

# The Summer Tunique of Violette d'Epigny

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Presented here is the summer *tunique* of the charming French lady doll, Violette d'Epigny, who is currently on display in the special exhibit, "The Dolls of Les Petites Filles Modèles," at The Musée de la Poupée in Paris, France. The doll, originally belonging to a wealthy Protestant family in northern Italy, possesses an extensive collection of summer dresses and ensembles, some white-work articles, aprons and jackets, as well as several hats and other accessories. Among the miniature treasures are visiting cards with her full name hand written on them. The majority of the trousseau was created in the late 1860s and early 1870s by the original owner. The doll was passed down to her granddaughter who played with it along with her childhood friends. The doll remained in the family and was played with and cherished through the 1940s and 50s, and now is part of the Odin collection at the Musée. Most of Violette's trousseau remained intact, losing but a few small accessory items. (See Samy Odin's article in this issue on the exhibit.)

During the early 1870s, the dictates of fashion were lenient. So great a liberty was given to individual taste, almost any color and any style could be worn, and still appear in the mode. Walking suits were short, with skirts just escaping the ground, although some were long enough to sweep up all the dirt from the streets. Dresses with long skirts were reserved entirely for the house and visits of ceremony. Skirts with or without over-skirts were equally fashionable. Single skirts were

very much trimmed, or simple and perfectly plain. Waistcoats were popular, but not universal.

A polonaise could be very long, showing little of the skirt, or made with a loose front and confined at the waist. *Tuniques* were often short in front and long in back, prettily tucked up here and there. Mantles and *saques* and wraps, by whatever name they carried, were found in such variety that one could hardly go astray. Some bonnets and hats were decidedly large and infinitely becoming, or very small and perched high at the top of the head. The variety of shapes was endless, all styles for all faces.

These fashion delights were made up in a vast array of materials, in plain cloth, stripes, plaids and changeables, with novelties constantly making their appearance. Among the most favored were silks made up in crisp taffetas and smooth, lustrous satins, or finely ribbed faille or reps. There were combinations of silk and wool *barège* or textured *bengaline*. Cottons were fine and light and sheer, or heavier with a ribbed surface, sometimes with a tiny sprigged print. Very much worn for summer were light muslins, mohair, grenadine, or any other cool, soft material. All were worn, as fancy dictated.

As to colors, they were seen in great profusion. Rich shades such as plum, garnet and red in each of its various tints, all yellows, from the lightest aurora to the bright marigold, infinite blues and greens and grays, and so on through the gamut of colors, were for ordinary wear. Some "invisible" greens defied description, so vague and complicated were the

The replica *tunique* is modeled on the left; the original dress is on the right.



Violette d'Epigny wears her cotton print summer tunique, one of the ensembles in her vast trousseau. Her friend models an embroidered apron which was made by a doll couturier.



shades. For evening wear, the palest tints of peach, pink, *ciel* blue and softest lilac were all the rage, as well as the number of marvelous tones of the same color. The recent chemical discovery of aniline dye showered fabrics with some of the brightest, most vibrant tints yet known in the world of fashion. The most exquisite tints of blues and violets and magenta were very much in favor by the *grandes élégantes*.

Transformation in fashion was gradual. Even in Paris, the place above all others to witness varieties and whims, the *couturiers* introduced change slowly,

never glaringly and without exaggeration. So subtle it was, that often no decided innovation was perceived. In this manner, fashion flowed successively and simultaneously. Such a transformation is seen here, in Violette's trousseau. Some skirts are made full, set with gathers or side plaits at the waist in the 1860s style, and others are of the later, 1870s gored style. Several *tuniques* are full length, long and flowing at the back, while others are tucked up prettily behind. The side-back forms are top stitched with a back stitch as seen in the 1860s. Sleeves are curved and fitted as in the 70s, or a bit

