

“Hitty’s Clothes” by Patrica Fifer (with photos by Bill and Patricia Fifer)

Note: originally written in 1996. This version was edited and arranged by Wendi Dunn in 2024.

On September 25th of this year [1996], we visited Hitty for a second time in her current home in the Stockbridge, Massachusetts Public Library. She is wearing a cotton print dress and among her belongings are two other cotton dresses. One seems to be an extremely tattered version of the dress she is depicted as wearing in the colored illustration found in the frontispiece of the hard-backed early editions of the book.



Other fabric belongings in her display case include a velvet bonnet, two sunbonnets, a quilt and a pillow.



The following are my notes from examining her clothes. All of Hitty’s clothes are completely hand sewn. In her current outfit, she has cotton pantalets and a cotton petticoat, but there is no chemise as described in the book (although she may well have had one when originally purchased by Rachel Field).

Her pantalets, which are constructed of a rather sturdy heavyweight cotton, consist of two lace-trimmed leg tubes and a narrow yoke with a narrow hem at the top to accommodate a drawstring. The lace trim is heavy and seems to be handmade. The seam of each leg tube is sewn together on the inside of the leg and the two tubes are joined at the crotch with seams continuing up the center front and center back to where they join the yoke.



The entire garment is slit about 1-3/4-inches on the right side. This slit goes through the yoke and side of the leg, and is hand hemmed and has no raw edges showing. The drawstring seems to be a twined yellow thread. The yoke shows about 3/8-inch high on the outside of the garment. This includes the tiny hem for the drawstring. It should be cut to measure about 3/8-inch to 1/2-inch plus the finished seam at the top for the drawstring and hem where it is joined to the pants legs.



Hitty's petticoat is made of a lighter weight cotton, also trimmed with a different, rather heavy handmade lace. It has a 1/2-inch hand stitched hem and a 1/8-inch tuck about 5/8-inch above the hem. The lace has been applied by hand after the hemming was completed. The finished length (including the lace) falls to about 1-inch to 1-1/4-inches above her ankles.

The gathered petticoat is completely encased in a narrow waistband with a small pearl button with four holes and a hand-worked buttonhole at the center back. The back of the waistband overlaps slightly, probably with a short slit. It buttons left to right.



The dress Hitty is wearing [now called the Library Dress] seems to be either a brick red or rust cotton with an off-white figure partially outlined in olive green. The dress fabric is faded, particularly in front. The dress has a plain bodice with short puffed sleeves and a gathered skirt which just covers the petticoat. My measurements are very rough. The dress length (from the shoulder to the hem) is approximately 4-inches (plus hem and seam allowance), and the width of the skirt is approximately 5-1/2-inches when stretched flat to measure the bottom edge from side to side, or about 11-inches in circumference around the bottom for cutting purposes. The skirt length is approximately 3-1/16-inches plus the hem and seam allowance.



The bodice is approximately 7/8-inches long (plus neck hem and waist seam allowance) with very narrow shoulders (approximately 3/16-inch wide each) and a rather wide neck. I was unable to determine if it is lined or not, but the photographs we took brought out details and shadows that were not apparent at the time, and I now seriously doubt that it is lined. The short, puffed sleeves are encased with a very narrow self-binding to form a cuff with a very narrow, heavy lace tacked on. The neckline was turned and stitched to the inside and the same lace applied.

The skirt was not lined. It has a center back seam and is gathered to the bodice. When looking at Hitty from the back, the button loops are on the right, and the buttons are on the left. I believe the top inch or so of the center back skirt seam has not been joined, but forms an extension to the bodice opening for ease in dressing and undressing. Frankly, I was afraid to try to open the button loops for fear one would break! The buttons are white pearl, rounded on the top, with a self-shank underneath, through which a hole is drilled from side to side for the

thread, rather than the more common metal shank type. I had lots of dresses with this type of button in the 1930s. Because of their shape and color, we called them “pearl buttons.” The loops are crocheted belt loop type, probably made of the same cotton thread used in sewing the dress.



Hitty’s coral necklace is composed of tiny (not all perfectly round) coral beads. I forgot to measure them, but after playing around with beads at home, I realized that beads between 1.73mm and 2.0mm would be perfect. There is no discernible closure to Hitty’s necklace. I think the beads should be strung on silk thread and then double tied, with a tiny dot of zap-a-gap or such glue applied to the knot, and then the loose ends tucked into a couple of beads.

Learn more about Hitty:

<https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hittys-clothes/>

<https://ataleoftwohittys.com/who-is-hitty/>

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