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THE USE OF "ROBES" BY AMERICAN DRESSMAKERS: A. & L. TIROCCHI, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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THE USE OF “ROBES” BY AMERICAN DRESSMAKERS:

A. & L. TIROCCHI, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

BY

HILARY S. BAKER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN

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OF

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ABSTRACT

During the early twentieth century, dressmakers struggled to compete with the burgeoning ready-made industry. Anna and Laura Tirocchi, Italian immigrants from Guarcino, owned a prominent dressmakers shop in the Federal Hill area of Providence, Rhode Island, from 1915 to 1947. The Tirocchi sisters made dresses, blouses, and coats with imported Parisian “robes”, which are pre-embellished lengths of fabric, as a competitive strategy against the advancing ready-made industry. These robes arrived as layers sewn at the top to a low thread count strip of fabric with a tag identifying the importer and a label identifying the country of origin. Robes for dresses included plain fabric for a slip between layers of ornamented fabric that required minimal stitching to create a garment. The unfitted, tubular shape of twenties fashions made construction especially simple. These robes are now rare artifacts in historic costume and textile collections, and little is published about them. The researcher examined robes and extant garments from the Tirocchi collections housed in the Historic Textile and Costume Collection at the University of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum and evaluated their use as a strategy in dressmaking businesses, an industry in transition. The Tirocchis’ use of robes as a competitive business strategy against the ready-made industry was short-lived. Anna and Laura used robes most heavily during the fall of 1922 through 1923, after which the sisters increasingly began to rely on the sale of ready-made garments rather than custom made garments.

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PREFACE

This thesis was written in the manuscript format as prescribed by the University of Rhode Island Graduate School. It is the intention of the author to submit it upon its completion and acceptance by the University of Rhode Island to *DRESS*, the journal of the Costume Society of America.

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Manuscript

**The Use of “Robes” by American Dressmakers: A. & L. Tirocchi,
Providence, Rhode Island**

by Hilary Baker

is submitted to *DRESS*, the scholarly journal of the Costume Society of
America

Use of “Robes” by American Dressmakers:
A. & L. Tirocchi, Providence, Rhode Island

Introduction

The use of pre-embellished lengths of fabric for simplified garment construction, termed *à la disposition* or *en disposition*, dates at least as far back as the eighteenth century.¹ Tailors used these embroidered fabrics to quickly produce waistcoats and gowns without the excess time and labor spent on embellishing individual pieces of a garment. Their use has long assisted tailors and dressmakers with the task of timely production, but in the early twentieth century, these fabrics took on a renewed purpose: helping dressmakers compete with the ready-made industry. When these fabrics came to be known as “robes” within the fashion industry is unclear, but the general practice of pre-embellishing lengths of fabric with the intention of making them into clothing has remained the same.

During the early twentieth century, dressmakers struggled to compete with the burgeoning ready-made industry. Anna and Laura Tirocchi, Italian immigrants from Guarcino, owned a prominent dressmakers shop in the Federal Hill area of Providence, Rhode Island, from 1915 to 1947. In the early 1920s, The Tirocchi sisters made dresses, blouses, and coats with imported “robes,” pre-embellished lengths of

¹ Susan Hay, “Paris to Providence: French Couture and the Tirocchi Shop,” in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers’ Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 157; Jean L. Druesedow, *In Style: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Costume Institute* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 23; Kyoto Costume Institute, *Revolution in Fashion: European Clothing, 1715-1815* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 144; Lucy Ginsburg, “Embroidery,” in *The Illustrated History of Textiles*, ed. Madeleine Ginsburg (New York: Portland House, 1991), 136.

fabric, as a competitive strategy against the advancing ready-made industry.² The robes arrived as separate, folded layers of ornamented and unadorned fabric, typically used for the garment lining or a slip. A low thread count strip of fabric, or scrim, sewn across one end held the layers together, creating an easy-to-handle assemblage of materials. Each robe included a paper tag identifying the name of the import company, model number, and price. A label sewn into the finished garment established the fabric's country of origin. The unfitted, tubular shape of twenties fashions made construction especially simple. These robes are now rare artifacts in historic costume and textile collections, and little is published about them. The researcher examined robes and extant garments from the Tirocchi collections and evaluated their use as a strategy in dressmaking businesses, an industry in transition.

The Tirocchi collections at the University of Rhode Island (URI) Historic Textile and Costume Collection and Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum offer the opportunity to study extant robes; plus, the business records exist in the RISD Fleet Library. After the death of Anna Tirocchi in 1947, the contents of the A. & L. Tirocchi shop were left untouched by Laura and then her daughter until 1989 when Louis J. Cella Jr., Laura's son, donated selected objects from the Tirocchi shop to RISD and URI.³ These donations resulted in an exhibition entitled *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947* at the RISD Museum of Art, the concurrent publication of a book of the same name, as well

² Pamela A. Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail, Distinction, Individuality: A. & L. Tirocchi, Providence Dressmakers," in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 36.

³ Information provided by Dr. Margaret Ordoñez who selected objects for the URI Historic Textile and Costume Collection.

as the creation of a website, A. & L. Tirocchi Dressmakers Project.⁴ The contents of the Tirocchi shop created a time capsule of early twentieth-century dressmaking that cannot be found anywhere else in the United States.⁵ The rarity of such complete records offers a unique opportunity for a case study of American dressmaking during a period of transition. The website catalogs a portion of the documents and materials found within the Tirocchi shop and features a brief explanation of robes. In the book, little attention is paid to the concept of robes, except to mention the ease of their production into garments.⁶ Importers, such as Harry Angelo Co. in New York, presented the season's latest fashions from Paris as illustrations in the form of a model book (Appendix C, page 65). Dressmakers selected robes from these books and received a set of supplies that included the robe and an accompanying picture of the completed garment.⁷

At the turn of the century, middle- and upper-class women still predominately patronized dressmaker establishments. While many clothing items were available ready-made, societal norms and expectations hindered their purchase, as the wealthy still preferred to have their wardrobes custom made.⁸ By the 1920s, however, the ready-made industry had matured and was the most common source of fashion

⁴ *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000); RISD Museum, "The A. & L. Tirocchi Dressmakers Project,"

http://tirocchi.stg.brown.edu/514/evidence/cd_remaining_garments.html.

⁵ Susan Hay, Introduction to *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000).

⁶ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ Rob Schorman, *Selling Style: Clothing and Social Change at the Turn of the Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 51.

consumption for the middle classes.⁹ With the prevalence of ready-mades came the blurring of class divisions.¹⁰ Once only available in the strata of the well to do, affordable stylish clothing became available to everyone.¹¹ Claudia Kidwell and Margaret Christman refer to this phenomenon as the “democratization of fashion.”¹² American women still held Paris fashions in the highest regard, and the department stores fueled that desire by importing original Parisian designs.¹³ The list of Tirocchi clientele reads as a who’s who of Providence high society: wives of prominent businessmen, lawyers, and physicians who favored Parisian fashions.¹⁴ Harry Angelo Co., a favorite supplier of the Tirocchi sisters, imported goods from Paris. To stay in business, these importers evolved with the ready-made industry and eventually began supplying more ready-made goods than fabrics.¹⁵

Numerous publications chronicle the world of early twentieth-century fashion. Studies on dressmaking analyze the social circumstances of typical shop owners, their workers, and the type of clients they serviced, while tending to focus on the demise of dressmaking as a career. These studies place emphasis on new technologies, innovative drafting systems, and the evolution of women’s views on fashion

⁹ Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume: A History of Western Dress*, 4th ed. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2008), 366.

¹⁰ Claudia Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), 15.

¹¹ Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 3.

¹² Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*, 15.

¹³ Marlis Schweitzer, “American Fashions for American Women: The Rise and Fall of Fashion Nationalism,” in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 132.

¹⁴ Susan Porter Benson, “Clients and Craftswomen: The Pursuit of Elegance,” in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers’ Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 54.

¹⁵ Parmal, “Line, Color, Detail,” 43.

consumption.¹⁶ The rise of the ready-made industry is equally well documented, with particular attention paid to immigrant workers, labor unions, and department stores.¹⁷

However, the actions taken by dressmakers to prevent being superseded by the ready-made industry are rarely examined. Incomplete business records for early twentieth-century dressmakers may be one reason; therefore only speculations can be made about business practices. For this reason, the contents of 514 Broadway, the home and dressmaking establishment of Anna and Laura Tirocchi, supplies a rare glimpse into early twentieth-century dressmaking practices.

E. McClung Fleming's model for the study of material culture lends itself to exploring the historical positioning of these robes and their cultural context. Fleming's model uses four steps—identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation—to create a holistic model for the study of an artifact.¹⁸ This study used Fleming's model to analyze extant robes and completed garments in the University of Rhode Island Historic Textile and Costume Collection and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. With the pressure to quickly produce completed garments, robes provided dressmakers with fashionable materials to meet the demands of clients without risking the loss of business. The business records and Harry Angelo Co. model books from the Tirocchi shop, housed at the RISD Fleet Library, helped clarify the prevalence of the Tirocchis' use of robes.

¹⁶ Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1940* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Schorman, *Selling Style*, 45-75.

¹⁷ Florence Richards, *The Ready-to-Wear Industry, 1900-1950* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1951); Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*, 65-169; Jessica Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle: The American Story of Fashion for the Millions* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 28-53.

¹⁸ E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 165.

The goal of this study was to investigate the Tirocchi sisters' use of robes as a competitive business strategy against the ready-made industry. This study primarily examined robes of the 1920s, as this was the decade the Tirocchis most heavily relied on robes; however, research into the 1910s and 1930s helped place these robes within their context along the continuum of custom dressmaking to ready-made. This research is a resource for costume collection curators and managers who may have robes in their collections, but do not fully understand their role in early twentieth-century fashion.

A Custom World: The History of Anna and Laura Tirocchi

Anna and Laura Tirocchi were Italian seamstresses who immigrated to the United States in 1905, briefly working in New York under another dressmaker before settling down in Providence, Rhode Island. The sisters opened their original shop located in the Butler Exchange on Westminster Street in 1911. After Laura's marriage to Dr. Louis Cella in 1915, their operation moved to 514 Broadway, a three-story Victorian Italianate mansion that housed the Cella family and Anna, Dr. Cella's medical practice, as well as the sisters' dressmaking business. While both sisters are remembered as being active within the business, Anna reportedly took command of the entire enterprise and oversaw business decisions. Laura managed the sewing room and employees, a markedly less time consuming enterprise, in an effort to balance familial and professional responsibilities.

At any given point during the 1920s, when the shop was most active, Anna employed an average of fourteen hired seamstresses, all of them young immigrants. A division of labor existed among the seamstresses with the more skilled responsible for

cutting and the less skilled sewing. Apprentices occupied the bottom rung of the hierarchy and took on menial tasks like basting, overcasting, and sewing seams when they were not running errands. While the sisters considered most of these women as part of their family, they discouraged them from having anything more than minimal interaction with the patrons of the shop. The separation of the fitting rooms on the second floor, where Anna conferred with clients about designs and fabrics, from the workrooms on the third floor ensured this separation of laborers from customers. Anna capitalized on public knowledge of their Italian training, though that was the only connection to Italy she allowed. Anna's intention to present her business as high class in turn led to her refusal to align herself as an Italian immigrant and shy away from Providence's Italian society.¹⁹ She felt this would ultimately help attract the most ideal clientele.

Indeed, the patrons of the Tirocchi dressmaker shop were among Providence's high society. These women greatly valued the quality and individuality of custom made clothing and required their garments to be of the latest Parisian style. For them, a custom-made garment was considered a long-term investment that would be repeatedly made-over to conform to the French ideal. The Tirocchis assisted with repairs, alterations, and creating new garments appropriate for the various social events attended by their clients. Anna recognized the importance of meeting the expectations of her clientele by importing goods from Paris and positioning her business as a premiere dressmaking establishment. The Tirocchis encouraged the idea of European associations with shop advertisements emphasizing the phrase "Di

¹⁹ Benson, "Clients and Craftswomen," 61.

Renaissance.” Anna herself traveled to Paris a handful of times to purchase products, but she mainly relied on the business of importers to acquire fabrics, notions, and trims.²⁰

The evolving role of women in society stimulated change within the fashion industry. The number of women entering the workplace was steadily increasing, and these new workingwomen did not have time for multiple consultations and fittings with a dressmaker, nor did they possess the means to afford custom garments. The clothing industry rushed in to fill the need for ready-made, reasonably priced fashion. While Anna’s clients were not necessarily counted among those who worked for a living, the sisters recognized this shift in fashion consumption as a convenience and began purchasing ready-made clothing to supplement their custom-made wardrobes.²¹ Anna offered her clients ready-made garments as early as 1914 and attempted to introduce robes into her inventory in 1919, though all six were eventually returned. Indeed, the Tirocchis sold zero ready-made garments, which included robes, during 1918 and 1919 despite having made similar sales during the previous three years.²² Custom-made garment sales far outweighed ready-made sales until 1924, when Anna greatly increased her ready-made offerings.

The styles of the 1920s greatly contributed to the growth of the ready-made industry; the unfitted, tubular silhouette allowed manufacturers to produce fashionable styles in bulk to sell to the masses with little danger of ill-fitting garments. The

²⁰ John Briggs, “Strategies for Success: The Tirocchis, Immigration, and the Italian American Experience,” in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers’ Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 42-3.

