

Doll Clothes of Yore

Original, Historical Designs for 18" Dolls

American Civil War Period - Circa 1840-1870



'Elizabeth Keckley' Dress

History

Who was Elizabeth Keckley?

Elizabeth Keckley, or Keckly was born a slave in antebellum Virginia. Although she had a difficult upbringing, Elizabeth was determined to change her situation. After her master's family moved to St. Louis, Elizabeth worked as a seamstress, making elegant dresses for the wealthy women of the town. She worked her way to freedom and married James Keckley in the 1850's. In the 1860's, Elizabeth moved to Washington D.C in the hopes of being able to making a living dressing the politician's wives. Elizabeth was eventually introduced to Mary Todd Lincoln just after Abraham Lincoln had been inaugurated as President. Mary Lincoln chose Elizabeth to be her personal dressmaker, and the two formed a strong friendship. After the tragic death of Abraham Lincoln, Mary Lincoln (who was not well-liked in Washington) was severely criticized by her peers. Elizabeth, upset by the unjust criticism, published her memoirs with help from Frederick Douglass. This book tells not only Elizabeth's story, but also that of the First Lady. This book can still be found and read today.

Fashion

This dress was inspired by a well-known photo of Elizabeth Keckley, taken sometime in the 1860's. The basic elements of this dress; the removable lace collar, long jacket, and shorter outer sleeves; were very common in Antebellum women's fashions.

During and after the Civil War, women's fashion took a more masculine turn with the 'military' styles. This dress is an example of the emphasis on streamlined tailoring and a less-feminine look.

A lady in the 1860's would have worn her dress over a steel crinoline (hoopskirt), which took the place of layers of petticoat. A lady would also have worn her dress over a chemise, corset, and corset-cover (camisole). It was not uncommon for a lady's complete dress ensemble (underclothes and all) to weigh over 20 pounds.

