

Introduction

The current installation features clothing and accessories belonging to Daisy Williams (1867-1884), in whose memory Sweet Briar College was founded by her mother, Indiana Fletcher Williams. Daisy's untimely death at age 16 suspended her in time, forever a girl. Her grief-stricken mother understandably saved mementos of the child's life—baby shoes and nightgowns, a piece of tiny jewelry, a pretty bonnet. In so doing Indiana also preserved artifacts that tell a story—fragmented and imperfect but compelling—of the life of a child growing up in a well-to-do family in the 1870s and early 1880s. The real, living Daisy of many a Sweet Briar College story and tradition wore these clothes. In them she played, and studied, and visited friends.

The items on display here are shown in tandem with references to clothing and accessories pulled from Daisy's two preserved diaries and her extant letters. The clothing has been selected to show garments from different stages of her life—from babyhood to adolescence—and to highlight the difference between what she wore as a toddler to play at rural Sweet Briar and what she wore as a young lady in the more sophisticated scope of her wintertime life in New York City. The selections on the walls from Daisy's diaries and letters reveal a child bonding with her mother on shopping trips to fashionable department



Fig. 1.—YOUNG LADY'S GRADUATING DRESS.
For description see Supplement.

Fig. 2.—YOUNG LADY'S AFTERNOON DRESS.
For description see Supplement.

stores and fittings with exclusive dressmakers and a girl growing acutely aware of the economic messages embedded in clothing and of the social meaning of certain fabrics and styles. Daisy's remarks can also shed light on the family's economic standing—in 1882 she notes buying a pair of shoes for \$5.00, the current equivalent of about \$120.00. Her writings show that she and her mother made hats together, and designed and altered some of their own outfits. Daisy herself sewed items such as aprons and handkerchiefs, helped servants wash and iron clothes, and relished the barefooted freedom of summer at Sweet Briar. She brought gifts of ribbon and calico to the family's employees when she returned from New York and formed opinions on fashions of the day.

Daisy mentioned, often with abbreviated or misspelled names, a number of Manhattan department stores and smaller shops as well as a few individual dressmakers in her diaries and letters. The stores and boutiques she noted catered to well-to-do shoppers and offered fine furnishings as well as clothing, dress fabrics, and accessories. Some of the large department stores, such as Macy's, are still in business, while others have merged with similar enterprises or have long been defunct. The locations given below refer to the stores' New York City locations at the time that Daisy and her mother patronized them in the late 1870s and early 1880s. All were located in a mid-town Manhattan up-scale shopping neighborhood popularly known as "The Ladies Mile" (the city officially designated it a historic district in 1989), an area roughly covering 15th to 24th Streets (north/south) and the present-day Park Avenue South to 6th Avenue (east/west). Many of the stores' grand buildings still stand in New York, repurposed for modern commerce.

image: Young Lady's Graduating Dress; Young Lady's Afternoon Dress, *Harper's Bazar*, 19 May 1883

Vendors & Glossary

“Altman’s”: B. Altman and Company, a department store located at 6th Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets.

“Arnolds”: Arnold Constable and Company, a vast department store located at Broadway and 19th Street.

“Boutillier”: LeBoutillier Brothers, a dry goods store located at Broadway and 14th Street.

“Cantrells”: Shoe stores owned by George Cantrell, located at 251 4th Avenue and at 32 Broadway.

Co-operative Dress Association: A short-lived innovative business (1882-1883), located on West 23rd Street. Its goal was to provide work for women as seamstresses and to offer good-quality, affordable clothing.

“Ehrichs”: Ehrich Brothers, a huge dry goods store doing business at 6th Avenue between 22nd and 23rd Streets.

“Macys”: R.H. Macy and Company, located at 6th Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets.

“Lord and Taylor’s”: Lord and Taylor, a luxury department store located at Broadway and 20th Street.

“O’Neils”: A large dry goods store owned by Hugh O’Neill. Located at 6th Avenue between 20th and 21st Streets.

“Rothschilds”: The millinery (hats, veils, headpieces) shop of Jacob Rothschild, located at 56/58 14th Street.

“Sterns”: Stern Brothers Department Store, a large department store located on West 23rd Street.

“Stewarts”: A.T. Stewart and Company, an influential department store located at Broadway and between 9th and 10th Streets.

alpaca: a fabric woven from the fleece of the alpaca, a member of the llama family native to South America

basque: a closely fitted bodice comprising the top of a woman’s dress ensemble

calico: a plainly woven cotton fabric usually featuring a printed design

chuddah (or chaddar): a plain weave cotton fabric; the word derives from a type of cotton cloth woven in India and from the term for head coverings worn there made from that cloth

flannel: a woven fabric of light or medium weight with a softly napped (fluffy or fuzzy) surface

gauze: a fine, sheer fabric woven of cotton or silk

gingham: a yard-dyed, lightweight woven cotton fabric, often featuring checkered or striped patterns

india rubber: natural rubber made from the sap of some tropical vines and trees

lady’s (or ladies’) cloth: a lightweight plain, woven broadcloth or a fine flannel used for women’s garments

lawn: a plain, sheer, lightweight cotton fabric used for women’s and children’s clothing and items such as handkerchiefs

linen: fabric made from fibers of the flax plant, often used for warm-weather clothing

lisle thread: a two-ply cotton yarn

merino: a fine, soft wool woven from the fleece of merino sheep

rick rack (or rickrack): a flat braid woven in a zig-zag pattern used to decorate women’s and children’s clothing

