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Bethany L. Haight
Western Oregon University

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The Impact of World War I on American Women's Fashion

By

Bethany L. Haight

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Prof. Sandra Hedgepeth,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

Western Oregon University

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Defining Fashion and Culture at the Start of the Twentieth Century

Introduction:

Clothing has been part of human history for tens of thousands of years. During this time fashion has been subject to innumerable changes around the globe. It has been, and continues to be, influenced by everything from the availability of resources to environmental and physiological necessity. While being reflective of culture the two play off one another, each impacting and redefining the other. To fully understand the shifts that occur in fashion it is necessary to understand not only coinciding the changes in culture but those that precede and develop as a result as well. Additionally, one must recognize that no fashion concept stands alone. No matter how innovative the change may appear to be, it always draws on previous styles for influence. As such, before the fashion concepts in question can be effectively discussed, what came before it must also be understood.

It is a commonly held belief that the introduction of habitual clothing, or clothing that is worn consistently, came about as a response to migration into cooler areas such as northern Europe and Asia. Clothing offered a modifiable microenvironment with the potential to protect the human body from a variety of factors. As it became complex, sewn and tailored, it changed human physiology and altered the expression of cultural norms. With the transition to

habitual clothing body painting lost much of its relevance and clothing became a new form of skin.¹ Over time it developed into a mode of self-expression, social subjugation, and visual representation of rank. As such, fashion has become linked to the formation of first impressions.

Learning about influential events, such as World War I, that surround changes in dress can provide the context needed to understand why these changes occurred in the first place. Prior to discussing contemporary influences it is important to consider antecedent factors. While the entire history of clothing and fashion could be discussed, this work will focus on the most relevant years, the decade that preceded World War I. While this is due in part to its immediate association with the time in question this decade also marked the end of a century-long standstill in the Western fashion industry. Consequently, analyzing just this short period in history provides a depiction of fashion standards in the century before as well.

Pre-War:

The years between the beginning of the twentieth century and the beginning of World War I are known by many names. The most common of these

¹ Ian Gilligan, "Neanderthal Extinction and Modern Human Behaviour: The Role of Climate Change and Clothing," *World Archaeology* 39, no. 4 (2007): pg. #502; Ian Gilligan, "The Prehistoric Development of Clothing: Archaeological Implications of a Thermal Model," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 17, no. 1 (2010): pg. #24-27.

is “The Edwardian Era” but others include “The Age of Opulence” and “La Belle Époque.”² Even today, these names evoke images of splendor in the mind. Fashion during much of this time was slow to change, and Paris stood as the unquestioned capital of Western fashion. Clothing varied to fit the changing seasons, but year to year it remained a static holdover of the previous century. With the consistency in styles people turned to other areas to infuse the desired individuality into their dress. During the first decade of the twentieth century this took the form of extensive trim.³

Throughout much of history women have been encouraged to adopt unnatural forms and postures to satisfy culturally accepted concepts of fashion and femininity. Western fashion has included everything from exaggerated hips to S-shaped corsetry.⁴ In 1908, backed by the couturier Paul Poiret, the idea of the natural figure was reintroduced in Paris, and eventually the whole of Western fashion. In the more than century that has followed Western fashion has continued to embrace natural posture in fashion.⁵ As was common at this time, New York fashion lagged behind Paris. Rather than developing new ideas New York focused on producing Parisian styles and while not far behind, in 1909 they

² Valerie D. Mendes and Amy De La Haye, *Fashion since 1900*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), pg. #10.

³ Elizabeth Ewing, *History of 20th Century Fashion* (Hollywood: Costume & Fashion Design, 2001), pg. #62.

⁴ See reference image 5.

⁵ Ewing, pg. #62-63.

were still producing the S-shaped silhouette and flared skirt that had been tossed off by fashionable Europeans a year prior.⁶ This new style also marked the first time since the 1700s that women's silhouettes were scaled back to a size that was comparable to menswear.⁷ Dresses and skirts became lighter and overall circumference shrunk, removing the necessity of standing several feet from everything.

This revolution did more than allow for natural posture to overtake the existing S-shaped profiles. It took several years but this transition played a major part in the eventual dissolution of widespread corsetry. Before this could happen however, a new form of corset was needed to accompany the changing style. It produced a smooth vertical line from under-bust to foot and its various forms remained in toiles in the years that followed. However, they were no longer a necessity used to bully the human form into submission and as such a few fashionable, and revolutionary, women decided to forgo them. Early forms of the brassiere existed in the late 1800s, and earlier in isolated cases, but the garment came into more widespread use at this time and was patented on November 13, 1914.⁸

⁶ National Cloak & Suit Co., *Women's Fashions of the Early 1900s: An Unabridged Replication of "New York Fashions, 1909"* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992).

⁷ Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pg. #127.

⁸ Ewing, pg. #63.

