

American Lace

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## **The World in Lace**

The study of textiles provides a glimpse into the lives of people, especially women, of our and other times. Which clothing was worn, when, why, how, and by whom it was produced all tell of the social values at that time in history. How women decorated their homes illustrates what values were important to them. This work will show how lace reflects the history of American women. The study of lace offers the opportunity to research and analyze trends in fashion, women's lives and the creative process. This work will give a glimpse into a small part of American history through the keyhole of lace.

People have always desired possessions that express their status, wealth and personality. In our century, houses, cars, and clothing provide clues to the identity of the owner; they tell us what this person values and how she wants to be perceived. In earlier ages, travel for pleasure was non-existent, entertainment was limited to the home, and there were very few tangible luxuries. Before the industrial revolution, the home was the center of social activity and its furnishings conveyed the family's prosperity; clothing and household furnishings were important indications of status. Lace curtains, table linens, and doilies spoke of a prosperous family that could afford luxuries. These items were also an investment and they represented the woman's contribution to the household. At a time when a well brought up woman could not work outside the home, the needle arts provided an outlet for creativity and production. Expertise in the needle arts was an important indicator of a woman's status, education and the care she took of her family and home.

Lace was also another important indication of status. During the years that America's society was dominated by the Puritans, it was frowned upon for any but the highest classes to wear lace. As lace became more available, these constraints lessened. Lace has been available since the Middle Ages to adorn clothing and household goods. However, because it is extremely time-consuming to produce, it is one of the most expensive textiles, and was available only to the wealthy prior to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women's clothing has often included lace, and until the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century men wore lace, on their shirt fronts, cuffs, collars and even boots. Ostentatious decoration on clothing was an indication of power and wealth. The lace on Queen Victoria's coronation dress cost more than one thousand pounds to produce. Napoleon III gave a lace dress to the Empress Eugenie that required 36 lace makers 18 months to produce. It is estimated that the dress would cost \$40,000 to make today (Schwab 18). The extravagance that these costumes represented was a statement of the power and status of their wearers, and helped to keep ordinary people aware of where they fit, or did not fit in society.

Making lace by hand remains a slow and painstaking art. Contemporary lace makers can produce a moderately complex two-inch wide bobbin lace at the rate of approximately one half an inch per hour. At this rate, it would not be commercially feasible to produce a marketable product. When machine made laces began to be available at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cachet of lace began to diminish for the upper classes. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ordinary people began to be able to afford lace, and the quality of the designs available deteriorated rapidly. Hand made lace is still available, especially to the couture fashion industry, but it is extremely expensive. While

the profession of lace maker has all but disappeared, the art is still practiced, especially in America. The egalitarian ideals of American society have promoted the concept that even the lowliest member of society could wear lace, if they could make it or buy it. Despite lace's sometimes old-fashioned reputation, a growing number of artists in America continue the traditions of hand-made lace.

Lace is inherently different from the other textiles used for decoration. Unlike embroideries, lace is not inscribed onto fabrics; it is the fabric, created to exist alone. Although more decorative than woven fabrics, lace retains many of the characteristics of a fabric. True lace is defined as an "openwork of threads that have been twisted, looped, and intertwined to form patterns" (Rogers 347). Bobbin and needle lace are considered true laces. Other forms of lace include those made by knotting threads, including macramé and tatting, and those made by looping a single thread into a fabric, including knitting and crochet. The oldest form of lace is needle lace, made by stitching the lace in the air, called *punto in aria* in Italian. In early 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, embroidery on fabric developed into needle lace, which does not require the background fabric. The designs copied the geometric shapes that followed the warp and weft of the background fabric. Bobbin lace, quicker and easier to make, was developed to mimic the more complex needle lace in the middle of the century. A worker using hundreds of bobbins could quickly out-produce a lace maker using one needle and thread. The geometric styles of the time were very popular with the aristocracy of the Renaissance. As clothing styles changed, so did the styles of lace that were popular and saleable.

Technological improvements also encouraged the development of lace making. Most hand made lace is made of white linen or cotton thread. Prior to this, it was

difficult to launder clothing and the lace quickly showed wear. Improvements in soaps kept the lace wearable longer and improvements in metals made the production of lace more feasible. Because they were cut by hand from wire, pins and needles were expensive. The pin and the pinhead were made separately until 1824, when the solid-headed pin was invented (Hopewell 11). Bobbin lace requires an enormous number of pins, generally made of rustproof brass, and needle lace requires fine strong needles. Previously, lace makers had used fish bones and thorns for pins, adding wax beads for heads; these were cumbersome and slow to use. With the availability of machine-produced pins, needles, and better threads, lace became more easily produced, while still being beyond the means of most people.

Most fabrics are made from plant fibers. Silk, produced by silkworms, has always been scarce, and wool, from sheep, has never been as common as cotton and linen. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most lace was made of linen. Linen was stronger than cotton or silk and smoother and easier to bleach than wool. It is also easier to spin a thinner thread in linen. The terms *household linens* and *lingerie* remain to show linen's dominance in fabrics. Traditionally silk, wool, and cotton were more expensive than linen, but by 1920 linen became much more expensive. World War I and the Russian Revolution destroyed many of Europe's flax fields, and linen became more expensive than cotton (Schoeser 156). Lace made from linen is stiffer than that made from cotton and so does not require to be starched. Cotton is easier to work than linen, but because it cannot be spun as thin as linen, it makes a less delicate lace. The availability and lower prices of cotton thread has made lace more affordable now than at any time in history.

By 1700, lace had become a profitable business. Centers of the industry were developed in Venice, Milan, Flanders and France. Louis XIV's finance minister Colbert subsidized the industry in France and wrote laws to protect against the importation and smuggling of lace (Levy 36). The earlier geometric designs became more stylized and flowing. The heavy Italian needle laces lost popularity and the lighter floral laces from France and Flanders grew in popularity. In France, the courtiers at Versailles kept in thrall to the whims of the Sun King spent vast fortunes on gambling, servants, and personal finery. Some bankrupted their estates to pay for their lavish lifestyle, including elaborate laces (36.) Other lace making centers developed in England, Germany, and Ipswich, Massachusetts. By 1800 the popular styles had become sheer and open, with little ornamentation. Perhaps because of the French and American Revolutions, the style of heavy baroque laces had given way to less ostentatious and lighter ones.

Lace came to America with the colonists. Although most lace worn in America was imported, many lace makers immigrated to America to escape the poverty and political disruptions in Europe. The destruction of the French aristocracy during the revolution severely damaged the industry and many Huguenot lace makers immigrated to America. Despite laws in colonial Massachusetts forbidding the wearing of lace, it was still very popular (Bath 303). The English lace industry suffered a decline during the American Revolution because they lost one of their main overseas markets (Levy 59). Lace makers from the Midlands in England settled in Ipswich, Massachusetts and began the only commercial bobbin lace industry in America. Needle lace, perhaps because it is so difficult to make, never became an industry in America, but bobbin lace did make some inroads in the new world. The social and economic changes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

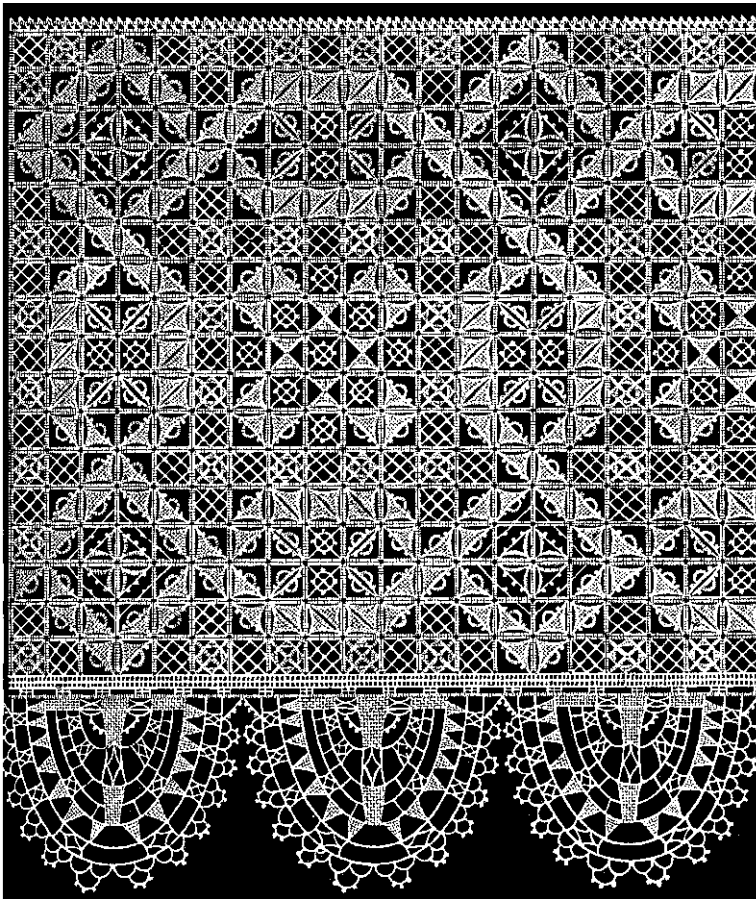


decreased the demand for lace, which disappeared from men's clothing and became less important in women's. The invention, in 1808 by John Heathcoat, of a machine that could produce the hexagonal mesh, called bobbin net, that hand made lace was based on, began the collapse of the hand made lace industry (Levy 80). The Leavers machine, invented in England in 1813 (Schwab 27), was used to weave patterned laces. Machine made laces became popular for curtains, tablecloths and napkins, while hand made bobbin laces were still in demand for clothing. Fabrics that imitated lace, like Carickmacross and Limerick lace, grew in popularity. Attractive and inexpensive to produce, these fabrics combined hand embroidery on a machine made mesh ground to imitate the more expensive laces. After World War I, machine made laces completely took over the market. The lace maker, working solely by hand, disappeared from the economic landscape, but she can still be found making lace for her own satisfaction. In Europe and America, modern lace makers have worked to keep the traditions of making lace alive. There are national and international guilds for historians, suppliers, designers and lace makers. There is a growing industry of publishers and suppliers to provide threads, patterns and tools. And at the center of this revival, there is a small army of lace makers dedicated to ensuring that this art will flourish.

### **Needle Lace**

The first true laces were made with a needle and thread. They evolved from embroidery, the art of ornamenting cloth with needlework. Although the styles have changed, the techniques of these textile arts have remained the same since the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest needles were made of bones or thorns, and needles made of metal have been available since the Middle Ages. They were first made of bronze, then silver and gold,

and finally iron and steel. Until the the 19<sup>th</sup> century, needles were made by hand and were quite expensive (Carver 13). The earliest needle laces were created on a woven ground fabric; these drawn thread and cutwork embroideries are the ancestors of true needle lace. In drawn thread work a thread or a series of threads is drawn out of an even weave fabric, usually linen. The remaining threads are drawn aside and covered with ttonhole and other embroidery stitches to make a geometric pattern.



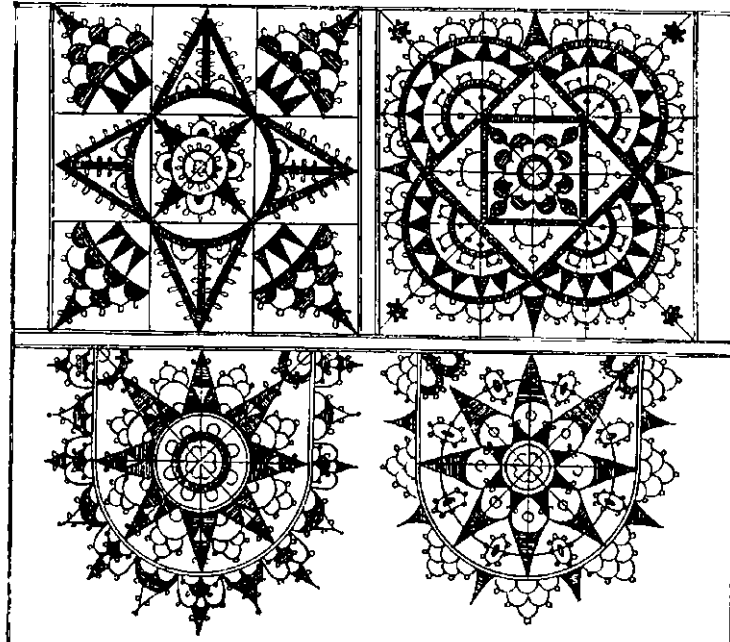
**Illustration 1** Drawn Thread Work

In laces, most of the threads are drawn away, leaving an open net grid on which designs are embroidered. In cutwork, the fabric is cut actually cut away, leaving spaces, which are then embroidered. When so much of the material is either drawn or cut away, a lace-like fabric remains. These lace-like embroideries were used on clothing, household

linens, and ecclesiastical linens. Portraits show the importance of lace and lace-like fabrics on shirtfronts, caps, hose, collars, cuffs, ruffs, veils, and shawls.

