CRAFTING CULTURE, FABRICATING IDENTITY
Gender and Textiles in
Limerick Lace, Clare Embroidery and
the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework

by

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Abstract

My thesis examines how identity was constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century amidst the growing possibilities of the cross-cultural transfer of ideas and products by analysing case studies of women-owned and -operated craft organisations: Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery (Ireland) and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework (United States). I contend that the increased accessibility of print culture, travel and tourism, and World’s Fairs enabled the women responsible for these craft organisations to integrate a pastiche of artistic influences – those recognised as international, national, and local – in order to create a specific and distinct style of craft. The Arts and Crafts movement, with its ideas about art, craft, design, and display, provided a supra-national language of social and artistic reform that sought to address the harshness of industrialisation and to elevate the status of craft and design. The national framework of revival movements – the Celtic Revival in Ireland and Colonial Revival in the United States – promoted the notion that Folk and peasant culture was fundamental to each country’s heritage, and its preservation and renewal was essential to fostering and legitimising a strong national identity. I critically access the way these case studies, which were geographically separate yet linked through chronology, gender, and craft, operated within these international and national movements, yet they negotiated these larger ideologies to construct identities that also reflected their local circumstances. My intention is to unite social history with material culture in order to investigate the ways in which the discussion and display of the crafts, and the artistic components of the textiles themselves operated as a vehicle for establishing identity.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis seeks to examine the way in which identity is constructed through the dialogic relationship between international, national, and local frameworks by analysing case studies of women-owned and -operated craft organisations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century: Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery (Ireland) established by Florence Vere O’Brien and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework (United States) founded by Ellen Miller and Margaret Whiting. The project aims to engage critically with the way in which each association managed to balance a pastiche of artistic influences – those recognised as international, national, and local – in order to create a specific and distinct style of craft. My intention is to unite social history with material culture in order to investigate the ways in which the discussions and displays of the crafts along with the artistic components of the textiles themselves operated as vehicles for establishing identity.

I frame these craft organisations around the triangular interconnection of the international, the national, and the local; this methodology, however, must be implemented cautiously as each of these components are complex and multifarious. I aim not to oversimplify or over-generalise, but to outline and utilise elements that were

1 The term “identity” is often a vague or undefined word with a variety of meanings. As this term is integral to my aims within this project, it is important that I outline to what I am referring by its use. While it will be used to denote several different levels of identity – such as national identity, organisational identity, and craft identity – the word itself, as used within this thesis, can be defined as a sense of character, or a set of characteristics, that are presented as distinctive or defining.

2 This methodology is adapted from Nicola Gordon Bowe’s essay “A Contextual Introduction to Romantic Nationalism and Vernacular Expression in the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement c. 1886 – 1925,” in Art and the National Dream, ed. Nicola Gordon Bowe (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993): 181 – 200. In her discussion, Gordon Bowe actually mentions four separate frameworks – international, national, organisational, and individual. As will be apparent in the following discussion, I have adapted the last two elements into one singular framework, the local.
recurring themes in discussions of craft organisations in general and my case studies in particular during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

The international framework is represented by the Arts and Crafts movement, which began in nineteenth-century England, but was quickly adapted by other Western countries. Reformers associated with the Arts and Crafts movement sought “to provide an alternative code to the harshness of late-nineteenth-century industrialism, to foster spiritual harmony through the work process and to change that very process and its products.”3 While this movement operated supra-nationally, in that ideas and designs associated with it transcended the political, economic, historical, artistic, and cultural boundaries of any one country, it is impossible to define the movement in terms of one single social or artistic narrative. Alan Crawford notes that the disparity between the movements even within the four areas of the United Kingdom makes it “impossible to generalise,”4 which will also be apparent in the transatlantic applications of Arts and Crafts in Ireland and the United States as presented within this project. When I discuss the international Arts and Crafts movement, I am not referencing a specific, universal ideology applicable to every use in every country; instead, I am referencing the multitude of social and artistic ideologies that were credited to and associated with Arts and Crafts.5 The section below outlines the origins of the movement as it began in England, but each chapter of this thesis discusses its manifestations specific to the respective country associated with the case study.

The national frameworks exist here as revival movements specific to a particular geographical area. Beginning in the nineteenth century, countries sought ways to define

5 I use the term “ideologies” here to refer to a set of principles or theories affiliated with the Arts and Crafts movement. This term is pluralized purposefully in order to highlight the myriad of interpretations and applications of the ideas credited to this movement.
and differentiate themselves as increased access to print culture, travel, World’s Fairs, and international movements – such as Arts and Crafts – created greater cross-cultural, globalised contact. Countries looked to anchor the nation’s identity as a distinctive, essential character different from that of other countries. The Celtic Revival (Ireland) and the Colonial Revival (United States) sought to institutionalise cultural nationalism through normalising ideas of peasants and the Folk as the “cultural essence” of a nation’s character. The different political, economic, and historical conditions of either country determined the ways in which the revival movement manifested itself; that is, like the Arts and Crafts movement, revival movements and the search for national identity cannot be broadly summarised from nation to nation. However, one condition that was consistent in both the Celtic and Colonial Revivals is that each looked to specific, historical periods idealised as untouched or untainted by a modernising force, be that element British Imperialism in Ireland or industrialisation in the United States.

The third level in this triangular relationship could arguably be interpreted as two, but I am combining them here as one. The regional framework refers to the way in

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6 Following Ian McKay’s discussion of Folk culture in *The Quest for the Folk*, I capitalise the word “Folk” in order to identify its use as a concept. This term is complex, as it denotes two inextricably united, yet distinct meanings. First, the term Folk refers to a particular class: a rural, mainly agrarian, group of people who were romanticised by the urban middle-class as “untroubled by urban stresses, nourished by all the natural beauty around them” (Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994, xvi). This use of Folk can be viewed as synonymous with peasant. The second use of the term Folk refers to “cultural essence” and the belief that all citizens of a nation shared a particular, inherent set of characteristics. While the Folk or peasant classes represented this “cultural essence” in its purest, most untainted form, the urban middle-class – as benefactor’s of the nation’s character – also embodied the Folk, although it was more corrupted by modernity. Throughout this thesis I will be as clear as possible with this term in order to avoid any ambiguity.

Although he uses the term “ethnoscape” in order to refer to the construction of the Folk as intrinsic to the character or identity of nation, Anthony D. Smith addresses similar notions in his chapter “Nation and Ethnoscape” in his book *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 149 – 57. Smith’s term “ethnoscape” is used to link a particular group of people and terrain (150). Smith explores the “territorialization of memory,” which describes the process whereby the “landscape is revered as an ‘ancestral homeland’ and the ethnoscape becomes an intrinsic part of the character, history and destiny of the culture community” (151). Although I use McKay’s language of the Folk to outline the nationalising processes that relate to my case studies, Smith’s article was integral to my understanding of the ways in which these processes develop and function.
which identity was constructed as representing a specific, idealised area of a country, one that was perceived as the very heart of national identity. An organisational framework is the way in which each craft association attempted to portray itself and its products as different and distinct from those of other groups. I unite these two frameworks – regional and organisational – into one, which is the local because, in terms of the craft industries I am examining, these two elements are inextricably linked. The names of the organisations themselves – *Limerick* Lace and *Clare* Embroidery, and the *Deerfield* Society of Blue and White Needlework – elucidate the importance of region in the very definition of the organisation. In this thesis, I am interested in exploring the construction of identity through the adaptation and interpretation of the first two frameworks (international and national) by the third (local, which is the combination of regional and organisational).

While the exchange is dialogic, this study centres on the way in which the local utilises the international and national. Information about Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery, and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework were featured in widely circulated newspapers and journals, and they exhibited at international exhibitions. This inclusion in cross-cultural platforms reveals the reciprocity between local, national, and international: the organisations and their crafts became synonymous with region, defined nationhood, and contributed to the ever-evolving discourse and design of an international style. Through this process, craft organisations participated in defining the larger categories of region, nation, and trans-nation. While I acknowledge the various applications of this interchange, I am interested here in exploring how each organisation employed, interpreted, and personalised these larger frameworks – international, national, and regional – in order both to situate themselves within recognisable categories and simultaneously to individualise themselves.
Beyond looking at the larger frameworks of how the organisations created identities, I also intend to examine the crafts as material objects. The case studies presented within this thesis – Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework – assimilated the disparate influences of international, national, and local, resulting in social and artistic identities that were hybrid. This notion of hybridity is also apparent within the identification of the objects themselves. The lace and embroidered objects functioned within three distinctive categories often defined autonomously: art, artefact, and commodity.\(^7\) While the women responsible for promoting the textiles of the organisations carefully posited the crafts within the categories of art and artefact, the less desirable category of commodity – with its associations of commercialism and market values – was often unacknowledged or dismissed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner describe the intersections where objects come to be defined as art, artefact, and/or commodity as interstitial nodes, which they explain as

sites of negotiation and exchange where objects must continually be reevaluated according to regional criteria and local definitions. At each point in its movement through space and time, an object has potential to shift from one category to another and, in so doing, slide along the slippery line that divides art from artefact from commodity.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) This framework is adapted from the chapter “Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter” by Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, taken from their edited book *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Post Colonial Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999): 3 – 19, where Phillips and Steiner explore the circulation and definition of “primitive” or ethnographic objects. I feel, due to the way in which the organisations attempted to situate and promote their work (to be discussed in the following chapters), this framework can be appropriately applied here in my material culture analysis.

\(^8\) Phillips and Steiner, 15.
While Phillips and Steiner contend that the defining of objects is a negotiation from one category to another, I argue that the lace and embroidered pieces created for Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework operated simultaneously as all three. This framing of the very character of the objects is an underlying theme to all parts of my material culture analyses throughout this project.

While I have outlined my methodological approach above, the following sections present a more detailed description of the international, national, and local frameworks that will structure my discussions of Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. The sections presented below give a general overview of the main issues pertaining to each element in order to contextualise and unite the more specific applications of these notions in the succeeding chapters.

**INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK: The Arts and Crafts Movement**

Often credited as the first truly modern artistic movement, Arts and Crafts was a massive international force in the latter part of the nineteenth century.9 This movement, which was both social and artistic, emerged as an effort “to address what was seen as the disastrous effects of industrial manufacture on the design and manufacture of goods” and sought “to reform manufacture through the revival of handicrafts, by elevating the status of the craftsman and giving due recognition to the individual.”10 The four main principles can be summarised very broadly as “design unity, joy in labour, individualism and regionalism.”11 While the formal moniker of “Arts and Crafts” did not come into being until the first exhibition of the society of that name in London in 1888, the

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principles that would later fall under the movement’s umbrella began in the early-nineteenth century with the writings of English architect A.W.N. Pugin (1812-52). Writing and practicing soon after the Industrial Revolution in Britain, Pugin was concerned about the influence of the machine and factory-based, mass-produced goods; he felt that the greatest threat to architecture, art, and design was mechanised production. Pugin, one of the leading architects of the time, renounced the staid, Classical-style common during the period, and extolled the merits of the Gothic-inspired style. He felt that medieval-inspired ecclesiastical buildings were only suitably outfitted with medieval-inspired interiors, including embroidery. Pugin explicitly condemned the low quality of nineteenth-century embroidery, stating: “We cannot yet hope to revive the expression and finish of the old work, but we may readily restore its general character.” Pugin’s interest in “reuniting art and labor, designer and craftsmen, and the spiritual with the everyday” provided the ideological basis for the Arts and Crafts movement.

Following and expanding on the reformist notions of Pugin, John Ruskin (1819-1900), the first professor of Art History at Oxford University, popularised the romantic visions of life and artistic expression of the pre-industrial period. Ruskin believed that the factory system characteristic of capitalist, industrialised societies created “morbid thinkers and miserable workers,” and strongly supported the idea that the designer and workman ought to be the same person. In his extremely influential essay “The Nature of Gothic,” which appeared in his 1853 book The Stones of Venice, Ruskin stated that proper aesthetics only resulted from labour that was a joy to the craftsman, in that

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only happy labourers could produce beautiful things.\textsuperscript{16} In this essay, he outlined the three main rules integral to true artistic production: “[n]ever encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessity, in the production of which \textit{Invention} has no share”; “[n]ever demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or noble end”; and “[n]ever encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving record of great works.”\textsuperscript{17} Although Ruskin attempted to elucidate specific standards of production strategies, he never tried to establish set instructions for creating or for rules of design; Ruskin always firmly maintained that “true beauty, in both the fine and decorative arts, could emerge only from the creative imagination of a maker inspired by nature.”\textsuperscript{18} Ruskin’s emphasis on the inhumanity of machine production and concern for demoralised workers set a guideline of individuality over standardisation that would become resoundingly embraced by later Arts and Crafts supporters.

Arguably, the most popular figure associated with the Arts and Crafts movement was William Morris (1834-96). Morris was heavily influenced by Pugin and especially Ruskin, but whereas the earlier two men focussed mainly on architecture, Morris developed their ideas more fully into the realm of decorative arts. Morris had begun his career in design as an architectural apprentice to George Edmund Street, the most renowned Anglican architect of the mid-nineteenth century. Street, like his contemporary Catholic counterpart Pugin, believed in the merits of creating a total environment – structure and decoration – influenced by historical Gothic precedents.\textsuperscript{19} Street maintained that “every architect should be in his degree, as Giotto or Michel Angelo, and should himself be able to decorate his own building with painting and

\textsuperscript{17} Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic,” 181.
\textsuperscript{18} Frank, \textit{Theory of Decorative Art}, 7 – 8.
\textsuperscript{19} Paul Larmour, \textit{The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland} (Belfast: Friar’s Bush Press, 1992), 86.
sculpture."^20^ Street was very interested in embroidery and took particular interest in any surviving medieval embroidery he saw during his trips around the English countryside. It was during his apprenticeship with Street that Morris first turned his attention to embroidery.^22^ In 1857, soon after his time with Street came to an end, Morris taught himself embroidery stitches by picking apart an old embroidery then stitching it back together. He believed that in order to design effectively for the medium, he had to understand fully the finer details of the skills involved.^23^ Morris only ever fully completed one textile himself; he felt after completing this one example, he was qualified to teach the skills to others and could focus solely on designing.^24^ This division of labour, which so closely paralleled the very capitalist system that he condemned, was often separated along gender lines, where the men would carry out the designs – the part of the labour process that required artistic talent and *ingegno* – whereas the women would be responsible for the hand labour, an ability associated with inherent feminine dexterity.^25^ The rifts of male/female, head/hand, talent/skill, and art/craft permeated much of the

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^21^ Larmour, *Arts and Crafts*, 86.
^22^ Larmour, 95.
^24^ Parry, 11. It is somewhat debatable whether Morris, after completing only one textile, could have fully understood the finer details of the skills involved with needlework and embroidery. His belief that he had, however, highlights the condescending view many had toward the skills involved with manual labour. It is also important to note here the large role played by Morris’s wife Jane Burden in the development and practice of textiles in Morris’s personal and professional life. In 1859, Burden described how she and Morris together learned the stitches required of old textiles: “we studied old pieces and by unpicking, etc., we learned much, but it was uphill work.” From: Jane Burden Morris as quoted in Barbara Morris, *Victorian Embroidery* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 95. Burden, along with her sister Bessie, later played an integral role in the embroidery and needlework departments of Morris’s business, supervising the firm’s other needlewomen. The gender division of man as designer and woman as manual labourer was still apparent, as it was Morris who retained control of creating the textile patterns. For further reading on Jane Burden Morris and textiles, see: Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York: Quartet Books, 1985); Debra N. Mancoff, *Jane Morris: The Pre-Raphaelite Model of Beauty* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2000); Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Circle* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005).

ideologies and crafts associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, and they are the very notions I seek to explore when studying the women-owned and -operated organisations of Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework.\textsuperscript{26}

The place of women within the larger Arts and Crafts movement is interesting, as their role was both idealised and dismissed.\textsuperscript{27} As represented by my discussion above, which focuses on male writers, the voice of women within the Arts and Crafts was often secondary, constructed on their behalf by the men who perceived them as muses.\textsuperscript{28} The decorative arts, before the institutionalisation of Arts and Crafts-based reform, were denigrated as lower art forms – crafts – that were rooted primarily in the feminine desire for utilitarian domestic objects. With the rise of anti-industrial sentiments against machine-made, mass production, there was “an attempt to restore a dignity and respectability to labour, to oppose the separation of art and politics, morality and religion. Craft was to be art in society.”\textsuperscript{29} These crafts – once associated with non-art, utilitarian

\textsuperscript{26} While I present a series of binaries here, I acknowledge the hierarchies such juxtapositions create. I introduce them here in order to address the dualistic oppositions that existed in discussions and practices of the late-nineteenth century. For further reading on the problems inherent to such dichotomies, see Rosi Braidotti, \textit{Nomadic Subjects} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{27} The systematic dismissal of women’s contribution to the development and promotion of the Arts and Crafts movement is not confined to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. As Peter Cormack highlights in his review of two recent (2004) Arts and Crafts exhibitions at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the lack of attention paid to the role of women continues today. Peter Cormack, “A Truly British Movement,” \textit{Apollo} (April 2005): 49 – 53.

\textsuperscript{28} This selection of only male writers was intentional. During the nineteenth century and the development of Arts and Crafts ideologies, it was male writers – Pugin, Ruskin, Morris – who were credited as the leaders and who were most well-known at the time. I am in no way stating that there were no women involved because there were well-known and respected women writing at the time, such as Ann MacBeth and May Morris. I am also not suggesting that women had no agency in terms of how they were portrayed. What I am trying to say is that, at the time (and often still now), it was predominantly male authors who were credited with defining the parameters of the Arts and Crafts movement. Within my discussions of Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, I will explore the role women played in terms of defining and interpreting various ideologies.

production and thereby constructed as inferior to artistic, non-economic production – became re-defined as objects of artistic significance, representing the innate abilities of the craftsperson untainted by industrialisation. As part of this social elevation of the decorative arts, reformers such as Morris looked to “the idealised example of pre-industrial agricultural society, when craft production had been centred on the family unit and was an integral unit of everyday life.”

Women, as the linchpin of the family unit, were portrayed as the holders of this tradition. As craft production became elevated to a worthy artistic pursuit, however, it was men who began to direct its production as designers and women who became the silent workers carrying out the designs. Once decorative arts became recognised as an art form, crafts became subsumed into the male-dominated artistic canon that had traditionally excluded women. Instead of crafts reorganising the gender hierarchy that had characterised art, crafts became redefined as art and replicated its gender hierarchy.

Morris, like his predecessor Ruskin, was very concerned with methods and venerated pre-industrial production. Both men romanticised the creative processes of the medieval period as the last time when artistry and craftsmanship were united.

Morris’s businesses, in both its 1861 incarnation of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., “Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals” and the 1875

31 This process of marginalisation based on gender also operates in reverse. Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, in their 2002 book on fashion and gender, address the way in which perceptions of the fashion industry shifted from the 1920s onwards as the introduction of mechanised production “de-skilled” the labour. This tendency directly affected the involvement and perceived roles of women and men. As the fashion industry became more industrialised and thereby constructed as a less artistic process, production, which had once been predominantly the domain of male designers, was perceived to be reduced to the mindless, manual labour of female workers. Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women’s Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 4.
32 This problem of redefinition is taken from Christopher Steiner, “Can the Canon Burst?” Art Bulletin 78 (1996): 213 – 7. Steiner’s article addresses the difficulty of trying to include traditionally marginalised groups into mainstream museums without redefining the categories of marginalised and mainstream themselves. I have taken his framework and applied it here to gender hierarchies and craft.
organisation Morris & Co., sought to reclaim the handmade, natural creative approach that were applied in the making of objects during the medieval period. Morris revived long forgotten techniques of dyeing, printing, and weaving, organising his production in a handicraft workshop in the countryside rather than an urban factory. Through this process, Morris functioned within nineteenth-century fears about polluted, dirty, urban life and views of the romanticised notions of rural life as untouched and untainted by the ills of modernisation. By promoting the medieval-techniques of his production methods, Morris enabled his objects to be associated with a specific way of life, fabricated as representing and recalling historical elements that embodied “true” Englishness, a time when the primary influence of nature allowed the inherent artistic processes of the rural craftsperson to produce beautiful objects. Through this association of the past with objects, middle- and upper-class consumers, the only groups who could afford Morris-made articles despite his calls to the democratisation of everyday objects, could become part of the larger ideological framework. Morris’ attempts at working within an anti-modern framework, through replicating pre-industrial production methods, are contrasted with the modernised consumption methods of selling his objects-as-ideology to the growing middle-class, who were constructed as the new cultural elite. The idea of modernising the anti-modern is ubiquitous throughout the international applications of Arts and Crafts movement.

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34 I first came across the notion of modernising the anti-modern in Lynda Jessup’s essay “Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: An Introduction,” in Antimodernism and Artistic Experience, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001): 3 – 9. The term anti-modernism is defined in Jessup’s essay as “the pervasive sense of loss that often co-existed in the decades around the turn of the century along with the enthusiasm for modernization and material progress. …It describes what was in effect a critique of the modern, a perceived lack in the present manifesting itself not only in a sense of alienation, but also in a longing for the types of physical or spiritual experience embodied in utopian futures and imagined pasts” (3). The term anti-modern does not refer to de-modernising or un-modernising or against-modernising; that is, it
NATIONAL FRAMEWORK: Romantic Nationalism and Revival Movements

The increased cross-cultural exchange made possible through mass print culture, increased ease of travel, and World’s Fairs during the nineteenth century resulted in a desire for nations to define and differentiate themselves in order to compete in an increasingly globalised economy. This heightened international exchange resulted in the perceived dissolution of national boundaries and the desire to affirm national identity.35 The Arts and Crafts movement, as an international phenomenon, established a cross-cultural style that could be integrated with nation-specific agendas. Whereas in Britain, Ruskin and Morris had romanticised the English Gothic period as the apex of Britishness, the ideological framework of the movement, which venerated the pastoral, rural, pre-industrial life, enabled easy appropriation and assimilation of these Arts and Crafts ideas as nation-specific. The Arts and Crafts movement’s glorified interpretation of pre-industrial life became a universal theme permeating anti-modernist movements throughout the nineteenth century. The ambiguity of pre-industrial life allowed countries to interpret their own past, to represent nation-specific elements, thereby integrating an international style – that of the Arts and Crafts movement – into a national framework.

was not an attempt by Morris or other Arts and Crafts reformers to be removed from the modern period and return to an idealised, pre-industrial past, but instead refers to the desire to replicate specific, pre-modern elements within a modern context. As the Arts and Crafts gained international recognition as a modern movement, it became accepted that to be modern was to be anti-modern. (see, for example, Wendy Kaplan, “Traditions Transformed: Romantic Nationalism in Design, 1890 – 1920,” in Designing Modernity, ed. Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995): 20). Therefore, my contention that the phenomenon of modernising the anti-modern was present in the Arts and Crafts movement is not a suggestion that there was an anachronistic attempt to revert fully to a non-modern way of life, but a proposal that many followers endeavoured to utilise specific elements that were associated with the pre-industrial, a time period that can be expressed as the opposite of modern or anti-modern.

This idea of modernising the anti-modern highlights the intricate ways in which the ideologies of the Arts and Crafts movement functioned. This movement was so successful in part because it satisfied a number of conflicting ideas, such as modern and anti-modern, progressive and conservative, and urban and rural. Proponents of Arts and Crafts could locate themselves and interpret aspects of the movement on a sliding scale as it coincided with their own agenda.35 M.K. Flynn, Ideology, Mobilization and the Nation (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 11.
This desire to define the nation manifested itself in Romantic Nationalism. Increasing concerns with “disappearing customs, national identity, the unchanged forms of expression of an indigenous master race” resulted from the perceived dilution of cultural heritage brought on by mechanisation, urbanisation, and immigration, ills blamed on nineteenth-century industrial processes. Proponents of Romantic Nationalism sought to ground a nation in its “essential nature,” asserting that “true” national identity sprang naturally from the soul of the Folk untouched by modern life. This constructed Folk culture as unspoiled in order to exemplify the continuity of nation-specific traditions. The idea that Folk culture represented a particular set of characteristics and a way of life that escaped the ravages of modernity enabled nations to establish particular symbols and discourses that came to stand for national identity. The adaptations of Folk and other indigenous cultures were used to define national identity and to express a distinctive cultural heritage that manifested as revival movements. In Ireland, this search for a noble past resulted in the Celtic Revival; in the United States, the Colonial Revival. Each of these countries utilised characteristics of a perceived Folk culture as nationally specific elements to differentiate the identity of the nation from that of others.

