Chapter I
Introduction

Mark Twain coined the name Gilded Age to define the period of rapid industrial advancement, economic boom, big business development and frothing material opulence that erupted in America after the Civil War.[1] In *Mrs. Astor's New York,* Eric Homberger calls this same time period "The Age of Aristocracy" although he is explicit in differentiating his usage from the traditional European sense of the term. A true aristocracy has its base in the ownership and cultivation of land which the ultra wealthy of 1880s New York did not have.[2] Homberger describes aristocracy as a "metaphor for high social status or prestige" and uses it to identify an upper class subgroup of individuals and families who shared a British-based set of aristocratic rituals, identity and organization.[3]

Homberger suggests that renewed interest in British culture began in the 1820s and 1830s when negative Revolutionary War sentiments had eased and many wealthy Americans looked to England for the latest fashions in lifestyle as well as templates for domestic architecture.[4] Social pacesetter Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt favored French design and sophistication. As young Alva Smith, she had been taken to Paris by her mother in the 1860s and entertained at the glittering court of Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie.[5] In later years, Mrs. Vanderbilt brought her love of the French Renaissance and the Bourbons[6] into the design of her homes. She employed architect Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895), a proponent of the Beaux Arts style and known for his ideas of European grandeur.[7] Hunt designed the William K. Vanderbilt chateau at Sixty-First Street and Fifth Avenue, the Versailles-inspired Marble House[8] in Newport,

and brother Cornelius II's Genovese palazzo The Breakers, also in Newport. It was an all-encompassing European aesthetic and many credited Hunt and Alva Vanderbilt for setting the standard in Gilded Age European-style splendor.[9]

The Beaux Arts style flourished in America between 1876 and 1930, and architects such as Hunt complemented exterior detail by incorporating Beaux Arts elements into the interior design.[10] Stained or colored glass windows and screens were provided by John La Farge (1835-1910) and Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933); sculpted fireplace surrounds, pediments and entrances were commissioned from Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907) and Karl Bitter (1867-1915) while cabinetmakers such as Gustav and Christian Herter (1830-1898, 1840-1883) made breathtaking suites of furniture.[11] There were hundreds of wealthy citizens willing to pay for a lavish town house or a magnificent country "cottage" if it would distinguish them from others in their "set." In *The Elements of Style,* Calloway suggests that owners of these mansions may even have perceived themselves as "modern equivalents of Renaissance princes."[12]

The inspiration and reinforcement of the European aesthetic came from wealthy Americans traveling overseas. In her autobiography *A Backward Glance,* Edith Wharton comments that even as a child in the 1860s she had memories of people, particularly New Yorkers, who were either just leaving or just returning from abroad.[13] Their main purpose was to find culture and seek forms to imitate,[14] but money, mansions, and mind-broadening experiences were not enough to guarantee admission to "aristocratic" society. One needed to be invited "in" by Caroline Schermerhorn (Mrs. John Jacob) Astor. This self-styled leader of the upper echelon[15] was convinced that "New York society would be fatally undermined if vulgar wealth alone was allowed to dictate the social agenda,"[16]

and thus refinement and culture became additional defining points for acceptance in high society.

Mrs. Astor contrived systems to exclude those she considered undesirable. Best known for her "Four Hundred," the maximum number that could fit in her ballroom and therefore only the most select of the *beau monde*, Mrs. Astor also worked with society *doyen* Ward McAllister to establish another exclusive institution called "The Patriarchs." McAllister established a board of twenty-five New York society gentlemen and asked them to create guest lists for three consecutive subscription balls to be held annually in Delmonico's ballroom. The inspiration and prototype were fashionable assemblies held at London's eighteenth-century Almacks, an upper-class social club; this nineteenth-century version was intended to identify New York's social elite.[17]

There was yet another way that Gilded Age society defined itself: fashion. One of the most visible forms of consumption, fashion creates symbolic boundaries, quickly communicating social as well as personal identity.[18] As with domestic architecture, interior decoration and social interaction, fashionable clothing was used by America's upper echelon to establish and reinforce exclusivity. In the Gilded Age, the place to go for privileged-class fashion was Paris.

While by no means the only source for elegant clothing, many wealthy American women traveled to Paris to have dresses designed by Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895). An Englishman, Worth moved to Paris in 1858. His designs were distinctive for their elegant cloth more than the cut of the dress; inventive layers of fabrics and textures as well as an astonishing quality of craftsmanship were his hallmark. It was Worth who invented the concept of haute couture, informing a woman what she was going to wear, what silhouette, what material. According to Jean Worth, his father recognized only two

authorities, “God and the Emperor [Napoleon III], and beneath these he ruled his own extensive kingdom unmolested.”[19] Worth had long relationships with Princess Pauline de Metternich, his first royal client, and the Empress Eugenié, wife of Napoleon III. Eugenié loved lace and Worth incorporated it into many of his fashions for her. When France’s Second Empire collapsed in 1870 and Eugenié fled to England, her revival of lace in international fashion became her legacy.

Americans saw Worth as “the established oracle of fashion.”[20] They flocked to him because he spoke to them in English, “putting them at ease as he subdued and seduced them into luxury.”[21] Author Edith Wharton’s mention of Worth in her novels not only confirms upper tier commitment to this couture designer, it also demonstrates that Americans subscribed to his fashion aesthetic, including his liberal use of lace. In *The Age of Innocence*, May Welland Archer’s wedding dress had “gone to Paris to be made over for next winter, and Worth hasn’t sent it back,”[22] and “Old Mrs. Baxter Pennilow, who did everything handsomely used to import twelve [Worth dresses] a year, two velvet, two satin, two silk, and the other six of poplin and the finest cashmere. It was a standing order.”[23] Among Worth’s nonfictional patrons were Isabella Stewart Gardner of Boston, the Hewitt sisters (of the Cooper-Hewitt family) and *grande dame* Mrs. Potter Palmer of Chicago (Figure 1.1).

Given Worth’s reputation for sumptuous fabrics, fastidious craftsmanship, and lavish detail, one assumes he only used fine, handmade lace as his fashions’ finishing touch. There are records of Worth dresses made for Eugenié with handmade Alençon lace, but the general nature of Worth’s business set certain production limitations. Particularly during the social season, fine handmade laces were not readily available in the quantity needed. Instead, Worth relied heavily on machine-made lace (Figures 1.2 and 1.3),

chemical lace, hand-embroidered machine-made net, machine-embroidered machine-made net, appliqué on net, and Irish crochet. That venerable couturier designers including Charles Frederick Worth used lace extensively played a key role in re-instituting lace as a fashionable and highly desirable accessory.

Initially, wealthy Americans embraced the novelty of machine-made lace and draped themselves in it lavishly. A skirt flounce could require eighteen yards of lace to make just one circumference. But the tempo of fashion increased in the 1880s as telephones, cruise liners and other innovations made possible the swift transmission of ideas.[24] Paris couturier designs were meticulously copied down to the small details such as lace insertion by fashion promoters. The American public had seen the latest styles in fashion magazines and retailers scurried to produce Paris-style clothing at one-third the cost for its more financially modest customers.[25] Intent on living fashionably, the rising middle class took their cues from the lifestyle of the privileged class. The upper-class French trade became an American mass market.[26]

The expense and unavailability that had once made certain styles and goods exclusive to the wealthy was now rapidly disappearing. The upper class responded by looking for new ways to distinguish themselves from *hoi polloi*.[27] Wharton wrote that Americans in European shops "found inexhaustible consolation from the loneliness and inconveniences of life in foreign lands."[28] Some shops would have been selling lace. Some amount of lace would have been antique and highly desirable for two reasons. First, since antique handmade European lace was only worn by royalty, nobility, and the extremely wealthy, it carried the caché of its previous upper-tier owner. Second, as a handmade antique, identical pieces were less likely, giving the new owner the benefit of wearing something unique. This would have been especially appealing since there could be

similarity in style among new dresses, even those designed by Worth. Antique lace might also be perceived by others as a family heirloom, even if it technically belonged to someone else's family. In *Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt*, Amanda Stuart comments that in the contest for social advantage, certain social leaders, including Alva Vanderbilt, weren't above rewriting a degree of genealogy.[29]

This thesis will demonstrate that from 1880 to 1930, wealthy American women wore refashioned antique European lace to reinforce their Gilded Age identification with the European privileged class and to distinguish themselves from the middle class who were wearing machine-made lace. Even though couturiers such as Charles Frederick Worth continued to use fine machine-made lace when significant yardage was required for gowns, the overall commitment by upper-class Americans to fine handmade European lace stimulated a preference for handmade lace on all levels of American society.

Rather than attempting to address the general use of lace in the Gilded Age, the focus will be lace collars. Lace collars were a fashion trend of the Gilded Age. There had been lace collars and cloth collars trimmed with lace in the seventeenth century, but with the exception of the bertha (a deep collar worn by women that extended from neck to shoulder or falling off the shoulder from a low neckline) collars from 1700 to the 1820s had been largely in the form of trimming around the neckline rather than a formed collar shape. The collar made solely of lace didn't become its own entity until the 1850s when a modest lace collar was used to soften the high plain neckline. For the next eighty years the lace collar would be a fashion staple.

Most of the collars in this thesis are from the textile collection of the National Museum of American History (NMAH) in Washington, D.C. The two exceptions are from wedding gowns owned by the Berkshire County Historical Society (BCHS) on view

at Ventfort Hall, Lenox, Massachusetts, in 2009. Additional examples of lace were exhibited at the Wadsworth Athaneum (WA), in Hartford, Connecticut, in the fall of 2009.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter II traces the history of the lace industry in England, France, Belgium and Italy from 1800 to 1865. It presents early lacemaking machines, examines ways machine-made lace effected the evolution of handmade lace, and identifies how the relationship of these two enterprises set the stage for transferring European lace into American culture.

Chapter III presents European lace as a facet of American upper-class culture through a selection of handmade European lace collars and discusses their use in Gilded Age context. Shape, size and lace type are used to interpret function, and individual lace developments are traced to convey a lace type's historic, and therefore social, value. Etiquette manuals are used to outline lace protocol, and quotes from Gilded Age novels reinforce social context. All portraits and photographs modeling the collars are of Americans. Most of the collars to be discussed are antique laces refashioned in the mid-to late-nineteenth century; all are handmade. Reasons why a lace was selected for refashioning will be addressed in the discussion of individual collars.

Chapter IV follows the same collar presentation format as Chapter III, and explains how and why the American middle class adopted the wealthy American commitment to handmade lace and by doing so confirmed that European handmade lace became part of American culture in the Gilded Age. Examples include affordable handmade European lace, and lace constructed at home from patterns offered by ladies' periodicals. Brief descriptions are given of the development of department stores and mail-order catalogues since they were so highly instrumental in providing the middle class

easy access to lace for purchase.

A short definition or description is given immediately after a lace term or lace name is first used; additional information is available in the glossary. Note that in general, lace names come from one of two sources: they are named for the town or country with which they are associated such as Alençon (France) and Honiton (England), or they may be named for a characteristic of their appearance such as *point de gaze (*Brussels) referencing the airy (gauze-like) mesh. With the exception of *reticella* (cutwork) and *punto in aria* (stitch in the air) which are Italian, all lace names in the thesis are given in English or French, including names such as *point* (stitch) *de Venise* (Venice), an Italian needle lace.

There are two appendices. The first appendix shows diagrams of handmade lace net (mesh) patterns and has been included to help the reader understand some of the differentiation between lace types. The second appendix is a catalogue of the handmade lace collars photographed at NMAH with technical data.

Primary source books include Edith Wharton's autobiography, *A Backward Glance,* which recounted her personal story of Gilded Age society and two volumes on etiquette. The first, Richard Wells' *Manners, Culture and Dress of the Best American Society* (1890), plays a key role in identifying how much lace was worn in American society and for what occasion. While Lillian Eichler's *Book of Etiquette* (1922) gave a similar listing of what to wear and when, the obvious absence of lace, except for very mature ladies, lends a counterpoint for the end of the Gilded Age.

Novels written during the Gilded Age offer lace and social context. Edith Wharton, herself a child of a wealthy New York family, perfectly captured the opulent lifestyle in *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*. *The Age of Innocence* reveals 1870s New York aristocracy through the interaction of a young socialite couple and their families,

while *The House of Mirth* explores the vulnerability of unmarried women by tracing the gradual social decline of Lily Bart. In both stories, material possessions, including fashion and lace, play a significant role in gauging social position. In *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, a wealthy young woman feels trapped by social expectations and restrictions. Her silent struggle gives poignancy to the description of her role as hostess on a reception day. While *Babbit* by Sinclair Lewis is the story of a cynical middle-aged man, the narrative gives a peek at a Gilded Age childhood.

Three novels are used to illustrate dynamics of the Gilded Age rising middle class. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells is the story of a *nouveau riche* family bewildered by the social expectations of Old Boston and provides context for the etiquette manual. *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser follows small-town Carrie Meeber on her journey to create a better life for herself in 1890s Chicago and New York, and *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson records the successes and failures of a young man fleeing from his true identity. In both of these stories, lace is used as a marker of middle class refinement in imitation of a wealthy lifestyle.

The periodicals *Godey's Ladies Book* (1830-1898), *Ladies Home Journal* (1883-current) and *The Ladies' World* (1886-1918) were role models of middle-class quality life. Each provided monthly samples of Gilded Age lace-related needlework that encouraged their readers to incorporate lace into their lives. A Butterick (1883-current) reproduction catalogue shows dress patterns encouraging lace embellishment and a reproduction National Cloak and Suit Company (founded 1888, then merged into other companies) provides images of mail order lace merchandise.

Certain secondary sources were particularly instructive detailing the story of lace. Santina Levey was Keeper of the Department of Textiles and Dress at the Victoria and

Albert Museum in London when she wrote *Lace: A History.* This is a monumental work with tremendous detail on many facets of European lace development. At the time Heather Toomer wrote *Antique Lace: Identifying Types and Techniques* she had been collecting and studying lace for over twenty-five years; her clear explanations of lace characteristics and lace history were invaluable. *How to Recognize Machine Laces* is one of several books by Pat Earnshaw and her explanation of lacemaking machines is unparalleled. Elizabeth M. Kurella's *Guide to Lace and Linens* and Judyth Gwynne's *The Illustrated Dictionary of Lace* are particularly instructive on lace type characteristics, both handmade and machine-made. Other references provided social and material culture context. *Land of Desire* by William Leach was most helpful in understanding the development and growth of American consumerism; Amanda Mackenzie Stuart's *Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt* and Eric Homberger's *Mrs. Astor's New York* illustrate the workings of Gilded Age upper echelon society *par excellence.*

A last word of introduction: refashioned antique lace is central to this study. These pieces are usually ignored, even denigrated by purists; in actuality, they are a treasure trove of artistry, craft, fashion history and socioeconomic commentary. Refashioned antique lace carries a double history: first when the lace is made and then when it is remade. What inspires the refashioning is a story in itself and one worth considering. The alternative is to lose a piece of textile history, with lace slowly disintegrating. The fresh and unique perspective of this thesis is an innovative approach, bringing new appreciation of refashioned handmade laces from the Gilded Age.

Chapter II

The Development of Machine-Made Lace and Its Impact on the Handmade Lace Industry

Today we include knitting, crocheting, tatting, macramé, and several forms of embroidery as means of creating handmade lace, but the classic modes for fine laces are needle lace and bobbin lace. Both laces appear around 1550, and while they developed from two very different styles of thread manipulation, their histories are eventually woven together.

As the name suggests, needle lace is made by using needle and thread. It evolved out of the embroidery techniques of drawnwork and cutwork known as *reticella* in Italy where it developed. This decorative element was used to embellish collars and sleeve openings, particularly of church garments; the circa 1600 Italian handkerchief in Figures 2.1A-B shows the rich combination of cutwork and embroidery on linen cloth. In time, fabric-based lace embroideries transitioned to lace made on a foundation of freestanding outline threads, the process of which can be seen in Figure 2.2. As needle lacemaking developed, lacemakers began to construct continuous lengths rather than separate motifs. Symmetry remained key within the motif and in the overall layout of the piece. A raised outline was often used to clearly define motifs, and floral patterns generally had areas available for fancy filling stitches. Worked stitch by stitch, the sixteenth and seventeenth century designs largely retained the tendency to compartmentalize motifs in the manner of the drawn thread work patterns that had preceded them (Figure 2.3).

Bobbin lace has its roots in braiding and weaving. A hard, straw-stuffed pillow supports the pattern; threads are initially looped around pins along the top edge, separated and weighted by bobbins tied to individual thread ends (Figure 2.4). The

threads are then interlaced, linked, and knotted, according to the net, clothwork and overall pattern needs. Unlike needle lace, there is no clear antecedent for bobbin lace. It may have evolved from the making of passementerie; making narrow decorative braids for trim is an old art and many methods used bobbins to weight and organize threads.[30] Celtic knot work and Islamic geometric motifs coming into Europe via trade appear to have influenced design.[31] It is a popular belief that the Flemish developed bobbin lace, but it is more probable that the earliest bobbin laces were made in Italy. This is supported by the Venetian publication in 1557 of the first bobbin lace pattern book, *Book I of Le Pompe,* which documents bobbin work as the lace we know today (Figure 2.5). From the beginning, linen thread was used to make bobbin lace for trimming linens, and silk and metal thread were used for making bobbin lace to decorate clothing and personal items (Figure 2.6).

Trade provided numerous handmade lace models and lacemakers felt free to relocate. Thus, needle lace migrated from Italy to France where varieties continued to develop; bobbin lace spread from Flanders into England and then France. As for which lace type was dominant, needle lace or bobbin lace, the answer lies primarily with Paris, the prevailing fashion leader. From the 1550s through Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715), visually bold needle lace was preferred. Louis XV's Madame Pompadour (active at court 1745-1764) began to mix her laces and by the time of Marie Antoinette (r. 1774-1793), the soft silks and rococo style demanded the soft drape of bobbin laces.

Regardless of lace type, each country had thousands employed in the lace industry: pattern designers, thread makers, lacemakers, lace merchants, and dressmakers using the lace to embellish clothes. Each phase had intermediaries, and all added to cost. Because of its outrageous expense, lace had always been reserved for royalty and the

wealthy. No one else could afford it. And while the fortunes of particular lace types such as Italian needle lace *point de Venise* and English Honiton bobbin lace waxed and waned with fashion needs, overall lacemaking was big business.

