Crochet and Knitting in an Age of Progress

Case 4 Introduction

The birth of American industrialization is often credited to Samuel Slater, an immigrant from England who in 1790 constructed the first successful American cotton-spinning mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. As a protégé of Jebediah Strutt (partner of Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the water-powered spinning machine), Slater had been exposed to all phases of the factory system prior to his arrival in the United States. However, it was not until 1813 that the factory system was applied to the entire textile industry. Francis Cabot Lowell and his associates built the first American manufacturing company to process raw cotton into finished cloth. By 1815 hundreds of textile mills were in operation and household fabric production had become limited to rural communities. After the war of 1812 improvements in transportation further fueled the ensuing industrial revolution. The opening of canals provided access to the anthracite region of Pennsylvania in the late 1820s, fostering the emergence of steam-powered mills across New England. Railroad construction followed, facilitating the development of a national market for all manufactures.

By the mid-nineteenth century nearly all fabric production was in the hands of the manufacturer. This rapid advance of the textile industry soon placed American producers in competition with established European firms. German wool and Asian silks, which previously dominated the needle arts, were now contending against comparable American threads. This sparked a spirit of invention and innovation in the textile industry that resulted in a wide variety of materials in new colors and textures. Beginning in 1851, industrial fairs became annual events across Europe and the United States, giving manufacturers the opportunity to showcase their new merchandise. Products exhibited included ready-made fabric, needles, sewing and knitting machines, dress patterns, and finely spun threads, the convenience of which greatly influenced the emergence of crochet and knitting in American popular culture.
Case 4 Label Copy

THE INDUSTRIAL FAIR

The French first conceived the concept of the industrial fair, and its system of awards by juries, to encourage the advancement of national manufactures. England hosted the first international exposition in 1851. British manufacturers feared an international exhibition would harm national industry, by creating a demand for imports. Instead, the exhibition inspired a healthy level of competition and national pride among exhibitors, which encouraged invention, innovation, and fair pricing. The event was open for six months and viewed by over six million people from around the world. The prevailing theme of the 1851 exposition, and subsequent fairs, was the synthesis of art and industry. The concurrence of textile and needlework exhibits exemplifies this.


Late Manufacturer. The Great Industrial Exhibition, in 1851. [London: 1850?].


Exhibition of 1861: Why it should be. What it should be. Where it should be. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1859.

THE SEWING MACHINE


The most arduous and time-consuming task of the early American housewife was outfitting her family. During the nineteenth century mechanical innovations gradually emancipated women from their needles. Elias Howe patented the first practical home sewing machine in 1846. It was not until Isaac M. Singer, of New York City, completed his machine and patented it under I. M. Singer & Co. in 1851 that they entered the consumer market. Wheeler & Wilson, and Grover & Baker, soon followed in competition. Eighty Year's Progress of the United States, published in 1869, estimates that by 1860 Wheeler & Wilson had made 55,000 machines, Singer & Co. 40,000, and Grover & Baker 35,000. Sewing machine companies successfully traded on ideas of freedom, family, comfort, and social happiness, which explains why by 1870 there were over 200 sewing machine businesses in America alone.
When Singer first introduced his machine at $125, the novelty of owning one was a privilege of the wealthy. In an effort to open the market to families of lesser means, the Singer company introduced the installment plan. Only five dollars down was required to take a machine home, with monthly payments due thereafter. Competitors soon followed suit and by the turn of the century the machines were found in nearly every American home. Sewing machines, by increasing both production and efficiency, afforded many women leisure time, a previously unknown commodity. Middle and upper-class women, in particular, used this new found freedom for activities such as crochet and knitting. This led to the enormous popularity of pattern books, instructional literature, and periodicals relating to needlework.

