

# TEN DOLLARS TO A BETTER IMPRESSION

## *Easy, Affordable Upgrades to a Civilian Impression*

Compiled by Elizabeth Stewart Clark

Elizabeth Stewart Clark is a historic clothier specializing in clothing for infants and children. She has been absorbed in living history for nearly ten years, and finds new things to learn and do each season. She and her family live in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Being vain, she has avoided all cameras both motord and historic. For other articles and patterns, please visit her website at <http://www.elizabethstewartclark.com>

*I*f you had \$10 to spend on "upgrading" your civilian impression, and could use it on anything you wished, in what would you invest?

This simple question, posed to living history enthusiasts across the country, elicited some great suggestions to inspire you. Which suit your impression best? And more importantly, what would you do with \$10? Take a few notes from fellow hobbyists; accuracy is not synonymous with expensive! Shop wisely, and pick an improvement to implement today. If you are involved in "Missionary Outreach" activities, the \$10 upgrade suggestions will go a long way toward improving your group's loaner box for citizens.

### For the Wardrobe

Purchase any combination of the following:

- White cotton or linen, to make a collar and cuff set, or multiple collars.
- A skein of fine wool to knit stockings, a scarf, or a shoulder shawl, with enough left over for a pair of knitted garters.
- One-third to one-half yard of iridescent silk taffeta at Needle & Thread (or more, if it's on the remnant rack!) to make a new cravat for a gentleman, with enough left over for a bodice ruching or bonnet trim.
- Enough checked cotton to make six handkerchiefs for a favorite fellow.

Get on a chain-fabric-store flyer list, and use coupons to purchase as much white cotton fabric as possible, to be made into:

- Chemises and drawers (2 yards needed for each... five new garments out of one ten-dollar bill!)
- Petticoats (about 5 yards each, or less for a corded petticoat)
- Nightgowns and caps (4-5 yards for a gown, and less than 1 yard for a cap... and no modern nightwear to pack in the future.)
- Additional collars and cuffs or simple undersleeves (much less than 1 yard each... make plenty.)
- Neckerchiefs and handkerchiefs (about half a yard each)
- Dress linings and hem facings if needed
- A bodice toile (2-3 yards), to be fitted precisely and used as a pattern base in the future.
- Yard of lightweight cotton for a slat bonnet, plus 2.5 yards of print or plaid for a pinner apron. These are also ideal "loaner" items.
- Correct garters from Suzanne Carter Isaacson at The Stevenson House; plan to buy a spare set if you have a spindle-shanked significant other who suffers from falling military-issue socks!

### For the Sewing Basket

Keep yourself gainfully employed during odd moments, and readily supplied with sewing essentials, by purchasing any combination of the following:

- New beeswax to keep handsewing threads sturdy and straight.
- Packets of 9 & 10 needles for handsewing. With the Recent Unpleasantness, good steel needles are even more valuable than before.

- Small remnants of silk and wool scraps, to make a pretty needlebook.
- New marking chalk (tailor's chalk)
- Ball of fine tatting cotton, spool of white sewing cotton, or skein of white embroidery cotton, to aid in sewing tasks mundane and decorative.
- A simple thimble; it's not necessary to add blood to the sweat and tears of the hobby.
- Box of glass-head steel pins.
- A sewing basket! Select a shallow basket, add a lining with pockets for your essential tools, and leave the center open to hold your work.

### Hair Helps

Even the best physical impression is ruined by modern hairstyles. Improve yourself with the following:

- Purchase one pack of invisible hair nets and two wave nets (from Sally Beauty Supply), decorative cord and tassels at the decorator fabric outlet, some beads at the craft store, and some ribbon remnants at the ribbon outlet or fabric store, to make two new decorated nets for fashionable wear.
- Purchase a small pasteboard pencil box, one set of "faux tortoise" combs, hair pins, and a comb: instant hair kit, with spare pins for others to borrow, and no need to haul modern things any longer.
- Save your hair and make two rats, covering them with two invisible nets, and add some fashionable and attractive width to the sides of your hairstyle.
- Purchase a tub of pomade.
- Make a nightcap from scrap muslin, to protect your hair from your pillow, and your pillow from your pomaded hair.

### Personal Effects

Clothing isn't all that counts-add to your feeling of time travel when you locate:

- Reproduction stationery and writing tools; write a letter or two home, or to a distant friend.
- A reproduction "Testament," Bible tracts, prayer book, or hymnal to help add a spiritual dimension to your impression as needed.
- Temperance, abolition, and other "social issue" tracts may also be found.
- Make towels from a few yards of cotton huck toweling.
- Reproduction currency and coin to carry.
- Thrift store wrist-length leather gloves
- A ball of hemp twine from a bead store; useful for many things!
- White china from the dollar store (it's usually free of

### Good for the Sole

Comfortable and appropriate feet provide a good foundation for a great impression. Consider adding:

- Sole inserts for period shoes, to alleviate problem with diabetic neuropathy. An invisible consideration for a medical need!
- A new pair or two of cotton stockings.
- Remove modern "period passable" boots to a shoe repair shop and have speed laces clipped off.

### Improving Your Mind

The material world is just the beginning! Add to a savings for books to help improve your research, impression, or life base, including:

- *Who Wore What*, and other pictorial works
- Sewing instructional books (reprinted and modern)
- Reprinted cookbooks
- Novels of the period
- Diaries and biographies
- Books and treatises on any topic of interest, including agriculture, social issues, religion, politics, philosophy, transportation, inventions... the list is endless!
- Large binder or notebook to organize research notes and papers.

Suggestions contributed by Elizabeth Clark, Kathryn Coombs, Kathryn Gager, Deborah Hyland, Lauren Payne, Carolann Schmitt, Hank Trent, and Katie Vog