Possessing & Preserving Iconic Film Culture:
How Fashion, Fans, and Money Keep Costumes Alive

by
Sarah Suzanne Bellet

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program
Department of Cinema Studies
New York University
August 2016
Introduction

In the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Department – at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University – the curriculum focuses on the physical preservation of moving image materials. The Department studies film, video, and digital mediums on a technical level by producing deliverables and handling media directly. Preservation of these materials is habitually studied on a physical level, but conceptual thinking and learning are also a large part of the course study. The program studies how museums, archives, and libraries are responsible to their patrons, and examines the degradation of the medium that occurs over years of use. Within the program’s course there is an emphasis on understanding the historiography of film and television in America, the principles of copyright barriers, the curation of artifacts to the public, and access to those artifacts. Preservation is taught both practically and conceptually. Students do not handle physical material in every course. Sometimes, preservation is taught as a philosophical discipline.

Multiple chemical components are used to make physical celluloid film, but they do not contribute to the film’s actual narrative. That requires other components, such as sets and costumes. Film costumes are the focus of this thesis. They are worthy of study for both performance value and aesthetic value, and as such they are studied by scholars of cinema and fashion alike. By examining the trajectory of costumes from three different films after their release, this thesis aims to broaden the discussion of what preservation is and what it means beyond just a technical restoration.

There are Hollywood costumes, such as Dorothy’s Ruby Slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*, that have become iconic, quintessential expressions of American culture. They are displayed often, such as in blockbuster museum exhibitions, such as the 2012 Victoria & Albert Museum
show, ‘Hollywood Costume,’ which featured costumes from famous films like *Star Wars Episode V: Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). During its twelve-week display in London, it drew an audience estimated at over a quarter of a million people.¹

**Summary of Thesis Argument**

Costumes for examination in this thesis and as case studies for my main arguments will be the Cowardly Lion costumes from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), – designed by Adrian – the Curtain Dress (as it is known) from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) – designed by Walter Plunkett – and the Ruffle Dress (as it is known) from *Letty Lynton* (1932) – also designed by Adrian. In the areas of finance, fandom, and continued public interest over the decades, these costumes have come to represent specific areas of film and costume history. Each costume has come to have an iconic status. Not only is each costume iconic, but each one has been preserved in different ways and in different settings. For example, the Cowardly Lion costumes were bought and sold by private collectors at auction sales, and their values increased. The Curtain Dress was displayed at museums, allowing fans to foster a connection to the film outside the movie going experience, and to fund the costume’s preservation. The marketing of the Ruffle Dress revealed how Hollywood influenced the American retail market and the tastes of consumers.

The Cowardly Lion costumes have been sold at auctions since 1970 to multiple buyers. The Curtain Dress would not have been restored without the funds from fans of the film who remain excited and connected to one another more than seventy-five years after the film was first released. *Letty Lynton* – a film that cannot be distributed because of copyright restrictions –

would have fallen out of public memory if not for the popularity of the ready–to–wear Ruffle Dresses it inspired women to buy in the early 1930’s.

This thesis is organized by each costume’s overall trajectory. The first chapter, The Wizard of Oz: Costumes & Financial Gain, explores the relationship between private collectors and the sale of the Cowardly Lion costumes over the past 46 years. These costumes have continually sold for increasing prices to private individuals. The chapter analyzes collectors who purchased the costumes, and the effect The Wizard of Oz has had on film and television history. Chapter two, Gone with the Wind: A Never Ending Source of Funds and Fans is a study of how the fan community of Gone with the Wind facilitated the preservation of the Curtain Dress, a luxurious costume worn by Scarlett O’Hara that serves as a key plot point in the film. The chapter also focuses on how the fans of the film stay active and connected to one another through organized events and film screenings. The final chapter, Letty Lynton: The Fashion Legend is an examination of the Ruffle Dress worn by Joan Crawford in the film. Copies of the dress were sold through department stores in the early 1930s. This thesis examines the influence the dress had on American fashion trends.

To gather sources for this thesis I interviewed film curators, film programmers, museum directors, auction house representatives, and private collectors of film memorabilia, as well as cinema scholars, librarians in fashion and museum libraries, and organizers of fan events and communities.² I also researched primary newspaper articles and periodicals of the era (1932-1940) in America.

² Those professionals, academics, and collectors interviewed for this thesis were done so by email correspondence, as well as over the phone and in person with the author. Film curator Steve Wilson from the University of Texas at Austin arranged the ‘Making of Gone with the Wind’ exhibit and coordinates the Robert De Niro collection. Film programmer Joe Yranski was a former senior film librarian at the New York Public Library. He is also a film historian of early cinema as well as a film programmer. He has relatives who bought Letty Lynton Ruffle Dress copies and has conducted his own research into the history of the dress and was an acquaintance of its designer, Adrian. Museum professionals interviewed include Dwight Bowers, a former curator at the Performing Arts Division of Music, Sports, and Entertainment at the National Museum of American
Costume History: After Production

Through my interviews and study of the rising financial value of these costumes, one major theme became apparent. A costume’s history continues after the film’s production, through the active participation of the fans of the film. Many fans go beyond the pursuit of trivial knowledge about costumes and become collectors who feel the need to own and touch them. The physical possession of a costume can become an extension of the original joyful experience of watching the film.

The life of a film never truly ends once the credits start to roll. If there is enough interest, viewers will create the legacy beyond the movie screen. Fan clubs, theme parks, and sponsored merchandise are all ways in which a fan can integrate the story into their daily life, or seek it out in a more active way. Costumes are not only literal artifacts of a film. They represent an emotional connection. The individual pieces of films, like costumes, live on to create their own histories - apart from their original function and context. Some costumes have remained important to fans of the films and there is larger story that enhances the knowledge and scholarship around them. These costumes – whether on display at a museum, sold at private
auction sales, copied by retailers for sale, or even completely lost and unavailable – serve as a physical object for viewers to recall and preserve emotions.

Costumes expand communication and excitement among fans. The effects of this excitement can be seen through the increasing financial value of film memorabilia, and the changing shape of trends of retail fashion. As distinguished film artifacts, the costumes examined by this thesis are unique not just because of their onscreen presence. Since the films’ release these particular costumes have been studied by academics, thus giving them not only an emotional life, but an academic one. In addition, there is a financial incentive to collect them.

This thesis is an exploration into the monetary gains and audience involvement in the life of a costume. It is also an examination of the preservation of one’s own memory. Memories become unclear over time, clouded by personal opinion, and can change based on a person’s emotional response. This emotional response is the catalyst to start collecting and interacting with others who share the same enthusiasm and excitement.

The amount of money a person is willing to spend emphasizes a desire to become a part of the film. A film captures an actor’s performance and a story that resonates with an audience. But once a film is edited and sent to the theatre, it is complete. The film itself can change formats and be preserved through transfers, migration, and digitization. A dedicated fan cannot go back in time and become involved in the production of their favorite film years after it has been released. But if they have the means, they can own an artifact from the film after production. The

---

3 These academics include: Cinema scholars, Christine Gledhill, who wrote Stardom: Industry of Desire, and Rashna Wadia Richards’s, Cinematic Flashes: Cinephilia and Classical Hollywood who draws on the theories of film scholar Elizabeth Wilson. All of who’s work focuses on the use of costume in film. And Deborah Nadoolman Landis who has written extensively on costume history with her book Hollywood Costume. The book serves as a companion to the “Hollywood Costume” exhibition she curated at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The work of film scholar Jane Gaines in multiple writings that include Fabrications: Costumes and the Female Body as well as other academics such as Jean Druesedow, Director of the Kent State University Museum, and Steve Wilson, Film Curator at the University of Texas at Austin. Howard Gutner who authored, Gowns by Adrian: The MGM Years, which is an examination of Adrian’s designs as they relate to his career. These are just some of the academic sources for this thesis and collective research, but represent a mix of those who curate, research, and write about costume history in film.
The possession of a costume is one way for a person to integrate him or herself into a film’s life after it was on screen.

A costume can extend the feeling of happiness after the first viewing. A costume can also provide a focal point for an extended conversation about the film with those who share a similar interest. In the last few decades, it has become clear that a costume has a history all its own. Though one’s memory of a film changes and fades, a costume becomes a way to re-establish the connection to the emotion of the performance in the film.

**Short Summary of the Three Main Chapters**

Below is a brief summary of my focus on the three costumes, followed by an in-depth analysis in each chapter.

**The Wizard of Oz**

_The Wizard of Oz_ (1939), directed by Victor Fleming, was based on the 1900 book _The Wonderful Wizard of Oz_ by L. Frank Baum. The story follows Dorothy, a simple farm girl from Kansas, as she travels to an alternate universe where she encounters characters such as a lion, a scarecrow, and a tin-man who assist in her adventurous trip to Oz. Since 1939, the film has been re-released and re-aired on television and home video where it has found new audiences. The film now holds an iconic film status.

Value – financial or emotional – is the key to understanding why a costume is coveted and the extent to which a person will go to possess it. Private collectors of this film’s materials are not uncommon. A private collector may be a wealthy businessman or an everyday individual
who has saved enough to purchase a costume – sometimes before anyone else recognizes its potential value.