As part of this revival of directoire fashion hobble skirts⁹ came into vogue. The hobble skirt received its name because it did not widen at the knee or hemline thereby restricting leg movement. The dichotomy of this style led Poiret to say, "...I freed the bust, but I shackled the legs."¹⁰ The very nature of this skirt limited its marketability as only women that lived lives of luxury and ease could afford such limited mobility. As was common with most preceding aristocratic fashions, appearance trumped functionality. However, new methods of information dissemination allowed the hobble skirt to become popular despite this flaw. The clean lines and reduced fabric meant it was easy to produce but middle and lower-class women needed a skirt that would allow for greater range of motion. Slits and nearly hidden pleats proved to be the solution.¹¹

Soon the hobble skirt design was paired with the trotteur, or walking skirt, the hem of which rested above the ankle thereby limiting the concern for damaged and dirtied hemlines.¹² However, the style became so pervasive within society that the upper-class sought to find a new fashion that would distinguish them from everyone else. Once again, Poiret led the fashion houses in a new form. He added subtle folds to skirts and lifted waistlines, mirroring earlier

⁹ See reference image 3.

¹⁰ Ewing, pg. #63.

¹¹ Ewing, pg. #66.

¹² Ewing, pg. #66.

Empire styles.¹³ Additionally, tunics and overskirts of varying designs became fashionable. These allowed the column-like shape indicative of the hobble skirt to be separated by one or more horizontal lines.¹⁴

During this time Eastern influence melded with Western fashion as well. As early as 1908 kimonos and Oriental satins were being advertised in London and they remained popular until the beginning of the war. Vibrant colors had come into vogue a few years earlier, and were furthered with the introduction of new Oriental colors. Unfortunately, Eastern influence floundered in 1914, due in large part to the beginning of World War I and the resulting strain on trade.¹⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century necklines were high and constricting, with boning that came nearly to the chin. However, by 1908 they had begun to lower. Round necklines and Peter Pan collars were both present, as was the controversial 'V' neck. The reintroduction of the 'V' neck brought back the modestly vest that had been popular a century earlier. Soon these concerns ebbed and the necklines, now even lower, were accepted without modestly vests.¹⁶

¹³ Ewing, pg. #69; see reference image 2.

¹⁴ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #37.

¹⁵ Ewing, pg. #69.

¹⁶ Ewing, pg. #75-76.

The Early Years: 1914-1917

When it began, no one thought that World War I would last for more than a few months. History had detailed several wars that lasted longer, but nothing that was of a comparable scale. The belief in a swift victory was so widespread that most countries made very few efforts to adjust. The United States was not yet part of the war and European countries rejected the need for change. Status was defined by accomplishments and class, and women were expected to live their lives as they had prior to the war, void of strenuous manual labor, waiting at home for their husbands to return. It wasn't until 1915 that women were allowed to take over positions in munitions factories.¹⁷

Despite the fact that Germany officially declared war against France on August 3, 1914, Paris saw no reason to cancel their Autumn show, nor any of the ones that followed.¹⁸ In the same year, with a limited number of designers, American *Vogue* organized a Fashion Fête to show American potential in the fashion industry. Their hope was to aid the war-stricken fashion capitals of Europe, specifically Paris.¹⁹ However, French fashion houses worried that it was an attempt to take over the industry and promote local talent. America went on to try to diffuse the resulting hostility through several more attempts at

¹⁷ Ewing, pg. #79.

¹⁸ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #48.

¹⁹ Ewing, pg. #81.

support.²⁰ Another such example took place just prior to the United States entering the war. A Carnival of Fashion was put on by the French Wounded Emergency Fund with Dallas Clubwomen modeling both Parisian and American fashions, raising nearly \$4,000, or approximately \$150,000 today.²¹

Early in 1915 the true extent of the war began to be realized and the fashion houses took heed. Several designers introduced military influences, such as cut and pockets, to their designs for women's daywear. The hobble skirt, already on the decline, disappeared. Over the course of the next few years fashion would not be determined by the whims of the wealthy; instead it revolved around the needs of the lower classes. Tunics, which had been popularized by the upper-class a few years earlier, were lengthened so the restrictive nature of the hobble skirt could be lost. These new skirts were fuller and by 1916 hemlines had raised to several inches above the ankle. As such, elaborate petticoats, which had disappeared with the hobble skirt, returned.²² Women's jackets also became looser at this time. Despite the bulky nature of this design the overall effect was an increased range of motion, freeing women to work in new fields. Certain jobs require fashion to go a step further and by

²⁰ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #48.

²¹ Melissa J. Prycer, "A Larger Housekeeping: Dallas Clubwomen and World War I," *Legacies* 20, no. 1 (2008): pg. #18.

²² Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #50-51.

necessity trousers and bloomer dresses²³ replaced skirts.²⁴ Jumper blouses²⁵ also became popular because they were highly versatile, allowing for use with several types of clothing. Additionally, mourning etiquette, which dictated everything from dress to actions, was relaxed so women could continue to work.²⁶

With the shift in priorities domestic labor was decreased drastically and clothing that required extensive care and upkeep became increasingly impractical. Eveningwear became less common and the longstanding tradition of dressing four times per day was dropped.²⁷ On the other side of this, munitions factories often employed women that previously had little money to spend on nonessentials. Their new income was large enough that they could now afford the more extravagant side of fashion. While it was impractical for them to purchase expensive pieces for use during work hours many observers discussed the fact that on their off hours it was common for these women to go out in some of the best fashion had to offer.²⁸

The hobble skirt had been ideal for mass production because of its simple lines. Wartime styles were ideal candidates for mass production for another reason. The loose fit allowed for greater variability of body type within a cut, or

²³ See reference image 1.

