

Final Performance Report

PG5095110

Preservation Assistance for the Vassar College Costume Collection

Arden Kirkland

Vassar College

9/27/2011

1. Project Activities

In the spring of 2010, students, faculty, and staff at Vassar College came together to participate in this NEH grant-funded project, which came to be known as the Historic Costume Preservation Workshop (or affectionately known as the HCPW for short). This project included a general preservation assessment, education and training in the form of a series of 3 workshops, and the purchase of needed preservation supplies.

We were surprised at the widespread interest of students, and ended up with 13 students participating, a much larger group than we had expected (8 in our original proposal). We also had one staff member participate, and two faculty members participated and supervised the project, bringing us to a total of 16 participants.

The project officially kicked off on Friday, January 22. We jumped in right away with a very hands-on and thoughtful exercise, working in small groups to carefully observe some of the objects from the collection. This and all subsequent activities were documented at <http://blogs.vassar.edu/hcpw> (some of this report is taken from those posts). This blog was publicized to members of the Costume Society of America (CSA), the Costume Commission of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT), and the h-costume (historic costume) listserve, in addition to the Vassar community (including past donors and other interested alumnae). We ended up with a group of subscribers to the blog, who inspired us to share more about our process.

At the first meeting, we discussed the syllabus (see Appendix A). Students were able to work on this project for ungraded credit, similar to the format for an off-campus internship, for which they are required to work for 80 hours for 1 credit, and submit additional written work. In addition to their participation in the three scheduled workshops, they were required to participate in weekly labs to apply the skills learned in the workshops to more of the objects in our collection. Over the course of the semester, their work included submitting data and photographs to the database during each of their labs, writing about their experiences on our blog, participating in YouTube videos showing and discussing the objects, researching

some of the objects in greater depth, writing a final paper about the object they worked on for the stabilization workshop, and helping to mount our final exhibition.

Our first formal workshop was with Jonathan Scheer, and his assistant Rebecca Chartier, on Wednesday, February 3, on the subject of condition reporting. First, Mr. Scheer spoke about the factors of textile deterioration, characteristics of fibers, best practice for handling historic textiles, and strategic planning for the care of collections. Ms. Chartier also discussed environmental issues affecting collections and shared a sample condition report and treatment/mounting plan. Then, we worked hands-on with objects from our collection. Participants were divided into seven pairs, and each pair was assigned an object with condition issues. Each pair worked on filling out a condition report worksheet (see Appendix C), with close examination of the object. Mr. Scheer, Ms. Chartier, Ms. Kirkland, and Miss Hummel circulated around the room to offer guidance and help with analysis and terminology. Finally, we brought the group all together again, to talk about how some of the objects on display represented specific condition issues and terms. Mr. Scheer and Ms. Chartier both provided thoughtful answers to student questions, including interesting anecdotes from their personal experiences working with a variety of textiles at a variety of institutions.

Rather than presenting a second formal workshop, Mr. Scheer then worked informally with the project director, helping her to write a general preservation assessment for the collection (see Appendix I). Mr. Scheer generously refused to accept payment for his time, so his portion of the grant budget was able to go toward purchasing more archival textile boxes.

On Friday, February 12th, we welcomed Jessa Krick to lead our workshop about cataloging of historic costume. After a brief round of introductions, Ms. Krick shared her presentation entitled "Object Cataloging: Idea and Practice." She provided some background about the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, where she was formerly a Senior Research Assistant, and then described the process undertaken for their Costume Documentation Project. Her presentation included many images of objects selected as highlights of the project, and photographed and documented for ArtStor. She provided several very helpful examples of catalog entries for objects in the Brooklyn collection, to help guide our process. Next we

had some hands-on work with object cataloging. Ms. Krick worked with a two-piece dress from our collection to develop a catalog entry, getting students involved along the way, both in terms of remembering the best practice she had indicated in her presentation, and examining the object in detail. The piece chosen was found to have been significantly re-styled for use as a theatrical costume before it was removed from the theatrical stock and placed in the historic collection. While this aspect was frustrating at times, this made it an excellent subject for thorough investigation.

In the days after Ms. Krick's visit, we began to implement some changes in our procedure, as inspired by her presentation. We started cataloging the more recent objects in the collection first, then worked backwards in time, as Ms. Krick explained they had done with the Brooklyn project. This was a very helpful approach, allowing all of us to take some time to perfect our cataloging technique with more familiar objects before moving on to the many complicated late nineteenth and early twentieth century pieces we have in the collection.

Throughout the semester, students had access to the collection Filemaker database on a campus server. When working hands-on with objects, they had a computer nearby to enter new data as they went along. Ms. Kirkland was able to develop the flexible Filemaker database as the project progressed, adding fields as needed and changing data entry layouts to make the process more comfortable and efficient for students. For example, we discovered that it was more helpful to organize the cataloging data entry worksheet with observable data at the top, and more abstract data (such as date/period) at the bottom (see Appendix B). This helped students to arrive more organically at conclusions regarding the object's date, considering visual characteristics more fully before forming their theories about period/region/etc.

Participants took many digital photos of the objects while working with them, and we had some difficulty with our work flow for processing photos into the database. Since this was not a stated objective of the project, we processed as many images as possible into the database, but reserved many to follow up with at a later point. In the time since the project ended, we have continued with this; in fact, a current grant from the Mellon Foundation is providing for a student research

assistant to help specifically with the digital archive, so catching up with these images will be one of her projects.

As we were exposed to more objects in the weekly labs, we grew even more excited about the treasures that had been “buried” for years. However, the students had trouble keeping up with the blog posts/comments they were supposed to be writing. We determined that this is a case where a picture is worth a thousand words, and a video is worth several thousand. While working hands-on with the objects, students began video-taping each other discussing what they were seeing, and sharing their theories about the objects. We realized that this was a much more efficient way of sharing and discussing the objects, and began posting these videos on YouTube (and on our project blog). From this stage of video discussion, some students went on to choose objects for more research, testing their theories (see Appendix F). In March, we also started posting photos and descriptions of objects on the blog as candidates for stabilization during our workshop with Colleen Callahan.

On March 31, we made a field trip to Vassar’s Chemistry Department for a Fiber Analysis lab, a workshop in addition to the ones from our original proposal. Stuart Belli and Edie Stout generously offered to lead a lab with us. Prof. Belli began with a brief but very enlightening introduction to the principles of chemistry behind the instruments we would be using. Next, we headed to the lab where each of us had a chance to work with the infrared spectrometer and the computer that guides it. We tried several swatches for which we knew the content, and then we tried some unknown samples and compared them. Then, we headed to yet another lab to use their new handheld XRF, another instrument which allows for the detection of heavier elements, particularly metals. Both instruments are very helpful for non-invasive analysis of fiber types. Since this workshop, several students have returned to the chemistry lab with objects to conduct further fiber analysis tests.

On April 9-13, Colleen Callahan conducted her 5-day intensive stabilization workshop (see Appendix E). Ms. Callahan began with a presentation on Friday afternoon, sharing her wealth of experience to show both general philosophies and specific techniques of costume conservation. Then, on Saturday, participants began

work on their projects, working individually or in teams. After writing their treatment proposals (see Appendix D) and going over them with Ms. Callahan, they began the treatment process, under close supervision from Ms. Callahan, Ms. Kirkland, and Miss Hummel. This work continued over the 5 days of the workshop. On Sunday, Ms. Callahan led another formal presentation on the subject of mounting historic clothing for display. On the final day, participants mounted their completed (or almost completed) objects and displayed them to the group and invited guests from the community. Some participants had more challenging projects, which were not able to be completed during the 5 day workshop. Those projects continued into May, under the supervision of Ms. Kirkland. Many of the treatment reports and process photographs were posted on the blog.

For the remainder of the semester, participants split their time between finishing stabilization projects, researching and writing about their objects, conducting inventory of more boxes and drawers, documenting more objects, and preparing for our exhibition. The exhibition was a wonderful culmination of our project, open to the public from May 21 – June 6, 2010, in the Palmer Gallery in Vassar's College Center. This was perfect timing, as it opened just before commencement and closed just after reunion. Our senior students were able to proudly show their work to their parents, and our alumnae were also a very appreciative audience. We received wonderful publicity, and very positive feedback. Through the efforts of our participants and Vassar's Office of Communication, the exhibition was publicized not only on campus, but also in local media (see Appendices G and H). Vassar's Alumnae Association also promoted the exhibition during reunion weekend. People in the Vassar community were very proud to see that the project was supported by an NEH grant; this has given our efforts a greater legitimacy and has helped us greatly moving forward.

