



Women, Sleeves, and Power: Pushing Spatial Boundaries

by Nancy Martin

THE ALAMEDA MUSEUM

RECENTLY ACCEPTED a dress for the collection from the 1890s that features massive leg-o-mutton sleeves. The dress belonged to Kate Moynihan, an Irish emigre to San Francisco who moved to Alameda with her husband, Fred Brampton, after 1880. They resided at 2024 Pacific Avenue, where Fred worked first as a policeman, then as a butcher. They had four children: Louise, Edith, Albert, and Florence.

Florence, who inherited dress, was born in 1891, attended Haight School and Alameda High School, then graduated from Healds Business School. She married William R. Francis, who worked in city engineering. They also lived in Alameda homes at 1725 Paru, then at 1989 Stanton, and had three children: Warren, Robert, and Dorothy. Florence lived for over 101 years, and the dress eventually was passed to her grandson Glenn, who currently resides in Lafayette. The dress acquisition is significant to the museum as it is one of the older garments in the collection.

The museum has several less fancy dresses from this same era. According to author Joan Severa, sleeve styles spanned this wide during the 1890s. They are a reliable system of garment dating because, in just five years, they expanded from little puffs at the shoulder to broad horizontal extensions. She notes in *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion 1840-1900* that by 1893, sleeves show the distinctive "drooping" feature observable in this dress. What factors influence sleeves



Special thanks to Ashmita Sapkota for her interpretation of the dress donated by the Noga family. The dress contains signature styling of 1893s with drooping leg-o-mutton sleeves and cut velveteen paneling.

to take such a dramatic form during this era?

Sleeves grew to similar widths during the 1890s in line with the pervasive adoption of shoulder pads. During that era, power suits with extended shoulders signaled a shift in American culture and communicated female aspirations toward equal status to men in the workplace. Not limited to professional attire, shoulder pads were included with every top available in the marketplace and diffused into other forms. Laura Ashley, for example, reintroduced wide ruffles beginning at the shoulder leg-o-mutton sleeves reminiscent of the Gibson Girl. Sleeve widths "seemed to [symbolize] woman's increasing place in the world," reinforcing messages from other social outlets, such as the film *9 to 5* featuring women's workplace empowerment or Sandra Day O'Connor's nomination to the Supreme Court. Perhaps this dress reflects similar directions.

The dress is a bodice and skirt combination made in an all-over floral motif of cut velveteen and navy-blue sateen. The fabric is fashionable for the time and though up-market, shows moderation in its cotton makeup. The bodice center panel features vertical pin-tucks in sateen edged with tightly spaced steel buttons. The side panels are made with patterned velveteen and feature a tiny patch pocket. The sleeve is made in two parts; the cut velveteen undersleeve finishes at the wrist with a pointed cuff and small ruffle, whereas the leg-o-mutton oversleeve in navy sateen ends at the elbow. The bodice, at the center front, is slightly pointy and extends to the high hip level. The skirt is bell-shaped, floor-length, with a short train. Following the bodice style, the center panel is made of cut velveteen framed by wide pleats tacked down with large, covered buttons. The details include a small ruffle at the hem and an invisible pocket inserted into the left side seam. Currently, the dress has an elaborate sateen bustle swathed up asymmetrically at the rear, determined to be an alteration. More likely, the bustle was originally apron-like drapery covering the front and tacked to the back. Fullness remains at the rear, where tightly spaced cartridge pleats have been folded under to add lift. It may have been supported with a small bustle, like the BVD spiral bustle, "the only bustle that will not break down."

The garments focus, the sleeves, are characterized by volume that expands the individual's boundary in space. The silhouette presents a solid and structured form, yet the sleeves and bustle are moving parts that would express themselves in a rustle as the wearer walks. Not only do they move, but they droop. The aesthetic dress movement of the 1880s may have initiated this character which gave the wearer "a languid,

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A series of Kodak snapshots presumably featuring Kate Moynihan. She is wearing a dress similar to the donated one. The photographs taken in sequence would not be possible without the invention of roll film.



drooping appearance that contrasted with the stiffly constructed lines of fashionable, bustle-supported dresses." This drooping feature would also move with the figure. However, the sateen fabric has a starchy hand that maintains its volume.

The series of photographs included with the donation supports evidence found in the dress. The individual in this photograph would be very fashion-forward with her high topknot and generous sleeves. How the photos and garment are connected has not been established, though they date to the same time—1890—by the figures' distinctive hairstyle and sleeves. This series of photos represents innovation in

photography that affected everyday people. The introduction of roll film by Eastman Kodak enabled photographs to be taken quickly and in succession. With the invention in 1893, the company marketed the snapshot camera and an advertising campaign featuring "The Kodak Girl," encouraging women to take on amateur and candid photography. They "targeted women as photographers and subjects, encouraging them in the decades that followed to regard snapshot photography as both a fashionable activity and a domestic duty." During the 1890s, the use of both cameras and bicycles emphasized women's growing independence, activity, and mobility outside the home.

