HERMAN PATRICK TAPPÉ:
AMERICAN FASHION DESIGNER AND IMPORTER

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Science in the
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By
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ABSTRACT

The first half of the twentieth century saw many exciting and fresh changes in women’s fashion. Designers such as Poiret, Vionnet, Schiaparelli, Chanel and Patou made their way into the newly developing fashion scene in America. In addition to these French designers who were keenly sought after, homegrown American designers began building names for themselves as well. A personality of intrigue, American fashion designer Herman Patrick Tappé (1876-1954) created a prestigious name for himself among the top designers of his era. Herman Tappé rose from a small town in the Midwest to become one of the key fashion designers and importers in New York City, the fashion capital of America.

Tappé designed for the wealthy and famous in New York society, and was well known and trusted as a discriminating importer of French fashion goods. In addition to creating women’s daywear, eveningwear and accessories, he was enthusiastically chosen to design wedding gowns and themes for many prominent New York City brides and their bridal parties. Books on American fashion history are strangely silent about Tappé. Although he seems to have been a prominent figure in New York fashion, no source can be found that provides more than a few sentences about this enigmatic man.
Qualitative, narrative historical research was conducted to find extant garments designed and sold by Tappé, to determine the extent of his business and range of clients, and create a direct commentary on his aesthetic and design sense. Shedding light on the career of Tappé provides fashion scholars, designers, and historians a more complete picture of New York American fashion in the early twentieth century, and contributes to the existing body of knowledge about individual American designers of the twentieth century.
Dedicated to Jeff
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VITA

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Human Ecology
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              Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Fashion
              Fashion Design, Construction, Aesthetics, and Pattern making
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................. ii
Dedication ............................................................................................. iv
Acknowledgments.................................................................................... v
Vita................................................................................................... vii
List of Figures ........................................................................................ ix

Preface................................................................................................ 1

Chapters:
1. Introduction....................................................................................... 2
   Research objectives..................................................................... 4
   Research procedure..................................................................... 5
   Limitations of the study............................................................... 8

2. Humble Beginnings............................................................................ 11

3. Tappe: Designer and Retailer................................................................. 29
   Location, Location, Location......................................................... 30
   Clientele.................................................................................... 35
   Weddings: Master of the Revels.................................................. 38
   Advertising and Promotion......................................................... 44
   Tappe in the News..................................................................... 46

4. Tappe’s Designs: An Aesthetic Analysis................................................ 69
   Labels............................................................................................ 70
   Millinery..................................................................................... 72
   Daywear/Eveningwear................................................................. 80
   Wedding Gowns....................................................................... 88

5. Tappe’s Legacy................................................................................ 138
   Suggestions for Future Research.................................................. 142

Bibliography....................................................................................... 144
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>822 Crescent Drive, Sidney, Ohio. Tappe’s childhood home.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>The Chimneys, built 1913, c. 2004.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>The Chimneys, view of the side porch.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Anna Tappe, Herman’s mother. Courtesy of Robert Allinger.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Herman Patrick Tappe, n.d., Shelby County Historical Society.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Herman Patrick Tappe, c. 1918. Courtesy of Mr. James Casey.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Tappe monument at the family burial plot in Sidney, Ohio.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Herman’s gravesite at the Tappe family burial plot.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Locations of fashion retailers advertised in the 1934 issues of <em>Vogue</em>.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Mrs. Hollinger of Akron, Ohio (right) wearing a Tappe hat. Courtesy of the</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kent State University Museum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Mrs. Philip R. Peters’ receipt from the House of Tappe. Courtesy of The Ohio</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State University’s Historic Costume and Textiles Collection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Movie poster for <em>Orphans of the Storm</em> costumes designed by Tappe, premiered</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1921.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Tappe’s society brides featured in <em>The Ladies’ Home Journal</em>, 1939.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Miriam Cecilia Thedieck, wearing an original Tappe wedding gown, late</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1920s or early 1930s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.7 Margaret Louise Thedieck, wearing sister Miriam Cecilia Thedieck's Tappe wedding gown, in *Vogue* magazine ...................................................... 57

3.8 Margaret Louise Thedieck, wearing sister Miriam Cecilia Thedieck's Tappe wedding gown, in *Vogue* magazine ...................................................... 58

3.9 Miss Margaret Louise Thedieck and Dr. William Wendell Weis, January 24, 1948, Tappe gown with altered neckline, courtesy of Susan Gansz ................ 59

3.10 Miss Margaret Louise Thedieck, January 24, 1948, Tappe gown with altered neckline, courtesy of Susan Gansz ...................................................... 60

3.11 Floral muff by Tappe, *Vogue* magazine, May 1, 1932 ......................... 61

3.12 Wedding gown (far right) by Tappe, *Vogue* magazine, May 1, 1932 ............... 62

3.13 Exterior of announcement, courtesy of Mr. James Casey ...................................................... 63

3.14 Interior of announcement, courtesy of Mr. James Casey ............................. 64

3.15 Advertisement in the October 15, 1934 issue of *Vogue* magazine ............. 65

3.16 Illustration in *Vogue* magazine, March 1, 1931 issue. Imported costume designed by Vionnet sold at House of Tappe, center .................................. 66

3.17 Illustration in *Vogue* magazine, March 1, 1931 issue. Imported hat designed by Maria Guy sold at House of Tappe, right .......................................... 67

3.18 Tappe's wool gloves, as advertised in *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1935 ...... 68


4.2 Interior label of green silk-covered straw hat, 1917-18. Museum of the City of New York ...................................................... 95

4.3 Detail of silk flowers on silk-covered straw hat, 1917-18. Museum of the City of New York ...................................................... 96

4.5 Navy blue velvet cloche hat, 1926. Museum of the City of New York.............98
4.6 Black velvet turban with lace and rhinestone ornament, 1928. Western Reserve Historical Society.................................................................99
4.7 Tan silk hat with wide floppy brim embroidered in palm trees, 1920s. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University...........100
4.8 Interior label of tan silk hat embroidered with palm trees, 1920s. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.............101
4.9 Coral straw picture hat, 1935. Western Reserve Historical Society..............102
4.10 Brown felt hat with turned down sides and slubbed netting, 1930-49. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.................103
4.11 Interior labels of brown felt hat with turned down sides, 1930-49. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University...............104
4.12 Brown felt hat with “tongue” crown, 1938. Kent State University Museum.....105
4.13 Side view of brown felt hat with “tongue” crown, 1938. Kent State University Museum.................................................................106
4.14 Lime green beret, 1930. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University .........................................................107
4.15 Lime green beret, back view, 1930. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University ..............................................108
4.16 Interior label of lime green beret, 1930. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University ......................................................109
4.17 Woven straw hat with summer fruit, 1930s. Kent State University Museum..........................................................................................110
4.18 Detail of woven straw hat with summer fruit, 1930s. Kent State University Museum..........................................................................................111
4.19 Crocheted yachting cap, 1930-35. Courtesy of Texas Fashion Collection ......112
4.20 Evening jacket with metallic lace, 1910-17. Courtesy of the Cincinnati Art Museum.................................................................113
4.21 Detail of evening jacket with metallic lace, 1910-17. Courtesy of the Cincinnati Art Museum................................................................................ 114
4.22 Black taffeta gown with red yoke, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT............... 115
4.23 Detail of shoulder and bodice of taffeta gown, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT....116
4.24 Interior label of taffeta gown, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT..................... 117
4.25 Waist yoke detail of taffeta gown, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT............... 118
4.26 Black taffeta surplice dress with net skirt, 1925. Museum of the City of New York................................................................................ 119
4.27 Bodice detail of black taffeta surplice dress, 1925. Museum of the City of New York......................................................................... 120
4.28 Blue velvet coat, 1926. Museum of the City of New York.......................... 121
4.29 Red velvet dress with scalloped hem, 1927. Museum of the City of New York................................................................................ 122
4.31 Red velvet dress trim detail, 1927. Museum of the City of New York ........124
4.32 Interior label of red velvet dress, 1927. Museum of the City of New York ......125
4.33 Black georgette gown with sequins, 1927. Western Reserve Historical Society..........................................................126
4.34 Bodice detail of black georgette gown with sequins, 1927. Western Reserve Historical Society..........................................................127
4.35 Lace collar on black velvet dress, 1928. Western Reserve Historical
Society.................................................................128

4.36 Peach floral lace gown with rhinestone detail, 1928. Western Reserve Historical
Society........................................................................ 129

4.37 Rhinestone brooch at hip of peach floral lace gown, 1928. Western Reserve Historical
Society...................................................................... 130

4.38 Detail of lace collar with monkey fur, 1929. Western Reserve Historical
Society....................................................................... 131

4.39 Faggoting detail on interior slip of dress with monkey fur, 1929. Western Reserve Historical
Society...................................................................... 132

4.40 Asymmetrical silver “V” dress with bugle bead embroidery, 1929. Western Reserve Historical
Society....................................................................... 133

4.41 Pink-beige crepe with Italian Venetian point lace, 1944. The Museum of the City of New York......................... 134

4.42 Detail of Italian Venetian point lace, 1944. The Museum of the City of New York................................. 135

4.43 Interior label of crepe dress, 1944. The Museum of the City of New York...... 136

4.44 “Elizabethan-inspired” wedding gown worn by Doris Marguerite Brixey, 1927.
Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York..............................137
Driving northwest along Ohio state route 33 toward Sidney, Ohio is to enjoy the peaceful experience of the rise and fall of a beautiful country highway. Cornfields, small country homes, two-story farmhouses, and the occasional barn and silo are common occurrences along my ride on a blustery but clear-skied, crisp January day. As I approach the small town of Sidney, I pass a large and very old cemetery, a short row of shops, and finally the charming century-old buildings that make up the downtown area. I pull into a parking spot alongside the Shelby County Historical Society, which is a lovely and somewhat imposing brick building with large white columns and heavy wooden doors. I am scheduled to meet Robert Allinger, longtime Sidney resident and friend of the family of Herman Patrick Tappe. Upon entering the building, a spry and handsome man in his eighties greets me with dancing blue eyes. He is full of stories, he says, about the Tappe family—shall we get in his car and go for a tour? This was my first stroke of luck in unraveling the mystery of the career of American fashion designer and importer Herman Patrick Tappe.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first half of the twentieth century saw many exciting and fresh changes in women’s fashion. Designers such as Poiret, Vionnet, Schiaparelli, Chanel and Patou made their way into the newly developing fashion scene in America. In addition to these French designers who were keenly sought after, homegrown American designers began building names for themselves as well. A personality of intrigue, American fashion designer Herman Patrick Tappé (1876-1954) created a prestigious name for himself among the top designers of his era. In *The Ways of Fashion* (1948) M. D. C. Crawford, noted anthropologist and promoter of American fashion, hailed Tappé as one of the most original and accomplished couturiers of the early twentieth century, along with Hattie Carnegie, Jessie Franklin Turner, and Valentina. Indeed, Tappé made a name for himself even before America made its break with French fashion during World War I.¹

Herman Tappé rose from a small town in the Midwest to become one of the key fashion designers and importers in New York City, the fashion capital of America. He had meager beginnings in the small, quaint town of Sidney, Ohio, only to rise to fame, fortune and popularity among the elite of American society. Tappé is a great example of the American Dream realized, which makes him a fascinating character to study. His life and the lives of his family in Sidney, Ohio, were forever changed as he transformed the
Tappe name into one of high standing in his hometown, and one of recognition in the fashionable “salons of America.”

Tappe designed for the wealthy and famous in New York society, and was well known and trusted as a discriminating importer of French fashion goods. In addition to creating women’s daywear, eveningwear and accessories, he was enthusiastically chosen to design wedding gowns and themes for many prominent New York City brides and their bridal parties. His many famous brides include Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III, and Mrs. William Wendell Weis, daughter of Tappe’s boss during his early days at I. H. Thedieck department store.

Tappe was a unique and dramatic participant of New York society himself, and regularly contributed to the discourse on fashion in the popular media of his day—newspapers and fashion magazines. In *New York Fashion* (1989) Caroline Rennolds Milbank described him as “the Poiret of New York,” and “primarily as a designer of wedding, bridesmaid, and coming-out dresses.” Shedding light on his career provides fashion scholars, designers, and historians with a more complete picture of New York American fashion in the early twentieth century, and contributes to the existing body of knowledge about individual American designers of that time period.

Books on American fashion history are strangely silent about Tappe. Even Milbank’s comments on him are brief. Although he seems to have been a prominent figure in New York fashion, no source can be found that provides more than a few sentences about this enigmatic man. That leaves the research problem: who was the early twentieth century designer named Herman Patrick Tappe, and what was his contribution to American fashion history?
Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research were threefold: The first objective was to establish Tappé’s background and beginnings, including information about his early career and family life in Sidney, Ohio. The second objective was to describe the development of Tappé’s business as a designer/importer, and place his business in the context of the fashion industry in New York during his lifetime. This included identifying who his clients were, his approach to retail business, and identifying the types of goods he sold and designed. The third objective was to investigate Tappé’s design and aesthetic sense as evidenced through extant items of clothing held in costume collections. An important component of this third objective was to call attention to the drama and femininity expressed in Tappé’s fashion designs.

The overall goal of this research was to examine the legacy of Tappé’s contribution to American fashion. The results of the study document more completely the role of America in twentieth century fashion. This study removes the blanket of obscurity from Tappé’s name and reveals his importance to the New York fashion scene in the early twentieth century. The results of this research are of use to scholars of fashion and New York City history, as well as to curators of costume collections with Tappé holdings. These institutions will benefit by having access to more cataloging information. The Shelby County Historical Society in Sidney, Ohio, has expressed great interest in knowing more about their arguably most famous past resident. They have placed a request for a copy of this thesis when it is completed, as it will be invaluable information to pass on to their citizens. Bill, Pat and Pauline Kane, the current residents
of Tappé's family home, The Chimneys, in Sidney, Ohio, have also requested a copy of this thesis to remain with the home as part of its history.

Research Procedure

The research approach of this study is a qualitative, interpretive historical method for the purpose of exploring and describing the life and business of American fashion designer Herman Patrick Tappé. Historical research is the process of systematically examining past events to give an account and communicate an understanding of what has happened in the past. It is not a mere accumulation of facts and dates or even a description of past events. It is a flowing, dynamic account that involves an interpretation of these events in an attempt to recapture the nuances, personalities and ideas that influenced events.

