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Walking Through the Progressive Era in the Jenness Miller Boots

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Abstract

The Progressive Era of 1880-1920 saw the development of a variety of reform programs and progressive ideas. This thesis explores Annie Jenness Miller (1895-1939) and the Jenness Miller Boots she created. My research examines shoe reform, sheds light on Annie Jenness Miller as a reformer, and the shoes she constructed. Jenness Miller was a dress reformer who believed that fashion should be 'hygienic' and comfortable for women. She developed the Jenness Miller Boots which allowed women to walk around town comfortably. She has since been forgotten to history. She became a businesswoman at a time when women were entering the workforce. Jenness Miller gave thousands of speeches across North America. She created her own dress reform magazine and several clothing items. Her work in the dress reform industry not only created a line of 'hygienic' boots but also showed women that they had a place in the business world.

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Introduction

During the Progressive Era of 1880-1920, women started to rebel against uncomfortable clothing. A relatively unknown person in history, Annie Jenness Miller, seen in Figure 1, took advantage of this desire for clothes that were more comfortable and healthier to wear. She designed the Jenness Miller Boot, a shoe that was touted in newspaper advertisements as the most ‘hygienic’ and ‘healthy shoe. Her advertisements promoted the health quality of her boots and described how they provided comfort for woman’s feet. Her use of health reform promoted the idea of a market for these types of shoes. Jenness Miller used this need for clothing that was deemed “healthier” in her advertisements as the main tagline for her shoe. She promoted her boots as the health reform shoe and turned her advertisements into a fashionable sales pitch, while at the same time starting a topic of discussion in this dress and health reform movement. Her work in dress reform allowed her to become one of the most celebrated women in the dress reform movement. Jenness Miller has since faded into history, but it is important that we remember the work she did and how she tried to create a comfortable, healthy shoe for women to wear.



Figure 1 Jenness Miller, Annie. “Author,” 1896. Photograph. (*Father, Mother, and Babe*. New York: Physical Culture Publishing, 1916).

To understand the history of Jenness Miller and her boots, it is also vital to understand the timeframe of the Progressive Era, in which she worked and lived. The Progressive Era of 1880-1920 was one of constant change. There was a mass influx of people coming to America. More immigrants were beginning to enter the country than

seen in previous decades. These immigrants needed jobs and wages to support their families. They began working at factories and sweatshops where they would earn enough money to survive. There developed a need to assimilate into American society and a cult of Americanization began that drove immigrants to strive for the American dream by buying clothing and shoes that were deemed fashionable. Immigrant women especially sought to become emerged in American style by purchasing and wearing American clothing. The factories that developed needed workers, both immigrants and lower-class women, to work, as cities and towns were expanding. Despite their hard work, most women and men made low wages. For example, women as seamstresses earned \$0.25 to \$0.30 a day and \$1.25 to \$ 1.50 a week.¹ Men did not fare any better as they earned \$1.25 a day and \$5.25 a week in factories and in other average labor jobs. These salaries were enough for young women to live on and allowed them the opportunity to purchase movies tickets or fashionable clothing to wear. Despite this freedom, many upper- and middle-class women did not approve of the working and living conditions that these immigrants and lower-class women were forced to live and work in, so they formed civic clubs to raise awareness of these conditions.² Jenness Miller's life provides an example of these changes that developed.

By examining the Jenness Miller Boots, this thesis aims to shed light on the history of shoe reform. There is not much research written on the subject about women's shoe reform or the fashion designer Annie Jenness Miller. There are a few sources that

¹Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History... Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1983), 35.

² Nancy S. Dye, "Introduction," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 1-4.

mention Jenness Miller's fashion but not many that go into detail about her life or the shoes she developed. She was working on filling a void in the market for women's fashion with her boots. My study concentrates on the history of shoe reform during the Progressive Era. Most historians focus on the developments that have taken place in women's clothing, like pants or skirts, whereas my thesis focuses on a unique subject, shoes. Annie Jenness Miller's boots managed to combine health reform and comfort into a new and popular style. Her life and business success provide a window into the social changes and new concerns about health and fashion that developed at the turn of the twentieth century.

The historiography of shoe reform history is relatively limited compared to other developments in the Progressive Era. Most discussions on shoes by historians are added as a part of a major argument that describes the history of another subject. For example, historians have included the study of shoes in their research on sportswear, health, and art. The subject of shoes has not been singled-out as its own subject and is instead tacked onto other research projects. When historians do write solely about shoes, it is usually in the format of an overarching theme. Historian Nancy Rexford described the subject of shoes from 1795 to 1930. Instead of focusing on a specific decade, such as the Progressive Era, she takes the subject into a broad time frame that shows the evolution of shoes. This tactic, while illuminating to history, does not give the researcher enough specialization to focus on one specific decade or the slight changes that happened. Nonetheless, existing studies provide a good foundational basis for the importance of shoe reform in history.

The methodology of examining a broad time frame may stem from some of the first shoe historians R. Wilcox and June Swann. R. Wilcox's book *The Mode in Footwear* published in 1948, focuses on the history of shoes from their beginnings in ancient Egyptian history to the 1940s. R. Wilcox is one of the first of these historians to provide a detailed look at the evolution of shoes. He devotes a chapter to what he considers the important aspects of shoes. While R. Wilcox was one of the first historians who wrote about shoe history, other historians, like June Swann who published her book in 1982, have been considered more foundational and important in the discussion. Swann's book *Shoes: The Costume Accessory*, uses similar methodology to that of R. Wilcox's research, as Swann describes the history of shoes from London in the 1600s to modern day shoes in the 1980s. According to shoe historian, Nancy Rexford, Swann is one of the most important researchers in the field of shoe research.³ June Swann describes the overall process of making shoes and the unique designs and manufacturing shoes have gone through. Swann describes how shoes were initially not manufactured differently with right and left sides and instead were initially constructed as "straights."⁴ This forced men and women to have to fit their right and left feet into one pair of shoes that were identical and were not specifically made for each foot. Swann's research into shoe history shows the beginnings of this study into shoes and how she helps to define the methodology for future historians.

Historians Lucy Pratt, Linda Woolley, and Rebecca Shawcross describe the history of shoes by focusing on the evolution of shoes. Pratt, Woolley, and Shawcross did

³ Nancy Rexford, *Women's Shoes in America, 1795-1930*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), 2.

⁴ June Swann, *Shoes: The Costume Accessories Series* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1982), 90.

not focus on any specific time frame of shoes. Pratt and Woolley use an overarching history in both of their books published on shoes, *Shoes* and *Shoes: An Accessories*. While both books do provide helpful information on the understanding of shoes, just like Wilcox, they did not research a specific decade. Shawcross follows this methodology in her book. For example, Rebecca Shawcross wrote a book, *Shoes: An Illustrated History*, published in 2014. Shawcross works at the Shoe Resources Offices at The Shoe Collection, Northampton Museum, in the United Kingdom. The book chronologizes the history of women's shoes from their prehistoric beginnings until present day. Her section on shoes from 1850 to 1920 creates a cornerstone for understanding the Jenness Miller's health reform boots. Shawcross' book provides examples of the types of shoes women wore during this time and provides a contextual history for these shoes. While this methodology helps to provide insightful data on the transition of shoes, it does not help to illuminate a specific time frame and the evolutions that shoes went through in a specific decade.

By analyzing this specific time frame of the Progressive Era, it is important to look at books that do not have a central focus on shoes. Patricia Cunningham's book, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art*, describes dress history and the women's dress reform movement. This book provides an overview of health reform history that happened in women's fashion. She focuses on politics, health, and art which have influenced the changes that occurred in women's fashion. Cunningham argues that these three aspects have been the major influence in dress history. She describes how dress reformers tried to design clothing that was more comfortable than the clothes of previous eras. She does this by describing a health corset

that was created to be more comfortable on a woman's chest and back. This healthier corset eased the restraint on the rib cage making it more tolerable for women to wear. Her book is one of the few complete sources on dress history and the reform techniques that were tried during the Progressive Era.

Historians have mentioned shoes in connection with broader reaching research. For example, historians Stella Mary Newton and Patricia Warner Campbell have connected shoe history to their own research. Newton's research into dress and health reform demonstrates how women wearing tight shoes caused poor posture and ailments, such as corns and bunions, in their feet. She describes how this pain is important in understanding the need for dress and health reform in nineteenth century America and England. Her research into the pains women faced in their shoes provides a foundational basis for why Jenness Miller created a health reform shoe to comfort and protect women's feet. Newton's research helps to illuminate the problems and ailments women faced while wearing uncomfortable shoes. Patricia Warner Campbell, like Newton, studies shoes in terms of her own research on sportswear. Campbell's research describes the history of women's sportswear in America from 1860-1940. Instead of focusing on the health problems women faced by wearing uncomfortable shoes, her research shows how women's shoes evolved as sports fashion evolved. She describes how shoe companies, like Spalding Shoe Company, developed shoes for sports activities, like croquet, tennis, and bicycling. This research helps to show another important aspect that was happening during the Progressive Era which was the change in women's sports activities. Her research while not focusing on shoes demonstrates why women needed a comfortable shoe that they could exercise and move about in. Even though Newton and Campbell do

not focus specifically on footwear, their additions of shoe history as a part of their research helped to show why there was a demand for comfortable shoes for women during the Progressive Era.

Other historians, such as Jenna Weisman Joselit and Lydia Edwards, focus on shoes as a part of art and fashion history. Instead of relating the subject of shoes to the changes in history that are occurring, they look at shoes from the perspective of a fashionable item. In Jenna Weisman Joselit's book *The Perfect Fit*, she describes the history of shoes in correlation with other garments from 1890 to 1930. Her research focuses on the pains of women feet, the development of corsets, and the rise in hemlines. This methodology looks at shoes from a different perspective and shows how their change related to the new styles in other garments. According to Weisman Joselit, "health reformers encouraged consumers, especially female ones, to speak out against the stylish shoe. Fanciful footwear, they claimed, hobbled the feminine form much like its cousin the corset."⁵ She equates the pains in women's feet with those of the corset. Women faced problems in all areas of the garment from the corset to the feet. Another historian, Lydia Edwards, researches the history of shoes from an artistic perspective like that of Weisman Joselit. She describes the evolution of women's fashion from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. In her research, she describes how the change in women's shoes is affected as the garment evolved. Edwards researches each garment from a certain time frame. She examines the shoes, hats, dresses, and gloves that women would wear. According to Edwards, as women's hemlines rose, they were more likely to wear

⁵ Weisman Joselit, Jenna, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2001), 132.

elaborately designed and expensive shoes. Her research along with that of Jenna Weisman Joselit, shows how dress historians researched shoes as a contribution to the outfit as a whole and showed the role they played in fashion's evolution.

Two other authors who have written about women in fashion history from a sociological aspect are, Diana Crane and Fred Davis. Diana Crane published her book, *Fashion and Its Social Agenda*, in 2012 and focuses on how fashion related to a person's identity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her book describes the importance of clothing for women and how it relates to who they are as a person. Crane writes that, "in the nineteenth-century, fashionable clothes generally expressed the gender roles of upper-class women... while middle- and working-class women dress reformers developed alternative definitions of gender roles that were only tangentially reflected in fashionable dress"⁶ This demonstrates her focus on women's fashion in terms of the person and their class. She claims women in higher classes tend to wear silk and satin clothing, while women of a lower class wore clothing of cheaper materials, like wool and linen.⁷ Fred Davis focuses on a similar aspect for his book published in 1992, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. His book explains that what a woman wears daily is linked to the social and cultural factors in her life and community. For example, Davis describes how during the dress reform era of the mid-1800s, they believed wearing less constricting clothing would allow women to be better mothers.⁸ It was thought that more comfortable garments would put less strain on women's bodies and make it easier for them to care for

⁶ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agenda: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 16.

⁷ Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History... Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1983), 285-286.

⁸ Fred Davis, *Fashion Culture and Identity*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 173.

their children. These descriptions of combining women's garments with the social movements of the time illustrate his methodology of combining social and cultural history. Fred Davis makes the argument that fashion choices are codependent upon a woman's standing in society. His argument is relevant to the Jenesse Miller Boots as his idea shows that these women were looking for more progressive fashion during this time of clothing reform. Both books enhance our understanding of women's roles in fashion and the choices they make in terms of clothing and accessories.

My historiography on shoes demonstrates that there has not been a book focused solely on shoe reform in the Progressive Era. My research contributes to existing knowledge by providing a specific look into the shoes created and developed during the Progressive Era through an examination of the life and career of Annie Jenness Miller. My thesis shows that as women became more active economically and politically, clothing and shoes became more comfortable and healthier. Women were looking for clothing and shoes that were easier for them to wear. As women led a more public life, shoes became an example of the outdoor activities and jobs they were pursuing. These newfound options in shoes were symbolic of the freedom's women experienced. Before this timeframe, women had worn shoes that were more constraining and did not allow for extensive movement. With the development of the Progressive Era, this began to change as boots were popularized and allowed for easy movement.

This change in shoes showed that women needed clothing that would be more comfortable and easier to wear as they participated in more activities. Due to their new economic power, these women had a voice in what they could purchase. This empowerment fundamentally changed designs for women. Shoes help to illustrate the

social environment we are living in. We see this today with shoes that are made to be lighter and easier to move about as people's roles continue to shift. Previous historians show the history of the Progressive Era as part of broader timeline. My thesis shows how Annie Jenness Miller's business and advertising techniques reflected and contributed to shifts in women's fashion beliefs and practices in the Progressive Era.

My methodology combines both cultural and social history. This combination of these two approaches illuminates how Jenness Miller marketed her boots as the health reform shoe and shows how the change in clothing affected the women who were wearing these shoes. The use of social history helps to examine the life of Annie Jenness Miller and why she cared about creating clothing and shoes that were deemed healthier for women. The social aspects, show that these women were upper-middle-class white women who lived in cities and moved from rural areas. These women cared about their health as well as wanting to look fashionable. Along with this, the use of cultural history shows why a health reform shoe was needed during the Progressive Era. The cultural aspect demonstrates how the evolution of these shoes related to women's changing role in the Progressive Era. As women's roles in society began to change and shift, they needed a shoe that would be comfortable for them to walk around town. The combination of social and cultural history will help to provide insight into the change of shoes.

A useful model for researching social and cultural historical analysis is Gayle Fischer's history about pants, *Pantaloon and Power*. Her book uses cultural history, as she describes how pants represented a symbol of power in America. Fischer focuses on how women's pants have evolved over time especially during the early eras of the suffrage movement, from 1840-1870. She describes how a garment called the bloomers

developed, which were a Turkish style pant with a shortened skirt cut to about knee length over the pants. These bloomers take up much of the discussion on her book. In her introduction, Fischer writes that, “fashion clearly reflects the changing social construction of human relations and manifests the many discourses about sexuality and power that existed in nineteenth-century society.”⁹ This ideology shows how the trends of the shoes shifted from simply fashionable and uncomfortable to a more comfortable healthier look. Fischer describes this change in pants using social history. She talks about how these pants became a part of the women’s fashion health reform history. These pants took the place of painful corsets and heavy petticoats that women had to wear on a day-to-day basis. Her discussion on trousers as a reform garment relates to my thesis, as Jenness Miller created her own health reform solution, the Jenness Miller Boots. Fischer’s book provides an approach that I would like to emulate in my own research on shoe history.

Annie Jenness Miller’s boots provide a look into the fashion choices of Progressive Era women. Her boots represent a significant aspect of women’s cultural history. The shoes are reflective of the woman and her status in society. To interpret this history as a cultural aspect of women’s history, it is important to note how the footwear helps to define a woman’s personality. For example, in the book, *Shoes: An Illustrated History*, Rebecca Shawcross writes that, “shoes were seen as status symbols...through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and well into the nineteenth.”¹⁰ This demonstrates how shoes are an important aspect of a woman’s cultural history, as they help to depict the status of the woman and describe her personally.

⁹ Gayle V. Fisher, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth Century Dress Reform in the United States*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁰ Rebecca Shawcross, *Shoes: An Illustrated History*. (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2014), 6.

Annie Jenness Miller's life points to the social aspects of my research, as she describes her life and work through the books and writing she left behind. Her work in the dress improvement movement shows how she used fashion to improve women's lives for the better by making garments less constricting. The best sources for examining Jenness Miller's motivations are the writings she left behind. In her book, *Physical Beauty and How to Obtain It* published in 1892, she described the future of shoe design and wrote that "an especially attractive boot is one which has a vamp of serviceable leather, and a cloth top matching the general character of the walking-dress."¹¹ Her use of the term 'serviceable leather' implied that the leather would survive for a lengthy time and be of service to the owner of the boots through constant wear. She wanted to develop a boot that was more comfortable for women to wear that fit with their clothing options. Jenness Miller's book provides insights into understanding the motivation to develop her boots, as she describes the technique and style that is needed for a reform shoe. Her boots were not only for health reform; they also provided the development of a stylish, dynamic shoe.

