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## **Dresses a reflection of old times**

By Lyn Bostian  
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Town of Delavan – In a dressmaker's farmhouse hang reproductions of Civil War ball gowns, complete with hoop skirts, 1740s homespun day dresses, and Conestoga-era muslin sunbonnets.

As part of "Another Time," Bev [Wassam's] reproduction costume business, she frequently steps back in time wearing historic fashions, items which she has meticulously hand stitched.

I pretty much work with period clothing from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on up to the 1880s, but my favorite era is the mid-1800s. Those days were so romantic, and the clothing back then reflects that," she said.

[Bev] and her family regularly attend heritage events in full costume, such as Civil War Days and 18<sup>th</sup>-century rendezvous, re-enacted weekend encampments depicting daily life of yesteryear.

The costuming business evolved from a need for several changes of clothing when Bev was hired to work at a museum at Old World Wisconsin, near Eagle, eight years ago.

Now she is kept busy crafting fashions for other employees at the site and for participants of the encampments.

She works on a custom basis, fabricating individual muslin matters for a perfect fit.

[Bev's] designs are drafted from historical illustrations and museum pieces.

Great attention is paid to detail; hand-stitching tucks, fastening whalebone stays, weaving ribbons and laces. Wool shawls are woven after [Bev] spins the wool on her wheel and handcrafted straw bonnets are carefully decorated with everlastings and ribbons.

Hundreds of tiny tucks are hand stitched on several layers of undergarments.

"Most women a century ago had only one or two dresses. Accessories were very important," [Bev] said. "By added a lace scarf or cuffs, changing sleeves or even a front bodice, or by wearing different bonnets depending on occasion, repetition in dress was alleviated."

[Bev] weaves a visual history of little-known dressmaking facts, such as how sailors long at sea would scrimshaw elaborate designs on whalebone to be used for their ladies' corsets.

“It’s nice to be doing what I love best,” said [Bev], who now makes her living from her costume business. “I’d love to create a period wedding gown someday and just to continue what I’m doing.”