

IRISH CROCHET LACE

150 YEARS OF A TRADITION

EXHIBIT CATALOG
OPENING EXHIBIT APRIL 1 - JULY 30, 2005



LACIS MUSEUM OF LACE AND TEXTILES
2982 ADELINE STREET, BERKELEY CA 94703

dedicated to KAETHE KLIOT the LACIS MUSEUM

Two score years ago, an unknown seed was planted. It was nurtured by Kaethe whose simple pleasures in life came from a pursuit of knowledge and of sharing that knowledge. She followed her hands which so effortlessly manipulated any thread, yarn, needle or bobbin. These same hands nurtured the seed. The seed grew and it was given the name LACIS, a word not just representing the most basic of all laces, but a name which defines a network reaching out and touching all aspects of what was most dear...the world of fibers and textiles.

More than a place to find what couldn't be found elsewhere, Lacis always looked beyond the obvious and became a Textile Art Center, Kaethe the mentor to all who came for answers, encouragement or simply for a place to charge the spirit..

With Kaethe's sudden passing in August of 2002, the immensity of my loss was not just shared but was intensified by those she touched...and they wrote:

...whenever I needed to recharge my spirit, I knew that a visit to Lacis would do the trick...

...her sense of the appropriate, that just-rightness which made Laces the alluring treasure trove that draws us in...

...her enthusiasm was contagious and she always wanted to share it. She was the consummate teacher...

...she had a mission to share everything she knew...

...she did what she loved and her passion and enthusiasm was always evident...

...Kaethe was the sort of person one takes with them – part of who I am is because of her...

...She will be remembered for many things; for me it will be a sense that all is possible...

Not wanting to let go, the nurturing of this spirit to become the living legacy of Kaethe, has made me believe that all is possible.

Creating a framework to support this Legacy, beyond my own mortality, has led to the establishment of the LACIS MUSEUM OF LACE AND TEXTILES...a place where the spirit of support, knowledge and encouragement is the guiding mode in the dissemination of knowledge. It is centered around an extensive collection of laces, textiles and the related library and tools supporting this collection, lovingly assembled by myself and Kaethe.

This initial exhibit, IRISH CROCHET LACE, consisting of laces selected from the Lacis collection, represents a defining moment in Irish history, when survival depended upon the belief that "all is possible"...and this is the mantra that I follow in making this Museum a reality.



Irish Crochet evening
dress of bold motifs and
heavily embroidered
net. c. 1900.
JDE.14059

IRISH CROCHET LACE

*A tribute to the human spirit.
Beauty born of necessity.
Conceived from lowly beginnings,
With a dream of higher aspirations,
It grew out of patience, perseverance and ingenuity,
To stand in majesty,
To feed a nation.*

The mid 1800's found Ireland in the midst of a devastating famine. A potato blight had obliterated the agricultural mainstay of the nation. The country was in desperate need of a lucrative commodity to lift it out of its declining state. Lace-making was a profitable business, but the traditional methods were too slow to afford the quick relief that the country needed. In an effort to copy the treasured and exquisite forms found in the valued Venetian Needle lace and the more delicate filigree of Rosaline lace, emerged a distinctive style of crochet that proved to be both quick and profitable. It soon became known as "Pt. d'Irlande" in the countries who sought its beauty. It is a style that has earned the right to stand alone, a thing of beauty, to be admired, coveted and collected by the best of collectors. Its delicate filigree and bold relief still speak of dedication, skill and the desire for a better life.

It is generally accepted that it was Mademoiselle Riego de la Blanchardiere who invented the now famous style. She published the first book of Irish Crochet patterns in 1846. It was used and referred to by both the schools of crochet that sprang up and by the ever growing Irish cottage industry.

The distinctive feature of Irish Crochet is its separate motifs joined by either filigree mesh or crocheted bars. Stylized motifs of flowers, shamrocks, and grapevines are arrayed in splendor. It is an artistic mode of crochet that lends itself well to the creative mind. A cord padding is often incorporated into the motif and by carefully adjusting the tightness and the amount of stitches, the stems, leaves and flowers can be artistically manipulated to add 'life' to the objects. The pattern is meant merely as a structural skeleton, much is left to the imagi-

Irish crochet apron
in Clones lace with
added border in pad-
ded work mimicing
Venetian point. c.
1840-1850

JdE.13421



nation of the worker. Two people, making the same motif, can turn out vastly different products. It is the creative spirit and thoughtful eye that enabled someone to manipulate the pattern to instill vitality into the growing work.

