

# Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

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## From The Editor –

Goodness me, how time flies! You did not receive this newsletter on May 1<sup>st</sup>, because I was not prepared. Simple confession – said – done – I am human, too. Your orders may go out quickly, but sometimes my personal life gets just a bit harried! Jim and I arrived home from vacation last week to find my precious stray white male kitten pregnant! Yes, you are reading correctly. Diva became Davie after we thought ‘she’ was a ‘he’, and then upon our return, it was obvious that Davie was Diva, indeed! We got her to the vet just in the nick of time! Now that the emergency has been taken care of.....

We welcome back Karen Faylor with her darling confections. The adaptations of her own pattern are wonderful, and a great inspiration for us all. I applaud her for embellishing the entire garment. Children are seen from all angles, not just the front, and I have always been an advocate of including the back of a garment in special decorations. I am continuing our study of Linen, which I hope you are finding as fascinating as I am. As I have said previously, the story of linen is a long one and somewhat complicated. I hope I have simplified the technicalities without diminishing its beauty.

Our next issue will see the conclusion of our study of linen with more on blends and why fabrics wrinkle. Till next month, enjoy our beautiful spring weather, and look to those rainy days as a blessing for an unplanned day of stitching.....

Sheila



## A Brief History of the Azalea

**Many of our best-loved plants first entered the South in Charleston.**

No plant has shaped the Southern garden more than an evergreen shrub called the Indica azalea. Native to Japan, it got its name because at the time it was discovered; Asia was known as the East Indies.

Growing 8 to 12 feet tall and wide, it smothers itself in spring with mind-boggling blossoms of red, pink, white, purple, and salmon. First-time onlookers were stunned. By 1845, the largest and oldest collection flourished at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens up the Ashley River from Charleston.

Today, thousands of azaleas boisterously spill their blossoms from the edges of Magnolia’s winding trails, ponds, and marshes. Though only 40 of the 86 original selections planted can be positively identified, their descendants, the Southern Indica hybrids, grace more homes in the Middle, Lower, and Coastal South than any other shrub. (from Steve Bender, Southern Living)

## A Child of Spring

I know a little maiden,  
She is very fair and sweet,  
As she trips among the grasses  
That kiss her dainty feet;  
Her arms are full of flowers,  
The snow-drops, pure and white,  
Timid blue-eyed violets,  
And daffodillies bright.

by Ellen Robena Field

When warmer weather appears we love our little ones in breezy, light fabrics. Bear Threads Baby Striped Dimity is the answer when we wonder, "What will I sew for her this summer?"

The dress is The Karen Faylor Company's *Kensington* pattern. The full skirt is the ideal setting for this summer garden. Flowers of silk satin ribbon and French cotton lace bloom along the lace insertion hillside. Beaded centers, embroidered French knots and leaf flourishes of silk embroidery floss bring the flowers to life.

The bloomers are created with The Karen Faylor Company's *Savannah* pattern. Three blossoms are scattered across the back, making this outfit as cute from the front as it is from the back.

The bonnet is from the pattern *Toddler Coat and Bonnet* from The Karen Faylor Company. The brim of the bonnet was reduced in size by one inch at the center front, tapering to the ear. To embellish the bonnet, scatter lace and ribbon blooms, add beaded centers and attach to bonnet with silk floss French knots. Add in a few leaf flourishes wherever you like. Attach silk satin ribbon ties under flowers.

Karen Faylor,  
The Karen Faylor Company





FYI

We have all either owned, or remember from our grandmothers, their 'Huck' kitchen towels. *Huck-a-back* was one of the first fancy weaves of linen. You will note that huck fabric has an uneven weave.



The uneven surface created by these weaves absorbs water and dries quickly. Many derivations of this weave are found in folk weaving, particularly from Germany and Scandinavia. The name may have been adapted from 'hucksters', known from around 1200, who were peddlers who carried their wares on their back and sold linens in the market. Our mothers and grandmothers found this uneven weave to make interesting patterns for embroidery.



## TRIVIA:

"Is there a difference between scissors and shears?"

Yes or No

## LINEN FABRICS

### Part II – From Yarn to Linen Fabric

#### From Fiber to Yarn:

Last month we ended our study with the flax fibers having been processed to the point of being separated into bundles of short fibers or *tow*, and the longer fibers known as *line*, the line being used to produce the most desirable yarn.

From this point we are ready to spin the flax into the yarn.

Parts of very early spinning wheels – spindle weights or *whorls* – have been found in excavated Neolithic sites in Syria, Mesopotamia (Iraq), and Persia (Iran) along with fragments of flax fibers. From this we know that flax cultivation and spinning can be dated at least to 8000-6000 BC. We also know that the very early lake dwellers in Switzerland spun flax and were linen weavers.

We learn from paintings in tombs of the Egyptians that spinning was a threefold operation. 1) Drawing out, or *drafting* the fibers; 2) The drafted fibers called *rovings* were now twisted into a continuous yarn; and 3) winding the yarn on a device to prevent it from untwisting. Being so well organized, the Egyptians

employed three people, each acting as a human machine, one for each step.

Needless to say the process has evolved over thousands of years with some of the most important developments being the flyer spinning wheel. Developed in Europe, this allowed the twisting and winding to be simultaneous, and therefore the spinning could be continuous. Then, during the seventeenth century, the treadle was introduced allowing for both hands to be free for drafting.

The *reel* was an important piece of equipment and often sold as a pair with a flax spinning wheel. To avoid having the spinning wheel idle, another member of the family reeled off the full bobbin into a *hank*. The hanks were subdivided into *leas* and the number of leas spun from 1 pound (approx. ½ kilo) of flax gave the count number of the yarn. In other words, the greater the number of leas, the higher the count and the finer the yarn. This is not different from our thread counting system today.

From Yarn to Fabric:

Weaving cloth on a loom is dated to at least the fourth millennium BC, through the discovery during excavations in Lower Egypt, of a pottery bowl with a representation of a loom painted on it. A similar loom was found painted on the wall of an Egyptian tomb over two thousand years later. The Egyptians' shrouds and their mummy wrappings have lasted to this day. Heavier linen was even used to stuff and reshape the body after the removal of the organs.

From the time the first linen was woven, it has been considered the most important fabric for religious rites. The use of linen continued with the Israelites, and continued to be maintained by the Greeks and Romans. With the expansion of the Roman Empire linen production expanded to many parts of Europe.

Spain produced extremely fine linen due to the excellent water available. Even Germany produced fine linen fabrics which the women used in dress making. The production continued to North America where it is reflected in the pattern of life of settlers. One of the most deep rooted traditions in our country was the making of a chest full of linen for a bride's dowry.

Linen continued its importance traveling west where it was the most widely used cloth until the mechanization of cotton spinning the last half of the eighteenth century. The linen demand then declined further as the industrial revolution meant that cotton cloth was cheaper to produce. There was a brief boom in the linen industry during the American Civil War when cotton crops were burned creating a shortage.

In Part III next issue we will talk about the characteristics of both linen and cotton, and why linen blends are so popular today.

Sheila T. Nicol

**ANSWER:**

**Yes**

"Shears are designed specifically to cut fabric, while scissors are made to cut paper and the like. If you cut fabric with scissors, you will struggle forever; while if you cut paper with shears it will dull them."

**And now you know!**

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