The economic and social history of the early twentieth century was integrated into understanding how Tappé and his business fit into the social and economic scheme of New York during his years as a designer. Based on the elite social status of his own circle of friends, in addition to the status of the women who were his clientele, this viewpoint has the advantage of viewing Tappé in the context of upper class New York City society in the early twentieth century. No explicit theoretical framework is uniformly adhered to because the findings and discussions based on this research are emergent rather than prefigured. The strategy of inquiry is a narrative case study. That is, the researcher studied the lives of individuals, in this case mainly one individual, and the information was analyzed and interpreted in a narrative format.
Primary historical materials were available in New York City and Ohio. These include primary and secondary sources such as donor records, photographs, and garments in collections, as well as contemporary magazine and newspaper articles and advertisements. The first objective was to establish and report the story of Tappe’s background and beginnings, including information about his family life and home in Sidney, Ohio. Information regarding Tappe’s life in relation to Sidney, Ohio and his upbringing was searched for at the Shelby County Historical Society and the Sidney Public Library in Sidney, Ohio. One such visit resulted in a discussion with surviving neighbor and friend of the Tappe family, Mr. Robert Allinger. Mr. Allinger’s personal account provided personal details about the Tappe family that would otherwise be lost. A second visit to Sidney involved visiting and touring Tappe’s family home, which was requested by a letter to the home’s current residents. The current residents Bill, Pat, and Pauline Kane also provided newspaper clippings about the home that were collected by past residents.

The second objective was to describe the development of Tappe’s business as a designer/importer, and place his business in the context of the fashion industry in New York during his lifetime. This included identifying who his clients were, his approach to retail business, and identifying the types of goods he sold and designed. Tappe’s nephew Mr. James Casey, a financial supporter of the Shelby County Historical Society, was contacted in attempt to recover surviving records and materials from the business.

The third objective was to investigate Tappe’s design and aesthetic sense through examination of extant items of clothing held in costume collections. The following institutions had Tappe artifacts that were available for the researcher to examine: The
Museum of the City of New York, the Museum at Kent State University, The Museum at
the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Texas Fashion Collection at the University of
North Texas, the costume collection at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Western Reserve
Historical Society, and the Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State
University.

The largest collection of Tappe garments was located at the Museum of the City
of New York (MCNY). They hold catalog records of fourteen Tappe items, several of
which consist of multiple components, such as matching hats or gloves. I was able to
personally study and photograph five of these items.

The researcher’s home institution, the Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at
The Ohio State University has three hats designed by the House of Tappe. One hat bears
the label “La Mode Chez Tappe, Inc.” and another with a different label that reads
“Tappe Hats, Inc.” These include a lime green straw beret dating from the 1930s
(accession number 1991.655.122), a brown felt hat with side extensions and slubbed silk

In addition to the institutions mentioned above, other collections were contacted
as necessary in order to locate and document as many existing Tappe items as possible.
Locating specific holdings and additional research sites was negotiated as an ongoing
process in the study due to the emergent nature of historical research.

Steps taken to gain entry into the previously mentioned institutions included
contact via e-mail or telephone in the form of a research request. All institutions listed
above provided research time and space for graduate students conducting studies relevant
to their holdings. Once appointments were obtained and confirmed, travel arrangements were made accordingly. Permission for digital photography and/or photocopying and scanning of materials were requested, as these materials were an important visual part of the final thesis paper.

The collected information was gleaned from artifact analysis and public documents to visual materials such as photographs and illustrations. The data collection extended to whatever means were necessary in order to complete the research to satisfaction. One source continually led to a new and different source or form of information.

Once information from all sources was obtained, it was organized and categorized according to the research objectives. Visual sources were prepared by scanning into a digital format and digital photographs were set at proper resolutions. The historical information was reviewed to gain a broader understanding of what had been found. Information was then divided and organized into chapters of the thesis. A description of Tappé's apparel artifacts was generated and integrated into the narrative, in a separate chapter, as evidence to support the stated findings. Finally, themes emerged regarding Tappé and his design aesthetic, which formed the conclusion part of the study, and the information was interpreted in a broader context.

Limitations of the Study

The potential limitations to the proposed research should be addressed. First, the time period for data collection was limited to two academic quarters, or approximately twenty weeks. Second, there were limited financial resources available for travel.
Access to research institutions and actual garments was therefore limited. Only the collections and locations deemed most pertinent to the study were visited. In addition to limited access due to geography, at times access was limited due to museum staff decisions. Collections access was dependent on the willingness of curators and collections managers to spend their time and resources pulling materials out of storage and offering research space and assistance. Lastly, there was a limitation due to a lack of first hand accounts by actual persons alive at the time Tappé was working.

The Museum of the City of New York, in particular, was a wealth of opportunity for studying Tappé garments firsthand. It is exciting to see that Mrs. Guggenheim herself owned and wore a dress made by Tappé, which says a lot for the level of his clientele. However, due to the museum being understaffed and having confined storage conditions, it was very difficult to actually pull out and study the items. Less than half of the Tappé items held there could be studied. Perhaps someday the situation will improve and one can return to study the collection at MCNY, among others, more thoroughly.
NOTES

Chapter 1


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., 183.
CHAPTER 2

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

To acquire a better understanding of Herman Patrick Tappe’s life as a designer, it is important to discover where he came from and how he evolved into the man he became. Similar to the beginnings of American designers Halston and Blass, Tappe was born and raised in the Midwest, evolving from modest beginnings that were not part of a typical high society New Yorker’s privileged upbringing. Tappe hailed from Sidney, Ohio, a small city approximately 40 miles due north of Dayton, Ohio, and 85 miles northwest of Columbus, Ohio. Today the population of Sidney numbers about 20,000; in Tappe’s day it was half that size. The city was originally named for Sir Philip Sidney, a poet and member of the British Parliament, and consisted of a mere 70 acres. The city has grown substantially since the early 19th century, and today Sidney is described as “a progressive, growth-oriented community.”

Before Herman’s rise to fame, the Tappe family was no different from any other family of moderate means. I had the great honor of speaking with a longtime friend and neighbor of the Tappe family, Mr. Robert Allinger, who was a child when Tappe was in his prime, but who shared the day-to-day experiences of life in Sidney with the Tappe family next door. As he grew older, his relationship with the family remained steady, and he was the pallbearer at the funerals of not only Herman Patrick Tappe himself, but of
Tappe's mother and sisters as well. His insightful and personal account of the Tappe family is interspersed throughout this chapter, in quotations, to add a firsthand view of the family's life.

The most excellent written source depicting Herman Patrick Tappe's early life before he was a designer is an online biographical article and book chapter written by Ohio historian Rich Wallace in 1996 for the Shelby County Historical Society and the William A. Ross, Jr. Historical Center in Sidney, Ohio. Wallace describes Tappe's childhood beginnings as "humble." Born on June 20, 1876 to parents Anna and Herman, Sr. in Sidney, Ohio, Tappe's father ran a cigar company and founded a civic musical band known as "Tappe's Band." Tappe had three sisters: Mayme, Celia and Elizabeth, the latter who was better known as Bess. Herman, Sr. passed away from consumption in 1883 at the age of 41, and from that point forward Tappe's mother Anna raised the children on her own. 3 Wallace states that Tappe's own band serenaded his body to Graceland Cemetery "in classic New Orleans style." 4 According to neighbor and family friend Robert Allinger, Anna supported her children after her husband's death by rolling cigars in her home.

The house where Tappe was born is now located at 822 Crescent Drive. The original location of the home was in the same location "The Chimneys" now stands on South Ohio Avenue. The little house on Crescent Drive is a small white aluminum sided bungalow with only one small window facing front. It must have been considered small even in Herman's day. Figure 2.1 shows the front of the house, with the address 822 located just over the latticework opening that leads to the front door.
After Tappé became a successful designer, he moved his mother’s small home a few blocks away to Crescent Drive and built the new family home in 1914 called “The Chimneys” on the same spot on South Ohio Avenue, so named for the two chimneys that made up the façade of the house. The Chimneys was the pinnacle of luxury and elegance of its day by Sidney standards, described by Rich Wallace as “Sidney’s residential masterpiece at the time of its construction.”

As we drove past The Chimneys, Robert recalled:

This house with the brick wall around it Herman built for his mother. It was a beautiful place. At one time it had the best of the furniture, and then it was sold later on when Herman ran out of money. But you see it had a nice porch there, and it had a beautiful yard, and there used to be all kinds, well, there’s one of the statues still there. There was a pond down there which is still there, then the gates and the statues, it was well kept; it was a beautiful place. (Allinger 2004)

Originally the grand house had two stone cats on the roof, whose purpose were supposedly to protect the family from evil spirits. Unfortunately, the stone cats are no longer part of the house today. Robert Allinger also remembers the stone cats, and does not know what happened to them, although he suggests they might have been moved out to a country home. Today The Chimneys is still a beautiful home and one of the finer houses in Sidney. The current owners have removed the striped awning original to the side porch, and have added solar panels to the rooftop. Beside these minor updates, the home still holds its original charm. Figure 2.2 shows the front of the house, with its lovely brick wall surrounding the home, and figure 2.3 is a side view of the porch. Note the original stone vase and flower sculptures, which can be seen also in figure 2.4. Figure 2.4 shows Anna, Herman’s mother, photographed on the side porch of The Chimneys in the late 1920s or early 1930s. She is wearing a dress made by her son.
Allinger recalls:

I would imagine a lot of the stuff his mother wore he probably made for her because he was pretty [devoted] to his mother. When his father died...his mother raised the four kids and she made cigars. That's the way she made her living to raise these four kids: by making cigars, in that little house on Crescent Drive. And of course when Herman came into big bucks he built that fancy house... She was a pretty sharp little old lady. And of course she was pretty prominent in town since Herman was such a character. Of course the town was only about half the size of what the town is now, about 10,000, I think now it's 20,000, so Grandma Tappe was pretty well known. Of course she lived in the pretty fancy house, too. (Allinger 2004)

Herman Tappe, Jr. possessed dashing good looks, as evidenced in a profile view photograph (n.d.) which appears to be from his early to mid twenties (fig. 2.5). Herman’s first marriage was in 1907 (the same year that he began his own business) to Ada Joffray McVickar, daughter of a clothing merchant in New York City. Ada died a short ten years later in 1917. It did not take long for the newly single Herman to find and marry Ann Holch, known in New York City as “The Beautiful Anna.”

One of Tappe’s grand events at the armory in Sidney was the announcement of their engagement and a celebration of the end of WWI in 1918, which was a smashing party complete with jazz band and orchestra, coined “The Victory Ball.” According to Rich Wallace, “Over six hundred people attended the social event of the season. The Shelby County Democrat reported that Tappe brought in a jazz band and a colored orchestra from New York for the occasion. Local legend has it that Herman later redecorated some of The Chimneys in blue to match the striking blue eyes of Anna.”

Allinger recalls the grand parties thrown at the armory:

Herman used to come back from New York and he’d always throw a big party and they would hold them down at the armory. Of course I was just a kid so I never got to go to one of the parties, but they had all the affluent people of the
city at that time. Whatever he did he did first class. But then he finally ran out of money. And he made quite a name for himself. (Allinger 2004)

The Sidney Daily News captured the essence of the party with the following announcement on December 27, 1918:

The premier social event that has ever taken place in Western Ohio will be held at the armory Monday evening – the “Bal Victoire” given by Herman Tappe and his bride. The salons of Paris will show no more gorgeous gowns and rare furs and gems than will be worn by the charming bride and her party. A number of these costumes are costly replicas of evening gowns designed by Mr. Tappe for wealthy South American belles. (Sidney Daily News 1918)

Interestingly, however, on Tappe’s regular visits home, sans glamorous parties, Robert never remembers Herman’s wives being present in Sidney, “...he never had any children, and when he came back he was always by himself, he never brought any wife with him, he always came back by himself.” Therefore, it is hard to determine the level of interest or closeness Herman felt with his wives, and how much they were involved in his life. It is possible that they remained involved in his high society life in New York, while not being much involved in his ongoing connection with Sidney. This is, however, speculation, as the truth cannot be deduced from what is known.

In terms of his personality, Herman could be described as particular, somewhat feminine, and flamboyant. Robert remembers him well as a man with definite ideas about how everything should look, from his yard to his clothing, to the furniture in his homes:

Well, [chuckles], he was a little on the feminine side, really. A little eccentric, but he was a nice-looking fellow, but he was just different, you know. To be a man who designs women’s clothes, you’d have to be... He lived pretty high, he lived in New York and he designed dresses for some of the famous people in New York, he went to Paris every year and came back with these designs... Herman was pretty...I guess you’d call...flamboyant, maybe. He would come through on the train and his chauffeur would drive his car through,
and he drove a Pierce Arrow, and the chauffeur sat out in the open, and he sat in the back and had a speaking tube in the back, and you could talk to the chauffeur in the back. And Eddie, Mayme’s son, was about the same age as I am, and we used to ride uptown with him in the Pierce Arrow and the chauffeur. Herman would send us uptown with an errand to buy something for him, and we would ride up in the Pierce Arrow. Boy you talk about being hot kids. Getting chauffeured, and New York license plates, it was almost unheard of, but this was probably 1925-1927 in that era, see. So we were really hot on the town. (Allinger 2004)

Herman was also very particular about how The Chimneys was maintained. In addition to a memory where Herman once made Robert and some other neighborhood kids follow the stone-filled path in the garden, replacing the rocks one by one that had fallen into the grass, Allinger recalls, “I remember Herman when he would come back to the big house, most of the furniture in there was imported from Europe because when Herman went to France or Paris every year on buying trips he would send it home. It was built in 1913 or 1914, and had the best of everything. I remember as a kid when they got word that Herman was coming home, that everything had to be put in place where it was when Herman left it, you see. Herman had a good eye, and we had to make sure that the table [and other furniture was] where it was when he left it. It was all beautiful furniture, one light had a goldfish bowl in it, with fish swimming around inside. They had a lot of beautiful things in that old house down there.”

