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Peacock Alley: Highway 41 and the Growth of the Chenille Bedspread Industry

Ashley Callahan

In the fall of 1935, a newspaper editor traveled from Oklahoma City to Atlanta to attend a baseball game, and along the way encountered a stretch of road near Dalton, Georgia known as Bedspread Boulevard. He recorded his experiences in his daily column: "Twisting through northern Georgia late Saturday afternoon, dodging cotton wagons and trying to get an eyeful of the gorgeous tints that glorified the turning trees in the mountains, I thought I saw a washing strung on a line by the roadside. Soon another flashed past. Then they followed in regular succession. . . . Is it possible they get no breeze down here and they have to dry their sheets by getting the rush of wind from the passing cavalcade?"¹ The editor soon realized that what he saw was not the week's washing, but tufted bedspreads. This roadside product thrived with the increasing numbers of tourists traveling on the Dixie Highway, the newly established route linking the Midwest to the Deep South. Over the course of the twentieth century, automobile tourism, the popularity of the Colonial Revival style, and evolving technology each impacted the interconnected histories of the tufted bedspread industry and the main road through northwest Georgia.

The origin of the tufted bedspread industry is well known but difficult to verify. Possibly because the industry was viewed as women's work during its early history, little formal documentation survives, if it ever existed. The traditional story of the industry begins with a visit by a twelve-year-old girl from near Dalton to her cousin's home in 1892. There Catherine Evans (1880-1964, later Catherine Evans Whitener) saw an antique candlewick bedspread. Intrigued by this textile, but unable to find an elder relative who knew the technique used to make it, she eventually devised her own method of tufting.² In 1895 she made her first tufted spread, in 1896 her second, and in 1900 her third, which she presented to her brother as a wedding gift. Later that year she sold a spread to her brother's new sister-in-law for \$2.50, which initiated the multi-billion dollar tufted carpet industry in Dalton.³ This account of the history appeared in print as early as 1925, and by mid-century was featured in nearly every article about the industry and was frequently told by Evans.

Deviations from the traditionally accepted version of the origin of the bedspread industry do exist, however. An article from 1925 sets the date of the beginning as about

¹ Walter Harrison, "The Tiny Times," reprinted in "Oklahoma Editor Amazed at 'Washing on the Line' in Bedspread Belt," *The Dalton Citizen*, October 10, 1935, p. 1.

² The traditional method of making a tufted bedspread begins with an unwashed sheet. That sheet is placed over a pattern (a tufted, unwashed spread) and stamped with a piece of metal (such as a skillet or tin box lid) that has been rubbed with meat skin or soot so that it will make dots on the sheet where tufts should be. The pattern is stitched with a running stitch, and then the stitches are clipped. Next the sheet is boiled to shrink the fabric around the stitches, thereby holding the tufts in place. Finally, the spread is hung on a line and beaten to fluff the tufts. It is this last step, according to tradition, that led to the popularity of these spreads as roadside products. [Maria Nader Douglas, *A Handmade Life: Ida Whaley Chance of Dalton* (Athens, Georgia: Agee Publishers, Inc., 1988), p. 2.]

³ "Mrs. Whitener Tells Students at North Dalton about the Start of Bedspread Industry Here," *The Dalton Citizen*, March 18, 1954, p. 20. [Many slight variations of this story exist. This article records the complete text of Whitener's talk at the North Dalton School. The text recorded in this article appears in several publications.]

1905, while two articles from 1929 set the starting date as circa 1919.⁴ One article relates an alternative version of the origin, attributing the beginning of the industry to a young woman named Jane Roberts Heath. Mrs. Heath noticed an announcement for a prize offered in the county fair for “an old-styled bedspread,” and using a technique learned from her Scottish grandmother, she submitted a tufted spread and won the prize. In this version of the story, Catherine Evans saw Heath’s spread, copied it, and with her friends sought a market for tufted spreads.⁵ Possibly both accounts, and potentially many others, are partially true, and are all part of a larger revival of handicraft traditions. However, the timeline of Evans’s story fits with other accounts of the development of the tufted textile industry, and despite discrepancies in the details of the various accounts, the story of her single-handed founding of the bedspread industry is a significant and integral part of the identity of that industry and the succeeding carpet industry.

