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Try it on!

The mock-up should fit snugly, distributing the flesh evenly and with a minimal amount of wrinkling. Mark your waist and the shape of the top and back edges on the mock-up, making sure the side edges are not too high up. If there is too much fabric, pinch up the extra and pin it. If it is too tight, do not be afraid to cut through the fabric and create more space.

Once the mock-up is fitted correctly, take it off and mark any changes on the pattern. If a lot needs to be changed, you may need to make another mock-up, but this is time well spent, so do not hurry the process!

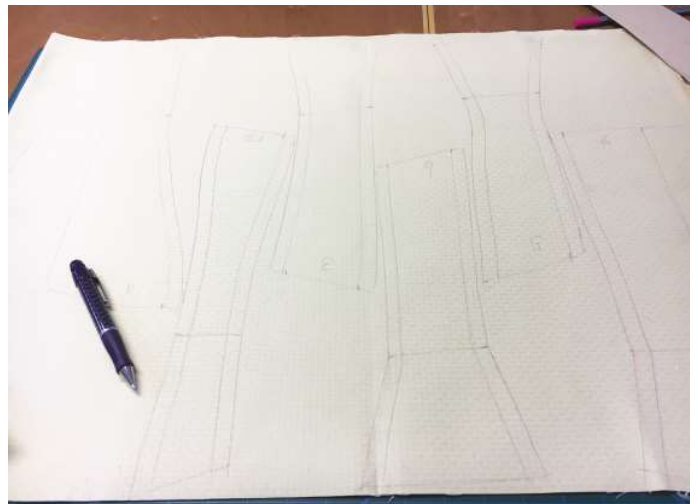
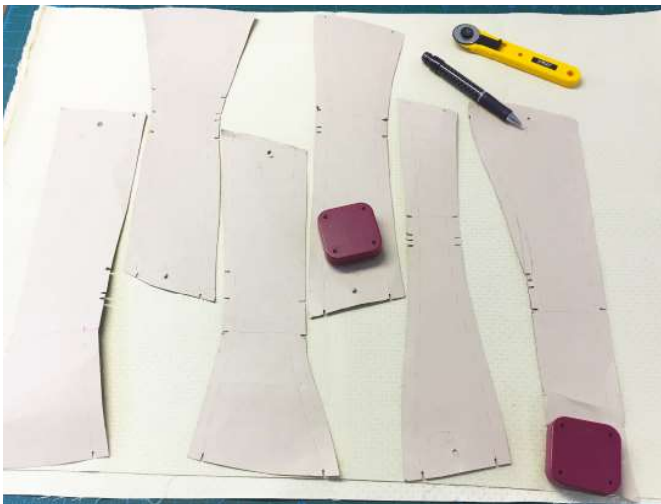


Two mockups of modern overbust corsets, one in coutil and one in calico. Although Victorian corsets are mid bust, you can see clearly the fit achieved and some alternations.

Notice that in the second one, there is no busk - the front panel was simply cut on fold.

You can still add central boning if needed.

Making the Corset



* Trace the pattern onto the fabric, marking seam allowances, grain, and waist.

To save time you can do it on a folded fabric.

*Cut the pieces out carefully, making sure both sides are identical, and that the seam lines etc are marked on both sides.

Make the mock-up first.

Tip: You can use your generic corset mock-up and trace the lines of this pattern onto it. It's a much easier way of getting the fit right and will only take small alternations! This is an ideal solution for those who, like me, are not mathematically inclined...



* Trace your pattern pieces onto both layers of fabric. Precision is important here, as ideally both layers should align perfectly.

* Mark all the seam allowances, etc, very carefully.

Gore insertion:



*Fold and press the edges of the main piece.

* Place the gore underneath it, both right side facing. Pin.

* Topstitch near the edge, sewing through both pieces - you can then run a second stitch a few millimetres out, for extra security and a neat look.

* The same method is used to connect all the pieces of the corset here.



Once the gores are inserted in all the pieces, reinforce the points with flossing.

* You can do it on both the top and lining layers separately, or all in one go once the corset is assembled.



The main pieces are treated the same - the seam allowance is folded under on one piece, (the curved seams will need notching), and then topstitched with the next piece underneath.

