



Dickens of a Christmas Costume Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to educate vendors, crafters, businesses and the general public about authentic Victorian life. The goal is to encourage all to consider creating their own displays or dressing in period costume to celebrate and enhance the Victorian theme during Ebensburg's Dickens of a Christmas.

We encourage all residents, businesses and vendors to fully participate in the "Dickens" experience. Simply dressing in Victorian-era clothing or decorating your home or business with a Victorian theme will greatly enhance the event.

We strongly suggest research on the Internet, where there is a considerable amount of information readily available regarding appropriate costumes. Your search should concentrate on the early Victorian period, generally considered to be between 1837 and 1860. Dickens himself lived between 1812 and 1870. Google keywords such as "dickens costumes" and "Victorian costumes".

One of the best sources of information about "Dickens" costumes can be found online at www.dickensfair.com/involved.htm. The Website offers tips for "building your character" and "costume guidelines". It gives great tips on making men's and women's costumes appropriate for the period.

For general information about Charles Dickens and Christmastime, we strongly suggest that you visit the following websites:

www.charlesdickenspage.com/christmas.html

www.dressingup.info

www.logicmgmt.com/1876/xmas/trad.htm

Some may be interested in sewing their own costumes. For great ideas and patterns, visit:

www.denverfabrics.com/pages/static/vintage/victorian-clothing.htm

www.mccallpattern.com/costumes/page-1

www.anniescostumes.com/turnof.htm

You may wish to purchase your costume. Good websites to check out include:

www.gentlemansemporium.com

www.fashion-era.com/early_victorian_fashion.htm

www.demode.tweedlebob.com

www.avalonusa.com/dickens

e-Bay always has a wide selection of items for dickens-style costumes as well. If you search for "Victorian costumes" and "dickens costumes" you will find hundreds of items. Right here in Ebensburg, you will find items at businesses like High Street Emporium or the Ebensburg Goodwill Store.

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Victorian-era Clothing Ideas

FOR LADIES

1. Every lady wore a hat. Outside, ladies usually wore bonnets of some kind, trimmed with feathers, flowers, ribbons and bows. Create a bonnet easily from an old straw or felt hat from a thrift shop. Indoors, ladies often wore small lace caps that can be fashioned today from lace handkerchiefs, a flower and a few small ribbons. Domestic servants wore mopcaps.
2. A Victorian dress usually had a high neckline, sometimes with a collar and fitted bodice, three-quarter length full sleeves and a very full, long skirt worn over layered petticoats or a hoop. With a few amendments, such as adding more fullness to the skirt, accenting with ribbons, braid, lace and flowers, and even adding a collar, any thrift-shop find can be transformed into a lovely Victorian dress. Keep in mind that solids and small prints were more common, but stripes and plaids also were popular. Cotton, lightweight wools or any fabric that looks like silk or brocade would most resemble period cloth.
3. When choosing a long skirt, accent it with ribbons, lace and a full petticoat or hoop. A high-necked blouse with a cloak, mantle, shawl or pelerine jacket completes this easy outfit.
4. A working class woman would wear a simple dress with narrow sleeves and a dark material, with no petticoats. She might wear a bibbed apron over the dress, gloves, a fan and a small purse.

FOR GENTLEMEN

1. Hats are a must. A gentleman always wore a hat of some kind when he was outside. Even working-class men are pictured with battered top hats or lower-crowned, broad-brimmed hats. Tweed skimmers were more sporty versions of Victorian attire.
2. A plain white shirt can be given a period look by turning the collar up. Add a ribbon, scarf or fancy cravat and knot in front. A working-man would wear a collarless shirt or smock, with sleeves rolled up.
3. A vest (or waistcoat) of brocade, velvet or silk will help create a gentleman's costume. A waistcoat of wool in bright colored strips or plaid will make any 21st Century man a sporting 19th Century chap or shopkeeper.
4. Tapered pants in black, grey or buff with a strip of ribbon running down the outer seam were a gentleman's normal attire. A working-man would wear a baggy pair of pants in wool or corduroy.
5. A frock coat or tailcoat is easy to create, using a dark overcoat or raincoat. Trim the collar with velvet, silk or brocade, and move the first button to mid-chest, causing the coat to fall in a cutaway fashion. A laborer, fisherman or stallkeeper would have a wool coat with a scarf tied around the neck.

FOR CHILDREN

1. Boys wore trousers, shirts and coats as grown men did. A cap or small top hat also was common. The younger boys wore knickers, and the "young men" wore trousers.
2. Girls wore low frocks fastened behind, and short sleeves. When they went outside, they put on a cloak or shawl. Upper-class parents dressed their girls like miniatures, reproducing on a small scale each detail of puff, frill and elaborate decoration. The more commonfolk tended to be thrifty, and would reuse garments to make their children's clothes.
3. Babies were dressed in layers of flannel or cotton petticoats to combine warmth and ease of washing. Caps, with rows and rows of lace, looked dear around an infant's face. It was fashionable to drape baby in a simple circular cape while outside.

TIPS

For additional tips on Victorian dressing, check out the Internet sources listed above. Rent an old Charles Dickens classic turned into a movie such as *A Christmas Carol* (version with Patrick Stewart is best for costumes), *Oliver* (the initial crowd scene), *Nicholas Nickleby* (2002) or *David Copperfield*. Try to duplicate the clothing worn by the actors. Remember, a Victorian costume can be custom-made by a professional dressmaker, or pieced together with elements found in many closets or thrift shops. Dressing in Victorian fashion for Dickens of a Christmas adds to the festival enjoyment, and makes visitors part of the festival instead of mere observers.