According to the traditional history, for the first ten years the tufted bedspread industry centered on Evans, and for the next ten it remained an industry run by women. As demand for tufted spreads increased, Evans taught other women in the area to make the spreads, and these women in turn taught more individuals. Over time, a system evolved in which women in town prepared the patterned sheets, and “haulers” (workers who delivered sheets in wagons or cars) carried the sheets throughout the region, especially to rural areas, where women and sometimes whole families tufted the spreads. (The woman visited by the editor from Oklahoma City had “200 men and women working for her back in the hill country.”⁶) The haulers then returned the stitched spreads to the women in charge, who boiled and fluffed them. This process constantly evolved, and often several states of evolution coexisted, depending on the sizes and fiscal situations of the various operations. As the volume of spreads being made grew, and the financial rewards increased, men became involved in the industry, around 1922. Also, elements of the process became specialized and mechanized, leading to dyeing, laundering, sheet making, and many other related industries. The increased mechanization beginning in the 1930s eventually developed into the tufted carpet industry.

Various accounts indicate that initially information about the bedspreads traveled by word of mouth. For example, according to Evans, her brother’s sister-in-law moved to Summerville, Georgia (approximately forty miles southwest of Dalton) shortly after purchasing her spread, and when her new friends saw the spread they ordered more from Evans. Articles from 1925 onward indicate that marketing of the tufted bedspreads to department stores began in the late 1910s, and as with the earlier history of the industry, the records of this phase also are filled with conflicting accounts. In the book *Bedspreads to Broadloom: The Story of the Tufted Carpet Industry* (1993) are numerous descriptions

⁴ “The Hand-Tufted Spread Industry,” *The Dalton Citizen*, September 17, 1925, reprinted in *Whitfield-Murray Historical Society Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1996), 4-5; “Miss Evans Made First Bedspread,” unidentified newspaper from Chattanooga, Tennessee, February 1, 1929, page unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia; “Cannon Company Ships Bedspreads Throughout the World,” unidentified newspaper, October 1929, exact date and page unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia.

⁵ “Versions at Variance on Origin of Candlewick Spread Industry,” unidentified newspaper, date and page unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia. [The article appears to be from a newspaper from outside of Dalton from the 1920s or 1930s.]

⁶ Harrison, p. 9.

of the early individuals in the industry, but author Thomas M. Deaton notes that, "Many stories exist about those early days which seem to credit different people with similar deeds."⁷ Often repeated accounts include the enterprising activities of Mrs. Addie Evans, Mrs. G. M. Cannon, and Mrs. L. B. Wood.⁸ Mrs. Addie Evans, Catherine's sister-in-law, went into business around 1917 with Mrs. Fred Parmalee of Louisville, Kentucky, who was connected with the Southern Railway; Evans made samples for Parmalee to take to merchants via the railroad, and their first sale was to Rich's Department Store in Atlanta in 1918 for twenty-four spreads.⁹ Mrs. G. M. (Mae Weatherly) Cannon, whose husband owned a dry goods store in Dalton, joined forces with a traveling salesman in 1921, provided him with sample spreads to carry to merchants, and within the first two weeks received an order for 100 spreads for William Taylor Sons & Company in Cleveland, Ohio.¹⁰ Also in 1921 Mrs. L. B. Wood made spreads for Wannamaker's Department Store, and by 1929 produced up to 600 a day for that company and sold \$60,000 worth of spreads a year to B. Altman & Company in Manhattan.¹¹ (The traveling editor from Oklahoma City noted in his column in 1935 that if he "were a buyer for a big department store," he would "slam down there [to Georgia] and try to buy up a carload of these things and put on a special sale ahead of the Christmas season."¹²)

A key factor in the success of the bedspread industry was Dalton's location and accessibility. Dalton is located in the northwest corner of Georgia, in a valley between two mountain ridges, in the southernmost foothills of the Appalachians. Rail reached Dalton in 1847 from Atlanta, but more intricately related to the bedspread industry was the road. The famous Dixie Highway was constructed between 1915 and 1927, and its 5,706 miles linked Ontario, Canada to Miami, Florida. The Dixie Highway Association, which promoted the highway's construction and selected the routes, was based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, about thirty miles north of Dalton.

