Fashioning Philadelphia - The Style of the City, 1720-1940


The current exhibition, “Fashioning Philadelphia: The Style of the City, 1720-1940,” uses the Library Company’s extensive collections of prints, photographs, books, pamphlets, trade cards, and artifacts to tell the largely unexplored story of Philadelphia’s contribution to the fashion trades over three centuries. Curated by Wendy Woloson, a history professor at the University of Rutgers, Camden, the exhibition tells an exciting but little known story.

As the location of the Continental Congress and the nation’s first capital, 18th-century Philadelphia hosted many trend-setters who knew that what they wore was as important as what they said. This was true whether representatives dressed in clothing made of luxurious fabrics imported from overseas, or in patriotic homespun made entirely from domestically-produced materials. Benjamin Franklin was perhaps Philadelphia’s “first fashionista.” Several exhibit portraits show him in his rustic mode – in spectacles and fur hat and without a wig.

Until the mid-19th century Philadelphia was the country’s most cosmopolitan city. Not only was it the nation’s most active port, but it also supported diverse cultures and communities whose personal styles helped shape larger fashion trends. The city was home to the largest population of free African Americans, rising classes of skilled and unskilled tradesmen, and generations of Quakers. Cut paper silhouettes, daguerreotype portraits, and lithographic renderings of these and other groups are on display throughout the exhibition.

Philadelphia’s role as trend-setter was nowhere more evident than on Chestnut Street, renowned as one of the most fashionable retail corridors in the world. Casual travelers and style mavens alike remarked on the thoroughfare’s grandness, elegance, and exclusivity, likening it to the shopping districts of Paris, London, and Milan. People flocked there to “promenade” – to see others and be seen – as illustrated in the many scenes of Chestnut Street in the show. One observer at the time noted the “thronging of well-dressed people, and the unexpected splendour of the shops – large stores shewing [sic] a long vista of elegant counters, shelving, and glass-cases . . . stocked with the most costly articles of luxury.”

The city was not merely a consumer of the latest and most fashionable goods, but an important producer of fashion as well: Philadelphia’s industrial power rivaled the factories in New England. Countless numbers of weavers, spinners, dyers, and tailors who settled in Philadelphia brought skills from Europe. The water-powered mills of Manayunk wove some of the finest
textiles. The city’s merchant tailors – some of whose innovative patterning systems are included in the exhibition – helped men dress for success; and French milliners outfitted upper-class women in the finest dresses and hats. The city’s many tanneries, set along the banks of the Schuylkill River, processed hundreds of thousands of pounds of leather a year, producing raw material that would make everything from the most durable of coach bags to the most luxurious kid leather shoes.

The Frankford and Kensington sections of the city supported innumerable light industries that also contributed to the fashion trades. Wireworks, iron processors, light metal shops, and carvers made constituent parts for fashion items as diverse as hoop skirts and umbrellas. John B. Stetson’s landmark factory was situated in the heart of Philadelphia, and at its peak in the early 20th century was producing some 2 million hats per year. Visitors to the exhibition can see a vintage Stetson top hat along with its custom-made leather case.

Philadelphia was not just an important industrial hub, but a center for printing and publishing as well. As such, it was the place where several important fashion magazines, such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, were launched. These publications disseminated the latest trends far and wide and helped spark the consumer revolution. Examples on display show how these magazines, in their drive to produce color fashion plates more cost-effectively, also spurred important innovations in printing technologies.

In addition to the city’s taste-makers and manufacturers Philadelphia’s retailers also played an important role in shaping the American fashion industry by bringing the latest and most stylish goods to market. Retail visionaries like John Wanamaker, Justus Strawbridge, and Isaac Clothier remain well-known, even though their flagship retail stores closed years ago. One of the highlights of the exhibition is a classic wool pinstripe suit, on loan from Library Company member Walton C. Burwell, whose father purchased it from Wanamaker’s in the 1930s.

All of these stories, and more, are told in “Fashioning Philadelphia: The Style of the City, 1720-1940,” which is on display until March 4, 2016, and can be seen for free during the Library Company’s operating hours. The exhibition is supported by the Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation and the Rittenhouse Foundation.

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A call to our members!

Please share your WWI stories.

In the Fall of 2016, the Library Company will mount an exhibition relating the story of how WWI impacted the Library Company—its operations, staff, board, and shareholders—within the larger story of Philadelphia in the war.

Curators Sarah Weatherwax and Linda August are currently conducting research for this exhibit and are interested in learning more about Philadelphians during the War.