²² See chart “A. & L. Tirocchi Business Transactions 1915-24” in Parmal’s “Line, Color, Detail” essay, 31.

importance of dressing fashionably and rapid seasonal style changes previously had created problems for dressmakers whose expensive and time-consuming garments contrasted with the convenience and lower cost of ready-made clothing.²³

Paris: The Epitome of Style

In the 1890s, John Wanamaker became the first retailer to import French fashions for resale, followed closely by Marshall Field & Company.²⁴ This practice grew in popularity, and importers such as Harry Angelo Co., a favorite supplier of Anna's, sent representatives to Paris to purchase the rights to the latest couture designs. There they observed trends in materials and decorations and brought them back to the United States to sell. Bi-annual showings held in New York displayed the latest Parisian styles alongside the importer's interpretations, usually with a few "Americanized" modifications.²⁵ Fashions previously only available to the wealthiest dressmaking establishments, and guarded closely for fear of copying, became available to all manner of dressmakers through these showings, along with published model books containing illustrations and descriptions of the styles. This dissemination of Paris fashions helped level the playing field for dressmakers by eliminating the cost of overseas travel. The availability of model books meant that attending the bi-annual showings was not necessary.

From the model books, dressmakers could select "robes" to purchase. "Robes" are pre-embellished lengths of fabric layered together and sewn to a low thread count fabric, or scrim. These robes included the decorated fabric as well as un-decorated

²³ Jean L. Parsons, "No Longer a 'Frowsy Drudge' Women's Wardrobe Management: 1880-1930," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 20 (2002): 34.

²⁴ Hay, "Paris to Providence," 135-36.

²⁵ Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle*, 146.

lengths of fabric that would complete the portions of the garment with no embellishment or serve as the petticoat or lining of the garment (Appendix A, page 32). Each robe included an illustration of the finished garment and a paper tag indentifying the importer, model number, and price²⁶ (Appendix A, page 50). Robes could be purchased alone or as part of a “model set.” The “model set” included the supplies needed to complete a garment as shown by the importer.²⁷ Due to her concern about handling delicate fabrics, Anna showed customers the accompanying illustration rather than pulling out the actual robes.²⁸ This most likely accounts for the lack of illustrations with the extant robes; only one robe of a coat retained its illustration.

Department stores recognized the consumer’s desire for French fashions and fueled the competitive fire by also importing original Parisian designs. Purchasing models directly from the couturiers proved costly; thus, copying became rampant as manufacturers and department stores realized the savings potential of purchasing sketches for the newest models through a copy house or independent sketch artist. These copied models greatly impeded a retailer’s ability to sell lawfully purchased Parisian models as their retail price needed to be significantly higher than the copies.²⁹ The incorporation of Paris models into the ready-made industry ensured availability of the latest styles at every price point.

The dependence on Parisian couturiers dictated the business calendars of American dressmakers. With seasonal lines coming twice a year from Paris, many

²⁶ Parmal, “Line, Color, Detail,” 38.

²⁷ Ibid., 39.

²⁸ Ibid., 38.

²⁹ Elizabeth Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach* (New York: Random House, 1938), 55.

dressmakers experienced a lull in business during the summer and late winter, after clients had purchased and received their orders. Before the 1920s, these respites from production allowed dressmakers to travel to Paris to preview the upcoming season's offerings or, a more common occurrence, to simply give the impression of traveling to Paris by closing shop and going on vacation.³⁰ As the ready-made clothing industry began to dominate fashion retail, many dressmakers found these slow months offered them the chance to get ahead of the fashion game by making up a number of garments to have on hand beginning, for some, the transition into the ready-to-wear and ready-made industries.³¹

Staying in Style

By the 1920s, the ready-made industry was a well-oiled machine, quickly becoming the preferred method of fashion consumption. Ideal fashion aesthetics shifted from ornate fitted garments to loose easy-to-fit styles, simplifying the reality of mass manufacturing. Improved quality coupled with the affordability and availability of ready-made garments pitted custom dressmakers against department stores. Large stores offered customers one-stop shopping by having both a ready-made department and a custom department, which carried fabrics and trims and was available for alteration work.³² This type of convenience especially appealed to the younger generation whose lifestyle no longer allowed for leisurely fittings at the dressmaker.³³ The fashion industry was evolving, and custom dressmakers had to evolve with it or risk losing their business entirely.

³⁰ Schweitzer, "American Fashions for American Women," 135.

³¹ Parsons, "No Longer a 'Frowsy Drudge,'" 34.

³² Gamber, *The Female Economy*, 194.

³³ Cynthia Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere: Dressmakers in Cincinnati's Golden Age, 1877-1922* (Lubbock, TX: Cincinnati Art Museum and Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 138.

To compete with the department stores' convenience, dressmakers began to modify their merchandise offerings. Some chose to sell "ready-made" garments along with custom garments; others included "ready-to-wear" garments, and some offered a combination of custom, ready-made, and ready-to-wear. The industry term "ready-to-wear," according to a 1916 trade study, referred to "a single gown made up on a single exclusive pattern in advance of the specific order of a customer, but offering an individuality and exclusiveness of style in the finished product which the ready-made in its many duplications in various sizes can not do."³⁴ "Ready-made" referred to a mass produced garment available in a variety of sizes and purchased as-is. The largest and most progressive establishments transitioned to mass manufacturing, an overwhelmingly male-run occupation, thereby shifting back into the male controlled sphere of production.

Anna chose to, first, add ready-to-wear options to their inventory in the form of robes. Because the ornamentation was already complete, making a robe into a garment required minimal stitching and minimal time. While a robe arrived as a pre-determined set, Anna's clients frequently customized the designs of their garments, requesting an alteration to the proposed style, and Anna could easily substitute a part of one robe with another (Appendix F, page 75). The twenty-nine robes remaining in the Tirocchi shop at the time of donation raises the question of why they were never sold. At least five of the extant robes housed at RISD have been dated to 1926. This is significant due to a mild recession occurring between October 1926 and November 1927, a factor which likely contributed to a decrease in sales. While many dressmakers spent the

³⁴ May Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade for Women in Massachusetts" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1916), 20.

slow months constructing garments to have available, possibly Anna, knowing her clients' preference for individuality, pre-ordered a number of robes. This practice could greatly alleviate the issue of a client requesting a customized garment while expecting it to be completed quickly. By having a number of robes on hand, the wait for orders to arrive was eliminated, and Anna could accommodate these requests. The very nature of the robe, quick and convenient yet still customizable, highlights the definition of ready-to-wear.³⁵

Department stores already bypassed the dressmaker altogether by appealing directly to the home sewer with well stocked fabric departments. By offering their own dressmaker services for custom-made garments or alterations, the department store began successfully luring wealthy clients away from small dressmaking establishments and into the world of ready-made clothing. Some retailers took this evolution one step further by offering sewing kits. Advertised as the perfect Christmas gift, these kits included a dress pattern and the required fabric for construction.³⁶ Directly rivaling the robe, these convenient packages offered the same fashionable styles while eliminating the costs associated with sourcing through a dressmaker.

Yet another change was headed for the fashion industry. Despite being in the midst of war, Paris continued to sell models to American retailers throughout World War I, and the French fashion industry became even more dependent on American consumers after the war.³⁷ Evidence of promoting American designs could be seen early in the twentieth century with *Ladies' Home Journal* editor Edward Bok among

³⁵ As defined by Allinson's "Dressmaking as a Trade."

³⁶ Schorman, *Selling Style*, 55.

³⁷ Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle*, 140; Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Berg, 1999), 252.

the movement's staunchest supporters.³⁸ In 1916, a small editorial appeared in the inaugural publication of *The Soil*, a modernist magazine, in which the author, F. M., calls attention to this movement saying, "Yet there is a basis for departure here, along dressmaking lines; there seems to be an American body among women...."³⁹ Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor took the reins in the 1930s and embarked on arguably the most well-known campaign for an American look.⁴⁰

According to Allinson, ready-to-wear "represents the last resort of custom dressmakers and tailors to combat the ready-made."⁴¹ Large department stores aimed at offering a world of luxury and opulence that appealed to the dressmakers' clientele, and the sheer amount of selection available required an amount of capital dressmakers could not afford. The resurgence of home sewing also took its toll on the world of custom dressmaking with an abundance of advice manuals and sewing patterns. The custom dressmaker became reliant on loyal customers, though even their patronage came to be increasingly limited to alterations and the making over of garments, and the Tirocchis were no exception.

Extant Robes, Garments, and Harry Angelo Company Model Books

During the teens and most of the twenties, Harry Angelo Co. used their model books to advertise certain fabrics as prominently as the illustrated model gowns. Generally following the same format, each model book showed five to ten model gowns followed by an advertisement for the latest in fabric fashions. These ads tout an array of fabrics, although they mention crepe fabrics and velvets quite frequently

³⁸ Schweitzer, "American Fashions for American Women," 131.

³⁹ F. M., "Dressmaking," *The Soil*, December, 1916, 30.

⁴⁰ Tiffany Webber-Hanchett, "Dorothy Shaver: Promoter of 'The American Look,'" in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (New York: Berg, 2011), 520.

⁴¹ Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade," 19-20.

(Appendix F, page 74). Of the twenty-nine extant robes examined in this thesis, eleven are silk crepe, four are velvet, two are silk taffeta, two are rayon gabardine, two are net, four are a combination of crepe and net, two are a combination of crepe and velvet, one is plain-weave cotton, and one is a weft pile fabric with uncut loops. In terms of overall fabric colors, the robes can be divided into three groups: black, cream or neutral, and color. The majority of the extant robes have an overall coloring of either black or cream/neutral, with eleven and ten robes respectively. The remaining robes are saturated colors including two red, four brown, one blue, and one green.

While most advertisements within the model books focused on fabric, those marketing robes paid significant attention to the methods of embellishment (Appendix F, page 73). The most common embellishment technique, present on thirteen of the twenty-nine robes, is machine embroidery using a chain or satin stitch. Nine of the twenty-nine robes combine techniques such as beading and appliqué with embroidery or use lace insertions along with embroidery, which makes embellishment combinations the next most common practice. Only three robes relied solely on beading for their decoration.

The placement of embellishment among the extant robes can be divided into two categories: planned placement, with the general shape of the finished garment apparent, and allover or random placement.⁴² The number of robes in each of these categories is almost even with fifteen robes featuring planned placement and fourteen robes featuring an allover or random placement of decoration. In terms of motifs, four design categories emerged: geometric, floral/natural, ethnic, and abstract/other. Floral

⁴² The term “random” refers to embellishments in which the general shape of the finished garment is not inherently clear. Careful planning by the manufacturer ensured the embellishment placement wasted the least amount of fabric.

or natural motifs represent the largest category with twelve robes. Geometric motifs are present on eight robes. Six robes bear ethnic motifs from African, Eastern European and Chinese cultures. Only three robes had abstract/other designs.

A number of factors present among the extant garments are proof of their construction from robes. Garments with significant all-over beading or sequins can be assumed to have originated from a robe due to the ornamentation's labor-intensive requirements. At this point in history, a dressmaker would not spend the time or money embellishing each piece of the garment individually. In some cases, a portion of the embellishment can be seen in the seam allowances of the finished garment, indicating the consumer was smaller than the intended size. The garment's construction can indicate its being made from a robe, such as obvious panels of embellished fabric or grid-like layouts of decoration (Appendix C, pg 61). URI's collection holds an extensive number of fragments found at the Tirocchi house, some of which are the remains of robes, though without additional evidence, this definitive classification is difficult. Their existence, however, speaks to the thriftiness of the Tirocchis and their reluctance to dispose of these materials despite their being unsold.

Advertisements specifically geared toward robes appear in the spring and fall model books of 1921 and continue until the spring of 1923, after which the term robe is not used again⁴³ (Appendix D, page 76). Towards the end of the 1920s, the model books shifted focus toward the model gowns and away from advertisements. An increase in the number of illustrations increased the overall size of the publication while the number of advertisements decreased until eventually they were eliminated

⁴³ This finding is based on the model books housed in the Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library at Rhode Island School of Design.

completely.⁴⁴ The main focus of these ads never faltered from the latest trend in fabrics. Though they read like a newspaper's fashion column, the sole purpose of the advertisements within the model books is to sell specific fabrics (Appendix F, page 81).

The terminology used within the model books is deceiving. Each model gown is attributed to a designer. A number of gowns in each of the model books examined are identified as Angelo designs, and while we know import companies created their own interpretations of French fashions, whether these Angelo gowns are the designs of Harry Angelo Co. or a French designer named Angelo is unclear (Appendix F, page 72). Equally misleading is the lack of definitions for the terms "robe" and "model set" within the model books. Based on subsequent definitions, perhaps they are indistinguishable, though both terms appear separately in descriptions of model gowns from the same season. Examination of the Tirocchi's purchase records from Harry Angelo Co. shows that they are not synonyms as evidenced by orders for both robes and model sets within the same transaction. Additionally, the term "model set" is not mentioned within any of the model book advertisements, and pre-1922, the terms "flat robe" and "robe" are used interchangeably. One possible defining characteristic is model sets were purchased "as is" while robes were available in a variety of colors (Appendix F, pages 71-2).

Short-Lived Success

Ultimately, the time and labor saving benefits of the robe could not compete with the infinitely more convenient ready-made garment. Indeed, the Tirocchis' use of

⁴⁴ Fall 1926 is the last model book containing advertisements.

robes as a competitive tactic against the ready-made industry spanned just a few short months with the largest and most frequent robe purchases being made between August of 1922 and April of 1923.⁴⁵ By 1924, the bulk of Anna's purchases included more ready-made garments than robes, although she continued placing orders for the occasional robe, presumably for her dwindling custom clients, throughout the rest of her career.

