

12-17-2012

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Cynthia Bornhorst-Winslow

The Important Role Played by Household Crafts in the Lives of Nineteenth-Century Women
In Britain and America

Household crafts were created in the domestic sphere by a wide range of women in the nineteenth century in both Britain and America. Although sometimes neglected by historians and viewed as frivolous and oppressive by some feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, household crafts played a very important role in many British and American women's personal lives, and also played an important social role. This essay examines the three primary ways in which household crafts played this important personal and social role: they provided women with a form of self-expression, gave women more opportunities for social activities outside the home, and increased women's social influence as educators in morality and science, and as contributors to the arts.

As a form of expression, household crafts provided an important vehicle for women to express and promote their religious beliefs within their families and the general public, and helped them and their families cope with loss during the mourning process. As a means of increased opportunities, household crafts entertained women, enabled them to learn new skills, and allowed them to create their own personal property. Through gatherings like quilting bees, crafts empowered women to create a female support system and a personal social life separate from their families. As a form of social influence, crafts helped women gain a greater presence within their religion and provided them a means of supporting charitable causes. Women also increased their social influence through the creation of nature-based crafts, which enabled them to gain a foothold in the world of science as they collected specimens for their work. By

exhibiting their work to the public in household parlors, local fairs, and women's exhibitions, these women shared their personal artistic expression and achieved a greater presence outside the domestic sphere, which in turn allowed them to become more socially influential. As more women took advantage of the opportunities which household crafts created, household crafts became an important means of increasing women's social influence and self-esteem. Although society's promotion of female crafts created in the domestic sphere could be viewed as a form of oppression of women, they can also be seen as an important influence on women's history which helped expedite the expansion of women's influence and power from the private sphere into the public sphere. More historians today, such as Ariane Fennetaux and Maureen Daly Goggin, are researching the value of women's household crafts in terms of their artistic influence and their importance as a historic record.

Fennetaux believes this "fancywork," as it was often called, has frequently been overlooked by both historians and art historians (91). This situation has begun to change as more contemporary historians, like C. Kurt Dewhurst and Betty MacDowell, and artists, like Judy Chicago, become aware of the work produced by women of the nineteenth-century. Many Victorian men, such as English author Charles Kingsley in his 1855 poem titled "The Husband's Lament," found household crafts to be inconsequential and believed they took women away from their wifely duties, while some Victorian women, such as novelist Dinah Mulock Craik and writer Mary Lamb, found crafts to be a burden dictated to them by society and intellectually dulling (Parker 149, 172). Some modern-day historians, however, like Fennetaux and Beverly Gordon, have argued that female crafts were important and did provide women with increased opportunities and influence. This essay looks at evidence based on written records and work created, and research presented by modern scholars, in order to determine the importance of

women's household crafts in women's personal lives, their society, and as a historic and artistic record for contemporary society. When looking at the works themselves, it is important to note that we only possess a limited amount of knowledge about the makers since many are not signed, and others may supply only initials, a name or date completed, or sometimes a location. Any other information such as wealth, social status, or personal details is usually not available. We can infer, however, that because of the extensive promotion of household crafts by women's publications for middle-class women, it is likely that a large number of the crafts created during the nineteenth-century in Britain and America were made by this social class.

This essay begins by examining the three primary ways that household crafts were a means of expression. These three ways are: crafts as expressions of morality and religion, as a means of coping with hardship, and as a way of sharing women's personal thoughts and experiences. Next the four important opportunities presented for women through household crafts are examined, and these include: entertainment, a more active social life, an opportunity to learn new skills, and a way of creating personal property. Lastly three important ways in which household crafts provided women with increased social influence are discussed, and these include: social influence through religious funding and charitable giving, social influence through the popularizing of natural science, and finally influence through creating and exhibiting. In conclusion some of the works by women are also looked at in regards to their possible status as art. For this section the theories of three prominent philosophers of aesthetics, R.G. Collingwood, Immanuel Kant, and George Dickie, are examined and considered.

Women's household crafts, particularly needlework, were avidly produced throughout the nineteenth-century in both Britain and America especially during the years of 1830-1890. Women employed a wide range of materials in their crafts; these were usually either relatively

inexpensive, like thread or fabric scraps left-over from making clothing, or were free like feathers, shells, and human hair. From the mid-nineteenth-century forward, the types of crafts women created for their homes expanded to include areas previously dominated by men, such as furniture-making, taxidermy, and nature crafts, which required gaining some knowledge of the natural sciences.

During the Victorian era, British women from all classes created household crafts to various degrees, although the most avid creators were middle-class women living in both town and country. Upper-class women often had greater opportunities for travel and study and so had less time for fancywork. Lower-class women were more likely to be employed in some manner in order to help feed their families, and did not have hired help with household duties and child care, so free time was limited. While British upper-middle-class women usually had multiple servants to look after their children and help with much of the household work, most middle-class women had only one domestic and did most of the child-rearing themselves, often with the help of their older daughters (Gorham 10,17). However, industrialization in Britain created more time-saving devices and higher family incomes, which gave even the middle-class the ability to have some domestic hired help in addition to housekeeping assistance from older children or other extended family members, and this in turn may have allowed more women time to pursue pastimes such as household crafts (Bell 27). Joan Perkin believes, though, that the number of women who were “decorative and idle” was very small since few had enough wealth to employ a large number of servants (87). Deborah Gorham finds that middle-class women were especially charged with using their time to create “an appropriate domestic environment,” which included tasteful home decoration and the pursuit of feminine pastimes. Gorham also believes this duty

made middle-class women responsible for “assuring that the private sphere acted as an effective indicator of status in the public sphere” (8).

In nineteenth-century America, middle-class women in towns and cities were also particularly avid creators of household crafts, and they also experienced the benefits of more free time because of industrialization. Through letters written home, and beautiful dated quilts and rugs, we also find that rural lower and middle-class women settling new territory somehow still managed to find time from their domestic chores to create beautiful items for their primitive homes. Their lives could be very difficult, and pioneer Anna Howard Shaw recalls, in her account of her family’s early life in the Michigan wilderness, that when her mother saw the “forlorn and desolate” home prepared for the family by her husband, her mother’s face “never lost the deep lines those first hours of her pioneer life had cut upon it” (Dewhurst 99-102). Women’s creations no doubt served to help focus their attention from far-away loved ones, and brighten their simple, and often times rustic dwellings in order to create a new sense of home. The exhibition and book titled, Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women (1977), serves as evidence that American women from all regions of the country engaged in household crafts. This traveling exhibition and book, which chronicles nineteenth-century women’s folk art, was written and organized in Michigan, although it includes work and research involving many states. While the bulk of the work included is concentrated in the more populated states of the northeast region, work is also included from a variety of states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Virginia and West Virginia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Texas, California, Nebraska, Idaho, and Minnesota. Exhibitions of women’s folk art similar to “Artists in Aprons” also opened during the 1970’s in Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York (Dewhurst, xi).

Though many women found expression and opportunity through household crafts, opinions of the value of crafts during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries varied, and some women, like British eighteenth-century feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft, believed that crafts often limited women intellectually and made them dull. She wrote in 1792, “I have already inveighed against the custom of confining girls to their needle, and shutting them out from all political and civil employments; for by thus narrowing their minds they are rendered unfit to fulfill the peculiar duties which nature has assigned them” (169). Wollstonecraft believed in the importance of mothering and believed that active minds made women “more attentive to their duties” and therefore, better mothers (169). The evangelical Anglican writer Hannah More agreed with Wollstonecraft about the importance of being a good mother, and she also believed that embroidery had associations with aristocratic decadence and the cardinal sin of vanity. More states in her book, Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799), that young women should always embroider for others, and that “habituating young ladies to exercise their taste and devote their leisure, not to the decoration of their own persons, but to the service of those to whom they are bound by every tender tie of love and duty,” enabled them to avoid committing the cardinal sin of vanity (330). While their arguments have some validity, participating in household crafts also can be viewed as an example of how women adapted to very limiting situations and created opportunity from adversity. This essay examines the ways they used the socially acceptable activity of female crafts to quietly expand their influence both inside and outside the domestic sphere to become more influential members of Victorian society.

Handmade items created for the decoration of the Victorian home often had religious-undertones, and were synonymous with the pure and moral domestic sphere where women served as the moral guardians. In his 1865 essay, “Of Queens Gardens,” John Ruskin articulates

the mainstream view that women were ideally suited for this home decoration since their intellect was for “sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision” (67). Women’s motivations to create sentimental handmade crafts for their homes were varied, and included wanting to display their good taste, civilized nature, and morality. The Victorian woman’s primary duties took place within the home, and contact with the outer world was often seen as impinging on their ability to perform those duties (Gorham 6). Perkin, however, believes there were two very different middle-class ideals of “true womanhood,” since one was held by men and one by women. She asserts that while many women pretended to be as men wished them to be, they were simultaneously developing their own identities. Perkin also believes there were few real “angels in the house” who were “decoratively idle,” “sexually passive,” “self-sacrificing,” and dependent. Rather, she finds women were more accurately portrayed by women authors whose characters had strong passions and were independent minded, in addition to being the successful organizers of their households (86-7). The devout attention many women gave to a well-managed, well-decorated private sphere also benefited her family by increasing their social-standing. This was because one’s home, its decoration, and the cleanliness and condition it was kept in was seen an indicator of status.

1. Household Crafts as a Means of Expression

1.1 Expressions of Morality and Religion

Female crafts in the nineteenth-century were important as a means of expression in three primary ways: they were a way for women to promote their religious beliefs, a means of coping with loss and hardship, and a vehicle for illustrating their personal thoughts and experiences. Household crafts intrinsically possessed some religious significance since a woman’s virtue, work ethic, and selfless love for her family were tangibly represented through their production.

Some of the crafts women created were an even more direct means of religious expression, and promoted religious beliefs within the sanctuary of the family home. Pieces that were a direct religious expression included needlework pictures depicting scenes or quotations from the Bible, and embroidered mottos promoting good moral conduct. A woman could also actively participate in promoting Christianity and changing society for the better by creating a morally-uplifting environment for her husband and children. Ruskin believed this morality was the true nature of home: “It is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division” (67). Creating a beautiful, well-decorated home was viewed by Victorian society as a religious undertaking, and if the woman was successful, her home was believed to “have an elevating influence on those who dwell in it,” as stated by designer Christopher Dresser in his book Studies in Design (1879) (9). Historian Colleen McDannell explains that Victorians linked morality and religion with the purchase and maintenance of a Christian home. It was acceptable to acquire and display domestic goods, since you were “not building a shelter, but a sanctuary” (50). In The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, Gorham concludes that the British emphasis on the importance of domesticity helped alleviate the conflict taking place between Christianity’s moral values of love and charity, and capitalism’s emphasis on competition and survival of the fittest (4). While the male public sphere was dominated by business, politics, and professional life, the female private sphere served as a safe haven for love, emotion, domesticity, and religious values and provided a “place of renewal” for men away from their competitive and sometimes morally questionable activities (Gorham 4).

