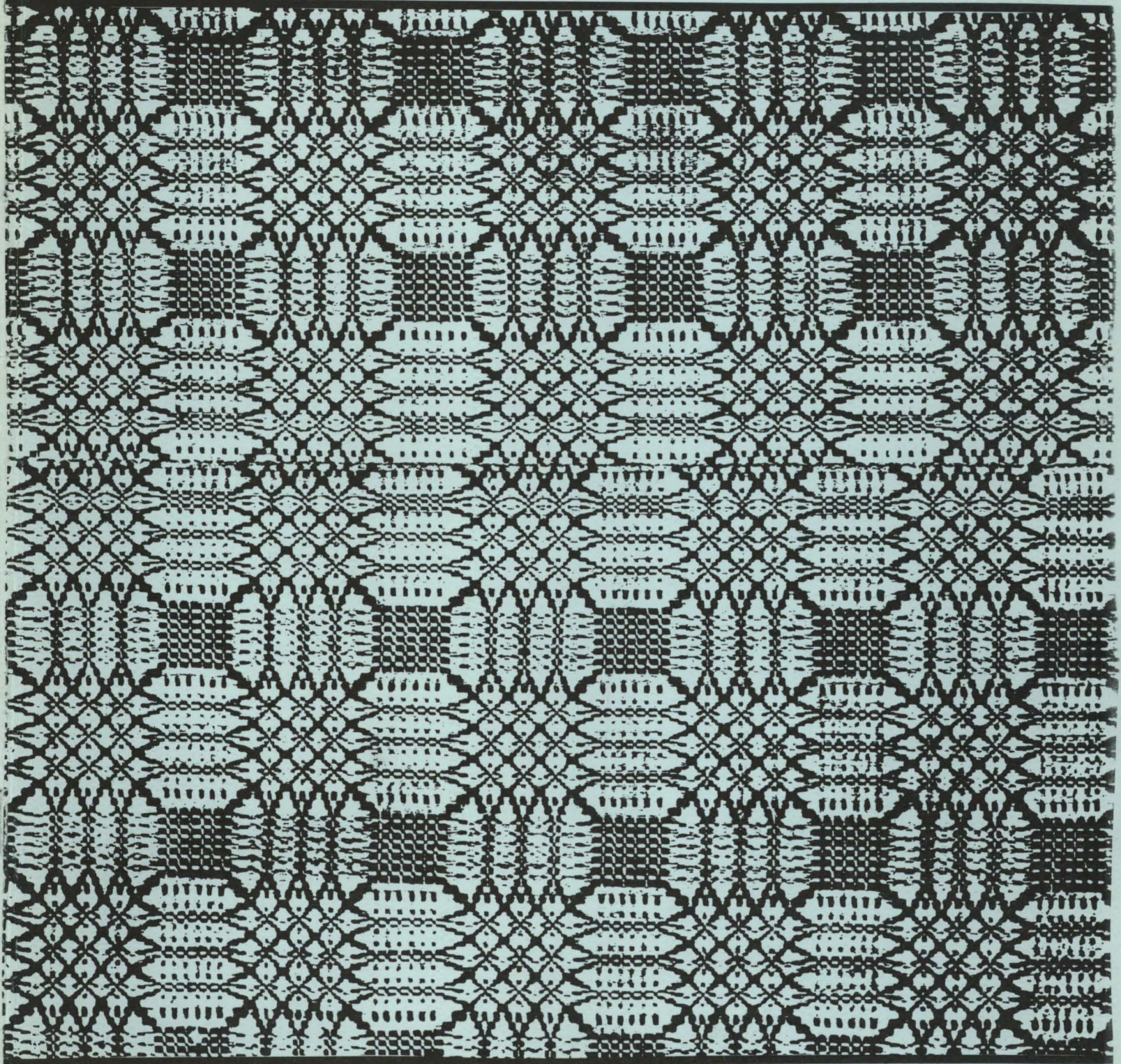



# LATAH LEGACY

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Cover Photo: View of a Nineteenth Century Coverlet from the LCHS Textile Collection. The coverlet is blue and white and woven in a summer winter pattern. Peter Rowley photo



"The Soul of man is his clothes."  
anon.

Clothing to civilized man is second only in importance to food and shelter. And the pioneer of Latah County was no exception. Remnants of his pursuits, his self-image, his business, his toil, his religious endeavors, his entire life-style may be pieced together from the clothing that survives him in collections in the Moscow area today.

This Legacy is designed to introduce you to the costume and textile collections in Moscow as well as to some of the objects they contain. Three collections contain textile objects from the local citizenry and one reflects the culture of the Appaloosa Indian inhabitants.

Latah County Historical Society houses a collection of clothing and household textiles at McConnell Mansion. Focusing on the story of Latah County and her people, this collection contains a large variety of items such as bed linens, quilts and coverlets, table linens, Victorian textiles for the home, and men's, women's, and children's clothing, all of which increase one's awareness of the history of this county. Special appointment may be made to study or view the collection.

The Leila Old Historic Costume collection, housed in Home Economics at the University of Idaho, has a large collection of clothing of the men, women, and children who have in some way contributed to the history of Idaho. Stored chronologically, the collection dates from 1840 and is available for student study and other costume research.

The Museology program at the University of Idaho also has a number of clothing articles within the museum collection, which are available for research.

The Appaloosa Museum housed at the Appaloosa Horse Club contains clothing articles made and worn by the Indians of the area. The exhibits are open to the public during business hours.

These collections play an important role in unraveling the tangled facts of history and piecing together the whole story. They are an assemblage of our past where care and conservation techniques are being used to preserve them for the future. The opportunities they offer for study and research, nostalgia they generate, and the inspiration we may gain from them help us understand ourselves and our future in a more integrated manner.



## A LEGACY OF LACE

By Leila Old

Remarkable and unexpected articles occasionally are donated to collections. I remember overhearing a conversation at a conference once where the speaker was telling about accessioning a group of 100 items of underwear recently received.

An unsolicited gift of great interest came to the home economics collection at the University of Idaho in 1968. An alumna, Mrs. Elizabeth Hayes Decker, who had retired to Florida, and who was apparently "putting her house in order" found an assortment of doilies, lace collars, handkerchiefs, and lace remnants which she recognized as having been from her mother's garments while a Regent of the University of Idaho.

