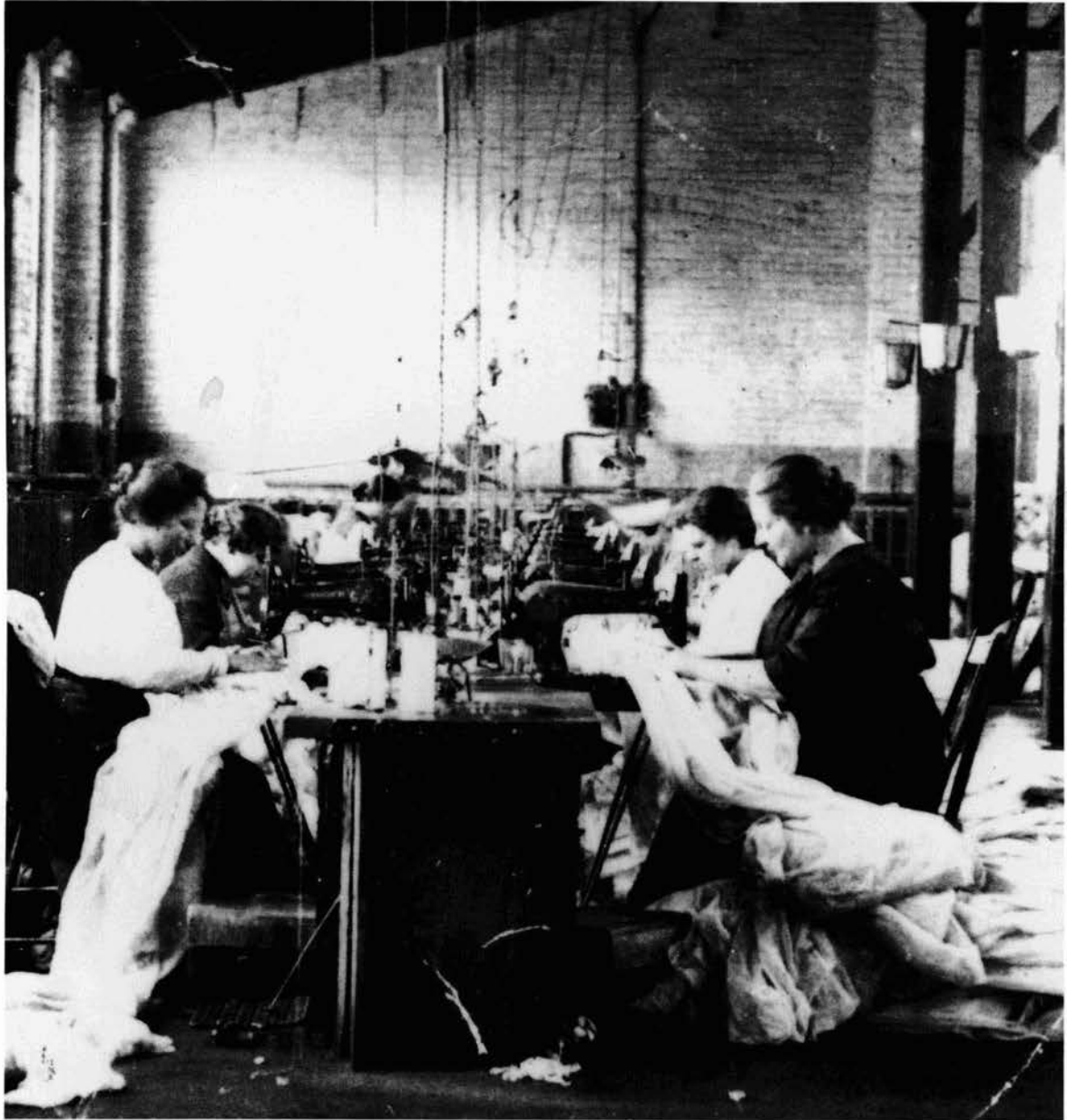


The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

QUARTERLY



Fall 1993

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association
QUARTERLY

Volume XXXVIII
Fall 1993
No. 4

This publication is made possible in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts

Editor: Cornel Reinhart
Copy Editor: Karen Johnson-Weiner
Production Editor: Mark R. Petersen

ISSN: 0558-1931
Copyright © 1993 St. Lawrence County
Historical Association

The Quarterly is published Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall each year by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

Extra copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617, at \$4.00 each plus \$1.00 for postage and handling.

Contributions: *The Quarterly* welcomes contributions in the form of manuscripts, drawings, and photographs. If documentation is necessary, we request that it conform to the *MLA Style Manual*. A summary of the *MLA* format is available from the editor. Please address all editorial communications to The Editor, *The Quarterly*, St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

Mission Statement

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit educational resource center and museum that researches, collects, preserves, and interprets St. Lawrence County history through collections development, publication, exhibition, and programming; whose purpose is to help establish the intellectual and cultural connections that expand awareness and place St. Lawrence County in its state and national context, while revealing its unique identity. The Association examines different aspects of life in St. Lawrence County from multiple and diverse resources through community partnerships and collaborations.

SLCHA values quality, integrity, and accessibility and operates within established museum standards befitting its AAM accredited status.

CONTENTS

<i>Shirley Tramontana</i>	3	Black Iron: White Lace
<i>Nelson B. Winters</i>	15	Of Gouverneur and Old Lace: The International Lace Manufacturing Co., 1903-1944

*Cover: Gouverneur. International Lace Mill. View of
Menders Working in the "Brown Room"
(Photo Courtesy of Nelson B. Winters)*

Black Iron, White Lace

by Shirley Tramontana

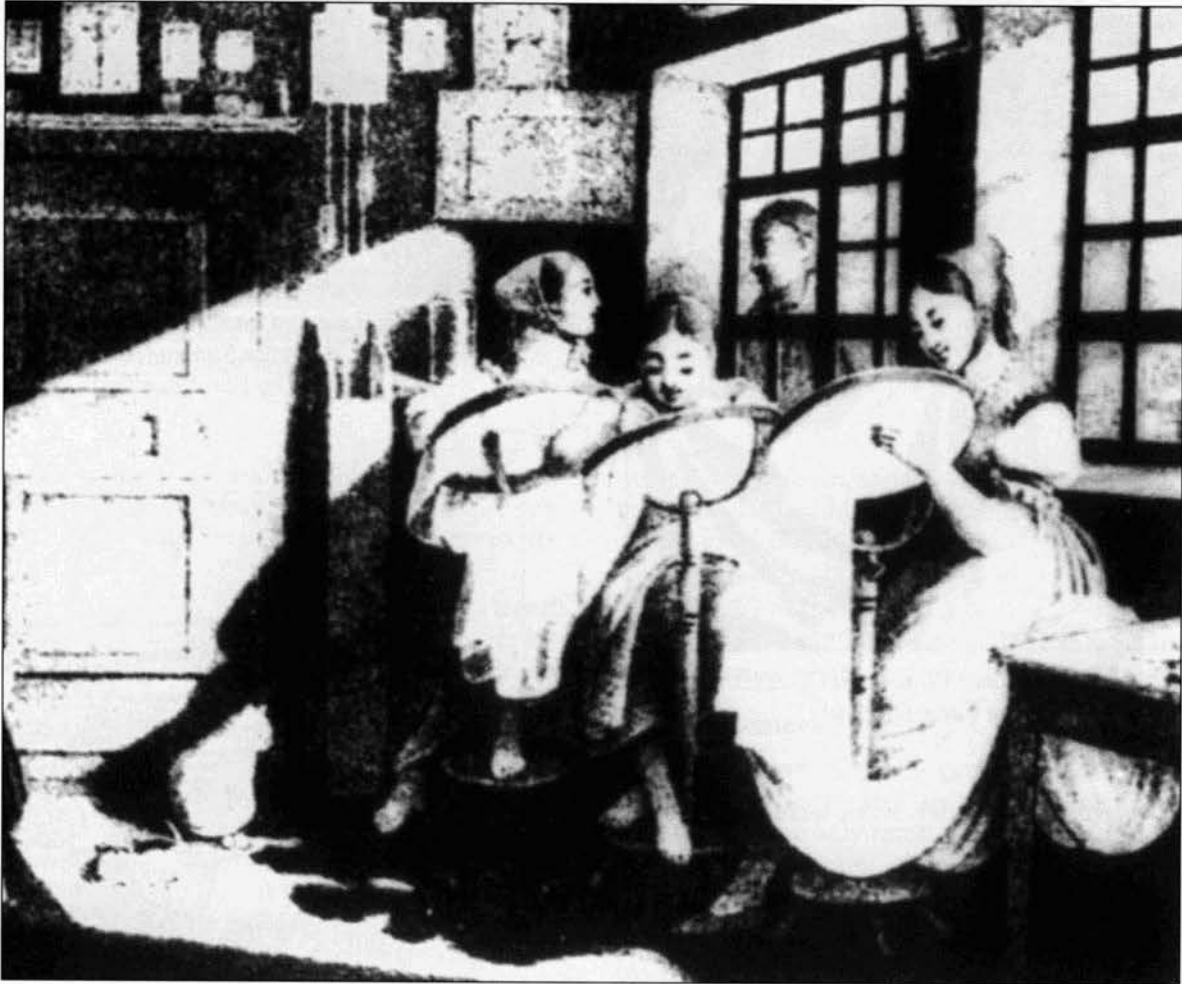


Fig. 1: "Making of Fine Laces in a Swiss Cottage" (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

It is difficult today to understand the passion with which men and women once craved lace, making it a luxurious and precious commodity. No longer does the general populace aspire to "lace-curtain acceptability." Lace today is thought of as "grandmotherly," foppish, and old fashioned. As an object, it is feminized and marginalized. This article examines the emergence of the lace industry in Europe and the United States with particular attention given to the factories at Scranton, Pennsylvania and Gouverneur in St. Lawrence County, New York.

Fish net to Bobbin net.

Lace is an openwork, ornamental fabric strictly classified as netting. The word "lace" derives from the latin *laqueus*, which means a noose or snare. Like knitted goods, lace is made by looping, tying, or twisting strands

of thread on themselves and on other strands. Netted fabrics are the precursors of modern lace and were used by many early cultures in the construction of fish nets. Lace also has a long history as an ornamental fabric. The Sumerians used lace on their garments as early as 4,000 B.C., and archaeologists discovered fragments of lace dating from 2,500 B.C. The Bible and Homer both speak of nets, and the fabled Veil of Isis may have been a netted fabric. Early forms of lace and lace weaves have been found in Roman and Egyptian tombs.¹

Needlepoint, another early lace technique, was produced by nuns for ecclesiastic decoration. This type of lace is produced by pulling threads from pieces of linen and then filling the created spaces with elaborate stitches, using the exact number of threads that have been withdrawn. The lace we know today developed gradually



Fig. 2: 15c Bobbin Lace Weaver (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Carol Barclay)

from linen cutwork and drawn work techniques dating from the fifteenth century.