Despite the simplicity of creating robes into garments, they still required time that the consumer spent at the dressmakers for fittings and time for construction. The immediacy of ready-made was a difficult factor for robes to overcome, even considering the attraction of owning a customized garment. The paradigm of fashion consumption was evolving from the idea of customized quality that could be repeatedly remade into the season's latest style to the still prevalent idea of planned obsolescence. Manufacturers of ready-made clothing needed the general public to return every season and continue purchasing. The idea that being out of style is comparable to irrelevance, proliferated largely by fashion periodicals, took root most strongly within the younger generation.⁴⁶

With the popularity of custom dressmaking dwindling, importers also felt the pressure to adapt to the changing fashion industry. They too began importing more ready-made products than raw materials. The demand for ready-made far outweighed the demand for trims and notions. Larger import companies that catered to department stores soon eclipsed the smaller companies like Harry Angelo Co., putting them out of

⁴⁵ A comprehensive table of the Tirocchi's business transactions can be found in Parmal's "Line, Color, Detail" essay on page 31.

⁴⁶ Eduard Fuchs, "Bourgeois Dress," in *The Rise of Fashion*, ed. Daniel Leonhard Purdy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 323; Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere*, 165.

business, despite the changes that were made to stay relevant.⁴⁷ Correspondence between debt collectors for Harry Angelo Co. and Anna Tirocchi during the early 1930s illustrates the ever-present struggle of bill payment, typical to the goods for credit system. Harry Angelo Co. could not weather the burgeoning ready-made industry and with the Great Depression came the closure of the import company.

Anna's decision to incorporate ready-made garments into her merchandise led to a period of prosperity for the Tirocchis' business. Along with garments, Anna began offering a selection of accessories and household linens. This choice, along with the Tirocchis' proficiency at alterations, resulted in the shops' survival well after similar establishments had closed. However, the Tirocchi sisters never made the transition to designer, though evidence suggests Anna did occasionally design garments at a client's request. During the 1930s, the idea of designing garments, rather than merely sewing them together, gained popularity as retailers and manufacturers began to rely on American produced goods, rather than expensive imported models from Paris.⁴⁸ The push for American fashions by American designers had begun, and two women, Elizabeth Hawes and Hattie Carnegie, capitalized on that shift of ideals.

Elizabeth Hawes began her career in fashion in 1924 as a workroom apprentice at Bergdorf Goodman, New York. During the summer of 1925, Hawes left the United States for Paris, promising monthly correspondence on Parisian news to a few small American newspapers. Once in Paris, Hawes secured a job at a copy house where she attended the couture shows to view and attempt to memorize each model, then sketched them out later that day. These sketches were used by the fashion industry to

⁴⁷ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 43.

⁴⁸ Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Styles*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 98.

illegally copy Parisian models without having to pay the designer. Hawes sold sketches to American stylists, the predecessor of today's buyer, and eventually took a job with Macy's as a stylist. While in Paris, Hawes also wrote fashion editorials for *The New Yorker* as their Paris correspondent and briefly worked under Nicole Groult, sister to Paul Poiret, at her couture house. Hawes returned to New York in 1928. The experiences garnered from the multiple jobs within the fashion industry held by Hawes all led to her decision to begin designing clothing for American women. While Hawes was aware of the need for American designers, she had not entertained the idea of beginning her own design business until the realization that a niche group of women existed in New York who were not having their clothing needs met. Hawes and her friend, Rosemary Harden, opened a custom dressmaking house, Hawes-Harden, in 1928.⁴⁹ Harden left the business in 1930 while Hawes continued designing, even holding a fashion show in Paris in 1932 to debut her American styles.

Elizabeth Hawes is considered among the first "American designers for American women."⁵⁰ Hawes did not always agree that the latest fashions out of Paris would be the best design for American women. She believed that practicality equaled style and repeatedly urged women to wear the dress, not the other way around. Hawes wrote multiple books, including *Fashion is Spinach* in which she details her career path to designing and argues that "fashion is a parasite on style."⁵¹ Fashion encompasses the short-lived trends while style "only changes as often as there is a real

⁴⁹ Milbank, *New York Fashion*, 89.

⁵⁰ Milbank, *New York Fashion*, 100.

⁵¹ Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 6.

change in the point of view and lives of the people for whom it is produced.”⁵² Hawes retired from the fashion industry in 1940, though she briefly reentered to open a shop on Madison Avenue in 1948 that only survived through its first year. Eventually, Hawes took on the role of fashion critic rather than designer, until her death in 1971.

Henrietta Kanengeiser, who later changed her name to Hattie Carnegie, was born in Vienna in 1889. She attended public school until age 11, when she answered an advertisement for a hat shop assistant, thus beginning a string of jobs that introduced her to the world of clothing manufacture. Though she did not sew herself, Hattie was especially skilled at conveying her wishes to the women who ultimately constructed her garments and, like any designer, required the last word on any design.⁵³ Her massive department-store-sized shop in New York included a fur coat and wrap department, antiques department, jewelry, cosmetics and perfume, bags, pajamas and underwear, custom hats, ready-made hats, blouses and sweaters, a ready-made dress department that offered Carnegie originals along with a few curated designs from other designers, a second ready-made department called Jeune Fille Shop that carried pieces from Carnegie’s Spectator Sports collection and models from design houses, and even a Carnegie chocolates department. Carnegie’s workrooms occupied the top three floors of the store, where the designs of Carnegie originals were realized, and all the custom garments were produced. The Carnegie empire also commanded two other buildings in New York: one that housed the manufacturing for

⁵² Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 5.

⁵³ Beryl Williams, *Fashion is Our Business* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1945), 59.

Hattie's ready-made line and another where the manufacturing for Spectator Sports took place.⁵⁴

Carnegie understood the needs of American women and made sure each piece she designed met, if not exceeded, those needs. Like Hawes, Carnegie took into account the latest styles from Paris, but she did not believe they all met her standards of design. For this reason, she offered her own interpretations of the fashions alongside the models she imported from some of the largest Parisian couturiers. Her clients knew that a Carnegie design would probably fit them better than a design straight from Paris.⁵⁵ Her reputation for repeatedly presenting designs that sold to American women kept the eyes of Paris couturiers and Seventh Avenue manufacturers on her seasonal lines. Paris designers always watched to see how Hattie reacted to their lines, getting a better idea of what would sell in the American market. Seventh Avenue manufacturers knew they could produce a profitable design if it was Hattie-approved.⁵⁶

Hattie Carnegie, like the Tirocchis, adapted her business to fit the changing fashion industry, but unlike the Tirocchis, she embraced the changes fully and in a timely manner. The economic crisis of 1929 led to Carnegie's Spectator Sports line, a lower priced ready-made line of everyday garments that, to Carnegie's surprise, quickly turned into a highly successful endeavor.⁵⁷ Once she realized the need for reasonably priced, well-designed garments, Carnegie began producing them. When custom-made clothing regained some of its earlier popularity, she offered that service

⁵⁴ Williams, *Fashion is Our Business*, 54-5.

⁵⁵ Williams, *Fashion is Our Business*, 59-60.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁷ Williams, *Fashion is Our Business*, 60.

alongside the ready-made options. Carnegie's death in 1956 began the slow decline of the empire she built, and by the mid-1960s most of her employees took jobs elsewhere.⁵⁸ Carnegie continuously kept pace with the changing fashion industry, ensuring a successful business and, consequently, that her name be remembered.

Although in business at the same time, the Tirocchi sisters typified the fashion industry of the past while Elizabeth Hawes and Hattie Carnegie represented the future. Despite being an astute businesswoman, Anna could not, or refused to, make the changes necessary for longevity, both in business and in name. Even with the inclusion of ready-made merchandise, the French fashion ideal remained the quintessential ideal, and Anna's failure, or refusal, to see the changes taking place in the industry ultimately resulted in the demise of her business.⁵⁹

Conclusion

While, in the end, the Tirocchis' use of robes as a competitive business strategy against the ready-made industry did not succeed in allowing Anna the freedom to continue primarily creating custom-made garments, the idea of robes opens the door to more questions about early twentieth-century dressmaking. Other strategies, yet unidentified, might have been in practice. Robes present in other costume collections may help curators and collections managers piece together a small bit of history concerning other early twentieth-century dressmakers. Embellishments within garment seam allowances and the overall layout of decoration can help curators

⁵⁸ Milbank, *New York Fashion*, 185.

⁵⁹ Madelyn Shaw, "American Fashion: The Tirocchi Sisters in Context," in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 127.

identify extant garments created from robes. With the widespread use of imports and the predilection for adornment in the 1920s, we can assume the use of robes by other dressmakers, however brief, was equally prevalent. The large number of extant Harry Angelo Co. model books within libraries and collections across the United States is, at the very least, proof of a general knowledge of robes within the dressmaking community.

The early twentieth century saw numerous changes occurring within consumer society. Technology advances allowed the ready-made industry to flourish with increased manufacturing and faster dissemination of fashions. Women increasingly began entering and remaining in the labor force, leading to consumer needs that were better met through ready-made clothing than custom-made. The convenience of department stores, with their wide selections and reasonable prices, far outweighed the convenience of the dressmaker.

With the world of custom dressmaking swiftly disappearing, the Tirocchi sisters opened an establishment and managed to keep it open thirty-two years. The competition from department stores and the ready-made industry forced independent retailers to change their business strategies or face closure. Anna Tirocchi chose to contend with the ready-made industry. Her business acumen allowed the sisters to make the necessary adaptations to be able to survive into the forties, though their business by no means flourished. Anna chose to supplement her merchandise with ready-to-wear, in the form of robes, and when this tactic did not provide the desired outcome, she increased her ready-made merchandise. Other early twentieth-century dressmakers, such as Hattie Carnegie and Elizabeth Hawes, survived the ready-made

industry by joining it and repositioning themselves as designers. The affordability and convenience of the ready-made industry became an unconquerable obstacle for the sisters. Despite attempts to evolve with the industry, the Tirocchi dressmakers' shop could not survive after Anna's death because Laura, the surviving partner, had competing obligations with children and family.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Robes at the University of Rhode Island, Historic Textile and Costume Collection



1990.09.77 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
45 in. x 40 1/4 in.

Black silk crepe with floral Schiffli embroidery ending in a scalloped hem and a black net extension featuring black silk embroidery in a curlique design. Unlike the other extant robes with only one length of unadorned fabric, this robe has two different lengths of plain, black fabric, crepe and taffeta, each with their own Harry Angelo Company tag.



1990.09.78 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
55 in. x 28 in.

Cream silk crepe and black net with silk embroidered flowers in a chain stitch; one length of unadorned cream silk crepe. The general outline of bodice and skirt are visible due to the layout of the embroidery. This robe had an accompanying illustration at one point prior to accession, the remains of which can be seen in the buckram band.



1990.09.79 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
 38 1/4 in. x 29 1/2 in.

Cream silk crepe with light blue appliqués featuring yellow, light and dark green, and red chain stitched flowers and houses; one plain length of cream crepe fabric. The appliquéd fabric is one long length folded into quarters, while the much smaller, plain length fabric is folded in half altogether creating 6 layers of fabric. This robe has a Harry Angelo Company tag identifying it as model set 148/1 and priced at \$75. The purchase order for this robe is among the Tirocchi business records housed in the Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library; it was ordered on April 2, 1926, priced at \$62.50



1990.09.80 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Upper left: 55 1/4 in. x 37 1/2 in.

Upper right: 53 3/4 in. x 36 5/8 in.

These two pieces are identical robes; the upper left picture shows a robe still sewn to a buckram band and the upper right picture is a robe that has been removed from its band. Each piece is off-white plain weave silk crepe featuring a chinoiserie pattern of Peking knots and chain stitched orange, blue, light pink, and yellow silk embroidery. A small tag identifying the complete robe as model 1072 is present on the buckram band, but the company from which it was purchased is unknown.



1990.09.81 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
55 1/2 in. x 39 in.

Green-brown silk crepe with chain stitched gold metal-wrapped core yarn and light brown silk embroidery, eyelets, and imitation Venetian machine-made lace insertions; one partially cut, unadorned length of green-brown silk crepe fabric.



1990.09.82 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
55 1/2 in. x 48 in.

Off-white cotton fabric featuring round medallion motifs chain stitch embroidered in teal, dark and light blue, orange, red and cream silk, attached by brides.



1990.09.84 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
39 in. x 70 in.

Red silk crepe with ribbon applique onto net ground in a floral pattern, applied ribbon border directly underneath buckram band.

1990.09.84b (not pictured)

135 in. x 38 in.

Unadorned length of red silk crepe. This length would have been used for the unadorned parts of the garment.



1990.09.85 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
38 1/8 in. x 31 5/8 in.

Off-white silk crepe with silk embroidery threads. Openwork, satin stitch, blanket stitch. Floral pattern with radiating lines of silk embroidery. Tag reads “No. 5010; 2”



1990.09.87 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
140 1/2 in. x 36 1/2 in.

Gray-green silk crepe with silver painted appliqué and couched black silk embroidery in an Art Deco-influenced design. The outline of the bodice is clearly visible. Features a Made in France label.



