would be kept on hand, but again, special orders were possible (Mills 107). During the 1870's many items which previously had to be made at home or purchased in a large city could now be shipped. Department stores, such as Montgomery Wards, started offering mail-order catalogs. For those who could afford it, ordering clothing for men and children through the mail became common and greatly eased the woman's sewing load. Men's clothing was ordered more frequently than children's because it made more economic sense.

Stores sold a wide variety of fabrics. The type of dress goods advertised for sale in city papers included; black and fancy silks, laces, linen, and lawn, cotton, muslin, Wamsutta organdy, sheeting, denims, cambric, delaine, corset jean, ticking, cashmere, brilliantine, grenadine, gingham, and cambric among others. On November 26, 1887 a Minneapolis wool manufacturer advertised plain, fancy, double, and twist wool fabrics including cassimere*, tweed*, doeskin*, flannel, and melton*(Minneapolis Journal).

When a woman decided what style of dress to make, she had to consider how much the fabric and trim necessary for that style would cost. Fabric prices varied. For example, in 1870 Joseph Foriter sold two yard of gingham for 36 cents, which is a cheaper price than the 19 cents a yard he sold ten yards of gingham for in 1868. In Minnesota City in 1877, Southwick & Co. sold gingham for between 8 and 12½ cents per yard. The same company sold poplin at 32 cents per yard, and chambray for 23 cents per yard. On August 2, 1870, sheeting sold for 10 to 16 cents per yard, depending on brand, width, and color. The most expensive fabric listed was Cassimere at $1.15 to $1.35 per yard, closely followed by meltons at $1.25 to $1.30 per yard. The least expensive were cambric and cotton prints at 7 to 12 cents per yard (Minneapolis Trib.). On June 2, 1876 cotton prints sold for $.06 to $.07 per
yard, and silks for $.50 to $2.50 per yard. According to McClung, in 1870 fabrics cost: “Calicos, 8 to 12½ cts; brown sheeting, 12½ to 16; bleached cotton, 13 to 18; brown shirtings, 10 to 14; domestic gingham, 14 to 17”(188). Dresses would take between five and twelve yards of fabric, creating a price of between 35 cents on the very low end, and $30.00 on the higher end, just for the fabric.

To put these prices in perspective, in cities in Minnesota, a woman working in a woolen-mill could expect to make between $4.00 and $7.00 a week. Of that amount, a woman living on her own would need to pay around $3.75 a week for room and board. A female servant could expect to make between $8.00 and $9.00 a month, plus room and board. Women working at other jobs could expect to make between $1.00 and $1.60 per day. That meant that a woman living on her own could earn as little as $13.00 a year after room and board, or as much as $200.00 a year. Between $65.00 and $100.00 a year would have been common for women working for wages. (Young 203, 216-218, 227) There was a much wider variety in income among married women who depended on their husbands for money. In general, women earned two-thirds the wages of men (Young 218), but men also had a wider variety of jobs to choose from, and a farmer’s income could vary considerably from year to year. A new dress could easily use up a large part of any woman’s available money.

Women, whose farms were destroyed year after year by grasshoppers, and others facing economic hard times had no money to buy fabric for new clothes and frequently did not have sheep or money for yarn. Women in this situation were creative, using whatever was available to maintain a respectable appearance. Those women who did own sheep or could afford the price of raw fibers spun their own yarn and wove their own fabric, especially of wool and linen. It was a way, “to economize by looming at least a part of their cloth or
producing surplus materials to be traded for other goods.” (Meyers 149) Homespun fabrics were usually sturdy, and were used for many simple dress styles. When weaving new fabric was not an option, old dresses could be taken apart and remodeled into new styles. The fashion of having clothing made from more than one fabric was useful in this instance. Flour and feed sacks made of a heavy muslin also provided material for dresses if necessary. Fabric was reused as many times as possible to make first a dress, and then perhaps curtains, and finally a rag rug to brighten and warm the floor (Mills 126).

Economics and technology influenced the style of women’s clothing in many ways, but it is hard to determine all the factors that influenced the styles of clothing worn in particular places at any particular time of history. However, as Carolyn Shine states in her article about Ohio pioneers, “the economic aspects of the production and distribution of clothing have always been of enormous significance” (Cunningham). When discussing specific clothing styles in Minnesota in the 1870’s it is helpful to talk about differences between women of different economic levels, as well as noticing the distinction between those living in cities and on farms.

The cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul were already well established in 1870 and typical of other cities of the era. Women who lived in these cities could be grouped into four basic categories: the wealthy and prestigious, middle-class housewives, working women, and the poor. The lines between these groups were set, although it was possible for a woman to move between them if her financial situation changed. Women within each grouping were not all alike, and sometimes there was more variation in the clothing worn by women within a group than between different groups.
Women of the social class which was identified by Theodore Bost in 1874 as "the rich tycoons" (p327), closely followed the fashions which were worn in the Eastern states. Social entertaining was an essential part of upperclass life, and high society women dressed appropriately. Each social activity had a specific style of dress connected with it, and upperclass women could afford to own dresses for each occasion. During the latter half of the seventies and early eighties, social life around the Minnesota State Capitol was lively. Beautiful evening dresses with long trains were worn during this period. (Dress 8809.1)

The most common fabrics for these dresses, in Minnesota as in the East, were silks. The gowns were trimmed with ribbons, laces, and other frou-frou to look like the fashion plates in magazines. The dresses, made in the latest style, were elaborate in both design and workmanship. Members of this class would have dresses made to resemble elaborate fashions out of Godey's and Harpers Bazaar. Women in high society rarely made their own clothing; they hired professional dressmakers. Some women had dresses made in Minnesota. Others bought their clothing on trips out East.

Having a dress made would be more expensive than making one at home. A description in Godey's Lady's Book in December of 1870 of a dress made in New York stated that it cost $1,200. It was described as "exceedingly tasteful, and weighs about ninety pounds," trimmed with ostrich plumes, lace, satin, and artificial flowers. A dress this expensive would have been made with many trimmings, and was certainly not common. An example of the price a Minnesota woman would find reasonable comes from a receipt for a dress purchased in Ohio. In 1875 Mrs. Leduc, who was in Washington with her husband while he served as Minister of Agriculture, wrote home to her daughters that she had
purchased two dresses for $125.00. One of these dresses may be the dress in the Minnesota History Center (MHC) collection which was ordered by Mrs. Leduc when she went to visit her relatives in Ohio, and worn at a ball when she joined her husband, in Washington D.C.. It was then worn to social functions within Minnesota. (Dress 6062.62)

Silk fabrics were not easily reused for other applications, and since styles changed rapidly, the dresses were not likely to have been worn for over a year by the original wearer. Many dresses were given to maids, less fortunate relatives, or charity organizations and were then made over to resemble the newest fashions. Dresses such as wedding gowns or others worn for special occasions were frequently saved by the original wearer, and therefore these dresses have frequently survived and ended up in history center and museum collections. (Dresses 8016, 8809.1) (Fig. 15)

The level of society just below the extremely wealthy was the upper middle class. It can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between dresses worn by members of these two classes. These women were married to men who were successful businessmen and community leaders. These men and women were not rich, but they did not have to worry too much about money. Upper middle class women, like upperclass women, dressed fashionably in different outfits for different activities. These women were frequently the wives of congressmen, legislators, or other government officials. They probably mixed with members of the wealthy class at legislative functions, and they did their best to follow fashion.

Upper middle class women copied fashions out of magazines such as Godey's and Peterson's, and would either have their own sewing machine or hire a dressmaker to construct their clothing. (Fig. 16) They were likely to own at least two or three silk dresses
and were likely to buy new silk dresses every few years. Old silk dresses were remade as long as possible before being passed on. Because they would be remade, upper middle class silk dresses were less likely to follow the extremes of fashion. A dress which had been constructed along simpler lines was more likely to be able to be remade than a fancier dress.

The fashion which called for combining colors and materials allowed women great freedom in remaking an old dress, and the large amount of fabric in skirts could be re-draped to create many variations in the line of the skirt. A new bodice could be cut from an old skirt, or perhaps the sleeves and underskirt of a new cuirass bodice would be made from a skirt that had been fashionable earlier in the decade. Skirts could be constructed so that silk was used only where it would show, and the section of material hidden under an overskirt could be made of lining fabric. Through techniques such as simple alterations and changing the shape of the bustle, a woman could keep one dress in fashion for a number of years. (Dress 925236)

Some dresses worn by upper middle class women were still made in such a manner that they could not easily be remade into a new style. These dresses were often saved in the hope that they could be remade at a later date. Many of these dresses never were remade; they ended up in museums along with dresses which were saved for sentimental reasons. (dress 9973.1)

The next rung down on the economic ladder was the middle class. This social/economic class had the most members. Women from this level were also expected to look and dress “appropriately.” Their dresses would be expected to follow the basic lines of fashion, although not all the vagaries. (Fig. 17) They were likely to have dresses which
doubled for more than one occasion, while a wealthier woman might have had separate
dresses for each occasion. The trim on middle class women's dresses would likely be a little
plainer than that on a dress worn by wealthier women, but aside from simplicity, middle class
women did not dress much differently than the upper middle-class. Middle-class women
were usually the wives and daughters of businessmen, and social respectability was
important. They would probably own at least one silk dress for best, and wool and cotton
dresses in the latest fashions for less important situations. In August of 1876, Peterson's
Magazine advertized a style of dress by stating, “Even a calico dress can be made to look
stylish; and one made after this model cannot fail to do so.” (Mills 26) In rural areas styles
changed a bit slower than in the city because rich women, who were wearing the highest
fashions, were not often available to use as models of fashion.

