

Daily Life in the Colonies

CLOTHING, RANK, AND RELIGION

Throughout the colonies, clothing expressed both social rank and religious beliefs. Some colonial governments passed laws controlling what colonists could wear. Puritan laws in Massachusetts required modest clothing to express Christian humility. But in Virginia only the poor were prohibited from wearing extravagant clothes.

Quakers wore the most modest clothing of all religious groups. Quakers thought rich clothes encouraged envy and pride. Their plain clothes were intended to show that they were more concerned with the spirit than with social rank.

STRANGE BUT TRUE

In the 1630s there was a fashion for sleeves slashed to reveal expensive undergarments. While Virginia colonists displayed their wealth through multiple slashes, Massachusetts Puritans passed a law allowing only one slash.



PENNSYLVANIA QUAKERS

1680s

VIRGINIA ANGLICANS

1680s



Artifact File

Imported fabrics and clothing allowed the rich to show off their wealth.

Men wore elegant caps when they removed their long wigs.



Women's shoes were richly adorned.



Women attached fancy "stomachers" to the front of their gowns so that their waists would appear longer.



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