

'PIONEER DAY CLOTHES: NOT VERY COMFORTABLE'

Our pioneer ancestors may have been very hardy folk—but they weren't very comfortable.

"Anyone who had to wear clothes like that couldn't have been very happy about it," says Richalene Kelsay, the young woman in charge of the costumes worn by the women on NBC's *Little House on the Prairie* series (Wednesdays at 8PM).

Kelsay's costumes have led to a flood of mail asking for patterns of the clothing she has designed for the show. This is especially true for the sun bonnets.

She said: "Today's kids just love those bonnets. I'm getting letters from Girl Scout leaders, teachers and individuals asking for the pattern."

Kelsay said they may well be what she terms "a rebirth" of the sun bonnet among American women—but she's betting against a return of the rest of the clothing worn in the late 1870's and early 1880's—the period for *Little House on the Prairie*.

"The cloth was heavy and without color and those shoes were about as much fun as a toothache," she said.

In order to make sure that the costumes are authentic, Richalene uses nothing but the real thing. "A pair of those button shoes probably cost about 50 cents in the 1870's but I have to pay \$165.00 to have each pair made today.

"The most difficult part of my job is to

find the woven material for the dresses and coats. I can't use today's modern synthetics and not many people are still making their



FROM BOOTS TO BONNET—Richalene Kelsay (left), adjusts boots for Melissa Gilbert, who plays Laura Ingalls in NBC's *Little House on the Prairie*.

own cloth. I know a young man in northern California that turns out material exactly the way it was 100 years ago—and I buy everything he makes."

She needs a large collection of clothing of that period to outfit the Ingalls women as well as the guest stars and the many extras appearing on the show.

"You won't see a large wardrobe for the Ingalls family," said Richalene, "because people of that period didn't have many clothes. On an average, they had one work outfit and one dressup set—and that was all!"

"They'd wear those clothes until they were in rags and then buy another set. They couldn't afford the luxury of fashion. The clothes didn't fit well at all and the fabrics were rough besides being heavy and without bright colors."

Kelsay is an art major who researches old books and magazines to get ideas for the clothing of that period. She thinks nostalgia has gone about as far as it will go for modern American women.

"We have worked our way back to the fashions of the 1930's and 1940's but I seriously doubt if you'll see a rush to the fashions of the 1870's. Women like long dresses but they don't like them dull and heavy, and they certainly aren't going to go back to the 'corset' look. The hard-working people of that era were beautiful—but their clothes were awful!"

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