

Spotlight Review

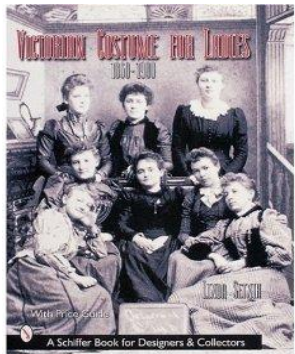


Three Victorian and Edwardian Clothing Books

Kathe Gust

Our intrepid reviewer recommends three of her favorite historical clothing books, all inexpensive and readily available.

Victorian Costume for Ladies 1860-1900



Written by Linda Setnik. Oversized paperback, 176 pages, Schiffer Publishing, 2000

Cost: \$21.86 at [Amazon](#), (less than most used copies!)

This book explores and documents American Victorian costume with profuse photographic illustrations from mainly California sources. Most of the photos are of middle to upper class subjects taken from Carte de Visites of the era. Despite the inexpensive price, the book has crisp, clear reproductions of the images and in some instances the photographer's mounting is included as well as the photo.

The author records where an image is taken, showing that she is aware that there were geographically specific fashion trends which can be important for those wishing to recreate authentic styles.

The format of the book sets out styles decade by decade, but does not include close-up photos, period garments, or pattern pieces or shapes. It does however, mention fashion details which can assist in dating vintage garments and illustrates more obscure terms such as basque and cuirass bodices.

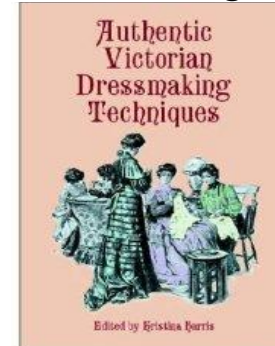
In addition to capturing the fluctuations in style, the author traces the impact of fashion on the mental, physical, and social lives of women. Individual chapters on undergarments, casual wear, sports clothes, common dress, evening attire, laundry, and clothing manufacture are included. Information about personal hygiene, cosmetics, jewelry, hairstyles, and methods for dating vintage photographs is a plus.

Lower income groups, trades and ethnicity are not the subjects of this book. There are representations of Gentlemen's fashion in some of the photographs, but there are no accompanying comments.

Comprehensive and clearly written, *Victorian Costume For Ladies 1860-1900* is a contribution that will be appreciated by theatrical costumers, fashion historians,

students of Victorian culture, and photography buffs.

Authentic Victorian Dressmaking Techniques



Trade paperback, 144 pages, Dover Publications, 1998

Cost: Can be found as low as \$9.85 (used) but only \$11.01 at [Amazon](#).

Like many Dover Publications,

this book is a reprint. In this case it reproduces a 1905 Butterick sewing manual, *Dressmaking - Up to Date*. The addition of the term "Victorian" in the re-issued title is misleading. The focus of the book is actually on Edwardian period fashions, although one must remember that many Victorian sewing techniques were still in use in 1905 since few people could afford to own a sewing machine. The book demonstrates how execute even hand stitching which would be period correct for either Victorian or Edwardian sewing.

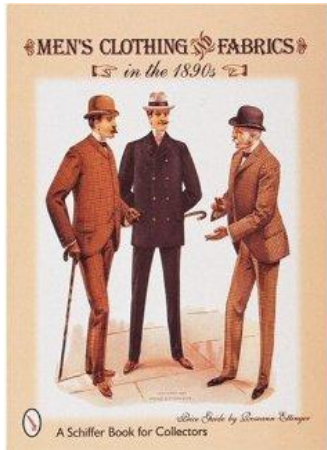
The book does not mention bustles, hoopskirts, fitted bodices, or any of the other key elements that defined earlier Victorian clothing. It also does not contain any patterns, but does offer clear instructions for

altering vintage patterns and creating shirt-blouses, skirts, wedding gowns, coats, maternity wear, children's clothing, and other apparel.

Since the book was written in 1905 it is not as clear to the novice sewer as a modern manual. There are no step-by-step instructions here, but it is an invaluable assistant in recreating hems, hand-sewn plackets on skirts and finishing the bottom of a boned bodice without linings and other period correct details.

The book has wonderful illustrations of hand sewing and photographs from the early 1900's. The binding is paperback and will not stand up to extreme use, but is sturdy enough for normal reading and reference.

Men's Clothing & Fabrics in the 1890s: Price Guide



A Schiffer Book for Collectors. Oversized Paperback, 112 pages, Schiffer Publishing, 1998.

Cost: Can be found as low as \$15.68 (used), \$22.45 at [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

This is a book focused on men. I wish it covered a longer span of time and had more commentary, but it provides color

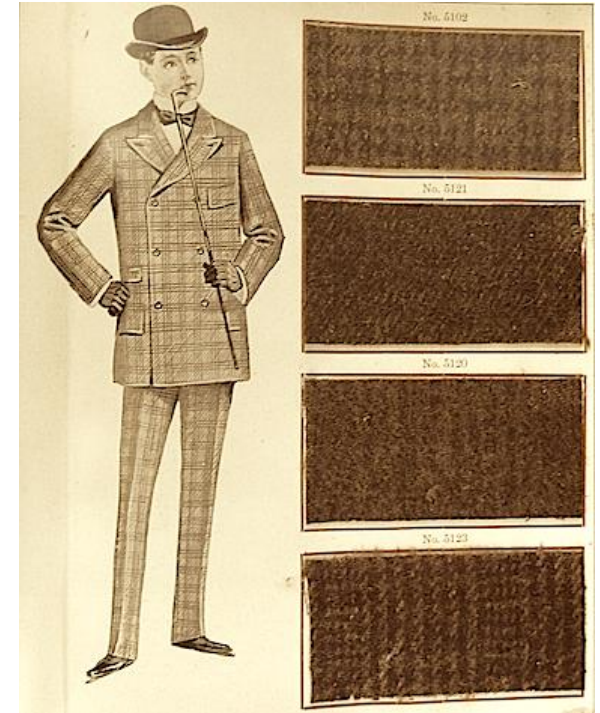
lithographs, line drawings and a few photographs of men dressed for work and leisure in the 1890s.

The illustrations appear to be from advertisements, tailor's samples, and other similar sources. There is no additional comment on what they represent or what types of people are likely to wear such clothing. The reader is left to decide for themselves what the difference between a \$5.00 suit and a \$10.00 suit said about the wearer.

The special attraction is the accompanying photographs of cloth swatches from the era. Sometimes the swatches are attached to an advertised garment, making the relationship between fabric and coat or suit easier to establish (sample at right).

The swatch photographs are crisp and clear showing the subtle patterns and textures of the cloth. A few are displayed with matching buttons! These are a good source for the decade on either side of the book's stated time frame, since basic fabrics did not change much during that time of natural fibers, though the popularity of certain patterns may have.

Over half of the book is concerned with suiting and coating, but there are small sections on vests, sportswear, housecoats & smoking jackets, and a few employment "uniforms", such as pharmacist and clergy. There is no section on undergarments or shirting.



Though there is no specific section covering hairstyles or gentlemen's accessories, these are amply displayed in the full figure illustrations which include models from many different age groups.

There is some representation of working class men in the style of valets, pharmacist, train conductor, office workers, etc., but no lower classes or manual laborers are shown.

Kathe Gust enjoys creating clothing for many historical periods, and for various sci-fi and fantasy genre. Visit her [web site](#) to read articles and see photos for some of her costuming projects.