

# BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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## Contents

1.	Introduction .....	2
2.	Start with the Period .....	2
3.	Select your Persona.....	2
4.	Recommended Attire for Gents .....	3
4.1	Shirts .....	3
4.2	Jackets and Coats .....	4
4.3	Trousers.....	4
5.	Accessories .....	5
5.1	Chaps.....	5
5.2	Vests.....	5
5.3	Boots and Shoes .....	5
5.4	Spurs.....	5
5.5	Holsters .....	6
5.6	Neckwear.....	6
5.7	Hats .....	6
5.8	Watches, Rings & Eyeglasses .....	7
5.9	Correct Closures .....	7
5.10	Gloves and Walking Sticks .....	7
6.	Military Attire.....	8
6.1	Boots .....	8
6.2	Trousers.....	8
6.3	Shirts .....	8
6.4	Sabre.....	8
6.5	Revolver .....	8
7.	Costume Contests and Reenactment Skits– Contestant Guidelines.....	8
8.	Some Illustrations .....	10
9.	References, Costumes, and Supplies .....	11

# BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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## 1. Introduction

You have already decided that you are interested in being part of the Boots and Bustles, and have taken the next step – that is acquiring a persona and dressing that person in period-correct attire. The information in this guide is intended to help you along the way. We have all been down this path just a bit ahead of you, and this document will share some of our research and experience so you don’t have to feel like you are re-inventing the wheel. Having said that, the contents of this guide are just that – a collection of suggestions and general rules – none of which must be followed exactly. After all, developing your persona and then dressing to suit your own tastes is part of the fun! This booklet is meant to serve as a guide to help you build your costume wardrobe. Over time you may want to develop several personas and wear different costumes to different events. *Please avoid the impulse to go out and buy yourself an entire outfit before you have given yourself a chance to do some research.*

## 2. Start with the Period

The Boots and Bustles dress in period-correct attire for the period from 1870 to 1990. This timeframe was chosen after considerable thought. We have all been influenced by Hollywood, and must be careful not to emulate what we have seen in the movies or on TV, since much of the costuming has been done with little or no regard for what was actually correct for the period. With the exception of a handful of movies, most of the silver screen costumes we see were styled to fit into the era the movie was made in. Townspeople of the Victorian period were very modest by our standards. A gentleman would not use rough language around a lady. Shirts were always worn buttoned up to the top, and a vest was worn with the bottom button unbuttoned.

Daily dress was much more formal than it is today. Unless they were a workman or laborer, every gentleman was expected to wear a coat, vest, and hat. To walk around in shirtsleeves without vest or coat would be the modern-day equivalent of traipsing about in one’s underwear. Very unseemly, and most ungentlemanly!

## 3. Select your Persona

Having a persona that you have researched and thought about is the MOST important aspect of being able to develop a believable period character. You already know in what period your character lived – 1865 to 1890. Now it is up to you to “put some flesh on the bones” as it were. It might be helpful to select someone whose life and social status was similar to your own. For example, you might choose to portray a soldier who was stationed at Fort Whipple. You can do research, (Sharlot Hall has a nice selection of books about Prescott in that period) or go on the internet to check out persons who might be of interest, or you might model your persona on one of your own ancestors. You may end up with more than one persona, and that’s fine too. Once you have found an interesting persona, then you will be able to start filling in the details. Would they have worn plain clothing and boots suitable for working on a ranch, or would they have had fine vests and puff ties? Were they married? What sort of status in the community did they have? Was your character a famous person, or an unknown pioneer? Being able to answer questions like these will make your character come to life as you tell others about what “your” life was like in the 1800’s. Knowing the details about “your” person’s life, habits, and history will give you credibility and confidence, and make your portrayal more believable.

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

---

### 3.1 Some general categories of Gents in the 1800’s

During the Victorian period, society was broken down into three distinct classes. There were the aristocracy, the middle-class, and the working class. Each one of them behaved in society with its own set of characteristics. Common categories found in Prescott during the period included politicians, townsmen, cowboys, gamblers, miners, military, and trappers or mountain men.

