



INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of two back-to-back, complimentary essays. In the first, Sunshine Psota explores the historical context for needleworkers in the mid to late 19th century and situates the specific West Approach needleworkers within that context. Mary Beaudry identifies and describes specialty sewing implements, some of which have not been identified in archaeological contexts heretofore.

NEEDLEWORKERS OF THE WEST APPROACH PROJECT

Sunshine Psota

THE FEMALE ECONOMY

The common perception that late-19th-century women's work was temporary while men's work was permanent ignores the more important complex relationship of the value of women's economic contributions to their family and the turbulent economy of the times (Turbin 1987). Many working-class men were not employed full time, and those who were could not always support a family on their wages alone. Women's work in the home, in contrast, was always full time, although unpaid; if women worked outside, the stereotypical view held that they did so at the beginning and near the end of their adult life: there was the young single woman, who worked a few years before marriage, and the widow who worked to provide her own support. Population census takers did not record the other work women performed throughout their lives, upon which their families often relied. In fact, many women regularly augmented their family's income by working outside, sometimes enjoying long-lived careers. San Francisco women worked in a diversity of jobs. Apart from boardinghouse managers, washerwomen, needleworkers, and other domestic-related endeavors, employment opportunities included door-to-door sales; various positions at photography shops (Palmquist 1989; Shaping San Francisco 2004); a range of doctoring (Luchetti 1998); artistic ventures (Anderson 1989); divining (Myers 1999:121); entertaining; and prostitution. A small sample of documented working women, mainly those in the needle trades and those running boardinghouses, is represented in the West Approach neighborhoods. From archaeological deposits associated with the households of the needleworkers, an exceptional collection of sewing-related artifacts has been amassed.

In 1880 there were 285,401 Euroamerican women across the United States who worked as dressmakers, seamstresses, and milliners; men and minority women were missing from this count, as were untold married women who operated beyond the realm of the census takers (Gamber

1997:Table A-1). Tripled from the previous decade, this figure includes not only some of the women who worked from their homes, but also outsourcers, clerks in stores, and those with their own shops. Often city directories listed needleworkers—tailors, tailoresses, dressmakers, fitters, seamstresses, dressmakers' apprentices, and milliners—yet many more of these workingwomen existed than were listed in city directories or censuses (Gamber 1997; Nicklass 2005). Further details can be ascertained when place of employment and a person's family and living situation are taken into account. Compared to their male counterparts—the tailors, women dressmakers and seamstresses often appeared in the historical or primary record for a shorter time, and were often described as unmarried or widows. Once married or remarried, their contribution to the family's economy was often veiled behind the census taker's phrase "at home." Yet needlework offered flexible options to women, from intermittent work to a life-long profession, whether they were married or not. Gamber (1997) asserted that the "female economy" was a complex, frequently ephemeral, intimate interaction between predominately female customers, retailers, employees, and producers, sandwiched between the male wholesalers and creditor economy, and the customers' husbands, who controlled the payment for garments they may not have liked or thought too expensive.

The types of needleworkers represented in the West Approach Project run the gamut of the profession: tailors and tailoresses, dressmakers, seamstresses, and even a lone sewing-machine operator. Tailors created trousers and men's outergarments, such as overcoats and jackets. Tailoresses' work was limited to women's coats and jackets, or men's outergarments (Penny 1863:355–356); this was considered the most skilled occupation for women needleworkers, comparable to male tailors in skill level and occasionally compensated at almost the same rate. Dressmakers who owned their own shops and created and constructed dresses for the city's elites were also well paid for their highly developed skills. Aside from dress shops along fashionable commercial travel ways, other exclusive dressmakers operated out of tiny rooms rented in large commercial buildings in the downtown district (Gamber 1997:31, 100). Other skilled and well-paid positions with good social standing were fitters and cutters, who worked in a dressmaker's shop and created the patterns for a custom garment, fitting it to each customer. Independent dressmakers either "went out by the day" to a customer's home or worked out of their homes. Working at home was often reserved for an adequate or intermittent dressmaker, who likely balanced many household chores along with her paid obligations.

The least honored were seamstresses, whose work consisted of sewing simple garments (such as skirts, shirts, neckties, nightclothes, and undergarments), as well as accessories, or sewing trim to decorate garments and then charging by the yard. As independent small operations, needleworkers often worked throughout the day and into the night to complete a job on time. Because of their expertise in creating custom patterns and correctly fitting garments to their clients, tailoresses, dressmakers, and fitters were paid typically two to three times more for their efforts than were seamstresses. A discussion of the varied skill levels of the West Approach Project needleworkers and how these were identified in the collections is given below.

*THE IMPACT OF THE SEWING MACHINE ON AMERICAN HOUSEHOLDS AND SOCIETY**Sunshine Psota*

"Seamstress," ca. 1853; daguerreotype of an unidentified woman with an early sewing machine. (Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, DAG No. 1204 [Digital ID: cph 3c06400])

There is one thing more powerful than all the armies in the world and that is an idea whose time has come, to paraphrase Victor Hugo. Such was the case with the invention of the sewing machine.

While Elias Howe Jr. is credited with patenting the invention on 10 September 1846, many other inventors in several different countries either contributed to or created similar machines. And while Howe was unsuccessful in marketing his machine, mainly because it sewed so poorly, other inventors met with success. Isaac Merritt Singer, for example, targeted the household market and, with a better design, produced a machine that actually did what it claimed to do. To protect his patent, Howe brought about a series of lawsuits against Singer and others; in 1856, after his case won in court, Howe became part of the Sewing Machine Combination, with partners Isaac Singer

(inventor of the foot-operated treadle, tension device, and heart-shaped cam for the needle bar), Nathaniel Wheeler (the rotary hook), and Allen B. Wilson (the four-motion feeder). Since all of these men played pivotal roles in the development of the sewing machine, they pooled their patents and for a short time had a monopoly on the market. While the patents still held, prospective manufacturers had to obtain a license to make sewing machines, paying \$15 to this partnership for each machine produced, with the fee divided among the patent holders. Howe's take was more than \$2,000,000 (Lewton 1930:578). When the patents expired in 1877, so did the relatively short-lived, but lucrative, combination.

