

Women's Attire/Les Vêtements féminins. Edited with an introduction by Valerie Simpson. Saint John, N.B.: The New Brunswick Museum, 1977. 63p., illus. (NBM Collection Catalogue 3). \$4.95

It is apparent that the editor of Women's Attire very much wanted to publish an informative, attractive catalogue. The costumes are generally interesting and judging from the catalogue itself a reasonable amount of money was available for preparation and publication. However, reading through the book again after several months, I find that my original unenthusiastic response is now more negative. It seems that really competent experience and expertise is lacking and that too much attention is paid to glamour and atmosphere and not enough to information.

The greatest shortcoming of Women's Attire is the lack of organization and purpose. As far as I can make out there is no order to the examples shown; even though this publication is only a catalogue the garments would be more meaningful in a chronological sequence. Perhaps this random arrangement has been used to cover inadequacies in the collection. There are too many examples from the 1890s and no actual garments from the 1860s though the styles of the 1860s are mutely shown on three pages of unexplained photographs at the back of the book. Unfortunately a brief description of the fashions and their changes during those ten years is omitted. Conversely, I question the inclusion of an eighteenth-century dress in a book of nineteenth-century costume, especially when the garment is so badly mutilated and displayed that it gives no information other than the fact that striped fabrics were used at that time.

When a garment is mounted for display there are several simple rules to follow. Most importantly, a dress is intended for a human body and because of this should be shown on a mannequin. Each dress should also be made to appear as fresh

as possible and each should have the undergarments necessary to give it the proper shape. The uninformed viewer can be given the wrong understanding of a style if it is not presented, as much as possible, in the way in which it was originally worn. These are dresses, not sofa throws or bedspreads, and would be more clearly illustrated on forms than on furniture. Those dresses worn by the live models are more realistically presented but greater care should have been paid to hairdressing and accessorizing.

In the 1870s and 1880s (pp. 16,27,30,56) hair was almost invariably worn pulled back at the sides, above the ears, and upwards into a bun at the upper back of the head. The size and position of the bun generally imitated the proportions and height of the bustle. Hair set on modern rollers will not show the same curl and frizz as hair set in rags or braided when damp. Note also that it was fashionable to wear a "frizzette," bangs of tightly curled or crimped hair, either real or false. The use of long, falling, back curls is certainly typical of the period but the effect should have been more closely imitated.

The entire publication would be more appealing if some of the garments had been better prepared. Many of the dresses appear to have been carefully pressed or steamed, but why not the most spectacular piece, the wedding dress of Sarah Reed, shown on the cover? This dress, incidentally, is shown without the white collar and under-sleeves it should have. Many other garments are in a similarly crushed condition, thereby spoiling the aesthetic appeal and, in at least one case (p.45), confusing the information presented to the reader.

I also contest the mounting of the dresses on pages 37 and 39. Although the two dresses are dated 1890s and 1880s respectively, the first is more likely ca. 1906 and the second, mid 1890s. The first dress appears to have a "pouter pigeon" bust, the signature of high Edwardian style (1898-1912), with the leg-o-mutton sleeve as revived in 1905-07. The second dress

has a bodice tight in the abdomen (the pre-1898 style) with the leg-o-mutton sleeve as used in the mid 1890s. This skirt is cut in full gores with the fullness pleated into the small of the back; therefore the "bustle" is meant to be incidental and merely a shadow of its former self. The flared hems of both skirts are picturesque as illustrated but these garments were cut to form a stiff conical silhouette; the dresses should reach to the floor but should not extend onto it.

The photographs are adequate but are frequently badly exposed. Artistic photography is fine but the use of back lighting obscures detail and natural sunlight is not only harmful to costume but also sets a bad example for the public.

The brief text is correct but Valerie Simpson writes without real assurance even though obviously acquainted with good reference books. The information could be more precise and the dating could be tightened up; there are nine illustrations without dates.

To sum up, it is unfortunate that more careful selection and preparation and more academic experience was not evident in the production of this catalogue. I am sure, however, that this was a labour of love and that the editor and company will produce much finer publications in the future.

Ivan Sayers
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Quelques boutiques de menuisiers et charpentiers au tournant du XIXe siècle. Jacques Bernier. Ottawa: Musées nationaux du Canada, 1976. 72p. (Canada. Musée national de l'Homme. Division de l'Histoire, Collection Mercure, Dossier no. 17). ISSN 0316-1900. Gratuit

Nous avons eu dernièrement l'occasion de mettre la main sur