²⁴ Ewing, pg. #81-82.

²⁵ See reference image 4.

²⁶ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #52.

²⁷ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #51-52.

²⁸ Ewing, pg. #85-86.

size.²⁹ Mass production in the clothing industry boomed during World War I because of the high demand for uniforms, both military and medical. The necessity of producing large numbers of standardized uniforms required increased cooperation between and within the textile and clothing industries. It also led to the mechanization of clothing manufacturing.³⁰ The buttonholing machine, a staple in the manufacture of clothing, was invented in the United States by the Reece Machinery Company in 1914 to speed the rate of uniform production.³¹

Growth in the industry led to unions and the shift from craft to industry status. Hours, wages, and working conditions were all regulated for union participants. Interestingly, most of women's fashion was excluded from this change. The individuality offered by small shops held appeal for most women. Bespoke garments were still preferred because they ensured that a woman's clothing would not appear on anyone else.³²

Among Poiret's greatest rivals was Lucile, Lady Duff Gordon. She had her own fashion empire based in London that reached both Paris and New York and viewed World War I as an opportunity to finally overtake Paris' longstanding

²⁹ Ewing, pg. #82.

³⁰ Ewing, pg. #86-87.

³¹ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #55.

³² Ewing, pg. #86-87.

monopoly on fashion.³³ During the war she focused on the New York branch, previously centered around production while relying on Parisian designers for new fashion ideas, and designed extravagant clothing that only the wealthy could afford. Interestingly, she was largely responsible for bringing about a style she disliked. Prior to the war she dressed Irene Castle thus marking the beginning of the moderns, although it was the 1920s before this style was popularized.³⁴ The look was often described as boyish as the loose fit and dropped waist truncated the legs and deemphasized any existing curves, an idea that Lucile abhorred.

Post United States Declaration of War: 1917-1918 and After

As the war continued the fashion industry began to feel the stretch. America, which had long been a production center, exploded with cheap ready-to-wear items. In 1917 British restrictions on paper limited catalogue length, and following the war they began producing budget-priced clothes for those with incomes decreased as a result of war.³⁵

The United States officially entered World War I only a year and a half before the Armistice. While this did limit the potential for changes in fashion somewhat this time was still marked by a rapid reduction in the fullness of skirts. By 1918 they had returned to a slim-line shape while not reverting back to a full

³³ Ewing, pg. #28-29.

³⁴ Ewing, pg. #84-85.

³⁵ Ewing, pg. #83.

hobble skirt style. With the reintroduction of narrow skirts, tunics were pulled back into vogue to be paired with them. The years that surrounded the end of World War I were marked by a juxtaposition of slim lines and loose-fitting tops, and women's fashion merged prewar minimalism with wartime practicality and shape.³⁶

The war drew to a close in 1918, but it had a lasting impact on fashion. The independence, and freedom to work, that women had gained during the war became a new standard in society despite a push to return to traditional gender roles when men returned from war. The ability to support themselves, if not a family, became even more important in the wake left behind. Death tolls were high and the notion of 'surplus' women, with little hope for marriage, became an accepted cultural concept.³⁷

While wartime fashion may have got its start from earlier styles it was not kind to the designers that were influential in its development. War changed fashion to such a degree that designers had to adapt or fail. Some took this shift in stride but others, such as Poiret, were less lucky. Despite the fact that in many ways he served as the impetus of this change his unwillingness accept new concepts of fashion led him to live out the rest of his life in relative obscurity.³⁸

³⁶ Kathleen M. La Barre and Kay D. La Barre, Reference Book of Women's Vintage Clothing, 1910-1919 (Dallas, OR: La Barre Books, 2006), pg. #132-135.

³⁷ Ewing, pg. #91-92.

³⁸ Ewing, pg. #99.

Women and Wartime: 1914-1918

With the magnitude of World War I it quickly became necessary to mobilize an ever increasing level of support for the war effort. One of the most common methods employed was the use of wartime propaganda. The distance created by war allowed women to imagine the men in their lives as heroes, abiding by all the expectations of a Western gentleman. He would be brave, patient, intelligent, resourceful, courageous, and any other desirable trait that could be thought up. They were given no information with which to refute this, and it was not in the best wishes of the media or the war effort to do so. With such honor bestowed upon their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers came a level of pride. Pride in these men translated to pride in their country which in turn led to increased support for the war.³⁹

As is common throughout history women and femininity were equated with mothering, nurturing characteristics. This idea served as a double-edged sword, providing divergent ways these characteristics would present themselves in women. They were encouraged to draw on their caring nature by joining the war effort as nurses on the European battlefields. However, should a mother attempt to prevent her son from enlisting she was characterized as overprotective. At the same time, women's groups that opposed the war did not

