

Miss Minnie Muse Millinery
By Derric Scott
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By Derric Scott

At the turn of the 20th Century women were relegated to few public job categories. Certainly wife, mother, and caregiver were, by far, the most common jobs they held. However, few and far between, there were successful businesswomen. One almost forgotten career that was widely accepted for women was that of “milliner.” The word Millinery is rarely heard today, but 120 years ago it was in widespread use. Millinery is the design, manufacture, and sale of hats, especially women’s hats in the context of this article. Very often a retail millinery business includes other women’s fashion items as well. With this background, let’s talk about Miss Minnie Muse who was originally from Jemison.

Minnie Muse was born July 26th, 1870 in Alabama. In the 1870 U. S. Census she was living with her family in Perryville, Perry County.

11	10	Muse Thomas	24	20	M	Farmers	407	330	Alabama
		Rebecca	21	19	W	at home			Alabama
		Fanny	3	1	W				Alabama
		Minnie	1	1	W				Alabama

1870 U. S. Census, Perryville, Perry County

However, by 1880 both parents had died and she and her sister are living with their Uncle and Aunt Robert and Mary Wood in Randolph.

255	256	Wood Robert	W	M	49	1	Farmers	Neurologia	11	Alabama	So. Ala.	Perry
		Mary	W	F	34	7	Housewife		11	Alabama	P. Co.	So. Ala.
		Muse Fanny	W	F	12	1	at home		11	Alabama	Ala.	Ala.
		Minnie	W	F	10	1	at home		11	Alabama	Ala.	Ala.

1880 U. S. Census, Randolph, Bibb County

In the 1900 U. S. Census she is living with her aunt Mary “Fanny” Wood Smitherman in Jemison and in 1901 Miss Minnie Muse was spending time working in Birmingham under a milliner from New York.

204	205	Smitherman Mary F	W	F	Feb 1846	54	2nd			Alabama	South Carolina	South Carolina
219	221	Muse Minnie	W	F	July 1873	27	3			Alabama	Alabama	Alabama

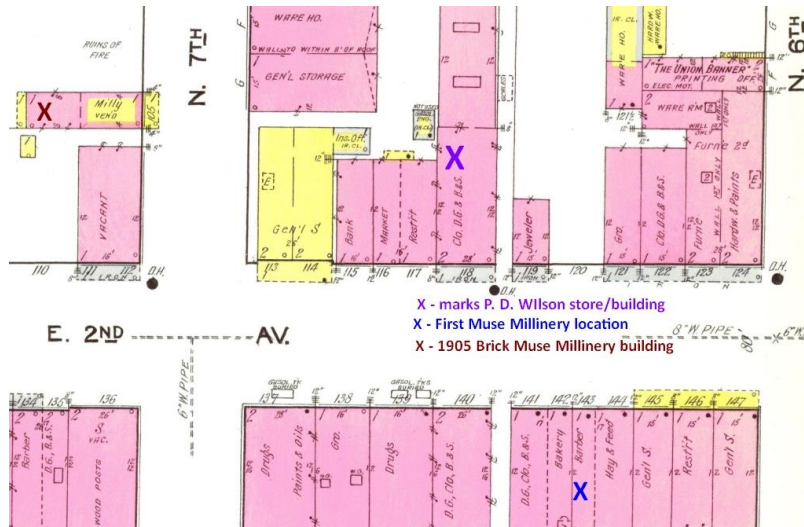
1900 U. S. Census, Jemison.

Minnie Muse is in business for herself in Clanton, by 1904 and is setup in the “old barbershop” in front of P. D. Wilson’s. Minnie Muse wasn’t the first milliner in Clanton. Mrs. G. L. Phillips had run a Millinery store in Clanton for many years and she was one of the premier businesswomen in town. By the time Minnie Muse was ready set up shop Mrs. Phillips was about ready to scale back her career. She sold her business to Minnie Muse in 1904 and helped in that business for several years. It’s likely that Minnie Muse bought out Mrs. Phillips and started business in Mrs. Phillips store. Within a year of buying Mrs. Phillips store Minnie Muse built and moved into a brand new brick building for her business. It was located a little bit north of the 2nd Avenue North and 7th Street intersection, on the west side of the street, just “behind” Sartor’s corner store.



Photo from about 2017 showing the 2 story Grover Walker building on site of Miss Minnie Muse Millinery brick building.

Miss Minnie Muse Millinery



Sanborn 1917 Fire Map segment showing the first location of Miss Minnie Muse Millinery on south side of 2nd Ave N. also her new brick location on the west side of 7th Street, and P. D. Wilson's store/building. All indicated by different colored Xs.

In 1910 Minnie Muse is living in Clanton, again with her aunt who is assisting her in her business.

67	Minnie Muse	Head	W	33	1	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	English	Retail Merchant	Millinery
	Fannin	Wife	W	34	1	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	English	Merchant	Shop

1910 U. S. Census, Fifth Street, Clanton.

Minnie Muse ran her business and advertised for many more years. The last advertisement found for Miss Minnie Muse was in March of 1917. In February 1918 the Clanton Mercantile Co. announced that they had hired Miss Minnie Muse in their Millinery and Ladies Department. Soon there-after (September 1918) D. P. Garner opened his jewelry store in the Miss Minnie Muse building. That ground floor spot remained a Jewelry Store for many decades after that, under several different owners.

