

MUSKEGON'S FIRST LADY BARBER AND HER HUSBAND

Ann C. Wisehart was born in Illinois in August of 1862 to Mary J Bell and George Wisehart. According to the 1880 Census, she had 5 sisters and 2 brothers and they were living in Adams, Illinois. She married DeWitt C. Clark, a widower with 2 children, on 25 August 1894.

The 1900 Census shows the couple living in Oskaloosa, Mahaska, Iowa. She has been working as a barber and DeWitt is the proprietor of a bath house.

On 10 Nov 1904, the Muskegon Chronicle had an article titled "Lady Barber Shop Opened in Muskegon". It read: "Muskegon has at last come up to the times with a lady barber. Mrs. D. C. Clark, formerly of Oskaloosa, Iowa, last evening opened a shop at 225 W Western Avenue, opposite Union Station. The shop has two chairs and another woman barber, Miss Bell McNelley, is expected here in about two weeks to assist Mrs. Clark in her work. Mrs. Clark, the present female exponent of the tonsorial art (fancy words that describe someone who gives shaves and haircuts) in Muskegon, says she has been shaving all kinds of faces for the last 5 years and expects to make a success in this city."

I wanted to do an article on Ann C Clark (Mrs. D. C. Clark) Muskegon's first lady barber; unfortunately, the above excerpt from the Chronicle is about all I could find on her. Her husband, on the other hand, was another story.

DeWitt C. Clark was born on 9 February 1861, in Blissfield, Michigan. For a while he worked as a farm laborer there. At some point, he married Edith Culp and they had two children in South Dakota, a boy named Felton (birthdate unknown) and a girl named Jessie (born 1885 according to her marriage license). When DeWitt and Ann move to Muskegon, both Felton and Jessie are with them.

The barber shop occupied space in part of the building at 225 W. Western, and part was occupied by Felton, who had started a photography business, and DeWitt, according to the 1906 city directory, was a "feather renovator" making pillows and feather beds, along with various other small businesses renting out other spaces. The upstairs was used for the family residence. DeWitt also raised white leghorn cockerels (chickens) and sold chicken eggs.

There was an article in the Chronicle dated 31 June 1906, "Cute Peddler Is Captured" about a hunt that went on for several weeks by the License Collector of Muskegon for someone who had been peddling perfume without a license. It said they arrested "Felton W. Clark, barber, photographer, peddler, and jack-of-all-trades, whose wife runs a barber shop at 255 W. Western Avenue. Clark had so cleverly concealed his wares that the police and the License Collector had never been able to locate him". It turns out that when the police went to investigate a robbery of a suit case at the Milwaukee House, they came across Clark "vending his perfume, which he carried in bottles attached to a belt concealed under his clothing". The

reason the police hadn't caught up with him sooner is that they had been looking for someone who had their wares openly displayed. Clark was arraigned before Judge Oosterbaan and pleaded guilty. He was offered the chance to take out a license, but he said he had no money for that. The penalty for the offense was a \$10 fine or 20 days in jail. Clark refused to take out the license, which would have cost him \$3 a week or \$1 a day. Clark told the Judge that he would let the city pay his board at the jail for the next 20 days. After spending one night in jail, he changed his mind and paid the \$10 fine. But that's not all of the story....

It turns out that it wasn't Felton W. Clark, who was the "barber, photographer, peddler, and jack-of-all-trades" that had committed the crime; it was his father, DeWitt C. Clark. Felton was in Crystal Falls, Michigan, with the American Amusement Company doing magic and slight-of-hand stunts when he saw the article in the paper saying that he had been arrested. He quickly wrote a letter back to Muskegon stating his innocence and the fact that he wasn't even near Muskegon at the time. When he wrote the letter, he was unaware that it was his father who had actually committed the crime.

The original complaint sworn out by License Collector Allport had been issued with the name "Felton W. Clark" as the defendant. Even though the Judge read the complaint to DeWitt in full and had taken special care to read it slowly and distinctly, including the name Felton W. Clark 3 times, DeWitt never said a word. Later, when DeWitt was asked why he didn't correct the mistake, he said "he did not notice the mistake in the name until after sentence had been passed on him, that no one had asked him his name, and that he was in no mood to put the officers right in the matter". So, apparently, he would rather have the crime on his son's record, rather than his own. Not exactly the father-of-the-year.

After this incident, I wasn't able to find out anything more about Felton other than that he was listed in the Muskegon City Directory in 1908 for the last time. DeWitt took over the photography business at that time. (Some of DeWitt's photos can be viewed on the Lakeshore Museum's website.) Ann had the building moved from 225 W. Western Avenue to 273 W. Western Avenue in 1908. She continued her barber shop while her step-daughter, Jessie, made "switches" (hair pieces) from combings from the barber shop which she would dye to match a person's shade. The barber shop must have done well because Ann would spend each winter in Florida (renting out her barber chair while she was away).

It looks like DeWitt continued to have problems. In 1917 he was held at the county jail awaiting action as to his sanity. He was found wandering about Union Station without his clothes on. He said he feared that someone was endeavoring to poison him and that he was trying to make his escape. Application was to be made to send him to the state hospital. Whether he went or not or if he did, for how long he stayed is information I wasn't able to gather.

After the 1922 City Directory, Ann is no longer listed as a barber. DeWitt continues to be listed as a photographer up to 1930.

Ann C. Clark, Muskegon's first lady barber, died on 21 May 1931 and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery. DeWitt died on 7 September 1936 and is buried in Restlawn Cemetery. Jessie married a carpenter named Maurice Lindsey in 1914. She died in Indiana in 1942. Felton W. Clark's whereabouts remain unknown.