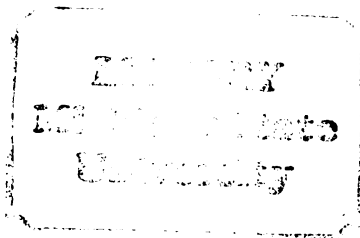


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Dressmaking and Millinery in  
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1847-1910

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Claire L. Gonzales

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M. A. degree in Clothing and Textiles

*Anna M. Creekmore*

Major professor

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DRESSMAKING AND MILLINERY IN  
LANSING, MICHIGAN  
1847-1910

By

Claire L. Gonzales

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Human Environment and Design

1983



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## ABSTRACT

### DRESSMAKING AND MILLINERY IN LANSING, MICHIGAN 1847-1910

By

Claire L. Gonzales

An analysis was made of existing women's dresses and millinery with maker's labels from Lansing, Michigan and a profile of the demographic characteristics developed along with a study of the production and marketing methods of the dressmaking and millinery populations from 1847 to 1910.

The twelve dresses, hats, and bonnets with Lansing labels were analyzed using an artifact study model. The objects were identified and compared with clothing illustrations and descriptions found in period fashion magazines. The demographic profiles and the production and marketing methods of Lansing dressmakers and milliners were compiled from the federal censuses, city directories, and local newspapers.

The dresses and millinery were found to represent the mode of their respective time periods. The dressmaking and millinery populations in Lansing had similar demographic profiles. The groups differed in their production methods, but used comparable marketing methods for products made in a shop environment.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to each of the members of my guidance committee--Anna M. Creekmore, major area professor; M. Suzanne Sontag, committee member; Anne Meyering, minor area professor; and C. Kurt Dewhurst, committee member--for their wisdom and counsel.

I would also like to thank the librarians and museum personnel who were especially helpful to this study including, Jane McClary, Lansing Public Library; Carol Schmidt, Royal Oak Public Library; and Val Berryman, The Museum, Michigan State University. Special appreciation is also extended to the staff of the Michigan Historical Museum for their cooperation and encouragement.

Lastly, I extend a special thank you to my husband, Paul, for his emotional and financial support during the many academic years of our marriage.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During the past several decades historians have broadened the scope of their research interests to include more than significant personalities and military clashes. Along with the traditional analyses of power struggles, historians are now investigating the lives and experiences of minority and ethnic groups, particularly women and black Americans. This branch of historical investigation, christened the new social history, emerged as a result of new questions being asked about men and women of various ethnic and social backgrounds. Newer and different sources of information and methods of investigation have been used to answer these questions.

Traditionally, only primary documents were used by historians as the main source of information and study. This type of resource was generally adequate when investigating persons with literate abilities or events of sufficient magnitude to warrant being written about by their contemporaries. Unfortunately, letters, diaries, and other narrative documents are scarce or totally lacking when studying the masses of common people now of interest to the social historian. As a result, public records have become one of the major sources of information.



These records have provided insight into the lives of various ethnic, religious, and economic groups from specific communities or geographic areas. Parish books, immigration records, censuses, and city directories have been examined for whatever information could be learned about these anonymous groups. For example, through the use of quantitative methods in organizing the historical data, investigators have discovered demographic patterns of specific populations. Other public documents, such as wills, tax records, and newspapers, have been searched for evidences of social class differences.

Another source of information, the artifact, has also become important to the social historian. Previously, artifacts housed in personal and public collections were ignored or given light commentary by most historians. Indeed, archaeologists, art historians, and museum curators were the principle groups who appreciated three-dimensional objects for the information they contain. Social historians have become enlightened as to the historical value of objects once used by people who have left few recorded accounts of their lives. The artifact has been recognized as an important social document and represents "material evidence worthy of the attention of the historian."<sup>1</sup>

Historians who work in museums recognize the importance of an object for the characteristics and conditions it can reveal about the time from which it has survived. One historian has noted, "the

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<sup>1</sup>E. McClung Fleming, "Early American Decorative Arts as Social Documents," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 45 (September 1958): 284.

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underlying premise is that objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged."<sup>2</sup>

Among the myriad of objects that are preserved in historical collections, clothing items represent a rich and challenging source for study by the social historian. The richness of the field of historical clothing becomes more apparent when considering that items of apparel have been used by individuals of all socioeconomic classes and ethnic backgrounds. A systematic study of clothing enables the historian to envision and understand the economic, social, and cultural spirit of the time when the clothing was made and worn.

A noted clothing historian, Marybelle S. Bigelow, has attributed the ability of clothing to reflect its own particular culture to three dominant factors and related subfactors represented in individual garments.

The dominant factors include: (1) sociological and political exterior influences; (2) technical advances and production capabilities; and (3) aesthetic and cultural concepts. The subfactors of influence are: (1a) philosophical, economical, psychological; (2a) availability, invention, industrialization; and (3a) line, color, texture, and mass.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter, An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," Winterthur Portfolio 17 (Spring 1982): 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Marybelle S. Bigelow, Fashion in History, Western Dress, Prehistoric to Present, 2nd edition (Minneapolis, Minn.: Burgess Publishing Company, 1979), p. 1.

These factors and subfactors are in a constant state of change and account for the differences in clothing types and styles over time.

The challenge for the historian is to "read" mute objects for hints or facts about the people and culture that utilized them. Methodologies of artifact study or object analysis provide a systematic approach to the study of artifacts and generally enable the historian to successfully "read" a variety of items, including furniture, ceramics, glassware, and clothing. All artifact studies begin with accurate and thorough descriptions of the objects. The descriptions include relevant data on the object's physical characteristics, function, and history. The descriptions are necessary for an interpretation of the artifact.

The methods are often borrowed from or based on analyses used in related fields of study. For example, one study of clothing forms and their meanings within its culture was modeled after methods used for analyses of languages.<sup>4</sup> The clothing worn by an extended Nigerian family as shown in 607 photographs dating from 1900 to 1974 were scrutinized for clothing types and accessories, which correspond to the "syntactical and semantic components in language analysis."<sup>5</sup> As rules exist for language usage, the investigators were able to determine rules of dress within the culture of the Yoruba people as related to the status and social role of the wearer. In another study,

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<sup>4</sup>Betty Wass and Joanne Eicher, "Analysis of Historic and Contemporary Dress: An African Example," Home Economics Research Journal 8 (May 1980): 318-326).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

content analysis and seriation were used in evaluating data from printed sources to determine style changes of nineteenth century bonnets. The resulting data were then used to successfully identify and date twenty bonnets in a historical collection.<sup>6</sup> In their publication, authors Roach and Musa suggested a functional analysis approach for studying Western dress as a means of relating its various forms and their "associated functions" to the physical environment, economic, political, and social patterns of a culture.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most appealing approaches which combines detailed object descriptions with stepwise analytical procedures is presented in a model of artifact study proposed by E. McClung Fleming.<sup>8</sup> His model provides the historian with a practical, organized approach to artifact study. Appropriately, the study begins with a physical examination of the artifact, itself, in order to accurately record its characteristics. Next, Fleming devised four specific steps or "operations" that develop logically to discover the object's meaning and role within its own culture and within today's culture. When using this model, Fleming believes the 'museum scholar' will be able to move beyond the concise, factual information level of artifact study to a

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<sup>6</sup>Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh, "The Seriation of Fashion," Home Economics Research Journal 7 (March 1979): 241-248.

<sup>7</sup>Mary Ellen Roach and Kathleen Ehle Musa, New Perspectives on the History of Western Dress, A Handbook (New York: NutriGuides, 1980), pp. 13-18 and 69-81.

<sup>8</sup>E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study, A Proposed Model," Winterthur Portfolio 9 (1974): 153-173.

broader, interpretive level. As noted earlier, the value of the artifact to the historian is the information it can reveal about known and anonymous people and the time period when it was made and used.

This study is an investigation of existing women's clothing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, each item having a specific maker's label or an association with a maker from Lansing, Michigan. The labeled clothing, consisting of dresses and millinery, are from known dressmakers' and milliners' work whose careers could be documented through supportive evidence of public documents, such as the city directories and the censuses. A more concentrated intense study would be possible by focusing on these trades from only one city. The belief was that a study of the clothing made by Lansing dressmakers and milliners would uncover characteristics about these trades which would describe aspects of the city's economic and social history. Such characteristics as where the businesses were located within the city and how the products were made and marketed, the style of the clothing, as well as who wore it and for what occasions would be specific details from which conclusions could be drawn.

The merits of Fleming's model, its concise nature and organized interrelated steps, led to its being chosen for use in the study of the clothing with Lansing labels. Through the use of the artifact study model, this investigation explored the background of the dresses and millinery as products of Lansing's economic and social history.

## CHAPTER II

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

#### Statement of the Problem

The goal for this study was to investigate the dressmaking and millinery businesses of Lansing, Michigan. The basis of the study was women's dresses and millinery with labels of Lansing dressmakers and milliners or were strongly associated with them according to written records. The clothing items were analyzed using an artifact study model proposed by E. McClung Fleming. A study of clothing with Lansing labels would reveal information about the dressmaking and millinery businesses in relation to the economic and social community of an American city during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The following four objectives of the study were patterned after the operations of Fleming's model.

1. To locate and identify clothing made by Lansing dressmakers and milliners;
2. To evaluate the apparel items according to an artifact's basic properties: history, material, construction, design, and function;
3. To develop a profile of the dressmaking and millinery populations of Lansing; and

4. To analyze methods of production and marketing used by Lansing milliners and dressmakers.

### Explanation of Fleming's Artifact Study Model

Figure 1 is a diagram of Fleming's model and illustrates the succession of operations that are to be performed during an in-depth study of an object, which for whatever reason has prompted the curiosity of the historian. The model is applicable to a single object or a group of related objects.

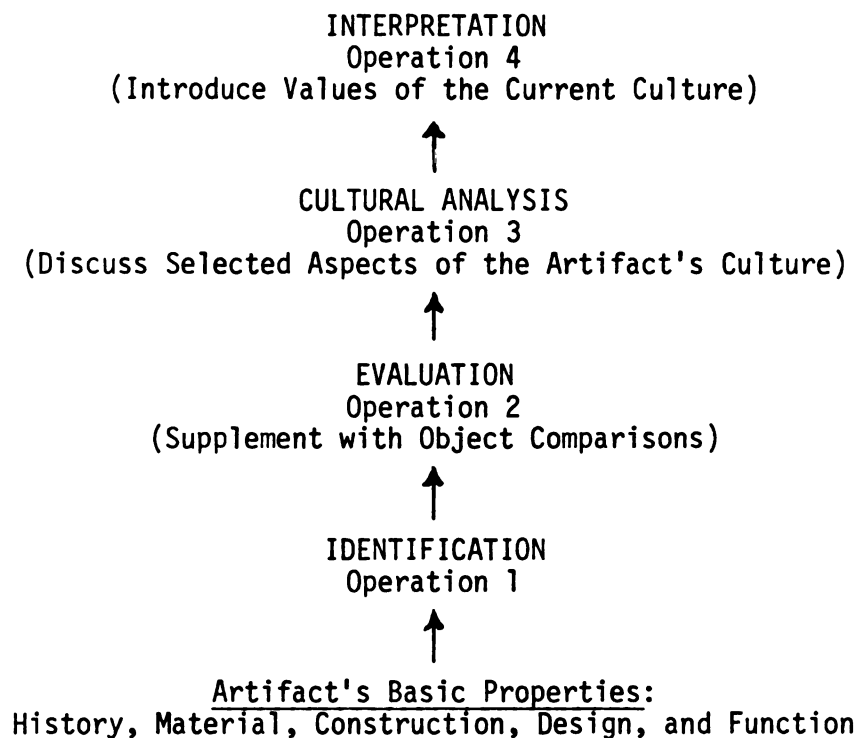


Figure 1. Diagram of Fleming's Artifact Study Model.



### The Artifact's Basic Properties

At the basis of the model are five basic properties of an artifact which Fleming has defined as: history, material, construction, design, and function. Most of these properties represent observable characteristics inherent in the object, such as, color, shape, size, and decorative applications. The history of an object is perhaps the least observable of the properties and often must be communicated to the historian through written and verbal accounts. The symbolic function of an artifact is also not easily observed.

The first of the four operations is directly dependent on the basic properties and, in turn, each of the remaining operations build on one another. The operations which advance from factual description to abstract concepts are identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation.

### Identification

The first operation, identification, involves a description of the artifact's basic properties. The object needs to be physically examined in order for the material, construction, design, and function to be accurately identified. Museum personnel will recognize this process as the cataloguing of an artifact, a process routinely performed on historical collections. In order to determine these properties, the historian may require the aid of equipment, such as measuring devices, microscopes, or reference guides. The historian's knowledge or previous experience may also be used to identify and

describe these properties. The object may or may not have a history, a property which is often dependent on family or community tradition. During this operation it is necessary that the artifact properties be recorded in written form and it is often helpful if they are documented by photographs or sketches. The written descriptions and illustrations ensure accuracy in identification of the properties and are useful as references in the other operations of the model.

The identification of an object also involves its classification and authentication within the realm of material culture. For example, most historical collections of nineteenth century clothing seem to have an abundance of long, white cotton infant's dresses that are embellished with embroidery, lace insertions and rows of tucks, which invariably have a history of being worn as christening gowns. As the subject of an artifact study, the identification of the properties of the dresses would determine whether they should be classified as everyday infant's clothing or clothing worn for a baptismal ceremony. Further identification of the properties would indicate whether the dresses were in an unaltered state or modern-day reproductions.

### Evaluation

The next operation, evaluation, can be discussed on one or two levels, according to Fleming. One type of evaluation would involve a discussion of the object's aesthetic quality, workmanship and expressiveness. For clothing, the historian might apply the following line of questioning in the evaluation: Why were certain colors used in combination? What effect is achieved by the use of a particular weave

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or a printed design? Why were applied trims used and how do they affect the garment's appearance? The construction techniques used to make the clothing, such as, types of stitches, seam finishes, and use of supportive fabrics provide a basis for evaluating the workmanship. The expressiveness of a garment will not be easily detected if it is observed in a deflated state of hanging or lying flat. Clothing is unique among artifacts, in that, it always requires the human form to produce the dimensions and proportions of its shape. The addition of motion also introduces a kinetic dimension not often recognized or evaluated. The complexity of the problem of evaluation becomes apparent when one considers the prohibitions against wearing historical clothing amply recorded in artifact conservation literature. In order to remedy this predicament, if the garment is in good physical condition, it may be displayed on a mannequin or dress form while the historian observes its style lines and expressive qualities.

Another type of evaluation would be a comparison of the object's size, cost, and rarity with similar objects. For example, a group of wraps, such as mantles worn by women during the late nineteenth century could be evaluated based on the individual properties of function, history, material, construction, and design. During this operation the historian may become aware that the mantles having a history of being worn to evening activities, such as balls or the theater, are made of fancier materials and more elaborate construction than mantles reportedly worn for afternoon activities, such as visiting or shopping.

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Printed sources are an important part of an artifact study and are necessary to supplement the evaluation and cultural analysis operations. Printed sources provide documentation for the identification of the artifact's basic properties. These sources also contribute to the historian's understanding of how the object was made and used in its respective society. Written documents with accounts of clothing are often found in fashion magazines, newspapers, mail order catalogues, trade catalogues, and occasionally in letters and diaries. Other non-written sources include oral history, paintings, and photographs.

### Cultural Analysis

The third operation of cultural analysis, Fleming notes, focuses on the comparison of the objects by "isolating characteristics common to the group that enable the researcher to make inferences of a general nature about the society that produced and/or used the body of artifacts."<sup>1</sup> He suggests several methods for making these inferences, such as functional analysis, historical analysis, product analysis, and content analysis. The processes used in this operation serve to define the meaning(s) of the object within the context of its culture. Continuing with the example of the wraps, the use of a functional analysis approach would account for the differences in cut and design details of the mantles based on differing characteristics of the activities to which each was worn; i.e., the theater or a ball as being different from paying a call or shopping.

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<sup>1</sup>E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study, A Proposed Model," Winterthur Portfolio 9 (1974): 158.

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### Interpretation

The last of the four operations, interpretation, is based on the culmination of knowledge gained by the historian about the artifact and its culture during the previous three operations. At this stage in the model the historian is now able to decide on the significance of the object within the body of material culture, the object's society, and current day society. Fleming notes that there may be several interpretations of an artifact. A garment may be significant in that it belonged to a famous personality or is associated with a national or local event. Persons interested in the history of clothing production may find a man's lounging robe from the 1860s important as a representative of an early example of the ready-made clothing industry. A dress with a label of a Parisian or American clothing designer may be of interest in that it may be representative of that person's work or was a model that was copied extensively by the ready-made industry. Students of costume history may find a maternity dress of the nineteenth century significant because it is a rare survival from that time period. Another garment may be an unusual example of its time due to its color, fabric, or trim.

Fleming's model provides the historian with a practical and necessary method for "reading" inanimate objects. In working through the various operations proposed in his model, the historian will be able to use artifacts as a historical source concerning the people, place, and period under study.



Application of Fleming's Model to the Study  
of Clothing with Labels of Lansing  
Dressmakers and Milliners

Objective 1

The search to locate labeled Lansing clothing made by dressmakers and milliners was conducted from May 1982 to April 1983 and yielded a total of thirteen clothing items including five dresses, one jacket, five bonnets, and two hats. One hat did not have a label, but had a history of being made by a particular Lansing milliner. Cover letters and questionnaires were sent to local individuals, as well as museums and historical societies in Lansing and within the state. Personal interviews were conducted with individuals who provided pertinent information about Lansing's dressmakers and milliners. Twelve of the items were owned by museums and one was privately owned. See Appendix A for the forms used during the search process.

In order to accurately and consistently record the basic artifact properties, a data collection sheet was developed to aid in the identification operation (see Appendix B). This form was a compilation of several forms which were modified to meet the needs of a clothing study.<sup>2</sup> The categories of the data collection sheet corresponded to the five basic properties defined by the model as: history, material, construction, design, and function.

Each garment was physically examined by the author and the data sheets were completed with the aid of a measuring tape and a

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<sup>2</sup>Ken Perry, ed., Museum Forms Book (Austin: Texas Association of Museums, 1980), chapter on registration.

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variety of reference guides, such as textile dictionaries and historic costume books. Laboratory analysis of fabric samples that were to have been taken from the garments was abandoned due to the condition of the fabrics themselves where taking a tiny sample would have damaged them. Thus, the fiber content and fabric name are based on the observations of the investigator at the time the clothing was examined.

Colored slides of the garments were also taken in order to aid in the identification and evaluation operations. They provided a more accurate representation than sketches or detailed line drawings and were used as references when consulting fashion periodicals and trade catalogues. The slides also provided a permanent record of the clothing. All the garments were in good or excellent physical condition and were photographed on dress or head forms. To prevent damaging the fabrics from excessive light exposure, precautions were taken to use only available light or when necessary an automatic flash attachment was used following the guidelines established by The Lighting Group of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Conservation Committee.<sup>3</sup> These precautions included using only one source of flash, placing the flash no closer to the object than three yards, and using only one flash exposure per minute.

Study questions relevant to Objective 1 included:

1. Did the style and construction of the garment suggest a date if no history was provided?

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<sup>3</sup>Garry Thomson, The Museum Environment (London: Butterworths, 1978), p. 45; and Garry Thomson, Conservation and Museum Lighting, Museums Association Information Sheet, 2nd revised edition (London: Museums Association, 1974), p. 6.

2. Were the garments genuine or remakes of an earlier or later period?

### Objective 2

This objective followed the second operation of the model in an evaluation or extended identification of the basic properties of the dresses and millinery. The completed data sheets and slides were used as references when consulting various issues of the following nineteenth and early twentieth century women's magazines and fashion periodicals: Godey's Lady's Book, Peterson's Magazine, Harper's Bazar, and The Delineator. In addition, historic costume references were also consulted for their overview and summary of the style changes and characteristics of women's clothing during this time period.

Based on the consultation with these sources, the thirteen labeled garments of Lansing were dated from 1880 to 1918. A preliminary search of city records revealed the makers of these garments worked from 1877 to 1946. As a result, the decision was made to not use the latest garment, a dress with the label of Florence Burnett, in the historical collections of The Museum, Michigan State University at East Lansing, Michigan. The date of the dress, 1914-1918, and the work years of Mrs. Burnett, 1911-1946, covered too long a time span to be adequately investigated for this study. Therefore, 1910 became the cut-off date which would include the remaining twelve dresses and millinery.

Study questions relevant to Objective 2 included:

1. Did the style and material of the garments indicate the activity for which it was intended; i.e., morning, afternoon, or evening wear or informal or formal wear?

2. Did the style, fabrics, colors, and trims indicate the garments were high fashion styles or the mode of their respective period?
3. Were parts of the clothing ready-made and other parts assembled especially for the individual object?
4. Were there differences in stitches or finishing techniques within a single garment that perhaps indicated more than one person was involved in its construction?

### Objective 3

This objective corresponded with the model's third operation of cultural analysis. Using a product analysis approach to the Lansing clothing, this objective was concerned with the individuals who made these products. The individual makers were then compared to others who worked in the dressmaking and millinery trades in Lansing. As a result, a profile of Lansing's dressmaking and millinery populations was developed.

The names of Lansing's dressmakers and milliners and their demographic characteristics were compiled using the federal censuses of 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910,<sup>4</sup> Lansing city directories and Michigan business gazetteers of 1863-1910. Those individuals listed with the following occupations were included in this study: dressmaker, seamstress, sewing, milliner, millinery clerk, trimmer, and apprentice.

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<sup>4</sup>The 1890 federal census was not available having been almost totally destroyed by a fire in 1921. See: Genealogical Records in the National Archives, General Information Leaflet Number 5, revised. (Washington, D.C.: General Services Administration, 1977), pp. 2 and 4.



Tailoresses, although a part of the sewing trades, were excluded from this study because many worked for tailor's shops and made men's clothing.

Study questions relevant to Objective 3 included:

1. What were the demographic characteristics of the individuals whose labels appeared on the Lansing clothing?
2. How long did each maker work in her/his respective trade?
3. Were there indications of why these individuals worked?
4. Were these individuals typical or atypical when compared to other Lansing dressmakers and milliners?
5. What were the demographic characteristics for dressmakers and milliners of Lansing?
6. How did the profile of Lansing's dressmaking and millinery populations compare with data of these occupations in other American communities?

#### Objective 4

This objective was also related to the cultural analysis operation of the artifact study model. The major concern of this objective was to determine the production and marketing methods used by Lansing dressmakers and milliners. A related concern was the development of these trades in Lansing's history.

The major source of information for Objective 4 was the local newspapers which were read in weekly issues from 1855 and 1889 and thereafter, an accidental sampling of spring and fall issues of the dailies through 1910 were read. The newspapers used were the Lansing

State Republican and the Lansing Journal. Additional sources included published studies about the operations of dressmaking and millinery in other communities, as well as interviews with Lansing individuals who were former customers of these businesses.

Study questions relevant to Objective 4 included:

Work Place:

1. Where did Lansing dressmakers and milliners conduct their business; i.e., in their residences or in the city's commercial district?
2. How much work space was needed for these occupations?

Supplies and Equipment:

1. What supplies were indicated in the labeled garments for the materials used in these trades?
2. What equipment was indicated in the labeled garments for the cut and construction techniques used in these trades?
3. Were the materials available locally in Lansing?
4. What were the sources of design ideas for the products?

Techniques of Production

1. Did the dressmaker and milliner tend to work alone, employ others, or work for another?
2. Did the maker create the product from start to finish or was there a division of labor?
3. How was the cost of a garment determined?
4. Were the dressmaking and millinery trades year round or seasonal work?



Daily Operations of the Business and Marketing Techniques:

1. What selling techniques were used to generate business; i.e., newspaper advertisements and mailings, seasonal or holiday sales, window displays, word-of-mouth, trade signs, selling other items that would appeal to their female customers?
2. Was the purpose of a maker's label mainly for advertising?
3. What were the wages paid to dressmakers and milliners in Lansing?

Other

1. Were the makers of the labeled garments typical or atypical in their production and marketing techniques compared to other makers in Lansing?
2. What socioeconomic contributions did the dressmakers and milliners make to their families?

## CHAPTER III

### CLOTHING WITH LABELS OF LANSING DRESSMAKERS AND MILLINERS

The findings of Objectives 1 and 2 are reported in this chapter. These objectives corresponded to the first and second operations of the artifact study model, namely, identification and evaluation. The operations (and objectives) were concerned with identifying, documenting, and evaluating the five basic properties of the Lansing products: history, material, construction, design, and function. Twelve garments with labels of Lansing dressmakers and milliners were used in this study and included four dresses, one jacket, five bonnets, and two hats. The products and their makers are listed in Table 1 and complete descriptions of each product are given in Appendix C.

#### The Basic Artifact Properties

##### History

Among the five properties, history was lacking in all but one of the Lansing products. The museum records and the private individual provided no information about when each individual garment was purchased, the price, or the purpose or occasion when it was worn. A follow-up with the donors was possible in only one case and even then no further information was obtained as to date, price, occasion, or

Table 1. Labeled Products of Lansing Dressmakers and Milliners

Products	Product Date <sup>a</sup>	Dressmakers	Years Worked in Lansing
3-piece ensemble	1896	Ada Passage	1890-1896
3-piece dress	1903	Jessie Tompkins	1894-1903
Jacket	1903-1906	Isabel Towne	1888-1908
2-piece dress	1903-1906		
2-piece dress	1903-1906		
<u>Milliners</u>			
Bonnet	1880-1885	Charles Sutliff	1877-1896
Bonnets (3)	1882-1889	Asenath Regina Abels	1880-1891
Hat	1892-1895	Harriet Dillingham	1883-1910
Bonnet	1896-1899	Bliss Stebbins	1896-1902
Toque	1896-1899		

<sup>a</sup>Date assigned by the author.

photographs showing the original owner wearing the garment. The name of the person for whom the clothing was originally made was recorded for only three of the items.

One hat had a brief history in the form of a small piece of paper that was pinned to the lining. The handwritten, anonymous note read, "Worn 1892, trimmed by Mrs. Dillingham, fashionable milliner, Lansing, Mich."<sup>1</sup> The note was probably written by the original owner or the donor, who may or may not have been one and the same. The existence of a Mrs. Harriet (Hattie) Dillingham, milliner, was verified by a listing in the Lansing City Directory as working from 1883 to 1910. The hat had no maker's label and showed no signs of ever having one.

