

ELIZABETH PARKE FIRESTONE:
HER COUTURE COLLECTION AND HER ROLE AS A WOMAN OF INFLUENCE

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Parke Firestone was the daughter-in-law of Harvey Samuel Firestone Sr., the founder of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and the wife of Harvey Samuel Firestone Jr., chairman and president of the rubber company after World War II. She was a patron of the arts and amassed collections of paintings and drawings, porcelain, eighteenth-century silver, furniture, and couture clothing.

As the wife of a prominent businessman in Akron, Ohio, Elizabeth took her role very seriously. She believed in representing her husband, family, and the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company with dignity and grace. Her collection of couture clothing began because she felt it was her duty to look her best at all times. She collected paintings and drawings, porcelain, silver, and furniture to decorate their homes, mainly Twin Oaks in Akron, Ohio, and Ocean Lawn in Newport, Rhode Island. Her personal appearance and her homes were elegant and highly admired by others.

Elizabeth cared for all of her collections with the same dedication and attention to detail. She researched each purchase carefully. Her collections, including her couture clothing, were catalogued and carefully maintained. The respect she demonstrated for her clothing collection exemplified her belief that clothing is a decorative art.

Towards the end of her life, Elizabeth disposed of all of her collections in a determined and methodical manner. The Detroit Institute of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Art received valuable collections of eighteenth-century silver. She donated

clothing to historical societies, universities, and museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Elizabeth's collections of decorative art, including couture clothing, will be enjoyed and studied by students, experts, and the public for many years to come.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Virginia Gunn, an inspiring professor with a true desire to share her love of learning. It is written in memory of Thurle Boyer, a delightful and loving woman with an open heart and deep sense of commitment. Sharing this experience with these two women has been an enriching experience and one I have enjoyed immensely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Sandra Buckland and Dr. Teena Jennings-Rentenaar provided strongly appreciated and greatly needed guidance and encouragement. Charles and Retta Billow answered my many questions as I attempted to piece together the life of Elizabeth Parke Firestone. Gizella Karder gave me an understanding of Elizabeth's love of fashion and textiles that I would not have comprehended without her help. I wish to thank these special people.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a young girl, Elizabeth Parke Firestone already knew that she wanted to be an influential woman. She became a very feminine lady of luxury with an exceptionally defined idea of the role she played in the Firestone family. Her perfectionism, passion for learning, and desire to share the arts with others helped her become a woman of influence. At the end of her life, her astounding collections of couture clothing, eighteenth-century French silver, paintings, and porcelain provided her with a priceless estate. She was justifiably pleased to be able to share her collections with others for the promotion of the arts.

Elizabeth Parke was born into a well-to-do family and married into a very wealthy and powerful family. In 1921, she married Harvey Samuel Firestone Jr. His father, Harvey Samuel Firestone Sr., was already a highly successful entrepreneur and a close friend of the president of the United States. Harvey Firestone Sr. was the founder and president of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and Harvey Jr. was highly active in the business.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, women were expected to marry, then stay at home and raise a family. The ratio between male and female college graduates receiving undergraduate degrees was 4.23 men to 1 woman. When Elizabeth was married, three times as many men as women graduated from college. Women finally

equaled men in the number of college graduates in 1980.¹ In *The Founding Fortunes*, Michael Patrick Allen wrote, “the women of corporate rich families . . . are able to choose any career without the necessity of choosing one at all.”² While pursuing her education in New England and England, Elizabeth was an eager learner of the fine arts. She graduated from finishing school and did not attend college; later, her daughters graduated from college in the 1940s and 1950s. Allen also stated that, “Although [wealthy women] possess great wealth, they are often denied the power that is usually associated with such wealth.”³ If Elizabeth wanted to be influential, she needed power, and she had to find a way to gain power in spite of being a wealthy woman who did not pursue a career.

Knowing how to be a beautiful and well-mannered lady was important for any young woman wishing to marry well and live well in the early twentieth century. *Etiquette*, by Emily Post, was the best-selling nonfiction book in the United States during 1923, and it was the fourth best-selling nonfiction book in 1924.⁴ Elizabeth developed her pursuit of being beautiful and living in beautiful surroundings into an avenue towards power and influence.

Couture clothing was the resource Elizabeth used to obtain clothing that was made to her specifications, which included perfect fit, style, color, fabric, and construction. Wealthy women were willing to pay high prices for what they wanted, and the couture houses found a way to exhibit the creations these women purchased.

The School of Family and Consumer Sciences at The University of Akron received gifts of couture clothing from the estate of Elizabeth Parke Firestone in 1989 and 1991. During my undergraduate and graduate coursework at The University of

Akron, I had the privilege of viewing many of the clothing items in the Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection in historic costume, textile preservation, and clothing construction classes. As a graduate assistant, it was a pleasure to work with the collection while cataloguing, repairing, and organizing the clothing items Elizabeth had donated to the university. The collection became more and more interesting to me, and I began researching and dating specific pieces of clothing. During fall semester of 2001, I researched a 1961 gray wool day dress given to the university by Elizabeth in 1989.

Thurle Boyer, the administrative assistant to Elizabeth Parke Firestone, worked diligently with Elizabeth for several years donating many of her possessions to museums, universities, and historical societies. These donations became Elizabeth's legacy. Dr. Virginia Gunn shared the information she had about the collection with me, and our conversations intensified my interest in the collection. Dr. Gunn and I contacted Boyer, and she kindly agreed to talk with me while I was researching the gray wool day dress. Later, she was happy to be interviewed for this thesis.

When it came time for me to choose the topic for my thesis, it was thrilling to imagine researching the Firestone Collection. My research was a joy to pursue, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Learning about Akron, Ohio, history, talking to various elderly members of our community, and exploring The University of Akron archives and the Firestone Collection of personal papers at The Benson Ford Research Center were adventures I will always cherish. The research of Akron history has become a hobby, and I hope to have the opportunity to continue it in the future.

Many of Elizabeth's personal papers and over one thousand pieces of clothing, including dresses, shoes, and gloves, were donated to The Benson Ford Research Center

at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. The study of her personal papers provided a great deal of information about her collections and her life. Boyer worked for Elizabeth for over fifty years, and Gizella Karder, Elizabeth's personal seamstress in Akron, Ohio, worked for her for thirty years. Both of these ladies grew to know her well and gave great insights about Elizabeth to me.

Elizabeth led a life filled with trips to exotic places, four children, amazing wealth, and overwhelming sorrow. A study of some of the people and objects she left behind reveals how she surprised even herself with the value of the collections she so lovingly purchased, used, and maintained.

Notes

¹ Rich Reis, "Opening to Diversity: Women and Minorities" (accessed 6 January 2006); available from <http://sll.stanford.edu/projects/tomprof/newtomprof/postings/361.html>. The excerpt is from "Perspective: Historical Snapshots," *Campus Lives in Creating Community on College Campuses* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

² Michael Patrick Allen, *The Founding Fortunes: A New Anatomy of the Super-Rich Families in America* (New York, NY: Truman Talley Books, 1987), 118.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "1920s Bestsellers" (accessed 13 May 2006); available from <http://www.caderbooks.com/best20.html>.

CHAPTER II
THE FAMILY HISTORY OF ELIZABETH PARKE FIRESTONE AND HER
HUSBAND, HARVEY SAMUEL FIRESTONE JUNIOR

In the year 2000, the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, which had become Bridgestone-Firestone, Incorporated in 1988, and the Ford Motor Company were involved in a major corporate image scandal. Due to fatal tire blowout accidents on Ford Explorer sport utility vehicles equipped with Firestone fifteen-inch Wilderness tires, a massive tire recall was mandated from August, 2000 to August, 2001. The aftermath of the scandal resulted in a schism that ended a century long business relationship between the two corporate giants in May, 2001. Many of the tires in question were built at the Decatur, Illinois, tire facility. The history of this plant can be directly traced to the marriage between Harvey Samuel Firestone Jr. and Elizabeth Parke, a young woman from Decatur.¹

Although she was neither a Ford nor a Firestone by birth, Elizabeth Parke Firestone played an intriguing role in this story by being the person who led the Firestones and Fords to have business interests, including the fateful tire plant, in Decatur, Illinois. When their second daughter, Martha Parke Firestone, married William Clay Ford, Henry Ford's grandson, in 1947, the Firestone and Ford families united in a way that could not be changed by the demise of the business relationship between the two. Nearly forty years after the Decatur, Illinois, plant opened, Elizabeth's grandson

became the Chief Operating Officer of Ford Motor Company during the restructuring following the Ford Explorer-Firestone Wilderness tire scandal.

Elizabeth Parke Firestone was a significant and compelling woman in her own right, but her accomplished family, as well as the Firestones, Fords, and other prominent families, profoundly shaped her world and the woman she became. The history of her family carries a certain fascination and air of accomplishment. Guy James Parke, Elizabeth's father, owned and operated Parke and Sons Warehouses, a very successful business started by his father, Virgil Hickox Parke, in 1854, and it is still in existence in Decatur.² Parke was a descendant of Robert Parke, a passenger on the *Arbella*, the flagship of the eleven ships in the Winthrop Fleet of 1630. Four of the ships carried most of the thousand-person expedition; and, the most important passengers were on the *Arbella* with John Winthrop, a Puritan who led the fleet to settle Massachusetts Bay Colony after their arrival in Salem on June 12, 1630.³

A family wedding photograph featuring Elizabeth's mother, Gertrude Chambers Parke, and a photo of maternal grandmother, Caroline Julia Anna Newton Chambers, provide evidence of family wealth and position (see figures 2.1 and 2.2). The wedding photo was produced by Frank A. Rinehart, an Omaha, Nebraska, photographer famous for his photographic portraiture of businessmen and elegant women in the middle and upper classes.⁴ Rinehart became well-known as the official photographer of the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha. At this huge exhibition, "The Department of the Interior's Office of Indian Affairs sponsored the Indian Congress . . . that drew 500 Native Americans from 20 tribes. Rinehart, the Exposition's photographer, and his assistant were commissioned by the sponsors to take photographic portraits of



Figure 2.1. Gertrude Chambers Parke.
This is a wedding photo of Elizabeth Parke Firestone's mother, circa 1895.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 5, Folder 13,
Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.



Figure 2.2. Caroline Julia Anna Newton Chambers.
She is Elizabeth Parke Firestone's maternal grandmother.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697,
Box 5, Folder 13, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

participants.”⁵ Perhaps Elizabeth’s mother and grandmother had an ability to identify quality in fine art; later Elizabeth utilized her ability to identify quality in the fine art she collected during her lifetime.

Elizabeth’s paternal grandfather built a home at 307 West William Street in Decatur during 1866-67. She grew up in the home, and the home remained in the family, and was listed in 2002 as a historic home in the Decatur newspaper, the *Herald and Review*. The homes on West William Street appear in a photo of Guy and Gertrude Parke (see figure 2.3).⁶

The Parkes had their first child, Elizabeth, on November 6, 1896, in Decatur. Like many other young women with high aspirations at the beginning of the twentieth century, Elizabeth strove to be a woman of influence and success even when she was a little girl. She named her favorite childhood doll “Mrs. John D. Rockefeller” and wanted to be “an important lady” from the time she was seven years old.⁷ Elizabeth is holding her doll and standing with her younger sister, Gertrude, in a photograph taken at about that time (see figure 2.4).

Sewing was a part of Elizabeth’s education at home and at school. When she was eleven years old, she wrote a letter to her father while on vacation in Fish Creek, Wisconsin, with her mother, siblings, and grandparents. In the letter, she stated, “Mother is paying me 25 cents for 2 doz. buttons and this morning I sewed on 17.”⁸ In March, 1912, Elizabeth went to New York City with her father; then to Leeds, England, with her mother’s uncle, to attend Leeds Girls High School.⁹ While attending Leeds, she showed a strong desire to learn art. Upon completion of her first term, L. G. Lowe, an official at the school, wrote to her father stating, “we have had to make rather special arrangements



Figure 2.3. Guy and Gertrude Parke.
The parents of Elizabeth Parke are shown walking along
West William Street in Decatur, IL.
Source: Photo was a gift from Thurle Boyer,
Elizabeth Parke Firestone's administrative assistant, to the author.

Elizabeth Parke



Memories

1902 - 1924

Figure 2.4. Elizabeth Parke and her sister, Gertrude.
This is on the cover of Elizabeth Parke Firestone's scrapbook.
Source: This is an uncatalogued scrapbook shown to me by John Miller,
Director, The University of Akron Archives.

for her, as she did not want all the school subjects, and she wanted to take special lessons at the Art School.”¹⁰ In the fall of 1912, Elizabeth attended Rosemary Hall in Greenwich, Connecticut, and she later graduated from Miss Mary C. Wheeler School in Providence, Rhode Island.¹¹ An advertisement for Mary C. Wheeler School, in the August 1, 1948 issue of *Vogue* magazine, includes sewing in the list of courses, making it possible that sewing was taught at the school when Elizabeth attended.¹² Boyer stated that Elizabeth learned to sew while she was in school, made many of her outfits when she was young, and designed her wedding ensemble. She also said that Elizabeth’s father spoke of how proud he was of his daughter for her sense of fashion.¹³

According to an article in the *Herald and Review*, “Elizabeth Parke married into a nationally known family, but her father and grandfather were well-schooled in their own right in Decatur. Some of the Parke children, including Elizabeth, were schooled in England and ran in social circles with people like the Firestones and Muellers.”¹⁴ During the time Elizabeth attended Mary C. Wheeler School, she met Harvey Samuel Firestone Jr. at a party in Washington, D. C.¹⁵

When Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. met, Harvey Samuel Firestone Sr. was a prominent and wealthy industrialist with a respected family history. During the nineteenth century, the Firestone family had established a highly successful 640-acre sheep farm in Columbiana County, Ohio, that produced very fine wool similar to Merino wool. As he faced becoming a fourth-generation farmer, Harvey Firestone Sr. decided to move to Detroit in pursuit of a career in business. He began as a Detroit carriage salesman working for his uncle, then moved to Chicago and started a business manufacturing hard rubber tires for buggies. After merging his company with Kelly’s

Rubber Tire Wheel Co. (later Kelly-Springfield), he sold the company for a profit of \$45,000. During this period he met Idabelle Smith of Jackson, Michigan, “daughter of George Smith, inventor of the middlings purifier, an improved milling system,” in November, 1895.¹⁶

Before the turn of the century, Harvey Sr. moved to Akron, Ohio, with his bride Idabelle and their first child, Harvey Jr. He organized the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in 1900. Five years later, he made a deal with Henry Ford to supply original equipment tires for Ford’s production of two thousand automobiles, which sold for five hundred dollars each. Firestone and Ford quickly became friends. Firestone soon realized that providing replacement tires for Ford’s cars would provide a solid business opportunity. By 1910, Firestone had become a four million dollar company.¹⁷

When the Firestone family moved to Akron, they lived in the Windsor Hotel until they rented a house next to Hower House, the home of John Henry Hower, located on the edge of the Akron Municipal University campus. Harvey Jr. attended Henry Elementary School. He went on to Asheville School in Asheville, North Carolina. In 1912, his family built Harbel Manor (“Har” for Harvey + “bel” for Idabelle), which was located where Georgetown Apartments are now, on the north side of West Market Street, west of downtown Akron.¹⁸ Frank A. Seiberling, the founder of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, and his wife, Gertrude Penfield, completed their mansion, Stan Hywet, in 1915.¹⁹ Stan Hywet was located only a mile or two from Harbel Manor. The wealthy and influential rubber families of Akron were firmly established in West Akron.

Henry Ford introduced Firestone to Thomas Edison at the World’s Fair in San Francisco in 1915. Firestone also met Luther Burbank at the World’s Fair, and Burbank

introduced him to naturalist John Burroughs. Firestone, Ford, Edison, and Burroughs quickly became the “Famous Foursome,” and eventually collaborated to learn to grow rubber.

Harvey Firestone Jr. began studies at Princeton in 1916, and he met Elizabeth Parke, his future wife, at a debutante dance in late 1919 or early 1920.²⁰ During a hiatus from college, he trained in United States Naval Aviation and was photographed wearing his naval uniform in 1918 (see figure 2.5). For several years (except 1917), he accompanied his father on summer vacations with Ford, Edison, and Burroughs (who died in 1921).²¹ After graduation, he began working at Firestone in 1920.

