Quilts were made for two primary reasons: for decorative purposes and as utilitarian objects. These quilts were often made of scraps of fabric, collected after making clothing, that were pieced into a pattern of the quilter’s choosing, then quilted and bound. This quilt was meant to be used. One tell-tale sign is that the backing is made from feed or flour sacks.

Cotton sacks were being made for feed, flour and other items as early as 1858 by the Bemis Company, Inc. of St. Louis. Many a frugal housewife recycled the cloth bags into clothing, towels, quilt backing, and other items. Feed sack manufacturers began to acknowledge how women reused the bags and made the bags aesthetically pleasing. In fact, printed feed sacks were available by the mid 1920s; however, their popularity rose in the 1930s when the Percy Kent Bag Company of Kansas City began promoting printed sacks. The back of this quilt was made using several feed sacks. One of the feed sacks is printed with the label “Manufactured by the National Oats Company, East St. Louis, Ill.” It also contains a partially legible flour sack from a Kansas company.

Mary Louise Elizabeth Dickinson, one of the first settlers in the town of Eureka, Kansas and the owner of this dress. She was born in Bedford, New Hampshire in 1851. Sixteen years later, in Olney, Illinois, she married 26 year old Civil War veteran Charles Reich who was ready to settle down and have a family. In 1871, they moved to Eureka, Kansas.

Keeping house and living in a small town kept Mary very busy and she did not have time to be a fashion plate. Rather, she sewed her own simple clothing, perhaps noticing the changing silhouettes and making slight alterations such as raising the waistline and adding a pretty lace collar.

Sewing, cooking, raising a granddaughter and attending church and town functions summed up the life of Mary Louise Elizabeth Dickinson, one of the first settlers in the town of Eureka, Kansas and the owner of this dress. She was born in Bedford, New Hampshire in 1851. Sixteen years later, in Olney, Illinois, she married 26 year old Civil War veteran Charles Reich who was ready to settle down and have a family. In 1871, they moved to Eureka, Kansas.

Keeping house and living in a small town kept Mary very busy and she did not have time to be a fashion plate. Rather, she sewed her own simple clothing, perhaps noticing the changing silhouettes and making slight alterations such as raising the waistline and adding a pretty lace collar.
Men’s and Women’s Dress, 1920s

Arlesa Shephard

In the 1920s, women’s fashions changed in a shocking manner since more of women’s bodies were revealed than ever before. Part of fashion change was a shift from a look of maturity to fascination with youth. Although a booming stock market left an image of a care-free life, not everything was going so well. Many rural families found the 1920s to be difficult since there were years of poor crops, culminating with a drought in 1924-1925. Rural women did not have access to glamorous New York fashions but their simple cotton housedresses reflected fashion trends of the time.

Rural men also saw the importance of being economical. Work shirts were mended, buttons were replaced, and tears patched. Also, workers were less formal. In the 19th century, men wore vests over their shirts but to be considered decently dressed. By the 1920s, society accepted the loss of the vest among working men, exposing their suspenders and shirt.

Men’s and Women’s Dress, 1940s

Jaime Minard

There was little change in fashion occurring shortly after the outbreak of WWII that lead to rationing apparel as well as other goods. L-85 restrictions made everyday clothing simpler and encouraged the use of man-made fibers. Housedresses, like this one, were typically worn by housewives as they did their daily chores. These dresses could be purchased from catalogs such as Montgomery Ward or Sears or made at home. This one is an example of a homesewn dress that may have been made of feed or flour sacks. The apron, likely made of flour sacks protected the dress, reducing the labor of washing clothing.

Men’s work clothes consisted of jeans and button-front shirts for labor-intensive occupations. The shirt was made of rayon, one of the commonly used man-made fibers used during World War II. Overalls, now called jeans, were considered work clothing and not appropriate for other activities.

Hats: 1920s through the 1940s

Shannon Immegart

These hats span the period from the 1920s through the 1940s. The three on the right are cloches that were the iconic styles of the twenties. Cloche hats had a basic bell contour with bulbous crowns and, if worn correctly, could add inches to the height of the wearer.

Hats such as these were not part of everyday dress but were accessories women used when they participated in out-of-the-home activities. They were often sold in general stores as well as millineries and department stores.

Yellow Shirt
Ca. 1920s
Accession: 1987.42.93
Donor: Howard Marshall

Denim & Elastic Braces
Ca. Early 20th Century
Accession: 1988.12.21
Donor: Glauser

Cotton Housedress
Ca. 1926
Accession: 1991.00.2
Donor: Unknown

Green Felt Hat
Ca. 1940
Accession: 1996.4.1
Donor: Gladus Weinberg

Beige Felt Hat
Ca. 1935
Accession: 1968.00.4
Donor: Unknown

Cloche w/Black Braid Trim
Ca. 1920s
Accession: 2328
Donor: Ann Edwards Manson

Cloche of Black Velvet
Ca. 1920s
Accession: 1993.15.1
Donor: Howard Marshall

Cloche of Beige Straw
Ca. 1920s
Accession: 1991.41.8
Donor: Doris Happel

Blue Housedress
Ca. 1903
Accession: 1575
Donor: Daisy Cunningham

Man’s Vest
Ca. 1840s
Accession: 718a
Donor: Robert Howard

Apron w/Crocheted Trim
Ca. 1900
Accession: 1432
Donor: Margaret Manson

Child’s Blue Dress
Ca. 1917
Accession: 2006.11.30
Donor: Pat Timberlake