Crochet itself was well adapted to the rigorous life of the peasant people. Cotton thread was cheap and easily laundered. The technique required only the crudest of handmade tools: the crochet hook. The labor could be done either by the light of day, or in the dim glow of a peat fire lamp helped by a glass globe of water to reflect back what little light it shed. The lace often became dirty in the harsh conditions of poverty and had to be washed before it was sold. Particularly fastidious workers would wrap the work in progress and put it under their bed at night. This practice became known as “bedding the work”.

The labor soon became a family occupation. Young and old, women as well as men turned to this new industry to provide life's sustenance. Within Ireland itself, the lace became known as “relief lace”. A division of labor sprang up. The technique adapted well to all levels of ability. Everyone in the family could contribute to the finished piece. One person might make the same motif over and over. The more difficult patterns were left to the nimblest of hands, while those less agile and creative could work the simpler leaves and stems. The motifs were brought by foot to a lace-making center in the town. There they were arranged in a studied manner and crocheted together to form everything from collars and cuffs to bodices, dresses and coats.

From a wellspring of ingenuity, perseverance and community cooperation the lace industry flourished for a time. It served as a vital cottage industry throughout the famine. It not only fed the people, but preserved their dignity...and the world took notice. In the post-famine years its popularity waxed and waned with the flow of the economic tides. Soon, the surge of two world wars put a harsh decline on the demand for luxuries, but by then, the lace had worked its magic and revived a nation. Today, we see in its bold patterns the life of the people, and the hope of a country.

Martha Sherick Shen, 2005



Irish crochet high neck collar: The floral motifs have superimposed cord padded centers. 19th c.

JAE.13453



Irish crochet high neck collar: The floral motifs have superimposed cord padded centers. 19th c.

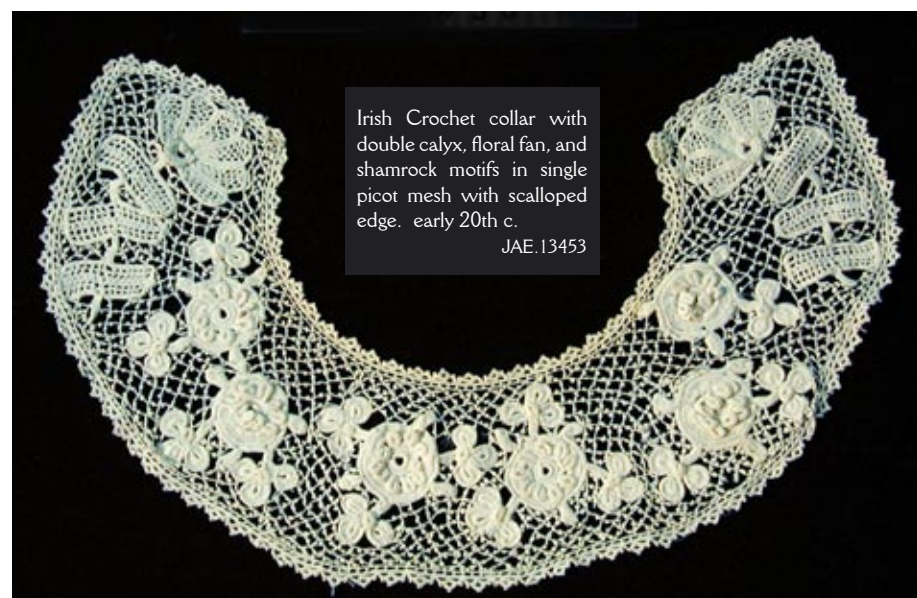
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Clones lace is an Irish Crochet lace, named after the town where it was marketed, developing its own character over nearly 150 years. Cassandra Hand, wife of the local Church of Ireland minister introduced it as a famine relief scheme to this small drumlin region of west Monaghan and south-east Fermanagh in 1847. Within a short period, nearly every family in the area was involved in the production of crochet lace, supplying markets in Dublin, London, Paris, Rome and New York. Clones soon became the most important center of crochet lace-making in the north of Ireland, while Cork was the leading center in the south.

Irish Crochet lace originally derived from specimens of Venetian rose point, first brought to Ireland in the 1830's by Ursuline nuns in Blackrock, Cork from France. Indeed, the crochet lace that developed in Cork is very distinctive. It comprises very large motifs, joined by thick bars, which are made up of double crochets stitched over foundation chains. There are varying accounts of between 12,000 and 20,000 girls being employed in its production from 1847. Mrs. Meredith was the patron of the Adelaide school for crochet in Cork, which became a depot where lace was received and sold.

