



Conserve O Gram

July 1994

Number 4/5

Storage Techniques For Hanging Garments: Padded Hangers

Historic garments require special consideration for their safe storage. The garments in most costume collections are suspended from hangers. Hanging may be appropriate for pieces in good condition; however, fragile costumes should be stored flat in customized boxes or in drawers of dust-tight cabinets.

When garments hang vertically, stress concentrates on the upper body sections, such as the bodice, shoulders, and neck. Appropriate storage techniques should minimize distortion to the fabric and reduce tension on the seams. A specially made hanger, padded to conform in shape to the cut and style of the costume, will help to minimize these stresses. Dresses with heavy skirts need additional support from the waistline to the hanger to relieve the strain created by the skirt.

The Hangers

Collection managers must customize commercially available wooden hangers by padding and wrapping them with polyester batting. The batting enlarges the size of the hanger and provides a cushioned support for the garment. The wrapped hanger is protected with a cotton cover that removes easily for washing. The hanger assembly may be sewn by hand or with a sewing machine.

It is best to have a variety of sizes and types of wooden hangers on hand to suit individual garments. The simple single bar hanger is sturdy and can be shortened easily if the ends are too wide. (See Figure 1.) The triangular hanger without a metal clamp on the rod will be useful as well. (See Figure 2.) Look for hangers with long-necked metal shafts since it is

very important that the garment does not rest high on the hanger and touch the hanging bar of the storage cabinet. The hangers will need to be sealed with a coat of shellac to inhibit outgassing of volatile wood acids (be sure shellac is used by the date stamped on the can).

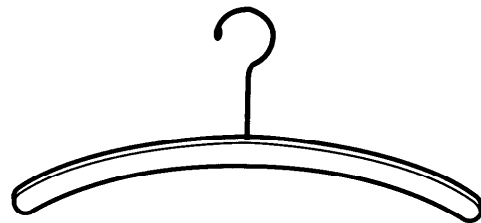


Figure 1

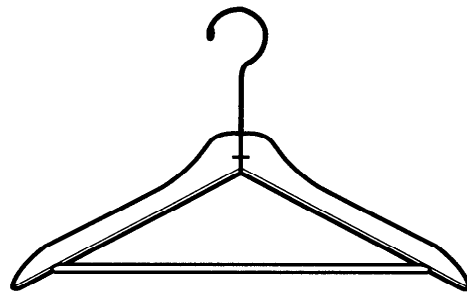


Figure 2

Materials

All materials used to make padded hangers can be obtained from local fabric, variety, and hardware stores. Parks can order some of these through NPS *Tools of the Trade*.

- 100% cotton muslin, washed
- Matching colorfast thread
- 100% cotton twill tape, one inch wide
- Needlepunched polyester batting
- Soft, unbuffered, acid-free tissue
- Wooden hangers with long necks

- Scissors
- Pins and needles
- Sewing machine, if available
- Arm & Hammer® or Cheer Free® detergent

Consult the NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part I (Rev 9/90), Appendix K, pages 31-34, for additional information on the storage of hanging garments.

Preparation of the Materials

Before the cotton muslin is used, it must be washed in hot water with detergent (Arm & Hammer or Cheer Free) to remove sizing or finishes and to allow the fabric to shrink. The cloth should be put through a second cycle in the washing machine without detergent. When hand washing, rinse repeatedly because it will be in long-term contact with the costume. Allow the fabric to dry flat and press out the wrinkles with an iron.

Before starting to pad the hanger, size it to the garment. Anticipate that the padding will increase both its width and height. If possible, use needlepunched polyester batting, manufactured by a process that does not use resins. Cotton batting will compress over time but the polyester padding will maintain its loft (height). The thickness of the batting will determine how many strips of padding have to be cut. The purpose of the padded hanger is to provide cushioned support and relieve stress on the garment wherever possible.

Single Bar Hangers

- Cut a piece of batting which is at least 5 inches wide and long enough to extend beyond the ends of the hanger.
- Make a small hole in the middle-center of the batting and slip it over the hanger. (See Figure 3.)
- Wrap narrow strips of batting around the hanger until it becomes a rounded form without sharp ends. (See Figure 4.)

Baste additional batting in place where needed. (See Figure 5.)