Over the years, many of the costumes from *The Wizard of Oz* have been lost but a few have been found again. Some have been purchased by private collectors at auctions. One – the Scarecrow costume – was taken home by the actor who wore it, Ray Bolger. He would wear it again in an episode of his 1954 variety show. It was donated to a museum after his death. But this is a unique circumstance.

The main argument I will make is that this film’s costumes have sold to private collectors at increasing profit for multiple reasons. One of the first examples was the sale by Metro Goldwyn Meyer Studios Inc. of one of the Cowardly Lion costumes used during production (duplicates of the same costume are made for a film), along with many other props and costumes from the company’s holdings.

Two of the Cowardly Lion costumes, worn by actor Bert Lahr, are the focus of this study. The costumes’ existence after the film’s release demonstrates proof of the increasing financial value costumes can accrue over time. MGM first filed for bankruptcy protection in 1971 and has continued to be financially unsound into the 21st Century. To help raise funds for other projects, MGM de-accessioned its props, costumes, and memorabilia in 1970 to buyers at auction. Some items from *The Wizard of Oz* that sold at that sale have increased tremendously in value.

One of the costumes of the Cowardly Lion was found in a trash bag at MGM in the 1990s and then in 2014 it was sold at Bonhams Auction House for $3,077,000. The costume’s sale for

---

5 Such duplicate costumes are common to film production. This is because of wear and tear that can occur throughout the months of filming, as well as the use of the costume in a scene (i.e. if the script calls for the costume to be ripped or ruined in some way).
such a large amount is indicative of what the film symbolizes to its audience. It also represents the increasing monetary amount a costume can be worth as an investment. James Comisar, a professional entertainment memorabilia collector, was the owner who put the costume up for sale at the 2014 Bonhams auction. When he owned the Cowardly Lion costume he spent thousands of dollars on restoration work and eventually had formed a bond with it. Lucy Carr, Specialist in Entertainment Memorabilia at Bonhams facilitated the final sale of the lion costume. She was able to speak to Comisar’s motivation for selling. “For him, this is his business. He is a dealer in memorabilia and he’s working on building a television museum, so for him that is his occupation. He’s very invested in where these things go and very invested in them being displayed. It’s definitely… it’s an emotional attachment you know? It’s not just some sort of professional concern for him.”

Costumes have also come to represent a blue chip item investment. “I think at that level they [private collectors] typically do have a public display in mind at some point,” said Carr. For some with high disposable incomes, costumes can be a monetary investment, because of their perceived value to sell at auction in later years. But as stated previously, value can mean financial gain and/or emotional investment when an investor has paid into the millions for a costume.

**Gone with the Wind**

*Gone with the Wind* (1939), directed by Victor Fleming, was based on the novel of the same name by Margaret Mitchell. Though the book was enormously popular upon release in 1936, with Mitchell winning a Pulitzer Prize for her work, the film remains the most popular

---

8 Lucy Carr, (Specialist in Entertainment Memorabilia at Bonhams) in discussion with the author, January 2016  
9 Ibid
iteration of the narrative. The epic story follows a young and wealthy Southern belle, Scarlett O’Hara, as she navigates the dangers of the Civil War. The film is as much a romance tale as it is a woman’s account of personal strength and perseverance.

Beyond a compelling narrative, the film has a rich history - from production, to casting, to release – which has generated the amount of material and scholarship written about the film. Fans have an endless curiosity, and there is constant communication online among them. This facilitates their interactions with each other through fan communities both online and in person.

The costumes were designed by Walter Plunkett who started working in Hollywood in 1925 and would later receive an Academy Award for his work on *An American in Paris* (1951). His designs for *Gone with the Wind* reflect the film’s theme of romance and strength, which is represented best in the Curtain Dress. The costume that is the focus of this study has been named the Curtain Dress because in the story Scarlett, now poor, takes green velvet curtains from her home and fashions them into a dress in order to make a good impression on her wealthy suitor, Rhett Butler. The dress was last displayed to the public at the Harry Ransom Center at University of Texas at Austin in 2014.

This dress and many others from the film are examples of costumes displayed in museum exhibitions. Museums can only allow the public limited access to the costumes because of the temporary nature of a given exhibit or because of the fragility of the costumes, among other factors. Those costumes that are housed in museums are presented behind a display case. They are kept in proper storage when not on view. The Harry Ransom Center chose to exhibit the Curtain Dress without a display that created a barrier between the costume and the audience. It also houses five of the original dresses, and displayed them at the ‘Making of Gone with the
Wind’ exhibit in 2014. This exhibit was funded in large part by donations from fans of the film from all over the world. The Marietta Gone with the Wind: Scarlett on the Square Museum in Marietta, Georgia, has also continuously displayed the film’s costumes and recreations, further encouraging fans’ enthusiasm.

_Gone with the Wind_ fans represent a larger element of film’s history. They are not just simple spectators. They are purchasers of its merchandise and organizers of events. They have continually organized anniversary screenings, meet and greets with the cast, and discussions with producer David O. Selznick’s descendants about his legacy.

‘Windies,’ a term that fans of the film have given themselves, are an example of one of the longest running fan communities. Seventy-five years after the film’s release their excitement for the story still shows. These fans mobilize mostly online to discuss their interests and even take their interactions outside of the web and into real life by dressing up in full _Gone with the Wind_ regalia in custom made costumes.

Kathleen Marcaccio, a _Gone with the Wind_ scholar, stated that she gave more than 50 talks at libraries during the 75th Anniversary of the film. “The people that I know that put on those costumes, yes, they turn into Scarlett… There are a lot of local people who will come who are not necessarily _Gone with the Wind_ or Clark Gable fans …but they want to support their local museums.” She is a noted presence in the fan community who runs her own fan page, _Scarlett Online_.

Costumes enhance an actor’s performance. In fact, actors commonly state that they do not feel like they are truly in character until they are in their costume. In addition to _Gone with the Wind_ materials, the Harry Ransom Center also houses the costume and manuscript collection

11 Kathleen Marcaccio, (_Gone with the Wind_ enthusiast and operator of _Scarlett Online_) in discussion with the author about her years of involvement and traveling talks to educational institutions about Gone with the Wind scholarship, February 2016.
of famed actor Robert De Niro. As Film Curator at the Harry Ransom Center, Steve Wilson stated that De Niro started collecting his costumes early on in his career because he felt that “it’s an important part of his process.”¹² In this way, costumes are not only used to study the creative process of filmmaking and production, but also the individual actor’s performance and movement on screen.

**Letty Lynton**

*Letty Lynton* (1932), directed by Clarence Brown, was based on Marie Adelaide Belloc Lowndes’ novel of the same name. Set in the early 1930s, the story revolves around the fictitious young upper-class woman, Letty Lynton (played by Joan Crawford), and her affair in Montevideo, Uruguay, which jeopardizes her engagement to another man. Because of litigation by two playwrights, Edward Sheldon and Margaret Ayer Barnes, the film was released in theaters for a limited time and has since become unavailable. The two playwrights claimed the film followed their play *Dishonored Lady* too closely. Previous to MGM basing the film on the Lowndes’ novel, they had extended an offer to Sheldon and Barnes for their play. MGM later rescinded the offer to Sheldon and Barnes after the script writing began, and instead purchased the rights to Lowndes’ novel. Sheldon and Barnes were given no financial compensation at the time of the film’s release in 1932.

Because of this Sheldon and Barnes took their suit to court in 1936. In 1939 MGM was found guilty of plagiarism and was forced to pay part of the profits of the film to Sheldon and Barnes. MGM then appealed the case to the Supreme Court where it was ruled affirmative in

¹² Steve Wilson, (Film Curator at the University of Texas at Austin) in an interview with the author. February 2016.
Because of the copyright violations against it, *Letty Lynton* cannot be legally accessed until 2025. At that time *Dishonored Lady* will enter public domain, which should resolve the copyright conflict of splitting profits between Warner Bros. – who now owns the rights to *Letty Lynton* – and Sheldon and Barnes’ estates. There is no commercially available way to watch the film, as legal distribution is not possible. There are however digitally accessible illegal copies.

The plot of the film follows Letty as she leaves Uruguay. Her lover, Emile Renaul (played by Nils Asther), behaved abusively while she resided in the country with him. On a ship back to her home in New York, she finds love with a passenger, Jerry Darrow (played by Robert Montgomery), and they become engaged. After her arrival, Emile finds her, and blackmails her with letters she has written to him. Letty, so overwrought with despair, puts poison in her drink and plans to commit suicide. Unknowingly, Emile drinks from her glass before she can, and she allows him to die.

Joan Crawford, who played the title character in the film, wore the Ruffle Dress by the costume designer Adrian. Copies of the costume were made to sell in department stores from 1932-1934. Sales were purportedly high for such ready-to-wear collections, ranging from a conservative 15,000 all the way to 1,000,000. The dress appears in the film for only a short time and was worn for under 10 minutes in only two scenes. In promotion for the film, MGM utilized designer Adrian’s sketches of the costumes and descriptions of the materials to market the film towards women. The studio also used Crawford and her rising popularity to push the dress’s appeal, although the promotional high fashion photographs of her wearing the dress were taken on a different film’s set.

---

As the film has been taken out of all circulation, the only legal means of seeing any content today are through those press photographs, although they misrepresent the story of the film. Many press images were not taken on the film’s set, but instead on the set of another film Crawford was working on at the time. While on that set she was wearing one of her costumes from *Letty Lynton*. The context of the two scenes where the dress was worn remains unclear to those who have not seen the film.

