

# The Cost of Accuracy 2010

© Elizabeth Stewart Clark 2010.

This article may be copied for personal, non-profit, and educational use. For permission for other uses, please contact us at [www.elizabethstewartclark.com](http://www.elizabethstewartclark.com).

Times change, but one charge continuously leveled at those who push for greater and greater historic accuracy is that “it’s too darned expensive to do it that way! Not everyone has that kind of money to spend!”

Several years ago, I set out to take a look at the true costs of historic accuracy. Recently, I set about updating my facts and figures to reflect current pricing in the living history hobby. **It’s truly shocking.**

The reality is, it can be far *less* expensive to purchase top-accuracy clothing, or to sew some portions of the wardrobe yourself, than to outfit yourself with Merchant Row, “sutler” quality items. Going with accuracy as the top goal, you’ll find yourself in less need to replace items within a few years, due to “upgrading accuracy” concerns. Your wardrobe will hold resale value, as well. Gently used, highly accurate garments can bring nearly as much as their “new” prices on the resale market when you’re ready for something different!

A modest budget is nothing to be ashamed of in living history—most everyone is in the same boat. I know I can more easily work out \$400 for the DIY Blender path to a historic wardrobe, than fork out nearly \$1500 for things I’ll need to replace if I want to attend a history-heavy or invitation-only event! Remember: highly accurate clothing will be appropriate at *any* event, but “Sutler” quality won’t work the same way.

Some notes on the categories and process:

- Most undergarment patterns contain multiple garments, stretching the budget further
- A **Functional Weekend Wardrobe** is the Skin Out plan plus two additional sets chemise/drawers.
- “**Sutler Quality**” prices were gleaned from a variety of websites purporting to cater to citizen living history enthusiasts.
- “**Best Available Purchase**” prices were taken from websites of top-quality historic clothing makers. All prices are accurate as of Fall 2010, but may change with time.
- The “**DIY Blender**” plan assumes a willingness to sew for oneself, gaining needed skills over time, while turning to top-quality makers for some items difficult to make at home. It includes home sewing of undergarments, skirt supports, aprons, shawls, and utility bonnets, using professionals for a top-quality dress, white accessories, fashion bonnet, stockings, garters, and shoes.
- You can save even more by working with the **Do It Yourself** plan on page three—create an entire working class wardrobe for about \$180 total—including your own copy of our *Dressmaker’s Guide*, with diagrams and instructions included for many wardrobe items.

## \$392 or \$1479

### Which Can You Best Afford?

<b>Total Cost, Skin-Out Ensemble Hoop Era:</b> <i>Chemise, corset, drawers, hoop, two petticoats, shoes, stockings, dress, collar/cuff, apron, shawl, utility bonnet</i>		
“Sutler” Quality	Best Available Purchase	DIY Blender
\$638 to \$1142	\$832 to \$1399	\$360 to \$596

<b>Two Additional Sets Whites</b> <i>(Chemise, Drawers, Collar/Cuff/Sleeve, stockings)</i>		
“Sutler” Quality	Best Available Purchase	DIY Blender
\$286 to \$336	\$236 to \$336	\$32

<b>Skin Out plus Whites for a Functional Weekend Wardrobe, Hoop Era</b>		
“Sutler” Quality	Best Available Purchase	DIY Blender
\$922 to \$1479	\$1068 to \$1735	\$392 to \$628



*If you don’t have a notepad handy, let me sum up for you: you can save just over \$1000 on a complete historic wardrobe by using a blend of high-quality purchases and home sewing!*

*Page 2: full breakdown of costs & options  
Page 3: complete Do It Yourself for under \$200!*

<b>Moving Forward: Additional Dresses</b>		
“Sutler” Quality	Best Available Purchase	DIY Blender
100-200	150-200	30.00



Find more free articles and projects in the Compendium at [www.thesewingacademy.com](http://www.thesewingacademy.com)  
Email for “tech support” with your historic clothing projects or research questions, or visit us on-line at [www.thesewingacademy.org](http://www.thesewingacademy.org).