These were obviously treasures because, having decided to give them away, she didn't just box them up and send them to the University. This, in itself, would have been a nice gift. Instead, she bought a loose leaf notebook, gold stick-on letters for a title on the outside of the binder, and mounted all the items on black pages. Each page was completed with a hand-written commentary, giving the name of the lace or the technique depicted, and any information she recalled about identification, price, where it came from, or conditions under which it had been made. There were examples of Irish crochet, Battenberg tape lace, Binche, Margot, Renaissance, Venise, and more.

This combination of carefully presented materials including informative details was a real thrill to students in costume

history and design classes. It gave a starting point for identifying the laces on garments in the collection and strongly motivated researching those laces which did not match to anything in the Decker donation. I, for one, needed to know more about lace, if only to keep up with my students. As I searched for information, I found my interests centering on four areas: vocabulary, identification, techniques, and facts and legends of origin.

An early vocabulary item that delighted me was the origin of the word "lace". It comes from a Latin word meaning "to ensnare or entice." I find it easy to associate lace visually with the ensnaring quality of spider webs and psychologically with the enticing feminine wiles associated with lace handkerchiefs, lace collars, or lace stockings.

My reading led me to numerous stories concerning the origins of lace, some of them appearing more historically possible than others. The literature provides us with several "cradles" for the art of lace making, a craft closely interwoven with needlework and also with netting. Interestingly, every cradle, every place credited as a birthplace of lacemaking, is located near the sea where netting was a natural development and was undergoing continual improvement.

Egypt is one example. Their ancient writings describe how they "work in flax and weave network," and wall painting in tombs, statuettes, and mummy wrappings show network, drawn work, cut work, and other openwork ornamentation.





David's dry goods store with a variety of Battenberg tape lace for sale. LCHS photo

There are also early records from Europe. The oldest finds are a form of netting; hairnets from bodies found in bogs in the north. These bogs are made of compressed plant material which preserves protein and even some vegetable matter very well. These fragments date from 3-4,000 B.C., but from that time on, all through the dark ages, nothing else lace-like has been recovered.

Then, out of the 16th century comes evidence of lace activity in Italy. The Doge's Palace in Venice contains a mural showing the Virtues, Patience and Industry, holding a large cobweb, thought to commemorate the lace makers of Venice. Why this association with cobwebs? It is something more than mere fantasy. For example, in a museum in Bremen there is actually a scooping net for small fishes which is literally a cobweb. Aesthetic variations on netting and inspiration from cobweb structures seem very possible.

One famous legend supporting Venice as the birthplace of lace--the sort of lace that the word conjurs up in our minds today--is this. A young girl in love with a much absent sailor was gazing hour after hour at a chunk of coral that her lover had given her as a keepsake. To while away her time, she attempted to imitate its slender and intricate branchings with a mazy weft of linen threads.

Another story, coming out of Flanders, claims that the last of the Crusaders on their return from the Holy Land brought the industry to the low countries--not so much a claim to its origin as an explanation of how lace came to that part of the world.

Perhaps the most complicated tale is the one claiming that lace techniques were carried to Nuremburg in the bundle of a Protestant refugee escaping from Spanish persecution. There a rich burgher's daughter learned the art. When she mar-



ried, she took it with her to her new Saxon home where she taught the miners' daughters (children of men who worked for her husband) to make lace. Thus, the name of Barbara Uttmann became revered for the industry, and for the welfare her skills had brought to the district. A prophesy held that, on her marriage, she would have as many children as there were bobbins on her lace pillow. Among her children and grandchildren she had 75--but this is only enough to make rather narrow lace. At least the dates on her tombstone establish reality, 1514-1578. It seems assured that some kind of lace was being made in Germany by mid-to-late 16th century. The fact that volumes of lace patterns which show an advanced development of lace techniques were published in Venice in the 1550's throws some shadow on the Barbara Uttmann story. The epitaph on her tombstone claiming that she invented lace must fall somewhere between history and legend, much like the story of William Tell.

Each record seems to reflect some truth. Venice was a lace headquarters from the earliest times. Early Venician pattern books showed strongly oriental arabesques, and from the very start of their lace records they show advanced techniques. Venice was a commercial channel at the time of the Crusades, so the possibility and probability of a source for lace carried in from the East is strong. In addition, patterns with similar oriental flavor appeared simultaneously in Venice, Genoa, and Ragusa--and nowhere else--and all three were chief trading posts with the East. Also, all European pillow lace was too technically uniform--same tools, same stitches and plaiting--to support the theory that each country invented it separately. We do have pictures showing plaited cords used as trimming in the Middle Ages, but no pictures of lace appear before the time of Christopher Columbus. Pictures are more reliable evidence than inventory records since vocabulary is easily misunderstood, the word "lace" often referring to a cord for lacing rather than the openwork, decorative material we presently mean when we use the word.

Thus, the best the authorities seem to be able to say about the origin of lace is that it sprang from something functional like fishing nets, was lost to Europe and most of the rest of the world during the Dark Ages, perhaps was kept alive in China, and brought to light by the Crusaders. Thereupon, it developed to a new level of artistry and elegance from the 16th century onward.

One supposition is that the spread of the use of lace and the great enthusiasm for it may have been caused by the restrictive sumptuary laws. These regulations repressed the use of gold and silver cloth, jewels, silk, and other valuable materials due to religious ideals and an effort, also, to maintain the status quo--to keep the rising middle classes "in their place." The plain white delicate thread product evaded the statutory laws yet gratified the taste for luxury and artistic beauty.

Enough, then, about how lace making began.

Now, to answer the question "How did they do it?" And right from the start, my quest for word meanings will necessarily insert itself into the answer.

Most of us understand fairly well the processes of knitting and crocheting. Both are methods by which lace-like materials can be made. Macrame has been popular recently, so we also can visualize how knotting, if done in fine enough thread, could be somewhat lacey. Many of us, too, can recognize tatting when we see it, even though fewer of us can tat than knit or crochet. Still, products from these several techniques are not what most of us think of when we say "lace." We mean something sheer, patterned, feminine, expensive, and certainly not something we can make. So, how is that kind of lace made?