This combination of cultural and social history helps to explain the importance of shoe reform history in American women's fashion. Culture becomes an important aspect of how a woman dresses and is representative of the types of products a woman would purchase. The garment a woman chooses to wear is reminiscent of the timeframe in which she lives. For example, women would wear corsets, as it was apart of society's trends. They were uncomfortable garments that caused pain, yet women still wore them

¹¹ Annie Jenness Miller, *Physical Beauty: How to Obtain and How to Preserve It* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1892), 149.

out of sense of duty to their peers and society's pressures. The cultural history helps to illustrate that women during the Progressive Era were interested in healthy shoes that helped with posture and gave them comfortable support while walking. The popular style for women shoes was a half-boot with a short heel with laces or buttons. My use of social history helps to describe Annie Jenness Miller's motivation for why she created the garments. She wanted to design a boot that was considered healthier for women's feet. Social history helps to explore how middle-class women had developed the desire to purchase these boots. This helps to understand that the consumer of these shoes was a woman on her own for the first time, living in the age of freedoms, and purchasing her own garments, as she earned her own wage. This use of both social and cultural history helps to explore women's changing role in the Progressive Era and their need for a new, comfortable boot.

Chapter 1 of my thesis describes the history of women's experience in the Progressive Era. The chapter examines women's changing roles and the evolution from that of mother to worker. The section describes how dress and health reform related to the changes in fashion during the Progressive Era. I describe organizations that promoted these changes, like the Rational Dress Organization and the Young Women's Christian Association. Both groups had an impact on how women's dress evolved to become more comfortable and healthier for women to wear. These movements, especially the Rational Dress Organization, helped to bring about people, like Annie Jenness Miller into the spotlight.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the life of Annie Jenness Miller (1859-1935). Jenness Miller became a famous lecturer, writer, and designer during the Progressive Era. She

spent many years speaking about the importance of health reform giving over eleven-hundred speeches. Her speeches were advertised across the country in Washington D.C., San Francisco, and publicized in various cities in Canada. Jenness Miller published several books, including two on the history of dress reform, *Physical Beauty and How to Obtain It* and *Father, Mother, and Babe*. Along with her career in dress reform, she designed health reform garments, such as the Jenness Miller Bodice and the Jenness Miller Boots. Both garments, demonstrate how she attempted to help improve women's health.

I conclude my thesis with a chapter on the Jenness Miller Boots and how they fit into the history of the Progressive Era. Her boots followed along with the traditional ideas of the dress reform shoe. In the Progressive Era, women began wanting clothes that were considered healthier. According to R. Turner Wilcox, "thus, was developed the 'common sense shoe,' a sturdy, laced boot with a medium-broad heel."¹² This design followed with the image of the Jenness Miller Boots. Her boots were short boots that cut off at the ankle. The Jenness Miller Boots were advertised as the "hygienic boot," that would keep women's feet comfortable and did not cause pain when women walked. This chapter shows that other shoes, made in the beginning of the Progressive Era were not sturdy enough to support women's feet as their roles changed and evolved. The goal of my thesis is to show the impact Annie Jenness Miller made on dress reform.

Annie Jenness Miller created a legacy with her shoe reform that has been left out of history. She developed several ads promoting the hygienic qualities of her boots.

¹² R. Turner Wilcox, *The Mode in Footwear: A Historical Survey with 53 Plates* (New York: Dover Publications, 1948) 144.

Miller claimed that they were the best option for women who were looking for a health reform boot, as she described in her ads how the boots are “hygienic” and “safer” for a woman to wear. Her boots are stylish with decorative buttons and a short heel that provides the woman with a bit of decoration to her outfit. So, not only are the boots supposed to be comfortable, but they are also attractive to wear. These boots follow along with what Jenness Miller said and wrote about dress reform. Her boots provided women with a comfortable option to wear on a day-to-day basis. According to her advertisements, these boots followed the beneficial changes that she discussed in her books and speeches. Jenness Miller’s Boots show how healthy and comfortable shoes were being sold profitably to women in America.

The Jenness Miller Boots are an example of the types of improvements made in women’s fashion during the Progressive Era. Jenness Miller created a business that focused on health reform. She was a business owner which was not common during the late 1800s. She marketed these boots to women who had just started to enter the workforce and earn their own money. These women were interested in purchasing products that met with the trendy notions of health reform and wanted to wear clothing and shoes were less constraining and easier to move about in. Jenness Miller’s Boots provided this option. Her boots were promoted as the health reform shoe and allowed women with this option to purchase a shoe that was advertised as comfortable and easier to walk around town.

Chapter 1: Lacing Up Your Shoes: Women in the Progressive Era 1880-1920

The Progressive Era of 1880-1920 was one filled with change and new ideas on politics, health, and especially fashion. During the Progressive Era, the ideas of reform seeped through the country and into the fashion world. According to historian Joanne Meyerowitz, between 1890 and 1930 many women, both black and white, traveled away from the home to enter the workforce and live independently.¹³ Women began to question how restrictive clothing affected their bodies and their overall well-being and health. One reformer, Annie Jenness Miller, saw health issues in the way women dressed and created an alternative. The work Jenness Miller did has since faded from history, but her story and the boots she created need to be told. By exploring women's role in the Progressive Era, we can see the world in which Annie Jenness Miller worked and lived and how she affected the lives of many women.

Throughout the Progressive Era, the image of women began to change and became distinctly different from that of the previous Victorian Era. In the Victorian Era, women were viewed as mothers and homemakers. The ideal wife was a woman who would stay home and take care of their children and maintain the household while her husband would go out into the world and earn a living. This stereotype held true predominantly in white upper-class households where husbands earned enough money. As the Progressive Era developed, Victorian ideas were weakened and there was a shift in how women perceived themselves.¹⁴ Many women were working outside the home

¹³Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago 1880-1930*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), XV-XVI.

¹⁴ Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021),

and providing income for the household. Some women, during the Progressive Era, believed that they could be self-sufficient and not rely on a husband to take care of them. This radical change came about with the ideas that sprang from suffrage.

The ideals of the Victoria Era (1837-1901) focused on upper-class women who spent most of their time at home, raising and educating the children. These women did not live an independent lifestyle. They relied on their husbands to work outside the home and earn a living to provide for them. The role of upper-class women became someone that was supposed to protect the morality of the family. According to Carrie Brown, these women were “imbued with the late-Victorian cultural ideal of woman as guardian of the family and morality and stirred by their own lack of full citizenship.”¹⁵ These Victorian women focused on their role with the family and had limited opportunities to enter the workforce. These ideas only extended to upper-class women during the Victorian Era. Lower-class women had to both work at the home and outside to support the household.

White women’s focus on domesticity was enabled by employing other women, including free and enslaved black women, to work for them. In contrast to these white upper-class women who ran the home, most black women did not have the luxury to stay home and tend to their children. In addition to caring for their children, black women had to work and earn a living along with their husbands in farms or in houses as slaves and servants. Historian Jacqueline Jones writes that “like the Irish and French-Canadian immigrant women who labored in New England textile mills to help support their families, freedwomen were considered exempt from the middle-class ideal of full-time

¹⁵ Carrie Brown, *Rosie’s Mom: Forgotten Women Workers in the First World War* (University of New England Press, 2013), 14.

domesticity.”¹⁶ Poor, immigrant, and black women could not live like upper-class Victorian women. Maria Stewart a prominent black woman in the 1850s described the pains these women faced. She spoke of the impossibilities of moving up in society as a black woman. She believed that “as servants, we are respected; but let us presume to aspire any higher, our employer regards us no longer.”¹⁷ Stewart believed that if black women and men remained the role of servant and slave they were respected in society, however, if they attempted to move beyond that station into any other position, they faced negativity and backlash. The difficulties black women faced in moving up showed that they lived outside of the ideals of the white person. These black women had to earn a living and that did not help them to rise in society. The small amount of money they earned kept them in the lowest rungs of society’s class structure. Black women were paid substantially less than white women during this time. Stewart’s descriptions of the inequalities black women faced portrays the problems black women struggled with during the Victorian Era.

The Victorian image of women only belonging in the domestic sphere was not without challengers in the nineteenth century. Their daily routine was shaken and dramatically changed as women developed a role for themselves out of the family. The original beginnings of the dress reform movement had ties to the early developments of the suffrage movement. During the early days of the suffrage movement in 1848, a Women’s Rights Convention was held at Seneca Falls in New York. Shortly after this

¹⁶ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985), 45.

¹⁷ Maria W. Stewart, *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* (Washington, D.C.: [Maria W. Stewart], 1879), pp. 55–59.

meeting was held in 1851, Elizabeth Smith Miller (1822-1911) came up with the idea of the bloomer costume while visiting her cousin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, on a trip to Seneca Falls.¹⁸ Suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) decided that the costume helped to embody the ideas of the suffragist movement. Both Smith Miller and Cady Stanton felt that women's clothing had become unhealthy and too form-fitting for women to move about. Smith Miller believed that the loose-fitting garment would make it easier for mobility.

The notion of dress reform was tied to Elizabeth Smith Miller and her creation of the bloomer pants in the 1850s. Smith Miller was a suffragist and had created these pants to provide an optional dress for women that was a complete opposite to the tight-fitting gowns of the Victorian Era. These bloomers were made famous by and named after Amelia Bloomer (1818-1894), another American suffragist, who wore the costume in a magazine and became the icon for the pants.¹⁹ The pants were designed in a Turkish, loose-fitting style that did not hug a woman's legs and instead sat loosely. They had a short dress that fell over the pants and made the look feminine. The bloomers, while comfortable, were not a popular design and were viewed as 'mannish.'

Cartoons about the bloomer appeared in popular magazines of the time. One such magazine was *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. This magazine was created in the nineteenth century and focused on politics, culture, and art. The magazine was built by

¹⁸ Sally Sims, "The Bicycle, the Bloomer and Dress Reform in the 1890s," in *Dress and Popular Culture*, ed. Patricia Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), 133-134.

¹⁹ Sally Sims, "The Bicycle, the Bloomer and Dress Reform in the 1890s," in *Dress and Popular Culture*, ed. Patricia Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), 133-134.

the same company that had created the popular women's magazine, *Harper's Bazaar*, and has become the second longest running magazine in America today.²⁰ In a cartoon published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in August 1851, the artist depicts women wearing bloomers in the style of men²¹. The women are seen smoking cigars and standing tall and confident which contrasts with the other women in the cartoon. The other women are slightly hunched over with more feminine features. These depictions in cartoons of women as looking mannish while wearing their bloomers added to the negativity surrounding bloomer fashion. Along with this comic, other comics portrayed bloomers in the same light as "mannish" and attempted to ostracize the women who wore the garment. Women wearing bloomers challenged traditional ideas of Victorian Era.²² The bloomers became a depiction of how society would drastically change if women achieved the right to vote. The negative depictions of the bloomer caused suffragists to cease promoting the bloomer style and to put aside the dress reform movement. The garment made women's changing role in society more apparent and visible than people would have liked. The bloomers were abandoned, and the ideas of dress reform became separated from suffrage. The ideas of dress reform initially started out as a tenet of the suffrage campaign but quickly developed into their own distinctive and separate movement.

Women of all classes began to look to improve their political rights. They looked at their lives and saw inequalities that they faced every day. These inequalities they

²⁰ Theodosia E. Bang, "Women's Emancipation" *Punch*, August 1851.

²¹ Gayle V. Fisher, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001), 94-95.

²² Gayle V. Fisher, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001), 101-109.

believed could be solved by obtaining the right to vote. The campaign became known as the women's suffrage movement which strived to achieve the right to vote for women of America. Women of all classes had been campaigning for the right to vote since 1848 when they devised a plan to hold a Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York.²³ Despite their hard work and dedication, the suffragists had not been successful. After the convention, women campaigned hard for the right to vote. Unfortunately, their efforts came up short. After this crushing defeat, the suffrage movement faded away. As the Progressive Era continued to illuminate new independent pathways for women's expanding role in America, ideas began to be planted about taking the mantle of suffrage up once more.

These Progressive Era suffragists followed the tenets of former suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and saw the inequalities they faced. Elizabeth Cady Stanton believed that "suffrage [was] a natural, inalienable right; shown from the lessons of history, that one class can not legislate for another."²⁴ They saw the oppressiveness Cady Stanton described in their daily jobs and felt that the treatment was unfair. They formed a state-by-state campaign to fight against this inequality through the National Women's Suffrage Association or NAWSA. This fight for inequality was a main factor in the lives of many women. NAWSA's mission was eventually successful in 1920 when women won the right to vote.

²³ Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71-77.

²⁴ Elizabeth Cady Staton, "The Rationale for a Women's Suffrage Amendment," in *Women's Suffrage*, ed. Richard Haesly (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2003), 53.

In addition to asserting their political rights, women were starting to enter the workforce and earn their own money in the Progressive Era. Families and especially young women moved to cities and towns and away from country life. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz writes that, “among these wage-earning women, a sizeable group, known as ‘women adrift,’ not only entered the work force but lived apart from the homes of family, relatives, and employees.”²⁵ This ‘woman adrift’ as Meyerowitz describes her, began to live on her own and was in-charge of her own livelihood. These women would use their pocket money to spend freely as they chose. As urban development continued in America, and more women had income-producing jobs, they could afford to dress in more modern fashionable styles.”²⁶ They tended to use this money to purchase their own clothing that met the day’s fashionable standards. Maureen Flanagan describes this new woman in her book *America Reformed*. She writes, “young women, especially working women who now had money of their own, exercised new social freedoms and choose their own forms and places of leisure.”²⁷ Women’s role as consumers developed even further as more ready-made products were available to them. These women started to gain their own independence through this new source of income.

During the Progressive Era, department stores developed in the mid-1800s, and women emerged as more important consumers. These newly developed department stores were focused on selling clothing and shoes that were centered towards women.

²⁵ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xvii.

²⁶ Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women’s Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art* (London: Kent State University Press, 2003), 15.

²⁷ Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 185.

Previously, most of women's fashion was produced in the home. With the development of ready-made clothes, women started to move away from homemade, and to the more fashionable boutique goods and purchased items at department stores. According to Lois Banner, "department stores were palaces bringing an upper-class style to the people. They were also shrines commemorating women's shopping rituals."²⁸ At these stores, women could choose their own garments and shoes that were considered trendy and what women deemed fashionable. In advertising her boots, Jenness Miller tapped into this market by letting women know that her boots were available for purchase at Dalton Shoe Company. She did not have her own storefront to sell her boots and had to sell through third party vendors, such as the Dalton Shoe Company. Jenness Miller was trying to reach this new group of women by informing them where to purchase her boots.

The development of department stores also sparked a rise in the number of women's magazines. These magazines publicized white women in stylish outfits. Magazines, like *Harper's Bazaar*, would have white women dressed in fashionable clothing advertising the latest styles. If black women appeared in these advertisements, it was usually as a negative stereotype. For example, in one advertisement published in *Harper's Bazaar* in August 1906, there is an advertisement for "Gold Dust," pictured

²⁸ Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History... Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1983), 55.

in Figure 2. This product is claimed to be the “world’s greatest cleanser.”²⁹ In the advertisement, there are two young black children dancing around in skirts that say, “gold dust,” and performing chores. The racist depictions and the accompanying text show the racism many black women faced during the Progressive Era. Black women unfortunately were forced to endure these depictions and saw that they were not suitable for fashionable advertisements. That is until they published their own magazines. These magazines, like Julia Ringwood’s *Afro-*



Figure 2 Gold Dust,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (New York, New York), August 1906, 64.

American Journal of Fashion focused on a black perspective in fashion and described the black women’s point of views. This magazine was one of only eight black magazines published between 1891 and 1950, only two of which were published during the Progressive Era.³⁰ These magazines had articles and advertisements that were published especially for the black female audience.

Africo American’s Journal of Fashion even had dress improvers, like Annie Jenness Miller, publishing articles and advertisements in their magazine to advertise the latest dress reform styles to black women. Black women could take advantage of the most fashionable reform outfits of the day and be caught up on the latest trends. This development of magazines like, the *Afro-American Journal of Fashion*, gave black

²⁹ “Gold Dust,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (New York, New York), August 1906, 64.

³⁰ Rooks, Noliwe, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture That Made Them*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 4.

women the opportunity to become engaged in the dress reform movement and have an opportunity to keep up with trends that were not stereotyping them. One issue of the magazine published in June 1893 pairs a two-page advertisement for the Jenness Miller dress line along with her writings on “Artistic Clothing.” This advertisement and article are published next to an article by Julia Ringwood about the hygienic principles of hair.³¹ Annie Jenness Miller published her ads in this magazine at a time when black women were not viewed as contributing members to the fashion industry. Despite potential negative backlash, she still supported a black owned business. Further research would be required to know exactly why she targeted a black audience. She could have been more focused on black women customers, as they were more likely to stand on their feet working long hours in. Magazines like the *Afro American Journal of Fashion* made minority women feel a part of the conversation, especially with their inclusion with known designers.