After the film’s release, copies of the Ruffle Dress soon became a very popular retail item. For Adrian it was a huge moment in his design career. It was also a turning point in American consumer retail and would set the footprint for Hollywood costume recreations for the mass market. Macy’s department store is frequently cited as having sold a large number of these copies, but there is no way to substantiate the multiple accounts of dresses that were sold.

Macy’s utilized its ‘Cinema Shop,’ a label that would recreate dresses worn by Hollywood film stars. This partnership between the studio and retailers gave some women a kind of access to the desired dresses from films. Crawford and Adrian were influential in the early marketing of the film, but *Letty Lynton* would represent more than just their star power in the industry. The movie “showed that film fashions could do more than just elicit interest in a picture and draw women to theaters. Ready–to–wear copies or reproductions of motion picture gowns could carry new fashion ideas into the emporiums of America on a mass scale.”

The reported numbers of copies of the Ruffle Dress that were sold at the film’s height of popularity are inconsistent at best. There are claims that the dress sold 50,000 copies from Macy’s but the department store has no record of this number in its archives. The Macy’s archivist even stated that after looking through catalogues from the 1930’s she “didn’t find any

---


15 Throughout my research I have seen numbers ranging from 50,000 to 1,000,000. Curator Kevin Jones at the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM) was also baffled as to the range of numbers and could not discern their origin.
advertisements of the dress from that time frame.” 16 Estimates of sales figures can fall between 500,000 and 1,000,000 depending on source material. 17 Such a range of sales figures means that, at the very least, the dress had an important impact on women and their everyday clothing choices, not to mention how they spent their money.

In essence, the Ruffle Dress and its retail history have become well known to fans of Adrian and Joan Crawford. The fashion stills taken at the time of promotion are all that exist of the original dress and are still widely distributed to fans of Crawford and films of that era. 18 The Ruffle Dress remains the first costume to be desired by women so thoroughly – in such a devastated economic market – that its influence today is solely outside of its utility as a costume.

16 Lauren Marchisotto, (archivist at Macy’s) in correspondence with the author about finding the source of the supposed 50,000 copies of the Ruffle dress sold. March 2016.
17 Throughout research and as cited in this thesis the sales figures for the Ruffle Dress copies are inconsistent. In Amy M. Spindler’s New York Times article, “Bringing Hollywood Home,” she claims Macy’s sold 50,000 copies. In one academic film studies article, scholar Rashna Wadia Richards’ Cinematic Flashes: Cinephilia and Classical Hollywood claims the dress sold 500,000 copies. In Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films, Elizabeth Haas, Terry Christensen, Peter J. Haas claim that the number is “over 1 million copies.”
18 After looking for the original dress from sources at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Fashion Institute of Technology, Fashion Institute Design & Merchandising, The Harry Ransom Center, and Kent State University every museum director and curator was in agreement that the original dress was ‘lost’ and most likely destroyed.
The Wizard of Oz: Costumes & Financial Gain

“The Wizard of Oz is pure magic...it gains luster with each passing year. The trouble is, there aren’t many movies quite in that class, or quite that ageless. It’s a lucky thing for television that there aren’t. Television – any television – looks awfully prosaic, awfully ordinary after The Wizard of Oz”
- John Crosby, Critic for New York Herald Tribune, 1956

The Wizard of Oz is an American classic. This chapter’s focus is not on the themes and elements of the narrative that have aided the film in achieving this status. Instead, the focus is that the Cowardly Lion costumes have exclusively resold at increasing financial value through private auctions. Following the trajectory of the Cowardly Lion costumes is not just a study of what happens to costumes after production ends. By tracing the legacies, the Cowardly Lion costumes reveal a larger discussion about the increasing costs investors are willing to pay to possess such artifacts from films they consider iconic.

Costume designer Adrian made multiples for the film – meaning there were multiple copies of the same costumes for each character. Exact numbers of multiples for each character are unknown however, research confirmed that two, if not three, Cowardly Lion costumes were worn during filming.²⁹ Memorabilia collector, James Comisar, purchased one Cowardly Lion costume, and though he is no longer in possession of the costume, he remains its most prominent owner. Sculptor Bill Mack purchased the other Cowardly Lion costume. Though he was neither its first buyer nor its most recent owner, he housed the costume for over two decades, making him its longest possessor.

²⁹ There is also the suggestion that a fourth lion costume was used during the beginning of production. Supposedly it was skinned off the carcass of a lion and smelled very bad. This was to the point that actor Bert Lahr asked for another to be made because it was not possible to work with. This brings up a question as to which iterations of the lion costume should be considered to be the “real” one.
For clarification throughout this chapter one costume will be known as the James Comisar Lion, and the other will be referred to as the Bill Mack Lion. Each of the most recent owners added their own aesthetic touches to each costume during repairs and preservation. These touches changed the forms of the costumes and also served a utilitarian purpose by contributing to their long-term preservation.

It needs to be stressed that neither of these costumes could have been considered an ‘authentic original.’ The mask worn by Bert Lahr was a molded design glued to his face before filming each day. This mask was unique to Lahr’s facial structure and included pronounced feline features that helped to enhance his performance as a lion. Though the masks commissioned by Comisar and sculpted by Mack do use the original as a measure of authenticity, they are still only recreations. None of Lahr’s masks survived until the time of the auction sale of the costumes. There is however one mane that remains intact. Lahr’s make-up artist on the film, Charles Schram, donated it to the Academy Museum in Los Angeles. It is unclear if the mane is a part of either the Bill Mack Lion or the James Comisar Lion, or another Cowardly Lion costume all together.

*The Wizard of Oz* is still prominent in current culture. It has proven to be profitable past its initial release in theaters in 1939. Beyond the film gaining an expanded audience, the story has inspired multiple versions, formats, and fan fiction based works ranging from the billion Billion-dollar grossing Broadway musical *Wicked*, to the modern fantasy retelling of the titular character in the film *Oz the Great and Powerful* (2013).

*The Wizard of Oz* is frequently referred to as the “most watched film” in history.\(^{20}\) There is also dialogue from the film that has been adopted into the American pop-culture vernacular.

---

This serves as the basis for key jokes today in films and television that are not in the same genre and that do not serve the same audience as the original film. A riffing off of the lines “click your heels three times,” and “I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore” are well known. This is not evidence that the film and its popularity always remain at a constant for audiences and fans. Rather, so many people have seen the film, or know enough about it that those references are almost universally understood.

To examine why collectors and investors see the costumes from this film as having an inherent financial value, one must first explore why and to what extent the film was able to have such an emotional connection to an audience. This connection was fostered through the many television re-airings the film has had. The film was accessible and influential during the adolescence of many who now have the disposable incomes to purchase such memorabilia at its current cost.

Re-release and Popularity

After World War II The Wizard of Oz was re-released for the first time in 1949. That release created an estimated, adjusted for inflation profit of $15,008,319.33.\(^{21}\) In 1955 the film was re-released again. The 1955 profit was about one third of the 1949 profit, but was still estimated at $4,131,767.91.

The reasons for this decline may be a fluke occurrence in the history of its release and have nothing to do with the resonance of the story. But because of the low gross from the film in 1955, MGM decided that the best way to continue making a profit from it was to license the film distribution rights. This led to the film being sold to cable companies so future re-airings occurred on television. Though this practice is standard for films made now, the idea and

---

\(^{21}\) This number is based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI calculator that can adjust for inflation depending on multiple years in the U.S. The source was from: data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl
implementation of airing feature films on television was, at this time, in its infancy. During this era, a movie airing on television was not as bloated with constant commercial breaks of today. 

*Oz* was not edited for television commercial breaks when it first re-aired in the 1950s. During this period of programming “…it was considered excessive to incorporate twenty minutes of commercials in a two-hour program.”\(^2\) It would not become edited for television until the late 1960s and 1970s when stations began to incorporate longer commercial breaks.

In 1956, the film was first aired on television by CBS. At first, CBS inquired after the rights to air *Gone with the Wind*. After being rejected, they offered and later purchased the rights to two telecasts for *Oz*. Each airing was bought for what is now a value of $1,969,841.91. The film would be shown on the series finale of the *Ford Star Jubilee*, a variety program that offered “a series of television spectacles."

To keep the audience entertained and to create an event out of the broadcast, CBS commissioned Bert Lahr to host the program with Judy Garland’s daughter, a then ten – year – old Liza Minnelli. The program was overwhelmingly well received and watched by millions. Though it is important to be wary of ratings as an exact survey, the consensus is that the program was viewed by over half of the public who were watching any type of television in the United States during the two hours it was on air.\(^2\)

In 1959, the program re-aired close to the Christmas holidays in mid-December with a new host that was not affiliated with the original production of the film. Using a new host was a marketing tactic for CBS programs looking to expand the audiences of their other offerings. The


\(^2\) Though color televisions were available at this time it can be assumed that not all of the millions of televisions that watched the movie were able to show it in color.
new host would serve as publicity for other shows from the network. This proved successful and after 1959 the film was picked up again for a third annual airing.\textsuperscript{24}

This would be the beginning of four continual event type telecasts on CBS throughout 1964. This airing of *Oz* cost CBS what is now an estimated expense of $1,609,000 for each of the next four telecasts. For the airings in 1960, 1961, and 1962 that occurred during the holiday season, hosts Richard Boone and Dick Van Dyke separately curated the screenings accompanied by their children, further endearing the film to a childhood audience.