## 4. Recommended Attire for Gents

How should a gentleman dress?

The Boots and Bustles dress covers the period from 1865 to 1893. We try to target our costumes toward the 1870’s and 1880’s, and avoid the Edwardian style of dress that became popular early in the 1890’s. (The Edwardian style for gentlemen is typified by light-colored jackets and pants, and high-buttoned shoes.) It is important to do your own research in order to present a period-correct portrayal for a given point in time within these dates. Your selected persona (i.e. Townsman, miner or military man for example) will have a direct effect on your costume choices. All the details of your outfit, from your hair to your shoes, will tell the world who you are and how much attention you have paid to what you wear. Remember that if your intention is to educate the public, you do them a disservice when you do not present an accurate portrayal. Details such as eyeglasses, spurs, and hats are just as important as your clothes. Spend time looking at vintage pictures from the period to become familiar with the look you are trying to achieve. **YOUR CLOTHING CAN (and WILL!) BECOME A MAJOR INVESTMENT, SO TAKE YOUR TIME.** Pick a style that suits your age and interest.



Coles Bashford (1816 – 1878) moved to Prescott, Arizona Territory as a private citizen, and was soon appointed its first Attorney General by Governor Goodwin, serving from 1864 until 1866.

### 4.1 Shirts

Men’s shirts of the period 1865 – 1890 were generally of the pullover type with a three or four-button placket, or less often, a ribbon lacing at the front. The fabric would be plain, striped, or calico. Most collars would be a plain band. However, attached collars were also available. Dress shirts would usually have detachable collars and a bib front. Although wool shirts were popular, especially for work, cotton was preferred where weather permitted.

Cotton was the most common material for shirts, and was made into various weights, such as duck, canvas, twill, corduroy, flannel and denim. Silk was considered a luxury fiber, and was usually reserved for ladies



## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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clothing, although we see vests, puff ties and wild rags in silk. Linen, sometimes referred to as “homespun” or coarse shirting, was used for both men’s and women’s clothing, but to a lesser extent than cotton.

Buttons are an important detail on your shirts, and if you wish to keep your outfit “in period”, you should be careful NOT to have obviously plastic buttons. Buttons of the time were made of a variety of materials: metal, shell, wood, ivory, glass, leather, and horn. Some were inlaid with silver, or featured carved designs.

### 4.2 Jackets and Coats

Sack coats and variations were generally of waist to hip length. Frock coats extended down to mid-thigh or knees, depending on the style.

Sweaters of knotted woolens were sometimes worn in cold weather.

Dusters worn by cowboys and others were essentially long, buttoned, unlined, single or double-breasted coats. They were made of heavy cotton or canvas, and extended almost to the ground. Slickers were the same as dusters, only made of rubberized or fish-oil-treated canvas.

*Aussie style dusters were not seen in the “old west”.*

### 4.3 Trousers

4.3.1 The most common fabric for men’s trousers in the 1800’s was wool. Wool does not wear well in the saddle however. Pants generally worn by cowboys were of duck, corduroy, heavy cotton, or wool. Some had a double layer of material or buckskin sewn onto the seat and inner thigh to extend their usable life. Most cowboys distained the blue denim “waist overalls” of Levi until after 1890. They thought them to be the clothes of the lowly (in their minds) farmer, miner, or other person who did not earn his keep astride a horse.



4.3.2 Pants were worn high at the true waist and snug at the waist. Generally a cowboy did not want to wear a belt or suspenders, as they might chafe him. Otherwise, suspenders were the way pants were held up. Trousers had a button fly and usually a small strap and buckle at the back to make adjustments to the waist. Belt loops on pants did not exist until after 1900. Miners and farmers preferred Levi’s riveted “waist overalls” for their durability. Some frontier men, mountain men, and scouts preferred buckskin pants. *The zipper, originally known as the “hookless fastener”, was not invented until 1893, and is not period correct.*

Suspenders used to hold up pants were either the “Y” or “X” back variety, and were often made of canvas, but sometimes were elastic. These suspenders had leather eyelets at the ends so they could attach to the buttons on the waistband of the pants. *Suspenders that have metal clips at the ends are not period-correct.*

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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### 5. Accessories

#### 5.1 Chaps

Shotgun chaps and “woolies” are the recommended chaps that should be worn by cowboys of the period. They did not wear batwing chaps.

