

# The Nashua Historical Society

*Preserving the Past for the Future*

Issue No. 1 Spring 2023

[www.nashuahistoricalociety.org](http://www.nashuahistoricalociety.org)

Abbot-Spalding House 1 Nashville Street/1 Abbot Square Nashua, NH 03064

Florence H. Speare Museum 5 Abbott Street, Nashua, NH 03064-2119

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## And the Bride Wore...

*A Showcase of 150 years of Nashua Bridal Fashion Continues*

Curated by Paula Lochhead and Janice Fronko

### Exhibition Dates and Times:

**Saturday, April 15 and Sunday, April 16, 2023**

Astrida Schaeffer of Schaeffer Arts will speak on

*"The Bride Wore Purple"*

**Saturday, April 15, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.** at the Speare Memorial Museum

The exhibit in the Abbot-Spalding House will be open **1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on both days**

**Saturday, May 13, 2023**

Linda Welters, Ph.D. from the University of Rhode Island will speak on

*"A History of Wedding Fashion"*

12 p.m. to 1 p.m. at the Speare Memorial Museum

The exhibit in the Abbot-Spalding House will be open 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

**Saturday, June 24 (last day of the exhibit)**

Elaine Isaak, aka E. Chris Ambrose aka E. C. Ambrose Young Adult author

*"From Fashion to Fantasy"*

12 p.m. to 1 p.m. at the Speare Memorial Museum

The exhibit in the Abbot-Spalding House will be open 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

The Abbot-Spalding House Museum is located at 5 Nashville Street, Nashua, New Hampshire

The Nashua Historical Society, Florence H. Speare Memorial Museum is located at

5 Abbott Street, Nashua, New Hampshire

Parking for both museums is available behind the Speare Museum.

Members are admitted at no cost on all dates.

Non-member cost is \$10.00 cash or \$12.00 for debit and credit cards

**Officers and Board of Directors  
2022-2023**

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**The Nashua Historical Society's  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Continues into 2023**

*The Nashua Historical Society is nearly ready to reopen the exhibit, And the Bride Wore... starting in April with the final closing at the end of June. There is no charge to members, and you do not need to register in advance.*

Over the years of its existence, The Nashua Historical Society has been the very fortunate recipient of many treasured family heirlooms, gifts from Nashua's citizens, prominent and humble. It is because of these gifts that the anniversary celebration planning included the decision to showcase objects from the clothing and textile collection, specifically bridal fashions. Nothing speaks more to a viewer than a wedding dress, no matter when it was worn, as each era provides clues into social status, and speaks to an individual's style.

In the Society Newsletter No. 2 (Summer 2022), two brides were the topic of discussion: Martha Jane Cross (1851) who married James L. Pierce, and her granddaughter, Gertrude Irene Pierce (1913) who married Arthur S. Bolster, both from two very distinct generations of dress. In this issue of the Society Newsletter, learn about a "triple threat," a family of wedding dresses that span nearly 100 years, from 1898 to 1995.

For the Cole family, and unlike the Pierce-Bolster wedding, there is no poignant remembrance to one's ancestor with lace or jewels, but instead each dress has similarities. The brides in this discussion are Velma Bessie Cummings (grandmother) who married Russell Cole in 1898, Selma Gatz (daughter-in-law) who married Velma's son, Russell Cole, Jr., in 1936, and Clarinda Cole (granddaughter), who married Harold Lustig in a Jessica McClintock dress in about 1995.

# VELMA BESSIE CUMMINGS and RUSSELL COLE

October 11, 1898

Nashua, NH



**Velma Bessie Cummings**

Velma Bessie Cummings was a well-known music teacher in Nashua who studied the violin at a very young age. She was born January 1, 1875, in Nashua, and died June 11, 1955. Her father was Willard Augustus Cummings (b. October 7, 1844 and d. September 4, 1925), of Tyngsborough, a known violinist who also tuned pianos for a living. Velma's mother was Martha A. Bohanan of Brookline, N.H. (b. December 27, 1847 and d. August 24, 1897). Willard and Martha were married July 2, 1873. Velma lived in Nashua at 63 Manchester Street most of her life.



