Women of the Edward J. Gay Family as Textile and Dress Consumers in Louisiana, 1849-1899

Lindsay Danielle Reaves
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, ldreaves17@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations

Part of the American Material Culture Commons, and the Other History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/4885

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
WOMEN OF THE EDWARD J. GAY FAMILY
AS TEXTILE AND DRESS CONSUMERS IN LOUISIANA,
1849–1899

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

by
Lindsay Danielle Reaves
B.A., University of Alabama, 2008
M.S., University of Alabama, 2013
May 2019
This dissertation is dedicated to my Louisiana State University dissertation committee chair and major professor, Dr. Jenna T. Kuttruff, who was “down in the historical trenches” with me as I wrote this dissertation as her final graduate student before her retirement, and to Mrs. Pamela P. Vinci, who provided me with invaluable experience working alongside her at LSU’s Textile and Clothing Museum. These women were a much needed emotional and intellectual support system for me during my doctoral studies.

This work is also dedicated to my father, Terry Reaves, who has always encouraged me to pursue my academic dreams and to become the first in my family to achieve the highest academic degree possible. Thank you, Dad, for being my hero in life and always cheering me on no matter how long it has taken me to finally complete my educational journey.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people who dedicated their time and help towards supporting me during the completion of my doctoral studies and dissertation: my committee members (Drs. Jenna Kuttruff, Casey Stannard, Ioan Negulescu, Nancy Isenberg, and Craig Colten), the staff at LSU’s Hill Memorial Library (Tara Laver, Germain Bienvenu, and Mark Martin), and the staff at the Louisiana State Archives in Baton Rouge. Most importantly, I would like to express gratitude to my parents and the rest of my family for always supporting me in my academic endeavors over the years, even when it appeared I would always be a “career student” or the stress of it all was almost too much for me to bear.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**..................................................................................................................iv  
**LIST OF TABLES**.............................................................................................................................vii  
**LIST OF FIGURES**............................................................................................................................viii  
**ABSTRACT**.........................................................................................................................................x  
**INTRODUCTION**.................................................................................................................................1  
  - Significance of the Study....................................................................................................................7  
  - Research Objective............................................................................................................................9  
  - Assumptions.......................................................................................................................................10  
  - Limitations..........................................................................................................................................11  
  - Delimitations.......................................................................................................................................11  
  - Operational Definitions......................................................................................................................12  
**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**................................................................................................................14  
  - Defining Consumer Culture..............................................................................................................14  
  - Theoretical Framework......................................................................................................................15  
  - Consumer Culture Research on Textiles and Dress Items...............................................................16  
  - Women’s Role in Consumer Culture of Apparel and Textiles.........................................................19  
  - The Edward James Gay Family of 19th-Century Louisiana............................................................36  
**GAY FAMILY HISTORY**....................................................................................................................39  
  - Edward James Gay.............................................................................................................................39  
  - Lavinia Hynes.....................................................................................................................................45  
  - Andrew Hynes Gay.............................................................................................................................47  
  - Mary Augusta Dickinson....................................................................................................................48  
  - Lodoiska Clement...............................................................................................................................49  
  - Sophie Mitchell Gay............................................................................................................................49  
  - Philip Augustus Crow..........................................................................................................................50  
  - Mary Susan “Sue” Gay.......................................................................................................................50  
  - Major Lawrence Lewis Butler...........................................................................................................51  
  - Edward James Gay, Jr.......................................................................................................................52  
  - John Henderson “Johnny” Gay, Jr.....................................................................................................53  
  - Rebecca Parker Conner.......................................................................................................................54  
  - Anna Margaret “Nannie” Gay...........................................................................................................55  
  - Andrew Price......................................................................................................................................56  
**METHODS AND PROCEDURES**.......................................................................................................57  
  - Procedure..........................................................................................................................................59  
  - Analysis.............................................................................................................................................61
LIST OF TABLES

5.1. Gay Family Women’s Acquired Dress Fabrics, Notions, Tools, and Equipment…………..69
5.2. Louisiana Dry Goods Merchants Visited by the Gay Family………………………………..72
5.3. Dressmakers and Seamstresses Employed by the Gay Family Women……………………72
LIST OF FIGURES

2.1. Ink drawing of Leon Godchaux’s Clothing Company..................................................25
2.2. Maison Blanche in 1898..............................................................................................26
2.3. Hand-colored fashion plate “Godey’s Fashions for July 1873”.....................................28
2.4. Elias Howe’s 1846 model lockstitch sewing machine..................................................31
3.1. Edward James Gay.....................................................................................................39
3.2. Segment of Norman’s Chart of the Lower Mississippi River with inset showing Edward Gay’s land holdings.................................................................40
3.3. St. Louis Plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana............................................................41
3.4. The first Edward J. Gay steamboat.............................................................................43
3.5. Photograph of the second Edward J. Gay steamboat..................................................43
3.6. Lavinia Hynes.............................................................................................................45
3.7. Andrew Hynes Gay...................................................................................................47
3.8. Sophie Mitchell Gay.................................................................................................49
3.9. Mary Susan “Sue” Gay and Major Lawrence Lewis Butler.........................................51
3.10. Edward James Gay, Jr..............................................................................................52
3.11. John Henderson “Johnny” Gay, Jr............................................................................53
3.12. Anna Margaret “Nannie” Gay and Andrew Price.....................................................55
5.1. Frequencies of specific mention of decorative household textiles and dress items found in personal documents and records..................................................62
5.2. Frequencies of involvement in consumption process stages......................................64
5.3. Modified consumption process..................................................................................65
5.4. Frequencies of decorative household textiles, dress items, and implements used in dress-item construction...........................................................................68
5.5. Pages from separate 19th-century printed cotton fabric catalogs at the LSU Textile and Costume Museum………………………………………………………………………………..70

6.1. Frequencies of Lavinia Hynes Gay’s consumption by decade…………………………………….76

6.2. Frequencies of Sophie Gay Crow’s consumption by decade……………………………………..81

6.3. Sue Gay’s silk satin wedding boots, 1869…………………………………………………………………..84

6.4. Silk bowtie made by Sue Gay, 1870………………………………………………………………………85

6.5. Frequencies of Sue Gay Butler’s consumption by decade………………………………………..85

6.6. Frequencies of Nannie Gay Price’s consumption by decade…………………………………….87

6.7. Nannie Gay’s green-and-blue silk basque bodice made by Saint Louis dressmaker Miss E. Nolan, ca. 1870s–1880s……………………………………………………………………….90

6.8. Frequencies of Mary Dickinson Gay’s consumption by decade…………………………………….91

6.9. Frequencies of Lodoiska Clement Gay’s consumption by decade………………………………..95

6.10. Frequencies of Rebecca Conner Gay’s consumption by decade…………………………………97
ABSTRACT

Economic, social, and cultural historians have studied and analyzed consumption behaviors throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Decorative household textiles and dress items are two product categories that follow the consumption process. American consumption behaviors during the introduction of mass-produced textiles and dress items throughout the 19th century have not been well documented.

The purpose of this research is to expand the knowledge of Southern planter-class women’s consumer behavior in relation to decorative household textiles and dress items. Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) Consumer Culture Theory and Belk’s (1988) research into possessions and the extended self provide the theoretical framework for this study of two generations of female members of the Edward James Gay family of Louisiana.

A content analysis was performed on data collected from the personal letters, diary entries, purchase receipts, and bequeathal and estate inventory records dated from 1849 to 1899 that were associated with these women. They were chosen as a case study to record and analyze their consumption behaviors and motivations as Louisiana consumers of decorative household textiles and dress items during the latter half of the 19th century before mass-produced items were widely available to the public.

Kunz and Garner’s (2011) clothing consumption process involves a five-stage cycle of acquisition, inventory, use, renovation, and discard that outlines modern-day consumption behaviors. Based on research results, Kunz and Garner’s (2011) consumption process was modified to include “creation” as an additional component in the model. In addition, a reordering of the consumption process places use, renovation, and creation as options at the same stage, depending on the completeness and condition of the product upon acquisition.
Each Gay family woman’s creation and renovation activities varied based on her skill level. Their dress item and household textile purchase intentions were for everyday use and as gifts for others. Dress items’ meanings and memories were only mentioned in letters and diary entries if they were for special events. Despite living in the wartime and post-war South, the women rarely expressed household textile and dress item acquisition problems, which were often solved by relying on their family network.
INTRODUCTION

Social, cultural, economic, and political historians have long conducted research in their separate domains. Until the 1980s, they rarely combined forces to explore and explain the history of consumer societies and their consumption behaviors although ample opportunities have been available (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Brewer & Porter, 1994). In the study of dress, evidence of consumption can be found throughout history. Furthermore, people have increasingly placed value and emotional attachment on material possessions and view them as reflections of their identities (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1991; Kleine & Baker, 2004). Personal dress items are a means by which people can nonverbally express their identities and values (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Further, the self can be expressed through a person’s home and its interior decorations (Cooper, 1974; Sadalla, Vershure, & Burroughs, 1987). Accordingly, this research uses a 19th-century Louisiana family as a case study to examine and analyze its female family members’ participation in the consumption process of personal dress items and decorative household textiles.

In contemporary society, “consumer culture” is a phrase often used to describe a “social arrangement in which the relations between the [lived cultural experience of everyday life] and social resources, between meaningful [valued] ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets” (Arnould, 2011, p. 182). Essentially, consumer is a form of capitalism that considers consumers’ relationships with certain products or services that help them attain or maintain particular lifestyles. From an anthropological perspective, consumer culture can be understood within a cultural matrix involving material goods and their production, exchange, and consumption (Featherstone, 1991). Historians have not been able to come to a general consensus as to the origins of modern-day
consumer culture. One historian may believe that consumer culture began in the early 19th century with the production of textiles during the Industrial Revolution or in late-19th century France with retailers’ and advertisers’ innovative efforts to attract consumers, while another may argue it has an even earlier beginning dating back to the Italian Renaissance or the 1630s’ Tulipomania phenomenon in Holland (McKendrick, Brewer, & Plumb, 1984; Peiss, 1998; Williams, 1991). Regardless of consumer culture’s origins, material objects and written documents representing society’s involvement in consumer culture can be found throughout homes, museums, and archival institutions all over the world.

When researching consumer culture, dress items and decorative household textiles and readily conform to the consumption process (Styles, 1998). As described by Kunz and Garner (2011), the clothing consumption process is a cycle that involves five stages: acquisition, inventory, use, renovation, and discard. Acquisition is the act of a consumer adding items to his/her inventory for personal use. Items can be obtained through purchasing, exchanging, borrowing, or receiving as gifts. Inventory is the entire collection of items that an individual or group owns. Use is the stage in which the item is actually used or worn. The “use life” of an item can vary depending on its purpose and durability. Renovation is the stage in which an item is restored to its original condition or manipulated into a new form in order to extend the use life of the item. The final stage of the consumption process is discard, which is the act of relinquishing possession or ownership of an item either through loss, resale, trade, gifting, or garbage (Kunz & Garner, 2011).

Sometimes, individuals have a difficult time giving up ownership of their possessions because they view them as tangible extensions of themselves. Belk’s (1988) seminal research on possessions and the extended self provides evidence that people often use their possessions to aid
in the formation and maintenance of their identities. A lengthy period of time may pass before the possessions are replaced by acceptable substitutes, especially for those individuals who have difficulty adjusting to a loss of possessions either by unprovoked force or natural disaster. To consumers, possessions hold symbolic meanings and characteristics that represent the interests and values that best align with their personal identities (Belk, 1988; McNeill & Graham, 2014; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Tian & Belk, 2005). As consumers take on new and additional identities, their collections of possessions change to accommodate the new composition of identities. For example, as college students prepare to enter the working world, they add professional attire to their more casual wardrobes in order to fulfill the expected appearance for job interviews and their future careers (Cutts, Hooley, & Yates, 2015).

The symbolic meanings and personal identities attributed to personal possessions are often preserved through family legacies for generations (Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000). Family legacies are traditionally passed down to younger generations through oral histories; published histories of places where ancestors lived or of events in which they participated; and tangible items, such as photographs, letters, and personal possessions (Guelke & Timothy, 2008). *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (n.d.) defines legacy as both “something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past” and “a gift by will especially of money or other personal property” (para. 1). The legacies instilled in family heirlooms allow descendants to reflect on the relationships within their families prior to their births, to appreciate their family history, and to understand that people can hold a place in the world beyond their own lives and accomplishments (Belk, 1988).

Clothing and other dress items are of particular interest to some individuals because of the close, physical relationship they have or once had with the owners. According to Belk
(1988), “the prior possessions of the deceased can be powerful remains of the dead person’s extended self” (p. 144). Severa and Horswill (1989) comment that clothing is the most intimate of possessions because it forms man’s closest environment and acts as an extension of the body and a vital part of nonverbal body language. The close proximity of clothing to the previous wearer’s body can be a bit unsettling to the new owner due to frequent negative connotations of physical contamination involving cleanliness; however, positive contamination can also exist in the form of the previous owner’s desirable traits and values magically transferring to the new owner (Belk, 1988). Additionally, the act of wearing or enshrining the deceased’s dress items can be bittersweet during the grieving process because not only do the items serve as touchstones for the good memories of the deceased, but they are also visual reminders of the mourners’ loss (Attfield, 2000; Hallam & Hockey, 2001). Ash (1996) adds that clothing, in particular, marks “the simultaneously existing presence and absence of a person” (p. 221) because it reminds mourners of the deceased’s absence all the while making them feel as if the deceased’s spiritual presence is nearby. This same sentiment could readily translate to decorative household textiles given that they are used to express a person’s identity and values like many other household furnishings. As Attfield (2000) states, “Because clothes make direct contact with the body, and domestic furnishings define the personal spaces inhabited by the body, the material which forms a large part of the stuff from which they are made – cloth – is proposed as one of the most intimate of thing-types that materialises the connection between the body and the outer world” (p. 124).

While future generations of descendants who appreciate family heritage may cherish inherited clothing and decorative household textiles for quite some time, some historic clothing and decorative household textiles can serve as reminders of particular eras in time (Baudrillard,
1975) or as social markers (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). Familial connections among family members and with associated material objects generally tend to be stronger than that of their nonfamilial counterparts. Apart from familial connections or family property, one must also consider the thousands of private collectors and museums who understand the historical, cultural, artistic, and monetary value that their collection items hold despite a possible lack of personal connections to the items’ previous owners.

American museums were once thought only to be repositories of cultural heritage artifacts for current and future generations; however, they now have the responsibility to be good stewards to the public by collecting; preserving; displaying; interpreting; educating; and fulfilling the role of classroom, playground, sanctuary, community center, and/or laboratory (Schwarzer, 2006). According to the International Council of Museums (2010):

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (Article 3 – Definition of Terms, Section 1)

Prior to 1900, the majority of a museum’s collection was obtained through the combined efforts of scholars and people whose careers allowed them to collect artifacts of interest for the museums (Nason, 1987). A large portion of museum artifacts are received as donations from the public, who feel their donations are of significant social and/or cultural value. In some instances, donors are no longer willing or able to care for or store items properly; yet, they still feel the items hold value and can be of benefit and interest to researchers, the public, and future generations. Nonetheless, museum artifacts do not necessarily lose legacy value for a family upon donation (P. P. Vinci, personal communication, October 28, 2015).

Clothing and related dress items are no exception. Many private, public, and university-based museums are devoted to the collection and care of clothing and textiles or have a
collection of clothing and textile artifacts within their larger collections. Louisiana State University’s (LSU) Textile and Costume Museum (TCM) is an example of a university-based clothing and textiles museum whose mission is “to generate, disseminate, apply, and preserve knowledge, the arts, and artifacts related to textiles and costume for the benefit of the people of the state, the nation, and the global community” (J. T. Kuttruff, personal communication, September 17, 2015). A majority of the TCM’s artifacts are of Louisiana origin or were once owned by Louisiana residents. One historically prominent Louisiana family represented in the TCM’s collection is the Edward James Gay family, of whose artifacts mostly span across the 19th century.

Although not a native Louisianian, Edward James Gay became a successful Louisiana businessman and politician. Upon the death of his father-in-law Colonel Andrew Hynes in 1849, Edward inherited Home Plantation in Plaquemine in Iberville Parish, one of the colonel’s numerous land holdings in Louisiana (Hansen, Richard, & Mitchell, 2013). Once Edward had firmly established control of the plantation’s sugarcane production, his wife and children joined him in 1854 at the plantation, which was renamed “Saint Louis” in honor of Saint Louis, Missouri, where Edward and his family had lived prior to their move (Hansen et al., 2013). Edward’s business acumen helped him to become a successful sugarcane planter and cotton merchant, leading him to establish the commission firm Edward J. Gay and Company in New Orleans and to own many plantation properties across Louisiana and Mississippi (Hansen et al., 2013). His business successes also allowed him to serve as the first president of the Louisiana Sugar Exchange in New Orleans (“Gay, Edward James,” n.d.). By 1885, Edward had entered the political arena and represented the Louisiana Democratic Party in the U.S. House of Representatives. He continued to perform his duties as both a business owner and politician until
his death in 1889 (Hansen et al., 2013). Edward’s economic and political contributions are significant to Louisiana history, but his male heirs—son Andrew Hynes Gay, son-in-law Andrew Price, and grandson Edward James Gay III—maintained the Gay family’s legacy with their roles in U.S. politics and the family plantation businesses.

Edward’s wife Lavinia, as well as his daughters and granddaughters, also contributed to the family legacy with their less public actions. The letters written by the women in the family found in the Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, the Andrew Hynes Gay and Family Papers, and the Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers at LSU’s Hill Memorial Library show the women’s interest in preserving family heritage among their other social interests. The women handed down personal dress items that they had either purchased or created to other members of the family. Evidence of their actions can be found in the family’s successions records and handwritten letters, journals, and possession bequeathals. Although the family members may not have consciously realized it at the time, their documents and records would provide evidence of their participation in consumer culture. In addition, the Gay family legacy has been maintained because the material items from everyday life have been saved by Gay family descendants and are presently archived at LSU’s TCM, Hill Memorial Library, and Rural Life Museum. A set of values assigned to these documentary artifacts by their previous owners has been enhanced and then extended by being accepted into the institutions’ holdings, much like that of museums and their collections (Gurian, 2004).

**Significance of the Study**

Given the debate as to the start of European American consumer culture, historical research has been published on the subject (e.g., Brewer & Porter, 1994; Brooks, 1981; Davis, 1966; Ewen, 2008; Lury, 2011; Peiss, 1998; Sassatelli, 2007; Schlereth, 1982; Slater, 1997).
Peiss (1998) believes modern American consumer culture developed after 1890 as a culmination of innovative production and distribution methods and new styles of merchandising, packaging, display, and advertising spawned by technological advancements during the Industrial Revolution earlier in the century. Her assertion is strengthened by Veblen’s (1899) famous critiques of upper-class women’s conspicuous consumption as more than just a leisurely pursuit but a way of life.