#### 5.2 Vests



Vests were 2 or 4-pocket, and made of wool corduroy, canvas, silk or cotton. Most were of a single color, depending on how fancy the material was. Trims of velvet, satin or corduroy were used. Even fancier vests were of brocaded silk. Vests were single or double-breasted with lapels. Double-breasted vests were worn by gamblers or other well-heeled town members.

To the cowboy, the vest was a necessary garment. Pants tended to be cut tight near the waist, making it difficult to use the pockets – particularly while astride a horse. Also, many shirts had no pockets. The vest pockets contained some of the cowboy’s meager belongings. The vest also helped keep him warm on cold nights while riding heard.

#### 5.3 Boots and Shoes

Early cowboys wore flat-heeled boots and shoes with a box toe that they brought home from the civil war. Some had lace-up field shoes, which like the boots had a square toe. Farmers liked field shoes because they laced up and would not slip off while working in the fields. These shoes were also popular with the loggers and miners of the time. The cowboy started having boots made to fit his style of dress and work in the early 1880’s. At the same time the box toe was being replaced with the round toe, since this allowed slipping the foot into a stirrup more easily. The cowboy also wore a laced-up boot called a “packer”, which were worn from the 1880’s to the present. Nearly all boots were 16” to 18” tall, and were black or brown. The pant leg could be worn either inside or outside of the boot. Townsman who didn’t wear boots wore a “Brogan” type of lace-up shoe. The pointed toe cowboy boot was not worn in the 1860 – 1890 timeframe. Only women’s shoes had pointed toes. *It should also be noted that the laces should always go through eyelets – the little quick-lace “hooks” we see today are not period-correct.*

In the 1860’s the true cowboy boot appeared featuring a reinforced arch and higher heel. Later boots took on semi-functional frills, such as a more pointed toe and floppy grips called mule ears to make the boots easier to pull on. The fanciest boots, made after the mid-1880’s, were of soft leather with decorative stitching.

#### 5.4 Spurs

Highly practical, spurs were also a vital part of the cowboy’s image, and he rarely took them off. The spur’s heel band fit over the back of the boot, while the spur strap fastened across the instep. The heel chain kept the spurs from riding up and, along with the

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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jinglebob, made a sound that was music to the strutting cowboy’s ears. Most Americans shunned the Mexican spurs, with their spiky rowels, and used models like the “OK”, with rowels that were filed down to avoid scouring their pony’s flanks. The plainest type was the work spur, with a gentle, star-shaped rowel. However, many cowboys also owned a pair of fancy silver spurs.

### 5.5 Holsters

Despite what most of us have seen in Hollywood movies, the western frontiersman neither wore his gun low on his thigh, nor tied down the holster with a thong. Most wore them high on the hip and close to the body. When on horseback, the holster would be slipped around to the right hip close to the back pocket, or around to the left side for a cross draw.

Early holsters were of the military type – it was the grandpa of the slim Jim. The slim Jim was like a military holster, but with a flap cut off and the gun set deep in the holster to protect the gun from the weather. As time went by, the holster was cut to make a better trigger clearing. Shoulder holsters were also in fashion in the 1800’s.

Another type of holster was the Mexican loop. This holster became very popular with outlaws as well as lawmen. The holsters would often be decorated with studs, silver buttons, etc. The Boots and Bustles recommend any type of holster that is NOT a drop rig. Holsters from drop rigs can be used if NOT on a drop rig belt.

*It should be noted that unless you are in a judged event, most people don’t know what rigs were correct, and you can wear whatever suits you.*

### 5.6 Neckwear

Bandanas or wild rags were nearly always worn, as they were so useful. For the cowboy, they were an absolute necessity. Usually made of silk or cotton, cowboys sometimes liked to tie very fancy knots in them. A townsman always wore a tie of some sort – either a plain length of fabric was tied in a bow at the neck, or a fancier puff tie was worn. These were usually of silk, and sometimes a decorative stick pin advertised the wearer’s wealth or status.

