



# HISTORY CONNECTIONS

Vermont Historical Society News and Notes ■ Summer 2023

## Threading Our Way Through History







VERMONT  
HISTORY

VOLUME 17 - Number 3

**History Connections** is published by the Vermont Historical Society.

The Vermont Historical Society engages both Vermonters and “Vermonters at Heart” in the exploration of our state’s rich heritage. Our purpose is to reach a broad audience through our outstanding collections, statewide outreach, and dynamic programming. We believe that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities.

Executive Director: Steve Perkins

### Vermont History Museum and Store

The Pavilion Building,  
next to the State House  
109 State Street, Montpelier, VT  
Tuesday – Saturday 10 am – 4 pm  
(802) 828-2291

Notice: The Museum is temporarily closed for building repairs related to the 2023 floods. Keep an eye on our website for updates and please check back in about a reopening date in the fall.

### Vermont History Center

60 Washington St., Suite 1, Barre, VT  
(802) 479-8500

Library hours :  
Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday 9 am – 4 pm  
Wednesday 9 am – 8 pm  
Second Saturdays 9 am – 4 pm  
Appointments are recommended.  
Please call or email to schedule your visit.  
library@vermonthistory.org  
(802) 479-8509  
www.vermonthistory.org  
info@vermonthistory.org

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## In The Galleries

### History Museum Special Exhibits

#### *A Stitch in Time*

We all know the phrase “History repeats itself.” We hear it applied to politics, wars, and large social movements, but what about the small things? In our new rotating exhibit, *A Stitch in Time*, the Vermont Historical Society will explore how your fashion choices today are informed by the fashions of history.

In our first rotation, we will examine the new trend of luxury loungewear— at-home comfort clothes that are also seen as status symbols. Has the pandemic and working from home ruined couture, or is this just another rotation of the fashion history wheel?

**On view in the National Life Gallery through June 2024.**

#### *Calvin Coolidge: Vermont's President*

On loan from the Coolidge Foundation, this exhibition presents key episodes and questions from Coolidge’s life with specially-commissioned illustrations and explanatory text. Visitors will also be able to learn about Coolidge’s communications styles through interactives.

**On view in the Calder Gallery through June 2024.**



#### *Fancy Goods: Hats and Fashion Accessories 1850-1950*

What was once the storefront of Mrs. S.C. Adams Millinery & Fancy Goods is now home to the Middletown Springs Historical Society. Mrs. Adams’ store inspired the Society to explore the history of these “fancy goods”— mass-produced luxury goods that were designed for ornamental purposes rather than practical ones. This exhibit features items such as hats, purses, shawls, and ties considered “fancy” by the people of Middletown Springs between 1850 to 1950. On view in the Local History Gallery through January 2024.

**On view in the Local History Gallery through January 2024.**

### History Center Special Exhibits

#### *Icons and Oddities*

Vermonters have always been keen to reuse and recycle. For this newest iteration of *Icons, Oddities, and Wonders*, VHS staff sought items from our collections that show hundreds of years of clever adaptation and thoughtful reinvention. **Visit the gallery during Library open hours.**

### Events

Want to learn more about upcoming events and programs? Visit our calendar at [vermonthistory.org/calendar](http://vermonthistory.org/calendar) and follow us on social media!

*Director's Note*  
by Steve Perkins

# The New Vermont History Center

*The following introduction was written before the devastating floods of July 2023. As a valued member of the Society, I want to reassure you that our irreplaceable collections were unscathed by the disaster. After the 1992 Montpelier flood, the Society decided to find a new home for the library, archives, and museum collections. The Barre location, situated on its hill, stayed well above the flooding. The History Museum, on the raised first floor of the Pavilion escaped all water damage. Thank you all for your ongoing support and concern.*



Through donations, grants, and the work of Senator Sanders’s office, we are embarking on the construction of a long-anticipated, material culture study facility at the Vermont History Center in Barre.

Over the summer we will be upgrading our climate systems and installing state-of-the-art storage and display furniture to allow the public to inspect much

of our object collection. Now, in addition to studying the massive holdings of archival materials in our library, researchers will also be able to explore the stories and histories bound within objects of the past. In conjunction with the Vermont Department of Libraries and the Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center, our Barre location will truly be **The Vermont History Center.**

If working with objects, or libraries and archives, interests you, we are always looking for volunteers to move our work forward. Depending on your skills and interests we have lots of projects waiting to be explored. Do you have an article or book idea percolating? The depth of our collections is staggering and can provide many primary sources or even just inspiration for your project.