In and of itself, Consumer Culture Theory is concerned with consumption choices and behaviors based on cultural and social influences rather than economic or psychological ones (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Although consumer culture has been analyzed through interviews (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Holt, 2002), ethnographic and netnographic observations (Kozinets, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Slater & Miller, 2007), and case studies (Carter, 1984; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007), limited research has been done through the use of personal historic documents. Much contextual information can be gleaned from primary historic sources such as letters, journals, and diaries, but they are not often used for consumer culture research because they are not found in abundance like that of mass media, judicial, and business records.

Using the personal documents and records belonging to the Edward James Gay family of 19th-century Louisiana as a case study, this research helps fill the void in the study of the history of American consumer culture prior to 1890 and adds to the body of knowledge of Louisiana history. The Gay family is known for its economic and political contributions to the progress of Louisiana, but little is known about the family as everyday consumers in the 19th century. An examination of the historic primary documents belonging to the family gives a clearer picture of the Gay family’s consumption behaviors. Additionally, the family’s artifacts held in the TCM’s
collection were donated by Gay family descendants David D. Plater (a former manager of the Acadia Plantation in Thibodaux, Louisiana, that Edward once owned) and Edward F. Twiss, Jr., with little information regarding the historic provenance of the artifacts having been recorded. Though these artifacts are evidence of the Gay family as consumers of dress items and decorative household textiles, no context relating to their acquisition, creation, or use is known.

**Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to expand the knowledge of Southern planter-class women’s relationships to dress items and decorative household textiles through a historical lens. Previous research has used material artifacts to examine Southern consumer culture in textiles and dress items (e.g., Banning, 2005; Brantley, 1998; Tandberg, 1985; Welker, 1999; Wilson, 1990) while reviews of historical media advertising, public records, paintings, and photographs have also documented this phenomenon (e.g., Aldridge, 2012; Hunt, 1994; LaComb, 1996; Stamper, 1988; Tandberg, 1988, 2005; Tandberg & Durand, 1981; Ulrich, 1985; Wilson, 1990). This type of documentation provides evidence of society’s participation in consumer culture but does not truly help researchers to understand the motivations and values behind consumers’ purchase decisions and behaviors. Using Lavinia; her daughters Sophie, Mary Susan (“Sue”), and Anna Margaret (“Nannie”); and her daughters-in-law Mary, Lodoiska, and Rebecca of the Edward James Gay family of 19th-century Louisiana as a case study, this research uses information found within the Gay family’s personal documents and records to trace the women’s participation in Louisiana’s consumer culture.

As informed by the concepts of consumer culture and the sequential steps outlined in Kunz and Garner’s (2011) clothing consumption process, the following questions help guide the research objective of this study:
1. What types of dress items and decorative household textiles did the Gay family women purchase, create, or receive as gifts?

2. What was the purpose for the purchase or creation of the dress items and decorative household textiles?

3. What memories or meanings did the women assign to their textile and dress-related possessions?

4. How did the women renovate (i.e., repair or transform into new items) the dress items and decorative household textiles?

5. How did the women dispose of the dress items and decorative household textiles (e.g., loss, discard, gift, exchange, or resale)?

**Assumptions**

This research is based on three assumptions. First, because the creation of garments and other needlecraft arts are traditionally associated with women’s work, written evidence of these activities would be more frequently found in personal communications penned by women than by men. Second, since 19th-century American women still did not have complete liberty to control their households’ finances, vendor receipts for merchandise related to dress items and decorative household textiles could have been recorded as being purchased by male heads-of-household or family members. Third, the consumption practices of dress items and decorative household textiles for the Gay family were typical of the Southern planter family, which was unlike Northern families who did not experience the same level of disruption to the economy, consumer culture, and gender dynamics during the American Civil War and Reconstruction.
**Limitations**

One limitation is placed on this research in order to focus more closely on 19th-century Southern planter women’s participation in the clothing consumption process. Only two generations of the Edward James Gay family women who lived in 19th-century Louisiana are used in this research because a large quantity of written documents and records containing information essential to this research is available in the archives of LSU’s Hill Memorial Library and the Iberville Parish Clerk of Court. Although the Gay family did not originate from the South, their participation in the Southern planter life may have led the family to assimilate associated consumption practices into their lifestyle. Furthermore, the inventory step of Kunz and Garner’s (2011) clothing consumption process is not included in this research because the entire inventory belonging to the Gay family women cannot readily be determined.

**Delimitations**

Two delimitations were placed on this research in an effort to study more closely two generations of the Edward James Gay family women’s participation in the clothing consumption process while living in the American South. First, although the Gay family originated from Saint Louis, Missouri, rather than Louisiana, this research focuses exclusively on mid- to late-19th-century written records from 1849 to 1899, a time in which the Gay family had moved to and was most active in Louisiana, both in business and politics. The women’s participation in the clothing consumption process is not representative of middle- and lower-class women nationwide; however, their consumption practices are expected to be similar to women of upper-class, plantation families in Louisiana and other Southeastern states during the same time.

Second, although the Gay family owned hundreds of slaves across many plantations, the acquisition of slave clothing information is not included in this research since the focus of this
research is to examine the Gay family’s personal acquisition, creation, use, renovation, and disposal of dress items and decorative household textiles among the family members. Since plantation families sometimes handed down their unwanted, secondhand dress items to favored, household slaves and such events are examples of the disposal step in the clothing consumption process, instances of these events are noted during data collection.

**Operational Definitions**

For the clarity of understanding in this research, the following terms are used throughout this study and have been defined as follows. Any term definitions without author citations are operational definitions developed for the purpose of this research.

- **Consumer culture:** A system explained by the theory that consumer behaviors, marketplace and home-produced goods, and symbolic meanings are linked together through social and cultural influences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

- **Decorative household textiles:** Textiles sold in yardage or bolts that are eventually manipulated into new products for use in the household (e.g., bed and table linens, window dressings, upholstery coverings, etc.).

- **Dress:** “An assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body” (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p. 1).

- **Dress item:** An article of clothing or a worn or carried accessory used by a consumer (e.g., a dress, a shirt, a pair of trousers, a hat, a walking cane, a necklace, a pair of earrings, etc.) that is motivated by a need or desire for decoration, modesty, protection, or status (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015).
• Heirloom: “A valuable object that is owned by a family for many years and passed from one generation to another” (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Simple Definition of HEIRLOOM section, para. 1).

• Heritage: Historical sites and events, physical artifacts, and intangible attributes that hold special meaning to a group or society (e.g., Poverty Point State Historic Site in Pioneer, Louisiana; the 19th-century Confederate flag of the Confederate States of America; and customs, beliefs, and language recorded in folklore and oral histories).

• Legacy: A lasting memory or history of an individual passed down to descendants or successors that helps to maintain an intimate, personal connection to the individual through tangible or intangible mediums.

• Notions: Small sewing implements (e.g., thread, elastic, boning, twill tape, buttons, snaps, and other fasteners, etc.) used in the construction of a finished dress item.
Defining Consumer Culture

The terms “material culture” and “consumer culture” are often used interchangeably when describing the study of people’s relationships to material goods. Lury (1996), however, believes there is a clear distinction between the two concepts. She asserts that consumer culture is a specific form of material culture that developed during the latter half of the 20th century in European American societies. Instead of being concerned with the everyday use of physical objects and the symbolic and moral meanings associated with these objects like that of material culture, consumer culture distances itself from the understandings of everyday consumption practices of things and considers “use” in a more general sense (Lury, 1996). Ultimately, Lury (1996) believes consumer culture describes instances in which the use or appropriation of objects are moments of “consumption and production, of undoing and doing, of destruction and construction” (p. 1). An example of Lury’s (1996) concept of consumer culture is shown in the consumption of textiles in the making of apparel items. Initially, the task of making apparel requires the destruction of textiles as they are cut into shaped pieces; however, these cut pieces are ultimately assembled into a new arrangement and sewn together to form new apparel items to be used by future wearers as either purchased merchandise or received gifts.

Although Lury (1996) believes consumer culture to be a type of material culture, other researchers use the term that best suits their research needs/goals. This researcher does not entirely agree with Lury’s (1996) concept of consumer culture because evidence of consumer culture in European American societies can be traced back to earlier time periods than Lury claims. Nonetheless, this study uses the aspect of Lury’s concept that describes consumer culture as occasions in which material objects are consumed in the process of the production of
new objects. This aspect combined with the culturally assigned symbolic meanings associated with created and purchased goods in the anthropological study of material culture (Featherstone, 1991) guides the research in this study. For the purpose of this study, “consumer culture” is used since only historical documents and records are examined in great detail instead of conducting an actual in-depth physical examination of dress items and decorative household textiles.

**Theoretical Framework**

“Consumer culture” is frequently used by the general public to describe “a form of capitalism in which the economy is focused on the selling of consumer goods and the spending of consumer money” with an emphasis on using material goods to obtain and maintain a particular lifestyle and sense of happiness and satisfaction (Thompson, n.d., para. 1). For academicians and researchers, this definition barely scratches the surface of what we know about consumer culture. Arnould and Thompson (2005) have reported at great length the consumer culture studies that have been performed since the 1980s using research published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* and have developed the Consumer Culture Theory as a result from these endeavors.

Like culture itself, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is very complex because it does not explain the actions of just one perspective of culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT describes the dynamic relationships of cultural meanings, material objects, and consumer behavior. Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain that culture is not a homogeneous set of meanings, ways of life, and unifying values collectively shared by members of a society. Instead, culture has heterogeneous meanings because of the overlapping cultural groupings that exist due to capitalism and globalization (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Thus, “consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social
resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets” (Slater, 1997, p. 8). Jameson (1979) believes that culture is the cornerstone of a consumer society and that no society has ever been bombarded with signs and messages like the current one. Ultimately, by exhibiting free personal choice in everyday life, consumers negotiate commercially produced images’, texts’, and material objects’ cultural meanings in order to assimilate them into their lives, environments, and social situations (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). For example, textiles and dress items are used on a daily basis, and how consumers integrate them into their everyday lives varies based on the social and psychological factors that influence their choices.

**Consumer Culture Research on Textiles and Dress Items**

In the recent past, research in textiles and dress items in consumer culture has increased in popularity and has continued to span across many regions, nations, and cultures. For instance, through a historical lens, Shannon (2006) examined how the increase in the availability of materials goods to the middle class in late-19th-century Britain led to the development of the contemporary masculine ideal of “the gentleman” appearance, starting from its origins in the form of the “dandy” as best represented by George Bryan “Beau” Brummell of the Regency era. Using a large sample of inventions, Roche (1997) explored the differences among the various social classes in 17th- and 18th-century France regarding the amount of money that French citizens spent on clothing and the kind of clothes they were wearing at the time. Further across Eurasia, Jirousek (2000) traced the Ottoman Empire transition from “traditional” to “mass-fashion” in clothing from 1600 to 1920 (primarily in urban centers such as Istanbul) as the Ottoman Empire became exposed to new textiles, garments, and technology through conquests of countries and empires and trade with other cultures. Gerth (2003) wrote extensively on the
rebirth of Chinese nationalism in the early 20th century as Chinese concerns about the loss of identity upon opening the country’s borders to imports and exports. In his research, Gerth (2003) elaborated on the confusion that many Chinese experienced over the enforcement of government-regulated dress and hairstyles while some regions of China promoted the incorporation of Western World styles into citizens’ dress and appearance.

Although these types of studies are advantageous to product developers and market researchers, they do little to help historians to fill in the void of the history of American consumer culture in textiles and dress items. For example, more is known about 17th- and 18th-century British American colonists’ textiles and apparel consumption (e.g., Baumgarten, 1986; Baumgarten, 2002; Martin, 1996; Montgomery, 2007; Staples & Shaw, 2013; Ulrich, 2001) than that of French American colonists (e.g., DuPlessis, 2009; DuPlessis, 2015; White, 1997). Research has been conducted on various aspects of 20th-century consumer culture in textiles and dress items [e.g., L-85 regulations during World War II (Mower, 2011), the influence of Hollywood costumes on America fashion (Prichard, 1982), women’s feed sack fashion (Banning, 2005)], with an increasing amount research involving textiles and dress items prior to the 20th century being conducted by academicians, independent researchers, and institutions (e.g., the Smithsonian’s American History Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Colonial Williamsburg).

Historical everyday dress items were often worn until they were threadbare. In most cases, dress items and decorative household textiles that have been preserved in museums and by the hands of individuals have remained in existence because of the special occasion for which they were created or purchased or of the significance of the person to whom they once belonged. Even rarer to find are written documents or records to give provenance to the historical dress
items and decorative household textiles. While most historic dress items and decorative household textiles that provide evidence of American consumer culture are found in museums, an overwhelming number of these artifacts were created or once owned by women. As a result, the history of women’s participation in the American consumer culture of textiles and dress items can be traced much more easily than its male counterpart.

Research in modern-day consumption practices in dress has also been conducted in many countries worldwide, with some studies focusing on countries and cultures experiencing religious and economic developments. Kılıçbay and Binark (2002) have traced how the “fashion for veiling” in Turkey has grown since the 1990s. Once worn by Muslim women as an articulation of the Islamic faith, the veil has become a consumable fashion item that is heavily advertised in Islamic women’s magazines and fashion catalogs distributed by major Islamic clothing companies. Akou (2007), Schulz (2007), and Shreim (2009) have also published studies on 21st-century Muslim dress practices. The economic boost many Asian countries’ economies have experienced due to the acceptance of product manufacturing for global companies has allowed the countries to gain quite a foothold in the consumer market. Countless consumer studies involving Asian nations’ consumption of textiles and dress items can be found (e.g., Delong et al., 2004; Dickson et al., 2004; Jin & Kang, 2011; Kim, Knight, & Pelton, 2009; Mathur, 2010; Prendergast & Wong, 2003; Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer, 2005; Wang & Heitmeyer, 2006). U.S. consumer culture research studies of textiles and dress items in the last few decades has tended to focus more on present-day consumer behavior (e.g., Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009; Kang, & Park-Poaps, 2010; Lennon, Johnson, & Lee, 2011), purchase intentions (e.g., Halepete, Littrell, & Park, 2009; Kim & Arthur, 2003; Kim & Kim, 2004; Knight & Kim, 2007), and branding (e.g., Goldsmith, Flynn, & Clark, 2012; Kim &
Women’s Role in Consumer Culture of Apparel and Textiles

Women have long been associated with the production and consumption of apparel and textiles. Throughout history, men have engaged in the commercial production of textiles and textile goods with women also participating, albeit on the domestic front (Díaz-Andreu, 2005). Once the production of textiles and apparel became industrialized and the acceptance of women entering the public workforce increased, women became even more involved in the production and consumption of apparel and textiles (Bridenthal, Koonz, & Stuard, 1987). The newly found autonomy that women experienced allowed them to become consumers beyond that of fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers and allowed them to earn the notorious title of “Mrs. Consumer” (de Grazia & Furlough, 1996, p. 162). Depending on the circumstances, women’s rising consumption of textiles and dress items could be viewed as fulfilling a common stereotype of women being objectified or as reinforcing their increasing independence and individual identities (Waters & Ellis, 1996). Regardless of women’s role in consumer culture, Brennan (2015) states, “Women drive 70-80% of all consumer purchasing, through a combination of their buying power and influence” (para. 4). With women’s strong association to their households’ consumption of goods, men appear to not have an obvious role in purchasing choices; however, Vickery (2009) directs her readers to review his-and-her household account books—although rare to find—for a family in order to understand that men could also be as highly acquisitive as women.

“Separate spheres” or a method of empowerment. Historically speaking, men and women have frequently been viewed as operating in separate spheres of society with women relegated to the private world of domesticity and family up until the 19th century (Smith, 1973).
The concept of “separate spheres” stems from French historian and political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1840/2009) observations made during his nine-month-long travels in the United States in 1831. In *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville (1840/2009) remarks about young middle-class American women’s status in society, “In no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes and to make them keep pace one with the other, but in two pathways that are always different” (pp. 1154-1155). According to Kerber (1988), “sphere” has been used as a figure of speech that has separated the actions of men and women in American culture since the 19th century and has particularly been associated with descriptions of women. Kerber (1988) further emphasizes that de Tocqueville’s observations of 19th-century American women described them as “liv[ing] in a distinct ‘world,’ engaged in nurturant activities, focused on children, husbands, and family dependents” (p. 10). In addition, their social circles could extend beyond the domestic sphere into the public domain, but they are usually associated with other individuals within their social class, barring a few exceptions (McCurry, 1995).

Aptly described as a “cult of true womanhood” (Welter, 1966), the virtues of purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness to the male sex could easily be located in women’s sphere of the home (Kerber, 1986). In *A Plea for Woman*, Marion Reid (1843/1988) states that men, on the other hand, have been thought of as the stronger sex in a physical, emotional, and intellectual manner so that they are less likely to succumb to the dangers and vices of the outside world. Modern-day women have made strides in gaining gender equality in social, political, and economic endeavors. In many societies throughout the world, however, the idea still persists that women should be confined to the home to maintain their virtue and should only be concerned with their domestic duties that maintain the home environment for their families (Burn, 2010).
Consumption has long been associated with the female identity because of women’s roles in fulfilling domestic duties and to show off their husbands’ wealth (Rutherford, 2010; Veblen, 1899). In order to maintain their households for their families, women have had to purchase, exchange, and use goods based on the knowledge of where to go and product prices and qualities, as well as skills in bargaining (Berg, 2005; Peiss, 1998). Feminists argue that women have been the victims of male capitalists and male family members because they have had to consume purchased goods, such as cosmetics and fashionable apparel items, in order to fulfill the feminine ideals that have been thrust upon them by their male counterparts (de Grazia & Furlough, 1996; Scanlon, 2000; Vickery, 1994). McCurry (1995) remarks about Southern planter women, “Every aspect of ladyhood was displayed on the body: leisure, luxury, wealth, and refinement” (p. 128). Nevertheless, recent feminist historians and cultural theorists have examined how women disrupt stereotypes of femininity by manipulating the idealistic images forced upon them. Using cosmetics and the world of fashion as an example, women are able to express themselves and find autonomy through their bodies although some would argue these material objects reinforce the stereotype that women are more valued for their bodies instead of their minds (Scanlon, 2000). Ulrich (1991) remarks:

Much of the social history of early America has been lost to us precisely because women were expected to use needles rather than pens. Yet if textiles are in one sense an emblem of women’s oppression, they have also been an almost universal medium of female expression. (p. 40)

For instance, although samplers and silk embroideries provide evidence of women’s aesthetic skills and traditional roles, Ulrich (1991) believes that women’s ordinary clothing offers a more muted discourse of their self-expression. In a historical example of the empowerment of women through consumption, Vickery (1994) examined how Elizabeth Shackleton of 18th-century Britain purchased goods not only for herself and others in her household in order to manage and
maintain their lifestyle and social status but also to provide sentimental heirlooms for her descendants and to guarantee her remembrance. Domosh (1996) provides further support of 19th-century women’s empowered fashion decisions because “fashion” is often considered a status indicator specific to an individual and her choices in styles, fabrics, and colors were her own and indicative of her respectable taste level related to her social status. From an early age, slaveholders’ daughters were instructed on the qualities of fabrics and the fine points of dress in order to establish themselves as ladies by observing fashionable conventions that showed a restrained elegance according to their class position without excessive display of extravagance that could suggest loose morals and conduct (Fox-Genovese, 1988).