Dress shirts often had plain band collars to which a separate, detachable collar was added. These detachable collars were usually very stiff, and attached to the shirt with a button at the back of the neck, and a collar stud at the front.

### 5.7 Hats

A cowboy would truly be naked without his hat. It was an extremely practical item of clothing because it protected from both intense heat and rain and snow. There were a few broad-brimmed hats in the 1865 – 1890 period, but most appeared after 1890. In 1865 Stetson started producing his western hat. The most popular was known as the “Boss of the Plains”.



Montgomery Ward sold a planter’s hat in the 1870’s which dominated the market in the mid-west and northern plains. In the Southwest many cowboys favored the wide brimmed hats from Mexico.

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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Top hats were a must for parties and formal events throughout the century, but were also worn as day wear by the established gentleman. A variety of other hat styles persisted, including the wide-brimmed “wide awake” style and the flat topped “pork pie” which were seen through the period. Derbies or bowlers, short-brimmed with rounded crowns, became more common as the century progressed and by the mid 1890's outnumbered most other hat styles.

### 5.8 Watches, Rings & Eyeglasses

Ornaments, such as watches, elaborate fobs and chains, or rings made of precious metals set with gems or imitation gems were worn during the Victorian era as a personal adornment to show wealth or as an accompaniment of fashionable clothing. For gents, the most common jewelry was the watch and fob, which were sometimes very elaborate.

When choosing a watch, you should always prefer one that is hand-wound. Avoid a battery-operated watch if you can. That said, unless you are in a costume competition, your battery watch will still give the right look and feel to your costume. The chain can be very plain or decorated with a watch fob. The fob can be almost anything you fancy.



A very fancy vintage watch fob and chain.

After 1870, with the opening of the diamond mines in South Africa, diamond rings became widely available and were often worn. Try to choose jewelry made with natural materials, like cameos, pearls, and semiprecious stones.



Windsor-style eyeglasses were introduced in 1880 and remained popular until after the First World War. Characteristics of this style are: round lenses, a nose saddle (no nose pads), and wire temples that loop behind the ear. Windsors came in silver, roman steel, gold filled, white gold filled, and nickel. Often, the lenses and sometimes the temples were covered

with Zylo (celluloid). Common Zylo colors are black, brown, blond, and tortoise shell.

It is sometimes possible to obtain genuine antique glasses and then have an optometrist fit them with your prescription lenses. The larger chain places won't do this, but often an independent optometrist will be willing.

### 5.9 Correct Closures

Zippers were invented in 1851, and used in shoes in the 1890's. They were not used in clothing until the 1930's. Snaps, known as snap fasteners were invented in the late 1890's but again, they were not used in clothing until much later in the early 1900's. That leaves us buttons, hooks and eyes, frogs, ribbon, and string ties to hold our clothing together. Shoes typically had buttons or laces to close them. The little “quick-lace hooks” are not correct.

### 5.10 Gloves and Walking Sticks

Cowboys wore gloves while they were working, and military men wore or carried gloves as part of their uniform. Townsmen would also wear gloves when in public, unless they

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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were working in a trade – for example as a shopkeeper. Avoid gloves with snaps, as these are not period-correct.

Well-to-do townsmen, politicians, and other upper class gents frequently carried canes or walking sticks. Some were very elaborate, and featured handles inlaid with silver or jewels. Some canes had a secret compartment for a small vial of whiskey, or had a hid a sword or knife attached to the handle.

### 6. Military Attire

#### 6.1 Boots

The 1881 Cavalry boot was used by cavalry units on both sides in the war between the states. This boot is characterized by a square toe and scalloped knee guard. Used through the 1880’s, this boot was made of horse or mule hide and leather lined for comfort.



Here is a vintage boot (right) size 5 ½, and the reproduction, size 9 on the left.

