

Equestrienne CDVs: Portraits of Riding Habits
by Dr. Holly Ray

For many years, I have been an avid collector of Victorian equestrienne images, and the ones from the 1860s are my “Holy Grails.” It has become part of my daily ritual to peruse the Internet for these elusive images. My ladies have travelled to me from Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, and from various states.

Because they are a niche subset of the CDV population, equestrienne images tend to command a higher price than those in the general pool. I have found good fortune on occasion, such as when a lady in a riding habit was mislabeled as a vivandiere, and when listings have been overlooked due to misspellings in titles.

In addition to CDVs, I also collect stereoviews, ambrotypes, and tintypes, all of which will be included in this study. While European images and American images have more similarities than differences, there are some recurrent nuances that are worthy of note.

As I stress in my other article regarding the reading of CDVs, ALWAYS look at the entire image, front and back. Use magnification with light, and look again! Just as the eye and mind become habituated to recognizing styles of other clothing from the 1860s, so too will you become accustomed to identifying riding habits through the decades.

Habits followed the trends in other clothing. In the 1850s, waists were longer and many habit bodices were of the basque style which tended to fall at or below the hips. The next decade brought a higher waist and a much shorter peplum, if it existed at all.

Various types of hats worn included wool and straw hats with flat or shaped brims, the Mousquetaire, top hats of beaver or silk plush, turbans, and more rarely, jockey caps. Habits tended to be somewhat conservative, dispensing of flapping tassels and fringe, BUT many are fancier than what is first observed with a cursory glance. I am often surprised at how elaborate the trimming is when observed with light and magnification. Keep in mind that not every lady who rode sidesaddle wore a habit. Those who posed for a photo in their habit were often ladies from a more advantaged lifestyle.

Horses of the period tended to be thinner and less muscled than our horses today. It was not uncommon for English horses to have a bobbed tail, and longer tails were sometimes drawn on the image to make it more aesthetically pleasing. English riders are often depicted with a groom, seemingly more often than their American counterparts. Mounted riders were most often photographed from the “off side” (the side of the saddle on which the skirt hangs freely, which is most often the right side), showing the full length of the skirt, but four images in this discussion are photographed on the “near side” which allows us to visualize the saddle.

The next section will contain my interpretation of each image with a summary of both salient and subtle points. Images are from the 1860s unless otherwise noted for comparative purposes.

- 1) 1850s, Dublin, Ireland. This basque bodice has coat sleeves with chevron trim and decorated undersleeve cuffs. One of the gauntlets is on the pedestal with the brimless straw hat and has a hole in the forefinger. She is wearing a corsage and brooch and holds a park whip with tassel.

Ray, Image 1. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 2) Hartford, CT. The exquisite bodice with open sleeves of this upper class lady is heavily trimmed with braid on the large folded triangular cuffs, chest, and points. Matching buttons adorn the cuffs. A button is present on the skirt near her forefinger, the purpose of which is to fasten the train when dismounted so that she may walk. She is wearing cross earrings that look to be hairwork and a neck bow with a central white star. She holds gauntlets while her whip rests upon the heavily trimmed hat.

Ray, Image 2. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 3) No back mark and a 2 cent tax stamp. The bodice with coat sleeves is heavily decorated on the shoulders and sleeves, with a 3X3 pattern of what may be black velvet squares and the same material adorns the top of the shoulders. The brimmed hat is heavily decorated with flowers and streamers.

Ray, Image 3. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 4) New York City. The bodice with coat sleeves is heavily trimmed with buttons along the edges, and there are five rows of buttons from bust to waist. She wears a jockey cap with a thin strap under the chin, short gloves, a velvet neck bow, large cuffs, and holds an ivory-handled park whip.

Ray, Image 4. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 5) Hamilton, Canada West (now Ontario). The wool habit is plain with coat sleeves. She wears a neck bow and the gloved hand holds an ivory-handled park whip—the other glove rests on the table with a heavily feathered hat.

Ray, Image 5. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 6) Oakland, CA, late 1860s. The teenage girls appear to be twins. Their wool habits with coat sleeves are heavily decorated with buttons at the armhole. They each hold gauntlets and an ivory park whip with silk tassel, and each wears a watch and chain.

Ray, Image 6. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 7) Scotland, back inscription: “Welsh (referring to Welsh pony?) Ewerhille.” Plain habit of thicker wool or velvet has coat sleeves. Her lovely hat has a curved brim and bears a large ribbon flower/bow on the front. Since the subject is photographed from the offside, we can see that the saddle is an example of a transitional 3-horned sidesaddle bearing a handkerchief pocket. She carries a ferruled park whip.

Ray, Image 7. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 8) Edinburgh, Scotland. The plain wool habit bears coat sleeves and the young lady wears her gauntlets and holds her park whip and straw hat adorned with lace.

Ray, Image 8. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 9) No back mark. The plain wool habit bears modified coat sleeves to allow the puffy undersleeves to show. She is wearing gloves, neck bow, earrings, and is wearing a shallow crowned hat with plume and veil. She carries a very fancy ivory handled park whip.