³⁹ Nadine Gingrich, "'Every Man Who Dies, Dies for You and Me. See You Be Worthy': The Image of the Hero as Rhetorical Motivation in Unofficial War Propaganda, 1914-1918," *War, Literature & the Arts* 17, no. 1/2 (2005): pg. #109.

feel that they were either overprotective or unpatriotic, rather that they were expressing their motherly and moral duty by opposing what they saw as an unnecessary war.⁴⁰

Gingrich wrote on the dichotomous nature of women's roles in Britain during wartime. This can be extrapolated for the discussion of women in the United States as many parallels exist. While Britain was much closer to the warfront they were still distant enough that the majority of information available to the public was gained through the media. Once again women were expected to take on masculine characteristics and yet maintain their femininity. They were expected to maintain the idea of hearth and home, an idyllic image of what the men in their lives were fighting to save, and the haven from the outside world that would be awaiting them upon their [hopefully] victorious return. However, women also had to drastically adjust their lives to fill the vacuum left by the removal of so many men to war. They were told to face the realities of war with the courage and fortitude that had been credited to men.⁴¹ Today the idea that a women could be both feminine and possess emotional fortitude and strength of character in times of war seems obvious but such ideas were not common at the time.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Mckillen, "Pacifist Brawn and Silk-Stocking Militarism: Labor, Gender, and Antiwar Politics, 1914–1918," *Peace & Change* 33, no. 3 (2008): pg. #389.

⁴¹ Gingrich, pg. #108; 113.

Throughout the war propaganda was used to systematically tell women the definition of womanity, a practice that continues to this day. However, those developing these propagandistic ideas had to overcome the hurdle of consolidating the conflicting nature of the nurturing woman and war, for the very definition of a “true” woman was at odds with the violence and aggression of war.⁴² They transformed a woman’s desire to be desired into a desire to be worthy of sacrifice and by extension worthy of the men in their lives. In essence they argued that “[f]eminine virtue [set] off, inspire[d], masculine greatness.”⁴³

Greenwich Influences

Fashion is not always determined by fashion houses, the wealthy, and economic necessity. In the early twentieth century Greenwich Village was home to artists of many kinds, and well as advocates of Freudian psychology and an associated way of life. Henrietta Rodman was an English teacher but when she was not working in New York’s girls’ schools she wore sandals, flowing gowns known as Village sacks, and bobbed hair. She is often credited with beginning the bohemian style popular in the 1910s that would later spread to the larger world and be influential in the development of flapper fashions.⁴⁴

⁴² Gingrich, pg. #109.

⁴³ Gingrich, pg. #114.

⁴⁴ Deborah Saville, "Freud, Flappers and Bohemians: The Influence of Modern Psychological Thought and Social Ideology on Dress, 1910–1923," *Dress* 30, no. 1 (2003): pg. #63-66.

During these years there were two forms of fashion coexisting in Greenwich Village. The first, the emancipated sack, was considered to be the purview of the political feminist and took the form of crude dark linen or cotton sheaths paired with dark socks and sandals. Artistic dress on the other hand included batiks, floating tunics, and silk robes.⁴⁵ The early spread of these liberal attitudes towards dress is best marked by the 1916 debut of counterculture boutiques.⁴⁶

Ready-to-Wear and Sizing

Prior to the development of ready-to-wear each item of clothing was made-to-measure by family or a tailor. On occasion tailors would produce completed pieces that were available for purchase using proportional dressmakers systems in the nineteenth century. While this work drew on years of experience they often resulted in ill-fitting pieces that required further tailoring.

The ready-to-wear industry began to come into its own during the American Civil War. The demand for uniforms meant that for the first time ready-to-wear became high quality and common. Additionally, as government agents measured conscripts a pattern was discovered that allowed for the creation of a

⁴⁵ Saville, pg. #66.

⁴⁶ Saville, pg. #70; 75.

standardized set of sizes.⁴⁷ However, despite superficial changes in women's fashion between 1830 and 1910 it maintained a close, restrictive fit and exaggerated silhouette.⁴⁸ As a result, prior to 1880 the production of fitted women's garments continued to be in the hands of family and dressmakers using the method of draping. In the last portion of the nineteenth century the first ready-to-wear garments for women, other than undergarments and the occasional loose piece, were produced. However, these early efforts at fitted ready-to-wear were cheap, simplified forms of current fashions that relied on a fixed proportional relationship between circumference and length.⁴⁹ In other words, as the overall circumference increased so did the length, meaning the pieces only fit a small range of sizes with any level of accuracy.

The change in silhouette that occurred in 1908 allowed for inexpensive, easily produced womenswear as the pieces could be produced by altering basic rectangles. It also marked the development of nested patterns similar to those used today.⁵⁰ The upper-class maintained bespoke wardrobes as a status symbol and the lower-class could not afford the cost of new ready-to-wear clothes. Still,

⁴⁷ Winifred Aldrich, "History of Sizing Systems and Ready-to-wear Garments," in *Sizing in Clothing: Developing Effective Sizing Systems for Ready-to-wear Clothing*, ed. S. P. Ashdown (Cambridge: Woodhead Pub. in Association with the Textile Institute, 2007), pg. #36.