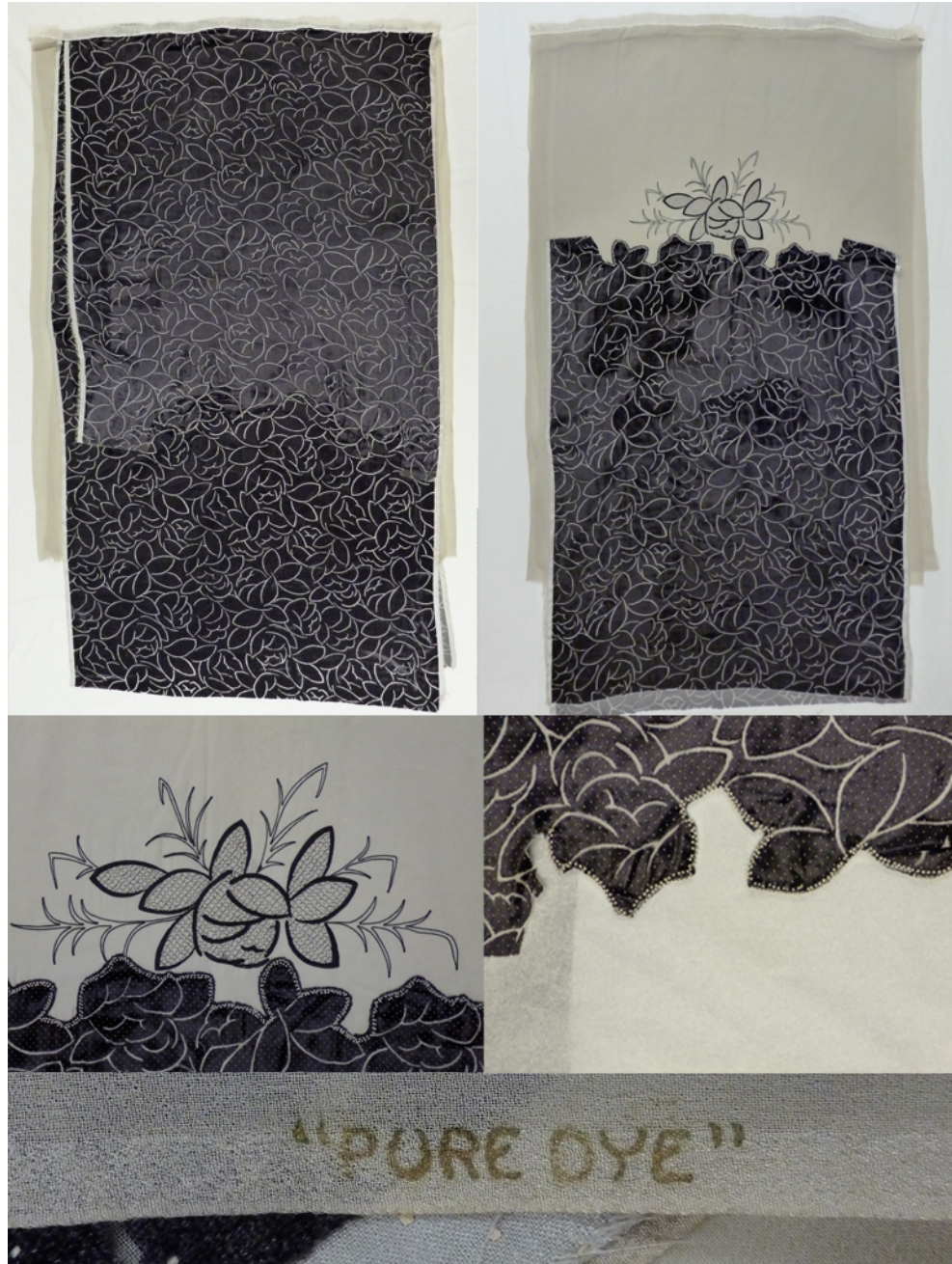
1990.09.88 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
38 in. x 67 1/2 in.

Black silk crepe and black velvet featuring black machine embroidery in a stylized floral pattern. A Harry Angelo Company tag is attached to the accompanying unadorned black silk crepe fabric. Tag reads "No. 4113/1; Pc. No. 52700; Yds. 2; Plan for 513/1"



1990.09.89 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
 58 in. x 42 1/4 in.

Brown silk with orange, dark and light blue embroidery in a geometric pattern. This robe has a Harry Angelo Company tag identifying it as a Berthe model coat 152/2 priced at \$125 though the backside of the tag is marked \$75. The embroidery at the bottom of what would be the back of the garment is a dark blue where it is a light blue at corresponding places throughout the rest of the garment. A matching robe in green at RISD (1990.129.30b) lacking this discrepancy leads the assumption that a mistake had been made which accounts for the price difference.



1990.10.503 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island
64 1/2 in. x 39 1/2 in.

Robe of gray silk crepe and black voided velvet in a leaf and printed dotted pattern; seed bead border following the floral motifs along the both ends of the velvet length; floral embroidery and beading on gray silk crepe; unadorned gray silk crepe length. "Pure Dye" printed on crepe selvedge.

Appendix B

Robes at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum



1991.123.8a (top) Rhode Island School of Design Museum

20 in. x 40 in.

1991.123.8b (bottom)

26 in. x 39 in.

Printed rayon gabardine featuring an all-over pattern of playing card suit motifs; white silk chain stitched card suit motifs on black taffeta. "Pure dye" written along one selvedge.

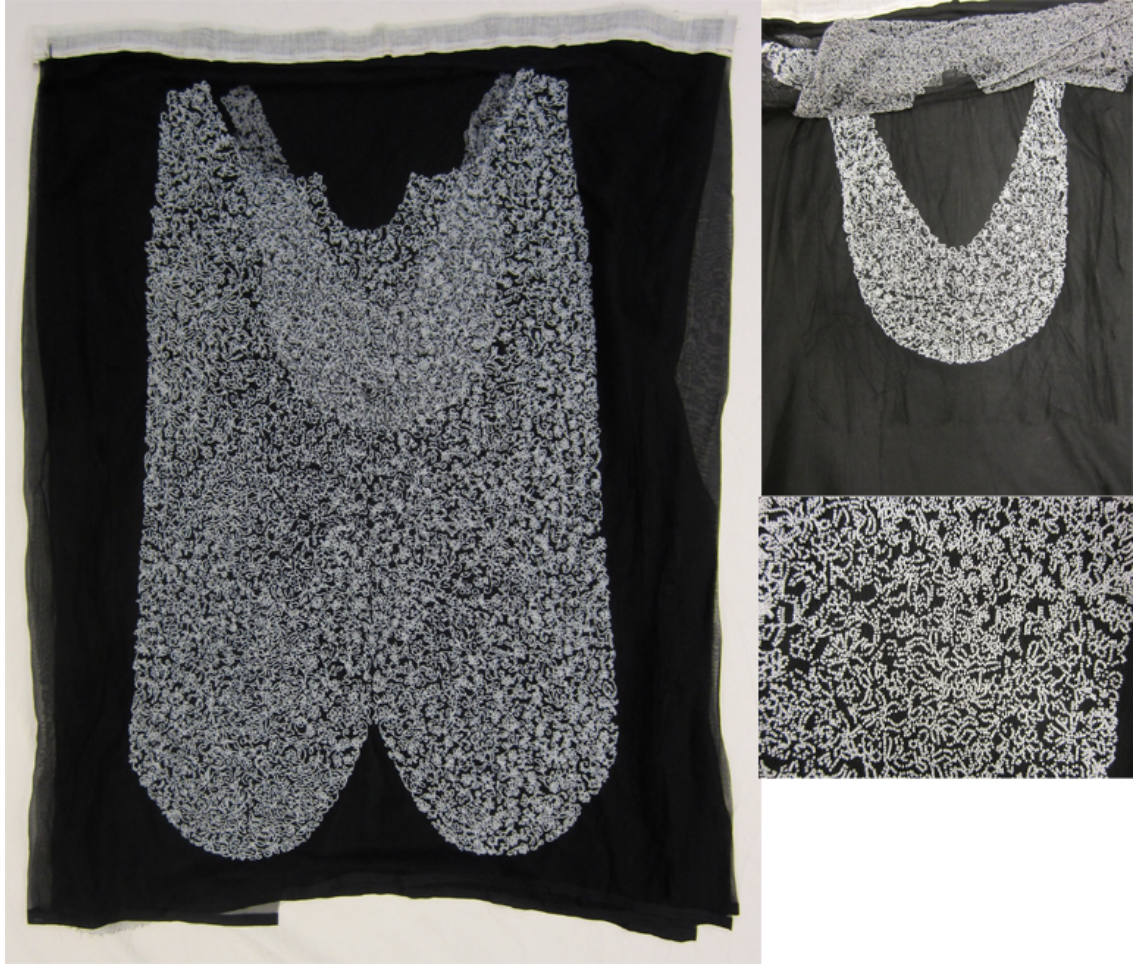


1990.129.30b Rhode Island School of Design Museum

55 1/4 in. x 42 in.

1990.129.30a (illustration)

Dark green rayon taffeta with grid and abstract floral pattern embroidered in orange, light and dark blue silk chain stitch and couched bronze metal wrapped core yarn. The general shape of the garment is clearly visible. RISD curators dated this robe to 1926. A matching robe in brown (1990.09.89) is at the Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island.



1990.129.35 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
36 in. x 29 in.

White seed beading on unbacked net; unadorned black silk crepe length.



1990.129.36 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
125 in. x 37 in.

Navy blue silk crepe featuring a chain stitched, couched, and French knot geometric pattern in four shades of blue. Circa 1926.



1990.129.37 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
57 in. x 37 1/4 in.

Red/orange silk crepe with, appliquéd red leaves and red silk chain stitched embroidery attached to a buckram band; unadorned red/orange silk crepe length. Circa 1929.



1990.129.39 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

54.5 in. x 38 in. – top left

1990.129.39 (a or b)

55 in. x 39 in. – top right

Black velvet with geometric, tribal influenced orange and blue-green embroidery and blue, yellow, orange, and green rhinestones and pearls beading. 1990.129.39 (a or b) features a free-hanging tassel of blue and orange embroidery thread. Circa 1926.



1990.129.40a Rhode Island School of Design Museum

59 in. x 38 in.

1990.129.40b

58 in. x 39.5 in.

Cream velvet with red, pink, cream, green, black, gold, metallic brown, and cream/gold-striped beads in an Art Deco influenced pattern. Circa 1926.



1990.129.41 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
39.5 in. x 30.5 in.

Black silk crepe featuring stylized floral medallions and border embroidered with gold metallic yarns in a satin stitch. This robe has retained its accompanying illustration. Possible example of a model set.



1990.129.48 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
115 in. x 37 in.

Orange/brown silk crepe featuring a geometric pattern couched and chain stitch embroidered in brown, cream, and pink silk and gold metallic wrapped core yarns. The yellow silk core of the metallic yarns is visible in the bottom left picture illustrating deterioration. "Made in France" label.



1990.129.53 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

61.5 in. x 37 in.

Top two-thirds is sheer cream silk crepe, bottom third opaque silk crepe with orange, red-orange, blue, black, and gold metallic couched and chain stitched embroidery in an Eastern European influenced design. The general shape of the garment is clearly visible.



1990.129.55 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
39 in. x 33.5 in.

Dark brown weft pile fabric with uncut loops featuring green and brown satin stitched silk embroidery and brown beading in vines and umbrella motifs. This piece may be a partial robe. The general outline of a bodice is clearly visible.



1990.129.57a Rhode Island School of Design Museum

1990.129.57b

49 in. x 28 in.

Gold, red, pink, cream, light and dark blue seed beads on an embroidered and sequined black net. The general outline of the garment is clearly visible. 1926



1991.169.70 Rhode Island School of Design Museum
112.75 in. x 31.5 in.

Brown, silk crepe featuring a Macintosh rose-inspired motif embroidered in brown, cream, and gold metallic yarn. The intended neckline is clearly visible.

Appendix C

Garments at the University of Rhode Island, Historic Textile and Costume Collection



1990.09.52 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Pink silk chiffon dress with geometric motifs embroidered in silver metallic yarn and beaded with clear seed beads and rhinestones. "Made in France" label. The lack of a sizing label and the straight grid-like layout of the embroidery and beading suggest this dress was constructed from a robe.



1990.09.53 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Dark pink silk chiffon sleeveless dress beaded in a geometric motif with silver and white seed beads.

The grid-like layout of the beading and the lack of a sizing label suggest this dress was constructed from a robe.



1990.09.62 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Light blue-green silk chiffon beaded dress with faux belt. The skirt is composed of beaded layered strips that end in beaded fringe. "Made in France" label. The "40" sizing label suggests this dress was purchased ready-made by the Tirocchis but it was probably made from a robe by the manufacturer.



1990.09.205 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Black machine-made lace dress with floral appliqués. “Made in France” label. Size 38. The “38” sizing label suggests this dress was purchased ready-made. A duplicate of this dress, with the addition of long sleeves, is housed at the RISD Museum (1991.169.34).



1990.09.354 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Light orange dress with blue silk embroidery and beaded flowers. "Made in France" label. Size 36.

Again, the "36" sizing label suggests this dress was purchased ready-made by the Tirocchis but manufactured from a robe.



1990.09.415 Historic Textile and Costume Collection, University of Rhode Island

Black silk chiffon sleeveless dress with white, black, and pink rhinestone butterflies.
“Made in France” label.

The lack of sizing label and the straight back panel (illustrated in bottom picture)
suggest this dress was constructed from a robe.

Appendix D

Garments at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum



1990.129.6 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Light pink crepe dress featuring beading and sequins in an abstract geometric and floral design.



1990.129.10 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Blue velvet cape coat with blue sequins and silver beading in a geometric pattern.



1990.129.54 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Cream silk crepe dress with taupe ribbon embroidery and cream openwork in silk. Hand-sewn seams. "Made in France" label. Size 38.

The "38" sizing label suggests this garment was purchased ready-made by the Tirocchi but was probably manufactured from a robe.



1991.169.17a Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Gray silk day dress with embroidery and openwork in a geometric pattern. “Made in France; Harry Angelo Company” label.

The label could indicate this dress was a Harry Angelo Co. design, though a witness present at the Tirocchi house said rolls of such labels were found at the site.