We would love to hear from our members who had family, especially if they were Library Company shareholders, in Philadelphia during that time who served in the military or on the homefront, volunteering in the many organizations aiding the war effort, fundraising for liberty bonds, growing liberty gardens or preserving food, etc.

If you would like to share your stories, contact us by emailing: printroom@librarycompany.org, laugust@librarycompany.org, or calling 215-546-3181. Please do not send material without speaking with us first.

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Painting by James Peale Conserved

In our ongoing efforts to conserve our extraordinary Art & Artifacts Collection, we are pleased that *Still Life with Peaches* by James Peale is back on display after being restored.

James Peale (1749-1831), younger brother of artist Charles Willson Peale, was an accomplished painter of portrait miniatures and later still lifes and landscapes. He was one of the first American artists to specialize in still life and is now deemed one of the founders of the American still life tradition. His complex arrangements of fruits and vegetables showcased his skill at recreating different textures and degrees of translucence. Our painting is a fine example of his work. There is an inscription on the stretcher indicating that the painting was a New Year’s gift to James Rush’s wife Phoebe. Rush was Peale’s family doctor.

Conservation work on the paintings and their frames was completed in September. Painting conservator Carole Abercauph cleaned dirt, grime, and discoloring varnish off of the canvas, filled in losses, and applied a new coat of varnish. Frame conservator Bret Headley removed dirt and grime, replaced ornament losses, and gilded the frames with gold. Our visitors can now fully appreciate this superb painting. We hope that you come and see it in person.

News from the Board and Staff

We would like to extend an enthusiastic welcome to our newest Trustee. Charles P. Keates is a partner, Chief Counsel and General Compliance officer at Veritable, LP, a high-end financial services company founded in 1986. He is Chairman of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks and previously served as a Trustee of the Pennsylvania Ballet.

We are delighted to welcome several new staff members to the Library Company. Development Director Raechel Hammer joined the Library Company in June 2015. Ms. Hammer previously served as Vice President of Strategic Development & Compliance at Klein Life. She holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Rider University. In August 2015, we welcomed Harriet Young as Business Manager. Ms. Young is originally from the Philadelphia area but most recently worked at the Dallas Symphony Orchestra in Dallas, Texas. She received a Master of Business Administration from Texas Woman’s University and a Bachelor of Music from the University of Texas at Arlington. Membership & Development Coordinator Kate Philipson previously served as the Library Company’s digital humanities intern and became a staff member in September 2015. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Film and Media Arts and American Studies from Temple University. Facilities Manager Francis Dolan joined the staff in November 2015 and previously worked as Associate Director for Tour Programs and Site Operations at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and American History from La Salle University. Emma Ricciardi, who served as Reading Room Assistant, became a Project Cataloger in February 2015. She received a Master of Library Science from Rutgers University and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Creative Writing from Widener University.
Suffragettes Led the Way

History-minded moviegoers should make time to see “Suffragette,” the recent movie about the English suffrage movement in the year 1912, when suffrage activists were especially militant—smashing windows, setting off pipe bombs,

Madeira was used to toast the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and to celebrate the inauguration of George Washington in 1789. A bottle of Madeira was used by visiting Captain James Server to christen the USS Constitution in 1797. Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams are all said to have appreciated the qualities of Madeira. The wine was mentioned in Franklin’s autobiography and the first order for Madeira in George Washington’s correspondence dates to the spring of 1759.

The Library Company Madeira is now available for purchase at select Fine Wine and Good Spirits stores in Pennsylvania and at rarewineco.com.

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and carrying out other violent acts designed to bring attention to the cause of securing voting rights for women.

On this side of the Atlantic, the origins of the women’s movement can be traced to the Woman’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in July 1848. In the second half of the 19th century, the idea of women getting the right to vote elicited widespread concern that it would disrupt “natural” gender roles of society. Critics on both sides of the Atlantic claimed that voting rights for women would result in women neglecting household management, child care, and other gender-based duties.

American women repeatedly made the case for equality, in print as well as in public lectures. But their strategies were often defensive efforts to show that having the right to vote would be compatible with women’s “natural” roles. Later, after the Civil War, there was disagreement within the movement over whether suffrage for African American men should take precedence over voting rights for women. The controversy caused a schism, with the American Woman Suffrage Association supporting the 15th Amendment and the National Woman Suffrage Association opposing the 15th Amendment unless it also gave women the vote.

In the 20th century, the strategically violent English Suffragettes—so well-depicted by Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham Carter, Meryl Streep, and others—received significant press coverage and inspired American Suffragists. Many women chose to work regionally to pass amendments to state constitutions. In the 1910s some state referendums failed and others passed.

