

Black silk shirtwaist with
lace jabot, ca. 1900s.
FRC2008.03.007.



OF SHIRTWAISTS & THE MODERN WOMAN

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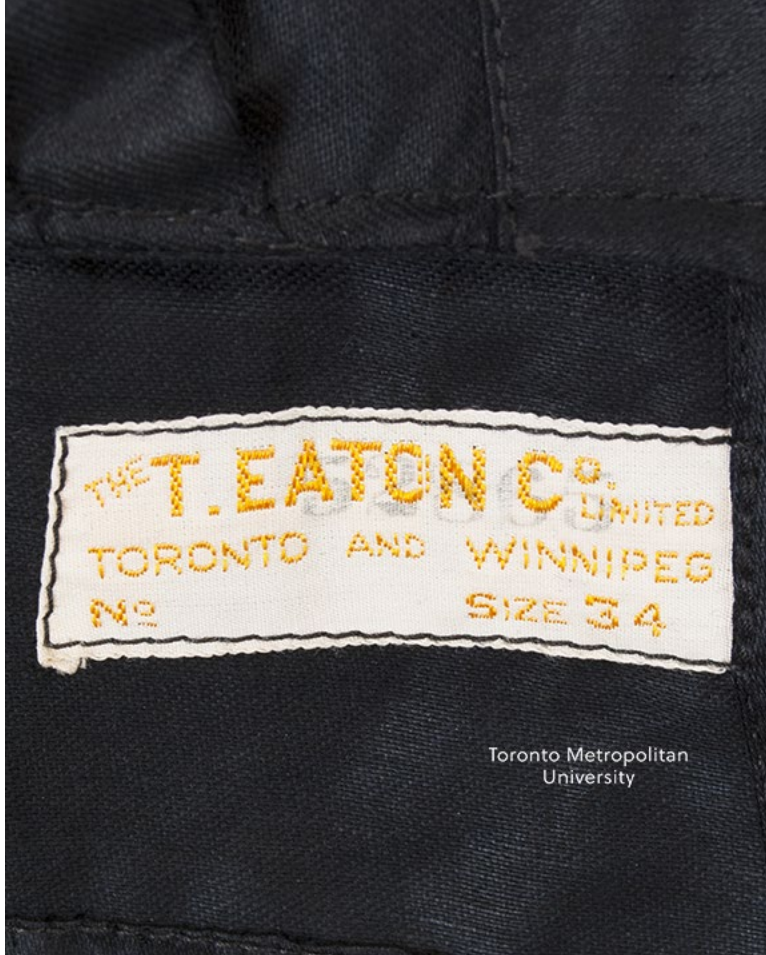
A shirt-waist, or waist as they were sometimes called, was a tailored blouse worn by women at the turn of the century. Worn with a long skirt, the shirtwaist was one of the first separates worn by the modern woman. Change the shirtwaist, change the look.

Shirt-waists came in a variety of colours and fabrics, although white was the most common. This particular shirt-waist from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection (FRC2008.03.07) is made of black silk and has a label from *T. Eaton Co. Limited, Toronto and Winnipeg*. The label is also stamped with "No. 52865". The waist is size 34. The vertical pin tucks along the front add visual interest and the front placket conceals the 5 button closures. The high banded collar closes with snaps and the machine lace jabot with black beads appears to have been added by the original owner after purchase and is loosely sewn onto the banded collar.

Shirtwaists came in a variety of colours and fabrics. Silk was the most expensive choice at \$7.50 while a cotton shirtwaist cost only \$1.50 according to the 1901 Eaton's Catalogue. Eaton's had a factory in Toronto where these shirtwaists and other garments were manufactured.



Black silk shirtwaist with lace jabot, ca. 1900s. FRC2008.03.007. Lace jabot detail.



Black silk shirtwaist with
lace jabot, ca. 1900s.
FRC2008.03.007. Label
detail.

For those with a dressmaker, sewing skills or unable to afford to buy a shirt-waist, patterns were available for order from magazines like Harper's Bazar. The February 1902 issue of Harper's Bazar offered a cut paper pattern no. 4399 in sizes 32, 34, 36, 38, and 40 inches bust measure. The pattern cost 25 cents. The article describes the shirt-waist as requiring three and a half yards of 27-inch material and provides a full page of description including this extract:

"A thoroughly practical shirt-waist pattern in the new style, opening at the back, is show in the waist of Cut Paper Pattern No. 399. This waist is laid in shallow box-pleats, the edges of which are cut-stitched together with a contrasting shade of sewing-twist. Fancy buttons catch the plats through to the lining, or if it is preferred to omit the lining portions, those buttons, being sewed through the three folds of material, hold the pleats firmly in shape, and serve to make the upper part of the waist fit smoothly. The model is a very good one for simple silk waist's for flannel and even for cotton or linen materials. If used for washable materials, a better effect will be produced by stitching the pleats flat, either by machine or with a fancy feather-stitch, than by copying the cat-stitch shown in the illustration. Naturally, in making a shirt-waist which is to be laundered, the lining would be omitted." (page 191-192)

The balance of the description includes suggestions on how to customize the shirt-waist and the article also suggests a pattern for a five-gored skirt with a shallow inverting pleat at the back and a slight train requiring 3 1/2 yards of material 45-inches wide.

The Fashion Research Collection has several shirtwaists in a range of material for study, some with lace trim. A selection of them are shown on this rack.



Image of Eaton's factory and store from back of Eaton's 1901, Catalogue #46.



T. Eaton Co. Ltd. 1919 in Eaton's Golden Jubilee (1869-1919). Sourced from Torontoist.



A rack of FRC shirtwaists,
Photo by Ingrid Mida 2014.

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