On June 25, 1921 at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Decatur, Illinois, Harvey Firestone Jr. married Elizabeth Parke (see figure 2.6). Palms, ferns, and baskets containing roses and larkspur decorated the church; and, Episcopalian Bishop Frank Du Moulin of Cleveland and the Reverend David Clarke Beatty of St. John’s Episcopal Church conducted the ceremony together. The bridal party consisted of twenty-one members, including siblings of the bride and groom, and represented twelve cities. A dinner reception for 225 guests at the Country Club of Decatur followed the service.

Elizabeth wore a fashionable wedding gown with a unique headdress and veil. Her wedding gown was “white satin, heavily beaded in crystal with a flowing five-yard train embroidered with roses and lily of the valley.”²² Her headdress was trefoil-shaped with lace covering, and her long divided train was edged with matching lace (see figures 2.6 and 2.7). The bridesmaids wore wide-brimmed hats, a choice her daughter Martha



Figure 2.5. Harvey Firestone Junior.
This photo of Harvey Firestone Jr., in his naval uniform, is dated November 10, 1918.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 5, Folder 5,
Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.



Figure 2.6. Elizabeth Parke Firestone.
This is a bridal photo dated June 25, 1921.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 2, Harvey and Elizabeth
Firestone Jr. Wedding file, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.



Figure 2.7. Elizabeth Parke and Harvey Firestone Junior.

This is a wedding photo dated June 25, 1921.

Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 2, Harvey and Elizabeth Firestone Jr. Wedding file, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

would repeat many years later at her wedding to William Clay Ford on June 21, 1947. In the March 1991 issue of *Connoisseur*, Thurlie Boyer, Elizabeth's administrative assistant, is quoted as stating, "She designed her wedding gown and made it herself. She made her entire trousseau, too. She always dressed beautifully, and every detail was important to her. Every quarter inch mattered."²³ Later, Boyer told me that she was not positive that Elizabeth made her gown; however, she was sure that Elizabeth designed it and made many of the items in her trousseau.²⁴ Nancy Bryk, curator for The Benson Ford Research Center at the Henry Ford Museum stated: "Firestone family members relate that Elizabeth designed and produced her own off-white silk satin wedding dress."²⁵ Bryk, who studied the dress in detail, noted that it is "entirely handsewn . . . the quality of the handwork makes it apparent that the dress is not expertly sewn, . . . seams are somewhat 'finished' with overcast stitches, . . . red markings for glass bugle bead floral decoration are visible at close examination."²⁶ She concluded that Elizabeth probably did make her own wedding dress.²⁷

The couple went on a honeymoon trip to Lake Louise in Canada; and then, the newlyweds joined the Firestones, Fords, Edisons, and President and Mrs. Warren Harding on a camping trip.²⁸ Harvey Firestone, Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison enjoyed annual outings together from 1916 to 1924. Their trips became very well known; crowds gathered to meet them and photographers followed the entourage. Granite markers celebrate the locations of some of the places they visited; and, the 1921 trip later became the subject of *Camping With Henry and Tom*, a 1995 off-Broadway play by Mark St. German.

On July 21, 1921, the Firestones, including the newlyweds, and the Fords met at the Firestone farm in Columbiana County, Ohio. The Edisons met the party in Maryland the following day, and President Warren G. Harding joined the group for the weekend, July 23-24.²⁹ In *There to Breathe the Beauty*, author Norman Brauer wrote:

Firestone, on one of his trips to Washington—accompanied by Bishop William F. Anderson of Ohio—made a call at the White House to propose a camping trip to President Warren G. Harding. Firestone had known the President for a long time; in fact, they had met when Harding was lieutenant governor of Ohio. The President accepted gladly, with the caveat that his presence depended upon affairs of state and the request that the camping be done somewhere within a reasonable driving distance from Washington, D. C.³⁰

The entourage camped near Licking Creek in Pecktonville, Maryland, while the president was with them. They drove into the campsite in a variety of Ford automobiles and with trucks, including a large refrigerated truck loaded with produce from the Firestone farm, carrying an extensive crew. President Harding was accompanied by his secretary, George Christian Jr., and a staff of Secret Service men and others. Eighty people were in the camping group during the president's stay.³¹ Ford and Firestone were known for their appreciation of the media as a way to advertise their companies, and their camping trips were yet another way for them to gain publicity. According to Brauer:

Permission was granted to the ten regular White House newspaper correspondent and nine newsreel photographers, to stay at the camp during the President's visit, as the gathering of these four men was looked upon in the daily press at the time as a highly newsworthy event.³²

Elizabeth went from being in the spotlight as a bride in a historic Decatur wedding to being a part of a historic camping trip with four world-renowned men four weeks later. These events set the stage for her future. Boyer stated that Elizabeth considered the 1921 camping trip “her duty and the beginning of a life she was prepared

to lead.”³³ Boyer’s confidence in this statement told a great deal about Elizabeth’s personality. Harvey Jr. and Elizabeth began their life together with knowledge and understanding of their roles in the family business, in society, and in philanthropy.

Notes

¹ Paul Brinkman, “Decatur Roots Run Deep: City’s Relationship with Tire Maker Dates Back to 1921 Marriage,” *Herald and Review* (Decatur, IL), 28 June 2001, A5.

² Gary Minich, “A Piece of History: Decatur’s Oldest Continuous Business, Parke Warehouses, Has Been Around for 143 Years and is Still Growing” *Herald and Review* (Decatur, IL), 2 September 1997, D1; James H. Holcombe, “Thomas Holcombe of Connecticut” (accessed 29 August 2004); available from <http://www.holcombegenealogy.com>, Person Page 367.

³ “Elizabeth Parke Firestone,” “Biography from Christie’s, December 1990” noted on the front page, University of Akron Archives, Box 1; Gerald G. Johnson, “The Arbella” (accessed 25 March 2005); available from <http://bigelowsociety.com/rod2001/arbella1>; “Winthrop Fleet 1630 Passenger List” (accessed 25 March 2005); available from <http://members.aol.com/myself7482/win5/html>; “Winthrop Fleet 1630 Passenger List” (accessed 25 March 2005); available from <http://www.askgar.com/genealogy/winthrop.html>.

⁴ “Rinehart, 1520 Douglas Str, Omaha” and the monogram signature “FAR” are printed below the photograph of Gertrude Chambers Parke in her wedding gown. Frank A. Rinehart purchased the Brandeis building and used it as a portrait studio for forty years. The Brandeis building is located at the corner of Douglas and 16th Streets; therefore, the photograph was developed by Frank A. Rinehart. Thomas Yanul, “The Big Six: Business and the Baroque 1880-1915,” *Photographic Portraiture – The Baroque* (accessed 25 March 2005); available from <http://hometown.aol.com/yanult/baroque.html>; C.T. Peters, Inc. Fine Art, “Biographical Information for Frank Rinehart” (accessed 25 March 2005); available from the Ask Art Home Website, http://www.askart.com/artist/R/frank_a_rinehart.asp?ID=9001280; Jason Kaspar, “The Brandeis Building,” *Early Omaha: Gateway to the West*, (accessed 25 March 2005); available from <http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/earlyomaha/buildings/brandeis.html>.

⁵ “19th Century American Indian Portraits Exhibit Opens at Interior Museum,” Press Release from the Office of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, 2 August 2002 (accessed 25 March 2005); available from <http://www.doi.gov/news/020802.htm>.

⁶ “Historic Homes Snapshots,” *Herald and Review*, 11 December 2002, B8.

⁷ Thurle Boyer (Mrs. Firestone's administrative assistant), interview by author, 26 March 2004, Medina, OH, author's notes.

⁸ Copy of letter included in Elizabeth Parke Firestone's scrapbook entitled "Elizabeth Parke: Memories 1902-1924," p. 2 (hereafter cited as Scrapbook). A copy of this scrapbook was shown to me by John Miller, Director, The University of Akron Archives, on 3 September 2004. He did not have it catalogued; however, Boyer told me during our interview on 26 March 2004 that she had given the scrapbook to Miller for the archives. The scrapbook is dated 1902-1924; Elizabeth was born in 1896.

⁹ Copy of article entitled "Decatur Girl to School in England," *Decatur Herald and Review*, 5 March 1912, included in Scrapbook, 3.

¹⁰ Copy of letter from L.G. Lowe, on Leeds Girls High School letterhead stationery, to Mr. Parke, dated 12 July 1912, included in Scrapbook, 5. The letter is signed L.G. Lowe only.

¹¹ Copy of Grade Report for Elizabeth Parke, dated November 1912, included in Scrapbook, p. 4; "Elizabeth Firestone, 93, Dies in Rhode Island," *Akron Beacon Journal*, 15 October 1990, D8.

¹² "Girls Schools," *Vogue*, 1 August 1948, 49.

¹³ Boyer interview.

¹⁴ Susan Reidy, "Marriage Cemented Firestone Link with Decatur," *Herald and Review*, 8 July 2001, A1.

¹⁵ Don Brilley, "Wedding Linked City with Tire Manufacturing," *Herald and Review*, 5 September 1999, B6, reprint from 4 April 1976 issue of *Herald and Review*.

¹⁶ "The Origins of the Firestone Family," Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 2, File Folder 2-6, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

¹⁷ Howard Wolf, "1868-1938 – An Era of American Industry, Farm Boy to Fame: The Story of Harvey S. Firestone," *Akron Beacon Journal*, 7 February 1938; 1, 14-15.

¹⁸ Kenneth Nichols, "Harvey Firestone is Dead at 75; Build the Firm," *Akron Beacon Journal*, 2 June 1973, A11; Nancy Bryk, "Who Made Elizabeth Parke Firestone's Wedding Dress?" (accessed 29 August 2005); available from The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village Website: <http://www.hfmgv.org>.

¹⁹ "Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens," 4th ed., Booklet, 1992, iii.

²⁰ Nichols, A1 & A11.

²¹ Ibid., A11.

²² Susan Reidy, A1; Don Brilley, B6; “Firestone-Parke Wedding Largest and Most Fashionable of June,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 25 June 1921, Home Magazine Page.

²³ Eve Auchincloss, “Last Look at a Bygone Era,” *Connoisseur*, March 1991, 122.

²⁴ Boyer interview.

²⁵ Bryk, 1.

²⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Reidy, A1.

²⁹ Norman Brauer, *There to Breathe the Beauty* (Dalton, PA: By the author, Norman Brauer Publications, 1995), 147.

³⁰ Ibid., 149.

³¹ Ibid., 151-53.

³² Ibid., 158.

³³ Boyer interview.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE OF MRS. HARVEY SAMUEL FIRESTONE JUNIOR

The legacy of the Firestone family in Akron, Ohio, was growing before Elizabeth Parke and Harvey Firestone Jr. were married in 1921. When Elizabeth became a member of the Firestone family and moved to Akron, she entered “The Rubber Capital of the World” as one of the elite. Elizabeth stepped into her role as a representative of her husband and Firestone Tire and Rubber Company soon after her marriage, and she continued that role throughout the rest of her life.

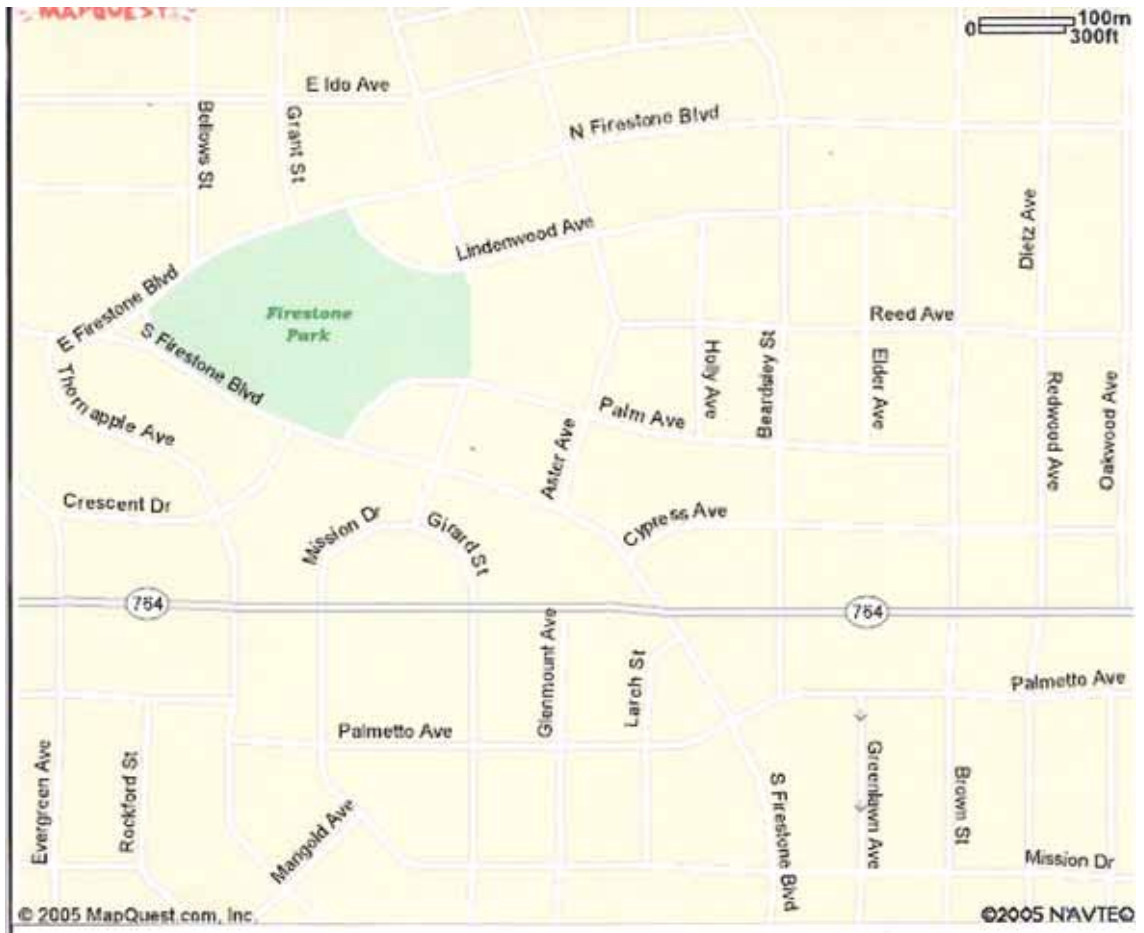
The growth of Akron was driven by the growth of the rubber companies located in the city, including Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. The founders of these companies, and their families, influenced the development of Akron for decades.

As the rubber companies in Akron strove to meet the demands of the growing automotive industry and the rubber product needs of the armed forces during World War I, men from West Virginia, Kentucky, Europe, and other places moved to Akron seeking work. There was not enough housing in Akron to accommodate the increasing population. Akron was the fastest growing city in the United States during the decade of 1910-1920. In 1910, the population of Akron was 138,560. In 1920, Akron had grown to 322,334 residents.¹ Living conditions for rubber company employees and their families were deplorable as the work force at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company grew

from 5,800 in 1910 to 25,000 in 1920. Firestone Tire and Rubber Company employed one thousand employees in 1910 and 19,800 in 1920.

Frank A. Seiberling, founder and owner of Goodyear, financed Goodyear Heights, a housing development in East Akron, to reduce employee turnover by providing quality housing for employees at cost. Families began moving into the homes in 1913.² In 1915, Harvey Firestone Sr. incorporated the Coventry Land and Improvement Company for the development of Firestone Park, a south Akron housing development of Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalog houses and homes designed by Alexander B. Trowbridge and Frederick L. Ackerman, a New York architectural firm. Harvey Sr. and Idabelle Firestone had utilized this architectural firm for Harbel Manor, their Akron home. Local contractors built the houses in Firestone Park. The housing development included a recreational park shaped like the Firestone shield; the streets form an “F” around the park, with Firestone Boulevard as the main artery (see figure 3.1). This middle-class neighborhood became a tribute to the Firestone family.³ In 1917, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company Plant II was completed nearby, adding to the display and prominence of the Firestone name in Akron.⁴

Post-war inflation and recovery brought a short and deep recession in 1920, but prosperity in the rubber industry returned at the end of 1922.⁵ Agriculture was the leading industry in the United States, followed by the automotive industry, and then the steel industry. Harvey Sr. began to depend upon Harvey Jr. to help him meet the demands of a changing economy. From 1923 to 1925, Harvey Jr. assisted his father in finding a location for natural rubber production and in the “Americans Should Produce Their Own Rubber” campaign. Harvey Sr. wanted to reduce imports through the



3.1. Firestone Park Map.

Notice the Firestone shield and the “F” shape of the streets around the park.

