

HARRY COLLINS AND THE AMERICAN ART OF DRESS: 1884-1980

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my partner and support in all things Chase and my fantastic parents, Steve and Marsha Carleson, who have continuously supported my dream to study pretty things and interesting people instead of medicine.

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I would like to thank my many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made the idea of this thesis, which was had been in the back of my mind for years, into a reality. In particular I want to thank my significant other, Chase, who constantly kept me motivated and my family members who continuously supported my goals including, Steve and Marsha Carleson, my spectacular parents. I also want to give a huge thank you to Alanna Mills, Leslie Wilson, and Kristen Wyse for listening to eight months of thesis discussion and helping with edits. Furthermore, I would like to thank the curators and assistants who were willing and eager to allow me to study objects first hand and went above and beyond to help me rediscover Harry Collins—I could not have completed this thesis without them. Great acknowledgement needs to go to my mentors Mary Doering and Howard Kurtz for giving me a foundation of knowledge and practical skills that were indispensable to my studies. Lastly, I cannot begin to describe how fortunate I was to have a thesis director and mentor in Dr. Jennifer Van Horn. Dr. Van Horn's unwavering support, guidance, and faithful belief in my thesis, as well as all aspects of my academic career have meant more than I can ever say. Without her, this thesis would have been a nightmare and not a dream.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

American Fashion for American Women	AFFAW
World War One	WWI
World War Two	WWII
National Museum of American History.....	NMAH
Ohio Historical Society	OHS
Western Reserve Historical Society.....	WRHS
Meadow Brook Hall and Garden	MBH

ABSTRACT

HARRY COLLINS AND THE AMERICAN ART OF DRESS: 1884-1980

Nora Ellen Carleson, M.A.

George Mason University, 2013

Thesis Director: Dr. Jennifer Van Horn

Today when one hears the name Harry Collins very little comes to mind. However, from 1910 to 1950 Harry Collins was a name known across the United States. To simple housewives, first ladies, and stars of the stage and screen that sported his designs, Harry Collins was synonymous with American fashion. A New York designer, author, and philanthropist, Collins was both prolific and celebrated during his nearly fifty-year career as a “dress artist.” His peers included famous turn-of-the-century designers such as Poiret and Lucile as well as later well-known designers such as Adrian, Hattie Carnegie, and Clarie McCardell. Collins often showed alongside these illustrious stars of the fashion world and was seen as their equal. Not only was Harry Collins a designer for the stage, screen, and shop, however, he was also a creative author, critic, and inventor who sought to bring an art to the dress of the everyday American woman. Unlike many of his peers, Collins reached out to a broader audience publishing pieces in

Ladies Home Journal and *Modern Priscilla* as well as a popular book used in Home Economics courses, *The ABC of Dress* (1923.)

To date, Collins has attracted little scholarly attention. This thesis will explore Collins's multi-faceted career in order to uncover his important role in creating an American style of dress in the early 1910s and 1920s, his most prolific period of design. Decades before the infamous Dorothy Shaver and New York designers of the 1930s and 1940s sought to establish an American fashion, Collins articulated and promoted an American style intended to surpass and sublimate the Parisian monopoly on fashion. As Collins articulated it, the American style was intrinsically linked with a burgeoning national identity. Collins even supported his country and its soldiers through philanthropic works during both World War I and World War II in the realm of fashion, further cementing the connection between the American style and patriotism. While costume historians have heralded the birth of an American style in post WWII America, the first wave of American critics and designers who sought an American mode of dress in the decades just before and after WWI remain understudied. Establishing Collins' contribution to the formation of an American way of dress in this earlier period helps to illuminate the beginnings of this important movement in design history.

Because Collins uniquely bridged the gap between the worlds of high fashion and that of the everyday American woman, he provides an ideal case study to examine the complex intersection of elite patronage and mass culture that enabled American fashion designers to create a new and unique style. Through careful examination of Collins' identified dresses and his sketches, as well as study of the rich treasure trove of his

patents, marketing materials, and copious writings in magazines, newspapers, and trade journals which expressed his ideals, this thesis will construct a greater understanding of Collins's significant contribution to an American style of dress in greater context to the fashion world in the twentieth-century.

PREFACE

A Name Unknown

This thesis truly started two years ago in the fall of 2011, when in my first semester as a master's candidate in the Smithsonian / Mason History of the Decorative Arts program, I was assigned a research paper for our Proseminar course. As an introduction to our studies of decorative arts, all the first year students are asked to find an object, from any museum in or around Washington, D.C., or New York City, from any time period, in almost any medium and throughout the semester draft and write an essay describing the significance of the piece. Out of the hundreds of thousands of items I could have chosen, I picked a dress from the First Ladies exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, a dress that once belonged to Florence Harding. I cannot say what drew me to this piece. It may have been the color or the style, but it certainly was not the name of the designer. The label simply read: "Florence Harding's dress features pearlized sequins on tulle and rhinestone-trimmed blue velvet ribbon. It was designed by Harry Collins."¹ There was no date on the label and I had no idea when she wore it or where to. Most of all this name of the designer—Harry Collins—was an enigma (Figure 1).

¹ "The First Ladies at the Smithsonian: First Ladies' Fashions," National Museum of American History, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/first-ladies/first-ladies-fashions-page-2>.



Figure 1: *Florence Harding Dress*; tulle, pearlized sequins, velvet, ca. 1920, Harry Collins, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.

Apparently no one else knew much about Harry Collins either. Other than the odd line here or there about a New York fashion designer in secondary sources written about Florence Harding, I found that no scholars seemed known who this man was. It seemed strange to me that a First Lady would wear an unknown designer. Therefore,

instead of giving up, I decided to search for primary source documents. What I found took me aback. In one database search for a newspaper article on Collins, I found about a hundred editorials, advertisements, and articles written about or by Harry Collins spanning five decades. As the semester passed I chose to focus on the First Lady and her fashion choices, which the dress represented. However, in the following two years I found myself returning to the mysterious designer, well known and prolific in his day; yet now utterly forgotten. In my spare moments I often searched for Collins, his garments, his designs, his writings; and soon I knew that he was an important character and part of the history of American Fashion and that I could not ignore my desire to share this man's story and his significant contributions to design. Therefore what follows is two years of relentless research on a man forgotten by time and historians but spectacularly significant in his day. Not an unknown New York fashion designer, Harry Collins was an essential figure of the American fashion movement in the first half of the twentieth century who had a lasting effect in his field.

INTRODUCTION

An Important Label

From 1910 to 1950 Harry Collins was a name known across the United States. To simple housewives, first ladies, and stars of the stage and screen that sported his designs, the name Harry Collins was tantamount to American fashion. When introduced as a writer for *Modern Priscilla* in 1922 the editor intoned:

Mr. Collins needs no introduction to American women. His name is synonymous with Art in Dress throughout the country. Perhaps more purely American in feeling and ideals than any other dressmaker of nation-wide prominence, Mr. Collins has a message for the women of to-day that millions will read eagerly. His plea is for simplicity and good taste—for the knowledge of principles that make “fashion” the servant and not the mistress of those who love beauty...²

As a New York designer, critic, author, and philanthropist, Collins was both prolific and celebrated during his nearly fifty-year career as a “dress artist.”³ His peers included famous turn-of-the-century designers such as Poiret, Hickson, Bendel, Redfern, Thurn, Callot Souers, and Lucile as well as later well-known designers such as Adrian, Hattie Carnegie, Vera Maxwell, Claire Potter, Norman Norell, and Clarie McCardell. Collins often showed alongside these illustrious stars of the fashion world and was considered their equal. Harry Collins was not only a designer for the stage, screen, and shop; he was

² Harry Collins, “The Art of Dress as Related to Our Work To-day,” *Modern Priscilla*, October 1922, 5.

³ Collins labeled himself as a dress artist, his term and understanding of a fashion designer, and therefore the term can be seen in the majority of his advertisements.

also a creative author, critic, and inventor who sought to bring an art to the dress of the everyday American woman. Unlike many of his peers, Collins reached out to a broader audience publishing pieces in *The Ladies Home Journal* and *Modern Priscilla* as well as a popular book used in Home Economics courses, *The ABC of Dress* (1923).

Furthermore, through his creation of an early ready-to-wear and semi-fitted department in his dress shops, and his invention of plastic patterns for the home sewer, he helped less privileged American women to dress both fashionably and affordably even while maintaining an elite clientele of First Ladies and wealthy elite. Through this duality of design and production aimed at both the wealthy socialite and the middle class home sewer, Collins consistently strove to create a truly American style of dress that would be able to surpass the monopoly of the French fashion industry and express the views of American individualism. This style, deemed by Collins to be the “Art of Dress” consisted of simple lines, well-fitting forms, and an ease of wear and appearance suited to meet the needs of the active American woman. In short, fashion with a sports wear flare, years before the mavens of fashion deemed American designers the Kings and Queen of that subset of fashion.

The thesis that follows will present the life, career, and designs of Harry Collins in a chronological format. Chapter One, “Harry Collins-American Dress Artists,” traces Collins birth from 1884 to the beginning of World War I in Europe, in 1914. It will examine Collins’s upbringing and place in society as a young man, the events and movements in the industry that would affect Collins for the rest of his career, and the start of his business, The House of Collins, in the early 1910s. Chapter Two, “From

Manufacturer to Designer,” follows the House of Collins and its owner through World War I and the dramatic changes that took place in the world as well as with Collins careers and philosophy of dress. Chapter Three, “Florence, Films, and the Art of Dress,” examines the interwar period (1919-1939), Collins’s most productive years and the time in his career where he was most well-known. The last chapter, Chapter Four, “The Rise of New York Fashion and the Fall of the House of Collins,” examines the years of the Second World War and the years after, eventually leading to Collins death in 1980; the year in which Collins’s name and influence slowly faded from history, leaving the designer in obscurity today.

Using rare surviving examples of Collins fashions, period newspapers, magazines, books, patents, films, and patterns, as well as vast amounts of secondary sources, the life, career, and philosophy of Harry Collins has emerged, presenting a pivotal figure in the history of American fashion that has all too woefully been forgotten. It is this author’s hope that by giving Harry Collins the scholarly attention he deserves, a new line of inquiry may be sought out in relation to American fashion design and business in the first decades of the twentieth century and that Collins and his peers will be given the recognition of historical importance, no so long forgotten.

CHAPTER ONE: HARRY COLLINS, AMERICAN DRESS ARTIST

Origin Story

Harry Collins was born August 13, 1884 to parents Joseph and Esther Collins in New York City (Figure 2).⁴ Later in life, Harry Collins would be described as, “dark, compact, brisk, and businesslike, but little is known about Collins’s childhood or early adulthood.”⁵ Harry was the oldest son, and second child of the English immigrants who came to the United States about a year prior to Harry’s birth.⁶ Family lore states that Harry’s grandparents were successful milliners in London and that Joseph had been disowned for marrying Esther, a girl from below his station. Together Harry’s parents immigrated to the United States sometime between 1883 and 1884.⁷ By 1910, Joseph was the head clerk of a Department Store and all six of his children also worked in the fashion or retail business.⁸ Julia, age twenty-six, was the foreman of a waist shop—a shop which sold ready-to-wear shirt waists or blouses. Harry, about twenty-five, was listed in the 1910 census as a manufacturer of Ladies’ wear while Jane, age twenty-three, was a sales lady at a waist shop. Clara, at twenty-one, was an auditor at a dry goods store. The two

⁴ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, New York, New York, Roll 1766148, Draft Board 125, “Harry Collins.”

⁵ Faith Service, “Who Are the Best-Dressed Women on the Screen--and Why?,” *Motion Picture*, October 1926, 24.

⁶ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Manhattan Ward 12, New York, New York, Roll T624_1026, Page 10A, FHL Microfilm 1375039m, “Harry Collins.”

⁷ Michael Collins, “Re: Harry Collins,” email message to Nora Carleson, June 28, 2013.

⁸ Ibid. Family lore states that Joseph was the clerk in the men’s department at Macy’s.

younger boys—Lewis, nineteen, and Samuel, age seventeen—were an assistant buyer for a shop and shipping clerk at a clothing house respectively.⁹

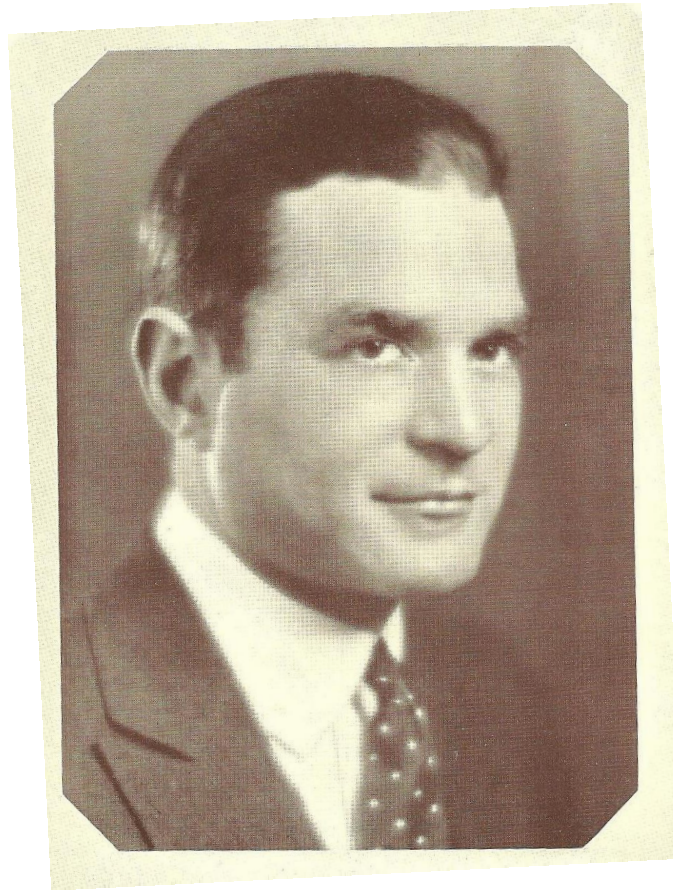


Figure 2: Photograph of Harry Collins, photographer unknown in, Harry Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, Greenwich, CT: The Condé Nast Press, 1923, n.p.

In 1910, the eight member family lived together in Manhattan's twelfth Ward.¹⁰ Specifically, Collins and his family lived on West 173rd Street in the neighborhood of

⁹ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Manhattan Ward 12, New York, New York, Roll T624_1026, Page 10A, FHL Microfilm 1375039m, "Harry Collins."

Washington Heights. At this time Washington Heights was a neighborhood transitioning from a suburban, almost country locale, to part of the thriving metropolis of New York.

As described in the New York Times in April 1910,

[t]here is no part of Manhattan Island that can offer the natural advantages either in the beauty of its surroundings or in the health-giving qualities of its high altitude and broad streets, where rents are so reasonable and apartments so well built and finished in such a comfortable and home like manner as Washington Heights...¹¹

Throughout this time Harry Collins was employed as a “manufacturer of ladies’ wear.”¹²

While early documentation is scarce, Collins more than likely opened his own salon and workshops prior to 1914, probably around 1910. In his unpublished typescript, Collins states that he initially entered the fashion world as a messenger at an embroidery business, eventually becoming a salesman who earned a commission. It was in this position that Collins was able to save money (presumably by living with his parents) to open his own embroidery establishment. Located at the heart of New York’s garment district on 38th Street, Collins’s manufactory served both individual dressmakers and wholesale dress houses.¹³ During the earliest part of his career, much of Collins’s business was copying French embroidery. Becoming known for his nearly perfect replications, he received many of these types of orders.¹⁴ In Collins’s own words: “[t]o give the right perspective to the story of the dress industry and the part I played, it must

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ J. Day Knap, "Building on the Heights: Fort Washington Sections Showing Rapid Growth," *New York Times* (New York, NY), April 24, 1910, RE9.

¹² Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *1910 United States Federal Census*, Manhattan Ward 12, New York, New York, Roll T624_1026, Page 10A, FHL Microfilm 1375039m, “Harry Collins.”

¹³ Harry Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one* (unpublished typescript, Private Collection, n.d.), 8.

¹⁴ Ibid.

be stated that vast industries, thousands of workers, depended to a large extent upon ideas created in Paris.”¹⁵ Initially, Collins had no qualms with the French fashion industry for it kept him in business and he recognized the power and force it wielded both with American consumers and across Europe. However, when Paris decided that embroidered gowns were out of style and fashions would be designed without trimmings, Collins knew his business would suffer because of the whims of the French. The enterprising young garment worker found a new opportunity in tailored suits.¹⁶ As Collins called it, his “first designing experiment” was the embroidery of chiffons and silks to be sold to dressmakers as unmade blouses.¹⁷ With the success of this initial venture, Collins entered the wholesale shirtwaist business.¹⁸ Unfortunately no designs or pieces survive from his next major project: a small blouse collection with embroidery that he thought was a bit “too fantastic” for the regular shopper. To offset the fanciful embroidery, Collins decided to drape the blouse with a thin layer of chiffon to create a gossamer effect. Upon their creation, Collins believed he had failed and left for a reprise in Atlantic City. Yet, when he arrived in New Jersey, Collins received news that Gimbel Brothers ordered \$3,500 worth of the blouses for their newest collection. With that news in hand, Collins boarded the next train to New York City with a renewed vigor and confidence in his own skills as a designer. Eventually when Paris decided not to produce

¹⁵ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

tailed suits, Collins began designing his own skirts to match the blouses; no longer merely an embroiderer he had become an American fashion designer.¹⁹

Something to Believe in

At this point in the early 1910s, Collins was designing and creating his own garments as well as importing fashions and designers from France.²⁰ As was the standard of the day, designers and shop owners who could afford to do so travelled to France to see the new themes and designs stemming from the center of fashion world. While many American shop owners went over to buy the latest Parisian fashions, the majority of American manufacturers went abroad to copy French models and bring them back for American customers.²¹ In the period, it was almost common practice for American and English designers to pirate French fashions, as it had been for decades. Often designers copied pieces exactly; in other cases they used them as inspiration to recreate similar gowns. In this way American designers provided American consumers with French fashions at a lower cost.²² This led to extremely competitive markets and to multiple fashion faux pas. Moreover, it gave more power to the French designers. For if their pieces were important enough to pirate, it followed that they were in fact the best available and most desirable. Even female and male shoppers travelled to Europe to view

¹⁹ Ibid, 10.

²⁰ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, March 1915, 141.

²¹ Linda Welters and Patricia A. Cunningham, eds., *Twentieth-Century American Fashion* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 3.

²² Patricia Mears, *American Beauty: Aesthetics and Innovation* (New York: Yale University Press/The Fashion Institute of Technology, 2009), 93.

the finest and newest styles available. In short, Paris continued to hold a monopoly on fashion, as they had for hundreds of years.

It appears that Harry Collins followed the standard of American fashion manufacturers and went to Paris on multiple occasions. He may have undertaken the trip for design inspiration and/or to buy and bring back the latest French fashions for which American consumers clamored. However, he could have also been traveling to Paris to purchase fine silks, fabrics, and furs—the best of which were only available in Europe. Collins is listed on passenger lists arriving on the *Kaiser Wilhelm II* returning from Cherbourg to New York on July 17, 1912 and again on the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie* sailing from Cherbourg to New York on July 2, 1913—this time accompanied by Hattie Collins, his new wife.²³ Harry had met Hattie just a year before on a ship bound for France, which could have very well been the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. She was traveling with her parents.²⁴ In Collins’s own words, “[t]o me she was beautiful, her slim girlish figure, her large smiling eyes – captivated me – when she smiled I knew that the future for me without that smile would lack fulfillment.”²⁵ On the third day aboard the ship, Harry asked Hattie’s parents for their consent to marry. They asked that he and Hattie wait until they returned to the United States to marry. The following spring they were married.²⁶

When writing about his quick engagement and subsequent marriage, Harry wrote: “...that

²³ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*, 1912, New York, New York, Arrivals, Microfilm Serial T715, Microfilm Roll 1899, Line 18, Number 92, “Harry Collins”; Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*, 1912, New York, New York, Arrivals, Microfilm Serial T715, Microfilm Roll 2121, Line 5, Number 11, “Harry Collins”. Cherbourg, being almost directly south of the important English port city South Hampton and easily accessible by ships coming from New York City would have been an important port city for travelers on their way to Paris, a relatively land locked city.

²⁴ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 7.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

hasty decision made on a European crossing was my one perfect decision – I still enjoy that smile.”²⁷ Collins’s second trip to Paris in 1913 could have fulfilled a dual function: a honeymoon with his new bride and a shopping trip to purchase furs, fabric, other accouterments, or gain inspiration.

Though American clothing manufacturers and importers flocked to Paris every few months to view the latest French fashions, there were growing tensions in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century over the lack of American-made clothing. As Kristin L. Hoganson points out in *Consumer’s Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity 1865-1920*, the wealthy elite women of the United States looked to members of the European aristocracy for marriage prospects and “[w]omen who could not afford a prince or lord spend extravagant sums on hats made in Paris and gowns a la mode. Unable to procure titles, they settled for clothes.”²⁸ As today, in early twentieth-century those of the middling and lower classes in America looked to members of the upper echelon for style trends. Less expensive imports or American pieces modeled after French examples were the next best thing for those who could not afford European couture. Yet the ideas of “Frenchness” linked to these modes also implied inherent inequalities associated with the aristocracies of the Europe, something the United States did not have.²⁹

Looking as far back as the creation of the nation, there had been strong opposition among Americans to the ideals and structures of nobility and aristocracy in Europe.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 58.

²⁹ Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium*, 74.

Americans as a whole sought to be part of a republic and therefore mistrusted those who sought refuge behind hereditary titles. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the wealthiest of Americans began to tie themselves to the European aristocracy through marriage and through fashion, in a significant departure from long held American beliefs. Seeking to separate themselves from the rising economic and social classes below them, and to reinforce ideals of inequality, the American upper classes sought titled European marriages and purchased French clothing. French fashion, then, gained in appeal for wealthy Americans precisely because of its association with European ideals of social structure.

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century a group of Americans began to oppose the French fashion industry and the old world beliefs so closely linked with their clothing. The movement, which would become known as “American Fashion for American Women (AFFAW),” sought to sublimate the Parisian monopoly on fashion design and search for a more “American” style of dress for the women of the United States.³⁰ The effort, which would last until the 1920s, was heralded by none other than Edward Bok, the editor of *The Ladies’ Home Journal* from 1889-1919.³¹ Bok was a particularly fine leader for the movement due to the power he held in the publishing business and because of the widespread reach of his voice through *The Ladies’ Home Journal* and his writings for other popular publications—including the *New York Times*. Jennifer Scanlon, author of *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home*

³⁰ “American Fashions,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 6, 1912, 8; This movement was also known as American Dress for American Women and American Made for American Maids.

³¹ Edward Bok, “Thirty Years,” *The Ladies Home Journal*, January 1920, 1.

Journal, Gender and the Promise of Consumer Culture, wrote of Bok and his magazine, “[t]he voice of the editor comes across as a powerful one from the outset, guiding reader actions with absolute conviction. Bok, ready to fight for a better world, expects his readers to engage in each battle with him.”³² One of his battles was AFFAW and the readership of *The Ladies’ Home Journal* was the ideal group to hear his message. Middle and upper-middle class, white, women who were “decidedly conservative” and often highly nationalistic in thought— subscribing to the view that the United States was superior to all other nations--comprised the main body of readers.³³ However, a percentage of upper class women also read the magazine.³⁴ As Scanlon points out, “The *Journal* wanted its readers to be part of a ‘new generation’ of people who understood and accepted basic class difference but nevertheless looked for common ground.”³⁵ For members of the AFFAW the common ground that united disparate parties was an embargo on Parisian fashions.

Bok and his peers asserted that Parisian clothing was un-democratic, immoral, and too expensive for the average American woman. The most egregious claim by the supporters of AFFAW was that the French fashion designers were no longer artists, but merely tradesmen manipulating and taking advantage of their customers. The American reformers felt that while Parisian designers once “[l]ived in their art and for it,” now they sought bizarre and far-fetched fashions which they constantly changed, in order to secure

³² Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York, Routledge, 1995), 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

wealth.³⁶ This quest for monetary gain led French designers to disregard the artistry they once practiced.

Furthermore, Bok and his peers believed that American women required clothes that suited the more active lives of American women and their unique body shapes.³⁷ French designers created fashions with the aristocracy in mind and thus their clothes were not ideal for dynamic or working American women who bought these Parisian garments.³⁸ The French clothing trends being pursued by the American manufacturers were those intended for women of the leisure class who spent the majority of their time lounging, strolling, or sitting, and often were not made with the ability of movement required of the more on the go American woman. Additionally, AFFAW supporters believed that all American women should have the opportunity to look their best whether they were able to spend five or five hundred dollars on a dress and that the dress should then be able to last multiple seasons of style.³⁹ In essence, fashion should be democratic; women should put their “national identities above class.”⁴⁰ At a point in history where the United States was coming into its own and slowly beginning to rival the powerful more established nations across the ocean, the members of the AFFAW movement believed that it would take the full support of the citizens of the United States to enact long lasting change. To those involved with AFFAW, supporting the United States and promoting the

³⁶ Edward Bok, "Pleads for American Fashion for American Women," *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 15, 1912, Household Hints, F1; Edward Bok, "Paris Fashions and Our's," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 6, 1912, 8.

³⁷ Bok, "Pleads for American Fashion," Household Hints, F1; "American Fashions," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), November 3, 1912, 16.

³⁸ Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium* 72.

³⁹ Bok, "Pleads for American Fashion," Household Hints, F1.

⁴⁰ Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 101.

beliefs of the nation were more important than differentiating class boundaries by following the standard practices of Europe. For as Hoganson writes in *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity 1865-1920*, "...U.S. fashion writers who advocated national fashion saw them as highly visible marks of national standing and a route to greater economic self-sufficiency and wealth."⁴¹

Therefore, closely linked to reaction against French fashion was a growing sense of American nationalism and exceptionalism. In an article entitled "Editor of Paper for Women Sees Doom of Paris Fashions" from the *Washington Post* printed on August 7, 1910, Bok proclaimed: "'Where the French woman is monarchical in nature and taste; the American woman is republican in every essence of her being.'"⁴² This statement helped to sum up the AFFAW movement in the 1910s. The desire for American clothing was more than an aesthetically based sentiment; AFFAW was a rally call for self-promotion. Those who favored American fashions and products cited anti-nationalistic feelings in men and women choosing the foreign styles. American women were supposed to be the living embodiment of American ideals. If they wore clothing produced abroad it made a specific statement to lookers on. Those of the AFFAW movement wanted their bodies to make a pro-United States message, hence the promotion of American made clothing.

One question that must be asked when examining the ideals of those involved in the AFFAW movement is: to whom were they speaking? It can be presumed that when discussing the stopping of French clothing purchases, reformers spoke to those who could

⁴¹ Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 101.

⁴² "Editor of Paper for Women Sees Doom of Paris Fashions," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), August 7, 1910, MT7.

afford to purchase couture: wealthy whites. Furthermore, reformers primarily attempted to reach women. Female consumers had the greatest impact on the fashion industry; for menswear, even by the 1910s, was far more stagnant and less fashion-driven. Women sought the latest trends from France and sought to marry wealthy European Aristocrats. This is not to say that proponents of the AFFAW movement did not attempt to sway men's opinions for it is certain that they did. However, female fashions made a designer's name and caused notoriety, so it made sense for reformers to concentrate their attention upon women. Along with the social and financial elite, members of the AFFAW movement attempted to reach other women who bought pirated French styles and French ready-to-wear garments. These women included both native and immigrants, but were primarily white women of the upper middle and middle classes who could afford to purchase the clothes associated with Paris. Given these constraints, it becomes evident that when reformers spoke to "American Women" they did not attempt to influence African Americans, Asian Americans, or women of the lower classes. Therefore, while those involved in the AFFAW movement cited republican and democratic ideals in their efforts to reform dress, the movement was not purely democratic and un-biased; nevertheless, it was a step toward the democratized fashions of the mid and late twentieth century.

While there is little direct evidence of Collins's ideals in the early part of his career, it is safe to assume that his acceptance and championing of the principles of the AFFAW movement later in his career were influenced by these earlier reforming voices. In particular, Collins's strong use of American symbols and history in his more mature

designs were clearly influenced by the early writings and actions of the AFFAW as well as the views of Edward Bok and his peers. Yet, one aspect of Bok's arguments in the movement seems discordant with Collins's views: Bok's presumed lack of dress artists in the United States.

