

# CSA NEWS

Costume Society of America • Winter 2013



Mining the History of Costume:  
FANTASY AND FACT

CSA 39th National Meeting  
& Symposium 2013  
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## Antique Automobiles and Vintage Clothes in Alaska

by Judith Appel Mathey

Alaska is a state of awe inspiring beauty and natural wonders. My husband, Bob, and I visited the state via the Alaskan railroad for two weeks in August and capped the fabulous adventure with a visit to CSA member Barb Cerny and her husband Tim in Fairbanks. They own the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum and have constructed a state of the art, temperature controlled building at the Wedgewood Resort, where they permanently exhibit their collection of antique automobiles, vintage fashion dating from 1790 to 1940 and artifacts from Alaskan transportation history. Large scale historic photographs of Alaska adorn the walls and tell a visual story of their own while the signage educates and amuses. The uniqueness of the antique automobile collection is that all but one or two of the autos are in running condition and are taken out for an occasional spin around the resort, much to the delight of those strolling by. The driver and passenger often wear a duster or reproduction clothing and hats illustrating what would have been worn during the era of that automobile.

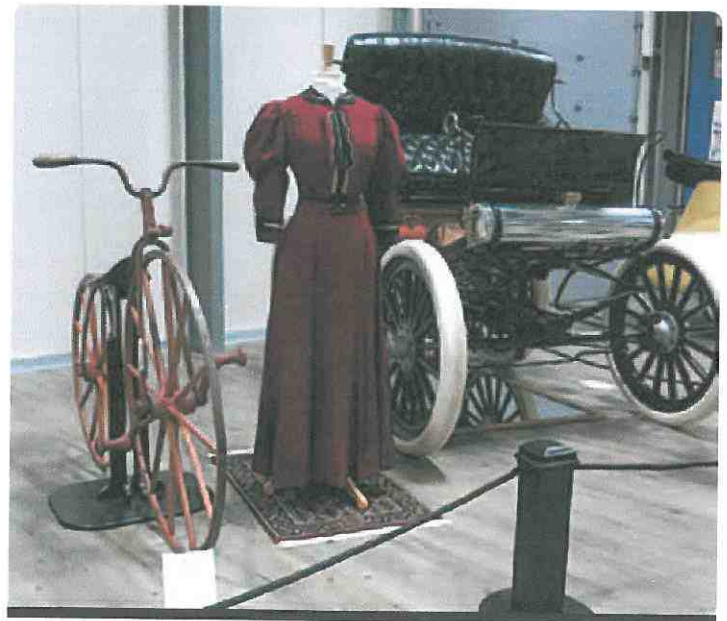
The collection of antique automobiles predates World War II and vintage costumes of each era compliment them. The juxtaposition is captivating. In addition, Barb and Tim have focused on preserving and conserving the clothes of the

pioneers of Alaska. Their museum is becoming a repository for original Alaskan clothing. When potential donors observe Barb and Tim's focus on preservation, conservation and education, they are eager to allow them to select their best pieces for loan, conservation and display. A short time ago, the Museum was offered a buffalo coat worn by a miner in the 1890's in Dawson, Yukon Territory with vintage

photos of one like it being worn in the extreme cold. They have a bear coat made in Palmer, Alaska in 1915. Recently, the museum received a full WAVE outfit from World War II that belonged to a resident of Lake Minchumina, a remote settlement not accessible by road. The woman's daughter wanted a safe home for it and a place that would display it. A collection of footwear made by

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**Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum, Fairbanks, Alaska has a collection of antique automobiles, vintage fashion dating from 1790 to 1940 and artifacts from Alaskan transportation history.**



1896 walking suit from Caralee's Closet with 1898 Hay Motor Carriage and antique bicycles.

# Antique Automobiles and Vintage Clothes in Alaska

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Alaskan natives, dating from 1915 to the 1930's, features examples of fur and skin items used for warmth before modern day fabrics accomplished the same. These were also donated by a community member.

