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HANGING IT UP OR NOT: CLOTHING STORAGE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

By Virginia Mescher

Clothes hangers and closets are such an integral part of our lives that clothing storage in the nineteenth century remains a mystery to most of us. Although some houses, owned by more affluent people, did have built-in storage for clothing, most did not; cupboards, wardrobes, shelves, bureaus, and drawers were used for clothing storage. Even in houses with closets, clothes were not hung on hangers and hangers hung on rods; they used pegs or hooks for hanging longer items, such as dresses and cloaks, and shelves or drawers were used for folded items. If, in the rare instances when hangers were used, heavy items such as cloaks or outer-wear coats were hung from them.

Images of early hangers, from ancient Egypt and Greece are shown on the web site of the Museum of Coathangers. Also shown are several early nineteenth century coat hangers, one which dates to 1809 and was made by Albert Trou; it had a wooden frame which was padded with cotton and covered with wool and was found among Napoleon Bonaparte's effects upon his death in 1821. Wire and wooden hangers dating from 1835 are displayed Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë's home in Haworth, England and were supposedly made by a local carpenter. A padded wire/wood silk-covered hanger from 1840 is also shown on the museum web site which was made by Stanley Fry, a confectioner, and the hanger was part of a set of ten that was presented to Queen Victoria upon her marriage to Albert. All the above hangers were of European origin but there is little evidence that these hangers were mass produced and readily available to the general public. A quote from an 1873 issue of the *Young Englishwoman* explained the advantage of hangers. "Hangers . . . will be found very advantageous for hanging up heavy articles of dress, as winter cloaks, etc." From this quote, it seems that hangers were not necessarily a part of every household.

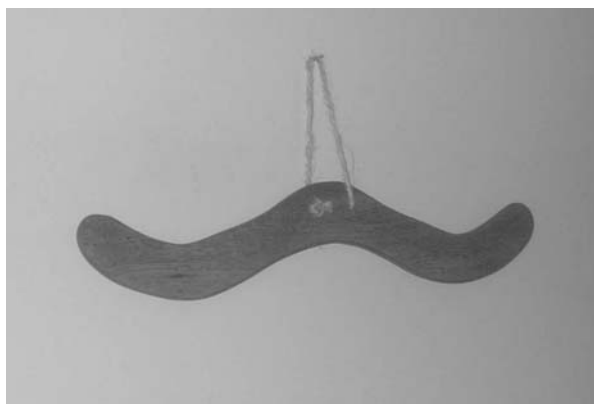
A number of secondary sources indicate that Thomas Jefferson invented the clothes hanger. Not being able to document the statement, the author contacted Monticello and received the following reply from Bryan Craig, a research librarian at the museum. He replied, "I don't think Thomas Jefferson invented the clothes hanger. This allegation might have an origin however. At the foot of his bed, Jefferson had a clothes horse that had more than 40 projecting 'hands' on which he hung his coats and waistcoats. He turned this with a long stick. It was a unique item; we don't have pictures and I don't think he invented it but it was described in Merrill Peterson's *Visitors to Monticello* and Susan Stein's *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*."

TYPES OF HANGERS

FLAT WOODEN HANGERS

Various secondary sources attribute the Shakers with the invention of the coat hanger. They did produce a shaped flat wooden coat hanger but it did not hook over a rod; it was hung from hooks or pegs by a loop of twine or cord strung through holes in the top of the wooden form. There is no mention of this type of hanger being in common use outside the Shaker communities but an illustration of a similar hanger was shown in an 1876 article in *The American Agriculturist*. Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky has a number of wooden hangers in their collections similar to the one pictured in *The American*

Agriculturist along with other variations. Reproductions of this type of hanger are available at Pleasant Hill gift shops. Shaker Workshops at <http://www.shakerworkshops.com/> also has reproduction hangers. Having attempted to use this type of hanger, it is evident that it is not an ideal solution for hanging dresses; the arms of the hanger is inserted into the sleeves of the dress the garment is distorted at the neck and shoulders. They may work if two loops were sewn into the waistline of the skirt and each loop was hung from the arms of the hanger.



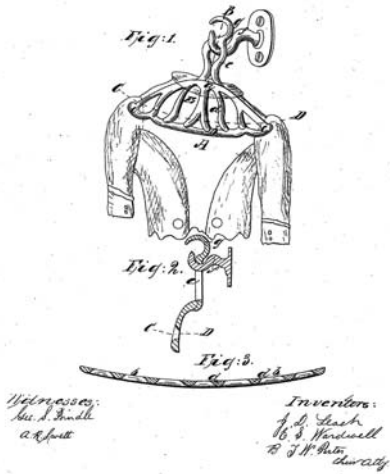
This hanger is 13 1/4 inches wide and from 1 to 1 1/2 inches tall

Numerous other types of wooden hangers were patented but there is little evidence that they were commonly used by most people in the United States. Other than a brief mention in one patent application and an article in 1876, there is no reference to their use in descriptions of clothing storage methods. In England, there is some indication that wooden hangers were made by local carpenters but little mention is made of the hangers and their use. In 1885, the Metropolitan Hotel in New York, commissioned Steinberg and Company to manufacture wire/wooden hangers that were used in the hotel; these hangers were used until 1965 when the hotel was demolished. Please refer to the web site of the Museum of Coathangers for illustrations and additional information.