Basically, lace is made one of two ways: with a needle and thread, or with bobbins. Lace made with a needle is commonly called needlepoint lace. Lace made with bobbins may be called bobbin lace



but more frequently is referred to as pillow lace because the bobbins are hung onto a pillow or firm cushion to work the pattern. Unfortunately, these terms are sometimes more confusing than helpful in searching the literature to try to decide which kind of lace you have at hand, since both types are made on some kind of a pillow or pad, the word "point" is often misapplied to some types of pillow lace and certain bobbin stitches have "point" in their names.

Needle-point lace appears to have developed in Italy from reticella, a needle art of buttonholing along areas in fabric from which numerous bands of thread have been drawn out. The effect is much like several rows of hemstitching, side by side, a net or mesh effect being produced. If you think about it, when you pull out several adjoining threads in a crosswise direction and then several in a lengthwise direction, a hole is created where the threads crossed. If the hole is very big it must be supported with some sort of needle work. Over time, more and more threads were pulled, the holes became larger, and so much space had to be filled in with needle worked bars, spider webs, and other designs that the cloth was discarded entirely, as a starting point, and only the needle and thread work was done. This they called "punto in aria," stitches in the air.

With no cloth to work with, the original effect had to be produced by constructing bits of cloth texture with the needle and thread. All needle laces have these clothlike areas. The literature usually refers to them as "toile." The various backgrounds, or grounds, are frequently called "reseau," and little openwork sections in the patterns are called "jours," meaning windows. The little bands that are used to join one pattern unit to another are called bars, legs, or brides (translated, bridges), which may be decorated with a series of small loops called "picots." As you can see, the vocabulary just goes along with the territory.

To begin a piece of needle lace, the design lines are pricked onto heavy dark paper which is then lined with cloth to strengthen it. The pattern units are outlined with heavy thread, held in place on the pattern with close stitches. The inner space of the pattern unit is then filled with toile and jours attached to the outline thread, which is later cut loose from the pattern by snipping the stitches between the cloth and paper patterns. These finished pattern units are positioned on another pattern and attached to each other by a ground of net and bars. Buttonhole stitch characterizes much of needle lace structure, often extremely fine. In fact, one characteristic of Argentan lace is its hexagonal ground which has ten buttonhole stitches to each of the six sides, each side being a millimeter or less in length. It does indeed take a magnifying glass to see some of the details required to identify one lace from another.

Now, how is bobbin lace different? Bobbin, or pillow lace is made by weaving or braiding. It requires more planning but is easier to do than needle lace, the repetitions becoming automatic. Bobbin lace starts just as for needle lace, by pricking a pattern onto stiff paper or parchment and placing it on a pillow, either a firm bowed cushion or a solidly stuffed cylinder. Bobbin-like spindles are wound and hung in pairs at the beginning of the pattern. Pillow lace is sometimes called "bone" lace because, early on, holders for very fine thread were fish bones. Always worked in pairs, the bobbins are alternately crossed or twisted, then held in position on the pillow with glass headed pins until needed for their next cross or twist.

Bobbin lace is generally sheerer, lighter weight, as well as more flexible than needle lace. A comparison in your mind of the texture of a piece of cloth with close-set all-over embroidery with a piece of woven fabric of a similar weight will help you understand this difference.

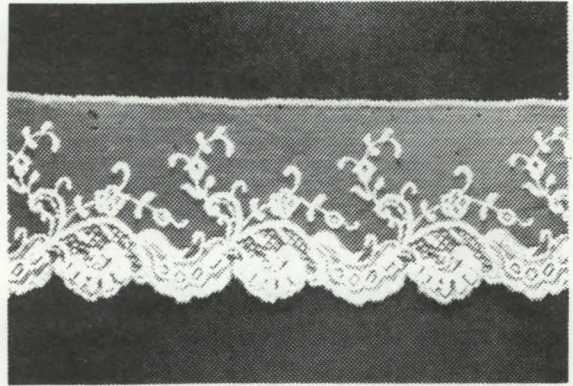


Certain bobbin laces are completed inch by inch as they are being made, some bobbins carrying heavier thread than others, thus permitting toile, jours, reseau, brides and even cordonnet (a heavy outlining thread) to be done as the work progresses. However, the cordonnet is more commonly added with a needle--hand-run--as a final process. Other bobbin laces are made in separate units, just as for needle lace, but done with bobbins, and then joined on a pattern with a ground of bobbin stitches.

Can one be sure, from the two lace making methods just described, that one can tell bobbin lace from needle lace with the naked eye? Sometimes! I struggled a lot. Either I couldn't really see what I thought I was looking for, or I'd mix up which characteristic went with which type of lace. The burden was lifted from me a little bit recently when I read the following quote in a 1907 authoritative lace book: "A good deal may be learnt too from A. Lefebure, tho he has made some mistakes in classification, even confusing point with pillow."

Besides trying to be able to distinguish bobbin from needle, are there any laces we can learn to identify by name? Some are rather easy, others are not. Some are named for the location where they were made, such as Brussels net; some for the nationality of the people who made them, for example, Armenian lace. Methods or implements used are reflected in lace names also, for example "rose point" which is a stitch, or "bobbinet" which is made with bobbins.

A few laces are fairly easy for the amateur to determine whether they are bobbin or needle made, and practically foolproof in assigning the right name. First, a look at some bobbin lace. One that is very easy to recognize is Cluny. It is a coarse lace made in linen or cotton. The patterns were copied from old Italian laces in the Cluny museum. Cluny lace contains solid grain-of-wheat shaped units, often arranged to resemble the



An example of Chantilly lace. Leila Old Collection

Maltese cross. The edge characteristically has a pronounced scallop. A close look will reveal that the wheats and some bars look like woven fabric, other bars look like tiny braids. These two details prove it to be a bobbin lace, the coarse texture and wheat units identify it as Cluny.

A second bobbin lace well known to many present day consumers is Val lace. The full name is Valenciennes from the place where it was originally made in France, and it is, possibly, the type of lace you last sewed onto something. It has either square or diamond reseau which close scrutiny shows to be plaited. The pattern and ground are both of the same weight thread and there is no outlining cordonnet. It is a flat, sturdy but delicate lace frequently used for baby dresses or blouse trimming, and on lingerie where decoration is desired which will wash and wear well. Since plaiting is another term for braiding, this indicates that the lace is pillow lace--made with bobbins--and the lack of cordonnet usually means Val.



