

ous years, they began to incorporate simpler patterns in sales promotions. By adapting the utilitarian quality of knitting and the timeless sense of style and simplicity found in the earliest American patterns, crochet was able to regain its popularity in the twentieth century.

The earliest patterns published in the United States, between 1840 and 1850, were simple, elegant, and full of color. They appeared in the genre of instructional literature, which included manuals of needlework and housewifery. Although the availability of instructional books and patterns promoted the popularity of crochet, they were not always useful to the beginner. Published patterns often assumed the reader had a far broader knowledge of the craft than would be expected today. American crocheters learned their skills initially from family and friends, or hired instructors. This tutelage allowed them to navigate the published instructional books and patterns with greater ease. To this day, the instructional guidelines and patterns remain open to interpretation and often do not correspond well to the illustrations that were provided.

The majority of needlework and crochet authors were anonymous, calling themselves “an American Lady,” “Lady of Philadelphia,” or “Lady of New York.” These authors often “revised and expanded” European editions, resulting in a repetition of patterns among different American publications with varied instructions. Because crochet and knitting standards were not established in the United States until the mid-twentieth century, authors used terms familiar within their sphere of family and friends. Modern crocheters have found these patterns difficult to decipher due to the change in styles, materials, and terminology, with the result that a treasure of patterns, which represents the foundation of modern crochet, has gone unused for nearly a century.

The Library Company of Philadelphia holds a unique collection of crochet patterns published in the United States before 1850, from which this publication is derived. Its significant holdings of books, periodicals, and pamphlets, from the earliest period of American pattern publication up to the turn of the century, offer an unprecedented opportunity for research and translation. Without this ability to cross-reference materials from the nineteenth century it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to recognize the trends in stitches and materials. This opportunity has allowed me to provide a history of crochet in American popular culture from 1840 to 1850, while adapting some of the earliest patterns published in America for the use of crocheters today.