Most families had their own secret and closely guarded motifs. The family nickname often reflected the motif with which the family was associated, such as the 'Lily Quigleys' or the 'Rose McMahons'. When neighbors entered a house unexpectedly, the lace was hidden from view. Their special motif was the basis of a family's income. Many motifs have gone to the grave due to the secrecy, although pattern makers examined finished pieces in the USA and England and transcribed them in Irish Crochet publications. Crochet workers delighted in creating new filling stitches, embellishments and motifs, as these would bring them a better income.

CLONES LACE, Marie Treanor

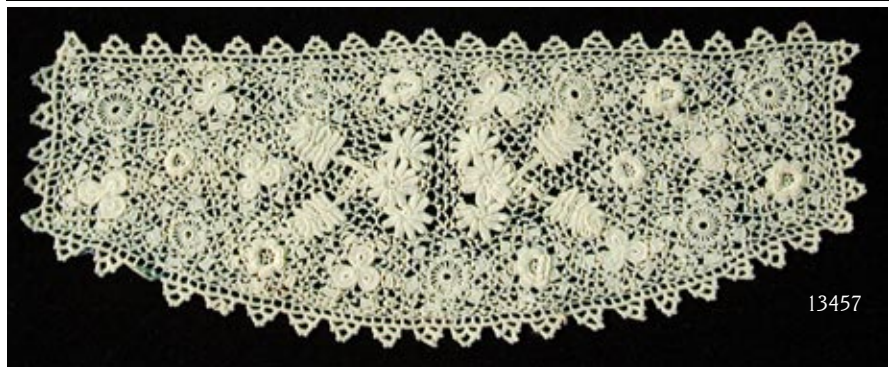


Making Irish crochet lace is most fascinating, greatly because it allows sufficient freedom in the arrangement of designs to display the workers' ingenuity. In ordinary crochet the work usually progresses in rows, one worked upon the other in carefully counted stitches. In Irish lace numerous sprays of flowers, leaves, etc., in more or less conventional style are worked over a cord foundation. These rather solid pieces of crochet are arranged according to fancy and firmly sewed upon a foundation pattern. The spaces between the sprays are then filled in with lace-like bars of crochet and the whole is finished with the edgings characteristic of Irish crochet lace.

In the sprays, the cord padding is an important factor, for by its tightness or looseness, stems or leaves of various designs can be curved in any direction desired and give a life-like appearance to the flower, which the counted stitches alone can never give. The directions for a spray may be followed very carefully by two workers, and yet they may obtain quite different results. When a spray shows signs of getting either saucer shaped or frilled, when it should lie flat, the worker will have to use her own discretion, increasing or diminishing number of stitches in order to bring out the desired result. The aim of the worker should be, to produce the most artistic work she is capable of; if, by altering a curve or adding a leaf to any spray she can create a design more pleasing to herself, she should not hesitate to follow her own inclination.

These instructions are intended for those who wish to become good workers, and to them it is necessary to explain the object in view. They must understand that two workers seldom work alike, and the same spray from these directions, by two different persons, might turn out to be of a different size. In order to teach each detail in a clear manner it is necessary to give exact number of stitches for it, but when it is once mastered a worker may discontinue the counting. Every worker after a time should be able to work from a drawing and until she can at least to some extent follow one the highest perfection in Irish crochet cannot be obtained. Careful observation, however, will soon enable anyone to work any flower, composed of rings and petals, from a drawing.

IRISH CROCHET LACE, DESIGNS & INSTRUCTIONS, T. Buettner & Co 1910



IRISH CROCHET AND HOW TO MAKE IT

The best lace is always firmly and evenly worked, and it is fresh and clean when it comes from the worker's hands. Much of the lace offered for sale, some of which scarcely deserves the name of lace, has been washed and starched to give it an appearance of firmness which in itself it does not possess. It is very difficult for two workers to make motifs exactly alike from the same written directions. A slight difference in the size of the hook or in the tightness of the work would alter the size of the motif; while the tightening or loosening of a padding cord might alter the entire sweep of the leaflets. For this reason the directions for a sprig may be carefully followed by two workers, and yet the two may turn out quite different results. One worker will make a very common-place leaf, while the other, with more artistic feeling, may give to the leaf those subtle touches, by means of the cord, which make it a real work of art.

