Wire bustle, ca.1885-1890.
Toronto Metropolitan University
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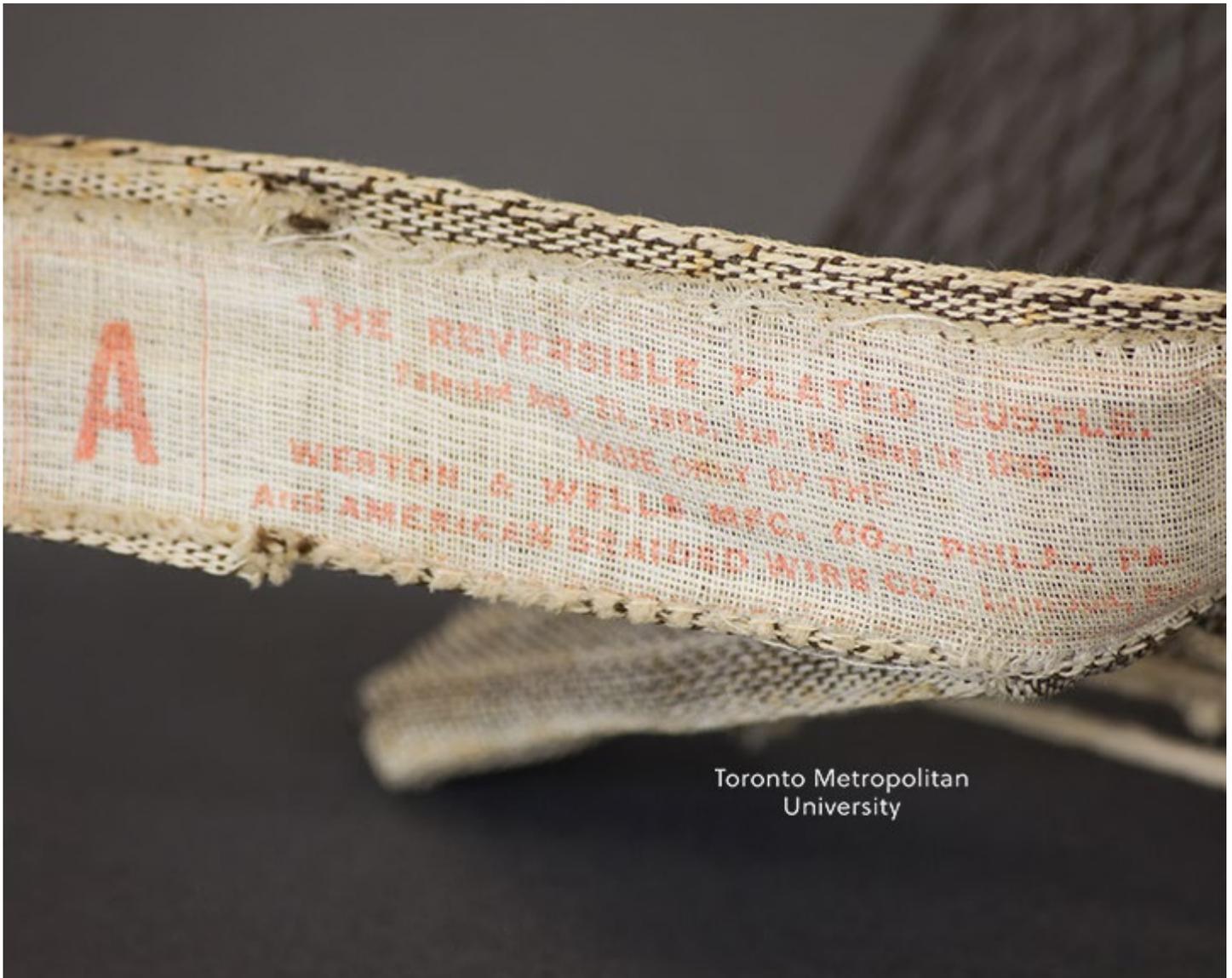
THE REVERSIBLE PLAYER SPORTS BUSTLE, c.1885–1890

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In the latter part of the 19th century, the bustle (also known as the *tournure* in France) came in and out of fashion. **Designed to support the draping of the dress from the inside to give emphasis to a woman's backside, they were constructed from a variety of materials, including horsehair, stiffly starched cloth, and frames of whalebone, bamboo, rattan and wire.**

The bustle pictured above is made of wire mesh and cotton tape with a metal fastener and would have been worn attached around the waist. This sports bustle has the label "The Reversible Player Bustle" and includes patent details dated 1885 for the manufacturer Weston & Wells Mfg. Co. of Philadelphia. It is likely from c.1885-1890. Worn underneath a dress or skirt of the period, it would have added dimension and bulk to the derriere, consistent with the fashions of the period. The band is 79 cm (31 inches) in length and is pierced at about 17.5 cm (7 inches) in where the metal closure would have been fastened.

THE REVERSIBLE PLATED BUSTLE.

WESTON & WELLS MFG. CO., PHILA., PA.

Toronto Metropolitan
University

Sports like tennis were becoming more popular for ladies during this period and this wire bustle was intended to achieve a fashionable silhouette with a lighter substructure than those composed of horsehair or stiffly starched fabric. The wire construction would have facilitated movement compared to a more rigid bustle such as that worn under a formal gown (like the examples on the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute Collection website), since this wire bustle is springy.

Further Reading:

The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: Fashion, A History from the 18th to the 20th Century. ed. Akiko Fukai. London: Taschen, 2002.

Waugh, Norah. *Corsets and Crinolines.* New York: Theatre Art Books, 1954 (fourth printing 1987).