The Kansas City Museum would like to acknowledge the many donors who made this exhibition possible. All gave their family clothing, photographs and mementos, so future generations could learn from their past.

### HISTORIC CLOTHING COLLECTION

- Estate of Georgia Estelle Zimmerman
- Eleanor Halley
- Evelyn Cummings/Florence Willis
- Evelyn Dole
- Dolores Ufford
- Mrs. William L. Lowery
- Martha Galloway Knight
- Jean Scullock
- Camp Fire, USA, Heartland Council
- June Gearhart
- Jo Marie Scarlett
- John Herbst, Jr.
- Martha Bryant
- Mary Gall
- William Brady
- Elizabeth Ridge
- Anbell Shepard
- Guignon Family
- Marjorie Leavitt
- Mrs. William H. Hoffstot
- Kay Blatne
- Antionette Ishmael
- Charles B. Wheeler
- Josephine Burke
- Estate of Loula Long Combs
- Mrs. William J. Bland
- Theresa Hyatt
- Jackson County Historical Society
- Mrs. George Royer
- Mrs. Orville W. Rowe
- Antoinette Scott
- Mrs. M. M. Bills/Elizabeth Hodges
- The Kansas City Research Center
  (formerly Western Historical Manuscript Collection)
- Barbara and William Shelley
- Barbara Scidlitz
- Nancy Thornton

The museum also wishes to offer thanks to Lucero Jimenez for letting us borrow her beautiful dress which she just wore this past July. Also thanks are offered to Paul Gutierrez and Anna Bazan from Mattie Rhodes Center for helping us find the perfect Quinceañera dress.

### PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

- The Renton Historical Society (Washington State)
- Strauss Peyton
- William Longmooar
- Mary Lackey
- Portia Powell/Harry Johnson
- Marie Fabricus
- Joie Tennebaum
- Estate of Georgia Estelle Zimmerman
- Estate of Loula Long Combs

Graphic design by Carrie Maidment, Print Media Design and production by Custom Color.

---

The Kansas City Museum is operated by the City of Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department.

### BOARD OF PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSIONERS

Director Mark McHenry
Deputy Director Terry Rynard

### KANSAS CITY MUSEUM STAFF

- Anna Marie Tuter, Executive Director
- Denise Morrison, Director of Collections
- Lisa Shockley, Curator of Collections
- Ryan Schaub, Preparator
- Andrew Mouzin, Community Relations Manager
- Janet McGuire, Education Aide

Special thank you to our many volunteers.
The Kansas City Museum can proudly boast of having one of the finest costume and textile collections in the country.

The museum has this fine collection thanks in part to the auxiliary of women who made it their job – as volunteers – to gather historic clothing, quilts, accessories and other items for the museum from the time it opened in 1940 until about 1968, when the Women’s Division raised the funds to hire the museum’s first Curator of Costumes.

Having this breadth of collection allows the museum staff to interpret regional history through the lens of fashion. How we wore clothes and why we wore certain clothes tells a story of who we are as a people over time.

“We dedicate this exhibit to the Women’s Division volunteers, and to the many donors over the years who gave generously of their family clothing and memories.”

“Dressing Up In Kansas City,” as an overall subject, will be explored in many different ways and in many different exhibits at the museum throughout the next few years. The collection is too good not to share, and in sharing, there are some great stories to be told and some great history to be learned.

For our first exhibit in the “Dressing Up” series we chose “Rites of Passage” for a couple of reasons; it offers us a large canvas – from birth to death – to display and interpret more items from the collection; and an opportunity to take a closer look at how different cultures and religions celebrate and acknowledge the rites of passage.
Baptismal gown worn by Eleanor Halley, c. 1895. This ivory silk christening gown was made by the Sisters of Mercy as a thank-you gift to Eleanor’s father, a medical doctor who gave of his free time to the sisters’ various charities.

Founded in Ireland by Catherine McAuley in 1837, her first “House of Mercy” was created to shelter and educate women and children of Dublin. The sisters came to the U.S. in 1847 and created schools and hospitals around the country for the sick and economically poor. They came to the Diocese of Kansas City in 1877 to establish a home for working girls. In 1893, they took over the school at St. Patrick’s, until its closure in 1912. That same year, they acquired the use of the former Lillis Home at 11th and Forest for their girls, renaming it St. Catherine Hall. 10/12/14

Baptismal gown of Georgia Wiesner Zimmerman (b. 1897), the granddaughter of Kansas City Fire Chief George Hale.

