

## Early 19th Century Day Caps and Patterns from The Workwoman's Guide, Part 2

Lynn McMasters – ....out of a portrait

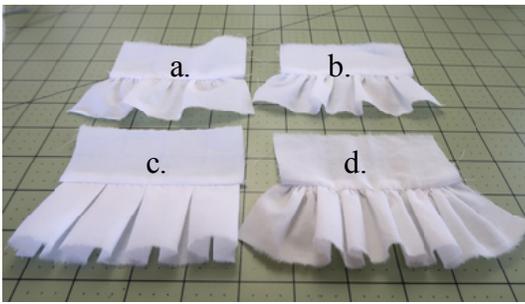
In Part 1 of making an early 19th c. day cap from a period sourced pattern, I left off at the muslin stage. Here I will discuss the steps to finishing the cap. After you have the basic cap body that fits your head and hairdo, you need to decide how much ruffle you'll need before you cut the pattern in the fashion fabric. This can be as simple as measuring the outside edge of the pattern, multiply by 2 and cutting a strip the of that length of that [product] by 2" (5 cm) wide. However, there are a few factors you need to consider that might alter this. Looking at the details within Figure 1 (below), there are a wide range of ruffle types.



(Image 1: All images courtesy of The Smithsonian American Art Museum. Attributions at end of article.)

- Not all caps have gathered ruffles; some are cartridge (k), box (c and j) or knife (a) pleated.
- Some caps had no ruffle at the center back.
- Some caps had ties that run along the back edge within a channel. This will gather up a ruffle even more; therefore, it's best to have a less gathered ruffle in this area.
- The caps in Figure 1 have a range of ruffle density from very gathered (g), to little (b, f and i), to none at all (h).
- Ruffles are often doubled (d, i, j and l) or tripled.
- Ruffles that come under the chin make an angled point as the turn towards the bottom edge. These caps require extra fabric length and more gathering. The wider the ruffle, the more you need to gather it.

If you are trying to recreate a particular cap from an extant museum photo or portrait, here is a quick way to make a sample ruffle. Cut a 2" (5 cm) by 4" (10 cm) piece of your fabric. If you think the gathering might be double that amount, cut another piece of fabric 2" (5 cm) by 8" (20 cm). Sew two rows of gathering stitches along one long edge of the 8" piece at 1/8" (.32) from one edge, and 3/8" (.95 cm) from the other edge. Gather this to match the 4" (10 cm) piece. Sew the two pieces together between the rows of gathering stitches at 1/4" (.63 cm). Pin this to your muslin even though you have not added a hem to the ruffle. This will subtract 1/4" (.63 cm) and should give you an idea if you want to make the ruffle narrower or wider, more gathered or less. It will also give you an idea of how



(Image 2 Four ruffle samples (a) 4 to 6, (b) 4 to 8, (c) 4 to 12 box pleated, and (d) 4 to 12 gathered.)

### Choosing Your Fabric

For this time period you can choose from cotton, linen, or silk. Cotton and linen would have been more common but as the portrait of Mrs. Mott (seen in Part 1 of this article) shows, silk organza was used. Each of these fibers were available in different weaves and grades; from plain and coarsely woven to fine, almost transparent. This last category could be embroidered or made into net. As with any costume accessory, be it for theater, living history, or reenactment, your choice of the quality of the fabric and the ornateness of your cap needs to match the station of who you are portraying.

### Starch is Your Friend

For ease of construction you need to starch your fabric. The stiffer it is the easier it will be to make a rolled hem and sewing seams. Additionally, starch fabric helps reduce fraying. You can dip or spray starch before you cut the fabric. I make my own from corn starch and, should you want to do the same, there are recipes and instructions online. The exception to starching is if you are using a stiff cotton organdy or silk organza; however, you can starch if it's the softer type. I have seen portraits of pastel pink and blue caps. If you wish to replicate these, you can add some food coloring to your starch. The color will wash out of the fabric laundered, at which point you could re-starch it before pressing. Also, it's easier to achieve an even color with the dip method.

### Pre-Thinking How to Sew the Cap

I had the pleasure of examining and photographing several extant early 19th c. day caps from the collection of Aurie Bradley. Three of the caps are featured here to help you understand how these caps were sewn and assembled.



Cap 1 (Image 3) is very similar to Figure 2, Plate 9 in *The Workwoman's Guide*. The only difference I see is that the head-piece and the front ruffle are a bit wider.