Source: <http://www.mapquest.com>.

campaign. In June 1924, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company purchased a ninety-nine year lease at Mount Barclay in Liberia, close to the equator on the coast of Africa, north of the Ivory Coast, for the production and export of rubber to the United States.⁶

While her husband was working alongside his father, Elizabeth was adjusting to an entirely new life. She gave birth to Elizabeth Chambers on July 16, 1922.⁷ Martha Parke Firestone was born on September 16, 1925.⁸

At the same time, Elizabeth was deeply interested in the Liberia venture, and she accompanied her husband to Liberia in 1926-27. During the end-of-the-year holidays, they sent Christmas cards to friends and family from Liberia (see figure 3.2). In 1928, Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. traveled to the Far East, Europe, and Liberia. Harvey Sr. and Idabelle Firestone joined them on the trip to Liberia to view the progress made during 1927 and 1928. A hospital had been built, and a public school system initiated.⁹ Sadly, the stock market crash of 1929 halted the Liberian venture until 1933. Harvey Jr. and Elizabeth returned to Liberia several times after operations were resumed. When Elizabeth died on October 13, 1990, Robert Troyer, manager of corporate public relations for Bridgestone/Firestone Incorporated, stated “She had a keen interest in Liberia. She would call from time to time just to ask for a report on what was happening in Liberia.”¹⁰

Harvey Jr. became an officer of the Firestone Plantations Company, a separate company formed for the natural rubber plantations being purchased in Liberia and in Chiapas, Mexico. The climate in Chiapas was not hot and humid enough for the rubber trees to yield an adequate amount of high grade latex; therefore, the Las Palmas plantation in Chiapas failed.¹¹



Figure 3.2. Christmas Card.

Elizabeth and Harvey Firestone Jr. mailed Christmas cards from Liberia to their families and friends in 1926.

Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection, Box 1, The University of Akron Archives, Akron, OH.

Harvey Jr. also became an officer of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in 1925.¹² Elizabeth traveled with him extensively, including spring and autumn trips to Europe. She firmly believed it was her duty to represent her husband and the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company with dignity, and this included having an impeccable appearance at all times. Beginning in the late 1920s, she purchased her clothing in Paris and developed a deep relationship with the French couture houses.¹³

In 1925, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary quietly; the Firestone Stadium and Athletic Field were dedicated. The 235-acre company property on South Main Street in Akron, Ohio, including plant operations, became known as “Firestone City.” The Idabelle Firestone School of Nursing at Akron City Hospital, funded by Firestone money, opened in 1929; and the following spring, the Firestone Country Club opened.¹⁴ Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. had been married less than ten years.

In the midst of the immense expansion at Firestone Tire and Rubber Company and the Firestone family’s involvement in the Akron community, Elizabeth continued building her own family. Her home life dramatically changed when Harvey Samuel Firestone III was born on March 26, 1930, at Maternity Hospital (later renamed MacDonald House) of University Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio.¹⁵ Harvey III was diagnosed with cerebral palsy soon after he was born, and he required continuous nursing care throughout his life. His health and welfare were Elizabeth’s responsibility.

Harvey III was christened on July 6, 1930, at the age of three months. The fragile health of Harvey III may have been the reason for his christening so soon after his birth. The daughters of Elizabeth and Harvey Jr., including Anne, who was born after

Harvey III, were baptized when they were toddlers. The Billow Funeral Homes operated the first ambulance service in Akron, Ohio, and Charles Billow, the former president of Billow Funeral Homes, remembers transporting Harvey III to Akron City Hospital many times.¹⁶ Elizabeth supervised Harvey III's care and maintained a close personal relationship with his caregivers.¹⁷

Just months after the failure of the stock market in October, 1929, and the birth of Harvey III, Elizabeth accompanied Harvey Jr. to Brazil, Belgium, and Italy. The growth of the international ventures of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company was dependent upon Harvey Jr., and Elizabeth considered her role as his wife to be of utmost importance.¹⁸

During the 1930s, Elizabeth traveled to Europe, South America, South Africa, and Liberia with her husband. In May through June of 1933, they went to France and London, while Elizabeth was expecting her last child. Anne Idabelle was born on November 10, 1933.¹⁹

The Firestone family enjoyed many family events in the 1930s. Harvey Sr. wintered at Harbel Villa, their Miami Beach, Florida, home, along with an extensive staff from the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. Harbel Villa was an expansive estate with a large main house, gardens, and additional buildings. Harvey Jr. and his family, as well as other family members, often visited Harvey Sr. there (see figure 3.3).

In 1933, Firestone-Hispania was formed and a factory was opened in Bilbao, Spain.²⁰ Operations at the rubber plantation in Liberia were resumed the following



Figure 3.3. Firestone Family at Harbel Villa.
The above photograph was taken at Harbel Villa, Miami Beach, Florida
on March 25, 1932.

Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 31,
Firestone Family – Harvey and Idabelle Firestone – Family – At Harbel
Villa 1932-1933 file, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

year.²¹ In 1935, the factories in Argentina and England were enlarged and one was built in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.²² Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Firestone Jr. celebrated their fifteenth wedding anniversary at Harbel Manor in Akron, Ohio, on June 25, 1936. Harvey Jr. assumed greater responsibilities internationally as Harvey Sr. entered the seventh decade of his life and began to have heart problems. On February 7, 1938, Harvey Sr. died of heart failure during his sleep at Harbel Villa in Miami Beach, Florida.²³ He was 69 years old.

Before his death, Harvey Sr. donated land across the street from the Columbiana Cemetery to Columbiana, Ohio, for a recreational park, which was named Firestone Park and Pool. In return, the city gave land near the entrance to the cemetery for a Firestone Family Memorial. A family trust pays for the maintenance of the memorial. Columbiana is fifty-five miles from Akron.²⁴ Harvey Sr. and Idabelle are buried in the center of this memorial, and the plots for their children and their families surround them.²⁵

Soon after Harvey Sr.'s death, the United States became involved in World War II and the focus of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company shifted to defense products, including items for planes, tanks, trucks, inflatable rubber pontoons, amphibious tanks, gas masks, and mobile anti-aircraft units.²⁶ While the factories in Europe were crippled, those in the rest of the world began producing at record levels. The rubber crisis of World War II was saved by the production of synthetic rubber and the strong production of high-grade latex in Liberia.²⁷ During the war, Elizabeth traveled with her husband within the United States, including trips to New York, where she purchased couture clothing, but foreign travel and social events lessened.²⁸

Harvey Jr. and Elizabeth's daughters, Elizabeth Chambers, Martha, and Anne, attended Our Lady of the Elms School, located very close to the home they lived in on Twin Oaks Road in Akron, Ohio. Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. attended functions at Our Lady of the Elms and supported the school with financial donations.²⁹ Harvey III was tutored at home, and he later attended college and law school in Florida with a male companion and caregiver.³⁰ All three daughters graduated from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

As a mother, Elizabeth had high expectations for all of her children. They learned to take good care of their possessions, and to maintain their appearance. Martha remembered growing up in their beautiful home, filled with antiques, and she told Betsy Lammerding, *Beacon Journal* staff writer: "It wasn't like growing up in a museum. We all were aware of their [the antiques] value and importance, but they didn't detract from the warmth of our home."³¹ The children knew they were members of a prominent and loving family, and they learned to behave accordingly.³² They enjoyed many joyous times together and the exciting experiences available to them. A casual family photo exemplifies a moment in the family life of Elizabeth and her young family (see figure 3.4).

As an art lover, Elizabeth enjoyed sharing her interest in the arts with her children. Harvey Jr. and Elizabeth traveled to Europe with their children many times over the years. They took the children to exhibits and shows in the United States and abroad, and "they lived with the arts in their home while they were growing up."³³



3.4. The Harvey Firestone Jr. Family.
Casual photo of the family, circa 1939.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697,
Box 3, Folder 9, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

Elizabeth was member of the Akron Garden Club and the Women's Auxiliary Board of Akron City Hospital.³⁴ One highlight during the war was a dinner at Harbel Manor in Akron, Ohio, in honor of Edwin Barclay, the President of the Republic of Liberia on May 31, 1943. The six-course dinner included green turtle soup and filet of beef served in a splendid manner.³⁵ Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. also attended parties in New York, including one at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City in July, 1944 (see figure 3.5).

Elizabeth suffered great loss during World War II. Her sister, Gertrude Parke Cruikshank, died in 1944; and then, in 1945, her mother, Gertrude Chambers Parke, died.³⁶ Her personal life had to be very different after the war due to their deaths.

The end of the war brought major changes to the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. Alfred Lief, author of *The Firestone Story*, noted:

John W. Thomas announced his retirement in January, 1946, but remained as a director and honorary chairman. Harvey Firestone jr. became the active head of the company to steer the vast organization in the era of peace.

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, with subsidiaries domestic and foreign, had progressed into the ranks of the world's most influential industrial enterprises. Each activity undertaken had reflected new honor on its name.³⁷

In January of 1948, Harvey Jr. "was elected chairman and chief executive officer" of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company.³⁸

After the war ended and Harvey Jr. assumed the presidency of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, Elizabeth resumed traveling abroad extensively with her husband. She began collecting decorative arts pieces, especially eighteenth-century porcelain and silver, with earnest. On June 25, 1946, Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. celebrated



Figure 3.5. Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. Dancing.
They were at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City in July, 1944.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697,
Box 3, Folder 10, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in grand style with a party in the Crystal Room at the Ritz Carlton in New York City. Their two eldest daughters, Elizabeth Chambers and Martha, attended the event.³⁹ They also joined their parents on a European trip the following April.⁴⁰

Social events were a great source of pleasure for Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. after the war. As Eve Auchincloss wrote, “Dancing was her greatest delight, and she and her husband danced together beautifully, a tiny, perfect couple.”⁴¹ Occasionally, photos of them attending various social events appeared in magazines and newspapers, including a photograph of them in the February, 1957 issue of *The Diplomat*, featuring them at the Bachelors’ Ball in New York City.⁴²

The Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone families were formally united by marriage on June 21, 1947. Martha Parke Firestone, granddaughter of Harvey Firestone Sr., and William Clay Ford, grandson of Henry Ford and son of Edsel Ford, were married at Harbel Manor. The tables for the reception surrounded the pool, and it was a very elegant event. The wedding, attended by many well-known personalities, was one of the most notable social events in mid-twentieth-century Akron history.⁴³

Martha and William Ford now live in Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan. They have three daughters, Martha, Sheila, and Elizabeth, one son, William Clay Jr., and several grandchildren.⁴⁴ William Sr. served in the U. S. Navy Air Corps during World War II and graduated from Yale University in 1949 with a Bachelor of Science degree in economics. He was employed by the Ford Motor Company after graduation and became a member of the Board of Directors in 1948. He retired from the board on May 12, 2005,

and became Director Emeritus.⁴⁵ In 1964, he became the sole owner of the Detroit Lions.⁴⁶ Martha has been very active in the community throughout her married life.

Elizabeth Chambers Firestone married Charles Fountain Willis Jr. on January 23, 1954, in Christ Church, New York. They had one child, Elizabeth Willis Leatherman.⁴⁷ Thurlle Boyer stated that Elizabeth Chambers was a concert pianist before she married.⁴⁸ According to Elizabeth Chambers' obituary in the *Chicago Tribune* on October 22, 1989, Elizabeth Chambers "devoted herself to jazz, making appearances with Mel Torme, Lionel Hampton, Gene Krupa, and B. B. King. Most recently, in collaboration with Hampton, she wrote "The George Bush Election Theme."⁴⁹ In the article "Airplanes in the Wrangells," author Kenny Smith wrote of Elizabeth's husband:

His name was Charles F. Willis Jr.: Charlie was married to Elizabeth Firestone, (an heir to the famous Firestone Tire Company fortune) and he had quite a reputation. He was a World War II hero, a navy pilot who had earned, among his many attributes, three separate Distinguished Flying Crosses in addition to the purple heart he received after being wounded during the Pearl Harbor attack. He once served on President Eisenhower's White house staff of aviation advisors. He ran his airline like he fought the war, taking such extreme risks that he was continually driving company directors and stockholders nuts.⁵⁰

Charles was the founder and vice chairman of Citizens for Eisenhower in 1951-52 and Assistant to the President from 1952 through 1955.⁵¹ Charles and Elizabeth eventually divorced after a difficult life together.⁵² Elizabeth struggled with liver disease and died of heart failure at Presbyterian-University Hospital in Pittsburgh in 1989. She was sixty-nine years old. Funeral services were held at the Idabelle Firestone Memorial Chapel of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and she is buried in the Firestone section at Columbiana Cemetery in Columbiana County, Ohio.⁵³

Harvey III married Betty Lou (“Beverly”) McFarlan, a school teacher from Cleveland on July 21, 1956, in Brecksville, Ohio. They lived in St. Petersburg, Florida, and had a daughter, Diane. On May 5, 1960, at the age of thirty, Harvey III committed suicide while he was in Cuba with his cousin Morgan, Russell Firestone’s son.⁵⁴ He is buried in the Firestone section at Columbiana Cemetery near his sister, Elizabeth Chambers. On July 5, 1960, Harvey III’s Paris nurse, Louis Alice de Zarreitrau, wrote to Elizabeth stating that she hoped Elizabeth would “draw consolation from the realisation [*sic*] that your beloved boy has at least that peace – which, realising [*sic*] it or not, we all crave for – and which is his already.”⁵⁵ She was aware of the continual caring concern Elizabeth had for her son, and the sadness Elizabeth experienced with his death.

Anne Idabelle, the youngest daughter, married John Fleming Ball on November 9, 1957. They have three children: John F. Jr., David, and Sheila. Anne and John live in Deer Park, Greenwich, Connecticut. As Boyer stated, “Anne is very handy with the needle” and “she enjoys planning her gardens the way her mother did.”⁵⁶ Boyer also noted that Anne “sold fine fabrics for a few years,” and “she loves to cook!”⁵⁷

The Harvey Firestone Jr. family celebrated many great moments in the middle of the twentieth-century. In April, 1949, the family attended the grand opening of the Harvey S. Firestone Library at Princeton University. This is the main library on the Princeton campus today. Harvey Jr. was a member of the Princeton University Board of Trustees when the library was built. In *The Firestone Story*, Alfred Lief wrote about the sons of Harvey Sr.: “All five sons had been graduated from Princeton, and they joined with their mother in making a gift of more than a million dollars.”⁵⁸ This gift funded the new library.

A statue of Harvey Samuel Firestone Sr., by James Earle Fraser, was unveiled at the fiftieth anniversary of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company on August 3, 1950. The statue was installed in front of the Firestone Research and Development building, east of the Firestone plants, on South Main Street in Akron.⁵⁹ A true, and quite humorous, story about the statue of Harvey Samuel Firestone Sr. has become Akron folklore. The statue was not completed in time for the unveiling, and a plaster model was painted bronze and used for the ceremony. When the bronze statue was ready, the plaster model was removed and the bronze statue installed in its place – in the middle of the night.⁶⁰

The Firestone family built a legacy at their church. Idabelle Firestone and her sons donated the western edge of the Harbel Manor property along West Market Street in Akron to St. Paul's Episcopal Church. On November 25, 1952, the new St. Paul's Episcopal Church was consecrated. After Idabelle died on July 7, 1954, her sons made a sizeable donation to the church for the building of the Idabelle Firestone Memorial Chapel. The organ from Harbel Manor was redesigned and installed in the chapel. The new chapel was consecrated in April, 1958.⁶¹ Harbel Manor was torn down after Idabelle Firestone died, and the remaining property was sold.

