

Miss Lisa Brown's Guide to Dressing for a Regency Ball – Gentlemen's Edition



Jane Austen & the Regency

The term “Regency” refers to years between 1811 and 1820 when George III of the United Kingdom was deemed unfit to rule and his son, later George IV, was installed as his proxy with the title of “Prince Regent”. However, “Regency Era” is often applied to the years between 1795 and 1830. This period is often called the “Extended Regency” because the time shared the same distinctive culture, fashion, architecture, politics and the continuing Napoleonic War.

The author most closely associated with the Regency is Jane Austen (1775-1817). Her witty and engaging novels are a window into the manners, lifestyle and society of the English gentry. She is the ideal connexion to English Country Dancing as each of her six books: Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Emma, Persuasion, Mansfield Park and Northanger Abbey, feature balls and dances.

Hair

If you are unable to assemble much of a Regency wardrobe, you can still look the part by growing your sideburns and getting a Caesar cut hairstyle.

Sideburns were long with a tilt towards the lips. No vertical sideburns please.

The general rule was that “side whiskers” were to extend no lower than a line connecting the bottom of the ear lobe and the corner of the mouth.

The British army even had a method to determine the correct length of side whiskers:

Take a yard of string, grasp center in mouth, run ends behind the ears and then up to meet on top of head. Tie a bow, shave anything below the string



(and remove string!) Shave face every Wednesday and Sunday as per regulations.

Other types of facial hair were not popular and were not allowed in the military. No beards, mustaches, goatees, soul patches or Van Dykes.

If you have short hair, brush it forward into a Caesar cut style with no discernable part. If your hair is long, put it into a pony tail at the neck with a bow.

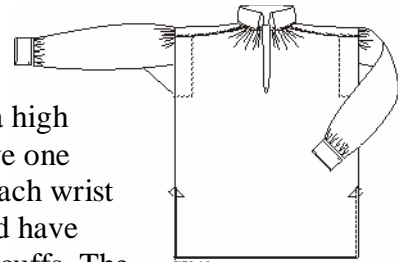
Curly hair for both men and women was favored over straight hair. Individual curls were made with pomade (hair gel) and curling papers.



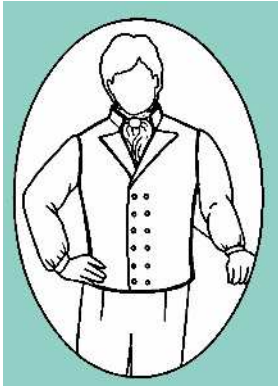
The Minimum

If you wish to dress the part of a country gentleman but don't own your estate, the following list will help you look the part. It requires just three Regency items with your own modern pants, shoes and socks.

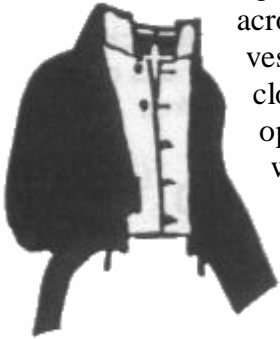
1) Shirt- Drop sleeve white cotton shirt with a high collar. They usually have one button at the neck and each wrist only. For a ball, it would have ruffles at the throat and cuffs. The ruffles at the wrist should be long enough to almost brush the base of the fingers. Today, this type of shirt is most often called a “poet shirt” although it can also be called a “pirate shirt” or “peasant shirt”



Using these modern names, it can sometimes be found in stores. Please don't buy one made of shiny satin and if it has laces at the throat, they must be removed.



2) Waistcoat - A vest with buttons down the middle and a high collar. The bottom is straight across – no points like modern vests. The bottom button is worn closed while the top two can be open to accommodate the tie. The waistcoat is usually the most colorful and fanciful part of the outfit. A brocade, stripe or patterned material was often used.



3) Tie- A white neck cloth tied in an intricate manner is also required. During the period, a tie for a ball would have been silk but today you can use silk, linen, taffeta or some other stiff fine fabric. (See Regency Cravat guide for further details)



4) Pants - Any color straight leg modern pants. Regency pants were worn tight to show off the shape of the leg and stirrups were hooked under the heel to pull the cloth taught. The tightness of your modern pants is up to your discretion.

5) Shoes – Wear your own shoes with a low heel. The most important rule for dancing is to wear comfortable shoes. No one has fun when their feet hurt.

The Maximum

If you are the heir to your family's estate with money and time being no object, the following items should be added to the shirt, waistcoat and tie listed above.

1) Tailcoat – Double breasted with wide labels and high collar. It stops above the waist in the front and cuts away to tails of various styles. It was usually made of wool or linen. The waistcoat extends for two or more inches below the front of the coat. The long tail is split in the middle and straight across the bottom. The coats were usually a dark color.



2) Knee Breeches – Trousers were too informal for balls and fall front breeches of wool, linen or silk that buckle, button or tie below the knee would have been worn. They had a high waist, baggy seat and tight legs. No pockets. Any color is acceptable.



In a pinch, horseback riding breeches can be used if they aren't two-tone. The high-waisted full-seat variety is best for this purpose. No jodhpurs please! You could also try football or baseball pants. Please avoid shiny material and stripes on the sides.

To make a simple pair of breeches, put elastic at the waist and leg openings and sew three faux buttons along the side of each knee.

3) Stockings – These can be made of cotton, linen, silk or wool. For formal wear they were most often white

although black could be worn with black knee breeches. During Regency times the stockings were held up by garters. We, fortunately, have knee socks with elastic to do the trick. Try white soccer socks.