A parallel seam is run next to it, for reinforcement.



* Insert the busk as usual (see the Foundations chapter for details)

* Prepare the back panel (insert grommets and stitch the back boning channels).



* Measure both the inside and the outside layers and correct any discrepancies.

A slight misalignment may occur and it rarely affects the finished product, but try to get the layers as closely aligned as you can.

* Place the layers right sides together and sew at pieces #1 and #6 straight edges.

* Flip onto the other side and press

Join the front and the back, pleat the back, insert into the waistband, and add a closure.
Here, the hem is bound in satin. Add facing as needed (I used a strong cotton tape).

Optional - POCKETS!

Victorian skirts often featured a pocket hidded in the waistseam or the side seam of the skirt.
Inserting it is not the easist thing, but it is worth it!

Insert one or two pockets on each side - it is done while connecting the skirt pieces.



Cut the pocket (2 rectangles, or 1 fold) and stitch it together.

Turn it inside out and place on the right side of the skirt piece. Sew on side.



Complete the pocket while attaching an adjoining skirt piece, carefully sewing to a point. Pinning the pocket before sewing will help!



Finished pocket - all that needs to be done is to turn it inside...



Also optional - balayeuse.

A Balayeuse, or a dust ruffle was a detachable guard that protected the hem of the skirt, particularly on trains. Once dirty, it was detached and washed before the next outing.



Cut a piece of cambric or twill corresponding to the section of the skirt which will be on the ground. Hem, and make buttonholes along all edges at regular intervals.



Pleat/gather cotton lace and attach it in rows. Remember that the lace will be washed frequently, so it needs to be sturdy!



Complete! Now you just need to sew the buttons to the skirt, making sure the buttons and buttonhole positions match.

Balayuses came in different shapes and forms - as well as colours.

Some are just a sturdy ruffle protecting the hem all around, whereas some are big, elaborate affairs with lots of lace - they will be particularly useful in the next chapter, as we tackle the long trains of the Natural Form era like the one shown here..





Mock up the pieces. The back is pretty straightforward, but the front will depend a lot on your shape and the shape of your crinoline.

Cut out the front pieces in calico and drape them, making/pinning any changes. Mark the pleats, too. When you cut off spare pieces where the pleating is, you will notice that the fabric looks jagged - in fact just like the traditional patterns do. These are simply your pleats:-)

Cut out the front pieces in the top fabric and lining, bag line them, press, and pleat as needed. Repeat on the back piece.



Measure the target length of the ruffles. The ruffle narrows here as it goes up the sides!

Make the ruffle just like the one on the back of the skirt.

Sew the ruffle, pleat (subtle double stacked box pleats are used here), and attach to the overskirt. Add the fringe.

Pleat the top edge of the back piece. Put it on a dummy and arrange the three parts so that the front parts overlap the back parts.

