

Image of Lot Robbins courtesy of Historic New England, Gift of Misses Ethel Mary and Mildred Rider, 1974.363. All other images courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.

PHOTO ESSAY

# The Robbins Family of East Lexington, Massachusetts: Furriers and Their Clothing, 1775-1825

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**Editor's Introduction:** *This unique photo essay explores the clothing of a prominent family of furriers. In 1783, Stephen and Abigail Robbins established themselves in East Lexington, starting a fur dressing business along with a store where they sold and traded textiles and other finished goods. As their family and business interests grew in the following decades, so did their influence in this corner of Lexington. Here, they grew and prospered until the financial panic of 1837. At the end of the nineteenth century, their great granddaughter, Ellen Adelia Robbins Stone (1854-1944), donated a large collection of clothing, costumes, and textiles to the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston. Most of the items had been used or worn by members of the Robbins family. The clothing in the collection mostly dates between 1780-1820 and varies from functional to fashionable.<sup>1</sup>*

*Author Jennifer Swope is a curatorial research consultant in the Textiles and Fashion Arts department at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Her research offers a unique perspective on the family's history. Swope argues that a close examination of individual items highlights the personal choices that family members made about their dress and the degree to which their choices were influenced by their gender and age.*

*In addition to their central role in business and the town's economic development, the second generation of the Robbins family shared a deep commitment to equality and antislavery, highly unusual for the 1830s. Robbins Hall, built by Stephen and Abigail's son, Eli, in 1833, provided a public lyceum where major lecturers spoke, including Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The Robbins family's philanthropic and intellectual contributions to the town left a lasting legacy, as will be explored in the afterward to this photo essay.<sup>†</sup>*

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In the late eighteenth century, Lexington, like most Massachusetts towns, remained primarily an agricultural community. Its population stood at more than 1,000. The Lexington Historical Commission's succinct overview of the town's history enables us to situate the history of the Robbins family:

Despite its rural characteristics, Lexington was also a center for commerce. Over Lexington roads countless teams with four and six horses laden with produce and small manufactured articles passed through town, on their way to southern New Hampshire or Boston. There were also droves of cattle, swine and sheep on their way to market or being driven to the back country for pasturage. For travelers Lexington was often the last stop before reaching Boston. . . . All this commercial activity manifested itself in the establishment of numerous taverns along the heavily-traveled routes. . .

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<sup>†</sup>**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank Jane and Richard Nylander for their encouragement and insights into the Robbins family of East Lexington and their descendants. Ann Colman, former curator of Textiles and Fashion Arts of the Museum of Fine Arts, initiated my research of the textiles that Ellen Stone donated to the Museum of Fine Arts and generously shared her knowledge of American costume. Pam Parmal, current David and Roberta Logie Curator of Textiles and Fashion Arts of the MFA, has continued to support my research of this important collection. Associate Conservator Claudia Iannuccilli and Collections Care Specialist Allison Murphy of the MFA's Textiles and Fashion Department lent their expertise to producing the best images in my photoessay. Elaine Doran, curator of the Lexington Historical Society, and other staff members have generously allowed me access to the Robbins and Stone material in their collection over many years.

Despite a lack of waterpower, various industries were established in town and especially in the East Village. The dressing of furs was the dominant industry in the early nineteenth century. Beginning in the late 1700s, Stephen Robbins [the subject of this photoessay] was the first to exchange dry and West India goods for pelts and skins which came through Boston from foreign ports. After being dressed and finished, the furs were again exchanged for goods or sold. Robbins' factory, later continued by his son Eli, was located at the junction of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street. Ambrose Morrell opened a similar business nearby . . . in 1802 and another was operated by Joshua Swan.

Various fur shops remained in business until the 1850s, turning out fur capes, caps, muffs, boas, gloves, fur-lined overshoes and other items. At their peak, it is estimated that 300 to 500 found employment in the fur shops. Eli Robbins' factory alone occupied several buildings and employed about 80 to 100. The collective output of the Lexington furriers is said to have been greater than any town outside of Boston or New York.<sup>2</sup>

"Factory," however, was a somewhat misleading term. Stephen Robbins probably had a large workshop that would have been called a "manufactory" at the time. It was local historian George O. Smith who inaccurately described these fur dressing operations as "factories" in the early 1900s. The word stuck, although its meaning later drifted toward large-scale water- or steam-powered factories. Fur dressing in the first half of the nineteenth century, however, was pre-industrial manufacturing and partly a cottage industry, not at all on the scale of the later cotton mills of Lowell. The scanty evidence also suggests that fur "dressing" (the processing of fur pelts for use) involved mostly seasonal labor and was conducted in large sheds that bore little resemblance to large-scale factory production. Unfortunately, no buildings or photos remain that document fur dressing and the actual making of furs into muffs, tippetts, and trim.<sup>3</sup>

The Robbins' work shaped their community and established their place within the elite ranks of East Lexington. Fur dressing, along with the sale and trading of textiles and other finished goods, provided both the means and materials for their wardrobes. The Museum of Fine Arts' collection of 500 textiles and 200 examples of clothing from this and other fur dressing families of East Lexington was extremely well-documented when donated over a century ago, with each object named, described, and often identified by its wearer. It includes the clothing of men, women, and children of both genders and ranges from fashionable to everyday.