2. Accomplishments

This project was an overwhelming success. As a direct result of the workshops, our students, faculty, and staff have greatly developed their skills in documentation, handling, storage, stabilization, and mounting of the garments in our collection. We have also been able to pass these skills on to new students,

faculty, and staff who were not around to participate in the original workshop. With these skills, we have gone on to host our first formal exhibitions in many years. As discussed above, at the end of the original workshop, we hosted an exhibition of the garments that were stabilized during the workshop. The following year, several students returned to continue to work with us, and new students joined us, to create an exhibition related to the college's 150th anniversary. Another set of 17 objects were documented and stabilized for this exhibition.

Our goals for this project were achieved, but we will continue our progress. For the initial workshop, we set a goal of documenting at least 180 of our objects, but in fact 280 objects received at least brief condition descriptions, 202 were more fully catalogued, 39 received extremely detailed condition reports, and 10 objects received stabilization treatment. Now that many of our students are trained in this method of documentation, we are able to devote some time each semester to continuing this work. At this rate, we look forward to having the collection fully documented in the next few years.

In fact, the accomplishments of this project have allowed us to move forward significantly, leading directly to other opportunities and bringing us closer to the long term goals of greater access which we presented in our original proposal. Without the stabilization achieved in the original workshop, we never could have mounted and exhibited the objects from that project; in fact, they might have been forgotten, as many were deep in boxes that hadn't been seen in years. Without the publicity we received from that first exhibition in 2010, we would not have had the mandate to exhibit again in 2011. This is especially true in terms of the students who joined our effort for the 2011 exhibition. In the absence of funding for professional staff designated only for work with the collection, it is student work that makes our exhibitions possible. Faculty and staff input on the projects is currently primarily a volunteer effort, limited by other commitments. However, this NEH project has also led to support for faculty involvement with the project. First, we received an internal Vassar grant in Fall 2010, from the Frances Fergusson technology fund, to support external hosting to migrate our database from Filemaker to a web-based site using the open-source Omeka platform. This platform allows us to more easily share our database with the public, including an

exhibition module. Project Director Arden Kirkland used her time in a 2011 NEH summer institute at the Bard Graduate Center to research a group of objects from the collection and present her research using the Omeka. In 2011/12, an Inter-Institutional Grant from the Mellon Foundation will allow the collection to be a part of an initiative called Archives that Count, for faculty to develop digital archives related to their research. This grant has allowed us to hire a research assistant for this year to focus on work developing the digital archive in Omeka.

Each time that the objects were mounted for exhibition, we were able to fully photograph each object on display. We have found that the most time for photography goes into mounting and lighting, and by placing the mounted object on a turntable, we can take 20 high resolution views (showing the garment from all sides) in not much more time than it takes to shoot one frontal view. These images can then be stitched together in software such as VRWorx or Object2VR to create a representation that better shows the three-dimensional nature of the garment. This view can be rotated 360 degrees and zoomed in upon, to see fine details of trim and stitching. From the 2010 exhibition, 10 objects were photographed in this way. Ms. Kirkland was able to do this with the help of one student, photographing all 10 objects in one day. Over the following week, the student then processed the raw photos into the ObjectVR software. Currently one of these files is hosted online, at <http://vcomeka.com/vccc/items/show/614> (please be patient for this high resolution file to load). An earlier prototype, in a more compressed version that is slightly faster to load, is at <http://vcomeka.com/vccc/items/show/615>. With support and student labor from Vassar's Academic Computing Services, Visual Resources Library, and Digital Initiatives Library team, we are working this semester to re-process these files in a more compressed version before hosting the rest of them online. We also will work this semester to similarly process the photos taken of 16 objects from the 2011 exhibition.

3. Audiences

This project has had a ripple effect, expanding its audience with each step. The workshop presenters reached out to develop the skills of the original participants, who then reached out to other members of the Vassar community who

have come to us to learn the same skills, then this continued work reaches out to share our objects with members of the general public.

Of the original participants, the 13 Vassar students who participated in the workshops were in their late teens to early twenties. The three staff and faculty participants were in their 30s-60s. All participants were female, middle to upper class. Those who have joined us to work on subsequent projects also fit this demographic. For these direct participants, the benefit is in the access to knowledge of preservation techniques, knowledge that is not often made available to undergraduate students. They are an underserved audience for this material by virtue of their age. By spreading knowledge and respect for material culture to younger students, the foundation of the historic preservation field is strengthened for future generations.

In terms of reaching out to a wider public, as a result of this grant we were able to reach a much larger and more diverse audience than we have in the past. The actions of the workshops led directly to the two public exhibitions and our online presence. Through these new public resources, we have reached thousands of people who previously didn't even know our collection existed.

While we did not formally count the visitors to our public exhibitions, traffic on an average day would suggest that several hundred people visited each exhibition. The majority of this traffic came from the Vassar community: students, faculty, staff, alumni and their families and friends. However, the exhibitions were advertised to the general public in local media, attracting a wider population. We also have an established outreach program with middle school girls in our area, through the Project AWARE and PASSWORD programs with the Mill Street Loft, a local arts organization. Those programs are specifically for underprivileged 11-18 year old girls from Poughkeepsie and Beacon. Girls from this program have been coming to us once a year for our Trying on History program, but since our preservation project, we have supplemented their visit with a behind the scenes look at our preparation for that year's exhibition.

Turning to our digital visitors, Google Analytics indicate that from January 2010 to today, 770 unique visitors visited the blog for this project at <http://blogs.vassar.edu/hcpw>, from 47 different countries/territories. In the same

time frame, 1142 unique visitors visited the blog for the costume collection at <http://blogs.vassar.edu/vccc/>, where we have consolidated our blogging efforts in the last year. These are larger numbers than those for our previous blog for the "Trying on History" project, which received 413 unique visitors in the same time period. We have received comments on the blog and emails from several visitors who found us through search engines while looking for information about specific designers or manufacturers who are represented in our collection and were helped by the information on our blogs and database.

This project has also had an impact on cultural heritage efforts in our larger community. Two workshop participants created a small costume exhibition at Locust Grove, a nearby historic estate. This estate is known both as the former home of inventor and artist Samuel F. B. Morse and as the estate of the Young family. The estate has a significant collection of costumes and textiles from the Young family, but since they don't have any dedicated staff in that department, it is difficult for them to exhibit such objects. With the training they received from the NEH project, these participants were able to volunteer and assist this local institution.

4. Evaluation

This was a very strong program. The diverse workshop leaders brought a great deal of knowledge to share with the participants. The participants were able to test their knowledge with a wide range of objects from our collection. The only weakness of this project that comes to mind relates to the level of quality control in the students' documentation. Because so many objects were documented during the course of the project, by so many different students of so many different levels of previous experience, the quality and completeness of the documentation is not entirely consistent. Of course any such data is a great improvement over what existed before, but an additional step is still needed for a supervisor to go over the data. A stipend for the project director might have allowed for some extra supervisory labor to keep up with that step as the project was underway. As it is, that step is continuing now, as time permits, between other projects. The large number of student participants made it more difficult and time consuming to

supervise the project, but of course the more students that were involved, the more objects they were able to cover in the documentation process.

Public response to this project was very positive. We didn't receive any negative feedback, either from our presenters, participants, or visitors. In fact, the feedback has been so positive that we have been encouraged throughout the community to keep exhibiting at least once per year. We have received increased donations (though small) to support the collection, and are taking slow steps toward seeking funding for more dedicated staff time with the collection.

5. Continuation of the Project

This project is absolutely continuing forward. The knowledge gained by workshop participants is allowing us to work with the collection more than ever before. Participants have already trained new workers with the skills gained from the workshops, and this process will continue forward in the years to come.

While this project did not involve a specific commitment from our institution to formally continue the project, the positive feedback from the project has built a strong foundation from which we can continue to increase support for future projects. The physical and digital exhibitions have become a resource that several professors use in their teaching, and as more faculty come to depend on this collection, we will be in a better position to seek more support.

As a result of this project, we have formed and strengthened relationships both internal and external to Vassar. Internally, this project helped us to build our connections with many individual faculty members, the departments of History and Women's Studies, the Library (especially Special Collections and Archives), the Alumnae/i Association, the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Academic Computing Services, the Visual Resources Library, the Digital Initiatives team in the library, the Office of Communication, Campus Activities, Media Resources, and Student Employment. Externally, this project has helped us to build our connections with diverse members of the Costume Society of America, and with local cultural heritage institutions such as Locust Grove.

