

Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

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June/July 2014

From The Editor –

Summer is officially here – well not by the calendar, as that date is June 21 – but we know it is here because the red/white and blue buntings, flags and BBQ invites have appeared.

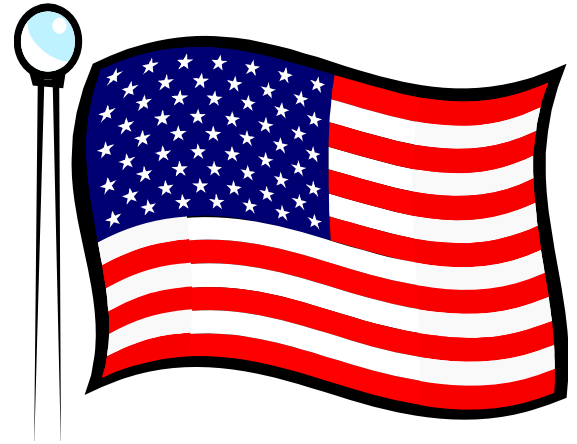
In this issue we close our study – honestly I cannot call it a study, but rather an introduction – of lace. I hope you have enjoyed bits and pieces, as well as learned something along the way.

We are delighted to welcome Kathy Awender this month. She does absolutely beautiful sewing giving special attention to the smallest of details. This beautiful project is so sweet and the pocket is such a refreshing idea replicating the smocking around the yoke. I wish you could see it in person as she even hand rolled the hem (this is our beautiful Baby Dimity in squares) and it is perfectly straight!! Thanks so much, Kathy, for sharing your beautiful handwork.

As you know the June/July issue of *Bear In Mind* is a combined issue to allow both you and we to take time to enjoy our own BBQ's. We will return in August with an exceptional issue which I know you will enjoy.

As you pack your bag for beach or mountain – be sure to pack your sewing, too. Till August....Happy Stitching,

Sheila



O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet,
Whose stern impassion'd stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America! God mend thine ev'ry flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

O beautiful for heroes proved In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved,
And mercy more than life!
America! America! May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness,
And ev'ry gain divine!

O Beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam,
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!



Part V

Of the four types of lace, to date we have talked about the Embroidered laces of the 1500's, Needlepoint laces of the 1600's and last month the Bobbin laces of Flanders, Italy, Spain and Brussels during the 1700's. We continue with English and French Bobbin laces of the 18thC, and finally our beloved Machine Made laces of today.

FRENCH BOBBIN LACES

Last month we mentioned Valenciennes laces when we were talking about the laces of Flanders. Let me clarify that 1) these bear almost no relation to the Valenciennes laces of today and 2) the old Valenciennes are nearly always considered Flemish as their design and technique are closer to the Flemish laces of the same time. Now we move on to the laces of France.

The city of Valenciennes was annexed by France in 1678. As stated, these fine old Valenciennes were very close to the Flemish laces of the same time. They reached their peak in the mid eighteenth century, and in their heyday only the lace produced in the city was called 'true' or *Vrai* Valenciennes, and that produced elsewhere were called 'false' or *Fausse*. From 1780 fashion dictated its decline. The French Revolution saw as many as four thousand lace workers, but that number diminished to only two hundred and by 1851 there were only two, both in their 80's. Ironically to us today, by the mid 19thC the monopoly of Valenciennes manufacture was acquired by Belgium.

These Valenciennes laces were used for trimming lingerie and night clothing, and were widely used by English nobility. They were clean, durable and consisted of round dots or small stylized flowers with the *reseau* or background being the diamond shaped mesh. NOTE: These were the earliest of those laces resembling what we use today as 'Val' laces.

Other cities produced laces bearing their names such as Lille, Caen, and Le Puy, all with some distinctive features such as cordonnets, or certain types of cotton or silk thread. Normandy laces were quite narrow, featuring

small dots and childlike simplicity, most often being used to trim baby bonnets.

Possibly the most famous of this family of laces were the Chantilly laces. Most often black, their production flourished between 1740 and 1785 during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI. However, few 18C examples have been identified because the dye was acidic and contained iron, which tended to oxidize and rot the threads. Its' popularity was revived in the early 1800's when Napoleon I declared that only Alencon and Chantilly laces could be worn at court.

ENGLISH BOBBIN LACES

As we have learned with the other European bobbin laces, there are too many varieties of English bobbin lace by district or design to mention them all here. The two main types we will touch on here are the Honiton and Midlands laces.