**63 Manchester Street today in Nashua. It is unknown if this was the Cole family home, as addresses can change over time.**

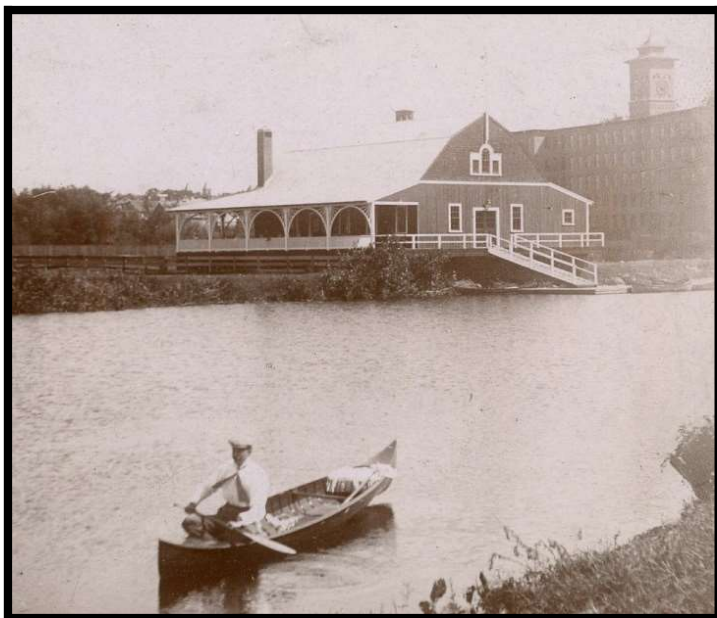
Velma was a founding member of the Nashaway Women's Club in 1895, as well as a member of the Women's Association of the First Congregational Church, and a member of the Matthew Thornton Chapter, D. A. R. She gave music lessons, perhaps violin or voice, during her early years, and later gave piano lessons. She must have been quite a proficient musician because her name appeared in the Nashua Telegraph as an accompanist for soloists during social entertainments. The Nashua Telegraph also

stated that "she was active in musical circles, and one of the prime movers behind the Nashua Symphony Orchestra," celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

Russell Cole was born in Boston to Charles Henry and Mary Louisa Russell of Dedham, Massachusetts, on April 20, 1870, and he died June 6, 1962 in Nashua. He lived in Dedham, MA, in his younger years and briefly in Washington, D. C., but came to Nashua in about 1891. Velma and Russell married October 11, 1898 in Nashua, living at 6 Hopkins Street during the early years of their marriage before taking up residency in their Manchester Street home.

As a young man, Russell worked for a number of years in Boston, but after urging by one of the company bosses, Fred W. Estabrook, Russell transferred to the Nashua location of the Estabrook and Anderson Shoe factory. According to the Nashua Telegraph, the factory was considered the world's largest shoe plant under one roof. Russell began as a clerk, but his growing knowledge of the shoe business earned him numerous promotions within the company, which led to the position of plant manager and later a company officer. After his time with Estabrook and Anderson Shoe, Russell worked for the Nashua Gummed and Coated Paper Company, in recent years known as the Nashua Corp. Russell Cole retired from the Nashua Gummed and Coated Paper Company in 1941.

In 1895, Russell Cole was one of the founders of the Nashua Boat Club. He was a charter member and first treasurer of the Golden Age Club, and also a member of the Retired Craftsmen, a club formed by Nashua Corp. retired employees. He was a descendant of John Alden and John Adams.



**Russell Cole, Sr., in front of the Nashua Boat Club building in the canoe he brought from Dedham, MA**



**Willard Cummings, Velma's Father**

When Russell Cole died in 1962, Fred Dobbins of the Nashua Telegraph summed up Russell Cole this way, "I sure am going to miss the occasional visits of the late Russell Cole to my office... This adopted Nashuan, who lived in this city for 71 years of a full and active life, up until a few years ago, when illness stopped him from doing much walking, used to visit the office quite often, sit down at a chair near my desk and swap talk about old Nashua and the people who made it go in his active days..." Here Dobbins spoke of Cole's working life, and included a few words about Velma, and ended with, "He probably was our oldest active reader and never missed a column... He liked it and we liked him... F.H.D." In another column, Dobbins spoke of Cole as "a beloved figure in Nashua for years." Russell Cole, Sr. lived to be ninety-two years old.