The Folk was constructed as the original base of a society, examples of living traditions producing “Folk arts [that] were considered as the vocabulary of a ‘mother-tongue of forms’ in their motifs.” Within the context of Romantic Nationalism, “the ‘Folk’ were those whose very existence and culture testified to the possibility and necessity of the nation.” The notion of the Folk was normalised as “the last true products of [a

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39 Ian McKay, The Quest for the Folk, 12.
nation's] soil and the last authentic producers of [its] culture." It was believed that Folk and peasant customs revealed what was intrinsic to a particular society. Through establishing the “true nature” of a nation as part of an inherited “cultural essence” shared by everyone native to that nation, the middle-class could then participate. The concept of the Folk functioned beyond denoting a particular rural, peasant class and represented the “true character” of the people of a nation before they were “complicated (and perhaps corrupted) by ‘society.’” The middle-class – as citizens of a nation who could therefore claim inclusion in and ownership over this “cultural essence” – had license to interpret and utilise Folk culture. Middle-class participants, then, became both cultural benefactors and cultural shapers. The nationally specific motifs constructed around Folk culture enabled individual nations, and the organisations that created objects in the name of national identity, to produce objects using Folk motifs that were perceived as representing the true character of the nation.

LOCAL APPLICATIONS: Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery, and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework

The craft organisations presented within this thesis identified with international and national movements, yet they carefully constructed identities that also reflected their local circumstances. Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery are, in fact, two separate businesses operated by one woman, Florence Vere O’Brien. Limerick Lace was begun in 1883, while Clare Embroidery was started twelve years later in 1895. These two textile organisations are united through Vere O’Brien and the similar way both functioned in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ireland. Heavily influenced by

40 McKay, 29.
41 McKay, 12.
42 McKay, 11.
philanthropy and Irish reform movements, Vere O’Brien’s craft businesses elucidate the complex relationships among gender, craft, class, and Irish nationalism.

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework originated in 1896 in Deerfield, Massachusetts. Organised by two women, Ellen Miller and Margaret Whiting, this organisation was credited with being one of the first and most successful American craft industries of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The women running this organisation very carefully positioned their businesses within the precepts of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival, but still managed to instill their crafts with a sense of romanticised regionalism.

These case studies – related by chronology, gender, craft, regionalism, and adaptations of international and national ideologies – provide the anchors around which I explore the point of intersection between international, national, and local in order to study how craft organisations built and promoted identity. I engage critically with the way these groups promoted themselves and their crafts, their production processes, and their objects and designs in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century amidst the growing possibilities of the cross-cultural transfer of ideas and products.
Chapter 2

Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery

This chapter focuses on two craft organisations – Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery – owned and operated by Florence Vere O’Brien in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ireland. In the first part of the chapter, I present an overview of the textile associations. Then, I discuss the international ideologies of the Arts and Crafts movement as it functioned within Ireland and the national ideologies of the Celtic Revival movement. In the last part of the chapter, I examine the applications of these larger movements in a localised setting. The analysis of how Vere O’Brien’s organisations both operated within international and national discourses as well as individualised their identity is approached through four main themes: craft and philanthropy; reform and education; division of labour and class; and object and design. By examining Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery in this way, I explore the interconnections between international, national, and local in order to investigate how each craft organisation fabricated an identity.

Lace as a craft practiced by women in Ireland has a long history. In the eighteenth century, lace-making was considered a pastime of the upper-classes. The delicate stitching and fine details were judged as a measure of femininity appropriate to ladies. In 1808, John Heathcoat introduced a machine that produced net identical to the time-consuming hand-made net required of lace-making. In 1828, another invention was introduced that further altered the production of lace. The Jacquard system was

incorporated into Heathcoat’s net-producing machine, thereby imitating both the net and distinctive lace design that were once the role of the handicraft maker.\(^{45}\) Able to make lace more efficiently and inexpensively than actual workers, those innovations in process marked the rise of machine-embroidery, which put many hand-workers out of business. As lace-making moved away from the intricate skill and detailing of entirely hand-made pieces, it became less of a hobby for gentlewomen, and by the early-nineteenth century, upper-class women were lace patrons and not lace workers.\(^{46}\)

Lace made in Limerick has a history that extends over half a century before Florence Vere O’Brien brought her philanthropic activities to the area. In 1828, Charles Walker, an Englishman, established the first Irish lace-making business set up on a purely commercial basis.\(^{47}\) He arrived in Limerick with twenty-four young women who were skilled in art embroidery in order to teach local women and girls lace-making.\(^{48}\) Walker chose Limerick as the location for his business due to the large population of unemployed women, thereby ensuring plenty of cheap labour.\(^{49}\) The style developed in Walker’s factory that came to be known as Limerick lace is technically not a lace, but a form of embroidery on net.\(^{50}\) Using either a chain stitch (tambour) or a darned stitch (run-lace) or a combination of the two on net backing, Limerick lace only became feasible as a practice after machine-made net became readily available after 1815.\(^{51}\)

\(^{45}\) Earnshaw, 18. The purpose of the Jacquard system, originally patented in France in 1805, was “to mechanise the manipulation of the threads which made the design” (18). This machine was composed of a series of cards, each one responsible for a portion of the complete design. The combination of this system with Heathcoat’s net producing machine resulted in the complete lace product, able to replicate both the net and design that had once been the domain of the manual labourer.

\(^{46}\) Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, 139.


\(^{48}\) Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 11.

\(^{49}\) Elizabeth Boyle, *The Irish Flowerers* (Belfast: Ulster Folk Museum and Institute of Irish Studies at Queen’s University, 1971), 46.

\(^{50}\) Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, *Limerick Lace*, 11. For a more detailed explanation of the techniques of Limerick lace verses that of other forms of lace, see Nellie Ó Cléirigh’s chapter in this source.

\(^{51}\) Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 11.
The label of lace then, while not applicable in a technical sense, is more to denote the use and aesthetic of the material, and as this style was referred to as lace during its production and sale in the nineteenth century, it will be discussed as lace, not embroidery, throughout this chapter.

Walker’s business was quite large; a visitor reported in 1844 that it employed over 1100 workers in a variety of areas such as “tambourers, runners, darners, menders, washers, finishers, framers, muslin-embroiderers and lace open-workers.” The majority, approximately 800, of Walker’s employees worked in the factory, while the rest worked out of their homes.

While Walker has the distinction of creating the first commercial lace-making organisation in Ireland, he was not alone in producing lace in the region, particularly after the Great Famine of 1845-1847 created a dire need for mass employment. Convents in Ireland had a long history in providing work and training to local women and girls. From 1848 until 1860, the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Limerick offered training to penitents – unmarried mothers or ex-prostitutes. Offering both job training and moral reform, the Convent of the Good Shepherd originally had Madame de Beligand from France teaching lace-making. She was replaced by a renowned Belgian expert in Valenciennes lace, Amelie van Verevenhaven, who later became Sister de Ste. Philomene when she received her religious habit. Van Verevenhaven was so desired as an addition to Limerick that businessman, Henry O’Shea, paid her travelling expenses.

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52 This is a quotation credited to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Hall who published an account of their travels in Ireland. As quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 14.
53 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 13.
54 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 15.
55 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 15.
56 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 15. Van Verevenhaven was so valued by the Belgian court that, shortly after her arrival in Limerick, a representative of the court was sent to lure her back to Belgium, thereby preventing the spread of Valenciennes lace-making outside of the country. She denied the request and remained in Limerick.
expenses, revealing the significance of lace-making to the area.\textsuperscript{57} The Convent of the Good Shepherd continued making Valenciennes lace until the 1880s,\textsuperscript{58} presumably switching to the Limerick-style of lace because it was cheaper and faster to make, as well as gaining prominence due to the efforts of Florence Vere O’Brien.

**Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery**

When Florence Vere O’Brien settled in Limerick with her new husband Robert in 1883, the lace industry was severely disorganised. Vere O’Brien’s first contact with Limerick lace was at the train station upon her move there.\textsuperscript{59} She describes the Limerick lace works she first encountered as “often good in workmanship, and sometimes in design, [but] … apt to be made in such course materials as to be more suitable for furniture than for flounces or for handkerchiefs.”\textsuperscript{60}

Vere O’Brien’s 1883 arrival in Limerick was not her first visit to Ireland or even to Limerick. She first came to Ireland in 1878 to do a tour of the island.\textsuperscript{61} Born Florence Arnold, she was raised in Burley-in-Wharfedale, in England, along with her three siblings, by her adoptive parents Jane and William E. Forster after her natural parents

\textsuperscript{57} \textsuperscript{Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 16.}  
\textsuperscript{58} \textsuperscript{Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 16.}  
\textsuperscript{59} \textsuperscript{Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.}  Much of the biographical information here regarding Florence Vere O’Brien and Limerick lace is taken from \textsuperscript{Ó Clérigh and Rowe’s book.} There are very few sources that discuss Vere O’Brien and her business beyond a brief mention within larger discussions of Irish lace-making during the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is important to acknowledge the danger of basing much of my discussion on one source. Veronica Rowe, the author of the section in \textit{Limerick Lace} that pertains to Florence Vere O’Brien, is Vere O’Brien’s granddaughter, therefore there is a certain amount of personal, family investment that is inherent to her discussion. I have tried to take this into account, and hopefully through integrating information from other sources – although sparse – along with my own analysis, I can piece together a more rounded discussion of Vere O’Brien and her organisation.  
\textsuperscript{60} Florence Vere O’Brien as quoted in \textsuperscript{Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.} Another difficulty in using Rowe’s account of Vere O’Brien and her lace organisation is that there are many quotations and materials not cited, making it difficult to explore these sources more thoroughly or to date them. This style could be in part due to the fact the Rowe inherited much of the material regarding the business when her aunt – Flora, daughter of Vere O’Brien – passed away in 1970 and left Rowe all the surviving material. Perhaps much of the material is of a personal nature – journals and records – as opposed to published articles, which could be more easily cited. \textsuperscript{61} \textsuperscript{Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.}
died in 1858. William E. Forster, originally the owner of a woollen mill, eventually entered politics, and in 1880 moved the family to Ireland in order to take up his position as Chief Secretary. In her twenties, Vere O’Brien, along with her siblings, legally changed her last name to Arnold-Foster. Vere O’Brien first met her future husband, Robert, during her 1878 tour in Ireland at a charity ball in Limerick. The young couple were married in London in 1883 (Figure 1).

In her account of Florence Vere O’Brien, author Veronica Rowe stated that Vere O’Brien “studied drawing in London with several well-known teachers.” This statement regarding Vere O’Brien’s formal artistic training was never further elucidated, although due to her later renown as a designer, her artistic skills were well-acknowledged by her contemporaries. Along with her artistic training (in whatever form it may have taken), Vere O’Brien, through her family connections, “came to Limerick armed with a wide knowledge of people, politics, literature and education, and above all, a strong sense of duty to help in any community in which she might find herself.” By the time she and her new husband moved to Old Church, a large house in Limerick that the couple shared with Robert’s mother and sister, Vere O’Brien was well situated to herald in a new era of success for Limerick lace.

The earlier acclaim lace from the city of Limerick had experienced during the time of Charles Walker had passed, but there were still several surviving organisations making Limerick lace during the early 1880s. Two businesses – Cannocks and Todds –

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62 Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.
63 There is a note in Rowe’s biography of Vere O’Brien regarding Forster’s woollen factory, saying the owner was concerned with “involving the workers as friends” (Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45). This slight mention is interesting as there is no further elaboration of the point. It seems, however, to be fairly significant by subtly establishing a sense of class equity in a working situation, which Vere O’Brien, having been brought up in that environment, perhaps would have tried to establish in her own business.
64 Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.
65 Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.
66 Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 45.
as well as the Convent of the Good Shepherd were producing tambour and run lace at the time Vere O’Brien moved to the city. Much of this lace was for ecclesiastical and theatrical use, with “the demand for the finer kind of lace … so small that the principal employers did not consider it worth their while to go to the expense of importing high quality materials.” Vere O’Brien, who had originally admired the handiwork of the crafts she had seen at the Limerick train station, believed that better materials and innovative designs would vastly improve the quality of the textiles. The ideologies of Ruskin and Morris, while still not officially collected under the title of the Arts and Crafts movement when Vere O’Brien moved to Limerick in 1883, were widespread and well-known in England. Although these theories would not be embraced in Ireland for over a decade, Vere O’Brien, with her interest in artistic practice and connections to England, would most likely have come into contact with the reformist philosophies by 1883.

It seems as if Vere O’Brien’s later commercial success was somewhat inadvertent. The process of establishing her business originated as a casual interest into the art form of Limerick lace, but gradually evolved into an official organisation as the works produced under her supervision garnered much praise. After her initial contact with Limerick lace at the train station, Vere O’Brien began to explore how good materials and design could contribute to good handiwork. Vere O’Brien started the process of collecting relics of old Limerick work to establish a precedent of design and

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67 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 46.
68 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 46.
69 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 46.
70 In 1883 - the same year Vere O’Brien began her ventures in lace – an exhibition at Mansion House was held in London. This display was credited with having initiated late-nineteenth-century lace reform. Although Vere O’Brien did not display any lace there, she very likely was aware of the exhibit. Vere O’Brien also had direct connections to people heavily involved in lace reform throughout Ireland. James Brenan, the headmaster of the Cork School of Art, and Alan S. Cole, an expert in needlework from the Department of Science and Art in London and one of the most influential people involved in Irish lace reform, were both associates who worked with Vere O’Brien. A more detailed discussion regarding Vere O’Brien’s connections with lace reform is presented later in this chapter.
materials. She borrowed an old lace design from a neighbour, Madame O’Grady.\textsuperscript{71} Vere O’Brien managed, through the help of Robert’s aunt, Lady de Vere, to attain some “fine old Brussels net and thread.”\textsuperscript{72} Seeking a worker who could be guaranteed to provide the good handiwork component of the process, Vere O’Brien convinced one of the old Limerick lace crafters, Mary Blake, to work the pattern with the good material.\textsuperscript{73} This first example of Limerick lace produced under the supervision of Florence Vere O’Brien, which was purchased by Robert and presented to his wife as a gift, set a standard for how the early lace was produced.

The designs for the lace came from a variety of sources. Vere O’Brien took designs from old lace loaned to her by friends.\textsuperscript{74} Other patterns supplied to the workers were created by Vere O’Brien, her previous training in art being put to good use.\textsuperscript{75} As interest in lace reform increased during the 1880s in Ireland, art schools began incorporating lace design into their curriculum.\textsuperscript{76} These schools, including the Schools of Art in London, Cork, and Limerick, provided patterns that Vere O’Brien gave to her workers.\textsuperscript{77}

Along with the variety of design inspirations, the materials were also from an array of places. The fine net, the backing upon which the designs were woven, was imported from Brussels, a place renowned for its lace-work. The thread was originally

\textsuperscript{71} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 46. In Rowe’s account, it is unclear whether this “design” was actually an example of lace or simply a drawn pattern.
\textsuperscript{72} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 46.
\textsuperscript{73} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 46. It is unclear, in this account, what specifically is meant by “old Limerick lace-workers.” It is obvious that Mary Blake was an elderly lady who had previous training and employment with a company dealing with Limerick lace, but it is not clarified beyond that. The exact training and company is not mentioned.
\textsuperscript{74} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 47.
\textsuperscript{75} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 47.
\textsuperscript{76} These interests in reforming Irish lace design will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{77} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 47.
bought from a company in Leeds, but Vere O’Brien later switched to thread purchased from companies in Nottingham and Chesterfield.\textsuperscript{78}

It is unclear when Vere O’Brien established an actual business. It is apparent that in the beginning her involvement was more of a casual interest in the lace-making process based on her concern for the loss of good, high quality lace. It seems that toward the end of 1884 and most definitely by 1886, Vere O’Brien had officially positioned herself as a business owner with specific workers under her hire.\textsuperscript{79} The production process, however, was similar during both the early tentative stages and the later business stages. Vere O’Brien provided the workers with a design – either an old pattern, an original by Vere O’Brien herself, or a design from one of the art schools – and high quality materials. The workers took these designs and materials to their own homes, where it would be worked thoroughly. Upon completion, the worker returned the finished lace piece to Vere O’Brien, who sold the work under the name Limerick lace, which, during the early years of her involvement, referred to the style of lace established by Charles Walker, not the name of an official company. During Vere O’Brien’s early interest with Limerick lace, there was no official business beyond the work process. Vere O’Brien, during this period, operated more as a middle-manager than as a company owner. The works produced under the guidance of Vere O’Brien (Figure 2) were sold at Haywards of Oxford Street in London, and the Irish Lace Depot in Dublin.\textsuperscript{80}

In 1886, this latter business was purchased by Lady Aberdeen, a staunch supporter of

\textsuperscript{78} Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 47.

\textsuperscript{79} I am estimating these dates as I could not find discussions dealing with the actual process and progress of Vere O’Brien’s business. These years are based upon the language used at the time of the establishment of the Private Committee for Promoting Irish Lace in 1884 and Alan S. Cole’s visit to Limerick in 1886. Both of these topics will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{80} Ó Clérigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 48.
the craft revival in Ireland, and renamed the Irish Industries Association Depot;\(^\text{81}\) with outlets in both Dublin and London, these depots continued to sell the lace produced in Limerick under the guidance of Vere O’Brien. Beyond depots, Vere O’Brien also sold her lace at exhibitions of Aberdeen’s Irish Industries Association and Alice Hart’s Donegal Industrial Fund.\(^\text{82}\)

Convents had long been involved in producing lace and textiles as a means of teaching skills and providing work to penitents. The Convent of the Good Shepherd in Limerick had an extensive history of lace-working. Vere O’Brien, interested in supporting Limerick lace beyond the confines of her own workshops, convinced the convent to “become more seriously involved in the making of lace” and she provided designs and materials to aid in the process.\(^\text{83}\) This convent, along with the Convent of St. Vincent, Convent of Mercy in Kinsale, and St. Joseph’s Convent, was in close contact with Vere O’Brien. Vere O’Brien supplied each with designs and high quality materials.\(^\text{84}\) This commitment to improving lace designs by aiding the convents elucidates Vere O’Brien’s interest in reviving Limerick lace as a whole and creating jobs for skilled lace workers.

By 1886, Vere O’Brien and her lace had gained some important recognition, both in Ireland and England. According to Rowe, Vere O’Brien’s workers had made a flounce for Queen Victoria, as well as several pieces for the Countess of Aberdeen.\(^\text{85}\) This


\(^{\text{82}}\) Janice Helland, “Exhibiting Ireland: The Donegal Industrial Fund in London and Chicago,” *RACAR* 29, 1-2 (2004): 35. The fact that Vere O’Brien displayed her works with both Lady Aberdeen and Alice Hart is very interesting, as there was a definite rift between these two women. Vere O’Brien’s need to negotiate her position between Aberdeen and Hart will be revisited later during the discussion of displaying Irish works at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago.

\(^{\text{83}}\) Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, *Limerick Lace*, 48.

\(^{\text{84}}\) Boyle, *The Irish Flowerers*, 47.

\(^{\text{85}}\) Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, *Limerick Lace*, 48.
acknowledgment of the high quality of the Limerick lace being produced by the workers employed by Vere O’Brien only increased in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

It is unclear, throughout the first decade of her business operations, whether Vere O’Brien was recruiting and teaching a new generation of worker or if she relied solely on the expertise of the older women who had been trained through previous involvements with Limerick lace. An 1893 article would suggest that she originally had only the older, experienced workers under her direct employment: “Mrs O’Brien has had constantly employed a number of workers who represent some of the old factory hands of by-gone days.”86 By 1889, however, it became clear that formal teaching was necessary to ensure the continued growth of the lace industry. In May 1889, a lace training school, managed by a committee that included Vere O’Brien, opened in a house on Bank Place in Limerick. Called the Limerick Lace Training School, it accommodated eight pupils and one of Vere O’Brien’s workers, Mrs. Keane, became the run-lace teacher. By June of that year, the school had twenty students.87 This school earned a good reputation fairly quickly; when Lady Aberdeen was attempting to ready an exhibit of Irish crafts for the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, she travelled to the school to select some of its lace products. Lady Aberdeen also chose one of the girls being trained at the school to accompany her to Chicago to be part of the living exhibition demonstrating the making of lace.88

Along with objects from the Limerick Lace Training School, lace created by Vere O’Brien’s workers was included in Lady Aberdeen’s Irish Village exhibition in the Chicago World’s Fair. Vere O’Brien sent £100 of the lace by her workers to the 1893 exhibition in Chicago and was successful in selling it all.89 It is unclear as to what sort of

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86 Limerick Chronicle, 24 June 1893, as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 51.
87 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 50.
88 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 51.
89 Limerick Chronicle, 24 June 1893, as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 52.
In black lace is a beautiful specimen to which trailing flowers are worked out in a most artistic manner, and a narrow black flounce in tambour work may also be mentioned. A scarf of very striking design in white lace is also on view. It shows a dragon at each corner, with a harp in the centre, whilst shamrocks are plentifully interspersed throughout.  

Although this quotation does not delineate the exact lace pieces included in Lady Aberdeen’s exhibit at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, it does give a sense of the kinds of works being produced under the direction of Vere O’Brien during the early 1890s.

The same year as the Chicago World’s Fair, there was a shift in the management and direction of the Limerick Lace Training School. From its beginnings in 1889 until 1893, the school was supervised by a man by the name of Mr. Shaw.  
In March of 1893, Vere O’Brien was asked to take over the responsibility of running the school.  
The original school on Bank Place closed permanently, and Vere O’Brien’s new school opened on George’s Street on 6 November 1893, renamed the Limerick Lace School.  
The school started with five “little girls” as students and the teachers were all former lace workers of Vere O’Brien (Figure 3). In an 1894 article that appeared in the Limerick Chronicle, Vere O’Brien stated the purpose of the school under her direction: “The object of the school, as at present carried on, is to give free instruction in lace making to young girls who may wish to take up the industry in after life, either at their own homes or in one or other existing factories of the city.” The new Limerick Lace School was entirely

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90 Limerick Chronicle, 24 June 1893, as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 52.
91 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 52.
92 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 53.
93 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 53.
94 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 53.
95 Florence Vere O’Brien, Limerick Chronicle, 1894, as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 53 – 4.
financially dependent on Vere O’Brien and her husband, and although the products were quite successful, the school very rarely made a profit. Even after Vere O’Brien took over the management of the lace school, she was still heavily involved with directing her older workers working within their own homes. From 1893 onward, the works produced both by younger women within the school and older workers in their homes were all sold under the label of the Limerick Lace School.

Providing young girls with a marketable vocational skill was the main purpose of the Limerick Lace School under Vere O’Brien’s direction. In 1901, however, training beyond manual skills for some of the girls was introduced, an idea originally proposed by Alan S. Cole over a decade previously. It was decided that twenty students from the Limerick Lace School were ready to attend courses in artistic lace design at the Limerick School of Art. Some of the designs produced by these students were used in lace works made by Vere O’Brien’s younger school workers and her older home workers.

The widespread success of Vere O’Brien’s enterprises was demonstrated by the many exhibitions in which the works were included, the many prizes the lace won, and the formal recognition of the city of Limerick. Some of the domestic and international exhibitions in which Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace School participated include the World’s Columbian Exhibition (1893), Royal Dublin Industries Exhibition (1902), Dublin Royal Society Exhibition (1903), St. Louis World’s Fair (1904), International Exhibition in Dublin (1907), and Home Arts Exhibition (1908). In each of these exhibitions, Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace School was awarded medals for design and craftsmanship. The international recognition gained through participating in and winning at these exhibitions

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96 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 53.
97 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 60. All lace produced under the supervision of Vere O’Brien after 1893 – both by students and home workers – will be referred to as made by the Limerick Lace School.
98 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 55. The involvement of Alan S. Cole in lace and textile reform in Ireland will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
99 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, *Limerick Lace*, 55.
100 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 51, 54, 55, 56, 59, 61.
made the lace produced under the guidance of Vere O’Brien a visible commodity to both the city of Limerick and Ireland as a whole. In 1907, the Corporation of Limerick granted Vere O’Brien the right to use the City Arms as a “badge of excellency.”

Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace School operated until 1922, when post-war markets did not provide the demand necessary to make the business feasible. Upon closure, all the remaining designs and materials remained in the possession of Vere O’Brien.

Along with her Limerick lace ventures, Vere O’Brien was also involved in reviving traditional needlework and embroidery. In 1890, the Vere O’Brien family moved to Newhall, near Ennis in County Clare, approximately thirty-eight kilometres from Limerick. While this situated Vere O’Brien further from her Limerick workers, the family moved so that Robert could be closer to his work as a Clerk of the Peace at the Ennis courthouse. In 1895, from her new home, Vere O’Brien began a school to teach embroidery to young girls in the region. Vere O’Brien established the embroidery business as “a response to the plight of families who found it hard to make ends meet.” This venture heavily involved Mina Keppie, a young Scotswoman who had spent several years working in northern France and was originally hired as a nanny to the Vere O’Brien children. At the beginning of the business, twelve to fifteen young

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106 Mina Keppie was an integral component of Clare Embroidery. Information on her life beyond her role in this business is very scarce. Her training in art is unknown, but it would seem that she undoubtedly did have some sort of art education. Being from Glasgow, Keppie was most likely
girls came to the Vere O’Brien house for two hours weekly where they were instructed in embroidery stitches by Keppie. The organisation was called Clare Embroidery, taking its name from the county where the work was occurring.