During the early 1960s, Harvey Jr. remained at the helm of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and he and Elizabeth continued to travel and attend social events. Then, her life changed dramatically. Her father, Guy James Parke, died on March 4, 1965, at the age of 98.⁶² Later that year, Harvey Jr. fell in the bathroom and broke his hip. It did not mend well, and he used a walker and wheelchair for the rest of his life. His health was fragile, and he died of cancer of the throat and esophagus on June 1, 1973,

at the age of seventy-five.⁶³ The funeral service, attended by many well-known personalities, was in the Idabelle Firestone Memorial Chapel at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Akron.⁶⁴ Harvey Jr. is buried with his family at Columbiana Cemetery in Columbiana, Ohio.

Elizabeth moved to Ocean Lawn, their second home in Newport, Rhode Island, after Harvey Jr. died. Thurle Boyer continued to conduct business for her in Akron and maintained an office at 2855 West Market Street, Suite 216, Akron, Ohio, until the early 1990s. Boyer also traveled to Ocean Lawn periodically.⁶⁵

After Harvey Jr. died, Elizabeth remained active socially. The July, 1974 issue of *Town and Country* featured her as a member of the social elite in Newport, Rhode Island. The photo caption states:

Mrs. Harvey S. Firestone, Jr., framed by her famous peacock chair. She is known for her marvelous folly of a peacock costume at the annual White Elephant Ball, a Labor-Day weekend tradition at Bailey's Beach during which Newporters try to outdo each other with the wit of their skits and costumes.⁶⁶

She was known for her sense of style and fondness of clothing and costumes. According to the biography of Elizabeth distributed by Christie's Fine Art Auctioneers of New York, she "was a member of the YMCA World Service Council, a life member of the Newport Historical Society, and a supporter of the Newport Preservation Society and the Newport Jazz Festival."⁶⁷

In 1982, Elizabeth broke her hip and had a hip replacement in Boston. After the hip replacement, she remained at home in bed. In the March, 1991 issue of *Connoisseur*, Eve Auchincloss wrote:

Though she lay abed after the age of eighty-five, she once astonished a friend asking her to give a dinner for four, including herself and (Alan) Pryce-Jones [a close

Newport neighbor]. “After a while a large station wagon with servants and a wheelchair arrived,” he recollects. “She emerged in a sapphire dress, Adolfo I think, pushed the wheelchair aside, strode into the house, and for two hours talked brilliantly. Then she went home to bed and there she stayed.”⁶⁸

Her greatest glory in her last days was the deep respect and admiration she received when curators and Christie’s experts visited her home during the last years of her life. She showed them her amazing collections of paintings, porcelain, silver, and couture clothing; and she shared her immense knowledge of each piece. She knew the history of her pieces, maintained very complete records, and kept the collections in mint condition. After the Christie’s experts left her home, she told her daughter Martha, “my head is so big I couldn’t walk through the door.”⁶⁹

As a person who inspired others to make a difference, Elizabeth was able to complete her life knowing that she had truly made a difference. She died on October 13, 1990. After her funeral in Idabelle Firestone Memorial Chapel at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Akron, she was buried beside her husband in Columbiana Cemetery. Her essence is summarized on her tombstone, which reads:

A loving wife and devoted mother, a most gracious lady and a courageous advocate of form and beauty in the fine arts. She traveled the world and had a great sense of spirit and adventure. She was always most loyal to the people and ideals in which she believed. May she rest in peace.⁷⁰

Notes

¹ Akron, OH Population by Decades, Real Estate Center, website (accessed 5 November 2005); available from <http://recenter.tamu.edu/data/popmd/pm0080.htm>. The website cites the U. S. Bureau of Census as its source.

² Steve Love and David Giffels, *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron* (Akron, OH: The University of Akron Press, 1999), 47-48.

³ Ibid., 52.

⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁵ Alfred Lief, *The Firestone Story* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Book Company, Incorporated, 1951), 127-34.

⁶ Ibid., 152-53.

⁷ Elizabeth Chambers Firestone was christened almost two years later, on June 8, 1924.

⁸ Martha Parke Firestone was christened on July 25, 1926, at the age of 22 months.

⁹ Lief, 163-64.

¹⁰ “Elizabeth Firestone, 93, Dies in Rhode Island,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 15 October 1990, D8. Robert Troyer is quoted by the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

¹¹ Lief, 159-160.

¹² Ibid., 157.

¹³ Thurle Boyer (Mrs. Firestone’s administrative assistant), interview by author, 26 March 2004, Medina, OH, author’s notes.

¹⁴ Love and Giffels, 217.

¹⁵ Boyer interview.

¹⁶ Charles Billow (Firestone family funeral director and ambulance service provider) and his wife, Retta, interview by author, 10 September 2004, Akron, OH, author’s notes.

¹⁷ Boyer interview.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Anne Idabelle Firestone was christened on November 29, 1934.

²⁰ Lief, 197.

²¹ Ibid., 205.

²² Ibid., 209.

²³ “Heart Ailment Takes Famed Tire Wizard While He Is Asleep,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 7 February 1938 Evening Edition, 1.

²⁴ Billow interview; Website entitled: “City of Columbiana: ‘The Biggest Little Town in Ohio’” (accessed 19 October 2005); available from <http://www.cityofcolumbiana.org>.

²⁵ Author’s description of the Firestone Memorial at Columbiana Cemetery. Author visited the cemetery on July 21, 2003.

²⁶ Lief, 262-65.

²⁷ Ibid., 280-81.

²⁸ Boyer interview.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Billow interview.

³¹ Betsy Lammerding, “Treasures Valuable Firestone Artwork From Akron on Block in N.Y.,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 3 March 1991, D1.

³² Boyer interview.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Behave Like a Beauty,” *Vogue*, 1 February 1950, 142.

³⁵ Menu entitled “In Honor of His Excellency Edwin Barclay, President of The Republic of Liberia,” dated 31 May 1943, Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection, Box 2, University of Akron Archives, Akron, OH; hereafter cited as UA EPF Collection.

³⁶ Susan Reidy, “Marriage Cemented Firestone Link with Decatur,” *Herald and Review*, 8 July 2001, A1.

³⁷ Lief, 348-49.

³⁸ Ibid., 364.

³⁹ Copy of Invitation to Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration, dated 25 June 1946, and photo of Harvey Samuel Firestone Junior and Elizabeth Parke Firestone cutting their anniversary wedding cake at the celebration, Firestone Collection, Accession

#89.492.1697, Box 3, Folder 10, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI; hereafter cited as BFRC Firestone Collection.

⁴⁰ Photo of Harvey Samuel Firestone Junior, Elizabeth Parke Firestone, Elizabeth Chambers Firestone, and Martha Parke Firestone aboard the R.M.S. Queen Elizabeth, dated April 1947, UA EPF Collection, Box 1.

⁴¹ Auchincloss, "Last Look at a Bygone Era," *Connoisseur*, March 1991, 123.

⁴² Edward Seay, "Manhattan Vignettes," *The Diplomat*, February 1957, 26.

⁴³ Boyer interview; Billow interview.

⁴⁴ Ford Motor Company: Board of Directors website (accessed 15 October 2005); available from <http://www.ford.com>. The son of William and Martha Ford, William Clay Ford, Jr., became Chief Executive Officer of Ford Motor Company on October 30, 2001, in the midst of the Ford Explorer/Firestone Wilderness tire scandal. Before his promotion, he was the chairman of the Ford Motor Company Board of Directors Finance Committee.⁴⁴

⁴⁵ "William Clay Ford: His Detroit field of dreams added new piece to city's rebirth," *The Detroit News*, 4 May 2003 (accessed 14 October 2005); available from <http://www.detnews.com>.

⁴⁶ Ibid. In 1956, William Clay Ford Sr. was hired as director of the Detroit Lions franchise, and he purchased the franchise eight years later. In 2002, the Ford family celebrated the opening of Ford Field in Detroit, a "state-of-the-art facility" for the Detroit Lions and their fans.

⁴⁷ Death notice entitled "Elizabeth Firestone Willis," *Akron Beacon Journal*, 20 October 1989, D10.

⁴⁸ Boyer interview.

⁴⁹ "Arts patron Elizabeth F. Willis," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 October 1989, New York Times News Service (accessed 18 October 2001); available from <http://www.nytimes.com>. Elizabeth Chambers Firestone Willis died on October 18, 1989.

⁵⁰ Kenny Smith, "Airplanes in the Wrangells," *Wrangell St. Elias News* (Wrangell St. Elias, AK), March and April 2001 (accessed 16 October 2005); available from <http://www.mccarthy-kennicott.com>.

⁵¹ “Oral History Transcripts,” Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (accessed 14 October 2005); available from <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov>. This listing includes the names of persons interviewed and the principal positions held by them during the Eisenhower administration.

⁵² Billow interview; Boyer interview. Charles Billow, Retta Billow, and Thurlle Boyer did not know the date of the divorce.

⁵³ Death notice entitled “Elizabeth Firestone Willis,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 20 October 1989, D10.

⁵⁴ Billow interview. No obituary appeared in the *Akron Beacon Journal* or the *New York Times*.

⁵⁵ Letter from Louis Alice de Zarreitrau to “Mrs. Firestone,” dated 5 July 1960, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 14, Folder 7.

⁵⁶ Boyer interview.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lief, 372.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 383-84.

⁶⁰ David Giffels, “A Legacy Cast in Bronze,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 5 May 2005, B1.

⁶¹ Patricia M. Zonsius, “St. Paul’s Episcopal Church Choir of Men and Boys,” dated October 1993 (accessed 14 September 2005); available from St. Paul’s Episcopal Church Choir website: <http://www.boychoirs.org/akron>.

⁶² Reidy, A1.

⁶³ Billow interview.

⁶⁴ “Big Names Gather At Firestone Rites,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 5 June 1973, A1-2.

⁶⁵ Boyer interview.

⁶⁶ “Newport Naturals,” *Town and Country*, July 1974, 20, BFRC Firestone Collection, Periodicals File.

⁶⁷ “Elizabeth Parke Firestone,” Biography from Christie’s, undated. This biography is a typed version of the one used in “The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Part I,” *Christie’s* catalogue (New York, New York), 21 March 1991; however, it is not exactly the same and may be a rough draft.

⁶⁸ Auchincloss, 123.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Tombstone of Elizabeth Parke Firestone, located in the Harvey S. Firestone Lot near the entrance of Columbiana County Memorial Park, Columbiana, Ohio.

CHAPTER IV

THE FINE ART COLLECTIONS OF ELIZABETH PARKE FIRESTONE

When Elizabeth married, her mother gave her a photo album filled with photos of the rooms in her childhood home at 307 West William Street in Decatur, Illinois.

Thurle Boyer stated that Elizabeth and her mother shared a love for interior design and fine art.¹

As newlyweds, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey S. Firestone Jr. resided at Harbel Manor, the Akron, Ohio, home of Harvey Jr.'s parents. Harbel Manor was a 55-room mansion with a gatehouse and expansive gardens.²

Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. purchased several residences, decorated each one, and filled them with paintings, drawings, porcelain, eighteenth-century silver and furniture.

Homes

Within a year of their marriage, Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. moved to a home on Mayfield Road, a street connecting Twin Oaks Road and West Market Street. Then in 1927, they moved into their new home at Fifty Twin Oaks Road.³ This home, designed by Charles R. Greco, a prominent Boston architect, was in French neoclassical style with a stucco exterior and stately mansard roof.⁴ It had twenty-seven rooms, including seven full bathrooms, six half baths, and nine bedrooms. Family bedrooms and guest rooms were on the second and third floors. The fourth floor included a playroom and kitchen.⁵

Servants' quarters were in a wing at the back of the house, and the house and detached four-car garage sat on a 1.9 acre lot.

The family also built a cottage in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in 1954, and they purchased a Waldorf Towers apartment on Park Avenue in New York City.⁶ In 1955, Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. purchased Ocean Lawn on Cliff Avenue of Easton Bay in Newport, Rhode Island, for \$46,321.⁷ Elizabeth continually researched the provenance and general history of her possessions, including her homes.⁸ David Chase helped research the origin and history of Ocean Lawn. In his 1984 letter to her, he stated:

Whatever the impetus, it is known that Mrs. Gammell had long been seriously considering replacing her old summer cottage, years before she actually built Ocean Lawn. In January of 1881, Richard Morris Hunt's office prepared no fewer than four alternate schemes for a new Gammell cottage. For reasons unknown, none of the Hunt plans were accepted. Mrs. Gammell reportedly also sought proposals from McKim, Mead & White during the '80's, but ultimately she chose Peabody and Stearns of Boston to design Ocean Lawn. The firm had been planning Newport cottages since 1870. Among their best know local projects, begun prior to Ocean Lawn, were Pierre Lorillard's The Breakers; Vinland, commissioned by Catherine Lorillard Wolfe; and F. W. Vanderbilt's Rough Point, under construction when work on Mrs. Gammell's house began.⁹

McNeil Brothers of Boston began building Ocean Lawn in February, 1888, and it was completed in August, 1889.¹⁰

The twenty-three room brick English manor house included a large foyer, his and hers libraries, numerous formal and informal sitting rooms, seven bedroom suites, a wine cellar, and a servants' wing. A greenhouse and pool adjoined the carriage house, and there was also a children's playhouse complete with a kitchen and bathroom (see figure 4.1).¹¹ Gardens and wide expanses of lawn surrounded the house on twenty-two acres. The Firestones purchased additional adjoining land in 1962, 1964, and 1967.

Elizabeth moved to Ocean Lawn permanently after Harvey Jr. died on June 1, 1973. The



4.1. Ocean Lawn.

The Elizabeth and Harvey Firestone Jr. estate in Newport, RI.

Source: "Estate of Elizabeth P. Firestone 'Ocean Lawn' Newport, Rhode Island 02840, Real Estate Appraisal as of October 13, 1990" document by Gustav J.S. White Real Estate and Appraisers, Newport, RI, Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection, Box 1, The University of Akron Archives, Akron, OH.

improvement and maintenance of the house, accessory buildings, and grounds were very important to her throughout their ownership of the property.

Elizabeth had impeccable taste and a surprising ability to know when property or possessions would become valuable, making it possible for her to invest family money in items that highly appreciated in value while she and her family enjoyed using them. The entire Ocean Lawn estate, including all acquired land and buildings, was appraised for estate purposes in 1973 and valued at \$632,500.¹² The property acquired in the 1960s was appraised at \$3,800,000 as of October 13, 1990, the date of Elizabeth's death.¹³ The original Ocean Lawn property, which they bought for \$46,321, was placed on the real estate market for \$5,750,000.¹⁴ In 1989, the Firestone family sold the Twin Oaks estate in Akron for \$600,000.¹⁵

Interior Preferences

Elizabeth enjoyed decorating all of her homes. When they built Twin Oaks, their Akron home, she began to express her love of French furniture and collectibles through purchases for her home. After World War II, she began collecting French art, furniture, porcelain, and silver. She preferred the femininity, grace, and elegance of eighteenth-century French fine and decorative arts. After Harvey Jr. became Chief Executive Officer of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company and they purchased Ocean Lawn, Elizabeth had additional funds and space for expanding her collections.

Elsie de Wolfe, the author of *The House in Good Taste* and the person often credited with establishing interior design as a profession, preferred eighteenth-century French and quality Georgian furniture.¹⁶ While Elizabeth grew up, married, and raised

her children, de Wolfe grew up and began doing eighteenth-century French revival interior design. She decorated the historic Washington Irving House, New York's Colony Club, and the Henry Clay Frick residence (now home of the Frick Collection in New York City). De Wolfe disliked the cluttered rooms, heavy draperies, and garish colors of the Victorian period. She preferred elegant simplicity, beige and white tones, plenty of light, flowers for color and decoration, and comfortable furniture. This philosophy suited Elizabeth.

In the 1940s and 1950s, masses of flowers, Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture, and Rococo art provided the opulent settings for the social class photographed in *Vogue* magazine. Even advertisements for automobiles depicted well-dressed, bejeweled women in rooms with flowers and eighteenth-century silver candlesticks. Fashion models were photographed in Louis XV rooms with the bi-color marble floors, curvilinear fauteuils and consoles, and Sèvres porcelain of eighteenth-century France.