The gown is white cotton with eyelet lace at cuffs. Georgia’s christening gown is unique in its use of light-pink ribbon throughout the lace insertions. 11/3/17

Infant’s long white dress of handkerchief linen with an ivy leaf design embroidered in red and a bottom edge of heavy crochet.

The history of this dress is that it was worn by a child at circumcision. Of all of the commandments in Judaism, the brit milah (literally: Covenant of Circumcision), is the one most universally observed. It is commonly referred to as a brit and is performed on the eighth day of the male child’s life. 6/26/11

One of the few examples in the museum’s collection of a christening ensemble of gown, bonnet, bib and booties. These items were lovingly made by Helen Lorenz in 1904 and worn by four generations of Lorenz children.

By the turn of the century, christening gowns became shorter and were not as reliant on cotton for their fabric. This one is made of ivory silk; the beautiful lace embellishments remain. 3/3/17 3/14

An infant’s dress of white cotton batiste trimmed in net and embroidered with flowers at neckline, cuffs and hem.

It is unknown if this is a baptismal or christening dress but it dates from 1885-1890. 5/6/14

The eyelet embroidery of this white cotton infant’s dress – possibly a christening gown – was also popularly used in women’s undresses. This makes the family story about this dress being made from the mother’s trousseau petticoat plausible. This dress is dated 1850-1863 and is from the Price-Willis family.

Infant’s white cotton sleeveless gown with center panel of Ayreshire lace, one of the finest examples in the museum’s collection. It is surmised to have been worn by Emma Price Willis who was born in 1858 and was the mother of the two donors, Florence Willis and Evelyn Cummings.

It is not known if this was a christening gown. However, the fine quality of the lace suggests that it was worn for a special occasion. Ayreshire is a geographic region of Scotland known for its lace manufacturing. 7/18/11


Wood cradle, c. 1870-1880, looks handmade; its worn edges speak to many years of use. Made of pine, it has no decoration but two openings on either side. 1/3/16 3/14

Cotton red, yellow and white calico pieced baby quilt, c. 1880. Star of Bethlehem or Lone Star pattern. 5/10/14
Dressing up in costumes — playing make-believe — is a childhood delight. What little boy wouldn’t want to be George Washington? Hopefully John Edward Stouring who wore the 1912 costumes appreciated the detail of burlap knickers pants over bright yellow cotton stockings, along with the lace-accented waistcoat over a vest with white archive buttons. 1052, 200, 4–5

Many children get to dress in costume for special performances. JoAnn Scurlock (b. 1953) was one such girl who took toe and tap dance and wore this drum majorette costume. The ivory same short jacket has gold button and shoulder epaulets; it is paired with a matching skirt. The “boom’s” are cleverly made of a gold lame material over velvety cardboard with a strap on the bottoms so they fit over a pair of proper dance shoes. JoAnn took lessons in 1961 and her teacher’s mother, Mrs. Dan Wells, made the costume. 1053, 60–1, 4–5

June Gearhart (b. 1920), known as ‘Baby June’, was a child star of the vaudeville stage from age three. She traveled around the country singing and playing trumpet and accordion. June’s mother, Vivian, traveled with her and made all of her costumes including this lovely dress, c. 1935. It is white taffeta with a full skirt and scalloped hem, and a sewn-in petticoat bodice is lined with cotton and has spaghetti straps decorated with bugle beads. The flower decoration is pinned on the fabric. Vivian would visit Stage sewing machine stores whenever June was performing and use their machines to make costumes; some stores charged her and some didn’t. 1054, 216–9

Religious Ceremonies, no matter your faith, include special attire. In the Catholic faith none is more important than the First Communion and Confirmation dress. The First Communion is a person’s first reception of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and typically occurs at age seven or eight. Confirmation is one of the seven sacraments through which Catholics pass in the process of their religious upbringing. Kansas Citian Martha Bryant (b. 1927) wore this short-sleeved, scoop-neck white net dress with accompanying veil to her First Communion and Confirmation (1935-1936). Martha is pictured in the photo gallery wearing this dress in front of her childhood house after her Confirmation in May 1936. 1055, 114–5

