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The Art of Pressing

Murle Scales

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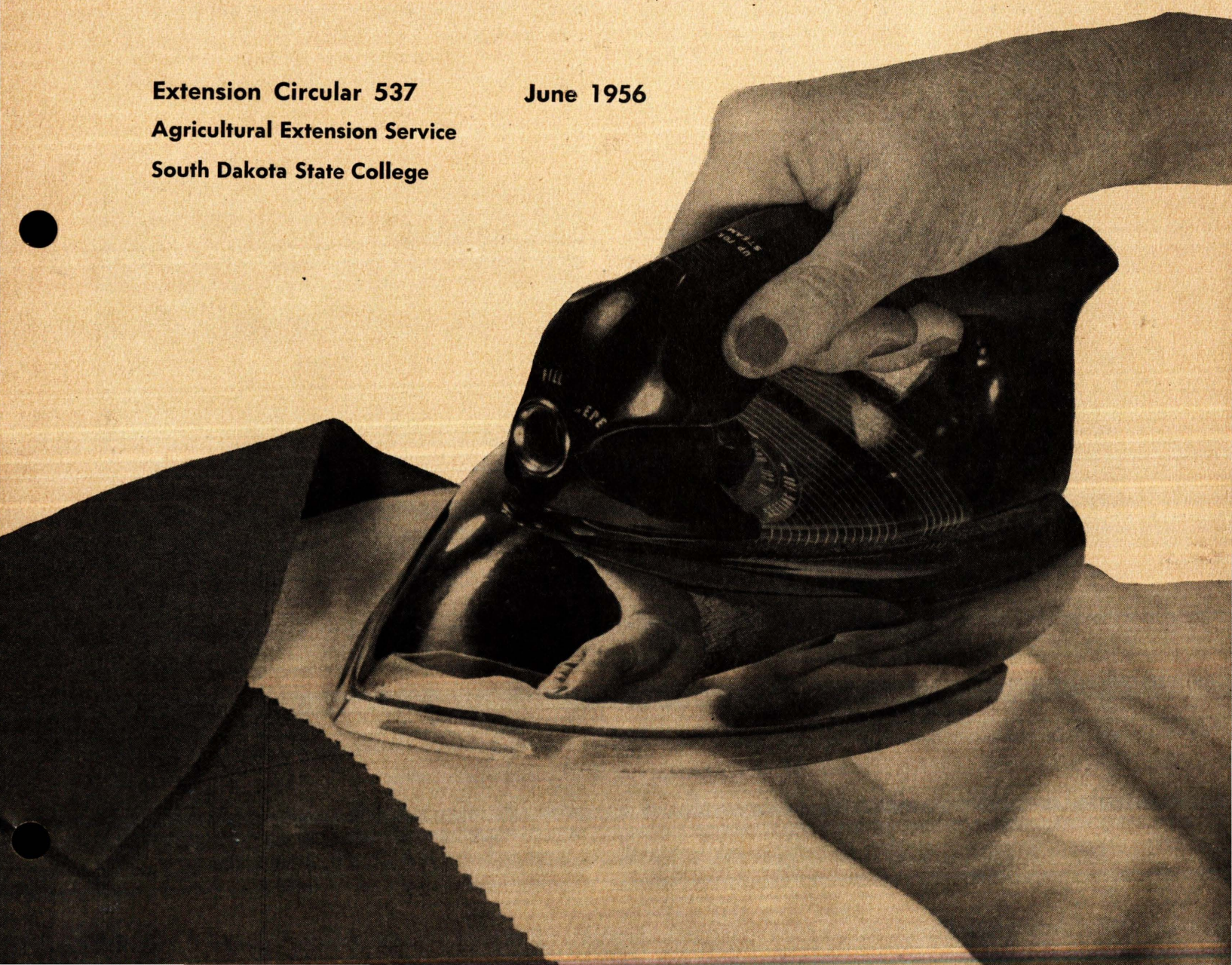

The Art of Pressing

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THE ART OF PRESSING can be learned by any girl or woman who knows a few fundamental facts and has the patience to work with fabrics. Pressing is time consuming but well worth the effort. It helps give a professional look to garments made at home. Every seamstress should put up her ironing board for pressing when she sets up her sewing machine. No garment can look well made without proper pressing during construction.

Pressing Equipment

You cannot expect to do good pressing without proper equipment. The minimum pressing equipment for anyone doing much sewing with wool or wool-like fabrics is shown in Figure 1. These are iron, ironing board, press cloth, large pressing ham, sleeve board, whisk broom, 5-inch pressing ham, clapper, and pressing roll.

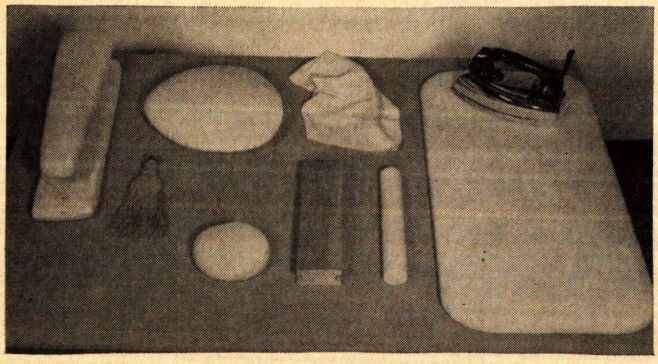

Figure 1. Minimum pressing equipment for wool fabrics.

Iron with regulator—either a dry or steam iron. If you use a dry iron, a sponge and wool press cloth will distribute the moisture and prevent spotting. The sole plate of the iron must be absolutely clean, and free from all burned starch. The plate may be cleaned with baking soda after the iron is cool. Put soda on a damp cloth and rub the sole plate until it is clean. With another cloth rinse off soda and dry the iron. The soda will not scratch the sole plate, yet will remove even the stubborn cases of burned starch.