In 1964, the program was hosted by Danny Kaye, who would go on to serve as host through 1967. In 1965, CBS paid a one time adjusted fee of $1,133,961.90 for airing *Oz*. Then in 1966 and 1967 the fee rose to $1,194,334.88 for each airing. That raises the grand total that CBS paid MGM for airing *Oz* to $13,898,315.48 adjusted for inflation.

With the justified success on CBS, MGM raised the asking fee for re-airing *Oz*. Feeling that the fee was too high, CBS declined and NBC hurriedly grabbed at the chance. For the next three airings NBC paid $4,634,305.39 annually and an additional $3,068,711.34 for each of the five airings after that.\textsuperscript{25}

Following NBC’s success, CBS renewed their contract with MGM and it was available for four more years at a total purchase of $16,740,386. From 1981-1985, CBS paid $2,619,713.97 per year it aired. In 1986, Ted Turner acquired the MGM library for license and distribution under Warner Bros.\textsuperscript{26}

The Ted Turner takeover of MGM was both historic and practical. He at first purchased the entire company, but specified after the sale that his only intention was to own the film library.


\textsuperscript{25} During the NBC airing of *Oz*, the film was edited for time by cutting out a minute-long tracking shot of footage.

\textsuperscript{26} In 1980 when popularized home recording was being used the film was later restored with the one minute of footage using a compression process. In both home video and television airings the movie seen now is its complete final form.
of titles. Six months after purchasing the company, he sold the remaining arms of MGM, which included the 44-acre lots and film lab for production. His total purchase of MGM—including the debt the company acquired in the years before its sale was an estimated and adjusted $2,600,000,000. At the time of purchase the film library – which included an average of 2,200 film titles - was enjoying an average revenue of $216,000,000 a year. If video rentals and VHS distribution of the library stayed at this plateau of profit, it can be determined that Tuner successfully made back a healthy gross on his investment.27

The Bill Mack Lion

Figure 1. Promotional image for the sale of Bill Mack’s Lion (year unknown). (Profiles in History)

To first understand how Bill Mack came into possession of the Cowardly Lion costume sale, we need to examine how the original costume was introduced into auction sales. The first

high value sale of costumes, props, and Hollywood memorabilia came in 1970 when MGM liquidated its warehouse holdings in a public auction. At the time, MGM wanted to open a Casino/restaurant property in Las Vegas. The company believed that the auction would facilitate raising the funds necessary to expand the MGM empire. The MGM sale of their property is a remarkable moment in the company’s history, as well as in Hollywood and film history. Not only was it a very public display of a company liquidating its assets, it represented a truly historic breakup of the former studio system of Hollywood.\(^{28}\)

The auction was facilitated by MGM vice chairman and principle stakeholder, Kirk Kerkorian. His interests were focused on the Las Vegas expansion as a priority, so he sold huge portions of company real estate to make sure the project was well funded. An auctioneer named David Weisz bought the land that housed MGM’s props and costumes in 1970 for $1,500,000, which, in today’s dollars, would be $9,206,134.02. Though unaware of exactly how many items he acquired, he estimated his holdings to be approximately 300,000. Weisz planned to sell the “30,000 most interesting costumes, pieces of furniture, and oddments” over the course of an eighteen-day auction.\(^{29}\)

The Cowardly Lion costume was not originally going to be for sale. The costume was a last minute addition to the auction. Reports differ, but the costume was found either earlier that day or earlier that week.\(^{30}\) What is known for sure is that a general practitioner named Julius Marini was the purchaser of the costume for $2,400, a number that adjusted for inflation is now valued at $14,729.81. This was not the only purchase that Marini made at the auction. He also

---

\(^{28}\) Ironically, many of the public auction catalogues over the course of the seventeen-day auction are now collector’s items in their own right.


\(^{30}\) Reports differ on the exact day in which the Cowardly Lion costume was found. This is important to keep in mind because if it was not found until earlier in the day, possibly the day before, then there would have been little advanced notice to buyers who were interested in purchasing it. Also, there are reports that Julius Marini did not pay the asking price in full as he did not have enough cash on hand because he did not know it was available for purchase. In research it was not found if Marini purchased the costume in a spur of the moment decision or if it was calculated.
bought a loincloth used by actor Johnny Weissmuller in *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932). Though the reason for his purchase of the loincloth is unclear, he is quoted as buying the Cowardly Lion costume for its sentimental value to him.

> I saw *The Wizard of Oz* when I was 8 years old; my father was ill, my mother depressed. The picture gave me a certain sort of lift. It told me what to do when things go wrong. And things were very wrong. It said you don’t get things from someone else, you get them from within yourself.\(^\text{31}\)

Marini’s time with the costume remains a mystery. It is reported that there was an offer made from an unknown children’s museum about two months after the auction. The asking price was nearly double what he originally paid for it, and in today’s dollars would equal $30,687.11. Marini did not sell the costume to the museum. When asked why, he was quoted as alluding to its sentimental value: “If I were a businessman, I probably would have jumped at it.”

There is little information describing what, if any, preservation work went into the costume.\(^\text{32}\) It remains unclear when or why, but after a decade or so, Marini agreed for it to be sold. In the ensuing years until 1985, sculptor Bill Mack purchased the costume from an unknown memorabilia store. Mack has never publicly stated the name of the memorabilia store, nor the price he paid for it. He has however said that he remembers the cost “was several thousand dollars, instead of several hundred thousand,” and that “it was a collectors’ market then.”\(^\text{33}\) Mack later paid a taxidermist for restoration work to be done to the costume.

Mack’s restoration work begets a larger examination of authenticity. Mack is a professional sculptor. He is also a collector of American history and possesses presidential letters

---


\(^{32}\) There is one account of Marini having the costume ‘lined with leather’ and the ‘skins restored by a taxidermist.’ There is also the possibility that the costume was ‘in cold storage like any other fur.’ These claims come from Aljean Harmetz who conducted the interview with Marini that is in her book *The Making of the Wizard of Oz*. Though the source is credible, it has never been corroborated or more heavily elaborated on.

and the former Hollywood sign. With the latter, he is currently working on completing a portrait project that combines Hollywood’s film stars onto the actual façade of each letter. Mack has historically incorporated his artistic work into the pieces he acquires as part of their preservation. With his lion costume, he personally sculpted the new face. There is no report of how close he tried to remain to the original, but the fact that Mack is a sculptor by trade raises a larger point. Because of Mack’s restoration of his lion’s face, is it now an extension of his personal body of work as an artist? It remains unknown if this is how Mack views the work on his lion costume. What is clear is that his intentions were to sell it after the restoration.\textsuperscript{34}

In 2006 the Bill Mack Lion was sold through eBay for an estimated $805,000.\textsuperscript{35} Profiles in History, a Hollywood memorabilia auction house were the facilitators of the transaction. Their business model operates on both Internet live auctions through eBay, and private sales offline. According to Mack the purchase of his Cowardly Lion costume was, “the highest price ever for a costume, as far as I know, by a lot.” Directly after the sale he said, “I'm going through seller's remorse now. But it's a big number, so it's good.”

The Cowardly Lion costume was not the most expensive costume ever sold at that time, though it was close. The Givenchy designed black shift dress worn by Audrey Hepburn in \textit{Breakfast at Tiffany’s} (1961) was sold in December of 2006 for nearly $900,000 at Christies. The sale of other notable costumes have gone on to sell in the multimillion dollar range, many of which were sold through Profiles in History, but not the eBay branch of the company.

The auction house is self-described as the “nation’s leading dealer in guaranteed-authentic original historical autographs, letters, documents, vintage signed photographs and

\textsuperscript{34} Bill Mack. “Hollywood Sign.” billmack.com/
\textsuperscript{35} Multiple reports differ on the exact year of the sale as being in 2006 or 2007, probably because it occurred in December. It is also important to note that different sources will list the selling price as less than $800,000. This is most likely because taxes and buyer premiums were not taken into account. By stating the value at the high end this is meant to exemplify the complete cost of buying the costume. Also when buying any item into the millions or hundreds of thousands of dollars, taxes account for a large amount of final purchase price.
manuscripts.” Profiles in History also sold the hat worn by actress Margaret Hamilton as the Wicked Witch for $230,000 and a test pair of the Ruby Slippers formerly owned by collector and actress Debbie Reynolds for nearly $500,000.\textsuperscript{36} It remains unclear why the Cowardly Lion costume was not sold through the Profiles in History direct private auction. The buyer of the costume remains unknown and so does the motivation for such a purchase.\textsuperscript{37}

**The James Comisar Lion**  

![Figure 2. Promotional image for the Comisar Cowardly Lion used by both Bonhams Auction House and the Comisar Collection (year unknown).](image)

The James Comisar Lion was sold during the 75\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the film in 2014. The location of the costume when it was discovered is unknown as is the original asking price. What is in the public record and what Comisar has admitted, possibly for publicity for the costume, is that it was found in a trash bag on MGM property sometime in the early 1990s. The man who

\textsuperscript{36} About Us. profilesinhistory.com/about-us/profiles-in-history/#sthash.sS5JPNg.dpuf  
\textsuperscript{37} Research about Profiles in History could only be conducted through public reports as the auction house refused to answer questions about the sale of the costume or why it was done in an online sale. No communication from them was ever returned. Mack has also publicly stated that he does not know who owns the costume now.
first found the costume also remains unknown, but has been described as a “scavenger” in some reports.

