

Handiwork of Winnifred Kirkman Baird

By [Karen Baird](#) on Saturday, June 4, 2011 at 1:52pm

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WINNIFRED KIRKMAN BAIRD

These items were written by their daughter Vera Baird Farnes, for the Family reunion of their descendants, held in Blackfoot, Idaho on 31 July 1982.

Since a small child I have been interested in the handiwork of people, and remember the things our Mother did during her life. What really started me to thinking that a record of handiwork of Mother should be written, was an incident in the spring of 1981. At that time Reva Baird Corbett and Karen Baird came from Idaho to visit me in Littleton, Colorado. Karen brought her tatting with her, and asked me if I had ever learned to tat. I answered her that my Mother had taught me to tat when I was a very small child, even before I went to school.

Karen looked surprised, and made a reply to the effect that she had asked her father if her grandmother had ever done any tatting, and he said he didn't think she had ever known any thing about tatting.

As I was thinking about this, I felt impressed that we older children in the family should share what we know of the younger life of our parents, with their descendants. I mentioned this to Reva and got an assignment for this reunion.

The word "handiwork" is a noun and means "work done by the hands".

SEWING: When we lived in Shelton and Riverside, and also later years in my life, I remember women coming to our home to have Mother make clothes for them. Mother would help them alter a dress, blouse, slip, pants, etc. that didn't fit them in the desired way. The woman would put on the item of clothing, usually wrong side out, then Mother would pin the clothing the way it should fit. Mother could show how to rip out a certain seam, and then sew it up differently so it would fit. Sometimes it wouldn't have enough material, so a piece would be added, which many times would be a wedge shaped piece of the same fabric as the garment. Or sometimes it would be a strip of the fabric. It happened many times that the seams didn't match well, so all that was needed was to re sew the seams. Many times she has helped someone fit a sleeve, which usually required ripping out the seam, and putting it in again. Many times she found the sleeve sewn in backward, and just needed to be sewn in correctly. I remember one woman saying that she didn't think it made any difference. I have watched many such sessions. In later years Mother didn't do this as much as in her younger years.

Mother also sewed for other women, as sort of a seamstress, making them blouses, or dresses. Her price for this was that they would purchase enough material for two dresses or two blouses. Mother would make both of them. One would be for herself as pay for making the dress or blouse for the other woman. I know at times she has also made children's clothing at this bargain, or without pay. Sometimes the woman would bring Mother a loaf of bread, some eggs, or other food products, which were always welcomed at our house. Many times Mother just helped the woman to be a good neighbor or friend.

Mother did have an old White brand sewing machine. About the summer or spring that I was nine years of age, she had me learn to do a little sewing on this old machine. I would sew up seams that had come apart on any of the family clothing, or help with other mending. (I also sewed the needle through my long john finger. It went through and back so quickly. Mother did her first aid treatment on it, of which she was well qualified, and it healed all right. A few years later I was helping Aunt Eliza Sessions do some sewing of denim for a quilt. When the needle hit a heavy seam, the needle bent and went through the end of this same finger, through the nail, then broke off. She called Uncle Darius to come with his pliers, which he did, and pulled the needle out of my finger. Aunt Eliza being a nurse did the necessary first aid.)

About the fall or winter that I was nine years old, this machine wore out. For awhile after this Mother did her sewing by hand. The next summer she accepted some cast off clothes from a friend, and sold some chickens and eggs, from which she got enough money to buy a little material. These she cut up into dresses for us girls and shirts for the boys. All of these she sewed by hand, so that we would have clothes for school, when it came school time. This would have been the summer Clair was born. She taught me to sew by hand. French seams were what she always did for sewing two pieces together.