When a sprig shows signs of either getting saucer-shaped or of frilling, when it should lie flat, the worker must use her own discretion as to increasing or diminishing the number of stitches, in order to bring about the desired result. The aim of the worker should be to produce the most artistic work she is capable of; therefore if by altering a curve, or by adding a leaflet to any sprig, she would make a design more pleasing to herself, she should not for one moment hesitate to follow her artistic instinct. It is the power to do this which makes Irish crochet so very fascinating. Now it is this very freedom, so fascinating to the worker, which creates such difficulties to a writer upon Irish crochet. Even with the same worker a design may work out with slight differences each time it is repeated if it is one which depends much upon the cord for its shaping. When this is so the fillings of bars must differ also in each case, or they will not lie flat between these most uncertain little sprigs, and to follow directions for a given number of bars composed of a given number of stitches, would be fatal to the beauty of the lace, as no two workers would space alike. In Ireland, where the lace is so extensively done, no directions are ever given for the background, because if minute



directions for fillings could be written, they would be so extremely intricate that to attempt to follow them would drive most workers distracted. The easiest plan, and the one which we shall adopt, is to teach the general plan of each filling and leave the worker to practise it until she becomes familiar with it.

There are two threads, as it were, used in working this lace. One is the working thread, which is used to make the stitches; the other thread, or cord, is only used to work over, which gives this lace the rich effect so different from ordinary crochet work. This cord is sometimes held close to the work and the stitches are made over it into the row of stitches made before, (working only in the back loops) or the stitches are worked over it alone, using it as a foundation. In making Irish crochet the stitches should be uniform, close and compact; loose or ragged crochet makes inferior lace, wanting in crispness, and the padding cord should never show through the work. It is necessary in a book of this nature to remember the beginner in lace making as well as the experienced worker, and in consequence we have given detailed instructions for making the simplest as well as the most intricate designs, hoping the collection will be welcome to all lovers of crochet.

PRISCILLA IRISH CROCHET BOOK, Lula M. Harvey 1909

In 1847 Mrs. Meredith established the Adelaide Industrial School in Cork for the teaching of crochet and the industry spread rapidly throughout the south of Ireland. Convents in the area were mainly responsible for teaching the work and for organizing the sale of finished pieces.

VICTORIAN LACE, Patricia Wardle

Mlle Riego was born in England to a father of Franco-Spanish nobility and an Irish mother in 1820. She discovered that Spanish needle lace, which was similar in appearance to the exquisite Venetian needlepoint lace, could be adapted to the crochet hook and was much faster. A seven-inch piece of lace could be crocheted in about twenty hours, whereas the same piece would take at least 200 hours to sew with a needle.

As people were generally illiterate, teachers passed along Mlle Reigo's instructions orally and the crochet workers learned the various motifs from sample books.

CLONES LACE, Marie Treanor



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Of all the forms of crochet lace, that known as 'Irish Crochet' is the most sought after and is probably the best known. It was regarded by the couture profession in the early years of this century as the true Irish lace. While the Irish tradition for producing this work dates back to the sixteenth century, when it was known as 'nun's work' because the technique and style of the craft was developed in Irish convent communities in imitation of continental European lacemaking styles, the manufacture of crochet lace did not become a cottage industry in Ireland until the middle of the nineteenth century. The inventor of the style of crochet which is the subject of Irish Crochet Lace was Mademoiselle Riego de la Blanchardaire, who discovered that a type of Spanish Needlepoint could effectively be adapted to Irish materials.

During the famine years of the 1840s the Ursuline Sisters established 'Crochet centres' in Ireland, the first in 1845 in their convent at Blackrock in County Cork, to help relieve starvation in the neighbourhood. Crochet-making was soon adopted by many other centres throughout the country. And so crochet, which originally had been deemed 'nun's work' in the convents of Europe or was the prerogative of the manor, changed and developed a unique style, which became, for Irish people, a symbol of life, hope and pride. In the years immediately after the famine, crochet became a practical subject in the curriculum of convent schools. The crochet lace developed in Irish convents had a rich and decorative appearance which was partly due to the nuns' adaptation of motifs from seventeenth century Venetian needlepoint, as well as from the then fashionable Honiton lace from England and the Flemish lace, Mechelen. So attractive was this new crochet that from about 1850 it was sought by the fashion conscious in Paris, Vienna, Brussels, London and New York.

