

“Ahead of the World”: New York City Fashion

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It was a rare visitor to the Empire City during the nineteenth century who was not struck by the spectacle of stylish persons promenading up and down the avenues, by the diversity and quality of the shops, and by those wondrous must-see bazaars, the large department stores. Evidently the onetime colony had gone a long way toward shaking off its reputation for social backwardness. As for the early American style of unpretentious simplicity that honored the ideals of a new republic, it had proven no match for the alluring range of wares offered in what was becoming the greatest shopping city in the world.

Arriving in New York City, one docked at the southern end of Manhattan and proceeded up its widest, most accessible thoroughfare, Broadway. When

travelers published their impressions of the new country they almost always commented on the hustle and bustle of this main artery (see fig. 194). What in 1819 seemed to a delighted British observer “one moving crowd of painted butterflies”¹ became, as the city ballooned in size, more intimidating to others: in 1853 a Swedish visitor worried, “I merely think of getting across the street alive,”² and a Russian writer grumbled in 1857, “Starting in the morning until late in the evening, Broadway and the adjoining streets are crowded with magnificently dressed women and with Americans rushing about on business. Despite the wide sidewalks, the crush is so great that one cannot make a step without poking someone with elbows or body. If you want to excuse yourself or if you wait for apologies, the American has flown by like an arrow.”³

1. Frances Wright, *Views of Society and Manners in America in a Series of Letters from That Country to a Friend in England during the Years 1817, 1819, 1820* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1822), p. 28.
2. Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, 2 vols., translated by Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co., 1853), vol. 2, p. 12.
3. Alexandre Borisovich Laksar, *A Russian Looks at America*, translated from the 1857 Russian ed. and edited by Arnold Schrier and Joyce Story (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 65.



APRIL SHOWERS.

Fig. 194. After Winslow Homer, *April Showers*, 1859. Wood engraving, from *Harper's Weekly*, April 2, 1859, p. 216. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library.





FALL & WINTER FASHIONS FOR 1835 & 6. BY JAMES G. WILSON NEW-YORK

Fig. 195. *Fall and Winter Fashions for 1835 and 1836* by James G. Wilson, New York, shown in front of houses at 74–76 Broadway built in 1833 for hat manufacturer Elisha Bloomer, 1835. Lithograph with hand coloring by Curtis Burr Graham. Collection of The New-York Historical Society

4. Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), p. 55.
5. William Thomson, *A Traveller's Travels in the United States and Canada in the Year 1827*, 40, and 42 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1842), p. 33.
6. Lady Louisa Stuart-Wortley, *Travels in the United States, etc. during 1829 and 1830*, 2 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1831), p. 268.
7. James Fenimore Cooper, *America and the Americans. Notions Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, 2 vols., ed. (London: Published for Henry Colburn by R. Bentley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradburn, Dublin: John Cuninghame, 1836), p. 194.
8. Frank Leslie's *London Gazette*, 91 *London* 1 (January 1855), 10.

That the crowds were “magnificently dressed” remained undisputed (see figs. 195, 196). In an 1850 description of his visit to New York, Charles Dickens wrote, “Heaven save the ladies, how they dress! We have seen more colours in these ten minutes, than we should have seen elsewhere, in as many days. What various parasols! What rainbow silks and satins! What pinking of thin stockings, and pinching of thin shoes, and fluttering of ribbons and silk tassels, and display of rich cloaks with gaudy hoods and linings!”⁴ Showy or prosperous-looking attire was not restricted to women: a visiting tradesman described a fellow boarder “who came out about five years ago, with only one coat; now he has plenty, sports a gold watch, and a silver-headed cane.”⁵ Another writer noted, “A mob in the United States is a mob in broad-cloth. If we may talk of a rabble in a republic, it is a rabble in black silk.”⁶

Selling Fashion

Although Philadelphia, Boston, and New Orleans, like New York, were port cities known for their sophistication, only the Empire City became a shopping mecca regularly mentioned in the same breath as Paris and London. Broadway could “safely challenge competition with most if not all of the promenades of the old world,” wrote James Fenimore Cooper.⁷ Exclusive to New York was the great range of its emporiums, from showman A. T. Stewart’s department store (perhaps the world’s first) to the small but extravagantly luxurious establishments run by modistes or couturiers, milliners, fancy-goods dealers, and jewelers. As one journalist declared in 1855, “The windows in Broadway alone are enough to make the money leap from one’s pocket, if in these times any one is fortunate enough to have any.”⁸



Fig. 196. *Autumn and Winter Fashions for 1849 and 1850* by Saxony and Major, shown in the Astor House ballroom and outside the hotel on Broadway, 1850. Lithograph with hand coloring by Asa H. Wheeler. Museum of the City of New York, The J. Clarence Davies Collection

Most likely the windows that were the eyecore of all eyes belonged to Stewart, a successful and influential merchant and a visionary who became one of New York's first millionaires. The Irish-born Stewart got his start in 1823 selling a shipment of Irish laces at 283 Broadway, then slightly north of the most fashionable area. The great appeal of a dry-goods store (from which the department store would develop) was that for the price of a packet of pins one could gaze in wonder at a thousand-dollar shawl. Sensing the possibilities of something bigger, Stewart expanded and moved his business several times until, in 1846, he built his "Marble Palace" (see fig. 197). While most shops occupied the ground floor of a residentially scaled building about twenty-five feet wide,⁹ this new marble-faced structure (cat. no. 96), perhaps the first ever built specifically to be a store, was far larger. Both

architecturally and in terms of its offerings, it would be enormously influential. Its plate-glass windows, which had to be imported, struck the public as extravagant and novel. A rotunda provided interior light. Inside were impressive columns, wall and ceiling frescoes, ornate chandeliers, and gaslights. Features that awed visitors most were the size of the space, the height of the mirrors, the number of mirrors and windows, and, of course, the profusion of goods. These included carpets, sold on the basement levels; upholstery and drapery fabrics; dress goods; silk goods; embroidery; fancy articles; shawls, displayed in a shawl room; and hosiery and gloves, in their own room.¹⁰ As in the early days of Stewart's shop, fine lace and lace articles (see cat. no. 201) were always available. On the top floor was a wholesale department from which dry-goods merchants from around

9. Harry F. Rosengauz, "Stewart's Marble Palace—the Cradle of the Department Store," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 48 (April 1964), p. 131.

10. The variety of goods available at A. T. Stewart made it easy to buy a trousseau there. The list of purchases made in preparation for an 1850 marriage by Elizabeth Ann Valentine of Richmond, Virginia, and her parents, survives as part of the Valentine Museum collection, along with some of the items on it (including her wedding veil of Irish Carrickmacross lace [cat. no. 213]). The list gives an idea of what were considered necessities for setting up a young lady in a new household: dresses of silk, muslin, and calico; handkerchiefs, bonnets for outdoor wear, head dresses for evening parties, caps

was thought to rival European examples. The best laces and ornately woven silks were always imported, but embroidered goods were luxuries that could be manufactured by American entrepreneurs, since embroidery was easily taught and mastered, and a business dealing in the craft might start small and grow as needed.

