



Jack Liebman peau de soie dress, ca. 1950-1960. Ryerson FRC1983.06.003. Donated by Bee Lewis.

Ryerson University
Fashion Research Collection

ASSEMBLING THE PUZZLE OF JACK LIEBMAN'S CAREER

By **Hannah Dobbie**
BDes Fashion Student

April 10, 2017

For those knowledgeable on Canada's sartorial history, the name **Jack Leibman** may be familiar, invoking images of cocktail dresses from the 1940's. Leibman contributed to the history of Canadian fashion and left a lasting mark on our culture. In spite of all this, his name is shrouded in mystery. We know very little about the particulars of Leibman's life and work, a fact which presents us with the challenge of learning as much as we can about this enigmatic figure.

The Ryerson Fashion Research Collection has four Jack Liebman garments, one of which I examined in an earlier post (note 1). These fascinating pieces have no accompanying ephemera or histories, and so naturally invite interest into the questions of who Jack Liebman was and what contexts these garments fit into. **This blog post will attempt to assemble information about this Montreal-based fashion line using archival research.**

Much of fashion history is pre-internet and in order to discover information about mysterious figures or little-known topics, such as the life of Jack Liebman, it is important to expand the scope of investigation. It took extensive research and persistence to find these references. After the preliminary searches in general search engines and databases proved insufficient, it was necessary to explore new sources. By searching in newspaper databases, government records, and national archives, many more relevant results appeared.

I began my research with Ryerson University Library and Archives' Search Everything feature. My searches included phrases like "Jack Liebman", "Jack Liebman Dresses", and "Jack Liebman Fashion". By using key words, I hoped to find relevant material, but this was not enough to narrow the results. I continued to sift through the information I came across through RULA's Search Everything, and other search engines like Google, but the results were not answering the questions I had about Liebman.

In order to dig deeper, I met with Naomi Eichenlaub, the Fashion librarian at Ryerson University. She had searched for additional information and offered many research tips. **She suggested searching in more focused databases such as the RULA's Fashion subject guide, RULA's Newspapers database, and Government of Canada archives.** When exploring the Fashion database, I was able to access Vogue Archives, WGSN, and Berg Fashion Library. Once I broadened my search terms in more narrow databases, I was able to find results pertinent to my research. Eichenlaub also offered **helpful tips like using quotation marks around key words you'd like to find together (ie. "Jack Liebman")**. She made it clear that it is important to remain determined and keep an open mind when looking for information on under-documented topics.

Let us now examine the first piece of the Jack Liebman puzzle. We know from various sources (see notes 2-6) that **Liebman was the owner of Jack Liebman Dresses Canada Ltd. which was located at 423 Mayor Street, Place 3008, Montreal (note 2), but the exact nature of the business is unclear.** The Globe & Mail described Liebman as a designer (note 3), while *The Montreal Gazette* described him an importer on one occasion (note 4) and a manufacturer on another (note 5). His label was called "Fashion Preferred Styled by Jack Liebman" (note 6).



***The Globe & Mail* published articles related to Jack Liebman three times, the first of which was in 1946.** In the article "Grecian Influence Sends Skirts Down 3 Inches", the author suggests that the fashions for fall were to be "longer, simpler, better" - a claim that Jack Liebman supported. He is described as a Montreal designer who was "showing buyers across Canada a collection of fall clothes that are truly in the best couturier tradition" (note 7). Ten years later, Liebman was mentioned again. **A 1956 article "Fall Silhouette Is Called Released Sheath" describes fall trends.** The accompanying image shows two women in Canadian-made garments. The figure on the right wears a slim fitting wool dress with a bloused back by Jack Liebman. The article presents opinions about fashion trends in Montreal. **The slender line was the most common silhouette, knit fabrics were growing in popularity, crepe was making a resurgence, and the ensemble (or jacket dress) was a well-liked garment type** (note 8). Finally, in September of 1958, a piece called, "After-Five Fashions Are at Sixes and Sevens" was written to showcase the major trends for fall. A black broadcloth sheath dress by Liebman was featured as a leading silhouette of the season (note 9).

Jack Liebman printed silk dress, ca. 1947-1950.
Ryerson FRC1991.04.001.
Donated by Bee Lewis.

During February of Canada's Centennial Year, 1967, the Ottawa Journal released an article called, "High Style, High Color in Centennial Collection". It describes a number of garments that were shown in Montreal. It was a glimpse into what fashion was like during this moment in Canadian history. **A Jack Liebman dress is included under the heading "Oriental Influence". It is described as a "daytime dress in white ribbed fabric... styled with uncluttered lines and a small mandarin collar"** (note 10).