While the collection's breadth and provenance are extraordinary, when individual objects are examined in the context of the family's diaries, along

with numerous letters and accounts in the archives of Lexington Historical Society, a complex portrait of the first two generations of the Robbins family emerges. Of course, their clothing choices were influenced by their age and gender, but when their written legacy is considered together with their material one, we gain a more nuanced understanding of them as individuals and the roles they played in their family and community.<sup>4</sup>

In a broad sense, this portrait of the Robbinses shows that the nuclear family remained the basic unit of production in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, before the industrialization of manufacturing. More specifically, furs and textiles were the bricks and mortar of the foundation of their success, allowing them to leverage their own and their neighbors' labor to acquire greater wealth and status. The clothing of the first two generations of the Robbins family in East Lexington tells the story of a New England family's rise to prominence in the initial decades of our country's history. Because of the intimate nature of clothing and extensive written account of the wearers' lives, we are afforded a rare glimpse into their personal choices and relationships.

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Abigail Winship Robbins (1759-1850) came from a large, land-owning family that had its roots in the seventeenth-century English settlement of Lexington (Illustration 1). In 1779, she married Stephen Robbins (1758-1847). (Unfortunately, no extant image exists of the family patriarch, Stephen.) They initially lived in Cambridge, where he originated. Four years later, Abigail and Stephen returned to Lexington and bought a house at the junction of Pleasant and Main Streets (now Massachusetts Avenue) in what was then considered the village of East Lexington (Illustration 2).<sup>5</sup>

This location was ideal for their new fur dressing business. The house bordered a large marsh that provided water for processing furs and a population of small animals for trapping. A few yards north, Stephen Robbins established a store for "the exchange of dry and West India goods for pelts and skins, which after being dressed and finished were again exchanged for goods, or sold."<sup>6</sup> In this way, Stephen Robbins and the others in the fur dressing elite of East Lexington controlled the "local [circuit] of commodities" in which textiles and accessories functioned like currency.<sup>7</sup> In the coming years, Stephen Robbins would buy neighboring properties, establishing a family compound that was expanded by his son Eli Robbins (1786-1856).<sup>8</sup>



**1. Silhouette of Abigail Robbins, c. 1810-1820. Unknown artist. Opaque watercolor and pencil on paper.** Courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.

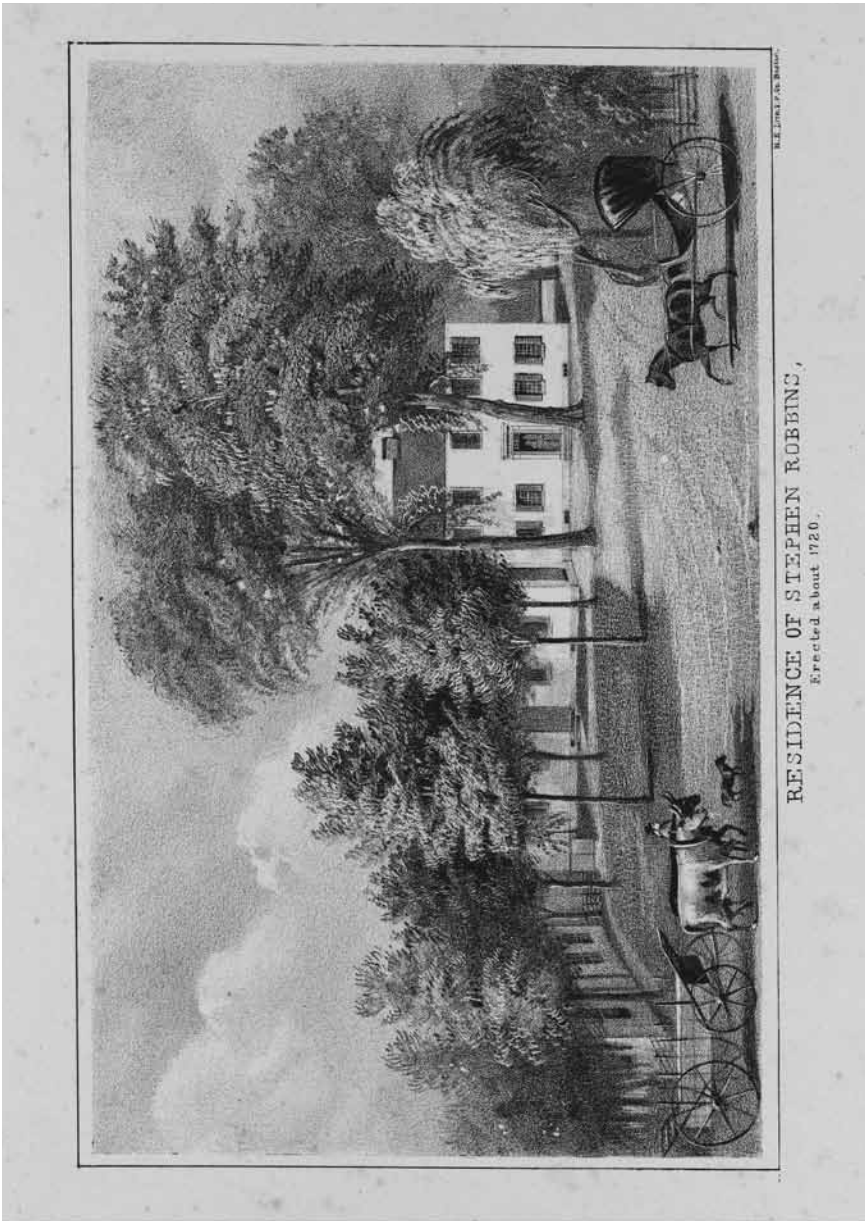
Called “shades” or “shadow portraits,” portrait silhouettes were less expensive than painted portraits. Itinerant artists captured the profiles of many American sitters in painted black watercolor or cut-out black pieces of paper, often using a tracing device. Distinguishing features, such as eyelashes and hair ribbons (or the cap Abigail Robbins wears in her portrait above), were often rendered in pencil or ink.

