

Costume Society workshop hosted by Halton Museum

By Dorinne Belbeck
What I am told, I forget. What I see, I remember. What I do, I know.

This old Chinese Proverb proclaims the theme of the Spring Workshop of the Costume Society of Ontario, held March 23 and 24 at the Halton Regional Museum. Dynamically led by Mrs. Eileen Collard, Chairman of the Costume Society of Ontario, the workshop attracted participants from such widespread parts of Southern Ontario as Owen Sound, Barrie and Renfrew. The session was limited to 20 people so that maximum benefit could be derived for those attending; 53 applications were received.

David Pequegnat of the Theatre Arts, York University said he had attended many seminars and workshops but that this session at the Halton Regional Museum was by far the best. The organization of the workshop by Mrs. Collard, the warmth and hospitality of the Halton Regional Museum staff and the superb food provided for their lunches were high on his list of outstanding qualities of the session. The gathering of museum curators, members of board of management, directors and university representatives also voiced their enthusiastic approval.

Costumes
Mrs. Collard had chosen Halton Regional Museum for the proposed Spring Workshop in October, 1973. Mrs. Eileen Collard, Curator of the Museum, was delighted to have such a prestigious event designated for Halton, and at such an opportune time. The title of the Workshop was "Organizing a Costume Collection in a Small Museum." Halton Regional Museum had decided to embark on a project that would better preserve the extensive costume collection in the museum and store them in the Alexander Stone House. The project was designed to allow Mrs. Collard to illustrate her topic in a real situation and to give Halton Museum the benefit of the collective talent that would be present at the Workshop.

Eileen Collard, a vigorous and knowledgeable woman was approached by the Costume Society to present workshops semi-annually to meet the demand for information on costumes from museums, education and the theatre. Her training as a designer and her work at museums has enabled her to conduct outstanding seminars covering the costume's contribution to social history, comment on design, storage and preservation. She has written several booklets on costume including "The Cut of Women's 19th Century Dresses" and "Fashions of the Seventies (1870-1879)".

Reading
This highly organized woman, once she has selected a museum as the host for the seminar and completed the preliminary preparations, moves into high gear 10

Muffin meeting

President Joyce Wilson of the Hornby 4-H club opened the recent meeting with the pledge, then after business had been discussed the girls retired to the kitchen to make three kinds of muffins—also judged by two members.

Different kinds of flours were examined and the meeting closed with the devouring of the delicious muffins.

weeks prior to the session. She "tries to keep it to a full day job," but it takes all her nights too. She visited the Halton Museum once a week examining the costumes in preparation for the workshop. Each participant was sent a list of required reading weeks before the event. They were also given a choice of working on the blueprints of the area chosen in Halton Museum to become the new storage area, or to bring blueprints of their own storage areas they were prepared to work on.

Arriving at Halton Regional Museum at 9 a.m. Saturday morning, the group registered, had a coffee and were hard at work by 9:30 a.m.

Period dress
Mrs. Olive Newcombe, Director, Dundas Historical Society Museum, chaired the workshop. She introduced Eira Brittain who welcomed them to "the barn" where the workshop was held. The very impressive structure has hand hewn beams of whole tree trunks across the lofty ceiling, and a magnificent Stagecoach Inn fireplace. The participants remarked later that it was a truly fascinating building.

Mrs. Brittain then turned the workshop over to Mrs. Collard. Mrs. Collard spoke for a few minutes on "Why Clothing Artifacts Should be Preserved" and outlined the topics that would be covered during the session. There was a short visit to the Craft House of the Museum where the costumes are presently displayed. A dramatic presentation of a "Gift to the Museum" introduced the first topic "Identifying the Silhouette or Period." Using artifacts from the museum's collection plus slides and posters, Mrs. Collard gave an energetic and enthusiastic presentation.

The informal atmosphere of the workshop session and Eileen Collard's forceful and

dramatic presentation of her next topic "Organizing Suitable Storage and Work Areas" so engrossed the group that coffee was taken at their work table. They had

viewed the actual accommodation proposed for the Halton Collection and using the blueprints provided, plus a working model, they designed a new storage and

work area for the Alexander House. The problems of storage in a limited space were illustrated by Mrs. Collard. Shallow drawer storage, hanging storage and

utilizing odd spaces for storage were also included.

Social hour
A social hour with slides on "Canadian Costume 1780-1920" was held on Saturday evening in front of a roaring fire made with enormous logs, in the huge fireplace at the Museum. This added to the reputation for hospitality the Museum is rapidly acquiring.

The Sunday session began at 9:30 a.m. and considered the topic "Preserving, Restoring and Cleaning of Costumes." What not to do was included as well as what to do. Vacuuming of historical items was illustrated. A constructed wire frame torso and bust and an altered mannequin were used to display the costumes effectively and inexpensively. As finances are a large headache for any museum, Mrs. Collard advocates using all and any materials available. The best solution to a preserving and storing problem is usually the most expensive. Next best was emphasized. Mrs. Jean Van Nostrand, Training Co-ordinator, Ontario Museums Association will be evaluating the seminar and will send her findings to the museum.

Lunches
Friends of the Halton



VACUUMING A COSTUME are Ellen Langlans and S. J. Erwood, participants in the Costume Society Workshop this past weekend hosted by Halton County Museum.

(Photo by D. Pink)

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