



mid-to-late 1760s



ca. 1915



ca. 1920



ca. 1965



ca. 1970

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY preserves more than 850 pairs of shoes in its collection, from hiking boots and galoshes to wedge heels and silk mules. This is fitting for the home state of Red Wing Shoes, an internationally recognized company that rose to prominence outfitting American soldiers during World War I and helped create an association between footwear and the Land of 10,000 Lakes. MHS has acquired several pairs of Red Wings over the years, including those worn by Dakota activist Joe Campbell.

Shoes—and the material traces they carry—tell the ground-level stories of Minnesotans as they went about their daily lives. Soul Asylum bassist Karl Mueller’s high-top Converse sneakers retain bits of duct tape on their soles. Specks of mud cling to the birchbark shoes that helped a nineteenth-century mailman trudge through the bogs along his delivery route. And the worn soles of a pair of dancing slippers show that their owner was especially fond of cutting a rug.

Though the collection represents a broad range of styles, functions, and periods, it is particularly strong in women’s dress shoes. The oldest are a pair of handmade linen clogs whose blunt toes, peaked tongues and white piping around their sole fronts point to a creation date in the mid-to-late 1760s. Like other shoes from this period, the clogs feature relatively low Louis heels, so named because of their origin during the reign of Louis XIV and identifiable by their initial inward curve and tapered bottom. Newer collection highlights include the disco-era glitter platform sandals worn by a teenage girl growing up in Little Canada and a pair of red, white, and blue pumps that wouldn’t look out of place in the wardrobe of a fashion-forward politician’s wife. In between there are Victorian ankle boots, 1890s lace-up oxfords, and Italian stilettos from the 1950s, each capturing the spirit of the age that produced it.

—Lizzie Ehrenhalt, collections assistant



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