The costume was, by all accounts, in horrible condition when it was discovered. One of the paws was mangled and the entire costume was covered in dirt and rat excrement. The asking price for the costume in this condition is unknown. Because Comisar purchased it directly from the original source there was no publicly held auction at the time.38

After the purchase, Comisar took nearly two years to preserve/recreate the original costume. This included reconstruction of the mangled paw and the hiring of Italian artisans to recreate the mane. Comisar also had the son of Bert Lahr, who supposedly bares a striking resemblance to his father, sit for a mold of his face that was then crafted to look as close to the original lion mask as it could be. This work and labor cost an estimated $50,000.

Throughout the years Comisar actively looked for a buyer for the Lion costume. It is purported that he offered it to the Smithsonian Museum, which currently houses the Ruby Slippers and The Scarecrow costume, for $3,000,000. Though this sum was the final selling price for the costume at auction in 2014, it was too high for the museum to purchase. The Smithsonian acquired the costumes it has from Oz on a donation basis.39 In 2014 the film had its 75th Anniversary and the Cowardly Lion costume was sold for its asking price at Bonhams auction house. $3,000,000 remains one of the largest reported prices paid for a costume. But the high asking price was strategic for Comisar who, in addition to running the Comisar Collection as a

38 It needs to be noted that after trying to get in touch with Comisar and others who work for him to no avail, the research depends solely and public reports and comments that he made publicly and that others who have interacted with him have made. The original asking price remains unclear because Comisar has never publicly revealed his source’s name or how much he paid for it.

39 After the Academy Museum purchased the Ruby Slippers in 2011 Comisar stated that he wished for the costume to be united with its other parallel characters so that it could stay together. The Academy never made a public statement as to whether it would purchase the costume or if it was in the position to. Given they have the Lion Mane from an unknown pelt in their personal collection this publicity for the James Comisar Lion was most likely brought on by Comisar himself in preparation for the 2014 sale at Bonhams.
business, used the Cowardly Lion costume sale as direct capital to start his Museum of Television.

The film is historical as a major Hollywood blockbuster at the time of release in 1939. It is also integral to understanding the history of television and its connection to major film studios. The film also represents a larger appetite that networks had for making an event for parents and children to watch the film together on television. The irony of selling the Cowardly Lion costume from a film that is integral to studying television history is interesting, considering the money generated from its sale has been used to fund a television history museum.

To sell such an artifact of the film in order to start a museum dedicated to the history of television indicates that perhaps Comisar remains unaware the effects Oz has had on television programming. Or, that he simply needed the money and was willing to part with the costume, and what it represents of the film, if it meant it could fund his ultimate goal of professional fulfillment. In either scenario of justification for selling the costume, the end result remains the same. The buyer for the James Comisar Lion remains anonymous, just like the buyer for the Bill Mack Lion.

The cycle of anonymity amongst the buyers of the Cowardly Lion costumes will most likely be revealed in time. Perhaps the costumes will be auctioned again during the 100th Anniversary of the film, for a larger profit than was sold by Comisar or Mack. The history and popularity of The Wizard of Oz from its initial theatrical release in 1939, to its many publicized re-airings on television through 1956-1985, cemented its status as an American Classic. The film still airs on multiple cable channels today, furthering its reach and influence on multiple generations of fans. The Cowardly Lion costumes’ history after filming is one of the clearest manifestations of the emotional and financial connections audiences and collectors have to their
experience with the film into their adult life. As iconic as *Oz* has become it is the costumes, and the Cowardly Lion in particular, that remain one of the best-persevered examples of film ephemera and its ability to become monetized. But it is not purely financial gains that have generated interest in the costumes so many years later. It is *Oz*’s emotional resonance with its audience that remains, even three quarters of a century after its release.
Gone with the Wind: A Never Ending Source of Funds and Fans

“…not the best costume of motion pictures, not by a long shot but I am very happy to think it is the most famous costume. There’s hardly a day goes by that you don’t hear somebody talking about pulling down the curtains to make a dress or something of that nature. So I’m proud that it was mine.” – Walter Plunkett

Like The Wizard of Oz, Gone with the Wind shares the distinction of being widely known as an American classic. Both films have legacies through continuing re-releases and television airings. Gone with the Wind has been theatrically re-released numerous times over the decades. At the time of the film’s initial release in 1939 it won accolades from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and many lifelong fans, with its re-releases in the United States in 1942, 1947, 1954, 1967, 1974, 1989, and 1998. The initial fans who first connected to the film during its release in 1939 and fans of the film who were exposed to it upon its numerous re-releases are known as ‘Windies.’ Throughout this chapter we examine the connection the Windies have to each other, as well as costumes from the film. Windies connect to each other using museums, like the Harry Ransom Center and its Gone with the Wind collection of costumes, memorabilia, and merchandise. They also become actively involved in community events that re-energize their passion for the film.

Though Gone with the Wind saw fantastic monetary and critical success after its release, the production was plagued by its massive size and undertaking. Many of the costumes worn during filming were damaged from the dirt and soot of the set. This harsh treatment of the costumes extended post production. During promotion for the film, and into 1940, the costumes were taken around the country and put on display. Figure 3 shows an advertisement from this time that promoted the costume tour. This touring and posing of the costumes has deteriorated

---

40 IMDB. Gone with the Wind Release Info. imdb.com/title/tt0031381/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt
their condition, which has lead to an overhaul of preservation and restoration work in the decades following production.

Figure 3. Ad for Gone with the Wind costume tour (year unknown)

After the tour, producer David O. Selznick retained the costumes, as well as a vast amount of his personal correspondence that related to the film. The collection was originally housed in Bekins Warehouse in Los Angeles, California. The Selznick estate donated the archive of documents, photographs and costumes to the Harry Ransom Center at University of Texas at Austin.

The Harry Ransom Center

The Curtain Dress that was donated by the Selznick estate is the only one known to be in existence. To this day it remains unclear how many curtain dresses were made at the time of
filming. It is also unclear if the Curtain Dress is made of the curtains that were a part of the set during filming, or another material altogether.

The Curtain Dress in Gone with the Wind served as a key plot device. In the narrative, Scarlett created a dress out of green velvet sun-stained curtains. This was the only fine fabric she had left after Union soldiers tore through her home. The lushness of the material was meant to make her physically appealing to Rhett, but also to hide the fact that all her other gowns were dirty and that she had no money for newer clothing.

The Curtain Dress is one of the more memorable costumes in the film. Equally as stunning is the Red Birthday Dress that also serves as a plot point in the film. Instead of showing off Scarlett’s ingenuity and cunning, the red dress is used to demonstrate Scarlett’s sex appeal. Both costumes, and all those throughout the film, are examples of Plunkett’s excellent work and attention to detail.

In 2011 the Ransom Center exceeded expectations in one of their largest financial fundraisers. In order to prepare for ‘Making of Gone with the Wind,’ an exhibition that would celebrate the film’s seventy-five-year history, the Ransom Center publicly asked for $30,000. They expected to achieve that goal within a month. Instead, one third of that amount came to them during the first four hours of the opening of the fundraiser, which is incredible considering its speed and its origin. The Film Curator at the Ransom Center, Steve Wilson, explained that this was most likely because the petition was picked up by the Associated Press and disseminated across the world.

Many of individual donations in the first few hours came from countries including Russia, China, and Australia. In the following two - three weeks the Ransom Center received the bulk of their donations in $5, $10, and $15 notes sent though the mail. Many of these donations
came with a personalized letter attached. As Wilson explained, “we thought it would be popular but we didn’t expect it to happen that quickly.” The money amassed by the fundraiser was specifically for the costumes in their possession. Of the original five in the Selznick collection, only two – The Curtain Dress and the Red Birthday Dress – could be displayed after conservation work was performed. The remaining three costumes are still in the Ransom Center and have undergone preservation work. Even so, it was agreed by conservators that these costumes were too delicate to be displayed.

![Image of a costume on display.](image)


The Curtain dress was one of the two costumes able to be exhibited. During the show, the other three costumes on display were recreations. The Ransom Center was adamant about labeling them in this way. The costumes were posed on faceless white mannequins that stood on round pedestals more than two feet off the ground. In reference to Figure 4, in order for one to be able to touch the dress they would have had to stretch far over the podium. There was apparently so much of this type of behavior – women leaning over to stroke the garment – that extra docents were hired to prevent such actions. The monetary and enthusiastic success of the ‘Making of Gone with the Wind’ is proof the Windies are still strong today.

---

41 Steve Wilson, (Film Curator at the University of Texas at Austin) in an interview with the author. February 2016.
Over the three months the exhibit was shown, an estimated 71,000 patrons visited the Ransom Center. Even though this exhibit marked the 75th Anniversary of the film’s release, the turnout in attendance was overwhelming given the location and population of the area. The focus of the exhibit was the costumes, but there was such a rich history in the documentation – personal memos from Selznick and photographs on set – that the flat imagery composed most of the content of the show. But as Wilson says “the star was of course, the Curtain Dress.”