Ironing board well padded. An ironing board of adjustable heights is ideal, but a much less expensive board is satisfactory. For an all-purpose board the padding should be about ½ to 1 inch thick. Silence cloth, or old wool or cotton blankets may be used for padding. Have 3 to 5 thicknesses of padding. The top thickness should completely cover the board; the sides as well as the top. Each succeeding thickness should be graded ¼ inch smaller, starting with the first one the size of the board, the next one ¼ inch smaller, etc.

Place layers so that the smallest one is on the board first and continue until top one covers all. Then make a tight cover of fabric to keep padding in place.

The cover may be of pocket drill, muslin, or an old sheet. Pocket drill is usually more satisfactory. The cover should be removed often and washed. A dirty or scorched cover may stain a fabric during pressing.

It is very convenient to have a small press board that will fit on a card table or on boxes. See Figure 1. This may be put close to the sewing machine so that it will not be necessary for you to move from your chair to press. The one illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 is made of ¾-inch plywood. It is 30 inches long and 14 inches wide, with the corners rounded. You may wish a slightly different size board to accommodate your particular sewing setup.

Pressing roll can be made from a magazine. Choose a magazine about ⅜- to ½-inch thick. Roll the

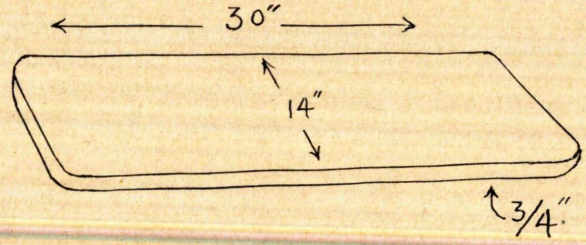

Figure 2. Pressing board.

magazine very tightly and hold securely in place with cellophane tape. Pad with pocket drill, muslin, or an old sheet.

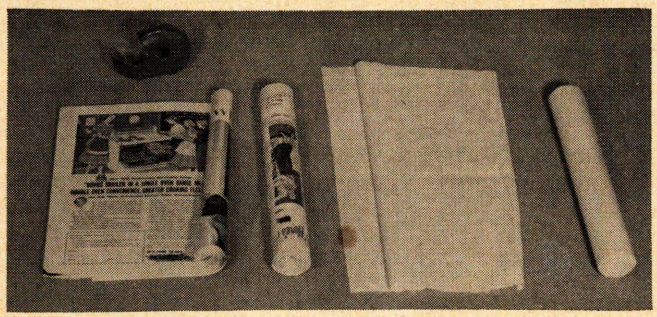

Figure 3. Pressing roll made from magazine.

A rolling pin with one handle removed and a slice cut from the wood so that it is flat on one side makes a good pressing roll. This may be covered with cloth or a piece of wool felt. Figure 4 shows the covered rolling pin—both round and flat side.

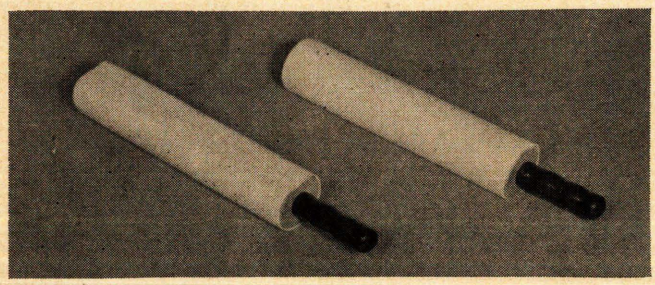

Figure 4. Pressing roll made from rolling pin.

Pressing hams are necessary to mold and shape a garment during construction. They may be made from pocket drill, ducking, or wool fabric. Be sure that the fabric will not fade. A small 5-inch ham may be made as follows:

Make the pattern by drawing a circle with the pencil and pointer of the compass 3 inches apart. This is the pattern for the top and bottom of the pressing ham. If you do not have a compass, use a saucer or small plate. Measure across the saucer or plate. It should be about 6 inches from one side to the other. Trace around the plate and then draw your circle larger or smaller as needed to adjust the size.

Cut a 2½-inch bias strip about 18 inches long for the boxing. Stitch the bias strip to one of the circles using ½-inch seams. Join the boxing on the straight of the grain which makes a seam at a slant. Be sure to use ½-inch seams throughout or the ham will be too large.

Sew the other circle to the boxing to form the top of the pressing ham. Leave about 3 inches unstitched

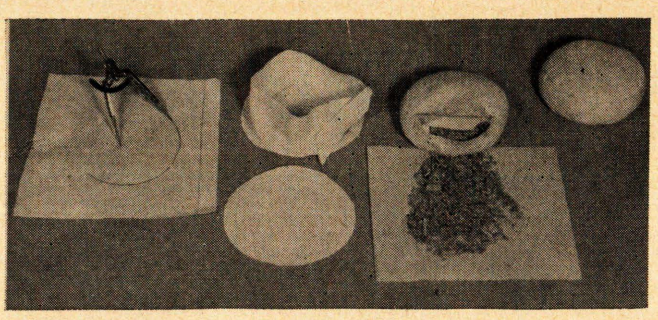

Figure 5. Steps in making a small pressing ham.

for the opening. Tie threads or back stitch. (If you stay stitch the 3-inch opening for both the boxing and top circle before combining the two, it is easier to whip the edges together accurately after filling the ham.)

Turn the pressing ham right side out. Fill the ham (through the 3-inch opening) with hardwood or fir sawdust. Do not use pine. The steam and heat will bring out the resin in pine and stain the fabric. Put in a little sawdust at a time and pack very hard. Put in all the sawdust that you possibly can and still leave room to turn under the ½-inch seams in the opening. Wool yarn or very tiny wool scraps are also an excellent stuffing. Ravel an old sweater or cut wool scraps into pieces between ½ and ¾ of an inch square.

