

# The Farmer's Favorite

## Building a believable 19th century hat

by John F. Graf

*Editor's note: The following article originally appeared in Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine, Vol. X, No. 1, Spring, 1989. Although aimed at museum professionals and historic site interpreters, this article offers some very sound advice that can be applied to civilian headgear in our ranks. Mr. Graf is the Director of Interpretation at Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site and this material appears through his kind permission.*

Quality interpretation at a living history museum depends on strict attention to detail. If it is the museum's goal to create a believable depiction of another time, then that museum must exercise extreme caution in selecting its interpretive tools. When the living history site uses the "out of sight, out of mind," method of interpretation, it runs the risk of the public catching them at their game and destroying the illusion they have worked so hard to create.

There are several good forms of reproduction civilian headgear on the market. One of the most common forms, the wool felt hat, has not been adequately reproduced, however. To wear one of the currently available hats in an unmodified form, the interpreter runs the risk of jeopardizing the illusion of his 19th century impression.

Haentze Hatcrafters of 20 N. Springfield, Clifton Heights, PA 19018,



FIGURE 2. 1/6th plate tintype of a man wearing a woolen hat similar to Haentze's Quaker. (From the author's collection.)

manufactures a couple of excellent forms with which to begin creating an accurate reproduction of the style of woolen hat popular from about 1835 to the end of the 19th century (see figures 1 and 2). Haentze's hat style no. 60 called the Quaker, and no. 285 called the Priest are shipped ready to wear with a vinyl sweatband and synthetic ribbon and binding. For situations where an interpreter does not remove his hat or come too near the public, these hats are fine without any modification. Most interpreters do, however, interact closely with the public and do remove their hats. With a few modifications, the

simple act of an interpreter removing his hat will enhance rather than endanger his 19th century impression.

After receiving your hat from Haentze, you must decide how you want to line it. Generally, 19th century hats were lined. Two documented types of linings are shown in Figures 3 and 4. A member of the Bishop Hill Colony at Bishop Hill, Illinois wore a hat with a style 1 lining about 1860.<sup>1</sup> James W. Poague, a Confederate soldier, wore a hat with a style 2 lining which can be found at the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>2</sup>

Having chosen which lining to put into your hat, first use a seam ripper to remove the ribbon, the binding around the edge of the brim, and the sweatband. Assemble your desired lining using silk, polished cotton, or printed cotton. Fit the lining into the crown taking care not to go through the felt crown but rather just catching it. With the lining now in place, whip stitch a band of dyed, lightweight leather, 1 5/8" to 1 3/4" wide, along the base of the crown and over the lining material (see Figure 5).

With the lining completed, you can begin work on the hat exterior. Hand stitch a silk ribbon, generally of the same color as the hat, 1 1/4" to 1 1/2" wide, around the base of the crown folding it to form a bow on the side of the hat. Finally, a 1" silk binding is sewn to the brim using an enlarged buttonhole stitch for hats prior to 1855 (see Figure 6) or machine stitched if later (on the Poague hat, however, it is hand stitched).

Doing these simple modifications will enhance the quality and depth of your living history impression. Do not be disappointed though if a visitor never compliments you on the accuracy of your hat. Our successes are measured not by what the visitor recognizes but rather, by what he does not recognize.

Figure 1



No. 60 QUAKER



No. 285 PRIEST



**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> As part of the clothing distributed to each male member of the Colony the issue book records a "Hat" with a slash or the letter "y" for ylle, the Swedish-English word for woolen. See "Clothing Issues, 1859," Bishop Hill Heritage Association, Bishop Hill, Illinois.

<sup>2</sup> Michael R. Thomas, *A Confederate Sketchbook*, (Fredericksburg: Michael R. Thomas, 1980), p.12.

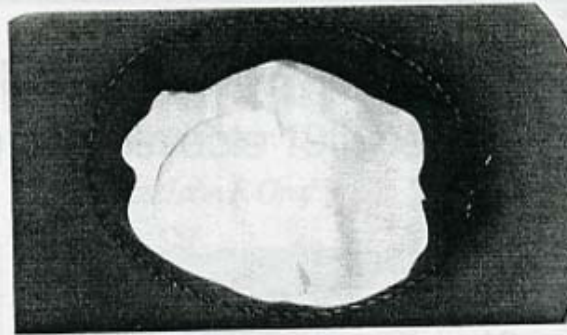


Figure 3 (Left) Style 1 lining as found on Bishop Hill, Illinois hat, Bishop Hill Heritage Association.

Figure 4 (Below) Style 2 lining as found in the James W. Poague hat, Museum of the Confederacy.

