

Uniform Threads 5

By Chris Gray

After determining that the clothing for the era you are recreating requires a leg-of-mutton (L-O-M) sleeve, let me assure you that it is not as difficult as it looks. This style of sleeve is the most forgiving. It does not have to be accurate and any mistakes can be worked out, sometimes making the sleeve more interesting than originally planned.

You will need a blouse, jacket or coat pattern with a set-in-sleeve (arm hole is round). The lower part of the sleeve (elbow to wrist) should be fairly narrow. Also needed is a large sheet of tissue paper or pattern tracing fabric (available in sewing stores) to trace the pattern on. Bulletin board and pushpins to hold the original pattern and tissue paper or pattern tracing cloth in-place are handy, but not necessary.

The L-O-M sleeve should be seven inches (or more) longer than your normal sleeve length to allow for the puffing at the shoulder. Follow pattern direction for lengthening sleeves. In this measurement you can allow for cuffs, pin tucks or other customizing. If you forget or are unsure of making these adjustments, don't worry about it; these adjustments can be taken care of later. On the original sleeve pattern, measure from the bottom of the sleeve to the elbow. Draw a horizontal line across the pattern at this point.

Lay the original pattern piece on the tissue paper. Secure the pattern piece to the tissue paper with straight pins, weights or push pins on a bulletin board. Trace the original pattern lines from below the elbow to the bottom of the sleeve.

At this point you have two options to create the fullness at the top cap of the sleeve. The first option is to make vertical slashes from the cap of the sleeve to the elbow line. Start these lines equal distances on each side of the center of the cap. Continue slashing and spreading the original pattern to the desired fullness. Trace the lines of the sleeve pattern above the elbow line. In the cap area, connect the spaces between the slash marks with the original lines of the pattern. Transfer any important sewing marks (grain line, etc.) on the original pattern, to the copy.

If you do not want to cut the original pattern, trace the original on tissue paper or pattern tracing cloth and make the slashes on the copy. You now have a permanent pattern that can be used on any garment. If you would like to add a stiff lining to keep the puffing at the top of the sleeve from dropping, you can use your new pattern. Line the sleeve from the shoulder to the elbow. If the fabric you choose for stiffening is not comfortable when it makes contact with your skin, you will need to put a softer fabric over it.

After cutting out the garment, cut a piece of material about four inches wide and a few inches longer than the length between your shoulder and your elbow. The edges of this strap can be finished by turning under 1/4 inch and stitching, zigzagging or overlock. This strap will help you adjust the puff and length of the sleeve.

Construct the garment according to the pattern directions. You will have a lot more gathers at the top of the sleeve, of course. Follow the underarm-hole curve as best as you can. It is not necessary to be perfect with all the extra fabric on the top; no one will ever see the underarm seam.

Try the garment on and mark a little above your bent outside elbow. Pin one end of the strap on the inside of the sleeve at this line. The center of the strap should be at the center of your outside elbow. Adjust the length of the sleeve and create the puff by pulling this strap up to your shoulder. This strap can be sewn to the sleeve at the line above the elbow or at the top on the sleeve/shoulder seam. Sew three or four small snaps or hook & eyes to the opposite end of the strap. This will allow the puff to be released, making the sleeve much easier to iron and pack. Placing the snaps or hooks at the shoulder or elbow is a matter of personal preference since the strap is secured before you put the garment on.

If the garment is to be worn by more than one person, you may want to sew the strap at the top of the sleeve and leave extra strap length at the elbow so the fasteners can be moved to accommodate different arm lengths.

If in spite of all your measuring the sleeve is too short, just add a cuff or an insert. Accent your addition with some trim so it looks like it was planned. If the sleeve is just too long to pull up in the puff, it can be cut off if it will not ruin the shape of the lower sleeve. The sleeve can also be shortened by making small

pin tucks or larger tucks around the lower portion of the sleeve. Mark all the adjustments on your permanent Leg-of-Mutton sleeve pattern. The next garment will be easy.

I have tried to make these instructions as comprehensible as possible. If you have any suggestions for improving them, please let me know so they can be corrected on the website or before they are put in bulletin form.

Two manufactures of period clothing have been contacted as possible sources for uniforms: K&P Weaver and Quarter Master Shop. Both would like to see photos or drawings of original uniforms. Please send me copies of anything you have that will help me give the manufactures an accurate idea of our needs. There is a chance that representatives of K&P Weaver will be able to attend the Elgin Meet to see first hand what our needs are. Chris Gray, phone 248-652-4897.