What seems to be most poignant about the Tappe family is their strong sense of duty and care toward each other. Herman was dedicated to the well being of his mother and sisters, largely being their financial support, and visited them frequently. The four Tappe women (Anna, Mayme, Cecilia, and Bess) lived together after they were widowed until their deaths, and later, after Anna’s death, took in Mrs. Grace Kelly who, although she outlived them all, was eventually buried with the family members. Mrs. Kelly lived
in Chicago with her husband, and was widowed earlier than she would have liked. She came to visit her friends, the Tappé family, and ended up staying in Sidney with them. Robert recalls her fondly, "Mrs. Kelly, she was no relation, but she was the gem of the bunch. She was the last to go, and she was truly an Irish lady. She looked after the others; they all looked after each other. Mrs. Kelly was a very devout Catholic, she went to church about every time the bell rang, right up until the end." This touching picture shows a family well grounded and connected; realizing that their greatest wealth was the love of a family and a sense of community with their neighbors.

James Casey, a.k.a. Edward or Jim Casey, Tappé’s nephew who currently lives in Manhattan Beach, California, was kind enough to send me many newspaper clippings and photographs of his memorabilia from his uncle. One of the photographs pictures Herman at home at The Chimneys, casually leaning on one of the stone sculptures in the garden (fig. 2.6). The photograph, dating from 1918, shows a man confident in himself, who is at ease in his surroundings, and a man who has not lost his good looks. This photograph, more than any other, gives insight into Tappé as a man. The picture seems to speak of a man resplendent with character, charm, and grace, and also possessing a pensive and introspective quality.

In addition to Tappé’s homes, Robert also took me to the Sidney graveyard, where the Tappé family has their burial plot. Indeed, when Tappé made his money he had a monument made for the site in the form of a large Celtic cross, on which the base has the raised letters: Tappé. The monument can be seen in figure 2.7. It is interesting to note that on his gravestone, Herman is spelled Hermann, perhaps to distinguish him from his father of the same name. Herman (1876-1954) is buried next to his sister, Cecilia
(1879-1950) (fig. 2.8). The other plot occupants are Herman’s parents, Herman Sr. (1842-1883) and Anna (1843-1937), Herman’s sister Bess (Elizabeth) Davis (1872-1953) and her husband Frank Davis (1870-1946), Herman’s sister Mayme Casey (1874-1956) and her husband J. Edwards Casey (1885-1924), and friend of the family Grace Kelly (friend-1960). A total of nine graves are on the Tappe plot to date. Neither of Tappe’s wives was buried with him, signaling that his connection to his family and to Sidney may have been stronger than the connection to his wives.

When Herman died, an article was written in the local Sidney paper with the title, “Noted Fashions Authority Dies in New York City.” The article states that he died unexpectedly of a heart attack on a Monday morning, and the news was delivered to Mayme, who was his only surviving sister at the time. It was revealed that he had a heart condition for the past ten years that eventually forced him to retire in the last year of his life.

The article reads, “Born in Sidney, Mr. Tappe left here in early manhood to make a name for himself as a designer, wholesaler and retailer of women’s millinery and gowns, particularly bridal and formal attire. Not only was he known the country over for his artistic skill in his chosen field, but was equally as well known abroad, particularly in Paris, France. In earlier years he spent six months of each year in the millinery and gown designing field in Paris. Although away from Sidney to make his home since 1907, Sidney was close to his heart and he frequently returned to visit with his family and friends…”
Unfortunately, Herman lived high and large, and too much so for his own budget to allow. He spent every dollar he earned, and later in his career was quite broke. Robert relates:

...He apparently was very successful in New York, and he made a lot of money, but he didn’t know how to handle it. So when he died he was broke.”

Because of the lack of finances, The Chimneys had to be sold even before his death, and the three sisters, Mayme, Cecilia, and Bess moved back into the small house on Crescent Drive. They lived there until their deaths, being financially supported by Bess’ son, Mr. Davis. He was kind enough to pay for the ladies’ basic necessities, and even provided for Mrs. Kelly to continue to live there until her death a few years later. (Allinger 2004)

Herman Tappé was all glitz and glamour, staging an elaborate production, even to the very end. After Herman died in New York City in 1954 he was brought home to Sidney for the funeral. Robert, who was a pallbearer, states:

The last I saw Herman was when he was in the casket, but he was pretty flashy then, he had a dark blue velvet smoking jacket on him. That’s the way they buried him: fancy. Right down to the end, even if he was broke. (Allinger 2004)
NOTES

Chapter 2


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 190.
Fig. 2.1. 822 Crescent Drive, Sidney, Ohio. Tappé’s childhood home.
Fig. 2.2. The Chimneys, built 1913, c. 2004.
Fig. 2.3. The Chimneys, view of the side porch.
Anna Tappe 1843-1957 Mother of
Herman P Tappe 1876-1954
Dress made by Herman in late
1920 or early 1930. Picture
Taken on South Porch of House
In Sidney Ohio

Fig. 2.4. Anna Tappé, Herman’s mother. Courtesy of Robert Allinger.
Fig. 2.5. Herman Patrick Tappé, n.d., Shelby County Historical Society.
Fig. 2.6. Herman Patrick Tappé, c. 1918. Courtesy of Mr. James Casey.
Fig. 2.7. Tappé monument at the family burial plot in Sidney, Ohio.
Fig. 2.8. Herman’s gravesite at the Tappé family burial plot.
CHAPTER 3

TAPPÉ: DESIGNER AND RETAILER

Herman Patrick Tappé graduated from Holy Angels School, after which he worked in the millinery department of the I. H. Thedieck store in Sidney, Ohio. At this job he excelled, and according to Miriam Weis, Thedieck sent Tappé to the "Windy City" to work for two years with Shane, The Furrier in Chicago. This early experience was just what he needed to move on to bigger and better opportunities. Tappé permanently moved to New York City in 1900 and gained employment with Wurzberger and Hecht, Wholesale Feathers and Flowers in the position of foreign buyer. It was in this ideal working environment that Tappé gained his contacts throughout Europe, and especially in Paris. Seven years later in 1907, he opened his own business in Manhattan specializing in women's hats. His first establishment as a milliner was listed as Tappé, Inc.

The Costume Collection at the Museum of the City of New York has copies of city records beginning in 1908 showing Herman P. Tappé, milliner and importer as running concurrently with Tappé, Inc. The millinery business continued for approximately three years, following which he experienced brief financial trouble. After a short period of bankruptcy in 1910, Herman opened his newly reformed business,
renamed the House of Tappé, at 25 West 57th Street, in a building that is known as the Lewison mansion.4

**Location, Location, Location**

The Costume Collection at the Museum of the City of New York has city directory records listing Tappé, Inc. from 1912 to 1917 at 25 West 57th Street, and from 1918-1925 at 9 West 57th Street. He seems to have changed names or run two establishments at the same time during certain years. In 1912 the Directory listings are: Tappé, Herman P., importer, 25 West 57th Street; Tappé (firm name), milliners, 4 West 40th Street; Tappé, Inc., milliners, 25 West 57th Street. In 1913 the Directory listings become even longer: Tappé, milliners, 4 West 40th Street; Tappé, Inc., milliners, 25 West 57th Street; Tappé Millinery Co., 4 West 40th Street; Tappé, Herman P., importers, 25 West 57th Street; Tappé of Four West Fortieth Street, Inc., milliners, 4 West 40th Street. Additionally, in the years 1917 and 1925, Tappé, Inc. is listed only as a dressmaker and not a milliner. This information is taken directly from the Tappé catalog cards at the Museum of the City of New York. It is possible that some of these locations were workshops, rather than retail locations. However, the numerous addresses for the same years may also be a matter of poor recording.

Tappé’s business was located in the heart of fashion activity in New York City. To obtain a visual understanding of the location of his business in comparison to other fashion boutiques and department stores in the city, a map was created. Eighteen other large name stores and designers, in addition to La Mode Chez Tappé, were collected from the 1934 issues of *Vogue* magazine, according to the addresses listed in their individual
advertisements. The year 1934 was selected because it is the mid-way point in Tappé's career as an established designer who was competing with the other creators and sellers of high society fashion. During that year, and for most of his long career, Tappé was located at the House of Tappé at 25 West 57th Street, and the Lieberts were designing for him at 19 West 57th Street. The map titled "Locations of Fashion Retailers Advertised in the 1934 issues of Vogue" can be viewed in Figure 3.1.

Tappé's address of 19 West 57th Street was used for the first location on the map; however, his address of 25 West 57th Street was just down the street. The second location marks his 9 West 57th Street location. These uptown locations were in a "hot spot" of fashion activity. Tappé's direct neighbors were Milgrim, Henri Bendel Inc. (advertising as "Importers and Designers of Clothes for Women"), Bonwit Teller, and Bergdorf Goodman. Jessie Franklin Turner was located just uptown at Madison Avenue and East 67th Street. Tappé's address at 4 West 40th Street was located at 5th Avenue and 40th Street, which was very close to both Macy's and Best & Co., both of which were closer to downtown Manhattan.

In addition to the multitude of Fifth Avenue establishments, the Madison Avenue shops were not far from Tappé either. The fashion houses of Sally Victor, Lilly Daché, and Hattie Carnegie could be found just a short walk down Madison Avenue from La Mode Chez Tappé, in that order. Numerous other shops which were frequently advertised in Vogue dotted the streets of the fashion district: Janet – Fifth Avenue Hats, Dobb's Hats, Rose Amado, Stein & Blaine, Inc., Lillian Sloane, Turner's Gowns Ltd., Yvonne Carette, and Rhoda Gowns are all placed on the map. Due to space constraint, other designers and retailers in the area not featured on the map in Figure 3.1 but listed in
the 1934 issues of *Vogue* are: Jay Thorpe at 57th Street West, Emilie Harwick at 16 East 52nd Street, Maybelle Manning Gowns at 443 Park Avenue, Chez Ninon Modes at 551 Madison Avenue, and Estelle-Mildred who advertised as “Gowns of Dramatic Beauty” at 665 Fifth Avenue. Caroline Rennolds Milbank writes in her book titled *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (1989) that there were in fact “literally thousands of dress, suit, coat, accessories, lingerie, and fur houses listed in *Fairchild’s Women’s Wear Directory* for New York City in the year 1930.”

It is important to name even more of the fashion stores open for business in the vicinity to give a full picture of not only the retail competition Tappe faced on a day to day basis, but to firmly establish his place and standing in the fashion industry in New York. Also working in the vicinity were Polly Francis at 23 East 37th Street, Revillon Frères at 5th Avenue and 54th Street, Emma Maloof “Trousseau Specialist” at 444 Madison Avenue, Florence Reichman Hats at 16 East 52nd Street, James McCreery & Company at 5th Avenue and 34th Street, Mme. Pauline at 6 East 53rd Street, and Mrs. Howard, Inc., advertising as “Importer and Originator of Distinctive Clothes for All Occasions” at 38 East 50th Street. In terms of millinery, there were plenty of custom retailers focusing on headwear including Alice Rohrer Hats at 5 East 51st Street, Marion Vallé at 501 Madison Avenue, Russ Russell Chapeaux at 501 Madison Avenue, Jean King at 640 Madison Avenue, and Nicole de Paris Chapeaux at 7 East 55th Street. As a final mention, it is important to note that Peck & Peck, a highly advertised fashion retailer for college women in the 1930s, was also located on Fifth Avenue.

From the list and the map in figure 3.1 it becomes clear that Tappe was not designing, selling, and promoting his garments in isolation. In fact, he was at the very
center of a city burgeoning with fashion, both new, upcoming American fashion, as well as Parisian imports and other European fashions. Tappé's direct competition would have been those establishments most like his own—offering original designs by the designer himself or herself, as well as a nice selection of imported goods. It is possible that Tappé's location near large stores such as Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman, and Henri Bendel benefited him by the expected outflow of patrons. If a lady could not find something original or fine enough to suit her tastes at the larger department stores she could stop next door or down the street into La Mode Chez Tappé or Tappé Modes, to search for something unique in a smaller, more personal venue.

Herman Tappé's locations on 57th Street were certainly not chosen arbitrarily. Indeed, Milbank writes, "By the 1920s, Fifty-seventh Street was the most luxurious and exclusive street after Fifth Avenue, and Jay-Thorpe was one of its best stores, offering custom-made clothes from French and in-house designers." According to Milbank most of the stores, those mentioned above as well as numerous others, offered the very best selection of hats, gowns and accessories for New York women. Milbank explains how American fashion really began to take off in its own right in the Thirties, partially because American women would only adopt fashion styles that adapted to and enhanced their lifestyles. If American women felt a European fashion was impractical or restrictive of their active American lifestyle, they would not accept it. It was this sense of independence that allowed American fashion to be accepted and flourish at last.

According to M.D.C. Crawford, Tappé was considered to be the first American designer to become internationally famous. His establishments and working environment were nothing if not upscale. Having such a flamboyant and showy
personality, he accepted nothing less than the best. This is evident in his choice of locations for his stores, and can be reflected in the level of his clientele as well. Tappe’s clients were among the top-notch of New York society, and also extended to the top tier society ladies of other cities as well. Tappe emanated the qualities of elegance and refinement, and he expected just as much elegance from his clients. The House of Tappe was contemporarily known as having grand and extravagant selection of hats and dresses, and in 1930 was duly noted in Gretta Palmer’s book, *A Shopping Guide to New York*, as an exciting shopping experience:

We will now discuss Herman Patrick Tappe of 9 West Fifty-seventh Street. This is not a branch of the modest little firm on West Fortyeth Street, opposite the pigeons. It is a somewhat spectacular shop where an elevator fitted up like a ship and goldfish swimming inside a lamp may give you a start, but where the clothes themselves are one of the big experiences that life offers to a woman. Besides the imports, there are a number of le maître’s own creations which are always piquant and often extreme. He corresponds, roughly, to Paul Poiret on this side of the water and has all the same God-given sense of color. All kinds of ideas are introduced by Tappe which will never reach the market because of their exuberance, but you may love them...

...Among the shops which are at least as strong in their millinery sections as in any other is Tappe, whose wholesale department sells models, arm in arm with Nat Lewis’ matching bags, to the most uppish of the out-of-town specialty shops. His own hats are often more effective than anything to be found in his dress department and he imports some highly entertaining French models that are hard to run down elsewhere. The prices range up from $30, except at sale times, when they drop with a celerity that takes the breath away from the more conservative houses across the way, and $5 will buy you a ready-made beret. (Palmer 1930, 24-25, 69)

Such a description is an exciting contemporary look at the attitude and sentiment toward Tappe’s business at the time. Palmer sums up Tappe as having unique wearable creations, excelling in millinery, and selling well-selected imports in an extravagant, albeit unusual, setting. With his early training and success as a foreign buyer, it is no surprise when Palmer states that Tappe’s imports are unique and hard to find anywhere.
else. Palmer describes Tappé as an innovative, if sometimes extreme, designer. His selective purchasing skills while abroad surely accounted for much of his success early on, while he continued to develop his name as an original designer.