Without personal histories to provide dates of when the garments were worn, the makers' labels were used to provide a range of dates when the clothing was probably made based on the years the dressmaker or milliner was in business. The labels, printed or woven, were judged to be authentic to the items and not later additions. They were either an integral part of the garments having been put in place during the finishing process or the original stitches used to sew the labels in place were still intact. The names and addresses on the labels were verified by locating the same in the Lansing city directories and the State business gazetteers. Although fake labels are known to have been

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<sup>1</sup>Museum personnel involved in cataloguing donations of clothing and textiles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often encounter these handwritten notes pinned or sewn to the object. These notes often provide important information or family history which help the person cataloguing to identify and date the object and should be verified for accuracy.

used, the practice was largely confined to forging works of the Parisian haute couture houses, such as Worth, Callot, and Poiret, by sewing fake labels with their names into United States-made copies.<sup>2</sup> It is unlikely that such a practice would have occurred in Lansing-made clothing.

During the identification operation of Objective 1, it became apparent that the seven individual makers and their twelve products represented a small part of the dressmaking and millinery businesses in Lansing. Several explanations may account for this limited representation. The most obvious reason may be that very few examples survived over time or were donated to local public collections for preservation. Another reason may have to do with the practice of sewing labels into clothing. Noted English clothing historian, Janet Arnold, has stated that putting maker's labels on waistbands of dresses "was customary from the haute couture houses down through the various ranks of dressmakers from the 1870s onward. One of the earliest labeled dresses in existence is at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, which dates from the early 1860s"<sup>3</sup> and is from an establishment in Paris. Therefore, it is not likely that early examples (pre-1870s) of professionally-made clothing from Lansing would have been labeled.

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<sup>2</sup>Samuel Hopkins Adams, "The Dishonest Paris Label, How American Women Are Being Fooled by a Country-Wide Swindle," Ladies' Home Journal, March 1913. Reprinted in Dress 4 (1978): 17-23.

<sup>3</sup>Janet Arnold, "The Dressmaker's Craft," Strata of Society (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1974), p. 34.

The use of maker's labels appears to have been an inconsistent practice by both trades throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a result, there may be clothing still in existence that was made by a Lansing dressmaker or milliner, but without a maker's label or a personal history, there is no way to attribute it to a specific maker. Several such examples came to light during this study where clothing of early Lansing families had been preserved, but no background information had been recorded concerning its manufacture.

### Construction

In dating historic clothing there are several factors to be considered. These include, "the fabric, the embroidery, the details of stitching and trimming, the cut and construction methods used, and the shape of the dress in wear. The last two provide the safest way of dating a specimen. . . ."<sup>4</sup> The style lines and the cut and construction of the Lansing-made clothing were used to narrow the dates when the garments were most likely to have been made and worn within the range of dates when the makers were known to have worked in the city. The dates assigned to the garments by the author are shown in Table 1.

The source used most frequently to date the dresses was The Delineator, which was published by the Butterick Pattern Company from 1873-1937. This monthly periodical featured Butterick patterns with

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<sup>4</sup>Janet Arnold, A Handbook of Costume (New York: S. G. Phillips, 1973), p. 129.

explicit, illustrated descriptions on their style and cut. There were often illustrations which showed details of various garment parts, such as sleeves or necklines, which were helpful when identifying the Lansing-made clothing. The corresponding fashion illustrations and commentary found in other contemporary women's magazines as Godey's and Peterson's were also helpful, but did not include the detailed descriptions of the cut of the dresses as found in The Delineator.

Although issues of The Delineator did not provide as precise commentary or illustrations of cut and construction for millinery as for dresses, they did include more detailed descriptions and pictures than those found in Godey's and Peterson's. Millinery illustrations from Harper's Bazar reprinted in a Dover publication<sup>5</sup> were also helpful in determining the styles and appropriate dates for the Lansing-made headwear.

#### Material, Function, and Design

The material property of the dresses and millinery, that is, the fabrics and trims were found to be consistently discussed in the period fashion magazines which were used in determining the identity of the fabrics and trims of the Lansing-made clothing.

Function was another artifact property consistently given in the period fashion magazines for both dresses and millinery. The clothing illustrations were always labeled with the appropriate activity for which the garment was to be worn. The labeled functions

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<sup>5</sup>Stella Blum, ed., Victorian Fashions & Costumes from Harper's Bazar: 1867-1898 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974).

were as specific as, visiting, walking, riding, or had less definite labels such as afternoon, day, or evening wear. Dresses were given more specific labeled functions than millinery.

The design property of the Lansing-made clothing was correlated to the appropriate design period in historic costume and was evaluated as to whether it represented the mode or high-style clothing of the period.

### The Dresses and Jacket

#### Ada Passage (Worked 1890-1896)

The ensemble with Ada Passage's label consisted of a two-piece dress and matching cape (see Figures 2a and 2b). The ensemble was probably a walking outfit based on the type of fabric and trim that was used. Dresses labeled as worn for walking in the fashion magazines were characterized by being made of sturdy fabrics, instead of lightweight silks, wools, or cottons. The trim of walking dresses often consisted of applied, flat decoration as opposed to lace frills or three-dimensional, applied trim. The Passage ensemble was made of a silk and wool fabric and was trimmed with applied, velvet bands in graduated widths on the skirt. The velvet was also used to make the standing collar and cap sleeves on the bodice.

The date of 1896 assigned to the ensemble was based on its style and construction. In particular, the dress was representative of women's dress styles of the hourglass period in costume history. The cut of the bodice and skirt contributed to this silhouette. The bodice featured cap sleeves which gave some emphasis to width at the





Figure 2b. Matching cape to the Passage dress.

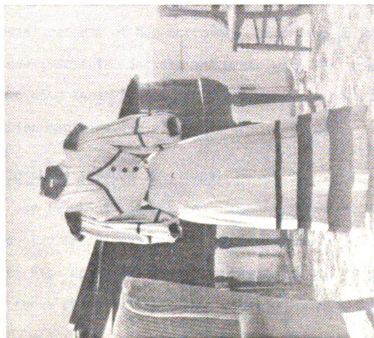


Figure 2a. Two-piece dress with label of Ada Passage.

shoulders, a deceptively loose-looking yoked bodice which narrowed to a small, fitted waist. The gored skirt with fitted waist and flared hem completed the hourglass shape.

Despite its association with this style period, only one illustration was found which slightly resembled the bodice and skirt to document the Passage outfit (see Figure 3). The Passage bodice featured full cut bishop sleeves, rather than the overly-popular leg-o-mutton sleeves that were shown in the majority of the fashion illustrations. Bishop sleeve styles were illustrated in The Delineator (see Figure 4).

One uncommon feature of the outfit was the falling collar of the cape. Although no tally was taken, the majority of the capes illustrated during the mid-1890s were shown with high, rolling collars as shown in Figures 5a and 5b. Perhaps the style of the collar on the Passage cape represents a less-popular variation of cut or was made at the special request of her customer. According to Ada Passage's newspaper advertisements, jackets and wraps were her specialty. Presumably, she would have known how to cut the popular rolling collars shown in the fashion magazine.

#### Jessie Tompkins (Worked 1894-1903)

The Tompkins' outfit was unusual in that it featured a separate skirt and two matching bodices, one for day wear and one for evening wear (see Figures 6a and 6b). How common it was to make two separate bodices for a dress is not known, but the practice had been in use for

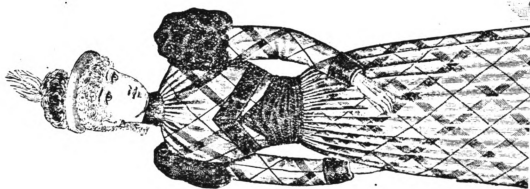


Figure 3. Dress style similar to the Passage dress shown in The Delineator, January 1893, p. 28.

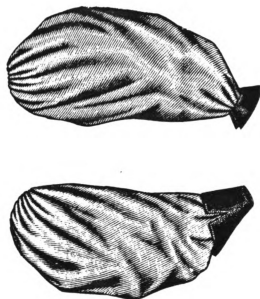


Figure 4. Bishop sleeve illustrations, The Delineator, July 1895, p. 37.

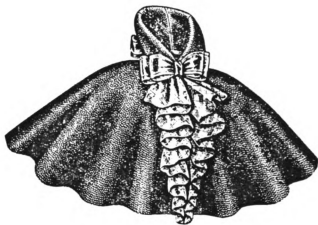


Figure 5a.

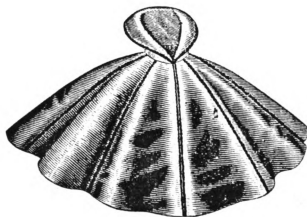


Figure 5b.

Figure 5a and 5b. Popular cape styles of the mid-1880s, illustrated in The Delineator, September 1895, p. 278.

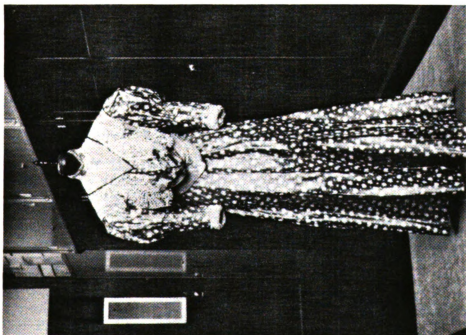


Figure 6a. Dress with day bodice with label of Jessie Tompkins.

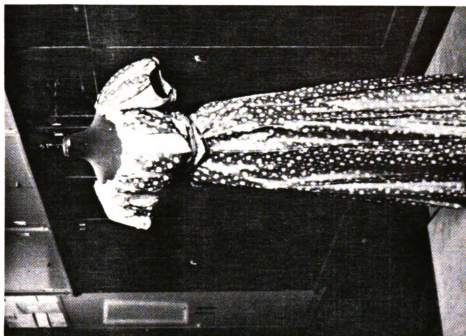


Figure 6b. Dress with evening bodice (using same skirt as shown in Figure 6a) made by Jessie Tompkins.

many years since there are dresses with both a day and an evening bodice that have survived from the 1850s.<sup>6</sup>

The style lines of both bodices and the skirt revealed the characteristic Edwardian silhouette which prevailed during the first decade of the twentieth century (see Figures 7a and 7b). Edwardian style features in both the bodices included a loose, fitted, pouched front applied over a fitted, boned lining, and shaped, fitted waistband which allowed the appropriate S-shape created by the corset. The skirt was made in the popular tailored style that was also contemporary with the gored, flounced skirts. The outfit is believed to have been made during the last years that Jessie Tompkins worked in Lansing, probably in 1903. This outfit was made from a lightweight silk taffeta which was also typical of this period in costume history. Fabrics used in Edwardian dresses were lightweight, clinging types.

Both bodices also featured trims that were characteristic of the Edwardian period, primarily in the form of lace appliques. The day bodice with its lace applique, draped bias bands and large enameled buttons served to illustrate the following fashion commentary published in the June 1903 issue of The Delineator.

One of the principal sources of embellishment this season is found in buttons, and when employed in association with braids, innumerable decorative possibilities are suggested. Straps, huge cuffs, bands, panels, revers and flaps and other devices are especially designed so that buttons may be artistically used in connection with them.

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<sup>6</sup>See Doris Langley Moore's, The Woman in Fashion (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1949), plates XXI and XXII.



Figure 7a. The Edwardian silhouette as illustrated in The Delineator, March 1901, p. 360.



Figure 7b. The Edwardian silhouette as illustrated in The Delineator, October 1906, p. 496.



Typical Edwardian construction details included in the skirt were inset panels at the hip which created a yoke-like effect and a series of inverted pleats that the contemporary fashion literature may have referred to as "slot seams," although no contrasting underpanels were used. Trim on the tailored skirts was often rows of machine stitching in matching or contrasting thread. The former was used in the Tompkins' skirt.

The tailored style of the skirt made it compatible with the day bodice, but somehow inappropriate for the evening bodice. Evening dresses were most often illustrated with gored, flounced skirts which created a graceful, curved silhouette. The Tompkins' evening dress with its straight, tailored skirt appeared stiff by comparison. Perhaps, if there had been a personal history with the dress, an explanation may have been provided as to why the customer chose to have that particular skirt style made for the two bodices.

#### Isabel Towne (Worked 1888-1908)

The three surviving garments with Isabel Towne's labels were made for two different people and are believed to date from the last years of her career. The two dresses and jacket were dated as being made and worn during the years 1903-1906 (see Figures 8, 9, and 10). Their style lines were characteristic of the Edwardian silhouette and featured a pouched front, inward curve at the back waist, shaped fitted waistband or "girdle" as it was sometimes referred to in the contemporary literature and a fitted skirt which flared at the hem.

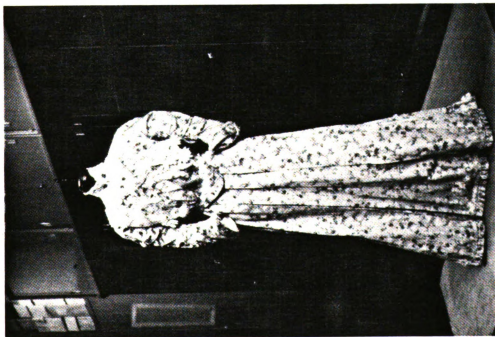


Figure 8. Afternoon dress with label of Isabel Towne.



Figure 9. Afternoon dress with label of Isabel Towne.

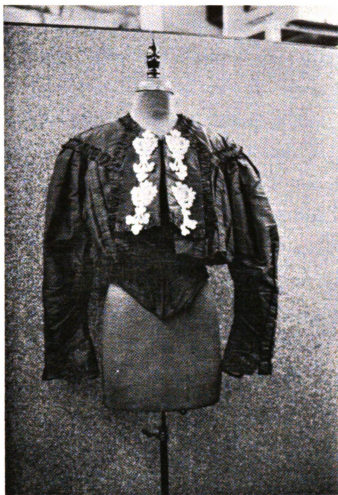


Figure 10. Jacket, probably part of an afternoon suit, with Isabel Towne's label.

The dresses were classified as afternoon dresses based on the similarity of fabrics and colors to those illustrated in The Delineator from 1901 to 1906. The dresses were made of a figured silk and silk foulard in light color combinations of medium green with white and in shades of grey. Lightweight, clinging fabrics, such as crepe de Chine, chiffon, china silk, foulard, and nun's veiling in soft, delicate colors of ash grey, ivory, bisquit, apple green, dull blue, and old pink, were often listed for dresses worn for afternoon wear. The profusely applied lace trim on the Towne dresses, especially the bodices, was also characteristic of Edwardian afternoon gowns (see Figures 11 and 12).

The jacket originally was probably part of an outfit consisting of a matching skirt and a light-colored, boned bodice with a high, standing collar. Unfortunately, the jacket was all that was donated. The black taffeta body trimmed with appliqued lace motifs and self-fabric ruching were also typical characteristics of afternoon wear.

### Summary

The garments with the labels of Ada Passage, Jessie Tompkins, and Isabel Towne were concluded to be of the prevailing mode of their respective time periods. All of the items featured characteristic style lines, fabrics, and trims that were illustrated in period fashion magazines. However, due to the lack of a personal history it was not possible to determine if they would have been high-style clothing.

The dresses and jacket clearly represented products of the professional sewing woman, the dressmaker. However, it was not possible to determine whether more than one person worked in

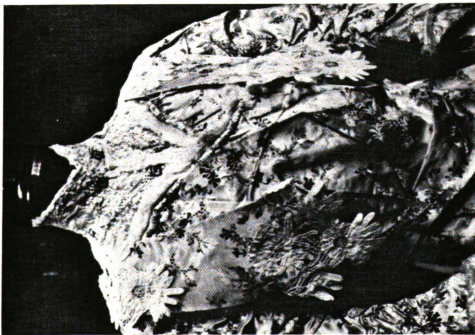


Figure 11. A bodice with Isabel Towne's label showing the Edwardian characteristic of applied lace trim.

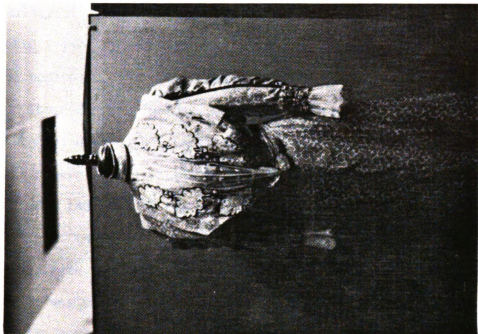


Figure 12. Another Towne bodice showing similar lace treatment.

constructing the garments. The construction and finishing techniques used in each piece, particularly the bodices, illustrated the high quality of dressmaking during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (see Figures 13, 14, 15, and 16, for views of the insides of the bodices). The cotton and silk underlinings used in the Passage and Towne dresses featured seams finished by pinking, overcasting, or ribbon binding. The stays in the Passage bodice were sewn in place with a herringbone stitch. The lining of the Towne jacket was used to cover the ends of the hooks in order to provide a smooth, clean finish of the front opening. The entire inner edge of the jacket was marked with a row of herringbone stitch. The effect of these techniques was one of extreme neatness. Arnold has stated, "The 1890s and the early 1900s are probably the most interesting periods for the study of the dressmaking craft. The art of cutting and skills of fitting and dressmaking were at their highest level."<sup>7</sup>

### The Millinery

#### Charles Sutliff (Worked 1877-1896)

The bonnet with the printed label of Charles Sutliff and made of plaited straw bands machine sewn together was constructed in a rather plain style having a deep crown with no brim (see Figure 17). The high, curved edge of the back of the bonnet suggested the assigned date of 1880-1885. The applied trim of matching straw and paired glass beads were handsewn around the entire outer edge at the time the bonnet was made (see Figure 18). However, the other trim of fabric flowers,

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<sup>7</sup>Arnold, "The Dressmaker's Craft," pp. 39-40.



Figure 13. Inside view of bodice with Ada Passage's label.

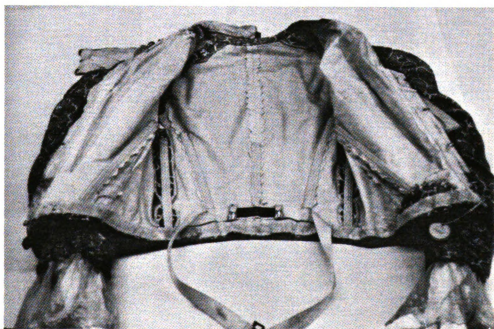


Figure 14. Inside view of bodice with Isabel Towne's label.



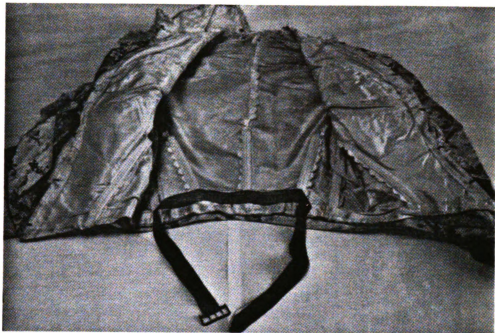


Figure 15. Inside view of a different bodice with Isabel Towne's label.



Figure 16. Inside view of bodice made by Jessie Tompkins.



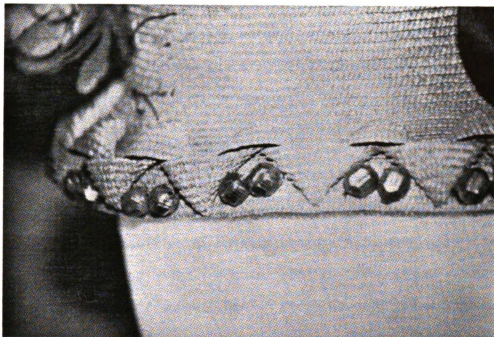


Figure 18. Detail of trim at the outer edge of the Sutliff bonnet.

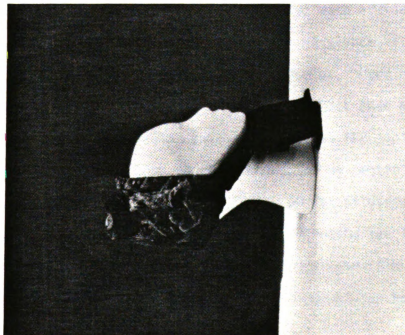


Figure 17. Bonnet with label of Charles Sutliff.

lace fabric and ribbon ties were crudely applied in a manner uncharacteristic of the period and were probably added to the bonnet in the twentieth century. The natural colored, plaited straw was a common material used for women's summer headwear throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Asenath Regina Abels (Worked 1880-1891)

A contemporary of Charles Sutliff, Asenath Regina Abels had all her labels printed as Mrs. A. R. Abels. The three products from her shop were classified as bonnets because each were made with ribbon ties to be fastened under the chin. Unlike the somewhat nondescript style of the Sutliff bonnet, Abels' three examples seemed much more stylish in shape and trim. All the bonnets represented the slightly different styles that were illustrated in the fashion magazines throughout the 1880s.

One of the Abels' products was constructed with a wide, open brim and a shallow crown (see Figure 19). At first glance, it appeared to be reminiscent of bonnet styles in earlier decades. Upon examination, however, it showed the characteristic curved back edge and applied trim of the 1880s. One particular characteristic was the application of ribbon trim along the lower edge which formed a bow at center back and was extended out to form the ties. See Figure 20 for illustration showing this bonnet's close fit of the head which framed the face. The use of dark brown velvet and black fabric and ribbon trim gave the bonnet a very dark, subdued appearance. The bonnet may have been

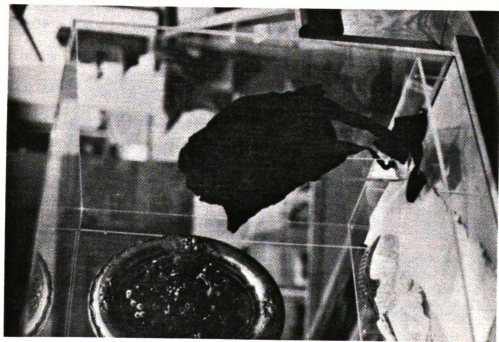


Figure 19. Bonnet with label of Mrs. A. R. Abels.

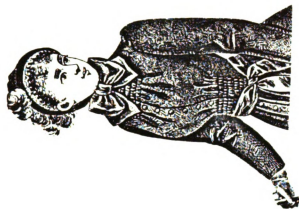


Figure 20. Illustration showing bonnet style in Figure 19 being worn, The Delineator, February 1884, p. 76.

made for the fall and winter season as velvet was traditionally reserved for wear during those months.

By comparison, Abels' other two bonnets were made in the shape most often associated with the mid-1880s and the last bustle period. They were constructed with an upright, oval-shaped, shallow crown which was worn forward and high on the head (see Figures 21 and 22). By the mid-1880s, "hats and bonnets were built up high with standing ornamentation in wings, aigrettes, tightly curled ostrich, stuffed birds, wired ribbon loops of taffeta, satin and velvet."<sup>8</sup> Both bonnets featured trims of wired fabric and ribbon concentrated at the top of the crowns. See Figures 23 and 24 for illustrations showing how this style of bonnet was worn. The trim was arranged assymmetrically, which reflected similar treatment used in the draped, bustle shirts of the period.

The bonnet shown in Figure 21 was handmade and an excellent example of a milliner's skill in cut and design of custom headwear. The dark navy blue velvet (almost black) was fitted over a buckram frame and featured an integral corded band at the outer edge with tapered, wing-like extensions. The edge of the crown was slightly pointed at center front, which was also characteristic of bonnets of the mid-1880s. The contrasting color used in this example was cream in the form of a lining for the velvet extensions, as well as ribbon trim. The contrasting fabrics used with the velvet were moiré and

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<sup>8</sup>Ruth Turner Wilcox, The Mode in Hats and Headdress (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), revised edition, p. 255.

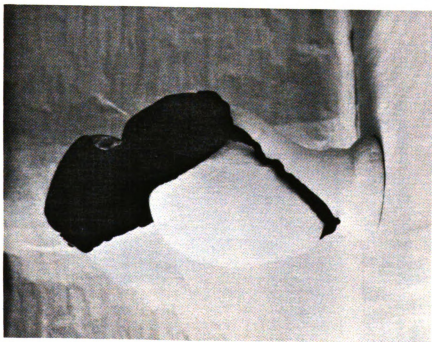


Figure 21. Bonnet with label of Mrs. A. R. Abels.

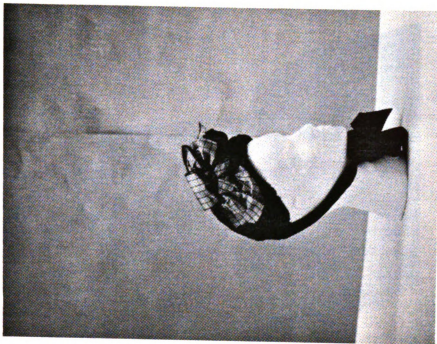


Figure 22. Bonnet with label of Mrs. A. R. Abels.

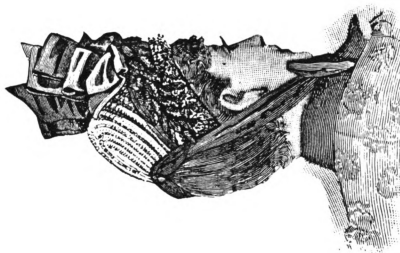


Figure 23. Illustration similar to bonnet styles in Figures 21 and 22, shown in Harper's Bazar, June 15, 1889, p. 448.

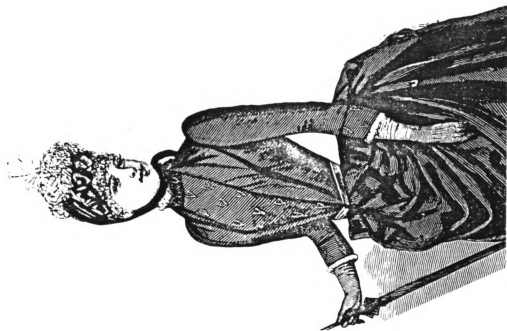


Figure 24. Illustration similar to bonnet styles in Figures 21 and 22, shown in Harper's Bazar, September 6, 1884, p. 571.

grosgrain taffeta ribbons, which also reflected similar treatment in women's dresses of the period.

The last Abels' product (Figure 22) was made in an openwork straw pattern which was a popular headwear material during this period. The straw bands were overlapped and handsewn together. The use of contrasting colors (black and cream to the natural colored straw) and contrasting patterns (open straw, leno weave fabric trim, and windowpane check ribbon) again reflected similar treatments in women's dresses of the 1880s.