Please enjoy the season! We look forward to seeing you at the Museum and the History Center often.

Steve Perkins, *Executive Director*

# A STITCH IN TIME

## How the fashion of yesterday informs today's textiles

By Teresa Teixeira Greene

Every generation likes to imagine they are discovering new ideas, setting trends more innovative than any previous generation. Those left behind imagine the same: they established good taste in fashion for the first time in recorded history.

Today is no different. Individuals from Gen Z are parting their hair in the center and rediscovering flared pants, while Baby Boomers are bemoaning the decline of appropriate formality.

But is this perception true? A new exhibit at the Vermont History Museum's National Life Gallery explores this question this question by examining four aspects of fashion over the course

of the next year, with the first installation focusing on loungewear and athleisure. Both terms have wide definitions, but they do overlap. Each are designed with an eye for both fashion and comfort, meant for wear at home and during particularly informal activities, such as visiting close friends and running household errands.

Informality has always been a part of people's lives, and for those who could afford it, their wardrobes. Historically, loungewear represented heightened informality; clothing only appropriate to be seen by members of one's family and closest confidants. Allowing someone to see you in such a state was a sign of great regard. This principle was famously illustrated to an extreme degree in the French royal court, where duties such as dressing the monarch were given to the highest-ranking nobles, as opposed to servants.

For the rest of society, this informality was achieved simply by removing outer layers of clothing. For men

in the eighteenth century, this could mean simply removing their coat and waistcoat, leaving their shirt (considered underwear) completely exposed. For those who could afford it, specialized garments such as banyans and wrappers (roughly equivalent to today's robes) allowed the wearer to lounge at home in a structured way with close friends. These garments

often conveyed one's wealth; they were made of show fabrics such as silks or printed cottons, rather than the plain linen used for undergarments.

With the Industrial Revolution, textiles became far more affordable, and a greater number of people now had leisure time. One result was the creation of the tea gown, a garment made specifically for women to wear at home while entertaining their female friends.

While ostensibly informal, they differed

from housecoats and robes by being purely fashionable. Like housecoats and chore clothes, tea gowns were cut slightly looser than regular clothing, giving them the appearance of comfort and utility despite being worn over corsets and bustles, which maintained the wearer's fashionable silhouette. Additionally, they were made from expensive, stylish fabric, rather than the easy-to-wash cottons of utilitarian chore clothes and undergarments.

These tea gowns hold a significant place in fashion history. They are one of the first garments created specifically for this informal social sphere. Unlike wrappers, they were not created to be worn while performing household chores or lounging alone with immediate family, but specifically to be shown off to one's peers.

Men were not exempt from this trend. Instead of tea gowns, men wore smoking jackets. Like tea gowns, these garments carried markers of comfort without the ease

Historically, loungewear represented heightened informality; clothing only appropriate to be seen by members of one's family and closest confidants.

of care and thoughtlessness of true informality. At their inception, smoking jackets were used to keep ash and smoke from one's clothing, so they were worn over formal clothing. However, because they were made of silks and other heavy, expensive fabrics, smoking jackets were often much more expensive than the clothing they were protecting. Unlike tea gowns, smoking jackets have persevered in both actual use and public imagination as a symbol of luxury.

Our current trend for athleisure and loungewear is widely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, after everyone quarantined in their homes for months. Without social activities and work to get dressed up for, people prioritized comfort, favoring elastic waists and soft fabrics. Those are not the only concerns in designing clothes to fit the trend. With these fashions increasingly making their way out of the home by way of social media images and informal, in-person activities, they also reach for the same goal as tea gowns and smoking jackets: exhibiting wealth. Historically, garments could be identified as expensive, and thus symbolic of wealth, by the material they were made from. Today, synthetic and imitation fabrics make this difference difficult to spot by the untrained eye. A dress made from silk might look identical to one made of polyester, while hitting vastly different price points. The same could be said for coats made from wool and acrylic. Without those easily identifiable, visual markers for showing off wealth, we have moved to more representative messaging as well as explicit, legally protected markers such as visible branding.