WIRE HANGERS

Since wire hangers were a later invention, little space will be devoted to their description. The first patent for a wire hanger was granted in 1869 but there was no documentation that they were manufactured until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Popular legends give credit to Albert J. Porterhouse for the 1903 invention of the wire hanger but a similar twisted wire hanger had

E. N. Snow,
Coat Hanger
Leach & Wardwell, v. *J. 1869.*
Coat and Cloak Hanger.
N^o 79,580. Patented July 7, 1868.



Snow Patent Hanger

been previously patented on December 7, 1869 (#97,562) by E. N. Snow and in subsequent years, many others were patented. Between 1900 and 1906 there were 189 patents issued for wire coat hanger-like items and this does not include other types of hangers.

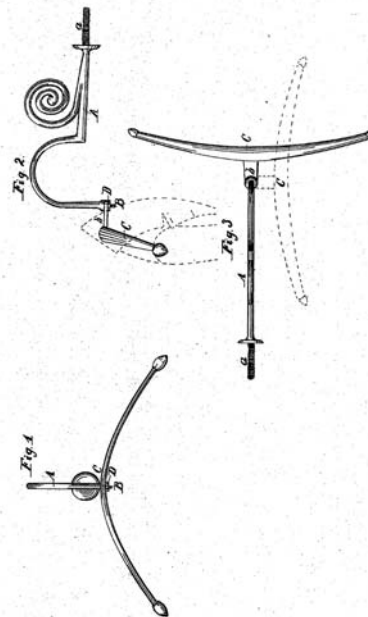
Wire hangers did not take the place of wooden hangers but were introduced as an improvement in hangers. In 1876, the *American Agriculturist* printed an article on hanging up coats and vests. The illustration showed a flat wooden hanger with a string loop at the top, similar to those the Shakers devised but there was no reference made to the Shakers. Along with the wooden hanger, a simple wire hanger was shown and described as, "A heavy wire, . . . answers to hang up vests. Supports for both vests and coats, made of heavy copper wire, are sold by street vendors, in cities, but any one can make one equally useful, if less showy ones, out of ordinary fence or bailing wire." Both of the hangers illustrated had closed loops and were hung from hooks rather than from a rod.

HANGER PATENTS

[Author’s note: Please realize that just because a product was patented on a specific date, it does not mean that the patented item was available on that date or that it was ever manufactured. The patent dates should be used only as a guideline for dating but should not be the only criteria used in dating a particular invention or item.]

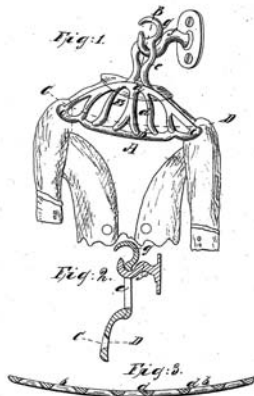
In looking at patents, no documentation was found that the Shakers ever patented the flat wooden clothes hanger. The first patent, for a hanger, was issued to W. B. Olds on April 6, 1852 (#8,858) and the title was a "coat-form." In his application, Mr. Olds described his invention as "consists in a bow or shank on one side opposite to its vertex, or pivoted to a bracket which is secured in a wall, or to any stationary standard or pendants horizontally upon the pivot." This hanger was permanently attached to a wall rather than being portable and was intended for displaying ready-to-wear clothing rather than a hanger

W. B. OLDS.
 REVOLVING COAT FORM.
 No. 8,858. Patented Apr. 6, 1852.



Olds Patent

*Leach & Wardwell,
Coat and Cloak Hanger.
N^o 79,580. Patented July 7, 1868.*



*Witnesses:
Geo. J. Smith
A. R. Pratt*

*Inventors:
J. D. Leach
E. S. Wardwell
By J. H. Allen
Attorney*

for home use. Although Mr. Olds' patent was for retail use, he provided us with an excellent description of existing hangers and the problem encountered with using them. "The only coat form in common use, consists of a bent stick suspended at about the middle of its length by a string, which draws upon the collar and injures its shape."

The next hanger patent was issued to J. D. Leach and E. S. Wardwell on July 7, 1868 (#79,580) and was used as a coat and cloak-hanger and was formed of cast iron or wood. This hanger was portable but still was hung by a loop-type device rather than a hook over a rod. The first wire coat patent was issued to E. N. Snow (#97,562) was an improvement on Leach and Wardwell's patent for "Coat and Cloak Hanger."

PRACTICAL CLOTHING STORAGE

Clothing storage is not just about hangers; they were not commonly used and could not be used for every type of garment.

Leach and Wardell Patent Clothing still needed to be stored in some way so alternative storage methods were employed. Perhaps the best way to discover how clothing was stored in the nineteenth century is to study primary sources. Below are a number of excerpts on short-term clothing storage, folding, hanging, and long-term storage of garments. Note: The original spelling was retained in the direct quotes.

