

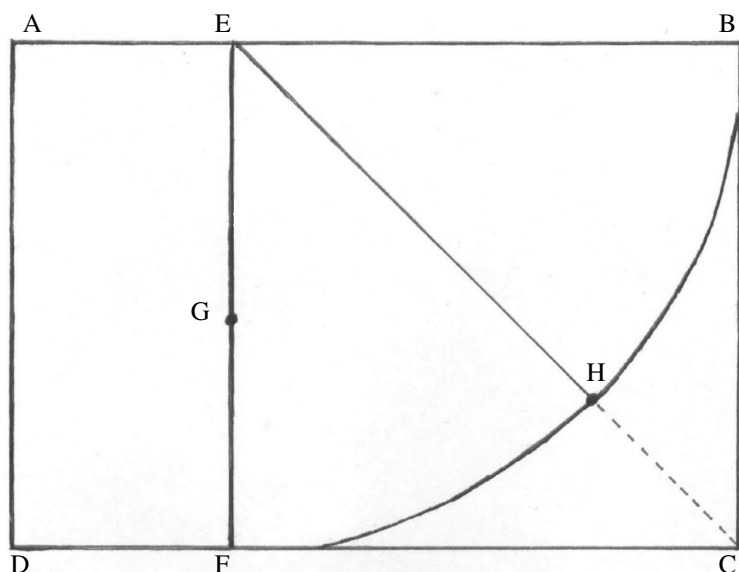
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How To Make Pioneer Sunbonnets

A good sunbonnet is part of a staple pioneer-era wardrobe for women of all ages. The shape given is typical of the early pioneer era (roughly 1840-1865). Other bonnet shapes apply to later eras. Sunbonnets are easily made at home and come in quite a few different styles for each era, but they all share some aspects in common:

- Deep brim to shade the face
- Stiffening in the brim by means of quilting, cording, or pasteboard slats in channels. This pattern is for *slat bonnets only*; see the author's website for other free sunbonnet patterns.
- Deep "curtain" or bavolet (bav-o-lay) to shade the neck and upper shoulders
- Lightweight fabric to allow air and sound passage
- Lighter colors are common (prints of all colors!)
- Easily washed, starched, and ironed.

You can make your own sunbonnet from the chart and pattern below.



Measures in Inches	Infant (0-1)	Tot (1-3)	Girl 1 (3-7)	Girl 2 (7-13)	Girl 3 or Woman (13 and up)
Yardage	1/2	2/3	2/3	2/3	3/4
A-B, D-C	15	17	19.5	21	24.5
A-D, B-C	10	10	13	14	17
A-E, D-F	5	7	6.5	7	7.5-8
E-G	6	7	8	8.5	10
E-H	10	10	13	14	17
Tapes (each approx)	10"	12"	12"	14"	16"

Cutting

Bonnet

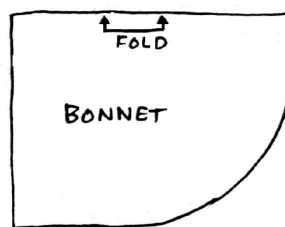
Cut bonnet shape with line A-B on a fold of fabric. Add 1/4" seam allowance to all edges.

Brim Facing

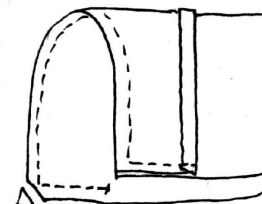
Cut rectangle A-E-F-D with line A-E on a fold of fabric. Add 1/4" seam allowance to all edges. Use a pale, light-weight cotton for the facing.

Sewing Instructions

Cut your pattern with line A-B on a fold of fabric. Cut the brim facing with line A-G on a fold of fabric. Press one long edge of the facing to the wrong side.

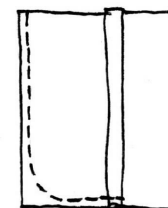


Lay facing right sides together with bonnet, matching the long straight edge. Sew with 1/4" seam allowance. Press and trim corners to reduce bulk.



(Alternate corner option: draw a rounded lower corner at D, and stitch along that line when attaching facing.)

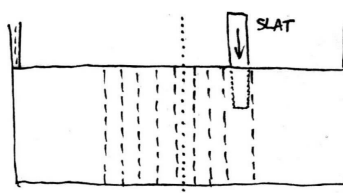
Turn facing to inside of bonnet; press edges well.



Press rest of bonnet outer edge to the wrong side 1/4". Tuck under the raw edge, and secure along the fold with a small running stitch.