The idea of the new woman emerged in the late nineteenth-century as women’s roles began to shift. As more women moved to urban areas and entered the workforce, the concept of the new woman developed. This woman was a young person who ventured out of the house with an aura of independence. She had for the first time the ability to walk along city streets with other women without the need for a chaperone. This new woman started experiencing her independence as she began to earn her own living and live away from the protective confines of her family. Many of these new women had white-collar jobs such as secretarial or clerical workers. Working class women had found

³¹ Annie Jenness Miller, “Artistic Clothing,” *Afro American Journal of Fashion*, June 1893, 82-83.

jobs in factories and sweatshops where they worked long hours. Whether working in a factory or as a secretary, these new women began to enjoy their independence by taking advantage of their new opportunities in which they could spend their days. Work provided these women with the opportunity to enjoy more free time and have autonomy.³² In the fiction book, *A Study in Bloomers* (1895), author George Franklin Hall depicted the new ideas of life that this new woman had about work and play. One of his characters in the book, states to another that it was “exhilarating to be always at one’s best, equally ready for work or play. This seems to be the case with you, and if this is one of your new woman ideas, I say God speed.”³³ These new women found enjoyment in this freedom and took advantage of their changing role in America.

Women started exercising their independence by attending dance halls and shopping for their own clothes. Before this change, women were accompanied by an escort who would supervise them. According to historian Kathy Peiss, “style and amusements were important aspects of their lives as well, but the ‘woman adrift,’ as she called them experienced the cult of the streets, clubs, and dance halls in a different context from those who resided at home.”³⁴ Once these women started having their own income, they had the opportunity to enjoy life by partaking in new amusements. This gave them a sense of freedom to enjoy life as previous generations never had the

³² Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986), 39.

³³ George Franklin Hall, *A Study in Bloomers: Or, The Model New Woman: A Novel* (Chicago: American Bible House, 1895), 169.

³⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986), 73.

opportunity to do. The freedom of not having to get permission to purchase items also gave women more power as consumers.

The different roles for women were not the only change occurring. The development of towns and communities began to shift as well. The First Industrial Revolution (from 1820 to 1840) and the Second Industrial Revolution (from 1870 to 1914) helped to create this shift of building more factories. Changes were beginning to happen in towns even before the Progressive Era began as people moved from farming to factories. Historian Judith Wellman writes that, “factory-style production eroded the system. Many men and young women left their homes every day to go to work on a schedule set by someone else, in a building they did not own.”³⁵ As factories were built, there was a demand for more and more workers. Many industrial jobs and clerical jobs began opening suddenly. The companies needed both men and women to fill these positions. This development of factories led to more younger men and women moving to towns and cities to obtain a factory job. These jobs had their employees working on assembly lines to produce mass quantities of products for people to purchase. Most of these jobs required difficult work, but it gave working-class women the chance to enjoy city life.

As more people moved to urban areas at the turn of the twentieth century, living conditions drastically changed. Many people went from living in rural areas with acreages of land to living in urban areas where space was more confined, especially in terms of working-class women. This meant that most working-class families lived in

³⁵ Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman’s Rights Convention* (New York: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 77.

small apartments that were reminiscent of today as people were stacked on top of each other. In her study of late nineteenth century urban life, Sarah Deutsch describes how working-class women faced a lack of space in their homes. “Breathing space was in short supply. Health standards dictated 600 cubic feet of air per person; they got 250.”³⁶ This description of a lack of space shows how these women did not have freedom and felt they were suffocating without room. They took in boarders and charged them rent to help support their families. When they came home after a long day’s work, they were surrounded by people, and were unable to think, or be themselves alone in their own spaces. This lack of space extended to wealthier families. Instead of living in rural areas where they would have large mansions and acres of space, many wealthy families living in the city would have a smaller upscale house that paled in comparison to the mansions. Deutsch’s descriptions of lack of space helped to show the problems many women constantly faced and why they fought for more freedoms.

Personal health in America during the mid-1800s was not of huge concern for many average American citizens. They had other concerns such as issues with their families, work, and daily life. For example, according to historian Suellen Hoy, “because shoes were so expensive, they were almost never worn in the countryside except in cold weather. When children and adults put on shoes, they often did not wear socks, and before 1840 they hardly ever wore underwear.”³⁷ This lack of attention to undergarments and shoes demonstrates how families were not concerned with health in their daily

³⁶ Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1910s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 29.

³⁷ Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

routine. Instead, they focused on daily tasks that they felt were more important. As diseases like cholera began to rise in 1832-1866 America and with the development of more urban cities, the concerns over health rose.³⁸ People began to worry about how to stay healthy and how to promote a healthy lifestyle. This was a difficult task to accomplish, as many families lived in small apartments in cramped places. Some companies decided to advertise for clothing and products that they believed were considered hygienic and healthy for people to wear. The use of the term “hygienic” became an important factor in distinguishing American products. Products that used the term hygienic were thought of as cleaner and healthier. These terms implied that America thought it was a clean country to live in and helped to create a trend for more hygienic living conditions.

With this newfound independent lifestyle, some women felt the need to improve their social situation. These women started organizations in the late 1800s that fought for women's political and social rights to improve their overall condition. They believed in fighting for causes, such as education, improved working conditions, and health improvements. According to historian Nancy Dye, many women formed their own civic clubs and municipal improvement associations.³⁹ These groups were formed by women of all different races and classes. They used these clubs to express their political opinions and try to improve working and living conditions for many women. Clubs such as the Women’s Consumer League (1899), Young Women’s Christian Association (1850), and

³⁸ Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60.

³⁹ Nancy S. Dye, “Introduction,” in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 1.

the General Federation of Women's Clubs (1890) focused on issues of health, worker's rights, and women's position in society. Many of these ideas for the club's women developed out of their personal experiences. For example, many middle-class women helped to form Sanitary Commissions founded in 1861 that focused on cleaning city streets. Urban streets were filled with dirt, human waste, and debris that these Sanitary Commissions argued needed to be cleaned and sanitized.⁴⁰ These women's clubs became an important way for women to express their opinions about political and social problems they saw in America.

New avenues began to open for women in the workforce as many white women worked in white-collar jobs as secretaries or clerks.⁴¹ As a solution to this sedentary lifestyle of working at a typewriter all day, some women got involved in the physical culture movement. The ideas behind the physical culture movement started from the work of the health reform movement of the mid-1800s. The movement focused on health and fitness to become less sedentary and healthier. According to dress improver and physical culturalist Mabel Jenness, sister of fellow dress improver Annie Jenness Miller, "to the minds of such physical culture is a synonym for sensuous and sometimes sensual development, and a means for attracting attention to the physical by methods as diligently practiced as the exercises for development of the body."⁴² Similar to other physical culturalists, Mabel Jenness believed that if people, specifically women, focused on their development of the body and exercise this would allow them to be healthier. Physical

⁴⁰ Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 78.

⁴¹ Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 74.

⁴² Mabel Jenness, *Comprehensive Physical Culture* (St. Louis: Becktold and Co., 1892), 29.

culturalists worked to promote the use of exercise to strengthen the body. Their work in physical culture helped to show women new techniques for exercising and how to enhance their body in a healthy manner. This development of the physical culture movement also extended to women's bathing habits.

As the focus for health and physical culture became more prevalent during the Progressive Era, new techniques in bathing and hygiene were introduced. Women's organizations, focused on hygiene and how to properly bathe. They believed that this was one of the first steps in becoming a healthier person and sought to promote this idea of proper bathing techniques. For example, in an article published in *Harper's Bazaar*, the author wrote, "frequent bathing of the feet not only adds to immediate comfort and preserves their strength and elasticity, but also helps to keep them in good shape."⁴³

Bathing had become an important part of keeping clean and healthy during the Progressive Era. As epidemics, such as Yellow Fever in 1878, began to sweep the nation, people used bathing to ward off disease.⁴⁴ Magazines, like *Harper's Bazaar*, took advantage of this need and began publishing techniques, like foot bathing, in their magazines. These bathing techniques became more prevalent as more and more Sanitary Commissions began to advertise these techniques in newspapers and on ads that lined city streets.

In addition to physical culture, bicycles provided another avenue for healthiness. Bicycles introduced a new way for women to not only exercise but also have a new mode

⁴³ "Our Humble Servant," *Harper's Bazaar*, August 13, 1892, 653.

⁴⁴ Nancy A. Hewitt, "Politicizing Domesticity: Anglo, Black, and Latin Women in Tampa's Progressive Movements," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 25.

of transportation starting in the early 1890s. They rode bicycles around town for fun, exercise, and to take advantage of the freedom the bikes offered. In *A Study in Bloomers*, George Franklin Hall described the benefits of riding a bicycle. He wrote through the character Grace, who became a lot healthier and prettier after learning to ride a bicycle. “Now there is Grace Thorne, for instance,” he wrote. “Mr. Brown remembers that when she first came to Smithville, four summers ago, she was pale and weak; but now she is one of the handsomest creatures I ever saw, and as strong as an ox, apparently.”⁴⁵ This description of Grace as becoming healthier and more beautiful illustrates the benefits that Americans believed women obtained from cycling exercise. The development of a bicycle riding allowed the new woman to flourish and find new methods of exercise.

Besides bicycling, other sports, such as croquet and tennis, developed as a way for women to exercise and become healthier. These sports usually required women to wear comfortable shoes to partake in outdoor events. One department store, Bloomingdale's, developed a shoe called, the “Ladies Croquet.”⁴⁶ This shoe was made of rubber and sold in 1886 as a specific shoe made for women to play croquet. Even if women did not get involved in croquet or tennis, they could still go for daily walks. These walks helped to put more emphasis on women’s shoes and promote the ideas of comfortable, more “loose-fitting” footwear. As the new woman continued to explore new activities for exercise, a need for a comfortable and easy shoe began to emerge. This need for comfort

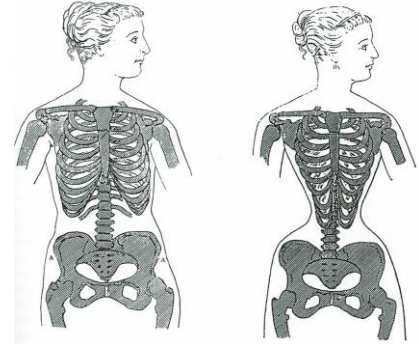
⁴⁵ George Franklin Hall, *A Study in Bloomers: Or, The Model New Woman: A Novel* (Chicago: American Bible House, 1895,) 22.

⁴⁶ Patricia Campbell Warner, *When the Girls Come Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 29.

and health in fashion helped to merge the health reform movement with that of the dress reformers and their demands for loose fitting, easy to move in garments.

During the mid to late-1800s, women wore clothing that was considered unsafe and harmful to their organs.

Historians, like Valerie Steele, have described these clothing problems in grave detail. This clothing, especially corsets, could be dangerous to women's health. When wearing a corset, a woman would tighten the laces to have



a smaller figure. This would create an hourglass shape that resulted in women having a sixteen-inch waist. This is exemplified in Figure 3. This was something fashion magazines reported as

Figure 3 “Normal Figure” and “Distorted Figure.” From Ada S. Ballin, *The Science of Dress in Theory and Practice* (London: Sampson Low, Martson, Searle and Rivington, 1885), *frontispiece*. In Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art* (London: Kent State University Press, 2003), 95.

the new trendy style. Unfortunately, these tight corsets caused women's organs to be rearranged in a dangerous shape. An article in *The Washington Post* in 1891 noted that “the pull and strain on the waist” of tight corsets-were “making the women weak and sickly.”⁴⁷ This description of corsets as making women “sick and weak” demonstrates the problems that women faced every day. Dress reformers wanted women to feel comfortable in their own clothing and not have fashion that caused irreparable damage to their bodies.

⁴⁷ “Modern Dress Reform: Mrs. Annie Jenness-Miller Gives Her Views on the Subject: Current Fashions Condemned,” *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1891, 6.

New styles for women's clothing began to develop in the mid-1870s. A garment called the bustle became a popular addition to women's clothing. The bustle was a padded undergarment that was placed on the lower back and added fullness to the garment and created a new shape. It was usually made from metal wire cage that was attached to the lower back of the garment⁴⁸. The addition of the bustle put more strain on women's backs as it added weight to the woman's overall outfit. The garment helped to fix one of the main concerns in women's clothing. Women would walk along streets and drag mud and dirt along with them in their long skirts, as many streets were not clean and were filled with various debris. To prevent this, designers worked to create the bustle to pick up the skirt and prevent this mud from being dragged. The bustle was created to help solve a problem many women faced, but the garment added weight and strain for women as they carried the wire cage on their lower backs.

Along with the worries about the corset and the bustle, women also experienced pain in their poorly fitted shoes. Many women wore tight-fitted heels that did not give their feet enough room to breathe. The Rational Dress Organization believed that the tight-fitting shoes that became popular in the late 1880s impeded the movement of women's feet.⁴⁹ It was believed that these heels were causing ailments, like corns and bunions. These concerns were later proven to be accurate by physicians. Based on an article in the *Harper's Bazaar*, it appears that women faced these problems often, as the article describes the best care for a woman's foot to prevent corns and bunions. The article states that, "if however, one bathes, massages, and points the feet properly and

⁴⁸ *Fashion: The Definitive History of Costume and Style* (China: DK Penguin Random House, 2021), 180-181.

⁴⁹ Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century* (Great Britain: John Murray Ltd., 1974), 126

frequently, and has a shoe made of a personal last, and not bought readymade ... one can be tolerably sure of having as much freedom and painless of movement as the unshod animal has.”⁵⁰ Many women needed to know the proper instruction and care of their feet to prevent suffering from those painful illnesses. This is especially seen with immigrants who had moved to the United States, as they were unsure of proper bathing techniques.⁵¹ *Harper's Bazaar*, a popular woman's magazine, supported the ideas of dress reform and the need for comfortable shoes during the Progressive Era. The pains women faced in their feet show another reason why dress reformers felt the need to improve on women's fashion styles.

Dress reformers were women and men who believed that current styles of clothing were causing pain to women. The idea of reform started to spread, as the country began to see the emergence of the creation of dress reformers. They believed that constricting garments, such as corsets, tight shoes, and bustles, caused problems to women's health. One dress reformer, Olivia Flynt, felt that women's health was endangered by the popular underwear garments women wore daily. Flynt wrote, “there never, was, and there never will be, a corset that laces up anywhere that is conducive to health, that is not decidedly injurious.”⁵² Olivia Flynt was a clothing designer and supporter of the dress reform movement. She created a Flynt Waist, or True Corset, that helped eliminate the pains women felt in their back from wearing the whalebone corset.⁵³

⁵⁰ “The Painless Foot,” *Harper's Bazaar*, June 2, 1894, 449.

⁵¹ Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 94.

⁵² Olivia Flynt, *Manual of Hygienic Modes of Under-Dressing: For Women and Children* (Boston: C.M.A. Twitchell and Co., 1882), 25.

⁵³ Olivia Flynt, *Manual of Hygienic Modes of Under-Dressing: For Women and Children* (Boston: C.M.A. Twitchell and Co., 1882), 7.

This garment also allowed more freedom in women daily's movements. Flynt's work in the clothing industry and her opinions about the need for less constricting clothing shows that there was demand for comfortable clothing. Dress reformers, like Flynt, were concerned with the pain women faced everyday while wearing what was considered fashionable at the time.

Despite the rough start to the dress reform movement in the mid-1800s, dress reformers continued to develop more comfortable clothing and their popularity rose at the end of the 1800s. To encapsulate this popularity, the dress reform movement decided to separate themselves from those of the past. They developed a new term to refer to their goals of changing women's garment; the "dress improver." Dress improvers, like Annie Jenness Miller, believed in staying away from the term "reformer." Dress "improvement" suggested that instead of completely reforming and changing the styles of fashion, their goal was to find an improved way to change garments that fit with the tenets of the dress reformer movement.⁵⁴ They focused on shifting styles, instead of creating completely new looks. Dress improvers focused their attentions on constrictive garments, such as the corset, high heeled shoes, and the bustle. These were garments that many in the dress reform movement considered constrictive and unhealthy.

Based on the backlash that previous dress reformers received with the bloomers, dress improvers sought to distinguish themselves and publicize this distinction. Annie Jenness Miller herself implored, "'please do not call me a dress reformer.' 'For some reason or the other this title has been applied to me ever since I have been before the

⁵⁴ "Good Living as an Art," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1900, 115.

public. I am not a dress reformer, but have lived; yes, and almost died, under this shadow for eleven years.”⁵⁵ This notion of improving women’s fashion and creating their own brand allowed these new dress reformers the opportunity to promote clothing that was both healthy and fashionable without being tied with the negative connotations of past failings.

To fix clothing struggles that women faced, dress improvers created their own organization. The Rational Dress Society was founded in 1881. The society was made up of upper- and middle-class women who sought to improve clothing for women to make garments less constricting and allow for more movement. This organization developed to combat issues women faced with clothing.⁵⁶ They believed in the ideas of combining health reform with the need for more comfortable garments. Their goal was to promote less constricting clothing for women and men to wear. They attempted to find alternatives to garments like the corset and tight shoes. The organization also believed in using terms such as “hygienic” to promote their garments and show that they met with the health reformers’ standards. They believed in combining their dress reform techniques with what they considered to be beautiful garments. Historian Lydia Edwards writes, “so as not to compromise the beauty of dress, rational dress advocates developed and promoted ‘healthy’ corsets and lighter garments.”⁵⁷ This way women could feel as though they wore clothing that met the fashionable image and matched with the new ideas of “healthy” living. The work of the Rational Dress Society helped to promote the ideas of

⁵⁵ “Good Living as an Art,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1900, 115.