The Robbins/Stone House, as it came to be known, formed the nucleus of their family homestead and was eventually inherited by Stephen's great-granddaughter, Ellen Adelia Robbins Stone (1854-1944) when her mother died in 1890. Stone had just graduated from Boston University Law School in 1889. With no children or surviving siblings to share her inheritance, Stone had a houseful of objects to give away. Many of New England's oldest museums benefited from her generosity; her first significant gift was the meticulously labeled and researched clothing and textile collection she gave to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

Although fur dressing, textiles, and dry goods were the initial sources of income for Stephen Robbins, he and his son Eli later owned taverns and mills. As a fur dresser, Stephen Robbins tanned pelts from a variety of animals, then cut them into strips that were made into muffs, boas, and tippetts (stoles or scarf-like narrow pieces of clothing, worn over the shoulders). He was said to have employed up to 100 people at a time in seasonal labor—many of them women and children—making fashionable fur accessories from the hides of bears, sables, foxes, martins, fishers, and polecats.<sup>9</sup> Smaller animals, like squirrels and rabbits, were trapped locally, but most of his unprocessed furs were purchased from Boston and New York fur dealers.<sup>10</sup> The limited sources suggest this was pre-industrial, seasonal, and home cottage production rather than full-time “factory” work.

Ironically, we don't know how much of their own fur the Robbins family or other local families wore. No fur trimmed or fur lined clothing survives in any of the museum collections that now contain Robbins family material. Indeed, no fur dressing tools have been identified in the Lexington Historical Society's collection.

Stephen Robbins exchanged the finished fur accessories for yards of imported textiles, numerous accessories (such as gloves and handkerchiefs), skeins of thread and other sewing supplies, and cash. In November 1804 Stephen Robbins traded Davis Whitman furs for a variety of goods, including India cotton by the piece; yards of coating (napped wool cloth), calico, and lustring (light weight, lustrous silk); skeins of thread; bandanna handkerchiefs; and silk hose (or stockings).<sup>11</sup> Whitman was his main source for these finished goods, which Robbins needed to pay his workers and stock his store. Whitman, in turn, retailed Robbins' tippetts and muffs.<sup>12</sup> Although Stephen Robbins traded fur accessories for a number of silk products, including skeins of silk thread, ribbon, hose (stockings), and lightweight, plain weave silk (referred to as lustring and Persians), he did not purchase more expensive silk damasks and brocades. These were usually in a floral

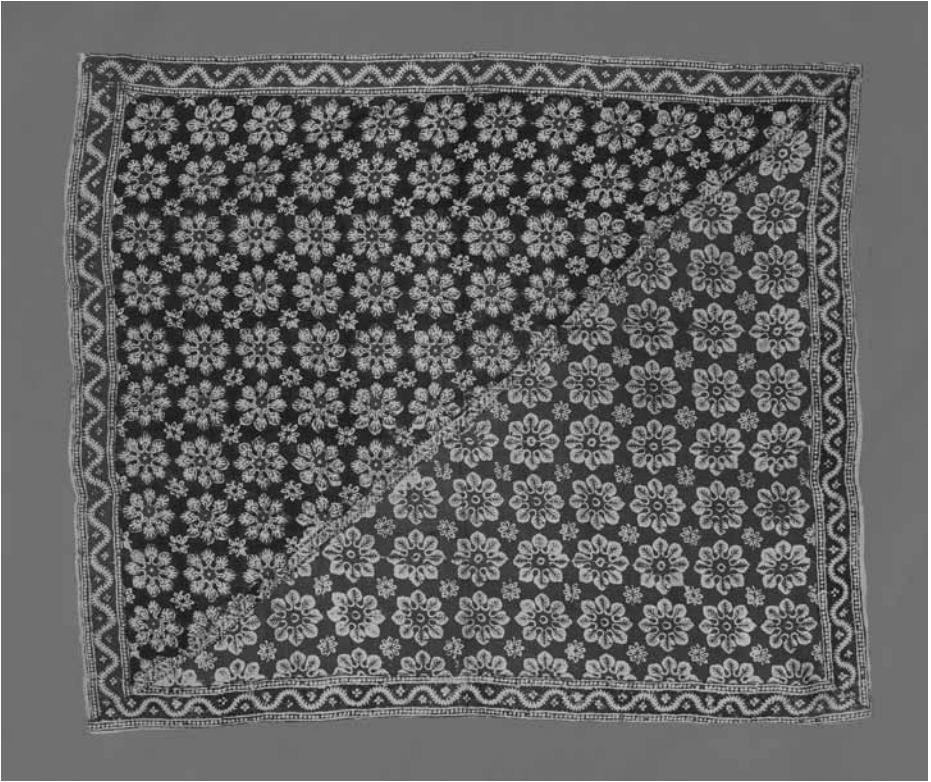


2. "Residence of Stephen Robbins," last quarter of the nineteenth century. Lithograph, North East Lithography S.P. Co., Boston. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, M14661. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.





