

# LA GAZETTE HELVETIQUE

THE NEWSLETTER OF MUSEE DE VENOGE, INC.

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## IN EXPLANATION

LA GAZETTE HELVETIQUE (the Helvetian or Swiss Newspaper), is the official newsletter of Musee de Venoge (Museum of Venoge). The French adjective 'helvetique' refers to the Latin name for Switzerland (Helvetia) in use for more than 2000 years. Rhyming with "antique" it is easier for English speakers to pronounce than its synonym "Suisse". In 1802 the settlers of New Switzerland in the south eastern corner of Indiana territory, renamed Indian Creek "Venoge" after a small river in the grape growing region of European Switzerland.

## VENOGE OPEN HOUSE April 26-27

Saturday 10-5 & Sunday 12-5

Join us as we enjoy spring in 1820's Indiana, roast venison and bake pies in the outdoor oven. Visit our cottage featured in the spring issue of *Early American Life* magazine.

Explore history in this French-Swiss cottage, one of the few remaining examples of French colonial architecture that was once common in the early settlement of Vevay, Indiana. Jacob Weaver and his French-Swiss wife Charlotte Golay Weaver lived here with seven of their ten children. Interpreters and volunteers in period clothing will welcome you to the cottage.

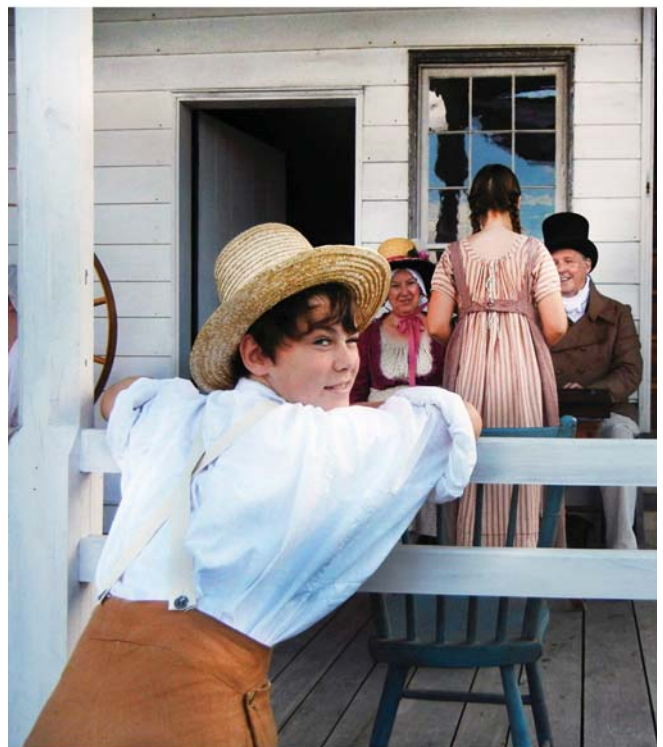
Our French-Swiss weaver will be returning to demonstrate the process of turning flax into cloth as well as other skilled craftsmen...from woodworkers to gunsmiths.

Music, provided by Michael Rennels Thompson, fiddle maker, will entertain you while you try your hand at early crafts and trades like graining, basket making and painting a fraktur.

Visit the kitchen garden with heirloom plants and herbs and the outdoor bake oven. Admission is always free, but donations are always appreciated.



## Musée de Venoge Open House



## April 26-27

Free Admission, donations appreciated

**Hearth Cooking  
Bake Oven  
Music  
Weaving  
Early Trades  
Domestic Arts**

## SHAPING FASHION & FORM

Continued from Gazette spring 2013

Before proceeding, we should discuss the cut of bodices worn over transition stays. Proving to a certainty what was worn under a gown is extremely difficult because it is rare in America to find late-18th century or early-19th century documented, fashionable, boned stays and gowns that were worn together. To solve the mystery of which shape stays was worn under which gown, it is necessary to study the art of the period.

The following excerpts from an article by Nancy Rexford ("Frocks and Curls: A Costume Historian Looks at Early 19th-Century American Women's Portraits," Thirtieth Annual Ellis Memorial Antiques Show, 1989, 53-63) document costumes worn in urban and rural areas of New England and provide valuable clues to the shape of the stays worn under the sitters' gowns.

### Can costume be used to date portraits?

'It would be risky business indeed to try to date paintings from the sitter's clothing if there were no reliable external yardstick by which changes in fashion could be described and dated. But from the late 18th century, French, English and German ladies' magazines regularly began to include plentiful fashion plates, all striving to be as up-to-date as possible, and as a result, we have many dated images of women's clothing for every year—indeed, every month—of the entire 19th century. These provide us with a clear understanding of the sequence of women's fashions, and provide the basic "yardstick" to which the clothing in portraits can be compared.

Fashion plates can firmly establish the earliest possible date for a painting—it cannot have been painted before the dress shown came into fashion. And it may be possible to establish a plausible end date as well, since a particular combination of cut and ornamentation is likely to appear in fashion plates only for a year or two. For this reason, the more elaborate a dress is, the more precisely it can be dated, while the simpler a dress is, the more difficult it is to date. But even when fashion plates can pin down the time at which a dress was at the height of fashion, it cannot reveal how long any particular person may actually have worn it.

