"To be a milliner, one must be able to visualize," these are the words of Jeanette Underhill. Jeanette (Jack) Underhill was definitely born with this gift. In her opinion, to be able to visualize and use your imagination is a must in the milliner trade. Each hat has to be an original creation with its own style, personality, and adaptability to the wearer.

Jeanette was born in Edina, Missouri, on March 20, 1890. She is the daughter of John C. and Elizabeth Jack. Her father was a rancher on a large stock farm near Edina for 32 years. He later moved to the Kirksville area, where he was hired as head of maintenance at what is now the Northeast Missouri State University.

In the early 1900's, when Jeanette was about 10 years old, she and her family moved to the Kirksville area. She became interested in the millinery as a young girl. During recess, Jeanette relates that she would go to the "girls side" of the

The photographs above show Jeanette modeling the hats that her skilful fingers created.

playground and make hats from the leaves and twigs growing on nearby shade trees. Her creativity and dexterity were evident at an early age.

Jeanette began her living making hats during the Edwardian period. The hats of this time were always elaborately trimmed, especially in the summer, when flowers, lace, tulle, Chenille, and feathers might all form a decoration for one single hat.

A milliner has to keep up with the styles of the times because in this trade, the styles seem to change every year. The hats complimented and completed the high-necked, beautifully detailed long gowns of this time. For example, during the 1940's, World War II period, skirts were short and hats were small, often decorated with sequins and net. Styles
change with the times, adapting to the way of life.

She learned her trade from Mrs. Hastings, Mrs. Withersford, and Mrs. Laura Underhill. George Underhill and his wife, Laura, were the proprietors of Underhill’s Ready To Wear and Millinery Store. The business was located on the west side of the square in downtown Kirksville. Jeanette took classes under Laura Underhill and later went to work for the Underhills. Jeanette also met her future husband, Garnett, who was the son of George and Laura Underhill.

In the early 1900’s, before going to work for the Underhills, Jeanette was in business with her sisters, Letha and Geneva. Together they ran the Jack Sisters Novelty Store, where they sold such specialties as fine china.

Jeanette and Garnett were married on August 20, 1916, by Rufus D. S. Putney, rector of the Trinity Episcopal Church. They later had one child, Mrs. Ralph (Jolean) Pink. Jeanette and Garnett took over the Ready To Wear when Garnett’s parents retired. It was located in the building where Four Seasons Sports is now operating.

The Underhills owned over 17 houses at one time in the Kirksville area. Many were located in the vicinity of the 500 block of South Franklin Street.


Mrs. Underhill now resides in a private room at the Kirksville Manor Care Center. She has been a resident there for seven years. Jeanette’s skillful fingers have created many, many examples of exquisite needlework. She is a lovely lady with a quiet, gracious manner. Many people enjoy conversing with her.

The Underhill family played an important part in the development of the city of Kirksville. Jeanette is 92 years old, but she is still young at heart.

By Pam Anderson
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Photo above: This is Jeanette today, living a peaceful life at Manor Care. Photo below: This is Garnett and Jeanette’s first home. It is located in the 500 block of South Franklin Street in Kirksville.