

Today in Columbus history, October 12, 1833, three advertisements for clothing appeared in the *Columbus Enquirer*. One, from Ayer & Smith, was for summer “Ready-made clothing” with a long list of words I’d never seen, from “bombazine,” and “brochellas” to “summer cloth Frock Coats.” A second ad on the same page for the establishment of Shorter, Tarver & Co., advertised “Irish linen,” “Domestic plaid, stripes and checks.” A third smaller ad for Jacob M. Johnson’s business advertised many of the same items, like “Pantaloons,” “Sattinett,” “Bombazines,” and “Valencia vests.”

The new “Ready-made” clothing business throughout Georgia and the Deep South was surprisingly robust from the 1820s on. Augusta was a hub of shipping and receiving from New York manufacturers of the new pre-sewn items, particularly men’s wear, which was a major concern of wholesale manufacturers and salesmen. (Zakim)

There is so much here to talk about – industry, manufacturing, exporting and importing, not to mention fashion. I decided I’d look at the meaning of a few of the words for clothing and types of cloth in the ads and what they meant to the reader (and consumer) of the 1830s.

1. *Columbus Enquirer*, October 12, 1833

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were already obsolete in the 1915 *Dictionary of Textiles*.

Bombazine (sometimes bombazeen) was a 16th-century English white worsted and silk fabric OR a French or Italian obsolete silk or cotton fabric...essentially cloth with a silk warp and worsted, dyed black, and “used for mourning.” **Cassimere** was a variety of plain woven or twilled woolen or worsted fabrics, in checks or stripes, often used for men’s wear (as many of these fabrics were). In a publication of 1808, cassimere was suggested for draperies and was not cheap. (Worsted originally meant: a closely twisted yarn or thread made from combed long-staple wool.)

At the other end of the spectrum, these advertisers also sold clothing and cloth for the use of enslaved people in Columbus and the surrounding region, and that fabric was quite different.

3. *Columbus Daily Sun*, October 21, 1857

Items of clothing and fabrics for people who could afford them (generally, elite whites and occasionally free people of color) included “Blue summer cloth Frock Coats,” “Black Bombazine,” “cassimere,” “circassian,” “brochellas,” “Valencia vests,” “Chintz prints,” and “Irish linen.” These well-made and more expensive materials contrast, in the same ads, to cheaper, coarser fabrics, like “sattinett,” “kersey,” and “domestic plaid.”

It is quite difficult to find understandable definitions of some of these words, especially the finer or more exotic fabrics, for example “circassian” or “brochellas.” Many

clothing. The men and women slaves received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal. Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes; the whole of which could not have cost more than seven dollars. The allowance of the slave children

4. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (Boston, Mass.: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847), 10. (Internet Archive)

“kersy” was originally an English cloth similar to “devon,” which was obsolete, thick woolen overcoating,” “domestic,” “duffle,” “ticking,” “cottonade,” “denim,” “jean,” “linsey,” and “linsey-woolsey” were all words for cheap or coarse clothing items and fabric that slaveowners purchased for slave clothing. Another was “Sattinett” or “satinet,” which sounds fancy (like satin) and not like something a slave would be allowed to wear. “Negro clothing,” “Negro cloth,” and “Negro shirts,” were the most obvious terms for these items.

The ads here for **ready-made** negro clothing were probably aimed at smaller slaveowners, not the large plantation owners of twenty or more slaves. Large owners would either have weaving done on the plantation (homespun) or would buy reams of

Summer Clothing
AYER & SMITH,
 (Next door to the Columbus Bank.)
 HAVE just received and offer for sale, a complete assortment of
Ready-made Clothing,
 Among which are the following:
 Blue summer cloth Frock Coats,
 Green do do do
 Black Bombazine do
 Black and Green assimere do
 Blue and black lastug do
 Roan assimere do
 Summer cloth dress do
 do do Coatees,
 Black lastug and circassian do
 Roan cassimere
 Green and black summer cloth Pantaloon,
 Black bombazine and circassian do
 Black and brown brociellas do
 Blue and black lastug do
 Brown linen drilling do
 Roan cassimere do
 200 pair Russia duck, do
 Ruffled and plain linen SHIRTS,
 3 ton Shirts, (with linen bosoms and collars,
 20 doz. course **NEGRO SHIRTS,**
 Brown and linen striped **ROUND JACKETS,**
 Dark & Light Valencia Vests,
 Figured and plain Mersinoes do

6. Columbus Enquirer, October 12, 1833

Shorter, Tarver & Co. advertised “Bleached and unbleached shirtings and sheetings,” “Domestic Plaid, Stripes and checks” (all terms for cheaper fabric used for slave clothing), and “Negro cloths and Shirtings.” Ayer & Smith listed “200 pairs Russia duck [pantaloon],” and “20 doz. course [sic] **NEGRO SHIRTS,**” ready-made clothing that was intended for slaves.

Other terms such as “Osnaburg,” or an unfinished German linen, and “kersey” or



5. “Slave Coffle Passing the U.S. Capitol,” wood engraving illustration from A Popular History of the United States (New York, N.Y.: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876-1881), Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98510280/>

“coarse cloth” or “cloth for plantation use” and have enslaved women make clothes for other slaves. (Ordonez, Zakim)

One other example of ready-made clothing for enslaved people: An 1857 advertisement by J.H. Daniel in the *Columbus Daily Sun*, advertised “A Superior lot of Jackets and Pants, manufactured from the ‘Columbus Factory’ Kersy,” indicated that Daniel had purchased the kersy from the factory and then had had the cheaper clothing, as well as “Hickory and colored Flannel Shirts,” made for enslaved laborers. – **Rachel Dobson**

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

SOURCES

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