Garment	“Sutler Quality”	\$\$	Best Available Purchased	\$\$	DIY Blender	
<b>Chemise</b>	Poly-cotton blends, nylon lace, quasi-historic shape & details	\$66+	100% cotton, historic shapes, techniques, and trims	\$40-\$60	Free pattern, 2 yards cotton	\$3
	Poly-cotton blends, nylon lace, quasi-historic shape & details	\$50	100% cotton, historic shapes, techniques, and trims	\$42-\$60	Purchased pattern, 2 yd cotton	\$15-\$23 first, \$3 additional
<b>Drawers</b>	Poly-cotton blends, nylon lace, quasi-historic shape & details	\$65-\$100+	100% cotton, historic shapes, techniques, and trims	\$65	Free pattern, 2 yards cotton	\$3
	Poly-cotton blends, nylon lace, quasi-historic shape & details	\$65-\$100+	100% cotton, historic shapes, techniques, and trims	\$65	Purchased pattern, 2 yards cotton	\$15-\$23 first, \$3 additional
<b>Petticoats</b>	Poly-cotton blends, nylon lace, quasi-historic shape & details	\$65-\$100+	100% cotton, historic shapes, techniques, and trims	\$65	Free pattern, 5-6 yards cotton	\$10
	Poly-cotton blends, nylon lace, quasi-historic shape & details	\$65-\$100+	100% cotton, historic shapes, techniques, and trims	\$65	Purchased pattern, 5-6 yards cotton	\$20-\$30 first, \$10 add'l
<b>Corset</b>	Variable quality and man-made fabric/trims, non-custom fits	\$85-\$200+	100% cotton, historic shapes, cut-to-measure or custom-fit	\$125-\$225	Purchased pattern, \$12-\$20; \$50 fabric & supplies	\$62-\$70
	Modern bridal hoop (man-made fabrics and trim, uncomfortable drawstring waist, often too large in circumference and length for the average woman.)	\$20-\$80	Custom cage or hoop (customized length and circumference, 100% natural materials)	\$105-\$200	\$7 Truly Victorian pattern; \$40 supplies	\$47
<b>Skirt Support</b>	Modern bridal hoop (man-made fabrics and trim, uncomfortable drawstring waist, often too large in circumference and length for the average woman.)	\$20-\$80	Custom cage or hoop (customized length and circumference, 100% natural materials)	\$105-\$200	Kay Gnagey cage kit	\$65
	Modern bridal hoop (man-made fabrics and trim, uncomfortable drawstring waist, often too large in circumference and length for the average woman.)	\$20-\$80	Custom cage or hoop (customized length and circumference, 100% natural materials)	\$105-\$200	Wooded Hamlet/Needle & Thread cage kit (the only narrow-gauge wire kit on the market!)	\$200
<b>Dress</b>	Corded petticoat	\$200	Corded petticoat (pre hoop eras)	\$80	Homemade corded petticoat with Skirting the Issue (\$10), \$15 supplies	\$25
	Semi-historic shapes and techniques; variable quality, off-rack sizing	\$100-\$200	Historic shapes and techniques, 100% natural fibers, often custom or semi-custom fit	\$150+	Dressmaker's Guide, \$30; 7-8 yd sale cotton, \$30 or less materials & notions	\$65 first, \$30 additional
<b>Collar/Cuff</b>	Man-made content trims, string-crochet body or edging	\$20-\$45	100% cotton or linen, 100% cotton trims, thread crochet	\$28-\$40	Purchased pattern \$12-\$20, 7-8 yards sale cotton, \$30	\$42-\$50 first, \$30 add'l
	Man-made content trims, string-crochet body or edging	\$20-\$45	100% cotton or linen, 100% cotton trims, thread crochet	\$28-\$40	Free pattern from personal toile, 1/2 yard good cotton	\$4
<b>Apron</b>	Basic pinner or half-apron style, variable accuracy of fabrics	\$15-\$40	Basic pinner or half-apron style, accurate fabrics and techniques	\$40	Purchased pattern; 1/2 yard good cotton	\$13 first, \$4 add'l
	Basic pinner or half-apron style, variable accuracy of fabrics	\$15-\$40	Basic pinner or half-apron style, accurate fabrics and techniques	\$40	Free pattern, 2 yards sale cotton	\$5 or less
<b>Shawl</b>	Acrylic knit	\$35-\$75	Hand-knit wool, accurate	\$75+	60" square good light wool, fringed	\$15-\$30
	“Holly Hobby” bonnet or straw	\$12-\$40	Cotton slat bonnet	\$35-\$55	Free pattern, 1-2 yards light cotton	\$5 or less
<b>Fashion Bonnet</b>	Inaccurate shapes and materials	\$65+	Fully finished	\$100-\$200	Purchased slat bonnet pattern plus fabric	\$21 or less, \$5 each add'l
	Inaccurate shapes and materials	\$65+	Partials & Kits	\$40-\$100	Purchased fashion bonnet pattern plus supplies	\$16+
<b>Stockings</b>	Mergerized cotton, good quality	\$7.25	Quality cotton	\$8.00	Home knit wool or purchased cotton	\$8 or less
	Mergerized cotton, good quality	\$7.25	Quality cotton	\$8.00	Home knit wool or purchased cotton	\$8 or less
<b>Garters</b>	Varicose-causing narrow elastic	\$3-\$4	Flat-elastic, adjustable to fit	\$6	Home knit from period instructions, wool	\$5 or less
	Varicose-causing narrow elastic	\$3-\$4	Flat-elastic, adjustable to fit	\$6	Home knit from period instructions, wool	\$5 or less
<b>Shoes</b>	Payless man-made	\$30	Base to top quality repro	\$80-\$150	Can be homemade; most use a quality repro.	\$80-\$150
	Baseline repro	\$70+	Base to top quality repro	\$80-\$150	Can be homemade; most use a quality repro.	\$80-\$150