⁴⁸ Aldrich, pg. #21.

⁴⁹ N.A. Schofield, "Pattern Grading," in *Sizing in Clothing: Developing Effective Sizing Systems for Ready-to-wear Clothing*, ed. S. P. Ashdown (Cambridge: Woodhead Pub. in Association with the Textile Institute, 2007), pg. #153; 157.

⁵⁰ Aldrich, pg. #38-42.

the varied forms of the hobble skirt did manage to take advantage of the ready-to-wear market. Unfortunately this market relied on practices all too familiar in the clothing industry. Tailors and dressmakers formed the foundation of the industry yet they worked long hours for little pay in poor conditions. The variability that existed in production preferences and fit meant that most ready-to-wear shops also offered local dressmaking and tailoring services, often with better pay and hours.⁵¹ However, this business model was not possible for top Parisian couturiers. In order to retain their power-hold in the changing fashion industry they needed to increase production without sacrificing quality. As a result, they employed as many as 600 laborers under these harsh working conditions.⁵²

It was not until the 1940s that a more rational grading system came into use. While the new systems rely on intermediate fit models, they still fail to account for the variability in size that exists among women. For example, the typical fit model is an 8-10 in US misses with a bust of 34.5-36 inches.⁵³ Currently, my size hovers around a 6 in US misses and yet my bust measures approximately 39 inches. As a result I am one of a multitude of women that have difficulty

⁵¹ Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #17-20.

⁵² Mendes and de la Haye, pg. #26.

⁵³ Schofield, pg. #157-158.

finding clothes that fit. Additionally, it took until the 1980s for dimensional sizes such as large/plus, petite, and tall to be used.⁵⁴

The clothing industry has the challenge of creating clothes that fit a variety of people while allowing for the greatest profit which leads to the prioritization of certain size groups. Individuals that fall outside these often experience discontent with existing sizing systems and selection. Perhaps more importantly, these individuals often place the blame on themselves when they have difficulty finding clothes that fit, rather than the industry that is producing the items. They are also more likely to purchase smaller sizes either for a self-esteem boost or for weight loss motivation. An idea that goes hand-in-hand with the fact that women that are smaller than average have an easier time finding clothes whereas for men it is those that fall within the normal, or average weight category.⁵⁵

Matters are complicated further by inconsistencies in sizing that exist. Over time coding numbers have shifted. A 13/14 in the early 1900s is estimated to be a 1/2 from 1991. Additionally, size categories vary within and between manufactures as well as countries. All of this has combined to create a generalized dissatisfaction with existing sizing systems. Nearly ninety percent of

⁵⁴ Jongsuk Chun-Yoon and Cynthia R. Jasper, "Consumer Preferences for Size Description Systems of Men's and Women's Apparel," *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 29, no. 2 (1995): pg. #430.

⁵⁵ Kirsi Laitala, Ingun Grimstad Klepp, and Benedicte Hauge, "Materialised Ideals: Sizes and Beauty," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 3 (2011): pg. #19-20; 33-35.

consumers and half of retail buyers desire a standardization of size, but a global system is not feasible as body type and fit preference vary greatly both within and between countries.⁵⁶

While there are a multitude of benefits to the extensive ready-to-wear industry it is not without drawbacks and the complexity of the human form means a solution is not likely to be soon found. We can only work toward a better system within the changing fashions, while educating on the dangers of living with restrictive standards of beauty.

Conclusion

Amongst all the loss and devastation of World War I, fashion records a more hopeful side. It communicates women's changing roles in society, a shift in cultural values, and erasure of an institutional monopoly in industries such as fashion. Globalization reached a new plateau and women had a new outlook on life. Their clothing reflected this metamorphosis. Even today we can see the lasting influence of these events in women's attire, as well as their opportunities in the world.

⁵⁶ Chun-Yoon and Jasper, pg. #429-430.

Willamette Heritage Center Internship

As part of my preparations for this thesis I spent three months interning at the Willamette Heritage Center at the Mill in Salem, Oregon. My main responsibility was to re-catalog and rehouse the garments and textiles in the museum's textile storage room. Through doing this I would not only be learning about artifact handling but getting firsthand knowledge of historical fashions and textile production.

I was responsible for taking detailed descriptions of blankets, quilts, and vintage clothing which I then crosschecked against information on the database PastPerfect. Any discrepancies or changes in condition were noted and submitted. Once all items were assured of accurate ObjectIDs, or identification numbers, as well as descriptions and pictures they were relabeled and rehoused in an effort to minimize future damages.

On occasion I would come across a piece that was contemporary with World War I. These pieces provided examples of manufacturing techniques used to complete garments in that era. For example, modern sewing machines can be used for dozens of stitches, encouraging finished edges. However, early sewing machines were designed with only a straight stitch. Often unfinished edges were hidden but this was not universal. Inner seams, such as those on the sides as skirts, sleeves, shoulders and center back were left unfinished. Folding the fabric

under to create a more finished look would have added unnecessary bulk to the seam as they would only be visible when the article of clothing was removed.