3. "Evening Dresses," *Gallery of Fashion*, February 1795. The figures from left to right are shown wearing bear skin tippet, goat skin muff, and bear muff and boa.



4. Handkerchief or bandanna, early nineteenth century, made in India for export to the West. Block-printed plain weave silk. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.841. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



5. Pair of stockings embroidered with initials “CR” for Caira Robbins, early nineteenth century. Knitted silk with silk embroidery. Made in England. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.40a-b. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

pattern and were more expensive because of their heavier weight and more complex weave structures.

Stephen and Abigail had eight children, three of whom died before age five.<sup>13</sup> Caira Robbins (1794-1881) was their youngest. Her accounts from August 1810 to February 1811 show that she earned \$170 in store credit from cutting, sewing, and “wristbanding” muffs and from sewing and lining tippetts (Illustration 7).<sup>14</sup> She was well educated for the standard of the time, and in June 1812, between schools, Caira Robbins went to visit her older sister’s family in Montpelier, Vermont. She wrote her father in September asking to extend her stay until spring. He replied:

. . . if I knew that Nabby actually wanted you to stay and you desired the same, I should consent, although I should be much pleased to have you come home. Firstly: We should be glad to see you. Secondly: We want your work. You know, yourself, that what you could earn this fall would amount to quite a large amount when you are eighty.<sup>15</sup>

Although the Robbins children were well provided for, Stephen Robbins expected Caira and her brothers and sisters to contribute to the family business.

When her silhouette was made around 1815 (Illustration 1), Abigail Robbins would have been in her mid-forties to early fifties with two of her surviving children at home. The embroidered cap that she is shown wearing in her portrait would have been slightly out of style in the eighteen-teens, but her age and the cap’s presumed high quality probably influenced her decision to be portrayed in it. While she wore some of her late eighteenth-century clothing into the nineteenth century, she chose to update other examples, like her black silk hat, which was made around 1790 by a skilled milliner (Illustration 8). About twenty years later, she probably altered it herself, cutting down the height of the crown and using the wide satin ribbon band and bow to hide the changes.

Abigail’s riding hood is the quintessential example of eighteenth-century outerwear for women (Illustration 9). Made from imported English broadcloth (in this case, 60 inches wide), its simple construction made efficient use of the wool textile. The hood was made from a rectangular piece gathered at the back and sewn to a broader piece that was gathered at the shoulders, and a triangular piece was sewn to each of the lower front corners. That this cloak was very special to Abigail Winship Robbins and her descendants is clear, as she passed it down with the story that it belonged to

1864		Stephen Robbins		C.	
400	Nov 16	To Am B up	1002 20	1773 45	426 50
17		Cash	30		
		1 p <sup>r</sup> India Cotton 30	5		
		Quincy's M <sup>r</sup> Perry	4 56		
		6 p <sup>r</sup> Baste 4 6	11 50		
		2 yds Coaling 8	2 67		
19		6 yds Cobblers 11 6	11 50		
		20 yds Calico 2	9 67		
20		Deer Muffs & tip p <sup>r</sup>		8	
21		1 Angora Muff	5		
		1 do do	4		
		1 Old Father Muff & tip p <sup>r</sup>	11		
		12 yds Lustring 6 9	13 50		
		6 lb Shred S 6	6		
		6 yds Silk 6 9	6 75		
		1 Beaudanne Hand 3 9	62		
23		Deer Muffs & tip p <sup>r</sup>		6 37	
24		Cash	67		
		1 Silk hose 11 3	1 88		

6. Page from Davis Whitman ledger, 1804. It records Stephen Robbins' account with him. It is unclear how Whitman's ledger came into the possession of the Robbins family. Courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.

		L. Robbins to Cairn R. D. August 6 <sup>th</sup> 1810 D		B.
181	August 18 <sup>th</sup>	to sewing & wristbanding	42 elt muffs 1/6	50. 50
		sewing & wristbanding	8 sable muffs 1/6	2 - 00
		cutting & making	7 linings 1/6 per	58
		cutting	3 linings 1/3	12 1/2
September 8 <sup>th</sup>		cutting	22 linings 1/3	92 2/3
		sewing	1 lining 1/3	1
15 <sup>th</sup>		sewing	46 muffs to stuff 10cts	4. 60
22 <sup>nd</sup>		sewing	141 muffs to stuff 10cts	14. 10
29 <sup>th</sup>		sewing	120 muffs to stuff 10cts	12. 00
		sewing	83 muffs to stuff 10cts	8. 30
		cutting & sewing	2 sable muffs 15cts	1. 50

7. Page from Cairn Robbins' account book, 1810. Courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.



**8. Silk hat, which belonged to Abigail Robbins. Originally made c. 1790 and altered c. 1810. Plain weave silk, silk satin, and buckram. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.10. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**



9. Riding hood or cloak, before 1779. Plain weave wool and silk. The color is a bright orange-red. MFA, 99.664.16.





10. Gingham dress (front and back views), which belonged to Abigail Robbins, early nineteenth century. Plain weave cotton. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.71. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



her before she was married in 1779. She was no doubt proud of her Winship heritage, which dated back to Lexington's original English settlement in the seventeenth century, and proud, too, of her parents' ability to provide her with a high quality wardrobe.