⁵⁶ Lydia Edwards, *How to Read a Dress: A Guide to Changing Fashion from the 16th to the 21st Century* (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), 112.

⁵⁷ Lydia Edwards, *How to Read a Dress: A Guide to Changing Fashion from the 16th to the 21st Century* (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), 113.

“hygienic” clothing that was both a better fit for the human body and met with progressive opinions on dress.

The shirtwaist was another fashionable garment that developed from the dress reform movement. The shirtwaist was created as a working woman’s blouse that could be worn with long skirts. These blouses were described as mannish just like the bloomers. Their development matched that of the new woman that had begun to emerge. According to historian Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, “The shirtwaist was structured as a female version of a man’s dress shirt, and it retained the functionality and adaptability to mass production of the masculine garment even after its adaption to the female body.”⁵⁸ While the garment appears masculine, it ranks as one of the more important garments that was developed during the Progressive Era. The shirtwaist gave women the option to dress for work in a more masculine clothing while at the same time feeling attractive. Instead of facing the same scrutiny that the bloomers faced, the shirtwaist was embraced through artist renderings such as those done by Charles Dana Gibson. Gibson was an artist who drew images of white American women, called Gibson Girls, at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁹ These women portrayed the new styles of the new woman as she participated in activities, like bicycling and tennis. His image of the shirtwaist helped publicize the garment and show its usefulness and need. This development of the shirtwaist showed that women could wear clothing that was both attractive and comfortable for work.

⁵⁸ Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 26.

⁵⁹ Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History... Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1983), 239.

Even though Charles Dana Gibson's Gibson Girls were depictions of white women, African American women also embraced the style. African American women wore the shirtwaist with long skirts akin to those of the white women. This was done to embrace the image of the new clothing styles, and to fight against the derogatory stereotypes that were seen in Dana's drawings of black women. According to Erinav Rabinovitch-Fox, "by portraying themselves as Gibson Girls, African American women could challenge derogatory white stereotypes that perceived African Americans as uncivilized and ugly, using her fashions to present themselves as modern women of leisure."⁶⁰ Dressing in Gibson Girl fashion allowed African American women a way to use the dress as a political stand. They could embrace the new style while fighting this negative stereotype and show the racism African American women faced in fashion.

Other popular clothing styles regressed back to form-fitting painful garments. The hobble skirt, popularized in women's fashion from 1908-1914, made it difficult for women to walk and became a hazardous garment. According to historian Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, "christening in 1910 the 'hobble skirt' – a long skirt with a narrow hem inspired by the traditional Japanese costume—[Paul] Poiret declared, 'Yes, I freed the bust, but I shackled the legs.'"⁶¹ This description of "shackling the legs" illustrates the pain women faced by wearing the hobble skirt. By "shackling the legs," Paul Poiret was essentially going against the ideas of the loose-fitting garments that the dress reformers supported. The hobble skirt was a formfitting mermaid cut dress that usually flared out at

⁶⁰ Erin Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th- Century America," *Case Western Reserve University*, (2017).

⁶¹ Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 59.

the ankles. This skirt was cinched at the ankles and fitted throughout the legs. This hindered women from taking a basic stride. For example, in an article published in the *New York Times* entitled “Victim of ‘Hobble Skirt,’” the author described the dangers women faced by wearing the garment. The newspaper stated that, “a woman who was unable to run owing to the tightness of her [hobble] skirt fell immediately under the horse. Its shoe caught in her hair, and she was dragged a considerable distance. Her skull was fractured.”⁶² This inability to walk and escape horse trampling was a danger many women faced in the early twentieth century when they wore their hobble skirts. Despite the dangers women faced, many women continued to wear the garment. These descriptions of the difficulties women faced in walking helps to show why the dress reformers believed clothing was too constrictive and needed to be fixed.

The concern and need for health reform eventually led to the creation of Health Department and government regulation. During the early beginnings of the Progressive Era, many people suffered diseases due to an unsanitary environment and mass habitation. It was not until 1900 that many cities around America created health departments that focused specifically on health and disease.⁶³ Later in the Progressive Era in the 1910s, state legislatures passed laws to help change living and working conditions. According to historian Carrie Brown, by 1912, several new laws had been passed to regulate safety, health, and the sanitary conditions in working environments.⁶⁴ This need

⁶² “Victim of ‘Hobble Skirt’: Woman, Unable to Get Away from Bolting Horse, Falls Under It,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1910.

⁶³ Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 64.

⁶⁴ Carrie Brown, *Rosie’s Mom: Forgotten Women Workers in the First World War* (University of New England Press, 2013), 34.

for a health department showed that people were starting to care about the conditions of the city and about their own personal health. These commissions focused on cleaning up city streets, educating the public on how to stay healthy, and become more hygienic. This emphasis on hygiene caused people to think more seriously about their own health and how to keep their bodies in shape.

Despite the claims that healthy dress would protect the body, women still faced criticism for wearing comfortable clothes. This is exemplified in short stories and fictional works written during and after the Progressive Era. In Charlotte Perkins' short story published in 1914, "If I were a Man," the main character begins to question the painfulness that her garments caused her. She stated, "we invent all those idiotic hats of theirs, and design their crazy fashions, and, what's more, if a woman is courageous enough to wear common-sense clothes—and shoes—which of us wants to dance with her?"⁶⁵ By questioning if this girl will receive any invitations to dance, it helps to illustrate that the idea of women wearing common sense clothing was still new and not accepted by everyone. Despite what the Rational Dress Society hoped, some women did not leap and run towards clothing that was less constrictive. Luckily for the Rational Dress Society, dress and fashion for women did eventually transfer to a more comfortable and less fitted styles around 1915. Even though women did not leap into the trends of dress reform right away, eventually fashion took its course towards the ideas they were promoting.

⁶⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "If I were a Man," in *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, ed. Ann J. Lane (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 38.

In 1915, the beginnings of flapper fashion began to emerge in America. In flapper fashion, women wore looser, shorter dresses and styles that made it more comfortable to walk around. These styles of looser shorter dresses fit with the tenets of dress reform, as they allowed women to wear comfortable clothing that was not fitted and did not hug their frame. While flapper fashion started its beginnings in 1915 most people associate the garments with the 1920s. This was at the very end of the Progressive Era. This fashion was considered boyish during its trend as women wore loose fitting garments that did not show off an hourglass figure.⁶⁶ This image of women in looser garments tied back to the ideas of women's liberation. As women got the right to vote, their bodies became an example of this liberation. Women's right to vote was finally achieved at the end of the Progressive Era in 1920. Flapper fashion became an extension of this right to vote and allowed young women to assert their youth and sexual rebellion through clothing.

These new flapper fashion styles stemmed from women's liberation as they had just won the right to vote and were fully engulfed in the ideas of the new woman. Even though there is no data to say that flapper fashion stemmed directly from the dress reform movement, the styles that were promoted as the iconic flapper relate to the dress reformers' beliefs on how women's garments should be constructed.⁶⁷ The garments were less fitted and allowed women the space to breathe and move about comfortably. The loose garments were reminiscent of the previous generations attempts at dress reform.

The Progressive Era was one of constant change as women's roles in the home were redefined as women began to enter the workforce. Their status changed and many

⁶⁶ *Fashion: The Definitive History of Costume and Style* (China: DK Penguin Random House, 2021), 226-227.

⁶⁷ Angela J. Latham, *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 26.

women looked to athletic avenues to assert their newfound independence. These changing styles of the Progressive Era illustrate the world that Annie Jenness Miller was working and living in when she created her Jenness Miller Boots. The ideas of women's health reform and dress reform had begun to swirl in her head, as she attempted to create comfortable clothing and boots for women. She wanted women to feel less constricted as the dress reformers suggested. Jenness Miller used these tenets of the dress improvers to lecture and create solutions for women's constrictive garments. These ideas became the basis for her business. Whether or not Jenness Miller was successful, her impact in the dress reform movement, or as she called it dress improvement, had a lasting impact.

Chapter 2: Annie Jenness Miller: One Shoe at a Time

In the nineteenth century, woman's prescribed duty was to her home and children. This role of women in the late nineteenth-century, however, began to shift. They began looking for jobs due to lack of family support and for financial means. Women left their homes and began to migrate to areas with jobs where they could earn a living and become independent women. Most women worked as secretaries or in sweatshops as factory girls. Most Americans did not believe that women could successfully run a business or promote the idea of an American businesswoman. This chapter explains how Annie Jenness Miller broke the stereotypical mold to become a successful manager and owner of her own business. Annie Jenness Miller's impact on dress reform stems from her designs, books, lectures, and advertisements that promoted reforming women's fashion.

As a young girl, Annie Jenness Miller started out wanting to make comfortable clothes. She and her sister Mabel were troubled by the painful clothing that women wore that were considered fashionable. They noticed that garments, such as corsets and bustles, were a detriment to the health of women. Jenness Miller transformed this idea from when she was a child into a career that spanned decades. She wrote several books, became a public speaker, and created several clothing garments, some of which she patented. Besides this, she was able to have a loving family complete with husband, child, and a sister who supported her to the end of her life. Jenness Miller's success in business demonstrated that women were capable of being a successful business owner something that was not usually thought of during the late 1800s. During the Progressive Era, women were thought of as second-class citizens. She was successful in a time when women struggled to be thought of as business leaders. Jenness Miller was viewed more as an

attractive woman, then as a businesswoman. Articles published during the time would focus on her beauty instead of treating her as a serious leader of the community. In her speeches, she would often undress to model all her available clothing options, including her undergarments. Men would sneak into these lectures, not to hear what she said but to watch her undress.⁶⁸ This desire to see her partially naked, took away from any possible respect she could have received in the business world alongside prominent men, as they viewed her as a sex object, instead of an equal. Despite this, her work in dress reform is exemplified by her work with the reform boots she created in the late 1880s. The Jenness Miller Boots are an example of the types of improvements made on women's fashion during the Progressive Era and the work Jenness Miller accomplished.

Annie Jenness Miller was born on January 28, 1859, in White Mountains, New Hampshire to Susan Wendell Jenness and Solomon Jenness Miller She was the youngest of two children. Her sister, Mabel Jenness, was the older sibling and became a close confidant of Jenness Miller. Annie and her older sister, Mabel, held discussions about clothing when they were young girls being educated by private tutors. An article in the *Los Angeles Herald* noted that, "She [Mabel Jenness] often talks [sic] with her sister in regard to a more healthful mode of making their garments. It was the day of the big bustle and heavy skirt draperies."⁶⁹ They believed that clothing should be lighter and less constricting for a woman's body.

Annie Jenness Miller was especially troubled by how fashionable dresses harmed internal organs. Some physicians quantified that women faced many problems from

⁶⁸ "Dress Reform: Annie-Jenness Miller's Entertaining Lecture," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1892, 2.

⁶⁹ "Originator of Jenness Miller Dress Reform Movement Now a Resident of Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Herald*, March 6, 1904.

wearing corsets, such as poor circulation, weakness of lungs, and displacement of internal organs.⁷⁰ In a book she published at the age of thirty-three in 1892, *Mother and Babe*, Jenness Miller wrote that, “habits of dress are indulged which render the proper development of the vital organs impossible, and the nervous and mental systems are overtaxed until every member of the body physical becomes like the strings of an instrument out of tune.”⁷¹ She described how women were being constricted and wore painful garments just so they could be considered fashionable. Jenness Miller and her sister wanted to remove the pain women were experiencing. Both women wanted to create fashionable garments that were more loose fitting and considered healthy.

Jenness Miller and her sister vehemently disliked the popular image of a tight corseted, fashionable woman and sought to create comfortable clothing for women. For example, in *Mother and Babe*, Annie detailed clothing that was considered more comfortable and less restricting for mothers. She created a garment called the divided skirt, that was a long skirt that had a slit up the front that stopped at about ankle length, usually closed or opened with buttons. The divided skirt allowed for more ease and comfort when walking about. Women did not have to struggle with one long skirt and instead had a divided skirt that acted as pants and allowed their legs more flexibility in their movements. An article in the *Los Angeles Times*, described that, “the famous ‘divided skirt’ proved to be soft ecru pongee [known today as silk], gathered to a well-fitting yoke at the waist, separated into little skirts by a central seam.”⁷² In her book,

⁷⁰ Christina Bates, “‘Their Uniforms All Esthetic and Antiseptic:’ Fashioning Modern Nursing Identity, 1870-1900,” in *Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion*, ed. Ilya Parkins and Elizabeth M. Sheehan (Durham, NH: University Press of New England, 2011), 164.

⁷¹ Annie Jenness Miller, *Mother and Babe* (New York: Jenness Miller Company, 1892), 5.

⁷² “Dress and Undress,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1889, 3.

Jenness Miller tried to combat the image and pain that women faced when they put on tight corsets and painful shoes. She, along with her sister, tried to create safer, more comfortable clothing for women to wear by starting their own clothing design company, the Jenness Miller Company. This way their bodies would not be tortured by the clothing that magazines considered “trendy.”

Boston in the late 1800s was becoming a central point for dress reform.⁷³ In 1891, Boston became the center for a garment workers strike. The strike led to the Massachusetts legislature passing the “Act to Prevent the Manufacture and Sale of Clothing Made in Unhealthy Places.”⁷⁴ Before this act, female laborers would bring their work home to earn extra money as the pay at the factory was low. This legislation also helped to create cleaner and healthier sweatshops where men and women worked each day. This new law was considered ahead of its time.⁷⁵ Boston had become one of the premiere places focusing on reform work. The promotion of dress reform in Boston helped to spur Jenness Miller along as she continued in her career and education. Annie Jenness Miller attended Emerson College in Boston. Boston’s involvement in dress reform helped to add to Jenness Miller’s knowledge of the subject and spurred her interest in health reform.

It was not until her marriage to Conrad Miller in 1887 that Annie Jenness Miller fully committed to the ideas of dress reform and began her business with Mabel.

According to her book *Tribune Development*, she began to develop an illness at the time

⁷³ Valerie Steele, *A Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 108-9.

⁷⁴ Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

⁷⁵ Nancy Folbre, “Women's Informal Market Work in Massachusetts, 1875-1920,” *Social Science History* 5 No. 1 (1993), 145.

of her marriage. This illness she believed to be resulted from a poor diet, lack of exercise, and specifically constraining clothing.⁷⁶ During the late 1880s, women's clothing included popular garments such as the steel boned corset and dresses that created a tiny wasp waist. The wasp waist was a garment that "emphasized by the most enormous sleeves and pyramid skirts with smooth fronts, which had pleating concentrated at center back" and became a popular dress style in the 1890s.⁷⁷ Jenness Miller believed that these confining garments led to poor health. This caused her to wear a more comfortable type of clothing that she had produced for her at a dress shop. Annie Jenness Miller along with her sister, Mabel, became members of the Aesthetic Dress movement. This movement wanted women to "combine 'physical, cultural, artistic, dress, and rational undergarments,' but avoided controversial styling of street dress."⁷⁸ This movement gave Annie and Mabel an opportunity to explore their interests in dress reform, and they believed they could educate the public on their newfound opinions on a new style. The desire to share these beliefs regarding healthful garments eventually led to Annie Jenness Miller to become a public speaker.

Annie Jenness Miller's became a popular member of the lecture circuit.

According to her, she began this career giving advice on health and comfortable dress⁷⁹. She started by telling her story of ill health and her solutions to this problem to female friends and family. These women became enamored with her story and wanted to hear

⁷⁶ Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 9-10.

⁷⁷ *Fashion: The Definitive History of Costume and Style* (China: DK Penguin Random House, 2021), 184.

⁷⁸ Jane Farrell-Beck, Laura Poresky, Jennifer Paff, Cassandra Moon, "Brassieres and Women's Health from 1863 to 1940," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 16, no. 3 (1998): 106.

⁷⁹ Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 11.

more which led to lecture circuit invitations. In her book, *Triune Development*, she writes that, “women began to gather from near and far, to hear more of the ‘new gospel of health.’ My home in Washington [D.C.] was besieged in season and out, like a public institution.”⁸⁰ This praise from local women led to Jenness Miller giving speeches at local women’s groups and clubs. This desire to hear her speak was pursued by newspapers. Jenness Miller goes on to write that the newspapers “took notice” of her work and helped to elevate her popularity in the press.⁸¹ They believed that she was spreading the idea of good health as she explained the needed steps women should take. These speeches promoted the beginning of her dress reform business.

The idea for speaking came from the letters Mabel Jenness and she received on the work they were doing with women’s dress reform.⁸² Mabel’s experience in oratory classes in school helped Jenness Miller prepare for these speaking engagements. In these speeches, she described that a woman should wear clothing that was “not too tight ... and not too fastened around her chest.”⁸³ She gave lectures throughout the United States and Canada to publicize her opinions on dress reform. Both Annie and Mabel gave lectures to the public, but it was Jenness Miller who eventually gained more popularity with the public than her sister. Annie Jenness Miller was the younger of the two and considered more beautiful. Audiences preferred her looks and her way of speaking over her older sister. The speeches that Annie Jenness Miller began giving in the late 1880s lead to her

⁸⁰ Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 11.