#### 6.2 Trousers

Trousers were made of Kersey wool, with a double thickness in the seat, and buttons for suspenders at the waist. The width of the side stripe varied with rank, and the color of the stripe indicated the branch of the service. Yellow = Cavalry, Red = Artillery, Blue = Infantry.

#### 6.3 Shirts

The shirt was made of cotton, and commonly called a Bib Shirt or Battle Shirt.

#### 6.4 Sabre

Considered by the pentagon as the primary weapon, the saber had to be worn on the left side so that it could be cross drawn with the right hand.

#### 6.5 Revolver

Issued in a 45 caliber with a 7 ½” barrel, the revolver had to be worn on the right side and drawn with the left hand. Men in the field soon recognized this mistake and modified their equipment so they could draw their revolver with their right hand, and left their sabres on their bunks.

### 7. Costume Contests and Reenactment Skits– Contestant Guidelines

Costume competitions are a fun part of many re-enactment events. If you wish to compete, you may have to make some adjustments to your “regular” wardrobe to avoid being marked down by the judges. Your peer judges have developed these guidelines to promote fairness and equity in costume competition judging. We hope these guidelines will help make the experience of both novice and experienced costumers more comfortable and enjoyable. The following guidelines have been developed to serve costume competitions at all levels.

A contest is a staged show where entries are presented before an audience. These presentations may take the form of skits, fashion walks, or as otherwise designated. Entries

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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will compete for awards based on how the costumes or skits appear and are presented; workmanship and authenticity will be considered. Judges may agree, before initiating the contest, if there is to be a novice category for individuals just beginning their re-enactor career, as well as an accomplished re-enactor category.

### **Men’s Costume Competition Guidelines:**

Some competitions will expect you to be able to give a short speech about your persona. You should be able to tell them who you are, what year you are portraying, and what you do for a living. The more vintage items you wear or can produce (like vintage coins in your pocket), the more points the judges will award. Other competitions don’t want to know “who” you are. They will expect you to be able to describe what you are wearing, and why these items are appropriate to the time period you are portraying.

**Clothing:** Should be made of natural fibers such as cotton, silk, linen or wool. Try to avoid synthetic fabrics if possible. Closures should be hook-and-eye, lace-up, or buttons. Snaps, Velcro and zippers are not period-correct.

**Shoes:** Boots and shoes should be as close to period-correct as you can manage. We have run into judges who claim that “mule ear” boots are not period correct. If you have a choice, avoid wearing this style of boot in competition. Your shoes should be all natural – especially with leather soles. Man-made materials like composite soles will get marked down. Laces should only go through eyelets – those little “quick lace hooks” are not period correct.

**Hats:** Your hat can be about any style you like, however you must be careful about materials. The inside hat band must not be plastic. The hat itself should be felt or straw, with no stitching around the outside edge of the brim. Hats in the period came with the crowns unblocked, and were usually blocked by the purchaser to suit themselves, so any kind of crease should be OK.

**Accessories:** Watches should be only wind-up for competition. Battery-powered watches will cost you points. If your glasses frames are vintage, be sure to point them out to the judges. Your wedding ring will not count against you, nor will prescription glasses. Accessories that support your “trade” – for example medical tools if you are portraying a doctor – will enhance your costume and help support the persona you wish to portray.

Hint: if you know who is running the contest – for example RGA or SASS, you can usually go to their web site for guidance on what they consider a correct costume.

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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### 8. Some Illustrations



Cavalry Bib Shirt



Banded Collar Shirt



Mountain Man/Trapper/Trader



Gentlemen's Shirt



Drover's Shirt



Banker's Collar Shirt

Keep in mind that these shirts were almost always made of cotton. They could be plain, striped, or made from any kind of calico. Corduroy, wool and linen are also acceptable. You want to avoid buttons that are obviously plastic. If you find a shirt that is perfect except for the buttons, it is easy to replace them with period-correct wood, horn, shell, metal or leather buttons.

