John Burbidge and Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge
Wedding Design Collection, 1951-2006

NMAH.AC.0562
Catherine Keen
1997 November
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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title: John Burbidge and Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge Wedding Design Collection
Identifier: NMAH.AC.0562
Date: 1951-2006
Extent: 1.6 Cubic feet (3 boxes)
Creator: Bellefleur-Burbidge, Cile
Priscilla of Boston.
Burbidge, John (costume designer)
Language: English
Summary: Includes Burbidge's design drawings for wedding gowns while employed by the Priscilla of Boston firm, and scrapbooks documenting Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge's wedding cakes.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
The collection was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Burbidge. The design drawings were donated in 1997 and the scrapbooks were donated in 2007.

Related Materials
Materials at the National Museum of American History
The Division of Home and Community Life has a collection of several Priscilla of Boston wedding gowns.

Other Finding Aids
Inventory available.

Processing Information
Processed by Catherine Keen, archivist, November 1997; revised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist, November 2010.

Preferred Citation
John and Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge Wedding Design Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Restrictions
The collection is open for research.

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Biographical / Historical
John Burbidge was a creative and prolific fashion designer for the Priscilla of Boston wedding gown company from the late 1940s to 1985. Burbidge, born in 1922, went to work for the Priscilla of Boston firm in 1948, after graduating from the New England School of Art and Design and serving for three years in the Army during World War II. He started out operating a button machine and gradually worked his way up to designing. His technique involved clipping photographs of models from magazines, laying tracing paper over the cut-out, and tracing the figure, onto which he added his design. After creating, in his words, "hundreds" of sketches and doodles, he would work out the details in muslin. Eventually he achieved status as Priscilla Kidder's favorite designer and was known for his use of certain features, such as bows, bustled backs, puffed sleeves and "star" bodices. The high point in his career with Priscilla of Boston was in 1971 when he designed the wedding dress worn by President Nixon's daughter Tricia at her White House wedding. The design had a strong influence on wedding fashion, though the design used was never duplicated by the company. Since leaving Priscilla of Boston, Burbidge has made a second career designing and creating dolls in elegant historic costume, while Burbidge's wife, Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge, designs and creates elegant and elaborate wedding cakes.

Scope and Contents
Includes Burbidge's design drawings for wedding gowns while employed by the Priscilla of Boston firm, and two scrapbooks documenting Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge's wedding cakes. Also included are two books written by Cile Burbidge on cake decorating.

Arrangement
The collection is divided into three series.
Series 2; Wedding Cake Scrapbooks,
Series 3: Books,

Names and Subject Terms
This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:
Subjects:

Costume design -- 1970-1990
Costume designers
Fashion design -- 1970-1990
Wedding cakes
Wedding costume -- 1970-1990

Types of Materials:

Design drawings
Interviews
Scrapbooks -- 20th century
Sound recordings

Series 1, Wedding Gown Designs and Materials Related to John Burbidge, 1968-1985, consists almost entirely of design sketches John Burbidge made for wedding gowns manufactured by Priscilla of Boston between the years 1968 and 1985. The sketches are in pencil or color pencil, and occasionally, ink. Following the sketches, there are packets of photographs of dolls in historic costume which Burbidge designed and created. Also included are tapes and a transcript of a 1998 oral history interview of the Burbidges conducted by Claudia Kidwell, Priscilla Wood and Catherine Keen. The design sketches have been arranged, as much as possible; in chronological order, but for several reasons this was difficult or impossible to do with certainty. John Burbidge did not date his designs, though most have design numbers on the sketches. Some sketches have two numbers on them, and to add further complication, many design numbers were re-used in later years. Further complicating the organization, the company did not consistently use certain numbered "series" for the same design lines. For example, during one year the 1500 series would be used for gowns in the Priscilla Boutique line, another year series 1600 might be used. Dating was done by comparison with advertising tear sheets and publicity photographs found in the Priscilla of Boston Collection, (ACNMAH #557) and with the illustrated seasonal style books which also are found in the Priscilla of Boston Collection. After lengthy research, only a portion of the designs were dated. These are indicated in this finding aid by italics and/or bold lettering for design numbers. Numbers which are italicized indicate designs which were dated by comparison with tear sheets or publicity photographs in the Priscilla of Boston Collection. Numbers which are in bold lettering indicate designs which were dated by comparison with illustrations in the style books located in the Priscilla of Boston Collection. Those which are italicized and in bold lettering indicate designs which were dated by comparison with design descriptions in the style books located in the Priscilla of Boston Collection. Those which appear in neither bold lettering nor italics, but which were put into folders with specific dates were put there because they had been clipped or stapled together by Burbidge and were assumed to be from the same time period as those they were attached to. Design lines are specified, when possible, after 1976, when the style books first appear in the Priscilla of Boston Collection. Order that is not numerical was used in cases in which Burbidge had some sketches stapled together. As much as possible, sketches were kept in his order.