Clientele

Herman Patrick Tappé was a significant force among the fashionable society of New York City because he dressed women from extremely prominent and wealthy backgrounds who led very public social lives. This is evidenced by the names and levels of status of the famous and wealthy persons who have donated Tappé garments to museums. The average American woman was not wearing Tappé hats and gowns—it was only in the most select and fashionable circles to which he catered. He provided socialites with clothing that would suit a range of their activities from travel and leisure, to formal evening activities and dancing.

Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. was well known for her sense of fashion, and she was also known to step out in rather daring and innovative garments. Her Tappé black taffeta wrap dress with a black net skirt and gold and green brocade underlay from 1925 was donated to The Museum of the City of New York. The design of the dress is discussed in detail in the next chapter. The fact that a fashionable lady such as Mrs. Roosevelt, who was greatly under the eye of public scrutiny, would patronize Tappé’s establishments automatically gives him the reputation of being an important fashion force at the time: not just as a producer of clothing, but as an innovator of fashion. According to curator Phyllis Magidson, the dress was worn at an affair of state, showing that Mrs. Roosevelt was not afraid to wear Tappé’s dramatic fashion even at a political function. It
is also a possibility that Mrs. Roosevelt was using her influence among American women to make a political statement supporting American fashion designers.

Another example is Mrs. Hollinger, an Akron, Ohio socialite who wore a unique Tappé hat designed by the Lieberts to the Women's City Club Washington birthday dance, an event at which she was photographed for the Akron Beacon Journal's "News of Society" pages. A photograph of Mrs. Hollinger wearing the hat was published in the newspaper on Wednesday, January 26, 1938 (fig. 3.2). Mrs. Hollinger had a very active and public social life, and she was one of the elite members of Akron society. She repeatedly appeared in the society pages of the Akron newspaper all throughout her adult life. Her name and picture appear frequently at social functions such as parties, charity functions and community outings throughout the thirties and forties.

In all her photographs Mrs. Hollinger was fashionably dressed, and was certainly aware that she would frequently be photographed for the newspaper. She must have taken a great degree of care when selecting her wardrobe for these important social functions, and therefore would also have required unique and one-of-a-kind items that would single her out among society women. She is a prime example of a wealthy lady choosing to purchase Tappé garments because of their fashion importance, style, and status. The hat was saved and later donated to a costume collection, showing the intrinsic value of the Tappé name. Wealthy families knew the significance of owning a Tappé hat or garment, and subsequently chose to preserve the hats and garments for posterity to appreciate rather than discarding them or otherwise devaluing them.

Catalog records at the Cincinnati Art Museum relate that Mrs. Carl Krippendorf, a woman from a wealthy family in Cincinnati, Ohio was the original owner of a beautiful
Tappe evening coat from the 1910s. In addition to being able to purchase some Tappe items at their local boutiques or dressmakers, many wealthy women traveled to New York City to do their shopping for a season. This continues to provide evidence that Tappe's clients were of the upper, wealthy classes, whether they were from New York or other cities around the country.

Two Tappe hats were donated to The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University from the estate of Mrs. Philip R. Peters. Mrs. Peters lived in Lancaster, Ohio, and owned the 1930s bright lime green beret of finely woven straw and the 1930s brown felt cloche wing-like hat discussed in the next chapter. To say Mrs. Peters was interested in fashion would be an understatement. She patronized the House of Tappe, along with Christian Dior, Reine, Sally Victor, Adrian, Nettie Rosenstein, Hattie Carnegie, Lilly Daché, Henri Bendel, Geoffrey Beene, Bill Blass, and many others. Included in her donor file at OSU are original, handwritten receipts direct from Christian Dior in Paris (multiple receipts written in French), Reine in Manhattan (which was delivered to her husband at the Plaza Hotel on March 3, 1944), Varela in Madrid and Sevilla, Spain (written in Spanish), and a Paris card direct from Jean Patou in 1967 (also written in French). In addition, there is an original receipt from the House of Tappe at 25 West 57th Street in New York City (fig. 3.3) that reads "To Mrs. Phillip R. Peters." It was delivered to the Hotel Plaza Annex, but unfortunately carries no date. This surviving receipt beautifully illustrates Tappe's exceptional handling and personal attention to his clients.

Although she lived in Ohio, the wealthy Mrs. Peters shopped in New York City for highly recognized, upscale fashion label clothing and accessories. She patronized the
House of Tappé because it was recognized at that time as one of the leading couturier houses of American fashion. Mrs. Peters considered Tappé to be worthy amongst her selections of French fashion, such as the brilliant names of Patou and Dior, conceding that Tappé’s creations were just as unique and significant as those famous French designers.

These women are only a few examples of Tappé’s typical clients, as discovered through specific extant garments located for this research. According to Rich Wallace, Tappé was “the social advisor, interior decorator and wedding planner for many of the ‘New York 400.’ That was the term used to describe the most elite families in the city. The Rockefellers, Roosevelts, and Astors utilized his services.” Mrs. Roosevelt, Jr., Mrs. Hollinger, Mrs. Krippendorf, and Mrs. Peters’ shopping habits make major and relevant contributions supporting the premise that Tappé was equally as important, unique, famous, and fashionable as his French and American contemporaries, and deserves a better place than he has been given in fashion history.

Weddings: Master of the Revels

As Tappé’s business grew, he expanded from eveningwear, daywear, hats and accessories into creating and designing wedding gowns. Eventually, he was not only designing bridal gowns and headpieces, but also managing entire weddings with a specially designed and selected theme that included the gowns of the entire bridal party, mother of the bride, flowers, props, and even lighting schemes. In this way Tappé became truly legendary in his time, and Tappé weddings were much in demand among
society brides. Although Tappé designed within many categories of women's apparel, he was most acclaimed and remembered for his wedding dresses and fashionable hats.

Tappé's passionate nature and creative mind also transferred well to other arenas in which fashion was advancing. With the advent of movies and filmmaking, fashion became accessible to the masses in a "moving" and "living" form. He designed costumes for the D. W. Griffith, Incorporated film *Orphans of the Storm*, which premiered in December of 1921.¹⁰ A movie poster showing the Gish Sisters in costume can be seen in Figure 3.4. Theatre costume was also an avenue Tappé explored on at least one occasion. He designed costumes for the character of Miss Gish in the Broadway play *Uncle Vanya*, which premiered at the Booth Theatre in September of 1930.¹¹ The impressive, outstanding reputation of director D. W. Griffith, along with the great fame accompanying the Gish sisters, is a true credit to Tappé's career, and one that should not be overlooked in terms of Tappé's enduring importance.

Although he dabbled in the screen and stage, his forte became the dramatic weddings he designed and produced. Rich Wallace describes Tappé as having been "incredibly talented, and to some, outlandishly peculiar." This description attributes to Tappé's unique management of weddings. He gained much fame because of his extravagant and fashion-forward style of presentation. A most valuable source for descriptions of Tappé's working style is an article by Gretta Palmer titled "Women Should Cry at Weddings," published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in July of 1939.¹²

His popularity increased both by word of mouth and because the weddings he designed were highly publicized in the newspapers and fashion magazines. As his reputation increased, so did the status of his clientele. Figure 3.5 shows the wedding
attire of three of Tappe’s high society brides, who were featured in Palmer’s article in 1939: Mrs. Warren Pershing, “lovely in ice-blue satin,” Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., “Her wedding was a Tappe triumph,” and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, III, “Cathedral windows inspired Tappe.” Also on the page were Mrs. Henry J. Topping (the former Gloria Baker) and Mrs. Angier Biddle Duke, “Tappe’s ‘medieval bride.’”

In the text of her article Palmer used vivid descriptions of Tappe and his personality as a designer, which is characterized by “his famous temperament,” and “his equally famous prices.” She describes Tappe as “of a temperament which thrives on the hysterical preparations for a big wedding,” and notes his “talent for mimicking the brilliant figures of the past.” In the article, he is further portrayed as witty, popular, determined, imaginative, traditional, cunning, extravagant, and an ardent admirer, if not exploiter, of all things innately feminine. Indeed, Tappe began his career in the lush environment of the Edwardian era, characterized by its “great ostentation and extravagance.”

Tappe was likened to French designer Paul Poiret, being called “The Poiret of New York,” and “Poiret on this side of the water.” Indeed, Tappe had characteristics similar to Poiret, both as a designer and as a man. Diana Vreeland, author of Inventive Paris Clothes, 1909-1939 says of Poiret:

A man of enormous imagination and extravagance, Poiret evoked the world of seraglios, galas, fêtes. His salon, strewn with floor cushions and resplendent with assistants dressed in furs, re-created the Arabian Nights; his parties and costume balls were legendary... His clothes were always original and often absurd... For his clients and friends he made the world of maharajas, princesses, peacocks, and treasure chests seem real. (Vreeland 1977)
The same description could be applied to Tappé without much alteration. Indeed, both
the American and French designer began to decline in popularity when their lavish,
exotic and ostentatious style ran its course.

Tappé's bridal themes included Joan of Arc (the bride wearing a silver corselet
and a head dress shaped like a steel helmet), "Biedermeier" (gowns inspired from
nineteenth century Austria), and a Hindu wedding (silver veil and slippers, lotus flowers,
and beating drums), to name a few. 15 Although his ideas and theatrical themes were
outlandish, the effect was always stunning and completed at the highest level of
extravagance. Tappé weddings were in high demand, and he welcomed the chance to use
each individual young woman's looks and personality to form a unique and stunning
Tappé creation. According to Palmer, Tappé's vision for each of his brides had to
complement not only their looks and personality, but their deportment as well. His
imagination took over as he began the woman's transformation in his mind's eye to a
particular but inspired vision.

The article by Gretta Palmer from 1939 is so poignant because we can actually
"hear" Tappé's voice as he describes himself and his business:

Recently a mother and daughter, new to New York, came to Tappé's shop
on West Fifty-seventh Street and made what seemed to them a simple, reasonable
request of the man who has designed more wedding gowns than any other
American.

"We should like," said the mother, "to see some dresses appropriate for a
small home wedding."

Tappé, his gray locks flying, waved the other aside with one of those
don't-bother-me-I'm-thinking gestures, which would have stilled grander ladies
than she. He studied the daughter, a pretty brunette, removed her hat and swept
her hair into a high knot.

"A Psyche headdress," he said. "With silver ribbons binding the hair and
holding the veil. How tall is your groom?"

"Five feet seven," said the thoroughly frightened girl.
Tappe dropped her hair, "No Psyche," he said sadly. "You’d dwarf him."
He walked six paces back, squinted at the bride as if she had been a painting
hanging on a wall, and apparently went into a trance. Finally he spoke. "We’ll
make it a Hindu wedding," he said. "Silver slippers. Cloth-of-silver veil, binding
one side of the head. Lotus flowers in your arms. Drums beating. Musicians
playing ‘The temple bells are ringing’ on squeaky oriental instruments. When can
you come for a first fitting?”
“Have you this Hindu dress in size 14?” asked the mother.
Tappe woke from a dream of silver sarongs with a look of loathing
disbelief.
“In stock?” he said. “Do you think I’m a department store? Ready-made
dresses are for Thirty-fourth Street. I never repeat a gown.” (Palmer 1939, 29)

This story is essential to truly understanding the man that was Herman Tappe, his
philosophy of design, which is to be singularly original, couture, without repetition, and
his approach toward designing a wedding. Palmer implied that his success came just as
much from his eloquent manner and ability to express his vision, as from the clothing he
created. Palmer wrote, "He never makes models, he never sketches; but his Irish
elocution can make a nonexistent frock sound so desirable that heiresses would forgo
their dowries and pawn their pearls to own the reality."16

A historically inspired wedding gown designed by Tappe is currently held at The
Museum of the City of New York, and resembles Elizabethan dress combined with
elements of fashion from the 1920s. The style details of the dress, which dates from
1927, are discussed in the next chapter but it is clear at a glance that it is not a typical
wedding gown of the twenties. The intent to incorporate historical elements with modern
fashion shows innovation and skill.

Due to Tappe’s close ties with his hometown of Sidney, Ohio, it is no surprise
that he also designed for some of his old contacts. Miriam Cecilia Thedieck (also known
as Mrs. William Wendell Weis and Miriam Thedieck Weis), daughter of Tappe’s boss
during his early days at I. H. Thedieck department store, had her wedding gown designed especially for her by Tappé. The gown became a family heirloom, and was eventually worn by three brides in the family before it became too fragile to pass down. The newspaper photograph of Miriam in the original gown can be seen in Figure 3.6.

Miriam’s much younger sister, Margaret Louise Thedieck, was later married in the same gown after alterations were made to the neckline. Margaret’s daughter, Susan Gansz, provided details regarding the story of the dress. She states that both of her mother’s older sisters, Miriam Thedieck Weis and Bernadine Thedieck Wright, wore the original dress. They were fourteen and fifteen years older than Margaret, and were married in the late 1920s or early 1930s, in Sidney, Ohio. Miriam’s wedding was announced in the Sidney paper on November 15th:

...uniting in marriage Miss Miriam Cecilia Thedieck, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank P. Thedieck of this city, and Dr. William Wendell Weis, son of Mrs. Thomas A. Weis of Piqua.

The marriage united two of the most prominent families of Sidney and Piqua, and was one of the most brilliant and outstanding of the autumn social events of society of the two cities, attended by hundreds of guests.

...a picture of exquisite loveliness in her wedding gown, a medieval gown of ivory satin with a long train, a bateau neck and cuffs of old rose point lace. Her veil was of tulle with a coronet of orange blossoms...

Yellow and white, the color note for the charming decorations at the church, was repeated in the decorations for the Thedieck home. The beautiful decorations for the church and home were under the personal supervision of Herman P. Tappé of New York city, a close friend of the family. All of the lovely gowns for the bride and the members of the bridal party had been designed and made by Mr. Tappé at his New York shop. (Sidney Daily News)

From this description it is clear that Tappé had a hand in much more than simply the bride’s gown. He coordinated the entire bridal party, flowers and decorations.