Inventions to manufacture lace-like textiles by machine had their start with the stocking frame, invented by Reverend William Lee in 1589. In concept, it echoed hand knitting: a weft (horizontal) thread was stretched across a bar of barbed needles which were raised and lowered by treadle to add and then remove uniform rows of loops. Shaping was accomplished at the edges the same as was done in hand-knitting: an increase in width was made by adding additional loops at the end of a row; stitches could be decreased by knitting two stitches together. Wool, silk, and occasionally cotton hosiery were produced. Openwork, or "clocks," could only be effected through labor intensive handwork and thus were expensive. In 1775, the stocking frame was modified to use a separate spool of thread for each needle. Called the warp frame, its vertical pillars of loops produced a solid fabric which could be cut without unraveling. In time, the warp frame was adjusted to create an openwork of spaced loops to compete with fine handmade bobbin net.[32]

By 1808 when John Heathcoat provided embroiderable plain mesh from the bobbinet machine, the market was ripe for do-it-yourself lace. Based on the twist-net ground of the English bobbin lace known as Bucks point, (see Chapter IV for further discussion) it used two distinct sets of threads. The first half were vertical threads stretched from a warp frame below to a cloth roller above. The other half of threads were wound on thin circular bobbins and positioned between the warp threads on an upper beam. The mesh was made by carefully synchronized movements: the bobbins were swung back and forth between the warp threads; after each bobbin swing-through, the

warp threads were shifted a little to the right or left. In this manner, the warp threads placed themselves first on one side then on the other of the pendular bobbins, effecting a twist, and ultimately creating net. In time, Heathcoat's invention would produce net in wide expanses, useful for making flounces, veils and dresses. Lace was suddenly accessible as never before and the bobbinet's financial success encouraged further development.

The net made by the bobbinet machine is a remarkable imitation of handmade bobbin net, but there are some differences. Relatively minor is the technical variance of handmade bobbin lace, which uses threads in pairs, versus the single threads of the bobbinet machine. More obvious to the eye is the difference in the directional flow of threads. Handmade lace shares the machine-made lace protocol of passive vertical threads and diagonal working threads, but which handmade lace threads are passive and which are active changes back and forth as the design develops. Thus, in handmade bobbin lace, the threads follow the shape of the motif and net as needed (Figure 2.7) whereas the bobbinet-made net, with its roller stretched warp threads, displays an uncompromising downward straight line (Figure 2.8). Directional thread flow is a key means to differentiate between machine-made and handmade laces.

Another important difference between machine-made and handmade lace is that when the bobbinet machine was first developed, it could only produce plain net. Embroidery techniques such as running stitch, chain stitch and appliqué were needed in order to mimic handmade lace designs. Still, machine-made net was comparatively inexpensive, in part because of nominal labor costs with only a few workers needed to run the machines, and in part because it used less- expensive cotton thread rather than costly fine linen thread. This gave the machine lacemaking industry a tremendous advantage.

Cotton thread fine enough for handmade lace was not available until 1835.

The pusher lacemaking machine was so named because of the mechanical arms which pushed bobbins between the warp threads. Invented in 1812 by Samuel Clark and James Mart of Nottingham, the pusher machine retained Heathcoat's bobbinet technique of fixed vertical warp threads which moved right and left to effect diagonal weft thread twist. Paired with the Jacquard attachment in the 1830s, it played an important role in the refinement of patterned machine lace.[33] The pusher machine excelled in patterned piece-goods such as bonnet veils, shawls, lappets, collars and other lace accessories which could be made to shape.[34] However, the complex patterning process made it slow, and the motif outline thread couldn't be inserted during manufacture; it had to be run in or couched on by hand after the lace was removed from the machine. Hand finishing added to the time and cost of production.

More successful at adding pattern to net and therefore more threatening to the handmade lace industry was the Leavers machine. It was invented by John Leavers in 1813 with the assistance of Benjamin Thompson, a bobbin manufacturer. Thompson's extremely thin bobbins allowed double the number of warp yarns by using front (right or S-twist) and back (left or Z-twist) sets. Patterning yarns were added on up to 400 rollers. Leavers was also able to add picots (1827) and gimp (motif outline) threads (1847) during manufacture, although hand finishing (for prestige or convenience) was also used. From the late 1830s when the Jacquard was first used to the late 1880s, Leavers lace was the dominant machine-made lace.The development of a variety of techniques as well as an increased number of threads spoke to its technical superiority.[35]

Machine-made needle laces were developed later than machine-made bobbin laces. Just as handmade needle laces were based on hand embroidery, machine-made needle laces

were directly connected to embroidery sewing machines. The two most significant needle lacemaking machines were the handmachine and the Schiffli. Both were primarily developed in Switzerland.

With the handmachine, the fabric was tightly stretched over a frame and a horizontal bar bore the sewing needles. The bar was controlled by foot-operated pedals moving back and forth over the fabric as needed. Using a pantograph system, a worker used levers to control the up-down left-right gliding of the frame, positioning the stitches. While the handmachine couldn't quite duplicate the stitching of genuine needle laces exactly,[36] and some articles needed later hand embellishment, it did a reasonable job mimicking hand embroidery including a fair copy of the buttonhole stitch. The handmachine also had the ability to apply embroidery onto net, and thus copy mesh-ground bobbin or needle laces, but perhaps its most interesting development was that of chemical or burnt laces. Sometimes identified as Swiss lace since the technique was primarily developed in that country, the chemical lace process involved embroidering fabric which was then destroyed by applying a corrosive chemical. It left the embroidery as free standing motifs which could be directly attached to each other or linked by sewn in stabilizing bars (Figure 2.9A & B)

The Schiffli developed a little later than the handmachine and had the technological advantage of using steam and electricity to drive the machines. By embroidering on net or onto chemically degradable fabric, the Schiffli could produce copies of both mesh-ground and guipire (without mesh) laces. Its copies of needle lace were expensive, but not as expensive as the lace produced by twist-net machine. The Schiffli used cotton rather than the linen thread of antique laces.[37]

Invented by French Joseph-Marie Jacquard in 1804, the original intent of the

Jacquard head was to speed the execution of detailed designs in woven fabrics and first applied to “kashmir” shawls and silk weaving. However, because of its critical relationship to pattern-making in machine lace, a description of how it worked is included here. Note that the Jacquard head is an attachment to a loom, not a loom in itself. Hailed as the prototype of today’s computer because it uses a key punch system for weaving, it is a mechanism which tells the loom which warp threads should be raised to create the appropriate shed (passage through which weft threads pass).

The Jacquard loom operates in the following manner: stiff cards are punched with holes according to the intended design and laced together for a continuous run; a treadle rotates a cylinder which pulls the cards across the top of the loom, pressing the punched pattern against a group of long needles that reside just below. Each needle is attached to a vertical hook, which is connected to a heddle. A heddle looks like a long, skinny, flat skewer with an enlarged needle’s eye in its middle. There is one heddle for each warp thread. It is the needles that read the cards: If there is a hole, the needle passes through, pulling the heddle up and therefore pulling up the the warp thread. If there is no hole, the card prevents the needle from rising, leaving the warp thread lowered. For lacemaking, there is one card per row of stitches (Figure 2.10) and depending on the complexity of the design, there might be a dozen or several thousand cards. It was particularly successful with the Leavers (bobbin lace) (Figure 2.11) and the Schiffli (needle lace) machines.

Even though Heathcoat’s bobbinet machine had essentially replaced plain handmade net, handmade lace and machine-made lace were not yet regarded as rival fabrics for the first thirty years or so of the nineteenth century.[38] Embroidered net, pretty though it might be, was not in the same league as fine handmade lace. The competition lay elsewhere. The advent of the pusher and Leavers machines has already been cited. When

Heathcoat's patent expired in 1823, additional manufacturers eagerly leaped to produce highly lucrative lace net. In addition, there was the rivalry between England and France.

Initially, industrial England had an advantage over agricultural France in that machines to make lace were being invented in England and used to create a machine-based lace market. France finally made strides by smuggling machines in from abroad, and was soon making a fine tulle. In 1826, the tide firmly turned in favor of France: overproduction of English net led to a financial crash. This was aggravated by England's free-trade act reducing the duty on French tulle. Suddenly the British aristocracy was buying French tulle rather than handmade English lace.[39]

The creation of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1831 helped reposition Brussels in the world of lace manufacturing. There had been temporary dominance of French blonde (a silk bobbin lace) and embroidered nets, but by the 1840s fashion favored delicate, rich patterns and Brussels lace was once again in the lead. New lace schools were opened and the close relationship between Brussels and Paris lace industries was established. Bobbinet machines had been set up in 1834, but it was the famous Brussels handmade point net that royalty and the ultra-wealthy sought. Interestingly, Brussels needle lace grounds had not been made for so long (roughly seventy years) that its reappearance seemed innovative. Brussels would become known for its mixed laces, combining elements of both bobbin and needle laces.

The 1830s also brought a preference for lace with large motifs. Initially, this development benefitted the handmade lace industry because machine-made lace ornamentation was still limited to simple patterned edgings. Lacemaking machines were not yet sufficiently developed to handle large designs. Indeed, the large patterns in the handmade lace of the late 1830s and early 1840s were less cumbersome to make than the

huge quantities of net that had been required for Neoclassical style.[40] In Brussels and Honiton, England, lacemakers were able to combine separately made motifs with machine-net grounds. This application of handmade motifs onto machine-made net lowered labor cost, reducing even further the cost gap between real lace and embroidered net.[41] It also, for a time, created a productive boom for the English Midlands, but as the 1840s progressed and the Jacquard, with its ability to handle large designs and long repeats was applied to lace machines, machine-made lace took firm control of the lace market. The balance between handmade and machine-made lace began to shift: it was markedly in favor of machine-made lace.

The handmade lace industry had other problems. It had been roughly sixty years since lacemakers had done pattern lacemaking and the industry found it needed to train lacemakers and teach designers how to facilitate large scale patterns.[42] The designers and lacemakers looked to seventeenth-and eighteenth-century laces for inspiration. Initial attempts lacked technical detail and laces were weak shadows of the original designs, but over time, design and lacemaking expertise revived. By the 1860s, the handmade lace industry was producing a fine and very marketable product.[43] The resulting search for fine lace in rich designs led to another development: the refashioning of antique handmade lace. Over the next eighty years, preexisting handmade laces would be cut, spliced, reassembled, given fresh net, given new edging and otherwise revamped and reused in a new form. As early as February 1840, the English periodical *The Ladies Cabinet* described an evening dress as decorated with a “wide berthe of Antique Point Lace.” Refashioned antique handmade lace was becoming another competitive factor in the lace market.

The London Exhibition of 1851 provides a comprehensive technical and artistic

synopsis of the lace industry as it stood in the mid-nineteenth century. Unlike similar venues, this Exhibition was the first to truly aim at international representation. Its intent was to examine both fine and applied arts as seen through invention, design, product and raw materials. Class XIX was devoted to lace, embroidery, tapestry and floor coverings, and the evaluating jury was enthusiastically supportive of creative ingenuity as well as practicality.

Class XIX was an eclectic forum. Ireland exhibited embroidered nets from Limerick, Carrickmacross appliqué, needle-made copies of Venetian lace and a great deal of crochet and tatting. The Swiss were praised for their embroidered nets and muslins. In addition to their traditional laces and Valenciennes (a Flemish bobbin lace), the Belgian manufacturers showed black silk lace similar to France's Chantilly. The British Midlands proudly displayed Bucks point and similar handmade bobbin laces, but the highest accolades went to the French. Le Puy, France was notable for its diverse range of laces that used silk, wool and cotton, both plain and colored, to produce lace types from chunky braid edgings to delicate blondes,[44] and the firms of Videcoq & Simon and Lefébure were cited for "combining perfection of design with surpassing elegance."[45]

According to Santina Levey, the 1851 Exhibition made it clear that the public wanted lace designs which were well-formed, naturalistic, and carefully executed. It became obvious that all lacemaking centers needed to evolve or expect to perish.[46] The new machine-lace technology had generated excitement. It fed the international attraction to what was new and innovative, and illuminated the potential for expanding access to lace to a wider market. By comparison, the handmade lace industry was unprepared to meet the demands of Victorian fashion leaders. After languishing for almost sixty years, the handmade lace industry was in urgent need of new manufacturing and business

strategies. A variety of developers worked to bring the handmade lace industry forward, but the handmade lace industry developed quite differently on the Continent than it did in England.

It was the French manufacturers who provided the initial support for the regrowth of the handmade lace industry, recognizing that technical and stylistic excellence was the best response to the threat from machines. Videcoq & Simon were among the leaders. They had revived the Alençon needle lace industry when fashion regained interest in lace in the 1840s. Among other projects, they created an Alençon flounce for the trousseau of Empress Eugenié that was nineteen inches deep and took thirty-six workers eighteen months to complete. The firm also made black silk Chantilly bobbin lace (actually made in Chantilly). As noted earlier, they were praised for their rich designs, variety of fillings and consistency in their grounds at the 1851 Exhibition, and at London's subsequent 1855 Exhibition they won prizes for both their Alençon and Chantilly laces.

Handmade lace was also manufactured by the French firm of Auguste Lefébure. Lefébure's workers were trained well and carefully supervised to maintain consistent quality. Several lacemakers might work on the same piece, but Lefébure encouraged pride of execution and job satisfaction by having individual workers complete all of the elements for their section: motif, fillings and ground. It was the classic means of handmade lacemaking, and quite different from the approach of other manufacturers who had lacemakers specialize in only one element. Initially, they might excel as they learned their craft. Over time, boredom set in and quality deteriorated. Assembly-line production was a strategy for turning out handmade lace quickly, like the machines, but with disastrous results and would spell the ruin of several handmade lacemaking companies. Those willing to pay for handmade lace wanted quality, not quantity.

Lefébure appreciated the need to support the handmade lace industry through excellent designs. He established a design school in Bayeux, and in time, a special workshop at Destelberghe, Belgium to oversee his new venture making Brussels *point de gaze* (a needle lace) and application lace (appliqué). In the 1860s, Lefébure trained workers to make a fine, if hybrid, needle lace which combined aspects of Alençon and *point de gaze* called *point d'Alençon*. A spectacular piece was shown in the 1867 Paris Exhibition. It is no wonder that Lefébure's firm was commissioned in 1856 by the City of Paris to make the christening gown for the infant Prince Imperial.

In 1850, Lefébure employed Alcide Roussel, who would eventually be credited as the leading lace designer of the nineteenth century (Figure 2.12). He won recognition in Brussels in 1856 and from then on, he regularly won awards at virtually every exhibition.[47] Roussel had been educated in the French schools of design whose origins lay in the government-sponsored projects of the seventeenth century. When the French government showed renewed interest in industrial design in the nineteenth century, these programs were revamped and given financial support. It began in 1811 with a small school at Alençon to teach lace design. By 1829, the *L'École Centrale des Arts et Manufactures* (The Central School of Arts and Manufactures) was established in Paris and the *École Royale Gratuite de Dessin* (Royal Free School of Drawing), established in 1767, linked to *École Royale des Beaux Arts* (Royal School of Fine Arts), was revitalized.

There were private schools as well. Verdé, Delisle & Cie (Belgian) established a school on the grounds of Chateau de Lonrai, near Alençon, in 1857. Like Lefébure, they believed in sound technical training to produce their Alençon needle lace, Brussels application lace, Chantilly bobbin lace (mainly at Bayeaux), and *point de gaze*. Originally named the *Compagnie des Indes*, (India Company) the business had begun by selling

shawls and other goods from Kashmir. By 1851, it was also selling Brussels application shawls and in 1854, it became involved with the French lace industry. Verdé, Delisle & Cie also bought designs from Roussel, sometimes using the same design for laces of quite different techniques with very different results.[48] By 1867, new designs and remastered lacemaking technique propelled the French lace industry to the forefront of handmade lace manufacturing.[49]

Belgian lacemakers were always recognized for their skill in making lace, but for a period of time their designs came primarily from France. By the 1862 International Exhibition in London, though, five Brussels designers showed their work and three earned medals. The main trade for major Brussels firms remained application lace, but most added the handmade *point de gaze* to their repertoire. Displayed on a handkerchief by Monsieur Vanderkelen-Bresson in the 1847 London exhibition, *point de gaze* was rapidly gaining popularity.

The English East Midlands were not entirely devoid of credible lacemaking or lace patterns. Outstanding continuous bobbin lace designs were offered by Thomas Lester of Bedford (1834 -1909). His father (also Thomas or Thomazin Lester) had been a lace manufacturer and dealer since circa 1830. Thomas Lester (the son) maintained the traditional elements of Bedfordshire lace and spoke of imitating Honiton lace. He fully explored bobbin lace techniques, using different combinations of lace stitches to achieve new effects in pattern and ground. He also appealed to the Victorian sense of novelty by incorporating naturalistic floral work and exotic creatures such as ostriches, eagles in his designs.[50] After the 1851 Exhibition, Lester added the golden silk bobbin laces of Malta as part of his repertoire. It was a style of lace that had been growing in popularity since the 1830s, and their bold visual presence gradually replaced the lighter weight French

blondes. Known in time as Beds Maltese, the guipure construction was faster to produce than the prevailing staple Bucks point and thus a more profitable venture.

It wasn't only the English handmade lace industry that struggled with competitive design; English machine-made lace floundered as well. Between 1833 and 1836, John Heathcoat's agent in Nottingham, William Felkin published a series of articles in the Nottingham press "urging the necessity of a school of design if the industry was to move into 'the fancy trade' and to adopt the Jacquard attachment."[51] Government Schools of Design were launched in 1837 and ultimately both machine and handmade lace would benefit. Different schools in different locations offered different training. The Nottingham school, established in 1846, advocated a curriculum based on geometric drawing as the foundation for fashionable floral designs. These lace designs were purchased by the English machine-lace industry, the English handmade lace industry and even French manufacturers. In addition, many Nottingham designers were trained to cope with the design complexities of a Jacquard-controlled machine.[52] It was a critical industry skill. In 1856 alone, the Jacquard apparatus was attached to an additional four hundred lacemaking machines.

