

White Embroidered Mull Chemise Dress



Unknown maker and place of origin

Sprigged mull (i.e. embroidered cotton plain weave)

Date of garment: 1780s, 1790s, or early 1800s

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Accession # 2019.8.1

2019 purchased from Cora Ginsburg LLC (Sharon, USA)

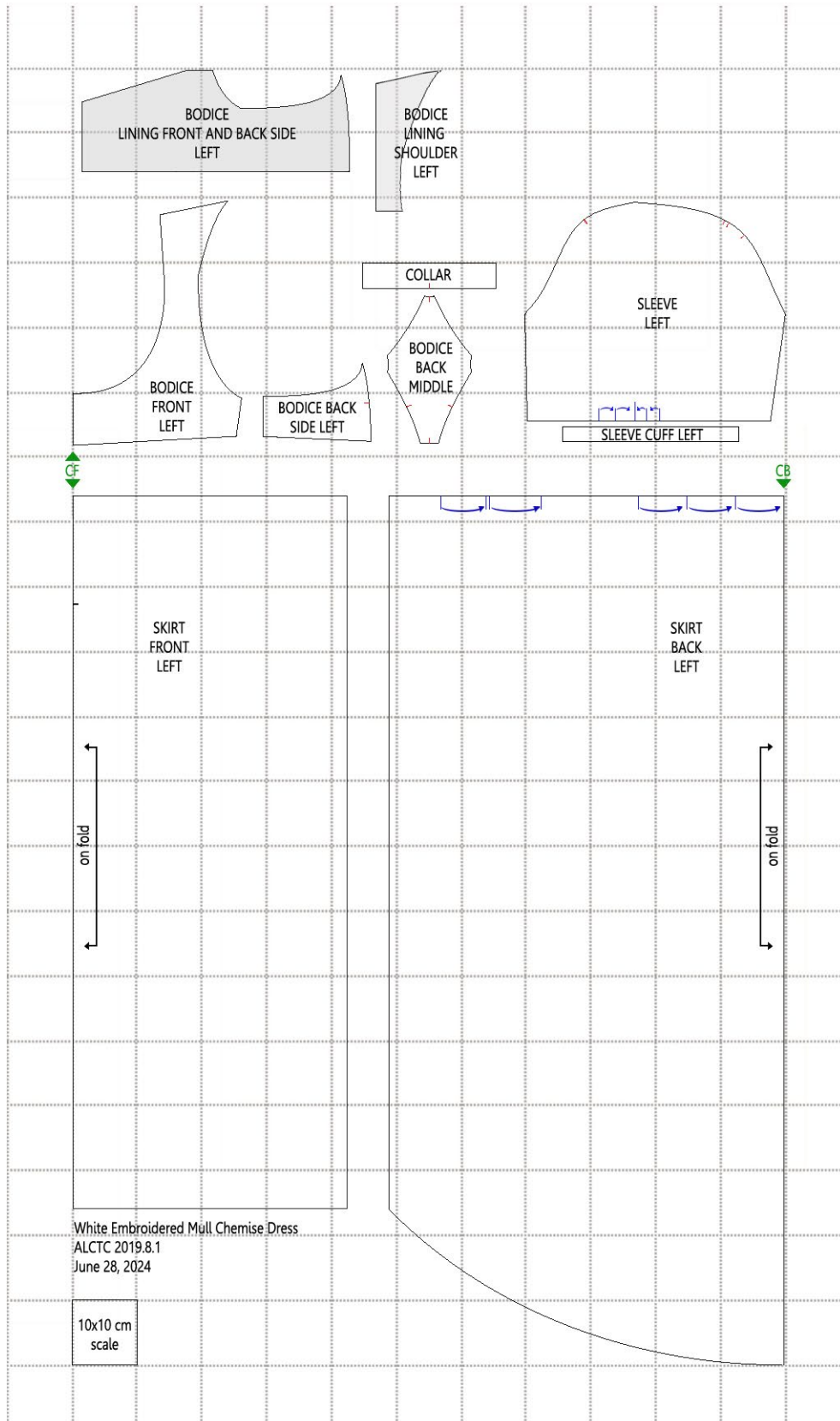


Figure 1
Pattern Diagram 2019.8.1



Figure 2
2019.8.1: Front View
Paper hair by Emily Graca, undergraduate student, and Anne Bissonnette.
Mount and photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.



