

Chain of Responsibility for the Care of the Collection

The chain of responsibility for the care of the Collection is composed of three links: The College (A), the Theatre Department (B), and the Administrative Intern (C) to the Collection. Each link has specific interests in the proper care of the Collection. Each link's responsibilities are commensurate with its interests.

A. The College

The Development of the Smith College Collection of Historic Clothing provides the College with the opportunity to further involve alumnae on campus, to possess a unique academic research resource, and to offer new and unique educational experiences to students. Each of these opportunities gives the College an interest in the Collection's development.

The College's responsibilities for the care of the Collection rest on a more critical interest. The garments in the Collection are museum pieces. Indeed, many pieces are of significant museum value. The garments were given to the College. The College is responsible for ensuring that the garments are not irresponsibly destroyed.

College responsibilities are three-fold: Maintaining the integrity of the Collection; Reviewing the worth of maintaining the Collection and financing the two semester internship to the Collection.

1) Maintaining the Integrity of the Collection

The College has a responsibility to protect the Collection's contents from being irresponsibly destroyed. The College must maintain the integrity of the Collection as a study resource. This Responsibility has been met by President Conway's statement of official College Policy defining the parameters to the use of the Collection and specifying the method for disposing of deaccessioned items.

College Policy states that the Smith College Collection of Historic Clothing exists as a primary research resource. It defines the parameters to the use of the Collection: The historic garments are available to the public for supervised study and exhibition. They are not available to be worn, used on stage or altered (except to restore them to their original condition).

College Policy specifies the method for disposing of deaccessioned items in detail:

If the name of the donor of the deaccessioned piece is known, effort must be made to ascertain the donor's wish. We can offer to return the piece, transfer it to the costume stock, or put it to auction for the benefit of the College. We cannot assume the obligation for assuring it is placed in another museum.

If the donor's name is not known, the deaccessioned piece must be put to auction directly; it cannot be transferred to the College costume stock. Accessioned pieces must be presumed to be of museum quality. Auction allows other museums the opportunity to add our deaccessioned pieces to their collections and consequently fulfills the College's ethical responsibility to attempt to place museum-quality pieces in other collections.

President Conway's statement of Official College Policy places the weight of College authority behind maintaining the integrity of the Collection as a study resource.

2) Reviewing the worth of maintaining the Collection

The College responsibility to maintain the integrity of the Collection does not commit the College to the permanent support of the Collection. The three year project, which began in 1979 to develop the Collection, was undertaken to catalogue the College's existing holding of historic garments. The catalogue is to be used to review the contents of the Collection and assess the worth of maintaining it as a study resource. The College is responsible to make this assessment at the conclusion of the project in May 1982 and periodically thereafter. The College can discontinue support of the Collection at any time. However, the contents of the Collection must be dispersed in accordance with College Policy regarding the disposal of deaccessioned pieces should the support of the Collection be discontinued.

3) Financing the Two-Semester Administrative Internship in the Collection

The College is responsible to the development of the Collection to finance the Internship which provides a modest stipend to the Intern to the Collection. This stipend is nominal, it is not intended to compensate the Intern in full for her time in the Collection. Rather, it is intended to create a professional attitude in the Intern. The Intern has been hired by the College; she is responsible to the College.

B. Theatre Department

The Theatre Department has a substantial interest in the development of the Collection. The Collection is housed in the Theatre building, theatre costume designers are the principal users of the Collection, and the Department's professor of costume is the faculty advisor to the Collection.

The Department's interest in the Collection is represented by the faculty advisor. She bears the Department's responsibilities for the care of the Collection. These responsibilities are three-fold:

- 1) participating in all accessioning and deaccessioning decisions and all loan request decisions
- 2) reviewing all proposed changes of the Collection Management Manual
- 3) being available to advise the Intern on the general administration of the Collection

The faculty advisor does not have the authority to make a unilateral accessioning, deaccessioning, or loan-request decision. All such decisions must be made jointly with the Intern to the Collection to ensure that no such important decision affecting the development of the Collection is made unilaterally.

Soliciting funds to finance the maintenance and further development of the Collection is not as straight-forward a task as soliciting gifts of historic clothes. The Collection cannot solicit funds from alumnae or any other source which regularly gives money to the College. Alumnae have given money to the Collection, but these monies were wholly unsolicited. The founding grant of \$10,260 was solicited from Celanese Corporation, but Celanese had refused to give money to Smith on many previous occasions. The Collection can only seek funds from sources which do not otherwise give to Smith.

Any effort to solicit funds must be cleared with the Development Office. The Development Office will know if the targeted funding source has contributed to Smith in the past and therefore cannot be approached by the Collection. Development Office staff are a source for suggestions of possible funding sources, and they can give valuable assistance in writing grant proposals and in making the approach to potential donors.

