

MS 652021 | Accession Number: 2020-0021

***American Textile History Museum Records, 1965-2020: A Finding
Aid***

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American Textile History Museum Records, 1965-2020
Alcott Pressley Research Center and Museum, Boston, Massachusetts

Collection Information

Title: American Textile History Museum Records, 1965-2020

Creator: American Textile History Museum

Collection number: MS 652021

Accession Number: 2020-0021

Extent: approximately 0.54 linear feet, 307 items (62 photographs; 749 pages of documents)

Language: English

Dates: 1965-2020 (inclusive), 1971-2010 (bulk)

Restrictions to Access: None

Historical Note

The American Textile History Museum was originally founded in 1960 by Caroline Steven Rodgers as the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum. The museum sought to promote and preserve the rich history of American textiles and textile production. Over the course of its history, the museum changed its name twice, first to the Museum of American Textile History (“MATH”) in 1984, and then to the American Textile History Museum (“ATHM”) in 1996. The museum, which began life in North Andover, Massachusetts, relocated to Lowell, Massachusetts in the late-1990s. The museum closed due to financial struggles in 2016. The records in this collection were gifted by the museum to the Alcott Pressley Research Center and Museum in April 2020.

This collection primarily focuses on institutional outreach in the 1980s-2000s. During that time, the museum changed its name to ATHM and relocated to the Lowell, Massachusetts. A contributor to this collection is Diane L. Fagan Affleck, a longtime curator at the museum. According to “American Textile History Museum: A Timeline History” (2019), Affleck was hired as an Assistant Curator of Textiles in 1982. She became the Curator of Textiles in 1986, and then Senior Curator of the museum in 1993. She stayed on in various curatorial roles at the museum until its closing, with several brief breaks as the museum was restructured. She officially retired in 2014, but remained a Consulting Curator for the museum in a volunteer capacity. In 1987, Affleck published a book, *Just New From the Mills: Printed Cottons in America*.

In addition, the collection contains photographs of a fire in Lowell, Massachusetts in March, 1987. The fire destroyed much of the Lawrence Manufacturing Complex and some of the oldest buildings in Lowell, Massachusetts (*Fire sweeps factory complex*, 1987). Over 200 firefighters

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were involved in putting out the fire (*Mill Fire May Have Caused Up To \$10 Million Damage*, 1987). The fire began in the Sweeney Mill building, consumed two other buildings, and damaged several other buildings. The complex was a historic mill site that was once home to the Lawrence Manufacturing Company. More information about the company can be found in the Harvard Business School's Baker Library Special Collections' finding aid for the Lawrence Manufacturing Company records.

External Resources

A Brief Timeline of the American Textile History Museum. (n.d.).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uqWSJ-IGPiV8IrPafZgmCcfrAPHoen6k/view?usp=sharing>.

American Textile History Museum. (n.d.). *Mission & History / American Textile History Museum*. Internet Archive Wayback Machine. Retrieved April 15, 2021, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20170722222242/http://www.athm.org/about-athm/mission-history/>.

Fire sweeps factory complex. (1987, March 24). UPI. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1987/03/24/Fire-sweeps-factory-complex/5903543560400/>.

Lawrence Manufacturing Company Collection. Baker Library Historical Collections. Harvard Business School. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/bak00059/catalog>. Accessed April 15, 2021.

Mill Fire May Have Caused Up To \$10 Million Damage. (1987, March 24). AP NEWS. <https://apnews.com/article/fa79edefa2719070fe66c5b0845f4145>.

Sheridan, C. M. (2019). American Textile History Museum: A Timeline History. In Cherry, K, et. al., *North Carolina Textile Museum Feasibility Study* (pp.68-119). North Carolina Office of Archives and History. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/documents/4-Textile-Museum-Feasibility-Study-Final-1.pdf>.