But rather than concentrating on the finer laces for a limited market in the manner of the French, a major arm of the English handmade lace industry chose to continue making the lace which the machines were now copying, trying to produce it more cheaply to compete with machine-made lace in price. This practice was especially true in the East Midlands.[53] A series of production compromises were made. Less refined materials were used,[54] children were employed to help keep down the cost of labor[55] and lacemakers were often restricted to making only one or two patterns, extreme familiarity building speed into production. Working conditions were kept minimal. Spinners and lacemakers

sat in damp, dark rooms in order to keep threads moist and supple. Often small and ill-ventilated, these work spaces became breeding grounds for tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other life-threatening illnesses. As the industry diminished, there were shortages of food and fuel.[56] In the end, the efforts to reduce production cost did lower the price of East Midland handmade laces, but it was at the expense of quality. Sales and reputation continued to drop. It was a commercial operation of only transient profit, and it is of little wonder that lacemakers began to drift into other fields such as straw-plaiting where the wages were higher and the hours fewer.[57]

What temporarily buoyed the British handmade lace industry was the blossoming Philanthropic Movement, formalized in 1883 as the Society for Promoting Industrial Villages. Lacemaking enclaves were an early focus. Obtaining high quality patterns-and lacemakers willing to use them, was an issue. Lacemakers often only worked the patterns of their village, despite the pattern having become inaccurate or woefully outdated to meet fashion needs.

There was another, if somewhat different impact on the English handmade lace industry. The Elementary Education Act of 1872 and subsequent Factory and Workshops Act radically improved children's prospects, but divested the handmade lace labor force of most future lacemakers.[58] On the lighter side, Liz Bartlett notes in her book *Lace Villages* that at the end of the nineteenth century, savvy elderly lacemakers in little towns such as Olney took advantage of photographers interest by posing in their doorways making lace. The potential, from the lacemaker's perspective, was that the interaction might lead to sale of the piece. It was a bit of a ploy; in reality, no self-respecting lacemaker would make lace so close to a dusty dirt road.[59]

The increasing variety of laces reflects the growth in technology, investment in

artistic design, the easing of international politics, and expanded trade. As the second half of the nineteenth century began, both handmade and machine-made laces focused on design and the need to attain technical excellence. Industry was truly being revolutionized. It was a period when machine-made laces were invented and the handmade lace industry regrouped. Less expensive lace made lace an accessible commodity, and the foundation was being laid for the lace obsession that possessed America from 1865 into the 1920s.

Chapter III:

Refashioned Antique European Lace for the Gilded Age Upper Class

Today, we think of collars as small embellishments topping a shirt or jacket, but lace collars can be grand affairs, even layered for effect, and they were fashion significant in the Gilded Age. Lace was the equivalent of jewelry. Like jewelry, it came into possession because it was inherited, received as a gift, or was self-purchased. This chapter will show that in the Gilded Age, wealthy Americans selected lace for its reinforcement of their identification with European aristocracy[60] as well as its artistic merit. It will be made clear that upper-class Americans perceived no detriment in refashioning antique lace; for them, it was no different than placing gems in a new setting. From the perspective of the American elite, refashioning enhanced the lace's inherent beauty and it is the act of refashioning that placed the American stamp on antique European lace.

Recognizing that America never had a true aristocracy but rather what Wharton termed a "social aristocracy," [61] this thesis characterizes a lace collar as aristocratic if there is strong indication it would have been worn by an American in high society. Criteria for aristocratic identification include: the quality of the lace defined as only affordable by wealthy Americans; whether the lace type had known association with European aristocracy such as blonde lace with Marie Antoinette and Alençon lace with Empress Eugenié; the historic value and age of the lace, suggesting the lace was acquired by a wealthy American traveling abroad; and for what occasion the collar would have been worn, reflecting "aristocratic" lifestyle. Consideration is also given as to how, and therefore where, an antique lace was refashioned into a collar. Fine refashioning suggests

the hand of an experienced European lacemaker, which again suggests travel abroad or finances to purchase fine lace.

Refashioning lace was not new in the Gilded Age. Handmade lace has always been treasured, but over the centuries, there was shifting preference between needle and bobbin laces; new designs and ready supply meant lace was put aside and saved rather than refashioned. The decline in handmade lacemaking that came in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries limited the availability of handmade lace; old handmade laces suddenly had fresh caché. It's not possible to assign a specific date, but the practice of refashioning older lace seemed to emerge in the 1820s when fashion silhouettes began to expand.

While it slightly predates the period of our focus, the blonde bobbin lace collar in Figure 3.1 is an excellent example of early lace refashioning. This honey-colored French silk lace was made in the 1820s or earlier, but the style suggests the collar was assembled in the 1830s, and while the blonde lace may be handmade, other components of the collar are not. Machine-made net is used as an attachment base under the tiers to create a fall (Figure 3.2). The combination of machine net with handmade lace is an example of how machine technology helped preserve handmade lace. The construction only needed average needlework skills and a little imagination to execute, suggesting it could have been fabricated in America. The lace itself came from Europe and may have been inherited, purchased in this country from a lace merchant or lace shop, or received as a gift from someone who purchased it abroad. That the lace was relatively new when it was refashioned suggests it was a recent acquisition and quickly repurposed to meet the fashion needs of a young woman.

The three tiers of handmade blonde lace in this collar show an overall pattern of

repeated, simple, stylized flowers and leaves. The motifs are outlined by an untwisted silk gimp (outline thread); the gimp is caught up in the construction of the clothwork (densely interlaced thread), half stitch (less densely interlaced thread), and honeycomb mesh, verifying that this lace is handmade. In general, the attractive sheen of the blonde lace flowers is due to the heavy silk thread used for blonde clothwork. Most motifs maximize the silk shine by being worked only in clothstitch; half stitch may appear for occasional contrast. If motifs are outlined, a single, untwisted silk thread is usually used although corded silk is also seen. Blonde lace rarely uses ornamental filling stitches, honeycomb or similar mesh and flower centers being the exception. Little has survived of blonde laces made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; their existence is recorded primarily in portraits and written records. From these, we know that blonde used airy, open grounds and light, geometric patterns, similar to mid-eighteenth century linen laces.[62]

Blonde lace was a favorite of Marie Antoinette, and her dressmaker Rose Bertin supplied the queen with dresses and accessories almost exclusively decorated with blonde lace until Marie Antoinette's execution in 1792. It became particularly fashionable for the Neoclassical dress of the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century. By the 1810s and 1820s, it was being used for flounces, veils, stoles and extravagant collars. At a time when everyone wore muslin, a blonde silk lace overdress distinguished the wealthy mistress from her maid.[63]

While 1830s day wear might rely on impossibly broad shoulders, embroidered muslin collars, fichus (a shaped scarf of diaphanous material such as muslin or lace) and pelerines (capelets), evening wear meant low necklines and deep lace frills. This blonde lace is styled as a bertha collar. A bertha is a deep collar worn by women that extended

from neck to shoulder or falling off the shoulder from a low neckline. Tiered berthas were extremely popular at this time, as evidenced by the bertha styles in Figure 3.3. Lace berthas and flounces remained a fashion constant for the second third of the nineteenth century; uncomplicated blonde lace patterns complimented the architectural lines of the fashions. Lace historian Santina Levy says, “There is no doubt that the leading lace of this period was silk blonde: it was mentioned in virtually every contemporary description of dress and it appears in many portraits.”[64] Tiered bertha collars would reemerge as fashionable in the 1890s, although the bold motifs of refashioned *point de Venise* and *point de gaze* would become the favorite lace types.

By the late 1830s and 1840s, machine-made copies were satisfying the blonde market and lacemakers were turning their skills toward Chantilly lace, also of French origin and bobbin-made. Copies of blonde silk were made by darning silk machine nets with floss silk thread. In handmade blonde, the floss silk is trapped within the ground threads; in machine-made blonde, the floss silk can be traced passing in and out of the net. Sometimes handmade blonde edging was attached to a machine-made net center; the machine-made net might be additionally decorated with separately worked blonde motifs.

The blonde lace in this collar was refashioned and worn more than thirty years before the start of the Gilded Age, yet it seems part of the *fin de siecle* period. A wealthy young woman would have worn this luxurious three-tier bertha, the association of blonde lace with Marie Antoinette making it particularly attractive to an American who wanted to be identified with European royalty. The refashioning speaks to American willingness to use whatever means necessary (in this case, combining machine-made lace with handmade lace) to repurpose lace for current fashion. It is the 1830s, and this collar stands as a harbinger of a high society fashion trend to come.

The Mechlin lace in Figure 3.4 demonstrates a different strategy for creating a modern collar from old lace: two separate pieces of the same type of lace are simply whip-stitched together. The long, narrow shape of this collar's upper band strongly suggests the lace was originally used as edging for a short sleeve; the spare motif points to a late-eighteenth or early- nineteenth-century Neoclassic dress (Figure 3.5). The lower band also was originally a straight strip of trim. The two inch depth suggests it was most likely a cuff ruffle. The gathered ends of the collar show an effort to fashion a decorative frill; cloth tape reinforcement suggests the collar was closed with a pin.

Mechlin is a Flemish town near the border between Belgium and France. A lacemaking center in the late sixteenth century, it was known for its fine bobbin lace by the mid-seventeenth century. Very similar to French and Belgian laces at the time (Binche; Valenciennes), Mechlin lace has two distinguishing characteristics: a heavier, silk gimp thread used to outline motifs and a fine, soft, white thread for clothwork. Binche and Valenciennes laces are worked in a more tightly twisted, creamy thread. The mesh that defines Mechlin lace today was developed circa 1720. It is a hexagonal mesh with twisted threads on four sides and four strand braids on two sides. (See Appendix I) In the eighteenth century, the two-thread sides were usually crossed, but in the nineteenth century, the twist was added, slightly increasing the length of the mesh. From the early to late eighteenth century, Mechlin lace used complex grounds for ornamentation; cartouches and other areas were decorated with elaborate filling stitches. With the simplistic dress of the early nineteenth century, fancy filling stitches were limited to small areas such as flower centers.

By the late seventeenth century, the name "Mechlin" was frequently used as a generic term for Flemish continuous bobbin lace (lace threads pass from clothwork to

mesh to clothwork without interruption). Its designs changed with fashion so there are no specific characteristic motifs. Mechlin lace was particularly popular in England, draping gently to offset the stiff brocades of the early to mid-eighteenth century. Trim and lappets (pendular flaps on a cap) and other headdress were common formats. It is possible that the thicker, corded gimp of the 1760s and later was an effort to imitate the crisper needle lace coming back into fashion.

There are conflicting opinions on whether or not Mechlin lace was successfully copied by machine. Kurella asserts that Mechlin cannot be accurately duplicated on machine because the thread used for handmade Mechlin is extremely fine and the resulting lace extremely delicate.[65] Gwynne, however, states that Mechlin was copied by the pusher machine from 1812 and quite successfully by the Leavers lace machine after 1890.[66] In the early twentieth-century revival, cotton thread was used for the gimp.

The average adult female neck measurement is fifteen inches. This collar's inside measurement of thirteen inches suggests that the collar could have been worn by a small woman or an adolescent girl. Collars such as these were popular in the 1850s and 1860s to soften high, round, plain necklines. Considered appropriate for informal afternoon or at-home evening wear, the collar might have been worn with a brooch or bow large enough to hide the tape. More likely, though, is that the collar was worn by a child. The collar would have been turned to open to the rear, the cloth tab edges basted inside the back opening of the dress. Figure 3.6 shows a little girl, but the collar could also have been worn by a boy as old as seven years. With the advent of half-length petticoats and ankle-length pantaloons, boys and girls in nineteenth-century America were dressed alike between the ages of three and seven. Frocks for either sex could be plain or fancy; the same colors were used, and the same trims and laces. The pantaloons could be straight,

scalloped or lace edged. In *Children in the House,* Karin Calvert states, “There were girls in very short hair, high boots and plain clothing, and boys in delicate long curls, lace-trimmed frocks, and thin leather slippers. Ribbons, bows, pink, blue ruffles, pinafores, boots, pants were all equally acceptable children’s attires.” [67] Such undifferentiated dressing created an image of innocence, which Victorian parents found reassuring.[68] (Figure 3.7)

Plain linen or muslin collars, possibly embroidered, served for harder everyday use. This fine Mechlin lace collar would have been worn for special occasions such as receiving visitors or a holiday celebration. Even if the pattern was outdated, this handmade Mechlin lace would have been valued for its extraordinary soft fineness. To perceive the motif’s small scale as appropriate for a child was intelligent recycling. That the collar was engineered from two small, relatively insignificant looking pieces suggests they were family keepsakes given new purpose.

The child’s collar in Figure 3.8 is clever, even ingenious in its assembly. The bottom one-and-three-quarter-inch edging is handmade Mechlin lace, topped by one-quarter-inch handmade bobbin *entre deux* (literally “between two”; an insertion or decorative stitching to connect two other pieces of material), topped by three-quarter-inch machine-made Valenciennes edging; the neck edge is a folded piece of machine-made net (Figure 3.9). The layers are whip-stitched together by hand, with the total depth of the collar measuring three inches. Mechlin lace was so highly valued because of its softness, fine quality, and long history that great effort was made to showcase even this small piece of lace rather than abandon one inch.

In the novel *Babbit*, George Babbit’s mother reminisces, “Georgie, you were such a little fellow at the time--my, I remember how you looked that day, with your goldie

brown curls and your lace collar..."[69] *Babbit* was published in 1922; since the novel is about George Babbit in mid-life crisis, we can suppose the character to have been born around 1882, remarkably close to author Sinclair Lewis's birth year of 1885. It would be easy to believe that Lewis was remembering his own experience wearing a lace collar as a child.

Having presentation clothing for children was something of an affectation borrowed from the European gentry that wealthy American families strove to emulate. Certainly throughout history, the arrival of a new baby has been cause for celebration. In nineteenth-century society, the baby was as much a showpiece as fine jewelry. On receiving days, the baby would be encased in a long gown draped gracefully over the arm of the mother or attending nurse; the gown's style, decoration, quantity and quality of lace, ruffles, and robings attested to the level of family wealth and standing. Such statements and affirmation were highly valued.[70] Figure 3.10 shows nineteenth century *point d'Angleterre* baby collar and cuffs used for such a purpose; it is a classic combination of bobbin lace motifs with *point de gaze* needlelace ground and needle-made rings. The inside measurement is thirteen inches, confirming that this sizing is meant for a child; the short one and one-half inch lace depth indicates a proportion suitable for a baby.

The name *point d'Angleterre* has been interpreted more than one way over the years. Some insist it is a lace made in England to be exported to the continent; others contend it is a lace made in France and Belgium to be sent to England. A third theory is that it is a term "applied to continental lace to evade export taxes on lace shipped to England."[71] It could be any of the three. In general, though, the consensus is that *point d'Angleterre* is a non-continuous bobbin lace (motif and ground are made separately) with

exotic designs. The name was used in Brussels in the early to mid-eighteenth century to denote fine Brussels lace, but it was a name also used in the late seventeenth century with no specific country of origin.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the term *point d'Angleterre* was applied to a combination of delicate Brussels bobbin lace with *point de gaze* (needle) mesh background. The assumption is that it was made in Belgium since both the motifs and mesh were often used there. It was the favorite lace of Napoleon I, and in 1895, couturier Jacques Doucet commissioned *point d'Angleterre* lace for Consuelo Vanderbilt's wedding gown to honor her groom the Duke of Marlborough's English ancestry. It was something of an ironic choice considering that there was probably nothing English about the lace other than the name, but the ivory white satin gown bore Doucet's trademark abundance of lace and publicity for the design catapulted *Maison Doucet* into American consciousness.

Jacques Doucet (French; 1853 - 1929) became a moving force encouraging the lavish use of lace on American dress. The third generation of Doucets in the business of fabrics and clothing design, he was an aspiring painter and took his artistic sensibilities into his family's couturier business. Particularly enamored with eighteenth-century France, he injected "Louis" (XIV, XV, XVI) fashion elements into his nineteenth century designs. Preferring supple silks to the stiffer taffetas and satins favored by Charles Frederick Worth and others, Doucet created fashions that were soft and sweeping, giving a woman "the illusion of fragility" even if the woman was "of cast iron nature or an ingenue of unsuspected complexities"[72] (Figure 3.11). Models of Doucet dresses were imported into New York City and used by dressmakers and carriage-trade stores such as Lord and Taylor and Arnold, Constable & Co.[73] Jacques Doucet was a known name

among wealthy Americans; they would have understood Edith Wharton's reference in *House of Mirth* when Gus Trenor asks sad Lily Bart, "Is your last box of Doucet dresses a failure?" Lily replied, "I have had to give up Doucet...I can't afford it."[74]

Doucet's use of *point d'Angleterre* lace brought it to American attention. That it was used for Consuelo Vanderbilt's wedding gown for her marriage to a duke gave it aristocratic association and that *point d'Angleterre* lace was also the favorite of Napoleon I doubled its royal caché for wealthy Americans. Even a small piece of this lace gives a baby's presentation gown extreme social significance and explains the effort to refashion.

The sumptuous beauty of *point d'Angleterre* lace can be seen in Figures 3.12 and 3.13. This lace cape could be draped with the opening in the front or the back (Figure 3.14) depending on the fashion effect desired. Draping to just above the elbow, this fine and somewhat delicate lace was meant to be viewed close up and worn over a long-sleeve dress or layered over a cloth cape to pay calls (Figure 3.15). Its purpose, of course, was to demonstrate extreme wealth and position. A woman wearing this cape would take pleasure in showing off her knowledge of Consuelo Vanderbilt's wedding gown lace and imply an intimate association.

That the motifs in this specific piece are stabilized with bars, not needle-made mesh, and that the bars sport picots, suggests that this lace was made in the eighteenth century (Figure 3.16). However, as shown in Figure 3.17, there are at least three discrepancies in the symmetry of the overall design which indicate refashioning at a later date. The invisible piecing and flawless splicing of motif suggests that refashioning was performed in Europe, either Belgium or France, and shows the hand of an accomplished lacemaker. It is the kind of impeccable work done by the Callot Soeurs.

Less commercial than the House of Worth or *Maison Doucet*, the name Callot

Soeurs is not as widely recognized, but the sisters appear in virtually every list of French fashion icons. Launched in Paris 1895, their *Maison* was particularly known for the stunning surface treatment of its creations. Antique lace was restyled and intricate embroideries executed to drape European and American élégantes, and it is this meticulous art and craft that had impact on American Gilded Age fashion. Their work demonstrated what was possible.

