

Newspaper clippings of Mollie Hamilton from June 6, 1931 and February 1, 1930 (left to right).
Publication unknown.



MARY HAMILTON'S WEDDING DRESS

By Hannah Dobbie
BDes Fashion Student

October 24, 2016

“Wedding dresses are often only worn once and then carefully stored away as a material memory of a significant event” (note 1).

This is true of a fashionable 1930s satin wedding dress and headpiece that was worn by Mary Hamilton (1908-2000) at her Toronto wedding in 1936. Mary's dress and headpiece as well as related ephemera were recently donated to the Ryerson Fashion Research Collection by her daughter, Mary Walton-Ball.



Violet H. Jones

A photo of Mollie on her wedding day; June 27, 1936.

Mary Hamilton, known as Mollie, was born into a prosperous Toronto family in 1908. The Hamiltons were in the steel business and made many contributions to the city's industry. Mollie studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music and sang in Healey Willan's choir, as well as the Yorkminster Park Baptist Church choir. In 1935, Mollie was offered a position with a stage company and performed live before the main show at the Imperial Theatre. In addition to these endeavours, she sang on a radio show called the "Blue Coal Hour".

On June 27, 1936, Mollie married Dr. Horace Gifford (Lou) Walton-Ball. The reception was held in the garden of their home at three in the afternoon (note 2). The couple went on to have two children; David in 1939 and Mary in 1945. Mollie contributed to her community as a volunteer at the Toronto Western Hospital gift shop (note 3). Throughout her life, Mollie travelled across Europe and North America. Mollie, in her 92nd year, passed away on July 4, 2000. She was described as "feisty with a quick sense of humour" and "elegant, articulate, and graceful" (note 4).

The words elegant and graceful describe 1930s fashion just as fittingly as they do Mollie's personality and demeanor. According to the book *The Wedding Dress: 300 Years of Bridal Fashion*, dress styles from this period were, "eclectic, but the strongest trends were slim-fitting draped styles inspired by classic or medieval dress" (note 5). Mollie Hamilton's wedding dress fulfills all of this criteria, making it an embodiment of a fashionable 1930s bridal gown.

The dress is made of a creamy white bias cut satin (FRC2015.09.001). It has no labels, so there is no indication of where or by whom it was made. Mollie's daughter Mary suggested that the garment was likely custom-made by a dressmaker in Toronto (note 6). The bodice features gathers on either side of the point created by the empire waist seam. Those gathers are repeated along the neckline, which is topped by a border of silk rosettes with beaded centers. The sleeves of the dress are adorned with beaded smocking on the shoulders and along the cuffs at the wrists. There are snaps at the base of the wrist to allow the hand of the wearer to pass through this snug closure.

The gown's skirt begins at the empire waist and continues in a gradual flare. The skirt's already long length is extended by a train of 41 inches (104 cm). The train begins at either side of centre front, growing in size as it reaches the centre back of the garment. The flare created is dramatic; to ensure that the fabric fell with the desired effect when worn, small weights were sewn into each side of the hem.

This dress was machine-stitched, with the beadwork being sewn by hand. The dress is unlined and does not have any pockets. The selvedge of the fabric can be seen in one of the seams between the train and the skirt. There is no form of reinforcement and there has not been any finishing process on the fabric. Four self-covered buttons arranged vertically down centre back with a hook and eye closure above them serve as this garment's only form of closure.

Walton-Ball 1930s Wedding Dress



Sketch of the wedding dress sleeve, rosette, and bodice by Hannah Dobbie, 2016.

The dress is in good condition. It shows little to no fading and only very slight signs of wear. Some beads have fallen off and there are some small stains on the under side of the train where it would have dragged on the ground. There do not seem to be any signs of alteration or intentional removal of embellishments.

When worn, this fabric would feel smooth, cool, light, and luxurious on the skin. A faint swooshing of the satin would be heard when parts of the dress rubbed against each other. The garment's construction is relatively simple, but the intricate details and beadwork create an impression of understated beauty.

According to a study of vintage evening wear by DeLong and Petersen, dresses in the 1930s were characterized "by slim-fitting elegant shapes and vertical lines that created the image of a womanly curvaceous body, with surfaces defined by fluid fabrics and enhanced by fitted shapes" (note 7). Mrs. Walton-Ball's wedding dress was a very of-the-moment, stylish piece that, 80 years later, still looks fashionable. This garment evokes a sense of glamour, elegance, and femininity – characteristics that Mollie Walton-Ball herself exemplified.

NOTES

Note 1: Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim. 2015. "Case Study of a Lanvin Wedding Gown" in *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-based Research in Fashion*. London: Bloomsbury, 160.

Note 2: Handwritten letter written by Mollie Walton-Ball in April, 1968.

Note 3: Funeral program for Mollie Hamilton dated August 8, 2000.

Note 4: Ibid.

Note 5: Edwina Ehrman, *The Wedding Dress* (London: V & A Publishing, 2011), 117.

Note 6: Email correspondence with Mary Walton-Ball dated October 6, 2016.

Note 7: M. DeLong and K. Petersen, "Analysis and Characterization of 1930s Evening Dresses in A University Museum Collection," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 22, no. 3 (2005): 99-112.

REFERENCES

Ehrman, Edwina. *The Wedding Dress*. London: V & A Publishing, 2011.

DeLong, M. R. and K. Petersen. "Analysis and Characterization of 1930s Evening Dresses in A University Museum Collection." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 22, no. 3 (2004): 99-112.

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