*Tuniqué continued on page 56*

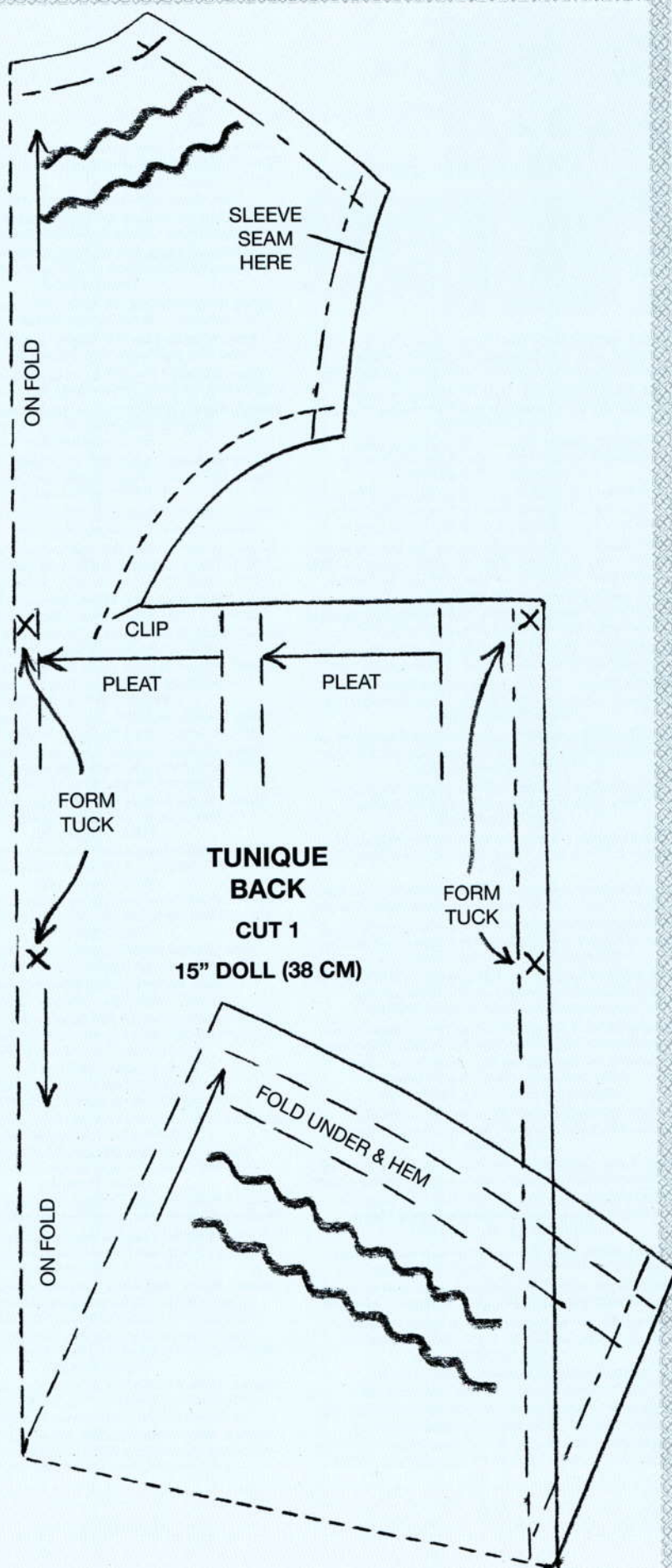


**Tunique** continued from page 29

full with slight gathers at the wrist to form a frill. One *tunique* features the pagoda sleeves which were the *fureur* in the 60s. There is much fanciful style and originality displayed in the clothing, and the creator was completely devoted to following the dictates of fashion and good taste.

Upon examining the trousseau, it is apparent that nearly all the dresses and ensembles were made using only two basic patterns. This feature is often seen in other original wardrobes, whether they were made at home, or by a young girl, or were fashioned by the talented hands and magic needle of a doll couturier. One style in Violette's trousseau is the classic ensemble consisting of a fitted jacket or *basque*, an overskirt and a gored skirt. Lightweight cotton in a pale beige, with the slightest tinge of pink, is made into a simple jacket with a classic overskirt and skirt. A large self-fabric bow is set at the back. All is crisply starched and garnished with Valenciennes lace. One of the prettiest fancies is a three piece ensemble of a bright rose and pink geometric cotton print. The overskirt is rounded in front and garnished in the back with a large self-fabric bow having one long, rounded lappet. The skirt is finished with a wide flounce, gathered very full, and the overskirt and the jacket are trimmed to correspond. A jaunty addition to the trousseau is made up in a soft cotton flannel in small scale plaid of deep cobalt blue, pale blue and creme, a fabric seldom seen in doll clothing. A large bow sets off the rounded overskirt, set on top of a perfectly plain skirt; the overskirt and jacket are also unadorned.

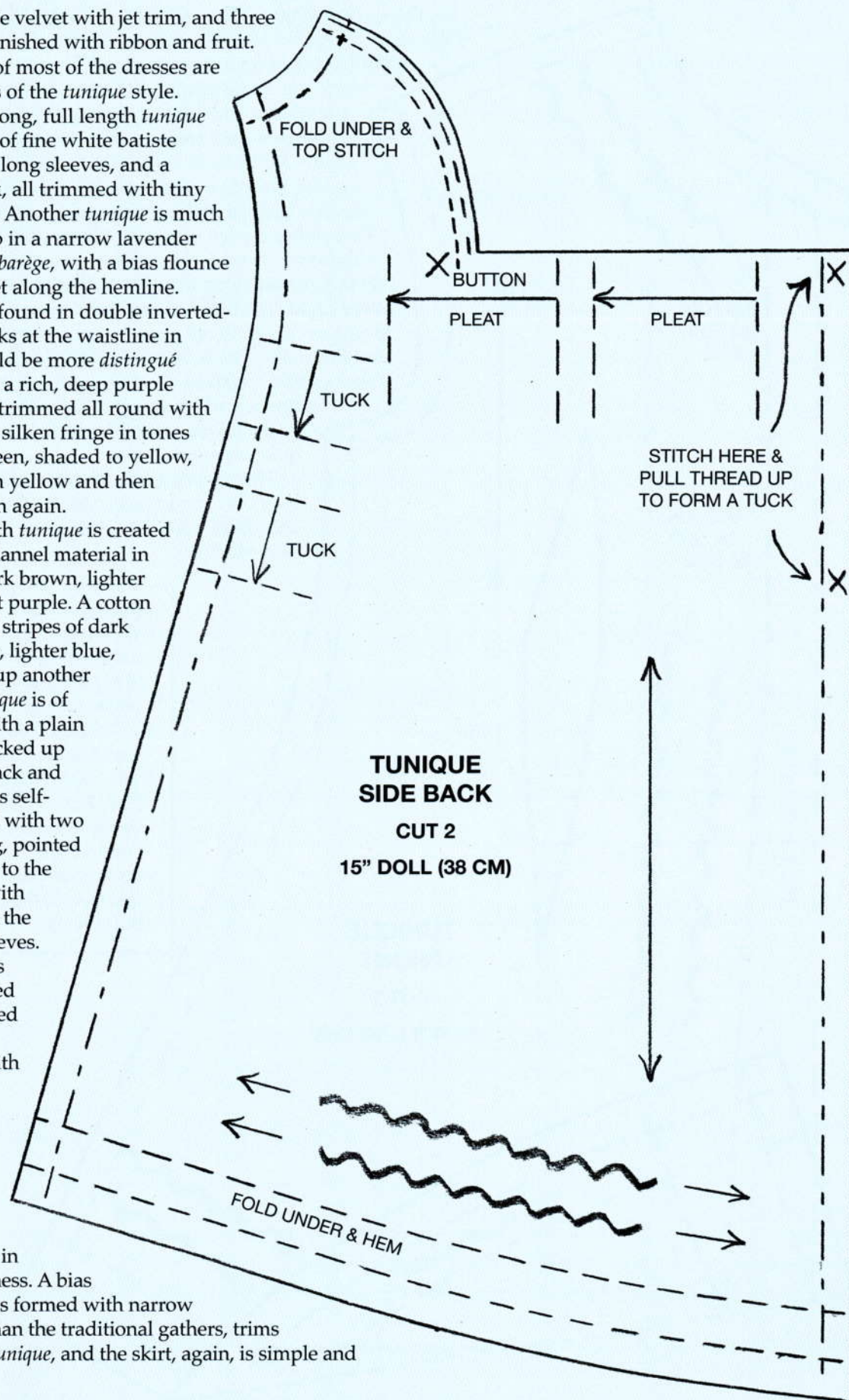
Three individual skirts are made up in a crisp, slightly sheer wool and silk *barège*. One is a pale blue and white tweedy texture with a small woven diamond design in a bright *Eugénie bleu*. Another is a stunning windowpane plaid of bright magenta on a creamy white ground. The last is a small, classic plaid of red, blue and black on beige. All are unlined, with a lightweight cotton false-hem, and narrow side pleats at the waist. A similar skirt is made up in a soft, yellow geometric printed cotton. There are two jackets, one of black wool with a lace frill at the neck and sleeves, and the other is a small-scale check of dark gray and creme, edged all round in blue. Also included are four cotton aprons. Two are identical and are most unusual for this trousseau in that they surely were made by a doll *couturier*. They are fashioned with a small bib front, full gathered skirt and two rounded pockets. All are edged with tiny, embroidered scallops. One apron is tan with red scallops, the other is beige with white. There are several hats to be found,





