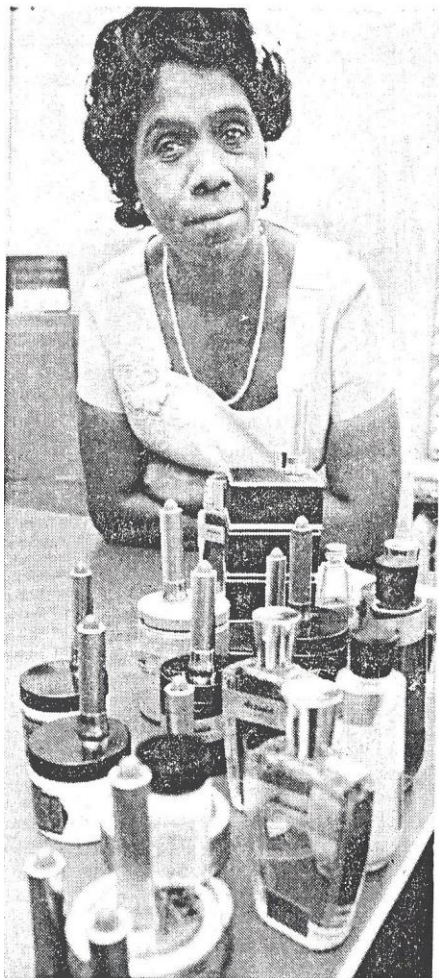


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Staff Photo by P. A. Gormus

Mrs. Arsonia Allman With Products

She Concocts Her Cosmetics In Back Room of Her Shop

By BETTY PETTINGER

Mrs. Arsonia Allman, a black woman, has been a Richmond industrialist for 39 years.

In a small way, to be sure. Mrs. Allman manufactures cosmetics. She mixes them up in a back room of her beauty shop on Clay Street.

It's all quite aboveboard. She's licensed as a Class B manufacturer by the State Board of Pharmacy and has had her formulas approved properly, but her "laboratory" would make the giant cosmetic companies which produce such expensive and promising beauty treatments from vast and glistening laboratories turn redder than their pots of rouge and tubes of lipstick.

MRS. ALLMAN concocts her creams and powders in what used to be the kitchen of the residence which is now her shop.

She got the original formulas from a pharmacist in Chester, S. C., and, unlike the cosmetic companies which believe they must produce a new and wondrous substance from an ever-rarer source every few months in order to keep the sales going, Mrs. Al-

lman has never changed hers. They work nicely, so why should she, she reasons.

A plain metal dishpan and an old crockery bowl are her containers for mixing the ingredients, which come from larger containers, including 100-pound drums of basic grease from a petroleum company. These are all stored in a couple of green metal office cabinets which can be locked up. And a plain old kitchen table serves as a work area, where the black and white jars are filled.

MRS. ALLMAN sells her cosmetics in her own shop and in a couple of beauty shops in other communities, one in Newport News, another in Philadelphia.

Included in her line of products is a series of hair preparations which Mrs. Allman believes capable of restoring hair. She has a series of photographs of a child who lost all her hair and eventually regained it through treatments at Mrs. Allman's shop.

"I didn't believe it would come back, and for three months nothing happened. Then it gradually started coming along the hairline, then in patches all over the head."

A bald man, a relative of Mrs. Allman's in Washington, also tried the preparation and his baldness lessened through new growth around the edges of the bald spot but his hair never completely returned.

MRS. ALLMAN worked for a pharmacist in Chester, S. C., where she learned the formulas for her preparations. She moved to Richmond because her sister lived here but while she was still in South Carolina, Mrs. Allman, who had also been to beauty school and learned to care for hair, played a role in a custom of the wealthy in bygone years.

She spent each summer in Asheville, N. C., where she went from house to house giving shampoos and sets to the

wealthy Southern women who came with their families to the mountains of North Carolina for the hot, humid months, before the days of air conditioning.

"They had their permanents for the summer," said Mrs. Allman. "All I had to do was give a shampoo and push the waves into place with my fingers."

THAT ALSO was in the days of the "finger wave," when women wore their hair close to the head and precisely waved rather than swelled into puffs by rollers.

When she came to Richmond, Mrs. Allman hunted around for a place in which to open a beauty shop and found what she wanted on First

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Street between Broad and Marshall.

"I was told nobody would rent to a woman, that I'd have to get a man to sign a lease for me, but I had no trouble. The landlord even let me sign a lease in January for rental to begin in April, as it suited my convenience," she said.

She opened the shop in 1933 and later, when her building was sold, bought the residence she now uses as her shop on Clay Street. She's a devotee of religion and believes God has led her through her business life.

NOW MRS. ALLMAN hires a chemist to work with her on her beauty preparations and in the days before the cosmetics industry was so conscious of the special needs of the black members of society, she developed products especially suited to the coarse, kinky hair of black people.

Mrs. Allman named her shop Arnello's in honor of her daughter, whose nickname is "Arnell." The business will belong to her daughter some day, she reasoned, and it should bear her name. Mrs. Allman's daughter is a teacher of beauty culture in the Richmond public school system.

One problem encountered by Mrs. Allman has been fending off people who wanted to share the business and, incidentally, get the formulas. She told of one man who insisted, "Why, I'll just come right in your lab and work with you, Mrs. Allman."

Mrs. Allman is shrewd enough to combine firmness and grace when she says "No."