

"Victorian Times" were a time of great change and growth on a global scale--much like the world today. Foreign trade agreements, cultural exchanges, new technologies, civil unrest, and an abundance of artistic and creative outlets were all characteristics of "Victorian Times." The Victorian period incorporates The Age of Liberalism & Nationalism (1826-1850) and The Age of Imperialism (1875-1900).

Civil unrest and social class battles, as well as strong patriotic bonds among citizens to protect their interests at home characterized the Age of Liberalism & Nationalism in both Europe and America. The emerging middle class sought personal freedoms for the individual and a more democratic government.

The Age of Imperialism, in contrast, was a time of world domination and a desire by governments such as Britain to establish empires. Through Queen Victoria, Britain was able to dominate small countries and control raw materials and world markets.

But, despite all this political and governmental turmoil--or, perhaps, because of it--many great minds expressed themselves in the form of invention. Victoria was privileged to reign during a time of great individual achievement. From new colors to cures for deadly diseases to new forms of entertainment, it was a time filled to the brim with change.

Victoria's education was solid and sensible; and, despite her young age and the heavy duties of being Queen of England and Empress of India, she was always gracious and poised. These qualities are often associated with the period.

Americans, even after having revolted in war to gain their freedom from English rule, continued to be culturally influenced by England for decades. Before 1800, the speech, costume, cuisine, architecture, furniture and furnishings of most American households--whether in Boston or out west--were English. By the early 1800s, Parisian taste arose but was short-lived. The culture of England was firmly imbedded in American custom to such an extent that when England began to build its empire in Asia, Americans eagerly bought Asian imports such as silk fabrics and tropical plants to stay in fashion with their British cousins.

By the 1840s and through 1900, home furnishings and accessories of all kinds also became accessible to poorer Americans. Even in frontier homes you could expect to find fine china dishes, for instance. Much like today, Americans in the last century wanted to "look" wealthy and fashionable even when they could not afford it. The ability to buy things on credit, for instance, was an increasingly common request by consumers.

FASHIONABLE THINGS

- Silk ribbon imported from Japan brought silk ribbon embroidery to the west.
- Fern collecting craze in Europe led to serious depletion of some species in the wild.
- Ferns grown at home were kept in Wardian cases (sealed glass boxes--miniature greenhouses).
- Nosegays (little bouquets sometimes called tussie-mussies) were a new form of an Elizabethan period floral arrangement; they had a more ornamental function than in Queen Elizabeth's day.
- "Say it with _____" started. _____ and herbs took on standardized meanings. For instance, lemon balm = sympathy; roses = love; violets = modesty; and rosemary = remembrance.
- "Standards" (not topiaries, but similar) of herbs like rosemary pruned into geometric shapes were common household ornaments.
- Linens, silks, and colorful textiles for all occasions were plentiful.

If Victorian women had had television, they would probably have enjoyed programs like

HouseSmart with Lynette Jennings on the Discovery channel, Home & Family on the Family channel, and of course anything by Martha Stewart!