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

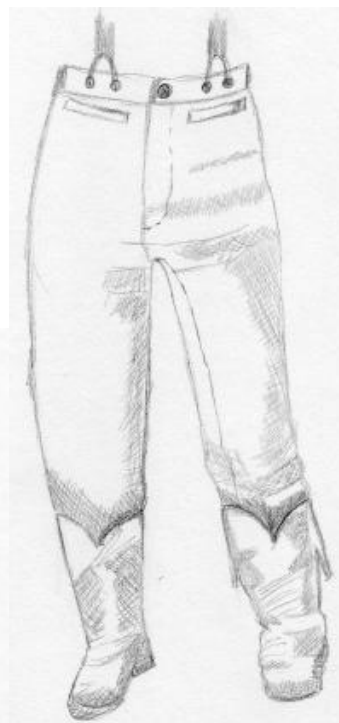
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Men’s Range Coat (Duster)



Mackinaw Coat



Trousers with button fly

The men’s range coat or duster was nearly always of heavy-duty material like duck or twill. A “slicker” was simply a duster that had been treated with wax or linseed oil to make it more waterproof. The Mackinaw Coat shown appears to have made from a wool trade blanket. The color and number of stripes on a trade blanket indicated the number of pelts it took to purchase the blanket. Note the way the suspenders button on to the pants pictured above. This is the period-correct attachment. *Never use clip-on suspenders – they are not correct.*

### 9. References, Costumes, and Supplies

We hope this guide has given you a fair idea what sort of clothes you will need to make, buy, or have made by your favorite seamstress. Many pattern companies (see the appendix in this guide) provide historically-correct patterns, and most will also say what years a specific pattern was popular. You might want to start with something conservative. Save the busy prints or bold stripes until after you are comfortable with what was popular in the time period. Stick with natural fabrics – cotton, silk, linen, and wool are all good choices, and be sure your buttons are a natural material as well. Bone, mother-of-pearl, wood and metal were all used for buttons. In no case do you want to have buttons that are obviously plastic.

A number of knowledgeable members are available to provide assistance and suggestions as to period correct outfits and accessories, as well as information about vendors from whom you may purchase desired items. Some members may have patterns available for loan. In addition, Sharlot Hall Museum is an excellent resource for books and patterns.

## BOOTS AND BUSTLES – GENT’S COSTUME GUIDE

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Antique malls and stores often have old clothing, hats, and buttons for costumes. Be aware that much old clothing is fragile and cannot be replaced. If it is in very good shape, wear undergarments to protect them from your body oils. Wear a handkerchief under a vintage hat.

Additional sources to purchase items that are otherwise hard to find are the vendors who come to re-enactment events like Festival of the West, Winter Range, Tombstone, and Yuma. Also SAS (there are several in Phoenix and Mesa) which is a warehouse of fabrics and trims.

You may elect to sew your own costume, or have one made for you of modern fabrics. Several sources to obtain patterns and accessories are given here.

Sharlot Hall 415 W. Gurley St, Prescott, AZ (928) 445-3122

Abbie’s Attic Victorian Reproductions - Maxine Dillahunty makes outfits to order)  
(928) 778-5236 [MVDillahunty@cablone.net](mailto:MVDillahunty@cablone.net)

Madame’s Mercantile (online store) members Cheryl Ritchie and Sue McDonald provide hats, purses, carpet bags, wild rags, puff ties, stickpins, and other period-correct accessories for ladies and gents. [www.madamesmercantile.com](http://www.madamesmercantile.com)

Double D Western World 955 W. Wickenburg Way, Wickenburg, AZ

Several companies offer period patterns and clothing online:

Truly Victorian	Ageless Patterns	Amazon Drygoods
Past Patterns	Buckaroo Bobbins	Wild West Mercantile
Laughing Moon	Abraham’s Lady	

Some places online to view period hats are:

<a href="http://Wwmerc.com">Wwmerc.com</a>	<a href="http://culturedcowboy.com/hats">culturedcowboy.com/hats</a>
<a href="http://gentlemansemporium.com">gentlemansemporium.com</a>	

If you need help, please ask any member. Sue McDonald is currently the chair of the Costume Committee, and Sam Angle has materials that may be helpful for gents.