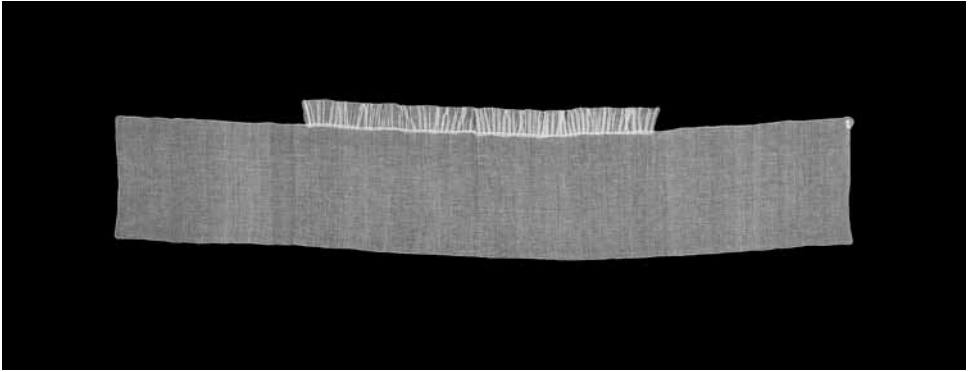
In the early nineteenth century, Abigail Robbins acquired new clothing: among other items, a gingham dress, muslin shawl, and straw bonnet (Illustrations 10, 11, 12). Two figures wearing remarkably similar dresses appear in a 1797 English fashion plate titled "Bathing Place. Morning Dresses" (Illustration 13). The left figure's dress has a high waist and skirt that is gathered at the back with ruffles on the hem and shoulder, like Abigail Robbins' dress. The right figure is shown wearing a striped gingham dress, long white shawl, and funnel-shaped straw bonnet, giving an impression of how Abigail Robbins' ensemble would have appeared if worn together.

Stephen Robbins traded cotton cloth, such as muslin and gingham, a plain weave cotton in various weights usually woven in a stripe, check or plaid.<sup>16</sup> Although not as expensive as silk, imported cottons were considered a luxury good until later in the nineteenth century when the industrialization of cotton production was complete.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to his wife's, Stephen Robbins' strategy for dealing with changing nineteenth-century fashion was to ignore it entirely. One person, recalling Robbins in the first half of the nineteenth century, stated, "His dress was always the same."<sup>18</sup> Another remembered that he ". . . wore a long, straight-bodied coat, ruffled shirt, knee breeches, and a low-crowned broad-brimmed hat, with his hair in a queue."<sup>19</sup>

The few examples of his clothing in the collection, like his shirt and breeches, confirm these impressions of his dress, which would have seemed eccentric and old-fashioned during the last years of his life in the 1830s and 1840s (Illustrations 14 and 16). His pleated linen stock is a rare survivor despite its ubiquity in the eighteenth century. The stock's pleats would have been crisply ironed and its ends secured with a buckle at the back (Illustration 15). In the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, his high-quality conservative attire would have been appropriate for a middle-aged patrician businessman in the close-knit community of East Lexington.

Lot Robbins (1790-1873), the youngest son, worked in the family business like his three older brothers but was also known for his talents as a dance teacher (Illustration 17). He probably wore his white waistcoat with printed trim and cloth-covered buttons to some of the dances for which he was a master of ceremonies, where it would have looked stylish compared to his father's eighteenth-century dress (Illustration 18). It was made from "brilliant" (a warp-striped cotton satin) that was specially printed for a



**11. Muslin shawl, which belonged to Abigail Robbins, early nineteenth century. Plain weave cotton (21  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 65  $\frac{3}{4}$ "). Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.87. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**

Muslin is a loosely woven cotton fabric which originated in India. It was introduced to Europe from the Middle East in the seventeenth century and quickly became very popular.



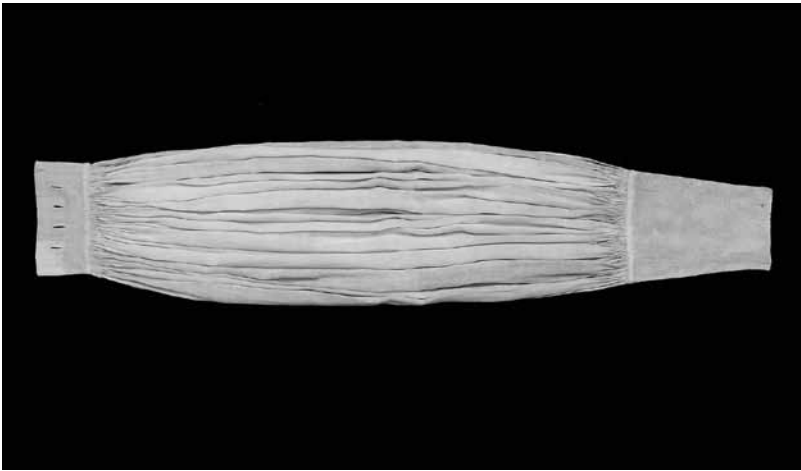
**12. Bonnet, early nineteenth century. Braided straw lined with plain weave silk. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.96. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**



13. “Bathing Place. Morning Dresses,” September 1797.



