

The period costume theme is optional but if you need tips on period dressing Alexandra Jeanblanc provided:

Menfolk:

The men have it relatively easy – not too much in the way of odd costuming elements and your formalwear is essentially unchanged. You can do a scarf-type cravat or a bowtie, and while black and white was pretty much the norm, you can do a colored tie. Also, one of the more amusing comments I came across lamented the fact that Americans simply didn't know how to follow the rules of dress (mixing up day and evening wear). So feel free to chalk up any little inconsistencies to being frontier colonials

One stop shop: <https://www.historicalemporium.com>

Sidenote: Men's fashion being remarkably static, you don't have to entirely go the historical reproduction route. We picked up reproduction pants and a jacket for Doug, but he's wearing a modern tuxedo shirt (because the collar is pretty accurate and the historical reproductions come in very limited sizes for the shirts).

Fellow ladies:

Bad news: Yes, they wore corsets. Good news: prior to 1860 the corsets are NOT compressing – you stay whatever size you are, no squishing of lungs, internal organs, etc., they're really just there to hold up the dress.

Corset:

There are many examples. You want one that's pretty much straight across and comes down to the hips. This one is steel boned and nicely lined. Sizes pretty accurate. They lace up in back, which gives you 3-4 inches of wiggle room on size (the listed size is a minimum measurement, with the sides touching in back).

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00TE0E4B8/ref=oh_aui_detailpage_o08_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1

Further good news, hoop crinolines were in (meaning you do NOT need layers of fluffy stuff to shape the dress) and you can find them dirt cheap on Amazon. This is the one I got:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01LDAKQQ8/ref=oh_aui_detailpage_o08_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1

Shoes:

Two choices: those Victorian granny boots, or some kind of ballet slipper. If you want something ornamented, there are an astonishing variety of flats from India that are pretty close to being historically appropriate. The main details for the 1850's are the shoes having square-ish toes, and that they were still unlasted (no difference between left and right).

The dress:

You have a wide array of choices. You can go pre-made (there are many sites, but they get pricey), and I believe there are places that would rent them, or do it yourself. I'm opting for the do it yourself option, with underpinnings from Amazon. Unlike the men, colors and patterns were very much in style. No real limits on colors, etc., silks, velvets, damasks, gauzy things, stripes, florals, paisleys - all appropriate. They were not shy about mixing patterns either. The construction is not really that complicated – the skirts are separate pieces from the bodice, and for evening, it would have been a short-sleeved, off the shoulder look. Sample images abound, patterns are a little harder to come by. The skirts can be single or multiple layered (i.e., the cake look). It's really all personal preference. If you're doing a single layer skirt, the bottom is just a hair bigger in circumference than the hoop, and you gather it at the top in pleats. There are fabrics that come pre-gathered and would be well suited for a layered dress.

Hair:

More good news. All those elaborate Victorian hairstyles? Very much augmented by massive quantities of false hair (attached by clips). You also have the option of covering your lack of hair (as I plan to) by wearing a little lace and ribbon cap in back.

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