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LITTLE BOWER FASHION PLATE
COLLECTION, 1798-1917, 1967, 2003
2 linear inches (46 plates)

ACQUISITION: The plates were donated by Cynthia Smith in 2003.

ACCESS: The collection is open for research. Shelved in map case A, drawer 25.

PROCESSED BY: Monica Fusich, 2004.

History

Fashion plates were originally a way of illustrating current dress styles for consumers, dressmakers, and merchants. They were published in women's magazines such as *La Belle Assemblée*, *Journal des Modes*, and the *Magasin des Demoiselles*. These periodicals were mostly weeklies that also included fiction and household hints along with the fashion plates. Since France was considered the center of fashion, both British and American periodicals contracted with French journals to republish their plates. Originally, the plates were engraved and hand colored with watercolors until the 1880s when color printing and chromolithographing became stylish. Fashion plates were popular until the 1920s when photography became the norm for fashion reporting.

A good source for more information about fashion plates and styles is *Survey of Historic Costume* by Phyllis Tortorra and Keith Eubank (New York: Fairchild, 1989, 3rd edition). This textbook was used to establish the time periods of the collection.

Scope and Content Note

The Little Bower Fashion Plate Collection measures 2 inches and dates from 1798 to 1917, 1967 and 2003. The collection is arranged in six series: Directoire and Empire Period (1790-1820), Romantic Period (1820-1850), Crinoline Period (1850-1869), Bustle Period and the Nineties (1870-1900), the Edwardian Period and World War I (1900-1920) and Miscellaneous. Cynthia Smith donated a portion of the fashion plates collected by her grandmother, Charlotte Northrup Little, and preserved by her mother, Charlotte Little Bower, to the Special Collections Library. The collection is named for both mother and grandmother and is thus known as the Little Bower Fashion Plate Collection. The fashion plates in this collection span from the Empire through Art Deco periods, and are strongest in the Romantic, Crinoline, and Bustle eras. The plates come from a variety of French and English periodicals as well as a few publications from other countries. The rest of the collection was donated to La Cañada College in Redwood City, California, and has been scanned onto a CD, which is also available in this collection.

The **Directoire and Empire Period** series (1798-1799 and undated) contains four fashion plates: two from *La Belle Assemblée*, two from unknown periodicals. The images illustrate the simple and elegant costume of this era. The silhouette derives its inspiration from classic Greek and Roman times, and the typical look was short-sleeved, with an elevated waistline located under the bust, and fabric clinging to and revealing the shape of the body. Typical fabrics used were cotton, muslin, and silk in whites, pastels, and delicate patterns. The women in the two images from *La Belle Assemblée* are wearing turbans which were especially fashionable after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. The increased decoration on the two gowns is indicative of late Empire style.

Scope and Content Note (cont.)

The **Romantic Period** series (1823-1850) contains twelve fashion plates from the journals *Les Modes Parisiennes*, *Ladies Magazine*, *La Belle Assemblée*, *Costumes Parisiennes*, *Corriere delle Dame*, *Direction*, *Magasin des Demoiselles*, *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, and *Le Bon Ton: Journal des Modes*. All of the plates feature women except for three which includes men's costume. The silhouette for women during this time is characterized by a waistline moving down from under the bust to several inches above the natural waist, fuller skirts with increased decoration at the bottom, and a wide variety of sleeve types. Hair was worn parted in the middle, with the back arranged in a knot, and side curls beside the face. Bonnets were popular headgear during the day. Men wore tight fitting trousers or pantaloons, coats nipped at the waist, and top hats. It was customary for the trousers, waistcoat, and coat to be different colors.

This series is especially strong in highlighting daytime versus evening dress as well as offering excellent examples of the variety of sleeve styles that were popular during this era. The types seen in this collection are the marie-sleeve (full sleeve tied at intervals with ribbon) shown in the lavender carriage dress, the imbecile or idiot sleeve which is seen the evening dress of the woman on the left in the *Costumes Parisiens* plate, and the demi-gigot (full from shoulder to elbow, then fitted to the wrist) seen in the green dress in the *Lady's Magazine* image.

The three plates that feature men reveal the typical fashion during this period. Men wore high collars, coats fitted around the waist, and close fitting pants. Top hats were worn both during the day and in the evening. Both boots and square toed shoes are seen during this time. Some of the fashion innovations for men are seen in the *Lady's Magazine* plate in which the man is wearing a cravat, a neckpiece tied around the neck and finished in a bow. The man in the *Corriere delle Dame* image is attired in a frockcoat, the main alternative to the tailcoat. And the man in the *Modes Parisiennes* image is sporting a greatcoat, which is the forerunner of today's overcoat.

Of special note are the fashion plates by Anais Toudouze and Jules David. Toudouze was one of the most prolific and famous French artists working with the fashion press. Her father was Alexandre-Marie Colin, a distinguished painter and lithographer and he trained his four daughters and son in this art. David was Toudouze's chief competitor and he collaborated with the publisher Adolphe Goubaud on *Le Moniteur de La Mode*, and drew all the fashion plates for this publication.

The **Crinoline Period** series (1850-1861) consists of eight fashion plates from the journals *Les Modes Parisiennes*, *Magasin des Demoiselles*, *Godey's Fashions*, *Album de la Mode Illustrée*, and the *Gazette of Fashion*. The silhouette for women during this era is a narrow waist, very full skirt, and fitted bodice with dropped sleeves. The cage crinoline was a major

Scope and Content Note (cont.)

fashion innovation and very popular with women because it was light, unlike clothing in the Romantic era which required up to twenty petticoats to add fullness to the dress. Coal dyes were invented during this period and new colors such as mauve became available as well as deeper and brighter shades as seen in these plates. Of special note are the number of images of both first communions and weddings. The first communion scene in the *Magasin Des Demoiselles* plate is a good example of the more intense colors of fabric available as well as use of the pagoda sleeve with engageantes, which were removable undersleeves. The wedding fashion plate entitled “Brides and Bridesmaids” shows the bertha, which is a drape of fabric across both the shoulders and bust.