one pretty in purple velvet with jet trim, and three straw hats, one garnished with ribbon and fruit.

The remainder of most of the dresses are made in variations of the *tunique* style. Among them is a long, full length *tunique* for summer made of fine white batiste with a demi-train, long sleeves, and a flounce at the neck, all trimmed with tiny tucks and Val lace. Another *tunique* is much the same, made up in a narrow lavender and white striped *barège*, with a bias flounce of scant fullness set along the hemline. A unique detail is found in double inverted-box pleats and tucks at the waistline in back. Nothing could be more *distingué* than the *tunique* in a rich, deep purple lightweight wool, trimmed all round with narrow *Thom Puce* silken fringe in tones of the brightest green, shaded to yellow, then warm, golden yellow and then repeating the green again. A similar full length *tunique* is created in another cotton flannel material in a small plaid of dark brown, lighter brown and a bright purple. A cotton fabric with shaded stripes of dark blue, medium blue, lighter blue, then creme, make up another ensemble. The *tunique* is of medium length, with a plain gored skirt. It is tucked up quite high at the back and adorned with a bias self-fabric bow, formed with two loops and two long, pointed ends falling nearly to the hem. Bias ruffles with scant fullness edge the bottom and the sleeves. Another costume is made in a cherry red and white pinstriped cotton fabric. The *tunique*, this one with pagoda sleeves, is quite long and rounded in front and in back, and very much tucked up at the waistline, with a fluff of cotton set in to insure the puffiness. A bias flounce, the fullness formed with narrow side tucks rather than the traditional gathers, trims the bottom of the *tunique*, and the skirt, again, is simple and unadorned.