Box 1, Folder 1  
Sketches for designs including numbers 903, 904, 907, 911, 913-915, 917, 920, 1968

Box 1, Folder 2  
Sketches for designs, series 8000, Bridesmaid, numbers 8000 -8010, 8012-8014, 8016, 8018, 8020, 8022, 8024, 8025, 1971

Box 1, Folder 3  
Sketches for designs, series 1900, Priscilla Boutique, numbers 1900-B, 1902-B, 1971

Box 1, Folder 4  
Two sketches done for Tricia Nixon. One (which is annotated "Triss") is an early design for Tricia Nixon's wedding gown. The other can be seen worn by Tricia Nixon in a newspaper photograph, 1971

Box 1, Folder 5  
Sketches for Spring/Summer designs, series 500, 1500, 5000. (numbers 506, 507, 560 and 1501 matches photographs in the Priscilla of Boston Papers.)
Numbers include 504, 506, 507, 508, 510, 512, 560, 1500, 1501, 1502, 1503, 1508, 1509, 1510, 5001, 5003, 5007, 5008, 5009, 5011, 5025, 5037, 5038, 1974

**Box 1, Folder 6**

Sketches for Fall/Winter designs, series 700, 1700. Includes numbers 700, 701, 704, 1705, 1706, 1703, 1707, 1708, 1974

**Box 1, Folder 7**

Sketches for designs, Series 6000. Numbers include 6020, 6021, 6022, 6023, 6025, 6025, (number is repeated but design is different), 6026, 6026, 6027, 6028, 6029, 6032, 6033, 6034, 6035, 6036, 6037, 6038, 6040, 6041, 6000-6002, 6004, 6005, 6007, 6009, 6010, 6013, 6015, 6016, 6017, 6018, 6019, 6034, 6035, 6005, 6006, 6008, 6012, 6013, 6002, 6003, 6005, 6001, 6000, 6002, 6005, 6006, 6007, 6009, 6010, 6011, 1974

**Box 1, Folder 8**

Sketches for "Capsule" designs, series 6000. Includes designs 6001, 6003, 6004, 6006, 6008, 6009, 1976

**Box 1, Folder 9**


**Box 1, Folder 10**

Sketches for Fall designs, series 500, 1500, 5000. Includes Priscilla design numbers 500, 501, 503, 505, 506, 507, 508, 511, 515, 516; Priscilla Boutique design numbers 1502, 1504, 1510, 1514; and Bridesmaid design numbers 1516, 5000, 5001, 5002, 5003-5006, 5008, 5012, 5013, 1978, 1979

**Box 1, Folder 11**

Sketches for spring designs, series 600, 1600, 6000. Includes Priscilla design numbers 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606 (2), 607, 608-610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 617; Priscilla Boutique numbers 1612, 1613, 1615, 1616, 1618, 1619; Bridesmaid design numbers 6000, 6001-6004, 6005, 6006, 6007, 6008, 6009, 6010-6016, 6017, 6018-6020, 6022, 6023, 6024, 6026, 6027, 6028, 6029, 6031, 1979

**Box 1, Folder 12**

Sketches for Fall designs, Series 700, 1700, 7000. Includes Priscilla design numbers 702, 719; Priscilla Boutique numbers 1702, 1708, 1709, 1710, 1711, 7000; Bridesmaid design numbers 7001, 7002, 7003, 7004, 7005, 7006, 7007, 1979