In 1898, the Vere O’Brien family moved to a home nearby called Ballyalla House (Figure 4), and the Clare Embroidery class continued there. Many of the original students kept attending the classes offered, but now had to travel further distances to reach the new location; these former students were also joined by new students from the area. The new school at Ballyalla started with twelve students, who carried out their work in what was originally the servant's hall (Figure 5). Keppie was an integral component of the business: she “taught the girls basic stitches, gave out the work, put it together when it was finished, sent out invoices, and kept accounts.” The embroidery class, run by Keppie, met every Tuesday. The students were taught basic stitches and used a book belonging to Vere O’Brien entitled The Embroiderers Alphabet to learn stitches for letters, figures, monograms, and ornaments. After each girl learned the foundations of the stitches necessary, she was required to learn how to trace the patterns – all designed by Vere O’Brien – onto the fabric to be embroidered. All the students had to make successful trial pieces before they were allowed to work formally. Once a girl had proven herself capable of completing the tasks required in

familiar with the needlework being produced by Jessie Newbery and Ann Macbeth at the Glasgow School of Art. Both Newbery and Macbeth were renowned artists during the late-nineteenth century and their styles were quite prominent, and it is unlikely that a Scottish woman trained in needlework and embroidery would not have been familiar with them. The possible connections of the Glasgow School of Art and Clare Embroidery will be explored later in this chapter.
an embroidered pattern, she took the work home. Most of the embroideries were
completed in the homes of the workers, and brought back to the school for “finishing,
sewing up, and posting.”\textsuperscript{116} The sale price of the needlework went entirely to the
worker, minus the cost of material and expenses.\textsuperscript{117} The needleworkers were also
permitted to keep all the prize money won from exhibitions and competitions.\textsuperscript{118}

The patterns for the works completed at Clare Embroidery were designed entirely
by Florence Vere O’Brien.\textsuperscript{119} Vere O’Brien based her designs on the flowers and foliage
of County Clare, giving artistic life to nature found in the region.\textsuperscript{120} Although her patterns
were rooted in the regional landscape, the inspiration was “the bold work of French
peasant embroiderers, suggested to her by Mina Keppie, who worked in Northern
France before coming to Ireland.”\textsuperscript{121} Originally the designs created by Vere O’Brien
were placed on the material through carved stamps and ink.\textsuperscript{122} This process was soon
replaced by a system of tracing the design using carbon paper and a stylus;\textsuperscript{123} this latter
process made it much easier for the workers to take responsibility for transferring the
designs themselves.

Along with creating the designs, Vere O’Brien was responsible for providing all
the material and threads. The material was white cotton or linen, chosen for its
practicality, as the products for which the embroideries were used – dresses, aprons,
bedspreads, firescreen panels – were designed for everyday use, and needed to be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} Rowe, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{117} “Embroidery Process,” County Clare Museum Website, http://www.clarelibrary.ie.
\item \textsuperscript{118} “Embroidery Process,” County Clare Museum Website, http://www.clarelibrary.ie.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Rowe, “Clare Embroidery,” 54.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Larmour, \textit{Arts and Crafts}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{121} “Embroidery Process,” County Clare Museum Website, http://www.clarelibrary.ie. This “bold
work” suggested by Keppie could also have been influenced by the Glasgow style of embroidery
and needlework.
\item \textsuperscript{122} “Embroidery Process,” County Clare Museum Website, http://www.clarelibrary.ie.
\item \textsuperscript{123} “Embroidery Process,” County Clare Museum Website, http://www.clarelibrary.ie.
\end{itemize}
durable and washable (Figure 6). The white cotton or linen backing was complemented by the choice of vibrant colours for the thread, mainly blue and red, recalling the Folk design patterns introduced through the work experience and travels of Keppie, who had such an integral role in Vere O’Brien’s work in embroidery.

Similar to the Limerick Lace School, Clare Embroidery participated in many exhibitions, and was often successful at winning awards. Unlike Limerick Lace, which participated in many international shows, Clare Embroidery exhibited mostly at shows in Ireland and England. The Bath Exhibition (1904), Irish Industrial Exhibition (1904), Home Arts and Industries Association (1907), and Royal Dublin Society Art Industries Exhibition (1907 and 1909) are exhibitions in which Clare Embroidery was awarded prizes for design and handiwork.

Beyond the recognition that exhibitions brought to the company, patronage from well-known clients also earned Clare Embroidery a respected reputation. In 1902, after a successful show in Windsor, Queen Victoria ordered twelve dresses for her granddaughters. Sales such as this, along with success at exhibitions, helped Clare Embroidery earn a good reputation in the early-twentieth century.

Clare Embroidery was maintained after the Limerick Lace School closed in 1923. It was managed by Florence Vere O’Brien until her death in 1936 when it was continued.

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126 The different design influences of Vere O’Brien’s embroideries will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
127 There is brief mention in two sources – County Clare Museum Website, [http://www.clarelibrary.ie](http://www.clarelibrary.ie) and Rowe, “Clare Embroidery – that Clare Embroidery did participate in exhibitions in America, but this fact is never explored further and I was unable to locate any other information about this possibility.
for another two years, run by one of her former workers.\textsuperscript{130} Clare Embroidery closed permanently in 1938.

While an overview of Florence Vere O’Brien’s organisations, Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery, outlines their development and growth, it is essential to examine the broader context of international and national influences in order to understand the complexities of how their identities were constructed. I first explore how international ideologies were adapted and interpreted within the Irish context, then I analyse how the national movement of the Celtic Revival promoted a particular brand of national identity based in Folk culture and authentic “Irishness.” Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery both functioned within these larger international and national frameworks to create and promote a particular identity that was embodied in their respective crafts.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland

The Arts and Crafts movement was not officially promoted in Ireland until the formation of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland in 1894. Created under the guidance of Lord Mayo, the society originated with a series of lectures arranged to educate the Irish about “appropriate” art production.\textsuperscript{131} The main purpose of the society was to associate art with life and “to make the exercise of handicraft even more a mental than a physical effort.”\textsuperscript{132} Stressing the importance of sound craftsmanship and individuality over imitating “perverse models,” such as machine-made goods, Lord Plunkett explained the need for Arts and Crafts ideologies in Ireland in a 1907 essay:

Our surroundings have become out of harmony with refined thought; and the sense of beauty, common to rich and poor, is being deadened in both.

\textsuperscript{130} “The Embroidery Class,” County Clare Museum Website, \url{http://www.clarelibrary.ie}.


\textsuperscript{132} Plunkett, 224.
Skill, imagination, grace, fitness, put below the conveniences of commerce, should be restored to their rightful pre-eminence. The individual work, producing results that machinery cannot touch, should have the opportunity of providing his gifts for those who value them.”

The first exhibition arranged by the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland was held in Dublin in 1895, one year after the society's formation. The works created under the umbrella of the Irish Arts and Crafts movement were inspired by three distinct elements: ancient Celtic mythology; noble legends of High Kings and Queens; and the British Arts and Crafts movement, particularly the writings of Ruskin and Morris. The focus on ancient Celtic mythology was used as a distinctively Irish parallel to the British focus on Gothic, medieval culture. Celtic mythology was Ireland's example of a pre-industrial past. This history was romanticised as revealing the very essence of Ireland, constructed as a time when Irish culture was untainted, and craft production and life was most pure and authentic. The interest in the Celtic period demonstrated the longing for what was perceived as a purer, less complicated era, a desire that consistently characterised the Arts and Crafts movement in all its international variations. This idealisation of the Celtic period in Ireland was not only used within an Arts and Crafts ideological framework, but was also embodied within a separate, very nationalist movement that came to be known as the Celtic Revival, to be discussed later in this chapter.

While the British Arts and Crafts movement was a direct inspiration for the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland, it was clear that the Irish style was intended to be distinct and individualised from that of the British. Works in the British style were criticised for artificiality by Irish reformers: “The re-action from vulgarity in England, like the Romantic period in literature, was in its beginnings so artificial that it naturally failed to convince the

133 Plunkett, 224.
‘practical man’: hence all reform in design was, for a time, usually accounted ridiculous.”136 It was clear that the British ideologies of reform could be adapted to an Irish framework, but that copying or imitating British stylistic models was perceived as a false example of what the Irish Arts and Crafts movement represented.

Part of this abhorrence of imitating British models related to the political and economic relationship between England and Ireland. The Arts and Crafts movement was based partially in a reaction against the perceived ills caused by the Industrial Revolution. The economic situation in Ireland was quite different from that in England or even that in the United States during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Ireland had not experienced the massive increase of mechanised production that characterised industrialisation; in fact, Ireland was still mostly agrarian at this time.137 The poor conditions for many people in Ireland were often blamed on England’s refusal to allow Ireland to industrialise.138 In Ireland, by this point in history, there was strong support for autonomy from British rule, the Home Rule movement having begun in 1870.139 Many reformers, seeking to establish Ireland as a “core” rather than “peripheral” economic and political power, attempted to free the country from the domination of English rule.140 Supporters of the Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland were often also members of the

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138 Bowe and Cumming, Arts and Crafts Movements, 78.
139 Kaplan, “Traditions Transformed,” 23. The Home Rule Movement (1870 – 1916) is described as “expressing the growing desire for independence which also led to the founding of Sinn Fein in Ireland after the turn of the century, the violent Rebellion of 1916, the Anglo-Irish War (1919 – 1921), and finally to the dissolution of the Act of Union with England in 1912 and the establishment of the Irish Free State (Saorstat Eireann).” (T.J. Edelstein, Richard A. Born, and Sue Taylor, “Introduction,” in Imagining an Irish Past: The Celtic Revival 1840 – 1940, ed. T.J. Edelstein, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992, xiv). Although the Home Rule Movement was defined as above, it is important to note that there were varying degrees of support. This idea will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
140 Kaplan, “Traditions Transformed,” 23.
Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Society;\(^{141}\) the artistic and social reform of the Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland was often inextricably linked to the larger economic and political framework of developing an independent state – associations that politicised the Irish manifestation of the Arts and Crafts movement much more than those manifestations in either England or the United States.\(^{142}\) In Ireland, “the [Arts and Crafts] movement was as much concerned with political, social and cultural ideology as the making of beautiful, functional, materially fitting objects.”\(^{143}\)

The Irish interpretation of the Arts and Crafts movement took from the British movement the “moral aesthetic, adherence to regionalism, and glorification of ‘the simple life’ and the hand-made.”\(^{144}\) These ideologies, which venerated pre-industrial, rural life, were easily adopted within the Irish context. In fact, the lack of industrialisation in Ireland – which was blamed on British resistance to Ireland accumulating any independent wealth and power – made adopting these Arts and Crafts notions appear as part of a natural process based on the current situation of Irish society. Arts and Crafts reformers in Ireland could easily adopt and interpret a pre-industrial stance because Ireland was pre-industrial, in that the country had never fully endured the modernising processes of the Industrial Revolution.

While Lord Mayo provided the impetus to establish officially the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland in 1894, his wife was involved in helping to institutionalise the

\(^{141}\) Kaplan, “Lamp of British Precedent,” in “The Art that is Life”: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875 - 1920, ed. Wendy Kaplan (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 59. The Gaelic League was founded in Ireland in 1893 by Douglas Hyde. The purpose of the organisation was to restore the “true” Irish language to “its place in the reverence of the people” (Bowe and Cumming, Arts and Crafts Movements, 79).

\(^{142}\) It is true the English movement was quite politicised, especially in later years with Morris’ interest in socialist movements. It is also true, however, that much of Morris’ later involvements in politics were often dissociated from the British Arts and Crafts movement. The interpretation of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the United States was almost always discursively separated from any notion of politics, often simply defined in terms of an objective sense of artistry and simple joy in labour.

\(^{143}\) Bowe and Cumming, Arts and Crafts Movements, 77.

\(^{144}\) Kaplan, “Traditions Transformed,” 23.
movement’s ideologies. In the same year as the beginning of the society, Countess Mayo revived the “home of art needlework” when she took over the Royal Irish School of Art Needlework in Dublin. Originally started thirty years earlier by the then Lord Lieutenant’s wife Countess Cowper, the school had fallen upon hard times until Countess Mayo took over its management. Clearly modelled on its British namesake, the purpose of the school was to promote and improve the practice of the Artistic Handicrafts in Ireland – and all of the work of an ornamental and decorative character. The Society hoped to be able to develop much natural talent which is now unused or misdirected – and in various ways to aid Irish Craftsmen in regaining for their work the high repute it once possessed for excellence of workmanship and artistic taste.

Under Countess Mayo’s direction, the school employed approximately thirty full-time workers and became financially self-supporting. Aside from the training and work that was carried out within the school itself, instruction was provided to convents and ladies to help disseminate proper needlework and craft skills to the population at large. In a 1907 article written by Mrs. Domville entitled “Art Embroidery in Ireland,” the school was credited for raising the standard of art needlework all over Ireland.

NATIONAL INFLUENCES: Home Arts and Industries

While the Arts and Crafts movement was officially adopted in Ireland in 1894 through the establishment of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland and revival of the Royal Irish School of Art Needlework, it is incorrect to assume that artistic and social reform had not been taking place in Ireland prior to this time. While the founding of each explicitly

146 Domville, 227.
149 Domville, 227.
150 Domville, 227.
promulgated the ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement, developments were already taking place on a national level in the Irish revival of handicrafts beginning in the 1880s, mainly under the title of home arts and industries.\(^{151}\) Many of these home arts and industries applied ideologies that would later be associated with the Arts and Crafts movement – design and work reform – and often participated in Arts and Crafts exhibitions, although each association “had its own unique characteristics usually reflecting the influence of the founder or founders of the specific organisation.”\(^{152}\) The organisations operating under the label of the home arts and industries – with ties to the British Home Arts and Industries Association – were often “directed by educated middle-class women… [and] successfully intertwined art, entrepreneurial activity, and philanthropy, with an unusual brand of nationalism.”\(^{153}\) Although Florence Vere O’Brien’s organisations – Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery – had obvious ties to the ideologies of the Arts and Crafts movement, both of her industries were directly connected to the home arts and industries.

One of the first organisations in the latter half of the nineteenth century to fit under this category was the Donegal Industrial Fund. Established by Englishwoman Alice Hart in December 1883 (the same year Vere O’Brien first became interested in Limerick lace), the Donegal Industrial Fund was founded to help relieve the immense poverty felt in the wake of the Donegal Famine (1879-1883).\(^{154}\) This industry gradually developed into one of the most successful philanthropic ventures in Ireland.\(^{155}\) Through the Donegal Industrial Fund, Hart set up classes where “new styles of artistic work could be taught, and better designs and materials provided,” then arranged for the products to

\(^{155}\) Larmour, *Arts and Crafts*, 18.
be sold through a store she opened herself, exhibitions, and established London shops.\textsuperscript{156} Hart developed a new style of embroidery called Kells Art Embroidery.\textsuperscript{157} Introduced in 1885 and based upon designs found in the Book of Kells, an Irish illuminated manuscript written early in the ninth century, this type of embroidery related to the search for an authentic Irish identity that could be portrayed through art and design. Vere O’Brien had a cooperative relationship with Hart, exhibiting at the Donegal Industrial Fund’s 1888 Irish Village at Olympia, England and using the fund’s depot to sell her lace works.\textsuperscript{158} The Donegal Industrial Fund thrived throughout the 1880s and 90s, but faded during the early-twentieth century as other organisations – such as the Dun Emer Guild, which was run by Irishwomen who could claim a more direct and “authentic” connection to Irish identity – gained popularity.\textsuperscript{159} Arguably, the most well-known and influential proponent of home arts and industries in Ireland was Lady Aberdeen. In February 1886, Lord Aberdeen was appointed Viceroy of Ireland.\textsuperscript{160} His wife, Lady Aberdeen, immediately upon her arrival in Ireland, immersed herself in the craft revival already underway in the country. In preparation for Ireland’s display in the International Industrial Exhibition to be held in Edinburgh later in 1886, Lady Aberdeen formed the Irish Industries Association in order to gather and organise Irish works.\textsuperscript{161} After her initial foray into organising craft industries for the purpose of the exhibition in Edinburgh, Aberdeen became interested in permanently establishing this association as a nucleus organisation to keep track of all

\textsuperscript{157} Helland, “Exhibiting Ireland: The Donegal Industrial Fund in London and Chicago,” 32.
\textsuperscript{159} Helland, “Working Bodies, Celtic Textiles, and the Donegal Industrial Fund,” 151.
\textsuperscript{160} Rowe, “Clare Embroidery,” 51.
\textsuperscript{161} Larmour, Arts and Crafts, 49.
the cottage industries scattered around Ireland.\textsuperscript{162} Originally, she attempted to make links with the British-based Home Arts and Industries Association; when this amalgamation did not work out, Aberdeen decided to maintain the Irish Industries Association as an autonomous organisation under her supervision.\textsuperscript{163} The three main objectives of Aberdeen’s association were: to organise and promote home and cottage industries; to provide practical assistance to workers; and to find a market for products.\textsuperscript{164} In order to ensure Irish workers included under the umbrella of the Irish Industries Association were able to find the largest market, Aberdeen purchased the Irish Lace Depot in Dublin after the 1893 death of merchant Ben Lindsey, who had opened the depot in 1868.\textsuperscript{165} In an attempt to increase sales of Irish work, Lady Aberdeen opened a second depot in London.\textsuperscript{166}

Aberdeen was responsible for one of two Irish Villages set up at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago; Hart managed the other. These two displays were originally intended as a joint venture between Aberdeen and Hart, but the two women were unable to agree upon the terms of the exhibition and each organised her own separate Irish Village.\textsuperscript{167} In preparation for her display at the World’s Fair, in 1892 Lady Aberdeen embarked upon a tour throughout Ireland in search of crafts to include in her Irish Village.\textsuperscript{168} Including lace works produced by Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace School as well as one of the students, Aberdeen’s Irish Village was the first time Vere O’Brien’s lace was displayed on such an international scale. It is unclear why, when Vere O’Brien had previous ties with Hart, she chose to participate in Aberdeen’s Irish Village rather than Hart’s. The fact that there were two Irish Villages was rooted in the discord

\textsuperscript{162} Larmour, \textit{Arts and Crafts}, 49 – 50.  
\textsuperscript{163} Larmour, 49 – 50.  
\textsuperscript{164} Boyle, \textit{The Irish Flowerers}, 94.  
\textsuperscript{165} Bowe and Cumming, \textit{Arts and Crafts Movements}, 88.  
\textsuperscript{166} Rowe, “Clare Embroidery,” 52.  
\textsuperscript{167} Larmour, \textit{Arts and Crafts}, 21.  
\textsuperscript{168} Larmour, 50.
between Hart and Aberdeen, which may have originated from Hart’s resistance to the Donegal Industrial Fund being subsumed under the umbrella of the Irish Industries Association lead by Aberdeen.\textsuperscript{169} This tension coupled with the two women’s class differences and political disagreements in regards to Irish Home Rule only exacerbated the situation.\textsuperscript{170} These circumstances would seem to suggest that Vere O’Brien was forced to chose one exhibition over the other – and thus align herself with either Aberdeen or Hart.\textsuperscript{171} Perhaps in terms of political and organisational opinions, Vere O’Brien began to feel more affiliated with Aberdeen’s thinking rather than Hart’s. Or perhaps Aberdeen’s strong connections and influence made her a welcome ally; while Hart’s Donegal Industrial Fund was strong enough to survive without Aberdeen’s help, Vere O’Brien may have felt her organisation was not.\textsuperscript{172} Either way, the two Irish exhibitions at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago introduced Irish crafts to an expanding consumer market. The inclusion of Vere O’Brien’s works in Lady Aberdeen’s exhibition explicitly and permanently identified her lace within international markets as tied to the home arts and industries reform taking place within Ireland at the time.

\textsuperscript{170} Helland, 38. Aberdeen was aristocratic and Hart was middle-class. Aberdeen’s organisations were “focused upon a traditional kind of cottage industry and promoted the making of luxury goods” while Hart was more interested in “education, training, and the production of art, as well as, the making of wearable luxury items.” In terms of Home Rule for Ireland, “Aberdeen staunchly supported Home Rule,” although “it was Home Rule that respected the English monarchy and aristocracy.” Hart, however, “considered the English aristocracy largely responsible for the ills of Ireland” (Helland, 38).
\textsuperscript{171} I could not find any information on whether Hart and Vere O’Brien had further business arrangements after the 1893 Chicago’s World’s Fair. Presumably, Vere O’Brien’s participation with Aberdeen’s Irish Village over Hart’s would have severed their working relationship, but I could find no sources that either supported or disputed this fact.
\textsuperscript{172} Helland, “Exhibiting Ireland: The Donegal Industrial Fund in London and Chicago,” 38.
The Celtic Revival

Both Alice Hart’s and Lady Aberdeen’s displays at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair brought Irish crafts to the notice of Americans. The purpose of Lady Aberdeen’s Irish exhibition was to introduce “Americans to the quaint charms of rural Ireland, demonstrating its historic past and persuading potential customers that Irish industry and handicrafts – particularly lace making, linen weaving, spinning, and embroidery – were alive and well.” Part of this display, in which Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace played a role, was based on the notion of Ireland’s rural, primitive, and pastoral life, projections that were meant to convey the idea that this situation was representative of the present rather than a disconnected past. This display, while it economically supported Irish goods and handicrafts, “reinforced stereotyped visions of Ireland as a backward peasant society, whose depressed inhabitants needed help from their better-educated and sympathetic patrons.” In this way, Celtic Folk and peasant life remained defined as the Other who needed help and control, which further justified British rule. This hegemonic relationship is complicated, as people who supported either a wholly independent Irish state or Home Rule that still paid homage to the British monarchy utilised design motifs that came to be associated with the Celtic Revival, an Irish

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173 Rowe, “Clare Embroidery,” 52. Although there were, in fact, two distinct Irish Villages – one run by Alice Hart and the other by Lady Aberdeen – I’ve decided to focus my discussion here on the latter due to Florence Vere O’Brien’s associations with that one at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. It should be noted, however, that many of the comments I make in this section regarding how Aberdeen’s Irish Village affected and created perceptions of Irish national identity can also apply to Hart’s Irish Village.


175 Harris, 99.

176 Harris, 99 – 100.

177 In much of the literature relating to the Celtic Revival in Ireland, the term peasant is often used in the manner with which I apply the term Folk. In order to stay true to my own approach and methodology, I will most often use the term Folk within this discussion. When I do use the term peasant, I am referring to a particular class of people who were a rural, agrarian group. I would, however, like to acknowledge this discrepancy in order to situate my research and critique within previous studies.
nationalist movement that attempted to define authentic Irish identity as inextricably tied to its Celtic roots in order to empower Ireland.178

The search for a pre-industrial, authentic past in late-nineteenth-century Ireland contributed to the development of the Celtic Revival. The notion of a Celtic style and revival within Ireland began with several archaeological discoveries in the 1840s.179 The Tara Brooch, discovered in 1850, and the Ardagh Chalice, found in 1868, “became emblematic of a glorious Irish past...[their] motifs of bands and animal interlace, inland stones and filigree scrollwork became the standard design vocabulary of the Celtic Revival.”180 These examples of Celtic work, along with Irish illuminated manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, received increased interest and established these Celtic motifs as the visual vocabulary and stylistic backbone of Irish national identity. Symbols such as the shamrock, harp, Irish wolfhound, and round tower were used as obvious emblems of “Irishness” to distinguish and characterise Irish works.181 While later these images became integrated into the Arts and Crafts movement’s ideologies that romanticised a pre-industrial past, the Celtic Revival began in Ireland several decades before Lord Mayo formally institutionalised the Irish Arts and Crafts movement in 1894.

Like other national movements occurring during the same period, such as the Gothic Revival in Britain and the Colonial Revival in the United States, the Celtic Revival in Ireland sought an idealised past that could define, connect, and anchor the present. A major difference, however, between the Gothic and Colonial Revivals and the Celtic Revival was the manner in which the past and present were disconnected. The Gothic Revival in England and Colonial Revival in the United States, each heavily influenced by Ruskin’s writings idealising a pre-industrial past, were lamenting a time that was

disconnected from the present by the Industrial Revolution. This rift between the past and present was viewed as a natural side-effect of modernisation, and reformers believed that the gap could be bridged through reviving the pre-industrial spirit. In Ireland, however, there was no true Industrial Revolution against which to react. Instead, the Celtic period “was idealised as a golden age, since it preceded British colonisation.” The modernisation that was associated with the process of industrialisation in Britain and the United States was affiliated with the arrival of British Imperialism in Ireland. This economic and political situation in Ireland had a massive affect on the way in which artistic and social reform was viewed.