The Workwoman's Guide described, in detail, on how clothing was folded and stored and the type of available storage. "Care of The Lady's Wardrobe. It is of great consequence that dresses should be carefully and neatly put away, as their preservation depends much on the attention paid to this: a gown smoothly folded, and laid by directly it is taken off, will last half as long again as one that is thrown about upon dirty chairs, or tumbled and creased in the wrapping up. The dresses that are in constant use may be hung up in a closet; but those that are only occasionally worn, should be folded up and wrapped either in linen cloth, or covered with the coarsest brown paper; the latter is particularly good for white silk or satin dresses, as the turpentine in it excludes the air, and thus preserves the colour more effectually than any thing else.

The best way to fold a dress, either when put away or packed up, is as follows: —

Place your gown upon a bed, so that the front and back breadths, lay on upon the other quite flatly, the back breadth being uppermost, and the slit behind in the center, then fold the two outer sides over so as to make them meet down the middle of the back; take hold of the bottom of the skirt, and double it underneath the gown for about a quarter of a yard deep, then fold the upper part of the skirt forwards, to lie above it, turn back the body and arrange it and the sleeves neatly, so as not to crush them or the trimming, turning the sleeves in towards the middle; then take hold of the upper two folds of the gown, and by lifting them up, the tail falls down again

without displacing the upper part of the dress: this tail or bottom of the gown is turned up over the sleeves and body: a pin is put in at each end, and thus the dress may be carried about, or packed up without tumbling it in the least. It may be well to mention that the reason the bottom of the skirt is turned up in the first instance, is to determine the size to which the body is to be folded, and the reason why it is let down in the second, is, that it may preserve the body, &c., from being crushed. The dress may be folded to fit any drawer or trunk by wrapping the sides more or less over each other in the middle. This is called the French method of folding; it may appear rather complicated at first, but by exactly following the directions here given, and a little practice, it will soon become easy.

To wrap up a child's frock, place it on a bed, so that the front and back breadths lie one upon the other quite flatly, the back being uppermost; fold the skirt once or twice, according to the length, letting the body lie upon the skirt, and turn the two ends over the centre.

After travelling, dresses are apt to be creased, they should therefore be hung up, either in a closet, or on hooks fixed in the wall; they should never be pinned to a bed or window curtains, as this is very bad practice and is apt to tear the chintz. . .

. . . a very convenient wardrobe for ladies' dresses, heavy linen, bonnets, caps, furs, sleeves &c., and is contrived as follows. The centre is divided into two compartments, the upper is enclosed with doors, and contains sliding trays for dresses, collars, &c., the rest, consisting of drawers, contains heavy linen. The left hand wing has one door from top to bottom, in which a mirror is fixed. This closet is intended for dresses to be hung in, and the drawers below to put away furs, &c. The closet on the other side holds bonnets in the upper part, and shoes in the lower, each part having a door to itself. . .

Care of the Gentleman's Wardrobe. . . The following is the best method for folding a coat for travelling, or for putting away in a wardrobe, where there is not much room: —

Lay the coat at its full length upon a table, with the collar towards the left hand; pull out the collar, so as to make it lie quite straight; turn up the coat towards the collar, letting the crease be just at the elbow; let the lapel or breast on one side, be turned smoothly back on the arm and sleeves. Turn the skirt over the lapel, so that the end of the skirt will reach the collar, and the crease or folding will be just where the skirts part at the bottom of the waist; when you have done one side, do the same with the other. Turn the collar towards the right hand, fold one skirt over the other, observing to let the fold be in the middle of the collar.

It is advisable to have about a yard and a half of brown Holland in which to wrap the coat, trowsers, and waiscoat; this will keep them clean and free from dust.”

Eliza Leslie in her book, *Miss Leslie's House-Book*, there was an extensive section on closets and the storage of women's clothing as well as information on bandboxes and traveling luggage. “RECEPTACLES FOR DRESSES, &c. — In building or altering a house, it will be found an excellent plan to construct a range of large closets (three in number) between the two principal chambers on each floor; the central closet having two doors (one opening into the front room and one into the back,) and two tiers of deep shelves. In summer, by throwing open both these doors, you may have a fine draught of air through the rooms. On the inside of each door let hooks be fixed for hanging up dresses. Of the other two closets, one may belong to each room; or, if uniformity of doors is particularly desired, the middle closet (being the largest) may be appropriated for the occupants of one chamber, and the side closets to those of the other.

A ward-robe, or commode, is an almost indispensable article of furniture for a chamber, particularly if there is no large closet or press. In spacious rooms occupied by two persons, there are frequently two commodes. Those are perhaps most convenient that have a tier of shelves on each side, and a space in the middle furnished with two rows of large brass or iron hooks, on which to suspend dresses or coats; the linen and smaller articles to be laid on shelves.

Exclusive of the large wardrobes that are tall enough to contain dresses hanging up, there is a smaller sort, about the size and height of a bureau, with four shelves instead of drawers, all enclosed by a two-leveled door, opening in the front. They stand on castors, and are made of mahogany or stained wood, and have advantages over bureaus, as they preclude the trouble of pulling drawers in and out; the whole being opened by a door, one lock suffices for all. Every thing that you would keep in a drawer can be laid just as conveniently on the shelves of one of these low commodes.