Subsequently, darned nettings were devised. These are nettings in which a design is embroidered in the open spaces of a new foundation, instead of on the spaces created by withdrawing threads from a piece of whole cloth. Altar cloths, bed covers, and table cloths are among the historic pieces still in existence dating to the beginnings of this lacemaking method.

Until the seventh century A.D., lacemaking was purely a domestic art. About that time, convent nuns began to make articles of lace for church ceremonies, for bridal veils, and for other types of adornment. Gradually, the fashion spread, and a cottage industry formed that had its leading centers in the European cities of Venice, Brussels, Mechlinn, Valenciennes, and Lille (fig. 1).

During this early period, all laces were made by hand, using either needles or bone pins. In 1561, Barbara Utman of Annaberg, Germany, invented the pillow, or bobbin, method of making lace (fig. 2).² Bobbin lace is made by twisting many individual threads around pins placed in a pattern on a cushion or pillow (fig. 3). The threads are usually of linen, silk, or fine strands of precious metal. The progress of a piece of bobbin lace is slow, often taking several weeks to produce even a few yards of simple ribbon.



Fig. 3: Lace and Lace Bobbins, Courtesy of
Lacemaker, Radmilla Suman (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Carol Barclay)

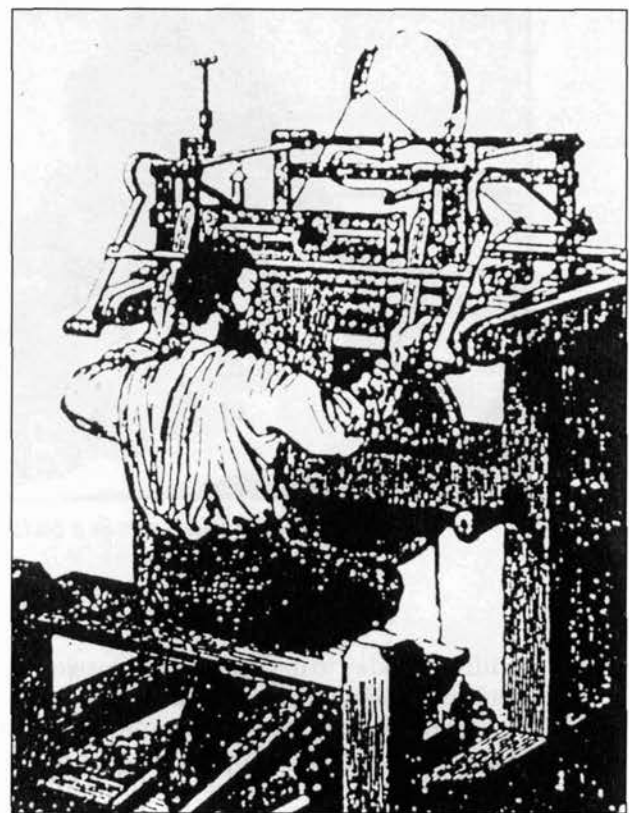


Fig. 4: Hand Powered Stocking Frame
Machine (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol
Barclay)

During the Renaissance, the handmade lace industry was so valuable and profitable that the average citizen in Venice was not allowed to wear lace. Lace was sent abroad, to bring gold to the coffers of the Doges. Colbert, the French minister who served under Louis XIV, went to great lengths to transplant the Venetian lace industry to France. He even bribed Italian lace workers to emigrate

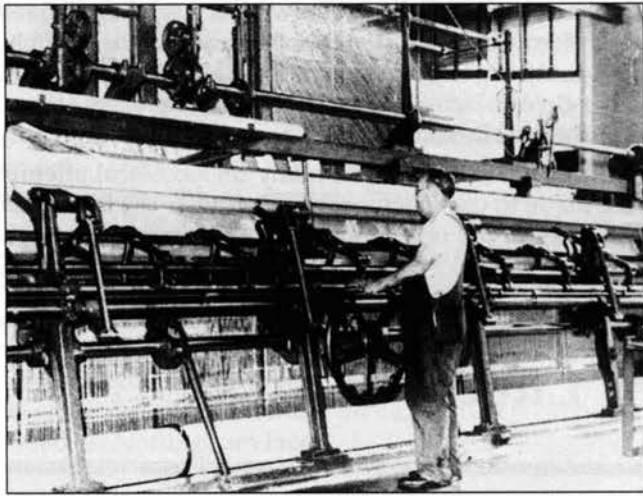


Fig. 5: Nottingham Lace Power Loom (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

to Alençon and to teach the art of lacemaking to French workers. This was the beginning of the notable Alençon laces and brought the French lace industry to its preeminent position.

The famed Elizabethan ruffs started a fashion trend that brought the early lace industry production to a fever pitch. Queen Elizabeth's own ruffs were made to a depth of three-quarters of a yard, with edges comprising twenty-five yards of lace. Lace was so coveted that, although the Puritans preached against its use for adornment, Cromwell himself indulged in a spot of lace trim on his clothing.³

By the seventeenth century, the ruff had passed its zenith as an item of fashion, but the demand for lace in other forms continued. The industry spread throughout Europe, with each lacemaking community seeking to establish its own identity and leadership in pattern innovation. Lace-making centers emerged in Venice, Burano, Alençon, Chantilly, Cluny, Valenciennes, and Bruges. Today, machine-made laces characteristic of the distinctive types developed during that early period are designated by the names of the original lace centers.

Demand for lace of every type was strong. The art of lacemaking was held in high esteem. Autocratic rulers of the period prohibited the sale of lace to the common people and restricted lace's use to the privileged few. Furthermore, the quantity of artistically crafted lace represented many hours of an artisan's handwork, which few could afford. Because handmade lace could not be created in abundance it remained a unique possession. Many thought that the production of machine-made lace would diminish the demand for the finer fabrics of the pillow and needle variety of lace. On the contrary, the nobility, who believed that machine-made lace could never possess the touch, finish, and beauty of the laces made by hand, sought more eagerly than ever the ex-

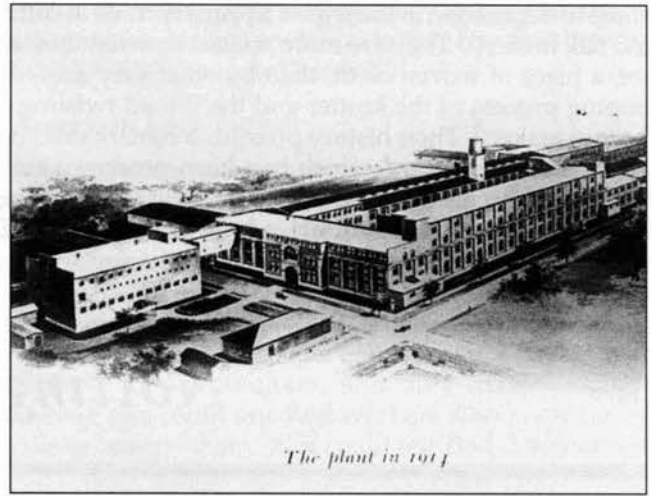


Fig. 6: The Scranton Lace Mill, 1914 (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

quisite works of Brussels and Alençon, while machinery brought the wearing of lace within the reach of the other classes of society.

Machine furnishing lace, Nottingham lace, is a direct descendent of handmade bobbin lace. In machine furnishing lace, however, a machine is used to twist the threads around one another.

Lace Machines.

In the United States, the production of handmade lace has never been extensive. Ipswich, Massachusetts, seems to have been the only location where handmade lace was produced in volume. An account of 1786 stated that Ipswich workers annually produced 42,000 yards of silk lace by hand. The lace was bobbin lace created on round pillows and used as lace ribbon, decorative trim, and dressmaker's lace. Bobbin lacemaking also occurred in the Hudson Valley, but never developed into a major industry.⁴

Early "machine net" factories were established at Medway and Ipswich. In 1818, Dean Walker's Medway factory became the first machine-lace manufacturer on American soil. A second manufactory was founded in Ipswich in 1824. The machines in these factories were used to create the net used for a ground base, or background, for hand embroidered laces.⁵

The invention of the lace machine has its beginnings in the "stocking frame" used in the hosiery industry in England (fig. 4). After 100 years of alterations and refinements, the stocking frame machine was capable of duplicating the finest bobbin laces.

Hosiery and lacemaking were both important nineteenth-century machine industries. The two were closely connected, with machine-made lace developing from the older frame knitting industry in Nottingham at

a time of depression in the region's primary trade in cotton and silk hosiery. They are more related by what they are not, a piece of woven cloth, than by what they are—the looping process of the knitter and the thread twisting of the lace maker.⁶ Their history presents a remarkable contrast. Knitting hosiery, which had been produced since Elizabethan times on an intricate machine (the stocking frame), was slow to adapt the use of power. As late as 1870,

the majority of hosiery workers were engaged in the handwork of knitting on a stocking frame. Machine lacemaking, on the other hand, became concentrated in power-driven factories at a comparatively early stage of the Industrial Revolution.⁷

Until Napoleonic times, many unsuccessful attempts were made to use machinery to duplicate the fascinating handwork of the needlepoint and bobbin-lace methods.

Nottingham Lace.

Nottingham lace is a general term given to machine-made lace made of coarse cotton. It is created in one piece on the loom and the wide widths are used for furnishings such as curtains and tablecloths (fig. A). It is also called "curtain lace" and "furnishing lace". In addition to cotton, the lace is now also produced using synthetic fibers.

Because of the weaving process, Nottingham lace has several specific characteristics and is relatively easy to identify. This machined lace could be patterned and delicately gauged from course to fine and was always made in wide widths, or in finished pieces such as curtains and tablecloths. It has a square mesh, usually with a slightly raised pattern surface. The weave structure of twisted vertical threads is linked together by the pattern threads woven in a characteristic sideways "V" (fig. B). It is called Nottingham lace because this lace originated in Nottingham, England, where the machinery for the production of the fabric was developed.

From the 1840s, Nottingham lace was exclusively produced in, and purchased from Nottingham, England. Not until the 1890s did the United States manufacture its own curtain lace. Nottingham lace was the first machine-made lace to duplicate exactly, the highly prized handmade bobbin lace.