Susan’s mother, Margaret Louise Thedieck, married her father, Albert Ernst Schrader, Jr., in the same dress (although the neckline had been lowered) on January 24,
1948 in Miami Beach. Their wedding was highly publicized and featured in *Vogue*, which can be seen in Figures 3.7 and 3.8. Margaret’s formal wedding portraits are shown in Figures 3.9 and 3.10, showing Miriam and Bernadine’s gown with the subsequent neckline alterations.

Two of Tappe’s wedding creations were featured in the May 1, 1932 issue of *Vogue* magazine for a spread called “Pageant in Puffs” on pages 58-59. The first photograph (fig. 3.11) featured a gown by Bonwit Teller, holding a unique floral “muff” designed by Tappe with the following caption: “The muff is all of orange-blossoms; designed by Herman Patrick Tappe.” The second photograph (fig. 3.12) featured three bridal gowns, of which Tappe designed the dress on the far right. The caption for the photo reads, “Mrs. Nicholas Holmsen wears embroidered white muslin enormously full as to its skirt. The white straw hat has a halo and bow of muslin. The bouquet of pink hyacinths and pussywillow is from Max Schling.”

*Advertising and Promotion*

A large part of any designer’s business, presenting the new season’s line was a big event, especially in New York. Tappe’s nephew, James Casey, furnished this research with a surviving invitation and announcement to one of Tappe’s spring line reveals, shown in figures 3.13 and 3.14. Although the year of the announcement is not known, it carries the House of Tappe name, and the address at 25 West 57th Street. This lovely paper announcement was originally a one-piece bi-folded card, of which the interior and exterior have been scanned separately. They would have been mailed to
Tappé’s exclusive list of clients. On the front of the card are pictured two ladies dressed in ball gowns styled from the 1850s, giving a nostalgic and romantic preface to his name.

One of the main quandaries regarding Tappé’s business is his lack of advertisement. However, it is important to realize the female, rather than male, American designers were not only more numerous in New York City, but also advertised more vigorously. Nearly every issue of *Vogue* in the 1930s contains an ad for Jessie Franklin Turner, or Lilly Daché, for example. In contrast, only one advertisement for the Tappé incorporation was found. In the October 15, 1934 issue of *Vogue*, the advertisement reads: “Hats by the young lieberts, La Mode chez Tappé, inc., 19 West 57th St., New York.” The ad can be viewed in Figure 3.15. As Tappé’s business expanded, he hired Helen Liebert and her husband to work as designers for his millinery line. Helen’s own name, or the Liebert name, was on the labels along with Tappé’s name:

The young Lieberts, otherwise known as La Mode chez Tappé, make hats. The lady Liebert designs them. The gentleman Liebert supplies the long neglected masculine viewpoint. He thinks crowns should be low, lines simple, materials luxurious... Of course, if you are going South, you don’t need a pick-me-up. You need the Lieberts’ newest favorite hat, inspired by Marie Antoinette and her Petit Trianon. The crown is narrow, sits high in the back. Out poke your curls. The brim is long over the face. Piquant and very flirty. (*Ladies’ Home Journal* 1935)

According to Phyllis Magidson, curator of the costume collection at The Museum of the City of New York, male designers at that time were much more reserved, reticent, and exclusive than their female counterparts. It is my theory that Tappé believed that advertising, or soliciting business in a magazine or newspaper, was beneath him. He relied on word-of-mouth from one elite client to another, and upon the “advertisement” of high society ladies wearing his clothing.
Although he may have disapproved of direct advertising, Tappé’s flamboyant and aristocratic character was often displayed in the printed media. He wrote articles for *Harper’s Bazaar* describing his fashion designs, and would often include original “poems about current styles as well as sketches of his hats and other designs.” In addition to contributing to articles and fashion spreads *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue*, he was occasionally mentioned in the *New York Times* for giving fashion advice. The paper provided the following anecdote on Sunday, July 12, 1936: “Hand Fans Urged for Men: Keep Cool and Forget Conventions, Is Advice of Designer.” The summer of 1936 was particularly hot, and Tappé was frustrated that men were afraid to break with convention. He urged men to use old-fashioned hand fans, as he himself did. For men, he thought, comfort must come before convention and men could still be masculine with fans:

Herman Patrick Tappé suggested that American men use old-fashioned hand fans when the thermometer rises. He arrived at the French liner Champlain before noon yesterday, bound for Europe, and he cooled himself with a large black fan as he told friends good-bye.

A well-known New York designer, Mr. Tappé declared that American men were so trammeled by conventions that they hesitated to do anything to make themselves comfortable in sweltering weather. Only at a ball game, he said, “when a man is in his shirtsleeves, is it deemed proper to use a fan.”

Mr. Tappé is going to Ireland to visit his 93-year-old mother, Mrs. Anna Tappé, and later he will inspect the Fall and Winter fashions in Paris. (*New York Times* 1936)

*Vogue* magazine occasionally showcased hats or garments that were designed or sold by the House of Tappé. In the March 1, 1931 issue on page 44, a lovely skirt suit with a white jacket and navy skirt by Vionnet was featured in one of the magazine’s many fashion spreads titled “Greens Anywhere, Checks Somewhere, Blue-and-White Everywhere.” The caption under the illustration (fig. 3.16) listed the designer of the item,
and where the item could be purchased. It reads, “Vionnet – Herman Patrick Tappé.”

And below the illustration is written, “Blue promises to colour the spring landscape. It’s smartest in a blue-and-white combination—such as Vionnet’s white jacket and navy-and-white crêpe de Chine dress; Herman Patrick Tappé.”

On page 46 the feature “New Head-Lines on Colour Contrast” in the same issue of *Vogue* features a navy blue and white hat: “Maria Guy – Herman Patrick Tappé.” See figure 3.17. The magazine elaborates on the illustration:

> Here is the equestrienne type of hat again, more charming than ever—and more charming than ever—and it’s charmed several different generations already! This time, Maria Guy has used straw ribbon and trimmed it with suède-surfaced satin Alaska. The designer calls this model “Amazone”; from Herman Patrick Tappé. (*Vogue* 1931)

Tappé items were featured in other magazines as well. The *Ladies’ Home Journal* advertised “Tappé’s wool gloves” (fig. 3.18) in their January 1935 issue: “If you really want some fun, order the bright wool gloves you see in the picture. The pierrot ruche buttons tight around the wrist. They can be crocheted in three days, ten dollars, any color.”¹²

In fact, Tappé was such a celebrity and known person that a piece of news didn’t necessarily have to do with fashion in order for his name to be put in print. In November 8, 1927 the *New York Times* gave the following information on page 25 titled, “Tappé Saves Paintings: Carries a $150,000 Rembrandt Out in Fire in Apartment”:

> A painting by Rembrandt valued at $150,000, several other oil paintings of great value and tapestries and needlepoint lace curtains narrowly escaped destruction last night when fire swept through the basement and first floor of the building at 535 Madison Avenue near Fifty-fifth Street. The second floor of which is occupied by Herman Patrick Tappé, whose place of business is at 9 West Fifty-seventh Street. Mr. Tappé, whose apartment is furnished in Victorian style

47
with hundreds of valuable objects of art, carried his Rembrandt and some other pictures to the street when firemen feared the flames might spread higher in the building.... Tenants on the upper floors suffered only from smoke, but Mr. Tappe had some anxious moments when it appeared the fire would spread through the building. (*The New York Times* 1927)

The press also noted Tappe's travels. According to Rich Wallace, early on in Tappe's career the Sidney Journal stated that he "had 'crossed the Atlantic twelve times and feels at home on the rolling deep'."18

Tappe also had his taste of radio publicity. The Shelby County Historical Society in Sidney, Ohio, compiles a section in the *Sidney Daily News* called "Out of the past."

On March 20, 2004, the paper recalled the following information that was originally printed on March 20, 1929:

"Many Sidney people had the pleasure Thursday morning of hearing a radio talk given by Herman Tappe, of New York City, a former Sidney resident. Mr. Tappe talked through the courtesy of the National Broadcasting Company for the Rit Color Co. His talk was on styles and colors. (*Sidney Daily News*, 1929, 2004)"
NOTES

Chapter 3


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., 95.

7. Ibid., 106


13. Ibid.


16. Ibid., 29.

Fig. 3.1. Locations of fashion retailers advertised in the 1934 issues of Vogue.

1. Tappé – 19 West 57th St.
2. Tappé – 9 West 57th St.
3. Tappé – 4 West 40th St.
4. Milgrim – 6 West 57th St.
5. Hattie Carnegie – 42 East 49th St.
7. Sally Victor – 18 East 53rd St.
8. Henri Bendel – 10 West 57th St.
9. Bergdorf Goodman’s – 5th Ave. at 56th St.
10. Best – 5th Ave. at 35th St.
11. Macy’s – 34th and Broadway
12. Bonwit Teller – 5th Ave. at 56th St.
13. Janet Fifth Avenue Hats
17. Lillian Sloane – 573 Madison Ave
18. Turner’s Gowns – Park at 50th St.
19. Yvonne Carette – 5th at 54th St.
20. Rhoda Gowns – 605 Madison Ave
Fig. 3.2. Mrs. Hollinger of Akron, Ohio (right) wearing a Tappé hat. Courtesy of the Kent State University Museum.
Fig. 3.3. Mrs. Philip R. Peters’ receipt from the House of Tappe. Courtesy of The Ohio State University’s Historic Costume and Textiles Collection.
Fig. 3.4. Movie poster for *Orphans of the Storm* costumes designed by Tappé, premiered December 1921.
Fig. 3.5. Tappé’s society brides featured in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, 1939.
Fig. 3.6. Miriam Cecilia Thedieck, wearing an original Tappé wedding gown, late 1920s or early 1930s.
Orange Blossoms
in MIAMI BEACH

The wedding of Miss Margaret Louise Thedieck, daughter of Mrs. Frank Philipp Thedieck of Sidney, Ohio, and the late Mr. Thedieck, to Mr. Albert Ernest Schrader, Jr., son of Captain Albert Ernest Schrader, Jr., U.S.N., retired, and Mrs. Schrader, of Washington, D.C., was one of much interest in Miami Beach. The double-ring ceremony was performed by Monsignor Martinus Wagner, of St. Lawrence Church, Cincinnati, at St. Patrick's Church, on Saturday, January 20th, 1934. A reception and luncheon followed at The Surf Club.

A few intimate moments with her mother, Mrs. Frank Philipp Thedieck, on her wedding day.

The bride and groom, with brother-in-law, Dr. William W. O'Neill, Sr., of Peru, Ohio, leave St. Patrick's, Miami Beach, after the nuptial high mass.

Fig. 3.7. Margaret Louise Thedieck, wearing sister Miriam Cecilia Thedieck's Tappé wedding gown, in Vogue magazine.
Fig. 3.8. Margaret Louise Thedieck, wearing sister Miriam Cecilia Thedieck’s Tappé wedding gown, in Vogue magazine.
Fig. 3.9. Miss Margaret Louise Thedieck and Dr. William Wendell Weis, January 24, 1948, Tappé gown with altered neckline, courtesy of Susan Gansz.
Fig. 3.10. Miss Margaret Louise Thedieck, January 24, 1948, Tappé gown with altered neckline, courtesy of Susan Gansz.
Fig. 3.11. Floral muff by Tappé, *Vogue* magazine, May 1, 1932.
Fig. 3.12. Wedding gown (far right) by Tappé, *Vogue* magazine, May 1, 1932.
Fig. 3.13. Exterior of announcement, courtesy of Mr. James Casey.
HERMAN PATRICK TAPPE

invites you to his

Spring Collection

of

GOWNS - MILLINERY
TAILORED SUITS

25 West 57th Street
New York

Plaza 3-8366

Fig. 3.14. Interior of announcement, courtesy of Mr. James Casey.
Fig. 3.15. Advertisement in the October 15, 1934 issue of *Vogue* magazine.
Fig. 3.16. Illustration in *Vogue* magazine, March 1, 1931 issue. Imported ensemble designed by Vionnet sold at House of Tappé, center.
Fig. 3.17. Illustration in *Vogue* magazine, March 1, 1931 issue. Imported hat designed by Maria Guy sold at House of Tappe, right.
Fig. 3.18. Tappé's wool gloves, as advertised in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, January 1935.
CHAPTER 4

TAPPÉ’S DESIGNS: AN AESTHETIC ANALYSIS

An important part of understanding Herman Patrick Tappe’s design sense and aesthetic approach regarding fashion involved gaining access to costume collections and museums that currently hold garments designed or sold by Tappe in his shops. By looking at surviving examples of his designs or imports, firsthand knowledge can be gained regarding the artistic quality that Tappe put into his work, and how his designs and aesthetic sense developed over the course of time throughout his career. According to Lou Taylor in *The study of dress history*:

There are now a growing a number of examples of ‘good practice’ in artefact-based historical dress research. All of them combine the collecting of a specific, focused database of clothing, which is then examined in detail and set within its socio-cultural and historical context. (Taylor 2002, 52)

This chapter explores individual garments in detail and considers their aesthetic qualities as they relate to Tappe’s design skills and the period in which he was designing.

Although Tappé was mainly devoted to millinery and bridal apparel, his day and eveningwear must not be discounted. Tappé began his career in the Edwardian era, a period in American history that placed great emphasis on the appropriateness of specific clothing ensembles for specific social functions, revolving greatly around the time of day. It was also a time of grandiosity and extravagance. A woman’s femininity was highly
prized, flaunted and mercilessly maintained through the extensive and particular use of clothing and accoutrements. It was this social culture in early twentieth century America that helped shape Tappé’s idea of femininity. He maintained an ideal image of the female form throughout his career, and resisted the modern, liberated, and, in Tappé’s eyes, masculine rather than independent, woman.

Labels

A different perspective regarding Tappé’s many locations in New York emerges when the labels inside dated extant garments, which state addresses of the exact Tappé establishment from whence they came, are compared. The labels show that Tappé had different “lines” for different levels of exclusivity of his garments, and different lines for the different products and locations of his garments. Out of the total number of garments studied, Tappé had eight different interior garment labels, and six different addresses. The most commonly found label was “Tappe Modes, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York.” The garments with this particular label ranged in date from 1920 to 1941. This label was kept in use, virtually unchanged in terms of style and color, for at least two decades.