Some children dress up to show pride in their heritage. Bonita Gonzalez (b. 1938) made this costume to represent her Mexican family roots as a Camp Fire Girl in the 1950s. The black velvet vest and bell-bottomed pants include the colors of the Mexican flag in their embellishment. Bonita is one of a three-generation family of women who went through Camp Fire, beginning with her mother, father, sister, Frances, and Frances’s daughter, Teresa. 2004, 28–9

Prior to the 20th century, children were dressed as miniature adults; girls wore styles their mothers wore. Boys were dressed the same as their sisters until such time as they were ‘breeched’ — when they transitioned from wearing dresses to wearing trousers. This usually happened between five and seven years of age. They transitioned first to knee pants, then shortly thereafter to long pants; each transition was considered a major rite of passage.

The red and white boy’s dress and matching jacket is reminiscent of the Zouave regiments of the Civil War years and is dated from this time period, c. 1863-1866. The French actually created the colorful uniforms of red, blue, and white that included short jackets and full, baggy pants tucked into their boots. Military styles, particularly sailor suits, were the preferred style for boy’s’ dresses. Lots of buttons, even Scottish kilts, were “moddy” styles during Queen Victoria’s time, because that is how she dressed her sons. 1055, 432–3

By the early 20th century, boy’s dresses were still worn, but were not as elaborate as earlier years. This plain striped cotton dress was worn by Kansas Citian Paul Elliston sometime between 1905-1928. 1052, 216

Little Lord Fauntleroy was the first children’s novel by English playwright Frances Hodgson Burnett. It was originally published as a serial in St. Nicholas Magazine from 1885 to 1886, then as a book in 1886. The Fauntleroy suit created a fad for American middle-class children; the suit appeared in Europe as well, but nowhere was it as popular as in America. The classic Fauntleroy suit was a velvet cutaway jacket and matching loose pants worn with a “fancy blouse” with a large lace or ruffled collar. It was most popular for boys three to eight years old, but some older boys wore them as well. It’s been speculated that the popularity of the style encouraged many mothers to breed their boys earlier than before and was a factor in the decline of dressing young boys in dresses. This particular suit has a Marshall Field’s label. 1057, 432–3

By the 1930s, the Fauntleroy style had been modified to accept the newer concept of jumpsuit and playsuit. While boys still wore knee pants, the dresses were starting to give way to one-piece suits. This modified Fauntleroy suit was made for John I Herbert, Jr. (b. 1928) by his aunt, Anna Hamm. It includes a jumpsuit, shirt, and cuff. You can find John in the photo gallery modeling the suit. 2004, 213–4

1052, 200, 4–5

1053, 60–1, 4–5

1054, 216–9

1055, 114–5

1056, 432–3

1057, 432–3
In the 19th century, young girls’ dresses were very similar to their mothers’ in style, but shorter. As a girl became older, her skirts gradually became longer. By her teenage years, a girl would have discarded wearing the petticoat, an undergarment covering the legs that usually showed under a girl’s dress. She would be dressing in a more fashionable way as she could, mimicking her mother’s or older sister’s fashion, only a shorter length.

This bustle dress from around 1878-1882, is two pieces, a bodice and skirt, in beige-gray taffeta and trimmed with a silk satin floral print on a white ground. There is cording and other trim of dark red satin. The bodice has unusual white, red, and blue painted shell buttons that show off the entire outfit.

This is no ordinary dress, it would have been worn for special occasions. 

Quinceañera is a rite of passage for 15-year-old girls of Latin-American heritage and this tradition has carried on in the Hispanic community in Kansas City. The elaborate ball gowns worn by the Quinceañera is just one of many traditions; another is the gift of a tiara or crown, signifying that her family sees her as a princess. Traditions vary depending on what part of the Latin-American world you are from, but most include a religious ceremony followed by a celebratory reception of music, formal and informal dances, food and gifts.

The ball gown and tiara is on loan from Lucerno Jimenez and was worn this year. Lucerno’s dress is very modern, made with a synthetic fabric with beads and sequins and short jacket or shrug she carries a bouquet.

Graduation is a significant stage of development from childhood to adulthood. Unlike other rites of passage, graduation celebrates many years of hard work, either through the elementary and high school years, or college. Dressing up for one’s graduation has changed over the years; it used to involve new clothes, often of a more adult fashion, and the taking of photographs to document the event. Parties often accompanied the ceremony of wearing cap and gown.