Figure 5. Promotional image for the *Making of Gone with the Wind Exhibit* (year unknown)
Harry Ransom Center

The Harry Ransom Center utilizes costumes as more than a means to draw an audience to an exhibit. Unlike other popular costume exhibitions like the London 2012 V&A ‘Hollywood Costume,’ the Ransom Center has used costumes to highlight the performance process of an actor. Understanding costumes’ use for the purpose of performance art is fundamentally different than studying the aesthetic and utilitarian qualities of the costume on its own. In 2006 the Ransom Center acquired the Robert De Niro Costumes and Props Collection which “consist of
approximately 8,000 costume, prop, and makeup items from fifty-six motion pictures and two
theater productions.\footnote{34}

The collection was formed after De Niro – early in his career – was in a costume
wardrobe room and saw the state of deterioration of many Hollywood costumes he considered to
be significant. Since this experience, his performance contracts allowed him to keep scripts,
props, costumes, and personal notations made and used during filming. The collection is meant
to expand upon the costume’s use in performance. As the actor, De Niro is the person one would
expect to have the closest personal connection to the costumes in his films because he is the one
that had them on his body. Thus, the costume is both a representation of a character De Niro
played in a film and an element that helped produce his performance.

Ray Bolger, who played the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz, is another actor who kept his
costume after filming completed. He was the only actor in the film who is known to have done
so. It remains unclear why Bolger kept the costume, but it is known how he was able to acquire
it.

Ray Bolger would probably have seriously considered buying his own Scarecrow costume if he had not already owned it. Although MGM was notorious for keeping every hat, every handkerchief, every garter belt, during the last week of filming someone from the wardrobe department had stopped Bolger and offered him the costume.\footnote{43}

After his death, his wife donated the costume to the Smithsonian Institute where it now
resides. In all three of these cases – the Curtain Dress, the De Niro Collection, and the Scarecrow
– all costumes were donated to museums for the purposes of academic study and preservation.

\footnote{34} Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. “Robert DeNiro: A Preliminary Inventory of His Costumes and Props at the Harry Ransom Center,” norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00482
Because these costumes are available for public viewing, museums have given fans of these costumes a destination to travel to, connect with others, and further extend their overall excitement over the film.

**The Windies**

For the purposes of research, it was important to not only understand why a fan of *Gone with the Wind* would willingly associate themselves with the fan community at large, but also how much influence this community has had over the history and re-release of the film today. The Windies are a self described group of fans and scholars of both the book and the film adaptation. Though there was no survey or sample done, it can be judged based on research conducted that overwhelmingly most of the fans are women who are over the age of thirty, if not entirely over the age of fifty plus. This is not to say that men are not welcome to join, as there are those who do call themselves Windies, but most of the members are women.

There is not one club or Internet site to which they all belong. Though the Internet has historically proven to be a fantastic resource to connect with others who share a common interest, much of the fan interaction that occurs within the community is in person. Museums, libraries, and event gatherings are all facilitators of this interaction. Many Windies stay up – to – date about the community at large through print circulations and digital newsletters.

Some Windies have become scholars and researchers on the topic, so much so that their books have become vital resources for much of the research for this chapter. In essence, the Windies have written their own histories. For many though, the interest in *Gone with the Wind* started at an early age, and began when they saw the film at one of the many theatrical re-releases that occurred over the decades since it was first distributed. Many then went on to read
the book and have continued to stay active either in local fan circles, or by collecting
memorabilia and ephemera.

If there were a museum that is significant to any *Gone with the Wind* enthusiast it would
be the Marietta Gone with the Wind: Scarlett on the Square Museum in Marietta, Georgia.\textsuperscript{44}
Though this museum does not hold a large authentic costume collection, there are some originals
on display. There are also event spaces to rent for parties as well as events inside the museum.

The Museum actively works to put on events for Windies who are interested in
participating further with the history of *Gone with the Wind*. In one such case they hosted
outside balls in full period piece regalia. One such gathering can be seen in Figure 6 below.
There are also Windies and fashion enthusiasts who specialize in working with commissioned
pieces that other Windies hire them to make for these specific occasions. Some of the works
created by these Windies were commissioned by the museum in Marietta as recreations because
of their attention to detail and accurate construction.\textsuperscript{45}

![Figure 6. Event. Marietta Gone with the Wind Museum: Scarlett on the Square (Year Unknown).](image)

\textsuperscript{44} The museum is not privately funded, nor does it exist on a grant or donation basis. It is under the city of Marietta that pays
employees and keeps funding intact.

\textsuperscript{45} Connie Sutherland, (Director of the Marietta Gone with the Wind Museum: Scarlett on the Square) in interview with the
The Museum is well known for housing the Bengaline Honeymoon Dress from the film, worn by Scarlett as she returns from her honeymoon with Rhett. This costume is significant to both museum display and private auctions. Dr. Christopher Sullivan is the costume’s current owner. He has stated that he bought the costume from auction house Butterfield and Butterfield when he received a catalogue in the mail and recognized the costume. Sullivan refuses to reveal the price he paid for the costume but does say that he’d been planning on a car purchase, but used the funds to buy the dress. When he realized he could buy a costume from his favorite film he said, “well I can buy a car anytime.” He has never divulged what he paid at auction. But Sullivan does state that if he had put that same amount of money in the stock market at the time of his purchase, the investment wouldn’t have appreciated as much as the costume did.46

His investment may be doing so well because The Marietta Gone with the Wind: Scarlett on the Square Museum pays him quarterly for the privilege of housing the costume he has loaned to them. Neither fans nor patrons fund the Museum entirely. The museum is actually part of the city of Marietta’s operating budget. The Museum has been open since 2003 and in the last fiscal year it reported a higher attendance than when it first opened. Does this indicate that the Windies are only increasing in popularity?

This remains unlikely, as many who consider the term to apply to them are older fans of the film. In fact, according to Wilson, the Windies are in a sharp decline because of their age. John Wiley, Gone with the Wind scholar and author of several books on the film, runs a personal fan newsletter that he circulates in print and on the web. He admits that his viewership is, sadly, dying out and receives multiple emails indicating his readers have passed away. But if the film is so iconic, should the story not also speak to a younger generation of fans?

---

46 Christopher Sullivan, (Gone with the Wind memorabilia and costume collector) in discussion with the author about his reasons for purchasing a costume from the film and what he has done to exhibit and preserve it. February 2016
The breakdown of the age of fans is unclear, but it is accepted that the majority of Windies are not young girls. Could this be because the narrative does not speak to them? The story of overcoming adversity during a time of economic hardship can be viewed as cyclical in its relatable characteristics to a larger audience. This is one reason that the film probably appealed so much to viewers in 1939, as America was at the tail end of the Great Depression. Though the subject matter was a civil war epic, the anxieties of placing food on the table and finding work were as relevant to those who lived in the 1930s as they were to those who lived in the 1860s.

Though Wilson agrees with this line of thinking and believes the story no longer relates as well to the women of this generation, this is not to say that the Windies are not also strong and resilient. Though the women who attended ‘Making of Gone with the Wind’ were older, there are still young girls who attend The Marietta Gone with the Wind Museum, according to its director, Connie Sutherland. This continued passion and ardor the film inspires from fans has seemingly outlasted that of any other film to date. And as long as there are Windies who remain connected to one another there will always be screenings of the film and events that celebrate its history.
Letty Lynton: The Fashion Legend

“The first time I became conscious of the terrific power of the movies was some months after Letty Lynton was released. I came to New York and found that everyone was talking about the Letty Lynton dress. I had to go into the shops to discover that of all the clothes I had done for Crawford in that film, it was a white organdie dress with big puffed sleeves that made the success. In the studio we thought the dress was amusing but a trifle extreme. The copies of it made the original Letty Lynton look very modest and shy.” — Adrian

Letty Lynton is an example of a film that is lost to generations of moviegoers. Though the film is available illegally to those that understand how to access it, it is unavailable to a wide market.47 As described in the introductory chapter, Letty Lynton has had an unfortunate flirtation within American copyright law. The outcome of the Supreme Court decision left the studio with the potential of being sued if the film is ever distributed again without the consent of the estate of Sheldon and Barnes. Because of this, Warner Bros. will most likely never distribute the film until Dishonored Lady enters public domain. Until such time, what remains of the film’s legacy, and the conversation surrounding it, has its place in American copyright case law, and the Ruffle Dress has a unique position and claim to fame in fashion history.

During the film’s release in 1932 fashion was much different than the style of dress that Adrian would introduce to the young women who saw Letty Lynton. The trend at the time in Hollywood favored sleek silks that clung to the body and emphasized a petite, long waist with thin straps around the neck and shoulders.48 The copies of the Ruffle Dress were a turning point in American fashion, and more specifically the fashions of Hollywood and their influence on American women in day wear. It was not until department stores copied the Ruffle Dress into

47 Though the film is not barred from distribution, Warner Bros. has never distributed the title since its initial release in 1932. It is most likely that Warner Bros. will wait until the play is in the public domain to release the film again, though they have never stated their plans for such a re-release.
ready-to-wear garments that the fashion world elite began to question Hollywood’s influence. As early as 1934 and as late as 1940 there were many articles on this topic from around the country. From Figure 7, Spokane Daily Chronicles, “United States Hardly Misses French Styles” on September 23, 1940, to the Herald Journal on July 8 1934, “Hollywood Offers Many New Fashions: Society Seizes All with Avidity.”

