

# *International Costumer*

Volume XV, Issue 5

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*Lady with a rather plain solid dress but her belt appears to be the same color, only a shiny fabric with a center buckle. Courtesy of Lisa Ashton.*



*Safely displaying historic textiles. Courtesy of Vicky Assarattanakul.*

## Researching, Preserving, and Honoring Costume History



*Rather plain undersleeves visible with pagoda sleeves, Courtesy of Lisa Ashton.*

## President's Message

By Philip Gust

My wife, Kathe, and I just returned from a trip to Laguna Beach, California to see a performance of the "Pageant of the Masters" <https://www.foapom.com/pageant-of-the-masters/> part of the city's Festival of the Arts. The "Pageant of the Masters" is a staged, 90-minute-long show that presents over 50 works of art as tableau vivants ("living pictures"), where actors become characters in paintings, sculptures, jeweled brooches, and even crystal perfume bottle stoppers.

Over 1000 people volunteer for many months to put on the show every night during July and August, including over 100 actors who must remain perfectly still for a minute and a half per scene. While that doesn't sound long, for performers who must stay in whatever positions the artworks require, it can seem like an eternity. Music and narration describing the artwork accompany each scene. The performances are at night because precision lighting is critical to creating the illusion.

One of the most amazing aspects of this amazing show is the costumes, which are unlike anything most costumers are used to. All the costumes are made of heavy muslin, and all the colors, patterns, pockets, buttons, neckwear, props, and even the shadows that fall on them in the artworks



*Philip Gust as "Prof. Lysander Phlppotts" (Muggle Studies) and Kathe Gust as "Prof. Estelle Sinstra" (Astronomy), await the release of "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child."*

are painted on. The stage lighting "blows out" the actual shadows, leaving a perfect replica of the characters who stand against giant matching painted muslin backgrounds. Nothing is wasted: parts of the costume that don't show aren't made, and makeup that doesn't show isn't applied. The effect is stunning.

Kathe and I were lucky enough to be invited backstage before the performance to meet the costuming director and view some of the costumes. The backstage operation is a well-orchestrated machine, with a

pipeline of precise call times for actors to be made up, get into their costumes, go on stage, take off their makeup and costumes, and leave. There's simply no room to linger. The Pageant has been running for over 80 years, so they've had plenty of practice.

One of the things that I love about costuming is the diversity of styles, approaches, and uses of materials and techniques to create costumes for many purposes. Our visit to the "Pageant of the Masters" provided an opportunity to explore a unique kind of costuming. But while it is done for a very special purpose, it shares with all other kinds of costuming the pride of the maker and the wearer, and the enjoyment of all those who appreciate seeing the costumes.

The ICG held a ceremony at the 74th Worldcon in August to commemorate its recognition of Myrtle R Douglas as the "Mother of Convention Costuming." See my article in this issue for more about Douglas, the recognition, and the ceremony. The vote for the 76th Worldcon went to a bid by Silicon Web Costumers' Guild President Kevin Roche and his team. It will be in San Jose, California in 2018, and Kevin will serve as conference chair. Congratulations to Kevin and everyone involved in the bid. The website is <http://worldcon76.org>.



## Preserving Costumes

By Vicky Assarattanakul

Nestled among the cornfields and small towns of Northwestern Illinois is a little gem – The International Preservation Studies Center (IPSC). Located in Mount Carroll, Illinois, the center exists to educate people, mostly museum professionals, in best practices for preservation. The programs are hands-on, and unlike any other programs in the world. This past July, I had the opportunity to take a course on Textile Preservation.



*Metcalf Hall. One of the buildings on the IPSC Campus.*



*Identifying fibers through microscopy.*

Formerly known as the Campbell Center, IPSC has multiple preservation courses on everything from textiles to masonry. In the Introduction to Textile Preservation course, we learned how to identify fibers via microscopy, what types of treatments are considered best practices for museum preservation, and things to think about when exhibiting or displaying textiles.

My interest in preservation really took off when I inherited my grandmother's wedding dress. I wanted to ensure that I was taking care of it so that it would stay in good condition for years to come. She never wore it, as she and my grandfather eloped when he returned from World War II, but it still has a few condition issues that I was concerned about.

