

Legends of Freeborn County Feed Sack Clothing - 1930's

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Years ago, people didn't drive to the nearest mall to purchase new clothes for spring. They went to the nearest feed store and bought feed for their chickens or to the general store and bought a bag of flour. Then when you needed a new shirt or a dress, Mom would pull out one of these cloth bags and sew the clothing. These sacks - originally containing feed for the animals, or flour or sugar - were made from 100% cotton, and were far too valuable to throw away.

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The museum collection contains many items made from these bags. Among the most interesting are pillow cases, an apron, a handkerchief, (They didn't use Kleenex either. Everyone was supposed to carry a handkerchief in a pocket at all times.), table cloths, a clothespin bag, a sheet, a potholder, and even a bedspread.

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Because the flour and sugar bags had labels on them, these labels had to be bleached out; but we've heard stories of children wearing underwear that still advertised a particular brand of sugar. Oftentimes the material was so scratchy that it had to be washed many times to soften it so the person wearing the garment, pajamas or shirt for example, would be comfortable.

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Often women went to the feed store to purchase the feed for the animals, because they were afraid their husbands would not pick out the bag with the right pattern on the fabric. If a lady was sewing a dress that required a lot of fabric, she might need several matching bags; or if she was making new curtains for the kitchen she would want all of the material to be the same pattern.

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A letter from a man who had grown up west of Albert Lea stated, " This luncheon cloth was made by my mother, as were many items including shirts, ladies blouses, dresses, pillow slips, etc. As you are likely aware, the only way to be assured of getting sufficient material to produce any article of clothing was to buy enough feed contained in the one pattern of sacks at one time, so many times this was the criteria as to how much feed to bring home at any given time. Many of the items made by my mother were exhibited at the Freeborn County Fair and were awarded prizes over the years, as she was a very talented seamstress, and took great pride in the many items she made from feed sacking."

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