In August of 1920, Miss Minnie Muse had a Guardianship Settlement for her guardian arrangement over Marie and Alice Williams in Chilton County. In this timeframe all three of them move to Colorado and live with Minnie's Aunt Fanny Smitherman, again, working in the Millinery business. The 1920 U. S. Census indicates that Alice and Marie are African-American.

Smitherman Fannie	Head	W	71	73	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Keef	Boarding House
Minnie Muse	Wife	W	38	38	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Milliner	Alabama Store
Andrew Edward R	Partner	W	70	70	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	None	
Williams Alice	Servant	W	18	18	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	None	Boarding House
Marie	Servant	W	16	16	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	None	Boarding House
Wilson Paul	Partner	W	31	31	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	None	Boarding House

1920 U. S. Census, El Paso County, Colorado. Minnie, Fannie, Alice, and Marie together.

Next Miss Minnie Muse was living in Los Angeles, California in 1930, with Marie Williams, now 26 and listed a lodger and a servant. Marie and Alice Williams and their relationship to Minnie Muse continue to be a puzzle. Miss Minnie Muse was still working in the Millinery business, sometimes listing herself as a designer or seamstress. Minnie and Marie were still together in 1940 in Los Angeles, this time Marie is listed as white.

43	Minnie Muse	Head	W	60	5	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	52	Milliner	Hat Shop
	Williams Marie	Lodger	W	26	5	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	52	Servant	Boarding House

1930 U. S. Census, Los Angeles, California.

R 32	Muse, Minnie	Head	W	69	5	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	40	Domestic	private home
	Williams, Marie	partner	W	36	6	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	40	Domestic	private home

1940 U. S. Census, Los Angeles, California.

Miss Minnie Muse Millinery

Miss Minnie Adna Muse died in Los Angeles, California, on June 20th, 1952. No record has been found of her burial place. Marie Williams is buried in Forest Lawn Memorial Park (Hollywood Hills), Los Angeles and listed as Marie Saba Williams, born November 2nd, 1903 in Alabama, died February 27th, 1990, and her mother is given as a McGee.

A little on the Minnie / Marie & Alice relationship ... apparently their mother was a McGee and there was an Andrew McGee (70+ years old in 1916) that was killed in a mining accident in Crawford County Kansas on February 14th, 1916. They may have been orphans of some sort in 1910 in Hale County. There was a court case against Western Coal & Mining Co. in Crawford County, KS and Alice and Marie were represented by a guardian attorney J. O. Middlebrooks and guardian Minnie Muse during the case in 1917 – 1918. There must have been a close relationship built-up between them because the sisters followed Minnie Muse to live with Minnie Muse's aunt in Colorado, and Marie continued on with Minnie to California, where they both stayed the rest of their lives. There no further mention of Alice Williams after the 1920 U. S. Census in Colorado.

References

Union Banner:

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps:

U. S. Census:

References on Alice and Marie Williams:

1910 US Census possibly the Williams sisters... in Sawyerville, Hale County, Alabama:

Two sisters, Alice and Marena, ages blurred out, but could be 9 and 7 which would be right and are listed as mulatto. They are living with their black Aunt and Uncle Elder and Helen Brown.

Another McGee-Brown reference in death records as well: Millie L McGee, 1903-7.26.1929, Birmingham, m. James Brown.

Chilton County Probate Court Minutes, volume 9, page 29-34. Items of interest:

“Case of Alice & Marie Williams ... against the Western Coal & Mining Co.” (1917?)

Travel to Birmingham by attorney J. O. Middleton to see Mollie McGee. (1917?)

Travel to Pittsburg, Crawford Co., KS by Middleton. (1917?)

Attorney fees paid to attorneys in District Court, Crawford Co., KS. (1917?)

Mining records online show:

Mining accident 2/14/1916 death of Andrew McGee in Crawford Co., KS

Pittsburg Daily Headlight, KS, Feb 16, 1916 –

Newspaper article describing the accident: unknowingly walked in front of lighted shot.

Findagrave.com obit:

The funeral of Andrew McGee, the colored shotfirer who was killed in Western mine 15 Monday, was held in the Bowman Chapel at 1:30 o'clock today. Rev. L. G. Cooper was the officiating minister. The Chapel was filled with friends of the deceased. Burial was in Mt. Olive Cemetery. (Pittsburg, Crawford Co., KS). Born 14 Feb 1842, Alabama, USA. Died 14 Feb 1916, Crawford County, KS.

1910 FC, Crawford, KS, Andrew McGee, black, 59, widowed, b GA, father b MD, mother b GA, Coal Miner

1911 Birmingham City Directory: Mollie McGee, colored, cook, Wm Cain St.

1915 KS Census, Franklin: Andrew McGee, 70, m, black, AL, with Americus? McGee, 49, f, white, MS

1920 FC, Birmingham, AL: Mollie McGee, black, age 30, wd, living with Hilden McGee (b-in-law) family.

California Voter Records:

Miss Minnie Muse	1934	14284 Lakeshore av	Los Angeles	-	Democrat
Miss Minnie Muse	1936	115 S Berendo St	Los Angeles	Designer	Democrat
Miss Minnie Muse	1938-50	11154 Mohawk St	Los Angeles	Seamstress	Democrat