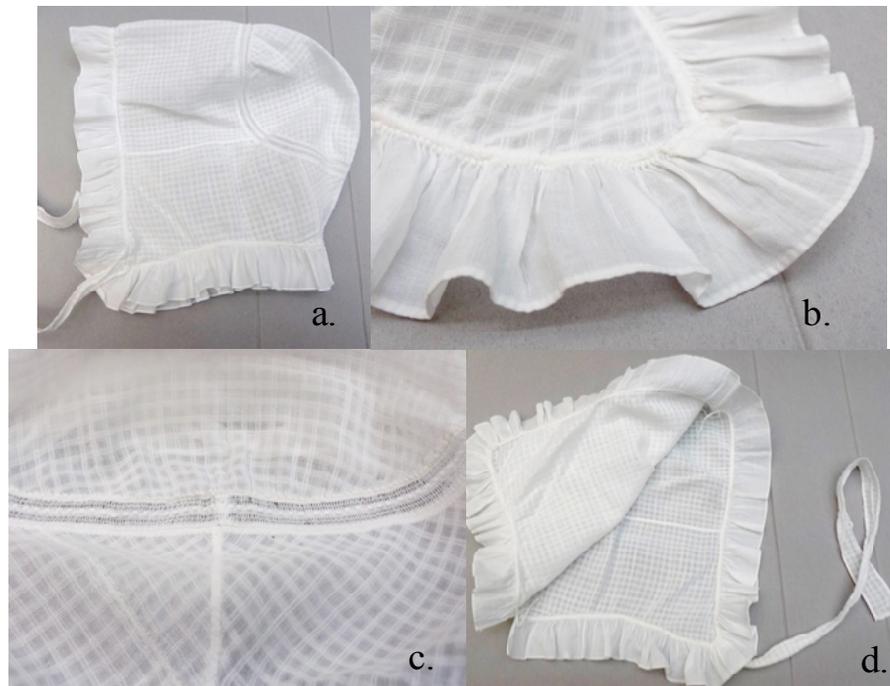
(Image 3 Features of Cap 1: (a) The cap from the outside with the back gathered; (b) the inside center back showing the drawstring tie in the center back; (c) the inside of the cap with the drawstring pulled open; and (d) the cap from the outside with the drawstring fully open.)

What this cap tells us is: 1) There is no gathering in the ruffle across the bottom edge of the crown, 2) the drawstring is a very fine cord, and 3) it slips out of a gap in the stitching of the bottom hem. This is a simple way to create an opening, but you will need to make a small buttonhole or eyelet if the drawstring has to come to the right side of the fabric or there is one on the hem. I recommend using drapery cord for drawstrings as twist cord has a tendency to un-twist.



(Image 4 Features of Cap 2: (a) The cap from the right side folded on the center back seam; (b) the cap from the right side showing the center back finished with insertion lace; (c) the crown folded to show a very fine piecing (parching) of the fabric and how the bag is gathered into a piece of insertion lace and is sewn to the head-piece; (d) the folded edge of the cap has no ruffle and the hem is stitched to give it a decorative edge. It seems twisted cord was couched to the edge with a fine, evenly stitched whipstitch.)

What this cap tells us: 1) There is no ruffle along the bottom edge of the cap, the double ruffle ends just a little past the corner, 2) there is no drawstring in this cap, and 3) both the center back seam and the seam between the crown and the head-piece have insertion lace. In the instructions for the cap from Plate 15 in *The Workwomen's Guide* (pg. 172) the author calls for insertion lace.



(Image 5 Features of Cap 2:(a) The cap from the right side folded on the center back seam; (b) the cap flipped over to the other side showing the base of a missing tie; (c) the center back seam of the cap showing a splice in the fabric to the left and the insertion lace that joins the crown and the head-piece; (d) the cap opened up to show two drawstrings, one to adjust the bottom edge of the cap and the other to adjust the front edge of the cap.

What this cap can tell us: 1) The ruffle is much narrower than the other two caps by nearly an inch (2.34 cm), 2) drawstrings can be used anywhere, and 3) this cap has a different type of insertion lace.

### **Insertion Lace**

Insertion lace is straight on both edges that join two pieces of fabric together without an apparent seam, much like the decorative insertion lace of the Edwardian era often used in blouses and underwear. The lace on these caps is a little different: Caps 1 and 2 have embroidered cutwork insertion lace, and Cap 3 has a woven insertion lace. Often the insertion has enough fabric on the edge to sew it to the cap fabric. Hem the seam allowances with a flat felled seam.