Initially, the fashions pictured in American magazines—the first such appearance was in 1830, in *Godley's Lady's Book*—were styles purchased or copied from French or English sources. By the 1840s *Godley's* was publishing, in addition to French fashions, designs described as "Americanized."¹⁵ In the 1850s the magazines that covered fashion¹⁶ began to rely less and less on French looks and to show drawings of American designs, for the first time describing actual clothing available in actual stores. Many more fashion goods were being produced in New York now, an expansion that accommodated the growing population of the city itself, which had tripled in size in a quarter of a century. Magazine articles noted enlargements and improvements to stores as well as fashion innovations. Much of what was newsworthy in 1855 was extravagantly luxurious, like the "magnificent set of white guipure point lace, a scarf, two flounces, a handkerchief, a berthe" available for \$500 at A. T. Stewart, or the diamond-and-ruby earrings in the shape of pendant blossoms for \$800 at Ball, Black and Company. Also of interest were technological novelties, such as the devices that gave a pinked or crimped edge to silks, displayed at Madame Demorest's. Perhaps the city's favorite fabric in 1855 was a white moiré antique available at Arnold Constable and Company, which was singled out because it had been manufactured for the Paris Exposition of 1855.¹⁷

Newspaper and magazine write-ups about "opening days" make clear which were the city's most fashionable shops at the end of the decade. A. T. Stewart, Lord and Taylor, and Arnold Constable and Company were the stores for dry goods. Brodie's main competition for elegant cloaks, mantillas, and wraps was the Mantilla Emporium of George P. Bulpin, who displayed at the New York Crystal Palace exhibition of 1853 a sumptuously embroidered velvet cloak that had been made, he proclaimed, entirely in America. Top dressmakers included Madame Deiden, Madame Plazamet (who advertised that she had been the fitter at Deiden), Madame Ferrero (see fig. 201), and Madame Ralling, also a milliner. (Rare was the practitioner of either trade who did not adopt the title "Madame.") The leading milliners, Madame Tillman and Madame Harris, were both associated with

Parisian establishments—Madame Harris with Duteis, silk flower purveyor to Empress Eugénie of France. (Mary Todd Lincoln ordered bonnets and head-dresses from Madame Harris throughout her White House stay.) John N. Genin was a renowned hatter, providing beaver and silk top hats for men, caps and other hats for men and boys, and tailored hats for ladies; he also expanded his business to include children's and women's clothing, lingerie, and furs, all sold at his shop on Broadway (see figs. 28, 203). William Jennings Demorest and his wife, (Madame) Ellen Curtis Demorest, ran an establishment of unusual range: their New York store featured a full-service dressmaking department (see fig. 204), their paper dressmaking patterns and fashion magazines were distributed around the world, and they later marketed such items as perfumes and cosmetics, sheet music, skirt elevators (which raised a skirt so the wearer could step onto a curb), even bicycles.¹⁸

Not only were the stores places to find every sort of marvelous creation, but shopping also became an ever more acceptable pastime; it was something ladies

15. Other aspects of European culture were "Americanized" as well. According to Dinitia Smith, "Christmas trees became popular only after 1848, when the *Illustrated London News* published a drawing of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their children gathered around a tree hung with ornaments. That usage was transformed for New World consumption when it appeared in *Godley's Lady's Book* in 1850, democratized with the removal of the Queen's coronet, and Albert's moustache, sash and royal insignia." Dinitia Smith, "Spirit of Christmas Past and Present, All Stuffed into One Man's Collection," part 2, *New York Times*, December 15, 1999, p. B1.

16. Besides *Godley's Lady's Book* these included *Pterson's Magazine*, *Graban's American Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art*, and *Frank Leslie's Ladies Gazette of Fashion*.

17. *Frank Leslie's Ladies Gazette of Fashion* 3 (January 1855), pp. 2 (square), 12 (earrings), ibid. 3 (March 1855), p. 42 (shawl).

18. For information about the career of the Demorests, see Isabel Ross, *Crucades and Crinolines: The Life and Times of Ellen Curtis Demorest and William Jennings Demorest* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).



Fig. 198. "La Duchesse" Mantilla Furnished by Brodie. Wood engraving by William Roberts, after Lewis Towson Wright, from *Godley's Lady's Book*, August 1853, p. 194. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library.



Fig. 199. "The Rose of Long Island." Miss Julia Gardiner and Gentleman in Front of Bogert and Meeamly's, 86 Ninth Avenue, 1839 or 1840. Lithograph with hand coloring by Alfred E. Baker. Museum of the City of New York. Gift of Miss Sarah Gardiner 39.5

maid of honor, drew an unfavorable comparison: "American ladies bestow those hours of leisure, which English women of the same class give to drawing, to the study of nature, and to mental cultivation, almost wholly on personal adornment."²⁰

In Europe it was customary for a purveyor of quality goods to obtain permission to display a royal warrant;²¹ in republican America merchants turned early to the idea of publicity featuring celebrities. In 1824 a hatter sent General Lafayette one of his creations and presented additional hats to Lafayette's son, ostensibly in recognition of our country's debt to the general but probably also hoping to promote his wares as Lafayette-worthy.²² In 1839 Julia Gardiner, a society belle known as "The Rose of Long Island" and the future wife of President John Tyler, allowed her picture to appear in an advertisement for a store called Bogert and Meeamly's, an event that sparked considerable controversy (fig. 199).²³ By midcentury the savvyest merchants were sending articles of clothing to prominent persons in order to advertise their patronage. Genin, possibly New York's best-known hatter, generated a great deal of publicity by delivering a riding hat to singer Jenny Lind—newly arrived from Sweden in 1850 to begin what would be a wildly successful tour—and then selling duplicates known as "the Jenny Lind hat" at his store.²⁴ President Millard Fillmore wrote several letters, beginning in 1851, to the New York tailor Charles Patrick Fox, thanking Fox for fabric, for an offer to make him a pair of pantaloons (pants), and for fitting him for a suit of clothes.²⁵ In 1852 a newspaper called *The Lily* published a testimonial about the Genin hat that had been sent as a present to its editor, Amelia Bloomer, and helpfully furnished Genin's address for anyone wanting to order a hat of her own.²⁶

New York merchants set many precedents for the presentation and selling of clothing throughout the country. Their innovations included the new and widely copied architectural settings (Marshall Field advertised his Chicago store as the Stewart's of the West),²⁷ an emphasis on all things French, and the unabashed use of celebrity cachet, as well as set prices, advertising, use of catalogues and promotional booklets, and organized displays of the latest wares. These last ranged from coordinated "opening days" when stores displayed their latest imports and creations to both customers and the press, begun in the 1850s, to exhibitions such as the annual fairs of the American Institute of the City of New York, which were precursors of international expositions such as those at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851 and in New York in 1853.