Figure 3
2019.8.1: Side View
Paper hair by Emily Graca, undergraduate student, and Anne Bissonnette.
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Figure 4
2019.8.1: Back View
Paper hair by Emily Graca, undergraduate student, and Anne Bissonnette.
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Figure 5
2019.8.1: Detail of Sprigged Mull Fabric
Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.



Figure 6
2019.8.1: Sleeve and Back View Detail
Paper hair by Emily Graca, undergraduate student, and Anne Bissonnette.
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Figure 7
2019.8.1: Detail of the Front Lining Panels
Mount, paper hair and photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.



Figure 8
2019.8.1: Detail of Sleeve Cuff
Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.



Figure 9
2019.8.1: Inside View Detail
Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.

Observations

This ca. 1780s-early 1800s “sprigged” (i.e. embroidered) cotton mull chemise dress features a drawstring centre-front closure at the neckline and an elevated waistline. The below-the-elbow unlined sleeves are gathered over the shoulder and have two inverted box pleats secured by a narrow cuff (Figure 8), presenting a fullness not unlike the sleeves of a “chemise” (i.e. a woman’s linen undergarment also called a shift). This gown also has a rounded neckline similar to a chemise with the exception of a rectangular standing collar towards the back.

Under the fragile mull bodice is a lining structure of plain-woven cotton or linen. This structure comprises three pattern pieces: the same “bodice back middle” piece as the mull bodice, the “bodice lining front and back side” piece and the “bodice lining shoulder” piece. The narrow, diamond-shaped “bodice back middle” pattern piece is in a whiter fabric than the rest (Figure 9). The “bodice lining front and back side” piece is detached from the mull bodice at the side seam (i.e. the “bodice front” and “bodice back side” intersection). This lining piece gets superimposed over the wearer’s bust and fastened with pins (Figure 7) and thus protects the mull fabric from tension.

The unlined skirt is full length, can be A-line or columnal, and has a train. If the skirt did not have a train, its hem circumference would be 206 cm, which accommodates an extremely wide stride. The “skirt front” pattern piece has no pleats or gatherings at the waistline. The “skirt back” pattern piece has a triple inverted box pleat at the centre back (CB) with each pleat ca. 0.2 cm from one another. There are also two pleats near the side that are folded towards the CB on this pattern piece.

The mull fabric used is very wide (over 125 cm) and is embroidered in white with small cutwork and chain-stitched floral motifs (Figure 5). These floral motifs were likely added before the garment was cut as some motifs are cropped into seams.

Of importance:

- The use of white cotton mull, the cut and volume of the sleeve, and the round neckline of the gown serve to identify the garment as a chemise dress.
- This garment contains no selvage-to-selvage widths. The widest panel is the back skirt, which measures approximately 125 cm at its widest point.
- The lack of darts on the “bodice front” and “bodice lining front and back side” pattern pieces may suggest the gown was worn over traditional conical stays that do not delineate individual breast volumes.
- While the circumference of the skirt portion is narrowing in comparison to earlier gowns (206 cm if the skirt did not have a train), the use of one or more petticoats remains possible.
- This pattern was created early on in our pattern-taking project, therefore it was not done using the streamlined method referenced in the website’s introduction. As such, this pattern and the accompanying construction notes lack some details.

Pattern Notes:

Pattern diagram:

- All descriptions use proper left and right, unless otherwise specified.
- All patterns are placed on the grid, which corresponds to the grain line.
- Seam allowances are not included.
- The “collar,” “bodice back middle,” and “sleeve cuff” pattern pieces are presented fully, while the remaining pattern pieces are presented for one side of the body (e.g. the sleeve pattern piece is for the left sleeve only).

Garment materials:

- The selvedge is not visible so the width of the cotton mull is unknown.
- The gown is completely hand-sewn and has only a cord at the centre front neckline as a closure.

Assembly of pieces:

- The “bodice lining front” pattern piece is longer than the outer mull “bodice front” piece. The notch on the former indicates where the latter ends.
- The “skirt front” pattern piece is cut along the centre-front fold from the elevated waistline to the notch to create the centre-front opening slit.

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This garment has also been part of the virtual exhibition [Dress & Escapism Series — Part 1: Dress Artifacts & Curatorial Practices](#) (2020) where it is [dressed with a broad and a narrow waist sash](#).

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