

ChicagoHistoryMuseum

The Costume Collection

With over 50,000 costume and textile artifacts, the Chicago History Museum's collection is one of the nation's premier clothing and fashion collections. The collection spans the breadth of Chicago's history and is particularly strong in materials from the late 19th century to the present. The Museum's collection, different than other costume collections in the country, uses costume as a powerful lens for understanding the city's social history and communicating these stories to visitors.

The Museum's extensive couture holdings range from gowns by Charles Frederick Worth the "father of couture" to Paul Poiret's Sorbet evening gown. Recent designers such as Dior, Halston, Miyake, and Versace along with the innovative designs of Yohji Yamamoto have earned the collection an international reputation.

Many artifacts in the Museum's collection were made by Chicago's dressmakers, milliners, and manufacturers. The costume holdings encompass a number of items worn by prominent Chicagoans and Americans; some unique pieces include personal items belonging to Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, Michael Jordan's basketball uniform, and Mahalia Jackson's choir robe. The earliest pieces include suits worn by George Washington and John Adams.

A new emphasis on the significance of clothing as historical artifacts has increased interest in the collection. Recent acquisitions include clothing documenting 19th- and 20th-century work attire, such as uniforms of nurses, police officers, and flight attendants, as well as clothing from Chicago's immigrant communities. Future collecting will also focus on Chicago's once-thriving garment industry and contemporary fashion.