PINS

The term "Pin Money" originally applied to the annual allowance given to women by their husbands or guardians for the purchase of pins. In the nineteenth century supplemental income earned from the sale of needlework became "pin money." Americans relied on English imports of pins until the War of 1812 restricted imports making supplies scarce. During the war, convicts at the Greenwich Village State Prison in New York City began manufacturing pins under the direction of some English entrepreneurs. They continued production until the end of the war when imports resumed. In 1832 John J. Howe patented the first successful American pin machine and twenty years later introduced a machine to mount them in sheets for retail sale.


DRESS PATTERNS

"Diagram of the Victoria Pardessus." *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*. February 1859. With the introduction of the sewing machine periodicals recognized the need for dress patterns, but those provided were often confusing and difficult to make. To prepare a pattern it was necessary to scale it up and resize it for the wearer, then draw it on paper. Madame Demorest’s Emporium of Fashion and E. Butterick & Company introduced paper patterns scaled to size after the Civil War.

SILK

Lack of investment capital and adequate machinery for spinning retarded the silk industry’s progress in the eighteenth century. In the wake of the industrial revolution, access to new spinning and spooling technologies encouraged investors to buy enormous numbers of mulberry trees for the nourishment of silk worms. However, in 1839 a harsh winter killed the trees destroying all prospects of domestic silk production. The American silk industry finally became successful when manufacturers decided to rely on imported cocoons for the spinning of sewing silk.

COTTON

The invention of the cotton gin in 1793, which coincided with the application of Watt’s steam engine to the textile industry, made it possible for the supply of raw cotton to meet the demand of manufacturers. The total production of raw cotton increased from 189,500 pounds in 1791 to 3,826,086 bales in 1860.

Alfred Jenks and Son. *Illustrated Catalogue of Machines built by the Alfred Jenks and Son*. Bridesburg, Pennsylvania: C. Sherman, printer, [1853].
Alfred Jenks was a protégé of Samuel Slater, (the inventor of the first American spinning machine) before he came to the Philadelphia region. In 1810 Jenks established the first American factory for the manufacture of cotton machinery in Holmesburg, Pennsylvania. In 1819, he commenced the manufacture of woolen machinery for Betheul Moore at Conshohocken, the first woolen mill in the Commonwealth. By the mid-nineteenth century, Alfred Jenks offered a wide variety of textile machinery, including looms, Jenks' cotton-spreader, carding engines, Jenks' fly frame, Jenks' patent spinning frames, and Jenks' improved cylinder cotton gin.

DYEING

In the eighteenth century, it was common for families to dye their own fabric and yarn in the winter months. They used natural substances, such as leaves and berries, which they collected throughout the year. Nineteenth century urban migration made it difficult for families to continue this tradition. Instead, they relied on professional dyers with adequate facilities and knowledge of new chemical dyes. This book provides examples and recipes for the professional dyer to succeed in the "delightful art" of color.

WOOL

Wool produced in colonial America, for home consumption, was coarse and unappealing, but after the revolution finer breeds began to arrive from Europe. In 1793 Mr. William Foster of Boston returned from a trip to Spain with two merino sheep, the first of their kind
in the country. He presented them as a gift to his friend Andrew Carnegie (no relation to the philanthropist) Ignorant of their worth Carnegie ate them. Imports of sheep continued steadily, and by 1850 twenty-two million sheep thrived in the United States.

INVENTION & INNOVATION

The annual number of patents increased dramatically between 1790 and 1850, from an average of 77 per year to 2,525. The items illustrated here offer a glimpse at the variety of inventions intended to improve the craft of needlework. The home knitting machine, largely a failure in the nineteenth century, resurfaced in the twentieth century and developed a substantial following of crafters. Cobalt lenses also found new life a century later as a fashion trend. The original intent of this optical marvel was to ease eyestrain when working on white needlework. Inventions such as the sheep-shearing chair and carpet rag looper were quickly outmoded.

"Lamb Knitting machine" from Horace Greeley’s The Great Industries of the United States. 1872.