Turn the seam allowance of the opening inside and whip the two edges together. Use strong thread (do not use nylon) about size 20 or 40, or heavy-duty thread. Use a double thread on the size 40 for added strength. Make tiny, whipping stitches. Go one way and then come back the opposite way. This gives a row of crossed stitches.

A large pressing ham is made without a boxing. The measurements are shown in the diagram. Fill as described for the small ham.

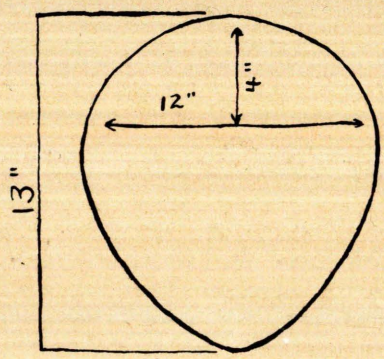

Figure 6. Measurements for large pressing ham.

Press cloth. A variety of press cloths may be used. A good one of soft wool flannel is excellent for pressing wool. Cheese cloth, muslin, and heavy pocket drill may be used at times. A good size for general use is about 18 by 24 inches. You may also wish one just

slightly larger than the iron, to use when pressing some detail on the right side where you need to see as much of the garment as possible.

Sleeve board. You will find this sleeve board helpful with the ironing as well as the pressing jobs. It is most useful in ironing blouses and children's clothing that cannot be placed flat on an ironing board. The sleeve board should be made of oak or other very strong wood. Pad with about three layers in the same manner as for the ironing board.

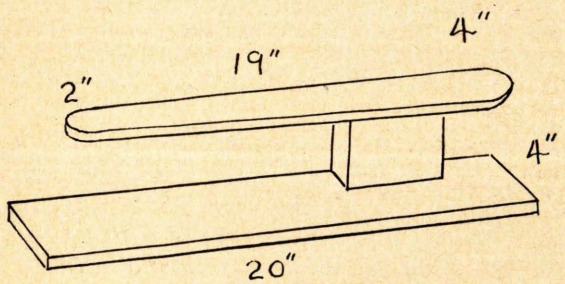

Figure 7. Measurements for sleeve board.

Clapper. The clapper should be made of oak or birch with grooves in the side to rest your fingers as you use it. The edges may be rounded as shown in the sketch or left plain as in Figure 1. The clapper is used to force steam through the fabric and flatten seams and edges.

Brush, whiskbroom, or piece of self-fabric. This is used to raise the nap and prevent or remove shine from the fabric.

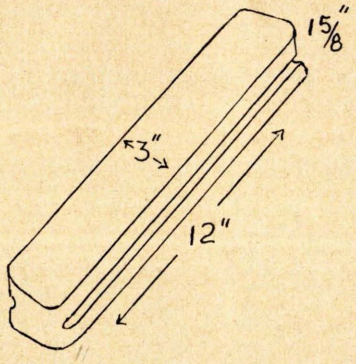

Figure 8. Measurements for clapper.

Fourteen Points to Good Pressing

These points are the basic principles of all pressing.

1. Test fabric with iron to see how much heat and steam it can take.

2. Press by raising and lowering iron—do not slide iron over surface.

3. Press with the grain; that is, from the wide to the narrow. Press from the hem up to the waistline.

4. Press seams in position stitched.

5. Press each seam before crossing with another seam.

6. Leave some moisture in the wool when pressing. Do not press wool until it is entirely dry, or it will become stiff and harsh.

7. Keep garment in position pressed until it is dry before handling.

8. Learn to steam and finger press to prevent shine on fabric. Do not alter texture of the fabric in pressing.

9. Press lightly over bastings, then remove bastings and press completely.

10. Press wool on a firm ironing board for wrong-side pressing and on a very soft, well-padded board for right-side pressing.

11. Protect garment with a press cloth when pressing from right side even though a steam iron is used.

12. Press pleats from hem up to waist.

13. Use clapper to force steam through lapel edges and flatten them without shining or damaging fabric.

14. Use a clean ironing board cover.

To press correctly it is necessary to know the difference between ironing and pressing.

Ironing is used on garments that have been washed. It is the smoothing and drying of these washable fabrics with a sliding motion of the iron. The garment has usually been moistened by sprinkling.

Pressing is smoothing or flattening of the fabric with an up and down motion of the iron, usually with the use of steam. It is used on garments that have become wrinkled from wearing or packing. It is used in the construction of a garment to form crease lines, to flatten edges of garments, and to shape garment to fit the body.

In pressing out wrinkles it may be necessary to move the iron lightly over the garment. Always keep the weight of the iron in your hand and exert only the pressure needed for the particular fabric.

Press During Construction

As you become skilled in pressing you may substitute pressing for much of the basting.

Seams

Before pressing seams open, place the seam flat on the ironing board and press its two edges together in the same position in which it was stitched. This smooths the seam and works the stitches into the fabric, and should be done with almost every seam stitched. (Exception: across gathers.) Press a skirt seam with the grain—from hem to waistline.

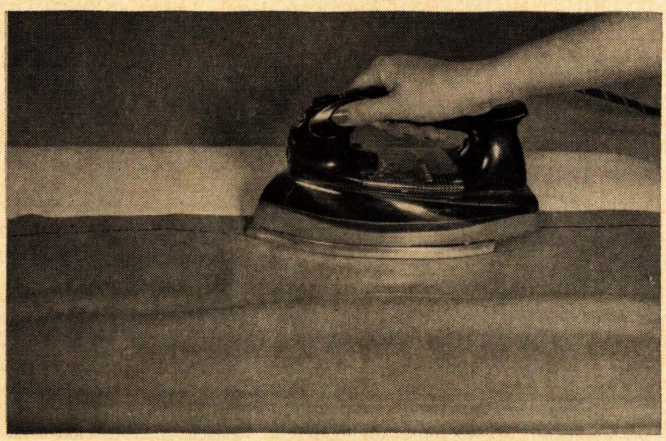

Figure 9. Press seam edges together in same position as stitched.