Figure 7. Screenshot of Spokane Daily Chronicles “‘United States Hardly Misses French Styles.’” (Originally published September 23, 1940).
The *Herald Journal* reported an Associated Press article that stated, “because Joan Crawford first wore a dress which became known as the Letty Lynton, hundreds of women admirers bought (at $18.75) and wore copies.” Adjusted for inflation the cost of the copy is equivalent to $346.46. Cheaper copies were sold for an adjusted rate as low as $86.00 but it is important to keep in mind that copies were purchased for a range of prices throughout the country.

The inability to obtain accurate records of sales of the Ruffle Dress copies is only one element of the knowledge surrounding the press of the film. The Ruffle Dress costume forever lives on in images taken by famed photographer George Hurrell, whose name is now synonymous with early Hollywood glamour. His body of work is most exemplified by his portraits of stars like Joan Crawford, taken in black and white in high contrast. Hurrell would leave his work-for-hire-position with MGM the year following his portraits for *Letty Lynton*. Crawford loved how he photographed her so much so that he would go on to take pictures of her throughout her career.49 Hurrell’s influence on the style of 1930s and 1940s glamour shots cannot be understated and his use of light and shadow is widely admired and studied today. But it not just Hurrell’s work that preserves and continually generates interest in the film. Joan Crawford was a major Hollywood star and icon during her career and Adrian’s designs only further enhanced that. Adrian’s career also reached a professional high during his time with MGM.

---

Unsubstantiated Claims and Reports

The history of the Ruffle Dress in American retail markets and the extent of its overall influence on the lives of everyday American women remain unclear. This is because of the reported ranges in price, availability, and copies sold. The Ruffle Dress copies are purported to have been sold through Macy’s department store at a record number. But this ‘recorded’ number – 15,000, 50,000, or even 500,000 – is unsupported and unsubstantiated. Throughout research for this thesis there was no proof or basis of fact found that could account for such a range of numbers, or their source of origin. There are many reports that the dress sold at Macy’s department store, but other shops at the time sold the dress and no number has been attributed to these sales. Though it is true that Macy’s sold the dress, they have no archival record of the transactions, and no direct press materials related to the sales.\(^{50}\)

\[\text{Figure 7. MGM Press Image for } \textit{Letty Lynton} \text{ worn by Joan Crawford (1932).}\]

\(^{50}\)After contacting the archivist at Macy’s it was made apparent that such materials were not kept in their holdings. The archivist also did not know about Macy’s historical affiliation to the dress. In all the multiple sources that I researched it became clear that there is no historical consensus on the number of dresses sold or where these multiple of five originated in source. \textit{Vogue} magazine, the book \textit{Gowns by Adrian}, and \textit{Silver Screen Modes} – one of the most popular blogs for early cinema fans – have conflicting numbers of the dresses sold.
What do we know of the effects of the Ruffle Dress on American women at the time? It is accepted that the dress had some effect on ready-to-wear fashion. Many reports in women’s fashion magazines and newspapers reference women wearing the ‘Letty Lynton sleeve.’ This part of the silhouette, with wide high shoulders, became a mark of Crawford’s career.51

Advertisements of copies in most cases were illustrations of various dresses that took inspiration from the film, but do not conform to the original Adrian design. From 1933 through 1940 these ads did not differentiate between a strict uniform copy of the original and a variation of the design of the costume, but instead use Letty Lynton as a reference to the film in the description of the dress. These ads featured ‘copies’ that had a bow in the front, a colorful pattern of material, or did not include a drop waist or ruffles at the bottom. Such variations of the original costume pose the question – what serves as inspiration and at what point is something a strict copy of form and design? In either case, it seems that dresses similar in style at the time – with large, ruffled shoulders and a floor length skirt – are referenced as copies throughout scholarship. Such differentiation was not expanded upon in the primary materials sourced.52

As cinema scholar Rashna Wadia Richards writes in her work Cinematic Flashes: Cinephilia and Classical Hollywood: “Indeed, the white chiffon organdy dress with built-up shoulders and puffed sleeves has persisted like a still from Adair’s album of “flickers.” It became popular immediately upon the film’s release, so much so that Macy’s claimed they had sold

---

51 Crawford’s style in film has been historically scrutinized and studied. Her own shoulders were thought to be too wide and masculine, and so the use of such a large ruffle on her in Letty Lynton was so striking she continued to keep the emphasis on her shoulders throughout her career. In a style examination by Brie Dyas, who holds a degree in art history and was former Senior Editor of The Huffington Post, stated: “Crawford’s popularity continued on the shoulders of, well, her shoulders. The ‘Letty Lynton’ dress emphasized her broad shoulders, a feature that was previously ignored in fashion. As the 30s turned to the 1940s, Crawford traded the feminine gowns for highly structured suits and dresses.”

52 Primary sources in this case were ads from 1932, 1933, and 1934 that were source from across the United States. Though some were from female oriented magazines, many were in local newspapers that were selling dresses from private department stores. Some mentioned the film outright in promotion and some mentioned Joan Crawford. Only some of the ads were for the Ruffle Dress copies. Many ads were not just for the Ruffle Dress, but for an all fur coat copy that was worn in the film. These ads used phrases that included Letty Lynton in the description. Most of the illustrations within ads featured a dress that was in some way different from the original in the film.
500,000 copies of it, and an article in *Vogue* reported that ‘the country was flooded with little Joan Crawfords.’”53 This claim is factually inaccurate as it relates to the number of dresses sold and had no primary source documentation to support it. Though at the time, *Vogue* did claim the country was being flooded by women wearing copies of the dress, even that article has no evidentiary support or sources about the sales estimates.54

In 1993 *The New York Times* reported that “A dress designed by Adrian that Joan Crawford wore in the 1932 film *Letty Lynton* was copied that year by Seventh Avenue, and Macy's alone sold more than 50,000.”55 For this figure, like the one above, there is no source, no quote, and not a mention of the span of years or months during which such a number was recorded. The disparity in reported numbers from 50,000 to 500,000 is remarkable. Perhaps it is because of the inconsistencies in factual reporting that such sales figures are described with anything short of wonder.

Though the sales numbers are different from article to article, they are always in a rounded figure and a multiple of five, so within those articles’ sources all sales figures were mentioned as approximations. *Letty Lynton* was released in 1932, but are the sales reported of the copies from that year, 1933, or until 1934? When Macy’s department store is referenced as a supplier of the copies is this in reference only to the Herald Square location in New York, or is it also used in reference to Macy’s other department store partnerships with smaller retailers at the time? The context of the dress’s sale should be scrutinized in the articles mentioned above—but seemingly are not. The inconsistencies in the numbers reported in these articles call into question their accuracy. What was the price of these copies? Were they relatively cheap, or moderately

54 The article referenced was from February 1st, 1933, “Does Hollywood Create?”
expensive for their era? Why is there no mention of the fact that sales took place in the middle of the Great Depression when most Americans were struggling to find stable work and discretionary spending was minimal? Is such an event in American history not a factor to discuss when mentioning the buying power of American consumers?

These questions are not meant to discount reports that the dress had some influence on women’s fashion. Far from it, since mentioning the copies and their sales can perpetuate interest in *Letty Lynton*. But such claims should not be measured based on the number of copies sold or not sold. By repeating a number without any proof, it merely serves to give false claims to the film’s influence as well.

But the wide range of reported sales figures begets the question: where are the copies of the dress that exist? To assume the dress sold enough copies to take on such a mythic quality, it is within reason to assume that some copies of the dress from the 1930s should survive today. But like the original Crawford costume and the film itself, copies of the dress are seemingly lost to time.

**Current Display Copy**

Even though MGM kept a large archive of costumes and props, as demonstrated by their sale of property holdings in 1970, the status of the original Ruffle Dress worn by Joan Crawford remains unclear. It can be inferred that the dress is ‘lost’ in some capacity. Or that it was perhaps thrown away.56 There has been no mention of its existence or survival. This may be because of the material used to create the dress. Though it remains unclear whether it was chiffon or organza, both fabrics are hard to maintain and need pressing and steaming to hold shape. It is

56 In email correspondence about the status of the original costume with Kevin Jones, curator at the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising - which holds a large Adrian collection of designs - it was specifically mentioned that other researchers have tried to find the original costume but none have. He went on to say that “I suspect it didn’t survive the ‘30’s.”
also unclear how many multiples were made of the costume. Both the material it was made from and the status of its existence remain unknown. But what of the copies made for retail sales? If we are to believe that the dress had some impact upon retail markets, would it not stand to reason that copies of the retail version of the dress exist today?

Just as the film is no longer available to be seen by a wider public, there is only one known copy of the dress available to be viewed. Stephen’s College in Columbia, Missouri was the only costume collection found during research that had displayed a ‘copy’ of the dress. This copy, as seen in Figure 9, includes many variations from the original. There is a pattern of flowers across the front of the dress, and there is a bow at the waist instead of the simple drop waist design in the original.

Figure 9. Stephen’s College Press Image of Letty Lynton copy (Year Unknown).