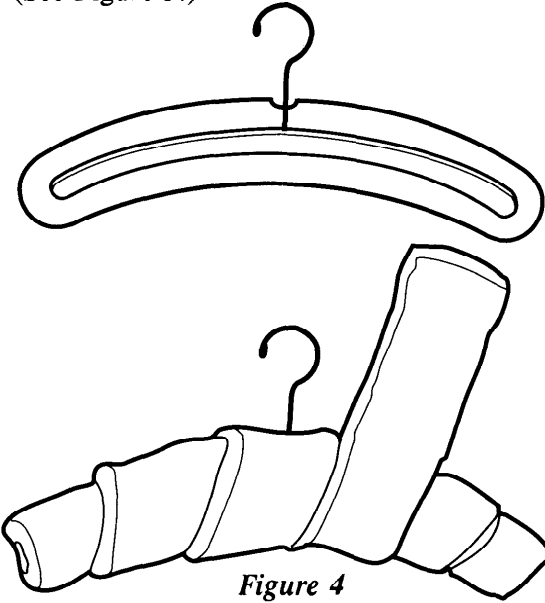


Figure 4

- Create a paper pattern by tracing around the padded hanger, increasing its dimensions by one inch.
- Square off the bottom edge.
- Cut two pieces of muslin using this pattern.
- Turn under bottom edge ¼-inch and hem.
- With the hems to the outside, sew a seam along the top of the pattern from A to B as marked on Figure 6.
- Leave a one inch gap in the center for the hook to go through.
- Turn the cover inside-out and place it over padded hanger. (See Figure 6.)

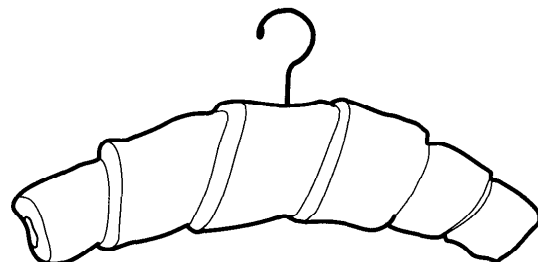


Figure 5

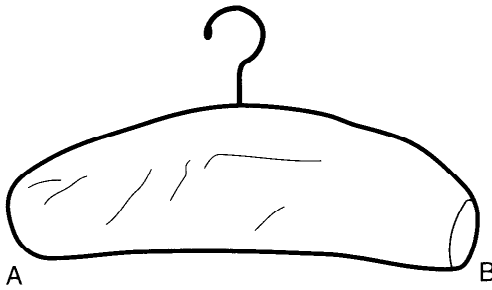


Figure 6

Triangular Hangers

- Cut the batting ½-inch larger than the pattern provided on page 4. (See Figure 9.) The increase in size permits the fabric to be shaped to the contour of the hanger. Cover the hanger with the batting and baste it in place with thread.
- Additional padding may be needed to round out the ends of the hanger, conforming it to the shape of the garment.
- Cut, arrange, and sew additional pieces of batting where the garment needs the most support. (See Figure 7.)
- Be careful not to pad too closely to the metal hook since the garment should not ride too high on the hanger.
- Using muslin and the enlarged pattern, make the cover for the hanger. Fold the selvages of the muslin together, place the fold of the fabric on the fold line of the pattern, and pin.
- Cut two pieces of fabric in this manner.
- Turn under ¼-inch, hem the straight edge of each piece.
- With right sides together (the hemmed section to the outside), sew the two pieces together using a ½-inch seam allowance.

- Leave a gap in the stitching at the center top where the metal hook will pass through the cover (marked by an X in the pattern).
- Turn the cover and place over the prepared hanger. (See Figure 8.)

