

Getting Started in the N-SSA Costume Competition

The N-SSA Costume Competition is open to anyone interested in the civilian clothing worn during the years 1861 through 1865. To compete in competition, you must be issued a costuming competitor number, register for competition according to the established procedures, and have not been barred from N-SSA activities. If you are interested in participating, the following information will assist you in getting started. Please note that the information given complies with N-SSA Rules (Section 35), Policy, and By-Laws in addition to Costume Committee procedures and/or guidelines.

When is the competition held?

Costume competitions are held during the Spring and Fall National Skirmishes. Some regions may also host a competition. The schedule for each of the national competitions is published in the Skirmish Line Magazine, on the official national program, on the N-SSA web site, the Facebook N-SSA Costuming page and posted on the bulletin boards throughout Fort Shenandoah.

How do I obtain a competitor number?

Costume competition participants must file an application with the registrar. Two signatures and/or an active N-SSA membership number as requested on the form must accompany applications. Applications are available from the Registrar, the Operations Coordinator, or the Committee Chair. The applications are also available on the N-SSA website. Upon receipt of the completed application, the Registrar will issue a costuming competition card that contains the costuming competitor number. Please note that the costume competition card is not the same as the N-SSA membership card.

The following information is required:

- Current N-SSA members must provide their competitor number and their signature.
- Competitors that are not N-SSA members but are family members of a current N-SSA member, the N-SSA member's name, competitor number and signature are required. Family members are considered the spouse, sibling, child, or grandchild.
- Individuals that are neither N-SSA members or dependents of a member of the N-SSA, his or her application must include the name, competitor number and signature of two (2) active N-SSA members in good standing of the organization who are willing to serve as their sponsor.

How do I register for competition?

All competitors must submit a completed registration form with the competitor's number and required signature(s) to the competition Registrar prior to the start of competition. When registering, you will need to advise the Registrar as to which category you will compete in. If you are not sure which category is appropriate for your costume, you may request advice from the Registrar or other committee staff. The final decision will be the competitors. Competitors may compete in one or more categories; however, competitors

must be ready for the category when it is called for judging. Registration will close at the start of the competition. No late registrations will be accepted.

Do I need to make my own costume? Does it have to be sewn entirely by hand?

See the individual competition levels and categories. Some require the competitor to make the dress or costume, some require the entire costume (including underpinnings) to be made by the contestant, and others allow ready-made clothing to be entered. The sewing machine was readily available during the Civil War and clothing was constructed both by machine and by hand. It is up to the competitor to research and decide which method of construction to use.

What if I have special needs?

Persons that may have special needs must inform the Operations Coordinator of these needs prior to the start of competition. The staff will make every effort to accommodate special requests *if time permits*; however, situations arise where these requests may not be honored due to scheduling conflicts. An example would be if a person wishes to compete in multiple categories.

Physical limitations: Competitors whose physical condition may limit their ability to participate are encouraged to inform the Operations Coordinator or the Committee Chair of such limitations prior to the start of competition. The Operations Coordinator and Committee Chair will arrange accommodation.

Competitors entering national competition shall pay an entry fee upon registration for costume competition. The fees are as follows.

Member Adult \$5.00

Member child \$3.00

Non-member Adult \$10.00

Non-member child under 12 years of age \$5.00

Competition Categories

| Children's Category | Competition Level | Age Range |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Infants | Best Visual | All children |
| Children | Regular | 0-2 |
| Girl's Informal & Semi-Formal | Regular | 3-5 |
| Boys Civilian Regular | Regular | 6-11 |
| | | 6-15 |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Young Ladies Category | Competition Level | Age Range |
| Informal, Semi-Formal & Formal | Best Visual | 12-18 |
| | Regular | 12-18 |
| Adult Ladies Category | Competition Level | Age Range |
| Informal, Semi-Formal & Formal | Best Visual | 19 and over |
| Specialty Dress | Intermediate & Regular | 19 and over |
| | Intermediate & Regular | 19 and over |
| Men's Category | Competition Level | Age Range |
| Civilian | Best Visual, Intermediate & Regular | 16 and over |
| Judges Category | For judges who wish to compete | |

Category Descriptions

Informal Costumes are the simplest styles worn during this time period. They are intended for practical and certain leisure activities.

Examples: Housekeeping, gardening, traveling, country walks, picnics, some sporting activities.

- Style: Closed neckline, closed or narrowed sleeves, small, medium or no hoop.
- Fabrics: Cotton, wool, linen, blends of these fibers, some silks, colors and patterns. Reflect practicality of garment; generally plain weave.
- Trim: Small amounts usually sewn flat; skirts left untrimmed.
- Accessories: Simple collar and cuffs, simple hairstyles and head covering, other accessories plain and practical with little ornamentation.

Semi-Formal Costumes are dressier garments chosen to enhance the status of the wearer during social activities.

- Examples: Making and receiving formal calls, small dinner parties, walks in fashionable parks and resorts, carriage drives.
- Style: Neckline may be closed or slightly open, closed or open sleeves, small or medium hoop.
- Fabrics: quality cottons, wool, linen or silk; may be plain or textured weaves Jacquard, damask, moiré, velvet; colors and patterns reflect more fashionable use.
- Trim: Used more frequently and may be flat or three-dimensional.
- Accessories: More elaborate hairstyles and head coverings, accessories more ornamental and may be nicely trimmed.