**Elisabeth Cole**

Velma and Russell Cole had four children (3 surviving): Martha (b. 1899 and d. 1975), Elisabeth (b. July 29, 1902 and d. May 11, 1990), Mary Louise (b. June 25, 1906 and d. June 18, 1907), and Russell Cole, Jr. (b. October 17, 1908 and d. May 10, 1996). Russell Cole, Jr.'s life will be discussed in the text about his marriage to Selma E. Gatz in 1936. The Cole daughters, Martha and Elisabeth, remained unmarried during their lives, but Elisabeth was the Historical Society's donor, she was very active in the Nashua community, and had a distinguished life and career.

### **About Cole daughter, Elisabeth, the Society's donor:**

Elisabeth Cole graduated from Nashua High School in 1920, and Smith College, class of 1924. For a few years she worked as a tutor, a governess, and taught in Vermont public schools (specific location unknown at this time), eventually returning to Nashua in 1936. She worked for the New Hampshire Department of Public Welfare as a caseworker for six years, opened her own nursery school, and later began to teach at the Ledge Street School. Like her mother, Velma,

Elisabeth was a member of the Matthew Thornton Chapter of the D. A. R., and a founder, as well as director of the Nashua Boys' Club. A member like her father, Elisabeth was secretary of the Golden Age Club non-profit. At the meeting of December 1954, the group wanted to establish a branch of Sunset Industries Inc. in Nashua, a group organized to find jobs for men and women over sixty years of age. Apparently, the Nashua Federation of Social Agencies initiated taking action because the group of retirees was growing. Apparently many Nashuans were interested in returning to work after retirement in some capacity. At this time, how the organization fared is unknown, or if its objectives were successful.

(The Historical Society has little information about Martha Cole to discuss at this time. Miss Cole, however, did celebrate the elderly, as she attended the December 1954 Sunset Industries meeting and provided entertainment as the pianist. Further research about Martha has yet to be done.)

### **About Velma Cummings' dress:**



Velma's wedding dress represents a transition from the oversized 19<sup>th</sup> century gowns of the Victorian era, to the slimmer and less bulky dresses of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of the early Edwardian. The late 1890s skirts were reduced in volume through the use of gore panels that were narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. While women continued to be corseted, the bodice's broad shoulder enhancement made a woman's waist look small. Velma's dress consists of three pieces, a bodice, a skirt and a belt. Fabricated of cotton voile or "lawn," the bodice design or "monobosom" was meant to hang over the belt. The general visual of the silhouette consists of an "s" curve. The bodice emphasizes the shoulders with a ruffle positioned above the high sleeve cap, and the sleeves are beautifully ruched and tight fitting. Insertion lace has been sewn to the bodice in diamond shapes and the pattern is echoed on the skirt. The overall look is one of great delicacy, slimmness and beauty.

**A fashion illustration of the Edwardian silhouette of Velma's bridal.**

## **SELMA E. GATZ and RUSSELL COLE, JR.**

**October 17, 1936**

**Hudson, NH**

Selma E. Gatz was born in Hudson, N.H. in about 1913 and she died in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada in 1980. Her father was Ernest Arno Gatz, born in Germany (b. about 1880 and d. 1942), and her mother was Ida Hunter Gatz (b. about 1880 and d. 1959). After her father's death in 1942, it appears that her mother, Ida, left New Hampshire to live with Selma and Russell, Jr. in Peterborough, Ontario, where she died. Selma married Russell Cole, Jr., October 17, 1936. Russell Cole, Jr. was born October 17, 1908 in Nashua, and died in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, May 10, 1996.



**Selma Gatz**

Selma graduated from Nashua High School in 1930. Her yearbook photograph has the byline, "Personality is a great charm," and further states that "the soft charm of her speech won the hearts of all her classmates." She was class vice president in her junior year in 1929. After high school Selma worked as a bank clerk at the Indian Head National Bank before she married in 1936. After announcement of the engagement to Russell Cole, Jr. was made, her co-workers threw a surprise bridal shower for her at the Elm Tree Inn. She received gifts of linen, crystal and silver presented in a hand constructed horse. Apparently Selma enjoyed horseback riding, so that became the party theme. Before her marriage to Russell, she is listed in Nashua city directories as a clerk and later as a stenographer.