I learned many things about preserving historic textiles, but also things I can do to preserve my personal clothing and costumes right now. For example, most of us have seen the damage that sunlight can

cause to a fabric, but did you know that incandescent light also causes damage over time? We also see water damage in textiles after a flood, but I had never really considered that condensation in the house can also damage fabrics.

On the final day of the course, we were able to document the condition of a piece from our personal collection. With the assistance of our classmates, and the instructor, who is a professional conservator, we also formulated plans for cleaning, storing, and displaying our pieces.



*A dress from my personal collection. In good condition, but has some silk shattering.*

I am now enrolled in the Care of Textile Collections Certificate Program at IPSC. This is primarily a future career endeavor, but I hope that the knowledge I have gained and will continue to acquire can serve the ICG, so that we can preserve our physical history. If you would like more information about IPSC and its courses, please visit <http://www.preservationcenter.org/>.

## Report on the Civilian Symposium at Harrisburg 2015, Part Two

By Lisa Ashton

### Part Two: “The Details Make the Dress”

This is a synopsis / discussion of the formal presentation by Colleen Formby at the Civilian Symposium of 2015, titled “Little Things Mean a Lot”. In the presentation, Ms. Formby discussed how significant dress accessories became during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and that they were often pieces that could be made at home by ladies.

Accessories could transform an outfit (one-piece or two-piece dress) that was presumably already well-known by one’s family and acquaintances, into an outfit that could be considered new, different, or more stylish.

Fashion and details at that time were primarily dictated by the most recent fashion magazines; Godey’s Lady’s Book and Peterson’s Magazine were popular examples, as was Arthur’s Magazine, but there were many other sources for new styles, and the market for fashion and society publications only expanded as the Victorian era progressed. (Another meaning for “transformation” was the not uncommon practice of completing a skirt (requiring the most fabric) with both a day bodice and an evening or fancy dress



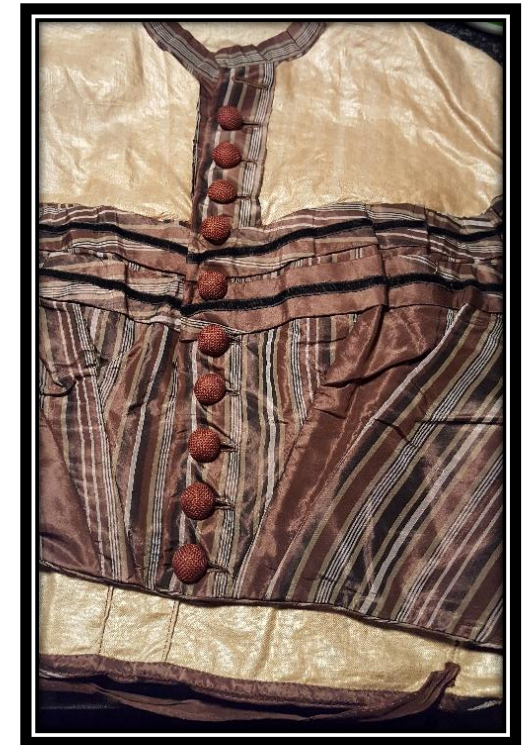
*1860’s gem portrait of a lady with large oval shaped buttons—they appear to be carved wood.*

bodice, to enable greater flexibility of wardrobe). To this discussion I have added some of my own subsequent explorations into and discoveries about mid-19<sup>th</sup> century accessories.

Ms. Formby introduced many possibilities for personalizing one’s own style, even if one did not sew one’s own gowns. There were many types of accessories that could be easily added or substituted, even with minimal sewing skill. The following is a somewhat complete list (and Ms. Formby offered magazine notations for almost all of these, and a slide show of photos for others):

**Buttons:** made of natural materials such as mother-of-pearl, jet, minerals or other

substances, synthetic such as hard rubber which could be molded into various designs or monograms, thread-covered buttons, “drop” buttons which have a tassel or drop hanging from the face (acorn shapes were quite popular), every shape button imaginable, steel or wood buttons, metal latticework buttons containing braided hair as mementoes, and more. Buttons could be tiny or quite large and dramatic, and were often sewed on as decoration, while the closure was actually accomplished using hidden hooks-and-eyes.