During the summer of 1924, when I was eleven years old, Mother got a brand new SINGER sewing machine. She certainly did need it. The transaction happened this way. Our Father was sort of a horse trader, and at times traded a horse for something he thought would be a better farm horse. Sometimes when he traded a horse we had used for riding, he would give another horse, or called it our horse. I had one of these horses, obtained in this way, because Dad had traded a horse that I used for errands, and I liked to ride. Dad traded and got a horse that was supposed to be a good strong horse to use with farm equipment. Dad said the newly acquired horse would now be considered my horse. This horse turned out to be a good farm horse, but no good to ride, and when he got hitched to a wagon or buggy, he refused to go. Or would go for a distance then refused. Dad said he knew he was part mule. I remember various times when we went to church, this horse would maybe get us there, then refuse to go after we stared home. Also I remember some of us getting out of the buggy and

walking home. Eventually Dad would get the outfit home. We called this horse "Balky Bill".

A sewing machine agent came around our home one day trying to sell Mother a sewing machine. She said she had no money. He said he would take farm produce, or would take a horse, cow or chicken etc., as part of the payment. So our father gave him my horse, "Balky Bill", for part of the machine payment, and got a new sewing machine. Then Dad said if I outlived Mother, I could have this machine, which I did get. Clair took it to Littleton for me, and now Carol has it at her home in Leamington, Utah. Mother used this sewing machine for the rest of her life and did much sewing on it. During some of the last years of her life, she made many clowns, giving one to most of her grandchildren, and several she made for the Relief Society for bazaars and other activities. I'm sure that she enjoyed the machine much more than the balky horse, and the agent didn't seem to mind accepting a balky horse. He said he knew someone that could handle the situation, and use the horse just for farm work.

Many times relatives and friends gave Mother their old cast off clothing, and she would rip up the seams, and make necessary clothing for her children. She also endeavored to teach her three daughters to be good seamstresses, and learn what she knew about sewing.

TATTING: Tatting was the hobby craft, which Mother used for decoration of her home and children's clothing. I have been trying to remember who taught her to tat. She may have known a little about it's construction, but it seems to me a sister Longhurst, who was a great friend at the time they lived on the Uintah Reservation, in Utah, who inspired and taught her to become a good and proficient tatter.

Figure #1

Tatting was made for several uses. (See Figure #1) This is a doily, which consists of several round groups of stitches made into a circle. Then several circles were joined together with various stitches. Tatting consists of double and half stitches, which together make a row of knots, then slipped into a ring. Tatting is made with a shuttle made for this purpose, and some kind of thread, crochet cotton, etc. (I have the shuttle that Mother used. She gave it to me for a Christmas present in December of 1929, because she didn't have anything for me a Christmas present, nor any money to buy a present.)

Today shuttles are available to use to make Afghans. The Priscilla Tatting Book No. 2 -- Shows a collection of beautiful and useful patterns. This book was originally published in 1915, and contains instructions for making items as shown in Figures 1, 2, 3, & 4. (International Standard Book Number 0-436-23554-8 and Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 77-77046)

Knots made with a tatting shuttle are similar to the knots made in doing macramé. The tatting secret is to keep the thread loose so the knots can be slipped on it.

For years one didn't see much tatting, nor in stores books of instruction, shuttles etc. Today it is again popular, but differs from that of Mother's time, and sometimes is called "New or Modern Tatting". The general style and appearance are the same or similar today as seventy years ago, when Mother was becoming a proficient tatter. The charm of the old tatting was in its fineness and feathery daintiness, lent by the many picots. The new is more conventional in design and durability. It required skill and patience to make a beautiful piece of lace with even picots, and Mother was good at this. Tatting takes much time, which is probably the reason that today it has been modified.

Figure No. 2 shows a piece of lace of a type that was used for edging on a handkerchief, scarf, table cloths, etc. Mother used a very similar lace of this type to trim the edge or bottom of some of our slips when we were small girls. She put it on the bottom of dresses and slips for baby clothes for her babies. I think all of us but Neil had such baby clothes, with trimming like or similar to this.