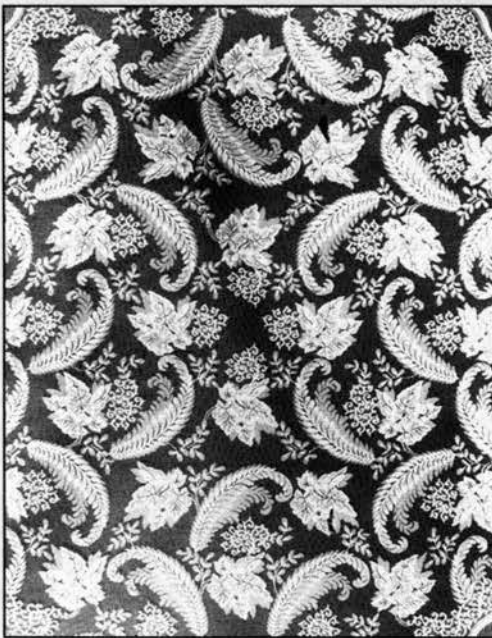


Fig. A: Nottingham Lace Tablecloth
(SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol
Barclay)

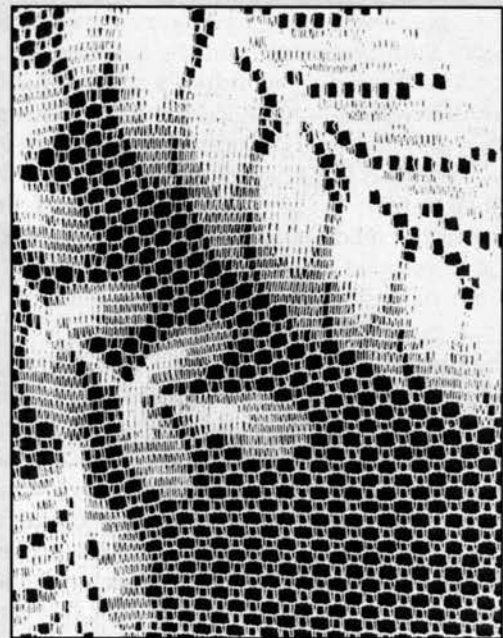


Fig. B: Nottingham Lace
Tablecloth. Structural Detail
(SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol
Barclay)

Nevertheless, important advances towards producing lace by machine were made. About twenty years after hosiery frames had been adapted for lace making, John Heathcoat, a framesmith in the hosiery industry, introduced the first machine that could make satisfactory bobbin net. The machine was named because threads were wound upon bobbins, creating twisted instead of looped net.⁸ In 1813, John Leavers modified the Heathcoat machine, which became the foundation for all modern machines. Since the majority of men who patented lace-making machines were employed by the weaving and hosiery industries in Nottingham, the English lace companies became concentrated in and around that city, with the result that their machine-made product soon became known as Nottingham lace.

display, each five yards long by two yards wide, covered with spacious designs so elaborate they required between 12,000 to 15,000 Jacquard cards."¹⁰

American Lace Industry.

After the invention and improvements of the Heathcoat machine in 1809, Nottingham, England, became the most important center in the world for the production of lace curtains. To maintain its competitive advantage, Nottingham kept secret almost everything that was known about its lace-making machines. The machines, with their many intricate and complex parts, were produced in Nottingham, and only in Nottingham; nowhere else could one find workers who knew how to make or operate them. Nor could one find designers and

Plants in the United States.		
Pennsylvania.	Machines.	Organized.
Philadelphia:		
John Bromley & Sons,	68	1891
Lehigh Manufacturing Co. (Jon. H. Bromley), (reorganization and enlargement of Horner Bros. lace plant),	76	1898
Wilkes-Barre:		
Wilkes-Barre Lace Manufacturing Co.,	28	1898
Wyoming Valley Lace Mills,	11	1892
Scranton:		
Scranton Lace Manufacturing Co.,	15	1895
Columbia:		
Columbia Lace Co.,	15	1896
Chester:		
T. I. Birkin & Co.,	12	1899
Number of plants in Pennsylvania,	7	
Number of machines in Pennsylvania,	255	
Outside of Pennsylvania there are lace mills as follows:		
New York State:		
Patchogue, L. I.: Patchogue Manufacturing Co.,	14	1894
Connecticut:		
Tariffville: Tariffville Lace Manufacturing Co.,	7	1891

Fig. 7: List of Lace Plants in the United States, 1900 (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

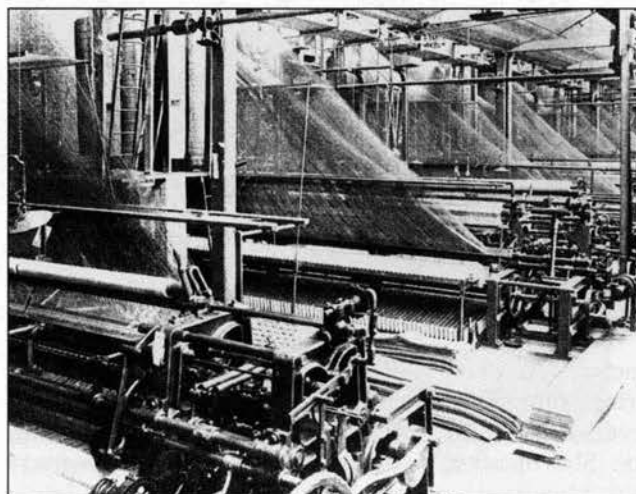


Fig. 8: The Scranton Lace Mill. View of the Backs of the Lace Machines (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

The manufacture of lace by machine soon began to assume formidable stature in England's national economy. The exportation of a lace machine was punishable by banishment or death. However, as soon as the Napoleonic Wars were over, machine parts were smuggled to France. The transplanted industry immediately took root. Eventually, Leavers himself established factories on the other side of the channel, first in Paris in 1818, and in St. Quentin in 1826.

"In Nottingham in 1841, Hooton Deverill made the first successful application of the French Jacquard to lace making."⁹ This application made the reproduction of the traditional patterns of handmade lace possible. In 1846, John Livesey adapted the original bobbin-net machine to create lace curtains. "The curtain machine appeared long after other bobbin-net machines were established and producing patterned laces. It thus had an advantage from the start of making use of the Jacquard apparatus. At the Great Exhibition of 1851, some fine store curtains were on

craftsmen to prepare patterns for the machines, or trained workers who could handle the products from gray (off the loom, unfinished) to finish. Nottingham had the industry to itself for over half of a century, and grew rich on the proceeds.

During the Victorian era, Nottingham lace curtains gained a worldwide reputation. As American purchases of lace goods increased, the Government of the United States passed the McKinley Act of 1890 in an effort to create an American-based industry to support the production of cotton goods. The McKinley Act placed a high tariff on imported goods, including curtain lace. Encouraged by this legislation, American merchants decided to establish a domestic lace industry.

In 1885, a Nottingham lace curtain loom was purchased in England and shipped in pieces to the United States, where it was erected in Fordham, New York.¹¹ Great difficulty was encountered in trying to set up the

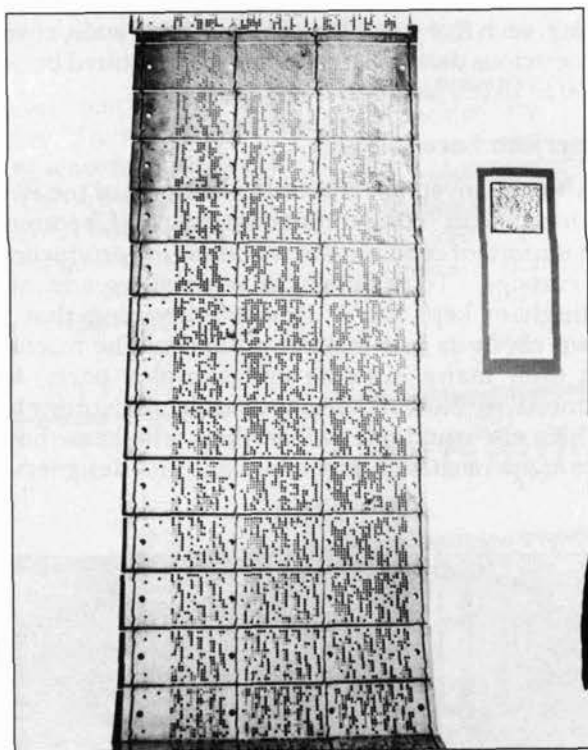


Fig. 9: Jacquard Cards (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Stu Wilson)

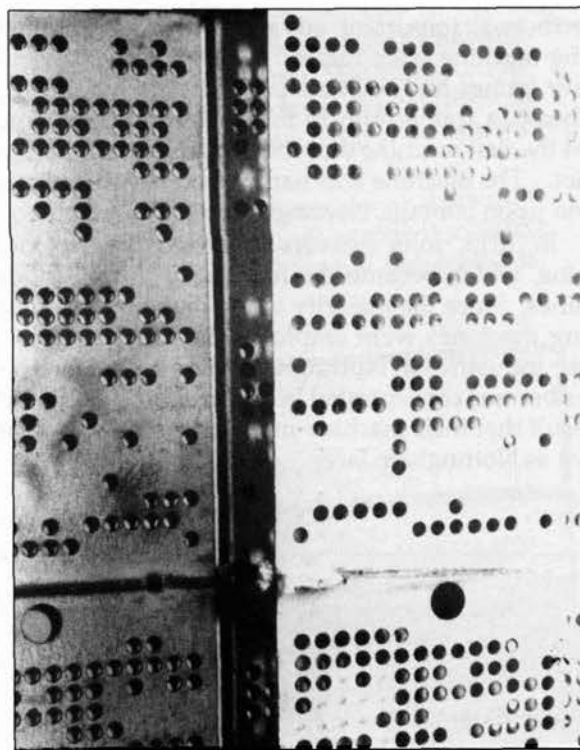


Fig. 10: Jacquard Card. Detail (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Stu Wilson)

machine. Workers skilled in all aspects of lace manufacturing were in short supply. In fact, the Fordham plant never succeeded in producing a single piece of furnishing lace. Shortly after, however, other lace mills appeared in Pennsylvania at Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, and Philadelphia and subsequently in the towns of Patchogue and Gouverneur in New York state.

Around 1890, one of the largest commission houses in New York was having difficulty obtaining curtains due to the conditions in Nottingham and the lack of success in Fordham. To offset the shortage of goods, the commission house secured the cooperation of Mr. Mosley, an English lace mill owner, and an agreement was reached to start a new lace manufacturing company in the United States. Scranton was chosen as the site for the mill, because there existed an ample supply of coal, ensuring a cheap source of power, and because that area was viewed as having a sufficient number of intelligent, trainable laborers (fig. 5).

