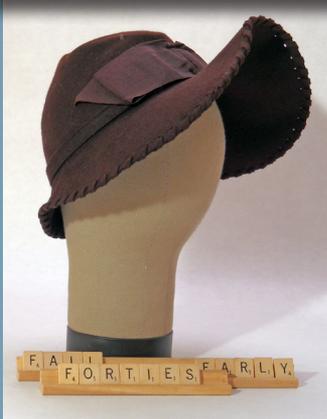


# ~ MAMIE'S HATS 1914 - 1960 ~

## A SOCIAL HISTORY THROUGH HATS



~ S U S A N L I L L Y ~



**MAMIE'S HATS 1914 – 1960**  
**A SOCIAL HISTORY THROUGH HATS**

**BY SUSAN LILLY**

~ MAMIE'S HATS 1914-1960 ~

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3733 SE 35TH PLACE  
PORTLAND, OR 97202

[WWW.WEAVINGROOM.COM](http://WWW.WEAVINGROOM.COM)

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A Social History Through Hats  
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DEDICATION



*"My pattern for my chintz dress."  
Mama (Mary Katharine Martin), April 9, 1942*

*— Dedicated to Mama, to whom I owe my  
Costume Design career —*

*Susan Lilly*

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*It is in paintings or in family albums that traces of true fashion are to be found.*

*Coco Chanel*



This is the story of Mamie, my grandmother, and her three daughters, my aunt Marguerite, my mother Mary Katharine, and Dorothy, my other aunt. It is, therefore, a story about me. Because of them, I was surrounded by sewing and dolls and doll clothes and new dresses and hats and gloves, yes, even white gloves. This is a story about their hats and what they wore, and indirectly, how all of that influenced me. The story starts with the hats, discovered forgotten in an attic, lovingly retrieved, restored and photographed, and extends out into the world. As with any good detective story, I followed the clues embedded in the hats, letting them take me where they would. Where did each one come from? Who designed it? Who wore it? What did it mean as a social statement? What was going on in the world when it was worn? I looked in libraries, contemporary magazines, and the family archive to find answers. I did web searches, went to The Hat Museum here in Portland, and even visited an obscure museum in the nearby Columbia Gorge. It is a story of how we are all connected and affected by world events, how fashion is shaped by the needs of a society in a certain time and place, and how we are influenced by those around us. We each think we are so special and individual, but really, we are all part of a grand wave, mostly moving along together, but with a few odd splashes and ripples, to make things interesting. This then, is the story of three generations of one family's women, the clothes they wore, and why.

## THE FAMILY ALBUM



Photo of Mamie as a child

Mamie was born in 1888, in York, Pennsylvania, to Charles, a successful carriage maker, and his beautiful young wife, Ida Martha Eve. Ida died soon after of childbed fever, leaving Charles a widower with two young children. This picture was taken soon after Charles was married again, to Annie, a dressmaker. Annie could have made this handsome coat with many rows of braid on its collar and capelet. It was probably navy blue with white braid and buttons, as was then the custom.

Her hat is a Breton, named for the farmers of Brittany, France. The brim is turned up in classic schoolgirl fashion, and on the brim we see the outstretched wings of a bird. The whole bird probably sits there, stuffed and posed in perpetual flight. This whole-bird-on-a-hat was a popular idea in the mid-1890's. In fact, some people called ladies' hats the graveyards of birds. Egrets, in particular, were hunted for the beauty of their plumes, so much so that they were in danger of extinction. The Audubon Society, with its symbol of the egret even today, was started at that time to raise awareness of this and to stop the senseless slaughter.

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Mamie's high school graduation picture.

## ~ MAMIE'S HATS 1914-1960 ~

Mamie graduated from high school in 1905. As an adolescent, she wears her hair pulled back, with a large bow and a bit of tulle as ornamentation. We see that her chest is thrown out and her shoulders back, pressed into this stance by the corset that she was probably thrilled to be old enough to wear. She is imitating the S-curve that was the Edwardian beauty ideal. If we analyze the word, *corset*, we can see that it means core set. This coming of age garment was to set the shape of Mamie's body for the rest of her life.

As it so happens, I ended up with a handful of magazines as well as the hats after all of the stuff was cleared out of Grandma's house. And letters, and piles of snapshots. So with all that, I was able to get a pretty good picture of what I think their life might have been like. I didn't get many magazines, just enough to give me the flavor of what Mamie and her daughters were reading. The early ones were not the magazines of the fashion elite, they were the ones that an industrious young mother would have, full of projects, recipes, and romance stories. From those, I could see that the fashion ideals that Mamie saw were a bit more down to earth than those shown in *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle*. Those came later, when the girls were in college. I include pictures from those dusty findings to illustrate Mamie's middle-class milieu, as it probably related to the purchase of the latest hat, or the styling of a new dress.

