

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Hand Made Mantillas

A mantilla value depends largely upon whether it is handmade or machine-made, according to the experts, collectors and antique dealers' opinions. And, seeing a number of handsome old ones at the Merienda we thought it might be interesting to discover some of the history of mantillas.

To the uninitiated, learning to spot handmade lace from machine-made may seem like a frightening problem, but to the expert it is quite easy.

The mantilla usually is made of black silk and if old it usually has a rather odd shape-wide through the middle and tapered to rounded points. A valuable one usually has a heavy be-flowered design on the most delicate of tulle.

Mantillas gained an added impetus to their church-going popularity through the great Spanish painter, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, whose many aristocratic ladies wore them over high-standing combs.

Size, really, is no clue to the mantilla's worth, regardless of what you may hear, according to one writer. A four-foot long one can be just as valuable as a ten-footer. But the thread-the gossamer the thread, the finer the handwork, the more exquisite the result and the greater its value. But that again raises the dilemma: handmade vs. machine-made, How to tell them apart?

Pinkney Gage says: "First feel the material. Handmade has a softness, a certain flexibility and, more important, an elasticity which machine-made lace does not have. That is because the latter must have a high and constant tension of the thread.

"More than this, by scrutinizing handmade lace under a under a glass you'll soon become aware of being able to follow a single thread quite easily, while the machine-made lace will appear usually intermingled, a mass-work, a hold-together, a machine system of thread.

Tirey Ford writes in his "Dawn and the Dons": "The women wore gowns of various textures, silks, crepe, calicos, etc., made after the European style in the early days of Monterey, except that the sleeves were short, leaving the arms bare, and that they were loose about the waist. They wore shoes of kid or satin, sashes or

belts of bright colors, and almost always a necklace or earrings. Bonnets they had none.

"They wear their hair, which is always invariable black, or a very dark brown, long on their necks, sometimes loose, and sometimes in long braids; though the married women often do it up on high combs."

According to this authority mantillas were not in vogue in Monterey but we believe that many of the old Spanish possessed very handsome ones which have been handed down to their descendants of the present generation. Ford writes: "Their only protection against the sun and weather was a large mantle which they put over their heads, drawing it close around their faces when they go out of doors."