

## **Renovations help historic shoe shop step into new era**

By Caroline Enos Staff Writer, December 7, 2022

Danvers' historic 10 footer shoe shop stepped into its next chapter last Monday.

Crews worked to replace aged and dilapidated parts of a large garden shed, known as a 10 footer, on Page Street throughout the day as part of a roughly \$12,000 effort to save the building.

Built in the 1880s or 1890s, the shed was purchased by Adra Day and her husband, Arthur, in 1905. It became the first shoe shop and factory for Mrs. Day's Ideal Baby Shoe company, started by Adra.



**Crews repair the ten footer, an old shed turned shoe shop by Adra Day in the early 20th century. The Danvers-based company Mrs. Day's Ideal Baby Shoes became internationally famous after it started in the shed, now located on Page Street in Danvers. DANVERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/Courtesy photo**

“It’s important, especially for younger generations and girls, to realize that women are important parts of history; that there were some women who did incredible, amazing things in their lives that benefited people,” said Sheila Cooke-Kayser, a volunteer education coordinator with the Danvers Historical Society. “The Ideal Baby Shoe company employed thousands of people through the years.”

In 1922, Day revolutionized the baby clothing industry when she introduced standard sized shoes for infants and toddlers that were curved to fit their left or right foot, instead of the interchangeable straight-toed shoes that for years had been the standard for young children.

The shoes were better suited for babies learning to walk, and became such a hit that Day had to hire other women in the area to help stitch them.

The company would go on to sell the tiny shoes to department stores around the country and internationally, including on U.S. military bases.

President Woodrow Wilson’s first grandchild, Queen Juliana of Holland’s children and Queen Elizabeth were just a few of the babies who wore the shoes, according to the Historical Society.

A six-story Ideal Shoe factory stood behind Danvers Town Hall from the 1940s until the late ‘90s, when the dilapidated building was torn down to make way for a parking lot.

While the company outgrew the 10 footer, which originally sat on Locust Street, the Historical Society is hoping to get new use out of it now that the siding, windows, roofing and a severely damaged back wall are being replaced.

What started out as a simple project to replace the roof turned into a more intense effort once crews inspected the building two years ago, said David McKenna, the Historical Society's president.

"When we opened up one of the eaves, the whole wall almost fell off. And we had squirrels invading, living in there and making a mess, so it turned out to be a bigger project than we thought," McKenna said.

Aspen Roofing Services in Peabody has donated free labor to repair the roof and McKenna footed \$5,000 of the bill himself, but donations are still needed to cover the remaining renovation costs.

The building could serve as a shoe-making demonstration area or exhibit space in the future, McKenna said. Regardless of its use, the building will help Adra Day's legacy live on — just like the Historical Society's collection of Ideal Baby Shoes.

"We have hundreds of her baby shoes that people have donated through the years, and some of them have come from people from Danvers who bought them on military bases in the 1950s," Cooke-Kayser said. "They were excited because they came from Danvers."

*To donate to the building's restoration, click the donate button on the **Historical Society's** website by visiting [www.danvershistory.org/](http://www.danvershistory.org/).*