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## How To Organize a Sewing Day

While pioneer clothing uses only basic shapes and techniques, many people may not have confidence in their sewing abilities. Organizing a group sewing day is a great way to teach sewing skills, boost confidence, and complete historic clothing projects quickly. Use a sewing day for a young women's activity or Relief Society Activity Group. Plan for a two-hour session; this is long enough to complete a sunbonnet, or an apron, or a petticoat. To do all three in one day, plan for a Saturday, mid-morning to mid-afternoon.

### Savings

None of the projects presented in the Pioneer Pack are costly (sunbonnets can be made for about \$2, aprons for around \$3.50, and petticoats for under \$7, for instance).

One of the best ways to save even more is for individuals on to sign up for coupon mailers from a chain fabric store (such as Joann's). When a coupon for "40% Off One Item" arrives, use it to purchase an entire unopened bolt of 36" or 45" white muslin in the quilting section. With 36" muslin, you'll bring the cost per yard down to about 60 cents; with 45" muslin, it will come down to just over \$1 a yard. Bolts have between 25 and 50 yards each. Divide the bolt into 4 yard lengths (a generous amount for a petticoat), and each teen or adult can make their petticoat for about \$4 in fabric. (Encourage individual families, or groups of friends, to do this, and save!)

### Sign-ups and Commitments

It's important to know how many people will attend, so you can arrange an appropriate number of machines, irons, and mentors. Sign-up sheets with a deadline, a materials list, and perhaps a materials purchase fee (such as for a petticoat, above) will help participants commit to attending. You'll find a sample sign-up on the second page; feel free to make photocopies!

### Set-up

Bring out long banquet tables and chairs; you can fit about three machines at each table. Since the projects include steps for machine, steps for hand, and steps to press, you can plan for at least two sewists to share each machine. **Machines** need not be complex: a straight stitch is the only function you'll be using. Sergers are not needed for any project, and won't speed up any step of construction. **Extension cords** with multi-plug ends will be very useful! Plan for a **pressing station** (ironing board, iron, pitcher of water, and a small "landing zone" table) for each sewing table. Basic handsewing supplies (#10 sharps or #10 crewel needles, thimbles, and beeswax) are also helpful. Six sewists and one mentor can work at each table.

Each sewing machine should be set up with:

- 100% white cotton sewing thread, one spool, and at least three pre-wound bobbins
- New pack of #14/90 sharp machine needles
- One pair sewing scissors, sharp
- One seam ripper, sharp (reverse sewing is a part of every project!)

### Skills

Mentors should be comfortable demonstrating and assisting with these basic sewing skills:

- Straight stitch seams by machine
- Running stitch by hand (enlist hand-quilters for this!)
- Pressing seams
- Folding and pressing hems
- Drawing up gathers

The projects presented on this site teach historic methods where they are easier than modern machine sewing methods. Some hand sewing techniques (such as for gathering) are less frustrating for novice sewists, and yield a far superior result in the finished garment. Sewing mentors who are mainly familiar with modern machine techniques will want to practice the handwork, to better demonstrate it. Clothing need not be perfect to be very functional.

### Your Sewing Session

Start with a prayer. This really does make a difference! The added patience, perseverance, and clarity of mind for each person dramatically enhances the experience.

Divide your sewists into groups with mentors, or into "skill stations." Each project needs to be completed in the order described in the pattern. With larger groups, it may be helpful to work on more than one project, to stagger the instruction. Many skills will be used at more than one step, or in multiple projects; once a skill is learned, mentors help reinforce and enhance confidence of individual sewists. Learning to correct mistakes is part of sewing! Mentors must be comfortable teaching "reverse sewing", and maintaining a positive, patient attitude toward mistakes.

Background music can also help keep everyone on task and concentrating, but watch the volume level; normal conversational tones are important to prevent the sewing day becoming painful. If you are working with a small group in someone's home, turn on a church history movie once everyone is involved in construction, or turn on pioneer-era music and use the time for "internal" trek prep.

### Clean-up

Don't forget this step! Have everyone share the load to put up tables and chairs, sweep and vacuum the work areas, and police the floors for stray pins. As in pioneer days, many hands make light work. Enjoy your sewing projects!

### About the Author

*Elizabeth Stewart Clark is a 19th century dressmaking instructor and historic pattern designer. A member of the LDS Church, she is always interested in helping others more fully appreciate our pioneer heritage. Find more patterns, articles, and books related to living history and the 19th century at*

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