The leisure clothing fashionable today trends more toward athleticwear than sleepwear, showing off the wearer's perceived access to healthy activities as the markers of status, such as taking yoga classes. Many status brands, like those sponsored or designed by celebrities, are marketed more similarly to everyday clothing rather than activity-specific clothing, indicating their intended use as leisurewear over gym wear.

It can be easy to recognize the inspirations and influences of history within the past while still viewing the present as separate from, and thus unaffected by, it. In this exhibit, we hope to use the things you interact with the most—your clothing—to show how we are all part of our collective history.

Right: Tea Gown made of silk and steel between 1880 and 1890. These garments were made specifically for women to wear at home while entertaining their female friends.







The story of clocks and timekeeping stretches back millennia and is integral to the history of technology and industry.



# A brief history of a time(piece)

## Harold Hawes, World War I and the rise of the men's wristwatch

By Andrew Liptak

“Do you have the time?”

If you wear a wristwatch, you might have just glanced at your wrist, looking at what the tiny arms and numbers on the dial tell you. Presently, the global wristwatch industry accounts for tens of billions of dollars in revenue each year, encompassing everything from expensive, high-end timepieces like Rolex and the modern Apple Watch, to the ubiquitous and utilitarian Timex.

For more than a century, the wristwatch has been a popular and useful accessory. One item in the Vermont Historical Society's vast collection is a good representative example of how watches became a common and indispensable part of one's everyday outfit: a Lancet owned by Harold Hawes of Barre.

The story of clocks and timekeeping stretches back millennia and is integral to the history of technology and industry. The first mechanical timepieces emerged from Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries for city towers, and technological innovations allowed inventors to devise smaller clocks.

When wrist-worn clocks were invented, they were relegated to the realm of women's fashion, known as “wristlets,” while a pocket watch became an indispensable tool for the men involved in the industrializing workplace, where precision timekeeping was essential.

The mechanized nature of war brought a new level of precision to the battlefield: maneuvers and actions could be coordinated in time and space, and in the heat of battle, fishing a watch out of a pocket cost precious seconds of attention. In her book, *Marking Modern Times: A History of Clocks, Watches, and Other Timekeepers in American Life*, Alexis McCrossen explains how British soldiers began to strap their pocket watches to their wrists during the Second Boer War in South Africa, so they could read them at a moment's notice. It was a move that helped prompt the clock's shift from a man's pocket to his wrist.

With the advent of the First World War, clock manufacturers recognized a growing market for a new product: the trench watch.

This is where Hawes enters this story. Born on May 24, 1889 on Vine Street in Berlin, Vt, he spent his childhood in Montpelier and Barre. When the United

States entered World War I in 1917, he qualified for the draft, but ended up volunteering for a specialized training program set up by the University of Vermont to train blacksmiths, carpenters, machinists, and mechanics for the Army.

After he completed the program, Hawes was assigned to the 87th Infantry Division, where he likely was part of the 336th Field Artillery Regiment, which was deployed to France in September 1918 — mere months before the Armistice in November. Among the items he brought with him was his Lancet wristwatch.

Made by Switzerland's Langendorf Watch Company, Hawes's watch, and those like it, saw widespread use by U.S. soldiers during the war, with several innovations designed to help the wearer in the field. Fastened to one's wrist with a sturdy leather strap, it features large, easy-to-read, radium-painted numbers on a white dial, and comes with a metal shrapnel protector for the glass face. We do not know if Harold saw combat while in France (he likely he served in an engineering role), but it's a tool he would have relied on while there.

After returning home, Hawes settled into a quiet life. He married Carol Batchelder in 1922 and found work in the insurance industry, first as a salesperson and then

With the advent of the First World War, clock manufacturers recognized a growing market for a new product: the trench watch.