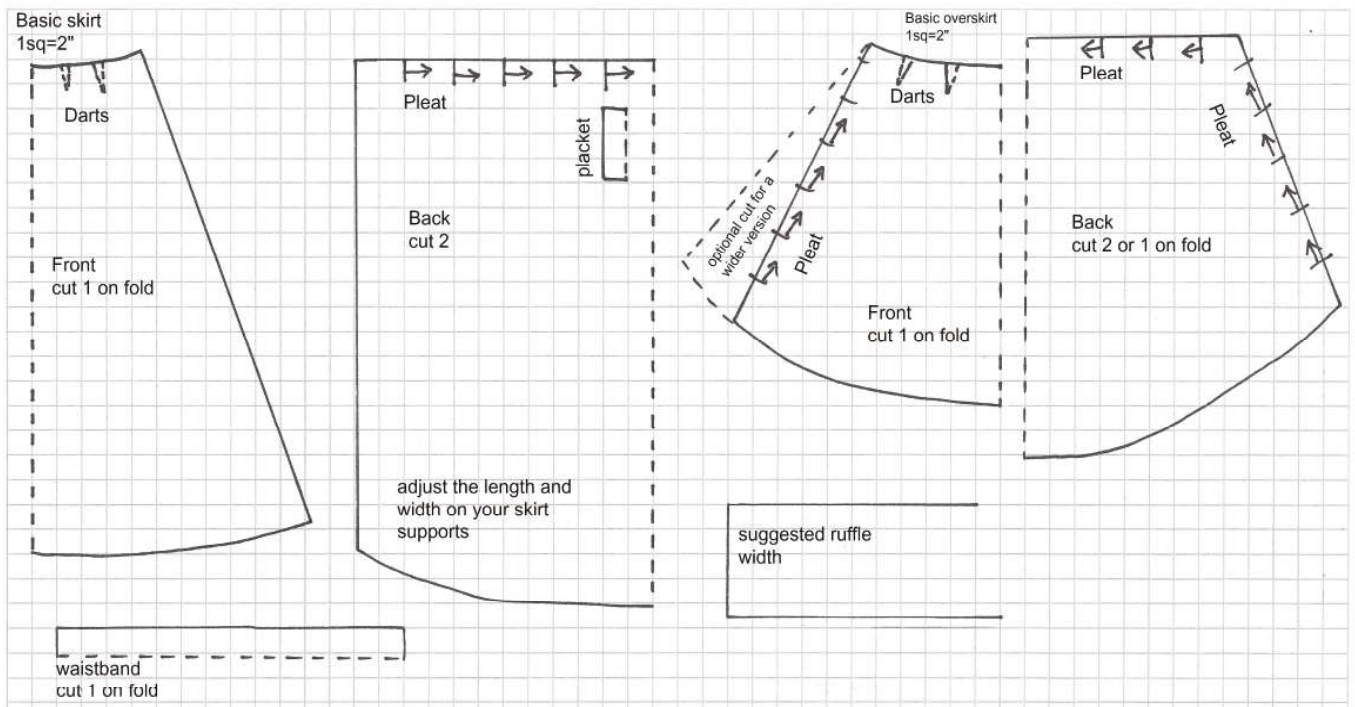
Prepare a waistband and mount the pieces onto a waistband. The skirt will close in front by overlapping the front pieces. Add hooks and eyes.

Make and attach the bows.



Skirt.

The skirt is made using the generic pattern.

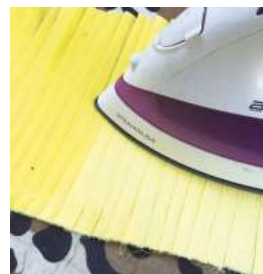
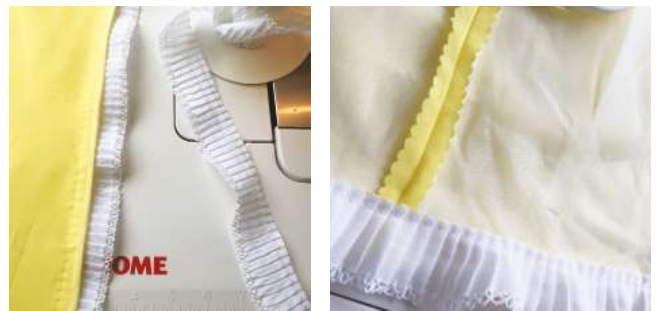


Assembly:

Cut and assemble as always: flatline, sew together, finish the seams, and hem.

Here a readymade short ruffle was added to reinforce the trim—when it becomes dirty and tattered, it can be removed and a fresh one can be sewn on.

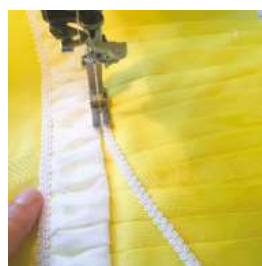
Do not set the skirt into the waistband yet—it is easier to add the ruffles first!



Cut the desired width and length of the ruffles (approximately three times the desired finished length). Hem.

Pin, sew along the top to secure the pleats, and press using a vinegar and water mix or a modern spray starch. The vinegar concoction might smell, but not only is it authentic; it also lasts a lot longer. I use a 1:2 ratio of vinegar to water, but experiment, as a different ratio may be best for your fabric. Do not use steam when pressing your pleats.

Once the pleats are ready, pin and sew onto the skirt, make into the cuffs, etc.