Then place over a pressing roll and carefully use the tip of the iron to open the seam. Place the entire iron on the opened seam. The use of the pressing roll places the entire weight exactly on the seam line and prevents the seam edges from leaving markings on the right side.

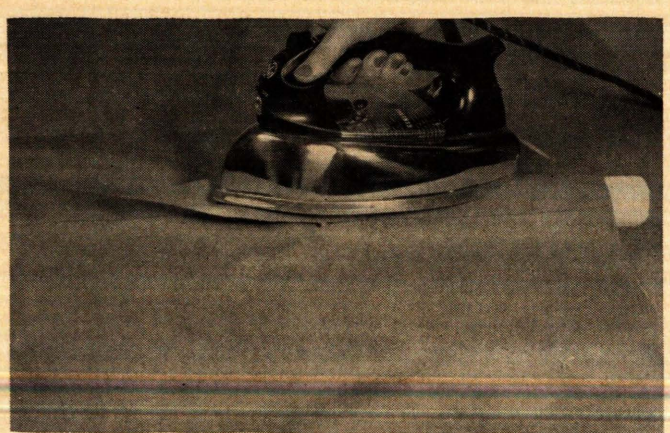

Figure 10. Press seam open on pressing roll.

For twills or broadcloths that shine easily, place a piece of the broadcloth or other soft wool fabric over the pressing roll before using.

For a curved surface such as hip line seam of a skirt, press only 2 inches at a time. Move the pressing roll ahead of you so that the curve will not be distorted. After seams are fairly well separated, press over the large pressing ham to keep the curve of the hip line seams.

Darts

Press first in position stitched and from the wide part to the point. Be careful not to press past the point.

Then press over a pressing ham to shape and mold. Use very little pressure with the iron. This must be done very carefully to preserve the shape and not distort fabric texture. You can steam the dart and pat it with your hand to help in shaping and molding. Remember to press from the wide part of the dart to the point.

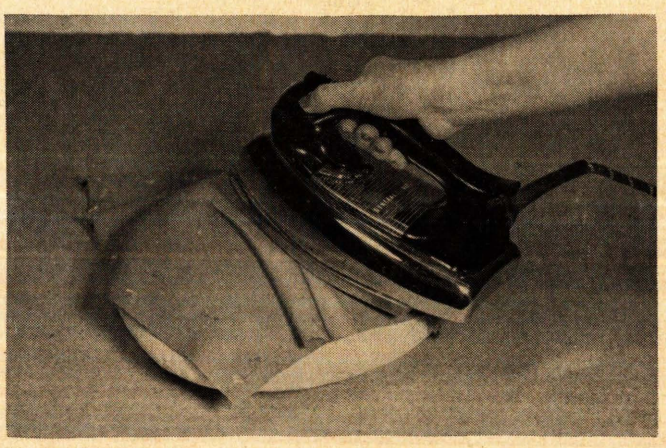

Figure 11. Press darts over pressing ham to shape and mold.

Use pieces of heavy brown paper or lightweight cardboard under the dart to prevent imprints on the right side. Do not use a sliding motion, but lift and lower the iron. Handle carefully. Allow to dry in this same shape. Be sure to steam and press out any bubble that may form at the end of dart.

Darts in the back of a skirt will fit better over the hip curves when they are pressed over the curved edges of a tailors' ham.

Piped or corded buttonholes

Never press a bottonhole from the right side. Place the buttonhole on the small 5-inch pressing ham with

the right side next to the ham and the wrong side up. Steam press. Put pieces of cardboard under the edges of the buttonholes to keep them from marking the right side. Instead of using the cardboard, you may run the iron up under the edges to remove any marked places after the buttonhole is pressed.

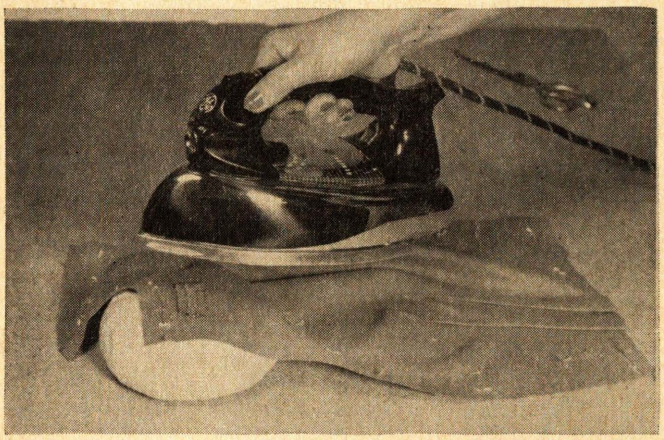

Figure 12. Press buttonholes over pressing ham.

Edges of facings, collars, cuffs, double sashes

Press the seams in position in which they were stitched.

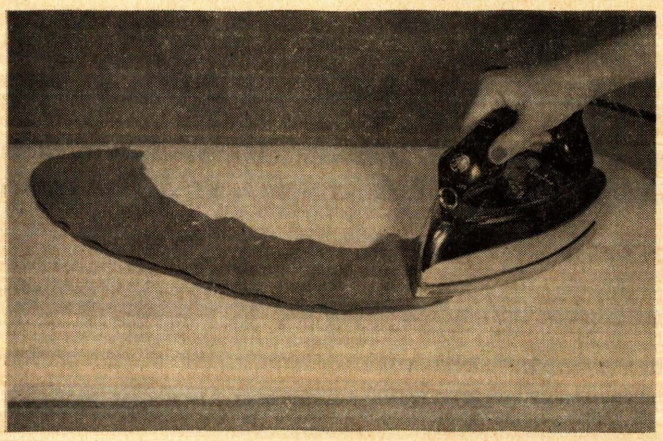

Figure 13. Pressing seam on collar.