Having grown up in a family immersed for generations in lace and lace making, the Callot Soeurs had a well-honed appreciation of overall appearance, texture, and movement. They had intimate knowledge of the variation in designs and structure, and knew the range of laces made, how each lace looked, draped, felt against the skin, and how it interacted with fabric. Their repertoire included day wear, tailored suits, and evening dresses, but they were most famous for their eighteenth century-inspired dishabillé and luxurious evening dresses. Silk, chiffon, organdy and lace created ethereal, pastel-toned confections in filmy layers.[75] What differentiated the teagowns of Callot Soeurs from those of other couture designers is that others might use a flourish of vintage lace to decorate, but Callot Soeurs frequently used the lace to inspire the garment's total design.[76] For the Callot Soeurs, fashions were a canvas for antique lace.

Antique lace was culled from a variety of sources. The largest separate pieces often came from seventeenth-and eighteenth-century church garments that sported flounces of lace two feet deep and several feet long. More modestly sized segments could be pirated from eighteenth century skirt fronts, layers of sleeve ruffles, or elaborate collars. Lace lappets from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could be cut and pieced to convert them to more modern collars, cuffs and edgings. It was a complex task and one which required finely honed skill to do well. The antique lace might require

repairs, and the piecing and edging would need to be in harmony with the style, coloring, and design ethic of the lace. It's important to keep in mind that every lace makeover is unique, regardless of the type of lace and how it is, or was, used. A great deal depends on the technical expertise of the artist. Marie Callot Gerber (1857-1927) used her extensive knowledge of lace and lace structure to create unique fashions with antique lace. She was also able to maximize the amount of lace she used with each construction and could piece it together invisibly.[77] The effort by the Callot Soeurs to refashion lace both demonstrates and confirms the appeal of high quality refashioned lace. Their work, and the work of others with similar skill, made the *point d'Angleterre* cape the exquisite piece that it is, and helped fuel the wealthy American pursuit of handmade European antique lace to refashion.

The House of Callot would go on to lead the 1920s trend for embellishing the columnar dresses of the era. Their work demonstrated to wealthy Americans traveling to Paris that refashioned lace not only offered beauty but also provided tangible connection to the European privileged class, the previous owners of the lace. It was an association that elitist Americans sought and with which they identified. American socialite Vera de Acosta Lydig, for example, collected *gros point de Venise* lace and had Marie Callot Gerber fashion it in various articles of clothing, including the vest in Figure 3.18.

Venice was well known for its needle laces by the mid 1600s. These laces evolved from the geometric *punto in aria* and incorporated the flowing movement of the Italian baroque. They were made in two forms: *point de Venise* (Venetian flat point) and *point de Venise rose* (Venetian rose point). They share the same general characteristics, but *point de Venise rose* has, as the name implies, raised work. Heavy Venetian raised work also carries the name *gros point*. It was a favorite of Louis XIV, who loved its obvious drama.

Lighter versions of Venetian lace were created using smaller motifs and numerous inter-linked bars decorated with picot-covered rings. A variety of filling stitches lighten the appearance of the dense clothwork and padded outlines may have picot (tiny loop) frills.

Fashion changed toward the end of the seventeenth century; texture became more important than pattern. Tiny picot rings and crescents scattered among the bars became popular in a lace called *point de neige*. By 1700, lighter bobbin laces were preferred for fashion and the once prestigious Venetian lace industry was in decline. It would not regain a following until the 1850s when the bold designs of heavier laces and guipires (bobbin or needle lace motifs held in position via bars rather than mesh) became popular once again. Antique originals were cut and refashioned to meet current fashion trends and they, along with copies, formed a growing part of the needle lace market by the late 1870s. Towns such as Burano in the Venetian lagoon, Innishmacsaint and New Ross in Ireland, and various Belgian towns made "Venetian" needle laces. Some were direct copies done in fine linen thread. Others were worked in coarser thread and with mediocre technique. Raised work was often added to earlier flat points. Copies were also made in crochet and by machine. Designs and shapes were adapted to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fashions, but the variation in quality as well as method of execution further suggests why refashioned antique lace was preferable to new. That *gros point de Venise* maintained its status as a classic and timeless lace is perhaps best expressed by Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. *Grande dame* New York aristocrat Mrs. van der Luyden "still wore black velvet and Venetian point when she went into society."[78]

Both the collar in Figure 3.19 and the collar in Figure 3.20 are examples of late seventeenth century *gros point de Venise* lace. Both *gros point* laces were refashioned in the nineteenth century, their bold, showy motifs (Figure 3.21) as well as their presumed

aristocratic ancestry highly desirable. Figure 3.19's shape is irregular both in the back edge and the lappet-like ends. The telltale nineteenth century edging adequately stabilizes the motifs, but disguises edge shapes rather than displays them. The broad expanse of the lower back (ninety-six inches with a lace depth of sixteen inches) plus the generous fifty and one-half inch inner edge suggest this piece was a candidate to wear over a cape, be it for a carriage ride, visiting, or even the opera.

The opera was considered the most formal and the most opulent of occasions. In an 1890 etiquette book titled *Manners, Culture and Dress of the Best American Society,* author Richard Wells states, "A lady goes to the opera not only to see but to be seen, and her dress must be adopted with a full realization of the thousand gaslights which will bring out its merits or defects."[79] The heaviest and richest jewelry, an opulent opera cloak or wrap, and lace were considered necessary opera attire. It is easy to imagine the House of Worth providing American socialites with dresses for such an occasion. In *The Age of Innocence,* May Archer went to the opera wearing the "blue-white satin and old lace of her wedding dress"[80] which had been sent back to Worth for remodeling. Figure 3.22, on view at the Wadsworth Anthaneum, Hartford Connecticut (fall, 2009), gives another view of the *gros point de Venise* grand statement. Constructed circa 1900, the opera coat is seamlessly pieced handmade Brussels silk and linen needlelace in the style of *gros point de Venise* (Figure 3.23). The lace is said to have originally belonged to the Empress Eugenié and supports the rich design of the *gros point de Venise* collar for the most opulent occasions.

One might wear the *gros point de Venise* fichu in Figure 3.20 for dining out. Its modest size has just enough front drape to cover a bosom, the ends perhaps fastened with a brooch or simply draped over the shoulders. Wells asserts it is the American custom for

women to be modestly attired at a dinner party, in contrast to the European custom of wearing short sleeves and displaying considerable *décolletage*.[81] If the dress to be worn was a bit bare, a lace cape or shawl would provide just the right amount of coverage.

Lillian Eichler's 1922 *Book of Etiquette* documents that the lace fichu remained a recommended accessory for mature women into the 1920s. It was appropriate with a full skirt of brocaded satin, and black lace over black velvet was considered especially elegant for formal occasions. Lace could also be used by a matron to veil a skirt or sleeves, but Eichler is quite specific that lace is not for the young.[82] This dictum is in complete contrast to Wells' 1890 book of etiquette which lists lace use in detail for every occasion for both the young and the maturing woman. It is the difference of over thirty years of evolving fashion: youth seen in elaborate frill versus youth in minimalist lines.

The 1893 painting of Lydia Field Emmet (Figure 3.24) by William Merrit Chase captures the lush clothing of a young American woman at the turn of the century. The bertha collar she wears is sensually draped over rich, dark fabric customary for an evening event such as a soiree. Parallel in size and intended use, the collar in Figure 3.25 is a late-nineteenth or early-twentieth- century interpretation of seventeenth-century needle lace *point de Venise rose* with late nineteenth-century *point de gaze* elements. The overall pattern is completed eight times with a little overage toward each open edge. These edges are fabricated from motif elements (Figure 3.26) and are not mirror images; the flow of the design is only in one direction. There are two possible explanations for this. One, is that the collar was refashioned from another piece of lace, probably the continuous flow of a flounce. Following this conclusion, it becomes tempting to speculate that the clothwork was made in the seventeenth century and the refashioning took place in the late nineteenth century. However, all parts of this collar are cotton; no part of this handmade collar was

made before 1835. *Point de Venise rose* and fashion history suggest the flounce could have been made in the 1850s-1860s and fashioned into a collar at century's end.

There is a another and perhaps more plausible explanation for the lack of mirror design and non-matching collar edges. The motifs, made separately, were assembled into a pattern. Additional motifs were added to complete the circle and a half for the bertha, and the collar edges constructed from remnants. The design would flow all in one direction because that's the way the motifs were engineered. In addition, motifs could be made separately by more than one worker and then assembled. *Point de Venise rose* was made in several locations by the end of the nineteenth century. The *point de gaze* elements mentioned strongly suggest it was made in Belgium. Regardless of how it was made, this collar speaks to privileged lifestyle on many fronts: the intricate design and delicacy of the lace suggest it was expensive and it's extravangant shape speaks to upper class social purpose. Even as new lace, this *point de Venise rose* collar would have attracted a high society American.

The raised outlines and decorated brides of *gros point de Venise* and smaller scale *point de Venise rose* both evolved from *punto in aria,* the oldest of needle laces. *Punto in aria,* literally "stitches in the air," references the transition from fabric-based lace to freestanding lace. It is the combination of *reticella* and *punto in aria* that is seen in so many collars in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century portraits. In the early seventeenth century, the initial pointy shape of *punto in aria* softened and an alternate, more arch-like shape appeared. Both pointed and scalloped *punto in aria* used repeated or alternating designs within their shapes, always with a line of symmetry through the center, whether the design was geometric or floral.

Figure 3.27 is a choker collar constructed from quintessential early-seventeenth-

century *punto in aria* needle lace. The motifs are fleshed with needle-interlaced ornamentation along the geometrically positioned bars; fancy fillings are created by the tight stitches of the clothwork as well as the use of buttonholed bars. Picots appear on both bars and motif components; Figure 3.28 shows the method of linking the components. Most likely secured in the back with a ribbon, this collar would have acted as a "necklace" above a high, plain neckline. The choker collar was being worn in the 1880s and became highly popular in the 1890s through the beginning of the twentieth century. One story is that the style was introduced by Princess Alexandra of Wales (1844-1925) to hide a scar.[83] Another suggestion is that it is related to military attire.

The differing coloration indicates that this collar is constructed from more than one piece of lace and raises the question of whether all components of this collar date to the seventeenth century or whether some pieces may have been made in the nineteenth century to complete the design. The various patterns could be duplicated and some effort to do so was taking place at the end of the nineteenth century. However, two points suggest that all of the components were made in the same time period. First, the designs are remarkably consistent in appearance and execution. Second, the thread is 2-ply, S-twist linen thread throughout. *Punto in aria* made in the late nineteenth century would have been made with cotton thread.

Whether to include this *punto in aria* choker collar with the upper class lace collars or place it in the chapter of middle class lace collars was a matter of some consideration. It raises the question, "What differentiates upper class lace collars from middle class lace collars?" The method of refashioning is one criteria, fine laces requiring an accomplished and expensive lacemaker. The refashioning of the choker collar is simple and could have been accomplished by anyone with good sewing skills. Did that make it a

second-tier lace collar? The color variation might have had questionable appeal to members of the upper circle who were used to having only the finest lace. Did that make it a second-tier lace collar? The point is arguable, but in the end, the decision to include it with the aristocratic lace collars was based on who had access to this lace to wear it. The lace is very old, roughly three hundred years at the time it was refashioned and in excellent condition. Because it is a unique antique lace, the components, if not the completed refashioned collar, would have been acquired in Europe, signaling the purchase by a wealthy American traveling abroad rather than a more pedestrian home-based purchase.

It is for similar reasons that this chapter on upper-class lace collars includes the collar seen in Figure 3.29. It is Flemish lace, probably from the late seventeenth or very early eighteenth centuries, and like the *punto in aria* choker, the components were most likely purchased abroad. Not all lace refashioning is elegant. Figure 3.30 shows the rudimentary running stitch used to connect the two pieces in the nineteenth century; it is clumsy, suggesting a dressmaker's hand or even home construction. The upper piece was once a smaller collar with a maximum depth of nine and one-quarter inches and the lower portion, four inches deep, was most likely a trim. Note the superior execution of the clothwork, bars and picots on the upper lace versus the distortion and rough fillings of the lower piece. Wear may account for some of the difference in appearance, but this juxtaposition illustrates the potential range of quality in any lace type. However, the lace itself was so rare and valuable that wearing it would have been considered a fashion coup regardless of the condition or assembly.

"Flemish" is a general name given to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century bobbin laces made in the in the Low Countries, particularly Flanders. Flanders, along with

Holland and assorted other provinces, made up the Netherlands. They were closely tied to Milan, which is also known for very early bobbin lace. In the seventeenth century and early eighteenth centuries both Flanders and Milan were controlled for a time by the Spanish Hapsburgs. Their bobbin laces share similarities including serpentine bands or ribbons of clothwork to form the designs, and backgrounds of either mesh or bars. The laces began to diverge in the late seventeenth century and by the 1680s, Flanders favored a symmetrical style of tiny individual motifs versus Milan's heavier baroque style of flowing, backward-curving motifs.

The French design influence was felt in Flanders in the late seventeenth century. Lacemaking towns such Brussels and Mechlin began to develop their own lace characteristics by inventing new ways of decorating clothwork, new ways of joining motifs, and new techniques for carrying threads. But in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, bobbin lacemaking as a craft was new, and Flemish lace stands as the direct ancestor of most bobbin laces known today. Its historic roots alone would have made the Flemish lace collar desirable; its age means it could only have been worn by Europeans of the privileged class. Again, this elitist aura with which wealthy Americans identified lent tremendous motivation to refashion these pieces and show them off.

Layered above a cloth cape, the relatively bold design of the Flemish lace would be visible from a distance, making it an excellent candidate to wear on a carriage ride. Like the opera, carriage rides were an opportunity for Gilded Age grand display and while this particular Flemish lace lacks the fineness needed for the close inspection permitted at the opera house, it makes a sufficiently strong visual statement for the carriage ride. To leisurely drift along a fashionable city street or park lane in the family landau, a private brougham or even a small coupé was a statement by itself. An occasion to see and be

seen, Wells insists the dress materials for a carriage ride could not be too opulent, and silks, velvets and laces with rich jewelry and costly furs are all appropriate.[84] In her autobiogrpahy *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton states that the afternoon carriage drive was a regular diverson in Newport and it was customary to dress as elegantly as if attending the races at Auteuil or Ascot.[85]

While the *punto in aria* and Flemish lace might be treasured because of their venerable antique status, other laces were worn because of the ancestry of the lace type, even if the lace itself was new. Two such lace types were Alençon and Honiton.

The needle-made lace mesh now known as Alençon was introduced sometime between 1720 and 1730. It is not certain that it was actually invented in Alençon, France and it was used in laces made elsewhere, but it is this mesh in combination with other lace characteristics that defines Alençon. In contrast, the Alençon designs (clothwork and overall shape) vary with contemporary vogue. Figure 3.31 is not a refashioned collar in the sense that it is older lace reengineered into a second use. It is, if you will, a refashioned lace type in that it maintains the classic characteristics of Alençon lace. It also demonstrates an innovation of the later nineteenth century Alençon: horse hair is used to support the picot edging (Figure 3.32). The filament bends at an angle and negotiates gentle curves, but is cut and temporarily discontinued when the curve is a steep horseshoe shape. The filament allows cleaner edges and a more dense array of shapes while adding physical support to the overall piece of lace. In a fashion environment where display was increasingly important, lace construction such as this would help the lace show well and boost its desirability.

Alençon lace was copied by the pusher machine from 1812-1870 and by the

Leavers machine in 1838. Both machine-made versions required hand-finishing and the Leavers Alençon was reported to be more expensive than handmade Alençon.[86] The French handmade lace industry made Alençon something of a *cause celebre* in the 1840s when fashion was beginning to renew its interest in lace. As mentioned in the second chapter, firms such as Videcoq & Simon, Auguste Lefébure, and Verdé, Delisle & Cie all trained designers and lacemakers to produce fine Alençon lace, and competed successfully against the more rapidly produced machine-made Alençon. Today's lace industry still trades on the name Alençon although the machine-made products do not resemble the original handmade laces and small pieces of handmade Alençon lace sell for outrageous prices.[87]

Alençon was the official court lace of Louis XVI and after the French Revolution was reestablished in this honored position by Napoleon I. He wore a small ruff and cravat of Alençon lace when he was crowned Emperor in 1804, and Josephine wore the same lace in a standing collar.[88] Alençon was a favorite lace of the Empress Eugenie,[89] and it is one of a handful of laces whose designs and execution maintained a consistent level of quality over the centuries. This imperial and royal lineage would make Alençon lace a highly desirable acquisition and fashion statement for wealthy Americans aligning themselves with European aristocracy.

The late-nineteenth-century needle lace Alençon collar in Figure 3.31 has matching cuffs. In shape, the Alençon collar is shy of a full semicircle; the slight slant of the short ends indicate it was meant to attach at the shoulders. Thus draped, the twelve and a quarter inch circumference of the inner neckline shows that this collar was worn roughly one to two inches away from the base of the neck, possibly to leave room for a separate, high collar. When worn, it would have given a similar presentation to the collar and cuffs

of Figure 3.33, a formal reception dress.

Visiting was a major form of amusement in the nineteenth century. One mode was a protocol established by the wealthy: receiving days. A letter of general invitation was sent out to desired company announcing what day(s) the hostess was available. The hostess would be appropriately dressed and prepared to receive guests.

> "On Tuesday afternoons--Tuesday being Mrs. Pontellier's reception day--there was a constant stream of callers--women who came in carriages or in the street cars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted. A light-colored mulatto boy, in dress coat and bearing a diminutive silver tray for the reception of cards, admitted them. A maid, in white fluted cap, offered the callers liqueur, coffee, or chocolate, as they might desire. Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, remained in the drawing room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors. "[90]

The scene above takes place in *The Awakening,* first published in 1899. Author Kate Chopin stages this reception day in a well-to-do home in the New Orleans French Quarter, but it could have been enacted anywhere in this country or even abroad. According to the etiquette author Wells, a hostess should choose a dress plain in color but of rich fabric, such as silk, in order to do honor to her visitors but not outshine them. A modest amount of lace and jewelry was allowed.[91] For this, the Alençon collar would be ideal as would the Honiton collar in Figure 3.34.

Similar in dimension although more angular in shape, the Honiton lace collar shows an abundance of stylized flowers and leaves that exude unsophisticated exuberance; the slight variations from one motif to the next offer charm (Figure 3.35). The English rose is created from ribbon-like clothwork strips and there is a suggestion of a shamrock, a frequent Honiton motif. The nineteenth century innovation of gimp thread outlines flower

petals and provides leaf rib accents. A variety of bars is used to connect motifs, including a braid, a two-thread twist, wrapped bands, and bars with loose buttonhole stitch.