Figure #2

Figure #3

Figure Nos. 3 & 4 show baby caps. Mother made several of these, or so it seems to me all her babies had a cap like this when they were small, and is which they wore when they were taken to church to be blessed. Fig. No. 3 is more feminine, and with the ribbon bows what the girls would have, while fig. NO. 4 is more what the boys had. However I believe that Mother made some caps that were used for girls or boys, by adding or removing ribbons. Sometimes a ribbon was strung through some of the tatting for decoration, and always a ribbon was sewn on each side for tying under the chin.

Figure #4

I remember a dress that Reva wore with a bonnet to match. The dress had a yoke of tatting, tatting on the edge of the sleeves and bottom of the dress and a slip to match the dress. All of these Mother had made. This Reva wore when she went to church, or to dress-up places. If I remember correctly, Mother made this dress for me, then Beth wore it then Reva.

More simple dresses were made for the boys, and after Reva, the boys did have baby dresses, but not so much, and more simple edges, some with only hemstitching on the hem at the bottom of the dress.

CROCHETING: When I was a girl Mother didn't do to much of this. What she did was mostly the buttonhole type to put on the neck and sleeves of sleepwear, or slips. Nighties were usually made and if some crochet cotton was available to her, she would finish around the neck and sleeves by a little crocheting, instead of hemming. (When I was about ten years of age the Jerry Early family moved by us, and sister Elvira Early was such an efficient crocheter. She inspired me to want to learn, and she wanted to teach Mother more about this art. At that time Mother wasn't interested. Now that I look back, I feel that it may have been because she felt she couldn't buy the supplies, because she needed the money she had for other things. Sister Early is the person who taught me to crochet.)

In those days commodities of sugar, flour, salt, cereal, etc. were packaged in cloth sacks. The cloth in the sacks became the material for the baby clothes, girls slips, nighties and panties. Also sleepwear for little boys, and at time their underpants. The string with which the sacks were sewn, was saved and this was used for crocheting and tatting as well as household uses.

BEADING: My first years of Mutual were in the Basalt Ward, at which time Mother was our teacher. About this time wearing jewelry made of seed (or Indian) beads was the rage. Seemingly Mother had learned some things about this during her years in Utah on the Uintah Reservation. At least she knew enough to coach some of us girls in making some necklaces and bracelets of beads. Which we proudly wore. She also had us string a few beads into a small circle, which circles we hung around our ears for earrings. (Actually I think this was my Father's idea which he concocted from something he had seen being done during his reservation years on the Uintah), but Mother assisted us in doing this.

FLOWERS: I don't know when Mother learned to make flowers, but she knew the art. She taught many of her children how to make flowers out of crepe paper. She showed me how to make some out of hair, but this was one of her arts she disliked, so tried to forget. I've seen her make flowers out of old stockings, and other bits of scraps. These she usually used as decoration for a party or decorating graves for Memorial Day. I remember some times when some of the families or women got together and made many, many flowers for a church social as decorations, or primary costumes, or for a school program. (One of these women was Janell's grandmother Jane.) Many of these times Mother was teaching or showing the others how flowers should be made. We've made flowers out of old magazines or newspapers, and decorated a box or bucket for an Easter Basket. I remember once when I wanted to decorate an egg for Easter, and we didn't have, nor could we buy any supplies for decorating, so Mother made a paper flower and Dad tied it to a hard boiled egg. I remember Mother making paper flowers out of crepe paper to use in Primary to decorate the children's hair and shoes, for a play for primary entertainment, and many other activities.

KNITTING: I know Mother did know how to do this, but it was not something she liked to do. She knew how to knit socks, and could have done this, as well as knit a sweater if it became something she was required to do.

NETTING: This is a lace made with special long pins and thread. The thread is measured on pins, and tied in place with knots, at various points. Sometimes crocheting has been considered as a kind of netting. Once I asked Mother is she ever learned to do this craft. She said she had learned a little, but she liked to tie knots of tattling, so stuck to that, and later learned to crochet. Aunt Eliza knew this art well and did show mother and I how to do it. We both tried a little of it with Aunt Eliza's equipment, and learned how to make this kind of lace, but never really pursued this type of handiwork.