One of the driving forces behind the Dixie Highway was Carl Graham Fisher (1874-1939), the successful entrepreneur from Indiana who founded the Prest-O-Light Battery Company, which manufactured automobile headlights, and who organized the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Fisher owned real estate in Miami Beach, Florida, and sought to develop that area into a popular vacation destination, so he needed a clear route there.¹³ After extensive promotion by the Dixie Highway Association and discussion in numerous communities potentially to be traversed by the Dixie Highway, the route selection committee, which included Fisher as a representative of Indiana, met in Chattanooga in 1915. The meeting came to a halt when Fisher and Clark Howell, a newspaperman from Atlanta who chaired the committee, reached an impasse regarding

⁷ Thomas M. Deaton, *Bedspreeds to Broadloom: The Story of the Tufted Carpet Industry* (Acton, Massachusetts: Tapestry Press, 1993), p. 7.

⁸ The following descriptions are based on repeated accounts, but there are conflicting accounts. These descriptions represent the ways in which the industry first began marketing to department stores.

⁹ Deaton, p. 5.

¹⁰ Mrs. G. M. (Mae Weatherly) Cannon, "Mrs. Cannon Tells Story of First Candlewick Spreads," unidentified Dalton newspaper, 1940, Sec. B, pp. 1 and 5, exact date unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia.

¹¹ "Manufacturing Catherine Evans' Bedspreeds," *Time* September 2, 1940, p. 48.

¹² Harrison, p. 9.

¹³ Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 52-53.

the selection of the route. The committee reconvened two days later and determined that the Dixie Highway would be composed of two main branches, the Eastern Division which traveled through Detroit, Dayton, Cincinnati, Lexington, Knoxville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Savannah, and Jacksonville and the Western Division which traveled through Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Tallahassee.¹⁴ This division was a result of the fierce competition between counties to be on the route of the Dixie Highway, which promised great prosperity, and the Dixie Highway Association's desire to balance a direct route, a route that remained near large towns and scenic attractions, and a route with local support.¹⁵ The division also reflected Fisher's desire to have the road constructed quickly.

Though the Eastern and Western Divisions converged in Chattanooga and Atlanta (about ninety miles south of Dalton), the branches divided in northwest Georgia; the Eastern Division ran through Dalton and Calhoun, and the Western Division ran through LaFayette, Summerville, and Rome. When the United States government decided to formally establish a numbered road system, which was in place by 1927, the communities along both branches in northwest Georgia sought to be included in the new system. The Eastern Division won the important designation of being on the route of U. S. 41, a major north-south highway, while the Western Division eventually was designated as U. S. 27.¹⁶ That the Eastern Division, a more direct route between Chattanooga and Atlanta, had won the competition for tourism was clear by 1940. Highway maps from that year for Whitfield County (in which Dalton is located) and Floyd County (in which Rome is located) indicate that Whitfield had twenty-seven gas stations and six tourist camps along U. S. 41, while Floyd had only three gas stations and one tourist camp near U. S. 27.¹⁷ Dalton was well located for capturing tourist dollars.

