

Pilgrim Clothing How they Dressed

Pilgrim Clothes for Men Women and Children at Plymouth Massachusetts

In taking an overview on the kind of clothing pilgrims wore, it is important to note that actual dress attire depended on pilgrim status. Men, women, and children from families with status below that of noble persons had to dress less fashionable. This expectation applied even when families could afford the higher priced fashions. This meant that even if women could afford to wear things like satin gowns worn by noble women, pilgrim society forbade them from doing so and looked down on them if they did.

The clothing pilgrims took to Plymouth with them tended to imitate attire English yeomen and servants wore in the 17th century. Typically, clothing fabrics consisted of wool and linen, and shoes made from leather.

Although pilgrims dressed in ordinary fashion, their clothing did not consist only of the blacks and whites that are stereotyped in modern society. Pilgrim made their clothing from colorful fabrics like yellow, red, green, and purple. Some colors like black, blue, and chestnut had social stigma attached to them. For instance, black indicated respect, chestnut indicated compatriot status, and blue often adorned servants and children.

Doublets and Trunk Hose Breeches for Men

Pilgrim men often wore long loose linen shirts with short sleeves and snug padded jackets called doublets. Doublets

could be sleeveless like vests or long sleeved. Men's pants called breeches were knee high and came in different styles. One of these styles, called "trunk hose", puffed out at the thighs.

Garters and Ruffs

Garters adorned or fastened men's breeches at the knees and they covered their legs from the knee down with stockings made from cloth or a knitted fabric. Their plain man's shoes tied with bows and had a bit of a heel. They also wore boots. Their shirtsleeves had lengthy cuffs and they wore rather flamboyant lacy collars called "ruffs". They also wore hats made from felt. Older and distinguished men frequently wore lengthy gowns over their pants and shirt outfits.

Shifts and Stays for Women

Pilgrim women wore undergarments called "shifts" that were made almost like a man's shirt. Women fastened their undergarments in front and tied them at the cuffs and the collars. Petticoats and corsets called "stays" went over the shifts. Women sometimes wore more than one petticoat in cold weather.

Dress Lengths and Sleeves

Pilgrim women wore their dresses just above their shoes and sometimes wore long gathered skirts with waistcoats, which were tight fitting jackets. Dresses and gowns were full length. They consisted of skirts and bodices in the same or differing colors that buttoned down the front. Women sometimes stitched sleeves to their bodices and sometimes they attached them by tying them.

Coif Caps and More Accessories for Women

Pilgrim women usually covered their hair with "coifs" a type of brimless cap made out of linen. Other than aprons, pilgrim

women wore to keep their dresses clean while working, the remainder of their clothing such as stockings and coats imitated what pilgrim men wore.

Children's Attire Before Age Seven

Boys and girls dressed almost the same until they reached seven years old. Their clothing consisted of shirts or shifts covered with gowns that fastened in the back and were ankle high in length. They also wore caps called "biggins" that tied below the chin, aprons, and sometimes bibs. Boys and girls wore similar stockings and shoes as adult males and females.

Children's Attire After Age Seven

After age seven, boys and girls modified the way they dressed with male dress changes coming about more adamantly than females. Boys began wearing clothing that better resembled male adults. This dressing toward adult male hood consisted of a scaled down version of male attire and its purpose was to "breech" males from boyhood to manhood.

Girl's attire apparently did not change drastically until after they became teenagers and although pilgrims breeched the males, boys and girls wore coats, hats, and capes that resembled outdoor attire worn by adult males and females.

No doubt, the ways in which Americans dress today compared to days of old in Plymouth Massachusetts is quite drastic; most notably in the amount of skin we reveal now versus how much used to be considered taboo when not concealed.