

From Decorous Past to Candid Present

By CHARLES COLLINS

HISTORY is recorded by the needle-scarred fingers of dressmakers and tailors more vividly than by literary pens. The changes in styles from one period to another—often a brief span of years from the historical point of view—reflect the manners and mental attitudes of the people; and pictures of the clothing of the past, whether in stiff and unreal old prints or in the vivid naturalism of modern color photography, form an important branch of source material for scholars and men of letters. Drama and motion pictures are particularly dependent upon costume-study in creating their illusions, and their producers collect large libraries of costly works on this subject.

● The pictures on this page suggest in four-color camera plates the changes in Anglo-American culture of 150 years—from the candid present to the graceful formalities of Revolutionary war times. The world has spun swiftly down the grooves of change during this century and a half—more swiftly and giddily, perhaps, than during any other corresponding stretch of time since the start of civilization.

● Above at the right is a studio portrait of Miss Gypsy Rose Lee, the most popular and most publicized undressing lady of the song-and-dance stage. She is wearing an evening gown of shimmering white silk, with only a touch of ornament—a dress designed to cling to every curve of her body and also to reveal the maximum of uncovered arms and torso. It is, moreover, a gown whose skirt is slashed to a point well above the knee, permitting the wearer to exhibit her most useful professional equipment—her legs—in full splendor.

● The three other pictures represent the ample and modest costumes that were in fashion at the birth of this republic, gay in color but much more demure in design than the clothing of today. They represent characters in the play "Pride and Prejudice," based on Jane Austen's classic novel—English gentlemen whose counterparts could be found in every American city of the Atlantic seaboard at the time. The Old Americans, as the colonial population has been called, were much like their English cousins and wore the same costumes, especially among the upper classes, although they were from three to six months behind the London styles.

● Muriel Kirkland (left), a well known actress, is seen as the heroine of "Pride and Prejudice," Elizabeth Bennett, dressed for an afternoon party. In the center is an evening drawing room group, with Lowell Gilmore as an officer in the militia and Miss Chouteau Dyer as a girl about to be invited to be his partner in a quadrille. Miss Eugenia Rawls (lower right) appears as the shy sister of pert Elizabeth Bennett in her church-going best.

● "Pride and Prejudice" was the most handsomely costumed "period play" of the last year. Its success established its author, Helen Jerome, as a specialist in dramatizing vintage novels. She followed it with "Jane Eyre," featuring Katharine Hepburn.



Not so gay in colors but certainly more daring in design than the costumes of her feminine ancestors of Revolutionary days is the shimmering evening gown of Gypsy Rose Lee, highly featured undresser of the song-and-dance stage.

(Chicago Tribune color photos.)



Above: The gentlewoman of old England of 150 years ago delighted in bright-hued raiment, but would have fainted away at the sight of a gown such as that worn by Gypsy Rose Lee.

At right: Veritable peacocks were the handsome officers of the days of "Pride and Prejudice"—even more striking in appearance in their gaudy uniforms than the ladies upon whom they lavished courtesies and flattery.



Not a masquerade costume, but a modish attire for church-going. The lady of 150 years ago revealed not even an inch of ankle.