Of the more than 200 sewing-machine companies in operation in the United States in the early years, Singer was the most successful. The Singer sewing machine offered a few desirable features

not available from the others. The needle sewed in an up-and-down motion, instead of sideways, and a tension knob maintained adjustable control over the threads. Perhaps most important, the machine was powered by a foot treadle instead of a hand crank, leaving both hands free to manipulate the cloth. To target the homemaker, whose main focus was to produce most if not all of her family's clothing needs, Singer advertised his machines as so simple that even a child could run them (Breneman 2001). He promoted the machines as timesavers, allowing women more time for the many tasks involved in caring for their families. The machines were displayed in sumptuously decorated showrooms, where attractive young women would demonstrate how the machines worked. Beyond the stores, Singer and then his salesmen traveled across the United States, showing off their machines and teaching their prospective customers how to use them. As an added incentive, a woman could take a machine home overnight, which probably sealed the deal on many occasions. The company offered part exchange and after-sale service, which allowed them to control the secondhand market for their product. These were new concepts in selling, created or at least promoted by Singer and his staff.

Sewing machines were expensive, priced equivalent to buying an inexpensive automobile today. To reach a larger audience, an innovative purchasing plan was developed to allow more people to afford this luxury-priced item; called the hire-purchase plan, the strategy is known today as installment buying. The machines could be taken home for an initial small deposit, with monthly payments made until paid in full. This allowed many women to pay for their purchase from the money they earned using it.

The sewing machine was one of the most significant American inventions of the 19th century. In addition to benefiting the family seamstress, it revolutionized the fledgling ready-to-wear clothing industry. Sewing garments by machine shortened the construction time by at least half and reduced the cost of production by 50 to 80 percent (Cooper 1976:58–59). This meant a factory sewing-machine operator was paid more than a hand-sewer; the company made more garments and more money, and each garment could be sold for less. These features, in turn, inspired people to own more clothes, which

meant they were warmer, cleaner, and more comfortable (Robert S. Taylor, 10 April 1891, as cited by Lewton 1930:583).

Along the way, a few glitches had to be worked out, requiring more innovations. Machine sewing used two to five times more thread than did hand stitching, depending upon the type of stitch (either chain or interlocking). Improvements to thread construction were needed to produce a more durable product for commercial machines. The solution was a process advertised as "Six-Cord," in which three strands of two-ply silk or cotton thread were plied together. Other improvements, attachments, and adjunct machines were designed for different aspects of the ready-to-wear industry. By the late 1860s, a buttonhole sewing machine was on hand at most factories. In 1873 Helen Augusta Blanchard patented the first zig-zag-stitch machine, which bound the edges of a seam by stitching, yielding a sturdier garment (Bellis 2006). The industry built around the sewing machine continued to grow, both here and abroad. By 1890 Singer claimed 80 percent of the world market (Singer 2006). This had been a pivotal decade for marketing the machines in San Francisco as well: in 1879, city directories listed 25 sewing-machine stores or agents, but by 1889, there were 128 entries.

When the sewing machine was adapted to shoe and boot construction, it inspired changes to that industry on a scale similar to the clothing industry's revolution. Machine-sewn shoes lasted eight times as long as hand-stitched ones (Cooper 1976:60). In a very short time, all of the upper pieces of commercial footwear were machine sewn. Aside from clothing and footwear, the manufacture of many other products benefited from the use of sewing machines, including awnings, tents, sails, books, flags and banners, purses, trunks, saddles and harnesses, mattresses, umbrellas, belting and hosing, upholstery, and even hot-air balloons. An example from the West Approach Project area is 18-year-old Rosy Murphy from Tar Flat, who worked as a sewing-machine operator for an awning and bag-making factory in 1877, possibly earning more than her laborer father. Between 1860 and 1900, the United States exported approximately \$90,000,000 worth of sewing machines, a significant contribution to the American economy (Cooper 1976:64).

While no sewing-machine parts were identified from the archaeological remains at West



Three brands of sewing-machine oil used by West Bay Approach residents (Well 866, Cat. Nos. 1255-97 and 1270-50; Privy 810, Cat. No. 966-70).

Approach, three bottles that once contained sewing-machine oil were discovered in two features. The rectangular bottles had four recessed panels with embossing. A bottle with the Bailey & Eaton brand from Privy 810 was most likely associated with the John Monahan family. From another feature, two bottles of sewing-machine oil were recovered. One of the bottles contained sperm oil, with no manufacturer specified; it was most likely associated with dressmaker Miss Annie Tobin. From an upper, later level, a Singer brand bottle was unearthed. Other indicators of the presence of sewing machines, such as sewing-machine needles and sharply bent pins, were not found in any of the West Approach assemblages. In contrast, deposits associated with households across the bay in Oakland, examined during the Cypress Project, yielded one sewing-machine part, while seven features yielded one or more sewing-machine-oil bottles.

CONSTRUCTING OUR NEEDLEWORKERS

Compilations from several decades of 19th-century San Francisco city directories detail the variety and number of clothing-related occupations in the city, along with the social titles used by the listed needleworkers (Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Similar to other urban areas, most of the women were single, yet the next most numerous were those women listed as Mrs., presumably either married or widowed. A small but constant presence among the dressmakers was the group of highly skilled French dressmakers, or those who adopted a French persona by using the title “Madame” ($n = 12$ in 1861) or the lone “Mademoiselle.” A few men played a part in the San Francisco fashion industry; in fact four of the nine needleworkers on Table 5.3 are males. From these directories and U.S. census records, several needleworkers were identified living within the West Approach study area during the latter half of the 19th century. Two tailors lived in Tar Flat on Block 4, while a sewing-machine operator turned dressmaker also lived in that neighborhood. Further south, at the base of Rincon Hill on Block 9, a mother–daughter dressmaking team operated out of their home. On Block 10, one block to the west, a dressmaker and a coat maker had their own shop, two sisters worked as seamstresses, and another young woman worked as a dressmaker’s apprentice. Four of these households left behind not only sewing implements and fasteners, but also the fabric on which they likely toiled.