Scope and Content Note

This collection broadly contains records relating to the museum's outreach. The dates of the collection span from 1965-2020, with gaps between 1965-1971 and 2010-2020. The collection contains photographs (Kodacolor 35mm film prints of the 1987 mill fire, copies of older photographs), newsletters and other documents pertaining to advertising/outreach, newspaper clippings, correspondence (letters, fax/telefax, email), and other documents.

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Subjects include: exhibits, specifically “Opulent Textiles” (1991), an exhibit on coverlets (1998), “Dressed For the Part: Costumes From the Silver Screen” (2000), a joint exhibition with the Kelmscott Rare Breeds Foundation (2002), and “Aprons: fifties FUNCTIONal Fashion” (2010); longtime curator Diane L. Fagan Affleck’s presentations and talks at other intuitions; the creation of the museum’s website; ATHM’s educational programs in the 1990s; the evolution of the museum’s newsletter between 1979-1995; and documents relating to the 2000 case *Warner Brothers vs. John LeBold vs. American Textile History Museum (trustee)* over costumes loaned to the Museum by Mr. LeBold for the “Dressed For the Part” exhibit.

Collection Arrangement

Since the collection does not have any existing original order, the records are arranged into thematic series, and then ordered topically and/or chronically within the series. Duplicates, blank pieces of paper, and unusable photocopies were removed from the collection.

The collection is arranged into four series:

Series I: Publications and PR records, 1979-1999

Series II: Exhibits and Educational Programs, 1965-2010

Series III: *Warner Brothers vs. John LeBold vs. American Textile History Museum (trustee)* case materials, 2000

Series IV: Miscellaneous records

Collection Inventory

Series I: Publications and PR records, 1979-1999

Extent: 0.29 linear feet

Scope and Content: This series contains materials relating to the museum’s newsletters, advertising, and other outreach efforts. It also contains correspondence relating to Diane L. Fagan Affleck’s various presentations and talks given outside of the museum. This series is arranged topically into the following file-level description. The folders are arranged topically and/or chronologically.

- Advertising/outreach materials
Location: Box 1, Folders 1-3
- Newsletters
Location: Box 1, Folders 4-29
- Correspondence relating to curator Diane L. Fagan Affleck’s presentations and talks outside of the museum, 1984-1995
Location: Box 1, Folders 30-48

Series II: Exhibits and Educational Programs, 1965-2010

Extent: 0.089 linear feet

Scope and Content: This series contains materials relating to several of the museum’s exhibits and educational programs. It includes photographs, research materials, correspondence, and press materials. This series is organized topically.

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- Gallery photographs, 1963 and 1965
Location: Box 1, Folders 49-50
- Coverlets exhibit, 1998
Location: Box 1, Folder 51
- Kelmscott Rare Breeds Foundation joint exhibit, 2002
Location: Box 1, Folder 52
- “Aprons: fifties FUNctional fashion,” 2010
Location: Box 1, Folder 53
- Educational Programs
Location: Box 2, Folders 1-3

Series III: *Warner Brothers vs. John LeBold vs. American Textile History Museum (trustee)* case materials, 2000

Extent: 0.071 linear feet

Scope and Content: This series contains correspondence and museum records relating to the legal case *Warner Brothers vs. John LeBold vs. American Textile History Museum (trustee)*. This case is related to the museum’s 2000 exhibit, “Dressed For the Part: Costumes From the Silver Screen.” The lawsuit pertains to costumes loaned to the museum by John LeBold that Warner Brothers claimed to own on behalf of Debbie Reynolds. This series is organized chronologically and by format (correspondence, museum materials).

Location: Box 2, Folders 4-5

Series IV: Miscellaneous records

Extent: 0.09 linear feet

Scope and Content: This series contains miscellaneous records from the collection, including inventory documents, photographs of the Lawrence Manufacturing Complex fire, and the deed of gift for this collection. This series is organized topically and chronologically.

- Merrimack Valley Textile Museum inventory documents, 1969-1972
Location: Box 2, Folders 6-9
- Lawrence Manufacturing Complex fire photographs, March 1987
Location: Box 2, Folders 10-11
- Other records
Location: Box 2, Folder 12