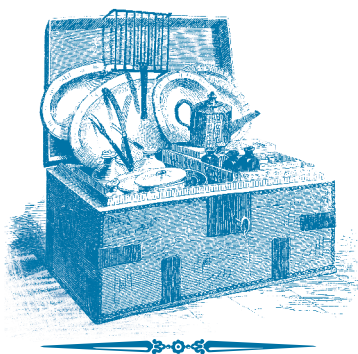


UP FRONT



CURATOR'S CORNER

By Emily Ruby, Assistant Curator

Azen Fur Bouquets

Fur has drawn interest in this region since the first people arrived, when abundant wildlife provided skins for warmth and for trade. That trade encouraged Europeans to settle the region and generated wealth that sparked both the competition to control the forks of the Ohio and investment in other enterprises. Centuries later, the history of the fur trade in Western Pennsylvania continues to be written.

Recently an unusual piece came into the Heinz History Center museum collection that adds a new chapter to this story: a bouquet

of mink flowers from Max Azen Furs. Pittsburghers might remember Azen's; some might even have an Azen piece hanging in their closet. Azen's, a downtown institution founded in 1906, supplied the region with fine fur until 1981. The mink flower bouquet, donated by Christopher Milne, dates to 1968 when Milne's uncle, Dr. Clifford Lee Wilmoth, went to Azen's to choose a fur coat for his wife as an anniversary gift. Wilmoth was a surgeon at Shadyside Hospital. The company sent him home with a bouquet of its various mink colors. Accompanying the bouquet was a "Happy Anniversary" card signed by Harry

Azen, with instructions to "nurture these flowers and soon they will grow into a full length mink coat."

It is unclear whether this floral gift was a one-time sales pitch for a special client or a regular enticement used by Azen to cultivate customers in the 1960s. Helen Azen, the wife of Harry Azen (Max's son), remembered wearing beautiful mink flowers on her uniform during special sales at Max Azen's Furs, but she did not recall the use of fur bouquets to promote sales.

Guy Herrmann of Carl Herrmann Furs recalled that accessory manufacturers made those types of bouquets in the 1960s and

Max and Bessie Azen wearing their furs in Atlantic City, c. 1940.

HHC L&A, Rauh Jewish Archives,
Corinne Azen Krause Photographs.



A 1934 ad.

Courtesy Jewish Criterion.

Two

THE JEWISH CRITERION

October 26, 1934

Any Day
is Fur-Buying Day at
AZEN'S

You always get the most out of your fur-buying dollars when you shop at Azen's. Our extensive selection of fur and fur-trimmed coats, the greatest in Pittsburgh, offers you distinct smartness, fashionable quality, plus economy.

JAP MINK COAT
(as pictured at right)
\$395

Gorgeous coat of Japanese mink worked out in up and down skins—Looks and wears as well as the finest Eastern Mink coat, and almost the same shade.

OTHER OUTSTANDING VALUES IN
CUSTOM-FITTED FUR COATS

Northern Seal*, self-trimmed or with fitch	\$52
Muskrat, silver or combination	\$74
Caracul, black, gray or taffa	\$89
Leopard Cat, swagger style	\$119
Squirrel, soft gray skins	\$129
Hudson Seal**, self-trimmed	\$145
Dark Raccoon, swagger models	\$119
Jap Weasel, herringbone design	\$245

Other Fur Coats \$39 to \$950
* DYED COBBY ** DYED MUSKRAT

Azen Cloth Coats
GLORIFIED WITH SUMPTUOUS FURS

Cloth Coats glorified with BADGER, RACCOON, WOLF, KIT FOX, CARACUL, MARMINK	\$28
Cloth Coats glorified with RED FOX, BEAVER, BADGER, SKUNK, KOLINSKY, BLUE FOX	\$37
Cloth Coats glorified with MINK, SILVER FOX, PERSIAN, SABLE-DYED KOLINSKY, CROSS FOX	\$79

Others \$26 to \$145

3 Floors of Quality Fur Selections
Manufacturing Furriers over a quarter century

MAX AZEN
705 PENN AVENUE

Small Deposit
Reserves Your Selection Until Wanted. All About Our Lay-Away Budget Plan.

All Azen fur coats—whether from stock or made to order—are CUSTOM-FITTED by the same master fur designers AT NO EXTRA COST.



The Azen fur bouquet.

HHC Museum Collection. Photo by Paula Andras.
2009.101. Gift of Christopher Milne.

1970s to generate conversation and interest in the office. Fur manufacturers also sent elaborate samples to retail stores, but those were rarely sent to customers' homes. Perhaps the Wilmoths were special customers of Azen's and were given this extra consideration by Harry Azen.

Maximilian Azen came to Pittsburgh with his wife, Bessie, and their eight children in 1906 from the city of Daugavpils (Dvinsk) in present day Latvia, where he had been a traveling fur salesman. After a few months

selling dry goods in Pittsburgh, he returned to selling furs. The first Azen's location was at 1023 Fifth Avenue in the Upper Hill. After several moves and expansions, the business ended up in a large former bank at the corner of Wood Street and Liberty Avenue. Max and Bessie had four more children in the United States; many of the children helped to carry on the business after their father's death in 1943. The Azens were a vital, active part of the Jewish community in Pittsburgh, especially Congregation B'nai Israel.

In addition to donating the fur bouquet, the family recently donated a portrait of Max Azen and some photographs and papers to the History Center's Rauh Jewish Archives. These materials preserve the story of Pittsburgh's 20th century fur trade and a local family who made its mark in that business. 