There is frequently much trouble with the handles of bureau drawers, particularly if they are of glass, as they are very apt to come off in your hand. So, indeed, are the plated and brass handles. Those of mahogany keep their places best, and have been introduced very successfully on the handsomest bureaus. Unless the top of a bureau is marble, it is usual to cover it with a white cloth, either of damask linen, or of dimity, fringed. If a drawer is apt to stick in damp weather, the inconvenience may be remedied by nicely paring away with a knife a little of the wood on the side edges.

Bandboxes are seldom used now, except for the convenience of conveying a cap, bonnet, or dress to the house of a friend or milliner. They are rarely found among the baggage of a genteel female traveler, square wooden boxes, with locks, keys, and handles, being substituted for them. These wooden boxes are generally tall enough to contain a folded dress under the bonnet or other millinery, and should be painted on the outside. They will last for many years, will bear exposure, and can go outside with the rest of the baggage. Tall square leather trunks are sometimes used for carrying bonnets, &c. A paste-board bandbox ought to have a strong loop of twine, red tape [red cotton twill tape used to tie documents together], or galloon [a trimming of wool, silk, cotton, worsted or a combination of fiber], passed through one side, large enough to slip over the hand in carrying it. To secure the lid, bore two holes in it near the edges, one on each side, and pass through them strong pieces of string, each about a quarter of a yard in length, fastened by a knot on the inside. Make two corresponding holes near the upper edge of the bandbox itself, and pass a similar string through each of them. Then put on the lid, and tie each pair of strings in a tight bow knot. These is no better way of keeping a bandbox fast."

Emily Thornwell described clothing storage in her book *The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility*. "A clothes-press or closet is indispensable in disposing of dresses, cloaks, mantillas, etc. Nice dresses should always be turned wrong side out, and suspended by one or two loops, fastened to the bottom of the waist-lining. Cloaks should also be suspended by means of loops inside the neck. Laces, handkerchiefs, and all small fancy articles, should be deposited in bureau drawers, where they will be protected from dust and air."

Catherine Beecher, in *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, included instructions for folding gentlemen's coats and shirts and women's frocks. "*On Packing and Storing Articles*. Fold a gentleman's coat thus: — Lay it on a table or bed, the inside downward, and unroll the collar.

Double each sleeve once, making the crease at the elbow, and laying them so as to make the fewest wrinkles, and parallel with the skirts. Turn the fronts over the back and sleeves, and then turn up the skirts, making all as smooth as possible.

Fold a shirt, thus: — One that has a bosom-piece inserted, lay on a bed, bosom downward. Fold each sleeve twice, and lay it parallel with the sides of the shirt. Turn the two sides with the sleeves, over the middle part, and then turn up the bottom, with two folds. This makes the collar and bosom lie, unpressed on the outside.

Fold a frock, thus: — Lay its front downwards, so as to make the first creases in folding come in the side breadths. To do this, find the middle of the side breadths by first putting the middle of the front and back breadths together. Next, fold over the side creases so as just to meet the slit behind. Then fold the skirt again, so as to make the backs lie together within and the fronts without. Then arrange the waist and sleeves, and fold the skirt around them.”

In June 1860 issue of *Godey's* the following advice was given.
‘THE WARDROBE.

‘How do you hang up your dresses?’ asks a sensible English woman, writing to a ladies' magazine, and then proceeds to answer the question.

Probably like ninety-nine English and Scotch women in a hundred, either by one sleeve, or both, if you have pegs to spare, while a cloak will be hooked on by or under the collar, and, when it falls down, which probably it will, be hung up again, with rather more of the material crumpled up over a hook than it had before, but not in security after all.

But, supposing you can have a nicely made dress from a nice French dressmaker, you would find proper loops for the *express* purpose of hanging up the garment, either at the waist or at the tops of the inside of the sleeves. For a cloak, the silk loop would be placed beneath the collar inside, as is done by good *English* tailors with gentlemen's overcoats. I think all persons would find the expedient of the loops for all dresses a great improvement upon the general fashion of unsafe and untidy danglings necessitated by the want of them; and dressmakers who wished to acquire a reputation for '*knowing what's what*' could not do better than add loops *a la Francaise* (in the French mode) without being particularly requested so to do. All dresses left hanging in a room should be covered with a cloth or curtain. Cloaks and dresses exposed to rough or out-of-door wear, and destined to *keep other garments clean*, should not be turned inside out, that which comes near the finer dresses beneath being what is really of most importance to preserve from dust or accident.

Shawls should be folded in the crease, and laid in a drawer or box; mantles and mantillas always folded from the dust, or they will soon have a “rusty, dusty, fusty” look. Gloves are serviceable twice as long, if the fingers are drawn out when they are taken off, the glove stretched lengthwise, and laid away. Under-sleeves and collars are more often soiled by being tossed on or under the dressing-table than by actual wear, and every clear-starching breaks and rots the fibres of the muslin, until the work separates from it in an untimely rent. Shoes, gaiters especially, should be protected from the dust by a shoe-bag, basket, or drawer, for there is more economy in order and carefulness than in the miserly pinching which the lack of it often forces the careless to resort to.”