Another important stitch for investigation was the hemline. Modern sewing machines have a variety of stitches that can be used to create a hem, many of which are nearly invisible from the outside of the garment. However during the time in question, even machine sewn clothing was hemmed by hand when seeking to avoid visible hemlines. The items I examined provided three methods of hemming clothes. They were a visible straight stitch, a hidden elongated straight stitch, and a hidden diagonal loop stitch, the last of which I implemented in my project.

My internship supervisors were familiar with the research I was doing for this thesis and as a result charged me with an additional responsibility. One of the museum displays was due to be changed out and I was tasked with helping design a new exhibit for the centennial of World War I, complete with a military uniform and contemporary dress, as well as a short description of relevant fashion industry topics. I spent several days combing through records to find pieces that would fit the bill. In the end we chose a dress from the late 1910s that would allow us to talk about the liminal period at the end of the war that led into the Roaring Twenties.

Throughout my time working at the museum I learned many things that have augmented my research and been pushed to examine and question what I thought I already knew. Overall, my work there has enabled me to provide a more complete depiction and response to the events of World War I and relevant surrounding topics of study.

Reproducing World War I Era Fashion

Main garments: skirt, shirtwaist, and jacket

There are many types of garments that were in use during World War I. While others, such as undergarments, do make an appearance in this work, outerwear and main garments underwent the greatest visible transition. It is true that corset design radically shifted, but this was a response to a new style of dress rather than the cause of it. As a result I chose to focus my efforts on potential main garments, and to a certain extent outerwear.

Step 1: Research

Before beginning the work on my reproduction pieces it was important to ensure that I understood the garments I would be creating. The first step therefore was to research designs, fabric, and production methods, much of which has been recorded in previous sections.

Step 2: Pattern choice

After sufficient research had been completed I began searching for pattern options. In the end I chose a skirt, shirtwaist, and jacket pattern from Past Patterns that are dated to 1915-1917. Past Patterns specializes in reproducing authentic vintage patterns with directions as available, and as such ensures that

not only are the pieces more accurate in design but in construction methods as well.

The pieces I chose fell well within the war era but were early enough that they had yet to resemble the fashions that came into vogue near the end of the war and continued into the 1920s. Additionally, by selecting separates I gave myself more room for exploration and as a result a greater variety in the final product.

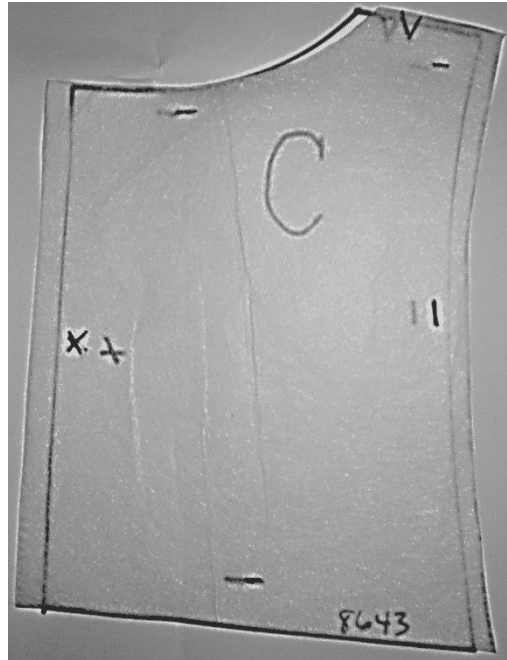
Step 3: Alter patterns to fit

Vintage patterns such as the ones I used, often only come in one size, meaning that most of the time they require alterations to fit. A comparison of the basic pattern measurements and my personal measurements is included below.

	Pattern Measurements	Personal Measurements
Bust	38"	40"
Waist	26"	29"
Hips	40.5"	42"

I used the shift method of pattern adjustment to resize the patterns. It involves moving a pattern piece as you trace it to make it either larger or smaller. While this method is largely simple to do it is important to maintain ratios and angle as the pattern is resized, rather than just adding or removing inches from the circumference measurements.

After tracing my adjusted patterns onto pattern interfacing I cut out the pieces and checked to ensure that they still lined up correctly. When I was happy with the resized patterns it was time to test out the adjustments.



Step 4: Create muslin mockup

The next step was to create a mockup of the garments to test the fit and optimal sewing methods for the final pieces. Often this is done in inexpensive muslin to save on costs. I began by arranging and pinning my pieces on the muslin and then cutting them out. Once that was completed I pinned them together and sewed as instructed in the patterns when possible, experimenting when not.

As these pieces were mockups I only completed the pieces to the point where I could check fit, and ensure I had the skills to complete the garments.

Uncompleted portions included final hems and fasteners such as buttons and hook-and-eyes.