Three extant artifacts hold two different labels without addresses, one reading “Tappe Modes New York” and the other reading “La Mode Chez Tappé, Inc.” The items with these labels date 1920 to 1930. Both of the objects labeled “La Mode Chez Tappé” are hats, indicating this label may have been exclusive to his millinery line. Three garments carry the label “House of Tappé, Inc., 25 West 57th St., New York,” which was Tappé’s flagship location. They date from the late 1930s to the 1940s, although city records indicate that particular address being established in 1910.

70
Beginning in the 1930s and carrying through to 1949, three extant hats were found with the label “Helen Liebert, Tappé Hats, Inc., Atop 19 West 57th St., New York.” Finally, three garments were found with one each of the following labels: “Tappé, 4 West 40th St., New York,” from 1917-18, “Tappé Mode, Inc., 17 East 57th St., New York,” from the 1930s, and “Tappé, 12 West 40th St., New York,” from the period of 1922-25. It is probable that these downtown addresses were less commonly listed on labels because they were production workshops rather than retail locations.

As the scope of Tappé’s career broadened in the Twenties and Thirties and he maintained several locations in the city, Helen Liebert and her husband were hired as designers and advisers for Tappé’s millinery business. With Tappé expanding into designing wedding gowns, along with the meticulous management of society weddings, the “young Lieberts” were a perfect solution for keeping his millinery business intact and thriving.

The Lieberts were held high enough in esteem that Tappé had distinct labels made that included their names with his own. The addresses on the labels refer to establishments that Tappé owned, but were managed by the Lieberts. Their fresh approach toward ladies’ hats, as witnessed through their unique designs, complemented Tappé’s own creative ideas and lent a new dimension of imagination to his millinery lines. However, through an analysis of the addresses on the labels, it is expected that the Liebert’s line of hats were sold in separate locations from Tappé’s own singular creations. It is doubtful that the Liebert’s hats were sold at his main location at the House of Tappé. Indeed, some of the addresses say “atop” the address, which implies they were
located in a separate establishment closely connected with the House of Tappé that was on the second floor above the main store.

**Millinery**

Tappé’s millinery, and hats bearing his label that were designed and made by his assistants (the Lieberts) can be described as fun, flashy, outgoing, flirty and inventive. The use of a variety of materials, from straw to velvet ribbon to molded resin fruit, shows immense imagination and a talent for utilizing an array of design elements. Tappé is a master of texture in his millinery. One only has to look at the hat to want to touch it. He combines luxury with frivolity, playfulness with chic, innocence with daring. Regardless of proportion, his hats are always alluringly feminine. It is these qualities that make his hats unforgettable and especially important to the history of American fashion.

The sampling of hats found in costume collections show that Tappé’s millinery creations became more unique and stylistic as his career progressed. His early hats are much more in line with current fashion dictates, while some of his later hats are difficult to date because they are so unique. A pale green silk-covered straw hat dated 1917-18 is trimmed in feathers and pale pink rosebuds, and still intact in its large round hatbox. The hat is grand and stylish, typical of its period with a wide brim, high rounded crown, and long delicate feathers decorating the edge of the brim in abundance (fig. 4.1). The crown of the hat has a separate rounded panel edged in silk cording, and a wide silk band around the lower part of the hat. The feathers are now a brighter and more vibrant green than the faded silk.
The underside of the hat shows the woven straw base with the interior lined in white silk, and the center inside of the crown boasts the Tappé label, which reads, "Tappé, 4 West 40th Street, New York" (fig. 4.2). The brim of the hat is turned up on one side, with the silk flower decoration about one-third of the way around from the turned up portion. The flowers are delicately rendered in shades of pink, with the edges of the petals of the largest rose bound in the same pale green silk (fig. 4.3).

The overall shape and styling of this hat was popular in 1917: a similar hat designed by Helen Dryden was featured on the cover of Vogue magazine in February of 1917. Dryden, according to author Susie Hopkins, "liked to capture the image of ladies of culture with simple hat styles."1 This Tappé hat can be considered lovely and stylish, but not daring. It is elegant but without intentional innovation. However, this hat is historically significant for two reasons. First, it is an excellent example of the very beginning of the eventual development of the high crowned, cloche style hat that would gain popularity and evolve all throughout the fashion of the twenties and early thirties. Second, it aptly illustrates Tappé's aesthetic sense and less daring design choices made early in his career.

The original hatbox is still paired with the hat. The box lid depicts a scene from the New York City skyline, at which front and center shows an armed soldier (fig. 4.4). The design is reflective of the city of New York in the early years of WWI. Above the skyline in the blue-gray sky is a biplane, which bears the words, "Tappé, 4 West 40 St." Tappé's name also appears again on the side of one of the buildings. The hatbox provides evidence that Tappé was similar to a fashion brand today, having its own
specialized wrapping and packaging. Tappé understood the importance of making his brand unique and special in this manner.

The most plain millinery design found was a simple navy blue velvet cloche hat from 1926 trimmed with a band of blue grosgrain ribbon. The hat can be seen in figure 4.5. The brim is turned up in the front, and it is lined in blue silk. Although it was worn as a part of a "going away costume" with the blue velvet coat described elsewhere in this chapter, it is possible they were not designed as matching pieces. The shades of blue velvet do not precisely match, and the items are lined in different colors of silk. They were perhaps purchased together from Tappé to be worn together, rather than designed expressly for the wearer as a set. This cloche is very typical of its day, and would be worn down low over the wearer's ears and forehead.

Another example of predictable, yet fashionable styling can be seen in a black velvet turban from 1928. This turban matches a black velvet dress that Tappé designed as an ensemble, and is discussed later in this chapter. Gathering and wrapping fabric around the head makes the black velvet turban an interesting piece, where it is draped to a rhinestone ornament at the center front. The lower part of the turban is made of the same lace to match the collar of the dress. The turban can be seen in figure 4.6. The label inside the hat reads, "Tappé Mode, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York."

In contrast to predictability, a tan hat with a high crown and a wide floppy brim, dated 1920-1929, skillfully combines elements of current trends with a novel texture and motif. The tan silk is decorated in chainstitched embroidery, with palm tree and coconut motifs. The slightly raised chainstitching creates an understated interest in texture. The stems and coconuts are rendered in a taupe color, and the palm leaves are embroidered in
two shades of subtly contrasting green. The hatband is 3/4" wide brown grosgrain ribbon, starting at the sides and forming a bow at the center back. The brim is narrowest at the center back, widening along the sides and front. It is a truly whimsical and fanciful hat. While its overall shape was common in its day, the overall effect is original and outgoing. A full back view of the hat can be seen in figure 4.7. The hat is lined in tan silk, and the center interior crown of the hat carries the label, which reads, “La Mode Chez Tappé, Inc.” (fig. 4.8).

Texture plays an important role in all of Tappe’s hats. The same style of contrasting texture can be found in the form of a coral straw picture hat, dated 1935, with a black velvet strap that went under the hair, and a tumble of black velvet gathered on the crown to look like leaves (fig. 4.9). The straw is plaited, and the cut velvet ribbon is stamped and sewn to the hat. This hat is very interesting because of its unique labels. The first, which is more familiar, reads, “Helen Liebert, La Mode Chez Tappé, Inc., Atop 19 W. 57th St., New York.” The second, a retailer label, reads, “Mabel Fisher, Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles.” This second label shows that in later years Tappé and his associates, the Lieberts, branched out and sold their hats to retail establishments in other cities. Other Tappe hats were also found with store labels in them, such as Mrs. Eugene Gray, Inc. from Columbus, Ohio. Tappe hats were in high demand among the upper classes in many cities other than New York. Wealthy ladies in Akron, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio owned Tappe hats. Clearly Tappé was a well-known, respected, and highly desirable name in fashion. In addition, these separate retail stores did not remove Tappé’s label before adding their own, as was common practice at the time. Indeed, the
shopkeepers must have felt the Tappé label added more value to the hat than their store name alone, showing proof that the Tappé designer name was desired and respected.

Unusual shapes, creating singularly original silhouettes on a lady’s head, are often found in Tappé’s millinery, especially during the 1930s. Helen Liebert, or both the Lieberts, designed these anomalies for La Mode Chez Tappé, Inc. and Tappé Hats, Inc. In direct contrast to the predictable shapes of the cloche and picture hat described above, is a creation of brown felt with side extensions, folded up at the front brim, and gathered into pleats that are secured at the back of the hat. It gives the impression of a sailor hat, but it is also reminiscent of an eighteenth century tricorne hat sans the third corner, also called a bicorne hat.

The crown is covered with brown slubbed netting, which extends down the back of the hat as a veil (fig. 4.10). The wide, boat-shaped hat dates from 1930-1949, and has two labels on the interior. The main label reads, “Helen Liebert, Tappé Hats, Inc., Atop 19 W. 57th St., New York.” The secondary label is from the retailer, “Mrs. Eugene Gray Inc., Columbus, Ohio, Dayton, Ohio – Harbor Springs, Mich.” (fig. 4.11) This is one of the hats from the estate of Mrs. Philip R. Peters, who was discussed as an avid participant of designer fashions in the previous chapter. In addition, Harbor Springs, Michigan was a posh, elite and expensive vacation area full of pricey shops and designer goods. Again, this detail pays tribute to the exclusivity of Tappé’s fashions.

Regarding the bizarre shape and proportions of the hat, it is important to mention that asymmetry and touches of the absurd were not unusual for the period. The 1930s abounded with odd-shaped hats. Milbank states in *New York Fashion*:
Unlike the 1920s, when all cloches looked alike, in the 1930s hats ran the
gamut from cartwheel picture hats to the Eugénie, worn back on the head
nineteenth-century style, to slouchy fedoras and turbans... Whereas earlier
accessories were expected to be in the best of taste, in the 1930s they began to be
witty and daring. (Milbank 1989, 105)

This unique decade of non-traditional hat styling applies to many of the Tappé hats from
the Thirties.

Similarly, another Liebert hat made for La Mode Chez Tappé in 1938 has unusual
shaping and asymmetry. It is shown being worn by Mrs. Hollinger of Akron, Ohio, in
Figure 3.2. The styling of the hat itself is somewhat whimsical, although the brown and
hunter green color scheme is sedate. Somewhat awkward in appearance, it is
nevertheless unique and innovative. The brown felt hat with a tall floppy crown and brim
with a green chenille gathered band (fig 4.12) significantly shows the distinctive taste in
fashion the Lieberts presented to Tappé clients. The brim is narrowest and seamed at the
center back, edged in decorative topstitching, and the floppy crown is tongue shaped.
Although the crown now rests flat on the top (fig 4.13), it once stood up at an angle. It
also has a separate narrow felt band, which extended down over the hair to hold the hat in
place. The labels inside the hat include the maker’s label, which reads, “La Mode Chez
Tappé, inc., Lieberts, Atop 19 West 57th St., New York,” and a retailer’s label which
reads, “O’Neil’s Millinery Salon.” The latter is the establishment at which Mrs.
Hollinger purchased the hat in Akron, Ohio.

Tappé’s style of originality in design, versus the Lieberts, was sometimes of purer
and simpler lines. A plain but jaunty lime green straw beret from 1930 illustrates
simplistic design combined with interesting texture. The beret is edged in 1” wide
matching grosgrain ribbon, and has a seamed triangular panel at the back. See figures
4.14 and 4.15 for front and back views. The label reads, “La Mode Chez Tappé, inc.,” and is sewn onto the grosgrain ribbon near the back of the hat. Figure 4.16 shows the label inside the beret.

A final example that demonstrates the playfulness in Tappé’s millinery design aesthetic is a summer hat from the Thirties of green plaited straw, with a high crown and a medium width, asymmetrical brim. The brim is trimmed in grapes and lemons (fig 4.17). The brim is slightly raised at the wearer’s left brow, and then attractively but subtly dips down low on the right side. The straw is plaited with thick and thin variations in the weave, and there are thin straw fibers wrapped around them holding them together. The variegated weave creates an interesting texture to the hat. The grapes and lemons seem to be made out of a type of resin or plastic, with silk leaves wired together and forming the hatband. There is a trail of grapes down the widest area of the brim (fig. 4.18). The label reads, “Tappé Modes, Inc., 17 East 57th St., New York.”

The green straw summer hat is amusing, and evidence that high crowns like those of the cloche were still apparent in the 1930s is not surprising. Susie Hopkins notes how the cloche “looked fun and sophisticated, and pulled right down to eye level, which gave it a soft femininity and mysterious sexiness.” The elements of cloche styling were not readily abandoned by women, who found them so versatile and flattering.

Tappé also imported hats from European, mainly French, designers and sold them alongside his own. One example is a knit yachting cap of royal blue hand knit cotton yarn with a flat crown (fig. 4.19). The visor has white blanket-stitched trim, and the front has a white anchor yachting symbol embroidered onto the blue ground. The cap is dated from 1930-1935. Being an import, rather than an original Tappé, the additional label
inside the cap reads, “Made in France.” His own label is also sewn into the interior and reads, “Tappé Modes, 9 West 57th Street, New York.” The French designer of the cap is unknown. Because Tappé was such an adept and selective importer, he almost certainly chose his imports carefully to align with his own season’s designs.

Other Tappé hats were located in the collections that I was unable to study firsthand: A hat from the 1920s made of white straw with long streamers of pale green velvet and silver lame ribbon, with the label: “Tappé, 9 West 57th St., New York,” donated by Mrs. John Walden Myer. A beret from 1930 made of soft black velvet and “very full with an artist’s flair,” with the label: Tappé Mode, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York,” donated by Mrs. Frederick R. Childs. A hat from 1922-25 made of peach shiny straw with a deep crown, wide brim, and a narrow peach velvet ribbon bow, with the label, “Tappé, 12 West 40th St., New York, donated by A. Sanford Kellogg.

As demonstrated by these examples, Tappé’s aesthetic intent in his millinery becomes clear: to accessorize, dramatize and call attention to a woman’s face through the use of fashionable design elements in combination with unusual textures. Tappé used different combinations of color, shape, scale and proportion to complement a woman’s complexion, flatter her hairstyle, and create an individual sense of femininity for each wearer. At times the silhouettes are simple, and at times extraordinary and strange. But the effect is undoubtedly wonderful in either case. As established in previous chapters, Tappé was a dramatic man. He expressed the dramatic facets of his personality through his hats, and thus became known for their outlandishness. He was a man who prided himself on his creative vision, his singular perspective on the fashion at hand. Tappé was not a designer set out to please the average lady shopper looking to fit in with a crowd.
He set out to create his own style of fashion and then convince the lady shopper that his vision was most excellent. Through millinery, Tappé could be inventive to the maximum degree. In essence, he could tell a woman exactly who she should be—and they would happily acquiesce as they touted their new Tappé creation.

