

# THE CLOTHES PRESS

WINTER 2008 No. 95

## DRESS NOVA SCOTIA

### BOYS' COSTUMES FROM THE YARMOUTH COUNTY MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

*Susan Winship*

'BOYS WORE DRESSES! NO WAY!' is the usual comment when youngsters of today learn that boys wore dresses up to the age of five or six. Here at YCM&A we are privileged to have a few of these dresses as well as an extensive collection of lace-trimmed christening gowns, flannel nightgowns, knitted booties and caps, girls' dresses and varied miscellaneous items. One collection was donated by a mother who saved every article of clothing belonging to her son and daughter from infancy to young teen. This is of newer vintage, the late 1960's through to the early 80's. Even now, though not antique they are unique. It is interesting to note that so much of our children's clothing is either for infants or little girls. We have a tendency to save our daughters' frilly dresses but not our sons' dungarees. Our boys' dresses are in remarkable condition and having the provenance for each one is an added bonus.

The oldest dress is of sturdy cotton in a forest green check with pink flowered trim. It has the classic features of its time – the drop shoulder with tight upper sleeve widening to a full cuff and a tightly gauged skirt. This dress was worn by Henry Wheeler Sabean (1854-?) and was donated by the Sabean Family Reunion which was held in Yarmouth in 1999. It had been worn by two succeeding generations for other family reunions. Those little boys must have been rather upset to have to wear a dress even for a short time.



*Continued on page 2*

## CHRISTMAS GET TOGETHER

Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 7 PM December 8.

Meg Wilcox will be in town to tell us all about her trip to Florence,  
so come along and join us for some good stories and Christmas cheer.

## BOY'S COSTUMES FROM THE YARMOUTH COUNTY MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

*CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1*

The beige and pink checked linen dress has a shawl collar with lace trim. The full sleeves are gathered to deep flat-stitched cuffs. Three flat-stitched pleats at the back from neckline to waist add detail and fullness to the bodice. The skirt is pleated and belt loops and a two-button front closure secure the fabric belt. There is an unknown factor with this dress. Two small buttons (one at the waistband and the other just at the lower collar line) are on the inner right side. There are no corresponding buttons or indication of any attachment on the other side. The placket at the front waistband indicates the closure point at the waist but there are no hooks, eyes or buttonholes. A V-shaped insert is a reasonable possibility. This little outfit was worn by James Allison Foulis (1898-1901) and was donated by a family member.



Though not a dress, this outfit merits special mention. The knee pants and cap are of sturdy chocolate-brown velvet. The pants are fully lined and there are two decorative metal buttons on each side at the knee. The muslin waistband has side and front buttonholes. Unfortunately we do not have the upper portion. The cap has a high soft crown; gathered on one side with a black silk bow and tassel trim. There is a twisted metallic 'rope' and a velvet tartan band. This outfit was worn by Reginald James Allen (1872-78) who was the brother of the donor, Miss Letha Allen of Yarmouth.

This dress and jacket are of midnight-blue velvet. The bodice portion is of blue striped cotton; sleeveless and with metal button front closure. This bodice was not meant to be shown. The skirt is pleated with two rows of mother-of-pearl buttons from waistband to hem. Hooks and eyes close the front panel of the skirt. The open jacket has an attached vest with two small inner pockets and mother-of-pearl button front closure. A blue satin bow is at the neckline. A button at the centre back of the neck indicates a detachable collar was worn with this costume. This dress was worn by the grandson of Oliver Jones of Moncton, N.B. The elder Jones was the founder of the Westmoreland Bank.

Thank you for the opportunity to showcase a few of our juvenile costumes from YCM&A. It is a wonderful idea to have articles from the varied museums of our province. We all have such a rich heritage to share.

Susan Winship, Costume Department



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Phone: 902-742-5539 Fax: 902-749-1120  
Owned and Operated by the  
Yarmouth County Historical Society*

## **COSTUME AND TEXTILE CLASSES, WINTER 2009**

NSCAD Continuing Studies is offering the following classes starting in January 2009.

- Sewing Techniques
- Intermediate Sewing Techniques
- Personal Dress Form
- Draping
- Vat and Acid Dyeing Workshop
- Felting Workshop: Balls and Vessels

Registration begins on December 4th.

