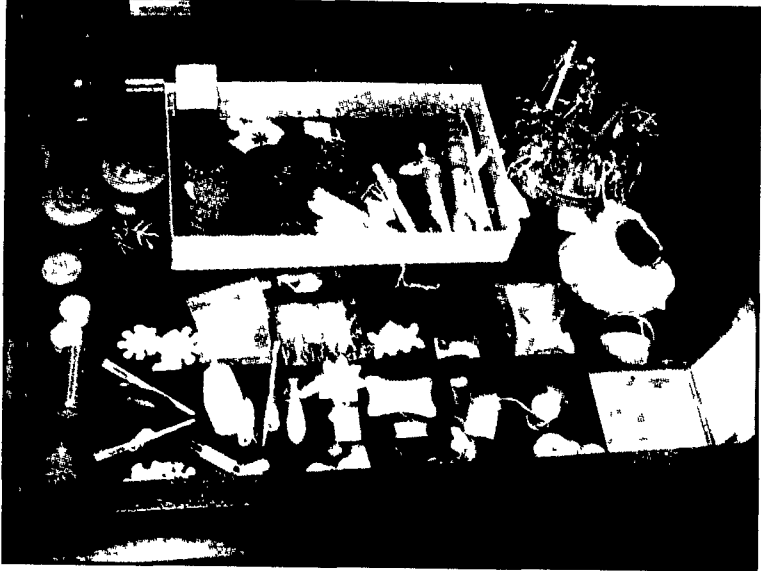


Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*



Sewing tools primarily used between 1850-1910 were often encased in ivory, mother-of-pearl or wooden hand-carved cases. Thread winders, lace bobbins, tape measures, and needle holders most often are found in wooden containers, but women of means often had items accented with ivory, mother-of-pearl, and even diamond chips. A number of unusual pin cushions also show the unique talents of that era.

Sewing Collectibles Chronicle Needlework Movement

LOU ANN GOOD
*Food And Family
Features Editor*

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — "I used to sew every stitch on my back. Then I started graduate school, and didn't have time to sew. So I started collecting every piece I could find," Sue Murphy said of her extensive collection of antique sewing items.

Murphy, of Cedar Hill Farm, Milford, N.J., finished her education and retired from her career in education, but her affinity for collecting continues to grow.

Murphy takes her collections of Americana, quilts, and folk arts to about three quilt shows annually. Recently, her novel collection of items that pertain to women grabbed the attention of visitors at the Quilters' Heritage Celebration, Lancaster.

"All these items are interesting, but quilters seem to like the sewing tools best," Murphy said.

Her collections chronicle the items that women considered essential from 1850s-1910. During that era, women cherished fine needlepoint skills and were never far from thread, needle, and thimble. Sewing supplies



Sue Murphy, left, and Carol Woodbridge examine the items packed tightly within the small Ladies Companion case, which holds an amazing number of sewing items, a perfume bottle, and cosmetics. In good condition, the Ladies Companion sells for \$850.

were such a necessary part of their lives that women found novel ways to keep them close at hand. One was a ring with an attachment of items that a woman wore on her pinkie finger during an evening out. Also popular was a chatelaine, a chain wore around the waist to hold keys, purse, and sewing supplies.

The sewing items of the 1800s were not strictly utilitarian. Instead, elaborate cases in ivory, mother-of-pearl, studded with diamond chips and other gems enclosed such sewing necessities as needle, thread winder, lace bobbin, and tape measure. Pin cushions, too, showed originality, such as one made of sea shells.

Murphy said the handcrafted wooden cases were typically owned by all classes, and ivory and jeweled cases were owned by the upper class.

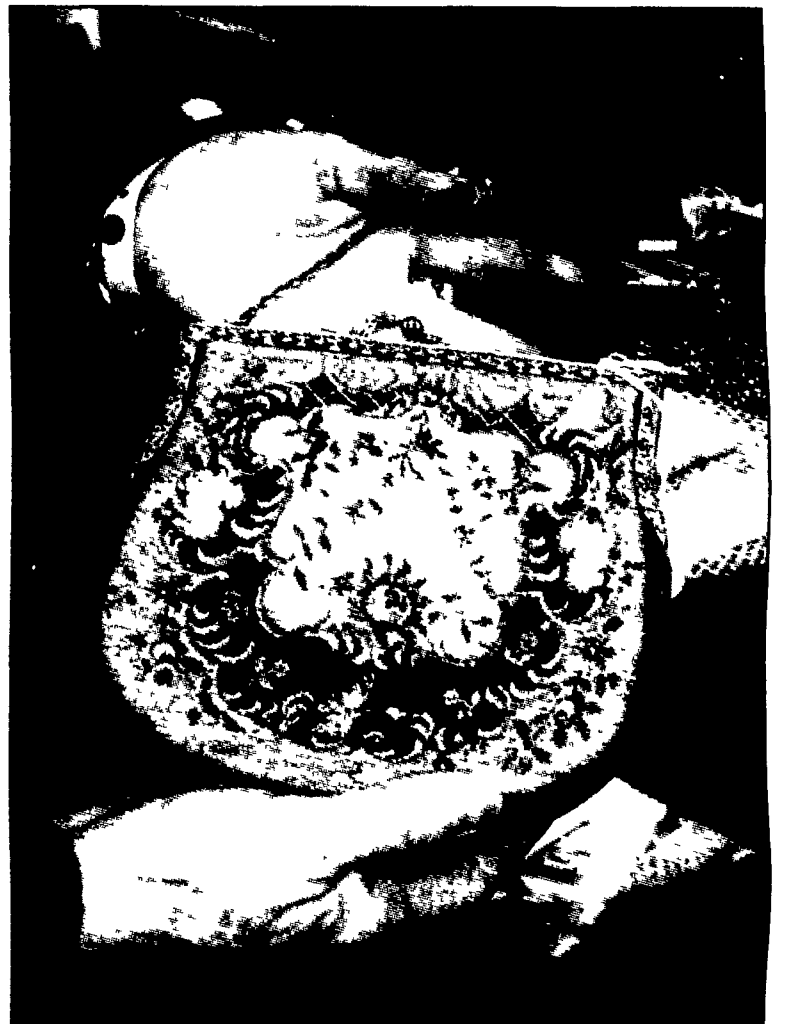
Although many of the antique sewing tools appear as delicate as fine jewelry, their strength has endured generations of use. The ivory handles have worn to a subtle sheen.

In addition to sewing tools, Murphy's collection includes antique quilts, hand-knit stockings, pantaloons, and other clothing.

Sandy McCay, who owns a shop named Cotton in the Cabin, Spencerville, Ind., displayed a collection of antiques for quilters, vintage fabrics, and old quilts.

Spool cabinets from the turn of the century were used in mercantiles to display floss, silk, and threads. Now these cabinets are in demand. Collectors often use the cabinets as end tables, coffee tables, or stack them for eye-catching decor in their homes.

Vintage linens, doilies, handkerchiefs with elaborate embroidery, and crazy quilts



A 1920s' evening handbag shows the fine needlepoint detail of that era. It sells for \$85.



Black memorabilia are really popular collectors' items. This bucket was probably filled with penny candy and displayed in stores sometime between 1930-1940. Elaine Buck, Ohio, recently displayed this at a benefit auction for the Elverson Fire Company.

from 1876-1890 were also displayed at the Quilters' Heritage Celebration.

Antique dealers most often evolve. According to Murphy, fascination with one item often ignites collections, which soon

expand to include related items. Often their collections grow so extensive that they sell a few items to make room for more.

"It's contagious," Murphy said of collecting sewing memorabilia.