FURNITURE USED FOR CLOTHING STORAGE

Since wardrobes tended to play such an important part of clothing storage, a description of them is an integral part of any discussion on clothing storage. The following descriptions of various wardrobes and chests of drawers are taken from the *Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy*.

“Wardrobes are far more convenient for keeping apparel than chests of drawers formerly in general use. In wardrobes, the dresses are hung up, or laid on shelves which draw out, and are therefore not injured by folding; also, by unlocking one or two doors the whole is exposed to view, or secured by locking them, without the trouble of employing the lock and key of each drawer. Wardrobes are made of various forms and states, according to the particular uses for which they are required, or the expense to be gone to, and they are accordingly constructed of various woods, as mahogany, wainscot, or deal painted.

Fig. 455 represents one of the simplest and cheapest wardrobes, being a press with folding doors and sliding shelves. At the bottom is a deep drawer for holding bonnets and caps; those are best placed upon bonnet-holders within the drawer, *fig. 456* or hung on hooks fixed in the inside of the drawers, as in *fig.*

457. Drawers certainly exclude the dust better than sliding shelves; and they may be equally convenient if the fronts are made to fold down in the manner of a pianoforte; this is shown just above the deep drawer.

But the most complete mode of excluding all dust from delicate things

is to have each drawer covered by four pieces of paper fixed by paste to the upper edges of the drawer. Two of these paper, which must be in width more than half that of the drawer, and consequently lap over each other, are first folded down, and over them the other two, as shown in *fig. 458*. In many cases two only will be found sufficient. The paper should be rather thin and pliable.

Fig. 459 is another wardrobe, with an upright partition in the middle; the space on one side has no shelves, but instead pegs at the top for hanging cloaks, dresses, coats, &c.; and cloak pins are also placed on the inside of the door to hang more things on. On the other side of the partition are sliding shelves or drawers.

ON HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE.

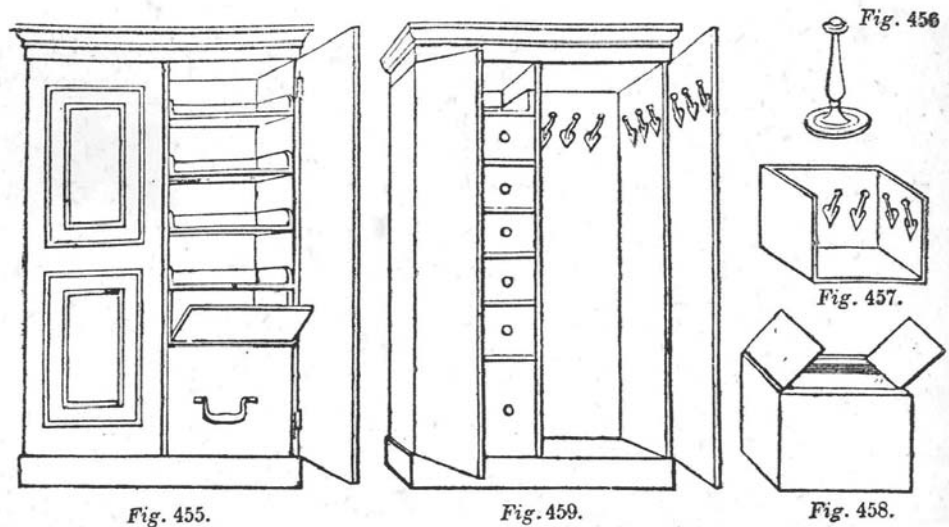
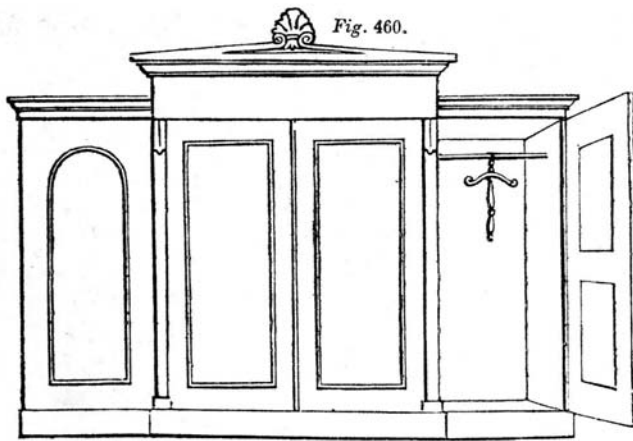


Fig. 460 is a wardrobe of a more elegant design, executed in fine mahogany, and French polished. This is termed a *winged wardrobe*, from the pieces on the side of the central one. The