Another bobbin lace, obvious if you know its name, is bobbinet. This is a simple unadorned net now available in nylon and very wide--to most of us, just net. Of course, bobbinet is machine made. Attempts were made as early as the mid-1700's to produce lace on the stocking knitting machine invented in 1589, but the knitted lace raveled and ran as knitting will, and, therefore, was not popular. By 1760, some pillow lace effects were accomplished on the weaving loom and, in 1809, John Heathcote perfected the bobbinet machine, imitating very well the hexagonal stitch of Brussels net, the hand made product bobbinet imitates by machine.

As these early dates suggest, much old lace was machine made, even though the making of lace by hand continued well into the present century. Much machine lace was excellent in quality and design, and even skilled experts sometimes find it hard to tell hand made from machine made.

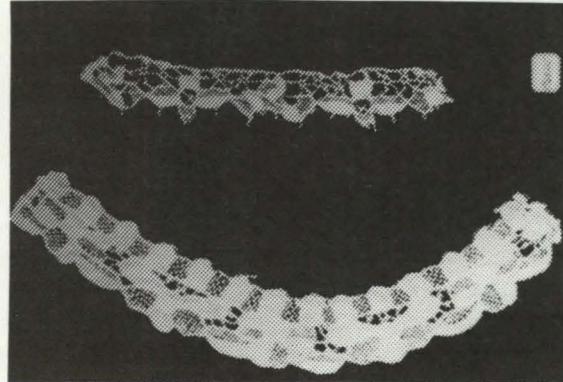
Maybe the most romantic name in bobbin lace is Chantilly. Generally thought of as black, it was also made in natural colored silk and called Blonde. It is as fine in texture as Cluny is coarse and has all the suppleness and grace of hand required of lace shawls and mantillas. The ground is very fine, a slightly coarser thread being used for the toile



An example of Filet lace. Leila Old Collection

which is usually somewhat floral in design. The patterns are defined with a cordonnet of flat, untwisted coarser thread. A sheer and delicate lace with these qualities is probably Chantilly.

Turning to needle-point laces, Point Venise is the one many people can recognize easily. It is usually white, bold, and floral in design, the patterns connected by brides that are heavily ornamented with picots. Joins in the ground are concealed by sprigs, little units worked separately and joined onto the background where needed. Everything is buttonhole stitched, a sure sign that it is needle made. The solidity, bulk, and generous ornamentation make identifying Point Venise quite simple.



An example of Needle Lace-Point Venise from the Leila Old collection.

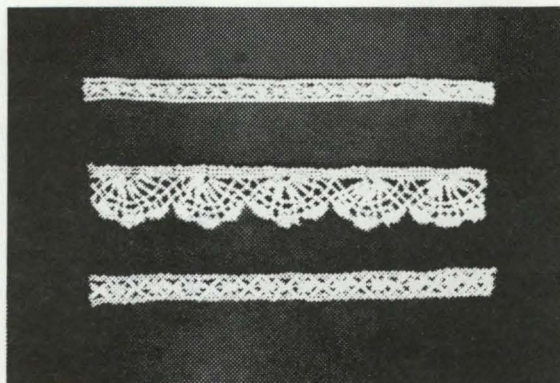
A second needle lace we were very familiar with about thirty years ago, when we wore slips, was Alencon. This lace usually was made in 2" or 3" widths, sheer but somewhat stiff, and effective for trim at neck and hem of lingerie. The ground was fine net and open work, the design units surrounded with cordonnet. Originally the rather straight edge of Alencon lace was firmed with horsehair carried along with the cordonnet as it was buttonholed to the outer edge of the lace. The combination of delicate ground and pattern and rather conspicuous cordonnet strongly suggest you are looking at Alencon lace.



A needle lace more familiar to our mothers and grandmothers than to us, but easy to identify, is Renaissance or Battenberg lace. This is a tape lace joined by needlework. Around the turn of the century and in the first decades of the 20th century, women's magazines such as *Priscilla* advertised kits of tape and thread, along with directions for stitches, and patterns for making blouses or skirt and bodice combinations. The ready made tape was basted onto the locations indicated on the cambric pattern and then held together by specified stitches such as bars, spider wheels, and flat stitches something like fagoting. It was a needle work pastime enjoyed by many. If the clothwork shows that it is a strip adjusted to fit the design it is at least a tape lace, probably Battenberg.

Another needle lace that skilled fingers also were doing at that time was of Paraguay or Teneriffe origin. It was made in separate wheel like units of spider or floral effects and joined to form the required size and shape. Present day daisy makers are something of an offshoot.

One last lace, perhaps the most familiar to us because we have seen it imitated so often in crochet, is filet lace. Popular in the '20s and '30s, its appearance is characterized by a coarse square mesh background, knotted at every corner, often deeply scalloped, and frequently carrying patterns of roses and rose leaves. By technique, it has a knotted or netted structure for the ground; the pattern is worked in with a needle in an under-and-over darning stitch giving a clothlike look. It is one of a group of laces called "darned lace," a revival of laces or darned netting from the middle ages. It can be expertly copied by machine and its beauty plus low cost contributed to its popularity in the recent past not only on clothing but for table scarfs, doilies, and anti-macassars. Beautiful sturdy filet table cloths can still be purchased today, imported from China.



An example of Bobbin Lace-Cluny from the Leila Old collection.

This is but a brief introduction to lace techniques and lace names, lace history and lace legends, but chances are very good that not a week will pass before you will have some encounter with lace that you would previously have overlooked. This time it will mean something. Enjoy!

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CLOTHING AND THE WORLD OF THE  
PALOUSE FARMWIFE 1890-1910

by Kim Haubner

"Clothes make the man," as the saying goes. They also make the woman and, in a museum collection, they make for interesting historical research. The clothes people have worn throughout history tell us a great deal about their activities, their environment, and their beliefs. The clothing of the Palouse farmwife is no exception.

