

# The Morning Dress: A Study of Status, Function, and Dress Reform in 19th Century Fashion

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## Introduction

The FSU Historic Costume Collection, owned and maintained by the Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship, is a vast archive comprising over 5,000 textile objects. It includes apparel garments, accessories, shoes, home furnishings, and a diverse array of historic fashion plates, magazines, and sewing patterns.

This research explores methods for accessioning, organizing, and digitizing textile objects in the Historic Costume Collection of the Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on Victorian-era morning gowns and their representation of status, function, and dress reform in the 19th century. Morning dresses, also called dressing gowns and later tea gowns, were worn by women in the home in the morning and while entertaining guests for tea. The main function of morning dresses is to display wealth and taste. The advent of the morning dress accompanied the rise of the Middle Class. Middle Class women used morning dresses and the societal practice of afternoon tea to defend their newfound status in society. Morning dresses take inspiration from antique fashions and are less structured than earlier garments, reflecting comfort as a new priority in the late Victorian era. While morning dresses take a markedly different turn in terms of comfort and functionality, they still reflect 19th century societal values and classism. Clothing styles changed frequently in the Victorian era according to the fashionable silhouette but were consistently used to display wealth, connection, status, and culture.

## Methodology

### Inventoried Textiles and Apparel

- Conduct a systematic inventory of all relevant garments in the Historic Costume Collection.
- Assign unique identification numbers to each object.
- Categorize textiles based on garment type, era, and condition.

### Material and Textile Analysis

- Identify fibers, colors, and weave structures of garments using visual examination and, if possible, fiber analysis techniques.
- Compare materials with historical textile references to ensure accuracy.

### Garment Documentation and Description

- Using standardized terminology for consistency, record detailed descriptions of each object, including silhouette, embellishments, construction techniques, and condition.

### Donor and Provenance Documentation

- Gather and document donor information to establish garment provenance.
- Trace ownership history and cultural significance where possible.

### Photography and Digital Documentation

- Capture high-quality images of each garment and include close-up shots of fabric details, labels, and construction techniques.
- Maintain an organized digital archive for accessibility.

### Focus on Morning Dresses

- Identify specific morning dresses within the collection for in-depth study.
- Analyze their role in reflecting status, function, and dress reform in the 19th century.

### Historical Context Research

- Investigate the time period (Victorian era, particularly late 19th century) to contextualize morning dresses within social and fashion history.
- Utilize academic sources, museum archives, and primary documents.

### Comparative Research

- Examine morning dresses in museum collections for comparison.
- Analyze late 1800s fashion plates, contemporary clothing catalogues, and fashion advice literature to identify recurring trends and deviations in morning dress styles.