The key to successfully soliciting funds is making the right approach to the targeted donor. Research your targeted donor and determine what might interest him/her in giving to the Collection. Direct your approach to appeal to the targeted donor's interest. For example, Celanese Corporation produces synthetic fibers. Previously, the Corporation had only given money to the Science departments of major universities. They were interested in funding science laboratories in the hope that these laboratories might produce chemists and researchers for synthetic fiber research and development facilities. The Corporation also has a growing interest in fiber merchandizing and the general health of the textile and fashion industries. The Collection's approach to Celanese was directed toward this second interest. Smith College provides a liberal arts education to a student body of dynamic, career-oriented women. Celanese was interested in funding the Collection as a unique resource for instructing the history of the textile and fashion industries.

A History of the Origin of the Collection

The Smith College Collection of Historic Clothing officially came into existence in 1979. Yet, the origin of the present Collection goes back further in time. The College Theatre Department had accumulated an extensive collection of 19th and 20th century clothing and clothing accessories over many years, as a result of alumnae gifts. Originally these historic items were neither housed nor cared for as a study collection. The items had not been acquired as museum specimens but for use as stage costumes or scrap-bag garments to be cut up to construct stage costumes. The historic items were stored among the stage garments of the theatre costume stock and used in this manner, until Ms. Katherine Smith joined the Department. Ms. Smith (Assistant Professor of Theatre and Instructor of Costume Design) recognized that the historic clothing and clothing accessories were too valuable to be worn (and destroyed by wear) on the stage. She had them set aside as a permanent study resource for students and costume designers.

Ms. Smith removed the historic clothing from the costume stock and placed them in the metal wardrobe cabinets which now house the Collection; cabinets which she had obtained specifically for that purpose. She also contacted the Curator of Costume at the Northampton Historical Society, Nancy Rexford, seeking advice on how to store and preserve these items properly. The demands of teaching, designing and chairing the Theatre Department prevented Ms. Smith from much further work on the original collection, but her work planted the seed which was to grow into the present Collection.

Ms. Smith's interest and enthusiasm for using the collection of historic clothing as a permanent study resource was contagious. Tracy Cottrell, '78, and Beth Pfaltz, '80 caught her enthusiasm. Together, they prepared a special Art Museum exhibit of historic garments entitled, Color in Women's Clothing: 1820-1920. The exhibit was part of the all-college, inter-departmental examination of color conducted through January and February of 1978. This examination explored the concept of color from the multiple perspectives

represented by each academic department. The Costume exhibit was an annotated examination and visual representation of color in women's fashion. The exhibit showed how fashion related to the scientific discoveries that created new dyes and dye techniques, the aesthetic tastes which accepted fashion's dictums, and the social dictums which directed fashion's evolution. Clothing as demonstrated as a point of departure for examining several socio-historic phenomenon. The exhibit revealed the value of the College is holding of antique clothing as a resource for inter-disciplinary study.

The project to develop the Smith College Collection of Historic Clothing grew out of the Color Festival exhibit. While working with the collection to prepare the exhibit, Tracy and Beth found that very few items were identified or dated. The use of the collection was essentially limited to students and faculty members who had a knowledgeable background in fashion history. They also observed that the historic items were improperly stored in over crowded cabinets. Insufficient attention was given to the irreparable damage of these articles incurred from improper storage. Tracy and Beth recognized that the use of these items need not be limited, nor their conservation neglected. Identifying, dating and cataloguing the hisoric items would give an organized form to this underutilized resource and make it accessible to all students and faculty members. The use of the collection would no longer be limited to persons with a background in fashion history. Systematic storage procedures would minimize the damage to the historic items incurred from improper storage. The preservation of the items would be better assured. Beth Pfaltz, with the advice and guidance of Ms. Smith, designed a project which proposed that the College establish the "Smith College Costume Collection" and undertake a three-year project to develop it as a usable resource.

Ms. Pfaltz and Ms. Smith discussed the project with Jean Higgins, who was then the Assistant to the President of the College. Ms. Higgins was very enthusiastic about the possible uses of the Collection and advised submitting the proposal directly to the President. The proposal was submitted to President Conway, accompanied by photographs of the Color Festival exhibit,

Color in Women's Clothing. The proposal was accepted in the Spring of 1979. Beth Pfaltz was selected as the first Administrative Intern to head the project.

* Note: The Collection was proposed to be called "The Smith College Costume Collection. The name was changed in February of 1980 to "The Smith College Collection of Historic Clothing" to eliminate any confusion between the Collection and the Theatre department costume stock. The Collection's pieces are actual antique garments. They are not theatrical costumes. Costume stock items are theatre costumes and available for use on the stage. ~~Collection items are actual antique garments. They are not theatrical costumes and they are not available for use on the stage.~~ The Collection's name change was made to clearly mark the distinction between the two collections.