Most turn-of-the-century women's clothing found in costume collections today consists of a woman's "good" or "Sunday" dress. Worn on special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, or going to town, it was well cared for and highly cherished. Most often, the best dress of the Palouse farmwife was made of one of two fabrics--silk or fine wool. Black silk was the most common, though patterned silk was used by women of greater affluence.<sup>1</sup>

During the late 19th century, it was very popular for women of fashion to wear great amounts of trim on their clothing. This included lace, bows, braids, and beads of all kinds. A fashion not lost on the Palouse farmwife, one oral history mentions that four or five rows of braid around a "nice, big gored skirt" was not uncommon for a trip into town on Saturday.<sup>2</sup>

Other days, the best dress was carefully put away and clothing more appropriate to the farmwife's everyday chores was worn. Unfortunately, little of this "common" clothing survives. Clothing was used and reused by the practical farmwife until it was even too "shot" for the ragbag.<sup>3</sup>

Practicality was necessary in a life that was far from leisurely. The days were long and the work hard. Large meals were cooked for the family and, at threshing time, for a crew of field hands. The children needed care and the sewing done. She fed the chickens daily and collected the eggs. She also planted, weeded, and harvested the garden, canning or storing the abundance. According to one source, "canning 700 or more jars of produce a season was not uncommon."<sup>4</sup> Along with all this went ironing, laundering, churning, and butchering.<sup>5</sup>



"Mother Hubbard" style dress with apron.  
LCHS photo





Typical combination shirtwaist and gored skirt. LCHS photo

The clothes to be worn for these types of activities were less fashionable and more durable and simple. With laundry done only once a week and a woman only owning one or two everyday dresses, clothing was usually of dark colors which did not show the dirt. The most popular styles were a combination shirtwaist and gored skirt or a "Mother Hubbard," which was a simple dress. The former outfit was popular because if one or the other part became soiled only that part had to be changed. An apron was usually worn over the dress. This protected the dress and was easier to clean. A clean apron was often kept on a hook by the door for a quick change in case of company.<sup>6</sup>

Fashion invaded women's lives in spite of the usual practicality in everyday clothing. Some women, for example, still wore their corsets even while doing their work. Indeed, many women had worn them

for so long that they became necessary for the proper support of the back muscles. Also, petticoats were worn year-round. Though flannel ones were practical in the winter, cotton petticoats added extra weight in the summer.<sup>7</sup>

Where did these clothes come from? There were basically three sources. Handmade clothing was sewn either by the local dressmaker or a woman for her own family. Pattern sources came from taking apart old clothes and using the pieces as a pattern, seeing magazine pictures and copying the style, and buying paper patterns from stores or through popular magazines. Paper patterns first became available in the third quarter of the 19th century, Butterick and Peerless being the popular brands to purchase.<sup>8</sup>



Bolts of fabric available to the Latah County seamstress. The J. C. Penney Store. LCHS photo



Clothes could be ordered through mail order catalogs from stores such as Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck. Though the "Wish Book" and "Farmer's Bible" were very popular, clothes were not ordered frequently from these catalogs.

Another source of new clothing was the local department store in town. Stores in Moscow included Creighton's, Williamson's, the Greater Boston, and David & Ely. Vollmer's was available for those in Genesee.<sup>10</sup> Though ready-to-wear clothing became available in the middle 19th century with the invention and perfection of the sewing machine, it was not considered proper or normal clothing for many years. Women's ready-to-wear clothes, with the elaborate styles, were often

ill-fitting and very difficult to manufacture. Even when the quality was improved, it took a long time before anything but a special dress might be bought in a store.

Through experience and necessity the turn-of-the-century Palouse farmwife most often made and wore very practical clothing. Even though thousands of miles from the world's fashion centers and relatively isolated from them, she was still as aware and enthusiastic about fashion as her eastern sister. Increasingly better communications, such as the expansion of the railroad, the rise in availability of clothes by catalog, and the creation of Rural Free Delivery helped to mainstream her into this important aspect of American life.<sup>11</sup>



Turn of the century dress styles. LCHS photo





An early 1900s group of young women. Note the use of lace on their waists. LCHS photo

#### Notes

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11. Lehman, p. 5.

Most of the materials used for the research for this article were papers and oral histories prepared for the Palouse Hills Living History Farm project of the University of Idaho Museum. A copy of these materials has been donated to the Latah County Historical Society and is available to the public.



## LEVI'S

Recognized today as an Americana tradition, Levi jeans have been added to the Smithsonian collection. Although the pants do not often find their way into textile collections (because they were usually worn out) there is some evidence of jeans or denim work pants in the photo collection at Latah County Historical Society. As you can see from the accompanying pictures, men were wearing durable and rugged, yet close fitting pants at the turn of the century in Latah County and maybe even a pair of "Levi's pants."

According to legend, Levi's originated in the San Francisco area in the 1850s, and it is almost certain that these heavy pants (or similar models) found their way into the Latah County pioneer men's wardrobe worn for farming, timbering, or mining chores. Mr. Levi Strauss arrived by boat in San Francisco about 1850 with a large supply of dry goods from the family operation in New York. Included in his stock was heavy canvas meant for tents and wagon covers. It is said that the first person to examine his goods was a crusty old miner who, upon seeing the canvas, muttered, "You should have brought pants. Pants don't wear worth a hoot up in the diggins."

Levi, realizing the mild California cli-



Men in the woods wore durable and rugged pants. LCHS photo





This man appears to have LEVI-like pants on. LCHS photo

mate didn't require tents, took his canvas to a tailor and had it made into tough and rugged trousers. Although the first pairs did not have back pockets, a yoke, or belt loops, they looked very much like the basic straight leg of today.

The miner who received that first pair of canvas pants is said to have strode through town boasting about "these pants of Levi's." The name stuck and soon everyone wanted a pair. And so the uniform of the West was born!

Levi ordered tough French cotton, later called denim, and had it dyed indigo blue

to guarantee consistent color. In the 1860s suspender buttons and one back pocket were added. It was in 1872 in cooperation with a tailor from Nevada that rivets were added to the pockets. They kept the pockets (often stuffed with ore) from falling off. In 1886 the famous Two-Horse brand leather patch was added. Belt loops were introduced in 1922 and the rivets were concealed in 1937. Button flies were replaced on some styles with zippers in 1954.

The full story of Levi Struass is told by Elaine Ratner in Dress, The Journal of the Costume Society of America, Vol. 1, 1975.



## REMEMBER WHEN

by DeAnn Thomas

Long ago, it was not unusual to see the woman of the household behind a loom as part of her daily chores. She produced most of the cloth used in her home. Often, the bedclothes have survived her and are found in our collections today. Woven coverlets have been handed down from generation to generation, from grandmother to granddaughter. Sometimes in this process we forget the art of how these heirlooms were produced.

