

## Fashions Tell Us about the Times

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The 2008 junior fellows located and inventoried ladies' fashion illustrations among the deposits from 1899 that they surveyed. Are these deposits just ephemera, depictions of old-fashioned clothing that are of little value?

Not according to the Library's American Memory website. Fashion magazines can reveal the level of an era's formality as well as its view of ideal female body shape, pregnancy, and childhood. Variations in hairstyle, hats, and hemlines might help a genealogy researcher date an old family photo. "Material for clothing," says the American Memory website, "may vary with tariffs, rationing, or new technologies."

Among the junior fellows' finds was artwork for the November 1899 *Delineator*, the premier fashion magazine of its time. Published by the Butterick Publishing Company of New York City, the magazine began as a marketing tool for clothing patterns but soon evolved into a general interest women's magazine. Ebenezer Butterick invented graded sized sewing patterns printed on tissue paper, first for men's and boys' clothing in 1863 and then in 1866 for women's dresses. Prior to

Butterick, patterns, if they existed at all, came in one size only and had to be enlarged or reduced by the sewer. Butterick's idea was a hit, and within one year his business had grown such that he had to move his operations from his home in Sterling, Massachusetts, to an enlarged headquarters in New York City. Printed

patterns, delivered by mail, brought fashion to the masses, who could not afford clothing from New York or European fashion centers.

The Junior Fellows also identified a deposit from House of Doucet, a Paris firm founded by fashion designer Jacques Doucet (1853–1929) that was known for elegance, luxury, and opulence. The drawing of the Doucet design shown above is by Felix Fournery (1865–1938), a well-known fashion illustrator and poster artist. The copyright claimant was S.M. Baldwin, a person or entity who remains unknown. ©



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