For more information check the website at <http://www.nscad.ns.ca/cstudies/index.php>

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

*Sally Erskine Doucette*

When Meg Wilcox was a little girl in big city Toronto, she used to tell people her family was from Italy (although they weren't really). Her father went through an Italian Renaissance hobby phase which had a huge impact on the visions of possibilities in Meg's head. Much later, when her dear sister dragged her to Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), she decided to do Italian Renaissance for her SCA ensemble because of its elegance and embellishment, ie lots of lace and beautiful extras, a choice that stood out among plain Middle Age clothes. After meticulous research and teaching herself how to sew, draft patterns, etc, our Meg became something of a costume expert, renowned in the SCA community as an award winning Italian Renaissance costume historian. Who knew?! She works away so quietly down the shore in Sherbrooke Village...

That was then, this is now. It just so happens that one of Meg's costume hero's, Janet Arnold of the UK (author of *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* and *Patterns of Fashion*), was feted in Italy this year. And, funding in hand, inspired companion Elaine MacKay (formerly of Halifax, now of Black Creek Village in Toronto) at her side, Meg went to Italy. Read all about it on page 6.

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## COSTUME GIFTS FROM THE CYBERSPACE

Treat yourself to some free costume articles to enjoy over the Holidays

### **Textile History** (Maney Press)

At the moment you can download the entire contents of Volume 38, number 1 (May 2007) of *Textile History* at <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/tex>

Articles include:

"To attract the attention of fish as little as possible: An Object-Led Discussion of Three Garments, for Country Wear for Women, Made of Scottish Woolen Cloth, Dating from 1883-1908" by Lou Taylor

"The novelty consists in ornamental design: Design Innovation in Mass Produced Boys' Clothing 1840-1900" by Clare Rose.

The Maney Press is also allowing free downloads of sections of *Dress in the Court of Henry VIIIth*, by Maria Hayward . Access the table of contents, introduction and chapter 3 (Creating Magnificence: The Role of the Great Wardrobe) at <http://www.maney.co.uk/search?fwaction=show&fwid=220>

And if you want to know more, listen to an interview with the author, Maria Hayward, on the BBC Radio 4 website at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/04/2007\\_48\\_tue.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/04/2007_48_tue.shtml)

### **Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture**

Volume 7, Number 1 (March 2003) of *Fashion Theory* is free for the downloading. Titles include:

"Decorated Men: Fashion the French Soldier 1842-1914" by Alison Matthews David

"Tehran Chic: Islamic Headscarves, Fashion Designers, and New Geographies of Modernity" by Alexandru Balasescu

"Casanova and Mlle Clairon: Painting the Face in a World of Natural Fashion" by Morag Martin.

Get your free read at <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/berg/jdbc>

## LIBRARY RESOURCES

The Costume Society of Nova Scotia donated its library collection to the Costume Studies Program at Dalhousie University. This costume reference library is available to members of CSNS by contacting Dianne Kristoffe @ 494-2178 [dianne.kristoffe@dal.ca](mailto:dianne.kristoffe@dal.ca)

The library collection is housed within the Costume Studies accommodations at 1515 Dresden Row, Suite 202 in the City Centre Atlantic. Please allow time for scheduling visits as the room is used for classes also. Books, journals and videos of Costume Studies fashion shows are available.

## THE NUN DOLLS' STORY

*Anita Campbell*

Eight years ago Sister Wendy James founded the Servants of the Sacred Cross, a religious sisterhood committed to upholding the historic Catholic Faith. Important to this commitment is the wearing of the habit. Sister Wendy understands the significance of clothing, of how the habit makes the nun easily identified, a sign of parochial availability. She believes this was lost with the reforms of Vatican II, and is part of a movement to re-establish the wearing of the habit and the awareness of nuns in our everyday life.

One of the community members, Sister Rosaire moved from Seattle to join this special community, and with her she brought a collection of 300 dolls dressed as nuns. Look up nun dolls on e-bay and you will get an idea of the variety available to a collector, from the cheap and mass produced, to porcelain figurines correct to the last detail. Sister Rosaire has examples of both. She has dolls made by the best known fabricators, such as the Cholewa Brothers, as well as a Sally Fields Flying Nun doll. But perhaps the most valued are the convent made dolls, those dressed by nuns themselves in the habit of their community. These dolls were given to young girls to foster a vocation with the community, or by a novice to her family when she left



*Sister Rosaire holds a 'Sister Luke' Audrey Hepburn doll, from the Nun's Story.*



*Convent dressed doll in the habit of the Sisters of Saint Casimir.*



*Doll dressed in the habit of the Holy Family of the Nazareth.*

the family home to enter the convent. A charming example is the doll dressed by the Sisters of Saint Casimir, a community organized in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to serve Lithuanian immigrants in America.

Every doll in the collection has a story. A doll dressed in the habit of the Sisters of Holy Family of the Nazareth prompts Sister Rosaire to relate how members of this community were persecuted in Nazi Poland, slaughtered for their religious beliefs including the wearing of their habit.

