

# How to Choose Pioneer Patterns

Everyone has a different level of interest in wearing historic clothing. If you are excited by the idea, and day-dream about using your pioneer clothes over and over, you may be most interested in highly accurate clothing from the skin out. If you'll be dressing as a pioneer only once or twice, and don't really consider yourself the "time travel" sort, you can get a good pioneer flavor without worrying over every historic detail—and without being so obviously modern that you're visually jarring for others.

You can use the free patterns in this digital book, as well as on-line at [www.ClothingTheSaints.com](http://www.ClothingTheSaints.com) to create many easy, accurate pieces of a pioneer wardrobe. Every free article and pattern on the site, and in this digital book, are copyrighted with full permission granted to freely share and photocopy for personal, ward, stake, or site educational use.

Right now, it's not possible to give full dress, trouser, vest, and coat patterns to print at home, so you'll want to choose some commercially published patterns for those items. Please keep in mind that purchased patterns are protected by copyright and licensing rights, just as these free patterns are. It is important to observe the Church's policy on use of copyrighted patterns, as well as the copyright restrictions from each publisher. In general, for any of the patterns listed below, plan for each family to buy their own patterns. Making photocopies or tracings of the patterns listed below, or copying the instructions or illustrations, violates US copyright law, even if you are not selling the copies.

## General Notes

With any pattern you use (historical or modern costume), plan to make up a test version of the basic pieces in scrap cloth. Every body is unique; you'll have small changes to make in order to get a comfortable fit that looks like real clothing, rather than a stage costume. Changes to bodice and hem length, sleeve details, precise dart placements, and neckline curves are very common places to alter any pattern.

If you want to use your dress more than once or twice, and are still growing taller, plan growth tucks into your skirt length (add 2" of length for every 1" finished tuck.) With growth tucks, you'll be able to let out your skirts and petticoats very easily as you get taller, without re-

making anything. The tucks are also rather pretty, and a common way to embellish an everyday dress.

## A Note About Fabrics

Use only 100% cotton, wool, silk or linen (silk will be very rare!) for your pioneer clothing. Man-made fibers pose a safety and fire hazard, and should not be used.

Your most economical choice is usually cotton. Many fabric stores carry documented historic printed cottons in the quilting section, as well as "homespun" woven plaids and checks—these are well suited to historic clothing use. (Solid cotton colors don't wear well, and were not commonly used for dresses in the period.) You can often find these in the \$1 to \$3 per yard range. An average woman's dress will take 6 yards with careful cutting; a teen's dress can be made with 4-6 yards printed cotton. Men's shirts will use 2-3 yards of cloth; trousers can generally be made with under 2½ yards of duck (a mid-weight cotton canvas) or other "bottom weight" cotton.

Solid color wools, as well as wool plaids and checks (and tweeds for men), are common. Wool does not need to be heavy to be useful; look for wools in the "tropical" or "summer" weight categories, as they make for lighter, low-bulk clothing similar in weight to the originals. Wool will be harder to find in chain fabric stores; check our website for links to on-line shops that carry good quality, historically-appropriate wools

You will not need lace or other "fine" trimmings for trail clothing. You may find places to wear finer things (such as historic villages or fine events), but the trek was not a place for delicate items that require special care. If it can't withstand dust storms, sage brush, mud, wind, and sun with the chance of laundry every few weeks, it doesn't belong in an emigrant's trail wardrobe.

With steady sewing sessions, and some patience, you can create a highly accurate, comfortable, functional historic wardrobe!

## Going All Out and Accurate

For the most historically-accurate feel, you'll be happiest using documented, researched historic patterns from small publishers. Small publishers tend to keep their pattern line stable; you'll find the same styles available ten



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years from now. You'll be buying from living-history merchants, or on-line in most cases, so plan a cushion of a few extra weeks in your projects.

Historic pattern lines generally run between \$8 and \$20 each, but they usually include research notes and more detailed instructions than "Big 4" patterns. And, you can often contact the designer personally for help if you get stuck (or, ask Sister Clark for help by email or on the Sewing Academy tech support forum at: [www.thesewingacademy.org](http://www.thesewingacademy.org).)

These patterns will use historic sewing techniques, and usually are designed from original garments from the era. Remember, if you're sewing for a young woman, shorten the hems to youthful lengths (lower calf to within a hand-span above the ankle bones.)

#### **Past Patterns** ([www.pastpatterns.com](http://www.pastpatterns.com))

- 001: 1820s-1840s Corded Stay
- 003: 1830-1836 Gown
- 708: 1840s Corset
- 801: Fan Front Bodice, 1840s
- 803: Everyday Round Dress, 1840s/1850s
- 806: 1830s Dress
- 808: Sacque and Petticoat (skirt)
- 006: Men's Underdrawers
- 007: Mid-19th Century Shirts
- 008: 1830s-1840s Small Fall Trouser
- 009: Summer Paletot (suit coat)
- 014, 015: Summer Trousers
- 018 Waistcoat (vest)