For 26 years (1880–1906), the Wolf Samuel family rented at 416 Folsom. During that time, Wolf worked as a tailor out of his shop fronting Folsom (Table 5.3). A Jewish immigrant from eastern Europe, he was 31 years of age when he first appeared in the city directories in 1880. Wolf continued to be listed at this address until the 1906 earthquake, which forced his family to move. He married Minnie in 1881 and together they had nine children, several of whom did not survive childhood. Also living at this address between 1879 and 1883 was a tailor named Moses Hyman, who was likely Minnie’s father or another older relative. After the Samuel family moved to 624 Locust Avenue, Wolf opened a tailor shop outside his home. When Minnie died in 1915, Wolf moved in with his daughter’s family, the household of Simon and Tillie Shapiro. Wolf continued

Table 5.1. Needleworkers and Related Occupations Listed in San Francisco City Directories

	1861	1869	1879	1889
Cloakmakers	6	9	18	11
Dressmaker	82	212	248	577
Embroiderers	11	17	19	10
Milliners	44	66	87	105
Tailors*	148	231	381	1,266
Total	291	535	753	1,969

*Tailors and drapers were grouped together for 1861

Table 5.2. Social Titles and Gender of Dressmakers in San Francisco City Directories

Year	Total	Miss	Mrs.	Widow	Madame	Mademoiselle	Women without Title	Unknown Gender	Men
		Count %	Count %	Count %	Count %	Count %	Count %	Count %	Count %
1861	82	26 31.7	42 51.2	0 0.0	1 1.2	0 0.0	2 2.4	9 11.0	2 2.4
1869	212	48 22.6	110 51.9	12 5.7	12 5.7	1 0.5	15 7.1	9 4.2	5 2.4
1879	248	47 19.0	152 61.3	0 0.0	14 5.6	0 0.0	26 10.5	6 2.4	5 2.0
1889	577	234 40.6	137 23.7	4 0.7	4 0.7	0 0.0	45 7.8	45 7.8	19* 3.3
Total	1,119	355 31.7	441 39.4	16 1.4	31 2.8	1 0.1	88 7.9	69 6.2	31 2.8

* 16 are listed as ladies' tailors

Table 5.3. Needleworkers at West Bay Approach Addresses

Name	Occupation	Age	No. of Years Operated	Ethnicity	Parents' Occupation/ Ethnicity	Social Status	Block/Address	Associated Feature
Wolf Samuel	Tailor (shop in home); tailor merchant (ca. 1920-)	31-77	46 (1880-1926)	Jewish from Poland/ Russia	Unknown	Married	4/416 Folsom	Privy 1300
Moses Hyman (Hyman Moses)	Tailor	69-73	4 (1879-1883)	Jewish from Poland/ Russia	Unknown	Widowed	4/416 Folsom	Privy 1300
Jacob Samuel	Tailor; cloak maker (1901-1902)	21-23	2 (1900-1902)	U.S. born	Tailor - S/Jewish from Poland/Russia	Unmarried	4/416 Folsom	None
Bessie Samuel	Seamstress in cloak house	24	1 (1910)	U.S. born	Tailor - S/Jewish from Poland/Russia	Unmarried	Off-site at 624 Locust (once 4/416 Folsom)	None
Matthew Delano	Tailor	35	1 (1880)	Scotland	Unknown	Married	4/240 Fremont	None
Rosy Murphy	Sewing-machine operator (1877); dressmaker out of home (1880)	18-21	3 (1877-1880)	U.S. born	Laborer - Ireland	Unmarried	4/11 Baldwin	Privy 1318
Mary Shore & Ida Briggs Shore	Dressmakers; out of home	36, 19-20	1 (1878); 1 (1880-1881)	U.S. born	Unknown	Married*/ Unmarried	9/20 (35) Perry	Privy 9
Annie McDonald	Dressmaker; shop 141 Fourth/121 Post	29-43	11 (1890-1904)	U.S. born	Salesman - P/ Irish	Unmarried	10/112 Silver	Well 866
Celia M. Hayes	Coat maker; shop 533 California	Unknown	1 (1890)	Unknown	Unknown	Unmarried	10/112 ½ Silver	None
Mary & Carrie McIver	Seamstresses; out of home	21, 17	1 (1881)	U.S. born	Stevedore - SS/ Scottish	Unmarried	10/125 Perry	Privy 806

*Mary Shore's marital status was not listed on the 1880 census, but by 1900 she had been married 30 years. Note: P = Professional; S = Skilled; SS = Semi-skilled.

to work until just before his death in 1926, making him the longest-working needleworker in this San Francisco cohort.

The one-story residence at 416 Folsom was probably divided in half, with each side containing a small shop, and with working or living quarters in the rear. The half portion of the building would have been more affordable to rent and the busy Folsom Street would have insured good foot traffic. (Wolf was never recorded as unemployed on census records, suggesting a successful operation.) A large privy in back of the main house yielded many artifacts associated with his business and family, as well as items discarded by the Leonard Smith family. A modest sample of sewing implements was recovered, including brass and steel straight pins, while the remains of 33 fabric scraps and 2 new scraps are more telling of his profession.¹ Most of the wool scraps are small pieces with remnants of their previous construction. The variety of light- to heavyweight wools retain narrow, machine-sewn seams, 1/8 to 3/8 in. wide, diagnostic of men's tailored clothing (trousers, jackets, coats, and vests). A few hand-sewn details, such as buttonholes, are likely from trousers. Other machine-sewn details include a bound buttonhole and a narrow band of fabric trimmed from around a collar and lapel, all parts of outer garments. Also typical of men's outerwear are the cloth-covered buttons, representing 29 percent of the button collection; another piece of wool is likely an extra circle blank, cut for that purpose but never used. Most of the wool is typical of the four main colors worn by men in the late 19th century: black, dark blue, brown, and olive (Walkley and Foster 1978:127). Eighteen different textured woven fabrics are likely the remains of pairs of natty trousers, which were popular in the 1870s and 1880s (Peacock 1996:65–106; Severa 1995:314, 388).