Nineteenth-century British society believed women’s crafts contributed not only to the favorable moral development the woman, but to that of her family and society as a whole. Part of British women’s religious and moral mission included providing early religious instruction for

their children. Girls, like boys, were taught the moral qualities of self-discipline, order, regularity, and self-control, but mothers often used women's pastimes such as needlework and painting to teach these virtues to their daughters. Appropriate home decoration was also viewed by Victorian society as a way to educate children, and so was promoted in The Lady's Every-Day Book (1873) written by Robert Philp, which stated that pictures on the wall, such as classical scenes displaying admirable virtues and young girls in domestic settings, were subjects that would "awaken our admiration, reverence of love" and "at times prevent our going astray by their silent monitions" (6). In Treasures of Needlework (1855), Mrs. Warren and Mrs. Pullen wrote that needlework "brings daily blessings to every home, unnoticed, perhaps, because of its hourly silent application; for in a household each stitch is one for comfort to some person or other; and without its ever-watchful care home would be a scene of discomfort indeed" (Introduction xi). Creating and displaying household crafts not only had the potential to create moral improvement in the members of the household, but in the maker themselves. Historian Ariane Fennetaux finds that many of these crafts were "intrinsically disciplining," since they could be very tedious and time-consuming, sometimes taking several years to complete, thereby teaching women self-discipline and patience. Fennetaux also believes that the production of home-made goods was important for middle-class women as a socially acceptable, morally endorsed expression of their materialism. Nineteenth-century British society applauded women for beautifying their households with decorating and embroidery, and viewed this activity as virtuous (94, 96).

Producing scripture coverlets was also a means of women's religious expression, and a morally acceptable activity popular in Britain throughout the nineteenth-century. Organizations and institutions endorsed the production of these coverlets as a means of offering people

“spiritual comfort and guidance during times of duress.” Churches, Sunday schools, Bible classes, temperance groups, ladies sewing circles, hospital wards, and asylums all praised the benefits of recording Christian scripture in embroidery, which included coverlets intended for the maker’s personal use, and those made to sell at church fairs (Prichard 250). Rozsika Parker believes that women often bore the entire responsibility for their family’s moral and domestic comfort, and British women’s needlework skills were viewed as a means of contributing to both religion and family (157). However, she also points out the presence of class conflict, because when upper and middle-class women embroidered it was the woman’s “taste” which “shed a moral and spiritual light” for her family’s benefit, but when lower-class women engaged in the creation of beautiful objects for their home, the moral change to their family came not from the woman’s taste, but from the embroidery or object itself (179). While lower-class British women had less time for leisure activities than upper and middle-class women, they still produced some household crafts as a means of economically decorating their homes, showing their morality, and as a means of relaxing.

In nineteenth-century America, women experienced the same industrialization as women in Britain, and the same division of labor that placed them firmly in the domestic sphere. Merish believes that during the early nineteenth-century, Protestant and liberal capitalist traditions merged and created a “pious materialism,” which she describes as a type of sentimentalism which made capitalism habitable. Merish finds that luxury items were viewed favorably and seen a means of both civilizing and spiritualizing the country, while at the same time contributing to its economic and moral growth (91,117). Family homes, now filled with morally acceptable extensive furnishing and decoration, were the place where American women reigned and administered their moral power and influence. In America in 1842 the *Northern Star* and the

Freeman's Advocate reprinted an article from the *Philadelphia Temperance Advocate* describing wives as deities, “who preside over the sanctities of domestic life, and administer its sacred rights” (qtd. in Boydston 143). American ministers and authors of the mid-nineteenth century such as Daniel C. Eddy in his book, The Young Woman's Friend; Or the Duties, Trials, Loves, and Hopes of Women (1857), viewed the home as a woman's sole place of power. He wrote, “Home is a woman's throne, where she maintains her royal court and sways her queenly authority” (23). Eddy's comparison preceded British author John Ruskin's similar reference in 1865 to women as queens in his essay, “Of Queens Gardens,” although Ruskin called for women's moral power to be used not only in their households, but also “within their sphere” in order to strengthen the morals of society as a whole (56).

Horace Bushnell, a notable pastor and preacher who is known as a father of American Christian education, also acknowledged the power of women in their domestic religious realm, but he did so by reinforcing patriarchal and hierarchal attitudes towards women, and promoting a solid marriage and family life. Historian Michiyo Morita believes that through this means Bushnell sought to secure the family as the “cornerstone for a Christian America,” but also “entrusted the building of a strong church foundation not to men, but to women” (11). However, while Bushnell showed confidence in the religious power women possessed, he did not want women involved in the administration of the church or politics because he believed it would upset the patriarchal order and could negatively impact the cornerstone of family which he valued so dearly (Morita 11-12).

Catherine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe in their book, The American Woman's Home (1869), stated that they believed in the power of women's religious expression and influence in the home and discussed the religious importance of home decoration. They

maintained it could make the home both happy and attractive, give it a “wholesome power over the young, and contribute much to the education of the entire household in refinement, intellectual development and moral sensibility” (71). The moral mission of home decoration was a common view held in nineteenth-century America, as in Britain, and Effie Woodward Merriam wrote in her instruction manual for women in 1891 that “It is woman’s peculiar province to supply this need of beauty in the home, to cover the hard facts of life with something pleasant to look upon - something to refine and elevate” (Sheumaker 110-11). These sentiments touting a woman’s special talents in the home are also present in an article in 1851 by J.H. Agnew titled, “Women’s Offices and Influence” in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine. He stated, “Let man, then, exercise power; woman exercise influence. By this she will best perform her offices, discharge her duties” (657). By mid-nineteenth century women’s hard domestic work was barely acknowledged, and women’s influence was seen instead through their touches of luxury and beauty in the home. Sheumaker believes that at this point in time women were defined primarily as a Mother, and the family was seen as her craft (64). What was required then for a happy home was not a worker, but rather as Agnew wrote, a “great reservoir of love” (654-7).

In nineteenth-century America, fancywork was sanctioned by Victorian society as an ideal moral activity for women since it required discipline, regulated self-expression, and a willingness to give of one’s self. Sheumaker believes that fancywork was meant to knit a family together, just as wives and mothers were told to do, and that it was a tangible representation of the ideology of separate spheres for men and women (61,107). Household crafts were created as the product of a woman’s selfless love for her husband and family, and often showed her frugality. The handmade items also added value to the home, though the items were usually made from materials that possessed little or no monetary value themselves (62,108). In her book

The American Frugal Housewife (1832), Lydia Marie Child explained the moral importance of the materials used stating, “The true economy of housekeeping is simply the art of gathering up all the fragments, so that nothing be lost. I mean the fragments of time, as well as materials. Nothing should be thrown away so long as it is possible to make any use of it, however trifling that use may be” (qtd. in Kiracofe 52). Handmade articles expressed a woman’s loving sentiment for her family, and the “cheap luxury” she created was far superior to any cheap market value of dehumanizing industrial goods. Sheumaker finds that the parlor was where the “market and the heart met” and it was the face that the family put forth to the public while still retaining some privacy within the confines of the home. Household crafts could sometimes be intensely private, but still meant for public display in the parlor and even in exhibitions and fairs. Many of the items women created also looked, and were, very time consuming to make. This was seen as part of their sentimental and moral value as they illustrated, in a tasteful way, the love and effort a mother puts into her family, and showed the mothers power to influence (62,108,114).

1.2 Household Crafts as a Means of Coping with Death and Hardship

Women’s household crafts, in addition to being an expression of religion and morality, could also be an expression of grief, and were used by women as a means of coping with death and hardship. In nineteenth-century Britain, death was much more commonplace in people’s lives than it is for us today. In Bath between 1839 and 1843, one child in five from a middle-class home died before reaching the age of five, and in a working class home the death rate could be as high as one child in two. Many children lived much of their childhood having lost at least one parent, as well as a sibling in infancy, and lived with the prevalence of death among their friends and neighbors (Perkin 8, 10). Women often turned to working with their hands for

consolation, and as a means of coping with their sorrow. Sometimes the work they created took the form of embroidered mourning pictures, which could include men and women standing by the tomb of the departed alongside symbolic images such as the weeping willow, and birds symbolizing the loved one's soul flying up to heaven. Parker, however, finds an interesting difference in the way women were portrayed in these mourning scenes. In men's mourning paintings the dead are portrayed as noble, while the grief is expressed entirely by the mourning women, or the man's "heroic self-control" if he was the survivor. In women's embroidered mourning pictures, however, it is the woman who possesses the power of self-control when she stands by the tomb bravely as the remaining heroic survivor, still filled with life and able to carry on with her duties (135).

Needlework, in the form of quilting, was also used in Britain as a method of coping for both women, and sometimes men. Nearly everyone had access to scraps of fabric; these common items often had sentimental value. In the archives of the London Foundling Hospital, there are records of abandoned babies being left with a small strip of silk and cotton patchwork embroidered with a heart as a symbol of kinship. In case the woman would ever have the means to reclaim the child, one half was pinned to the child, the other half kept by the mother. This undoubtedly gave the woman some small amount of comfort knowing that someday she might see the child again (Prichard 14-15). Quilting could also provide solace during times of confinement, whether for male or female. Perkin states that women in the late nineteenth-century began to write more of the confinement they felt when growing up. Constance Maynard, pioneer educator and founder of Westfield College, wrote that she and her sister were "shut up like eagles in a henhouse" with her mother subduing all their ambitions making them feel "constantly netted by invisible rules" (Perkin 25). Prichard believes that stitching quilts

performed an important function during times of confinement, whether in one's home or cell. She maintains that the coordination of eye and hand in a repetitive motion acts as a form of meditation and refocuses the mind, while at the same time gives someone the opportunity to create something of value in the "most abject of circumstances." That could be one of the reasons that prison reformer Elizabeth Fry noted in 1827 that "patchwork occupied much of the time of the women confined to New Gate" (Prichard 93). Military quilts were also produced by soldiers, primarily between 1850 and 1910, and more than 30 examples of these were exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 to showcase "regimental prowess." Some were produced during tours to places like India, which were "stressful and monotonous in equal degree." Christopher Breward's research shows that craft-production was acknowledged as a powerful-aid to healing in both military and medical circles, and was often used to help convalescing soldiers (85-6).

