

Apron Strings - Ties To Our Past

by Lynne Belluscio

When I started this project, I thought it would be an easy exhibit to put together and in some ways it has been. A lot of people have loaned us some great aprons. On the other hand, once I got all the aprons together in one room, it was pretty obvious that I was overrun with aprons, but I have done my best to put most of them in the exhibit.

There is a case completely filled with white aprons with unusual trim of crochet, tatting, lace, eyeletting and pulled thread designs. Another case has some ethnic aprons from Mexico, Japan, Scandinavia, China and Finland. One of the aprons from Japan is a Buddhist priest's apron that is worn in the temple, although we haven't figured out how it is worn. This case also contains some fragile silk "pinnies" as they were called in England. They are made from a square of fine silk with ties to go around the waist. The top corner is pinned (thus the name) to the top of the dress bodice. One of the more unusual pinnies, I just bought on E-bay. The pocket has an embroidered "1919 Souvenir of France". The numbers 1919 are the flags of England, France and the United States and I think Germany. This apron and two others with the same pocket design are probably souvenirs commemorating the end of World War I and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

We also have a World War I Red Cross smock that I believe was worn in the Armistice parade in Le Roy at the end of the war. The aprons are embellished with wonderful flower embroidery. From World War II we have a Victory Garden apron. There are

three aprons that were made from handkerchiefs, which were very popular in the 1940s and 1950. I was also able to find directions for making one of these aprons. We have 4-H aprons: one that was made by Kathy Yacuzzo (she won a blue ribbon for it) and a blue drawstring apron made by Shelley Stein while she was in 4-H.

I actually put up a full sized clothes dryer and hung about twenty aprons including a couple aprons made from sugar and grain sacks and a very nice collection of gingham aprons. The hand work on the gingham aprons is very interesting. Gingham is either a printed or woven checkered design. The checks can be as small as 1/8 inch or as large as 1 inch. Some of the aprons were smocked and many were embellished with a cross stitch pattern and rick rack. If you get a chance to see the exhibit, take a close look at the gingham aprons. The hand work on them is wonderful.

Part of the exhibit is about wedding aprons. Some Slovak communities, the bridesmaids sing mournful songs and remove the bride's veil and then tie an apron around her waist. Another wedding apron tradition includes the bride's dance. She wears an apron with huge pockets and collects money from all the young men who want to dance with her.

Also in the exhibit is a carriage apron which was worn to protect the clothes from the dust and dirt. Since the whip (or driver) sits on the right side of the carriage, the monogram is on the right knee. Passengers wear the monogram on the left knee. We have three Masonic aprons in the exhibit,

on loan from the Le Roy Lodge and there is a ferrier's leather apron. We have a barber's apron.

At one time, in England the "apron men" had different designs and colors depending on their jobs. Stone cutters wore white aprons because of the white stone dust. Cobblers wore black aprons because they used black wax. Gardeners, spinners and weavers wore blue aprons. Butchers wore blue striped aprons. Butlers wore green aprons. Barbers wore checkered aprons. We have a maid's uniform from Donald Woodward's estate. The black uniform can be altered with different collars and cuffs, as well as aprons depending on the season or the event. Even though servants wore aprons as a symbol of their rank, it was

fashionable in the 1700s and early 1800s to wear aprons. The aprons were not really functional, but rather a fashion statement and even ladies of high rank wore highly decorated aprons.

We have two fashion plates from the 1830s showing several

ladies with their fashionable silk aprons and in our collection we have a couple of beautiful silk aprons, probably from that period. Next week I'll share some interesting apron stories that I have discovered.





ncrocker@nothnagle.com
www.nothnagle.com
1-800-295-2797 PC#

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