Whether you’ve heard the phrase or not, “dressed to the nines” can be defined as being flamboyantly or smartly dressed.

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 Kansas City Museum can proudly boast of having one of the finest costume and textile collections in the country. Having this breadth of collection allows the Museum to interpret regional history through the lens of fashion.

**Dressing Up in Kansas City: Dressed to the Nines** is the second in a series of exhibitions that the Museum has created focusing on the fashion worn by generations of Kansas Citians. The first exhibition, **Dressing Up in Kansas City: Rites of Passage** in 2014 highlighted clothing worn for life milestones from birth to death. **Dressing Up in Kansas City**, as an overall subject, will be explored in different exhibitions throughout the coming years. There are great stories to be told and great history to be shared.

**Dressed to the Nines** takes us back to the high-end fashion gowns and dresses of the late 19th century to today, and the evolution of local dry goods and department stores to the ready-to-wear movement.

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**Acknowledgements**

A museum is only as good as its exhibits and the Kansas City Museum is grateful for its many donors who over the years have given their family treasures to the Museum so that future generations can be educated and entertained by them. Thanks to the following donors for helping make **Dressing Up in Kansas City: Dressed to the Nines** possible:

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<td>Irene Alls</td>
<td>Ellen Goheen</td>
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<td>Mrs. John Gayton Barnes</td>
<td>David Krom</td>
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<td>Jane Barton</td>
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<td>Ann Canfield</td>
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Graphic design of the exhibition is by Carrie Mardm, Print Media Design, with production by Custom Color.

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Beading accents can sometimes make the dress—and sometimes they are the dress.

Cream silk knee-length evening dress, embellished with silver embroidery and white and pearl beading. C. 1926 / LABEL: ISAAC RUBINS, "SHOP OF ORIGINATIONS," 1112 BALTIMORE, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI (SELLER)

Above-the-knee silver beaded evening dress with bottom panels. WORN BY DE DE DEVILLE / 1994 / LABEL: BLOOMINGDALE'S, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK (SELLER)

Black silk evening dress has an attached rayon underdress covered in a sheer silk overdress with beading and sequins, mid-calf length, and keyhole back. WORN BY ELLEN GOHEEN / 1989 / LABEL: OLEG CASSINI, MADE BY HE-RO INDUSTRIES INC. / ACCESSORY: BLACK SILK HIGH-HEELED FERRAGAMO SHOES, 1983
The Jewel Ball was created in 1954 by Enid Kemper and Clara Hockaday to raise funds for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Kansas City Symphony. The event is presided by a woman of social standing. For many years, chairwomen donated their gowns along with a portrait wearing the gown to the Kansas City Museum.

White satin evening gown has embroidered and beaded floral design on the bodice; large satin bow on back. Worn to the 1964 Ball by Ann Gurley Canfield / Label: Bianchi / Accessory: Long white gloves

Red satin gown has short sleeves, stand-up collar, and full skirt. The bodice is bejeweled with a large Maltese cross. Worn by Barbara Seidlitz, Chairwoman of the 1969 Jewel Ball / Label: Norman Norell

Evening gown of yellow satin with a heavily beaded bodice; the skirt has two layers of silk crepe. Worn by Jane Barton, Chairwoman, 1970 Jewel Ball / Labels: Swanson’s on the Plaza, Harvey Bearing, Design by Karin Stark
In 1949 ten men and women formed **BOTAR** with the goal of promoting the **American Royal**. The young women chosen to be “Belles of the American Royal” worked throughout the year on a variety of projects culminating in a grand ball. In 1959 they became an official women’s organization.

Strapless formal gown of ivory taffeta has art deco-like beading on bust and full layered net skirt over a straight taffeta underskirt. Worn by Helen Jones Lea at the 1955 ball / no label / accessories: gloves, tiara and earrings.

Pink moiré taffeta gown is strapless and features a fitted bodice with a large bow on the back of the waist. Worn by Dora Lu Barnes Hart at the 1958 ball / no label / accessory: flower wreath headpiece.

The most famous accessory for every BOTAR is a large feather fan. These are kept by the organization and provided to the BOTAR for the ball.
It was quite prevalent at the turn of the century for women seamstresses who had acquired a large clientele to open their own shops, creating clothes for women the same way tailors did for men. This dress is one of those.

Two-piece evening gown of Chantilly black lace over white satin with white silk organza trimmed in aqua velvet bow, black jet beads, and sequins. It has been speculated that this gown may have been made from machine-made Chantilly shawl from the mid-19th century. Sleeves have been altered from original appearance. 1902 / Label: Rose Altman Building Kansas City, Mo.
Charles James (1906-1978) is considered "America's First Couturier." Born in England, he made his way to Chicago by the mid-1920s working as an architectural assistant. He put that training to good use when he began his fashion business. He is most famous for his architecturally-structured evening gowns which he gave names to— he considered "Cloverleaf" his greatest creation. His work is still influential today.

“Swan” is the name of this original design by Charles James. Peach silk strapless evening gown with a draped peach crepe on bodice and over skirt, and pink, yellow, and orange underskirts. The original dress was designed for actress Jennifer Jones to wear to the 1949 Venice Film Festival. Several copies of the dress were made in varying color schemes. How this one came to the Kansas City Museum is a mystery; no record of the donation can be found.
Kansas City women no longer had to make trips to New York or Chicago or hire an expensive and timely local seamstress to get high-end fashion. Local dry good stores and department stores began carrying lines from some of the biggest names in the fashion world. From Emery, Bird, Thayer to Swanson's on the Plaza she could shop locally for that perfect designer evening gown.

