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Kid Gloves

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“A Dozen pairs of kid gloves, Paradise gloves, the shop’s specialty.”¹

Zola’s *The Ladies’ Paradise* highlights both the vast array of ready-made goods available in newly developing department stores and the dramatic manner in which these goods were displayed. Gloves of various types are mentioned several times throughout the book (“gloves were asymmetrically arraigned, their fingers elongated their palms as delicate as those of a Byzantine virgin...”²) with specific fabrics and designs included occasionally. Kid gloves are mentioned specifically when sold to the lover of the Paradise’s owner. A pair of white kidskin gloves were located in the URI Historical Textile and Costume Collection, donated in February, 1961 by Mr. and Mrs. Henry G. Clark, a prominent Rhode Island family dating back to 1638. *Gloves* 60.19.01 (Figure 1), display seams stitched together using a 2-ply cotton and flax thread; they close using six small pearl buttons at the inside wrist. The right glove includes a blue stamped label on the inside, which reads “Grande Medialle d’Honneur Trefousseole” (Figure 2). A smaller stamp denoting the glove a size “6” is visible, as well as several blue lines near the edges. These are most likely marks used when cutting and stitching the gloves to shape. The gloves are worn and discolored, particularly in the finger areas, and have a few small holes, particularly in the seams. The area covering the back of the hand features pointing, an area of stitching used both for decoration and to insure a tight fit. According to the accession records, the gloves were worn by Celia Elizabeth Carr when she married George Herbert Clark on December 26th, 1877 in Newport, Rhode Island.³ The HTCC collection records indicate that George H. Clark also wore a pair of Trefousse white kid gloves (1960.19.02), but they have yet to be located.

Leather gloves have been utilized by nearly all classes of people at some point during the last five centuries. Whether for protection during hard labor or in battle, or as an act of modesty, leather gloves have played an important role in the history of dress. Gloves made from silk, wool, linen and cotton were also made, used extensively, and sold in shops like the Ladies’ Paradise, but leather gloves are of particular interest in this case. Gloves in the second half of the nineteenth century were an essential part of Victorian etiquette. The number of occasions during which gloves had to be worn increased during this time, partially due to increased social mobility and the resulting flood of etiquette books this inspired.⁴ For ladies, gloves were to be worn at all times while in public, except when eating “unless their hands are not fit to be seen.”⁵ Short, plain leather gloves with pointing on the back of the hand were worn by both men and women in the 1860s and 1870s. Kid leather gloves produced in France were considered the highest quality and the most desired beginning in the seventeenth century and extending through the early twentieth century. *The Workwoman’s Guide*, published in 1838, notes that “French gloves are by some preferred to the English make, as they are considered to be more elastic.”⁶

¹ Zola, Emile. 1995. *The Ladies’ Paradise*. Translated by Brian Nelson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 100.

² Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise*, 5.

³ *1880 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

⁴ *Ibid*, 55.

⁵ *Ibid*, 55.

⁶ 1838. *The Workwoman’s Guide*. London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 175.

The expansion of the glove industry and the development of ready-wear gloves was due in part to the regulated method of glove sizing developed by Xavier Jouvin, a Frenchman from Grenoble, the centre of French glovemaking, in 1834.⁷ This was essential for glove manufactures to keep up with the increase in demand for kid and doeskin gloves in the nineteenth century, according to Michael Stephen Smith's *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800-1930*. He states that the best example of the mechanized production of gloves "is Trefousse, Goguenheim et Cie, which in the 1890s employed 1,600 workers in steam and electricity-powered plants in Chaumont (Haut-Marne)... and another 1,500 outworkers in nearby towns and villages. Trefousse, Goguenheim gloves were known for their 'brilliance, suppleness and solidity' and were sold through company-owned sales offices in Paris, London, New York, Frankfurt, Belgium and Switzerland."⁸

The renamed company, Les Gants Trefousse, was founded in 1892 by Jules Tefousse⁹ and became the leading firm in French glovemaking at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Little record of Trefousse is seen prior to the 1900s, though several pairs Trefousse kid gloves, supposedly produced between 1870 and 1880, can be found in collections like the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It is possible that gloves under the Trefousse label were made and sold exclusively in France at shops like the Ladies' Paradise prior to the creation of the company Les Gants Trefousse. This would coincide with the dates connected to the wedding of George H. and Celia E. Clark in 1877. An ad found in *The Morning Oregonian* newspaper in 1907 alerts customers to the presence of counterfeit Trefousse gloves, and includes a picture of the Trefousse label which matches the label Mrs. Clark's glove. The date coinciding with this label design is not mentioned, though the presence of this ad supports the idea of the Trefousse glove popularity in the early twentieth century, and that exclusive department stores were where they were sold.

