

THE TONGUE-TIE

Great excitement was sweeping over the primitive settlement of Vermontville, in Southern Michigan. The dressmaker had finally been brought to town! It was a long journey -- fifteen or twenty miles from the settlement where she lived. The roads were always bad and often impassable. It took three days to make the trip, and the new settlers who worked from dawn till dark to turn the wilderness into productive farm lands rarely had three days to spare.

The Perkins family had waited long for the dressmaker. Now that she had finally arrived, other housewives were hoping that they could engage her to sew up the bolts of calico, cotton or linsay-woolsey waiting in their storerooms. One of them was my grandmother, Mrs. Benedict.

"Sara, go over to the Perkins'," she suggested, "and ask the seamstress if she'll come to us next. I haven't a thing to wear myself and I want a couple of dresses made for you."

Sara (my mother) and her younger sister Anna were delighted for an excuse to visit Jenny Perkins. They had never seen a dressmaker in action. They knew she was something very special and made clothes much more elegant than those produced by the local families without patterns or much native skill.

As soon as the noon meal was cleared away and the dishes washed, Sara and Anna ran down the woody path to the Perkins' home.

When the "Village" was laid out, ten acres of land were given to each settler, so the families were far apart, and one didn't make the trip from home to a neighbor's without good reason.

Jenny saw her friends coming and greeted them excitedly at the door. Jenny had an impediment in her speech and excitement made it worse.

"She's started on my pink merino and next, she's making a blue alpaca", she announced, with a little stutter, as she led them into the big main room of the log cabin, which had been given over entirely to the seamstress and her working tools.

A large pine table held bolts of cloth, papers, patterns, measuring rods, huge pincushions and enormous scissors -- the latter brought from the east and carefully treasured.

The seamstress called to Jenny to "come and be fitted." Jenny stood in the center of the floor while cloth was held up to her; seams pulled in here, seams let out there, during all of which time the fitter carried on an animated conversation with her mouth full of pins. Sara and Anna were sure she would choke-- the pins would be swallowed and the victim would die a horrible death. They watched fascinated, dreading, yet hoping that if it was going to happen it would be while they were there.

The seamstress was a small, bright eyed woman. She was dressed in dull black silk, with a white ruche at the collar, and wore a quaint little black silk apron which had tiny box plaits all around the edge, and in the corner a little pocket