#### **Homespun Patterns** ([www.jamescountry.com](http://www.jamescountry.com))

- W001: Work Dress
- M004: Frock Coat

#### **Patterns of History** ([www.jamescountry.com](http://www.jamescountry.com))

- 1840 Day Dress

#### **Period Impressions** ([www.jamescountry.com](http://www.jamescountry.com))

- 440: 1830 Day Dress & Pelerine
- 445: 1837 Day Dress
- 447: 1845 Day Dress
- 448: 1859 Modified Fan Front Dress
- 702: 1858 Frock Coat

#### **Laughing Moon Mercantile** ([www.lafnmoon.com](http://www.lafnmoon.com))

- 100: Corsets
- 106: Trousers
- 107: Men's Shirts
- 108: Men's Frock Coat & Vest

- 111: 1860s Women's Dress
- 114: Late 1840s-1852 Ladies' Round Dress

#### **Truly Victorian** ([www.trulyvictorian.com](http://www.trulyvictorian.com))

- TV-455: 1830s Romantic Era Dress
- TV-454: 1845 "German" Day Dress
- TV-456: 1856 Gathered Dress
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#### **Sewing Academy** ([www.thesewingacademy.com](http://www.thesewingacademy.com))

- The Dressmaker's Guide
- 100, 105, 110: Infant clothing
- 200, 250: Girls 2-14 years
- 220: Boys 2-5 years

#### **At the Local Fabric Store**

These are patterns you can find at the local stores. While not historically accurate, they can be used for pioneer clothing with some modifications (changing zippers to buttons or hooks, for instance, using bias bindings instead of facing pieces, and skipping any modern serger or zig-zag finish instructions.) Buy them on the \$2 pattern sales—they don't include enough detail to be worth more than that.

I've included only those patterns that actually bear a resemblance (both in the finished garment, and in the basic lines) to actual historic clothing suited to the pioneer trek (in other words, hardworking historic clothes, not "high fashion.").

Stick to the list below to avoid being a visually modern "jolt" on the trek, or styles that are unsuitable for the rigors the pioneers faced. Pattern numbers and availability are accurate as of Winter 2012.

#### **Overall**

I'm not keen on any of the little girl's "historic" or "pioneer" dress patterns put out by these companies. If your young woman is not yet into adult sizes, you'll get a better result using any of the "Design Your Dress" type everyday patterns, leaving off any collars, and choosing back-buttoning styles with full gathered skirts and to-the-waist bodices.

Remember, if you're under 18, shorten the skirts of any pattern to "youth" hem lengths. Use the instructions in the free pattern "How to Make Pioneer Petticoats and Skirts" to measure, shorten, and balance your skirts.

#### **Simplicity**

Simplicity has two sets of patterns that actually use his-



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toric shapes and many historic techniques: the Martha McCain Fashion Historian series, and the Originals By Kay series. Not all work for “everyday” trail-worthy clothing, however—you won’t need an 1860s ballgown on the trail! These do make the grade for style and pioneer use:

- **S2890:** Corsets
- **S2895:** Men’s “Western”. These are not fully accurate, but they give a decent historic flavor.
- **S4551:** Three sleeve options and a dress that works well for “generic mid-19th century” cotton dresses. Hem appropriately shorter for teen girls.
- **S5726:** Corset and Chemise only.
- **S7215:** Another style for Corset and Chemise.
- **S7212:** View B for working wear, hemmed appropriately shorter as needed.

For a full review of the patterns above, visit the Compendium: Clothing Articles section at [www.thesewingacademy.com](http://www.thesewingacademy.com).

The Martha McCain Fashion Historian men’s patterns are out of print—if you can find this specific line, it can be used for boy’s and men’s clothing (all except a coat). Simplicity does have an out-of-print buying option on their site; search for

- **5023**
- **5033**
- **5035**
- **5037**

### McCalls

- **M4548:** Dress **only**. Eliminate growth tucks if you’re over 16; if under 16/17, hem to an appropriate length (lower-calf to a handspan above the ankle). Finish the neckline with a self-fabric bias binding (skip the collar.) Add another skirt panel; 85” is far too narrow for the pioneer era, unless you’re four years old. Do not use the similarly-styled children’s pattern.
- **M3669:** Dress **only**. Skirt widths are more realistic, but use the XL skirt for all adult and teen dresses, and hem girl’s and teen’s dresses to an appropriately shorter length; women’s dresses to the ankle or top of foot.

### Butterick

Only a very few Butterick designs are helpful; sadly, the “Making History” line is one of the worst for any accuracy level in women’s or girl’s clothing, with the exception of Nancy Farris-Thee’s work.

- **B5831:** An 1860s shape that works for the 1850s as well. Opt for plain petticoats instead of the fancy one, and be sure to balance the skirts over your petticoats.
- **B4254:** Corsets: the shaped corset can give basic mid-century support. Careful fitting adjustments are vital; when laced snugly, there should be an even 2” gap at the center back.
- **B3648:** Men’s Tail Coat & Trousers. This does not use historic shapes or techniques, but the “tailcoat” look is a style inspired by men’s fashions in the 1830s.
- **B6816:** View B dress only, with no collar or sleeve ruffle, zipper changed to buttons. Hood with deep curtain is reminiscent of an accurate hood for cold-weather wear mid-century.



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