Graduate Mary Gall (b. 1938) wore this two-piece dress for her high school graduation in 1956. The dress includes a strapless underdress made of ivory polished cotton and an overdress of ivory gauze with embroidered flowers.

The fabric was purchased at Kaplan’s in Kansas City.

Quinceañera is a rite of passage for 15-year-old girls of Latin-American heritage and this tradition has carried on in the Hispanic community in Kansas City. The elaborate ball gowns worn by the Quinceañera is just one of many traditions; another is the gift of a tiara or crown, signifying that her family sees her as a princess. Traditions vary depending on what part of the Latin-American world you are from, but most include a religious ceremony followed by a celebratory reception of music, formal and informal dances, food and gifts.

The ball gown and tiara is on loan from Lucerno Jimenez and was worn this year. Lucerno’s dress is very modern, made with a synthetic fabric with beads and sequins and short jacket or shrug she carries a bouquet.

Graduation of another kind happens when you attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Coming of age at West Point after World War I, William Brady was the first cadet from Independence, Missouri, graduating in 1920.

His school uniform for 1918-1919 is blue-gray wool trimmed with black braid. The jacket sleeves have two diagonal stripes in gold braid indicating Second Classman on the forearms. The jacket is distinguished by large round brass buttons—three sets of them, two of which are decorative—and “tabs” that taper to a rounded point in back with the same brass buttons.

Brady retired from his military career at the rank of Colonel. He attended the Academy during the era that Douglas MacArthur was superintendent (1919-1922).
Not all women adhered to the all-white Victorian ideal bride’s dress. This lovely black dress was worn by Imogene Higgins at her marriage to Edmond O. Harris on September 1, 1935. The mid-calf length dress is of black silk crepe; highlights include long bishop sleeves of black silk gauze pleated at the shoulders, each with a wide-face insertion and narrow cuff. A stand-up collar of pleated silk gauze extends down center front with two round black plastic and muslin buttons for decoration at center front neck. The dress is completed with a self-fabric belt with rectangular cloth-covered buckle at center. The dress was worn with matching black shoes. 218.34.2.3

This gown was worn by bride Antionette Vigliaturo at her 1980 wedding to Phillip Ishmael. It was designed by Raytown, Missouri native Paula Varsalona, and is an ivory satin floor-length dress with chapel train. The dress has organza overlay from waist to hem of train, edged with narrow lace and pearl beads. The bodice is covered with net and lace overlays with a high lace collar. The dress has 3/4 length lace overlays. The center front closure has a hidden metal zipper covered with 31 self-fabric buttons and elastic loops. A white tulle wedding veil on lace-covered headpiece completes the look. 218.30.5.7 / 218.31.6

A man’s formal jacket and vest in black wool broadcloth with four silk covered buttons; lined with white cotton. Worn by Emilie Guignon of Kansas City at his wedding to Julia Rose Miltemberger on September 24, 1884 in St. Louis, Missouri. Men’s formal wear for weddings hasn’t changed much over the years however, before 1850 men traditionally did not wear black as it was considered inconsistent with the occasion. After 1860, the jacket’s shape and color depended on whether the wedding was a morning or afternoon affair as very few were in the evening during that time. Tuxedos were considered evening wear so Mr. Guignon’s coat implies the wedding took place at night. 218.23.4.4

The oldest wedding dress in the museum’s collection is this gown from 1836, worn by Eliza Miller at her wedding to Richard Gentry of Pettis County, Missouri. The dress is gold silk brocade with three lines of cream taffeta trim on center front. Everything is hand stitched and the bodice is lined with polished cotton. 218.97.1

This wedding gown was worn by Arabelle Bowen in 1874 at her wedding to John Barber White in Kansas City. The dress is actually two pieces – bodice and ruffled skirt – in a light olive green taffeta with brown satin trim on sleeves and ruffles on skirt, with lace at cuff. One of the most interesting aspects of the bodice is the three-dimensional buttons. 19.564.2.a.b