The **Bustle and Nineties Period** series (1876-1900) consists of twelve fashion plates. The round look of the Crinoline Era shifted to a fitted look with a bustle, a device made out of horsehair or wire that added fullness to the back view. The Nineties Period was known as the Gay Nineties in the United States and the Belle Epoque in France and the silhouette was hourglass-shaped and clothing was characterized by the skirt and shirtwaist with full sleeves.

There are three stages of the bustle but only the first and third stages are seen in this collection. All three types can be seen in the Nineteenth Century Fashion Plate collection, however. The first stage is seen in the image in the *Demorest Monthly Magazine*, where the bustle is created by manipulation of drapery at the back. The pleats, flounces, and bows create the bustle in this image. The shelf bustle, the large, almost horizontal protrusion, is seen in the four remaining plates. Both evening and day dress are shown as well as a little girl who is not wearing a bustle.

The exaggerated silhouette of the previous era had been simplified in the Nineties Period to a fitted hourglass shape with vestiges of the bustle shown in pleats at the back of the skirt. The green outfit in the 1893 illustration in *La Mode Illustrée* is a good example of the tailor-made matching jacket and skirt as well as the popular leg-of-mutton sleeves and the small fitted hats with trimming that led the eye upward.

The **Edwardian and World War I** series consists of ten fashion plates (1901-1917 and undated) from the journals *La Moda Elegante Illustrada*, *La Mode Illustrée*, *Le Chic*, *Costumes Parisiens* and *The Designer*. The shape of the Edwardian Period is characterized by an S-shaped curve with full, pouched bodices, high necklines, and skirts that were flat in front with a rounded hipline in the back. Skirts hugged the hip and flared into an upside down tulip shape. The two women who are shown in three quarter view in *La Mode Illustrée* are good examples of both the tailored and lingerie look. The lingerie dress was popular during this period and was made out of soft, frilly fabric. The full bottoms of the skirts are balanced by the large picture hats worn atop the pompadour, the popular hairstyle of the day.

Scope and Content Note (cont.)

By 1909, the S-shape curve was followed by a straighter line. An Empire revival during this period can be seen in the raised waistline in the 1909 fashion plate as well as Asian influences seen in the decoration on the gown at the left. Another popular style was the hobble-skirt, which is seen in the 1914 *Costumes Parisiens* plate in which the circumference of the bottom of the skirt was so narrow that women could only walk in small steps. The 1917 plate reveals the shorter, fuller silhouette that was worn during wartime years. Coats were also wider in order to fit over the fuller dresses. The woman in the brown dress is wearing spats. The shorter hairstyle and variety of hats are also shown in this image.

The Miscellaneous series consists of three CDs on which 1400 fashion plates from 1750 to 1949 were scanned. This was done at Cañada College in Redwood City, California, where the originals, collectively called the Charlotte Northrup Little and Charlotte Little Bower Memorial Collection, are housed. There is also a reprint of a Smithsonian Press booklet, "Origin and Early History of the Fashion Plate" by John L. Nevinson (1967).

Related Collection

Nineteenth Century Fashion Plate Collection

Box no. Description

Box 1

Directoire and Empire Period

- Two women in full dress, 1798
- Two women in morning dresses, 1799
- Woman seated in evening dress, [1809]
- Woman standing in evening dress, [1813]

Romantic Period

- Woman in cottage dress watering plants, 1823
- Woman with parasol in carriage dress, 1824
- Man's costume, 1828
- Two women in evening and opera dresses, 1828
- Two women in evening dresses, 1829
- Two women in evening dresses, 1830
- Couple in riding costumes, 1831
- Two women in evening dresses, 1832
- Two women in riding dresses, 1835
- Woman in wedding dress, 1840
- Two women and a man in evening dress, 1843
- Two women in wedding and day dresses, 1847
- Three women in wedding and day dresses, 1848

Crinoline Period

- Five women in evening and day dresses, 1850
- Two women in day dresses, 1850
- Two women in day dresses and a child in confirmation dress, 1854
- Two women in wedding and evening dresses, [1856]
- Two women in day dresses, 1857
- Three brides and four bridesmaids, [1860]
- Two women in day dresses (back view), [1860]
- Six brides in wedding dresses, 1861
- Two women in day and wedding dresses, 1861

Bustle and Nineties Period

- Two women in day dresses, 1870
- Five women in day dresses, 1884
- Five women in wedding and day dresses, 1885
- Two women in day dresses and a child, 1885
- Two women in evening dresses, 1886
- Two women in day and evening dresses, 1892

Box no. Description

Box 1 (cont.)

Bustle and Nineties Period (cont.)

- Two women in day dresses, 1893
- Two women in day dresses, 1894
- Two women in day dresses, 1898
- Two women in day dresses, 1899

Edwardian and World War I

- Woman in brown day dress, 1900
- Woman in purple day dress, 1900
- Woman in afternoon dress and a child, 1901
- Woman in day dress, 1903
- Woman in day dress, 1904
- Woman in day dress, 1905
- Three women in day dresses, 1907
- Two women in day dresses, [1909]
- Woman in day suit, 1914
- Seven women in day dresses (two sided plate), 1917

Miscellaneous

- “Origin and Early History of the Fashion Plate,” 1967
- Scans on CD, 2003