19. Marie Fontenay de Grandfort, *The New World*, translated by Edward C. Wharton (New Orleans: Sherman, Wharton and Co., 1855), p. 18.

20. Amelia M. Murray, *Letters from the United States, Cuba, and Canada* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Company, 1850), p. 146.

21. A hat owned by Queen Victoria and made by one of her suppliers is labeled "W. C. Brown, Making & Fancy Hatter, To Queen Victoria, The Empress of the French, and the Elite of Europe, 13 & 14, New Bond Street," illustrated in Kay Staniland, *Royal Fashion: The Clothes of Princess Charlotte of Wales*

could do without chaperones, and thanks to such in-store enhancements as art exhibitions, lectures, and architectural novelties, it even acquired the gloss of a cultural excursion. That American women occupied their time thus was occasion for comment. Wrote a Frenchwoman, "Broadway is to New York what the *Boulevard des Italiens* is to Paris. It is the general rendezvous of the fashionable ladies, who go from store to store, looking at the newest stuffs or examining the latest styles of jewelry. They call this 'shopping.' A New York lady, without a hundred dollars a month to spend in these rounds, would look upon herself as the most unfortunate woman in the world."¹⁹ Another observer from Europe, Queen Victoria's



Fig. 200. Benjamin J. Harrison, *Annual Fair of the American Institute at Niblo's Garden, 1841*. Watercolor. Museum of the City of New York 51.119

Manufacturing Clothes

It was natural for the manufacture of ready-to-wear clothing to expand dramatically in an American setting. The biggest advantage of early ready-made clothing was not that it might cost less but that its production saved considerable time and effort. Well into the nineteenth century, the process of acquiring a dress was complicated. Although bills of sale from the period record the price of a "robe," the consumer who purchased that robe was really buying the stuff, trimmings, and other necessities for making a dress. The fabric was then taken to a dressmaker or modiste, or just brought home, to be made into a full article of clothing; if it was done professionally, this added to the cost.²⁸ The typical consumer of fashion in the late eighteenth or the nineteenth century had to be quite knowledgeable about fabrics and construction. Fashion plates—black-and-white engravings that sometimes had been hand colored—were the only visual information about styles available and necessarily were more like recipes that could be interpreted than directions that had to be followed exactly. Before the invention of the paper pattern, first demonstrated by the Demorests in 1814, the process of having a dress made

involved participating in its design, and not everyone had the talent, patience, or interest for this. Jane Austen, for example, who was attentive to fashion in a general way, wrote in a letter of 1798, "I cannot determine what to do about my new Gown; I wish such things were to be purchased ready made."²⁹

American ready-made men's clothes were for sale in New York by the mid-eighteenth century, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the city was already producing ready-made clothing for women and children as well as uniforms for servants and sailors, along with a variety of items such as fancy dress, hats, wigs, shoes, and every kind of printed fabric. In the course of the nineteenth century New York became not just a giant of retail but the center of a rapidly growing garment industry, fed by the city's ideal location for incoming and outgoing goods, a constantly renewed immigrant workforce, and an explosion of new technologies. Some of the innovations, such as the sewing machine and the paper pattern graded for size, had applications at home as well as in business. Manufacturing benefited from the invention of power-driven looms that wove specialty fabrics and machines that made lace, covered buttons,

and Queen Victoria, 1790–1837 (London: Museum of London, 1997), p. 152.

22. Cooper, *America and the American*, p. 238.

23. Posing for an advertisement lithograph was simply not done: not by established matrons, not by actresses, and certainly not by going ladies of the social stature of Julia Gardiner, whose prominent New York family had settled and owned Gardiner's Island. No other such occurrence in that period is known. To rub salt in the Gardiner family wound there were the facts that the store, forgotten today except for this one episode, was less than fashionable (the family patronized A. T. Stewart); that Julia was shown ostentatiously dressed, and worst of all that she was shown practically arm-in-arm with "an unidentified older man, clad like a dandy in top hat and light topcoat . . . carrying an expensively wrought cane." Had a young lady ventured out for an unchaperoned promenade with such a stamp in real life, her reputation would have been ruined. As it was, the Gardiners "were embarrassed and humiliated" and sent her to Europe. That Julia's reputation survived is perhaps most clearly proven by her marriage five years later, in 1834, to then-President John Tyler. See Robert Seago II, *And Tyler Too: A Biography of John and Julia Gardiner Tyler* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), p. 6.

24. For more information about Genin's career, see Wendy Mladkoff, "Genin, the Celebrated Hatter," *Seaport: New York's History Magazine*, spring 1999, pp. 23–27.

25. Fox eventually included all the letters in his book, Charles Patrick Fox, *Fashion: The Power That Influences the World*, 3d ed. (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1872), pp. 2–4–6.

26. *The Liberator*, Series 1, vol. 4 (March 1832), front page.

27. Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, *Gone with the Wind: The Story of Marshall Field & Company* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1924), pp. 38–39.

28. Examples of dressmakers' fees are given in *Godey's Lady's Book* 48 (June 1844), p. 172. "No city dressmakers, with any pretense to good style, will undertake to make a dress for less than three dollars. In the really fashionable shops, \$4.75 is the charge of

making a basque waist, apart from the skirt—silk, buttons, all trimmings charged separately in the bill; so that you have from seven to nine, and even fifteen dollars to add to your two yards and a half of silk, the quantity usually purchased for a basque.”

29. Jane Austen to an unknown correspondent, in Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 107.

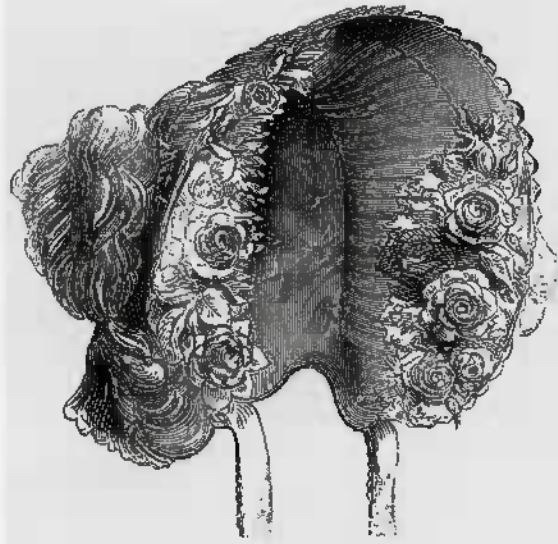


Fig. 201. *Emerald Green Velvet Bonnet from the Establishment of Madame V. Ferrero, 5 Great Jones Street, 1854.* Wood engraving, from *Frank Leslie's Gazette of Paris, London and New-York Fashions*, January 1854, p. 7. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

printed in many colors on fabrics, tucked or embroidered, or cut through several layers of fabric at once. The development of aniline (man-made) dyes made rich, strong colors more obtainable and affordable than ever before.