#### Harriet Dillingham (Worked 1883-1910)

The product of Hattie Dillingham, another contemporary of Sutliff and Abels, was probably purchased by her ready-made from a wholesaler and then trimmed in her shop.

The hat was made of purple-dyed, plaited straw bands that were machine sewn together (see Figure 25). The hat was probably produced in an eastern factory and ordered by Dillingham as a new style for her spring, or possibly fall, opening in 1892. (According to the handwritten note, it was worn in 1892.) By the 1880s straw was no longer restricted to summer wear and perhaps the dark purple of the straw would have been appropriate for fall headwear. Trims applied to the straw form included dark purple velvet edging, passementerie and wired, grosgrain ribbon bows. A partial lining was also added. In describing the somewhat odd shape of this particular hat style, the eminent English clothing historian, Anne M. Buck, noted, "Witch-crowned hats, that is, hats with crowns pointed in a cone-shaped, were fashionable in the

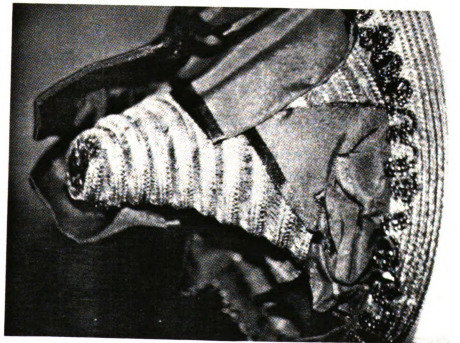


Figure 25. Hat with history of being trimmed by Hattie Dillingham, back view.



Figure 26. Illustration of a bonnet nearly identical in style to the Dillingham hat, shown in The Delineator, January 1893, p. 43.



mid-1890s."<sup>9</sup> An almost identical style to the Dillingham hat was illustrated in The Delineator (see Figure 26).

Bliss Stebbins (Worked 1896-1902)

Both of the products with the Stebbins' label were examples of the small size headwear that was one of the popular styles worn during the hourglass period of costume history. Although the bonnet and toque (hat with brimless crown) were dated during the first four years of Stebbins' career, this style was seen throughout the 1890s (see Figures 27 and 28). This style of headwear could have been worn with the Ada Passage ensemble. Despite their small surface areas, approximately 6 inches, both displayed characteristic profusions of ribbon and flower trim. Figure 29 had narrow fabric ties extending from the back edge and was classified as a bonnet. Figure 30 was made with a crown only and would have required a hat pin to hold it in place.

Both were probably worn for the spring season due to the light colored materials used in their construction. Figure 29 was made of cream and natural colored straw with pale grey ribbon trim, fabric flowers, and chiffon poufs. The ties were made of grey taffeta. Figure 30 may have been worn as a new Easter style with its dark purple silk violets and light green cotton stems and leaves made a pleasing contrast to the grey velvet and figured silk background with grey chenille and taffeta ribbon trim.

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<sup>9</sup>Anne M. Buck, Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1961), p. 125.

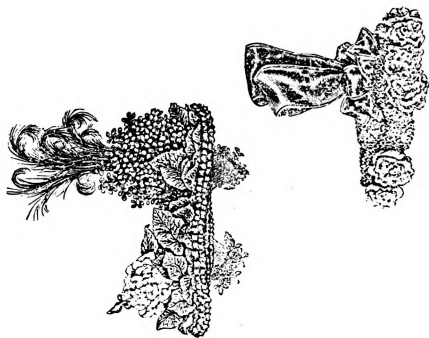


Figure 28. Illustrations of toque styles similar to the Stebbins' toque, shown in The Delineator, July 1895, p. 61.

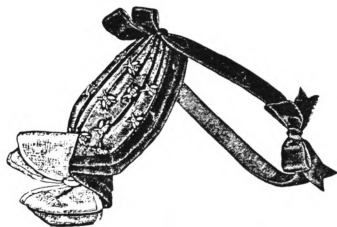


Figure 27. Illustration of bonnet style similar to the Stebbins' bonnet, shown in The Delineator, June 1891, p. 493.



Figure 29. Bonnet with label of Bliss Stebbins.

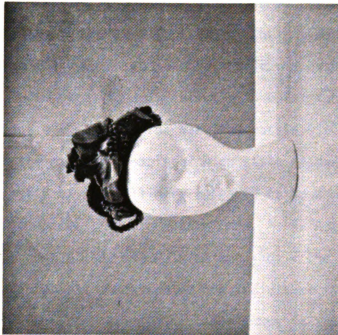


Figure 30. Toque with label of Bliss Stebbins.

Summary

The millinery, as with the dresses and jacket, were also concluded to be made in the prevailing style of their time. Without a history for the objects, which would have provided a date and/or occasion when they were worn, it was difficult to determine if the Lansing millinery was high style. The hat from Hattie Dillingham's shop may represent the closest example of high style headwear.

The workmanship of the millinery appeared to be a mixture of ready-made and custom-made. The products of Mrs. A. R. Abels were handmade and were probably made entirely in her shop. The other headwear items were probably purchased by the individual milliners as ready-made frames and then trimmed in their shops in the prevailing mode.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LANSING

#### DRESSMAKERS AND MILLINERS

The demographic characteristics of Lansing dressmakers and milliners revealed a definite profile for both populations. These personal statistics were compiled using the federal census of 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910. The 1850 federal census, collected three years after Lansing was chosen as the site for the new state capitol, indicated that no dressmakers or milliners were counted among the town's population. Although the demographic characteristics remained consistent for each census year, the forms used in recording the information changed from census to census. This inconsistency is most noticeable in the marital status and living arrangement categories which resulted in a somewhat disjointed tabulation for this study. The findings of this chapter correspond to operation three of the artifact study model in the form of an analysis of the types of people who were likely to work in these occupations.

#### Total Numbers of Dressmakers and Milliners

The total numbers of dressmakers and milliners for the five census years are shown in Table 2. The milliners almost doubled with each decade from 1860 to 1880, while the dressmakers nearly tripled in

Table 2. Demographics of Lansing Dressmakers and Milliners

	1860		1870		1880		1900		1910	
	Dressmaker	Milliner	Dressmaker	Milliner	Dressmaker	Milliner	Dressmaker	Milliner	Dressmaker	Milliner
Total	22	12	32	15	111	31	182	46	168	58
Mean age	27	28	27	29	28	28	33	26	36	26
Country of Birth:										
United States	19	11	28	15	99	30	157	45	149	54
Foreign	3	1	4	--	12	1	25	1	19	4
Marital Status:										
Single	4	5	9	2	76	22	100	34	62	41
Married, widowed, divorced	5	1	9	3	--	--	--	--	--	--
Unknown	13	6	14	10	--	--	--	--	--	--
Married	--	--	--	--	17	7	44	8	65	15
Widowed/divorced	--	--	--	--	18	2	38	4	41	2
Living Arrangements--Single:										
With both parents and siblings	1	1	1	1	27	5	30	15	18	17
With a parent and siblings	2	4	3	--	9	4	8	3	5	4
With parent(s), no siblings	--	--	2	1	4	3	9	4	10	6
With siblings, no parents	1	--	3	--	9	1	20	1	11	2
With other family	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	3	--	--
With non-relatives	--	--	--	--	26	8	22	7	16	12
Alone	--	--	--	--	1	1	9	1	2	--
Living Arrangements--Married, Widowed or Divorced:										
With husband and children	1	1	1	2	--	--	--	--	--	--
With husband, no children	2	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
With children, no husband	2	--	7	1	--	--	--	--	--	--
Living Arrangements--Unknown:										
With non-relatives	12	6	14	10	--	--	--	--	--	--
Alone	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Living Arrangements--Married:										
With spouse and children	--	--	--	--	6	5	18	3	27	5
With spouse, no children	--	--	--	--	6	2	12	5	26	15
With children, no spouse	--	--	--	--	4	--	9	--	7	--
With no spouse, no children	--	--	--	--	1	--	3	--	5	--
Living Arrangements--Widowed or Divorced:										
With family members	--	--	--	--	8	1	21	1	29	1
With non-relatives	--	--	--	--	7	1	9	1	9	1
Alone	--	--	--	--	3	--	8	2	3	--

Source: Manuscript census of 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910.

the decade between 1870 and 1880. In the last census, 1910, the dressmakers had declined by fourteen from the number recorded in 1900. However, the overall increase in both groups probably can be attributed to the growth of Lansing in terms of population as well as commercial development and social activities. Both groups provided necessary services to the women of Lansing who required up-to-date clothing.

Perhaps the reason the number of milliners remained consistently lower than that of the dressmakers may be found in the different natures of the two businesses. In particular, most Lansing milliners operated or worked in shops with established business hours that were separate from their home while dressmakers, on the other hand, had several options open to them for working in the trade. They could work either in a shop/store or home environment.

The great increase in the number of dressmakers in Lansing from 1870 to 1880 may be accounted for by changes in women's dress styles and increased social opportunities for women in Lansing. During this ten year period, dress styles became increasingly complex in the cut and construction of the bodice and skirt, as well as in the fit of the bodice which covered the torso and hip area like a sheath. In order to create the popular style, many women turned to the professional sewing woman who had training and experience in using the numerous drafting systems on the market that were needed to create the correct look. Corresponding with the increase in dressmakers, Kidwell reported that the number of patents granted for these dressmaker drafting

systems increased from twelve for the period 1860-1869 to twenty for 1870-1879.<sup>1</sup> Not all of the several hundred dressmakers reported in the census of 1880, 1900, and 1910 represented separate shops in Lansing's commercial district. Many of these women also worked in their own homes or in those of their customers.

#### Occupations Taken from the Censuses

The occupation titles of dressmaker and milliner used in Table 2 are broad terms which included several other listings found in the censuses. For example, dressmaker in this study also denotes those listed as apprentices, dressmaker/milliner, and seamstresses. Although seamstresses did simple sewing and restyling of garments, many of them in Lansing are known to have worked for dressmakers and were included in this study. Those seamstresses listed in the 1900 and 1910 census as working for a carriage manufacturer, shirt, and auto factories, and book binderies were not counted. Milliners in this study also included those listed as milliner/dressmaker, apprentice, millinery clerk, millinery saleslady/salesman, and trimmer. Two people located in the 1900 census were not counted since one was listed as a straw operator in a hat factory and the other as a commercial traveler for millinery. The four individuals who were listed as both a dressmaker and milliner in the censuses of 1860, 1870, and 1880 were counted in both of the categories for Table 2.

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<sup>1</sup>Claudia B. Kidwell, Cutting a Fashionable Fit (City of Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), p. 101.



A total of only seven apprentices were recorded for the five census years: one for a milliner in 1870, two for dressmakers in 1870, one for a dressmaker in 1880, two for a milliner in 1900, and one for a milliner in 1910. Apparently, apprenticeships were not a rigid part of the dressmaking and millinery trades.

#### Race and Sex

Except for the 1880 census, the race of the Lansing dressmakers and milliners remained all white. In 1880, two mulatto dressmakers, a mother and daughter, were listed in the census. Both women were either widowed or divorced and may have worked in their own home or those of their clients. There were 209 blacks recorded in Lansing for 1880.<sup>2</sup> The mulatto dressmakers may have served this population as well as the white community.

Exceptions to the nearly 100 percent female Lansing dressmaking and millinery populations were found in the 1880, 1900, and 1910 census. A male milliner, Charles Sutliff, was noted in 1880. One of his products was analyzed in this study. Two men were associated with the millinery trade in the 1900 census. One was Bliss Stebbins, who worked in partnership with his wife, and the other was listed as a millinery salesman whose wife was also a milliner. The 1910 census recorded two married, male dressmakers. Neither one had any children. One worked at a shop and the other at home. The wives were not involved in their husband's business as one was listed as a hairdresser and the other with no occupation. These exceptions can be considered uncommon

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<sup>2</sup>Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census: 1880, Table VI (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), p. 420.

for the city the size of Lansing. Male dressmakers and milliners, while always a minority, were more common to large metropolitan areas, such as New York City and Chicago.

### Age

With the exception of the 1900 and 1910 census, the mean age for both dressmakers and milliners varied between twenty-seven and twenty-nine. Over the five census years the youngest age for the milliners was fifteen and the oldest was sixty-three. For the dressmakers, the ages were respectively fifteen and ninety-four. The seven apprentices listed in the censuses were all teenagers ranging from fifteen to eighteen years old.

Data collected from the 1900 census revealed a mean age of thirty-three for Lansing's dressmakers and a mean age of twenty-six for the milliners. The mean age for the former was approximately five years older than that found for previous census years. A breakdown of the marital status categories for the dressmakers explained in part the age variance. While the mean age of twenty-eight for the single women was consistent with past age averages for that group, the mean ages of the married and widowed/divorced women were higher at thirty-eight and thirty-nine respectively.

In 1910, the mean age of thirty-six for the dressmakers was also higher than previous census years, while the mean age of twenty-six for the milliners was the same as the previous census. Perhaps the dressmakers' variance can be attributed to the great increase in Lansing's population during the years 1900 to 1910 when it swelled

from 16,845 to 31,229. The personal circumstances of these newcomers, particularly the women, may have required them to seek employment. Among the 1910 dressmakers, the single women remained at a mean age of twenty-nine, but the twenty-nine widows and twelve divorcées listed as working in this occupation had mean ages of forty-eight and thirty-seven. The mean age of twenty-three for the single milliners was much lower than in previous censuses and the mean ages of the married and widowed or divorced also shifted to higher ages with means of thirty-four and thirty-eight.

An overwhelming majority of Lansing's dressmakers and milliners were native born. The total number of dressmakers for the five census years was 515, of which 452 or 88 percent were born in the United States. Correspondingly, the total number of milliners located in the censuses was 162, of which 155 or 96 percent were born in this country. From 1870 on, a large portion of the native born of both groups were born in Michigan. The majority of those who were foreign born were from the English-speaking countries of Canada and England. Other countries represented included Ireland, Germany, France, Prussia, Nova Scotia, and Holland.

The nativity of the dressmakers and milliners reflected the general population in Lansing as reported in the 1870 and 1880 census. For 1870, the population of Lansing was 84 percent native born and 16 percent foreign born, of which the milliners were 100 percent native and the dressmakers were 88 percent native born and 12 percent foreign born.<sup>3</sup> In 1880, Lansing's population was 85 percent native born and

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Table IX, p. 451.

15 percent foreign born which corresponds to the milliners who were 97 percent native and 3 percent foreign born, as well as the dressmakers with 89 percent native and 11 percent foreign born. In all, Lansing's dressmaking and millinery populations were a homogeneous group having a white, anglo-saxon heritage.

The 1900 and 1910 census showed the largest increase of foreign born persons who worked as dressmakers and milliners, particularly among the former. Although no data were compiled from the censuses, the increase may reflect an overall increase of foreign born individuals in Lansing's population. The flexible work environment of dressmaking that could be conducted in a home or shop may have appealed to foreign born women with adequate sewing skills.

#### Marital Status

The marital status of the dressmakers and milliners was difficult to determine for the 1860 and 1870 censuses, because no such category was used. Therefore, when tallying the status for these two census years, the categories of single, married/widowed/divorced, and unknown were used for Table 2. All of the dressmakers and milliners in the second category were married at one time or another, but it was not clear whether they were still married or widowed at the time the census was taken. The majority of those placed in the unknown marital status category were probably single, although they could have been married and separated from their husbands or widowed. None in the unknown category were listed with children.

The 1880 census contained the following designated marital status categories: single, married, and widowed/divorced. As a result the latter category was listed separately in Table 2.

The censuses of 1860 and 1870 show a majority of Lansing dressmakers and milliners as being of an unknown marital status. However, most of them were probably single as they were listed as living with non-relatives. The next largest marital status category was that of the single women, all of whom lived in a family arrangement varying from daughters in a complete family to in-laws living with their sibling's family. The smallest marital status category for the 1860 and 1870 censuses was that of married/widowed/divorced. These women represented fourteen out of fifty-four dressmakers or only 26 percent and four out of twenty-seven milliners or 15 percent. Considering the domestic nature of the trades, especially dressmaking, the numbers from this category were surprisingly low.

The 1880 census reflected a mixed picture over the previous census findings. In this instance, ninety-eight of the total 142 dressmakers and milliners or 69 percent were single. Married dressmakers, however, were almost evenly split with those that were widowed/divorced. Married milliners were predominant over those who were widowed/divorced.

The data collected from the 1900 and 1910 census revealed that both dressmakers and milliners were likely to have been single. In 1900, the total number of both groups was 228 of which 134 or 59 percent were single. The 1910 census revealed a total of 226

dressmakers and milliners of which 103 or 46 percent were single. In comparing the two groups for both censuses, single milliners were 74 percent and 71 percent respectively, while single dressmakers were 55 percent and 37 percent. Perhaps the differences in the work environments of the two trades account for the larger numbers of single milliners. For both the 1900 and 1910 censuses, the second largest marital status category was that of married dressmakers and milliners.

### Living Arrangements

The living arrangements of Lansing's dressmakers and milliners revealed several possible reasons for their participation in the labor force. A majority of the single women listed in the 1860 and 1870 census were either sole supporters of their parents or contributed to the support of a widowed mother and one or more siblings. Those who lived with a brother's or sister's family or in a family with both parents and siblings might have kept their wages for themselves or perhaps supplemented the family's income.

This latter suggestion is reasonable when the job levels of the working male members of the households are considered. The occupations of the fathers or brothers were for the most part at a skilled craftsmen level, such as master carpenter, house builder, cabinet maker, paper pressman, machinist, carpenter and joiner, sawyer, turner, printer, and boot and shoemaker. One male held a proprietor level position as a merchant. A few of the men held laborer level occupations, such as painter, farmer, stage driver, and undesignated laborer.

The women listed in the 1860 and 1870 censuses that were given an unknown marital status in Table 2 were also self-supporting. This group showed a preference for dressmaking over millinery work.

The living arrangements of the dressmakers and milliners of the remaining census years of 1880, 1900, and 1910 were dominated by single women who lived in families including both parents and one or more siblings. In many of the cases, the women were not the only children working. These women, as well as those who lived as in-laws in their sibling's family, were probably able to keep their wages for their own use or would supplement the family's income. In contrast, the dressmakers and milliners who lived with their widowed parent (most often the mother) and with or without siblings no doubt supported the family or was the major contributor to its support. Obviously, the single women that lived alone or with non-relatives were self-supporting. Those single women who lived with non-relatives represented the second largest living arrangement category.

The living arrangements of the married, widowed, or divorced women listed in the 1860 and 1870 census did not present any clear indication for their reasons for participating in the labor force. Of the total six women listed in 1860, four had husbands who were employed as skilled craftsmen and a few as laborers. Perhaps the women's wages were necessary to help support the family. The two dressmakers without children had both been married within the census year. They probably had worked prior to their marriage and continued in the labor force. Of the total twelve women listed in 1870, four

had husbands who were also employed in the occupation levels of 1860. Again, whether the males' wages were inadequate to the point that their wives had to work is not known. The women with children and no husband were either the major wage earners in the family or had older children also in the work force to help support the family.

The families of the married dressmakers and milliners of the 1880, 1900, and 1910 censuses were generally headed by working husbands and occasionally included working children. The occupations of the male family members were highly concentrated at the skilled craftsmen level. A few held labor-oriented jobs and some held low, white collar level positions, such as engineer, detective, salesman, and express agent. Whether the wages of their wives were necessary to support the family or were a supplemental income could not be adequately determined. For the census years of 1880, 1900, and 1910, the majority of Lansing's married dressmakers and milliners lived with either their spouse and children or with their spouse and no children.

None of the married dressmakers and milliners were at the "empty nest" stage of their life-cycle pattern. The majority were still in their child-bearing years ranging from nineteen to forty-six years. Almost all of them were mothers and, in all but a few cases, had minor age children of eighteen years to infants. This is a clear indication that both occupations were feasible for young, married women with small children who needed or desired to work. However, more married women were found to work as dressmakers than milliners over the census years of 1880, 1900, and 1910. This preference



probably can be attributed to the flexible work environment of dressmaking which could be conducted in one's own home.

In contrast, most milliners in Lansing worked in a shop environment with established business hours which must have been a less flexible situation for working women with children. Yet, of the seven married milliners listed in the 1880 census, five of them were mothers of children ranging in ages from four months to eighteen years. Three of the total twelve children were less than a year old. The 1900 census also revealed that the majority of the milliners' children were eighteen years old and younger. This data raises more questions than it answers. For example, how did these mothers handle their family duties and work as a milliner in a shop? Were minor age children of the shop owner or employees a common occurrence in the environment of a millinery establishment? Or was some of the millinery work, such as the trimming, conducted in the milliner's home and then returned to the shop to be sold?

A majority of the widowed and divorced dressmakers and milliners reported in the 1880, 1900, and 1910 census were undoubtedly sole supporters. Data totaled from these three censuses revealed that 40 percent of the dressmakers and 63 percent of the milliners lived either with non-relatives or lived alone. Again, there were more dressmakers than milliners in this marital status category. Presumably, these women lacking in any family duties could easily have chosen one occupation over the other. Perhaps the preference for dressmaking by this group was due to the nature of the millinery

business which required a certain initial capital outlay to acquire a business establishment, a stock of millinery goods, and one or more employees to work in the shop.

Support Network Among the Lansing  
Dressmakers and Milliners

The living arrangements of Lansing's dressmakers and milliners were investigated for evidence of possible support networks among the two groups. Despite the almost 100 percent female membership and the domestic-like nature of the trades, there was little evidence found to indicate that women working as dressmakers and milliners tended to live with other women involved in the sewing trades. Table 3 is a breakdown of the data for women living in various marital status arrangements which also included other women working in the sewing trades, including millinery, dressmaking, seamstering, and tailoring. The figures were surprisingly low considering the total number working in the occupations for the five census years.

The single dressmakers and milliners were the largest category to show any type of pattern and even then, the pattern was loosely structured. Among the single women who lived in a household with one or more family members that included other women involved in the sewing trades, the combination was most often sisters rather than a mother and daughter.

The dressmakers and milliners who lived with others involved in the sewing trades may have found emotional and financial support, especially the ones that lived with non-relatives. Perhaps this loose

Table 3. Households of Lansing Dressmakers and Milliners Which Included Other Women Who Also Worked in the Sewing Trades<sup>a</sup> and Their Relationship to the Dressmaker or Milliner

Marital Status of Dressmakers and Milliners and Relationship of the Other Women	1860		1870		1880		1900		1910	
	D <sup>b</sup>	M <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	M <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	M <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	M <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	M <sup>b</sup>
<u>Single:</u>										
Family	1	2	3	2	14	4	24	2	9	2
Non-relative	--	--	--	--	12	4	10	4	3	6
<u>Married:</u>										
Family	--	--	--	--	2	1	4	5	--	--
Non-relative	1	--	3	1	1	2	4	--	--	--
<u>Widowed/Divorced:</u>										
Family	--	--	--	--	5	1	3	--	--	--
Non-relative	--	--	--	--	4	1	6	2	--	--
<u>Unknown:</u>										
Non-relative	2	2	4	8	--	--	--	--	--	--

<sup>a</sup>Includes dressmakers, milliners, seamstresses, and tailoresses.

<sup>b</sup>D = dressmaker; M = milliner.

Source: *Manuscript census of 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910.*

support network provided initial training in these occupations as well, due to the lack of an established apprenticeship system in the Lansing trades.

Even so, the data do not indicate a strong support network among Lansing's dressmakers and milliners as was found among the women who worked in New England textile mills in the early 1800s.<sup>4</sup> Evidence indicated that women, especially sisters, who worked in those early industrial jobs tended to recruit one another into the textile mills and helped newcomers from the rural countryside make adjustments to mill work and life. Boarding houses for the single, female employees provided by the textile mills created an environment of emotional support and peer pressure which acted as a social control on the women's lifestyles. Non-industrial jobs, such as dressmaking and millinery, were evidently too loosely structured to require or maintain a strong support network among those who worked in the trades.

#### Profile of a Typical Lansing Dressmaker and Milliner

The data compiled from the censuses indicated that the profiles of Lansing's dressmaking and millinery populations remained the same over several decades. The typical dressmaker was most likely to have been a white, native born female, about twenty-eight years old and single. She was apt to have lived in a family arrangement with both parents and one or more siblings and may have kept her wages for her own use. A woman who worked as a dressmaker had the choice of working

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Dublin, Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 49.

in a shop, in her own home, or the homes of her customers. The 1910 census indicated the following work locations among Lansing's 168 dressmakers: eighty-one worked in their own homes, thirty-nine worked in a shop or store, twenty worked in their customer's homes, and twenty-eight were undesignated.

The typical milliner was also most likely to have been a white, native born, single female, about twenty-eight years old. She, too, was more than likely to have lived in a family arrangement similar to the dressmakers. Her choice of a workplace was much more limited than a dressmaker, being confined to a shop location either as owner or employee. Both groups, however, were just as likely to have been single but living with non-relatives. In those cases, a small number of them lived with other working women involved in the sewing trades.

The dressmakers and milliners of Lansing are obviously just one, isolated example of the total number of women who worked in these trades throughout the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Questions remain concerning the place these occupations in Lansing have in the overall history of these trades. Were the demographic characteristics in the Lansing example unique to these trades? How typical or atypical were they in comparison with dressmakers and milliners who worked in other American cities? Unfortunately, few studies have been conducted about these trades and fewer still included any demographic information. One study which investigated demographic characteristics of dressmakers, seamstresses, and tailors revealed several nationwide trends, of which Lansing

reflects in part.<sup>5</sup> Between 1880 and 1920, the study found that dressmaking and seamsterring were dominated by white females and the largest percentage of these were single; "65% of all dressmakers nationwide in 1900 were single." In 1910, the majority of dressmakers who worked in small cities were not only of native birth, but native parentage as well. Seamstresses were more likely to be women of ages sixteen to twenty-four and dressmakers were ages thirty-five to forty-four; the latter figures closely follow Lansing's findings in the 1910 census.

Only one case study which focused on the dressmaking population in Rochester, New York in 1880 provided sufficient data for comparison with Lansing dressmakers.<sup>6</sup> Rochester in 1880 was a city nearly ten times as large as Lansing having a population of 89,366. There was a similar industrial base to Lansing consisting of clothing and shoe manufacturing, flour milling, foundaries, malt liquor, and tobacco factories. The sample for Rochester consisted of 1,019 dressmakers as compared with 111 in Lansing. Despite the great difference in these numbers, the demographic characteristics of the dressmakers in both cities were almost identical. The typical Rochester dressmaker was also most likely to have been a white, native born female, about twenty-eight years old and single. Among the single women, it was

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<sup>5</sup>Pat Trautman, "Personal Clothiers: A Demographic Study of Dressmakers, Seamstresses and Tailors 1880-1920," Dress 5 (1979): 83-84.