Press the under seam back on the under side. This separates the seam edges and gives the finished seam a tendency to roll to the back. Grade the seams and turn right side out. Roll the seam to the under side.

Baste the edges with fine thread, and press lightly to prevent basting from marking garment. Use a press cloth to protect garment on the right side.

Remove basting and press more firmly.

Many seams will require the clapper to flatten them.

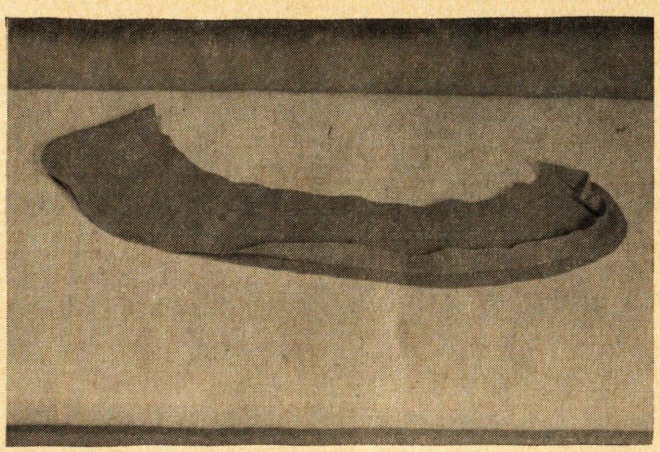

Figure 14. Press under seam of collar back on under side.

Sleeve and armhole

After pressing the sleeve seam open on pressing roll, place on sleeve board wrong side out and finish pressing.

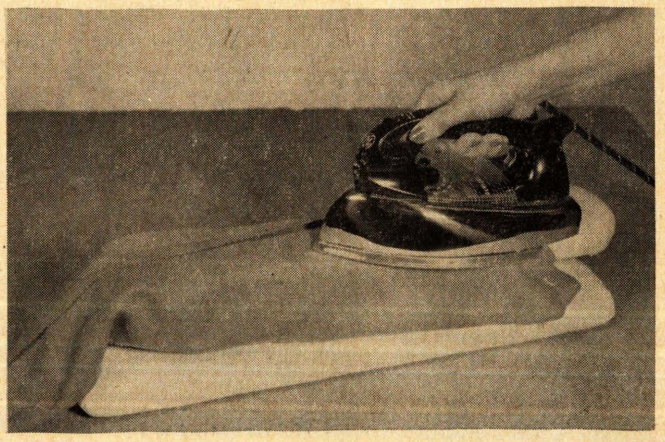

Figure 15. Press sleeve on sleeve board.

Place the armhole over the sleeve board as shown in Figure 16. Press the garment side of the under arm. Do not press past where the notches would be. Now,

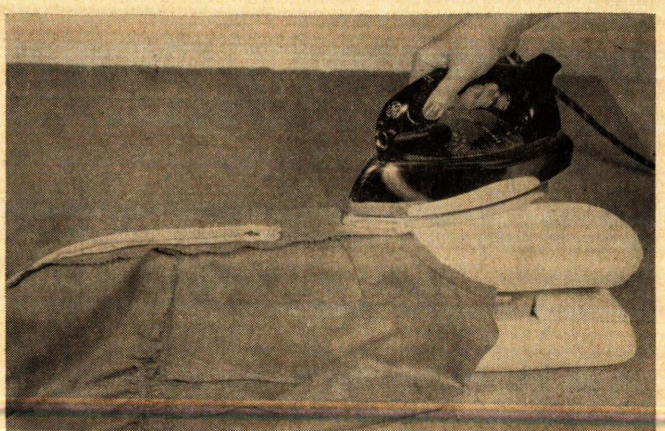

Figure 16. Armhole in position on sleeve board.

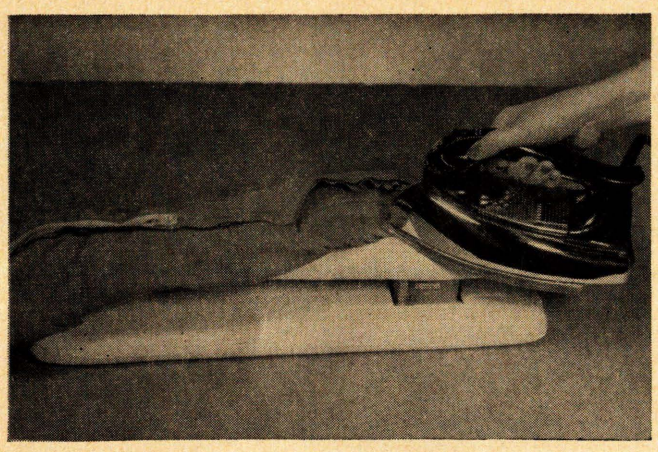

Figure 17. Avoid pressing more than 1 inch into sleeve cap.

place the sleeve as shown in Figure 17. Press on the sleeve side. Avoid pressing more than 1 inch into the sleeve cap. For a normal set-in sleeve, do not press the seams open or to one side. The fashion today dictates that the seams are pressed together and turned out into the sleeve. From the outside, the sleeve curves slightly out over the armhole.

Never turn the hem of a finished sleeve wrong side out to press it. This will stretch the bottom of the sleeve. Place as shown and barely put top of the iron into the sleeve. For most fabrics you will need a press cloth.

