Women in Overalls

By Beth Lau

The History Center’s collection includes several volumes of Shop Notes, a bi-weekly newsletter put out by employees of the Showers Brothers Furniture Factory in the early twentieth century. The volume for 1918 features a number of articles that reflect the opportunities and controversy that arose when women were hired to replace the men who had left to fight in France during World War I.

One article, with the title “The Woman Versus the Factory,” by L. M. Wilson (9 February 1918), begins by stating that “Female help in wood working factories is in its infancy” and at present is still in an “experimental stage.” The practice of hiring women to do what was formerly considered men’s work, Wilson explains, has had its supporters and skeptics, with the latter “doubt[ing] the feasibility of employing female labor in a furniture factory.” The results so far Wilson labels “satisfactory,” but the main point of his article is to identify what he sees as a key problem with the women’s presence.

That problem is the male employees’ “sympathizing attitude,” which they are counseled to “guard against.” Apparently the men were too prone to help the women learning their new jobs. Although “it is perfectly right to lend assistance to anyone either man or woman,” Wilson concedes, “yet we must be sure that the help is really necessary, and not prompted by a sympathetic attitude.” He insists that the women must be held to the same expectations as male employees, and they will not “continue to improve and be of still greater value to us” if their male co-workers keep assisting them. Although the article is addressed to the male employees and indicates that their misplaced sense of chivalry is the source of problems, the title, “The Woman Versus the Factory,” suggests that the women themselves are a disruptive, even adversarial force. Clearly male workers were having to adjust to the novel presence of women among them and to rethink their assumptions about gender roles and relationships.
The title of an article in the next issue of Shop Notes (23 February 1918)—“Girls Clad in Overalls Make Pleasing Picture”—indicates its more positive response to the female employees at Showers Brothers. A group of visitors had recently toured the factory, one of whom was “a young lady who attends Indiana University and who is on the staff of the Daily Student, the University newspaper” (her name is not given). “These visitors,” the article states, “were particularly impressed by the sight of the girls in our plant who, clad in overalls, are doing the work of the men who have joined the colors.” The IU student’s remarks in the Daily Student are then quoted. “Who says women aren’t equal to men?” is her spirited opening sentence. “Anyone doubting this has only to go through Showers’ furniture factory and he will quickly change his opinion … Right here in our own town we have women in overalls taking the place of men, doing heavy work in Showers’ factory … It just takes something like war to make everyone realize that women are useful as well as ornamental.” The women have “adopted the custom of wearing overalls” because “skirts are an impediment as well as a danger around the machinery,” but for this reporter, “Without seeing these girls thus attired few can imagine what an attractive sight they make.”

Not everyone in town, however, considered the women clad in overalls “an attractive sight.” As reported in the 27 July 1918 issue of Shop Notes, controversy erupted when the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) objected to “the wearing of overalls by women working in factories.” The subject was addressed at a City Council meeting on July 23, where a crowd of Showers employees and townspeople showed up to support the women in their nontraditional attire. The W.C.T.U. had already learned that their views were in the minority and sent a letter stating that “they had decided to withdraw from the discussion.” Mayor Weaver, presiding over the meeting, nonetheless invited others to speak to the issue, and both W. E. Showers, owner of the factory, and Superintendent Charles Sears, praised the women for “com[ing] to the rescue at this time when men were going to the front and industries had found it imperative to use women [sic] labor.” Councilman William Graham called for a vote of the City Council, “which was responded to unanimously.” The article concludes that everyone left the meeting “feeling much better and happier for the excellent and high-minded way in which the council and people in general in Bloomington, looked toward the girls in overalls.”

The same issue, a few pages later, features an opinion piece on this same subject by Isaac Bault, presumably written before the decisive City Council meeting. Bault castigates the “few unpatriotic and narrow-minded women in this community, who blinded by a sense of imaginary modesty” have “add[ed] more to burdens which the working women of our country are already bearing” by criticizing their clothing. “It must be remembered that necessity forced the donning of the overalls,” Bault explains, and not all women employees have positions that allow them to wear stylish skirts and blouses. “Why, then,” he asks, “further humiliate or put on the defensive the women who are making a great sacrifice” so that their “men folks may unhampered fight to make this world safe for Democracy and Freedom. Women in overalls today, by sacrificing on the altar of patriotism and necessity puritanical ideas, false modesty and pride, have made it possible for us to keep the wheels of industry moving.” “The woman in overalls is fighting the Kaiser,” concludes Bault’s lofty defense, and her fellow workers “honor and respect her.”