The notion that Parisian designers did not truly create anything is a constantly reoccurring theme in the writings of the AFFAW proponents. To make their point American advocates stated that the French fashion designers merely adopted or modified past ideas. In the same *Washington Post* article from August 7, 1910 Bok stated:

Paris does not originate fashions. Paris has never yet originated a single new fashion except in the one instance of the uncurled plume, and that was an accident. What the Paris dressmakers do is adopt and modify certain old and historic ideas in dress to conditions.⁴³

Bok was so adamant that Parisian dressmakers no longer created anything new that he quipped: 'were customs and frocks of all countries copyrighted as are books Paris fashions would become nothing but a memory and Paris dressmakers would promptly go into bankruptcy.'⁴⁴ According to Bok Americans should respond by adapting native historic designs to American needs.⁴⁵ While the supporters of the AFFAW movement had faith that Americans were capable of this fact, they did not believe that Americans were capable of creating new designs. Moreover, they still questioned whether or not they could convince the American consumer to purchase national designs instead of foreign ones. Thus, in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century one would be hard pressed to find a fashion "designer"—self-proclaimed or otherwise. Collins

⁴³ "Editor of Paper for Women," MT7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

himself was labeled as a manufacturer of ladies' wears at this time. This absence is most likely due to widely held belief that Americans did not possess the skills to create their own designs. In a lengthy piece in the *New York Times* entitled "Shall American Women Follow Paris Styles [?]," Henri Bendel was asked about Americans creating designs apart from Paris.⁴⁶ Bendel, a milliner and owner of an important fashion house on Manhattan's fifth avenue, known today as the man who brought Coco Chanel to the United States retorted: 'Create? Never! We over here, we fix and change and copy a great deal, but we have not the environment, we have not the thousand things which are necessary to create the most beautiful clothes.'⁴⁷ Bendel went on to explain:

'...above all, the American mentality is not creative. Americans adapt and modify and shape better than anyone else in the world. They have good taste. They know what is fit. The American woman is, on the whole, from the time that she gets up in the morning until she goes to bed at night, better dressed than the French woman, because she knows what suits every different occasion. But adapting and suiting, ah, that is not the creation!'⁴⁸

Many of those opposed to the AFFAW, such as famous French importers like Bendel, felt this way.

Reformers believed it was common knowledge that Americans lacked the artistic training and history of the great old nations in Europe. In a way this was true. There were fewer schools for design and the arts and there was not nearly the same extent of historical couture in the United States. As the proponents of the AFFAW movement put it when asked if America was up to the task of adopting fashions for the American women:

⁴⁶ Rona L. Holub, "Bendel, Henri," American National Biography Online, last modified October 2008, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-01700.html>.

⁴⁷ "Shall American Women Follow Paris Styles?," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), October 6, 1912, F8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

‘We can...not so easily...because we have not the history and experience of the past to fall back upon, as Paris: we have not the artistic background of older nations. But we have New World cleverness that they have not, and, above all, we have a knowledge of the needs of our own people that another nation has or can have.’⁴⁹

There was hope and belief in the nation that Americans could meet the tasks asked of them by the leaders of the movement. To correct the issue of proper training, Edward Bok even attempted to start a school to train would be manufacturers to create garments for American women.⁵⁰

Collins seemingly disagreed with the sentiments of his peers of the AFFAW movement that Americans were incapable of the creation of design. Early on, Harry Collins sought to create what he deemed “Art in Dress.” While it is clear that he originally imported French clothes and supplied ready-to-wear garments, he himself was also a manufacturer and designer when there were few designers in the United States.⁵¹ Moreover, Collins would take advantage of the one thing that the proponents of the AFFAW did think Americans could successful create: silk.

Like Harry Collins, the American silk industry has been mostly forgotten.⁵² However, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was a boom in production and corresponding proliferation of American silk on the market.⁵³ This may have been due in part to the efforts of AFFAW. Besides calling for a stop to the Parisian monopoly on fashion, they lobbied for increased production and use of American textiles in clothing

⁴⁹ “Editor of Paper for Women,” MT7.

⁵⁰ “American Fashions,” September 6, 1912, 8.

⁵¹ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, March 1915, 141.

⁵² Jacqueline Field, Marjorie Senechal, and Madelyn Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts*, Costume Society of America (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), XIX.

⁵³ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, XX-XXI.

made for American women. While those involved in the AFFAW movement may not have believed in the designing powers of American dressmakers, they did believe that the textile industry in the United States could easily create new designs and sublimate the power of the European textile markets.⁵⁴

One prominent American silk manufacturer, H.R. Mallison & Company (formerly M.C. Migel and & Company) made it their goal to produce high quality and expensive dress silks that customers would normally have to go to Europe to purchase.⁵⁵ Moreover, Mallison himself was an outspoken proponent of American textiles for American fashion.⁵⁶ As Madelyn Shaw described in *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts*, “[t]he very few American novelty silk manufacturers from this period derived their design either from historical models or European samples, and Europe generally (and France specifically) was usually considered to be the source of all the best fashion.”⁵⁷ Yet, Mallison’s sources spoke to the history of the United States. Some novelty silks even boasted images of National Parks and American landscapes.⁵⁸ These motifs were exactly those that the AFFAW movement felt should inspire American designs. H.R. Mallison & Company achieved what the reformers associated with the AFFAW movement hoped the silk manufacturing industry in the United States could achieve, and they would continue to do so throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Harry Collins would even work closely with Mallisons, appearing in advertisements and

⁵⁴ Edward Bok, "If America Had Her Own Fashions," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 25, 1912, 12.

⁵⁵ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, 177, 173.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

participating in fashion shows, and using their silks to create thoroughly American fashions.⁵⁹

Just as H.R. Mallison and Harry Collins would have a future together, the AFFAW movement would become an important aspect of Collins ideology and career, ultimately sparking a desire to democratize fashion in the United States. Though one cannot strictly link Collins to the movement in the early years, or to Edward Bok, Collins would later expound many of the ideals of AFFAW he would become inexorably linked with them. And while Harry Collins started his career as an importer, as time went on and he developed his creed and career moving from a young entrepreneur to a household authority on fashion, he would fully embrace a wholly American design for his American clientele.

⁵⁹ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, 240.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM MANUFACTURER TO DESIGNER

A Star is set in the Couture Horizon

In 1914, the future of American fashion was greatly altered with the beginning of World War I in Europe. For the supporters of the AFFAW movement, it seemed that effects of war on the European nations, and France in particular, would be the perfect opportunity for American designers to convince the entire nation that they could dress the women of the country better than their foreign competition. Furthermore, it was a time of great economic changes, fluctuating class structures, and a burgeoning attitude of a modern and mutable world. It was around this time, 1914-1918, that the fashion house of Harry Collins began to grow and flourish. and the AFFAW reformers finally began to support the abilities of designers and not just manufacturers. An article titled “Plea for U.S. Styles” published in the *Washington Post* on April 6, 1914 stated: ‘It is unquestionably the psychological moment for American women to cast off the shackles of foreign dominion in their clothes and benefit themselves and American economic conditions.’⁶⁰ For Collins, the years of the Great War in Europe, 1914-1918, was when he did just that and when he later recalled his “star was set in the Couture horizon.”⁶¹

The Great War, as it was known at the time, broke out on July 28, 1914 and the fashion capitol of the world, Paris, would quickly begin to see the effects of war time

⁶⁰ "Plea for U.S. Styles," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), August 6, 1914, ES5

⁶¹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 3.

rationing, the difficulty of cross continental transportation, and the rise of nationalism. In short, due to war time restrictions, it was far more difficult for American women and designers to purchase and study French fashion trends. Thusly, the designers and women of the United States had to look to home for their clothing needs for the foreseeable future. One avenue for women to see the latest fashions was on Broadway.

Since the late nineteenth century, with the rise of theaters on Broadway, women had flocked to theatrical shows and revues to see stars wear the latest couture styles. Yet even with the new technologies of the 1880s and 90s, there was lag between styles originating from Europe and their arrival in America. However, theater owners and managers who had the financial means to procure the best gowns from France for their stars before the rest of American women could even see the designs.⁶² By the early twentieth century, actors were even being given particular styles that would help designers to sell a certain name or trend.⁶³ Even with calls for American dress coming from the AFFAW movement, stars for the most part continued to wear Parisian fashions which they believed shared in “a modern transnational aesthetic.”⁶⁴ Actresses wore the biggest French names: Callot Soeurs, Poiret, Lucile, Worth, etc. However it could never be denied that there was a very strong tie between the fashions found in the theater and the city of Manhattan.

⁶² Marlis Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and the American Culture* (Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 8.

⁶³ Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway*, 26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

As early as the 1870s department stores including Lord & Taylor were contracted to design or produce costumes for Broadway productions.⁶⁵ While throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the majority of American clothing retailers and fashion houses moved ever closer to the theater district, securing a relationship between the two industries. In 1905 *Theater Magazine* highlighted the best and newest fashions in a recurring piece called “Fashion Footlight.” As Marlis Schweitzer explores in *When Broadway was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and American Culture*, fashions magazines such as *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazar* and *The Ladies’ Home Journal* “offered extensive coverage of ‘gowns seen on the stage,’ complete with photographs and articles on actresses’ clothing preferences.⁶⁶ Possibly due to this close connection between the theater and the fashion industry in New York, a large number of fashion debuts took place in the theater.⁶⁷

The theater, like its successor film, was a form of entertainment accessible to all social classes. With the rise of the so called “matinee girl,” a white, middle-class, young woman from the suburbs who was able to come to the theater and partake in the spectacle of the shows, the standard audience for performances began to change.⁶⁸ That is not to say that the new class of working women did not attend the theater often either, for they did. Yet women of all social classes looked to the actresses as fashionable icons. They were also the type to imitate the fashions they saw on the stage. These women and young ladies of the middle and working classes often turned to ready-to-wear imitations of the

⁶⁵ Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway*, 56-57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

magnificent fashions since they could not afford the gowns made directly by the American and European designers and shown in their grand salons.

Eventually at the turn of the century, fashion shows, which had once been solely elite gatherings held in fashion salons, became public shows as fashion parades and shows began to be held in the theater.⁶⁹ To be sure designers continued to hold exclusive fashion shows in their ateliers and fashion houses; however, because of the fashion parades new found place on Broadway, anyone who could purchase a ticket was able to see the newest fashions in New York. In other words, middle and lower class women were able to take part in the world of fashion previously denied to them.

In 1915, “The Fashion Show” came to Vaudeville. “The Fashion Show” was the first fashion show of its kind, a Broadway style story where clothes were the main attraction. May Tully, the show’s creator, had a goal of sharing ‘the celebrated artist-modistes [designers] of Fifth Avenue,’ to the public at large.⁷⁰ Tully’s “Fashion Show” included the most prominent New York branches of European Houses-- Lanvin, Redfern, and Lucille, the best of the department stores—Bonwit Teller, and the greatest artistic American Designers— including Harry Collins.⁷¹ These were some of the most exclusive designers and retailers then operating in the United States, and their participation set the fashion show apart from its successors in the theater. Most importantly, May Tully intentionally connected the show with *Vogue*’s “Fashion Fete in celebration of American Fashion” which not only supported the movement to buy

⁶⁹ Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway*, 179.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 206.

⁷¹ Ibid.

American Fashion, but now supported the idea of the American designer.⁷² Many of the designers in Tully's show, including Harry Collins, were seen regularly on the pages of *Vogue*. In an article from June of 1915, entitled, "Vogue Plays A New Role," a Harry Collins gown was illustrated alongside gowns from Lanvin, Lucile, and Hickson (among others).⁷³ These photographs came from a show at the New York Palace Theater, and could have well been part of Tully's fashion show. Five months later, in November of 1915, another article published in *Vogue* with a tag line "When Vogue Chaperoned the 1916 'Mode At The Palace Theatre,'" described the experience of May Tully's theater show as follows:

We took our seats at the Palace Theatre and chatted, and our programs fell unheeded to the floor. What then was our amazement to see the curtain rise on the sewing room of a dressmaking shop, with, yes, the Vogue Girl painted on a panel of the wall. Three little sewing girls were talking—how two were going to a dance and the third could not go. Oh if she could just have what she wanted for once! After the others had gone she put her head on the table and cried—and slept. Then the Vogue Girl grew and grew, and stepped from her frame. She touched the girl. 'You wish beautiful clothes?' "Oh, if for one day!" So the fairy godmother showed her the kingdoms of fashion. The *midinette* waked in her lovely boudoir.⁷⁴ She shopped, past windows like that at the left; she went to the Country Club, where a dozen sports were possible; she went to tea; she went to a ball. Then there was an end of the dream, --but she had had her day. We looked at our programs—the story had been 'conceived and produced by May Tully.'⁷⁵

This beautiful description of the production and of the feeling that one had when seeing Tully's show speaks volumes to the fantasy that was couture.

⁷² Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway*, 207.

⁷³ "Vogue Plays a New Role," *Vogue*, June 1, 1915, 33.

⁷⁴ A *midinette* is a Parisian shop girl or seamstress.

⁷⁵ "When Vogue Chaperoned The 1916 Mode at the Palace Theatre," *Vogue*, November 15, 1915.

Couture was, and has always been, something desirable, ineffable, luxurious, and exceptional. Couture instantly speaks to wealth, rarity and art. More often than not there is a sense of higher and forward thinking design. These notions, for decades had only been associated with French fashions. Only the wealthiest and more important names in the world wore haute couture. Queens, princesses, duchesses, and ladies, famous actresses and signers all wore couture. The rest of the world, looking to these famous faces associated couture with the lives of the rich and famous. The element of fantasy and a want for the splendid therefore was commonly associated with the clothes that the gentry wore. However, with the onslaught on the twentieth century, the world grew rapidly and as wealth spread to middle classes the couture market increased. This in turn allowed for a greater number of people to actively take part in the fantasy.

While the level of allure and fantasy may have been slightly diminished by the growth of wealth in both Europe and United States, many individuals could never afford a couture gown which, for many, cost more than their yearly salary. Nevertheless, advertisers and designers continued to evoke the ideas of dream and fancy that couture conjured in order to sell fashion in the early twentieth century—much as they do today. The use of the Cinderella tale as an archetype, as in Tully’s “The Fashion Show” captured the fantasy of fashion and made the clothing accessible to both those who could purchase it and those who could only dream that a fairy godmother could transform them into a girl who could own it.

“The Fashion Show” had an immense effect on the American fashion industry, as evident from the description of the event in *Vogue*. The article also illuminates other

designers in the show such as Abercrombie & Fitch, Estelle Mershon, Faibisy, and Thurn.⁷⁶ At the top of the article, a photograph of a Collins evening gown was featured. The description reads: “[t]he evening gown (upper left) is black satin, gold brocade, over black lace, with black net front panel above gold cloth. Harry Collins” (Figure 3).⁷⁷

Collins’s gown in *Vogue*’s coverage of “The Fashion Show” is a fashion forward evening dress. Although the gown is no longer extant, from the photograph it can be determined that it was unlike many gowns of the day. It strays from the standard Edwardian sheath style of the period and is comprised of a gold broadcloth bodice, loose fitting, sleeveless, and with a deep central V. The bust between the V is covered with a modesty panel that appears to be a net or lace. The skirt is made of horizontal bands, probably of the black satin and gold brocade as described by *Vogue*. The shape of the skirt is a loose A-line, similar to a tea gown line with a square train at the back. The train, a common trait in clothing a few years earlier, was more of a rarity in 1915. The overall style of the dress seems to look forward to Jeanne Lanvin’s infamous Robe de Style, though it still makes use of the diaphanous layers of fabric which were so popular in the 1910s. Starting at the natural waist, a draped gather of black net descends from the central front of the gown. From the image in *Vogue*, the hem of the dress appears to rise about six inches from the ankle; while the train extends over two feet past the hem line. The model has accented the gown with a bandeau (possibly gold) and black heels.

In comparison with the other pieces pictured from “The Fashion Show,” Collins’s entrant looks distinctively modern and new. By comparison, the piece by Estelle

⁷⁶ "When Vogue Chaperoned the 1916," 49.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Mershon appears to continue to look to Paris for inspiration. Mershon's gown is specifically reminiscent of gowns by Lucile and Lanvin but with a pattern evocative of designs for the Ballet Russe. Nevertheless, these gowns were significant enough to be chosen by May Tully to become a part of history.



Figure 3: Collins gown, top left. "When Vogue Chaperoned the 1916 Mode at the Palace Theatre." *Vogue*, November 15, 1915, 49.

Collins's participation in May Tully's "The Fashion Show" played an important role in the development of his career. After "The Fashion Show," Collins had the opportunity to design costumes for a variety of Broadway shows, something that his foreign competitors such as Paul Poiret and Lucile were also doing. From 1917 to 1923, Harry Collins designs original costumes for at least eleven productions including *His Little Widow*, *Somebody's Sweetheart*, *Little Whopper*, and *The Gingham Girl*.⁷⁸ Like many shows of the day, these productions had very short runs and no costumes survive. Therefore while the gowns cannot be studied as a piece of Collins's career, the importance of his designing costumes for the theater and the opportunities that it presented to Collins, his ideals, and for his fashion career were immeasurable. Most significantly it helped launch his career on the west coast as he would later use his theater background when designing for films in Los Angeles.

The Creation of "Art in Dress"

While actively involved in fashion and theater, Collins simultaneously expanded both his design career and family. On July 20, 1914, Harry and his wife, Hattie, had a son, Richard.⁷⁹ At this point Harry and Hattie had been married for a little over a year and while his career as a fashion designer was about to flourish, Collins faced significant career setbacks. Though Collins's career would soon be launched through his

⁷⁸ "Harry Collins," Internet Broadway Database, last modified 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://ibdb.com/person.php?id=414360>.

⁷⁹ Woo, Elaine. "Richard Collins dies at 98: onetime blacklisted screenwriter." *Los Angeles Times*. Last modified February 15, 2013. Accessed October 29, 2013. <http://www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-richard-collins-20130215,0,7312511.story#axzz2j8VsBn9Y>.

work on Broadway and the connections he gained there, by the middle of the 1910s the designer had almost lost everything for a third time due to the fluctuation of fashion trends coming from France.⁸⁰ Collins knew at this point that without a major change in thinking about dress American fashion designers would never be able to escape the all-powerful force that was the French fashion industry.

As Collins wrote, “[i]f I and business like mine were affected by the whims of Paris it meant little or no stability to any branch of the dress industry unless you always followed Paris.”⁸¹ He knew that while in the past the American fashion industry had relied on Paris, it need not do so anymore. According to Collins, in these years the ideas of changing this situation and the need to rely on Paris were consuming his “every waking moment”.⁸² It was from here that he laid the groundwork for a conference of American fashion designers on modes that would change their industry forever; and it was perfectly timed to strike when the French market was in threat from war. In Collins’s unpublished autobiographical works he wrote this on the meeting:

The buyers and the public were resisting the call for American designed clothes. To be truthful, it wasn’t natural pride that was missing. To create clothes in America. It was in my case one of economics. I formulated a plan of battle. I’d create a large group of American designed clothes. If I lost the money a collection would cost I was young enough not to care—I could try again. So I went into the fight for recognition as an American designer—an adventure I started with great enthusiasm. I designed a collection and in order to show that I was free from the dogmatic influence of Paris. I took as my inspiration the uniforms of Colonial Days...[t]hat started the movement for American designed clothes.⁸³

⁸⁰ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 11.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 12

Whether Collins knew it in the moment, or only later in life he understood the importance of his actions in 1914.

According to the *American Silk Journal*, as of December 1914, there had been only “two significant movements making towards interpretations of fashion by American designers of costume” to date—one of them was the Fashion Fete held at the Ritz-Carlton during the first week of November...⁸⁴ As the *American Silk Journal* reported, the other major event of the year was the conference on modes organized and initiated by Harry Collins on the week of November 16, 1914.⁸⁵ The major difference between Fashion Fete, patronized by Mrs. Astor and her Four Hundred, and Harry Collins’s conference was:

In the case of the Ritz-Carlton affair, the main purpose was to parade before fashionable society the consensus of styles opinion as expressed in cosmopolitan fashions built in American. A majority of the numbers shown were largely inspired by the styles set forth by Paris before the war on the continent came to interfere with its activities...[i]n strong contrast, the conference on modes brought into being by Harry Collins, one of the foremost American costumers, was the emphatically American tone of the styles exhibited by a score or so of other recognized dress authorities.⁸⁶

For the conference, Collins created models “from which he supervised the designing of.”

⁸⁷ Collins’s claimed supervision because by 1914 the fashion house of Harry Collins had multiple employees who helped to supplement Collins’s individual work.⁸⁸ The models at the conference all represented his style principles and lines. The finished pieces were then exhibited in his fashion house where he sent out invitations to other prominent

⁸⁴“American Designer's Fashions for Spring," *The American Silk Journal* 23, no. 12 (December 1914): 31.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 10.

American designers to discuss the modes presented. He asked that these designers then return to their workshops and create garments in the same spirit.⁸⁹ In this way, American designers would meet together and discuss a plan for the next season's styles in the way that French fashion designers had done for decades, thus creating a cohesive plan for line, color, and pattern. The style agreed upon by the American designers in 1914 was motivated by the nation's colonial past, with an emphasis on military effects.⁹⁰

Using the colonial past of the United States for inspiration was particularly ingenious since only a few years prior, the AFFAW had claimed that Parisian designers were at fault for adapting clothing designs of other nationalities and that American women should look to their own past for creative stimulus. Collins and his peers took that belief to heart and created the colonial mode of 1915. Some gowns created by Collins included the "George Washington," the "Puritan, and "The Paul Jones" (Figure 4).⁹¹ Collins even went on to apply for a patent for his "design for a dress" on January 27, 1915. On April 27, 1915 he received the patent—number 47,256—for a term of three and a half years (Figure 5).⁹² While the description of the dress has minimal information, claiming that he has "invented a new, original, and ornamental Design for Dresses..." and only features a sketch of a perspective view of the dress, it is incredibly similar in appearance to a sketch of his "George Washington" dress found in the *The American Cloak and Suit Review* in January 1915.

⁸⁹ "American Designer's Fashions for Spring," 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Collins, Harry, Design for a Dress, US Patent 47,256, filed Jan. 27, 1915, and issued Apr. 27, 1915



Figure 4: Sketch of George Washington Dress designed by Harry Collins. "New York Press Accepts the Collins Collection as original and Correct." *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116B.



Figure 5: George Washington Dress Design Patent (cropped image). Harry Collins, Design for a Dress. US Patent 47,256, filed January 27, 1915, and issued April 27, 1915.

The advertisement in the January 1915 issue of *The American Cloak and Suit Review* uses a fairly standard method of creating a collage of clippings from other publications. Clippings are from: *Women's Wear*, *Dry Goods*, *The American Silk Journal*, *The New York Tribune*, *The New York Sunday Herald*, and many untitled publications. A caption box at the bottom of the page reads: "New York Press Accepts Collins's Collections as Original and Correct."⁹³ The advertisement makes use of headlines, snippets of editorials and columns, sketches of Collins's designs, and Collins's logo all

⁹³ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116b.

overlaid on one another. Sketches featured Collins's "George Washington Dress," "Paul Jones Dress," and an afternoon dress trimmed with butterflies (Figure 6). The pieces of editorial and columns speak of Collins's triumphs including his conference on modes. In one piece, from the *New York Tribune* (date unknown) states: "Mr. Collins wished to prove that a fashion epoch can be inaugurated and outlined by American creators, entirely from American ideas, and he did prove this."⁹⁴ Another article read: "One of the best indications that a forward step in the world of fashion has already been taken in this very gratifying response with which Mr. Collins's invitation to collaborate had been met...Mr. Collins's plan is practical and most necessary at this time."⁹⁵ Pieces like this, though chosen by Collins for advertisement purposes, reinforce the impact that Collins made in 1914 with his conference on modes. Looking back on his historically inspired collections Collins called them "frightful examples of a first try."⁹⁶ However, the press took note of a new collection independent of Paris. In Collins's view, "Women's Wear" stated it was a movement for Art in Dress in America."⁹⁷ It was from here that Collins took his signature line "art in dress."⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116b.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 12.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.



Figure 6: Butterfly Dress designed by Harry Collins. "New York Press Accepts the Collins Collection as original and Correct." *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116B.

The Democracy of Art in Dress

While Collins designed and produced these incredibly patriotic garments and actively sought to articulate an American style of dress and to contribute to the rise of American couture, he still had to be financially responsible. Many American women continued to look to France for their fashions despite the efforts of AFFAW.

Furthermore, the conference on modes required money and the new colonial gowns were untested as of yet. At this time, Harry Collins continued to sell French made and designed ready-to-wear garments, such as shirt waists. In the January, July, and September issues of *The American Cloak and Suit Review* in 1915 the house of Collins advertised the procurement of Jules Samuel, a Parisian blouse and gown designer.⁹⁹ Collins along with a Mr. A.H. Cobden, as Cobden-Collins Co., Inc. also advertised a joint venture to both manufacture and import novelty waists. According to the advertisement in *The American Cloak and Suit* review in January of 1915, these novelty waists were first shown on January 11 of that year. In this instance, *novelty* most likely means both new and made of a textured or specialty fabric. While the sale of French ready-to-wear garments by a designer who championed the AFFAW movement and the American Fashion Design industry may at first appear hypocritical, Collins's actions are far from hypocritical. Instead they illustrate the rapidity with which Collins was able to launch his American based designs on the back of his success from French fashion ventures. French designs may have given Collins the capital to build his fashion business, but as soon as he was financially able he devoted himself to American design. In one short year Harry

⁹⁹ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116c; *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, July 1915, 144; *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, 20h.

Collins changed from advertising himself as an importer and manufacturer as he did in 1914, to the “creator of ‘Art in Dress’” as he did in 1915.¹⁰⁰

The success that Collins achieved from his conference on modes, gave him quick notoriety and many offers to promote his name, ideology, and unique American style. Soon after the events of 1914 a member of the William Morris agency approached Collins with the invitation to show a collection of clothing at a special midnight attraction on the New York Roof, a popular vaudeville establishment. Admission to the show was \$1.00. Collins did not produce the show but left it up to the agent from William Morris to blend the fashion parade with typical vaudeville acts to bring in a paying crowd.¹⁰¹ For this venture Collins received no financial compensation but he gained a different audience every night to view his new collection and his name was listed on the marquee in “electric lights on 44th Street and Broadway.”¹⁰² This exposure was incredibly important to Collins’s career expansion. While he had participated in fashions shows, parades, and even dressed stars of the stage this was more than likely the first time his name was featured in lights on a Broadway marquee. In his own words: “[n]othing before or since ever gave me the sense of triumph I felt when I saw the great electric sign—‘Fashion Review of Art in Dress’ by Harry Collins.” The review featured a dancing team and a display of fashion with twelve girls modeling three outfits a piece. The initial one-week engagement proved so popular that Collins’s works were displayed for four more weeks. According to Collins, it was during that time that he took orders from some ladies who

¹⁰⁰ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, November 1914, 64; *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116c.

¹⁰¹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

would become inexorably associated with both vaudeville and the early era of silent film.¹⁰³ Collins dressed two major stars: the Dolly Sisters, stars of vaudeville and linked to such huge names as Diamond Jim Brady.¹⁰⁴ The sisters admired his clothes so much that they sent him a \$2,000 advance for clothing a day after they met Collins at his review.¹⁰⁵ Others such as, Nora Bayes, Grace La Rue, Marion Davies, and Olive Thomas, like Collins, are mostly forgot today but were important style setters at the time and having them as clients was an important step toward achieving a major design label for Collins.¹⁰⁶

When Collins wrote of his “Fashion Review of Art in Dress” on the roof he described it as so life changing and overwhelming that it was a blur. One of the few moments he remembered was the playing of a song entitled “destiny” during part of the review.¹⁰⁷ More than likely this song was actually the *Destiny Waltz* by Sydney Baynes.¹⁰⁸ This song and moment made such an impression on Collins that he subsequently continued to play the song at all of his fashions showings.¹⁰⁹

After the four-week run of Collin’s fashion review was over, the House of Collins began offering 36 clothing models for sale to stores across the United States. The first store to purchase models and to advertise Collins’s name was Famous Barr in St. Louis, Missouri. Though they had had differences over the initial price offering, the store and

¹⁰³ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 14; *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ H. Paul Jeffers, *Diamond Jim Brady: Prince of the Gilded Age* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 315-316.

¹⁰⁵ Collin, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ "Destiny Waltz," National Jukebox, accessed November 1, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/3774/>.

¹⁰⁹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 15.

Collins eventually came to an understanding, and Famous Barr promoted Collins as the Paul Poiret of America.¹¹⁰ In other words, they dubbed Collins the King of American fashion.

The popularity of the Collins's collection at Famous Barr and the reputation that Collins built in these years supposedly had such an effect on the department store that Collins's gowns helped the rest of the high-quality merchandise to sell.¹¹¹ Mr. David May, founder of the May Company, owner of Famous Barr, and Collins's friend, was supposedly so impressed with his showing and had such belief in Collins's future that he offered to double the capital of the House of Collins if Harry decided to enter the retail world with him. Fearful that May would then become a partner who demanded control over the business as a whole, Collins was hesitant. Nevertheless, he needed capital to help develop his fast growing business and eventually May invested \$20,000 into the House of Collins.¹¹²

Collins's commitment to bringing creative clothing design directed specifically to American women's lifestyles and bodies fully emerged as war broke out in Europe. His American design was not adversely affected by the importation of shirtwaists and Parisian designers to his fashion house. In fact, the war in Europe left a gap in the fashion world that Collins quickly took advantage of when he began designing clothing for the American woman, a decision that would forever change his career. Collins was at the forefront of American fashion even before his conference on modes; after the conference

¹¹⁰ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 16.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 17.

¹¹² Ibid., 18.

he became one of the leaders of the AFFAW movement. At the start of WWI, America had other prominent American designs. These included: Thurn, Hickson, Abercrombie & Finch, and undoubtedly more that have been lost to history. Nevertheless, the majority of the American designers were still primarily importers. Without Collins's resolute guidance American designers and manufacturers may never have taken the opportunity presented to them by WWI and challenged the preconceived notion of French authority. Furthermore, though the French fashion monopoly returned in the interwar years and today the names of houses that imported survive, such as Henri Bendel, the work that Collins and his peers did for American fashion cannot be overstated. Collins was one of the first American designers to challenge the established authority of French design and did so at a time when the majority of the world was against him. French fashion might recover in the short run, yet the work of the early American designers meant that the Parisian fashion industry never quite recovered from the effects of WWI.