Do you remember when "Mother used to spin the flax on the little wheel to make the foundation for her coverlets"?<sup>3</sup>

Or do you remember when "Mother used to dye the thread and her nails would be blue with indigo"?<sup>3</sup>

In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth century the art of decorative weaving was a universal practice. It was very common to have magnificent pillared bedsteads and cover them with beautiful coverlets. These coverlets were so highly prized that they were bequeathed in wills. Even today, far back in the mountains of every Highland state, are families whose meager incomes do not exceed a few dollars a year, but who treasure the old "kivers" and would never consider selling one of them except "for to get a doctor."<sup>3</sup>

"Recently in a remote place in North Carolina where cash income had long since been cut off by the 'lean times,' a mother explained that she did not see how she could raise the amount necessary to pay the taxes on the old home that year. When asked if she would care to dispose of any of the coverlets or quilts in the three cupboards filled with them, she made it clear that these were being kept to pass on to the children and nothing would induce her to part with them, not even to save the old place."<sup>1</sup>

Coverlets, then, were a very important article to have in your household and without them the home was really not complete. Because of this, the average woman in the colonies had to use her own resourcefulness and self-sufficiency to produce such a coverlet.

The typical coverlet was made with a linen or cotton warp and a woolen weft in two separate colors. The resulting design, when traditional overshot, summer and winter, or double weave were used, created geometric patterns in reverse colors on either side of the fabric--if blue on a white ground on one side, the other would be white on a blue ground. Narrow lengths were usually sewn together with such perfect register and care that only the closest examination reveals the seam.

The weaver began in the field with the growing of the flax or cotton. Some of the earlier coverlets were woven with a linen warp. The flax was grown in the summer months, cut in the fall, and retted outdoors when it was thoroughly disintegrated by the rains and snows. Then it was scutched, the fiber separated, and made fine enough for spinning on a low wheel. The making of linen was such a laborious process that cotton for the warp seemed to become more prevalent in use. Preparing the cotton was not an easy task, either, for the woman often planted, hoed, and picked the cotton herself. Being too far from a cotton gin, or too poor, she would gin the cotton with homemade equipment that resembled an ordinary clothes wringer. Then she would card it, spin it on the big wheel, and twist it into yarn.

To prepare the weft material or wool the mountain weaver often sheared the fleece from the sheep. After picking out the burrs, bark, and tangle weeds gathered by the animal, she washed it, carded it into soft rolls, and spun the yarn.



Before the actual weaving could begin the wool had to be hand-dyed with available materials. The cotton thread was left in its natural color and the wool was usually dyed blue using indigo, although other colors could be produced. "Indigo played such an important part in the dyeing attempts of the early settler that its Americanization should be noted. The housewife in New England could get her indigo supply from abroad since ships went frequently to and from Boston to the mother country, but colonists in remote areas could not. Indigo was destined to be the second greatest plantation crop of the Carolina's."<sup>5</sup>

Of necessity, the women of early colonial times produced their dyes from the materials that they found growing in the fields, pastures, and garden plots. Huge brass or copper kettles for dyeing were part of each household's outfitting. Setting the blue pot was an event of great importance fraught with much risk and worry, although a few Highland women who seemed invincible on any occasion thought it no trick at all.<sup>3</sup> Now the weaver could begin her artistry. The talent for weaving "runs"<sup>3</sup> in families and manifests itself in varying degrees. Some weavers must have a draft or pattern to guide them and others can look at a coverlet or a picture of one, then write a draft and and weave it with perfect accuracy. Others required neither coverlet nor picture to guide them; they make their own drafts. Once these drafts were used they were usually handed down to the next generation.

A great many of the nineteenth century coverlets were woven by itinerant weavers who carried their looms with them from farmstead to farmstead. Their skill enabled them to deviate from the rigidity of geometrical devices and conventional repeats, displaying patterns of great intricacy and elaboration, including human figures, birds, and beasts as well as flowers, fruits, and foliage. This particular type of coverlet could not be woven on a mountain loom and was usually done with a Jaquard loom, which was brought over with the European itinerant weavers.

The Latah County Historical Society, housed in the McConnell Mansion, is the proud owner of a beautiful coverlet that is navy blue with an off-white background and woven with an overshot pattern. Because of many different names of patterns, no attempt was made to try to identify the pattern. The only history that could be found on this coverlet was that it was woven by an Elizabeth Gilstrap in 1898. The coverlet is pictured on the cover of this issue. If you recognize it or know any information about the maker, please call the Society. It helps preserve the history of our county in a more effective manner.

Histories are very important in heirlooms such as these because as they are passed down from generation to generation, the information is lost and therefore the sentimental value.

If you are the proud owner of such a coverlet or any heirloom, take the time to search out the important information from relatives and others who can still remember and take the time to record this information so that your children and their children can . . . remember when. . . .

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A HISTORY OF THE BRASSIERE  
AND SIMILAR DEVICES DESIGNED  
TO PERFECT THE BUSTLINE

by Shannon O'Dell

Underwear is not usually a suitable subject from the scholarly point of view; Victorian attitudes still abound concerning the appropriateness of such a topic. It is, however, a very essential part of costume since the shape of women's fashion silhouette was and still is determined by what is underneath.

Until recently the brassiere or "bra" was generally thought of as a clothing garment meant to shape and confine women's breasts. Only lately has the brassiere been considered a regular part of the costume for American women. Although most people think of it as a product of twentieth century dress, particularly after the 1930s, the brassiere has a much longer history and was not always called by that name.

