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FIVE DOLLARS

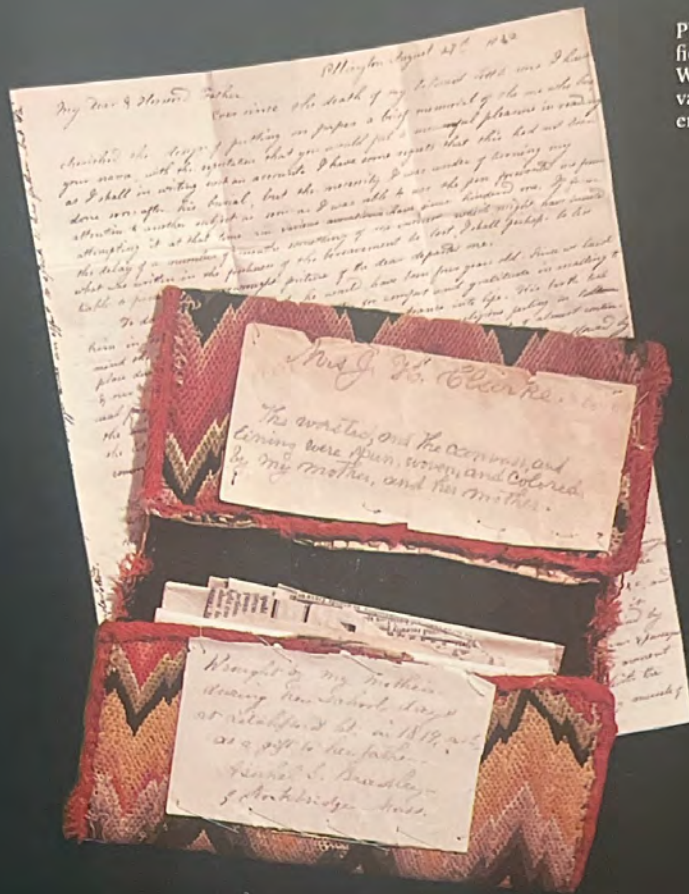






Constantinople  
1762





Pl. II. Man's pocketbook, Litchfield, Connecticut, 1814-1815. Wool Irish stitch on linen canvas with wool binding and linen, cotton, and leather linings.

## Costumes and textiles in the collection of Cora Ginsburg

BY LINDA R. BAUMGARTEN

Pl. I. Eighteenth-century needleworked textiles. Clockwise from upper left: Apron, English, 1725-1750 (see Pls. XVII and XVIIa). Apron, English, c. 1740; silk embroidery on brown silk. Man's cap, European, c. 1700; silk and silver-gilt embroidery on silk. Apron with original paper stiffening still attached, English, 1730-1740; silk embroidery on silk. Small pocketbook, French, 1700-1740; silk French knots and couched silver gilt on silk. So-called Constantinople pocketbook, probably Mediterranean or Near Eastern for the souvenir trade, 1749; silver-gilt embroidery on silk. Apron, English, c. 1740 (see also Pl. XVIII). The background panel, European, 1720-1750, is silk embroidered with silk and silver-gilt threads. Photographs are by Hans E. Lorenz.

CORA GINSBURG has been collecting costumes and textiles for more than thirty-five years. Although along with many collectors and dealers today she admits to having sometimes paid what she considered too much for an object, she says she still cannot get used to recent prices. Nonetheless, some objects that arrive in her Madison Avenue shop still find their way to her house in Tarrytown, New York, where she has occasionally shared her substantial private collection with a limited number of specialists in the field. On October 13, however, a special exhibition of some 130 of her costumes, accessories, and flat textiles will open at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Gallery at Colonial Williamsburg, where it will remain on view until September 4, 1989.

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Pl. III. Seventeenth-century accessories. *Clockwise from upper left:* Glove, English, 1610–1640, leather and silk satin with metallic thread; drawstring bag, English, 1650–1690, silk needle lace applied to silk (the arms may be those of the Halsall family of Lancashire, England); one of a pair of silk garters, Mediterranean, possibly Algerian, 1649, inscribed "Ierusalem 1649"; bag, English, 1600–1650, silk and silver-gilt tent stitch on linen.