The perception that Britain was the modern force to be reacted against in the Celtic Revival in its search for Irish national identity resulted in the idealisation of Irish Folk culture. Modernity in Ireland was viewed as a top-down process, brought to the country through English colonialism and the Act of Union of 1800. Celtic culture became “aligned with the medieval, with the pre-modern, the archaic and the maladapted; with all those things whose inevitable fate it was to be vanquished by modernity.” As international movements began promoting the return to the pastoral past, reformers in Ireland sought to characterise their own distinctive culture, separate from the imposition of British modern society. The relationship between modern coloniser and primitive colonised is described in a 2005 article by Emer Nolan:

The modern, in colonial conditions, is associated with ‘foreignness’, domination and violence; it is in no sense naturalised in the course of a long process of economic and social development. It is precisely in such

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182 I am not suggesting here that there were absolutely no industrialised areas of Ireland as, for example, the linen industry in the north of Ireland had become quite industrialised during the nineteenth century. I am only stating that relative to the widespread changes experienced in other parts of the world – such as England and the United States – Ireland had no true Industrial Revolution.


185 Cleary, 3.
a situation that the culturally ‘old’ appears most intensely valuable, and becomes the object of political contestation. For while it may virtually obliterate traditional culture, such an experience of modernisation also confers an auratic significance on the remnants of the archaic. 186

Reformers in Ireland used Irish Folk and peasant culture – including stories, music, and handicrafts – as the natural “cultural core” before it was complicated by modernised British culture. It was within these national economic and political conditions that Florence Vere O’Brien’s two organisations – Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery – operated in the late-nineteenth century in Ireland.

LOCAL APPLICATIONS: Craft and Philanthropy

Folk culture in Ireland in the late-nineteenth century was used to promote an ideal of Irish authenticity. The Folk was used to distinguish “those aspects of popular culture which have long been established in agrarian society and are associated with a particular way of life – especially that of peasants – from more recent and non-rural forms.”187 As Ireland sought to differentiate itself from the modernity of British colonialism, Irish Folk culture was re-defined as a high culture, a way of elevating existing Folk and peasant traditions from their submissive role to the dominant British way of life.188 While this Folk culture was treated as an element common to all Irish, it was generally constructed that only through the guidance of an educated middle- and upper-class could the true potential of this culture be achieved. These higher classes were perceived as having the cultural essence of the Folk, but through education and contact with modernity, became slightly removed from the primitive, naturalism associated with rural peasants. Therefore, while people of the middle- and upper-

188 Notion of making Folk culture into high culture suggested by Ó Gialláin, 226.
classes were able to justify their use of Folk motifs, it was mainly their involvement with
the peasant classes, who were viewed as the living continuum of Folk traditional life, that
they were able to participate. In this way, a mainly female upper-middle-class group
took on the task of reviving Irish craft production through charitable endeavours. This
craft philanthropy developed as a “blatant form of benevolent colonialism,” where
boundaries were “mercantile rather than military, directed toward self-help rather than
external control.”

In Ireland, much of the handicraft revival, particularly that related to lace,
operated as a charitable, philanthropic effort where the lower classes were directed in
labour by the educated higher classes. After the 1845-1849 famine in Ireland, there was
an increase in convents providing craftwork to lower-class women desperate for added
income. The most extensive welfare programmes were established through Catholic
nuns and convents. As textile production gained momentum as an appropriate form
of reform activity, more secular organisations became involved. Middle- and upper-class
women, in particular, played an integral role in establishing textile industries designed as
altruistic efforts to elevate the status of crafts and peasant women’s handiwork.

Although many of these organisations established by middle- and upper-class women
were arranged outside the direct influence of the Church, these voluntary efforts to help
the lower-classes were considered part of their Christian duty; it was a way in which a
sense of middle- and upper-class morality could be imposed upon the lower-classes.

Vere O’Brien’s involvement with convents in the area during the 1880s, such as the

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189 Janice Helland, “Embroidered Spectacle: Celtic Revival as aristocratic display,” in The Irish
Revival Reappraised, eds Betsey Taylor Fitzsimon and James H. Murphy (Dublin: Four Courts
Press, 2004), 104.
191 Maria Luddy, “Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,” in Women,
Philanthropy, and Civil Society, ed. Kathleen D. McCarthy (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,
2001), 10.
192 Maria Luddy, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge
Convent of the Good Shepherd, reveals how sacred and secular charitable works were closely related.

These philanthropic endeavours “reaffirmed the traditional role played by middle- and upper-class women. It offered new opportunities as women went beyond local and individual dispensation of charity to establishing city, state, and national organisations that required substantial management and design skills.”

Many of the women involved in craft philanthropy were often formally trained in textiles and design, and had the economic privilege to be free from labour. Establishing a craft organisation enabled middle- and upper-class women to operate within a public domain, but for reasons that did not transgress the appropriate standards of femininity; setting up a charitable organisation that sought to help working-class women through craft reform offered women often disconnected from the public marketplace a way to gain economic power in an appropriately feminine way.

When Florence Vere O’Brien first became involved with Limerick lace in 1883, it was for the dual purpose of reviving the craft itself and providing trained peasant women with employment. Vere O’Brien’s early work with lace was very focussed on elevating the objects already being produced by older, trained women through the use of better designs and materials. Through supplying the workers with designs and materials, Vere O’Brien was able to provide consistent employment that was increasingly well-paid as the reputation of her lace became more widespread.

It was, however, Vere O’Brien’s educational initiatives that truly represented her philanthropic spirit. Both the Limerick Lace School (1893) and Clare Embroidery (1895) were opened with the sole purpose of teaching employable and financially viable skills to young girls in the region. Both organisations provided training to all students free of charge.

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charge and were financially dependent on the Vere O’Brien family alone. This financial burden on the family was not small: Vere O’Brien states that the amount of money to maintain the Limerick Lace School was “a very heavy expense” on her husband and worried how long the family would be able to maintain the cost.\footnote{Florence Vere O’Brien as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 53.} Aside from money used to pay teachers and purchase materials, all profits went to the students or workers manually responsible for any crafts sold.\footnote{Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 54.}

Vere O’Brien’s involvement with philanthropy was in no way simply a middle-class woman dabbling with craft. Vere O’Brien was very much aware of the politics inherent to the philanthropic ventures that appeared in the late-nineteenth-century Irish landscape. While there was no writing specifically elucidating Vere O’Brien’s personal political viewpoints, her affinities with others whose politics were more well-known situated her opinions. Her cousin, Mary Ward, was a famous English fiction writer working in the late-nineteenth century. Ward was outspoken about the social functions of religion, such as charity and moral education, for the benefit of the poor and weak.\footnote{Judith Wilt, \textit{Behind Her Times: Transition England in the Novels of Mary Ward} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 12.} Ward was also responsible for establishing a settlement for the poor in London called the Passmore Edwards Settlement in 1897, as well as creating educational opportunities for physically disabled and poor children.\footnote{Wilt, 16.} In 1908, Ward became the first president of the Anti-Suffrage League in England.\footnote{Wilt, 14.} Vere O’Brien’s connection to Ward, whom she called her favorite cousin,\footnote{Janice Helland, \textit{British and Irish Home Arts and Industries, 1883 – 1900}, 43.} clarifies somewhat her political affiliations and demonstrates how Vere O’Brien’s work with craft and philanthropy, as well as education, was actively involved in the reform politics occurring beyond her two craft organisations.
Reform and Education

When lace was originally revived in Ireland, mainly through the efforts of convents after the 1845-1849 famine, it was used as a way to provide supplementary income to poor families. These charitable schemes attempted to teach peasant women lace-making, which had once been exclusively an upper-class activity. These attempts at promoting lace-making proved very successful, and the supply of Irish lace increased. The lace produced at this time was praised for its handiwork, but as the focus shifted to the importance of artistry and design – in thanks, mostly, to the international dissemination of the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris – Irish lace-making was criticised for its lack of innovative designs, and by the early 1880s, as an art, was viewed to be in serious decline. The beginning of lace reform in Ireland was credited to the 1883 exhibition held at Mansion House in London:

At this juncture [when the lace industry was in such dire straits] a number of important firms who had dealt with Irish lace exhibited in London at the Mansion House in 1883. Every description of Irish lace and crochet work was then displayed. The cleverness of the different sorts of handicraft is generally acknowledged, but it was felt that the artistic or ornamental taste displayed in them was not only dull but was low in standard; and a few specifically prepared specimens made from good patterns and with superior threads did not materially alter this feeling. The exhibition however served to give some hope of new possibilities in Irish lace-making, and certainly awakened new, if limited, interest.

What had prior to 1883 solely been charitable efforts to provide labour and wages to rural, peasant women became, after the Mansion House lace exhibition, inextricably linked to the increasingly popular international social and artistic reform movements.

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201 Martin, 128.
202 Larmour, Arts and Crafts, 11.
After the 1883 Mansion House exhibition, it was generally agreed upon that a true revival of lace-making in Ireland required new, artistic designs. While the charitable efforts of convents and philanthropic upper- and middle-class women were recognised on a social level, these types of organisations were perceived as ill-equipped to handle artistic reform: "benevolence usually leads to results different from the more lasting ones of commercial discipline." The need to institutionalise lace reform in Ireland was a popular idea during the period directly following Mansion House. James Brenan – the headmaster of the Cork School of Art during the 1880s and an influential lace reformer responsible for setting up classes in design at various convents as well as establishing a small class within his art school – described the need to re-organise lace-making so that it was no longer the domain of untrained amateurs:

…the development of the industry was impossible without a large business organisation. Design suitable to the changing fashions had to be provided, so that the manufactured goods could be placed to advantage on the market. These requirements of peasant women, however competent, could not fulfil.

The need to make Irish lace commercially viable was a recurring theme in the discourse during the early stages of lace reform. The irony of simultaneously attempting to modernise the lace industry in Ireland and to make it more commercial while promoting the traditional home peasant labour practices was not acknowledged.

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205 Cole, 658.
206 Cole, 655 – 6. The criticism of the untrained, amateur supervisors of philanthropic organisations dealing with lace-making was a very gendered attack. In his analysis of the Irish lace-making industry, Cole constantly refers to the fact that "benevolence does not imply artistic perceptions, or capacity to direct" (656). As the vast majority of philanthropic activities during this period were organised by women, this critique of benevolent work becomes synonymous with ill-conceived, yet well-meaning, plans undertaken by women. There seems to be, in Cole’s discussion, doubt concerning women’s abilities to design. Despite the fact that he is credited as a social and artistic reformer – and in fact did provide the impetus for many changes in the Irish lace industry – Cole appears still to fall back on the patriarchal artistic framework that relegates women to a manual, not mental, labour position.
207 Larmour, Arts and Crafts, 11.
208 Martin, “Manufacture of Lace,” 128.
Lace was not a central craft of the Arts and Crafts movement; in fact, toward the end of the nineteenth century, hand-made lace was on a steady decline, with machine-made lace deemed a worthy, almost indistinguishable, and less expensive substitute.\textsuperscript{209} Competition from foreign high quality, low priced, machine-patterned lace was viewed as having adversely affected Irish lace.\textsuperscript{210} Reforming lace-making in Ireland was a difficult task as it was “a home-based industry with geographically isolated workers, and in the course of production lace might pass through the hands of several intermediaries, who were less accessible and therefore [lace-making was] less easily ‘improved’.\textsuperscript{211} The difficulty of untrained amateurs supervising lace-making organisations, the need to develop artistic designs to differentiate hand-made lace from machine-made lace thereby making it commercially competitive, and the nature of the home-based labour made lace reform a difficult process.

Part of Brenan’s tactic to improve lace-making and design in Ireland was to educate upper- and middle-class philanthropists and peasant workers alike about good design. In 1883, the same year Florence Vere O’Brien first became involved in Limerick lace, Brenan borrowed some pieces of “exemplary antique laces” from the South Kensington Museum in London to display at the Cork Industrial Exhibition to be held that year.\textsuperscript{212} Brenan also invited Alan S. Cole – an expert in needlework from the Department of Science and Art in London – to lecture about good design during a 1883 visit to Limerick.\textsuperscript{213} After his travels around Ireland, Cole became very concerned about the state of organisation and design of contemporary lace-making.\textsuperscript{214} In 1884, Cole

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\textsuperscript{209} Wardle, \textit{Victorian Lace}, 173.
\textsuperscript{210} Bowe and Cumming, \textit{Arts and Crafts Movements}, 89.
\textsuperscript{211} Callen, \textit{Women Artists}, 144 – 5.
\textsuperscript{212} Bowe and Cumming, \textit{Arts and Crafts Movements}, 89.
\textsuperscript{213} Bowe and Cumming, 89. Cole had been planning a visit to Ireland in order to collect £200 of Irish lace for the South Kensington Museum collection (Bowe, “Contextual Introduction to Romantic Nationalism,” 185).
\textsuperscript{214} “Irish Lace-making,” \textit{The Times}, 23 January 1884, 7.
\end{flushright}
organised the Private Committee for Promoting Irish Lace in order to raise money for prizes in lace design.\textsuperscript{215} This Private Committee brought in fine Irish work – new and old – to help set a precedent for design.\textsuperscript{216} Although Vere O’Brien did not serve directly on this committee, she was involved with the project as some of the designs produced by her older workers during her early involvement with lace-making came from this competition (Figure 7).\textsuperscript{217} Vere O’Brien also had personal connections to the committee: Lord Emly (in whose house Florence and Robert first met), and Edward William O’Brien (a cousin of Robert) both served on Cole’s reform committee.\textsuperscript{218}

Cole’s efforts to introduce “good” lace to Irish lace workers through exhibitions situates his reform approach within Ruskin’s idea of missionary aestheticism. This approach, which operated within a framework of middle-class paternalism, supported the notion that teaching the Folk and peasant classes to recognise what was beautiful and good also taught them proper morals and discipline.\textsuperscript{219} Introducing Folk workers to the beauty of true art was a way in which to guide Irish national identity towards Ruskin’s conclusion in his 1862 book \textit{Unto the Last}: “That country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.”\textsuperscript{220} Vere O’Brien, who brought in examples of old lace and embroidery to both her Limerick Lace School and Clare Embroidery, used this brand of education as well. This imposition of middle-class morality on the supposedly deprived working-classes was framed within the larger issues of reform that attempted to instill a pre-industrial joy in labour. This attempt at reform, however, was severely limited in terms of the amount of power bestowed upon the working classes. Although peasants were given the education to recognise beauty

\textsuperscript{215} Ó Clérigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 47.
\textsuperscript{216} Plunkett, “Arts and Crafts Society,” 224.
\textsuperscript{217} Ó Clérigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 47.
\textsuperscript{218} Ó Clérigh and Rowe, 47.
\textsuperscript{220} John Ruskin, \textit{Unto this last and other writings} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 222.
or aesthetic “goodness” – meant to be extended to their everyday life and moral “goodness” – the workers were not given any agency as to how or what was produced. Although Vere O’Brien did, in 1901, permit twenty lace pupils to attend lace designing classes, it was she, as middle-class philanthropist, who had final judgement as to what should or should not be produced. Basically, the missionary aestheticism approach, promoted through the actions of both Cole and Vere O’Brien, only allowed the workers to appreciate the beauty of the work being imposed upon them rather than to carry such an education into works of their own creation.

It is interesting that although Vere O’Brien seemed to support missionary aestheticism as an educational approach and wanted her workers to be surrounded and inspired by beautiful objects, there was a lack of concern for the production environment of her lace workers. Ruskin’s philosophy of moral environmental imperative extols the importance of the work setting to the production of beautiful works. The Folk and peasants were perceived to be part of the “rural idyll,” a landscape with “harmonious relations between the people and nature and by extension social harmony too.”

This idealisation of the atmosphere was constructed as two separate yet interrelated settings: “one based on the English ideal of estate and village, and the other on an ‘elemental’ Irish landscape.” Vere O’Brien’s workers, as peasants, were considered to be a native part of this locale, and thereby entrenched in the natural, beautiful landscape. Yet, although the workers’ experience included the “rural idyll” as a larger circumstance, the actual production conditions – which, according to Ruskin were crucial in the creation of aesthetic works – were severely lacking. While there was an attempt in Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace School at both social and artistic reform, there seems to be a complete lack of interest in improving the home life of the workers. In fact, the poor

222 Cusack, 203.
living and working conditions was discussed almost as an inherent part of the lace-making process, one where the final product of a clean piece of lace was viewed with astonishment.

Vere O'Brien very explicitly acknowledged the poor and undesirable home life of her workers in the lace industry, yet did not try to create alternative work space. In fact, the degrading home conditions of the production of lace was used almost as a shock factor both to re-validate the need for Vere O'Brien’s presence as a social reformer in Ireland and to provide a foil for the pristine condition of the finished lace pieces. The homes of the lace workers were acknowledged with almost a flippant disregard and normalised as part of natural peasant life. The production process of Limerick lace was described by Vere O'Brien:

> These workers enter with the greatest intelligence into the idea of a new design, which we used to examine together before it was worked, either at my own house, or in their own little rooms – rooms so dark and dingy in the most dilapidated quarter...that it was a wonder how the lace could emerge, as it generally did, as clean and fresh as if made in the most well-appointed and roomy factory.223

While the needleworkers for Clare Embroidery also worked in their homes and most likely under the same poor and undesirable conditions, it was not discussed in the same way as the lace workers. Instead, in the discourse surrounding Clare Embroidery, there was a marked focus on the happy and collective atmosphere for the Clare embroiderers within Vere O'Brien’s own home in Ballyalla. One women who worked for Vere O'Brien's embroidery organisation recalls the experience: “The girls sat around the long table in the servant’s hall. Mrs Vere O’Brien used to sit at the head of the table with her pet robin on her shoulder and read stories to them. After the class there was plenty of tea,

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223 Florence Vere O’Brien as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, *Limerick Lace*, 49. The exact date of this quotation is unknown.
cake and chat."224 This disparity in the environments of the home workers and students was quite large. Vere O’Brien seemed to treat the embroidery students with a middle-class paternalism while the home lace-workers were left to fend for themselves.

**Division of Labour and Class**

The lack of an explicit monetary profit for Florence Vere O’Brien highlights the altruistic nature of her works produced in Limerick and County Clare. Her commitment to providing older women and younger girls training and supplies so they had an income and marketable skills was a noble attempt to alleviate some of the poverty experienced in rural Ireland in the late-nineteenth century. There are, however, some significant problems inherent to these philanthropic efforts. Whether dealing with the older, trained workers carrying out the labour in their own homes or the younger girls being trained and employed within Vere O’Brien’s school or home, the power relationship and class disparity was apparent. The division of labour was formulated around Vere O’Brien’s provision of designs and materials while the lower-class workers and students carried out the manual labour. This split along class lines for mental and manual labour was not uncommon. Vere O’Brien, as an upper-middle-class woman who had received formal artistic training, was constructed as the natural supervisor and educator of the lower-classes. The training Vere O’Brien provided to the students in her own schools – both Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery – focussed mainly on the utilitarian aspects of lace and embroidery; that is, the education was centred on practical aspects, such as learning the stitches or tracing Vere O’Brien’s designs onto the fabric, as opposed to the

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more artistic aspects like designing.\textsuperscript{225} In this way, Vere O’Brien’s philanthropic efforts functioned to create a culture of dependency, whereby the peasant workers were unable to continue a successful business venture – one that offered customers fashionable and innovative designs made with high quality materials – without direct guidance and supervision. This breakdown of labour responsibility of Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery replicated the larger social categories of middle-class and peasant, urban and rural, educated and Folk.

It was not until 1886 that Vere O’Brien and Cole met.\textsuperscript{226} Upon his arrival to Limerick in that year, Vere O’Brien took him to visit some of her workers in their own homes.\textsuperscript{227} Two years later, in 1888, Cole returned to Limerick to give another lecture and to show a small collection of lace brought from the South Kensington Museum.\textsuperscript{228} It was during this visit that he suggested introducing drawing classes to young lace workers.\textsuperscript{229} Vere O’Brien was a huge supporter of this plan, and was the leading force behind the committee formed to raise money to open a school that would teach lace-making.\textsuperscript{230} The result of these efforts was the Limerick Lace Training School, which opened in 1889, but involved no art design training for the workers.\textsuperscript{231} The lack of

\textsuperscript{225} The organisations established by Florence Vere O’Brien did, in fact, only offer manual training. It is, however, very important to note that Vere O’Brien did very much advocate for artistic and design training for workers. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{226} I am not sure if this is entirely true. It is possible that Cole and Vere O’Brien first met in 1883 during Cole’s first lecture tour in Limerick under Brenan’s invitation. If they did indeed meet at this earlier point, I have not been able to locate any information on this meeting.

\textsuperscript{227} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 48.

\textsuperscript{228} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 50.

\textsuperscript{229} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 50.

\textsuperscript{230} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 50.

\textsuperscript{231} It is actually somewhat unclear whether there were any drawing or design classes for students. The works promoted by the school were marketed as Vere O’Brien designs and the handiwork of students. There is no mention in any of the sources I found regarding the Limerick Lace School about works carried out that were designed through the efforts of the pupils. Other facilities, such as the Limerick School of Art, instituted design classes, but I could find no information as to who was able to attend these classes. Presumably, peasants could not afford to attend the courses, so any design instruction would, once again, be the domain of the leisurely middle-class who could find the time and money to take the courses. Other schools, such as the Kinsale Industrial School, offered three different areas of training to peasant workers: art classes,
design training in the lace school – in both its original incarnation and its later form which was under Vere O’Brien’s direct supervision – propagated the disparity of the classes associated with lace work. It is unclear what Vere O’Brien’s personal political stance was at this time on the issue of peasants designing for themselves in order to gain some level of autonomy in their work process. It is clear, however, that by 1901, Vere O’Brien was supportive of art training for her workers. Vere O’Brien arranged for twenty of her pupils at the Limerick Lace School to attend designing and art drawing classes at the Limerick School of Art; subsequently, some of the patterns designed by her pupils were used. This gesture at providing design training for peasant workers transgressed the class divide that normally characterised the lace industry. It was, however, still framed within the power dynamic whereby Vere O’Brien ultimately held control over what did or did not get made.

Although Clare Embroidery was also involved in the class dynamics inherent to this type of philanthropic venture, the Limerick Lace School especially was implicated in the severe disparity between classes. Lace was an area of much philanthropic interest, with many organisations created “to revive a dying rural craft whose products were traditionally highly prestigious, and carried a mark of wealth and social status for the wearer.” In fact, lace was the most widespread handicraft in nineteenth-century Ireland. Lace-making was predominately practiced by poor working-class women and girls in their own homes. These workers were often at the mercy of their agents, who

crochet, and cut work or lace training (Boyle, *The Irish Flowerers*, 49). While Vere O’Brien had direct connections to the Kinsale Industrial School – supplying designs and materials – and would have been aware of the training, which included art design, I do not know if this style of instruction was replicated for the workers at the Limerick Lace School.

232 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, *Limerick Lace*, 55.
233 Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 55.
collected the lace to sell and supplied more thread to the workers.\textsuperscript{236} Most often, lace “was made by barefoot women in unlit, unclean cottages along the coast of Ireland to be worn by English and Anglo-Irish ladies.”\textsuperscript{237} Lace, as the high fashion fabric from the 1880s until World War I, reached across a major class divide in Irish society. Vere O’Brien, whose lace designs adorned women of the highest level of society, such as Countess Aberdeen and even Queen Victoria,\textsuperscript{238} addressed the environments of poverty in which the workers, in their homes, produced the lace: “it was a wonder the lace could emerge, as it generally did, as clean and fresh as if made in the most well-appointed and roomy factory.”\textsuperscript{239} Vere O’Brien, although involved in philanthropic reform activities, participated fully and knowingly in the severe class divisions of producer and consumer common to the Irish lace industry. In fact, Vere O’Brien’s work practices did not veer far from the role of agents who were widely condemned with exploiting workers for their own financial gain.

\textbf{Object and Design}

Vere O’Brien demonstrated her political affiliations even before she started working with either lace or embroidery. Upon her first move to Ireland in 1880, after her adopted father’s appointment as Chief Secretary, Vere O’Brien began compiling information about the Hungarian politician Ferenc Déak.\textsuperscript{240} This interest resulted in a book

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\item \textsuperscript{236} Callen, \textit{Women Artists}, 138 – 9.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Florence Vere O’Brien as quoted in Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{240} Bowe, “Contextual Introduction to Romantic Nationalism,” 182. Ferenc is the Hungarian form of Déak’s name. Vere O’Brien referred to the politician by the English form of his name, which was Francis.
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published the same year entitled *Francis Déak, Hungarian Statesman: A Memoir.*

Déak (1803-76) was a Hungarian nationalist who advocated the recognition of Hungary as a separate kingdom from Austria and insisted upon the restoration of the Hungarian constitution. Hungary was a natural political parallel to Ireland. Both countries were under the domination of another, thereby existing as peripheral economies seeking to establish autonomy as separate and distinct nation states. Hungary’s “revolutionary zeal” was viewed as an exemplar for Ireland in terms of establishing a sense of national identity separate from that of the dominating nation – Austria-Germany and England respectively. Hungary was perceived as successfully establishing itself as an independent nation:

[Hungary] possesses a great modern literature, an equitable land-system, a world-embracing commerce, a thriving and multiplying people, and a National Government. Hungary is a Nation. … Hungary realised that the political centre of the nation must be within the nation. When Ireland realises this obvious truth and turns her back on London the parallel may be complete.