HAND-KNITTING

David H. Strother. Virginia Illustrated. New York: 1857. In the nineteenth century, hand knitting remained a necessity for African American slaves. Staples such as socks, stockings, and other warm apparel monopolized their needles. However, accounts and newspaper advertisements of runaway slaves describe in great detail the unique designs and colors of their knit apparel, illustrating some influence of fancywork's popularity.

George P. Burnham. A Hundred Thousand Dollars in Gold, How To Make It. Springfield, Mass: W.J. Holland, 1876. Through a series of entertaining short stories, the author, who gained and lost a hundred thousand dollars in gold, gives the reader financial advice. In particular, the story of Fannie in "Two Clear Heads Sometimes Better Than One," presents us with a young wife who applies her skills in embroidery and crochet to earn money for her savings account. Her industrious nature in times of comfort becomes a lifeline when her husband loses his job in the panic of 1837.
HOSIERY

The manufacture of American hosiery in the mid-nineteenth century consisted of two branches: fashioned and un-fished. Fashioned hosiery was shaped by narrowing and widening the fabric during the process of knitting in the loom. Unfashioned hose consisted of knit fabric produced in lengths, cut to form, and sewn together, which resulted in unsightly seams, runs in the fabric where cut, and an unshapely appearance. Some manufacturers wet unfashioned hosiery and dried them on blocks to give the illusion of shape.

(From left to right)


TRADE CARDS

The use of trade cards for advertising began in the last third of the nineteenth century. Businesses recognized the need for a new form of advertising to distinguish the wide variety of products available to consumers. Trade cards were given to store patrons by retailers or sealed in packaged goods making them the most ubiquitous advertising gimmick of the nineteenth century.

Advertising Trade Cards for Sewing Machines and Paper Patterns

"He Loves Me A Little." Maison Demorest Reliable Patterns. [New York: ca. 1870s].

"Mme. Demorest's Cosmopolitan Emporium of Fashions, the Representative Pattern Establishment." [New York: ca. 1870s].

"The Olden Time." American Sewing Machine Company. [ca. 1870s].

"Wheeler and Wilson's Sewing Machines for Domestic & Manufacturing Purposes, Cash or Easy Terms." [ca. 1870s].

"Romeo and Juliet." Singer Manufacturing Company. [ca. 1870s].
"What I Have Sewed Together Let No One Rip Asunder." Singer Manufacturing Company. [ca. 1870s].

Advertising Trade Cards for Sewing, Crochet, Knitting Threads

"H.M.S. Pinafore." Willomantic Six Cord Spool Cotton. [ca. 1870s].
"Two Boys with Kite." Clark’s O.N.T. Spool Cotton. [ca. 1870s].

"Four Children Rolling Spool" J & P. Coats Best Six Cord. [ca. 1870s].
"Ef Dis Don’t Fetch You Nothing Will." J. & P. Coats Thread. [ca. 1870s].
"Gulliver and the Liliputians." J. & P. Coats Best Six Cord Spool Cotton. [ca. 1870s]

"Hold on Tight, Willie, This Silk Won’t Break." Brainard, Armstrong, & Company. [ca. 1870s].

"For Good Luck, Use the Brainerd & Armstrong Spool Silk." Brainerd and Armstrong Company. [ca. 1870s].

"Factories at Brainerd and Armstrong." Brainerd & Armstrong Company. [1910].

Advertising Trade Cards for Millinery Stores and Worsted Yarns.


"Star Braid and Fleisher’s Worsted Yarns." [ca. 1870s] (verso. "Presented by J.P. Coburn dealer in General Merchandise, Orwell Pa.").

"Star Braid and Fleisher’s Worsted Yarns." [ca. 1870s].