Organdie decoration:

cut strips of the fabric on the bias.

Pleat (knife pleats) with a ruffler foot on one side and then on the other, making sure the pleats fold in the opposite direction. Sew onto the bodice/skirt and border with narrow lace or another trim.

Once all the decoration is on, set the skirt into the waistband and add a fastening.

Add decoration.

Here, rows of satin knife pleats (pleated on a pleater) and styled pleats (directional knife pleats, opened up and stitched) are both used



The pleats are lined with cotton - the bagging method was used here. You can also leave them unlined - simply hem the edges.



The strips are then pleated on the pleater and secured lightly with masking tape. The same pleats will be used on the day bodice sleeves!



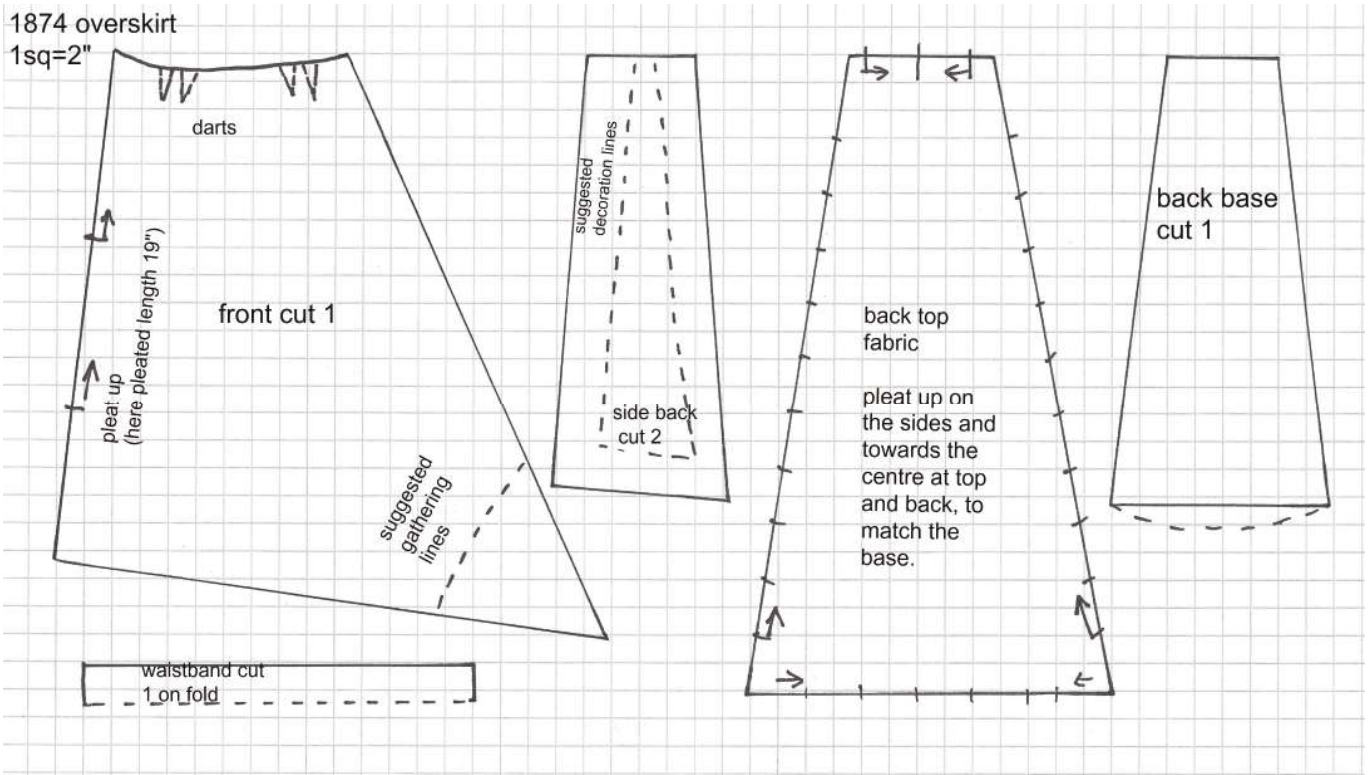
Top row pleating arrangement. Pin, sew, press and manipulate the pleats. Stitch onto the skirt, using braid to cover the stitching.