It is interesting to compare this collar's two edgings. While both edgings repeat the circular shapes of the collar motifs, there is marked difference in visual impact. The loose, almost haphazard weave of the neckline edging is soft physically and in appearance. Its loose structure may have been intended to accommodate a ribbon for tying the collar around the neck. The three-lobed outer edging echoes the clover motif, providing an extension of the overall design of the collar. The relatively tight interlacing of linen thread adds a certain formality, but the execution is unrefined. The difference in edging style is a reminder that Honiton is a part-lace; that is, it is made in parts and then assembled, and the parts may be created by more than one lacemaker, as is undoubtedly true with this collar. In the nineteenth century, motifs could be individually chosen by the customer and assembled by the lace merchant to fashion veils, collars and other wearable pieces.[92] Wealthy Americans traveling abroad would have had access to this service.

Honiton is a non-continuous bobbin lace with roots that date back to the seventeenth century. It was dismissed in the first half of the nineteenth century as a less sophisticated "country" lace because of its design ethic based on stylized floral sprigs, usually of roses, with amorphous petals and vague leaves. Eighteenth-century Honiton has a slightly softer feel and somewhat fuzzy appearance because the thread used was whiter and softer than Brussels thread. Occasionally, Flemish thread was used in England, but it was very expensive and hard to obtain.

Honiton lace is often compared with Brussels bobbin lace, which it resembles. The English lace is often criticized for inconsistent quality, sometimes even in the same piece. Part of the difficulty is not specifically with the lace but the English lace industry.

Brussels was a major city, linked to Paris and the French Court. The lace workmanship was strictly supervised, thread supplied, and trained designers provided patterns. By comparison, there was no large body setting standards for Devon-made lace; thread and patterns were what the cottage Devon lacemakers could devise. In addition, Devon was a distance from London, and the English aristocracy less obsessed with lace than their French counterparts. Thus, the motivation for excellence in craftsmanship and the inspiration for new designs, were missing.

Despite the 1816 establishment of John Heathcoat's machine-net factory in Tiverton that provided an inexpensive background for Honiton appliqué, the Honiton lace industry struggled. Queen Victoria tried to help the industry by commissioning a flounce and veil of Honiton lace for her wedding to Prince Albert. These pieces were subsequently worn at family christenings and weddings and it was hoped that the Royal Endorsement would bring a fresh desire for opulent fashion. The Honiton lace industry did revive for awhile, but over the course of the nineteenth century, its fortune waxed and waned. The demands of the 1850s and 1860s resulted in hasty and poorer quality work; by the 1870s, Honiton lacemaking was again in a slump. There were only a limited number of lacemakers to satisfy the sweeping lace revival launched in the late 1880s.

Fortunately, Honiton handmade lace had two champions. The first was Lady Trevelyan. Her role was primarily philanthropic, but she and her husband were close friends of botanist John Ruskin. Exposed to Ruskin's knowledge of plants, Lady Trevelyan "produced some lovely naturalistic lace designs which showed a deep understanding of both flowers and of the techniques of lacemaking."[93] Her artistic concepts brought a level of sophistication to Honiton lace pattern. Lady Trevelyan's design assistance helped buoy this once thriving lacemaking center.

Mrs. C. E. Treadwin of Exeter was also a leading figure in the Devon lace industry. A devotee of the dense laces of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, she advocated assembling Honiton lace motifs in the guipure technique rather than applying them to machine-made or handmade net ground as was the current custom.[94] "Guipure" has had more than one definition over time, but in the seventeenth century when it was first popular, guipure referred to lace whose motifs were held in place by brides (bars) rather than net. Motifs touch each other directly or at least huddle in close proximity, and the overall effect is intense design. Guipure lace went out of favor in the eighteenth century when handmade meshes developed, but was highly popular again in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries when fashion preferred bold pattern. Thomas Lester, an accomplished lace designer in the British Midlands was promoting Beds Maltese, another guipure lace, and guipure laces were being designed in LePuy, France. The guipure style of lace would have a major, positive impact on the handmade lace industry when lace was revived as an accessory in the mid-1880s and for the next thirty years. Mrs. Treadwin's fashion sense kept Honiton lace desirable and competitive further into the century.

In *House of Mirth,* Lily Bart "consulted the little jeweled watch among her laces."[95] By placing them together in the same drawer, Wharton subtly points to the equal monetary and emotional value shared by laces and jewels. The two were considered interchangeable adornment, and the choice was based on what a lady might own, and if both, her preference for the occasion. The comment, so casually made, also reminds us that women of financial substance and upper class breeding possessed multiple laces, and while some, like jewelry, were occasion-specific, many, like jewelry, were interchangeable and had flexible application. Of course social position and wealth, or lack of it, dictated

the amount and quality of lace, because in the nineteenth century, it was not just the very wealthy American "aristocracy" who wore lace. Many fine pieces adorned women determined to be stylish regardless of financial or social status. These included refashioned antique laces, less costly new laces, and lace simply less opulent.

Figure 3.36 is *point de France*, a needle lace that is a less opulent refashioned antique. Tiny holes decorate the clothwork and the raised cordonnet above the flat bands is used as a design element, a French characteristic. The abundance of bars covered with buttonhole stitch and decorated with picots almost gives the impression of a net.

One of the identifying characteristics of French design is symmetry, often arranged around a central motif. It is not present in this piece. This, in combination with the flow of filling stitches without separation (a characteristic of the early eighteenth century) and what appears to be an undeveloped design style, suggests that this *point de France* is from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth cantury. The fashioning of this lace into a collar, however, is nineteenth century. Both outer edgings show a physical integrity of thread and structure that is much newer than the actual lace. The original *point de France* was worked with very fine thread and with very delicate, ornate motifs; it was worn until the end of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, a similar picot-decorated hexagonal background and similar filling stitches were used for large-scale household furnishing laces. The difference in scale is critical for identification; it also highlights the fineness of the older *point de France,* suggesting why it would be precious and refashioned for use.

Point de France came about because of Jean Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's finance minister. In 1665, he ordered French manufacturers to start producing lace similar to that being made in Venice and Flanders. Until then, the French aristocracy was pouring its

money over the border in order to purchase this seductive ornamentation from foreign sources. Colbert's intent was to keep France's money in France. The royal manufactories of Alençon, Sedan, Rheims, Aurillac and other old lacemaking centers with a cadre of professional needleworkers rose to the task. *Point de France* was launched and worn until the end of the 18th century.

Colbert brought in designers and Venetian workers to instruct the French lacemakers in needle lace. At first, French needle lace merely imitated the Venetian designs; in time, French laces developed a character of their own. In the manner of engraver Jean Bérain the Elder (1640 –1711) these designs initially consisted of tiny motifs on buttonhole-stitched-covered bars from circa 1670 to the early eighteenth century. At that point, formal arrangements of exotic flowers became popular, and the background became a more structured hexagonal mesh covered on all sides with buttonhole stitches and decorated with picots.

This *point de France* lace collar would have been appropriate draped across or strategically tucked in the front of a bodice for casual entertaining. In *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton wrote, "It was usual for ladies who received in the evenings to wear what were called 'simple dinner dresses': a close-fitting armor of whale-boned silk, slightly open at the neck, with lace ruffles filling in the crack, and tight sleeves with a flounce uncovering just enough wrist to show an Etruscan gold bracelet or a velvet band."[96] With a fourteen and one-half inch inner edge and modest depth of two and three-quarter inches, it could also have been worn as a frill (Figure 3.37) or simple accent collar (Figure 3.38). With the pretty ends facing front, it could also have been fastened with a brooch over a plain, high-necked dress. While *point de France* lace in general would have been of interest to the American aristocracy, this specific refashioned lace collar might

not. It is modest in visual impact for a wealthy social group bent on display, but is included with this grouping of aristocratic laces because of its historic heritage.

To this point, collars have been presented that either featured refashioned antique lace or new lace with antique roots. There was also lace worn by the American privileged class that did not have antique roots but had other qualities to commend it. One was *point de gaze*. *Point de gaze* emerged circa 1850 and was the Belgian solution to making carefully executed needle lace with less labor intensive construction. Clothwork of loose buttonhole stitch and cordonnets (outlines) were fastened with spaced buttonhole stitch rather than numerous time-consuming tight stitches.

Often compared to delicate (and expensive) French laces such as Alençon and Argentan, *point de gaze* is known for its grandiose splendor. It is similar to eighteenth-century Brussels needlepoints although its outlines are more pronounced and the clothwork is more loosely worked. Raised rose petals started to be used circa 1860; the name *rose point de gaze* or Brussels *rose point* references the three dimensionally of the lace, not the flower. Large pieces of *point de gaze* such as shawls were made in parts, generally by more than one lacemaker. The completed pieces were then assembled on a master pattern by others. By dividing the labor, no one person had all of the information to complete a piece, a deterrent to design pirating.

The *point de gaze* collar seen in Figures 3.39 and 3.40 is certainly an elaborate statement; its bold, pendular shape would have been layered over another piece of lace to go visiting as in Figure 3.41. It is interesting to compare it to Figure 3.42, another *point de gaze* collar. While the motifs of this second collar have a late-nineteenth-century art nouveau sensibility about them, the style of the collar and the simplicity of the *point de gaze* lace suggest an 1850s date of construction. The points created by the upturned lilies

are a clever reference to Van Dyke points, popular at the time; its shape indicates it was worn around the neck to soften a jewel neckline. The temptation is to assign this modest-sized collar to the middle class, but the artistic design and the fine handmade execution place the Van Dyke collar with the other aristocratic collars worn by a wealthy American who could have afforded its excellent craftsmanship. For the middle class, collars of this Peter Pan style were of far more affordable machine-made lace, embroidered net or embroidered muslin.

The intricate detail and bold visual statement of *point de gaze* kept it highly popular into the early twentieth century. The contrast of the execution and overall pattern of two collars of the same lace, gives perspective to the evolution of a lace type over fifty years.

Chantilly lace is another nineteenth-century invention. The Chantilly fichu in Figure 3.43 displays the naturalistic designs for which Chantilly is known, including the characteristic half-stitch for clothwork, the Lille point ground, the popular honeycomb filling (Figure 3.44) and the black coloring. The gimp is “captured” by the ground mesh and continuous within a small group of shapes, and occasionally provides an accent when inserted into a motif via needle. A second piece of gimp has been added at the top of the loop to add visual weight to the bottom of the teardrop shape.

In the early ninteenth century, the town of Chantilly produced blonde lace. By the 1840s, black lace was the rage and it remained popular into the 1860s. The best black silk laces were made at Chantilly, Bayeux, and Caen in France, and Enghien and Grammont in Belgium. Leading centers of black silk lace also manufactured less expensive versions, and black silk lace was made elsewhere, including Buckinghamshire, England, the Le Puy area of France, the Ligurian Coast of Italy, and Spain. Most black lace was imitation

"Chantilly" bobbin lace, and while it never had the lightness of fine handmade laces nor could it imitate the naturalistic shading of the 1860s, Chantilly lace was also successfully copied as embroidered net. Black lace was so popular that manufacturers used a wide range of black thread to accommodate different markets; in addition to silk, cotton and even wool was used.

Various machines are able to make close copies of Chantilly lace. The clearest distinguishing feature is the gimp thread. In machine-made, it is often darned in by hand. Another sign of the machine-made is the presence of two cut ends; handmade lace usually has only one cut end.

The ability to manufacture a stable black dye became important. Until this time, dyes were extracts from natural sources such as plants or animals, but in 1856, W.H. Perkins received a patent for aniline dyes. They were based on coal tar derivatives mixed with acid. The first, known as Perkins purple in England and mauve in France, was the first of many bright, if somewhat garish colors used to tint cloth. In the 1860s, a chemical black dye was introduced and widely used, even though it had a tendency to fade into a rusty green color. This fugitive coloring is seen in many lace pieces from the 1860s and 1870s, after which new, improved dyes were developed.

The full skirts of the 1850s and 1860s required huge flounces and shawls and Chantilly lace was often the lace of choice for Americans. Black lace was popular over purple, pink, and orange fabric. Chantilly was also one of the favorite laces of the French court during this same time period but its market virtually disappeared when the Second Empire collapsed in 1870. Chantilly lace reappeared in the 1890s. Some Chantilly lace had been made earlier and simply stored until there was renewed interest and new Chantilly lace was also made, although often with coarser thread and slightly stiffer

versions of earlier designs.

The Chantilly fichu is a lovely example of the finely detailed naturalistic design and black coloring typical of Chantilly lace. Even this modest-sized piece exudes an aura of luxury. When young New York aristocrats May Welland and Newland Archer married in *The Age of Innocence*, Newland's mother wore a Chantilly veil,[97] and May's aunt Mrs. Lovell Mingott, wore black Chantilly lace over lilac satin[98] (Figure 3.45). More than just a literary detail, the specific mention of Chantilly lace worn by wealthy women at an august occasion is testimony to the American regard for Chantilly as an aristocratic lace.

May's wedding gown was embellished with old lace, but brides of the Gilded Age also used beautifully executed embroidered net. The embroidered net industry, particularly the French and Belgian firms, prospered with the fashion demands of the 1850s and 1860s. As usual, Paris led the way on fashion, decorating dresses, shawls, and lappets. Lyons produced elaborate silk embroidery on silk net; other centers included Calais, Lunéville, and in Normandy, Lorraine and the Vosges. Quality varied in execution and detail, but France's unwavering concern for design and awareness of fashion extended even to embroidered nets; it enabled them to retain a large share of the lace market, despite the competition from handmade laces and of the well-designed French machine lace. In England, the main center for embroidered net was Nottingham and London marketed tambour-decorated (fine chain stitch embroidery) high-class piece goods.

The wedding gown in Figure 3.46 belongs to the Berkshire County Historical Society and was on display at Ventfort Hall in Lenox, Massachusetts in 2009. The gown was worn by Josephine Boardman when she married Senator Winthrop Murray Crane in 1906. This dress is a sumptuous combination of quilted satin, embroidery, a full satin train lined with another layer of satin, lace inserts in the skirt and a tulle flounce. Figure

3.47 is a close-up of the beautiful hand-embroidered net lace trim which was fashioned into a collar for the dress. The same hand-embroidered net is used to cap the satin sleeve; to trim the lower edge of the sleeve with a wide band; to line the inside of the sleeve; and as a choker collar. It is not known whether the net is handmade or machine-made, but the detailing of the embroidery speaks to high quality needlework and it is used lavishly. It is an opulent gown that speaks to wealth and high-profile status. Mrs. Crane would go on to be a cofounder of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

This chapter presented a selection of lace collars worn by American high society during the Gilded Age. The collars demonstrate a range of styles, lace types, ages, and costume purposes. Lace histories validate individual lace value and support the choice to refashion antique lace into a Gilded Age collar where applicable. Quotes from novels helped place lace collars in social context, and references to both textile and costume history synthesized the overarching theme of handmade European lace infused into American culture during the Gilded Age. These refashioned collars document that lace types such as blonde, *point d'Angleterre* and *point de Venise* laces were particularly attractive to wealthy Americans because of their direct association with Europeans of the privileged class. Other lace types such as Flemish and *punto in aria* were worn by wealthy Americans because of venerable history; pieces were assumed to have been worn by Europeans of distinguished ancestry. Other laces might have been new-made but their lace type had royal association such as Alençon, official lace of the French court.

The effort and finances spent in collecting and refashioning handmade European lace are a testimony to the laces' attraction for wealthy Americans. Certainly European lace had an exotic air, a romance with historic roots. Regardless of reason, wealthy Americans identified with European royalty and others of the privileged class and used

antique handmade European lace as a symbol of that identification. Edith Wharton frequently used lace to convey wealth and social position in her novels. In *House of Mirth,* for example, Mrs. Selden is said to have "an understanding of old lace."[99] Mrs. Selden was no longer affluent by New York society terms, but the description conveys she had an aristocratic heritage, was well-bred and refined. Only someone who had been raised in luxury, surrounded by expensive handmade lace, would be familiar with various types.

Chapter IV:

Lace Collars for the Rising Middle Class

In *Mrs. Astor's New York*, Eric Homberger states that "America's love affair with the superrich was born in the decade after the Civil War when there was a strong American commerce in images of celebrity."[100] The new phenomena of photography played a key role, with Sunday newspapers featuring images of entertainers and figures in society by photographers such as Byron, Sarony, and Mora.[101] Hostesses and especially mothers of eligible daughters encouraged this attention, quick to appreciate the value of flattering social visibility.[102] Thus, even in this early time of American fashion marketing, the rising middle class had ample opportunity to be aware of how society dressed.[103]

Fashion makes a woman feel special[104] and for the Gilded Age rising middle class woman being fashionable created an aura of luxury that could transport her beyond "drudgery, bills, and the humdrum of everyday."[105] However, being fashionable came with a certain anxiety[106] especially in the context of the American mass market, where fashion demanded constant change and incessant newness.[107] Wearing last year's hat or costume suggested an inability to buy new, a financial restriction that aspiring social climbers were loathe to admit.[108] Women sought not only to gain wealth but to achieve status, and people feared being left out or scorned because they didn't appear equal to others in material comfort.[109] In this period of intense social competition and struggle for satisfying identity, lace collars were a useful tool for the middle class; affordable and easy to obtain, they could quickly update older garments.

This chapter shows that the American middle class copied the American upper

class's commitment to wearing handmade lace, demonstrating that handmade lace, European or otherwise, had become part of American culture. As with the previous chapter, a selection of lace collars from the National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., are presented. Shape, size and lace type are again used to interpret function, and individual lace developments are traced. What is different is that the European handmade laces included in this chapter have no connection to European aristocracy or old wealth. Instead, the middle class made liberal use of machine-made lace and had a broad interpretation of what constituted handmade lace; this will be discussed within the context of individual collars. Sources that inspired American middle-class lace consumerism, as well as information regarding lace venues, will be presented.

The middle class was motivated to appear refined and socially sophisticated. To know what to do when showed breeding; a *faux pas* meant social disaster. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham*[110] for example, the financially comfortable but socially awkward Laphams accept an invitation to pay a call on the old Boston, old monied Coreys. This sets off a flurry of visits to the dressmaker and grave debate about which waistcoat, which cravat and pantaloons should be worn by Colonel Lapham; in the end, the Laphams seek advice from a book on etiquette. It would have been similar to the one penned by Richard Wells in 1890. *Manners, Culture and Dress of the Best American Society* was written as a protocol guide for the *fin de siecle* nouveau riche and rising middle class. Identifying virtually every conceivable social situation, the book specifies appropriate tactics, including how to dress. Wells warns,"A lady might wear the costliest silks..., adorn herself with laces from Brussels...yet still, in appearance, be essentially vulgar."[111] And appearances were everything.