With several Liebman garments appearing in major publications as examples of the 1956, 1958, and 1967 trends, it can be inferred that Jack was considered a prominent leader in the Montreal fashion scene throughout this time. But the question remains, what clientele were these garments aimed at? One strategy of gathering information, recommended in step 17 of *The Dress Detective's* Reflection Checklist, is to identify whether there are similar garments or related ephemera available for sale on Ebay and/or auction sites. This step revealed two billheads from the brand that were available for purchase on eBay (note 11). At the time of my search, February 21, 2017, these receipts were being sold for \$3.00 and \$6.00 dollars by seller stillman_82 of Stillman Collectibles. **These bills of sale indicated that Liebman's garments were sold at a mid-level price point. One billhead from 1945 lists two garments that were sold; one for \$11.75 and the other for \$13.75. The second billhead from 1946 indicates that one dress was sold for \$13.75.**

The statement that Leibman was a prominent leader on the Montreal fashion scene is reinforced by the 1989 *Montreal Gazette*. The newspaper published an article called, "Show time!; Fall and spring trends land on runways". It discusses a trade show that presented fall/winter designs to a consumer audience and spring trends to an audience of retailers. **The trade show, which was held at the Four Seasons Hotel, featured Jack Liebman, who was described as a legendary name. It says that Liebman showed designs from brands Tricoville, Parigi, St. Jacques, Bellino and Jacqmar.** The article states that Charles Widmer, managing director of Jack Liebman Dresses Canada Ltd., told the audience that the company was purchased by a European trading company called UTC (UTAC in the U.S. and Canada). The article goes on to say that, "from the 1940s to the '60s, Liebman was a style leader and manufacturer". It also states that at the time this article was published (1989), the company was importing collections designed in Europe that were mostly produced in the Orient (note 12).

Interestingly, it seems that Liebman had an international reach and a celebrity clientele. In June of 2004, Christie's, the historic auction house, was selling four garments owned by Patsy Cline (note 13). One of these was a Jack Liebman dress with the label "Original Fashion Preferred Styled by Jack Liebman Montreal-Canada". It is a beige silk chiffon ankle-length dress with a rhinestone adorned bodice. The description of the collection states that many of the dresses were worn by Cline while performing in Las Vegas in 1962. This suggests that the purchase of Liebman's garments extended beyond the realm of the middle class, affecting an even greater influence on fashion than at first imagined.



With the success of his business, it appears that Liebman became not only a business leader but a philanthropist and community leader as well. In 1942 Jack Liebman's company donated funds to Montreal's Jewish General Hospital and was recognized for his contribution in their Ninth Annual Report (note 14). *The Canadian Jewish Review* from Toronto recorded the marriage of Louis Liebman and Ruth Betty Wine in December of 1950. The publication describes the wedding in detail. It lists Mr. and Mrs. Jack Liebman of Montreal as out of town guests (note 15). These findings suggest that Jack Liebman was an active member of the Jewish community in both Montreal and Toronto.

Throughout his career, Liebman must have collaborated with various individuals and/or companies. I found an example of this in the Furriers Joint Council of New York's publication "50 Years of Progress 1912-1962". Liebman's name is listed with eleven others under the heading "Golden Anniversary Greetings from the workers of Clay Furs, Incorporated, 224 West 30th Street". This suggests that Liebman worked with a furrier in New York in the early 1960s (note 16).

Jack Liebman crepe
cocktail dress, ca. 1945.
Ryerson FRC2014.07.024.

The final piece of our puzzle is a description of the scope of Leibman's garments. **The Canadian International Property Office lists Jack Liebman Dresses Canada Ltd. as having filed for the trademarks of four brands; Fashion Life, Saint Jacques & Design, Puccini, and Lambsuede.** *Fashion Life* was filed for in 1975 and sold "Ladies' dresses, blouses, skirts, pants, coats" (note 17). *St Jacques & Design* was filed for in 1980 and was listed under "Ladies; coats, dresses, pant suits, shirts, skirts, blouses, slacks, lounge wear" (note 18). Jack Liebman Dresses Canada Ltd. is listed as the "Registrant" and Pollack, Kravitz & Teitelbaum are listed as the "Representative for Service" for both brands. *Puccini* was filed for in December of 1983 under the description, "Ladies' dresses, suits, skirts, slacks, blouses, and sweaters" (note 19). *Lambsuede* was filed for in February of 1983 and was described as, "Knitted imitation suede fabrics in the piece constructed from 100 percent synthetic polyester" (note 20). For both these brands, Jack Liebman Dresses Canada Ltd. is listed as the "Registrant" and Seymour Machlovitch is listed as the "Representative for Service".