### **Why Drawstrings?**

Looking through the cap drawings in *The Workwoman's Guide* and examining extant caps, I've noticed that many have drawstrings. Opening a drawstring makes pressing much easier and, for a garment that needs frequent laundering, you appreciate this timesaving feature in their care. For caps with or without drawstrings you'll need a pressing ham to press them without setting in wrinkles.

### **To Hand Sew or Not to Hand Sew**

If you ever wanted to experiment with hand sewing an entire garment this is a good opportunity: day caps are small projects that are doable. Keep in mind that if you want a densely gathered ruffle, sewing a rolled hem on both sides of the ruffle can take a considerable amount of time. For instructions on period stitches, *Your Wardrobe Unlock'd* published a four-part article on *The Workwomen's Guide* written by Ava Trimble in 2012. I've chosen to do a mixed method construction. When making period costumes, I do as much machine work as possible (especially for time periods prior to the invention of the home sewing machine) I hand sew where the stitches will show, such as whip stitches and rolled hems, as well as flat felled seams, done first by machine then whipped stitched by hand. Also, I gather stitches by machine.

### **Materials cap 1**

- 1/2 yard (45.72 cm) of fabric
- ~ 5 yards (4.5 meters) of ribbon 1/4" (0.64 cm) to 1/2" (1.28 cm) wide
- Matching thread
- Pins
- Scissors
- Disappearing marker
- Fine hand sewing needle and a large-eyed needle, such as a darning or ribbon embroidery needle

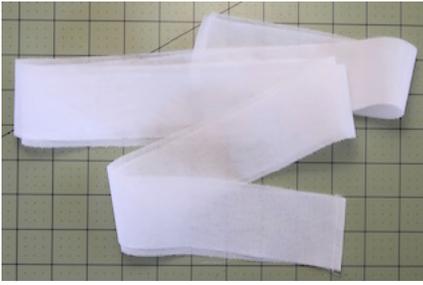
### **Recreating the Bonnet Cap in Plate 15. Fig. 19 & 20 from *The Workwoman's Guide***

#### **Step 1 Calculating the Amount of Ruffle**

One last change you might make to your pattern before you cut it is to either shorten or lengthen the lappet. The lappet is the narrow part of the cap below your ears. If you have chosen a wide ruffle it might end up overlapping in the middle under your chin. If you choose a narrow ruffle it might not close in the middle. If either one is the case alter the pattern now. To determine how much ruffle you need, use your muslin or your pattern. Measure each section and multiply by the density you have chosen. If you are measuring the pattern remember to subtract for the channels. As the muslin already has channels, you won't need to make any subtractions. I doubled the total length I took off the muslin: 32" X 2 = 64" (163 cm).

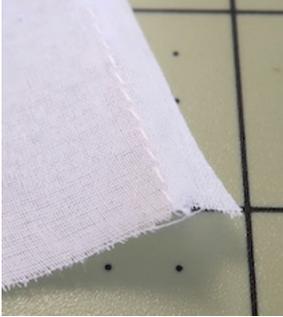


(Image 6 Measuring the length of neck and the front of the cap off the muslin.)



## Step 2 Preparing the ruffle

Cut as many strips of ruffle from your fabric to make the total length. With right sides together seam them with a 1/4" (0.64 cm) seam. Bind the seam allowances with a flat felled seam as shown in the next few steps. (Image 7 Total length of the ruffle seamed together in two places.)



Trim one of the seam allowances to 1/8" (0.32 cm) (Image 8 Seam edge with one of the layers of the seam allowance trimmed back.)



Fold and press the un-trimmed seam allowance around to encase the trimmed one. (Image 9 Seam allowance folded up.)



Open up the seam and press all seam allowance to the left. (Image 10 Seam allowance pressed to the left.)



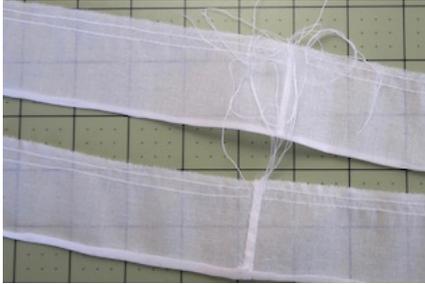
Sew the folded seam allowance down with a whip stitch. Repeat with all seams. (Image 11 Sewing down the seam allowance with a whip stitch to create a flat felled seam.)