<sup>6</sup>Janice Tauer Wass, "Dressmaking as a Trade for Women: Rochester in 1880" (M.A. thesis, State University College, Brockport, New York, 1981).

found that 78.7 percent lived in a family environment. The next largest marital status group among the Rochester dressmakers were those listed as widowed/divorced and comprised 12.8 percent of the total. Married dressmakers represented the smallest group and like the Lansing dressmakers were found to be of child-bearing age. The Rochester study also revealed that most of the dressmakers that lived with their families did not work out of economic necessity. As was the case with the working male members in the families of Lansing dressmakers, about half of the fathers and husbands of the Rochester dressmakers were found to work at a skilled craftsmen, proprietary, or low white collar level. A much stronger support network was found among the Rochester dressmakers, than in Lansing, with 22.9 percent having family members who sewed and 34.7 percent boarded with people in the sewing trades.

Lansing dressmakers in 1880, then, appeared to mirror the dressmaking profile found in a larger city. Perhaps, future studies of the millinery trade will show that Lansing's milliners are representative of that trade as well.

## CHAPTER V

### LANSING DRESSMAKING BUSINESSES

A portion of Objective 4 dealing with the production and marketing techniques of Lansing's dressmakers is discussed in this chapter. The individual makers and their products are discussed in terms of their cultural setting, that is, their place in Lansing's history, as well as within the city's dressmaking community.

#### Historical Background: Custom and Ready-Made Clothing

The technological developments that occurred in nineteenth century America provide a fascinating account of man's attempts to constantly improve his lifestyle through the use of faster and more efficient tools and equipment. Developments in transportation and communication in the United States offer key examples where, during the 1800s, people traveled first by stagecoach and wagon train, then by railroads and streetcars and in the last years of the century by the horseless carriage. While letters and greeting cards never declined in personal appeal, speedier alternatives were made available via the telegraph and telephone. Obviously, these and other technological developments did not occur simultaneously throughout the United States during the century. Contrasts in lifestyles could be found at any one time between the east, midwest, and west or even within a single square mile of a state or territory.



Remains of nineteenth century technological developments, primarily those of mass-produced products, are still prevalent in current-day America. Museum collections abound with examples of decorative arts, household goods, tools, and equipment. Today's collectors regularly haunt estate auctions, flea markets, and yard sales for that unrecognized or unappreciated Renaissance Revival armchair, parian ware figurine, or slag glass compote.

Although nineteenth century mass production methods never equalled the highly mechanized, assembly line factories of today, hundreds of thousands of consumer goods were produced in varying price ranges to appeal to the purchasing power of the growing middle and working classes. One phenomenon of mass production during this period was the advent of ready-made clothing.

Prior to the 1830s, men's, women's, and children's clothing was made for individual clients or family members by individual makers, such as, the tailor, dressmaker, or the housewife. At some point during the late 1820s and early 1830s tailors began to produce pants, coats, vests, and shirts ahead of time or ready-made for their walk-in customers.<sup>1</sup> The tailors were able to make proportional-sized clothing without knowing the individual measurements of their future customers through their expert knowledge in drafting, cutting, and fitting of clothes.

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<sup>1</sup>Claudia B. Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, Suiting Everyone (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), pp. 43-47.

Other makers followed this lead and established small manufacturing companies. By the 1850s, ready-made children's clothing, women's underclothing, nightwear, and wraps (cloaks, capes, and mantles) along with men's clothing were available in the market place.<sup>2</sup> Other clothing articles, such as shoes, boots, gloves, collars, and personal accessories (jewelry, pocket watches, fans, and parasols) had flooded the market place by the 1870s.

The distribution of ready-made clothing in the nineteenth century became a highly developed system.<sup>3</sup> For the most part wholesalers in the eastern markets, primarily New York City, would sell their goods to local and out-of-state retail merchants on their annual or biannual buying trips. The goods would then be shipped via available means to their hometowns for resale to customers there. This system of distribution was supported by developments in transportation which assured the retailer that inventory would be received on a regular basis.

By the late 1860s, directories for such cities as Detroit and Lansing were filled with names of not only traditional dry goods stores, but specialty stores as well. These stores generally sold one type of goods or related goods, such as shoes, men's and boy's furnishings, and women's accessories. The pasttime of shopping at local retail businesses was born. In larger cities, department stores were built which featured separate sections, including men's and boy's clothing

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-64.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

departments. Later in the century, mail order catalogues brought a selection of clothing and other consumer goods to those living in isolated and rural settlements.

### The Need for Dressmakers

Women's clothing, particularly dresses, remained a custom-made business throughout the nineteenth century. Despite the availability of ready-made dresses by the 1880s, it was not until 1920 that off-the-rack buying would dominate in women's clothing.<sup>4</sup>

The primary cause of this lag in mass-production was that the cut and fit of the dresses from the late 1860s to the early twentieth century became increasingly complex. Whether the dresses were one or two-piece, the bodices were cut with the following parts: standing collar, two-piece sleeves, two-section front, four to eight-section back, and extensions at the lower edge which covered the hips in varying lengths. The extensions could have been added separately or cut in one with the main sections. Skirts were cut with five or more gores sections and depending on the mode of the period would also have included tunic or draped overskirts plus tapes and metal bands sewn to the inside to produce the correct bustle effect. The complex cut and fit of women's dresses were not adaptable to mass production methods that required simplified style lines and standardized sizes.

Home sewers, who lacked the necessary knowledge and skill, may have found the complex cutting and fitting beyond their basic sewing abilities. In addition, during the last quarter of the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

nineteenth century, the popular use of figured silks, satins, and velvets in day and evening wear demanded special handling skills. The combination of these fabrics in differing colors within a single garment, as well as the applied, detailed trimmings required the experienced and artistic eye of a professional--the dressmaker. As a result, "the source of most women's clothes was still, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the piece-goods department, patterns, the sewing machine, and the sewing woman (hired or family)." <sup>5</sup>

#### Characteristics of Dressmaking

The occupation of dressmaking represented socially-acceptable work for women within the confined moral attitudes concerning a woman's role in nineteenth century society. Dressmaking was in keeping with the tasks of plain and fancy sewing that were a traditional part of a woman's domestic sphere. It was also an occupation that was confined to meeting the needs of female customers, by other females, thus avoiding possible unsuitable encounters with the male population.

Dressmaking as a career was adaptable to the needs and ability of the individual woman. The occupation could be depended upon to provide financial support during times of personal economic necessity, to supplement the family income, and to provide a genteel guise for economic independence in the man's traditional sphere of the business world. A recent study of the dressmaking population in Rochester, New York for 1880 revealed that financial necessity was not the major

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<sup>5</sup>Jessica Daves, Ready-Made Miracle (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 31.

reason that women in that city worked as dressmakers.<sup>6</sup> At that time over two-thirds of the Rochester dressmakers lived in families with other wage earners and almost 20 percent of them were daughters and wives of middle-class families. A minority of dressmakers became successful entrepreneurs. One documented example was Mrs. A. H. (Carrie) Taylor, who operated an establishment in Bowling Green, Kentucky from 1878 to 1917.<sup>7</sup> She continued her business after her marriage in 1879 and the birth of two children in the early 1880s to eventually employ an average of 206 employees and at her death in 1917 left an estate valued over \$250,000.

#### Working Conditions

A simple definition of dressmaking can only denote the activity involved in making women's clothes and not the circumstances under which the work was carried out. There were many ways a woman could work as a dressmaker. "She could work in her customer's home or in her own domicile. She could be the head of her own small business employing several other women or she could be a cutter in a major dressmaking establishment."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Janice Tauer Wass, "Dressmaking as a Trade for Women: Rochester in 1880" (M.A. thesis, State University College, Brockport, New York, 1981), pp. 55-56.

<sup>7</sup>Sallye Clark, "Carrie Taylor: Kentucky Dressmaker," Dress 6 (1980): 13-23.

<sup>8</sup>Claudia B. Kidwell, Cutting a Fashionable Fit (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), p. 90.

Depending on her needs and/or ambition, a woman could either have invested in one of the hundreds of drafting systems on the market and purchased the necessary sewing tools or she could have used available capital to rent shop space, purchase stock, and employ additional help. The self-employed dressmaker would carry out all the tasks involved in making a garment from the cutting and fitting to the sewing and trimming. Those women who owned a shop would delegate tasks among their employees.

Apprentices were sometimes included in the dressmaking shop. A study published in 1916 on dressmaking in Massachusetts recommended a small shop as the best environment for an apprentice to learn the business.<sup>9</sup> In such a situation, "the young worker has the advantage of a general training on all parts of the gown under the direct supervision of her employer."

Related, but separate occupations to dressmaking were those of seamstress and tailoress. A seamstress was one who did not cut and fit complex garments. Instead, she did plain sewing including making garments with simple lines or household textiles and mending. A tailoress had knowledge and experience in tailoring techniques and could cut and fit complex men's and women's suits and riding habits.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin No. 193, Dressmaking as a Trade for Women in Massachusetts, by May Allison (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 149.

<sup>10</sup>A rare daybook of a tailoress is preserved in the collections of the Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. It contains the accounts of an L. (or Jane-?) O. Wheeler who worked in Saline, Michigan during 1845-1848. Although listed in the card catalogue as a seamstress, she made primarily men's clothing "pants, coat, vest, o'coat, cloke" and only an occasional dress.

There are drawbacks in any occupation and dressmaking was no exception. Frequent complaints were the long hours and low pay.<sup>11</sup> These factors would vary with the circumstances of self-employment or of being employed by others. Self-employment was probably the most flexible in terms of work hours and hourly wage.

Another drawback was that dressmaking was governed by two seasons--spring/summer and fall/winter with slack times in between. The Massachusetts study, which was originally begun in 1909, noted that a dressmaker's clientele often determined the type of work schedule she would have. "The dressmaker who caters to the middle and lower classes is much less bound by Parisian decrees, and as a result has a longer and more regular season."<sup>12</sup> The study went on to identify three types of customers and their effect on the dressmaker's schedule. First, the dressmaker who catered to ultra-fashionable customers became dependent on Parisian models which required her to make one or two trips a year to Paris. Second, with less-fashion-minded clients a dressmaker could depend on the imported Parisian models shown in New York. Third, for middle or lower class patrons, a dressmaker could get by on fashion books and shop windows for new styles.

In order to combat the slow times, dressmakers with shops would often supplement their business by selling women's furnishing goods and

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<sup>11</sup> See Janet Arnold, "The Dressmaker's Craft," *Strata of Society* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1974), p. 38; Madeleine Ginsburg, "Clothing Manufacture, 1860-1890," *High Victorian Costume 1860-1890* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1969), pp. 3-5; and Clark, "Carrie Taylor," p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *Dressmaking as a Trade*, p. 84.

needlework supplies. Dressmaking and millinery establishments were one of two types of retail outlets for needlework supplies in the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> A daybook kept by Theresa Bohr, a dressmaker and milliner who worked in Westphalia, Michigan during the late 1870s and early 1880s, included a section for "Notions" where such needlework items as "mottos, zeph'r, canvas, needle, cardboard, and java buff" were recorded as being sold.<sup>14</sup>

Many women also advertised their services as both a dressmaker and milliner. Those working in rural areas performed seamstress tasks as well as the more specialized dressmaking skills. The Bohr account book listed such services as retrimming hats; making buttonholes and curtains; making basques, wrappers, dresses, drawers, dolmans, and waists; cutting basques and a pattern; and cutting and fitting a basque and a polonaise.

From the 1860s on, some women became agents for selling the numerous dressmakers' drafting systems that were on the market, as

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<sup>13</sup> Rachael Maines, American Needlework in Transition, 1880-1930 (Ambridge, Penn.: Center for the History of American Needlework, 1977), p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Daybook, Theresa Bohr dressmaking and millinery business, Westphalia, Michigan, 1878-1884, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

"Mottos" probably referred to the popular late nineteenth century wall hangings made of perforated cardboard with printed mottoes, such as "Home Sweet Home" and "Welcome" that were embellished with wool or silk yarns. "Zeph'r" referred to a type of wool yarn called Berlin, German, or zephyr made of soft merino wool, dyed in vibrant colors, and used primarily for canvas work during the nineteenth century. Java was a closely-woven canvas with double warp and weft threads; buff referred to the color.



well as paper patterns.<sup>15</sup> The dressmakers would offer instructions in the use of the systems and patterns to customers who had purchased them. Their newspaper advertisements and business cards of the 1880s and 1890s would often be printed with the name of the particular system or pattern they carried.

Beginnings of Lansing Dressmaking  
Businesses: 1847-1859

Almost ten years would pass after Lansing was chosen in 1847 as the permanent site for the state capitol before dressmakers and milliners would appear on the scene. During those early years the town was cleared out of a swampy, forested section in Lansing Township of Ingham County. The area was often flooded by the Grand and Red Cedar Rivers. Prior to 1847, the area was sparsely populated with a few diligent settlers from Lansing Township, Tompkins County, New York who had decided to stay on in the area despite having been swindled into buying lots on a false plat map in the fictitious, settled community of Biddle City.<sup>16</sup> Others in the area included families who had come to settle sections of land for investors back in New York who had bought the property.

Throughout 1847 the town was called Michigan, until 1848 when Lansing was adopted as the permanent name by the legislature.<sup>17</sup> A

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<sup>15</sup> Kidwell, Cutting a Fashionable Fit, pp. 77-80.

<sup>16</sup> Justin Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness (Woodland Hills, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1981), p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

genuine plat map was drawn up with blocks of lots bounded by spacious streets. By 1848, the new state capitol, a two-story framed structure topped with a cupola, was completed. Contractors, carpenters, and masons were kept busy building hotels, commercial buildings, and residences for legislative members, merchants, tavern keepers, skilled workmen, and others who came to live in the town.

By 1856, the Michigan Gazetteer reported that Lansing had a population of 3,000 and included four hotels, five churches, and twenty stores among its structures. There were also two newspapers, several flour and saw mills, machine shops, and foundries along with a variety of specialty and dry goods stores. The town was connected via plank roads to Detroit, Jackson, and Marshall. Due, in part, to its near central location in the lower peninsula of the state and, in part, to the serviceable plank roads, Lansing had become the regional trading center.<sup>18</sup>

The business district was concentrated in the central part of town, called "middle town," one of three distinct districts that had developed in Lansing.<sup>19</sup> The other sections included upper town in the south and lower town in the north. All three districts were based on the flow of the Grand River. Upper town contained mostly residences and lower town was a mixture of business and residential areas. The location of a business would often be listed in the business directory or in the newspapers according to these districts, along with the street name.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

There were several incidents that occurred during the 1850s which may have helped encourage people to settle in Lansing.<sup>20</sup> In 1855, the nation's first land grant college was founded within a ten-mile distance east of Lansing. At about the same time, two sisters from New York, Abigail and Delia Rogers, founded the Michigan Female College. The school accepted boarders and day students and continued to operate until the death of one of the sisters in 1869. Finally, in February 1859, Lansing was incorporated as a city and established itself with a city charter, elected officials, and three voting wards.

The two earliest advertisements for dressmaking establishments in Lansing were found in the May 20, 1856 issue of the Lansing State Republican. It may have been at this point in the town's development that there was sufficient need among the female population for such services. See Figures 31 and 32 for the advertisements which noted that millinery services were also available. Both businesses were located in middle town or the business district.

According to her ad, Mrs. Gardner owned a shop on Washington Avenue. The shop was probably located in a frame structure, of one or two stories, and may or may not have included living quarters in the back.

The ad placed by Mrs. Velie and Mrs. Moody, which first appeared in the April 28, 1856 issue of the same newspaper, presented a somewhat puzzling location for today's reader. The Lansing House, where they were located, was a three-story frame hotel. Perhaps the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 40 and 42.

**Mrs. Velle & Mrs. Moody**  
 Would call the attention of the Ladies of Lansing and vicinity that they have just opened a  
**MILLINERY STORE**  
 In which will be found almost every variety in the line of  
**BONNETS, FANCY GOODS, &c.**  
 Ladies wishing Dresses made will also be accommodated.  
 Rooms first door above the Lansing House.  
 Lansing, April 28, 1850. 43w6

Figure 31. The earliest Lansing dressmaking and millinery advertisement from the Lansing State Republican.

**STRAW, MILLINERY,**  
 —AND—  
**DRESS-MAKING ESTABLISHMENT,**  
 FIRST STORE SOUTH OF F. M. COWLES', WASH. AVE.  
**MRS. GARDNER**  
 Would inform the Ladies of Lansing and vicinity that she has opened the above establishment, where she is prepared to do all kinds of Millinery and Dressmaking on short notice, and in the best manner. Straw Bonnets bleached and altered to the latest styles; also, Gentlemen's Leghorn and Panama Hats bleached and pressed.  
 A good assortment of Millinery on hand, which the Ladies will please call and examine, as Mrs. G. is confident that she can suit, both in quality and price. The Latest Fashions for Ladies' and Children's Dresses received Monthly. Patterns for sale.  
 Lansing, May 20, 1850. 56w13

Figure 32. Another early Lansing advertisement from the Lansing State Republican.

words, "rooms first door above the Lansing House" indicated that there was commercial space available within the hotel. Again, the women may or may not have had their living quarters in the "rooms."

Both ads revealed that the women sold items to supplement the services they offered. "Fancy Goods, &c" were sold by Mrs. Velie and Mrs. Moody. The last lines of Mrs. Gardner's ad provided a clue that she probably subscribed to one or both of the women's monthly magazines which contained colored fashion plates and black and white illustrations of women's and children's clothing, as well as hair styles along with their descriptions. Subscriptions to the magazines, Godey's Lady's Book and Peterson's Magazine, were advertised in the Lansing State Republican in 1856 and 1857. "Patterns for sale" may indicate that Mrs. Gardner sold the full-scale, one-size only clothing patterns that were marketed by Godey's as early as 1854<sup>21</sup> or that she sold patterns of her own making to clients whose size she knew or whom she could measure.<sup>22</sup>

The duration of the time the two shops were in business is not known. None of the three women were noted working in Lansing four years later in the 1860 census. Nothing is known of their ages or family circumstances. No doubt there were other dressmakers working in Lansing in the 1850s, but they did not bother to take out an ad in the local paper.

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<sup>21</sup> Kidwell, Cutting a Fashionable Fit, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Walsh, "The Democratization of Fashion: The Emergence of the Women's Dress Pattern Industry," The Journal of American History 66 (September 1977): 301.

A wide selection of fabrics and sewing supplies were available in Lansing to dressmakers and their customers. There were several dry goods stores, such as H. Ingersoll's and John Thomas & Co., that advertised for sale "dress goods of every variety."<sup>23</sup> Many of these Lansing merchants are known to have traveled together on their annual or biannual buying trips to New York City or Boston.<sup>24</sup>

Period of Growth for Lansing and the  
Dressmaking Community: 1860-1869

The 1860s represented a period of commercial growth in Lansing especially in the years following the Civil War. This growth was probably due in part to an increase in the population (5,000 by 1860), as well as the numerous stage routes that connected to the city and to the one railroad line that was completed in 1863.<sup>25</sup> In 1866 alone, three blocks of commercial buildings "were erected at a cost of over \$250,000."<sup>26</sup> Many of the structures boasted French plate glass windows measuring 11 feet high by 5-1/2 feet wide. The December 31, 1868 issue of the Lansing State Republican featured an article entitled, "Growth of Our City--100 Dwellings and Business Houses Erected the Past Year." Several dry goods stores were included among the new buildings.

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<sup>23</sup> See Lansing State Republican, 25 May 1858, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Frank M. Turner, ed., Historic Michigan--An Account of Ingham County from Its Organization, Vol. 3 (Dayton, Ohio: National Historical Association, Inc., 1924), p. 180; and Mrs. Frank L. Adams, Pioneer History of Ingham County (Lansing, Mich.: Winkoop, Hallenbeck & Crawford, 1934), p. 568.

<sup>25</sup> Birt Darling, City in the Forest (New York: Stratford House, 1950), p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness, p. 52.

The following advertisement (from Lansing State Republican, October 8, 1868, p. 3) for one such store that had been built in 1866 is presented here for its excellent visual description of the inside of one of these establishments, as well as an illustration of the variety of fabrics and notions that were available locally for dressmakers and their customers.

TO STRANGERS--Ingersoll's Double Crystal Plate Glass Mammoth Dry Goods and Clothing Establishment is the finest and largest store in the State--44 feet front, 100 feet deep, 16 ft. ceiling, galleries on three sides. Four sheets of plate glass fill the front; warmed by a furnace, lighted with gas made on the premises; Clothing, Cloths, Hats and Caps on one side; Dress Goods, White Goods, Flannels, Prints and Gingham, and Domestics on the other side. Two 66 ft. Circular Counters in the centre--one holding Ribbons, Trimmings, Notions, Gloves, Hosiery, &c. The other enclosing the office, cashier and book-keepers' desks. 75 feet in length of show cases. Shawls, Cloaks, Furs, and Custom Tailoring department in the galleries; Carpet rooms on second floor. Business conducted for cash. Purchases made largely of manufacturers, by the package, and the lowest current prices at all times guaranteed. These statements are made, that new comers and strangers may know what the "Double Mammoth" means.

One of Ingersoll's competitors, I. H. Fonda and Company, placed an ad in the January 30, 1867 issue of the Lansing State Republican which also listed the following incredible array of fabrics available to the women of Lansing.

Fine Dress Goods--Black & Colored Silks; French merinos, Plain and Figured; Empress Cloths, All Colors and Cheap; Irish, French and English Poplins; Wincoup; Alpacas; Splendid Line of Wool Delains, Single and Double Width; English and French Bombazine; Mohair Lustres; French Flannels; English and French Prints (Beautiful Patterns); A Large Variety of Delains; and very good print for 12-1/2 cents per yard.

In White Goods, Our Stock is full of Sarsonet Cambrics; Victoria and Bishop's Lawns; Swiss and Book Muslims; Nansook; Linen Lawn. . . .

Also a Fine Variety of Genuine Cluny Valencines Thread and Smyrna Laces! Cluny, Point and Maltese Lace Collars, Embroideries, etc.

Examples of Production and Marketing  
Methods Used by Lansing Dressmakers

Of the twenty-two dressmakers listed in the 1860 census it is not known how many of them had been working during the 1850s or how long they continued to work into the 1860s. For example, only one of them, Miss Louisa J. Barrett, is listed in subsequent years of the Michigan Gazetteer as working to 1867. The reason the other twenty-one women did not list themselves in this publication may be due to the nature of the source. A fee payment was required in order to have one's business listed in the state business directories. The suggestion has been made that those dressmakers who paid the fee considered themselves to be a businesswoman, rather than a temporary member of the work force.<sup>27</sup> Two other names, not listed in the 1860 census, were found in the directories for 1863 and 1867, bringing the total to twenty-four.

An ad placed by Miss M. F. Powers, listed in the 1867 business directory, was located in the December 26, 1866 issue of the Lansing State Republican. According to her ad, Miss Powers offered services as both a dressmaker and milliner. The ad noted that her millinery goods were "selling at cost," perhaps a more enticing eye-catcher to potential customers than "having a sale." Her skills of "dress and cloak cutting and making" were "done with neatness and dispatch." She also sold related furnishings, such as dress caps, headdresses, and ribbons. The following wording of her location would seem to imply

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<sup>27</sup>Pat Trautman, "Personal Clothiers: A Demographic Study of Dressmakers, Seamstresses, and Tailors," Dress 5 (1979): 90.



that she had a shop which may or may not have included her living quarters. "Remember the Place, on Franklin St., One Door West of R. Elliott's, Lansing, Lower Town."

An ad placed by a Miss Williams in the December 24, 1868 issue of the Lansing State Republican announced that she was "prepared to do all Kinds of DressMaking, Plain Sewing, Machine Stitching, French Fluting, &c, &c." Like other women of the time she was probably paying for her sewing machine on an installment plan. According to her ad she would work at her shop located over John & Bailey's Shoe Store or she would also do work at the home of her clients.

Lansing Dressmakers Meet the Demand of the  
City's Active Social Scene: 1870-1879

Among the factors believed necessary to sustain interest in obtaining and wearing fashionable dress are: an abundance of raw materials to produce the clothing, a moneyed class to purchase the clothing, and activities and functions where the clothing can be worn. All three of these interrelated factors were visibly present in Lansing during this decade. Most noticeable of the three was the increase in the number of activities outside the home available to the general public and especially to the female population.

During this decade a variety of women's groups were organized in Lansing. Many were associated with each of the churches and sponsored "New England Suppers," "oyster suppers," and "ice cream socials" as fundraisers. Several of the benevolent societies that were founded included the Ladies' Relief Society, the Lansing Industrial Aid Society,

and the Daughters of Sharon, founded by the "colored ladies of this city" in 1879.<sup>28</sup> This last society held their weekly meetings in the old council room over Ekstein's grocery because the black community had not yet secured enough funds to erect a church building.<sup>29</sup> Some women participated in the women's societies which corresponded with the fraternal organizations, such as the Grand Lodge of Good Templars and the Ladies of Ruth Lodge, No. 4. Another group, The Society for Mutual and Social Culture, met at the home of its members.

One of the outstanding organizations sustained by Lansing women was The Literary and Library Association. For several years members of this group sponsored recitations, recitals, and lectures to raise funds in order to purchase books for a future city library.<sup>30</sup> An offspring of this group was the Lansing Woman's Club which provided its members with opportunities to increase their knowledge in the areas of art and literature, history, science, and education.

There was also an increase in meetings and lectures devoted to the topic of woman's suffrage during the 1870s. Some of the lectures were sponsored by The Young Men's Society and others by The State Executive Committee of the Woman Suffrage Association. Notable speakers who came to the city included Susan B. Anthony, Anna Dickinson, and Victoria Woodhull. In 1874, the Ingham County

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<sup>28</sup> Lansing State Republican Weekly, 29 January 1879, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> See Lansing Journal, 10 July 1879, p. 3; and Lansing State Republican, 5 September 1866, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Darling, City in the Forest, p. 106.

Woman Suffrage Association was organized.<sup>31</sup> That the subject of suffrage was taken with mixed reaction locally is illustrated in the following note published in the July 17, 1874 issue of the Lansing State Republican, "Some ladies in this city who did not care anything about woman's suffrage, now see that if they could vote it would not be so easy for the men in office to cut down teachers' salaries."