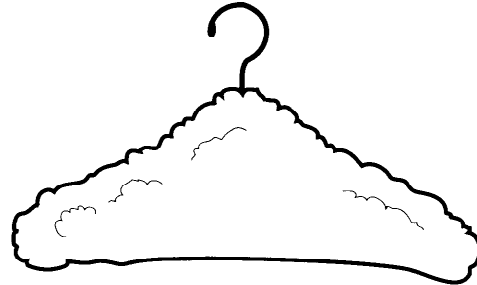


Figure 7

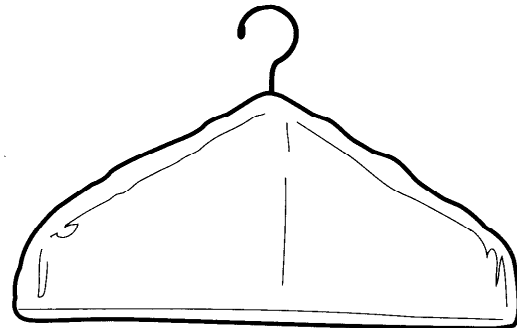
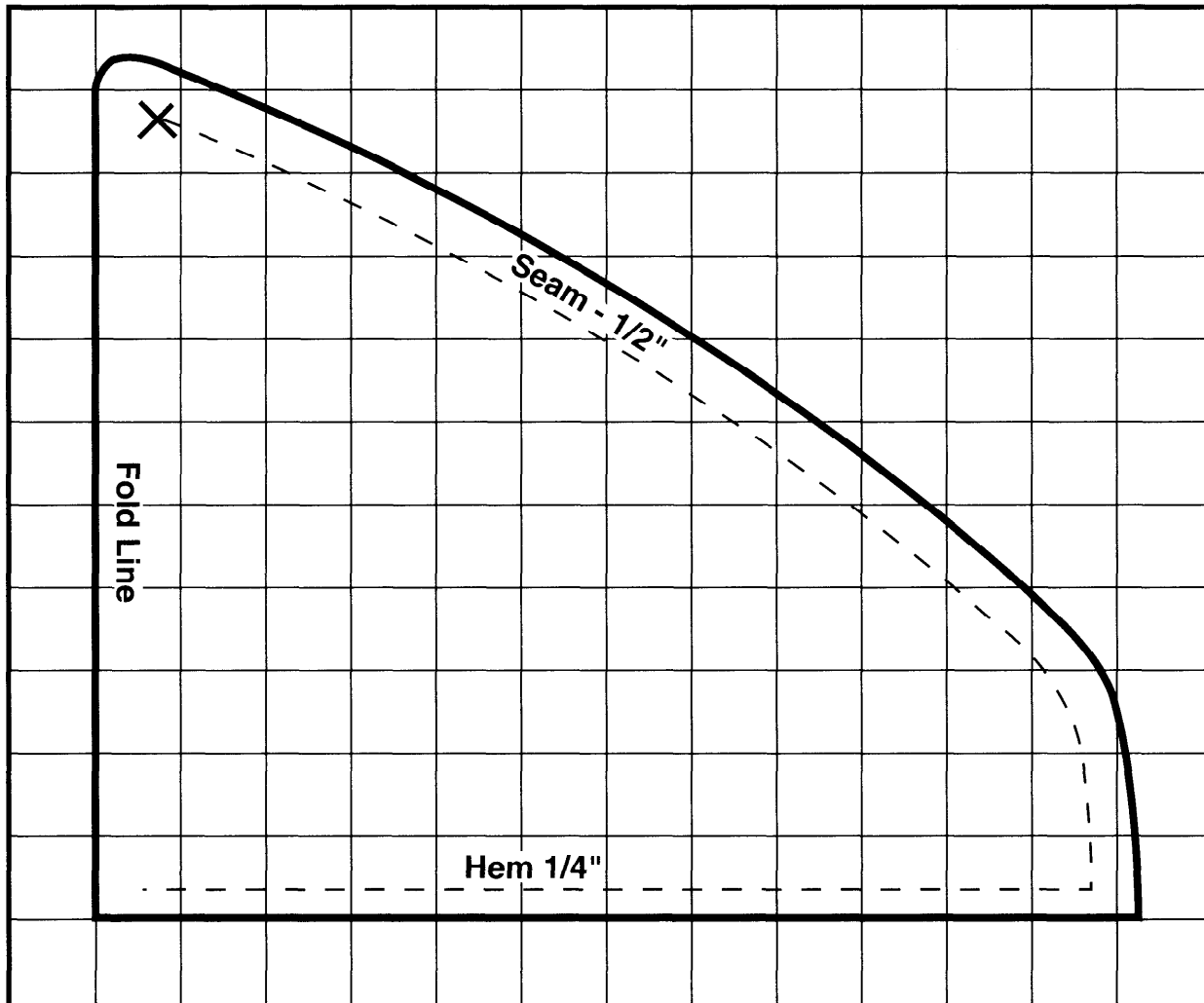


Figure 8

Additional Support

For particularly heavy garments or dresses with bustles, supplementary support of the garment to the waist from the hanger may be necessary. Using a needle and thread, securely stitch lengths of one-inch-wide cotton twill tape to seam allowances or strong areas of the waistband on the garment. Tie the tapes to the hanger's wire neck, adjusting the lengths of the tape so they provide adequate support. The twill tape may stretch over time as the garment hangs and may need to be adjusted periodically. Use as many twill tapes as necessary to support, but not distort, the skirt. Additional interior support may be needed, depending on the construction of the garment. Stuff sleeves, support collars and fill spaces where necessary with soft, crumpled unbuffered, acid-free tissue.



Grid Squares = 1"x1"

Figure 9

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