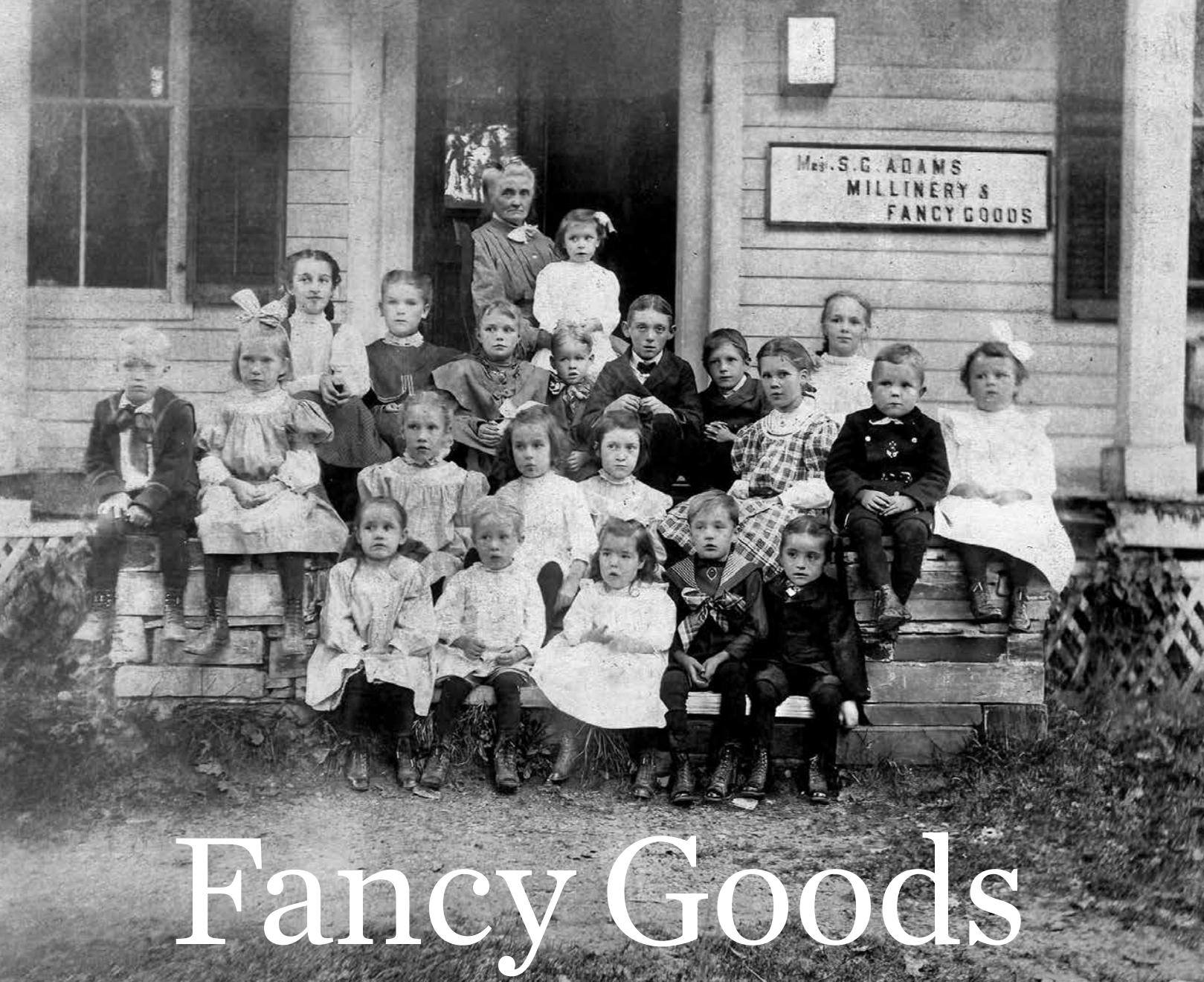
as a fire inspector. He became deeply involved in the Barre community through the local chapters of the Masons, American Legion, and other community organizations. When he passed away on May 11, 1945, the city's papers reported his funeral was attended by a large gathering of his friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

Hawes was, in many ways, a typical citizen soldier. He was someone who went off to serve his country and

returned to civilian life in his community, where the utility of the wristwatch did not fade away. In a piece for *The Atlantic*, “A Brief History of the Wristwatch,” Uri Friedman points out that while the pocket watch was an emblem of the railroad era, World War I ushered in a new, modern world, one where the wristwatch quickly became part of the fashion of the new, technological world. It's endured the technological advances of the last century, a testament to its utility and function, and continues today to function as both a tool and a fashion accessory, ready to tell you the time at a moment's notice, whether you're in Barre or a distant country.

Facing page: The Lancet Watch owned by Harold Hawes of Barre. Above: Members of Company M of the Vermont Volunteer Militia march in Bellows Falls as they prepare to travel to Camp Devens in Massachusetts on April 2nd, 1918.