Mosely arranged for the purchase and shipment of lace machines, and also gathered a nucleus of trained weavers who were willing to immigrate to Scranton and undertake the training of American employees. Initial difficulties beset the Scranton Lace Curtain Manufacturing Company: unable to generate sufficient sales to maintain operation, the company went into receivership. Still having great expectations for the growth of the lace curtain industry, the company was reorganized as the Scranton Lace Company on June 23, 1897. In only one year,

Scranton Lace produced over 18,886,000 pairs of curtain and was "operating in the black." By 1905, the company's volume of sales had more than doubled, growing from \$236,000 to \$559,000 (fig. 6).¹²

By 1900, most of the difficulties involved in manufacturing Nottingham lace in the United States had been overcome. Twelve lace curtain plants were established after the first machine arrived in the United States in 1885. In England, lace curtain manufacturing was confined to the city of Nottingham, while in the United States, the industry developed in many regions. In 1900, there were more than 300 machines operating in plants in Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Texas (fig. 7).

Made of cast-iron, the lace curtain machine is black and impressively large: it weighs as much as fifteen or sixteen tons, varies in length from twenty to fifty feet, and has the capacity to carry as many as ten-thousand threads. "Curtain machines had been intended from the first to make very large pieces of lace, and their working width grew to astounding proportions, varying between 144 and 420 inches wide until, by 1928, 300 inches was regarded as the minimum that could function economically."¹³ The machine is capable of weaving several pairs of curtains at one time, and one machine can potentially yield from fifty to 175 pairs per day.

The lacemaking process is based on the interaction of three threading units: the warp yarn, the spool yarn, and the bobbin yarn (fig. 8). The warp yarns are wound on a



Fig. 11: Canton. The Silas Wright House Museum. Nottingham Lace Exhibit, St. Lawrence County Historical Association (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

large warp beam, in a manner similar to the way yarns are wound on a warp beam in standard cloth weaving. The warp beam rests horizontally in the lower part of the machine, and the warp yarns are threaded vertically through the machine. The spool yarns are wound on small spools about eight inches long and one inch in diameter. The spools are situated on a rack at the rear of the machine. Spool yarns are fed vertically through the machine parallel to the warp yarns. Spool yarns are tensioned individually, allowing for the production of a pattern that requires varying thread lengths.

As many spool yarns as bobbins are used in any given design. The bobbin yarns are wound on flat bobbins which move back and forth on a fixed track and are placed in the machine in such a way that the yarns run vertically and parallel to the warp and the spool yarns. The warp and bobbin threads form the twist, and the spool yarns zigzag back and forth horizontally forming the pattern threads.¹⁴

A "Jacquard system" is based on pre-punched cards which direct the movement of the yarn (figs. 9 and 10).

Under the direction of the "Jacquard," the loom manipulates the three yarns in a basic sideways "V" motion. The two basic movements of the yarn—revolution of the bobbin yarns and the left-and-right movement of the bobbins—result in the winding and the twisting of the threads. The resulting weave is characteristic of Nottingham lace. The Nottingham lace curtain machine is a progeny of the Leavers machine and is similar, but not identical, in operation.¹⁵ The Nottingham lace machine is limited to the types of lace it produces. These include: curtain lace, net, and filet.

"Machine-made lace is a triumph of mechanical ingenuity, and a greater amount of inventive genius has been devoted to its production than to any other branch of the textile industry."¹⁶ At the time of the lace loom's invention, *Scientific American* called that loom the most complicated machine of its time. Machine-made lace sought and surpassed the art of handmade lace in the areas of fineness, delicacy, and pattern variation. Machine-made lace pushed the lacemaking industry to new heights. While the manufacture of lace became



Fig. 12: Lace Designer (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Carol Barclay)



Fig. 13: Lace Cartoon (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Stu Wilson)

primarily a French industry, the machinery manufactory stayed in Nottingham. If England is to be credited with the development of the technology of the lace machine, and the French given primacy over the design and the making of lace, the United States must be recognized for its contribution of cotton as a raw material and for the development of the American factory system.¹⁷

Black Iron, White Lace.

In creating and curating the recent exhibit at the Silas Wright Museum, the title "Black Iron, White Lace" was deliberately chosen to evoke the contrast between the machine and the lace it produced (fig. 11). In developing the exhibit, it became clear that one must begin with the machine and its operators before fully understanding the nature of the product. Furthermore, the composition of artifacts in the exhibit served to challenge the pre-existing notions about an industry which was neither feminine nor marginal.

The exhibit at the St. Lawrence County Historical Association was the first exhibit in the United States that displayed the Nottingham lace process from start to finish. Previously, the industry itself controlled knowledge of all the steps and processes for fear that the competition would steal the secret of the machine and designs. Lacemaking begins with the design process (fig. 12). The designer, created a full scale "cartoon" with as much detail as is needed to visually explain to the drafter what pattern repeats were necessary for the lace cloth. The cartoon is created on tissue, on vellum, or on architect's linen (fig. 13). The best designers were familiar

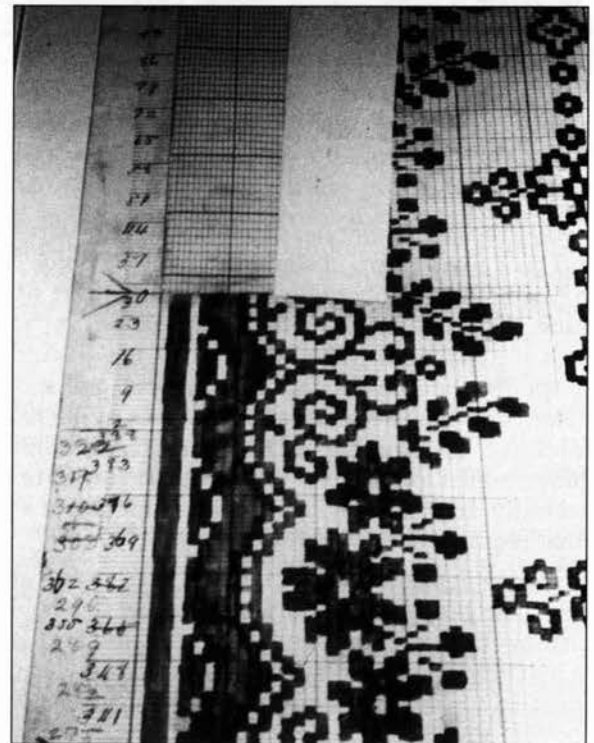


Fig. 14: Draft, Scranton Lace (SLCHA Exhibit
Photo by Stu Wilson)

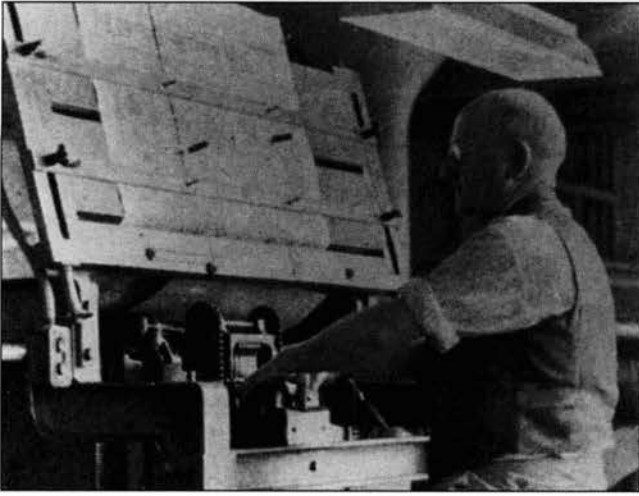


Fig. 15: *Puncher* (SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

with the intricacies of the machine's movements and knew how to use this capability to achieve certain effects. The lace mill facilities in the United States were designed to make lace from the first stages of design to the finished product's final packaging.

Once the draftsman finished a drawing, he translated it into a structural draft, on point paper (fig. 14). This draft included all the information workers would need to punch the Jacquard pattern cards and to set up the machine. Point paper is a type of graph paper or charted paper with lines/points graphed on a per-inch basis. Eight-point paper represented a lace with eight twists per inch. Nottingham lace could be gauged from coarse (5 point) to fine (16 point). Every thread and pattern repeat is accounted for on the graph; single and double patterning threads are detailed, in red and green markings, respectively. The drafts and designs were signed by their makers. Most drafts also included: the number of divisions of lace (number of individual pieces across the loom), the width of the finished product, the individually numbered threads, the number of the machine on which the lace was to be made, and the production or job number.

Next, the draft was sent to the puncher, who read the draft and punched the jacquard cards (these looked much like the computer cards of the 1950s) which governed the movement of the spool yarns and the lace patterning (fig. 15). These cards were threaded together, in sequence, on the lacing machine. It was not unusual to have several thousand Jacquard cards governing the patterning of one design for a tablecloth. While designing, drafting, and punching operations were in process, looms were dressed, warp beams and bobbins threaded, and spool threads prepared.

Once the loom was set up, weaving began under the watchful eye of the "twisthand" who looked for broken

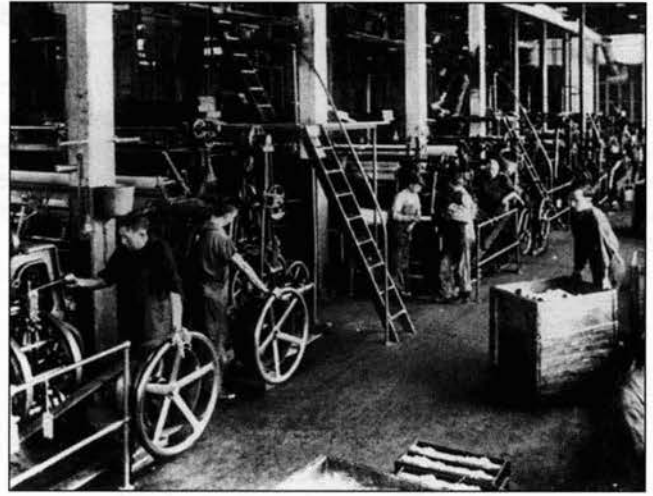


Fig. 16: *The Scranton Lace Mill. View of the Production Floor* (SLCHA Exhibit Photo)

threads and listened for the proper clacking rhythm as yards of lace twist across the machine. Practically all twisthands, as lace makers are called, were either men who learned their trade in England or France, or the sons of such men (fig. 16). Lace makers served a long apprenticeship. It was a highly skilled operation, and, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was the highest paid of any comparable occupation in the textile industry. In other sectors of the textile industry, the weaver may oversee as many as a dozen machines. In the Nottingham lace industry, a twisthand worked one machine. A Nottingham lace weaver was one of the most-skilled, best-trained, highly paid individuals in the textile industry (fig. 17). The union required that, after preliminary training, a weaver serve as apprentice, for approximately three years. At Scranton lace, the training and apprentice period was seven years.

