

**Historical Style**  
**Story – Kelly Carnes**  
**Photography – Dan Plutchak**

Not many people can copy something from just a photograph. But [Bev Wassam] can.

In fact, that's how she does her job.

As owner of Another Time, Bev makes period clothing, mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She began making period clothing about 10 years ago while working at Old World Wisconsin in Eagle. She combined her years of sewing knowledge with what she learned from being a historic interpreter at Old World Wisconsin.



**Picture 1: [Bev Wassam] at her sewing machine**

Because her clothing is historical, she can't just go to the nearest fabric store and pick up a pattern. Some of her customers bring her a picture and say, "Can you make this?" Bev says this is the most challenging part of her job. Most of her patterns come from the Amazon Dry Goods Company in Davenport, Iowa, which specializes in reproductive clothing patterns.

Bev has to do quite a bit of research in order to make these dresses. She does some research at the local libraries as well as at the State Historical Society in Madison. She is a member of the Walworth County Historical Society and the Costume Society of America Region 3.

"I've done research on hats to shoes and everything in between," Bev says.

She needs to know what styles were in fashion for the time period as well as the colors and types of materials that were used.

Linen, wool and cotton were popular fabrics in the 1800s. No synthetics were used. Neither was silk or taffeta because they were expensive. In the 1860s, chemical dyes were used. Mauve was a popular color along with a brilliant green and a cherry red. Prints and stripes were also appropriate during this time. Bev said she can usually find fabrics at the area fabric stores.

In her two-room shop on South Third Street in Delavan, Bev has a small workroom which houses two sewing machines. One is a Pfaff which is a computerized machine and the other is a regular industrial machine.

One of the dresses Bev had in her shop was a deep burgundy and grey dress with a bustle that would have typically been worn by a woman in the mid-twenties. Another dress she

had on display was a purple print bustle dress that would have been worn by a woman in her seventies.



**Picture 2: Her dresses are the result of extensive research.**

To get a correct fitting for the customer, she will make the pattern of the dress out of muslin fabric and will have the customer try it on and Bev will make the adjustments. The reason for starting a dress this way is that historic patterns are not always accurate. From beginning to end, it usually takes about 32 hours or four days for Bev to complete one dress.

When making these Victorian dresses, Bev has to remember the Victorian mindset.

“Women had limbs, not legs. And women had a bosom, not breasts. If a woman was pregnant, she was ‘in family way,’ not pregnant,” Bev explains.

Bev also hosts Victorian fashion shows. She narrates those shows in a Victorian dress of her own. Her models include her mother, sister, and friends that worked with her at Old World Wisconsin. She will also ask some of her past customers to model their dresses in some of her shows. Sometimes she will take volunteers from the group to get involved.

One of the highlights of her shows is called “from the skin out,” demonstration. Bev will bring out one of her models dressed in only a chemise, corset and drawers. From there, Bev will dress her model layer by layer beginning with an underpetticoat and on to the corset cover, the hoop, overpetticoat, skirt, bodice and accessories. The accessories include jewelry, gloves, fan, purse, hat and parasol. She explains what each article of clothing that would be worn by a proper Victorian woman.

Bev has two shows coming up. She has one scheduled for April 16 for the Burlington Lionesses and another for May 12 at Episcopal Christ Church in Delavan which is open to the public.

Bev’s customers include those who participate in Civil War re-enactments and sesquicentennials, particularly churches. She also does mending and alterations as well as bridal gowns, bridesmaid’s dresses, and prom dresses.

Looking at any of Bev's work you would never know she is visually impaired. She is considered legally blind and does not drive. She received help from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Kenosha in getting special lights that are brighter and help her see better. She also has special magnifiers to help her when sewing. "I've been sewing so long, I could do it in my sleep. It's really a labor of love," Bev said.



**Picture 3: Customers often ask if she can copy a dress from an old photograph.**

One of the strangest and most fun projects that Bev worked on was making an Austrian Father Christmas costume for Old World Wisconsin. And once again, all she had to work from was a picture.

Bev also did work for some four-legged participants in the Chicago Christmas parade about 10 years ago. She was asked to make the costumes for the horses to match with the knights of King Arthur's court.

Bev also made clothing for the French and Indian War re-enactments.

Bev recently received an offer from Mankato State University in Minnesota which is interested in making her a part of an apprentice program. The program would have a textiles and fashion student work with Bev and learn the methods for making reproduction clothing.

Bev has been sewing for 38 years. She started making costumes about 10 years ago out of her home until she opened her shop in Delavan.