

Lancaster Farming

*Antiques Center***Lady With White Linens Offers Glimpses Of Victorian Finery**

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BERNVILLE (Berks Co.) — As Doris Hetrich fingers the delicate organdy of a Victorian gown, her eyes light up. "This is real organdy made before World War II," she says with the excitement of finding a rare treasure.

Seeing her treasure trove of fine linens, lace, and delicate cutwork enables a person to

catch a glimpse of the glories of the Victorian age — the era when women's fashions touted the most exquisite details. Tiny pleats, delicate embroidery, crocheted lace, diminutive buttons, and patterned cutwork prevalent in the gowns and baptismal dresses reveal the pride accomplished seamstresses took in their work.

Pressing those pieces from the past are no easy task. Doris

spends hours preparing pieces for display at one of the four shows in which she participates annually.

When Doris is finished, each piece is displayed in pristine condition, glistening white, and ironed to perfection. Because the fabric appears so white and perfect, it's hard to believe these pieces are old. Customers from around the world say no one else has as beautiful linens and gowns as the "Lady with the white linens," as Doris has become known.

Doris is so well known for her outstanding collection that famous people often seek her out when they have pieces to sell or buy. Some of her linens and homespun sheets appeared in the movie, "The Witness," starring Harrison Ford.

Despite these brushes with fame, Doris remains unimpressed. "I love the pieces for what they are — not for who used them," she said.

She wants her customers to treasure the pieces as much as she does. "I'd rather they wouldn't buy if they won't take care of it," she said of the pieces.

She is especially thrilled when a bride-to-be chooses one of the Victorian gowns to wear for her wedding.

Although the gowns are exquisite in detail, they also carry an aura of simplicity and purity.

Some pieces come from Europe, some from Austria, and some from America.

Linen and old fabrics are often yellowed with age. Through years of experimenting, Doris has become an expert in restoration.

"Never wash by machine," she emphasizes. "The problem is that too many people are too much in a hurry today," she said of many fine pieces that have been ruined.

Doris washes everything by hand. Some pieces are soaked in Ivory soap or Biz for three days. Doris frequently changes the water to keep it hot enough. This method almost always removes stains. As a last resort on a few pieces, Doris has used a tablespoon of bleach on a particularly stubborn stain.

Fabric is always ironed on the wrong side after it is starched with liquid not spray.

She layers four thicknesses of blankets on the ironing board when pressing embroidery and cutwork. This enables the embroidery to stand out from the linen and causes it to "bounce."

Her patience for pressing the time-consuming vintage pieces—some as many as six hours—amazes even Doris. "When I was a child, I hated ironing," she said.

But today, the ironing process invigorates her. "I feel reborn," she said of seeing a piece brought to life through this final process.

Her display booth always attracts crowds. In addition to gowns, she has selections of napkins and linens for banquet tables measuring from 90 to 144 inches in length.

In buying and selling, Doris



Doris Hetrich tries on a battenberg lace collar that comes with matching cuffs. The detachable set enabled women to switch the set from dress to coat.

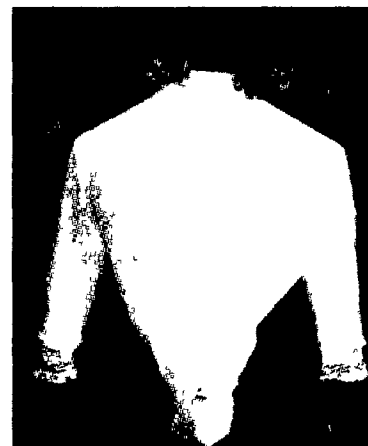


Beneath the silver tea set is a linen bed tray cover featuring open cutwork.