Formal Costumes are special occasion garments worn for evening and more formal events.

- Examples: Balls, the theater, concerts, formal dinners, the opera, affairs of state.
- Style: Neckline usually low and wide, often off the shoulder; sleeves may be short or slashed open; skirts are full, sometimes with a short train; elaborate, elegant.
- Fabric: Elegant, of the finest quality, very fine cotton, silk, moiré, velvet, gauze, tulle, lace.
- Trim: Amount depends on garment fabric, elaborate and elegant.
- Accessories: Fancier and more formal hairstyles and headdresses; accessories are elegant and exquisitely embellished.

Specialty dress category is for those that cannot be judged by the standards of the other categories; they must be substantially different in style and construction.

- Examples would be nightwear, clothing for special occupations, clothing of ethnic or religious groups, specialized sports clothing such as riding, sea bathing, and exercise, costumes for theatrical productions and fancy dress.

Competition Levels

Best Visual- Competition in the visual category is the basic or entry level. It is designed for those people just getting started in competition who may have a costume, but do not have all of the underpinnings, shoes, and so on, that make up a complete outfit. You are judged only on the outward appearance of your garment; there is no oral presentation to the judges, and you are not judged on any item that is not visible. You appear before the judges for a short period of time who will look at your costume from a distance of approximately six feet. After all of the competitors have been presented, the judges score the competitors. The scores are tallied and the competitor with the highest total is declared the winner. You may enter this category twice and then you are encouraged to move on to the next level of competition. If you have competed in Intermediate or Regular competition in the past, you are discouraged from returning to the Best Visual competition. In this category of competition, no touching or handling of the garment is allowed by the judges.

Note: All undergarments (with respect for modesty) and outer garments will be touched and handled by the judges in the Adult, Childrens, Teens, Specialty and Men's intermediates and regular categories.

Intermediate - Intermediate competition is for adult competitors who have a complete outfit but are still new to competition. At this level, a verbal presentation is made to the judges and every phase of the outfit is judged. In order to enter this category, you must have made your own *costume*. If you have purchased your costume, or someone else has made it for you,

you must enter regular competition. This restriction applies to the *costume* only; underpinnings and/or accessories may be purchased or made by someone else. In this level of competition, the judges will touch and handle the outer garments and all undergarments presented by the competitor. Once you win first place in this category twice, you must move into regular competition. This applies to both women and men's categories.

Regular - Costumes in the regular competition may have been made by the wearer, or made by someone else. A verbal presentation is made to the judges. The total score is calculated by adding the points from all sections of the judging form. In this level of competition, the judges will physically inspect all outer garments and undergarments presented by the competitor.

How is my costume judged?

Contestants are judged on a point system. The three judges are seated together. When each category is called for judging, the contestants in that category shall line up and approach the judges individually. The contestant gives the judges their competitor number. The contestant has four minutes to make a verbal presentation to the judges explaining any aspect of their costume. The contestant may bring a prepared script and read it and show documentation/pictures for special aspects of their costume, provided it falls within the allowed timeframe. A warning is given at the end of three minutes. Time is called at the end of four minutes. The judges then have three minutes to ask questions, enter scores, and note any comments. Maximum total time per competitor is seven minutes. Please note: Competitors may not continue their presentation once time (four minutes) is up. Continuation by competitor after time has been called will result in a disqualification of contestant. Contestants may answer questions that are asked by judges during the three-minute judges costume review. After judging, contestants are expected to make themselves available for presentation to the audience. The contestants may describe themselves or have the narrator do this for them. Special competitions for the revolving trophies have judging procedures specific to that award.

Three individuals who have been selected by the Judges Coordinator serve as judges for all categories in the competition with the following exceptions:

- Members of the 3rd Maryland Artillery select the winner of the Becky Wood Award.
- Young Seamstress and Costumer Award- will be judged by the Committee Chair

What happens if I win?

A costume may be entered and win first in a regional costume competition, and then be entered in a national competition. If a costume wins first place in a national competition, the costume (not the contestant) must be retired for a period of two (2) years unless substantially altered to a point where the costume would have an entirely different look. For example, a day dress skirt may be used within 2 years if worn with an evening bodice. After the two (2) year waiting period, a *dress* may be reentered unaltered. Regions holding costume competitions may make their own rules about whether a costume that has won a national competition may be entered in subsequent regional competitions. Special awards such as the Delaney and Rosaleen Hulshart Awards have specific rules regarding retirement. A Delaney award *dress (dress only, not underpinnings or accessories)* must be permanently retired. If a costume wins the Hulshart award, the entire costume must be permanently retired, including undergarments, shoes and accessories.