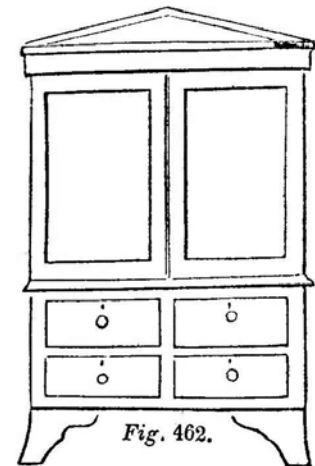
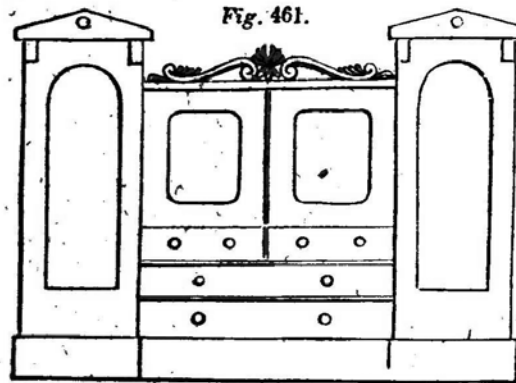
central part may have sliding shelves, and the lower part drawers; and the wings are for hanging dresses in; the most perfect mode of doing this in to put the dresses on the apparatus of brass represented sliding on a rod, and consisting of a handle and a cross piece, something like a cross-bow. The cross piece goes into the arm of the dress, and several may be suspended on the same rod; by this means each dress can easily be seen and got

without disturbing the rest. [This is the first and only reference seen to this type of clothes hanger.] One or two of the panels of the door of this wardrobe may be filled with mirrors.

Fig. 461 is a *dwarf wardrobe*, proper when a small one is sufficient, or where there is not room for a larger. Fig. 462 is a small wardrobe of a very plain kind. . . .

Presses for linen are made nearly in the same manner as wardrobes, with sliding shelves and drawers. . . .

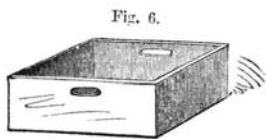
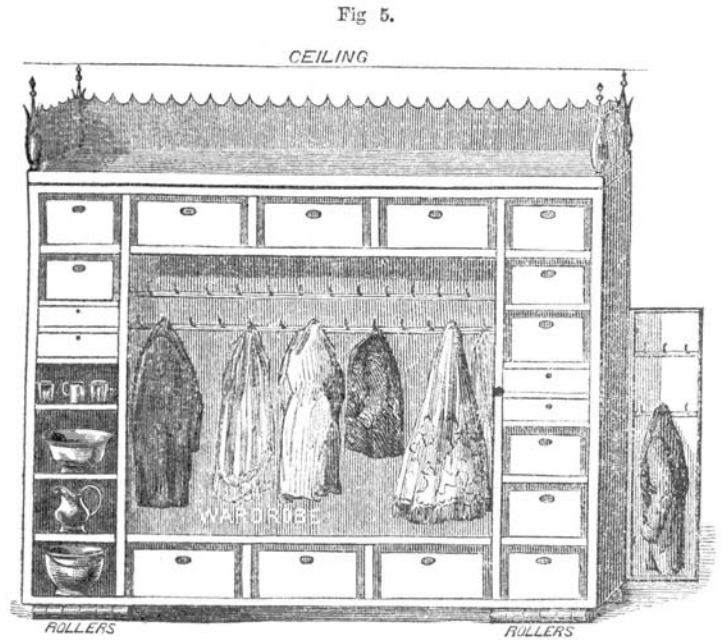
Chests of drawers are well known, and were once universally used, till they have given way, in a great measure, to wardrobes. They are, however, still employed and may be purchased of various qualities and prices, from deal to the best mahogany. All the handles of the drawers are best when the form of knobs of hard wood; brass tarnishing, and being otherwise liable to be out of order. . . .”



SECT. VI.—CHESTS, DRAWERS, ETC.

The wardrobe in Fig. 460 seems to be similar to one described by Walkley in her book. She described a wardrobe designed in the eighteenth century, “A type of coat-hanger had already been invented, for at the end of the previous [18th] century Sheraton had published a design for a wardrobe with a hanging compartment, in which a brass rail passed through the heads of curved wooden hangers. They could not be removed from the rail, nor could they swivel, but they were certainly a great advance on the wooden pegs. . .”

Catherine Beecher included a drawing, in *The American Woman’s Home*, of a multi-purpose wardrobe. One side of the wardrobe was a painted sliding screen on the parlour side and the other side, which was a wardrobe, opened into the bedroom area. In her description of the screen/wardrobe, she wrote about the wardrobe; “Fig. 5 shows the back of inside of the moveable screen, toward the part of the room used as the bedroom. On one side, and at the top and bottom, it has shelves with *shelf-boxes*, which are cheaper and better than drawers, and much preferred by those using them. Handles are cut in the front and backside, as seen in Fig. 6. Half an inch space must be between the box and the shelf over it, and as much on each side, so that it can be taken out and put in easily. The central part of the screen’s interior is a wardrobe. . . . The inside of these doors is furnished with hooks for clothing. . .”



