

WOODHAMS  
—STONE—  
COLLECTION

Woodhams Stone Collection

Paper Pattern by Mme. Demorest

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There are a number of home dressmaking items in the Woodhams Stone Collection. One such item is a paper pattern for a walking petticoat by Mme. Demorest dating from about 1880.



Paper patterns are now an accepted, if not essential, requirement for the home dressmaker, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were a significant innovation. It may be hard to imagine now, but until the development (and acceptance) of the ready-to-wear market, all clothing was made for an individual by another individual. This may have been a professional tailor or dressmaker, but for most people it was the untrained, but often skilled, housewife. Producing up-to-date well cut clothes for the family was a struggle, but two inventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century dramatically changed the production of clothing; the sewing machine and the paper pattern. The sewing machine undeniably speeded up the process of stitching a garment together and it has been said that paper patterns democratized fashion.

The earliest printed tailor's patterns date from the 1580s, but these early works were aimed at the professional. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century instruction books with full sized patterns and pattern drafts were available. The patterns were simple, many based on squares and rectangles, and the instructions were minimal. Also available were periodicals featuring the latest fashions. By the mid 1800s these had given way to less expensive, broader based magazines which included news of the latest fashions and practical instructions for achieving the same look.

Diagrams of flat pattern shapes first appeared in *Le Journal des Demoiselles* in 1833. They were soon included in other magazines in Europe and America. They did not, however, usually give an indication of scale or size and instructions were scant. The next step was to include fold-out full size patterns. Again *Le Journal des Demoiselles* led the field in 1841. Full scale patterns appeared in England in the 1850s in *The*

*World of Fashion*. In America in 1854 Frank Leslie's *Ladies Gazette of Fashion* included a full sized paper pattern. Unusually, the pattern's designer was named. She was Madame Demorest.

Madame Demorest was born Ellen Louise Curtis in 1824. Her father owned a hat factory and she initially opened a millinery shop. After moving her business to New York she met and married William Jennings Demorest, a widower, who had recently opened Madame Demorest's Emporium of Fashion on Broadway. She developed many fashion related innovations including her own drafting system, but it was her mass-production and promotion of paper patterns that single her out in the history of fashion.

Madame Demorest offered single paper patterns for bodices, sleeves, children's clothing, underwear and outerwear in plain or trimmed. Complete patterns were also sold and were available through shops, dressmaker's establishments or mail order. The patterns were all one size only and came with very few instructions. They had to be adapted by the maker to fit the wearer, although Madame Demorest offered custom made patterns on receipt of the relevant body measurements.

As well as promoting her patterns in existing magazines, Madame Demorest launched her own quarterly publication in 1860. By 1864 this had become a monthly magazine with a readership of over 100,000. It was also expanded to include a London circulation. In addition, by the mid 1870s Madame Demorest had 300 shops throughout Europe, North America and Cuba.

Ellen Curtis Demorest retired in 1887 and the pattern business was sold. Although, less known today than those who followed her such as Ebenezer Butterick or James MacCall, she was in her time responsible for bringing affordable and stylish fashion to millions of women throughout Europe and America.

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