Elizabeth surrounded herself with the world depicted in *Vogue* and in *The House in Good Taste* when she decorated her Twin Oaks and Ocean Lawn homes, although she did not begin collecting earnestly until the late 1940s. The biography of Elizabeth in "The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Part I," Christie's Fine Art Auctioneers of New York catalog noted:

In 1940 Mrs. Firestone visited Robert Ensko, a New York silver dealer, to purchase a wedding gift for Henry Ford II. When asked what she collected, Mrs. Firestone replied, "I don't collect anything now, but I assure you that when I do it will be French."

She later purchased her first piece of silver, French of course, from Ensko. Elizabeth Parke Firestone's core collecting years were the late 1940s through 1970. As a collector she sought perfection above all else, and she took great pleasure in the actual hunt.¹⁷

She took collecting very seriously, yet she only purchased items she enjoyed, and these items were French, of course. She devoured books, gleaned information from dealers and curators, and followed the auction market closely.¹⁸ As time passed, she amassed collections of eighteenth-century silver, Sèvres china, soft paste bisque figures, porcelain boxes, and eighteenth-century paintings that were admired by curators and collectors around the world. In *Connoisseur*, Paul Grigaut, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Detroit Institute of Arts, described her as an “intimate collector” who felt both humility and pride in her collection.¹⁹ The importance and history of the antiques humbled her, and she was proud to be able to share them with others. Elizabeth took great joy in seeing her collections exhibited and appreciated by others. Some of her collections were exhibited at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and other major institutions. Her participation in these exhibits began during the years her children were growing up and continued through the rest of her life.

Elizabeth had a deep respect and appreciation for the pieces she collected. She maintained them with great care and an elaborate cataloguing system. She kept a folder for every significant piece in her collection and for each room in each of her houses.²⁰ Thurle Boyer kept the cataloguing current and correct at all times, and Harvey Jr. reviewed the records annually.

Laurence Benaim, a French journalist, reviewed the Christie’s Europe Exhibition of part of The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection in *Le Monde* magazine. He referred to Mrs. Firestone’s style as the “Pompadour *new look*,” noting her love of French eighteenth-century arts, pastels, and feminine looks.²¹ Benaim recognized Elizabeth’s enjoyment of the feminine style of Madame de Pompadour, a mistress of Louis XV.

Elizabeth also admired the work of Francois Boucher, a noted Rococo artist who painted various famous portraits of Madame de Pompadour. De Pompadour commissioned works of art by Boucher and wore the feminine and sensual gowns depicted in his works. Ruffles, tucks, ruching, ribbons, and bows embellished the gowns and draperies.

Paintings and Drawings

Elizabeth proudly displayed paintings and drawings by Rococo artists, including Francois Boucher, Jean-Honore Fragonard, Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, and Jean-Baptiste Greuze in both Twin Oaks and Ocean Lawn.²² All four of these artists painted very feminine, decorative art. Textiles are an important decorative element in these paintings and drawings, providing color, design, and texture; and, they are idealistically rendered.

Elizabeth's interest in art developed while she was in England as a teenager and continued throughout her life. Although Elizabeth had numerous paintings and drawings in her collection at the time of her death, she collected most of them at a relatively later time in life in comparison to other art works, such as her porcelain and silver collections. She chose very specific and very valuable works for purchase, and she prized them. Each work claimed a place of honor in her homes. After intense study of the eighteenth-century French Rococo artists, she communicated with various curators and dealers about specific works before making each purchase.

Her collection featured major works by Boucher, Fragonard, and Greuze. Elizabeth owned several highly finished chalk drawings by Francois Boucher, including *Head of a Woman*, circa 1768; *A Study of the Head of Ariadne*; *A Shepherdess Standing*

in a Landscape Holding a Basket Under Her Arm; and a *Shepherd and Shepherdess in a Landscape*.²³ Boucher “epitomized the age of Madame de Pompadour” and was Pompadour’s favorite artist.²⁴ Elizabeth also owned *The Card Trick*, chalk drawing, 1773-74, and *Two Cupids*, oil on canvas, by Jean-Honore Fragonard and *La Reveuse*, oil on canvas, by Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Fragonard was “Boucher’s star pupil.”²⁵ Boucher, Fragonard, and Greuze lived at the Louvre as members of the Academy of Art in Paris. Elizabeth owned two atmospheric landscapes by Jean-Baptiste Pillement.²⁶ Pillement, a Rococo landscape artist, worked at the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory, the royal tapestry workshop.²⁷ Nicolas Lancret, a royal painter who painted genre scenes for Louis XV, made numerous works for Versailles and other royal residences.²⁸ Alexandre-Francois Desportes, a favorite painter of Louis XIV and Louis XV, painted royal hunts and animals.²⁹ He also designed tapestries. Elizabeth owned drawings by Lancret and a floral painting by Desportes.

In 1967, Elizabeth decided she wanted to purchase a painting by Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun and she contacted Schaeffer Galleries in New York City.³⁰ Schaeffer Galleries frequently provided her with information and assistance in finding a specific work of art, and the firm found the *Portrait of Hyacinthe Gabrielle Roland*, 1791, oil on canvas, by Vigée Le Brun. Vigée Le Brun, portraitist for Marie Antoinette, depicted the eighteenth-century idolization of the cult of love and feminine beauty with grace and splendor. She painted thirty portraits of Marie Antoinette.³¹ Elizabeth remained true to her love of eighteenth-century France throughout her collecting years, and she crowned her fine art collection with her purchase of the Vigée Le Brun painting.

Porcelain

In contrast to her paintings and drawings collection, Elizabeth began collecting soft-paste porcelain early in her marriage, and she continued to collect throughout the years. In *Connoisseur* magazine, Eve Auchincloss noted that Elizabeth had an amazingly large collection with “many of them packed away in cotton wool and stowed in closets, but dozens of them arranged along the edges of shelves in her vitrines.”³² Elizabeth began her collection with purchases of Sèvres and Vincennes serving pieces, then moved on to smaller manufacturers, purchasing 1730s and 1740s St. Cloud potpourri vases with pierced covers, Menecy stuff boxes and travel tea services, and decorative Chantilly pieces. The most famous French porcelain factory began in Vincennes about 1738, and production was transferred to Sèvres in 1756. Elizabeth amassed an impressive grouping of Sèvres biscuit figures produced by this factory during the third quarter of the eighteenth century.³³

Eighteenth-Century Silver

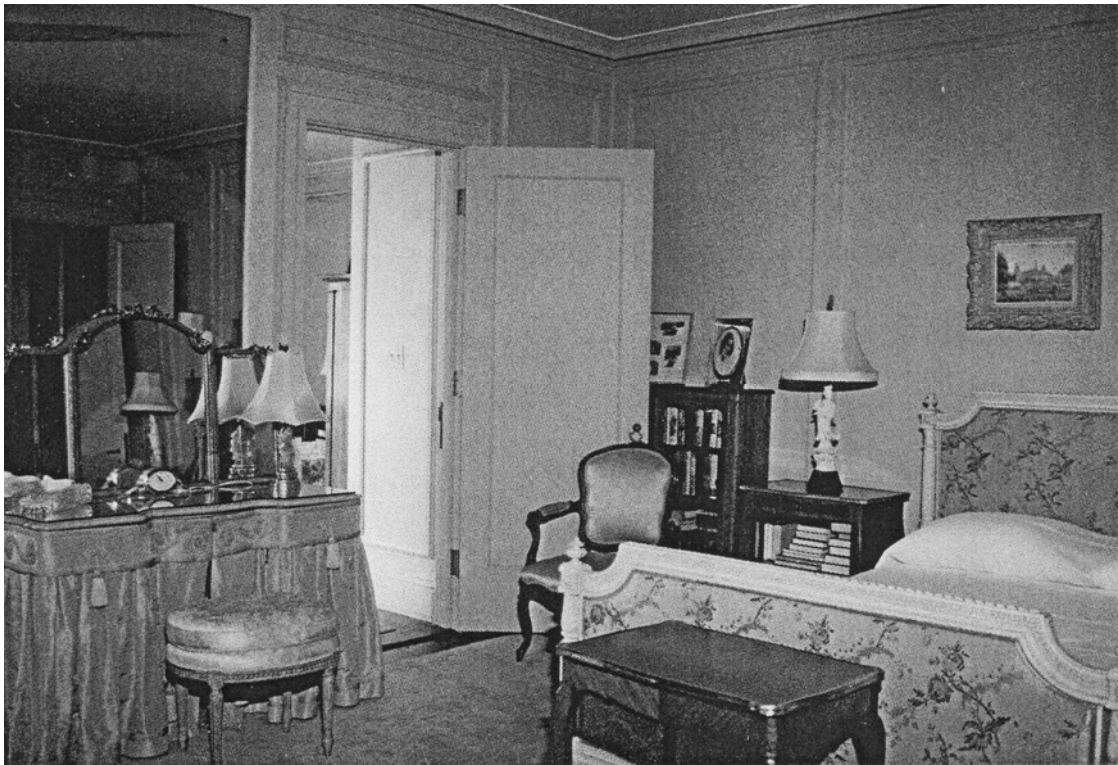
The crowning glory of Elizabeth’s collections was her impressive collection of eighteenth-century silver. Elizabeth developed an interest in silver while she was living with an aunt and uncle in England and attending Leeds Girls High School.³⁴ Her aunt collected English silver. By 1957, Elizabeth had collected over four hundred pieces of Louis XV-style silver designed by the greatest goldsmiths of the *Grand Siècle* of French craftsmanship. Elizabeth was a perfectionist, and she demanded what she considered to be the most perfect of the perfect. Elizabeth usually purchased the simpler, more solemn style “à l’antique” that Madame de Pompadour preferred.³⁵ Both women seemed to

enjoy the more decorative, floral porcelains and the more restrained silver pieces. French silver is rare because it was melted down to be restyled and/or for money to support its owners' personal desires or military campaigns. During the French Revolution, enormous quantities of plate silver from royal palaces and personal residences were melted down. The silver produced during the eighteenth century was of the finest craftsmanship. Goldsmiths had very few apprentices, and they emphasized perfection of form and "excellence of detailed perfection rather than originality of design."³⁶ Elizabeth found perfection and the essence of eighteenth-century France in the silver produced during that period.

Furniture

Eighteenth-century French furniture, especially the mature Louis XV style, suited Elizabeth well. According to Grigaut, she favored its "dignity and perfection of form" and "formal grace and elegance."³⁷ Her choices of furniture were decorative, finely crafted, and beautifully proportioned. She collected five noteworthy Louis XV ormolu-mounted bombe' commodes, including examples stamped by Jacques Dubois, Pierre Roussel, Jean-Baptiste Tuart, and Adrien Faizelot Delorme.³⁸ The collection included a pair of Louis XV ormolu-mounted lacquer encoignures stamped Dubois, a Louis XIV boule clock, and a Louis XV bureau plat, also.

Dressing tables were important elements in Elizabeth's bedrooms at Twin Oaks and Ocean Lawn. The one at Twin Oaks had a gathered satin skirt (see figure 4.2). When Elizabeth chose the design for her dressing table at Ocean Lawn, she had it copied from a Rococo painting (see figure 4.3). The scene in the painting is feminine and



4.2. Dressing Table at Twin Oaks.
Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection, Box 1,
The University of Akron Archives, Akron, OH.



4.3. Rococo Painting with Dressing Table.
Source: Thurlle Boyer gave the photo of the painting to the author.

elegant, and it includes a silver toilet service. Elizabeth's dressing table at Ocean Lawn had a gathered lace ruffle and skirt, and she also purchased a circa 1738-39 Cadaval toilet service for it (see figure 4.4).³⁹ There are notable similarities between the toilet service in the Rococo painting and Elizabeth's, although the later service appears to be more complete. Elizabeth's Ocean Lawn dressing table and toilet service are now in the Detroit Institute of Arts.⁴⁰ The Cadaval toilet service was the first gift she gave to the Institute.⁴¹

In 1953, Elizabeth began a relationship with the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) which lasted the rest of her life. She gave the silver Cadaval toilet set to the museum in 1953 under an arrangement whereby she had the items in her possession for six months and the museum kept them for six months of each year until her death, when the collection became permanently owned by the museum.⁴² As she collected silver during the following two decades, she added many items to the collection lent to the DIA. Martha Ford, Elizabeth's daughter and a collector of English silver, was instrumental in working with the Detroit Institute of the Arts for the acquisition of her mother Elizabeth's eighteenth-century French silver collection.

Disbursement of Collections

After Elizabeth's death on October 13, 1990, many of her collections were sold by auction and others were donated to various museums. In addition, highlights of her collections were featured in *Connoisseur*, *Apollo*, and *Antiques* magazines.⁴³ Her collection of fine art, which probably did not include furniture, was valued, for federal estate tax, at \$1,000,000 in 1972.⁴⁴ In March 1991, furniture, sculpture, drawings and



4.4. Dressing Table at Ocean Lawn.
Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection, Box 1,
The University of Akron Archives, Akron, OH.

paintings, and early French porcelain were included in the two-part Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection sold by Christie's. The 480 lots of her porcelain collection (more than one thousand pieces) sold at Christie's for a total of \$3,500,000.⁴⁵ The Dubois commode sold for \$286,000, and the entire Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection sold by Christie's totaled \$11,060,000.⁴⁶

Emmanuel de Margerie, the director of the French state museums, and his wife had visited Elizabeth before her death to encourage a bequest, mainly of eighteenth-century silver, to the Louvre. Elizabeth had a collection of eighteenth-century silver designated for the Detroit Institute of Arts. She had an additional, highly valuable and extensive, eighteenth-century silver collection, and she specified in her will that the silver she had not designated for the DIA be given to another museum. The trustees of her estate, which included heirs to her estate, chose the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA).⁴⁷ This second silver collection was donated to the MFA in 1993.⁴⁸ In 1997, the MFA opened The Firestone Galleries, two galleries on the second floor of the decorative arts wing, for the display of 125 pieces of French domestic silver donated to the museum from the Elizabeth Parke Firestone estate.⁴⁹

Elizabeth's collections of furniture, porcelain, paintings and drawings were amazingly large, and the disposition of some pieces was decided after her death. The trustees of the Elizabeth Parke Firestone estate chose to sell many valuable pieces, including some eighteenth-century porcelain, furniture, and paintings. A selection of pieces from The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Parts I and II was shown at Christie's Europe by Christie's of New York on May 5-7, 1991.⁵⁰ Emmanuel de Margerie attended the showing and wrote to the CMW Financial Group of New York

stating, “May I take this opportunity to acknowledge your message informing me of the Trustees decision. I was disappointed, of course, for the Louvre and its wide audience, and the curators, need I say, were very sad.”⁵¹ De Margerie valued Elizabeth’s knowledgeable and giving contribution to the fine arts.

In *Christie’s* magazine, Caroline Clifton-Mogg wrote that “the best collections are based on deeply held values—in beauty, knowledge or art.”⁵² Elizabeth held all of these values, and more. She appreciated the need for fine art, and the need to share it. While studying art, she became a highly educated woman. Her expertise in the fine arts, especially eighteenth-century silver, rivaled that of the men of her time. She gleaned information from a wide variety of sources and maintained very complete records. In a limited way, she built and maintained a small museum herself; and later, she gave large portions of her collections to a variety of museums and historical societies, widening her sphere of influence for the appreciation of the arts.

Notes

¹ Thurle Boyer (Mrs. Firestone’s administrative assistant), interview by author, 26 March 2004, Medina, OH, author’s notes.

² Harbel Manor was torn down in 1959, after the death of Idabelle Firestone, and Georgetown Condominiums were built on the site at the corner of West Market Street and Twin Oaks Road.

³ Boyer interview.

⁴ Susan Smith, “Family Home Sells Same Day as Announcement,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 2 August 1989, A7.

⁵ “First American Real Estate Solutions,” *Realist.com Property Details: A Service from Real Estate Solutions* (accessed 28 April 2003); available from <http://realist2.firstamres.com/propertydetail.jsp>.

⁶ Boyer interview.