Printed embroidery patterns were not available until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, so embroiderers used samplers to keep a record of patterns. Johannes Schonsperger printed the first lace pattern book in Germany in 1523 (Hogue 54), including many examples of open work embroidery. The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts has Anne Gower's sampler, circa 1620, believed to be the oldest sampler found in America. It is thought that she brought it to Salem from England in 1612; she later became the wife of Governor John Endecott. This 8 by 18 inch white sampler has drawn thread work, lacis, cutwork, and other embroidery techniques (55). It serves as a visible record of her stitching skills, and also a measure of the value it held for her to bring it all the way to the New World.

Lacis later evolved into *reticella*, in which even more threads are removed and diagonal threads are added to build more complex patterns. The remaining threads form the ground on which the embroiderer stitches her designs.

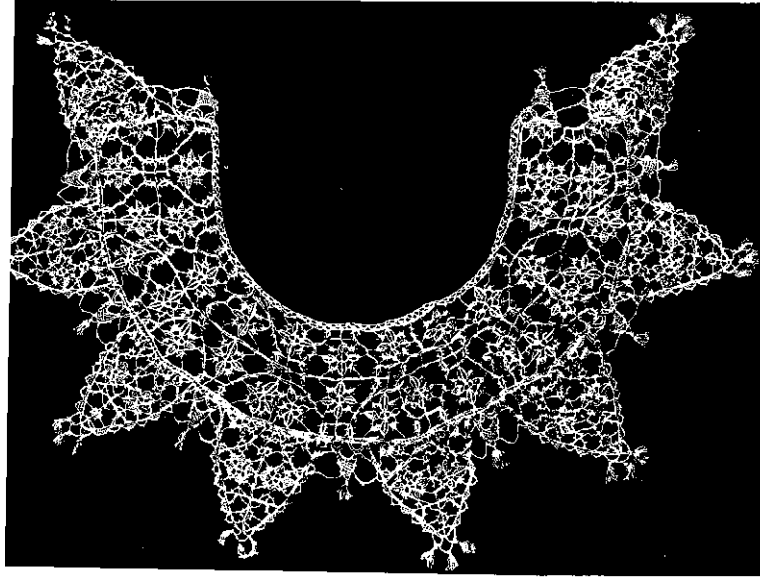


**Illustration 2** Reticella

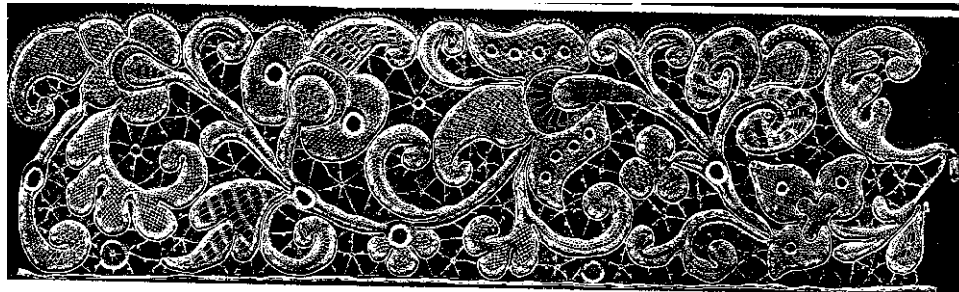
Here again, improvements in technology changed fashion. With the increased availability of parchment, embroiderers were able to escape the strictly geometric designs required by using the warp and weft of woven fabrics. They could now create more flowing patterns by drawing a design on parchment and laying foundation threads over the design. These threads formed the framework on which the rows of buttonhole stitches were sewn, to make the lace. When done, the foundation threads were released from the parchment and the lace was freed. This is true needle lace, the most difficult to make, and therefore the most valuable of all the laces. In France it is called *la reine des dentelles et la dentelle des reines* (the queen of laces and the lace of queens) (Goaziou 25). Because of the complexity of its production, the different stages of making needle lace were usually done by different workers. One would draw the design, another would lay the foundation threads, another would work the filling stitches in the design area, and another would work the ground stitches between the design areas. A final worker would

sew the separate pieces of lace into one article, and then a seamstress would attach it to an article of clothing.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the geometric reticella laces gave way to more flowing naturalistic designs in needle lace. These laces were often called point laces, and they included heavy Italian gros point laces and more delicate laces from Belgium and France.



**Illustration 3** Italian Gros Point Lace

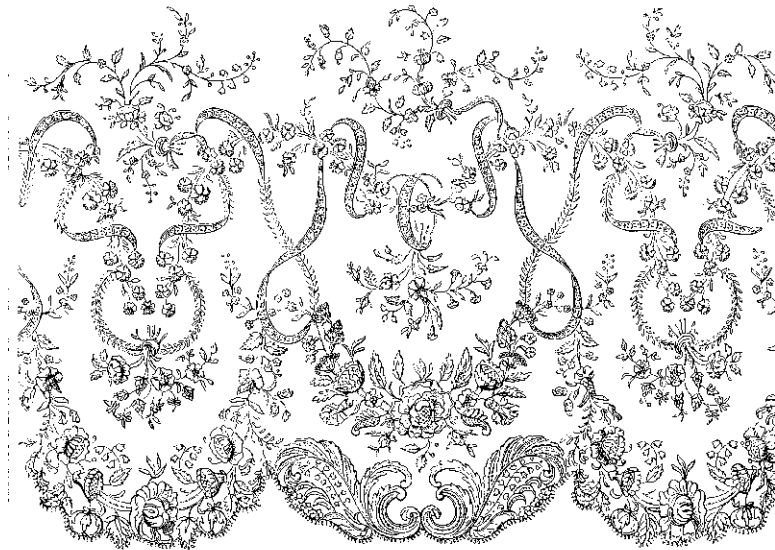


**Illustration 4** Belgian Needle Lace

They are classified according to where they were made and by what type of ground stitch is used. Because of the skills required and expense, needle lace was never widely available, and it lost favor after the introduction of bobbin laces, lighter in style and quicker to make. In America, white embroidery on white fabric, including linen, muslin,

and lawn, was much more popular than needle lace or bobbin lace. It requires less expertise and less time to produce an attractive lace using existing fabric and embroidery skills.

Around 1760, a worker in a stocking factory in England discovered a way to make net on a knitting machine, although it did not closely resemble hand made net (Vanderpoel 3). This net was used as the background for needle run lace, in which the designs are embroidered onto the net. This type of lace became an industry in Limerick, Ireland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the lace became known as Limerick lace. It was brought to America by the thousands of young Irish lace makers who emigrated here in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wilson, Embroidery 30). The lace maker would baste the white cotton net over a pattern drawn on paper or cloth, and then embroider the design in and out of the meshes with cotton or silk floss.

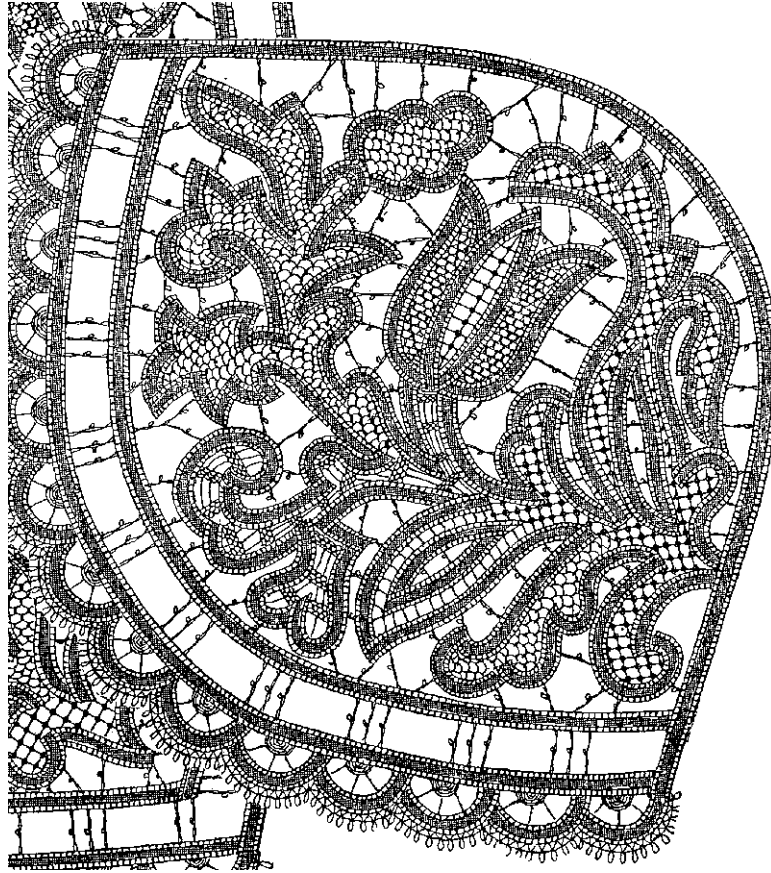


**Illustration 5** Limerick Lace

Occasionally other colors and fibers were used, most notably black silk. In 1808, John Heathcoat patented a machine that produced a bobbin net which closely resembled hand

made bobbin lace net (29). This revolutionized lace, making it more widely available, and destroyed the hand made lace industry. Difficulties, including riots, broke out between hand made lace workers and machine lace-makers. When Heathcoat's patents expired in 1823, there was a huge increase in the production of net in England. Although there was a small machine net lace industry in Medway, Massachusetts, it closed in 1830 after the removal of tariffs opened up the industry in England to American consumers (30). While social and industrial changes destroyed the hand made lace industry, they also made lace available for the first time to the ordinary people, thus ensuring that lace would outlast the aristocratic societies that were its first patrons.

Tape laces came to America with the Industrial Revolution. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, *mezzo punto* laces used hand made bobbin lace tapes combined with needle lace stitches. These laces were characterized by floral designs with needlepoint bars and fillings. When machine made bobbin lace tapes became available, this type of lace became increasingly popular, especially in America, where it was called modern point or Battenberg lace. By the turn of the century, hundreds of machine made linen, cotton and silk tapes were available. They were basted over a pattern, and at every point where the tapes touched, they were connected by needle lace stitches. Large spaces were filled with needle lace grounds, buttonhole stitch bars or filling stitches.



**Illustration 6** Battenberg Lace

This type of lace was popular for household linens because it was sturdy and could be laundered. Sara Hadley (1860-1927) widely promoted this lace through the many ladies magazines of the day, especially the *Ladies Home Journal*. In the October 1902 issue she announced, “Royal Battenberg lace, though having a foreign name, was originated by an American – the writer”. This lace commemorated the marriage of Princess Beatrice of England to Prince Henry of Battenberg in 1885 (Swanson 29). Sara Hadley was born in Canada in 1860 and moved to America in 1882. She owned a lace shop in Brooklyn where she designed, made, and sold lace, material and patterns. Although she used other techniques, she concentrated on Battenberg lace, and her designs appeared in many of the ladies magazines of the day. She won a gold medal at the 1893



Columbian Exhibition of the Chicago World's Fair for a Battenberg lace tea cloth (30).

Battenburg lace is still very popular for table and bed linens, however most found for sale in America now is made in China.

The Butterick Publishing Company, the inventor of modern dress patterns, published the magazine *The Delineator* from 1873 to 1937. This magazine often included Sara Hadley's lace patterns and information on lace making and how to use lace in clothing and household linens. She published her patterns in other magazines, including *McCall's* and *The Modern Priscilla*, and she started her own, *The Lace Maker*, in January of 1903 (Swanson 32). These magazines helped spread the popularity of lace through all parts of American society. Lace changed from being a symbol of the wealthy to an art form that could be enjoyed by any woman who could use a needle.

Another type of needle lace popular in America was filet. This lace is embroidered onto hand-knotted netting. Hand-knotted netting dates back to the Stone Age; pieces have been found near Lake Zurich, Switzerland, and in Peru (Davidson 40). Depending on which knots are used, it makes either a square or diamond shaped mesh, used in nets for hunting and fishing, hair nets, tennis court nets, hammocks, and shopping bags. Its biggest advantage is that it holds together even if some of the meshes are cut. Before the advent of the automobile, horse nets and bonnets, to protect horses from flies, were an important netted item. The net factory in Vinhalven, Maine produced around 83,000 of them each year during the 1880's. This factory remained open until 1926 (42). Although most fishermen now buy commercial netting, it is still made by hand by lace makers.

The materials required for netting are thread, a gauge to maintain a uniform size for the meshes, and a shuttle or needle to store the unused materials and manipulate the threads. In filet lace, also called lacinis, the meshes are made in a uniform size, making a square mesh. The meshes are later darned with a design, often a floral or geometric pattern.