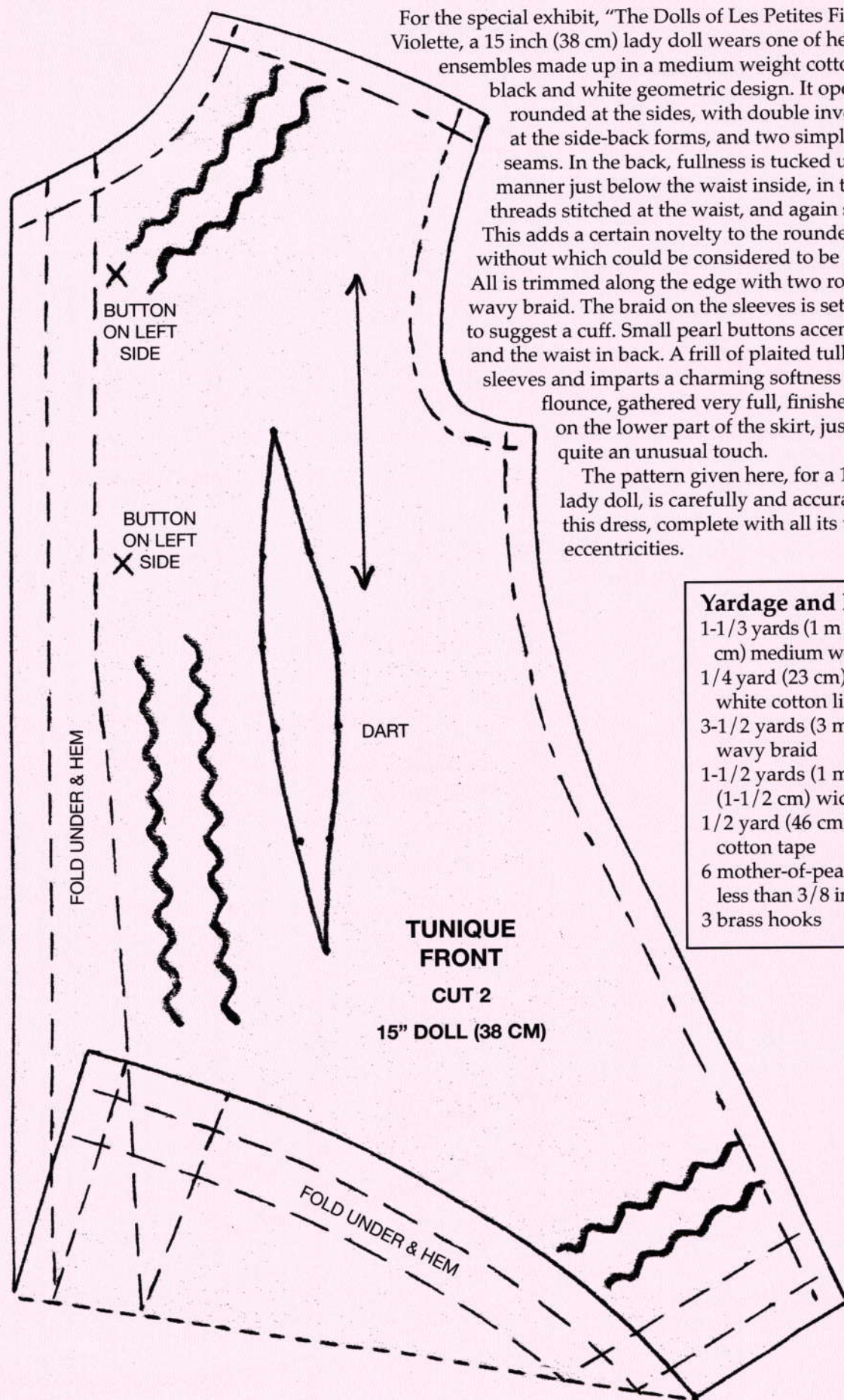


For the special exhibit, "The Dolls of Les Petites Filles Modèle," Violette, a 15 inch (38 cm) lady doll wears one of her tunique ensembles made up in a medium weight cotton with an all-over black and white geometric design. It opens in front and is rounded at the sides, with double inverted box pleats at the side-back forms, and two simple tucks at the side seams. In the back, fullness is tucked up in a coquettish manner just below the waist inside, in three places, with threads stitched at the waist, and again slightly lower. This adds a certain novelty to the rounded *tunique* in back, without which could be considered to be a bit old fashioned. All is trimmed