Pl. IV. Long gloves reputedly owned by Annie Van Rensselaer, probably English, 1780-1810. Kid stitched with linen. Short gloves, Barcelona, Spain, for the export market, c. 1800. Printed kid.



Like many professionals privileged to work with a collection of antiques, Cora Ginsburg has never stopped learning from hers. For example, on a trip to Europe in 1954 she bought two long, narrow strips of silk that were displayed as bookmarks and bore the woven inscription "Ierusalem 1649" (Pl. III). Sometime later, she read in Alice Morse Earle's *Costume of Colonial Times* that they were actually a pair of rare seventeenth-century garters of a type given to Judge Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) of Boston in 1688: "a pair of Jerusalem Garters which cost above 2 pieces 8 (Spanish dollars) in Algeria."<sup>1</sup> Like so-called Constantinople pocketbooks surviving from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Pl. I), these garters must have been brought back as souvenirs from the Mediterranean and Near East. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries both men's and women's stockings were held up by a ribbonlike garter tied firmly around the upper leg over the stocking.

Surprisingly large numbers of small costume accessories have survived in good condition from the seventeenth century, probably because of their elaborateness and the large quantities in which they were produced. Among those in the Ginsburg collection is the leather glove (one of a pair) shown in Plate III, with cuffs and tabs enriched with gold purl couched to the surface and metallic lace trimming the top edges. Elaborate gloves not only proclaimed the wearer's ability to pay for fancy clothing, but they were often given as gifts and as mementos of a loved one at a funeral.

Small, decorative bags were also popular gifts during the seventeenth century. Often worked in stitchery on a very fine canvas by professional needleworkers and amateurs alike, they were called sweet bags and were intended to hold sachets, money, or other small, expensive presents. The English drawstring bag in Plate III is decorated with unusual coiled elements which were worked separately and then applied to both sides. In the center of one side are the needleworked arms of the Wilkinson family of Waltham St. Lawrence, Berkshire, and in the center of the other, what may be the arms of the Halsall family of Lancashire.<sup>2</sup> This type of needlework, with separately





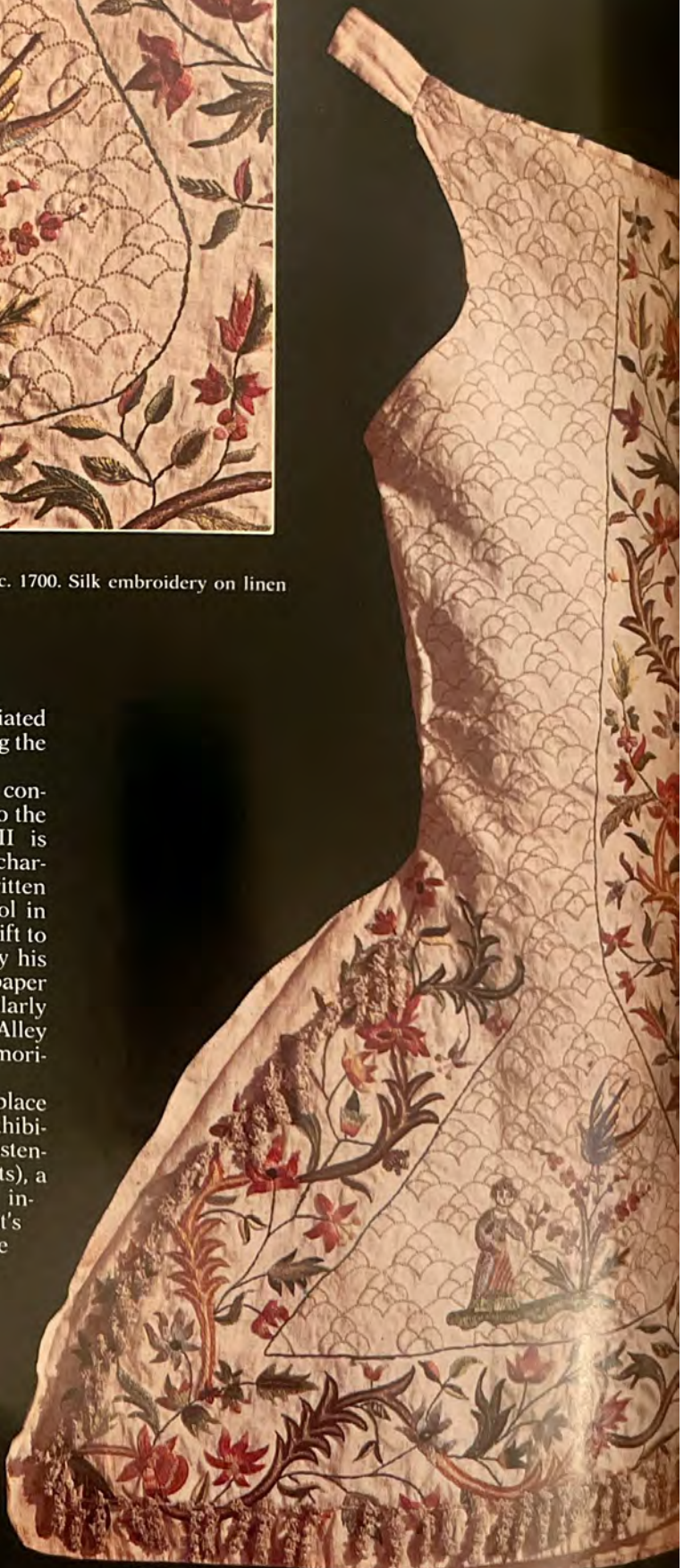
Pls. V (right) and Va (above). Woman's waistcoat, English, c. 1700. Silk embroidery on linen with linen lining and fringe.

