

Site Information: 2015 Campus Archaeology Field School

During June 2015, we discovered an exciting collection of artifacts never found on campus before located behind the Hannah Administration Building: gendered artifacts, including perfume bottles. Because of these items and the unusually high quality of ceramics found, this collection likely came from the nearby home of Professor Thomas Gunson, a 20th century horticultural professor.



Artifacts from the Admin/Gunson Assemblage
Upper: Perfume bottle
Lower: Rubifoam bottle



Scents, Consumption, and Gender

Hygiene

Westerners during the mid-nineteenth century were becoming increasingly conscious of their hygiene. They were bathing more frequently and developing a deeper interest in bodily care, making soap and dental products quite marketable.

Previously, perfume was used to hide unpleasant scents and uncleanness. As correlations between smell and illness rose, heavy scents became less popular.

Synthetic Scents

Throughout the nineteenth century, chemists gained a greater understanding of the chemical structure of scents. This permitted the mass production of man-made scents and by the twentieth century scents such as vanilla, violet and musk had been artificially created. That is not to say that these entirely replaced natural scents, increased production of soap coupled with new transportation technologies in the 1800s allowed essential oils to be made more readily available. **This resulted fragment?????**

Genderization

Along with deodorization came the gendering of perfume. Floral and sweet-smelling scents were reserved for women while “sharper, woodsy, pine, and cedar” scents were deemed masculine.

Fashion was integral to the actual processes of developing perfume. In 1910, Paul Poiret, an influential designer, used his feminine ideals to create the perfect scents as fashion accessories. **Why is this point important? Does it belong here?**

Bottle Revolution

Glass manufacturing naturally played a key role in perfume production. Mass production of glass emerged during this time thanks to French experiments in producing wine bottles. Because of this, assembly-line glass blowing into molds became a reality by 1886.

Glassmakers such as Baccarat (1822) and Verreries Brosse (1854) also began to standardize their bottles. Trademarks were achieving greater importance in the latter part of the nineteenth century resulting in labels being printed discreetly on the glass itself. Glass was made lighter as improving transportation made it safer to move delicate pieces.

René Lalique and François Coty

In 1905, Lalique opened a shop close to that of perfumer Coty. At the time, Coty had only recently achieved acclaim for his perfume La Rose Jacqueminot. The two struck up a partnership not long after with Lalique first creating labels for perfume bottles. He then turned his attention to the bottles themselves. The results were beautiful, mass produced perfume bottles that were, most importantly, affordable.

Marketing Strategy

The assemblage dates after the Industrial Revolution, but marketing during this time was fairly similar to what it had been. This was called the “production era” during which business’s success was in part due to lack of competition. At the start of the 1920s, the “sales era” took hold as competition grew, thus businesses employed new techniques to move products quickly.

The packaging of perfumes changes in order to attract customers. Poiret’s packaging resembled that of his fashion: luxurious and brilliant. The correlation between packaging and fashion only grew; Chanel No. 5, launched in 1921, was sold in a sharp gray box and in a simple flacon much in the style of those used for men’s cologne. This reflected twenties fashion which feminized masculine looks.

Scents Then & Now

La Rose Jacqueminot (1904, Coty)
Chypre (1917, Coty)
Mitsouko (1919, Guerlain)
Tabac Blond (1919, Caron)
No. 5 (1921, Chanel)
Shalimar (1921, Guerlain)



Vivaudou Perfume Ads. Upper: 1910s, lower: 1920s.