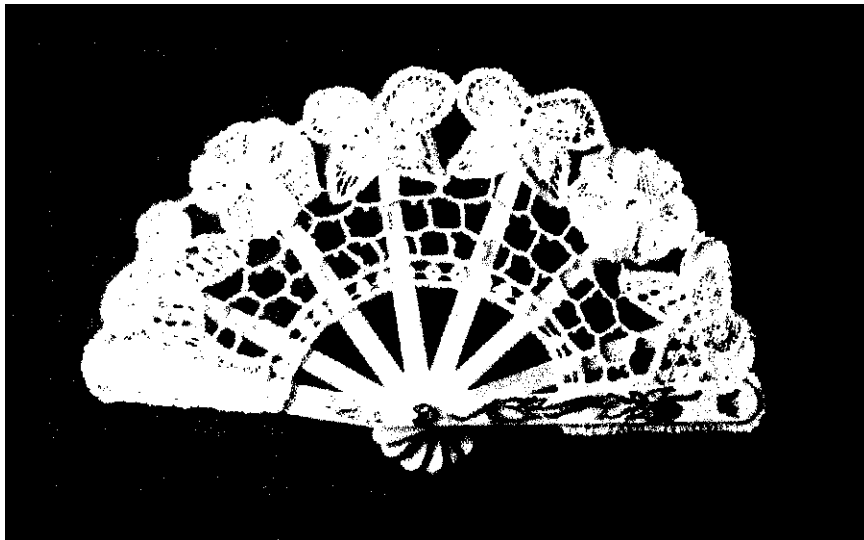


**Illustration 7** Filet Lace

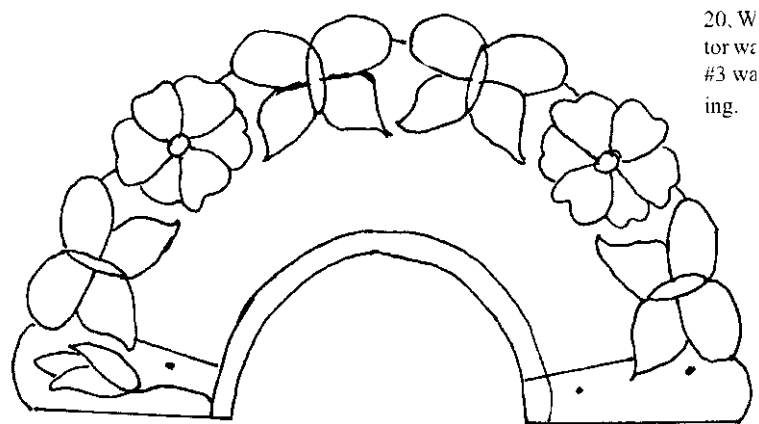
This type of lace has been made in Europe since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, usually for ecclesiastical purposes (Caulfield 356). A later type, called netted lace, developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, uses meshes of different sizes, grouped together to form the design. This lace lost popularity because it was so easily copied by machine. The commercially available pieces were of poor quality and so common that it was no longer valued, although hand made netted lace is still made by lace makers.

Like bobbin lace, needle lace has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in recent years. Instruction and history books are available, vendors provide supplies, and guilds have been organized to network and inform. The Internet has become a means of sharing patterns and resources. New artists and designers are bringing life to an art once thought lost. OIIFA, the International Bobbin and Needle Lace Guild, publishes a quarterly journal for its members and oversees a biennial Congress. IOLI, the International Old Lacers, Inc. is an American guild of more than 1300 members, including lace makers, teachers, vendors, and collectors. It provides resources, maintains a library for its members, publishes a quarterly bulletin and hosts an annual convention. Irma Osterman, the needle lace editor for the IOLI Bulletin, has published several books on needle lace. She is a researcher and designer and writes a needle lace column for the IOLI Bulletin. Her Youghal lace fan is a contemporary interpretation of a needle lace technique from Ireland. It was published in the Winter 2000-2001 Bulletin of the International Old Lacers, Inc. The fan was designed to fit miniature fan sticks from Ireland. Youghal lace began in Ireland in 1845 and was popular until 1940 with a revival in 1987-1992. Its designs included floral patterns and traditional Irish motifs like harps. Ms. Osterman's notes for making the lace state "The stitches are, for the most part, the usual ones found

in good needle laces. The motifs are joined by Raleigh bars and Dots reminiscent of the picoted bars of Venetian Point laces and Point de France. . . . I used threads of white cotton sizes 36/3 for the foundation cord, and 100/2, 80/2, 140/2 for the lace work” (Osterman 9).



**Illustration 8** Mini Youghall Fan



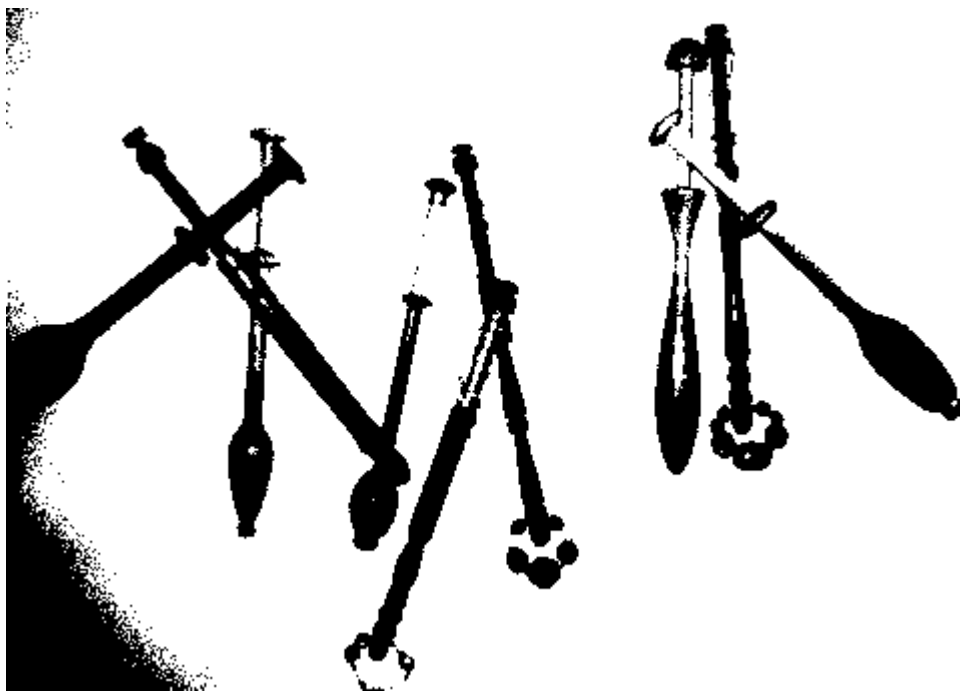
**Illustration 9** Fan Pricking

Used with permission of the designer, Irma Osterman

Instructions for making needle lace may be found in books or journals or on the Internet. Needlework guilds provide names of teachers and suppliers. The list of resources at the end of this work has suggestions for more information.

### **Bobbin Lace**

Bobbin lace, also called bone or pillow lace, is made using small spools, called bobbins, to hold the threads that make the lace. Bobbins are usually made of wood or bone, but can also be made of glass, plastic or metal. Many bobbins are plain, while some have spangles, usually of beads or buttons, to add weight.



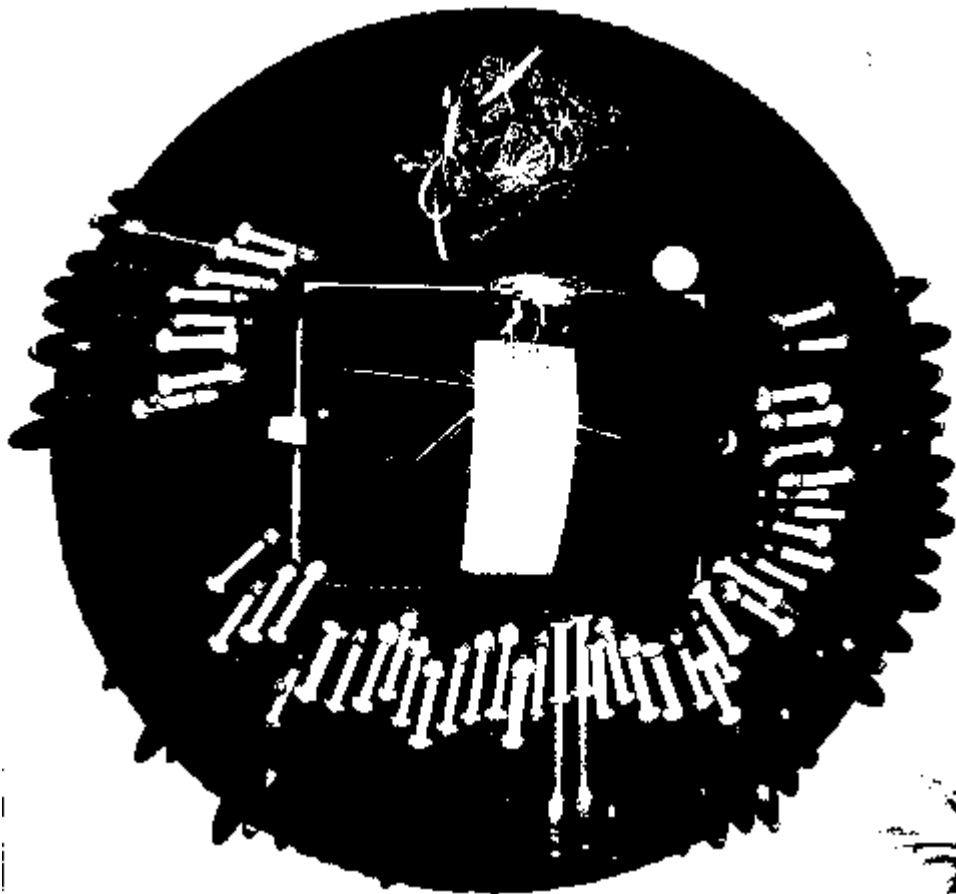
**Illustration 10** Lace Bobbins

The spangles also keep the bobbins from rolling and untwisting the thread. Spangles are often decorative and may include mementos of the lace maker's life. The bobbins are wound with thread, usually cotton, linen, or silk, but other materials can be used, including metal threads. In each country where lace is made, different styles of bobbins

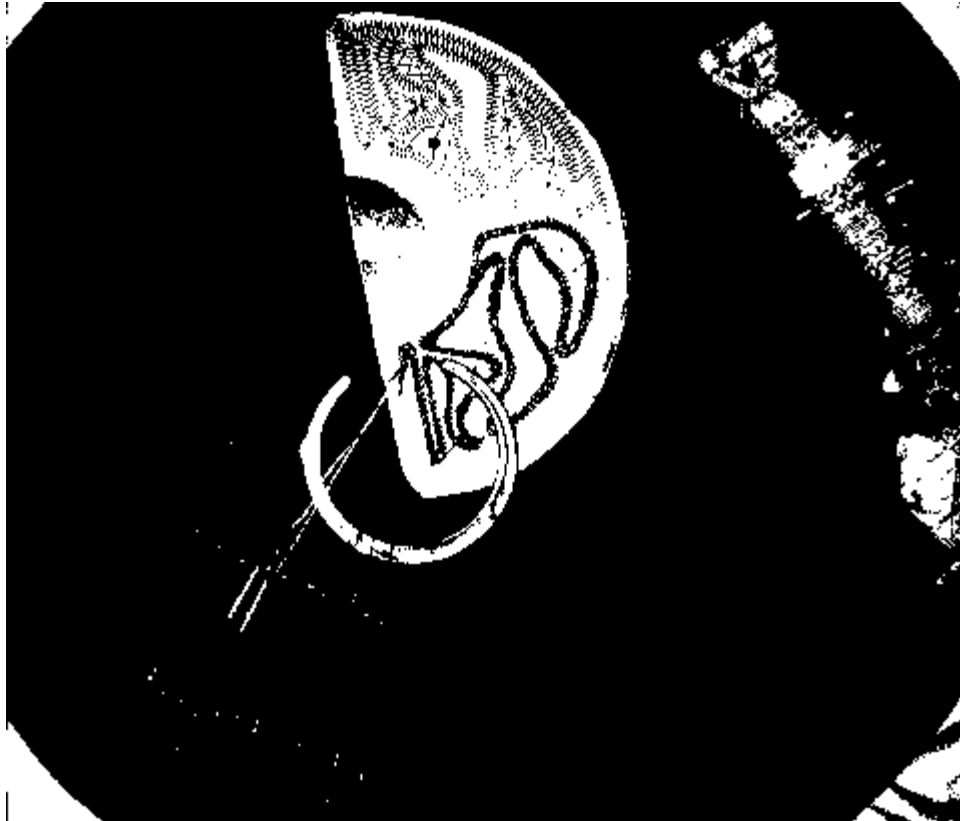
and pillows are used. Because America attracted lace makers from many different countries, there is no generally accepted American style of pillow or bobbin.

Contemporary American lace makers use many different styles of bobbins and pillows.

The pillow that the lace is formed upon may be rectangular, square, circular, or shaped like a bolster. It is stuffed with straw, wool, foam, or any material that will hold pins securely and usually has a removable cover of a dark plain washable material. The lace pillow may have a plain gently sloping surface, somewhat like the cap of a large mushroom (often called a cookie pillow), or it may have a roller sunk into the surface on which to make the lace.