Long after Privy 1300 was filled in and forgotten, Wolf Samuel was still making a living as a tailor. By this time, too, the tailoring craft had been disseminated from father to children. His eldest son, Jacob, started working at 18 in 1897 as a porter salesman for Greenberg and Greenberg, a fancy goods importer, and then two years later for the silk importers R. Isaacs and Brother. By 1900 he was a tailor, at times focusing on cloaks. Jacob drifted away from the needlework profession, becoming a packer and, by 1910, a salesman in a shoe store. By that time, the Samuels' 24-year-old daughter, Bessie, worked as a seamstress in a cloak house. In a few short years, she married, presumably leaving outside work.

Around the corner at a boardinghouse operated by Amanda Scales at 240 Fremont, Matthew Delano and his family lived for a less than a year while he worked from home as a tailor. Not listed in any of the San Francisco directories, his mention is limited to the 1870 census, which placed him living with his wife and child in this boardinghouse along with five other people. His tenure was approximately four years before the filling of Privy 1326 at this address. Cultural materials in the privy include two-dozen straight pins, an adult's thimble, and buttons from 48 garments, almost all plain. It is doubtful that Delano would have found any room to practice his trade in this cramped boardinghouse; the pins and non-tailor's thimble attest to someone doing hand sewing, but probably not the activities of a tailor. More likely, they represent general household activities from one or more of the people living in the boardinghouse over time.

1. All counts reflect minimum number of items (MNI), not individual buttons or pieces of fabric. "New scrap" refers to leftover scraps from constructing new clothes, whereas "scrap" alone refers to sewn or distinctive fragments from refashioned garments. Decorative buttons comprise a variety of materials but are fancifully decorated, such as porcelaneous buttons with a piecrust design or glass buttons with molded designs. Plain black glass and other similar buttons are not counted as decorative, because this category is independent of price and merely reflects a level of embellishment.

At 11 Baldwin Court, the alley of small workers' houses off Folsom, New York-born Rosy Murphy lived with her Irish-born parents, Patrick and Cecelia. In 1877 the 18-year-old Rosy worked as a sewing-machine operator at an awning and bag-making factory. Three years later, the young woman was described as a dressmaker on census records. After this entry she disappears from the historical record, leaving behind perhaps a few indications of her occupation among her family's discards in Privy 1318.

A total of 29 garments are represented in the collection from this feature, based on the minimum number of buttons, but only 7 percent of the sample consists of better clothing, as indicated by decorative buttons. Of the 8 different fabrics recovered, 2 (25%) are inexpensive, including the remains of a man's store-bought jacket or coat with machine-made buttonholes that probably belonged to Rosy's laborer father, and portions of a woven-plaid wool shawl that still contained some fringe. The shawl was a practical garment that would not have been a fashionable item worn on the streets of San Francisco; it may instead have been a relic from the family's native Ireland, worn inside the home to keep warm. Another piece of fabric is a possible scrap from an everyday, remade dress or outergarment. This is the lone indication that someone in this household had sewing skills beyond those of the average working-class woman of the day. The only possible sewing-related implement is a turned bone handle fragment that probably was fitted with a crochet hook or similar implement. There is nothing that can help detail Rosy's transition from a sewing-machine operator to her more lofty position as a dressmaker, nor do any items allude to the type of work she produced. All this suggests that Rosy Murphy worked outside the home, most likely at her clients' houses.

At the base of Rincon Hill in Block 9, several blocks southwest of Wolf Samuel's shop and home, was a home dressmaking business contemporaneous with Wolf's earliest San Francisco efforts. Mrs. Ida Shore began listing herself as a dressmaker in the San Francisco city directory in 1878 at 2511 Post, with no residence listed. The following year she had moved to 20 (35) Perry and provided no occupation in the directory. For two years, between 1879 and 1881, Mary Shore and her adopted daughter, Ida Briggs, lived with Mary's brother-in-law's family, John and Mary Usher. (John was a sailmaker and his wife kept house, while their two older sons worked and a younger daughter attended school.) About the time that Mary and Ida moved to Perry Street, a transition took place: Ida was first listed as a dressmaker; later she gave her name as Ida B. Shore, and Mary was no longer listed with an occupation. The two-story 20 × 42 ft. house with a 10 × 25 ft. outbuilding would have had ample room for the Usher and Shore family, with likely a room devoted exclusively to the sewing business. Both John and his eldest son were unemployed for four months in 1880; the economic viability of the family would have been enhanced during the leaner months by the Shores' contribution to the household.

Besides her handiwork, we know very little about Mary E. Shore. Neither she nor her adopted daughter can be located on the 1870 census. The 1880 census did not list Mary Shore's marital status and simply described her as a 38-year-old Ohioan who stayed "at home." The 19-year-old Ida Briggs was also born in Ohio from parents born in the same state. According to the 1900 census, Mary had been married to Thomas Shore in 1870, although neither can be located for that year's census. He was a year younger than his wife and had emigrated from England in 1863. By 1880 Mary and Thomas may have been separated.

This was another family where sewing had shaped the family's economic history. The skilled hands of a sailmaker were less sought after as more and more ships transitioned from sail power to steam in the 1880s; ironically, this change occurred shortly before the transition from hand-



Figure 5.1. Thread spools recovered from Privy 9.

sewn to machine-sewn women's garments. By 1880 at the age of 56, John Usher had reinvented himself as a driver and hostler for the Pacific Transfer Company, working for the same firm his son had. The dressmaking endeavor that operated out of his home was likely a family effort. First the daughter assisted her mother, gaining valuable experience, which she shortly put to use while her mother assisted with hand-sewing at home. Many other people in the Usher family may have helped sew from time to time: John Usher was unemployed for several months and his wife, Mary L., was "at

home." The artifacts left behind and thrown into Privy 9 document the greatest sewing activity for the West Approach Project, represented by sewing implements, buttons, and fabric remains (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Sewing implements from Privy 9 include 176 straight pins, 2 tracing wheels, 4 needles, and 28 wooden spools that once held thread (see Beaudry, this chapter). A plethora of buttons representing at least 96 garments, plus 70 button blanks and fillers, also attest to on-site dressmaking activities. Of the 96 minimum number of garments represented by buttons, 24 percent are fancy and typical of women's better clothes. But the gem of this collection is the assemblage of clothing remains, representing at least 46 garments, with 7 new scraps and 45 other scraps, as well as 52 different kinds of ribbon. Many of the fabric pieces are colorful silks, a fabric that typically does not preserve as well as wool. All but three seams were hand-stitched (see "Stitches in Time" for specific details). The bulk of their business appeared to be in refashioning older clothes, by taking in the girth of a skirt or altering a neck or the shape of a sleeve. Most middle-class and working-class women had one silk dress in their wardrobe for best occasions. More often than not, these fell out of fashion long before they were worn out. Even slightly worn silk clothes were remade, with the expensive fabric reversed, rather than purchasing new silk (Tarrant 1986). The average silk garment in the late 1870s cost two to five times as much as a wool one (Severa 1995:295).