© Elizabeth Stewart Clark 2010.

This article may be copied for personal, non-profit, and educational use. For permission for other uses, please contact us at [www.elizabethstewartclark.com](http://www.elizabethstewartclark.com). Find more free articles and projects in the Compendium at [www.thesewingacademy.com](http://www.thesewingacademy.com) Email for “tech support” with your historic clothing projects or research questions, or visit us on-line at [www.thesewingacademy.org](http://www.thesewingacademy.org).

## Beyond the Blender Plan: Make an Entirely DIY Working Class Wardrobe on \$20 a Month

*Yes, that's accuracy on just \$5 a week!*

This functional working class wardrobe includes

- *Undergarments: 2 sets chemise/drawers, corded corset, underpetticoat, 2 regular petticoats*
- *Dress Ensemble: 1 dress, 1 set collar/cuffs*
- *Footwear & Outerwear: wool shawl, sunbonnet, apron, "passable" used leather boots.*

	Month 1	Month One	Month 2	Month 3
<b>Starting Budget</b>	\$20.00	40.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
<b>Buy</b>	No purchases; Sign up for chain fabric store coupon list	<i>The Dressmaker's Guide</i> , \$30 10 yards white muslin, \$1/ yd with coupon	2 yards cotton sateen, \$3/ yd with coupon cotton cording, \$4 4 yards white muslin, \$8	15 yards white muslin, \$1/ yard with coupon
<b>Sew</b>	Research styles & shapes, fabric prints	1 chemise, 1 pr drawers, 1 underpetticoat, muslin test for corded corset/stays	Finish sateen corded corset/stay 1 chemise, 1 pr drawers	2 full-gathered underskirts, muslin test for bodice drape
<b>Roll Over</b>	\$20.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5.00
	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7
<b>Starting Budget</b>	\$25.00	\$35.00	\$25.00	\$30.00
<b>Buy</b>	No purchases	7.5 yards print or plaid cotton, \$3/ yd with coupon; thread, packet hooks & eyes	Period "passable" leather boots from resale shop	2 yards 60" wide wool on sale, \$8/yard
<b>Sew</b>	Continue making undies & fitting muslin bodice	Construct basic dress. Use scraps of white muslin to make collar & cuffs	Continue with basic dress & accessories.	Fringe wool square for basic shawl
<b>Roll Over</b>	\$15.00	\$0.00	\$10.00	\$14.00
	Month 8	Month 9	<p style="text-align: center;">True, a working class wardrobe is not terribly glamorous—but you'll be in excellent company with the majority of the 19th century population, and even thin budgets can make the spending/sewing plan work! Well-fitted, simple working class clothing looks great; you'll be set up to participate in a wide range of living history events and scenarios.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">While you're working your way from the skin out, many items can be borrowed from established living history enthusiasts at little to no cost.. And you'll have a working historic <i>wardrobe</i> for less than the cost of <b>one</b> non-historic "Sutler" skirt-blouse-jacket ensemble!</p>	
<b>Starting Budget</b>	\$34.00	\$28.00		
<b>Buy</b>	1.5 yards lightweight cotton print; 2 yards medium to dark cotton print	2 pair cotton stockings, 1 yard flat elastic, buckles, accurate hair pins		
<b>Sew</b>	Sunbonnet from lightweight cotton; apron from medium cotton	Finish bonnet & apron Construct garters		
<b>Roll Over</b>	\$18.00	<b>Total Spent: \$180.00</b>		



© Elizabeth Stewart Clark 2010.

*This article may be copied for personal, non-profit, and educational use. For permission for other uses, please contact us at [www.elizabethstewartclark.com](http://www.elizabethstewartclark.com). Find more free articles and projects in the Compendium at [www.thesewingacademy.com](http://www.thesewingacademy.com) Email for "tech support" with your historic clothing projects or research questions, or visit us on-line at [www.thesewingacademy.org](http://www.thesewingacademy.org).*