Wedding dress and its secret underneath

Thursday, April 26, 2018 by Wen Xin Zhao

The evolution of women's fashion proceeds as changes occur in human history. As people take in the information around them they change their tastes on everything. That includes how they define beauty. For me as a Fine Art student who is attracted by the changing definition of beauty, I am interested in how evolving concepts of beauty influence people's outfits. In addition, because outfits change that means what a woman has to wear under her fancy dresses is also going to change.

What I really want to explore is in what order a woman in the 20th century wears her garments. I am unable to find any reference image or photo in our collection that can inform me how exactly a woman wears her dress but I did find some wedding photos and wedding dresses that belong to the Breithaupt Hewetson Clark Family. Wedding dresses as a important part of fashion are also able to reflect the tastes of the era. Thus I think I may be able to find some clues from the actual wedding dresses that belonged to Rosa Melvina Breithaupt Hewetson Clark, daughter of Louis Jacob Breithaupt and Emma Breithaupt (nee Devitt).

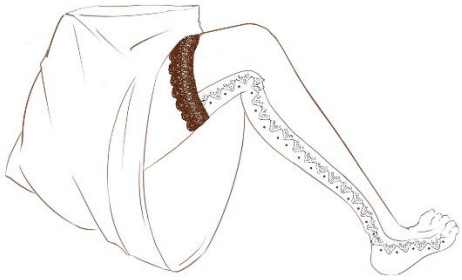
This donation contains different pieces of Rosa's wedding gown which gives me the chance to identify each of their functions, how they should be worn and when can they be put on the bride. My final results after I have done much research and drawing studies is this series of drawings that shows my best guess for what steps a bride takes to wear her wedding gown.

Envelope chemise



This is the very first step a bride has to take and it is called the envelope chemise. It is just like the brassiere a modern woman wears before they put their other clothes on. However, the difference is that the envelope chemise is more lose like nightwear. In order to prove my idea I have found a YouTube video Getting Dressed in the 18th Century and it shows that envelope chemises can be worn as nightclothes and the flexibility of the fabric makes it comfortable.

Stockings





Stockings are the second piece of clothing a bride puts on herself. Due to the fact that women in the early 20th centuries still wore corsets to shape their body, it is important for them to put on the stockings before they lose the freedom of being able to bend. Usually, there should be at least a ribbon to tie the stockings or suspender clips on the sides in case it creeps down. However, the photo shows no evidence of the clips on the stocking. Thus, I would assume that Rosa used ribbon instead.

Petticoat





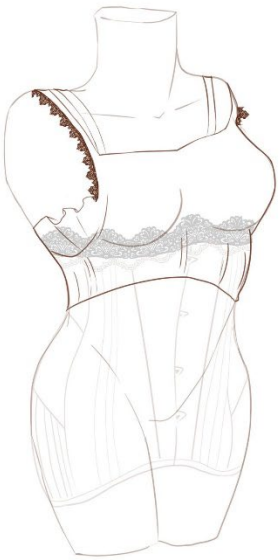
After the stockings it is time to put on the petticoat. This is the first layer of skirt a bride puts on herself which is also called the underskirt. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in the history of fashion evolution, a petticoat was used as padding to increase the fullness of women's skirts. However, after the crinoline had been developed the petticoat lost some people's favour because it is less comfortable than the crinoline. In the 20th century, women can make their own decision on whether to wear a crinoline, a petticoat, or none at all.

Corset



This is the corset, one of the most symbolic pieces of clothing that identifies the difference of the taste of beauty between **modern and old-fashioned**. The corset I drew here is a little bit different from my reference image provided on page 88-89 of New York styles: fall and winter 1919-1920. because the stocking Rosa wore did not have suspender clips. Thus, it is possible that the corset she wore is different from the modern design. The corset laces that control the tightness of the garment are located on the back of the corset which is similar to the 18th century's design.

Brassiere





This is the early 20th century design of a brassiere. The only difference I can find is the corset boning inside this brassiere. This brassiere shares

some similarities with the corset and it covers only 1/3 of a person's upper body. In my estimation, a person may decide to wear either a brassiere, a corset or both.

Train





This is the train of the wedding dress which is also the 2nd layer of skirts a bride may wear. The length of the train dictates the trains name. According to the length of this dress it can be either a court train or a chapel train.

Corset cover





This is the corset cover which can be worn above the brassiere. Different than the brassiere, a corset cover is more loose fitting and it does not contain any boning inside. In Jennifer Rosbrugh's blog article Corset Covers, Chemisettes and Under-Bodices, Oh My! she explains that, just like its name, the function of the corset cover is to smooth out the lines of the corset underneath it.

Final layer





This is the final layer of skirts a bride may wear. Unfortunately I cannot find an appropriate name for this layer and so its function is unidentified. However, the reason why I believe this piece of clothing is the final layer of Rosa's wedding gown is based on two reasons. First, is its adjustable waist. There are two layers of dresses underneath this layer. Thus, the waist is not fixed it is wide enough to cover up the petticoat and the train underneath it. Second, the bottom of this piece is very delicate and decorative. If this layer is worn underneath the train than its decorations are going to be blocked by the opaqueness of the train.

Do you know the name of this layer of dress? I would love to hear from you if you do have the answer. Send an email to Special Collection & Archives.

Underbodice





This is the underbodice which works similarly to the corset cover. In the article Corset Covers, Chemisettes and Under-Bodices, Oh My! Jennifer briefly explains its function which can be either to provide extra warmth or to work as the silhouette support. In this case it works as the latter.

Shoes





Here comes the bride's shoes. There is nothing really special about the order of when a bride should wear her shoes. However, one of the interesting things I discovered during my research is that some brides may decide to buy a pair of shoes that can be worn other than her wedding date due to economical considerations. Thus, some bridal shoes are not as decorative as other ones. This fact can be tracked in the book *The Wedding Dress 300 years of Bridal Fashions* by Edwina Ehrman.

Hairpiece & veil













There is not much I can say about hairpieces and the veils. However, as you compare my drawings and the actual photo of Rosa you can see the difference. Rosa's first wedding dates to the year 1917. Thus, it is reasonable to see that the hairpiece she wears shows evidence of the early 1920s style. However, it is difficult to identify exactly the style of the hairpiece Rosa is wearing. I would say the details of its design are in accord with the description of the Juliet Cap that is described in the article 1920s – a Head for Fashion (As of 2021-06-07 this link is broken). The Juliet Cap is named after Juliet, heroine of William Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Romeo*

and Juliet. It is a type of mesh cap that has decorations of pearls or beads on the sides and the veil associated with this type of cap is cathedral length. The reason my drawing is different from the photo is because from the donation I cannot find the actual hairpiece that Rosa wore. However, the hairpieces I found became my inspiration for what if Rosa wore these instead. My drawing displays my imagination.

Additionally, the pattern of the hairpiece decorated with three butterflies, can be identified as the Kokoshnik pattern, which is a traditional headdress pattern in Russian culture.