Awards

The Judges Coordinator calculates the scores. If there is a tie the Operations Coordinator will break the tie, if there is still a tie then the Register will judge the contestants and break the tie. Awards may be presented for first place, second place and honorable mention in each category. Minimum point standards are required for each award. If the minimum point standards are not met, no award is given. Total possible points before judges' points are listed. Minimum points are as follows:

Ladies Regular – 66+ points possible

1st & 2nd Place – 66 points minimum, highest score wins 1st Place

Honorable Mention – 63 points minimum

Ladies Intermediate – 66+ points possible

1st & 2nd Place- 54 points minimum, highest score wins 1st Place

Hon. Mention – 63 points minimum

Men's Regular & Boys (in trouser) – 54+ possible 1st

& 2nd Place- 54 points minimum

Hon. Mention – 51 points minimum

Men's Intermediate – 54+ points possible

1st & 2nd Place – 48 points minimum, highest

Hon. Mention – 45 points minimum

Best Visual Award- 27+ possible points

1st and 2nd Place- 21 points minimum

Highest score wins

Infants and Children (girl or boy), & Young

Ladies-66+ points possible

1st & 2nd Place – 66 points minimum

Hon. Mention – 63 points minimum

Susan J. Brisbin Memorial Award (for special

projects)- 15+ points possible, highest score wins

One place only awarded

Rosaleen Hulshart Award- 87+ pts pos(women)

87 point minimum, only 1 place awarded

Protests and Concerns

A competitor may address their concerns and/or protests about any aspect of the costume competition by speaking with the Committee Chair. Depending on the nature of the concern, the Committee Chair, the committee staff, the national commander or the N-SSA Board of Directors may resolve it. Confidentiality will be maintained whenever possible. Concerns may be presented to Committee Chair at any time. Protests must be filed within one hour of the announcement of the close of the competition on Saturday.

Reviewing Individual Score

Contestants are permitted to review their respective judging scores, but not those of another contestant, anytime during a one-hour period immediately following the close of competition. This review can be accomplished by seeing the Judges Coordinator.

COSTUME COMMITTEE REVOLVING TROPHIES

The following awards are presented annually at specific nationals. The recipient of these awards is presented with the revolving trophy and a medal. After the awarding of the trophy, photographs shall be taken and the trophy returned and housed in the Historical Center.

Revolving trophies shall not leave the competition area at any time.

SPRING EVENT

The Rosaleen Hulshart Award is presented at each spring national skirmish for outstanding achievement in historical costuming. The contestant may enter a costume made and worn by the contestant; enter a costume worn by the contestant but made by someone else; or enter a costume made by the contestant and modeled by someone else. The competitor is allowed 29 minutes for their presentation to provide opportunity to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the costume. Judging is done on a point system with a minimum number of points necessary to win the award. The winner of this award must permanently retire all items worn in the competition, including underpinnings, accessories and jewelry. There is no additional fee for this award if already entered in another category.

FALL EVENTS

The Elmer Venskoske Award is presented at each fall national skirmish to the competitor with highest points who has not previously won a first or second place award in competition. The competitor may only win this award once.

The Young Seamstress & Costumer Award is presented to a young person who had made his or her own costume/dress (excluding underpinnings and accessories). The recipient is known as the YSC and is presented in the fall; The Committee Chair will judge this category. This award is for competitors under the age of 18. It is not a separate category or level of competition; the YSC is awarded from competitors already competing in other categories.

The Delaney Award is presented at each fall national skirmish to the adult competitor with the best overall outfit *made by the wearer*. Any items not made by the wearer are excluded from the competition. Contestants are judged on a point system with a minimum number of points necessary to win the award. The winning garment is permanently retired from any future competition. At the time of registration competitors are given the opportunity to sign up to be judged for the Delaney award. There is no additional fee for this award if already entered in another category.

SPRING & FALL

The Potomac Region Award for children is held each spring & fall. The Potomac award in memory of John Elton and is presented at each national to the child with the highest overall percentage score. To compensate for the difference in categories between boys and girls, the highest percentage score is determined by dividing the cumulative score of the three judges by the maximum number of possible points (not including judge's points).

The Susan Brisbin Projects Award is presented at each national skirmish. At a preceding national skirmish, a single item is selected for competition for this award; e.g. an underpinning, an accessory or specific article of clothing. The article is also the discussion and/or actual sewing project for the workshop. The item may be for a man, woman, or child. Items are judged on a point system. The item must be made by the competitor.

Costuming Workshops

In addition to costuming competition, the Costume Committee offers a workshop on Friday of every National event, held in the lower level of the Historic Center/Veterans' Building. This program is free and open to the public. Committee members and guest speakers are scheduled and a lecture/instruction on making an item that could be used in regular competition is offered. Many times, original garments/items are shared.

The competition is held in Memorial Circle on the main range. In the event of inclement weather, activities will be held in the basement of the History Center/Veterans' Building across from Sutler Row. It can be reached from the lower parking lot behind the building. During civilian competition, a Commentator will share educational topics on period clothing, accessories and/or civilian life during the Civil War.

Additional Costuming Awards

The Becky Wood Award is presented at each spring nationals in honor of a deceased member of the 3rd Maryland Artillery. Everyone in costume during the spring nationals the day the award is presented is eligible for this award. Members of the 3rd Maryland select the winner based on their own criteria. Participation in the costuming competition is not required.