After the lace left the machine, it went to the mending room for inspection. This examination required a skilled eye, and mending demanded a skilled needlewoman. After mending came the dressing, or the starching, that was a most important part of the finishing process. In Nottingham, the manufacturer of the curtains did not finish them, but sold them as gray goods. The Nottingham lace loom is huge, with thousands of moving parts. The success of this synchronized movement was due to the discovery and use of powdered graphite as a machine lubricant. That black powder enabled parts to move against each other with silky smoothness—but blackening everything, machine, workers, and lace, in the process.

Only after the lacework was completed was it treated to a "bath" restoring it to a white color. From the weaving department, the lace moved to the finishing area for mending, cleaning, bleaching, sizing, hemming, and packaging. Finally, the lace was ready for transport to

markets across the state, the country, and the world (fig. 18).

Initial inquiry on machine-made lace often focuses on the designer, the drafter, and the weaver, leaving the impression that a lace mill was predominantly male. The most labor intense area of any lace mill, however, is the finishing department usually staffed by female laborers from the local community (fig. 19).

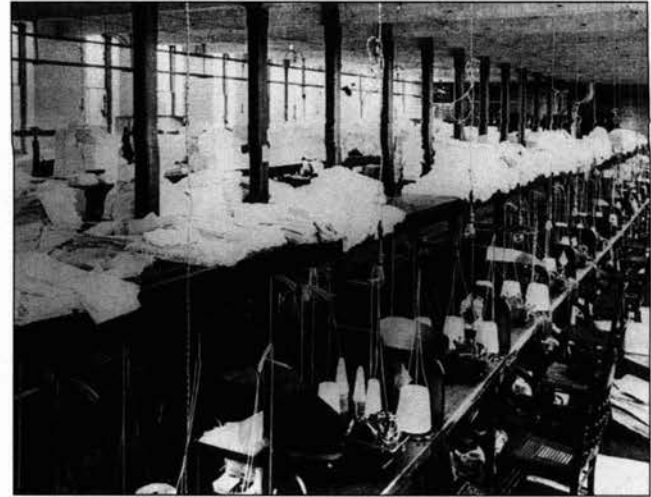


Fig. 18: The Scranton Lace Mill. The Finishing Department (SLCHA Exhibit Photo)

LACE GOODS AND DRAPERIES MANUFACTURED, 1909, NOT INCLUDED IN PHILADELPHIA.	
Number of establishments considered,	10
Capital invested (realty, machinery, business, etc.),	\$3,014,517
Market value of production,	\$4,457,892
Average days in operation,	302
Managers and office force employed,	87
Total salaries paid,	\$128,844
Average number of wage earners employed,	2,779
Males,	1,104
Females,	1,397
Minors,	278
Aggregate amount of wages paid,	\$1,098,307
Males,	\$694,835
Females,	360,156
Minors,	43,316
Average yearly earnings,	\$395 22
Males,	\$629 38
Females,	257 73
Minors,	155 81
Average daily wage,	\$1 31
Males,	\$2 08
Females,	0 85
Minors,	0 52
Average value of production for each employe,	\$1,604 14
Total production as given:	
Lace, in yards,	5,792,635
Curtains, in pairs,	3,825,206
Lace goods, in pounds,	179,250
Accidents in this industry:	
Non-fatal,	5
Nationality of employes as reported,	2,746
Americans,	2,376
Foreigners,	370
Working hours per week 54 to 60—average working hours,	57
Days idle in this industry,	55
Two firms report trade condition good; one reports fair; one reports depressed.	

Fig. 17: Lace Goods Report, 1909.

Until the 1964 closing of the design department at the Scranton lace mill, all of the designers (and drafters and weavers) were male and of English background and/or training. Informants have suggested that in the 1960s there was a woman who wanted to become a lace curtain designer at the Scranton mill. However, rather than place a woman in such a prestigious, high-paying, and difficult job, the company chose to close the design department and rely on its archives of designs to make its product. Although existing evidence has yet to establish that there was a design department at Gouverneur's International Lace mill, lace was produced and finished at that plant. Later, after a reorganization of the mill's operation, lace was produced as "gray goods" and shipped elsewhere for finishing.¹⁸ Information on the activities prior to reorganization has yet to be collected and documented.

The Gouverneur Lace mill.

The International Lace Company of Gouverneur, New York, was part of an industry whose life and death spanned less than one-hundred years, but whose roots

reached back to the ancient textile practice of knotting and netting.¹⁹ The daily output of such a mill was 3,000 pairs of curtains, in a variety of patterns and fineness, and ranging in price from thirty cents to four dollars.

Lengths of white lace, duplicating the finest handmade bobbin lace, reached markets across the country and the world to drape windows and tables in the homes of an emerging working class now capable of not only creating the goods, but also able to purchase them.

The International Lace Company was the first major employer of women in St. Lawrence County, opening its doors in 1903 with approximately 300 employees, mostly female (fig. 20). Until the advent of the textile mills, practically no industries employed female labor. Operations at the Gouverneur mill initially set up with 10 looms. The looms were "manned" by English weavers from Pennsylvania based plants, with the rest of the labor force coming from the local community. According to Census records from 1910, many village families were employed at the Prospect Street lace mill. The *Gouverneur Free Press* from that era encouraged and reflected the change in family roles through regular columns on the "Modern Woman," which stressed that working outside of the home and having a family were not incompatible. A column the *Gouverneur Free Press* in 1904 announced that "the Old Woman Vanishes, and the New (Woman) Arrives", a much different message from the previous 1902 garden party "how to's".

The International Lace Company brought diversification to the industrial life of Gouverneur, whose talc mines, paper mills, and marble quarries were already thriving. Prosperity, new industry and optimism, however, were short lived at the International Lace mill (fig. 21). Shutdown, reorganized, and reopened repeatedly, the lace mill never realized its intended potential of 25 looms, 600 employees, and half a million dollars in annual sales.

Today there is only one Nottingham lace plant left in the United States, the Scranton Lace Company, which



Fig. 19: The Scranton Lace Mill. The Cafeteria
(SLCHA Exhibit Photo by Carol Barclay)

operates approximately 15 looms. In spite of areas shut down because of the declining market for the product, the plant functions in much the same way as it did at the turn of the century. Giant black iron looms clack rhythmically as pattern, weft, and warp threads twist into intricately patterned lace. Wide lengths of graphite-soiled white lace casually grace the floor waiting for the next step in processing. Everything in the plant extolls yesterday's technologies. At the Scranton lace mill, long term, experienced employees mix with the sons of sons of "imported" English talent. The city's women and new minorities fill the cleaning, finishing, and packaging positions. In 1990 the legacy of Nottingham lace lives on at the Scranton lace mill, struggling to reach its centennial year while computer-aided knitting machines render the familiar cast-iron loom obsolete.

Acknowledgements

The research behind this article was collected over a six year period with help and encouragement from numerous people. The exhibit "Black Iron, White Lace" was funded in part by the New York Council for the Arts. Special thanks to Thomas Price, Collections Manager at the St. Lawrence County Historical Association; Radmilla Zuman, lacemaker; Nelson Winter, Gouverneur historian and the many guests and visitors at the exhibit who shared and exchanged information with me. Stewart Wilson and Carol Barclay shot the photographs that provided illustration for this article. Exhibition artifacts, video and audio tapes, and additional photographic resources were kindly provided by Chester Kulesa, from the Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum; Mary Ellen Calemno, Lackawanna Historical Association; and Walter Krzan, Scranton Lace Company; the Gouverneur Museum; and the Gouverneur Public Library. I'd also like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support, patience, and cohesive editing provided by Melissa Barker and Charles Tramontana.

WANTED

MACHINE MENDERS AND GIRLS TO LEARN MENDING. LEARNERS WILL BE PAID 10 CENTS PER HOUR FOR THREE WEEKS; AFTER WHICH THEY SHOULD EARN \$6.00 TO \$8.00 WEEKLY. IN TWO MONTHS THEY SHOULD EARN FROM \$8.00 TO \$10.00. GOOD MENDERS EARN FROM \$10.00 TO \$14.00 PER WEEK OF 54 HOURS.

WE ALSO WANT BOYS OVER 16 YEARS OLD FOR THREADING CARRIAGES. LEARNERS WILL BE PAID 10 CENTS PER HOUR FOR THREE WEEKS AFTER WHICH THEY SHOULD EARN \$7.00 AND OVER WEEKLY. IN TWO MONTHS THEY SHOULD EARN \$9.00 AND OVER WEEKLY. FAST THREADERS EARN \$11.00 AND OVER WEEKLY.

Apply INTERNATIONAL LACE COMPANY

Fig. 20: Help Wanted Advertisement
(Photo Courtesy of the Gouverneur Historian's File)

Notes

- ¹ *Encyclopedia of Textiles.*
- ² *Encyclopedia of Textiles.*
- ³ *Encyclopedia of Textiles.*
- ⁴ Derry, *A Short History of Technology*, p. 557
- ⁵ Derry, p. 558
- ⁶ Clothmaking consists of threads that traverse the entire loom in the weaving process, lacemaking and hosiery making use vertical twisting or looping system.
- ⁷ Derry, p. 573.
- ⁸ "But the first really successful machine for bobbin-net (so named from the threads crossing the warp being supplied from bobbins) was that of Heathcoat, invented in 1809, and suggested by the machinery employed in the making of fishnets." "Lace", *The American Cyclopaedia*, New York 1875.
- ⁹ Derry, p. 573
- ¹⁰ Earnshaw, *Lace Machines, Machine Laces*, p. 175
- ¹¹ "Although John Willoughby is often credited with bringing the first lace loom in this county to Fordham, New York in that year, Joseph Atkin began the Wilkes-Barre Lace Manufacturing Company in Wilkes-Barre (Pennsylvania) on April 1, 1985 only a few weeks later." *The Miner's Lamp*, p. 2
- ¹² More information on the History of the Scranton manufacturer is available from "Our First Fifty Years."
- ¹³ Earnshaw, p. 175

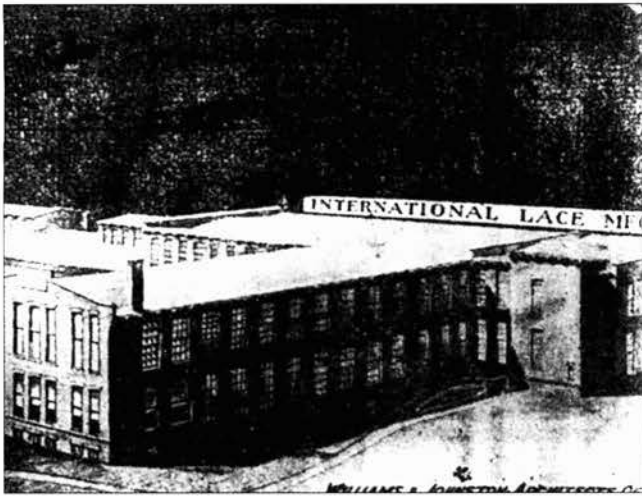


Fig. 21: Gouverneur. The International Lace Mill. (Photo Courtesy of the Gouverneur Historian's File)

¹⁴ Derry, p. 558

¹⁵ See Zillah Hall for detailed comparison of the Leaver's and Curtain lace machines.