Evening lectures, theatricals, and roadshows held at Mead's Hall or Buck's Opera House provided more formal social outings for Lansing women and their escorts. The Opera House was opened in 1872 and was built with 1,100 seats.<sup>32</sup> The opening performance featured Edwin Booth in Macbeth. The Young Men's Society annually sponsored a lecture series and sold season tickets as well as tickets at the door. One lecture in February 1872 drew a crowd of 500.<sup>33</sup> Other notables who came to Lansing were Mark Twain and Will Carleton. Additional activities included public dinners and dances sponsored by private groups, including the German Musical Association. In 1875 one public activity, a "dancing party," sponsored by the Boat Club was judged "the most fashionable observance of New Year's eve."<sup>34</sup>

Along with an increase of activities for Lansing's female citizens, which may have fostered new customers for the dressmaking community, there were two main attractions during the 1870s that drew

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<sup>31</sup> Lansing State Republican, 16 October 1874, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> Lansing State Republican Weekly, 8 February 1872, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 January 1875, p. 3.

in potential customers from outside the city. One was the mineral well by the Grand River at the south end of the city. A large hotel was built at the location to accommodate those who came to the city to partake of the healthful water. A boat called "The Pickwick" made trips every half hour between the well and north Lansing.<sup>35</sup> Another attraction during the years 1873-1879 was the building of a new \$1 million state capitol building. One historian has noted, "as the walls of the capitol began to rise, the railroads charged special excursion rates and brought a stream of visitors to the city."<sup>36</sup>

The presence of money within the city can perhaps be best illustrated by economic growth. By the mid-1870s four railroad lines connected Lansing with points in all directions.<sup>37</sup> The railroads brought goods and supplies as well as new citizens. At the end of the decade the population was nearly 8,000. The railroads also transported goods manufactured in Lansing at such companies as E. Bement & Sons, The Lansing Wagon Works, and The Lansing Iron Works to other market areas. These and other manufacturing firms would in the coming decade form an industrial base for Lansing's economy.

Commercial building continued in the 1870s with storied, brick and stone structures being erected. The streets were brightened with gas lighting.<sup>38</sup> It seems quaint today to read the many

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<sup>35</sup> Lansing State Republican, 7 July 1870, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> Darling, City in the Forest, p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to street lighting, the capitol dome was illuminated with gas jets. See Lansing State Republican Weekly, 5 December 1878, p. 4.

advertisements in the two local newspapers that often gave a business location as "opposite the Lansing House" or "two doors south of H. Ingersoll's." The need for these descriptions is made clear, however, by the editor's declaration in the October 17, 1873 issue of the Lansing State Republican, "Street signs are more needed in this city than gas-lamps. Will the common Council help puzzled wayfarers?" Evidently, Lansing's commercial and manufacturing growth coupled with an increasing number of visitors to the city necessitated labeling the streets.

Dry goods stores, like that of Harley Ingersoll's, continued to offer a vast selection of fabrics and notions that were needed by the dressmaking trade. Dressmakers and seamstresses, as the necessary labor in clothing production, had increased to thirty-two by 1870.

#### Types of Dressmaking Services Available to Lansing Women

Advertisements placed in the local newspapers during the 1870s provided additional clues as to the nature of the dressmaking business. For example, during this decade women who needed the services of a dressmaker in Lansing could have chosen one of three alternatives. Miss Hattie E. Dodge advertised in the mid-1870s that she preferred to do dressmaking in the homes of "the families who wish my services."<sup>39</sup> Another advertised in 1879 that she had dressmaking rooms at her residence on Capitol Avenue.<sup>40</sup> Other makers rented shop space on the second floor over other establishments, which was cheaper than having a street level location.

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<sup>39</sup> Lansing State Republican, 24 April 1874, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 12 June 1873, p. 3.

The dressmakers most often called their business location, "rooms," instead of shop or store. Exactly how many rooms there were is not known. The number undoubtedly varied between the types of structures where they were located.<sup>41</sup> How often these rooms included the dressmaker's living quarters is also not known.

A dressmaker would probably have required two or more rooms for her business with one being sufficient if that was all she could afford. One room would have been for the fitting of the garment with mirrors and a stool as the minimum furniture. This room or another might also have contained copies of women's magazines with fashion illustrations and additional furniture where the dressmaker and her client could sit in consultation over the fabric the client had bought and the type of garment that was desired. The room might also have contained display cases or tables of notions and fancy goods. Another room would have served as the dressmaker's work area with a table for cutting the fabric, a dress form, sewing machine, an additional cabinet for sewing supplies, and space for ironing, as well as a source for heating the irons.

Newspaper advertisements during this time indicate that some dressmakers were in need of help and requested apprentices. Others continued to offer services as both a dressmaker and milliner. They

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<sup>41</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Dressmaking as a Trade, pp. 31 and 34.

<sup>42</sup>Lansing State Republican, 16 October 1874, p. 3.

also supplemented their work by selling needlework supplies and by being agents for Butterick patterns.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the 1870s, women's dress styles had become close-fitting sheaths that covered the torso and hip area with draped skirts below. This style required great skill in cutting the pieces as well as fitting the garment in order to achieve the correct look. A specialist trained in using one of the numerous dressmaker drafting systems on the market now appeared in the dressmaking trade. The pressure that this style put on the dressmaking community is evidenced by a local newspaper announcement that appeared in 1879 which stated that one dressmaker, who probably lacked these necessary skills, had "engaged the services of Mrs. Forsyth, late of New York, as cutter and fitter."<sup>44</sup>

Prosperity for Lansing and Its  
Dressmaking Businesses: 1880-1889

Activities and social functions continued to thrive in Lansing from 1880 to the end of the century. Church fund-raisers sponsored by the women members were regularly advertised in the newspapers. Fraternal organizations, such as the "colored Knight's Templar" would give banquets and balls.<sup>45</sup> The Woman's Relief Corp also sponsored social events. New popular public activities that appeared were roller skating and attending baseball games.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 21 December 1871, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Lansing Journal, 10 April 1879, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 8 January 1889, p. 3.

In 1889, the Woman's Club sponsored a lecture by dress reformist, Mrs. Jennes Miller, who spoke on the topic of "Correct Dress."<sup>46</sup> The lecture was reportedly attended by a large audience of females only--"all gentlemen being rigidly excluded." At the close of her lecture, Mrs. Miller modeled a variety of "healthy" clothes including undergarments and dresses for all occasions. Within a month after the lecture, patterns for the clothes advocated by Mrs. Miller were available at Mrs. Porter's book store. Perhaps one or two dress-makers in the city were engaged to make one of the outfits.

During this decade the population of Lansing was increased, in part, by the continued growth of the manufacturing companies as well as the establishment of new companies. By 1890, Lansing "emerged as a world center for the manufacture of plows and other agricultural implements."<sup>47</sup> The largest of the manufacturing firms employed nearly 800 people in 1885. Potential customers of the dressmaking community were undoubtedly among the female members of the families of the management and hourly workers of the firms.

Additional clientele may have been generated by female employees of some of the manufacturing firms such as those that worked for the cigar manufacturers, the Paper Box Factory, and the Lansing Pants and Overall Company. There are several examples during the 1880s and 1890s of women who were listed in the city directory first as a dressmaker and then in subsequent years as an employee in such firms as the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 15 February 1889, p. 3; 20 February 1889, p. 3; and 1 March 1889, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness, p. 63.



Collver Shirt Factory, Michigan Knitting Company, and Condensed Milk Company.

Other customers of the dressmaking community may have come from the ranks of working women in the professions and small businesses. By 1883, telephones were beginning to be installed in the local drug-store, businesses, and private residences and were operated by women.<sup>48</sup> Schoolteachers, school principals, and librarians represented another group of women with steady incomes. The branches of state government also employed female clerks. Some women were listed with positions as photograph retoucher or saleslady.

The identity of the clientele of Lansing's dressmakers is difficult, if not impossible, to determine. A rare letter or journal entry and personal remembrances of current day citizens are about the only sources. Newspaper accounts of the period provided no clues. For example, in 1882 and 1888 there were weddings in two of Lansing's most prominent families, the Barnes' and the Turner's.<sup>49</sup> The newspapers gave an account of the events including very detailed descriptions of the attire of the brides and bridesmaids. However, no mention was given of who made the dresses or where they had been acquired.

#### Responsibilities of Dressmakers with Shops

Among the different types of dressmaking in Lansing, those women who operated their own shops were the most exposed to the ways

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<sup>48</sup>Lansing State Republican Weekly, 18 April 1883, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Lansing Journal, 19 January 1882, p. 3; and 22 November 1888, p. 4.

of the business world. By the 1880s, perhaps due to the volume and specialization of the business, many dressmakers with shops hired one or more employees. Their advertisements would often specify the skill level they were looking for, such as apprentice, seamstress, first-class sewing girls, or cutter and fitter.

These women, whatever size their shop, had to develop skills in management and employee relationships. Disputes were inevitable, however. One such incident was given press coverage in the December 15, 1888 issue of the Lansing Journal.

"Those dresses were all right when I left them," defiantly said Miss L. S. Bonwell of Detroit to Justice Pinckney this forenoon. Mrs. L. S. Petry and Miss Kate E. Phillips recently started a dressmaking establishment over Mifflith's store, and advertised in the Detroit papers for a competent cutter and fitter. Miss Bonwell came to Lansing in response to the advertisement and was engaged. After a few days, the ladies say, her work did not prove entirely satisfactory and at the end of a week she was paid off. Since then they have discovered that a handsome black tea gown and a black silk polonais had been cut in a queer manner, and probably spoiled, and last night called upon Justice Pinckney in regard to the matter. Miss Bonwell repels all insinuations regarding her and refuses to settle because she says she has nothing to settle for. No warrants have been issued as yet.

Insurance premiums to cover personal and business property became an expense for many dressmakers. Unfortunately, not all of them abided by this good business practice. For example, in 1880 a fire broke out in a two-story, frame structure causing extensive damage to the contents of the millinery store and residence on the first floor and the dressmaking business and residence on the second floor.<sup>50</sup> The milliner and one dressmaker were covered by insurance; the other dressmaker was not.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 16 September 1880, p. 3.

Some women with shops that perhaps did a large enough volume of business with Lansing's upper class females went to openings for dressmakers held in larger cities. It was noted in the local newspaper for April 1881 that Libbie Jeu Devine was "in Chicago this week attending the openings of the leading dressmaking establishments with a view to getting the latest styles in her department of work."<sup>51</sup> After returning from a trip to Cleveland and "other Eastern cities" in the fall of 1888, Mary Hickok advertised that she was prepared to cut and make the newest fall and early winter styles.<sup>52</sup> B. Altman's in New York was one department store that offered exclusive showings to dressmakers.<sup>53</sup> The store's buyers would return from Paris with the latest models and fabrics and present them at the showing. Although the models were not for sale, the materials could be purchased in the store's wholesale fabrics department. Perhaps the clothes worn by the customers of Jeu Devine and Hickok were style-setters in Lansing and other dressmakers followed their lead.

During this decade, women continued to advertise that they would work in their own homes or those of their customers. In either case, including those with shops, their ads were dominated by their declarations as having knowledge in cutting and fitting. That attribute may have been utmost in their customers' minds as the styles of women's dresses continued to sheath the body. Such phrases as,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 21 April 1881, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 15 October 1888, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Daves, Ready-Made Miracle, p. 34.

"perfect fit guaranteed" and "special attention given to cutting" were common.<sup>54</sup> Others included the specific names of the cutting system they used. Although no statistics were gathered, there appeared to be several dressmaking partnerships at this time. This may be due, in part, to the specialized skills that were necessary, in that one partner would be the cutter and fitter and the other would handle the rest of the business.

Several women with shops continued to locate their businesses in the second story of a building. "Rooms" continued to be a common term in the ads along with such other terms as establishment, parlors, and dressmaking emporium.

#### Economic Setback for Lansing and Its Dressmaking Businesses: 1890-1899

The city's economic health was marred by setback during the mid-1890s. As the depression of 1893 descended on the nation, Lansing was not left unscathed. Within a period of four months of that year, two of the city's four banks closed their doors and in 1896 a third one followed suit.<sup>55</sup> Some companies went bankrupt and a few manufacturing firms laid off employees.

The effect of Lansing's depressed economy on the dressmaking community is not clear. A compilation of the total number of dressmakers and seamstresses found in the city and business directories for

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<sup>54</sup>Lansing Journal, 5 August 1880, p. 2; 1 May 1888, p. 2; and 4 April 1889, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup>Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness, p. 66.

the years 1894 through 1898 did not provide any meaningful clues.<sup>56</sup> There were no clear indications that more women sought employment in these trades in order to help support their families or that less women were employed in these trades. Did the women who worked as dressmakers and seamstresses have to work for a longer period of time during the depressed 1890s? Again, there was no strong indication, for the sixty-one women who were found to have worked five years or more in the 1890s, thirty-six or 59 percent of them had been working prior to 1890.

Undoubtedly, the dressmaking community was affected by the poor economy. Those women who had clients from the upper and middle classes probably continued with an active business, while those whose clients were from the ranks of the working class would have seen a definite decline in their trade. Although ready-made women's suits and wrappers were sold in Lansing in the 1890s by the dry goods stores, dressmakers and seamstresses were still a necessary factor in dress production.<sup>57</sup>

#### Additional Comments About Dressmaking in Another Area

There are few studies which have investigated dressmaking businesses in American communities during the nineteenth and twentieth century. One such study revealed the dressmaking techniques that were

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<sup>56</sup>Results of the tabulations were: 1894 = 169, 1895 = 88, 1896 = 151, 1897 = 79, and 1898 = 115.

<sup>57</sup>Lansing Journal, 15 September 1891, p. 1; and 20 March 1893, p. 6.

used in North Dakota for the period of 1890 to 1920.<sup>58</sup> The study involved personal interviews with fourteen former dressmakers ranging in ages of seventy-six to ninety-nine.

Although no specific numbers were given, all the women represented the types of dressmaking that also existed in Lansing. That is, they worked either in their own homes, those of their clients, or in shops. The women had received their training either from a relative who was also a trained dressmaker or by serving an apprenticeship in a shop which lasted from three months to two years.

"Charts" or "models," as the women called them, were their major tool in designing and creating the garment patterns. The resulting patterns were often cut out of newspaper or wrapping paper. Some of the women received these dressmaker's drafting systems from their mothers or "as sort of certification upon finishing study with a dressmaker." Many of the women "who had the chart and were very adept at using it rarely purchased patterns even when they were available. These dressmakers considered ready-made patterns to be a waste of money. By manipulating the chart, they were able to copy any fashion by simply looking at a picture of it."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Linda Novak Jonason, "Dressmaking in North Dakota Between 1890 and 1920: Equipment, Supplies, and Methods" (M.S. thesis, North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota, 1977).

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

### Wages of Lansing's Dressmakers

In 1892, for the first time, statistics on the wages and work hours of Lansing dressmakers were made available.<sup>60</sup> The names were not recorded, but it is believed the dressmakers interviewed were associated with a shop. Of the eleven examples that were collected for work hours, ten began their day at 7:00 a.m. and quit at 7:00 p.m. with a one hour dinner break. They worked six days a week. The eleventh example worked the same number of days, but a half-hour longer each day with an hour dinner break. Wages for twenty-three women were reported and it is not clear in the tables if they included the same women questioned about the work hours. Two women reported weekly wages of \$3.50, four at \$4.00, eleven at \$4.33, one at \$4.50, and five at \$5.50. Yet, their reported yearly incomes, respectively, \$116.00, 192.50, \$165.30, \$220.00, and \$187.40, were well below the figures calculated at fifty-two weeks per year. The discrepancy probably can be attributed to the slack seasons of the business when work was below normal. By comparison, these wages were higher than those of a domestic, which was advertised in the local newspaper with a weekly wage of \$2.50.<sup>61</sup>

### The Individual Makers

Three of the dressmakers whose products were included in this study, Isabel Towne, Ada Passage, and Jessie Tompkins, worked during

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<sup>60</sup> Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics, February 1892, pp. 78-84 and 114.

<sup>61</sup> Lansing Journal, 8 March 1893, p. 3.

the 1890s. The women were known to have owned their own shops which included several employees. How these women delegated tasks within their establishments and how much they were involved in the actual construction of the garments was not determined. As owner of the shop, however, their names appeared on the labels. The Massachusetts dressmaking study noted that a dressmaker with a shop would delegate the duties according to the size of her work force and trade. Her time would have been divided between managing the business, directing the clothing production, as well as participating in the cut and fit of the dresses and other skilled processes.<sup>62</sup> All three dressmakers used the newspaper to advertise their business and may have sought a general clientele rather than an exclusive one.

Isabel or "Belle" Towne (worked 1888-1908). Miss Towne began her twenty-year career in Lansing in a short-lived partnership with a Mrs. George Gregory. By 1891, she was listed in the city directory as working on her own. Throughout this period she employed at least eight women and was located at four different addresses over the years. The 1900 census listed her as a single, 34 year old with both parents living at her house. Except for the last few years, her residence was separate from her shop. She is one of the few women to have retired from this occupation and continued to live in Lansing well into the 1920s.

Ada M. Passage (worked 1890-1896). Miss Passage worked and resided at the same location in Lansing's business district. During the six years she was in business she employed at least six women,

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<sup>62</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Dressmaking as a Trade, p. 34.



including two that were her sisters. She used the local newspapers to advertise for the positions that were needed, such as "experienced seamstress and a girl to learn the trade."<sup>63</sup> At least one year she went away for a vacation during the summer slack season. Along with advertising that jackets and wraps were her specialty, in 1893 she indicated that gaiters would be made to match ladies' suits.<sup>64</sup>

Jessie Tompkins (worked 1894-1903). Born in Michigan, Mrs. Tompkins was a young, childless widow who worked for nine years in Lansing. Her first "rooms" were located over Mrs. Dillingham's millinery store on Washington Avenue.<sup>65</sup> Except for the last three years, she lived away from her business location. In 1900, she had a widow, also a dressmaker, boarding at her residence. She employed at least three people during the years she was in business.

#### A City and a Trade Still Going Strong: 1900-1910

As one historian has noted, "the advent of the automobile industry abruptly ended the torpor and uncertainty of the 1890s."<sup>66</sup> The Olds Motor Vehicle Company of Lansing had been organized in 1897 and by the early 1900s employed over 1,000 workers in its factory. Other manufacturing businesses also prospered during this decade. "In the five years preceding 1905, Lansing's industries--which included 82 incorporated companies in 50 different industries--

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<sup>63</sup> Lansing Journal, 1 April 1893, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4 March 1893, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Lansing State Republican, 28 April 1894, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Kestenbaum, Out of a Wilderness, p. 77.

doubled their work force and increased the value of their output by 134 percent."<sup>67</sup> Increased manufacturing growth was directly correlated with the city's population growth which during 1900-1905 swelled from 16,845 to 29,000. To aid the hustle and bustle of the city, "a greatly improved system of streetcars and interurban lines eased access of workers to factories, increased Lansing's share of retail trade, and integrated the economic and social life of the community."<sup>68</sup>

The social and cultural activities in Lansing were also on the upswing. The social life of the women in the city, which no doubt spurred the dressmaking businesses, continued to include church functions, women's club meetings, and cultural events of lectures, musicals, and operas.

Although Lansing department stores and dry goods stores carried ready-made women's tailored suits, skirts, and dresses, dressmakers apparently continued to work in a thriving trade. The 1910 census listed 168 individuals involved in the dressmaking business. Evidently, during this decade ready-mades had not yet begun to compete seriously with the city's dressmaking community.

#### Lansing Dressmakers Remembered

At the time of this study there were still women in Lansing who could remember aspects of the dressmaking community in Lansing during this period. Most memorable to these women were the makers who came to sew in their parents' home during the spring and fall

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

seasons of 1905 through 1915. One woman recalled that her mother would clear out a spare bedroom for the sewing activity and would have ready for the dressmaker the necessary fabrics and notions or the clothes to be restyled as well as the sewing machine, table, and chairs.<sup>69</sup> The dressmaker would bring her cutting system or paper patterns, tape measure, thimble, and shears. One particular dressmaker, it was recalled, wore her pin cushion at her shoulder. The maker would arrive by 8:00 in the morning and leave by 5:00 in the afternoon and was treated like a family member. She was provided with morning and afternoon tea and lunch. Before any cutting, there would first be a conference with the dressmaker about what was needed to be made for the members of the family. Another dressmaker, it was remembered, did not request the mother's help with basting or other simple stitching. No maker's labels were sewn into the clothes that were made at the customer's home.

Similar recollections by another Lansing woman were published several years ago.

Other welcome visitors to Lansing homes were the seamstresses or dressmakers who came for a week or two in the fall and spring, to repair and prepare the family's wardrobe for the change of season. I remember well Kitty and Emma Wolff--sisters--who worked as a team: Kitty did skirts and Emma waists, and neither knew a thing about the other's work. Whenever possible my grandmother and mother worked with them, and I pulled bastings. One room was turned over to them, and by the end of the visit, it was a confusion of pins, ravellings and bastings. There was always a flurry in the household when the Wolff girls came. They arrived in time for breakfast coffee and whatever else was on the breakfast table. The noon

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Martha S. Pratt, Lansing, Michigan, 24 March 1983.

meal, usually luncheon in our house, was dinner, and was prepared with the girls' favorite dishes--one of which was always boiled dinner, corned beef and cabbage.<sup>70</sup>

In 1908, women's dress styles had changed to a more simple line which enhanced the feasibility for their mass production. The new style was constructed in one-piece with a straight tubular silhouette. The exacting cut and fit in dresses of previous decades were gone.

An example of one woman's use of both ready-made and custom-made clothing in her wardrobe was recorded in 1911.<sup>71</sup> A young, single woman living in her parent's home and employed as a Lansing schoolteacher made the following entries in her journal:

March 2, 1911--Had to go up after my waist to wear to the opera. I walked up. Found my waist was not finished so I waited and finally Bess came. Miss Powers had to finish my waist and it was late when we started home. I had to hurry to get ready to go to "Il Trovatore."

June 15--met Mother and bought a new dress.

November 14--Had a quarrel with my father over my dress which the Schuon sisters made for me. I do not like it and will not wear it until I get it changed to a fuller skirt.

Presumably, the dress she bought on June 15 was a ready-made. In a more reflective mood, she wrote on September 22nd.

Received my pay. Was glad to get it. Resolved that I would save some of my money this year. I have taught four whole years and I haven't a single thing to show for it but my clothes. Have been extravagant.

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<sup>70</sup>Juliette Bartholomew Stucky, To Lansing With Love (Lansing, Mich.: Historical Society of Greater Lansing, 1960), p. 10.

<sup>71</sup>Isabella Hamilton's diary, 1911. State Archives, Michigan History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan.

Incidents such as the one above and others mentioned in this chapter are specific details which combine to form a story of the dressmaking businesses that were once an integral part of Lansing's economic and social history. The existing products and the biographies of the individual dressmakers provide additional insight into the once common occupation of dressmaking.

## CHAPTER VI

### LANSING MILLINERY BUSINESSES

The production and marketing methods of Lansing's milliners are discussed in this chapter. The producers of the labeled millinery were analyzed within the cultural setting of Lansing as well as the millinery community of the city.

#### Historical Background: The Customs and Manufacture of Headwear in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century it was customary for men, women, and children to have their heads covered with some form of headwear when participating in activities outside the home. As with other forms of clothing, the styles of headwear were numerous and can be dated according to the shape, fabrics, and trims that were used in their construction.

Women's headwear, in particular, experienced more style changes than men's or children's headwear and varied within the forms of hats and bonnets. From the 1860s to the end of the century, hats vied with bonnets for popularity.

The bonnet was considered the more formal of the two and was "a feminine privilege not permitted to the young lady till she made her debut in society or married. Until this event, she wore a hat."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth Turner Wilcox, The Mode in Hats and Headdresses, revised edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 246.

It was also customary for women in the nineteenth century to wear head caps for in-home activities. "The caps fall into three main groups: night caps, caps worn with morning and home dress, and the decorative caps of dress wear."<sup>2</sup> Each type was most often white and varied in fabric, trim, and the amount of head they covered according to the prevailing mode. As the nineteenth century progressed, the number of women who wore caps declined, especially among the young, single women, so that "from the mid-1880s to the end of the century, the wearing of dress caps was more and more limited to elderly women."<sup>3</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the prevailing custom of wearing a head covering coupled with the increased number of activities available outside the home probably spurred the development of ready-made headwear. As early as 1800, Philadelphia was the leading manufacturer of men's felt hats in this country and by 1810, the annual value of hat manufacturing in the United States was estimated at \$10 million.<sup>4</sup> The making of felt and silk hats required specialized knowledge and training in a trade that was dominated by men.

The making of straw hats and bonnets, however, was practiced by women.<sup>5</sup> During the early 1800s, women in New England took up the

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<sup>2</sup>Anne M. Buck, Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1961), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Elizabeth McClellan, Felt, Silk & Straw Handmade Hats, Tools and Processes (Doylestown, Penn.: The Bucks County Historical Society, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Teaching Materials: Trades I, The Hat-Maker (Sturbridge, Mass.: Museum Education Dept., Old Sturbridge Village, 1981).

process of preparing the straw stalks for plaiting (braiding) and then sewing the plaits together to form the current mode of a bonnet or hat. Children would often be involved in the plaiting of the straw.<sup>6</sup> Many young girls working at home were able to help support their family or earn a substantial income prior to their marriage. By the late 1830s and 1840s the manufacturing of straw headwear was conducted in small shops and factories with female employees.<sup>7</sup>

Ready-made headwear was sold through wholesale and retail outlets and later in the nineteenth century through mail-order catalogues. At the retail level, men's headwear was sold by the haberdasher and by dry goods stores where some women's and children's headwear was also sold. The milliner generally sold women's headwear, although a few men's or children's hats may also have been included in their stock.

#### The Milliner and the Trimmer

The millinery trade was conducted in a shop or store, rather than in a home environment.<sup>8</sup> Milliners were either sole proprietors or were employed by other milliners or dry goods stores. A typical millinery shop would have consisted of a single room filled with a stock of "patterns" or headwear styles displayed on stands and cases filled with millinery and fancy goods. Another room may have been the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>The statements expressed in this paragraph and the following one are based on the investigator's findings in the Lansing millinery trade.



work area where the headwear was created or trimmed. The shop might also have included one or more employees, depending on the volume of business and perhaps even included an apprentice. A shop located at street level rather than on the second floor would have been more expensive to rent.