# Fancy Goods

## in the Local History Gallery

By Eileen Corcoran

People buy clothes not just for their utility, but because they signify something about the wearer to society at large. The history of clothing is the history of the public's changing norms and values, as well as the relationship between manufacturing, markets, and consumers.

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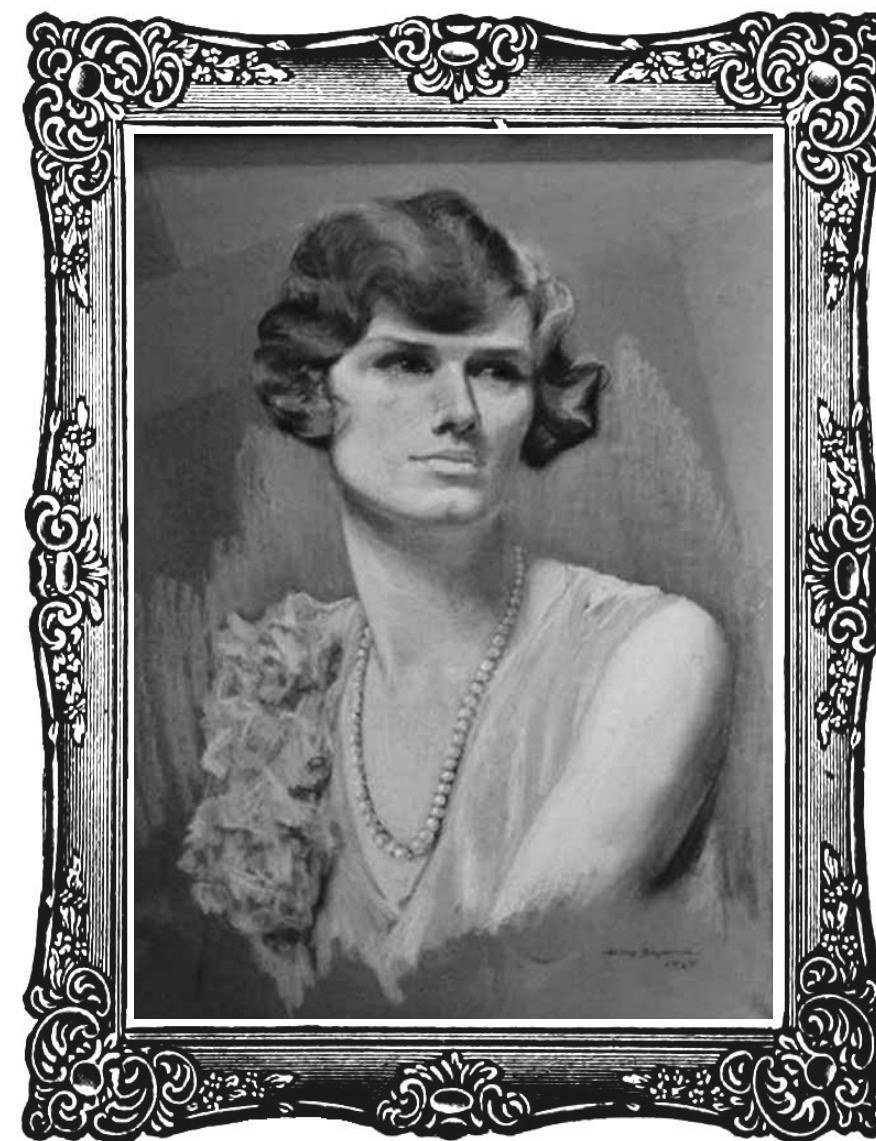
Keep an eye on our website and social media channels for an opening date for *Fancy Goods: Hats and Fashion Accessories, 1850-1950*.

In the middle of the 19th century, industrialization began to change the kinds of products available to buyers, bringing more variety and consumer goods, like disposable trinkets and mass-produced clothing, into stores. In many small towns in Vermont and elsewhere, those items were called “fancy goods.” The term broadly applied to novelties, accessories, or notions that are primarily ornamental or designed to appeal to taste or preference, rather than essential.

Around the turn of the 20th century, Julia Adams operated a millinery and fancy goods store in the Adams House, now the home of the Middletown Springs Historical Society. A photo of Julia with members of her Sunday school class sitting on the steps of the shop beneath the sign “Mrs. S.C. Adams Millinery & Fancy Goods” inspired the exhibit *Fancy Goods: Hats and Fashion Accessories, 1850-1950*, curated by the Middletown Springs Historical Society. It documents what residents of Middletown Springs considered fancy goods, and includes items such as hats, purses, shawls, and ties. The items were donated to the Middletown Springs Historical Society collection by local families.

