

"The Pageant of Shawls"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Providing the clothing and other household textiles for the family was traditionally a task of women. Not surprisingly, women preserved important items of dress and passed them down through female decedents. For this reason, nearly all of the textile items in the Historical Society's collection were donated by women.

The importance of costume was recognized by one of the Historical Society's earliest events, "The Pageant of Shawls" held on November 28, 1941. This newspaper carried a lengthy article about the event, part of which is reproduced below.

In the presence of state dignitaries and officials of local organizations as well as friends from far and near of the Carroll County Historical Society and of the William Winchester Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Pageant of Shawls was presented on Friday afternoon at the Historical House. When Mrs. J. Pearre Wantz, regent of the chapter, started to announce the program, the guests were seated in the three large rooms down stairs, in the hall and in every available space upstairs.

The Pageant opened with the signing of "My Ould Plaid Shall," by Mrs. Davis H. Taylor, daughter of Mrs. Wantz, who wore a plaid shawl of generous proportions belonging to Mrs. Mary Zollickoffer Keener, great-grandmother of Mr. John L. Reifsnider, Jr. Mrs. Taylor was accompanied by Mrs. Harry M. Kimmey. As a prologue to the pageant, Mrs. Wantz gave a most interesting history of the origin of shawls and of their part in the realm of fashion. In her research, she found the first mention of shawls in the reign of the Emperor Jelah-eddin Mohammed Akbar, in 1556, the word being of Persian origin. She told how the famous Kashmir shawls were made from goats' soft wool. Mrs. Wantz announced the names of the models, as they came down the stately stairway of the Shellman mansion, and told interesting bits of information about their costumes and the shawls they wore. Each model walked through the rooms of the house, displaying their costumes to all present.

The first was Mrs. Robert M. Unger, wearing a Paisley dress made with a tight fitting basque and three flounces, belonging to Mrs. Charles O. Clemson. This dress of the period of about 1845, came from the Laveille house in Calvert county. Mrs. Unger wore a shawl, belonging to the Shower family of Manchester, the family of Mr. Unger. This old shawl came from India many years ago in a Clipper ship, and is made in small pieces, the trade mark being in the center. Next came Mrs. John R. Woodward, wearing her grandmother Breckinridge's dress, 1896, created by Madame George, a famous dressmaker of Baltimore, and Ring shawl of India white silk embroidered, which has been in the family of Mrs. Woodward's mother, Mrs. Robert La Porte, for 150 years. These were called "ring" shawls because the silk before being embroidered will pass through a wedding ring, so fine and soft is its texture. The third attractive model was Mrs. R. E. Lee Hutchins, Jr., wearing a dress from Mrs. La Porte's trousseau of 1900 and a Kashmire shawl loaned by Mrs. Clara Billingslea. This is a particularly fine one and was bought by the late Mrs. William P. Maulsby years ago. Another interesting costume was that worn by Miss Sarah Jane Rice and belonging to Miss Byrd Belt's mother, it having been worn to many functions, including a costume ball at the White House. Miss Belt, Chevy Chase, Md., is State Historian for the D.A.R. The Paisley shawl worn is alike on both sides and was the shawl of Mrs. Luke Ensor, grandmother of Mr. Edgar G. Barnes. Miss Katherine Little's dress was a quaint one belonging to Miss Annie Baust. The Shawl belongs to Mrs. Nellie Dice and was bought from a traveling salesman whose visits in the country

seventy-five years ago were great events. The next appearance was Miss Betty Linton Smith, great-great-grandmother of Gen. Mordecai Gist, gowned in a taffeta dress of trousseau of Mrs. William Chritzman, Gettysburg, in 1855. The richness of the Paisley shawl was enhanced by the plainness of the dress. The shawl belonged to Mrs A. Earl Shipley's grandmother, Mrs. Bellamy. The shawl pin was always worn by Mrs. Bellamy and has her father's picture in it. He was Jabez Bellamy, of Sheffield, England. Mrs Roland Shipley modeled a Broche shawl presented to the Historical Society by Mrs. Carroll Stouch, worn by Mrs. Stouch's grandmother, Mrs. Elizabeth Lawyer Warehime. One of the dresses that has a historical background, having been worn to a reception given to Lafayette in 1824, was worn by Miss Lottie Lee Geiman and over it a black lace shawl belonging to Mrs. Frank Cunningham. One of the most outstanding episodes of the Pageant was the presentation of a shawl sent from Texas especially for this event by the Rev. Paul Reese and Mrs. Reese, which was the property of Catherine Jones Shellman, wife of Col. James M. Shellman, mother of Miss Mary Shellman and former occupant of the Historical House. This was modeled by Miss Betty Billingslea, and again the shawl was paraded through the rooms familiar with its presence for over a hundred years.

The remainder of the article described the outfits worn by several other women in the program. A lone man, Burrier Cookson modeled a shawl worn by a man in the nineteenth century. The event was attended by nearly 200 people and proceeds of the event went to the cosponsoring organizations. Unfortunately, it would be several years before any more historical programs were held in the Shellman House. Less than two weeks after the program, the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into World War II. The members of the fledgling Historical Society turned their attention to more serious matters for the duration of the war.

Photo Caption: The cast of "The Pageant of Shawls" cosponsored by the Historical Society and the William Winchester Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution in November 1941. The lone man was Burrier Cookson who "received an ovation as he came down the stairs demonstrating how the men of the last century wore a shawl, his being that of the late Amos Wampler, and loaned by a daughter, Mrs. Herbert L. Corbin." Photograph by John Byers, Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.