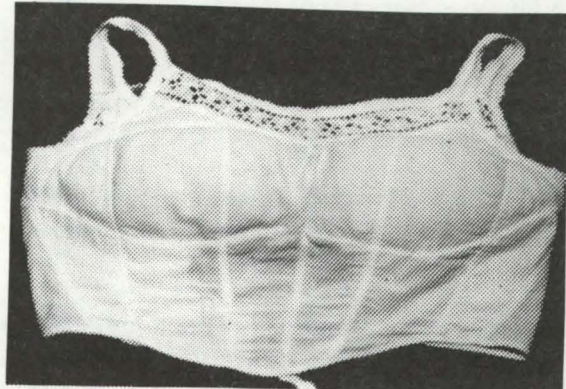
The application of the word "brassiere," as it pertained to women's underwear, came from a French man, Charles R. DeBouoise, who made and named the first brassiere in 1902. The word's literal interpretation is confusing; one source states that it translates as "arm protector"<sup>1</sup>; another source claims that the word means "infant's underbodice."<sup>4</sup>

The idea of a breast garment can be traced to as early as 800 BC when women of ancient Greece used wide, tight waistbands to lift the bosom and then bound their breasts with woolen cloth.<sup>1</sup> These bands that flattened or minimized the bust were called mastodeton by the Greeks. Roman women of the fourth century AD wore another breastband called a stophium. A Roman-Sicilian mosaic of that time shows an athletic female in briefs and bra.<sup>4</sup>

During the Middle Ages the body was considered sinful and little was said about underwear. From about the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century the greatest influence on the shape of the

female figure was the corset. The bustline at this time was confined inside the corset and occasionally the corset was designed to push up the bust. False bosoms were popular for a time around the end of the eighteenth century and were worn with empire-waisted dresses.

Advertised bust improvement devices were utilized by women in the late nineteenth century and during the first decade of the twentieth century. Bust pads of celluloid and rubber were popular. An "inflated undulating artificial bust" was patented in 1860.<sup>4</sup>



Muslin camisole brassiere-type garment from the LCHS Collection. PR photo

The only brassiere-type garment in the costume collection of the Latah County Historical Society is that of a factory made camisole of white muslin with two pockets which hold two elliptically shaped pads filled with feathers. This garment was worn in 1908 and could be what was termed at that time a "bust bodice" or "bust confiner."<sup>1</sup> Similar devices were advertised in a 1900 issue of the Mayflower, a women's magazine, and were called "bust forms" (p. 379). Such bust forms "take any desired shape and size and produce perfectly the full bust and slender waist. . ." reads the ad of Henderson and Henderson Bust Forms of Buf-



falo, New York. Cunnington and Cunnington<sup>3</sup> describe similar garments that began to be worn in the 1880s or 1890s. "For a dance the size (of the pad) that (the wearer) selected 'would depend upon who (her) partner was to be.'" Such could have been the case with the garment in the costume collection at the Historical Society.

During the Edwardian years a fashionable woman wore soft and sheer gowns and women found it necessary to cover and control the breasts if one was to remain modest. Part of this need arose when the corset began to be worn lower on the hips, thus necessitating support for the bosom. The bust bodice was often boned (with stays) like a corset and created a round or pigeon-chested effect. It was considered necessary for "stout" women and less so for smaller breasted women.<sup>13</sup>

The bandeau came into fashion in France around 1914. In the beginning its use was for control under a bathing suit. It was the first elasticized brassiere and was advertised as the "secret of a bewitching figure."<sup>1</sup> That was also the year of the first patented bras which, unlike the bust bodice, showed separation between the breasts.<sup>4</sup>

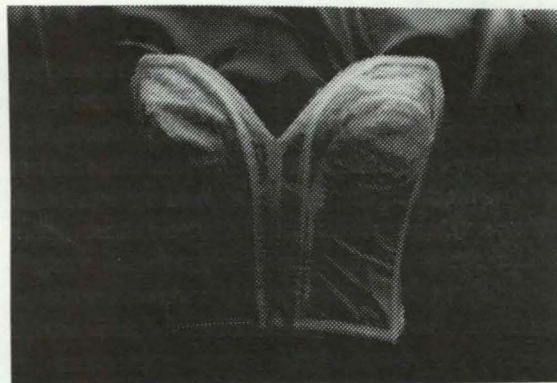
During the twenties the flat-chested look was fashionable with flattener brassieres becoming the new rage. They were made of strong cotton or firm broche and fastened on one side.<sup>4</sup> One was called the "flat-o-form."<sup>1</sup> "Undies" were all that were required to be worn under a dress (at least by the younger generation). They consisted of a brassiere and short panties.<sup>3</sup> If a corset was worn, the aim was to flatten the breasts and make the hips narrowed.<sup>4</sup> In 1919 for those who wanted full-line control but no corset there was the corselette, which was a brassiere and corset in one. Rayon came into general use and made cheap underwear more attractive. It was advertised as "artificial silk."<sup>4</sup>

The 1927 to 1943 period was a developmental era for American underwear with new companies and new materials coming into the picture. In 1926 Mrs. Rosalind Kline developed the Kestos bra. It was the

start of the bust cup in which each cup was darted to give the bust shape. It did not have the long-line look which was popular earlier. During this period the bust was accentuated and the waist indicated; emphasis on the size of the bust and its extreme thrust came later. Ida Rosenthal, another pioneer in the new industry, created a booming business in the 1920s by giving away an uplifting brassiere with every dress she sold in her shop. Her firm later incorporated under the name of Maidenform, a very familiar brand in underwear today. Maidenform was one of the first companies to have special machinery to make brassieres during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>5</sup>

Next developments in the industry are still used today. In fact there has been little innovation since this period before and during WWII. The invention of elastic thread in 1930 was an important development in the underwear industry. The year 1935 saw the introduction of cut fittings and the establishment of cup sizes, but it was some years before the system was widely use. The first bra-slip combination and the first padded bra were introduced in the mid-1930s. Nylon, which was first developed in 1940, subsequently had a great impact on the underwear industry because it was inexpensive and easy to care for.<sup>4</sup>

The years from the mid-1940s to about 1960 represent a period of exploitation of women's bustlines. Most important during



White 1950s longline brassiere from the Leila Old Historic Costume Collection at the U. of I. PR photo



this time was the size of a woman's breasts and increases in it were achieved through garments meant to uplift and often falsify the magnitude of the bosom. If one could imitate a particular star on the movie screen, that was the ideal. "Falsies," bust improvement devices, and methods sold well. Martin explained that the American interest in the bustline was a result of the war time pin-up girl and the Hollywood sweater girl. "Girls" at home did not want to disillusion the soldiers when they returned and as a result the bosom was highlighted as never before. In 1948 four-and-a-half million breast pads were sold.<sup>8</sup>

There were three kinds of brassieres worn during the 40s. One was the bandeau, for the youthful figure; it was narrow, composed mainly of bust sections, and looked somewhat like a modern brassiere. Another was the long-line bra; it had a band below the bustline which controlled the diaphragm and some had hooks to connect to a girdle. The third was the brassiere, which extended farther below the bust for greater coverage and control. A strapless brassiere, designed by an engineer, "defied gravity" by supporting the bust with a double arching wire worn over the breasts. It was retailed as Arlene Bras and three models were available: "Sweater," "Cupshaped," and "Accentuated" or "Ubangi."<sup>14</sup>

The late 1940s also saw the renewal of circular stitching (originally started in 1928) for each cup for support of the breasts. A predominant shape was the cone, reminiscent of the science-fiction rockets in the movies of the time. This pointed shape lasted for only a few years but extreme uplift remained to 1960.