The trade was governed by the spring/summer and fall/winter seasons. Milliners either traveled to large metropolitan cities, such as Chicago or New York, to view the latest styles and order their stock and supplies or bought their goods from millinery wholesalers.

Increasingly during the nineteenth century, retail millinery became dominated by ready-made headwear, instead of custom-made headwear. At what point this change occurred is not known. One study of the construction of women's headwear found that from the 1870s on, patents granted to hat manufacturing companies were for the mechanization of millinery production methods, which were traditionally hand-crafted processes.<sup>9</sup> Thus ready-made headwear could be purchased by milliners in trimmed or untrimmed conditions from these companies.

Artistry and creativity were not lost in the millinery trade, however. Rather than completely creating a bonnet or hat from scratch, milliners would have ordered ready-made frames and then trimmed them with the latest novelties in ribbons, lace, beads, artificial flowers

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<sup>9</sup>Mildred Doris Lit Litner, "The Height of Fashion: The Construction of Ladies Fashion Headwear, 1830-1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979), pp. 124-125.

and feathers in the prevailing mode. Trimmed headwear sold in a millinery shop would have been more expensive than untrimmed frames. Untrimmed headwear offered customers the opportunity to choose their own trims, perhaps at a cheaper price. This type of headwear could also have been decorated by the customer herself who would purchase the supplies from the milliner or dry goods store or she could make her own trims. Magazines, such as The Delineator, featured articles on home millinery. Milliners would also restyle or retrim their customer's outdated bonnets and hats.

Perhaps as a result of the increased amount of ready-made factory produced headwear frames, there developed in the nineteenth century a specialist in the millinery trade known as a trimmer. This person trimmed or decorated the plain frames in the latest style. This occupation title had begun to be listed in the city directories and the federal census by 1880. In the sixth of a series of articles on employment for women published in the October 1894 issue of The Delineator, the author discussed the differences in the millinery trade between a milliner and a trimmer.<sup>10</sup> "The position of trimmer is the highest grade attainable, and to reach that coveted place one must possess a faculty which is born in some, and which is known as 'style.' Almost all women can become milliners, but those who have not genius will never make good trimmers." Milliners, who perhaps did not have "style" or needed additional help, often employed a trimmer in their

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<sup>10</sup> L. M. Babcock, "Employments for Women--No. 6, Millinery," The Delineator 44 (October 1894): 516-517.

shops. Trimmers, according to the author, also received higher salaries.

### Working Conditions

The Delineator article in discussing the merits of millinery work also noted that it was a good trade for women because it was an "essentially feminine" occupation and there was not the rivalry for positions and pay between men and women as found in other occupations, which usually found women on the short end. However, the author did caution,

This statement is qualified advisedly, for we all know that there are men engaged in the work, and that a few firms prefer men to women as trimmers, arguing that they are bolder and more original in designing. These cases, however, are so rare as to be the exceptions that prove the rule. We speak of a man-milliner, never of a woman-milliner, because the craft belongs inherently to women, just as tailoring does to men.<sup>11</sup>

This tolerance of male milliners had been expressed several years earlier in a quip which appeared in the October 1870 issue of Godey's Lady's Book, "A Man Milliner--They have one in New York, and, of course, he will be patronized merely because he ought not to be. The sewing is done by burly, strong he-Prussians, Poles, and Hungarians."

Newspaper advertisements of the nineteenth century indicate that milliners offered additional services and goods to their customers, probably to supplement the seasonal work of the business with its inherent slack times. Dressmaking was offered by some shops either through the milliner herself or in a partnership, where one was the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 516.

dressmaker or through an employed cutter and fitter. Goods, such as needlework supplies and women's accessories were sold along with the millinery stock.

Beginning and Development of Lansing  
Millinery Businesses: 1847-1874

During the 1840s and 1850s, wholesale dealers in Detroit were probably anxious to expand their market into the interior of the state as towns became connected by plank roads which allowed regular stage-coach routes to be established. Once Lansing had become connected with this transportation system, the following ad appeared in the May 5, 1855 issue of the Lansing State Republican.

To Milliners, Millinery Goods at Wholesale, Holmes & Co., No. 80 and 82 Woodward Ave. Have received their Spring Stock of Millinery Goods. Our Stock will present more than usual attraction this season; being very large and comprehensive--selected with reference to the trade of the west. We are now prepared to supply the trade of this state, Northern Indiana and Canada West, with every article and style of their line, and at as low prices as are offered in New York. Purchasers making their selections from our stock will be shown every attention, and to such, we shall take pleasure in giving information as to the latest improvements in the manufacturing department of this trade as well as furnishing them with the latest patterns and styles. Our terms will be Cash. We invite special attention to our stock of Straw Goods.

Early Lansing Milliners

Whether Holmes & Company ever made any sales in Lansing is not known, but a year later in April 1856 the millinery advertisement of Mrs. Velie and Mrs. Moody appeared in the Lansing State Republican. One month later, in May 1856, Mrs. Gardner also placed an ad in the same newspaper. Refer to Figures 31 and 32 (p. 87). As noted

previously, both shops offered dressmaking services also. Mrs. Gardner apparently knew the intricacies of working with straw for she offered to not only bleach straw headwear, but also to alter bonnets "to the latest styles." She also bleached and pressed men's straw hats. Her ad appeared during the spring months which was the appropriate season for straw headwear. Mrs. Velie and Mrs. Moody, in addition to selling headwear, also sold fancy goods.

Another milliner to set up shop later in 1856 was Mrs. Miles. Her first ad stated her choice selection of goods could be seen "for the present" at her residence.<sup>12</sup> Seven months later, in May 1857, she was located in a shop selling a "general assortment of millinery goods and Ready-Made Bonnets."<sup>13</sup> This ad indicated that she also could bleach and press straw headwear. By March 1858, a Mrs. Osborn had taken over Mrs. Miles' store and continued to sell millinery and fancy goods.<sup>14</sup>

Other milliners may have operated in Lansing during the 1850s but did not advertise in the newspaper.

#### Selected Milliners of the 1860s

The 1860 census recorded twelve milliners working in Lansing. Very little is known about these women and their work. Advertisements in the local newspaper, however, did provide information about the

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<sup>12</sup> Lansing State Republican, 28 October 1856, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5 May 1857, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 30 March 1858, p. 3.

nature of a few of the millinery businesses. A Mrs. Williard advertised in October 1866 that she had just returned from "Eastern cities" with a new stock of goods.<sup>15</sup> She may have traveled on the one railroad line that reached Lansing in 1863 and/or the stage route for her buying trip. Miss M. F. Powers, who also advertised as a dressmaker, offered the following line of merchandise in her shop: "Beaver Hats and Caps, Ready-Made Bonnets, Ruches, Laces, Flowers, Ladies' Dress Caps, Head-dresses, Ribbons, etc."<sup>16</sup> Ingersoll's dry goods store also offered a selection of ladies' and misses' straw hats, as well as sun shades and shaker hoods that were prepared by the store's milliner.

As members of the business community, milliners would, on occasion, join with other merchants to protest unfavorable business conditions. For example, the January 30, 1867 issue of the Lansing State Republican reported that Miss Parment, who had been working as a milliner since 1856, other merchants, and the Republican were paying more insurance due to a fire hazard presented by an abandoned frame building that stood nearby their buildings. It was also noted that Miss Parment's "millinery business has been nearly ruined by its standing virtually between her store and Washington Avenue." The editor expressed hope that the marshall would act soon to have it removed.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 17 October 1866, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 26 December 1866, p. 8.

Business Practices of Milliners  
of the 1870s

Female citizens of Lansing in the 1870s who wished to purchase a bonnet or hat could have chosen from more than half a dozen millinery shops located in middle town and upper town. Most shops continued to be rented on the second story of the commercial buildings. By the mid-1870s, the increasing number of visitors to the city that came to benefit from the mineral well or to view the construction of the new state capitol building, no doubt, patronized the millinery establishments for headwear and accessories.

Those women who desired a new "toilette" for an upcoming evening performance at Buck's Opera House or an afternoon program sponsored by The Literary and Library Association had several shops to choose from. Some may have sought out the sign of the Big Bonnet which was the shop of Olivia Roberts.<sup>17</sup> In 1874, Mrs. Roberts added dressmaking to her establishment, making a specialty of silks. Perhaps visitors to the city were not always able to make appointments to order their dresses which may have prompted Martha Collins, who sold millinery and fancy goods, to advertise that she could cut, fit, and make dresses on short notice.<sup>18</sup> Another milliner who offered dressmaking services during the 1870s included Mrs. Mary M. Case, whose shop was located over Ingersoll's dry goods store.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 27 November 1874, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1 May 1873, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6 October 1874, p. 2; and 11 May 1871, p. 1.

In order to assure their customers that they carried the most up-to-date styles, a few milliners mentioned in their newspaper advertisements that they had just returned from New York or Chicago with a new stock of the latest styles in hats and bonnets. The buying trips usually occurred in March and September to acquire goods for the spring and fall seasons.

Upon their return, the stock of headwear and accessory items was undoubtedly prepared and arranged in new displays for the customary spring and fall openings. Public announcements in the milliners' advertisements included the dates of the opening which varied from one to three days.

Women in Lansing who wanted to stitch the new Berlin-work slipper pattern they had seen in the latest issue of Peterson's or the workbasket made of silver-glazed perforated paper worked in silk or zephyr that was shown in Godey's may have patronized the shop of Lucy Whelan, who had been a milliner in Lansing since 1867. Her advertisement in the October 2, 1874 issue of the Lansing State Republican stated that she carried, "the finest lot of zephyr Worsted, Fancy Yarns, Worsted Embroideries, Patterns, Canvas in variety, cardboards, etc." Also included in her inventory were "all articles which should belong strictly to women's trades." In addition, her ad contained a rare special appeal to the women of Lansing, "The patronage of all ladies who wish to encourage women in honorable self-support is solicited by Mrs. L. Whelan." She, too, must have encouraged self-support for women for the 1870 census listed a young apprentice,



Alexa Hasty, living with her. How long the apprenticeship lasted is not known, but there were probably "lessons" in retail management, customer relations, window and case display, and the trimming of headwear. Evidently, the ladies of Lansing enjoyed the goods and services offered at Mrs. Whelan's shop for she continued in business until 1882 at which time she moved to Hillsdale, Michigan.

In October 1873, Mrs. Sarah A. Gates, a milliner who had recently moved from Chicago, set up a shop in Lansing on Washington Avenue in the Opera House block where her motto was, "Small Profits and Quick Sales."<sup>20</sup> Compared to the simple, demure ads of her contemporaries, Mrs. Gates' advertisements were written in the long-winded, aggressive manner of a true merchant. Her notices often included a long list of goods for sale and occasionally the sale prices, as well as a comment on the shop by "Mrs. & Miss Advise." In April 1874, Mrs. Gates "engaged a First-Class Dressmaker from Chicago" and a month later became a selling agent for "Dewey's Invisible Dress Elevators, the most perfect and convenient article ever devised for raising the dress from the ground in crossing the street, or in damp weather. Every Lady should have them. They save many times their cost in a single season."<sup>21</sup>

The greatest problem a milliner might have incurred, besides a lack of customers, was a fire. Burglary and shoplifting were rarely reported in the Lansing newspapers in connection with a millinery shop,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3 October 1873, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. , 3 April 1874, p. 3; and 8 May 1874, p. 3.

but fires and related disasters did occasionally occur. Two such incidents took place in the early 1870s. One unidentified store had a fire that ruined several bonnets at which the editor noted, "perhaps lessened the number of fashionable worshippers at some of our churches."<sup>22</sup> In February 1874, Mrs. Maria Brower found her winter stock was damaged by soot and smoke when high winds burned out a chimney in the building and caused an excess of \$25 or more in damages.<sup>23</sup> Although it was not reported, both shops may have carried insurance for such disasters.

#### The Golden Years of Lansing's Millinery Businesses: 1875-1891

In the April 28, 1881 issue of the Lansing Journal the following notice declared, "Lansing is fast winning reputation for its millinery trade. With three wholesale establishments, Ingersoll's, Ten Eyck's, and Sutliff's, and in the neighborhood of a dozen retail millinery houses, the Capital City very justly claims to be headquarters for the Central Michigan millinery trade." The 1880 census listed thirty-one milliners in the city, over twice as many milliners that were recorded in 1870.

#### Three Milliners of the Lansing Products

Three of the milliners whose products were included in this study, Charles Sutliff, Harriet Dillingham, and Asenath Abels, worked during the "Golden Years" period.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 31 October 1872, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 27 February 1874, p. 3.

Charles Sutliff (worked 1877-1896). In the 1880 federal census, Charles Sutliff is listed as age thirty-six, married, with four children ranging in ages from eleven months to eight years. His wife, Lida, apparently did not participate in millinery work for her occupation is listed as "keeping house." Also included in his household was a servant girl, a female millinery clerk, and a male traveling agent, presumably for the wholesale business.

For a short while from 1877 to 1879 he was in partnership with William Ten Cyck, after which he was in business for himself. The Sutliff wholesale and retail store was located in the Opera Block or the 100 block of Washington Avenue for the years 1879-1886. Based on newspaper advertisements, he had at least four trimmers and one saleswoman who worked for him during the years of his location in the Opera Block including Mrs. Olivia Roberts (1881-1882), Miss E. J. Reynolds (1883), Miss Lou Davis (1883), Miss Cross (1883-1885), and Miss Sheppard (1885). Mrs. Roberts would accompany Sutliff on his buying trips to New York to help select goods for the spring and fall seasons.<sup>24</sup> She also attended the openings of the New York millinery houses to study the new styles. In addition to millinery, the store also stocked such items as umbrellas, corsets, novelties, ribbons, and kid gloves. In 1885, Sutliff also employed a traveling agent for his wholesale trade.

The address of "Opera Block" is printed on the Sutliff label in the bonnet of the collections of the Michigan Historical Museum.

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<sup>24</sup>Lansing State Republican Weekly, 11 January 1882, p. 4; and Lansing Journal, 16 February 1882, p. 3.

Therefore, the date assigned to the bonnet was 1879-1886. The straw bonnet with glass beads (Figure 17, p. 44) sewn around the outside of the brim and a band of brown velvet on the inside may have been trimmed by any one of the women who worked for him during those years. As the owner of the establishment, however, his name appeared on the label.

In 1888, Sutliff relocated his store to 277 North Washington Avenue where it remained until approximately 1896. His stock continued to include accessory items, such as gloves and aprons and in 1891, misses' and children's jackets and cloaks were added. At one point he advertised for sale 10,000 straw hats for men and boy's at wholesale prices.<sup>25</sup> During the years 1887 to 1892 he employed four different female milliners than those noted above. A small illustration of his store appeared in part of someone else's advertisement in the 1896 Lansing City Directory. The picture shows a street-level store front of cut stone in a Romanesque-style commercial building with large plate glass windows filled with hat stands and partially shielded from the sun with window shades. The reason he quit the millinery business after eighteen years is not known. Perhaps the unstable economic times of the 1890s played a part in his decision. By 1898 Stebbins was listed in the city directory as working for the Capital City Cigar Company.

Harriet (Hattie) E. Dillingham (worked 1883-1910). Mrs. Dillingham, who worked for twenty-seven years as a milliner in Lansing, was one of a few who were able to retire from the Lansing millinery

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<sup>25</sup>Lansing Journal, 17 April 1889, p. 3.

business. She first opened a shop at her residence in north Lansing in 1883. She may possibly have offered dressmaking services in 1885 as well. By 1884 and for the rest of her career, she maintained a residence separate from her shop. In that same year, her husband, Claude, who worked as a painter and paper hanger, finished building them "a very cosy home at the corner of Maple and Chestnut Streets."<sup>26</sup> According to the city directories, she moved her shop five times over the years and finally settled at 208 North Washington for the last twelve years of her career. Her daughter, Blanch, was among several women she employed as milliners during the 1880s.

The Dillingham shop featured the traditional Easter and fall openings of millinery goods. Her newspaper ads never specified where the stock was obtained and apparently she did not promote her shop as a source for cheap headwear because her goods were never described in such terms. Instead, Mrs. Dillingham used such phrases in her ads as "fine line," "choice line," "elegant line," or "the finest ever shown before this city." She was not above promoting sales, however. The shop's Easter opening in 1895 featured a free ticket to the Wilbur Opera Company performance to customers who purchased \$2 worth of millinery.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning in 1898, she was listed in public records such as the city directories and newspaper ads as "Mrs. Hattie E. Dillingham," instead of the usual "Mrs. C. B. Dillingham." Claude was listed from

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<sup>26</sup> Lansing State Republican Weekly, 26 November 1884, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Lansing State Republican, 11 April 1895, p. 4.

that date onward at a different residence. They may have just been separated, rather than divorced for by 1900 Hattie was listed in the census as his widow. Although she was last listed as a milliner in the 1910 city directory, Hattie continued to be a Lansing resident into the 1920s.

The one product from her shop, which is preserved today in the historic collections of the College of Human Ecology at Michigan State University, was not given a label. This fact may be due to the style of the hat, which left very little interior space for a milliner's label, or to the lack of such a practice on the part of Mrs. Dillingham. The hat may have been trimmed by her or one of her employees may have applied the wired ribbon bows and passementerie.

Asenath Regina Abels (worked 1880-1891). As the "star" of the "Golden Years" in Lansing millinery, Mrs. Abels' career as a milliner is recorded not only in the three surviving bonnets from her shop, but also through printed sources as well. The newspapers, in particular, chronicled her eleven years in the business.

The beginning was ordinary enough when she opened her first shop in 1880 over Mason's hardware store in the Opera Block with a typical, simple statement that she would "be pleased to see all her old friends and any new ones who are wanting anything in her line."<sup>28</sup> That same year, the federal census recorded Regina Abels, age thirty-one, living with her 38-year-old husband, Warren, in a boarding house on Capital Avenue. They had no children. Warren worked as a detective.

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<sup>28</sup>Lansing Journal, 18 March 1880, p. 3.

Apparently the ladies of Lansing liberally patronized her shop, for the next three years were filled with activity that indicated Mrs. Abels' had a growing business. By September 1881, she had moved twice and finally settled at 207 North Washington. Olivia Roberts was employed as head trimmer during 1881 and perhaps helped to trim the headwear which was displayed by the shop at the Ingham County Agricultural Society Fair held in Mason during September 28-30, 1881. The following account of the display was reported in the October 6, 1881 issue of the Lansing Journal:

Ingersoll & Ten Eyck are making their exhibit at the Double Mammoth this week, and Mrs. W. S. Abels has the only millinery display at the fair, but that is one that reflects credit upon the whole millinery trade of Lansing. To say that this is the finest case of bonnets we have ever seen would be to confess ourselves a woman with all a woman's weakness for a pretty bonnet, a woman always being presumed to think the last bonnet she sees just the loveliest. Mrs. Abels shows seven bonnets and hats, very dissimilar but all rich, and elegant: an olive satin hat trimmed with satin and plush with beautifully shaded ostrich tips; a white plush trimmed with satin ribbon and a long white plume; a black, beaded, with black tips; a cardinal beaver with shaded maroon and pink plume; a peacock-blue plush trimmed with blue and gold ribbon; and an olive plush with golden tints. Mrs. Abels is to be congratulated upon her rich and artistic display.

By February 1882, Miss Lillie Fisher was employed as trimmer in Mrs. Abels' shop.<sup>29</sup> She had previously operated her own shop in the late 1870s. With Miss Fisher installed as trimmer, Mrs. Abels was undoubtedly busy selling the following array of goods.

New Hats and Bonnets in all the new braids. Hats and Bonnets, Trimmed and Untrimmed, in Canton, Milan, Chip, and Porcupine Braids. A full line of New Laces and Collars. Corsets, Bustles, and Hoop Skirts always on hand. Every

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 16 February 1882, p. 3.

Department full of New and Novel attractions. Orders taken for the Celebrated Butterick Patterns [as well as the following needlework supplies] Angora Wool, Andalusia Yarn, And a full line of Zephyrs, Crewels, and Embroidery Silks.<sup>30</sup>

Both women traveled to Chicago to replenish the stock with the latest seasonal goods. In September 1882 it was reported that Miss Fisher was in Chicago "attending millinery openings and studying up new styles in fall millinery."<sup>31</sup> Although she was not given credit, undoubtedly, her talents were also used to help create another display for the 1882 Ingham County Fair. The following article from the October 19, 1882 issue of the Lansing Journal provided an excellent description of the display complete with prices.

One of the few exhibits at the recent fair that arrived too late to admit of mention in our regular report of the fair, and yet one that was too deserving of mention to permit to go unnoticed, was the exhibit of millinery made by Mrs. A. R. Abels, of this city. Owing to the late arrival of some of her goods, they were not put in place until Thursday, but during the last two days of the fair they attracted a great deal of attention. The case occupied a position near the eastern entrance of Fine Art Hall, and was handsomely fitted up with elegant hats and bonnets, ribbons, and novelties. The hats ranged in price from \$7.50 to \$23, and were a most artistic combination of velvets, plumes, and fancy feathers. Among the more notable ones was a handsome black velvet, large, trimmed with long black plumes, containing no color except that of some steel buckles, this being the most expensive of the lot. A navy-blue velvet, with pale-blue ostrich feather, and having two handsome imported birds very uniquely arranged on the left side, one above the other underneath the rim, with bills just meeting, was greatly admired. A white beaded lace bonnet with elegant white ostrich plume and a South American bird of brilliant plumage was a marvel of taste, and a bronze green velvet with plumes and fancy feather of the same color equally so in a more

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1882, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 21 September 1882, p. 3.



quiet way. Other handsome and more inexpensive hats gave equal evidence of artistic skill and taste. The exhibit reflected great credit upon Mrs. Abels, and was a good index of the fine fall and winter millinery now to be found at her rooms on Washington Avenue.

Also in October 1882, Mrs. Abels together with several millinery and dry goods merchants agreed to close a few hours earlier during the week through the winter months. This was probably due to the early onset of darkness at that time of year. The group agreed they would still operate six days a week, Monday through Saturday. The following public announcement appeared in the Lansing Journal on October 12, 1882.

We the undersigned, dry-goods and millinery businesses, do hereby agree to close our places of business at 7 p.m. from Oct. 16 to March 17, 1882, excepting Saturdays and from Dec. 18 to Jan. 1. First bell 6:45, closing bell 7 p.m.

B. F. Simons,	H. Ingersoll,
I. Glicman,	Mrs. A. R. Abels,
D. Rodman,	C. H. Sutliff,
N. F. Jenison,	A. Newman,
Geo. H. Dell,	J. J. Mead.
R. S. Robson & Bros.,	

The ladies of Lansing are especially requested to consider the interests of both proprietors and clerks, and render easy a strict compliance with the above agreement, by doing their trading at an earlier hour.

In the October 19, 1882 issue of the Lansing Journal it was reported:

"A bell on Mr. N. F. Jenison's store gives warning at 6:45 and announces time for closing at 7 p.m. to the dry-goods, millinery, and clothing houses." Why Mrs. Abels was the only female milliner to have been included in the group is not clear. Perhaps she had the largest (size and volume) shop of all the milliners or maybe she was the type of person to get involved in the business affairs of the city.

Miss F. M. Heiser joined Mrs. Abels' staff as a milliner in 1883 and continued to work there through 1888.<sup>32</sup> One year the two women took a vacation around the Great Lakes. Another year the local newspaper reported that Mrs. Abels had returned to Vermont for a visit.<sup>33</sup> Her father had been born in that state and she, no doubt, had relatives still living there.

Another innovation shown by her shop was the first use in a Lansing newspaper of an illustration in a milliner's advertisement (see Figure 33). Prior to this and even afterwards, ads placed by Lansing milliners most often consisted of three to seven lines in small, simple print. "All the Go" referred to the name of the hat pattern. The naming of a hat style continued into the twentieth century in the millinery trade catalogues.

In October 1891, Mrs. Abels began to advertise special sales on her stock in order to close out her business by January 1, 1892.<sup>34</sup> No reason was given as to why she wanted to shut down. Her ads had been interspersed with comments of ill health over the years and this may have prompted her closing. In order to liquidate her inventory, she made an assignment and it was estimated that the liabilities were \$1,600 and the assets were \$2,000.<sup>35</sup> Why another milliner did not take over Mrs. Abels' business which probably included a large stock

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15 March 1883, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1 February 1883, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 29 October 1891, p. 2; see also Ibid., 1 December 1891, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 8 December 1891, p. 2.

# MRS. A. R. ABELS'



**"ALL THE CO."**

**SPRING  
OPENING**

**OF**

**PATTERN BONNETS!**

**HATS, TOQUES AND**

**CHILDREN'S HATS!**

**AND A CHOICE SELECTION OF**

**Millinery Novelties!**

**WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY,  
APRIL 17 AND 18, '89.**

Figure 33. The earliest illustrated millinery advertisement, 1889. (Source: *Lansing Journal*, 8 April 1889, p. 3.)

and steady clientele is not known. Perhaps the dark clouds of a depressed economy that would cover the city in the coming year were already beginning to descend. The following formal notice appeared on December 22, 1891 in the Lansing Journal.

Assignee's Sale of Millinery. Notice is hereby given that on Saturday the 2d day of January next, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, I will offer for sale at auction, to the highest bidder, the entire stock of Millinery and Fancy Goods, together with the store furniture and fixtures, lately owned by Mrs. A. R. Abels. Also the following described interest in real estate situated near the village of Okemos, to wit: The swfr of the se 1/4 and one acre off the east end of the s fr of the sw fr 1/4 of section 21 in town 4 north of range 1 west, in all about 35 acres, a life interest, subject to homestead exemption and \$900 mortgage incumbrance. Sale to take place at the store recently occupied by her, No. 207 Washington Avenue, City of Lansing.

H. B. Carpenter, Assignee

Although she used the unc customary practice of the initials of her first name on her labels and in her ads, Mrs. Abels remained married to her husband, Warren. They are believed to never have had children. During this time he had been appointed Deputy Sheriff and in 1887 he became a Deputy U.S. Marshall, a position he still held in 1893. In 1892, the year her goods and property were auctioned, she was listed in the city directory as a clerk, but no location was given. Although the wages of her husband were not determined, Mrs. Abels is thought to have worked not out of economic necessity.

The three bonnets with labels from Mrs. Abels' shop were dated 1882-1889 based on their style and trimmings. During those years, Lillie Fisher and later, Miss Heiser worked in the shop. Mrs. Abels herself could have trimmed the bonnets or she could have left that part to her employees.