**Box 1, Folder 13**


**Box 1, Folder 14**

321; Bridesmaid design numbers 8000, 8001-8009, 8011 (2), 8012-8014, 8015, 8016, 8024, 1980


Box 1, Folder 16  Sketches for winter designs, series 600. Includes Priscilla Custom design numbers 601, 602, 605, 608, 616, 1982, 1981

Box 1, Folder 17  Sketches for 1982 designs, series 8800. Includes design numbers 8800, 8801, 8802, 8803, 8804, 8805, 8806, 8807, 8808, 8809

Box 1, Folder 18  Sketches for Spring/Summer 1982 designs, Series 2-R-8-R, 700, 1700, 7000. Includes Contemporary Romantic design numbers 2-R, 6-R, 8-R; Priscilla design numbers 1704, 1707, 1712, 1716, 1728, 1729, 1732, 1733; Custom design numbers 701, 703, 706, 715; Bridesmaid design numbers 7003, 7004, 7013, 7015, 7017

Box 1, Folder 19  Sketches for 1982 designs, series 200, 600, 1200, 1600, 6000. Includes Teeny design numbers 219, 221, 222, Contemporary Romantic design numbers 1216, 1221, 1223, 1224, 1225; Custom design numbers 601, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610; Priscilla design numbers 1625-1627, 1628, 1629; Bridesmaid design numbers 6000,6001, 6002, 6003, 6005, 6006, 6008, 6014B, 6016 B/S, 6018 B/S, 6019 B/S, 6020 B/S, 6021 B/S, 6022 B/S, 6026

Box 1, Folder 20  Sketches for 1982/1983 designs, series 300, 400, 800, 1800, 8000. Includes Teeny design numbers 419, 421, 424; Custom design numbers: 800, 801, 806, 807, 809, 810, 811, 812, 814, 815, 818, 820, 821; Priscilla design numbers 1806, 1808, 1809, 1815, 1817, 1822, 1831; Bridesmaid design numbers 8000, 8001, 8002, 8004, 8005, 8010, 8011, 8017, 8019, 8020, 8021, 8022, 8024, 8031, 8032

Box 1, Folder 21  Sketches for 1983 designs, series 114, 500, 1500, 5000. Includes Teeny design numbers 114, Custom design numbers 500, 505, 512; Priscilla design numbers 1500, 1501, 1502, 1503, 1514; Bridesmaid design numbers 5004, 5001

Box 1, Folder 22  Sketches for 1983 designs, series 60R-73R, 900, 1900, 9000 Includes Contemporary Romantic design numbers 60R, 61R, 62R, 65R, 73R; Custom design numbers 901, 903, 902, 905, 906, 909, 910, 913; Priscilla design numbers 1901, 1914, 1916, 1922, 1924, 1928; Bridesmaid design numbers 9000, 9002, 9003, 9006, 9008, 9010, 9020, 9028
Box 1, Folder 23  Sketches for 1983, 1984 designs. Includes design numbers 600, 601, 603, 604 (2), 606 (2), 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 6000, 6003, 6011, 6013, 6014, 6015, 6016, 6017

Box 1, Folder 24  Sketches for Spring/Summer 1984 designs, series 600, 1600, 6000. Includes design numbers 600, 603, 604, 607; Priscilla design numbers 1605, 1623, 1625, 1626, 1629, 6011, 6012, 6013, 6014; Bridesmaid design numbers 6004

Box 1, Folder 25  Sketches for 1984 designs, Series 1700. Includes design numbers 1700, 1701

Box 1, Folder 26  Sketches for February, March 1985 designs, series 400, 500, 700, 1700, 1800, 7000. Includes design numbers 411, 412, 501, 701, 702, 704, 705, 708, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 766, 804, 1706, 1709, 1714, 1715, 1800, 1803, 1804, 1806, 7002, 7003, 7004, 7008