6. Long Term Impact

The NEH's support of this project will definitely have a long term impact on the preservation and outreach of the Vassar College Costume Collection. Exactly as we had hoped in our original proposal, improved physical care for the collection has allowed for much wider access to the collection, both physically and digitally. Even after our physical exhibitions are over, they are preserved as text and photographs in digital exhibitions, used as a resource by faculty both on and off the Vassar campus. Fragile objects that previously could not be shown publicly or even photographed have now been stabilized, displayed, and photographed in great detail. As participants share their skills with others moving forward, more and more objects will be similarly stabilized and preserved each year. For objects that require professional conservation, the documentation of the objects that resulted from this workshop will put us in a much better position to seek future funding. The support of the NEH has strongly increased our credibility both on and off campus, and has already resulted in an increase in private financial support. Having finished this project, we can now regroup and will be in a strong position to develop proposals for future support from other funders.

7. Grant Products

Products resulting directly from this project are the project blog on Vassar's Wordpress site at <http://blogs.vassar.edu/hcpw>, and videos on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/VassarHCPW>. The general assessment conducted as a part of this project is attached as Appendix I.

It is also worth noting the products that are indirectly a result of this project, outside of the scope of the project but impossible without it: our continued blog for the collection as a whole at <http://blogs.vassar.edu/vccc>, and our online database and digital exhibition resource at <http://vcomeka.com/vccc>. As our digital projects continue, the ObjectVRs from the 2010 and 2011 exhibitions will soon become available as a part of the online database.

3. Appendices

Appendix A – Project Syllabus

Appendix B – Sample Catalog Entry

Appendix C – Sample Condition Report

Appendix D – Sample Treatment Report

Appendix E – Schedule for Workshop with Colleen Callahan

Appendix F – Screen Shots of Related Online Resources

Appendix G – Publicity examples

Appendix H - Links to related online resources and publicity

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

Historic Costume Preservation Workshop - Spring 2010
 Drama 298 or 399 - Independent Work - 1 credit
 facilitated by Arden Kirkland

WEEK#	DAY	DATE	TIME	CLASSWORK	HOMEWORK DUE
1	Fri	1/22	3:15-5:15	Introduction	Hand in student survey, conflict schedule
2	Mon-Fri	1/25-1/29	Self-scheduled	Lab – Inventory Work in teams of 3	Reading Completed Inventory
3	Wed	2/3	3:30-5:30	3:30-5:30 Jonathan Scheer workshop Condition Reporting	Reading
4	Fri	2/12	TBA	Jessa Krick workshop Cataloging	Reading
5	Mon-Fri	2/19	Self-scheduled	Lab - Work in teams of 2-3	Documentation submitted online
6	Mon-Fri	2/26	Self-scheduled	Lab - Work in teams of 2-3	Documentation submitted online
7	Mon-Fri	3/5	Self-scheduled	Lab - Work in teams of 2-3	Documentation submitted online
8	Fri	3/12		BREAK!	***
9	Fri	3/19		BREAK!	***
10	Mon-Fri	3/26	Self-scheduled	Lab - Work in teams of 2-3	Documentation submitted online
11	Mon-Fri	4/2	Self-scheduled	Lab - Work in teams of 2-3	Documentation submitted online
12		4/9-4/13		Colleen Callahan workshop:	
12	Fri	4/9	3:30-5:30	Preservation Presentation (with invited guests)	Reading
	Sat	4/10	10-6	Project work Mounting Presentation (with invited guests)	Project work
	Sun	4/11	10-6	Project work	Project work
13	Mon	4/12	Self-scheduled	Project work	Project work
	Tues	4/13	Self-scheduled	Project work	Project on mannequin to view
	Mon-Fri	4/16	Self-scheduled	Lab	Documentation submitted online
14	Mon-Fri	4/23	Self-scheduled	Lab	Documentation submitted online
15	Mon-Fri	4/30	Self-scheduled	Lab	Documentation submitted online
16	Tues	5/4		last day of classes	
	Fri	5/7		celebrate a job well done!	all documentation complete and handed in or submitted online

Required Work:

As this project is being treated like an internship, students will be responsible for 80 hours of work, as they would be for one credit of field work. Those hours will take place as follows:

2 (or more) workshops with Jonathon Scheer	8-12
Workshop with Jessa Krick	4-6
Workshop with Colleen Callahan	28
Weekly labs throughout the semester (about 4 hours a week for 10 weeks)	34-40
TOTAL HOURS	80

Participants will keep a time sheet to log their hours.

- Attendance at all workshops is required, as these are the core of the project
- Labs will be self-scheduled within times offered by Arden Kirkland, however it is still required that you come at the time you signed up for; much work will be done in groups and your group will not be able to proceed without you
- Some work may include independent research/writing, which will also count toward the total hours

The goal of this project is to add significantly to the documentation of the Vassar College Costume Collection.

To that end, work submitted from the “labs” will include

- text documentation (notes and reports)
- photography

Work will be submitted in both

- digital format (uploaded to the collection database)
- hard copy (object files)

Highlights of our process will also be shared with the public, by way of a blog. Students will be expected to add to the blog on a regular basis:

- blog posts
- comments on blog posts by others

With each phase of the project, we will narrow down the selection of objects we are working with:

- Inventory/Survey – basic documentation of every object (500+)
- Cataloging – brief description of every object (500+)
- Condition reports – more detailed reports for objects with condition issues (60-100)
- Research - on background of objects that might be candidates for exhibition (32-50)
- Stabilization – conservation of objects to be exhibited (5-7)

Readings:

TBA, as suggested by our consultants (as handouts or available online)

For the semester, a temporary library of costume and textile books will be on hand to help with identification of textiles, silhouettes, etc. (to be used in the space only, not to be borrowed).

Supplies (optional):

TBA – provided by the costume shop, but students may prefer to use their own

Grading:

If the independent study is being taken in Drama, then the final grade will be determined by the workshop facilitators and consultants.

If the independent study is being taken in a department other than Drama, the student's faculty sponsor in that department will submit the final grade, with input from the workshop facilitators. The faculty sponsor may require additional work.

"SA / Satisfactory" work is defined as work at C level or above

- Familiarity with the content of the course
- Familiarity with the methods of study of the course
- Evidence of growth in actual use both of content and method
- Full participation in the work of the class
- Evidence of an open, active, and discriminating mind
- Ability to express oneself in intelligible English

"UN / Unsatisfactory" work will not be credited toward the degree.

- not fully participating in the work of the class

"DS / Distinction" is given only rarely

- involves conspicuous excellence in several aspects of the work

Accommodations:

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Office of Disability and Support Services. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by Office of Disability and Support Services, as indicated in your ODSS accommodation letter.

Contact:

Costume Shop / Voice Mail - (845) 437 5589 (Vassar extension 5589)
email – costumeshop@vassar.edu

a more detailed contact sheet will be developed early in the semester



CATALOGUER NAME AND DATE Margaret Thompson 4/23/10

TITLE Cream and Brown Printed and Striped Bodice

CATALOGUING WORKSHEET

Appendix B

MATERIALS silk, cotton, metal

DIMENSIONS armscye 9from neck
lower sleeve: outer seam 17, inner seam 11.5

CHEST 32
WAIST 25
HIPS
CFLENGTH 15.5
CBLENGTH 15.5

A
B
C
D
E

DESCRIPTION.MAIN

cream lightweight silk with narrow brown stripe, perpendicular pattern of a light brown wider stripe with brief patches of dark brown (paintbrush effect); dark brown velvet ribbon (probably silk, but unsure); sateen weave cotton (or possibly linen) cream lining; metal hooks and eyes

BRIEF DESCRIPTION cream and brown printed and striped silk bodice with rouching and velvet ribbon detail

Tight-fitting bodice, dropped shoulders with puffs at top of sleeves. Closes CF with hidden hooks and eyes; high close neckline, no collar (current collar not original), self-piping at neckline; vertical stripes of rouching with narrow ribbon detailing front and back; two vertical darts either side at front; attached belt of same materials, with ribbons at edges and silk and ribbon rosette detail at CF; armscyes self-piped, puffs at top of sleeves have 4 ribbons making a sort of cage, apparently only attached at seams of puff, lower sleeve two pieces, curved but no additional shaping (no darts or godets), 3 ribbon stripe at cuff, only on front/top of sleeve; bodice fully lined.

migrated

CONDITION some ribbons loose or detached, belt coming loose, stains at underarms and a few water stains, fraying at cuffs, collar not original, been let out in back seams
good

could it be hanging? N should it be in its own box? N does it need further fiber analysis? Y

collection Design History highlight / sutdy / deaccession? highlight

CREATOR.ROLE CREATOR

LABEL

REFERENCES

DONOR

WORN BY

PERIOD 1850's-1860's - Crinoline

DATE.ORIGINAL 1867

DATE.CERTAINTY circa

REGION

CULTURE

GENDER female

CLASSIFICATION Bodice

NOTES French 280?

