

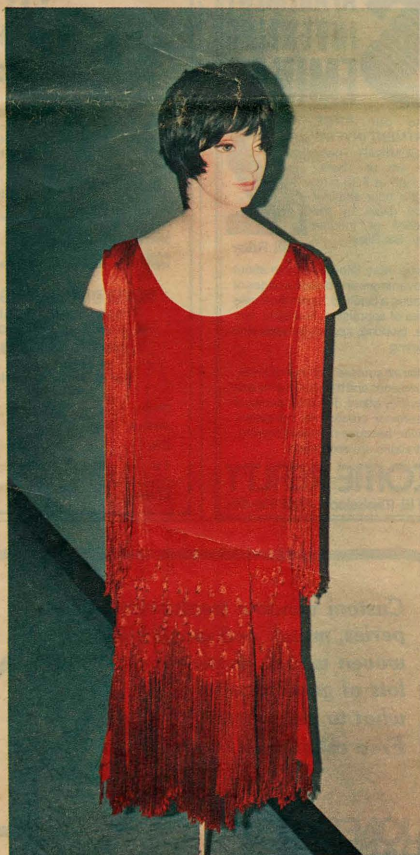


Special displays such as historic children's garments are on temporary exhibit.

HISTORIC COSTUMES

A Colorado resource

By CAROL CAMPBELL



Historic dresses, this one from the 1920s, can be adapted for discos.



This Japanese silk kimono adds regal elegance to a recent Oriental display.

AN UNUSUAL museum is in the Gifford Building at Colorado State University at Fort Collins, where the items aren't locked behind glass cases and the visitor can look AND touch.

Established in 1973, the Historic Costumes Collection of clothing, patterns, accessories and textiles is a study resource for students and faculty as well as the people of Colorado.

You can't wear the historic garments. But, they can be used as a pattern resource to design exciting, affordable clothes that bring back the mystique of the past.

Beaded or sequined dresses that danced the Charleston in the 1920s are in the swing today. Copying a pattern from the collection could result in a smashing disco outfit at half the retail price.

Located in the Textiles and Clothing Department (College of Home Economics), the Historic Costumes Collection has grown from 1,200 items in 1976 to more than 6,000. It consists of donated items primarily from the 19th and 20th centuries, with a hand-painted French fan dating to the early 1700s.

Occasionally complete outfits have been preserved and donated. For example, the collection contains the complete commencement outfit (including hat, gloves and shoes) worn by one of the women who graduated from then Agricultural College of Colorado (now CSU) on June 3, 1897.

Imaginations of our historic past pop out of every closet, drawer and shelf in the collection. The caption: "Three-piece suit worn by the daughter of Nathan C. Meeker,

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founder of the town of Greeley," led to the discovery of one experience from Miss Meeker's life. While she probably wasn't wearing this same three-piece suit, Josephine Meeker and her mother survived the White River Indian Massacre, Sept. 29, 1879, when they were taken captives by the Indians and "suffered extreme hardships and indignities for 23 days." (Nathan Meeker was killed that day in what is called the Meeker Massacre.)

Visitors to the collection may browse through *The Delineator*, a beautifully illustrated ladies' journal, published by Butterick around the turn of the century. The history buff can enjoy articles from the 1900s on such topics as fashion, gardening, recipes, athletics for women, social customs of the day as well as numerous short stories.

Art students study the textiles collection (fabrics not yet made into a garment) to learn the various weaving techniques. For example, the col-

lection contains some India textiles that were woven with 14-karat gold or silver, resulting in a shimmery fabric.

Today's fashions give evidence that historic garments influence apparel designers. Victorian underclothing is being worn again... but, today it is on the outside. (Tank tops started as men's underwear and camisole corset covers are now worn as camisole tops with shorts or pants.)

Students in CSU's Costume and Textile History, and Fashion Design classes are challenged to adapt from one of the collection's historic costumes a design for a new garment that can be worn on the street today. Sometimes a long-abandoned construction technique is rediscovered, modified and found to be very appropriate for today's home sewer.

"Sometimes people come to the collection looking for a particular pattern. It's fun to see their surprise when we find the answer to their question," said Patricia Trautman,





Graduate student Polly Willman restores a French fan ca. 1900.