From 1914 to 1918 Collins's fashion house was located at 29-33 West Thirty-Eighth Street in New York City.¹¹³ This is where Collins planned and launched his attack on the preconceived notions of the fashion industry. The location of Collins's shop was as important for his success as his choice to start creating an American dress style. During the four years of WWI, Collins shop and showrooms were located off of Fifth Avenue amidst the ever growing garment district. To the editors of the *American Silk Journal* it was important that during these war years, "broadly speaking, the only fashionable world left untouched and calling for new styles..." was the United States of

¹¹³ *The American Cloak and Suite Review*, January 1915, 116c.

America.¹¹⁴ So, due to the war, the American fashion industry as well as their competitors from Great Britain and France expanded their real estate foothold on and around Fifth Avenue in New York City and Collins's shop and therefore presence and voice was settled among the other establishments.

New York had been a shopping destination for the American public since the rise of department stores in the mid-nineteenth century and by the 1910s Fifth Avenue was the star. From ready-to-wear and import shops, department stores, and couture houses Fifth Avenue in Manhattan attracted men and women from across the country to shop. As Harry Collins became a well-known name, women of means began visiting his establishment. On August 15, 1917, an advertisement in *Vogue* announced that Collins's creations would be sold exclusively at his own store; no other businesses in New York City would carry them. In the words of his personal advertisement, "...no New York shop can his original models be had except at his own showrooms—where individual fittings and personal dressmaking service will lend additional grace to his charming creations."¹¹⁵ However, Collins evening gowns, evening wraps, afternoon frocks, and street dresses could be found in stores throughout the country. According to the 1917 *Vogue* advertisement "[i]f you reside outside the New York Metropolis, Mr. Collins will be glad to direct you to the exclusive shop in your city authorized to feature his

¹¹⁴"American Designer's Fashions for Spring," 32.

¹¹⁵ "Advertisement," *Vogue*, August 15, 1917, 75. It is difficult to say whether Collins's choice to only sell at his own shops in New York is a unique strategy at this point. However, it seems more than likely that others are selling across the United States like Collins did. It is known that Lucile had a line with Sears, but besides Lucile there is not enough scholarly research completed at this time to fully understand this element of Collins's business.

models.”¹¹⁶ The fashion house of Harry Collins was accessible throughout the nation, but was exclusive in New York City.¹¹⁷

At this moment in time New Yorkers attempted to build a fashion reputation to rival that of Paris. One place to start was with the flaunting of their most exclusive retail establishments—one of the most common reasons for wealthy tourists to travel to France. Collins’s exclusive American couture establishment in New York City helped to draw rich women from across the United State to the city to shop; helping to replace oversea voyages with cross country trips instead.

Only one piece of Collins’s work is known to survive from the period before the end of WWI. Dated to 1917, it is one of a series of dresses purchased over the course of two years by Mrs. Matilda Rausch Dodge Wilson, the Dodge Motors Heiress of Michigan. The gown is now in the collection of Meadow Brook Hall (Figure 7).

The majority of Ms. Wilson’s dresses were custom-made in New York.¹¹⁸ Due to the date of this individual piece and the dress’s stylistic features, it can be attributed to Collins’s New York Salon. Depending on when it was made in 1917 it could have been produced at either Collins’s shop at 29 west 38th street or at 9 east 57th street. This particular Collins dress owned by a Meadow Brook Hall is a black chiffon evening gown adorned with black beads and details. This gown is a perfect representation of the clothing

¹¹⁶ "Advertisement," *Vogue*, August 15, 1917, 75.

¹¹⁷ It is unclear what stores or how many carried Collins’s ready-to-wear / ready-made garments but it can be presumed that they were in most major U.S. cities.

¹¹⁸ Madelyn Rzakowolski, "Re: Collections Inquiry," e-mail message to Nora Carleson, July 11, 2013.

made for Harry Collins's wealthy clientele during WWI.¹¹⁹ The dress is composed of multiple layers of black chiffon which cascade over an underdress. The basic shape is strapless sheath. A loosely draped sheer black chiffon layer lies over the body of the dress and rises to cover the shoulders. The draped sheer layer of black chiffon is adorned with beads sewn onto the dress to create a pattern of stylized, geometric flowers. Along the edges of the sleeveless shoulders are bands of scrolling beaded vines. Additionally, the scoop neck is outlined in a single row of beads. At the natural waist of the dress rests a fully beaded belt, gathered at the front left portion of the waist and descending loosely down the side of the gown in two bands terminating in a long tassel with an acorn like top. In comparison with other garments of the period made by elite couture designers, this gown fits the simplified style of American dress which Collins and the AFFAW movement advocated. This 1917 gown is sleek and simple and elegant—everything American designers hoped their work would be. Unlike similar sheath dresses of the period, especially those by Lucile, the best known designer of this particular style of dress, Collins's sheath dress looks forward to the sleek and modern styling of 1920s and the so called "Jazz Age." The dress is not only in a darker color, but is adorned with geometric floral patterns more closely associated with Art Deco and strays from the Edwardian and late teens lighter colored gowns with realistic silk floral adornments and motifs. Furthermore, the hem of the dress is slightly raised, probably to show both the

¹¹⁹ "Black chiffon evening gown accented with jet beads and tassels," Digital Dress: Meadow Brook Hall Historic Costume Collection, accessed November 1, 2013, http://dlxs.lib.wayne.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?q1=Harry%20Collins;rgn1=hcc_all;op2=And;rgn2=hcc_all;g=costumegroupic;size=20;c=hcc;back=back1373228833;subview=detail;resnum=2;view=entry;lastview=thumbnail;lasttype=boolean;cc=hcc;entryid=x-01-und-04-und-17;viewid=ET01A01_04_17D.JP2.

ankle and part of the calf. This could be why Mrs. Wilson was pictured wearing the dress in Nice, France, with her three children in the early 1920s (Figure 8).



Figure 7: “Black chiffon evening gown accented with jet beads and tassels,” Harry Collins, 1917, accession # 01_04_17, courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI.

While this dress did not make use of the drop waist that was to come, Collins's 1917 gown was instantly modern and futuristic in its appearance, allowing it to look almost "of the moment" years later. Techniques evident in the construction of the 1917 gown for Mrs. Wilson appear often in the House of Collins designs, including taking a standard, simple dress form of the period and then adorning or draping it to best fulfill the desired effect. Additionally, the waist adornment of the dress, a long beaded tassel dropping to just below the hem, is a common ornamentation technique of Collins's gowns that can be seen in various forms through the next decade.



Figure 8: Photograph of Mrs. Dodge (Wilson) and her children believed to have been taken in Nice, 1923 wearing dress # 01_04_17, courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI.

The April 1918 issue of *Vogue*, announced that the salon and atelier of Harry Collins had moved to Nine East Fifty-Seventh Street in New York City.¹²⁰ According to Collins, at the time East Fifty-Seventh Street was a quiet location with restrictions on signage; therefore, his establishment relied on advertisements and word of mouth. One of the ways the House of Collins brought business to the new salon was through a charged admission to the salon opening. All proceeds would go to the Permanent Blind Relief War Fund.¹²¹ In his unpublished writings Collins claimed that not only this idea, but much of the House of Collins early success was due to his public relations agent—Frederick Sand.¹²² In Collins's words, Sand was "...about twenty-five years old, inexperienced in publicity or the dress business."¹²³ However, what mattered to Collins was that Sand was "...a fanatic on the subject of made-in-America fashions."¹²⁴

The admission fee for the opening at Nine East Fifty-Seventh Street location was \$5.00. The event was advertised and so many tickets sold (over two thousand) that the event had to be moved to the Plaza.¹²⁵ The House of Collins showed its collections for two nights and two afternoons to the performances of vaudeville stars (presumably Collins's clients).¹²⁶ It was from the success of this event that the House of Collins decided to promote its name and aid the war effort by holding fashion fetes across the United States.

¹²⁰ "Advertisement: Harry Collins," *Vogue*, April 1, 1918, 19.

¹²¹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, (unpublished typescript, Private Collection, n.d.), 11.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Collins events to aid war efforts were primarily organized by Permanent Blind Relief War Fund committee in each city, though the House of Collins chose which stores would sponsor the events. As with the opening for the new New York salon, tickets were sold at \$5.00 apiece. Collins chose six pieces from the current collection to be duplicated and they were shown during a six-week, fifteen city tour. Hattie Collins, Harry's wife, acted as "chaperone and model."¹²⁷ The events were so successful that most stores had to rent out larger venues to accommodate the number of attendees. According to Collins's unpublished memoir, Neiman Marcus in Dallas had to rent the Scottish Rite Cathedral and host four performances to accommodate the number of tickets sold.¹²⁸ In addition to fetes hosted by the Permanent Blind Relief War Fund committee other fetes were patronized by Collins's clients. These fetes garnered a great deal of publicity. For example on April 12, 1918, the society pages of *The Washington Post* informed readers:

Liberty bonds will be sold on Tuesday afternoon at the Shoreham between 11 and 2 o'clock by Harry Collins's mannikins, who will be here for the fashion evening in the ballroom of Mrs. Henry F. Dimock, on Scott circle, for the benefit of the permanent blind fund for American, British, French, and Belgian soldiers and sailors.¹²⁹

These small displays of manikins and models for a charity fashion shows may seem trivial, but they were far from it. Not only did these benefits allow Collins to demonstrate his patriotism, by donating time for charity and supporting the war effort—and raising significant funds in the process—but they enabled him to capitalize upon and to further his connections in elite American circles. Wealthy socialites like Mrs. Henry F.

¹²⁷ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 12.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ "Society," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), April 12, 1918, 7.

Dimock would have been patrons of Collins. Mrs. Dimock's choice of using Collins's fashion for the benefit would have then been an obvious one. Furthermore, the attendees would have then been introduced to works by Collins, which not only promoted his names, but the hostess' taste. In turn, this enlarged the circle of women who wore Harry Collins exclusive designs. The efforts for war blind veterans may have been particularly important for Collins for later in the fall of 1918, *The New York Times* reported on a Fashion Fete benefit for the permanently blinded. Once again the event, this time at the Plaza, was held by Mr. Collins. The costs and support were given by patrons:

Mrs. Edmund L. Baylies, Mrs. Edward G. Cushing, Mrs. Charles H. Ditson, Mrs. F. Gray Griswold, Mrs. Otto H. Kahn, Mrs. S. Vernon Mann, Mrs. Charles H. Marshall, Mrs. John T. Pratt, Mrs. Charles A. Potter, Mrs. Douglas Robinson, Mrs. Charles H. Sabin, and Mrs. William Douglas Sloane.¹³⁰

Taken from the society columns, these names brought clout to Collins's enterprise and showed that Harry Collins was an important couturier. Furthermore, these relationships forged in war time would last into the peace and Collins's philanthropic efforts would continue to help cement ties with wealthy patrons. In particular, his work for the blind would be recognized by other prominent women, including a First Lady.¹³¹ Collins, though not making a direct financial profit in these events, knew the importance of spreading his brand. As a result of this tour, consumers in all the major cities in the country heard the name of Harry Collins. Branding was as important in the early years of the twentieth century as it is today.

¹³⁰ "Benefit for War Blinded: Fashion Fete to be Held for Permanent Blind Relief Fund," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), October 5, 1918, n.p.

¹³¹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 12.

Though he never fought, Collins registered for the draft. On his card, he was listed as a manufacturer by profession; yet, this was a deceptively simple job description for Collins had far surpassed the antiquated notion that Americans could only alter or manufacture clothing.¹³² In less than ten years, Harry Collins had moved from an bachelor importer and embellisher of Parisian fashions living with his siblings and parents in the twelfth ward of New York City to a married father living on the upper west side at 219 west eighty-first street with a domestic staff.¹³³ He had become an American fashion designer when no one believed they could exist, seen the greatest war of the modern era start and end, and helped launch the American style of dress. Through it all, Harry Collins not only expanded his business and created a brand known throughout the country, but was greatly responsible for founding the American couture industry. While all these great things happened in the years between 1914-1918, the greatest recognition, both financially and in type were yet to come for the House of Collins.

¹³² Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, New York, New York, Roll 1766148, Draft Board 125, "Harry Collins."

¹³³ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *New York, State Census, 1915*, New York State Archives, Albany, NY, Election district: 23, Assembly district: 15, City: New York, County: New York, page 43, "Harry Collins."

CHAPTER THREE: FLORENCE, FILMS, AND THE ART OF DRESS

A Desire for Democratic Dress

The First World War was a time when the house of Harry Collins as well as its namesake, found their identity as style leaders. While Collins had been using the tag lines “Creator of Art in Dress” and “Art in Dress” for nearly five years, in 1919 he formalized his ideology on dress in the article, “Art of Dress” published in the *Los Angeles Times* on April 6, 1919. In the article, Collins places the art of fashion on the same level as painting, music, and poetry; stating that all are bound to sets of laws of style.¹³⁴ Collins argued that: “[t]hanks to that evolutionary process which shapes every department of human endeavor, art in dress has achieved a special place in the creative Hierarchy. Dress is becoming as individual as the human personality itself.”¹³⁵ In other words, no longer does one form or color of dress fit all women. Fashion, in Collins’s opinion, could be individualized and not a slavish interpretation of popular trends. What flattered a particular coloring, shape, or age of woman was just as, if not more important, than the current fashion trends. To Collins, the key in individuality lay in originally, for each individual is unique. As Collins stated,

I cannot perform the miracle of defining style, but I can explain my attitude toward it, the aims I would serve and the goals I would set. After

¹³⁴Harry Collins, “Art in Dress: As Much in it as in Painting or Poetry,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), April 6, 1919, III29.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

all, if the designer stands back of the work of art it is his conception and his vision that underlie the result. Let me therefore explain tersely what it is we imply by the motto of our enterprise, 'We originate everything we make.' I would not attempt to discredit those leading house of fashion which have always pinned their faith on foreign productions. I can readily understand that in the infancy of the field in America we should have had to rely on the richer experience, the Deeper insights, and traditions of the Old World, but just as we in this country have been steadily working out our own salvation in business, art and the sciences, so are we gradually emancipating ourselves from that adherence to borrowed ideas on fashion, which when carried too far, becomes slavishness rather than appreciation. The genius of America is no laggard and its development is a consistent self-expression in accordance with our ideas an ideals which are uniquely our own. Because of my indomitable faith in the genius, I from the very first, adhered to the purpose of working out distinctive styles in dress rooted in American conceptions and adapted to our peculiar needs.¹³⁶

This strong feeling of national identity and how to properly express it in dress can be seen in Collins's view of line; further expressed in "Art of Dress." Harry Collins believed that American woman needed beautiful, simple clothes. Simple, as Collins used it, did not mean plain or boring. Rather he felt that clothes could be luxurious and extravagant without being ostentatious or gaudy.¹³⁷ To Collins, "[t]he smartest women in America knows conclusively that they eschew the tawdry, the trivial and sensational—their preference is for the simple and the beautiful straight line."¹³⁸ In the most simplified terms Collins's ideology as conveyed in "Art of Dress" is American-made design with clean, modest, and artful lines and adornment tailored to an individual who, like the garment, is unique and extraordinary.

¹³⁶ Collins, "Art in Dress: As Much," III29.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Reading further into the text one can see Collins drawing on language inevitably associated with the United States and the nationalistic leaning of both Collins's ideology and fashions. Collins not so carefully used both *emancipation* and *slavishness* when referring to the ways in which women followed French fashions. Using these terms helps to reinforce the notions of power that the Parisian fashion industry wielded over foreign buyers. It emphasizes the difficulty that American designers and buyers faced when attempting to break free of the French monopoly on fashion. Moreover he addressed traditions and clothing as though they were rooted in what it meant to be American. These ideas of breaking away from unfair, unfit, and harsh masters are grounded even more; so closely associated with AFFAW years before create they backbone of Collins's beliefs that he would promote for the rest of his career.

Beyond the "Art of Dress" article published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Collins shared his ideology of dress with the American public throughout the interwar years in a variety of modes. After speaking to students who were studying costume and textile design at the Teachers' College at Columbia University in August of 1921, Collins began a discourse on fiscal conservatism in dress.¹³⁹ The *New York Times* reported on the lecture at Columbia University, in an article "Sees Longer Skirt, But Not Too Long." The reporter summarized that according to Harry Collins, "[t]he American woman is governed by the principles of good taste and not by the laws of fashion."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ "Sees Longer Skirt, But Not Too Long; Designer for Mrs. Harding Says the Proper Length Will Be 8 1/2 Inches From Ground," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), August 9, 1921, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

The use of the word *fashion* or as it may better be written, *Fashion*, by Harry Collins has many resonances. In the period, as today, fashion was generally understood to mean a trend, something in the mode that was changeable. Fashion then was not closely related to one specific idea or place of manufacture, but rather a changing goal. Collins, however, used *fashion* in a more specific and political way. He almost solely related *Fashion* to the power of the French clothing industry; thus, as he employed it, the word had a negative connotation. Furthermore, because of Collins's association of the word with French ideas, *Fashion* takes on overtones of elitism, impracticality, expensiveness, un-necessary changeability, restrictiveness, quick changing trends, and un-democratic philosophies. Because of the power that *Fashion* then wields, for Collins it becomes anthropomorphized and almost sentient. Collins saw *Fashion* as the enemy against which his ideology of Art in Dress was positioned. In sharp contrast to France's *Fashion*, Collins's good taste represents a fluidity of design and adherence to principals of classic design, i.e. line, as well as a morality found in the beliefs of democratic America, and an almost puritanical or spiritual obedience to modesty and fiscal conservatism. Thusly, *Fashion* is old world, European, restrictive and sinful, while good taste is modern, American, and grounded in morality.

To illustrate these ideas to students at the University and those reading the article, Collins discussed the clothing of a model he brought along who wore a three –year- old design and demonstrated how with additional trim or slight alterations the dress could be worn for longer periods of time. However, Collins added that in order for this to be

achieved one had to take care in what was purchased.¹⁴¹ In this instance, Harry Collins was not speaking to his elite clientele who had no need to be fiscally conservative. Rather, the women he addressed in this article were women drawn from the middle classes who only purchased only a few dresses and sewed the rest of their wardrobe. To Collins these women were just as important to his work and he believed that they deserved the knowledge of how to dress just as much as the woman who could purchase a new gown every day of the week—for he truly sought to find a democracy of dress in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.

The House of Collins began to follow its democratic ideology further when they announced the opening of a semi-fitted department in the fall of 1921.¹⁴² These semi-fitted styles were ready to wear in the sense that they only needed to be fitted in shop and then one could walk out wearing them, instead of a normal fitting which took two or three visits to the salon. Such semi-fitted styles, then were not ready to wear in the sense that they were produced in sizing standards as we know today. As the advertisement in *The New York Times* proclaimed, “[a]fter years of intensive creative effort in behalf of American art in dress, the designs of Harry Collins have reached the stabilizing point of forming a definite style.”¹⁴³ This style which previously was only available to the small number of elite women who could afford gowns, dresses, capes, furs, and more starting at \$350.00 was now attainable to thousands of customers with the introduction of Collins’s semi-fitted department.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the new semi-fitted garments, afternoon dresses

¹⁴¹ "Sees Longer Skirt, But Not Too Long," 7.

¹⁴² "Display Ad 26," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 25, 1921, 8

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 10.

and evening gowns, cost between \$85.00 and \$175.00; making them nearly half the cost of the least expensive custom made Collins dress.¹⁴⁵

Over the next few months, Harry Collins continued to publicize his new semi-fitted department. In newspaper advertisements that followed the initial announcement of the new garment line, Collins's ideas of dress became more pronounced. An advertisement in the *New York Times* on October 16, 1921 proclaimed: "Our new 'Semi-Fitted Department constitutes a revolution in ideas of exclusive dress and a revelation of the difference between *the Truth that is Art and Fad that is Fashion*.'" ¹⁴⁶ Once again Collins presented his beliefs on *Fashion* versus dress and attempted to make the consumer understand that their only true choice was Art in Dress.

Collins was now advertising the fiscal conservatism in dress he spoke of a few months earlier. In the advertisement he states that the dresses in the semi-fitted department will outlast changing styles and therefore will be able to be worn for multiple seasons—an idea which he also shared in his talk to the design students at Columbia University. While this notion may have chafed some of his elite clientele, Collins believed in the democracy of dress.¹⁴⁷ As he advertised, "...within the reach of every woman who seeks distinction in Clothes are offered Harry Collins models with no sacrifice in style, because a Harry Collins dress is always a Harry Collins dress."¹⁴⁸ In this line he attempted to express that whether a dress he designed was worth \$300 or \$3,000 it followed the principals of line, good taste, and thusly "Americaness" for which

¹⁴⁵ "Display Ad 26," 8.

¹⁴⁶ "Display Ad 52," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), October 16, 1921, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ "Display Ad 52," 16.

he and his fashions stood. The garments designed by Collins were more than clothes to make women beautiful, they were expressions of his beliefs including the idea that if clothing was well fitted to an individual, in both form and character, the cost of the dress did not matter. Additionally, underlying all of Collins's expressions of his beliefs was the idea that only American-made garments suited the American woman; no foreign competitor could accurately represent her traits, personality, and lifestyle.

Though he was already beginning to reach a lower economic class of women with his semi-fitted department there was another group of women to whom Collins had no access: home sewers. Women who made their clothes were still the greatest percentage in the United States at the time; the women who bought the bulk of their clothes were a minority. Both middle and working class women turned to home sewing alongside their purchases of cheaper ready-to-wear garments. Home sewers could buy patterns from dry good stores, decipher a pattern from looking at a finished dress, or purchase patterns from popular magazines such as *Modern Priscilla*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, and more. For decades these publications had provided fashion advice and patterns to home sewers for a few cents. The lady merely sent away her money and within a few weeks a new and fashionable dress pattern arrived. Before 1920, many of the patterns came from designers on staff or were copies of French garments. It is unclear whether Collins was alone among America's major designers in creating patterns for home sewers or if there were other designers doing the same, but in the early 1920s Harry Collins and his patterns for

home sewers began to appear on the pages of *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Modern Priscilla*.¹⁴⁹

According to Collins, he was approached by the *The Ladies' Home Journal* to write a series of articles on his theory of dress and to supply patterns as well. Collins agreed and contracted to receive \$25,000 for twelve articles and a royalty for all of the patterns sold.¹⁵⁰ This opportunity fitted him well both in his desire to democratize dress by bringing beautiful, simple, and affordable clothes to the masses, and by providing him with greater financial means. In turn, *The Ladies Home Journal* would have a designer who, until this venture was primarily associated with affluent, white, upper class women and vaudeville stars. The magazine might have hoped that, by association, their readership would grow to reach that particular demographic. Even if the wealthy women would not buy the patterns Collins produced, the magazine would still be able to establish a connection to high fashion. Additionally, the magazine may have hoped that they would sell more patterns to the middle class women who idealized the starlets if they had a designer with recognizable association with the theater like Collins.

Collins's work in *The Ladies' Home Journal* centered on his understanding of dress and his philosophy of art in dress. Collins's articles followed a basic outline, providing a short discussion of how a woman can best dress to suit her features and a statement of the upcoming styles of the season. Along with sections written by Collins there was also either a following section with a large photograph of a model in a dress

¹⁴⁹ Harry Collins, "Modern Life and Dress," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1920, 211; Harry Collins, "No Such Thing as a Clothes Problem! Dress as An Expression of Personality," *Modern Priscilla*, October 1921, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 13.

made from an available pattern surrounded by small sketches and descriptions of each available pattern or a sketched layout of patterns in a scene that fit the style of dress presented; i.e. women walking and conversing on the street in walking suits or women lunching in afternoon dress. These pattern presentations filled anywhere from one to three pages. Additional half pages had photos, sketches, and descriptions of dresses, usually without Collins's fashion musings. The patterns for garments could be dresses, skirts, waists, or coats. The designs were always clearly marked "Designs by Harry Collins." (Figure 9)

Designs by Harry Collins



GROUPED ABOVE are four of the evening gowns presented on this and the opposite page. The grouping gives you some little notion of how very charming they would look if the wearers were assembled at a social gathering.



THIS DRESSING, A-773, is of green tulle, and the CHAMPAGNE underskirt is of soft satin. IN THE CENTER OF THE NET GIRDLE is a gold-colored satin ribbon, while the center of gold cloth is in the side. THE SKIRT is cut straight, with loops of net that form part of the net skirt—see sketch, but arranged to form the pattern you see in the sketch. Pattern cut to order any size up to 44.

Photographs by Campbell Studios



EVENING GOWN OF JADE-GREEN CHIFFON AND RIBBON (No. A-772). THE FANCY RIBBON has pale green and gold edging, while the apron is of jade-green chiffon. THE GIRDLE is of chiffon. THE OVERBODICE is cut two inches longer than required in order to enhance the natural waistline with a bloused effect. Pattern cut to order any size up to 44.

Harry Collins' patterns may be purchased from any store selling Home Patterns, or by mail, postage prepaid, if you address the Pattern Service, The Ladies' Home Journal, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Designs designed and numbered with three figures (for example, A-773) will be cut to measure at \$4 each. Other Designs: Dresses, 30 cents; Skirts, 25 cents; Coats, 30 cents.

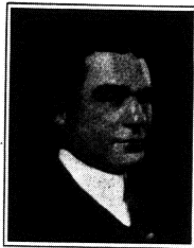
Figure 9: "Designs by Harry Collins," *The Ladies Home Journal*, February 1920, 212.

PRELUDE

I DO NOT myself believe in fortune telling, but this I must say: When a palmist studies the lines of your hand, he is unconsciously, perhaps, recognizing a really scientific principle which governs everything that lives. Dreammaking is a philosophy as well as an art, and while I am not so sure that the palmist can read your fortune, I can tell you in all earnestness that your good fortune in being dressed beautifully depends on your ability to read your lines correctly. When you come right down to it, all of us are constantly studying lines. We like or dislike a landscape because of the way the hills roll. The most beautiful sunsets are a marvel of shifting lines. The foliage of nature is a dance of lines in trees and fields. As Ruskin says: "Dress yourselves beautifully, not finely, unless on occasion, but then very finely and beautifully too. Also you are to dress as many other people as you can; and to teach them how to dress, if they don't know; and to consider every ill-dressed woman or child whom you see anywhere as a personal disgrace; and to get at them, somehow, until everybody is as beautifully dressed as birds."

Lines! Lines! Lines!

By Harry Collins



STENDHAL, the French wit, who wrote the first guide-book to Love, reports the following conversation in a salon of 1820. An old diplomat chatting with a countess about a stage celebrity, says: "Madame, she has fine lines." "True, my dear marquis," comes the reply, "but she sets a fashion that obscures her natural grace. Her dress, so to speak, vents." I permit the reader to draw the moral. The problems of dress do not change, not because there is no progress, but because the human figure seldom changes—which is quite fortunate for the dressmaker, for otherwise the art of dressmaking could not rest on permanent principles. The art of acting has a body of laws, be the play a comedy or tragedy or farce. In painting, the artist follows certain unchanging principles of art, there would be anarchy; and were there no unchanging principles of good taste in dress, Fashion would be a saucy minx, making life a hideous discord.

It is most interesting to note that the foundation of good dress is precisely the same as the foundation of good art. You will remember that I devoted my first article to the theme of good taste as the only genuine authority on dress. It is now my privilege to indicate more in detail how good taste and the so-called secrets of correct dress may be acquired. I claim no unusual powers, and I speak only by that authority which comes from the humble study of the masterworks of nature. A Raphael, a Michelangelo, a Rodin, a Shakespeare never tried to lead nature, but were content to follow her by a constant study of her lineaments in field and tree and water and in the human heart. They discovered nothing new; they only reasserted the eternal principles in their own medium, whether it was pigment, marble or verse. In all the arts the supreme principle is the law of line. Summed up in a phrase, the master key to correct dress is knowledge of the right line of your figure.

To Master Line, Observe Nature

AT THIS point I would like to speak of Miss B, who has sought my advice in the problems of correct dress. She is, in disposition, the typical American girl, vivacious, with a sense of proportion that is the despair of her admirers. A lover of the outdoors, she is interested in modern sports without making a hobby of any one of them. Yet in her boudoir she broods. She bears nature a grudge for not having bestowed on her a "smart" figure. Always she complains to me: "I know that I have good taste; if only I had a figure!"

In a measure all of us can understand her plea. She has read so many articles on dressmaking which rehearse the commonplaces about clothes that look well. Seldom are you told why certain styles are ill adapted to you and what clothes are ill becoming. There is neither tact nor originality in talking of perfection as long as human beings are mortal. It is wiser not to cry for the moon and to know our limitations. With this knowledge we can learn how to surmount "defects." I have seen a commonplace woman achieve more with simplicity than a "smart" woman who featured her good points in headlines.

Once two painters made a portrait of a lady distinguished for her talents rather than for her looks. One drew her as she appeared to the superficial observer with the result that he accentuated her plainness. The other, without departing from her natural features, so interpreted them as to reveal her nobility of character. The first was a "photographer," the second an artist. So the dressmaker may be an artist; and the art of dress reveals the personality of the wearer by interpreting the right line of the individual figure.

To master line it is important to observe nature. A landscape is a harmony of lines, be the trees dwarfed or majestic, the branches clustered or sweeping, the boughs angular or free. Each tree is true to its physiognomy. To contemplate this miracle is to be filled with tranquility, the feeling of the eternal fitness of things. Let us dress as nature dresses her

children, adding the touch of art for dignified decoration. William Morris has well said: "Everyone who adds beauty of raiment to goodness of soul makes goodness doubly dear."