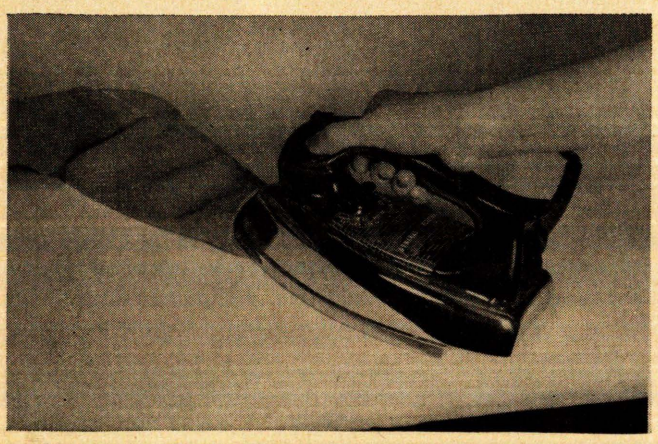

Figure 18. Press hem of finished sleeve this way.

Pleats

Press pleats from hem to waistline. Press very lightly at first, then gradually use more pressure.

Gathers

Never iron across gathers or insert point of the iron into gathers at the seam line. Lift gathered edge and press toward gathers at the seam line. If you have pressed the fabric well before gathers were made, very little if any pressing will be needed later.

Figure 19. Press toward gathers at seam line.

Shape garment by shrinking out fullness

Sleeve cap. Some seamstresses prefer to set in sleeves in a wool garment without shrinking out the fullness in advance. Others prefer to shrink out the gathers in the sleeve cap. If the latter is done, put in a row of gathering threads on the seam of the sleeve cap. Do not put any gathers across the top of the sleeve for $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch on each side where the sleeve joins the shoulder seam.

Place wrong side out over the edge of the small 5-inch pressing ham and gradually shrink out the fullness. Shrink from the seam edge. Do not let the iron go much past the seam onto the sleeve cap. This shrinking takes time and patience.

Bust fullness. In a princess line garment the ease over the bust may be shrunk either before attaching it to the rest of the garment or after attaching. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages. Many seamstresses think it is easier to do the shrinking before attaching for there is less danger of transferring seam markings to the right side. However, in this method it is harder to shrink out exactly the right amount of gathers.

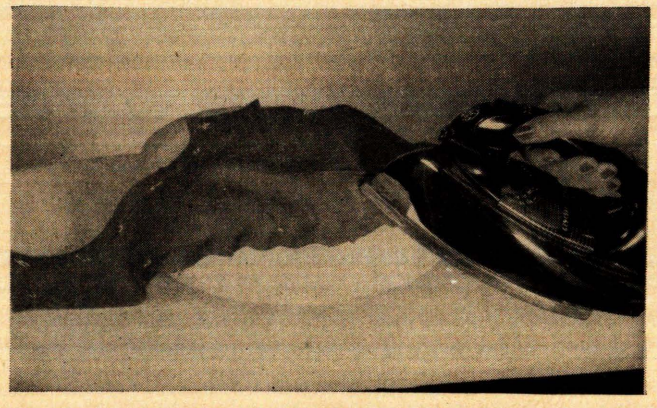

Figure 20. Shrinking out fullness.

In either case, put in a row of gathering threads and pull up the gathers the needed amount. Anchor the gathering thread by wrapping it around a pin.

For shrinking out fullness before attaching this piece to the rest of the garment, place it wrong side out over the large pressing ham. Steam the edge until the gathers disappear. Do not place weight of the iron on the gathered edge until the fullness has disappeared. Do not allow the tip of the iron to go very much past the seam line. This is a very slow process. Notice in Figure 21 a comparison of the garment piece with and without the gathers shrunk out. The upper piece has been shaped and fullness shrunk out.

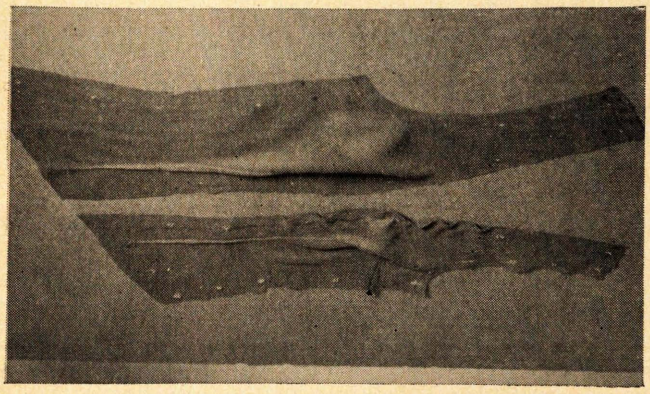

Figure 21. Garment pieces with and without gathers shrunk out.

Yoke with bust fullness. Do same as for bust fullness. Put gathering thread in blouse and pull up gathers to fit the yoke. Shrink out the fullness.

Hem. Shrink out fullness in the hem of a wool garment. If you use hem tape, the fullness in the hem should be shrunk out before sewing on the tape. Regulate the gathers. Place a strip of heavy paper cut the shape of the hem between hem and garment. Gradually steam and shrink out this excess fullness. Work from the edge of the hem up to the gathers. Never press around the bottom of the hem. This will stretch the bias section. (Work gradually. All of the fullness cannot be shrunk out at one time. Repeat the process again and again.)

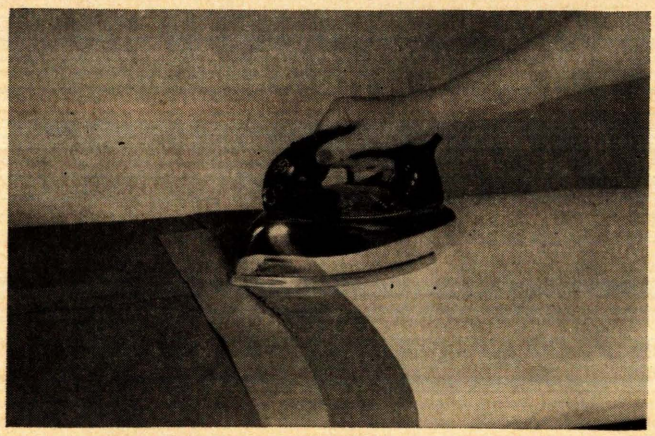

Figure 22. Shrink out fullness in hem before sewing on tape.