Department stores. In the 19th century, the development of department stores helped to emphasize women’s role as “Mrs. Consumer” and established women as their targeted consumers (Domosh, 1996). Although historians debate the origins of contemporary consumer culture, Barth (1982) remarks that France, Britain, and the United States were the first to make a foray into establishing department stores, the meccas of materialism and consumption. Urbanization, production process innovations, rising wages for the middle class, and improved modes of transportation during the last half of the 19th century helped to propel the desire for mass-produced consumer goods, which would ultimately lead to a need for venues in which to display and sell larger quantities of goods (Laermans, 1993). Tortora (2015) remarks, “This ample stock of consumer goods was enough to supply not only department stores, but also specialty shops that dealt with one or several items such as footwear or jewelry” (p. 119).

In 1846, Alexander Turney Stewart opened the first floor of his Marble Dry Goods Palace in the Broadway commercial district of New York City (Resseguie, 1965). When the building was finished two years later, it became the first building in America that was officially
designed as a department store (Laermans, 1993). Although department stores continued to open in major cities across the United States afterwards, they quickly became centers of consumption, leisure, and socialization for women in the later 19th century (Laermans, 1993).¹ Some examples of national and regional department stores that initially opened in the 19th century and continued operating well into the 20th century for different socioeconomic classes are:

- Lord and Taylor, Saks and Company, R. H. Macy and Company, B. Altman and Company, Gimbel Brothers Department Store, Bloomingdale Brothers Great East Side Bazaar, and Abraham and Straus (headquartered in New York City);
- Filene’s Sons and Company and Jordan Marsh and Company (headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts);
- John Wanamaker and Company’s Grand Depot and Kaufmann’s Department Store (headquartered in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, respectively);
- F. and R. Lazarus and Company (headquartered in Columbus, Ohio);
- Marshall Field and Company (headquartered in Chicago, Illinois);
- Von Maur (headquartered in Davenport, Iowa);
- Carson Pirie Scott and Company (headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin);
- Scruggs, Vandervoort, and Barney and Stix, Baer, and Fuller (headquartered in Saint Louis, Missouri);
- Woodward and Lothrop (headquartered in Washington, D.C.);
- Belk Brothers (headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina);
- M. Rich Brothers and Company (headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia);

¹ High-end department stores Nordstrom and Von Maur have sought to enhance their shoppers’ experience by providing live music from pianists and Wanamaker’s with its seven-story-tall grand pipe organ (Biswanger, 1999; Ng, 2011; Waltzer, 2013).
Gayfer’s Department Store and Parisian, Inc. (headquartered in Mobile and Birmingham, Alabama, respectively); and

I. Magnin and Company and The Emporium (headquartered in San Francisco, California).

Until the development of department stores in the United States, American women either created goods for their homes or purchased them from local mercantile stores or mail-order catalogs (Laermans, 1993). According to Laermans (1993), mercantile stores and post offices offered some degree of socialization for women, but the primary purpose for women’s visits were to obtain necessities for the home. Once department stores were established with extra amenities such as tea rooms, ladies’ lounges, daycare services, consumer culture changed (Belanger, 2008). “People could now come and go, to look and dream, perchance to buy, and shopping became a new bourgeois leisure activity – a way of pleasantly passing the time, like going to a play or visiting a museum” (Bowlby, 1985, p. 4). Despite this change in the consumption paradigm, early department stores reinforced the traditional image of women as “good housekeepers” because women were able to fulfill their roles as wife, mother, and lady by purchasing goods the department stores perpetually offered at bargain prices, temporary price cuts, and sales promotions (Laermans, 1993). In essence, 19th-century department stores offered women the chance to expand the domestic sphere into a public space by offering safe, socially acceptable places to shop without the protection of a male family member acting as a chaperone (Blakemore, 2017; Rappaport, 2000).

**New Orleans department stores.** As female consumers in Louisiana, the Gay family women studied in this research had the financial means and access to department stores in New Orleans, Louisiana. As a large metropolitan city in the South, New Orleans afforded shoppers its
own department store options in the 19th century. The three major department stores in New Orleans that were established during this period and existed well into the end of the 20th century were Godchaux’s Clothing Store, D. H. Holmes, and Maison Blanche (Morris, 2016). Godchaux’s (not to be confused with Goudchaux’s Department Store of Baton Rouge, Louisiana) (Figure 2.1) was established in 1840 by its namesake Leon Godchaux, a French Jewish immigrant who initially peddled dry goods to plantations around New Orleans (Hammer, 2012; Sternberg, 2009). Opened in 1842 as a dry goods emporium by its founder Daniel Henry Holmes, D. H. Holmes was primarily a ladies’ store that sold fabric, notions, and accessories and employed dressmakers and seamstresses since few ready-made clothes were available at the time in fine department stores (Labord & Magill, 2006). An outgrowth of the earlier dry goods store S. J. Shwartz and Company established by Simon Shwartz², Maison Blanche (Figure 2.2) opened October 30, 1897, on Canal Street just doors away from its largest competitor, D. H. Holmes

Figure 2.1. Ink drawing of Leon Godchaux’s Clothing Company (Daily Picayune, 1895)

² German immigrant banker Isidore Newman is commonly attributed as the founder of Maison Blanche; however, his son-in-law Simon Shwartz was the true founder. Newman was only the funding source for the business venture (Branley, 2011).
Laborde and Magill (2006) remark that the store opened to great fanfare with the media boasting that the store was New Orleans’s first real New York-style department store that included 130 feet of mirror-lined show windows along Canal Street.

Like several other department stores in New Orleans, Godchaux’s, D. H. Holmes, and Maison Blanche expanded and/or relocated to other buildings along Canal Street at various times throughout their histories until their eventual closures. Godchaux’s filed for bankruptcy in 1986 and closed not long afterwards (Vintage Fashion Guild, 2010), but the flagship building still remains to this day as STNDRD Athletic Company. D. H. Holmes closed its doors for a final time in 1989 when it was sold to Dillard’s Department Stores, yet the building still remains as a landmark today as the Hyatt® Centric French Quarter hotel (Laborde & Magill, 2006). Maison Blanche was also ultimately acquired by Dillard’s in 1998 and effectively closed. Like that of D. H. Holmes, Maison Blanche’s flagship store was eventually converted to the present-day Ritz-Carlton Hotel (Branley, 2011).
Fashion magazines. During the 19th century, department stores were not the only means by which women garnered information on feminine fashion. Such information was frequently disseminated throughout the United States via women’s magazines. According to Tortora (1973), fashion magazines were a valuable resource for American women during the evolution of their societal roles in the 19th century. Black-and-white and colored illustrations of garments, written descriptions of fabrics and trims, and small patterns that could be traced and enlarged were featured in these publications (Campbell, 1999). Burman (1999) remarks, “The aggressive marketing of stylish paper patterns and allied magazines of practical advice helped to give [the consumption of fashion] a fashionable gloss” (p. 49). Fashion advertisements became increasingly more visually interesting and glamorous throughout the 19th century, peaking consumer interest in the pleasures of personal ornamentation and the female figure for display and social status enhancement (Loeb, 1994).

Godey’s Lady’s Book, Peterson’s Magazine, and Demorest’s Monthly Magazine are a few examples of the fashion magazines available to women. Established in July 1830 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the most prominent of all 19th-century women’s magazines was Godey’s Lady’s Book, which became the model for many women’s magazines to follow (Mott, 1966). Prior to the Civil War, Godey’s reached its highest circulation with 150,000 subscribers and included hand-colored fashion plates (Figure 2.3) and art engravings within in its pages in order for its readers to better visualize contemporary fashions (Mott, 1966). Godey’s largest competitor was Peterson’s Magazine, which was founded in Philadelphia in January 1842 and directly modeled upon Godey’s (Mott, 1966). Peterson’s Magazine presented information on prevailing fashions and social guidelines to female readers, eventually surpassing Godey’s in subscribers after the Civil War with 165,000 in number (Mott, 1967a; Rabalais, 1986). Founded
in New York in January 1865, Demorest’s carried colored fashion plates and woodcuts, music, serial fiction, poetry, sketches, and recipes (Mott, 1967b). Reaching 50,000 subscribers at its peak, Demorest’s set itself apart from other women’s magazines of the period by including a tissue-paper dress pattern created by the publisher’s wife in each issue as a premium (Mott, 1967b). Although many other women’s magazines proliferated throughout the 19th century, Peterson’s, Godey’s, and Demorest’s were the most prominent and experienced the longest publication runs, each one ceasing publication in April 1898, August 1898, and December 1899, respectively (Mott, 1966, 1967a, 1967b).
**Home sewing culture.** The development of department stores sped up the rate of consumption of mass-manufactured dress items and decorative household textiles beyond that of mail-order catalogs in Western society. Nevertheless, home sewing and domestic production in rural areas of the United States existed well into the later decades of the 19th century since department stores were located in large metropolitan cities and the advent of paper patterns and the sewing machine were a boon to home sewers (Stamper & Condra, 2011). As part of the role of being a good wife and mother, women were expected to have sewing skills in order to help maintain their households (Gordon, 2009). Sewing was considered “a truly feminine employment” that mothers taught their daughters while sitting alongside one another working on a garment or house textile (Fox-Genovese, 1988; Osaki, 1988). According to Osaki (1988), young girls were taught from an early age to sew and were expected to continue to sew on a regular basis as part of their household duties once they had acquired the skill since future potential husbands would take into account their sewing talents, cooking skills, wealth, and social status before entering into a marriage agreement. In the American South, slaveholding women often sewed or at least cut out their slaves’ clothing with the assistance of their female slaves. Accordingly, female slaves on the largest plantations might have been assigned to do the majority of their mistresses’ sewing; however, those same mistresses would often complain about the amount of time expended in laboring away to provide at least two sets of clothing for each slave every year (Fox-Genovese, 1988).

Genteel women were frequently taught the art of decorative needlework, which was not necessarily of any use in helping them to fulfill their duties as wives but was rather a testimony to the social status they held that would allow them to leisurely pursue feminine arts (Beaudry, 2006). Embroidery became increasingly associated with stereotypes of femininity beginning in
the Renaissance as the craft was performed more and more by women working in the home than by male professional embroiderers (Parker, 1984). In the centuries since the Renaissance, embroidery evolved to become an ideology of femininity that was an innate behavior for women, also signifying a leisured, aristocratic lifestyle from the 18th century forward (Beaudry, 2006). According to Parker (1984):

Embroidery was supposed to signify femininity—docility, obedience, love of home, and life without work—it showed the embroiderer to be a deserving, worthy wife and mother. Thus the art played a crucial part in maintaining the class position of the household, displaying the value of a man’s wife and the condition of his economic circumstances. Finally, in the nineteenth century, embroidery and femininity were fused and the connection was deemed to be natural. Women embroidered because they were naturally feminine and were feminine because they naturally embroidered. (p. 11)

Despite the stereotypes of femininity associated with decorative needlework and sewing, women sometimes responded to and used these ideologies to provide support and satisfaction for themselves and to covertly negotiate the constraints of femininity (Parker, 1984). Some upper-class women engaged in creating garments for themselves and their families even though they could afford to hire a seamstress to do the work for them because constructing and mending garments was still cheaper than buying ready-made ones (Falk, 2013). Fox-Genovese (1988) states, “Increasingly, home sewing intermingled with purchases of clothing, but only the most elegant dresses did not require some additional attention, customarily provided by the woman herself or perhaps a seamstress” (p. 124). Furthermore, prior to the development of sewing machines, these activities helped to pass the time of a leisurely life and could be conducted while participating in light conversation or listening to a novel being read because they were not mentally taxing (“Pride and Prejudice,” n.d.). Middle- and lower-class women were expected to have utilitarian skills in spinning, weaving, and sewing in order to provide for their families within their domestic sphere, but decorative needlework was not always beyond their purview
Women of lower social standings often relied on their utilitarian sewing skills and decorative needlework abilities in order to supplement the family income or provide a suitable standard of living for their children if they were widowed or single (Beaudry, 2006). As Vickery (2009) states, “Plain sewing was demanded of female servants, the largest single occupational category for women. The archetypal labouring woman was the seamstress; millinery and mantua making the quintessentially feminine business” (p. 236). Unfortunately, women’s sewing and embroidery skills for pay were often frowned upon since Victorian-era prostitutes sometimes made and mended dress items for their male clients as additional means of income (Cohen, 1999).

**A revolution in sewing: The sewing machine.** The mechanization of sewing first made its appearance in the 1840s with patents for sewing machines (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015); however, most Americans claim that Massachusetts farmer Elias Howe, Jr., is the father of the sewing machine (Forsdyke, n.d.). He completed a prototype in 1845 and received a patent for it the following year (Figure 2.4), but he did not make a single sale despite months of

![Figure 2.4. Elias Howe’s 1846 model lockstitch sewing machine (Bachman, 1918)](image-url)
demonstrations (Forsdyke, n.d.; McDonald, 2012). Howe then traveled to England to perfect and sell his machine. When he returned to America in 1849, Howe discovered that the sewing machine had finally been accepted by consumers and engaged in legal battles with manufacturers in order to protect his patent (Forsdyke, n.d.; McDonald, 2012; “Sewing Machine,” 1998).

Improving upon Howe’s design, Isaac Merritt Singer is known for developing one of the most successful sewing machines and for his aggressive sales tactics, such as setting up showrooms in which attractive young women would demonstrate and teach how to use his machines (Tortora, 2015; Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). Sewing up to 900 stitches per minute, his machines were one of the first domestic appliances to be manufactured on an assembly line using interchangeable parts, which made them easier to produce and affordable to more consumers (“Isaac Singer biography,” n.d.). Eventually, he was able to sell his machines for $10 to domestic households, making them symbols of status and self-reliance for housewives (“Isaac Merritt Singer,” n.d.). By 1860, the Singer Manufacturing Company was the largest sewing machine manufacturer worldwide and continues present day as the Singer Corporation (“Isaac Singer biography,” n.d.).

The Civil War showed how useful the sewing machine could be because of the huge demand for ready-to-wear uniforms, but all sewing machine manufacturers were located in the North. Breakwell’s (2010) research on hundreds of Civil War uniforms in museums suggests that a majority of Confederate uniforms were handsewn by tailors and seamstresses with the exception of those sewn on home machines or imported from England. After the war, the quantity of simple, mass-produced clothing (i.e., men’s shirts, calico dresses, hoop skirts, coats,

---

3 Initially, the $100 cost of a sewing machine discouraged its widespread adoption even though Virginian farmhand James Edward Allen Gibbs invented a slightly less expensive model in the 1850s (Tortora, 2015).
and cloaks) soared because manufacturing time had essentially been cut in half when compared to handsewn versions (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). The time saved in the production process using the sewing machine contributed to its rising popularity. For seamstresses and home sewers, sewing machines significantly reduced the labor involved in reconstructing earlier dress styles into updated fashions. Formerly done by hand, scalloped, vandyked (V-shaped), and ruffled trims and skirt panels’ long, straight seams were much easier to construct once machines were introduced (Tortora, 2015).

**Textiles’ value for women.** Home sewing and decorative needlework skills were not the only valuable assets that American women living prior to and during the 19th century had to offer. In the closing remarks of the introductory chapter of *The Age of Homespun*, Ulrich (2001) states, “[T]extiles, homemade or store-bought, were a form of wealth and the core of female inheritance in a world where fabrics were so precious that rugs covered beds rather than floors, tablecloths were more valuable than tables, and an argument over yarn could lead to arson” (p. 40). Her analysis of an 18th-century New England cupboard provides evidence of how valuable textiles were, both monetarily and emotionally, in colonial North America since they were not easy to obtain and time consuming to create. She argues that the cupboard was more than just a decorative furniture piece; it was also a protective receptacle to store highly valued items related to women’s domestic lives dedicated to maintaining a house and home. A similar comparison could be made with historical and more contemporary dress items and decorative household textiles. These objects are still frequently found in trunks and closets among family members’ personal possessions, as well as museum inventories and private collectors’ caches. Although no written records may accompany these objects, Ulrich (2001) believes that their continued
existence helps to not only memorialize the families but to create their memories in the first place.

The Civil War: The Southern woman, dress items, and textiles. Although American women’s roles were beginning to change prior to the Civil War, the war offered women (especially Southern women) the opportunity to actively assume new roles and more independence over their lives because the men were away at the battlefront (Scott, 1970). Because of men’s absence from the home, a generation of women found themselves forced to be economically self-sufficient (Clinton, 1985). After the war was over, women had more of a voice and power in the public sphere; however, some Southern women advocated for the restoration of traditional values and gender roles in order to sustain social order (Rable, 1989; Whites, 1995). Rural isolation in the South further reinforced these ideals and made them easier to remain in continuance (Rable, 1989).

The Southern planter woman lived a somewhat different life than that of Northern women. Although they looked after the family’s food, clothing, and household like that of their Northern counterparts, Southern planter women were often well educated in order to provide a slightly more balanced partnership in their marriages (Farnham, 1994). Sarah Haynsworth Gayle commented in an August 29, 1827, passage from her journal, “[I]n the first place, never marry a man whose principles, moral and religious, are not secure; secondly, never marry one whom you feel your inferior in intellect, wisdom or penetration” (Wiggins & Truss, 2013, p. 8). In addition, Southern planter women’s added value came in the form of the number of slaves they brought with them into the marriage. While they looked after their slaves’ religious training and the plantation when their husbands were away, they did so under their husbands’ explicit instructions (Edwards, 2000; Walker, 2000). Nevertheless, the Civil War allowed some Southern planter
women to gain the freedom to manage the plantations under their own directives because of their husbands’ prolonged absences. Through the Reconstruction Era, a shift in gender relations and power dynamics within the family continued as a result of the war, and many Southern planter women from the old elite became more invested in the moneymaking activities related to their part of the plantation (i.e., dairy, poultry, and gardening) (Censer, 2003; Walker, 2000).