The tricks of cutting a dress to make the most of a piece of material were important
for cost conscious women to learn. Patterns from fashion magazines were used carefully by
women of the middle class. A pattern would usually be cut out of muslin by following the
printed diagrams; then they would be fitted to the wearer before being cut out of good fabric.
“Ten yards of muslin was said to be enough to cut a pattern” (Mills 92).

Dresses would be made in the latest style, and would be worn as long as possible.
They would often be made using a conservative amount of good fabric and so could be
difficult to remake. However the narrowing of the skirts as the decade progressed made it
possible to remodel the dresses. (dress 6734.2) Middle class women might own sewing
machines, or know someone whose machine they might share. Even though there was an
increase in the number of sewing machines purchased and used by the middle class as the decade progressed, some of these women still sewed their dresses by hand.

Sophie Bost, a middle class woman, wrote to her mother-in-law on May 13, 1871:

As soon as the great springtime rush is over I shall leave her [Marie, a servant] free to go out and work for other people for a few months... unless we are fortunate enough to be able to take in some borders... I'm so eager to earn enough to buy a sewing machine, and you may well believe I need it, since I do all the sewing for the whole family (305).

During the 1870's, female servants in middle-class homes were part of the expanding group of working women. According to the 1880 census, domestic servants, milliners, dressmakers and seamstresses were the most common positions, each held by thousands of women. In St. Paul and Minneapolis hundreds of women also worked as barbers, hairdressers, restaurant and hotel keepers and employees, teachers, clerks or accountants, and mill operators (Census). New technology and expansion as well as a great influx of new people to the state meant a large number of jobs were to be had.

Women who worked in these positions were expected to dress neatly and stylishly. A slovenly appearance was adequate grounds for dismissal from most jobs. Working women dressed as fashionably as they could on their budget. (Fig. 18) A well paid domestic servant or milliner might have a number of silk dresses, while clerks and teachers would likely wear calico. Wool was the favored fabric because it was warm and durable. Linen was popular, although less so, for the same reasons. Cottons, gingham, and calicoes were also commonly used because they were less expensive than silks and had a nice appearance. Silk was still a favorite fabric in any of its variations, and was purchased if it could be afforded. Dresses
were cut to follow the lines of fashion, although the style was frequently more plain than the style of high fashion. (Dress 6734.2)

Immigrant women who moved to cities and towns were likely to try to follow the new fashions. Many young Swedish women worked as maids for middle class families in Minnesota cities and towns. Swedish women were considered neat and tidy, and therefore they were in great demand as domestic servants. Once hired, they were expected to outfit themselves appropriately for their job, and so they quickly adopted the American style of dress. These young women found they “could dress just as fancy as their mistresses and [that] American men treated ‘ladies’, themselves included, with unaccustomed consideration.” (Barton 112) References to Swedish girls becoming quickly Americanized in both manner of dress and actions can be found in letters written back to Sweden. (Barton 114, )

It is hard to find information about the clothing worn by members of the working class and by the poor in the cities of Minnesota because they did not often have their pictures taken, and they did not usually keep diaries. Most of the information which we have is found in social commentaries and financial records of the period. Working women often dressed better than the lower middle class in cities.

Women of the lower middle class and the poor were usually the wives, widows, and daughters of laborers. They were frequently hard-pressed to keep their families clothed. Their clothing was almost always hand made, because they could not afford the price of a sewing machine. Charity from those with more money was an important source of clothing for the poor and sometimes for lower middle-class women. Style and fashion were not as important as being dressed respectably, and so cast off clothing was frequently remade. These women
sewed their own clothing and used many of the same techniques that poor rural women used to find fabric for clothing. Old dresses could be remodeled, old sheets and blankets could be turned into clothing, and muslin flour and feed sacks could provide material for dresses if necessary.

Conditions in rural areas varied almost as widely as they did in the cities. Many communities were formed and settled during this decade, and towns became social gathering spots. Because women who lived in rural areas usually had little exposure to current high fashion, styles of dress in rural towns were simpler and changed more slowly than styles in cities. Much of rural Minnesota was still a frontier, and neighbors could be several miles away. Women on farms did not usually follow fashion as closely as women in cities or even towns. Farmers’ wives did not often have social engagements to attend, and they did not have to dress to please an employer. They had to dress in clothing that would allow them to work, but it was still expected that a woman present a respectable appearance in public. (Fig. 19)

The majority of women in rural Minnesota were new to the state and lived on farms rather than in towns. The inexpensive land being offered to immigrants by railways and the homesteads which could still be staked in Minnesota brought an influx of families to the state in the early 1870’s. Women started their lives in Minnesota with the clothes they had brought with them and frequently wore those until they started to wear out.

Women who took trains west could wear styles of clothing which were modeled after the current fashions if they so chose. Hoopskirts and bustles were no more inconvenient on trains than in carriages in eastern cities. This was not the case for women who traveled overland in covered wagons. The Hoopskirts which were still worn at the beginning of the
decade were not practical for this method of travel, and decoration and trim on clothing was likely to catch on wagons, bushes, or other objects, and be torn off. A pioneer woman might bring one good dress with her from the East. It was carefully preserved and worn only on special occasions.

Fashionable clothing would be just as unwieldy when setting up a homestead as it was on the trail. Until a stove could be procured, families had to cook over an open fire or in a fireplace. One settler, Ellen Pennock, reported the problems she had when cooking: "The fronts of my dresses would be scorched, the toes of my shoes burned, and my face blistered in the process." (Myers 147) Some women adopted a variation of the bloomer costume for outdoor work, or as a modest way to dress while on the trail. The bloomers kept their legs from being exposed to sight, and allowed them to wear shorter skirts that did not get lifted as easily by the wind. According to Myers, "Although they dressed ‘appropriately’ most of the time, some continued to wear pants when doing outside chores"(125).

Unfortunately for those who research clothing, examples of women’s clothing from the rural areas of Minnesota in the 1870's are hard to find, as are pictures of such clothing. Once dresses were too worn to wear women cut them down and used the fabric to make other things such as children’s clothing and aprons. Even small pieces of fabric could be made into something for the home. They could be used as quilt squares or cut into strips called rags and tied together, then braided to form rugs for the floor. This is why it is rare to find a dress made of cotton, wool, or other easily reusable fabrics from this period. Existing pictures of rural women in Minnesota are also rare. Sometimes pictures which included women were taken of church picnics, school groups, and farm work, but these pictures can be hard to find.
Those that do exist show unadorned, simple dresses. Some women in these pictures have small bustles, but most do not have a bustle. In the photographs I have seen, the dresses the women are wearing were fitted and looked appropriate for the pictured situation.

Times were hard for many farmers in the 1870's. Those whose farms were destroyed year after year by grasshoppers had no money to spend on food, much less on fabric for new clothes. Women everywhere were creative, using whatever materials were available to help them maintain a respectable appearance. Old dresses were taken apart and re-sewn to prolong wear. The fashion of having clothing made from more than one fabric made it easier for women to recycle clothing. Like poor women in towns, women on farms used any fabric available to make dresses. Some women saved money because they spun their own thread and wove their own fabric. If enough fabric was made it could be traded or sold to acquire other supplies. (Fig. 20)

In order to save money, dresses would always be mended if they were torn or burned. The method used was simple, but effective enough that many patches still hold on existing garments. The edges of the section which needed mending were cut away, and a small patch of matching fabric was fitted to the underside. This patch was sewn on by a line of stitching in a circle around the hole. Frequently threads were also sewn into the weave to help keep the patch in place. (Dress 66.230.2)

Women on the frontier were often expected to work in the field as well as perform typical household chores. (Fig. 21) They tried to maintain the standards of cleanliness and order that had prevailed in their homes before moving to the frontier. To do so required much time and hard work. Pioneer women commonly wore a wrapper because it used a small
Figure 21
amount of fabric and allowed for a great range of movement when doing chores. For some women the wrapper became their only form of dress during hard years. It was not considered acceptable to go visiting in such a dress, but this problem was solved by staying at home. (Dresses 8429.10, 8085.1, 8429.2)

When times got better, one of the first things a woman would buy for herself was likely to be a new dress. The prevailing fashions required from six to ten yards of fabric, but a dress in a simpler style could be made using much less fabric than was usually used. To conserve fabric women cut their fabric carefully and made skirts that fit closely to the body. The dresses might have bustles and a peplum, but would usually not have elaborate drapery or lots of trim. (Dress 8943)

By 1870, immigrants to Minnesota from foreign countries were being informed by friends who had already emigrated to bring clothing, and sometimes pieces of fabric, with them when they emigrated because the fabric in their mother country was usually better than that found in Minnesota. Headdresses and regional dress pieces such as the bodice would not be useful, but skirts and dresses made in an urban style could be easily modified to look American. Most women did switch to a somewhat Americanized version of clothing within a year of arriving in Minnesota, but many kept pieces of their national dress (Cole 34, Cunningham 105). (Fig. 22)
Conclusion

There were many influences on women's clothing during the 1870's throughout the country and the state of Minnesota. The Minnesota History Center has an extensive collection of dresses and photographs from the middle class level of society and up. Research has provided a good overview of some of the influences on clothing style worn in Minnesota in the 1870's, but it has also raised many questions. Further study of this decade could include more information about immigrant populations, specific differences in fashion in different specific areas of the state, and the actual influences of improving technology.