*Lovely hand-worked brown crochet-type buttons that are functional with buttonholes on a striped silk 1860’s bodice*





*Elastic garters from the 1860's, with hand embroidery on pink silk.*

**Collars and Cuffs:** a tremendous diversity of these items existed, and were made at home. Every type of fabric from plain cotton and linen to fancy laces, homemade crocheted laces, leather, fur, and silk was used. Patterns abounded in the journals for collar and cuff patterns, from a gauntlet cuff, rounded, edged with contrasting or similar color or lace, beaded patterns, embroidery with cotton, wool or silk threads; the variations were truly endless.

Even in later Victorian decades, adding a lace or crocheted collar to a bodice or dress was the often fastest or easiest way to change one's look. These collars and cuffs were often basted on, sometimes quite sloppily, I've found, and could be easily

removed for harsh laundering, saving the dress itself from such treatment.

**Undersleeves:** were an easy way to change an impression. With pagoda sleeves and other open types of sleeves as popular as the Bishop (or coat) sleeve (which was usually self-piped at the cuff end), undersleeves could be quite elaborate or quite plain. The ones I've seen or have photographs of were generally light colored, and often feature lower cuff pleating or lace, sometimes almost like the lace "insertions" of a later time. They are a way to "dress up" a relatively plain sleeve.

**Ladies Cravats and Neckties:** Godey's Lady's Book from June 1864 mentions that "the latest styles for silk and muslin neckties for gentlemen and ladies has the initial embroidered on the ends". These



*Photos of matching whitework embroidery cotton collar and gauntlet pointed cuffs on a brown plaid silk 1860's dress*



*1860's CDV of a lady with a very full skirt, very puffy undersleeves under pagoda sleeves, and a Swiss belt, attractively defining her waist.*

neckties for ladies often included a

"frontlet" or what we might call a "dickie" of cotton or silk, mostly white, with the necktie around the collar. The drawings show it is not a long, hanging necktie, such as we are familiar with, but more often was akin to a wide ribbon tied around a rather narrow collar with a central or slightly asymmetric knot. Sometimes the frontlet was known as a "guimpe" or chemisette, of thin or translucent fabric, and could be even made of tulle, and added into a lower neckline for a different look.

As a side note, monographs have been written about men's neckties from this period, and how the size, type, and position of the knot defines how to date the image.



*Lady with fashionable cravat tied around the collar and wide belt with a large, dramatic buckle.*

**Wristlets:** which could be worn over the ends of sleeves with no cuffs, were commonly made of ribbon, either silk or velvet, beaded or not, as an “ornamental finish”. Sometimes they were called “velvet bracelets” and could be decorated with a ruffled flower or silk embroidery. Elastics were frequently employed to wear them; they could also be worn over the tops of gloves or attached to the gloves themselves, or a small buckle could be used, which doubled as decoration.

**Puschel:** Frequently called “velvet balls” or “plush balls” in most of the English magazines, these were used to embellish numerous fashion items, and were a huge fad in the 1850’s, although their popularity faded somewhat by 1860. They were added onto everything from knitted and velvet hoods, bonnets, headdresses for the hair, and larger puffs to cuffs and shoulders. Later in Victorian times they became extremely popular again and are found on bodices, shoulders, dress yokes, belts, even skirts.

**Handkerchiefs:** pocket handkerchiefs were *de rigueur* for any lady of society. “The ornamented handkerchief is now as much a part of a lady’s toilette as the embroidered collar and sleeves...” (The Lady’s Newspaper, Jan. 2, 1858). They could be in colors, or have embroidery, especially monograms and lace trim, and the fragrances with which to imbue them were printed in the periodicals as specific formulae, including how to blend the extracts and oils to achieve the most pleasing and agreeable odors.

**Porte jupe or skirt lifters:** A belt worn under the dress from which depends multiple pieces of strong braid joined together in front and sewn to a button, then fixed to the hem of the skirt with ribbon

loops, in order to draw up the dress clear of the pavement in muddy weather.

