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## In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

The earliest occupations open to women, outside the homes, were dress - making, hat - making, and school-teaching. In the 1860's, in this county, women began to work in the mills—the Bufalo Paper mill and Jackson's Yarn mill at Double Shoals—because the men who usually did such work had gone to fight in the War Between the States.

Among the advertisements appearing in Shelby's newspapers in the 1880's and 1890's, we find several "fashionable millinery" shops advertising their goods.

In 1889, Miss Sue Palmer and Miss Loula Kendrick each had a millinery shop. Later, Miss Palmer married D. Aug. Beam and discontinued her business. Miss Kendrick married D. S. Connelly, but continued her business through the turn of the Century, when she sold out to Miss Maggie Black.

Miss Belle Fromm, who spoke broken German and called veils "wales" and velvet "welwet" carried a line of dress goods and hats. If Miss Belle did not have what the customer asked for she usually replied: "We don't have it now, but we are expecting some in a day or two."

Miss Pattie Ramsey, who later married Burwell Blanton, had a shop where the Webb building now stands. Mrs. Emily Tompkins, mother of Mrs. "Yankee" Hall, was among Shelby's earlier milliners. I am told that Mrs. Townsend, who worked in John F. Stephen's store, was the first professional milliner in Shelby.

Recently, I wrote about Shelby's stores of 1854, and the lovely materials carried by them. I suspect there was somebody here who made pretty hats even before Mrs. Townsend's arrival.

Dress-making in those earlier days — back beyond the 1880's and 1890's was indeed a chore. There were no simplified paper patterns such as we have today. The dress-maker used a "chart-system," and made her own pattern.

My grandmother had a dress-making shop in a room of the "old Dr. Williams house" corner North Washington and East Marion streets. Miss Verannie Durham had a dress-making place in the same block, but nearer the site of the present Post Office.

### **"WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE"**

From the time of the coming of the first settlers until probably along in 1825 or 1850, right here in Cleveland county, the woman of the house made the clothes for

# LIFE

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the family by hand. And when I say she made the clothes with her hands, I mean just that.

Whether or not she sheared the wool from the backs of the sheep she washed that wool, carded it, and spun it into thread. Perhaps she did not pick the cotton, but she did pick the lint from the seed and card it, then spin it into thread. She dyed both the wool and the cotton thread, using roots, barks, berries, rye, oats, and sometimes indigo which was grown locally. She gathered and spun flax, too, but the flax was (as a rule) not dyed.

After she had fixed the "chain" on her loom she could perhaps weave two full yards of cloth a day. Out of this cloth she made clothes for her family. This was all hand-work. There were no sewing machines until after 1850. A mixture of cotton and wool cloth was called "homespun" and was used for men's clothes.

At night when she was resting she knitted stockings out of some of the thread she had spun. No wonder one woman sang:

**"Many may toil from sun to sun; but woman's work is never done."**

In wealthy families slaves did this weaving and sewing. However, in Western North Carolina only about one family in twenty had slaves.

After the first quarter of the 19th Century, in addition to cloth imported from England, a few cotton mills begun operating in the USA, and sometimes cloth was bought instead of being made at home.

A Shelby woman told me that as late as 1893 her mother wove their woolsey-linsey petticoats on a hand-loom.

## **ERA OF ELEGANCE**

In the early 1870's and for some time thereafter, there came an era of elegance in dress, and false modesty to the point of prudishness. Clothes were made to conceal the lines of the female figure. How any woman ever sat down in those hoop-skirts and bustles is, to me, the \$64.00 question.

**Today, women have changed from hoop-skirts and pantallettes to pants! Call 'em slacks if you want to.**

Attitudes toward certain kinds of clothes have changed with the times. Not much more than thirty years ago a policeman asked a woman to get off the streets of the city of Rock Hill, S. C., because she was wearing riding breeches.

Fifty years ago, in Shelby, young girls of 17 wore long sweeping dresses frequently made with a train, and three to six ruffled petticoats reaching to about one inch of the floor. This costume was quite proper for street wear. A lady was supposed to hold up her skirts so they did not touch the ground, but must do it gracefully with er left hand, so her legs did not show.

No respectable woman in Shelby showed her legs. In fact, until about the time of World War I, a woman had arms and knees and feet, but legs were not mentioned in polite society. They were referred to as "limbs" or "nether extremities."

## THE SILHOUETTE OF 1900

About the turn of the Century, sailor hats, and shirtwaists and skirts were fashionable. Skirts, I mean skirts of serge and other woolen materials, were anywhere from five to six yards around the bottom, and were lined all the way to the top. In addition there was a piece of heavy lining material about twelve inches deep all the way around the lower part of the skirt to make it stand out. On the bottom of this skirt, to protect the hem from wear against the ground, there was a binding of brush-braid.

The 1900 silhouette emphasized the ample bosom, small waist and big hips. (If a woman did not possess big hips, cotton was not expensive). This is the silhouette the older men still refer to as "a fine figger of a woman."

I think I can safely say that fifty years ago no respectable Shelby woman used face rouge. However chaste a woman might be, if she "painted" her face or mouth, or had long curls about her neck, the finger of suspicion was pointed at her and folks wondered if she were a "bad" woman.

### KILLED A SNAKE

Sometimes the long skirts the women wore proved dangerous. A young woman who lived on the street a few doors above my house, walked home one summer's night with her suitor. They sat for a while on the steps in the moonlight. Next morning when she went out to sweep the porch there on the sidewalk right by the step was a small snake about six inches long. Her trailing skirts had gathered it in. Fortunately she had trampled it with her heels and it was dead.

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