

Lancaster County Historical Society
Oral History Project

Interviewee: Miss Yetta Sachs
Interviewer: Mrs. James Wilson
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Ms. Wilson: Now this is the year 1975. The mode of dresses becomes so casual that many young women's wardrobes contain few if any outfits other than jeans, tight polo shirts, or sweaters. Indeed many mature women have become addicted to pantsuits or to slacks and top combinations; in lieu suits or dresses. We must wonder what's become of the ladylike look of when we observe the youth of today and actually find ourselves wondering if they are male or female. Lancaster was fortunate to have for many years an establishment devoted to completely furnishing, discriminating young and mature women with tasteful, well coordinated clothing. We are fortunate to be able to ask the sister of the owner in this regrettably closed shop to tell us about the lady's fashions of years gone by. This is Mrs. James Wilson interviewing a charming lady, Miss Yetta Sachs of Mary Sachs.

Ms. Wilson: Miss Yetta, please tell us about the days when there was no question that the clothes made the woman?

Yetta: Ms. Wilson, I'll go back to my earliest entrance into this field of work. It was such a privilege when my sister asked me if I would come to Lancaster and I commuted for many years from Harrisburg to Lancaster and we merchandised everything from our Harrisburg store for Lancaster. And then she took me to Paris, that was in the early '20's and she took me to Madame [cadell] for corset, that is the undergarment and in Paris everything is charged to your hotel room you don't pay these houses and then you pay the hotel. When the package came, I opened it and saw what the corsets cost and I was stunned. Well, my sister said to me you gotta let this be one of your lessons in merchandizing and being well dressed. Unless a woman is properly dressed underneath, no matter what you sell her, or she wears she is not properly dressed. It's your foundation garment and I want you to know that Madame [Cazell] was the first one to make undergarments without any stays and for your information I've never worn a stay since.

This is a one of the foundations of being well dressed and for the woman who's traveling and they used to come in the store and they're going to Europe and they would buy a complete wardrobe and I would always say to them, "Why buy a new wardrobe for Europe buy a new wardrobe and hang it in your closet so when you get back and you're old, things are worn out then you put you're new ones on because when you're traveling in Europe, you have a well rounded wardrobe, you don't need new clothes. You only need new clothes for the people at home see you and for heavens sakes, don't buy any dated clothes we never sold dated clothes.

My sister taught me when I went into the market to never buy what the manufacturer decides that your clients are going to wear, you decide. You know your customers and you know your community and every community uh, basically is alike as far as the well-dressed woman is concerned. The woman that wears a good camel's hair coat and when it's worn out, she replaces it. But the woman that says oh I don't want a camel's hair coat I just finished it she'll never be well dressed. Cause she's hunting for dated clothes. When I say dated clothes, I mean buy basic, good things and don't have to buy a coat every year. If you can't wear a coat four or five years it was wrong the day you bought it; likewise with a suit, likewise with a dress. Don't you fall for the manufacturers who change their lines to make new wardrobes, to sell more to the merchants. And we ladies have to know that, fill in what you need. If you need a couple new dresses and your dress of last season needs shortening or lengthening or cleaning or let out or taken in, don't throw it away. You see dressing from a man's point of view, men like women that look effeminate and I'm going to just stop here for a minute and tell you a story.

A woman goes in and buys a very expensive bag and she has her coin purse and her key ring and her papers and all of the stuff in her bag that she thinks is elegant and then she opens up her bag to get a tissue out which is nothing more than toilet paper, where is the woman that always wore a handkerchief? Now, (I always), and I was at an affair the other night and the women were beautifully dressed but one woman I was standing talking to had a sneeze and she took a piece of tissue out and I was so embarrassed for her. In Lancaster the women used to dress at home. They dressed at home for dinner, they dressed for each other they had parties in their home there was a wonderful, um thing that happened here at Iris Club which is a local uh wonderful uh club women's club and it was called [Clio] and the women dressed and they met once a week (I think on a Friday) once a week (on Friday) once a week and the men dressed as well as the women and I knew that we had a certain clientele that I had to be, that we had to be prepared for dinner clothes for them to wear to Clio.

We have done a lot of beautiful weddings in this community and I love the day when the bride and the mother came in and they sat down and there was a whole discussion and the plan was drawn. Many a wedding in the City of Lancaster that the Mary Sachs Shop took care of. Some of them came from Paris direct. I know of several, I know of one wedding in particular where the flowers even, they used artificial flowers it was the first time that artificial flowers were ever used and they came from a pla- a house in Paris and um, we used them and the dresses were made with the same color as the flowers. But that day is over. People don't spend that kind of money, they want things that they can throw away and I like the word tradition that a bride can wear her wedding dress and her daughter can wear her wedding dress and her granddaughter can wear the same dress.

I once lost a very big wedding in the city of Lancaster because the bride wanted to wear a dress above her knees and I said, "I like the word tradition, wear a simple dress with a little string of pearls and a plain simple veil and then you'll always look elegant." Well, we lost the wedding and I went to her wedding and it was the ugliest wedding I've ever seen.

I still think that women wear their clothes too short, I don't care what Vogue or Harper's, know yourself. The ugliest part of a woman is her knees and her elbows, and they should be always covered. A woman should wear her clothes at least three inches below her knees. Nothing is more, that's when dressing from man's point of view, that's what Ben like, he likes effeminate women, he doesn't want to sit in a room and see a woman exposed nor does he want to see his wife look like that. And I don't approve, of people wearing pants 'cause the wrong women wear them. Most of them don't wear girdle underneath and that's most important. And to see people come to a wedding in a slack suit or go to church in pants if I was a minister, I would ask them to leave. Of course, I'm not a minister I'm just a merchant, ex-merchant and this is just my opinion. But we once wrote an ad we had; all our ads were editorials we never had any prices in the paper we never featured anybody's clothes; it was all the Mary Sachs' clothes.

But we used to dress women to go to market, market in Lancaster is tradition. People used to go to market and then go to lunch and send their marketing home. And every basket was just filled with beautiful flowers and vegetables and all kinds of fruit, and we used to look at each other's baskets to see if we missed something. And, but people don't do that today. Our, I'm ashamed to look at some of the women that I meet going into our market.

And then our beautiful Fulton Opera House, also a tradition. I remember the time that I used to stand on the pavement in front of the Fulton Opera House and the people used to drive up with their cars or their chauffeur and the door man would yell uh, (can I give names), Mrs. Straub, Mrs. Atley, Mrs. Frame, Mrs. Frichey, Mrs. Slaymaker these are, and I could go on with many, many more names in the city of Lancaster but these people dressed to go to the Fulton Opera, you never saw, you saw beautiful hairdo's, you saw beautiful combs in their hair, you saw women wearing evening coats, not a tweed coat or an evening dress, but beautiful velvet and brocaded evening coats. (Should I say anything else?)

In closing I just want to say that it has been my privilege to be in the city of Lancaster and to dress all of these magnificent women and sometimes when I look at some of their children, in their ragged slacks, I wonder what's gonna happen to the next generation. Because women in this generation are losing the art of dressing and there is an art. And ladies if you don't get a compliment from your husband, it's your own fault. And never go shopping with your dearest friend because she'll never tell you the truth. She won't want you to look better than her. And then they'll go home and they'll call on the phone and say you know that green dress that Susie had on, well I would love to have it, the very dress that she told you not to buy she wants. And don't wait for a woman to pay you a compliment she never will. If a man says, "my you look pretty", or "my that's a beautiful dress", or "you look elegant", that's the compliment. It's very seldom another woman will tell another woman how she looks.

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