The manufacture of clothing in America was less expensive than importation, since it did away with shipping and especially import taxes; and it was patriotic, which suited the independent American spirit. From 1828 on, the American Institute of the City of New York held an annual fair at which awards were given for excellence in the areas of agriculture, horticulture, manufactures, commerce, and the arts (see fig. 200). Items of clothing of all sorts were to be seen there, as they were later at expositions such as the Crystal Palace exhibitions in the early 1850s. New York-made articles included—in addition to boots and shoes (rubber, patent leather, cork soled) and hats (of fur plush, for fur, along with rare plumage, was still one of America's most abundant natural resources)—corsets, umbrellas, clothing of homegrown merino wool, even homespun silk from the cocoons of silkworms fed on peanut plants. Evidently New York's fashion ingenuity was applied to producing what people wanted at least as much as to supplying what they needed.

Technology's greatest contribution to fashion was to make good-quality clothes widely available. Although Americans did not invent ready-to-wear, they perfected its mass manufacture, marketing, and distribution; by the end of the nineteenth century, what was produced in New York and sold throughout



Fig. 202. *A Selection of Day and Evening Dresses Available in New York, including a ball gown (far left) imported by A. T. Stewart and others made from materials available at A. T. Stewart and Arnold Constable and Company, 1854.* Wood engraving by Leslie and Hooper, after Edward Wailes, from *Frank Leslie's Gazette of Paris, London and New-York Fashions*, January 1854, p. 9. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library



Fig. 203. Ball Gown Made by Genin with Silk from A. T. Stewart and Luce from Genin, 1854. Wood engraving, from *Frank Leslie's Gazette of Paris, London and New-York Fashions*, May 1854, p. 85. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library



Fig. 204. Country Excursion Dress Made by Madame Demorest, 1854. Wood engraving, from *Frank Leslie's Gazette of Paris, London and New-York Fashions*, August 1854, p. 144. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

the country was a profusion of well-made, well-fitting clothes for men, women, and children, obtainable in every price range. When, well into the twentieth century, European couture houses decided to dip into the lucrative market of better ready-to-wear, they turned to New York manufacturers for machinery, skilled workers, and expertise.

Fashion and Manners

Technology affected not just how clothes were produced and distributed but also how they looked. Men's clothing, the first to be standardized and mass-produced, as the nineteenth century unfolded grew soberer and simpler than ever before. First the frock coat and long trousers and then the lounge suit (pre-

cursor of the business suit) became a uniform that had an equalizing effect. In the previous century both sexes had worn powdered wigs, colorful brocaded and embroidered silks, shoes with heels and elaborate buckles. As a definite masculine style emerged that was tailored and somber, women's clothes became far more feminine by comparison, particularly in silhouette and degree of decoration (see figs. 201-204). Novel types of ornament could now be produced in copious amounts by machine, and changing attitudes toward display and ostentation encouraged the proliferation of elaborate effects. Moreover, as the population became increasingly upwardly mobile, new codes of behavior abetted consumerism.

The republic had certainly come a long way since George Washington's schoolboy days, when he kept a



Fig. 205. *Broadway, West Side from Fulton Street to Cortlandt Street, 1856.* Tinted lithograph, published by W. Stephenson. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures. Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1984. 34.90.1161

workbook of rules about decent and polite comportment. Its numbered maxims included these: "8th: Put not off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Drest. . . . 13th: kill no Vermin as Fleas, lice ticks &c in the Sight of Others, if you see any filth or thick Spittle put your foot Dexterously upon it if it be upon the Cloths of your Companions, Put it off privately, and if it be upon your own Cloths return thanks to him who puts it off. . . . 51st: Wear not your Cloths, foul, unript or Dusty but see they be Brush'd once every day at least and take heed th[at] you approach not to any uncleanness."⁵⁰ By the late eighteenth century advice about clothing etiquette was somewhat more developed, but it still had a simple message: "Dress should only second beauty, and not shroud it; the choice, and heap of ornaments, are the foil."⁵¹

Yet in a few decades the dictates of etiquette had multiplied, reinforcing a newly strong relationship between consumerism and propriety. Rules of civilized conduct prescribed what ladies and gentlemen should wear at all hours of the day and for all types of occasions. Magazine coverage of etiquette was closely intertwined with that of fashion, and the advice given was so specific that an insecure customer paying close attention could purchase secure fashion footing:

For morning excursions, or what is called shopping, it is the very best taste to be dressed with the most unpretending simplicity—in the darkest colors,

without either flowers, feathers, or jewelry. The elegance of the cut of the garments; the neatness of the black gaiter boot; the fineness of the texture of the handkerchief, and the plain cambric or India muslin undersleeves and collar, are alone sufficient marks of distinction. No lace, except Valenciennes, is admissible in early morning costume; no bracelets, excepting plain gold circles round the wrist. . . . As the day advances towards its meridian, all its useful avocations having been performed, the time for displaying the elegancies and richness of the fashion arrives. Visits are supposed to be paid, and the object of being in the street is that of promenading and meeting friends and acquaintances [see fig. 205]. Even now, however, there are certain colors, materials and forms, which should never be worn in the street. No precious stones are made for sunlight—they are made to glisten beneath the brilliant chandelier of a ball-room, and appear tawdry at all other times. Now, rich embroideries may be worn—richer laces, and lighter colors, though sky blue, pink and yellow, should be studiously avoided. . . . In the early morning toilette, dark gloves—gray, brown and olive green, should be worn. In the afternoon toilette, all the more delicate tints, straw color being the best, are allowed. White kid gloves should on no occasion be worn in the street.⁵²

It is no coincidence that just when fashion was turning into a more exacting dictator and the role of the fair sex was becoming increasingly connected with

50. *George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, edited by Charles Moore (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926).

51. *The Ladies' Friend* (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1792), p. 38.

52. *Forham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art* 46 (February 1855), p. 105.

display, a small group of women were beginning the first push for suffrage. This too had fashion repercussions. In the 1830s Frances Wright, the author of a popular book about American society who had left Scotland for the United States and become an abolitionist, utopian, and defender of equal rights for women, was spotted in Turkish trousers. The 1840s saw anticorset societies. In 1851 a small band led by Amelia Bloomer adopted an antifashion uniform consisting of a knee-length dress worn over voluminous Turkish trousers. The public response to this costume was intense, so much so that its original wearers abandoned it in hope of being able to concentrate on other areas of women's rights. The outfit continued to be worn, however, as a political statement and for active sports. In 1858 *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* published an engraving of a feminine gymnastic costume by Madame Demorest featuring what had come to be called "bloomers."³³