Before the Federally sponsored numbering system was installed, and named routes with multiple branches abounded, good maps were especially important for travelers. The first maps of the South for automobile tourists included by the American Automobile Association (AAA) in its annual publication *The Automobile Blue Book* appeared in 1910.¹⁸ In that publication the AAA noted, "It is probable that there will be a great increase of travel to and from the south within the next year . . . and it is the expectation of the Blue Book to materially extend its work in the states through which these routes will run."¹⁹ By that time, the South was becoming an attractive destination for drivers from the Northeast eager to test their driving skills in that rural part of the country. With the establishment of the Dixie Highway and the widening availability of maps, automobile tourism in the South increased over the next several decades. This increase in tourism supported a wealth of roadside businesses such as gas stations, tourist camps, country stores, food stands, and souvenir shops. In order to attract tourists,

¹⁴ Martha Carver, "Drivin' the Dixie: Automobile Tourism in the South," *The Society for Commercial Archeology Presents: Drivin' the Dixie: Automobile Tourism in the South* (1998): p. A-13. [In 1918 the Dixie Highway Association added a third major branch through the Carolinas. (Carver, p. A-15.)]

¹⁵ Carver, p. A-11

¹⁶ Jeffrey L. Durbin, "The Dixie Highway in Georgia," *The Society for Commercial Archeology Presents: Drivin' the Dixie: Automobile Tourism in the South* (1998): p. B-23.

¹⁷ Durbin, p. B-28.

¹⁸ Preston, p. 98-99.

¹⁹ Preston, p. 99.

communities and automobile clubs encouraged road maintenance, including paving, and promoted scenic attractions.

Before the Dixie Highway, the route followed by the Eastern Division in northwest Georgia was known as the Battlefield Route or the Johnston-Sherman Link. Plans for this road between Atlanta and Chattanooga were finalized in 1911, and the road was constructed between 1912 and 1917, fitting with the AAA's prediction of increased tourism in the South. This route was named after Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston and Union General William T. Sherman, and closely followed the path taken by Sherman to Atlanta.²⁰ The United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a statue of General Johnston on Hamilton Street in downtown Dalton in 1912, the same year that Hamilton Street was paved.²¹ Daltonians were aware of the positive effect on tourism of promoting the region's Civil War history, and upon the occasion of the arrival of a Dixie Highway motorcade in Dalton in 1929, the Dalton Junior Chamber of Commerce noted the historical and economic importance of the highway in its newsletter, the *Jaw Cracker*:

... aside from the commercial interests which Georgians naturally feel in the completion of the newly paved Dixie highway, it is also mete [sic] that we pause to consider the wealth of historic associations which cling to this celebrated old route . . . The followers of Johnston and Sherman—Americans all—made these North Georgia hills and valleys sacred to the memory of a later generation, and it is but fitting that this motorcade of progress should retrace the steps of these valliant [sic] American soldiers. (*Jaw Cracker* 1929:3)²²

The region's Civil War heritage was further emphasized to tourists when, beginning in the late 1930s and finishing after World War II, the National Park Service, in conjunction with the Works Progress Administration, created a series of five pavilions, with interpretive metal tablets, picnic tables, and low stone walls, commemorating Sherman's Atlanta Campaign. Four of the sites are within fifteen miles of Dalton.²³ These pavilions were directed towards automobile tourism—they provided an extended attraction designed to be accessed by car.

The South also capitalized on popular Romantic notions of its antebellum history. In the book *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935*, author Howard Lawrence Preston explains the Romantic portrayal of the South by late nineteenth-century writers as a reaction to industrialism:

Still overwhelmingly agrarian, and for the most part unscathed by industrialization, the South held great appeal to writers who sought to remind Americans that certain cherished virtues had not been altogether lost or abandoned. Hospitality, a slower pace of life, balmy winter weather, refined gentility, bucolic landscapes, and charm were all part of

²⁰ Durbin, p. B-11.

²¹ *An Official History of Whitfield County Georgia 1852-1999* (Dalton, Georgia: Wolfe Publishing in association with the Whitfield-Murray Historical Society, 1999), p. 82.

²² Durbin, p. B-13.