Full-length bright yellow and dull green silk taffeta gown; draped and pleated bodice has optional spaghetti straps. There is a floating draped sash that goes from hip to back to the bottom of skirt. Worn by Irene Allis to the Inaugural Ball of President John F. Kennedy in Washington, D. C. / 1961 / Labels: Helga, Harzfeld's Kansas City, Made in California.
Gowns may have subtle details that make them unique. The use of color and beaded details is what gives these gowns tremendous personality.

This dress has a crepe bodice with multi-colored seed beads sewn onto large buttons, a large silk sash in bold colors, and the brilliance of the bright pink skirt with a slight bustle in the back. WORN BY SALLIE LONG ELLIS, DAUGHTER OF ROBERT A. LONG / 1914 / LABEL: EMERY, BIRD, THAYER D. G. CO. KANSAS CITY (SELLER)

A two-piece evening gown with a bias-cut silk charmeuse underdress and chiffon overdress. The overdress has amazing beaded details around the neck, down the back, and on the arms. 2004 / LABEL: ZANDRA RHODES LONDON / RHODES DESIGNED FOR DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES, AND CONTINUES TO DESIGN FOR ROYALTY AND CELEBRITIES
It’s possible that this dress was made as a costume, but also it’s more than possible that this highly-decorated dress was designed to be worn by a woman of the theater—and in this case a woman of the opera. Yvonne de Tréville (born in Texas) was an opera diva, a contemporary of Kansas City’s own Alice Nielsen. This dress came to the Kansas City Museum after Tréville’s death in 1954.

Heavily ornamented dress has metallic fibers, sequins and silk embroidery, and a center back floating panel which forms a fishtail train. Although not visible, it also has a lavender colored cotton twill weave bosom binder. Shoulder straps are cut-out net with metallic couching and glass beaded floral motif. C. 1917-1920 / NO LABEL
This trio of dresses shows the progression of shapes and colors from the 1930s to the WWII era to the postwar era.

Deep blue velvet, figure hugging shape, bias cut—this dress screams 1930s elegance and style. The gown has decorative burn-out sections in the upper arms/shoulders and around the collar. *Originally worn as a wedding dress and two generations later in a photo shoot as De De Deville / Purchased in Chicago / 1935 / No label / Accessory: Gold high-heeled shoes*

Slate blue gown has a metal zipper which was rationed once the war began. The gown has a fitted bodice with spaghetti straps and a gathered, layered skirt with gold silk on the bottom and green and blue net layers over it. *Worn by Barstow School student Charlotte Johnson to a sorority dance / 1941 / Labels: New York Creation N.Y. Dress Institute, made under standards of I.L.G.W.U. and original by Miss America New York*

Christian Dior’s “new look” design of 1947 emphasized a cinched waist and fuller hips. A great example is this emerald green gown. Skirt extends to either side and, along with the neckline and sleeves, is lined with stiffened net for shaping. *Worn by Helen Spencer / 1948 / Label: Christian Dior-New York, Inc.*
Certain colors lend themselves well to gowns, but none so well as gold did once synthetic fabrics and threads came into popularity in the 1970s. These examples show off a variety of gold.

Gold flecks stand out on an orange/red background in this gown, made from a Tom and Linda Platt pattern for Vogue by De De DeVille. C. 1990 / NO LABEL

A gold lamé, sleeveless evening dress; gathered fabric on one side and gold buttons provide the decorative touches. WORN BY DE DE DEVILLE / C. 1976–1978 / LABEL: YVES SAINT LAURENT, RIVE GAUCHE, MADE IN PARIS FRANCE

Sleeveless gown of chiffon has gold and silver metallic chenille decoration and back cowl. PART OF THE HISTORIC GARMENT DISTRICT MUSEUM COLLECTION / C. 1970–1979 / NO LABEL / DESIGN BY MARIAN VAN HORN
African American sororities formed after the turn of the century when college students were not welcome into the established Greek Letter Societies. The first sororities were founded at Howard University, Washington, D.C. – Alpha Kappa Alpha (1908) and Delta Sigma Theta (1913). Kansas City’s Beta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha was organized in 1920 and Delta Sigma Theta Chapter in 1925.

Sleeveless cream silk shantung gown with matching sleeveless full-length vest; gown and vest are decorated with silver beaded vines and flowers. Worn by Cheryl Lynn Thompson to the Alpha Kappa Alpha debutante ball in 1965 / no label / on loan from Sonié Joi Ruffin

Two-piece sleeveless debutante gown has a fitted beaded bodice and tulle full-length skirt. Worn by Rebeakah C. J. Ruffin Ammons to the Delta Sigma Theta cotillion in 2004 / label: Sonié / on loan from Sonié Joi Thompson-Ruffin
The *Fairy Princess* has been delighting children in Kansas City since 1935. *Kline’s Department Store* (11th and Main) created her for their newly remodeled “Toyland” as an alternative to Santa Claus. Kline’s closed its doors in 1970. The *Kansas City Museum* revived the princess in the mid-1980s.

Straight white floor-length sleeveless gown with a round neck and empire waist accented with a white satin bow at center front. Under layer is white nylon; top layer is a generous draping of white nylon crepe. C. 1960-1969 / LABEL: NADINE / DONATED BY KLINE'S EMPLOYEE MERTIE NINEMIRE
Simple, elegant lines and unusual colored velvet already make this gown eye-catching. But add the clip-on jewelry and matching belt buckle and you have something even more stunning.

Wine silk chiffon velvet evening dress and jacket. The jacket has yoke; the body of jacket has batwing sleeves and is lined with georgette crepe. The dress skirt has smocked flounce, front and back; blouse has panels attached at shoulder which make a sash for the dress that wraps around.

C. 1930 / NO LABEL