During the nineteenth century fashion became newsworthy in a way it had never been before. Journalism had generally treated the latest styles as one of women's domestic interests and grouped them with sentimental stories, songs, crafts projects, articles on health, and recipes; but now a consideration of highly entertaining Dame Fashion began to seep into the general culture. Absurd novelties such as immense sleeves, anything related to hoop skirts, and, of course, the bloomer costume were fodder for political cartoonists and commentators. Excessive display, ever on the increase, was becoming news. In 1840 a private costume ball given by Henry Brevoort was described on the front page of the *Morning Herald*, occasioning a great hue and cry about the invasion of privacy. Nevertheless readers lapped up all the details about who was there and what was worn—the paper even published floor plans of the house.³⁴ Thus was born an insatiable appetite for information about society and fashion. In a pattern that would continue, the ball was both fawningly described and (in another article) satirized.³⁵ By 1860, when the renowned Prince of Wales ball took place, a number of newspapers devoted front-page articles to speculation about what people might wear and descriptions of what they did wear.³⁶

Dresses for Two New York Balls

Of garments from our period definitively known to have been purchased or worn in New York—or anywhere else, for that matter—relatively few survive. Articles of dress disappear over time because they are

remade, discarded, or too fragile to last. The origins of most clothes that survive from the nineteenth century and earlier are unknown. Labels had yet to come into common use; much of the information supplied by donors of clothes to museums has been lost; and what remains is not always reliable, since a donor may easily be a generation off when trying to recollect the owner of a garment. Thus it is remarkable to be able to compare dresses known to have been worn to two historic New York balls almost four decades apart, one given for General Lafayette in 1824 (fig. 206) and the other feting the Prince of Wales in 1860 (cat. nos. 204, 205). Each dress well exemplifies, for its own era, the height of fashion in Manhattan. An examination of the way one style developed into the other provides a brief history of the period's modes and mores.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the dominant style continued to be the one known as Empire, a look that alluded to the ideals of the French Revolution and had been fashionable internationally since that time. It might also aptly be called republican dress, since its hallmarks were simplicity, a comparatively natural silhouette, and plain, unassuming fabrics. The Empire style was meant to recall the dress of ancient Greece and Rome and followed the lines of antique sculpture almost literally: dresses were white and columnar, with high waists. This narrow silhouette, interpreted in sheer, revealing fabrics, was demanding to wear, since it left little room for artificial aids such as corsets. On the other hand, the unrestricting design freed the body, and the use of relatively inexpensive fabrics such as muslin made high fashion affordable to many more women. (Strict adherence to the year-round mode for lightweight fabrics could have dire consequences, however—pneumonia came to be known as "the muslin disease.")

Empire characteristics—simple lines, a high waistline, a preference for white, unpretentious fabrics such as muslin and gauze, embroidery in noncolor thread (white or metallic) to suggest a classical precedent—all appear in the Lafayette ball dress. The cut-steel necklace also worn that evening (see fig. 206) typifies another aspect of Revolutionary dress that well suited a republic: nothing could be less royal than jewelry made of a common metal rather than a precious one.

The Lafayette dress was made of imported fabric, perhaps obtained from an establishment similar to the one that advertised in 1803, "Received by the latest importation from Calcutta, a trunk of the most fashionable Gold and Silver worked Muslin."³⁷

33. *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* 36 (January 1858), p. 68; caption: "The Metropolitan Gymnastic Costume" from Demorest's Emporium of the Fashions, 378 Broadway, New York."

34. *Morning Herald* (New York), March 2, 1840, front page.

35. *Ibid.*, February 19, 1840.

36. Newspapers and illustrated weeklies covering the ball included the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald*, and *Harper's Weekly*.

37. From an advertisement placed by "Ephim. Hart, No. 36 Broad Street," in *The Arts and Crafts in New York 1800-1840*, a collection of advertisements assembled by Rita S. Gottesman (New York: New York Historical Society, 1966), p. 347.

38. Three evening dresses in the collection of the Valentine Museum, Richmond (V.6.14.44, 45, 46, 14.44, 45, 46, 14.44, 45), are associated with balls given in Virginia in Lafayette's honor. Compared with the two dresses in New York collections known to have been worn for similar occasions the same year (Museum of the City of New York, 33.112.1; Metropolitan Museum, 979.346.8), the Virginia examples are considerably more fashionable. They are all made of rich silks brocaded with small figures; one is in a burnished brown that looks ahead to the dark yet intense colors of the 1830s. The trappings, including rows of cording, puffs of sheer silk, dog-tooth edging, three-dimensional appliques, and sheer ruffles edged with satin bands, are just the kind of dressmaker details seen in fashion plates.

One dress (V.6.144, 36) has a wash printed with a small portrait of General Lafayette. Other items printed with his likeness and worn in his presence include men's kid gloves and a lady's fan, kerchief, and gloves. The engraved image of Lafayette copied on a pair of man's kid gloves (New York Historical Society, 1999.1184) is by Asher B. Durand.



Fig. 206. Ball gown worn by Elizabeth Champlin to the Lafayette Ball at Castle Garden, September 14, 1824. Silver-embroidered muslin imported from India, 1824. Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Mrs. Frederick S. Wombell 33.112.1

Necklace, part of a parure worn to the Lafayette Ball, English, ca. 1820. Cut steel. Collection of The New-York Historical Society 1920.11-17

Long gloves, 1820s-20s. Linen, bias-cut. Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Miss Elisabeth B. Brundige 30.44.4

Fan, European, early 19th century. Spangled net and ivory. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Miss Agnes Miles Carpenter, 1955 35.43.12

That a type of fabric considered stylish in 1803 was thought worthy of wearing to a grand ball in 1824 is not unlikely. Fabrics were precious, and dresses were often remade to suit the next generation of wearers. Moreover, early in the century, styles changed slowly. Fads, such as the turbans so loved by First Lady Dolley Madison, could last for years and years. The simple cut of the Lafayette dress resembles not the styles of contemporaneous fashion plates but those of about five years earlier. Comparison of this dress with several others worn the same year in Virginia for celebrations of Lafayette's visit there reveals that in the 1820s New Yorkers, although well dressed, were less up-to-date than Virginians. While the New York dress could have been worn some years earlier, the examples from Virginia, with their darker colors, silk fabrics, and intricate dressmaking details, relate closely to fashion plates of the day and to the color palette of the coming decade.³⁸

As the 1830s opened, a new silhouette appeared that seems a harbinger of things to come. The waistline dropped closer to its natural position and the skirt began to assume the shape of a bell. The fuller skirt was balanced by various widening devices at the shoulder such as pelerines or cape collars or, for more formal dress, wide, open necklines. Silk, usually woven with a subtle texture, was much worn. Gauzy whites gave way to browns, mustards, indigo, and rose, rich but somber colors that mirrored the relative absence of color in the uniform men had adopted. It would be the last time in the century that the two sexes complemented each other in dress by similarity rather than by contrast (see cat. nos. 197, 198).