These articles reflect a variety of responses to the women working at the Showers Brothers factory in 1918. Male coworkers had to overcome their impulse to assist those they had been taught to consider “the weaker sex” and treat them as capable fellow employees. The W.C.T.U., upholder of traditional values and gender roles, objected to the women wearing unfeminine clothing. Although the Showers executives and employees supported the women’s right to work and wear overalls, they did so on the grounds that the women were thereby aiding the war effort and nobly sacrificing their preference for fashionable dress. It is only the young IU student who found the overall-clad female employees attractive and inspiring as a sign of women’s ability to accomplish more than restrictive gender roles had previously allowed them. For the Daily Student reporter and perhaps aspiring journalist, these working women were demonstrating not so much their patriotism during a temporary crisis as their inherent and hitherto unacknowledged competence.

Notes

Stanford Baptist Church in Van Buren Township

By Penelope Mathiesen

In the late 1830s, the village of Stanford was established in Monroe County’s Van Buren Township near the Greene County line. Sources state that it was laid out by Hardin Tarkington in 1838.  

Monroe County deed records contain a property transfer to him from William and Nancy King on 9 November 1837 followed by a plat map labeled “Stanford” that is dated “January 29, 1838, H. A. Tarkington property.”

Hardin A. Tarkington was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on 30 November 1802, the fifth child of Jesse Tarkington (1767–1854) and Mary Tarkington (1773–1859). In 1815, the family left Tennessee for the Territory of Indiana, settling along the White River in what later became Edwardsport. In 1816, a land sale was held in Vincennes, and Jesse bought a quarter section west of where Stanford was later located. The family, which grew to include 12 children, moved to Monroe County in 1817. Jesse and Mary both died at the homestead near Stanford and were buried in Keller Cemetery.

Hardin’s older brother, Joseph, became a Methodist traveling preacher (and is also known as the grandfather of author Booth Tarkington). Hardin may have followed in his brother’s footsteps. He seems to have left home at an early age and, except for the land transaction, spent most of his life outside of Monroe County. Methodist Church records place him in Peoria, New York, in 1828. Subsequent records show him in the Indiana counties of Tippecanoe (1831) and Howard (1851). The 1860, 1870, and 1880 U.S. censuses list him in Shelby County, Iowa. His occupation is given as “minister” in the 1870 U.S. census and “Methodist minister” in 1880. He died in Shelby County on 1 September 1884.

Despite the Methodist connections of the Tarkington family, it was the Baptist faith that flourished at Stanford. In the 1840s, a class organized by the United Baptists grew and thrived. A Baptist church, initially called Bethany Church, was established at Stanford on 22 September 1849. “The congregation held meetings in various neighborhood homes before their house of worship was built.” By 1850, “there was an established place of meeting, proof being found in minutes of February of that year, when a motion was made to inclose [sic] the building with a plank fence.” In September 1851, the name was changed to Stanford Baptist Church. A new frame building measuring 34 x 44 feet was completed on 16 September 1854 at a cost of $590.

In 1853, about the time the church was built, 42 lots were added to Stanford’s original plan. By 1883, Stanford was home to 75 or more inhabitants. In 1885, it was described as “a pleasant little village, situated on a hill.” It contained about 96 inhabitants, a store-house, blacksmith shop, milliner’s shop, hotel, two-room school house, and Baptist church—but no saloon.

“In 1938–39 extensive improvements were made to the church building with the addition of a basement and front entrance. Stained glass windows were gifts of the Dr. J. E. Moser family (Mrs. Moser had been church organist for 20 years)” and other members. The church celebrated its 100th anniversary in September 1949. An educational building was added in 1961 and a new parsonage in 1964.

In 1968, the “church was lowered to make way for a modern building.” The 125th anniversary was celebrated in 1974 and the 150th in 1999. Still active today, the Stanford Baptist Church is located about nine miles west of Bloomington, just south of SR-45 at 8918 West Hinds Road.

Notes


(Notes continued on page 5.)
Remembering

Harold Bond served in the Marine Corps and enjoyed traveling, cooking, and gardening, as well as mentoring international students at Indiana University.

Mark David Brown was Deputy Budget Director for the State of Indiana. He enjoyed golfing and spending time with his pets and his family.

