

## PAISLEY SHAWLS NOW HISTORIC TREASURES OF A COMPLETE EPOCH

It is indeed a pleasure to pass on an heirloom to those who not only appreciate art, but who have the art of appreciation for the lovely things in life. That is why the Paisley Shawl in our family was given to Mrs. Kathryn Patty, for through the many younger people she contacts constantly, she will be able to help keep green the memory of the fine old God-fearing men of integrity who beautified living in their day by the perfection of their industry.

There is no record of how this shawl came into the possession of my Grandmother and her Mother who had lived in Virginia and Ohio prior to the Civil War. Our Grandmother was born June 17, 1837, and widowed when about 27 with four children to provide for, my own Mother being a baby in arms when her father, Phillip C. Miller died in Andersonville Prison in the South.

Grandmother, Mrs. Rebecca Heckert Miller, was <sup>a</sup>pioneer of Wood County in Ohio where she operated a 200 acre farm in a rich oil area. People came for miles to see her garden for every flower she ever saw found a home in a huge fence-enclosed plot right beyond the milkhouse. We still have some sage which she grew there.

Known as "Aunt Becky", she was loved and respected far and wide for her devotion to little children. She nursed back to health many a tiny infant whom doctors said could not live. She would ~~encircle~~<sup>this</sup>/warm wrap around her shoulders and drive her horse and buggy many miles sometimes to a sickbed. Holding close each precious child in her loving arms, she used old fashioned herb teas, made from her own farm garden and woods. They hung in dried bunches from the rafters in her storeroom. It seemed as if she always knew which ones to snip off, here and there, and reduce to a powder in the palms of her chubby, busy hands. With the love of life in her very soul, she brought back the glow of health to fever ridden bodies and pale faces, and happiness to many a mother's heart. One of my fondest memories is the day when, as a child, I tiptoed into the room where she rocked a little baby to sleep...both completely encircled with her lovely, warm Paisley shawl.

The shawl she treasured may have originally been a bridal gift as was the universal

custom, or part of her Mother's trossseau. To own such a fine garment in the days of her youth was a mark of distinction. These wardrobe necessities predated the sleeved cloaks of the next generation. The story of these shawls is one of the most thrilling in the history of fabric weaving throughout the ages.

The Paisley shawl industry really originated as an off-shoot of Edinburgh, in Scotland, the pioneer center for British weaving. The small town of Paisley was just a few miles southwest of Glasgow. It was not rich, and not noisy. Around it were flowering leas, and the Bonnie Woods of Craigielea. The town produced artists and poets who "sang amid the shuttles'din...the music of the woods". Its craftsmen were designers, skilled dyers, expert workmen, and unusually fine citizens.

In 1695 there were only 66 weavers in this little town of about 1,129 people. By 1820 it is said that 7,000 looms were operating with many of them being engaged in shawl weaving. Although the finest of the first products were made of goat's wool to make them soft and sheer, the weavers later used silk and cotton.

In making a Paisley shawl, the design was first sketched on plain white paper by the "pattern drawer", and transferred to squared or "point" paper - with lines for warps and wefts. The old weavers made beautiful and perfect reproductions of these designs. It took patience, skill and devotion, and as they worked, they gained intellectual strength, a cultured taste, and a love of beauty in fabrics, in Nature and in song.

The first shawls in Paisley are said to have been made around 1808. The weavers prepared their own patterns, and tied their own "harnesses" and looms. In 1812 the "10 Box Lay" was introduced, a device to allow 5 shuttles to be held in the loom simultaneously, which greatly aided in the making of multicolored patterns.

Later, weavers attempted to make exact copies of Kashmir shawl designs, and sold their products for around 12 pounds in competition to the originals from India which brought from 70 to 100 pounds.

The real Paisley shawl came into being about 1820, and was a blending of Hindu and Arab ideas. The cone was popular in designs - a conventionalized form of a religious symbol originating in Chaldea from whence it spread into India and also into Europe. The

is symbolic  
cone of the date palm of the Creator . It suggests the renewal and communication of  
life. It is venerated in the East and was used in the decorations of Solomon's  
temple.

By 1840, Paisley began to copy French designs in earnest. These garments in the  
final phases of shawl making - 1840 to 1870 - were distinguished by the elongated, mul-  
tiple cone designs running from the edge to the center and leaving only about  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the  
center field plain.

In 1842, five years after she was crowned, Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, purchased  
17 Paisley shawls, one of which she wore to the christening of her infant first-born --  
Edward, who later became King after her death. She also wore a handsome Paisley shawl  
when attending the dedication of a monument on the Isle of Guernsey in memory of her  
late spouse, King Albert. I have heard Frank Terrace who worked with Sam Hill, the  
great builder of good roads in the State of Washington, tell of this event which happened  
when he was a small boy. He stood beside Victor Hugo that day, and never forgot the  
beauty of the Queen's shawl and her "pretty sunbonnet".

During these years, French women were not described as "well dressed" as is the  
fashion today, but as "well draped ladies". The proper drape of a shawl became an  
art to be learned by professional instructesses. Even Princess Josephine needed this  
training for the 3 to 400 shawls she owned, although it is chronicled that many of them  
were used for her gowns, bed quilts and even cushions for her dog ! Napoleon, when  
calling on her, preferring to see her uncovered shoulders, sometimes pulled off the  
shawl and flung it into the fireplace - whereupon she would calmly send to her wardrobe  
for another !

The international shawl trade became extremely complex between 1850 and 1860.  
The French had taken their patterns to Kashmir to be copied by the natives, and the  
French were copying the Persian designs. The Paisley weavers used designs from both  
nations, although they also made beautiful designs of their own/learned from the study  
of their own flora.

It was not until around 1865 that reversible shawls were perfected with a double  
set of warp so the opposite side was complementary to the other. The Franco-Prussian

War (1870-1871) , marked the <sup>2</sup>ec<sub>R</sub>lipse of the shawl as an article of fashion in the West. By 1870 the Kashmir style, originally a mark of exclusiveness and exotic rarity, became "vulgar and mundane" as a result of its popularity among "lower class" circles. The surprising thing is that it took as long as 100 years to reach the general populace.

The manufacture of Harness Shawls ceased altogether in Paisley by 1880. The period of the Paisley Shawl is a complete epoch. Its life history is ended.

It is well that we pause now and then in our busy lives today to hear these stories of the past. The great English essayist, Thomas Badminton Macaulay, once wrote: " He who takes no pride in the accomplishments of remote ancestors and other great men of the past, will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants".

To emulate the example of the famous weavers and artists of Paisley, who developed a high artistic taste and intellectual culture, is a challenge to the present generation. A Paisley shawl, made by artisans more than a century ago, almost SPEAKS, as we today behold its beauty and perfection. This treasured historic relic from a beloved old lady's wardrobe is more than a Paisley shawl....it is a MESSAGE which opens avenues of thought. Each of us who enjoy it has a responsibility to hold high the horizons of accomplishments of the early weavers of dear old Scotland. 100 years from now, what will historians have to say of us ? Wouldn't you like to return and listen ?

So - as Dr. Ernest N. Patty says to the youth of Alaska - "BE BOLD ! There are no bounds to the potential possibilities of accomplishments for a glorious future ! "

We, too, can make a contribution to posterity !

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