¹⁶ Derry, p. 557.

¹⁷ Derry, p. 558.

¹⁸ See the following article in this issue by Nelson B. Winters, p. 16.

¹⁹ See Winters for the history of the Gouverneur Lace Mill.

Bibliography

Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs, Part III, Industrial Statistics. State of Pennsylvania, 1899.

Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs, Part III, Industrial Statistics. State of Pennsylvania, 1909.

United States Government, *Tariff Commission Report*, No.83, 1935.

The Gouverneur Free Press, 1902, 1904, 1906

Bendure, Zelma and Pfeiffer, Gladys. *America's Fabrics: Origin and History, Manufacture, Characteristics and Uses.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946.

Cole, George. *Cole's Encyclopedia of Dry Goods.* New York: Root Newspaper Assoc., 1900.

Derry, T.K. and Williams, Trevor I. *A Short History of Technology: From the Earliest Times to A.D. 1900.* Oxford University Press: 1970.

Earnshaw, Pat. *Lace Machines and Machine Laces.* London: B.T. Batsford LTD., 1986.

Encyclopedia of Textiles. Englewood Cliffs: 1972.

Felkin, William. *A History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufacturers.* London: Logmanns, Green and Company, 1867.

Gioello, Debra Ann. *Understanding Fabrics: From Fiber to Finished Cloth.* New York: Fairchild Publications, 1982.

Hall, Zillah. *Machine-Made Lace in Nottingham*, 2nd Edition. The City of Nottingham Museums and Library Committee, 1964.

Harding, Keith. *Lace-Furnishing Manufacture.* London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1952.

"Nottingham Lace Making," *Scientific American Supplement*, Vol. 64, December 21, 1907.

Our First Fifty Years: A Story of the Scranton Lace Company. Scranton: 1947.

Palliser, Mrs. Bury. *A History of Lace.* London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1910.

Winter, Nelson. "Gouverneur and Old Lace." *The Quarterly*, April 1983.

Shirley Tramontana is the Director of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. She is interested in the history of textiles, and her own work in this medium has been exhibited widely.

Of Gouverneur and Old Lace: The International Lace Manufacturing Co., 1903-1944

by Nelson B. Winters

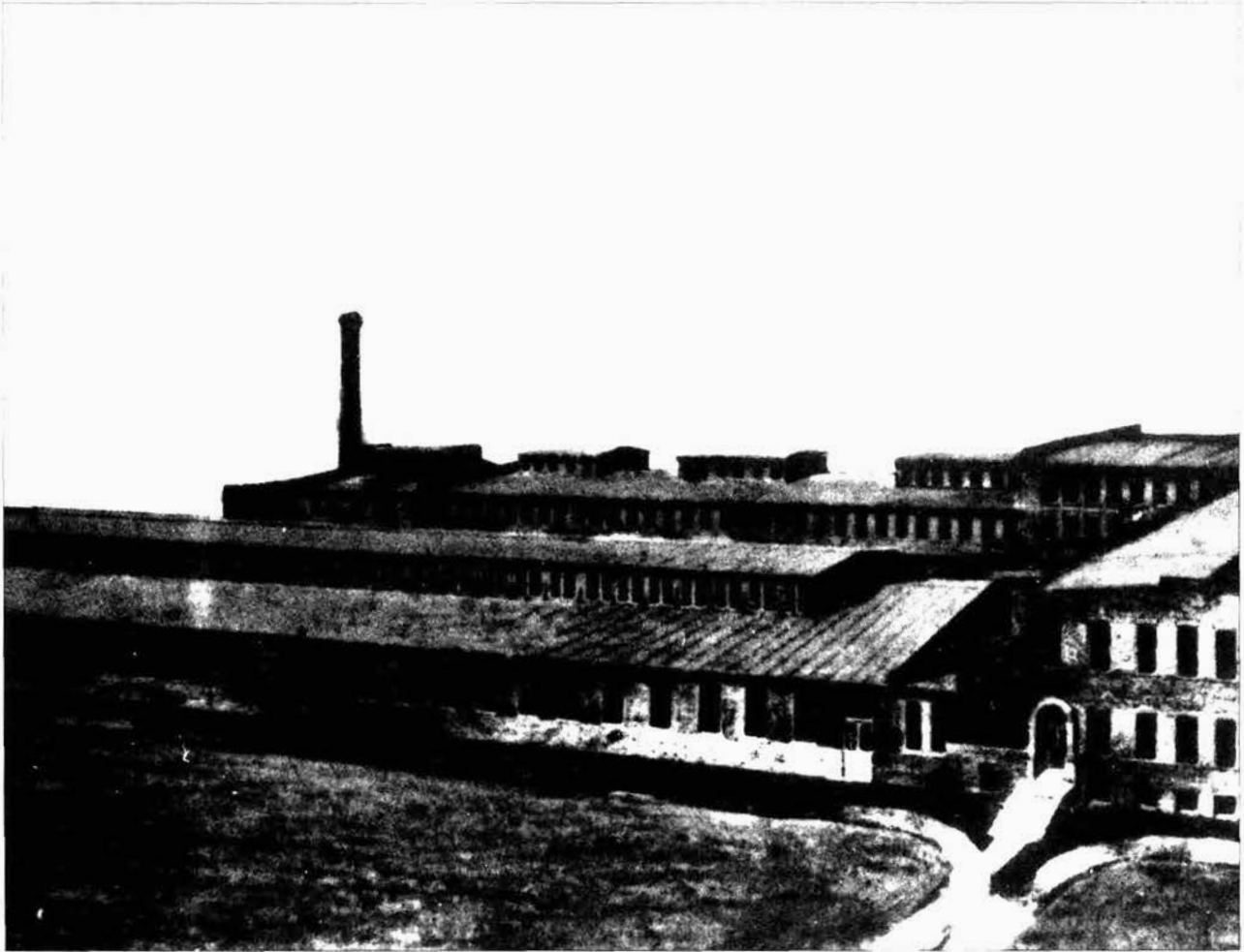


Fig. 1: Gouverneur. International Lace Mill. Postcard View of Exterior Published in 1925 by Draper Brothers, Gouverneur (Photo Courtesy of the SLCHA Archives)

Far distant from the famed lacemakers of Belgium or Ireland, the International Lace Manufacturing Company was located in Gouverneur for over forty years (figs. 1 and 5). In the following pages, I will recount the interesting history of one manufacturer, the first major employer of women in the county, and how it flourished and diminished in one of our small towns. Although lacemaking and silk hoseiery production ceased by 1944, the mill itself continued to contribute to the economic life of Gouverneur until the middle of the 1950s. In the subsequent years, the changing paper companies ownership--Rushmore, Groveton, Diamond International, and currently James River--the converting operation and of-

fice were moved to the Natural Dam mill site in the town of Gouverneur.

The lace mill assumed warehouse status, the windows were boarded up, and no trespassing signs were posted on the property. A fire in 1968 caused some damage to a small section of the mill. In late 1983 there were some negotiations toward establishment of a towel manufacturing operation, but nothing ever came of the textile proposal. A Building-Structure Inventory form was filed in 1984 by the village historian with the New York State Division for Historic Preservation section of the State Parks and Recreation Department in Albany. A repre-

sentative made an inspection of the lace mill. As 1994 makes its appearance, nothing further has developed.

Eighty years ago, on October 15, 1903, an industry new to Gouverneur made its first production run of lace curtains. It was to continue with various degrees of success until 1944. It brought diversification to the Gouverneur area already thriving industrially with its tale mines, paper mill, and marble quarries. It also required impor-

domestic source to produce their own lace. They canvassed their customers for suggestions for a mill location. A Gouverneur dry goods merchant, Anson A. Potter, replied with a recommendation that this community was just what Lesser Brothers would want.

According to the *Northeast Tribune* (June 6, 1902), a Mr. Robert Irving representing Lesser Brothers came to Gouverneur to ascertain if there was enough interest here