Both Mrs. Corey and Mrs. Lapham would have been pleased to wear the delicate

rosaline collar in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Rosaline is a small scale nineteenth-century bobbin lace with roots in Italy. The collar displays typical rosaline motif elements of small flowers and short scrolls. Tiny holes decorate the fine tape-like clothwork, and tiny stitch-covered rings accent both flowers and the decorative mesh. A commendable effort to translate seventeenth-century Venetian needle lace into nineteenth-century bobbin lace, rosaline was highly popular during the Gilded Age. It has no European aristocratic associations, for which reason it was not included in the chapter on aristocratic collars, but this specific handmade collar might have been worn for a quiet supper at home by a wealthy socialite simply by virtue of it being pretty. It might also have been a special occasion piece for someone of more modest means (Figure 4.3). It is an especially romantic piece; the gentle scallops would have draped across a scoop-neck bodice front. Who wore rosaline lace and for what purpose depended on the design and quality of the individual piece.

Both rosaline and rosaline *perlée* (little tight hard button rose ornamentation) lace were copied by the Schiffli embroidery machine from 1881 forward. While the motif shapes and spatial relationships remained, Schiffli's chemical version had far fewer bars, and the clothwork was only in lock stitch. There was no subtlety, no combination of loose and relatively dense linen stitch to create shading, and the raised circles were made by oversewing rather than buttonhole stitch. Bars were made with a simple jump stitch, not interlaced. The small holes decorating the clothwork are visible in the Schiffli version and there is some attempt at decorative filling mesh. Rosaline's handmade manufacture is particularly associated with the Alost district of East Flanders (Belgium) but it was copied in both Italy and France. A type of rosaline lace was made in the Lace School of Palestrina near Venice, Italy, in the early twentieth century. Here, rosaline was sometimes

combined with Burano lace characteristics.

Of fine quality, delicate and feminine, this rosaline collar might well have caught the eye of a wealthy American socialite. Even if it was not antique with European aristicratic roots, that it was handmade gave an aura of elitism, making it desirable to someone in the rising middle class seeking to imitate wealthy lifestyle.

A needle lace, Burano lace shares many technical characteristics with Alençon lace including clothwork of detached buttonhole stitches along a "straight return" and a wide variety of fancy filling stitches based on variations and combinations of interlacing and buttonhole stitches. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 are of an example of circa early-nineteenth-century Burano lace that has been refashioned. The clothwork is of flowing, stylized flowers with slightly raised outlines; their relatively large size gives the lace a somewhat heavy look, although the space between motifs lightens the general appearance. In some places, the motif is appliquéd onto the mesh, in other places, the mesh is attached to the outline of the motif. This piece uses bars covered with buttonhole stitch as a base for decorative elements, as well as tiny holes in the clothwork, probably to imitate Alençon lace.

Looking at the two ends, it becomes quickly apparent that the collar is not symmetrical, indicating that it was pieced from lace originally made for another purpose. There is, however, a repeating pattern, most easily detected by beginning with the stylized leaf in the lower left corner and progressing up through the sinuous vine. This pattern is repeated roughly two and one half times, with the short edges composites of motif elements. Considering the consistent elements in the repeats, and the length of the overall pattern, the original lace was, in all likelihood, a length of some sort, and quite probably a flounce. The piecing is invisible, taking place behind the clothwork. It suggests

the hand of a professional lacemaker, many of whom turned to refashioning old lace when the market for new handmade lace dwindled in response to competition from machine-made lace. The center back has slightly less depth than the ends. The circle is two-thirds complete, suggesting that it was worn across the back, the front edges attached to an open jacket as in Figure 4.6. The lace-over-cloth outerwear is similar in concept to the *point d'Angleterre* and *point de Venise* capelets in the previous chapter. The Burano collar is of shorter length, lending a more youthful air, and the lace is less opulent, suggesting upper middle class rather than American privileged class. Still, it is handmade and has been refashioned and worn.

Burano is an island in the lagoons near Venice. Its lacemaking history dates back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and includes drawnwork and embroideries as well as both bobbin and needle laces. Burano lace is a distinctive style of needle lace that went out of favor in the early eighteenth century along with other needle laces of the time. It resurfaced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries although it was made in limited quantity and simplified form. By the mid-nineteenth century Burano lace was considered all but extinct. The establishment of the new Burano Lace School in 1872 revived the Burano lace industry. Initially, the designs were copies from the early nineteenth century; in time, the Burano Lace School reproduced designs from a variety of earlier laces including seventeenth-century *point de Venise rose* and fine mid-eighteenth-century French laces.

The Gilded Age upper class considered Burano lace, an imitator of other needle laces, as suitable primarily for household goods. Large amounts of Burano lace tablecloths and bed linens were exported to the United States especially for Neiman Marcus[112] a store that catered to the more affluent customer. The advertisement of Burano lace-

trimmed linens by Neiman Marcus and other stores made Burano lace a familiar and tantalizing name to the middle class customer, encouraging use of Burano lace in whatever format available such as the refashioned collar. The middle class came to regard the use of household lace as a lifestyle embellishment, reinforced by magazine articles such as "Pretty Laces for the Dining Table" in the February 1900 *Ladies Home Journal.* (Figure 4.7)[113] In addition, advertising by Neiman Marcus and similar enterprises identified the department store as a viable and reliable source for purchasing lace.

The American department store was truly a child of the Industrial Revolution. It was key in providing a variety of laces for a variety of uses for the entire American social strata, and its growth was aided by technological advances. This included transportation that encouraged masses of people to visit the city, as well as street cars and electric street lights to help them on their way once there. By the 1890s, rural Americans and immigrants were flooding into the cities, and "the big stores," as they were called, launched into frequent expansion. In *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class,* Jan Whitaker comments that by 1910, the consumption of women's ready-to-wear clothing had reached full scale, forcing stores to add more space.[114] The American standard of living was on the rise, and people had more money to spend on clothing and household goods. Improved living conditions freed up resources once drained by constant illnesses.[115]

Many of the big stores had started as smaller enterprises specializing in dry goods (cloth and simple ready-to-wear items). Gradually, they expanded the variety of their stock, creating "departments" (sometimes referred to as "sections"). Initially, these items were clothing related, including gloves, hats, footwear, and trimming such as ribbons and

laces. In time, merchandise ran the gamut, from menswear and books to bicycles, food, and more. Services were also added, including savings banks, photography studios, travel bureaus, and restaurants.[116] An article in an 1890 issue of *Dry Goods Economist* said, "It would not surprise anybody if these big bazaars advertised next that they took in washing, or sold real estate, painted original Corots and Millets in quantities to suit, or personally conducted parties to the Holy Land."[117]

This combined variety and quantity of goods would seem a treasure trove to the rising middle class, but beyond the veritable cornucopia, the department store also offered a precious service to the new, inexperienced shopper: confidence. There was no need to know a variety of shops-or their quality or honesty-to make purchases. Fledgling customers were reassured by the department store's capacious stock. Prices were often less than in specialty shops because the "big stores" bought quantity, insisted on cash to minimize loss, and banked on the synergy of display to encourage multi-item purchases. Then, too, there was familiarity in the holistic approach to shopping. Books on American consumer history tend to quantify the department store as a specialty store that grew by adding a diverse range of goods. In concept, though, the department store is more a small town general store that mushroomed, and it played a key role in educating the American consumer.

Gilded Age novels sometimes use lace as a marker of aspiring middle class financial, social, and cultural status. In *Sister Carrie,* (Theodore Dreiser) first published in 1900, Carrie has her first encounter with a city department store when desperately seeking employment. She marvels at the variety of articles available, including laces. Whether the laces were piece goods or yardage of trim, handmade or machine-made would have depended on the quality of the store, but that these items were novel quickly paints

Carrie as unsophisticated and lower class. Indeed, Carrie's later advancement in fashion sense is indicated when Dreriser says, "she had learned much about laces and those little neck-pieces which add so much to a woman's appearance." [118]

One of those "little neck-pieces" might well have been the Bucks point collar of Figures 4.8 and 4.9. This linen lace is handmade and shows remarkable delicacy. The varied shapes at the outside edge seem ruffled; in actuality, it is a tromp l'oeil. The decorative gaps down the center of the long ovals make the shapes appear folded; the gimp thread is key. The linen stitch and half stitch in this piece are particularly open, giving an airy feel. Close up, the mesh fillings seem almost haphazard, but they, too, add to the fragile look of the collar. Traditionally, Bucks point does not use bars, although they are in this piece. The two twisted threads on each of the four sides is visible; the pull of the mesh gives it a six-sided rather than four-sided shape.

It is interesting to compare this collar with Figure 4.10. Both are of Bucks point, but the collar in Figure 4.8 is made with linen thread and appears much more delicate. Its proportions are modest and one can easily see it adorning the neckline of a young girl's bodice. The collar in 4.10 shows the simple, stylized flowers on airy mesh associated with Bucks point but is made with cotton thread, indicating a later manufacture date. The shaping gives the collar a gentle sophistication and the obvious symmetry and dense border give formality to what is otherwise a very simple design. In addition to the difference in thread and shape, comparing these two examples of one type of lace demonstrates the evolution of a lace type over time.

Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Northhampton are the three counties in the English East Midlands known for lacemaking going back to the sixteenth century. In Buckinghamshire, Newport, Pagnell, and Olney were well known lacemaking towns since

the seventeenth century. While the region had thousands of lacemakers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their lace was not particularly recognized until circa 1780 when they began to use a fine twisted-thread mesh background today known as point ground.

Kurella states that the Bucks point designs are rarely naturalistic or bold. They are often described as "rustic" or provincial.[119] Gwynne says some designs are geometric, while others may be naturalistic or even abstract. Sprigs decorated the lace in the late seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries; this progressed into large bunches of flowers through the 1830s-1840s. In the 1860s, new floral designs were brought over from France by a Mr. Sargent, lace manufacturer.[120] By 1812, Bucks point laces were copied by the pusher machine and from 1850 onwards by the Leavers machine.

The Bucks point laces were made as collars, that is, neither collar is pieced nor refashioned in any way. The angled corners indicate that the collars were to be worn around the back of the neck with the points facing forward, a nineteenth-century innovation. Meant to soften and decorate a jewel-neck dress or blouse, the collars were a popular accessory starting in the 1850s and continued into the 1920s. This modest style was always perceived as a sign of middle class gentility or at least genteel aspirations and a simple adornment for at-home use. Wells is quite specific that if the lady of the house has been attending to household duties, it is acceptable for her to receive a casual (unexpected) caller in the morning with plain linen collar and cuffs as long as the dress is neat. However, a lady should always be prepared for callers, even unexpected ones, in the evening. For this, lace such as the Bucks point collars and some jewelry might be worn. The collars would also be appropriate to attend a lecture or concert but not the theatre or church, both of which required unadorned, unobtrusive dress.[121]

There was a time when lace was only worn by the privileged class, but in the

Gilded Age, lace carried a different symbolism: universal female identity. The nineteenth century was a period of tremendous social growth. After centuries of status quo, women were gradually being liberated from their subservient place in society. The women's rights gathering in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, was a landmark event. One outcome was that women began to get jobs and become persons of independent means. In a world that descried women leaving traditional roles at home, lace became a signal and a symbol that women had not lost their femininity. A case in point is the Duchesse collar in Figure 4.11. This is not an elegant collar, but it is cleverly fashioned and demonstrates the effort to include lace in the ensemble. It is made from a cloth handkerchief. Two half sides have been removed and the remainder appliquéd via whip stitch onto machine-made point ground net. The construction of this collar is crude compared to other collars in this thesis; the elementary finish was probably well hidden by a choker collar. As is illustrated in Figure 4.12, sometimes all that was wanted was a showy lace dickey to lighten the severe lines of a jacket.

Duchesse is a variant of Belgian lace. Invented in the 1850s, its technique stems from early Brussels bobbin lace, albeit worked in heavier thread. Duchesse flowers and leaves are larger than Brussels, making it visually bold. Space is filled with bars, sprigs of leaflets, and scrollwork. The best Duchesse has details such as shading, and raised work in the scrolls and flowers. Motifs are well shaped. Poor quality Duchesse has loosely braided bars instead of decorative half stitch, and motifs are not well shaped. Production shortcuts are evident in many cut thread ends.

Kurella simply identifies the better quality as Brussels Duchesse and lower quality as Bruges or Bloemwerk. Toomer offers alternate criteria for differentiation. She states that Brussels Duchesse refers to Duchesse that includes needlework or insets of

point de gaze. Those without such needlework are Bruges Duchesse. She adds that toward the end of the nineteenth century, many Belgian lace manufacturers had moved part or all of their businesses out of Brussels to places such as Bruges and Ghent. These smaller towns had their own lacemaking traditions and the cheaper laces were made here.

Duchesse was a particularly popular nineteenth-century lace; both fine and poor quality samples were exported to the USA in great quantities.[122] It could be purchased at any number of department stores, and while the Duchesse lace collar demonstrates a preference for lace, the idea of repurposing a handkerchief to make neckwear was typical of instruction found in women's magazines. *The Ladies' World* in September 1911for example, ran an article titled "Pretty Neckwear Made of Handkerchiefs."[123] Projects (Figure 4.13) are shown with basic directions that would confound most women today but would have made sense one hundred years ago to a reasonably competent home-sewer. In this same issue, women are encouraged to think ahead to Christmas gifts and the collar in Figure 4.14 is one of the suggestions. Labeled "Sailor Collar for Coat," it is constructed from machine-made "Princess Lace Braid" that is snipped and tacked in various configurations to form the motifs. For twenty cents, one would receive the design stamped on colored cambric without the material to actually make the collar; the stamped design and all working material were available for one dollar and twenty-five cents. Princess lace is a tape lace, its name made up at the end of the nineteenth century for craft patterns. It was used both for appliqués on machine net and for tape laces with backgrounds of bars. The overall effect of the sailor collar lace echoes the Duchesse lace in the dickey for good reason: princess lace patterns often imitated the round flowers, leaf sprigs and scrollwork of Duchess and mixed Brussels bobbin laces. This contrived resemblance and exotic association would have given the middle class's princess braid a

certain panache just as the association with the European privileged lent caché to certain laces for wealthy Americans.

The middle class could not afford to subscribe to American upper class elitism; they had a much more practical approach to lace. For the middle class, lace selection was based on usefulness and affordability rather than heritage and expensive exclusivity, and they quickly embraced lace types new in the nineteenth century such as Maltese and Torchon.

Figure 4.15 is a classic display of Maltese elements including arrangements of wheatears, and the Maltese cross (Figure 4.16). There are twisted threads that connect the wheatears; they look like an element that should be hidden on the back of the piece, but are on the front, adding subtle three-dimensionally. As with most handmade lace, Maltese lace shows very little difference in appearance between the front and back sides.

This collar was made in several pieces and then joined: there is the inner bib, the elaborate outside border and a simple inner border. Obvious horizontal and vertical bands add to the geometry of design but are not seams. While rectangular shaped collars were sometimes draped over the front of a bodice, the long extensions on this particular collar indicate it was meant to be worn with the rectangle across the back (sailor style), with the long side pieces draped in the front. Figure 4.17 shows this style of collar for a bridesmaid in a 1902 issue of *La Mode Illustrée*. Guests would have ample time to view a collar during the ceremony and while there is no way of confirming that the Maltese collar was worn for this purpose, its silk sheen plus the robust Maltese design would have made it a good choice.

Lady Chichester brought lacemaking to Malta in the 1830s. It was a philanthropic gesture to give orphans and the poor of Malta a means to earn a livelihood. Originally

based on seventeenth-century Genoese patterns, Maltese laces eventually expanded to include Italian peasant lace designs. The most distinctive feature of Maltese lace is the Spanish silk thread used. Originally black, it soon changed to the honey-color silk that became its trademark. Other trademarks include wheatears, especially plump ones that overlap, and the Maltese cross of four triangles touching at the apex. Large pieces are made in strips three to six inches wide and then joined with an overcast stitch; seams often break in antique laces.

Of course the sheer popularity of Maltese lace prompted copies by machine. By the middle of the 1850s, imitations were being manufactured in Nottingham, and by the 1860s close copies were made on the Leavers machine. Predominantly geometric pattern and wheatears, it was a victim of so much copying by other lace centers that Maltese manufacturers included the Maltese cross as a means of distinguishing their product. Bedfordshire in the East Midlands was most notable in copying Maltese although it was also made in Belgium, northern Italy and Le Puy, France.

Figure 4.18 is a torchon lace collar made in two pieces: the V-shaped plastron and a band intended to go around the neck. The even balance of dense and open areas is easy to see; Figure 4.19 gives a closer look at the spider with braided legs and the torchon mesh. There is no gimp thread in this piece. It is interesting to note that crochet stitches are used here, a relatively modern technique of needlework. While the lace appears to be made as a collar, the plastron is actually cut from a larger piece of lace. A handmade trim has been applied to disguise the cut threads. The word “plastron” comes from the breast plate in a suit of armor. Cunnington states that a plastron might be used to fill in the area between the front edges of a cuirasse bodice in his description of 1880-1890 women’s clothing[124] and Toomer identifies a plastron as a “decorative front sometimes worn over

the high-necked bodices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries"[125] (Figure 4.20).

Although the country of origin is not certain, lace with simple torchon-like geometric designs have been known since the seventeenth century. It is considered one of the most basic bobbin laces, frequently used to initiate beginner lacemakers. In the mid-nineteenth century it became a mainstay for many European lacemaking communities trying to compete with machine lace because it is relatively quick, easy and inexpensive to make. Immensely wearable, it is still hand made in Puerto Rico for christening gowns, first communion dresses, wedding gowns and special occasion clothing.

Torchon can be made with a variety of threads including worsted wool. Known as "yak" lace, wool was used when there was a shortage of cotton thread. Mourning dress, particularly outer garments, were often embellished with black yak lace. Yak lace may have originated around Le Puy although it was later made elsewhere.

The spiders and half stitch of torchon lace have been successfully imitated by machines such as the Barmen. It can be difficult to distinguish between machine-made and handmade, the regular repetition of errors being the best clue. However, machines are not able to duplicate the overall path of threads as done in handmade.