We must likewise study the native beauty of the human form before line may be mastered. The human figure is the most beautiful combination of lines known and its charm in woman is emphasized in the sinuous line from armpit to ankle. Grace of motion is a finer quality than faultless proportions. A marble statue may be exquisite in form, but it cannot be compared to an elastic, spirited woman whose every gesture indicates soul.

Correct Line Should Always Take Precedence

THE application of these truths to the art of dress may now be made. First, then, knowledge of the correct line of your figure should precede every step in the making of the dress. Some women intuitively feel line and are naturally graceful. But this faculty may be acquired through study; not alone from observation of nature, but by schooling oneself in controlling the carriage of the body. You have often heard the expression: "Her gesture is eloquent," or "She spoke volumes with a toss of the head."

In reality, what we call *chic* is a feeling for line. Some look for it in mysterious attributes associated with wealth and social station. But grace, charm, piquancy—these proceed from training the body to express one state of mind with sincerity and poise. By giving proper attention to such seemingly slight details of deportment and carriage, one acquires a sense of line and nonamount of precept laid down by the designer can take the place of that self-study. Since every woman has her own individuality, I would impress most urgently the cultivation of personal traits and talents in order to dress artistically. And let mothers teach their daughters to walk well and hold themselves well and they will have no greater accomplishment or charm.

The age of Miss B is not relevant for our purpose, but it may be said that she is in that period where the charms of girlhood have become mellowed. Her complexion is fair and her weight is about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Dressmakers call her figureless; but I think this a fallacy, because you might as well say that a human being is altogether characterless. Perhaps, just as certain qualities are latent in all of us, so many possibilities of the figure are overlooked by hasty dressmakers. It is true that Miss B's hips are not large and her bust line is not accentuated; it is also true that her neck is a trifle too long and that her limbs may be an inch or an inch and a half too short, but with that faith which is born of the dressmaking art, we shall show how to profit even from limitations. Miss B, having learned the wisdom of self-knowledge and being essentially modest, is now going to dress in such a way that her natural limitations will be subdued and her natural grace—latent in all women—enhanced. For a bodice she can wear most anything to her liking, with attention to certain details of general applicability.

The Most Flattering Line of the Human Figure

MISS B was somewhat perplexed on the question of correct sleeve lengths and its relation to the waist. Her dilemma was increased by the shifting decrees of fashion on this subject and the fad of lengthening sleeves. Here, as in other instances, I made it clear that once the principle of line is grasped and properly applied, such dilemmas must vanish. Consider the kimono sleeve favored by so many women. To gain variety I have always advised breaking this line by having a panel from the neck to the waistline. A double result is thus secured—on the one hand the panel arrangement gives the effect of a longer line, and on the other hand it hides what might be an inelegant line at the point where the sleeve is connected to the waist.

I advised Miss B that if her sleeve was to be a long one it should have a certain degree of fullness so as to conceal the thinness of the arm. A loose sleeve serves the function of suppressing inartistic details of the arm. Should a short sleeve be desired, it should be built so as to achieve four inches at least above the elbow, or an inch below the elbow. This helps to subdue an over-accentuated elbow bone, so that when the arm is raised or the elbow is in motion, the beauty of line is conserved.

As to the prevalent practice of lengthening the sleeve an inch below the wrist, I can only say that its desirability is debatable and that its "smartness" is dubious. But to those who are insistent on following this preference, I beg to suggest that they have their sleeve built right to the wrist, with the proviso of having an inch or an inch and a half

CONTINUED ON PAGE 55

Figure 10: "Lines! Lines! Lines!," Harry Collins, *The Ladies Home Journal*, March, 1920, 49.

From February to July 1920, the first page of every Collins article followed the same format (Figure 10). At the top of the page was a box made of floral scrolls, inside was the “prelude.” Here Collins shared a famous classical passage, an anecdote, or an expansion on a famous quote that related to topic that would be discussed below. Below the prelude would be the large title of the article, follow by the standard Harry Collins signature. Additionally, there was always a picture of Collins on the first page of the article. The picture was either a long, vertical, three quarters image of Collins in the center of the page or a small, square figure in profile at the left of the beginning of the article. The titles of articles from February to July of 1920, in order, were: “Modern Life and Dress,” “Lines! Lines! Lines!,” “Dress and Character,” “The Dress of Yesterday And the Vision of To-morrow,” “The Harmony *of the* Costume,” and “Democracy *and* Aristocracy in Dress.”¹⁵¹ These topics were direct presentations of Collins’s philosophies of dress and design. Mostly importantly, in February 1920’s “Modern Life and Dress,” Collins shared his “Ten Maxims of Good Taste.” Collins’s maxims were:

1. Study the natural line of your figure.
2. Let every detail of the costume be in harmony with the general effect.
3. Let simplicity be the basis of decoration and embellishment, and not the reverse.
4. Let the complexion be a factor in the determination of color, and let the profile of the face as well as the line of the hair be adjuncts to the determination of the right contour of the dress.
5. Let every dress be appropriate as much to the occasion as it is to the wearer.

¹⁵¹ Collins, “Modern Life and Dress,” 220; Harry Collins, “Lines! Lines! Lines!,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, March 1920, 49; Harry Collins, “Dress and Character,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, April 1920, 49; Harry Collins, “The Dress of Yesterday And the Vision of To-Morrow,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, May 1920, 48; Harry Collins, “The Harmony *of the* Costume,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, June 1920, 49; Harry Collins, “Democracy and Aristocracy in Dress,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, July 1920, 49.

6. Let dress adhere to natural factors rather than to the whims of fashion. Be not ashamed to dress wisely in accordance with age. As the spirit of youth mellows the lines of the face, beautiful dress enhances the line of the figure.
7. Let every accessory to the dress be in complete accord with it. The dress may be considered as the design of your personality and the accessories as added decoration.
8. Let the hat you wear be logically correlated to the dress that you wear.
9. Let your materials and fabrics be chosen in harmony with your character. A dress can be the expression of a state of mind if you try to make it so.
10. The dilemmas of fashion vanish in the knowledge of correct line in dress. From mastery of the line of our individual figure follow correct skirt lengths, artistic waist line, properly accepted hip line, etc.¹⁵²

Collins would expand upon these maxims in subsequent articles and re-present them in various forms for the rest of his career. Particular elements of Collins's ideology are not only eloquent, but poignant. In the prelude to April 1920's "Dress and Character," Collins writes: "[s]omeone had defined beauty as a state of mind, but I like to think of it as an expression of character....[c]haracter reflects soul, and dress reflects character. A dress is your novel, your poem, your painting, composed by you and bearing the message of yourself."¹⁵³ Not only does Collins compare dress to other forms of art, a tactic he often relied upon, but he continues to stress the importance of greatness of individuality. This close relationship of beauty and individuality seems inexorably linked to Collins's strong belief in American individualism.

From August 1920 to January 1921, Collins presented very different articles. Instead of writing on his philosophy of dress, Collins notified readers about upcoming trends and styles; his beliefs are barely visible in these writings, though they still are

¹⁵² Collins, "Modern Life and Dress," 220.

¹⁵³ Collins, "Dress and Character," 49.

present in pattern design (Figure 11). A sampling of titles from these months includes: “The Autumn Silhouette: Showing the Influence of Greek Drapery”, “Color and Line in New Clothes For the College Girl and her Mother,” “Fashion Decrees Slender Lines for Daytime Clothes,” “Long Line in One-Piece Frocks Rule the Fashion Realm,” and “Coats Grow Shorter for Spring.”¹⁵⁴ This sudden change in the purpose of his articles may have been Collins’s attempt to meet the demands of his middlebrow audience by offering readers prosaic advice. For as Collins would lament less than a year later in *Modern Priscilla*, “I have been accused of putting too much emphasis on the artistic principals of dress, and very often have been told that my name conjures up forbidding pictures of unattainable ideals in the designing of clothes.”¹⁵⁵ Alternately, Collins might have felt that he had effectively made his point and should now present the current modes of fashion to which his readers could apply his previous teachings. For a few years later, in a 1923 issue of *Modern Priscilla*, Collins stated: “I am at times taken to task for placing too much stress on artistic principals. To this I answer that the precious advantage of the knowledge of the principals of correct dress is that *it makes one independent of advice and secure in one’s view.*”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Harry Collins, “The Autumn Silhouette: Showing the Influence of Greek Drapery,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, August 1920, 43; Harry Collins, “Color and Line in New Clothes For the College Girl and Her Mother,” September 1920, 66; Harry Collins, “Long Lines In One-Piece Frocks Rule The Fashion Realm,” November 1920, 52; Harry Collins, “Coats Grow Shorter for Spring,” January 1921, 57.

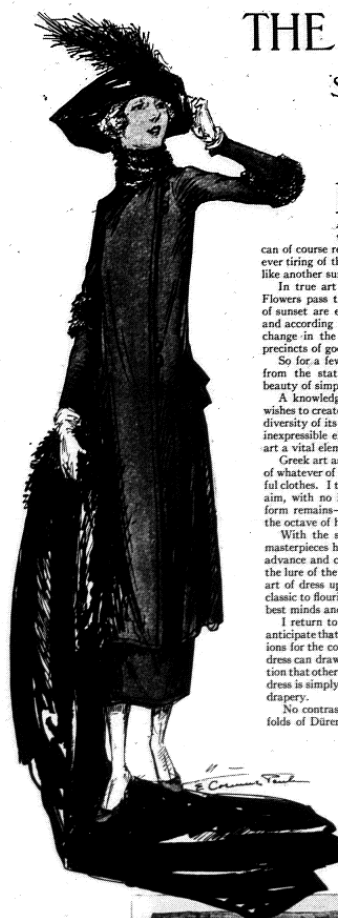
¹⁵⁵ Collins, “No Such Thing as a Clothes Problem” 11.

¹⁵⁶ Harry Collins, “Building a Wardrobe,” *Modern Priscilla*, January 1923, 14.

THE AUTUMN SILHOUETTE

Showing the Influence of Greek Drapery

By Harry Collins



DRESS is drapery in movement, life wedded to art in a form that blends the beauty of repose with the fascination of rhythm. Art that tends to develop monotony must give way to a higher art that develops variety. We can of course repeatedly see the beauties of the sunset without ever tiring of them, but that is because no one sunset is exactly like another sunset.

In true art as in nature, there is ample scope for change. Flowers pass through various color phases, and the splendors of sunset are ever new, although ever old. It is thus proper and according to nature to advocate at the right time a slight change in the lines of dress without leaving the immediate precincts of good taste.

So for a few minutes let us travel to Greece, so as to learn from the statues of Phidias and Praxiteles the unchanging beauty of simple lines.

A knowledge of drapery is necessary to the designer who wishes to create the ideal dress. The refinements of drapery, the diversity of its folds, the endless variety in its "throw" and the inexpressible elegance of its ensemble make a study of Greek art a vital element in such work.

Greek art as expressed in Greek drapery is the high priestess of whatever of nature has been invoked in the creation of beautiful clothes. I turn to Greek art with no backward or reactionary aim, with no idea of galvanizing outworn ideals. The classic form remains—now as always—the touchstone of good taste, the octave of harmony.

With the simplest of means, the Greek sculptor achieved masterpieces hardly equaled in two thousand years of technical advance and certainly never surpassed. Instead of yielding to the lure of the unusual and the exotic, I prefer to establish the art of dress upon the same principles that enabled the Greek classic to flourish and to spread its beneficent influence over the best minds and over many centuries.

I return to the subject of fundamentals not only because I anticipate that the influence of Greek lines will be seen in our fashions for the coming season, but because I believe that the art of dress can draw from classical sources the same wealth of inspiration that other arts have been continuously finding there. Correct dress is simply an extension of the principles embodied in Greek drapery.

No contrast can possibly be stronger than the seven square folds of Dürer and the even, continuous and flowing folds of Greek sculpture. It is not only a difference of material and of purpose, but it also denotes a different cast of mind. The character of drapery varies with almost every individual artist who treats it, and individuality in dress is just as varied.

TO THESE classic lines, it is our good fortune to be able to add modern decoration and the modern feeling for

color. We may always borrow something from nature in the season of autumn hues and observe the fall's browns of decay worked over with carmine, olive, maroon and buff. Autumn in ancient Greece was doubtless not so very different from autumn to-day; but the sense for color, the expression of color is a relatively modern product. Imperial purple has always existed, but the tunic of Greece and the toga of Rome were somber in their monotony—only their noble lines relieving the drabness of the single color scheme.

It is for us to borrow from the ancients only that which we cannot improve upon; and so I commend to women of good taste the delectable harmony of Greek lines with modern colors—modern not in invention, for nature is of course infinitely superior to us in color, but modern in the sense that in these days we have awakened to the language, so to speak, and the manifold meaning of color in dress.

IF YOU will study nature's color scheme as it is shown in the wonderful autumn-tinted symphonies of New England woods or Western forests, or any of the other diversified manifestations of it north and south, you will quickly notice how the first splendors of the season are riotous with exquisitely blended hues. The foliage, from orange to vermillion, the red partridge vine in the woods, the haw with its vividly colored tiny Chinese lanterns, the small lavender aster, spray on delicate spray by the roadside and in the fields—all announce the exultant beginning of the autumnal color wave.

To bathe in the warm Indian-summer suggestions of these days is to gain a clearer and fuller idea of what color in dress may be made to mean.

Dress this autumn will be simpler in color without becoming somber.

Softly elegant materials will be in vogue in colors which will suggest good breeding and refined taste.

Dull shades will be used, such as the wrong side of crêpe meteor and the wrong side of crêpe de Chine. As a compensation, hats will use brighter shades of material, to avoid lending drabness to the costume.

Sleeves, I take it, will be long. In afternoon and street dress the long, tight sleeve will come into fashion.

The top material in a gown requiring an underdress will be open either in the center or at the side to show a different color underneath, as indicated in these fashion pages. And in every case I look forward to seeing full draperies instead of puffs.

Embroidery stitches on the new gowns will be simple. In the double-square motif illustrated on page 44, for instance, the center square is a spider web; the triangles of the outer square being filled in closely with long stitches in heavy embroidery silk.

A new self-trimming that is introduced this season is exceedingly smart. On the gown for formal affairs, illustrated on page 44, it is shown to advantage. A satin strip is picoté on each side and turned every two inches with mitered corners. On page 47 you will see this new trimming on a serge dress. In that case the satin strip is made double and simply folded over and back at a distance of about two inches, more or less.

TAILORED suits this fall will have long coats extending well nigh to the shoe tops, and this vogue will serve economy as well as beauty since it will give the garment a two-fold purpose. It will be possible to wear the coat both as a top coat and as a suit coat with equal propriety.



DARK blue covert cloth is used in the coat illustrated above. Ample fur collar and elbow cuffs add a softening dressy touch to the garment. Loops of black braid add another dressy touch. The back of the coat is shown on the first group figure. The coat, pattern No. 2754, sizes 16 years, 36 to 40 inches bust measure. Skirt, pattern No. 2668, sizes 16 years, 26 to 32 inches waist measure.



DARK brown velvet, with collar and deep cuffs of beaver fur, make up the rich-looking coat shown in two views on the center figures of the group. Coat, pattern No. 2755, sizes 16 years, 36 to 40 inches bust measure. Skirt, pattern No. 2644, sizes 26 to 36 inches waist measure.



BLACK duvetine, with satin facing for piping, makes up the conventional looking tailored coat illustrated on the right-hand group figure. The coat would develop charmingly in blue duvetine with black satin. Coat, pattern No. 2753, sizes 16 years, 36 to 42 inches bust measure. Skirt, pattern No. 2649, sizes 16 and 18 years and 26 to 36 inches waist measure.

Harry Collins Patterns may be purchased from any store selling Home Patterns; or by mail, postage prepaid, if you address the Pattern Service, The Ladies' Home Journal, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dresses, 35 cents; Skirts, 25 and 30 cents; Coats, 35 cents; Waists, 30 cents.

Figure 11: "The Autumn Silhouette Showing the Influence of Greek Drapery," Harry Collins, *The Ladies Home Journal*, August, 1920, 43.

The patterns from *The Ladies' Home Journal* were distributed by the Home Pattern Company, located at 18 East 18th St in New York City. The patterns could be purchased by prepaid postage sent to the company or to the pattern service at *The Ladies' Home Journal*, as well as at stores who carried the company's patterns. The cost for Collins's patterns ranged from thirty five cents for skirts and waists, forty cents for a dress and one dollar and five cents for patterns pre-cut to a specific size in 1921; up in price from a year earlier when patterns for shirts cost twenty five cents, coats and dresses cost thirty cents, and patterns cut to order were one dollar a piece.¹⁵⁷ In relation to in-house designs made by *The Ladies' Home Journal* just one year earlier, Collins's patterns were quite expensive. In May of 1919, *The Ladies' Home Journal* presented patterns from their book, *Everywoman's Clothes*. The magazine claimed that *Everywoman's Clothes* was a "...new illustrated book showing over 100 new designs in clothes for women, girls, and children, with helpful suggestions for making." To acquire the book women only had to send two three cent stamps to cover mailing costs.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, for six cents, women would receive over one hundred designs. However, it is unclear whether these were images for inspiration or actual patterns. More than likely, the book contained sketches with suggestions of material, sewing techniques, and the like, not actually giving patterns.

The pattern designs found in *The Ladies' Home Journal* seem to have been simplified versions of Collins's more exclusive designs; yet, they were not direct copies.

¹⁵⁷ Collins, "Coats Grow Shorter for Spring," 57; Harry Collins, "Designs by Harry Collins," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1920, 50.

¹⁵⁸ "Eight Ways of Making a Summer Dress: Draperies, Deep Tucks, and Slim Lines Prevail," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1919, 173.

Many of the designs for the magazine's readers seem to have limited adornment, which appears in strong contrast to the Collins's surviving custom gowns.

In comparison to the designs for patterns in *The Ladies' Home Journal*, the patterns presented by Collins's in *Modern Priscilla* were far more detailed and ornamented. This greater level of ornament may be explained by the demographic of *Modern Priscilla* readers. Aimed at a highly skilled home sewer, *Modern Priscilla* specialized in needlework patterns and finely detailed examples women's work; in fact, including dress patterns appears to be a departure from their normal presentation.

In July of 1922, *Modern Priscilla* advertised that Harry Collins would be writing on dress in their magazine—"New York's most famous costume designer will tell women how to dress not only fashionably but artistically—in an illumination series of article accompanied by original sketches."¹⁵⁹ The advertisement stated that Collins's writings would begin appearing in the October issue and that he would teach women that the correct way to dress is to understand the lines of the human figure and not merely enhance the beauty of the face. Additionally, Collins would explain how women can adapt fashions that flatter their individual features.¹⁶⁰ The ideas he presented in the articles for *Modern Priscilla* were to be "of such import to the women of America that they [would] constitute practically a college course in dress appreciation."¹⁶¹ This was equivalent to *The Ladies' Home Journal* who touted that Collins's articles were touted as constituting, "a postgraduate course in dressmaking."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ "Display Ad 14," *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 5, 1922, 16.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² "Editorial Announcement," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1920, 122.

While Harry Collins had written articles for *Modern Priscilla* prior to his tenure as contributing staff, he was formally introduced to the readership in the October 1922 issue in a piece entitled “The Art of Dress as Related to Our Work To-day.”¹⁶³ As the editorial staff wrote,

Mr. Collins needs no introduction to American women. His name is synonymous with Art in Dress throughout the country. Perhaps more purely American in feeling and ideals than any other dressmaker of nation-wide prominence, Mr. Collins has a message for the women of to-day that millions will read eagerly. His plea is for simplicity and good taste—for the knowledge of principles that make “fashion” the servant and not the mistress of those who love beauty. It is his ambition to teach *Priscilla* readers to use the scissors as the artist does his pencil—the pattern as the architect does his blue-print...¹⁶⁴

From this paragraph of introduction Collins beliefs were able to develop within the pages of the magazine. He used similes of scissors and pencil as well as pattern and blue-print to reinforce the notion that women at home can bring his beliefs in Art of Dress to life as he did in his atelier. Moreover, these similes emphasize the element of art and help to dismiss the idea of Fashion.

In his first article as contributing editor, which accompanied his introduction, Collins wrote on the place of fashion in art, the rise of American fashions in relation to WWI and France, the place of the home dressmaker in fashion, and skills needed by a home sewer to create beautiful garments.¹⁶⁵ This scholarly tone was similar to that found in the first part of Collins’s articles (February to July 1920) for *The Ladies’ Home*

¹⁶³ Harry Collins, “The Art of Dress as Related to Our Work To-day,” *Modern Priscilla*, October 1922, 5.5; Collins contributions to *Modern Priscilla* prior to his introduction as contributing staff were published [in the fall of 1922 and winter of 1923, with articles being published in October of 1921 and March of 1922]

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Collins, “Art of Dress as Related,” 5.

Journal. Yet, the articles written for *Modern Priscilla*, including his first piece in October of 1922 featured far more technical writing. This major difference (the discussion of skills needed for home sewers) was one element that distinguished Collins's work for *Modern Priscilla* from that in *The Ladies' Home Journal*. Perhaps this is why he heightened the complexity of designs and patterns provided to *Modern Priscilla* readers as well. For the sketches in *Modern Priscilla*, published only a year after those in *The Ladies' Home Journal*, are more detailed and intricate in form and ornamentation. The extra ornamentation and detail are shown through what appears to be embroidered detail, beading, fur, and types of materials used.

The first set of designs and patterns by Harry Collins for *Modern Priscilla* followed his introduction. They were afternoon and evening ensembles for the winter season (Figure 12). Unlike *The Ladies Home Journal*, where patterns cost a range of prices, all patterns from *Modern Priscilla* were fifty cents.¹⁶⁶ The extra cost, in comparison with *The Ladies Home Journal*, could be due to the later date, the more detailed design, or a difference in readership and overall quality of the magazine.

Collins remained a guest editor for *Modern Priscilla* until September 1923.¹⁶⁷ Throughout his time as a contributor the basic format of Collins's articles remained unchanged. Articles were spread across three full pages with a continuation of the text in small sections at the end of the magazine. Collins's ideological writings and technical advice took up the entirety of the first page and constituted the bulk of the article. They

¹⁶⁶ Harry Collins, "Inspiration for Winter Wardrobes: Afternoon and Evening," *Modern Priscilla*, October 1920, 6-7.

¹⁶⁷ Harry Collins, "For Your Autumn Dressmaking," *Modern Priscilla*, September 1923, 51.

occasionally featured Collins's photograph, small sketches of dresses, or actual patterns. The next two pages, always presented beside one another, presented a title at the top and a row of women sketched in scenes, running horizontal across the pages. Below the images would be descriptions of the gowns as well as a brief discussion of current trends. Unlike the articles and images of patterns in *The Ladies Home Journal*, there were never any photographs of gowns created from the patterns, nor were there patterns that stood alone, not accompanied by Collins's views on Art in Dress.



Figure 12: Collins's first patterns for *Modern Priscilla*. Harry Collins. "Inspiration for Winter Wardrobes: Afternoon and Evening" *Modern Priscilla*, October 1922, 6-7.

During the year that he wrote for the magazine, Harry Collins delved deeply into the intricacies of sewing and designing clothing for a variety of women with different personalities, colorings, and figures. Along with those found in *The Ladies' Home Journal*, articles such as that published in the November 1922 issue of *Modern Priscilla*, "The Law of Line in Its Relation to Dress and Its Application to Individual Types of Women," "Building a Wardrobe," (January 1922) and "Adapt the Fashions to Your Figure Advises Harry Collins" (April 1923) all paved the way for Collins's greatest attempt at teaching the laws of fashion to the masses: his 1923 book, *The ABC of Dress* (Figure 13).¹⁶⁸

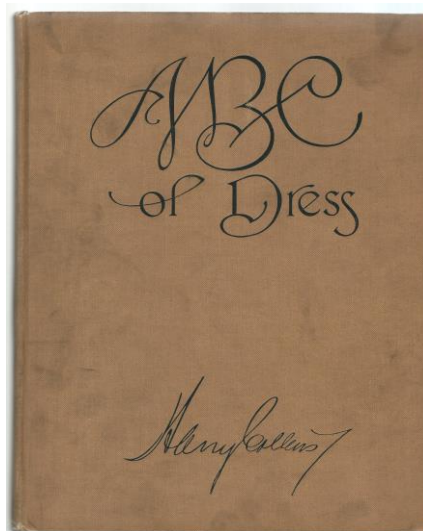


Figure 13: Book cover. Harry Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, Greenwich, CT: The Condé Nast Press, 1923, n.p.

¹⁶⁸ Harry Collins, "The Law of Line in Its Relation to Dress and Its Application to Individual Types of Women," *Modern Priscilla*, November 1922, 21; Collins, "Building a Wardrobe," 14-15; Harry Collins, "Adapt the Fashions to Your Figure Advises Harry Collins," *Modern Priscilla*, April 1923, 18. Harry Collins, "The Art of Dress as Related to Our Work To-day," *Modern Priscilla*, October 1922, 5.

The ABC of Dress, written by Harry Collins and published in 1923 by the Modern Modes Corporation, part of The Condé Nast Press, was yet a further continuation and synthesis of Collins's ideology of art in dress. The goal of the book was to expound upon the ideas set forth in his articles for *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Modern Priscilla*. Thanks to Collins's contributions to these main stream publications he had a ready audience of built in readers for the book. These ideas were to help teach home dressmaking as it applied directly to their individual bodies and needs and how to eventually become their own designers.¹⁶⁹ In this work, Collins sought to cover the "artistic foundations of art in dress" and dressmaking theory and practice in depth.¹⁷⁰ Collins was cognizant of the changes taking place in the post war world. He saw that women were more active in both their careers and social lives. He knew that women looked for gowns that offered more comfort than the cumbersome gowns of the late Victorian period and early 1910s. Most importantly, Collins understood that class distinctions were becoming irrelevant.¹⁷¹ He believed that in the modern world, "clothes indicate[d] breeding, personality, and intelligent understanding of line and fabric..." not just financial and social success.¹⁷² *The ABC of Dress*, was meant as an educational tool as the articles in *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Modern Priscilla* had been before it. As Collins wrote: "[e]ducation in the principles of correct line and color, a study of detail and accessories, the application of artistic principles to daily life, are destroying the

¹⁶⁹ Harry Collins, *The ABC of Dress* (Greenwich, CT: The Conde Nast Press, 1923), XV.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., XV.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷² Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, 3.

former allegiance to Fashion's dictates."¹⁷³ In other words, once one has the knowledge of the subject they can make up their own minds as how to apply it and disregard the dictated rules of those of the fashion elites who created and disseminated fads. These were the ideas he hoped to pass along to the women of the United States.

The ABC of Dress was broken down into two sections. The first examined and explained the theory behind dressmaking and how a woman could decide what clothing options were best for her own body and personality. This section (part one) included a foreword, an introduction, and six chapters: proportional form, suitability of dress, types, dress versus line, the selection and treatment of materials, and color and texture. These chapter titles are straightforward and mostly covered how to individualize styles based upon elements such as body type and coloring and well as choosing what fabrics and cuts of clothing are appropriate for particular occasions. It is here in chapter two that Collins explained "Fashion does not follow any set laws. *There are principles of good taste*, but there are no real laws of fashion."¹⁷⁴ This statement was a summation of his ideology presented in both his articles for *The Ladies Home Journal*, *Modern Priscilla*, and his various writings for newspapers. Part two of Collins's *ABC of Dress* was entitled "ABC of Dressmaking" and it contained a brief statement, the "Fundamentals of Dressmaking," followed by seven chapters: the tools in your workshop, stitches and seams, making the lining, cutting material from patterns, putting the parts together—fitting—finishing, what to wear and when: a few don'ts of dress, and embroidery. Additionally, the second part of the book featured a conclusion on accessories for each type of woman and their

¹⁷³ Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, 107.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

particular types of clothing. In short, this section of the *ABC of Dress* teaches women of little to no knowledge of sewing or how to construct garments. Through descriptions, instructions, and sketches, the reader to learned to read patterns and sew almost anything. Additionally, the depth of knowledge provided by Collins could further novice sewers knowledge and help them learn more advanced techniques. With the combination of the two parts of the *ABC of Dress*, women could learn both how to dress in the American mode and how to create those very pieces.

Today very few copies of the *ABC of Dress* survive. One copy, now in the author's collection has stamped markings in the both the front and back covers reading: "Property of Domestic Art Dept." This information along with the basic knowledge of the book, as well as a quote of a 1928 *Los Angeles Times* article, "Stylist Come to Gown Films," that reads: "He [Collins] is the author of the 'A B C of Dress,' which has been used in high schools throughout the country" suggest that book was in fact used as a textbook for home economics courses.¹⁷⁵ The article in the *Los Angeles Times* went on to state: "[a]lthough this book was published five years ago, it is possible to take any one of the models shown and by a slight variation of length or other minor detail, transform it into the reigning mode. This expresses Harry Collins's idea of line and design."¹⁷⁶ By teaching his principals of dress at an early age to the young women of the United States, Collins was in essence attempting to spread the his philosophy at the most basic level

¹⁷⁵ Valerie Watrous, "Stylist Comes to Gown Films," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 25, 1928, B7.

¹⁷⁶ Watrous, "Stylist Comes to Gown," B7.

across the entirety of the country and therefore training young ladies to buy and wear American.

Expansion of a Belief

Although Collins was spending significant time designing for home sewers and attempting to teach the women of America how to dress their best, he had not given up his grand New York salon where he dressed the wealthiest women in the United States. The two dichotomous business models were both important to the spreading the name of Collins and his theories. With both his patterns and book he was able to reach the middle and lower classes, his work on the stage crossed from the middle to upper classes and his custom dressmaking salon catered to the wealthiest and most powerful in the nation. Therefore, the House of Collins was accessible to nearly every woman in the United States at the same time. It was because of the wealthy clients that Collins could afford to reach his less wealthy protégés.