Virginia Fowler was a fast walker and a fast driver, and others had a difficult time keeping up with her. Her love of locomotion inspired her to start RCA travelers, planning group trips to exotic locations, including New Zealand and Australia.

Mary Patterson Livingston was a published historical writer who had a passion for genealogical research and traveling around the world with her husband, Julian.

Sandy Strain kept active as a member of many groups and organizations, including the IU Varsity Club, the Clover Hill Cemetery board, and the Harrisburg Heritage Days festival. She worked at Indiana University for over fifty years.

Event: Art Sale
October 1, 2021 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m./October 2, 2021 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Location: Monroe County History Center 202 East Sixth Street
Fantastic art from the Lois Heiser collection and other personal art collections will be on sale, as well as valuable estate jewelry. Artworks include unique pieces by Rudy Pozzatti, a Dali ethograph (limited edition), a Magritte, oils by Paula Bates, and works by Harley Francis. All proceeds support the preservation of the collections, programs, and exhibits of the Monroe County History Center.

Event: MCHC Holiday Bonus Sale Fundraiser
November 6, 2021 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Location: 4015 Profile Parkway, old GE Plant off W. 3rd Street
The largest garage sale in Monroe County opens for a bonus holiday sale! From antiques and household items to holiday decorations and gifts, the warehouse on Profile Parkway is filled with treasures waiting for you. All items are donated from the public and proceeds of the Holiday Bonus Sale fundraiser support the preservation of the collections, programs, and exhibits of the Monroe County History Center.
A Note from the Director

By Daniel Schlegel, Jr.

Hello, everyone. It’s been a pleasure to meet so many of our volunteers and members over the last two months. I hope to continue to meet and get to know many more in the upcoming weeks and months. For anyone that doesn’t know, my name is Daniel Schlegel and I am the new director at the History Center. I grew up three hours east of here in Ohio, but took a long route to Bloomington, with stops in Texas and Colorado along the way.

Museums have always been a passion of mine. In Ohio, I worked at an outdoor 65 acre museum. While there I ran a 1930s era print shop, dressed in costume as a War of 1812 soldier, and rode a high wheel bike, among many other interesting tasks. In Texas, I spent time as the director of a county museum where we created a wide range of exhibits, opened an arthouse, and welcomed the public in record numbers. Most recently in Colorado I worked at a geology museum as the Operations Director. Although I loved the outdoor space in Colorado, my heart is in history. When this opportunity presented itself, I threw my hat in the ring.

This is an amazing place filled with so many people with great stories, big hearts, and fun personalities. Learning about the history of Monroe County has kept me quite busy and I’m having a lot of fun meeting so many people and finding out about their interests.

I’ve enjoyed learning so much about Monroe County and the amazing history here, both the history with people and the geologic history, as well. The people have been so welcoming and wonderful. The History Center is a great place to spend some time and learn things, so if you have not stopped by recently, please take some time to attend an event here, check out the new exhibits on display and do some shopping in our Museum Store. Don’t be a stranger, stop by today!

Collections Corner

The Collections department has on-boarded two new IU student interns, Rachel Bayler and Stella Winterman, who will be helping Hilary process donations, rehouse artifacts, and update databases. They will also be working on several blog posts, so keep an eye on the History Center’s blog for interesting spotlights on collections artifacts.

The collection is never complete and we are always adding wonderful items that help our exhibits tell the story of Monroe County’s history. We are looking to add artifacts that relate to our African-American community — people, places, events, socials, families, objects, etc. We are actively working to make our collections and exhibits reflect the diverse community that is Monroe County. If you think you might have something to donate, please contact Collection Manager Hilary Fleck at collection@monroehistory.org or 332-2517 ext. 6.

(Notes from Stanford Baptist Church in Van Buren Township, continued from page 2.)

Volunteer Spotlight

**Luann Dillon** began volunteering at an interesting time! Following her retirement from the Monroe County Public Library in 2019, she made the decision to volunteer across the street at the History Center in February 2020. Luann is currently editing our early deed index so it provides more information than when it was first indexed many years ago while also making it uniform with our current indexing format. Her decades-long tenure at the MCPL as a genealogy librarian makes her incredibly useful as she quickly can recall all sorts of information and resources that others don’t know about or that would take 30 minutes to find. In her free time, Luann is a member of the Bloomington Quilters Guild and has been quilting for over 40 years.