1991.169.33 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Black beading on black net in a grid pattern. Stitched together at hipline; Hems and seams open. "Made in France" label. Size 40.

The sizing label suggests this garment was purchased ready-made, however this is clearly not the case due to the incomplete seams and hems. This garment may be an example of ready-to-wear, a mostly completed garment that still left room for customization.



1991.169.34 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Black lace dress with crepe floral appliqués. "Made in France" label. Size 38.

A duplicate dress without sleeves is housed at the Historic Textile and Costume Collection at URI (1990.09.205)



1991.169.50 Rhode Island School of Design Museum

Light pink dress with ethnic influenced yarn embroidery. RISD Museum curators think Anna Tirocchi may have worn this dress.

Appendix E
U.S. Collections and Libraries with Harry Angelo Co. Model Books

***Special Archives and Collections,
 Fleet Library,
 Rhode Island School of Design,
 Providence, RI***

Spring & Fall 1918
 Spring & Fall 1922
 Spring & Fall 1923
 Spring & Fall 1924
 Spring & Fall 1925
 Fall 1926
 Spring 1927

***University of Kentucky Libraries,
 Lexington, KY***

Fall 1919

***Hennepin County Library,
 Minnetonka, MN***

Fall 1913

***Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland,
 OH***

Fall 1926

***University of Nebraska Omaha,
 Omaha, NE***

Fall 1926

***University of California, Los Angeles,
 Los Angeles, CA***

Fall 1914 & Spring 1915

***Onondaga County Public Library,
 Syracuse, NY***

Fall 1905
 Spring & Fall 1907
 Spring & Fall 1908
 Spring & Fall 1909
 Spring & Fall 1910
 Spring & Fall 1911
 Spring & Fall 1912
 Spring & Fall 1913
 Spring & Fall 1914
 Spring & Fall 1915
 Spring 1915
 Spring 1917
 Spring & Fall 1918
 Spring & Fall 1919
 Spring & Fall 1920
 Spring & Fall 1921
 Fall 1922
 Spring & Fall 1923

***Washington University in St. Louis,
 St. Louis, MO***

Spring & Fall 1921
 Fall 1922

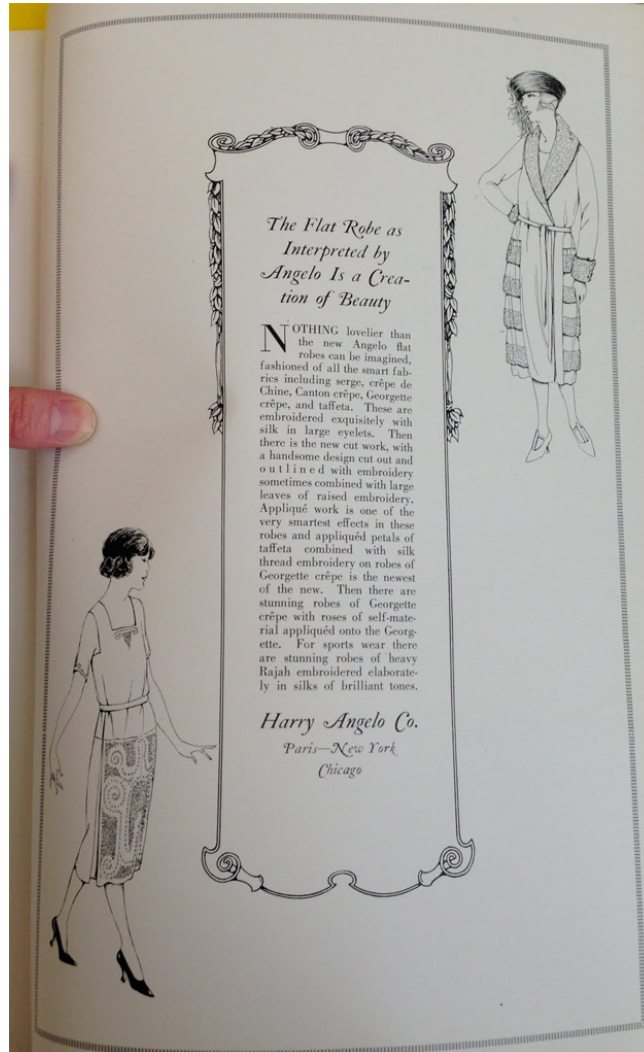
***Minneapolis College of Art and
 Design, Minneapolis, MN***

Fall 1925

Appendix F

Harry Angelo Co. Model Books

Spring 1921



Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for robes; describes fabric options and embellishment techniques

“Nothing lovelier than the new Angelo flat robes can be imagined, fashioned of all the smart fabrics including serge, crêpe de Chine, Canton crêpe, Georgette crêpe, and taffeta. These are embroidered exquisitely with silk in large eyelets. Then there is the new cut work, with a handsome design cut out and outlined with embroidery. Appliqué work is one of the very smartest effects in these robes and appliquéd petals of taffeta combined with silk thread embroidery on robes of Georgette crêpe is the newest of the new. Then there are stunning robes of Georgette crêpe with roses of self-material appliquéd onto the Georgette. For sports wear there are stunning robes of heavy Rajah embroidered elaborately in silks of brilliant tones.”

Spring 1921



Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

No. 16 Madeleine et Madeleine
Model set 136

“Handsome street dress of blank Canton crêpe with pagoda sleeves, inserted with a deep band of metal mesh filet, embroidered in black silk. Oval neck line. The waist forms a bodice effect in front, trimmed with curving bands of black silk braiding. The lower band is continued around to the back, and brought down to low waist-line below which the skirt forms a full panel. The front of the skirt has a deep curving band of the metal mesh black embroidered filet with narrow bands of the black silk embroidery above and below. Our model set 116.”

Spring 1921



No. 40

ANGELO

Navy blue taffeta frock handsomely embroidered in cut work and heavy embossed leaves in raised embroidery. This embroidery trims the full tunic at the front and sides. A deep girdle at low waist-line finishes in a bow at the back. The front of the dress is slashed and turned back in revers attached to a collar which rolls high at the back and low in the front. Short embroidered sleeves. This model may be obtained in various fashionable colors. (Robe 1901).

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

No. 40 Angelo

Robe 1901; available in multiple colors

“Navy blue taffeta frock handsomely embroidered in cut work and heavy embossed leaves in raised embroidery. This embroidery trims the full tunic at the front and sides. A deep girdle at low waist-line finishes in a bow at the back. The front of the dress is slashed and turned back in revers attached to a collar which rolls high at the back and low in the front. Short embroidered sleeves. This model may be obtained in various fashionable colors. (Robe 1901).”

Fall 1921



*The Angelo Collection of
Flat Robes
Is Now Complete*

NEVER has the Angelo Company been in position to offer such beautiful robes, some semi-made, in such a marvelous variety of materials. Exquisitely lovely are the robes for evening wear in jet, paillettes, spangles and beads, Black Sphinx, iridescent, opalescent, of shimmering beauty, they make up into gowns of undeniable beauty and chic. They are designed to be worn at the opera, dinners, theatre, and all sorts of social affairs.

For daytime functions there are stunning flat-embroidered robes, which are of all the fashionable crêpey fabrics—Crêpe de Paris, Crêpe Morrocaïn, Elizabeth Crêpe, and Canton Crêpe. But these fascinating robes are by no means confined to the crêpe fabrics. There are also Duvetyn and Velvets, Stockitine and other fashionable materials.

*Harry Angelo Co.
Chicago—New York
Paris*

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for robes; describes embellishments, fashionable fabrics

“Never has the Angelo Company been in position to offer such beautiful robes, some semi-made, in such a marvelous variety of materials. Exquisitely lovely are the robes for evening wear in jet, paillettes, spangles and beads, Black Sphinx, iridescent, opalescent, of shimmering beauty, they make up into gowns of undeniable beauty and chic. They are designed to be worn at the opera, dinners, theatre, and all sorts of social affairs.

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Fall 1921

The Mode Presents
Brocaded Velvets for
Formal Gowns

ESPECIALLY lovely this season are the Angelo brocaded velvets which are favored for dinner and evening gowns, the long stately lines of the mode lending themselves gracefully to this beautiful fabric.

The velvets come in many stunning designs on a wide variety of foundations. There are no less than twenty-five new shades to choose from including the ever-popular black.

Velvets for Street Wear

PARIS proclaims velvet the queen of fabrics, and Angelo's velvets reproduce all the exquisite richness of this beautiful material in the shades sponsored by Paris including, castor, taupe, the new browns, navy, steel, that mirror the warm tones of Autumn foliage.

Harry Angelo Co.
Chicago—New York
Paris

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for fabric; velvet

“The Mode Presents Brocaded Velvets for Formal Gowns: Especially lovely this season are the Angelo brocaded velvets which are favored for dinner and evening gowns, the long stately lines of the mode bending themselves gracefully to this beautiful fabric. The velvets come in many stunning designs on a wide variety of foundations. There are no less than twenty-five new shades to choose from including the ever-popular black.

Velvets for Street Wear: Paris proclaims velvet the queen of fabrics, and Angelo's velvets reproduce all the exquisite richness of this beautiful material in the shades sponsored by Paris including castor, taupe, the new browns, navy, steel, that mirror the warm tones of Autumn foliage.”

Spring 1922



Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

No 28 Madeleine et Madeleine

Handwriting in spine says "Mrs. Ellis' front waist", probably written by Anna Tirocchi. This evidence supports the claim that Anna customized orders for clients by essentially mixing-and-matching garment pieces.

"Afternoon gown of Ashes of Rose Sauvage. Loose blouse trimmed with jet bugle beading. Turkish girdle at low waist-line with jet cabachon in front. Sleeve draperies of self-colored lace extending below hips. Skirt of Satin with jabot draperies of lace."

Spring 1922

Clever Embroidery
Characterizes The New
Angelo Robes

MORE varied and more chic than ever the Harry Angelo embroidered robes make their bow. Among the loveliest are robes of crêpe faille, embroidered in self-tone chenille.

Sometimes the chenille embroidery takes on an exotic note from the Persian or Chinese or Egyptian coloring. Then there are some beautiful openwork effects that are distinctly novel.

Ribbonzine embroidered with long fringe provides novelty for crêpe de Paris robes in delightful colorings, and there are the most adorable robes of Canton crêpe, the embroidery of lace and braid forming medallions. Also, new are the taffeta robes embroidered in beads combined with cut-work.

The widest variety is achieved in the robes of silk crêpe, some embroidered in bold colorful designs for sports wear, while other for afternoon and dinner gowns are more conservative in tone.

Most fascinating frocks can be made from the fine sheer voile and batiste embroidered robes in perfectly enchanting designs and colors. These are ideal for garden parties and outdoor social functions during the long warm Summer days.


Harry Angelo Co.
Chicago—New York
Paris

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for robes; describes embellishments, fabrics

“Clever Embroidery Characterizes the New Angelo Robes: More varied and more chic than ever the Harry Angelo embroidered robes make their bow. Among the loveliest are robes of crêpe faille, embroidered in self-tone chenille. Sometimes the chenille embroidery takes on an exotic note from the Persian or Chinese or Egyptian coloring. Then there are some beautiful openwork effects that are distinctly novel. Ribbonzine embroidered with long fringe provides novelty for crêpe de Paris robes in delightful colorings, and there are the most adorable robes of Canton crêpe, the embroidery of lace and braid forming medallions. Also, new are the taffeta robes embroidered in beads combined with cut-work. The widest variety is achieved in the robes of silk crêpe, some embroidered in bold colorful design for sports wear, while other for afternoon and dinner gowns are more conservative in tone. Most fascinating frocks can be made from the fine sheer voile and batiste embroidered robes in perfectly enchanting designs and colors. These are ideal for garden parties and outdoor social functions during the long warm Summer days.”


Spring 1922



Angelo's Crêpe Faille
Offers The Clever
Dressmaker Hundreds
Of Ideas For
Summer Frocks

NEVER have silks offered such allurements. Soft and clinging, rich and lustrous, crêpe faille takes its place as a favored novelty. There is practically no limit to its possibilities for developing lovely and picturesque frocks. If a simple straight-line frock is needed it falls in slender graceful lines. If a more elaborate gown, crêpe faille drapes beautifully, and lends distinction to the most formal affair. Angelo is showing it in a simply marvelous range of colors, though it is especially lovely in the new beige, and burnt bread tones.

Harry Angelo Co.
Chicago—New York
Paris



Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for fabric; crêpe faille

“Never have silks offered such allurements. Soft and clinging, rich and lustrous, crêpe faille takes its place as a favored novelty. There is practically no limit to its possibilities for developing lovely and picturesque frocks. If a simple straight-line frock is needed it falls in slender graceful lines. If a more elaborate gown, crêpe faille drapes beautifully, and lends distinction to the most formal affair. Angelo is showing it in a simply marvelous range of colors, though it is especially lovely in the new beige, and burnt bread tones.”

Fall 1922

*More Beautiful Than
Ever Are the New
Angelo Robes*

SUCH originality, novelty and beauty are combined in the new Angelo robes, that any woman who sees them will scarcely know which to choose. From the hand-painted robes, the hand-painting done in lovely soft dull tones outlined with metal threads and combined with silk embroidery on sheer net, to the gorgeous velvet robes embroidered in glittering rhinestones, there is a stately collection embracing every new note of fashion.

Quite stunning are the broadcloth crêpe robes embroidered in the smart, new loop effect, and equally effective are robes of wool material embroidered in broadtail effect.

