

BACK IN TIME

Learning to sew

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

I was in sixth grade when Mrs. Maud Port came to our school and asked us girls if we would like to join a 4-H Sewing Club. Eighth grader Rosella Offenbacher and I were the only ones interested. We were invited to Mrs. Port's home at the Star Ranger Station where her husband, Lee, was the ranger. Since my dad was one of the employees, I was well acquainted with the Ports and their son, Lee Jr., and daughter, Frances, both of whom had been classmates of my older brother and sister.

It was especially nice of Mrs. Port to offer sewing lessons because she was very involved in the community. Not only was she our school's clerk, but she was also an active member of the Upper Applegate Grange and a Home Extension participant. She admitted that after attending so many night meetings, she would become sleepy on her way home and have to pull over to the side of the road to take a short nap.

Rosella and I both chose to make a dress for ourselves. Mrs. Port said that we should try something simpler because we were beginners. She suggested an apron, pillow, or laundry bag, but our hearts were set on dresses. She kindly gave in, warning us that it would be difficult and she would be disappointed if we did not complete the project.

It's strange that I do not recall if she took us to Medford for our patterns

and materials, but I remember drawing a picture of what I wanted my dress to look like. Of course, it was not simple, but that dear lady probably feared she would lose my interest if she did not grant me my choice. Naturally, I chose a striped material, which only added to the difficulty of the project. I think my mother must have had a council with Mrs. Port to make sure I would finish that dress.

I don't remember how often Rosella and I went to Mrs. Port's for our instructions, but after school I would walk there, which was about four miles away. Our first meeting to cut out our dresses was very exciting. Mrs. Port did an amazing job of improvising my pattern from my drawing, and I thanked her for doing that. We then did all the necessary markings and pinned pieces together before basting with a needle and thread. Then it was time to hurry home to show Mother my accomplishment. After supper that evening, a lamp was lit so I could continue basting.

I also don't remember if Mrs. Port had a treadle or electric sewing machine or even if I used it. They did have a generator that was used for lights at the station and their home, so it's possible that they had an electric sewing machine. I just remember her being pleased with my sewing that I did on our "Minnesota" treadle sewing machine. My mother was



Rosella Offenbacher (left) and Evelyn Williams (right) modeled the first dresses they ever made during a 4-H sewing class taught by Maud Port.

a good seamstress, and I, many times, ended up having to rip out stitches after she examined my work. I almost gave up the dress-making project at times, but did not want to hurt Mrs. Port, so I finished the dress.

I really liked Rosella's dress, it being a navy style. I don't remember if our dresses were later displayed at the 4-H fair, but Mrs. Port was very proud of us and took our pictures. Rosella stood by a rose trellis on the left side of the Ports' home. My photo was taken by the steps

near the road. Note the saddle shoes we both wore. One was not in style at that time without saddle shoes.

I regret never seeing Rosella again. She went on to high school, married, and a few years later, sadly, died of cancer. Often times now, when I pass the Star Ranger Station, I think about my many memories of her and Mrs. Port and the 4-H dress-making project.

Evelyn Byrne Williams
with Janeen Sathre
541-899-1443