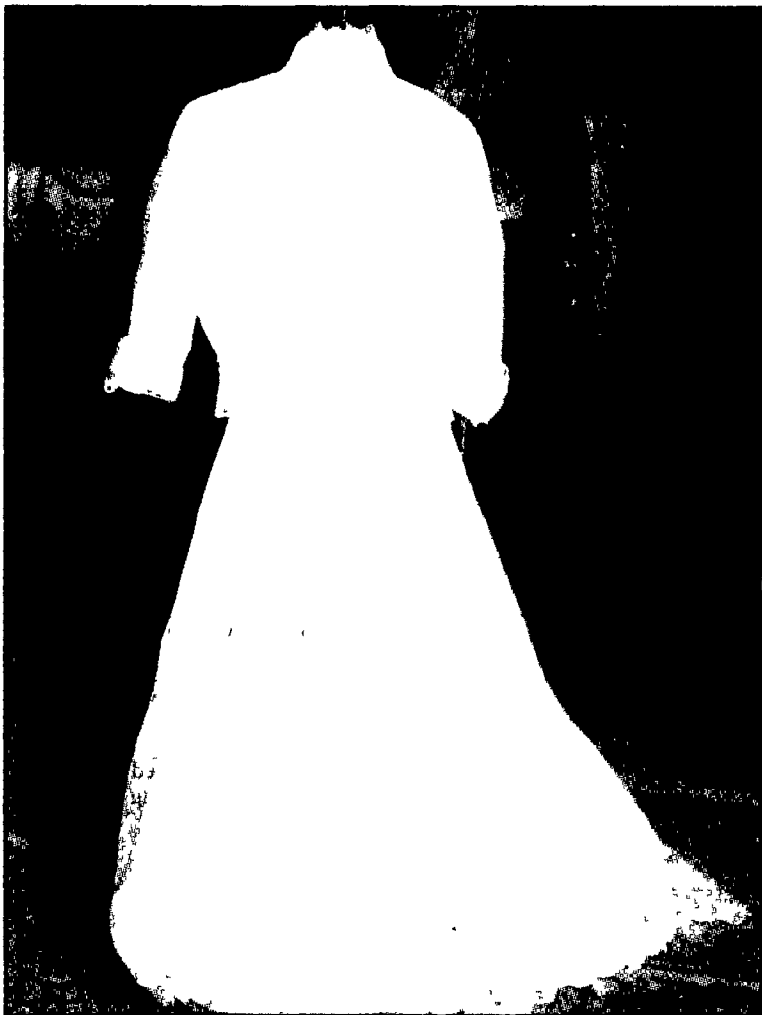
makes fairness a priority. "I don't use people," she said of connections. "The Christian way is the only way to do business."

The 74-year-old finds time to enjoy her home filled with collections of antique dolls, dishes, and profuse flower beds. She admits with a laugh that husbands and linens don't mix, but is grateful her husband helps with the props and seven-hour setup of her booth.

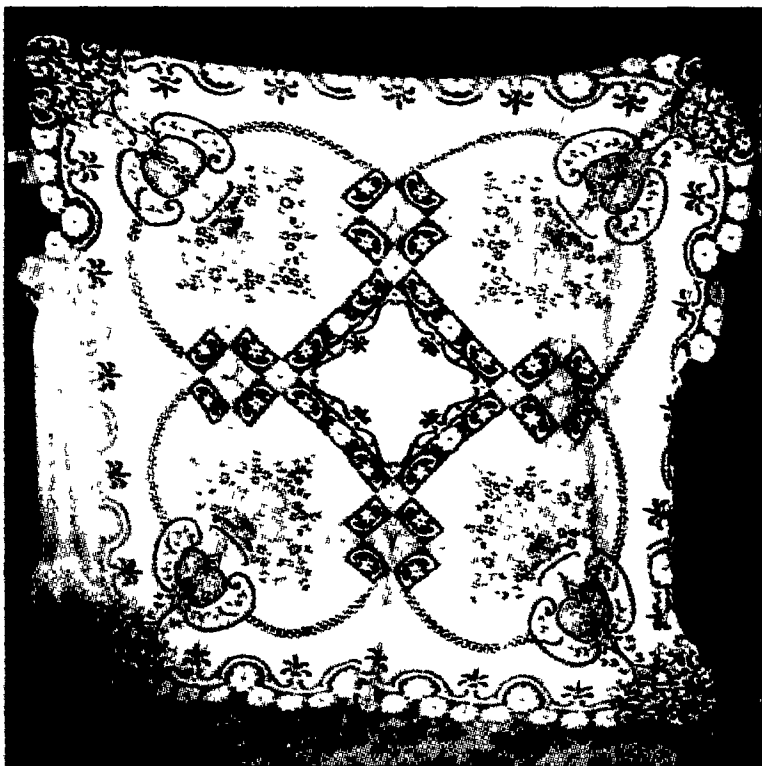
The next show for "the lady with the white linens" is scheduled for the 50th Reading Antiques Show, Riveredge, July 20-21.



This handmade Victorian blouse with fine detailing sells for \$95.



This batiste wedding dress comes in two pieces. Most of the dresses from the Victorian era featured extremely small waistlines because women's waists were pulled tight with corsets and sometimes ribs were broken to make their waists appear even smaller. Today, seamstresses can enlarge heirloom gowns by inserting antique lace beneath the armpits to the waist.



This 39-inch square tablecloth hand pieced in Portugal sells for \$85.