Much variety is given by combining a skirt of graceful broadcloth crêpe with a waist of sheer material elaborately embroidered. There are velvet robes in black, and in all the fashionable colors beautifully embroidered in colored metal, in crystal beads and in rhinestones. Quite the newest note though is struck by the robes embroidered in Slovakian effect and colors, though many of the colors are softened to suit the more refined taste of American women.

Not so striking perhaps, but equally smart are handsome robes of wool materials and silk crêpes, embroidered in fine soutache, or flat narrow silk braid. Altogether, the collection is unusually interesting and attractive this season, and the variety is simply amazing.

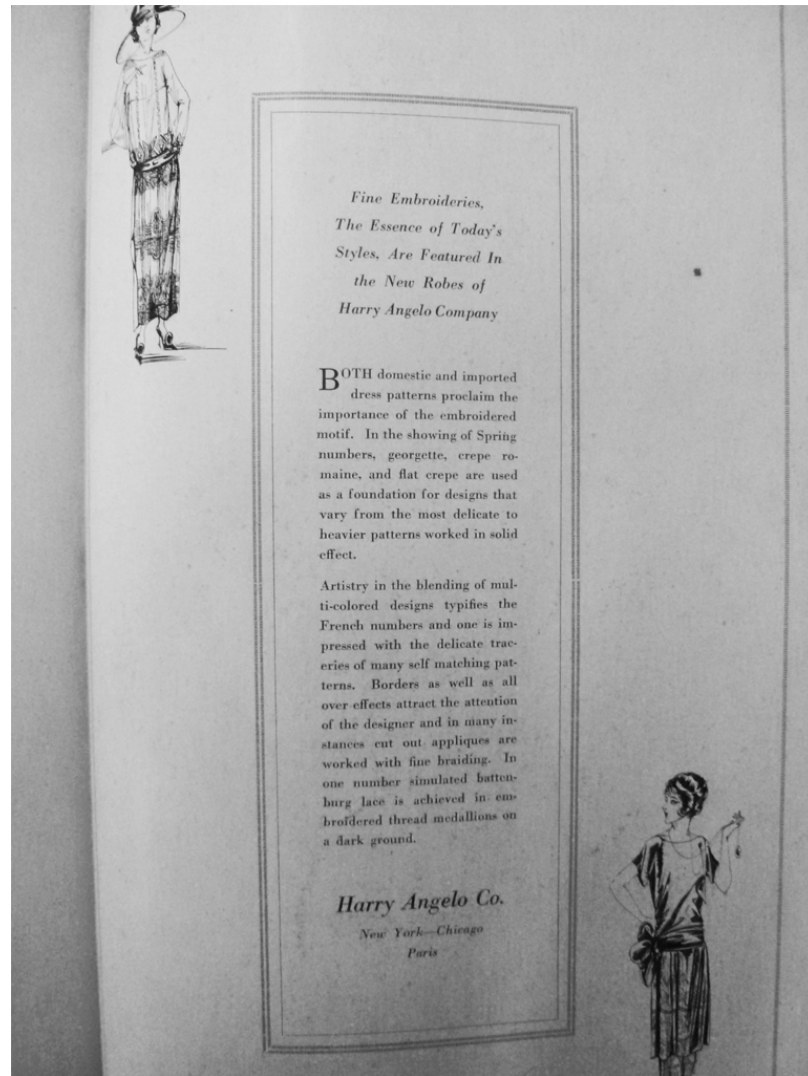
Harry Angelo Co.
New York—Chicago
Paris

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for robes; focuses more on the ground fabrics than the embellishments, a change from previous seasons.

“More Beautiful Than Ever Are the New Angelo Robes: Such originality, novelty and beauty are combined in the new Angelo robes, that any woman who sees them will scarcely know which to choose. From the hand-painting done in lovely soft threads and combined with silk embroidery on sheer net, to the gorgeous velvet robes embroidered in glittering rhinestones, there is a stately collection embracing every new note of fashion. Quite stunning are the broadcloth crêpe robes embroidered in the smart, new loop effect, and equally effective are robes of wool material embroidered in broadtail effect. Much variety is given by combining a skirt of graceful broadcloth crêpe with a waist of sheer material elaborately embroidered. There are velvet robes in black, and in all the fashionable colors beautifully embroidered in colored metal, in crystal beads, and in rhinestones. Quite the newest note though is struck by the robes embroidered in Slovakian effect and colors, though many of the colors are softened to suit the more refined taste of American women. Not so striking perhaps, but equally smart are handsome robes of wool materials and silk crêpes, embroidered in fine soutache, or flat narrow silk braid. Altogether, the collection is unusually interesting and attractive this season, and the variety is simply amazing.”

Spring 1923



*Fine Embroideries,
The Essence of Today's
Styles, Are Featured In
the New Robes of
Harry Angelo Company*

BOTH domestic and imported dress patterns proclaim the importance of the embroidered motif. In the showing of Spring numbers, georgette, crepe romaine, and flat crepe are used as a foundation for designs that vary from the most delicate to heavier patterns worked in solid effect.

Artistry in the blending of multi-colored designs typifies the French numbers and one is impressed with the delicate tracteries of many self matching patterns. Borders as well as all over effects attract the attention of the designer and in many instances cut out appliques are worked with fine braiding. In one number simulated battenburg lace is achieved in embroidered thread medallions on a dark ground.

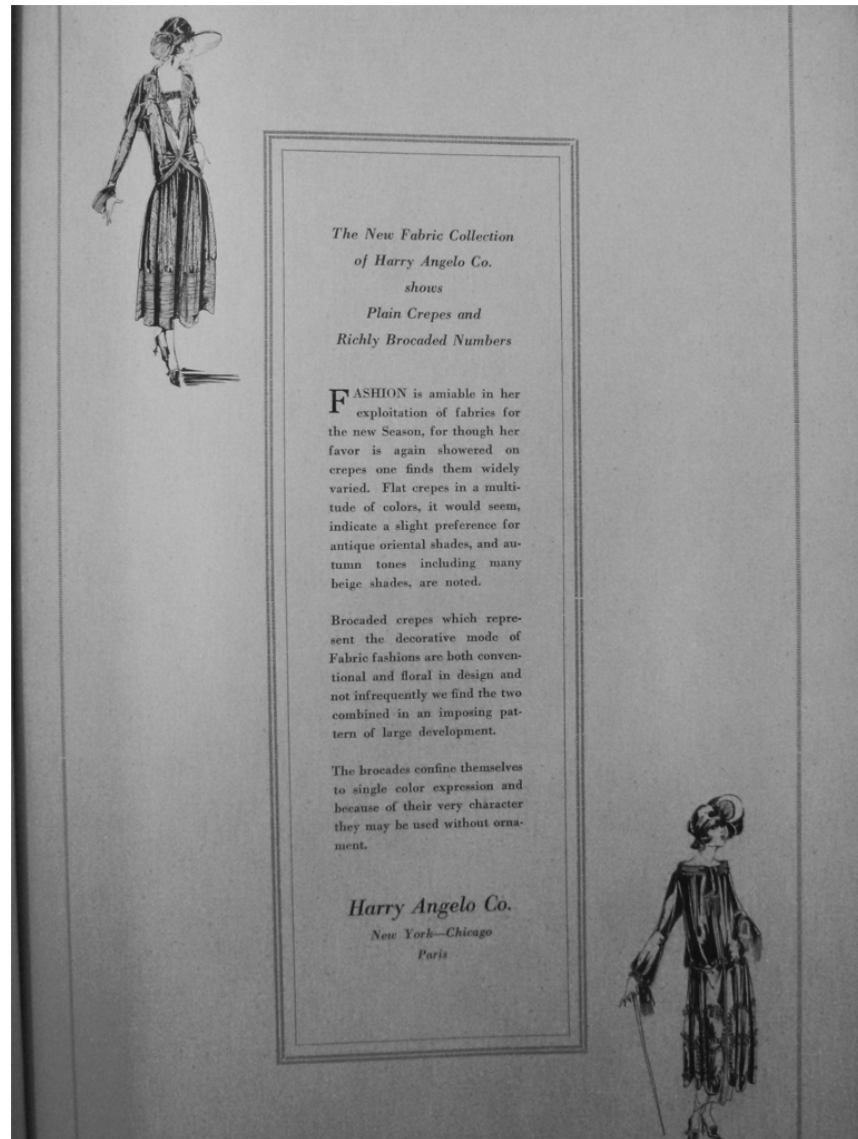
Harry Angelo Co.
New York—Chicago
Paris

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for robes; focused on fabrics and motifs rather than embellishment techniques

“Fine Embroideries, The Essence of Today’s Styles, Are Featured In the New Robes of Harry Angelo Company: Both domestic and imported dress patterns proclaim the importance of the embroidered motif. In the showing of Spring numbers, georgette, crepe romaine, and flat crepe are used as a foundation for designs that vary from the most delicate to heavier patterns worked in solid effect. Artistry in the blending of multi-colored designs typifies the French numbers and one is impressed with the delicate tracteries of many self matching patterns. Borders as well as all over effects attract the attention of the designer and in many instances cut out appliques are worked with fine braiding. In one number simulated battenburg lace is achieved in embroidered thread medallions on a dark ground.”

Spring 1923



The New Fabric Collection
of Harry Angelo Co.
shows
Plain Crepes and
Richly Brocaded Numbers

FASHION is amiable in her exploitation of fabrics for the new Season, for though her favor is again showered on crepes one finds them widely varied. Flat crepes in a multitude of colors, it would seem, indicate a slight preference for antique oriental shades, and autumn tones including many beige shades, are noted.

Brocaded crepes which represent the decorative mode of Fabric fashions are both conventional and floral in design and not infrequently we find the two combined in an imposing pattern of large development.

The brocades confine themselves to single color expression and because of their very character they may be used without ornament.

Harry Angelo Co.
New York—Chicago
Paris


Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for fabric; plain and brocaded crepe

“The New Fabric Collection of Harry Angelo Co. shows Plain Crepes and Richly Brocaded Numbers: Fashion is amiable in her exploitation of fabrics for the new Season, for though her favor is again showered on crepes one finds them widely varied. Flat crepes in a multitude of colors, it would seem, indicate a slight preference for antique oriental shades, and autumn tones including many beige shades, are noted. Brocaded crepes which represent the decorative mode of Fabric fashions are both conventional and floral in design and not infrequently we find the two combined in an imposing pattern of large development. The brocades confine themselves to single color expression and because of their very character they may be used without ornament.”

Spring 1924

**The Smartest New Fashions
Feature Silk Crepes**

 AN EVENT of the greatest importance to those interested in the making of clothes is the Harry Angelo Company showing of new silks and crepes. This is a collection of the utmost beauty, embracing every smart weave and texture, and in all the lovely new Spring shades and colors as well as the popular Black and White.

These fascinating silk crepes lend themselves to the vagaries of the new mode most enchantingly—the plaits and tucks, the swagger scarf collars, the swirl of the circular skirts, the cape effects, the overdresses, or the straight slim lines of the afternoon tailleur.

A decided novelty is the silk Alpaca called “Crepe-Afta,” (No. 4404) which Paris is using for the slender straight line overdresses, that are almost severely plain at times, and again show panels and borders of elaborate embroidery, in beads, silk or metal threads. These overdresses frequently fall open at the sides to show a finely plaited slip of softer crepe like Crepe Romain (No. 1934).

“Crepe-Afta” is only obtainable in Black and White, but Crepe Romain comes in the loveliest of colors, as well as all the delicate tones and shades known to the dyers art.

Dance frocks for the smart supper clubs are fashioned of the lovely new silk crepes, sometimes self-trimmed, sometimes most elaborately and intricately embroidered. Most of these frocks are sleeveless and are simple in line. A chic medium for the working out of these adorably youthful frocks is Crepe Renee (No. 4113), which may be had in all the modish colors as well as Black and White.