(PRIVATE INFORMATION)

accession# 1992 . 012 . ab

examiner name(s) Molly Turpin

reportdate 3/4/2010

TITLE Brown and Ivory Print Silk Dress

Appendix C

accession# 1992 . 012 . ab

LOCATION DRAWER 4 2

currentstorageconditions in acid-free box, wrapped in unbuffered acid-free tissue

brittleness lining of skirt is brittle and shattering in many places

mildew no

pest damage no

abrasion some abrasion of velveteen; shattering from abrasion on bodice, particularly elbows, underarms and cuffs

fraying at elbows; in gauze panels

snags no

holes a few small holes in skirt

tears no

cuts no

wrinkles in lining; varied wrinkles in bodice esp. sleeves and lining

folds no

finish no

former washing.treatment no

loose gauze is detaching

detached no

missing no

substituted parts new waist tape, new boning casing; new hook and eye closures in skirt

fading no

yellowing cotton gauze yellowing

corrosion no

color bleeding.reduction color bleeding of bodice lining onto gauze

stains brown stains at top of skirt; possible makeup stains in varied places (pink and gold); possible blood stains

suspended marks no

surface dirt on cuff lace, some on waist ribbon

unstitched no

mended no

alteration added hook and eye closure

restyling added bow and ribbon at waist and at collar

CONDITION.RATING

good

could it be hanging? N

should it be in its own box? N

does it need further fiber analysis? N

collection

highlight / study / deaccession? highlight

recommendations
and reasons for
determinations above:

NAME Leksi Kolanko
DATE 4/10/10

TITLE Black and Gold Beaded Dress

Appendix D

TREATMENT REPORT

BRIEF. Beaded black netted dress over gold metallic organza lined with China silk.

DESCRIPTION
(summarize from
DESCRIPTION.MAIN)

CONDITION OF ITEM (refer to condition report)

1. Gold netting deteriorating and falling off around neckline, under arms, and on back of bodice
2. Piece at right shoulder detaching
3. White beads breaking at discolored
4. White and gray beads fallen off
5. Gold organza and lining torn at bottom left side seam
6. Organza frayed at bottom hem
7. Staining on inside of lining
8. Silk shattering inside skirt
9. Staining on organza near center front waist band
10. Holes in the black net at the bottom of the skirt
11. Wrinkles in the gold organza

TREATMENT PROPOSAL

1. I will stabilize the areas detailed in #1, covering them with gold netting and stitching in place.
2. I will reattach the area detailed in #2.
3. I will not attempt to fix the broken and discolored beads detailed in #3.
4. I will tack on the loose strands of beads back on the dress.
5. I will re-sew the area detailed in #5.
6. I will cover the areas detailed in #6 with gold netting at stitch in place.
7. I will not attempt to remove any of the stains detailed in #7 and #9.

TREATMENT.REPORT

1. I removed tacking stitches at both sides of CF at neck to have better access to the netting of the modesty piece.
2. I tacked down the gold netting of the modesty piece and sewed a layer of netting over the original netting.
3. I tacked down the gold netting on the back of the bodice.
4. I removed a snap at the back left shoulder (to be reattached).
5. I sewed a layer of netting over the gold netting that I tacked down at the back of the bodice.
6. I reattached the snap at the back left shoulder over the netting.
7. I sewed in a few stitches of black thread and tied the thread to loose pieces of thread on the dress where bead strands were coming undone.
8. I took off the snap at the top left shoulder on the back of the bodice, moved it over, and re-sewed the snap to the dress in its new position.
9. I took out the stitches at the right back of the skirt where the net wraps around from the front and attaches to the back and sewed on a black snap in this location.
10. I took out the stitches of the right side seam in the gold organza of the skirt and re-sewed it.
11. I used black thread to re-stitch the hem of the bottom layer of the black netting of the skirt, stitching about every half inch and going back on the stitch every other stitch.
12. I stitched up a big hole at the bottom of the black net with black thread.
13. I steamed the bottom of the gold organza of the skirt to try and remove some of the wrinkles.
14. I covered the bottom hem of the gold organza in the skirt with conservation netting and sewed the netting on, coming up about a half inch on either side of the skirt.
15. I reattached the loose piece at the right shoulder.

**Historic Costume Preservation Workshop
Vassar College—Spring 2010
Conservation and Display Segment
Taught by Colleen Callahan of the Costume & Textile Specialists
Friday, April 9 to Tuesday, April 13, 2010**

Friday, April 9:

9:00-1:00: Colleen Callahan (CRC) and Arden Kirkland (AK) make selections of garments to be conserved and mounted for display during workshop. They will pair the selected garments with student workshop participants who will work on them.

3:30-5:30: CRC presents overview power point lecture on various aspects of historic clothing conservation. Guests from local historical societies and others interested are invited to attend presentation. The presentation will cover:

- Philosophy and mission of textile and costume conservation in museums
- Sewing stabilization techniques and materials
- Vacuuming and pest control
- The use of wet and dry cleaning
- Storage challenges, options, and materials

CRC meets with students workshop participants and discusses workshop format and informs students of their assigned garments.

Saturday, April 10:

10:00-1:00: Student workshop attendees write up treatment proposals for their assigned garments and begin initial conservation work. All major conservation and mounting steps will be documented with a written record and photography.

1:00 – 2:00 lunch

2:00-6:00: Student workshop lab continues.

Sunday, April 11:

10:00-1:00: Student workshop attendees continue with conservation work on their projects. There will be a break for lunch.

1:00 – 2:00 lunch

2:00 – 3:30 Student workshop lab continues.

3:30-6:00: CRC presents overview power point lecture on various aspects of mounting historic clothing for display. Guests from local historical societies and others interested are invited to attend presentation. The presentation will cover creating the proper period silhouette for an outfit using cost-effective techniques. CRC will demonstrate these techniques assisted by AK, using a 19th century outfit from the Vassar collection.

Monday, April 12:

9:00-6:00: Student workshop attendees will schedule times between other classes to continue with conservation work and begin to dress their outfits for display.

Tuesday, April 12:

9:00-5:00: Student workshop attendees will finalize their projects as much as possible.

5:00-6:00: Presentation of conserved outfits for display. Invited guests welcome.

Historic Costume Preservation Workshop

with the
Vassar College
Costume Collection



March 1,
2010

Video of blue floral bodice with bustle

Posted by Arden Kirkland under [Videos](#), [labs](#) | Tags: [labs](#), [video](#) |

[\[3\] Comments](#)

Archived Entry

Post Date :

