

Founding Mothers feature Historical Museum exhibit

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This is the third in a series of stories surrounding Kings Mountain Historical Museum's current exhibit, Pioneering Women of Cleveland County. This exhibit focuses a spotlight on our "founding mothers" — the women who helped establish and maintain our area's industries, hospitals, schools, churches, and civic organizations. The display also showcases local women who were groundbreakers and pioneers in their professions, those who opened doors and paved the way for women in following generations.

The following stories highlight Kings Mountain women during the GREAT DEPRESSION (1929 - LATE 1930S) & WORLD WAR II (1939 TO 1945).

Ida was the eldest daughter of William A. Mauney, the first Mayor of Kings Mountain and

Ida Pauline Mauney Neisler (1870-1964): Ran Neisler Mills at a loss during the Great Depression rather than put people out of work.



one of the founders of the first cotton mill in the city, Kings Mountain Manufacturing Company. She married C.E. Neisler, who founded Neisler Mills, Inc., which was at one time Kings Mountain's largest employer. Mrs. Neisler was a force within the local textile industry. Many remember

that it was she who insisted that Neisler Mills run at a loss rather than close down in order for mill workers to earn a living wage during the Great Depression. Ida is also remembered as the mediator of Neisler Mills, as she took it upon herself to effectively resolve conflicts between employees and management when they arose. She was also extremely community-minded, donating the land for the construction of the First Presbyterian Church and for the Kings Mountain Woman's Club house; she was a charter member of both organizations.

GRACE NEISLER PAGE (1910 - 1999): KINGS MOUNTAIN'S SPORTS CHAMPION

Grace Neisler Page and her sister Margaret were two of the daughters of Neisler Mill founders Charles E. and Ida Mauney Neisler, and the namesakes of the Margrace Mill in Kings Mountain. Encouraged by her five older brothers, Grace Neisler was an avid sportswoman from early childhood. At Kings Mountain High School she played varsity basketball, and at the two-year school Ward Belmont (TN) she was a member of the archery, bowling, softball, and basketball teams. She graduated from the George Peabody Teacher's College (now part of Vanderbilt) with a degree in physical education. It was during her college years that she was introduced to skeet shooting and began competing in regional,



GRACE NEISLER

state, and national competitions. She became North Carolina's Women's State Skeet Champion in 1935 and again in 1936, to a crowd of some 10,000 people.

In 1936, Grace also won the Midwinter Target Tournament in Pinehurst, NC, as the lone female entrant. The Sandhills Daily News article about her win read: "Can women shoot a gun as well as a man? That question was answered here yesterday by Miss Grace Neisler of Kings Mountain when she held out until her closest rival, a man, Dr. G. W. Sower of Jonesboro, could no longer keep pace with her..."

Throughout her lifetime, Grace served as a camp counselor and coach, and was a champion of youth sports. She was active in church and civil affairs; she taught young people at First Presbyterian Church for over 20 years, was a Girl Scout Troop Leader, and was active in the Kings Mountain Woman's Club. Grace was elected to the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame in 1994.

Several original artifacts relating to Grace Neisler Page's legacy are currently on display, including photographs of her hunting, fishing, and practicing archery, as well as "The Sportsman" Remington 12-Gauge, the gun she used to win the North Carolina's Women's State Skeet Shooting Championships in 1935 and 1936.

HAZEL HERNDON FRYER (1914-2003): SERVED IN THE AMERICAN RED



Fryers on wedding day.

CROSS IN WWII

Hazel Herndon Fryer was a true Renaissance Woman of Kings Mountain. After reading Hazel's autobiography, A Sense of Delight, one friend wrote to her, "Your life story reads like an adventure novel with a sensitive and courageous heroine." Truly, Hazel's life experiences could have been torn from the pages of a novel, as she describes in a resume for her autobiography:

"I have worn the Duchess of Windsor's clothes. I worked as a private secretary to the famous Industrial Designer, Norman bel Geddes, during his heyday in New York City, and eavesdropped on Mr. Geddes and Frank Loyd Wright. I conspired with Max Reinhardt in directing a play on Broadway."

After Pearl Harbor, the American Red Cross asked for 100,000 nurses' aides. Hazel

answered that call. She served with the American Red Cross in England and Germany throughout WWII. There she met her husband, an American soldier, and married in Germany in 1945.

In addition to the intriguing international career she enjoyed in her youth, Hazel's contributions to the Kings Mountain community in her later years were immeasurable. She became a long-time Librarian at Mauney Memorial Library, a founding member and first President of Kings Mountain Historical Museum, a prolific and published poet, and historian.

Several fascinating artifacts are currently on display to tell Mrs. Fryer's story, including her WWII scrapbook, her service uniform, and her wedding dress, which was made of silk parachute material and lace curtains.

WOMEN IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

From the start of the 20th century, women were integral to the workforces of the local textile industries which dominated this region. In rural areas like Kings Mountain, as families moved off of their farms and into industrial jobs for the first time, it was common for the whole family to go to work in the mills. This trend is evident in many of the early photographs of local textile mill employees, which have high proportions of women and children. Women's roles in the textile industry and in other manufacturing jobs would become even more central during World War II.

During WWII, millions of women across the country

were encouraged to take over jobs previously done by men who were now serving overseas. Images of women workers became widespread in the media as government and commercial advertising was heavily used to encourage women to volunteer for wartime service in factories. "Rosie the Riveter" became a cultural icon representing American women who worked in factories during WWII, many of whom produced munitions and war supplies.

KINGS MOUNTAIN'S OWN "ROSIE THE RIVETERS"

"The Old Mountaineer" newsletter sent news from home via the Margrace and Pauline Mills in Kings Mountain to the men and women serving in World War II. This photo, from the June 28, 1943 issue, notes: "Sending along a photo of some of the girls holding down your jobs." Many Neisler family descendants recall hearing stories about the Neisler Mills in Kings Mountain producing fabrics that were used to cover and camouflage Allied tanks overseas during WWII.

Learn more about the Pioneering Women of Cleveland County at Kings Mountain Historical Museum now through May 23 from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is free and open to the public. Donations are appreciated. To find out more about upcoming exhibits and events, please visit us at: www.kingsmountainmuseum.org or call (704) 739-1019.



KINGS MOUNTAIN'S OWN "ROSIE THE RIVETERS" Photo courtesy of Jacob S. Mauney Memorial Library

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