COSTUMES *continued*

acting curator and professor in the Textiles and Clothing Department. One woman wanted to copy a pattern from an authentic circa 1890 riding habit which had a leg-of-mutton sleeve. She wanted to duplicate it for a pioneer horse show. We were able to find the garment and she was very pleased, laughing, "Well, now I've copied the pattern, I hope I can make it."

Disappointed because your family doesn't have an authentic old-fashioned wedding dress for you to wear? Visit the collection and copy a pattern from one of the many wedding dresses, oldest of which is a wool bustle dress worn in Fort Collins in 1886.

The Historic Costumes Collection is generally open to the public daily from 10 a.m. to noon during the academic year, or by appointment with Ms. Trautman (491-7356). Special permission may be obtained for use of items outside the Gifford Building for display purposes only, with appropriate security. Students are encouraged to visit the collection.

Textiles and clothing students assist in the care and cataloging of the items and arrange the exhibits in the display cases.

A recent acquisition, donated by the Sarazin Co. of Connecticut, contains close to \$200,000 worth of lingerie from the early 1920s through 1967. Students trying to identify and organize each undergarment, using the pictures and patterns included, chuckle over the titles, like "Gadabout Corset Brief," given to each pattern. This donation includes complete records of orders and sales as well as old journals containing methods used in pricing lingerie and is an important new resource for students in retailing.

Unusual international items in the collection include a 300-year-old Chinese embroidered skirt worth \$3,000, a maharajah suit and saris from India, Indonesian batiks, as well as bolts of exquisite Chinese silks. Or, if you are so inclined, you can examine a Buddhist rosary made out of camel vertebrae.

French designers from the 1920s,



COSTUMES *continued*

Chanel and Patou, along with contemporary designers Givenchy, Schiaparelli and Yves St. Laurent add European flair to the collection.

American contributions number a Seminole Indian outfit, a 1940s dress made out of coconut fiber, dresses with Gibson Girl bodices from the early 1900s, "bustle dresses" from the 1800s as well as "hourglass" dresses from the 1890s. "In the era of the hourglass dress, the idea was to have a waist size that was equal to your age when you got married. Some women removed the bottom rib, (to make the waist up to 1½ inches smaller)," says Ms. Trautman, recently named Outstanding Woman of America by that organization's national board.

Fashions by 1930s American designer Claire McCardell and contemporary American designer Bill Blass are visible throughout the collection.

Three rooms on the third floor of the Gifford Building are bursting with the collection which has grown tremendously in the last few years. "Originally to last 10 years in terms of the collection, we're already out of space," said Ms. Trautman, chairman of the Costume Society of America's national meeting in Denver October 11-13.

Donations come from alumni, students, the community, museums or people who hear of the collection. Items are accepted because they represent different clothing periods or cultures, demonstrate specific construction techniques, and/or are constructed of unique fabrics, not necessarily because they are museum pieces. The collection is low on men's clothing and donations are welcomed.

To preserve the historic items, each item is fumigated before it is allowed to join the collection. The storage rooms are kept at an average temperature of 70 degrees. "If it gets to 80 degrees, bugs appear and the entire collection must be fumigated," says Ms. Trautman, laughing.

Goals for the collection are "to get everything dated and to work on conservation so the collection can remain open for people to use. We need to devise methods to keep deterioration at a minimum," says Ms. Trautman, who is working on her doctorate in American History at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

To assist with the rapidly growing collection, Ms. Trautman would like to develop a "Friends of the Collection." Members could oversee the display cases, give talks on the collection, contribute clothing and search out new acquisitions. "It would be interesting to know the history behind all of the items in the collection and this is another area where the 'Friends' could make a valuable contribution," she says.

Unfortunately, unlike other things from the past, large quantities of clothing just haven't survived. Old



Cindy Harman, a textiles and clothing student, prepares the top to a Japanese dressing gown for an Oriental exhibit.



Patricia Trautman, acting curator, examines a copy of a 16th century gown worn by Empress Isabella of Spain.

clothes seem to give off a sense of fantasy and people are snapping them up to wear rather than donating them to museums.

Ms. Trautman encourages people who may not want to donate historic garments (including grandmother's quilts), but would like to know how to clean and store them properly, to contact her. Often items are damaged beyond repair because of improper cleaning.

Are you a history buff? Are you having trouble getting just the right idea for a costume party? Or, are you just interested in looking at these lovely historic items? Whatever your interests are, Colorado State University's Historic Costumes Collection can offer you an interesting trip into the past. ■

The author lives in Fort Collins, Colo.