14. Shirt, which belonged to Stephen Robbins, late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Plain weave linen. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.8. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



15. Stock or neck cloth, which belonged to Stephen Robbins, late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Plain weave linen. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.6. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



16. Breeches, late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Wool twill with brass buttons. MFA, 99.664.9. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

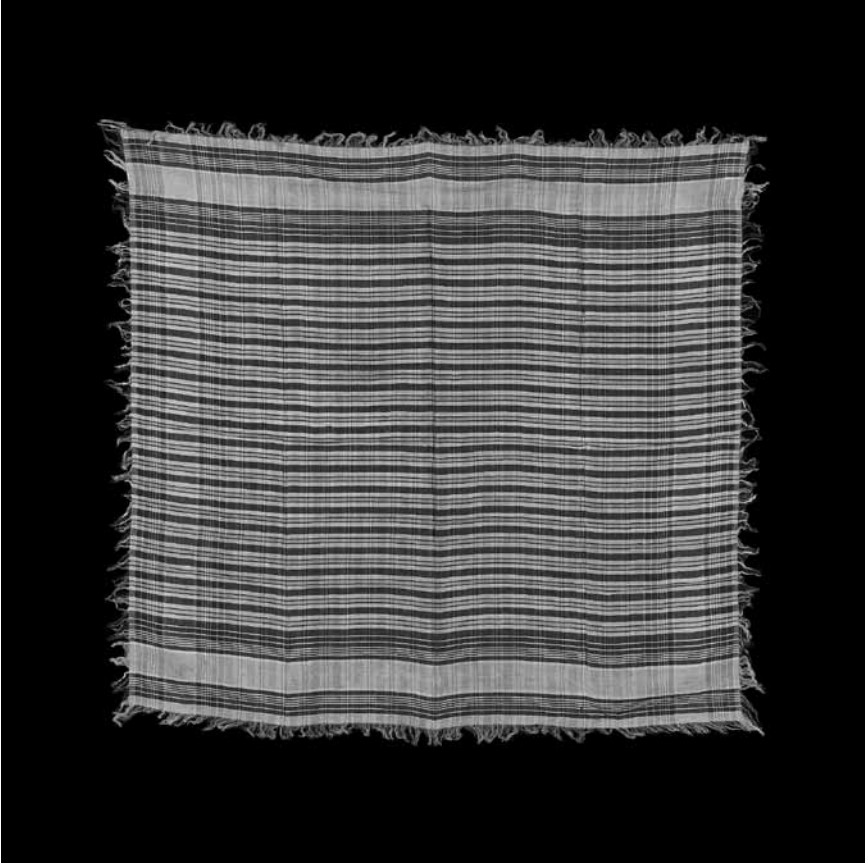


17. Unknown artist, Lot Robbins (1790-1873), c. 1820. Watercolor. Historic New England, 1974.363.





18. Waistcoat, which belonged to Lot Robbins, before 1827. Block-printed cotton with satin warp stripes and plain weave linen lining. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.68. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



19. Handkerchief, which belonged to Lot Robbins, before 1827. Plain weave silk. Gift of Dr. Merrell L. Stout, MFA, 45.610. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

waistcoat. Although this waistcoat was made later, his father bought a “vest pattern” from Cambridge merchants Thomas and William Parker in 1801.<sup>20</sup> Lot’s plaid handkerchief was marked with his name and the date 1827, the year he was committed to Mclean Asylum in Somerville, where he lived out the rest of his years (Illustration 19).<sup>21</sup>

Caira Robbins (1794-1881) and her brother Lot (1790-1873) represent the more-fashionably dressed, second generation of their family. The youngest child, Caira was named after the refrain of a song from the French Revolution, which included the phrase “Ça Ira” or “It Will Be.” She never married because, according to her great-niece Ellen Stone, as “the youngest child and only daughter at home, in a family in very comfortable circumstances, she enjoyed many advantages of education and opportunity beyond the average.”<sup>22</sup>

Her clothing is the best represented in the collection and was the most stylish. Her fashionable dress suited her busy social life well. The diary that she started in 1809 at age fifteen and continued to keep until 1823 describes the numerous dances, teas, plays, and lectures she attended.

Caira’s blue-green silk spencer (a type of short jacket worn by women in the early nineteenth century) is similar in size and quality to other fashionable garments in the collection made for her in the early eighteenth-teens (Illustration 20). Its similarity to the spencer shown in an 1810 French fashion plate suggests that it was made in the latest taste (Illustration 21). One of her diary entries perfectly captures how a cold spring morning in New England can challenge any fashionable dresser. For Sunday, May 20, 1821, she wrote: “Attended meeting. Walked. Wore my spencer, was cold.”<sup>23</sup>

Caira’s education was reflected in her penchant for writing. In one instance, she literally wrote on her clothing. At first glance, her stays are typical of the 1820s and 30s.<sup>24</sup> Made of cotton satin sewn with heavy silk thread, they are lightly boned on the sides with a long pocket down the front for a removable steel or busk (Illustration 22). Inside on the lining, Caira Robbins wrote in the voice of the offending stays: “I have been instrumental in bringing thousands of the fair sex to an untimely grave.” Her startling inscription expresses her ambivalence toward this restrictive garment—a sentiment no doubt shared by many of her peers.