From the right side of the fabric no machine stitching will show on a flat felled seam sewn, half by machine, half by hand. (Image 12 Flat felled seam from the right side of the fabric.)



From the back side of the ruffle press the edge up 1/8" (0.32 cm) and then again to create a hem. On the other edge sew two rows of gathering stitches on either side of the 1/4" (0.64 cm) seam line. Make it a short gathering stitch, I recommend a 3 mm stitch length. Experiment with a scrap of fabric as you might need to loosen the tension of the upper thread. (Image 13 Section of the ruffle with one seam allowance pressed up and the other with gathering stitches.)



Because of the length of the ruffle it's a good idea to start and stop the gathering threads. This allows you to gather from two different places. (Image 14 Ruffle folded in half showing that the gathering stitches are in two sets.)

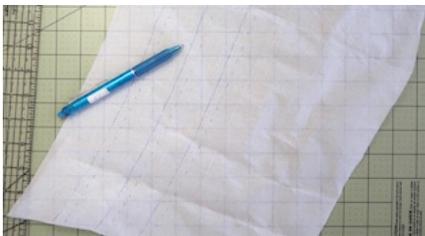


Sew the ruffle's hem down with a whip stitch. You should be able to get a few stitches on you needle and then pull the thread through to speed things up. (Image 15 Sewing down the seam allowance with a whip stitch to create a flat felled seam.)



### Step 3 Preparing the Cap Body

Cut one of the cap pattern on the fold. Transfer the fold lines for the channels from the patten with a disappearing pen. (Image 16 Fabric over the pattern.)



Measure and draw a seam line for your channels on the back side of the line. Make the channels the width of your ribbon plus a fraction for ease of inserting the ribbon. (Image 17 Drawing seam lines for the channels.)



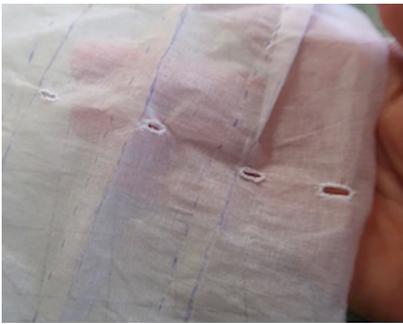
Mark four small buttonholes along the center line of the cap on the opposite side of the fold lines from the seam lines you just marked. (Image 18 Mark the buttonholes for the channels.)



With a double thread sew around all four sides of the buttonhole twice, just to the outside of your lines. (Image 19 Running stitch around the buttonhole marks.)



Carefully cut down the center of your stitching. Using a buttonhole stitch sew around the stitching. At this size and with a double thread it should about 5 stitches per side and 1 or 2 on each end. (Image 20 Cutting a hole.)



This is how it should look. (Image 21 Finished buttonholes.)



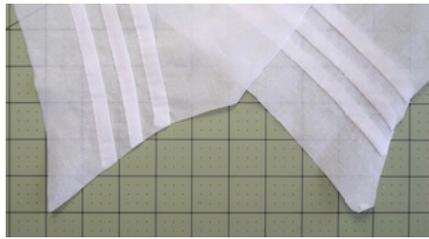
Fold the fabric along the lines from the pattern and pin them along the stitch line. (Image 22 Fabric folded for first channel.)



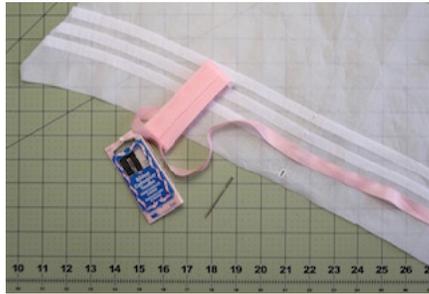
Sew a running stitch along the stitch line. You should be able to get several stitches on the needle at once. (Image 23 First channel being sewn.)



Press the channels towards the back. (Image 24 Channels pressed.)



Trim the jagged edge that was created when you made the folds for the channels. (Image 25 Trimmed edge of neck opening.)



Cut your ribbon into lengths long enough to span the channel and leave enough to make a bow in the center. Use a large eyed needle to pull the ribbon thru the channels from the center buttonhole to one side, then from the center to the other side, leaving a loop in the center. (Image 26 Large eyed needle and ribbon.)