DRAWN WORK: Several kinds of handiwork are included in this class. Today most all of the girls know how to make fringe, but it is done similar but yet different than it was done years ago. Today it is usually fastened by machine zigzag stitch. Years ago it was fastened by hand hemstitching.

The basic thing about this work is that threads are pulled from out of the fabric, and in their place put some kind of decoration.

Hardanger embroidery was one of these kinds Mother liked to do, and did well, and much of it during about the first dozen years of married life. I remember her doing some beautiful pieces when I was small. It takes a long time. Figure No. 5 shows a picture of this kind of work, and very similar to some Mother did. This type of work is done on dresser scarves, table runners, doilies, etc. Some of her work decorated our home until it wore out. I asked Mother why she didn't do this anymore, and she said it was no longer popular, patterns and materials were hard to find, it was costly to do, and she had enough things to do to keep her busy and other ways to spend her money.

Figure # 5

Figure No. 5 shows one corner. The other four corners are not shown. There may or may not be anything made in the center. I've seen some of the pieces Mother and others have done, that the whole piece was completed in Hardanger. Hardanger required a fabric with an even number of threads in both warp (lengthwise threads) and woof (crosswise threads). It is a counted thread project. This craft has not been popular for many years, and the type of material needed has been hard to find in stores. Today this craft is coming back again, so that many stores do carry needed supplies. The fabric to purchase is a crosstitch-hardanger 22 count fabric, which usually is a 100% cotton fabric.

Hemstitching is a combination of open work, or drawn work usually made with a hem. Mother used this to make handkerchiefs, and some dresser scarves, as well as some hems on bottom of dresses. Many times this was used to finish an edge with hardanger, or other drawn work. I've seen Mother use sugar sacks and make handkerchiefs with the hemstitching used on the edge. In those days we used hanky, not Kleenex. If one didn't have a hanky, of some kind, it was an insult to society. Sometimes Mother made a rolled hem on a hanky, or for the boys a machine hem, but usually she made these for girls or boys from sugar sacks, because the fabric in them was finer material.

At different times in Mother's life she did some of this handiwork. I think that she did more of this in her senior citizen years than any other year of her life, which was probably because she had more time in which to do it, and it was something to occupy her time. However her work was somewhat different in her older years than when I was small, or a child in her home. In her earlier years she dearly loved solid work, such as satin stitch, especially used in Hardanger, to put small flowers on a baby or child's dress. I've seen her do some of the most beautiful satin work ever dreamed of being done, into which she placed at many points of the design filled holes. To do this one takes a stiletto, with which a hole is made in the fabric, then the buttonhole stitch is worked around the hole.

In later years she used much cross stitch, running stitch, lazy daisy, etc., in her embroidery, and was good enough in her work to take some of it to the fair in Blackfoot, Idaho and win some blue ribbons on her embroidered pillow cases, etc.

ART: Mother did know a little about drawing. When a child she would at times show me some of pictures she had drawn. These she kept at the bottom of her old metal truck, so they would lay flat, and keep from getting wrinkled. These were some pencil drawings, of about 10 x 12 inches. I believe she learned this in school, and is where she probably did the pictures that she had. A few times I've seen her do a little painting on fabric, but this wasn't something she did very often. Drawing used to be something they taught in school, but it actually depended on the teacher and their talents, or desires.

She could cut out paper things. She cut paper into shapes of animals, people, houses, flowers, trees, which is something she taught to some of us. She taught us older children to do this, and we made such a mess, she wanted to forget it, and perhaps she did not do it much more, but I'm sure she still knew how it was done.

Aunt Susie Kirkman Streadbeck was also good at most of these same skills. I don't remember ever seeing Aunt Jennie Wilstead (or Wilsted) do any handicrafts. I believe that Mother and Aunt Susie got their love and desire to do handiwork and crafts from their maternal ancestors with whom they associated. I would guess this is something

many of us have inherited from our maternal ancestors, and something that will
continue with us. *By Vera Baird Farnes July 1982*