

# Flappers Personified a New Age

While flappers are viewed today as the fashion slaves of the Roaring '20s, the flapper look was in vogue for only about 4 years—roughly 1925 through 1928.

The look was epitomized by a young woman with short, or bobbed, hair and wearing a short skirt (at or above the knees!) or a shapeless dress. A boyish look was sought to the point that some women bound their chests to avoid the appearance of curves.

The typical flapper may have smoked in public and even applied makeup there. She may have consumed alcohol in spite of it being the Prohibition era. Outrageous!

And she danced. Sometimes it was to the syncopated rhythm of ragtime music. Other times, it was to jazz, a newfangled type of music that was associated with strange, frantic contortions—dances called the Charleston and the Black Bottom.

The Black Bottom migrated north, possibly from New Orleans, and referred to the muddy bottom of the Mississippi River. Others claim it originated in the Black Bottom district of Detroit, Michigan.

It was sometimes described as “not letting your right hip know what your left hip was doing.” It was danced very fast (140-160 beats a minute) and involved swaying the torso, bending the knees and kicking.

The flapper was not her mother's daughter. Her mother more clearly represented the Gibson girl, a Victorian woman with long hair, done up attractively, and wearing clothing that covered most of her, characterized by high necks, full sleeves and wasp waists.

The flapper was a product of her time. She came of age after World

War I ended, at a time when a generation of young men had been lost on the battlefields of Europe. She was unwilling to become a spinster; she wanted to have fun.

The men who came back from the “war to end all wars” had lived through a terrible ordeal as they became cannon fodder, running and jumping in and out of trenches amid rifle and artillery fire, bombs and poison gas. To survive, many developed a philosophy of living life with gusto and for the moment.

That credo was taken up by the women who waited back home.

It was the era of bathtub gin, beer and liquor smuggled in from Canada. Drinks often were served at a club behind locked doors—you gave a password through a peephole to get in.

But the party ended quickly as the Great Depression loomed and Ain't We Got Fun echoed through empty halls.