Shrink and curve the hem tape. Curve the tape by stretching the outer edge as you press it in a circle.

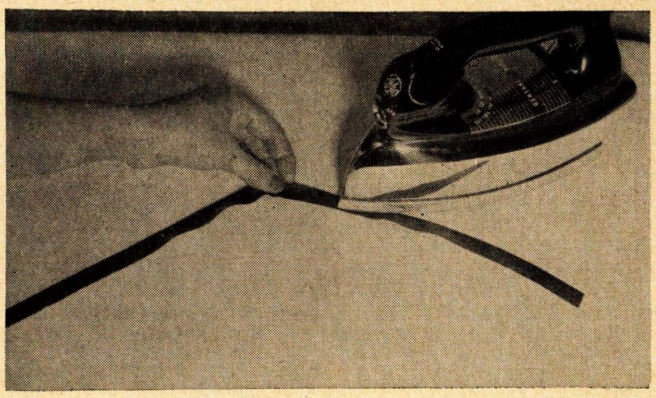

Figure 23. Shrinking and curving hem tape.

Press instead of basting

Yoke. Stay stitch the edge of the yoke almost on the seam line; clip the seam allowance as needed to turn the edge under. Press the seam allowance back on the wrong side. Now you are ready to attach the yoke to the garment.

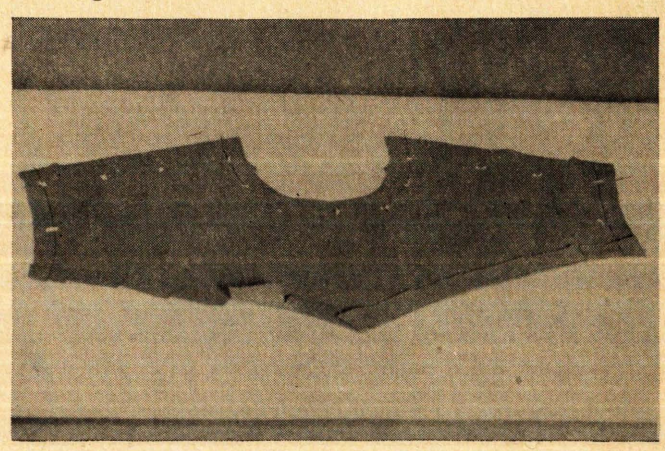

Figure 24. Press edge of yoke instead of basting.

Bias bindings. When bias bindings are cut, they may be prepared as commercial bindings before applying to the garment. This insures even bindings. Cut the binding twice the width desired plus two seam allowances. Cut a brown paper (or soft cardboard) guide exactly twice the width of the desired binding.

Place the bias binding on the board wrong side up. Put the paper guide in the center of the binding. Press the raw edge of the bias over the paper. With careful pressing this is less likely to stretch than the unpressed bias binding.

Press Finished Garment

Bias skirt

In pressing a bias skirt, place the lengthwise grain from hem to the waist on a straight line parallel with the edge of the board. Press with the lengthwise grain—from the hem up to the waistline.

Figure 25. Bias skirt in correct position for pressing.

For a four-gore bias skirt, such as a dress with stripes, the lengthwise grain will be perpendicular to the edge of the board. Continue to press with the grain—following the stripe. Notice that the skirt in Figure 26 is being pressed with the grain, but the skirt is not correctly placed on the board.

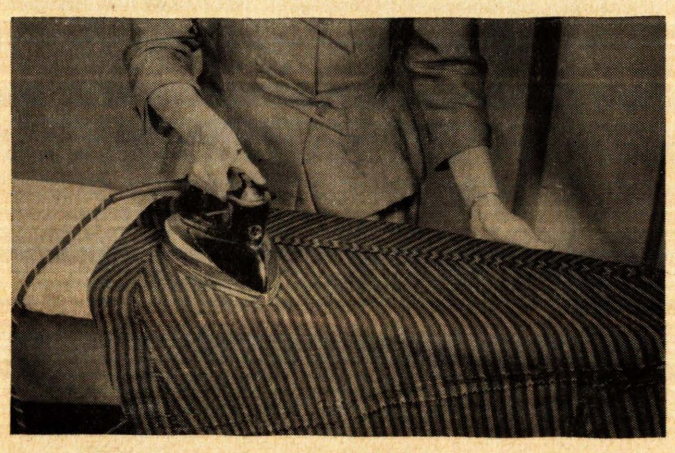

Figure 26. Bias skirt incorrectly placed on board.

Straight skirt

Place skirt over large pressing ham to press darts in the finished skirt. Use a press cloth for right side pressing.

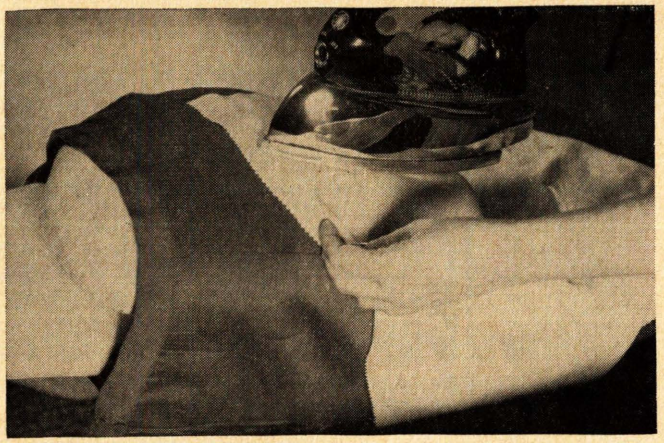

Figure 27. Pressing darts in a finished skirt.