Hairwork was another craft created by the women of Britain to cope with adversities in their daily lives, and it was particularly used to cope with the loss of loved ones. Hair began to be used as a material in mourning jewelry, particularly mourning rings, as early as fourteenth-century Europe. During the sixteenth-century many people wore "memento mori" jewelry (Bell 8). Mourning rings continued to be made, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries presenting them at funerals was a status symbol. During the eighteenth-century, hair jewelry was given as a sign of affection, mourning, and to commemorate the dead. Hair as an artistic medium became quite popular by the mid-nineteenth century, and hair jewelry became more fashionable since Queen Victoria wore jewelry containing her beloved Prince Albert's hair. During the nineteenth-century the act of mourning, particularly among the middle-class, was a very public activity and required specialized dress, elaborate etiquette, and specialized goods (Sheumaker 53-4). Hairwork became a popular home craft for women in Britain, and allowed

them to create a sentimental product that was seen as superior to commercial goods available in the marketplace where greed was perceived as rampant. Palette-working was the method most favored in Britain, which consisted of a loved one's hair being glued to a flat surface in arranged curls or patterns and then placed in brooches or locket, or even used to compose pictures. Hair was believed to transcend death, and promised to remain forever, "alive and active," thereby helping the living retain a small lasting part of the departed (Scheumaker 54).

Hair-working was an import to the New World, and Scheumaker believes along with it was the belief in sincere emotional expression through material goods (1). Americans favored table-working which consisted of braids that were tightly woven into elaborate patterns or woven open tubes of hair. They also employed the method of winding individual strands of hair around thin wire, then shaping the hair-covered wire into floral shapes or designs such as crosses, anchors, wreaths etc. to create pictures, some being as large as four feet in diameter (DeLorme 149). Using a loved one's hair in this manner was viewed by society as an open demonstration of sentimental grief, which was not only appropriate, but helped to validate membership in the middle class (Scheumaker 3). While middle-class culture emphasized control over one's emotions, sentimental crafts such as hairwork allowed for the "structured loss of control," and therefore condoned as an artistic public expression of private suffering (Scheumaker 30). The hair memorials that grieving women created triggered tears, and helped both them and others begin the necessary process of mourning. Often the hair would be combined in shadow boxes, along with other items from the loved one such as, pieces of clothing or shrouds, old shoes, stockings, or coffin plates. American women were particularly creative with their mourning pictures, often combining unusual materials in shadow box frames, creating one-of-a-kind vignettes to be hung on parlor walls. The unique pieces were then proudly exhibited in the

home, thereby allowing women to demonstrate to family and friends their ability to reconcile themselves to their loss, while still honoring and maintaining the memory of the deceased (Sheumaker 57- 9).

In America, as in Britain, women embroidered mourning pictures and used patchwork quilting as a means of coping with hardship. For many American women, in addition to coping with loss from early deaths, they also struggled to cope with saying goodbye to relatives and dear friends that were moving west to start a new life, or they themselves were moving and leaving their support system for the great unknown. The women being left behind often created friendship quilts to send with friends and family on their migration. Historian Beverly Gordon believes these quilts “served as physical embodiments of human relationships,” and they “commemorated and reinforced the private domestic relationships that were important to women” (95). Often the quilts would bear the names and sentiments of family and friends in order to help make the separation easier. When moving from New Jersey to Illinois, Alexander Hoagland and his bride Cornelia, only 20, were given such a quilt to carry with them. As Cornelia’s friend, Jane Snyder wrote on the quilt on February 27, 1855, “We have been friends together/It cannot be all over/We will be friends forever/Though here we meet no more.” That prophetic inscription turned out to be true, since Cornelia died of fever less than one year later, at which time Alexander sent her dresses, and the quilt, back home to her mother (Fox, Pleasure 136-8). Quilts played an important role in helping women cope with their difficult lives involving death and separation. This is pointed out in Good Housekeeping Magazine in 1888 when Annie Curd wrote, “Every young girl should piece one quilt at least to carry away with her to her husband’s home, and if her lot happens to be cast among strangers, as is often the case, the

quilt when she unfolds it will seem like the face of a familiar friend and will bring up a whole host of memories, of mother, sister, friend, too sacred for us to intrude upon” (“Beds” 13).

Once pioneer women arrived at their destination, the activity of making a patchwork quilt could be a valuable means of coping with the difficult life they found. Their primitive houses cried out for some colorful cozy furnishings, and making quilts and rugs was an important boost to their morale. It was also a needed break from their tedious and never ending chores and daily drudgery. They often longed for “something to do” as one woman recalled:

I think the most unhappy period of my life was the first year spent on Clatsop, simply for the want of something to do. I had no yarn to knit, nothing to sew, not even rags to make patches...One day Mrs. Parrish gave me a sack full of rags and I never received a present before nor since that I so highly appreciated as I did those rags (qtd. in Dewhurst 100).

The importance of having “something to do” when faced with difficult circumstances was noted by Dr. Seymour Bicknell Young, who brought his enlightened therapy to Salt Lake City Insane Asylum when he became director in 1876. He thought that the mind should be kept busy to insure happiness, and many residents at the asylum were taught crafts. Female patients did needlework and created beautiful quilts such as the well-preserved, multi-colored, 3000 piece quilt designed and created at the asylum circa 1880 (Fox, Pleasure 145). Young’s philosophy of the “work of troubled minds soothed by the work of busy hands” was applicable to many women in the nineteenth-century, and they employed crafts to help them cope with their lives. Modern feminist Debbie Stoller in her book Stitch ‘n Bitch: The Knitter’s Handbook, likewise comments on the “incredible satisfaction and sense of serenity that could come from the steady, rhythmic click of one’s knitting needles...Betty Friedan and other like-minded feminists had overlooked an important aspect of knitting when they viewed it simply as part of women’s societal

obligation to serve everyone around them – they had forgotten that knitting served the knitter as well” (9).

Through recording life’s events in fabric, women might have gained comfort and felt some sense of control over their new lives on the frontier, as well as when coping with the death of their loved ones. One example of this is a “Coffin Quilt,” created by Elizabeth Mitchell of Kentucky in 1839. This quilt can be viewed as the quilting equivalent of the embroidered mourning picture. In it, Elizabeth recorded family member’s deaths as they occurred by removing labeled coffins from the borders of the quilt when people passed, and placing them within the graveyard depicted in the center of the quilt (Dewhurst 101). Through this organization of unexpected occurrences, she may have attempted to gain some sense of control and cope with the natural ebb and flow of life, while simultaneously creating a beautiful memorial to her loved ones then and for future generations.

1.3 Household Crafts as a Means of Sharing Personal Lives and Thoughts

Women also used household crafts, particularly needlework, as a means of personal expression. At a time when societal conventions could often be restricting, particularly for women, needlework afforded an opportunity for women to illustrate their life experiences and personal thoughts. Lady Muriel Beckwith remembered this feeling of restriction when reflecting on her childhood in late-Victorian England, “signs of individuality in the young, if observed, were firmly nipped in the bud...The child was only permitted to think under supervision” (Perkin 30). Needlework afforded some British women a quiet place without supervision, while at the same time giving them the opportunity to express themselves in an acceptable and respectable way. In *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women* (1858), popular British novelist Dinah Mulock Craik wrote of the woman at home, “their whole energies are devoted to the massacre of Old

Time. They prick him to death with crochet and embroidery needles, strum him deaf with piano and harp playing..." (5-8). While she viewed needlework as having little or no value to the women executing it, other than a filler of time, for many women household crafts and needlework were welcomed opportunities for expression. Olive Schreiner, a British feminist author who lived most of her life in South Africa, and published her first book advocating the emancipation of women under the pseudonym of "Ralph Iron," believed in the value of embroidery for women both as an art and as a means of expression. In her book, From Man to Man, she wrote:

The poet, when his heart is weighted, writes a sonnet, and the painter paints a picture, and the thinker throws himself into the world of thought...but the woman, who is only a woman, what has she but her needle? In that torn bit of brown leather brace worked through and through with yellow silk, in that bit of white rag with invisible stitching, lying among the fallen leaves and rubbish that the wind has blown into the gutter or the street corner, lies all the passion of some woman's soul finding voiceless expression. Has the pen or the pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle? (301)

Parker believes that while Schreiner saw the value of needlework in one respect, she also associated it with femininity, and thereby presented it as a lesser art form than painting or poetry. Parker states that "by claiming that embroidery should be valued because of its intimate associations with women's lives and domestic tradition, Olive Schreiner inevitably though unwittingly discounted it as art" (15-16). While Schreiner may have unwittingly helped diminish needlework's value as an art form, for many women its value as a means of personal expression cannot be discounted.

The inspiration for items, such as patchwork quilts, came from many sources, and amateur quilt-makers stitched with confidence and imagination. They chose images, colors, and patterns that had personal meanings for them, and they were resourceful in collecting inexpensive materials, often over long periods of time. This process of finding materials could involve recycling old garments from family members and collecting unusable remnants from dressmakers or tailors (Prichard 179). Some quilts commemorated a personal event in the quilt maker's life, such as a marriage, birth, or death. Others reflected historical events taking place during the creator's lifetime, such as a particular military battle, the Golden Jubilee of King George III, or the coronation of Queen Victoria (1838). Many of the quilts in Britain and America exhibited a great degree of unbridled creativity, such as a quilt made in 1808 by Joanna Southcott of London for her fiancé Frances Taylor. In this quilt Joanna ingeniously added to its intimacy when she embroidered the center piece of the quilt with her own hair. Another coverlet, by an unknown maker in 1803-05, consisted of a center panel which depicted King George III's review of volunteer troops in Hyde Park. The border was comprised of 40 appliqued vignettes which showed patriotic, domestic, and naval scenes. Detailed embroidery was added on top of the patchwork in the central panel and border, as well as additional drawings and designs stamped in selected areas with black ink. Several of the small embroidered inscriptions include quotes from a soldier's letter such as, "I'm sorry to inform you there must be another campaign," and the words of the Lord's Prayer being read by a mother to her child (Prichard 180-85).

