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Northstar Newsletter

March 1, 2008

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## Events

### Member Meeting & Afternoon Tea

When: March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Where: Mr. Kevin Geraghty's Residence  
992 St Clair Ave  
St Paul, MN

Please join us for a Tea Party as we, the VSA Northstar Chapter members, vote for the next President, Secretary, and the 3 open Directors positions. BYOTC – Bring your own tea cup! We will send out a separate email with more details and the time.

### English Country Dance

Want to learn more about the country dances that we do at our balls?

Come join the fun at Tapestry Folk Dance center

When: Sunday Nights: 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Where: Tapestry Folk Dance Center  
3748 Minnehaha Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN

Cost: \$5.00 per session \$6.00 per person on the First Sunday of the month.\*

\*First Sundays feature live music and start at 6:00 pm. For information contact Mary Brown by e-mail ([mebbie10@cs.com](mailto:mebbie10@cs.com))

### Board Meeting:

When: Wednesday March 12th 7:30 pm

Where: Mr. Cusick's residence.

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## A Letter from the President

Greetings VSA Northstar Chapter Members,

In grand tradition of our Victorian Society, March 30 is our annual Members Meeting where we will be electing new members to the board and discussing chapter business. Due to the nature of our group, it is very important that we have the support of our members and a good turnout.

What the board needs is your input. Such as what type of events would you like to see happen? What direction do you want this organization to move in? Please consider attending. We will be having a social tea party with opportunities to mingle with other members and the board. This is a pivotal year

for the Northstar Chapter as we have been struggling with membership and keeping board members. Your support is vital to keep our organization running.

Sincerely,  
Ms. Sarah French,  
President, Northstar Chapter  
Victorian Society in America

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## This Month in History March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1852

By Laura M. McBeth

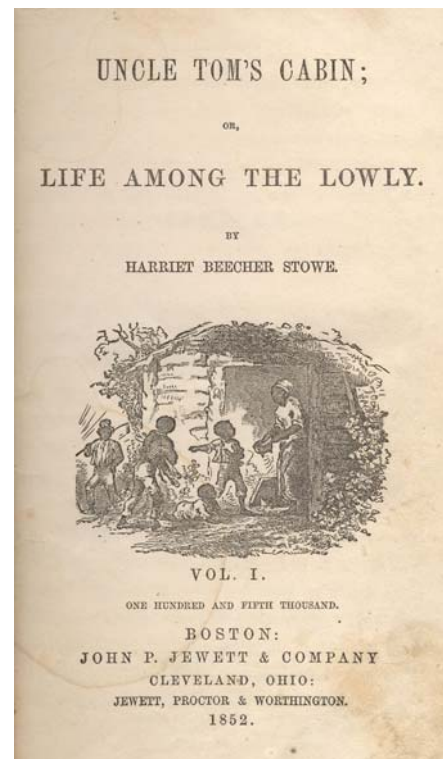
Women have always impacted history, though they haven't always been written about or given their fair share of credit. During the Victorian Era in America, women started asking for their rights to be recognized. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony are famous names from the woman's movement that started in 1848, but it wasn't until 1920 that the right for women to vote was acknowledged.

Look at how far we've come! Condoleezza Rice is Unites State's Secretary of State, Nancy Pelosi is the first woman to ever be the Speaker of the House, Hillary Rodham Clinton could be running for the Presidency, and I believe we even have a couple of women on the ballot for President and Vice President of our very own Northstar Chapter!

Yet, as amazing as these strides are now, imagine how difficult it would be for a woman to affect a society over 100 years ago. There is one woman who would help shape history before women were even thought of as equals to men, a woman that Abraham Lincoln himself referred to as, "the little woman who started this big war." Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published on March 20<sup>th</sup> of 1852.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold three hundred thousand copies in its first year and is described as an

"antislavery novel" by US History Encyclopedia. Though it was not intended as abolitionist propoganda, nor was it directed against the South. In reality it presented some of the favorable aspects of slavery and it also clarified the North's position on abolition.



Stowe, courtesy of [ohiohistorycentral.org](http://ohiohistorycentral.org) & <http://muarchives.missouri.edu>

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# Victorian Sewing Techniques

By Sarah French

The Victorian Society does not require its members to adhere to strict regulations about historical accuracy in their clothing, as do some other re-enacting groups. This is not likely to change. However, given that a significant number of our current members are involved with this group because they enjoy dressing up in Victorian clothing, I thought I would share a few techniques that I have learned which will smooth the way when wearing these garments.

While they are historical sewing techniques, I picked them not because they will make your outfit more historically accurate—although they will—but because they will help protect your Victorian garments when you wear them and improve the way that they function.

## Bodice Boning

The first question everybody always asks is “Why do I have to bone my bodice if I’m already wearing a boned corset? Isn’t that overkill?” Well, no, it isn’t. The boning in a bodice doesn’t pull in your waist; it just makes the bodice lie nice and flat. A Victorian bodice is generally quite tightly fitted. If you don’t bone your bodice, it will ride up every time you move your arms, and you’ll be yanking it down every five minutes. It’s well worth the extra time to bone your bodice.