⁷ Copy of document entitled “Real Estate Purchases,” dated 5 March 1974, Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection, Box 1, University of Akron Archives, Akron, OH; hereafter cited as UA EPF Collection.

⁸ The original owner of the property in Newport, Mrs. William Gammell of Providence, Rhode Island, had received part of the property from her father, and later inherited his portion in the 1870s. Small summer cottages were the only buildings on the land at that time, although other nearby landowners had begun building elaborate Newport cottages.

⁹ Copy of letter from David Chase to Elizabeth Parke Firestone, dated 24 July 1984, UA EPF Collection, Box 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Ocean Lawn, Newport, Rhode Island Private Properties,” Private Properties brochure, 1991, UA EPF Collection, Box 2.

¹² Copy of document entitled “Real Estate Purchases.”

¹³ Ocean Lawn was appraised by Gustave J. S. White Real Estate and Appraisers of Newport, Rhode Island, and Schaeffer, Bates, and McDonough Incorporated of Providence, Rhode Island.

¹⁴ Ibid; “Ocean Lawn, Newport, Rhode Island Private Properties.”

¹⁵ Smith, “Family Home Sells Same Day as Announcement.” Twin Oaks was sold to A. Mosby Harvey Jr., a Firestone attorney, and his wife, Karin. The house resold in 1992 to Samuel and Judith Dipaola for \$885,000, and it remains a private residence.

¹⁶ Elsie De Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (New York: Century Company, 1914). Elsie de Wolfe compiled *The House in Good Taste* from articles she wrote for newspapers and *Delineator* magazine. The book was published in 1913, and it quickly became a classic. De Wolfe was born in 1865 and died in 1950. Cecil Beaton, a photographer for *Vogue* and high society, was a close personal friend of De Wolfe.

¹⁷ “The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Part I,” *Christie’s* catalogue (New York, New York), 21 March 1991, Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 4, Folder 9, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI; hereafter cited as BFRC Firestone Collection.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Paul Grigaut, “French Silver: The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection,” *Connoisseur*, January 1957, 276, in BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 29, Periodicals: *Connoisseur* file.

²⁰ Boyer interview.

²¹ Laurence Benaim, “L’heritage d’une Pompadour *new-look*: La collection Firestone en vente chez Christie’s” [translation: “The Legacy of a Pompadour New Look: The Firestone Collection on sale at Christie’s”], *Le Monde*, 6 March 1991, UA EPF Collection, Box 2. Christie’s Europe had a presentation of select pieces from The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection in Paris on March 5-7, 1991.

²² “The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Part II,” *Christie’s* catalogue (New York, New York), 22 March 1991, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 4, Folder 9.

²³ “The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Part II.”

²⁴ Horst Janson, *History of Art*, 5th ed., revised and expanded by Anthony Janson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 606.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Homan Potterton, “When tyres meet taste,” *Financial Times Weekend*, 9-10 March 1991, UA EPF Collection, Box 2.

²⁷ Explore Art Website, “Jean-Baptiste Pillement” (accessed 14 May 2006); available within The Getty Museum Website: <http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/bio>.

²⁸ Explore Art Website, “Nicolas Lancret.”

²⁹ Explore Art Website, “Alexandre-Francois Desportes.”

³⁰ “The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Part I.”

³¹ Janson, 607.

³² Eve Auchincloss, “Last Look at a Bygone Era,” *Connoisseur*, March 1991, 102.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Boyer interview.

³⁵ Grigaut, 272.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Grigaut, 271.

³⁸ “The Remarkable Firestone Collection,” *Christie’s International Magazine* 8, (September/October 1990): 8, UA EPF Collection, Box 2.

³⁹ Marsha Miro, “Firestone treasured her collection of French silver,” *Detroit News/Free Press*, 24 March 1991, Arts Section, UA EPF Collection, Box 2. The Duke of Cadaval lived on the Lisbon Coast in Portugal, and he had many ties to Paris and French royalty.

⁴⁰ According to the Detroit Institute of Arts website (accessed 10 September 2005); available from http://www.dia.org/the_collection, the basic toilet service is by Sebastian Igonet, a French artist. Some of the other pieces in the service are by different goldsmiths.

⁴¹ “French Taste in the Eighteenth Century,” Exhibition Catalogue, The Detroit Institute of Arts, 27 April – 3 June, 1956, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 4, Folder 6. Elizabeth Parke Firestone loaned a wide selection of porcelain, silver, and furniture to the Detroit Institute of Arts for this exhibition. This was her first major endeavor of this kind. The first exhibition of her eighteenth-century silver at the DIA was in 1953.

⁴² Tracey Albainy, “Eighteenth-Century French Silver in the Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 73, no. 1/2, UA EPF Collection, Box 2.

⁴³ Susan Britman, “The Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection,” *Christie’s International Magazine* 12 (March/April 1991): 1-2, UA EPF Collection, Box 2. Susan Britman was Christie’s Fine Art Auctioneers publicist.

⁴⁴ “Elizabeth Parke Firestone Federal Estate Tax Calculations,” 21 September 1972, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 3, Folder 6.

⁴⁵ Susan Britman, “Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Sells For \$11.06 Million at Christie’s,” Christie’s news release, 23 March 1991, UA EPF Collection, Box 1. Britman, “Elizabeth Parke Firestone Collection Sells for \$11.6 Million at Christie’s.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Art: The Elizabeth Parke and Harvey S. Firestone, Jr. Collection of French Silver,” *The New York Times*, 27 June 1997, Datebook. A copy of this article was given to me by Thurlie Boyer, Elizabeth Parke Firestone’s administrative assistant. During the

interview, she also told me that the silver was willed to a museum and the trustees determined that the silver collection would be given to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

⁴⁸ Auchincloss, 100-01.

⁴⁹ Frances McQueeney-Jones Mascolo, "French Silver In The Firestone Galleries," 9 May 1997, 1 and 68-70. This article was given to me by Thurlie Boyer.

⁵⁰ Benaim.

⁵¹ Copy of fax from Emmanuel de Margerie, sent by Christie's Europe, to the CMW Financial Group in New York City, dated 4 March 1991, UA EPF Collection, Box 2.

⁵² Caroline Clifton-Mogg, "The Remarkable Firestone Collection," *Christie's International Magazine* 8, no. 3 (1991): 2, UA EPF Collection, Box 2.

CHAPTER V
THE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF
THE ELIZABETH PARKE FIRESTONE COUTURE COLLECTION

Elizabeth Parke Firestone collected clothing the way she collected fine art. She saved her wedding dress, trousseau items, and many clothing items from the first years of her marriage. Although Elizabeth did not begin to collect fine art until after World War II, she collected personal clothing and accessories from the day she was married. Elizabeth catalogued and maintained her wardrobe collection in an organized manner; and later, she collected porcelain, silver, paintings, and other decorative arts items with the same respect and devotion.

Elizabeth traveled extensively with her husband, attended a wide variety of social events, hosted numerous social affairs, and represented her husband and the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company wherever she went. Her responsibilities most assuredly made her do her best to fulfill her role as an elegant and gracious lady of high social position. People she met privately and publicly scrutinized her appearance and behavior due to the wealth and prominence of the Firestone family. Clothing played an important role in her image, and her personal interest in fashion and the arts enhanced this role.

When Elizabeth was at home at Twin Oaks, Ocean Lawn, or Waldorf Towers, a daily routine kept her trim and well-groomed. She watched her weight very closely, and

carefully planned her meals with the family cook. She was very specific about her diet. Each morning, after breakfast in her room, Elizabeth had a beautician come to her to do her hair and nails. At Ocean Lawn, she had a hair dryer and beauty parlor chair installed in her bedroom. A woman came to exercise with her each morning, and then Elizabeth completed her correspondence with Thurle Boyer and/or her personal social secretary.¹ Boyer noted “From a certain age, Mrs. Firestone had a facelift every seven years. She had them done in Florida. The surgeons there did all the movie stars.”² Elizabeth demanded perfection of herself and those around her, and she wanted everything, including herself, to be beautiful.

Elizabeth bought her clothing in complete outfits, including the garment, shoes, and other accessories. She kept each pair of shoes in a drawer with a fabric swatch from the garment. That way, a member of the house staff was able to find the correct shoes to match a garment. She utilized various labeling and cataloguing methods for her clothing collection and had clothing stored in many rooms at Twin Oaks in Akron and her summer house, Ocean Lawn, in Rhode Island.³ Numbers were written on pieces of fabric and pinned inside each garment at each house (see figure 5.1). Other times, numbers were written on labels inside garments. These numbers corresponded with numbers on lists kept by Boyer. Since Elizabeth purchased new garments and retired older garments each season, the numbering and cataloguing of the items varied over time as Elizabeth and Boyer thought of ways to improve the system.⁴

At Twin Oaks and Ocean Lawn, Elizabeth reviewed her current wardrobes with care for each upcoming season and had Gizella Karder, her Akron seamstress, work for



Figure 5.1. Example of Labeling System for Clothing.
This item is a knee length skirt that has a matching blouse.
Source: The University of Akron Elizabeth Parke Firestone Clothing Collection,
Accession #1992.10.75B.

several days or weeks to make sure every garment was well-maintained and perfectly fitted. Karder flew to Ocean Lawn many times, and when she arrived, the garments Elizabeth wanted altered were hanging in the bathroom, ready to be tried on. Elizabeth did not concern herself with finished seam allowances or matched plaids, yet she insisted upon straight hemlines that were not sharply pressed and fine elastic garter straps to keep her tops neatly tucked in at all times. After gallbladder surgery on April 7, 1954, she frequently had a thin pad placed inside a garment at the waistline to reduce the pressure of her waistband. She was so specific about the fit of her garments that she often requested to have her garments taken in “a pin’s width,” which was sometimes impossible to do without damaging the fabric or ruining the drape of the garment.⁵

Gizella Karder made clothing for Elizabeth for thirty years, beginning in 1950. Elizabeth had Karder copy garments she already owned using fabric she purchased in Paris and New York. These fabrics were of very high quality, in rich, beautiful colors, with elegant textures and/or designs in them. Elizabeth preferred to wear very fine, natural fabrics, especially silk. Karder had a dress form, with Elizabeth’s measurements, that she called “Clara Belle,” which she used to obtain the perfect fit and look that Elizabeth wanted. She carefully copied all of the couture features in the old garments as she made new ones, and she worked to refine her skills as she sewed. Although Karder did not provide original designs, she was able to provide the perfection and feminine styles Elizabeth preferred as fashion changed during the seventh and eighth decades of the twentieth century. Karder grew to know exactly what her client wanted, and she was able to provide her with intense personal attention to detail and fit. Elizabeth also grew to depend upon her to help her with other textile needs. When new garments arrived

from Paris, Elizabeth tried on each garment and checked every detail with Karder. Although Elizabeth sent her clothes to Paris to be cleaned, she needed to have them pressed at home. Elizabeth hired a woman to do this, and asked Karder to teach her to press each garment properly. All of Elizabeth's slips and nightgowns were bias cut silk and had to be pressed, not ironed, along the bias to keep the line correct and the hemline even. Otherwise, a small amount of slip might show below the hemline of a dress or skirt, or the hemline of a nightgown might be wavy and uneven.⁶

When Elizabeth traveled, Boyer completed packing lists for her clothing and accessories. The packing lists included notations about work to be completed on particular items, and the house staff packed the trunks with Elizabeth's supervision.⁷ Elizabeth included clothing and linen to be taken to France for cleaning, monogramming, copying, and altering.⁸

Elizabeth purchased shoes, gloves, and other accessories in an array of styles and colors. She chose accessories for specific outfits, and she purchased shoes and gloves in a wide spectrum of shades in the colors she wore often. The five hundred pair shoe collection donated to The Benson Ford Research Center at The Henry Ford by Elizabeth consisted of an assortment of colors, including many shades of blue, pink, beige, and other colors in numerous styles. She had several favorite shoe styles in many colors, plus specially made shoes for outfits designed for specific events. The selection of gloves in The University of Akron Firestone Collection is similar, with a wide variety of colors and styles. She had many shades and lengths in her favorite colors (see figure 5.2). Some of the gloves in The University of Akron Firestone Collection have never been worn.



Figure 5.2. A Sampling of Gloves.

These gloves are a small selection from the collection.

Some of the gloves have never been worn.

Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Clothing Collection at The University of Akron, a selection of gloves from Accession #1992.10.98-124.

Linens and lingerie for the Firestone family were purchased in New York City and France, and they were monogrammed in Europe. According to Elizabeth M. Kurella of *Antique Week*:

Around the 14th century, only the linens of royalty were marked with embroidered initials, crests, and heraldry. . . . The close association of royalty and linens marked with embroidered initials was never lost. The industrialization in the 19th century produced whole new generations of royalty – railroad barons, oil barons, steel barons and captains of industry. All were amazingly self-important, self-centered and individualistic, and it should be no surprise they chose to put their initials and monograms on everything.⁹

A sales associate from New York City visited Elizabeth at Twin Oaks or Ocean Lawn with samples on a regular basis from the 1940s until her death. Boyer sent letters from Elizabeth to the companies for special and repeat orders. Sometimes she had expensive Belgian lace and monograms added to handkerchiefs and lingerie while she was in Europe. She would salvage exceptionally intricate and expensive lace from linens and have new linens made. Her favorite styles for lingerie items were custom ordered in the colors she preferred, mainly blue, pink, and cream, and monogrammed (see figures 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5).¹⁰

Elizabeth liked her clothing to be simple, elegant, and feminine. Her favorite colors for suits, gowns, and dresses were “powdery icy blue, then pale pink.”¹¹ She had blue eyes, which were accentuated by the icy blue, and she enjoyed the warmth and femininity of pink.¹² Peau de soie was her favorite fabric due to its matte finish and refined elegance in look and touch.¹³

The development and maintenance of Elizabeth’s wardrobe was done in an organized and knowledgeable manner because she was motivated by her interest in fashion, ability to sew, and desire to dress well. Every detail of her wardrobe was



Figure 5-3. Monogram on Bed Jacket.
Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Clothing Collection
at The University of Akron, Accession #1992.10.129.



Figure 5.4. Dressing Gown with Monogram.
Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Clothing Collection
at The University of Akron, Accession #89.11.3A.



Figure 5.5. Lingerie Cover and Hot Water Bottle Cover.
Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Clothing Collection at
The University of Akron, Accession #1992.10.51A and B.

important to her, and she strove for perfection as she directed the staff in the care and maintenance of the clothing and linen in their home. Her enjoyment and appreciation of fashion served her well as she lived her married life amongst the upper class.

Notes

¹ Thurle Boyer (Mrs. Firestone's administrative assistant), interview by author, 26 March 2004, Medina, OH, author's notes. Author noted the hair dryer and chair in a photo of Elizabeth Parke Firestone's bedroom at Ocean Lawn, and Thurle Boyer discussed these items when she showed the photo to the author.

² Ibid.

³ Gizella Karder (Elizabeth Parke Firestone's seamstress in Akron, OH), interview by author, 28 October 2005, Akron, OH, author's notes.

⁴ Boyer interview.

⁵ Karder interview. The date of Elizabeth Parke Firestone's gallbladder surgery was determined by a letter she wrote to Madame Alice at Maison Balenciaga, dated 27 April 1954, Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 15, Folder 9, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI; hereafter cited as BFRC Firestone Collection.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Boyer interview.

⁸ Typed sheet entitled "European Trip, May 1958, Trunk No. 18," BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 14, Folder 4.

⁹ Elizabeth M. Kurella, "Monograms Convey Family Heritage," *Antique Week* 35, no. 1735 (26 August 2002): 1.

¹⁰ Boyer interview.