Education Updates

By Andrea Hadsell

The fall would not be complete without the Dearly Departed Cemetery Tours of Rose Hill. Thanks to our partnership with the City of Bloomington’s Parks and Recreation department, ticket holders can hear some of the unknown stories of those buried in the cemetery. It is bound to be a spook-tacularly good time!

November is full to the brim with things to do at the History Center. Resilience Productions is creating a special event for the Center on the traditions of soul food on November 13 and 14. And on the following week, our Genealogy Conference returns after its hiatus last year. Our traditional Canopy of Lights Open House is scheduled for November 26. We are working diligently to ensure that this downtown holiday tradition returns in some capacity while keeping all of our visitors, volunteers, and staff safe.

For more information on upcoming programs, be sure to follow our website and social media.

News from the Library

library@monroehistory.org

Compiled by Megan MacDonald and Penelope Mathiesen

New in the Library


Eller Family Descendants

The Eller Family Association (www.ellerfamilyassociation.com) will hold its next Biennial Conference in Monroe County. Many in the association trace their family back to John Eller (1786–1840), who established the “Eller Farm” about 1832 in the area where the Monroe County Airport is now located. Here with his wife, Susan, they raised eleven children. John and his son Frances Asbury Eller were Methodist ministers. Conference planners are trying to locate any descendants now in the area. If that’s you, please contact Harvey Powers (harv@harveypowers.com).
Current Exhibits

RECHTER GALLERY: Monroe: A County of Cultures

*June 25-January 8th, 2022*

The Monroe County History Center is excited to display close to forty objects on loan from the Evansville Museum of Art, History, and Science. Representing centuries and communities from all over the globe, *Monroe: A County of Cultures* aims to show how organizations, institutions, and other groups practice and infuse varying ways of life into the fabric we all call home.

BROWN GALLERY: Transportation in Monroe County

For the past 200 years, the import and export of raw materials, finished goods, and people has been a challenge for those living in Monroe County. Exhibits in the Brown Gallery tell the story of how Monroe County continued to grow despite obstacles presented by hilly terrain and a region without a major water source. The ongoing theme of the exhibits in the Brown Gallery will be transportation in Monroe County with changing artifacts throughout the year. Come check out the newest exhibit on Ralph Rogers and the Rogers Group.

HILL GALLERY: Annual Holiday Exhibition: Antique Toys and Crafts

*November 6, 2021-January 2022*

Before the days of big box and department stores, many families created their own crafts to give as holiday gifts and use as decorations. If you were lucky, you could go into town and purchase a fancy toy car or doll. See what Monroe County kids were able to make and dreamt of opening up Christmas Day!

(Photo—Public Service Company of Indiana Holiday Window Display, 1949. Courtesy Mary Ellen Haller.)

DECKARD EDUCATION ROOM: See Her Run

Through research gathered from Monroe County Election Records, the exhibit, *See Her Run: Monroe County Women in Politics*, highlights the remarkable Monroe County women who have run for public office. The exhibit features artifacts, documents, and photographs from the museum collection that trace the difficult defeats and historic victories of women in local politics. Sponsored by the SCI REMC Operation Round Up program.

COMMUNITY VOICES CASE:

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is celebrating their 200th anniversary with a display in our Community Voices Case in the Deckard Education Room. Check out their display from October 1st to November 30th and learn about one of the oldest congregations in our community.
Monroe County Historical Society’s
Monroe County Historian
October/November 2021
Vol. 2021, Issue 5

Society established 1905
Museum established 1980

For subscription information contact
the Monroe County History Center
at 812-332-2517, or visit
www.monroehistory.org

Monroe County History Center Membership Form

Collection Spotlight

Postcard depicting the Monon Railroad engine “The Thoroughbred,” ca. 1930. See more postcards from our collection in our online “miniature collection” on our website, under the “Explore the Collection” tab.

Monroe County History Center Membership Form

Annual Membership Levels

☐ Student $10
☐ Teacher $20
☐ Individual $40
☐ Family/Grandparents $50
☐ Supporter $100
☐ Benefactor $250
☐ Patron $500
☐ Sponsor $1000
☐ Sustaining membership beginning at $5 a month

Check if you are interested in:
☐ Volunteer Information

Renew and donate online at:
http://monroehistory.org/join-and-give

Or Send form to:
Monroe County History Center
202 East Sixth Street
Bloomington, IN 47408

Name (please print):
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