In conclusion, it is apparent that to compile a chronological timeline of Liebman's life and work would be extremely difficult. However, each of these findings act as pieces in the puzzle that is Jack Liebman. Alone, they may seem insignificant, but once put together, they begin to take shape. **Many of the pieces of Jack Liebman's story remain elusive, but the evidence has helped to create a picture of his influence on Canadian fashion.**

NOTES

Note 1: To read a previous post about a Jack Liebman cocktail dress, visit, https://ryerson.ca/fashionresearchcollection/research_creative/

Note 2: Address taken from an ad in the newspaper *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* on September 16, 1949.

Note 3: Cay Moore, "Grecian Influence Sends Skirts Down 3 Inches," *The Globe and Mail*, July 19, 1946. Accessed February 22, 2017.

Note 4: "Jack Liebman Dresses bought: [Final Edition]," *The Gazette*, August 9, 1989. Accessed February 22, 2017.

Note 5: Iona Monahan, "Show time!; Fall and spring trends land on runways: [Final Edition], *The Gazette*, September 5, 1989. Accessed February 24, 2017.

Note 6: "Artefacts Canada - Humanities," *Canadian Heritage Information Network*, 2013. Accessed February 22, 2017.

Note 7: See note 2.

Note 8: Olive Dickason, "Fall Silhouette Is Called Released Sheath," *The Globe and Mail*, June 5, 1956. Accessed February 23, 2017.

Note 9: "After-Five Fashions Are at Sixes and Sevens," *The Globe and Mail*, September 20, 1958. Accessed February 22, 2017.

Note 10: Lorraine Hunter, "High Style, High Colour in Centennial Collection," *The Ottawa Journal*, February 11, 1967. Accessed February 25, 2017.

Note 11: To view the billheads, visit, "1946 Billhead Montreal QC Canada Jack Liebman Dress Limited *Graphic*," eBay. Accessed February 21, 2017, <http://www.cafr.ebay.ca/itm/1946-Billhead-Montreal-QC-Canada-Jack-Liebman-Dress-Limited-No-Graphic-/272440754375?hash=item3f6ebc00c7:g:R~UAAOSwal5YH8RR>.

Note 12: See note 5.

Note 13: To view the Liebman dress and the three accompanying ones being sold, visit, "Patsy Cline Dresses - Entertainment Memorabilia," *Christie's*, June 24, 2004. Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/patsy-cline-dresses-4302144-details.aspx>.

Note 14: "A Tribute Everlasting," *Jewish General Hospital*, December 31, 1942. Accessed February 25, 2017.

Note 15: "Marriages - Liebman-Wine," *Canadian Jewish Review*, December 1, 1950. p.113. Accessed February 24, 2017.

Note 16: "Fifty Years of Progress 1912/1962," *Furriers Joint Council of New York*, December 8, 1962. Accessed February 22, 2017.

Note 17: To view more about the Fashion Life trademark, visit, "Canadian trademark data," *Canadian Intellectual Property Office*, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2017.

Note 18: To view more about the Saint Jacques & Design trademark, visit, "Canadian trade-mark data," *Canadian Intellectual Property Office*, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2017.

Note 19: To view more about the Puccini trademark, visit, "Canadian trademark data," *Canadian Intellectual Property Office*, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2017.

Note 20: To view more about the Lambsuede trademark, visit, "Canadian trade-mark data," *Canadian Intellectual Property Office*, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2017.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"After-Five Fashions Are at Sixes and Sevens," *The Globe and Mail*, September 20, 1958. Accessed February 22, 2017.

"Artefacts Canada - Humanities," *Canadian Heritage Information Network*, 2013. Accessed February 22, 2017.

"A Tribute Everlasting," *Jewish General Hospital*, December 31, 1942. Accessed February 25, 2017.

Dickason, Olive, "Fall Silhouette Is Called Released Sheath," *The Globe and Mail*, June 5, 1956. Accessed February 23, 2017.

"Fifty Years of Progress 1912/1962," *Furriers Joint Council of New York*, December 8, 1962. Accessed February 22, 2017.

Hunter, Lorraine, "High Style, High Colour in Centennial Collection," *The Ottawa Journal*, February 11, 1967. Accessed February 25, 2017.

"Jack Liebman Dresses bought: [Final Edition]," *The Gazette*, August 9, 1989. Accessed February 22, 2017.

"Marriages - Liebman-Wine," *Canadian Jewish Review*, December 1, 1950. Accessed February 24, 2017.

Mida, Ingrid and Alexandra Kim. *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object Based Research*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Monahan, Iona, "Show time!; Fall and spring trends land on runways: [Final Edition]," *The Gazette*, September 5, 1989. Accessed February 24, 2017.

Moore, Cay, "Grecian Influence Sends Skirts Down 3 Inches," *The Globe and Mail*, July 19, 1946. Accessed February 22, 2017.