

The Poetical Stance and the Grecian Bend

by Lynne Belluscio

What would the well-dressed gentleman of 1812 wear to the first LeRoy Town Meeting? More than likely, his coat would have wide labels and tails. The sleeves were long – often reaching the knuckles on the hand. Coats were made of homespun linen or wool or a combination of both called linsey-woolsey. Beneath the coat he wore a brightly colored single-breasted waistcoat that was tightly fitted and buttoned up to reveal white linen ruffled shirt with a high collar.

Some men wore a type of corset, to narrow the waist and make the chest look larger. Around his neck he wore a “stock” or cravat, that wrapped around and tied in the front in a short knot. The old fashioned knee breeches were long out of fashion and he wore “pantaloons” which in the daytime, would have been loosely fitted.

Evening wear would be more tightly fitted. The pants would have been “fall front”, with a wide flap in front. It would be another 10 years before the button-fly was introduced. The pant legs would be short, to expose the ankle and stripped or embroidered socks. The shoes were heelless – almost like a slipper, although I suspect on the frontier, a tall boot might have been more practicable. A tall beaver top hat would have been appropriate and most men carried a walking stick or cane. A gentleman would wear gloves, especially in the company of women.

Ladies, who wanted to display the latest fashion, would have worn a high-waisted dress, tubular in form. Although the dress lacked the “corseted” look of the 18th Century, ladies still relied on a corset to give the right silhouette. The hem was often high enough to reveal the ankles and decorative stockings, with embroidered designs were very popular. (We have a few stockings in the collection with wonderful embroidered designs.) Shoes were leather slippers with no heels. If the dress had short sleeves, the sleeve was a very short, puffed sleeve. Long sleeves, were tight fitting and extended beyond the wrist.

Skirts were embellished with

ruffles, embroidery and lace, in several rows around the bottom. The short waisted “spencer” jacket was very popular. It had long sleeves and a high standing collar. Long Kashmir shawls and “wrappers” were also very popular. Ladies hats were very tall and trimmed with ribbons and feathers. But as mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the turban was very popular. In warm weather, ladies carried a small fan on a string around the wrist.

A description of the appropriate manner and “movement” of the era mentions that men were to appear relaxed, casual, “negligent and poetical.” The chest is thrust forward and the stance draws attention to the shape of the leg. For women, they were to appear small, prim, nimble and mincing – removed from the formality

and elegance of the 1700s. The arms should hang naturally at the side and it was favorable to bend the body forward in what

was described as the “Grecian Bend.” (That might take a little practice! And there’s no way I can look small!!)



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