During the Civil War, the South’s economy was crippled because its citizens were effectively cut off from the food and textiles supplies that had been provided by the North prior to the war. Although some homes and plantations could supply meager amounts of basic foods, riots ensued because women were panicked and overwhelmed with trying to feed their families. Southern planter women’s pride, status, and feminine ideals suffered the worst because they no longer had access to beautiful, sumptuous textiles and dress items to which they had been accustomed (Faust, 1996). Additionally, Faust (1996) states, “The Confederacy’s economic weakness had a direct impact on the availability and style of women’s clothing in the wartime South” (p. 221). Dresses and accessories that once would have been given to favored slaves were hoarded as prized treasures (Simkins & Patton, 1936). Cloth production in the South was nowhere near the level needed to supply the demand. Efforts in home spinning and weaving were rudimentary at best. The cloth that was produced was considered to be “negro-cloth” by most white southerners because it was of the quality that slaves typically wore (Faust, 1996). In an October 3, 1862, passage from her Civil War journal, Kate Stone wrote:

> It is like going back to the days of the Revolution to the see the planters all setting up their looms and the ladies discussing the making of homespun dresses, the best dyes, and “cuts” of thread, though yet awhile I think a homespun dress would be more difficult to get than a silk. Silk of the poorest kind is now $500 [?] a yard and walking shoes $15 a pair and difficult to get at that. Everything has gone up in the same ratio. We expect to suffer for clothes this winter. We hear of a gentleman offering $50 for a pair of boots and then waiting weeks to get them made. Unless we capture some Northern city well
stocked, there will soon be no dry goods in the Confederacy. The ladies are raising a cry for calicoes and silks that echoes from the Potomac to the Gulf. (Anderson, 1995, p. 147)

Refashioning dress items and decorative household textiles into new forms became the largest response to the clothing shortage (Roberts, 2003). Bed linens, window curtains, and other household textiles were made into garments and undergarments. Hats, bonnets, old stockings, and other accessories were made into new items. In addition, every scrap of fabric and trim that could be salvaged from an article of clothing was used to create or to decorate a new garment (Simkins & Patton, 1936). Campbell (1999) states, “Remaking clothes consisted of such tasks as taking seams in or out; picking items apart for cleaning or dyeing; transforming adult garments into children’s; detaching skirts from bodices, turning them upside down or inside out and reattaching them; and other thrifty tactics” (p. 134). Of the shortage in dress items, none was more acutely felt than that of shoes. Women used every scrap of leather they could pull from their worn shoes, furniture, leather saddles, trunks, and buggy tops to have a shoemaker cobble together new shoes with woven fabric tops and leather soles, but those who could not access enough leather had no choice but to wear shoes with wooden soles like those of the negroes or to fashion shoes out of cloth and paper and let their children go barefoot (Faust, 1996; Simkins & Patton, 1936).

The Edward James Gay Family of 19th-Century Louisiana

The Edward James Gay family of 19th-century Louisiana is but one example of a historic family whose records, documents, and possessions can provide evidence of its family members’ participation in the consumer culture of dress items and decorative household textiles. Because of 19th-century American women’s confinement within the domestic sphere, very little public knowledge can be found regarding the women of the Gay family. Marriage notices published in local newspapers show that all of Edward and his wife Lavinia’s daughters married and two had
children: Sophie to Philip Augustus Crow of Nashville, Tennessee (daughter Lavinia and sons Edward, William, and Philip, Jr., born of this marriage); Sue to Major Lawrence Lewis Butler of Bayou Goula, Louisiana (daughters Anna, Frances, Lavinia, and Mary Susan and sons Edward and Lawrence, Jr., born of this marriage); and Nannie to Andrew Price of Franklin, Louisiana (no children born of this marriage). Edward and Lavinia’s son Andrew was the only other second generation to produce any female heirs when he married Mary Augusta Dickinson of Bayou Grosse Tête, Louisiana (daughters Anna, Lavinia, Mary Susan and son Andrew, Jr., born of this marriage) and Lodoiska Clement of Plaquemine (daughter Henrietta and sons Charles and Edward III born of this marriage) after his first wife’s death (Hansen et al., 2013).4 Other published newspaper notices regarding the Gay family women speak of their arrivals and departures by steamboat along the Mississippi River.

Although several of the male members of the 19th-century Gay family of Louisiana are well documented in public records, one cannot assume that the other members of the family were not significant. The number of records and personal documents belonging to the family held in the archives of Louisiana State University’s Hill Memorial Library, the Historic New Orleans Collection, and the Iberville Parish Clerk of Court show that the family members were sociable people who traveled and consumed and produced material goods. A closer look at their participation in consumer culture through dress items and decorative household textiles during the second half of the 19th century helps to fill in the void in knowledge of consumer culture during this time period. Additionally, a study into 19th-century consumer culture could provide

---

4 Edward and Lavinia’s son Edward, Jr., died a bachelor without issue. Their other son John, Jr., relocated to San Diego, California, during his marriage to Rebecca Parker Conner (no children born of this marriage).
evidence that Lury’s (1996) statement about American consumer culture beginning in the latter half of the 20th century is not accurate.
GAY FAMILY HISTORY

Edward James Gay

Edward James Gay (Figure 3.1), the patriarch of the 19th-century Louisiana Gay family, was born to John Henderson Gay and Sophia Mitchell Gay in 1816 in the Virginia town of Liberty (now known as Bedford). As a child, Edward and his family moved to Illinois and finally settled in Saint Louis, Missouri (Reilly, n.d.). Upon graduation from Augusta College in Kentucky in 1834, Edward entered his family’s mercantile business, which eventually led him to work for his future father-in-law, Colonel Andrew Hynes of Nashville, Tennessee (Hansen, Richard, & Mitchell, 2013; United States Congress, 1891). Hynes was a colonel under the command of General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. After Hynes’s death in 1849, Edward (who had married Hynes’s daughter Lavinia in 1840) assumed ownership of the Home Plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana (one of the many plantations that Hynes owned across Louisiana and Tennessee) (Hansen et al., 2013).

Figure 3.1. Edward James Gay (Conrad, 1901)
Although Edward had received no formal business education while at Augusta College, he was very interested in the inner workings of industry, the economy, and politics. Once assuming control of the Home Plantation after his father-in-law’s death, Edward relocated from his home in Saint Louis to the plantation by 1850. By 1856, Edward had purchased adjoining properties (Figure 3.2) owned by Lavinia’s relatives and had built a new colonial-style manor on the plantation for Lavinia and their children to live (Clement, 1952; Hansen et al., 2013). Once the house was finished and the plantation was renamed Saint Louis Plantation (Figure 3.3),

Figure 3.2. Segment of Norman’s Chart of the Lower Mississippi River with inset showing Edward Gay’s land holdings (Persac, Norman, & J. H. Colton & Co., 1858)
Lavinia and four of their six children (Sue; Edward, Jr.; John; and Nannie) moved to the property.\(^5\) Edward and Lavinia’s seventh child, a son nicknamed “Buddy,” was born three years later at the plantation but passed away before he was 16 months old.\(^6\)

The subsequent years were very successful for Edward, which led him to declare officially his residence in Louisiana (Declaration of domicile, 1860). He opened the prosperous Edward J. Gay and Company sugar and cotton commission firm in New Orleans, which purchased crop harvests from planters and resold the crops to manufacturers and was managed by his son Edward, Jr., until Edward, Jr.’s death from yellow fever in 1878 (Hansen et al., 2013). Although Edward was on the side of the South’s secession from the United States leading up to the Civil War, he realized early into the war that the South’s efforts would be for naught and

\(^{5}\) At the time of the Gay family’s relocation to Louisiana, Edward and Lavinia’s oldest children Andrew and Sophie remained in Saint Louis with their relatives in order to continue their private school educations.

\(^{6}\) See Appendix A for a visual family tree of the Gay family.
signed an oath of allegiance to the United States, the president, and the constitution on February 22, 1864, in order to protect his family, his lands, and his mercantile business (Oath of allegiance, 1864; Plater, 2015). To keep up the appearance of being loyal to the Union, Edward developed a working relationship with local Union forces who required the use of his plantation workers and animal teams in building a new fort in Plaquemine (Plater, 2015). He was later officially pardoned by President Andrew Johnson on December 24, 1866 ([Presidential pardon], 1866).

With his plantation and commission business still intact during the Reconstruction Era, Edward purchased several plantations across Louisiana and Mississippi, which were later overseen by his son Andrew and sons-in-law, Major Lawrence Lewis Butler (Sue’s husband) and Andrew Price (Nannie’s husband) (Hansen et al., 2013). By 1868, Edward either owned or was financially involved in:

- St. Louis, Olivia, Keep, Mount Magnolia, Greenfield, Kleinpeter, and Oaks plantations located in Iberville and West Baton Rouge Parishes. He continued to acquire holdings and interests until about 1880, and those plantations included Woodland, Landry-Toffier, Ridgefield, Theresa, Larimore, Greenwood, Pecan, Shady Grove, Acadia, Coulon, Mulberry Grove, Elvinia, Edgefield, Normandy, Dunboyne, and Kuneman Plantations located in Iberville, Pointe Coupee, and Lafourche Parishes. (Hansen et al., 2013, p. 4)

All the while, Edward was able to maintain residences in Plaquemine, New Orleans, and Saint Louis; to open a second branch of his commission firm in Saint Louis; and to manage a horse farm in Belleville, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River from Saint Louis. One of Edward’s only true business failures occurred when he attempted to replace his former slave workers with Chinese-immigrant laborers in 1870, an experiment which lasted less than a year (Garipoglu, 2013).

Edward was such a prominent business man that two sidewheel steamboats (Figures 3.4 and 3.5) that traveled up and down the Mississippi River from Saint Louis to New Orleans were
named in his honor. The first steamboat was built in 1859 and Edward’s younger brother William was happy to report that he had succeeded in having it named after “an acknowledged celebrity” (Gay, W. T., 1797–1938, Gay to E. J. Gay, May 7, 1859; Hansen et al., 2013). Samuel L. Clemens (better known as Mark Twain) was one of its licensed pilots from August 2 to

Figure 3.4. The first Edward J. Gay steamboat (Thomson, n.d.)

Figure 3.5. Photograph of the second Edward J. Gay steamboat (Hopper, 2009)
October 1, 1859; and it was acquired by the Confederacy during the Civil War but burned in 1863 to prevent Union capture on Mississippi’s Yalobusha River (Thomson, n.d.). The second Edward J. Gay steamboat was built in 1878 and burned in 1888 while at port in New Orleans (Clement, 1952).

With the successes of his commission firm and his plantations’ harvests, Edward eventually became the first president of the Louisiana Sugar Exchange in New Orleans (“Gay, Edward James,” n.d.). In due course, Edward’s friends and business acquaintances convinced him to represent the Democratic Party in a bid for the Louisiana seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, which he won in 1884 and served from 1885 until his death in 1889. According to newspaper articles found in New York’s Evening Post, Philadelphia’s Inquirer, and The Daily Hot Blast of Anniston, Alabama, published soon after his death, Edward died intestate with an estimated estate worth up to $10 million [approximately $273.1 million based upon an average yearly inflation rate of 2.58% by 2019 (Official Data Foundation, 2019)]. Edward would not be the only one in his family to serve in the U.S. Congress. Edward’s son-in-law Andrew Price succeeded him in the House of Representatives and served in that position until 1897 (“Price, Andrew,” 1914). In addition, Edward’s grandson through his son Andrew, Edward James Gay III, represented Louisiana in the House of Representatives (1904 to 1918) and the Senate (1918 to 1921) (Pino, Tarbell, Wiles, & Mitchell, 2016).

---

7 Although American inheritance laws in the post-Revolutionary Period allowed male and female children to receive equal shares in property and widows to receive cash sums equivalent to their husbands’ land value, males ultimately controlled the land holdings, money, and other property that a female brought into a marriage. Louisiana was one of eight western territories (which also include Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington) in the 19th century to enter the Union as community-property states that allowed females to inherit one half of their deceased husbands’ property under the inheritance laws (Shammas, Salmon, & Dahlin, 1987).
Lavinia Hynes

As granddaughter of Joseph Erwin (one of Louisiana’s plantation barons in Iberville Parish in the first quarter of the 19th century), Lavinia Hynes (Figure 3.6) was born into a life of privilege in 1821. Her father Colonel Andrew Hynes became a prominent merchant and businessman in Nashville, Tennessee, after the War of 1812 and married Joseph Erwin’s daughter, Nancy, in 1817 (Clement, 1952). After his father-in-law’s death around 1835, Hynes frequently visited Iberville Parish to help his mother-in-law restore the solvency of the vast Erwin estate (Clement, 1952). Hynes eventually purchased much of the Erwin properties in Iberville Parish. When he died in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1849, Hynes was the largest slaveholder in Iberville Parish and one of the largest in the United States with 257 slaves appraised at around $86,000 (approximately $2.8 million in 2019) (Succession of Andrew Hynes, 1850; Official Data Foundation, 2019). The Home Plantation (later the St. Louis Plantation) in Plaquemine that Lavinia’s husband Edward Gay assumed ownership of after her father’s death

Figure 3.6. Lavinia Hynes ([Photograph of Lavinia Hynes Gay], n.d.)
became known as one of the largest sugarcane producers in Iberville Parish, producing 495 hogsheads of sugar (approximately 990 barrels) in the 1851 to 1852 season (Clement, 1852).

During her marriage, Lavinia had the luxury of traveling up and down the Mississippi River between Louisiana and Missouri to visit family back in Saint Louis and to return home to the St. Louis Plantation in Plaquemine. Her trips to Saint Louis frequently occurred at the beginning of the summer months and lasted for several months. In the 19th century, people of means living in the southern United States would often make lengthy excursions north in order to escape from the summer’s oppressive heat and humidity. Coming from a wealthy Southern planter family, Lavinia was able to enjoy trips to New York, Minnesota, and Canada with her children.

Lavinia, Edward, and their children had an active social life, even during the Civil War (Plater, 2015). The Gay family attended church on a regular basis and enjoyed the sites and entertainment provided to them at Mardi Gras balls in New Orleans and the annual Saint Louis fairs. In addition, the family often had friends and family over for dinner in their Plaquemine, New Orleans, and Saint Louis residences. Some visitors even stayed with them at their home for up to several weeks at a time.

Although Lavinia enjoyed the company of others, she cherished time spent with her family the most. She was a devoted mother and wife, often remaining with Edward at the St. Louis Plantation during the sugarcane harvest season. During that time, she did not see him as much as she would have liked because he was feverishly working at the sugarmaking house on

---

8 Uncited information pertaining to the Gay family women in this study was obtained from reading their letters within the Edward J. Gay Family Papers (Mss. 1295), the Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Mss. 4872), and the Andrew Hynes Gay and Family Papers (Mss. 2542) at LSU’s Hill Memorial Library.
the plantation. Nevertheless, Lavinia felt it her duty to be available to look after Edward and his health in case she was needed. Her dedication to her family as well as her involvement in the plantation’s housekeeping and gardening activities show that she exemplified characteristics typical of a Southern planter lady. Even after Edward’s election to Congress in 1884 and their subsequent months-long residence each year in Washington, D. C., during his service, Lavinia remained involved in the upkeep of all their residences. She even assumed ownership of Edward’s sugar refinery and several of his properties after his death in 1889 until her death in 1891 in New Orleans.

**Andrew Hynes Gay**

The eldest son of Edward and Lavinia Gay, Andrew Hynes Gay (Figure 3.7) was educated in Saint Louis, Missouri, and resided with extended family members after his parents and siblings relocated to the Home Plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana, that his family had inherited from his maternal grandfather, Colonel Andrew Hynes. During the Civil War, Andrew left his studies to fight for the Confederacy and was captured as a prisoner near the war’s end.

Figure 3.7. Andrew Hynes Gay ([Photograph of Andrew Hynes Gay], ca. 1878)
After several months of imprisonment, he was released on the day of General Robert E. Lee’s surrender and returned to his family to reside in Louisiana for the remainder of his life (Confederate Veteran, 1915). Not wishing to continue his education, Andrew became involved in his father’s sugarcane-planting endeavors and continued do so after Edward’s election to Congress (Confederate Veteran, 1915).

After the Civil War’s end in 1865, Andrew married his first wife, Mary Augusta Dickinson of Bayou Grosse Tête, Louisiana, and had four children (Anna, Benie, Mamie, and Andrew, Jr.). Unfortunately, seven years into their marriage, Mary died suddenly. Andrew remarried in 1876, and he and his second wife Lodoiska Clement of Plaquemine had three additional children (Edward III, Nettie, and Charlie). Edward III was the only child from Andrew’s second marriage to live to adulthood (Hansen et al., 2013). In fact, as an adult, Edward III served as one of Louisiana’s U.S. senators from 1918 to 1921 (Pino et al., 2016).

Once entering into the planter profession, Andrew was involved in the management of some of his father’s plantation holdings (Confederate Veteran, 1915). He and family lived on a few of the plantations at various times. After his father’s election to Congress, Andrew and his family moved to the St. Louis Plantation since it was the home base for the Gay family planting business. He continued to live there after his father’s death and helped his mother in the management of all the plantation properties that the family owned. Up until his death in 1914, Andrew remained involved in the family’s sugarcane business (Confederate Veteran, 1915).

Mary Augusta Dickinson

Born in 1845, Mary Augusta Dickinson was the granddaughter of Charles Dickinson, who was killed in a duel with General Andrew Jackson on May 30, 1806 (Clement, 1952). Her grandmother was Jane Erwin of the Erwin family of Plaquemine, Louisiana. In 1865, Mary
married Andrew Gay, her maternal second cousin. Mary passed away in 1872, a week after her fourth child’s birth. The children from her marriage have previously been named.

**Lodoiska Clement**

Lodoiska Clement was born in 1843 and was the daughter of Plaquemine doctor Charles Clement (Clement, 1952; Seebold, 1941). She was a Gay family friend who became Andrew Gay’s second wife. She readily assumed the role of stepmother to Andrew’s children from his previous marriage and the children were very close to her. Lodoiska had three additional children with Andrew who have previously been named.

**Sophie Mitchell Gay**

As Edward and Lavinia’s eldest daughter, Sophie Mitchell Gay (Figure 3.8) was named in honor of her paternal grandmother. Born in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1843, Sophie did not relocate with her parents and siblings to the St. Louis Plantation in Plaquemine once her father had built a new home on the land; however, like her brother Andrew, she remained in Saint Louis to complete her education and resided there after her 1867 marriage to Philip Augustus

Figure 3.8. Sophie Mitchell Gay ([Photograph of Sophie Mitchell Gay Crow], ca. 1860)
Crow. She and Philip had four children (Lillie, Eddie, Willie, and Philip, Jr.), but the youngest
died in infancy. Initially, Sophie and her family lived within the Saint Louis city limits;
however, with a growing family and the trouble of keeping a reliable caretaker at Gay Villa (the
summer home that her father had built just outside the city around 1869), they eventually
established themselves in the countryside at Gay Villa.

**Philip Augustus Crow**

Born in 1840 in Nashville, Tennessee, Philip Augustus Crow was Sophie Gay’s husband.
He was initially involved in his family’s Saint Louis dry goods mercantile business, but later
found himself better suited to managing his father-in-law’s Gay Villa property just outside of
Saint Louis. The children born of his marriage to Sophie have previously been named.

**Mary Susan “Sue” Gay**

A frequent traveler in her youth, Mary Susan “Sue” Gay was born in 1846 and, as a child,
moved with her family from Saint Louis to her family’s plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana.
Like her older siblings, Sue received an education away from home in New Orleans (Plater,
2015). Through her father’s dealings with local plantation owners in Iberville Parish, she met
her husband Major Lawrence Lewis Butler of Dunboyne Plantation near Bayou Goula,
Louisiana. After marrying in 1869, Sue and Lawrence (Figure 3.9) partially lived at St. Louis
Plantation and later fully at Dunboyne Plantation. In 1873, they moved to Saint Louis in order to
find more desirable educational options for their children and for Lawrence to manage the
wholesale grocer and commission merchant business that his father-in-law, father-in-law’s
brother, and Richard Hanenkamp and Company had begun the previous year (Plater, 2015). The
couple had six children (Fannie; Eddie; Lawrence, Jr.; Lavinia; Nannie; and Susie); however,
Lawrence’s namesake died in infancy. Sue engaged in church activities on a regular basis and
was invested in the erection of local churches. She unexpectedly passed away in 1882 after a brief illness, leaving behind her husband and young children (Plater, 2015).