Honiton laces were by far the more delicate and complex of the two. The *toile* was worked separately then sewn or attached with *brides* or *picots* to the *reseau*. Designs were far daintier most often of intricate floral influences. Midlands's laces aimed at a more frugal customer where the Honiton laces could often compete with the fine Brussels laces for the clientele of the wealthy nobility. The Midlands laces were practical, and mostly made as narrow edgings and insertions approximately ¼ o 4 inches in width. Some of the names of these laces would be Yak, Cluny, Torchon, and Bucks - all were geometric and sometimes difficult to differentiate one from the other. They favored the look of cluny laces today.

I sincerely hope you have enjoyed our brief journey of lace history and that it has provided you with the desire to further study them. If you find yourself wishing to collect a few pieces, first decide if you want to re-use them, frame them as art, or just use them as a reference material. Then it will be easier to justify the asking price.

In a separate article elsewhere in this issue, I will walk you through the steps used today to make the lovely French laces we use on our Heirloom garments.

Sheila T. Nicol

THE MAKING OF 21st CENTURY FRENCH LACE

As with all things, first comes the idea. Then a specialized artist works out the idea on paper. The finished sketch is passed on to a technician who enlarges it so that the work of each thread on the loom can be shown. The threads are colored and numbered for each movement of the loom. To enable the design to be transferred to cards, the course of each thread is transcribed on a scale. Then someone punches the cards according to the figures on the scale. All of these operations take several weeks.

Next we have the Jacquard (named after its inventor, Joseph-Marie Jacquard) which reads the punched cards and transmits the information to the loom by operating the rods through which the warp threads go. It controls their movement according to the pattern to be reproduced. The Jacquard serves as the brain of the Leavers loom and is one of its essential features. It makes it possible to produce any type of lace from the simplest to the most complex.

The most important part of the Leavers loom is the carriage with its bobbin. The riveted copper bobbin holds 80-100 meters of thread. The bobbin is placed in the center of the steel carriage, which acts as a support and guide. Inside the loom several thousand carriages perform the same shuttle movement to form the weft of the lace.

Preparation of the thread is also time consuming. Starting from the cones, the threads are wound onto long metal rollers for the width of the lace. These rollers are placed in the loom to form the warp. Winding the thread into the bobbin involves an operation that is both delicate and spectacular, as the thread, which is very fine - often 200-300 meters to the kilogram - has to be placed between the lips of the bobbin. The bobbins are

then pressed and heated to make them all of identical thickness. Afterwards, the 'remonteur' places each bobbin in the center of a carriage, making sure that the spring of the carriage is in the middle of the lips of the bobbin, and ends by bringing the thread out through the hole at the top of the carriage. Several thousands of bobbins go through the hands of the 'remonteur' every day.

With the Jacquard as the brain of the loom, the warp threads in position on their rollers, and the carriages with their bobbins in the center of the loom, we come to the manufacture. Driven by the Jacquard, the warp threads running through the rods inside the loom perform a longitudinal movement which varies according to the details of each pattern. The 5000 carriages perform a transversal to and fro movement which interweaves the threads in the bobbins with the 9000 threads from the rollers. This is the basic and exclusive feature of the Leavers loom, which reproduces and duplicates the movements of the 'bones' on the traditional lace maker's pillow. It is important to note that these carriages can only be lubricated with graphite. As a result the lace is grey to black when coming off of the loom.

Now the lace is ready for an initial inspection, followed by bleaching, then dyeing white or any number of colors. The sheets of manufactured lace are then cut apart as dictated by the pattern or required by the customer.

Sheila T. Nicol



Oh My – How time flies! It seems that only yesterday the British were welcoming their youngest heir to the throne. He has already had a busy year, just recently finishing his first public engagements in New Zealand and Australia. With Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia all surrounded by water, and the flag colors of all three nations red, white and blue, it seems only natural that several of the little tykes outfits for his trip down under were red, white and blue and many with a nautical theme! So we have taken note and feature here an ensemble fit for Prince George. Ours is Swiss Superfine Twill in navy – you cannot imagine what this twill feels like! – with a shirt of Swiss Silky Broadcloth. We have featured sailboats – Prince George no doubt will be the yachting type – and it is oh so adorable. Call for samples of this fabulous ultra-soft twill fabric. Hint: We have even made fancy Heirloom dresses from this lovely fabric!

We hope you have enjoyed following us as we ‘dressed’ Prince George for a year!



Smocked Pocket

by Kathy Awender

Instructions are for a small pocket on a toddler dress. For larger sizes follow the same general instructions but enlarge the pattern a bit.

Cut a piece of dress fabric 4" x 10". Cut contrast bias fabric for French binding 1 1/2" x 4 1/2".