When clothing historians describe the refashioning of clothing to update style and fit (Paoletti 1980; Severa 1995), they write of better-quality silk dresses, so some evidence of refashioning silk garments was expected in the West Approach collection; the larger sample of refashioned everyday wool clothing, however, was a revelation. As women's fashions in the 1870s and 1880s changed, clothing could easily be readapted—voluminous skirts became more fitted, requiring several fewer yards to construct a dress. All the fabric needed to make a new dress was in the skirt if the bodice did not allow for refitting. This sample from Privy 9 details some of the efforts undertaken by San Francisco women to stay as fashionable as possible, even in the depressed

economic times of the late 1870s. Refashioning a dress would be more affordable, and kept Mary and Ida Shore in demand.

What happened to these women after the John Usher family moved in 1881 is uncertain. Mary next appears on the 1900 census with her husband, Thomas, living in San Francisco; no profession was provided for Thomas. The couple owned their house free of mortgage. After Thomas died sometime between 1900 and 1910, Mary moved in with her widowed daughter, now known as Ida B. Carr, and Ida's youngest son; her two other children had grown up and were living elsewhere. The 1910 census lists 11 other families and 2 boarders living at this crowded 18th Street boardinghouse. The women—now 68 and 49 years of age—have “none” listed as their profession, while Ida's son, 13-year-old Stanley, worked as a street newsboy.

Further uphill a block from the Usher/Shore household lived another West Approach dressmaker on Block 10. In 1890 the 29-year-old Miss Annie McDonald lived at her parent's large three-story home at 112 Silver with her brother, while operating a dressmaker's shop at 141 Fourth (Table 5.3). The family moved to Silver in 1886 and had lived there for six years when Annie's mother died. Both siblings continued to live with their father to 1900 and continued with their professions. While living at Silver Street, Annie relocated her business to 121 Post, where she worked between 1892 and 1894. By 1900 she was still dressmaking and lived at another address with her family. Ten years later none of the family could be found. For a short time while the McDonalds lived in the front at Silver Street, a coat maker, Miss Celia M. Haynes, lived behind in a back building. Most of Celia's time was likely spent working at her shop at 533 California, a large building where 23 other businesses operated, including 6 tailors (City Directory 1890).

A feature associated with the McDonald family, Well 866, probably predates Annie's operating her own shop. Instead, the sewing-related artifacts likely reflect early years of her career (between ca. 1886 and 1890), as she was building her clientele by going to customers' homes to work, thereby getting enough experience to support her own shop. A few items recovered are compatible with her profession: some heavyweight, charcoal-gray wool that appears to be scraps; a spool of thread; two thimbles; and a bottle of sewing-machine oil. The latter stands as a testimonial to her family's investment in her skills and anticipation of long-term employment, along with her father's success as a salesman. Twenty-six percent of the fasteners thrown into the well were fancy, many probably adorning Annie's clothes, along with salvaged fasteners from her clients' old garments.

Around the corner at 125 Perry Street, the 1881 city directory listed the widowed Murdock McIver family. His two daughters—Mary, 23, and Carrie, 18—are listed as seamstresses; a profession not recorded a year earlier by the census enumerator. If either of the sisters worked out of the home, they probably adjusted their work schedule to help care for their three younger siblings and their older brother. In 1880 Murdock was listed as a Scottish rigger and stevedore who had been unemployed for three months that year. His eldest, John, worked as a polisher, but was unemployed for six months, and another son, Louis, made boxes. In 1882 the family moved



Figure 5.2. Two stylish women's belt buckles recovered from Privy 9.

a few houses away on Perry. Both sisters are listed in the city directory for only one year. In 1889 Carrie died at the age of 25.

In 1887 the house at 125 Perry was a two-story duplex with a basement; the McIver residence likely consisted of two stories, 12-1/2 × 33 ft. long with a two-story 9 × 15 ft. rear addition and no outbuildings. This suggests there would have been enough room for the two women to work at home or to bring work home at night. With both Murdock and his eldest son being unemployed that year (for three months and six months, respectively), at times the bulk of the family's income must have rested on Carrie and Mary's modest seamstress operations and their 16-year-old brother's earnings as a boxmaker. Their 20-year-old sister, Marion, who may have cared for the three school-aged siblings, may have also helped sew during busy times.

The archaeological remains associated with the McIver household and their neighbors, the Martins, were recovered from Privy 806. These included pieces of a tailored outergarment that retained a combination machine-sewn and hand-sewn edge, the latter stitched with the precision of an accomplished sewer; such detailed work is not typically associated with seamstresses. Although 19th-century domestic features typically contain the remains of heavy outergarments, this privy contained many lightweight garments and buttons from at least 50 different garments, with 42 percent of the garments fastened by decorative buttons. Another unusual find was the fine-quality unspun wool that was probably used for padding to fill out an angular women's silhouette, a common shaping technique in the 1870s (Holford 1972:n.p.). Also found were four straight pins and a wooden spool that once held thread. The paucity of these implements understates the value and contribution of needlework to this household.