Eventually the Sisters of the Sacred Heart would like to have a convent with space to exhibit the dolls to the public. The dolls and their clothing are fascinating in themselves, but the real story is the history of the women who chose to wear the habit, women who were, and still are, the backbone of the Catholic and Anglican faiths. For now though, the community would be grateful to find a temporary home for the collection; they are looking for a secure location, accessible to the public, where the dolls can be viewed and their stories told.

## COSTUME COLLOQUIUM 2008: A TRIBUTE TO JANET ARNOLD FLORENCE, NOVEMBER 4 - 9, 2008

*Meg Wilcox*

This was a truly historic event, that I am so grateful to have witnessed, words can barely express it. I met loads of interesting people, saw a huge amount of art, ate tidbits and drank bubbly, and heard some of the most exciting things I have ever heard. It was an intense five days, and I'm still reeling from the impact.

The greatest thing I took home with me was a feeling of inclusion in a world I had believed was beyond me. I expected to lurk on the fringes and watch famous people shmooze, but the reality was completely different. The organizers consciously decided to omit all academic titles and institutions from the name tags; name and country were all we got. It was a small detail that made a huge difference, and reflected the general attitudes of everyone at this event. We are united in our love of history and our passion for its preservation, and it doesn't matter where we work or what we do, as long as we are willing to work together. Sharing was the watchword.

Elaine and I shared a hotel room, and hung out together a fair bit, so when I say "we" I mean Elaine and I. I'm glad we went to Pisa, if only for the *tête à tête* on the bus on the way back. Love you, M'Elaine!

I met a lot of really interesting people, some famous, some less so. I've got lots of Costume Geek Cocktail Party Stories (so we'll want to go to the pub after my presentation). Breakfast with Avril Hart was a highlight, but perhaps the most interesting person I met was Mark Wallis. Mark is the President of Past Pleasures, a UK company that specializes in Costumed Interpretation for the likes of Hampton Court Palace. Mark has been consulting with Newfoundland on the Cupids 400th Anniversary in 2010 (which I now want to attend in good middle-class English 1610!), and is very interested in visiting Nova Scotia in the next year or so, if we can work out the logistics. If Mark comes I will certainly give him as much of a tour as I can, and throw him a party. Mark gave a very passionate, entertaining, and educational talk on Costumed Interpretation, which I will find very helpful in my work at Sherbrooke Village. We also had a lovely dinner with him and his business

partner Stephanie Selmayr, the Costume Director for Past Pleasures, who modeled a wonderful late Elizabethan construction during Mark's talk.

There was tons of exciting news. I'll give you a few highlights, but for the full details you'll have to come to my presentation, or wait for the articles that will follow. This event has triggered something!

There has been a new discovery in the Medici Chapel at San Lorenzo! During reconstruction/exploration, they discovered a tomb, filled to overflowing with bodies, most of which seem to have been put there all in a bunch, probably taken from other burial sites some time in the 20th century. The most exciting thing about this is that, due to special conditions in this particular tomb, the fabrics that have survived are the opposite to what has been found so far; plant fibres have survived better than proteins, and the bodies appear to be mostly middle and lower class. It's a treasure trove for those of us who want to know what regular people wore. Results will be forthcoming, but the project is in its infancy. I wonder if they need any help? I'm free Winters...

The Janet Arnold Archive has been catalogued and presented to the Galleria del Costume. Ten years of sorting, and now this collection of over 100,000 slides and notes will be put on the internet, as soon as they work out formatting the database and sorting out the details of the operation of the site. I'll be keeping my ear to the ground on this, but if anyone hears anything, please let us all know. The main body of the work pertains to the Medici project.

I was very disappointed to have been rushed through the Galleria del Costume at the Palazzo Pitti, but at least I got to gaze upon the newly-mounted burial gown of Eleanora of Toledo, my heroine! My group was second through, and had to wade through hundreds of beautiful and interesting garments to get to the prize room, the Medici tomb finds. Such an amazing piece of work, the slow discovery of a gown out of a mass of fragments.

And it's so elegant! *continued p. 5*

## FLORENCE COLLOQUIUM *CONT.*

The gown fragments have been laid on a large plexiglass panel with mild backlighting, displayed on an angle for easy viewing. I had scant minutes to soak it in, and barely looked at the other garments on display in the room, let alone read the signs.

They really understand climate control in Italian museums! We could learn a lot from them, since they also seem to find funding for these vast projects. I'm starting to think "why shouldn't a Canadian from Nova Scotia study Italian garments, and history, and learn the language and move to Florence? Huh?" I'm almost afraid to see if there's any way...