Pleat 9 half space rows (or the number needed for your design) with the first row 1/2 space from the top edge.



Count the center 26 pleats (or the number needed for your design) and remove all extra threads at both sides. Tie off pleats on the wrong side so the pleated area measures about 1".



If the flat sides are different sizes, measure the smallest one. Use this measurement to mark the width of the other flat side to match. Measurement should be 1 1/4" to 1 1/2".

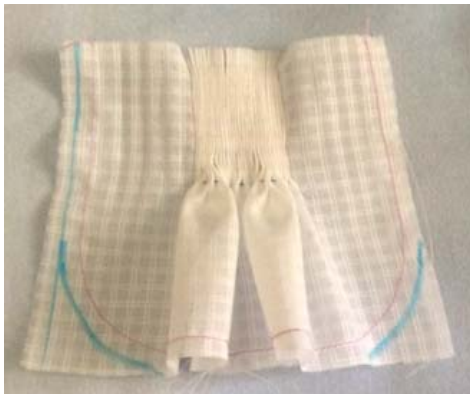


Use a round item 2" to 2 1/2" in diameter to draw the pocket curve cutting line at both lower sides of the pocket.





With matching thread stitch $\frac{1}{4}$ " inside the cutting line on sides & bottom (shown in pink thread) to mark the fold line.



Sew 2 gathering rows at the bottom: a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " from edge & $\frac{1}{2}$ " from edge (shown in aqua thread), centered below the pleating. Leave long tails to pull for gathering.



Pull up gathering threads at center bottom to 1".



Smock the desired design. Block. Trim on pocket cutting line, including curves and any excess width at one side.

Press the binding fabric in half lengthwise and trim to fit the pocket width. With right sides together and raw edges matching, sew to the top of the smocked pocket with a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. Trim threads to neaten. (sample is shown without smocking)



Fold the pocket sides under $\frac{1}{4}$ " (including ends of binding) and fold the binding to the inside. Hand stitch in place. Remove the pleating threads.



Press the pocket seam allowance under using the $\frac{1}{4}$ " stitching line as a guide.



Add gathered lace insertion to the pocket just below the binding: Pull the top thread at both ends of an 8" long piece of lace insertion and gather to fit the pocket. Fold 1/4" at each end of lace to the back of the pocket. Hand stitch the lace in place below the pocket band.



Pin the pocket to the dress and sew by hand with a blind stitch. Remove any exposed gathering threads.

Kathy Awender

FYI

Does Thread Have A Grain?

The simple answer is YES! To those who argue the point, I will say that some threads have a more prominent grain than others. Let's talk...

General Sewing Thread –

Manufacturers wind the thread on the spool so that as you pull it off, the end that you pull is the top of the grain. In other words if you thread the needle from the pulled end you will have the grain in the proper direction. So what about thread wound on a machine bobbin? Yes, that thread is wound in the wrong direction, but in most instances the bobbin thread is on the wrong side. For hand sewing the freshly cut end, from the spool should be your knot and the older cut end inserted into the needle eye.

Floss –

Floss definitely has a grain. Some flosses are so smooth that you may have never realized this. DMC, the most popular and considered the quality standard, even has a pair of hands showing you how to begin pulling the thread from the skein. This is not just to keep it from tangling, but to direct you to the correct grain. Embroidering with stranded threads, such as floss, with the correct grain, is especially important in smocking where you want the 'picture' to be perfectly smooth.

Needlepoint –

Wool, and most other fibers used in needlepoint today, has a definite grain. If some stitches are clean and others fuzzy, you are stitching with different grains of the yarn.

How to check the grain? Some helpful hints:

If you need 2 strands, always thread 2 strands through the eye of the needle.

Some say that their hands are callused and they cannot determine the grain with their fingers. Try running the thread or yarn under your chin or across your nose. Now turn the thread around and repeat. One direction will tickle more than the other. The direction that tickles the most is against the grain. In addition, many times if you are having trouble threading the needle, you are trying to thread against the grain.

Never double one strand over. Doing so means one half will be with the grain, and one half will be against. This would result in not covering the canvas as well as 2 independent strands and your stitches not lying as smoothly.

Knotting and fraying are most often the result of sewing with the wrong grain of thread. In addition **QUALITY** makes a huge difference. (Editor's note: I have never understood someone investing so much time and money on a garment or any other project and buying cheap thread!)

In conclusion, sewing with the correct grain of the thread gains you less frustration with tangled thread, and allows you to have the smoothest and neatest stitching possible.

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