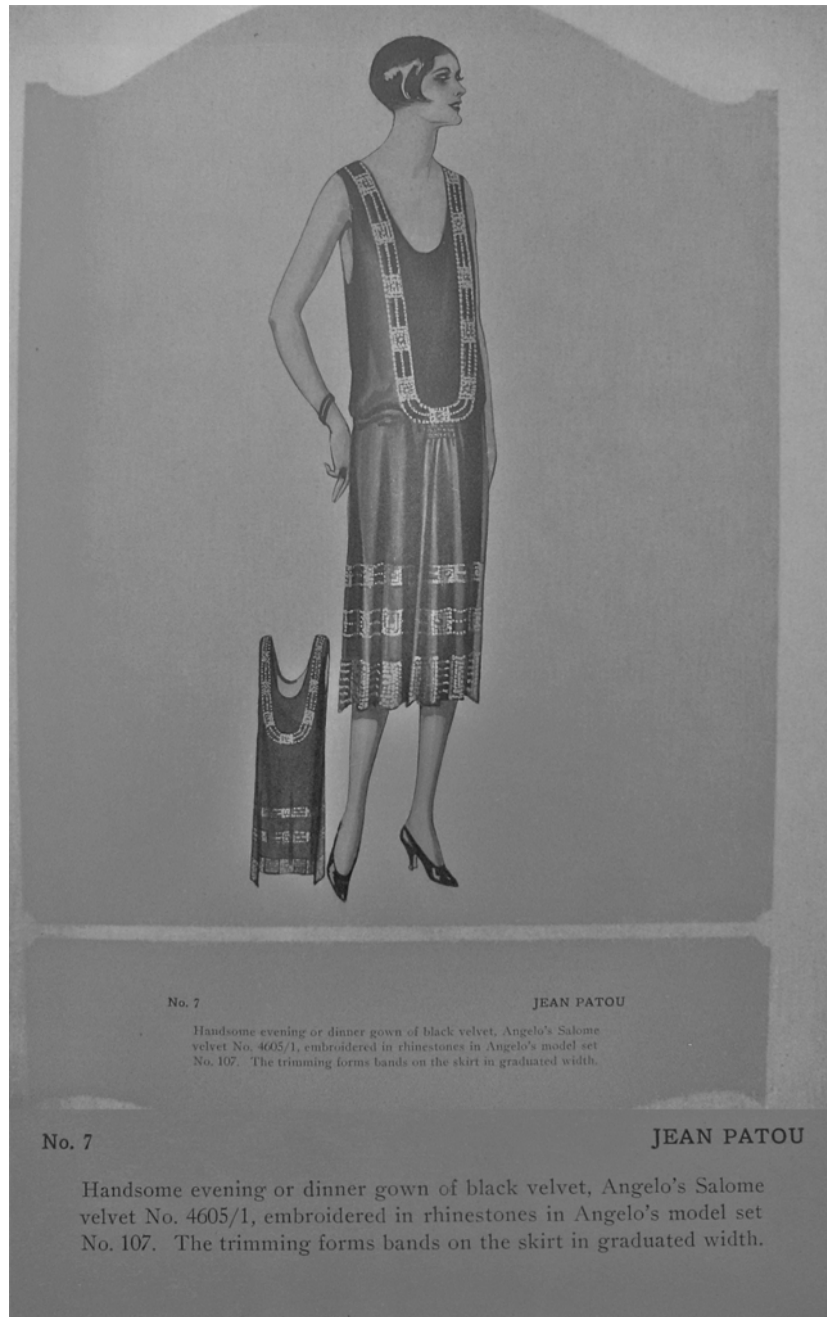
HARRY ANGELO COMPANY
New York Paris

Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for fabric; silk crepe

“The Smartest New Fashions Feature Silk Crepes: An event of the greatest importance to those interested in the making of clothes is the Harry Angelo Company showing of new silks and crepes. This is a collection of the utmost beauty, embracing every smart weave and texture, and in all the lovely new Spring shades and colors as well as the popular Black and White. These fascinating silk crepes lend themselves to the vagaries of the new mode most enchantingly—the plaits and tucks, the swagger scarf collars, the swirl of the circular skirts, the cape effects, the overdresses, or the straight slim lines of the afternoon tailleur. A decided novelty is the silk Alpaca called “Crepe-Afta,” (No. 4404) which Paris is using for the slender straight line overdresses, that are almost severely plain at times, and again show panels and borders of elaborate embroidery, in beads, silk, or metal threads. These overdresses frequently fall open at the sides to show a finely plaited slip of softer crepe like Crepe Romain (No. 1934). “Crepe-Afta” is only obtainable in Black and White, but Crepe Romain comes in the loveliest of colors, as well as all the delicate tones and shades known to the dyers art. Dance frocks for the smart supper clubs are fashioned of the lovely new silk crepes, sometimes self-trimmed, sometimes most elaborately and intricately embroidered. Most of these frocks are sleeveless and are simple in line. A chic medium for the working out of these adorably youthful frocks is Crepe Renee (No. 4113), which may be had in all the modish colors as well as Black and White.”

Fall 1925

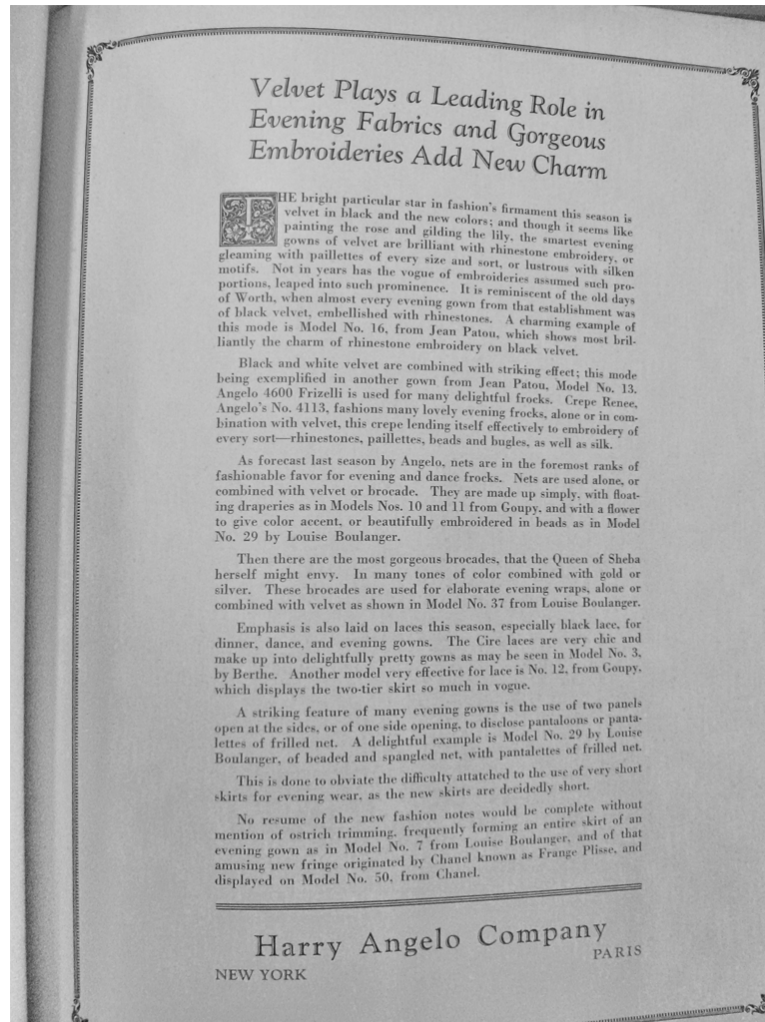


Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

No. 7 Jean Patou
Salome velvet no. 4605/1; model set no. 107

“Handsome evening or dinner gown of black velvet, Angelo’s Salome velvet No. 4605/1, embroidered in rhinestones in Angelo’s model set No. 107. The trimming forms bands on the skirt in graduated width.”

Fall 1926



Rhode Island School of Design Archives and Special Collections, Fleet Library

Advertisement for fabric; velvets, nets, brocades and laces; mentions designer models more frequently than Angelo merchandise.

This season is the last model book containing advertisements.

“Velvet Plays a Leading Role in Evening Fabrics and Gorgeous Embroideries Add New Charm: The bright particular star in fashion’s firmament this season is velvet in black and the new colors; and though it seems like painting the rose and gilding the lily, the smartest evening gowns of velvet are brilliant with rhinestone embroidery, or gleaming with paillettes of every size and sort, or lustrous with silken motifs. Not in years has the vogue of embroideries assumed such proportions, leaped into such prominence. It is reminiscent of the old days of Worth, when almost every evening gown from that establishment was of black velvet, embellished with rhinestones. A charming example of the mode is Model No. 16, from Jean Patou, which shows most brilliantly the charm of rhinestone embroidery on black velvet.

Black and white velvet are combined with striking effect; this mode being exemplified in another gown form Jean Patou, Model No. 13. Angelo 4600 Frizelli is used for many delightful frocks. Crepe Renee, Angelo's No. 4113, fashions many lovely evening frocks, alone or in combination with velvet, this crepe lending itself effectively to embroidery of every sort—rhinestones, paillettes, beads, and bugles, as well as silk. As forecast last season by Angelo, nets are in the foremost ranks of fashionable favor for evening and dance frocks. Nets are used alone, or combined with velvet or brocade. They are made up simply, with floating draperies as in Models Nos. 10 and 11 from Goupy, and with a flower to give color accent, or beautifully embroidered in beads as in Model No. 29 by Louise Boulanger. Then there are the most gorgeous brocades, that the Queen of Sheba herself might envy. In many tones of color combined with gold or silver. These brocades are used for elaborate evening wraps, alone or combine with velvet as shown in Model No. 37 from Louise Boulanger. Emphasis is also laid on laces this season, especially black lace, for dinner, dance, and evening gowns. The Cire lace are very chic and make up into delightfully pretty gowns as may be seen in Model No. 3, by Berthe. Another model very effective for lace is No. 12, from Goupy, which displays the two-tier skirt so much in vogue. A striking feature of many evening gowns is the use of two panels open at the sides, or of one side opening, to disclose pantaloons or pantalettes of frilled net. A delightful example is Model No. 29 by Louise Boulanger, of beaded and spangled net, with pantalettes of frilled net. This is done to obviate the difficulty attached to the use of very short skirts for evening wear, as the new skirts are decidedly short. No resume of the new fashion notes would be complete without mention of ostrich trimming, frequently forming an entire skirt of an evening gown as in Model No. 7 from Louise Boulanger, and of that amusing new fringe originated by Chanel known and Frange Plisse, and displayed on Model No. 50, from Chanel.”

Appendix G

Historical Review

The first section will look at historical background for Italian immigration to Providence, dressmaking as a profession, and the rise of the ready-to-wear industry during the early twentieth century. Understanding these factors is important for placing the Tirocchi sisters in context. The second section is a brief biography of Anna and Laura Tirocchi and their dressmaker's shop in Providence, Rhode Island.

Historical Background

Immigration to the United States has a long history, but the period between 1880 and 1914 demonstrated a change in immigration trends. This New Immigration, so named because immigrants were arriving from southern and eastern Europe rather than the traditional northern and western Europe, came about because of economic change.⁶⁰ The Italians involved saw an opportunity to escape overpopulation, depressed agriculture due to occurrences of malaria, competition from foreign markets and the end of feudalism, and political unrest and social disorganization from the Italian unification movement.⁶¹ These factors contributed to the influx of over 100,000 Italians every year to the United States between 1900 and 1914.⁶² The Federal Bureau of Immigration records show 54,973 Italians immigrated to Rhode Island between

⁶⁰ Patrick T. Conley, "The New Immigration and Rhode Island Catholicism," in *Rhode Island in Rhetoric and Reflection: Public Addresses and Essays* (Providence: Rhode Island Publications Society, 2002), 294.

⁶¹ Patrick T. Conley, "The Rise of Rhode Island's Italian American Community, 1880-1932," in *Rhode Island in Rhetoric and Reflection: Public Addresses and Essays* (Providence: The Rhode Island Publications Society, 2002), 300-301.

⁶² Conley, "The Rise of Rhode Island's Italian American Community," 301.

1898 and 1932.⁶³ The Fabre Line, an international steamship company, greatly aided the migration of Italian *contadini*, or rural peasants, by ending its route from Europe, with stops in Italy, in the Port of Providence in 1911.⁶⁴

In the early 1900s, Italian immigrants supplanted a neighborhood of Irish settled in Federal Hill, today a well-known Italian neighborhood in Providence.⁶⁵ By 1915, Italians comprised the largest immigrant group in Providence.⁶⁶ These immigrants usually came over as family units and migrated to where friends or family had previously settled.⁶⁷ The Italian immigrant work experience focused on the family as a whole, providing income and using family connections to make an easier transition into working life.⁶⁸ The women found ways to contribute using household skills, whether agrarian or artisanal, as well as taking on boarders.⁶⁹ This sort of work could be done in and around the home, ensuring the home life did not suffer as a consequence.⁷⁰ Jobs for unmarried women could be found within millinery shops or garment factories, and children contributed to family income by taking street jobs like peddling and shoe shining or helping with the family business.⁷¹ A study by Judith Smith found that family members, particularly brothers and sisters, were likely to

⁶³ Patrick T. Conley, *An Album of Rhode Island History, 1636-1986* (Providence: Patrick T. Conley and The Rhode Island Publications Society, 1992), 161.

⁶⁴ Conley, *An Album of Rhode Island History*, 162.

⁶⁵ Carmela E. Santoro, *The Italians in Rhode Island: The Age of Exploration to the Present, 1524-1989* (Providence: The Rhode Island Heritage Commission; The Rhode Island Publications Society, 1990), 7.

⁶⁶ Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 48.

⁶⁷ Santoro, *Italians in Rhode Island*, 3.

⁶⁸ Judith E. Smith, *Family Connections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 100.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷¹ Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 48.

combine households, increasing the amount of income and easing the transition to immigrant life in Providence.⁷² Smith also found that almost half of male Italian immigrants to Providence found work as skilled craftsmen and artisans within their community, and many owned their own businesses, working in a shop or front room of their tenement.⁷³ Sometimes, wives of these craftsmen and artisans had their own artisan skill they could utilize to contribute to family income: dressmaking.⁷⁴

Amid the social change of the early twentieth century, dressmaking as a career “challenged women’s proper place but did so within the confines of a ‘proper’ feminine pursuit.”⁷⁵ The largely female workforce of most establishments consisted of a smaller, highly skilled, and mostly permanent group of employees who remained employed all year and a larger, inexperienced, more transient group that were hired and let go each season.⁷⁶ Within this sphere existed a division of labor with each worker assigned a task and a corresponding pay grade. The more skilled workers, fitters who cut the muslin patterns, earned more than less skilled workers, finishers who sewed the clothes.⁷⁷ Apprentices, in charge of basting, overcasting, and sewing seams when they weren’t running errands, occupied the bottom rung of the workroom

⁷² Smith, *Family Connections*, 99.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁵ Cynthia Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere: Dressmakers in Cincinnati’s Golden Age, 1877-1922* (Lubbock, TX: Cincinnati Art Museum and Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 53.