worked applied elements, is more often associated with casket covers and looking-glass frames during the second half of the seventeenth century.

The practice of giving embroidered bags as gifts continued throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. The pocketbook shown in Plate II is worked with colored wools in the zigzag pattern characteristic of Irish stitch. According to a handwritten note stitched to the bag, it was made at a school in Litchfield, Connecticut, about 1814 or 1815, as a gift to Asahel Bradley of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, by his daughter. Stuffed into the bag are poems, newspaper clippings, and family letters, including a particularly poignant letter written to Bradley in 1832 by Alley Hyde, possibly the bag's maker, in which she memorialized her dead son, "who bore your name."<sup>3</sup>

Children's clothing and artifacts have a special place in the Ginsburg collection: among those in the exhibition are a rare set of seventeenth-century lace christening accessories (headpiece, cuffs, collars, and mitts), a white embroidered child's quilt, two silk-satin infant's gowns, and a pair of silk embroidered infant's mittens (Pl. XX). The rarest survival among the children's clothing is the boy's coat, or frock, shown in Plate VI—a small masterpiece embroidered in multicolored silks with a profusion of scrolling flowers and leaves on a background quilted in an over-all vermicelli pattern using the backstitch. It probably dates from the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Coats of this cut are occasionally seen in portraits, and were apparently only worn by boys before they were breeched.<sup>4</sup>

Similar silk quilting is found on other contemporary English gar-







Pl. VI. Boy's coat, or frock, English, 1700-1730. Silk on linen with silk lining and binding. This small coat measures only 30 inches from shoulder to hem.

ments such as the woman's waistcoat of about 1700 in Plates V and Va, which was probably designed to be worn at home, when a woman did not want to wear stiff stays. Several stomachers—the ornamental triangular pieces made to fill the V-shaped fronts of ladies' gowns—also illustrate densely quilted silk embroidery, although on a smaller scale (see Pl. VII). Stomachers were worn over the heavy, boned stays, or corsets, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and were usually stiffened themselves to further enhance the fashionable cone shape rising from waist to chest. If stays and stomacher failed to encourage straight posture and a flat front, a wooden busk (see Pl. VII) could be slipped into a pocket in the stays or stomacher to guarantee the results.