¹¹ Karder interview.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

ELIZABETH PARKE FIRESTONE AND THE COUTURE HOUSES

When Elizabeth began making spring and autumn trips to Europe with her husband in the mid-1920s, she began to purchase designer clothing in Paris, possibly for her trips to Liberia and the Far East with her husband. She bought a machine- and hand-sewn navy blue silk crepe day dress by Jean Patou, made in 1925-26.¹ She also purchased a machine- and hand-sewn red silk day dress by Jean Patou, made in 1925-26.²

Elizabeth developed a relationship with several couture houses. The couture houses mailed sketches and fabric swatches to Elizabeth, and she chose the designs and fabrics she wanted. Sometimes, she attended couture shows and chose garments, and she continued to receive invitations to couture shows when she was in her seventies and eighties.³ During her spring and autumn visits to Paris, she had fittings, and the garments were mailed to her when they were completed.⁴

Once she knew the abilities of the couture houses, Dior, Mainbocher, and Balenciaga became her preferred design houses. Balenciaga was her ultimate favorite for providing the look she liked.⁵ In all of her purchases of the objects she collected, Thurler Boyer stated "It was a question simply of what pleased her."⁶ Balenciaga catered to women on the best-dressed list who were willing to pay his top prices. His designs were known for their perfect fit and their relation to art, both of which were very important to

Elizabeth. According to Janet Flanner, a biographer of Main Bocher, “Bocher’s original aim as a dressmaker—which he attributed to his Middle Western background—was simply to dress women like ladies.” A Mainbocher customer was an immaculate, chic, wealthy woman who had kept her figure and liked to dress like a lady.⁷ Main Bocher, an American, opened a Paris couture house in 1929 after years as the editor of *Vogue* in France, and named his couture house Mainbocher. He moved his business to New York before Paris fell during World War II, and “from then until the 1960s he remained the undisputed leading couturier of the American upper classes.”⁸ Main Bocher designed flattering, feminine outfits for Elizabeth in the image she sought to achieve.

As her relationships with the couture houses deepened, she asked the houses to alter designs or use a fabric she had purchased previously or had chosen for another garment in the past.⁹ She had favorite fabrics and colors for specific garments, and she did not hesitate to purchase fabric from couture houses for future use or to have shoes made to match an outfit. With her shopping experience, she became familiar with the finer fabrics available in New York and Paris. In a letter to Madame Alice LaPorte at Maison Balenciaga, she wrote, “Do you think it possible for M. Dennis to make me the suit like your sketch No. 8 but in the material, a sample of which I am enclosing? This sample was sent me by Maison Dior, therefore I know that it exists in this color and material in Paris.”¹⁰

She frequently requested changes in designs, such as “I would want the skirt to be wide enough at the bottom or with a big overlapping pleat so that I can dance.”¹¹ She would ask Madame Alice if a dress could be made strapless and embroidery added to make it more dramatic.¹² When ordering a dress or suit, she often requested a bolero,

scarf, or coat to match. Elizabeth purchased an extra copy or two of a blouse if the original might be soiled easily due to the color or fabric. Sometimes, she ordered the same ensemble in different colors.¹³

Later in life, Elizabeth shopped in New York and ordered by mail rather than visiting Paris twice a year.¹⁴ In 1970, she wrote to Madame Elaine Flament at Hermes stating, “Due to many illnesses that my husband has had we have not been in Paris since 1967.” She also noted that they hoped to visit France sometime that year.¹⁵ Three years later, she explained in a letter to Madame Fernande Noel, a seamstress at Villa Plandome in France, that “Bob Bugnand, who is in New York now entirely and makes only for a very few people, does all my work.”¹⁶ In 1976, she answered a letter from Madame Flament to tell her “I cannot seem to bring myself to travel alone since losing my husband. I would love to come to Paris but just cannot face the trip alone and also I am afraid to stay alone in the hotels.”¹⁷

Over the years, Elizabeth kept couture design sketches, and bills for couture garments, and many of her letters to designer houses. Some of these files were donated to the Benson Ford Research Center at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. They provide a picture of Elizabeth’s work with couture houses. For example, Elizabeth received sketches in autumn of 1952, and she wrote to Madame LaPorte at Maison Balenciaga on October 14, 1952 to order several custom outfits, including an afternoon dress, two evening gowns, a coat, and a suit. She also stated, “I need a short evening dress and wondered if it would be nice in the red velvet like the scarf on Model #150.”¹⁸ She obviously reviewed the sketches and fabrics closely. Boyer noted that she often reviewed the sketches again and again before ordering, and then she would sometimes

request that the sketches be returned to her with her order.¹⁹ In the October 1952 letter, Elizabeth wrote:

I am enclosing a sketch which I cut out of Harper's Bazaar of a black and white lace over pink satin. I like the shape of it very much. Do you think the black and white lace over an orchid pink or a pretty shade of blue would be nice? Please let me know about this one.²⁰

She did not hesitate to suggest designs. In another paragraph of the same letter, she refers to Model # 141, stating:

I like very much the sketch and the satin serge, but do not like the embroidery on the net. I think the net spoils the look of the embroidery. Also from the sketch I cannot understand how the bird fits in with the over-all design which the sketch apparently shows.²¹

She analyzed the design and questioned its accuracy. In a later paragraph of the same letter, she requested changes in Model #77 when she wrote "I would like this dress without the ermine band and for me it has too many diamonds. I would like sapphire stones where there are pear-shaped diamonds and pearl fringe where there is crystal fringe."²² Then she wrote about a coat, Model #45, stating "It is difficult to tell from the sketch the exact shape. I prefer not to have set-in sleeves and I am wondering if you could match the grey of my tailored suit of which I am enclosing a sample."²³ On November 3, 1952, Elizabeth wrote to Madame LaPorte again, saying "As to #77, the pearl and diamond embroidered dress, I think I had better wait until I come to France to have such an important dress made."²⁴

Every minute detail was important to Elizabeth. She had a passion for flowers. Many of her evening gowns were embellished with flowers, and the flowers had to be beautiful. In a 1949 letter to Madame LaPorte, she wrote "I am also sending the 'dead' flowers that were on the dress as I find that I cannot replace them here in New York and I

would like you to send me four sets.”²⁵ After receiving the flowers, she wrote back to Madame LaPorte requesting, “I asked you to make four sets of three flowers and I only received four sets of two flowers each.”²⁶ Elizabeth expected perfection.

The staff at the couture houses advised Elizabeth about purchases she might especially enjoy. Madame Azemar of Christian Dior suggested numerous items in a 1953 letter, and she wrote “About the dress ‘Victorine’, I have found a lovely blue which I suppose may suit you, and Madame Marguerite is in love with this dress and this material and advises you to order it.”²⁷ The staff knew her preferences well, and fabrics and sketches were chosen specifically for her.

Staff members also knew when Elizabeth’s requests might not be advisable, and they explained the reasoning behind the original design, color, or fabric. Madame Azemar wrote to Elizabeth in 1955:

About the evening gown Fête a Neuilly, with the scarf, Madame Marguerite Madame Germaine and myself would like very much that you do not change the shade of the model. We are afraid that the embroidery in “oyster shell” would not match another colour than white and would disappoint you in that case. We are very enthusiastic about this dress, just as it is, and we are sure that you will not regret to order it all in white. The embroidery gives to it a very original and attractive effect.²⁸

In the same letter, Madame Azemar referred to another gown when she stated:

The short evening dress Almée, we find it really lovely. It is possible to make it straight, without sleeves, and with a scarf matching the ribbon sash. Monsieur Dior and Madame Marguerite do not advise you to mix gold and silver. They would prefer it either in gold or in silver. They also advise you to keep the same material, for the faille would be too heavy and would not give the same effect.²⁹

Elizabeth’s close relationship with the couture houses allowed her to request specific seamstresses or tailors to make certain items. At Maison Balenciaga, she preferred that Monsieur Denis tailor her suits, Madame Claude make her evening dresses,

and Madame LaPorte construct her boleros.³⁰ Elizabeth researched her clothing collection in the same way she researched her other collections, by discussing each piece with experts. She was highly involved in every aspect of every garment she purchased. Each item was completely customized for her in details of design, fabric, and fit.

Special events required specially designed gowns. Carrie Munn, a New York City couture designer who began her business in 1940, made one of these. Elizabeth wore a stunning Carrie Munn gown of silk marquissette on July 25, 1946, for her twenty-fifth wedding anniversary celebration with Harvey Jr. at the Ritz Hotel in New York. Sheer navy blue marquissette drapes over a white marquissette under-dress. The gown is edged with navy blue sequins at the heart-shaped neckline. Vertical floral patterns of seed beads adorn the dress (see figure 6.1). The spaghetti straps could be covered with the matching long-sleeved jacket at dinner.

In 1955, Elizabeth wrote to Madame Marguerite at Christian Dior:

I am writing you especially to ask you if Mr. Dior could do some especially beautiful wool gown for me. Something that would be extremely spectacular as we are going to Vienna for the opening of the opera and will be there several days. Many of my friends will be there, and they are all having beautiful gowns made here to take with them.³¹

The blue satin gown Dior designed has floral embroidery and an asymmetrical bow at the back waistline (see figure 6.2). Elizabeth wore the gown with a mink stole, and she was a smashing hit at the opera opening. This gown was featured in the “Vintage Couture: Fashions of Elizabeth Parke Firestone” exhibit at The Henry Ford from March 4 through July 13, 2005. Martha Firestone Ford, Elizabeth’s daughter, worked with The Henry Ford Museum and the Benson Ford Research Center in the development of the exhibition



Figure 6.1. Twenty-Fifth Wedding Anniversary Dress.
Left to right: This photo is of daughter Martha, mother Elizabeth Parke Firestone,
and daughter Elizabeth on June 25, 1946 at the Ritz Carlton in New York City.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697,
Box 3, Folder 10, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.



Figure 6.2. Ball Gown for the Vienna Opera House.
Photo taken at the “Vintage Couture: The Fashions of Elizabeth Parke Firestone”
exhibition at The Henry Ford Museum on June 27, 2005, by the author.

at The Henry Ford Museum, and she was very helpful to the museum by providing interesting details about her mother and her couture collection.³²

In 1949, Elizabeth chose two unique gowns to wear when she was photographed by Cecil Beaton, a British photographer, for a *Vogue* article. The first gown was a Carrie Munn blue/black satin evening dress with elbow-length sleeves and a gored skirt (see figure 6.3). A ribbon and white lace decoration adorns the bodice. Elizabeth wore this gown at the celebration of her daughter Anne's sixteenth birthday and mother-in-law Idabelle's seventy-fifth birthday on November 10, 1949 (see figure 6.4).³³ The second gown was a Salon Moderne gown, designed by in-house designer, Sophie Gimbel, at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City. The cream-colored silk damask strapless gown has a skirt and bustle arrangement attached at the waist and floral embellishments at the bodice and right hip (see figure 6.5). In 1949, she was photographed in this gown at a New Year's Eve party at Portage Country Club in Akron, Ohio.

Before and after World War II, *Vogue* regularly featured wealthy women wearing elegant clothing in rich settings, standing beside a Louis XVI bergère, sitting on a Rococo canapé, or sitting in front of a Louis XIV bureau plat. The upper-class women were debutantes, brides, newlyweds, young mothers, and grandmothers; and they were wealthy daughters, wives of prominent businessmen, wives of government officials, and royalty from other countries. The articles accompanying the photographs described the women as socially active, constantly traveling, entertaining, and providing for the arts. The settings were always amazingly feminine and lovely, and the ladies were beautifully dressed and highly polished with serene faces. In a way, each woman became a part of the décor, dressing the room like a Fragonard painting.



Figure 6.3. Cecil Beaton Photo of Elizabeth Parke Firestone.
This photo of Elizabeth in a Carrie Munn evening gown was taken by Cecil Beaton in 1949. A photo of Elizabeth in a Salon Moderne evening gown was chosen to be published by *Vogue* magazine instead of this photo.
Source: Elizabeth Parke Firestone Clothing Collection at the University of Akron, Accession #UA1994.3.3.



Figure 6-4. Carrie Munn Evening Gown.
Photo of Elizabeth and Harvey Firestone Jr. dancing at Idabelle Firestone's
seventy-fifth birthday celebration on November 10, 1949, at Harbel Manor.
Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 1, Folder 13,
Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.



Figure 6-5. Salon Moderne Evening Gown.
Photo taken at the “Vintage Couture: The Fashions of Elizabeth Parke Firestone”
exhibition at The Henry Ford Museum on June 27, 2005, by the author.

Vogue magazine had Cecil Beaton, a British photographer, and others photograph these women wearing exquisite gowns in elegant settings. Georgina Howell, author of *Vogue Women*, wrote:

Even the richest of women can be tempted to have her photograph taken if it is by a great photographer. Nast [Conde Nast, publisher of *Vogue*] lost no time in finding and winning over great new photographers who guaranteed a flattering and fashionable portrait. These were such masters of the art as Baron de Mayer, master of sparkling light, Steichen or Stieglitz, the brilliant Hoyningen-Huene and Horst, or Cecil Beaton. But the publisher required something more. He wanted portraits that expressed the glamorous world that these women inhabited.³⁴

Cecil Beaton attended Cambridge in the early 1920s, “photographed The Duchess of Malfi for *Vogue*,” and sought to enter “into the glamorous world where he felt he belonged.”³⁵ Soon, he moved to New York and was employed by *Vogue*; and then he was gradually able to freelance for magazines, theaters, and private patrons. He also wrote several books, of which *The Book of Beauty* was his first, and published his diaries. He loved women’s fashions from the time he was a little boy.

During World War II, he traveled extensively and photographed war photographs for publication; and, after the war, he was very active in London social life while he decorated his English country home. He acquired a classically designed eighteenth-century home near Salisbury, and filled it with art, eighteenth-century furniture, and Sèvres porcelain.³⁶

His taste in fashion and interior design was similar to Elizabeth’s. One day, after visiting a chateau in Chantilly with Greta Garbo, his very close companion at the time, they stopped at a small farm. In one of the small buildings on the farm, Beaton recalled, “we went in to see a large room painted in *trompe l’oeil* of trees and flowers with walls and ceiling making a Fragonard-like world” that “created a magical

impression.”³⁷ Beaton had photographed Queen Elizabeth of England in a setting of flowers and fantasy in 1939, and the photographs were highly successful. He needed to return to work, and he wanted to do female portraits in Rococo settings.³⁸ The *Vogue* photo of Elizabeth in her Salon Moderne gown is one of these portraits.

The Cecil Beaton photograph of Elizabeth in the Salon Moderne gown was published by *Vogue* in February 1950. Fittingly, the article was entitled “Behave Like a Beauty,” and stated:

A beauty behaves kindly, confidently, beautifully. . . . If you consistently move like a beauty, wear a beauty’s expression of confidence and serenity, are groomed like a beauty, dress like a beauty, act toward other people as if you were a beauty—you become one, . . . The colours you love usually love you. Don’t be afraid of repeating them—or a certain type of earrings, or a shoe last.³⁹

Irving Penn commented that Beaton “invented the Beaton woman. She was rather English, rather distant, the sort of woman that has roses falling at her feet.”⁴⁰ Mrs. Firestone suited the article and Beaton’s image of a woman well. In fact, Alan Pryce-Jones, her Newport neighbor, “describes her as ‘the most luxurious woman in the history of luxury.’”⁴¹ Most assuredly, Elizabeth enjoyed dressing in a feminine and beautiful gown in an eighteenth-century setting, being photographed by a well-known *Vogue* photographer, and being featured in a magazine she read regularly.

Elizabeth continued to choose special gowns for specific events, and she resumed traveling to France for clothing and other French items after World War II ended and business resumed in France. For Harvey III’s wedding in 1956, Elizabeth chose a Christian Dior organza strapless dress with a wrap-over bolero jacket.⁴² Silk flowers adorn the bodice above the bow at the waist. Many of Elizabeth’s dresses had bows, ruffles, embroidery, decorative flowers, and soft, transparent fabric, such as organza,

wrapped around the shoulders. These same feminine elements suit the Rococo settings of Cecil Beaton's photographs and were favorite elements in the clothing of Madame Pompadour and other women in eighteenth-century France.

Elizabeth and Harvey Jr. attended many costume balls, and their daughters joined them when they were young adults. In 1953, Elizabeth and daughters Elizabeth and Anne dressed as the three blind mice for a White Elephant Sale Ball in Newport, Rhode Island. They wore checkered pinafores with short skirts, tights, white high heels, and large mice ears. Elizabeth dressed as "Diamond Lil" for the 1960 White Elephant Ball at Bailey's Beach in Newport, and she won first prize (see figure 6.5).⁴³ The bill for the costume, blond wig, tights, earrings, long cigarette holder, and whip was \$1367.98.⁴⁴ Elizabeth especially enjoyed wearing peacock costumes to numerous balls over the years. A special peacock costume, with large colorful feathers that could be lifted up, was designed for her in 1970. Harvey Jr. did not wear costumes to the balls, and photos show him dressed for the ball in a business suit and smiling broadly as he stands beside his wife in her costume.