---

57 There is a mention in Christine Gledhill’s book *Stardom: Industry of Desire* that claims the Smithsonian in 1986 had a copy that traveled in the ‘Hollywood: Legend and Reality’ show. There was no photographic evidence cited.
This copy takes inspiration from the original costume design. But does that make this Stephen’s College dress a copy of the original Ruffle Dress or a new version of it? The dress has the famous shoulders and ruffles from the one seen on Crawford, but does this make it a direct copy? Since the tags from the dress do not identify it by Letty Lynton it is unknown how this dress was marketed and described to woman who bought it.

It also remains unclear where the dress was originally purchased, as it has no identifying tags. What is known is that a wealthy graduate of Stephen’s College, who spent many years abroad, bought it in 1932. After her death, her daughter thought it would be appropriate to donate her clothing to the college’s clothing collection. The collection was in overall good condition and included high end, fashionable designs of the time, such as the one above. But are there any other copies in existence? The answer is not as simple as ‘yes,’ or ‘no.’ If there are others that exist they are likely not publicized. But why are copies of the dress so rare in today’s era? Were contemporary copies discarded by consumers because of wear? Is it possible they fell apart because of bad quality? Could they have been later cut and used for another purpose? The status of these copies – however many there are – remains unknown.

Figure 10. Advertisement, Norfolk, Virginia. (17 December 1939)
Other films such as *Gone with the Wind* also had an impact on American retail, although later in the 1930s. (See Figure 10.) Also housed in Stephen’s College costume collection is a 1940 dress that was bought from an unknown source, and donated to the costume collection for use and study. (See Figure 11.) The collection’s manager, Jennifer Cole, said that the dress was a direct inspiration from *Gone with the Wind* for day wear.  

![Figure 11. Image from Stephen’s College Costume Collection (Year Unknown).](image)

In the years since *Letty Lynton*’s release and change in copyright status, American fashion has transitioned. After the film was released, though not necessarily because of it, Paris no longer held its grip on day wear. Though this can be attributed to Hollywood’s rising status as fashion inspiration, it was also because of Europe’s new preoccupation: World War II. American read-to-wear items also exist for *Gone with the Wind* relating to men’s suits, hats, and accessories. Ads for these were abundant and such items sold in local department stores throughout America in 1939-1940.

---

58 Such read-to-wear items also exist for *Gone with the Wind* relating to men’s suits, hats, and accessories. Ads for these were abundant and such items sold in local department stores throughout America in 1939-1940.
fashion and identity were allowed to rise and overtake the European model. But was the dress just a passing trend, with overly reported numbers with no factual basis? The answer, based on the evidence and researched amassed, it would seem, is yes. But does this indicate that the film, once it is able to be re-released post 2025 will see a resurgence in the Ruffle Dress copies and trends? Only time, and the fashion tastes of American women, can tell.
In Conclusion

Each of the three films and costumes studied throughout this thesis have served to facilitate the discussion of preservation of film artifacts in relation to their film’s history. Each costume has a unique relationship to American culture, but also stands in a special category of film and costume history. The Cowardly Lion Costumes, the Curtain Dress, and the Ruffle Dress were examples necessary to explain how film preservation is more than just the physical preservation of the sound and image recorded.

A costume can serve to enhance emotions because costumes are static objects that can be examined, possessed, and sometimes touched. What is seen on screen is held in memory even as the credits roll and the film has had its end. *Letty Lynton’s* status as a film that is inaccessible to generations makes it unique in that it is the costume from the film that has become more famous and well known than the narrative. This does, however, ask a larger question. What will happen in 2025 when the film may be available for legal distribution by Warner Bros? The film’s narrative was not the reason the dress became such a sensation. It was the fact that the dress was different, and so unlike other designs at the time. It was American, it was Hollywood glamour, and it was the Joan Crawford name that attracted women to the film. Adrian designed a costume that was unique to its period.

Did the dress sell 500,000 or 50,000 copies? Does the answer actually make a difference when so many sources claim so many varying numbers? What matters to the overall conversation of *Letty Lynton* is not how many copies were sold, but how the dress changed the conversation that surrounds the film today. Will this still be true when fans of Joan Crawford, early cinema, or fashion history are able to see this film? As fashion trends have proven to be cyclical, will America once again be flooded with ‘little Joan Crawfords?’ Once these fans are
able to see the film will its mystique be ruined and the costume’s value on American fashion history be undermined and rendered as a passing fad? Only time will tell.

Time seems to forever be on the side of *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Of all the films America has made throughout cinema history, these are the ones that have most endeared themselves to the public and become iconic in the process. Each film has enthusiastic fans and collectors who preserve the costumes. These costumes serve as both a representation of the films’ legacies and as an investment.

*As The Wizard of Oz* has proven, the story resonates and continues to enrapture its audience. The film is continually re-aired on television and is poised to retain its iconic status in film and television history. The Cowardly Lion costumes represent the ever-increasing financial value that private collectors are willing to pay to possess a piece of American film history. Whether the Cowardly Lion costume is sentimental to a collector, as was the case with Marini, or whether it serves as an investment, as with Comisar, the effect is the same. The Cowardly Lion costumes continually command high value at auction sales more than seventy-five years after the film was released.

*Gone with the Wind* costumes, such as the Bengaline Honeymoon dress, also demonstrate the potentially increasing financial value of a costume. But *Gone with the Wind* is a prized example of how fans fund the preservation of costumes and how the community at large keeps the spirit and excitement of the film alive. Windies remain the longest running fan community of a film, and though their fan base is shrinking, they show no signs of losing excitement for the story and staying involved in organizing community events and gatherings.

Museums serve to facilitate the gatherings of Windies. Both the Harry Ransom Center and the Marietta Gone with the Wind: Scarlett on the Square Museum are vital to supporting and
interacting with the community. It is now an undisputed fact that without the help of the Windies, the possessor of the Curtain Dress would not have been able to acquire the funds necessary to preserve it in 2011. The Marietta Gone with the Wind Museum serves as a place that fans can dress in period costumes of their own making or purchase. These events and exhibits connect fans together, but also serve to invite others to join and enjoy the spirit of the film.

What will 2039 look like? As Gone with the Wind and The Wizard of Oz are both poised to celebrate their 100th Anniversaries, what should the public expect? There will undoubtedly be another theatrical re-release of them, as well as interviews, literature, and merchandise to purchase. Both Cowardly Lion costumes will probably be auctioned again, and museums will have exhibitions on each film, which will demonstrate how they have continually stayed relevant and lasting in American culture. 2039 will be a huge year for Hollywood history and the marketing of this nostalgia to fans will most likely be very profitable. But does the marketing of these costumes, and in the case of the Ruffle Dress copies, the sale’s misinformation, actually preserve the legacy of the film?

To those who love early cinema, and who pay for every movie ticket to Gone with the Wind, or who sit down in front the television to watch The Wizard of Oz, or have become interested in the history of the Ruffle Dress copies Letty Lynton spawned, the answer is yes. But these actions are facilitated by audiences and fans throughout multiple generations who first began collecting and researching artifacts of the films they loved. But is it the fans of these films, whether Windies or solitary collectors, who are using costumes as a way to extend the enjoyment and excitement that watching the film has given them? When a fan has enough need for a film to continue past ‘The End’ costumes serve as a physical representation of that film. Costumes can
become facilitators of connections between fans and the films they love. Though there is a financial cost, these costumes have served to live on in public memory, much like the films of which they were a part.
Sources Consulted


Coco, Anne. Graphic arts librarian at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. “E-mail from Anne Coco to the author.” March 2016.


“Does Hollywood Create?” *Vogue*, February 1st 1933


Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. “Robert De Niro: A Preliminary Inventory of His Costumes and Props at the Harry Ransom Center,”
norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00482

Haas, Elizabeth, and Terry Christensen, and Peter J. Haas. Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films. Routledge. 2015


Hilton, Louise. Research archivist at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. “E-mail from Louis Hilton to the author.” March 2016.

IMDB (Internet Movie Database). Gone with the Wind, “Release Info.”
imdb.com/title/tt0031381/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt


Lammers, Joanne. Head of Core Collections Reference Files at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. “E-mail from Joanne Lammers to the author.” March 2016.


Marcaccio, Kathleen. *Gone with the Wind* scholar and operator of *Scarlett Online*. “Interview with Kathleen Marcaccio.” In a telephone interview with the author in February 2016.

Marchisotto, Lauren. Archivist at Macy’s. “Interview with Lauren Marchisotto.” In written correspondence with the author in March 2016.


Postrel, Virginia. “Starlight and Shadow” *The Atlantic*, July/August Issue


Sutherland, Connie. Director of the Gone with the Wind Museum: Scarlett on the Square.

“Interview with Connie Sutherland.” Telephone interview with the author. March 2016.


Tucker, Tom; Benbow-Pfalzgraf, Taryn; Galens, Judy. "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc."


“United States Hardly Misses French Styles,” Spokan Daily Chronicles, September 23, 1940

Wiley Jr, John. Author and Gone with the Wind scholar. "Interview with John Wiley Jr."

Telephone interview by author. March 2, 2016.

Wilson, Steve. Film curator at the University of Texas at Austin. “Interview with Steve Wilson.”

Telephone interview by author. February 2016.