²³ Carver, p. A-48, 49.

the image that writers and publishers perpetuated to appeal to citified Yankees who lived in colder climates."²⁴

Leading into the twentieth century this perspective pervaded all forms of media—paintings, advertisements, magazine articles, travel guides—and became what tourists expected to find in the South, and what business savvy Southerners sought to provide.²⁵ Often the businesses located along Southern roads referenced these Romantic sentiments in their architecture or names, such as The Rebel Court south of Nashville and the Old South Motel south of Atlanta, both on U. S. 41.²⁶

An idyllic view of the region was sustained by the popularity of the Colonial Revival style in the first half of the twentieth century, especially between the wars. Elements of the promotion and discussion of tufted bedspreads, also often referred to as chenille or candlewick spreads, closely related to the Colonial Revival style and notions of a Romantic South.²⁷ An article in *The Dalton Citizen* in 1934 even notes that the “popularity of Colonial furniture was a most potent stimulant” in the early commercial history of the spreads.²⁸

Evans’s story begins with a Colonial connection. The first tufted spread was based on a Colonial or antebellum model, the candlewick spread, which often was described as popular on Southern plantations from 1725 to 1850. Promoting tufted spreads as closely related to a historical form likely increased their appeal to tourists looking for a Southern souvenir, and to consumers across the country desiring a part of the Romantic South.

Also, the story of Evans is firmly in keeping with a Romantic perspective, and by mid-century the fairy-tale quality of her story was acknowledged: the first words in an article from 1953 in the *Tufted Textile Manufacturers Association Directory* are: “Like all worth-while fables, the story of the tufting industry began ‘once upon a time’”; an article in the *NC & St. L. Railway Bulletin* (Nashville, Chattanooga, and Saint Louis Railroad)

²⁴ Preston, p. 110.

²⁵ Preston, p. 110.

²⁶ Durbin, p. B-35.

²⁷ Connotations of the terms *chenille*, *tufted*, and *candlewick* varied throughout the history of the bedspreads. One article indicates that *chenille* was used for the spreads sold along the roadside, while *candlewick* (“or rippletuft or featherclipt or needletuft”) was used for the more refined products of the factories. [Wylly Folk St. John, “Georgia Bedspreads Cover the Country,” *The Atlanta Journal Magazine* (September 1946), 17.] At other times, *chenille* suggested machine-made, while *tufted* indicated hand-made. Mrs. Cannon is credited with coining the term “Colonial Candlewick”. *Chenille* means caterpillar in French, and may have been used because of the caterpillar-like quality of the spreads, fuzzy on top and bumpy underneath. The term *tufted* also was pronounced *turfed*, particularly by rural workers. [William M. Sapp, “Bedspread Industry Brings to City Phenomenal Growth,” *The Dalton News* (February 1940), Sec. C, p. 1; “Chenille Business is one of Georgia’s Newest and Best Sources of Revenue,” *Georgia Progress* October 1, 1946, n. p.; Murray E. Wyche, *The Tufted Textile Industry in the South*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Fairchild Publications, 1948), p. 9, 11, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia; “Bedspreads are Big Business,” *Georgia State Reporter* (March-April 1946), 9.]

²⁸ Will Greene, “Candlewick Wage Situation Defended and Condemned,” *The Dalton Citizen or Daily News Record*, March 8, 1934, reprinted in *Whitfield-Murray Historical Society Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1996), p. 15.

from 1949 describes the story of the origin of the bedspread industry as “Romantic”; and an article in *Georgia Progress* in 1946 includes the subtitle “Story-Book Beginning.”²⁹

Similarly, many of the spread designs suggest historical precedents. Numerous articles indicate that Evans took her designs from old quilt patterns, and one source notes that she was an accomplished quilter and had made twenty-nine quilts by age twenty-nine.³⁰ An article in the *Tufted Textile Manufacturers Association Directory* in 1953 indicates that by that time a wide range of styles were available, and particularly promoted traditional styles through the statement, “For the lover of antiques or early designs, there are exact replicas of the handcraft originated by American housewives in the early days of our country . . .”³¹ In perhaps the strongest association of Dalton’s tufted bedspreads with the idea of a Romantic South, the movie *Gone With the Wind* features tufted spreads from Dalton in bedrooms in Scarlett O’Hara’s Tara. One of the spreads was reportedly a copy of the “Henry Clay Coverlet” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³²