Eighteenth-century women went to great lengths to achieve a fashionable silhouette, which included wearing many layers of underwear: next to her skin a woman wore a white linen shift with sleeves; over that she laced stays stiffened with whalebone, wood, or even metal; and finally she put on at least one under-petticoat. In the Ginsburg collection is a set





Pl. VII. Stomachers and busk. *Left to right:* European, 1720–1740; silk embroidery and couched metallic threads on silk, linen lining and metallic braid. European, 1720–1740; silk embroidery and couched metallic threads on linen, quilted with backstitching, all overlaid with metallic cording. European, 1700–1725; silk and metallic-thread embroidery on linen. English, 1725–1740; silk embroidery on linen quilted with backstitching, all overlaid with yellow cord. Carved fruitwood busk, probably English, 1770. Carved on the busk are "R.U. HAMAH. BURNAM 1770," "L.B." (presumably the maker's initials), and "Hear's a fin busk: pray sister take it/In Remembrance of your Brother/ IF you should ever split or Brake it/ You must Not Expect Annother."

of clothing, including rare underwear, which is thought to have belonged to Annie Van Rensselaer of New York.<sup>5</sup> The stays in the Van Rensselaer group are made of white cotton lined with linen; they have narrow shoulder straps that tie to the front with tapes drawn through thread eyelets. The stays are open at the back with eyelets for lacing, and they have half lacings at the front so they can be adjusted around the chest. The linen hoop petticoat has a drawstring waist and two padded pocket slits on each side. The hoop was originally stiffened with four ovals of cane, although several are now broken or missing (see Pl. X).<sup>6</sup> One of the three Van Rensselaer linen shifts is thigh

length rather than the more typical knee length of most eighteenth-century shifts. Another of the shifts is visible in Plate VIII along with a man's shirt, both of which are miracles of survival because they still have their original starched finish and geometric patterns ironed into the sleeves and ruffles. It is rare for garments of this type to survive without having been washed, which removes the pattern ironing and therefore much of their historical value. The Van Rensselaer shift has "AVR 9" worked in cross-stitch at the center front of the scoop, drawstring neckline, which would have allowed the owner to account for the shift after laundry day. The man's shirt, a typically gener-



ous forty inches in length, has an elaborate chevron pattern ironed into the front neck ruffles. The shirt, Jersey where it was very likely worn in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

The other Van Rensselaer clothes in the Ginsburg collection include a two-piece gown and a pair of long white kidskin gloves with open finger tips that have been pinked (Pl. IV). Similar gloves are illustrated in the section on glovemaking in Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*.<sup>7</sup>

The two-piece Indian chintz gown consists of a fitted jacket with a ruffled short skirt and long, shaped sleeves, and a separate flounced skirt, or petticoat, pleated at the waist to narrow linen tapes tied at either side above nine-inch-long pocket slits (see Pl. X). The cut of the gown indicates a date in the late 1780's or early 1790's. Indian chintzes were banned in England from the early eighteenth century until well into the nineteenth (a prohibition often ignored), but they were allowed to be re-exported and one finds evidence of their use in America throughout the eighteenth century.

Eighteenth-century garments were frequently remade by later generations, often when they were

handed down from parent to child to salvage the expensive material. Several gowns in Mrs. Ginsburg's collection have the old fold and seam lines, which she calls "past life lines," that are a sign of remodeling. More unusual is the brocaded silk gown shown in Plate IX, which survived with an earlier bodice that was laid aside when the gown was remade around the middle of the eighteenth century. The gown is of heavy green silk with a bold floral design dating from around 1730; the silk seems remarkably like that bought by the English diarist Mary Granville Delany (1700-1788) in 1729, which she described as "dark grass green, brocaded in a running pattern like lace of white intermixt with festoons of flowers in faint colours."<sup>8</sup> In the middle of the century the original bodice was replaced with a fitted bodice open at the front to be worn with a stomacher or neck handkerchief filling in the V. Presumably the second bodice was made from pieces of a matching petticoat or trained skirt that were no longer needed when the gown was made into a closed robe—that is, one in which the skirt was not open in the front to reveal a separate petticoat.

Throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth, the proper attire for very formal occasions, coronations, and royal weddings was a so-called

Pl. VIII. Details of linens with original pattern ironing. Man's shirt, possibly New Jersey, 1780-1810. Far right: Woman's shift owned by Annie Van Rensselaer, New York, c. 1780. Stitched in silk, "AVR 9" at the neckline.





