

Time for Tea

Tea gained tremendous popularity in the Victorian era, and the beverage was something people of all classes could enjoy. Status was evaluated by what tea was served, what they wore, and the tea accessories or "tea things" they used.

Afternoon tea arose due to the influence of urbanization, as dinner time was being pushed later and later into the evening, most people having dinner at 8 or 9 at night. Lunch was still served in the early afternoon, so to fill the void between lunch and dinner, afternoon tea was born.

Tea was a time to show off your style to other ladies attending. Tea gowns made their first appearance in 1870, but what is a tea gown? As tea was primarily held in homes, you could wear a gown that fell into the category of "undress", the least formal in fashion categories. It's the equivalent to modern day sweatpants and tank tops,

As time went on, tea time became more flexible throughout the day, meeting outside porches and gardens. Summer gowns would be made of white eyelet material with lace or embroidery. More changes came to the gowns in later years, in the 1920s the dresses became shorter hitting at mid-calf or just above the ankle.



Cyclical Fashion

Fashion always repeats, as there are only so many ways textiles can be draped over the human form. For example, the leg of mutton sleeve saw popularity in the 1820-30s, again in the 1890s, and has inspired designers of the 20th century as recently as 2016.



Mend and Make Do

Our relationship with fashion has had drastic changes over the last few decades. Fast fashion, a global buying frenzy with human and environmental repercussions, has changed how we feel about clothes. We wear just over 20 percent of our closets, and may only wear an item 10 times before discarding it.

Throughout history and across cultures, people have been mending textiles to extend their beauty, wearability, and utility, for both practical and sentimental reasons. While mending skills are no longer passed down as routinely as they once were, there are now countless resources available so that people can learn to mend.

When textiles and clothing were difficult to come by or expensive, they would be mended or even altered to fit the latest styles. Hand-me-downs would be passed from generation to generation, until all the clothes were good for were rags.

Dressing for the Occasion



*The role of textiles
and accessories
throughout history*

Introduction

As Canada evolved from a slow-paced agrarian society into an urban-industrial nation, dress was transformed. Traditional rural styles declined and modern city modes, new workwear and holiday gear developed.

Women sewed at home, while shopping advanced, novel textiles and mass-produced goods bringing affordable fashion to ordinary people. Many of our predecessors worked as professional garment-makers, laundresses or in other related trades: close to fashion production, as consumers they looked after their clothes.

Victorians understood the social significance of dress, the observing strict etiquette through special costumes for Sundays, marriage and mourning. Poorer families struggled to maintain standards, but young single workers spent their wages on clothes, the older generation cultivating their own discreet style. Twentieth-century dress grew more relaxed and democratic as popular culture influenced fashion for recent generations who enjoyed sport, cinema, music and dancing.

Explore a small sample of historical items of significance. While we could not represent the vast history of fashion, including rural and men's fashion, we hope that our display encourages you to explore and examine trends, fashion history, and the roles fashion plays even in the modern era.

Unique Accessories

The role of jewellery within culture was important in determining a person's identity and social status. The Western world has often objectified jewels as aesthetic objects that are highly desired. Due to the financial value of jewels, those of lower social status could not afford to keep up with trends. If a woman did not wear jewellery, it was assumed it was because she was unable to afford it as a member of the working class. Imitation of jewels made jewellery more affordable for the middle class.



Art Nouveau jewellery (1890-1915)

The term "purse" originally referred to a small bag for holding coins. The modern purse, clutch, pouch, or handbag came about in England during the Industrial Revolution, in part due to the increase in travel by railway. Before handbags, pockets were secured inside a woman's dress which held personal items and retrieving items was done discreetly. As handbags grew into the mainstream in the 20th century, they began to transform from purely practical items to symbols of the wearer's wealth and worth in society.

Mourning with fashion

For over 500 years, wearing black signified bereavement in Europe and America, worn at funerals and for some time after the death of a loved one. Originally a custom for royalty and aristocracy who were experiencing grief, mourning dress became a fashion statement worn by people wishing to imitate the elite.



Mourning ensemble, c.1870

Black coded clothing made it clear who was in a funeral procession. Originally black dye was very expensive, but improved manufacturing techniques enabled mass production of fabrics and mourning jewelry.

Jewellery worn by widows came in black, with jet being the most popular stone. Jewelry made from the hair of the deceased loved one was a popular ornamentation. While such jewelry may seem morbid today, the fashion was seen as romantic and sentimental, a way to keep in touch with those that had passed.

