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PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Subject.....

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GOWNS OF YEARS AGO
AT FUNCTION OF 1924Miss Alderson's Unique Collec-
tion Worn by Toronto
Ladies at TeaHISTORIC COSTUMES
In Those Days a Dress Was a
Dress — Material
Aplenty

Miss Ida Alderson is a Toronto lady who collects antique gowns, and who has as discriminating an eye for a berth as a besque as a collector of antique furniture has for a fiddle-back or a pie-crust table top. And yesterday, at a tea given by Mrs. Newton MacTavish to the Alma Daughters, Miss Alderson lent her quaint and charming collection to a number of members of the group to wear during the afternoon and evening.

These were the gowns for which Godley's Lady Book set the patterns fifty or seventy-five years ago—with bodices so tight that one gasped for breath to look at them, and skirts double box-pleated at the waistline; ten good yards to a skirt, which stood so stiffly that how the youth of the period—whiskered youth, with paisley waist-coats—ever contrived to come within arm's length of the eighteen inch waists of the wearers is nothing less than a miracle of the power of romance.

For the Royal Ball

Mrs. Newton MacTavish wore a delightful gown that had been made to wear to a ball given in honor of his late Majesty, King Edward the Seventh, then Prince of Wales, visiting Canada. It was of embroidered net over white silk, with a ruffle of pale blue chiffon about the billowing skirt, blue chiffon, lace-trimmed sleeves, and a little "opera cape" of rose cashmere braided in white silk, which swung troubadour fashion from the shoulders; a costume which must surely have stirred the royal pulse. It is sad to have to relate that the Prince of Wales did not dance with the wearer of the pretty gown. Less indefatigable in the ball-

room than his royal grandson, he paused in the door-way for a moment, and then went away, and the lace gown was left to dazzle the local falansts.

A very stately costume, which was worn at the opening of parliament under General Bondhead in 1837, was of blue and brown plaid taffeta. After almost a century, the material was still practically intact, with only an occasional break in the thread of the pattern to show the passage of time. If any of the gowns that marked the opening of parliament in Ontario in 1924, are preserved for future generations, they will show perhaps three and a half yards of twenty-seven inch material, a seam on either side, and a strip of brilliant across a shoulder. But in 1837 it was a very different matter. A dress in those days was a dress. Seven yards around the bottom was the brown and blue plaid taffeta, and the long bell sleeves and berth were trimmed with narrow brown velvet ribbon and brown silk fringe, with a jabot of very superior honiton lace adorning the front, to indicate the wearer was a person of family.

Miss Alderson's gown of blue and grey "broken" plaid was made in the year 1850. It had a tight bodice, a pointed berth trimmed with braid, and a skirt that swung when she walked like a great bell. These skirts were designed in the spacious days before we had learned the art of restricted living: before the days of street cars and taxicabs and upper berths and kitchenettes and bathroom flats. The wearers moved graciously through wide rooms and great double-door-ways. When they went abroad, they required the whole breadth of the sidewalk, and no one questioned their right to it.

Sheltered Mackenzie

Mrs. Mary Alderson wore her own wedding gown made over fifty years ago; a sky-blue taffeta, bustled and basque, and trimmed with Spanish lace. Mrs. Alderson is a charming elderly lady, who went diving with William Lyon Mackenzie when she was eleven years old, and whose mother sheltered Mackenzie and Montgomery and Anderson overnight, during the rebellion, hiding their rifles in a hollow tree, and greasing their boots with tallow, while they slept upstairs, in preparation for their escape across the line to the United States in the early morning.

Miss Alderson and Mrs. Alderson have been collecting "period" gowns for some years. Some of them have come from their own family, some from friends, and they represent the surviving history of another generation. They were for a time in the Royal Ontario Museum, but they are now in the private possession of the Alderson family.

King, Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie (MG
26 J 7 volume 23) William Lyon Mackenzie
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