

Avoiding Regretful Purchases

Frequently, newer reenactors come to me very excited to show me their newest purchase or find. All too often I have to break the news, while a lovely item on its own, it isn't quite right or it isn't accurate. I truly hate to see people waste money on an item they will find they can not use. Here is a list of items that most often tempt people:

Hat - Unless you are a teen, you are better off investing in a sun bonnet or fashion bonnet.

Prairie Style Sunbonnet – Sure, it looks very affordable, but it is highly unlikely it will fit your impression. You are better off with a corded or slat bonnet.

“Snoods” – If it is crochet and a color or stretchy don't even go there. You are going to want a net instead.

Striped stockings – These are fun to wear, but most stripes in the period were narrower. Choose a solid instead.

White cotton Amish stockings – These are pretty close. But, I highly suggest trying on a pair first because they don't fit most legs comfortably.

Elastic garters – These are very uncomfortable for most people. Consider ribbon or knit garters instead.

Leather belts – Ribbon belts or same fabric belts were worn with dresses. Save the leather belts for the military.

Mitts – Most mitts are synthetic unless handmade. If you are going to spend the money on well made handmade ones, check to see if they fit your impression first.

Reticules – Most reticules fabric and crochet sold just aren't what women actually used. Take a look at some Godey's illustrations or original images before picking a purse. Or, go for pockets.

Baskets – If it is a sewing basket or a market basket, you may be okay. If it is a basket you intend to use as a purse, leave it.

Tin cup – Tin cups are fine for soldiers or prisoners, not for civilians. You want china or glass.

Enameled anything – Most research shows that enameled metal was not popular until after the War. Look for tin wash pans, ironstone plates, and china or glass cups instead.

Any cooking items – Please, research period cooking and 'camp' cooking before investing in pots, pans, grates and the like.

Parasols – Battenburg or synthetic 'repro' parasols will protect you from the sun or rain but stand out as eyesores. Battenburg lace was not used for parasols in the mid-century. You want a silk parasol instead.

Wool Military blankets – The key word here is military. Leave these for the men. Instead, invest in some basic civilian wool blankets and quilts.

The Shopping Itch

You are an excited, enthusiastic new Civil War reenactor on your way to sutler row.... Stop!

There are two things you should have with you; second, a truly knowledgeable mentor; first, some of your own basic research. Have those? Okay, you can proceed.

As a new reenactor (or even as one who has been around a few years) you are no doubt tempted by the lure of tents selling a wide assortment of reenactor wares. But, what do you *really* need?

Here are some fairly safe purchases when you have that shopping itch:

Gloves – Depending on your impression, this could be a safe purchase. Make sure of the materials first.

Collars and cuffs – If you don't already have these and they are constructed well. Purchase them. If you already have some, you can still use more. Make sure they fit your dress correctly first.

Underpinnings – You can always use multiple sets of chemises, drawers and petticoats. If these are constructed properly and you don't sew yourself, these can be a smart purchase.

Jewelry – 19th century bling sure is tempting. If it is a piece you absolutely love and later you find out it is not right, you can still use it for modern wear.

Fans – Correct fans are nice to have around. Most often you see the sandalwood fans at events. Please, take off the synthetic tassel. Not only does it scream synthetic, it can stain your clothes if it gets wet.

Housewives and Needle-cases – These are great items to have on hand. A good purchase.

Fabric bags – If you don't sew at all, these can be nice to have to organize things in.

Candles – If you have a lantern, it is nice to have extra candles and matches on hand.

Books – I can't say now to buying books. This is one of the best items to purchase.

Tent stakes – If you have a tent, it never hurts to have extra stakes.

Soap Stones – If it is a cold event and you don't deal well with the cold, you may consider one. Make sure you know how to use it!!