Clothing was very connected to technology in Minnesota in the 1870's, but it can be difficult to see the direct connections. One area in particular where the effect of new technology can be difficult to see is how sewing machines really affected clothing during the 1870's. They were definitely used, as most of the dresses at the history center are at least partly machine sewn, but the implications of their use are not clear. The sewing machine for instance did decrease the amount of time necessary to sew a seem, but instead of serving to decrease the time it took to sew a dress, a machine frequently raised expectations. As it became easier to sew simple dresses using a machine, dresses became more elaborate. The bodice was more likely to be sewn by machine than the longer seams of a skirt. This implies
that a sewing machines may have been important because they produced a stronger seam rather than as time savers.

Research for this paper has shown that the influences on women's clothing in Minnesota were varied and complex. There are many resources, such as historical centers around the state, records from organizations from the time, and state historical sites, which have not been tapped, but hopefully what has been presented has given a general overview of the types of fashion present in Minnesota during the 1870's.

Many people have a tendency to think of styles of dress from the past as homogenous, without variation, or at least without variation outside of by class. Hopefully information here will be helpful in showing that there was a wide range of clothing worn that generally followed a fashionable style, but that dresses were as unique as the women who wore them.
Appendixes
Appendix A

Notes on Dresses from the Minnesota History Center
General Notes on Dresses

The descriptions of these dresses vary in detail. Time and experience dictated what was written about any one dress. There are few specific measurements included in these descriptions, and often only a general category (such as wool or silk) will be given for the fabric because I was unable to identify it further.

Except where noted all dresses were entirely flat lined with muslin. Any pockets in the skirt were on the right side, watch pockets on bodice were found on both sides, but more often on the left. A flat woolen braid was used as the finishing at the bottom edge of the majority of these dresses. I have referred to this braid as hemming tape as I was not able to find a reference to it in any of my research.

Many of these dresses had two small square pieces of material sewn to either side of the bodice at waist level inside. These pieces served the same purpose as a petersham, to hold the garment in place at the waist, and give extra reinforcing to the waist opening. The square pieces were usually three to three and a half inches wide, and attached near the opening, as opposed to the petersham which was an inch to an inch and a half wide, was attached in the back, and circled the waist.

Through looking at a number of dresses and reference books, particularities to look for when dating a dress started to become clear. Wide trim on sleeves was found early in the decade. Elaborate pockets which were not necessarily functional appeared from 1875-77 (Harper 77). Asymmetry appeared at about the same time and lasted through the end of the decade. After 1870 skirts usually fastened in back and bodices in front. Another thing that helps date dresses is inside construction. In the late 1870's and early 1880's skirts had tapes and ties inside to help hold the fabric of the bustle in place. A horizontal seam in the side panel of the bodice was common in the late 1860's, and still used in the first few years of the new decade.

Pictures are included with as many of the dresses as possible in order to clarify descriptions. When a picture is available it follows the page describing the garment. Colors may not be true in all instances.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 116CL.1  
**Location Number:** HC-3-13E-8  
**Item Name:** Dress  
**Approximate date:** 1870's  
**Number of pieces:** One. Dress.  
**Fabric type(s):** Gingham.

**Color(s):** Navy and white.

**Specific Descriptions:**
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.  
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.  
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.  
Bodice fastening: Front. Hooks and eyes.  
Basic skirt info: Lines are continuous with the bodice, at least in back.  
Train: No train.  
Trims used: Puffs, contrasting fabrics, smoking.

**General description:**
This dress has a wide standing collar with lace ruffles at the top edge. The front panel of this dress has two darts in the lining. Front panel is gingham fabric, over which is a wool vest which attaches at the armseye and along the side. The sleeves are fitted and set flat into the armseye. The sleeve is the wool fabric, lined with gingham. The bodice is smocked at the top.

The skirt in the back is cut continuously with the fabric. In the middle where the skirt gets big and bodice is fitted, a section of the fabric is cut out so there is a center back seam in the bodice but not in the skirt, the extra fabric where the skirt and bodice meet is then taken up by an inverted pleat.

**Special Comments:**
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 1982.25.156  
Location Number: HC-3-13D-2

Item Name: Dress.  
Approximate date: 1875-1877

Number of pieces: Two.  
Fabric type(s): Cotton.

Color(s): White and red.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unboned.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Bodice fastening: Front. buttons
Basic skirt info: Princess lines.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Red fabric trim, cording, lace.

General description:
Princess cut dress. The original buttons on the dress were fifteen shell buttons, some have been replaced by plastic. The collar is a standing collar which is attached under a neck edge that is corded. There is lace at the top edge of the collar and two rows of decorative chain stitch done in red embroidery floss. The dress was basted by hand, then sewn by machine, some basting threads still remain. The dart seams were sewn by hand. The center front on either side of the opening has a gathered white fabric ruffle. To the outside of that there is a strip of red ribbon that travels up to the neck and around the collar. The bodice is unboned in eight pieces. There are two darts in front which continue below the waist. There are strips of alternating red and white gathered strips trimming the skirt in horizontal bands. The pocket is edged in the red.

The skirt was worn with a low bustle. The princess seams lines of the dress end just above the bustle in back. The six pieces of the back of the bodice are separated, and edged in red. This creates an affect that looks like a square scalloped edge. Under that is a yoke to which the bulk of the skirt is gathered. There are two ties to hold the fullness in the back.

Special Comments:
This dress has a pocket that was popular as a decoration, not as an actual pocket. It is set back and low on the skirt.
Minneso[t History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 1984.111.1
Item Name: Wedding gown.
Number of pieces: One. Dress.
Color(s): Blue with white fringe.

Location Number: HC-3-16-F-8
Approximate date: 1866-1871
Fabric type(s): Silk satin.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Six.
Number of panels in bodice: Five.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two, plus bell.
Basic skirt info: Eight pieces.
Train: No.
Trims used: White fringe.

General description:
Sleeves are loose to just past elbow. Armsgye is dropped over the shoulder. Bottom of sleeve is layered into a bell, hemmed with a shirrtail hem. Trimmed with a row of fringe at the start of the flare and at the hem. The flare is lined with white satin of the same color as the trim and buttons. The rest of the bodice is lined with muslin. There is a bone on each side seam, and on each of the four darts in front (two per side). Front panels are solid pieces with two darts each. There is a high untrimmed collar which has been finished by a corded facing of blue satin.

Skirt fully flatlined. There is a pocket on the right side sewn in by hand. Basting stitches can still be seen, but otherwise the dress appears machine sewn. The skirt has room for a small bustle. Fabric is loosely gathered to the waistband in front. Back quarter inch is pleated extremely tightly. The skirt is finished on the inside with pinked and whip stitched seams.

Special Comments:
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 6062.62

Item Name: Dress.

Number of pieces: Two. Skirt and bodice.

Location Number: HC-3-13-D-1

Approximate date: 1877

Fabric type(s): Silk, cut velvet.

Color(s): Purple and brown

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: 10 in lining.
Number of pieces in sleeve:
Bodice fastening:
Basic skirt info:
Train: Yes.
Trims used: Cut velvet, fringe, cording

General description:
The bodice is cut in the style of ten pieces. The center addition of the cut velvet brings the number up to twelve. All the bodice except the front piece of velvet is flat-lined. The collar has two rows of piping. The sleeve hem has two rows of cording, a section of plain fabric, and another two rows of cording. The sleeve cuff also has velvet pleating and fringe. The bodice is long, placing it late in the decade. Most of the seams of the dress are sewn by machine, the trim and boning was attached by hand. The lining fabric is striped, and probably wool. The dress had rubber armpit protectors which have mostly disintegrated. The dress has a pettisham. The bottom and top of this skirt are lined differently.

Special Comments: This dress was likely made by a dressmaker in Ohio based on outside information.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 6062.63

Item Name: Dress.

Number of pieces: Two.

Location Number: HC-3-13-D-1

Approximate date: 1875-77

Fabric type(s): Silk - Brocade and Grosgrain.