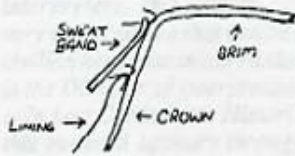


Figure 5. Detail of sweatband and lining attachment. In both cases, the needle only catches the hat's felt rather than piercing it.



Figure 6. Detail of the enlarged buttonhole stitch used to attach the brim binding.

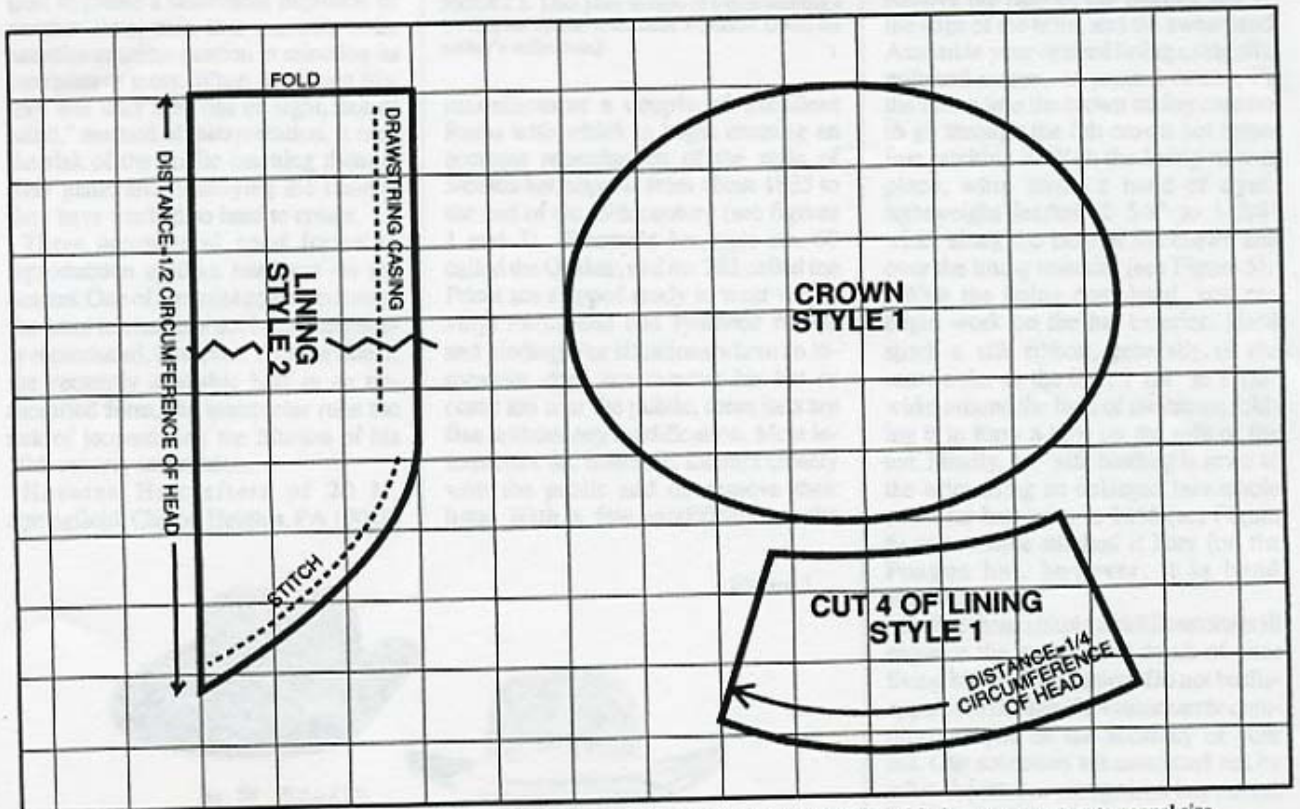
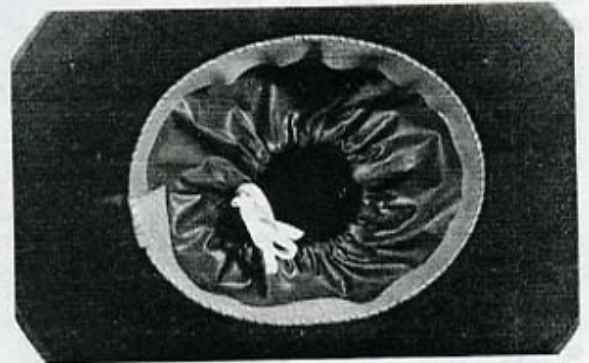


Figure 7. Patterns for style 1 and style 2 hat linings. Pattern has been proportionally reduced. Enlarge grid to 1 inch squares to return to normal size.