

Victorian Fashion

During the Victorian era, the social class of the wearer could be distinguished by the cut, material, and color of the garments worn. Fashions for the women of the upper classes were complex. Dresses had layers of different shades, fabrics, and trimmings. Properly dressed women would often accessorize with gloves and hats.

In 1890, the bustle disappeared. Skirts became slim in front and very full behind. Sleeves began to expand, and by 1892, the puffy, "mutton-leg" sleeves became the rage. Victorians considered the "hourglass" shape to be the best to flatter the female form. Women often wore restrictive corsets to achieve this ideal. During this decade, the focus switched from the skirt to the bodice. As skirts became plainer, bodices became adorned with layers and frills. The invention of the sewing machine revolutionized women's fashion on a practical level, as ladies began designing, customizing, and making their own garments.

Men's fashions of this era were much more comfortable for the wearer. Since it was considered impolite for a gentleman to appear in his shirt sleeves before a lady other than his wife, men almost always wore an informal "sack coat" or "lounger" during the day. This was a loose-fitting, single-breasted jacket appropriate for travel or business. The collar was small, with short lapels, moderately rounded hems, flap or welt pockets on the hips, and it had a slightly baggy appearance. Men's formal attire consisted of a top hat, cutaway coat, waistcoat, cravat or tie, and trousers.

For illustrations and more information, see the following websites:

<http://trulyvictorian.net/firms.com/index.html>

<http://www.costumegallery.com/research.htm>

<http://www.premierclothing.com/index.html>

<http://www.erasofelegance.com/fashion4.htm>