

Nimble Fingers Fashion Thread Into Delicate Lace

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Dorothy Schuster's nimble fingers fashion bundles of plain thread into fine, delicate lace. "This is handmade lace, not machine made," she quickly clarified. Dotty first became interested in the centuries old art of lacemaking when she purchased a book on the subject about three years ago.

"It was something I wanted to do with my spare time," she added. In serious pursuit of the craft, Dotty sought out an expert lacemaker to teach her the basics. "I took lessons with Marty Fry in Rockville," she explained. "She is excellent at lacemaking."

After just eight lessons, Dotty completed her first project, a lace bird. Since then she has made lovely bookmarks, flowers, and doilies. And she continues to learn various types of bobbin lacemaking, such as Torchon, Bucks, and Honiton. "I'd like to do Flanders and Tornder lace," she added.

"If you watch it," Dotty explained, bobbin lacemaking "is like weaving - over, under, over, under." She uses specially made bobbins to guide the threads around stick pins which outline the design to be made. All of the work is done on a 'lace pillow' which is a foam core covered with blue cloth. "The cloth is usually blue, green or brown so that the threads can be seen easily," she said. The paper pattern which is outlined with stick pins on the pillow is called a 'pricking.' "The same colors are used for prickings, which are made from card stock," said Dotty.

"I just made a lace heart doilie

Homestead Notes

with homespun linen in the center." To complete this project, she used seven pairs of bobbins and as many as one thousand stick pins. "Depending upon the size and intricacy of the project, Dotty said as many as 86 pairs of bobbins may be needed. "And they really get in the way," she added.

"A lot of people use magnifiers," she explained. "I don't. I only work in the daytime because of the shadows cast in the evening."

Those who have witnessed Dotty working at full tilt, marvel at her ability to do such finely detailed close work so quickly and neatly. Her husband, Lou, said "she gets those bobbins really clicking." The smooth wooden bobbins which she manipulates so easily are also of interest to many as collectors items.

"Some people use doll clothespins to wrap threads on," said Dotty. "Bobbins are made of hard and soft woods and exotic woods, such as Zebra Wood." She said the slim, turned bobbins can also be made of bone, ivory, cocabolo and ebony. Dotty explained that bobbins often tell a story with carvings and engravings. "I just pur-

chased a bobbin which commemorates the Spanish Armada. In England, some have the name of, for example, the sheep farm where the lacemaker lives," she said. Bobbins are often weighted with beads to keep them from moving on the pillow. However, bobbins used for Honiton lace are thinner with no beads."

Dotty said she usually purchases her bobbins at conventions that English bobbin makers attend. "There are bobbin makers in the United States." She named Holly Van Sciver of Ithaca, New York, as one with whom she is familiar.

Dotty's interest in lacemaking took her to England last year. "Lacemaking is quite an art in England," she said. "A lot of teachers come over to the national convention every year." Dotty joined the lace group of the Chesapeake Bay area three years ago. "The group was formed eleven years ago," she said. "We meet once a month at a member's home." The group works on projects together and shares ideas and techniques. When Dotty runs into a problem she said that she often calls a friend from the group to troubleshoot over the phone.

Lacemaking for Dotty is a hobby done for "accomplishment and enjoyment. It wouldn't be profitable for me," she commented. To make a three-inch lace heart, Dotty said "it takes about two hours." And to complete a ten-inch doily with a heart motif, she said, "with no interruptions, it takes about twenty hours."

The finished products are displayed in the Schusters' Glenwood, Maryland home. "Lou photographs them," she said. Some of her samples are in an album which she carries with her when she is asked to demonstrate lacemaking at various shows.

Dotty has performed her craft for thousands at the Montgomery County Fair for the past three years, at New Market Days last year, and at the International Lace Show held in the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. And a broken leg didn't keep her from demonstrating at the county fair again this year.

Her interest in lacemaking has led her to related crafts such as silk embroidery. Last summer, Dotty attended a four day workshop to complete a butterfly wall hanging made of silk and metallic threads. Dotty and Lou's rambling rancher is warmly decorated with samples of her lace, needlework, stenciling and folk art painting.