Others Who Valued Sewing

Eight other West Approach Project households left material remains that suggest the presence of sewers, either for themselves, their family, or clients, or a household ready to hire a dressmaker. In the early 1870s, items discarded by John and Mary Peel included 62 straight pins (dwarfed only by the Usher/Shore assemblage) and a thimble, along with the remains of 48 garments mainly represented by buttons. No scraps or evidence of hand or machine stitching was recovered. These items date to a time when the Peels entertained and attended social functions; another nearby feature, with very few sewing-related items, was created years later when Mary was a widow. To present a suitable façade, Mary may have sewed some of her own clothes or hired a dressmaker to construct fashionable clothes when she was younger, but may have found this practice unsuitable or unnecessary after her husband's death.

At another household, materials discarded in a privy around 1868 were associated with the family of master mariner Ferdinand Gee and his wife, Isabella. Artifacts included many straight pins, a few hand-sewing items, and an impressive number of garments with decorated buttons (37%). Of the eight different fabric fragments, two retained the remains of sewing: one was sewn by hand, the other both hand and machine sewn. This suggests that Isabella sewed for herself and her three young children.

Four families—those of Emile and Mary Schreiner, Christian and Annie Johnson, Peter and Catherine Degnan, and Thomas and Mary McIntyre—were associated with Privy 808; two families lived in the front house and two in the back. Artifacts left behind include the scraps from a newly cut garment, numerous straight pins, and a few other sewing items. This is certainly not a robust sample, but sufficient to suggest that at least one of the women was a home sewer.

STITCHES IN TIME

Sunshine Psota

Three handsewn basque belts, front and back views (shown at approximately 45 percent of their true size)

Urban archaeologists do not often find an artifact that reveals one small, single event in a person's life. Yet the fragile remains of wool and silk garments recovered from West Approach features offer such details. Among the 443 garments represented in the collection, a modest sample ($n = 67$, 15%) retains hand-sewn construction details, and a few can be attributed to a particular maker.

Usually the most intact clothing is some type of outer garment, perhaps a man's overcoat or the newly introduced shorter sack coat, or a woman's basque, cape, or coat. More often than not, after the 1880s, seams were sewn by machine. But occasionally there are the remains of hand-sewn work, some of these paired with machine-sewn stitching of vertical straight seams. The time of deposition of most of these features, the 1870s and 1880s, marks a brief transition for women's clothing from all hand sewn to all machine made, following a trend previously established by the men's garment industry a decade or so before (Greene 2002:13). The following account celebrates some of the unique hand stitches that highlight simple moments of the past.

Between 1879 and 1881, Ida Shore and her daughter Mary lived with Mrs. Shore's brother-in-law's family, the Ushers at 20 (35) Perry Street, leaving behind a testament to their prolific sewing abilities. Three hand-sewn wool belts, each from a different well-fitted basque (a woman's fitted jacket or bodice that flared to some point over the hips) illustrate the consistent sewing techniques and the forethought of this sewing team. Fashioned from one small piece of

wool cloth, the narrow rectangular-shaped belts flare slightly at both ends. The edges of the wool fabric were simply folded over and hand sewn, halfway between the raw and the folded edges, with a basic running stitch that was virtually invisible from the front. Then to keep its shape longer, a simple line of basting stitches from the end of one buttonhole to the beginning of the other was added—a structural detail noticeable in some places on the front. Hand-sewn buttonhole stitching encircles the buttonholes placed at the two ends of each belt. The buttonholes on the two darker ones, once dark brown or drab, were sewn with black-silk thread for one, and with a tan (at present) to medium-brown silk thread for the other. The remaining belt is of medium-brown wool dyed from copper-toned madder that appears to have been a woven plaid, which was sewn completely with a single color of silk thread. As two small steps in the whole process of constructing a basque, these expediently executed details demonstrate the consistency and precision needed to construct these everyday, highly fitted garments. With careful planning and reliable workmanship, each of these handcrafted belts look almost exactly alike.

One of these belts pairs with the accompanying remains of a woman's basque. The dark-brown wool seams were nicely hand stitched with black-silk thread. Sometime during its life the garment was cut or torn, which appears as an intentional destruction. But rather than throwing it away, either Mary or Ida Shore patched the wool basque with two kinds of expensive fabric. These were likely leftover scraps. It seems odd that the patches are from a mixed match of black

fabric: one is wool, while the other is silk. Both are expensive fabrics, woven in intricate patterns that differ from each other and from the basque. While the reasons for these actions are not clear, the level of effort undertaken to repair and maintain the shape of the garment is impressive. Patient hands mended the basque back together, restoring its structure but fully repairing its appearance. This was obviously someone's special garment that warranted unusual efforts at recovery.

The person who constructed the next garment from this address is unknown. What remains is a discarded scrap of aqua, white, and tan plaid silk, with fine hand stitching that created a fancy dress. The hem was expertly hand sewn with white silk thread using small, fine stitches. To enhance this expensive garment, a machine-made silk lace was selected to trim the edge of the skirt at the hemline. In contrast to these better materials and fine workmanship is the thicker brown thread used to attach the lace to the skirt at the hem, leaving large noticeable stitching on its backside. This last act was not completed by the same dress-maker that constructed the rest of the garment; it was likely done by someone who was paid by the yard. While the Shore ladies refashioned this garment into something more contemporary, they certainly would have noticed the poor finish to an otherwise exquisite dress.

When constructing clothing, most pieces can be taken apart and redone if the first attempt is not successful. But occasionally this was not the case. Sewing a buttonhole and creating the lay of a lapel are the two most common exceptions. These devilish, highly visible details can add or decidedly detract from a garment. Those who sew often pause before such steps, for if they are not successful, they will need to begin the garment anew. Louisa Baker, the presumed sewer at 108 Silver, did pause long enough to make a sensible choice. She chose to practice first on an old wool garment, probably of similar weight to the one under construction. That garment was a woman's or older child's outergarment with seams varying from 3/16 to 5/8 in. in width; wool twill tape had been used to strengthen the seams and maintain the shape. But after it was no longer useful as an article of clothing, she picked up the garment and used a small corner to practice sewing a buttonhole before she started on her main objective.