In 1899, this dress was made for Miss Cornelia Andrus, who was engaged to a young minister. The dress was never worn; the night before the wedding she ran away and married another man. The gown has a Rochester, New York dressmaker label and the fabric is a crushed silk wool blend. It is a two-piece dress – bodice and skirt. The dress ended up in the collection of a second cousin living in Kansas City. 16.086.2.a.b

This wedding ensemble was worn by Mrs. George W. Snyder, Jr. at her wedding in 1905; it consists of a jacket and skirt of ivory wool broadcloth and lace, a chiffon bodice with high neckline, and is topped off by an elaborate hat of chiffon in a subtle shape. 218.34.15.a
Mayor Wheeler most likely received this Kansas City Royals baseball cap in 1973 when the team moved from Municipal Stadium to the brand-new Royals Stadium. The Royals were founded by Kansas City businessman Ewing Kauffman and entered the American League as an expansion team in 1969, one year after the Kansas City Athletics moved to Oakland, California. 8051.3.41

In addition to a Worlds of Fun souvenir hat, Mayor Wheeler received a fake detonator to commemorate the amusement park’s official groundbreaking. Kansas City’s Worlds of Fun opened in May 1973 on the northern edge of vast industrial complex, developed by investor Laurence Hunt, in the bluffs above the Missouri River. In 1969, Hunt began a 500-acre entertainment/hotel complex, with Worlds of Fun being just one part. The amusement park, at a cost of $10 million, is one of the few pieces of that big plan that came to fruition. 8053.3.25

This Brownie beanie is from a uniform that originated in 1973; a Brownie represents the junior level of the Girl Scouts of the United States. This beanie is from Troop 478, and is embellished with several patches and pins, traditionally awarded for participation and completion in various Girl Scout programs. 8053.3.42

This Yellow Cab Co. hat is most likely a souvenir from a local company. Yellow Cab Company of Chicago (not to be confused with the Yellow Truck Co.) was founded by John Herz in 1914. According to Yellow Cab Co. history, the color (and name) yellow was selected by Herz as the result of a survey by the University of Chicago which indicated it was the easiest color to spot. 8053.3.42

The TWA turquoise hostess beret displays a logo pin that was introduced in 1968, but the beret-style dates back even earlier to about 1965. The hostess hat style was changed in 1971, so it’s possible Mayor Wheeler received this as a souvenir of a style no longer used. TWA (Trans World Airlines) has a long history with Kansas City, serving as the company’s world headquarters from 1931-1984. 8053.3.51

This conductor cap is a souvenir of Amtrak’s inauguration in Kansas City. Amtrak first moved into a near-empty Union Station. In 1970, Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act, the legislation established the National Railroad Passenger Corporation to take over the intercity passenger rail service, which had been operated by private railroads. Amtrak began service on May 1, 1971, serving 43 states with a total of 21 routes. 8053.3.19

This molded plastic hard hat with the Butler logo is one of many hard hats Mayor Wheeler collected as souvenirs from groundbreaking ceremonies and new building construction tours during his two terms in office. It is unknown what exact event the hat was used for. The Butler Manufacturing Co. was founded in 1901 in Kansas City by Emanuel Nonquist and brothers, Charles and Newton Butler. 8053.3.80

The genuine Stetson cowboy hat was a gift to Mayor Wheeler from a local retailer, Faulkner Western Stores. Faulkner’s opened a square-dance apparel store at 79th and Wornall in 1954, and expanded shortly thereafter to include more cowboy fare as requested by the folks at Benjamin Stables. In business for over 35 years, the company is now Faulkner’s Saddlery, a specialty store for the horse industry. The price tag for this hat was $25.00 and is still on the inside hat band. 8053.3.50

Kansas City came to know the blue jackets (and caps) as the Future Farmers of America, who came to town every year for their annual national convention from 1928 to 1998. Future Farmers of America was founded by a group of young farmers back in 1928. Their mission was to prepare future generations for the challenges of feeding a growing population. They taught us that agriculture is more than planting and harvesting—it’s a science, it’s a business and it’s an art. 8053.3.44

Souvenir hat from the Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company, made in the traditional style of a firefighter’s hat. Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company was founded in 1863 in San Francisco. In 1960 it became part of the Fidelity-Old Mutual Insurance Group of companies. 8053.3.45
Starting in the 18th century, infants were christened and baptized in gowns instead of swaddling clothes. These gowns became a textile work of art in the Victorian era (roughly 1850-1880) with lace inserts and lengths extending beyond 20 inches. By the end of the Edwardian era (1890-1910), christening gowns became less common. Today, they are still worn in certain religious denominations.