Stiffening

Fold the bonnet in half and press a crease along the A-B line. Mark a light pencil line on the facing, 1/2" to either side of this crease. Stitch from the brim edge to the free edge of the facing, with a machined straight stitch or running stitch by hand, to form a slat channel. Continue to stitch slat channel lines every 1" on either side of the first channel until you reach G, about ear level.



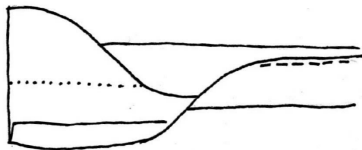
Continue to stitch slat channel lines every 1" on either side of the first channel until you reach G, about ear level.

Cut pasteboard slats (such as the back of a light-weight writing tablet, or heavy manila file folder) a scant 1" wide, and 1/4" shorter than your brim facing depth. Slide the slats into your channels. As you reach your ears, cut the slats shorter, so they stop before your ear; this makes it easier to hear when wearing your bonnet.

Use a hand running stitch to lightly close the slat channels and keep the slats inside. Make this stitching fairly light, with short stitches on the outside, and longer stitches inside; you'll need to remove it, and take out the slats, before laundering your bonnet.

Finishing

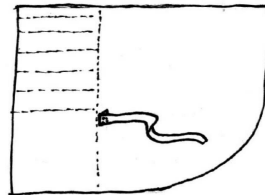
Make outer tape ties: cut or rip a strip of bonnet fabric 2" wide across the entire width. Fold lightly in half lengthwise to mark the center. Unfold. Press one long edge to the wrong side about 1/4". Bring the other long edge slightly past the center mark; fold the pressed edge to cover the raw edge. other long edge along the first, and press. Tuck under the visible raw edge and press.



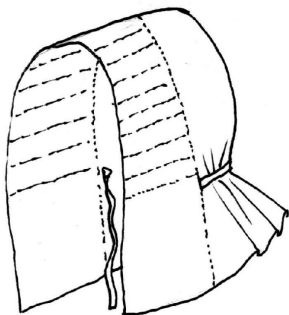
Cut the long strip in half across the width to create two narrow tapes, using the chart on page 1 as a length guide. Secure down the fold with a small slip, whip, or

running stitch.

Attach the tapes at G (just behind the ear near lobe level.) Tuck the short raw end under and stitch across the end securely.



These tapes tie behind the head to gather in the back of the sunbonnet. At the free end of the tape, turn the end under twice and stitch a narrow hem.



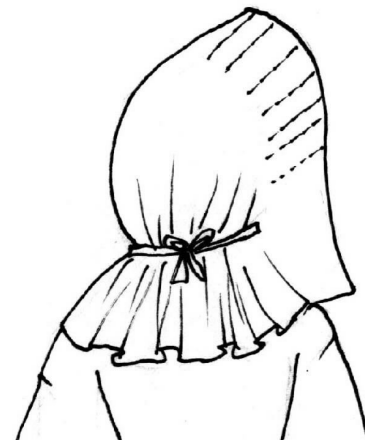
Attach utility ties on the inside of the bonnet at G (narrow cotton twill tape works well)

Wearing Your Slat Bonnet

Tie the outer tapes at the base of the neck, so the entire face is shaded by the brim. Tie the inner utility tapes to keep the bonnet on. The brim should shade your entire face, and the curtain covers your neck and upper shoulders. You will have minimal peripheral vision—be sure to turn your whole head around to check your surroundings! It should feel like you're wearing a mailbox—but that mailbox is your main sun protection.

When the bonnet gets dusty and grimy, take out the slats and laundry in the washing machine, or by hand. Dry and press the bonnet well, then re-insert the slats.

Back view of bonnet in use



Tips

- Do wear modern sunblock even with a slat bonnet.
- Use the lightest weight cotton you can find—semi-sheer is the best! You can often find quite sheer woven plaids at Wal-Mart for about \$1/yard.
- Go with lighter colors. A black slat bonnet will cook your brains under the sun.
- Slat bonnets are not always “fashionable”—they’re functional clothing. Don’t add lace (and certainly not nylon lace) or other trims. They’re not needed, and will interfere when you launder the bonnet.
- Your slats will tend to go soggy in the rain. If you get soaked, try to dry the bonnet laying flat, until the slats are solid again. (You’ll probably want to replace them at home, though!)
- Most of all: Wear Your Bonnet. It’s the period thing to do, and protects your skin.

About the Author

Elizabeth Stewart Clark is a 19th century dressmaking instructor and historic pattern designer. A member of the LDS Church, she is always interested in helping others more fully appreciate our pioneer heritage. Find more patterns, articles, and books related to living history and the 19th century at

www.elizabethstewartclark.com