⁸¹ Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 11.

⁸² “Originator of Jenness Miller Dress Reform Movement Now a Resident of Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 6, 1904.

⁸³ “How Women May be Beautiful,” *New York Press*, February 1890, 117.

promoting her own business and her opinions about “hygienic clothing” for women’s dress.

Jenness Miller’s speeches were well received, and many women attended the events to hear the latest on dress reform. At the Improved Dress Congress of the Christian League Fair in February of 1894, it was reported that “women certainly were in love with both Mrs. Miller and her pretty gowns.”⁸⁴ Women flocked to her speeches and felt she divulged how to dress in a more comfortable, hygienic way. Her personal story as a sick woman finding good health in exercise and changes to dress gave credibility to the lectures. This information in her speech related to women as her ideas had been tested on herself. Her illness and use of personal anecdotes in her speeches gave these women a reason to trust her.

Jenness Miller used these speeches to promote the Jenness Miller brand, which was developing a large following beginning in 1890. In her speeches, she promoted the books she was writing and began to use her lecturing career to garner support for her clothing line. In one speech, she promoted her book *Physical Beauty and How to Obtain It*. She pushed the book to promote her ideas on women’s ‘dressing’ habits.⁸⁵ Jenness Miller began to develop support for the clothing she and her sister had discussed years previously.

Annie Jenness Miller also promoted her clothing through modeling. She would wear her latest health reform clothing during her lectures. According to historian Sharon

⁸⁴ “Pretty Gowns at the Fair: Mrs. Annie Jenness Miller’s Costumes Much Admired,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 1894.

⁸⁵ Annie Jenness Miller, *Physical Beauty: How to Obtain and How to Preserve It* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1892), 1-5.

Wood, “she [Jenness Miller] toured the country giving lectures on her system, modeling her gowns and demonstrating the graceful movement they made possible”.⁸⁶ Modeling her garments gave her another avenue to promote her clothing and latest creations. In addition to giving lectures, Jenness Miller would design dresses with divided skirts that she believed would be more comfortable for women to walk around town. The divided skirts were a long skirt with pants placed underneath made to look like a recreation of the bloomer dress of the 1850s. These garments allowed her to demonstrate to women that they should dress in a comfortable manner. By modeling her designs, she reached a larger audience of buyers. She traveled across the United States and Canada and gave over eleven hundred speeches between 1890 and 1900. Jenness Miller used her fame to help promote her brand and show to women the types of clothing they should be buying.

Jenness Miller used the platform of the lecture circuit to promote her clothing. She would dress in her latest comfortable designs and educate women on the benefits of each garment as she spoke about health and dress reform. In some lectures she would change outfits as many as nine times.⁸⁷ Jenness Miller also demonstrated her undergarments as well. This meant that she stripped down into what we would consider today to be underwear. During one lecture, according to a newspaper article published in *Los Angeles Times*, “no sooner had Mrs. Miller let fall from her graceful shoulders the heavy cloak, revealing her pretty chemilette and divided skirt than she gave a little feminine shriek. ‘Oh, there’s a man,’ she cried and hurriedly pulled the cloak around her

⁸⁶ Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 73.

⁸⁷ “Modern Dress Reform: Mrs. Annie Jenness- Miller Gives her Views on the Subject: Current Fashion Condemned,” *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1891, 6.

again.”⁸⁸ She would present these garments by undressing in front of crowds. As the article shows, women were shocked and dismayed at the presentation she put on. It is not clear from the advertisements for her lectures that she had promoted this undressing. These lectures not only helped to show off the Jenness Miller clothing but also added an element of shock.

Annie and Mabel’s speeches created a platform for them to express their opinions on dress reform for women. They described how women needed to keep their limbs flexible to create a sense of freedom for the body. Annie especially believed that if a woman kept her body “cramped” into one position it would become a “stiff and unyielding figure.”⁸⁹ She filled her speeches with this type of rhetoric to educate women on how to properly take care of themselves. This information helped to spread their beliefs on dress reform. Their speeches enlightened society to the problems with women’s dress in the late 1800s and why women needed to change their clothing to a more comfortable style.

Annie Jenness Miller traveled to several cities and towns across the country. She not only gave speeches she also aided women’s groups in their charitable work. In one instance, she traveled to Davenport, Iowa to attend the Lend a Hand Charity. The Lend a Hand Charity was an organization focused on educating women and preparing for jobs in business. Jenness Miller helped other businesswomen to find clothes suitable for work. Historian Sharon Wood writes that, “the enthusiasm with which club members greeted Jenness Miller in Davenport suggests that working women were already discovering the

⁸⁸ “Dress Reform: Annie-Jenness Miller’s Entertaining Lecture,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1892, 2.

⁸⁹ Annie Jenness Miller, “Dress Improvement” (presentation, The Congress of Women: Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U. S. A., 1893).

impracticality in the workplace clothing designed for the respectable matron at home.”⁹⁰ This demonstrates that Jenness Miller helped other women climb up the business ladder. She wanted businesswomen to be comfortable in their clothing and give them another option besides the clothing they were wearing at home. Considering women were starting to enter the workforce at the turn of the century, these options would be greatly appreciated.

Jenness Miller’s main goal in promoting her brand was to focus on helping women first. She attempted to do this by focusing her efforts on reforming women’s clothing to find comfort and ease for them in their daily dressing. She even went so far as to declare that she would rather find a solution to the clothing problems women faced than to earn a living. In an interview she gave to *The Washington Post* in 1889, she stated that she had focused her work on women’s clothing more than on her own livelihood. She explained, “I have introduced and fostered the reform at the sacrifice of home comfort, personal ease, money, and all that I possess for over four years.”⁹¹ She dedicated her career and life to finding women comfortable clothing. It is presumed that the couple did have an income from Jenness Miller’s husband, Conrad Miller. Without more concurrent information about her husband or his work, it is impossible to state how much income they had. Her work in the industry of dress reform allowed her to find a business where she could help women feel less pain in their daily lives.

⁹⁰ Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 73.

⁹¹ “The Divided Skirt: Mrs. Miller Enthusiastic Over the Popularity of Her Dress Reform,” *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1889.

Annie Jenness Miller faced backlash as she continued her career in dress reform. Despite her popularity, dissenting opinions developed. In an editorial published by the *New York Times* in May 1890, the writer, Vaillant Julico, argued that Jenness Miller was popular simply because she was considered pretty. “The success with which Mrs. Jenness-Miller, the dress reformer, has met is due not to a mental capacity in the least unusual or to any very original ideas, but entirely to the fact that she is a rather handsome woman with a fine figure,”⁹² Julico wrote. This description of her as just a pretty face shows the negativity and backlash that Jenness Miller faced for being a woman in reform work. The author went on to complain that Jenness Miller contradicted herself continuously throughout her speeches. Julico provided no specific examples to support her critique, however. The review ends up sounding as if it was written by a jealous woman in need of her dose of fame and celebration. Even though Julico, titled her article, “The Moral Effects of Divided Skirts,” her article spends most of her time criticizing Jenness Miller and does not describe the moral problems with the divided skirt. Her article’s title almost hints at a play on words of the Jenness Miller lectures, sounding as though it could be one of her titles. The unsubstantiated contradiction in Julico’s writings shows the backlash Jenness Miller faced.

Jenness Miller’s career as a speaker continued to flourish. She was even invited to speak at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. The speech she gave was part of the Congress of Women’s Symposium that was held in the Women’s Building at the fair. The Congress honored prominent women from all over the country and gave them a forum to

⁹² “Moral Effect of Divided Skirts,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1890.

speak their mind. This speech helped to increase her recognition and promote her career as a writer and a lecturer. Jenness Miller gave a rousing speech about the “stiff” clothing and shoes women wore. She said, “the body has been cramped and distorted, its requirements for health and comfort disregarded.”⁹³ This speech shows the early beginnings of Jenness Miller’s ideas for shoe reform. She believed her boots to be more comfortable for a woman’s feet. She wanted the feet to feel as though they were comfortably placed into the shoes instead of being ‘cramped’ and feeling painfully confined into a shoe. This relates to her speech as she described how current designs in the late nineteenth-century placed the whole body into a cramped position even when it comes to the feet. Annie Jenness Miller’s speech explained how she tried to promote the ideas of comfortable, relaxed clothing for the whole body, especially the feet.

The Women’s Congress published a companion book along with the speeches given at the World’s Fair. This book was published in 1893 and was compiled with articles and essays from the women who participated in the conference. Annie Jenness Miller was one such woman who was asked to write a chapter for the book. In her chapter, she promoted her ideas on the need for physical exercise and comfort for women. She wrote that, “American women need the study of physical development because the higher evolution of the race depends upon them, ‘cause better human beings, better social conditions, better morals and wider humanities can only be hoped for as women interpret and live to higher physical ideas.”⁹⁴ In this excerpt, Jenness Miller

⁹³ Annie Jenness Miller, “Dress Improvement” (presentation, The Congress of Women: Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U. S. A., 1893).

⁹⁴ Annie Jenness Miller, “Physical Culture of American Women.” In *The National Exposition Souvenir: What America Owes to Women*, ed. Lydia Hoyt Farmer (Chicago: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893, 153).

described the importance of exercise and how this would help women to become healthier people. The inclusion of her writing into this book helped to promote her ideas and allowed her to become a more recognizable figure in the dress reform movement. Between her speech and this publication, Jenness Miller increased her recognition in the dress reform movement. Annie Jenness Miller used this recognition to promote her book *Physical Beauty* which she had just published the previous year.

Annie Jenness Miller published *Physical Beauty and How to Obtain it* in 1892 a year before she spoke at the Chicago World's Fair. In this book, she described her thoughts and opinions for how women should take their health into consideration when it comes to fashion. She wrote that, "no amount of denial will change the fact; and the first step to be taken toward a cure is to have one's shoes properly made by an experienced workman according to the anatomy of the foot."⁹⁵ While it is not clear from the research if her clothing was produced in a factory or not, we do know that she published the patterns for her clothing in her books and magazines. In her book, *Father, Mother, and Babe*, Jenness Miller published patterns for children's wear in her book that mothers could sew for their own children. Jenness Miller attempted to educate women on the importance of buying comfortable shoes. This way women would not suffer foot problems in the future. Throughout her book, she explained similar tasks for a woman's body, hands, hair, and even teeth. Jenness Miller believed strongly in the importance of combining health with fashion to have a long healthy life. These ideas stemmed from her medical conditions that she described in her speeches and shows that she was trying to

⁹⁵ Annie Jenness Miller, *Physical Beauty: How to Obtain and How to Preserve It* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1892), 143.

prevent the readers of her books from experiencing the same problems she faced. Jenness Miller's publications became another way for her to promote the ideas of dress reform and healthy dress for women.

Annie Jenness Miller continued to pursue a career in dress reform. Besides becoming an author and celebrated lecturer, she expanded her business by creating a magazine specifically for dress reform. This magazine entitled *Dress* and later *The Jenness Miller Monthly*, seen in Figure 4, promoted the ideas of dress reform and hygienic clothing. The magazine began publication in 1887 and ran until 1898 and “presented her [Jenness Miller's] opinions on healthy living and attractive clothing and served as a catalogue for reform garments and the undergarments she designed.”⁹⁶ She wanted to give women options on how to dress in a way that was more comfortable.

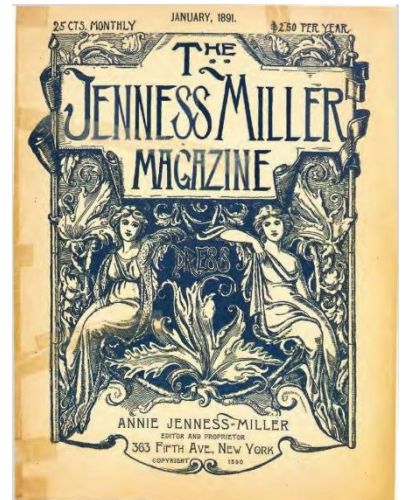


Figure 4 *The Jenness Miller Magazine*, January 1890, New York Heritage, New York.

Jenness Miller published advertisements she had approved that promoted hygienic clothing for women. In one advertisement, the Hay and Todd M’F’G Co. advertised their hygienic clothing to the readers of *Dress*. The ad stated that, “the readers of *Dress* are too familiar with the merits of Ypsilanti Full-Fashioned Jersey-Fitting Underwear to need any further arguments settling forth the merits which have gained it such universal approval and popularity with ladies desirous of obtaining truly Hygienic Underwear.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Emily Pecora, “Rationalizing Beauty: Artistic Dress Reform in America,” *Journal for Interdisciplinary and Cross-Culture Studies* 5 (2011), C10.

⁹⁷ “Ypsilanti Full-Fashioned Jersey-Fitting Underwear and Equestrienne Tights for Fall and Winter Wear,” *Jenness Miller Monthly Magazine*, January 1891, 2.

The Ypsilanti Full-Fashioned Jersey-Fitting Underwear was a body suit that was made of Australian wool and was supposed to be more comfortable to wear than other underwear in the nineteenth century. Her inclusion of this advertisement shows how she promoted not only her own health reform clothing but others as well. Annie Jenness Miller had a hand in the advertisements that were published in her magazine. She informed readers that each ad must go through a vigorous vetting process before being published writing that, “every advertisement inserted in the Jenness-Miller Magazine is first thoroughly investigated if it is not well known as a standard article, and nothing is permitted to appear in our advertising columns [or] in our reading pages for which this publisher is not willing to vouch.”⁹⁸ She paid close attention to what was being printed in her magazine. Jenness Miller wanted her readers to follow good advice that aligned with her opinions on dress reform and health. Not only did she promote hygienic clothing, Jenness Miller also used the magazine to promote her own books. This way she knew readers were not receiving bad advice and would follow her line of thinking. Annie Jenness Miller’s publication of this magazine became another important way for her to reach her followers and supporters of the dress reform movement.

Annie Jenness Miller saw the magazine as another avenue not only to advertise healthy clothing but also to advertise her own work. She published excerpts from her books in her magazine. This helped to get her name out and promote the books she was selling. In one magazine, published in January of 1891, she printed an excerpt of her book *Philosophers of Driftwood*.⁹⁹ She eventually published the book in 1897 through

⁹⁸ Annie Jenness Miller, “To Advertisers.” *The Jenness Miller Magazine*, January 1891, 10.

⁹⁹ Annie Jenness Miller, “Philosopher of Driftwood.” *The Jenness Miller Magazine*, January 1891, 336-339.

her publishing company, the Jenness Miller Publication based in Washington D.C.

Jenness Miller had a hand in choosing the content of her magazine, as she published her own work.

The critics focused on Annie Jenness Miller's attractiveness and not what she said. The business of beauty was a difficult industry for women to enter. While today we think of it as a female dominated market, originally the beauty business was run by men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As the country moved into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the industry became one of few that allowed women to dominate. According to Wendy Gamber, "far from lessening women's chances, the sexual division of labor in the custom fashion trades created a 'female economy' in which the principal actors—proprietors, workers, and consumers—were women."¹⁰⁰ Jenness Miller was not the only woman to face criticism for being an attractive woman in business she also faced the double-edged sword that women were not considered capable of running a business. Despite the criticism she faced, Jenness Miller continued her trajectory of publishing and creating garments for women to improve their health.

Despite all her work, Jenness Miller found time to have a child. She gave birth to her daughter, Vivian Miller, on a Saturday morning in 1892 in New York. Days later she returned to work. She wrote in her book *Father, Mother, and Babe*, "my child was born Saturday morning. The following Wednesday I corrected the complete proofs of my

¹⁰⁰ Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3.

book, *Physical Beauty*, which was being rushed to press. In ten days, I was about as usual.”¹⁰¹ Despite the birth of her daughter, her work was one of the most important factors of her life. Jenness Miller even went so far as to include Vivian into her books *Mother and Babe* and *Father, Mother, and Babe*. She discussed birthing techniques and used her daughter as an example of the importance of healthy dress for children. Annie Jenness Miller described how



Vivian, depicted in Figure 5, became another personal example of how hygienic clothing was a necessary part of life.

Figure 23 Jenness Miller, Annie. “Vivian Miller in Unrestrictive Play Clothes,” 1896. Photograph. (*Father, Mother, and Babe*. New York: Physical Culture Publishing, 1916), 66.

Even though Jenness Miller was busy being a

mother, she still had time to promote her work. Jenness Miller used her platform of speeches and magazine to propel her influence into social organizations and reform groups. She was invited to speak at a women’s organizations where newspapers took notice.¹⁰² These helped to publicize her work and her story in newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Morning News* published in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They also helped to propel her into working for social organizations, specifically groups that focused on dress reform and physical exercise. She helped to form the Society for the Promotion of Physical Culture and Correct Dress in Chicago, Illinois in 1888. The group believed her to be an inspiration for their work on dress reform. They stated, “the possibilities open to such a society first presented themselves to

¹⁰¹ Annie Jenness Miller, *Father, Mother, and Babe* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1916), 177.

