

Ladies Casual and Outdoor Wear in the Model A Era

by Melanie G. Whittington, Almost Heaven A's

The fun of dressing for the Model A era doesn't always have to involve evening gowns with lots of jewelry, matching shoes and purse. We sometimes forget there are many options to consider when dressing for the era. This article is going to focus on what to wear when outdoors. Our mothers, grandmothers and g-grandmothers were tending the garden, hiking, camping and a variety of other activities which took them outside. Think back to the people in your family who were around in 1928-31. If you are lucky enough to have pictures, they are a great reference for your research on what to wear with your Model A.



Figure 2: National Bellas Hess Co. Autumn 1931, Winter 1931-32

Ladies who lived out in the country would spend a considerable amount of time outside hanging up laundry and working in the garden. These activities were a necessity and kept their family fed and clothed. A cotton housedress and apron are a staple to start a wardrobe which focuses on comfort and utility. These dresses could also be worn on a picnic or a trip into town. Work-weight hosiery were commonly worn with these house dresses. These stockings would be heavier cotton, wool or silk, worn with a low-heeled leather shoe.

A dress I never knew existed in our era is the house frock with a divided skirt. Though we rarely hear about it, it was common enough to be included in the catalogues of the day, such as Sears, Montgomery Ward and National Bellas Hess. These dresses used a skirt with a seam in the middle to turn them into wide-legged pants. This gave the feminine look of a skirt, but the practicality of a pair of trousers. These dresses were made of printed cotton. The ad says, "for use around the house or to the market". This shows these were considered appropriate to be worn outside of the home.

Another option is bib overalls with a mannish long-sleeved, button up shirt with oxford style shoes, boots or even barefoot. This may have been reserved for very rural areas and not necessarily seen if you 'went into town', but it is still an option to wear while enjoying your Model A. This is also a great alternative for children and young girls with a short-sleeved cotton shirt. A dark wash blue jean fabric is what we usually think of, but they came in lighter blue, dark blue with white stripes, white (for painters) and various other colors. The fabric was usually heavy-duty denim or a duck/canvas to withstand the rigors of working or playing outside.



Figure 1: National Bellas Hess, Spring and Summer 1931



Figure 3: late 1920's, girl in bib overalls

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Figure 5: Charles Williams Stores, 1928

Camping with portable campers, pulled behind an automobile, became popular after the turn of the century. Ladies took to wearing knickers and jodhpurs for ease of movement and modesty as they camped, cooked and hiked across the country. These could be made of wool tweed, half wool tweed, cotton tweed, corduroy, whipcord, linen, or khaki. "Practically all the world wears the Knicker nowadays": Montgomery Ward and Co. Spring and Summer 1928.



Figure 4: late 1920s, lady camping



In pictures of the Model A era, you will see lots of ladies in tall leather boots. Red Wing introduced their first ladies' hiking boot, the Gloria, in 1926, complete with a 'compact pocket' to keep your powder compact safe. Pictured is one of the original ads for the same boot. Red Wing is reintroducing this boot as part of their Heritage Collection and can be purchased today. Also available were canvas shoes similar to today's Keds. In the 1931 Montgomery Ward's catalogue, they are available in brown, black or white canvas.



Figure 6: Montgomery Ward 1931

Wool or leather leggings, known as puttees, were used and had been since WWI by the American and Allied troops. Originals are getting harder to come by, but reproduction puttees are still available. Puttees could be used with short boots or oxford style shoes. Pictured is an ad referencing 'Uncle Sam's Wrap Style'. "Regulation army style wrap or spiral puttees, same style as worn by U.S. solders. Made of olive drab cloth. Worn by men, women, boys and girls."



Figure 7: Sears, Roebuck and Co., Fall and Winter 1931-32

Also pictured, is me in one of my favorite hiking outfits using reproduction puttees. This is one of the most comfortable outfits I have for the Model A era. I have tall cotton socks under the leg wraps, no garters needed, an era image cotton button up shirt, a vintage scarf and vintage brown velvet beret. If it's cold you can wear cotton or wool long underwear, which can be purchased from stores like Tractor Supply or Vermont Country Store.



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It is easy to get caught up in the belief Hollywood glam was what everyone was wearing and Flappers roamed the streets of every city and town. Just like now, everyday people do not go to the store or work around the house dressed like celebrities. Even on the occasions they did dress up, it was likely never to the extent of what was seen on the silver screen.

There are so many options, you don't have to be uncomfortable, or spend a fortune. My words of advice are to enjoy yourself and find a part of the era fashion you enjoy, and wear it.



Figure 8: late 1920s

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