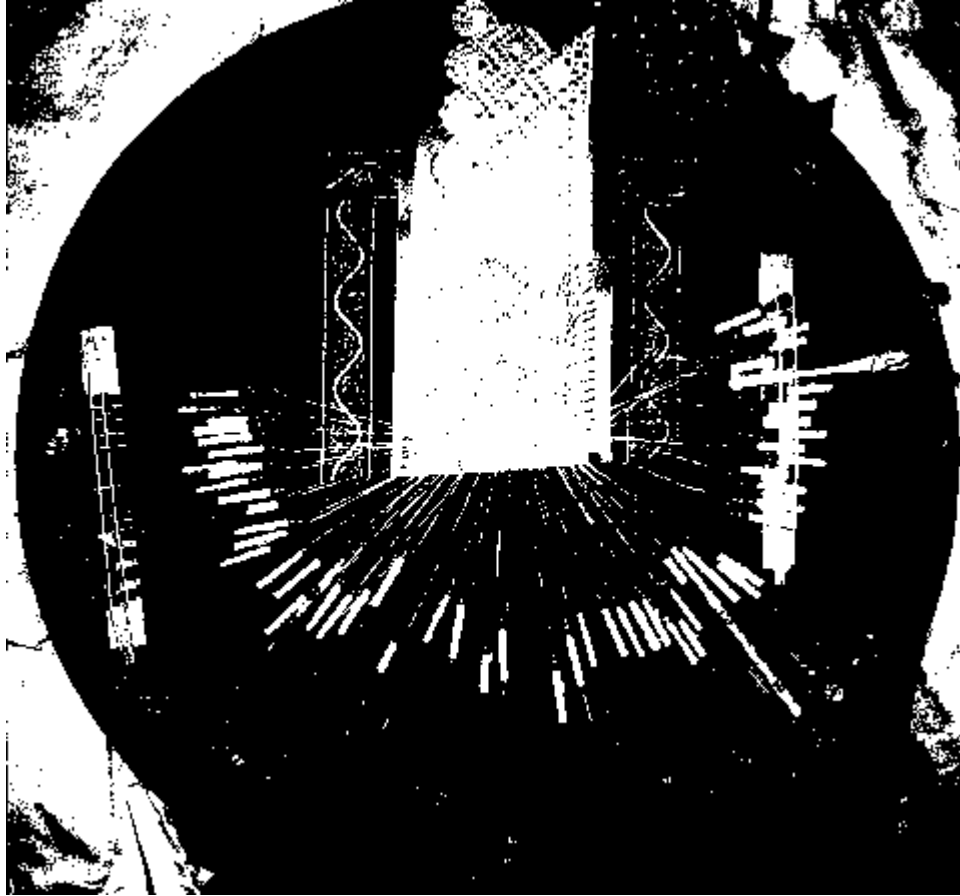


**Illustration 11** Roller Pillow



**Illustration 12** Cookie Pillow dressed with a Louise Colgan fan pattern

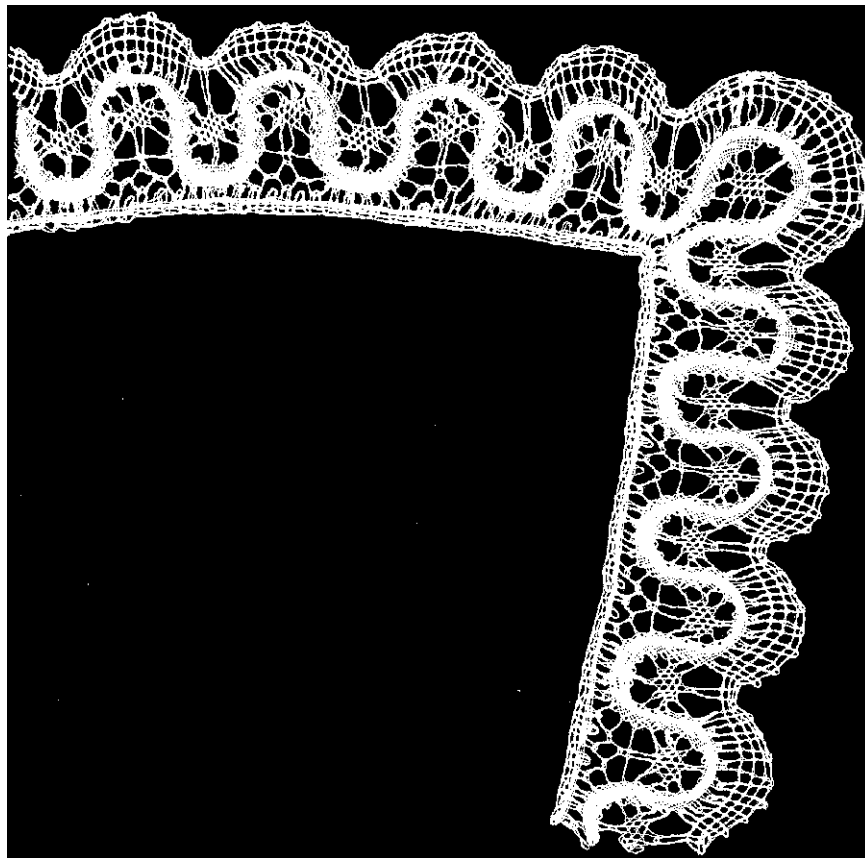
A pattern, drawn onto parchment or card, is pinned to the surface of the pillow or on the roller. Pairs of bobbins are hung off of pins placed into the holes on the pattern. The threads held by the bobbins are crossed and twisted around each other to form the stitches of the lace. Pins are placed into the holes of the patterns to hold the lace in place until it has enough integrity to maintain its shape. The lace maker follows the lines on the patterns to know how to manipulate the threads. Simple laces can be made with as few as twelve threads (six pairs of bobbins); more complicated laces may require hundreds of pairs.



**Illustration 13** Cookie Pillow with a Torchon Lace Edging

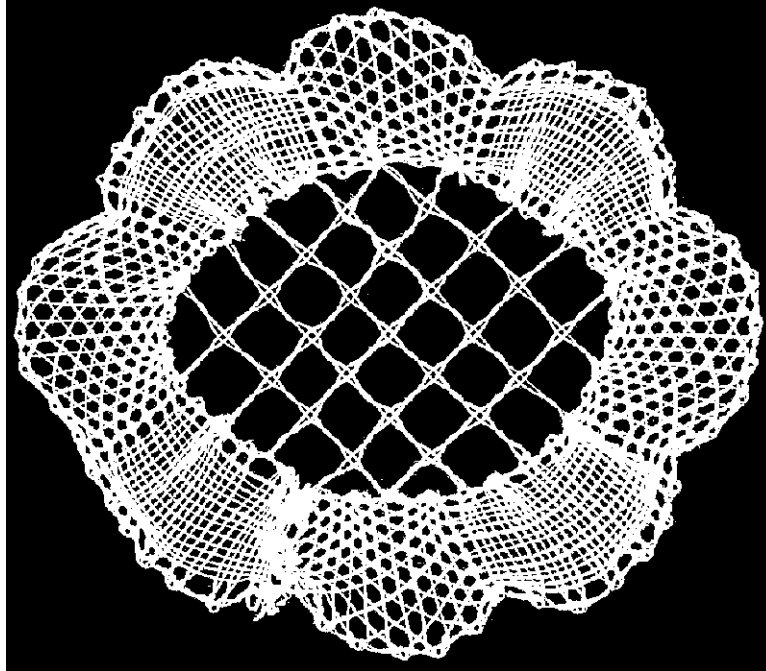
There are many different styles of bobbin lace. Most lace made in America is made in a long continuous strip, often with corners included for handkerchief edgings or trims for household linens. Lace for collars and cuffs would also be considered continuous. Illustration 14 shows continuous lace, while 15 shows a motif.





**Illustration 14** Lace Edging with a Corner

Other lace is made in small motifs, to be later embroidered onto hand or machine made net.



**Illustration 15** Lace Motif

Traditionally the threads used were white, off-white, and black, while contemporary lace makers use a wide variety of colors. Lace makers from different areas of the country often continue to make the same style of lace that their relatives brought from Europe. American lace has been strongly influenced by English lace, including Bucks point and Honiton. Bucks point is a continuous floral lace, while Honiton is made with separate motifs and grounds. Other lace styles in America include those from Germany and Czechoslovakia, often found in Minnesota (Southard 14-15). However, most modern American lace makers enjoy investigating many different styles and traditions, rather than just concentrating on one.

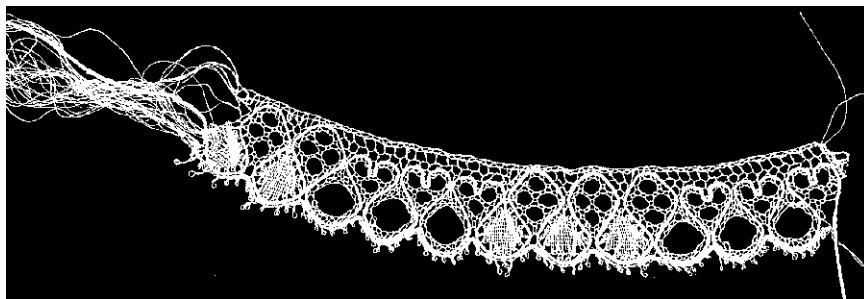
Bobbin lace came to America by many different roads. From England came the Puritans, who despite their dour reputations were very fond of lace, so much so that it was necessary to pass a law in 1634 banning the making and buying of lace. In 1651 the Massachusetts courts declared its condemnation of people of “meane conditions,

education, and calling” wearing gold or silver lace (Parker 4). When the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, Protestants fled Europe to America, bringing lace makers with them. Spanish lace makers came here from Central America and the Caribbean. Immigrants fleeing famine in Ireland brought crochet and embroidered laces while workers impoverished by the introduction of machine made laces brought English styles to our shores. Before the American Revolution, all imported lace was taxed heavily, especially those that were shipped either by or through England. Because of this, patriotic Americans refused to wear any lace at all. However, lace retained its popularity and many women continued to make their own.

There were only two serious attempts to produce commercial hand made lace in America. The first, in Ipswich, Massachusetts began around 1750 and ended in the 1840’s. The Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, mentioned the accomplishments of this industry in a speech to Congress in 1791 (Raffel 5). The volume of lace produced at Ipswich was large. In a letter from 1791, Mr. Joseph Dana reported that more than 600 women made and sold more than 41,979 yards of bobbin lace between August of 1789 and August of 1790 (6). These lace makers worked from their homes to supplement their incomes and provide for their families. Women and girls made lace in their homes, which could then be sold at market or bartered for other goods (18). The girls learned the skill from their mother or a neighbor and were then able to earn money without having to leave the home. After the American Revolution, the lace making continued and its market grew to include the middle classes (20). Initially the laces were made with white linen thread. As styles grew and black shawls became popular in the latter periods of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, black silk was used (33). Unfortunately,

the dyes used to create black threads are very harsh and destroy the lace as it ages; so many examples of these beautiful laces were lost. After the 1820's, cotton laces grew in popularity. As the industry grew, businessmen became middlemen between the lace maker and the market, changing what had previously been a domestic cottage industry (22). The profits to be made were diluted with the introduction of lace merchants; the women who produced the laces had to work harder and faster to make the same amount of money.

The designs of the laces made at Ipswich changed over time. In the 1760's the laces were made of white linen with intricate designs and brought the highest prices. A yard of lace would earn as much as a cord of wood or sixteen pounds of wool (Raffel 63). As the demand for lace grew, the patterns were simplified to improve the lace maker's speed. However, these laces brought in less money, while imported laces continued to be expensive. The Ipswich lace makers copied the expensive European laces and made them more available to the American public (64). The later laces from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were white cotton laces in Bucks or Tönder styles.



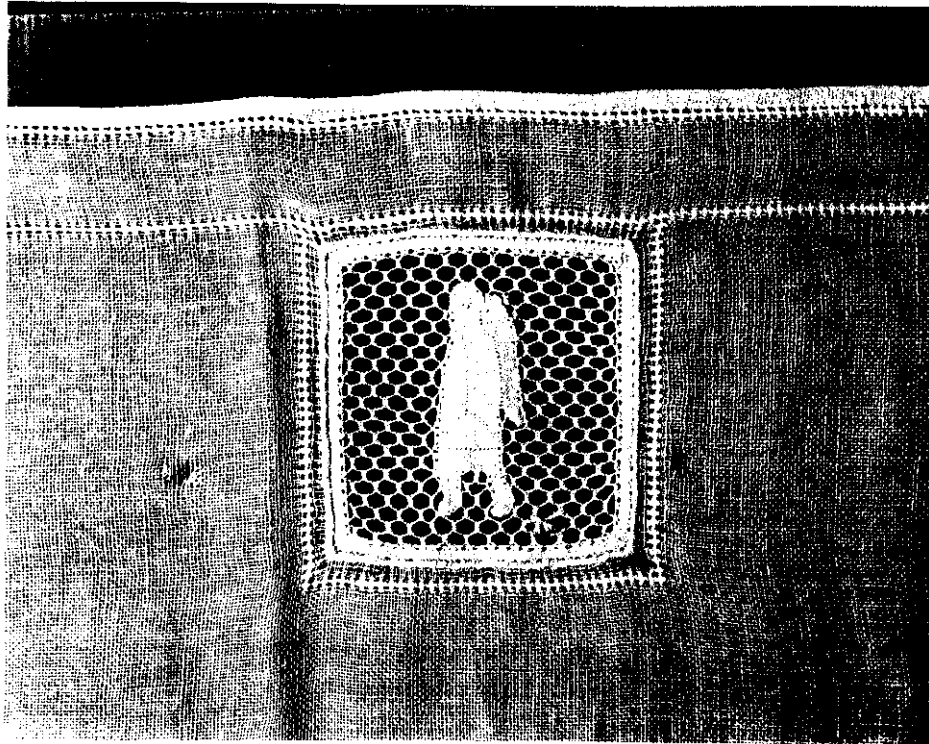
**Illustration 16** Tönder Edging

The industry began to decline in the 1820's with the introduction of machine made net. Women no longer made all of the lace; men ran the machines that made the net, and women embroidered the designs onto the laces. This was no longer a true

bobbin lace, and it became much less expensive to purchase. With the deterioration in the quality, the popularity of lace suffered. Women continued to make lace in their homes, but by the 1840's, the industry of hand made lace was finished in America (24). Bobbin lace was not completely abandoned, but knitting, crocheting and tatting began to be the dominant forms of lace making in the new world.