along the edge with two rows of narrow, white wavy braid. The braid on the sleeves is set in such a way as to suggest a cuff. Small pearl buttons accent the front, sleeves and the waist in back. A frill of plaited tulle garnishes the sleeves and imparts a charming softness to the face. A deep flounce, gathered very full, finishes the skirt. It is set on the lower part of the skirt, just above the hem, quite an unusual touch.

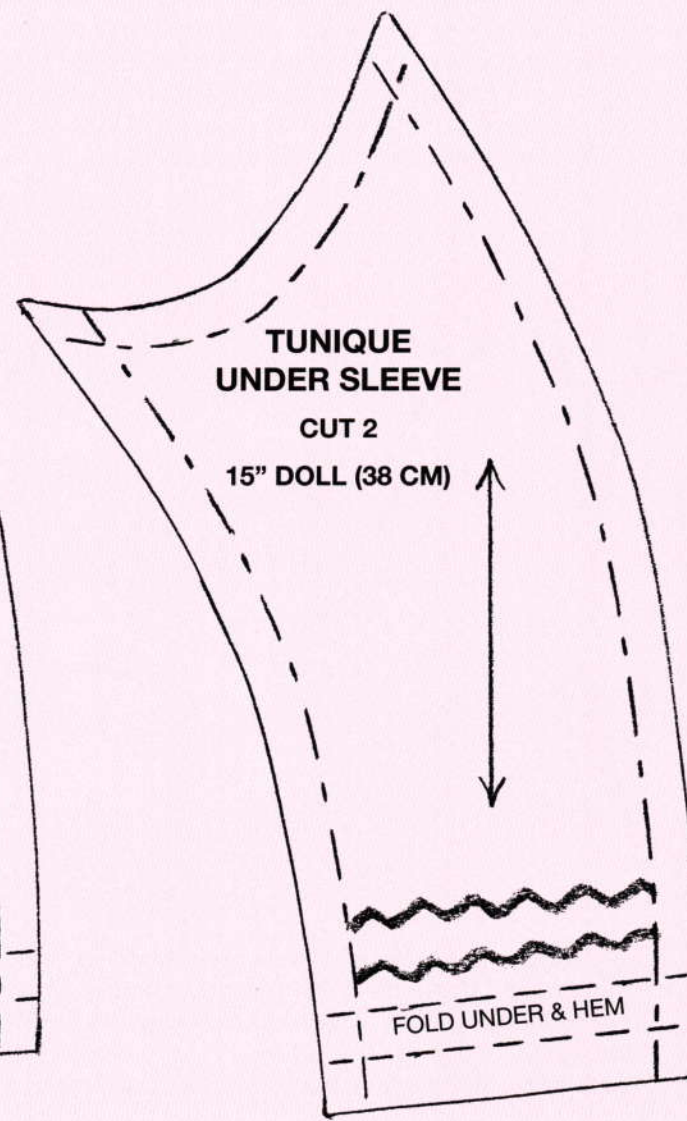
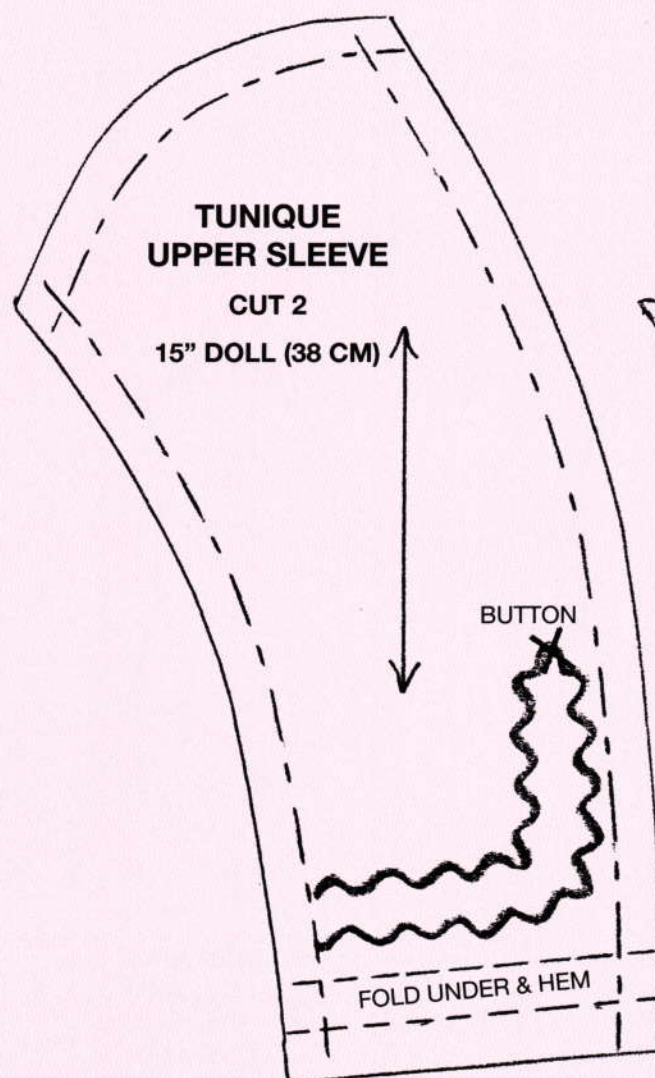
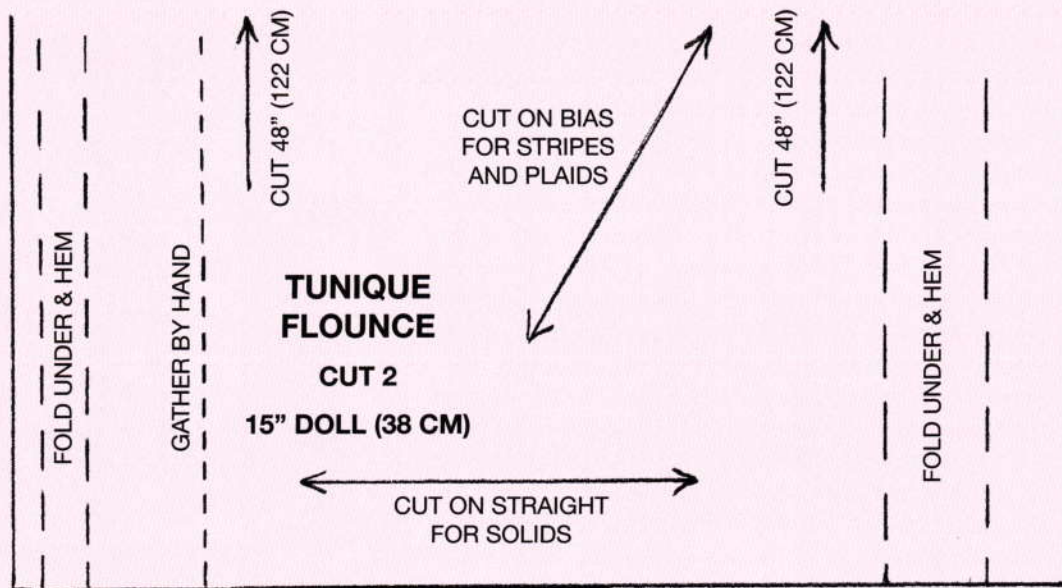
The pattern given here, for a 15-inch (38 cm) lady doll, is carefully and accurately drafted from this dress, complete with all its vagaries and eccentricities.