Christening (naming) and Baptism (purification from sin) are Christian traditions. All of the gowns in this display are related to Christian ceremonies, with the exception of one. The red ivy-embroidered gown was worn at a circumcision. The ceremony of circumcision is the oldest continuous rite in Judaism, over 4,000 years old.

Birth traditions vary dramatically throughout the world. In Holland, after the baby is born, the Dutch have a unique system of kraamhulp (maternity home care). For seven days, a nurse comes to the home, a benefit covered by insurance. The nurse provides not only medical care, but also cleans, cooks, and instructs in basic parenting skills. She also manages the flow of visitors and makes the traditional snack to celebrate a birth, beschauf met muisjes, which literally translates as “biscuits with mice.” The “mice” are miniature licorice bits with a blue-and-white coating for boys, pink-and-white for girls.

As in Holland, German women see midwives for their prenatal care. Midwives are so respected that by law they must be present at every birth — a doctor is optional. Government offices in German cities keep a list of “accepted names” that parents must adhere to when registering the name of their child. In the case of an unusual name, they must give a compelling reason why an exception should be made. The government policy is intended to act in the best interest of the child, in an effort to thwart potential ridicule of a child with a name that’s too different. Iceland takes this a step further. The Icelandic Naming Commission disallows any name that is not Icelandic in origin. In June 2014, a couple sued to name their children “Duncan” and “Harriet.” They lost their case and were denied. The case is currently being appealed.

After leaving the hospital in Japan, mother and baby often stay at the mother’s parents’ home for a month or sometimes longer. It is tradition that the mother stay in bed with her baby for 21 days after the birth. During this time, friends may drop by to greet the new baby and join the family in eating the celebratory food osekhans (red rice with red beans).

In Turkey, mother and baby stay home for the first 20 days after the birth. Friends drop by and drink a special beverage called lohusha serbeti. After this period, mother and child make return visits to gift-givers’ homes, where they receive a handkerchief filled with a single egg (for a healthy baby) and candy (for a good-natured baby). They also rub flour on the baby’s eyebrows and hairline, to grant a long life.
Childhood is basically one long, single rite of passage; every growth spurt brings a new life event to be marked as a special occasion.

Rituals involving children and growing up are varied within cultural groups and among families. There is at least one rite of passage for boys that no longer holds true today, but was very much observed in the 19th and early 20th century – the transition from dresses to long pants, called breeching.

Religious customs marked passages for growing up, and school graduations, particularly high school, were real coming-of-age experiences that each of us has or will have experienced.

Every family or cultural group has its own childhood customs. A toddler who finally grows out of using a pacifier is growing up. In Denmark when it’s time to give up the pacifier, there are trees in local parks where they can hang them up and say goodbye.

Losing your first tooth is growing up and usually involves a ceremony or celebration. In Western culture, the Tooth Fairy visits. In Japan, if you lose a bottom tooth you bury it; if you lose a top tooth, you throw it on the roof for good luck.
Coming of age is a young person’s transition from childhood to adulthood. The age at which this transition takes place varies in society as does the nature of the transition. Many cultures retain ceremonies to confirm the coming of age, some associated with religious responsibility, but most relate to a simple legal convention such as the legal age to drive, to vote, etc. Many rituals involve dressing up as part of signifying this transition.

For young Hamar boys of Ethiopia, for instance, becoming a man is marked when they can run four times over the backs of their cattle, while the boys of Brazil’s Xavante tribe come of age through a series of tasks including spending fifteen days immersed in water. Girls, too, have their initiation ceremonies, some more enjoyable than others. In Latin America and among Latinos, for instance, girls are thought to come of age when they turn fifteen and the occasion is often marked by a lavish party called a quinceañera. In America, wealthier families hold grand debutante balls at which parents present their daughters into high society.

In Korea, the Monday of the third week of May is “coming-of-age day.” On this day, those entering adulthood receive three gifts: flowers, perfume, and a kiss. In Japan, persons under 20 years of age are not permitted to smoke, drink, or vote. Coming-of-age ceremonies, known as seijin shiki, are held on the second Monday of January. For the ceremony, the young women and men are brought to a government building and listen to many speakers, similar to a graduation ceremony. At the conclusion of the ceremony, small presents are given to the new adults.

