

The Fabrics of Our Past

textiles and fashions, 1860s–1960s

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Museum exhibit focuses on fashion

A new special exhibit, “**The Fabrics of Our Past, 1860s to 1960s**,” will open at the San Bernardino County Museum in Redlands on Saturday, April 28, 2012 in the museum’s Crossroads in History gallery. Michele Nielsen, curator of history and archives, organized the exhibition, which centers around costumes, accessories, and textiles from the museum’s permanent collections. The exhibit is sponsored in part by the Western Textile Center Association.

Today, the clothing and accessories we wear are an important part of our everyday life, influenced by everything from pop culture icons to “green” trends and even styles of the past. Just like today, fashion of the past was dictated in many ways by social and cultural norms, and clothing and textile design from bygone eras reflect these influences.

“The Fabrics of Our Past gives visitors a chance to examine clothing and textile artifacts to learn more about the lives of the people who wore them and the world in which they lived,” said Michele Nielsen, the museum’s curator of history and archives. “Sometimes, subtle details reveal much, allowing us to think about their lives and circumstances in terms we can relate to—our own clothing and accessories.”

Tiny handbags used by women in 1860 contrast interestingly with the large, sumptuous bags that are popular today. In the past, what did women really carry in a handbag? Perhaps there was a handkerchief and maybe a few coins. Today’s large bags can hold electronic devices, a change of clothes, bottled water, and energy bars; even small pets—necessary equipment for people on the go. Why would Victorian-era women not have more in their bags?

In an era of mass-produced clothing that is relatively inexpensive and easy to obtain, we might not go to the trouble of altering an old shirt out of our closet to fit another family member. During World War II, however, recycling clothing was a practical and patriotic thing to do. Booklets published by the United States government offered directions on how to alter men’s clothing to fit women and children in an era when shortages and rationing were commonplace.

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San Bernardino County Museum

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The Fabrics of Our Past continued

Part of the focus of **The Fabrics of Our Past** is on the hand-worked aspects of the artifacts. The ability to sew a seam by hand, to embroider, to create beaded embellishment, to make lace, or to weave a fine cloth that could be used for clothing were valued skills long ago. Today, many people still enjoy carrying on these traditions, but often it is purely for fun and the chance for artistic expression, not because the skills are needed to be socially acceptable, or to have an occupation, as in the past.

The exhibit sponsor is the Western Textile Center Association, made up of member guilds who keep these historic techniques alive through their work. The guilds include the Inland Empire Handweavers Guild, the American Needlepoint Guild, the Bedazzled Beaders, and the Embroiderer's Guild of America, all dedicated to traditional techniques with a modern approach.

Examine your own wardrobe and then compare and contrast what you wear with some of the artifacts on exhibit. Are you a fashion-forward trendy person with skull-and-crossbones motifs on your clothing? See if you can identify a few trend-setting designs on the clothing and accessories worn in the 1920s. Do you enjoy making an up-cycled fashion statement that goes along with today's green initiatives? Check out the clothing from 1900 to find out more about the Arts and Crafts Movement philosophy that influenced not only architectural and interior design, but clothing design, too.

The Fab opening night event for The Fabrics of Our Past on Friday, April 27, 2012 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. is open to the public, with advance reservations. A series of programs that relate to the **Fabrics of Our Past** exhibit are scheduled at the museum during the run of the exhibit, which will close in November 2012.

The San Bernardino County Museum is at the California Street exit from Interstate 10 in Redlands. The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 9 am to 5pm. General admission is \$8 (adult), \$6 (military or senior), \$5 (student), and \$4 (child aged 5 to 12). Children under five and Museum Association members are admitted free. Parking is free. For more information, visit www.sbcountymuseum.org. The museum is accessible to persons with disabilities. If assistive listening devices or other auxiliary aids are needed in order to participate in museum exhibits or programs, requests should be made through Museum Visitor Services at least three business days prior to your visit. Visitor Services' telephone number is 909-307-2669 ext. 229 or (TDD) 909-792-1462.