"Knitting and Embroidery Materials, A.B. Häpke, Knit Goods, Harrisburg, PA." [1876].
Case 5 Introduction

The industrial progress of the nineteenth century ushered women's fashion into a new era. Ruffles, flounces, and petticoats grew in size as mechanical marvels of the industrial age manufactured fabrics, trimmings, and threads at increasingly affordable prices. Time women previously used for the spinning, carding, and weaving of cloth could now be used to make more fashionable wardrobes. In 1869 Charles Leroux wrote in his Practical Treatise on the Manufacture of Worsted and Carded Yarns that "Wool is now no longer spun by hand. That branch of industry, which has rendered such service to mankind has completely and for ever disappeared." Ready-made fabric, the sewing machine, and the proliferation of the printed word facilitated and promoted Victorian ideals of fashion, ultimately leading to a democratization of culture by the turn of the twentieth century.

Periodicals, Godey's Lady's Book and Peterson's Magazine among the most popular, reported the fashion trends of both the United States and Europe to their subscribers. These publications provided the patterns and instructions necessary for women to make fashionable garments and ornaments of dress according to seasonal trends. Sewing machines, coupled with the availability of ready-made fabric, enabled women not only to keep up with fashion but also to have the time to ornament their dress with fancywork. "Work Department" articles supplied an endless array of fancywork designs using wool, cotton, silk, and chenille. Millinery stores in urban areas sold the materials necessary to make these items. They provided a wide variety of thread, yarn, and needlework implements. The more economical needleworker sought out wholesale yarns from manufacturers' overstocks, or, as Lydia Maria Child recommended in The Frugal Housewife, "Buy your woolen yarn in quantities from some one in the country, whom you can trust. The thread stores make profits upon it, of course." The variety of available materials and patterns helped popularize fancywork in the nineteenth century.
COLD WEATHER APPAREL

Hand-knit sweaters, scarves, hats, and other cold weather apparel were often preferred in the nineteenth century over manufactured items, which remained inferior in strength and character.


Knitted mohair and silk. Mid-to-Late 19th Century. Lent by the Atwater Kent Museum.


GLOVES

A fashionable accessory in the nineteenth century gloves came in a variety of materials and styles. Middle-aged and older women often wore black lace gloves, while young ladies wore white lace, silk, or kid gloves.

Abigail D. Dreer wearing black fingerless gloves. Half-plate daguerreotype by William and Frederick Langenheim. Quaker


HANDKERchieFS

Young girls in the nineteenth century often learned to sew by hemming squares of cloth for handkerchiefs. By adding crochet, knit, or tatted edgings they served as appropriate gifts for family and close friends. Decorative handkerchiefs, made completely of crochet or knitting, became popular around 1840.


Unidentified Woman with Handkerchief. Albumen print. Carte-de-visite.

COLLARS

Collars and cuffs served as objects of both beauty and necessity during the nineteenth century. Infrequent bathing and the difficulty of washing clothes made these versatile adornments for women's and children's clothing indispensable. Primarily white to avoid the risk of fading caused by frequent bleaching and starching, they were made in crochet, knitting, tatting, and white-work. (Men, wore plain cotton or disposable paper collars that required less care.) By 1849, collars and cuffs had established themselves as a common staple of everyday fashion. Collars worn by women and children of the early 1840s fit tightly around the neck with the ends meeting in front. This changed by the 1850s, when collars, now available as wide as three inches, were worn lying flat on the shoulders with the ends no longer meeting at the throat. The framed collars on the wall above represent this later style.

Collar Box. Ca. 1890. Lent by the Ketcham Family.

Unidentified woman with crochet collar. Mid-to-Late 19th Century. Modern photographic reproduction of daguerreotype.

Unidentified man wearing crochet collar. Mid-to-Late 19th Century. Albumen print. Carte-de-visite.

Unidentified woman. Mid-to-Late 19th Century. Albumen print.


Unidentified woman with crochet collar. Mid-to-Late 19th Century. Modern photographic reproduction from daguerreotype.


PURSES

Before the nineteenth century, men carried purses more often than women. The mid-nineteenth century fashion of extravagant purses for women epitomizes their increasing
participation in the consumer market. Vivid color combinations, intricate designs, and metallic embellishments of gold and silver commonly adorned this accessory.