For a more complex understanding of clothing we have to go to other sources, including contemporary accounts and the surviving dresses themselves. They confirm that wealthy American women did wear clothing very much like that shown in fashion plates. Less affluent women wore simpler gowns, but the vast majority even of these show the essential characteristics of the prevailing fashion in terms of cut, fabric, and the placement and style of decoration. The only time at which European fashion plates fail to be a reliable guide to American dress is during the years 1807-1815, when the blockades of the Napoleonic wars interfered with normal commerce. Through at least 1811, Americans continued to wear the styles which had been current in France in 1806/7.

It is often assumed that American women were as much as ten years behind Paris fashions, and that one should

true. A small but significant proportion of dresses surviving has come down with a known date, and these show that American dresses were rarely more than a year behind French styles. This delay was the result not of conservative taste but slow and irregular transportation. Wealthy ladies in coastal centers of fashion like New York and Philadelphia bought new French fashions as quickly as the ships could bring them.

Even in frugal New England, women kept an eye on fashion. The tradition that women made one "best silk" last year after year may have some truth to it, but a study of those carefully preserved dresses shows that they were altered over and over again to keep them in fashion. And when no amount of fixing would do, they were carefully taken apart, cleaned, turned and remade in the new style, sometimes incorporating new fabric with the old. resources may have been limited but the evidence is eloquent that women were not indifferent to fashion.

Even in a culture as fashion-conscious as early 19th century America seems to have been, however, some women had occasion to be conservative in their dress. For example, the change from tight natural-waisted dresses to softly gathered high-waisted ones in the mid-1790s was too dramatic to be comfortably adopted by some older women.

It was not only older women who had trouble accepting the immodesty of the new style. As late as 1806, Mrs. Cephas Smith (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) was painted wearing a dress which is far more typical of the late 1790s. Another very similar dress, worn by a bride in 1805, survives in Northampton, Mass. As one might expect, these conservative examples are more likely to appear in the work of itinerant folk artists who served the smaller towns than in the paintings of such academic artists as Gilbert Stuart, whose clientele was urban, wealthy, and sophisticated.'



Figure 1: c. 1795-1805



Figure 2: c. 1795-1806

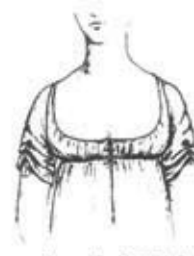


Figure 3: c. 1800-1808

In her article Rexford includes drawings to illustrate at which dates the differing gown styles appear in American paintings between 1800 and 1845. For the purposes of this discussion, Figures 1, 2, and 3, dating 1795-1808, have been chosen for comparison of the shapes of the bodices of front-opening gowns. The bodice shapes of Figures 1 and 2 would work well with the #038 Transition Stay.

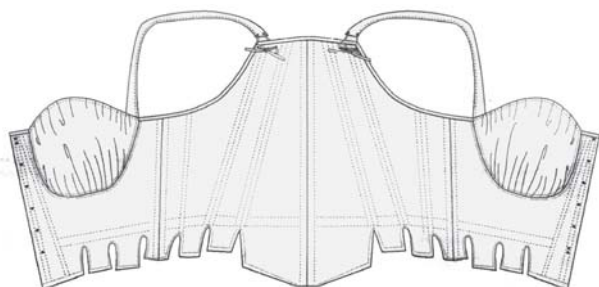
Compare Figures 1 and 2 with Figure 3. The bodice drawn in Figure 3 has a wide and low neckline and narrow back. Its rounded bustline and high, pinched-in waist would require the category four stay, made with adjustable fabric cups and wide-set shoulder straps.

Rexford's article continues:

The dates indicate when each style is likely to appear in [American] portraits, not necessarily when they appear in European fashion plates. The figures are roughly uniform to draw attention to differences in waist level, neckline and skirt fullness. The shoulder line reflects contemporary artistic practice. Most of the necklines shown would have been filled in with fichus, ruffs, collars or lace.

The new short-waisted style was well established in England by 1794, but it took some years to be adopted by all American women. Skirts were always quite full in the 1790s but from 1800 they became gradually skimpier. Necklines were V-necked or round, the latter dominating after 1800, when they were often quite low and wide. Many were on drawstrings, resulting in gathered effects over the bust. In the 1790s sleeves were tight to the arm and ended either at the wrist or elbow. After 1800 sleeves shown in portraits usually ended above the elbow. They are rarely very full, but are often tied up in a kind of swag (fig. 3). Note how the line of the armhole tends to slant inward toward the neck, creating the effect of a narrow shoulder.

Skirts completely flat in front were the rule from 1809 but sophisticated urban women wore them several years earlier. Between 1807 and 1810, rounded necklines gave way to low, wide, necklines with the square corners of figure 3 . . . .



#038 Transition Stay.