In its final reading, the dress exhibits a mixture of styles representative of female dress during the late 1800s. The textures, volume, and layering in deep and saturated jewel tones imply prosperity, a characteristic repeated in the number of glittery metal buttons and ornate tucking. Though sumptuous, the fabrics were made of cotton, a fiber available to everyone. This era was optimistic and known for increasing democratization, economic prosperity, and

political tranquility. The social climate was in flux, offering opportunities for women to work or participate in sports such as bicycle riding. For the first time, it became acceptable for women to be outside on their own.

Fashions reflect the "spirit of the times." Kate Moynihan would have been approximately 37 years old when this dress was made. Though quite fashionable, it exhibits the tendency for mature women to hold on to styles longer than entirely up to date. Wearing this dress, Kate expresses her willingness to embrace the new stylish mode while clinging to past fashions. The bustle, for example, represents a holdover from the previous decade.

The heavy crinoline interlining was dropped by 1893 to accommodate bicycle riding. Skirt lengths were beginning to rise, yet the hem of this dress shows wear to indicate that it did not clear the floor. The heavy dome shape, floor-length skirt, and double rows of metal buttons reference the previous decade, whereas the leg 'o mutton sleeves, the pockets, and cut velveteen are up-to-the-minute fashionable. Most notably, the tiny unfunctional patch pocket and functional inseam pocket mark modernity. Skirts flatten, hems raise and stays shorten, signaling women's increased mobility: their movement outside the home, on bicycles, and as photographers. As sleeves expand, both physically and socially, the wearer expands her breadth.



The Kodak advertising campaign featured "The Kodak Girl," an active young woman capturing everyday adventures with her snapshot camera. See more about the Kodak camera on page 10.

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**See details of the dress
in color online at**

www.alamedamuseum.org/
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FROM THE COLLECTION

A Camera for Everyone

by Valerie Turpen

THE BROWNIE WAS A CAMERA made by the Eastman Kodak company. It's easy use, portability, and convenient photo development process made the art of photography available to the masses. I remember the first camera I found in a closet at home was a Brownie, a simple box that was able to capture a memory of your day with the press of a button and the turn of a knob.

George Eastman was born on July 12, 1854, in Waterville, New York to George Washington Eastman and Maria Kilbourn. The family soon moved to Rochester where his father started a small business school. Unfortunately the senior Eastman died soon after. George jr. left school at age 14 and worked his way up in a variety of clerical and accounting jobs to help support his mother and sisters.

Eastman was fascinated by photography. Intending to travel to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic he purchased the heavy equipment used at the time to record his journey. Instead he studied the equipment and the complicated photographic process used to produce images. On April 13, 1880 he filed his first patent for "an improved process of preparing dry plates for use in photography" (shown below).

January 1, 1881, Eastman and Henry Alvah Strong formed a partnership called the Eastman Dry Plate Company. Strong, also a Rochester resident, had gained success with his family's buggy whip company. He provided the capital to launch Eastman's company and served as the first president.

George Eastman patented the first film in roll form in 1884. To market his innovative camera, Eastman decided to create a word that would be memorable in any language. He chose the letter "K," (the first letter of his mother's maiden name) and settled on Kodak. The inventor was quoted as saying, "It seems a strong, incisive sort of letter. It was short and euphonious and likely to stick in the public mind."

His original camera came loaded with 100-exposure roll film. When used up, the entire camera could be sent to the Kodak factory where the film was processed. The camera was returned with new film, the negatives, along with mounted prints, all for \$10.

Eastman continued to expand his business, purchasing camera and film companies in Boston, St. Louis, Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Milwaukee, and



In the museum is a No. 2A Brownie, Model C, a fancy red version complete with a matching red leatherette carrying case. The case is lined with metallic gold cloth. These Brownies were produced starting in the 1920s in five colors, red, gray, green, brown, and blue.

Sioux City. The Eastman Kodak Company soon became the dominant manufacturer of cameras and George Eastman was known as the "Kodak King."

In 1900 the Brownie camera was introduced. It took 2.25 inch square pictures. The camera cost \$1.00 and the film processing was 15¢ per roll. In 1901 the improved No. 2 model was available taking 2.25 x 3.25 inch photos at the higher price of \$2.00.

The name "Brownie" was chosen primarily because of the popularity of children's cartoon characters of the same name by Palmer Cox. These tiny goblin characters appeared in the ads promoting that the camera could be "operated by any school girl or boy."

Between 1928 to 1933 industrial designer Walter Dorwin introduced the No. 2 and No. 2A camera in a variety of colors and later fashionable Art Deco styles to appeal to women.

George Eastman made photography accessible to the world. His camera gave men, women, and children the ability to record their daily history in snapshots. Many photos in the museum collection are the product of these amateur photographers recording their moment in time.