Box 1, Folder 27  Sketches for 1985 designs, series 800, 1800, 8000. Includes Custom design numbers 802, 803, 806; Priscilla design numbers 1800, 1803, 1805, 1807, 1818; Bridesmaid design nos. 8018, 8019, 8020

Box 1, Folder 28  Sketches for Summer 1985 designs, series 900, 1900, 9000. Includes design numbers 900, 901, 902, 903, 906, 907, 908, 909, 911, 913, 914, 915, 916, 1912, 1928, 1929, 9011, 9013, 9020, 9021

Box 1, Folder 29  Sketches for 1984, 1985 designs, series 200, 700, 800 1800. Includes design numbers 200, 201, 202, 206, 209, 701, 707, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 808, 810, 811, 854, 856, 859, 1801, 1806, 1808, 1809, 1814, 1815 (2), 1818, 1822, 1824

Box 1, Folder 30  Undated sketches, 1980s. Includes design numbers 1-R, 4-R, 13-R, 16-R, 84-R

Box 1, Folder 31  Undated sketches, design numbers 101, 119, 122, 216, 325, 424

Box 1, Folder 32  Undated sketches, design numbers 500, 502 - 505, 508, 509, 1507, 1509, 1512, 5010, 5016

Box 1, Folder 33  Undated sketches, design numbers 1509, 1512, 1513

Box 1, Folder 34  Undated sketches, design numbers 500, 501, 502, 507, 510, 511, 512, 1504, 1511, 1519

Box 1, Folder 35  Undated sketches, design numbers 600, 603, 604, 605, 606

Box 1, Folder 36  Undated sketches, design numbers 700, 701, 703, 705, 706, 709, 716, 717, 721, 1706

Box 1, Folder 37  Undated sketches, design numbers 954, 9004
Box 1, Folder 38  Undated sketches, design numbers 1617, 1624

Box 1, Folder 39  Undated sketches, design numbers 1924, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1953

Box 1, Folder 40  Undated sketches, design numbers 5003, 5005, 5006, 5007(2), 5008, 5009(2), 5010(2), 5011(2), 5014, 5015, 5016, 5017, 5020(2), 5021, 5028, 5039, 5016, 5017, 5018, 5022, 5023, 5024, 5025, 5026, 5027, 5028, 5030, 5037, 5038

Box 1, Folder 41  Undated sketches, design numbers 5019, 5023, 5024, 615X, 6023, and six other unnumbered designs, but all are sketches for bridesmaid separates

Box 1, Folder 42  28 Undated sketches, design numbers 6000, 6003, 6004, 6008, 6010, 6012, 6014(3)

Box 1, Folder 43  Undated sketches, design numbers 6000, 6001, 6032, 6033

Box 1, Folder 44  Undated sketch, design numbers 9022

Box 1, Folder 45  Undated, unnumbered sketches

Box 1, Folder 46  Undated, unnumbered sketches

Box 1, Folder 47  Undated, unnumbered sketches, photocopies

Box 1, Folder 48  Four packets of photographs of dolls wearing historic costume, designed by John Burbidge; an advertisement for a doll and toy show Burbidge participated in, 1996; two articles about Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge's career as designer and maker of wedding cakes

Box 1, Folder 49  Oral history interview, John and Cile Burbidge, original audiocassettes, 1998

Box 2, Folder 1  Oral history interview, John and Cile Burbidge, reference audiocassettes, 1998

Box 2, Folder 2  Transcript of interview, 1998

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Series 2: Wedding Cake Scrapbooks, 1951-2006

2 Items

Series 2, Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge's Wedding Cake Scrapbooks, 1951-2006, consists of two large scrapbooks in chronological order, documenting Cile Bellefleur-Burbidge's career in wedding cake design and creation. Volume one begins with photographs from the Burbidges' own 1951 wedding and a short autobiographical statement. Included in the scrapbook are: articles from numerous publications about the wedding cake business, letters from grateful clients, and many photographs of completed cakes.

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2 Items

Box 1, Folder 50  
*Cake Decorating for Any Occasion*, 1978

Box 2, Folder 3  
*The Fine Art of Cake Decorating*, 1983

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