IRISH CROCHET LACE, Eithne D'Arcy



Cork was soon recognized as the main centre of the crochet lace industry in the South of Ireland but the manufacture soon spread to other areas. Mrs W. C. Thornton introduced crochet as an experiment in County Kildare, first as a famine relief scheme, and it proved so successful that a demand developed for teachers to go to other parts of Ireland. The Rector's wife at Clones in County Monaghan,

...Accordingly girl babies were more valued than baby boys, as they would become crochet workers and the crochet hook gave these women dignity. Rosela farmers were described as the 'worst in the country, as the men did the housework, while the women crocheted!..

CLONES LACE, Marie Treanor

Mrs Cassandra Hand, invited one of these teachers to her area. The combination of Mrs Hand's business ability and the expertise of the teacher soon made Clones one of the principal centres of

the craft. Exquisite models of Guipure and Point de Venise lace were developed there and Mrs Hand also developed a style of crochet based on Church lace, which became available after the dissolution of the monasteries in Spain. Within a few years of the establishment of the Clones school in 1847, about fifteen hundred workers were employed directly or indirectly through crochet working in the parish. As a result, by 1910, Clones was the most important centre of the industry in Ireland.

At the time that Clones lace was in demand, the standard of living in Ireland was very poor. In this depressed economic period, lacemaking provided a very important contribution to the budgets of families whose women had the skill. The fashions of the time created a great demand for lace for blouse bodices and cuffs, ruffles, trimmings and even whole dresses. Men wore lace in the form of jabots and evening shirts. New motifs were added by the workers themselves so that Clones lace eventually became an art form native to Clones and the surrounding area.



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Irish crochet became popular in the 1850s, a time when ornate machine made lace was becoming readily available. The result was a period of general decline in the development of the craft. By the late nineteenth century there was a change in fashion and lace was again favoured. Encouragement from state and charitable organisations helped to bring Irish crochet back to its position of renown as Ireland's most distinctive 'lace'. By 1904, Paris couturiers were using Irish crochet lace in their summer creations and Irish crochet was soon in demand in the other fashion centres of the world.

IRISH CROCHET LACE, Eithne D'Arcy

Crochet, the manufacture that seemed to grow in the air under the hands of its makers, far outdistanced Carrickmacross and Limerick in giving work to women after the famine. Mrs. Meredith, patron of the Adelaide school for crochet, Cork, which became a depot where good were received and sold, describes the efforts of "20,000 [employed from 1847] in the indigenous lace...When men's hands were useless, little girls' fingers by means of this lace-work provided for families...

THE IRISH FLOWERERS, Elizabeth Boyle

Even by 1855 inferior workmanship was becoming predominant, and by 1860s the industry was in a state of stagnation... In the 1870s there was a period of revival for a time. The crochet most favored then was distinguished by small neat patterns.

The revival of the 1870s was short-lived. In the following decade the crochet trade of Ireland entered the worst period of decline it had yet faced, as a result of competition from machine-made laces. It was not until the very end of the 1880s that the industry began to revive again.

Messrs. Hayward of Oxford Street, for example, took a direct interest in crochet and invented a new variety called "Royal Irish Guipure" which was made in silk.

VICTORIAN LACE, Patricia Wardle



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LACE SCHOOLS BECAME A FEATURE OF LIFE

The authorities were hesitant in their reaction to this development, worried by the impact they were having on general education. A report to the Commission on Endowed Schools in Ireland by William Dwyer Ferguson, Assistant Commissioner, dated 2 June 1856, illustrates this point. Describing a lace school established in Clogh, county Fermanagh, he wrote:

Both the master and resident curate stated that the establishment of crochet-work schools in the neighbourhood had seriously hindered the attendance of female children. I have heard this complaint repeatedly made throughout the parish and I think it is a subject worthy of attention. These crochet-work schools are, in most instances, patronized by the clergymen of the parish; and though, no doubt, most valuable in affording industrial education, should not be made to preclude entirely all opportunity of a literary and religious education.

By the turn of the twentieth century, nearly every family in the west Monaghan / southeast Fermanagh area was involved in the lace industry and by 1901, Clones was the most important center for the production of crochet lace in Ireland.

CLONES LACE, Marie Treanor

Many Irish organizations had direct contacts in the cities, most notably San Francisco which, until the earthquake of 1906, was one of the major centers for the distribution of articles in Irish crochet, including parasols and blouses.

CROCHET HISTORY AND TECHNIQUE, Lis Paludan





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