**Major Lawrence Lewis Butler**

Born in 1837 as the great-great-grandson of Martha Washington, the step-great-great-grandson of George Washington, and grandson of Adjutant General Edward Butler of the Revolutionary War’s “Five Fighting Butler Brothers,” Major Lawrence Lewis Butler was educated in political economy at the University of Virginia and studied law under a family friend (Plater, 2015). He fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, and afterwards, he returned to his family at Dunboye Plantation to help his family recuperate their crop losses. Upon marrying Sue Gay in 1869, Lawrence apprenticed under his father-in-law Edward Gay in order to learn the business trade and to run his father-in-law’s Iberville Parish plantations (Plater, 2015). In addition, he attempted to manage his family’s plantation with Edward’s help during the Reconstruction Era. By 1872, Lawrence had become partner in Gay, Hanenkamp, and Company, Edward’s Saint Louis-based wholesale grocer and commission merchant business
(Plater, 2015). He and Sue had six children who have previously been named. Three years after Sue’s death, he married family friend Susan Ann Martin, but no children were born of this marriage (Pino et al., 2016; Plater, 2015).

**Edward James Gay, Jr.**

Edward James Gay, Jr. (Figure 3.10), was born in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1850. Although he moved with his family to the St. Louis Plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana, he was educated in Saint Louis like his older siblings. Having a mind for business like his father, Edward, Jr., joined his father’s New Orleans-based sugar and cotton factor business, E. J. Gay and Company (Hansen et al., 2013). By 1872, he had become partner in the company and oversaw its daily operations. As a young bachelor, he very suddenly passed away in 1878 during a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans while his parents were in Saint Louis attending to his paternal grandfather’s funeral services (Plater, 2015).

![Edward James Gay, Jr.](image)

Figure 3.10. Edward James Gay, Jr. ([Photograph of Edward James Gay, Jr.], ca. 1874)
John Henderson “Johnny” Gay, Jr.

Edward and Lavinia’s youngest surviving son, John Henderson “Johnny” Gay, Jr. (Figure 3.11), was born in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1853 and named after his paternal grandfather. He was a bit of a restless spirit and was educated at different military schools in Virginia. He briefly attended Washington College (present-day Washington and Lee University) just before the death of its president, General Robert E. Lee. Johnny abruptly withdrew from school without his parents’ permission not long after Lee’s death in 1870 because of his desire to travel and begin an adult life. His father eventually allowed him to manage the Live Oaks Plantation in Rosedale, Louisiana, in order to make his foray into the family sugarcane business.

Figure 3.11. John Henderson “Johnny” Gay, Jr. ((Photograph of John Henderson Gay, Jr., ca. 1892)

Johnny married Rebecca Parker Conner of Natchez, Mississippi, in 1877 (Perilloux, Zachary, & Richard, 2010). Initially, they lived at the Live Oaks Plantation, but they moved to the St. Louis Plantation after his brother Edward, Jr.’s, death so that his father could be in New Orleans to take over the daily operations of sugar and cotton factor business. The physical and
mental stress of being a sugarcane planter proved to be too much for Johnny. As a result, he and Rebecca moved to San Diego, California, around 1885 after an extensive trip to the Southwest and Pacific Coast to find improvement for his health (Hansen et al., 2013). Johnny and Rebecca divorced in 1894 and had no children. Johnny went on to marry twice more in his life, which resulted in both marriages having their own eventual scandals (Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2014).

**Rebecca Parker Conner**

One of 10 children belonging to successful Mississippi and Louisiana planter Lemuel Parker Conner, Sr., Rebecca Parker Conner was born in 1854. Her father joined the Confederacy during the Civil War and was left in financial ruin after the war. In order to restore the family to financial independence, Rebecca’s father managed plantations in Louisiana. Eventually, he resumed the law studies he had abandoned prior to the war and became a successful lawyer in Vidalia, Louisiana (Perilloux et al., 2010).

Marrying Johnny Gay in 1877, Rebecca was not able to visit her family as much as she would have liked, but she maintained a regular written correspondence with her family and in-laws. After moving to San Diego, California, with her husband, Rebecca involved herself with several women’s and service organizations and even dabbled in real estate speculation. Having no children, she and Johnny divorced in 1894. She remained in California after the divorce and never remarried. In 1913, Rebecca—who had become a Christian Science practitioner—was murdered and robbed in her Los Angeles office by a man who used an insanity defense at his trial but was found guilty of the crime (*The Arizona Republican*, 1913; *The Ogden Standard*, 1913).
Anna Margaret “Nannie” Gay

Born in 1855, Anna Margaret “Nannie” Gay was the last of Edward and Lavinia’s children born in Saint Louis, Missouri. She traveled back and forth between the St. Louis Plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana, and her family in Saint Louis. Nannie received her education in Saint Louis, but she returned to the family’s plantation until her marriage in 1879 to Andrew Price of Franklin, Louisiana. She and Andrew (Figure 3.12) initially resided in New Orleans and then at the Acadia Plantation in Thibodaux, Louisiana, that her father had gifted to them (Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2014). Although they had no children, they remained at the plantation until Andrew assumed her deceased father’s seat in Congress in 1889 (Pino et al., 2016). When Congress was not meeting, Nannie would travel to visit with her family in Saint Louis and Plaquemine and her husband’s summer home outside of Nashville, Tennessee. She and Andrew left Washington, D. C., to return to Acadia Plantation in 1897 after the completion of his final term as a U.S. Representative.

Figure 3.12. Anna Margaret “Nannie” Gay and Andrew Price ([Photograph of Anna Margaret Gay Price], n.d.; [Photograph of Andrew Price], 1900)
Andrew Price

A native of Franklin, Louisiana, Andrew Price was born in 1854 at Chatsworth Plantation, which his family owned. He attended law school at Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, and Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri (McIntyre, 2015). While in Saint Louis, Andrew practiced law and met and married Nannie Gay. The couple moved to Acadia Plantation in Thibodaux, Louisiana, for Andrew to engage in the Gay family’s sugarcane planting business. Although not initially inclined towards politics, Andrew assumed his father-in-law’s seat as a U.S. Representative after Edward’s death (Clement, 1952). He maintained a historic summer home, Clover Bottom Farm, outside of Nashville, Tennessee, that raised livestock and thoroughbred horses (McIntyre, 2015). After his terms in Congress, he and Nannie returned to Acadia Plantation, where he died in 1909.
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The premise of this dissertation is based upon Belk’s (1988) seminal research of possessions as extensions of self. For this study, historical method using content analysis is performed on personal communication documents in order to identify the role that dress items and decorative household textiles played in the lives of 19th-century Southern planter female consumers using two generations of females in the Edward James Gay family of Louisiana as a case study. Historical method is used by researchers to report on events or conditions that have occurred in the past. Researchers using primary sources and archaeological evidence in the historical research method gather and establish facts in order to attempt to write conclusive histories of past events or conditions and to predict potential future events (Key, 1997).

Content analysis has been identified as a good method of analysis in communication research since communications, messages, and symbols are different from observable events, people, and objects because they inform about something other than themselves (Krippendorff, 1989). In addition, content analysis allows the researcher to assess data within a specific context in view of the assigned meanings that a group or culture has assigned to them (Krippendorff, 1989).

The use of content analysis as a research method harkens back to the 1950s’ study of mass communication (White & Marsh, 2006). As a method of research, content analysis can be used for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods data. The analytical constructs guiding the research can be guided by previous research, existing theories and research practices, and experts’ experience and knowledge (White & Marsh, 2006). In content analysis of quantitative data, hypotheses and generated coding schemes are determined prior to data collection while open-ended or exploratory questions guide content analysis research and collection of qualitative
data (White & Marsh, 2006). The ways in which the content analysis of both types of collected data are interpreted are fundamentally different. In content analysis of quantitative data, the data can be generalized and replicated by other researchers, resulting in similar outcomes.

Content analysis of qualitative data is specific to the research sample and the data confirms and/or disconfirms the researcher’s study questions (White & Marsh, 2006). The researcher’s investigative process is informed by one of three approaches to content analysis of qualitative data: conventional, directed, and summative. The major differences among these three approaches lies within the coding schemes, the origins of the codes, and threats to trustworthiness of the data interpretations (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), coding categories are directly determined by the text data in conventional content analysis while in its directed approach counterpart initial codes are guided by a theory or relevant findings of previous research. In summative content analysis, counting and comparisons of keywords or content are made and followed by an interpretation of the underlying context of the collected data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Written documents, visual representations, and verbal discourse observed in the mass media (i.e., radio, television, newspapers, magazines, films, etc.) are frequently reviewed using content analysis. Examples of content analysis used in historical dress research include: Paoletti’s (1981) comparison of cartoons depicting men’s and women’s clothing in order to interpret the prevailing attitudes towards men’s fashion from 1880 to 1910; Paff and Lakner’s (1997) analysis of female gender roles and dress in magazine advertisements from 1950 to 1994; Cosbey, Damhorst, and Farrell-Beck’s (2002) visual analysis of women’s daytime clothing styles depicted in two women’s fashion magazines from 1873 to 1912; and Banning’s (2005) analysis of women’s dress items held in the Louisiana State University Textile and Costume Museum’s
collection that were made from feed sacks or commodity bags and those advertised or featured in magazines from 1949 to 1968. Despite these public forms of communications, this research method can also be applied to less public forms of communication (e.g., personal letters, answers to open-ended interview questions, and witness accounts in court documents) (Krippendorff, 1989). Since the focus of this study is to record and examine the clothing and textile consumption process of two generations of female members of the Edward James Gay family of 19th-century Louisiana, content analysis has been determined to be the best method for analysis.

**Procedure**

The personal communications written during the 19th century among the Gay family female members are examined for this study. These documents include handwritten letters, journals, and possession bequeathals found in the archival collections of Louisiana State University’s Hill Memorial Library and the Iberville Parish Clerk of Court. No written records pertaining to the scope of this study were found at the Louisiana State Archives, the University of New Orleans, Tulane University, the Historic New Orleans Collection, the Historic New Orleans Collection, or Nicholls State University even though the Gay family owned properties and performed business transactions in the cities (i.e., Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Thibodaux, Louisiana) and surrounding areas where these archival institutions are located. The three forms of documentation are reviewed in this study because they were more likely to contain the largest and richest source of data to be collected for the study along with the written context in which they were originally recorded. Succession, or probate, records and purchase receipts are also reviewed in this study since these records may hold information regarding dress items and decorative household textiles that the Gay family women purchased or owned that are not mentioned or discussed in the other selected documentary forms. Succession records list
goods that were owned by the person at the time of death and not necessarily owned over the person’s lifespan (Shammas, 1994). In addition, they lack contextual information related to the acquisition and use or social function of goods that can sometimes be found in personal documents (Vickery, 1994). Hodder (2003) makes the distinction between documents and records as one in which documents are prepared for personal reasons and are closer to speech and require more contextualized interpretations, whereas records are created for official transactions.

Although Edward, Lavinia, and their children resided in Saint Louis, Missouri, for almost 15 years prior to relocating to Louisiana, only the Louisiana documents belonging to the Gay family from 1849 to 1899 are examined since this was the time period in which they resided in the state. Only the personal communications, succession records, and purchase receipts belonging to the first two generations of the Gay family women in Louisiana (i.e., Lavinia Hynes Gay; her daughters Sophie, Sue, and Nannie; and daughters-in-law Mary, Lodoiska, and Rebecca) are examined for this study since Lavinia’s granddaughters and great-granddaughters were all either too young to participate as active consumers, born after the turn of the 20th century, or not Louisiana residents. Information regarding slave clothing and accessories are recorded only if these items were passed onto the slaves as secondhand dress items that were once personally used by the Gay family women, which would provide additional evidence of the women’s participation in the disposal step of the clothing consumption process.

In LSU’s Hill Memorial Library, the collection of the Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, the Andrew H. Gay and Family Papers, and the Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers are examined in order to identify the 19th-century personal communications, succession records, and purchase receipts. At the Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, 19th-century succession records belonging to
female members of the Gay family are examined for potential data related to dress items and decorative household textiles that may have not been mentioned or discussed in the women’s personal communications held in Hill Memorial Library’s Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections.

**Analysis**

Once all data was collected and transcribed using Microsoft® Word word-processing software, the transcriptions were uploaded into the NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software program in order to identify and code the qualitative data for recurring themes. The interpretation of the research questions for this study are informed by consumer culture theory (CCT). As defined by Arnould and Thompson (2005), CCT is not an all-encompassing, unifying theory but rather a grouping of theoretical perspectives that address the constantly evolving relationships of consumer behaviors, the marketplace, and cultural meanings.

Additionally, based on the steps involved in Kunz and Garner’s (2011) clothing consumption process used in the study of consumer behavior, four initial themes were determined prior to data analysis: the acquisition, the use, the renovation, and the disposal of dress items and decorative household textiles. Any instance in the personal communications in which a decorative household textile or personal dress item is mentioned or discussed are noted along with any contextual information regarding the item. Since the realm of dress and adornment has traditionally been associated with women’s leisurely consumer interests (Peiss, 1998), one can theorize that the personal communications among the two generations of the Gay family women often feature a mention or discussion of dress items and/or decorative household textiles.
RESULTS

This research analyzed the written text contained in the personal documents and records belonging to two generations of female members of the Edward James Gay family living in Louisiana in order to gain insight into Southern planter women’s consumption behaviors and practices of dress items and decorative household textiles in the 19th century. Lavinia Hynes Gay, her daughters (Sophie, Sue, and Nannie), and her daughters-in-law (Mary, Lodoiska, and Rebecca) were chosen for review based on the large number of documents and records belonging to their family currently archived in Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University, as well as the numerous textile and clothing artifacts belonging to the women that are part of the Louisiana State University Textile and Costume Museum’s collection. The fifty years from 1849 to 1899 were selected for this research because these are the years in which the Gay family women were active consumers of dress items and decorative household textiles and/or residents of Louisiana. Figure 5.1 shows the frequencies in which specific dress items and decorative

![Figure 5.1. Frequencies of specific mention of decorative household textiles and dress items found in personal documents and records](image)
household textiles were specifically mentioned in the Gay family women’s personal documents and records. A total of 275 personal documents and records were used in the data analysis because each document or record type specifically mentioned one or more dress items, decorative household and/or apparel textiles, notions, tools, and equipment used to create or renovate dress items and decorative household textiles. Although 44 additional personal documents and records were identified during data collection, they were not included in the data analysis because only clothing or consumption behaviors in general were mentioned. Of the personal documents and records used in the data analysis, the women’s letters account for approximately 70% of the sources in which specific mention of dress items and decorative household textiles were found throughout the date range of the research. Also of note, 17 of the 18 diary entries were recorded in Sue’s diary while she was a teenager living on the St. Louis Plantation in Plaquemine, Louisiana, during the third year of the Civil War.

**Stages in the Consumption Process**

Using Kunz and Garner’s (2011) clothing consumption process model described in the introduction of this study, four of the five stages (i.e., acquisition, use, renovation, and discard) were readily identified during data analysis. For the purposes of this study going forward, the researcher chose to use the term “divestment” instead of Kunz and Garner’s (2011) “discard” as a general description for the consumption process’s final stage and the potential action involved (i.e., discard, gift, sell, trade, return, or loss) since “discard” is more frequently associated with placing an unwanted or no longer useful item into the garbage bin. Data analysis provided evidence that the Gay family women were active participants in the consumption of dress items and decorative household textiles. Of the personal documents and records that were reviewed, 446 instances were recorded in which the Gay family women acquired, used, renovated, and/or
divested items (Figure 5.2). Collectively, the data shows that the women were recorded as acquirers of goods in 214 consumption instances (48.0%) and users in 85 instances (19.0%). This result can most likely be attributed to the purchase receipts saved by the family over time or the women relating their most recent acquisitions in their diary entries and letters to others.

![Figure 5.2. Frequencies of involvement in consumption process stages](image)

The letters, including the diary entries, used in the data analysis provide context and background information for the mentioned items regarding their acquisition, use, renovation, and/or divestment. Through the review of the letters, diary entries, and purchase receipts, an additional stage in the consumption process was discovered during thematic coding of the data that had not previously been identified in Kunz and Garner’s (2011) model of the clothing consumption cycle. The Gay family women were found to have participated in 37 separate occasions (8.3%) in which they created dress items and decorative household textiles for themselves or other individuals using new materials. Accordingly, “creation” was identified as a potential stage proceeding after “acquisition” in which newly acquired textiles and notions that
have never been a part of a larger item can be manipulated to create a new decorative household textile or dress item. Additionally, the condition of the decorative household textile or dress item upon its acquisition may call for the item to need renovation prior to its use or divestment. As a result of the identification of the “creation” stage and the reordering of the “use” and “renovation” stages, this research proposes a modified theoretical model for the consumption process. Figure 5.3 provides a visual explanation of the modified clothing consumption process.

![Figure 5.3. Modified consumption process](image)

In the modified consumption process model, acquisition occurs as the first stage in which a new raw material or finished good (new or used) is obtained. Acquisition of an item is made through purchase, trade, reception as a gift, or discovery by happenstance. For this research, if the newly acquired item is a raw material or notion, the item can be manipulated and assembled with other materials or notions to create a new decorative household textile or dress item. The newly created item is then either used by its creator or divested to another individual. If the newly acquired item is a finished good, the item may be immediately used or may need renovation, depending on its present condition (new or secondhand) and/or fit (i.e., ill fitting). Once the item has been renovated, it either can be used by the owner or divested to another
individual. The movement of an item between the “renovation” and “use” stages can be exchanged back and forth a number of times until the item is finally divested. In a majority of present-day cases, newly acquired dress items and decorative household textiles and are ready-made finished goods; however, prior to ready-made products, dress items and decorative household textiles began either as raw materials that were manipulated by an individual to create a new item or as finished, secondhand items that were renovated for continued use or formed into a new item. Divestment is the final stage in the modified consumption process in which the decorative household textile or dress item’s creator or owner surrenders possession of the item in one of several ways: discard, gifting, sell, trade, return, or loss. The route that the divested item has taken from its initial acquisition can vary among any of the stages of creation, use, and renovation, depending on its original intended purpose and its chain of ownership.

As previously shown in Figure 5.2, the Gay family women were involved in the divestment of dress items and decorative household textiles on 77 different occasions (17.3%), with 69 occurrences involving the women gifting items to other family members or friends as newly purchased items or items they had created or renovated. Examples of the items that the women most frequently gave to each other or other individuals are: handkerchiefs, sashes, gloves, necklaces, watches, cravats, dresses, hats, and table mats. The women’s other divestment events occurred as sales’ returns, personal secondhand garments sold to community members, or losses from forgetfulness or fiery accidents.