Celia Elizabeth Carr, the owner of the HTCC gloves, married into the solidly established Clark family, whose members lived in several Rhode Island locations throughout the years, mostly in Newport, Westerly, Richmond, and Shannock. The George and Celia lived in Shannock, Rhode Island, close to where George's father, Simeon P. Clark, built a mill at Clark's Mill in 1849 and began to manufacture cotton yarn.¹¹ The family records do not aid in confirming the date of Mrs. Clark's wedding gloves. As a family in the textiles trade, it is certainly possible that a member or two of the family could have travelled to France and purchased the Trefousse gloves, though no evidence has been found to support this theory. However, in both photographs of the Clark family found, none of the men appear to be wearing gloves, and it is difficult to determine whether or not gloves were worn by the women. This could support the thought that women in rural areas did not follow the same glove rules as those in more metropolitan areas, a thought cited by Cumming from an 1898 magazine "It is rare to see gloves worn except out walking, while in the country many ladies never wear gloves at

⁷ Cumming, *Gloves*, 17.

⁸ Smith, Michael Stephen. 2006. *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800-1930*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 289.

⁹ V&A Museum. "Pair of gloves." <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1134966/pair-of-gloves-les-gants-trefousse/>

¹⁰ Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France*, 289.

¹¹ Hurd, Beth. "[RIGENWEB] Simeon P. CLARK". May 6, 2002.

"<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/RIGENWEB/2002-05/1020695561>

all.”¹² While women in the Clark family may not have worn gloves on a regular basis, it can be assumed that gloves were worn at George and Celia’s wedding since gloves were considered essential etiquette at such an event, not to mention that the wedding took place in the city of Newport in December.



Figure 1

¹² Cumming, *Gloves*, 75.

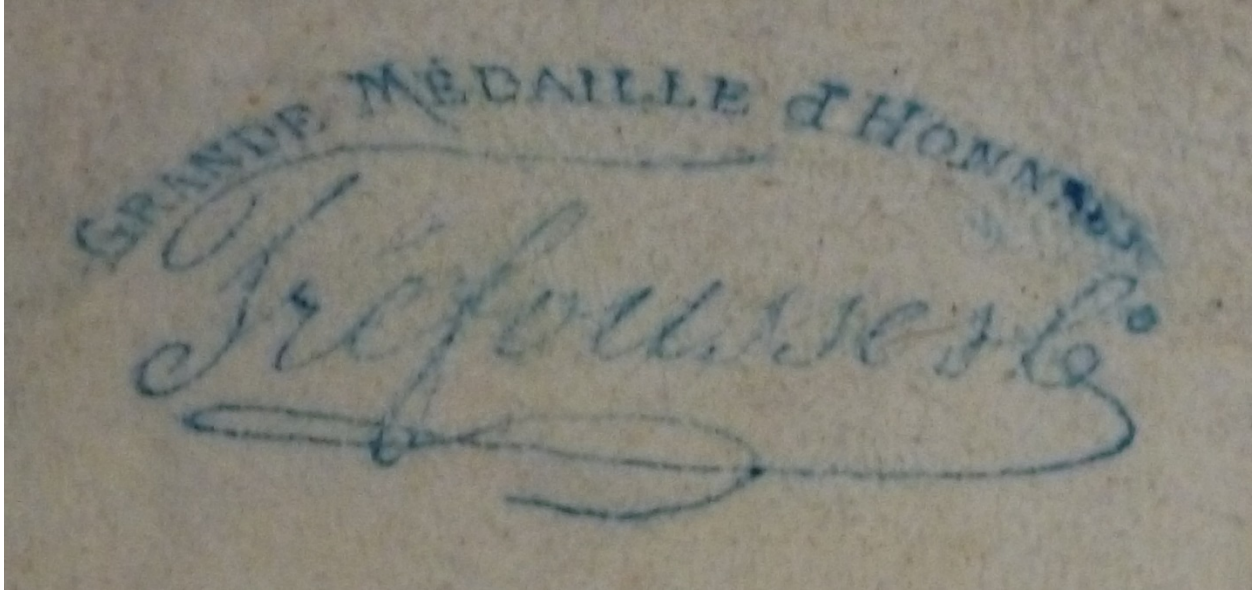


Figure 2

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