#### Yardage and Notions

1-1/3 yards (1 m 22 cm) 36" wide (92 cm) medium weight cotton print  
 1/4 yard (23 cm) medium weight white cotton lining  
 3-1/2 yards (3 m 22 cm) narrow wavy braid  
 1-1/2 yards (1 m 37 cm) 5/8-inch (1-1/2 cm) wide tulle  
 1/2 yard (46 cm) narrow white cotton tape  
 6 mother-of-pearl buttons, slightly less than 3/8 inch diameter (1 cm)  
 3 brass hooks

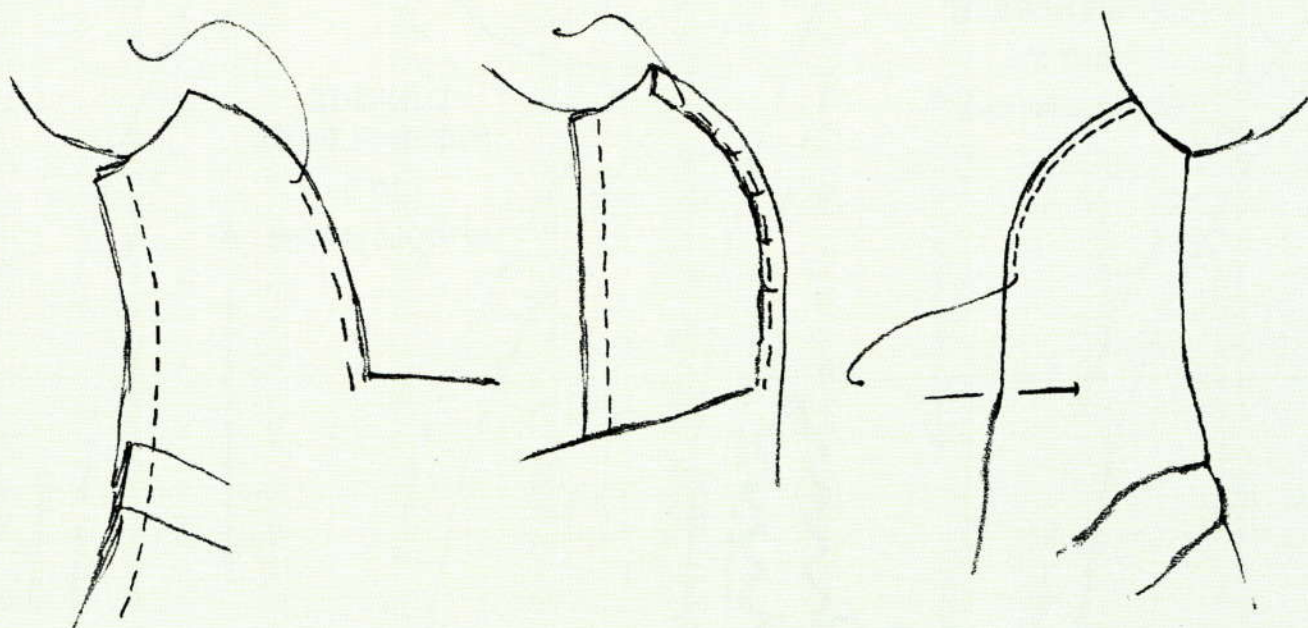








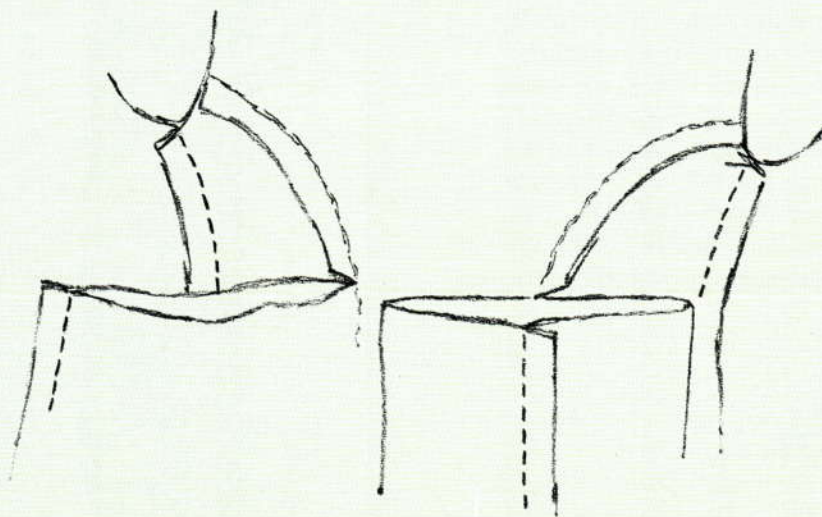
1. In the June, 1872, issue of the nineteenth century French children's magazine, *La Poupée Modèle*, a pattern was given for an ensemble quite similar to Violette's dress. The *tunique* is long and open in front to the waist, though buttons are set down the full length, and has pleats at the waist in back; the sleeves are not fitted, but are in the pagoda style. "This part of our engraving is devoted to a *tunique* in white pique for size four dolls. This *tunique* is garnished with flounces of white pleated muslin (you buy these ready-made), headed by a narrow cotton braid trim. The same muslin ornament and trim would be very pretty on gray or ecru batiste... This *tunique*, buttoned from the top to the bottom with charming little mother-of-pearl buttons, is set over a gores skirt. (we aren't giving the pattern to you because you have already received it a long time ago, and it is always the same). This skirt is simply garnished, on the bottom, with the same pleated muslin flounce, on top of which is set the cotton braid trim. You can transform this outfit into the most elegant summer *toilette*, always garnishing it with the pleated muslin, by using, instead of pique or ecru batiste, some lightweight silk in blue, pink, yellow, or mauve, these tones so charming and so much in style, of which you can find a pretty and complete assortment at La Malle des Indes. A notation on the pattern for the *tunique* back gives directions for the pleats at the waistline, which are identical to those on Violette's outfit: "Mount these pleats to a narrow tape which forms an interior belt at the waist." A pattern for another similar *tunique* appears in the following year, in July, 1873. This one is long, buttons the entire length in front, and has curved and fitted two piece sleeves. There are three tucks at the side seams as well as the center back seam which raise the *tunique* coquettishly, very much like the tucks on Violette's outfit.



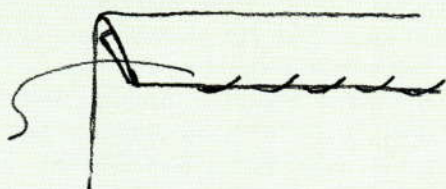
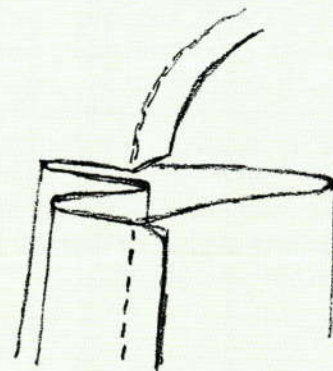
2. Violette's ensemble is unlined and completely sewn by hand; the seams are not finished with overcasting. The darts are sewn on the front and two tucks are formed on the side seam of the side-back form. The side seam is then sewn. A row of stitches at the rounded seam of the side-back form allow it to be folded under, exactly following the curved edge. It is then top stitched onto the back on the right side of the fabric with small back stitches, a detail seen through the 1860s.



3. The straight seam of the pleats is sewn. The seam on only the side-back form is clipped at the waist, allowing the fabric to be opened and flattened, with the pleat seam in the center.