The masking tape will be taken off just before the dress is worn. It is also a good method to use if the dress is in storage!



The Overskirt



This is one of the more complex draperies, so you may want to mock it up first to see how it works for your figure and height.



Making a mock up, although often considered a waste of time and fabric, is anything but. Yes, you will use few metres of cheap calico etc, but the time and mistakes saved by mocking up a drapery will be well worth it! Also, the pieces can be kept as templates for future versions, or re-used for other mock ups.



Cut out the pieces and work on each part individually to start with.

Front:

Sew in the darts.

Decorate with bands of fabric, trim, braid, etc. as required.

Line with silk or cotton - baglining works well here.

Add fringes where needed.

Gather at the corner and stitch up in place, adding a buckle.



Back:

Decorate the side pieces in the same way as the front. Line the pieces as you did the front, but leave the top and back seams open. Turn to the right side and overlock the back seam.

Pleat the back silk piece to fit the lining/base and sew or baste the pleats into place. Pin and secure to the base—use a straight stitch or simply overlock the sides.

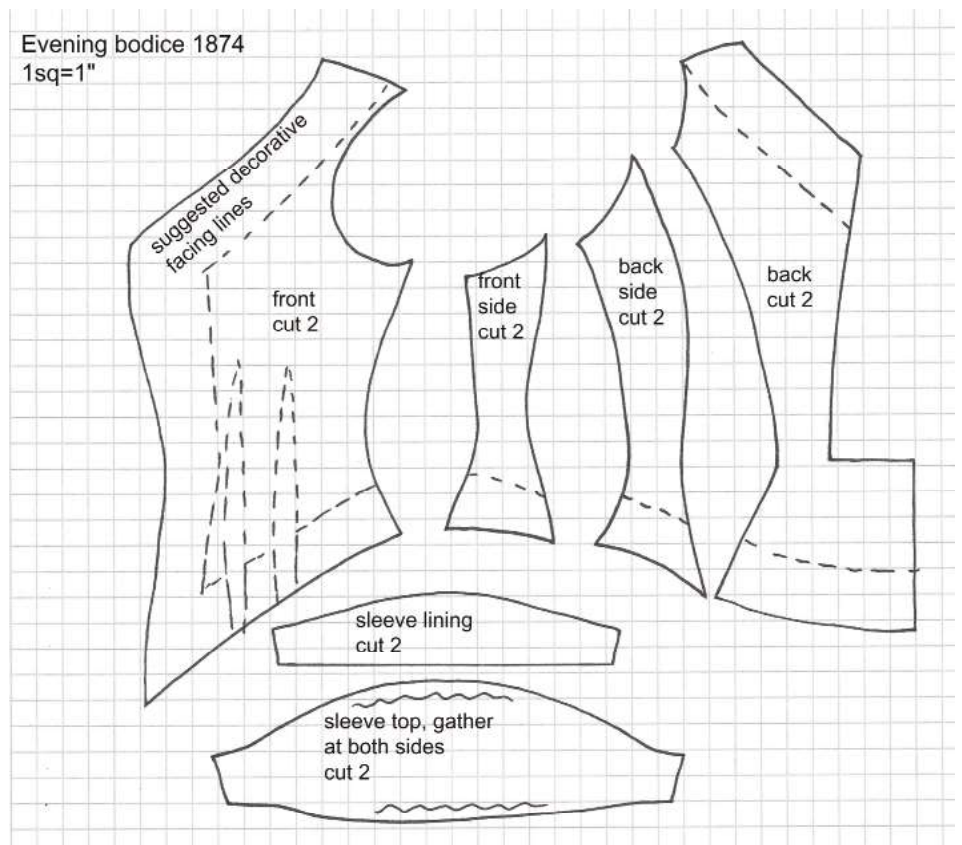
Assemble the parts and insert into the waistband. Add the fringe and any other embellishments



Ball bodice

The Pattern.

The bodice closes in front with hooks and eyelets under decorative buttons, but you can also use functional buttons or close it at the back; adapt the pattern as needed!



Cut and assemble the bodice as usual.