March 1, 2010 at 6:31 pm

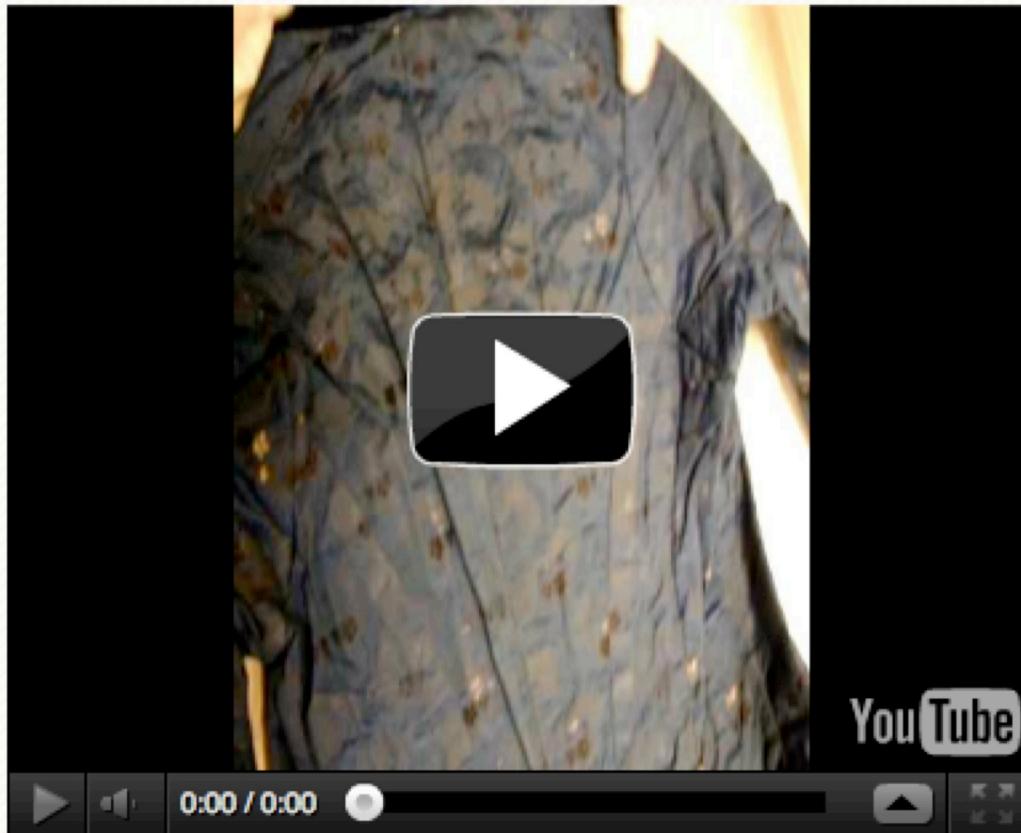
Category :

[Videos](#), [labs](#)

Tags: [labs](#), [video](#)

Do More :

You can leave a response, or
[trackback](#) from your own site.



Students examine a very small bodice from the late 19th century, #2001.165.

scroll down for part 2

Appendix F



1. fatang Says:

March 2nd, 2010 at 12:43 am

I did a little bit of research to back up our claim that this piece is childrenswear.



First I found an 1881 fashion plate of childrenswear that has some similar feature- the dropped waists, the bustling (especially on the blue dress to the left), and the solid colored bands on the patterned dress, as on the red ensemble in this plate.

I also found a brief description of 1880s girls' clothing that seems to fairly accurately describe this piece.

"The overskirt of most of these dresses was made in one with the bodice. Then a separate skirt was worn beneath that. A small bustle pad support helped hold the back skirt shape.

The bodice neckline was higher than in the 1870s and often featured a small stand neck... Mostly sleeves were straight and slim"

Finally, I found this excerpt from *The London and Paris Ladies' Magazine of Fashion*, March 1879 in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion 2*:

"Standard patterns cut for 34 ½ inch bust and 24 inch waist; "If a lady has not a body pattern of her own size, she measures ranging from 31 ½"" to 42 ½", that is to say, from the most petite lady to the lady of fine figure."

If a fashion magazine from the period refers to a 31 1/2" bust as belonging to "the most petite lady," then I think it is safe to say that a 27" bust- 4 1/2" smaller than that- could not have been an adult's.

So I feel confident in classifying this garment as childrenswear.

2. fatang Says:

March 2nd, 2010 at 12:44 am

Oops, I think the blog ate the citation for the excerpt of 1880s girls' clothing. It came from http://www.fashion-era.com/Childrens_clothes/1880_1890_girls_costume_pictures.htm



3. alcowley Says:

March 2nd, 2010 at 9:16 am

Very cool! I'm so excited that we have such a beautiful example of children's wear from this period. It certainly wasn't unusual for even children to wear corsets during this period, however. Valerie Steele's book "The Corset: A Cultural History" states that even into the 1880s, "little girls continued to be put into corsets, although they now wore special models designed for immature bodies, rather than the miniature adult stays typical of the eighteenth century" (Steele, 49). This would also support your assertion that this is child's wear because the silhouettes of adult women and children were now differentiated, even if both were corseted.

In fact children, beginning even back in the 16th century, were corseted to help them grow up "with straight body and limbs" (a 16th century text on women's childbirth, as quoted by Steele, 12), but this trend was changing to a less-intense version for children by the end of the 18th century, only to return later in the Victorian period (Steele, 29).



VASSAR COLLEGE COSTUME COLLECTION

150 YEARS OF VASSAR STUDENTS AND WHAT THEY WORE

Appendix F

FASHIONING AN EDUCATION

[Introduction](#) [1860's-1880's](#) [1890's-1900's](#) [1910's-1920's](#) [1930's](#) [1950's](#) [1960's - 2010's](#) [Conclusion](#)

[Introduction](#)

[About the Collection](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[How to View the Digital Exhibition](#)

Introduction



"A collection of the clothing worn by students at different periods would at least raise, if it did not answer, the question of how far dress has been influenced by education."

-Lucy Maynard Salmon. "A Museum of Vassar College." *Vassar Miscellany* (November 1911): 45.

How far has dress been influenced by education? Or more simply, has dress been influenced by education? How is this particular to women's education? What other factors have influenced changes in what we wear, and how do they relate to education? To pose some answers to these questions, we have spent a great deal of time not only with the objects, but also in the Vassar Library's Special Collections, immersing ourselves in resources related to the women who wore these articles of clothing.

Salmon, who is still famous at Vassar for having coined the phrase "Go to the source!" did not just mean text-based primary sources - she was very interested in the study of material culture, such as clothing, as a way of looking at history. These garments are artifacts from Vassar's history, and tell their own stories about the women who wore them, the time and circumstance they were worn in, and the event they were worn for, not to mention the people who made them.

What does education have to do with fashion? Some believe that fashion interferes with education - many schools have dress codes or uniforms for that reason, and officials at Vassar have tried at various times to regulate student dress, without much success. Looking over the last 150 years, since Vassar was chartered as the first college to educate women with goals on a par to

men's colleges, the changes in what women wear have been tremendous. For many centuries preceding the college's founding, women's fashionable dress in Western culture was most often extreme in decoration and manipulation of the female body. Brief periods of more simple, comfortable, mobile dress never lasted very long. However, from the 1900's to 1960's, simultaneous with the widespread growth of women's education, women's clothing again became simpler, more comfortable, and more mobile, but this time went even farther in that direction, and has relatively stayed in that direction. Surely this cannot be a coincidence.

VASSAR COLLEGE COSTUME COLLECTION

HISTORIC CLOTHING FROM THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY TO TODAY

Appendix F

INVERSE PANORAMA OF PINK AND GREY BUSTLE ENSEMBLE



Dublin Core

Title

Inverse Panorama of Pink and Grey Bustle Ensemble

Subject

Bustle Ensembles; 1870's-1880's - Bustle; ; female

Description

File(s)

[1992.001.b.q.p.static.mov](#)

(video/quicktime)

Collection

[Inverse Panoramas \(Rotating Views\)](#)

Citation

"Inverse Panorama of Pink and Grey Bustle Ensemble," in Vassar College Costume Collection, Item #614, Object Accession #1992.001.b.q.p.static.mov, <http://vcomeka.com/vccc/items/show/614> (accessed September 29, 2011).

Related Objects

Related Images

Related Documents

History of Dress at Vassar College

When the College is Hurtful to a Girl

Test Story 2

Like a school girl morning gown,
As we play our game of football
'Tis here at old Vassar,
We cheer across the gridiron,
'Tis given the rush and run,
But when the ball's kicked over the goal
The Vassar girl is gone,
For her there are no passions,
No shout of victory,
No thousand voices to raise the cry,
No thousand eyes to see,
"You've won the game! You've won the game!"
Our Freshman catches up;
But there's no mighty voice to shout,
"March for blue and grey!"
"Oh, why is this?" we cry aloud,
"Give us the march too,
Why is it that the blue and grey
Can't kick with orange and blue?"
"Well, look, my dears," the teachers wise
"Can the players see,



JAMES W. PALMER '90 GALLERY

At College Center, Vassar College
Poughkeepsie, New York 12604

For gallery hours and travel information
call (845)437-5370

Appendix G

A Glimpse into Vassar's Secret Closet

*An informal exhibition of final projects from
the Historic Costume Preservation Workshop*

Student work to preserve history and design from
the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries

Friday May 21 - Sunday June 6, 2010

Opening reception: Friday, May 21, 4pm - 6pm

 Individuals with disabilities requiring
accommodations or information on accessibility should
contact the Campus Activities Office, 845 437-5370.

check it out



Dress rehearsal

VASSAR HISTORIC COSTUME EXHIBIT
OPENS THIS FRIDAY

The exhibition "A Glimpse into Vassar's (Secret) Closet," featuring a selection of historic costumes from the Vassar College Costume Collection (VCCC), will be on view in the James W. Palmer III Gallery from May 21 to June 6. Free and open to the public, the exhibition will open this Friday, May 21 with an opening reception from 2 to 4 p.m. Throughout the span of the exhibition, the Palmer Gallery will be open Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 1 to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., as well as by appointment by calling (845) 437-5250.