Although the Gay family women were members of 19th-century, upper-class Southern society and could certainly afford to purchase ready-made or custom-made items for themselves and their families, the women’s diaries and letters provide evidence in which the women were engaged in the creation or renovation of dress items and decorative household textiles in 37
instances (8.3%) and 33 instances (7.4%), respectively. Their involvement in these actions shows that the women still placed value in the sewing and fancywork skills that were instilled in genteel women at an early age even when more convenient alternatives were available to them during the latter half of the 19th century. In most cases, the women personally renovated their children’s garments to accommodate the children’s growing bodies. Occasionally, one of the women’s personal garments was disassembled and remade into other multiple garments for her daughters. For those garments that the women purchased that were ill fitting or unsatisfactory, the women paid a dressmaker or other skilled seamstress to renovate or make adjustments to the garments. Overall, the women’s sewing skills appear to be at a level in which they could create or renovate basic to slightly complex dress items and decorative household textiles, but the most advanced items were created or renovated by hired, skilled hands.

**Dress Items and Decorative Household Textiles**

As participants in the consumption of dress items and decorative household textiles, the Gay family women were most frequently found to have been involved with dress items (i.e., apparel and accessories) than any other category shown in Figure 5.4. The 730 recorded dress items that the women acquired for themselves or for family members and friends were main garments, outerwear, nightwear, undergarments, and accessories (e.g., shoes, hats, gloves, handkerchiefs, jewelry, etc.). As dictated by the fashion rules of the 19th century, the Gay family women were collectively involved with 138 dresses either for themselves or others over the course of the 50-year span of the reviewed documents and records. Skirts and waist blouses were the second and third most commonly consumed main garments with which the women were involved. In regards to accessories, the women most frequently acquired, used, or divested
gloves, shoes, breast pins, watches, shawls, bonnets, and handkerchiefs, which were acceptable fashion accessories of the time (Beaujot, 2012).

The 191 decorative household textiles that the Gay family women consumed were all acquired as finished goods, with the exception of bed sheeting, calico fabric for curtains, and cretonne upholstery fabric. Carpets, floor and table mats, napkins, bed linens, quilts, and oilcloth were the most often recorded items among the women’s documents and records. In particular, carpets appeared as the most purchased or discussed household textile type. Each time one of the women planned to return home from a lengthy trip, she would write of wishes for the household staff to have the carpets cleaned and laid out on the floors prior to her arrival. Whenever one of the women moved to a new home or wished to redecorate, carpets were often the first items purchased not only for their decorative purposes but also to cover their homes’ floors in the colder months. Carpets, rugs, and floor mats were considered to be such valuable textiles in the 19th century that they were regularly recorded in household inventory records after a person’s death. For example, nine carpets and eight rugs totaling $99.50 (approximately
$2,747.00 in 2019) were recorded in Lavinia Gay’s household inventory after her death (Official Data Foundation, 2019; Inventory record, ca. 1892).

As previously mentioned, examination of the data showed that the Gay family women were engaged in creating and renovating dress items. Sales receipts, letters, and diary entries often note acquired dress fabrics, notions, tools, and equipment in order to complete their tasks. Table 5.1 provides a listing of these items. Visual examples of dress fabric colors and motifs available to 19th-century women for purchase are shown in Figure 5.5. Buckram, calico, flannel, linen, lace, muslin, lawn, silesia, and lining were the fabrics that the Gay family women most frequently purchased. As documented in their wardrobes, the women’s main garments were composed of calico, linen, wool, flannel, delaine, damask, barège, grenadine, and silk fabrics.

Table 5.1. Gay family women’s acquired dress fabrics, notions, tools, and equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dress Fabrics (Names and Types)</th>
<th>Notions</th>
<th>Tools &amp; Equipment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpaca Facing</td>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>Braid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barège Flannel</td>
<td>Sateen</td>
<td>Buttons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckram Grenadine Satin</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calico India Silk Serge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fastenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambric India Swiss Silesia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lacings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashmere Lace Silk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ribbon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check Lawn</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton Linen Linen Swiss Muslin</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottonade Lining Turkely Red</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crash Mozambique Twill</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damask Mull</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaine Muslin</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denim Net</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thimbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidery Plaid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Work bags</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 The dress fabrics’ descriptions and suggested uses are provided in Appendix B.
The Gay Family Women’s Consumption Motivations and Behaviors

The personal letters and diary entries examined in this study helped to give some context to the Gay family women’s consumption motivations and behaviors that their sales receipts could not. These documents provided information about events occurring in the women’s lives and their surrounding environments. The women’s participation as consumers in the Louisiana Southern planter class is documented as gradually increasing throughout the latter half of the 19th century and reaching its zenith in the 1880s, when the women were adults with children. Interestingly, there is no discussion of financial hardships or concerns related to an inability to obtain needed items during the Civil War, Reconstruction, or the Panics of 1873 and 1893 in their personal documents. A drastic decline in the women’s consumption occurred in the 1890s as three of the women were no longer living and one had divorced from the family. Their actual consumption patterns may differ from the written evidence because of potential missing records; one-sided conversations within letters and diary entries; and the women’s overall inaction in documenting every single decorative household textile and dress item they ever acquired,
created, used, renovated, and divested. A more in-depth discussion of each woman’s consumption motivations and behaviors is provided in the following chapter, but for now, a general idea of the women’s lives as consumers of dress items and decorative household textiles is reviewed.

The Gay family women’s letters regularly discussed common conversation topics, such as family members’ illnesses and wellness, the weather, local and national events, town gossip, friends’ and family members’ weddings, travel experiences and observations, and their homebound activities. In the women’s personal documents, their creation and renovation activities involving dress items and decorative household textiles appear to be an acceptable means in which to pass their leisure time or to fulfill their expected duties as caregivers to their husbands and children during the Victorian Era. The women often addressed their concerns about having their homes appropriately presentable to visitors and comfortably habitable after extended trips to other states, districts, and countries (i.e., Missouri; Minnesota; New York; California; Virginia; Canada; France; Washington, D. C.; etc.). They wrote of notifying their household staff in advance of their arrivals to launder the bed linens and to bring the carpets out of storage.

The women most frequently acquired new dress items to wear to family weddings, invitation-only events, and prior to their extended travels. While the women obtained the most basic dress essentials, fabrics, notions, tools and equipment for sewing from local general stores (Table 5.2), their more extravagant purchases of ready-made or custom-made goods were acquired from department stores, dressmakers, and tailors in New Orleans, Saint Louis, New York City, and Washington, D. C. (Table 5.3). They readily expressed their contentment or
Table 5.2. Louisiana dry goods merchants visited by the Gay family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baton Rouge</th>
<th>Rosedale</th>
<th>West Baton Rouge</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julius C. Bogel</td>
<td>F. R. Irwin</td>
<td>C. J. Barrow</td>
<td>J. Supple (Bayou Goula)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Feibelman</td>
<td>Max Fraenkel</td>
<td>E. L. Charroppin</td>
<td>J. E. Bargas (Bayou Grosse Tête)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Garig</td>
<td>Charles W. Slack</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Rosenfield</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaquemine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. L. Bruce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. M. Delavallade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Desobry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Kahn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. A. Kearny</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Levy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver A. Pierce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roth, McWilliams, &amp; Co.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlater and Dupuy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3. Dressmakers and seamstresses employed by the Gay family women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Orleans</th>
<th>Saint Louis</th>
<th>Washington, D. C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. E. Bigly</td>
<td>Miss Birden</td>
<td>Mrs. Gloria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Diedrich</td>
<td>Ann Burk</td>
<td>Mrs. Keckly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. M. B. Jones</td>
<td>Miss Cussen</td>
<td>Mrs. Tancil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Miss Henessey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mme. Marchand</td>
<td>Miss Mackey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaquemine</td>
<td>Miss E. Nolan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Adele</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Alexander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Elmire Barker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. D. Cade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Graves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Troxclair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thibodaux</td>
<td>Lizzie Matthews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Polson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
displeasure with their dressmakers’ skills, often employing more than one dressmaker at any
given time. When they could not obtain a desired textile or dress item locally or within a
reasonable distance from their homes, the women wrote to one another requesting that the other
woman acquire the item for them during one of her visits to a large metropolitan city. If the
exact item was not available for purchase, they all trusted each other’s taste and judgement to
select a suitable substitute.

Although the Gay family women were often acquiring new dress items and decorative
household textiles, their personal documents do not show much discussion of the memories or
meanings that they associated with these possessions. A few instances occur in their letters
whenever one of their wedding dresses and veils are brought out of storage for a younger female
family member to try on during a playful moment at home. Other memories are revealed in when
one of the women received a new diamond wedding ring to replace the old one on the
anniversary of more than 20 years of marriage. Watches are also other notable accessory items
that the women gave to their children entering into young adulthood as a way for the children to
remember their parents and the trust their parents had placed in them to cherish and care for the
valuable accessories. As matriarch of the Gay family, in her twilight years several months
before her death, Lavinia expressly bequeathed several of her and her late husband’s dress items
to her children, grandchildren, and daughters-in-law as tangible symbols of her legacy (L. H.
Gay, 1891).

This general discussion of the Gay family women as consumers of dress items and
decorative household textiles initially appears to be typical of upper-class women living in the
North and Midwest during the latter half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, as members of a
newly established planter family moving from the Midwest to the South prior to the Civil War,
Lavinia and her daughters came from a family whose values, ideals, and standards may not have entirely aligned with those families deeply rooted in Southern traditions and values. As a result, their aesthetic preferences in dress items and decorative household textiles; the social, monetary, and emotional values they placed on these items; and their overall consumption motivations, behaviors, and experiences may have varied from those of their Southern-born counterparts. The following, more detailed discussion of each Gay family woman’s participation as a dress item and decorative household textile consumer provides a deeper understanding of the 19th-century Southern planter female.
DISCUSSION

The data analysis results provide evidence that the Gay family women were active consumers of dress items and decorative household textiles during the latter half of the 19th century. Although the women were members of a family belonging to the wealthy planter class in Louisiana, they did not necessarily experience the same economic hardships as many of their fellow Southern neighbors did during the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era, and the many economic crises and depressions that plagued the United States in the late 19th century. In the personal documents reviewed for this study, none of the women wrote of not being able to afford to purchase items for themselves or others. In most cases, if one of the women could not obtain an item because it was either out of stock or not carried in a store’s inventory, she would simply write to one of the other women in the family to obtain it for her during the other woman’s next shopping excursion. Occasionally, the women also had their husbands purchase items for them while the men were away from their respective plantations. Several receipts attributed to Edward Gay and his sons Andrew and Johnny show that the men purchased textiles and dress items while in New Orleans or at the local dry goods store in an effort to assist their wives in fulfilling their domestic duties. While the men sometimes purchased finished goods (e.g., collars, handkerchiefs, and main garments), a majority of the items listed on the receipts were multiple yardages of fabrics, notions, and tools needed to construct or renovate dress items. A more detailed discussion of the each of the seven Gay family women’s consumption behaviors follows.

Lavinia Hynes Gay

As the matriarch of this study, Lavinia had the largest number of historical documents and records (73 letters, 17 receipts, a business card, a bill of lading, a bequeathal record, and an
inventory record) attributed to her that reflected her participation as a 19th-century Louisiana consumer of dress items and decorative household textiles (Figures 6.1a–e) from 1856 to 1891. She often acquired dress items for her family and textiles for the household. If she had the time, Lavinia would make dress items for her husband, children, and grandchildren. Over the course of her married life, she made shirts and dresses. She even had some knitting skills in which she could make winter socks for Edward and her sons. As noted in several of her letters to Edward, Lavinia seemed to have been quite concerned with the interior conditions of their St. Louis Plantation home prior to her return from extended trips to Saint Louis, Missouri. Even though Edward had stayed behind at the plantation to oversee sugarmaking activities, Lavinia was concerned about the house servants having the house cleaned and the carpets properly laid out in each room before her arrival. Sometimes, she would even request that Edward send room dimensions to her so that she could acquire new carpets for their home.

![Figure 6.1. Frequencies of Lavinia Hynes Gay’s consumption by decade. a) Dress item consumption.](image-url)
b) Dress item textile consumption.

c) Household textile consumption.

d) Notion consumption.
Lavinia was concerned not only about her children’s and grandchildren’s welfare and happiness but also that of her extended family members. After learning that her son Edward, Jr., was safe during his trip to Chicago in which the Great Fire of 1871 occurred, her thoughts turned to her cousin Nelly and Nelly’s sons, whose home and belongings were destroyed in the fire. In a letter to her husband while on one of her Saint Louis trips, Lavinia wrote:

I have received another letter from Cousin Nelly. I sent her fifty dollars by Mr Crow [Lavinia’s son-in-law]. I had invited her South for the winter but she does not say any thing [sic] about going down. She is boarding and it was only the last day they were there that Wm. [Edward’s brother] found where she was. Mr Crow did not get to see her but sent the money by Wm. She wrote me her little boys were in need of warm clothes. I thought I would send them a suit. No doubt there will be great suffering among the unfortunate this winter. (Gay, L. H., 1737–1938, Gay to E. J. Gay, October 22, 1871)

As a U.S. representative’s wife later in her life, Lavinia spent time in Washington, D.C., and took advantage of having access to the dressmaking services of Mrs. Elizabeth Keckly, a highly skilled seamstress, who used her seamstress skills to buy her and her son’s freedom in 1855.

10 Using her seamstress skills to buy her and her son’s freedom in 1855, Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly moved from Saint Louis, Missouri, to Baltimore, Maryland, and then to Washington, D. C. She continued her dressmaking business along the way, often acquiring clients by word of mouth, though occasionally advertising her dressmaking and teaching services in Washington, D. C.’s daily newspaper The Evening Star. As a highly skilled seamstress, she was frequently employed...
former slave and First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln’s past dressmaker and confidante. In three separate letters written in May 1886 to her daughter Nannie, Lavinia mentions making visits to Mrs. Keckly, who was producing a green silk grenadine dress for her (Gay, L. H., 1814–2013, Gay to A. G. Price, May 4, 1886; May, 14, 1886; May 24, 1886). More often, Lavinia employed the services of another African American dressmaker, Mrs. Mary A. Tancil, in making white dresses for her granddaughters Nannie and Susie Butler and a couple of her own dresses, specifically an iron-frame grenadine dress (Gay, L. H., 1814–2013, Gay to A. G. Price, May 4, 1886; June 29, 1888; February 26, 1889).

Lavinia showed interest in maintaining her family’s legacy in both written and dress item forms. In one of her letters to Edward at the St. Louis Plantation during one of her Saint Louis visits, she wrote:

I had a visit last evening from Mrs. Richardson who is assisting in getting up a very handsome Centennial book. She is very anxious to have my Father’s history & portrait in it. It is to contain some from each state. We will have to pay a good sum for the honor. She is anxious to start immediately. What do you think of it as it is history to be handed down to successive generations, have we any papers or items of his early life. She mentions Pa also if you were willing. (Gay, L. H., 1737–1938, Gay to E. J. Gay, January 23, 1876)

On another occasion documented in a letter written during a visit to Gay Villa from a few years prior, Lavinia reminisced about her wedding day that took place over 30 years before. In the letter, she not only thanked Edward for sending her a gift of a new, updated wedding ring, but

by U.S. politicians’ wives, one of whom eventually referred First Lady Lincoln to her services (Keckly, 1879, 1889; Wartik, 2018).

11 Mary A. “Mollie” Tancil (née Buster) was the wife of Herbert Pike Tancil, the personal barber for 10 different mayors in nearby Alexandria, Virginia, from 1876 to 1908 (Bah, 2018).

12 Sue Gay Butler’s children spent a considerable amount of time staying with immediate family members after her death.
she also described that evening’s event in which Edward’s and her wedding attire was pulled out of storage for their family to view:

   In the evening Nannie insisted on putting on my wedding dress to see how I then looked as she was about my size and is said to be like me (though I am sure I never looked so pretty as she did in it). You would scarcely believe, the waist was too tight for her, but a good fit otherwise, but your vest which I have preserved with it was too small & short for Mr Crow. The frail ring was carefully taken out and worn for the evening & next day laid away again, but I am glad the new one can always remain on my finger. (Gay, L. H., 1737–1938, Gay to E. J. Gay, October 25, 1871)

In a memorandum written by Lavinia and Edward’s granddaughter Anna Maria Gay McClung in Nashville, Tennessee, on August 12, 1934, she confirmed maintaining possession of their wedding attire decades after their deaths:

   Her wedding dress and slippers are still in a perfect state of preservation and are in my possession. Her dress is of white (ivory) satin and was made at Thompson’s in Nashville. His wedding vest of blueish white satin and made by hand is also in perfect condition. (Clement, 1952, p. 85)

**Sophie Gay Crow**

Sophie was not a Louisiana resident for very long because she only spent a couple of years leading up to the Civil War until her marriage actually living in the state (1859 to 1867). When the Gay family moved to St. Louis Plantation, she and her brother Andrew stayed behind in Saint Louis, Missouri, to continue with their private-school educations. Sophie also spent time in Baltimore, Maryland, before the outbreak of the Civil War. While in school in Saint Louis, her mother would send dresses to her, but Sophie or one of her aunts would write back to Lavinia stating that while Sophie was very appreciative of the gifts that the dresses often had to be altered to accommodate her growing body. A letter from Lavinia’s sister-in-law Eliza Gay Martin remarked about a dress sent to Sophie:

   The dress you sent does not fit well. I think it would be better to send the material here and have them made. If there is any particular way you would like to have them
made if you will give me some directions I will have it done accordingly. (Martin, E. G., 1797–1938, Martin to L. H. Gay, April 20, 1856)

A subsequent letter states:

In regard to the dresses you send Sophie she only tried them on yesterday as the weather has been to [sic] cool to wear them on yesterday. I had to get Miss Birden to alter them in the shoulders and to let down the skirt all that was turned in at the top and get something as near like them as I could and face the skirts. The old one you sent can’t be altered to fit at all, so I have laid that away. You forgot to allow anything [sic] for her growing and she now wears dresses to the top of her shoes. I think if you have others for her she will need them before a great while and if you will send them I will have them made for her. If you have any of the blue berege [sic] take care of it as there was not enough to make only a low neck and short sleeves. (Martin, E. G., 1814–2013, Martin to L. H. Gay, May 9, 1856)

After the Civil War, the only physical evidence found in this research of Sophie as a Louisiana consumer was a handwritten receipt dated April 13, 1867, from a New Orleans mantuamaker Mrs. M. B. Jones, in which Sophie purchased a bridal suit, a traveling dress, two sacques, and two other dresses for herself, as well as two dresses, a sacque, a waist, and a skirt for her sister Sue (Jones, 1867). Sophie married Philip Crow four days after purchasing the dress items and resided in Saint Louis for the remainder of her life. Despite not being considered a Louisiana consumer for much of her life, Figures 6.2a–e show data from 1856 to 1867 collected

![Figure 6.2. Frequencies of Sophie Gay Crow’s consumption by decade.](image-url)

- **Count**
- **Decade**
- **Acquisition**
- **Creation**
- **Use**
- **Renovation**
- **Divestment**
b) Dress item textile consumption.

c) Household textile consumption.

d) Notion consumption.
e) Tool and equipment consumption.

from 22 letters, six receipts, and her mother’s bequeathal record in which she engaged in consumption activities related to her family, such as creating slippers for her father, a dress for her daughter Lillie, and quilts for her home, as well as sending handkerchiefs as gifts to family members in Louisiana and inheriting some of her mother’s jewelry.

