

THE DRESS DETECTIVES

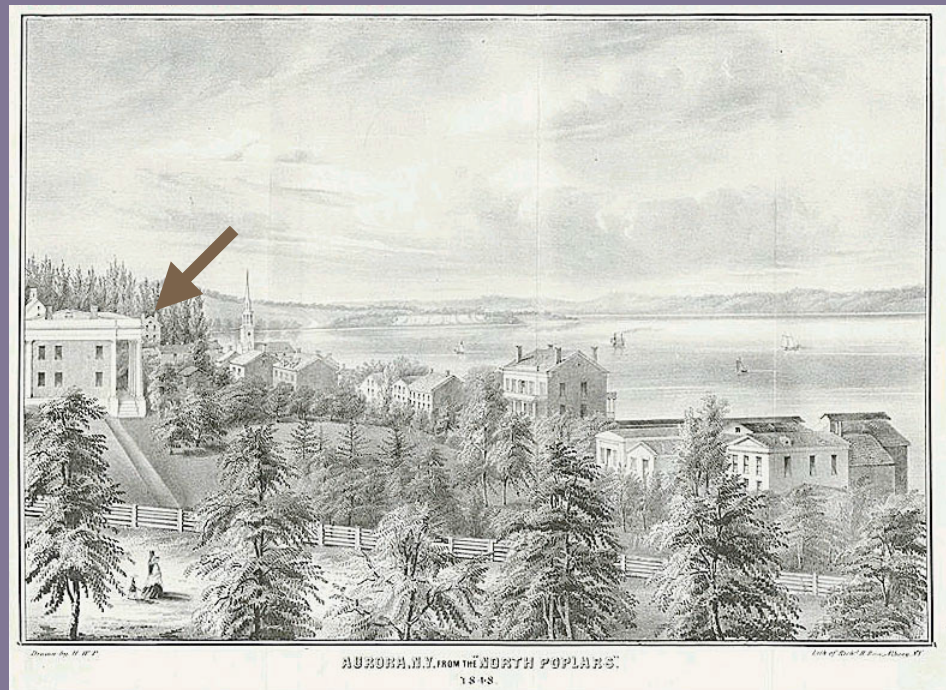
Or,

A Generous Gift Explored

CHAPTER 1:

In which we encounter a mystery

Kate Morgan was born in 1847, the year before this view of Aurora was engraved, to Henry Morgan and his wife Mary Platt Morgan. Their home is the large house with pillars on the left in this view. Today it is known as Taylor House.



Aurora in 1848

In June of 1870, Kate married William Brookfield, who had been a student at the Cayuga Lake Academy in Aurora. His Bushwick Glass Works in Brooklyn would soon become a major manufacturer of glass insulators. The Brookfields lived in New York; William died in 1898 and Kate in 1918, leaving four sons.

In December of 2012, Kate's great-granddaughter, Kate Morgan Wyckoff-Holmes, gave two of Kate Morgan's dresses to the historical collection of the Village of Aurora.

When were these dresses made? Do they reveal anything about Kate's life?

CHAPTER 2:

Ready for the Ball: The Evening Dress



Photographed in Taylor House

The evening dress is in two parts, bodice and skirt, still accompanied by one matching garter. The silk is very light and lustrous, striped in cream, beige and lavender taupe.

The nearly invisible stitches on the skirt's seams are completely even: they were made by machine. Sewing machines began to be used in the 1860s.

Could the lavender stripes be dyed with mauve? The first of the synthetic aniline dyes, mauve was invented serendipitously in 1856 and became wildly popular after Queen Victoria wore a silk dress dyed with mauve in 1862. Dresses of the era show a range of mauve-derived colors, from deep purple through pale lilac to lavender taupe. The gold fringe nicely accents the color.





Photographed in Taylor House



1860-1863 ball gown, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Pleats allowed the skirt to spring out over the supporting hoops, as in this museum display.

CHAPTER 3:

Stepping Out in Green Satin



Photographed in
Taylor House

The second dress, also a bodice and skirt, is green satin. Today it looks olive green, but un-faded portions are forest green. It is decorated with purple fringe.

Note how long the back of the skirt is compared to the front. This train accommodated a bustle, a style that took over from the hoop skirt (still worn for evenings) around 1870.