The second attempt to introduce a commercial hand made lace industry was started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Sybil Carter, an Episcopalian missionary. After visiting a lace school in Japan, she decided that this skill could be taught to Native American women, giving them the opportunity to earn money. After the Civil War, Sibyl Carter herself had to earn her own living, and she strongly believed that all women should have a way to support themselves (Ruffner 3). Like the lace makers of Ipswich, the Native American women required a business that could be started with little capital, be done in the home with no supervision, and would produce a marketable product. The beadwork that they produced was not in much demand, while there remained, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a strong market for lace on the east coast. Helped by the Episcopal Bishop Henry Whipple, Carter began a lace school for Ojibwa women at the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota (Duncan 29). Ms. Carter would provide the patterns and supplies and teach the skills to the women. After they finished the lace, it was mailed to New York where the Sybil Carter Indian Lace Association kept a shop. This association, started by friends of Ms. Carter in 1904, raised money and helped sell the finished product (31). The shop was quite popular among Ms. Carter's society friends; they were able to purchase attractive linens for their homes while supporting a worthy cause.

While Ms. Carter provided the initial designs, which resembled European laces, some of the laces produced incorporated motifs from Native American beadwork. Other pieces included stereotypical Indian designs, including teepees, women carrying papooses, or a man rowing canoes.



**Illustration 17** American Indian Lace, probably Oneida, showing a woman and papoose. Lace insert is 2 \_ inches by 2 \_ inches in linen; courtesy of the owner, Irma Osterman.

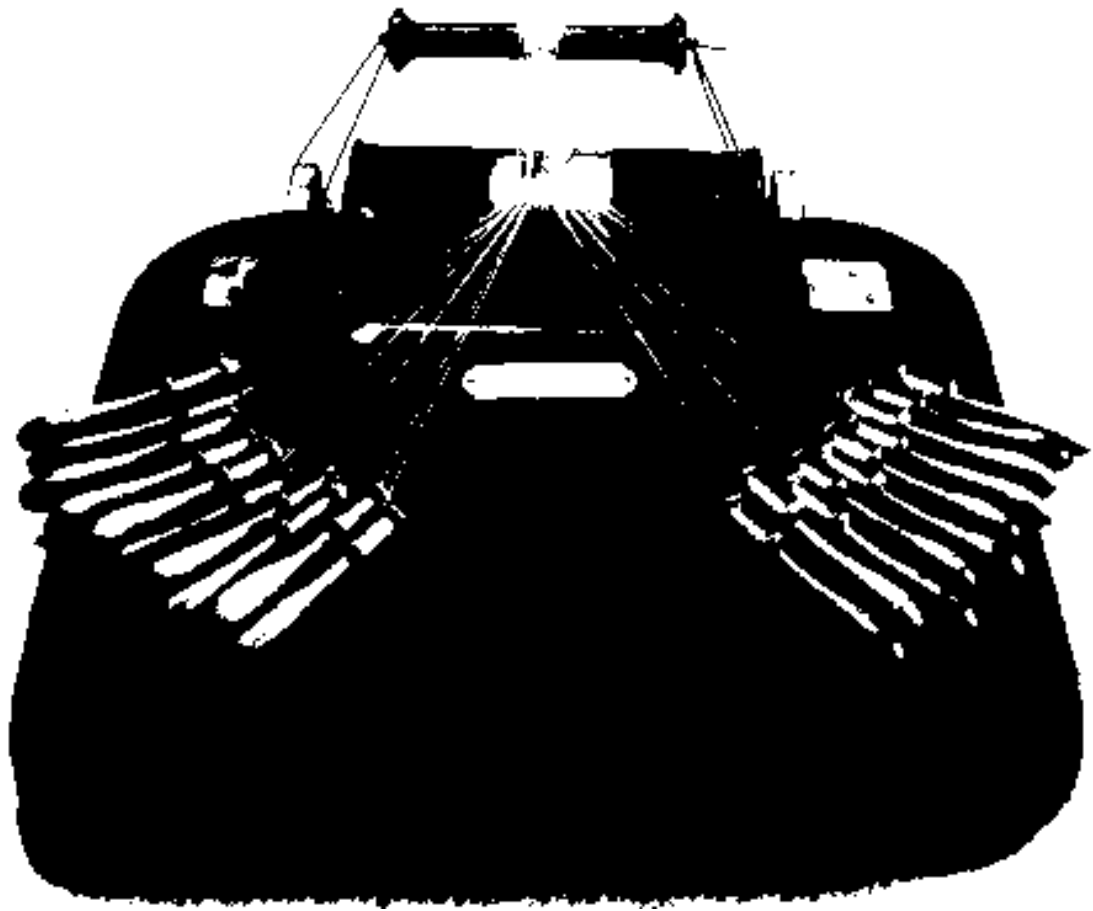
Because of this, some of the lace can be easily identified in the collections of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York or in the collections of the Sibley House Association of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Mendota, Minnesota. However, most of the lace produced by these women is indistinguishable from the other laces being made in America at the time (Duncan 29). Ms. Carter worked hard to create a product that would be in demand among her society connections, and they wanted the

heavy, floral, Renaissance laces that were in style. Most of the items produced were table linens and doilies, although lace edgings for clothing were also in demand.

Sybil Carter's lace schools spread rapidly, with the help of the Episcopal Church. As its missionary activities spread across the country, her schools proliferated. They were started among the Oneida, Sioux and Winnebago in the Midwest, the Onondaga and Seneca in New York, the Arapaho, Kiowa, Paiute, and Hopi in the west, and Mission Indians in California (Duncan 29). The teachers, friends of Ms. Carter or previous students, would buy the finished lace from the women at market price and send it to New York. A woman could earn up to a dollar a day making lace, more than enough to provide an income or supplement a household's finances (34). In 1899, there were 75 women making lace at the Oneida Mission at the Holy Apostles church in Wisconsin. They produced over 500 pieces of lace, including more than 600 yards of edgings, and earned \$425 for their reservation (Ruffner 4). The lace produced by the Native American women was of superior quality, winning prizes at the 1900 Paris Exposition and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (Duncan 34). In 1918, the Sibyl Carter Lace Association reported that year's output of more than 1000 items and 4092 yards of bobbin lace edgings (31). Among the members of the Sibyl Carter Lace Association were Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt and Mrs. Vanderbilt, who purchased a bedspread that required a year for eight Native American women to make (Dwyer 70). In the 1920's, probably because of changes in fashions, the demand for hand made lace disappeared. World War I had provided other economic opportunities for women and the number of lace makers among the Native Americans shrunk. Sibyl Carter died in 1908 and the Sibyl Carter Lace Association ceased operations in 1926. While some of the Native Americans continued

to make lace, the industry was finished. Examples of their lace may be found in museums and in private collections.

From 1901 to 1914, the Torchon Lace Company operated in St. Louis, Missouri selling an “improved” lace pillow called the Princess Lace Loom. This modern lace pillow, complete with cranks, gears, and by-the-numbers instructions, was advertised as a “delightful and fascinating pastime” for personal use or as a money-making hobby (Kurella 15). The instructions provided with the looms were not adequate to produce the advertised laces, and most purchasers were unable to make any money with their new hobby; however, the Princess Lace Loom helped to keep bobbin lace alive in America. The looms, selling for five dollars when new, are now valuable antiques.

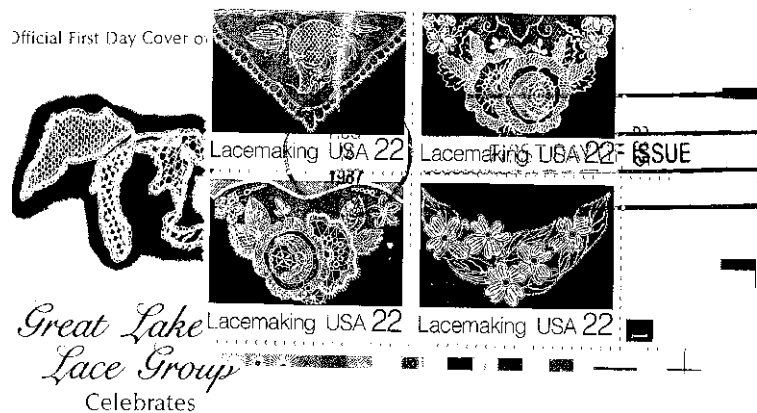


**Illustration 18** Princess Lace Loom, courtesy of the owner, Susan Banbury.



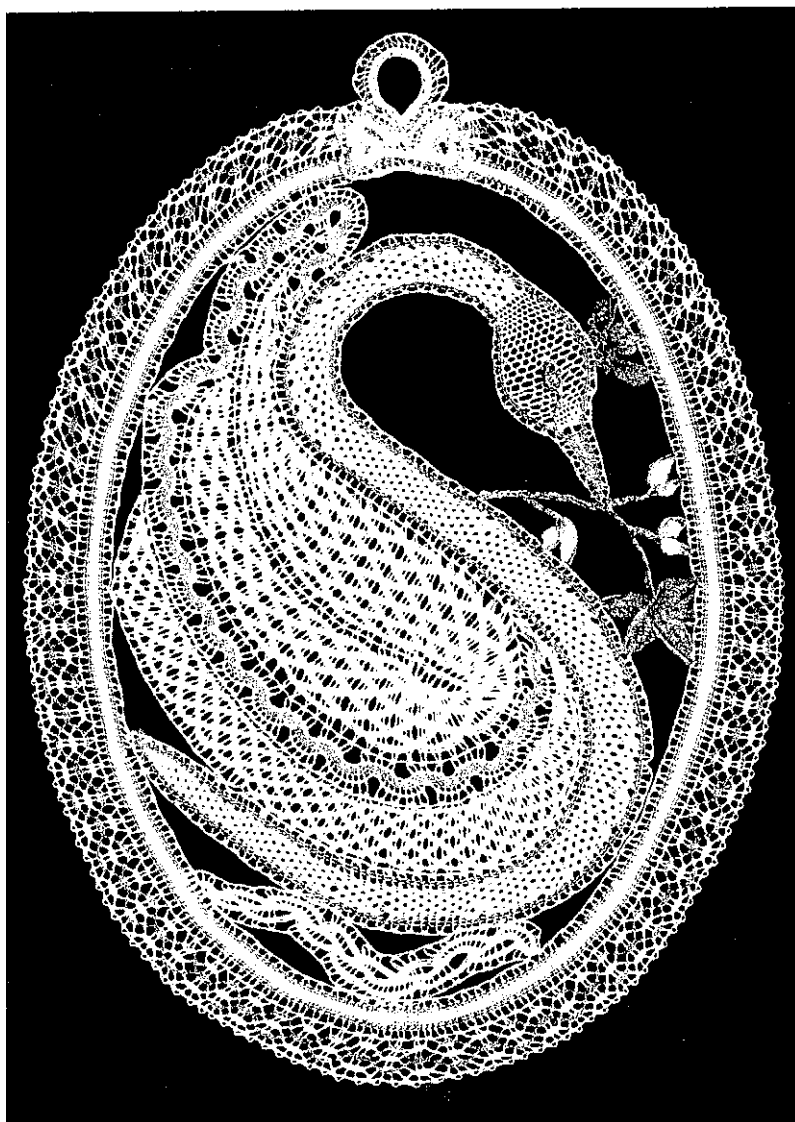
Despite the lack of a viable industry in hand made lace, the art continues to flourish. There are several guilds that promote and encourage making, teaching, studying and collecting lace. These include the International Old Lacers, Inc., a non-profit organization registered in Colorado, with more than 1300 members, and many local and regional guilds. The North Carolina Regional Lacers has more than 80 members in North and South Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. Most guilds publish newsletters, hold meetings, provide library services, maintain lists of teachers and suppliers, and provide encouragement and fellowship to their members. This lively community of lace makers is linked by the Internet with web pages, bulletin boards and on-line chat rooms. Supplies are often found through the Internet and mail order, although some needlework shops provide lace- making supplies. The guilds hire teachers from all over the world to lecture and teach workshops. Correspondence courses in different lace making techniques are offered for isolated members, and lace days are held periodically to provide a time and place for lace makers to meet, work together and purchase supplies from vendors. At lace days there is usually a lecture or a workshop, service projects are organized, and guild business meetings are held. In this atmosphere of encouragement and collaboration lace making in America is enjoying a renaissance.

Guilds have been instrumental in bringing lace to the public eye. Traditionally, guilds require that each member teach seven new lace makers during her lifetime. Guilds organize public demonstrations and encourage young people to try their hand at different types of lace. Guilds also offer a forum for members to publicize lace. In 1987 the United States Postal Service issued a series of four stamps showing hand made lace.