Organized by costumer Holly Hummel, Arden Kirkland and Candace Schuster of the Drama Department, the exhibition will offer the public a chance to see the results of a semester-long process of costume preservation. The VCCC received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Preservation Assistance Grant for Smaller Institutions to fund a series of Historic Costume Preservation workshops that informed the conservation process.

This exhibition will honor Hummel, senior Drama lecturer and costume designer, who is retiring this year. She began organizing the collection shortly after she started working at Vassar in 1981. The VCCC comprises a collection of more than 500

examples of original historic clothing, dating from the 1850s to the present, that is maintained as a research collection within the costume shop of the Vassar Drama Department. This NEH grant allowed Vassar to bring three professionals from the field of costume history to lead workshops for 13 undergraduate students and Drama Department faculty members and administrators. Faculty from the History and Chemistry Departments also participated.

The students, many interested in museum work, received independent study credit for the workshops. All participants gained hands-on experience with museum-quality objects and learned best practices for proper handling of costume objects, assessment and documentation of their condition, museum cataloguing procedures and stabilization and mounting techniques to conserve and display the objects safely.

This progress with the physical collection has also allowed for growth of the VCCC digital collection, and there are plans underway to make the on-campus database of the collection available online in the near future. Until then, photographs and other information about the collection are available at <http://blogs.vassar.edu/hcpw>.

Appendix H

Links to related online resources:

Project blog - <http://blogs.vassar.edu/hcpw/>

Videos - <http://www.youtube.com/VassarHCPW>

Collection blog - <http://blogs.vassar.edu/vccc/>

Blog for the Trying on History project - <http://tryingonhistory.blogspot.com/>

Collection Website and database - <http://vcomeka.com/vccc/>

2010 Exhibition - <http://vcomeka.com/vccc/exhibits/show/glimpse/intro>

2011 Exhibition - <http://vcomeka.com/vccc/exhibits/show/fashioning/introduction>

Links to publicity for the 2010 Exhibition:

<http://hudsonvalley.ynn.com/content/506799/inside-vassar-s-closets/>

<http://info.vassar.edu/news/2009-2010/100606-palmer-costume-collection.html>

<http://www.miscellanynews.com/a-glimpse-into-a-little-known-collection-1.2267467>

<http://www.wornthrough.com/2010/05/page/3/>

<http://gurneyjourney.blogspot.com/2010/06/antique-dresses.html>

Links to publicity for the 2011 Exhibition:

http://almanacweekly.ulsterpublishing.com/view/full_story/13334482/article--Dressing-with-class-Costume-exhibition-on-view-at-Vassar-shows-what-college-girls-wore-over-the-past-150-years-?

<http://contrastvassar.blogspot.com/2011/05/fashioning-education-150-years-of.html>

<http://issuu.com/Vassarcontrast/docs/contrastspring2011/33> (p. 32-33)

<http://edwardianpromenade.com/fashion/fashioning-an-education-150-years-of-vassar-students-and-what-they-wore/>

<http://www.miscellanynews.com/2.1579/exhibit-highlights-vassar-fashion-1.2576360>

<http://gurneyjourney.blogspot.com/2011/05/exhibit-showcases-womens-student.html>

<http://info.vassar.edu/news/2010-2011/110510-palmer-fashioning.html>

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

After examining our collection storage with our visiting consultants in spring 2010, we assessed our situation at that time and made recommendations for future improvements. Some have already been implemented and are also indicated below:

1. Storage Location

As of Spring 2010:

- all of the objects are placed near each other, in the front of the large storage room that the historic collection shares with the theatrical costume stock (worn in current shows)
- the collection is distinct, in drawers and boxes unlike the ones used for the theatrical costumes
- 1/3 of the costumes are stored in 2 units of large plywood drawers in an enclosed closet space at the front of the larger room; each drawer unit is behind a set of double doors
- the locks on the closet doors are opened by the same key as for the main room, so the space cannot be secured separately from the theatrical costumes
- the collection quickly expanded beyond the designated closet space, so that 2/3 of the collection are in boxes that cannot be secured separately from the theatrical costumes
- the doors to the closet, when open, block the aisle between the closet and the boxes
- the storage room is in the basement, and has an increased risk for humidity, especially for boxes closer to the floor

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- all collection items are now in a separate dedicated room behind the theatrical costume storage area (we were able to move the entire collection in May of 2011)

Future recommended improvements:

- the lock on the door to this room is opened by the same key as for the main room, so we need to have the lock changed so that the space can be secured separately from the theatrical costumes
- we also need to make sure that very few people have that key (and that we have a list of everyone who does)
- make sure that no boxes are stored directly on the floor; instead place them on shelves or risers at least 4-6" off the floor

2. Physical storage of the objects

As of Spring 2010:

- 1/3 of the collection is stored in large plywood drawers (2 units of 6 drawers each).
- the other 2/3 are in large acid-free unbuffered boxes, right across the aisle
- the location of the boxes was originally intended for hanging storage, but the metal pipes have been adjusted to different levels and plywood has been placed across them to make shelves for the boxes.
- both boxes and drawers are long and wide, so that most costumes don't have to be folded much to fit

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

- the boxes are acid-free and appropriate for conservation
- however, the plywood of the drawers and shelves has not been sealed, and is off-gassing onto the textiles
- the boxes are very deep, which means that the items at the bottom of the box are sometimes crushed by the ones on top
- the pipes that support the shelves are painted, and the paint can flake off

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- we have been able to purchase many new textile boxes, so that we could stop using the plywood drawers, and move all items to archival boxes
- the new boxes are similarly long and wide, but not as deep, so that it is easier to keep track of individual items, and items on lower layers are not in danger of being crushed
- where multiple objects are in 1 box, we now make sure that heavier objects are on the bottom, so that they aren't crushing layers below
- we have moved several of the more modern, sturdier garments to hanging storage, on padded hangers, on rolling racks

Future recommended improvements:

- we have started making muslin rack covers, which need to be completed
- one row of boxes is on plywood shelves placed on pipes originally designed for hanging storage (as in the old space), so we still need to cover the plywood shelves with a barrier material, such as muslin or polyethylene
- wrap the pipes in washed muslin
- if we do continue to use any of our deeper boxes, we will insert dividers of archival board to separate the layers in the boxes. These will be supported at the corners by pieces of acid-free foam to distribute the weight away from the items below, and they will have twill tape handles to lift them out
- acquire permanent shelving (ideally metal) for the boxed storage

3. Distinct Collections

As of Spring 2010:

- many of the objects are used on a regular basis as instructional materials for classes
- objects commonly used for teaching are not all kept together in 1 or a few boxes, but rather each type of object is kept in another box with other similar objects
- objects are still grouped thematically / functionally, so that, for example, all our bustles can easily be located and examined together without having to look in too many boxes
- as they are used more often, the commonly used objects end up on the top of the drawer/box
- if other objects are taken out for independent research and then returned to the top of the drawer/box, more commonly used items end up buried underneath
- as a result, more objects must be moved and handled each time we prepare for a class, which can cause undue stress to the objects

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- this connects directly with the recommendations for strategy #2 – having replaced the deep boxes with ones that are more shallow, we can now more easily separate

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

out the more commonly used objects into distinct boxes without moving them too far away from their thematic groupings

Future recommended improvements:

- consider carefully how the collection is used, and how the objects should best be grouped, then rearrange the boxes accordingly on the shelves
- consider creating a study collection of diverse objects that are boxed / grouped together for when we have classes come to visit. Ideally, these should be duplicate (redundant) objects, so that we can designate them for increased handling and know that we have other similar objects being preserved more carefully

4. Accession policies

As of Spring 2010:

- we receive a number of calls every year about potential donations, both to our historic collection and to our theatrical collection
- we suggest to donors that we are happy to take their donations with the understanding that we will either keep them in our historic or theatrical collections, or donate them to the Salvation Army or another such organization
- we keep lists of all items donated, with contact info for each donor
- for objects we feel might belong in the historic collection, we ask for supporting documents, such as photographs or letters
- we receive many interesting donations from our local community
- we are now able to better document the provenance of our donations than in years past
- however, we are out of space – we have very little room for new donations, and can barely keep up with properly documenting new accessions
- donations of objects come with invisible costs, such as for storage boxes and labor for cataloging

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- we have begun to articulate the dual mission of our collection, preserving objects that help us to teach both about design history and about Vassar's own history
- we have created a brochure that outlines the costs associated with preserving each donation of an object, to encourage people to make financial donations as well

Future recommended improvements:

- review museum registration examples at a variety of institutions (especially university collections) to determine the best policies for our situation
- write a formal mission statement that clearly defines our collecting policy
- create a document that formally communicates this policy to the public, to cut down on calls about inappropriate donations
- develop an official de-accessioning policy, and get approval from the college
- carefully go through the collection and de-accession some redundant items
- identify gaps in the collection (missing pieces that would help with our mission) and actively seek donations of such items
- when accepting new donations, communicate with the donors regarding copyright, privacy, and publicity related to their items

5. Workspace

As of Spring 2010:

- we have 1-2 folding tables in the aisle between the closet with the plywood storage drawers and the shelving with the acid-free boxes
- we also occasionally use the dressing room and lower costume shop, across the hall, as additional workspaces
- the tables in the storage room are very close by, so that we can take objects out and examine them without moving them too far
- if we want to leave an object out on these table for extended research over a few days, it is not out in a public space where it would be exposed to more danger
- since these spaces are all in the basement, there is no danger of natural light from windows
- the lower costume shop workspace is well lit (and objects are covered with tissue when not being examined, so that they are not exposed to light unnecessarily)
- however, the space in the storage area is very cramped: when the doors to the closet are opened to get to the drawer units, you can't get through the aisle. As a result, you have to move objects from the drawer to the table, close the drawer, close the closet door, and then move the object to its intended destination
- lighting in the storage area is not ideal – when doing research, we use clip on worklights to focus light on details that we are studying, but it is impossible to get a good overall view of the object
- when we leave the objects out in the lower costume shop or dressing room, these spaces are slightly more public and less secure
- the storage space is a dedicated space in which food, drink, plants, etc. are not allowed
- however, when objects are moved into multi-purpose workspaces, these are rooms in which food and drink are sometimes permitted, and must be carefully monitored

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- since we have moved to a new room, we no longer have the problem with the doors, but the new space is still cramped, and we only have room for one work table

Future recommended improvements:

- the space should have clear access to all drawers and boxes
- the work tables should be close by but not inhibiting movement in the space
- lighting should be available but controlled, with UV filters (such as sleeves for fluorescent lights)
- we also should get a light meter to record light levels of areas where objects are out for research, or on display
- be vigilant about not allowing food or drink in areas where the costumes are out

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

6. Climate Monitoring

As of Spring 2010:

- any monitoring of the climate control is part of the HVAC services for the entire building
- when the building was first built (within the last 10 years) there was attention paid to the climactic needs of the collection
- we are in a region that does experience significant seasonal change, but the building systems are designed to keep the indoor conditions constant
- HVAC services are recent and up to date
- however, we don't have access to the specific information about the levels in the room
- we are in the basement, and there is some concern for seepage of water from the outside where the wall meets the floor along the perimeter of the room

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- we met with our building's HVAC technician and were assured that the building is monitored daily and maintained at 75 degrees F and 50% relative humidity, which is close to our ideal range of 65 degrees F +/- 2 degrees, 55% humidity +/- 5%
- we have purchased two digital thermohygrometers to monitor temperature and relative humidity in the room where the collection is stored
- in August 2011 we arranged for the temperature in our storage spaces to be lowered to 65 degrees F
- we are in the process of requesting that a dehumidifier be installed

Future recommended improvements:

- install a dehumidifier
- develop our own regular monitoring of temperature and humidity conditions, having a student responsible for recording the temperature and relative humidity weekly, in a log book (along with any other relevant observations)
- this log should be examined closely at least 4 times a year, to make sure seasonal fluctuations are addressed
- make sure that this monitoring results in efforts to correct any findings that are not in the proper range (65 degrees F +/- 2 degrees, 55% humidity +/- 5%), for example using the dehumidifier, or adjusting the temperature
- as a part of our monitoring procedure, regularly check overhead pipes, etc. for leaks; notify buildings and grounds immediately if there is any problem

7. Cleaning

As of Spring 2010:

- we do not have any dedicated cleaning tools or supplies
- custodial staff for the college do not regularly clean the storage area, at our request, in fear that their cleaning methods might be somehow harmful or disruptive
- custodial staff, who do not know about the value of the collection, are not in a position to harm the objects in any way
- the storage space is far removed from entrances/windows, so very little dust/dirt enters the space

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

- however, regular cleaning does not occur

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- our new space has very little trouble with dirt and dust
- as it is in a remote space in the basement, it does not get as much foot traffic as in the front part of the room

Future recommended improvements:

- invest in some cleaning tools and supplies (vacuum, broom, dusting cloths)
- define a regular schedule / procedure for this – have a student vacuum and dust weekly, train them how to do this

8. Quarantine

As of Spring 2010:

- we keep each new donation separate while it is examined and documented
- we look for signs of pests/mold, but if there are no visible signs, they get put away with other objects
- obvious biological dangers are noted and endangered objects can be kept away from others
- however, pests could be present without an obvious visual sign, and then could contaminate a whole drawer or box of objects
- we have tried packing contaminated objects in plastic and freezing them, but our only access to a freezer is to a household upright freezer, which may not get cold enough to be effective

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- we have purchased a museum quality vacuum cleaner we can use to gently clean objects, including removing remains from pests

Future recommended improvements:

- purchase extra boxes and extra large Ziploc bags, and set aside space for quarantined objects
- quarantine all new donations in plastic for one month, regardless of whether there are obvious signs of pests
- find a local source for freezing or otherwise treating contaminated objects, or purchase a chest freezer
- consult with the college about the pest management systems already in place in the building
- develop a more thorough Integrated Pest Management program, including weekly checks for insects, mold, and rodents

9. Handling

As of Spring 2010:

- we wear white cotton gloves for most handling of the objects. When fine motor skills are needed we forego the gloves, but make sure our hands are clean
- when objects are moved, they are supported underneath by one or two people (depending on the size of the objects) and are moved with tissue both over and under
- handling is approached with great care
- however, larger objects are not supported or covered well for moving

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

- many of our gloves are old (with holes) and ill fitting
- Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:
- we have purchased support boards in a variety of sizes to help us to move the objects, and are now in the habit of using them regularly
 - we have purchased many more white gloves

10. Storage of flat textiles

As of Spring 2010:

- we have a small selection of flat textiles (scarves, shawls, etc.) mixed in with our other costume objects. These are stored flat, and often must be folded to fit in the boxes
- they have tissue inside the folds to minimize the creasing, but some creasing is inevitable
- coordinating objects are kept nearby (for example, the neckscarf that goes with the middy blouse)

Future recommended improvements:

- store them on padded rolls instead
- still keep them with coordinating objects, where possible (if small enough to stay in the same box)

11. Documentation

As of Spring 2010:

- paperwork for the objects is kept in plastic binders. Each object has a clear pocket sheet protector that holds a paper catalog record and any other paperwork associated with the object, including donor letters and original photographs. There are about 100 item records in each binder
- it is easy to find the paperwork for an item
- it is easy to browse through many item records in one sitting
- however, the binders are easily moved, and therefore could easily be lost or damaged
- original photographs and letters could be damaged over time, due to awkward handling and acidic storage
- all paperwork through 2005 has been scanned into the database

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- we have moved the paperwork so that each individual object has its own file folder in a filing cabinet

Future recommended improvements:

- ideally, obtain a file cabinet that is insulated, fire-rated, and locked
- wrap original photos and documents in acid-free tissue or other acid-free covering
- create placeholder cards to mark the space when a folder is temporarily pulled out from the drawer, as a reminder to put folders back when finished
- create a regular procedure to print a new catalog record each time changes are made to the database, so that the physical paperwork is up to date
- all new paperwork should be scanned into the database
- catch up on any paperwork from 2005 to present that has not been scanned into the database

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

12. Separations

As of Spring 2010:

- small separated pieces (loose buttons, beads, etc.) are placed in a white envelope labeled with the accession number of the object they came from, and a brief description of what they are
- these envelopes are placed near the binders that hold hard copies of registration info for each object
- however, the envelopes are only large enough for small pieces, like torn fragments or a lost button. In some cases we have a large piece that is separated (for example, a collar)
- an older strategy was to store separated pieces with the hard copy paperwork for the object, which is kept in one plastic sheet protector in a large binder. Previous separations have not been updated to this newer strategy; therefore storage of separations is not consistent.