Englishwoman Ann West also created a remarkable illustration of her life and thoughts 1820, in an inlaid patchwork and appliqued hanging or coverlet made of plain and twill weave wools. It consisted of a center panel showing Adam in the Garden of Eden, and surrounded by a

variety of scenes from the Bible. Smaller panels showing scenes and characters from early nineteenth-century life in England, such as “Milkmaid”, “Gardener”, and “Schoolboy” were also arranged at the top and bottom of the hanging. Another illustrative applique coverlet or hanging by an unknown maker is composed of many small panels illustrating a love story. Each panel shows a scene with figures dressed in costumes of the late 1870’s to early 1880’s, depicting various rituals and emotions associated with courtship including ‘Introduction, Jealousy, Kisses, Love Letters, Matrimony and Tiffs’ (Prichard 195). These personal creations could serve as cloth diaries for women and allow them to express their thoughts and emotions, record history, and add to their personal satisfaction and self-esteem.

By the 1880’s a more abstract form of quilting known as Japanese, “kaleidoscope” patchwork, or “crazy” quilts became popular in Britain and America, particularly among fashionable urban women. It was a new avenue for creative expression that most commonly used sensuous velvet and silk cut into abstract shapes. These shapes were then arranged in interesting compositions, and further embellished with figurative applique and embroidery. Other materials were also added such as buttons, bows, braids, laces, beads, ribbons or badges from organizations or activities, campaign ribbons, county fair ribbons, and even wedding menus printed on silk. This new type of quilting allowed women an even freer form of abstract expression in pattern and color, and when combined with personal memorabilia acted as a textile scrapbook meant for display in the parlor, not in the bedroom (Gordon 95-6). Historian Ariane Fennetaux believes that household crafts, such as crazy quilts containing campaign and award ribbons, could be subverted and used by women for their own ends, such as political expression. She also believes that they should be studied “not as evidence of a base, mindless, adherence to the material but of a meaningful process whereby women not only expressed themselves as

individuals but above all organized, appropriated, and made sense of the world around them” (92).

Rachel Maines, however, asserts that it was not until factories produced items such as sheets, shirts, stockings, and baby diapers that American women from the working and lower middle class had the leisure time to explore expression and creativity through needle and thread (111). While it is true to some degree that industrialization did give women more time and opportunity for creative expression, women in early nineteenth-century America with very little means somehow still found time to create beautiful items for their homes, even while settling new territory. Mary Comstock of Shelburne, Vermont created a large wool bed rug in 1810 with her name emblazoned largely across the upper edge. The entire process was done at home, and was a considerable project in light of the overwhelming household tasks of the rural woman. Mary raised the sheep, spun and dyed the wool, wove the fabric, and then covered the rug completely with beautifully detailed needlework. A similar feat was accomplished by Philena McCall of Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1802 when she created a bed rug covered with intricately embroidered stylized foliage and proudly labeled with her initials and date (Dewhurst 4-5). Bed rugs such as these went far beyond mere functionality, and were obviously created as a means of expression and to proudly display in order to both beautify their homes and showcase their talents. Many women who were busy with arduous, and seemingly endless-household tasks, might have welcomed the opportunity to play with pattern and color and create something of beauty for their modest homes. In the early years of the country, women were found to have often worked on two quilts at once, one very intricate quilt worked on during small segments of time snatched during the day, the other less complex and more utilitarian with cruder stitching so it could be worked on in the evenings by candlelight. For women this arrangement could meet

both their need to make warm bedcovers for their family, and their need for creative and aesthetic pleasure (Weissman 45-6).

Women's lives were often represented in their needlework, and this intimate personal expression is articulated particularly well by one quilt maker:

It took me more than twenty years, nearly twenty-five, I reckon, in the evening after supper when the children were all put to bed. My whole life is in that quilt. It scares me sometimes when I look at it. All my joys and all my sorrows are stitched into those little pieces. When I was proud of the boys and when I was down-right provoked and angry with them. When the girls annoyed me or when they gave me a warm feeling around my heart. And John too. He was stitched into that quilt and all the thirty years we were married. Sometimes I loved him and sometimes I sat here hating him as I pieced that patches together. So they are all in that quilt, my hopes, and fears, my joys and sorrows, my loves and hates. I tremble sometimes when I remember what that quilt knows about me (qtd. in Dewhurst 53).

In America, women also enjoyed making rugs for their homes, but unlike the sometimes social activity of quilting, rug makers tended to work alone in their homes creating rugs with strong, beautiful designs that went far beyond utility. Some of these remain as wonderful expressive illustrations of women's everyday lives, the most famous being the "Caswell Carpet," created by Zeruah Higley Guernsey Caswell of Castleton, Vermont between 1832 and 1835. She personally sheared, spun, and dyed the wool for this ambitious undertaking, which measures twelve feet by twelve feet, and consists of seventy-six uniquely embroidered squares containing floral, animal and human imagery. The carpet now proudly resides in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Other notable examples of personal expression in rugs include an appliqued and

embroidered rug executed in 1845 by 11-year-old Jane Gove of Wiscasset, Maine fashioned from fragments of her dead mother's clothing, and a hooked rug made by Eleanor Blackstone of Illinois in 1885 which not only included portraits of her six children along with their names, birthdates, pastimes, and pets, but strands of the children's hair worked into their individual portraits (Dewhurst 55-7). The amount of time and effort women spent and the imaginative and personal nature of these creations is evident. These factors show the work to be expressively important and go far beyond an activity to merely fill time or meet utilitarian needs.

In the essay "The Needle as the Pen," contemporary scholars Pritash, Schaechterle, and Wood write that they consider needlework not just an alternative to discourse, but a "form of discourse." They believe that needlework has the ability to shape identity, build a sense of community, and prompt both the maker and the audience into social action (14). Professor Maureen Daly Goggin agrees, and argues that categorizing needlework only as a form of "woman's work" unfairly hides the practice as a "potent rhetorical tool" (312). Although needlework fulfilled a variety of needs for women such as livelihood, acceptable feminine performance, and meeting the needs of their family, on some occasions it also allowed them to make a personal statement. These statements were often subtle or coded, and gave women the opportunity to present unpleasant truths in a form acceptable to society. This could be as subtle as making a quilt in the blue and white colors of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, thereby showing support for that particular organization and also serving an educational purpose to viewers who could read the code. Pritash believes the act of making such a quilt could have been that woman's "private protest march" (15-16). Numerous quilts in America contain both visible and veiled references to political and social events and causes, and women did express themselves by choosing specific quilt patterns such as "Lincoln's Platform," "The Little Giant,"

(referring to Stephen Douglas in his debates with Abraham Lincoln), “The Underground Railroad,” or the “Slave Chain.” Through their choices of pattern and color the maker could express her personal views on topics such as the Civil War and slavery. Women also used patterns such as “Drunkard’s Path” and the “Humility Block” in children’s quilts where they were employed as a subliminal teaching tool. They could also share their religious sentiments by choosing patterns such as the “Crown of Thorns” or “Jacob’s Ladder,” and the migration west inspired patterns such as “Rocky Road to California” and “Trail of Covered Wagons” which allowed women to express their varied life experiences (Dewhurst 109).

Household crafts also gave women an opportunity to express their views and concerns through activities such as making supplies for soldiers, or helping with fundraising for benevolent organizations and activist causes (Pritash 20). This enabled women to support what was important to them without requiring a monetary donation. The Temperance movement, and the Abolitionist movement also encouraged the involvement of young people, and organizations were created such as the “Juvenile Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle” which made items for sale to raise money for their cause (Fox, Small 175, 178). When women were chastised for their political involvement, needlework could re-establish their femininity, thereby moderating their message and perhaps making it more palatable to the public. One important example of this effect is when the suffragist Sojourner Truth deliberately included photographs of her holding her knitting in her portrait sessions, even though the knitting was held in a way that would prevent actual work. By asserting her femininity with the symbol of needlework, she was able to show motherliness and female respectability without diminishing the power of her message (Pritash 18). During the late nineteenth-century, needlework kits and pattern books became more available, and photography served to create an easier and more accurate means of recording ones

life (Dewhurst 120,124). These developments somewhat diminished the often exuberant creativity and personal expression women displayed when portraying their lives and thoughts earlier in the century.

2. Household Crafts and Opportunities for Women

2.1 Household Crafts as Entertainment

Female crafts also provided women with increased opportunities for entertainment, a social life, a strong female support system, an opportunity to learn new skills, and a way to create personal property. As a means of entertainment, female crafts offered women the opportunity to engage regularly in an activity that many women found pleasurable. Parker believes that while women were often accused of vanity if embroidering items for themselves, the stereotype of the obedient “silent seductive needlewoman” diminished the power and pleasure women derived from the activity, and represented it negatively (14). Wollstonecraft argued that needlework “contracts their [women’s] faculties more than any other by confirming their thoughts to their persons” and urged middle-class women to abandon embroidery because it made them sickly and self-absorbed, and thereby not suited for mothering (170). Opinions among women varied, though, and Hannah More, a conservative but sometimes progressive eighteenth-century British writer, and Maria Edgeworth, British novelist and educationalist, believed that if done in the correct selfless spirit, needlework created selfless women and therefore good mothers (Parker 142-3). Since women were expected to concentrate so much of their effort on the benefit of their family and household, it is also possible that the opportunity to create something expressive and beautiful lessened their resentment of domestic duties and enhanced their mothering. Imaginative creative expression might also have had an expanding effect on their mental processes, rather than a contracting one. Visualizing and planning a creative project can be very

mentally stimulating, and for some women may have been something to look forward to when dull and un-gratifying household tasks were completed. So while some nineteenth-century British women viewed crafts, such as needlework, as a major source of women's unhappiness, some may have enjoyed it as a source of solace and pleasure (Parker 143, 148). Maines asserts that she finds evidence of women's pleasure when viewing the history of quilting in Britain because she finds a significant amount of resistance to the use of the sewing machine for quilting. She believes that this is because quilters enjoy the process of quilting, just as hand-knitters enjoy the process of knitting. She also concludes that the reason some artists suggest artistic innovations are easier with hand technology is because it is just another way to say that the process itself is more enjoyable (118).