Pin down the ends where the ribbon comes out of the channels. (Image 27 Ribbon pinned on both sides.)



From the wrong side press the back edge of the cap fabric up 1/8" (0.32 cm) and then again to create a hem. You do not need to sew it down now. (Image 28 Pressed seam allowance along to back edge.)



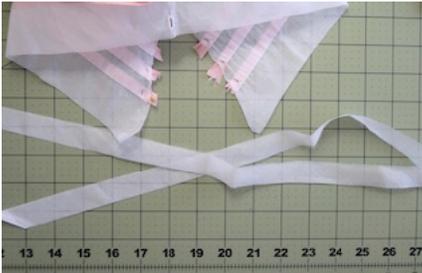
Sew the center back seam with a flat felled stitch as you did with the ruffle seams. (Image 29 Center back flat felled seam.)



Gather the hem you pressed earlier along the back edge with a wide ~1/2" (~12.5 cm) running stitch and a double thread. (Image 30 Back edge being gathered.)



Tie off your thread with a double knot for security. (Image 31 Center back gathered.)



Cut two strips of 3/4" (2 cm) wide bias fabric one long enough for the front edge of the cap and the other long enough for the neck opening. (Image 32 Two bias strips.)



Turn the strips into 3/8" (1 cm) single fold bias tape by pressing each long edge towards to the center. Set aside. (Image 33 Two strips of bias tape.)



#### **Step 4 Joining the ruffle and the cap body**

With right sides together pin the ruffle onto the edge of the cap matching the center front, center back and the point of the lappets. Pull the gathering stitches. (Image 34 Pinned un-gathered ruffle to cap.)



Pin it every 2" (5 cm) and sew it down, 1/4" (0.63 cm) from the edge. (Image 35 Pinned gathered ruffle.)



Press the seam allowance towards the inside of the cap. (Image 36 Sewn ruffle with seam allowance pressed.)



#### **Step 5 Binding the seam allowances**

Pin and sew the bias tape over the ruffle along the front opening matching one of the folds in the tape to the seam line of the ruffle. When you fold the tape over you will encase the seam allowance of the ruffle, cap, and bias tape. The bias tape should slightly overhang both sides. Leave it there for now. (Image 37 Sewn bias tape piece 1 along the front of the cap.)



Pull the remainder of your ribbon through the last buttonhole and tie a bow. (Image 38 Sewn ruffle with seam allowance pressed.)



Line the ribbon up with the edge of the cap under the seam allowances and pin it in place. From the inside of the cap, fold the bias tape over the ribbon and whip stitch it down.-(Image 39 Pinned ribbon along cap front edge.)



Pin and sew the other bias piece over the neck opening seam to the bias of the front edge. Trim and turn the edges and whip stitch all the bias tape ends and stitch them down to complete the cap. (Image 40 Neck opening binding.)



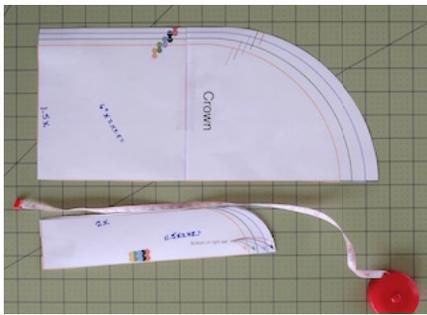
(Fig 41: Finished cap from several sides with a bow added at the back to cover the gathering hole.)

### Materials

- 1/2 yard (45.72 cm) of fabric
- 2 feet (60 cm) fine drapery cord (Roman shade cord)
- Matching thread
- Pins
- Scissors
- Disappearing marker
- Fine hand sewing needle

**Recreating a Neat School Girl Cap from Plate 9, Fig. 13 & 14 Combined with a Women's Day or Night Cap from Fig. 1**

**Step 1 Calculating the Amount of Ruffle**



Because this cap has a drawstring along the bottom edge, I chose to gather the bottom ruffle by one and a half times and the ruffle that attaches to the head-piece piece by two times. Measure both pieces and double this as they are both cut on the fold then, next multiply the crown number by 1.5 and the head-piece number by 2 to get the total length of the ruffle. (Image 42 Measuring for the ruffle.)

