



Boxing Day...it's just four months away

Guess what? In exactly four months from today it will be Boxing Day! That's tough to believe, right? Well our above friend says it is so, so...it has to be so!

Here's a picture that will cool you

For tourists visiting Midland, at the Gateway to the 30,000 Islands for the first time, this is a sample of what winter looks like around here. This was the scene on King Street back in January. Brrr!
-Photo by Bob Murray

She's a costume designer

Patricia Gray is a designer of clothes. She's a pretty, auburn-haired young woman with a creamy complexion and the ability to dress herself to look as sharp as tomorrow. But the clothing she designs is so dated it seems suited to another century. Which it is.

As the official costume designer at Black Creek Pioneer Village, the pre-Confederation cross-roads community operated by the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, at Jane Street and Steeles Avenue, in northwestern Toronto, Pat is an authority on what is or isn't proper dress for the Village inhabitants—men and women.

Having been taught to sew in public school, Pat became interested in the making and designing of clothes and attended night school at Seneca College to study pattern drafting. Later, she enrolled in the material arts course at the Ontario College of Art, graduating in 1968. During the summers,

while at OCA, she was employed by both the National Ballet of Canada and by Malabar's Costumers designing, producing, and altering costumes.

Upon graduation from the College of Art, Gray joined the staff of the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority as an interpreter to visitors coming to view the First and Second Stong houses, the two original structures around which the Village has been created.

Pat's abilities as a designer and a seamstress were soon put to work in helping the Village wardrobe mistress and, when that lady relinquished the job because of ill health, Pat took over.

Last year, Pat outfitted 48 women and 42 men on staff with costumes appropriate to the mid-1800s era and the type of life their work and social position demanded. In other years she has also had as many as two dozen summer student employees to outfit as well as providing costumes

for visiting teachers—and some students—to the Dickson Hill School, where an earnest attempt is made to have classes sample schoolroom life as it was 100 years ago. With assistance from one summer helper, Pat Gray also provides costumes for the waitresses in the Half Way House Dining Room, neighbouring groups marking some historical occasion, special celebrations at banks and stores, and for some of the weddings performed at Black Creek's Fisherville Church, when a period ceremony is requested. Other historic site groups also borrow costumes or call for information regarding sources of materials and authentication of styles.

"While there were clothing patterns, back in the 1800s, they aren't much help to the seamstress of today who is trying to produce pioneer clothing to fit present-day bodies," says Patricia. The

patterns of yesteryear were often made several to a single sheet of paper. There might be patterns on the sheet for the whole family—men's, women's, and children's clothing. The designs couldn't be cut out, but had to be retraced since the printing overlapped from one item to another.

"The biggest problem with the old patterns, however, is that they don't meet the requirements of the modern figure," Pat advises. "For that matter," she says, "the measurements for clothing of even 15 years ago are dramatically different from those of today, particularly for young people." And so, she has to start from scratch and redesign most items.

Essentially, our great grandparents were generally smaller than we are. Women, for the most part, were more petite. Not only have our foods had the effect of making bigger, more robust people, but the

infusion of ethnic peoples into our population has also produced figure characteristics of races other than the predominant Anglo-Saxon of the last century. "You'd be surprised at how the blue jeans worn by young people of 15 years ago differ from those of today," declares Pat. "Then, girls had much bigger waists and they were straight up and down. Now they once again have smaller waists and more fullness in busts and hips."

The costume work Pat does must reflect the

styles called for by particular Black Creek buildings and occupations. For instance, when the Doctor's House was opened at Black Creek, there was a new demand for men's frock coats, and ladies' hoop skirts.

An important and increasingly difficult part of Gray's job is seeking out sources of authentic reproductions of materials. The treadle sewing machine in the Village, for example, require white cotton thread on wooden spools. Appropriate printed materials are now hard to get, as is 100 per cent

cotton cloth. Thus far, keeping out-of-date on her job has continued to be possible as the enthusiastic young designer ferrets out supply sources to maintain the authentic clothing that is the pride of the Village. Just how long before modern substitute materials and equipment will have to be accepted is anybody's guess.

Aug. 31

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