

A Well Dressed Woman of Recent Times

by Matt Briggs

A WELL DRESSED WOMAN OF RECENT TIMES

In the country of America where since Colonial times a few families have lived generation after generation in the same house, some clothing of a former epoch has also survived. However, now in the modern day when the traditional family home is rapidly becoming a thing of the past; families move about the country each generation seeking a new habitat; the ultra modern up to date house has neither attics nor storerooms; people live in apartments, in hotels, even in trailers; now under these modern conditions, unless some definite plan is made and adhered to, the costume of today's people may not survive the current epoch.

To meet the needs of future museums gathered together and preserved are garments of the present, the archeological values of which may not be generally appreciated but will be in time to come. It has been with this view that the wardrobe of Gertrude Heim Remy has been arranged for preservation together with some of her small personal articles with photographs of her and her activities and her home in order to give as complete a picture as possible to a future generation of the costuming and personal property surrounding a well dressed woman of recent times.

THE WARDROBE OF GERTRUDE HEIM REMEY

Among her friends, Gertrude had the reputation of being the best dressed woman in Washington. On her annual visit to Paris, she

would spend a certain number of days diligently at work on her wardrobe, but she wasted no time on shopping. She planned outfits of clothes as an architect would a house. She bought and had made what her plans and specifications called for, so when the job was finished, it was complete and her mind was then free for other things. Her wardrobe, always up to date, was not merely a collection of clothing, but rather an assemblage of ensembles ranging from simple morning house frocks to sport clothes and riding attires and elaborate evening gowns. In addition to hats, gowns and dresses, this collection contains many pairs of shoes together with handbags and purses, vanity compacts, elaborate combs to wear in the hair and other articles of adornment.

In order to make this exhibit more complete, some toilet articles have also been included, which all taken together forms a picture of the intimate and personal belongings of a lady of the early 1930s.

REMOVAL OF THE BODY

At Gertrude's funeral the choir boys sang, "Nearer My God to Thee." Brigadier General Thornton noted that he could hardly keep himself from crying and that Charles Remy trembled with emotion.

LOOKING FOR GERTRUDE

August 12, 1932 -- Dear Mother — Before now Mary will have told you of Gertrude's death. She died just a week ago this morning at the Emergency Hospital. She had been ill for ten days and had suffered a great deal. No one, not even her doctor, realized how serious was her condition until it was too late to save her.

I have not written you before because there was nothing you nor anyone else could do. John and Margaret and Mary came down, and several of Gertrude's friends and relatives from Kansas City. There were many people here to help me. George William remained here

at the house day and night until after the funeral when Tom came. Tom is with me for a few days now and when he goes, George will return.

In a few days, as soon as I can get some things done, I will close the house and go to Jonestown. I plan to open the house in late fall and live here this winter until I can sell the place, after which I will look about and settle myself in other quarters.

You must not worry about me. I have a hold of myself only I am feeling very much done up and tired out. I have two good servants, and between them and Tom and George and many others, I am well cared for.

I am trying to busy myself as much as possible with things that I have to do and then the time passes.

Gertrude's body is in the vault at Rock Creek. I went the other day with George and Tom to Phick Chuck Yard and selected a lot there in the little country cemetery. As soon as everything can be arranged, we will place her remains there.

Day before yesterday was Father's birthday. I went down to Annapolis to see his bust that is now there in the library building. It stands at the foot of the big staircase and is seen from the vestibule as one enters the building. It is a good likeness, as you will see by the photograph that I sent you some days ago.

My love to you all, your affectionate son,

CMR [Charles Mason Remey]

P.S. -- Please tell Mary that letter writing is very difficult for me, so not to expect to hear often but that I will communicate with her if I need anything or have any other pressing reason for writing.

CMR

P.P.S. -- A letter has just come from Mary telling me that you read the details of Gertrude's death in the newspapers. I hoped you would be spared from the distress. Gertrude's illness was mental and she was ill for ten days as I have stated in my letter. Her's was a mental illness not a physical illness.

CMR

{Stationary from Long Peak Inn: A gentle, blue mountain rises in the distance like the swell in a quilt. In the foreground, a little roadside inn with windows spilling yellow light out onto the brown road.}

25 August 1932 -- I would not write to you, being so much a stranger to you in reality but after careful thought about Gertrude, I have reached a conclusion which whether true or not, has given her action an explanation which has seemed to be more comprehensive and less shocking and I feel that writing it to you, who did not know her through her years of struggle, that perhaps it might mitigate it for you also.