Color(s): Ivory and gold.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Nine.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Pieced together, elaborate.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Ruffles, buttons, scallops

General description:
The bodice has fourteen carved mother of pearl buttons up the front, two matching buttons for decoration on sleeves. Some of the long seams and the boning of the bodice is sewn by machine, most stitching still done by hand. There is nice sleeve detail and a postilion back on the bodice. The front of the dress has the front center panel a second color, similar to dress number 6733, and a shallow point. The middle color on this dress is the gold grosgrain, the rest of the front of the bodice is ivory brocade. The sleeves are also the gold color, around the sleeve hem there is just a bit of brocade forming a decoration. The bodice is cut in 8 pieces with tow darts on each side of the front. All but two of the back seams are boned. The armseye and bottom edge of bodice is piped.
The skirt is highly decorated and elaborate. It is pieced together more than would be expected. The showing seams are long and side seams, but many other seams, both horizontal and vertical, hidden by decoration. The prices are all sewn together by hand. There are no tapes in the skirt, but there is a pocket. The hem edge of the skirt has a lace dust ruffle.

Special Comments:
This evening bodice and skirt was one of the Leduc family dresses. The history center has a quilt square which is made of the same fabric as the dress. Identified as having been worn at the Japanese inaugural ball.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 61.76.15

Item Name: Wedding Dress.

Number of pieces: Two.

Location Number: HC-3-7-J-ON

Approximate date: 1873-75

Fabric type(s): Silk.

Color(s): Grey.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: None.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Layered, lots of self trim.
Train: No train.
Trims used: All self trim except lace around collar.

General description:
The bodice is fully lined, but unboned. There are two long darts in front. The sleeves are in two pieces, loosely fitted. The cuffs are edged with a tightly knife pleated ruffle of self trim. The dress has a standing collar, to which a ruffle of lace is sewn at the base. The bodice is about hip length, and fitted all the way down. The lower back of the bodice is built to sit on a low bustle. It has a bow which is made of wrapped fabric, rather than tied. A strip of fabric was pleated and another piece wrapped in the middle to give a bow like effect. The side back panels have four rows of stitching pulled into gathers. There are fourteen covered buttons down the center front.

The skirt has a lining that is used as part of the main body of the dress. The silk does not continue far under where the bodice overlaps it. The trimmed sections cover lining fabric rather than a flat piece of the silk. In the front there are four horizontal pleats, facing up. There is only about an inch of fabric folded under to give the effect of the pleat. These pieces are wen in place to either side of the center with a row of stitching. The fabric extends down front the last upward pleat to meet with a row of fabric which is bias but, and slightly gathered, under that ruffle a row of tight knife pleats attaches. The ruffle and row of knife pleats continue around to the back of the skirt. In the back of the skirt a flat strip of fabric is sewn vertically, attaching to the front panel on either side. A long piece of fabric is gathered unto these bands, and tapes are used to control the fullness. The back is symmetrical.

Special Comments: This dress is very stylish, but it uses fabric very economically.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 61.97.1
Item Name: Wedding Dress.
Number of pieces: Two.

Location Number: HC-3
Approximate date: 1880.
Fabric type(s): Brocade and satin.

Color(s): Gold and blue brocade, blue satin.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Eleven bones.
Number of panels in bodice: Ten.
Number of pieces in sleeve: One.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Fringe, bow, pleats, puffs.

General description:
The bodice is lined with brown cotton twill. It is long waisted and has a standing collar made of the same fabric as the dress, lined with blue satin. The overskirt section of the polonaise has blue facing in a two inch strip around edge of overskirt. Otherwise that section of the dress is unlined. There is a line of blue and white fringe sewn to that facing. The same blue is present around the sleeve hem formed into small pleats around wrist. The sleeve is fitted. The overskirt has extra fabrics, added in with an inverted pleat, sen across the top, and down the center. The extra length and width of the fabric is gathered onto a U-shaped tape on the back underside of the overskirt.

The skirt is mostly hidden by the polonaise and is not extremely decorated. The skirt is fully lined, and all trim is self trim. It closes in the center back. There is not much back fullness, but what there is, is low. There are ties inside the skirt. Fastens with a button in back. There is a pocket on the right side sewn shut by hand. The skirt seems to have been shortened and perhaps narrowed. It is possible to see that modifications were made, but hard to say what they were. The hem might be new. There is less fraying on the hem than the waistband.

Special Comments: This dress has a twenty four inch waist. The buttons are metal circles, with a recessed area that has little flowers painted on it. This skirt may not have originally belonged to this bodice.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 62.87.3

**Item Name:** Dress.

**Location Number:** HC-3

**Number of pieces:** Two. Bodice and Skirt.

**Approximate date:** Late 1870's.

**Fabric type(s):** Silks - satin and velvet.

**Color(s):** Greenish silver and brown.

**Specific Descriptions:**
Number of bones in bodice: Six.
Number of panels in bodice: Ten.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Asymmetrical.
Train: No Train.
Trims used: Smocking, pleating, cut velvet.

**General description:**

The front of both the skirt and the bodice is a panel of cut velvet. The buttons are metal flowers, with sparkles dented in, which complement the pattern of leaves on the velvet. The peplum is sewn like a polonaise back, the center sections are cut with extra fabric to the middle, and sewn in an inverted box pleat. The sleeves are plain. Loosely shaped, but not fitted, with no decorations. The collar is a standing collar and is edged with lace.

The cut velvet panel of the skirt is cut into square tabs along the bottom edge, the tabs are then finished with tape made of the silver fabric. The front piece of the dress has four layers. To the left of front is a panel that poufs. To the right is smocking at hip level with fabric hanging free after about eight inches. The skirt opens at the side back right, and closes with hooks and eyes. There is a second set of hooks and eyes along the second back seam. The dress in back has knife pleats on one side.

Some sewing done by machine, an equal amount by hand.

**Special Comments:** This dress has striped lining fabric - most is solid colored.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 66.2302

Item Name: Dress

Number of pieces: One. Dress.

Location Number: HC-3-18-E

Approximate date: Mid 1870's.

Fabric type(s): Cotton.

Color(s): White and Pink.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unboned.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Continuous from dress. Seven pieces by waist. Four gores added bellow hip level.
Train: No real train.
Trims used: Buttons, self-made bias tape and ribbon.

General description:
This dress is a white cotton house dress, which has no collar. The collar edge is finished with piping. There are 14 buttons down the front of the dress. It has an eight piece bodice. The dress has been altered at least once, it looks as though the size of the bustle would depend up upon the desires of the wearer. It could have been worn with a bustle, but it was not necessarily. It could also have been worn as a wrapper.

At the center back of the bodice there is a piece of fabric feet joined together in the shape of a triangular gore. There is a seam down the center back of the bodice. The center back of the skirt does not have center back seam. The two bodice pieces are cut at some distance apart, the extra fabric that will be in the center-back skirt then, is taken up in an inverse pleat. There is a row of trim (Bias tape edged in pink)which comes to a point in the rear. The pieces angle up, then come down over the shoulders, and extend almost to the hem in front, where they curve backward and connect again near the bottom in back. A row of this trim also extends horizontally around the base of the skirt, and the hems of the sleeves. The skirt is hemmed with a cotton fabric cut and used as a hemming tape.

Special Comments:
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 6733

**Location Number:** HC-3-18-I-2

**Item Name:** Wedding Gown.

**Approximate date:** 1873.

**Number of pieces:** Two. Bodice, Skirt.

**Fabric type(s):** Silk.

**Color(s):** Purple, two shades.

**Specific Descriptions:**
- Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
- Number of panels in bodice: Eight in lining.
- Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
- Basic skirt info: Narrow, simple.
- Train: No train.
- Trims used: Pleating, fancy buttons, contrasting fabric.

**General description:**
The lining for the bodice of this dress is cut in eight pieces. The outer layer has ten because the front center layer is a second fabric. There are also two darts on each side in the front. The darker fabric in the front center also extends around the collar and is used to edge the sleeves. The darker fabric on the sleeves is cut wider on one side, the narrower edge curves and overlaps the wide edge forming a nice design. It fastens with ten buttons.

The skirt is simply made. There is back fullness which is covered on the inside by a muslin piece. The fabric from the back comes around to the front where it is gathered to a piece of fabric which hangs free from it’s gathering near the top to form an apron effect.

Some of the seams of this dress are hand sewn. All trim is sewn on by hand. There is also machine sewing present, especially on the bodice. The bottom of the skirt has two layers of tightly pleated fabric, giving a bit more movement to the legs near the ankles. The area of the skirt which cannot be seen are pieced. Heavy wool along bottom edge of skirt.

**Special Comments:**
This dress was made to conserve fabric. It is a good example of a simple stylish dress that would not require as much fabric as some other styles. The dress was worn after the wedding as the armpits are stained and the dress is worn along the arms and collar.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 6734.2

Item Name: Dress.

Number of pieces: Two.

Color(s): Black.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unboned.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Asymmetrical.
Train: No train.
Trims used: All self trim. Pleating, and fringe.

General description:
This is a black silk dress. The skirt is lined with a checkered wool, which the black is at times sewn to, and at times draped over. The sleeves are also line in wool, but the rest of the bodice is lined in muslin. The bodice is simply cut in eight pieces. It fastens with fourteen buttons down the center front. The bodice comes to a slight point both in front and in back. In the back the seams of the bodice do not follow through to the edge of the material, and the peplum spreads apart to rest on the bustle.

