

WATERPROOF DRESS:
AN EXPLORATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN
FROM 1880 THROUGH 1895

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ABSTRACT

Waterproof dress had an important role in the late nineteenth century. Heretofore little research has been done to examine the development and design of this apparel sector. The three types of waterproofing techniques used and developed in the nineteenth century included oil or paraffin, chemical, and rubber solutions. The rise leisure and consumption contributed to the growth of waterproof dress allowing people of all classes to benefit from the protective apparel.

This research explored the technology and design of waterproof dress by collecting related patents between 1880 and 1895. These patents were compared with catalogs and periodicals from the same time period to better understand what innovations made their way to consumers. The patents helped to identify the problems with waterproof apparel that manufacturers sought to resolve. In addition, the patents assisted with clarifying the target consumers for specific apparel types. The research also revealed the longevity of the gossamer or lightweight rubber garment that experienced at least two decades of success. Overall, this research emphasized that waterproof dress was very important in the lives of many consumers toward the end of the nineteenth century.