There were six of us there from Canada; myself, Elaine, Alexandra Palmer from the ROM, Suzanne McLean from the Bata Shoe Museum, and two other ladies whose names I didn't quite get. Elaine knows them, though. We were outnumbered by Aussies (a cheery crowd of 10 or so) and Americans were thick on the ground. I saw a dear friend from New York, and got reacquainted with some ladies who I'm quite sure didn't recognize me out of costume. I tend to see faces more than costumes, and when I notice a costume, I'll usually remember the wearer, if it's good.

The SCA experienced a breakthrough at this event; we have been accepted as serious scholars and recreators of costume, and were actually given credit for the growth in private scholarship. After years of feeling belittled by "academia" this represents a complete shift in attitude that can only bring increased enthusiasm and sharing. So exciting for all Re-enactors who put their hearts into their studies.

More later!



Who is this mysterious man? What make of vehicle does he drive? Join us on December 8th when Meg will tell all!

## BOOK REVIEW

### PATTERNS OF FASHION 4

*Meg Wilcox*

*Patterns of Fashion 4 - The cut and construction of linen shirts, smocks, neckwear, headwear and accessories for men and women, c. 1540 - 1660.* Janet Arnold, with Jenny Tirimani and Santina Levy. Macmillan, 2008. ISBN 978-0-333-57082-1

Those of you who have been waiting for over 10 years for this book to be published, be prepared to be well satisfied. This is worth the wait!

In the usual Janet Arnold style, but with the addition of loads of colour pictures, this book covers many of the most mysterious and challenging garments ever worn, including ruffs of all kinds. The technical artistry apparent in the artifact linens is stunning, and the amount of information included in this book is monumental. No other study of it's kind exists, and many of the images included have never been seen before, except by those close to the work.

Along with stunning shirts, smocks, collars and ruffs, accessories such as rebatos and supportasses, coifs and caps, boot hose, drawers, gloves, and purses are touched upon, with the kind of detail we have come to count on from the late Ms. Arnold.

As with the other books in this series, Ms. Arnold included information from many sources, including statues, paintings, engravings, and text, to further illustrate the work. Many of the stitches used in linen construction, including those for openwork seams, are described in a section devoted to the technology of the linen-worker and laundress.

For the adventurous there is a section in the back on starching and setting ruffs. I would love to watch the pros do this at the Globe: they make it sound easy to iron a ruff, but I know better from experience! Their ruffs are beautiful, though, and it just makes me want to go work there even more!

If I have any criticism, it may be that looking at pages of straight sections of fabric is a little silly, but detail is detail, and Ms. Arnold didn't neglect to take drawings of even the simplest-cut garment.

For anyone interested in hand-sewing, historical underclothes, lace-making, or historical costume of any kind, this book joins the first three in the series as being indispensable. Now I'm going to go back and look at the book some more! In the next issue of the Clothespress, I will review *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing Sixteenth Century Dress*, Ninya Mikhaila.

## COSTUME WEEKEND IN MONTREAL

Anita Campbell

A weekend in Montreal is always a big treat for a small town girl, but it is even better when combined with a costume exhibit and colloquium. The exhibit *Reveal or Conceal* at the McCord Museum examines the trend to reveal more and more of the female body over the past 150 years.

The exhibit curator, Cynthia Cooper, drew on the extensive McCord collection of costumes and archival material to examine the intriguing relationship between the female body and its adornment. Such as the fact that concealing parts of the body can be as erotic, if not more so, than flaunting it. The exhibit points out that 19th century styles that seem so prim to us today could in fact be quite provocative; the bustle emphasized the female buttocks, and the flip of the hoop skirt often revealed the attractively stockinged ankle it purported to conceal. Or the counter-intuitive fact that social protocol required a low cut neckline for formal evening wear, but not if you were of the lower classes.



Behind the scenes at the McCord, Caroline Bourgeois explains how she makes the buckram forms, which give a life like form to the garment and in effect create an

Another interesting trend examined was the gradual acceptance of drawers for the female. At first considered too masculine for female wear, they gradually infiltrated the system until they were de rigueur, but had to be prettied-up and feminized in the process. Other topics were the adoption of trousers by females, the rising hemlines, and the present day sexualization of young girls through children's versions of very adult styles. I urge you to read the entire text of the exhibit, which can be downloaded from the McCord Museum website: <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/>

The colloquium, *Bodies on Display*, organized by the McCord in conjunction with the Costume Society of America, provided a forum to examine the body-adornment link in greater detail and from various perspectives, both academic and museum/material culture based. This resulted in two days and evenings of cutting-edge papers and presentations.

