

## Old-time weddings displayed

By Joan Holman  
Freeman correspondent

WATERTOWN – The wedding took place in 1841, but on Sunday a “Celebration of Weddings” will recall, with a vignette fashion show, the joining of Eliza Forbes and John Richards, builder of Watertown’s historic Octagon House.

The Watertown Historic Society is hosting the event at their location at 919 Charles St. The Octagon House was the result of Richard’s promise to his bride “to build the grandest home in the west.”

Born in Massachusetts, the couple met before Richard’s departure for the territory in 1837. He returned east for the marriage in 1841. The young couple then came back to Wisconsin where a log cabin was home until his promise produced the Octagon House, completed in 1854.

Now, 150 years later, the Watertown Historical Society is echoing wedding celebrations for Forbes and other couples married in the interim.

Beginning with a gown similar to that worn by Forbes in 1841, the Society will present its Celebration of Weddings. Changes in the styles can be seen with the progress of time and each decade’s fashion is featured by the period costume. The apparel has been donated or loaned for the program.

[Bev Wassam], a Delavan fashion historian, has created the Forbes wedding gown. [Bev] was born in Waukesha and grew up giving fabric and fittings more attention than rattles.

Since her 4-H days, she’s made garments and striven to understand the trends that brought particular fashions into being. This interest drew her to Old World Wisconsin in 1982, where she’s had occasion to become involved in presenting “Another Time” fashion shows.

[Bev] has been able to learn firsthand how Old World researched the background for the clothing worn by interpretators on the site. She knows, too, how fabrics and fashions can be duplicated.

Combining this knowledge, she drew on her sewing skills and created a Victorian wedding gown which led to her fashion shows of “Another Time.” These involve styles from 1803 to 1890.



**Picture 1: Fashion historian [Bev Wassam] of Delavan, above, makes an 1841 wedding gown similar to ones displayed at a “Celebration of Weddings” at the Octagon House in Watertown.**

Barbara Froelich is also an interpretator at Old World and a member of Watertown's Historical Society, Knowing of [Bev's] interest in fashion history, on behalf of the Watertown Society, Froelich asking [Bev] to create the 1841 wedding gown. This will be a highlight in the show.

[Bev] didn't want to chance bad luck in allowing Froelich to see the gown before Froelich did the modeling Sunday. Recreating Forbes' wedding gown amounts to 30 to 40 hours of work. [Bev] explains that although certain fashions were prevalent in the '30s to '60s. In the early periods patterns were non-existent. This meant that one style would be the answer for all occasions; only varying in color and material.

The Forbes gown, according to its creator, took 13 yards of 45-inch material and the veil was two yards of 72-inch fabric.

The gowns will be modeled outside the Octagon House at 1:30 p.m.