Originally planned to be issued in May of 1986, printing problems delayed the issue until August of 1987. The lace was designed and made by Ruth Maxwell, Mary McPeck, Trenna Ruffner, and Leslie Saari; all members of the Great Lakes Lace Guild in Michigan. Ruth Maxwell's design of a squash blossom (upper left) uses Bucks Point techniques and Trenna Ruffner's dogwood blossoms (bottom right) uses Duchesse and Honiton techniques. Mary McPeck's floral design in bobbin lace is at upper right, and Leslie Saari used bobbin lace, needle lace and tatting for her floral design at lower left (Maxwell 21-24). It was unusual for the Postal Service to honor such a small group of artists and craftspeople; however, the guild's members campaigned for and supported the idea. It took seven years of writing and calling to convince the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee to issue a block of four lace-making stamps as the eighth in the U.S. Postal Service Folk Arts and Crafts Series (McPeck 64). The support of guild members helped to expose this art to more than 15 million viewers, thereby providing American lace makers with their small moment of fame. The lace from the stamps has been donated to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

Two contemporary lace makers who are active members of IOLI are Tamara Duvall and Susie Johnson. Tamara Duvall is a Virginia lace maker, originally from Poland, who is active in the International Old Lacers, Inc. and other guilds. She is a designer, collector, and teacher and has published patterns in many journals. Her pattern “Swan Lake” originally appeared in the Spring 1999-2000 issue of the International Old Lacers Bulletin (Duvall 16). This design uses Milanese lace techniques and requires 17 pairs and cotton thread. Instruction books on Milanese Lace can be found in the resources chapter of this work. Detailed instructions for making “Swan Lake” can be found in the IOLI Bulletin.

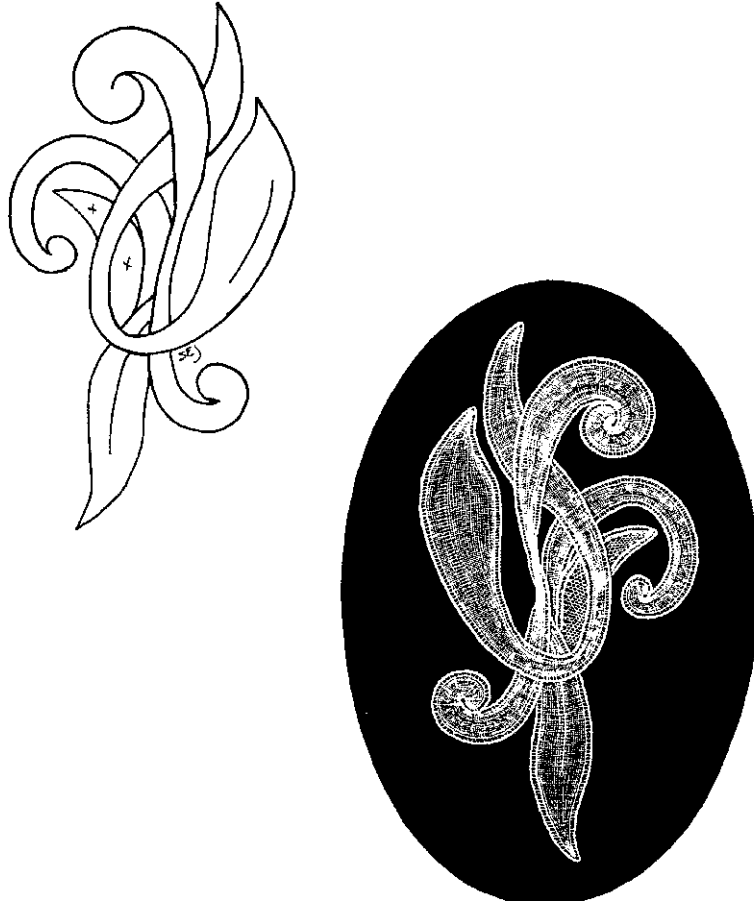


**Illustration 20** "Swan Lake" by Tamara Duvall



**Illustration 21** Pricking for “Swan Lake”, courtesy of the designer, Tamara Duvall.

Susie Johnson, a lace maker from Pennsylvania, specializes in Withof Duchesse lace, a style of lace that is only about twenty years old. Ms. Johnson is a designer, teacher, and writer and has won many awards for her lace. Withof lace was developed by Sister Judith de Kreijger and is named after the convent in the Netherlands where she lives. This lace is characterized by stylized motifs, often with an art nouveau feel, rolled edges, fine threads, and subtle shadings. “Inspiration” was designed and worked by Susie Johnson in the Withof style.



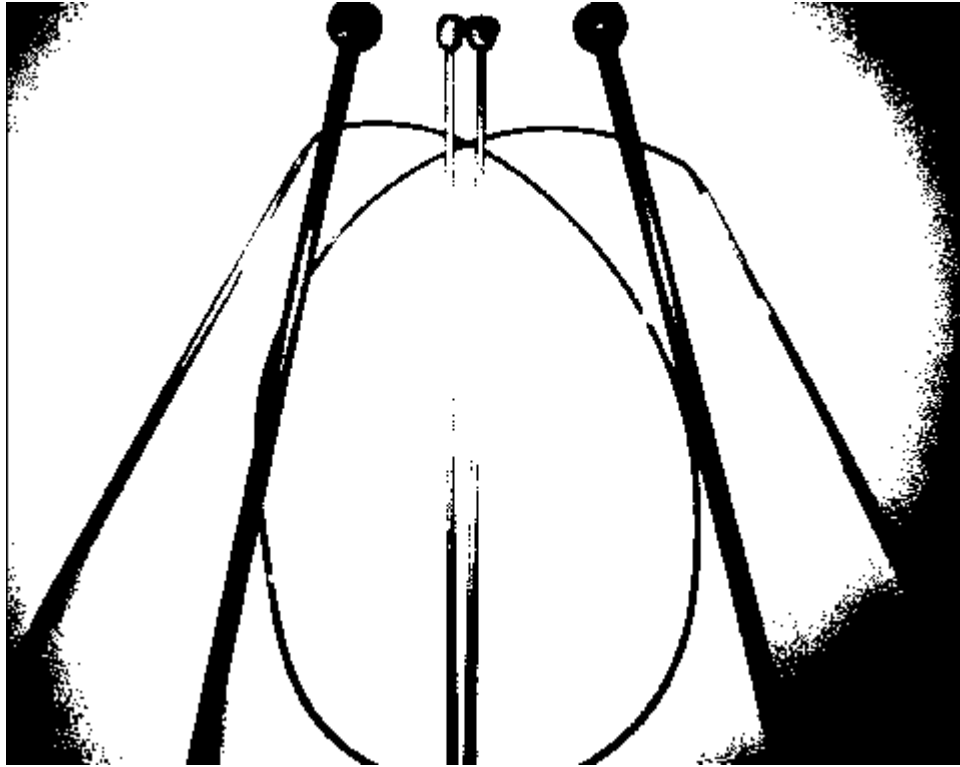
**Illustration 22** “Inspiration” by Susie Johnson

Lace is not a tradition-bound static art; artists and designers are always looking for new ideas and techniques. These new designs and innovations on old traditions are keeping bobbin lace in style and in the public eye.

## **Lace Knitting**

Knitting is one of the oldest textiles; pieces have been found that date back to the Nazca culture of Peru (100 BC to 700 AD). Perhaps the first knitters were nomadic shepherds and goatherds who had access to fiber to spin into yarn, but did not have a permanent home in which to set up a loom for weaving (Waterman 6). There are legends that say that Christ's garment was knitted and could not be cut because it would unravel, and so lots had to be thrown for who would receive it (Thomas 1). Knitting was introduced to Europe by the Arabs in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and it became an important industry in the Middle Ages (Rogers 350). Knitting was a skilled trade and most members of the Medieval Guilds were men. They were required to apprentice with a master for six years (Thomas 2). Caps, hosiery and gloves were knit in wool for ordinary people and in silk for the aristocracy. Lace knitting probably started in the courts of Europe when designs were knit into silk stockings. Queen Elizabeth I of England had the first knit pair of silk stockings in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Lane 167). Hand-knit lace stockings, made on needles so thin they are called wires, were still commonly made at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Knit lace has been used to trim baby clothes, handkerchiefs, household linens, and underclothes. While needle and bobbin lace remained an art practiced by few highly skilled workers, knitting appealed to most women. It had become a popular way of making lace available to a larger group of people.

Knitting is the process of making fabric by pulling loops of continuous threads through other loops. Flat fabrics are produced on straight needles; circular needles are used to make fabric tubes for socks and mittens.



**Illustration 23** Knitting Needles

Machine knitting can also be done on flat or circular frames; one to make stockings was invented in England in 1589 by the Reverend William Lee. This machine could make fabric with ten times the speed of a hand knitter. Circular and warp knitting machines were developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A further improvement was made in 1863 when William Cotton created a machine that could add and drop stitches, thus allowing the shaping of knitted garments (Kadolph 217). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, machine knitting had improved so much that knitted underclothes and hosiery became common. The yarns required to knit are more expensive than the material used to weave fabrics; however, the knit fabrics are warmer and more flexible than those woven on a loom. Sweaters, caps, socks, stockings, lace edgings and baby clothes are favorites among hand knitters. Hand knitting has remained one of the most popular needle crafts because the tools required are simple and it is relatively easy to master. Steel knitting needles have been mass produced



since the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (Waterman 7); modern knitters use these and needles made of wood, bone, and plastic. Patterns are available in books, magazines and on the internet. Yarn stores are available where knitters can buy supplies, join knitting groups and guilds, and take lessons. The popularity of knitting has increased in recent years, perhaps because of the trend towards a more creative and introspective lifestyle. Magazines like *Knitters* and *Interweave Knits* are enjoying an increasing readership and younger women can be seen knitting in coffee shops and on college campuses.

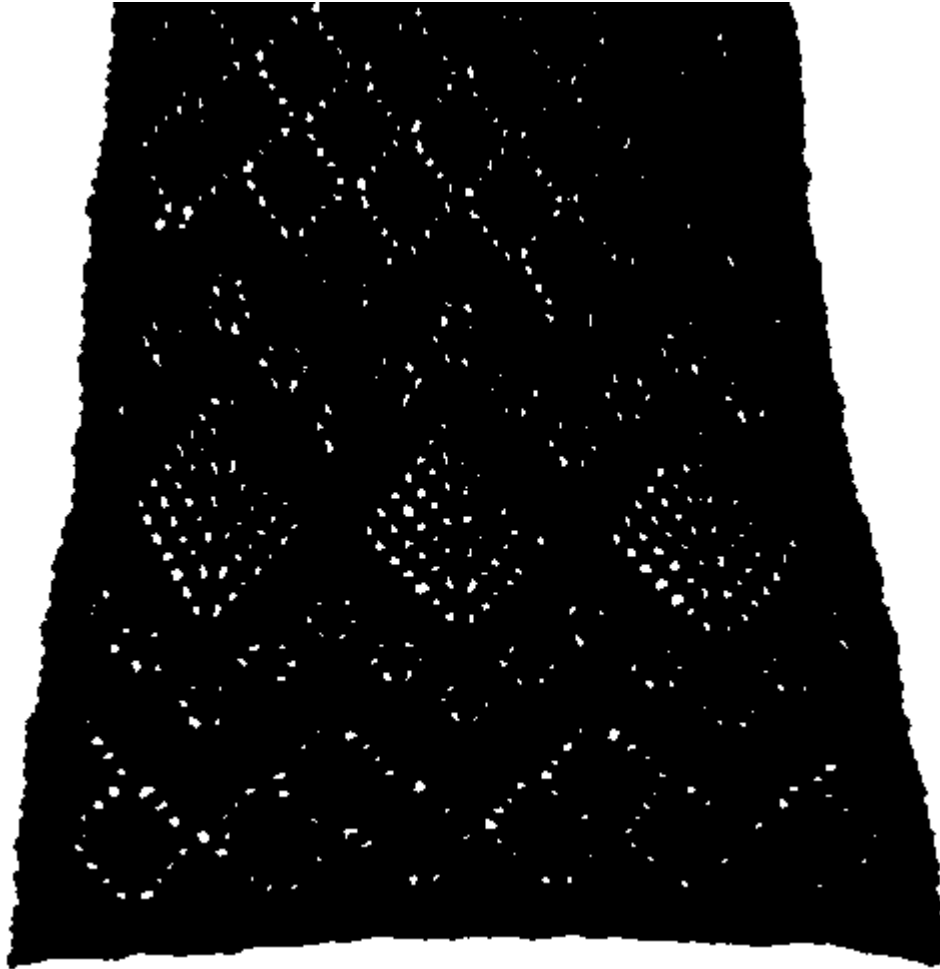
In colonial times, every American woman learned some form of needlework. Plain sewing, quilting, and embroidery were necessary for clothing and household linens. All of these required fabric, so many women also spun yarn and wove cloth. Because cotton was not readily available in America until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and silk was extremely expensive, most household goods were made of wool or linen, much of it imported from Europe. Rural and poorer Americans had to produce their own fabrics, and so raised flax for linen and sheep for wool. These fibers were spun on spinning wheels and woven on looms into linen, wool, or linsey-woolsey, a combination of the two. Another way to turn wool into a usable fabric is by knitting, and until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most well-brought-up American girls, and quite a few boys, learned how to knit. Stockings, mittens, caps, and scarves were always needed and could be made at home after other chores were finished. Knit stockings were valued enough to be included in 18<sup>th</sup> century inventories and wills (Weissman 177). In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, knitted lace shawls became popular in Great Britain and America as an important part of women's daily wear. Knitted shawl patterns became available, and many of the immigrants to America brought with them their needles, yarns, and pattern samplers (Waterman 8). Most

knitting in America has been done at home or as a cottage industry. The trade guilds were not found on this side of the Atlantic; perhaps because the guilds were communes and did not mesh with the spirit of individualism found in the new world.