I particularly enjoyed the examination of mannequins. Presentations ranged from the evolution of artists' figures to the realistic female mannequins seen in 19th century Parisian shop windows; to the use of mannequins in exhibits and how visitors like life-like figures but not so life-like as to be off-putting. A behind the scenes visit offered another chance to look at mannequins as McCord technician Caroline Bourgeois explained and demonstrated how she made the buckram forms in *Reveal and Conceal*.

Discussion of mannequins continued in the evening when Cynthia Cooper talked about the curatorial decisions behind the planning of the exhibit, including the use of the buckram forms rather than full-sized female mannequins. Cost was a factor in the decision but also the desire to make the artifact, not its mounting devise, the focus of the visitors' eyes. *Reveal and Conceal*, paradoxically is an exhibit about the female body without any bodies, and perhaps more effective because of it.

The exhibit *Reveal or Conceal?* runs until January 18th, 2009. McCord Museum, Montreal



## A TALE OF TWO EXHIBITS; *YVES SAINT LAURENT* VERSUS *REVEAL AND CONCEAL*?

Kelly Grant

In September I had the opportunity to visit the *Yves Saint Laurent* exhibit at the Musee des Beaux Arts as well as *Reveal and Conceal* at the McCord. My first thoughts were on how differently the two exhibits were mounted. The first had the clothes up close and personal, with very little to keep you from having your nose prints on the cloth, just a line on the floor, in some cases, not even that. Very little text was included for the garments. We learned about some of his thoughts on dressing women, but little about what went into building the clothes. The lighting was quite high for a clothing exhibit. Some great ideas though, the thought that you could get really close to the clothing and the turnstile mannequins so that all sides of the clothes could be viewed were fabulous in my mind.

*Reveal and Conceal* featured the clothing behind glass in a dimly lit room, but there was far more text to the exhibit, explaining how the clothing developed, why it was worn. While the clothes from *YSL* were displayed almost by collection, what inspired him to create the clothes he did, the garments in *Reveal* were displayed in chronological order but also by type, so bathing suits together, day dresses, etc. The mounts used in the *YSL* exhibit were, for the most part, very modern looking storefront style mannequins in white, and in the African inspired collection, blue. The mounts in *Reveal and Conceal* were barely noticeable, allowing the garments to appear to stand by themselves. We were not allowed to take photos in the *YSL* exhibit, but were, without flash, at the McCord. Unfortunately, since we visited the *YSL* exhibit first, we didn't think to bring a camera to *Reveal and Conceal*.

My second thought about the two exhibits was on the clothes themselves. I found it very interesting that the garments made for *YSL* seemed to be very hurried in workmanship. Stitches were not even, and in many cases an iron seemed to not have been in the studio during construction. What I thought should have been actual gold and jewels, for such expensive gar-

ments, turned out to be plastic. His earlier pieces seem to have been the most carefully constructed and wearable. I was inspired by some of his later pieces though; wide velvet hems on silk petticoats gave the feeling of lushness. Colourful embroidery, using more than just thread, but also different types of beads and ribbons made the embroideries seem to come to life. His use of the shape of a hand to form colourful leaves on a black silk evening skirt was fun.

In *Reveal and Conceal* the garments were all extremely well constructed and in wonderful condition. My favourite pieces included a late Victorian dress constructed of plaid and solid coloured silk taffetas, the plaid being cut on the straight and bias, matched perfectly, so to accentuate the shape of the era, and an Edwardian wool walking suit with raised stitching outlining only the veins of leaves, leaving the rest of the leaf to your imagination. The wool bathing suits from the 1940's were also very interesting in their weight, not what you would expect from what you see in the movies. My favourite piece though, was a little set of stays from the late 18th century designed for riding.

Looking back at my experiences in both exhibits, I can easily see that the *YSL* pieces were meant to be viewed as artwork, while the *Reveal and Conceal* pieces were exhibited to display their primary function, clothing the body. Differences that you would almost expect from an art gallery and a cultural history museum.

### CONSERVATION SUPPLIES

The CSNS maintains a small inventory of conservation supplies suited to textile care.

These are available for purchase by CSNS members.

Contact: [anita.campbell@pc.gc.ca](mailto:anita.campbell@pc.gc.ca)

## THE COSTUME SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA

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### THE COSTUME SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA

The Society encourages interest in the history, development and conservation of Nova Scotian costume and personal adornment, and offers learning opportunities through workshops and hands-on programming. The Society's membership is diverse, including collectors, museum professionals, designers, costumers, reenactors, researchers, historians, and students.

CSNS was founded in 1981 and is a member of the Costume Society of America, the Association of Nova Scotia Museums, and the Dartmouth Heritage Museum.

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