

The first step in creating historical costumes is to decide who you want to be. You do not have to have a certain person in mind, but it is a good idea to think about whether you want to be rich or poor, where you live, and to have a general character in mind. Federal Period or Regency (in England) costuming can include dressing for reenactment as an officer or as an enlisted soldier, as a wife and child of a soldier or officer or as a civilian with the army. Many people who enjoy English Country Dance want to dress in period clothing for a ball, and museums and historic sites frequently use costumed interpreters.

**Reenactment clothing:** Military units generally have a list of equipment and uniform guidelines for new members. Women and children will wear civilian clothing, keeping in mind the nationality of the unit. Some men will portray civilians such as townspeople or merchants.

Military reenactment units normally have uniform and equipment guidelines for new members. Some units require everything to be sewn by hand, others do not. If there are no guidelines, the level of hand-sewing involved in making clothing can be a personal decision. Although the Industrial Revolution has led to more mechanized spinning and weaving methods, the sewing machine hasn't been invented yet! However, it is less "threatening" to use a sewing machine for long interior seams that are not visible on the finished clothing. Natural fibers are a must, both for authenticity and for safety.

A little time before you start sewing will save you time and money in the long run, and make entering the re-enacting community a fun experience. Fanny and Vera's Guide for Civil War Re-enactors starts out with 5 tips that apply to all time periods:

1. Find a mentor
2. Keep it simple and straightforward.
3. Portray what you know.
4. Do lots of research.
5. Read about history and social history.

**English Country Dance:** Most people wanting dance costumes are looking for formal wear; fabric authenticity is not as strict. Movies such as *Pride and Prejudice* can provide inspiration. The fashion of the day stressed light

fabrics such as cotton muslins for women, white was a popular color. Menswear included coats, waistcoats and trousers.

**Museum costume:** A museum will be concerned with many of the same issues as a reenactment group. Normally, the museum has a definite idea of “who” and “where”, and the clothing will be part of the educational mission.

**Sources of Information:** Original clothing in museums is a wonderful resource, as long as you keep in mind that most of what you are seeing is not everyday clothing. Portraits and other paintings, especially street scenes or scenes of daily life can provide ideas about color and accessories. In general, “seeing something on a re-enactor” is probably not a reliable source of information, unless you know that the person does good research.

**Pitfalls:** Many of the patterns made for living history do not follow standard sizing. I have included several size charts from different companies; fortunately, many companies print several sizes in one pattern. If you are ordering patterns, you might want to call the supplier and ask for advice about sizing. Always, when using a new pattern, do a mock-up out of cheap fabric to test the fit. (I have included “The Great Pattern Review” website in the list below.)

If you go to a reenactment or online to buy ready-made clothing, you need to be careful. Many sutlers carry things for more than one time period. And, unfortunately, authenticity can vary widely. One piece of clothing frequently seen for women is the bodice. This, for lack of a better term, was “invented” during the Bicentennial of the American Revolution. It is NOT something you want to wear.

Printed fabrics are very tempting for women’s and girls’ dresses. However, this is an area that requires careful research. The technology of printing fabrics was still under development, and a lot of what is being sold today just couldn’t be done 200 years ago.

There are many **costume websites**, these are a start:

Costumer’s Manifesto:

<http://www.costumes.org/History/100pages/costhistpage.htm>.

Historic Threads, Three Centuries of Clothing

[www.history.org/history/clothing/intro/](http://www.history.org/history/clothing/intro/)

Jane Austen Centre, [www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine](http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine)

Jessamyn's Regency Costume Companion:

[www.songsmyth.com/costumerscompanion.html](http://www.songsmyth.com/costumerscompanion.html)

Napoleon and the empire of Fashion, <http://napoleon-fashion.com>

The Regency Fashion page, <http://regencyfashion.org>

The Great Pattern Review: [www.gbacg.org/great-pattern-review/index.html](http://www.gbacg.org/great-pattern-review/index.html)

Antique dealers such as Vintage Textile, [www.vintagetextile.com](http://www.vintagetextile.com) sometimes have original garments for sale with good close-up pictures.

There are also Facebook costuming groups such as "Regency Costuming" and "Georgian Regency Empire Biedermeier Clothing Construction Support Group".

### **Fabric and pattern suppliers:**

American Duchess: [www.american-duchess.com](http://www.american-duchess.com) for shoes and accessories

Austentation, [www.austentation.com](http://www.austentation.com)

Burnley and Trowbridge, [www.burnleyandtrowbridge.com](http://www.burnleyandtrowbridge.com)

[www.fabrics\\_store.com](http://www.fabrics_store.com) is a good source for basic linen. (note: there is an underscore between fabrics and store: \_)

Farmhouse fabrics [www.farmhousefabrics.com](http://www.farmhousefabrics.com)

Fashions Revisited [www.fashionsrevisited.com](http://www.fashionsrevisited.com)

Fig Leaf Patterns [www.figleafpatterns.com](http://www.figleafpatterns.com)

Kannik's Korner Patterns and books [www.kannikskorner.com](http://www.kannikskorner.com)

Renaissance Fabrics: [renaissancefabrics.net](http://renaissancefabrics.net)

Sense and Sensibility Patterns: <http://sensibility.com>

Smoke and Fire, [www.smoke-fire.com](http://www.smoke-fire.com)

William Booth Draper, [www.wmboothdraper.com](http://www.wmboothdraper.com)

## Period newspaper advertisements:

These ads from the *Plattsburgh Republican* give a feel for what was available in the Plattsburgh area:

23 July 1814 Cady and Platt have just received from New York a general assortment of dry goods and groceries which they will sell low for cash. Among which are 2000 yards factory Ginghams and stripes, 1 dozen lady's fashionable hats.

20 August 1814 Gordon and Wallach have the honor to inform the public that they have just arrived in this town with an assortment of fine jewelry. Patent lever, musical, repeating, horizontal, plain, single and double cased Gold and Silver watches, chains, seals, keys, Diamond, pearl and plain gold earrings, rings, brooches, necklaces and are of the latest fashions and New York prices. They flatter themselves particularly to give satisfaction to the fair sex. Old silver, gold and all kinds of valuable stones will be taken on reasonable terms.

9 July 1814 Bailey and Delord ...have received from the southward an elegant and seasonable assortment of dry goods which they offer for sale on the most liberal terms: Superfine white jean, white dimities, nankeens, Superfine fancy vestings, calicoes, broadcloths (assorted colors), cassimers, cambrics, Britannia linens, factory cottons, factory gingham, yellow nankeens, Elegant figured silk shawls, ladies Quilling, fine cotton stockings, corded cambric, diaper, table cloths, Officer's sashes, tow cloth, cotton shirtings, linen stripe, checks, etc.

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