

Living History

Melodie Nichols :: Museum Curator

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Flapper Fashion
Some things never change but fashion is not one of them.
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It's always busy at the museum and Melodie Nichols has the scoop.
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"The Way it Was" in Clawson
Deloris Kumler's new book "Clawson: The Way it Was" serves up another slice of our very interesting town.
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The cost of living!
29 cents per pound, \$2.90 per pound... it's all relative.
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Flapper Fashion

Fashion, especially for women, changed rapidly after World War I. In some ways it reflected changes in attitudes, especially among the younger generation. Skirt hems rose, waistlines and bust lines disappeared, fabrics became light, filmy, and occasion-

ally transparent. As the strictures of Victorian clothing were finally unlaced, so too were some of the Victorian ideals that, while rarely achieved, had been upheld as models for behavior and decorum.

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The Baker ladies (and friends) about 1925 who were part of a family that owned one of the first general stores in Clawson.

CLAWSON HISTORICAL MUSEUM PURPOSES AND POLICIES

The Clawson Historical Museum is owned by the City of Clawson. It is governed by a Historical Commission of five members appointed by the Clawson City Council. It is managed by a curator appointed by the City Manager. Its operating budget is funded through the City of Clawson and augmented by generous donations from the Clawson Historical Society.

Museum Purpose *The purpose of the Clawson Historical Museum is to collect, preserve and encourage the use of documents, photographs and artifacts related to the early history of Clawson, from its settlement in 1823 through the present, focusing especially on the decade of the 1920's, when Clawson incorporated as a home rule village.*

Collections Policy *Historical records include those related to area public and civic organizations, such as the Lions Club and the Women's Club, churches, schools and government, as well as personal oral histories of residents, property abstracts, school and business records and thousands of photographs documenting Clawson's buildings, homes, streets and the changes they have undergone through the decades.*

Also included in the collection are maps, almanacs, and contemporary published materials such as local newspapers and news clippings, books, historical research papers, and national magazines and periodicals that reflect the culture of the 1920's.

These materials are available to the public for research on genealogy, property history, environmental investigations and other personal interests. Student research is especially encouraged.



Above, The Baker ladies about 1905. Near right, opposite page, Nellie Blair, 1881.

Flapper Fashion continued

Changes had begun even before the War, with many women choosing to cut their hair short and wear clothing that allowed for freer movement. In 1920, women were able to vote, as well, increasing their expectations of equality and further eroding the "double standard" of behavior. New attitudes, and "modern" morals were seized by many young people, and fashion was but one manifestation of the "modern" lifestyle.

But this freedom also led to freer expression of behavior, as younger women disregarded their parents' moral code to attend unchaperoned dances, speakeasies, and petting parties, where they drank, smoked cigarettes and were freer with their affections than their mothers would like to admit. Zelda Fitzgerald, who is arguably credited with the creation of the flapper, described her antics thus: "She flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure; she covered her face with powder and paint because she didn't need it and she refused to be bored chiefly because she wasn't boring." To the older generation, the behavior of these young "flappers" was worrisome.

By today's standards, the modern woman isn't so shocking—she is among us always, and we accept women who work, wear trousers, and refuse to abide by different rules based on their sex. Why was the "modern" woman, who smoke and drank and showed her knees when she danced so scandalous in the 1920's? The youth of the 1920's had grandparents who were likely born before the American Civil War; their own parents were raised during the Victorian era. A glimpse of stocking-clad ankle had once been titillating; now a bare knee might be seen when the breeze blew, although, contrary to popular belief,

hemlines never climbed above the knee. But the changes that came in the 1920's were dramatic, and they occurred very rapidly.

Compare these photos of Clawson folks from before the Great War to those taken during the 1920's, and you begin to see how quickly styles of dress changed. The trends begun in the early 1920s spread quickly through all generations – even in small towns, photos show evidence of trendy dropped waist dresses, shorter skirts, bobbed hair and bold swimwear, even among those who are not so young!

The stock market crash of 1929 and ensuing Depression take the blame for ending the "party" that was the roaring twenties. Hemlines dropped to several inches below the knee, and hovered there throughout the decade, until fabric shortages during World War II forced them up again. It has even been suggested that in the twentieth century, women's skirts followed the economy's rise and fall.

And what became of the flapper? Articles were written suggesting reasons for her demise, but in actuality, by 1930 she had grown up. F. Scott Fitzgerald had described the flapper as "lovely, expensive, and about nineteen." But no one stays nineteen; quenched of the need to free herself from her parents' old fashioned morals and inhibitions, she found she still desired very conventional things; marriage and a family were foremost among her goals, and eventually she settled down, and became, if not sedate, at least a content modern woman, who in turn would worry about what *her* daughters were wearing on Saturday night.