Author’s Wardrobe
 Dimensions – 83 inches high
 50 inches wide
 18 inches deep

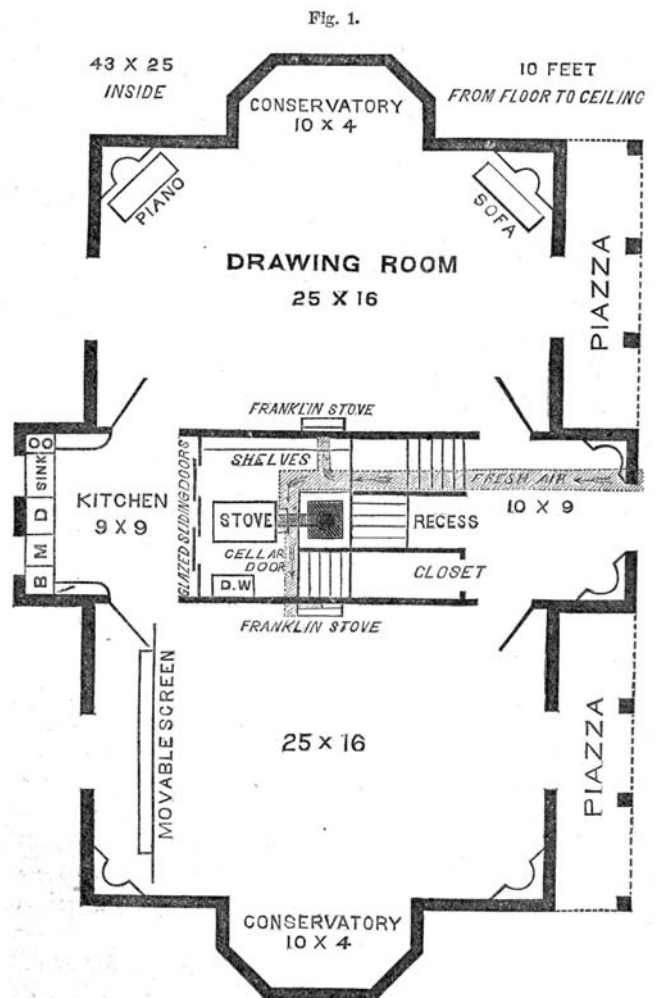


CLOSETS

An explanation of clothing storage would not be complete without a mention of closets. From the 1828 to the 1890s Webster's dictionary, closet is defined as "1. A small room or apartment for retirement; any room for privacy. 2. An apartment for curiosities or valuable things. 3. A small, close apartment, or recess, in the side of a room, for repositing utensils or furniture." Our modern definition of closet is "1. A small, room, enclosed recess or cabinet for storing clothing, food, utensils, etc."

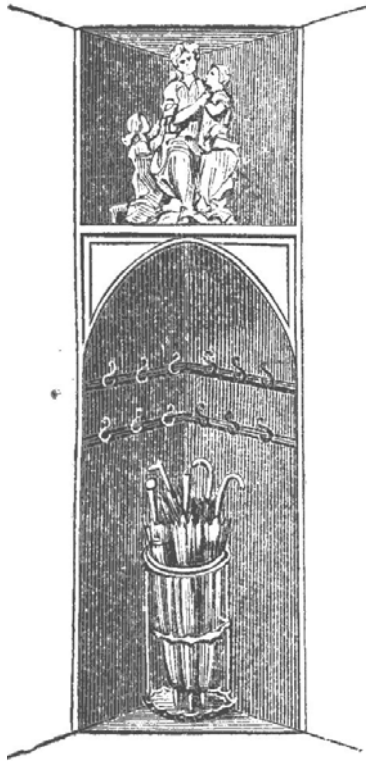
In reading the previous descriptions of closets none seem to be similar to our modern ones that have rods for hanging clothing. The use of hangers was not mentioned in relationship to closets. Clothes-closets often served other purposes or were a space or room with shelves or drawers for storage. In the November 1841 issue of *Godey's* there was a reference to a clothes-closet but it was not used for clothing storage. "... there was a very large clothes-closet up stairs, where the dirty clothes was all put, and sorted out for the Monday wash." *Rural Homes*, in 1851 and *The Genesee Farmer*, in the February 1852 issue, included identical plans and descriptions of a "Suburban Cottage" and there was the following provision made for a clothes-closet; "No. 6 [bed chamber], which is over the library or parlor below, and is provided with a spacious clothes-closet and a flue for a stove or fireplace." The plan showed, along one wall, the closet which was a very narrow space, about the width of a chimney flue.

In a number of issues of *Godey's*, there were general house plans for various styles of homes from mansions to cottages. Many of the plans included closets in bedrooms but a majority did not include closets. Even if closets were in the plans, there was seldom description of the closet size and none included any other additional information on the closet with the exception of suggesting shelves and drawers. In the May 1854 *Godey's* there was a description of a clothes-closet. "Attached to this bedroom is a clothes-closet, 8 by 4 feet, with shelves and drawers. Next the outer door, in rear end of the hall, is a small closet opening from it, 6 by 4 feet in dimensions, convertible to any use which the mistress



of the house may direct.” In the October 1864 issue of *Godey’s*, in a discussion of home building, there was a mention of the need for closets. “Every dining-room should have its large and well arranged china cupboard, every kitchen its roomy and convenient pantry, and every

Fig. 2.



bedroom its neat clothes-closet. The additional expense which these may cause in building will soon be repaid in the saving which in many ways will result from them.”