**Hats, bonnets and hoods:** Obviously there were many different types available, and each could easily be personalized for the season, the occasion, the outfit, and the personal style of the wearer. Silk or embroidered flowers were popular, as were lacy bits, various colors and sizes of feathers, ruffled shapes, or pom-poms. Headwear of the 1860’s is a whole book unto itself. Needless to say, hats and bonnets could easily be re-used by replacing the embellishment. The profile would



*Fur cuffs, c. 1850-1860. Fur accessories were widely worn in the mid-19th century, especially between 1840 and 1860. A spring steel band is in the middle of each of these cuffs. They “strap” around the wrist like a modern bracelet.*



remain but otherwise it would look completely different.

**Muffs:** While gloves were a necessity whatever season, in winter in cold locations, a muff could do double duty as both a hand-warmer and a small purse. Muffs could be made of velvet, wool, fur or sheepskin (or whatever was on hand), and often had a flannel, silk or satin lining, wherein a small pocket could be sewn.

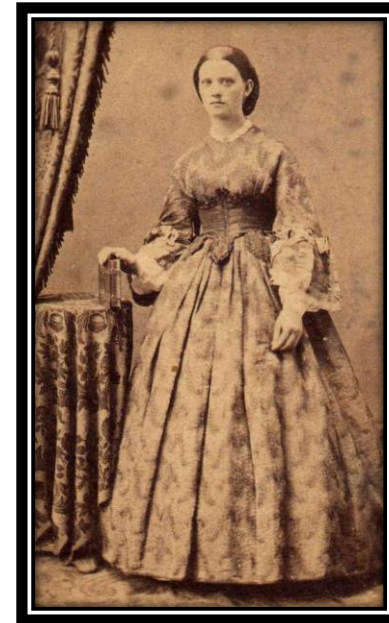
**Shawls:** demonstrated a tremendous range or possibilities: from very expensive cashmere or fine wool in any color, and with many types of designs from paisley to plaid to floral, they could also be the homeliest of homemade items. A relatively narrow knitted wool shawl could encircle the shoulders and neck, cross over the chest

in front, and tie in the back, giving a very different appearance to the front of the dress.

A “bertha”, or a shawl-like piece of draped lace or netting, could be added to the lower neckline of a ball gown or evening dress to thus “convert” it to a new look. A “pelerine” was an earlier type of shawl, popular during the 1830’s through the 1850’s, more triangular in nature, and was often made of the same fabric as the dress or bodice itself. It could be fringed, edged or plain and often buttoned or closed over the main part of the bodice, giving a different shape and accenting the shoulders.

The shawl or pelerine was often pinned in place, known by the many pinholes that extant examples display. The pelerine could also be used with the larger part over the front of the dress and pinned in the rear for a completely different look. Pelerines are even known that have sleeve extensions (similar to an open pagoda sleeve) that tie on at the shoulders. A “fichu” was considered similar to a pelerine, only made of lacy, gauzy materials, and much more ethereal appearing.

**Parasols:** were well-known, came in many colors and fabrics, with and without decorations, both with and without fringes, and could be used in any season. Much like with a fan, they could be used for flirtation.



*Lady in elegant print dress with fancy, embellished Swiss Waist, with scalloped areas on its lower edge. She also has translucent undersleeves.*



*Seed bead woven floral matching bracelets and belt, apparently a wedding gift or trinket, 1860's; part of rotating exhibit at the Conference.*

**Fans:** could be made of a multitude of materials, silk, bamboo, feathers, paper, or cardboard, and could be embroidered, painted or decorated with lace, beads, etc. Fans were generally an accessory for use with a ball gown rather than day dress. They were sometimes used as autograph “albums”, and some are known that were paper printed with photographs.

**A Diagonal sash worn over the bodice:** reminiscent of a military sash, could be made of velvet or silk, embroidered or beaded, and could have an embellished silk flower or fabric ruffle or bow at the waist. I’ve seen photographs of this on ladies wearing ball gowns and it is quite dressy.

**Belts:** Many day dresses of the Civil War era were belted. In addition, there is the “Swiss waist”, which is a (usually) boned “waist cincher” that could be beaded or decorated, and that often had a hidden closure in the center front and laced up the center back. It was wider than a plain belt and was tapered at the sides, giving a “pointed” look to the center front and back. It worked well with skirt-and-blouse combinations; the Garibaldi blouse became very popular in the 1860’s.