### Researching Patent Records for Examples of Separate Bust Cups

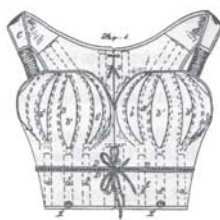
Researchers may hesitate to use patent records to document clothing, deferring to the concept that an issued patent was a dream that never became a reality. However, scholars who match existing garments with issued patents, such as those for the Madam Foy skirt-supporting corsets, know that patent records are a rich source of documentation.

H.F. Brown, Corset. Patented Dec 24, 1859



Patent No. 26,473  
1859

L. L. Chapman, Corset. Patented Dec 15, 1863



Patent No. 40,907  
1863

## CLEOPATRA

### Bust Girdle



GREATEST OF

SUCCESS THE AGE.

The most perfect production ever made. Health.

From *The Imperial: A Journal For The Home*, December 1894

A NICE THING TO FIT A DRESS OVER.

Patented Feb. 23, 1896.  
See Patent Stamp on each Waist.

FRONT. THE GENUINE Jackson Corset Waists

Take no Other. Are made ONLY by the Jackson Corset Co., Jackson, Mich.

The manufacturer's name is printed upon the bottom and stamped upon inside of clasp in each Waist. They are the most popular articles of the kind now on the market. Few should have one of them. Be sure and get the right thing.

BACK.

IF YOUR DEALER HASN'T IT, WRITE TO US.

The Delineator, May 1892.

Examples of corsets, corset waists, and underwaists with gathered or shaped cup(s), whether two separate cups or a single piece of fabric gathered across the entire bust, were substitutions for fully boned, uncupped corsets throughout the nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth century.

All possibilities are not represented in this short article. But the following illustrations show an interesting assortment of corset substitutes circa 1840s through 1899. These illustrations are drawn from extant garments, catalogs, ladies' magazines, advertisements, and patent records.

To see full patent records, both drawings and descriptions, go to <http://patft.uspto.gov/netahtml/PTO/srchnum.htm>. Enter the patent number and click on the word "image." Before clicking on "image," note the classification, which will allow you to do further research in the category.

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Donations and volunteers are always welcome at Venoge, email or call  
812-593-5726 [venoge@embarqmail.com](mailto:venoge@embarqmail.com)

### Venoge Summer Hours

Starting with the Spring Open House, Venoge will be open on Sundays from 1 - 4 pm.

## RURAL HERITAGE TOUR

Last year the Rural Heritage Tour coincided with the last weekend of the Bicentennial celebration, October 12-13. There were military demonstrations; a War of 1812 muster at Venoge and a Civil War encampment at the Thiebaud Farmstead.

There were demonstrations of period trades, hearth cooking, period music, dancing and an ox roast similar to those the Early Swiss held on the Court House Grounds. About 300 people attended.

New was a tour of a modern dairy farm. The Garland family joined the event and showed their modern dairy farm. It was a great family event with something for everyone.



The Forget-me-nots, a period dance group entertained the public with dances from 1813 at Venoge (left) and 1860 at the Thiebaud Farmstead.



Steve Thomas and his crew (His Lordship's Beef) dug the pit and put the ox on the fire the night before the event. The meat was delicious and the side dishes great. Our favorite drink, switchel, rounded out the meal.

Jerry Golay, a descendant of Charlotte Golay Weaver, first occupant of the cottage, learned a bit about plane table surveying from Tony Hollbrook, member of the Geographer's unit. Jerry is also descended from Elisha Golay, one of the first surveyors in the county.



Venoge with bunting, festive attire for the Bicentennial.

## a Country Christmas

A joint event of Venoge and the Thiebaud Farmstead

The first big snow of the season dropped 6 inches on the county the night before the event. Looking clean and cool, Venoge welcomed adventurous visitors. Cheery and warm inside with good things baking on the hearth and punch were the rewards for coming out in the cold.



The decorations were minimal due to the Presbyterian beliefs of the Jacob Weaver family who lived in the house 1828-1839. At the Farmstead, a 19th century feather tree was the centerpiece with garlands of dried apples on the mantle.

## New Crockery!



Another wonderful addition to the furnishings and collection at Venoge arrived in January. Don Carpentier sent a selection of feather-edge cream-ware plates, also mugs and bowls. A platter will be on its way soon.

A self-taught potter, Don creates Mochaware, the vibrantly colored plates and mugs found in 18th- and 19th century kitchens and taverns. His methods and tools for making Mochaware are authentic, producing pieces that are difficult to distinguish from the originals.

His work has received praise from the Henry Francis duPoint Winterthur Museum in Delaware, the Iron Bridge-Coalport Museum in England's Shropshire. Don has created china for Old Sturbridge Village and some of his feather-edge cream-ware dinner service is displayed in several interpretive sites in Colonial Williamsburg. And now add Venoge to that list!

He is founder of Eastfield Village in upstate New York. There his goal is to train men and women in a range of early American trades and historic preservation skills and to encourage crafts persons and preservationists in their efforts to save the technology of the past.

<http://www.historiceastfield.org/index.php>