



The Costume & Textile Specialists

Exhibitions, Conservation, Collections Management, & Appraisals

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Dry Cleaning for Historic Textiles

Many garments and other textiles in museum collections are in need of dry cleaning and can be safely dry cleaned. In fact, certain garments such as men's wool frock coats and uniforms, and women's silk garments from many periods can only be cleaned by dry cleaning. Yet museum staff members, especially at small museums, are understandably reluctant to have artifacts dry cleaned because the pieces must be taken to a commercial establishment. There are certain dry cleaners that do special handling of garments for museums—six of these are listed below. None of these cleaners will undertake to clean a garment if they feel that the cleaning process will harm the garment—unfortunately, some stains cannot be removed by any method.

How to Choose a Cleaner: Qualified, dedicated textile chemists (dry cleaners) still do exist in every state. The trick is how to locate them. We have developed some guidelines for you to follow in searching for a cleaning “partner” for your collection:

- Generally speaking, avoid any cleaner that is a franchise. You want an owner-operated business where the work is done on the premises, not sent off to a plant on the outskirts of town. Due to the increased awareness of the carcinogenic nature of many solvents, the EPA has imposed very strict guidelines on today's cleaning industry. Many cleaners only have pre-programmed, computerized machines which they cannot adjust. By finding a business where the owner is part of the day-to-day operation, you benefit from his/her willingness and ability to adjust the machines to the individual needs of the historic garment.
- Make an appointment with the owner and his specialist (depending on how successful the business is, there may be a specialist on staff) to discuss your needs and the specific artifact you have in mind. You will quickly find out if the cleaner has had experience with historic garments and if this is something they are interested in doing. In a couple of instances, we have learned that although the firm is capable of doing this kind of specialized work, they prefer to concentrate on fire and smoke damage. It costs nothing to ask.

Many dry cleaning professionals welcome the opportunity to work on historic textiles. It is a challenge and can be very rewarding professionally. While not cheap, it is nevertheless not out of reach for most budgets—and you can always ask about an in-kind donation of services. In our experience the costs range from \$80 for a c.1870 printed velvet hunting jacket, \$180 for a c.1780 men's silk embroidered waistcoat, \$300 for a

(filthy) 1942 rayon satin wedding gown, to \$800 for a heavily quilted and stuffed album quilt.

One possible source of qualified professional cleaners is through the Association of Wedding Gown Specialists (www.WeddingGownSpecialists.com). This group offers specialized cleaning services for bridal gowns—a special challenge due to the mixture of fabrics and trims. Some, **but not all**, of their members will have the skills needed to treat an historic textile. As we stated before, make an appointment to meet with the owner – and verify that he/she is actively involved in the technical end of the business – not just the bookkeeping.

SOME QUALIFIED DRY CLEANERS FOR HISTORIC TEXTILES

Prestige-Exceptional Fabri-Care

Elaine Harvey
9420 Georgia Ave
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-0333

Jessica Hack Textile Restoration

838 Pacific Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70114
504-366-0786
jhack49@aol.com

DeLuxe Laundry and Dry Cleaners

Dan
5325 Canal Blvd.
New Orleans, LA 70124
504-488-7733
www.clothingcare.net

Museum Quality

John Lappe
828 Washington Street
Peekskill, NY 10566
845-621-5438
email: MQ.NY@verizon.net

Orange Restoration Labs

Sally Lorensen Conant, Ph.D
454 Old Cellar Road
Orange, CT 06447
800-950-6482
www.GownRestoration.com

J.Scheer & Co.

Jonathon Scheer
23c East market Street
Rhinebeck, NY 12572
845-876-5399
www.jscheer.com