Lace knitting, while more complicated than regular knitting, is an easier and quicker lace making technique than bobbin or needle lace. Most laces are knit in cotton, although linen, silk, and wool are sometimes used. One advantage of lace knitting is that it does not require the strong light and good eyesight needed for embroidery and bobbin and needle lace. Knitting patterns, including lace patterns, are easy to memorize and alter to fit individual tastes. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most patterns were not written down, because of illiteracy and the cost of paper. Many knitters made samplers of the different patterns as they learned them and referred to the sampler for designs as needed. These patterns have changed very little over time. The first knitting pattern book was published in New York in 1843 by J. S. Redfield (Weissman 179). All knitting requires only two stitches, knit and purl, made in varying ways and in endless combinations. The lacy effect of lace knitting is produced by making yarn-overs to create holes in the fabric. Although the resulting fabric may appear complex, the patterns are repetitive and relatively easy to master.

Knitting fit easily into a housewife's schedule. Women could knit in the evenings or while visiting friends, making sweaters, caps, stockings, and lace. In colonial days when idle hands were considered to be tools for the devil, especially for women, knitting was a skill that could be useful and expressive at the same time. Women had few outlets for creativity, and needlework was one of the few proper pastimes available. The advances made in textiles during the Industrial Revolution and an increase in trade with

India brought cheap cotton yarn to America. This helped spur interest in knitting, especially for laces and coverlets (Patterson 26). Women's needlework magazines, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *Weldon's Practical Needlework*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, and *Peterson's* were instrumental in encouraging women to knit, by publishing instructions and patterns. A modern advancement in hand knitting is the use of charts for patterns. Following a chart, once the skill is mastered, is simpler than following written instructions. However, the stitches involved have not changed. A modern knitter can easily reproduce a knitting pattern from any time in history. The names of traditional lace knitting patterns show an interest in nature. Many of them come from northern Europe and reflect a life lived in the countryside and by the sea. They include Madeira leaf stitch, butterfly, wave and leaf, traveling vine, traveling leaf, florette, trellis ladder, old shale, shell, fern stitch, fir tree and dewdrop.



**Illustration 24** Knit Wool Scarf, showing Fir Tree and Diamond patterns

Modern knitters often alter traditional patterns to reflect their tastes and the changes in fashion, especially in knitting lace. The complicated lace curtains, tablecloths and doilies that once adorned the well decorated home have given way to simpler, more utilitarian linens.

Despite the complexity of the laces that can be made, knitting is a simple skill. The basics of knitting are best learned in individual instruction, but can also be learned from written directions. Teachers are available at yarn shops, community colleges, or senior centers. There are many state and national knitting guilds that can be found in local newspapers or on the Internet. Local yarn stores are a great resource for supplies, lessons

and advice. While yarns for knitting sweaters can be quite expensive, the cotton and wool used for lace knitting are reasonable. The tools needed, including knitting needles, markers, and measuring devices, are inexpensive. There are several magazines devoted to knitting and dozens of pattern books printed every year. By learning to knit, modern women will be joining a tradition stretching back thousands of years and reaching far into the future.

The pattern that follows is an easy traditional lace pattern, dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; it can be made in #20 crochet cotton and size 1 needles. Abbreviations: s- slip, k- knit, yo- yarn over, skp- slip 1 stitch, knit the next stitch, pass the slipped stitch over, p- purl, tog-together, sk2togp- slip 1 stitch, k2tog, pass the slipped stitch over.

**Diamond Point Edging:** Cast on 11 stitches and knit across.

Row 1: s, k1, yo, k1, (yo, skp) 3 times, k2.

Row 2 and all even rows: purl.

Row 3: s, k1, yo, k3, (yo, skp) 3 times, k1.

Row 5: s, k1, yo, k5, (yo, skp) 2 times, k2.

Row 7: s, k1, yo, k7, (yo, skp) 2 times, k1.

Row 9: skp, k1, yo, skp, k3, k2tog, yo, k2tog, yo, k3.

Row 11: skp, k1, yo, skp, k1, k2tog, (yo, k2tog) 2 times, yo, k2.

Row 13: skp, k1, yo, sk2togp, (yo, k2tog) 2 times, yo, k3.

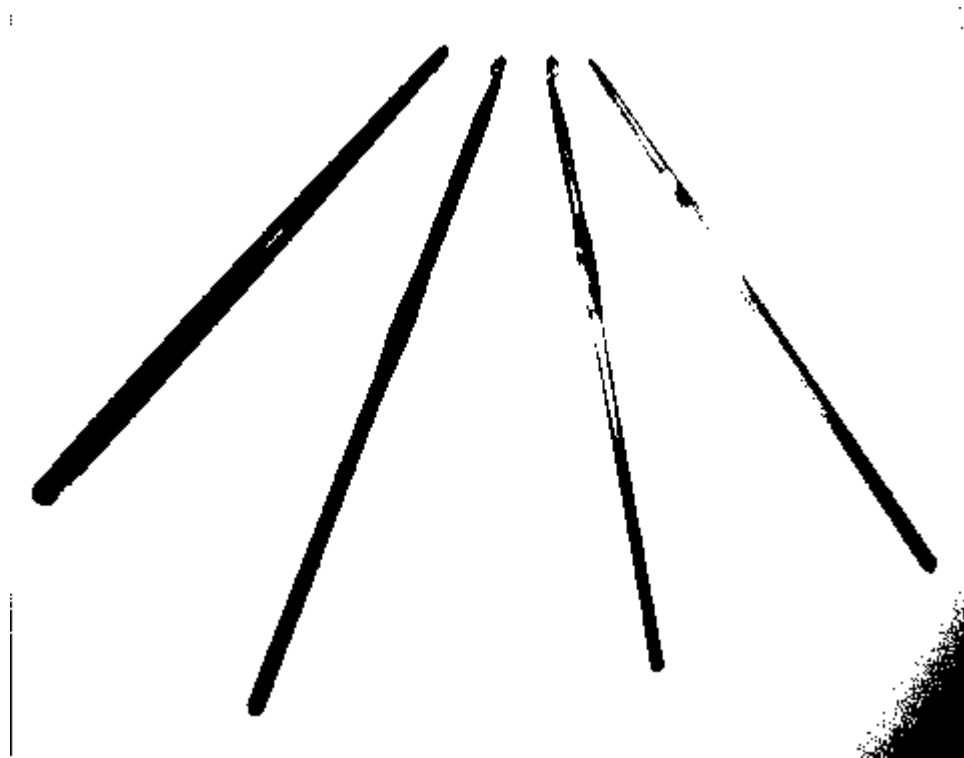
Row 15: skp, k2, k2tog, (yo, k2tog) 2 times, yo, k2.

Row 16: purl across.

Continue rows 1-16 to desired length.

## Crochet Lace

Like knitting, crochet (French for hook) is made by pulling loops of thread through other loops to form chains, but with a hook, rather than a needle. In ancient times, cords were made by chaining fibers without using hooks. The Pima Indians crocheted loops of fibers from tree bark into a fabric that they shaped into pots and covered with clay. These pots were used for cooking, and although the fibers have since rotted away, the impression of the crochet stitch can still be seen on the shards (Lane 145). According to legend, the first hook used for crocheting was modeled on a shepherd's crook.



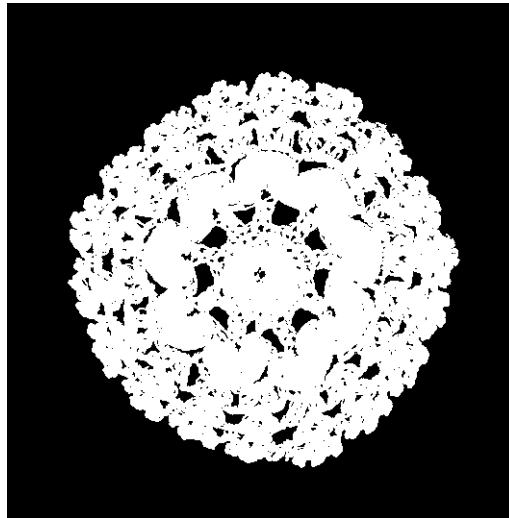
**Illustration 25** Modern Crochet Hooks

Unfortunately, there is very little recorded history of crocheting. The technique of crocheting lace was probably first used in France to connect sections of bobbin lace (Wilson, Famine 41). In America, colonial women did not know crocheting; it came to this country with the waves of immigrants from Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1845 and 1846 the potato crop in Ireland was destroyed by blight. Potatoes and porridge were the primary foods of most of the Irish and a famine developed that continued for years. The British government, unable or unwilling to help, manipulated the grain stores rather than provide for their subjects, and many of the Irish starved. By 1851, twenty five percent of the population had either emigrated or died of famine, typhus, cholera, and other diseases common where poverty reigns. Wealthy Irish and English women, hoping to alleviate the poverty, founded schools to teach skills to the poor. Nuns from the Ursuline convent in Blackrock, County Cork, started a lace school to teach crochet, a skill that one of the nuns had learned in France in the 1760's (Wilson, Famine 42). Cassandra Hand, the wife of the rector of the Church of Ireland in Clones, opened a school to teach Venetian Point needle lace. The workers, finding needle lace slow and difficult to make, developed Irish crochet as an imitation of the needle laces (Barnes 44). The laces produced by the schools were popular among upper class women who wanted to feel they were helping the poor while being able to purchase an affordable luxury. Provided materials and designs by the schools, the woman worked from their homes and were paid according to the difficulty and quality of the motifs they produced. These schools soon spread over Ireland, and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century their lace became world famous. Charitable organizations promoted the wearing of Irish crochet as a means of showing benevolence towards the poor. Queen Victoria wore Irish

crochet lace, and Queen Mary, wife of King George V, wore a dress of Clones Irish crochet lace to her coronation in 1910 (Barnes 45). The lace schools were successful in providing incomes for women, and they spread crochet lace to America with the thousands of Irish immigrants who crossed the ocean. Americans loved the luxury of lace, especially when it was available to all, not just to the rich.

Irish crochet lace, begun as an imitation of European bobbin and needle lace, became a distinctive type of lace in its own right. It is composed of floral motifs, often made over a padded cord to give a three-dimensional effect. The motifs are joined into lace edgings with a knotted background and a plain or scalloped edge. Even after the end of the famines in Ireland, the lace retained its popularity; perhaps because it was relatively easy to learn and cheap to produce.



**Illustration 26** Irish Crochet Lace

Because of the increased demand, dealers became involved, and by the late 1860's and 1870's the quality had begun to decline. Increased production hurt the quality of the lace and the designs lost their originality. The Franco-Prussian War in the late 1870's increased demand for Irish crochet lace because of the disruption of supplies from



continental Europe. In the 1880's the schiffli embroidery machine, which could imitate crochet lace, was invented. Mechanization and the competition of crochet from the Far East further weakened the market (Wilson, Famine 44). Although lace is often seen as an accessory for the wealthy, crochet lace had its origins in poverty and despair, and this style of lace continues to be a favorite among the working classes, especially in America.

In America, housewives learned to crochet from their new Irish neighbors and from the popular ladies magazines. Sara Josepha Hale, the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, was a woman of the people. Instrumental in convincing President Lincoln to establish a Thanksgiving holiday, she did not approve of the Civil War. In all the issues of her magazine published during that time, there are no mentions of the war, slavery, or state's rights (Lane, 148). She did however publish patterns for all of the newest laces, including bobbin and needle lace, knitting, and crochet.



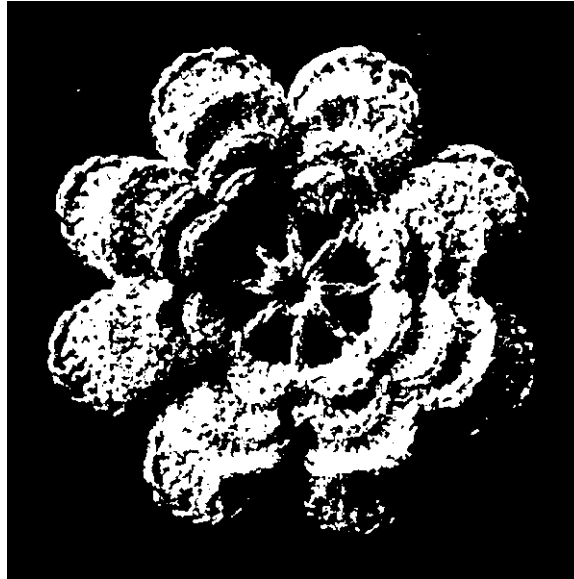
**Illustration 27** *Godey's Lady's Book* from April 1890

American thread companies, eager to increase their markets, produced thousands of leaflets with crochet and knitting patterns for collars, cuffs, yokes and edgings. As fashions changed and hemlines rose and fell, crochet lace remained a popular way to accessorize women's clothing.