¹⁰² Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 11.

its organizers at a lecture given by Annie Jenness Miller.”¹⁰³ Her lectures helped to lead to the formation of groups that supported her ideas and could continue the work she began in dress reform. This allowed her story and work to become an inspiration for these women in need of a more comfortable way of dressing.

Besides helping to form organizations, Jenness Miller also used her voice to support other issues such as temperance. In an article published in the *New York Times*, she proclaimed her support for the movement, stating, “I favor the extension of temperance by the various societies, but believe that all lessons should be given at home.”¹⁰⁴ Her support for the temperance movement shows that she was using her voice and the fame she had garnered during her lectures to support the ideas of temperance. Stating her opinions and support in a public forum, like the *New York Times*, helped the temperance movement, as it brought more recognition to them. Jenness Miller used the power of celebrity to not only support dress reform but add support to other movements during the Progressive era.

Her support of suffrage went back to the early beginnings of her career. In 1886, Harriet Burr, a suffragist, put together a book called *The Woman Suffrage Cookbook*. The book was filled with recipes and self-care tips. The cookbook had a variety of different authors, lecturers, and famous women send in recipes to help support the cause of suffrage. Prominent women of the suffrage movement, such as Lucy Stone, Anna Shaw, and Alice Blackwell, submitted recipes and articles to the book that supported the cause.

¹⁰³ Croly, Jane Cunningham, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen and Co., 1898), 408-409.

¹⁰⁴ “The Afternoon Session: Talks by Miss Jenness Miller, Mrs. Harper, and Others,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), February 20, 1897.

Annie Jenness Miller was one such supporter of the movement who contributed a “recipe” to this book. Her recipe was called how to “Preserve the Health,” and describes the importance of caring for oneself and family. In the book, she encouraged readers to adopt a “measure of common-sense, to which should be added in equal quantities by the guardians of the family life, independence and thoughtfulness. Mix well with fresh air and physical exercise.”¹⁰⁵ Her “recipe” shows that she believed in the importance of mixing time with family and physical exercise to help people stay healthy and in shape. She believed that one had to include family to stay healthy. Jenness Miller also included her husband into her recipe on how to stay healthy in life and showed the importance of their marriage. The fact that she included this “recipe” into the *Women’s Suffrage Cookbook* in 1886 shows that her support in the suffrage movement had existed since she was a young girl.

Annie Jenness Miller became a major supporter of women’s suffrage especially later in her career. In her book, *Father, Mother, and Babe*, she announced her support for women’s suffrage in 1916. She believed that the ballot would enable mothers to have more equality and recognition in society. By winning the ballot, mothers would have more of a voice when it came to their children’s education and lives. They could vote for government offices and support laws that benefited the female position in society. She wrote, “The day has come when certain facts of nature must inevitably find their way to the consciousness of mothers. And the logic of these facts will impel them to demand recognition of their rights—not alone to the ballot as a means for securing more

¹⁰⁵ Hattie A. Burr, ed. *The Woman Suffrage Cook Book* (Carlisle, Ma: Applewood Books, 1886), 132

proportioned justice from the laws.”¹⁰⁶ Throughout this section of her book, Jenness Miller not only promoted the ideas of women’s suffrage, but she was also thinking to the future and what would happen after women achieved the vote.

Her ideas on dress reform and comfortable garments caused Annie Jenness Miller to begin creating her own clothing. She wanted women to have an option that was comfortable for them to wear and still be seen as fashionable. She began by creating hygienic under garments, such as the Jenness Miller Bodice and the Catamenial Sack. The Catamenial Sack was meant to be a belt that wrapped around the waist and had a piece of fabric attached that wrapped under the crotch, almost like modern-day underwear. Her corsets would allow women to have a comfortable option to wear. Not only did Annie Jenness Miller create garments to maintain the body’s health; she patented many of her designs. For example, she patented the Catamenial Sack on June 10, 1891. According to her patent, this garment, was “a suspensory bandage and support therefore, which serves also as a support for the abdomen; and it consists in the features hereinafter pointed out in the claim.”¹⁰⁷ Her development of these products shows that she wanted to educate women on healthy clothing and create a garment that fit her standards. She developed into a savvy businesswoman, as she patented her ideas and designs. Jenness Miller gave women an option for healthy clothing while learning she could help to promote her company

One of Jenness Miller’s patents was reminiscent of the work she would do on her Jenness Miller Boots. On May 10, 1892, she patented the Combined Button and Lacing

¹⁰⁶ Annie Jenness Miller, *Father, Mother, and Babe* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1916), 5.

¹⁰⁷ Annie Jenness Miller, “Catamenial Sack,” United States Patent 458,035, August 18, 1891.

Hook. This device was meant to “hold the stud squarely in the fabric of the garment.”¹⁰⁸ This allowed the garment to close more securely and made it easier to wash. The significance of her Button and Hook patent is that towards the end, Jenness Miller described how her creation could be used for clothing accessories such as different undergarments and shoes. The patent states, “it is not necessarily confined to this use, as it may be used upon boots and shoes, the hooked portion of the article being modified to suit the different situations in which they may be used.”¹⁰⁹ Her descriptions of using this button and hook for other garments, especially boots, shows that she was looking for avenues to expand her business. Jenness Miller wanted to use garments to help grow her business and seek other avenues beyond speaking engagements and book publishing.

Jenness Miller’s Boots help to provide a look into the cultural aspect of the Progressive Era. These boots are an example of the health reform shoe that women wanted and desired. For example, a review published in the *Boot Shoe and Recorder*, reported that a store clerk tried to sell different shoes to a woman when they were out of stock of the Jenness Miller Boots, and she turned him down. The article stated, “. . .she wanted a pair of Jenness Miller’s shoes, and all his eloquence could not induce her to believe that he could give her ‘something just as good.’”¹¹⁰ Jenness Miller’s boot provides a cultural look into the kinds of shoes women wanted and were buying. The boot’s “healthier” side emerged as a selling point for women, something they just had to

¹⁰⁸ Annie Jenness Miller, “Combined Button and Lacing Hook,” United States Patent 481,767, August 30, 1892.

¹⁰⁹ Annie Jenness Miller, “Combined Button and Lacing Hook,” Patent United States 481,767, August 30, 1892.

¹¹⁰ Jenness Miller Boots, “Answer for a Crying Demand,” advertisement, *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, June 1, 1889, 113.

have and could not do without. These boots developed into the status symbol Shawcross reports on in her book, as no other shoe could fill the void that is left when a woman cannot purchase the Jenness Miller Boot.

The Jenness Miller Boots were invented as a fashionable boot that was promoted as a health reform shoe. These boots are depicted in advertisements as ankle high, black boots that a woman could wear comfortably walking down the street. These boots also had a slight one-inch heel and a line of black buttons that went up the side of the boots that provided a pleasing look to the shoes. In their taglines, they were advertised as the shoe to be worn by women who needed something comfortable to be worn on their feet. In a Jenness Miller advertisement published in the *Boot and Shoe Recorder* magazine in 1898, these boots were touted as the shoes that “fit the feet as nature intended.”¹¹¹ Some of her ads promoted how the shoes were being sold in many cities. Another ad that was published in the *Boot and Shoe Recorder* in June of 1898 described how the boots were being sold in cities across the country¹¹². This ad boasted about the “Famous Jenness Miller Shoes” being sold in cities, such as Cleveland, Ohio; Ogden, Utah; and Albany, New York. The ad described how these shoes being sold in other cities provided a look into the popularity of her boots. Based on Jenness Miller’s ads, these women wanted something that was comfortable to walk in and she provided them with the comfort they needed. Jenness Miller filled a need that was previously unfulfilled in the market of shoes.

¹¹¹ Jenness Miller Boots, “Introduction of the Famous Jenness Miller:’ Hygienic Shoes for Women!” advertisement, *The Nevada Daily Mail*, February 8, 1899.

¹¹² Jenness Miller Boots, “The ‘Jenness Miller’ Women’s Shoe,” advertisement, *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, June 1898, 46.

Despite a flourishing career in dress reform, Jenness Miller's career began to fade in the early 1900s. According to Mabel Jenness, Annie ended her career after her husband became ill. The couple moved to Switzerland in 1904 since the climate was better for Conrad Miller's health.¹¹³ This move further showed the importance Jenness Miller placed on health, as she uprooted her family to help improve her husband's health. She educated her daughter, Vivian, and continued to practice the tenets of dress reform and physical exercise that she began in the United States. Annie Jenness Miller did not publicly discuss what happened to her husband. Instead, she wrote in her book *Triune Development*, that it was for "personal reasons" that she withdrew from public activity.¹¹⁴ Her vague explanations leave the history of why she left for Switzerland muddled; we do know when she returned to America to continue her work in dress reform. Most likely her departure from Europe happened after her husband's passing, but there is no definitive research to state the exact time or reason.

Annie Jenness Miller continued her work on dress reform while she was abroad. This time she focused on clothing that was suited for young children. She tried her child reform garments on her young daughter, Vivian. Her daughter became the model for new clothing styles and Jenness Miller even used photographs of Vivian in her new book, entitled *Father, Mother, and Babe* which she published in 1916. This book showed similarities to another work she published at the height of her career in 1892, called *Mother and Babe*. This new work expanded upon the work of *Mother and Babe* and

¹¹³ "Originator of Jenness Miller Dress Reform Movement Now a Resident of Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Herald*, March 6, 1904.

¹¹⁴ Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 13.

described in more detail the role the mother had to play in child rearing. Jenness Miller pointed out that one of the ways women could help to raise their children in a healthy manner was through dress. She spent a chapter describing how to dress the baby complete with patterns and the types of shoes babies should wear. Jenness Miller wrote, “shoes must be broad enough to save the upper part from spreading over the sole at the ball of the foot, where the main weight of the body must be carried for proper poise.”¹¹⁵ Her descriptions of how the baby’s feet should be treated shows that she was continuing her work on the process that she started many years previously. This emphasis on the baby’s shoes demonstrates the importance of shoes to dress reform and how the care of people’s feet needed to start when they were just born. This work on baby shoes exhibited how she continued her research into dress reform and shoes while she was in Switzerland. Her work in this book illustrates how she came back to the United States to pick up her dress reform work where she left off.

After publishing *Mother, Father, and Babe*, Jenness Miller received some negative feedback from reviewers. The American Social Hygiene Association published a review of the work in 1917 describing the problems of the book. The author, described only as W.C., stated that there were vital mistakes when discussing the roles of both mother and father. The review states that “this is the fatal mistake made by the author in the first chapter; ... to the biological error of attributing to the father alone the life-giving gem, allotting to the mother simply the work of receiving and nourishing the vital spark to which she is apparently supposed to have made no contribution.”¹¹⁶ The reviewer

¹¹⁵ Annie Jenness Miller, *Father, Mother, and Babe* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1916), 124.

¹¹⁶ W.C., “Father, Mother and Babe,” in *Social Hygiene: Volume II 1916-1917* (New York: The American Social Hygiene Association, 1917), 120-121.

questioned the logic of her book and tried to show that she made errors in her discussions of the roles of mother and father in the rearing of children. Their criticism of the book shows that Jenness Miller was no longer receiving the constant praise she had gotten in her early days as a lecturer. Nevertheless, Annie Jenness Miller persevered to restart the career she once had as a famed dress improver.

Despite the criticism she faced, Jenness Miller continued to push forward and revive her career. She filed for another patent on May 29, 1928. This time the patent was for statuettes not related to dress reform. These statues were depicted as Romanesque Gods. The statue was of a small man with wings on his back carrying a shield and completely naked except for a large eye on his chest.¹¹⁷ He carries a blank scroll and is blindfolded with a scarf. It is thought that she intended to sell these statues. It is unclear if whether she made any money at selling these strange and peculiar statues. At any rate, this patent is her last known attempt to create the career she once had.

Her attempts to revive her career were short lived, as the country and women's fashion moved beyond dress reform. The newspapers stopped publishing articles about the strikingly beautiful Jenness Miller and her ideas on dress reform. The fashion industry in American began to focus on the development of new styles such as the flapper dress. Dress improver styles had been more conservative as they still promoted longer dresses. Their opinions on looser fitting dresses may have started out as a fad that was mocked but theoretically paved the way to a more comfortable style of dress.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Annie Jenness Miller, "Statuette," United States Patent 75,369, May 29, 1928.

¹¹⁸ Lee Hall, *Common Threads: A Parade of American Clothing* (Boston: A Bulfinch Press Book, 1992), 85.

Annie Jenness Miller moved out of the public eye and onto other projects. Her sister, Mabel, who had moved to Los Angeles in 1904, moved back to New York. It is thought that the two spent their days quietly reminiscing about the life they had spent and enjoying the time they had left. Annie Jenness Miller passed away on Thursday, August 10, 1935, in Bellevue Hospital at the age of 76 after having an emergency operation in New York.¹¹⁹ Annie Jenness Miller created a legacy with her dress reform business. Her work on dress reform helps her to be remembered an important influence on dress history. Despite cutting her career short, Annie Jenness Miller was able to make an impact on the fashion industry by educating women on the importance of healthy clothing for the body.

¹¹⁹ "Mrs. Jenness-Miller is Dead at Age of 78: Lecturer on Dress Reform Was an Early Advocate of Light Garb for Women," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), August 10, 1935.

Chapter 3: A Walk-through Shoes in the Progressive Era

A woman walks home after a long day's work. Feet aching from wearing the same old shoes. What is the solution? She comes home and starts to look for new shoes. She flips through the pages of the local newspaper and finds an advertisement for the Jenness Miller Boots. Shoe companies had begun to advertise shoes that were more comfortable and easier to wear. The boots fit her criteria; they sound soft and warm. They are advertised as the "hygienic" boot. What's more protective to her poor, aching feet than something "hygienic"?

Annie Jenness Miller decided that the shoe market was a new avenue for her to extend her dress "improvement" brand. She had been a success with the Jenness Miller Bodice and developed into a famous lecturer. Her next step was the shoe industry. Women were in desperate need of shoes that supported their feet and were made of quality material. Jenness Miller sought to take advantage of this market and advertise for her "hygienic boot."¹²⁰ The changing times, trends, and new fashions allowed her an opportunity to create a health reform shoe. She sold these boots in newspapers and popular women's magazines from 1890 to 1904. Jenness Miller's efforts in shoe reform initiated the catalyst for the development of comfortable shoes.

Before the 1880s, boots for women were not popular. Most women during the mid-1800s had taken to wearing slippers or low heel shoes on their feet.¹²¹ These were shoes that were more adequate for indoor use when a woman was socializing or partaking

¹²⁰ Jenness Miller Boots, "Answer for a Crying Demand," Advertisement, *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, June 1, 1889, 46.

¹²¹ R. Turner Wilcox, *The Mode in Footwear: A Historical Survey with 53 Plates* (New York: Dover Publications, 1948) 147.

in daily activities. They were not ideal for women to walk long distances. Most of these shoes were made of fabric and some combination of wood which made for an uncomfortable shoe to walk around in. To combat the problems women faced while walking outside in these shoes, designers created overshoes.¹²² These were a cover women placed over their slippers to protect dainty shoes from being ruined in the mud. The overshoes, which were rubbers or galoshes, were added to protect women's feet from the outdoor elements.¹²³ Manufactures in the United Kingdom began to publicize boots for women's daily wear. It was not until the late eighteen-hundreds that it became popular for American women to wear boots on an everyday basis. As hemlines began to rise to reveal the ankle, women had more incentive to wear attractive taller shoes like the Jenness Miller Boots.

In the 1880s as leisure activities for women developed outdoors, new alternatives for footwear emerged. These new varieties of shoes were originally sold to men and eventually sold to women. In the 1800s, another popular addition to the women's shoe were the gaiters or spats for daytime wear.¹²⁴ According to historians Lucy Pratt and Linda Woolley, these were more popular among women's styles but were often worn by men as well. These attempts at covering the shoe and other parts of the foot from the weather demonstrated that women were starting to look for shoes that protected their feet and allowed them to participate in leisure activities such as croquet or tennis.

¹²² Lucy Johnston and Linda Woolley, *Shoes: Accessories* (United Kingdom: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999), 31.

¹²³ Lucy Johnston and Linda Woolley, *Shoes: Accessories* (United Kingdom: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999), 85.

¹²⁴ Lucy Johnston and Linda Woolley, *Shoes: Accessories* (United Kingdom: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999), 85.

The gaiters were created to help protect the feet from the outdoor elements. Gaiters were a separate piece made of fabric that acted as a covering placed on top of the foot and ankle.¹²⁵ The use of gaiters were an attempt to solve the problem women faced when they walked outside in their short heel shoes. The gaiters were usually made of leather or canvas and were more uncomfortable for women's feet compared to overshoes. According to historian Nancy Rexford, "flimsy shoes or gaiter boots worn painfully short and tight were a very real discouragement to physical activity, and as a result they tended to foster both dependence and domesticity."¹²⁶ Her descriptions of the gaiter boots as flimsy and painful demonstrate that there was a real need for a health reform shoe. The problems women faced when they walked outside with the uncomfortable attachments added to their shoes only added to the problems. Women were ready for a new change in footwear and Jenness Miller had an option to fill that need.