Curator's letter

Things have been busy here at the museum. Even as the weather continues to bluster and blow, the museum house is snug and comfortable. Good thing too, with all the work that goes on inside these walls!

In January I presented a program to 90 Kenwood Elementary School 4th and 5th graders discussing how land has been used around Clawson through the years. They were intrigued with the photos of familiar Clawson sites, and liked learning about what had previously occupied such sites as the corner where Pizza Hut now stands (a gas station) and even their own neighborhood and school (fields and a few scattered homes.) I think they have a greater appreciation of their city and its history.

With the help of a new volunteer—thank you, Janet—I photographed several museum quilts for an on-line exhibit. I plan to include more on-line exhibits this year for people to enjoy items that are too large or fragile to stay on display. To that end, I will be taking a class on web design beginning in February.

If you have been to the museum, I am sure you have enjoyed the hundreds of photographs on display in the community room. Those displays have been painstakingly maintained by Deloris Kumler for many years, and have provided much information and entertainment for our visitors. However, the paper displays are deteriorating, so we are creating new professionally designed and printed displays. Much of the cost is being offset by the generous donation of Deloris Kumler and the Clawson Historical Society, who have earmarked money from the sale of Deloris' new book, "Clawson, The Way It Was," to the project. Stop by the museum, and take a look at the new displays.

Stop by and visit the museum Wednesdays or Sunday between 1 and 4. If you would like to help with a project or general maintenance, contact me at 248.588.9169, or email at historicalmuseum@cityofclawson.com

Melodie

The high cost of living (in the 1920's)

29 cents a pound seems like a good price for porkchops, until you consider the average monthly salary in 1920 was only about \$100. Lately it seems our income has trouble keeping up with expenses. As you look for ways to trim your budget this year, consider these average statistics from 1920, and compare them to today's income and costs of living.

Annual Income: \$1,236
 Teacher's income: \$976
 Illiteracy rate: 6%
 Unemployment rate: 5.2%
 Gasoline: 22¢ per gallon
 2-bedroom house (with indoor plumbing): \$2,000 and up
 Radio: \$50 and up
 Victrola record player: \$85-\$300
 Kitchen stove: \$59
 Kodak camera: \$6.50
 Electric refrigerator: \$450
 Washing machine: \$125
 Automobile: \$400
 Loaf of bread: 10¢
 Bacon: 47¢ pound
 Coffee: 45-50¢ pound
 Ladies everyday dress: \$15-\$35
 Man's suit: \$25-\$50
 Pair of shoes: \$4-\$5

"Clawson: the Way it Was" has arrived

Deloris Kumler, retired curator of the Clawson Historical Museum has recently completed a new book on Clawson's History that features stories and photos of Clawson from the days of the earliest settlers through the 1970's. Buy your copy at the museum, Clawson Credit Union, City Hall or Leon & Lulu for only \$20. Proceeds from book sales support the Clawson Historical Society.

Excerpt:

"During the latter part of the year (1928) the Village Commission appointed a committee to plan a celebration in commemoration of all the wonderful improvements in Clawson. A contest was held to choose a slogan for the day... some of the slogans were funny or very strange;
 "The town that satisfies"
 "Our tax rate is high, 'cause all people go to Royal Oak to buy"
 "Your slice of earth awaits you in Clawson"
 "The village of smiles"
 "Seven miles from the city's noise, the place to raise your girls and boys"
 The slogan that won was, "Clawson, the Pivot of Progress" Robert Waterland of Broadacre was awarded a \$10 gold piece donated by Herman Hendrickson. This slogan was the winner because, in the opinion of the selection committee, it was "terse, pithy, pointed and pregnant with meaning." After the contest, the village stationery was printed with a map of Clawson in the center and "Pivot of Progress" around the bottom.

The Clawson Historical Museum

Living History

Would you like a sneak peek behind the scenes at the museum? Volunteer!
Volunteers are always welcome and appreciated at the museum.
We have several projects that need assistance, including the following.

- 1) Placing photographs in protective poly sleeves
- 2) Washing windows twice a year
- 3) Tools in the basement need cleaning, and the display needs to be reorganized
- 4) Newspaper archives need to be photocopied
- 5) An electronic version of our accession books needs to be scanned and burned to CD
- 6) Dusting and vacuuming the exhibit rooms
- 7) Docents are needed to give tours one Sunday a month
- 8) Helping to market and promote museum to the community
- 9) Assisting curator with photographing items and creating on-line exhibits
- 10) Transcribing oral histories

If any of these projects seem to fit your area of interest and expertise, grab a friend and come on over to help. You don't need to make a big commitment, just whatever time you wish to donate. If you are interested, contact Melodie Nichols at 248.588.9169 for more information. And also please visit the website at www.cityofclawson.com/museum for the latest Historical Museum news.

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