

A 1920s EMBROIDERED EVENING COAT

By Dr. Ingrid Mida

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The Fashion Research Collection has been a flurry of activity in the last seven months after the acceptance of two major donations of almost 700 artifacts that have broadened the scope of the collection. I have been posting images on Twitter along the way as I have been the cataloguing and reboxing the items into archival storage. Two recent articles include more information about these donations, including the [Ryersonian](#) and Ryerson Today.

One of my many favourites (it is hard to single out only one) includes this exquisite evening coat from the 1920s (FRC2014.07.071) has a label that reads "Holt Renfrew & Co., Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, by Appointment of His Majesty King George V" (who reigned from 1910-1936).

The coat is made of black satin and is richly embroidered with green silk threads and finished with a collar and cuffs in mole. The lining is a muted grey green silk crepe with an inside pocket of Shirred fabric. This coat was included as a line drawing illustration on page 64 in the book *In Style: 100 Years of Canadian Fashion* by Caroline Routh. Sadly this book is no longer in print but there are copies available in the University of Toronto library as well as the [Toronto Public Library](#).

These types of evening coats were known as "clutch coats" because there were no visible means of fastening the coat closed. The narrow silhouette of the coat would have complimented the slim silhouettes of the flapper dresses of the 1920s. The FRC has several evening coats from this period, but this coat is by far the most sumptuous example.

Holt Renfrew is one of Canada's oldest luxury retailers with a history that goes back to 1837. And it remains one of the few luxury retailers that is Canadian owned and operated. For me, this coat is without a doubt one of the most valuable objects in the FRC representing an important part of Canada's fashion history, and as such it is now safely stored in its own archival box, preserving it for research for at least a few more decades to come.



Ryerson Fashion Research Collection
Photo by Ingrid Mida

Holt Renfrew black satin embroidered clutch coat, ca. 1920s. FRC2014.07.071.