If you are doing a dress from the 1850’s or 60’s, you can simply slide the bones in between the layers of the seam allowance and make a running stitch to hold it in place. This does not work on the darts of a bodice that goes below the waist, however, because the darts will not lie flat if you slip the bones into them. You will have to sew on casings for the bones; buy bias tape or make your own from scrap fabric. The bone casings can be sewn directly to the

seam allowances or tacked to the lining and centered over the seam. Kevin Geraghty has a tip that will make this process easier: leave the lower edge of the bodice unfinished until after you put the casings on, so that you can slide a magazine or a thin piece of cardboard between the fashion fabric and the lining. This will prevent your stitches from being able to catch the outer fabric when you’re tacking on the bone casings.

## Inner Waistbands

It is not uncommon to see an inner waistband in original bodices. This is simply a piece of ribbon or twill tape that is cut to the correct waist measurement and then tacked only to the two center back seams at the waistline.

Finish the edges (make sure you left seam allowance) and sew on a hook and eye on the ends. What this does for you is it both makes the bodice easier to close and takes some of the tension off the seams of the bodice. A fitted Victorian bodice can be a pain to fasten, especially if it is not settled properly across your shoulders; if the inner waistband is hooked up, the center back of the bodice is already pulled flat against your waist at the back, and the hooks or buttons will be much easier to manage. Also, this technique lessens the chances of the fabric shredding away from the seams because it is under so much tension.

## White Collars and Cuffs

Most, though not all, dresses seem to employ white fabric on the neckline and the sleeve cuffs. In the 1850’s and 60’s, the collars were a flat, Peter Pan shape, with rounded or pointed edges, and could be lace or fine white cotton. Cuffs consisted of either a flat band tacked inside the sleeve, or a false under sleeve which is sewn into a cuff at the wrist and comes about halfway up the upper arm, where it either has a drawstring or elastic. (Elastic is period correct; it was invented in the 1830’s.)



Rare side view. Trim on skirt, bodice points, and sleeves. New York, New York. Handwritten date "June, 1864."

### *1860 Collar and Cuff*

Collars were wider in the 50's than in the 60's, when they were only 1 to ½ inch wide. In the 1870's and 80's, when the most common necklines on day dresses were respectively a shallow V-neck and a high standing collar, it was most commonly a pleated frill tacked inside the collar, though a flat band is also seen. In the 1890's the shirtwaist comes into fashion and largely replaces the earlier style.

Why is all this important? Well, the salient characteristic of the white collar and cuffs is that they are only tacked inside the neckline and sleeves, and are therefore both removable and washable. Many of the dresses we wear are either not able to be cleaned at all (i.e. anything that is beaded, as dry cleaning chemicals will melt plastic beads) or can be cleaned only with difficulty.

Moreover, the neckline and cuffs of a bodice are the spot most likely to become grimy and worn, and no amount of cleaning is going to fix worn out fabric. If you put in white, cotton,

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detachable collars and cuffs, then they can be removed and cleaned or replaced when necessary. Cotton is a sturdy fabric and can take hot water, detergent and bleach easily.



### *1870 Collar Frill*

### Hem Facings

Most original Victorian skirts are hemmed with a shaped facing that comes at least 6" up the skirt and can be all the way up to the knee. While a simple rolled hem will finish your skirt edge just fine, a facing will make your skirt hang better and also help protect it from dirt.

If you are making a skirt from the 1830's up through the early 60's, you have an easy job: simply cut a strip of fabric the same length as the circumference of your skirt and whatever width you want, sew it to the skirt edge with ½ inch to 1 inch seam allowance, press it to the inside and sew it down.

If you are making a skirt from the mid-sixties through the 1890's, however, you will have to shape the facing. Just copy your skirt pattern as far up as you want the facing to reach,

cut it out of cheap fabric, and proceed as for the earlier skirts.

If you are going to be putting trim on the skirt, you can machine sew the facing down (and in fact this will provide you with a useful seam line with which to line up trim on the outside of the skirt) but otherwise it must be done by hand.



1880 Collar and Cuffs

### Dust Ruffles

A dust ruffle is a detachable ruffle or pleated frill made of inexpensive fabric that is basted or buttoned inside the hem of a trained skirt, to help protect the fabric of the train. The idea is that the train will ride around on top of the ruffle, so that it is the ruffle coming in contact with the floors or the ground and not the dress fabric. When the ruffle becomes dirty, it can be removed and cleaned, or replaced if it is too worn out. Generally the ruffle's top edge is sewn into a band.

I hope that these tips will be helpful for some of the sewers in our group, so that they won't have to learn the hard way as I did. Given the time and expense that we put into acquiring Victorian outfits, it makes sense to make them last as long as we can.



Late 1870 Dust Ruffle

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## Notable Quotes Harriet Beecher Stowe 1811 - 1896

- A man builds a house in England with the expectation of living in it and leaving it to his children; we shed our houses in America as easily as a snail does his shell.
- Friendships are discovered rather than made.
- Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.