The brassiere industry was at an all-time high in 1960. U.S. women were the world's best brassiere customers.<sup>5</sup> The designers began to bring more variety into the market, experimenting with light-weight fabrics, unusual colors and patterns, and oil resistant fabrics. "Body-bras" and coordinates (matching underwear sets) were made. In 1964 a brief fad of very low necklines was popular in New York and Paris, leading to the development of a

"demi-bra" which uplifted the breasts and came in black and "nude" colors.<sup>12</sup>

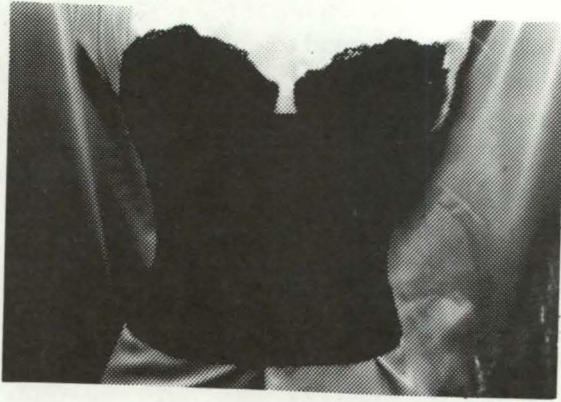
Even though America was getting away from the exaggerated bustline in the 1960s, retailers were advertising sensual brassieres, which were pretty enough to be seen. Rudi Gernreich designed the "no-bra" made of thin, sheer material, but his design did not sell well.<sup>10</sup> The 1960s period was merely an extension of the post-WWII emphasis on the bustline but the difference lay in that the underwear was meant to be seen by the privileged and allowed more skin to be exposed.

From about 1969 to the present the emphasis on brassiere design became more natural, in fact in 1968 and 1969 the "bra-burning" movement may have stimulated this. A 1969 survey stated that 32% of college-age women in the American east went braless. The Corset and Bra Council reported that overall sales were increasing only 1% compared to 5% in 1964.<sup>2</sup>

The mid-1970s was a time of concern for what I term "breast health."<sup>6, 10, 11</sup> Doctors, physical exercise professionals, and engineering experts were consulted by the fashion-conscious as to the effects of bralessness popularized by some in the most recent Women's Liberation Movement in 1968.<sup>2</sup> The consensus was that largely endowed women should wear a brassiere and small breasted women need not worry. Ramsay described "the brassiere syndrome" as affecting large-breasted women. Its symptoms includes permanent shoulder ridges, bruises and damage produced by shoulder straps that were too tight, arthritis of the upper cervical spine, dowager's hump, and numbness of the fingers. Relief came in 1978 with the Brantly Bra, a heavily constructed garment designed for the sports-minded large breasted woman. Brantly, an aeronautical engineer, used science to create the bras that came in 200 sizes.<sup>6</sup> He was not the first aeronautical engineer to design a brassiere; that honor goes to Howard Hughes who designed one especially for Jane Russell in 1943.<sup>1</sup>

Today's bras are mainly made with softer, sheerer fabric with little support in the





Black 1960s longline brassiere from the Leila Old Historic Costume Collection at the U. of I. PR photo

design, although some older styles are still available for those who prefer them. Following the dictates of fashion, the new styles are now designed to keep the breasts from sagging and to give them a rounder, more youthful appearance, a rounding sometimes achieved by an "underwire." Bra hardware has varied little in material and style over the years with most brassieres having back closures of hooks and eyes. Today some brassiers have front closures, which make for faster and easier placement of the garment. Manufacturers of modern brassieres have even begun to make plastic "hardware" for strap adjustment and closures.

Research on the underwear of the past remains difficult in the known textile collections open for research in Latah County. The collection of underwear at the Latah County Historical Society consists mainly of petticoats, drawers, and camisoles of the period between 1890 and 1920. Brassieres of this period are rare and were not commonly worn as a separate garment from the corset until the corset gradually disappeared around the 1920s. Early brassieres of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s are certainly eligible for collection by the Latah County Historical Society and should be sought.

For those interested in costume research, another costume collection, the Leila Old Historical Costume Collection, is available for research and is located in the Home Economics Building at the University of Idaho.

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Clifford & Loretta Wolf, Colton, WA  
Alice P. Zaring, Walla Walla, WA



LATAH COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
110 South Adams St.  
Moscow, Idaho 83843

Non-profit Organ.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit No. 161  
Moscow, Idaho

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Mrs. Calvin Warn  
, Box 202  
Moscow, ID 83843

In 1968 interested individuals organized the Latah County Historical Society to collect and preserve materials connected with the history of Latah County and to provide further knowledge of the history and tradition of the area. Every person, young or old, who is interested in the history of Latah County and who would like to assist in its preservation and interpretation is cordially invited to become a member. Subscription to this journal and a discount on books published by the Society are included in membership dues. Dues for the various classes of membership are as follows:

	Friend	Contributing	Sustaining	Sponsoring	Benefactor
Individual	\$ 5-10	\$11-25	\$26- 50	\$ 51-100	\$101-499
Family	9-15	16-40	41-100	101-200	201-499
Business	25-35	36-75	76-150	151-300	301-499

A "500 Club" is reserved for contributions of \$500 or more. Privileges are identical for all classes; the higher dues represent a much needed donation to help the Society's work. Dues are tax deductible.

The Society's services include conducting oral histories, publishing local history monographs, maintaining a local history/genealogy research library and the county museum, as well as educational outreach. The Society wishes to acquire objects, documents, books, photographs, diaries, and other materials relating to the history of Latah County. These are added to the collections and made available to researchers while they are preserved for future generations.

The Society is housed in the William J. McConnell Mansion, 110 South Adams, Moscow. The museum is open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Visits to the museum or research library are welcomed at other times and can be arranged by calling (208) 882-1004.