Crocheted Silk Purse. Mid-to-Late Nineteenth Century. Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Crochet Purse -- gold and red. Ca. 1820.

Crochet and Bead Purse -- green and white. Ca. 1840.

Crochet Purse -- tan with tan ribbon. Ca. 1860.


Unidentified Couple. Mid-to-Late 19th Century. Quarter-plated daguerreotype by McClees & Germon.

HOUSEHOLD DÉCOR

Needlework helped make homes more comfortable, refined, and fashionable, while providing a creative outlet for leisure hours. *The Ladies' Work-table Book*, published in 1845, professed that "Tender and affectionate, it is her highest bliss to minister to the wants, the convenience, or the pleasure of those she loves; and hence, her inventive powers have been, in all ages, called into early and active exercise, in the fabrication of those articles calculated to accomplish those desirable ends. Amongst these useful and ornamental needlework, knitting, and netting, occupy a distinguished place."


**SHAWLS**

Women of all classes in the mid-to-late nineteenth century wore shawls. Since women’s jackets could not accommodate the fashionably large circumference of their skirts, shawls provided warmth in the cold months of winter. Wealthy women favored imported luxurious cashmere shawls, particularly those from France made with the softest wool and most vibrant colors and those from India featuring finely woven, intricate patterns. These imported shawls inspired a domestic market in cheaper imitations. Crochet and hand-knit shawl patterns also appeared in periodicals and instructional literature. Despite varying costs and styles, specific guidelines developed to govern the wearing of shawls. In May of 1860 Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine suggested that black and white shawls suited all dress colors, whereas scarlet "should be worn with black, brown, or any undecided color." Blue was to be worn with dark brown or black. Although it was acceptable for women living in colder climates to wrap the shawl tightly across the chest, the literature advised those in warmer climates to drape it over the shoulders -- a look considered far more elegant.

Hannah and Margaret Churchman, and their niece Sally. Albumen Print. Mid to Late 19th Century.


**INFANT APPAREL**

Authors championed wool in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an invaluable asset to the health of adults and children alike. In 1794 William Butchman wrote, "the most decided superiority of the Fleecy Hosiery, consists in the powers which wool possess, over all other articles of clothing, in absorbing and conducting moisture." Because cold drafts combined with wet diapers threatened the health of infants, wool seemed a perfect safeguard providing both warmth and the breathable quality needed to keep them dry. Writers also recommended wool clothing for its qualities as a fire retardant. Particularly, for infants kept warm by stoves and fireplaces who were at risk of sparks landing on their clothing. Wool shirts, spensers, slippers, and socks were considered necessities in the middle- and upper-class infant’s trousseau, along with flannel gowns and blankets.

Alcott, William A. *The Young Mother, or the Management of Children in Regard to Health*. Boston: George W. Light, 1839.


LACE

During the early nineteenth century lace production became mechanized, first in Europe, then in America. Although the quality could never surpass that of hand-made lace, the amount of time required to make even a single hand-made garment was extensive and the price so high that the market for hand-made lace soon dwindled. Lace-making by hand, using such tools as needles and bobbins, had become a novel pastime and prestigious activity for daughters of wealthy families. These changes forced many lace-makers into factories, and those who remained working in the cottage industries turned to piecework activities, such as mending and hemming factory laces. Crochet emerged from lace making as an alternative that was more profitable as a business, and more enjoyable and less tedious as a leisure activity.

The beauty of lace masked the grim realities of how it was produced. Families who made lace in their homes as piecework, would often enlist the labor of children as young as three. Families survived on the meager wages provided by their employers through collaboration, but the individual pieceworker could barely make a living. Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, in her 1844 exposé The Lace-runners, questioned a manufacturer’s wage policies only to be told that he expected women to supplement heir income by engaging in prostitution.


Manufactured Laces and Collar. [ca.1890]. Lent by the Ketcham Family.

Hand-made Needle-lace Collar. [ca.1890]. Lent by the Ketcham Family.