In 1859 The Habits of Good Society, a British handbook on etiquette written anonymously by "A Man in the Club Window" and "A Matron" as they observed nineteenth-century English society, noted that "all accomplishments have the one great merit of giving a lady something to do; something to preserve her from ennui; to console her in seclusion; to arouse her in grief; to compose her to occupation in joy. And none answers this purpose much better than fancy work..." (268). Many women found that producing tangible creative work using the materials available to them went considerably beyond just giving them "something to do." Some of the items created were tour de forces of imagination and industry, and their creation could only have been motivated by the creator's pleasure. An American woman named Lizzie Weaves undoubtedly felt pride in her accomplishment when in 1890 *Kent News* in Chesterton, Maryland ran a story about the quilt she had just finished. It read "after forty-seven years of assiduous labor Mrs. S. Lizzie Weaves, a Bridgeton, New Jersey woman, has just finished a crazy quilt of 30,075 patches" (qtd. in Kiracofe 62). Another incredible quilt by

Martha Haggard, which she finished in 1897, describes the commitment of the maker on the back when it reads “This quilt contains 62,948 separate pieces. It is the work of Mrs. A. Haggard of White Cloud, Kansas. She commenced it in 1895 at 80 years of age, completed in 2 years. It took 36 yards of cloth and 24 spools of thread to make it...” (qtd. in Kiracofe 47). While some women no doubt felt oppressed by household crafts, others obviously took great pleasure and pride in their work, or they would not have spent their free time creating such intricate and complex pieces. It is also particularly impressive that they managed to carve time out of their busy days for creative work, and imaginatively employed the materials available to them.

2.2 Social Opportunities

In addition to offering women an opportunity for pleasurable entertainment, household crafts also presented social opportunities for females. Historian Deborah Gorham explains that in Britain friendships between girls, especially from outside their family, was encouraged by society as a way to demonstrate a girl’s personal depth and to foster a girl’s femininity, although having too many friends was discouraged as being shallow and frivolous (113-5). Feminine friendships continued to be encouraged as girls became women, and although crafts were often created in solitude, they were also undertaken by women as a group and presented opportunities for social interaction. Olive Schreiner wrote that embroidery forged a bond between women, and allowed them to sit together and work. Parker believes this situation was appealing to women because they could engage in a social activity “without feeling they were neglecting their families, wasting time or betraying their husbands by maintaining independent social bonds” (Parker 14-15).

While women could gather and work on their own individual projects, sometime women would share work on a single project such as a quilt. Friendship quilts created by a group of

women served as a statement of solidarity in a utilitarian form. The maker would send out patchwork blocks, sometimes to friends and relatives around the country, and the blocks would be returned with images and inscriptions designed specifically for the recipient of the quilt. This created a comforting sense of community, and strong ties of friendship between women (Pritash 18-19). Album quilts were also used as a means of social bonding, and were made for various occasions and events, such as when a friend or clergyman moved away, when a young man reached twenty-one, or as engagement or marriage gifts. Women would work their unique individual squares at home, then bring them to a formal album party where the squares might be just looked at and admired, or sometimes set together, backed, and quilted (Weissman 59).

Women also had the opportunity to exchange ideas and information and develop a communal bond by participating in quilting bees. Quilts were usually pieced at home by the maker, but then backed and quilted at a quilting bee to which friends and relatives were invited (Keller 57). Dewhurst explains that the quilting “bee,” sometimes called “quiltings,” quilting “frolics,” or “parties,” were uniquely American. In rural America there was very little social life on the farm for both adults and older people (Fox, Pleasure 10). While the goal of a quilting bee was to help other women complete their quilt, the gatherings served an even greater value by affording women an opportunity to “exchange news, recipes, home remedies, fabric scraps and patterns, to discuss political issues and personal problems, to learn new skills from one another, and to teach basic skills to their daughters, all in a mutually supportive way.” Usually either a dinner or lunch would be served, and may include men joining the ladies later on, and sometimes even dancing. It is interesting to note that it was at a quilting bee that Susan B. Anthony made her first speech advocating the vote for women (Dewhurst 47). These gatherings were popular

in all regions of America, particularly rural areas, but went out of fashion by 1895 (Weissman 45).

Women in nineteenth-century America would often help each other with domestic chores in times of sickness, sorrow, or trouble. Diaries and letters attest to the contentment women felt in each other's company, and the isolation they felt when apart. Women found security, status and power through their relationships with other women, and criticism of other women was discouraged during the nineteenth-century (Kemper 74, 172-3). The great pleasure women took in each other's company was expressed by Sarah Connell Ayer of New England in 1810 who recorded that "this afternoon we all took our work and sat down in the common setting-room. Sweet sociability prevail'd throughout our little (sewing) circle, and we were all satisfied with ourselves and happy in each other" (Ayer 164). The time they shared doing household crafts offered women an entertaining social life, and a mutual support network, as well as an appreciative audience for the pieces they created.

2.3 Opportunities to Learn New Skills

Household crafts also presented women with an opportunity to develop new skills. In Britain women were usually excluded from an art education in the academy schools, which prevented them from studying the nude model and producing prestigious paintings (Parker 120). In response, women developed alternative ways of creating, thereby bringing about a blossoming of new media which they used in their crafts as the century progressed. Cassell's Household Guide, published in Britain in 1877, showed a wide range of projects that used a large variety of alternative materials, in addition to many new and unusual varieties of needlework, such as fish-scale embroidery. Some of these innovative projects included beadwork, bead mosaics in cement, painting on glass, modeling in gutta-percha (a natural rubber from tree sap) or leather,

china painting, creating ornamental frames, painting tiles, making screens, decorating with paint or with items such as wool, shells, dried flowers, leaves, seeds, moss, feathers, colored cut paper, decoupage, and decorative painting on furniture and mantle pieces (Henderson 48-217). The Young Ladies Treasury Book (1881) in Britain also pointed out that if you are “clever with your fingers,” in addition to doing decorative needlework and crafts, you can now help make your home more beautiful through the practice of amateur upholstery (161). The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, however, disagreed with too much expansion of women’s skills. He wrote in 1893, that while some crafts like “sewing, embroidery, and lace-work” require little effort and come naturally to women, a craft such as tapestry making is less to the young woman’s liking, since “furniture is not connected with the person, but with mere opinion, it is too far out of their reach” (266). Fennetaux does see benefits for upper and middle-class women because of the expansion of female crafts, and asserts that some new, less historically female crafts were intentionally appropriated by women as a means of trespassing into “spheres of activities” that were not traditionally associated with them, or open to them, and thereby allowed women to learn new skills (100).

This “Do-It-Yourself” attitude also gave some women craft expertise that could be turned into a marketable skill (Edwards 12). Although crafts allowed some middle-class women to add to the family income by working in their homes, British working-class women doing crafts, such as hand-embroidered lace, professionally were, unfortunately, usually terribly exploited. While embroidery may have been a pleasurable pastime for upper and middle-class British women, working-class women and children were paid almost nothing to make various types of embroidery and lace, and were often blind by the age of twenty, their bodies misshapen and their lungs damaged from bending over their work for 14 hours a day. Public concern

regarding the conditions of these workers did not appear until about mid-century, when it became more widely-known that the women's deplorable conditions threatened their ability to tend to their families in their primary roles as wives and mothers. By the 1880's the use of embroidery machines became prevalent and embroidery was no longer widely made by hand. When it was made by hand, it was often fostered by the Arts & Crafts Movement which viewed the craftsperson with more respect, and helped improve women's working conditions (Parker 174-78).

American women and girls of the nineteenth-century were also learning new skills. By the 1820's schoolgirls were being taught how to paint on wood, and began painting decorative household furniture, often starting with sewing boxes and sewing tables (Dewhurst 73-4). Women of the growing middle class turned to a number of instructional books and women's periodicals to learn more about other practical household skills beyond traditional needlework, with which they were already well-acquainted. Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe suggested that re-upholstering was a practical way to save money (72-5). American author Hudson Holly echoes this "Do-It-Yourself" sentiment taking root in society when he wrote in 1878 that the desire for artistic surroundings will lead men and women to master arts for themselves that can "rival in attraction any for which the rich man ignorantly and carelessly exchanges his money." Holly goes on to talk about a gentleman who made his own furniture as a "work of recreation," and then discusses the "woman's work" the gentleman's wife undertook for the beautification of their home. Her work involved creating decorative painting effects on the walls, producing imitation stained glass from kits, and running up curtains, for which she designed wooden scroll brackets to hang the curtains and that "she herself cut with a bracket saw" (210). Nineteenth-century women in America were also engaging in activities not

normally associated with them, as Fennetaux pointed out previously in regards to women's activities in Britain. Tasks within the home that had been previously gendered male, such as those involving furniture and home maintenance, were now beginning to be included as acceptable activities for women because they took place within the home, which was their appointed sphere.

The classic image of a woman sitting quietly sewing became even more outdated as the century progressed, although that idealized circumstance was rarely accurate at any time. A letter written by Harriet Beecher Stowe to her sister-in-law Sarah Beecher in 1850 illustrated how the enterprising new woman expanded her expertise. Harriet stated that this was her first opportunity to write since moving to Brunswick, Maine the previous spring. Since she had arrived with her children, she had "made two sofas-or lounges- a barrel chair- diver's bedspreads- pillowcases- pillows- bolsters- mattresses... painted rooms and re-varnished furniture- etc..., and yet I am constantly pursued and haunted by the idea that I don't do anything" (qtd. in Boydston 148).

Women also began to master the skill of taxidermy. Imagery that involved dead animals was common in the nineteenth-century British and American home, such as images of the hunt in the dining room, animal skins in the library, and preserved animals in the parlor. By the mid-nineteenth century, an increasing number of Americans had pets, as well as animal objects displayed for aesthetics, novelty, and social status. Many deceased pet birds became parlor ornaments when they were stuffed and placed under glass domes by the lady of the house. Joseph H. Batty's Practical Taxidermy was published in 1880, and showed women methods of stuffing that involved sewing and incorporating fancywork scraps (Marcinkus 130-32). While this may be viewed as more gruesome than other household crafts, it allowed women to learn a

previously masculine skill, and begin to gain access to the world of natural science, which was very popular during the nineteenth-century. Under the guise of creating beauty in the domestic sphere for the benefit of their family, women's new and expanded accomplishments were looked on favorably and encouraged by Victorian society.

2.4 Opportunities to Create Personal Property

The production of household crafts also allowed women to create personal property. In the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries a quilt, or the household linens, would often be discreetly marked with the maker's initials, a skill women had perfected as young girls marking their samplers (Fox, Pleasure 31). This subtle claiming of property is exemplified by Hannah Barnard's eighteenth-century cupboard from Massachusetts, which has her name prominently emblazoned across the front along with decorative floral imagery. It is a beautiful example of how household possessions were stored and viewed during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. A cupboard was a container for household goods, rather than just a decorative object. Household goods, such as quilts, comforters, bed linens, towels, tablecloths and napkins were categorized as "movables," and they were handed down from mother to daughter, much as real estate was passed from father to son. They comprised the core of female inheritance, and they allowed women to become the "creators as well as the custodians of household goods" (Ulrich 110-11). The cupboards both preserved and stored the family wealth, but despite their beauty they were seen as less valuable than the items stored inside. John Pynchon's cupboard was valued at three pounds, but its contents were valued at more than thirteen. The high monetary value placed on some needlework can be seen in the example of a single "wrought napkin" of John Pynchon's being appraised at three shillings, when most of his land was only given the value of four shillings an acre (Ulrich 112-3).