Step 5: Test fit of mockup and record further alterations for final

Once the mockups were completed I tested the fit to determine what alterations were necessary for the final garments. For example, I originally increased the skirt waist by three inches to allow for my waist measurements. However, upon completing the mockup I found that the bottom of the waist needed to be taken in by one inch and the top by three inches, nearly reverting it to the original pattern size. Also, while I had made adjustments to the shirtwaist for the new bust size I discovered upon trying on the muslin that I needed to add an additional inch to the garment's length. These examples show the importance of testing the fit of a pattern before starting on the final piece.

Step 6: Create final pieces

The last step of the process was to create the final garments. I began by choosing the appropriate materials. This included navy twill, mauve silk, elastic, metal buttons, and natural threads. Next I cut, pinned, and sewed the final fabrics, much as I had with the muslin. However, this time I added the finished hems, elastic, buttons, and buttonholes that I had previously left out. Once the garments were completed I tested the fit and silhouette when paired with time-appropriate undergarments.



Undergarments: drawers, brassiere, camisole, and petticoat

All of the undergarments included in this project were completed in my free time with the intention of increasing authenticity and improving the

accuracy of the silhouette. They were not originally part of the planned pieces though as undergarments remained largely unchanged during this time. The main differences from earlier Edwardian styles were a decrease on overall complexity and size (to pair with the slimmer silhouette) along with the gradual shift away from corsets and into brassieres. As my project is looking at the changing world of fashion I forwent the corset and went with simple forms of the other undergarments as they would have been made in the 1910s.

While undergarments during this time were made using various materials such as cotton, silk, and lace all of mine are done in cotton muslin. This was done in part to limit material waste, and in part because muslin provided the backdrop for most undergarments and was a commonly used material for these pieces among the lower classes. For the drawers I drew inspiration for my pattern from a pair of similarly designed pajama pants and sample images. The brassiere was a combination of a vintage designs and a modern sample with a similar cut to provide an accurate fit. The pattern for the camisole was made without reference as it was a simple sleeveless design. Lastly, for the petticoat I reused a piece from the skirt pattern and shortened it by several inches, adding a single ruffle to the base.

Reference Materials

Timeline of Events by Year

- 1880s: Early form of brassiere, bust enhancers
Early women's ready-to-wear
- 1907: Brassiere first mentioned in *American Vogue*
- 1908: Natural figure embraced, marking the decline of S-shaped corsetry
Introduction of hobble skirts, clothing size scaled back
Eastern influence in London fashion
Necklines begin to descend from boned choker
Expansion of women's ready-to-wear industry
- 1910: Trotteur, off the ground walking skirt
Peter Pan necklines in store catalogs
Restrained V-necks and reintroduction of modesty vests
- 1911: Tunics used to alter the shape of fashionable clothes
Popularization of tango
- 1913: Beginning of pre-flapper bohemian style
- 1914: Onset of World War I
Invention of the buttonhole machine
American Vogue's Fashion Fête
Decline of Eastern influence in Western fashion
Patenting of the brassiere
- 1915: Women in England begin taking on new positions in the workforce
Shift to loose-fitting garments
Introduction of military influence
- 1916: Rising hemlines
Counterculture boutiques
- 1917: Dallas Clubwomen's Carnival of Fashion
US official entrance in the war
- 1918: End of War
Return to slim lines and tunics

Reference Images



Image 1: Bloomer dress

Adapted by author from Past
Patterns
<www.pastpatterns.com/8767.html>



Image 2: Empire silhouette

Adapted by author from Antique-
Gown <www.antique-gown.com/index.php/en/1900-1919/parisian-ball-gown,-empire-style,-ca-1912.html>

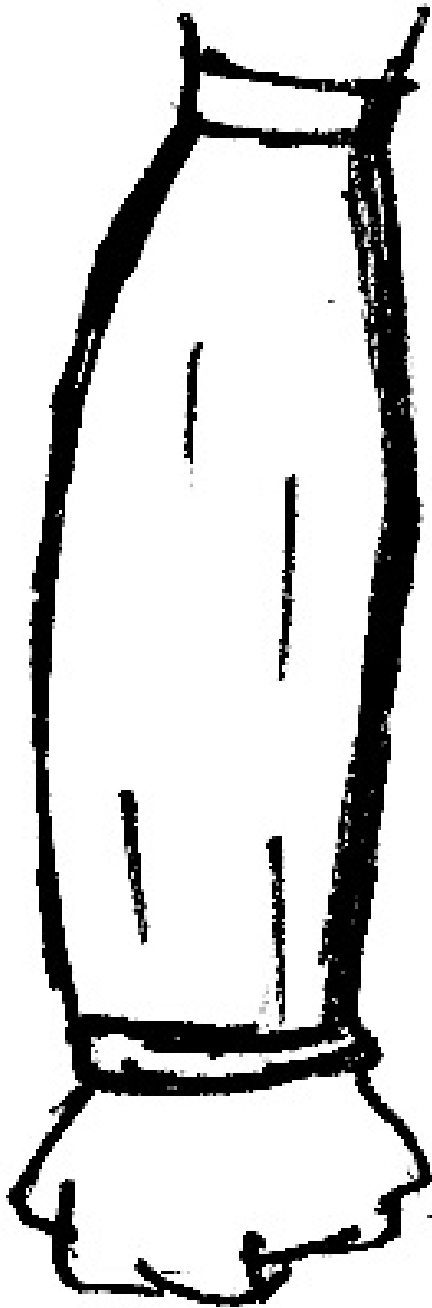


Image 3: Hobble skirt variant

Adapted by author from The New York Times
[<query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D07E1D71139E333A25751C2A9639C946196D6CF>](https://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D07E1D71139E333A25751C2A9639C946196D6CF)