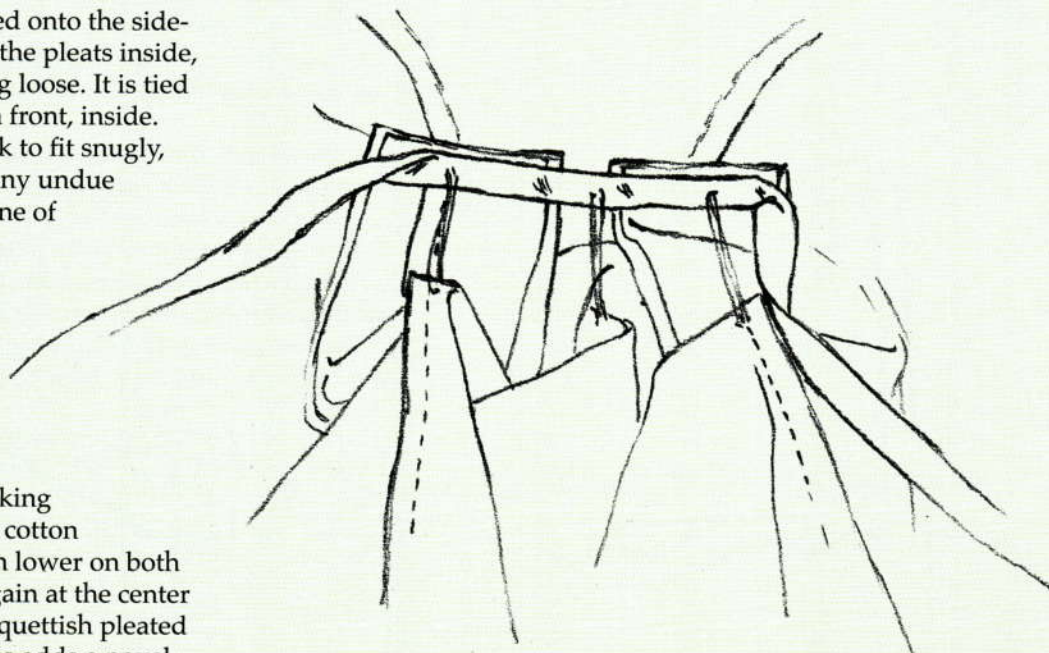


4. Each side of the open pleat is folded into a double pleat and tacked into place. The shoulder seams are then sewn.



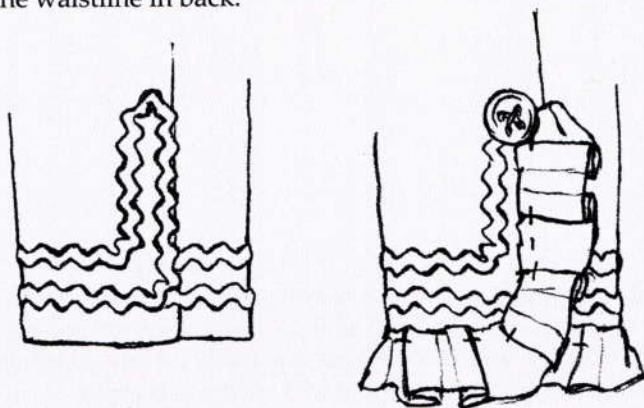
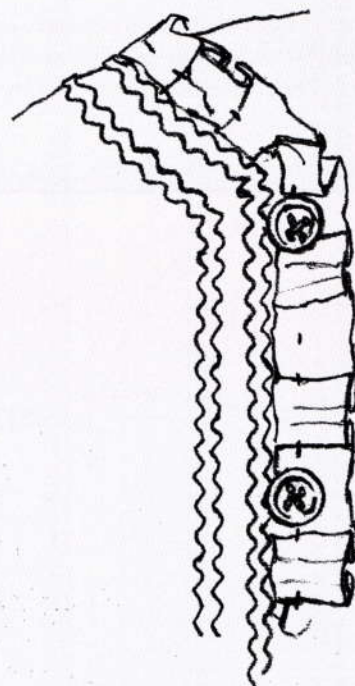
5. The hem and the sleeves as well as the front opening are folded under twice and hemmed. The child seamstress decided to make the front to open at a wider angle, accomplishing this by folding the edge under a bit more from the waist to the hem. Certainly an after-thought, but the result is charming, allowing more of the skirt to be seen. The neckline is finished with a narrow bias strip of fabric, measuring  $3/4$  inch by  $5-3/4$  inch ( $1-3/4$  cm by 15 cm), folded neatly to the inside and sewn. Another odd detail is seen at the neckline of the original dress. The front edges, after they were finished, are folded under to create a slight v-shaped neckline. The effect is nice, but a bit awkward. It was decided to draft the pattern with the slight v-neck.

6. A feature seldom seen on doll clothing, especially when made by a child, is a narrow, white cotton tape, which is tacked onto the side-back forms and on the pleats inside, the remainder being loose. It is tied around the waist in front, inside. This allows the back to fit snugly, and also prevents any undue strain at the waistline of the *tunique*. In the back, fullness is tied up with thread just below the waist inside in three places. Seemingly complex, this is accomplished by taking three stitches at the cotton tape and then down lower on both pleat seams, and again at the center of the back. This coquettish pleated and folded puffiness adds a novel detail to the *tunique* in back.





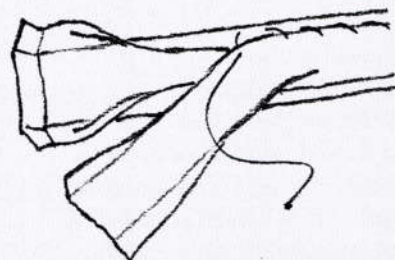
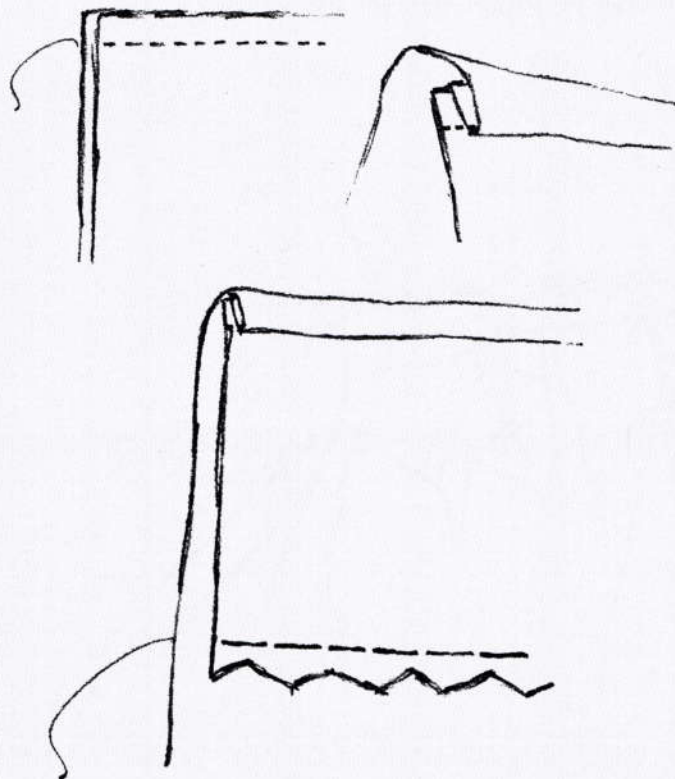
7. All is trimmed along the edge with two rows of narrow white, wavy braid, known as rick-rack today. One length of braid is set on the long, fitted, two-pieced sleeves in such a way as to appear like a double row of trim, suggesting a cuff. The braid begins at the bottom row, circles around to the same location, then forms a rounded corner, continues up along the seam, forms another corner, and so on, around the sleeve again, and ends on the upper row of braid, directly above where the trim began. A row of narrow tulle is disposed along the bottom of the sleeve, continuing up the braid where it ends. The fullness of the tulle is formed by making box pleats; four are placed at the sleeve bottom, one at the corner, and another just at the end. A mother-of-pearl button perfectly accents each sleeve and two more buttons garnish the seams at the waistline in back.



8. Wavy braid is set along the neckline, garnished further with pleated tulle. Three box pleats are set on the front edge, one at both corners, and five are positioned at equal distance around the neckline. Two pearl buttons are sewn on the front. The original dress was never finished with a closure, but was fastened with two straight pins. The new dress has been furnished with two brass hooks and thread loops.