Sometimes handmade household items were specifically mentioned in a woman's will, such as that of Betsey Wright Lee's written in 1887. She wrote, "To my daughter Belle L. Snow, wife of Walter W. Snow of Meridan, Connecticut, I give and bequeath one of my gold bead bracelets, my Singer sewing machine, my embroidery that was my aunt Betsey Wright's...my down comforter,...one album bed quilt" (Kiracofe 21). The succession of goods among women can also be seen when Alexander Hoagland returned their marriage quilt and Cornelia's dresses to her female relatives after she passed away (Fox 136). This inheritance of property applied as well to household crafts other than textiles, and Sheumaker explains that the elaborate hairwork wreaths and memorials made by women were always considered the property of the maker. In the event of the maker's death, rather than being retained by the husband, the piece was given to surviving female relatives (119). Design History professor Beverly Gordon states that women's personal property, such as quilts, clothing, and other belongings, were often transferred from one living woman to another either as a direct gift, or left by a verbal bequest, rather than going through a formal probate process. She believes that this practice created a "female centered economy" where women's possessions actually functioned as a type of currency. Gordon believes it is also equally important that this economy was based on kinship, mutual support, and transforming everyday materials into objects of value (95, 102).

3. Household Crafts and Social Influence

3.1 Religious Funding and Charitable Giving

Women in Britain and America also used crafts to gain more social influence during the nineteenth-century, and one way of doing this was by using their craft skills to increase their involvement within their religion and contribute to charitable causes. Women did this by creating items that afforded them some influence, both in their religion and society.

Medievalism was popular in the Victorian culture, and by the 1840's writings by men on mediaeval embroidery called for the revival of embroidery based on mediaeval designs in order to furnish Gothic revival churches (Parker 20). In "Church Work for Ladies" (1855), the Reverend T. James insinuated that contemporary church embroidery reflected Victorian femininity and had become "blowzy and over-blown." Because of these and similar accusations the "Ladies Ecclesiastical Embroidery Society" was formed in 1855 with the mission of embroidering church furnishings free of charge, asking only that churches supply the cost of materials. The society sought to restore women's reputation concerning religious embroidery, and agreed to "supply altar cloths of strictly ecclesiastical designs either by reproducing ancient examples, or by working under the supervision of a competent architect," which would mean a man (Parker 34). Though the embroidery of church furnishings by women was sometimes criticized by male art theorists such as Ruskin, William Morris, and A.W. Pugin, it did allow women an important place in the Gothic revival of nineteenth-century churches, and may have helped increase the status of embroidery, and of women executing it. Church embroidery, in addition to giving women a more tangible presence within the church, allowed them a public voice through the histories of embroidery and embroidery instruction manuals they wrote and published. Through writing histories and manuals women sought to claim Gothic revival embroidery as their own, and reinstate the artistic value they believed it was accorded during the middle ages. In this way they hoped to gain more appreciation from society for their own needlework, which up to this point had been denied (Parker 31).

British women also made and donated household crafts such as, pin cushions, needle books, card racks, work bags, infant wear, caps, and worsted flowers for charity bazaars for the benefit of the church or its mission efforts. Charlotte Bronte in her second novel Shirley (1849),

described how a large variety of crafts were made by the “willing or reluctant hands of Christian ladies of the parish, and sold perforce to the heathenish gentlemen thereof, at prices unblushingly exorbitant” (Parker 162). George Eliot, in The Mill on The Floss, appears to show no sympathy for household crafts in general, but Parker thinks Eliot does “sympathize” with the attraction of participating in church crafts for women. The character of Stephen Guest appears to disparage “idiotic bazaars” when he states that they take “young ladies from the duties of the domestic hearth into scenes of dissipation among urn-rugs and embroidered reticules. I should like to know what is the proper function of women if it is not to make reasons for husbands to stay at home and still stronger reasons for bachelors to go out. If this goes on much longer the bonds of society will be dissolved” (Parker 163). Through Stephen Guest’s frustration at the opportunities church bazaars presented women to move outside the domestic sphere, Parker believes Eliot conveys her opinion that despite the frivolous nature of the crafts, church bazaars permitted women to “cross the threshold into public life and to be mobile themselves instead of acting as anchors for others,” and so increased their social influence (163). Teaching embroidery to the poor also became part of Victorian philanthropy for middle-class British women, which created another opportunity for women to be more influential and mobile in society. However, despite this new opportunity, Sarah Stickney Ellis in her book, Women of England, expressed the suspicion that “there appears to me some ground to fear, that the amusement of doing public good, the excitement it produces, and especially the exemption it purchases from domestic requirements, has something to do with the zeal evinced by some young females to be employed as instruments in the dissemination of religious knowledge, and the augmentation of funds appropriated for benevolent uses” (75).

Middle-class women in America also used their craft skills to raise money and engage in socially influential religious activities, while being mindful not to neglect their domestic duties. Fox explains how by the 1860's a woman's church, her community and the great social causes were all recipients of her creative efforts (Pleasure 107). Women began fundraising in various ways such as forming philanthropic societies. One such society, the "Boston Street Aid Society" of Lynn, Massachusetts, was formed by twenty-seven women in 1851. While they looked forward to one another's social company they "agreed to bind Shoes to add money to the Treasury for the purpose of furnishing the interior of the M.E. Church to be erected on Park Street, or Boston Street." They held monthly meetings in their residences and bound from 36 to 128 pairs of shoes per meeting. The society's beginnings and the results of their labors was recorded in ink on a red and white pieced quilt between the years 1851-1886. The church was finally built and the society assumed responsibility for much of the church's decoration and upkeep for thirty-five years, including the purchase of gas pipes for the church, a furnace for the parsonage, and the assumption of the church's \$600 floating debt. The society also supported missions abroad, and provided assistance to individual parishioners, as well as aid to the western states when they were devastated by fire (Fox, Pleasure 97-9). Through philanthropic societies like this, women used their craft skills to raise money and effectively broadened their social influence.

By the middle of 1861 small groups of American women increased their social influence by providing the things they had always provided for their families, such as comforters, sheets, shirts, towels, quilts, and bandages, to the Sanitary Commission to aid the sick and wounded soldiers of the Civil War. This sometimes involved donating from their personal linen cupboards, and giving up quilts filled with sentimental value for the soldiers in need. Personal

messages sometimes arrived with the donations such as, “My son is in the army. Whoever is made warm by this quilt, which I have worked on for six days and almost all of six nights, let him remember his own mother’s love,” or “This pillow belonged to my little boy, who died resting on it; it is a precious treasure to me, but I give it for the soldiers” (qtd. in Fox, Pleasure 101). Nineteenth-century quilt makers raised money for worthy causes, and women’s societies often made quilts to be raffled. Squares were sold and inscribed with the donor’s name. These were a popular fundraiser, and gave women a way to make a valuable social contribution through the work of their own hands (Kiracofe 57). The three most popular social causes of the nineteenth-century that women used their household crafts to benefit were women’s rights, slavery and temperance. The women of America gained social influence, and participated in the intellectual and societal concerns of the day through their involvement in social causes, while they still performed the domestic duties delegated to them by society (Fox, Pleasure 111-3).

3.2 The Popularization of Natural Sciences

Women also achieved more social influence through their participation in the natural sciences. Middle-class women of nineteenth-century Britain were expected to have an enthusiasm for nature, because prevailing belief was that nature and morality were closely linked. Fennetaux believes that interior decoration, needlework, and shell work were indirect ways in which women entered the male preserve of science, particularly the “benign” area of natural science (100-1). Collecting natural materials for household projects also took women out of the domestic sphere in a way acceptable to most. Mrs. Ellis, however, warns in The Daughters of England that studying science for its own sake could harm a woman’s “feminine delicacy” and was only acceptable since it would “render them more companionable to men”

(113). John Ruskin shared a similar sentiment; he thought women should know a language or science “only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband’s pleasures, and in those of his best friends” (73).

In the early nineteenth-century, the science of botany was particularly associated with women, and as a science was gendered “female.” British upper and middle-class women were encouraged to have a knowledge of flowers and it provided them with both subjects for embroidery and a chance to learn about botany, which was the field where women gained earliest recognition for their scientific efforts (Fennetaux 101) John Lindley, a professor of botany at London University from 1829-1860, sought to create a “professionalism” in science, which would push out both women and clergy. Lindley wanted botany to be seen as “an occupation for the serious thoughts of man” rather than just “an amusement for the ladies” (Shteir 242). He did not necessarily want to exclude women as an audience, though, so he wrote Ladies Botany in 1834, a two-volume lavishly illustrated work which was botany for the “unscientific reader.” Lindley’s book consisted of fifty letters which explained the natural system of classification. They were written to a mother, who wished to teach her children about plants, and he saw it as “An experiment upon the possibility of conveying strictly scientific knowledge in a simple and amusing form” (Shteir 163). While he said that this method of simple writing was an “experiment,” he had already been preceded by other women “popularizers” of science who sought to dispense scientific knowledge in an understandable way to their audience of both women and men alike. The most famous female popularizer of science was British mathematician and scientist Mary Somerville, who also won recognition from male scientists for her scientific work (Lightman 21-22). Some female authors also combined botany, art, and morality in popular form through books about the language of flowers. Mothers were

encouraged by Victorian society to teach their children the natural sciences, and by educating themselves for this job women gained more social influence and power as natural science educators.

British women had a particularly avid interest in shells, and they often collected them, catalogued them, and knew their scientific names. Women also used shells in household crafts, and both men and women displayed them in curio cabinets for their aesthetic quality. While women's artistic arrangements of shells in wall boxes and on household items was seen as less than serious, men like Albert Seba, who was famous for the collection of natural curiosities he created in the eighteenth-century, also collected and arranged shells in festoons and figures which were very similar to women's nineteenth century shell work. Collecting natural items, sometimes from distant shores, could also be viewed as a way women domesticated nature, and even promoted colonial expansion by bringing those items into the British home (Fennetaux 101, 103).