American crochet lace can be either quite simple or complex. Filet crochet is simple; it can copy any imaginable cross stitch design in a geometric pattern. Crochet can also be quite complex. As an example, popcorn stitch produces a rich three-dimensional effect. Crocheted pin wheels and spider webs make beautiful curtains and tablecloths; yards of tiny edgings adorn handkerchiefs and baby clothes.

Like knitting, crocheting is easy to learn and inexpensive to produce. Little equipment is required, including hooks made from metal, bone or wood and cotton thread. Patterns are either written out or charted and instruction may be found in countless books and magazines. There are national, state, and local guilds for information and networking, and advice can be found at yarn shops. Crocheting has a more egalitarian reputation than knitting, perhaps because of its humble origins, and it is also reputed to be easier to learn. There is only one hook to manipulate, rather than the two needles of knitting. The stitches are geometric and most crochet work is either done in circular rounds, or back and forth in rows. Once the stitches are mastered they can be combined in many different ways to create original patterns or to modify traditional ones. For help in getting started at crochet, consult your local yarn store or general crafts store. They usually have classes or can provide information on teachers.

The following patterns are adaptations of traditional designs; the Irish crochet rose could be repeated for an edging or used as a motif on a handkerchief. Use crochet cotton and a small hook.



**Illustration 28** Irish Crochet Rose

**Irish Crochet Rose:** Chain (ch) 8 and join in a ring with a slip stitch (ss).

**Round 1:** ch 6, (1 double crochet (dc), ch 3) 7 times, ss in 3<sup>rd</sup> ch at beginning of round.

**Round 2:** (1 single crochet (sc), 1 half double crochet (hdc), 3 dc, 1 hdc, 1 sc) over each 3-ch loop. **Round 3:** working behind round 2, make 1 ss in the 1<sup>st</sup> ss of round 1, ch 5, (1 ss in next dc of round 1, ch 5) 7 times, 1 ss in first ss to close. **Round 4:** (1 sc, 1 hdc, 5 dc, 1 hdc, 1 sc) over each 5-ch loop. **Round 5:** working behind round 4, make 1 ss in the first ss of round 3, ch 7, (1 ss in next ss of round 3, ch 7) 7 times, 1 ss in first ss to close.

**Round 6:** (1 sc, 1 hdc, 7 dc, 1 hdc, 1 sc) over each 7-ch loop. **Round 7:** working behind round 6, make 1 ss in the first ss of round 5, ch 9, (1 ss in next ss of round 5, ch 9) 7 times, 1 ss in first ss to close. **Round 8:** (1 sc, 1 hdc, 9 dc, 1 hdc, 1 sc) over each 9-ch loop, fasten off.



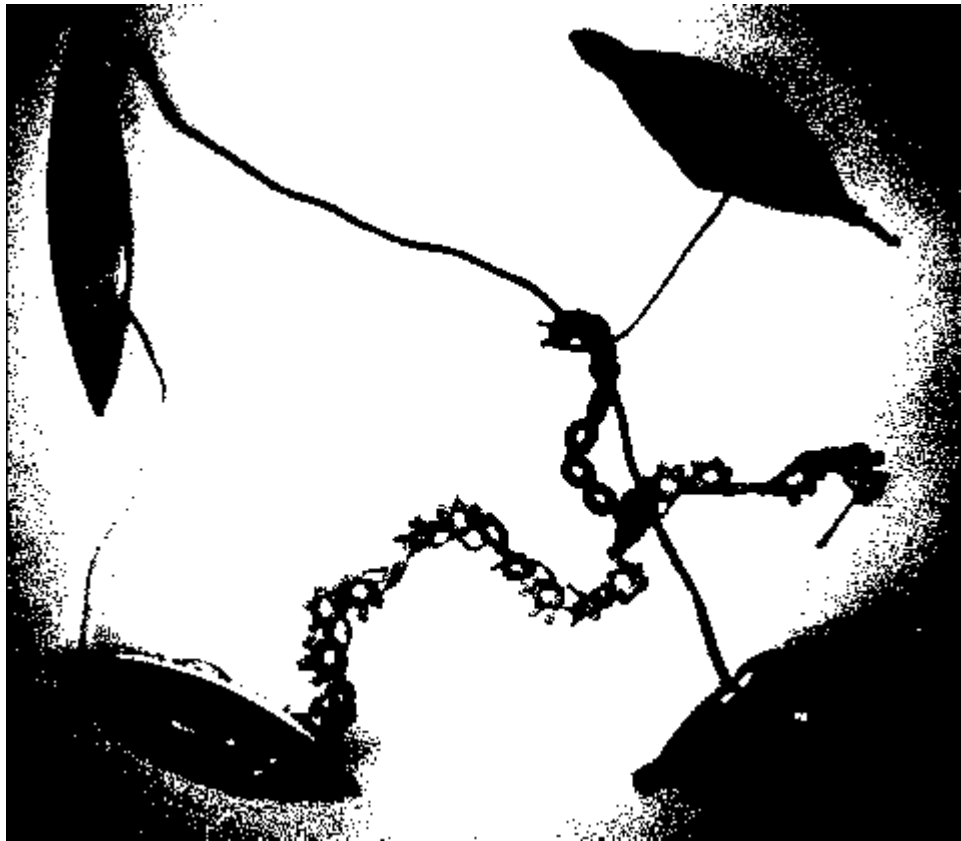
**Illustration 29** Scalloped Edging

**Scalloped Edging:** use crochet cotton and a size 10 hook. Make a chain a little longer than length desired. **Row 1:** Single crochet (sc) in 2<sup>nd</sup> chain (ch) from hook and in each ch across having a number of sc divisible by 16 plus 8. Cut off remaining chain. Ch 4 and turn. **Row 2:** Holding back on the hook the last loop of each triple (tr) make a tr in the next 3 sc, thread over the hook and draw through all the loops on the hook (starting cluster made); \* ch 3; holding back on the hook the last loop of each tr, tr in next 4 sc, thread over the hook and draw through all of the loops on the hook (cluster made). Repeat from \* across. Ch 1 and turn. **Row 3:** Slip stitch (ss) in next space, ch 1, sc in same space, \* ch 1, skip next space; in next space make (double tr, ch 1) 8 times and double tr; ch 1, skip next space, sc in next space. Repeat from \* across, ss to tip of last cluster. Ch 5 and turn. **Row 4:** Skip next double tr, sc in next space, \* (ch 3, sc in next space) 7 times; ch 2; skip next double tr and next sc and following double tr; sc in next space. Repeat from \* across, end last repeat with ch 5 instead of ch 2, ss in tip of last cluster, fasten off.

## Tatting

The origins of tatting, called *frivolité* (frivolous) in French, *occhi* (eyes) in Italian, and *Schiffchen arbeit* (little boat for the shape of the shuttle) in German, are uncertain.

This lace made of knots has been used for centuries to adorn clothing and household goods. When it reached England in the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century it was named tatting, perhaps because of the old English word *tat* meaning to entangle or weave. Tatting is made of knots worked in a ring or a semicircle around a base thread. It can be made with a long needle, but is more commonly created with a tatting shuttle and one or more threads.



**Illustration 30** Tatting Shuttles

Textile historians believe that tatting may have developed from different forms of knotting, including macramé and purling (mentioned in Chaucer's *The Canturbury Tales*). The early Egyptians made rings and circles of knots with a shuttle called a

*makouk* (Dusenbury 3). To allow for thicker threads, European knotting shuttles are wider and longer than modern tatting shuttles. An early mention of tatting is found in the poem *The Royal Tatter*, by the English poet Sir Charles Sedley in 1707. In the poem Queen Mary II (1662-1694) is seen to be either knotting or tatting:

For here's a Queen now thanks to God!  
Who when she rides in coach abroad,  
Is always knotting threads.

The earliest true tatting, as we know it today, was found on two chair covers made by Mary Granville Delany in 1750 (Dusenbury 3). This type of lace was popular in Europe in the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially among aristocratic women. A portrait of Madame Adelaide, the daughter of Louis XV, painted by Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1776) shows her holding a large tatting shuttle, as does an 18<sup>th</sup> century portrait by Benjamin West of Queen Charlotte of England and her daughter (Blomquist 8-9). Interest in tatting declined in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but was revived by the display of several pieces in the first Industrial Exhibition in France. Tatting was mentioned in a book titled *The Lady's Assistant for Executing Useful and Fancy Designs in Knitting, Netting, and Crochet Work* (1842) and *The Ladies' Hand-Book of Millinery, Dressmaking, and Tatting; with Plain Instructions for Making the Most Useful Articles of Dress and Attire* (1843) (Mescher 2-3). From 1846 to 1868 an English woman named Mademoiselle Elenore Riego de la Branchardière wrote eleven books on tatting. She was the daughter of a French nobleman and an Irish woman. She owned a needlework shop in London and was appointed as the Artiste in Needlework to Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales. She won prizes at the Great Exhibition in 1851, 1855 and 1862 and her many innovations in the art were responsible for a great upswing in interest (Mescher

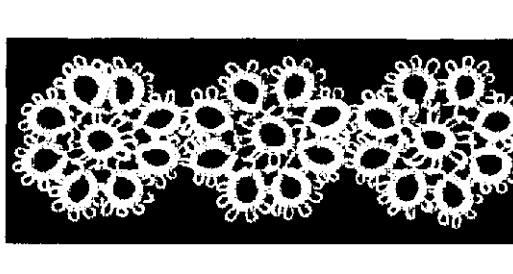
5). Prior to this, tatting had consisted of a series of knots that were sewn into circles. She improved on a system of rings of knots formed in a circle and connected by picots (small loops between the knots). Tatted lace adorned caps, shawls, collars, cuffs, handkerchiefs, baby clothes and underclothes. It was also popular on table runners, curtains, doilies, and antimacassars.

Tatting fell in and out of fashion as styles changed. After 1870, interest in tatting waned, perhaps because of the popularity of the needle point laces. In 1910 *The Art of Tatting* was published by Queen Elizabeth of Romania (1843-1916), writing under the pseudonym of Carmen Sylva, and her friend Lady Katharin Hoare. She incorporated jewels and beads in her tatting and appreciated the beauty and luxury tatting added to an increasingly industrialized life. She expressed many women's appreciation for the solace that needlework brought to their lives when she wrote "I have often pitied men, in the first place because they can't know motherhood, in the second because they are bereft of our greatest comfort – needlework (Trumbull 57). Needlework provides a creative outlet for women who have few ways to express themselves, while also offering the opportunity to show off skills, fine tools, and the finished products.

Tatting came to America with the pilgrims, and although its popularity has fluctuated over the years, it remains a well loved art. The women's magazines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *Godey's* and *Peterson's* published tatting patterns and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American thread companies included tatting patterns in their leaflets. Much tatting in America today is used to decorate household linens and baby clothes as it launders well. Tatting is one of the sturdiest laces: once each ring of knots in tatting is closed, it is difficult to open. Because of this tatting holds its shape well and will

not unravel like other laces. Traditionally done in white or cotton ecru thread, contemporary tatting often incorporates different fibers and colors. As with the other laces, there are guilds and teachers available to provide instruction and support. Yarn shops carry tatting shuttles and thread, and the lace making guilds include tatters among their members.

Like knitting and crochet, tatting patterns were initially written out in words. Modern tatters have developed diagrams that provide a clear visual set of instructions. Most pattern books in print now provide both charts and written directions. Beginning tatting instruction may be found in the books listed under instructional resources. The pattern that follows is a traditional edging, done in #20 crochet cotton or #80 tatting thread, which would be suitable for a beginning tatter.



**Illustration 31** Tatted Edging

Abbreviations: p – picots; ds – double stitch.

Rose motifs: in the middle, a ring made of 8 p, separated by 2 ds. Without cutting the thread, fasten with a knot into the first p. For one ring, 3 ds, 7 p separated by 2 ds and 3 ds. Close. Join by 1 knot in one picot of the center ring; leave the thread loose. Second ring: instead of first p, join to last p of the preceding ring. The last ring is joined to the first by the last p. The motifs are joined together by linking 2 adjacent rings by the p.



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Piecework. Interweave Press: Loveland, CO.

International Lace Magazine. Belgian Lace School: San Pedro, CA.

Needlearts. The Embroiderer's Guild of America: Louisville, KY.

### **Internet Resources**

The International Old Lacers, Inc.: <http://internationaloldlacers.org>

The International Bobbin and Needle Lace Organization: <http://mapage.noos.fr/oidfa/>

Palmetto Tatters: <http://palmettotatters.org>

The Lace Guild of England: <http://www.laceguild.demon.co.uk>

The Embroiderer's Guild of America: <http://www.egausa.org>

Crochet Guild of America: <http://www.crochet.org>

Arachne Lace Bulletin Board: <http://www.arachne.com>

The Knitting Guild Association: <http://tkga.com>