Déak was viewed as the political impetus that enabled Hungary to distinguish itself as independent. Vere O’Brien’s book on Déak demonstrated that she was very much aware of political reforms occurring at the time and connected the social reform aspect of her organisations to the larger framework of the search for national identity that was taking place at the end of the nineteenth century.

Vere O’Brien was not alone in making parallels between Ireland and Hungary. Joseph McBrinn, in his 2002 essay “The Peasant and Folk Art Revival in Ireland, 1890 –

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241 The dates of this book by Vere O’Brien (who, at the time of publication, was still Arnold-Forster) vary. Several sources list the publication date as 1881, but the actual date listed on the book itself is 1880.


245 Griffith, xxiii.
1920,” outlined the similarities in the ways people in both countries utilised an idealised notion of Folk and peasant culture in order to define national identity: “Ireland’s peasantry, located on the geographical and political fringes of Europe and the British Empire, possessed more than a passing resemblance to those of the Romanov and the Hapsburg Empires, and so too did its folk art revival reflect those in Russia and Austro-Hungary.”

Both Ireland and Hungary were situated within the desire “amongst the wealthy and educated, to both preserve the customs, traditions and crafts of a ‘national’ peasantry and at the same time elevate their miserable lot” occurring throughout the United Kingdom and Continental Europe. The political similarities of the two countries – both seeking independence from a ruling power – made Hungary and Hungarian nationalism a commonly used parallel in discussions regarding Irish nationhood during the late-nineteenth century.

Vere O’Brien’s sense of Irish nationalism was interesting as she was a relative newcomer to Ireland when she first involved herself in the politics of the country. Having been raised in England by adoptive parents with close ties to the British government, it is interesting that Vere O’Brien was so captivated by Irish cultural

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247 McBrinn, 15.
249 I was unable to find any evidence either supporting or refuting this statement. Finding any information concerning Vere O’Brien’s life, except for perfunctory biographical date, proved impossible throughout my research. It does seem, though, in the absence of any mention that Vere O’Brien was not heavily involved in Irish politics prior to her move in 1880. Her close family connections to politics, however, would have made it near impossible for Vere O’Brien to be ignorant of any of the political situations occurring contemporaneously in Ireland.
nationalism. Her involvement, however, does make sense in terms of international developments taking place and should not be read necessarily as politically radical. The Arts and Crafts movement and the home arts and industries organisations were attempting social and artistic reform in Ireland during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Each of these movements promoted the search for a vernacular style that could be used to define the “cultural essence” of nation, often exploiting the notion of Folk and peasant culture as the most unrefined, “natural” form of a nation’s character.

Vere O’Brien, whether she personally supported Home Rule for Ireland or not, was able to situate both her organisations in a way that was depoliticised through the mass acceptance and normalisation of Folk and peasant culture as a necessary part of defining region and nation. Coupled with her work with Cole, who was part of a mainstream British institution, Vere O’Brien’s politics were a non-aggressive way to participate in both the more radical and mainstream versions of Irish nationalism. Vere O’Brien’s interests in the political activism and nation building of Hungary extended beyond social reform. While influenced by the politics of Déak and Hungary, Vere O’Brien was also very influenced artistically by Hungarian Folk motifs. Vere O’Brien’s designs for Clare Embroidery very closely resembled Folk embroidery.

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250 Vere O’Brien’s interest, as an Englishwoman, in Irish nationalism is not an isolated or rare phenomenon. Lady Aberdeen, one of the largest proponents in the development of Irish craft and design, was also British. While it could be interpreted that Vere O’Brien’s use of “distinctly Irish” motifs and designs posits her politics on the side supporting Irish independence, I would argue that Vere O’Brien’s interest in Irish Home Rule is most likely closely aligned with that of Aberdeen’s. This support is one that recognised a distinct and original Irish culture, but only encouraged any sense of independence or Home Rule that still acknowledged the supremacy of the English monarchy and aristocracy. Participating in a movement that utilised romanticised symbols and images of Ireland enabled Vere O’Brien to market her goods to an international and national customer base eager to buy into an authentic Irish cultural nationalism, but did not necessarily expose her personal political affiliations. This description of Vere O’Brien’s possible opinions on Home Rule and Irish independence is adapted from Helland’s description of Aberdeen’s viewpoint on the same subject matter. Helland, “Exhibiting Ireland: The Donegal Industrial Fund in London and Chicago,” 38.

251 Cusack, “Migrant Travellers and Touristic Idyls,” 201.
produced in Hungary in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (see Figures 8, 9, 10).\textsuperscript{252}

This use of Hungarian motifs related to the perception of Folk and peasant culture during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The notion of a Folk culture that represented the “cultural essence” of a nation by existing as a sect of society untouched by the ills of modernity was naturalised in the nineteenth century. Each region or nation was presumed to have examples of the historical continuation of an idealised past residing in the rural, pastoral countryside. Nations, in order to define themselves as culturally distinctive from other countries, looked to the Folk to represent authentic character. Cusack explains the effects of this search for identity as having “created conditions and needs shared with other modern states…[which] gave rise to common discourses.”\textsuperscript{253} Through this process, Folk became both a universal and particular – that is both a plural and singular – characteristic.\textsuperscript{254} The concept is universal in that it was presumed Folk was an underlying category present in all nations, and it was through the return to the pre-modern, pre-industrial period – paradoxically constructed to be only possible through the efforts of an educated middle-class – that this “true” character could be revived in the present, modern time. Yet, although it was presumed that the Folk

\textsuperscript{252} The stylistic similarities between Vere O’Brien’s Clare Embroidery designs and Hungarian Folk arts was originally suggested in Bowe, “Contextual Introduction to Romantic Nationalism,” 182. One way this artistic appropriation could be interpreted is as a Gramscian affinity with the Hungarian national movement, in that Vere O’Brien was utilising motifs to show her, and by extension Ireland’s, interest in and support of national independence and a distinctive identity. This line of analysis, which would promote Vere O’Brien’s personal politics as quite radical, is not supported nor even suggested in any writings discussing Vere O’Brien’s organisations. In fact, quite the opposite is suggested, where Vere O’Brien’s lace and embroidery is discussed specifically as a development of the particular region.

\textsuperscript{253} Cusack, “Migrant travellers and Touristic Idylls,” 202.

\textsuperscript{254} In her essay on the paintings of Jack B. Yeats, Cusack explores similar issues of the universal and particular of the Folk, although she uses the terms extra-national and national. In regards to her methodology in discussing Yates, she states: “I examine in what sense Yeats’s travellers and landscapes have been constructed as ‘Irish’ and what relation to such representations the Anglo-Irish like Yeats might have. However, I also propose a reading of Yeats’s figures in terms of broader discourses of travellers which, although extra-national, provide symbolic identifications for the emerging middle class of the new nation” (Cusack, 201). Although Cusack is exploring notions of physical travel in her article, I feel the cultural “travel” of ideas of the Folk make her methodological approach applicable here.
existed as an underlying defining and authentic characteristic of all nations, each nation was expected to identify and distinguish this “cultural essence” from that of other nations. In this way, Folk becomes the particular. The Folk was constructed as the true descendent of a way of life, but was necessarily finely tuned through the awareness, knowledge and efforts of the educated middle-class. It was only through this refining that the Folk could become useful to national identity.

The notion of Folk as extra-nationally present yet nationally particular was only possible through modern developments such as print culture, travel and tourism, and World’s Fairs, all of which enabled more international contact than even before. As ideas, people, and objects circulated in ever expanding areas, the transfer of cross-cultural and cross-national elements became possible. The Folk as universal and particular falls into this category. The construction of Folk as a universal element allowed motifs to be appropriated and modified into the particular by a nation, in this case Ireland. Vere O’Brien’s use of Hungarian Folk motifs in her designs for Clare Embroidery related to the middle-class ownership of the Folk and Folk traditions as well as the increasing transfer of information through nineteenth-century modernisation. I was unable to locate writings contemporaneous to Vere O’Brien’s organisations that suggested these possibilities. Yet her 1880 book on Ferenc Déak and Hungarian politics connected her to Hungary and, with her personal interest in crafts, makes a strong case for the possibility of Vere O’Brien coming into contact with Hungarian Folk embroidery, and adapting it to suit her own national and artistic agenda.

While the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century experienced unprecedented international contact, the hybridity of influence in crafts was often not acknowledged. Along with the stylistic Hungarian motifs that were apparent in Vere O’Brien’s works, specifically those produced through Clare Embroidery, French peasant
embroideries were stated as the original influence.255 This style, suggested by Mina Keppie, was one that “Florence refined.”256 Aside from contributing French Folk motifs, Keppie most likely introduced elements from the Glasgow School of Art into Clare Embroidery. This style was characterised by “stylised, elongated, organic motifs including the geometricised Glasgow Rose, birds in flight – particularly the raven; plant forms drawn from early herbals; and an attenuated and conventionalised human (female) form” (Figures 11, 12).257 By the 1890s, this Glasgow Style and its embroidery – specifically designated as art embroidery – along with its promoters, many of them women, were internationally recognised.258 Keppie’s art education is unknown. However, the fact that Keppie was from Glasgow and skilled in embroidery combined with the stylistic similarities between the Glasgow style and Clare Embroidery supports my supposition of the influence of the Scottish style on Vere O’Brien’s needlework organisation.

These international influences – Hungarian, French, and Scottish – were never acknowledged or discussed in the material produced around the objects made through Clare Embroidery; in fact, the textiles produced by Clare Embroidery were always explicitly marketed as regionally-specific, Irish goods.259 The designs of Clare

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259 While Clare Embroidery was very much tied to regional identity – although it still operated within international and national frameworks - Vere O’Brien’s Limerick lace explicitly utilised recognisable Celtic motifs. An article in 1893 described a scarf made by Vere O’Brien Limerick lace workers as including some overt Celtic symbolism: “It shows a dragon at each corner, with a harp in the centre, whilst shamrocks are plentifully interspersed throughout” (Limerick Chronicle,
Embroidery were always credited as “reflect[ing] the delicate wild flowers of Clare” (Figure 13). Rooting the embroideries in a region while denying their international relationships enabled Vere O’Brien to promote her works within the framework of identifying authentic Irish culture. Developing a style through a pastiche of disparate influences – Hungarian, French, and Scottish styles and motifs adapted to elements that were regionally specific to County Clare – allowed Vere O’Brien to create a style in order to develop, rather than simply reflect and preserve, regional and national identity.

Along with the regional aspects of the works themselves, Vere O’Brien also only selected regional workers and pupils to become part of her businesses. When she created Clare Embroidery in 1895, she only selected young girls from the local vicinity. While this may be rooted in practical transportation issues, in that only girls within walking distance could logically attend the school, there was most likely an element of regionalism apparent here as well. The success of philanthropic endeavours, such as Vere O’Brien’s, hinged on finding markets for the goods in urban areas; yet, the advertising of the objects as authentic Irish embroideries depended on the associations of the work with rural, peasant populations. Relating to the notion of the Folk, Vere O’Brien only selected those workers who could most represent authentic Irish culture, but also who could justifiably work the patterns based on Clare plants and flowers. By creating patterns supposedly based solely on a region’s natural surroundings and allowing only Irish peasant workers, the bearers of Ireland’s “cultural essence,” from the

24 June 1893; as quoted in Ó Clérigh and Rowe, Limerick Lace, 51). The use of harps and shamrocks were part of the design vocabulary of the Celtic Revival and would have immediately associated works with Irish national identity.


The notion of textile industries creating rather than just preserving national identity was suggested in Paterson, “Crafting a national identity,” 106.

region to work the textiles, Vere O’Brien was ensuring her embroideries were firmly situated in a romanticised region that could be constructed as a building block of Irish national identity.

Vere O’Brien promoted the works of both her companies – Limerick Lace School and Clare Embroidery – as anchored in and representative of specific regions. The names of the industries themselves were indicative of this. While marketed internationally under the umbrella of Irish crafts – such as during Lady Aberdeen’s Irish Village exhibition at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago – the works were specifically allied with a particular region. In order to root further her objects in each respective region, Vere O’Brien used a logo that immediately identified an object’s association with region and place.\textsuperscript{264} In 1906, the City of Limerick authorised the use of the city arms as “a badge of excellence” for Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace School.\textsuperscript{265} The appearance of this emblem on the objects immediately associated the objects with Limerick and Ireland, as well as the ideologies of the organisation itself.\textsuperscript{266}

Florence Vere O’Brien’s two craft organisations, Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery, managed to interweave international, national, and regional frameworks into a distinctive identity for itself and its crafts. This identity was individualised, yet was the sum of parts that incorporated elements immediately recognisable as associated with the Arts and Crafts movement and Celtic Revival.

\textsuperscript{264} The notion of logo and modernity is discussed in detail in the following chapter concerning the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. While that discussion is also applicable here, due to the confines of space, I will not elaborate on this idea in both chapters.

\textsuperscript{265} Ó Clérigh and Rowe, \textit{Limerick Lace}, 60.

\textsuperscript{266} Clare Embroidery also had a logo, one that consisted of Vere O’Brien’s initials – FVOB (Figure 14). It is interesting that she did not develop a design that reflected the region, particularly since all the designs for the embroideries were rooted in plants and flowers native to County Clare. It is possible that Vere O’Brien’s fame and popularity within the Irish craft community was so well-known at this time that her name would automatically register a specific set of ideologies, and therefore denote region anyway.
There is possibility for much more research on Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery. Despite the recognition given to each organisation and Vere O’Brien’s work in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ireland, there is very little evidence of critical work carried out on this subject. Vere O’Brien was an important figure within the craft revival and the use of craft in the formation of identity. There is opportunity for further studies of Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery to engage critically with the way in which craft, gender, and class operated within the larger dialogic frameworks of international, national, and local identity.
Chapter 3

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, like Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery, formulated an identity that integrated international and national influences. I will engage critically with how the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework created and promoted an identity for itself and its crafts through localising international and national frameworks in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States. In the first part of this chapter, I give an overview of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. Then I present an examination of how the international ideologies of the Arts and Crafts movement were applied in the United States. Following that discussion, I explore how the Colonial Revival affected nationalistic discourse and design during the nineteenth century. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I analyse how the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework functioned within these larger frameworks. I examine the way in which identity was created by this craft organisation through looking at: gender, craft, and heritage; division of labour and cultural inheritance; moral environmental imperative and production; display and tourism; and object and design.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Deerfield, Massachusetts was a declining town. The population was a mere 3000 and many of the younger generation had left, lured by the economic prospects available in bigger cities.\textsuperscript{267} The remaining inhabitants of the town were very focussed on retaining a sense of heritage: they restored ancestral

homes and held a semi-annual pageant that re-enacted the Colonial-Indian wars.\textsuperscript{268} George Sheldon, a respected elder and the town's historian, had the idea in 1869 for the formation of an organisation that would be responsible for archiving the history of the town. Therefore, in 1870 – six years before the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and the Colonial Revival, which would officially institutionalise the preservation of the material culture and heritage of the United States – the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (PVMA) was formally established.\textsuperscript{269} This organisation started collecting artefacts with the express purpose of “preserving such memorials, books, records, papers and curiosities as may tend to illustrate and perpetuate the history of the early settlers of this region.”\textsuperscript{270} In 1876, Memorial Hall became the storehouse for the relics.\textsuperscript{271} Four years later, in 1880, this site was opened for public viewing.\textsuperscript{272} During that same year, Memorial Hall became the first museum in the United States to establish a permanent period room.\textsuperscript{273} It was within this interest in cataloguing local histories and heritage that the Society of Blue and White Needlework established itself in Deerfield in 1896.

\textsuperscript{268} Boris, 116.
\textsuperscript{269} The exact date of the formation of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association is slightly varied from source to source, some listing the date as 1869 (Zusy, \textit{Against Overwork}, 19) and others as 1870 (Boris, \textit{Art and Labor}, 117). The official history of the PVMA lists the date as 09 May 1870. From: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association. \textit{History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association 1870 - 1879, Volume 1} (Deerfield: E.A. Hall and Company, 1890), 6.
\textsuperscript{270} PVMA, \textit{History and Proceedings}, Vol. 1, 7. Also, while I discuss here the interest in and celebration of an idealised colonial history as specific to Deerfield, it is important to note that this phenomenon occurred throughout the United States, particularly in the New England area. For more information on this topic discussing towns beyond Deerfield, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, \textit{The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth}, New York: Random House, Inc., 2000.
\textsuperscript{271} Catherine Zusy, “Against Overwork and Sweating, Against Apotheosis of Cheap and Shoddy”: \textit{Als ik Kan, The Arts and Crafts Movement in Deerfield, 1896 – 1941} (Deerfield, Mass.: Historical Deerfield Summer Fellowship Program, 1981, unpublished research project), 20.
\textsuperscript{272} Zusy, 20.
\textsuperscript{273} Zusy, 19. The significance and influence of period rooms will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, specifically in terms of Ruskin’s theory concerning the moral environmental imperative and display strategies utilised by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework.
Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework

The two people most responsible for organising the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework were not originally from the town. Ellen Miller (1854-1929) was born and raised in Hatfield, approximately twenty kilometres outside of Deerfield. She moved to the town in 1893 with her mother and younger sister Margaret.274 Miller was described as shy, gentle, and inarticulate, preferring to work quietly and alone.275 Margaret Whiting (1860-1946) was also not originally from Deerfield. She moved from Holyoke – thirty-five kilometres away – in 1895 with her mother and sister Julia.276 Whiting’s personality was described as the antithesis of her future working partner, characterised as witty and articulate, with an amused impatience.277 Living in houses that faced each other on either side of Main Street (Figure 15), these two women started a craft organisation that would later be labelled as “one of the earliest successful village industries in the country.”278

Miller and Whiting knew each other before the move to Deerfield. Although it is unclear exactly when and where they first met, by the time of the move, they were “already friends of long standing.”279 Both were trained artists, each formally educated at the National Academy of Design in New York City.280 There is also evidence that the

275 Howe, 16.
276 Howe, 15. The biographical information on these two women — Ellen Miller and Margaret Whiting — is very incomplete, and what is discussed in sources often contradicts each other. Most definitely, each woman moved to Deerfield in the company of a mother and a sister. In the case of Whiting, there is mention of a father in one of my sources (Boris, Art and Labor, 117), but there is no further discussion of him nor is he mentioned in any of the other sources I used.
278 Howe, 43.
279 Howe, 45.
280 Boris, Art and Labor, 116.
women summered together at an artists' colony in Keene, New Hampshire. In 1895, Miller and Whiting co-authored an illustrated botany text entitled *Wildflowers of the North-Eastern States* containing 308 hand-drawn, life-size flowers (Figures 16, 17, 18). This project, “which was started as a personal pastime, [and] has taken its present shape under the belief that it were well to make a beginning towards a floral portrait-gallery,” foreshadowed the designs of the needlework organisation that Miller and Whiting formally initiated within a year of publishing the book.

Miller and Whiting found direct inspirations for their needlework society from two main sources. The first influence was credited to the village antiquarian George Sheldon and his Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association’s collection of artefacts stored in Memorial Hall. These historical pieces were seen by Miller and Whiting, and the women became particularly interested in the early- to mid-eighteenth-century textiles by colonial women settlers. The two artists were given full access to the collection and began assembling a compilation of designs found on the textiles. The second source of inspiration was the eighteenth-century craft heirlooms stored in homes of families in the region. Miller and Whiting, with their shared background in art and interests in nature, spent many of their early days in Deerfield travelling to surrounding areas to paint landscape watercolours. During these trips, the two women would meet people from the countryside and be invited into their homes for tea. In these homes, Miller and

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281 Boris, 116. Unfortunately, beyond a brief mention in this source, I was unable to find further information about the specific programmes offered to or involvement of Miller and Whiting at this artists’ colony, nor was I able to locate an actual date.


283 While I credit the direct inspirations to two main sources, I should reiterate here that interest in the colonial past and its objects was increasing at this time throughout the United States, particularly New England. Miller and Whiting, as educated women, would have been aware of other organisations established with the purpose of collecting and reviving colonial traditions, including textiles. For a discussion of other such societies, see Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun.*


285 Howe, 45.
Whiting were shown the old family textiles, often passed from generation to generation from mother to daughter. Miller and Whiting immediately recognised the “subtle artistry” of the designs and “began a collection of old patterns” through drawings or tracings, adding to their archive of designs taken from the museum.  

After compiling the drawings of the original eighteenth-century designs, Miller and Whiting decided to teach themselves the various stitches necessary to physically recreating the textiles themselves. By taking apart old designs, Miller and Whiting carefully examined the specific stitches and details comprising the eighteenth-century crafts. After completing this task and having several exact textile copies to show for their labour, the two women discovered their replicas “were so much admired by all who saw them, that the idea of producing them for the market took root.” The business begun by Ellen Miller and Margaret Whiting and called the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework officially started in August 1896.

It was a feeling of patriotic affection that originally motivated Ellen Miller and Margaret Whiting to copy and revive old needlework skills, “so that the work of the Deerfield foremothers should not perish from the earth.” They established their business with the express intention “of reviving the traditional embroidery of the colonial period, and of establishing a village industry.” Along with Miller and Whiting, two other women were heavily involved from the beginning. Margaret Miller, Ellen’s younger sister, and Mary Allen, who would later become nationally recognised for her

286 Howe, 46.
287 Howe, 46. It should be noted the direct parallel of Miller and Whiting’s self-taught needlework skills through dismantling and rebuilding old textiles with the way in which William Morris learned to do textiles.
289 Miller, 1.
photographs along with her sister Frances Allen, are credited with helping establish the society. Margaret Miller assumed the task of secretary, responsible for the administrative details of organising the business, and was credited for creating the logo that marked the objects produced by the society. Miller and Whiting embraced the duties of designing, as it was decided early on that the society would not copy the eighteenth-century patterns directly, but would, instead, use them as inspiration and adapt them. Miller and Whiting set to the task of training local women – farmers’ wives and their daughters – in the skills required to carry out the embroidery. By 1897, a year after the official start of the society, twelve local women were employed as skilled needlewomen. The workers had to be from the area, preferably Deerfield itself, and never numbered more than thirty at any one time.

While Miller and Whiting hired local women to carry out the manual labour of stitching the needlework, the task of designing remained solely under the control of the two trained artists. Income was based on the belief that mental and manual labour were equal and the payment of labour depended on the price of the object sold. The full price of the object was divided into ten equal parts. Five parts were given to the embroiderer, two parts went to the designer (either Miller or Whiting), two parts went to a fund for workers selected only from a specific region will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

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292 The involvement of Frances and Mary Allen in the promotion of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework cannot be overstated. After deafness forced both women out of teaching, the two sisters turned to photography. Along with creating handcrafted photographs as part of the craft revival experienced by the town of Deerfield (to be discussed later in this chapter), Frances and Mary Allen were able to exploit print media in order to circulate photographs of the society’s workers and objects to help the business gain national and international fame on a level and speed impossible in earlier periods. Frances and Mary Allen gained a national reputation with their photographs and helped publicise the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework to an ever-expanding audience through print culture.

293 Margaret Miller, “The Deerfield (Massachusetts) Society of Blue and White Needlework,” Harper’s Bazar (4 Sept 1897): 735. Also, to avoid confusion, Ellen Miller will be referred to as Miller, while Margaret Miller with be addressed by her full name.

294 The significance of the logo and the branding of the objects will be discussed later in this chapter.


296 Memorial Hall Museum Online, memorialhall.mass.edu/home. The significance and importance of workers selected only from a specific region will be elaborated on later in this chapter.
maintaining the society, and the last one part was used to cover the expense of materials. As the business became more popular and demand for a higher level of output increased, the separation between designer and worker increased, and the workers themselves were divided in terms of skill to account for stitch specialisation, which resulted in higher rates of productivity.