W-136 Morning Gown 1 Front



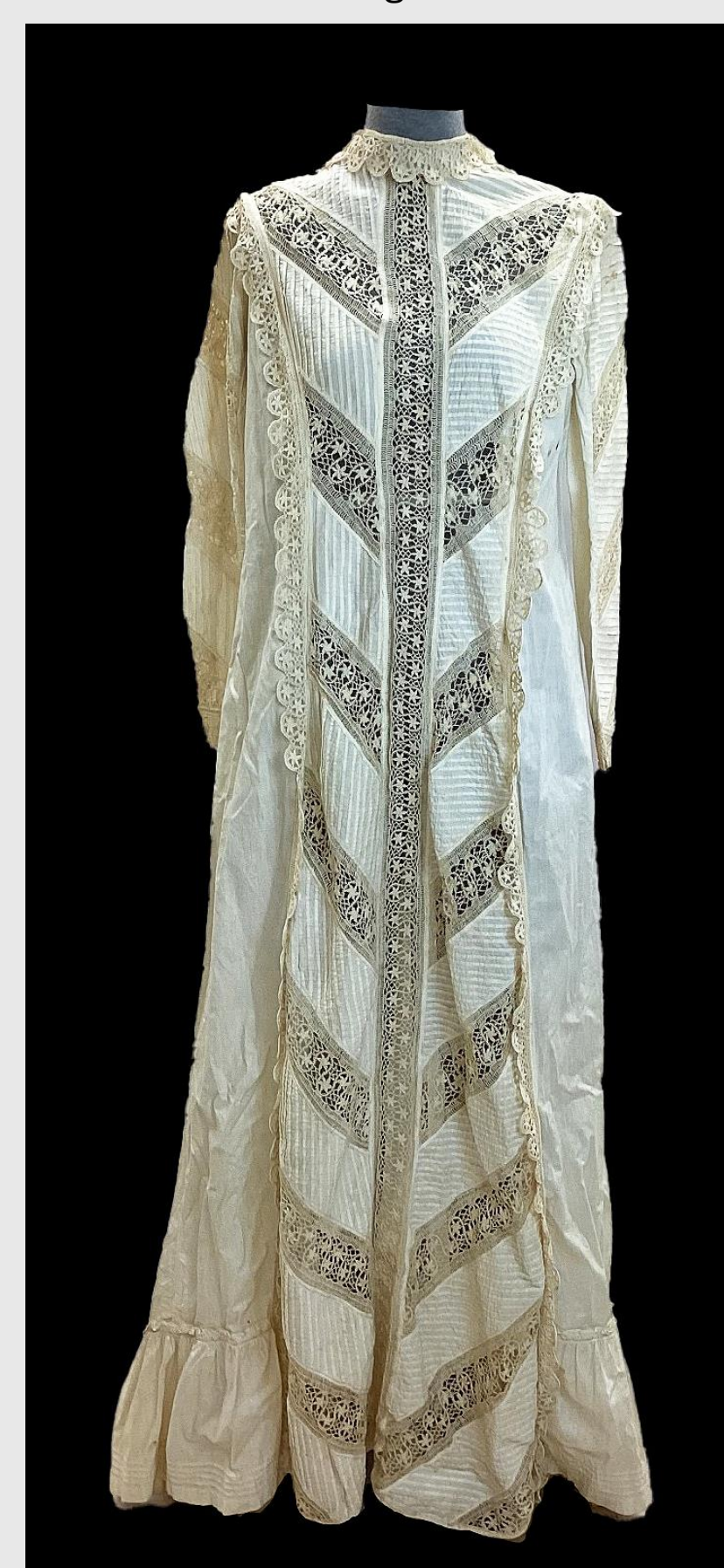
W-136 Morning Gown 1 Back



W-260 Morning Gown 2 Front



W-260 Morning Gown 2 Back



W-139 Morning Gown 3 Front



W-139 Morning Gown 3 Back

## Dress Analysis

### Unique Elements of Morning Gowns

- Constructed for comfort with looser structures, natural fibers like cotton and flax, and relaxed lines, yet also to display wealth through detailing, lace, and color use.
- Follow the characteristics of the category of undress: long sleeves and high necklines and often feature full length buttons down the side to achieve a flatter look to the front of the garment.
- Adorned with decorative lace and have anachronistic elements like the Watteau back popularized in 18th c. French fashion due to the depiction of the style in Jean-Antoine Watteau's paintings.
- Over time, they became more elaborate, including color and elements of Eastern fashion due to the association with afternoon tea. They eventually became known as tea gowns.

### (W-136) Morning Dress 1

- Full length chemise silhouette dress made of cotton with light weight plain weave and adorned with ruffles and lace.
- Front princess seam with ruffles of floral and geometric lace panels and floral and geometric lace insert paneling on top of sleeves.
- Scalloped lace trim at the hem, sleeve and collar with pin tuck pleats add texture and design at the hem of dress.
- Back has heavy weight cotton fabric for concealment and mitered yolk at back is made of the same floral and geometric lace paneling as the front.
- Style pleats or box pleat at center back for increase comfort, ease and fullness design (known as Watteau design)
- More shaping in the back of the garment than the front due to darts and pleating.
- Back fastens at the left shoulder at the mitered yolk seam, and the front fastens at right side underneath lace frill and there is a hidden pocket in the side seam.

### (W-260) Morning Dress 2

- Flax/ Linen chemise silhouette dress in loose plain weave construction with short train and lace-trimmed peter pan collar.
- Dress is entered by stepping in and pulling the dress up over the hips and fastened at button closure on the placket.
- Diagonal gathered panel inserts divided by crochet wagon wheel lace. Design details are in the front full length of the garment, creating a chevron pattern.
- Sleeves with wagon wheel lace and gathered panels have cuffs that feature gathered panel trimmed at the bottom with lace attached to a flounce sleeve trimmed in wagon wheel lace.
- ¾ length sleeves are gathered at the shoulder to create a slight puff and yolk at back shoulders pulls the shoulders back and supports the back of the dress.
- Princess seams on the back bodice for shaping that lead into a peasant skirt design from hip to hem of garment.
- Gathered panel with attached ruffle flounce are attached at bottom of the skirt except at front lace panel section.

### (W-139) Morning Dress 3

- Flax/ Linen relaxed A-line dress in loose plain weave construction with scalloped floral lace stand collar and short train.
- Asymmetrical design is achieved with horizontal pin tucks on the left dress panel that meet in the center with vertical pin tucks on the right dress panel. Alternating pin tuck and lace panels create a chevron pattern joined together by full length lace insert.
- Long sleeves comprised of alternating vertical panels of horizontal pin tucks and floral lace inserts.
- Mitered yolk at back shoulders pulls the shoulders back and supports the back of the dress. Same alternating vertical and horizontal pin tucks as front with crochet lace.
- Gathered full length back panel with peasant hem with pin tuck detailing.
- Button closure from left shoulder to hem of garment.

## Conclusion

This research has resulted in the identification of five morning dresses within the Jim Moran College Historic Costume and Textiles Collection. Further identification can be made using the information that has been collected and added to the collection's database. This research can be used to produce a future exhibition on morning dresses and/or clothing worn in the home during the Victorian period. This research also assists in the care, conservation, and storage of these garments. More research is necessary to identify precise dates and provenance for the morning dresses that have been identified. Furthermore, future research into the specific distinctions in style, construction, and uses between morning dresses and tea gowns is necessary to identify tea gowns within the Historic Costume Collection.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