⁷⁶ Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere*, 60; May Allinson, “Dressmaking as a Trade for Women in Massachusetts” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1916), 66; Susan Porter Benson, “Clients and Craftswomen: The Pursuit of Elegance,” in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers’ Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 67.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach* (New York: Random House, 1938), 136.

hierarchy.⁷⁸ To keep pace with the ready-made industry, some dressmaking establishments eventually instituted an even further division of labor, assigning such specialized tasks to workers so that learning the craft as a whole proved near impossible, and effectively ended the apprenticeship system.⁷⁹ The terms ready-made and ready-to-wear meant different things in the early twentieth century clothing industry, although sources today use them interchangeably. Ready-to-wear referred to a garment that was mostly completed, but allowed the client to make custom changes while ready-made referred to a garment that had been mass-produced in various sizes.⁸⁰

A woman who regularly patronized dressmaking establishments preferred originality and exclusivity in her wardrobe. She was actively involved in the design and retained a modicum of control over the outcome of her garment, a benefit the ready-made industry lacked.⁸¹ Even after ready-made clothing became a reasonable alternative, these factors continued to influence women's decisions to buy custom-made garments.⁸² For them, a custom-made garment was a long-term investment and would be repeatedly altered to fit the Paris ideal of fashion. The French held a definitive influence over American fashion.⁸³ Only the extremely wealthy could afford to make the trip to Paris couturiers for their seasonal wardrobes.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Illinois, The University of Illinois Press, 1997), 131.

⁷⁹ Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade", 71.

⁸⁰ Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade", 20.

⁸¹ Gamber, *The Female Economy*, 97.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸³ Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Berg, 1999), 253.

⁸⁴ Jessica Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle: The American Story of Fashion for the Millions* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 138.

To meet the need for Paris fashions, large companies sent a representative to Paris to purchase the rights to couture designs and bring them back, along with a list of supplies needed to complete the design, to the United States.⁸⁵ Allinson describes this practice as importers promoting the idea of “democratization of styles” by providing all levels of dressmaking establishments access to Paris fashions without the cost of a trip to Europe.⁸⁶ These importers, such as Harry Angelo Company in New York, presented the season’s latest fashions from Paris with “openings” and as illustrations in the form of a model book. These openings usually featured the Paris model side by side with a re-imagined version by the importers.⁸⁷ Dressmakers could then select robes, or pre-embellished lengths of fabric, from these model books and would receive the robe and an accompanying picture of the completed garment.⁸⁸ The robes arrived folded and sewn to a low thread count strip of fabric with a paper tag identifying the importer, model number, and price. They included plain fabric for a slip and fabric with the ornamentation already complete that required minimal stitching to create a garment. The designs featured in the model books were understood to be up for interpretation; substitutions could be made for skirt or bodice styles, decoration, or

⁸⁵ Pamela A. Parmal, “Line, Color, Detail, Distinction, Individuality: A. & L. Tirocchi, Providence Dressmakers,” in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers’ Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: The Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 35.

⁸⁶ Allinson, “Dressmaking as a Trade,” 21.

⁸⁷ Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle*, 146.

⁸⁸ Parmal, “Line, Color, Detail,” 28.

color.⁸⁹ This practice speaks to women wanting to be in the latest fashion, but to have that fashion tailored to fit their individual personalities.⁹⁰

The dressmaking world faced an unlikely competitor in the home sewer.⁹¹ The availability of affordable home sewing machines made creating one's own garments a reasonable possibility by simplifying the process while, at the same time, providing more possibilities for creativity.⁹² The proliferation of home economics courses being taught in schools further aided the use of home sewing machines to create garments as an alternative to custom dressmaking or ready-made clothing.⁹³ Home sewing offered women the opportunity to save time, money, and energy that would have been spent on luxurious materials and multiple fittings at the dressmaker.⁹⁴ How-to manuals and home economics textbooks suggested that learning the basics of sewing would improve one's skill at spotting quality ready-made clothing, which, by the 1920s, was no longer a rare commodity.

Ready-made garments have been in existence since the early nineteenth century, but with the advent of the sewing machine, the industry evolved rapidly.⁹⁵ Cloaks and tailor-made suits were among the first widely available ready-made women's garments, but were advertised in dressmaking terms instead of calling

⁸⁹ Madelyn Shaw, "American Fashion: The Tirocchi Sisters in Context" in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay, 105-130 (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2000), 116.

⁹⁰ Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade," 18.

⁹¹ Gamber, *The Female Economy*, 134.

⁹² Sally I. Helvenston and Margaret M. Bubolz, "Home Economics and Home Sewing in the United States, 1870-1940," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption, and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (New York: Berg, 1999), 306.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁹⁴ Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, "Home Sewing: Motivational Changes in the Twentieth Century," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption, and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (New York: Berg, 1999), 97.

⁹⁵ Daves, "Ready-Made Miracle," 28.

attention to modernity and innovation like marketing for men's ready-made clothing.⁹⁶ This practice calls attention to the lack of acceptance women's ready-made had in its early stages.⁹⁷ While these clothing items were available ready-made, societal norms and expectations hindered their purchase, as the wealthy still preferred to have their wardrobes custom made.⁹⁸

At the turn of the century, middle- and upper class women still predominately patronized dressmaker establishments. With fashions changing so frequently a ready-made line of women's clothing for spring would have been out of fashion the following year, if not the following season.⁹⁹ By the 1920s, however, the ready-made industry had matured and was the most common source of fashion consumption for the middle classes.¹⁰⁰ The style changes of the '20s contributed to the growth of the ready-made industry; with its unfitted tubular shape, fashionable dresses were simple to create in bulk to sell to the masses. With the prevalence of ready-mades came the blurring of class divisions.¹⁰¹ Once only available in the strata of the well to do, affordable stylish clothing became available to everyone.¹⁰² This is a phenomenon popularly referred to as the "democratization of fashion."¹⁰³ The popularity of the

⁹⁶ Rob Schorman, *Selling Style: Clothing and Social Change at the Turn of the Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 48-49.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume: A History of Western Dress*, 4th ed. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2008), 366.

¹⁰¹ Claudia Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), 15.

¹⁰² Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 3.

¹⁰³ Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*, 15.

shirtwaist as the unofficial uniform for the modern workingwoman, helped along by Charles Dana Gibson, illustrates this shift.¹⁰⁴

However, American women still held Paris fashions in the highest regard, and the department stores fueled that fire by importing original Parisian designs.¹⁰⁵ Importers who previously dealt in raw materials evolved with the ready-made industry to stay in business and began supplying more ready-made goods than fabrics.¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Hawes' 1938 book, *Fashion is Spinach*, argues that the mass manufacturing of women's apparel is more focused on price, economy, and the latest trend out of Paris than actual quality of design and the needs of the consumer.¹⁰⁷

With the rise of ready-made clothing and the department store came the decline of the dressmaker who faced many issues in trying to keep her doors open. In economic distress, the textile industry continuously dealt with disparities between production and market demand.¹⁰⁸ Having enough capital to covers expenses, competition from department stores and wholesale manufacturers, a dwindling skilled labor force, and an unstable selling season were problems that could spell the success or failure of an establishment.¹⁰⁹ The growth of the ready-made industry impacted the custom-made establishments by "decreasing the amount and changing the kind of work done by the dressmaker."¹¹⁰ Small-scale dressmaking operations found keeping

¹⁰⁴ Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Marlis Schweitzer, "American Fashions for American Women: The Rise and Fall of Fashion Nationalism," in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 132.

¹⁰⁶ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 43.

¹⁰⁷ Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach*, 333.

¹⁰⁸ Charles H. Hession and Hyman Sardy, *Ascent to Affluence: A History of American Economic Development* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969), 620.

¹⁰⁹ Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade," 25.

¹¹⁰ Allinson, "Dressmaking as a Trade," 62.

pace with the growing ready-made industry difficult. These changes in the fashion industry meant that a change in business practices for the dressmaker was necessary.¹¹¹ Pressure to provide garments in a timely manner and at a reduced cost forced many dressmaking establishments to close.¹¹² By the 1930s, two types of small-scale establishments remained to contend with ready-made retailers: shops that served a dwindling upper-class clientele and shops that offered alteration services, targeting the immigrant and working classes.¹¹³

Biography of Anna and Laura Tirocchi

Anna and Laura Tirocchi were Italian immigrants from Guarcino, outside of Rome. According to records, they were both trained in Rome under a noted dressmaker.¹¹⁴ The sisters immigrated to the United States in 1905 and worked in New York prior to their arrival in Providence.¹¹⁵ Their original shop, opened in 1911, was in the Butler Exchange, on Westminster Street, where its central location made it easy for clients to reach. At this point, the City Directory listed 754 dressmakers in Providence, a significant decrease from the 890 listed in 1906.¹¹⁶ After Laura's marriage to Dr. Louis Cella in 1915, the newlyweds and Anna moved to 514 Broadway, the house that became a time capsule for early twentieth-century garments and textiles. The three-story Victorian Italianate mansion housed Anna, Dr. Cella and

¹¹¹ Gamber, *The Female Economy*, 201.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 226-27.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹¹⁵ John W. Briggs, "Strategies for Success: The Tirocchis, Immigration, and the Italian American Experience" in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay, 79-102 (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2000), 82.

¹¹⁶ Briggs, "Strategies for Success," 85.

Laura, and eventually their two children.¹¹⁷ The dressmaking operations took over the second and part of the third floors while Dr. Cella's medical practice and formal family rooms occupied the first floor; living quarters took up the remainder of the third floor.¹¹⁸ Clients would be shown up the grand staircase to the second floor, where the showroom, fitting rooms, office, and stockrooms were located, to discuss business with Anna and Laura. The third floor housed the workrooms, and more importantly the workers, assuring that the clients would have little interaction with hired help.¹¹⁹ Anna made the business decisions for A. & L. Tirocchi while Laura oversaw the sewing room and its employees.

The Tirocchi sisters had an extensive, and well-to-do, client list. From politician's wives to the wives of manufacturing tycoons, the Tirocchi's assisted with repairs, alterations, and creating new garments appropriate for social events, some of them special occasions such as weddings. Anna's decision to distance herself from fellow immigrant clientele is said to have contributed to her successful positioning as a premier dressmaking establishment.¹²⁰ Anna offered her clients ready-made garments as early as 1914 and attempted to introduce robes into her inventory in 1919, though all six were eventually returned. Around 1924, Anna started carrying significantly more ready-made garments in the shop to appeal to the younger generations who appreciated the speed and ease of ready-made. This business decision led to a period of prosperity for the Tirocchi shop.¹²¹ This prosperity was not to last however; with

¹¹⁷ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 29.

¹¹⁸ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 29.

¹¹⁹ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 30.

¹²⁰ Briggs, "Strategies for Success," 94.

¹²¹ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 45.

the onset of the Great Depression and Anna's failing health, the final years of A & L Tirocchi were spent servicing a select number of loyal clients, frequently altering existing garments rather than creating new ones. Anna Tirocchi's story is not a traditional immigrant tale. She remained unmarried, handled her own finances and joint accounts held with Dr. Cella, and was the proprietor of her own business, which she opened during the decline of the dressmaking world and kept open long after its demise, catering to upper-middle and high class clientele.¹²²

After the death of Anna Tirocchi in 1947, the house was entrusted to Laura's daughter, Beatrice, with the condition that she take care of her mother. Laura and her family continued to live at 514 Broadway, and the contents of A. & L. Tirocchi were left untouched until Beatrice's death in 1989 when her younger brother and only sibling inherited the home and donated selected objects from the Tirocchi shop to Rhode Island School of Design and the University of Rhode Island. These donations resulted in an exhibition, *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, at the RISD Museum in the year 2001, the concurrent publication of a book of the same name, as well as a website, A. & L. Tirocchi Dressmakers Project.¹²³

The contents of the Tirocchi shop created a time capsule of early twentieth-century dressmaking that cannot be found anywhere else in the United States.¹²⁴ The

¹²² Briggs, "Strategies for Success," 95.

¹²³ *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000); The RISD Museum, "The A. & L. Tirocchi Dressmakers Project,"

http://tirocchi.stg.brown.edu/514/evidence/cd_remaining_garments.html.

¹²⁴ Susan Hay, Introduction to *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000).

rarity of such complete records offers a unique case study opportunity. The website catalogs a portion of the documents and materials found within the Tirocchi shop and features a brief explanation of robes. In the book, little attention is paid to the use of robes, except to mention the ease of their production into garments.¹²⁵ While researchers have studied the ready-made industry and dressmaking trades, none, with the exception of a few references in Hay's *From Paris to Providence*, have examined the role of the robe.¹²⁶ According to the project website, RISD curators "realized that robes are a previously unwritten part of the history of twentieth century dressmaking."¹²⁷ The concept of a robe is not new. Indeed, tailors have used pre-embroidered fabrics, called *à la disposition* or *en disposition*, to make garments since at least the eighteenth century.¹²⁸ However, researchers have not looked at the use of these fabrics in the twentieth century within the context of a business strategy.

¹²⁵ Parmal, "Line, Color, Detail," 36.

¹²⁶ Florence S. Richards, "1920-1930: From Bust to Boom to Bust," in *The Ready-to-Wear Industry, 1900-1950* (New York: Fairchild Publications, Inc., 1951), 21-23; Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere*, 137-65.

¹²⁷ The RISD Museum, "Custom Dressmaking," The A. & L. Tirocchi Project, http://tirocchi.stg.brown.edu/514/evidence/cd_remaining_garments.html.

¹²⁸ Susan Hay, "Paris to Providence: French Couture and the Tirocchi Shop," in *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art, and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*, ed. Susan Hay (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2000), 157; Jean L. Druessedow, *In Style: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Costume Institute* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 23; The Kyoto Costume Institute, *Revolution in Fashion: European Clothing, 1715-1815* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 144; Lucy Ginsburg, "Embroidery," in *The Illustrated History of Textiles*, ed. Madeleine Ginsburg (New York: Portland House, 1991), 136.

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