The Costume Institute

The first exhibition of the Costume Institute in its new quarters at the Museum opened on December 13, under the supervision of Polaire Weissmann. The special display of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century costumes is supplemented by exhibits from the ten departments of the Museum, indicating the variety of source material for costume design available in the new location. Access to the Institute may be had through the 83d Street Entrance.

Formerly known as the Museum of Costume Art, the Institute was founded in 1937 as a center for costume research. It was organized around the theory that clothing is, after food and shelter, of the greatest economic importance and that changes in style reflect the social history of a period. The Institute saw how it might thus be of service to scholars, fashion designers, and to the theater and motion picture industries, as well as to interested laymen. It started with two collections, those of Irene Lewisohn and Lee Simonson: it now has over six hundred donors, who have brought to it eight thousand costumes and accessories from all over the world.

The costumes in the collection, filed in "stacks" according to date on specially shaped hangers, are as accessible as books in a library (ill. above). There is also a room devoted to millinery and shoes. In addition, the Institute is equipped with individual designers' rooms, a study-and-lecture room, and a library. The Museum's Textile Study Room has been moved next to the Institute to facilitate research.
ABOVE: The bride wears a white silk ankle-length dress and a blonde lace three-quarter veil, the child tan-and-rose shot taffeta. The guest has on a tan taffeta dress, a pelerine, and a high-crowned leghorn. Hanging are a beige silk and a cotton print. All date from the 1830's.

BELOW: A pale gold dress of 1838, and a gray silk with the full gigot sleeves of 1834.
ABOVE: The hostess wears a full-skirted brown taffeta dress of 1858 with floral stripes in black, the boy a tan broadcloth suit and embroidered white shirt. The guest has on a blue moiré dress and a cashmere shawl of the 1860's. BELOW: The lady serving tea wears brocaded satin and a lace barbe of the 1840's. The guests are in orchid satin and tan-and-green silk.