In the Jewish faith, boys reach religious maturity at the age of thirteen and become a bat mitzvah (meaning “son of the commandment”). Girls mature earlier and become a bat mitzvah (meaning “daughter of the commandment”) at twelve. The new men and women are looked upon as adults and are expected to uphold the Jewish commandments and laws.
Marriage is a rite of passage wherein two people traditionally are ready to move out of their parent’s home and start a family of their own, following an extended period called “engagement.”

Cultures and religions follow many different customs, rituals and traditions in marriage. For instance, in the Catholic religion, the wedding ceremony is preceded by a period of religious instruction and counseling for the couple. In most cultures the bride takes her husband’s last name. Many ceremonies involve the exchange of rings and wearing ritual clothes, the most traditional being the bride wearing a wedding veil.

The definition of veil is to “obscure, shroud, mask or cover.” There are many stories of the origin of a bride’s veil. It is said that Romans believed evil spirits would be attracted to the bride, so they covered her face with a veil to conceal her and confuse them. Others say the bridal veil is from arranged marriages. After the ceremony, the veil was lifted to reveal the bride. This was to keep the groom from backing out if he didn’t like what he saw.

Many wedding customs can trace their roots to ancient times and there are many traditions that cross cultural, religious and racial lines. For instance, June is the most popular month for weddings; why? In the time of the Romans, the goddess Juno ruled over marriage, the hearth, and childbirth, hence the popularity of June weddings. We can also thank the Romans for the tradition of the wedding cake, where revelers broke a loaf of bread over a bride’s head for fertility’s sake.

And we owe a lot to England’s Queen Victoria, whose symbolic white wedding dress stirred the trend in 1840 – before then, brides simply wore their best dress.

Around the world there are many wedding superstitions; rain on your wedding day is considered good luck, according to Hindu tradition. For good luck, Egyptian women pinch the bride on her wedding day. Middle Eastern brides paint henna on their hands and feet to protect themselves from the evil eye. Peas are thrown at Czech newlyweds instead of rice. A Swedish bride puts a silver coin from her father and a gold coin from her mother in each shoe to ensure that she’ll never do without. In Holland, a pine tree is planted outside the newlyweds’ home as a symbol of fertility and luck. In South Africa, the parents of both bride and groom traditionally carry fire from their hearths to light a new fire in the newlyweds’ hearth.
We’ve all heard the term “wearing many hats.” As a rite of passage, starting a career and going out into the world to earn a living, is definitely one rite that signals adulthood.

Some individuals stay in one career their whole lives, while others have multiple careers. No one in Kansas City wore more hats than Mayor Charles Wheeler. Not only did he have several careers over the course of his working life, he collected many hats, so the term above is very apt for him.

Charles B. Wheeler, Jr. is a Kansas City native (b. 1926). He attended Westport High School, graduating in 1942. He served in the U.S. Navy while at the same time attending college, earning a B.A. from the University of Louisville in 1946. He started at The University of Kansas that very fall in the field of medicine, and became a third-generation physician in 1950. That same year he joined the U.S. Air Force, serving until July 1953 as a Captain and Flight Surgeon to the Thunderbirds, the original Air Force aerial acrobatics team. In 1953, he began his residency at St. Luke’s Hospital while attending night classes at the University of Missouri-Kansas City for his law degree.

Wheeler began his public career as Coroner of Jackson County, Missouri in 1965, then judge of the Western District of the Jackson County Court. He was elected Mayor of Kansas City in 1971.

During his two terms as mayor: Kemper Arena and Bartle Hall were built; Crown Center and Worlds of Fun opened; and the city got a new airport and sports complex. He was known as the “Do It Now” mayor.

Mayor Wheeler is known for his hat collection – hundreds of them, from hard hats worn for new construction ceremonies, to souvenir hats from sporting teams to retail companies to new entertainment ventures.

On display is just a sampling of the over 75 hats entered into the museum’s collection after the mayor left office.
Of all the rites of passage, death and mourning have the most symbolic rituals, customs and traditions for the bereaved. There are many symbolic features to mourning and various cultures and religious groups mourn in different ways.