Collins had successfully opened a much larger salon and workshop at Nine East Fifty-Seventh Street in 1918; however, by March of 1920 the house of Harry Collins had once again outgrown its location and needed a larger work and sales space.¹⁷⁷ Prior to 1920, Collins was the sole owner of Harry Collins, Inc., and had no need of capital from outside investors.¹⁷⁸ However, from about 1918 to 1920 his payroll for his custom dress making business had grown to nearly twenty thousand dollars a week. While business was perpetually expanding, he could not move into larger premises without the help of

¹⁷⁷ "Display Ad 120," *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 17, 1920, 16.

¹⁷⁸ Though as stated earlier, Mr. David May had invested some money years prior to this expansion.

outside investors.¹⁷⁹ Collins first received two investors, Tom May of the May Company and his friend Harry Goldman, a St. Louis cotton broker. Mr. May and Mr. Goldman each invested \$10,000. Yet, with the rapid growth of Collins's business more funds were needed to expand the company. The financial investment came from Mr. Mallinson, of Mallinson silks.¹⁸⁰

The House of Collins and Mallinson & Co. silks had enjoyed a working relationship since the last few years of WWI. In 1918, Mallinson expanded his successful line of fashion shows to include American designers who produced ready-to-wear garments. In November, models from Harry Collin's spring collection appeared in the Mallinson showrooms for four days.¹⁸¹ Critics at the time noted that this was "the first time that a fabric manufacturer has made such a practical use of his fabrics as to demonstrate them in ready models in advance design suggestions for an incoming season."¹⁸² While this showing was a success, Collins already had a working relationship, one that was even more public, as Collins and other stage designers often used Mallinson fabrics for their theater costumes. Mallinson took advantage of the designers who used their fabrics and used the actors and actresses dressed in Collins's garments in publicity materials.¹⁸³ At some point between 1918 and 1920, H.R. Mallinson approached Collins with a new synthetic fabric, their now famous Khaki-Kool (Figure 14). Khaki-Kool was a sports silk first introduced in 1915. According to the authors of *American Silk*,

¹⁷⁹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, 240.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, 244.

[l]abled samples in the Smithsonian collection show a thirty-six-inch-wide fabric, in plain weave with a fine warp yarn of filament silk, and a thicker spun silk weft of bundled fibers with very little twist, which gave the cloth body and a slightly rough surface without the high gloss of many silks.¹⁸⁴

Mallinson was interested in finding a larger market for his rough-surfaced material and offered Collins twenty five thousand dollars if he could help Mallinson so do.¹⁸⁵ Collins's idea was to use the material in a collection of hats. Once complete, he sent models to 'Breakers Beach' in Palm Beach, Florida in chiffon dresses and large hats made of pastel shades of Khaki-Kool.¹⁸⁶ Press reported on the hats, and must have stated their brilliance, because according to Collins, the millinery trade bought all the available stock of Khaki-Kool and Mallinson paid him the promised twenty five thousand dollars.¹⁸⁷ In addition to his use of Khaki-Kool, Collins and his designs were featured in an advertisement for Mallinson's fabric, Mikado Red (Figure 15).

¹⁸⁴ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, 208.

¹⁸⁵ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 14.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

March, 1 17

MALLINSON'S

Silks de Luxe

LIFE, gayety, sunshine—the very spirit of sport seems woven in Mallinson's Sport Silks de Luxe.

One glance at "Khaki-Kool," for instance, and you will understand why leading designers have used it in their creations of sport wear of all kinds,—suits, skirts, waists, hats, coats, and even for bags and parasols.

Mallinson's are the silks of inspiration. They inspire sport styles. Sport garments are made by, not merely of them. The originality of Mallinson's Silks imparts origination to the modiste. It imparts individuality and distinction to the wearer. When you wear Mallinson's Silks de Luxe, you do not look like every other woman;—every other woman wants to look like you. The stamp on the selvage marks the genuine.

At fine stores and in fine garments

H. R. MALLINSON & COMPANY

"THE NEW SILKS FIRST" PARIS

NEW YORK

Makers of Pussy Willow and Indestructible Voile

(All Trade Marks Reg. in U. S. Pat. Off.)

Costumes of "Khaki-Kool"

Figure 14: Mallinson's Khaki Kool Advertisement, *Vogue*, March 1, 1917, 17.

Two gowns, previously sold at PastPerfectVintage.com and now in private collections bear a striking resemblance to the figures in Mallinson's / Collins's Mikado

red advertisement (Figure 16 and 17).¹⁸⁸ While the dresses from PastPerfectVintage have a lower waist line than those in advertisement, the overall silhouette--including the long square train and draping shape-- clearly resemble the gowns in the advertisement. Though the advertisement is dated 1919, both dresses have been dated ca. 1923 by the seller, possibly explaining the subtle differences, including the dropped waist and art deco influenced appliques. The gowns appear to have been made of silk velvet, like many other Collins gowns. Additionally, both dresses feature beaded elements applied at the waist with hanging strands of beads, a design element found on multiple Collins gowns and seen in various patterns and sketches. While the interior of the gowns have not been studied, nor have the gowns been examined in detail, images provided from the seller show that at least one of the two dresses (the red one) was a custom made dress since it features Collins's double tag system, which included his normal label as well as a label of white on white noting the dress was an "original made" (Figure 18). Though no other dresses in this style survive, their label as well as clear resemblance to advertised Collins dresses leaves no question of their Collins provenance.

¹⁸⁸ Due to their previous sale, lack of available information, and inability to be examined by the author, these gowns can only be discussed in the simplest of terms. These gowns were previously featured on Pastperfectvintage.com's Gallery of Past Treasures (<http://pastperfectvintage.com/thepasttreasures.htm>), but are no longer featured on the website.

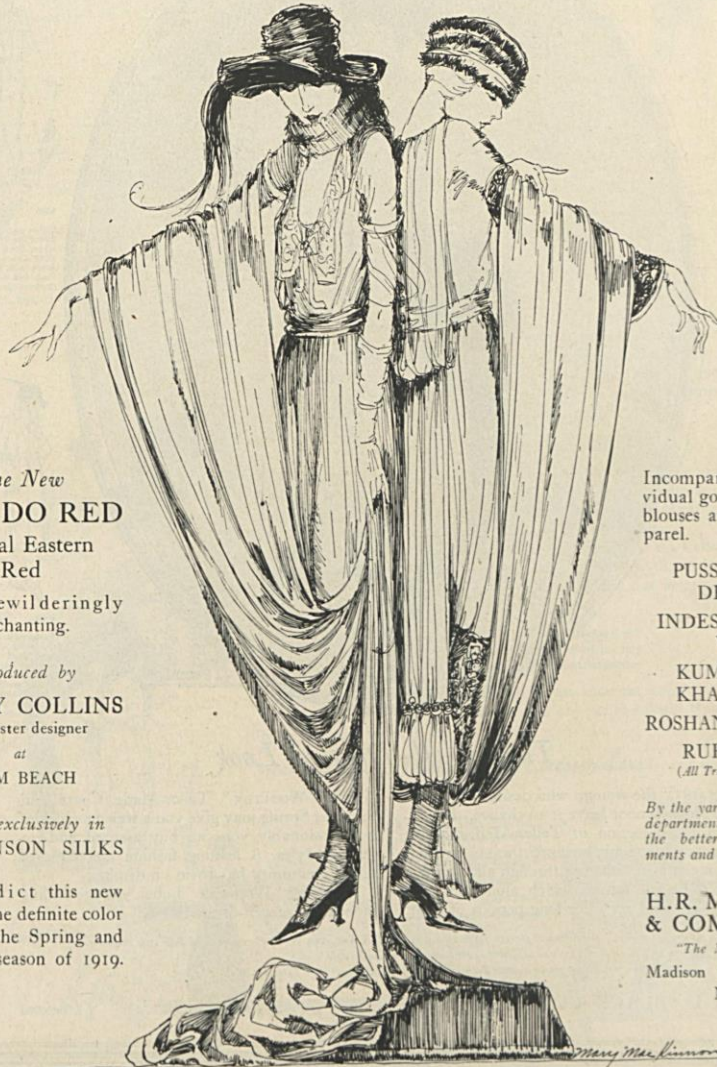
April 1

19

THE · EASY · GRACE · OF · LOVELY · SILKS

The slender silhouette of the hour is a coveted achievement in these Silks—supple in texture—exclusive and distinctive in weave—glorious in color—daringly different in design—peerless in quality.

MALLINSON'S
Silks de Luxe



The New
MIKADO RED
A Real Eastern
Red
subtle, bewilderingly
lovely, enchanting.

Introduced by
HARRY COLLINS
the master designer
at
PALM BEACH

Shown exclusively in
MALLINSON SILKS

We predict this new
shade as the definite color
note for the Spring and
Summer season of 1919.

Incomparable for indi-
vidual gowns, suits, skirts,
blouses and out-door ap-
parel.

PUSSY WILLOW
DEW-KIST
INDESTRUCTIBLE
VOILE
KUMSI-KUMSA
KHAKI - KOOL
ROSHANARA CREPE
RUFF-A-NUFF
(All Trade Mark Names)

*By the yard in all leading silk
departments—In apparel at
the better garment depart-
ments and class shops.*

**H.R. MALLINSON
& COMPANY, Inc.**
"The New Silks First"
Madison Ave.—31st Street
New York

Figure 15: Mallinson Advertisement featuring Collins gowns. "The Easy Grace of Lovely Silks," *Vogue*, April 1, 1919, 19.



Figure 16: “Woman’s Dress,” Harry Collins, c. 1923, sold by PastPerfect Vintage, now in unknown private collection. Image courtesy of PastPerfect Vintage.



Figure 17: “Woman’s Dress,” Harry Collins, c. 1923, sold by PastPerfect Vintage, now in unknown private collection. Image courtesy of PastPerfect Vintage.



Figure 18: White on white “Original Model” label from red Collins dress, c. 1923, sold by PastPerfect Vintage, now in unknown private collection. Image courtesy of PastPerfect Vintage.

It was sometime after Collins and Mallinson began working more closely with one another in 1920 that the House of Collins needed to move to larger premises to accommodate the rapid expansion of their business. Harry Collins purchased and moved the House of Collins into the entire three-story building at the northwest corner of Park Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street.¹⁸⁹ In Collins’s words, “Mr. Mallinson was anxious for a closer association...” and invested one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars into Harry Collins, Inc. to aid with expansion.¹⁹⁰ In turn, this gave Mallinson a seventeen and a half percent interest in the company which Collins had built and until that moment owned solely.¹⁹¹ Collins would go on to write in his unpublished autobiography: “I welcomed Mr. Mallinson—because he was a smart merchant and I felt it was an association that would prove mutually beneficial—but future events proved it was to be my Swan Song.”¹⁹² Though Collins may later have rued his choice, thanks to the investment of H.R. Mallinson The House of Collins moved to Forty-Nine East Fifty-Seventh Street, known as Park and Fifty-Seventh in 1920. Fond of the old building at

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁹⁰ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 15.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.; H.R. Mallinson died unexpectedly in 1931, five years later the company filed for bankruptcy (Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs*, 192, 194)

Nine East Fifty-Seventh, and with enough business to keep two stores in operation, Harry Collins, Inc. kept the building and created a specialized salon for young ladies. The salon was renamed—Six to Sixteen. It was at this shop that Harry Collins dressed some of the wealthiest and best known ladies of the early twentieth century. According to Collins Consuelo and Muriel Vanderbilt, Bernice Chrysler (later Mrs. Edgar Garbish) and Pat Mallinson (later Mrs. N. Cushing Olmsted), and many other prominent debutants were all dressed at one point or another at Six to Sixteen.¹⁹³

To decorate the new grand salon at Park and Fifty-Seventh, Collins hired famous French artist Caro Delvaille to decorate the first and second floor salons.¹⁹⁴ In Collins's own words, "[m]y only instructions [for Delvaille] were that the decorations express taste worthy of a first house whose function was to dress ladies of wealth and social position, and that it was not to frighten those who wished to buy and had not yet reached the top drawer."¹⁹⁵ Collins believed that Delvaille would be able to give the House "a mixture of aristocracy and democracy in feeling that would be worthy..." of both the house's clothing and customers, which was so important to Collins.¹⁹⁶ Though Collins had always denounced French design, he must have felt confident that with his supervision Delvaille could help him create a grand French salon, modernized and in the American style.

¹⁹³ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 13.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Collins was as discerning in the decoration of his salon as he was in all aspects of his career and brand. In his unpublished autobiography, Collins described the interior of his salon at Park Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street in detail.

The dress salon on the second floor was designed as a great oval—from each end of this oval, models would walk the full length of the room for inspection by our customers. At one end a marble and bronze staircase led to the main floor. The dress salon in pale coral—the millinery on the first floor in mauve to eggplant shades—the walls of shot taffeta hanging from the ceiling and garland of grapes, leaves for a halaver. Carpets were especially woven by Sloane—tables of Labatte glass from France.¹⁹⁷

When Delvaille proposed that he paint nude female figures painted on the walls, Collins was adamant that if they were to be painted that women's' vanities be played up to and that the figures be flattering and above all not embarrassing. Eventually Delvaille, upset that Collins disapproved of his nude figure ideas, painted hydrangeas on canvas and attached them to the walls.¹⁹⁸ The effect of this shop would have been grand. According to Collins, Arthur Brisbane, editor of the *New York Times*, thought the salon to be too elegant and grand.¹⁹⁹ Brisbane warned Collins that "...customers would hesitate to walk through this main salon unless they were beautifully dressed. And surely no woman wants to go shopping always looking her best."²⁰⁰

On the day of the opening the marble steps for the grand staircase were not yet complete, so the space was filled with hundreds of planted daisies.²⁰¹ It was on this day, the opening of the salon at Park and Fifty-Seventh Street on March 18, 1920, that Harry

¹⁹⁷ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 17.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Collins was approached by Mr. Edward Beale McLean, husband of Evalyn Walsh McLean (owner of the Hope Diamond), “to dress the future First Lady”—Florence Harding.²⁰² Collins was very excited for the opportunity. McLean told him that he would show Mrs. Harding ideas for “a White House trousseau” at the Ritz Carlton on the following Thursday.²⁰³ Much to his surprise, when Collins arrived to present his sketches to Mrs. Harding, he discovered “all the important Coutouriers of New York” waiting to present their sketches to the future First Lady.²⁰⁴ His pride wounded, Collins was about to leave, but relented when asked to stay. Eventually, Collins met with Mrs. Harding.²⁰⁵ In his own words,

Mrs. Harding, who greeted me kindly and said, “I know your work because I read the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and I admire your sketches and ideas of dress...” I went into the room without interest or enthusiasm, but was won over by these few words of greeting—and left with ideas suggested by Mrs. Harding for clothes that would, in a great measure, complete her wardrobe.²⁰⁶

From that first meeting until her untimely death in 1923, Collins designed various garments for Mrs. Florence Harding and helped to transform her public persona from a dowdy older woman to a fashion icon.

There are mixed accounts as to what Mrs. Harding wore to President Harding’s inauguration. While photographs survive, the First Ladies’ dress is almost entirely covered by her coat. Furthermore, *The American Cloak and Suite Review* published an article in the February 1921 issue that claimed Hickson, a fellow New York fashion house, was chosen to design the gown, wrap, and hat for the Presidential inauguration to

²⁰² “Display Ad 120,” 16; Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 18..

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 19.

take place on March 4, 1921.²⁰⁷ This counters Collins's claim, made in both his unpublished autobiography and his book *The A B C of Dress*, that he designed Mrs. Harding's inaugural gown.²⁰⁸ Collins related that he had personally asked which of the gowns he designed would be worn at the inauguration ceremony and which would be worn for the ball. After being told, he then offered the information to the press for a fee. Fifty-five papers paid for the story and sketches of the gown designs.²⁰⁹ A week before the inauguration was to take place, a trade paper interviewed Mrs. Harding and she stated she had multiple choices and the weather would ultimately affect her decision. She mentioned two dresses, one grey and one navy blue. Collins quickly realized that he had not designed a grey dress for the future First Lady. If Mrs. Harding chose the grey dress, the story he had sold to over fifty newspapers across the United States would be incorrect. Collins decided to contact a famous astrologer by the name of Evangeline Adams to read Mrs. Harding's horoscope and to find out if her lucky color was blue or grey.²¹⁰ Mrs. Adams told Collins that both colors could be lucky for Mrs. Harding. Collins chose to phone Mrs. McLain and tell her that Mrs. Adams said blue was the future First Lady's lucky color.²¹¹ According to Collins, he then went even further and asked for permission to use the phrase *Harding Blue*—a phrase which would be associated with the President and First Lady for years to come.²¹²

²⁰⁷ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, February 1921, 156.

²⁰⁸ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 20; Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, n.p.

²⁰⁹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 19.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹² *Ibid.*

Interestingly, despite his claim, the phrase “Harding Blue” was not coined by Collins. In fact, The Shepard Stores advertised “The First Showing of: Florence Harding Lavender, Marion Blue, Harding Blue, and Presidential Grey” in the *Boston Daily Globe* on February 3, 1921.²¹³ The advertisement claimed that “The Spring Shades Selected This Week in New York By Mrs. Warren Gamaliel Harding” were from the actual silk that she chose her color palette.²¹⁴ On page 156 of the February 1921 edition of *The American Cloak and Suite Review*, discusses “Harding Blue” as a Mallinson & Co. silk, of totally new design, handpicked by Mrs. Harding. They announced that the silk would be kept secret until inauguration day and would then appear for sale in stores across the United States.²¹⁵ It was in this same article that it was announced Harry Collins, Hickson, and Joseph and Elise, Ltd. all presented Mrs. Harding with designs and that she chose Hickson—which of course turned out to be incorrect.²¹⁶

The gown designed by Harry Collins was chosen and even featured prominently in his 1923 book, *The A B C of Dress* (Figure 19).²¹⁷ As Collins wrote in his author’s note in *The A B C of Dress*:

At the risk of being accused of a lack of modesty, the author begs to direct the reader’s attention to page vi on which is pictured the dress made for Mrs. Warren G. Harding and worn by her at the Inauguration on March 4, 1921.

Remarkable as it may seem, this is the first dress worn by any “Mistress of the White House” that shows the long waist line’ and though the author hesitates to prophesy, he believes that this mode will outlast all fads of fashion, and the dress be as wearable and in as good style at the next inauguration as at the last, since it is conceived on the principle of

²¹³ "Display Ad 15," *Boston Daily Globe* (Boston, MA), February 3, 1921, 4.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, February 1921, 156.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, VI.

correct line. The conception of this dress, be it said, was facilitated for the designer by Mrs. Harding's suggestions as to what was becoming to her. So strongly was the American Press influenced by the vogue of American Dress as sponsored by Mrs. Harding, that request was made for an article on the subject—an article which Mrs. Harding graciously gave the author of the book permission to publish..." (Figure 20)²¹⁸

As Collins wrote when looking past to the day Mrs. Harding wore his first design for her.

[t]he fates were kind—the day [inauguration day] was fair and the blue dress was worn. And the papers told the story about Mrs. Harding's clothes, as written in the release. This was my beginning of a very pleasant period. I became the White House dressmaker and I felt very important to have the official car meet me in my many trips to the White House.²¹⁹

Harry Collins and his fashion house would go on to greatly impact the fashion of Florence Harding as she executed her role in the White House and therefore have greater influence in the American fashion industry as well. Florence Harding was the quintessential American woman for Collins. She was a representation of the everyday woman, the elite woman, and the celebrity all at once. Thus, while associated with one significant woman, the two divergent parts of his career were united. Therefore, it cannot be a coincidence that while Mrs. Harding's favored him as her designer, Collins's career reached one of its highpoints.

²¹⁸ Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, n.p. This is in the author's note which is not paginated.

²¹⁹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 20.



Figure 19: Florence Harding Inaugural Gown Design, Harry Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, Greenwich, CT: The Condé Nast Press, 1923, n.p.

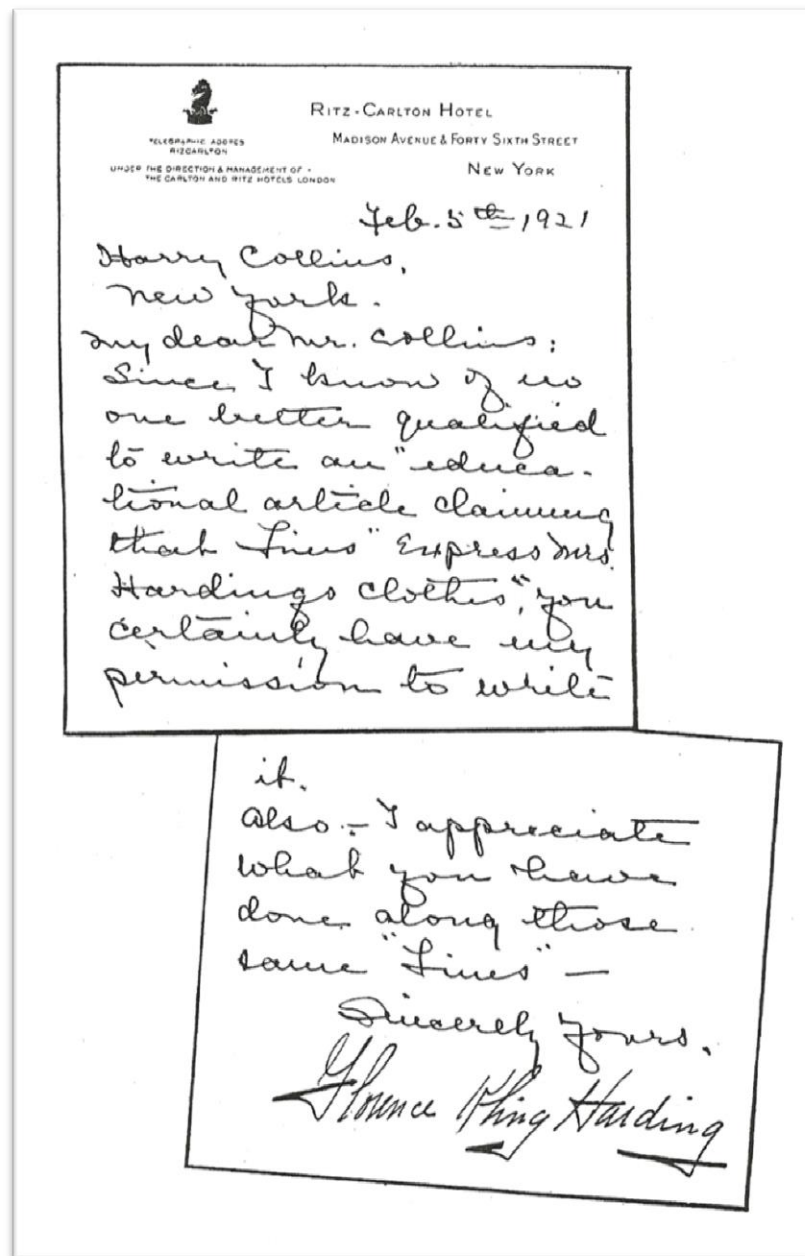


Figure 20: Copy of letter from Florence Harding to Harry Collins regarding use of Inaugural Gown Design, Harry Collins, *The ABC of Dress*, Greenwich, CT: The Condé Nast Press, 1923, n.p.

While Harry Collins cannot be given the entire credit for the creation for Florence Harding's public appearance as First Lady, he was instrumental in her transformation

from a dowdy older woman from the Midwest to a Washington socialite and beloved First Lady. With the help of her close friend, Evalyn Walsh McLean, Collins began a complete overhaul of the First Lady's look.²²⁰ Firstly, they had Mrs. Harding comb her hair in a different manner.²²¹ This was probably in accordance with a younger and more modern look that Collins hoped to achieve—as seen with the dropped waist introduced into the First Ladies wardrobe.²²² Additionally, Collins tried to get Mrs. Harding to stop wearing the black ribbon choker, or dog collar as it was known as, that was her signature look.²²³ However, he was unsuccessful and her black dog collar became so well known it was given the name the “flossie cling.” The flossie cling became a fashion fad. It was worn by everyone from women in their fifties and sixties to the burgeoning group of young flappers.²²⁴ While Collins could not and did not want to take credit for the dog collar he did take credit for Mrs. Harding's signature length of dress. In a *New York Times* article “Sees Longer Skirt, But Not Too Long” published on August 9, 1921, Harry Collins, credited as “[d]esigner for Mrs. Harding,” stated that the proper length of dresses was eight and a half inches from the ground.²²⁵ This choice of length suited Mrs. Harding, and she was often given credit for it; although who actually choice is length

²²⁰ While there is no record of Mrs. McLean being a customer of Collins, due to her social standing, proximity to Mrs. Harding, and the fact that Mr. McLean was the one to ask Collins to design for Mrs. Harding, one can assume that she too was a patron of the House of Harry Collins.

²²¹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 20.

²²² Florence Harding was the first First Lady to wear the dropped waist style of clothing.

²²³ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 20.

²²⁴ Bill Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book: The Stories of the Women of the White House from Martha Washington to Laura Bush* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 2005), The name for the flossie cling was a play on words. Flossie was Florence's childhood nickname and cling represented how it clung onto ones' neck but also was a play on Florence's maiden name, Kling,

which she never gave up after her marriage to Warren, using it as a middle name.

²²⁵ “See Longer Skirt,” 7.

remains a mystery.²²⁶ This length of dress fits perfectly with the Collins's dress, designed for Florence Harding in the collection of the National Museum of American History (NMAH) in Washington, DC (see Figure 1).

The Collins dress at NMAH is a stunning example of high end custom work from the House of Collins. The dress appears to be made of many layers of heavily beaded tulle with velvet, silk chiffon, and lame.²²⁷ The gown features a deep, wide, square neckline with a large modesty panel. From the base of the neckline up, the body of the dress looks as though it made of a fine yellow or cream net with gold, metallic, lame like, floral elements attached to the netting which covers the shoulders and sleeves which end, slightly trumpeted just above the elbow. Below the bottom of the neckline, the gown fits slimly against the body until it begins to widen and loosen at the natural waist through the use of draped and wrapped fabrics. Once again, the fabrics which are draped and wrapped to create the bottom of the gown appear to consist of cream or yellow heavily beaded tulle and velvet. The beading of small pearlescent bugle and seed beads creates overlapping and intricate geometric designs of wide bands and rounded forms. The fabric is draped to create a form with loose folds and short gathers on either side. Wrapped below the neckline from right to left and moving behind the dress is a thin piece of tulle that looks as though it creates part of a square train visible from a forward view of the dress. Below the train tulle is what appears to be a wide band of light blue velvet trimmed with metallic sequins or beads in a floral form. This velvet wraps under the

²²⁶ Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book*, 444.

²²⁷ Though the author has seen the dress displayed in a past exhibition, she was unable to study the gown in detail and its files.

tulle, moving left to right across the front of the gown. A lower square train section is visible from the front of the dress. This section of the train, although of unknown construction looks to be highly beaded. The gown more than likely rose six to eight inches above the ankle and could have been made anywhere between 1921 and 1923.²²⁸ No construction methods have been closely examined by the author but may be similar to other Collins creations. Furthermore, while the status of labels in the dress is unknown, the gown is known to be labeled by Collins.

Though the dress was not able to be further studied, the exterior elements of the gown share similarities to other Collins gowns. These similarities lie in materials used, style, and hip ornamentation. Additionally, this particular gown, owned by Florence Harding, shows the caliber of work Collins created for his beloved First Lady. While there are no other known surviving Collins designed gowns or dresses for Mrs. Harding for comparison, once can assume that this piece, with its level of ornamentation and quality of materials was a particularly fine custom creation. It is difficult to find clothing that belonged to Mrs. Harding as she gave much away upon her husband's death and near the time of her passing.²²⁹

A rare surviving hat of the Florence Harding wardrobe is now in the collection of the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) (Figure 21). The green velvet hat, made by the House of Collins, has a wide brim with one side that curls up more than the other. Additionally the velvet on the top of the crown folded at angle for added ornamentation. The velvet

²²⁸ Cynthia William, "COLLINS GOWN-NMAH," e-mail message to Nora Carleson, November 1, 2013.

²²⁹ Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book*, 447

has an almost changeable effect as the green velvet is on top of a brown backing. Wrapped around the crown of the hat are two large, brown ostrich feathers. The ends of the quills are sewn at a diagonal over each other at the front of the hat. The interior is covered in a brown silk, now massively shattered. In the center of the top of the hat's interior is a Harry Collins label; approximately 2" x 3" (Figure 22). The label is different from every other Collins label in the fact that instead of being a white label with gold thread, the label is a slightly metallic brown silk with light blue thread. Since Collins introduced his millinery department around 1920, it makes perfect sense that Mrs. Harding wore his newest designs, including hats. Furthermore, the Collins hat is very similar in style to other hats known to be worn by Mrs. Harding both in the collection of the OHS and as seen in period photographs.



Figure 21: "Hat," Harry Collins, 1920-1924, accession #H55485, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH. Photograph by Nora Carleson. Permission from Ohio Historical Society.



Figure 22: Interior label of “Hat,” Harry Collins, 1920-1924, accession #H55485, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH. Photograph by Nora Carleson. Permission from Ohio Historical Society.