Another wool piece from this address was part of a fitted dress with both machine-sewn and

hand-sewn stitching. Again the sewer employed wool twill tape to strengthen the seams, in this case for the inset piece that contoured down the side of a body under the arm. While the vertical, longer seams were machine sewn and ranged in width from 5/8 to 3/4 in., the horizontal seams are hand sewn with the same black silk thread. The practice piece, the variation in seam width, and aspects of the homemade dress suggest a sewer who followed her good common sense and had perfected her basic sewing skills to clothe her family. Perhaps she even offered her basic abilities periodically as a seamstress.

At 7 Baldwin Court in the Tar Flat neighborhood, fragments of brown wool, part of a woman's basque, were found, presumably that of Isabella Clark. Sporting 3/16 to 1/4 in. wide machine-sewn seams, the everyday garment includes the front and backing around a center-front seam. The front was folded over and handsewn to the slightly smaller back piece with nice even, small stitching; this preventing any of the stitches from being visible from the front. Three 7/8-in. buttonholes were hand sewn; through wear they are torn a little, perhaps from too tight a fit. The narrowness of the seams could indicate that the garment had been let out. The combination of hand-sewn and machine-sewn elements was well executed by a talented home sewer.



Three houses away at the Brown residence, the family's privy yielded the remains of a woman's outergarment. Cut from distinctive brown wool, the fabric consists of staggered woven rectangles, similar to a brick wall in design. The handsewn collar was stitched with black silk thread using a whipping stitch. The same thread also finished the buttonholes. This nicely made garment has 1/4-in. seams. Of the many garments from this feature, this one stands out as one of only two hand-sewn garments. As the best example of

someone's labors, the outergarment may have been fashioned by the female head of the household, Margaret Brown, before she had access to a sewing machine, or by a dressmaker.

Two other garments with preserved hand-sewn stitching came from the Fuchs or Cadigan family, who lived at this same Baldwin Court address several years later. A fragment from a plain brown wool dress, from the waist area, contained both portions of the skirt and the fitted bodice. The top of the full skirt was folded over and two rows of basting $\frac{3}{8}$ in. apart were stitched through both layers to gather the material. This would have added extra thickness at the waist and so the dress was not likely for Sunday best, but the sturdy construction did allow the skirt to hold its shape over a longer time.

The other garment is some sort of wool outergarment that was not a basque. Constructed from basic brown wool twill, the machine-sewn seams vary from $\frac{3}{8}$ to $\frac{5}{8}$ in. wide. The front opening was closed with at least three buttonholes that are rectangular in shape and $\frac{3}{4}$ in. wide. A matching, smaller, cloth-covered button is still attached to the cuff. The hand-sewn hem remains intact, as is one or two back pleats. A white-wool braid, knotted at one end, was sewn to the inside back of the neck to allow the garment to easily hang over a hook. Both garments retain the skillful touches of a talented sewer, likely the hands of Catherine Cadigan or Mary Fuchs.

Remains from a few other features suggest that at least one woman in each household created the family clothes or supplemented the family income with her skills. The modest garment sample at 14 (39) Perry speaks of a competent sewer, possibly a dressmaker, who created some everyday wool and expensive silk clothes. These efforts may have been an important contribution to the family by Mary Johnson. A few blocks away at the Dolan or Michelson home at 109–111 Perry Street, archaeologists recovered material from two new everyday garments, four or five remade garments, and numerous sewing pins. These items may represent the efforts of Jane Dolan and her two daughters, Jennie and Lizzie, or the work of Aletta Michelson to cloth her ever-growing family; or perhaps one of these women engaged in small-scale work as a seamstress or dressmaker. At 120 Silver Street in Privy 808, there are no garments with stitches, but there is possible evidence of home stitching: scraps of black silk cut for a new garment document the presence of someone capable or bold enough to sew with silk. This daring person would have been from the Schreina, Johnson, Degnan, or McIntyre families.

These simple little stitches, often reflecting humble tasks, are some of the grandest remains from the 1,421 sewing-related items of clothing represented by fabric and buttons from the West Approach Project. Now little fragments of wool and silk, they are the products of many hours of labor and years of experience.

The Theodate Dent family and the James and Mary Hannan family at 12 (41) Perry are associated with Well 6, a feature that contained a decent sample of straight pins and sewing artifacts, along with five scraps, including one from a new garment. There are 70 garments represented by buttons; 20 (26%) of these had fancy buttons. This wide variety of artifacts, coupled with the quantity of scraps from remade garments, strongly suggests that a professional dressmaker was operating out of the home.

Numerous straight pins, two new scraps, and five scraps from remade garments are associated with the early-1880s Michael and Jane Dolan or Jacob and Aletta Michelson households. Thirty-one percent of their buttoned garments had fancy fasteners. Though sewing-related artifacts are somewhat limited in their range, those that survive suggest that Jane or Aletta may have been a dressmaker working out of her home.

Privy 810, associated with the household of saloonkeeper John Monahan and his wife, Delia, was one of two features to contain a sewing-machine-oil bottle, yet no sewing-related items. This piece of furniture may have stood as a symbol of a successful household and may have been used by a hired dressmaker when custom-made garments were needed (see sidebar on sewing machines). All of the buttons found in this privy were plain utilitarian varieties.



Figure 5.3. Tongbao and Chinese sewing basket. A tongbao is part of the tassel decorating this basket; one possible explanation for the presence of the Chinese coins found in West Approach collections.

From Block 11, refuse discarded by the families of George and Maggie Donnelly or William and Esther Beal contained almost a dozen spools of thread, several sizes of straight pins, and two thimbles, along with a wool scrap; decorative buttons accounted for 30 percent of the 117 items in the sample. A Chinese coin in the collection, wen or tongbao, might have been an ornament atop a Chinese sewing basket. Maggie and Esther may have sewn for their many children or for themselves, or they may have worked as seamstresses or dressmakers.

In addition to the Donnelly or Beal feature, other West Approach Project features yielded a tongbao. These included the households of Steven and Louisa Baker at 108 Silver; Pat and Nancy McSheffrey at 9 Baldwin

Court; and Charles and Julia Towne, John and Francis Hill, or John and Rosanna Maloney at 129 Perry. As exotic objects of curiosity, some of these may have been tied to Chinese sewing baskets (see Figure 5.3), and therefore may pinpoint other home sewers or professionals in the South of Market neighborhood.

