



### Claire/McCardell Press Release

BALTIMORE, Md. (November 2, 2022) – The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) announces the opening of [Claire/McCardell](#), the first exhibition in nearly 20 years dedicated to the work of the iconic fashion designer Claire McCardell (1905–1958). Opening on November 5, this landmark exhibition offers a major contribution to the larger conversation about McCardell, a native of Frederick, Maryland, by exploring how her life experience and worldview shaped her creative practice.

Claire McCardell created trends that remain ingrained in American fashion today, including separates, ballet flats, pockets in dresses, cat-eye sunglasses, pedal pushers, and “ballet britches,” today called leggings. The style of McCardell’s dresses was unlike anything at that time and earned her the nickname “The Gal that Defied Dior.”

MCHC’s [Barbara P. Katz Fashion Archives](#) contains thousands of garments spanning four centuries of history. The Fashion Archives is also home to one of the largest collections of Claire McCardell designs, including dresses worn by the designer herself.

“MCHC is fortunate to be the steward of this amazing collection of fashion history, enabling us to connect to the past in personal ways and explore social history. Claire McCardell’s story is a reflection of women challenging the norm and seeking utilitarian solutions to everyday obstacles. Adding pockets to dresses, for example, was revolutionary and liberating,” said Katie Caljean, President & CEO at MCHC.

Over 20 designs on custom forms will be displayed in the 1,000-square-foot exhibition, including rare samples never commercially produced. These iconic fashions will set the stage as never-before-seen personal letters, diary entries, and photographs take the visitor on an intimate journey through the McCardell’s heart and mind.

In spring of 2020, fashion designer Tory Burch and her team explored the Claire McCardell collection at MCHC to gain a deeper understanding of McCardell’s designs. Drawing on elements from McCardell’s historic designs, Tory Burch launched her Spring/Summer 2022 collection. Burch also created the Claire McCardell Fashion Fellowship, in partnership with MCHC, to give a professional in the museum field the opportunity to create an exhibition on McCardell’s life and work.

“This fellowship has not only been a dream opportunity for me, but also a significant moment in fashion history as well as women’s history,” said Robyn Levy, MCHC Tory Burch Claire McCardell Fashion Fellow who curated the exhibition. “Claire McCardell was ahead of her time by creating her own designs and standing up for her wants in a male-dominant industry.”

Burch has also written a special foreword to a new edition of McCardell’s 1956 book [What Shall I Wear?](#) to cultivate new readership for the classic fashion publication.

Press are invited to preview the exhibition this Thursday, November 3, from 9–10 am. Please contact Margot Kopera at [mkopera@mdhistory.org](mailto:mkopera@mdhistory.org) for more information.

A virtual discussion complementing the exhibition is scheduled for November 10. Guests include Tory Burch, American fashion designer and entrepreneur; April Calahan, co-creator/host of the podcast *Dressed: The History of Fashion*; and Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson, a Baltimore-based storyteller who writes about architecture, design, cities, culture, and of course, Claire McCardell. Victoria Pass, Associate Professor of Fashion and Design History at The Maryland Institute College of Art, will moderate. Speakers will discuss how they personally connect with McCardell and her work.

### UPCOMING RELATED PUBLIC PROGRAMMING:

- October 13, 12-1 pm (virtual)—Claire McCardell: WWII and the American Look with Robyn Levy, Tory Burch Claire McCardell Fashion Fellow
- November 5, 6-8 pm—*Claire / McCardell* Opening Party
- November 10, 12-1 pm (virtual)—Fashion's Unsung Hero: A Conversation about Claire McCardell's Lasting Influence
- December 3, 10-11 am (virtual)—Object Dive: Paper Dolls and American Fashion Art-Making Virtual Workshop

Learn more about these free events at [mdhistory.org/events](https://mdhistory.org/events).

### ABOUT THE MARYLAND CENTER FOR HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) collects, preserves, and interprets the history, art, and culture of Maryland. Originally founded as the Maryland Historical Society in 1844, MCHC inspires critical thinking, creativity, and community through its Museum, Library, and education programs. The Museum and H. Furlong Baldwin Library are currently open Wednesday-Saturday. Museum hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Library hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Learn more at [mdhistory.org](https://mdhistory.org), including MCHC's safety procedures.

### MEDIA CONTACT

Margot Kopera  
Director of Learning & Interpretation  
[mkopera@mdhistory.org](mailto:mkopera@mdhistory.org)