Elizabeth had a very feminine, classic style. Her clothing accentuated her best features, and she knew what made her look perfect – from the blue color to accentuate her eyes to the expert tailoring. As a member of the influential and well-known Firestone family, wife of a highly successful chief executive officer, and international socialite, Elizabeth knew how she wanted to look and she achieved that look. She paid attention to



Figure 6.6. Diamond L'il Costume.

Photo of Elizabeth and Harvey Firestone Jr. before going to the White Elephant Ball on September 30, 1960.

Source: Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 3, Folder 4, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI.

every detail in the purchase of each item for her wardrobe, and she did it with skill and determination. She was, undoubtedly, a motivated woman with high expectations. In the 1950s, Elizabeth was listed with the “Women of Distinguished Taste Cited by Fashion Authorities” on The Best Dressed Women in the World ballot released by the Couture Group of the New York Dress Institute. Elizabeth then knew her success had been validated.⁴⁵

Elizabeth respected all of her collections, including her clothing collection. She disposed of her clothing utilizing the same methods she used for her paintings and drawings, porcelain, eighteenth-century silver, and furniture collections. Some of her clothing was sold by Sotheby’s Auction House. She gave gifts of clothing items to a variety of institutions including the Cincinnati Historical Society, Western Reserve Historical Society, The Ohio State University, The University of Akron, the Art Institute of Chicago, The Henry Ford Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her vast collection spans seven decades, providing a window into the history of fashion. These excellent institutions further awareness of fashion as an art form and the study of couture design and construction.

Notes

¹ “Dress with Underskirt, about 1927,” Accession #89.492.576, Gift of Mrs. Harvey Firestone, Jr., The Henry Ford Historic Costume Collection, Benson Ford Research Center. Clothing label states “Jean Patou/7 RUE ST. FLORENTIN, PARIS/CANNES/MONTE CARLO/BIARRITZ,” and, according to the description of the garment (accessed 23 October 2005), available from <http://www.dlxs.lib.wayne.edu/cgi/i/image/image>, there is an “illegible number handwritten on back of the label.” Digital images on the website are copyrighted by The Henry Ford and can be used for reference purposes only. Items from the Elizabeth Parke Firestone Costume Collection at the Benson Ford Research Center are catalogued on the digital website in association with Wayne State University. This digital project is funded

by an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) 2003 National Leadership Grant for Library-Museum Collaboration to The Wayne State University Library System in collaboration with the Detroit Historical Museum, the Henry Ford, and Meadow Brook Hall covering a two-year period beginning October 2003. This website can be accessed through The Henry Ford website (accessed 14 May 2006); available from <http://www.hfmgv.org/museum/vintagecouture/digitaldress.asp>. Click on “The Exhibit,” then “The Digital Dress Project,” then search “Firestone.”

² “Dress, 1925-1926,” Gift of Mrs. Harvey Firestone, Jr., The Henry Ford Historic Costume Collection, Benson Ford Research Center, Digital Dress Project.

³ Jean Patou Presentation de la Collection Printemps/Été [translation: Jean Patou Collection Presentation Spring/Summer], dated 3 Fevrier [February] 1972; Chanel Presentation de la Collection, dated Spring, 1979; copies of both invitations from Firestone Collection, Accession #89.492.1697, Box 2, Harold and Elizabeth Firestone Jr. – Correspondence – Couture Shows File, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, MI; hereafter cited as BFRC Firestone Collection.

⁴ Thurle Boyer (Mrs. Firestone’s administrative assistant), interview by author, 26 March 2004, Medina, OH, author’s notes.; Gizella Karder (Elizabeth Parke Firestone’s seamstress in Akron, OH), interview by author, 28 October 2005, Akron, OH, author’s notes..

⁵ Boyer interview.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “The Man Behind the Mainbocher Look,” *Vogue*, June 1961, 44-47, 122, quote on 46.

⁸ Seeling, Charlotte, *Fashion: The Century of the Designer, 1900-1999*, trans. Neil and Ting Morris, Karen Waloschek (Cologne: Konemann, 2000), 164.

⁹ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice at Maison Balenciaga, 10 January 1950, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 9.

¹⁰ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 8 April 1955, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 16, Folder 1.

¹¹ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice at Maison Balenciaga, dated 9 October 1953, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 8.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 8 April 1955.

¹⁴ Boyer interview.

¹⁵ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Elaine Flament at Hermes in France, dated 24 February 1970, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 22, Folder 10.

¹⁶ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Fernande Noel in France, dated 13 November 1973, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 22, Folder 8.

¹⁷ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Elaine Flament at Hermes in France, dated 26 April 1976, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 22, Folder 10.

¹⁸ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 14 October 1952, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 4.

¹⁹ Boyer interview.

²⁰ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 14 October 1952.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 3 November 1952, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 3.

²⁵ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 9 November 1949, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 1.

²⁶ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 10 January 1950, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 9.

²⁷ Letter from Madame S. Azemar to Elizabeth Parke Firestone, dated 15 October 1953, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 17, Folder 20.

²⁸ Letter from Madame S. Azemar to Elizabeth Parke Firestone, dated 22 March 1955, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 19, Folder 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 27 April 1954, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 15, Folder 13; copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Alice LaPorte, dated 12 March 1955, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 16, Folder 1.

³¹ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Parke Firestone to Madame Marguerite, dated 20 September 1955, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 19, Folder 1.

³² Several members of the staff at the Benson Ford Research Center, including Carol Whitaker and Jessica Lehr, told me about Martha Firestone Ford's participation in the exhibition when I visited the research center on August 1, 2003 and August 20, 2004. At the exhibition on June 27, 2005, the docent at the entrance also stated that Martha Ford visited during the installation and at the preview.

³³ Full Record of Evening Dress, Object Number 89.492.596, The Henry Ford Historic Costume Collection (accessed 14 May 2006); available from <http://www.hfmgv.org/museum/vintagecouture/digitaldress.asp>.

³⁴ Georgina Howell, *Vogue Women* (New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000), 28.

³⁵ Cecil Beaton, *Self Portrait with Friends: The Selected Diaries of Cecil Beaton 1926-1974*, ed. Richard Buckle (New York: Times Books, 1979), 1.

³⁶ Cecil Beaton's Country House," *Vogue*, 15 October 1949, 102-105.

³⁷ Cecil Beaton, *The Strenuous Years: Diaries 1948-55* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 61.

³⁸ Hugo Vickers, *Cecil Beaton, The Authorized Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 307.

³⁹ "Behave Like a Beauty," *Vogue*, 1 February 1950, 137-140, 214.

⁴⁰ Vickers, 347.

⁴¹ Eve Auchincloss, "The Peerless Collection of Mrs. Harvey S. Firestone, Jr.: Last Look at a Bygone Era," *Connoisseur*, March 1991, 123.

⁴² This Christian Dior dress was auctioned by Sotheby's on December 19, 1991. Thurle Boyer sent a photograph of Elizabeth Parke Firestone wearing her gown at her son's wedding to Yves Saint Laurent on March 3, 1992, according to a letter from Boyer

to Connie Uzzo at Yves Saint Laurent, 3 March 1992, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 17, Folder 21.

⁴³ “Costume Ball Held at Bailey’s Beach,” copy of an article from a local newspaper in Newport, Rhode Island, dated 6 September 1960, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 3, Folder 1. The name of the newspaper could not be located, however the article states, “Mrs. Harvey Firestone, as ‘Diamond Lil,’ won the first prize for women’s costumes.”

⁴⁴ Bill from Brooks Costume Company in New York City, dated 1 September 1960, to Mrs. Harvey Firestone at Ocean Lawn, Cliff Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 3, Folder 4.

⁴⁵ “The Best Dressed Women in the World Ballot – 1954,” International Poll conducted by the Couture Group New York Institute, Ballot No. 230, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 2, Folder 29; “The Best Dressed Women in the World Ballot – 1957,” International Poll conducted by the Couture Group New York Institute, Ballot no. 745, BFRC Firestone Collection, Box 3, Folder 4.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Immense wealth and public exposure can be an opportunity and a curse. Many of us wish for wealth, yet very few handle it well. Elizabeth Parke Firestone, wife of Harvey Firestone Jr., chose to utilize her assets well, and she strove to be a woman of influence, which was not an easy task during her lifetime. In addition to her financial resources and her beauty, she had physical resources, including house staff and a chauffeur. These were not the assets, however, that made the difference in her achievements. Her passion for learning and her desire to promote the arts drove her enthusiasm for making a difference in the fine arts. She was a perfectionist, realizing the emphasis she had to place on her appearance in public, and she united her interests and motivation through her collections.

Her involvement with the arts began when she was a student. She insisted upon taking art classes and learning to sew well. Although she had the resources to have someone else make her wedding gown, Elizabeth chose to design and construct it herself. Making the items in her trousseau allowed her to perfect the designs she wanted and make them meet her own standards of fine construction. In addition, the sewing and designing she did early in life gave her the skills to critique the items she had made by couture houses. She understood her figure and knew very well how to alter a couture design and make it suit her beautifully. She strove for a flawless wardrobe when she

demanded specific colors, exact designs, fine fabrics, and constant attention to every detail. Her success was exemplified through her inclusion on the list of The Best Dressed Women in the World and the accolades her couture clothing received when it was reviewed by the public, museum curators, and Sotheby's.

Elizabeth's confidence helped her become an influential woman, and this confidence came early. For her to be able to feel comfortable when she met the president as a newlywed, she must have been ready for her role as Harvey Jr.'s wife. Within the first few years after her wedding, she was traveling regularly and representing her husband with dignity and poise.

While raising her children, Elizabeth continued to travel with her husband, yet at the same time, she had a close relationship with her children and taught them well. Her interest in their education, especially in the fine arts, was highly evident. In conjunction with her husband, she supervised Harvey III's care and provided him with as many opportunities as possible. This allowed Harvey III to marry and be more independent, a major accomplishment in the 1950s.

Elizabeth was a pioneer in believing that clothing is wearable decorative art. Her homes were filled with various types of decorative art, and she viewed her clothing as one of them. She began collecting clothing and other decorative arts, as well as fine arts. Her careful study of each item and her refined taste transformed her shopping sprees into investments. Her love of learning and the arts, combined with her trained eye for flawlessness, gave her an edge when she chose the items she purchased for her collections. Her ability and taste were recognized by museum curators who sought to exhibit her collections. The Detroit Institute of Art exhibited her eighteenth-century

silver collection when Elizabeth had only been collecting silver for several years. The curators appreciated her collection and were delighted to accept the donations she made to the museum. Her reputation as a collector grew as she continued to expand her collections. The professional appraisals of her paintings, eighteenth-century silver, and porcelain revealed amazing increases in the value of the items during the years she enjoyed and maintained them.

Elizabeth collected intelligently. She maintained and catalogued her collections in a wise and educated manner. She studied how to care for each item, and learned ways to catalog them efficiently. Her perfectionism made it possible for her to provide extensive documentation with each item, increasing its value.

When the Detroit Institute of Art arranged the first exhibit of her silver collection in 1953, Elizabeth was able to begin sharing her love of the arts with others and to promote fine arts education among the public. The permanent exhibits of eighteenth-century silver at The Detroit Institute of Art and Boston Museum of Fine Arts are part of her legacy in learning. The numerous articles written about some of the pieces she collected expand her sphere of influence in the promotion of the arts.

Elizabeth's couture clothing is shown in exhibits at museums, historical societies, and universities. At The University of Akron, students are able to see the interior construction techniques, design, and fabrics closely in costume history and other classes. This close examination of couture clothing is highly valuable to students. The correspondence and sketches relating to specific couture garments are very useful for extensive study by curators and students, and they provided information for the recent exhibition of some of Elizabeth's couture clothing at The Henry Ford Museum.

Elizabeth realized the value of sharing her personal papers with the public as a way for others to study couture clothing.

The eighteenth-century silver, paintings, porcelain, and couture clothing collections of Elizabeth Parke Firestone promote interest and study in the fine arts.

Elizabeth was a lady among the most gracious and luxurious, and she will continue to influence others through her collections for many years to come.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL



Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

Akron, OH 44325-2102
(330) 972-7696 Office
(330) 972-6281 Fax

August 16, 2005

Lois Orr
1630 Shade Road
Akron, Ohio 44333

Ms. Orr:

The University of Akron's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) completed a review of your application for continuing review entitled "*Elizabeth Parke Firestone: Her Couture Collection and Her Role as a Woman of Influence*". The IRB application number assigned to this project is 20030807-3.

The protocol qualified for Expedited Review and was approved on August 12, 2005. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for expedited review:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation or quality assurance methodologies

This approval is valid until August 27, 2006 or until modifications are proposed to the current project protocol, whichever may occur first. In either instance, an Application for Continuing Review must be completed and submitted to the IRB.

Enclosed are the informed consent documents, which the IRB has approved for your use in this research. Copies of these documents are to be submitted with any application for continuation of this project.

Please note that within one month of the expiration date of this approval, the IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by email, as a courtesy. Nevertheless, please note that it is your responsibility as principal investigator to remember the renewal date of your protocol's review. If your project is funded, failure to comply with IRB requirements could jeopardize your continued funding. Please submit your continuation application at least two weeks prior to the renewal date, to insure the IRB has sufficient time to complete the review.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Sharon McWhorter
Associate Director

Cc: Department Chair
Virginia Gunn, Advisor
Phil Allen, IRB Chair

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS



School of Family and Consumer Sciences

Akron, OH 44325-6103

(330) 972-7721 Office

(330) 972-4934 Fax

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to participate in a study being conducted by Lois Orr, a master's level student from the College of Fine and Applied Arts, School of Family and Consumer Sciences, The University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325.

The project originated with the Elizabeth Parke Firestone Couture Collection at The University of Akron. The researcher's interest in the collection, its origins, and the culture surrounding it led to her desire to research Mrs. Firestone and her collections.

The project focuses on Mrs. Firestone and her collections, especially her couture collection at the University of Akron. Specifically, the project is to look at the life of Mrs. Firestone, the culture she lived in, and the role(s) she fulfilled during her lifetime. Her life is deeply connected to the history of Akron and the rubber industry, as well as the increasing role of women in the advancement of the arts.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview at a convenient time and place for you. The interview should take three hours or less of your time.

Participation in the project is completely voluntary. If you do not want to participate in the project, you may withdraw at any time.

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the study. With your permission, the researcher may audiotape her interview with you. Any audiotapes of interviews and any other data obtained from you will be kept confidential and will not be viewed by anyone but the researcher and her advisor. All audiotapes will be retained in a locked cabinet or other locked storage area. The tapes will be erased at the completion of the project.

There are no anticipated benefits or risks to you as a participant, aside from helping us to have a better understanding of the Elizabeth Parke Firestone collections.

If you have any questions about the research project, you can call me at 330-668-2517 or my advisor, Dr. Virginia Gunn, at 330-972-7729. My email address is: loisorr@att.net.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. Questions about your rights as a researcher participant can be directed to Ms. Sharon McWhorter, Associate Director, Research Services, at 1-330-972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790.

Thank you for your participation!

I consent to participate in this project:

Name _____

Date _____

Approved for use through _____

8/21/05



The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT TO BE AUDIOTAPED



School of Family and Consumer Sciences
Akron, OH 44325-6103
(330) 972-7721 Office
(330) 972-4934 Fax

INFORMED CONSENT TO BE AUDIOTAPED

The researcher would appreciate being able to audiotape the interview in order to maintain accuracy. Any audiotapes made by the researcher would be reviewed by the researcher, and possibly her academic advisor, only; and, purely for the purpose of clarification of data. While completing the thesis, the researcher will keep the audiotapes in a locked file cabinet. Upon completion of the thesis, the tapes will be erased and destroyed.

I consent to be audiotaped.

Name

Date



The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution

Approved for use through 8/27/05