They Ran To 'Cover' In 1864

Gas Buggies Changed Pace
Set by Godey

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In 1864, fashion chit-chat coming through from the Big Cities to smaller communities concerned itself with Parisian and Italian, Japanese and Oriental, advertising patterns for made-in, and trimmings for wrap.

In the millinery departments felt and taffeta (shrimp to us) were the leading colors for trimming. The "Pocahontas" (a native of Virginia) was the top selling in ladies' shoes. And bags were being worth.

Godey's Lady Book was the stylist's bible and not without an eye to practicality. In spring of 1864 it was promoting the lace-knitted petticoat, with wide loops, these handmade garments came, and we quote, "highly recommended for wear under cracks as they cling nicely to the figure for warmth." And we can suppose that Michigan's springs were as capricious then as they are now and the good ladies of Birmingham got out their petticoats and whipped up a few red and white numbers.

THERE WAS GREAT emphasis on "crescent dressing" in those times. None of this just slipping anything. You got out a something—a sweeping skirt—stitched with fluting, a buff apron, hawking costumes heavy enough to sink the ship, a special suffragette for "half-mourning," if there had been a bereavement in the family for 10 years or so before, and, because costume balls were the living rage, everyone was on the lookout for costume new in Greek, Egyptian or Turkish ensembles.

Those were the days when the world would hang around a shop and pick up the paper, as the English say. The girls played at being a "stove" and made a little basting in the evening. There was no television to distract them.

Or they snapped up their balls of cotton and worked on little Miss Sparrow who took in sewing.

THE COVERED-UP look was in, those areas were only for evening wear. The swimsuit would overwhelm the sun worshippers at Oakland Hills as completely as the modern bikini would have given great-grandma an acute case of the vapors.

But before Birmingham was to reach her mid-century mark, there was in the making a mathematical monster that proved to be: 20th Century fashion's most potent influence.

The girls needed shorter skirts to begin themselves into the motor car. No horseless carriages could (or can to this day) take three hoop-skirted girls in the back seat. Skirts became narrower and started their climb up midway.

Vails that were woven of fashion became solid protection for Nellie's whole hat, not just the bird thereon. And whoever needed a duster when Dobbie was doing the work.

The Henry Fords and Walter Chrysler did what Snobes and Done up and down never was done; there was no revolution in fashion, only evolution.

Uproar Followed Film Fade-Out

Although Birmingham was a growing community by the turn of the century, the village did not get a movie theater until 1913 when the Family Theater was built.

Two Royal family members, Lavender and Miller, decided to erect a modern building on the old Gurneys' property at Woodward and Hamilton streets (then called Mid-

die streets.

At the same time, James F. Winter, corner of the Birmingham Inn, decided to build a theater next to the hotel. Both were ready to be ready in a month.

WOOSTER, however, bought out Lavender and Miller and all the rest of the Pupillo property, which extended north to the corner of Hamilton, and proceeded to build Birmingham's first "movie" theater.

A contest was held to name the new theater and "The Family Theater" was selected. The building stood on the site of the old Birmingham Eccentric at Woodward between Oakland and Han-

nond. Rock was sold for $1 a share.

The theater opened on Feb. 12, 1913. It was completely fire-proof, with an asbestos roof and film bath. The vestibule was decorated in birch wood, while the interior was of black walnut.

Four ventilating fans and six electric fans kept fresh air circulating. A dome, heating plant kept the 260-seat theater warm in winter.

OPENING NIGHT featured a motion picture show, 8-piece orchestra and songs in accompany the film. The theater was open every night and showed week and continuance. Regular admission was 10 cents.

Ray Living played the piano for all performances and Homer Lea-

ker managed the reels. From three to five films were shown nightly. The Family Theater served a long-felt need in the village, but it closed in the early Twenties and Birmingham went until 1929 before film-land returned.

By 1929, Birmingham residents were ready for a modern movie house. But, a controversy arose as to the showing of Sunday movies. It almost led to a "Blue Law!"

MINISTERS of the local church vigorously protested Sunday shows and, when John H. Kunsy, of Kunsy Theatrical Enterprises, agreed to build a $200,000 show, petitions were circulated to resist the construction.

However, due to increased interest, the building was started on March 1, 1929. It replaced the old Whitehead home on the east side of south Woodward.

Scheduled to open in September, construction was halted when the site became one of the hottest in Birmingham's history. Ministers called for a Sunday, "Blue Law!" and Kunsy threatened to leave.

The matter was decided on a ballot in March of 1927 when Bir-

mingham, led by its momentous, decisively defeated the "Blue Law."

THE NEW Kunsy Birmingham opened on March 21, 1929, at a cost of $400,000. Opening night was Woodward, jammed for black tie with actors as 1,500 persons stayed until 11:30 p.m.

Tickets for that first night were an oracle as could be. Birmingham turned out in all the glory for the occasion. The Kunsy Theater is now the present Birmingham Thea-

ter.

Years later, Birmingham had its second "movie picker show" when the Shornfield Theater was built.

Lent His Assistance To Library Group

Through the kindness and assistance of Hugh Irving, local hardware dealer, the Ladies Li-

brary Association in 1891 was able to complete its arrangements for the addition to the old Library Hall which once stood on the cor-

ner of Merrill and Bates streets.

The addition was 16 by 25 feet, and was paid for by money raised from plays, parties and other enter-

prises.

THEIR FIRST show was on the 14th of May, 1964—25 years ago when the Birmingham Zoological—May 14, 1964  Commemorative Centennial Edition—Page 3.