From the 1830s on, novelty most often took the form of exaggeration. Sleeves ballooned, making observers worry lest their wearers take off; such sleeves were followed in the 1840s by tight-fitting ones, which were so impractical, critics complained, that they could be worn only by women who did not need to lift a finger. The one constant was growth in the size of the skirt, the part of the dress best suited to amplification for the sheer sake of display. As long as skirts got their fullness from layers of petticoats there remained a limit to their possible girth, but by the 1850s and 1860s, crinolines—lightweight contraptions made of steel, whalebone, and fabric tape—allowed skirts to reach frequently lampooned proportions (see fig. 197). Although utterly of their period, 1860 dresses, with their fitted bodices and full skirts, convey an air of the previous century. While the manufacture, materials, and distribution of attire had been modernized, women's clothes had over the course of the nineteenth century become more and more constraining because



Fig. 207. *Broadway—Respectfully Dedicated to the Prince of Wales, 1860*. Wood engraving by John McNevin, from *Harper's Weekly*, October 6, 1860, pp. 632–33. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

of increased physical mass, the restrictiveness of corsets, bustles, and hoops, and the oppressive degree of compliance now required by society's conventions.

That fashionable New York had forsaken republican simplicity could not have been made clearer than it was on the night of October 12, 1860, when a lavish ball celebrated the much heralded visit of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII (see fig. 207). Whereas several decades earlier America's proud anti-British stance had been remarked on by many (including the sharp-tongued Frances Trollope), and General Lafayette had been fêted as a political—almost a moral—hero, the Prince of Wales was purely and extravagantly Royalty, not to mention an eligible bachelor. Costliness and luxury were the order of the day. Already sumptuous ball gowns were made more elaborate with accessories: no lady felt completely dressed without a headdress; a bouquet holder (see cat. no. 204) with a nosegay by New York's top florist, Chevalier and Brower; gloves of white kid; a fan; a lace-edged handkerchief; slippers or gaiter boots of silk satin; a wrap, or *sortie de bal*, preferably white; and, especially, a *parure*, or matched set, of jewels (see fig. 208). Diamonds—previously scarce because they had to be imported and in any case regarded as too

flashy in an immediately post-Revolutionary America—were here so prevalent that the fete acquired another name, the Diamond Ball. The *New-York Times* reported, "One splendid *rivière* which recently astounded the city in the cases of Tiffany was most charmingly displayed upon the graceful beauty of Mrs. Belmont. . . . We have already spoken of Mrs. Morgan and her diamonds, and of Mrs. Belmont and her diamonds. We might go on the same way, with perfect truth, to speak of half the ladies of New York and their diamonds."³⁹

After diamonds, the element of attire most mentioned was lace, the costliest material of the time, comparable in price to precious stones. Numerous dresses were described as being entirely composed of this painstakingly handmade stuff, which would have seemed too ostentatious even five years before.⁴⁰ None of these survive; lace was too valuable not to be reused in another garment. Fortunately, a number of dresses worn to the grand ball for the Prince of Wales still exist,⁴¹ along with accessories and outer garments—far more than for any other event of the nineteenth century—and of these, several showcase silks woven in Lyon that were among the finest fabrics available anywhere in the world. In an attempt to revive the

39. *New-York Times*, October 13, 1860.

40. *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art* 40 (January 1855), p. 97, noted. "There is very little real guipure [a lace made without a net ground] in America. For, though the May-Flower brought over so many things and came over at the very time guipure was the height of fashion, its sage and stately matrons were not likely to bring anything which, like this lace, recalled the painted dames and the follies of the court from which they fled."

41. Most of them were donated to the Museum of the City of New York.



Fig. 208. *Superb Toilettes of the Ladies of New York, at the Grand Ball Given in Honor of the Prince of Wales at the Academy of Music, October 18, 1860, 1860.* Wood engraving, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, October 27, 1860, p. 1. Museum of the City of New York 92.51.80

42. The two-piece dress (Museum of the City of New York, 47.146.1-2) worn by a Quaker woman is made of silk taffeta in shades of periwinkle and beige woven with a design of patterned stripes alternating with narrow floral bands, and is trimmed with beige handmade lace and rios of periwinkle silk satin bands. The cape (47.146.3) is of bright pink serge lined with white quilted taffeta and is trimmed on the flat collar and down the front with bands of pink and lavender loop-edged braid. A mention in *Frank Leslie's Monthly* (1 November 1860, p. 467, of George A. Heam's shop at 425 Broadway could have been describing this dress material: "if we could fancy the style of goods that Quakeresses dress themselves like 'the world's people' would select for their *debut*—the dainty tiny patterns, the quiet colours, the judicious and very slight intermingling of bright lines with sober slate or delicate fawn—the general air of excellence rather than of showiness, we shall have some idea of the sorts of silks which are to be had here in great abundance."

French silk industry, dormant since Napoleon's time, Louis-Philippe had encouraged couturiers to make liberal use of the looms' products, and a ball gown worn that evening is attributed to Worth et Bobergh, the couture house most closely associated with implementing this plan. While the silhouette is rather simple, with an off-the-shoulder neckline, a narrow, corseted waist, and a tiered skirt held out by a crinoline, all of which had been in style for almost a decade, the material is nothing short of spectacular: coral velvet cut to a ground of silver gauze. According to information handed down with the dress, the material had been woven in Lyon for the empress of Russia and another piece obtained for the use of the Gardiner family. (The dress was worn to the Prince of Wales ball by the wife of David Lyon Gardiner, Julia Gardiner Tyler's brother.)

A second Prince of Wales ball dress of superb cut velvet from Lyon (cat. no. 205) was likely made in New York. In shades of brown and other colors, it is trimmed at the neckline and sleeves with a particularly fine point-de-gaze lace that would have stood out that evening even among stiff competition. The fabric itself is a fine example of a *trompe l'oeil* textile: in this case,

velvet designed to look like swags of floral lace on a ground of point d'esprit. It was created on the loom *en disposition*, that is, with a pattern intended to be used in a specific way. Accordingly, the dress is fashioned to best display the fabric: the part of the cloth with the largest pattern is used for the overskirt, that with a narrower band of corresponding design for the tiered underskirt, and that with a still narrower strip of pattern to ornament the cap sleeves and the cuffs of the day bodice (not shown here) and the cap sleeves of the evening waist. An uncut piece of the same textile in another color exists. The dress appears to have been made by an able modiste who used care and caution in handling this top-quality fabric.

Even a dress and wrap worn to the ball by a Quaker woman are of very fine fabric, a bright, brocaded silk.⁴² The textile design is much more reserved, however, and the style of the dress more covered up than those of the other ball gowns. Beyond the special restraint of religious conviction demonstrated here, the factors that regulated style of dress were age and marital status: older ladies, or "marrons," could display elaborate cut velvets and laces; younger women, particularly unmarried ones, were expected to choose less showy tulle, tarlatan, and other light, gauzy stuffs. A bell-skirted frock of white tulle remained popular garb for debutantes and prom-goers well into the following century.

