

Diana's Favorite Things

By Trail End State Historic Site Curator Dana Prater; from *Trail End Notes*, March 2000

"Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes ... " Although we didn't find a blue satin sash, we recently discovered something even better. While cataloging items from the Manville Kendrick Estate collection, we had the pleasure of examining some fantastic dresses that belonged to Manville's wife, Diana Cumming Kendrick. Fortunately for us, Diana saved many of her favorite things, and these dresses span almost sixty years of fashion history.



Diana Cumming (far right) and friends, c1913 (Kendrick Collection, TESHHS)

Few things reveal as much about our personalities and lifestyles as our clothing, and Diana Kendrick's clothes are no exception. There are two silk taffeta party dresses dating from around 1914-1916 and worn when Diana was a young teenager. The pink one is completely hand sewn and the rounded neckline and puffy sleeves are trimmed with beaded flowers on a net background. Pinked and ruched fabric ribbons loop completely around the very full skirt, which probably rustled delightfully when she danced.

The pale green gown consists of an overdress with a shorter skirt and an underdress - almost like a slip. The skirt of the slip has the same pale green fabric and extends out from under the overskirt. Both skirt layers have a scalloped hem. A short bertha (like a stole) is attached at the back of the rounded neckline and wraps around the shoulders, repeating the scalloped motif and fastening at the front. This dress even includes a mini-bustle of stiff buckram to add fullness in the back. Diana must have felt like a little princess when she wore this one!

Another of our favorites dates from around 1920 and must have been one of her favorites as well. It is a confection of cream satin, with layers of the most delicate embroidered lace and the airiest chiffon you can imagine. The sleeveless lingerie-like bodice has a low, V-shaped neckline which reveals the underdress of lace. At the hem of the tube-shaped skirt, a band of the same

lace peers out from under gossamer layers of handkerchief chiffon. A strip of satin hangs down the front of the skirt and a removable satin train attaches with snaps in back. Diana may have worn this dress as a debutante or bridesmaid, but it could have been a smashing party dress as well.

Additional dresses exhibit the classic features of decades past. The dropped waist of the 1920s and the sheer bias cut chiffons of the 1930s indicate that Diana was a fashion plate with exquisite taste, was fairly tall, and had a slim figure. We are very fortunate that she didn't part with her favorite things for all we can learn from them.

For anyone who collects vintage clothing, there are a few things to remember. Contrary to what you see in some of today's magazines, it is important to never wear or use these items because they are irreplaceable. Keeping them in good condition allows us to study their design characteristics and make copies of them, which is the thing to do if we want to wear them.

Today, accurate reproduction patterns of vintage clothing are available and sewing these can be very educational, challenging and fun. If you are interested in creating your own confection of satin, lace or chiffon, just take a cruise around the World Wide Web to find a pattern that's just right for you.



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