### Selected Milliners of "The Golden Years"

The following four milliners were singled out for several reasons. One represented "a first" in the city, another represented an additional millinery source, the dry goods store. Enough information had survived about the other two individuals which provided relevant information on the production and marketing methods used in the Lansing millinery trade.

William L. Damon (worked 1874-1875). "Damon, The Milliner," as one newspaper ad read, was the first male milliner in Lansing who appeared on the scene for about a year from March 1874 to February 1875.<sup>36</sup> He originally had come from Adrian, Michigan and during his brief stint in Lansing sold straw and millinery goods as well as needlework supplies and fancy goods.

Harley Ingersoll (dry goods and wholesale millinery merchant). Among the three wholesale millinery businesses identified in the Lansing Journal article of April 28, 1881 was that of Harley Ingersoll, one of Lansing's early dry goods merchants. For a short time (a year or less), he and William Ten Eyck were in partnership in the wholesale millinery part of his dry goods business, but this tie had dissolved by February 1882.<sup>37</sup> In April of 1882, Ingersoll decided to dispense "with the customary formal millinery opening" at his Double Mammoth store.<sup>38</sup> For two years he employed Miss F. M. Heiser as his milliner.

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<sup>36</sup> Lansing State Republican, 6 March 1874, p. 3; and 20 March 1874, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Lansing Journal, 16 February 1882, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 April 1882, p. 3.

Periodically, she would travel to Chicago to view the latest styles and purchase stock for the store.<sup>39</sup> In September 1882, Mr. Ingersoll decided to close out his wholesale millinery department, as "his other departments demand his entire time and attention," although he may have continued to sell retail millinery.<sup>40</sup>

Other dry goods stores that carried retail millinery departments during this time were E. Glicman's, Rodman's "People's Store" and A. Newman's. All advertised their goods were purchased in New York or the Eastern market, as well as employed milliners and/or trimmers in their departments.

William C. Ten Eyck (worked 1877-1885). The city directories indicated that William Ten Eyck was a partner of Charles Sutliff in the wholesale millinery business. That partnership dissolved in 1879 and a short time later he took on another partnership with Harley Ingersoll which was also brief. Perhaps these partnerships were opportunities for Ten Eyck to learn the trade, for thereafter he remained a sole proprietor of his own business. In 1883, he added a retail section to his business and employed as trimmer the experienced Olivia Roberts, who first came to Lansing in 1874 from Ashtabula, Ohio.<sup>41</sup>

The retail section offered the usual spring and fall openings for which Mrs. Roberts would travel to Cleveland to view the new styles and purchase stock. One of the store's ads of 1883 noted that, "the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 14 September 1882, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 21 September 1882, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 8 March 1883, p. 3.

results of her observations will be apparent at the spring opening soon to take place."<sup>42</sup> In 1884, "a large stock of imported wings and birds of every description" was advertised by the store.<sup>43</sup> However, Mrs. Roberts found herself out of work in March 1885, when Ten Eyck was forced to assign his goods after having been caught in a tight cash flow situation. Although his assets of \$3,500 covered his liabilities of \$1,700, it was all in stock and not in cash.<sup>44</sup> "A few creditors crowded him to the wall and he was driven to the alternative of either asking his friends to bridge him over or make an assignment. He chose the latter, and so the importunates must take their chances along with the other creditors."<sup>45</sup>

Madame Edward J. (Kate) Savigny (worked 1887-1895). Madame Savigny operated a millinery shop at 222 South Washington in the Smith Block for eight years. The city directories indicated her two daughters, Kate and Jessie, worked as milliners in the shop. Her son, Frank, was a partner in the photographic firm of Savigny and Christmas and many of their portrait photos of Lansing citizens survive today in the collections of the State Archives.

A card sent by Madame Savigny to "Mrs. J. Whiteley & Dau." that announced the dates of her fall opening in 1887 is shown in

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 15 March 1883, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Lansing State Republican Weekly, 19 November 1884, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 18 March 1885, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 25 March 1885, p. 5.

Figure 34. The formal printed card also noted the fancy goods available at the shop. Whether Mrs. Savigny's card was a typical example of the formal invitations sent by other milliners in Lansing is not known.

Perhaps in order to reduce expenses, she advertised in April 1888 that there would be "no formal opening as heretofore and no special cards of invitation issued," but that she would display "the most elegant New York and Chicago styles, and all the latest novelties."<sup>46</sup>

Dressmaking services were added in 1889 and Hall's Bazaar dress forms were sold as well.<sup>47</sup> In that same year, an illustration of the shops in the Smith Block, including Madame Savigny's, was published along with other local businesses in a book titled, Lansing Illustrated. See Figure 35 for the picture which showed her shop located between two merchant tailors. Her shop was street level and the goods behind the huge plate glass windows were protected from the sun's damaging rays by window shades printed with the words, "Millinery" and "Fancy Goods." The telegraph pole and the horse-drawn trolley car lend an urban air to the scene.

#### Additional Note

One customer of the trade was Theresa Bohr, the milliner/dressmaker of Westphalia, Michigan, who bought her spring and fall

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<sup>46</sup>Lansing Journal, 9 April 1888, p. 3.

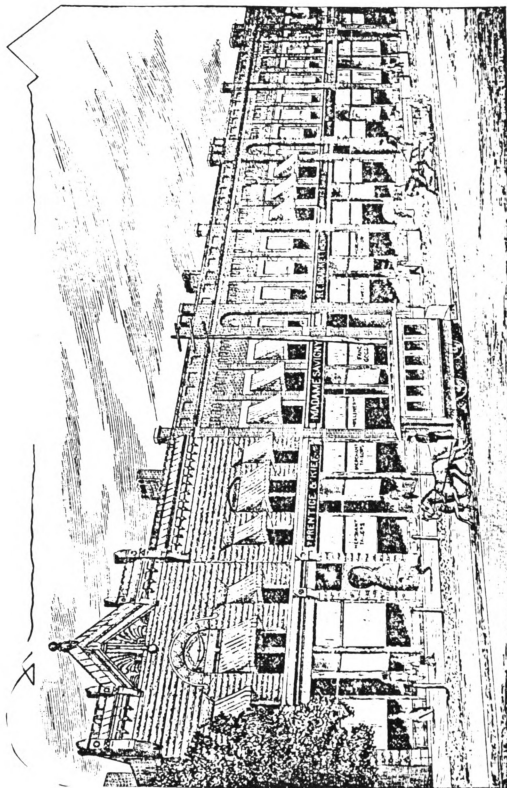
<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 8 January 1889, p. 3.





*A fine and complete line of Fall and Winter  
 Millinery of the latest patterns.  
 Materials for fancy work. A nice line of ladies'  
 furnishing goods, gloves, hosiery, etc. to be  
 fine underwear for ladies and children.  
 Gentlemen's neck scarfs, etc., etc. Imported  
 Caskets. Agent for Butterick patterns.  
 In New Smith Block. Lansing, Mich.*

Figure 34. Fall opening card sent by a Lansing milliner to her customers, 1887. (Source: Local History Room, Lansing Public Library, Lansing, Michigan.)



SMITH'S BLOCK. - WASHINGTON AVENUE. LANSING.

Figure 35. Milliner's store front in Lansing, 1889. [Source: *Lansing Illustrated* (Coldwater, Mich.: J. S. Conover, 1889), p. 46. No author.]

supplies over a period of time from all three Lansing millinery wholesalers. In one section of her account book she recorded the dates and amounts for each transaction:

April 30, 1877, Bo't. of W. C. Ten Eyck, \$52.13. . . .  
 August 24, 1880, Bo't. of H. Ingersoll, \$11.08. . . .  
 October 16, 1880, Bo't. of H. Ingersoll, \$21.10. . . .  
 April 13, 1882, Bought of C. H. Sutliff, Goods amounting  
 to \$54.82.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, she did not itemize the goods she purchased from them. She may have bought her supplies from their traveling agents or made the trips into Lansing herself to purchase directly from the stores.

Working Conditions, 1880: Remembrances  
 of an Iowa Milliner

There are very few records, such as letters or diaries, in existence which were written by women who worked at millinery. One of the rare examples is a 300 page autobiography written by Elizabeth Wright Heller, in which she relates her experiences working in a millinery store in Marengo, Iowa in 1880.<sup>49</sup> At that time Elizabeth was twenty years old, single, and self-supporting. She worked in Mrs. Swezey's shop, one of three milliners in Marengo, and recalled,

It was fun to sell hats and I had very good luck at it. I was considered a very good looking girl and I had a wonderful complexion without any artificial assistance, and I had a face that could wear any kind of a hat, so I tried them on myself to show them off, and usually made a

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<sup>48</sup>Daybook, Theresa Bohr dressmaking and millinery business, Westphalia, Michigan, 1878-1884, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>49</sup>Elizabeth Wright Heller, "A Young Woman in Iowa," Palimpsest 54 (1973): 19-20.

sale. I used to tell Mrs. Swezey that she ought to hire me for a dummy to try hats on and pay me a large salary.

Mrs. Swezey had a thriving business there. She used to go into Chicago twice a year to buy goods and had a millinery opening after she came back every spring and fall. She liked having me around to help show off the goods, which I enjoyed doing. She always thought a great deal of me and was a very good friend to me.

At one point Mrs. Swezey made a bonnet for Elizabeth and another girl who worked in the shop. Elizabeth, however, felt the bonnet was too elegant a style for a working girl to wear, so she retrimmed it in a simpler style which caused some hurt feelings on Mrs. Swezey's part. Elizabeth did not regret her actions and recalled her strong feelings about the incident.

They were simply elegant and the bonnet was lovely and looked like a pattern hat right from Chicago and like it cost about ten dollars. I looked fine in it too, but I wouldn't wear it. I told her it wouldn't look right for me to come out in such an expensive looking hat as that with my little wages and that I had nothing to correspond with it, and folks would talk about me, so I just couldn't wear it.

Girls are not so particular about dressing according to their means or circumstances nowadays, but that is the way I was brought up. People were quick to say things if a girl dressed beyond her means when earning her own living.

#### Lansing's Millinery Businesses in the Economic Depressed Years: 1892-1899

The "Golden Years" period for Lansing and its millinery businesses was followed by the depressed economic years of the 1890s. As with the dressmakers, there was no strong evidence to indicate that more women were working as milliners to help support their family during those unstable economic years. For this decade there were

twenty-three individual milliners, not including the millinery departments of the dry goods stores, that employed at one time or another from one to six employees in their shops. These employees filled positions as milliners, trimmers, apprentices, and millinery clerks. A tally was taken of the number of retail milliners, their employees, and those employed by the dry goods stores for the years 1891, 1892, 1894, 1896, and 1898 from the city directories and the state business directories. The results were as follows:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Total Number of Milliners</u>
1891 . . . . .	28
1892 . . . . .	38
1894 . . . . .	57
1896 . . . . .	53
1898 . . . . .	50

Although the number of those employed in the millinery trade showed an increase at the end of the decade, it is not possible to attribute the increase to the depressed economy. Each individual worker would have to have been investigated to determine the dominant reason why she or he worked before any definite statement could be made about these numbers. It is, however, interesting to note that the greatest increase in the decade occurred in 1894, the year after three of the four banks in the city closed.

As with dressmaking, the millinery trade was undoubtedly affected by the poor economy. Perhaps there were fewer numbers of new hats and bonnets sold and more old hats and bonnets retrimmed with the "latest novelties of the season." Like the dressmakers, millinery

shops provided a necessary service to the women of Lansing. Head coverings for women, especially for activities outside the home, were a standard part of their ensemble and would continue to be well into the twentieth century.

Throughout the 1890s, milliners continued to offer an assortment of supplemental goods which was a tradition in the trade. Included in the assortment were handkerchiefs, gloves, fancy goods, stamped linens, yarns, and other needlework supplies.<sup>50</sup> Also during this decade, hat pins began to be mentioned more and more in the millinery ads of the Lansing newspapers.<sup>51</sup> These pins were necessary to keep the hats in place since they were worn straight on the head and high on top of a "bun" of long hair.

Spring and fall openings continued to be held with the spring one referred to as the "Easter opening."<sup>52</sup> Newspaper advertisements revealed that this holiday more than any other, was associated with the millinery trade.

As in the previous decade, the ads during the 1890s would occasionally give the name of a shop's current trimmer. It seemed as if the trimmer made the store's reputation. The ads would sometimes tell how many years of work experience the trimmer had or comment on

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<sup>50</sup>Lansing Journal, 1 December 1891, p. 3; and Lansing State Republican, 1 February 1892, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup>Lansing State Republican, 5 April 1897, p. 5; and Lansing Journal, 19 April 1898, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup>Lansing Journal, 1 April 1893, p. 8; and Lansing State Republican, 5 April 1897, p. 5.

her artistic talents.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps when a trimmer left a particular shop for a position in another shop some of her old customers followed her.

#### Wages of Lansing's Milliners

In 1892, the wages of Lansing's milliners were published for the first time.<sup>54</sup> Work hours of the women were also included. Thirty-eight milliners and trimmers were used in the sample reporting wages, while thirteen milliners reported their work hours. Whether or not the milliners were the same individuals in both cases was not made clear in the tables. All thirteen milliners worked six days a week at varying daily hours of eight, nine, ten, and eleven. While five began at 8:00 a.m. and quit at 6:00 p.m., seven began at 7:00 a.m. and quit at 6:00 p.m. All thirteen received an hour dinner break. The milliner's wages were reported as follows: two at \$7.00, two at \$7.50, three at \$7.66, eleven at \$7.69, two at \$9.25, one at \$10.00, six at \$10.64, and one at \$15.00. The trimmers were reported with the following wages: one at \$2.00, five at \$4.75, and four at \$7.50. As with the dressmakers, the reported yearly incomes for the milliners and trimmers were below their weekly earnings calculated at fifty-two weeks per year. The discrepancy in the amounts can probably be attributed to the slack times after the busy seasons as well as to vacations and sickness.

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<sup>53</sup> Lansing Journal, 8 October 1891, p. 3; and Lansing State Republican, 4 November 1893, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics, February 1892, pp. 78-84 and 114.

The Remaining Milliner of a Product  
Used in This Study

Bliss Stebbins (worked 1896-1902). Prior to 1896, Bliss Stebbins had worked as a traveling agent for the Lansing Wheelbarrow Company, a firm managed by members of his family. According to the labels in his products, Stebbins included both retail and wholesale millinery in his business. His wife, Hattie, is believed to have managed the retail part, while Bliss may have traveled to promote the wholesale side. Almost all of the newspaper ads were placed by "Mrs. Bliss Stebbins" and the 1900 city directory lists his occupation as company traveler. The 1900 Federal Census lists them both as milliners. They were ages thirty-seven and thirty-three, respectively, and had been married nine years with no children. Also living in their household was Hattie's 68-year-old mother and a 23-year-old single, female boarder who worked as a millinery clerk in the shop.

In 1901, Mrs. Stebbins returned from a four week trip to New York with new spring stock. She had also added a dressmaking department under the supervision of Miss Flora Derfee, who had been in New York with her selecting goods for that department.<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Stebbins was among the first, if not the first, milliner in Lansing to offer hair dressing services complete with a shampoo. (The forerunner of today's beauty salons.) Previously, a few milliners had only advertised hair goods for sale. On the first day of the store's spring opening in 1900, a "hair Dress and Shampoo" could be had for

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<sup>55</sup>Lansing Journal, 1 April 1901, p. 4.



25 cents.<sup>56</sup> In April 1898, the store advertised Army and Navy hat pins in honor of the Spanish-American War. The ad urged patrons to "get one before the Boys march away."<sup>57</sup>

Despite their innovative and traditional services, the Stebbins did not remain long in Lansing and were last listed in the 1902 city directory. During the six years of its existence, the Stebbins' Millinery Store employed a number of people, including a hair dresser, dressmaker, bookkeepers, as well as milliners. As was the case with Charles Sutliff and Mrs. Abels, the products from his store were probably trimmed by someone other than himself or his wife. It was not possible to identify the individual who decorated the hat and toque which bear the Stebbins' label.

#### Lansing's Millinery Businesses: 1900-1910

This decade marked the end of the Victorian period and the beginning of the Edwardian period. Millinery continued to be a necessary element in an Edwardian woman's wardrobe. The Lansing city directories indicated that many of the milliners who worked in the nineteenth century continued to work well into the early twentieth century. At the end of this study the millinery businesses in Lansing still thrived. By 1910, the federal census listed fifty-eight women working as milliners in the city. They continued to own their own shops or work in the shops of others as well as in the dry goods stores.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1900, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 26 April 1898, p. 8.

Inside a Millinery Store--1910

Figure 36 is a rare photo of the interior of an unidentified milliner's shop in north Lansing from about 1910. Of the two women shown in the photo, the shop owner may have been the older woman on the right. The younger woman, on the left, wearing a shirtwaist and skirt may have been a millinery clerk or another milliner.

The store furnishings shown in the photo, which were probably standard millinery supplies, include the large, wood-framed, glass display cases; built-in display shelves which would have been covered covered with the dust curtains at night; a large, floor cabinet filled with spools and ribbons and other trims and a variety of hat stands. Some of the stands were floor length; others were short enough to be used in the display cases. The stands had either white porcelain bases with gilt banded trim or, at least one in the display case, had a stamped metal base. Other furnishings in the store include a fancy, wooden display table covered with a large, embroidered doily, several oriental rugs and several large fern plants in pots sitting on the top of the built-in shelves. The lace curtains at the back of the store may have covered an opening to the back workroom.

The headwear on display appears to be all hats, many in the large, engulfing style that was popular during the years 1902 to 1910. As a result of these large styles, many theaters established rules which required women to remove their hats during a performance.<sup>58</sup> All of the hats appear to be trimmed as well. As evident in the

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<sup>58</sup> Wilcox, The Mode, p. 329.



Figure 36. Interior view, unidentified millinery shop in north Lansing, about 1910. (*Source: Author's collection.*)

photo, feathers of all types were the main trimming material. The enormous appetite of the millinery trade for such trims led directly to measures being taken to limit or prevent any further use of feathers. "The vast destruction of bird life brought about the organization in the United States in 1905 of the National Audubon Society which was responsible for the Audubon Plumage Law preventing the slaughter of native birds and the importation or merchandising of paradise or aigrettes in this country."<sup>59</sup>

The spools of wide ribbon (4 inches or more) were popular not only on hats of the period, but were also worn by pre-teen girls in the form of over-sized bows in their hair. Juliette Stucky recalled that she and her sister had bows of the wide ribbon in plain colors or checked patterns to complement their outfits.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps on the other side of the shop the untrimmed hats, fancy goods, and/or needlework supplies were displayed.

The millinery products which were the basis of this study together with the biographies of various Lansing milliners noted in this chapter present a story of the development of a trade in a mid-western city during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Despite its being consistently outnumbered by dressmaking, millinery work proved to be a viable means of economic support and independence for some women in Lansing.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Juliette B. Stucky, Lansing, Michigan, 20 April 1983.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY

Studies in social history conducted during the past two decades have focused their attention on relatively unknown, ordinary groups of people, such as various ethnic communities or divisions of the social classes, in order to learn more about the total experience of men and women. Historians turned to public records and artifacts as new sources of information to better understand the lifestyles and time periods of these anonymous groups.

This study, in keeping with social history, analyzed a group of women's dresses, hats, and bonnets from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for information they could reveal about the persons who made and wore the garments, specifically, dressmakers, milliners, and their customers. All of the clothing featured maker's labels or a strong association with the City of Lansing, Michigan, which allowed for a concentrated, intense investigation into the operations of the dressmaking and millinery businesses in one location. The clothing was supplemented with related public documents, such as city directories, federal censuses, and local newspapers.

In order to accurately "read" these mute clothing objects, an artifact study model was required for the investigation. A model proposed by E. McClung Fleming was used as a guide to identify, analyze,

and interpret the Lansing-labeled clothing. His methodology provided the most integrated approach towards the study of an artifact within the society where it was made and used.

The starting point of the model was the inherent properties of every artifact which Fleming defined as: history, material, construction, design, and function. He developed a set of four hierarchial, analytical operations which were to be applied to the five properties of the object. First, each property was to be identified and described in a factual manner using whatever tools, equipment, and reference guides that were necessary to the historian. Second, the properties of the object were to be evaluated according to their aesthetic, historic, or monetary value through a comparison with related objects. Third, selected aspects of the environment or culture were to be analyzed for effects they may have had on the object when it was made and used. Fourth, the significance of the object was to be interpreted within the body of material culture, the history of the period and in current day society.

#### Evaluation of the Artifact Study Model

The use of Fleming's model facilitated the task of analyzing the clothing for facts or hints about the dressmaking and millinery trades in Lansing, and from a broader viewpoint, demonstrated the inherent characteristics of a group of artifacts to reflect aspects of their respective time. The strength of the model is that it provides procedures and consequent data from which interpretations can be made about historical artifacts. Ultimately, publications

and/or exhibitions about the artifacts and the people who made and used them can be the result.

The model, however, due to its hierarchial, analytical steps, tended to have a mushroom effect resulting in a lengthy discussion of the group of artifacts. Yet, the investigator acknowledges that each chapter in this study could have been expanded to greater length, but due to time and money constraints additional effort was not possible.

### Findings of the Study

The findings of the study were based on the objectives which followed the operations of identification, evaluation, and cultural analysis. Interpretation, the final operation, was possible only after these three processes were completed and will be discussed in this chapter.

#### Objective 1:

To locate and identify clothing made by Lansing dressmakers and milliners.

After a local and statewide search, thirteen items of clothing consisting of one jacket, five dresses, five bonnets, and two hats complete with labels of Lansing dressmakers and milliners or having a strong association with this group were located in public and private collections. The garments represented the work of eight individual Lansing dressmakers and milliners. After a preliminary investigation it was decided not to include one dress, made by a dressmaker who worked from 1911-1946, in the study, due to lack of sufficient time to cover the twentieth century. Thus the study was limited to the period 1847 to 1910.

The five properties of each garment were investigated, documented, and recorded through written descriptions and photographs. Among the properties, history was absent in all but one example. Only one item, a hat, had a recorded history telling about when it was used. Therefore, it was left for the investigator to decide an appropriate date, or range of dates, when the clothing could have been made and worn based on the years the maker was working, the cut and construction of the clothing, and to a lesser degree the fabrics and trims. The fabrics were not analyzed due to the nature of many of the objects where taking necessary samples would have damaged them.

The garments made by the dressmakers consisted of four dresses and a jacket which were given individual dates ranging from 1896 to 1906. One dress had a matching cape and was probably a walking outfit. Two dresses were classified as afternoon wear based on their cut, fabrics, and trims. Another dress was unique in that it was made of a matching skirt with two bodices, one for day wear and one for evening wear. The jacket was probably originally part of an afternoon suit which would have included a matching skirt and a contrasting, boned bodice.

The millinery consisted of five bonnets, one hat, and one toque (brimless hat) which were given individual dates ranging from 1880 to 1899. No special activity could be attributed to the millinery, and they were probably worn for day wear.

The reasons why there were not more and earlier examples of labeled clothing from Lansing, a city settled in 1847, could be



attributed to a low survival rate over time and to the late (1870 on) and inconsistent use of labels by the dressmaking and millinery trades.

Objective 2:

To evaluate the apparel items according to the basic properties: history, material, construction, design, and function.

Again, the garments' properties were the basis for the evaluation operation. To ascertain whether an item of clothing was high-style or the mode, magazines from the time period; such as Peterson's, Godey's Lady's Book, Harper's Bazar, and The Delineator, were used as a guide. The majority of the items appeared to be the mode of their respective time periods.

The hat associated with Hattie Dillingham, however, may have represented high-style headwear for the early to mid-1890s. The hat had a history of being worn in 1892 and the earliest illustration found in the contemporary fashion literature was in 1893.

In another example the results were inconclusive about the Ada Passage ensemble consisting of a walking dress and matching cape. The style of the bodice's sleeves and the cape's collar were not typical of the styles shown in the contemporary magazines of the mid-1890s. Yet, Miss Passage specifically advertised, "jackets and wraps a specialty," so the assumption is that she would have known how to make the current style. This ensemble may also be an example of high-style clothing and the creative genius of an individual maker or perhaps reflects the eccentric taste of the wearer.

Objective 3:

To develop a profile of the dressmaking and millinery populations in Lansing.

Data compiled from the federal census of 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910 disclosed profiles for the dressmaking and millinery populations in Lansing during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The 1850 census disclosed that no dressmakers or milliners worked in the city and the 1890 census does not exist having been almost totally destroyed by fire in 1921.

The typical dressmaker and milliner of Lansing was likely to have been a white female in her late twenties, who had been born in the United States. From the 1870s on, she was probably born in Michigan. She was likely to have lived either with family members or with non-relatives. Exceptions were found in the 1880 census with two mulatto dressmakers and two male milliners, in the 1900 census with two male milliners, and in the 1910 census with two male dressmakers.

Both dressmakers and milliners increased in number overall from 1847 to 1910. One reason for the increase was undoubtedly due to the growth and development of Lansing. However there were consistently more dressmakers than milliners throughout this period. The reason for the greater number of dressmakers was due to their flexible work environment which could be conducted at home or in a shop, unlike the milliners who conducted their business in a shop environment with established hours. Census figures also showed a large increase in the number of dressmakers from 1870 to 1880.

This increase was attributed to the increased complexity of women's dress styles during the 1870-1880 period which required the expertise of a dressmaker.

The census findings also revealed that married women were often engaged in both of these occupations. Most of the married dressmakers and milliners were in their child-bearing years and of those who were mothers, most had minor age children still at home. Correlated with this was the fact that there were more married dressmakers than milliners. The married women with minor age children may have preferred to work at dressmaking because it could be done in their own home, thus placing less restriction on their familial duties.

The seven dressmakers and milliners whose products initiated this study were found to be an assortment of typical and atypical representatives of their respective trades. The three dressmakers, Ada Passage, Jessie Tompkins, and Isabel Towne, were all self-supporting women who owned their own shops. Tompkins was a widow, while both Passage and Towne were single and lived with one or more family members. Two of the four milliners, Charles Sutliff and Bliss Stebbins, as married males were the major breadwinners in their families. Sutliff had minor age children cared for by his wife. Stebbins and his wife, Hattie, both worked together in the millinery business. The remaining two milliners, Asenath Regina Abels and Hattie Dillingham, were both married during most of their careers and of the two, Hattie had children. Whether either of these two women worked prior to their marriage is unknown. Neither Abels nor Dillingham appeared to have had to work out of economic necessity.