“While I love all the hats and fashion accessories,” exhibit curator Mary Lou Willits explained, “my favorite object in the exhibit is a framed pastel portrait of the late Kay Avery, a resident of Middletown Springs, painted by artist Mary Seymour in 1928. She is posed in a lovely soft green sleeveless chiffon dress with a draped ruffle on one side, and she is wearing a long string of white pearls.” Kay Avery (1908-2005) was one of the founding members of the Middletown Springs Historical Society back in 1969.

The exhibit was on view at the Middletown Springs Historical Society last year, and visitors commented on how pleased they were to see a part of the collection that had not previously been on display. The Vermont



Historical Society is excited to bring this exhibit to the Local History Gallery at the Vermont History Museum to further expand its reach and introduce the town's fancy goods to the greater public. The Middletown Springs Historical Society's Collections Care Committee works year-round to catalog and properly house textiles and other objects, archival material, and photographs so they can be enjoyed and studied by future generations.

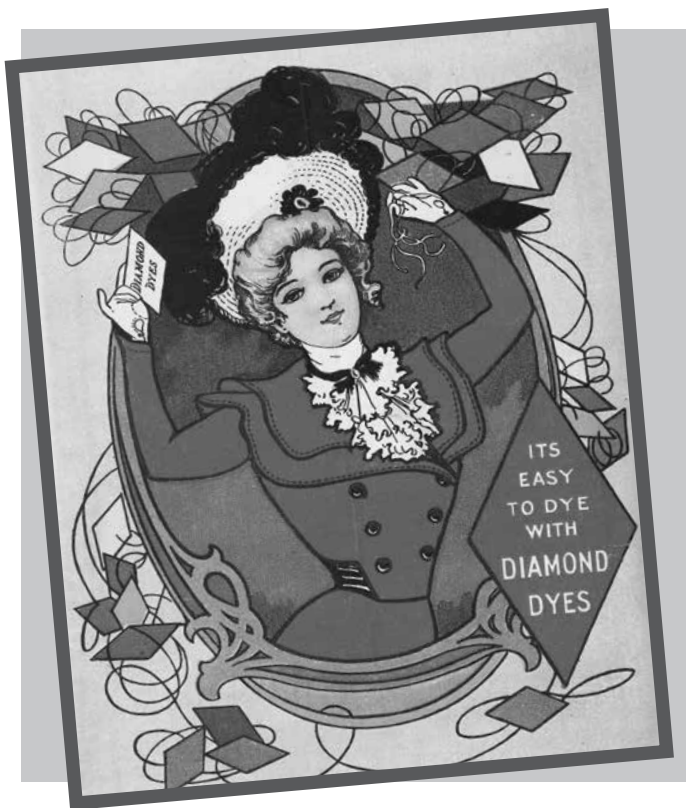
Facing page: Photo of Julia Adams with Sunday school class in front of her store, Mrs. S.C. Adams Millinery & Fancy Goods, in Middletown Springs. Circa 1905-1910. Photographer unknown. Gift of Jessie Allen Lacker.

Above: Portrait of Kay Avery by artist Mary Seymour Pastel, 1928. Gift of Kay Avery, a founder of the Middletown Springs Historical Society.



# Diamond Dyes of Burlington

## Color and Craft in Vermont



By **Juls Sundberg**

In today's world of fast fashion, it might seem strange to imagine dyeing a piece of clothing a different color instead of purchasing something new. But home dyeing used to be a well-practiced and thrifty way to keep your wardrobe fresh. The fabric dye of choice for Vermonters was Diamond Dyes, produced by a Burlington-based company called Wells, Richardson & Company. A 1926 booklet from the company held by the Vermont Historical Society titled "Color Craft" explains "The most expensive dress is that which hangs unworn in your closet. A dress you bought long ago may be made the fashion of the house with half an hour's deft dyeing."