The only difference in the construction of the evening bodice is in the decoration: bands of silk satin on the dark background.

Once the bodice is assembled, use its shape to make big facings. They will be wider than your usual facing and are going to be facing outwards.



Mark and cut the bottom and front facings. Notch the curved edges and press the seam allowance in. Apply the facings to the bodice along the edges. Flip over and press, making sure the fabrics lie evenly along the edge.

Pin the facing in place, smoothing as necessary. Slipstitch by hand or topstitch using a machine. Apply any decoration; here, silver braid and ribbon are added around the neckline. Add fastening of your choice.



Add the short sleeve (make them like the sleeves in the 1850s ball gown - same technique, just not quite as voluminous!)

Add the fringe.

Finish the edges inside and bone the seams.

Add the waistape.



Foundation Garments

As mentioned, the bustle cage came back into favour during this era. Over the years it evolved slightly to provide a more rounded posterior, and to achieve this shape it was often worn together with a bustle pad. Bustles made of wire, horsehair, etc., as well as tournures were worn. The foundation skirt was often boned, as well.

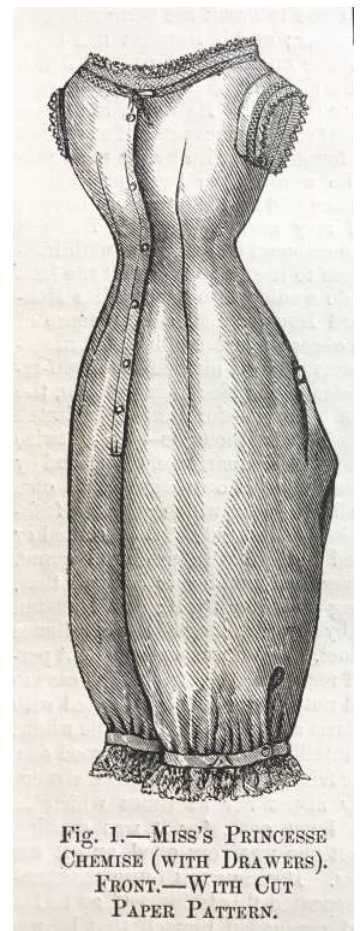
Petticoats, chemises, and drawers did not see much change, though chemises tended to be more lavishly decorated, with square or V-necks being exceedingly popular. Cottons, nainsook, batiste, cambric, etc., were used, as well as wool. Thin, soft wool was popular for undergarments (combinations, mostly), especially since it soaked up moisture well. Silk was also used. Drawers were usually worn on top of chemises and combinations and sported a lot of lace and frills. Black underwear appeared around the year 1889.

Camisoles followed the fashions and mostly sport V-neck or square neck openings, as well as a lot of lace decoration.

The flounced petticoat will work for any of the dresses of this period, as well as first bustle era petticoats. Many variations of flounced and drawstring petticoats existed, sometimes with boning inserted that would serve as a bustle cage. Two petticoats were often worn—less for the sake of shape and more for comfort and warmth. A quilted flannelette or wool petticoat could be added in the winter. For trained gowns, a detachable train was added to the petticoat. Toward the end of the decade, more and more colour was starting to appear in undergarments, too!

At the beginning of the era, corsets were long and extended over the hip. They did shorten a bit later on, although spoon busks were still very much in vogue. More and more silk was being used, especially satins and brocades, for those who could afford them. Cording, as well as traditional boning with baleen and coralline, continued, and steel boning gained in popularity. A plethora of styles and variations coexisted, including a true wealth of ready made ones, widely advertised in magazines and pamphlets and aiming at a very varied customer base, from ladies to their maidservants.

Suspender belts were invented, though many ladies still used garters. Bust bodices and bust improvers also started to appear toward the end of the decade.



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The Back:

Having worked on the hem decoration on the back pieces, stitch the two backs together, press, and couch the seams.

Mark the upper back design and work it in braid.

It is also easier to add the picot braid to the back design at this stage.



Front:

* Work the hem decoration as usual.

* For the front edge decoration, use a smaller design.

As mentioned before, in this case it was a conjecture as the front of the jacket was not shown on the fashion plate; since a lot of military-influenced braiding and frogging was in fashion, it seemed right to incorporate these influences in the design.