Florence Harding, though in her later years as First Lady, was a woman ahead of her time. Not only was Harding the first woman to be able to vote for her husband in the Presidential election, she was also responsible for bringing the first radio to the White House, and was the first to use Hollywood movie stars to endorse her husband for President.²³⁰ Above all she was a kind and gracious woman who was extremely loyal to those for whom she cared. Her relationship with Collins appears to have been one of trust and friendship, moving beyond the designer and client relationship. According to Collins, one day, presumably during a fitting, Mrs. Harding asked to know the names of Collins’s Washington, DC clients. He responded with a series of well-known names. Even so, Mrs. Harding proposed that she would hold a luncheon and invite woman who

²³⁰ Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book*, 444.

she thought would be good customers to Collins. In Collins's remembrance: "[s]he kept her word and our business became so important in Washington that we looked for quarters to open a branch."²³¹ Mrs. Harding and Collins shared many connections. First and foremost were their philanthropic ventures. Both Collins and Florence supported war relief for blind veterans. Moreover, the First Lady and her favorite designer were linked through *The Ladies Home Journal*. For, without Collins's articles in the magazine and Mrs. Harding's preference for the magazine he may have never gotten the job as designer to the First Lady. Later, a proponent of both his fashion and his beliefs, Mrs. Harding would endorse not only the House of Collins but the *ABC of Dress*. Collins in turn was able to further his popularity for both custom and mass market designs by flaunting his connection to the most American woman in the world, the First Lady of the United States and her choice of his all-American clothing. Therefore, the importance of Mrs. Harding's choice of Collins as her favorite designer cannot be overstated when examining the career of Harry Collins and its significance to American dress.

The Harding administration echoed the changing times; and Florence along with her husband was quickly embedded in scandal. Looking back Collins noted: "I noticed as time went on that her stubborn loyalty to her friends manifested itself in many ways and I, for one, was always sorry that this nice lady had to wade through the scandal of the Harding administration."²³²

²³¹ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 21.

²³² Ibid.

Clothing from the House of Collins

The interwar era constituted the most prolific of Collins's career and the majority of Collins's pieces that survive today are from this period. It was in these years that Collins opened his store in Palm Beach in 1920 (Figure 23), began selling gowns abroad at Selfridges of London, opened his Los Angeles salon, and even opened a buying office in Paris to obtain furs and fabrics.²³³ The opening of the House of Collins in Palm Beach was a significant success, as at the time it was the largest space devoted to dress in the city.²³⁴ Additionally, the House Collins was the first to bring American couture to Cuba in 1920, taking business away from the Parisian fashion industry that previously had a monopoly on fashions in South America.²³⁵ As described in the February 1920 issue of *American and Cloak and Suit Review*,

...news of an immensely successful opening in Havana, that tropical fairy-land, of a Collins showing of gowns, cloaks, suits, hats and fine details of dress which literally makes the House of Collins the first to introduce the American Couture to the women of the Latin race of Cuba and South America.²³⁶

In short, between 1918 and 1930, the House of Collins was not only located cross country but was represented overseas as well.

²³³"Harry Collins the Pioneer of a Great Movement: An Effort at last Which Links the South American Demand with North American Supply of Modish Dress," *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, February 1920, 165; "Fall Modes in Dresses Ready for Wear," *Vogue*, September 15, 1922,2;Olive Gray, "Exclusive Shop Opens for Women: Harry Collins, New York Designer Makes Debut in Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), April 13, 1930, B25; Collins, *Autobiographical writings part two*, 15.

²³⁴ "Harry Collins Pioneer of a Great Movement," 165.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.



Figure 23: The House of Collins Palm Beach Shop from "Harry Collins the Pioneer of a Great Movement: An Effort at last Which Links the South American Demand with North American Supply of Modish Dress." *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, February 1920, 165.

Despite Collins's strong national presence and his later global reach, today the majority of Collins's surviving works are located in the Midwest. This could be explained by several aspects of Collins's career, first and foremost, Collins's close association with Florence Harding, a major public figure in Ohio and an even more beloved figure in the state upon her return from the White House. Harding's patronage forever linked the name of Collins with Ohio. Though Mrs. Harding gave away the majority of her clothing away upon the death of her husband, a few pieces survive, as seen with the green hat by Collins, now in the collection of the OHS in Columbus, OH. However, four other pieces (two gowns, a headdress, and a shawl) that did not belong to Mrs. Harding remain in Ohio. Since Collins's friend, Mr. David May, of the May

Company also hailed from Ohio, this could also be another reason that the largest amount of surviving clothing can be found in the Buckeye state.

One gown of black Chantilly lace over cream colored satin crepe and chiffon, adorned with jet beading is in the collection of the OHS (Figure 24). According to the files of the OHS,

Mrs. Frederick Shedd (Agnes Jeffrey Shedd) of Columbus, Ohio, donated this dress in 1956. The dress belonged to the donor and was made from a lace shawl that belonged to the donor's mother-in-law, Mrs. Edmund E. Shedd. The donor noted that the dressmaker, Harry Collins, 'didn't want to cut [the lace shawl] so was hard to drape.'²³⁷

The date on the piece is 1925; however, through careful examination, one can see that the dress has been altered significantly. Furthermore, the construction of the dress, as well as the overall silhouette and form, including a natural waist and the drape of the gown, suggest that the piece was actually made in the late 1910s, probably between 1917 and 1919. The interior construction is similar to other dresses dated to this time period and the style of the dress is far more concurrent with dresses of that period than a 1925 style.²³⁸ Furthermore, the hooks and eyes used on the dress are the same as those used on Collins pieces from 1917-1919 in the collection of Meadow Brook Hall (Figures 25-26).

²³⁷ Ohio Historical Society Curatorial File, Dress. Collins, Harry. (manufacturer) circa 1925, H 43278

²³⁸ Collins adopted the lowered waist earlier than many, once again reinforcing that a 1925 creation would not feature a natural waist line.



Figure 24: "Dress," Harry Collins (manufacturer), ca. 1925, accession # H43278, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH. Photograph by Nora Carleson. Permissions courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society.



Figure 25: Detail of hooks. “Dress,” Harry Collins (manufacturer), ca. 1925, accession # H43278, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH. Photograph by Nora Carleson.
Permissions courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society.



Figure 26: Detail of hooks. “Lavender silk velvet evening gown with mink trim,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession #01_01_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI.
Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.

One of the most significant changes to the dress at the OHS is a shortened hem (Figure 27). This most likely accounts for the dating; the length of the altered hem would be accurate for a modest dress in 1925. Further adding to the modifications of the dress are a missing petersham and the letting out and re-stitching of seems (Figure 28). The label has also been kept, but moved and re-attached to a strange location in the interior back of the dress. Though the piece has no custom label remaining, with the alterations that took place and the presumed date of the piece 1917-1919, as well as the quality of design and materials and the donor information, this would have been a custom gown. Additionally, the donation of another dress by Collins to the OHS, a “Gown, chiffon shades of brown over copper colored stain, and decorated with black fur dots. Designed by Harry Collins as planned by Mrs. Shedd to represent the colors of fall,” now lost, further speaks to the custom nature of Mrs. Shedd’s Collins’s creations.²³⁹

The 1925 date of the dress could speak to the time when the modification took place and the dress was last worn. As stated earlier, a modest dress, perhaps for an older woman in the mid-1920s may not feature the prominent styles of the day. Furthermore, if Mrs. Shedd ascribed to Collins’s theories on dress, in addition to purchasing his lovely gowns, she may have chosen to buy a dress she could alter throughout the years slightly and continue to wear. She would not have been the first to prescribe to Collins’s theories since Mrs. Wilson did so with her 1917 Collins, which she too continued to wear in the 1920s.

²³⁹ Ohio Historical Society Curatorial File, Dress. Collins, Harry. (manufacturer) circa 1925, H 43278



Figure 27: Detail of altered hem. “Dress,” Harry Collins (manufacturer), ca. 1925, accession # H43278, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH. Photograph by Nora Carleson. Permissions courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society.



Figure 28: Detail of ripped stitches and re-sewn construction. “Dress,” Harry Collins (manufacturer), ca. 1925, accession # H43278, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH. Photograph by Nora Carleson. Permissions courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society.

Collins's theories on dress, specifically the wearing of a gown for multiple seasons, could therefore account for other pieces so clearly altered that survive today. Collins creation of simple, elegant, and almost timeless clothes allowed for his styles to be adapted, reworked, and re-worn giving them longer lifespans. Thus, Collins pieces may not survive in the same number or in their original configuration as other designers' fashions. One dress that appears to have been significantly altered is a tangerine velvet gown sold on Antiquedress.com (Figure 29).²⁴⁰ The dress, dated c. 1919 is more than likely from 1915 to 1918.²⁴¹ While the dress that remains is a lovely gown of bright tangerine silk velvet with gold lame lace over a silk lining on the bust, it seems oddly off in a minor way. The measurements given by the seller are: 33/34" bust, 25" waist, 53" long from shoulder to hem.²⁴² Depending on the height of the woman wearing the gown, the hem would fall somewhere between low to mid-calf. This information along with the bare shoulders that look as if they once were covered with gold lace and what looks like a wide fold to create a higher hem suggest that alterations have taken place. Moreover, by 1919 Collins had already begun creating a looser bodice that would transition into the dropped waist shortly thereafter. The bodice of the dress from Antiquevintage is both natural, if not a bit high, and tight. However, there are always exceptions to the rule; and without a provenance for the dress nor personal examination, accurate dating and an examination of construction methods cannot be given. Nor can one tell if the gown was a

²⁴⁰ This dress has been sold to a private collector and therefore has not been seen and handled by the author. Visual analysis has had to take place by pictures provide courtesy of Antiquedress.com.

²⁴¹ "Antique Vintage Dress Gallery: Item #4115," AntiqueDress.com, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.antiquedress.com/item4115.htm>

²⁴² Ibid.

custom creation or a semi-fitted look.²⁴³ What can be said of the dress, which is labeled as a Harry Collins, is that there are clear similarities to the outward appearance of other gowns, including the Florence Harding gown owned by NMAH. Sheer fabrics are layered over silk, specifically a gold lame lace and fabric is gathered at the hips.



Figure 29: “Evening Dress,” Harry Collins, c. 1919, sold by AntiqueDress.com, now in unknown private collection. Image courtesy of AntiqueDress.com.

²⁴³ Because of the fitted bodice one could presume the dress was a custom look, but without an examination of construction methods and the search for the typical double label, a standard Harry Collins label and a “original made” white label, it is unclear what type of dress this piece is.

A favorite technique of the House of Collins, gathering, draping, and beading at the hip or hips can be found on dresses from the early teens to mid-1920s. This typical hip adornment is present on another surviving piece currently in Ohio as well as in pattern sketches and advertisements. A 1924 wedding dress owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS) beautifully demonstrates the use of earlier Collins techniques in mid-1920s gown (Figure 30). The wedding dress was donated to WRHS in 2003 and originally belonged to Florence Reid Patton (1895-1983), the donor's mother-in-law.²⁴⁴ The dress was donated along with a matching shawl and a wedding headdress in an original Harry Collins box. The box no longer survives but was described as "Box (tattered) of yellow, green and blue 'New York/New York/Harry Collins/Art in Dress/Gowns/Millinery.'"²⁴⁵ The dress and accompanying pieces were worn by Mrs. Florence Reid Patton at her wedding to Dr. Edward Charles Patton on June 11, 1924. Dr. Patton died less than one year later and Mrs. Patton presumably then kept the pieces in their original box for sentimental value. The WRHS catalog description reads:

Wedding gown: ivory silk satin. Gown: sleeveless, dropped waist, unfitted bodice with bateau neckline and left shoulder hook-and-thread loop closure. Front and back neckline and bodice sides beaded with white and silver-tone glass seed beads and clear pastes applied with metal prongs. Open sides overlap slightly at waist, revealing under bodice with camisole neckline, .5" wide shoulder straps, and right-side front concealed snap closure. Ankle-length wrap skirt drapes to right side front with smocking at right hip and wide sash extending around back of skirt. Left side hook-and-eye closure concealed by large smocked bow with wide draped and weighted and reaching eight inches above him. Train: oblong rectangle of self fabric in two layers.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Western Reserve Historical Society Curatorial File Gown, Wedding. Harry Collins. (maker) 1924, silk, glass, metal, beads, pastes, and satin weave, embroidery. 2004.27.1. Gift of Phyllis Patton Ekelman.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

The gown, in remarkable condition, features the standard Harry Collins label and lacks an original made tag. Though this gown is the latest surviving piece (1924), it seems unlikely that Collins would have stopped his double tag system for custom made clothing. Furthermore, by 1924 Collins semi-fitted department was well secured and highly advertised. With these two pieces of evidence along with the restrained ornamentation, leads one to believe that this dress was more than likely a semi-fitted garment. However, Collins's beliefs on bridal fashion had been shown along pattern designs in the May 1920 issue of *The Ladies' Home Journal*. Simply put, Collins remarked, "[t]o me, it is decidedly poor taste to have excessive decoration in a wedding dress. The event is too momentous, the emotions too deep, for anything but the simplest of dresses—simple as the strong and beautiful words of the ceremony."²⁴⁷ While no other Collins bridal dresses are known to survive, it is hard to tell what Collins truly meant by simplicity in association with a wedding dress. Yet, the lack of ornament found on Mrs. Patton's dress appears to follow Collins's beliefs. Nonetheless, while Mrs. Patton's husband was a doctor and she had attended college, she may not have been able to afford a custom gown; instead choosing a ready-made option costing somewhere between \$85 and \$175 instead of the base price of around \$350. Interestingly, the hooks and eyes are different than those previously used on dresses from the 1910s and weights attached to the dress are not individually covered with fabric and then attached to the dress as with known custom made pieces (Figures 31 and 32). Instead the weights on the wedding gown are covered in a corner and covered by fabric .

²⁴⁷ Harry Collins, "Designs by Harry Collins," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1920, 49.



Figure 30: "Gown, Wedding," Harry Collins, 1924, accession # 2004.27.1, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Photograph taken by Nora Carleson. Permissions from Western Reserve Historical Society.



Figure 31: Individually covered dress weights. “Lavender silk velvet evening gown with mink trim,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession #01_01_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.



Figure 32: Covered dress weights. “Gown, Wedding,” Harry Collins, 1924, accession # 2004.27.1, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Photograph taken by Nora Carleson. Permissions from Western Reserve Historical Society.

The headdress worn with the wedding dress is attributed to Collins (Figure 33). The headdress is made of a half crown of handmade ivory floral lace, widest at the center front attached to a thin, round, metal circlet. The top edge is outlined with wax orange blossom buds. At either end are wax orange blossoms clusters and leaves. The back half of the circlet has a train of over 100 inches of ivory tulle sewn onto it, with sections gathered at the sides behind the orange blossom clusters. While there can be no definitive attribution, the headdresses connection to the wedding dress and the fact that by 1924 Collins was producing millinery products lead to a very likely attribution. Furthermore, the headdress is strikingly similar to a sketch of a wedding headdress in *The Ladies Home Journal* (Figure 34).²⁴⁸ Additionally, the shawl for the wedding gown, made of the same material as the dress, appears to have once had a label, now removed (Figure 35). This shawl also is very likely a Collins piece.

Other pieces by Collins survive outside of Ohio. The collection of Meadow Brook Hall (MBH) in Rochester, MI, as previously mentioned boasts five Collins originals. In addition to the evening dress from 1917, Mrs. Wilson's home retains two 1919 evening dresses, a 1919 dinner dress, and a 1919 day dress. These pieces feature many of the same construction and design elements as discussed with the other dresses; however, the level of design detail and craftsmanship in these pieces is superb. The dresses feature a clear provenance; with one of the evening dresses having a dated tag with model and room numbers still visible. Featuring the best documentation of any

²⁴⁸ Collins, "Designs by Harry Collins," May 1920, 49.

surviving Collins's gowns, the examples in the collection of Meadow Brook Hall (MBH) are important keys in understanding the work of Harry Collins and the House of Collins.



Figure 33: "Headdress, Wedding," Attributed to Harry Collins, 1924, accession # 2004.27.2, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Photograph taken by Nora Carleson. Permissions from Western Reserve Historical Society.

DESIGNS BY HARRY COLLINS



TO ME, it is decidedly poor taste to have excessive decoration in a wedding dress.

The event is too momentous, the emotions too deep, for anything but the simplest of dresses—simple as the strong and beautiful words of the ceremony. Therefore the dress in my sketch follows a natural grace, a simple suavity, mirrored in the material and fortified in the lines.

Nothing exaggerated, nothing pretentious, yet how majestically does the tulle train "lengthen the line," and how the abundance and richness of the tulle supplies in a tactful and concentrated point all that the bride needs of decoration. This dress has soft satin tissue for a foundation, with an overdress of white silk

net with motifs of lace dotted with seed pearls, which is to the dress as a stem to a rose, adding line and weight where needed.

The generous amount of tulle is used by me with deliberation, for there is nothing like tulle to interpret the true intimacy of the occasion and the beautiful thoughts that the wedding dress evokes.

Last but not least, the dress designed has the saving grace of economy and practicability, for, since it avoids rigid formality, it may be worn as a dinner gown, and thus it becomes a working part of your wardrobe.

Patterns for No. 2612 may be had in sizes 16 years, and 36, 38 and 40 inches.

Harry Collins patterns may be purchased from any store selling Home Patterns; or by mail, postage prepaid, if you address the Pattern Service, The Ladies' Home Journal, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Designs lettered and numbered with three figures (for example, A-774) will be cut to measure at \$1 each. Other Designs: Dresses, 35 cents; Skirts, 30 cents; Coats, 35 cents; Waists, 30 cents.

Figure 34: "Designs by Harry Collins," *The Ladies Home Journal*, May, 1920, 49.



Figure 35: “Shawl, Wedding,” Attributed to Harry Collins, 1924, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH. Photograph taken by Nora Carleson. Permissions from Western Reserve Historical Society.

One of the 1919 evening gowns from MBH (item 01_01_19), is a lavender silk velvet gown with pearlized beaded ornamentation and fur trim (Figure 36). The gown is a mixture of styles, having elements of both a tunic dress and a loosely waisted tea dress. The front of the gown features a deep scoop neck outlined in clear rhinestones stitched onto the dress. The center front also has a modestly panel of tucked lavender silk chiffon sew directly to the under bodice with a sold silk underlay.²⁴⁹ The loosely draped bodice of lavender silk velvet is adorned with stylized flowers and leaves comprised of opaque

²⁴⁹ Leslie Littell and Michelle Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions" (unpublished raw data, Meadow Brook Hall, Rochester, MI, July 2013), n.p.

pearlized white glass seed and bugle beads. In the center of the leaves are clear rhinestones. The sleeves of the dress too are ornamented with the same beading patterns and are sewn to the under bodice of the dress. The natural waistline of the gown is accentuated by a sash or belt made of gathered and tucked lavender silk velvet, closing at the back with a metal and rhinestone buckle made of four open rectangles, two above and two below, which covers a standard hook and eye closure. From careful examination, it appears that the rhinestone buckle may have been a later addition due to their appearance and manner of being sewn onto the dress.²⁵⁰ The skirt is comprised of multiple layers. The outer most layer, or the overskirt, is cut to a V-shape and is trimmed in a natural fur. The fur, once thought to be mink appears to have been dyed and that underlay is grey and not the red brown seen on the gown. Being as the fur is soft and contains no guard hairs, costume specialists have determined it is more than likely not mink.²⁵¹ On the reverse of the mink trimmed overskirt are metal weights, presumably lead, that have been individually wrapped in lavender silk velvet and carefully sewn onto the backing. Below the fur trimmed overskirt is a tubular, vertical skirt of the same fabric.

As with the majority of Collins pieces the lavender evening gown in the collection of MBH features both hand and machines stitching, with the majority of the detail and finishing work done by hand. Furthermore, the interior construction of this particular gown is highly similar to most of the other surviving Collins gowns. The interior is made of and ivory silk taffeta and has finished hem edges lined with a small and delicate lace edge. Seams are machine stitched and then Hong Kong bound with by hand. There is a

²⁵⁰ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

visible lack of boning and notably the gown has no evidence of ever being boned.²⁵²

Moreover, typical Collins gowns feature both hooks and eyes as well as snap closures; a typical closure for the period and almost always used by Collins. Also commonly used by Collins was a petersham or waist stay. The dress also bears a Collins label. This label, different than some of the others, is a white on white label reading “Harry Collins, New York,” with the typical spool of thread and needle, is still quite similar to all other labels seen on surviving Collins pieces. All of these appear to be common among works produced by the House of Collins at this period; with many of them appearing both prior to and after WWI.

²⁵² Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.



Figure 36: "Lavender silk velvet evening gown with mink trim," Harry Collins, 1919, accession #01_01_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.

Other elements unique to Collins work can be found on this piece (or only one other piece) and merit further examination. First and foremost, this gown features a paper label that remains intact noting the model number, “Model 933” (presumably the model number of the style of dress), the date, “10/21/19,” the customer, “Mrs. J. Dodge,” and the room, “M & M” (Figure 37). While the majority of the label is self-explanatory, the room remains a mystery. Was the room a specific seamstress, the maker, a special fitting room, or something entirely different? As this is the only label of its kind to survive, it may remain a mystery for some time. However, one solvable mystery contained by the lavender evening dress is easily understood, the remains of intact Kleinert dress shields. Kleinert, which is still in operation today, continues to be a well-known maker of dress shields. The dress shields in this gown are not only stamped with the Kleinert names, but also “1080, Harry Collins, Art in Dress, 9 East 57 Street, New York” (Figure 38).²⁵³ What is of particular interest is that although the date of the salon location fits the 1919 dating of the gown, the Collins logo stamped onto the dress shields is far more akin to the logo of 1915 than that being used in 1919 (Figure 39). Due to the stamp Collins could potentially be reusing dress shields or bought them in a large quantity a few years prior. Only one other surviving Collins piece has dress shields and it too is in the collection of MBH.

²⁵³ Littell and Hathaway, “MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions,” n.p.

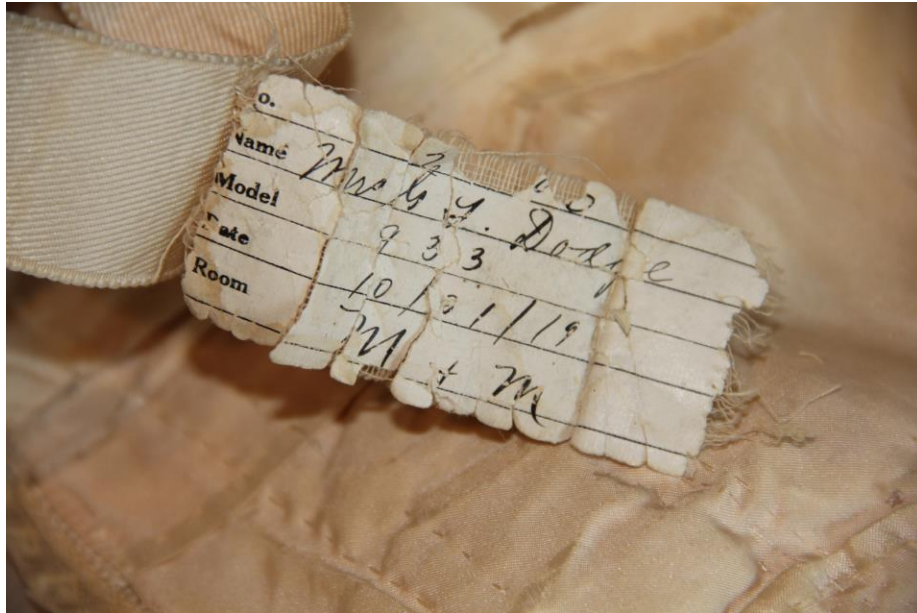


Figure 37: Original paper tailoring label in “Lavender silk velvet evening gown with mink trim,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession #01_01_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.

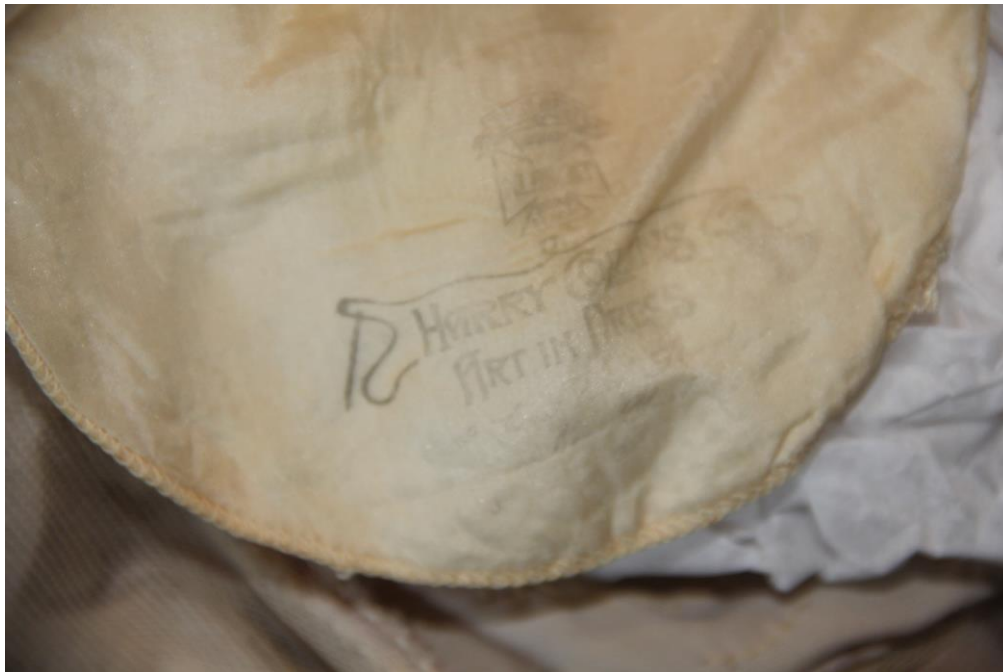


Figure 38: Stamped dress shields in “Lavender silk velvet evening gown with mink trim,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession #01_01_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.

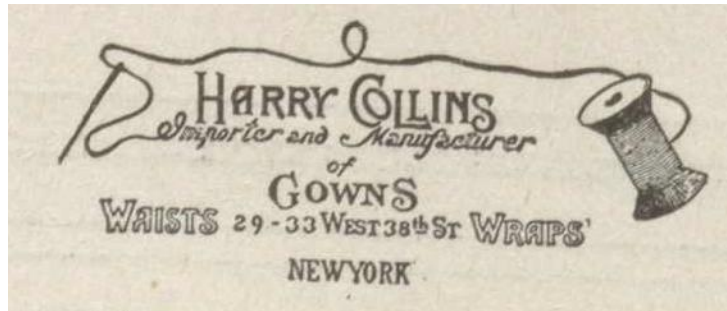


Figure 39: (Cropped) Harry Collins logo. *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, January 1915, 116B.

The other evening gown owned by Mrs. Wilson is a dress of black chiffon with heavy beading (#01-06-19) (Figure 40). Far more style forward than its lavender companion, the gown features elements that would become more popular in the 1920s than the late 1910s, including heavy ornamentation at the hips, a shorter hem, and fluidity in the movement of the fabric. The basic silhouette of the dress is a tunic form overlaid with loose layers of sheer black chiffon creating a slightly wrapped, deep V shaped cover over the bodice which over drapes the shoulders leaving to long trails of chiffon flowing from the back of the each shoulder. The hems of the chiffon are hand rolled and have hundreds of faceted, ovoid, dangling, black beads sewn on by hand. The bead's material is unknown but could possibly be Bakelite, jet, or a different form of early plastic.²⁵⁴ The overskirt of sheer black silk chiffon's hem is treated in the same manner. The waist comes to a natural point, but is loose, as if to suggest the changing modes to lower or waist-less dresses of the 1920s. At the front of either hips (or a little above) are large, highly detailed, geometric appliques. The entirety of the applique is attached by being

²⁵⁴ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

sewn through all layers of the gown through to the under bodice and underskirt layer.²⁵⁵

The applique is made of glass beads and looks forward to the art deco style with its geometric design. Hanging from each applique in three long strips are black bugle beads connected at intervals with swags of bugle and round faceted beads. At the end of the strips of beads are three dimensional tassels composed of black seed and bugle beads.²⁵⁶

Unlike other gowns, the closure for this particular piece is asymmetrical and on the left side back, leading one to conclude that this may have been designed as a dancing dress.²⁵⁷

The interior of the gowns follows the usual Collins construction methods including materials, lace edged hems, machine and hand stitching, Hong Kong bound seams, no boning or signs of boning, and a petersham. However, this dress too features an element that would have been common on custom made dresses but is likely lost on most examples: a white on white “original made” Collins label (Figure 41).²⁵⁸

Since Collins was excellent at making his brand as well as promoting his name, it is likely that he labeled all pieces. The majority of the surviving pieces have large visible labels. The labels, though they vary somewhat in size, usually measure approximately 2” x 3”, and are gold (non-metallic) thread on white with the Harry Collins signature and spool of thread and needle and “New York” as a location (Figure 42). However, as stated previously there are other forms of Collins labels known to survive. Though some pieces remain without labels it is likely that they originally bore label and that it has been lost to

²⁵⁵ Littell and Hathaway, “MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions,” n.p.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ An original made dress meant that the dress was custom and not semi-fitted or ready to wear.

time, for in many cases there is still evidence of stitching where the label had been located.



Figure 40: “Black chiffon evening gown with floating back panels and embroidered with black jet beads,”Harry Collins, 1919, accession # 01_06_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens,Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.