Russell Cole, Jr., was the youngest child of Velma and Russell Cole. In his Nashua High School yearbook photograph of 1926 (likely his senior picture), Russell, Jr.'s byline read, "Old King Cole was a merry old soul." He was described as being "merry, but not ancient." He was the instigator of class pranks that occurred, and he also played the cello in the orchestra. It appears that his mother, Velma, taught not only her son, but undoubtedly many other young people. He also attended the Lowell Institute. By the time of his marriage to Selma Gatz in 1936, he worked at the Nashua Gummed and Coated Paper Company along with his father, Russell, Sr.



**Russell Cole, Jr.**

Nashua Gummed and Coated Paper Co.  
wearing a rain coat newly developed  
for the U. S. military during WWII.

In 1946, Russell, Jr., was transferred to Peterborough, Ontario, to be plant manager for the company's Canadian facility. The family moved to Peterborough, Ontario, but returned regularly to Nashua for family visits, as well as company duties.

Russell Cole, Jr., retired in 1970 and joined CESO (Canadian Executive Services Overseas). He and his wife, Selma traveled the world on assignment to Iran, Brazil and Egypt. After Selma's death in 1980, he returned to Nashua for a period of time to his family home at 63 Manchester Street, but then moved back to Canada to live with his son, Russell Cole, III, where he died.



**Russell Cole, Jr.**

## About Selma Gatz's dress:

Selma's dress is most unusual because it was not fabricated from silk, the expected bridal choice during the 1930s, when Hollywood and movie stars influenced the long, slim, but also somewhat broad-shouldered look. Instead, Selma chose to wear a dress fabricated from ivory wide wale corduroy. Because no record was left behind, a visual examination indicates the possibility that Selma made the dress for herself, or her mother might have made it for her. In the case of being made at home, it is quite possible the dress design came from a fashion pattern or fashion magazine. There is no label inside and construction details are rough. Additionally, the headpiece might have been Selma's own design because it was fabricated from a padded tube of corduroy twisted by hand to create its effect as a crown. The dress is tubular, floor length with a train and buttons down the back. The dress sleeves are very reminiscent of the broad shouldered look of 1898 and further accentuated by the high sleeve cap with gentle folds at the shoulder area.



Fashion plate from Sears Catalog in about 1936

## CLARINDA COLE and HAROLD LUSTIG

Date Unknown, Probably 1995  
Probably California

Selma and Russell Cole, Jr., had two children, a son, Russell Cole, III, (b. April 7, 1940 and d. December 19, 2022), and a daughter, Clarinda Cole.

Little is known about Clarinda's life in Nashua, in Canada, or in California. In 1965, however, Clarinda graduated from the school of nursing at the Women's College Hospital in Ontario. She married Harold Lustig in San Francisco about 1995 where she wore the Jessica McClintock dress on display with her mother's and grandmother's dresses. Mr. Lustig died in California in 2018.

### About Clarinda Cole's dress:



Clarinda Cole

Clarinda's dress was part of the very popular Jessica McClintock clothing line. The McClintock standard consisted of lace, and more lace, a very *romantic* look. The visual emphasis on the bodice and shoulders, very reminiscent of the silhouette in 1898, and again in 1936, surely draws attention to the bride's face. Clarinda's dress is

fabricated of manufactured fibers, ivory, probably polyester, long sleeved and cocktail length. Jessica McClintock designs were sold throughout the United States in stores like Macy's, but also sold in Jessica McClintock boutiques around the country. At this time it is not known if a McClintock boutique might have been located in Nashua, but it is more likely that Clarinda purchased her dress at a boutique in California.

Researched and submitted by Janice Fronko

# Nashua Historical Society

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## Discount Admission Opportunities

If you are planning to travel, a reminder that one of the benefits of being a member of The Nashua Historical Society is access to the Time Travelers program and to the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The Time Travelers program includes over 400 organizations in more than 45 states across the country. Members of these organizations can receive a variety of exclusive benefits and privileges, such as free admission, gift shop discounts, and much, much more.

Most museums will require you to show your Nashua Historical Society membership card. Please contact the Society before your trip if you do not have a membership card.