Ray, Image 9. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 10) Boston, MA. Bolero jacket has coat sleeves bearing contrasting trim at the wrists and edges. One hand is gloved and holds the opposite glove and ferruled park whip, watch, and chain. The brimmed hat is decorated with a Chantilly lace veil and is secured with a large silk bow.

Ray, Image 10. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 11) Melbourne, Australia. Wool bodice has a short peplum and coat sleeves with a row of tiny buttons down the center front. She is wearing a neck bow, earrings, and a hat heavily decorated with flowers, feathers, and a bow. She holds a park whip with a silk tassel.

Ray, Image 11. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 12) Two tintypes of upper class Cora Moffit. The skirt is likely wool, and her Zouave jacket is heavily decorated with braid. Her Mousquetaire hat bears a huge feather pad and long trailing tulle veiling. Her horse wears a crupper, martingale, and a double bridle with tassel (we often see tassels on Victorian bridles).

Ray, Images 12 and 12a. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 13) Tintype, no identification. The plain wool habit with coat sleeves has a row of three buttons at the wrists and has a short peplum. She is wearing a toque hat, watch, and chain and the horse wears a tassel on the bridle with a full cheek bit. A saddle blanket is visible at the withers.

Ray, Image 13. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

- 14) England, Miss Leeke. The bodice of this wool habit has a short square skirt at the back and has a double row of braiding and buttons on the coat sleeves. The Mousquetaire hat has a large feather pad or cockade on the center front. She holds a hunt whip. The saddle is a three-horned transitional saddle with handkerchief pocket. The horse has a bobbed tail and is wearing a double bridle.

England, Miss C. Leeke. She is wearing a looser jacket with contrasting trim along the edges and cuffs, and she holds a park whip. Her hat and saddle are like her older sister's, and the pony has a Pelham bit.

Ray, Images 14 and 14a. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

15) England. Little girl wears a fancy dress, cape with scalloped edges, and a heavily feathered hat; she holds a whip. Her pony has a full-cheek bit. Mother's dress is a small check pattern lavishly trimmed with ribbons and bows. She is wearing a long cape, feather-trimmed hat, and gloves.

Ray, Image 15. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

16) No back mark. The wool habit has chevron trim on the coat sleeves. Many buttons adorn the front, and she wears gauntlets while holding her park whip with silk tassel. She wears a top hat with veiling.

Ray, Image 16. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

17) Tintype, no identification. The plain wool habit has coat sleeves and the pork pie hat is trimmed with feathers and streamers. She is wearing a gold brooch. The backdrop appears to be a makeshift studio for "out in the field."

Ray, Image 17. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

18) England, late 1850s/early 1860s. Plain wool habit with basque bodice. Hat is heavily decorated with feathers. Horse has bobbed tail that artist has embellished.

Ray, Image 18. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

19) East Dereham, England. Plain wool habit with square skirt on back of bodice, and coat sleeves. Mousquetaire hat has a large round feather pad. The pony wears a Pelham bit, and it is noteworthy that the pony looks way too small for the rider and her leg position is quite awkward.

Ray, Image 19. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

20) European beach vacation. The rider on the donkey is not wearing a habit, but a skirt with scalloped hem, a sacque coat and beautiful hat.

Ray, Image 20. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

21) Whitchurch, England, July 30, 1867. The plain wool bodice has coat sleeves, and she is wearing a neck bow, corsage, top hat with black Chantilly lace, and holds an ivory ferruled park whip.

Ray, Image 21. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

22) Glasgow, Scotland, 1870s. The bodice of the wool habit is heavily embellished with three rows of buttons. She wears a neck bow, top hat with Chantilly lace, and holds a park whip. The coat sleeves are fitting closer now than in the previous decade.

Ray, Image 22. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

23) Stereoview, Chestnut Hill area of Philadelphia. Child is wearing a sacque coat trimmed on the sleeves and border. Her hat is heavily decorated with feathers. A hitching post is

noted, and the gorgeous stone barn and stately home illustrate that this is a wealthy family. Little sister supervises from the step.

Ray, Image 23. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

24) Stereoview, England, "Out for a Ride." The plain wool habit has coat sleeves, and she is wearing gauntlets and holds her park whip. She wears a brooch, watch and chain, earrings, and a heavily feathered toque hat. Entire image is colorized.

Ray, Image 24. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

25) Ambrotype, late 1850s/early 1860s. The child is wearing a matching skirt and sacque coat. I believe she is using a rail saddle and the pony is wearing a crupper. Note that the skirt nearly touches the ground.

Ray, Image 25. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

26) Philadelphia, Pa. The wool habit with coat sleeves has contrasting buttons. There is a button on the front of the skirt just as the one in *image 2*. She is wearing gauntlets, a neck bow, long drop earrings, and a plume in her brimmed hat. She holds an ivory handled whip with a silk tassel.

Ray, Image 26. From the collection of the author. Used with permission.

I have many more equestrienne images and the collection is constantly growing. I think the most rewarding part of this research is the rediscovering of tiny details that have been lost to time. My goal is to one day write a book with detailed descriptions of each image. I love to discuss this topic and I am available to provide programs about sidesaddles and riding habits.