The center front panel of the overskirt is black and joined to the wool lining. On either side of the center front panel is a panel which hangs loosely over the lining fabric. The skirts waistband was sewn in by hand. The very bottom of the dress is pleated with a series of knife pleats that are stacked three to five on top of one another. The hem is again finished with hemming tape. There is lots of fullness in the back, but it is a simple draping job now.

Special Comments:
Minneapolis History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 7309.1

Item Name: Gown.

Number of pieces: Two. Bodice, Skirt.

Location Number: HC-3-5-H-1

Approximate date: 1872.

Fabric type(s): Heavy wool blend.

Color(s): Ecru/Brown.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Seven.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: One skirt, looks as though there is an overskirt.
Train: No Train.
Trims used: Pleating, self trim, ruching, lace.

General description:
This dress has a standing collar that is satin on the outside. The sleeves are set in, have two pieces, and are edged with pleated Tulle and lace. The dress had eleven buttons, most are missing.

At the waistline of the bodice there is the fabric with five hooks and eyes. The long seams on the bodice were done by machine. Horizontal waist seams, could be done by hand, but it is hard to tell. The bottom edge of the bodice is cored and above the cording are two rows of folded self-trim. The peplum in back is rounded on the sides, and the trim is cut on the bias to continue smoothly around it.

The skirt looks as though it has an overskirt, but they are joined at the waistband. There is a pocket hidden under the material of the overskirt. The pocket would be hard to reach. The material that forms the overskirt is gathered on cords that can adjust the mount of gathering at the sides of the overskirt. The dress is hemmed with hemming tape that was woven in a similar color as the rest of the fabric. The bottom of the underskirt has a row of fancifully folded box pleats, covering the line were a ruffle is added along the bottom. The skirts are flat into the waistband in front, and gathered in back. Some of the gathering in back has come undone. There are many tapes and ties controlling the fullness of the skirt. It look like some trim might be missing. There are places where very obvious hand sewing (i.e. big loops and knots) is showing, and it looks as though maybe these area’s should have been covered with trim.

Special Comments:
The hemming tape on the dress fist appears to have been speckled to match the dress material, but the design was actually built in to the fabric.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 7433.2

Item Name: Wedding Dress.

Number of pieces: Three. Bodice, skirt, overskirt.

Color(s): Light tan.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: Six.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Full, decorated, large bustle.
Train: No train.
Trims used: All self trim, buttons, pleats, folds, etc.

General description:
There is wide piping, (one third inch) used as decoration and finishing for much of the bodice. This piping lines the lower edge of the bodice, and outlines revers, the armsgye, decoration at the bottom of the sleeve. There are thirteen buttons fastening up the front, but pleated fabric hides most of them from view. This pleat continues up and around the neck, forming a standing collar. The same covered buttons are used as decoration on the sleeves and overskirt. The sleeve is finished with a piece of fabric that is about four inches wide, gathered and sewn down under a flat piece of fabric.

The overskirt is unlined. The bottom edge is finished with a turned up row of bias tape, cording, and buttons. The cording is used not only to edge the skirt, but to create patterns on it. The front panel is solid. In back the front panel joins the back panel, the back panel has lots of extra material available to puff out. The peplum in back spreads apart and would rest nicely on a bustle.

The skirt is fully lined. There are two bands of ruffles which are gathered and sewn onto the bottom of the skirt in flounces. The dress is hemmed with hemming tape, but see note below.

Trim is all sewn on by hand, although the long seams are mostly done with a machine.

Special Comments: In back this dress must have trailed slightly on the ground. It has a "Norsele Dress Protector" sewn along the back hem. This hangs about a half an inch below the bottom layer of the dress in back. The dress protector is layered, the outside is pleated and the inside is flat. More decoration can be seen that way.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 7634.4
Location Number: HC-3

Item Name: Dress.
Approximate date: 1878.

Number of pieces: One. Dress.
Fabric type(s): Grosgrain.

Color(s):

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Ten.
Number of panels in bodice: Ten.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Sleeveless.
Bodice fastening: Back. Laces.
Basic skirt info: Full in back.
Train: There is a train.
Trims used: Bows, pleats, lace, shaped fabric.

General description:
The dress is sleeveless, it has lace around the armholes, which may not be original. This dress has an actually petersham. The seams of the dress are finished with tape and whip stitching. Around the hem there is a row of fabric cut alternating a shorter curved scallop and a longer square tab. Under that there is a row of pleated lace. Lots of pleated fabric forming trim. There are round buttons used for decoration also. The very back of the skirt is pleated in a fan shape, extending the train out from the waist. There are extra pieces of fabric added for length. Three rows of ties in the back of the skirt hold the fullness of the train together.

Special Comments:
Most seams on this dress are a chain-stitch, I believe done by machine.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 7771.1

Item Name: Wedding Gown.

Location Number: HC-3-7-H

Number of pieces: Three - bodice, skirt, and overskirt.

Approximate date: Early 1870's.

Fabric type(s): Silk Taffeta.

Color(s): Faded to Brown.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Four short bones at front center.
Number of panels in bodice: Six. Center back seam. Two darts on each side of front.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two - Bell shape.
Bodice fastening: Front fastening, eight sets of hook and eyes.
Train: No Train.
Trims used: Bows, cording, pleats, ruffles, flounces.

General description:
Center front section of underskirt where visible has rows of flounces to floor. These flounces are strips of material sewn to lining fabric and folded down, hanging loosely, each flounce is a separate piece of fabric. Around the back of the skirt these alternate with vertical box pleats. The flounces on the front panel extend higher than the rest of the skirt. There is a bow on either side of the front panel where the side panels meet it with the vertical box pleats. The waistband on the underskirt is 1" wide, and is petersham material, rather than the fabric of the skirt. The underskirt has a fold of material extending down from the waistband four inches. This is flat in front, but expands out in back adding more bulk. Tape along bottom hem, covered by flounces and pleats.

Cording which is about one eighth inch in diameter extends around the armseye. At the waist there is a square reinforcer with four sets of hooks and eyes.

Overskirt is tightly gathered. The center back panel is cut longer than the side panels and gathered onto the side panels creating extra fullness in back.

Hand sewing is visible, especially on outside of underskirt. Some top stitching done by machine. Seams finished by hand. Other stitching questionable.

Special Comments:
There is a pocket which has been sewn shut. The opening was hidden by the overskirt. The seams throughout his garment were finished by pressing closed and whip-stitching together. The bodice has a placket which is made by cutting the bodice piece out to the selvedge, and using the folded under selvedge.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8016

Item Name: Dress.

Number of pieces: Three. Skirt, Overskirt, Bodice.

Location Number: HC-3

Approximate date: 1872.

Fabric type(s): Taffeta.

Color(s): Greenish grey.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: None.
Number of panels in bodice: Six.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Full, Seven piece underskirt. Overskirt.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Fringe, pleats, buttons, mostly self trim.

General description:
The bodice of this dress does not have the typical square tabs, nor does it have a petersham as such. Instead it has a band of fabric that ties around the waist inside the dress. There are twelve crocheted buttons down the front of the bodice. The sleeves are set in by hand, and lined with a different fabric. The armseye is cored. The bottoms of the sleeves are finished with a fancy panel made of self trim, which hangs free of the arm and is edged with fringe. There was originally a round collar to this dress, fabric was added to make the revers. This dress has a horizontal seam at the waistline on the sides. There is a flare in the back of the bodice which would allow it to sit on top of a high bustle. The bottom edge of the bodice is also trimmed with fringe.

The underskirt is very plain. It has two rows of cording along the bottom edge. The underskirt opens in front and fastens with a hook and eye. The hem is finished with hemming tape. There are three horizontal ties in the underskirt, and it has a pocket. The underskirt is fully lined. The back of the skirt is tightly gathered.

The overskirt is unlined. It has a two inch wide waistband, and fastens in back with a hook and eye. The back is tightly gathered, and a piece which is six inches long gathered, was added to add fullness. There are five sets of vertical ties, and two sets of horizontal ties holding the puffs of the overskirt in place. The skirt is symmetrical. The bottom, three inches of the overskirt are self trim. There is fringe along the bottom of the overskirt and cording along bottom and three inches up. This dress contains a lot of hand sewing. It had lots of room for a bustle.

Special Comments: Pencil marks from construction are still visible on this garment.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 8419.2  
**Location Number:** HC-3-13D-6

**Item Name:** Dress.  
**Approximate date:** 1870’s. Mid decade.

**Number of pieces:** One, Dress.  
**Fabric type(s):** Silk.

**Color(s):** Grey with darker grey fringe.

**Specific Descriptions:**
Number of bones in bodice: Unboned.  
Number of panels in bodice: Ten.  
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.  
Basic skirt info: Princess line dress extends till bottom ruffles of skirt.  
Train: Short train.  
Trims used: Fringe, self trim, bows, lace at collar.

