

The inspiration for "A Notion to Sew" came out of a two year project to inventory the furnishings and household items of the Hasbrouck family at Locust Lawn, a sprawling farm complex featuring the Federal era house of Josiah Hasbrouck. This stately 1814 house, today a museum owned and operated by Historic Huguenot Street, later became the home of Levi and Hylah Hasbrouck and their five children.

Rarely does a 19th century house survive intact with such a wealth of well-documented personal effects. So prevalent were household items with names (and sometimes dates!) written on their undersides that we had to wonder if the Hasbroucks knowingly consigned their belongings and their home to posterity for the enjoyment of future generations.

For the most part, it was the women in the family who identified themselves through their belongings. Hylah Hasbrouck and her daughters Sarah Maria, Ann, Laura, and Louisa inscribed their names on a variety of personal possessions: sewing kits and baskets, trinket boxes, puzzles and games, books, clothing and linens – all identified in tidy script or, in the case of the textiles, "marked" in carefully executed cross-stitch. It was this "sewn in" history that captured the imagination of our curatorial staff and led to the installation of this show.

"A Notion To Sew" is by no means a comprehensive history of sewing in the 1800s. Nor could we devote precious space to the topic of dressmaking or the exhibition of the family's clothing, of which there is a large collection. Much more room would be needed for this!

Instead, using photographs, letters and other archival materials, this show examines a group of talented and energetic women whose family history goes back to the earliest days of settlement

in New Paltz and offers viewers a glimpse of their handiwork and their “notions” – small sewing-related objects and tools found throughout Locust Lawn, packed in trunks, tucked away in drawers and nestled into baskets, wrapped in newspapers, pillowcases and old towels.

These objects are neither rare nor particularly unique – pin cushions, sewing kits, samplers and embroidered pictures. They are all fairly commonplace in the domestic settings of affluent 19th century women. Yet as the personal and documented belongings of real people who lived locally, these objects are treasures. They are reminders of how important (and necessary!) sewing and the needle arts were in 19th century America and they tell us a little something about the women who made, used and cherished them.

This exhibit could not have happened without the talent and hard work of two very special people on the Collections staff at Historic Huguenot Street; Archives Specialist Susan Stessin-Cohn and Curatorial Assistant Ashley Hurlburt. Their combined skill as researchers, their attention to the many details of installation and their passion for history made this exhibit possible.

Intern Luciano Valdivia deserves recognition for his willing assistance and talents in all aspects of the exhibit including research, exhibit text and installation. I would also like to thank Richard Heyl de Ortiz, our Director of Public Programs, for his creativity and patience in helping us with the design of our promotional graphics. His visual acumen is greatly appreciated. Finally, we would like to acknowledge Howard Grimm and the Grimm Family for their endowment of the gallery where this exhibit is presented.

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