**Sue Gay Butler**

Although Sue eventually moved back to Saint Louis later in her adult life, she spent at least 10 years living in and receiving an education in Louisiana. Additionally, Sue spent the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era living with or near her family in Plaquemine. Entries from her 1864 diary relate a lively social life despite the dangers of the war activities in the area surrounding St. Louis Plantation. She wrote of visiting with friends and neighbors, attending a dancing school, visiting a local dressmaker named Josephine, and even socializing with Confederate soldiers. In April 24, 1864, Sue says of her Confederate beau, “I received a long letter from Charlie. He has escaped & is safe in ‘Dixie,’ he sent me a pretty ring, with the confed [sic] flag on it” (Gay, 1864).

Sue’s friendship with Charlie appears to have been fleeting because Sue married Lawrence Butler four years after the close of the Civil War. The only physical business transaction of Sue purchasing dress items for herself while living in Louisiana that was found in
this research was a handwritten invoice for Sue’s wedding trousseau, which she acquired from Mademoiselle Julie Tillon’s shop on Rue Saint-Honoré in Paris, France. Her trousseau included 12 pairs of gloves, 12 monogrammed handkerchiefs, 12 other handkerchiefs with embroidery and/or Valenciennes lace, 12 towels with embroidery and/or Valenciennes lace, 15 chemises with embroidery and/or Valenciennes lace, 12 night chemises, a crocheted shawl, and a sortie-de-bal (a shawl or cape worn during a nighttime outing), totaling 4,957 French francs (approximately $17,470 in present day) (Official Data Foundation, 2019; Tillon, 1869). A physical artifact that still exists from Sue’s wedding is her pair of ivory silk satin boots that are held in the Louisiana State University Textile and Costume Museum’s collection (Figure 6.3). Sue’s diary entries also described her wartime sewing activities, such as a making cravat, a collar, her own and a family friend’s dresses, and even a tobacco pouch for Charlie (M. S. Gay, 1864). As a married adult, she continued creating dress items, including a blue-and-black-striped silk bowtie (Figure 6.4) for her brother Johnny while he was away at school in Maryland, as well
as underclothes, dresses, and shirts for herself and her young family. Sue’s time as a Louisiana consumer (1860 to 1873) was limited once she married because she and her family joined Sophie and her family in Saint Louis a few years into Sue and Lawrence’s marriage. Using the data obtained from 22 letters, two receipts, and 17 diary entries associated with Sue, Figures 6.5a–d show her brief tenure as a household textile and dress item consumer. In fact, the last instance from this study’s data recorded Sue having written in a June 1879 letter to her sister Nannie that she had obtained the gloves in Saint Louis that Nannie had requested for her upcoming wedding (Butler, 1879).

Figure 6.5. Frequencies of Sue Gay Butler’s consumption by decade.

a) Dress item consumption.
b) Dress item textile consumption.

c) Household textile consumption.

d) Tool and equipment consumption.
Nannie Gay Price

Moving to St. Louis Plantation within the first couple years of her life, Nannie spent much of her life as a Louisiana consumer. Figures 6.6a–e show her consumption behaviors from 1856 to 1899 that were recorded for this research. At one point in her later education, she followed her older siblings’ educational paths and attended school in Saint Louis while living with Sophie and her growing family. Once she had finished her education, Nannie moved back to Louisiana, but she accompanied her mother back and forth to Saint Louis for extended visits.

![Dress Items](image)

**Figure 6.6.** Frequencies of Nannie Gay Price’s consumption by decade.

a) Dress item consumption.

![Dress Item Textiles](image)

b) Dress item textile consumption.
c) Household textile consumption.

d) Notion consumption.

e) Tool and equipment consumption.

Her marriage to Andrew Price in 1879 made her a more permanent Louisiana resident as her husband assumed management of Acadia Plantation in Thibodaux for her father. Although Nannie and Andrew never had any children, she appears to have had close relationships with her
nephews and nieces, especially her namesake and Sue’s daughter, Anna Butler. A diary entry, a receipt, and 32 letters associated with Nannie that were reviewed in this research showed that most of her gifting activities were directed toward her nieces, with occasional gifts and fashion advice for her brother Johnny while he was away at school in Virginia. In a rare instance, she divested herself of some unwanted dresses by having a proxy in Louisiana sell them for her while on one of her visits to Saint Louis (Price, A. G., 1797–1938, Price to R. C. Gay, July 10, 1882).

Although her mother, sisters, and sisters-in-law had some level of sewing skills, Nannie does not appear to have either had the skills or an interest in doing so. Her personal letters to them discuss her endeavors in having dressmakers make or alter dress items for her. One of her letters from Acadia Plantation to her mother remarks:

    My shopping was principally little things. I wanted a dress but concluded to wait until later, hoping they might have more new goods. I took my old camel’s hair to Janet [a dressmaker in New Orleans] and fooled away a great deal of time there, and don’t believe after all it will repay the trouble and expense of making over. Janet is not fond of making over old dresses, and always discourages the ideas as much as possible. (Price, A. G., 1814–2013, Price to L. H. Gay, October 21, 1883)

Furthermore, Nannie readily appears capable of expressing her opinion of their work. She writes in a letter to her mother, “I have not yet got my blue dress from Madame Marchand [in New Orleans] but she promises to send it this evening. I don’t think much of her style” (Price, A. G., 1814–2013, Price to L. H. Gay, February 27, 1889). In a later letter from Washington, D. C., when her husband was serving as a U.S. Representative, Nannie complains:

    I undertook [sic] to have a little silk waist made; and as usual it was a great disappointment. The woman had made a regular basque, & it looked like some old time waist I had resurrected. She promised to change it, but I am afraid I can’t hope for much from it. ‘Twas ever this. I am going to buy a new one or another waist to Mrs. Gloria. She has a good reputation, works for the Misses Pattons, & others. (Price, A. G., 1797–1938, Price to L. H. Gay, July 10, 1890)
Nannie’s custom dress items appear to be a great source of pride for her and how she wished to present herself publicly. In fact, one of Nannie’s couture dresses designed by Lady Lucy Duff-Gordon (who survived the sinking of the Titanic) was donated to the State of Tennessee in 2014 as part of a collection of her and her husband’s personal items that were in the possession of Nannie’s great-grandnephew, R. Walter Hale III, of Nashville (McIntyre, 2015).

Miss E. Nolan of Saint Louis was another modiste whom the Gay family women solicited for her services on what seems to have been a regular basis. During the process of this research, a green-and-blue silk basque bodice with white lace trim (Figure 6.7) that once belonged to Nannie

Figure 6.7. Nannie Gay’s green-and-blue silk basque bodice made by Saint Louis dressmaker Miss E. Nolan, ca. 1870s–1880s (LSU Textile and Costume Museum, 2004.001.0037)
was located in the LSU Textile and Costume Museum’s collection. Although in an extremely fragile, fragmented condition, Nannie cherished it enough that she handed it down to her family members. Her taste in high-quality dress items also provided her with the opportunity to inherit her mother’s diamond pin that her mother had received as a gift from Edward a year prior to his death, as noted in her mother’s bequeathal record (L. H. Gay, 1891).

**Mary Dickinson Gay**

Very little information about Mary as both a Louisiana consumer of dress items and decorative household textiles while a Gay family member (1865 to 1872) was gleaned during this research because she passed away seven years into her marriage, within a week of giving birth to her only son, Andrew, Jr. Nonetheless, Figures 6.8a–e illustrate Mary’s brief time as both. Although only 25 instances were recorded in which Mary was actively engaged in the consumption process, her 12 letters written to various family members are very descriptive in regards to her exact involvement in the creation and renovation of dress items for herself and her growing family. In an 1869 letter to her mother Ann Maria Dickinson (née Turner), Mary writes about one of her adventures in creating a new dress for herself:

![Figure 6.8. Frequencies of Mary Dickinson Gay’s consumption by decade. a) Dress item consumption.](image_url)
b) Dress item textile consumption.

c) Household textile consumption.

d) Notion consumption.
After you left, I busied myself with my housekeeping so as not to miss you too much and finally, remembering your injunction to finish the calico dress, set vigorously to work on it. I sewed all the fold on and commenced on the seams, when lo! & behold I found a most heart-rending mistake had been made. You had cut the back breadths several inches too short. That much shorter than the sides, though even with the front so that it was impossible to remedy it. The profile of the dress was thusly several wild schemes of turning it hindpart before entered my mind & of piecing it at the top, but I contented myself with sending post haste after Lizzie Matthews (the Doctor). She arrived late in the evening & found me frantically tearing my hair & careening around the house....She examined the dress critically and then advised me to get more & put in new breadths behind as that was the only way to fix it. I dreaded the idea, but took her advice next day. I went down to see Sue & had a very pleasant visit. Mary E. & Cousin L. also dined there. I wore my new linen. On the way home I stopped at Mr. Mc's to match the calico and Oh! horrors, it was all gone and I have just sent to get Mr. Strimas to try to match it in town. I have enough left to put in one breadth. (Gay, M. D., 1857–1957, Gay to A. T. Dickinson, April 29, 1869)

In a follow-up letter to her mother, Mary relates how her apparel construction dilemma was finally resolved:

I received a letter from you in which you expressed regret about my “pretty calico being ruined.” Do not be distressed. It is far from being ruined & I have had the pleasure of wearing it this week. I put in one new width behind & pieced the other under the fold, put on a longer piece on the waist in front & red buttons, & Sue [Mary’s sister-in-law] complimented me on my appearance in it and was surprised to hear that you had made it was giving Mrs Golston the credit. It fits me perfectly. My green bérège will be finished tomorrow. (Gay, M. D., 1857–1957, Gay to A. T. Dickinson, May 6, 1869)

Mary’s later letters to her sister-in-law Nannie convey her busy activities with renovating a blue dress that Nannie had sent to her into smaller dresses for two of her young daughters,
Anna and Lavinia. She also expresses the stress that she has experienced while housekeeping, sewing, and performing other domestic activities because her house servant and cook have been away or otherwise indisposed (Gay, M. D., 1857–1957, Gay to A. M. Gay, February 14, 1871; January 12, 1872). The few other recorded consumption activities in which Mary was involved show her creating, altering, and mending dress items for her husband and three young daughters and acquiring dress items for herself.

Lodoiska Clement Gay

As Andrew Gay’s second wife, Lodoiska immediately assumed the role of making sure her four stepchildren were well attended. In several letters to her husband while she was on an extended trip to the briefly popular resort town of Newbern, Virginia, with her children and stepchildren, she would make requests for Andrew, Lavinia, or Nannie to purchase dress items or dress item textiles that she could not readily acquire. Even while the children were away at school, she continued to provide dress items and household textiles for them. Many of her letters in this research were addressed to her only surviving natural-born child Edward III. Lodoiska sent shirts, socks, coats, neckties, slippers, and mats to him while he was away at school in Virginia and New Jersey. The most prized possessions that she and her husband gifted to the children were watches, which were sent to Andrew Jr., Anna, and Edward III while they were away from home. Figures 6.9a–e show the frequencies of Lodoiska’s consumption behaviors as a Gay family member from 1876 to 1899 across 38 letters, seven receipts, a postcard, and her mother-in-law’s bequeathal record.

Lodoiska occasionally engaged in sewing, fancywork, and mending dress items for herself and others, but her letters show that she would send work to Mrs. Diedrich, a dressmaker on Baronne Street in New Orleans (Gay, L. C., 1797–1938, Gay to A. H. Gay, September 1,
Figure 6.9. Frequencies of Lodoiska Clement Gay’s consumption by decade.

a) Dress item consumption.

b) Dress item textile consumption.

c) Household textile consumption.
d) Notion consumption.

e) Tool and equipment consumption.

1882). She continued to rely on dressmakers for herself even after all the children were grown.

In a letter to Edward III while he was studying at Princeton University, Lodoiska tells of her recent shopping excursion with her stepdaughters Anna and Mamie to the D. H. Holmes department store in New Orleans in preparation for Andrew, Jr.’s, upcoming wedding. She writes:

We shopped and shopped. My object was to buy a dress and outfit for the approaching wedding and I almost had to devote my entire time to that purpose for the dress maker kept me waiting hours to try my dress on. It is really an amusing sight to go to Holmes and see the array of tired women waiting for their turns and then to listen to the conversations. How they do roast the dress maker, but in time she appears as smiling as possible and she promises faithfully that you will get your dress in time, alas for the vanity of human expectations. Mamie and Anna insisted that I must get a very handsome
dress so I bought a rich black satin and some real lace, a new bonnet, and etc. so I am prepared to pass muster as the mother of the groom. (Gay, L. C., 1737–1938, Gay to E. J. Gay III, January 30, 1898)

Rebecca Conner Gay

As the last female to marry into the second generation of the Gay family who was reviewed in this study, Rebecca’s length of participation as both a member of the family and a Louisiana consumer (1877 to 1885) is limited because she and Johnny relocated to San Diego, California, about eight years into their marriage. Nevertheless, she frequently sent dresses, coats, handkerchiefs, various neckwear, gloves, sashes, and breastpins, as well as household textiles such as table napkins and scarves, to her friends and family members while living at Live Oaks Plantation and during her travels with Johnny to the Southwest and Pacific Coast, continuing on with her actions even after their permanent relocation to California. The data collected from the 25 letters and 28 receipts (including her mother-in-law’s bequeathal record) associated with Rebecca are shown in Figures 6.10a–e. Having no children of her own, most of Rebecca’s gifts were sent to her sisters’ daughters in Louisiana and Mississippi. Her sister Janie Conner

![Dress Items](image_url)

Figure 6.10. Frequencies of Rebecca Conner Gay’s consumption by decade.

a) Dress item consumption.
b) Dress item textile consumption.

c) Household textile consumption.

d) Notion consumption.
Randolph at Blithewood Plantation in Bayou Goula, Louisiana, trusted Rebecca’s taste in dress items for her children enough that she requested Rebecca purchase dresses, stockings, union suits, a shirt, and flannel for overcoats, using the $20 that she was sending to Rebecca, who was visiting Saint Louis at the time (Randolph, J. C., 1737–1938, Randolph to R. C. Gay, September 22, 1884).

In acquiring goods for herself, Johnny, and their home, Rebecca relied on family, local, and more distant resources. Her sister Theodosia Conner Shaw and her mother Elizabeth Francis “Fanny” Conner (née Turner) sometimes made garments for Rebecca and mailed them to her from their relatives’ home at Woodlands Plantation in Natchez, Mississippi. In Theodosia’s letter to Rebecca on one occasion, she wrote:

I have just put up a package for you containing the two gowns you asked me to make, & which I will send by mail today. It gave us so much pleasure to make them for you and I hope you will like them and they will fit. Be sure to let me know if they are all right. We get so much sewing done it seems wonderful with all our other occupations, but it is by being systematic, and by the two of us [Theodosia and their mother] working together. (Shaw, T. C., 1737–1938, Shaw to R. C. Gay, November 10, 1884)

Closer to her home, Rebecca visited the Roth and McWilliams dry goods store in Plaquemine to acquire needed household and dress item textiles, as well as finished dress items. Receipts dated April 1, May 11, and November 21, 1882; March 19, 1884; and June 13, 1885, show that she
also hired local Plaquemine seamstress Mrs. Elmire Barker to make a calico wrapper, a cashmere dress, a linen dress and sacque, a skirt, and two underwaists for her, in addition to having a basque bodice altered and two bonnets decorated (Barker, 1882a; Barker, 1882b; Barker, 1882c; Barker, 1884, Barker, 1885). On two of those occasions, Rebecca made partial cash payments and the rest of the payments in butter and vegetables (Barker, 1882c; Barker, 1885). While on visits to New Orleans, she frequented D. H. Holmes and A. Shwartz and Son\(^{13}\) on Canal Street for dress items and yardages of dress textiles and the milliner Mrs. F. R. Hardon on Chartres Street. She even used Janet (the same New Orleans dressmaker that Lavinia and Nannie sometimes employed) to create a dress for her.

**Final Remarks**

The Gay family women reviewed in this study each had varying participation levels in the consumption of dress items and decorative household textiles, depending on their domestic skill set and access to available goods. As the two youngest women in this study, Nannie and her sister-in-law Rebecca had the least amount of documented evidence of their involvement in creating and renovating dress items and household textiles. Given that there was almost a ten-year or more age difference between the pair and other Gay family women in this study, Nannie and Rebecca may have thought sewing and fancywork did not have as much social and domestic life skill value as they once held for women. Instead, they focused more on acquiring items for themselves and other family members. The five other Gay family women, however, engaged in acquiring both finished goods for themselves and other family members, as well as creating and renovating items for themselves and their family. Within their family, the women had a built-in

\(^{13}\) Named after German Jewish immigrant Abraham Shwartz, A. Shwartz and Son was the family’s first dry goods store before Abraham’s son Simon eventually opened the Maison Blanche department store in 1897.
network of acquiring finished goods or needed items for personal sewing projects when accessibility to such resources was limited. Even though they relied on this family network for obtaining goods from time to time, there was no written evidence found in this study in which the women expressed distress in not being able to afford to purchase items for themselves or other family members. As they continued to participate in the consumption of dress items and household textiles throughout their lives, the women still regularly employed dressmakers and seamstresses to create and alter custom dress items, even as less expensive ready-to-wear dress items started to become options for middle- to lower-class women during the final decades of the 19th century. Lastly, contrary to previous research studies’ findings (Fox-Genovese, 1988; Shaw, 2012; Weiner, 1998), no written evidence was found in this study to indicate that Lavinia or her daughters supervised their family’s slaves in the cutting and sewing of their clothing, gifted any of their secondhand dress items to the family’s favored household slaves, or sewed any special items for particular slaves.
CONCLUSION

This research sought to expand the knowledge of consumer culture in decorative household textiles and dress items prior to the twentieth century beyond what has already been established in past studies that focused on the states that lined the United States’ eastern coastline. By reviewing and analyzing the personal records and documents spanning 50 years that belonged to two generations of women of the Edward James Gay family as a case study, additional information and a better understanding of 19th-century planter class females’ consumption behaviors and motivations has been realized. One of the most unexpected results of this research was that the Gay family women did not seem to experience any financial burden related to the Civil War’s events and eventual outcome, unlike what has been stereotypically understood to be the devastating financial losses and severe decline in the customary standards of living that many planter class families suffered because of the war. In addition to food shortages, textiles and apparel items were in short supply in the South during the war. In her Civil War diary written at her home on Brokenburn Plantation in northeastern Louisiana, Kate Stone noted, “Clothes have become a secondary consideration. Fashion is an obsolete word and just to be decently clad is all we expect” (Anderson, 1995, p. 109). None of the Gay family women’s personal letters or diary entries mention any sort of financial struggle they personally endured during the time period of this study that directly resulted in an inability to acquire needed dress items or household textiles or the materials required for their creation. This unusual phenomenon most likely could be explained by the fact that Edward was able to secure the financial future of his immediate family and heirs by making strategic decisions regarding his mercantile and sugarcane businesses that benefitted both parties involved in the Civil War, by
receiving a presidential pardon after the war’s conclusion, and by continuing to expand his sugarcane plantation holdings during the Reconstruction Era.

