Building an Edwardian Costume

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BUILDING AN EDWARDIAN COSTUME

An honors paper submitted to the Department of Theatre and Dance of the University of Mary Washington in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

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Megan Cadenas (digital signature) 05/31/16
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Kevin McCluskey, Project Advisor

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Gregg Stull, Chair
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Finishing the Garment

After my last fitting with Margaret, I finished everything that needed to be sewn with a machine before heading home for break. The only thing I did not get done before heading home was putting the button holes into the shirt. The only steps left were the little finishing things, like stitching the hem, putting in the buttons and closures, and other little places that needed hand-stitching. With the garment finally finished, it is just a matter of double checking that everything is still sitting correctly and did not get overly messed up over break. When we get back, I will call Margaret back in just for a quick fitting to make sure everything is still okay before my jury.

Editing

After my first fitting, I found that while I had some of the right shapes, I still had some edits to make to make sure everything fit right and looked just like the picture. I went back to the patterns of the bodice and the sleeve to add some fullness to them. I also added some length to the sleeve patterns. Once I felt that I fixed all of the notes that I could with the making of the patterns, I re-cut the pieces that needed completely re-made out of muslin. I took the first bodice apart and began to put it together again. I also put the skirt onto the waistband. Then I called Margaret in for a final fitting. I was still missing the collar and finalized plackets for the bodice when I fit her, but I needed to have the fitting and make sure everything was satisfactory before Thanksgiving break started. With this fitting, I marked a hem for the skirt and double checked everything. It all seemed to be fine to me, and I got all of the information I needed to do the finishing work on the garment.
Margaret Lewis was kind enough to be my model for this project. At her earliest convenience after I finished the first mock-up, she met with me to make sure everything was fitting and looking correct. I thought that the shapes were looking right, though there were a few minor adjustments that still needed to be made. I met with her a second time after this before going back to the patterns to make any changes so that I could get some input from Kevin McCluskey. I forgot to take pictures of the second fitting, when I had more of the final pieces attached, so they are not here.

After some discussion, we determined that I was on the right track and that all the things that needed fixed were simply minor cosmetic things. The skirt was correct for the most part, it just needed attached to a waistband and pleated to fit. The bodice was the right shape, it just didn't have quite enough fullness in it. The neckline, also, was a little too low and square, causing the collar to pull and not sit correctly. The sleeve was a little short and not quite full enough in the cap. The back of the bodice was fine, it just needed a pleat put into the neckline to keep the fullness at the bottom but keep it fitted at the top. This pleat also mirrors the one added to the skirt, creating a unified look. With these notes in mind, I had to go back and make the edits to the patterns before making the muslin fixes.
After I created a pattern that I felt confident with, I cut it out of muslin and put it together. I cut everything out and used a 1/2" seam allowance as I put it together. In my research, it was apparent that in the time period, a 1/2" seam allowance was most common, if not the standard. I also used the serger to finish all of the edges so that if the mock-up proved to fit correctly and have the right shape, then it was already partly finished. I used the cream thread for most of the pieces, and when that got too low, I switched to a light pink so as not to use all of the cream thread, since it was not mine and Marilyn was kind enough to let me use what the shop had. I put all of the pieces together with a cream thread over the course of two days in between classes, work, and rehearsals. Once it was all together enough to be fit, I called Margaret in to have a fitting to make sure that it all fit and was still looking correct.

After I had accumulated enough research, I started to create a pattern for the costume. This particular step took a much longer time than anticipated. I kept having to come back to it and alter the patterns.

I started with the easier pieces; the belt, cuff, and collar. Then I worked on the bodice. Since I had spent the first half of the semester getting my projects for my Independent Study in Patterning done, I had a block bodice pattern for Margaret Lewis, my model, already completed. I used that pattern and the techniques I learned to alter it from the Pattern Making by the Flat-Pattern Method book to change the shape of the bodice to the desired fit. I had to create a yoke by dropping the shoulder seam on the front of the bodice and adding it to the back piece. I moved the fitting darts on the front to the shoulder and turned them into gathers and added a lot of fullness to the bottom. Since the skirt in the picture has a placket with buttons going down center front, I extended the center front edge of the pattern by about an inch, marking where the center front line was, and then I cut off the amount that would make up the placket.

The back of the bodice was much easier, as it did not need much done to it. Aside from adding the yoke to the shoulder seam, the only real change I made to the back pattern was to add the fullness to the bottom like I had done with the front so that it would create that fullness bunched around the belt.