From the age of fifteen to eighteen, Caira Robbins intermittently attended three different schools. While at Westford Academy in 1813, she was instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, marking, plain sewing, and muslin work.<sup>25</sup> The sewing and embroidery skills that she learned at school are apparent in this cap and others like it in the collection (Illustration 23). Of course, the sewing supplies and muslin which she used to make it were available in her father’s store.



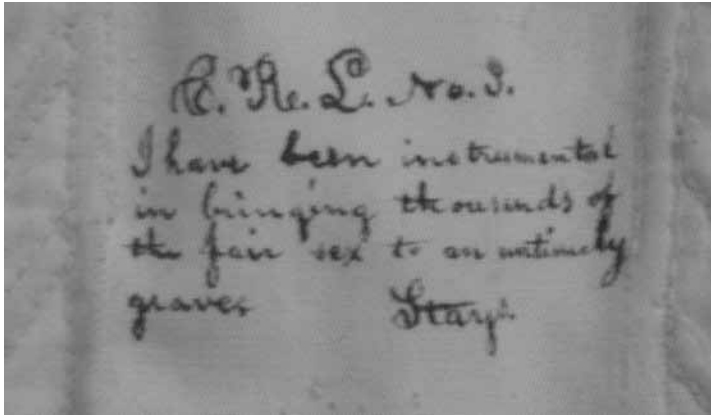
20. Spencer (short jacket), c. 1815. Plain weave silk. MFA, 99.664.39.



21. “Costume Parisien,” 1810.



22. Stays, which belonged to Cairra Robbins, c. 1820. Sateen (cotton in satin weave) edged cotton twill tape, silk cord at back. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA, 99.664.34. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Inscription inside stays: "I have been instrumental in bringing thousands of the fair sex to an untimely grave."

While Caira Robbins and other descendants of Stephen and Abigail continued to live in East Lexington and influence its development, their power in the larger town of Lexington was undermined after the economic downturn in 1837 and the construction of the railroad soon after. Their son Eli's death in 1856 and the sale of the family store a year later marked the end of an era: the fur dressing elite no longer held exclusive sway over their section of town.

However, their descendants were careful stewards of the Robbins legacy. Thanks to their efforts, an extraordinarily complete record of their lives survives to help us better understand their family trade in fur and textiles and its role in the local economy, contextualizing choices they made in clothing themselves.

After the American Revolution, their village (like many in New England during this time) had become a thriving pre-industrial manufacturing center; the Robbinses were central agents of this change. While age and gender influenced their style of dress, personal choice was also a factor in shaping their wardrobes. This comprehensive collection of clothing combines with historical documents to paint a picture of who they were as individuals and the roles they played in both their family and in the larger community.



23. Cap, which belonged to Cairra Robbins, c. 1820s. Embroidered plain weave cotton. Gift of Miss Ellen A. Stone, MFA 99.835. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.





**Ellen Adelia Robbins Stone (1854-1944), c. 1895**

She was the great granddaughter of Stephen and Abigail Robbins and lived for much of her life in the Robbins/Stone House, now located at 1295 Massachusetts Avenue, East Lexington, MA. It was she who donated these clothing and textile collections to local museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Courtesy of the Edwin B. Worthen Collection, Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, MA.

## Notes

1. Ellen Adelia Robbins Stone Jr.'s family legacy and her donations to local museums are described in detail in Jane Cayford Nylander, "Preserving a Legacy," in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*, ed. D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes (MA: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002).
2. While the older Center Village remained the town's civic center, the East Village became a hub of commercial and industrial activity. In addition to furrier businesses like the Robbins', "in other sections of town there were sawmills, blacksmith shops, a gristmill, a spice mill, a small malt house, a pottery, a tannery, a bake house and a turning mill. Small-scale boot and shoe production provided home employment. Peat swamps provided a ready local source of fuel." Lexington Historical Commission, "Federal Period, 1775-1830," *Lexington Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey*. 2010, [http://historicsurvey.lexingtonma.gov/lexareas/federal\\_period.htm](http://historicsurvey.lexingtonma.gov/lexareas/federal_period.htm)
3. George O. Smith, "Reminiscences of the Fur Industry," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1905-1912): 172. From daughter Caira's letter to her father, her account books, and those of her sister and sister-in-law, as well as the dates of his trades with Boston merchant Davis Whitman, I conclude that most of the cutting and sewing of furs was done late fall and winter. Presumably this time frame wouldn't have conflicted with agricultural work. Note: An image of a small brick building in poor condition that is described as "the cook and dye house of fur dresser Stephen Robbins" appears in Jane M. Morse, "The East Lexington Story," in *Lexington's Colonial Times Magazine* (March-April 2004): 12-13. This is the only surviving image of any aspect of the production.
4. The Robbins/Stone family papers, 1718-1935 (bulk 1801-1890) are located at the Lexington Historical Society and include the following (11 boxes): Account books of Stephen Robbins and Abner Stone (1821-1861); fur books (1817-1837); inventory (1844); ledgers (1792-1837); certificate for indenture for Abner Stone; store account of Philomon Robbins (1788, 1793); records of rental properties; War of 1812 enlistment roll; wills, deeds, and other papers of the Robbins family; diaries, correspondence, artwork, and workbooks of Caira Robbins; letters (1843-1853) to members of the Eli Robbins family; typescript of events in his life and accounts of Lot Robbins; papers of Julia A. Robbins; correspondence, scrapbooks, and other papers of Miss Ellen A. Stone Jr.; family genealogy; daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and other photographs of Robbins/Stone family members; and 40 handwritten family cookbooks, chiefly kept by Mrs. Ellen A. Stone Sr., containing household hints as well as occasional diary entries (1838-1890).
5. Ellen Stone Jr. most likely commissioned this lithograph of her family homestead using a watercolor painted around 1810 by her great-aunt Caira Robbins (1791-1880), which Stone later donated to Historic New England. An image of Caira's original watercolor can be found in Nylander, "Patterns of Family Legacies," in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*, ed. D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002), 202.