Although the 1915 Pennsylvania referendum failed, the campaign broadened the state’s women’s rights activism significantly. According to literary historian Ellen Gruber Garvey, the suffrage leaders, though mostly white and middle-class, began to work with diverse constituencies. As part of the campaign, the African American writer, teacher, and activist Alice Moore Dunbar (later Dunbar-Nelson) worked as a field organizer advocating women’s suffrage among African Americans. Notably, the referendum passed in Pittsburgh, where Alice Dunbar had been most active.

Ultimately it was Alice Paul’s efforts with the re-unified National American Woman Suffrage Association that resulted in the passage of the 19th Amendment on June 4, 1919, with women first voting nationwide in 1920. But the role of the state associations leading up to 1919 is a chapter of the story that still needs to be told, especially since—as the women’s suffrage timeline at the end of the movie “Suffragette” makes clear—there are parts of the world where women’s voting rights remains controversial, and in the United States the Equal Rights Amendment, first crafted by Alice Paul, has never been ratified. The Library Company has a number of broadsides published by the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association (such as the one shown here) that ground the ongoing efforts historically. We re-discovered the cache last August 26, when we posted this one on Tumblr to celebrate Women’s Equality Day.
From the Director

This February, the United States Postal Service officially unveiled the 39th commemorative stamp in its “Black Heritage” series. The stamp features Bishop Richard Allen, the celebrated abolitionist and founder of both Mother Bethel Church and the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. Celebrating its bicentennial in 2016, the AME Church remains a vibrant religious, social and even political institution in the 21st century.

As AME adherents gather in Philadelphia for various events throughout the year, they will be reminded of Allen's founding fame: in addition to religious groups, he helped organize the first black benevolent society in Pennsylvania, co-authored the first copyrighted pamphlet by an African American, and became the first black writer to eulogize an American president when he saluted George Washington’s emancipatory will in 1799.

They will also be reminded of the Library Company. For the image of Allen appearing on the stamp comes from our archives: an 1876 commemorative print, *Bishops of the AME Church* (Boston 1876). Engraving. Gift of Roger Stoddard.

And then there are the two copies of works by the ancient historian Josephus in our possession, each shedding light on Allen’s intellectual and literary inspirations. The first, a single-volume 1795 edition published in Philadelphia (*The Whole, Genuine and Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*) contains Allen’s name on a subscribers’ list inside the book. The second, a four volume edition published in New York in 1809 (*The Works of Flavius Josephus*), was actually owned by Allen and contains seven separate signatures by him. Secured at auction last year by trustee Clarence Wolf, the 1809 work was probably in Allen's possession until his death, when he bequeathed it. When Dr. Rev. Mark Kelly Tyler, pastor of Mother Bethel Church, saw Allen’s signed copies of Josephus, he gasped. “Wow!” “Amazing,” he continued, “simply amazing.”

Although Allen utilized many resources as a writer, he saw in Josephus a particular model for his own pamphlets of protest against injustice. Josephus is best known as a chronicler of Jewish and Roman society in the first century C.E. The works of Flavius Josephus provide insight on minority experiences in majority cultures. He also offered telling tales of divine retribution. In the 1795 edition, there is a marvelous image accompanying Josephus’s tale of Exodus, where a righteous God strikes down Egyptian slaveholders. One can only imagine what Allen made of this image!

We do know that Allen understood the importance of the Library Company as a repository of important information. After he and Jones crafted their Yellow Fever narrative decrying racism in the sickened city of Brotherly Love, they marched over to our building on Library Street and deposited a copy with us. We’re honored that the Library Company has now played a small part in revivifying Allen’s memory in the 21st century.

Richard S. Newman
The Edwin Wolf 2nd Director

The image of Allen appearing on the stamp comes from our archives: an 1876 commemorative print, *Bishops of the AME Church*, which features Allen at the center of black church history. The print was crafted well after Allen’s death but came at a moment when African Americans wanted to honor him as a founder worthy of broader recognition during the American centennial. A gift of Roger Stoddard in 1996, the original print features a beautiful wood frame. It’s a wonderful image.

It is not surprising that the USPS utilized the Library Company’s resources for the Allen stamp. We hold several important Allen documents, including beautiful editions of his 1794 pamphlet, *A Narrative of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity…in 1793* (his Yellow Fever expose co-written by Absalom Jones), as well as his 1833 autobiography, *The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (published posthumously by his family). We also have several prints of Allen cast during the 19th century, including two during his lifetime.