Descriptions of workers in Dalton’s tufted textile mills, though accurately reflecting their racial homogeneity, are shaded by a desire to link them to America’s colonial heritage. For example, in *The Dalton News*, the workers are described as “free from alien blood or influence, and . . . composed of descendants of pioneer stock,” and another article describes them as “pure Anglo-Saxon stock—‘All American’ blood.”³³ The second article includes an extended description of the mill girls that further emphasizes their perception as part of the Old South:

Although primarily from the rural sections, evidence of the bedspread girls being ‘from the country’ otherwise is eloquently belied by the riot of beauty and feminine pulchritude that greets the eye when one sees hundreds of these young ladies at their machines in any one of the thirty-some-odd plants in the Dalton area. Not only beautiful, but stylishly

²⁹ R. H. West, “Dalton ‘Spreads’ Itself” *NC & St. L. Railway Bulletin* (September 1949), reprinted in “‘Dalton ‘Spreads’ Itself’ is Title of Main Article in NC&StL Railway Magazine,” *The Dalton Citizen*, October 1949, exact date and pages unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia.; “History and Progress of the Tufting Industry,” *Tufted Textile Manufacturers Association Directory* (1953), p. 24; and “Chenille Business,” n. p.

³⁰ St. John, p. 16. [Deaton states that Evans created her own designs, since the emerging industry lacked a history of patterns. According to Deaton, Evans traced plates and washbowls for round designs, copied floral patterns from curtains, and adapted patterns from quilts. (Deaton, pp. 4-5.) Earlier source, however, generally just list quilts as the source for her designs. In 1946 Evans stated that her first spread was similar to the quilt pattern “Irish Chain” in squares, and that she called the patterns of her next two spreads “Spear and Circle” and “Star.” She added that over time she had “made a number of different designs and named them such as ‘Square Circle’, ‘Star and Circle’, ‘Wild Rose’, ‘Bow Knot Rose’, ‘Flower Basket’, ‘Acorn’, ‘Daisy’, ‘Interlacing Ring’, ‘Doughnut’, ‘Hexagon’, ‘Wedding Ring’, and many others.” (“Mrs. Whitener Tells Students,” p. 20.)]

³¹ “History and Progress,” p. 29.

³² “Hollywood Came to Cabin Crafts in Dalton for Bedspreads in Bedrooms of Tara Hall,” *Atlanta Constitution*, exact date and pages unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia.

³³ Sapp, Sec. C, p. 1; “Girls Who Make Spreads are Intelligent, Attractive Group,” unidentified newspaper, 1940, exact date and pages unknown, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia. [This sentiment appears repeatedly in promotions of north Georgia crafts in the early twentieth century.]

dressed, the attractive appearance of the chenille girls is more reminiscent of debutantes' sewing circle than a group of factory employees at work.³⁴

Initially spreads in Dalton, like their candlewick predecessors, were white on white, but as the industry evolved factories began producing colorfast yarns for tufting. Brightly colored spreads likely provided a more enticing product for tourists speeding along the highway than simple white spreads. In 1929, one journalist wrote, "Tourists from every section of the United States utter exclamations of surprise as they drive through the county and see the beautiful spreads, in more than a hundred varieties of colors, as they hang from clothes lines around country homes."³⁵ One particularly popular design was the peacock, which led to the road's other common nickname (in addition to Bedspread Boulevard) of Peacock Alley. One explanation for the origin of this design is that it provided an opportunity for tufters to use the leftover bits of yarn.

