

Guide to the manuscript: **Identification of American Women's Dresses 1775-1900** by **Elsie F. McMurry**

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COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

This manuscript is the result of a project funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and Cornell University to catalog and describe historic American dresses. The published book resulting from this manuscript is entitled American Dresses 1780-1900: Identification and Significance of 148 Extant Dresses.

The dresses used in this study of the characteristics of American woman's fashion are limited to "day" dresses and to only those worn by Americans (though the dresses may have been foreign made). The manuscript's table of contents includes 14 chapters, 15 appendices and a bibliography. The project was undertaken due to the scarcity of available literature on the subject. This passage from the preface describes the purpose of the project: "The objectives of this work were primarily two: to produce a body of comprehensive information about the characteristics of American women's dresses from 1775 to 1900 and to develop a guide for identification of these characteristics."

Of special note are chapters one and 13. Chapter one describes how to be a good detective in identifying and dating a period dress. Chapter 13 uses diagrams and graphs to help the reader in determining the time span of a dress by comparing sleeve styles. Most chapters contain diagrams, photographs and charts about example dresses. However, there is no text included from chapter three to chapter 12.

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