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LADIES FURNISHINGS SHOP

In 1858 this store was owned by H.M. Farmer, of Lee. He was a postman and a farmer. The building was also used as the office of the Lee Canning Factory at the end of the 19th century. When the factory burned, the office became a general store as it may have been when Mr. Farmer held title. It was donated by the Lee Methodist Church.

The wainscoting was a popular wall and ceiling finish of the last half of the 19th century. The narrow hardwood floorboards are original. A cast-iron stove provides the heat and a kerosene chandelier was used for light.

The sewing machine, ca. 1863, is a Florence, one of the earliest ones, manufactured in Florence, Mass. It sews from right to left, is threaded from the back, and has a shuttle rather than a bobbin. It is still operable.

Our shopkeeper would be aware of the newest fashions and materials, receiving goods from New York by way of the Canal. The shopkeeper would, most likely, also be a seamstress, able to do alterations. Clothes could be made to order or purchased off the rack. A wide selection of fabric and decorations were available. Dresses were of complex construction and would be considered very heavy by today's standards. Silk was a popular material for a dressy dress. Most were made from more than one kind of material. Paper patterns and sewing machines were being used by 1850 and one might come to the store for a piece of material to make-up an item at home. An old dress could be made usable again just by changing the braid or trim. It took about 14 yards of material to make a plain dress. Hats were worn by all when going out of doors. Hats, too, were refurbished. Shoes had buttons which were fastened with button hooks. Fans were used and gloves were worn. White stockings were worn for dress-up and some were color coordinated to go with an outfit.

Corsets and (open leg) drawers were worn. The small waist was most admired and women did their best to be in style. Young girls were introduced to corsets at an early age. The black corset (on table) shows an 18" waist. As the result of the

tight lacing, many women suffered poor health, as corsets rearranged the location of internal organs.

Women wore black while in mourning, a more popular custom in the city than in the country.

Cleaning was a problem, almost every fabric and color involved a different cleaning method. (See notebook in table drawer.)

In this small shop, a woman could find something just for herself or her daughter. She could see what the newest styles were, go home and copy them herself, or she could arrange to have a new outfit made for a special occasion.