



A Spot of Downton Abbey in Chicago

By [Megy Karydes](#) | 3/11/2016

Try not to be tempted, as I was, to reach and touch the decadent velvet that Countess of Grantham Cora Crawley wore in an episode of *Downton Abbey*. The docents are watching at The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, home to *Dressing Downton: Changing Fashion for Changing Times*. This 19th-century Chicago mansion brimming with architectural features and antiques from the Gilded Age provides the perfect backdrop for more than 35 costumes from the British period drama that recently wrapped up its final season.



Downton Abbey Season 1. Elizabeth McGovern as Cora Crawley, Countess of Grantham. ©Carnival Films / Masterpiece; White silk day dress and coat with black trim and light cream linen suit worn by Robert and Cora Crawley in Season 1. Costume courtesy of Cosprop.

The exhibit begins in the main hall entrance, where we're greeted with Cora's mother's elaborate coat, made from mixed silk fabric and trimmed with a fox fur collar and cuffs. We proceed to the front parlor, drawing room, library and dining room, where we see the costumes worn by Lady Rose MacClare, Jack Ross (the American jazz musician and singer who woos Lady Rose in Season 4), Robert Crawley and Lady Mary Crawley, among others. And this is just on the first floor. Two levels to go.



We walk up the grand marble staircase, imagining what it must have been like to be entertained here. The original owner, a banker named Samuel Mayo Nickerson, had the home outfitted with 17 types of marble and only the finest tile. If Nickerson were to build the same house today, it would cost upwards of \$80 million, according to one of the docents. So ... a pretty fitting choice for an exhibit on high fashion.



Throughout the tour, we learn more about British fashion and how it evolved. Changing mores and gender roles dictate both *Downton Abbey*'s storylines and the era's hemlines. As referenced in the show, World War I influenced fashion in Europe and the United States, with women wearing less restrictive clothing so they could be more active in charities and war-related organizations.



In one of the exhibit's final rooms, we see pictures of aristocratic American women who were as stylishly dressed as their counterparts across the Atlantic. Many traveled to Paris to acquire the latest haute couture but also shopped at large department stores like Marshall Field's and Carson Pirie Scott right here in the Windy City.

Dressing Downton continues through May 29 and includes concerts, movie viewings and a lecture by *Downton Abbey* set designer Jude Farr (April 7). Complete your experience with an afternoon tea party at the adjacent Murphy Auditorium (tickets must be purchased in advance). dressingdownton.com

Want to receive weekly digests of the midCetera blog? E-mail blog@midwestliving.com with the subject line "Subscribe".

Tags:

[Travel blog](#), [Chicago](#), [Illinois](#)

Related Links:

[Chicago Trip Guide](#)