The Garibaldi was often white or light colored, and could have pinstripes or a subtle floral pattern, sometimes embroidered with whitework flowers or designs. This was a great way to “extend” the wardrobe, by having a day (or day AND evening) bodice for a single skirt (the skirt required the most fabric for the pleats or gathers, often 6 yards or more, especially if layered with lace over it), as well as a Garibaldi.

Belts were often a dark or contrasting color, could be self-fabric of the dress or a fancier fabric (such as using a plaid or print with a solid color dress). They could close with a decorative buckle, buttons, or hooks-and-eyes, or even be pinned closed with a straight pin.

**Large fabric flowers:** have been seen in photos to decorate the front of bodices,

sometimes just one at the top of the center front, sometimes multiple ones in a vertical line down the center front.

### Final Thoughts

Undoubtedly, there were *many* ways to change one’s appearance even with a very limited wardrobe, especially with a little sewing skill. Many extant dresses show indications of having had sewn embellishments added or changed during their lifetime, from additional pleats, ruffles, edge treatments such as binding or narrow lace edging, layering or tiers of skirts, , draping, applique, trim or textural elements added. My objective of this summary has been to describe the variety of accessories that ladies could make at home to add interest and visual appeal to their daily dress.

I would like to again thank the ICG and the Marty Gear Costuming Arts and Sciences Fund for the grant enabling me to attend the Civilian Symposium at Harrisburg 2015. It has been exciting to share what I have learned with ICG members and the costuming community. Miss Lizzy’s is expanding its sphere of knowledge, and welcomes dialogue.

Follow Miss Lizzy's on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MissLizzy> [sTravelingHistoricalFashionShow](https://www.facebook.com/MissLizzy)

## Myrtle R Douglas: Mother of Convention Costuming

By Philip Gust



Myrtle R. Douglas c. 1940. Source: Efanazines.com (“I Remember Morajo”).

The tradition of convention costuming began at the first World Science Fiction Convention. It was held in Caravan Hall, on the third floor of a building on 59th Street in Manhattan in early July of 1939. Just two attendees wore costumes that year, inspired by the 1936 science fiction movie *Things to Come*.

Forrest J Ackerman wore a green satin cape, peg pants and a yellow long-sleeve button-down shirt embroidered with his nickname:



"4SJ." Myrtle R Douglas, known by her Esperanto name, Morojo (Mor-OY-o), had envisioned, designed, and made Ackerman's "futuristicostume," for that first Worldcon, as well as her own space-age gown that converted into a cape-romper combo.

They were both active in the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, the oldest sci-fi fan club, and had traveled to New York by train with several other members to attend the event. The idea of convention costuming quickly caught on, and Morojo continued



*The sci-fi movie, Things to Come (1936), inspired Forry's and Morojo's costumes. Source: Alamy photo service.*



*Forry and Morojo in their "futuristicostumes" at the first Worldcon in 1939. Source: ICG Pat and Peggy Kennedy Memorial Archives.*

creating costumes that she wore to conventions.

According to Ackerman, "In 1940 at the first Chicon, she & I put on a skit based on some dialog from *Things to Come*, and won some kind of a prize. In 1941 at the Denvention she wore a Merrittesque AKKA-mask (frog face) devised by the then young & as yet unknown master filmonster, model maker and animator, Ray Harryhausen. In 1946 at the Pacificon in LA, I understand she created a sensation as A. Merritt's Snake Mother."

At Conadian, the 52nd Worldcon in 1994, ICG President Pierre Pettinger presented a plaque to Ackerman, recognizing him as the "Father of Convention Costuming" for wearing his "futuristicostume" at that first Worldcon.

Over 20 years later, in a special ceremony at MidAmeriCon II, the 74th Worldcon on August 19th 2016, the ICG recognized Myrtle R Douglas as the "Mother of Convention Costuming," and presented a special award video in her honor. The video is available on the ICG YouTube channel <https://youtu.be/DasGQQkj-xY>.



*Forrest J Ackerman receives plaque from ICG President Pierre Pettinger at 52nd Worldcon in 1994. Source: ICG Pat and Peggy Kennedy Memorial Archives.*

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The ICG's Pat & Peggy Kennedy Memorial Archives is the world's largest archive of photographs, video and paper ephemera of costuming. Exhibits include an online photo gallery (<http://www.costume.org/gallery2/>) and the ICG Archives YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/ICGArchives>).

### **The International Costumer**

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