

# Strange shapes of times past

By MARY KAY DAVIS

Have you ever wondered what it's like behind the scenes at a large museum? I descended into the catacombs of the Chicago Historical Museum recently and it was like "Star Wars" combined with "Gone With the Wind."

The section we saw had to do with costumes. The Chicago Historical Museum has one of the largest collections of the 19th and 20th century clothes anywhere. The ladies of Chicago married such men as Pullman of the railroad cars, McCormick of the reaper and Armour of the butcher shop.

While the husbands worked hard to become fantastically wealthy, their wives must have been equally busy spending it all on clothes. Their gowns are fantastic, and a number of them have ended up in the museum's collection.

That presents certain problems. When you have thousands of costumes, no matter how lovely, how do you ever



the lively needle

Mary Kay Davis

find anything? Imagine your attic stuffed with every stich, shoe, accessory and hat you've ever owned and you'll get the general idea.

IN CHICAGO, they've solved the storage crunch spectacularly. Gowns are filed in the decade in which they were worn. Each decade is housed in a large metal box like a big armoire without doors. And each box is mounted on a motorized track, which is where "Star Wars" comes in. The room looks as though it's full of giant dominos.

Do you want to look at something from the 1870s? Push the right buttons and all the other decades move away

automatically, leaving you and the '70s in a space to yourself. When you're through, push more buttons and the boxes close ranks again, keeping dust and light away from the cloth (and also, I suspect, squashing columnists who don't retreat fast enough).

To display these costumes for the public, the museum has a large room packed with dummies. I found this unlikely spot absolutely fascinating.

Every era has had its "shape," and those dummies had been made to conform to it. It was hilarious to see the peculiar configurations that the female form has been squeezed into during the

last 150 years.

Shapes ranged from the Empire, with lots of bust from the Adam's apple to the ribs, and nothing down below, to the Victorian rounded silhouette which looked like the Pillsbury Dough Boy on top of a 19-inch waist.

Anatomy was ignored and the bust was a single bulge extending from one arm to the other. Anything beneath the waist was hidden under hoop skirts. You weren't supposed to mention "leg" anyway.

Then came the "S" shape in the 1870s with the bust in front getting bigger, balanced by an equally large bustle-bulge behind. The whole look was sway-backed. The dummies ended with the tubercular look of the Debutante Slouch in the 20s.

I giggled delightedly, and wondered, way back in my brain, how some young squirt 50 years from now is going to describe the way we look today.

## Catch-up math class is for adults

For adults who want to increase their mathematics skills beyond the basics, but experience chills at the prospect, a special five-week non-degree course will be offered by the Oakland University Division of Continuing Education beginning Wednesday, Oct. 24, and Thursday, Oct. 25.

Mathematics skills in algebra and geometry will be practiced in a support-

ive atmosphere with special attention directed to dissolving learning blocks. Enrollees' backgrounds and areas of common interest and difficulty will be considered during the course, entitled "On Your Way To Becoming Math Competent."

George F. Feeman, mathematics department chairman, will conduct the

Wednesday course from 7-9 p.m. Shirley Aune of the Continuum Center will instruct the Thursday course from 8-10 p.m. Tuition is \$40.

A second session of the workshop, "You Can Overcome Math Anxiety or Avoidance," also begins Wednesday, Oct. 24. The workshop covers common trouble areas in math such as simple arithmetic, algebra and geometry, and emphasizes the meaning and use of

math symbols, process skills, and story problems. A supportive atmosphere is maintained in the course.

Both courses are geared to those who did not develop math competency during high school or college, who experience psychological barriers, and consequently avoid math.

For information about the courses and registration, call the Continuing Education office, 377-3120.

## Course in effective relationships

What is your reaction to stress? What happens when you are given a test? How do you interact with others? What assumptions do you make about other people and what assumptions do they make about you? How do you operate in a working team? Do you trust other people?

The answers to questions like that make a difference in your future, in the home or on the job. The Continuum Center for Adult Counseling and Lead-

ership Training will hold seven-session program on developing effective interpersonal relations Oct. 29 to Dec. 10 in Bloomfield Hills.

The program, called "Getting in Touch," will be held from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m., Mondays, at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward at Lone Pine Road.

For information, contact the Continuum Center at Oakland University in Rochester or call 377-3033.

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