The coral and silver dress attributed to Worth et Bobergh is one of three Prince of Wales ball gowns that appear to be Parisian in origin. Open for business less than three years when the ball was held, Worth et Bobergh had been founded by the English-turned-French master Charles Frederick Worth, who was destined to become one of the most celebrated and influential couturiers of all time. Another dress bears the label of Worth's closest rival, Émile Pingat, then also new in the business. The third dress, although not certainly from Paris, is likely to have been made there as well, since it was worn to a ball given at the Tuileries by Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie before it appeared at the Prince of Wales event.⁴³ While in New York the world of clothing was becoming a vast mix of department stores, specialty shops, custom or couture houses, and manufacturers and retailers of ready-to-wear, in mid-nineteenth-century Paris the fashion structure was beginning to revolve around elite couture houses. Instead of buying fabric at a top draper's and taking it to a modiste, one might have a dress made by a couturier (conducting himself like an *artiste*), a procedure that was brand new. Well-traveled, well-heeled New Yorkers were, typically, among the first clients of French couture.

Despite obvious differences, the dresses New Yorkers wore to the Prince of Wales ball share some important characteristics with the gown worn to the Lafayette ball decades earlier. With the exception of two of the Paris-made dresses, the Pingat creation and the ball gown worn to the Tuileries, which are elaborately cut in accordance with the latest fashion plates, the dresses of both eras have what can be described as simple silhouettes.⁴⁴ The most elaborate aspect of the designs is the fabrics, which are the best the world had to offer. Because New Yorkers had access to all the very latest fashions, it is safe to assume that they preferred simpler designs that did not detract from connoisseur-level silks and laces. The Paris-made clothes are more sophisticated in cut, but the workmanship of dresses made in the two centers seems equal. In treasuring fine materials New Yorkers were perhaps holding on to their colonial past, when "clothing was much more difficult to obtain than food or shelter" because importing textiles was extremely expensive and making them at home was enormously time-consuming.⁴⁵

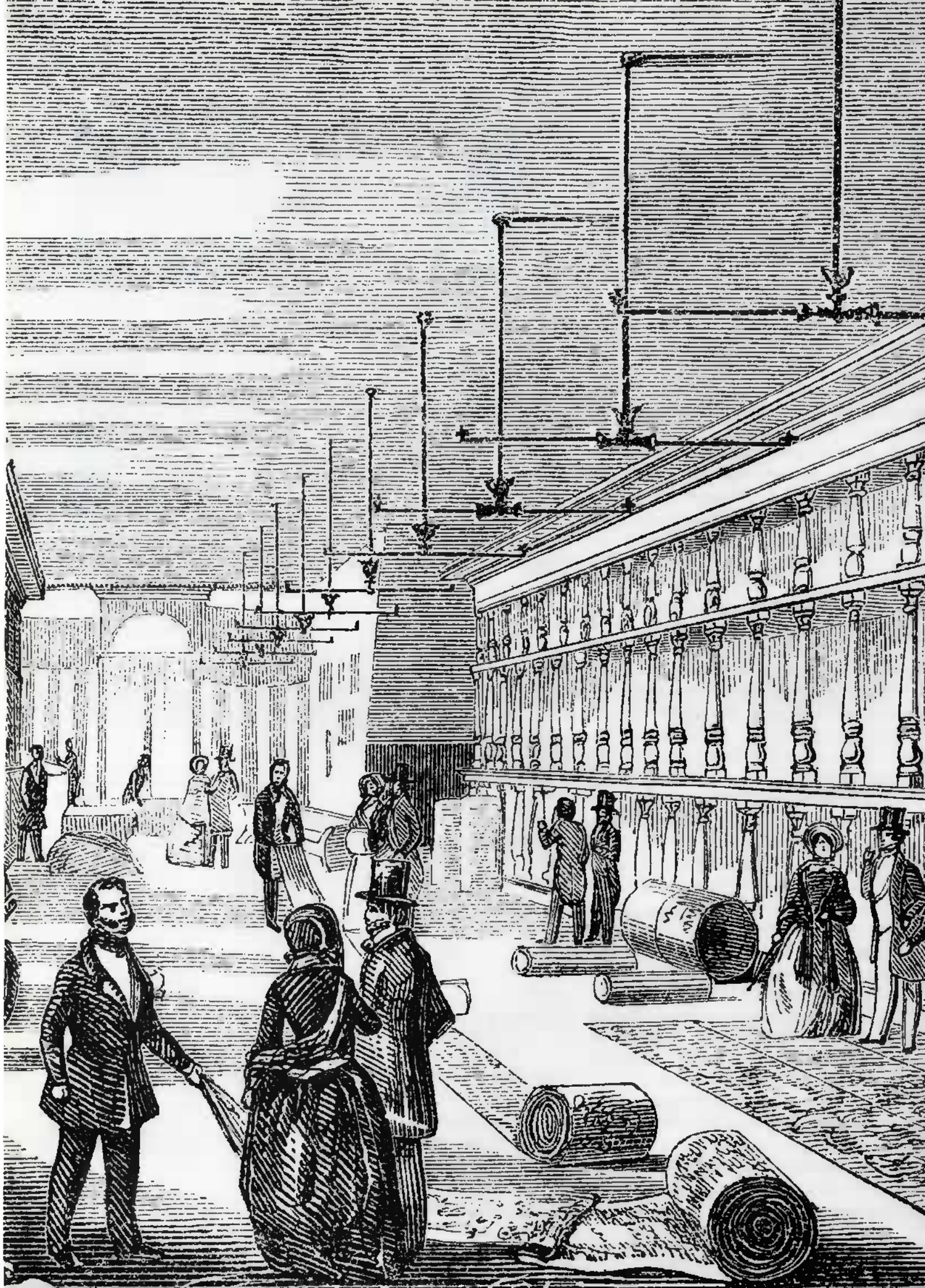
Scarcely three months after the Prince of Wales ball, Mary Todd Lincoln celebrated her husband's election with a shopping expedition in New York City. Newspaper and magazine accounts of the marvelous New York-made clothes worn that notable evening must have been on her mind as she sought to outfit herself appropriately for her future role as First Lady (see fig. 209). Offered credit, easily persuaded by able salesclerks to overspend, and flattered by the attentions of reporters following her around, Mrs. Lincoln spent freely: at A. T. Stewart she bought more than one black lace shawl for \$650 each as well as a camel-hair shawl for \$1,000. There seems to have been no celebrity discount for the wife of a new president likely to be involved in a civil war. Once in the White House, she wrote to her favorite New York stores placing order after order.⁴⁶ It was often said that Mrs. Lincoln lived in fear that her husband would fail to be reelected, as this would result in the calling in of all her debts—and some idea of those debts is given by her Washington dressmaker, Elizabeth Keckley, who quoted her remark, "I owe altogether about twenty-seven thousand; the principal portion at Stewart's, in New York."⁴⁷ The First Lady subsequently tried to liquidate what she clearly felt were real commodities, but the attempt backfired, and for the rest of her life she regarded her unmade silks, lace flounces, and other New York purchases as her most valuable possessions.