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- as the paperwork has been moved from binders to a filing cabinet, the envelopes with separations are now also in that filing cabinet, all together

Future recommended improvements:

- buy polythene bags in a variety of sizes to hold a variety of separations
- put separations in these bags, including previous separations stored with either strategy mentioned above
- label all bags with the accession number and a description of the separated piece, a theory as to how/why it became separated, and a description or diagram of where it used to be connected
- record them accordingly in the paperwork and database
- store the bags in the boxes with the objects they match

13. Labeling

As of Spring 2010:

- upon accession, all objects are given a tyvek hangtag connected by cotton thread to a small safety pin that is pinned to a section of the object where it is unlikely to cause damage. The accession number is written on the tag with a black Sharpie marker
- some objects were also marked with sewn in tags, with the accession number typed onto cotton twill tape (supported on a card for the typing), sprayed with Krylon spray as a sealant, and then sewn into the garment with cotton thread.
- all objects are identified with their number
- however, since not all objects have sewn in tags, if the hangtag gets separated, it could be hard to identify the object

Future recommended improvements:

- create sewn in tags for the remainder of the collection, by writing the accession number with an archival marker on archival linen tape, then sewing the label on the garment
- place the tags and labels as consistently as possible (on the cuff, center back neck, or center back waist)

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

- place hanging tags at the cuff or armpit of hung garments, so you can see it easily when hanging
- pin the hanging tag to the sewn on tag (where there is one)
- make sure there are tags on all separate pieces
- get archival kits for marking non-textile objects, such as jewelry

14. Audits

As of Spring 2010:

- we document an inventory of each drawer or box any time that we return objects that have been out for study
- before objects are returned to the drawer, objects already in it are compared to the last inventory, and corrections are made. Then as each object is returned to the drawer, it is added to the list. The list is numbered in order from the bottom up, so #1 is at the bottom of the drawer
- theoretically, our records are updated after each use of the objects
- this numbering system allows us to add more objects on top of the drawer/box without completely re-numbering our list
- however, the lists are often made on paper and not updated in the database right away – we can end up with a significant backlog of corrections, and not be able to find something right away if it has been moved
- this numbering system is not entirely accurate – as objects are taken out and then put back in, our numbering may be: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14 – with missing numbers that may be misleading
- often the objects still in the drawer are not taken out to be inventoried, but instead we carefully look at a small section of each layer as it's stacked (trying to find the tag with the accession number)

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- when we inventory a box, we take everything out, clean the box, and completely repack it
- with our new, more shallow boxes, there are only a few items in each box, so it is much easier to see what is in the box and there is less of a concern of changing the order of the layers
- each new box is labeled with a clear acid-free plastic pocket which holds index cards printed with a photo and brief catalog information for each object in the box
- we have also created a new system for organizing our box storage, with the shelves as a grid of lettered columns and numbered rows. We are in the process of marking the shelves and labeling the boxes accordingly

Future recommended improvements:

- the database should be used directly when doing an inventory (via a laptop) so that we can skip the step of a paper list that has to be entered
- we need to make sure that every box is checked on a regular schedule
- we need to check more fragile items more often (for example, the ostrich feather dress)

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

15. Activity Logs

As of Spring 2010:

- we keep notes on scrap paper about our activities with the collection. For example, workers may take notes about measurements of objects, or may list objects that have been taken out for research
- these then get saved in a paper folder and, where appropriate, entered into the database
- unfortunately, these are very informal and can be hard to follow or to organize

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- during spring 2011 we began using paper worksheets to document what students worked on each day, but this still needs to be instituted more consistently

Future recommended improvements:

- we need to record all activity with the objects more formally, including
 - materials used with the objects, with details (tissue, pins, etc.)
 - light exposure (times/levels)
 - display details (mannequin info, etc.)
 - condition reports
 - cleaning reports
- this could take the form of paper worksheets, or be entered right in the database via a laptop or tablet

16. Visitation

As of Spring 2010:

- we do not have formal procedures for visitors

Future recommended improvements:

- we need to keep a log of all who visit the collection, including outside visitors and student researchers
- provide continuous staff supervision during all visits (this may sometimes include student staff members supervising student researchers, but only with approved objects)
- provide access to database during visits
- individual visitors must register, and sign a form acknowledging their awareness of our procedures
 - give visitors access to lockers, etc., nearby, for their belongings
 - food/drink placed elsewhere
 - handling procedures (gloves, support, pencils only, etc.)
 - procedures for printing/copying, etc., using content from database
 - restrictions/legal issues - copyright/privacy

17. Database

As of Spring 2010:

- our collection data is maintained in a Filemaker database, stored on a Vassar server so that anyone in the Vassar community can view it (given the proper instructions)
- one curator administrates the database

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

- select students are trained to use the database and given a login which allows them to modify certain fields
- all data from the paper files is duplicated in the database, providing duplicates/backup in case of damage to the paper files
- students get the experience of working with collection management software
- however, Filemaker software is not available on all computers on campus
- many students have difficulty learning how to use the Filemaker software
- data entered by students is sometimes incorrect or formatted improperly

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- we are in the process of migrating our database to a web-based database using the Omeka platform, at vcomeka.com/vccc, for more convenient access
- after problems with the Filemaker server, our Filemaker database is no longer on the server, but rather kept on an external hard drive

Future recommended improvements:

- create and maintain a regular backup strategy for all iterations of the database
- create a quality control procedure for curators to check the work from student data entry
- make access to the database more convenient during work with collection (for example, using a tablet or laptop) so that changes can be noted immediately, especially –
 - classifications correct
 - descriptions sufficiently detailed
 - condition indicated and current
 - locations current
 - values current and updated periodically
 - photos uploaded and captioned

18. Loans

As of Spring 2010:

- we do not have a system for tracking incoming or outgoing loans, because we have never been asked to loan objects
- however, we have occasionally borrowed objects from Special Collections in the past
- other institutions have expressed an interest in borrowing items in the future

Future recommended improvements:

- create procedures for documenting incoming loans, storing paperwork, keeping track of the objects, etc.
- create procedures for documenting outgoing loans
 - loan request form (including insurance info)
 - loan form (outlining all policies for handling, storage, etc.)
 - procedure for dealing with loss or damage

19. Security

As of Spring 2010:

- we find the general security of the building to be sufficient for the collection

Appendix I - General Preservation Assessment Final Report

- the collection is housed in a location that doesn't receive a lot of traffic – not many people know it's there, which lessens our security risks
- fire prevention, detection, and suppression systems are maintained by the college
- no objects are stored within 18" of fire suppression heads (sprinklers)
- however, if we increase publicity of the collection, we may have increased security risks
- we do not have a specific emergency plan for the collection

Future recommended improvements:

- re-key the lock to the room dedicated to the historic collection and make sure that very few people have the key, and that those who do are aware of the needs and significance of the collection (as mentioned above in strategy #1)
- discuss the special needs of the collection with the college's fire safety professionals, and make sure they are aware of the significance of the collection
- create a specific emergency management, planning, and response plan for the collection, including plans for flooding, etc. (not just fire)

20. Exhibits

As of Spring 2010:

- we do not formally exhibit objects from our collection on a regular basis and therefore we have not developed formal procedures for exhibitions

Improvements implemented as of Fall 2011:

- in spring of 2010 and spring of 2011 we were able to exhibit objects from the collection in the college's Palmer Gallery, an enclosed, locked space
- we developed the following procedures
 - security (one trained student guard at all times, extras at high volume times)
 - mounts (neutral barriers between costume and mount, between costume and floor)
 - barriers between audience and objects (low posts with ribbon strung between)
 - daily/weekly inspection and cleaning by curator or trained student guard
 - lighting (off or low when not open to the public, otherwise light levels are ok as long as the exhibition is only for a couple of weeks for only a few hours a week)
 - monitoring visitors (guest book)

Future recommended improvements:

- document these procedures in a more formal handbook
- have the student guard count the number of visitors
- monitor the light levels more formally