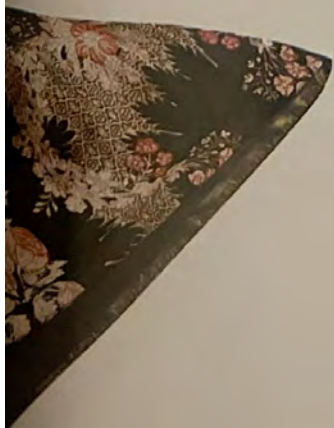






Pl. IX. Brocaded silk gown, English, c. 1730, remodeled c. 1750; and the gown's original bodice. The ribbons and kerchief are reproductions.

Pl. X. *Foreground:* Two-piece Indian chintz gown reputedly owned by Annie Van Rensselaer, New York, 1785-1795. The kerchief is a reproduction. *Background:* Underwear reputedly owned by Van Rensselaer, 1775-1800. Boned cotton and linen stays; linen and cane hoop petticoat; and linen shift.



*robe de cour*, or "stiff-bodied" gown. This consisted of a bodice that was heavily boned, like stays, a separate skirt, and a train. The bodice of the *robe de cour* shown in Plate XIII laces up the back instead of opening at the front (as was more usual at the time), and it has an attached stomacher decorated with applied metallic lace. No train survives. Mrs. Ginsburg bought the gown about six years ago and recalls thinking she would get it for very little, but alas, someone else wanted it too. "The old days were different," she muses.

The gown with matching petticoat in Plate XII has loose pleats hanging down the back from the shoulders in a style known today as the *robe à la française*, but usually called simply a sack in the eighteenth century. A laced linen inner bodice helps hold the gown close to the body at the front while allowing it to fall gracefully from the back pleats. The gown is made of English silk dating from about 1755, but the button-front stomacher, or *compère front*, came into fashion about the mid-1760's, suggesting that the dress was remodeled at that time. Thread pickings on the skirt front and petticoat suggest that the gown once had serpentine ruffles, or *robings*, but it has been retrimmed with silver lace. The gown originally may have been worn as a wedding dress; the combination of silver







Pl. XI. Polonaise gown with matching petticoat and stomacher, English, 1765–1775. Silk brocaded with silk, linen bodice lining. The lace is a reproduction.



Pl. XII. Sack, or *robe à la française*, with matching petticoat, English, c. 1755, remodeled 1765–1770. Silk brocaded with silver and silver-gilt metallic threads. The lace is a reproduction.

and white had become popular for weddings by the second half of the eighteenth century. However, wedding dresses were by no means exclusively white during the eighteenth century, nor were they reserved just for weddings. In an era when women owned fewer dresses than we do today, many women wore their wedding dress as their “best” for years after their marriage.

By the 1760's styles began to become softer; skirts were sometimes drawn up in loops of fabric in a style that came to be called the polonaise. The brocaded silk gown shown in Plate XI retains the sack back but has buttons and thread loops that allow the skirt to be drawn up in graceful drapes. Even the flounces on the matching petticoat can be looped to add to the puffy effect. The brocaded pattern, stomacher with trimming, flounces, and serpentine ruching combine to give a very lavish, busy effect to this dress, which has never been altered. Many gowns in the polonaise style

were eventually made of thinner, plain silk devoid of excessive trimming.

Lavish needlework is perhaps the glory of the Ginsburg collection and the element that often first attracted Mrs. Ginsburg to an object. She relates with wry amusement that she got a gown with marvelously worked iris flowers (see Pl. XXI) very reasonably at auction because the auctioneer's assistant held it up inside out and few in the room recognized its potential beauty.

Whitework (see Pl. XIX) and silk-embroidered aprons were very expensive and were obviously not intended for doing housework. Two of the aprons in the collection (see Pls. I and XVIII) are worked on dark brown grounds that can be related to Barbara Regina Dietzsch's (1706–1783) botanical watercolors of the same period, which have similar dark backgrounds. The apron partly visible at the lower right in Plate I is still stitched to its original paper stiffening, which





Pl. XIII. *Robe de cour*, or stiff-bodied gown, probably Italian, late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Silk brocaded with silk and metallic threads, linen bodice lining, and heavy boning. The skirt has been repeated on the mannequin for the exhibition, because the original waistband had been removed. The lace is a reproduction.





Pl. XIV. Man's waistcoat, French, c. 1790. Silk on silk satin, lined with cotton.