Mrs. Lincoln was hardly the only one to succumb to the allure of New York's wares. After the Civil War extravagance proliferated, so much so that in reaction there arose expressions of moral indignation. In a book published in 1869, *The Women of New York*, George Ellington included a disapproving yet fawningly detailed chapter entitled "Extravagance in Dress." "In the matter of female dress New York City is ahead of the world," he wrote. "The women of Boston may be well and richly dressed, but the prevailing fashions are always toned down to a more sensible and classical elegance, which is well-befitting the Athens of America. Brains rule at the Hub; gold is the god in Gotham. The quiet dames of Philadelphia are much more plainly clad than their Manhattan sisters; while even the women of Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis do not go to such extreme lengths as those of the metropolis."⁴⁸ That New York women had become walking displays of dry goods was only the beginning. From the Gilded Age on, every generation would have to come to terms with conspicuous consumption in its most visible form: dress.



Fig. 209. Mathew B. Brady, *Preinauguration Portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln*, wearing the Tiffany pearl parure (cat. no. 211) as well as a fashionable ball gown likely made with silk brocade purchased during her New York trip, taken in Washington, D.C., 1861. Albumen silver print from glass negative. Collection of The New York Historical Society

43. The Pingat ball gown and the dress worn to the Tuileries are in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York. The former (61.193) is pale mauve pink silk satin with bands of embroidered flowers and ivory silk fringe, and the latter (46.315) is ivory silk taffeta trimmed with lavender. Like many Prince of Wales dresses, they have never been photographed.
44. While the construction of the 1860 dresses may seem elaborate, it is not actually complicated; gathering even a wide tubular skirt into a waistband and making tiers or ruffles would be among the first sewing skills acquired by any novice.
45. Claudia Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, 1974), p. 27.
46. For Mary Todd Lincoln's letters to such favorite Manhattan merchants as J. Darrois, who sold trimmings; E. Uhlfelder, a dealer in fancy goods; Edwin A. Brooks, famous for shoes and boots; George A. Hearn, dry goods; May and Company, which billed her \$628.01 for, among other items, eighty-four pairs of gloves; and Madame Harris, known for exclusive hats, see Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, reprint (New York: Fromm International, 1987).
47. Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Formerly a Slave, but More Recently Modiste, and Friend to Mrs. Lincoln; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., 1868), p. 149.
48. George Ellington, pseud., *The Women of New York; or, The Underworld of the Great City...* (New York: New York Book Co., 1869), p. 28.



political favor. Nonetheless, he was just the right type of American Brady could use to promote his burgeoning New York portrait practice. Brady's portrait disguises Van Buren's small size and recalls his former prominence as an American president, one of only four living in 1855.

Alongside Brady's, Gurney's, and Harrison's portraits of a wide range of New Yorkers—from aristocratic Knickerbockers, to prominent politicians, to Brooklyn delivery boys—are likenesses of an altogether different sort. Photography was first put to service for the identification and apprehension of criminals in the late 1850s. In New York, 450 photographs of known miscreants could be viewed by the public in a rogues' gallery at police headquarters, the portraits arranged by category, such as "Leading pickpockets, who work one, two, or three together, and are mostly English." Yet, the reading of individual portraits is not always self-evident. Would the seemingly affable young man in the overcoat and silk tie appear villainous without the caption "Amos Leeds—Confidence Operator" below his portrait (cat. no. 177)?

In 1856 a preliminary plan for the improvement of a large tract of land that came to be known as Central Park was drawn up by the city's chief engineer. Within a year the commissioners had selected the proposal submitted by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, one of thirty-three submitted to a competition. The schematic design for their firm's elaborate program of bridges, walkways, and fountains survives in the municipal archives. Olmsted and Vaux employed Brady to produce photographs of the existing outlines of the terrain, which they used to construct their Greensward Plan, a series of "before" and "after" scenes on large presentation boards showing the proposed transformation of the landscape (cat. nos. 192, 193). On virtually every board, the designers presented an engraved map of their plan marking a particular feature and vantage point, a photograph entitled "Present Outlines," and a small oil painting, "Effect Proposed." In perhaps the most ambitious landscape project ever undertaken in America, photography played an integral role in communicating Olmsted and Vaux's task and vision. For the modern New Yorker, Brady's photographs remain the singular evidence of the terrain's original topography before

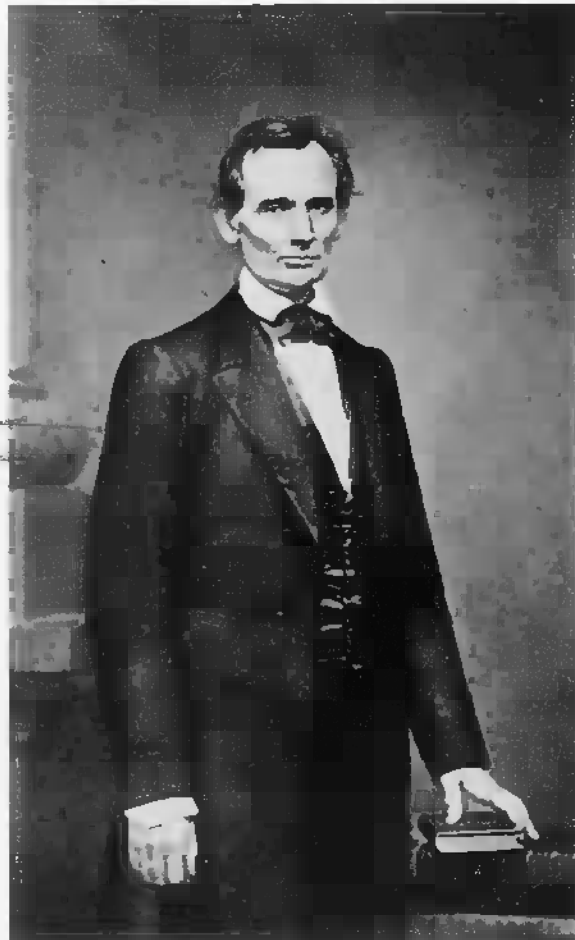


Fig. 193. Mathew B. Brady, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1860. Carte de visite; salted paper print from glass negative. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. NPG.96.179

its transformation. If these landscapes seem reticent and rather undramatic compared to the luxury of Brady's studio portraits, they do, nevertheless, serve as a precedent for what would soon occupy the artist: a five-year effort to document the Civil War, which would divide the century as it did the country (fig. 192). One could argue that Brady's first war portrait was of a tall young lawyer from Illinois named Abraham Lincoln, who spoke to a large Republican Party audience at the Cooper Union on February 27, 1860 (fig. 193). When elected president in the fall, Lincoln simultaneously acknowledged the astonishing power of both New York politics and the new medium of photography: "Brady and the Cooper Institute made me President."⁴²

42. Quoted in Mary Porter, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History* (ed. cat., Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1997), p. 160.