

return to (Miss) Mildred G. Burrage
Box 505,
Kennebunkport, Maine.

SHIP YARD FASHION SHOW.

There is a new kind of Fashion Show these days; its theme, "What the Well-Dressed Woman War Worker Wears." Recently, the New England Ship Building Corporation, an affiliate of the Todd Shipyards Corp., held such a show at their Yards in South Portland, Maine.

The girls work with men, and replace men. They bring with them the standards of the world they have left behind. They want to look pretty! Curls come out from under the required head covering. Little sweaters with no sleeves appear. Pants get rolled up to show a shapely leg. It is easy to forget that a woman's hair can get caught in machinery, and scalping can occur, --- even if it hasn't been done in Maine for two hundred years. Bare arms and legs can be burned by flying slag. Loose clothing can cause serious accidents. Women Counselors, going about the Yards, remind the girls of safety rules. But it is one thing to cover the curls, and another to keep them covered. They will creep out to nod at Bill, the welder, or Charlie, the ship fitter's helper.

So posters went up about the Yards, announcing a Fashion Show; feminine looking posters showing the Savings Stamp corsage designed by Mainbocher, with a red rose tucked into its red, white and blue ribbon; posters showing safety clothes and pretty girls wearing them.

The first show was held at ten thirty in the morning, the lunch period of the first shift. The band stand was decorated with signs, "The Best Dressed Women in the World". Men and women crowded around, eating their lunch, listening to the band. The girls, chosen by their shop stewards, looked very pretty as they trooped onto the stand. One of their Advisory Counselors introduced these "Best Dressed Women in the World, Uncle Sam's Defense Workers", and described their costumes.

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(Coll. 2494 Box 10/3)
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Date: 1943
Description: Shipyards fashion show report

First came a girl wearing a complete welder's outfit, leather jacket, with no back for hot weather, worn over a blue shirt, dungarees and leather chaps, safety shoes with concealed metal toes, heavy gloves. Over a closely tied bandana, she wore the welder's bonnet with its black glass window.

The second girl showed a practical grey coverall with silvered buttons, and a red, visored safety cap.

Then came a lighter weight green coverall, sleeveless, cut in a deep V to the waist, and worn with a blue, green and red plaid shirt. A heavy brown silk hair-net with a brown visor with a little green bow completed this outfit.

Eleanor Blue cotton made a trim two-piece suit, and with it was worn a turban gayly striped in red, blues, pinks and lemon yellow.

For a tacker, there was an olive green coverall, sensible and smart, with plenty of pockets. The red bandana, printed with bursting bombs, worn with this, was especially designed for women war workers by the government and treated to make it fire and water repellent.

A light-weight beige material, just the color of shipyard dust, made a two-piece suit. This ^{presented} ~~was~~ an attractive picture when worn at one show by a colored girl who added a beautifully tied turban of the same shade.

There was a blue denim coverall with a bib, worn with a light blue shirt, and a red snood which covered the hair completely.

There were khaki pants worn with a fetching red and brown shirt, and a well-cut waterproof jacket. A khaki cap hid the hair, but it was worn at a jaunty angle.

Yellow oilskins and a black sou'wester showed what to wear in the rain.

The show ended with the girls pulling out bandana handkerchiefs of all kinds and colors, printed with the insignia of the Army, the Navy, the Air Corps, the Marines, or with flowers, plaids, dots, and dashes,

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--- one for every girl's taste, big enough to tie on firmly and cover every hair. They waved them, smiling. "Remember, it's Fashionable to be Safe!", called the announcer, and the exhibition was over, with applause and friendly wisecracks from the crowd.

A second show followed in another part of the Yard, with the audience perched on piles of iron plates. The girls were old troupers now, and it went off with a bang. The whistle on the crane which lifts the plates about with such ease tooted enthusiastically. Afterwards, the girls were photographed. It reminded one of them of another festive occasion. "I had my picture taken with Mrs. Roosevelt last winter when she was here," she said proudly.

When the show for the second shift came on at seven thirty, with a new group of models, the sky was flaring with a red sunset. It had been a hot day for Maine, --- a "scorcher". Imagine being a fly on a hot flatiron and you will know what it is like working on a steel deck in a summer sun. But there was a whiff of salt in the air and it was cooler when the second show was over. In the darkening sky, a new moon looked pale and insignificant beside the lights of the Yard. Men and women, laughing and talking about the Fashion Show, streamed back to work when the whistles blew.

Half past three in the morning found the Yard a mysterious place. Everything was black, illuminated by hooded lights and fitful glows. Buildings of opaque glass flickered and pulsed with light. Dark figures, masked with strange helmets, struck blue lights, golden sparks, orange flares, as they worked. The great clamor of the Yard was as varied as an orchestra. It was dark and cool when the girls came onto the illuminated bandstand, but below, in the circle of light, showed white, tired faces, disappearing in the gloom. One sensed the weariness of the men and women working on the night shift, but they gave the girls a big hand.

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When it was all over, and the kerchiefs waved goodbye for the last time, it was dawn. The air from the sea was fresh and invigorating. A new day had come to the Ship Yard, and a new shift would come on at six thirty. Except for the few moments of eating and relaxation, work had never ceased for twenty four hours on the building of ships to carry supplies to our men overseas. It will never cease until the war is over and peace comes back again, --- more welcome than the summer dawn over the Ship Yard.

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