Household Textiles and Dress Item Production

The Gay family women individually engaged in varying levels of household textiles and dress item production with most production activities aimed towards creating and renovating dress items for themselves and other family members. Due to the frequency with which most of the women wrote in their personal letters of their creation activities, this research study suggests that “creation” be added as an additional option in Kunz and Garner’s (2011) clothing consumption process model at the stage in which renovation of an item occurs. Furthermore, their model should be modified as suggested in the results chapter of this study in order to modify the model and make use, renovation, and creation as possible options that can occur at the same stage in the model when progressing from the acquisition stage to the eventual divestment stage in the consumption process. Although the number of people in today’s society who have the skills to create their own dress items and decorative household textiles has significantly diminished because of the convenience of ready-made products being offered to them and domestic sewing skills not being as highly valued as they once were in the past (Norum, 2013), creation should still be included in the consumption process in order to have a more complete framing of the process and its participants.

Despite being members of an upper-class planter family who did not appear to experience financial hardships during the time period of this study (1849 to 1899) and being readily able to afford custom-made dress items, most of the Gay family women often performed creation and renovation activities on various dress items based on their sewing and fancywork skill levels. Many of their letters and diary entries reviewed in this study contained reflections of their
productions activities and the social aspects related to them. This information supports Fox-Genovese’s (1988) assertion regarding wealthy planter women: “These women viewed their work on their own clothes as proof of their industry, but they also enjoyed doing it. Not least, they shared sewing with other women of their households, with kin, and with acquaintances” (p. 128). Although this research did not uncover direct evidence of the Gay family women being involved in fabric production, a receipt dated August 9, 1861, recorded Edward’s purchase of one-half dozen spinning wheels from Beebe and Company on Old Levee Street (present-day Decatur Street) in New Orleans (Beebe & Company, 1861). Given that at the time of this receipt, the Gay family daughters-in-law had yet to marry into the family and Lavinia and her two oldest daughters were of age to possibly operate a spinning wheel, the receipt most likely records evidence that Edward had purchased the spinning wheels for his slaves to use in fabric production in the early days of the Civil War during a time when the outcome of the war and the future of supply levels were uncertain. Fox-Genovese (1988) notes that the actual extent of household textile production in the South during the 19th century is difficult to ascertain with the lack of detailed studies; however, cheap cloth was available for purchase for slave clothing, and slaves engaged in weaving has been documented as a regular activity in some farm and plantation books (with spinning and sewing occurring on most if not all plantations), specifically for slaves’ fancy clothes and for sheets and other household textiles.

Research Questions’ Summation

This study’s results are able to answer most of the research questions that are outlined in the introductory chapter. A comprehensive list was compiled of the dress item and decorative household textile types that the Gay family women purchased, created, and received as gifts. Interestingly, the types of purchased dress item fabrics varied slightly from the types of fabrics
described in their finished garments. Overall, the women acquired and created dress items and decorative household textiles for everyday use, although items were occasionally acquired for special occasions. Although they had the financial means to employ others to make or renovate dress items, the women who had basic to moderate sewing skills often mended worn dress items or significantly altered pre-existing adult dress items into new forms for their young children. The women frequently disposed of newly acquired, created, or renovated dress items and decorative household textiles by gifting them to other family members, although a couple of instances were discovered in which one of the women sold her secondhand dresses to a family friend. Finally, in their letters and diary entries, the women rarely discussed memories or meanings attached to particular dress items unless they were associated with a particular event (e.g., a wedding or an anniversary) or as a way for their family members to remember them after their deaths.

**Future Research Studies**

Although the research focused on one planter family in Louisiana, this study could readily be replicated using other 19th-century families across the United States who left behind a large collection of existing written records and documents currently held in state archives and educational institutions. Additionally, this study’s focus could be expanded to include a content analysis of local newspaper advertisements and dry goods stores’ inventory books and daily sales logs (including those of the locations that the family visited frequently or for extended periods of time) that still exist in order to compare the types of decorative household textiles and dress items that were advertised and offered to the Gay family against the goods that the family is recorded as having purchased. Another direction for further studies would be to investigate Edward and his male family members’ purchase of textiles for slave clothing production.
compared to those that were produced on his plantations for such endeavors. During this research, several receipts were discovered that recorded the purchase of large quantities of fabric yardage that have been traditionally associated with slave clothing textiles, specifically cottonade, denim, and fabrics with striped and plaid patterns (Hunt-Hurst, 2016; Sanders, 2012). Additionally, another of Edward’s purchase receipts showed that he also procured large quantities of similar fabrics from the Louisiana State Penitentiary, which could also lead to an avenue for future research exploration into 19th-century plantations’ economic connection with prisons’ textile mills.
APPENDIX A. GAY FAMILY TREE

1. Edward James Gay m. Lavinia Hynes

   A. Andrew Hynes Gay
   B. Sophie Mitchell Gay
   C. Mary Susan “Susie or Sue” Gay
   E. John Henderson “Johnny or Jack” Gay, Jr.
   F. Anna Margaret “Annie or Nannie” Gay

1A. Andrew Hynes Gay m. Mary Augusta Dickinson

    1. Anna Maria Gay
    2. Lavinia Hynes “Benie” Gay
    3. Mary Susan “Mamie” Gay
    4. Andrew Hynes Gay, Jr.

    m. Lodoiska Clement
    (6/6/1876) (4/12/1843 – 4/10/1933)

    5. Edward James Gay III

1A1. Anna Maria Gay m. Charles James McClung

1A2. Lavinia Hynes Gay m. Joseph Allen Weaver

     A. Margaret Weaver (12/8/1893 – 4/27/1979)
     D. Lavinia Lodoiska Weaver (1900 – 10/29/1993)

---

14All names, marriages, and birth and death dates have been obtained from a variety of sources
and are deemed accurate at the time of this study (ancestry.com, n.d.; findagrave.com, n.d.;
Clement, 1952; genealogy.com, n.d.; Glenn, 2014; Hansen et al., 2013; Plater, 2015; Thomas,
2017).
1A3. Mary Susan Gay m. Herbert Elliott Doolittle

1A4. Andrew Hynes Gay, Jr. m. Irene Cannon
(12/1/1872 – 2/19/1931) (2/17/1898) (1874 – 6/1940)
A. Andrew Hynes Gay III (1898 – 5/15/1899)
B. Elizabeth Cannon Gay (4/18/1903 – 10/7/1958)

1A5. Edward James Gay III m. Gladys Fenner
E. Gladys Lodoiska Gay (11/13/1920 – )

1B. Sophie Mitchell Gay m. Philip Augustus Crow
1. Lavinia Maria “Lillie” Crow (2/6/1868 – 4/19/1926)

1C. Mary Susan “Susie or Sue” Gay m. Major Lawrence Lewis Butler
1. Frances Parke “Fannie” Butler
2. Edward Gay “Eddie or Ned” Butler
3. Lawrence Lewis Butler, Jr. (1/19/1874 – 9/4/1874)
4. Lavinia Hynes “Toots or Tootsie” Butler
5. Anna Gay “Nannie” Butler
6. Mary Susan “Eleanor/Suzanne/Susie” Butler

1C1. Frances Parke “Fannie” Butler m. Major John Ewens
A. Frances Parke Butler Ewens (10/19/1898 – 9/2/1979)

1C2. Edward Gay “Eddie or Ned” Butler m. Emily Mansfield
1C4. Lavinia Hynes “Toots or Tootsie” Butler m. Wyatt Shallcross

A. Eleanor Custis Shallcross (12/17/1898 – 1/18/1959)
C. Lawrence Butler Shallcross (11/10/1907 – 8/14/1990)
D. Wyatt Shallcross, Jr. (5/2/1910 – 8/25/1987)
E. Mary Susan Shallcross (4/20/1919 – 10/14/1995)

1C5. Anna Gay “Nannie” Butler m. Richard Cheatham Plater

A. “Little Wonderful” Plater (1906 – 1906)
C. Louise Plater (1/31/1910 – 5/16/1982)

1C6. Mary Susan “Eleanor/Suzanne/Susie” Butler m. George Armistead Whiting

A. Eleanor Custis Whiting (1/3/1902 – 9/1/1949)
B. Dr. Lawrence Lewis Butler Whiting (4/9/1906 – 1/26/1950)

1E. John Henderson Gay, Jr. m. Rebecca Parker “Nannie” Conner
div. (1894)

m. (1898)
div. (1903)
m. (1911)

Lucille V. Daniel
Jeanette Phillips Talbot

1F. Anna Margaret “Annie or Nannie” Gay m. Andrew Price
APPENDIX B. DRESS FABRIC DEFINITIONS AND USES

Alpaca: “A lightweight, plain weave, dress fabric made with cotton warp and alpaca filling, usually black, with a lustrous finish. It was known as Alpaca Orleans in Bradford, England, where it was first manufactured. Similar to and sometimes called mohair and brilliantine…Uses: women’s lightweight coats, linings, shawls; men’s and women’s suits; sportswear” (Wingate, 1979, p. 15).

Barège: “Sheer, gauze-like fabric of wool combined with silk, cotton, etc. Used for veils, dresses. So called from Barèges, France, where originally made” (Picken, 1957, p. 14).


Calico: “In U.S., plain-woven cotton cloth printed with figured pattern on one side. Originally, fine fabric, comparatively new at time of Civil War when cost was 75¢ per yard for 18-inch width; now made from cheaper grade of cotton, highly sized” (Picken, 1957, pp. 42–43).


Check: “1. Pattern in squares of any size, woven or applied, resembling checkerboard; also square in such a design. 2. Fabric having pattern of squares” (Picken, 1957, p. 59).

Cotton: “Fabric made of cotton” (Picken, 1957, p. 84).

Cottonade: “Originally plain, also serge, or twill woven, all-cotton fabric made with single yarns and heavy filling. Made in solid colors, checks, stripes, plaids, etc. and used for dress goods,
tablecloths, and with the stronger grades, trousers. Coarse, heavy cotton fabric, an imitation of cassimere. Among the Acadians of Louisiana, cottonade was ‘the general clothing weight fabric,’ falling in the blue-white-brown color range” (Montgomery, 2007, pp. 206-207).

**Crash**: “Any of several coarsely woven fabrics having rough texture due to knotted or uneven yarns. 1. Linen or cotton cloth of plain weave in varying weights and colors. Used for dresses, blouses” (Picken, 1957, p. 87).

**Damask**: “Firm, reversible, glossy fabric of many textile fiber combinations, woven in patterns so that one side has satin warp face designs with filling face background, and the other side is in reverse. Modern damasks woven on Jacquard loom. Used for table linens, upholstery, hangings; occasionally, for garments” (Picken, 1957, p. 94).


**Denim**: “Washable, strong, stout twilled cotton cloth, made of single yarn, and either dyed in the piece or woven with dark brown or dark blue warp and white filling; used for overalls, skirts, etc. The term probably derives from *Serge de Nismes* [sic], a twilled woolen cloth made in France; by the eighteenth century, it was also made of wool and cotton…Single, double, and striped cotton denims were manufactured in the Lancashire area” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 216).

**Embroidery**: “Ornamental needlework consisting of designs worked [with a needle] on fabric with silk, cotton, wool, metal, or other threads, by hand or machine” (Picken, 1957, p. 111).

**Facing**: “Fabric applied to garment edge, often on the underside. Used as a substitute for a hem; also, for lining on parts of garment that are turned back, such as collars and cuffs” (Picken, 1957, p. 121).
**Flannel:** “1. Soft, light, woolen fabric, slightly napped on one side, in plain or twill weave. Used for shirts, sports clothes, children’s clothes, etc. 2. Cotton fabric in plain or twill weave with twisted warp yarn, napped on one or both sides. In plain colors and prints. Also called *cotton flannel*” (Picken, 1957, pp. 131–132).


**India Silk:** “Soft, thin, plain weave silk fabrics with an even texture and natural luster; made on hand looms in India” (Wingate, 1979, p. 306).


**Lace:** “Open-work fabric consisting of network of threads—linen, cotton, silk, wool, rayon, metal, or other fiber—usually having designs worked in...Made by hand with bobbins, needles, or hooks; also by machinery. Used for trimming on lingerie, dresses, suits, coats, etc.; also for entire garments or accessories” (Picken, 1957, p. 196).

**Lawn:** “Fine, soft, sheer fabric, usually cotton, in plain weave, filled with starch or sizing. Often printed after it is woven. Used for handkerchiefs, baby clothes, dresses, blouses, aprons, curtains” (Picken, 1957, pp. 207–208).

**Linen:** Cloth woven from yarns of spun flax fibers (Adams, 1912).

**Lining:** “Cloth partly or entirely covering inside surface of garment, forming inside finish” (Picken, 1957, p. 214).

Mull: “A soft, thin fabric made of very fine yarns in a plain weave, and bleached or dyed pastel shades. Cotton, silk, or combinations of these yarns are employed. Uses: millinery, dresses” (Wingate, 1979, p. 403).


Plaid: “Twilled cotton, woolen, worsted, silk, or synthetic fabric, woven of yarn-dyes fibers, in patterns consisting or colored bars crossing each other to form varied squares” (Picken, 1957, p. 254).

Rep: “Firm fabric of cotton, wool, or silk, woven with heavier weft than warp in crosswise ribbed effect. Used for draperies and upholstery; also for skirts, suits, and men’s and boy’s clothing” (Picken, 1957, p. 273).


Satin: “Silk or rayon fabric, sometimes with cotton filling, having smooth finish, high gloss on face, and dull back; also double-faced. Luster and brilliancy are due to manner of weaving and finishing between heated cylinders. Made in many varieties. Used for dresses, blouses, accessories, coats, linings, lingerie, trimmings, etc.” (Picken, 1957, p. 283).

Serge: “Twilled fabric woven of worsted, silk or cotton and comprising a long range of styles and finishes” (Adams, 1912, p. 57).


Swiss Muslin: “Fine, thin, cotton fabric rather loosely woven and having a great deal of stiffening. Differs from lawn in being sheerer, more loosely woven, and stiffer. The name Swiss is widely misused, often being applied inaccurately where it is desired to give the impression that the goods are excellent…Swiss is desirable because of its fresh, crisp appearance, and because it is cool. It wears well for so thin a fabric…Uses: Dresses for women and children; waists, neckwear, curtains, dresser scarfs” (Dyer, 1923, p. 312).

Suiting: “Fabric having enough body to be tailored nicely; often sturdy, firm cotton. Used for making suits and skirts” (Picken, 1957, p. 339).

Turkey Red: Cloth dyed with turkey red vegetable dye derived from madder. Named for the madder once brought from Turkey (Adams, 1912).

Twill: “Weave having distinct diagonal line or rib, to right or left, due to filling yarns passing over one warp yarn, under two or more. Strongest of all weaves. Cotton twills included denim, coutil, ticking; wool twills include serge and gabardine” (Picken, 1957, p. 372).

Veiling: “Piece of fabric, usually thin and light, worn over head or face for ornament, protection, or concealment” (Picken, 1957, p. 364).


Wool: “Fabric or clothing made from wool” (Picken, 1957, p. 376).
REFERENCES


Barker, E. (1882a, April 1). [Handwritten receipt to Rebecca C. Gay]. Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Mss. 1295, Box 114, Folder 1309). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


Barker, E. (1882c, November 21). [Handwritten receipt to Rebecca C. Gay]. Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Mss. 1295, Box 115, Folder 1326). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


Beebe & Company. (1861, August 9). [Receipt for Edward James Gay]. Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Mss. 1295, Box 42, Folder 397). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


[Fabric catalog]. (ca. 1830). Archives of the Louisiana State University Textile and Costume Museum, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.


Gay, M. D. (1869a, April 29). [Letter to Ann T. Dickinson]. Andrew Hynes Gay and Family Papers (Mss. 2542, Box 1, Folder 3). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.

Gay, M. S. (1864). [Diary of Mary Susan Gay: St. Louis Plantation]. Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Mss. 4872, Box 10, Folder 5). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


Godey’s fashions for July 1873 [Fashion plate]. Godey’s Lady’s Book, 87(517).


Hunt-Hurst, P. (2016). African American clothing, 1820–1859. In J. Blanco F. & M. D. Doering (Eds.), Clothing and fashion: American fashion from head to toe, volume 1, Pre-colonial times through the American Revolution (pp. 36-38). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.


Inventory record from the Iberville Parish, Louisiana, estate of Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Gay, St. Louis Plantation: Furniture and household effects. (ca. 1892). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections (Mss. 4872, Box 9, Folder 20), Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


La Cotonnière d’Alsace. (ca. 1840). *La cotonnière d’Alsace: 68025 Colmar* [Fabric catalog]. Archives of the Louisiana State University Textile and Costume Museum, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.


Martin, E. G. (1856, May 9). [Letter to Lavinia H. Gay]. Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Mss. 4872, Box 1, Folder 5). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


*N oath of allegiance*. (1864, February 22). Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Box 46, Folder 447). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


*The Ogden Standard*. (1913, November 15). Burr L. Harris is found guilty. p. 8.


[Photograph of Andrew Price]. (1900). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Box 2, Folder 20). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


[Photograph of Edward James Gay, Jr.]. (ca. 1874). Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Box 180, Folder 2232a). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.

[Photograph of John Henderson Gay, Jr.]. (ca. 1892). Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Box 180, Folder 2233a). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.

128

[Photograph of Lawrence Lewis Butler]. (n.d.). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Box 5, Folder 10). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.

[Photograph of Mary Susan Gay Butler]. (ca. 1880). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Box 2, Folder 16). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


[Photograph of St. Louis Plantation]. (1890). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Box 3, Folder 14). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


[Presidential pardon]. (1866, December 24). Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Box 49, Folder 498). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


Price, A. G. (1883, October 21). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Mss. 4872, Box 1, Folder 15). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.
Price, A. G. (1889, February 27). Gay-Butler-Plater Family Papers (Mss. 4872, Box 1, Folder 19). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


130

Reilly, L. M. C. (n.d.). A sketch of Sophie Mitchell: Great great grand-mother of Lavinia Gay Martin [Biographical sketch]. Historic Iberville, St. James, St. John the Baptist, and St. Mary Parishes Collection, 1846 – 1985 (Box 1, Item 4). Archives Stacks, Nicholls State University Library, Thibodaux, LA.


Shaw, M. Slave cloth and clothing slaves: Craftsmanship, commerce, and industry. *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 33.*


*Succession record of Andrew Hynes decd inventory copy*. (1850, April 2). Edward J. Gay and Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections (Mss. 1295, Box 22, Folder 168), Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


Tillon, J. (1869, November 9). [Receipt for Mary Susan Gay]. Edward J. Gay and Family Papers (Mss. 1295, Box 57, Folder 603). Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.


Growing up on a small farm in Heflin, Alabama, Lindsay Danielle Reaves loved reading and listening to stories from the past. While earning her bachelor’s degree in telecommunications and film at the University of Alabama, her theatre minor classes sparked her interest in the history of apparel and its cultural significance. She continued her studies at the University of Alabama and earned a master’s degree in human environmental sciences with a concentration in apparel and textiles. As her interest in historic costume research grew, she decided to pursue a curriculum in textiles, apparel design, and merchandising at Louisiana State University. Upon completion of her doctoral degree with dual concentrations in apparel design and the historic and cultural aspects of clothing and textiles, she plans to pursue work in academia or museums.