I have known Gertrude well all of her grown life and have been very fond her in spite of various, to my mind, faults. We had periods of separation when our tastes were different but have always remet and gone on as if nothing had occurred. And as I think of her desire to achieve a position which may seem an aim not of the value she set upon it, I have decided that with her very real gift for being a real hostess that desire was for her the necessity almost of a singer for an audience, she needed it use and fulfill a real talent. She never

used to show off, or to splurge. but to give real pleasure in an artistic and graceful manner. She achieved it in Kansas City in the face of enormous odds and I have always admired her greatly for her successful achievement.

When she married you, we all felt that she had reached a safe haven after a life of considerable storms. Moreover, she was going to exert her real talent.

When the news came that she was not to go on, it seemed that it was the crashing down of all that she had spent her whole life building up to, the ruin of years of effort. It would be like destroying your books. Evidently it came at a moment of high nerve tension due to a dozen causes and something gave. Unless some experienced psychologist could have stayed on the spot, which was impossible, I don't believe anyone could have really understood her nor made any real impression on her. We do endure these sufferings and we know that help is always being offered us if we are only able to take it.

Ethel Greenbough Holes

February 21, 1933 -- My Dear Mary -- As time goes on, I am trying to figure out Mrs. Remy's condition that caused her tragedy and now more light comes and I see things that I had not before noticed.

When Mrs. Dunlop came on from Kansas City to Washington for the funeral she told me that while living in Kansas City Mrs. Remy had formed the habit of taking some drug.

Not long since going through Mrs. Remy's medicine cabinet in her bathroom, I found a bottle of luminal tablets and on smelling the bottle I recognized a sort of sweet odor that I had frequently noticed on Mrs. Remy's breath. Up until that time, I had imagined it was

some tooth paste she used. Now I am convinced it was those tablets. As you probably know luminal is a mild drug used to quiet the nerves and to make people sleep.

Five days before Mrs. Remey's death I came in one afternoon and found her in a drowsy state from which I couldn't arouse her. I, therefore, called Dr. Adams and the late Mrs. Remey told him she had taken a number of luminal tablets. She didn't know how many.

Now, I am wondering if this does not explain some of the extraordinary things that happened. During the last few days of Mrs. Remey's life she was very changeable. One moment she would cling to me and seek my protection and be her own natural self and then very suddenly she would change completely and apparently seem to dislike one very much. These changes, as I say, were from one extreme to the other.

I am writing to ask you if you can throw any light on these matters. I'll appreciate knowing anything you can tell me, for I know there was no one who knew Mrs. Remey as well as you did, not even myself.

Mr. Heim has been here in Washington recently. He has then all of Mrs. Remey's silver, her jewels, all of her clothing, and some small things, like cigarette cases, purses, etc. All of the remaining things that belong to her he left here in the house to be called for later. I hope he will begin now to settle the estate.

CMR

March 25, 1933 -- There remains the mystery of why Gertrude had these mental changes, as it were from one extreme moved to another without apparent cause. These were so pronounced in the

last few days of her life that when I heard these stories about her drug use I wondered if something like that couldn't have produced those changes. You know drug addicts are often affected in that way. For Gertrude, though, I do not think this explains her behavior.

CMR

INVENTORY OF WARDROBE

One Skirt satin; One Dress and skirt, satin, lace embroidered; One Skirt, satin, grey; One Summer dress crepe, black and white, print; One Dress and skirt, crepe, white; One Evening gown pink georgette; One Skirt, satin pink; One Knitting bag, brocade, multicolored; One slip satin, white; Three Clothes hangers; Six Riding crops; One Umbrella; One Walking Cane; One Wig, brown, human hair; One Wig, silver, artificial; Ten Handkerchiefs; Six Paris silk hose; Four Collars for riding habits; One Nightcap, lace; One Bathing cap; One Evening gown white, crepe, lace embroidered; One Skirt, white georgette; One Negligee, pink, brocade; Three piece suit, grey, silk and wool; One Blouse, satin, wine; One Evening gown, crepe, white with rhinestone; One Negligee silk, pink, lace embroidered; One Negligee satin, pink, lace embroidered; One Skirt, crepe, pink; One Skirt crepe, georgette; Two Skirt satin, white; One Dress, crepe, black; One Dress satin, black; One Dress crepe, black and white; One Dress and skirt, velvet, black; One Leather coat, brown; One Leather coat, grey; One Coat, white flannel; One Dress grey cretonne; One Skirt, black satin; One Evening gown white, georgette, rhinestone shoulder straps (white feathers); One Skirt, black georgette, rhinestone shoulder straps; One Riding habit, checkered; One Riding habit, brown; Two Riding suits, coat and trousers; One Overcoat, grey striped; One Suit, fur trimmed, red velvet; One Evening gown and jacket, cretonne; One Negligee brocade; One Costume evening gown; Seven Straw hats; Four Shirts