**Daywear and Eveningwear**

As with his millinery, Tappé’s style for day and evening wear developed over time. This is evidenced by his early pieces that are not, while individually lovely, as unique or interesting as the designs from his middle to late career periods. One such piece is an early Tappé evening jacket from 1910-17 (fig. 4.20), originally owned by Mrs. Carl Krippendorf as discussed in the previous chapter. The hip length jacket has three quarter length sleeves and is made of pale gold silk warp printed with flower bouquets and trimmed with gathered gold and pink changeable taffeta and metallic lace. The metallic lace has tarnished, and now has a darker appearance. The jacket is lined with sheer pink silk. The label at the interior center back neckline reads, “Tappé Modes, 25 West 57th St., New York,” which was his flagship location. A detail view of the sleeve and edging detail is shown in figure 4.21.

Although Tappé was concerned with preserving and flaunting femininity, his clothing also had allure and flamboyance. The most interesting thing about Tappé garments is their unusual detail in terms of design: interesting waist yokes, jeweled ornaments, and combinations of varying textures fall into this category. For example, a short evening gown designed by Tappé with an unusual waist yoke, dated 1923-27, combines simplicity with a bold aesthetic appeal. The dress is made in black taffeta with
a set-in yoke in a contrasting red color at the high hip level. The skirt is fullest at the sides, and gathered or eased into the bottom of the hip yoke all around the circumference.

The hem tapers upward to the highest point at the front, which is about knee level, and then tapers down to a gentle scoop at the center back, at about mid-calf height. It was a common element of fashion for dresses of the twenties to be higher in the front. In terms of overall silhouette, as will be seen in many of the other artifacts described below, Tappé was very much in step with fashion.

The bodice has no darts, seams, or other shaping devices—it is tubular and straight in its silhouette. A double layer of delicate netting creates 1" wide straps at the shoulders, and is attached to the taffeta bodice at the armholes and front and back neckline. The front view of the dress is shown in figure 4.22. The edges of the net straps are rolled (detail of bodice can be seen in figure 4.23), and the narrow skirt hem is bound in self-fabric. Some of the seam allowances are the actual selvedge edges to accommodate the full cut of the skirt. The other seam allowances are pinked and pressed open. The label of the gown reads, "Tappé Modes, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York," and is set at the left skirt seam allowance on the interior near the hem (fig. 4.24).

The gown is relatively simple overall, and not overly daring in its style features. However, the bright red contrasting yoke is somewhat higher than the typical drop waist feature of the 1920s, calling attention to the waist. As noted earlier from the article by Gretta Palmer, Tappé believed that, regardless of fashion dictates, every fashionable woman should have a waistline. Perhaps this dress was a compromise between the two extremes, and can be viewed as Tappé's version of calling attention to the waistline in the
1920s, the decade when waistlines were not accentuated. A detail of the waist yoke can be viewed in figure 4.25.

During the same period in 1925 Tappé designed a sleeveless black taffeta surplice dress with a full, asymmetrical black net skirt with gold and green brocade underlay expressly for Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (fig. 4.26). Mrs. Roosevelt later donated the piece to the Museum of the City of New York. The surplice top has a deep V-neckline edged in 2” of fine black netting, and wraps around to tie at the wearer’s left side waist. Taffeta being a crisp and full-bodied fabric, the bow would stand out jauntily from the waist. Wrapping and tying the bodice at the waist also calls a great deal of attention and focus to the natural waistline. The black taffeta continues down in a yoke to the low hip point of the skirt, where its fullness is pleated into the waistline. Attached to the yoke is a very full two-tiered skirt of black net, which hangs lower on the wearer’s right side, probably hitting about mid-calf length. The skirt rises diagonally to the wearer’s left to hit approximately at the knee level.

Under the layers of netting is a bright emerald green and gold brocade skirt, which provides the backing and can be seen through the netting. A lovely multidimensional effect is created within the skirt, and seemingly illuminates it from the underneath. This dress was very appropriate for dancing and the wearer’s movement most likely highlighted its charms. The armholes and neckline are bound with 1/4” wide silk binding, and the dress has a snap closure opening on the wearer’s left side. A detailed view of the dress bodice can be seen in figure 4.27.

However, not every Tappé ensemble is particularly interesting or innovative. A blue velvet coat with lavender silk lining, and matching cloche hat ensemble (hat was
discussed above) is simple and understated. The catalog records at the Museum of the City of New York state that the donor, Mrs. Reginald P. Rose, wore it as part of her “going away costume” for her wedding on December 29, 1926. There is no label in either the coat or hat; instead the information about the garment origin comes from the donor. The coat is cut straight, with long sleeves and one pocket with rounded flap openings on each side of center front at hip level (fig. 4.28). The sleeves are slit at the sleeve hems, the collar is a turndown style with pointed lapels, and the overlapping center front placket has no closures. It is not particularly noteworthy, nor provides anything unexpected for the eye. Aesthetically, it has clean lines and monochromatic coloring to make for an uncomplicated composition.

On the other hand, some Tappé garments can be simple while still showing originality and playfulness in the design. In 1927, Tappé fashioned a sleeveless red velvet dress trimmed in silver braid (fig. 4.29). Besides the low, scooped neckline and large scalloped hem the dress is largely without shape, lacking shaping devices such as darts or seams but being fashioned from two large flat pattern pieces. Due to the lack of shaping, the armholes do not hug the wearer, but are rather loose and draped (fig. 4.30). The hem is longer at the sides and curves upward at the center front and center back.

The only decoration on the red velvet dress is silver metallic embroidery consisting of five rows of single needle topstitching on the top and bottom of the scalloped hem, and an alternating stitched leaf and circle pattern that is “growing” up from the bottom row of stitching. A detail view is shown in figure 4.31. The label of this dress is located on the interior seam allowance of the side seam, and reads, “Tappé Modes, Inc., 9 West 57 St., New York” (fig. 4.32). The seam allowances have all been
finished with hand stitching. Other seam allowances are the actual selvedge edge of the fabric, which may have been out of necessity due to the unusual width of the flat pattern pieces. Mrs. Harry Horton Benkard donated the dress to the Museum of the City of New York in 1933, which was worn by Mrs. Reginald P. Rose (nee Bertha Benkard), who was the daughter of the donor. The dress was on exhibit at that museum in a show titled “The Last Three Decades in New York, 1915-1945,” which ran from November 21, 1944 to January 8, 1945.

Although at first glance one might consider the dress uninteresting, it is important to note the features of its design that illustrate creativity. The contrasting textures of the velvet compared with the metallic braid create interesting effects with light. Absorbing and reflecting light in different amounts when the materials are in motion gives richness to the garment’s simplicity. The scalloped hem creates inherent contrast to the straight cut of the overall silhouette, while the deep, scooped neckline mimics the curves on the scalloped hem. It would be an ideal dress for dancing, as its straight cut and lack of shaping devices would most likely allow for a full range of movement.

A fascinatingly detailed gown from 1927 is made of black georgette and sequined fringe. The dress has a drop-waist silhouette with a short, three-tiered skirt made of narrow sequin-covered strips of georgette emulating fringe (fig 4.33). The bodice is sleeveless and tubular in shape, with the neckline being straight across in the front and back, and narrow camisole shoulder straps. The bodice has horizontally positioned rows of oval beads, which are in a diagonal position (fig 4.34). The gown is discolored in sections from the tarnishing and deterioration of the beads, giving the garment a green
striped appearance. Originally, however, the garment was solid black. Festive and ornate, the gown was very labor intensive.

The label for the garment reads, "Tappé Modes, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York," and has an additional label that reads, "Made in U.S. America, THE BEST, Warranted, Kleinert Trademark." The exact implication of this secondary label is not known. The catalogue records list the gown as being made in Paris, France, which would make the dress an import from a French designer. However, the latter mentioned label directly contradicts this information. It is more likely that Tappé designed and made this gown, and was promoting the fact that his original fashion designs were "all-American." It is also a possibility that the pieces were purchased abroad and imported from France to simply be constructed in New York.

An ensemble of a black velvet afternoon dress and matching hat (discussed previously in this chapter) from 1928 was part of Maud Eels Corning's (Mrs. Warren H. Corning's) trousseau. The black velvet dress has a wide lace collar that extends rounded from the back neckline and over the shoulder to a pointed shape at the front. The edge of the lace collar is bound with pale green satin. For a detail of the lace collar see Figure 4.35. The long sleeves have French cuffs, with a unique buttonhole closure through which pale green satin has been threaded and tied. There is also gathering at the elbow along the sleeve inseam for a more fitted sleeve. There are back neck darts under the back collar, and the bodice is gathered at the high hip at the side seams and on the front body. There is a belt at hip level, which has been fixed on top of the body fabric and has a back button closure. The front of the dress, which is of a drop waist silhouette, has a v-neck and faux button front. There is a tiny square pocket on the right side that shows a
lace handkerchief piped in pale green satin trim. The skirt is short and slightly gathered into the waist seam. The label inside the dress reads, “Tappe Modes New York.” The dress and hat are not as innovative as some of the other garments, but do show an attention to detail.

From the same year of 1928, there is a formal evening dress made out of peach and silver machine knitted lace, with a strikingly large rhinestone ornament placed at the wearer’s left hip. Again, the drop waist silhouette was adopted for this sleeveless dress with a tiered skirt of ruffles edged in horsehair braid for added fullness. The dress has a silk satin underlay with tulle edging, and a snap closure entry at the wearer’s left side seam. The dress also carries the label “Tappe Modes New York.” For a front view of the garment, see figure 4.36, with a detail of the rhinestone ornament in figure 4.37. This garment was fashionable for its day, and would have been an ideal evening dress for dancing. Its fun and flirty layers of ruffles lend itself well to the big sweeping dance motions of the 1920s, and the rhinestone ornament draws attention to the drop waistline, which was considered to be a very attractive line. Apparently, Tappé finally decided that the drop waistline was acceptable for his garments, as well.

Another formal evening dress from 1929 is a beige slip dress with a chiffon overlay, with detailed pintucks and a lace collar edged in brown monkey fur. The V-neck chemise with its cape-shaped collar is tucked at the waist and hip, and drapes softly down to a handkerchief hem. The lace collar is made of machine knitted lace. The dress is a very unusual combination of design elements, which signifies a risk on behalf of the designer. Combining the soft chiffon and delicate lace with a coarse and somewhat stiff fur trim is an atypical idea. It was more common to see monkey fur on stiff satins and
otherwise more substantial fabrics. For a detail view of the collar, see figure 4.38. The under slip also shows a great attention to detail, with the neckline and hemline being edged in a band of chiffon, with faggoting at the seam (fig. 4.39). The label attached to the seam allowance reads, “Tappe Modes, 9 West 57th St., New York.”

In terms of innovation, perhaps none is so striking as a pale green dancing dress from 1929 that is adorned with bold diagonal V-shape bugle bead embroidery, creating a faux surplice look. The glass silver bugle beads are sewn so closely together that it makes a wide, solid line on the body. The dress also consists of an under slip with camisole straps, and the pale green chiffon dress has tank straps that lay over the slip. There is a handkerchief drape off one side for added interest, creating an asymmetrical hemline. A front view of the dress is shown in figure 4.40, with a detail view of the beading.

Another notable ensemble is an afternoon dress from 1944 made of a pink-beige crepe. The dress is two pieces, consisting of a silk slip trimmed in Italian Venetian point lace, and the over dress with a draped, low-V neckline, structured shoulders more typical of the 1940’s, and long sleeves which are gathered into the armholes. Wide set-in sections of the same lace are at the forearm of the sleeves. A front view of the dress can be seen in figure 4.41. A detail of the lace can be seen in figure 4.42, which is very ornate and finely crafted. There is a matching hat to the ensemble, which was unavailable for study, and also a pair of matching gloves that were stolen from the museum when the ensemble was previously on exhibit. The silhouette of the dress has a slight drop waist, and an overall straight cut. A self-fabric tie wraps around the low hip
from the back and ties at the front. The label reads “House of Tappe, inc., 25 West 57th St., New York,” and can be seen in figure 4.43.

There were other Tappe garments in the collections that I was unable to study firsthand: An evening dress from 1931 made of pleated cerise taffeta and bands of chiffon, with the label: “Tappe, 9 West 57th St., New York,” donated by Miss Agnes Miles Carpenter. A dress from 1925 made of black net with embroidery of gold thread and blue beads, made by Tappe, 9 West 57th St., which was a gift of Mrs. S. R. Guggenheim in 1940. An evening dress from 1925 made of off-white chiffon and heavily embroidered with iridescent white and clear beads, with the label, “Tappe Modes, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York,” donated by Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Slater. And finally, an evening ensemble from the late 1930s to 1940s made of heavy silk black crepe, halter style dress and matching bolero jacket, with the label, “House of Tappe, Inc., 25 West 57th Street, New York,” donated by Mrs. Robert Blake.

Wedding Gowns

The pinnacle of Herman Patrick Tappe’s career can be illustrated by his wedding theme designs. In this instance, it is no wonder that Tappe was hailed as “the Poiret of New York,” and “Poiret on this side of the water.” Discussed at length in the previous chapter, Tappe’s involvement in his brides’ wedding parties was all-inclusive: from the bridal gown, to bridesmaid dresses, to the mother of the bride, props, veils, flowers, lighting and music. Tappe was not just creating a wedding; he was putting on a show

88
with the bride in the starring role. In this way he was very similar to Paul Poiret, who “saw each of his clients as a leading lady in a pageant. He was the leading man.”

For Tappé, the most important thing was to choose a theme that suited the bride’s looks and personality. Therefore, a Tappé wedding gown could quite possibly be the most unique and original garment ever created for his client. A Tappé wedding gown was never merely a dress: it was the embodiment of the woman’s soul. It is no wonder that Tappé weddings were in high demand among society women. Tappé revered his brides. They became his celebrities, and he was involved in every detail of the wedding to be certain the day was a spectacular theatrical event.

The heirloom gown in Miriam Weis’ family demonstrates evidence of the significance of a Tappé bridal gown. The Tappé wedding dress in their family was worn by three generations—and was wished to have been worn by a fourth—only to be retired when the gown became too fragile. The gown went through many alterations for its different wearers, including having the neckline lowered to fit later fashion dictates of the forties. Each time it was worn by another bride in the family, the dress took on a newfound significance and deeper meaning in their lives. The dress is still in possession of the family even though it has been retired.

