

*What**Hath**God**Wrought*

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## A TELEGRAPH CODE MYSTERY

*Was this silk dress worn by an early employee of the National Weather Service?  
Mystery code in the pocket tells a story about early forecasting.*

December 14, 2023 — Sometimes a dress is just a dress. In this story, a dress becomes a kind of time travel portal, where we get to return very briefly to the Industrial Revolution and learn about the history of weather forecasting on the frontiers of North America in the 1880s.

The story starts in 2013 in an antique mall in Maine, where Sara Rivers Cofield sees a beautiful brown dress for sale. Rivers Cofield is an archeologist who also collects old dresses and

handbags for fun. She loved this particular dress's beautiful metal buttons and elaborate bustle.

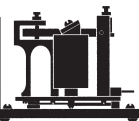
Once she got the dress home she found a secret pocket hidden under that bustle, inside the seams of the skirt. Upon further inspection, she also found crumpled bits of paper inside the secret pocket.

She recognized that both the dress and the paper were likely from the 1880s. What she couldn't decipher was the meaning of messages written on

*continued on page 10*



*Three views of the 1880s silk bustle dress in which crumpled bits of paper containing a code were found. The pocket where the code was found is located under the overskirt at the right hip. (Image credit: Sara Rivers Cofield)*



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The next issue of *Dots & Dashes* is scheduled for publication on March 30<sup>th</sup>, with submission deadline three weeks prior to that date.

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