satin: a smooth, lustrous, closely-woven silk fabric

seersucker: a lightweight cotton fabric featuring a woven pattern of puckered stripes, often used for summer clothing

silk: thread made from filament spun by insects such as moth caterpillars and the fine, strong fabric woven from these threads

chemise: an undergarment (such as a slip worn under a dress), or a simple dress, shirt, or blouse

cloak: a loose outer garment similar to a shawl or wrap

cloud: a long, loose head wrap or scarf

corset: a snug, fitted undergarment stiffened with boning (stays) worn by women to shape the bust, abdomen, and waist

gauntlet: gloves that cover the wrists, used by ladies when horseback riding

leghorn hat: a hat made from a particularly fine bleached wheat straw from Italy

muff: a soft, padded tube made of embellished fabric or fur, into which both hands



were tucked for warmth in cold weather

parasol: a dainty umbrella, used chiefly for stylish effect rather than rain protection

polonaise: a style of skirt in which side panels are draped and pinned up so as to show an under layer of the skirt

riding habit: a costume for a girl or woman consisting of a jacket and long skirt cut for sidesaddle horseback riding

rubbers: the short-hand term “rubbers” refers to waterproof slip-on coverings for shoes made of natural rubber

saque: a loose, open-front jacket; often used to refer to a garment for an infant or small child

shirtwaist (or waist): a blouse for a woman or girl cut and tailored to resemble somewhat a man’s shirt

water proof (or waterproof): a cloak or coat made with fabric treated, for example with wax, to repel rain

image: Children’s Outfits, *Harper’s Bazar*, 15 May 1880



Acknowledgements

The idea for the current installation, *Dressing Miss Daisy*, began as a research project undertaken by Jade Smith '18 for a Sweet Briar College class on museology in spring semester 2016. A business major interested in fashion, Ms. Smith chose to research for a class curatorial project a jacket and skirt belonging to Daisy Williams. Her project prompted Museum staff to consider more examples of Daisy's apparel for an exhibition. Ms. Smith's class work evolved into an Arts Management practicum in fall 2016, during which she assisted in researching, planning, and installing the current display.

Behind-the-scenes student assistants Abigail Schutte '17 and Grace Culley '17 played a significant role in preparing the clothing and accessories for display and aiding in the installation. Registrar Nancy McDearmon designed the specialized

mounts to safeguard these delicate items and to show them to their best effect and she also assisted with aspects of research. Colleagues in the Physical Plant carpenter shop deserve thanks for their help with the armatures.

Appreciation goes, too, to Liz Kent Léon in the College's Cochran Library archives for her help with a vintage photograph of Daisy and for facilitating access to Daisy's writings, and to Dr. Lynn Rainville, director of Sweet Briar's Tusculum Institute, for her assistance clarifying the identity of some of the individuals mentioned in Daisy's diaries and letters excerpted here. The signage on the gallery walls was designed and produced by alumna Nancy Blackwell Marion, owner of The Design Group and The Blackwell Press, Lynchburg, Virginia. Finally, the Museum staff is grateful to Mr. Paul Wailes of Amherst, who graciously shared information about his ancestors, the Capertons, whose daughters feature in Daisy's writings—especially those passages excerpted for these walls. Were she to join us in this room today, Mr. Wailes's grandmother Sadie would surely recognize more than a few of these pretty bonnets and frocks.

All of the clothing and accessories on display belong to the collection of The Sweet Briar Museum. The spelling and punctuation used in the wall texts are original to Daisy's diaries and letters.

Karol A. Lawson
Director, Art Collection and Galleries and The Sweet Briar Museum
Director and Assistant Professor, Arts Management Program

image: Garden Hats, *Harper's Bazar*, 3 August 1882



FIG. 1.—DRESS FOR MISS FROM 12 TO 17 YEARS OLD.—CUT PATTERN, No. 3288; BASQUE, OVER-SKIRT, AND SKIRT, 15 CENTS EACH. For description see Supplement.

FIG. 2.—PLAIN AND FLOWERED COTTON SATINE DRESS. FRONT.—[FOR BACK, see Page 484.]—CUT PATTERN, No. 3289; BODICE AND SKIRT, 25 CENTS EACH. For pattern and description see Suppl., No. VI., Figs. 72-74.

Sources & Suggested Reading

Books

Barth, Gunther P. *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Blanco, José F., ed. *Clothing and Fashion: American Fashion from Head to Toe*. 2 vols. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2016.

Fischer, Gayle V. *Pantaloon and Power: Nineteenth Century Dress Reform in the United States*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001.

Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Lewandowski, Elizabeth J. *The Complete Costume Dictionary*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2011.

Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *World Clothing and Fashion: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Social Influence*.

2 vols. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2014.

Tortora, Phyllis G., and Robert S. Merkel. *Fairchild's Dictionary of Textiles*. 7th edition. New York: Fairchild Publications, 2007.

Whitaker, Jan. *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006.

Primary Records

Daisy Williams's diaries and letters, Mary Helen Cochran Library archives, Sweet Briar College

Trow's New York City Directory for the period 1880-1883

United States Federal Census 1880

Internet Sources

Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art

<http://metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/the-costume-institute>

Mann Library, Home Economics Archive, Cornell University

<http://hearth.library.cornell.edu/>

Tusculum Institute, Sweet Briar College

<http://tusculum.sbc.edu/DaisyNYC/index.php>

http://lynnrainville.org/tusculuminstitute/pdf/vol2_iStory_Daisy-in-NewYork_lo.pdf

image: Girls' and Ladies' Dresses, *Harper's Bazar*, 21 July 1880

KL 12-20-2016