In America, women also created crafts using natural motifs and materials. They sewed quilts with images of shells, flowers, leaves and birds, and women used materials such as shells, feathers, moss, seaweed, pinecones, leaves, and even whole birds and fur in their creations which included amateur taxidermy preserved under glass domes. Creating household crafts with natural materials required women to accurately observe the natural world, and even use scientific texts and field guides as resources for their figurative representations and collections (Marcinkus 129). In America, during the second half of the nineteenth-century, there was also an interest in playing natural against artificial, and this became an aspect of nature-based fancywork, for example using wax, shells, or feathers to create faux flowers. Marcinkus compares this artificiality in nature crafts to photography, since they both attempt to capture a moment in time

and can cause the viewer to question what is real. Some natural craft items that captured a moment in time included crystallized dried floral arrangements and skeletonized leaves and flowers with only the veins remaining once the decayed flesh had been removed. Crafts of this type also allowed women to convey a hopeful moral message about life and death, since the pure bleached white skeletonized leaves reminded the viewer of resurrection after death (132-5).

Keeping albums was also a means of introducing nature into the home, and fern and sea plant albums were particularly popular from 1870-1890, both as a female craft and as a means of scientific exploration. It was particularly tedious work to collect, arrange, and press sea plants into albums in much the same way as Carl Linnaeus, founder of modern taxonomy, had done to create his preserved sea plant collections during the eighteenth-century. This scientific preservation technique was reborn as women's fancywork, but required the collector to spend hours in tidal pools, wearing rubber boots bent over and coaxing sea plants into compositions before carefully removing them from the water (Marcinkus 137-8). The plants would then be either pressed in albums, along with their scientific names, combined together to create pictorial wall pieces, or incorporated into collages in creative combinations with other materials.

Nature-based crafts afforded nineteenth-century women the opportunity to spend more time outdoors, educate both themselves and their children about nature, and enter the world of science in a sanctioned way. Women's involvement in the natural sciences also gave them an opportunity to be socially influential through their anthropomorphizing of nature where women science "popularizers" portrayed nature in sentimental ways, such as the "industrious spider" or the "busy bee," in their morality teachings for children. Through both anthropomorphizing nature, and domesticating nature by bringing it indoors, women created a non-threatening familiarity with nature for their families and were socially influential as conservationists helping

prevent the “industrial appropriation” of nature. Women’s nature crafts and their use of recycled materials potentially helped society realize that nature should be preserved and protected from the ravages of modern industry. Women also focused society’s attention on the moral lessons available through nature’s beauty, and promoted the power of nature as a means of communing with God through his miraculous natural creations (Merish 123-4).

3.3 Creating and Exhibiting

Although during the nineteenth-century women’s focus was meant to be primarily on the home, many women still managed to make time to create artistically and shared their work with the public. Women enterprisingly combined domestic tasks and creative endeavors, making household crafts part of their daily routine. They accomplished this by choosing to work with inexpensive, readily available, and acceptable materials for women, such as fabric, thread, and natural materials, and by choosing projects and materials that were easy to quickly put away when duty called. In the early and mid-Victorian periods, women in both Britain and America were discouraged from pursuing any art too seriously or professionally, and this was pointed out by Victorian advice author Matilda Pullen who wrote in 1855 that talents were to be undertaken as a “means of enjoyment” and never as a “medium of display” (81). Mid-century female author Craik concurred, and stated that any woman who paints a “commonplace picture” does a “positive wrong to the community at large” so women should “therefore, let men do as they will” and be satisfied realizing that the “smallest achievement is nobler than the grandest failure” (50-53).

Unfortunately, creative and talented women were excluded from the best of art education in the academy schools, and were also greatly hampered by their domestic responsibilities. American Jane Swisshelm wrote in 1880, “Where are the pictures I should have given to the

world?” “Is that Christianity which has so long said to one-half of the race, “Thou shalt not use any gift of the Creator, if it be not approved by thy brother”(47-50). Another talented American woman wrote, “quilts kind of filled in for the disappointment of not going to school to learn to be an artist” (qtd. in Dewhurst 49). Since during the nineteenth century women’s creative work was often intertwined with their procreative abilities, their painting, embroidery and sculpture were often only considered an expression of their womanliness. As an unfair consequence of this perception, what they accomplished creatively was identified only with nature and nurture, rather than with art and culture (Parker 22). One of the ways women reacted to this frustrating and limiting situation regarding their lack of education and perceived artistic status was by working with innovative and alternative media not used in the nineteenth-century art world. The progressive materials they employed, such as cut paper collage, shells, feathers, fabrics, and natural materials were combined in creative new ways that would later be acknowledged by the twentieth-century art world, and ultimately adopted by male artists.

When examining the social influence of some female crafts in regards to their possible status as art we can look to the writings of prominent philosophers such as R.G. Collingwood, Immanuel Kant, and George Dickie. The philosopher R.G. Collingwood argued that art is created through the act of expression, and the process itself of making a tangible object allows the creator to explore and clarify their own emotions in a deeper way, which many women likely did as they slowly and thoughtfully stitched their individual personal life experience into their creations. Looking at specific pieces can be helpful when considering criteria for what constitutes art. Both the “Caswell Carpet” and Ann West’s hanging are individualized representations of two women’s life experiences an ocean apart in Britain and America that are socially important as self-expression, but also merit consideration as art.

The “Caswell Carpet” was created by Zeruah Higley Guernsey Caswell in Castleton, Vermont during the years 1832-1835. The carpet consists of seventy-six embroidered wool squares and measures approximately twelve by thirteen feet. Its maker sheared, spun, and dyed the wool used to create this beautifully designed piece consisting of stylized plant forms, animals, and a loving couple. The squares that make up the carpet all have a black background appliqued with embroidered organic shapes in varying shades of brown, reds, cream and blue. The coverlet or hanging created by Ann West of England in 1820 is also made of wool, and consists of inlaid patchwork and embroidered applique, and uses the Bible as its inspiration. This piece consists of a black background along with varying shades of browns, cream, grey, red, blue and yellow in patchwork and embroidery. It is made up of fifteen biblical scenes, and fifty-four smaller patches which illustrate nineteenth-century characters and occupations. She signed her work twice with the embroidered caption “Ann West’s work, 1820,” and also incorporated the phrases “Forget me not,” and Remember Me,” which undoubtedly showed the pride she took in her amazing creation.

The “Caswell Carpet” is composed of eighty panels in which the maker creatively, but simply, depicted a large variety of interesting plant forms broken down into simple expressive shapes arranged in a striking design. These natural forms were most likely inspired by the plants in her environment, possibly the plants she grew herself. She also represented several of her pets, and a loving couple hand in hand, which she envisioned would someday “keep house on her carpet” (qtd. in Dewhurst 55). The exuberant anticipation of the future she hoped for is evident in the lively blossoming and blooming of every plant form on the carpet. Her dreams for her future life, which she no doubt contemplated as she labored over her carpet, came to be in 1846 when she married Mr. Caswell, the name by which her creation is now known.

Ann West's hanging also expressed her thoughts regarding her personal life and religious beliefs. Through the placement of the Garden of Eden in the center of the quilt coverlet, surrounded by panels depicting fourteen of her favorite Bible stories, she shared her beliefs and morals with the viewer. The large outer ring of the coverlet consists of the various people in her life and their allotted roles in society. The large array of figures she represented includes over fifty characters with titles such as "A Distressed Widow" and "Pray help a poor sailor." Also included is an intriguing panel which shows a marriage ceremony with only two females pictured, and no male, and the inscription "I will A W [always] love her" embroidered on the ministers book of service (Lister 90). This hanging expresses not only relevant events in Ann West's everyday life, but through her arrangement of the various panels she seemed to express her religious belief that God is at the center of all of our lives, and should be our focus regardless of our circumstances or the roles we have been given in life.

These two examples of work created by women of the nineteenth-century are socially important as expression, but also merit consideration as art. Collingwood concluded that both the process of self-expression and the exploration of ones' emotions were the most important component in the creation of work granted the status of art, and that these two criteria take precedence over the skill required to create the work, and the general consensus of the art world regarding its validity. He asserted that mere description generalizes, but pure expression individualizes, which differs from some crafts whose primary goal from the beginning is only to arouse emotion in the viewer (Janaway 150). Both Caswell and West go beyond mere description by expressing their personal view of the world based on their individual visual interpretations of nature, their perceptions and feelings regarding the people around them, and their religious beliefs. If their primary intent were to arouse emotion in the viewer, the visual

content of the work would not contain such straight forward personal observation. Their representations do not try to manipulate the viewer, but rather allow the viewer to be both an interested observer and an active participant who is free to add their own personal associations and interpretations to the work as well.

Collingwood also asserted that artistic status does not depend on where the work was created, the materials used, or the themes addressed, nor does it require academic training or great skill. The stylized simple plant forms on the “Caswell Carpet” exemplify his philosophy that “naturalistic art is not an attempt to reproduce nature but an attempt to depict it” (121). Rather than basing art only on technical skill, he believed that successful expression of personal emotion may be sufficient for a piece to be granted artistic status. He believed that art created as expression was a healthy outlet, and that unexpressed emotion usually made one feel oppressed, where expression created a feeling of “alleviation or easement” for the creator, thereby removing their sense of oppression (Janaway 153). Some women were focused on expressing their thoughts and intimate feelings both to other women, and sometimes to a wider public that viewed and enjoyed their creations. This opportunity for expression may have helped lessen their feelings of oppression, and put their minds more at ease. It also allowed them to cope better with the hardship and loss in their lives, both through the meditative creation of the work, and through the communal sharing of their feelings with viewers that may understand.

These two imaginative works, with their naïve intimate expression, also correspond with Collingwood’s argument that true art, rather than being a more highly-developed and logically advanced activity than others, is actually a struggle to recapture a more primitive mindset, and that from this springs a truly imaginative point of view. This could lead to the argument that the academic training of male artists inhibited and excessively influenced them to create only

exacting representations and thus prevented freer truly original creations. Collingwood's view does not eliminate "amateur" women, as society does, from this act of imaginative artistic creation, but rather reveals them to be a possibly purer source from which truly imaginative creation can spring (56-58). Collingwood also adds that a pattern is a work of art in its simplest form, and "owes nothing to any experience except itself" (119). Both the Caswell Carpet and Ann West's hanging are made up of strong patterns achieved through shape and color, which create a pure bold design when viewed from a distance, and upon closer inspection reveal more complex figurative compositions and details within each panel, layering pattern upon pattern to create a visually striking and thoughtful overall composition.