6. George Smith, "Reminiscences of the Fur Industry," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1905-1912): 172. Smaller animals, like squirrels, were trapped locally. Robbins got most of his furs at markets in New York City and through a Boston dealer, Henry Bass & Company.
7. John Styles, *The Dress of the People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 6.
8. Richard Kollen, *Lexington, From Liberty's Birthplace to Progressive Suburb* (Charlestown, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 52-65.
9. "Lexington Sixty Years Ago," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1905-1910): 32. See also "Reminiscences of the Fur Industry," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1905-1910): 175. For more information on how fur was used in clothing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see *The Workwoman's Guide* (1838; reprint, Guilford, CT: Opus Publications, 1986), 175-177; and Elizabeth Ewing, *Fur in Dress* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1981), 78-103.
10. Stephen Robbins Jr. *Stephen Robbins Jr. to "Pa," New York City, March 27, 1807*. Letter. Robbins Family Papers, Lexington Historical Society, Lexington, Massachusetts.
11. See Alice Baldwin Beers, *Trade Goods, A Study of Indian Chintz* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1970); and Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America, 1650-1870* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984).
12. For example, between May 1804 and January 1805, Stephen Robbins exchanged about \$700 worth of fur accessories with Davis Whitman for \$2,400 worth of textiles and accessories. Between September 1807 and May 1808, he acquired about \$13,000 worth of textiles from Whitman. Pages from Davis Whitman Ledger, 23 May 1804 to 22 January 1805, and 21 September 1807 to 23 May 1808. Robbins Family Papers, Lexington Historical Society, Lexington, Massachusetts.
13. See Robbins family genealogy in Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts: From Its First Settlement to 1869, Revised and Continued to 1912, by the Lexington Historical Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 580.
14. Caira Robbins Account Book, 6 August 1810 to 8 February 1811. Robbins Family Papers, Lexington Historical Society, Lexington, Massachusetts.
15. *Ibid.*, 66.
16. The name "gingham" originates from an adjective in the Malay language, *genggang*, meaning "striped." Some sources say that the name came into English via Dutch. When originally imported into Europe in the seventeenth century, it was a striped fabric. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, when it was produced in the mills of Manchester, England, it started to be woven into checked or plaid patterns (often blue and white). Checked gingham became more common over time, though striped gingham was still available in the late Victorian period.
17. On May 20, 1808, Davis Whitman charged him 56 cents for two yards of muslin, and on October 7, 1807, Whitman charged him \$2.92 for seven yards of

gingham. Pages from Davis Whitman Ledger, 23 May 1804 to 22 January 1805, and 21 September 1807 to 23 May 1808. Robbins Family Papers, Lexington Historical Society, Lexington, Massachusetts.

18. "Lexington Sixty Years Ago," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1905-1910): 33.

19. "Reminiscences of the Fur Industry," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1905-1910): 176.

20. This receipt shows that Stephen Robbins owed the Parkers \$38.63 for the following: a book, a ream of paper, black sewing silk, black cambric, a dozen hair combs, four yards of forest cloth, and three yards of linen. Receipt of Payment, 17 August 1801. Robbins Family Papers, Lexington Historical Society, Lexington, Massachusetts.

21. In the donor records for her gift, dated 1889, Ellen Adelia Robbins Stone Jr. gave the following background on her uncle: "Lot Robbins born March 28, 1790 died 1873. He was a dancing master, writing master etc. became insane while young and was one of the first patients admitted to the McLean Asylum in Somerville (Boston) where he remained fifty years. When he left home his mother locked the chest in which were packed away his clothes—it was not unlocked again for sixty years. Some of these garments are now the property of the Museum of Fine Arts. Others have been given to the Ipswich Historical Society."

22. "Diary and Letters of Caira Robbins," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 4 (1905-1910): 61-62.

23. *Ibid.*, 71.

24. *The Workwoman's Guide*, 81-82, plate 11.

25. "Diary and Letters of Caira Robbins," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* 4 (1905-1910): 63, 67.