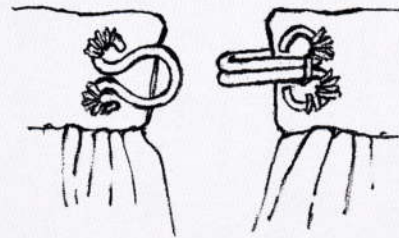
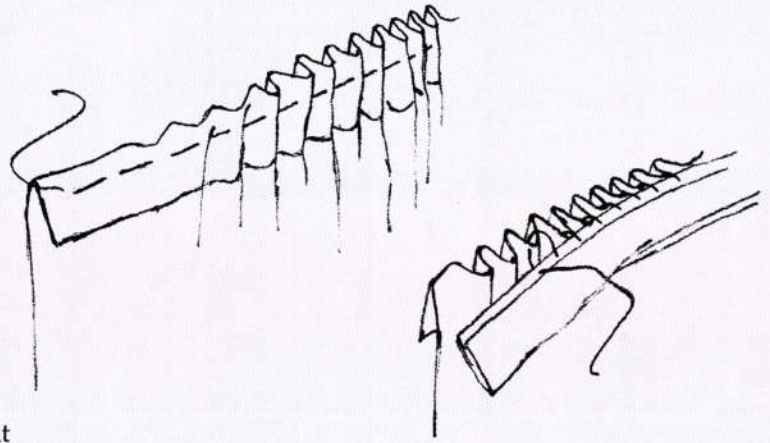
9. The skirt is straight and not very full, measuring 11 inches long by 30 inches wide (28 cm by 76 cm). It is finished on the bottom with a false hem of medium weight white cotton, 4 inches long by 30 inches wide (10 cm by 76 cm), cut in a wide, uneven zig-zag edge by hand. A row of running stitches, long stitches on the inside, tiny on the front, secures the hem.

10. The waistband is unusual, in that it is made with two pieces of fabric, one of the cotton print, the other, a lining of the same cotton as the false hem. This lining is not the same width as the printed fabric, but is slightly narrower. The cotton print is 1-1/4 inches wide by 9 inches long (3 cm by 23 cm); the lining is 1 inch by 9 inches (2-1/2 cm by 23 cm). All edges are folded under and sewn together with tiny stitches.

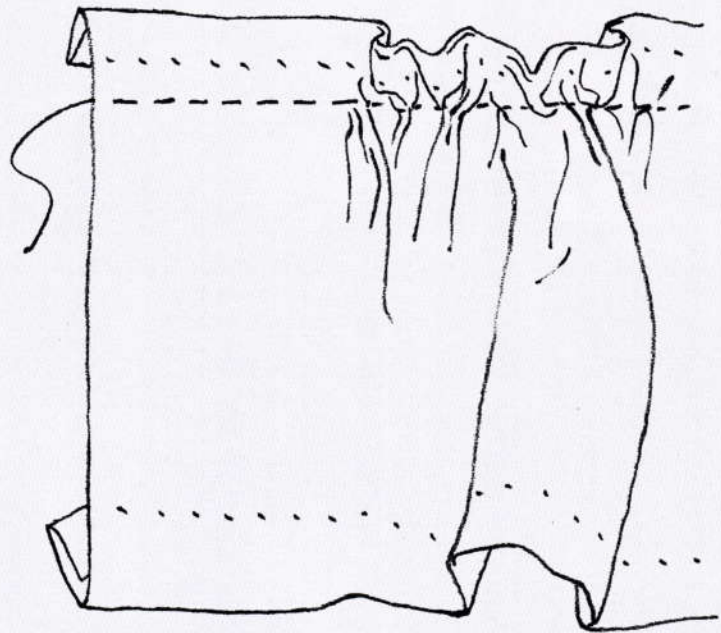




11. The fullness of the skirt is laid in gathers at the waist, unlike the other skirts in the trousseau which are gored. The skirt is one piece, without seams. The raw edges of the opening at the center back are merely folded under once, 4 inches from the waist (10 cm), without sewing them. The top edge is folded down 1/2 inch (1-1/2 cm) to the inside, with the center front folded 1/2 inch (1-1/2 cm) longer, or 1 inch (2-1/2 cm) total, tapering to even out at the sides. One row of running stitches is sewn along the edge, larger stitches on the inside, and smaller stitches on the front, resulting in neatly formed gathers. This treatment is slightly differently than the double row of evenly spaced stitches which is usually seen. The gathered skirt is sewn onto the finished waistband. It is easily accomplished by holding the waistband facing you, and the gathered edge behind this, taking one small stitch in each fold, then into the waistband. Each stitch into the waistband catches just the cotton print part near the top. Certainly, this is one of the oddities of the original dress. It could be done in the usual manner, using a cotton tape for the waistband, or a cotton print waistband of one piece. Regardless, the waistband should always be facing you; it is easier to take the stitch into each fold first, then continuing into the waistband, rather than first taking a stitch in the waistband, struggling to place the needle correctly into the fold.



12. Here is an interesting vagary. A rather large brass loop is sewn onto the waistband, not very neatly. The matching rather larger hook is sewn opposite, not on the inside, but on the right side, requiring the hook to be facing inside. If this placement of the hook is used in making the duplicate of the original dress, it will be destined to have the appearance of an old dress of the period.



13. The wide, generously gathered flounce which trims the skirt is also an eccentricity, but not so odd as to be considered a vagary. It looks straightforward enough, and it actually is, although extra sewing was required on the top of the flounce. This is hemmed in the usual manner, rather than the top edge being folded down lower than the row of hand-sewn gathering stitches, making this hem unnecessary. The bottom is simply hemmed. On the original skirt, the flounce is cut on the straight of the fabric, while flounces on ensembles made of plaid or stripes is cut on a slight bias. The flounce is 5-1/2 inches long and 48 inches wide (14 cm by 122 cm). The finished flounce is set on the skirt, not at the bottom, but up slightly. Perhaps this could be considered another eccentricity of this jaunty ensemble.

Such was the fashion of the day. *Petites mamas* created dresses in the throws of artistic frenzy, choosing details by whim or caprice, though ever watchful of the current fashion trends, resulting in confections that were at once fanciful and exceedingly tasteful.