Next I worked on the skirt. The first one I made I ended up scrapping because it was not quite the right shape. It was more of a circle skirt than what I wanted. The skirt that I went with in the end was a five-piece skirt.

The sleeves were a bit harder to do. I struggled a lot trying to figure out how best to approach them. I made three or four sleeve patterns before I had one that I felt ready to put into muslin. I started with a sleeve pattern that was similar to a bishop sleeve, but it was going to make more of a tube than the shaped sleeve that was more common in the period. I then switched to a two-pieced sleeve that was much closer.

When I finally got the patterns to a place where I was satisfied that they would be close enough to the desired look that I wouldn't have to completely re-do anything, I got muslin to make the mock-up.
which all can be found on the Research page. With the research done, it was time to start patterning.

Filed under: Uncategorized
This is the image I selected to be my basis for the costume that I was going to make for my Senior Project. With the knowledge that this was an outfit from the 1890's and functioned as a women's golf outfit, I set about finding similar images to get an idea of what it looked like and finding pattern pieces of similar outfits from the time period to aid me in making the patterns for the final piece.

The following images are the research images that I found. Items found online have the url underneath and the book images will be posted under a picture of the book from which it came.

http://www.ici.or.jp/archives/digital_archives/detail_94_e.html

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-fashion/

https://www.flickr.com/photos/53035820@N02/6943975464/in/set-72157629478409952/

http://fuzzykzie.com/golfclothing.html

http://www.plh.org/wgbh/americansexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-fashion/
This book ended up helping me a lot with the patterns themselves. The second grouping of pictures is where I found the basis for my skirt pattern. The last group helped me to figure out how much fullness to put into the skirt and give me an idea for the sleeve. The first patterns were the ones that I originally looked to as a basis for the sleeve, but scrapped because it didn’t make quite the right shape.
This book had a lot of patterns that I used more to see the general shape than as the end all be all pattern. It helped a lot to give me an idea of what the patterns should look like and the 360 degree look of the costume.

Jean Hunnisett’s book helped me too as a whole to look at the shapes and how to form the patterns for the period. There was nothing specific in the book that I used, it was just a helpful tool to help me with the information I gathered from the previous two books.

Since I was taking Patterning as an Independent Study this semester, this book taught me what I needed to do to make patterns. I referred back to it a lot to make sure that I was not forgetting anything important in the construction of the patterns.
I am very proud of my Senior Project. I spent a lot of time researching, patterning, and building my 1890's women's golf outfit. I am very happy with the outcome of this project. I have really stepped outside of my comfort zone with taking on the patterning of this project, which I feel is an area that I still have yet to master. Looking back, there are several things I would have done differently, but for what I have accomplished, I am quite proud. The following are just some of the things that, upon reflection, would have improved the final product.

If I were to do the project again, I would have selected a costume that was more complicated to construct but that already had a pattern to use. I have found through this process that patterning is not my strong suit, and easily the part of this project with which I struggled the most. The reason it was so difficult, is because I was trying to use a skill that I had barely learned, much less mastered. Perhaps if I had decided to use a pre-made pattern instead of trying to pattern and create the costume myself, I would have had better time management and a better end result.

Patterning the costume myself, as well as purchasing the materials myself, caused me to make the final product out of muslin rather than a nicer final fabric. I realized part way through the patterning process that it was possible that I was not going to have the time to make it out of a true final fabric. Kevin suggested that in order to save money and time, I just use muslin as my final fabric. It was the correct choice in the end, as the patterning took a lot longer than intended and planned for.

As it turns out, I spent more time on the patterning than I should have. I believe that I was just trying to get it correct so that I had less steps to make in the construction phase. I had to go back to the pattern several times to make little adjustments so that the shape of the final project was correct. Spending the time patterning, I was able to achieve the look I desired, even though there are a few things that are still not perfect. For example, even with all of the research I did, I could not find a back view for the piece, so the back is an educated guess based on other pieces of the time period and other images of women's golf outfits from the era.

As for what were strong parts of my project, the skirt is what I intended it to look like. The bodice, likewise, I think I got very close, though I am still not 100% happy with the sleeves. Everything fits Margaret very nicely. I think that for the time frame and using a skill that I was just learning, I did a great job of keeping rather close to the schedule I had tried to set for myself at the beginning of the semester.

Even though there are some things that make me worried that they are not perfect, I am very happy with this end result. It is very satisfying to finally be done with something that I have put so much time and effort into all semester. I am proud of the work I have done.

Filed under:

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