Feel free to design your own front!

* Keep the lining out of the way while working on the braiding. The only time you may have to stitch through the two layers is over the dart.



Sleeve:

* Work the cuff of the sleeve first, then mark and work on the upper part.

Again, it is easier to add the picot braid to the sleeve when it is still laid out flat and unlined.

Collar:

* Repeat on the collar piece.



Assembly

Sew the back parts of lining together and pin to the back.

Pin the rest of the lining to their top pieces and then assemble as usual. take care to match the ends of the lining. Add the picot braid.

Collar: Use interlining for a sturdier, stand-up collar. Baste the layers together and insert into the jacket.



To support the sleeve you can insert boning channels into the sleeve-head of the lining.

Wire supports like the one pictured above, can work well here, as will adding stiffening fabric. You can also use your sleeve puffs from the 1830, jacket if you 'do' this period!



Flatline or insert the lining independently.

Finish the cuff with fur.

Box pleat the head to fit into the armhole. Insert.

Use tape to cover the raw edges.



Baste the hem and add the fur decoration all around the jacket.



Here the vintage jacket that I used had fur strips interspaced with knitted strips; very handy for my use, as I used the knitted seam allowance for stitching. The strips were used as a binding, hiding the hem.

Use a narrow strip to go around the neck.

Finish the seams inside and add boning, waist tape, and front fastenings. Big vintage hooks and bars were used here.

The front closure can be also properly frogged, if you want to incorporate loops and buttons into your design.

1897 Day Dress ***

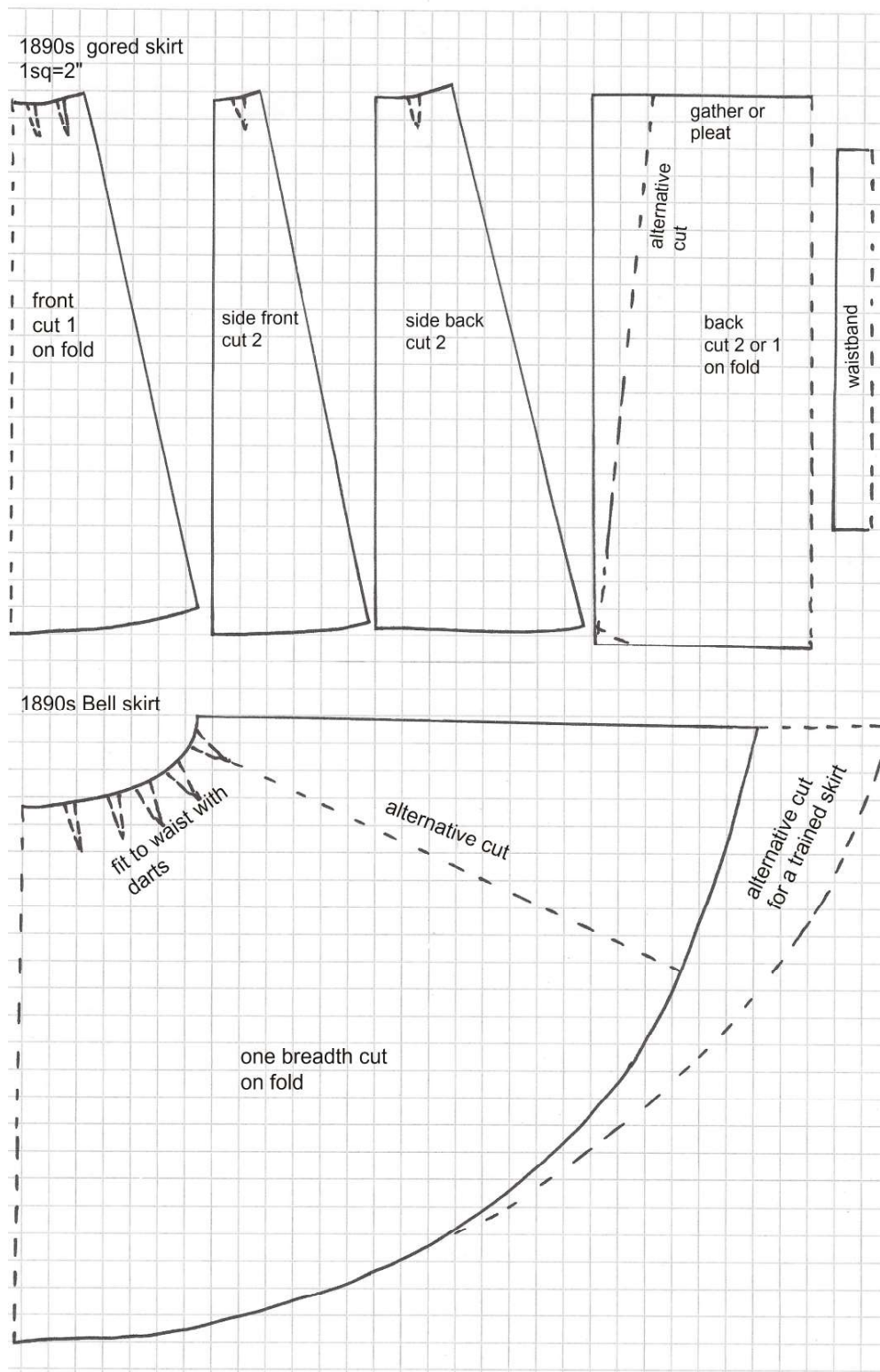
Based on the original made and worn by Ora Baily McCutchen, a concert pianist in San Diego. Currently in the San Diego Museum.