As tourism traffic increased, and as mechanization of the tufted textile industry stepped closer to carpet, a division between the road and the mill developed. While the mills and their workers were the height of Southern sophistication, the road and its peacocks came to symbolize unrefined gaudiness. In the 1980s a local resident recalled, "It was a great joke around Dalton . . . that so many of the tourists bought those flamboyant Peacock bedspreads . . . We thought they were not pretty and they weren't very well designed."³⁶ Fred Rosen, a manufacturer, stated simply, "No decent Southerner would want one of those gaudy, bright things in their house."³⁷ As the region continued to encourage progress, the symbol of that progress in Dalton shifted from the road to the mill. The roadside merchandise lost its seriousness, and according to an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, had even become a game for Georgia drivers: each passenger would select a spread pattern and count how many spreads of that pattern were visible along a set length of road, and the passenger with the highest number won.³⁸ The division between the peacock spreads and other spreads still exists, as indicated by a statement in *Martha Stewart Living*: "In the past, chenille had an image problem. People associated it with its most outrageous examples, like flashy bedspreads featuring . . . a fuchsia peacock with chartreuse feathers. But chenille can also be charming, and, occasionally elegant."³⁹

The large scale and bright colors of Dalton's tufted bedspreads lent themselves well to automobile tourism. The products were large enough to be seen from the road, and the patterns and colors provided visual appeal. In addition to spreads, tufted textile makers in Dalton also produced robes, throw rugs, toilet seat covers, bathmats, and products designed specifically for Florida-bound tourists, such as beach capes.⁴⁰

When the editor from Oklahoma City traveled through the region in 1935, he likely passed both hand-made and early machine-made spreads, encountering the industry as it shifted towards mechanization. And, over the following few decades, as automobile

³⁴ "Girls Who Make Spreads," page unknown.

³⁵ "Cannon Company," page unknown.

³⁶ Cheryl Rose Wycoff, "Tufted Bedspread Sampler," 1989, from the files of Crown Gardens and Archives in Dalton, Georgia.

³⁷ Deaton, p. 166.

³⁸ Minnie Hite Moody, "Bedspreads Bloom Again," *Saturday Evening Post* January 5, 1946, p. 74.

³⁹ Julia Szabo, "Chenille Bedspreads," *Martha Stewart Living* (September 1995), 54.

⁴⁰ Wyche, p. 15.

traffic and mechanization accelerated, and tastes of tourists changed, significant changes occurred in Dalton. In 1965 I-75, the major north-south interstate highway, was completed, relegating U. S. 41 to the role of a small, slow, meandering route rarely taken by travelers. The tufted textile industry devoted itself to carpet, and now bedspreads are gone and Dalton is known as the Carpet Capital of the World, but the relationship between the textile industry and the road has remained strong. Today gigantic carpet warehouses with enormous billboards and electronic signs beckon drivers on I-75.

Until I-75, both the bedspread industry and the route of the Dixie Highway, or U. S. 41, developed as automobile tourism increased; the road was conceived for and promoted to tourists, and those tourists supported the roadside sales of tufted bedspreads. Promotion of both was shaped by popular interest in the Colonial Revival and in notions of a Romantic South; the historical connections to the route and to the tufted spreads provided a consistent image to tourists. And, changing technology brought about major shifts in both; the importance of U. S. 41 as a north-south thoroughfare was usurped by I-75 and increased mechanization of bedspread production evolved into the manufacture of tufted carpet.

The rise in popularity of the spreads coincided with the increase in automobile tourism through the region. The traditional story of Evans notes that demands for spreads increased about ten years after her first sale, so she began teaching others to tuft at about the same time that the AAA published its first maps of the South and the Johnston-Sherman link was conceived. In the late teens, marketing to department stores began, while at the same time tourists traveling through the region began to take spreads across the country, helping to advertise and popularize them. As tourists began passing through northwest Georgia on their way to Florida, the spreads became more colorful and more numerous, and items specifically designed for use in Florida appeared. Though the road was not the only outlet for sale of tufted spreads, it is a significant part of the identities of the main road through northwest Georgia, the now historical bedspread industry, and the tufted carpet industry. The stories of Catherine Evans and Peacock Alley still are used widely in promoting Dalton and its carpet.



Postcard, "Dalton, GA. From the Air. U. S. 41. Dixie Highway/The Battlefield Route Thru GA/All Paved Cline '32," Collection of Trevor Brown.