

Doll Clothes of Yore

Original, Historical Designs for 18" Dolls

American Civil War Period - Circa 1840-1870



'Sarah Childress Polk' Dress

History

Who is Sarah Childress Polk?

Sarah Childress Polk was the wife of President James Polk, Commander-in-Chief of the United States during the Mexican-American War. Sarah was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and was one a well-educated woman in her time. She was educated at what is now Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Sarah was known as being "Wealthy, pretty, ambitious, and intelligent." Sarah and James had no children of their own, but raised a nephew as their own. James became President of the United States in 1845.

As First-Lady, Sarah was not known for her lively entertaining, as she did not approve of either dancing or strong liquor. Sarah, however, posted the very first annual Thanksgiving dinner at the White House, which has now become a much-loved tradition.

After the death of James, Sarah lived in Nashville, Tennessee until her death in 1891.

Fashion

This beautiful dress design was inspired by a portrait of Maria Carolina di Borbone that was painted in 1846, just one year after James K. Polk became President. This style is a familiar one, as many formal gowns had a 'Bertha' and a deeply pointed waistline. It is likely that Sarah Polk wore a dress very like this one during her tenure in the White House. Sarah was known to wear mostly blues, reds and maroons as they suited her darker coloring.

What is a 'Bertha'?

A 'Bertha' in the 1850's was a type of collar that stretched around a lady's shoulders. It was acceptable for a lady's shoulders to be exposed in evening dresses, and this collar was a way of accentuating that style. The style of this collar originated in the 1830's, and was usually formed of pleated fabric or gathered lace.