4) Shoes – Colonial style buckle shoes were still common. However, slip-on shoes with low heels called “pumps” were the preferred style, especially for balls. Don’t worry these are not the high heeled



women’s shoes of today. They do, however, resemble the low heeled “flats” that are popular with contemporary women. And they had bows on

them! This look can be replicated today with jazz dance shoes (pictured below) which can be purchased at any dancer supply store or on the internet. They are inexpensive but can only be worn indoors and usually come in limited sizes.

If you purchase new shoes for a ball, break them in first. As mentioned above, the most important consideration when choosing shoes for a ball is: “Are they comfortable?”



5) Accessories- Gloves, canes, pocket watches and watch fobs were all standard accessories for gentlemen. Men often wore white leather gloves while dancing. Decent white gloves can be purchased from police, military or marching band supply stores. Leather and cotton gloves can be purchased on line at www.coghlinandupton.com

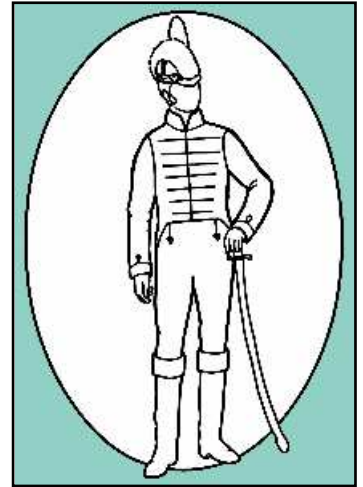


Uniforms

Officers only, no rank and file, would be invited to a ball and they would wear their full dress uniforms.

This would consist of the same white ruffled shirt, white tie, white stockings and shoes as civilians. The waistcoat and breeches would be white or off-white.

The uniform coat would be made of superfine wool and would vary depending on the country, branch of the service, rank and regiment. Silver and gold epaulettes would signify rank.



To greatly simplify, British army and marine officers wore the famous red coat with a red or burgundy silk sash around their waist to denote their status. Royal Naval officers wore navy blue coats with wide lapels and no sashes.

All officers carried dress swords which must be taken off for dancing.

Purchasing your wardrobe

By now you must realize these items cannot be found at the local mall. There are three main ways to acquire the clothing you will need.

1) Buy the patterns for yourself or a local seamstress to make.

It’s not possible to buy a single pattern to fit all your needs so be prepared to purchase several patterns.

Before purchasing any pattern, learn about its good and bad points from the Great Bay Area Customers Guild’s “Great Pattern Review”.

<http://www.gbacg.org/great-pattern-review/>

A) Simplicity and Butterick have some serviceable patterns for this era.

*Poet shirt from Simplicity # 4219.

*The tail coat from Butterick pattern #B3648.

*The Breeches from Butterick pattern #B4317 or #B3072.

*The shirt from Butterick pattern #B4486 or #B5008.

B) Patterns designed for re-enactors are more historically accurate. However, they can be difficult to make. Look under both 18th and 19th century categories for patterns. A sampling of Regency patterns is found below.

Tailor's Guide

1790's Frock Coaté, Five Shirt Styles 1700 – 1820, Drop Front Breeches or Trousers 1750 – 1820,

<http://www.tailorsguide.com/>

JP Ryan - shirt

<http://www.jpryan.com/>

Wingco - #211, #212,

<http://www.wingco.com/>

Rocking Horse Farm
Dragoon Uniform,
Gentleman's Waistcoat, Man's
1812 Waistcoat

<http://rockinghorse-farm.com/>

Kannik's Corner - KK-4101,
KK-4012

<http://www.kannikskorner.com/>

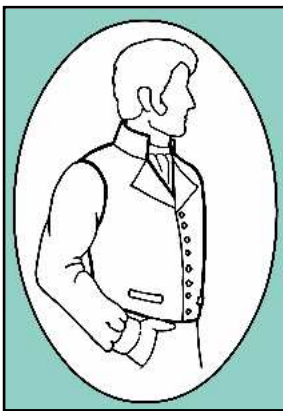


Past Patterns #032, #040

<http://www.pastpatterns.com/1789.html>

Reconstructing History RH804, RH809

<http://www.reconstructinghistory.com/>



C) Listed below are re-enactor supply companies that carry many of the above patterns and others. They also sell ready made clothing.

Smoke and Fire

<http://www.smoke-fire.com/>

Jas. Townsend & Son

<http://www.jastown.com/>

James Country

<http://www.jamescountry.com>

Patterns of Time

<https://www.patternsoftime.com>



2) Buy them already made on eBay.

eBay is your friend. It's a great source if you are patient and know how to use it. The eBay store Gentlemen's Jabot has Regency waistcoats and ties.

<http://stores.ebay.com/Gentlemans-Jabot>



3) Use a Period Costume Specialist for custom-made clothing.

Very Merry Seamstress in Lima, NY

<http://www.verymerryseamstress.com/catalog.htm>

Oakhill Clothiers located in Nunda, NY, south of Geneseo

<http://www.oakhillclothiers.com/>

Fashions in Time, located in Scotia, NY

<http://www.fashionsintime.com/>

Baldwin Clothing, Syracuse, NY

<http://baldwinclothing.com/Xindex.html>

Sue's Old Fashions, located in Cadyville, NY, near Plattsburg

<http://www.suesoldfashions.com/>

Linda's Early Fashions, located in Toronto, ON

<http://www.uppercanadianheritage.com/lindasearly/>

The Sutler of Mount Misery in Valley Forge, PA

<http://gggodwin.com>

The Quartermaster General, located in Cleveland, OH

<http://www.thequartermastergeneral.com/>

Threadbare Stitchery located in Chatfield, MN

<http://www.threadtheneedle.net/>



1811



1814

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