The need for dress reform grew as more women migrated to cities. At the turn of the twentieth-century, women were starting to enter the workforce. Patricia Cunningham writes, "As urban development continued in Europe and America, and more women, especially in America, had income-producing jobs, they could afford to dress in modern fashionable styles."¹²⁷ As the number of women in the workforce increased, the desire for comfortable shoes that they could work in grew. Women needed to wear shoes that provided support for their feet as they began taking jobs to support their families. The

¹²⁵ Nancy Rexford, *Women's Shoes in America, 1795-1930*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), 340.

¹²⁶ Nancy Rexford, *Women's Shoes in America, 1795-1930*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), 46.

¹²⁷ Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art* (London: Kent State University Press, 2003), 15.

magazine, *Harper's Bazaar*, weighed in about uncomfortable shoes, as they published an article stating that, "she who once has a well-made, well-fitting pair of these boots will never again submit to the discomfort of overshoes."¹²⁸ As the image of women changed from homemakers to workers in a vibrant fast-moving society, they needed a shoe that adapted with their lifestyle.

Upper- and middle-class women learned about the importance of uncomfortable shoes and feet by studying the history of Chinese foot binding. At the turn of the twentieth century, women started clubs that focused on travel without ever leaving their homes. These clubs were especially interested in Asian countries. In what was known as arm-chair travel clubs, these women saw images of Chinese cultural practice in which women's feet were believed to be mutilated. In this process, women's feet were made smaller as the "bones were irrevocable bent and new muscular habits formed."¹²⁹ Speakers would come to these clubs and demonstrate the painful process of foot binding through photos and pictures taken from China. Participants in these travelers' clubs were horrified by the image of foot binding. These upper- and middle-class women would donate money to missionary funds to help prevent this practice.¹³⁰ This process got them thinking about their own feet and the pain their shoes were causing them. Chinese Foot Binding also tied back to the notions of "hygiene." During the Progressive Era, the term "hygiene" was associated with the ideas of being a clean American, while immigrants were viewed as unhygienic. This need to conform to the ideas of being American and

¹²⁸ "The Feminine Mystique," *Harper's Bazaar*, 1912.

¹²⁹ Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 11.

¹³⁰ Hoganson, Kristen L. *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 195-6.

hygienic led to the fear of being considered an unhygienic immigrant. This led to the fear of the practice of Chinese Foot Binding taking place in America on women's feet.

The process of Chinese Foot binding gained more notoriety as authors wrote about the subject in books and newspaper articles published during the Progressive Era. In one article published in the *Washington Post* in 1889, the author described how Chinese foot binding bore a similarity to pain women were putting their feet through. "Women went right along constricting their bodies as Chinese do their feet, rendering useless their muscles and consigning to weakness and disease the third and fourth generations," she asserted.¹³¹ The author described how women's uncomfortable dress and shoes related to the painful qualities of the Chinese foot binding. Similarly, the book, *Intimate China* by Mrs. Archibald Little published in 1899 during the heart of the Progressive Era, depicted a woman's journey through China. In one chapter, she described how women suffered many dangers because of foot binding. She wrote, "Dr. Reifsnyder, the lady at the head of the Margaret Williamson Hospital at Shanghai, says toes often drop off under binding, and not uncommonly half the foot does likewise."¹³² The publication of this book as well as articles in the newspaper shows how the mass public was beginning to worry about the pains their shoes had on their own health.

Another health concern for women's feet was the discussion on corns, bunions, and other ailments women faced. These ailments caused women severe pain as they had to walk in tight fitted shoes that caused the irritation. According to John Beford Leno's book, *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking*, published in 1885, he described the process of

¹³¹ "Art Aids the Doctors," *The Washington Post*, (Washington D.C.), May 8, 1889.

¹³² Mrs. Archibald Little, *Intimate China: The Chinese as I Have Seen Them*. (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1899), 141-142.

how corns are created. He wrote that “the process has been thus described: ‘The hard corn is produced by the constant collision of a tight or small shoe against the projection point of some prominent bony surface, as on the lasts joints of third, fourth, and little toe.’”¹³³ This description of these ailments illustrates how shoes can cause women’s feet problems with poorly fitting shoes. Leno’s book also describes how these pains women faced were being discussed among boot and shoemakers of the time. Leno’s book was written with the shoemaker in mind, as he goes into lengthy descriptions of the process of making boots, choosing the correct leather, and techniques for producing the shoe. The fact that a shoemaker was concerned with these ailments demonstrates that they were aware of the problems in women’s feet and were attempting to find a solution.

During the Progressive Era, women began to venture outside the home and developed a demand for comfortable shoes. Women began participating in more outdoor activities, especially with the invention of the bicycle. They could ride freely around town which gave them a feeling of independence. Women also began to participate in outdoor games for exercise and enjoyment, such as croquet. In croquet, women needed to have shoes that were comfortable to wear and easy to play in. Companies, such as the Spalding Company, developed ‘croquet sandals’ that were made to allow women to play outdoors on the grassy fields.¹³⁴ Even if women did not participate in croquet or bicycle riding, they still needed a soft, durable shoe to travel around.

¹³³ Leno, John Beford. *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking: A Practical Handbook Including Measurement, Last-Fitting, Cutting-Out, Closing, and Making*. (London: W. Foulsham and Co. Publishers, 1885), 20-21.

¹³⁴ Patricia Campbell Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear*. (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 49.

The Jenness Miller Boots were created by Annie Jenness Miller as an answer to this need for a more comfortable shoe. She developed boots that were short ankle boots or as they are known, half-boots, seen in Figure 6. These boots used laces instead of the usual button and hook method making them easier to wear for their everyday lifestyle. In contrast, some popular shoes during this time were made with a button and hook style which required a hook tool separate from the boot to close the snaps on the shoes. Jenness Miller's Boots laced up the front for more convenient and easy access. They were also made of kid leather which had become an increasingly popular material for daytime weather



Figure 4 “Famous ‘Jenness Miller’ Shoes,” advertisement for Jenness Miller Shoes, *The Washington Post*, September 12, 1898.

shoes.¹³⁵ Kid leather was made from tanned mature goats, which was much softer than traditional leather. Her boots were touted as the “hygienic shoe” and were advertised to provide comfort for women's feet in a time when they were participating in more outdoor activities.¹³⁶

Annie Jenness Miller's brand became one that consumers trusted to provide healthy and less constrictive garments. An article published in the *Washington Post* in 1897, detailed the work Jenness Miller put into the creation of her shoes. The article stated, “after years of study and experimenting Mrs. Jenness Miller struck upon a model for a perfect hygienic shoe... Mrs. Miller only allowing her name to be used after she had

¹³⁵ Lucy Johnston and Linda Woolley, *Shoes: Accessories* (United Kingdom: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999, 85.

¹³⁶ Jenness Miller Boots, “Notice to the Public,” advertisement, *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 14, 1902.

satisfied herself by its wear that it fully conforms to her idea of the perfect shoe.”¹³⁷ This article demonstrates the work and effort that she put into designing the boots. She cared enough about women’s feet to spend hours of time designing shoes she thought were comfortable.

The design of the Jenness Miller Boots also followed along with the opinions of American dress improvers. According to historian Catherine Mas, dress reformers believed that boots were warmer to walk around in and less flimsy than the popular slippers. She writes that “the appropriate shoes and hats were additional items that regulated body temperature; boots were recommended for their sturdiness and warmth instead of the thin, flimsy slippers in fashion.”¹³⁸ Jenness Miller’s Boots fit with this new style of dress improvers and helped to promote the need for a comfortable shoe. While women walked around in slippers that were considered ‘flimsy,’ dress improvers promoted the necessary change to this shoe. Jenness Miller was building on the ideas of the dress improvers by constructing a boot that met their recommendations.

A design technique that Jenness Miller included in her boots was the shape of the toe. In one of her lectures, Jenness Miller described the importance of how the toe of the boot was shaped. She believed that to look attractive and pretty the toe portion of the boot needed to be rounded. She said that ““a perfectly square toe has a tendency to make the foot look ugly. I greatly prefer one with a slight curve. Follow nature’s curve and you will not be far out of the way.””¹³⁹ Her description of the importance of a rounded toe

¹³⁷ “Jenness Miller Shoes,” *The Washington Post*, 1897.

¹³⁸ Catherine Mas, “She Wears the Pants: The Reform Dress as Technology in Nineteenth Century America,” *Technology and Culture* 58 no. 1 (2017): 58.

¹³⁹ “Dress Reform: Annie Jenness-Miller’s Entertaining Lecture,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), May 22, 1892, 3.

helps to demonstrate how she felt the boot needed to be constructed in a way that met with nature. While her images of the shoe portray it as a pointed toe shoe, it is believed that these depictions are only for appearance and to catch the eyes. She did want women's feet to look pretty while being comfortable. As she disliked her own feet, something she pointed out during the same lecture, her addition of an attractive feature into the boots helped to emphasize that she not only wanted women to be comfortable but also look attractive.

To promote her boots, Annie Jenness Miller relied on shoe companies. The two significant partners that she had in selling her boots were Dalton's Shoe Company and Mr. Crocker's Shoe Company. Through these companies, Jenness Miller marketed her boots across America. She focused on advertisements published in newspapers, such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Evening Star*, and *The Washington Post*. Her advertisements for the Jenness Miller Boots also made their way into the *Ladies' Home Journal*. According to historian Kathy Peiss, the *Ladies' Home Journal* was one of the six most read magazines by women and published for women.¹⁴⁰ The fact that she was published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* illustrates that she could afford to advertise in a prominent magazine. In these advertisements, Jenness Miller would advertise her boots as the "hygienic shoe" which women should be wearing. In one advertisement published in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Jenness Miller writes that her boots are, "the finest made, most perfect fitting and most comfortable ever produced by man."¹⁴¹ By using words like "comfortable" and "perfect fit," Jenness Miller tried to

¹⁴⁰ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 122.

¹⁴¹ "'Jenness Miller Shoes!'" *The Ladies's Home Journal*, January 1897, 20.

promote her boots as shoes that would be easy on women's feet to wear, avoiding the pain and injuries that other shoes inflicted.

Annie Jenness Miller advertised her boots by handing out free copies of a chapter of her books with the sale of each pair. She instructed Mr. Crocker's Shoe Company to give away a free chapter from her book, *Physical Beauty and How to Obtain It*, to each customer with the sale of her boots. In her book, she had published a chapter, entitled "Feet," that described how to care for them and the importance of women wearing comfortable and attractive shoes. Jenness Miller wrote that "the first step to be taken toward a cure is to have one's shoes properly made by an experienced workman according to the anatomy of the foot, allowing sufficient length, and with soles broad enough to give the ball of the foot perfect flexibility and muscular play."¹⁴² She believed women should be wearing shoes that fit their feet to match their anatomy. Jenness Miller created ready-made shoes, a practice which became the main form of purchasing shoes. Previously shoes were produced using straights, which meant there was no difference between right and left shoes. As shoes were manufactured on a larger scale, new practices and techniques evolved for shoemaking, allowing the foot to have a right and left shoe and making them easier to wear. More ready-made shoes became necessary to keep up with consumer demand in 1883. The fact that Jeness Miller included chapters with this language with the sale of her shoes illustrates that she was trying to educate women about the best care for their feet.

¹⁴² Annie Jenness Miller, *Physical Beauty: How to Obtain and How to Preserve It* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1892), 143.

Annie Jenness Miller's goal for her health reform shoe was to create a boot that allowed comfort and ease when walking. She believed that walking was the goal to having healthier organs and improved breathing qualities. In one of her lectures given in Los Angeles in 1900, she stated that, "physical development is only physical development when it improves every organ in the body," she said, and then illustrated by four examples, standing correctly, sitting correctly, walking correctly and breathing correctly."¹⁴³ She wanted women to exercise and walk correctly while wearing comfortable shoes as a way to improve their overall health. She believed if women had more comfortable shoes, they were more likely to partake in exercise and walking that will help organs to function better. The women who attended these lectures believed that they could learn how to put her ideas to practice.¹⁴⁴ These attendees believed that not only was Jenness Miller selling these ideas through her health reform garments and lectures, but she also walked the walk so to speak. She became an example for these women to follow and understand.

Jenness Miller, a prominent member of the dress reform movement, included the term "hygienic" in her advertisements to tie her shoes back to the movement's ideas. In advertisements, Jenness Miller would emphasize her boots as the "hygienic shoe" that women should be wearing. For example, one of her ads, touted the shoe by stating, "the 'Jenness Miller' Hygienic Shoe is simply the answer to the crying demand for the perfect

¹⁴³ "Good Living as an Art: Mrs. Jenness Miller on the Subject," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), December 18, 1900, 115.

¹⁴⁴ "Good Living as an Art: Mrs. Jenness Miller on the Subject," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), December 18, 1900, 115.

shoe.”¹⁴⁵ Jenness Miller was a major proponent and speaker of the dress reform movement, or as she called it, dress improvement. The idea of the movement focused on clothes and shoes that were the main factors in causing women’s pain. The movement believed that “high heels, crinolettes (today called ‘bustles’), chignons [a popular French hairstyle] and tight lacing were all both dangerous to health and ugly.”¹⁴⁶ This description of calling women’s shoes “ugly and dangerous” shows that health reformers believed that there needed to be a solution to the shoes women had been wearing. The movement equated high heels with the problems of tight lacing that came from corsets. Jenness Miller, as a leader of the dress reform movement, felt that she needed to create a “hygienic boot” that she felt fit with the tenets and opinions of her fellow dress improvers. Much as she tried to save women with her reform bodice, Jenness Miller attempted to do a similar thing with her boots.

Jenness Miller also developed a line of Jenness Miller Oxford shoes for women. These shoes were not pictured in advertisements like the Jenness Miller Boots. Instead, they were advertised along with her boots and rarely by themselves. Based on other Oxford shoes sold during the late 1890s, the Jenness Miller Oxfords were short heel shoes that laced up the front. Considering that they were sold in connection with the Jenness Miller Boots, it is believed that they resembled her boots. Just like the boots, her shoes were sold with comfortable heels that women could wear and were also considered “hygienic” and good for walking.¹⁴⁷ Jenness Miller advertised these Oxfords along with

¹⁴⁵ Jenness Miller Boots, “Answer for a Crying Demand,” advertisement, *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, June 1, 1889.

¹⁴⁶ Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century*. (Great Britan: John Murray Ltd., 1974), 46.

¹⁴⁷ “Ease and Elegance Combined,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1899, 4.

her boots in newspapers around the country, from the *San Francisco Chronicle* to the *Washington Post*. These Oxfords were not as popular as the boots, and it is thought that the consumers did not like this style as strongly the boots. In addition, Jenness Miller did not utilize the same advertising techniques that she did for her boots.

Annie Jenness Miller continued to expand her business by creating shoes that focused on children. She redesigned these shoes as spring heeled, half boots. When Jenness Miller advertised these shoes, she also put a list of sizes for the boots so mothers and fathers would know the correct sizing for their children's shoes. Sizing was a technique that had first been implemented in the United Kingdom in the 1860s and had just started to be used by American shoemakers in the 1880s.¹⁴⁸ The shoes were advertised to protect children's feet from any harm. In her ads she wrote, "do not ruin your children's feet by crowding them into badly-shaped ill-fitting, poorly-constructed shoes."¹⁴⁹ These shoes were advertised along with her boots for women and published in the similar newspapers and magazines.

The development of her boots for children follows along with her concerns and worries about children's development. Jenness Miller wrote in her book, *Father, Mother, and Babe* about the care of children's feet and how to prevent their legs from being too cramped.¹⁵⁰ In addition to being concerned with women's hygienic behaviors, she also felt strongly about the care of children. This concern and development in her work seems to have appeared after she gave birth to her child, Vivian. According to the research, she used Vivian as a test case for what she thought would succeed on children and where

¹⁴⁸ Lucy Pratt and Linda Woolley. *Shoes*. (London: Victoria and Albert Publications, 2000), 65.

¹⁴⁹ "Children's Feet," *The Washington Post*, September 11, 1898, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Annie Jenness Miller, *Father, Mother, and Babe* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1916), 234.

their clothing needed improvement. Based on advertisements, it appears Jenness Miller was trying to solve a much-needed problem in children fashion by advertising for shoes that did not “ruin” their feet as she believed other designers had. Her work with children’s clothing and shoes seems to be something that she was passionate about especially after raising her daughter, Vivian.

An important factor in determining the success of the Jenness Miller Boots is to look at who purchased the shoes. According to an article published in the *Washington Post*, these boots were priced just out of reach of most women buyers. The article went on to state that, “Mr. Crocker has found it possible to sell it [Jenness Miller Boots] for \$3.50, which will no doubt be good news to all women who suffer with tender feet.”¹⁵¹ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, this amount would be well over a \$100 in today’s currency. The desire of Mr. Crocker to market her boots at a cheaper price showed that the company worried the boots were not being sold due to their high prices. Unfortunately, there are limited business sources to state whether her boots were successful. They were sold from the late 1890s until 1904 throughout the country in stores in San Francisco, Washington D.C., and other stores across America. Jenness Miller tried to create a healthy boot that would make walking more comfortable for everyday women. Based on the price of the boots, it seems as though they were not always affordable for middle- and lower-class women to purchase.