In the western world some customs for mourning go back as far as Roman times when the toga pulla, made of dark-colored wool, was worn during periods of mourning. By the 19th century, mourning behavior developed into a complex set of rules, particularly among the upper class, who could afford it. For women, customs involved wearing heavy, concealing black clothing with veils of black crêpe. The entire ensemble was colloquially known as “widow’s weeds” (from the Old English word weard, meaning “garment”). Special caps and bonnets, mourning jewelry made of jet—a whole industry evolved around the fashion of mourning.

In Victorian England, the length of time for mourning could be anywhere from two to four years for widows – influenced by the long mourning period of Queen Victoria after the death of her beloved Prince Albert.

Many customs of mourning are based on religious beliefs. Orthodox Christians usually hold the funeral on the day after death or on the third day, and always during the daytime. In traditional Orthodox communities, the body of the deceased was washed and prepared for burial by family and friends, and then placed in the coffin at the home. A house in mourning would be recognizable by the coffin – traditionally decorated with a cross on the lid and adorned with flowers – set up on the porch by the front door. In the Hindu religion, death is not seen as a final “end,” but as a turning point in the seemingly endless journey of the indestructible “atman” or soul through innumerable bodies of animals and people. Hence, Hinduism prohibits excessive mourning as this can hinder the passage of the departed soul towards its journey ahead.

Mourning is observed in Islam by increased devotion, receiving visitors and condolences, and avoiding decorative clothing and jewelry. Judaism looks upon mourning as a process by which the stricken can re-enter into society, and so provides a series of customs that make this process gradual. The most known and central stage is shiva, a Jewish mourning practice in which people adjust their behavior as an expression of their bereavement for seven days, beginning immediately after the funeral. In the West, typically, mirrors are covered and a small tear is stitched or drawn on an item of clothing to indicate a lack of interest in personal vanity.
Whether you’ve heard the phrase or not, “dressed to the nines,” can be defined as being flamboyantly or smartly dressed.

Is dressing up a rite of passage? In many instances the event for which you dress up is. Were you baptized as a baby? Did you attend your high school prom? Married? Then you have, most likely, “dressed to the nines.”

Looking at history through the fashion lens shows many similarities and differences between generations when it comes to dressing up. What will the next generation consider “dressed to the nines?”

The two-piece bustle dress was worn by Lenora Williamson Shelley, when presented to Queen Victoria in 1875; she was in Europe on her honeymoon at the time.

The “Hentennay” French dressmaker label is on the inside waistband. The bodice and skirt is purple satin, draped with silver/gold brocade, taffeta, and ecru lace.

A bustle is a type of framework used to support the drapery on the back of a dress. Bustles were worn under the skirt in the back, just below the waist, to keep the skirt from sagging and dragging.

This red satin gown by fashion designer Norman Norell was worn by Jewell Ball chairwoman Barbara Seidritz in 1969. (For many years it was a tradition for the chairwomen to donate their gowns to the museum’s collection.)

The gown has short sleeves, a stand-up collar, a full gathered skirt, and features a sewn-in “necklace” of gold-colored metal beads and glass cabochons, highlighted by the shape of a large Maltese cross.

The Jewel Ball is an annual debutante ball in Kansas City, organized by the Jewel Ball Foundation, which appoints a prominent Kansas City socialite to be chairwoman. Since its beginning in 1954, the ball has been held at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

Cream taffeta gown with train; worn by Nancy Moore Thornton in 1958, when crowned Queen of the American Royal; she was elected from the BOTARs – the only year this was ever done. (1958 marked the 50th anniversary for the American Royal.) Nancy wore long white gloves with the gown.

In 1949, a group of ten men and women founded the BOTARs with the mission to foster interest in the American Royal. The chosen “Belles of the American Royal” would participate in many activities, but mainly they would endeavor to stimulate knowledge of what the Royal means to the community and vicinity. The BOTAR, as a women’s leadership organization today, is the largest funder of the various events at the American Royal.

Child’s pink satin BOTAR train bearer costume with gold accents and trim, c. 1958; worn by Tommy Grant.

The outfit consists of puffy short-sleeved tunic, shorts, cape, hat, tights and belt. Part of the pomp and ceremony of the American Royal Coronation Ball (replaced by the BOTAR Ball in 1970) included children as train bearers, usually chosen from the families involved in the event that year.