Slide fastener plackets

If you have pressed properly during the construction, it is seldom necessary to press after the slide fastener has been put in. However, a dress that has become wrinkled may need additional pressing.

Place garment on the board wrong side out over a folded bath towel. Press from the wrong side being careful not to touch the metal teeth of the fastener with your iron.

Turn the garment right side out and again place it on the ironing board over the folded towel. Place strips of thin cardboard or heavy brown paper under the edge of the placket fold to protect the metal of the slide fastener. Press lightly from the right side using a press cloth to protect the garment.

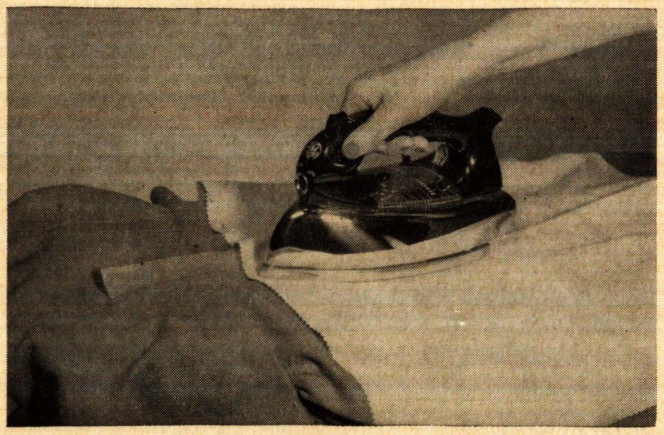

Figure 28. Protect the metal of slide fastener while pressing placket.

Jacket

To preserve the shape of the jacket over the bust, press over the large pressing ham. Again, use a press cloth to protect the right side.

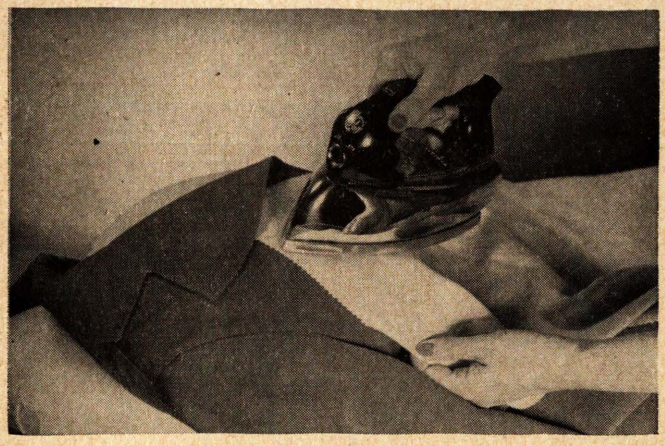

Figure 29. Press front of jacket over large pressing ham.

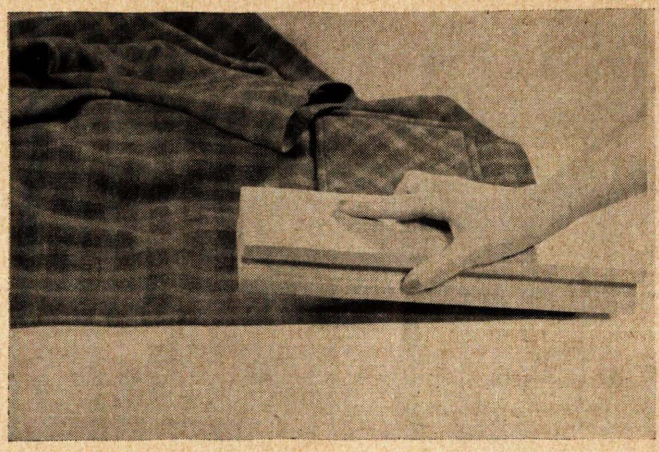

Figure 30. Use clapper to flatten edge of jacket.

Press the edge of the jacket by steaming with the steam iron. Then quickly slap the clapper down on the edge and hold to force steam through the fabric. Repeat process several times.

Press Other Fabrics

The man-made fibers such as Orlon, Dacron, nylon, and Acrilan need the iron set at rayon. Avoid pressing 100% dynel if at all possible. It may be damaged even with heat lower than rayon setting.

Corduroy and velveteen should be steamed rather than pressed if possible. When pressing is necessary, place garment face down on a bath towel and very lightly press from the wrong side. Keep the weight of the iron in your hand and exert as little pressure as possible. A velvet board is desirable if you sew very much velveteen.

Press silk with tissue paper next to the fabric on the wrong side. Avoid any right side pressing. Silk fabric water spots so the tissue paper will prevent moisture damage. It also protects silk from the heat.

Sewing Center With Pressing Unit

A U-shaped sewing center with a pressing unit such as this may be set up by any home seamstress. An adjustable ironing board is first choice, but an ironing board on boxes is satisfactory. If the seamstress can press without rising from her chair, she will be encouraged to press each detail as she sews.

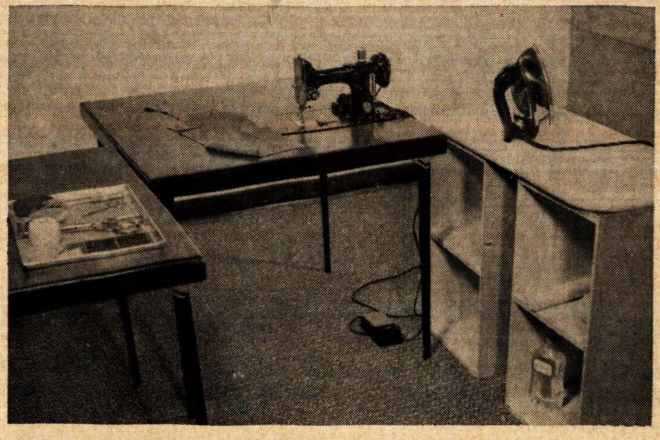

Figure 31. U-shaped sewing center.

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