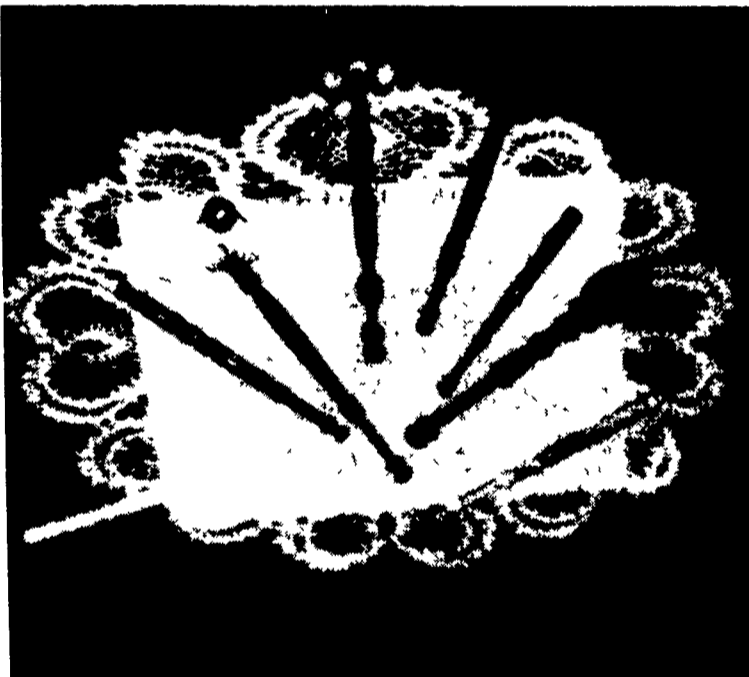
Perhaps the most important project which Dotty will attempt is "a piece of handmade lace for my granddaughter, Rachael's, wedding dress. Maybe I will make a garter," she said. "If I start on it now, I may finish in time." At that rate, maybe Dotty could make the whole dress - Rachael is three months old.



Dotty Schuster holds her 3-month-old granddaughter, Rachael. Dotty plans to make a special piece of bobbin lace for Rachael's wedding dress. She explained, "Something for which Rachael can remember her grandmother."



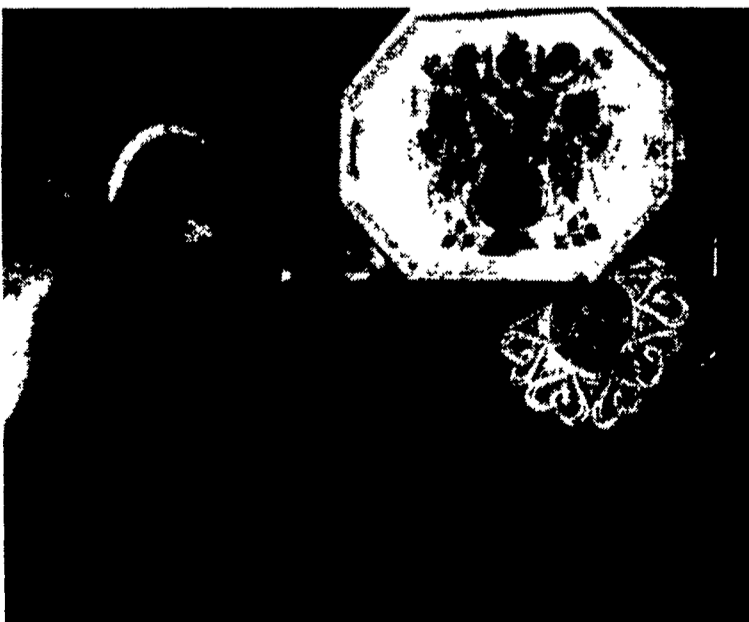
Dotty Schuster demonstrates bobbin lace making.



These are a few of the bobbins that Dorothy Schuster uses to make bobbin lace. The hand painted bobbin at top left commemorates the Spanish Armada. The bobbin at top right is made of ivory. The various wooden bobbins are intricately carved, turned and decorated with metal. Some of the bobbins are weighted with beads. They rest on a piece of bobbin lace.



Dotty's interest in bobbin lace-making has crossed over into other craft areas. She attended a series of classes to learn to make Japanese dolls. She made this Japanese Lion Dancer, the velveteen rabbit, the lace bookmark and other lace samples lie at the feet of the doll.



Dotty also is interested in silk embroidery, wooden decoys, doll making and folk art painting. The tray in the background is a sample of her painting.