### Step 2 Cutting you fabric Cut your ruffle and pattern pieces.

I used some trim instead of fabric for the forehead piece. This is machine embroidered and not quite a nail wide; however, I use the pattern to round off the front edges. (Image 43 Head-piece. )



### Step 3 Join the crown and the head-piece

Sew two rows of fine (3mm) gathering stitches on both sides of the seam line as indicated on the pattern. Adjust the gathers until the edge of the crown is the same length as the long edge of the head-piece. Pin the crown and head-piece together and sew. (Image 44 Edge of head-piece and crown.)



Trim the seam allowance of the crown fabric back 1/2. (Image 45 Seam allowance being trimmed.)



Fold the seam allowance of the head-piece to encase the cap seam allowance and whip stitch this down. See the instructions for the previous cap on how to sew a flat felled seam. (Image 46 Bound seam allowance.)



From the right side you should not see any machine stitching. (Image 47 Bound seam allowance from the right side.)





#### **Step 4 Preparing the ruffle and adding it to the cap**

Join the pieces of ruffle with a flat felled stitch. Hem and sew gathering stitches as done for the other cap. With right sides together, pin the ruffle to the cap matching the Center Front, Center Back and the seam. Sew it with a 1/4" (0.64 cm) seam along the front edge. As you are stitching around the corner gradually increase the seam allowance to 5/16" (0.8 cm). (Image 48 Outside seam from the inside of the cap.)



Trim back the seam allowance of the ruffle to about half its width. (Image 49 Seam allowance of ruffle trimmed.)



Fold over the seam allowance of the cap to encase the trimmed ruffle seam allowance. Whip stitch the flat felled seam along the head-piece edge and tie off. (Image 50 Finished flat felled seam along the head-piece edge.)



From the right side you should not see any machine stitching. (Image 51 Bound seam allowance viewed from the right side.)



#### **Step 5 Adding a drawstring**

Cut a piece of drapery cord long enough to reach the center from the seam opening plus 1 or 2" (2.5 or 5 cm). Knot one end. Slip the knot under the folded seam allowance. (Image 52 Adding the cord.)



Insert the cord and pin the seam allowance without pinning into the cord. (Image 53 Pinning the seam allowance.)



Whip stitch the seam allowance down making sure you are not catching the cord except at the knot, you will want to sew through that twice to anchor your drawstring. (Image 54 Anchoring the drawstring.)



When you reach the center back tie off twice. Add another piece of cord starting from the other side to the center. To prevent the cords from fraying, tie a knot close to the free ends. (Image 55 Center front with the cords coming out of the void in stitching.)



(Image 56 Finished cap worn with a Regency era costume by Laurie Tavan. Photo by Laurie Tavan. Cap and chemisette by author.)

These are only two of the caps from The Workmoman's Handbook there are so many others play around if these two do not suit you try another.

Caption to Image 1:

- a. Artist Unidentified (British) Sitter Mrs. Thomas Gatchell (Sarah Cherry), date 1845.
- b. Artist Joshua Johnson, Sitter Barbara Baker Murphy, date ca. 1810.
- c. Artist Philip Tilyard, Sitter Mrs. III John Cockey, date ca. 1822-1827.
- d. Artist Unidentified Sitter Lettie Stanley, date ca. 1810.
- e. Artist George Catlin, Sitter Mrs. Putnam Catlin, date 1840s.
- f. Artist David Boudon, Sitter unidentified, date 1811.
- g. Attributed to Ralph Earl, Sitter unidentified, date ca. 1800.
- h. Artist James Alexander Simpson, Sitter Rachel Bartholomew Davis, date ca. 1815.
- i. Artist Ammi Phillips, Sitter Robinson, date ca. 1819.
- j. Artist Unidentified Sitter Mrs. Ebenezer Williams, date ca. 1825.
- k. Artist Frederick Mayhew, Sitter Hulda Martin, date 1826.
- l. Artist Unidentified Sitter Mrs. William Mather Smith (Helen Livington), date 1821.

- Starching your fabric before cutting it out makes for a better final product and easier construction.
- Choosing a different ruffle can change the entire look of your cap.
- Using drawstrings can save hours of time pressing your caps over its lifetime.

#### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank, first my editor, Gailynne Bouret she really helped bring it together. Then my model, Laurie Tavan, you can put anything on her and she always looks like she belongs to the time period. Lastly Noelle Paduan for lending me a camera so I could finish the article.