Pl. XV. *Below left:* Man's waistcoat, probably French, c. 1750. Crewel wool needlework on cotton. *Below right:* Man's waistcoat, English, c. 1750. Cut and uncut silk velvet, wool back, and wool and mohair shag lining.

*Facing page, top:* Pl. XVa. Detail of the waistcoat at the right in Pl. XV.



would have been removed before it was sewn into a finished apron. Another English apron (see Pls. I and XVII), which Mrs. Ginsburg describes as her best apron, is lavished with silver and gold as well as silk threads.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries embroidered decoration was worn by men as well as women, as is evidenced by the caps illustrated in Plate XXIV. Such caps were usually worn by wealthy men when they removed their wigs and wanted to relax, although the collection also includes one small cap for a boy.

Men's waistcoats were also often embroidered, generally by professionals; fronts could be purchased already embroidered on flat pieces of silk, which would be taken to a tailor who cut them apart, added a plain fabric back, and sewed them to the customer's measurements. Beginning about 1780 waistcoats embroidered with pictorial subjects such as animals, insects, or pastoral scenes became fashionable. One French example (Pl. XIV) has the unlikely scene of cheetahs

*(Text continued on page 276)*





Pl. XVI. Man's sleeved waistcoat, English, c. 1740. Silk satin heavily embroidered with silver-gilt metallic threads and spangles.





Pl. XVII. Apron, English, 1725-1750. Silver and silver-gilt metallic thread on silk.



Pl. XVIIa. Detail of the apron in Pl. XVII.



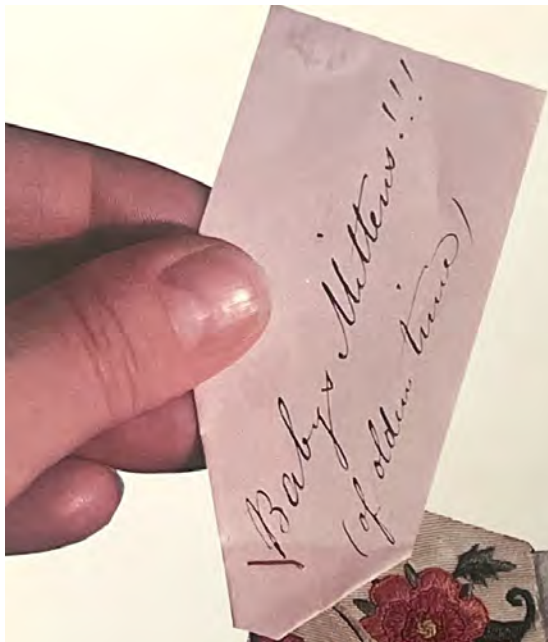
Pl. XVIII. Detail of an English apron, c. 1740. Silk embroidery on silk.



Pl. XIX. Whitework apron, English, c. 1700. Linen embroidery on sheer cotton.







Pl. XX. Infant's mittens, English, c. 1750. Silk embroidery on linen.



Pl. XXI. Detail of a gown and petticoat, probably French, c. 1780. Silk embroidered with silk floss.

Pl. XXII. Fragment of a brocaded dress silk, probably French, 1730–1740.

Pl. XXIII. Details of two brocaded dress silks (the one at the top woven with fancy filling in the ground, the other plain), English, c. 1745.

*(Text continued from page 272)*

clawing and biting each other in mortal battle, all worked in the seemingly innocent medium of silk floss. The long, cream silk, sleeved waistcoat in Plate XVI dates from about 1740, but as the century progressed waistcoats became shorter until by 1800 they were often waist length.

Waistcoats were sometimes woven to shape on looms and purchased in flat pieces, much like the embroidered ones. The rich red silk velvet example in Plates XV and XVa is especially beautiful: the pattern is created by the contrast of the shorn areas of the floral design with the uncut (or looped) pile of the background. The design was actually planned to accommodate the shape of the waistcoat and the placement of the pockets before the cloth was woven. This waistcoat must have been made for winter wear because the fronts and pocket flaps are lined with a shaggy wool and mohair pile fabric. In spite of the elegance of the velvet fronts the back of the waistcoat is made of a coarse twilled wool—a clear indication that men did not generally remove their coats in formal situations. The waistcoat is remarkably like one worn by William Shirley (1694–1771), the governor of Massachusetts, when he had his portrait painted in London by Thomas Hudson (1701–1779) in 1750.<sup>9</sup>





The exhibition also includes more than twenty fragments of woven dress silks ranging in date from about 1690 to 1800. The particularly beautiful example in Plate XXII was woven in Europe in the 1730's, when brocading on the loom reached its zenith as a way of achieving three-dimensional shaded effects. The two fragments shown in Plate XXIII are most unusual because they are woven in exactly the same pattern but with different grounds.