**General description:**
The dress has twenty two buttons down the center front. The top twenty are usable. There is line of fringe that extends around the lower edge of the skirt which calls between the last two buttons. The sleeve is loose in two pieces the curve is gathered, and there is some self trim, although not much. Here is folded fabric to form a ribbon and a bow about one inch from bottom of the sleeve.

The dress has a horizontal side seam, probably fabric pieced together as the horizontal seams do not match up. The dress is fully flat-lined, and unboned. The collar is a standing collar, trimmed with lace.

The skirt has lots of room for a bustle, but perhaps was worn as a wrapper without a bustle. Low on the bustle is a bow of self-fabric edged with the fringe. The bottom edge of the skirt is finished with knife pleats which extend out into the trim in back. The fringe gives the illusion of an overskirt where there is none.

**Special Comments:** This dress is slightly more fitted than the other wrappers I have looked at, but it looks as though it would qualify for that description.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8429.2
Item Name: Dress.
Number of pieces: One. Dress.

Color(s): Black.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: At least two.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: One.
Bodice fastening: Front. Hook and eyes.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Lace, dangles, pleating, ruching, other self trim.

General description:
The bodice is not typical of a one piece dress, and it has been altered. It is high waisted with a black flat ribbon on waist. All ribbon on this dress is made of the same fabric as the rest of its dress. The dress has a low square neckline that is not filled in. The neckline is edged in lace and with little thread covered drops. There is a front placket that fits between inner and outer layers of the bodice. There are also three rows of the bunched ribbon in the back of the dress. The front of the bodice is made of rows of ribbon tied into little bunches and sewn together, could easily be seen though if not for a second layer of fabric in addition to bodice lining. The bodice is in eight pieces. The back of the bodice is gathered into the waistband. There is a bone at the darts in the bodice.
The skirt has some trim, and a section of material forming an overskirt. The dress is tied back to achieve fullness in back. Gores are used to shape skirt to bustle. The overskirt fabric is sewn to the center front waistband with a three inch gap between the pieces. The two sides of the overskirt curve away from each other from there.
All the trim is sewn by hand. Other stitches are mostly chain stitch, and so probably sewn by machine. There are many pleats and ribbons and other uses of self trim.

Special Comments:
This dress is high waisted, which means if it is an 1870's dress it is most likely from the early part of the decade, but it is hard to tell. There is one dart in the front of the skirt, only on one side. In the back of the overskirt. Little metal covered weights are sewn into fabric.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8429.10

Item Name: Dress/wrapper.

Number of pieces: One. Wrapper.

Location Number: HC-3-17-L-11

Approximate date: 1870's.

Fabric type(s): Silk.

Color(s): Black with pink and white designs.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: One.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Unknown.
Bodice fastening: Front. Hooks and eyes.
Basic skirt info: Hangs loose from yoke.
Train: Slight train from the overskirt.
Trims used: Pink ribbon, gathering.

General description:
The dress is lined to the waist in both front and back. Below that it is unlined. There is a yoke in front to which fullness is pleated using box pleats. In back the yoke is set on straight expect for the middle two inches. Which are tightly gathered. The fabric extends down and out into a train from these gathers. The bodice fastens with fifteen hooks and eyes. The sleeve is edged with a pink ribbon, then a black, then another pink at the wrist edge. There is black lace sewn on underneath the loose sleeve of the dress. The black lace is gathered to the wrist. The dress has a standing collar which is edged with a row of pink and a row of black ribbon.
The hem of the dress is finished with hemming tape turned to the inside and sewn down. There are three rows of ribbon along bottom edge of the skirt. Two pink alternating with one black. Gores is actually a lovely person who doesn't know much to save money.

Special Comments:
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 8429.11  
**Location Number:** HC-3-13D-7

**Item Name:** Wrapper.  
**Approximate date:** 1870's.

**Number of pieces:** Dress.  
**Fabric type(s):** Silk.

**Color(s):** Brown.

**Specific Descriptions:**  
Number of bones in bodice: Seven.  
Number of panels in bodice: Eight in lining, five in dress.  
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.  
Bodice fastening: Front. Fourteen hooks-eyes for lining, four for dress.  
Basic skirt info: Gored, full, loose.  
Train: No train.  
Trims used: Self trim, pleating. Blue velvet fabric.

**General description:**  
The fabric is gathered into the neckline, which is just a piece of self-made bias tape, in the front. The brown cotton inner lining is boned, but it is loose. It is made in eight pieces with two darts, every seam is boned, but not the darts. There is a Watteau back from the neckline, fabric hangs straight to the floor with no seams. There is an inside ruffle around hem, sewn on top of skirt, finished with a shirttail hem. The hem of the skirt is finished with hemming tape. The two piece sleeves flare slightly from elbow, there is lace from inside finished off. All edges are finished with tape.  
There are two gores on each side of the center starting at hip level, giving extra fullness to the back. Belt type fabric currently pinned on, at wait. Back or front is questionable. There is a third piece which is a lightly curved rectangle, which could also be used in multiple ways.

**Special Comments:**
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 8609.1  
**Location Number:** HC-3-7-I

**Item Name:** Gown.  
**Approximate date:** 1879.

**Number of pieces:** Two - Bodice and skirt.  
**Fabric type(s):** Silk satin and velvet.  
Lace fabric for trim.

**Color(s):** Two shades of wine, velvet is deeper shade.

**Specific Descriptions:**  
Number of bones in bodice: Eight.  
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.  
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two  
Basic skirt info: Asymmetrical, highly decorated.  
Train: No train, or very slight.  
Trims used: Pleating, lace, draping and puffs, gathers, and bows.

**General description:**  
There is a velvet standing collar. The same velvet continues to form a square neckline down the front. The sleeves are fitted, sewn to curve, and the wrists are trimmed with lace. There are two decorative buttons on each sleeve. At the waist there is a square reinforcer with four sets of hooks and eyes. The bodice continues down into a short peplum which hides the waistband of the skirt.

The skirt looks as though it has an overskirt. The hem edge of the skirt is bound with hemming tape. Ruffles at the hem hide the tape. The lining fabric at the bottom edge of the hem was stiffened. The skirt closes with two hooks and eyes. The fasteners are about four inches apart and alternate directions. There is one hook and one eye on each side of the closure. The closure is hidden by lots of pleating. There are four layers of fabric in the front of the skirt with lots of velvet trim. The skirt is Asymmetrical with complex patterns of pleating and gathering. The skirt is fully lined, plus each over piece is lined, although with a loosely woven fabric. The front layers consist of the overskirt, a horizontally pleated front with sides that slightly flare, a layer of pointed scallops, and verticle pleats to the hem. The skirt stays close to the body in front. There are ties in the inside back of the skirt. There is an underlayer and an over layer which is intricately pleated and draped to a bow on one side of the back.

Seams are tape finished or whip stitched. There is a machine stitching visible in bodice especially around the boning and in the lining. All other visible stitches are hand stitching.

**Special Comments:** This dress is still in wonderful condition. Very well preserved.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8777.2
Location Number: HC-3-19-B3-ON

Item Name: Dress.
Approximate date: c. 1870.

Number of pieces: Two. Polonaise and underskirt.
Fabric type(s): Linen or linen and silk.

Color(s): Beige stripe.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: Four.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Seven pieces.
Train: No Train
Trims used: Cording, puffs, lace, self-trim bias tape.

General Description:
This dress is a two-tone beige with a linen warp and a linen or silk weft. There is piping around the arms and collar. The collar is a standing collar. The sleeves are decorated at their hem with lace, sewn on by hand, which covers the stitching line of where an extra piece was added at the bottom of the sleeve as extra decoration. Closes with thirteen buttons. The dress has a horizontal seam at the side waist. The bodice is a polonaise, and from the waist two vertical ties extend down to help hold bustle fabric in place.

The skirt is built in seven pieces. Gathered at rear, darts used to help with fitting. All machine sewn except for buttonholes and trim by hand.

Special Comments:
This is a light, spring dress.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8782.15
Item Name: Dress.
Location Number: HC-3-17K-3
Approximate date: Early 70's.
Number of pieces: Two pieces. Overskirt and bodice. Underskirt missing.
Fabric type(s): Silk.
Color(s): Brown.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: There is boning, quantity unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: Six.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Underskirt missing. Overskirt decorative.
Train: No train present.
Trims used: Lots of self trim, piping, pleating, also contrasting fabrics.

General description:
The bodice has a typical high neck, with a ruffle that has its top edge piped. It was once pleated to form a common style of trim, but it has come unpleated. It appears there is also other trim missing. The nine buttons are crochet covered. There is ruching down the front center of the bodice. The three rows of gathering stitches used were sewn by hand, as were the button holes, the rest of stitching by machine. The bodice has two darts on each side of the bodice front, and a horizontal seam at the waist. A second fabric was used to trim the sleeves. There is a ruffle made by using five rows of gathering stitches, and it is corded top and bottom. The peplum in back extends straight from the rest of the bodice. This bodice has breast enhancers sewn inside.