Miller and Whiting were very particular about what kinds of material were appropriate. It was very difficult in the beginning to locate good linen backing, and the society originally used a thin linen about the thickness of a handkerchief. Soon, Miller and Whiting decided to order hand-woven, more durable linen from Berea College, a newly opened Appalachian weaving business in Kentucky. Later still, the linen base was ordered from a company in Russia. The designs were worked in flax thread, as opposed to the crewel-wools used by the eighteenth-century textiles. The switch was legitimised as a tactic to prevent the moth damage that had plagued the older crafts. The thread used in different designs was of varying thickness. The finer threads were purchased from a Scottish company, Finlayson, Bousfield & Co., while the thicker threads were bought from a company located in New York City called Barbour Brothers Co. These threads were always purchased non-coloured. The process of dyeing the threads was one that the two women, Miller and Whiting, took very seriously. Like many associated with the Arts and Crafts movement and familiar with techniques of the colonial textiles, Miller and Whiting refused to use synthetic dyes, preferring colours produced from natural, vegetable-based methods. The indigo-coloured patterns that

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298 Boris, Art and Labor, 117.
299 Margery Burnham Howe, Deerfield Embroidery, 155. It is unclear from where exactly these thin linens were purchased.
300 Howe, 155.
303 Howe, Deerfield Embroidery, 156.
304 Howe, 156.
were so prevalent in the original eighteenth-century textiles were very inspirational, and as the name suggests, the early designs of the society were worked in only blue and white. The society had a scientific department that was responsible for exploring dyeing methods, and it looked to the English chemist Sir William Crooks for techniques. Whiting was originally in charge of the colouring, investigating traditional methods of natural dyeing. Miller eventually took over the dyeing process and gradually expanded the colour vocabulary of the society. In a 1900 booklet produced for the society by Margaret Miller, the secretary wrote: “The colors of the thread and cloth used are dyed in madder, indigo, fustic and native barks, not from an antiquarian preference for the old methods but because the chemically produced dyes do not satisfy the eye as do the refined and subtle colors of the natural dyes.”

The patterns, as has been previously mentioned, were designed solely by Miller or Whiting, then were given to the embroiderers for the actual stitching. The two women followed no artistic prototype blindly, and while the basis for the designs came from the eighteenth-century textiles stitched and stored in the immediate vicinity of Deerfield, the influences for the adaptations created by Miller and Whiting came from a wide variety of sources. The patterns produced for the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework reveal both historical and contemporary influences. Whiting herself described the style of the designs as a pastiche of influences: “Rub Oriental art through a Puritan sieve and how odd the result; how charming and how individual.” The “Oriental” influences that Whiting associated with the society’s work was a recurring artistic theme in the crafts. This influence was credited as a historical source, a style utilised by the original colonial

309 Taken from a 1898 talk given by Margaret Whiting in Flushing, NY, as quoted in Howe, Deerfield Embroidery, 18.
designs. It was believed the origin of the “Oriental” influence was suggested by figures and motifs on souvenirs brought home by sea-captains in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{310} In terms of contemporary influences, Miller and Whiting, with their experiences in New York and other major metropolitan areas, were well versed in the styles associated with the increasingly influential Arts and Crafts movement and the newly developing Art Nouveau. The society had subscriptions to \textit{The Studio, The Craftsman, The House Beautiful,} and \textit{Handicraft,} giving the women immediate access to designs associated with the artistry and ideologies of current art movements.\textsuperscript{311} The pomegranate, a common image in Arts and Crafts works, was used in several patterns of the society (Figure 19). As well, a 1919 wallhanging entitled \textit{Two Red Roses Across the Moon} (Figure 20) was directly inspired by a poem of the same name written by William Morris.

Although various influences were explicitly referenced in the designs created by Miller and Whiting, there was a definite desire to highlight the individuality of the society’s works. Mary Allen related, in a 1901 article, that the style of the objects is based, as is too well known to need repetition, on the Colonial school of embroidery, specimens of which are found all over New England. This, in turn, is based partly on Oriental sources, but in its conception of ornament and in its handling of the materials available is as peculiar to the race which evolved it as are the Aztec decorations of pottery. These old designs are modified and adapted to modern uses, retaining the spirit of the old, and the materials, so far as possible.\textsuperscript{312}

A visitor to the town in 1905 echoed this sentiment and claimed that, although basing ideas on other styles, the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework produced crafts that possessed “a distinctive character of their own.”\textsuperscript{313} In order to mark the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{312} Mary E. Allen, “Handicrafts in Old Deerfield,” \textit{Outlook} 69 (2 Nov 1901): 593.
\end{thebibliography}
textiles produced by the society, a logo was sewn into the design. Created in 1896 by Mary Allen, the emblem was a “D” inside a flax spinning wheel (Figures 21, 22, 23).³¹⁴ All the work produced in the name of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was carefully monitored, and it was only after a completed craft met the approval of either Miller or Whiting that the trademark was permitted to be stitched onto the work.³¹⁵ Miller and Whiting personally retained “exclusive possession” of the designs.³¹⁶ In order that the society – that is, Miller and Whiting – maintained total control over the quality and distribution of the textiles, “no classes [were] held to teach the general public, nor [were] designs or materials sold.”³¹⁷

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, when it was established in August 1896, was the first village industry to be set up in the town. The organisation proved to be a catalyst for a craft revival in Deerfield. After the society was founded, the general interest in making crafts increased. Women started working in many different areas of handicraft production: hand-loom ing, basket weaving, rug hooking, metal work, and photography.³¹⁸ These various crafts were eventually organised formally, coming together in 1899 to form the Deerfield Society of Arts and Crafts, which included the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework as a member.³¹⁹

The arrangement of these organisations was largely credited to women not originally from Deerfield. The idyllic, pastoral setting of Deerfield made it a favoured destination for people desperate to leave more urban areas and who had the economic freedom to do so. Madeline Yale Wynne and Annie C. Putnam were two such summer

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³¹⁵ Memorial Hall Museum Online, memorialhall.mass.edu/home.
³¹⁶ Allen, “Recounts Story,” 3.
³¹⁸ Howe, “Deerfield Blue and White Needlework,” 52.
residents, living together in the Old Manse on Main Street in Deerfield. Madeline Yale Wynne was a silversmith, writer, teacher at the Art Museum of Boston, and one of the founding members of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society (1897); she was a regular summer visitor to Deerfield beginning in the early 1890s. Annie C. Putnam was a bookbinder from Boston, and an active member of that city’s Arts and Crafts Society, formed in 1897. Both Wynne and Putnam were integral to the establishment of the Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society in 1899.

The Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society had its headquarters in an old barn, renamed the Art Barn. It did not control the separate groups nor individual craftspeople, but was responsible for setting up exhibitions, both in and out of the town, for the various crafts organisation that fell under its umbrella. The first exhibition of the Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society was held in 1899, the same year as its formation, and continued annually every subsequent summer. Everyone was allowed to participate during the summer exhibitions, provided she or he was a resident of the town. Works of the various arts and crafts organisations – except those of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework – were displayed in the Village Room, a building erected in memory of the late postmistress, the beloved Martha Gould Pratt. The Village Room had been built in the late 1890s and “furnished the right setting [for the display of handicrafts], for it was an exhibit in itself, being built by the village carpenter after plans by his son.”

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320 G.W.Cable, In Memory of Madeline Yale Wynne Collection, [publishing information unknown], 18.
322 Curtis, 22.
323 Curtis, 22.
324 Curtis, 20.
325 Reynolds, “Revival of Feminine Crafts,” 34.
The display of the textiles produced by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was held in a separate location, in the front parlour of the Miller home. 327 Marked on the outside by a mounted spinning wheel that echoed the logo on the objects (Figure 24), the exhibition inside the front room of the Miller home was described as a suite of rooms, including a bed-chamber, entirely fitted with the needlework, daintily harmonious in its quiet cool effect of embroidered counterpane, table cloth, curtains and portieres, together with other furnishings to match. Deft tiles, blue-and-white pottery, photographic blue-prints, and a piece of more elaborately decorative embroidery framed in old wood of weather-beaten grey. 328

The arrangement of the display replicated the period room-style that was established in the Memorial Hall museum two decades earlier. Although Miller and Whiting were personally responsible for adapting and creating the patterns, the name of the worker was attached to each piece in the exhibition, for the purpose that it “rouses the ambition and sets the standard.” 329 This display in the Miller house, signalled by the mounted spinning wheel, was eventually made a year-round, permanent exhibition. 330

The Society of Blue and White Needlework, along with its local success, gained recognition on both a national and an international level. Within the first year of its inception, it had displayed in both Boston and New York, perhaps aided by connections made through Madeline Yale Wynne or Alice C. Putnam. 331 Mary Allen boasted that, by 1901, the society was “constantly responding to invitations to Arts and Crafts exhibitions in all the larger cities East and West.” 332 Another source illustrated the high-quality of

329 Miller, “Deerfield Society,” 2. While it was significant to the mandate of the society to include the names of the needleworkers in the exhibition, this practice was not unique to Deerfield. The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, from its first display in 1888, emphasised the importance of the worker and object labels always included the name of the manual labourer.
work for which the society became known: “the work is often accepted for important exhibitions in large cities without going before a jury. Its excellence is taken as a matter of course.” It was credited with having been invited – that is, being exempt from jury selection – to art exhibitions in “Cleveland, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Detroit, St. Paul, Baltimore, St. Louis, Rochester, the Chicago Institute of Fine Arts and many other places.” Along with the exhibitions located within the United States, the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was involved with displays on an international stage, and was often successful at winning awards at these events. The needlework society was involved in the Exposition Universelle in Paris 1900 and won a silver medal for design and colour. A year later, in 1901, the society had a display at the Panama-Pacific Exposition held in Buffalo, New York, where its works were again successful, winning another silver medal. This success in national and international arenas expanded the fame of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework specifically as well as the reputation of the town and its other crafts in general.

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework survived World War I, but just barely. Most of the women working for the society became involved in assisting the war effort through rolling bandages and knitting socks, and orders for embroideries diminished. After the war, the society continued for several years until it was officially disbanded in 1926. As to why Miller and Whiting decided to close down the business, Whiting wrote,

For reasons strictly personal to Ellen Miller and the writer, they set away their dye pots and shut the old portfolio. Having weathered the Great War and outlasted most of its contemporaries, this revival of a distinctive form

335 Howe, “Deerfield Blue and White Needlework,” 51.
336 Zusy, Against Overwork, 2.
337 Howe, Deerfield Embroidery, 34.
of art with its long pedigree came to a close, quite as complete, it would seem, as that which befell it a hundred years before.338

Even to the very end, the society promoted itself as a colonial descendent, destined to suffer the same consequences as had its original manifestation a century earlier.

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was one of the first and most well-known cottage industries in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Originally motivated by the idea of recreating eighteenth-century works so that the designs would not be lost if the originals were to decay or disappear, Miller and Whiting situated their project within a growing interest in cataloguing local histories that was forming at international and national levels. In order to understand how this craft organisation and its objects functioned during this time, it is important to examine the international and national ideologies within which they operated.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES: Philadelphia Centennial and the Arts and Crafts Movement in the United States

The 1876 World’s Fair held in Philadelphia was the first event of its kind to take place in the United States. Through this international exhibition and later exhibits sponsored by societies and schools, people in the United States viewed the works of craftspeople from all over the world.339 Although print culture and the circulation of ideas and fashions had begun to increase on an international level due to industrialisation, the Centennial Exposition marked the first real introduction to foreign cultures and foreign art for many Americans.340 At this juncture in the history of the United States, the country was still relatively young. By 1876, development in the country had been focussed on gathering

338 Margaret Whiting as quoted in Howe, 35.
resources and materials so that the United States could industrialise, and thus participate and compete economically on an international level. The displays arranged around the 1876 exhibition highlighted the international shift away from mechanisation and industry to culture and artistic details. Therefore, the Philadelphia Centennial existed as a watershed in American history in terms of providing a catalyst for a variety of movements that looked to reshape production and America’s identity on a world stage.

The British Arts and Crafts movement had not yet formally begun by the date of the Philadelphia Centennial, but Britain had experienced a rapid change in the way in which decorative and applied arts were perceived and produced. The British crafts prepared for the 1876 exhibition featured works that would later be included in the Arts and Crafts movement and were created using “not so much a style as an approach, an attitude toward the making of objects.” Based heavily on the philosophies of John Ruskin and William Morris, the Arts and Crafts movement sought to reunite “art and labour, designer and craftsman, and the spiritual with the everyday.” In the United States, the latter half of the nineteenth century is labelled by historians as the Progressive Era – “a time of optimistic reform when the middle class sought to alleviate the ills generated by society.” The notion of incorporating art into everyday activity – “art for life’s sake” – democratised it, and made the movement attractive to those seeking social solutions, specifically improving conditions for the working classes, but more generally repairing American society as a whole.

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342 Kaplan, 54.
The establishment of the Royal School of Art Needlework in London in 1872 formally institutionalised ideologies that would later be associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, promoting the notion of decorative art as fine art.\(^{345}\) One of the most ambitious efforts put forth by this facility was its display arranged for the Philadelphia Centennial.\(^{346}\) This one exhibit, the first arranged by the school, included works designed by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, two men who had already achieved international acclaim.\(^{347}\) The display, in a space in the Fair’s main building measuring only twelve feet square, included walls decorated with embroidered paneling, doors furnished with embroidered portieres, and windows draped with curtains on both sides.\(^{348}\) This exhibition was one of the first times that people from the United States were exposed to these new ideas on craft and design, and it was generally judged that contemporary American products failed in comparison.\(^{349}\) The British textiles fuelled the desire of Americans to improve their own national decorative design and material display, in part from “international commercial rivalries,” but also because needlework textiles were viewed as integral pieces of American heritage and, therefore, elements that contributed to a coherent and distinct American national identity.\(^{350}\) Traditionally, American women took great pride in their needlework; by the 1870s, however, “these practices had fallen into decline, supplanted by technological innovation.”\(^{351}\) The

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\(^{345}\) Morris, *Victorian Embroidery*, 113.

\(^{346}\) Morris, 113.

\(^{347}\) Morris, 115.

\(^{348}\) Morris, 115.


\(^{350}\) McCarthy, *Women’s Culture*, 41.

\(^{351}\) McCarthy, 46. This notion of needlework in the United States as having declined relates specifically to innovative designs and perceptions of crafts as art, rather than production of textiles in general. In her book, Thatcher Ulrich examined how interest in colonial textiles, with their associations of an idealised heritage, increased throughout the United States in the nineteenth century. While she did not give a specific date or cause that spurred this general elevated enthusiasm for colonial crafts, she credited the beginnings of the awareness of the importance of craft production to a speech given by Reverend Horace Plunkett in 14 August 1851 at the Country Centennial Fair in Litchfield, Connecticut (Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 12).
growing interest in craft production appealed to those who believed that the United States was best suited to lead this international development due to its cultural inheritance, that is Americans’ inherent abilities with textiles due to their past.

The British Arts and Crafts movement officially began in 1888, but it took almost a decade before the Arts and Crafts movement became formally institutionalised in the United States. The first organisation to adopt the title was the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts in 1897. The president, Charles Eliot Norton, Harvard’s first professor of fine arts, was a personal friend of Ruskin and he established the organisation based on Ruskinian ideals. The Boston Society and the Chicago Society of Arts and Crafts, established in 1897 several months after Boston’s, were the two most prominent and influential such organisations in the United States, although many Arts and Crafts societies were formed throughout the country in the following years.

Along with Arts and Crafts societies, the ideologies of the movement were interpreted and circulated through print culture. The first popular Arts and Crafts journal was *House Beautiful*, which was started in 1896 by Chicago’s Herbert S. Stone and had a circulation of 40,000 by the early-twentieth century. The Boston Arts and Crafts Society was responsible for *Handicraft*, which started in 1901 as a monthly publication and later became the main chronicle of the movement in the United States. Another popular Arts and Crafts journal was *The Craftsman*, also begun in 1901. Founded by Gustav Stickley, one of the most prominent supporters of Arts and Crafts in the United States, this journal was issued in order “[to interpret] the crafts movement both to its devoted supporters and the public at large.” The proliferation of magazines and journals espousing the ideologies and exposing the visuals of the Arts and Crafts

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353 Kaplan, 57.
355 Boris, 33.
356 Boris, 54.
movement enabled larger numbers of people than ever before immediate access to an artistic movement.

An essential factor in the dissemination of the ideas associated with the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States was the creation of educational facilities that catered to the growing demand of the middle-class to be directly involved in the creative process of production. After the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial, there was a marked increase in schools involved in dealing directly with handicraft production. Candace Wheeler, one of the most influential people involved with crafts in the United States, opened the New York School of Decorative Arts in February 1877. Based directly on the model of the Royal School of Art Needlework, Wheeler’s school promoted the decorative arts as a suitable pursuit of women. Wheeler espoused a three-fold aim of the school: “to sponsor courses in art needlework and related crafts, to market high-quality decorative goods produced by women, and to upgrade the caliber of household decoration through exhibitions, lectures, and library development.” Although working prior to the general applications of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, Wheeler’s institutionalisation of crafts and women’s education set a precedent that would be closely followed in the succeeding decades under the label Arts and Crafts. A variety of schools throughout the United States – the National Academy of Design in New York (1825), Massachusetts Normal School of Art in Boston (1873), Rhode Island School of Design in Providence (1877), Pratt Institute in New York (1887), School of Industrial Art and Handicraft in Boston (date unknown – approximately 1900) – were involved in promoting Arts and Crafts ideals during the end of the nineteenth century.

The Arts and Crafts movement had a heavy influence on design in the United States following the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial, as seen through the establishment of

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357 McCarthy, *Women’s Culture*, 44.
358 McCarthy, 44.
359 McCarthy, 44.
Arts and Crafts Societies, journals dedicated to its design and ideologies, and educational facilities. It was wholly supported by reformers in the United States who felt the movement was the solution to “the need to discover a national style,” and provided “the benefits of wide-ranging skills from a multi-national workforce, and the confidence gained from living in a young, hardworking, enthusiastic and progressive country.”

The notion that every country should have art, handicraft, and design that reflected its own particular history and geography was central to the Arts and Crafts movement, and the emphasis on the vernacular allowed its ideologies to be easily appropriated and made specific to a nation’s identity.

NATIONAL INFLUENCES: The Colonial Revival

The drive to situate contemporary American life in a noble historical narrative resulted in the search for a past that could be used to explain the present, a hunt for a sense of national-self that would characterise a distinctly American individuality. This led to the Colonial Revival, officially beginning after the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876. Heavily influenced by the promotion of romanticised heritage represented in the Arts and Crafts exhibition by the Royal School of Art Needlework (with designs by Morris and Burne-Jones), the Colonial Revival idealised the colonial past in the same way that Ruskin, Morris and their British followers idealised the medieval past.

Supporters of the Colonial Revival perceived the American pre-industrial period as “a time when craftsmen

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362 Although the Royal School of Art Needlework’s exhibition in Philadelphia actually pre-dated the official start of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (credited as beginning with the first exhibition under the name of Arts and Crafts in 1888), I am using the term here to reference the style and type of work that would later fall under that category. This is not an attempt to apply an anachronistic analysis, but to associate the influences present in 1876 with the ideological and stylistic elements that were later labelled Arts and Crafts.
took pride in their work, buildings and their furnishings were beautifully made, and the fabric of society was cohesive.”\textsuperscript{363} The aim of the Colonial Revival was not “to replicate the past, but, rather, to capture its spirit by acknowledging and attempting to practice the values and virtues of the early founding fathers.”\textsuperscript{364} The colonial period was regarded as a time when people were closer to nature and their environment, and free from the social, economic, environmental, and political ills blamed on industrialisation and the machine. The products of craftspeople from the colonial period “became symbolic of control over impersonal forces. A generation overwhelmed by technology found solace in the values assigned to the handmade object: simplicity, integrity, joy in labor.”\textsuperscript{365} This renewed interest for contact with a decidedly American heritage lead to the rapid formation of historical societies. Many of these societies were heavily involved with collecting and displaying colonial objects as well as establishing period rooms, which were created as memorials to honour those of the past and educate those of the present.\textsuperscript{366}

A large part of the Colonial Revival was the re-discovery of Folk culture and idealising this sector of society as the modern link to the pre-industrial past, which related to the Arts and Crafts movement’s tendency to romanticise the primitive and the rural. Proponents of the Colonial Revival – intent on establishing a particular identity specific to the United States – looked to Folk life and crafts as the essence of national identity. The people of the middle-class “pursuing their own interest and expressing their own view of things, constructed the Folk of the countryside as the romantic antithesis to everything they disliked about modern urban and industrial life.”\textsuperscript{367} Folk culture was

\textsuperscript{363} Kaplan, “Vernacular in America,” 54.
\textsuperscript{364} Memorial Hall Museum Online, \url{memorialhall.mass.edu/home}.
\textsuperscript{365} Kaplan, “Vernacular in America,” 54.
\textsuperscript{366} Memorial Hall Museum Online, \url{memorialhall.mass.edu/home}.
naturalised as embodying the “cultural essence” of a nation and linking the present to an idealised past. A large part of the Colonial Revival was the anti-modern construction of Folk culture as the base unit of nationhood and belief that this pre-industrial culture could be captured and exemplified by objects that could then be used to build an aesthetic vocabulary of national identity.

LOCAL APPLICATIONS: Gender, Craft, and Heritage

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework situated itself within both the international discourse of the Arts and Crafts movement and the national framework of the Colonial Revival. The Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival each functioned within a reformist discourse, not only for artistic production but also for social change. The roles of women as artists and designers were an integral part of each movement’s mandate.

The increased acceptance of handicrafts, particularly textiles and embroidery, introduced the notion of women as artist into society. Before this elevated importance placed on handicrafts, embroidery and needlework were judged as delicate, intricate work requiring only patience, manual dexterity, and attention to detail. The appearance of sampler and embroidery designs in women’s magazines in the nineteenth century eliminated the last vestige of creativity or artistic expression, where needlework was reduced to a mindless yet integral skill exhibiting a woman’s femininity. Crafts were viewed as an appropriate pastime for middle- and upper-class women, as they were utilitarian and could be produced within the domestic sphere.

With the promulgation of Arts and Crafts in the late-nineteenth century, the value of needlework and embroidery and the importance of innovative design elevated crafts

beyond the mindless hobby of middle- and upper-class women. In the United States, the Colonial Revival intensified this interest in handicrafts, as textiles were viewed as part of its distinctive legacy and heritage.\textsuperscript{369} Women, in their role and associations with textiles, in particular, were constructed as keepers of this tradition. As educational facilities became more available to women, female crafters were recognised as more than just the hands that carried out the physical labour for designs created by others. Women became trained as designers. This acceptance of women’s skills as a creative process empowered women, yet this newfound power was still confined to a limited sphere. Crafts, although now recognised as an artistic and creative pursuit, were still often associated with the domestic sphere and appropriate, ladylike behaviour.\textsuperscript{370} The construction of needlework and embroidery as innate to womanhood, the elevated status of textiles through the Arts and Crafts movement, and the concept that craft was part of the authentic legacy of United States’ culture were all integral elements to the identity of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

Textiles as an appropriate pursuit for women was an underlying factor for the success of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. Producing needlework and embroidery had a great advantage as it could be carried out in the home as leisure permitted, without interrupting the daily demands of a woman’s life.\textsuperscript{371} While the reality of the gender divide and the separate spheres ideology of the late-nineteenth century has been debated and criticised – most notably by Amanda Vickery in her 1993 article “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A review of the Categories and Chronology of English’s Women’s History” – as simplistic and impractical, I address it here, albeit briefly, because it was part of the discourse used by the women in the Deerfield society

\textsuperscript{369} McCarthy, \textit{Women’s Culture}, 46.  
\textsuperscript{370} Parker, \textit{Subversive Stitch}, 182.  
\textsuperscript{371} Boris, \textit{Art and Labor}, 117.
to define their identity. The company was able to function commercially in large part due to the fact it was made feminine through marketing textiles – as crafts were often associated with ideas of the domestic sphere and appropriate gender roles – and thereby did not disrupt the traditional order of gender relations. The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was so acceptable and successful, in part, because it was centred around a historically feminine task.\textsuperscript{372} Through producing crafts within the domestic realm, the society could engage in a public activity without breaching the gender divide of the separate spheres. The women involved with the organisation produced objects that operated within the traditionally male-dominated spheres of commercialism and commodities, but maintained their appropriate feminine roles by working within the home, without disrupting proper family life.

Beyond being suitable for women because it could be carried out in the domestic sphere, embroidery was perceived as intrinsically suited to female nature. It was viewed by contemporaries as a natural expression of the feminine mind and ability: “Of the Crafts, embroidery is one of the oldest and, because it has always been the outward and visible sign of the inward artistic ability of women, it must possess a certain charm for the feminine mind.”\textsuperscript{373} This conventional tendency to associate embroidery with women was presented in new ways, redefining value based on a newly-achieved appreciation of this type of work as artistic. The Deerfield society exploited the heightened value of craft and this gendered expectation to elevate and justify its position as producers of textiles. Using language that paralleled Ruskin’s notion of individuality in design, Mary Allen stated the process of the workers within the society as inspired by an intrinsic artistic sense and ability: “A women who feels an inner leading to weave gets a loom and weaves. As she does it, ideas and fancies come to her and she weaves them into

\textsuperscript{372} Boris, 116.
\textsuperscript{373} Carrington Bouve, “Deerfield Renaissance,” 168.
designs. They may be novel and unconventional, but are all the more alive and promising for that."  