All in all, the exhibition of the Ginsburg collection points to the importance of a collector's eye for the unusual, the rare, the important study piece, but most of all, for sheer beauty. As Mrs. Ginsburg said of a garment she bought at auction, "It was so beautiful, I had to have it."

<sup>1</sup> (New York, 1924), p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> For this information I am indebted to Geoffrey Beard and to Stephen Slater and Michael Messer of the City of Bath Heraldic Society, Bath, England.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Hyde wrote: "To day had Bradley lived he would have been four years old." At seven weeks Bradley had survived whooping cough only to be lost to another illness less than four years later. Mrs. Hyde describes Bradley's excellent memory for Bible stories, hymns, and poetry, and records the fact that he began reading at the age of two. He followed his father around, helping pick up potatoes and stack wood. After his death his mother laments that "it was deeply affecting to his Father to go lonely to the places where the dear boy had been accustomed to be constantly at his side, sharing in his labors. . . ." As an example of the child's tenderness of feeling she relates the following story: "When about two & a half years old, his sister had shown & explained to him a picture which represented a slave driver following the slaves with the lash. Sometime afterwards being permitted to take the book he found the same place & fixing his teeth in the slave driver's head took a piece from that and several of the adjoining leaves, calling out to his sister 'there I have bit the naughty man that whips the poor slaves.'" During Bradley's last hour, his mother relates, "I told him that we thought he would die as his little brother had done & asked him if he was willing to die. He answered 'yes!'"

<sup>4</sup> See *De Peyster Boy, with a Deer* by an unknown artist in the New-York Historical Society, New York City, which possibly depicts Jacobus (or James) A. De Peyster (1726-1799); and *Portrait of Two Children*, attributed to Joseph Badger (1708-1765), in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> The group of clothing consists of three shifts, a hoop petticoat, stays, a two-piece gown, and gloves, all traditionally worn in New York by a female member of the Van Rensselaer family. One of the shifts is stitched with the initials "AVR," and the gloves bear a late nineteenth-century handwritten tag reading, "Gloves of the time of Washington" and "Annie VR Wells" as well as a typed tag reading, "Property of Mrs. Annie Van Rensselaer Wells Ossining on Hudson-N.Y." I would welcome any information about Annie Van Rensselaer Wells or her family.

<sup>6</sup> A hoop petticoat of related construction but only three hoops is in the Gallery of English Costume, Platt Hall, Manchester, England. It is illustrated in *Women's Costume, The 18th Century* (Gallery of English Costume, Manchester, 1954), Fig. 9b.

<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1762), Pls. III and IV in the section entitled *Gantier*.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in eighteenth-century Europe, 1715-1789* (London, 1984), p. 381.

<sup>9</sup> The portrait, in the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., is illustrated in Richard H. Saunders and Ellen G. Miles, *American Colonial Portraits, 1700-1776* (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 189, 210.



Pl. XXIV. Embroidered undress caps. *Top to bottom*: Gold silk worked with silk and metallic threads, European, c. 1700. Linen with white cord quilting and other needlework, English, 1720-1740. Small cap for a boy, European, probably 1730-1740; silk brocaded with silk, trimmed with silver-gilt lace and pastes, silk lining. Brown silk embroidered with silk, lined with striped silk and cotton, European, c. 1750. Linen with white linen coral-stitch embroidery and bobbin-lace trim, English, 1730-1750. Cotton and linen with crewel-wool needlework, and bobbin-lace trim, French, 1720-1750. The brown silk cap is stiffened with pages from a first-century Latin history of the wars of Alexander the Great by Quintus Curtius Rufus, which was widely reprinted in the eighteenth century.