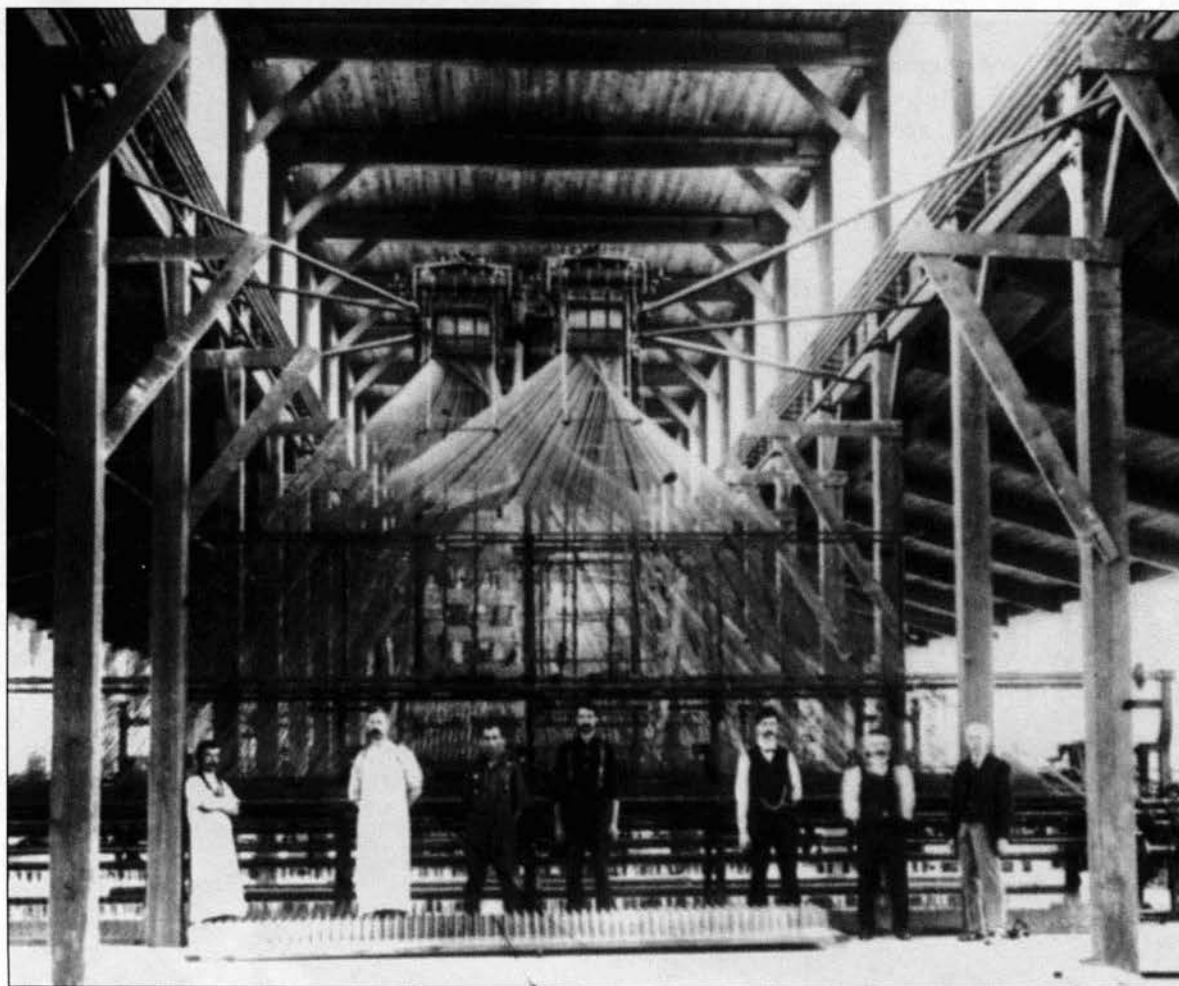


Fig. 2: Gouverneur. International Lace Mill. View of Weavers in the Loom Room (Photo Courtesy of the Author)

tation of skilled weavers, mostly from the state of Pennsylvania, and their families, and was the first major source of employment for women.

In 1900 the federal government imposed a seventy percent tariff on the importation of lace and lace products, most of which was coming into this country from Nottingham, England. The purpose of the tariff was to encourage domestic lace making. Instead of southern cotton being exported abroad and returned as a finished product, it could be consumed in the United States and sold at a lower cost.

Lesser Brothers of New York City were importers and sales agents for English lace. They decided to seek a

to establish a mill. Capital in the amount of \$500,000 was needed for the project. Half of this sum would be in preferred stock, of which \$75,000 must be raised locally through the sale of seven percent cumulative preferred stock at \$100 per share. The whole scheme envisioned a \$150,000 plant, with annual sales of one-half million dollars, employing 300-600 people, of whom most would be women. Common labor would be paid \$8-15 per week with the skilled help drawing \$25-30 for a weekly payroll of \$5,000. 50 skilled weavers and their families would be moved to Gouverneur.

A local committee was set up to see about meeting the financial requirements. In four days, \$75,000 was pledged



Fig. 3: Gouverneur. International Lace View. Exterior View of Prospect Street Elevation in ca. 1905
(Photo Courtesy of the Author)

by the well known names of that period: Aldrich, Dean, McAllaster, Parker, Dodds, Corbin, Eaton, Loveland, Abbot, and others. In July, one of the Lesser Brothers arrived in town to seek a site for the mill, check the water supply for bleaching, establish the cost of coal for the steam plant, and find workers.

In its August 1st edition, *The Northern Tribune* reported that Mr. Lesser was back in town with problems. Some New York stockholders were objecting to a mill in the backwoods, buried in snow for six months, with only periodic mail delivery and freight service. It seems that another \$50,000 from our backwoodsmen would overcome all the objections of the city slickers. It was proposed to raise this sum, pay by installments, and deposit the money in a local bank at six percent, withdrawals to be made as construction proceeded. The terms of the original stock sale provided for payment when the plant started up. This change required a new agreement. Mr. Barnard G. Parker, an astute local business man, was appointed to work something out. After a couple of trips to New York, a new plan was adopted, one provision being that a local man disburse the money.

International Lace Manufacturing Company was incorporated in Albany on August 11, 1902, with the plant now definitely set for Gouverneur. The site was to be the old Starbuck and McCarty Lumber yard on Prospect Street. The following corporate officers were elected: President, J. S. Lesser; Vice President, Morris Lesser; Secretary, Howard Lesser; Treasurer, B. G. Parker. The directors were the Lessers, Daniel Cohn, B. G. Parker and H. G. Aldrich. Messrs. Parker and Aldrich were the only local individuals.

The mill, which was to be built of brick, would be 80,000 square feet in area, and one and two stories in height. There would be "acres" of hardwood floors. The fifteen looms would be imported from Nottingham, England. The construction bid was accepted from Cummings Company of Ware, Massachusetts, called for completion by January 15, 1903. As a point of interest, the looms weighed five tons each, were composed of 30,000 parts, and required graphite for lubrication. The end product would be lace curtains of various grades.

There were the usual constructions delays, and the mill was not completed until late in the spring of 1903. It took more time for the machinery to be set up and the local help

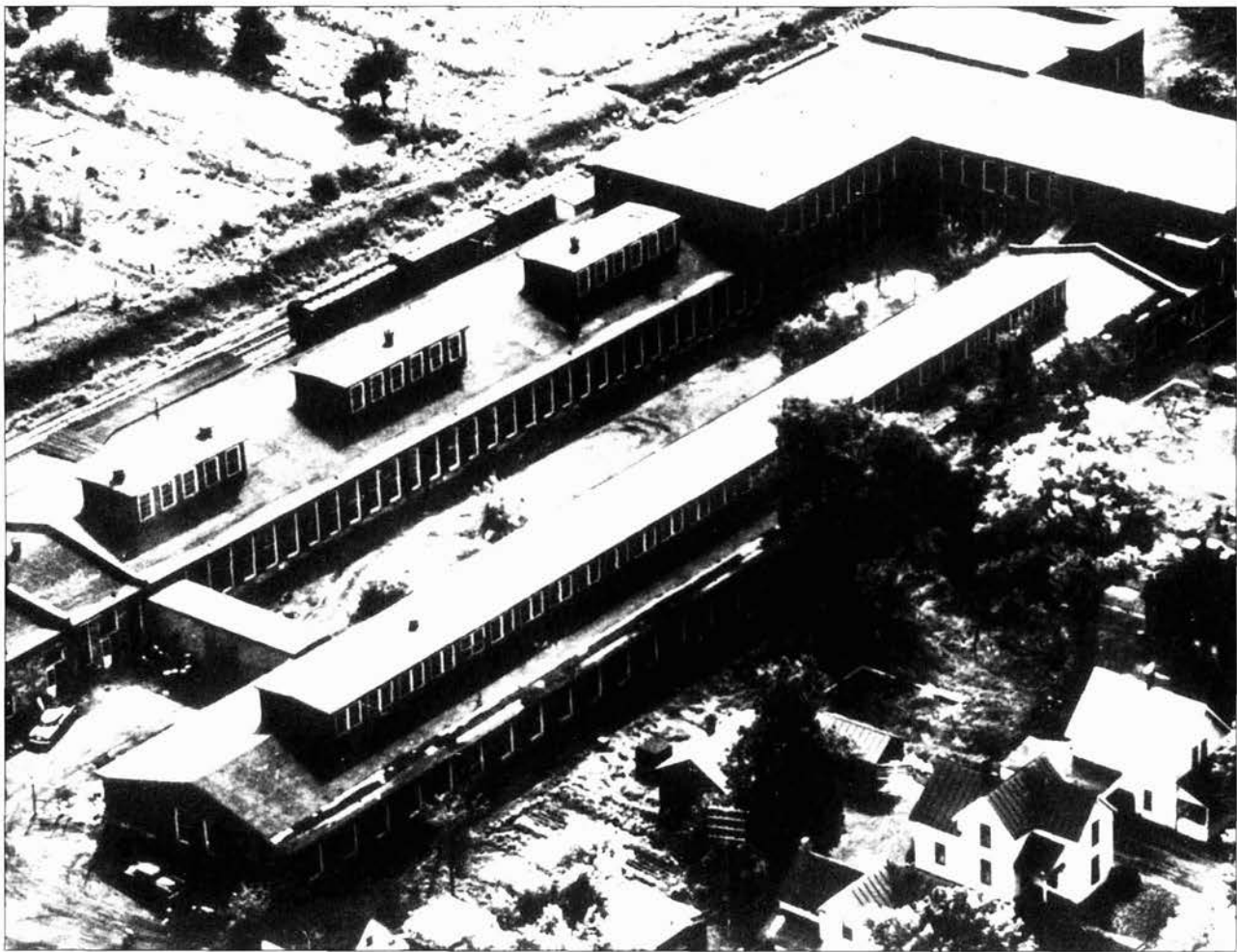


Fig. 4: Gouverneur. International Lace Mill. Aerial View of Mill in 1957, when it was owned by Rushmore Paper Mills, later Diamond International Co. (Photo Courtesy of Henry DeWolf, Rochester)

to learn the art of lace making than was anticipated. Most of the weavers were natives of England and had been transplanted here from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, lace-making plants (fig. 2).

An account of the International Lace operation in the *Gouverneur Centennial History* of 1905 indicates ten looms and 250-300 employees, mostly women (see cover photo), entailing a payroll of \$2,500 weekly, with the company's product being marketed principally throughout the United States. Raw materials for the mill and finished curtains all moved by rail.

As a sidelight, it may be noted that the English weavers organized cricket clubs, played exhibition games, and participated as well in tournaments for the edification of the local sports enthusiasts. There is no record that tea-breaks were an employee fringe benefit.

In spite of the auspicious beginnings, an announcement in the May 29, 1907 issue of the *Northern Tribune* stated that, due to the high price of cotton, the lace company had filed for bankruptcy and was placed in receivership. It was speculated that holders of first mortgage bonds would be paid in full. Second mortgage bondholders and creditors might receive twenty five cents

on the dollar. There were no local creditors. Preferred and common stockholders would get nothing. Later events proved these figures to be accurate. About \$100,000 worth of preferred stock was in the hands of Gouverneur investors. Mr. B. G. Parker was one of the two receivers appointed by the court. Although hope was held out for an early reopening, many of the English weavers left and returned to Pennsylvania.

Early in August, Clarence Whitman & Company, lace manufacturers of Scranton, Pennsylvania, started production on a small scale under a lease arrangement with the receivers. George Pike, the brother-in-law of Mr. Parker, was appointed manager.