Catherine Beecher described an entry closet in *The American Woman’s Home*. “The entry has arched recesses behind the front doors, furnished with hooks for over-clothes in both — a box for over-shoes in one, and a stand for umbrellas in the other.” The November 1872 issue of *The Manufacturer and Builder*, included plans of an average home and closets were included but they were narrow and small. One advantage this plan had over others was that adjacent to the family bedroom, there was a small room (called a wardrobe) that was seven by nine feet, in which “drawers, shelves, and etc.” were built in. Hooks, on one side of the wardrobe, were shown in the plan. In 1875, the Palace Hotel advertised that there was a clothes-closet in every guest room. By 1880, *The Manufacture and Builder* was touting dwelling designs that boasted three bedrooms, each with its own closet. It seems as the nineteenth century progressed, clothes closets were being mentioned more when a home was built but they were still far from being a common practice. Just think how long it became the norm for a closet to be a part of every bedroom, when in some houses, built in the early twentieth century, enclosed closets were not

included in bedrooms.

It was not just ordinary houses that did not have closets with rods; even closets in some large mansions only had cupboards with shelves and hooks. The 160 room Winchester house, built by Sarah Winchester in San Jose, California, was constructed between 1884 and 1922 had numerous closets but of the closets shown, none had rods. They had hooks for dresses or coats and there were many built-in cupboards and chests for storage. Although most of the house is not furnished today, the bedrooms that are furnished have chests of drawers, dressers, and wardrobes that were used for clothing storage.

In the homes that did have an enclosed area or closet, made from a cubbyhole, may have been used for clothing storage but hooks were attached to the walls on which dresses or cloaks were hung. Sometimes, there were shelves along the sides of the closet. This was more of a utilization of convenient and otherwise wasted space rather than a conscious plan for a clothes closet. According to Ireley, even if a home did have an enclosed area for clothing storage, it was

probably fairly small, narrow and not very deep. Most closets were fourteen to eighteen inches deep, just wide enough to hang garments on hooks or pegs and may have had shelves if space allowed. As the enclosed cubbyhole evolved into our modern closet (not a walk-in), the depth of the closet increased to twenty-four inches. This increase was probably due to the fact that hangers, hung crosswise on rods, needed the additional width. In houses built in the early 1950s, closets were still fairly narrow and very small according to our needs today.

Occasionally one will see examples of large clothing storage rooms which were furnished with shelves and pegs for long term clothing storage; these are generally found in Shaker community houses. In some cases, as Miss Leslie mentioned, sometimes closets were added when a house was updated or remodeled. In the December 1878 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* there was a fictional story titled, "Home." The story recounts a family's venture in purchasing and remodeling a large house. They had more space than they needed so some rooms were turned into closets; the two rooms that were turned into closets seem to be an exception to the rule of a small closet. The author wrote, "another [room] above of the same size [twelve by sixteen feet] with shelves, pegs, drawers, and presses for the dry-goods. . ." Later in the narrative, the husband indicated that his wife did not approve of the architectural details of the original house "— there were no closets or bow windows." . . . I detested closets. . . She wanted two closets in every room of the house. . ." Finally, in the same story, there was an illustration captioned, "A Man's Idea of a Closet," which showed a small double-door cupboard fitted with shelves and filled to overflowing.



A MAN'S IDEA OF A CLOSET.

THE "CLOSET TAX"

Most people have heard several explanations as to why early homes in the United States did not have closets. One reason given was that closets were taxed so people used wardrobes in order not to have to pay a "closet tax." It is possible that the closet tax story is a simple misunderstanding of the connotation of the word "closet." By using Webster's definition of closet, it is easy to see that a small room may have been assessed for tax purposes. Occasionally and in some areas, detailed descriptions of houses and other buildings were made for valuation

and tax assessments. There is little indication that this particular tax was collected on a regular basis but existing records do detail homes with the number of rooms including small rooms labeled as “closets” as well as the number of windows, and size of the house. There is no documentation that this space was used as clothing storage area.

CONCLUSION

In a day when we all seem to be “Flora M’Flimseys” with our extensive wardrobes, we have a difficult time envisioning that a free standing wardrobe, shelves and drawers would be adequate for clothing storage. Granted there were women and men that did have an array of clothing for all occasions and needed a great deal of space devoted to clothing storage but the average person probably did not have as many different garments as we do today and did not need as much storage space for clothing. With that thought, it is more easily conceivable that a person’s wardrobe could be stored in a free standing cupboard, on shelves and in drawers. Imagine, for women, having two or three dresses used for everyday work, hanging in the wardrobe; one or two nice dresses, saved for dressier wear, which were folded, wrapped and placed on shelves; underpinnings folded in drawers or placed on shelves; collars, cuffs, shawls, bonnets and other accessories stored in drawers or in boxes; and cloaks or coats hung on hooks. For the men, their shirts were folded; frequently worn vests and coats were hung on pegs or hooks; drawers and other underclothing folded and stored on shelves or in drawers; socks/stockings, cravats, hats, and other accessories stored in drawers or boxes; and heavy outdoor coats and cloaks hung from hooks. Of course, if a person had more than the essential amount of clothing, more space would be needed, thus a room that was devoted to clothing storage — the closet, was needed. For more effective use of available space and convenience, the development and evolution of the coat hanger was a natural step forward. At least people in the nineteenth century did not have to contend with the dreaded “invasion of the wire hangers” that many of us experience daily. Maybe our ancestors had the right idea — less clothing, less fuss and less space having to be devoted to clothing storage.

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