

1920s Blue Flapper Dress Object Description

This beautiful 1920s periwinkle blue flapper dress once owned by an employee of Julius Andrae and Sons Electric Company represents the change in the position of women in society at the beginning of the twentieth century. The dress incorporates an idea of rebellion and sophistication in its design and fashion style that parallels the changes to the social position of women in the 1920s.

The dress is periwinkle blue with two different layers. The outer layer is a sheer fabric with long sleeves and snaps at the cuff. The dress includes a dropped waist to highlight a long figure. There are vertical pleats at the shoulders and other pleating at the waist. The neckline has eyelet designs and a keyhole with a tie that allows for a drawstring. There is a belt at the dropped waist that is made of the same periwinkle blue material and has a copper flower clip to close the belt. There is also a row of ruffles beneath the belt. The flowers at the belt and the cuffs are painted yellow in the center with petals of various shades of blue. The inner layer of the dress is made of a slightly shiny and sheer fabric that is attached to the outer layer near the bottom of the waist. . The dress is supported by thick straps.

This dress was worn in the 1920s by a woman who worked at the Julius Andrae and Sons. The company was founded in 1860 and is now Terminal-Andrae Inc. The Company has deep ties to Wisconsin with the company first introducing incandescent light to Milwaukee and was one of the nation's biggest manufacturers of telephones. The company originated on Water Street and is still based in Milwaukee currently located on Clybourn Street. The dress would have likely been bought with wages from Julius Andrae and Sons Electric.¹

This dress signifies the changing times of the 1920s that goes deeper than small outer clothing changes. Instead the dress exemplifies a change to the individual people in all aspects of their life not just what they wear. Fashion styles can be seen to reflect the circumstances of the society around them. This dress incorporates an idea of change from stiffer conservative 1910s fashion with restrictive clothing. The radical 1920s flapper attire was a complete change to looser fitting clothing. The dress represents an emphasis on breaking away from the traditional ideas as to women's position in society by raising the skirt and incorporating sheer fabrics while still maintaining conservative elements with the neckline and shape of the dress. This dress also illustrates the greater theme of increasing involvement of women in the workforce. The original owner of this dress worked for the Julius Andrae and Sons in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that parallels the significant increase in working women in the 1920s not only across America but also in Wisconsin. This dress is an artifact CMY003770 in the collections of the Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear in Milwaukee.

¹ <http://www.terminalandrae.com/WiElectricalContractor/CompanyHistory>

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Primary: Although women's suffrage was granted in 1919, the position of women in society was still changing throughout the 1920s. Women also were increasingly involved in the workforce throughout the 1920s.² Women consisted of 21% of all gainfully occupied persons concentrated mainly in domestic and personal service, clerical occupations, and factory work.³ The women all across America increasingly were gainfully employed with an increase of over 2,000,000 female workers in any occupation from the United States 1920 to the 1930 Census.⁴

Secondary: Flapper culture emerged throughout the 1920s. The increased freedoms experienced during World War I and the new rights granted by the 19th amendment exposed women to new positions in society.⁵ There was an increasing sense of female independence and a more modern carefree spirit that was emphasized in the attire of the 1920s.⁶ These women were able to express their freedom and individuality through their clothing with the flapper style dresses.



² <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS561>

³ https://www.dol.gov/wb/info_about_wb/interwb.htm

⁴ https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/women/b0104_dolwb_1933.pdf

⁵ https://www.dol.gov/wb/info_about_wb/interwb.htm

⁶ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-history-of-the-flapper-part-1-a-call-for-freedom-11957978/>