The skirt is an overskirt. It is highly decorated, but unlined. The center front has three darts and has two gores adding fullness which gets pulled to the rear. It fastens center back, and there are two sets of ties in the back as well as four vertical tapes used to gather up fabric, making it shorter in the back before adding a bustle. The bottom edge is finished with a taffeta ruffle like that of the sleeve. There are five taffeta flaps at the center back of the overskirt. They look almost like a bow. All the trim is attached by hand, otherwise stitching has been done by machine.

Special Comments:
This dress originally looks complete, perhaps as if made for an adolescent of a shorter woman than most dresses were for. I believe that there was an underskirt which is now missing for a number of reasons. All underskirts which I have seen are lined. Overskirts are lined much less frequently. The hem edge in the rear does not hang straight. The back hangs lower than the front, and is composed of a large bow which hangs loosely from near the waist. The back of a skirt worn alone with a bustle should be slightly lower than the front of the same skirt, and this dress would definitely have required some form of bustle.

The breast enhancers are made of cotton batting, sewn into a crescent shape of lining fabric. They are sewn onto the bodice.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8809.1

Item Name: Wedding Gown.

Number of pieces: Two.

Location Number: HC-3-18-I-19

Approximate date: March, 1875

Fabric type(s): Lace, silk satin, silk velvet.

Color(s): White.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Eight.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Unknown.
Bodice fastening: Front. Lace.
Basic skirt info: Asymmetrical.
Train: Train attached to bodice.
Trims used: Brussels lace, velvet, crepe, pleats, couched cording.

General description:
This was a wedding dress which was probably only worn once, or possibly for one season. The velvet is plush and looks like fur. There is brussels lace around the neckline, creating a falling collar, then there is silk chiffon/ or crepe gathered very tightly which forms a standing collar. The front section of the bodice is pointed. There is a panel decoration covering that point, and mirroring it above, so there is a diamond with squared off sides made of plush velvet, which almost looks like white fur, and couching. The velvet and couching fill this diamond space by alternating strips of velvet and couching. Above the decorated triangle is satin. The three-quarter length sleeves are satin and are set into the armseye so that they puff some at the shoulders. The bodice laces up the front. In back the bodice continues into a train. The bodice and the top section of the train, that which would contact the skirt, as oppose to the floor, are lined in muslin. The part of the train that drags was lined with satin.

The skirt is asymmetrical. Left side is velvet alternating with satin. Rights side is two rows of knife pleats, each taking half the length of the front section. Around the entire bottom is two inches of pleating. The skirt is unfinished in back. It buttons to the train with three buttons down each side, showing that even in a dress this fancy expensive fabric was not always used where is would be unseen. The skirt is lined in muslin. It has a drawstring in the back to bring extra fullness over the bustle. The train has extra fullness to accommodate a built in bustle.

Special Comments:
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 8837.2

Item Name: Dress.

Number of pieces: One.

Location Number: HC-3-13B-13

Approximate date: 1870's.

Fabric type(s): Silk, lace.

Color(s): Floral print, orange, white.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Eight.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Full, complex, highly decorated.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Lace, bows, puffs, pleats, gathers, etc.

General description:
The bodice of the dress was altered at some time. There are currently fifteen covered buttons up the front of this dress. The neckline was originally three buttons higher, but it was cut and turned under. The old fabric was not cut off. The newer neck edge is finished with lace trim. The sleeves are cut in two pieces and finished with lace at the wrists. There is a petersham in the bodice. The skirt attaches to the bodice in back.

At the back of the dress there is a big bow of the print material where the skirt and bodice join. The print continues to fall loosely in puffs down to almost the hem of the dress. The print material is sewn to the pleated orange fabric at the bottom. There is a dust ruffle to the inside of this fabric.
The front of the skirt is covered with laces draped in complex manners. In general there is a lot of bulk to this skirt. The lace fabrics in front gather unto a piece of fabric that is about six inches long, and fastens to the center front waistband.

Inside the bodice is lined separately, but the skirt is also fully lined. There are two steels inside the back of the dress which tie around the legs using elastic and tapes.

Special Comments:
This is a complex, but beautiful dress.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 8890.2
**Location Number:** HC-3-17-T-14

**Item Name:** Dress.
**Approximate date:** 1875-76.

**Number of pieces:** Three. Skirt, blouse, vest.
**Fabric type(s):** Wool and lace.

**Color(s):** Blue, pink, white.

**Specific Descriptions:**
- Number of bones in bodice: Three. (Vest)
- Number of panels in bodice: Eight. (Vest)
- Number of pieces in sleeve: Two. (Blouse)
- Bodice fastening: Front. Hooks and Eyes. (Both)
- Basic skirt info: Straight. White Tulle apron.
- Train: No train.
- Trims used: Tulle fabric, embroidery.

**General description:**
Blue wool vest, edged with braid, covered with white Tulle and lace. The blouse is all lace. Both fasten in front with hooks and eyes, the vest alone has eighteen. The bodice has a very narrow bone (about 1/8 inch), at each side seam. There is a 1/4 inch bone at center back which extends down into the postition which is built to sit on a bustle. At the front of the vest there is a square section added in along one of the darts. It is less faded than the rest of the jacket, perhaps pieced in as a replacement section.

The skirt is very narrow and it opens in back. It is blue until the bottom section. Near the hem the blue is cut into rectangular tabs which fall over pink fabric which is knife pleated. The Tulle fabric in front is edged with lace. It is sewn into the waistband. The front is embroidered with blue and pink flowers. In back it ties into a bow and hangs loosely to the bottom of the skirt.

**Special Comments:**
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 8940.10
**Location Number:** HC-3-7-H

**Item Name:** Wedding Dress.
**Approximate date:** Mid 1870's

**Number of pieces:** Two - Bodice and skirt.
**Fabric type(s):** Silk with textured weave. Silk satin lining. Crepe collar.

**Color(s):** Patterned Beige, Shiny Beige, Matte Beige.

**Specific Descriptions:**
Number of bones in bodice: Built for nine bones, eight present.
Number of panels in bodice: Twelve. Eight in back with center back seam. Four in front, two darts each side.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Bodice fastening: Front. buttons.
Basic skirt info: Three tiers. Twelve pieces at top, seams match with bustle.
Train: There is a noticeable train.
Trims used: No pleats or frills. Decorated fabric. Cording.

**General description:**
The collar of this dress is high in back and narrows to a point on either side of a square neckline. The edges of the collar are trimmed with one-sixteenth inch cording. Buttons are one-eighth inch in diameter.

This dress was built to be worn with a specific, low/full bustle. It has an extra piece of fabric added at hip level in the rear, adding a fitted fullness over the bustle. Two inch band of crinoline fabric around bottom edge to add stiffness and protect hem, grows larger along hem of the train.

All seams in the garment were finished with tape. Bottom edge finished with hemming tape.

At waist a square reinforcer with four sets of hooks and eyes.
Mostly machine stitched, hand stitching for trim, and some other work.

**Special Comments:**
Unique collar. Simple dress, the decoration comes mostly from pattern in fabric.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 9085.1
Item Name: Dress/possibly wrapper.
Number of pieces: One. Dress.

Color(s): Floral print.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: None.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Continuous from bodice, unshaped.
Train: Extra fabric in back, possibly a train.
Trims used: Blue ribbon, ruffles of self trim. Covered wooden buttons.

General Description:
This dress was for a large woman. There is a standing collar which overlaps in front, circling the neck twice. The sleeves are in two pieces, they are loosely fitted. There is a ruffle of gathered self trim, sewn together with two rows of blue ribbon at sleeve hem edges. The same ruffle/ribbon combo starts at the back of the neck, just below the standing collar. It wraps around over the shoulders on each side, and down the front of the dress. Just above where the two rows of buttons start this line of trim ends and a horizontal row of the same trim is attached. The hem is finished with hemming tape, which is hidden by a flounce of gathered material.

There are seven working buttons down the front of the dress. Four buttons of decoration extend down from there. Columns of two buttons a piece line up with bottom buttons in front and extend around the skirt. The buttons were covered with the same fabric the blue ribbon is made from.

There is fullness pleated into the back of this dress, but it does not appear to have been fitted to a bustle. The pleats are very high and hang loosely. There is a tie at the waist inside the back of the dress in order to control fullness.

There is both machine and hand sewing in the dress.

Special Comments:
If this dress was worn with a bustle or crinoline it would be early seventies. If it is in fact a wrapper, the horizontal finishing of the skirt leads to the suggestion of mid to late seventies. It is most likely a wrapper and worn without stays.
The sleeve of this dress is fitted to the armhole, but there is an extra pleat in the armpit to allow for more movement.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 928CL.1

**Item Name:** Dress.

**Number of pieces:** Two. Skirt, bodice.

**Location Number:** HC-3-17-J-9

**Approximate date:** Mid to late 1870's

**Fabric type(s):** Silk taffeta, chenille fringe.

**Color(s):** Light olive brown.

**Specific Descriptions:**
Number of bones in bodice: Seven.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Bodice fastening: Front. Hooks and eyes.
Basic skirt info: Asymmetrical.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Fringe, embroidery, ruching, puffs, lace.