Figure 41: White on white “Original Model” label on “Black chiffon evening gown with floating back panels and embroidered with black jet beads,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession # 01_06_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.



Figure 42: Standard Harry Collins label in Figure 38: “Black chiffon evening gown with floating back panels and embroidered with black jet beads,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession # 01_06_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.



Figure 43: "Black wool day dress embroidered with black celluloid thread," Harry Collins, 1919, accession # 04_15_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.

The other two dresses in the collection of MBH are less formal and are truly everyday clothing, making them particularly rare examples. A black, wool, long sleeved, day dress with black embroidery is among the two dresses (Figure 43). The dress, constructed more like a wrap dress, has a front neckline of a steep, but shallow V neck with a silk crepe modesty panel sewn over the front of the interior under bodice.²⁵⁹ The area around the neckline is symmetrically ornamented with embroidery of 1/8" plastic tape in large geometric patterns, resembling a large paisley motif.²⁶⁰ The same pattern, materials, and technique are used to adorn the sides of the skirt as well. According to costume experts who examined the pieces in detail, some of the embroidery is couched while other sections are stitched through the dress using a satin stitch embroidery method.²⁶¹ The center front of the dress is of a panel construction which wraps to the back of the dress and closes with snaps. The dress itself however closes at the left side with hooks and thread eyes. The long sleeves of the dress are sewn to the under bodice, as with other Collins gowns.²⁶²

Typical of other Collins products, the interior has ivory silk fabric, Hong Kong bound hems, hand and machine stitching, no boning or sign thereof, a center back bodice closure with hooks and eyes, a petersham, and lace edged hems. Moreover, this dress too has Collins's double label system. However, unlike the other garments, the petersham on this piece is outside of the inner bodice and rests between the bodice and the wool

²⁵⁹ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

dress.²⁶³ Furthermore, this particular dress has darts and tucks hand stitched on the exterior that look as though they could have been alterations completed after the original construction. Since Mrs. Wilson gave birth in 1919, it is likely that these could have been made to allow for the expansion of pregnancy.²⁶⁴

The last dress from the House of Collins now in the collection of MBH is a black, silk velvet dinner dress with a lace collar (#05_12_19) (Figure 44). This dress is quite different from other Collins dresses in that it opens from the front, rather than from the side or back.²⁶⁵ The dress is rather simple in design when compared to Mrs. Wilson's other Collins dresses and is immediately reminiscent of pattern designs found in *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Modern Priscilla* just a few years later (Figures 45 - 46).²⁶⁶ This gown has a center front closure with an overlap on the bodice and a offset closure on the left of skirt that runs as far down as the knee, securing with both snaps and hooks and eyes.²⁶⁷ The front skirt panel is bias cut wrapping around to the back right with the hem of the silk velvet faced with black silk twill and has fully encased round metal weights similar to the lavender evening dress in the collection. The neckline is once again a V-shape with a modesty panel of silk chiffon.²⁶⁸ Outlining the front of the neckline is machine made ivory lace whip stitched to the dress. The same lace also ornaments the

²⁶³ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.; Madelyn Rzakowski, "Re: Collections Inquiry," e-mail message to Nora Carleson, July 1, 2013.

²⁶⁵ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

²⁶⁶ Harry Collins, "Designs by Harry Collins," April 1920, 50; Harry Collins, "Mr. Harry Collins Presents to Priscilla Readers Six of His Most Charming Creations," *Modern Priscilla*, November 1922, 22.

²⁶⁷ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

elbow length sleeves, creating a mock cuff.²⁶⁹ Additionally, the waist, at the natural height, features a similar belt or sash to that of the lavender evening dress in the collection.



Figure 44: “Black velvet dinner dress with a collar and cuffs of ecru machine made lace,” Harry Collins, 1919, accession # 05_12_19, Meadow Brook Hall and Gardens, Rochester, MI. Image courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall.

²⁶⁹ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

Designs by Harry Collins



AFTERNOON GOWN
OF BLACK TAFFETA
(No. 2593). Accordion-
plaited ruffle; Venice-lace
collar and cuffs.
Comes in sizes 16 years,
and 36 and 40 inches.



NAVY AND CERISE TAFFETA AFTERNOON GOWN
(No. 2616). A novel effect enhances this dress in the form of
hand hemstitching bands which provide trimming through the
skirt and waist.
Comes in sizes 16, 18 years, and 36 to 42 inches.



AFTERNOON GOWN OF BLACK TAFFETA
(No. A-966). The simplicity of the lines is but
heightened by the fine plaited ruffles, with a chain of
covered cord; lingerie collar and cuffs.
Patterns cut to order any size up to 42 inches.

*Photographs by
Campbell Studio*



EVENING GOWN OF ROSE-SHOT TAFFETA
(No. A-939). A wondrous color scheme with em-
brodery of dull gold and silver; the girdle of flame
velvet and the same taffeta.
Patterns cut to order any size up to 42 inches.

Home Journal patterns may be purchased from any store selling Home Patterns; or by mail, postage prepaid, if you address the Pattern Service, The Ladies' Home Journal, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Designs lettered and numbered with three figures (for example, A-774) will be cut to measure at \$1 each. Other Designs: Dresses, 30 cents; Skirts, 25 cents; Coats, 30 cents.

Figure 45: Harry Collins, "Designs by Harry Collins," April 1920, 50

Mr. Harry Collins
Presents to Priscilla Readers
Six of His
Most Charming Creations



ways be long and useful rather than decorative, (and rather than show you the short fur coat, we point to No. C-1008 which is part of a three-piece costume. You can imagine it is fur, and if you desire your last year's fur coat remodeled, into a short jacket like this, rest assured it will be becoming and in vogue. But the longer coat we show you in cloth has the more practical line for the fur garment, and correct lines do not go out of style). To select that which is most becoming to you assures double its style worth.

Evening dresses are long and sometimes touch the floor. In many cases they show classic draperies in all the forms that have made the dress of the ancient Greeks a permanent influence — from which we may derive inspiration.

Skirts for afternoon and theatre frocks will stay long, reaching to the ankles, from which point they will gradually descend.

Topcoats will be nearer the ground than ever.

The extreme long waist line has gone — to be resurrected, perhaps, in some distant day. The normal waist line — always in good taste — is now in fashion.

No. C-1007. To those who believe that the three-piece costume is more practical than *chic*, this design will come as an assurance that originality and smartness lose nothing in this type of costume. The dress is executed in black twill, and boasts original sleeves of gray faille embroidered in a subtle harmony of gray and steel. The gray motif is still further developed in the gray facings at the sides and bottom of the skirt. The coat, likewise, is developed in black twill, embroidered, with trimmer collar and cuffs to match. The embroidery both in its design and its placing, is worthy of special attention. The leaves are done in buttonhole stitch in a somewhat fine, loosely twisted silk thread, steel gray in color, all lines are run with silver metallic thread and the berry-like forms are represented by silvered jewels.

Transfer pattern of embroidery design, No. 22-11-1, 50 cents.

Coat and frock require $5\frac{1}{4}$ yards 54-inch Poiré twill with $\frac{3}{4}$ yard 14-inch fur for collar and $1\frac{3}{4}$ yards 4-inch fur for coat-sleeve bands.

All estimates are for size thirty-six.



Figure 46: Harry Collins, "Mr. Harry Collins Presents to Priscilla Readers Six of His Most Charming Creations," November 1922, 22.

The interior of the black silk velvet dinner dress too has the same elements of the other four dresses in the collection of MBH; however, unlike the other gowns this piece closes in the front with the modesty panel overlapping the closure.²⁷⁰ Furthermore, while the other gowns have a petersham sewn attached to the under bodice, the dinner dress's petersham is sewn directly to the velvet of the gown. Lastly this dress has dress shields that match those found in the lavender evening dress.

The collection of Collins dresses at MBH is an excellent example of a year of Collins work. Yet, as seen with WRHS's wedding dress, later pieces have survived. One custom dress, dated ca. 1921, now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) is the latest known surviving custom made gowns by Collins (Figure 47). The gown belonged to Mrs. Mabel Brady Garvan.²⁷¹ The dress, primarily comprised of peach and lavender silk chiffon, is made in a stylized Grecian design, with ornamentation on the short bodice and on the train. The bust is ornamented with thin band of silk in bright green, yellow, pink, and blue moving both horizontally across the front and back of the bodice and vertically below the left shoulder. The majority of the bodice is made of metallic threads of varying colors with geometrical pattern of elongated circles of silver thread and round red centers. Additionally, the front of the bodice features a large corsage of stylized flowers. The corsage is made of three flowers of peach silk, tan silk chiffon, and blue metallic threads adorned with clear seed beads, metallic ribbons, metallic blue sequins, and blue rhinestones. Surrounding the flowers are vines of wire

²⁷⁰ Littell and Hathaway, "MBH-Harry Collins Dresses: Descriptions," n.p.

²⁷¹ Dilys E. Blum and H. Kristina Haugland, *Best Dressed: Fashion from the Birth of Couture to Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1997), 22.

wrapped in blue silk thread and buds of ivory silk. These are also adorned with clear seed beads and floral wire forms with clear seed beads. Under the right shoulder, the four vertical bands of silk are sewn to a band of yellow silk chiffon, instead of the cloth of metallic threads which makes up the rest of the bodice. It is under this band of chiffon and silk that the gown closes with a combination of the standard hook and eye and snap closures (Figure 48). The hooks and eyes are incredibly similar to those found on the gowns at MBH and the OHS. As with other Collins dresses, the front top of the bodice is outlined in a thin line of machine lace. Furthermore, delicate, sheer sleeves provide an air of modesty to an otherwise fanciful gown. Below the bodice, which ends only a little below the bust, and resting halfway down the rib cage (but not completely down to the natural waist), is a diaphanous skirt of peach silk chiffon broken into stripes with embroidered rows of thick golden metallic thread. The skirt ends in points at the knee where un-backed, sheer, lavender silk chiffon is attached and draped to create a train that stretches to the floor and pools with an additional foot to foot and a half of fabric. The train is adorned with horizontal stripes composed of the metallic cloth from the bodice and yellow silk bands as well as a Greek key design of embroidered gold metallic thread. Additionally, the lavender silk chiffon train is outlined with a thick yellow silk band. Adding to the gown's stylized classical silhouette is a drape of peach silk chiffon outlined with lavender silk chiffon. When worn, the drape wrapped from the top left of the bodice, across the front of the dress, around to the back of the gown, and then over the left side, either to be held in the wearer's hand or stitched into place.

The interior of the dress has far less construction details than pieces from the collections of MBH or OHS. This is primarily because the dress is a vastly different style that required less interior construction methods than the gowns of the late 1910s. However, the dress does have a mixture of both machine and hand stitching as well as Hong Kong bound hems like all other Collins gowns. Yet, this piece lacks other common traits found in earlier Collins gowns; most importantly a label. The gown's provenance was given by the donor at the time of its donation. However, through surviving construction methods and materials it is clear that the piece in the collection of the PMA is a Collins gown.



Figure 47: "Woman's Dress," Harry Collins, c. 1921, accession # 1987-92-2, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA.

The overall effect of the gown is stunning today and would have been even more so when it was first created; before its bright colors faded. The outward appearance of the gown at the PMA is unlike any other surviving gown. It is not only an exceptionally unique evening piece, but borders on becoming a fancy dress or costume piece. The dress was important enough to its owner that she chose to have her formal portrait painted wearing the gown. In the portrait she and her three children are incredibly well dressed; wearing the best fashions of the day (Figure 49).²⁷² The choice of Mrs. Garvan, wife of Francis P. Garvan, founder of the American Chemical Association and known today for her significant art donation given to Yale University, was a wealthy and well placed woman, to wear Collins for her portrait speaks to the importance of his name in the second decade of the twentieth century.



Figure 48: Detail of hook and female side of snap closures on “Woman’s Dress,” Harry Collins, c. 1921, accession # 1987-92-2, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA.

²⁷² Blum and Haugland, *Best Dressed: Fashion from*, 22.



Figure 49: "Portrait of Mrs. Francis P. Garvan and her Four Children," Philip A. Laszlo, 1921, oil on canvas, accession #1965-208-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA.

A Foray into Film Fashions

Collins, the consummate businessman, was an innovator when it came to promotion and financial opportunities. He had known how and when to work on Broadway, how to get his message of art of dress across to millions, and when and how to sell. He was savvy enough to sell the building at Park and 57th for a 100% profit of

\$1,000,000.00 and continued to retain the space for his salon.²⁷³ Moreover, Collins was always conscious of the changes taking place in the world. Like his patron, Florence Harding, he saw the importance of Hollywood and the oncoming storm of the cult of celebrity. That is not to say that there were not celebrities of the theater and vaudeville, for there were, and Collins worked with many of them, including the infamous Billy Burke.²⁷⁴ However, the world was changing; Los Angeles and Hollywood were becoming centers of fashion. As Michele Tolini Finamore describes in *Hollywood Before Glamour: Fashion in American Silent Film*: “Between 1905 and 1925, the film industry evolved from a small-scale form of entertainment with working-class associations to a more refined product aimed at a broader audience that included the middle class.”²⁷⁵ Initially, like in the theater, actors and actresses had to purchase their own wardrobes and created their own style.²⁷⁶ The importance of French fashion and the use of high end ready-to-wear from France was just as important to the woman of silver screen as it was to those who lived in New York City and danced and sang on the great white way.²⁷⁷ However, soon there was a backlash to foreign fashions prominently displayed in film, just as there was across the United States. Many early films began to make light of Parisian fashions. The most accosted French Designer was Paul Poiret, known as the King of Fashion. There was even an entire film made revolving around

²⁷³ "Park Av. Corner Sold: Investor Buys Fifty-Seventh Street Site in \$1,000,000 Deal," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), June 1, 1922, 38; "100 Per Cent. Profit: Harry Collins Disposes of Corner After Lengthy Negotiations," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1922, 106.

²⁷⁴ "Display Ad 26," *Boston Daily Globe* (Boston, MA), December 1, 1920, 3

²⁷⁵ Michelle Tolini Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 2.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 130.

²⁷⁷ Finamore, "Hollywood Before Glamour," 16-18.

mocking the designer's well-known "harem pants."²⁷⁸ This was only a stepping point to the desire for American-ness that began with the start of WWI in 1914. The drive of nationalism in fashion at the period that suited Harry Collins and his business so well also greatly aided the development of the film industry to become what it is known as today.²⁷⁹ Likewise, during WWI, the film industry helped support the AFFAW movement by creating film serials that supported New York City based fashion designers over those of Paris.²⁸⁰ Soon a symbiotic relationship developed between New York fashion designers and Hollywood, much as it had earlier between Broadway and the designers. These costume designers for films were called "modistes."²⁸¹ "Modistes" tended to work on Fifth Avenue or Broadway. Harry Collins was one of the early "modistes" hired by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company in 1915-making him one of the first of many designers to move from theater to film, eventually setting up a business on the West Coast.²⁸²

Prior to the mid-1920s, virtually no records survive for costumes and credits were not commonly given.²⁸³ Moreover, it was not until the 1920s that trade and popular magazines like *Photoplay* began to feature articles on the subject of fashion and costuming.²⁸⁴ This is also the time when articles on Hollywood fashion begin to mention Harry Collins. Although he had worked on silent films since 1915, no records have survived to disclose what he was working on and whom he dressed. As Collins was

²⁷⁸ Finamore, "Hollywood Before Glamour," 36-37.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 45.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 71.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 114.

²⁸² Ibid., 115.

²⁸³ Ibid., 121.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 169.

actively building his fashion house and reputation in New York City and across the United States it seems unlikely that he would have been able to spend long periods of time on the west coast. However, by the 1920s, the House of Collins was firmly established and expanding rapidly. Film would have been an excellent opportunity for Collins to make his garments desirable to a younger generation, one whose participants were not necessarily acting as their own dressmakers but looking for ready-to-wear to fit their modern lifestyles. Furthermore, this younger generation did not purchase issues of *Modern Priscilla* or *The Ladies Home Journal*, though they may have been exposed to the *ABC of Dress*. Attracting this younger group of women through his work in film helped Collins to further promote his theories on dress, for the popularity of Hollywood attracted not only film goers but stars and ingénues from the east to west coasts.

In a *Washington Post* column, "The Film Flapper Says," published on October 29, 1923 author Inez Klumph, notes that a new film starring Madge Kennedy is "going to be a knockout."²⁸⁵ Klumph described the cast and crew and noted that Kennedy's gowns designed by Harry Collins were "very beautiful of course."²⁸⁶ What is particularly interesting is that the journalist notes that the film was shot in Long Island, meaning Collins did not have to go far to work on the picture. However, by 1925 it appears that Collins spent considerable time in Los Angeles. The majority of articles written by or on Harry Collins between 1925 and 1930 were in the *Los Angeles Times* or in film trade publications. It is quite possible that Collins relocated his family to Los Angeles to

²⁸⁵ Inez Klumph, "The Film Flapper Says," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), October 29, 1923, 4.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

pursue the opportunities he discovered in the film industry. It would have been difficult to constantly travel across the country and the film industry could have easily encouraged Collins to move to the west coast to secure a future in the business.

In a March 14, 1925 article for the *Los Angeles Times*, “Style Cannot Be Explained,” Collins was among a group of experts asked what they thought “chic” meant. Harry Collins, true to his beliefs, claimed that personality and its expression in clothing were the greatest factor in whether one was chic or not.²⁸⁷ As he said, “[p]eople will no longer fit into a prescribed pattern.”²⁸⁸ This statement was Collins’s ideology finally being realized in the modern temperament. Later in the fall of 1926, Collins was called upon as a critic and expert on fashion to pronounce the best-dressed women on the screen in the October issue of *Motion Picture*. In the article, Collins once again discussed his philosophy of dress. He summarized “There is a particular *essence* about being well dressed. It does not depend upon money. It depends upon the way a woman *puts on her clothes*.”²⁸⁹ Here Collins’s views on democratic dress emerged once more. Though no longer creating patterns for home sewers, Collins’s beliefs had not changed. The emphasis that had been placed on good style and taste over cost in his career was still evident. Looking at how a woman puts on clothes was not any different than Collins telling women to study their own body and dress for their features. Collins went on to name both Irene Castle and Gloria Swanson as best dressed women.²⁹⁰ By naming these

²⁸⁷“Style Cannot Be Explained: Varying Views as to What is Meant by the Word 'Chic,'" *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 14, 1925, A17.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Faith Service, "Who Are the Best-Dresses Women on the Screen--and Why?," *Motion Picture*, October 1926, 22.

²⁹⁰ Service, “Who are the Best Dressed Women,” 22.

famous screen stars, Collins again linked his idea of “Art in Dress” to women whom other American women looked to for guidance. He proclaimed that they followed his rules and others should as well. Collins continued to reinforce the belief that home sewers could use the advice found in the *ABC of Dress* and look just as beautiful as their idols without even having to expound on his beliefs.

In March 1928, while in New York, it was announced that Harry Collins would supervise female fashions for Fox studios with the assistance of his wife. The papers called it a sensation. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported it:

Until recently he [Collins] maintained one of the smartest shops here [New York] and his authority has been recognized for years by leaders of the stage, society and screen, the prestige of his designs being only equaled by the importance of his label in the eyes of those whose gowns and wraps adorned, to say nothing of those whose envy was aroused. It is understood that Harry Collins will be in complete charge of all the modern clothes worn and will furnish not only these, but furs and accessories of every description. In view of his standing and the increased expenditure his work will entail, this is considered further evidence of the expansion and improvement of the Fox product.²⁹¹

Noting that Collins and his wife, Hattie would be in charge of the modern clothing is an important distinction. In the Collins’s time, there was a strong division between costumes and gowns. Costumes were period pieces or anything not worn for a contemporary event. Those in charge of gowns were in charge of the modern clothing worn in contemporary films and occasional dressed starlets off screen as well.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Norbert Lusk, "Fox Engages Style Expert," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 4, 1928, C11.

²⁹² Finamore, “Hollywood Before Glamour,” 4.

Later in March of 1928, in an article titled “Hollywood Dress Artist” from the *Los Angeles Times*, Collins’s work was shown on June Collyer, who was photographed wearing a bonnet of his design. Next to the photograph of Ms. Collyer was a sketch of a dress called “the Mirage” (Figure 50).²⁹³ In the same issue of the newspaper, an article, “Stylist Comes to Gown Films” also mentioned Ms. Collyer and Collins’s Mirage dress which she had recently modeled for him in New York. The Mirage was inspired by the new skyscrapers in the city, and the new set-back style of architecture.²⁹⁴ Once again Harry Collins looked forward to a new age in designs and fashion.



Figure 50: “Mirage” dress sketch on right. “Hollywood Draws Dress Artist,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 25, 1928, B7.

²⁹³ “Hollywood Draws Dress Artist,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 25, 1928, B7.

²⁹⁴ Watrous, “Stylist Comes to Gown,” B7.

Harry Collins was highly touted and advertised as an authority of fashion and one of the most prominent names in fashion when he began working for William Fox and Fox studios in the late 1920s. A full color ad was placed in *Film Daily* in May of 1928. The advertisement announced that “Paris Come to Fox Hills,” “Harry Collins World-renowned Couturier and creator of Emotionism design all modern dress in William Fox Pictures.”²⁹⁵ The advertisement featuring a photograph of Collins and five sketches of Fox starlets (Madge Bellamy, Mary Duncan, Sally Phipps, Lois Moran, and June Collyer) seems strange and unlike Collins’s personal advertising.²⁹⁶ For Harry Collins to be linked with Paris, is not only odd, but against his philosophy of dress. One wonders how Collins received seeing this advertisement.

Whether Collins was pleased with his promotion at Fox Studios or not, he continued to act as head of modern fashions at Fox Studios and was still sought after for his opinion on dress through 1928. In a July 18, 1928 *Los Angeles Times* article, “Hollywood as an Interpreter of Styles: A Few Prophecies to Produce Actual Effect,” Collins, always ahead of his time prophesied the growing influence that Hollywood and its stars would have on fashion.²⁹⁷ As with the rise of American Fashion, the middle class, and the democracy of dress, Harry Collins seemed to constantly be ahead of his times.

By April of 1930, the House of Collins had opened a new branch in Los Angeles. As with the salon at Park and Fifty-Seventh, the interior was specifically designed to be

²⁹⁵ "Color Advertisement," *Film Daily*, May 24, 1928, n.p.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Alida Vreeland, "Hollywood as an Interpreter of Styles: A Few Prophecies To Produce Actual Effect," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, MA), July 18, 1928, 7.

elegant and enticing. In an article, “Exclusive Shop Opens For Women” published in the *Los Angeles Times* on April 13, 1930, journalist Olive Grey wrote more than four paragraphs describing the interiors which featured carved glass, black marble, flowers, metallics, and dark blue draperies.²⁹⁸ As always, the importance of the Collins brand and designers name was mentioned.²⁹⁹

While there is limited information, both published and unpublished, that survives from the 1930s, it is clear that Harry Collins and his family remained in Los Angeles through the middle years of that decade, probably traveling back to New York fairly regularly. One piece of evidence that suggests Collins’s firm commitment to Hollywood fashion is his son, Richard’s graduation from a Beverly Hills High School in 1932.³⁰⁰ This change of address took place sometime in the late 1920s. From 1922 to 1925 Collins’s and his family are listed as living at 460 Park Avenue in New York, NY.³⁰¹ Furthermore, by 1925 the Collins’s household had grown from three, Collins, his wife Hattie, son Richard, to seven with addition of daughter, Patricia (born approximately in 1922) and three live-in domestic servants: Marin Cooper (22), listed as a waitress, Bernhardine Zeh (32), a cook, and Elly Krtzenstein (48), a governess.³⁰² Five years later, in the 1930 United States census, Collins was listed as a lodger at 8221 Sunset

²⁹⁸ Gray, “Exclusive Shop Opens for Women,” B25.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Woo, “Richard Collins dies at 98: onetime,” *Los Angeles Times*.

³⁰¹ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*, 1922, New York, New York, Arrivals, Microfilm Serial T715, Microfilm Roll 3164, Line 16, Number 67, “Harry Collins”; Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *New York, State Census, 1915*, New York State Archives, Albany, NY, Election district: 23, Assembly district: 15, City: New York, County: New York, page 43, “Harry Collins.”

³⁰² Ibid. Servants were Scottish, and German (x2) respectively.

Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, working as a designer and dressmaker.³⁰³ This address was, and still is, the address of the infamous Chateau Marmont. The Chateau Marmont opened in 1929 and was originally a luxury apartment building; however, with the onslaught of the Great Depression, the cost of rent was too high and developers converted the Chateau into a high end hotel for Hollywood elite.³⁰⁴ Collins's choice of the Chateau as a temporary residence speaks to his phenomenal success; he was able to afford rent in the premier luxury apartment complex in West Hollywood and support his family on the East Coast.

The rest of the years Collins worked in Hollywood are difficult to define. However, one event stands out—Collins's work on the film *Fashions of 1934*. It was not the clothes that Collins's contributed to *Fashions of 1934* but the story. A short story co-written with Warren Duff entitled, *The Fashion Plate*, was the basis for comedy picture, *Fashions of 1934*. Both Collins and Duff received story credits for the film, though screenwriters F. Hugh Herbert and Carl Erickson wrote the actual screenplay. Directed by William Dieterle and starring both William Powell and Bette Davis, *Fashions of 1934* follows Sherwood Nash (Powell), a down on his luck swindler who decides to pull one over on the competitive and spy riddled fashion world by pirating Parisian fashions and selling them to a number of high end importers.³⁰⁵ To convince the buyer that they need

³⁰³ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *1930 United States Federal Census*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, Roll 134, Page 12A, Enumeration District 74, Image 889.0, FHL Microfilm 2339869 , "Harry Collins."

³⁰⁴ Raymond Sarlot and Fred E. Basten, *Life at the Marmont: The Inside Story of Hollywood's Legendary Hotel of the Stars--Chateau Marmont* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2013), 5, 7.

³⁰⁵ *Fashions of 1934*, directed by William Dieterle, performed by William Powell and Bette Davis, choreographed by Busby Berkeley (1934; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 2011), DVD.

to invest, Nash exclaims: “Come on, step on it before the fashion changes.”³⁰⁶ This exclamation has multiple levels of meaning hidden within that only those involved in the fashion world would realize. As Collins and the AFFAW movement heralded before his time, one of the largest flaws with Parisian fashions were the ever changing trends which were never economical and often resulted in outlandish fads and styles which suited only a few.

In *Fashions of 1934*, Nash goes on to hire a young American fashion talent to aid his scam, Lyn (Bette Davis). The two along with Nash’s goofy second in command travel to Paris in an attempt to copy Parisian fashions. While in the salon of the “King of Fashion,” Baroque, Nash and his accomplices get caught. Strolling throughout Paris they see Baroque purchasing a book on ancient fashions from an open storefront. Lyn and Nash realize that the famous French designers have been merely copying ancient and far off styles and calling it modern fashion.³⁰⁷ This too was a common complaint of Collins and reformers of the AFFAW movement. They felt that Parisian designers were drawing on old sources and creating nothing new. In the film, Nash and Lyn take this notion to their advantage and Lyn begins to create styles based on the information found in the antique books on fashion. The gang then stamps the designs with famous French designer names and ships them to New York and their unwitting buyers—making a small fortune.³⁰⁸ Yet, Nash sees more opportunities. In a bar, and in need of a way to pay for their drinks, Lyn and Nash cozy up to a man who turns out to be an ostrich feather seller.

³⁰⁶ *Fashions of 1934*.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

Nash convinces the salesman that he can increase demand exponentially for feathers in one year. He then convinces Baroque to use the feathers in a fashion review held in France; somewhat echoing Collins's relationship with Mallinson and the use of Khaki-Kool.³⁰⁹ The feathers are used to create bizarre fashions echoing the claims of American designers that French fashions were often strange and unbearable. Additionally, during the fashion review, the scene is set where a young girl, working in the fashion industry falls asleep and dreams, turning into the fashion extravaganza. This almost seems to be a direct correlation with Tully's "Fashion Show", in which Collins took part, and follows many of the same themes. At the end of the fashion review, Nash states that he will be opening his own salon with these, the newest designs in American fashion for France—taking credit for Baroque's designs and thusly beating the French at their own game and giving a different face to the piracy that had taken place for years in the real fashion industry. Baroque, angry claims that Nash cannot possibly do this and succeed, for he Baroque, is the King of Fashion. Nash smiles and says that a king "can always be taken by an ace."³¹⁰ This too is multilayered and harkens back to Collins's life as well as the tensions between the American and French fashion industries.

In *Fashions of 1934*, the character Baroque is clearly a not so subtle representation of the infamous French couturier, Poiret. Poiret, known as the King of Fashion, was an outspoken critic of American Fashion in the 1910s and 1920s. On trips to New York, through comments, and writing, Poiret openly commented on the inferiority of American designers, women, and taste. Both Collins and Poiret were a part

³⁰⁹ *Fashions of 1934*.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

of the same world. They produced gowns for the American stage, used Mallinson's silks, and were considered the top of their field. However, their views on American fashion could not have been more dissimilar. In an August 21, 1922 letter to the Editor of the New York Times, Collins called out Poiret's lack of modernism and snobbish demeanor. In the letter, entitled "Art is Not Geographical: American Designers Are Definitely Contributing to the Art of Dress," Collins writes,

[a]long comes M. Paul Poiret, after a long vigil in the mausoleum of ancient art and in the recesses of his theatrical designing retreat—blinks at the skyscrapers of Manhattan and repeats the patronizing formula of criticism that was so successful for French dressmakers before the war. We wish reassure M. Poiret. French originality is in no danger...³¹¹

The letter went on: "...in answer to M. Poiret, let us re-assert that American is dress-conscious. The war which threw us upon our own resources has given us a confidence in ourselves which nothing can shake."³¹² Collins's continued to support these ideas and seemed to have found a competitor in Poiret, whom he would continue to censure and mock with the caricature of Poiret, in *Fashions of 1934*. Little did Collins know that the era of Poiret and the dominance of French fashion would soon be tested once again with yet another war and a greater surge of American fashion designers hungry for recognition and opportunity to succeed.