## The Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum is rated the second highest tourist activity in Fairbanks.

Barb and Tim have done extensive research to enhance and maintain the quality of the collections. They have educated themselves and researched ideas by attending exhibits at many museums as well as viewing private collections and auction house sales. Some of their most treasured items have come from CSA member Caralee Smith of Caralee's Closet, noted for excellent examples of historic dress. To quote Caralee, "We enjoyed talking at our kitchen table even more than the time shopping in Caralee's Closet. At the conclusion of the sale I sent 11 boxes wrapped in black contractor's plastic to be crated to leave for Fairbanks via truck, ship and train." (Imagine the complexity of the Cernys' sending a vintage automobile to the lower 48 for a concours!).

Two years ago, CSA members Colleen Callahan and Newbie Richardson were invited to Fairbanks to work directly with Barb and her assistant on display and collection management issues. In addition, one day was set aside for Colleen and Newbie to present a workshop on preserving and displaying historic clothing that would be free and open to anyone in the Alaska museum community. Colleen says: "At the workshop, which was a version of workshop programs we had done for CSA, we had 20 attendees, several of whom came from the Anchorage area, flying up just for the day". Museums from Fairbanks and around the state sent personnel to participate. This type of event promoted by the Cernys illustrates their commitment to the education of museum leadership in the many historical institutions of Alaska. Colleen said: "This was one of the

most memorable and exciting experiences of our lives working in the field".

The signage for the exhibitions presents information in such an interesting way that everyone can relate. Tim calls it the "People Moment" when a person learns something new and interesting. For instance, one sign defines what the word flapper means, another details how you get into a car in a hobble dress, and others highlight historical moments or cite comparisons to the fashions of today. In addition, the signage goes on to describe how the costume was made and where it comes from. Everyone gets a "take-away" and Barb and Tim are committed to this educational focus for their visitors.

The Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum is rated the second highest tourist activity in Fairbanks. If you want to read some of the wonderful praise from visitors google "Trip advisor - Fairbanks - Things to Do" and read the reactions from some of their visitors.

## It is a gem of a museum owned and managed by two people who have dedicated themselves to collecting the finest antique automobiles complimented by excellent examples of historic costume

It is a gem of a museum owned and managed by two people who have dedicated themselves to collecting the finest antique automobiles complimented by excellent examples of historic costume as well as an equally important interest in preserving Alaskan transportation history including what was worn. Their focus on conservation, preservation, and education is inspiring. The exhibition is breathtaking. Thank you Barb and Tim for your wonderful vision.

Visit the Museum at [www.fountainheadmuseum.com](http://www.fountainheadmuseum.com) or better yet, visit them in person and enjoy the richness of Fairbanks and Alaska, and do it by the Alaskan rail! 🚂



Judy and Rob Mathey with Barb Cerny



Colleen Callahan and Newbie Richardson conducting the workshop.

## A President's Wish List

by Jane Likens,  
Mid-Atlantic Region President

When a new year begins we tend to make wish lists.

As the current President of the Mid-Atlantic Region my wish list would start with: I wish that more members offered their ideas and a bit of time to CSA. Saying that I hesitate to go further before thanking those members who have arranged trips and tours to museum exhibitions, lunch meetings and parties at various restaurants, written for our Newsletter, supplied articles and made us aware of regional events of interest to share with the membership. Here are some more ways you can get involved:

- If you have a good idea but feel you don't have the time to work on the details—such as putting together flyers, contacting curators, and the like—Board members and I can put it all together. So just let us know what you have in mind and we will make it happen.
- We need more people to come forward and serve as Board members and Officers. These positions offer opportunities to get to know people who share the same interests, yet have such varied experience in the field of dress. Our current Board also has a wide age range that enriches the point of view during discussions. For students who are looking to broaden their skills and know-how, serving as a Board member or an Officer can give them access to authors, curators, costumers, collectors and educators. During next Spring's elections we'll be looking for members to offer their unique skills, so think about how much you will be able to do and run for an Officer or Board position.
- Finally, in 2014 our region will host the National Symposium and we need everyone possible to get involved. I look forward to working together to make it a success.

I wish you all a safe and healthy new year and hope you enjoy your membership; it's rich in opportunities! 🍷