**General description:**
The front opening of the bodice is complex. The front panel is attached under one side of the dress, and the other section folds over the top. The arrangement is symmetrical. Under everything there are two panels that join snugly in front with eleven hooks, up to about the bustline. Over that is a triangular panel that covers the upper chest, this panel is covered with ruching and ties around the neck. On top of that panel on one side irregularly, and it is hard to tell what the original color was, but it was likely closer to the blue of the scallop trim.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 9299.1
Item Name: Wedding Gown.
Number of pieces: Two pieces.

Location Number: HC-3-18-I-6
Approximate date: 1874-1876.
Fabric type(s): Chiffon, Silk taffeta.

Color(s): Grey Silk.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: Fourteen
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Bodice fastening: Front Buttons, hooks.
Basic skirt info: Asymmetrical, large bustle.
Train: Maybe small train, otherwise large bustle.
Trims used: covered buttons, pleating, bows, almost all self trim.

General description:
The bodice has cording in every seam. There is a square collar filled in with small vertical knife pleats. There are little tabs forming a standing collar. Sleeves are fitted gathered and shaped at elbow. The bottom of the sleeve has pleated chiffon trim. Above that a row of self trim wrapped with a bow. There are small, self covered buttons around armseye. Two rows of buttons extend down the peplum.

There is lots of diagonal pleating and ruffles on the skirt. Diagonal extends around the front of the skirt. The back panel is gathered up on tapes forming extended back fullness. There is a large self trim bow right at the bustle.

Special Comments:
The amount of work in this dress is incredible. The cording and covered buttons alone would have created a lot of work, the decoration on the skirt adds even more.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

**Accession Number:** 9300.1  
**Location Number:** HC-3-6-K  
**Item Name:** Wedding Gown.  
**Approximate date:** 1870's.  
**Number of pieces:** One. Bodice.  
**Fabric type(s):** Silk satin.  

**Color(s):** Ecru.

**Specific Descriptions:**
Number of bones in bodice: Four. One on either side of center front, boned up back.  
Number of panels in bodice: Unknown.  
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two. Loosely fitted.  
Bodice fastening: Back. Laced.  
Basic skirt info: N/A.  
Train: N/A.  
Trims used: Cording, others unknown.

**General description:**
This is piece is a bodice from a wedding gown. The bodice is pointed in front and back and would not have been worn with a large bustle. The bodice is flatlined. There is cording around the sleeve edges. The hem edge of the bodice is turned up and sewn under by hand.

**Special Comments:**
The trim has been removed, but it is still possible to see the holes from the stitching. The trim was sewn on in a square shape, by hand.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 9417.1
Location Number: HC-3-5H-3

Item Name: Dress.
Approximate date: early 1870's.

Number of pieces: Two.
Fabric type(s): Homespun Wool.

Color(s): Purple and tan stripe.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: Five.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Plain.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Velvet ribbon.

General description:
Early 1870's sleeve, loose with a wide band of decoration at the wrist. The bodice has a peplus. Black velvet has been added center front. It now closes using hooks and loops on that velvet. Whatever form of closure was there before is missing.

The skirt has been altered at the waist, although what those alterations were is unclear. It looks as though it was taken in and pleats were added to the front. The dress has shaped and corded pockets. One opens to real pocket. The other is false. The skirt has fullness pleated into the waistband in back, and some fullness built into the front. The hem is finished with folded over hemming tape.

Special Comments: The velvet ribbon looks original, the velvet in the front and around the collar does not. One pictures is taken without the velvet showing.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 9417.2

Item Name: Dress.

Number of pieces: Two. Bodice, and skirt.

Color(s): Gray and White.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: Unknown.
Number of panels in bodice: Six.
Number of pieces in sleeve: Two.
Basic skirt info: Tubular, narrow.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Fabric and braid trim

General Description:
This dress is a simple style. The bodice is waist length and pointed in the front and the back. The velvet trim, especially the sleeve caps and cuffs, may have been added at a later date, but if so it was put back together very well. There is not much room for a bustle, there are double knife pleats meeting at the center back of the skirt.

Special Comments:
The fabric used for this dress is homespun. It is a simple dress. The weight of the fabric would not allow for draping, but the simplicity is still following fashion, albeit at a distance.
Minnesota History Center Museum Collections

Accession Number: 9973.1
Location Number: HC-3-17-K-6
Item Name: Dress.
Approximate date: 1865-75.
Number of pieces: Two.
Fabric type(s): Watered silk and faille.

Color(s): Two tones of purple.

Specific Descriptions:
Number of bones in bodice: None.
Number of panels in bodice: Eight.
Number of pieces in sleeve: One.
Bodice fastening: Front. Hooks and eyes.
Basic skirt info: Full, large bustle.
Train: No train.
Trims used: Ruching, fringe, gathers.

General description:
The bodice fastens down the front with seventeen hooks and eyes. The bodice has narrow shoulder, and full sleeves. The bodice has a ruched front. The lining of the bodice appears to have been let out in some places, stitching holes are still visible. To either side of the front panel is a row of pressed box pleated fabric to form ruffles. The bodice is in ten pieces with a dart on each side of the front. The lining for the bodice on the other hand is eight pieces with two darts to each side of front.
It is unboned, fully lined, and machine stitched.

The skirt could be worn with a tight hoop, full in back. In the front of skirt is a dart on the right side. The skirt has a total of six pieces. There are two gores added into the center back, and many pleats to add fullness. The opening is at the side back, and there is no attempt to hide the opening with an overlap. The waistband is muslin, and between that and the lack of overlap, it seems likely that an overskirt is missing.

Special Comments: It is possible that this skirt is missing an overskirt, but it could easily have been worn without one.
Appendix B

Glossary
Aniline: A colorless oily compound used as the base of coal-tar dyes.

Bind: The process of enclosing an edge of fabric in a bias band for direction, extra strength, or protection.

Basques - A bodice that is closely fitted by seaming from shoulder to the waist. Comes from the typical dress of Basque peasants.

Bodice - A garment, or part of a garment, covering the body from the waistline up to the shoulders.

Binder: A sewing machine attachment that is used to hold and aline the binding fabric while binding.

Braider: A presser foot through which there was a channel that braid for decoration could be passed.

Busk: A long piece of wood, horn, steel, etc placed in the center of the corset to keep the body erect.

Bustle: An artificial structure worn to extend skirts in the rear.

Cambric: Fine closely woven white fabric who’s right side was marked by a glossy appearance. It was often used for aprons or underskirts.

Cassimere Medium weight wool suiting cloth in a twill weave having no nap.

Chemise: Loose fitting short-sleeved cotton or linen undergarment of about knee-length worn under a corset.

Clubs: Godey’s magazine clubs - special rates to those who subscribe to more than one magazine or paper.

Corded seam: Welt seam with covered cord stitched along the seam edge.

Corder: A sewing machineg foot used on seams where cord is used.

Crinolette A bustle-like device.

Crinolines: From the German term for stiff, full petticoats, applied to all hoop-shaped skirt supports, including those of whalebone, cane, or steel.

Drawers: The most common late nineteenth-century term for the white cotton pantalettes of earlier years.

Embroidering foot: A sewing machine attachment that replaces the normal foot, allowing complex embroidering by machine.

Felled Seam: A lapped seam which encloses all raw edges.

Feller: A sewing machine attachment that folds the fabric to sew felled seams.

Flannel: Soft woolen fabric, slightly napped on one side, in a plain or twill weave. Often used for shirts, and other clothing.

Gatherer: A sewing machine attachment that sews gathers.

Gathers: Fabric drawn together with thread in order to form fullness.

Hairwork: Various articles, including switches, transformations, etc., made of human hair. Also the making of such items.

Merino: A fine, soft wool from the merino sheep that’s used for high-quality cloth.

Nainsook: 18th c. Somewhat heavy Indian muslin.

Panniers: Term used in fashion literature for support made of steel or cane at the hips under raised, draped skirts.

Peplum: Small ruffle, flounce, or flared expansion of the garment around the hips, usually from the bottom of the bodice.

Princess lines: The lines on a close fitting garment that are unbroken from the shoulder to the hem.

Quilter: A guide that attaches to the pressure bar of the sewing machine, allowing the even measurement of rows or stitches when quilting.

Revers: The turning back of the lapels.

Ruching: Drawing up of threads, especially drawing up a narrow strip of fabric on a center line of stitching or cording.

Self-trim: Trim that has been made from the same fabric as the garment.
Transformation: Pieces of hair made to be worn in addition to natural hair, or as a covering for the head.

Tucker: A sewing machine attachment to make tucks.

Tucks: Small, parallel pleats, that are stitched down along their entire length.

Tweed: All wool homespun fabric

Waist: The part of a garment that covers from the shoulders to the waist. Often called a blouse or bodice.

Watteau back: The back of a gown having fullness taken up in a box pleat near neckline hanging loosely from shoulders. Styled after costumes painted by the French 18th c. artist, Watteau.

Wide-hemmer: A sewing machine attachment that sews wide hems.

Wrappers: Loose fitting dress for at home wear.
Appendix C

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