Other shoe companies in America began to advertise shoes that followed the ideas of dress reform and health reform shoes. The Manufacturer’s Shoe Company, advertised

¹⁵¹ “Jenness Miller Shoes,” *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.) September 12, 1897, 5.

shoes that were considered perfect for “outdoor weather.”¹⁵² These shoes came in a variety of colors and advertised to women that they would be comfortable to wear for lengthy periods. They were made of fine “kid skin” like the Jenness Miller Boots.

Another company, the North Star Shore Company, advertised shoes that were created to be the bicycle shoe. These shoes were designed similarly to the Jenness Miller boots.¹⁵³

They were short ankle boots with laces that were considered the “most” comfortable boots to wear while bicycling. The ankle boots were sold in 1897 around the same time as the Jenness Miller Boots. While not using the same language as the Jenness Miller Boots, they promoted comfort for women when walking or riding a bicycle. These other advertisements demonstrate that there was a market for the shoes that fit the activities of the new style of women that developed during the Progressive Era. Women wanted a boot that would fit their new lifestyle of going to work every day and enjoy the new activities open to them.

Other companies sought to compete in this market not by creating shoes of their own, but instead by building supporting tools. These tools like ankle supporters, show how the shoes of previous generations were not always the most comfortable. Ankle supporters were designed for children and adults to support the ankle and make it easier for them to walk. They were initially constructed as tools to help children learn to walk. As their popularity grew, the company, R. H. Golden, expanded the operation to include adult supporters. According to their advertisement, it appears as if the ankle supporters were something you would put inside your shoe to support the foot from any damage or

¹⁵² “All the New Shoe Styles,” *Ladies Home Journal*, 1896, 30.

¹⁵³ “Comfort Style Fit,” *Ladies Home Journal*, 1897.

pain. R.H. Golden, advertised these boots in the *Ladies Home Journal* in the 1890s as the item “recommended by physicians as best appliance for weak or deformed ankles.”¹⁵⁴

These ankle supporters were another avenue for shoe companies to compete against new innovative shoes like the Jenness Miller Boots. While they are an insert instead of a shoe, the Ankle Supporters used similar language to that of the Jenness Miller Boots. Instead of using terms like ‘hygienic,’ they state they are ‘doctor recommended.’ This shows that there was a market for shoes that not only were comfortable but fit the changing needs of health reform.

In addition to competition from other companies, Jenness Miller had to contend with illegal replications of her boots. In the *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, an ad described how her boot had been copied and sold as the Jenness Miller Boot but was not the authentic boot. Other shoe companies had been copying her designs and sold the boots as their own. To combat this problem, Jenness Miller trademarked her name. In the advertisement she told her customers and boot sellers to only carry



Figure 7 1889, Annie Jenness Miller, Reform Under Garments

boots that had her trademarked name and signature inside the boot as seen in Figure 7. The advertisement stated that “Mrs. ‘Jenness-Miller,’ of national ‘Dress Reform’ fame, and each pair is stamped with the facsimile autograph of her name on top facing and

¹⁵⁴ “Ankle Supporters,” *Ladies Home Journal*, April 1894, 34.

sole—without which none are genuine.”¹⁵⁵ The Jenness Miller Boots had developed enough popularity that she wanted to protect her brand with trademark.

Annie Jenness Miller went beyond the work of simply selling shoes. Through her lectures and books, she taught women about health and healthy dress. She wanted to change women’s clothing for the better and create shoes that were healthier for their feet. In her book, *Triune Development*, Jenness Miller explained that she suffered from illness as a young woman in the 1870s and 1880s. She believed the solution to her ill health was through comfortable clothing and embracing the physical culture of exercise.¹⁵⁶ These were the ideas she had when she created her health reform shoes. These shoes were built to help women stand correctly and have comfortable healthy feet. Jenness Miller changed the scope of how to advertise for shoes by designing styles that were healthier for women’s feet. She did not want women to face the problems and ill health she faced, so she created products that improved their well-being. There is no definitive evidence that Jenness Miller consulted with doctors or orthopedists on the actual medical attributes of her shoes. There is documentation in the newspaper articles published about her that she did recommend women consult doctors if they were having medical problems. Jenness Miller focused her business on the process of helping women be healthier through fashion.

Despite the attractiveness of the Jenness Miller boots and other shoe reform shoes, women still demanded footwear that was stylish. They wanted to wear boots that

¹⁵⁵ Jenness Miller Boots, “Elegant and Exclusive,” advertisement, *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, June 29, 1898, 46.

¹⁵⁶ Annie Jenness Miller, *Triune Development: The Road to Self-Mastery* (New York: William Green, 1909), 11.

fit with the fashion styles of the Progressive Era and were considered trendy. According to historian, Jenna Weisman Joselit, “the high-heeled shoes, in contrast, made women feel, taller, thinner, and lovelier. Doctors might protest and dress reformers complain, but female consumers, across the country routinely chose stylish shoes.”¹⁵⁷ Jenness Miller tried to satisfy women's desires for heeled shoes. She designed her boots with low heels as a compromise to the women's desires and created the rounded toe to make their feet look more attractive. Many women preferred the styles and look of the heels. This preference helped to influence the changing styles of women shoes and bring about a shift in women's shoe design.

Jenness Miller moved away to Switzerland by 1904 to care for her ailing husband, Conrad Miller, and she did not return until the mid-1910s. Her husband passed away overseas. While she was away, shoe styles began to shift and changed along with the rise in hemlines. The demand for boots started to fade away as World War I started, and women needed more sensible shoes. A demand for ‘lower heeled’ and more “sturdier models of shoes in advertisement space began to appear.”¹⁵⁸ The need for boots, like the Jenness Miller Boots, faded away and companies started to promote lower heeled shoes that met the demand. She was not able to keep up with the drastic changes in shoe design. The last advertisements for her boots were placed in newspaper ads in 1904. The change in styles resulted in the boots fading away as trends changed. Considering that she left to care for her husband it seems as though her innovative boot designs were not able to keep

¹⁵⁷ Weissman, Jenna Joselit. *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 138.

¹⁵⁸ Lucy Pratt and Linda Woolley. *Shoes*. (London: Victoria and Albert Publications, 2000), 84.

up. After 1904, there were no more ads published promoting any type of Jenness Miller shoes.

Throughout history, fashion has evolved, and the Annie Jenness Miller Boots were no exception. The Jenness Miller Boots had helped to start a trend for comfortable wear in women's shoes, but her boots alone could not satisfy the changing demand for comfortable shoes. This is exemplified in the book, *The Outdoor Girls*, published in 1913 by Laura Lee Hope. In the book, the girls take a walking trip across several towns and have a desperate need for comfortable shoes. One of the girls, Grace, decided to wear shoes similar in style to that of the Jenness Miller Boots, but the others relentlessly mock her for wearing uncomfortable shoes. This causes Grace to order boots like the other girls, ones that are touted as "stout and substantial walking boots."¹⁵⁹ This criticism of boots like the Jenness Miller Boots shows that times had changed and the boots that once fit a need were not enough anymore. Women needed to wear something that matched their changing role in society and allowed them to be comfortable when they wanted to be outdoors or just walking to work.

A factor in the disappearance of the Jenness Miller Boots was the high price of leather. Shoe companies began to need more and more leather to produce their popular styles. To keep up with this demand and reduced supply, leather companies began raising the price of their goods in the first decade of the 1900s.¹⁶⁰ Considering most of her boots were made of leather, once the prices rose on the material, this would make it difficult for

¹⁵⁹ Laura Lee Hope, *The Outdoor Girl of Deepdale, Or, Camping and Tramping for Fun and Health*. (New York: Lasso Press, 1913), 59.

¹⁶⁰ Nancy Rexford, *Women's Shoes in America, 1795-1930* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000),29.

her to produce the boots at an affordable cost even for upper- and middle-class women to purchase. The increased price of leather goods along with the changing trends helped to lead to the end of the Jenness Miller Boots.

Despite the changing styles in women's shoes and their preference for high heeled shoes, Jenness Miller created a legacy with her boots. In 1919, there developed the federal government-run Department of Social Hygiene, which ran from 1911-1939 spearheaded by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).¹⁶¹ The Department of Social Hygiene was eventually dissolved in 1939 because of public backlash after researching sex issues.¹⁶² The YWCA focused on issues that affected the mind, body, and spirit, and saw women's feet as an extension of these principles.¹⁶³ One of their goals in creating the department was to develop shoes that were both comfortable and stylish for women to wear. According to historian Jenna Joselit Weisman, "American women, said the volunteer organization, want to be 'healthful' as well as beautiful and would eagerly welcome a shoe whose design incorporated both elements."¹⁶⁴ These women held similar beliefs to Jenness Miller when she created her boots. They wanted women to feel comfortable in their shoes and at the same time look stylish. Many shoe companies, such as J and T Cousins Company and Wm. Henne and Company, followed the opinions of

¹⁶¹ Weissman, Jenna Joselit. *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 143.

¹⁶² Teresa Iacobelli, "Sex Problems as Social Problems: The Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1911-1934," Rockefeller Archive Center, 2022, <https://resource.rockarch.org/story/bureau-of-social-hygiene-prostitution-history/>.

¹⁶³ Ruth Irving-Carroll, "A History of the YWCA Mission," YWCA, 2022, <https://www.ywca.org/about/history/#:~:text=The%20corporate%20name%20changed%20from,%2C%20effective%20December%2015%2C%202015.>

¹⁶⁴ Weissman, Jenna Joselit. *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 143.

the WYCA and created heeled shoes that they considered both attractive and comfortable. Even though, Jenness Miller had returned to the United States by this point after her husband's passing, there is no record that she became involved with the Department of Social Hygiene or the move for healthier shoes. These new ideas that were being spearheaded by the YWCA and the Department of Social Hygiene, shows that other women took up the cause that Jenness Miller had helped to start. They continued her legacy by focusing on campaigns that got women to care about their feet by creating shoes that were considered both stylish and healthful.

According to records published after her husband passed, it appears that Jenness Miller became involved with real estate investments and scouting properties. According to *Massachusetts Avenue Architecture* published in 2006 by the Commission of Fine Arts, Annie Jenness Miller was hired by families to scout properties and purchase articles necessary for these homes that were constructed on these properties.¹⁶⁵ Her work in scouting real estate was a drastic change from the dress reform and fashion world she had previously been involved in. After her husband passed, her passions must have changed, and she looked for new avenues to exert her influence as a businesswoman. It is unfortunate that we do not get to see what new designs would have followed the Jenness Miller Boots. Had her husband not become ill, she could have designed new shoes that fit perfectly with the changing styles but unfortunately, we will never know what her next pair of shoes would have looked like.

¹⁶⁵ The Commission of Fine Arts, *Massachusetts Avenue Architecture*, Charles H. Atherton, Donald B. Myer, Jeffrey R. Carson, Lynda L. Smith, J.L. Sibley Jennings Jr., Washington D.C.: Congress, 1973, 125.

The ideas of the “hygienic” shoe and the “health reform” shoe have since fallen from our vocabulary and are not seen published in tandem with a shoe advertisement. Today, when people think of comfortable shoes, they imagined tennis shoes designed specifically for jogging. They see brand names, like Nike, Adidas, and Sketchers. They look for shoes that have memory foam and feel lighter than air, shoes that they know they can wear on long walks or on trips to Disneyland where they walk miles a day for fun. Jenness Miller helped to start a trend in fashion. She believed that helping women find comfortable clothing was the first step in improving their health. She wanted women to avoid facing the same problems she did at a young age. Instead of being ill in bed, she wanted to improve the way women stand and wear clothes that did not bend their bodies in an uncomfortable manner. One aspect of the legacy that she left behind are the boots she created. She wanted these boots to help women find comfort in their travels as they walked to work or for exercise, something many women had not done before. Jenness Miller created a legacy with her boots, as she tried to find solutions to women’s health. She used her name and ideas about healthy dress to fight for women and encouraged them to find comfortable shoes. While the styles for shoes have changed, Jenness Miller’s impact on shoes will last for decades to come.

Conclusion

The Progressive Era created a long-lasting impact on women's dress. Women's fashion styles drastically changed from that of the beginning of the Progressive Era. In 1880, when the Progressive Era was in its early beginnings, women's clothing was characterized by long dresses that dragged on the floor, form-fitting shoes, and corsets so tight women could not breathe. As women's roles changed, so too did fashion. Dress improvers, like Annie Jenness Miller, fought hard to make clothing more accessible and healthier for women. They believed that improving women's fashion would help to improve their health conditions. There was animosity towards the dress improvers, but twentieth century fashion styles eventually changed in favor of healthier alternatives. Dresses for women became lighter and looser fitting and allowed for more comfort in women's daily lives. The changes that occurred during the Progressive Era helped to shape women's fashion today.

Dress improvers expanded their beliefs that they could cure and solve ailments of the feet. They focused on promoting less form-fitting shoes and bathing techniques that would help cleanse their bodies. They thought that by helping to solve women's foot problems they could correct difficulties with posture and breathing. Women faced painful problems, such as corns and bunions, that caused sore feet. We now know that the dress improvers were correct in their assumptions, as tight-fitting shoes do cause harm. Jenness Miller sought to correct these problems with her boots.

Annie Jenness Miller helped to start the work on reforming shoes for women. Her shoes opened a discussion on a market that had been previously overlooked by most designers and dress improvers. Her boots focused on the health and wellness of women's

feet. She produced the shoes using comfortable material and constructed them into a health reform shoe. The Jenness Miller Boots were targeted to women who wanted more comfortable and healthy shoes. We do not know how many designers used her shoes as a model for their future designs, but her shoes did start shift to more comfortable footwear. The Jenness Miller's Boots may have not been the defining feature of her company and brand. According to newspaper articles and her lectures, it seems as though her divided skirt and the Jenness Miller Bodice were more successful garments. Despite this, her boots helped to illustrate the concerns she saw with women's fashion.

Annie Jenness Miller not only worked in dress reform; she also used her voice to help women in their everyday lives. Her work in dress reform allowed her to speak out on many social issues for women, something many women during the Progressive Era did not have access to. This allowed her to become a champion for women's rights and a supporter of many women's movements. She used her voice to fight for women's suffrage, the temperance movement, and healthier dress for women. Along with her support for many women's issues, she designed clothing that focused on women's health and improving the way women dressed daily. Her role in the Progressive Era has been overlooked by many historians.

Annie Jenness Miller's clothing brand became one that consumers trusted to provide healthy and less constrictive garments. In an article published in the *Washington Post* in 1897, the author details the work Jenness Miller put into the creation of her shoes stating, "after years of study and experimenting Mrs. Jenness Miller struck upon a model for a perfect hygienic shoe... Mrs. Miller only allowing her name to be used after she had

satisfied herself by its wear that it fully conforms to her idea of the perfect shoe.”¹⁶⁶ This article shows the work and effort that she put into designing the boots. She cared enough about women’s feet to spend hours designing shoes she thought were comfortable.

The development of Jenness Miller’s shoes and the work promoting healthy feet demonstrates that dress improvers were trying to solve women’s health problems through fashion. Women daily will put on their favorite pair of shoes and think they are pretty and stylish. They may lack the arch support or comfort that is necessary for healthy feet. Shoe companies like Skechers, Keds, and Birkenstocks are creating shoes to promote style and comfort. Women now have the option of wearing shoes that will not cause pain. During the late nineteenth century, they did not have the choice to wear comfortable shoes at a time when outdoor activities like croquet and bicycling were emerging. Companies like Jenness Miller decided to jump on this opportunity and create healthy shoes. She advertised that her shoes were comfortable to wear and met the “hygienic” standards. Jenness Miller utilized the shoe industry as another way to promote her brand. In doing so she tapped into a new market that was developing for women. The Jenness Miller Boots stood out in the 1890s as they show that someone cared about women’s feet enough to try to make a difference with her company.

Annie Jenness Miller was one of the unsung heroes of the Progressive Era. She changed the scope and image of women as business owners, as she marketed clothing, sold magazines and books, and lectured to sold out crowds on the healthful benefits of reform dress. Her work showed women that they had the capacity to be a business owner

¹⁶⁶ “Jenness Miller Shoes,” *The Washington Post*, 1897.

and take charge of their lives. She supported women's adventures into the outdoors and attempted to create shoes that allowed them to walk and ride bicycles comfortably around town. Women's changing roles in society provided Jenness Miller with a new market to sell her divided skirts and boots to women needing a comfortable, healthier option. Her boots and the work she did changed the way shoes were made for women of future generations. Jenness Miller's boots were only one example of the expansive dress improvement business that she created. She lectured around the country, published works about dress improvement, and created fashion to help the masses. Her work in this movement signifies a change of the times. It shows that women had the ability to run their own business, something that was rare during the Progressive Era. She created a change in how women could view themselves by running a company owned and operated by women. Annie Jenness Miller's career helps to create a change in the way we view women during the Progressive Era.

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