Image 4: Jumper blouse

Adapted by author from Gabrielle Channel [sic] (Coco Chanel), *Les Elegances parisiennes*, March 1917.

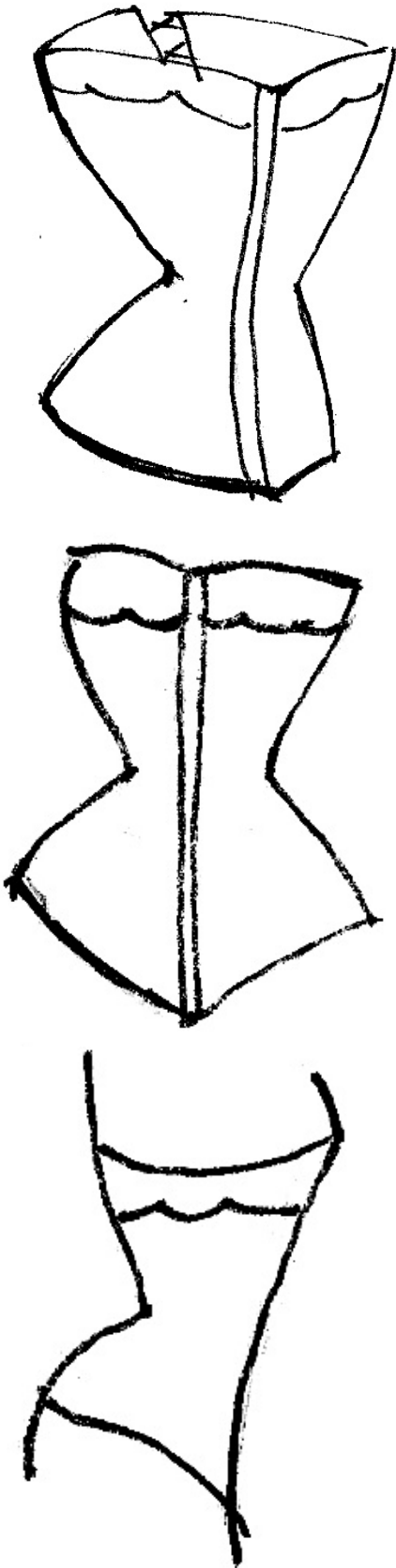


Image 5: S-shaped corsets from various angles

Adapted by author from bridges on the body
<bridgesonthebody.blogspot.com/2010/12/titanic-era-corset-and-pattern.html>

Glossary

Batik: Indonesian method of creating textiles by applying wax designs to fabrics thereby preventing those areas from receiving dye. Also the fabric created with this method.

Bespoke: Made to fit, custom made.

Bloomer dress: Also known as harem pants and harem skirt, similar to modern jumpsuits and rompers with loose fitting legs that taper at the knee or ankle. The World War I version was adapted from the 1850s dress reform for use in factory work. See reference image 1.

Coding: Size designations that are used for clothing and how they are graded.

Couturier: A person or establishment that designs and produces women's clothing.

Directoire: Relating to a Neoclassical style popular in France from 1795-1799, reflective of the Roman Republic. Popular examples include the Empire style.

Empire style: Early 19th century artistic movement that began in France; referred to as Federal style in the US and Regency style in Britain. See reference image 2.

Grading system: Method used to resize patterns according to preset ratios.

Jumper blouse: A loose pullover hip-length top without closures that was usually belted. A major feature of 1920s fashion, the name was shortened to jumper in 1919. See reference image 4.

Moderns: Fashions post WWI, but often associated with the Roaring Twenties, named for the relation with the philosophical movement Modernism that gained popularity in the 1920s.

Modesty vest: a small piece of fabric designed to maintain modestly and preserve a woman's character, placed under the neckline of dresses to cover visible skin.

Nested patterns: Method of placing multiple sizes of the same pattern piece one inside another. Used for creating new sizes and minimizing paper use. This is the method used by most modern pattern makers.

Proportional dressmaker system: Early grading system based on experience rather than anthropomorphic studies. Created and used by dressmakers and tailors between 1820 and 1838 they used a single measurement, often bust size to extrapolate all other measurements enabling the production of early versions of ready-to-wear items.

S-shaped corset: Styles of corset used through the much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and resulted in an exaggerated hourglass silhouette by constricting the waist while forcing a woman's torso out in front of the hips and legs. See reference image 5.

Under-bust: The circumferential line that runs parallel to the ground directly below the bust.

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