Using language that conveyed the production of pieces through an organic, independent process based in the creativity of each worker, Allen situated the work of the society within the larger framework inherited from the international discourse of the Arts and Crafts movement. These statements also discursively separated the artistic process from the modern aspects of modernity and capitalism, in that the society’s creative methods and objects were promoted as autonomous from monetary motivations. That is, while the society always recognised itself as a business, the potential for money-making was never acknowledged as a factor in the creation of the textiles. This separation of creation and economics mirrored the traditional marketing of art as autonomous from finances. As well, this approach masked the reality of production whereby Miller and Whiting represented the creative process and the workers were reduced to the traditionally feminine role of manual labour.

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework used this naturalised connection between women and crafts to act as a historical bridge to a pre-industrial period. Framing their discourse within Arts and Crafts and Colonial Revival ideologies that romanticised the pre-industrial past, the leading figures involved in the operation and promotion of the Deerfield society posited themselves as heirs to colonial women. Whereas Arts and Crafts reformers sought to establish themselves as descendents of medieval life and style, the Deerfield women constructed their identity as modern-day counterparts of colonial traditions. Although associating with an international movement, the society established its specific identity through connecting itself with the

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374 Mary Allen as quoted in Boris, *Art and Labor*, 119.
375 This separation between art and economics, production and consumption is discussed in more detail in the following section.
376 This split in the mental and manual labour will be discussed in further detail in the following section.
Colonial Revival and national identity. A 1903 article credited international sources but was overt in both nationalising and localising the Deerfield society:

> Deerfield is no blind follower of...English Pre-Raphaelites. As Ruskin and Morris liked to talk of that wonderful Thirteenth Century, when men loved their work and took pride in it, so the Deerfield embroiderers and weavers feel themselves true descendents of the Colonial women, who, after their baking and brewing, their scouring and scrubbing, were glad to sit down in their great, clean, sunny, shining kitchens and study out some new design for a blue and white coverlet, or sew together long strips of carpet rags for which the butternut dye was already waiting.\(^{378}\)

While always promoting its works as art, the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework never claimed its works were completely innovative. In fact, there was a conscious effort to define its works within the established discourse of the Arts and Crafts, and more significantly, the Colonial Revival. The women in Deerfield positioned their production process as the result of an inherited cultural ability, anchored in a female-associated task. Appearing as the female counterparts of the medieval craftsmen, they claimed their right to “joy in labour.”\(^{379}\) The production process, then, was propagated less as an actual labour than a naturally occurring channelling of inherent female-ness, specific to the national history of the United States, into textiles. Through this association, the objects were instilled with a sense of historical authenticity; crafts made by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework were constructed not as modern commodities, but as material and cultural artefacts inspired by colonial prototypes.

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework attempted to establish its workers as direct descendents of a cultural legacy and constructed the society as a historical bridge linking the modern to the pre-industrial. Mary Allen, writing fairly soon after the organisation’s inception, defined this connection between the past and present:

\(^{379}\) Boris, “Crossing Boundaries,” 42.
“Belonging to both periods, and to neither entirely, the transition from old to new can be traced almost continuously. The latest development, the Deerfield Society of Blue-and-White Needlework, is a curious example of this continuity.” Yet, although the society positioned itself as the modern recipients of colonial skills, there was a distinct sense of not simply deriving objects based on colonial predecessors, but improving and modernising to suit contemporary needs. Margaret Miller, writing in 1898, discussed the process as a mixture of old and new:

It is new because nothing like the work done by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework is being produced elsewhere, and it is old because the work is a revival of the Colonial art practices a century or more ago – and now almost lost – by the Puritan women of New England.

The Deerfield society situated itself not as producing thoughtless copies of examples from a bygone era, but as consciously conceiving of artistic designs based on the inherited spirit of the colonial period. There was an element of historical colonialism present in the discourse, a sense that the modern counterparts of the colonial tradition – that is the women of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework who believed they were the rightful benefactors of the pre-industrial traditions – could better understand and, in fact, improve upon the colonial production processes and designs. The women responsible for the Deerfield society were overt in their desire to engage critically with the colonial examples, to develop their own designs rooted in the colonial period, but bettered through modern knowledge and understanding. The colonial foremothers, while treated with reverence and respect, were perceived as Folk producers who created craft due to their natural predilections as opposed to the women involved in the society who had both natural ability through cultural legacy and modern understanding of the thought processes involved. That is, while both the colonial and

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380 Allen, “Blue and White Needlework,” 166.
society women had the inherent nature to do needlework and embroidery, it was only the modern counterparts who had the ability to engage critically and consciously with the crafts. Through establishing the cultural inheritance of the workers and framing the organisation and its objects as a historical bridge to the past, the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework defined itself as the modern – improved – sum of its colonial traditions. The society represented the “accumulations of generations,” carefully integrating “the traditions of a mellow past and the demands of an active present.”

Division of Labour and Cultural Inheritance

The perception of the workers in the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework as inspired by their innate handicraft ability masked the reality of the working situation. The society promoted the work process as a collaborative effort of all workers toward a common goal, possible due to the shared “New England Conscious.” A non-negotiable characteristic of the workers was that everyone involved in the organisation had to be from the Deerfield vicinity. Miller and Whiting, both originally from towns close to Deerfield, were very selective about who was allowed to be counted as a member of the society. Most of the workers were farmers’ wives and daughters who had always lived in the town and were eager to become part of the innovative company. A woman writing in the 1930s, recalling the organisation, referenced Ruskin’s theory to discuss the organisation of the society:

Following as it did in time and methods the general scheme of the Ruskin Industries in the English Lake District, it drew its workers from the neighbourhood, thus developing a truly cooperative organisation of much financial advantage to the village, and of an even greater value in things other than financial – but possibly more worthwhile.

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383 Allen, “Recounts Story,” 3. Ruskin’s Industries in the English Lake District referred to the Langdale Linen Industry, begun in 1885. Presented as a co-operative venture organised by the workers themselves and nestled in the English countryside, the Langdale Linen Industry was an organisation specialising in needlework and lace, and involved the efforts of large numbers of workers.
Cooperation was central to the discourse surrounding the society. Employing only women from a selective region built a sense of regional identity. More specific than national identity established through the Colonial Revival at the same time, this romanticised idea of regional identity was used by Miller and Whiting to select workers in order to establish a cooperative work environment, based on shared goals determined by a shared sense of identity. The Deerfield society promoted its united stance and cooperative atmosphere with a regional cultural essence: “[Miller and Whiting] had an easier job [than those who organised a business that was not co-operative], however, because they shared the culture and values of their workforce: Whiting knew that she could count on commitment to the work ethic and to a standard of excellence by other possessors of the ‘New England Conscious.’”\(^{384}\) Closely related to the colonial cultural inheritance that linked the society to its national roots, a shared regional constitution anchored the organisation to a local identity. Mary Allen, addressing the society’s refusal to admit non-Deerfield residents, justified that position through regional identity. Admitting non-Deerfield residents, according to Allen, would affect the crafts produced by the society: “The work would lose, in corresponding measure, the personal element, the individual sense of responsibility, the freedom for initiative.”\(^{385}\) There was a sense that the work produced by the organisation embodied and represented the specific regional identity inherent to the workers.

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The cooperative working conditions advocated by the society was meant in both a goal-orientated and economic sense. These advertised conditions did not, however, elucidate the power relations present in the labour processes of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. The work of the Deerfield society was divided in terms of mental and manual labour. Prior to the official establishment of the society in 1896, Miller and Whiting had been solely responsible for discovering the colonial pieces that provided the inspiration (in the Deerfield archives and homes of people in the countryside), adapting the designs, and learning all the embroidery and needlework stitches involved in creating the textiles. After 1896, Miller and Whiting were no longer involved in the physical construction the objects. 386 Similar to Morris’s process of learning the stitches then delegating the work process to others while retaining the designing responsibilities for himself, Miller and Whiting alone designed all the patterns while local women and girls – carefully trained in specific stitches by the two women – carried out the manual operations.

This division of labour, which so carefully followed the capitalist networks that were supposed to be reacted against with the return to colonial-inspired artistry, was justified by granting equal significance – artistically and economically – to both sides of the design and labour divide. As Mary Allen explained in an 1898 article, “The brain and the hand, the designer and sewer, work with mutual understanding and sympathy.” 387 The role of Miller and Whiting, as creators and designers, and the role of the women who were responsible for the physical production of needlework were extolled as separate but equal partners necessary to the successful production of the objects. The division of labour was viewed as a symbiotic relationship between designers and workers: “It will be seen that the proportion of the payment for the work and the design is

reckoned on the common basis of the labor involved. This proportion is founded on the belief that the hand and the brain work are interdependent and should receive equal money returns.  

Often the explanation of the monetary breakdown was used to elucidate how truly equal both sectors of the business were. In a 1901 article for *Modern Priscilla*, Margaret Miller wrote, “The Society was formed upon socialistic principles, it being the intention of the founders to pay the designers and workers at the same rate for their time, a method not usually employed by decorative art societies.”  

The use of economics to reveal the social and collective nature of the labour relations was significant. Miller and Whiting never denied the monetary motivations of their organisation, in that the society promoted itself as a business and was not romanticised as producing priceless artistic pieces beyond the value system of the capitalist marketplace.  

Yet, while acknowledging the economics of the arrangement, the discourse surrounding the society always placed primary importance on the “joy in labour,” where the potential for making money was a convenient side-effect or bonus to the personal joys associated with fulfilling a personal desire of the workers – a joy rooted in their rightful cultural inheritance. As expressed by the society in a 1901 article, “The pecuniary recompense is considered by some of the workers as secondary to the benefit received from a new interest in life, the social intercourse it brings about, and the enjoyment derived from labouring at a craft.”  

Although discussions concerning the actual breakdown of labour into mental and manual treated both aspects equally, the reality of the power relations in terms of Miller and Whiting verses the needleworkers was very different. In fact, the breakdown of work responsibilities made the actual needlewomen little more than piece workers or peons in
the factory process. The language of the society describing the production process extolled the innovation and individuality of the workers, claiming each woman created distinctive pieces that were united by an underlying cultural essence: “This charm is the individuality of the worker, who copied from nature or some other source, not only with fidelity to her model, but with genuine love for the work of her hand and with genuine love of beauty.” Despite these claims of individual expression by all workers equally, the reality of the situation left the creative powers firmly rooted in the hands of Miller and Whiting. A 1902 article described this work relation: “the workers have not originated any of their own designs. These are carefully drawn for them in patterns that follow the old traditions. The control of the work has always resided with the two founders.” The patterns designed by either Miller or Whiting were drawn directly on the linen, accompanied by a small working drawing to indicate specific colours and stitches. Threads of the necessary amounts and colours were counted, and the entire bundle was delivered to workers in their own homes.

These portrayals of the creative process created two very distinctive and disparate situations, one in which the workers were carefully chosen based on gender, cultural inheritance, and region, and the other in which the workers were merely the hands that carried out the mindless labour. It would seem to be a confusing, paradoxical portrayal that would result in an inaccurate or convoluted identity for the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. The society, however, was able to reconcile these incongruences in three ways. First, Miller and Whiting themselves were part of the colonial and regional cultural inheritance, an identity shared with their workers that created a sense of an underlying and inherent cultural essence. Both from towns in

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395 Howe, 50.
close proximity to Deerfield, each woman could claim historical and cultural rights to the objects produced in the name of the society.

Second, in the same way that the works of the society were constructed as embodying the colonial spirit, the notion of late-nineteenth-century Folk culture was used as an element that permeated the character of the objects. While Miller and Whiting were from smaller towns, both women had spent time in larger cities, having been trained at art schools in New York. This experience firmly situated the two women in the middle-class, able to pursue artistic training at a well-respected educational facility. The workers, however, represented an agriculturally-based, rural population. These women – wives and daughters of local farmers – represented the living traditions embodied by the Folk populations who resided in rural, non-modernised areas of the country.396 Whereas Miller and Whiting had experienced life in urban areas and were, therefore, “tainted” by modernity, the workers could be constructed as simple, humble residents of a town that had not yet felt the ills of industrialisation. Working in an environment that claimed a direct link to a romanticised past, the workers of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework represented the true peasant spirit that was so integral to the Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival as well as specifically to the organisation.397 Beyond embodying the pre-industrial spirit of the colonial foremothers, which also included Miller and Whiting, the women and girls who functioned as the manual labour in the society represented a living link to the rural way of life. Whereas the society itself could function as a historical bridge, the very people involved in the organisation paralleled this construction: the workers selected from the Deerfield area were seen as the surviving incarnation of the colonial women – exempt from the

396 Although within the confines of this paper, I am discussing mainly the construction of the Folk by the middle-class, I am in no way suggesting a lack of agency on behalf of the Folk in the construction of their own identity. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am looking solely at the imposition of a specific form of identity constructed for the Folk by the middle-class.
397 A more detailed discussion of the romanticised environment is developed later in this chapter.
modernising processes of late-nineteenth-century life. Even though Miller and Whiting were responsible for all the designs, it was still possible for the Folk spirit to be incorporated in the designs through manual labour – discussed as an equal element in the production process – which was in the hands of the rural-based women.

Third, the society justified the set division between mental and manual labour as a combination of the first two elements along with the cultural capital of education. Miller and Whiting could claim rightful ownership of colonial products due to the construction of cultural inheritance. The workers providing the manual labour for the organisation – although alienated from mentally creative processes – were integral to the society as they represented the direct link to past traditions and were examples of living Folk history. The main reason for the division of labour, however, was grounded in class relations, expressed in the Deerfield example through education. Miller and Whiting had both received formal artistic training, therefore the artistic process of adapting and designing the patterns was viewed as a natural filter for their skills. The workers, uneducated and not formally skilled, were perceived as ill-prepared for the necessary abilities involved in design. It was constructed as a natural division of labour, where the mental skills were left to the educated middle-class, while the uneducated Folk was responsible for the manual details. The Folk – the worker – was constructed as having the raw, inherent skills to carry out the work, but these unrefined abilities needed to be tamed and civilised by Miller and Whiting. Similar to the notion of historical colonialism

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I am using the concept of cultural capital as discussed in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as a form of knowledge that equips a person with an appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts. According to Bourdieu, there were two ways in which cultural capital was achieved: through educational capital, measured by qualifications; and through social origin, measured by father’s occupation (13). He suggested that “a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possess the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (2). Miller and Whiting’s cultural capital – gained through their middle-class upbringing and educational backgrounds – gave them the authority to interpret and dictate the works produced manually by the peasant women.
discussed above, the two middle-class women were able to colonise culturally the peasant women – through making the workers’ labour subservient to their own even though the discourse promoted equity and interdependence – because Miller and Whiting were perceived as understanding Folk culture better than the Folk could themselves. The division of labour, therefore, was naturalised through a process where Miller and Whiting’s educational background bestowed upon them particular knowledge, cultural capital, that supported their role as designers as well as explained why the rural women and girls were naturally suited to the manual labour.

**Moral Environmental Imperative and Production**

Much of the foundation of both the Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival was built upon a rejection of modernity and an attempt to herald back, through social and artistic means, to a pre-industrial time. The British Arts and Crafts reformers idealised the medieval period in England as utopian, when social structures and art reached their peak before the Industrial Revolution diluted them. This yearning and search for a time representing the apex of life and art that fully revealed a nation’s “true” character was embraced and nationalised by reformers in the United States. The Colonial Revival looked to the country’s seventeenth- and eighteenth-century past, and attempted to replicate specific desired attributes within a modernised context. Both the Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival shared a similar viewpoint on freeing art and craft from the creative restraints imposed by industrialisation and modernisation, establishing a generalised vocabulary of reform surrounding a “call of honesty and truth in materials, attacks on commercialism, and praise of nature, the natural, and simple
Supporters of both movements idealised the pre-industrial period as a time when agriculturally-based society was closer to nature and when craft production had been centred on the family and was an integral part of everyday life. The notion of "a rural idyll held great attraction for a middle class disillusioned with the sordid effects of a society based upon mechanised industry."  

Ruskin, in particular, extolled the significance of environment in creating objects of value. His theory of the moral environmental imperative stated that everyday articles set a standard of good or evil, and that "they both reflected personality and made character." To extend this idea, Ruskin believed that in order for artisans and craftspeople to produce articles of artistic value, the makers themselves had to be surrounded by objects of beauty and merit. The romanticised notions of a pre-industrial period combined with a moral environmental imperative – both ideas directly inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement and Colonial Revival – were elements that the society explicitly connected to the structure of their business through their discourse. Margaret Miller, in a 1897 article, discussed the society’s anti-modernist surroundings: “The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework is in perfect harmony with its environment. It is Colonial and Puritan, it is artistic, it is loyal to its traditions, patriotic, and there is not another like it.”  

Echoing this sentiment in a talk given in Flushing, New York in 1898, Whiting explicitly discussed Ruskin’s influence on her and Miller’s

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decision to form the organisation: “the idea came that it might be possible to adapt Ruskin’s theory to the Deerfield effort and establish a village industry which should be at once unique and in entire sympathy with its environment.” \textsuperscript{404} The environment both women were referencing, each writing soon after the organisation was established, was not the late-nineteenth-century reality of industry, urbanity, or pollution, but an idealised notion of (re-)creating a pre-industrial period in a town that had spent several decades – before the ideas of either the Arts and Crafts movement or the Colonial Revival became institutionalised in America – establishing itself as a historical link to the past. This interest in situating the works of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework in such an idealised space lent itself to verifying the authenticity of the objects. Margaret Miller and Whiting were emphasising the importance of environment in terms of creation and inspiration because they were able to situate the production and display of the textiles as both influenced by and inspiring to a town that was seen as a historical connection to a past that defined true American heritage.

The environment of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework actually referred to two separate yet inextricably linked areas. The first was the space of production. Ruskin demanded that crafts be produced in a situation where the craftsperson felt joy and freedom in labour, and that exact copying of works be strictly forbidden. \textsuperscript{405} Miller and Whiting directly referenced these ideas when discussing their business. The process of the workers stitching the crafts replicated a particular work process – a certain spirit of labour – that recalled the idealised pre-industrial period (Figure 25). The work process was described as

between 20 and 30 needlewomen [doing] the embroidery in their own homes; so that again around the broad hearth-stones, under the low-beamed ceilings, there flourished the venerable craft once the almost

\textsuperscript{404} Margaret Whiting as quoted in Howe, “Deerfield Blue and White Needlework,” 47.
\textsuperscript{405} Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic,” 181.
stolen delight of pioneer womenfolk, but now, under this most skilled of management, become artistically and financially, the glory of the village.  

The society promoted the working methods of its needlewomen as romanticised portraits of the past: “Stitching under old family portraits with rooms in wainscoted walls, cavernous fireplaces, and raftered ceilings, the Deerfield women remained gentlewomen and appeared as slightly frayed relics of a bygone past.”  

The place of production itself was positioned as integral to the identity of the organisation and its objects. These descriptions of the creative process explicitly separated production from the monotonous, uninspired factory setting that characterised industrial objects. Further justifying the work process as an authentic continuation of colonial traditions, the workers were constructed as “relics of a bygone past” and connected to their cultural inheritance, thereby validating their ability to operate properly within the setting.  

Along with the environment of the production of crafts, the town itself was viewed as a remnant of a pre-industrial past. Deerfield was marketed as an anachronistic oasis amidst the chaos of modernisation. The town was a place where “no smoke from noisy factories mars the landscape and no busy shops proclaims the labor of people.”  

Deerfield, in the late-nineteenth century, was viewed as a living museum, an actual example of life as it had been in the colonial period before industrialisation had disrupted its serenity.  

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406 Allen, “Recounts Story,” 3. Significant in this quotation is the phrase “under the most skilled of management”, further normalising the idea that the Folk producers – that is, the needlewomen – needed to be directed and supervised by the educated, knowledgeable middle-class.

407 Boris, Art and Labor, 119.

408 This relates back to the notion of the Folk and cultural inheritance discussed in the previous section.


410 The notion of a living history museum is very interesting, and could most definitely be explored further. In Deerfield, in particular, there is much work to be done in this area. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this paper, I am unable to explore this idea further here.
connection impossible in more modernised areas of the country.\footnote{Boris, \textit{Art and Labor}, 119.} The crafts produced in Deerfield were inspired by the rural, pastoral atmosphere as well as contributed to the creation of the town as a historical bridge to an idealised past. The crafts and the town were promoted as interdependent and inextricable elements: the crafts could not be properly produced without the town environment, and the town depended on the crafts as part of its colonial identity. Each of these elements was constructed as surviving pieces of history lost in other places:

In the developments at Deerfield we see an unconscious evolution of the old-time guild idea after the fashion that made the guild life and the guild work express themselves in some of the truest art that the world ever saw, and in their alliance stand for the shaping of the community life along the soundest artistic and civic lines.\footnote{Baxter, “Movement for Village Industries,” 160 – 1.}

The crafts, as part of the nation-wide Colonial Revival, were viewed as direct descendents of eighteenth-century works, the houses found on Main Street were mostly eighteenth-century originals with some restoration, and the street itself was unchanged from the days when a house and carriage were the only vehicular traffic. This atmosphere was viewed as the idyllic backdrop to an organisation producing authentic colonial-inspired crafts. It was believed that the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was an example of how the arts and crafts movement leads to and naturally merges in the civic improvement movements, which, in various aspects, commands the service of the arts that express themselves in handicraft. In view of this fact, it may well be appreciated how finely a place like Deerfield expresses its past and makes it a fitting theatre for the activities developing there.\footnote{Baxter, 161.}

**Display and Tourism**

The idea of Deerfield as a “fitting theatre” was further developed as the popularity and success of the textiles of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework at national
and international exhibitions caused increased visibility to the town. The annual summer
exhibition, arranged by the Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society of which the Society of Blue
and White Needlework was a member, began in 1899 and was held every year
afterwards.\textsuperscript{414} In order to be permitted to participate, a person had to be a Deerfield
resident,\textsuperscript{415} further instilling the importance of regionalism and a sense of cultural
inheritance that could be shared only by certain people. Unlike the other crafts that were
part of the Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society, which were exhibited together in the Village
Room, the Society of Blue and White Needlework exhibited their objects in the front
parlour of the Miller house on Main Street (Figure 26).\textsuperscript{416} This house, identified by the
large wooden spinning wheel that was the Society’s trademark fixed atop the front door,
was a popular tourist destination in the town. The local paper, \textit{The Gazette and Courier}
described the society’s 1901 display:

\begin{quote}
The display of the Blue and White Society shows many new designs. A
bed spread in blue is a reproduction of one worked by Keturah Baldwin of
Dorcet Mt. in 1750 which was burned last year. The society had made a
drawing of it and fearing it might be forgotten worked it out. Another
wonderful piece of work is a screen loaned by Mrs. E.E. Furbush of
Greenfield. In the central panel is the tree of life which spreads over the
other panels. It is done in beautiful colors, not confined to the simple blue
and white. There are many doilies and center pieces and various sizes
and shapes. The samples worked in cross stitch, the designs which are
taken from the Memorial Hall, form an interesting part of the exhibit. To
each piece of work is attached the name of the worker. The exhibition
was held through the week, morning and afternoons, and the number of
people who have flocked to it from all directions is an excellent proof of
the fame which the Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society has attained.\textsuperscript{417}
\end{quote}

The exhibition at the Miller home incorporated colonial works, copies of eighteenth-
century works, along with original designs. The connection of the specific worker to the

\textsuperscript{414} Curtis, “Crafts of Old Deerfield,” 21.
\textsuperscript{415} Curtis, 20.
\textsuperscript{416} “New England Invites You,” 53.
pieces was rare;\textsuperscript{418} often textiles, such as those exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, were listed by designer and the hand labourer remained nameless, perceived as performing a subservient task. This exhibit arranged by the society was an example of the needlewomen receiving full acknowledgment for their role. Margaret Miller, in a 1901 article, explained this action as being based in the idea that having the “worker’s name …attached to each article rouses the ambition and sets the standard.”\textsuperscript{419} Following the Arts and Crafts ideal of “joy in labour,” Miller and Whiting promoted personal pride for the workers by enabling each to claim personal – if somewhat limited – ownership over the pieces with which each was involved. This action, while certainly somewhat innovative and interesting, actually fit quite nicely into the identity of the society. A fundamental notion of the works and the society was their associations with a rightful cultural inheritance to the colonial period, this connection established in large part due to the identity of the farmers’ wives and daughters responsible for the hand labour component of the production process. By labelling each piece of artwork with the worker’s name, Miller and Whiting ensured an explicit connection to the Folk culture that formed the basis of the society’s identity.