Objective 4:

To analyze methods of production and marketing used by Lansing dressmakers and milliners.

Production methods. The earliest indication of Lansing dressmakers and milliners was found in 1856, nearly a decade after the city was chosen as the permanent site for the state capitol in 1847, when two advertisements were published in the local newspaper. Apparently, the dressmaking and millinery businesses did not develop until Lansing had acquired a sufficient female population, established residential and commercial districts, built reliable transportation systems, and organized cultural activities. The first advertisements indicated that these businesses offered combined services in both dressmaking and millinery.

Dressmakers throughout this period produced either custom-made garments or re-styled old garments for their customers. Dressmaking was conducted in several ways in Lansing: within the maker's home, in their customer's home by the day or by boarding, or in a shop employing one or more persons. The first two means required a smaller amount of capital for a woman to get started in the business than the latter type. From the 1870s on, Lansing dressmakers used drafting tools and charts available on the market or hired a specialist known as a cutter and/or fitter in order to produce the complex cut and tight fit of women's dress styles. The three dressmakers of the Lansing-labeled clothing all had shops and employed additional help in their businesses.

Milliners in Lansing were found to work primarily in shops that were separate from their residences. They may have produced custom-made millinery or retailed women's headwear that had been purchased ready-made from the manufacturers in the east or their wholesale agents. The headwear was purchased by the milliners in trimmed and untrimmed states and, in return, they would offer the same to their customers. Milliners, too, would re-style or re-trim their customers old bonnets and hats. The millinery trade also had a specialist, called a trimmer, who was hired by a milliner to specifically trim the new stock in the latest styles. This position was recognized in Lansing's millinery trade by 1880. A milliner needed more capital than a dressmaker to get started in the business in order to rent shop space, purchase inventory and store equipment for its displays, and hire one or more employees. Shops were located at either street level or on the second floor of a commercial building which was cheaper to rent.

Both trades used only a small number of apprentices, usually girls in their late teens. The length of the apprenticeships and their specific duties were not determined. All of the four milliners of the labeled Lansing millinery maintained shops with one or more employees. The length of time a woman worked as a dressmaker or a milliner in Lansing was not determined.

An 1892 government report showed that shop dressmakers and milliners in Lansing worked similar hours, varying from eight to almost twelve hours a day, six days a week. They started at 7:00

or 8:00 a.m. and quit at 6:00 or 7:30 p.m. Both groups had an hour dinner break. Wages, however, showed that Lansing milliners earned twice as much as the dressmakers. Both groups did not earn their full yearly salary, based on their calculated weekly wages, due to slack times of the trades, vacations, and sickness.

Marketing methods. The marketing procedures used by Lansing dressmakers and milliners were found to be very similar. Members of both groups used the local newspapers to advertise their services and stock as well as to inform the women of Lansing of a change in location or of a new employee, usually in the cutter and trimmer positions. Dressmakers with shops advertised in the newspapers more than dressmakers who operated out of their homes or those of their clients. At least one milliner had a trade sign for her shop and others may have also.

Milliners and those dressmakers who had shops were found to travel in the spring and fall to either Chicago, New York City, or occasionally, Cleveland to view the wholesalers' and department stores' trade openings of new styles, fabrics, and trims. Most of these buying trips were made in March and September.

Upon their return to Lansing, the milliners would advertise formal openings for their new stock, while the dressmakers would advertise that they were prepared to cut and fit the latest spring (or fall) styles. A few of the milliners were known to have sent formal printed invitations to their customers announcing the opening dates. The spring opening, which came to be called the Easter opening

was heavily advertised by the milliners, more so than any other holiday. There was no evidence found to suggest the dressmakers had a holiday association of their own.

Both trades endured slack times in between the busy seasons of spring/summer and fall/winter. The milliners and many of the dressmakers with shops offered additional services and sold related goods to help provide a more steady income including services as both a dressmaker and milliner. One milliner in 1900 even added a hair dressing and shampooing service to the business. Common goods sold by both groups were fancy goods, that included women's accessory items, such as, handkerchiefs, gloves, mitts, ribbons, laces, and "Dewey's Invisible Dress Elevators." Needlework supplies were also commonly sold in their shops. In addition, many dressmakers and milliners were selling agents for such related trade supplies as, dressmakers' fitting tools and charts, Butterick's paper patterns, and Hall's Bazaar Dress Forms.

All seven of the makers of the clothing with Lansing labels used these marketing methods. Most outstanding were Bliss Stebbins, whose business added the early beauty salon treatment and Regina Abels, who exhibited her shop's products at the county fair and who participated in the city's business activities.

#### Interpretation of the Products of the Lansing Dressmakers and Milliners

This artifact study is of importance to the historian for the relationships it reveals between the labeled dresses and millinery and

the respective trades they represent. Having worked through the operations of Fleming's model, it was possible to make the following observations or interpretations about the products:

1. Dresses, hats, and bonnets with makers' labels from Lansing tell only part of the story of the city's dressmaking and millinery businesses in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Due to the inconsistent use of labels, it cannot be assumed that unlabeled clothing was the work of the home sewer.
2. Dressmakers with shops were more likely to label their products than dressmakers who sewed in their own homes or those of their customers.
3. As in other craft/trade occupations, the maker's labels on Lansing dresses and millinery did not necessarily indicate the true creator. The label most often referred to the owner of the shop. The actual maker may have been the shop owner and any one of a number of employees used in these trades, such as cutter and fitter, seamstress, other dressmakers or milliners, trimmer, and an apprentice.
4. Millinery, more than dressmaking, facilitated a woman's entry into the business world.
5. Supplemental public records, such as newspapers, censuses, city directories, and business directories were vital sources in revealing information about the dressmakers and milliners who used labels as well as the anonymous ones who did not.



### Recommendations for Further Study

Although this study is the most comprehensive to date about the Lansing dressmaking and millinery businesses, other aspects connected with these trades need to be investigated. The following are a few suggested areas:

1. Develop a demographic and wage profile of other working women in Lansing, such as domestics, sales clerks, and factory workers and compare it to that of the dressmakers and milliners for similarities or differences and determine whether dressmaking and millinery provided a more stable and profitable employment for Lansing women.
2. Trace the individuals who worked in the declining years of the dressmaking and millinery trades to determine whether they changed to other occupations or retired.
3. Determine how many of the large majority of single, self-supporting dressmakers and milliners continued to work after they were married or whether their marriages occurred to men in a social level so that they would not need to work.
4. Compare the unlabeled clothing having a Lansing history with labeled clothing for differences or similarities in cut, construction, and finishing techniques.
5. Relate the prevailing aesthetic design for each period to the extant Lansing clothing for effects on the cut, fabric, trim, and color.

## APPENDIX A

### FORMS USED IN THE SEARCH PROCESS

## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN

Enclosed is a questionnaire requesting information about your collections. This information is for a thesis project involving nineteenth century women's clothing. I am a graduate student at Michigan State University and am investigating headwear and outerwear made by milliners and dressmakers of Lansing, Michigan. A portion of the study involves the location and description of surviving garments made by these women. The clothing items may be identified by the maker's label sewn inside or by family history.

Since 1972, I have been working with the historic collections at the Michigan Historical Museum and currently at the Department of Human Environment and Design. My responsibilities include accessioning, cataloguing, exhibiting and storing clothing and textile items. My work experience has given me many opportunities to see how a study of objects can reveal a great deal about the standard of living in the past. As a result, I have chosen to study the artifacts of the millinery and dressmaking trades in Lansing for what these objects may reveal about nineteenth century clothing production and working women.

I would appreciate your filling out the questionnaire and returning it to me in the enclosed, stamped envelope by

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Claire L. Gonzales

Enclosure

QUESTIONNAIRE ON CLOTHING WITH LABELS OF  
LANSING MILLINERS AND DRESSMAKERS

Your Institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Does your collection contain any women's clothing from 1850 to 1899 with a label of a Lansing milliner or dressmaker or having a family history as being made in Lansing?  
                             Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
2. Does your collection contain any of the above specified women's clothing dating from 1900 to 1920?  
                             Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
3. If yes, what types of clothing, approximate date and quantity are available?  
     Headwear (bonnets, hats) \_\_\_\_\_  
     Outerwear (dresses, cloaks) \_\_\_\_\_
4. If the above answers are not known, may I visit your collection and search the subject card file and storage area for women's clothing with a dressmaker's or milliner's label from Lansing?  
                             Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
5. May I examine and photograph the Lansing examples?  
                             Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you have suggestions of private individuals in your area, such as collectors or possible relatives of women who worked in Lansing as a milliner or dressmaker, that I might contact for more information? Please include their name and address.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you again for your time in answering these questions and assisting me in my study. Please return this questionnaire by

Mrs. Claire L. Gonzales  
 1430 Sunnyside  
 Lansing, MI 48918

RELEASE FORM RELATING TO THE STUDY OF THE  
DRESSMAKING AND MILLINERY BUSINESSES OF  
LANSING, MICHIGAN FROM 1847-1930

I hereby authorize Claire L. Gonzales to record on film, tape or otherwise my name and artifacts that I own or that I am in charge of, as well as, information I provide to her that relates to the dressmaking and millinery businesses of Lansing, Michigan. I also give permission for her to publish the above materials and information in her master's thesis being written through the Department of Human Environment and Design, College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University at East Lansing, as well as, for publication in any future journal or newspaper articles or for discussion in public educational programs. I reserve the right to withdraw from this project at any time and I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the interview before future use.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### DATA COLLECTION FORM

APPENDIX B  
DATA COLLECTION FORM

Current Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_  
Catalogue Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Object:

(Include identifying name, number and type of pieces, function)

Label:

(Include inscription verbatim, location and method of attachment, dimensions of label and inner waistband, woven or printed inscription, colors of lettering and background, style of lettering)

Style Period/Date Used:

(Based on information provided by donor or original owner in the museum records, primary or secondary reference materials)

Cut and Construction:

(Bodice--include number of pieces, shape, collar, neckline, sleeves, lower edge, method of closure and position, type of linings, seam finishes, supporting devices, stitches, pockets, flaps, inner waistband)

(Skirt--include number of pieces, shape or style, lower edge, method of closure and position, type of linings, seam finishes, supporting devices, waistband, stitches, pockets)

(Headwear--include shape of crown and brim, type of linings, method of fastening to the head, stitches, dimensions)

**Fabric:**

(Include identifying name and period name if known of outer fabric, interlining, underlining and supportive in terms of fiber content, yarn type and printed, woven or combination design and color in terms of the hue, value, and intensity)

**Trims:**

(Include location on the garment, functional or nonfunctional, method of attachment, materials, construction, and color)

**History:**

(Based on information in the museum records, owner's recollections and reference materials in terms of season/date when worn, occasion, by whom and where, whether there is any additional documentation such as a letter mentioning the item or a photograph of the original owner wearing the garment)

**Comments:**

(Include general observations and opinions in terms of the above categories)

**Condition:**

(Include worn areas, soiling, tears, missing parts, alterations, mending or cleaning and fading)

**Photography:**

Film  
Shutter speed  
F-stop  
Flash attachment  
Lighting condition  
Lense used  
Views (front, back, side, inside, label, details)  
Roll number  
Negative numbers



APPENDIX C

DESCRIPTIONS OF CLOTHING WITH LABELS OF  
LANSING DRESSMAKERS AND MILLINERS

## APPENDIX C

### DESCRIPTIONS OF CLOTHING WITH LABELS OF LANSING DRESSMAKERS AND MILLINERS

#### Walking Ensemble Consisting of a Two-Piece Dress and Cape, 1896

Woven label on inner waistband of bodice, "Miss A. M. Passage, Lansing, Mich."

All three pieces are made of ribweave fabric of pale green with pale pink in a yarn mixture of silk and wool.

The fully-boned bodice is underlined with tan cotton and fastens at center front with hidden hooks/eyes sewn in alternate positions to provide a secure closure. The underlining is cut with a four-piece back and two-piece front.

In contrast, the outer fabric is cut with a two-piece back and a front having an inverted V, gathered yoke with tightly fitted lower bodice which fastens off-center with three fabric-covered buttons. Has standing collar and full sleeves gathered at armscye and at lower edge into band cuffs. Sleeves are accented at the shoulders with broad, fitted cap sleeves. The lower edge of the bodice curves over the sides and is slightly pointed below the waistline at center front.

The gored skirt is fitted smooth over the hips into the waistband by groups of triple waist darts at the sides and the fullness arranged in soft pleats at center back. Fastens at center back with hooks and handmade eyelets.

Contrast in the dress is provided through the exclusive use of olive green velvet for the collar, cap sleeves, cuffs and buttons. The velvet outlines the yoke seam and bands the sleeves above the cuffs. Three velvet bands in graduated widths also trim the lower edge of the skirt.

The elbow-length cape is lined with green jap silk. Cut with a V-shaped yoke with the body of the cape gathered into the yoke seam. Features a wide, flared, falling collar which covers the yoke seam and falls in points at center back, shoulders and center front. Fastens at center front yoke with hooks/eyes.

Private collection of Sue Neller, Okemos, Michigan.

Dress with a Separate Day and Evening  
Bodice, 1903

Woven label on inner waistband of day bodice, "Tompkins, Lansing, Mich."

All three pieces are made of a dull, medium green silk taffeta with resist-printed white splotches in an allover pattern.

Day bodice has fully-boned lining of white jap silk with white cotton lining the sleeves. The stays are of "Warren's Featherbone," which was manufactured in Three Oaks, Michigan. Fastens at center front with hidden hooks/eyes sewn in alternate positions to provide a secure closure.

Outer fabric is cut with a low neckline ending in a V-shape at center front. Neck area is filled in with yoke and standing collar made of a double layer of ecru cotton net sewn with rows of tucks. The collar and yoke fasten with hidden hooks and handmade eyes. Bodice is fitted across the back with the typical Edwardian pouch across the front. The long sleeves are full at the top half being gathered into the armscye and also at the elbow with two rows of ruching. The lower half of the sleeves fit tight with spaced vertical tucks. At the lower sleeve edge are wide scallops, edged with bias self-fabric and trimmed with net.

The collar is trimmed with a handmade corded band of dull, solid green silk taffeta arranged in a looped pattern. The yoke seam is outlined with black silk taffeta. Below the yoke, the bodice is heavily decorated with an appliqued arrangement of dull green silk taffeta bias bands draped and inserted through openings in ecru cotton machine-made lace and held in place at the front and back with delicate champlévé enameled buttons featuring butterfly motifs.

An identical lining was made for the evening bodice which has a slightly lower neckline, no shoulder seams and a full front that pouches over the shaped, fitted waistband. Fastens at center front with hidden hooks/eyes and one snap. The short sleeves are full and gathered into the armscye and band cuffs.

Has a foundation of dull green silk taffeta covered with alternating ecru net fabric with a woven floral pattern and three inch wide strips of the resist-printed green taffeta, which gives a slashed look.

The neckline is trimmed with machine-made lace with dimensional motifs of flowers and sheaves of wheat. The cuffs are made of three rows of overlapped black velvet ribbon with a large ribbon rosette sewn to the back side. The dull green silk taffeta waistband is arranged in soft folds and is edged with a band of black velvet and gilt metal braid. A large, black velvet ribbon rosette adorns the center back lower edge.

The unlined skirt is constructed with four, large patch pocket-shaped insets which create a yoke effect at the waist. Between the insets and extending from them are a series of inverted pleats which are released above the hem. Has narrow waistband and fastens at center back with hidden hooks/eyes and snap.

The bodices and skirt can be fastened together at center back with hidden hooks/eyes.

Collection of Department of Human Environment and Design,  
College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University, East Lansing,  
Michigan. Catalogue Number: 1-6-29-50 #29.

### Afternoon Dress, 1903-1906

Woven label on inner waistband of bodice, "Towne, Lansing."

Bodice and skirt made of medium green silk foulard with printed, vermiculated pattern in white with black accent dots.

The bodice is fully-boned using "Warren's Featherbone" (manufactured in Three Oaks, Michigan) with a medium-weight, white cotton underlining which fastens at center front with hidden hooks/eyes sewn in alternate positions to provide a secure closure. Sewn at the bust level to the outside of the lining, underneath the outer fabric is a five and one-half inch deep, gathered bosom ruffle of glazed cotton to help create the fashionable, Edwardian pouched front. This silhouette is also created by a slightly raised bodice waistline at center back which curves over the hips and dips to a point at center front.

The high standing collar and plastron (front inset) are made of ecru silk chiffon with woven, scattered shell or feather motifs and lined with medium pink weighted silk.

The sleeves are three-quarter length, gathered into the armhole and constructed in four pieces: gored underarm panel, straight fitted side panels and gathered, puffed outer panel. Attached to lower sleeve edge are vertically ruched, self-fabric cuffs with added "frills" of four inches wide, gathered net with machine-embroidered floral motifs. To add support and create fullness, a gathered strip of lining fabric was sewn across the inside of the sleeves at the top of the armhole.

The skirt is constructed with center front gored panel to the floor with two wide circular-like side panels having an added circular flounce that extends across the sides and back only in a graduated width of seven and seven-eighths inches at the sides to twenty-two and one-half inches at center back; lined with cream-colored silk. Has fitting darts at the sides, pleats at center back and narrow waistband. Fastens at center back with hooks/eyes and snap.

The bodice is trimmed with a series of large lace medallions set in on either side of plastron and are outlined with applied cording of alternating black and white silk. The collar and vertical sleeve seams are outlined with black silk which is also added in three rows to the skirt flounce.

Bodice and skirt can be fastened together at center back with hidden hooks/eyes.

Collection of Michigan Historical Museum, History Division,  
Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: 7264.

Formal Afternoon or Reception Dress,  
1903-1906

Printed label on inner waistband of bodice, "Towne, Lansing, Mich."

Bodice and skirt are made of figured silk in a medium gray satin weave background with a woven, large-scale foliage and dotted pattern of light grey, medium grey, and black.

Bodice is fully-boned using "Warren's Featherbone" (manufactured in Three Oaks, Michigan) with a cream silk taffeta underlining in the body and polished white cotton lining in the sleeves. Fastens at center back neckline and center front with hidden hooks/eyes sewn in alternate positions to provide a secure closure. Sewn at the bust level to the outside of the lining, underneath the outer fabric is a deep, gathered bosom ruffle of taffeta to help create the fashionable, Edwardian pouched front. Bodice front has low, surplice opening which is filled in by a yoke with standing collar of graduated width. Yoke and collar are made of a lace-like fabric lined with cream chiffon.

The one-piece, three-quarter length sleeves are gathered along the sleeve seam and into the armscye and feature a two inch wide dart on the outside running the sleeve length tapering to a point above the separate, turned-back cuffs.

The skirt fastens at center back with hidden hooks/eyes and snap; unlined. Constructed with a narrow waistband, center front panel, side panels and two back panels with an added flounce at sides and back only in a graduated width of three and three-quarters inches at the sides to sixteen and three-quarters inches at center back. Arranged in series of pleats extending down from the waist and released above the flounce. Pleats and waistline darts are hand sewn.

Bodice yoke and skirt flounce are outlined with thick piping of light grey silk plush. The cuffs are also outlined with the plush. The collar is outlined with blue/green velvet ribbon. Yoke is trimmed with four handmade tabs of jap silk decorated with polychrome silk and

metal thread. The front opening is outlined with appliqued bands of braided chiffon. Extending down from the dropped shoulder seams over the bust area are wide, self-fabric bands decorated with appliqued medallions of handmade tape lace. This same lace is also used as trim at the back collar and over the shoulder area creating an epaulet effect.

Bodice and skirt can be fastened together at center back with hidden hook/eye.

Collection of Department of Human Environment and Design,  
College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University, East Lansing,  
Michigan. Catalogue Number: 1-6-30-50 #24.

Jacket, Probably Part of an Afternoon  
Suit, 1903-1906

Printed label on inner waistband, "Towne, Lansing, Mich."

Dull black silk taffeta, interlined with white cotton and lined with cream silk.

Cut with a two-piece front; one-piece back; round neckline with V-shape front; gathered, full-length, two-piece sleeves and softly gathered waistband that fits slightly above waist at center back and tapers from a width of one and three-quarters inches to a width of six inches at center front ending in a deep point. Above the center front waistband the bodice forms the fashionable Edwardian pouch. The fullness of the bodice is arranged in a series of one inch wide box pleats. The box pleats are repeated with a variation in the sleeves which were constructed with a gored panel at the underarm that is gathered into the seams connected to a panel of four box pleats which were opened to form flattened loops that begin at the lower sleeve edge and run halfway up where they are released to form a puff at the sleeve top. The center front opening folds over creating extensions and panels over the shoulders.

Trimmed with self-fabric, applied ruching; embroidered herringbone stitching and ready-made appliques with floral motifs and polychrome threads.

Fastens at center front with hidden hooks/eyes. Probably worn with a matching self-fabric skirt and a light colored, fitted, boned bodice with standing collar.

Collection of the Michigan Historical Museum, History Division,  
Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: 7266.

Bonnet, 1880-1885

Printed label fitted inside of crown, "C. H. Sutliff, Opera Block, Lansing, Mich."

Flat crown with wide, open brim of natural-colored, one-eighth inch wide plaited straw machine stitched together. Handmade lining of a white sateen.

Inner edge of brim is lined with band of brown velvet. The entire outer edge of brim is outlined with a twisted band of plaited straw with pairs of pressed glass, bronze lustre beads sewn in the open spaces around the front edge only. Brim is decorated with fabric flowers and a lace-like fabric.

Ties with dark red satin ribbon which was sewn in part along the lower edge.

Collection of Michigan Historical Museum, History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: SM-1187-75.

Bonnet, 1882-1885

Printed label fitted inside of crown, "Mrs. A. R. Abels, Lansing, Mich."

Flat crown with wide, open brim of black buckram interlining and dark brown velvet outer fabric. Handmade lining of black sateen. Velvet is arranged in soft folds over the crown.

Inner edge of brim has black satin lining with strip of dark blue velvet. At top of the brim and along one side is an arrangement of a black silk and cotton fabric with a woven diamond pattern. A black satin ruffle is stiffened with wire. Lower edge is finished with black grosgrain ribbon having satin edges that is formed into a bow at center back. Extending out from the bow along the lower edge are the ties of matching ribbon in a slightly narrower width.

Collection of Michigan Historical Museum, History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: SM-218-80.

Bonnet, 1885-1889

Printed label fitted inside of crown, "Mrs. A. R. Abels, Lansing, Mich."

Flat crown with wide brim of natural-colored straw, two-ply, twisted in a fancy openwork pattern. The bands of openwork straw are handsewn together to form the bonnet shape. Has interlining of black buckram and perhaps a wire or heavy fabric to support outer edge of brim. Handmade lining of black sateen.

Inner edge of brim is trimmed with black machine-made lace. Outer edge of brim is faced with a narrow band of black, plainweave cotton. Over this fabric is stitched a band of the two-ply straw in a scalloped pattern, which appears to have been crocheted. Stitched to top of brim and off to one side is an arrangement of bows in two different materials. One being a black silk or cotton leno weave fabric and the other being taffeta ribbon in cream with a black windowpane check pattern edged with a black pinstripe and cream picots. The ties are of black taffeta ribbon with satin edges folded and sewn along the lower edge of bonnet.

Collection of Michigan Historical Museum, History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: SM-252-77.

Bonnet, 1885-1889

Printed label fitted inside of crown, "Mrs. A. R. Abels, Lansing, Mich."

Crown is curved across lower edge with a wide brim that is slightly pointed over center front. Interlined with black buckram and lined with black sateen. Outer fabric is of a dark navy blue (almost black) velvet.

Velvet is fitted over the crown with two vertical tucks. At the outer edge of brim the velvet has a corded band (not applied) in a graduated width of one inch at the sides to two inches at center front. Behind the band the velvet forms tapered extensions with the widest portions at the center front. The extensions are wing-like and stand away from the brim at center front. The extensions are lined with cream moiré taffeta. Behind the extensions is an elaborate bow arrangement of cream grosgrain ribbon and black moiré taffeta ribbon with satin edges. Lower edge of bonnet is faced with a folded, bias band of self fabric which extends to form short ties.

Collection of Department of Human Environment and Design, College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: 1-6-26-47 #11.



Hat, 1892-1895

No maker's label. Handwritten, anonymous note pinned to lining reads, "Worn 1892, trimmed by Mrs. Dillingham, fashionable milliner, Lansing, Mich."

The high, narrow tapered crown is made of dull, dark purple straw in alternating bands of plaiting and fancy herringbone pattern with the oval-shaped, upturned brim made only in the plaited bands; machine sewn. Partially lined with black sateen.

Inner edge of brim is outlined with bias band of dark purple velvet. Outer edge of brim has applied, ready-made band of passementerie (black glass beads and faceted ornaments with cording). At center front are several bows of black grosgrain ribbon with satin edges which stand up against the high crown. At center back the same ribbon is arranged in several small, tightly gathered bows that lay flat at base of crown.

Collection of Department of Human Environment and Design, College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: 1-6-29-47 #5.

Bonnet, 1896-1899

Printed label fitted to inside of crown, "B. Stebbins, Wholesale & Retail Millinery, Lansing, Mich."

Crown is a slightly curved, kidney-shape with no brim, made of coarsely-woven natural and cream straw; lined with cream sateen.

Outer edge of crown is faced with a narrow band of grey velvet. Center back is trimmed with a double bow of pale grey taffeta ribbon and fabric flowers of grey satin with green cotton leaves. Both sides of crown are trimmed with poufs of shirred, grey chiffon. The short ties are made of narrow, folded bands of grey taffeta which extend out from the bow at center back and follow the lower edge.

Collection of Michigan Historical Museum, History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: 6143.

Toque, 1896-1899

Printed label fitted to inside of crown, "B. Stebbins, Wholesale & Retail Millinery, Lansing, Mich."

The brimless hat has a small, rounded crown which curves across the lower edge; white buckram interlining and white sateen lining.

Outer fabric is of medium grey velvet with a center back panel of figured silk in dark grey and white with a light grey background. Attached across the back of crown is an upright, ruffled rim of grey velvet, probably stiffened with buckram.

The ruffled rim is edged with a twisted band of grey silk cording and chenille, stiffened with wire. Across front of crown is a folded, light grey taffeta ribbon intertwined with the cord and chenille band and arranged in a bow on left side. Lower edge is outlined with dark purple velvet ribbon tied in a bow at center back. On either side of bow is an arrangement of dark and light purple silk violets with light green cotton stems and leaves.

Collection of Michigan Historical Museum, History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan. Catalogue Number: 6143.

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