

Points to Remember: Finding a Dry Cleaner for Historic Textiles

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

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

Generally speaking, avoid any cleaner which is a franchise. You want an owner operated business where the work is done on the premises, not sent off to a plant on the outskirts of town. Due to the increased awareness of the carcinogenic nature of many solvents, the EPA has imposed very strict guidelines on today's cleaning industry. Many cleaners only have pre-programmed, computerized machines which they cannot adjust. By finding a business where the owner is part of the day to day operation, you benefit from his/her willingness and ability to adjust the machines to the individual needs of the historic garment.

Make an appointment with the owner and his specialist (depending on how successful the business is, there may be a specialist on staff) to discuss your needs and the specific artifact you have in mind. You will quickly find out if this is something they are interested in doing. In a couple of instances, I have learned that although the firm is capable of doing this kind of specialized work, they prefer to concentrate on fire and smoke damage. It costs nothing to ask. Many cleaning professionals welcome the opportunity to work on historic textiles. It is a challenge and can be very rewarding professionally. None of this is cheap, but neither is it out of reach. In our experience the costs range from \$80 for a c1870 printed velvet hunting jacket, \$180 for a c1780 men's silk embroidered waistcoat, \$300 for a (filthy) 1942 rayon satin wedding gown, to \$500 for a heavily quilted and stuffed album quilt c. 1845.

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

The Costume and Textile Specialists

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Richmond and Alexandria, VA net

804-261-4998/ jette_2@msn.com - 703-684-0863/ pastcrafts@verizon.com.

SOME QUALIFIED DRY CLEANERS FOR HISTORIC TEXTILES

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

Clothing Care
Marty Wade
1100 W. Mercury Blvd.
Hampton, VA 23666
888-291-3638
www.clothingcare.net

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

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

Pitchford Cleaners
Gary Carter
2015 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23220
804-355-2853

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