

An Interview with the *Ddora Foundation Costume Fellow* Julia Harrington

*J*ulia Harrington is the 2024–2025 Ddora Foundation Costume Fellow. The OSV historical clothing fellowship is a yearlong immersive program that allows fellows to join a dedicated, passionate team of museum professionals. The fellowship is generously funded by The Ddora Foundation, which seeks to benefit endeavors in the fine and applied arts, cultural preservation, and education. The fellowship focuses on two main elements of historical clothing: examining original 19th-century garments as they compare to existing historical costume office patterns and the reproduction of garments worn by interpreters while balancing the resources of a nonprofit living history museum.

Tell us about your background.

I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Fashion Design from Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt). Before starting my fellowship, I worked at MassArt in a variety of staff roles including teaching fashion in Youth Programs, managing the Art Ed studios, and overseeing the development, care, and research of the Curating Fashion Archive. When I started this fellowship, I had just taught my first semester as adjunct faculty for pattern drafting, construction and creative fashion design at MassArt.

What interested you most about the fellowship?

I was most excited to broaden my knowledge of historical clothing and its construction, especially through learning methods of patterning historic garments. I always had a strong interest in historical clothing and dreamed of being able to make my own but had never had the opportunity to do so.

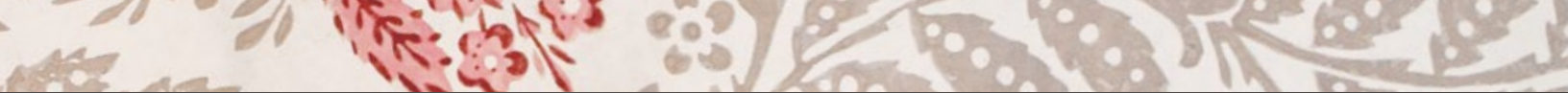
What types of work do you do as a fellow?

A large portion of my time is spent assisting the costume office with clothing our many interpreters. I have been working under the supervision of Abby Duell and Carrie Midura, the interim and former Coordinator of Historical Clothing, respectively. The tasks I work on include repairs, alterations, and construction of new garments for our day-to-day programming and special programs like *Phantoms by Firelight*. I assist with office database work for tagging, tracking, and organizing our costume items.

The other portion of my time goes to fellowship work and research. I work with Rebecca Beall, Textile Curator and Collections Manager, and our collections team to research items for my fellowship projects and to assist them with their needs. One of the projects we have been working on is assisting



PAIR OF STAYS CIRCA 1830s-1850s IN THE OSV COLLECTION



JULIA DRESSING A MANNEQUIN WITH ARTIFACT SHIFT, STAYS, PETTICOAT AND SLEEVE PUFFS FOR HER CASE TITLED A LADY'S FOUNDATION.

Brittany Jaarsma, Collections and Research Public Programming Specialist, with photographing the large number of quilts, flags, fans, garments and other textile objects in the collection. We have also been working on building storage boxes and mounts to rehouse objects.

What has been your focus as a fellow?

My primary focus has been patterning and researching undergarments, primarily those worn under dresses. Undergarments are very specific to each period of history and help provide the silhouette of the period, although they are usually covered by other garments when one looks at fashion plates or dress mannequins, making it a less commonly shown area of fashion history.

What has been one of your favorite projects to work on?

One of the most rewarding projects I worked on was copying a tie-on pocket we have in the collection. These types of pockets were tied around the waist and accessed through an opening in the side of the dress. To create a pattern for the shape of the pocket and patchwork squares, I took detailed measurements of the original pocket. In recreating the patchwork, I used fabrics that were like the original fiber content and conveyed the same variety of contrast in their colors and print sizes. The amount of seaming in the original pocket shows that it was likely made from scraps or cut from existing garments, so I pulled my fabrics from our scrap fabrics and retired garments. I arranged the squares like the original and took care to vary the directions the prints were facing in the same way. In constructing the pocket, I followed the same methods as the original pocket, with the addition of a few machine-sewn methods for the ease of replication. I recreated the cross-stitched initials of the original maker with my own on the final reproduced pocket. The original ties for the waist on the pocket have been lost, but there is evidence of where they were originally sewn so I did my best to replicate how I thought it had been done by looking at some of our other examples in collections.

I wear the pocket as part of my costume when I am in the Village. During our Textiles and Trades weekend in 2024, our interpreters and I used it as a demonstration tool to talk with visitors about pockets. It was a great way to spark an engaging discussion on the use of pockets, sewing them, and its comparison to the original.

What is something unique you have gotten to work on?

I worked on curating two artifact display cases in the Bullard Tavern showing ladies' undergarments. This process included selecting the garments, building custom mannequins for them, photographing the garments, writing labels, and installing the cases. The theme of ladies' undergarments was chosen to show items that are not usually seen in order to broaden what is usually exhibited in the Village. I found it important to educate on misconceptions about undergarments of the 1830s by showing that the stays in our period look different in comparison to those people usually picture when thinking of supportive undergarments.

What skills have you gained from this fellowship?

Through this fellowship I have learned a lot about the clothing types and styles of the 1830s, and how to create the patterns. In addition to some of the skills I have already mentioned like building mannequins, storing garments, and taking measure-



ments to create patterns, I learned from Carrie Midura how to drape an 1830s bodice pattern on a person wearing stays. Previously I had only draped modern clothing patterns primarily on mannequins. It has unlocked my ability to make a whole new range of pattern types.

What project are you focusing on now during the remaining months of your fellowship?

Throughout the fellowship I have been drafting copies of 1830s stays, or corsets, from the museum collection by taking detailed measurements and notes. I have made patterns of these garments and what we refer to as “ghost garments,” which are to scale mockups of the collection’s items. Just like our modern clothing, these patterns span a range of sizes. For the remaining time in my fellowship, I am focusing on creating stays patterns that fit our interpreters. I am currently experimenting with using a method of drafting that combines the techniques I learned in the Village, like copying garments, with my existing knowledge of modern pattern drafting for a person’s body measurements. I then plan to create different size copies of these patterns to fit

our modern wearers. In addition to increasing the size range of our stays patterns, it will create a variety that more closely resembles our collection. Stays are a crucial undergarment in giving the correct silhouette and support for period costumes. Making stays that are more accurate to the style of our collection will let us study how the historic stays behaved and change our movements. We will then be able to adapt the patterns to our interpreters’ body types and specific needs to ensure they can do their jobs comfortably.

How have you enjoyed the fellowship?

I have really enjoyed my fellowship and have loved having what I feel is the coolest job. I have been lucky to have such an in-depth, hands-on experience, and have learned things that there are very few opportunities to learn elsewhere. This field is one I have always hoped to get into, and this fellowship gave me the chance to start on that pathway to further my career.

I appreciate The Ddora Foundation for making opportunities like this possible for emerging craft professionals like me, and their dedication to keeping specialty crafts like historical clothing alive. They are fostering the next generation of historical costumers and because of their work, the research that we do will stay alive for years to come. 🐛



CROSS STICH EMBROIDERY AND PATCHWORK ON JULIA'S REPRODUCTION POCKET