Philosopher Immanuel Kant had his own idea about what constitutes beauty and art, and stated that the approval of others is not valid proof when making a judgment about beauty. One cannot base their aesthetic judgment on what pleases others, but rather this judgment must be made by the individual and is based on one's own feeling of pleasure when encountering the work (Janaway 130-1). Kant also believes the ability to create or appreciate beauty does not depend on specific rules set forth by the art world, so according to his theory women are just as capable as men of judging and creating great art. Like Collingwood, Kant also believes women could have an aesthetic advantage due to their lack of intellectual pretensions and prejudices which could limit their perceptions of what is beautiful. While women's household crafts were not considered art by the mainstream nineteenth-century art world, some nineteenth-century writers, such as Sarah Grand, defended embroidery and viewed it as an unappreciated art form and sought recognition for its true worth (Parker 7). Very little art that was created by self-taught women was included in the expositions of 1876 and 1893 in America, and folk art in general did not gain much validity until about 1930 (Dewhurst 111). The art world often did not

subscribe to Kant's view on determining artistic validity at a more personal level, and disregarded work by women that did not fit a majority consensus. The American feminist artist Judy Chicago, whose masterpiece The Dinner Party was composed of thirty-nine place settings each commemorating a historical female figure, agrees that women's art should be viewed in a more individual way. She asserts that, "what happened to all of us [women artists] over and over is that our work has been taken out of our historical context and put into some mainstream [art] context it doesn't belong in; then it is ridiculed, or incorrectly evaluated" (qtd. in Dewhurst xviii). Some works created by women, when viewed in a less rigid context and through the pleasure they afforded the individual viewer, merit consideration as works of art. Kant wanted the viewer to keep an open mind when determining what is beautiful and valid as art "for the judgment of taste consists precisely in the fact that it calls a thing beautiful only in accordance with that quality in it by means of which it corresponds with our way of receiving it" (qtd. in Janaway 128).

Kant also believed that works of art should be examples of the creative process, and not just an imitation of a previous model (Janaway 139). Many women were thinking very creatively in their work; for example, Dewhurst explains that during the nineteenth-century European and American painting consisted only of representational styles but that "quilt artists were already exploring purely formal elements of color, line, texture, and shape" (48). Art editor Cindy Nemser also agrees that women of the nineteenth-century were actively involved in the creative process that Kant required of art, but finds that "when women used geometric or organic designs in art work such as quilts, they were dismissed as "mere decorators," while men who later used similar patterns were viewed as fine artists and abstract thinkers" (qtd. in Dewhurst xviii). Many pieces created by women within the household also exemplified extreme creativity

in the use of inventive recycled materials such as cut paper, human hair and items from nature. Their creativity was also exhibited in new art forms such as shadow box frames filled with found collage materials. These collected, hand-made, and arranged items combined together tell the women's personal story and pre-date famous twentieth-century artist Joseph Cornell and his framed collage boxes in which he used similar found materials. Women also worked with new materials such as colored cut paper collage, a technique which Henri Matisse would later adopt in the twentieth-century as he grew older, and with the approval of the art world. Women also explored formal techniques that they creatively adapted to the materials they were using, such as skilled needle woman Miss Evans' innovative use of rainbow fabrics to create contour in her quilts (Weissman 64).

Female crafts were sometimes not only beautiful innovative creations, and a means of personal expression, but could also contain meaning for the viewing public. Philosopher George Dickie asserts two rules for making a work of art, the first of which is that one must create an artifact, by which he means "an object made by man especially with a view to subsequent use" (Janaway 168). Dickie's second criteria for art, is that the artifact created is presented to an art world public, or is created with the intent to present it to a public. Dickie believes that these two requirements are sufficient for making a work of art (Janaway 172). The household crafts women created were almost always presented to a public, or made with the intent of doing so. Quilts and other creations were put on display in the parlor, which was the public face of the Victorian home, and viewed by friends and family. They were also exhibited in churches, in city, county, and state fairs, and in regional and national exhibitions. Prizes were usually offered at exhibitions in different categories such as "autograph quilts," "crazy quilts," or "fancy silk quilts," and could be in the form of cash, magazine subscriptions, or diplomas of honorable

mention. In the Douglas County Fair in Lawrence, Kansas in 1871, \$3.00 was paid for first place, \$2.00 for second, and \$1.00 for third. A local hardware dealer even offered a washing machine, valued at \$20.00, for the “best and most tastefully executed patchwork quilt.” Quilts were not the only household crafts viewed by the general public. In the Kansas State Fair in 1870 quilts were included as a subcategory of “Needle, Shell and Waxwork,” a category also used at the Ohio State Fair between 1850 and 1865 (Brackman 93).

Dewhurst finds that the most accomplished quilts were prized possessions, and were treated with the same care given to a fine painting in a museum. They were used very sparingly, if at all and carefully stored and handed down as heirlooms to the maker’s descendants (67). Later in the century, “crazy quilts” or “Japanese quilts” became popular, and usually consisted of many colorful silk patchwork pieces with embroidery and other fabric and non-fabric items attached. These pieces became so ornate that the primary function could no longer possibly be that of a bedcover. Instead, the quilts were specifically created for the parlor and exhibition, and meant primarily as artistic expression and as a means of displaying their maker’s talents to the viewing public, as Dickie requires as a criteria for art (Weissman 67).

The fact that some pieces were created both as personal expressions, and with a viewing public in mind, can also be seen through the way some were signed. Ann West’s inlaid wool patchwork coverlet contains her name and the date the work was completed, as well as the phrases “Forget Me Not,” and “Remember Me,” which points to the importance she placed on being remembered for the creative work she produced, and that she likely hoped it would one day be viewed by future generations. Often through the creation and exhibition of their work women achieved a way to leave a mark, since their primary duty of household tasks was minimally acknowledged and not of a permanent nature. That women placed an importance on

the exhibition of their work can also be seen in regards to the Centennial Exposition of 1876 held in Philadelphia, where women were denied space in the Main Exhibition Hall for a display of their work. They enterprisingly raised financial support, and were ultimately able to provide their own Women's Pavilion where their creative work could be shown to the public (Dewhurst 110). Though a woman's viewing public might be smaller and more intimate in nature than that of male artists, their expressive work was socially influential and brought pleasure, contemplation, and beauty to the lives of their viewers, and based on Dickie's theories should not routinely be discounted as art.

Conclusion

Women in nineteenth-century Britain and America created household crafts which benefited both women and society, and therefore crafts deserve to be regarded with more historical significance than they have previously been given. Nineteenth-century writings and work by contemporary historians illustrate that crafts played an important personal and social role for many women, and provided them with a means of self-expression, opportunities for social activities, and increased social influence. Although participation in crafts can be viewed negatively as sedentary and confining, women often utilized crafts to their advantage and made them a vehicle for self-empowerment. Household crafts, when created as a form of religious expression, such as scripture coverlets, served to establish a woman's religious and moral power within the domestic sphere, their church, and society. At a time when opportunities for self-expression were limited, crafts allowed women to effectively express their thoughts and feelings, and cope with loss and hardship. Women also effectively created opportunities for themselves such as entertainment, a way to learn new skills, and a means of creating personal property all through their involvement in crafts. Participating in this activity helped created circumstances

which allowed women to step out of the domestic sphere, and become more socially influential through involvement in charitable church activities, the natural sciences, and the exhibition of their work in public venues.

Household crafts, for some women, could be repetitive, mindless, time-consuming, and confining, so for this reason they were viewed negatively by authors like Charlotte Bronte, educators like Constance Maynard, and feminists like Wollstonecraft. But their views sometimes generalized, and unfairly negated the personal and social benefits that could be gained through household crafts. Some women did not view participation in crafts as mindless or confining, and found a powerful source of self-expression and freedom in the work. One example is the anonymous quilt maker who spent 25 years recording her life in fabric “each evening after supper when the children were all put to bed” when she stitched her “joys and sorrows...loves and hates” (Dewhurst 53). Wollstonecraft and More warned that crafts could constrict women and make them self-absorbed adversely affecting their ability to be good mothers. Crafts, however, could also give women a sanctioned productive way to express and examine their “loves and hates,” thereby gaining an awareness that enabled them to become better mothers. In addition to being a valuable means of creative expression, creating and exhibiting crafts may have also increased women’s self-esteem. Author Barbara Russell wrote in 1897 that for women, “beauty has always a refining influence and the power of producing it markedly increased the self-respect of the maker” (329).

Their signed and dated work is valuable to us today as an important historic record of Victorian society in Britain and America, and contributes to our knowledge of women’s history. Unlike ephemeral domestic duties, the work women created provided them a tangible means to leave their mark. In many cases the pieces they made remain as the only record we have to

remember them, which they may have foreseen when they signed their quilts with phrases like, “Forget Me Not” and “Remember Me” (Fox, Pleasure 83). Some works are also important as a part of art history, and deserve to be acknowledged as an artistic achievement. Many museum curators today would agree with this conclusion, since they have placed Ann West’s quilt in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and Zeruah Caswell’s carpet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It is notable that some of the works created by women went far beyond being just a socially acceptable activity to fill time. Elaborate, time-consuming quilts like Ann West’s, or complex rugs like the “Caswell Carpet,” could only have been created by women who were driven artistically to produce a masterpiece, while also illustrating their lives and feelings and showcasing their skills. They often worked on a daily basis relying on personal inspiration without support from the established art world, and used innovative methods and materials that would later be adopted by twentieth-century artists. Some nineteenth-century women who worked creatively in the domestic sphere can be viewed as pioneers of art, and therefore some of their work deserves further study and artistic recognition.

While some women found crafts to be oppressive, others found freedom from oppression in the activity. These women chose to effectively utilize a societal expectation that was meant to confine as a means of liberation. Their approach showed women’s resourcefulness, and their ability to adapt to limited circumstances in creative ways, such as using church bazaars to step out of the domestic sphere in an acceptable way, and the duty of home decoration to learn new skills previously gendered masculine. They made valuable contributions to society through transforming the potential limitations of fancywork into opportunities. But regardless of the pleasure, or lack of pleasure some nineteenth-century women found in crafts, household crafts should be considered as a potential means of

empowerment and opportunity which deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated today. More research is needed to determine the extent of the historical and artistic significance of household crafts, but for many nineteenth-century women in Britain and America crafts played an important role in their lives, and gave them opportunities to expand the range of activities encompassed by the domestic sphere.

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