A wedding gown with Elizabethan-styled design elements from 1927 is exemplary of Tappé’s skill in period styling (fig. 4.44 shows the gown on exhibit in 1972). A most unique feature of the ivory satin gown is the ruffed collar and straight V-shape of the bodice, which are reminiscent of Elizabethan dress. Several layers of stiffened ruffles stand out from the back neckline, tapering down to the bust point. The garment appears to be made of two pieces, an over gown or coat, and a rose point and
duchesse lace dress over ivory satin that shows through from underneath the split at the front bodice and front skirt. However, the 1920s drop waist silhouette remains clear, and the copied “v” point of the bottom of the bodice area is not severely fitted as would occur from the boned stomacher of the seventeenth century.

The gown has long sleeves, which have been slashed at the front from the armhole to the forearm. The slashed openings have been trimmed in what the catalogue records state to be silver thread and rhinestones, and the same trim is visible down the center front edges of the over gown. The over gown has a cathedral length train, which is trimmed in the same silver thread and rhinestones. The gown also has a matching cathedral length veil of ivory tulle, and shoes. The label in the wedding gown reads: “Tappé Modes, Inc., 9 West 57th St., New York.” The gown was worn by the donor, Doris Marguerite Brixey, at her marriage to Henry Cushing Olmsted on June 14, 1927.

According to catalogue records:

Mrs. Brixey’s father was an art collector. He gave her a book of portraits. When she was to be married, she decided to design her own wedding dress, as she did not like the style of the period calling for dresses short in front and long in back. She went through the art book her father had given her and picked a sleeve from this portrait, and a collar from that, etc. Thus she composed her own design calling it “Marie de Medici” style. Tappé carried out her design. Her wedding became a craze for “period” weddings among society people. (MCNY 2004)

Indeed, Tappé’s specialty was theme and period weddings. And although Mrs. Brixey chose all the elements of her gown, it was up to Tappé to combine those elements in an artistic and aesthetically pleasing way. He carried out her idea with skill and the result was a Twenties version of an Elizabethan gown, which was extremely novel at the time.

When looking at the wedding gowns in magazines from the previous chapter, it becomes easier to see their true beauty. We can see them, although in two-dimensional
form, on human models with the original visual intent intact. The white muslin wedding gown featured in the May 1, 1932 issue of *Vogue* (fig. 3.11) shows a camisole bodice with a V-neckline and a full skirt decorated with cut-out embroidery in a scrolling floral pattern. A delicate, sheer long-sleeved blouse wraps over the main bodice. The model is wearing a sheer white hat with a ribbon band, and it is tilted becomingly over one side of her face. Compared to the two bridesmaid dresses in the photograph from Bergdorf Goodman and Jay-Thorpe, the Tappe gown truly stands out as being special.

The other photograph from the same issue of *Vogue* in 1932 shows a floral muff made of orange-blossoms (fig. 3.10), which demonstrates Tappe’s participation in other elements of a wedding besides the gowns. Orange-blossoms carried a strong significance in terms of marriage, as stated by Cornelia Powell:

> Incorporating orange blossoms into the bride's costume originated in ancient China where they were emblems of purity, chastity and innocence. There are few trees so prolific as the orange; it is one of the rare plants that blooms and bears fruit at the same time, thus becoming symbolic of fruitfulness. The 19th century bride even decorated her gown with this symbol of fertility. But it was Queen Victoria who created the vogue for the sweet smelling blossoms when she wore them in a grand wreath for her 1840 wedding, and the classic floral theme for the Victorian bride was set. The very influential etiquette journals of the 19th century dictated that every bride include the blossoms in her wedding. (Powell n.d.)

Many typical orange blossom arrangements of the period consisted of loosely gathered, large arrangements with profuse amounts of greenery that were carried, covering a large portion of the front of the bride so great was their size. Tappe’s tightly constructed, compact muff featuring solid blossoms and no visible greenery was a fresh new take on a Victorian tradition.
Although few wedding gowns were available for study, the examples that could be found are testimony to Tappé’s originality and dramatic flair. The innately feminine gowns resonate with images of delicacy, luxury and beauty. The drama and femininity in the designs of Tappé, while evident in all areas of his work, are especially visible in his wedding creations. Simple lines combine with ornate and delicate style details create a signature look that was sure to have been known as Tappé.
NOTES

Chapter Four


2. Ibid., 42.


Fig. 4.1. Green silk-covered straw hat, 1917-18. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.2. Interior label of green silk-covered straw hat, 1917-18. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.3. Detail of silk flowers on silk-covered straw hat, 1917-18. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.4. Lid of hatbox for green silk-covered straw hat, 1917-18.
Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.5. Navy blue velvet cloche hat, 1926. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.6. Black velvet turban with lace and rhinestone ornament, 1928. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Figure 4.7. Tan silk hat with wide floppy brim embroidered in palm trees, 1920s. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.8. Interior label of tan silk hat embroidered with palm trees, 1920s. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.9. Coral straw picture hat, 1935. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.10. Brown felt hat with turned down sides and slubbed netting, 1930-49. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.11. Interior labels of brown felt hat with turned down sides, 1930-49. The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.12. Brown felt hat with “tongue” crown, 1938. Kent State University Museum.
Fig. 4.13. Side view of brown felt hat with "tongue" crown, 1938. Kent State University Museum.
Fig. 4.14. Lime green beret, 1930.
The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.15. Lime green beret, back view, 1930.
The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.16. Interior label of lime green beret, 1930.

The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University.
Fig. 4.17. Woven straw hat with summer fruit, 1930s.
Kent State University Museum.
Fig. 4.18. Detail of woven straw hat with summer fruit, 1930s. Kent State University Museum.
Fig. 4.19. Crocheted yachting cap, 1930-35. Courtesy of Texas Fashion Collection.
Fig. 4.20. Evening jacket with metallic lace, 1910-17. Courtesy of the Cincinnati Art Museum.
Fig. 4.21. Detail of evening jacket with metallic lace, 1910-17. Courtesy of the Cincinnati Art Museum.
Fig. 4.22. Black taffeta gown with red yoke, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT.
Fig. 4.23. Detail of shoulder and bodice of taffeta gown, c. 1925.
The Museum at FIT.
Fig. 4.24. Interior label of taffeta gown, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT.
Fig. 4.25. Waist yoke detail of taffeta gown, c. 1925. The Museum at FIT.
Fig. 4.26. Black taffeta surplice dress with net skirt, 1925.
Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.27. Bodice detail of black taffeta surplice dress, 1925. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.28. Blue velvet coat, 1926. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.29. Red velvet dress with scalloped hem, 1927. The Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.30. Red velvet dress armhole, 1927. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.31. Red velvet dress trim detail, 1927. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.32. Interior label of red velvet dress, 1927. 
Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.33. Black georgette gown with sequins, 1927. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.34. Bodice detail of black georgette gown with sequins, 1927. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.35. Lace collar on black velvet dress, 1928. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.36. Peach floral lace gown with rhinestone detail, 1928. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.37. Rhinestone brooch at hip of peach floral lace gown, 1928. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.38. Detail of lace collar with monkey fur, 1929. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.39. Faggoting detail on interior slip of dress with monkey fur, 1929. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.40. Asymmetrical silver “V” dress with bugle bead embroidery, 1929. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Fig. 4.41. Pink-beige crepe with Italian Venetian point lace, 1944. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.42. Detail of Italian Venetian point lace, 1944. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.43. Interior label of crepe dress, 1944. Museum of the City of New York.
Fig. 4.44. "Elizabethan-inspired" wedding gown worn by Doris Marguerite Brixey, 1927. Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.
CHAPTER 5

TAPPÉ’S LEGACY

The fashion designer and importer Herman Patrick Tappé most likely had no idea how high his star would rise when he was a young man starting out in Sidney, Ohio. However, his career is not simply an example of hard work and determination. Tappé was driven by his passion for designing clothing and dressing women. He thrived in his self-made creative environment where he could be the master of his domain. Tappé was an admirer and exploiter of everything feminine, eventually surrounding himself with high society ladies whom he could dress, and charge a lot of money to dress, in his dramatic designs.

Tappé’s background and beginnings were discussed, setting the stage for the story of his career by illustrating his early family life, personality traits, and training in the millinery and fashion industry. The first objective of this research, to establish Tappé’s background and beginnings about his early career and family life in Sidney, Ohio, provided a more complete picture of who Tappé was as a man. One of Tappé’s most admirable qualities was his ongoing loyalty to his family, friends and hometown of Sidney, Ohio. He became a key player in the high society of New York City, rubbing
elbows with Rockefellers and Astors, but he obviously never forgot where he came from, or the well being of his mother and sisters.

The second objective of this research was to describe the development of Tappé’s business as a designer/importer, and place him and his business in the context of the fashion industry in New York during his lifetime. This included identifying who his clients were, his approach to retail business, and identifying the types of goods he sold and designed. Tappé was in the heart of the fashion district in his day. His locations were adjacent to the salons of other prominent designers as well as to the large, upscale department stores. He made custom daywear, eveningwear, hats, and wedding gowns. He sold expensive imports and one-of-a-kind originals to the wealthy families of New York, and to upscale fashion retailers in other cities around the country.

The third objective of this research was to investigate Tappé’s design and aesthetic sense as evidenced through extant items of clothing held in costume collections, and to call attention to the drama and femininity expressed in Tappé’s fashion designs. It can only be guessed at how many extant Tappé garments exist in total in collections around the country. This research certainly has the possibility of expansion by studying more garments firsthand. It is interesting to see Tappé’s style evolve over time by looking at the clothing that has been preserved from his career.

In contrast to his millinery, which retained its uniqueness and innovation, Tappé’s garments did not stay in step with fashion as his career progressed. His overall look and the image of his fashion brand retained its single-mindedness and traditional view toward the feminine that saw women as objects to be decorated, which ultimately led to his decline in popularity. Like the French designer Paul Poiret, Tappé was unable to make
the adjustment from expensive, one-of-a-kind, elaborate garments to modern sportswear and mass production. As American fashion readily headed in a different direction, Tappe was displaced because his luxurious, over-the-top style was no longer in demand. This may be part of the reason why Tappe has slipped into obscurity in terms of the recorded history of American fashion designers. He was innovative, but was not willing to extend that innovation outside of his personal tastes to follow the trends of modern fashion where everyday clothing was concerned.

In fact, Tappe abhorred “off-the-rack” fashion and looked on commercialism with disdain. Because of his elitist approach toward fashion, it is no surprise that he was subsequently forgotten in American fashion history, which particularly and continually emphasized comfort, functionality and accessibility to the masses. However, that Tappe sold his designs to only the most elite women of society in New York City and only the most elite shops outside of New York City must be considered as evidential proof of his importance among his contemporaries. In The Ways of Fashion (1948), M. D. C. Crawford wrote:

Since the early part of the century Herman Patrick Tappe has been among the leaders of fashion in New York City. He was perhaps the first American designer to receive the practical recognition of the trade by selling them models as well as merchandise. He is of Alsace-Lorraine French and Irish ancestry, but he is a native New Yorker. He is more famous perhaps as a creative milliner, but he is confined to no type of costume. His bridal gowns are particularly famous. He is a designer of creative imagination and authority, and is far less concerned with matters of organization than with the artistic phases of his profession. For a generation he has been recognized as an artist in costume by the most discriminating fashionables in the United States. He was among the first, perhaps the first, American designer to gain international fame. (Crawford 1948)

This paragraph is set between paragraphs written about Hattie Carnegie and the house of Bergdorf Goodman. In 1930, Gretta Palmer’s book, A Shopping Guide to New York,
stated that Herman Patrick Tappé was “where the clothes themselves are one of the big experiences that life offers to a woman,” and “he corresponds, roughly, to Paul Poiret on this side of the water and has all the same God-given sense of color.”

Certainly it is unjust that Tappé is no longer famous as a leading name among his contemporaries. It seems entirely ironic that Tappé could be so absolutely praised, and subsequently so absolutely forgotten, especially because he was analogous to Paul Poiret.

Tappé was called “The Poiret of New York” because his fashion perspective, personality, and the course of his career aligned so closely with that of the French designer Paul Poiret. They both loved theatrical extravagance, whether they were throwing a party or designing a gown. Both designers dabbled in costume designs for high-profile movies and theatre productions, Tappé designing for legendary producer D. W. Griffith, and Poiret developing his legendary Le Minaret style. Indeed, both Tappé and Poiret were innovative designers. However, when their outlandish, decadent style was no longer in vogue, they faltered. Unable or unwilling to alter their perspective to the inexpensive, mass-produced methods of modern clothing production, their businesses plummeted. Both designers died penniless after creating their vast fortunes and enjoying their spendthrift lifestyles. In The Century of Hats, Susie Hopkins says of Poiret:

In later life, Poiret’s inability to keep up with changes in the world of fashion led to his downfall. After the Depression in the early 1930s, the demand for expensive, exclusive garments diminished and Poiret stumbled from financial difficulties into bankruptcy. He died in 1944, in poverty, and was nearly forgotten until the young designers of the 1970s and 1980s acknowledged his contribution to twentieth century fashion and learned to appreciate him as the great master of innovation that he truly was. (Hopkins 1999)
In the same vein, we must also recognize Herman Patrick Tappé for the creative and innovative force in fashion for the first half of the twentieth century. He had a long and illustrious career. American fashion history is incomplete without Tappé joining other designers at the forefront of recognition. It is hoped that this research will bring Tappé to the forefront and help him achieve his proper place and recognition among American fashion designers. Tappé was truly a “Master of the Revels”: a choreographer, a director, a producer, and most significantly, a superior designer.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future research, I suggest a thorough search of costume collections in all major cities in the United States in order to find any more Tappé hats, eveningwear, daywear and wedding gowns that still exist. Because Tappé designed for entire bridal parties, it would be interesting to find all the dresses from one wedding as a case study. Surely there could be enough information to write a book about his weddings alone.

In addition, it would be helpful to research some of Tappé’s more famous clients in-depth to show the extent to which they utilized Tappé’s services. Also finding and analyzing business records, receipt books, or other financial documents from the House of Tappé would shed light on the day-to-day aspects of his business.
NOTES

Chapter 5


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