The society’s display in the Miller home was arranged as a household.\textsuperscript{420} The needlework was set to look “daintily harmonious in its quiet cool effect of embroidered counterpane…together with … furnishings to match.”\textsuperscript{421} Creating a coherent space followed the tradition of period rooms, purported by the people of Deerfield as a style invented by the town historian George Sheldon.\textsuperscript{422} Beyond following this style, there were two other possible reasons why the society established its exhibits in such a

\textsuperscript{418} To reiterate, this practice started with British Arts and Crafts Society exhibitions, beginning in 1888. However, associating the hand labourer with the finished product was still not a common practice.

\textsuperscript{419} Miller, “Deerfield Society,” 2.

\textsuperscript{420} Baxter, “Movement for Village Industries,” 155.

\textsuperscript{421} Baxter, 155.

\textsuperscript{422} Zusy, Against Overwork, 20.
manner. First, by creating a setting that displayed the works “properly,” the society positioned their crafts in a way that showed them off to their best advantage. These displays, invariably based on colonial archetypes, would further cement the authentic colonial-associations of the crafts. Second, following Ruskin’s moral environmental imperative, the displays instructed customers as to how pieces should be displayed. The society promoted its textiles as crafted with a complete environment in mind, creating the designs in order “to harmonise with Colonial rooms and Colonial furniture.”

By establishing an ideal domestic setting, Miller and Whiting could educate people about the importance of organising an entire space that suited the objects. This strategy related to Gesamtkunstwerk, a German term commonly used in the Arts and Crafts movement, which referred to the importance of items matching their purpose and harmonising with an interior to provide a total body of art. By assembling their works in an appropriate context, Miller and Whiting were showing the public the appropriate domestic arrangement to suit their objects. To extend this theory into the realm of consumerism, perhaps Miller and Whiting were attempting to exploit this notion to sell more of their objects. If customers hoped to replicate the exhibit or to apply properly this notion of Gesamtkunstwerk, then they would most likely purchase more of the products necessary to achieve this.

By the early-twentieth century, the town of Deerfield boasted an array of successful craft industries, from textiles to metalwork to basket-weaving, arranged under the umbrella of the Deerfield Arts and Crafts movement from 1899 until 1906 when the organisation reconfigured itself under the label of Deerfield Industries. 

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423 Alice Donlevy, “Art Department,” The Period 4, 8 (April 1897): 163.
425 When the Arts and Crafts Society rearranged itself as Deerfield Industries, the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was no longer a member.
annual summer exhibitions, “the entire beautiful town was part of the show.”\textsuperscript{426} The increased number of visitors resulted in a proposal to construct a chartered trolley that ran the entire length of Main Street. Many residents of Deerfield protested the building of the trolley, claiming it disrupted the serenity of the street, which was one of the scenic factors of the region,\textsuperscript{427} but the company pushed for its construction, and tracks were laid in 1903.\textsuperscript{428} This trolley further increased the number of visitors coming to Deerfield to experience a romanticised connection to the past.

The element of tourism that developed in the town was antithetical to the construction of Deerfield as an oasis free from the constraints imposed by modernity. Anti-modernism was contrasted with the modern encroachments of tourism, made possible by inventions such as train travel and trolley as well as increasing print culture, which advertised the town and its crafts. The paradoxical relationship that existed in modernising the anti-modern developed from a hatred of the modern through lamenting the past along with an enthusiasm for modernisation and material progress.\textsuperscript{429} The ambivalence of attempting to revive a pre-industrial past, which was central to both the Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival, was clearly apparent here in the example of the town.\textsuperscript{430}

\textsuperscript{426} Baxter, “Movement for Village Industries,” 155.
\textsuperscript{427} Baxter, 162.
\textsuperscript{428} Zusy, \textit{Against Overwork}, 24.
\textsuperscript{430} This conflicting outlook was also apparent throughout the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework: workers, production processes, and work environment, as well as the very objects that were promoted were constructed as embodying the very essence of the anti-modern spirit. This modernising the anti-modern conundrum was also demonstrated through the logo sewn onto each approved craft produced by the society and the notion of consumerism and commodity which was the very basis of the society’s success. These elements will be discussed later in this chapter.
Object and Design

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework was created with “the intention of reviving the traditional embroidery of the Colonial period, and of establishing a village industry.” All the products of the society were based around a particular style that originated in eighteenth-century textiles made in the United States. This colonial style was viewed as distinct and authentic, constructed mainly on a national scale to define a specific character considered inherent to a particular group of people. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this style was also used by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework to establish regional identity. Through this process, the society used the colonial style to mark itself as the strongest personification of this national identity. In other words, the women responsible for constructing the society’s image used the language of national identity to localise and integrate its own regional heritage with that of the nation; Deerfield became the heart of the nation and was, therefore, most justified in adopting national stylings into a regional organisation. The process through which the colonial style made its way to the United States, and more specifically to Deerfield, was explained by Margaret Miller in a 1900 booklet:

Much study of the old pieces of decorative needlework preserved in family chests, showed that the designs, coloring and stitches owed their origin to England, where in the Elizabethan manors and farm houses similar bed and window furnishings in blue and white and other colors are still found, these in turn being direct in descent from the famous early Anglo-Saxon embroideries. Transplanted in our first Colonial states the designs derived fresh vigor from the Orient, for the printed and woven fabrics bought through “the China trade” furnished many an inland draughtswoman with new motives to add to the traditional English variants of the rose, thistle, lily and carnation; thus enriched the work continued, each spread or curtain being drawn free hand, upon the homespun linen and wrought in hand-spun threads of linen or wool-dyed

432 This phenomenon of localising national identity is discussed by David Crowley: “The culture of the village was more than a matter of scholarly interest…; it was sometimes credited with embodying the nation which had been lost in the city.” David Crowley, “Haslemere and the Edges of Europe,” in The Lost Arts of Europe, eds David Crowley and Lou Taylor (Haslemere: Haslemere Educational Museum, 2000): 44.
in madder, indigo and fustic, until superseded by fine white embroidery and lace work, its production ceasing in 1830.  

In this excerpt, Margaret Miller established a very specific lineage of design, tracing the traditions found in the region – and by definition in the nation – back as far as Anglo-Saxon Europe. Margaret Miller carefully distinguished the work created in the United States from that in England by discussing “Oriental” influences that were added to the work. This tactic managed to claim not only an Anglo-Saxon and English heritage, but to legitimise the use of a Japanese or Chinese style found in the designs produced by the society (Figure 27). Establishing this connection as historical, being part of the colonial tradition, was very interesting: Japanese-inspired patterns were in vogue in England and the United States beginning after Japan’s exhibition at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876. This appropriation was addressed and heavily condemned by William Morris in an 1888 essay he wrote for the first official Arts and Crafts exhibition in London:

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434 It is important to note here that the British Arts and Crafts reformers did, in fact, look to the “Orient” and included “Oriental” influences in their work. The crucial difference, however, in the way the United States in general and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework in particular utilised these design influences was the way in which the ‘Orient’ was assimilated as part of their own heritage. With the British movement, “Oriental” motifs were credited as cross-national designs, and – as shown in the quotation by William Morris stated below – were to be used cautiously. But in the United States these design elements were constructed as part of its own national history and culture. A possible reason for this authority or ownership could be related to United States Imperialism and an 1853 trade treaty with Japan. In the nineteenth century, Japan had maintained a policy of isolation and refused trade relations with any western countries. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, American ships had been crossing the Pacific to trade in China or for whaling expeditions. Often, shipwrecks or storms forced American ships to land in Japan, breaching the country’s isolation policy. Realising the importance and possibilities of trade with Japan, American Commodore Matthew Perry, in 1853, negotiated an agreement that opened two ports to American ships and promised trade relations. No other western country had access to Japan in this manner at the time. Perhaps the United States’ role in gaining entry into Japan created a sense of connection to the culture, thereby giving Americans a sense of ownership over Japanese culture. It is perhaps this history – along with colonial “Oriental” trade and objects – that later permitted the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework to treat Japanese influences as part of its own American heritage. For more reading on the relationship between the United States and Japan in the nineteenth century, see, for example, Ian Neary, *The State and Politics in Japan*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002; and George Fefler, *Breaking Open Japan: Commodore Perry, Lord Abe, and American Imperialism in 1853*, New York: Harper Collins, 2007.

435 Memorial Hall Museum Online, [memorialhall.mass.edu/home](http://memorialhall.mass.edu/home).
It may be well here to warn those occupied in embroidery against the feeble imitation of Japanese art which are so disastrously common among us. The Japanese are admirable naturalists, wonderfully skilled draughtsmen, deft beyond all others in mere execution beyond whatever they take in hand... But with all this, a Japanese design is absolutely worthless unless it is executed with Japanese skill.\footnote{William Morris as quoted in Morris, \textit{Victorian Embroidery}, 110. I should note here that although Morris and other reformers warned against imitating Japanese styles, Japanese design motifs were quite common in crafts during the late-nineteenth century.}

By addressing this issue in her booklet, Margaret Miller justified the society’s use of Japanese or “Oriental” influences through including it as part of the region’s and nation’s own history. Margaret Miller, by claiming “Oriental” influences as part of a legitimate historical legacy, was distinguishing the designs of the society from frivolous fashions. This sense of ownership of particular traditions – Anglo-Saxon, English, and “Oriental” – as part of an authentic legacy established the backdrop to all the designs and textiles produced by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework.

The Deerfield society did not copy old patterns as much as channel the spirit of eighteenth-century designs through careful adaptations, although originally, Miller and Whiting replicated eighteenth-century textiles with preservation in mind. Whiting, in a 1898 talk given in Flushing, New York, described her and Miller’s original motivations: “At first it was our intention to make one replica of each of the pieces in collection. The wools had been badly moth-eaten and many of the pieces were threadbare, but the designs showed true New England directness, often with a vigor and perception of decorative need which was remarkable.”\footnote{Margaret Whiting as quoted in Howe, \textit{Deerfield Embroidery}, 18.}

When the practice evolved into business, the designs for the textiles became adaptations of the earlier patterns, rather than copies. Using a logic that was clearly influenced by Ruskin’s idea of truth in design and spirit, Whiting stated, “Since it was the spirit of the Colonial work that called for revival, and neither imitation nor strict copying of its style could meet the present needs, the quarry of drawings, and specimen’s of old
work were used with discriminating freedom.” 438 Once again, there was a sense of entitlement to “the spirit” of the colonial works and a belief that, through modern perspective, Miller and Whiting could improve on the eighteenth-century patterns.

The designs for the society were based on a pastiche of influences: the eighteenth-century textiles (colonial motifs and colour schemes), “Oriental” ideas (also linked to the colonial crafts), Arts and Crafts themes, and plants and flowers from the region. 439 The influences, however, were always treated as the backdrop to the creative process of adapting the colonial designs to modern purposes, and the patterns always related to the Deerfield women’s rightful cultural inheritance to crafts produced by their colonial foremothers: “The Deerfield Society does not copy or reproduce these old designs, but true to tradition, produces original work founded on its inheritance.” 440 Integrating modern styles with traditional ideas was promoted as an artistic process, explicitly differentiating mindless copying from inspired creation. This eclecticism combined various influences in creative ways to formulate a new style that was distinctly tied to the society. Uniting these motifs in a style that was inextricably interwoven with the identity of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework resulted in both the crafts and the society operating in frameworks that were historical and modern, derivative and original, as well as international, national, and regional.

The actual creation process was a mixture of colonial processes and modern adaptations. The crafts of the eighteenth-century women were worked in crewel wools with the dominant colour coming from the indigo-dyed yarn, a colour achieved from

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439 The last influence was very much aided by the 1895 book that Miller and Whiting authored about New England botanicals.
natural dyes. Miller and Whiting made a conscious decision to switch from the wool materials to a flax thread on linen backing, the change justified as a way to prevent the severe moth damage the earlier textiles had suffered. All colours were carefully crafted by Miller and Whiting themselves, using traditional dye methods with natural ingredients. The colours used in the designs of the society were originally worked entirely in blues and indigos, but later other colours, such as madder and fustic, were incorporated. The mix of colours added later – those not in found in the colonial textiles – were not chosen randomly; each colour was carefully selected and based on “Oriental” or regional influences: “the madder from Mesopotamia, the tawny shades of cutch (the bark of the South America acacia), fustic, which gave such a beautiful yellow, and finally all the warm greys and browns of local tree barks, butternut, maples, and sumac.”

Along with the hybridity of creative influences, the actual materials used in the construction of the Deerfield society’s textiles were from a variety of places. The thread was purchased, depending on thickness, from either a Scottish company or an American company, both stationed in New York. The linen backing used for the crafts was originally purchased from Berea College in Kentucky, but was judged to be too thin to have any longevity. Later textiles were embroidered onto a thicker linen purchased

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443 Margaret Miller, *The Deerfield Society*, [http://www.olddeerfield.org/museum.htm](http://www.olddeerfield.org/museum.htm). For a more specific and exact explanation of the actual processes and ingredients used by Miller and Whiting in the dyeing process, please see Howe, *Deerfield Embroidery*.
445 Howe, *Deerfield Embroidery*, 156.
446 Boris, *Art and Labor*, 130 – 1. Berea College was founded in 1893 under the presidency of William Goodell Frost, one of the “foremost discoverers of the ‘Appalachian uniqueness’ that mountain homespun most concretely represented” (130). The weaving produced by local Appalachian women under his guidance was shipped north to Boston and New York as “material culture arguments for [the] philanthropic support of his colleagues” (130). The fabrics produced at Berea College “were expensive and certainly beyond the budgets of the women who had once made them to clothe their own families” (131). This endeavour, which involved “improving” the lives of mountain women through marketing their crafts, was strongly supported by Candace Wheeler.
from a Russian company.\textsuperscript{448} Although combining materials from companies associated with the United States, Scotland, Appalachia, and Russia, the society crafted an identity that was meant to be first and foremost rooted in regionalism. The use of materials from varying groups, half of which could not even be linked to the society through nationalism, exhibited the increasing hybridity occurring during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century made possible by globalisation through print culture, easier international trade, and World's Fairs. It was the dominant countries who were able to appropriate the materials – and identities – of other countries.

The modern sense of cosmopolitanism and cultural entitlement expressed through the disparate ideological and material influences incorporated into the designs resulted in a hybrid identity for the crafts themselves. The embroidery and needlework produced by the Deerfield society operated within three distinctive categories traditionally defined autonomously: art, artefact, and commodity.\textsuperscript{449} The application of Arts and Crafts ideals along with the creative interpretations of past crafts and nature from the region allowed Miller and Whiting to situate the society's work within an artistic framework. The two women were trained at recognised art institutions in New York, and defined themselves as artistic designers of artistic objects. Relying on language that preached the value of art as beyond the constraints of the material world, Miller and Whiting expressed that they did not ever feel inclined to promote the work of their society through advertisement: “It is...art which founds and maintains a craft. If art is served, honesty remembered, and utility not forgotten, a craft needs no more help nor

\textsuperscript{448} Howe, 48.

\textsuperscript{449} As mentioned previously in Chapter One, this framework is adapted from the 1999 essay “Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter” by Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, taken from their edited book Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Post Colonial Worlds. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. In this article, Phillips and Steiner explored the circulation and definition of “primitive” or ethnographic objects. I feel, due to the specific way the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework attempted to situate their work, this framework can be appropriately applied here.
encouragement than it ought to find in the open market where it may squarely meet and
demand public recognition for its inborn merits.” These “inborn” qualities of the
objects elevated the crafts above simple utilitarian, household articles into the category
of art.

Along with positing the crafts as art, the objects, through the society’s historical
and cultural colonialism, operated as artefacts, promising a renewed contact with a
specific idealised way of life. This way of life – associated with the romanticised colonial,
English, and Anglo-Saxon past as well as the natural primitivism of the “Orient” – was
viewed in direct opposition to the mechanised and industrialised society against which
many in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century were reacting. The objects were
constructed as artefacts embodying a particular essence, positioned as products that
provided access to and knowledge about particular idealised cultures.

Through establishing their work as artefact, that is an obtainable object that could
connect the owner with a specific time and place, the society also manufactured their
works as commodities. This association with the Deerfield textiles was mainly masked
in the society’s ideological discussions that established the objects as art and artefact.
Although the notion of objects as having market value was addressed in the discussion
of the payment equity of labour, the discourse directly surrounding the objects
themselves never addressed commercial value. Instead, discussions about the crafts
produced by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework elevated the textiles to
a position above market value, praising their intrinsic artistic value or function as a
historical artefact. The commodification of the crafts produced by the society could not
have occurred without this establishment of the objects as art and artefact. It is through
the very connections the textiles had with these two categories, however, that defined

450 Margaret Whiting as quoted in Howe, Deerfield Embroidery, 19.
their value to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century consumers. Associating the crafts with a specific ideology enabled consumers – mainly those of the middle-class – to participate through purchasing the products.

Miller and Whiting, though never acknowledging overtly the consumerism inherent to their project, were intent on ensuring that their crafts and designs remained under their sole control. The works associated with the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework were only sold as completed objects in order to ensure an appropriate standard: “As the craft is to be regarded as an art, it is aimed to produce the embroideries of the highest excellence, no classes are held to teach the general public, nor are designs or materials sold.”451 To ensure that a certain standard or level of production was maintained, the society had an official logo that was sewn onto the textile after the work was completed and it passed the critical eyes of either Miller or Whiting. The handicrafts were carefully monitored by both women, and only when a finished piece met their approval could the trademark be sewn on.452 The logo was designed by Mary Allen and consisted of a “D” inside a flax spinning wheel, which mirrored the sign marking the front of the Miller house where the crafts were on permanent display.453 The trademark ensured that all textiles produced in the name of the society would be immediately identifiable, as well as eliminated the chance of having the society associated with inferior, imitation copies that lacked such an emblem. Due to the trademark, Miller and Whiting retained “exclusive possession” of all designs and crafts produced under the name of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework.454 Miller and Whiting, with their absolute control over the production and distribution over their works, could use their stamp of approval – the logo – as a guarantee to the

452 Memorial Hall Museum Online, memorialhall.mass.edu/home.
consuming public that purchasing the Deerfield society’s crafts was a dependable and genuine attachment to the ideologies it represented. The logo could also be seen as a status symbol: as the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework gained national and international renown, the object became not only instilled with the link to the past but also the prominence of owning a textile produced by a notable company, a brand name.

The Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework exemplifies the complexity of creating, maintaining, and promoting identity in the late-nineteenth century. As print culture, travel, and World’s Fairs increased cross-cultural access, the interchange between international objects and ideas amplified. At the same time as this increased globalised contact, the notion of nation became naturalised, and was promoted as an objective category. The search for a distinctive national identity often resulted in the search for “cultural essence,” an idealisation of a nation’s unique character that existed before industry and machine, mass production began homogenising modernised countries. These constantly shifting boundaries of international and national became categories with which organisations, attempting to participate in an ever-expanding marketplace, negotiated in order to link inextricably products with ideologies. Miller and Whiting’s society demonstrates the way in which a local craft association mediated international and national frameworks.
Chapter 4
Conclusion

The history of women and craft in the late-nineteenth century is complicated and multifarious, entrenched in broader issues such as gender, class, space, and power. The women-owned and -operated craft organisations examined in this thesis – Limerick Lace, Clare Embroidery, and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework – functioned within international and national movements, yet they negotiated these larger ideologies to construct identities that also reflected their local circumstances. These case studies reveal the complexity inherent to creating, promoting, and maintaining identity during the late-nineteenth century.

In her 1996 essay, “The Search for Vernacular Expression: The Arts and Crafts Movements in America and Ireland,” Nicola Gordon Bowe noted the stylistic similarities between the needleworks of Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. Yet, in all my research, I did not find any evidence that either Florence Vere O’Brien or Ellen Miller and Margaret Whiting knew specifically about or were explicitly influenced by each other. How is it, then, that geographically disparate

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455 Nicola Gordon Bowe, “The Search for Vernacular Expression: The Arts and Crafts Movements in America and Ireland,” The Substance of Style: Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement, ed. Bert Denker (Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1996), 19. It was from this source that I first got the idea to examine together the particular case studies in this thesis. The exact quotation by Gordon Bowe that linked the Irish and American examples was: “Florence Vere O’Brien’s Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery (with clear affinities to the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework).” Gordon Bowe does not elaborate upon the “clear affinities” beyond this brief mention. Due to the ambiguity of this connection, I sought out other sources in an attempt to explore further how the organisations of Vere O’Brien and Margaret Whiting and Ellen Miller were related. Unable to locate further information in any sources, my supervisor Janice Helland personally contacted Gordon Bowe through email. In her response dated 06 October 2006, Gordon Bowe stated the “affinities” to which she was referencing were based purely on aesthetic similarities.
craft organisations that carefully positioned their works as distinctive and rooted in region and nation came to produce textiles that were aesthetically analogous?

The increasing international interchange as a result of greater access to print culture, travel and tourism, and World’s Fairs made the cross-cultural contact of objects and ideas more possible than ever before in the nineteenth century. The Arts and Crafts movement, with its ideas about art, craft, design, and display, provided a supra-national language of social and artistic reform that addressed “issues of industrialization, urbanization, competition in an increasingly imperial and global economy, and the establishment (or reinforcement) of national identity.”

This desire to establish or reinforce a nation’s identity resulted in Romantic Nationalism, a movement that drew from the Arts and Crafts “advocacy of indigenous design, traditional ways of making objects, and the use of local materials.” The international concept of Romantic Nationalism manifested nationally as revival movements – the Celtic Revival in Ireland and Colonial Revival in the United States. Supporters of these revivals perceived Folk and peasant culture as fundamental to each country’s heritage, and considered its preservation and renewal essential to fostering and legitimising a strong national identity.

While there was no evidence of direct exchange between Limerick Lace and Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, these organisations used the same sources in order to localise and individualise their identities. Linked by chronology, gender, craft, and regionalism, these case studies adapted similar discourses and visual vocabularies of international and national

457 Kaplan, 17.
458 Kaplan, 17. I would like to note here that the notion of preserving and renewing Folk culture is misleading. As the Folk was a constructed concept, the process was more creating and promoting than preserving.
frameworks, intersections only possible through cross-cultural exposure due to increasing technology such as print culture and travel. Basing designs on these same reference points resulted in aesthetically similar products, even through the discourse of the organisations promoted a specific identity that was supposedly distinctive to each craft association.

It is ironic that projects based within frameworks that included a revolt against industrialisation to avoid the homogenous, mass-produced objects and a desire to define unique and indicative identities produced objects that were aesthetically comparable. This tendency, however, only escalated throughout the twentieth century as technology increased the ease and speed with which ideas and objects could circulate worldwide. The global economy in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century dissolved national and cultural boundaries through international interchanges, creating multicultural identities. Paradoxically, coinciding with this reduction of cultural autonomy was the increased desire to cement a distinct national culture in order to participate in this global economy.459 These disparities, apparent in their most nascent stages in the late-nineteenth-century case studies presented in this thesis, intensified throughout the twentieth century and continue into the present.

There is still much possibility for continued work into the topic of women and craft in general, and these case studies in particular. Although these organisations and the women who operated them were well-known and respected during their time, there is a distinct lack of contemporary scholarship. While craft studies have gained increasing acceptance in recent decades, large scale craft exhibitions – such as International Arts


As I continue my studies into a doctoral programme I plan to further my examinations of gender and craft, extending my focus from the late-nineteenth century into the twenty-first century. Anchoring my discussions in the globalised exchange that occurred in the Deerfield example, I want to map the triangular relationship of female designer, native culture or Folk, and exhibiting institutions that recurs throughout the history of textiles and informs the constructions of identity during craft exhibitions. Using a series of three case studies – the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework (United States, late-nineteenth century), the International Grenfell Association (Newfoundland, mid-twentieth century), and Carol Cassidy and Lao Textiles (Lao, twenty-first century) – I plan to examine these organisations within a framework that posits the triangular relationship as a structural paradigm for textile organizations and to explore how this dialogic relationship between female designer, native culture or Folk, and exhibiting institution is re-configured as the definition and role of nation changes within different periods. Building upon my Master’s thesis, my aim is to investigate the historically recurring dialogue between textile display and constructions of nation and identity in order to situate Carol Cassidy and Lao Textiles within the post-national landscape.

The case studies presented in this thesis – Limerick Lace, Clare Embroidery and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework – assimilated academic interests that are often examined as disparate areas, such as craft, gender, heritage, identity politics, and international exchanges. My intent was to unify these fields of knowledge and to build a more comprehensive analysis of the role of craft through situating material

460 For a review and critique of these exhibitions, see Peter Cormack. “A Truly British Movement,” Apollo (April 2005): 49 – 53.
culture within a larger socio-political context, a strategy I seek to further in my continuing academic pursuits.
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Figures

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