



Exhibit Preparation and Promotion: Treasures of the Textiles and Clothing Museum

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In spring 2013, the Textiles and Clothing Museum (TCM), Iowa State University unveiled the exhibit, “Treasures of the TCM.” The exhibit was a culmination of 2 years of preparation by the two curators and a host of other individuals and organizations. This paper and subsequent presentation highlights the processes in which the curators selected the over 50 objects in the exhibit, secured funding for a 70 page full color exhibit catalog, and promoted the exhibit through television, newspaper, and Internet media channels. The preparation and promotion of the exhibit, including lessons learned along the way, will be beneficial to curators, collection managers, and staff of college and university historic textile and clothing collections.

The TCM was officially launched in 2007; however the roots of our 10,000 object Collection date to the 1920s when Professor Olive Settles founded the Collection. Faculty member from 1923 until her death in 1962, Settles traveled globally and collected textiles to use as examples in courses she taught in the Department. Since its founding, the Collection has grown to include the material culture of many global societies, cultures, and time periods. The facilities have also grown and improved to include three named spaces: the Mary Alice Gallery, the Donna Danielson Conservation Laboratory, the Edward and Bertha Waldee Storage Facility, and the recently renovated TCM Resource Room.

Curators for the “Treasures of the Textiles and Clothing Museum” decided to highlight Collection sub-holdings, items that epitomized the “look” of historic dress from the nineteenth through twenty-first century, and objects related to the history of Iowa State University and the State of Iowa. We selected these themes because visitors to the Museum spaces often asked: “What does the Museum collect,” “Does the Museum need anything that I have,” and “How does the Textiles and Clothing Museum differ from the other [art] museums on campus?” Curators paid careful attention to select items with excellent provenance, preferably related to Iowa State University history; items in excellent condition and strong enough to withstand a three month display; and objects that would educate and entertain a diverse audience from students, to faculty, to the general public. Objects that were selected included, but were not limited to:

- Eighteenth century men’s coats and woman’s calash representing the influence of Europe in the clothing of American colonists.
- Twentieth century garments created or consumed by well-known and lesser-known Iowans including Carrie Chapman Catt (ISU class of 1880 and woman’s rights leader), a 1924 Olympic uniform worn by sprinter Eric Wilson, and a 1970s shirtwaist dress designed by Iowa-born designer Halston.
- Handmade clothing produced by faculty and students.
- Wedding dresses from 1815, 1885, 1895, 1950, and 2006.

- Garments from each of the cultures collected in the TCM including: a Guatemalan *huipile* or women's blouse; *mola* blouse made by Kuna women, Panama; *adinkra* cloth and stamp of West Africa, Indian *sari*, intricate needle and mirror work of the Rabari of Western India; a *Huichol* man's ensemble from Mexico; Norwegian *bunad*; Japanese wedding *kimono*; and woman's ensemble from Uzbek.
- Also highlighted were selected patterns, fashion publications and archival ephemera, such as a dressmaking system from the 1890s and a make do and mend pamphlet from the World War II era.

Many of the textiles and clothing objects selected were collected as part of research projects conducted by apparel program faculty. Faculty collected these objects on research trips, used them as teaching tools in undergraduate and graduate courses, and donated them to the TCM for continued use in exhibition, research, and teaching both within and outside of Iowa State University. These objects were helpful in painting the importance of the land grant mission to Iowa State University, stressing research, teaching, and outreach efforts of faculty members.

To accompany the exhibit, the curators secured \$13,000 in grant money to publish a 70 page exhibition catalog. To promote the exhibit and catalog, the curators created a press-release, worked with university news services personnel, and personally promoted the exhibit through hand-written cards, notes, and emails to potential exhibit-goers. Their promotion efforts were rewarded with an interview conducted inside of the Gallery posted to the central page of the University website, a 3 minute interview on the regional news station, two articles in the regional *Des Moines Register* newspaper, and numerous mentions via local Blogs and websites.

Outcomes of the exhibit continue to manifest themselves. The undergraduate honors student who worked on the project was selected to present her work at the "Research at the Capital." At this event, selected students from the three Regents Universities present their work to state legislators discussing how their projects enriched their educations, careers, and contributions to Iowa. The exhibit has also led to increased knowledge of the TCM and our mission; many of the individuals who have contacted us with objects to donate and requests for tours have noted learning about our Museum through the television, newspaper, or online media channels. Other outcomes of the exhibit include refinement of future exhibition ideas, including a title derived from one of the newspaper articles: Inside Iowa's Largest Closet. Outcomes of student visits to the Gallery and exhibition have been overwhelmingly positive. Following scheduled tours as part of their introduction to textile science class and twentieth century fashion course, students were asked to reflect on the knowledge gained in the exhibit. These are representative student comments:

- The exhibit substantiates the strong correlation between societal and economic views and appropriate fashions of the time.
- The exhibit and tour helped cement [textile science] information. That I could tell which 1920s dress was made of filament yarns and which was made of staple fibers based on luster made me feel great about my learning of course material!