Founded in 1872 by Edward Wells, Albert E. Richardson, and William J. Van Pattern, the company also

manufactured a wide range of goods and pharmaceutical products, including the famous Paine's Celery Compound. This widely popular patent medicine was originally produced by M.K. Paine of Windsor, Vermont, which touted it as a way to sooth nerves. The buildings that once housed the Wells, Richardson & Company still stand in downtown Burlington on College Street and are registered in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

The company's advertising was creative and full of practical advice on how to use their dyes. Amongst the items in VHS's holdings are "A Teddy Bear Tale," a booklet from 1907 with illustrations incorporating Diamond Dyes, and "American Bird Pictures," a booklet from 1900 meant to be colored in with Diamond Dyes crayons. Other items include more typical advertising materials, such as a book titled "Samples of Colors Made by Diamond Dyes," in which fabrics dyed with the advertised colors are pasted into the book for people to see, and a Wells, Richardson & Company catalog from 1878 listing dye colors such as "Diamond Fuchsine Red."

Home dyeing wasn't just for clothing. A ca. 1900 booklet titled "Fancy Work and Art Decorations with Diamond Dyes," features instructions on how to dye household items such as lampshades, pillows, and tablecloths.

These advertisements often emphasized staying with the latest fashion without spending too much money. One ad assured the reader, "The woman with tact and good taste can save many dollars...yet dress her family quite as well as a richer neighbor who has less faculty."

Since part of the company's mission was to teach its customers the process of home dyeing, in addition to selling their products, these booklets and advertisements give the reader a peek into early examples of the do-it-yourself crafting and sustainable clothing practices still prevalent in Vermont today.

The inside cover of "Color Craft" emphasizes the local Vermont setting of Diamond Dyes by saying, "This beauteous region, with its gorgeous sunsets, is a splendid setting for those who work with color. Nature's own inspiration is at ever at their door." So, if the next time you see one of our state's truly beautiful sunsets and feel inspired to head to your local craft store for fabric dye, know you are continuing a time-honored Vermont practice.

Above: From an undated Diamond Dyes pamphlet that was cataloged as "circa 1900".



# Threading Play into Learning

## Clothing as an Immersive Tool in Museum Settings

By **Danielle Harris-Burnett**



In college, my campus shared land with a living history museum, and as an anthropology major, that meant a quick and easy commute to work. But it also introduced an interesting question: where was the barrier between the historical landscape of the museum and the modern world of the college? The museum covered a span of several miles, interpreting what the state of Maryland would have looked like a few decades after European colonization. Even the college's newer buildings featured a historic façade to match the original architecture, meaning it was easy for museum visitors to accidentally wander into the campus's newer buildings. One way the museum separated the spaces was through immersive historical costuming. Visitors could look out over the field to see a 17th century interpreter tending to the museum's pigs and sheep, a scene easy to imagine taking place in the same space centuries earlier.

Museums are uniquely positioned as learning spaces. Since the early 2000s, many have integrated elements of play into their exhibits. This allows children and visitors to create experiences, where they can focus on their own learning interests in a hands-on setting. Allowing children to handle recreations of historical garments and fabrics allows them to visualize life in the past on a concrete level. They can feel the weight of a woolen garment or handle the raw materials that make clothes. Taking part in these tactile activities sticks with the children and builds their capacity to ask questions about lived experiences in the past.

Clothing and fabric play a vital role in the interactive stations at the Vermont History Museum. One of the

COVID-19 adaptations we retained in the exhibit is the dress-up mirrors in the Catamount Tavern, where kids can line up their faces and feet with hats and shoes in the reflection. When I started at the museum in January 2023, I noticed the hats and shoes did not match up with one another. One of my colleagues explained this was an intentional choice. By mixing and matching images of 18th century clothing from different economic levels and gender expressions, children can create their own image. This sentiment carries into the dress-up station in the Tavern.

We recently added a new interactive activity in the museum's Farming section, where visitors can learn to card wool. This process involves repeatedly running wool through a set of combs to create a worked set of wool fiber called a rolag, which is then used to create yarn. In the month since this interactive opened, we have seen both adult and child visitors stop to learn how to card the wool. While visitors experience varying degrees of success with their wool, they all walk away with a new understanding of the work required for a common household fabric.

By experiencing historical clothing at various stages of development, visitors can gain a new appreciation for the work and time that went into making clothing and other hand-made items. They also learn how clothing signals identity. By playing with recreations of historical garments, we give them a better understanding of how people in the past used clothing to express themselves.

Above: Danielle Harris-Burnett cards some wool at the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier.



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