Handmade lace carried the caché of upper class association that was difficult competition even for well done machine-made laces. The contemporary styling of both the Maltese and torchon collars demonstrates the continuing use of these lace types as well as the unwavering importance of handmade production to the rising middle class.

In March 1889, the Kennedy & MacInnes store in Pittsfield, Massachusetts offered torchon lace in widths ranging from one inch for two cents a yard to five inches at fifteen cents a yard.[126] It could have been handmade or machine-made lace and was meant

for trimming homemade clothing. The sewing machine had become an indispensable tool in the middle class home. Elias Howe received a patent in 1846 for a sewing machine although it would be his rival Isaac Singer who, in 1851, created the model popularly used. The first Singer sewing machines, manufactured in New York, were selling for $100 each by 1853. Singer's partner, Edward Clark, originated the hire-purchase plan, the prototype for all installment-selling or time-payment purchases. It allowed anyone, even those with limited income, to own a Singer sewing machine.[127] Initially appreciated for its ability to manufacture a quantity of military uniforms quickly, the sewing machine would one day allow Charles Frederick Worth to design dresses of complex construction, relying on the sewing machine to expedite the work.

The home sewing industry was further revolutionized when, in 1863, Ebenezer Butterick and his wife introduced paper patterns in a range of sizes. A semiannual catalog, *Metropolitan Fashions,* showed hundreds of garments for women and children, each illustration accompanied by descriptions of available sizes in which the pattern was available, the amount of material required, and the fabrics and trim best suited for the item - including lace. Figure 4.21 shows an 1892 "Carriage Toilette." The basque pattern is in thirteen sizes for ladies with a bust measure from twenty-eight to forty-six inches and costs thirty cents. The skirt is in nine sizes for ladies with a waist measurement of twenty to thirty-six inches and costs thirty-five cents. The yardage is given for the total toilette (ten and five-eighths yards of material twenty-two inches wide). Suggestions for lace embellishment were within the instruction packet.

For those who didn't own a sewing machine, there was ready-made clothing. In September of 1894, England Brothers Department store, also in Pittsfield, advertised Ladies Wool Suits, trimmed, value $7.50 on sale for $4.98.[128] Staff would have been on

hand to guide the customer through the purchase of the suit including the selection of lace accessories, advertised as “ready for view” in the same edition.

For those unable to get to a store, there was the mail-order. The first mail-order catalogue was a single sheet of paper sent out by Aaron Montgomery Ward in 1872. It showed the merchandise for sale with ordering instructions. In time, a true catalogue developed, heavily illustrated, dubbed a "dream book" by rural families. Ward (1844 - 1913) had been a traveling salesman for Marshall Field of Chicago when he conceived the idea of mail-order.[129] The Montgomery Ward mail-order catalog is such an icon of turn-of-the-last-century midwest that it is immortalized in *The Music Man* song “The Wells Fargo Wagon.” The townspeople of Gary, Indiana are imagining where packages might be coming from, including Montgomery Ward.

In 1888, the R.W. Sears Watch Co. printed a mailer to advertise watches and jewelry. In time, Sears expanded to “sewing machines, sporting goods, musical instruments, saddles, firearms, buggies, bicycles, baby carriages, and men’s and children’s clothing.” His 1894 catalog declared it was a "Book of Bargains: A Money Saver for Everyone," and the "Cheapest Supply House on Earth.”[130]

Specialty catalogs such as that of National Cloak and Suit Company were a more refined approach to mail-order clothing. Based in New York, its pages are filled with well detailed, graceful figures modeling all manner of women’s clothing: suits, dresses, dressing gowns, skirts, waists, petticoats and corsets. There are also sections for hats and children’s clothing. Suits were “made to order” and detailed instructions given on taking personal measurements. All items have description of fabric and detailing-including lace embellishment. In the 1909 catalog, waist number 4644 (Figure 4.22), for example, is described as fine batiste, “in white only” with a “wide band of Italian embroidery

insertion with filet effect with inserts of German Val[enciennes] on each side." "The yoke is of pin-tucked Batiste and Val[enciennes] lace while the chic revers are of imitation baby Irish lace edged with frills of Val[enciennes]."[131] The listing continues, noting sleeves and back button details. It's available for $2.49. Note that while they cite the baby Irish lace as imitation, they do not make that clarification with the German Valenciennes lace. The fact that it was made in Germany, not France, and obviously machine-made, did not negate the insinuation that it was "real" Valenciennes lace. To a woman with some limit to her means but trying to be fashionable, the nuance of handmade versus machine-made or country of origin was of no importance. As far as she was concerned, she was wearing Valenciennes lace.

The same consumer attitude prevailed regarding collars which could be purchased separately; there are two pages in the 1909 National Cloak and Suit Company catalogue that display a range of styles, some with matching cuffs (Figure 4.23). Varying details include Cluny lace, Valenciennes lace, *point de Venise lace*, Duchesse lace, Brussels net, Baby Irish lace, Swiss embroidery, and imitation Irish lace. There is no mention that the lace is machine-made or any testimony to its quality. It would be a fair assumption that the women purchasing these items were not concerned.

Of course, department stores, dress shops and salons carried these items as well, and many offered complete ensembles for personal inspection. The Harry Angelo Company of New York was one of many such enterprises that specialized in duplicating couture styling for less. Figure 4.24, from an 1895 advertisement has the following description: "Gown of blue net, yoke of Cluny lace and white ringed net with motifs of Irish crochet and blue and silver lace, sleeves of same with bands of blue satin. Under-sleeves of ringed net. Skirt ornamented with the blue and silver lace over deep fold of

pale-blue satin, with inserts of Cluny lace and motifs of Irish crochet." The dress was shown at the Templier and Rondeau Salon in Paris where Americans could bring home the "look" for less.

The extent to which lace was pervasive as a symbol of refinement can be seen in home furnishings. First published in 1912, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* describes a neat, Southern boarding house parlor as "furnished with cane-bottom chairs, each of which was adorned with a white crocheted tidy. The mantle over the fireplace had a white crocheted cover; a marble-topped center table held a lamp, a photograph album and several trinkets, each of which was set upon a white crocheted mat, and the cottage organ lamp-racks were covered with white crocheted mats."[132] With technical roots in tambour work and stitches mimicking embroidery and needle lace fillings, crochet is far more quickly executed than classic handmade lace. Almost always made with inexpensive cotton thread, it has long been dubbed "poor man's lace." That it appears so prominently in this modest parlor demonstrates the effort made to appear respectable and refined.

Patterns for crocheting, embroidery and simple lacemaking were available in instruction books, ladies magazines and even newspapers, allowing and even encouraging the rising middle class to mimic the upper classes as best they could. These same periodicals provided information about the latest fashions, not only what to buy and where, but how to make fashions at home. Women learned of changing style elements through published illustrations. *Ackermann's Repository* (British, 1809 - 1829) and *La Belle Assemblée* (British, 1806-1837) were two such resources, the latter being the first to regularly include fashion plates. It wasn't until *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830-1898) that there was a parallel American publication. Supported by railroads, the new United States postal system gave *Godey's* national distribution.

From its inception *Godey's* provided stories, poems, piano music, and advice on every topic from personal hygiene, how to cook potatoes and where to stay when visiting New York City. Regular columns included the Editor's Table, Receipts (recipes), the Work Department (needlework), *Godey's* Armchair and Chitchat. Diagrams and instructions were given for needlework projects such as a beadwork chess-table, a crocheted smoking-cap and bedroom slippers in berlin work (today's needlepoint) as well as drawing lessons and how to make cardboard toys. Illustrations ranged from alphabets for embroidery to domestic architecture with floor plans, while engravings of children and young couples reflected poignant moments and romantic moods. *Godey's* was perhaps best known for its fashion information, with multiple drawings each month of coats, hats, children's clothing, and ensembles for women, some as delightful colored plates.

Godey's understood its audience. There was a need to address practical matters and there was a need for luxury. Lace was one way to achieve luxury, and *Godey's* provided affordable and achievable lace-related projects. It might suggest using machine-made lace edging on a jacket or blonde lace trim on a hat. Tatting and crochet instructions provided accessories for the home and there were designs for embroidery on net. Thick cotton thread and silk floss were used for interweaving with net and there were frequent directions to liven a garment with machine-made lace insertions. One way or another *Godey's*, and other publications who catered to women's interests, helped the middle class woman incorporate lace into her lifestyle, and by doing so ingrained lace into American culture.

So it was that the American middle class came to wear lace. They draped themselves with this token of wealthy Americans the way wealthy Americans draped themselves in the lace of wealthy Europeans. The association polished personal identity

and lent an air of richness and importance, regardless of social strata. For the middle class, the essence of lace was more significant than the lace's pedigree; its presence was meant to signal refinement and sophistication. Wearing handmade lace may have been inspired by the laces of wealthy Americans, but that the middle class subscribed to this practice so whole heartedly, claiming it as its own, is a testimony to lace's importance in middle class lifestyle and to the American culture.

Chapter V:

Conclusion

From 1550 to 1800, Europe's privileged class used fine lace to demonstrate their wealth and social position. The French Revolution brought a distancing from conspicuous display and that, coupled with the shift to a spare fashion silhouette, resulted in minimal use of lace at the onset of the nineteenth century. With the exception of a few key laces such as silk blonde worn for special occasions, the making of handmade lace languished well into the 1840s. This same period was a time of invention and development for machine-made lace, and by the middle of the century the artistry, speed of production, and affordability of machine-made lace generated fresh interest in lace as a clothing accessory. Europeans began to use lace lavishly in the 1850s and wealthy American women traveling to Paris in the late 1860s for their dresses soon followed suit.

In the meantime, the industrial boom of mid-nineteenth-century America gave far more people easy access to far more goods than ever before. Nowhere was this conspicuous consumption more obvious than with women's clothing.[133] Fashion was becoming an industry, moving from customer-driven sales to active retail marketing.[134] Innovations in communication and transportation disseminated information with increasing speed, and the new consumer was bombarded with all manner of visual seduction from magazines, catalogs and stores. Driven to appear financially and socially progressive, the rising middle class sought to imitate upper class fashion. This was ever easier as ready-to-wear merchandise, including lace, became available on the American mass market.

The upper class, on the other hand, was determined to maintain exclusivity.

Through domestic architecture, interior design, social events, travel, and general lifestyle they sought ways to differentiate themselves from *hoi polloi*. Fashionable clothing became yet another tool. Machine-made lace had become common; wealthy Americans turned to collecting and wearing antique European lace, refashioned to complement contemporary fashion. In addition, the effort to acquire these pieces, the consummate care in reconstruction and the highly visible events for which they were styled underscores a second agenda that reached beyond simple fashion interest. Once worn by European nobility and persons of extreme wealth, antique lace carried the unique identity of extraordinary privilege and it served to reinforce Gilded Age identification with European aristocracy and old money. That some antique lace was less aesthetically pleasing but still refashioned is further testimony to antique laces' value for its royal association.

Expensive, often rare, antique European lace was far beyond the reach of middle class America. Still, the overall commitment by America's upper class to fine handmade European lace stimulated a preference for handmade lace on all levels of American society. This is well documented by the lace and lace-look clothing and needlework patterns offered for many years by ladies' magazines as well as frequent mention in literature of the time. It is important to keep in mind that even though some lace may be less fine, it symbolizes luxury regardless of socioeconomic level. For the middle-class woman in the Gilded Age, lace symbolized refinement as well as feminine beauty. It was attainable fashion. All of these factors combined to stimulate and maintain the incorporation of lace into American lives. It is not to say that the use of lace became exclusive to American culture but rather an accepted element.

There is a another aspect to the discussion of Gilded Age lace collars which is suggested in the text: the positive impact that machine-made lace had on the handmade

lace industry. It is a popular belief that machine-made lace destroyed the handmade lace industry, so it is interesting to consider what might have happened if machine-made lace had never come to be. Handmade lace languished in the first half of the nineteenth century with limited production and little in the way of new design. French manufacturers of handmade lace were staging a comeback, but how long it would take for handmade lace to once again be a profit-making product, if possible at all, is uncertain. In addition, Charles Frederick Worth and other couture designers were key in popularizing lace as a fashion accessory. Without the quickly-fabricated quantities of lace his fashions came to require, Worth might well have turned to embroidery to provide the finishing touch as seen in the Tibbits wedding gown (Figure 1.2). He had close working relationships with the brilliant French embroiderers Michonet and Albert Lesage, and Worth was already employing beads and sequins to create his opulent look. Embroidery, rather than lace, might have been what wealthy American women of the Gilded Age sought, changing a chapter in fashion history forever.

But machines to make lace were invented and the machine-made lace industry should be credited with helping to preserve the handmade lace industry, instead of destroying it. Machine-made lace stimulated fresh interest in lace as a fashion accessory, benefitting the lace market in all forms, and the success of machine-made lace goaded the handmade lace industry to train new designers and lacemakers in order to be competitive.

In truth, the fortunes of the lace industry were far more dependent on the caprice of fashion trends than on how the lace was produced. It can be reasoned that the real culprit in undermining the handmade lace industry was the sewing machine which drastically sped up clothes manufacture. With that came the ever-quickening shift from one style to the next; handmade lace just couldn't accommodate the rapidity of fashion

changes. Add to this the twentieth-century physically active woman, and once again, lace was worn only in the evenings and for special occasions, and rarely during the day. In short, it was not the invention of lacemaking machines that had such a devastating effect on handmade lace. Rather, it was fashion.

This thesis demonstrates that wealthy Americans collected, refashioned and wore antique European lace in the Gilded Age and shows that motivation was two fold: to reinforce their personal identity with the European royalty, and to differentiate themselves from a middle class intent on imitating upper class Parisian styles. This thesis also shows that the handmade lace industry benefited by the invention of machine-made lace.

In summary, lace had a strong presence in Gilded Age society. It was imported with couture fashions, ingrained by mass media, marketed by stores, and immortalized in novels. It trickled from the wealthy heiress through the nouveau riche, and from the rising middle class to the archetypical shop girl. Lace became everyone's jewelry, the easiest and quickest way to update the wardrobe. Over the course of the Gilded Age, popular use made lace an integral component of American culture.

It is also an intent of this study to attract attention to antique laces refashioned in the mid- to late- 19th century. These laces may have 17th-century clothwork encased in fresh 19th-century mesh, or be an 18th-century flounce that has been cut and engineered into a new and now usable shape appropriate to 19th-century fashion. Ignored, even denigrated, by purists, these laces in actuality are a treasure trove of artistry, craft, fashion history and socioeconomic commentary. They inspired new laces based on old patterns, spurred the creation of new lace types, and encouraged the use of laces that would otherwise have slowly disintegrated, hidden from view. The social and cultural

contribution of these long neglected pieces is highlighted in the course of the thesis, bringing fresh perspective, to the histories of material culture, costume and lace.

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54. This included a strain of flax plant that was cheaper to harvest because it grew more quickly. However, this flax plant produced a thicker fiber than had been used previously, and as a result, lace patterns had to be enlarged to accommodate the new, coarser materials.

55. The East Midlands census of 1851 showed there were 5,725 children between five and fifteen years old working in the industry; of these 1,754 were under the age of ten. Working hours were arduous: four to five hours a day for a young child; six to eight hours a day for girls aged ten to thirteen, and young women would work twelve to fourteen hours a day. Anne Buck, *Thomas Lester,*10.

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Glossary

Alençon lace: French; needle lace; 1665 to mid-twentieth century; early name for Alençon lace is "*points de France*." Lace characteristics: clothwork made of detached buttonhole stitches along a "straight return" thread. Eighteenth century examples are worked more closely and in finer thread than those in the nineteenth century; the outline is slightly raised and covered with extremely fine buttonhole stitches; the mesh is roughly hexagonal shaped and consists of loosely worked buttonhole stitches with an additional thread wrapping one side of the mesh. (See Appendix I); sometimes uses bars covered with buttonhole stitch as means to connect motifs and add to ornamentation. Alençon uses a wide variety of fancy filling stitches based on variations and combinations of needle weaving and buttonhole stitches; there may also be patterns of tiny holes in the clothwork. Alençon was the official lace of the French court and a favorite of Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III.

application lace/appliqué: Motifs are sewn on top of net to create lace. The net may be handmade (rare) or machine-made; the motifs may be handmade, machine-made, cut woven fabric, pre-made cloth tapes or layers of net. Embroidery is often used for additional embellishment.

Bedfordshire lace: Also known as Beds, Bedfordshire Maltese, Lester lace. A continuous bobbin lace produced in the English Midlands. Lace characteristics: clothwork often edged with tiny loops formed from pinholes in the lacemaking process; clothwork has texture from threads that emerge as braids to form the background; does not use mesh; bridges may be four-strand braids, narrow bands of woven clothwork or bar-like wheatears; ornamentation includes formations of

wheatears, either long and pointed or with squared-off ends, little braided scallops along edges, and in fine quality there may be a background of elaborate geometric grids.

Beds Maltese lace: A continuous bobbin lace made in Bedfordshire, England in the style of lace made on Malta. In addition to style and technique characteristics, quintessential gold silk thread was used. Introduced at the 1851 London Exhibition.

bertha: A deep collar worn by women that extended from neck to shoulder or falling off the shoulder from a low neckline. Particularly popular in the 1830s, especially in shiny silk blonde lace, and again in the 1890s in bold guipure lace.

Binche lace: Also known as *point de fee* (fairy lace). A continuous bobbin lace made in Binche, a small town in northern France near the Belgian border. Both ground and filling stitches are complex and highly varied in one piece. Lace characteristics: motifs rarely have an outline thread; the clothwork is done in linen stitch, often decorated with tiny holes; half-stitch is used to create shadows and the illusion of depth; the snowflake-like grounds are a defining characteristic with partridge eye and armure most typical. Bridges (bars) are not used.

blonde lace: A continuous bobbin lace, the name referencing the honey color of the silk thread. Blonde uses airy, open grounds and light, geometric patterns, similar to mid-eighteenth century linen laces. Lace characteristics: a single, untwisted silk thread or silk cord if there is an outline around the motifs; the silk thread used for blonde clothwork is heavier than the silk thread used for making the mesh, giving the blonde flowers an attractive sheen. Most motifs maximize the silk shine by being worked only in clothstitch; half stitch may appear for occasional contrast. The most common mesh used is a hexagonal mesh with four sides of two twisted threads and two sides

of two threads crossed (East Midlands point ground, see Appendix I); Paris ground or kat stitch is also used. Bridges are not used and blonde lace rarely uses ornamental filling stitches,with the exception of honeycomb or similar mesh inside a flower center.

bridges: A means of connecting motifs in lace; lace with motifs connected by bridges is often called guipure.