John J. McCloskey of Philadelphia bought the property for \$250,000 at the court-order auction in April, 1908. Then the records show that the Bromley family of Philadelphia acquired the mill about three weeks later; however, no price was mentioned. They put eight looms into production in August and did business under various names--Quaker, Bromley, International Lace--until a general depression in the textile industries closed it again September 14, 1928, putting 60 employees out of work. The mill had existed on a part-time basis for the previous

6 years. The Plant engineer, Henry J. Curtis, was appointed caretaker.

The Gouverneur Lace mill might have been down, but it was not out yet. Bold face type on the front page of the January 15, 1936, issue of the *Tribune-Press* announced the opening of the mill by Bromley Lace Company Mechanics, the latter of whom were at work making repairs to the heating and plumbing systems. Only 5 of the 18 looms

At a chamber of commerce meeting, Durant Kriebel, president of the hosiery division, stated that, if successful, there would eventually be 165 male and female employees manufacturing 210,000 dozen pairs yearly of full fashioned women's silk hose on 53 knitting machines. Only the weaving would be done here. At Mr. Kriebel's request, the chamber agreed to reactivate its housing survey for accommodations for twenty families, many of

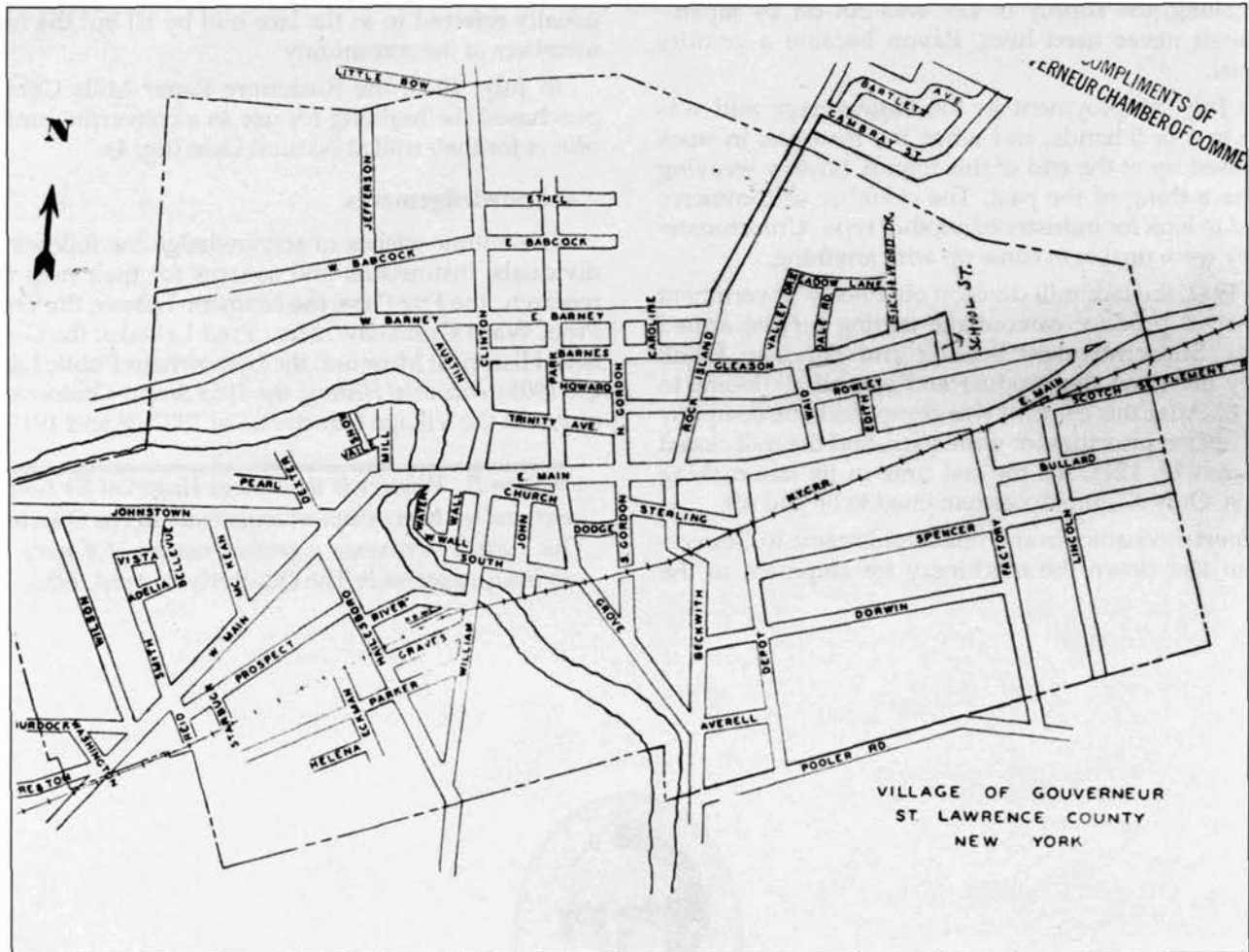


Fig. 5: Map of Gouverneur, New York (Photo Courtesy of the Gouverneur Chamber of Commerce)

were to be re-activated. Among the weavers returning were the Boulet, Higgins, and Towson families. There would be no bleaching or finishing. Production of curtains, tablecloths, and bedspreads using both cotton and rayon was started on May 18, 1936.

On February 24, 1937, the mill was front page news again in the *Tribune-Press*. A hosiery operation sponsored by Bromley Lace Company would start up in the unused part of the east wing of the lace mill. Four carloads of machinery had arrived in the name of Gouverneur Lace Mills, a hosiery division of North American Lace Company.

Polish extraction, who were being imported from Philadelphia. He also pointed out that Gouverneur was chosen for the plant over 130 other sites.

The hosiery section got underway early in the summer of 1937 with 23 machines and 55 employees. Initial production was 70,000 dozen pairs per year. It is of interest to note that the silk had to be processed in a wet condition. Maximum employment reached 100 with a payroll of about \$2,700 per week.

According to the June 5, 1940 *Tribune-Press*, it became definitely known that the hosiery division would close in a few weeks because the Bromley Company was going out of the hosiery business and had already closed production

units in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The chamber of commerce sent William Simons and Mason Smith to Philadelphia to try to persuade the owner to change his mind about the Gouverneur mill. The latter were unsuccessful. Mr. Bronley suggested that the employees form a cooperative and purchase the mill. An expert in this field came to Gouverneur and explained to the employees what was required. However, nothing further developed in this direction. Later events proved the wisdom of the decision not to form a cooperative: when World War II came along, the supply of silk was cut off by Japan. Although never used here, Rayon became a priority material.

By July, employment in the Gouverneur mill was down to 4 or 5 hands, and when the materials in stock were used up at the end of this month, hosiery weaving became a thing of the past. The chamber of commerce started to look for industry of another type. Unfortunately, they were unable to come up with anything.

In 1942, the lace mill division obtained a government contract to produce camouflage netting for the armed forces. Superintendent Schuler and Foreman Frank Boprey designed the product and altered six looms to make it. After this contract was completed, the company could not get priorities for more yarn, and the mill closed on March 16, 1944, for the last time in its lace-making history. Only 37 employees remained to be laid off.

Expert mechanics from Philadelphia came to Gouverneur to tear down the machinery for shipment to the

company's Chester, Pennsylvania, plant. Henry Ford wanted the last loom for an operating model for his then-new Greenfield Village and Museum at Dearborn, Michigan. Officials refused Mr. Ford's request because they feared competitors might copy their machine.

Although forty years have passed since Gouverneur's lace making days became a memory, former employees are always ready to reminisce about this fine art as it was practiced in the mighty Prospect Street mill (fig. 3). Although the building is now used for another purpose, it is usually referred to as the lace mill by all but the newest members of the community.

In July, 1945, the Rushmore Paper Mills Company purchased the building for use as a converting unit and offices for their mill at Natural Dam (fig. 4).

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the following individuals, institutions and sources for their help in his research: the *Free Press*, the *Northern-Tribune*, the *Tribune-Press*, Ward Grimshaw, Mrs. Fred LaDuke, the Gouverneur Historical Museum, the Gouverneur Public Library, the *1905 Centennial History*, the *1955 Sesqui-Centennial History*, and the Village Directories of 1907-08 and 1913-21.

Nelson B. Winters is the Village Historian for Gouverneur, and has been a frequent contributor to The Quarterly. This article represents a revised reprint of a piece that originally appeared in The Quarterly in April, 1983.



Continuing the Tradition



39 Market St., Potsdam
265-9260 fax:265-9296

newell® HOME
HARDWARE
COMPANIES



BULLDOG
HOME HARDWARE

DORFILE
STORAGE & SHELVING SYSTEMS

**SHEARSON
LEHMAN
BROTHERS**

26 Market St., P.O. Box 5238
Potsdam, New York 13676
315-265-6300 & 800-722-0226



COMPLETE FINANCIAL SERVICES

Member SIPC © 1990 Shearson Lehman Brothers Inc.

*Current Exhibits
At The
Silas Wright House
Museum*

*Currently Showing in the Main Gallery
(Through August, 1994):*

*Cash, Cows, and Computers:
The History of Financial
Institutions and Currency
In St. Lawrence County*



Currently Showing in the Children's Attic:

*Money, Money, Money!:
A Multi-faceted Look at Money
For Children of All Ages*

If you have enjoyed reading *The Quarterly* and are not currently a member of the Historical Association, please consider joining now.

To become a member, simply send a check with your name and address to: St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

Membership Rates:

Patron Member:	\$250 and up
Sustaining Member:	\$100
Contributing Member:	\$50
Family Membership:	\$35
Regular Member:	\$25
Senior Citizen (65 and older) and Student (22 and under) members:	\$20

PUBLICATION DATES

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association has changed the dating of **The Quarterly** from January, April, July, and October to Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall since our experience over the years has made it clear that dating by month raised unrealistic expectations among our readers in light of the complex and unpredictable circumstances faced by our contributors and staff.

Address Correction Requested
P.O. Box 8
Canton, NY 13617

BULK RATE
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 21
Canton, N.Y. 13617

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION



canton federal

SAVINGS & LOAN ASSOCIATION

Visit a Canton Federal Savings Mortgage
Loan Officer today and let us help you
obtain the home you have always
dreamed of. We'll work with you
to make it a reality.

Negotiable Order of Withdrawal (N.O.W. Accounts)
Passbook Savings Account
Christmas Clubs
Money Market Deposit Account
Money Market Passbook Account
Certificates of Deposit
Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA's)

Home Mortgage Loans
Equity Loans
Property Improvement Loans
Auto & Consumer Loans
Student Loans
Personal Loans
Mortgage Life & Disability Insurance

Direct Deposit Services
Money Orders
Travelers Checks
Drive-in Window
Banking By Mail
Free Notary Services
Automated Teller Machine



Member
FDIC



127 Main St., Canton, NY
386-4533