Materials:

- * Fabric: 6-7m of silk brocade
- * Lining: 6-7m of glazed cotton
- * 1m of silk velvet and 0.5m of silk chiffon

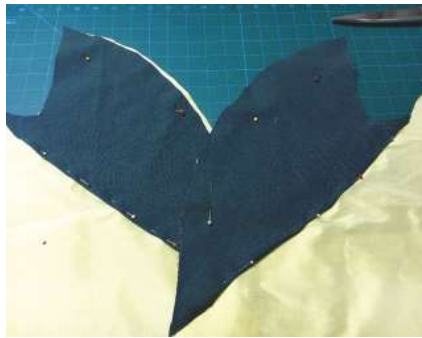
Skirt pattern:

You can use any of the 1890s patterns in this chapter. Here, the gored skirt pattern was used.
If your fabric allows for it, the Bell skirt is an easy and fast alternative too.

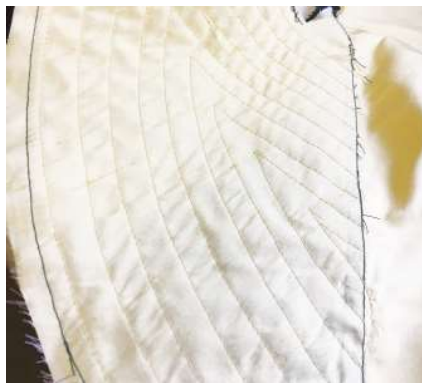


Bodice assembly:

*Mock up as usual. Cut the pieces in the lining and top fabrics.



Cut the lapel facing in the top fabric, as well as interlining for the lapels. Mount the interlining onto the lining and add the facing on the lining. Trace the pattern and sew on the braid. Repeat on the other lapel.



Prepare the collar and add interlining or a stiffening layer, mounted onto the top fabric. Sew the braid on.

In both the lapels and the collar, the application of the braid also functions as the pad stitching.

Prepare the sleeves, if you did not insert them earlier.

Either flatline them or bagline them.

Since the jacket is not boned, it doesn't have to be flatlined—it can be baglined instead, but both options were in use! Baglining was used here.

Assemble the top pieces, (backs, sides, and the collar), then repeat with the lining. You can insert sleeves independently now if you want to hide the shoulder seam inside.

Put the top and lining pieces right sides together, match the edges, pin/baste, and stitch around, leaving a gap at the back.

Pull inside out through the gap and press all around, making sure the seams are in the right place. Close the gap by hand.

Finish the seam and hand stitch all around to make sure the layers stay together neatly. The big running stitch is visible on the collar as a design feature.

Pin or baste the layers around the armholes and insert the sleeves.

