

Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

Old Lace, Bobbins, Shuttles Thrill Collectors

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Food And Family
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LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — “I thought I was getting into a cheap hobby when I started tatting — just shuttles and thread,” said Beth Eddowes, Enola. “No one told me that when I saw a Victorian shuttle of tortoiseshell inlaid with gold that I would need to have it.”

That’s how many hobbyists get drawn into collecting antiques that pertain to their pastimes. First, they love the craft, then they become mesmerized by the history surrounding the skill.

Eddowes and other members of the Keystone Lace Guild gathered recently to show off cherished old pieces related to their intricate craft.

“I just love the feel of these,” Eddowes said of her collection of more than 200 different styles of bobbins.

She has intricate and plain designs that date back to Civil War times. Her collection includes bobbins made of sterling silver, mother of pearl, ivory, rubber, old plastics, and celluloid.

The items invoke a bit of mystery, such as that surrounding a Lydia Pinkham bobbin. Between 1917-1921, Pinkham handed out bobbins with her picture as advertisement for her popular, cure-all tonic. The tonic is said to have had a high alcohol content, and while it is no longer sold today, Pinkham’s bobbins, made of French ivory celluloid, are sought after by collectors and sell for about \$100.

A carved ivory bobbin exudes an aura of finery, but Eddowes said the carved ivory is so thin,



Beth Eddowes, Enola, shows off some of her 200-bobbin collection. Ask Eddowes to show her favorite bobbin, and she scowls and retorts, “That’s like asking a mother of more than one child to name her favorite.”



Debra Bender, York Haven, started collecting lace and is earning a master’s degree in humanities that helps her in become certified to determine the age of fibers.

only 1/8-inch, which makes it totally impractical to use. But that doesn’t impede its value of \$500.

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The bobbins or spools that hold thread for lacemaking were used mostly by the lower class, who made the lace for the upper class society.

Bobbin Brown made bobbins during the mid-1800s. Those with mother and baby inside are of more value. The baby bobbin is not removable but makes a pleasant sound as it is in use. In fact, many of the bobbins have beads and bangles attached. The click and rattle of these as a skilled

tatter uses them creates a lovely, pleasing rhythm.

“But the seamstresses in Belgium wouldn’t be caught dead with spangles on their bobbins. They think spangles and beads encumber them and get stuck in their work (threads),” said Bender, who traveled to many European countries to search for pieces she loves. Instead, the Belgians use bobbins fashioned from bone, wood, glass, and ivory.

Some of that old lace made during the Civil War period belongs to Debra Bender.

The elaborate handmade bobbin lace was made by interlacing thread around small notched pins or bobbins stuck into a pillow.

While traveling in England, Bender, York Haven, contacted a

lace group in the area, and was thrilled with the many patterns and bobbins she acquired in her travels.

In England, she said, learning lace making is part of the educa-

tional system. Students can actually earn a certificate in it that is equivalent to an art degree in America.

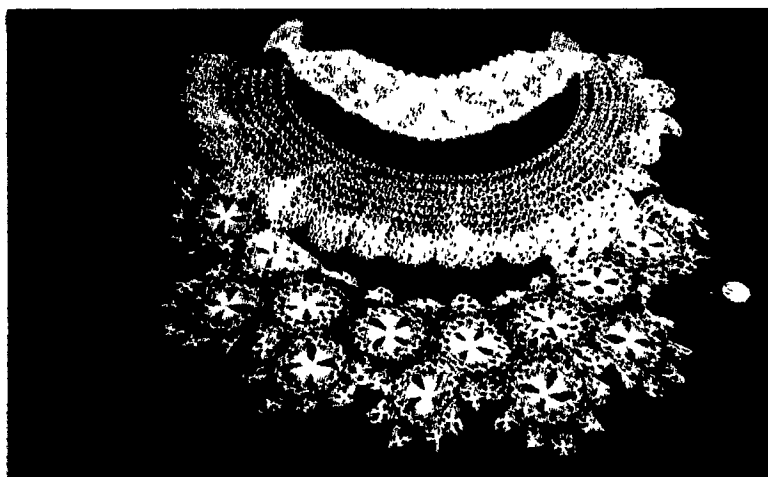
Bender collects old pieces of lace. She considers herself fortunate to have heard that the state museum was decommissioning some of its holdings. Bender bid at the auction and acquired 22 layers of lace samples for only \$50. One of the samples, a black chantilly lappet, is estimated to have a \$300 value.

Many pieces of old lace are made with 12-15 different motifs. According to Bender, a typical seamstress specialized in one motif that she did throughout life to supplement her husband’s farm income. It was sort of like a production line, where seamstresses made the same pattern over and over. The motifs were gathered from the different farm women and stitched together by a dressmaker. The workmanship in the pieces is so fine that it is impossible to detect where the dif-

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This shows the progression of lacemaking from fisherman’s knotted lace (made during biblical times), grid filet lace, and crochet filet.



These lace collar and cuffs from the 18th century were detachable to enable the wearer to use them with different outfits.



After Sharon Hibsham, Myerstown, inherited this collection, she joined the Keystone Lace Guild to learn how to use them.