for riding habits; Four Collars for riding habits; One Negligee, green crepe georgette; Two Handbags; Two Cigarette cases; Three Cigarette lighters; One Opera glasses, mother of pearl; Twelve Hair combs, large and decorated; One Five piece dressing table set, tortoise shell; Two Fans; One Miniature portrait on ivory of Gertrude H. Remey; Two Pairs riding boots, brown; One Pair sport shoes, brown; One Evening coat, red velvet, fur collar and cuffs; One Dress, crepe, brown, red and pink print; One Dress and jacket, crepe, black and white; One Evening gown, brown satin; One Coat, black crepe, fur cuffs; One Blouse black crepe, fur cuffs; One Blouse black crepe fur cuffs; One Dress, black satin, lace embroidered; One Evening gown satin, white; One Evening gown satin, white, rhinestone shoulder straps; One Evening gown, brocade, silver; One Skirt of evening gown, red georgette; One Jacket, red velvet; One Dress, grey wool; One Negligee, satin, ivory; One Evening gown and jacket, tan georgette; One Evening gown, satin, ivory, lace embroidered; Eight Nightgowns, satin; Two Nightgowns, georgette; Seven Slips, silk; Twenty Slips, satin; One Bedjacket, white satin; One Bedjacket, brown velvet, lace embroidered; Three Corsets; Thirteen Pairs of gloves; Nineteen Handbags; One Box assorted artificial flowers; One Derby (riding hat); One Straw hat, white; One Straw hat, blue; One Felt hat, red; One Felt hat, black with velvet; One Felt hat, black with ermine; One Felt hat, brown; One Felt hat, grey; One Felt hat, grey with grey wool; One Satin hat, black with artificial flowers; Five Pairs of shoes, black; Three Pairs of shoes, black, silver buckles; One Pairs of shoes, gold; Two Pairs of shoes, gold, decorated; Two Pairs of shoes, tan; Two Pairs of shoes, tan, decorated; Two Pairs of shoes, green; One Pairs of shoes, white; One Pairs of shoes, white, golf; One Pairs of shoes, brown, golf; One Pairs of shoes, red; Three Pairs of shoes, pink ; One Pairs of shoes, wine; Two Pairs of shoes, silver with buckles; One Pairs of shoes, alligator; One Pairs of shoes, grey snake-skin; One Pairs of shoes, dark brown, satin; One Pairs of shoes, grey, patent leather; One Pairs of shoes, light brown satin; One Pairs of bedroom slippers, rose and gold; One Black Coat, ermine collar and cuffs; One Black Coat, velvet collar; One Black

Jacket, black velvet collar and cuffs; One Black Dress and jacket, black velvet; One Beige dress, fur cuffs; One Brown velvet jacket; One Black velvet jacket, linked with crepe; One Cut glass powder-puff box with enamel inlay; Two Satin doilies; One Perfume bottle with enamel inlay; One Cigarette lighter (initialed G.H.R.); Two Tortoise shell Hair pins; One Compact in bag with enamel inlay; One Cigarette case with enamel inlay; One Hair brush; One Mirror (enamel inlay with carved ivory); One Comb.

FUNERARY OFFERINGS

In 1940, Charles Mason Remey sent the 1997 Volumes of his personal diaries (1903-1940) to eighteen universities with the stipulation that his diaries not to be opened until 1995. The diaries offer an account of his friendships, social life, travels, study of the Baha'I faith, and an account of his marriage to Gertrude Heim Klemm Mason.

Note: Request to publish materials; Manuscript Librarian; Milton S. Eisenhower Library; Johns Hopkins University, 3400 N, Charles St.; Baltimore, MD 21218.