Bucks point: An continuous bobbin lace produced in the English Midlands. Lace characteristics: Bucks point uses a "gimp" thread, often described as "silky" for outlining clothwork**.** Clothwork is worked in linen stitch with occasional accents of half-stitch. The Bucks point mesh, today called point ground, is rectangular or vaguely hexagonal shape; it includes two twisted threads on each of the four sides (See Appendix I). The six-point star known as kat stitch (also known as *Point de Paris*, Chantilly ground and fond chant) may be used for decoration. (See Appendix I). Bridges were not used. Better quality laces use a variety of fancy filling stitches for ornamentation, honeycomb (also seen in Chantilly) is one of the most popular. In the nineteenth century, a picot edge was added to distinguish handmade from replica machine laces.

Burano lace: A needle lace made on the island of Burano near Venice. Lace characteristics: a raised outline made with a heavy thread, attached with widely spaced stitches that are overcast or whipped; clothwork made of detached buttonhole stitches along a "straight return" thread (same as Alençon.) The mesh consists of loosely worked buttonhole stitches with an additional thread wrapping one side of the mesh. Again, very similar to Alençon, except Burano mesh stitches are worked more tightly, giving the mesh a more rectangular (rather than hexagonal) appearance. The

quality of thread was generally poor, giving the mesh a somewhat fuzzy appearance. Bars, covered with buttonhole stitches and decorated with picots are almost always present in the background of large household items such as tablecloths. As with Alençon, Burano lace uses a wide variety of fancy filling stitches based on variations and combinations of needle weaving and buttonhole stitches. They appear in the clothwork and as fillings between motifs in the best Burano pieces. Different from Alençon, raised outlines in Burano are rare.

Chantilly lace: A French bobbin lace developed in the 1830s. Lace characteristics: a slightly heavier silk thread called a gimp was used to outline motifs. Usually woven in as the lace was made, occasionally it would be run between the meshes of the completed lace via needle and thread. Machine-made Chantilly always used this needle-run method. Clothwork is made with half-stitch; the most common mesh used is called Lille or point ground (See Appendix I). Bridges were not used and the most popular accent was a honeycomb or similar decorative stitches in flower center or small areas. Handmade Chantilly uses picots along the outside edge, the threads traveling from the clothwork into the picots. In the machine version, a separate line of picots was sewn on after the lace was made.

chemical (burnt) lace: A process for making needle lace: machine-made embroidery is applied to fabric after which the fabric is destroyed by applying a corrosive chemical. The freestanding motifs can then be directly attached to each other or linked by bars to form lace. Primarily developed in Switzerland.

cloth stitch: Densely interlaced threads to create a motif in bobbin lace. Sometimes used with more loosely woven half-stitch which gives the appearance of shadow. See also linen stitch.

clothwork: The dense, broad areas (motifs) that stand out from the ground and form the design or pattern of the lace.

continuous bobbin lace: Lace threads pass from clothwork to mesh to clothwork without interruption.

cordonnet: Refers to a thicker thread or bundle of threads outlining a needle lace motif. The comparable term in bobbin lace is "gimp."

crochet: Crochet can be used to make both continuous lace and part lace; it's sometimes used to create an edging for refashioned lace pieces. The crochet hook is a thin stick, usually steel, with a hook at one end; the hook varies in size depending on the thickness of the thread being used and the intended size of the stitch. The stitches are combinations of loops. Crochet is dated ca. 1845 to present; its roots are probably in tambour work which involves using a similar hook to apply fine chain stitch onto taut fabric.

cuirass bodice: A tight, corset-like bodice that extends over the hips.

cutwork: Probably dating back to the fourteenth century, cutwork is made by cutting holes into fabric (first linen, later cotton) and then using needle and thread to bind the raw edges with buttonhole stitch. By the sixteenth century large open areas were cut out forming open squares; bars were sewn across the opening, frequently at an angle, reinforced with buttonhole stitch, and the inter space embellished with needle weaving. Known as *reticella* in Italy, cutwork laid the foundation for needle lace.

drawnwork: Warp and weft threads are withdrawn from linen or other loosely woven fabric to create open areas. A variety of needle-weaving stitches are then used between threads to create designs.

Duchesse: A Belgian non-continuous bobbin lace invented around the 1850s. Lace

characteristics: Duchesse lace uses three techniques for outlining motifs and one or all may be present in any given piece: gimp thread; raised ribs of woven clothwork; bundles of threads. The clothwork consists of flowers, sprigs of leaves, parts of scrollwork worked in linen stitch and half-stitch. Mesh is not used; instead, three and four strand braided bars zigzag between motifs. Good quality Duchesse is highly ornamented.

embroidery: Needle and thread are used for applying a variety of stitches to fabric or net

fichu: A triangular piece of light material worn around the neck; a shaped scarf of diaphanous material such as muslin or lace.

Flemish: A general name given to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century bobbin laces made in the Low Countries, particularly Flanders. Lace characteristics: The outline is not a significant element. Clothwork is primarily in linen stitch, decorated with patterns of holes, decorative stitches and occasional accents in half-stitch after 1700; most clothwork has a sewing edge. Meandering tapes are made in small sections and rarely double back on themselves (versus Milanese where tapes are almost always continuous and double back on themselves.) Thread is very fine and soft. In the early seventeenth century, motifs were joined directly to each other in some laces. Later, Flemish laces had either mesh (usually five-hole or six pointed star) or bar backgrounds. Bars were typically four-strand braids decorated with picots; worked in a continuous strand and decorated with picots, they jump from point to point and are also carried along the edge of the clothwork. Sometimes the bridges carry across the back of the clothwork. In addition to the decorated clothwork, decorative filling stitches are used between motifs. Better pieces have many interesting filling stitches.

flounce: A wide band of material, fabric or lace, attached to a skirt surface for decoration.

gimp: A thread or group of threads outlining a bobbin lace motif. The comparable term in needle lace is cordonnet.

gros point de Venise: Italian needle lace dating back to the 1600s *point de Venise* lace evolved from the geometric *punto in aria*, incorporating the flowing movement of the Italian baroque. Lace characteristics: use of one of four types of outline: (1) closely spaced buttonhole stitches over one or more surface threads; (2) a cord of uniform thickness made from a bundle of threads tightly encased in buttonhole stitches and used to snake around or within a motif for strong accent; (3) a cord made from a bundle of threads tightly encased in buttonhole stitches, but with tapered ends and often decorated with picot frills; (4) in smaller scaled designs, it may take the form of tiny padded curves and rings sometimes embellished with picot frills. The clothwork is tightly worked buttonhole stitch, often with geometric arrangements of holes. The scrolling, and branching coraline designs in the seventeenth century baroque style are a constant Venetian lace feature. Background mesh is not used and bridges, if used, are often decorated with rings and picots. Venetian lace is considered a guipire lace, that is, the motifs are close together and are either attached where they touch or by bars connecting adjacent edges. Ornamentation includes relatively large areas left open.

ground: Also mesh, net, or in French, *reseau*. The airy background of threads connecting and stabilizing motifs in lace. See Appendix I for example diagrams.

guipire: Bobbin or needle lace motifs held in position via bridges (bars) rather than mesh.

half-stitch: Half-dense interlaced threads to create a motif in bobbin lace. Sometimes used with cloth stitch to create a shaded effect.

Handmachine: Used for making needle lace. Primarily developed in Switzerland. Capable of executing a variety of embroidery stitches, it uses a pantograph system to

stitch pattern on taut cloth or net.

Honiton lace: An English bobbin lace with Flemish roots dating back to the 1600s. Lace characteristics: A single, heavy gimp thread became common in the nineteenth century to outline motifs and accent details within a motif. The three-dimensionally of the right side differs markedly from the flat wrong side; on the wrong side, groups of threads pass over motifs from one worked area to another. Motifs use linen stitch, sometimes alternating with areas of half stitch. Motifs, such as a rose, may be formed from ribbon-like clothwork strips spiraling out from a center. From the early eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, vrai drochel bobbin net was often used; it is a slightly elongated hexagonal mesh with two sides of four plaited threads and four sides of two twisted threads. (See Appendix I) Needle-made net or brides appeared around 1850. Handmade mesh is rare. Honiton motifs are more likely to be appliquéd onto a machine-made net available from the early nineteenth century onward. Many types of needle-made bridges were used. One of the most popular was four-strand plaits, made with two pairs of threads and decorated with picots. Others were single, double or any number of threads wrapped, or covered with loose buttonhole stitches. Honiton filling stitches almost always include wheatears (tallies). Honiton filling stitches almost never include any made with needle and thread, differing in this way from Belgian bobbin laces.

interlaced: Elements (for example, threads) pass over and under elements which are in their path. Also known as braiding.

interlinked: Elements (for example, threads) form a structure by linking (spiraling around) adjacent or near adjacent elements.

Jacquard: Invented by Joseph-Marie Jacquard (French) 1804. An attachment for

speeding up the pattern-making process of woven textiles. Based on a punched-card system. Used with the pusher and Leavers machines.

lappets: Pendular flaps on a cap.

Leavers machine: Used for making bobbin lace. Invented by John Leavers (British), 1813 using extremely thin bobbins provided by Benjamin Thompson. Able to add picots and outline thread to motifs during manufacture. The Leavers used the Jacquard attachment from the 1830s to the 1880s, making it the dominant lacemaking machine of the time.

Lille mesh/net: A French town near the Belgian border, Lille is part of a region that produced exceptionally fine continuous bobbin lace in the seventeenth century. The style which takes the name Lille is a late eighteenth century lace with a simple mesh background. The mesh has many names, today most commonly known as point ground, (See Appendix I) and was particularly popular from 1790 to 1810 as a background for small, delicate motifs. It was replaced by nearly identical machine-made net known as twist net.

linen stitch: Also called toilé, cloth stitch and clothwork. Only applies to bobbin lace; Defined by technique, the solid area of the motif looks like woven linen.

Maltese lace: Originally based on seventeenth century Genoese patterns, Maltese laces (dating from the 1830s) eventually expanded to include Italian peasant lace designs. The most distinctive feature of Maltese lace is the Spanish silk thread used. Originally, black, there was soon a change over to the honey-color silk that became its trademark. Lace characteristics: No outline; linen stitch for clothwork; twisted threads and/or braids to make ornamental or grid like backgrounds. Trademark ornamentation includes wheatears, especially plump ones that overlap, and the Maltese cross.

Mechlin: A town near the border between Belgium and France, Mechlin was a lacemaking center in the late 1500s, and known for its fine bobbin lace by the mid-1600s. The mesh that defines Mechlin today was developed in the early 1700s. (See Appendix I) By the late seventtenth century, the name "Mechlin" was frequently used as a generic term for Flemish continuous bobbin lace. Lace characteristics: a heavy, silky gimp thread outlining the motifs which are worked in linen stitch with accents in half-stitch. Before the development of the distinct Mechlin mesh, snowflake and five-hole meshes were commonly used. Bridges were not used. From the early to late 1700s, Mechlin lace used complex grounds for ornamentation; cartouches and other areas were decorated with elaborate filling stitches. With the simplistic dress of the early nineteenth century, fancy filling stitches were limited to small areas such as flower centers.

mesh: Also referred to as net, ground, or in French, *reseau*. The airy background of threads connecting and stabilizing motifs in lace. See Appendix I for examples.

mixed lace: Lace made using more than one lacemaking technique in a single piece, usually bobbin lace and needle lace.

muslin: A plain weave cotton fabric.

net: Also mesh, ground. The airy background connecting and stabilizing motifs in lace. See Appendix I for examples.

non-continuous bobbin lace: Bobbin lace where motif and ground are made separately.

pelerine: A woman's small shoulder cape, usually having long pointed ends in the front. Some are waist length.

part lace: Lace motifs and ground are made as separate parts and then combined. All needle lace, non-continuous bobbin lace, application lace and mixed lace are all

examples of part lace.

passementerie: Trimming, frequently braid, for clothing.

picot: A tiny decorative loop. Originally a device of bobbin lace made with metal thread as a means of changing thread direction.

plastron: A long, decorative strip or piece worn down the front of a lady's dress to cover front fastenings. They could be to the waist or extend down to the hem. Popular from 1890 to 1910, the term comes from comes from the breast plate in a suit of armor.

point d'Alençon: A French needle lace that combined aspects of Alençon and *point de gaze* lace characteristics.

point d'Angleterre lace: A non continuous bobbin lace with undetermined country of origin. Lace characteristics: The outline may be bundles of threads or extremely fine ribs of woven clothwork called tenstick. Sometimes, a single, heavier thread (called gimp), is used. Both linen stitch and half stitch for clothwork. *Point de gaze* mesh or *vrai réseau* mesh may be used with four strand braids used to create accents. The mesh, flower centers and other motifs may be covered with tiny rings covered with buttonhole stitch. Often, a single loop of the mesh is covered with buttonhole stitch. Both needle and bobbin lace decorative fillings are used.

point de France: *Point de France* lace was the result when in 1665, Jean Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's finance minister, ordered French manufacturers to start producing lace similar to what was being made in Venice and Flanders. Worn until the end of the 18th C, *point de France* lace used very fine thread to make the very delicate, ornate motifs. Lace characteristics: Varied motif edge treatment, often in the same piece. Many motifs had no outline; some had a slightly raised cordonnet covered with buttonhole stitches and/or decorated with picots. When comparing French

seventeenth century baroque needlelace to seventeenth century baroque Venetian needlelace, it is believed that the French used a motif with a padded raised central area surrounded by flat areas while the Venetian needlelace has padded crescents or raised ridges along the edges. Clothwork is buttonhole stitched, sometimes with patterns of very tiny, almost invisible holes. In the late 1600s, clothwork bands formed branches as part of the overall design; by the early 1700s, several filling stitches sometimes appeared in the same area without any distinct separation. Later, narrow bands of clothwork often outlined these areas. The best quality of these laces is exceptionally ornate. The background consists of small hexagons covered on all sides by buttonhole stitch and decorated with tiny picots. This may be in the format of a precise mesh or more loosely as tiny bars. The most common ornament is fancy filling stitches and picots.

point de gaze: *Point de gaze* emerged circa 1850 and was the Belgian solution to making carefully executed needle lace with less labor intensive construction. It is similar to eighteenth century Brussels needlepoints although its outlines are more pronounced and the clothwork is more loosely worked. Lace characteristics: an outline made of bundles of fine threads secured with widely spaced buttonhole stitches outline motifs; the very airy background mesh of loose, looping buttonhole stitches made with a single thread and from which the lace gets its name. Often compared to delicate (and expensive) French laces such as Alençon and Argentan. Shading is achieved through a very open appearance alternating with mesh-like stitches. Bridges are not used. Roses executed with layers of petals are an iconic *point de gaze* element, although they did not appear until roughly 1860. Tiny rings of buttonhole stitches in flower centers, are extremely common; there are often tiny dots on the mesh.

point de neige: An Italian needle lace made between 1650 and 1700. This lace is known for extreme detail; the outlines are highly ornamented and the clothwork is layered with raised and decorated curliques, loops and scrolls of picots. Mesh is not used; the tiny buttonhole-stitched bars are covered with rings of picots that connect the tiny motifs.

point de Venise: See *Gros point de Venise*.

point de Venise rose: See *Gros point de Venise*. The same characteristics apply although the scale is a little smaller and motifs may be layered.

point net: Handmade net made by needle lace technique rather than bobbin lace technique.

punto in aria: Literally "stitches in the air," references the transition from fabric-based lace to freestanding lace. It is the combination of *reticella* and *punto in aria* that is seen in so many collars in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century portraits.

Pusher machine: Used for making bobbin lace. Invented by Samuel Clark and James Mart (British) 1812. It excelled in patterned piece goods such as shawls and collars. Paired with the Jacquard in the 1830s. Hand finishing of lace was required.

reticella: (Italian) See "Cutwork."

rosaline: A small scale nineteenth century lace with roots in Italy. Typical motif elements include small flowers and short scrolls. Tiny holes decorate the fine tape-like clothwork, and tiny stitch-covered rings accent both flowers and the decorative mesh. A commendable effort to translate seventeenth century Venetian needle lace into nineteenth century bobbin lace, rosaline was highly popular during the Gilded Age.

Schiffli machine: Used for making needle lace; primarily developed in Switzerland. Used steam and electricity to drive the machines. Embroidery was applied onto net or

chemically degradable fabric, producing copies of both mesh-ground and guipire (without mesh) lace.

spider: A spider's web-shaped filling, particularly seen in bobbin laces such as Binche and Torchon. (See Appendix II, Torchon.)

tambour work: Fine chain stitch embroidery used to create designs on fabric or net.

tatting: The name first appeared in print in 1843. Little double half-stitch knots are worked along a thread like beads on a string, the little rings then joined with needle and thread. Motifs tend to be circular, many sewn together form a trim.

Torchon lace: A simple continuous bobbin lace, country of origin not known. Lace characteristics: a gimp thread, sometimes colored, to accent the design; small areas of clothwork are small with both linen stitch and half stitch used and the overall design largely geometric. There is a characteristic fifty-fifty balance between dense and open areas. Meshes are part of the integrated design rather than a specific background. The ones most commonly used are Torchon, Dieppe, and five-hole. Torchon mesh is diamond shape with two threads crossed or twisted on each side. The five-hole ground may be in an checkered configuration where roughly square openings alternate with squares of crossing threads. Twisted pairs of threads or braids may be used as extensions from small motifs. Ornamentation is a combination of spiders, fans, wheatears, and other decorative stitches.

Valenciennes: A continuous bobbin lace; Flemish; dates from the early 1700s; compare with Binche. Lace characteristics: complex backgrounds using either a snow ground or five-hole mesh in the early 1700s; four-strand braids on all sides mid-1700s; braids were lengthened in the nineteenth century and the mesh looked more square or diamond shaped. Designs are usually worked in linen stitch with accents of half-

stitch. Patterns of holes are used to delineate details in a design. Bridges are not used. An assortment of filling stitches, especially variation of the snow grounds, may be used as the background, or as filling in and between motifs.

wheatears: Also called tallies, lead works, leaves and barleycorns. A small decorative device, a wheatear is shaped like a simple leaf; it's formed by weaving a thread between two outside threads and one center "rib." Wheatears can be long and thin, short and plump or even have the point truncated. See Appendix II, Maltese lace collar.

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