³¹¹ Harry Collins, "Art is Not Geographical: American Designers Are Definitely Contributing to the Art of Dress," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 2, 1922, 6.

³¹² Collins, "Art is Not Geographical," 6.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RISE OF NEW YORK FASHION AND THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF COLLINS

The End of an Era

The years of the Great Depression, 1930-1940, yield little information on Harry Collins and his fashion house. Aside from opening his Los Angeles salon nearly a year after Black Tuesday and his work on *Fashions of 1934*, the life and works of Collins are a mystery for nearly a decade. However, one can assume that during a time of great struggle for many and financial hardships that changed a nation, the House of Collins saw changes as well. It is foolish to believe that the House of Collins came through the war without having suffered financially. Times were vastly different during WWII than they were during WWI and there was even less money to spend on luxury goods than there was before. Harry Collins and his philosophy of Art in Dress reappear in 1942 when he presented a Luncheon-Fashion show at the Waldorf-Astoria.³¹³ Two years prior, in 1940, Collins is listed in the US Federal Census as once again living in New York. The 1940 census provides more information than previous census results. From this document one can see that Collins only worked 26 weeks in 1939, just over half the year. Additionally the document states that in 1935 he and his family were still living in Los Angeles. Furthermore by 1940, the household had also shrunk. The Collins family no longer had

³¹³ "Display Ad 29," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), October 6, 1942, 6.

live-in servants; now it was merely Harry, Hattie, and their daughter Patricia renting an apartment on Central Park West.³¹⁴ This information is somewhat difficult to decipher. Collins no longer could afford servants, a year before was not working full time, and he had relocated his family to New York. However, he and his family could still afford the luxury of a Central Park West apartment—at least for a while. The affordability of a Central Park West apartment may not have been attainable, or perhaps Collins wanted to be nearer to his new shop, which in 1942 was at 647 Fifth Avenue in New York; because in 1942 Collins and his family moved to 100 West 55th Street.³¹⁵ This information clearly shows that Collins was no longer in the financial boom period of the interwar years and he had to consolidate households to survive; however the extent of his circumstances remains unknown.

Collins's indefinite conditions at this point seem fitting. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Paris had regained much of its power as the fashion capitol of the world. However, with the start of WWII, France was once again in a special predicament. For a second time, American designers had an opportunity to come forward in the fashion world. It is this point in history that fashion historians typically claim American fashion designers came into their own. A new field of American designers was coming forward. Decades younger than Collins, these designers—Hattie Carnegie, Norman Norell, Claire McCardell, Clare Potter, Adrian, etc.—have become synonymous with the rise of American fashion during and after WWII. Nevertheless, these designers would have

³¹⁴ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *1940 United States Federal Census*, New York, New York, Roll T627_2637, Page 2B, Enumeration District 31-608, "Harry Collins."

³¹⁵ Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *U.S. World War II Draft Registratin Cards, 1942 Record for Harry Collins*.

never been able to prosper if it had not have been for Harry Collins and his peers who constituted the first wave of American fashion designers. What truly stands out in relation to the second wave of American designers is Collins's longevity. During WWII and into the 1950s, Collins often showed alongside the younger designers both in the newspapers and inside the pages of *Vogue*.

In the January 15, 1943 issue of *Vogue* Collins was featured in the monthly article "Shop Hound." Following a small snapshot of a suite taken by Vogue Studios, the caption reads:

On-Colour Story. This suit is in a glowing shrimp colour, but you can choose the same suit of cashmere wool in any number of fine, forceful colours. Sizes 12 to 16; \$95. It's in the white-canopied corner of Harry Collins's shop at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Second Street, which is called, forthrightly, "Canopy Square." There are whole platoons of "Collins Designs," meticulously tailored, and with the extra virtue of ready-to-wear prices.³¹⁶

Collins's had come back to New York City selling higher end ready-to-wear garments at a time when ready-to-wear was becoming a standard for even upper middle and upper class men and women, along with his custom-made clothing. As Patricia Mears wrote in *American Beauty* "[t]he mastery of innovative and attractive ready-to-wear by American Designers is easily forgotten today because so few people, even the very wealthy, have ever worn custom-made clothing."³¹⁷ This speaks to the practicality that became a staple of the American wardrobe—something that Parisian fashion designers struggled with.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ "Shop Hound," *Vogue*, January 15, 1943, 20.

³¹⁷ Patricia Mears, *American Beauty: Aesthetics and Innovation in Fashion* (New York, NY: Fashion Institute of Technology, 2009), 3.

³¹⁸ Donald Albrecht, ed., *Paris-New York: Design, Fashion, Culture 1925-1940* (New York, NY: Museum of the City of New York, 2008), 104.

The functionality and elegant simplicity that American fashion designers became known for in the 1930s, and which continues today, began in the 1910s and 1920s with Harry Collins and his fellow designers. Yet, according to many costume historians, including Phyllis Magidson in her chapter “Fashion Showdown: New York verses Paris 1914-1941 in *Paris / New York*, “...New York’s fashion industry employed largely anonymous dressmakers who mostly interpreted Paris fashions until the 1930s.”³¹⁹ Magidson and her peers are right to assert the presumed superiority of French fashions prior to WWII many people pirated or altered French designs, yet Collins was one of a set of creative designers who created the styles and rules of line and simplicity that laid the groundwork for the rise of American fashion immediately before and during the Second World War. Collins, however, is unique in the fact that he helped start a movement that ebbed and continued in the fashion industry and then persisted to see the movement return with more vigor and eventually succeed in its mission.

In 1944, Collins was still being called upon as a critic and important leader in the fashion industry. In an article by Virginia Pope written for the *New York Times* entitled “Delicacy of Detail Marks Style Show: Harry Collins Endorses Tunic and Long Peplum for Day and Evening Gowns,” Collins was asked for his opinion on the upcoming fashions for the spring. Pope introduced Collins and the article with “Harry Collins who has always had a feeling for the distinguished in fashion...”³²⁰ This alludes to the fact that although Collins was sixty and had been a part of the fashion world for over thirty

³¹⁹ Albrecht, *Paris-New York*, 104.

³²⁰ Virginia Pope, "Delicacy of Detail Marks Style Show: Harry Collins Endorses Tunic and Long Peplum for Day and Evening Gowns," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), March 9, 1944, 20.

years, he remained a deciding force. Despite his occasional appearances, the decrease in mentions of Collins in the surviving primary source documents shows that he was slowing down. Times had greatly changed from the 1910s. He had seen two World Wars, significant changes in the structure of American society, and the dramatic changes to fashion and art that came with the rise of modernism. Therefore, it is not surprising when in 1945, Collins was a sideline and not the feature in an article concerning a Fashion Gala to raise money for the Red Cross.³²¹ Furthermore, this event, unlike those in the past were not sponsored or originated by Collins. Instead, this Gala was sponsored by Bergdorf Goodman, Bonwit Teller, Hattie Carnegie, and Saks Fifth Avenue—department stores and designers who had come into favor in this period.³²²

While Collins's career slowed, he continued to design and sell clothing until at least 1950—even having his 1947 winter line reviewed in the *New York Times*.³²³ However, the fashion writer addressed the Collins collection with mixed opinion—a very different reaction from the inspired reviews that Collins had once received. Yet, considering that a year prior in September of 1946, *The Christian Science Monitor* examined Collins nearly forty year career, it was clear that fashions designed by the House of Collins were becoming out of date in the modern fashion industry.³²⁴ The article, “Harry Collins’s Emphasis on ‘Line’ Important in His Career as Designer: Early Dressmaker-Type Fashions Contrasted With Changing Custom-Made Styles of Today,”

³²¹ "Fashion Gala Aids Drive of Red Cross: Variety and Ingenuity Flourish Under Wartime Fashion Restrictions," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), February 27, 1945, 16.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ “Extremes Avoided in New Collection,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 10, 1947, 33.

³²⁴ Barbara E. Scott Fisher, "Harry Collins's Emphasis on 'Line' Important in his Career as Designer," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, MA), September 19, 1946, 16.

focused not only on his career and how the industry had changed in his lifetime, but on what was next for Collins and his salon.³²⁵ The article begins “ [f]ew New York designers are born New Yorkers, Harry Collins, whose familiar signature in the custom-made clothes field winds up in a spool of thread, is one of these select few.” This small paragraph encapsulates the conundrum that though Collins was a member of a small elite group of all American New York designers, he has been completely forgotten by time.

Some of Collins’s last contributions to the world of fashion were revolutionary. In 1945, Collins patented a girdle that allowed for a fashionable silhouette and full flexibility without the use of elastic material; none have been identified as surviving.³²⁶ Then between 1949 and 1951 Collins worked on a new type of plastic dress pattern for home sewers; harkening back to his works in the domestic sphere of sewing that he first delved into in the 1920s. The patterns, sold at B. Altman & Co., were first introduced by Collins in February of 1949. There were originally eighteen styles for the spring. The patterns were somewhat revolutionary in the fact that they could be stitched together and tried on so that the home sewer did not have to pin the fragile paper together.³²⁷ As the *New York Times* reported, “[t]he new service is considered revolutionary, because it accomplishes the same purpose as muslins used when making custom order clothes.”³²⁸ The goal was that every three months another eighteen patterns would be released.³²⁹ It is unclear whether this plan came to fruition; yet, four months later the patterns were still

³²⁵ Fischer, “Harry Collins’s Emphasis,” 16.

³²⁶ Collins, Harry, Undergarment, US Patent 2,383,590, filed June 5, 1942, and issued Aug. 28, 1945.

³²⁷ “Form-Fitting Patterns of Plastic Fabric Good Springtime News For Home Sewers,” *The New York Times*, (New York, NY), February 26, 1949, 12.

³²⁸ “Form-Fitting Patterns of Plastic,” 12.

³²⁹ Ibid.

being discussed in newspapers.³³⁰ Collins went so far as to patent his plastic dress patterns which he applied for in January of 1949 and received in May of 1951.³³¹ The invention of these patterns was the culmination of years of Collins's efforts to aid women who could not afford custom-made clothing to dress beautifully, simply, and functionally in a way that suited their individuality as custom clothing.

While Collins created something revolutionary in the later years of his career, by the 1950s he had all but faded from publication and Collins received virtually no media coverage until his death in February of 1980, at the age of 96 in Los Angeles, CA.³³² It is unknown when Collins salons closed or what events took place to cause Collins to slowly fade from the press and records. But by 1950 bargain store, Filenes Basement advertised that they recently sold Harry Collins along with Nieman Marcus, Saks 5th Ave., Lord and Taylor, and Bergdorf Goodman.³³³ The question remains how did this happen? Was the House of Collins now too dated? Could Collins no longer produce garments for a modern society so different from that in which he launched his business, so four decades later? Or perhaps his patriotic all American persona was darkened by his sons' activities with the communist party. Richard, a Hollywood producer and writer was one of the nineteen witnesses called into the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, and again in 1951—in the latter identifying more than twenty friends and colleagues associated with

³³⁰ "New Plastic Dress Pattern Aids Sewing." *The Chicago Defender*, (Chicago, IL), June 25, 1949, 10.

³³¹ Collins, Harry, Clothing Pattern, US Patent 2,553,847, filed January 25, 1942, and issued May 22, 1951.

³³² Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, *Social Security Death Index*, number: 091-10-6265, Issue State: New York, Issue Date: Before, 1951, "Harry Collins."

³³³ "Display Ad 2," *The Daily Boston Globe*, (Boston, MA), March 22, 1950, 2.

the communist party.³³⁴ Though this is not a full explanation, it could have had a harmful effect on Collins's older and more conservative clientele.

In 1953 Collins, working with his son Richard, produced a pitch for a television show about fashion. The show was to be called *Know Yourself*; however there were multiple variations on the idea with different titles: *T.V. Dressmaker* and *The ABC of Dress*.³³⁵ The basic idea of *Know Yourself* was a modernized version of the tenants of Collins's theory of dress presented on the new, grand stage of television—the obvious successor to Collins's work on the stage, in magazines, and on film. As the pitch read:

The master of ceremonies is the couturier, Harry Collins, who will from a very accurate and personal experience take the T.V. audience behind the fashion curtain and reveal how the dress designer works and try to dissipate the theory that the selection of becoming dress and the expression of good taste is confined to those who spend the most money.³³⁶

Collins argued that:

Although women in all centuries have been dominated to some extent by the whims of fashions..more women of the present day are conscientiously flowing its dicate. They are not only willing to discuss what looks good on them, but are ready to point out what looks like bad taste on someone else.³³⁷

This argument had been the basis of Collins argument from the 1910s. The goal of the television program was to teach women how to dress for their body types and how to sew a beautiful gown in a few hours and at little cost. The program would consist of

³³⁴ Woo, "Richard Collins dies at 98: onetime," *Los Angeles Times*.

³³⁵ Harry Collins and Richard J. Collins, "Know Yourself: A Format for Television" (working paper, Private Collection, 1953), n.p.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

answering question from viewers' letters or women in the audience about dress with visual examples of sketches and draping mannequins or viewers in muslin. Then a few women would be selected from the audience and asked a question related to a sponsor (i.e. Singer sewing machines, a fabric company, thread company, etc). The woman with the best answer would receive a dress semi-made for her by Collins on the show. In making the dress in front of the audience for a random woman Collins would be able to address all the issues of personality, sewing techniques, constructions, good taste, etc. to the audience at once.³³⁸ Collins imagined himself telling an anecdote from his over forty year career while creating the garment and discussing the garment and giving notes on what he was doing.³³⁹ Other versions featured a dress of the week that was already semi-fitted and Collins would fit it perfectly to an audience member. Another, featured weekly guests of well-known fashion designers or artists. Putting together all these pieces of the proposed television show it is somewhat recognizable as a mixture of today's television shows *What Not to Wear* and *Project Runway*. Once again, Collins was ahead of his peers in trying to combine the celebrity and the everyday woman in the structure of his dress philosophy; yet, he had repeatedly proven that these techniques worked in his favor.

A Fashion Legacy

Though he had helped lay the groundwork for the American couture industry, Collins knew that he was not going to have the same effect on the changing landscape of American Fashion at mid-century. Collins, though successful in the 1930s and 1940s

³³⁸ Collins and Collins, "Know Yourself: A Format," n.p.

³³⁹ Ibid.

was a star of the exuberance of the 1910s and 1920s. He was of a generation that saw the unencumbered wealth of pre-depression America. Writing near the end of his career

Collins wrote:

I've lived through a changing period of world history, I've watched the Leveling of Democracy. The great wealthy of individuals being distributed with plan and purpose. The glamour and the drama that was the American Couture. The old monarchies and the aristocracies. The traditions and the old customs are forever lost.³⁴⁰

The House of Collins prospered when old families mixed with new industrial money; when clients like Louis Kaufman, the head of the Chatham Bank purchased a wedding dress for his daughter for \$6,500.00 and when Mrs. Joseph E. Widener paid \$2,500 for a gown that was to be worn for a reception at her home or Mrs. Julius Fleishman bought four chinchilla wraps in one season for a total well over \$130,000.³⁴¹ It was this time of extreme wealth that allowed Collins to pursue a democracy in dress. Without the great wealth, Collins could have created patterns for *The Ladies Home Journal* or *Modern Priscilla*. Moreover, without the popularity of Collins with his elite clientele he may have never been able to take the risk of presenting the American women with his theories of American dress.

Though the name Harry Collins may mean little to costume historians today, the depth of meaning the name once held is awe-inspiring. To the American woman, Harry Collins meant beautiful, simple, elegant clothing that was accessible to every woman in the United States. It meant clothing tailored for her individual needs and personality and

³⁴⁰ Collins, *Autobiographical writings part one*, 2.

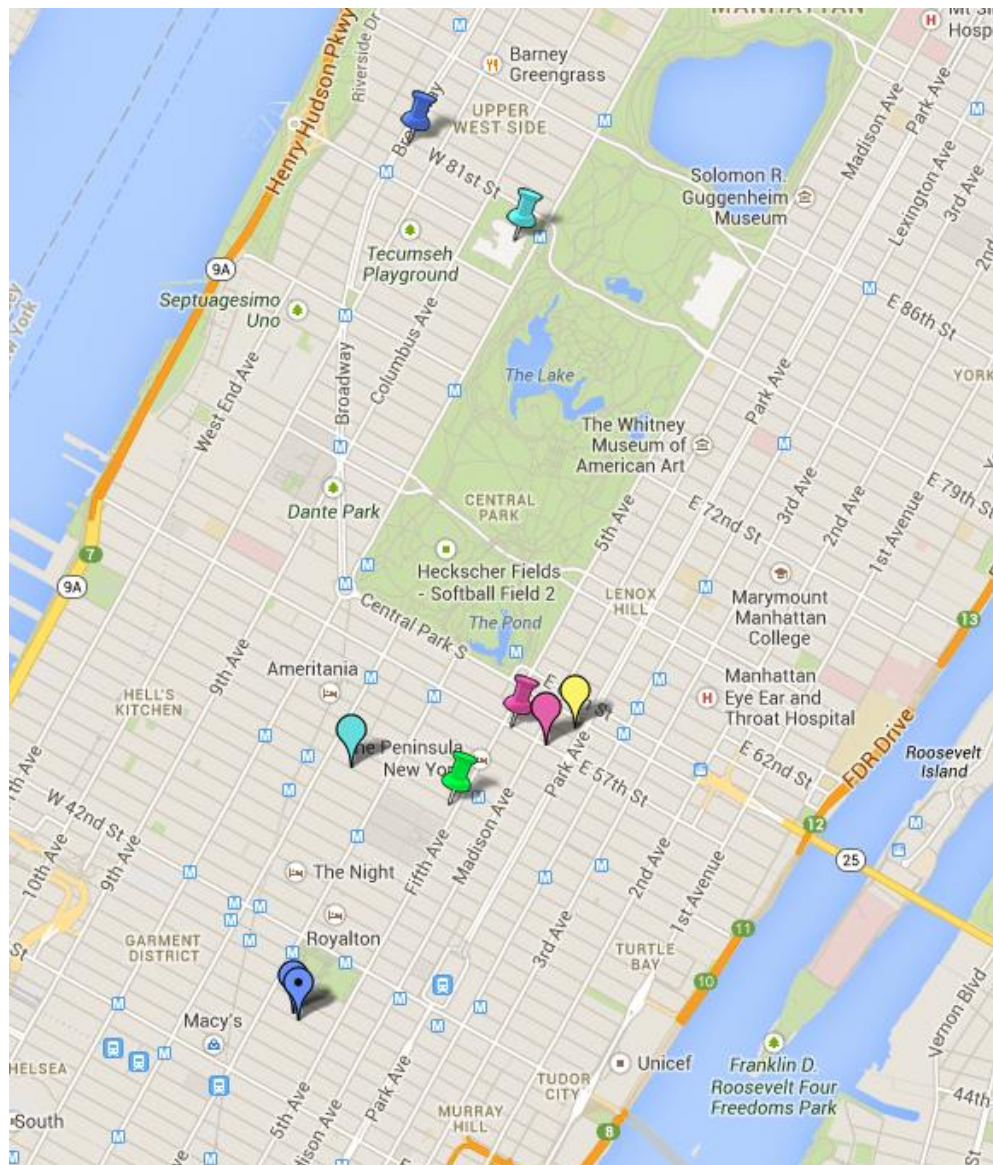
³⁴¹ Ibid.

not merely the newest unflattering trend forced upon her. The tagline, “Art in Dress,” was not just a gimmick but a goal attempted to be reached in every garment, every accessory, every pattern, and every bit of advice presented by Harry Collins. “Art in Dress” was a promise of good, long lasting taste based on the classic principals of line and female figure and not of cheap fads. Collins clothing was fashionable, following stylistic changes and contemporary feelings, but never followed the dictates of Fashion.

Through a mastery of networking, branding, and advertising the House of Collins was a household name nationwide. From movie and theater stars to the Four Hundred, magnates of industry, and political figures, to middle-class housewives, working girls, and home sewers, Harry Collins dressed American women of all shapes and sizes in American clothing. What few pieces of his works survive tell only part of the story of Harry Collins and his unrivaled impact on early American couture; however, Collins has usually been dismissed as a ready-to-wear designer of little consequence in the first decades of the twentieth century, he has been misunderstood until this point. When one examines the oeuvre of Collins life and career it is evident that while Harry Collins and the House of Collins have received this rebuff, it is not for a lack of significance, but a lack of understanding and scholarly attention.

APPENDIX I: MAP OF COLLINS KNOW NEW YORK LOCATIONS-1912 -1943

Map of Harry Collins living and salon locations, New York, NY, 1912-1943
By Nora Carleson via Google Maps.



Map Key

-  **Collins Home 1912**
Collins Home 1912 39 W 38th St New York, NY 10018
-  **Collins Home 1915**
Collins Home 1915 219 W 81st St New York, NY 10024
-  **1st House of Collins 1917**
1st Collins Shop Location 1917 29 W 38th St New York, NY 10018
-  **Six to Sixteen**
Six to Sixteen—Collins 9 E 57th St New York, NY 10022
-  **House of Collins 1920**
Park and 57th Salon—May 1920 49 E 57th St New York, NY 10022
-  **Collins Home 1924**
Collins Home 1924 480 Park Ave New York, NY 10022
-  **Collins Home 1942**
Collins Home 1942 100 W 51st St New York, NY 10019
-  **1943 House of Collins**
Collins Shop Location in 1943 5th Ave & W 52nd St New York, NY 10019
-  **1940 Collins Home Address Unknown**
Collins Home 1940 Address Unknown Central Park West New York NY 10024



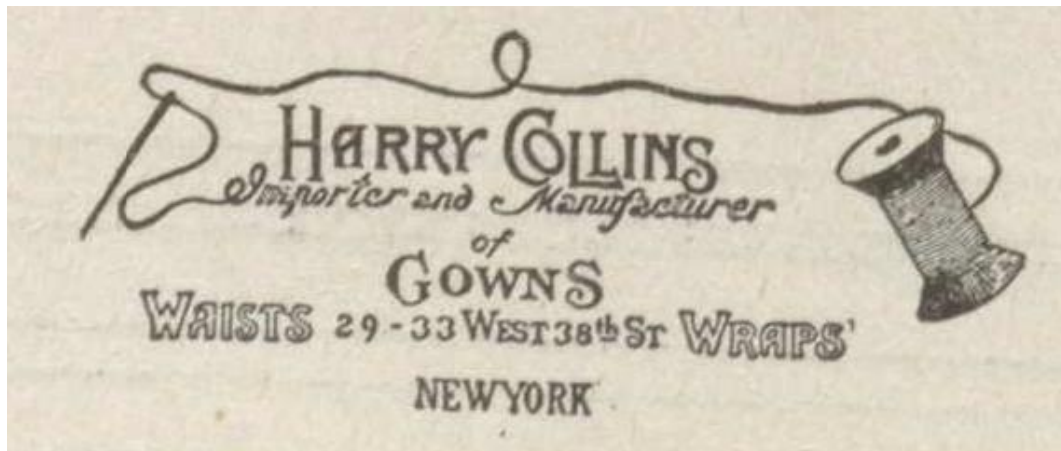
Map of Harry Collins living and salon locations, New York, NY, 1912-1943 can be accessed via:

<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msid=213788332414335369115.0004e4dd646cafe66aabe&msa=0&ll=40.768322,-73.977556&spn=0.046608,0.104628>
or by scanning QR code above.

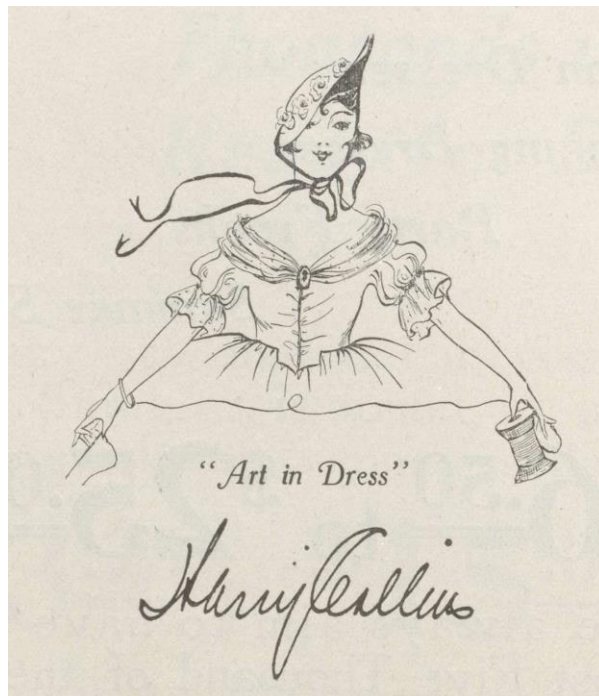
APPENDIX II: A SELECT EVOLUTION OF HARRY COLLINS LOGO 1914-1922



The American Cloak and Suit Review, November, 1914, 64-65; *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, December, 1914, 87.



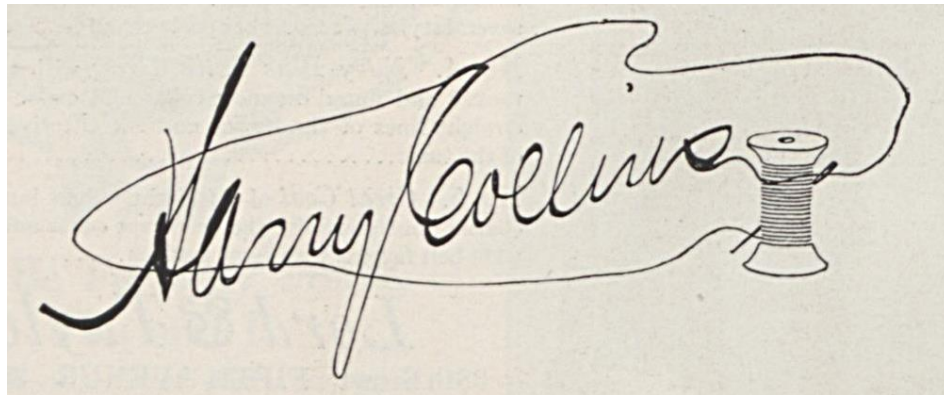
The American Cloak and Suit Review, January 1915, 116B



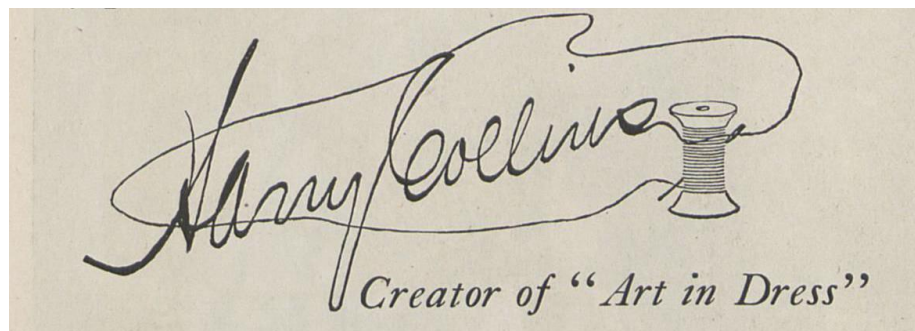
The American Cloak and Suit Review, May 1915, 100



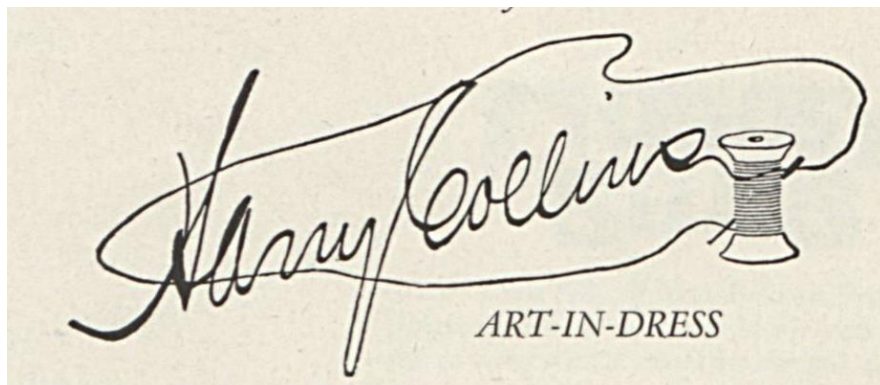
The American Cloak and Suit Review, July 1915, 144.



Vogue, September 15, 1917, 10.



Vogue, April 1, 1919, 19.



Vogue, February 15, 1922, 14.³⁴²

³⁴² Collins logo stabilized in the 1920s and remained the same or showed minor shifts back and forth throughout the rest of his career.

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BIOGRAPHY

Nora Ellen Carleson grew up in a historic village in rural Illinois. She attended Monmouth College, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in History 2011. She went on to receive her Masters in the History of the Decorative Arts from George Mason University in 2013. While a graduate student she interned at various institutions including The National Museum of American History, Hillwood Estate, Museum, & Gardens, and Heurich House among others. Upon the completion of this thesis Nora plans to continue research and work in the decorative arts field.