FOUR VIEWS OF A DRESS

As that thin layer between the public and the private, clothes offer a buffer from the outside world while signaling personal preferences and style, popular trends, economic conditions, and social aspirations. Yet clothing is also the product that reflects the livelihoods of the needleworkers who created them. The discussion below characterizes these different views of a garment: the perspectives of the wearer, the dressmaker, the clothing historian, and the archaeologist.

The Wearer

The purchaser's perspective is best expressed by Harriet Lane Levy (1947:131–135) in her autobiographical book about growing up in a relatively cloistered, Jewish family in 1880s San Francisco. When her mother, Henriette Levy, received a bill for \$58.20 for the design and creation of her last dress by the elite dressmaker Miss Denny, she announced to her family and friends that Harriet's sister Addie's new street suit would be constructed by a dressmaker who came to their house. Henriette chose Miss Lauber, recommended as "stylish and swift," who could create a finished garment between 8:00 a.m. and sunset. Most dressmakers who came to a house would take two days for this accomplishment and charged \$3.00 a day, but for her speed Miss Lauber charged four. She arrived at the Levy house promptly at eight dressed in a long black coat and carrying a black satchel in one hand and a fashion book in the other. She was escorted to the backroom where Henrietta and the family's sewing machine awaited her. On the bed lay yards

of plum-colored broadcloth and gray silk lining, whale bone, binding, and a box of assorted pins waiting for the dressmaker. After feeling the fabric and meeting the dress's prospective wearer, Miss Lauber quickly took out her fashion book and the process of choosing a style began. With so many to choose from, the family asked if aspects of three could be combined into one. The dressmaker complied by cutting the basque lining to the desired shape, incorporating elements of the three patterns. Next she pinned it onto Addie. With her own shears, Miss Lauber trimmed the pieces for a better fit. Then, she machine-sewed the lining, and another fitting confirmed a good fit and excellent workmanship. Then the whalebones were added to the lining. Once the inside was completed, the outer fabric was cut and sewn. All the while, the Levy women watched this professional work, entertained by Miss Lauber's speed and skill. At this point, Addie went out to buy silver buttons and silk trim. When she returned, lunch was served in a party-like atmosphere with plenty of food, including two servings of coffee and dessert heaped on Miss Lauber. "The conversation was lively and tactfully restricted to the subject of clothes and present fashions" (Levy 1996:133).

In the afternoon, work continued with the skirt cut and sewn, all seams to both garments faced and bound, and sleeves, collar, and cuffs added to the basque along with the newly purchased trim. Sixteen buttonholes were also completed. When lemonade was brought to her at three, the dressmaker drank while working, barely breaking her stride. By four, the collar that had looked so chic in the fashion book was less attractive on Addie's thin neck and the right sleeve did not hang right. What should have been the final fitting, instead also exposed the waist pulling to one side. Using a needle, the embarrassed Miss Lauber pulled out the machine stitching and went back to work. At six, she was offered dinner with the family, but declined in order to finish her work. By eight, the creation was done, and the dressmaker was ready for payment. Henrietta paid the bill and included a tip. Then Addie put the street suit back on and the women examined it closely. The sleeve now hung well and "it was not unbecoming," but "still it did not look like a 'Denny' dress."

The reader is left to presume that neither dressmaker was employed again. (Neither Miss Lauber or Miss Denny are listed in the 1880 U.S. population census or the 1879 or 1889 city directories. Levy described Miss Denny as the dressmaker of the Jewish elites of San Francisco.)

As a newcomer to 1860s San Francisco, the well-traveled, avant-garde writer Ada Clare offered a cosmopolitan commentary on San Francisco styles. Since she was new to the city, Ada was unable to interpret many of the signals conveyed by the local women through their fashion. She wrote, "It is hard to tell what are the exact fashions here. Dresses are worn of every kind of stuff . . . and made in every conceivable way" (Clare 1992:310). In the major fashion centers of New York and Paris where she had been living, a new fashion trend would sweep through the crowds and in a week all would be wearing it. In contrast, she was impressed that San Francisco women were free to establish and to interpret their own fashions. Ada continued:

All of [the] fashions have either lived their season, or are living them, in the great cities of the world. But here they are all worn simultaneously and with perfect originality. Everyone tries her own taste, and sails under her own independent colors [Clare 1992:310].

In addition to style and fashion, for working-class women there was the question of affordability. California's Bureau of Labor Statistics for 1887 describes how many young working-class women seeking employment outside the home found it impossible to afford new clothes. Instead they depended on hand-me-downs from family members and friends, and presumably

second-hand stores. These garments likely needed to be altered to fit and finessed to appear less dated. A presentable image was important to these young women finding employment, especially for highly visible positions such as shop clerks.

The Dressmaker

Dressmakers would see a different side of the garment and have a different experience of the dressmaker–client relationship. An 1896 article entitled “Suggestions for Dressmakers” has been attributed to the dressmaker Catherine Broughton, who described some of the attributes need to be a modiste. According to Broughton, a dressmaker

. . . is supposed to have a brain large enough to remember all of the foibles and fads of all her customers, and a heart sensitive and loving enough to bathe each one in sympathy for all the troubles and trials to the unbosoming of which the fitting of a dress somehow leads [Gamber 1997:102].

Another honest, anonymous article in *Ladies' Home Journal* (1908:8, 38) provided more details from the needleworker's perspective. That particular dressmaker began her career by going “out by the day” to sew in homes. As neither a servant nor a guest, many were unsure how to treat her. As with the Levy girls and Miss Lauber in San Francisco incident, often conversations would focus on the weather or other distant subjects. Yet the dressmaker found it ironic:

Here I was in the homes of people, concerned with the making of their clothes—one of the most intimate relations a person can have with another, for clothes express mind and spirit as well as body. And yet I was denied community of interest with them, although I served them. They never realized that in their demeanor toward me they expressed themselves and affected their clothes and my work for them [Anonymous 1908:8].

Some customers were exceptions. Only for these kind, repeat customers did that dressmaker take pieces home and sew at night without charging. For most, conversation was kept to a minimum with a sense of urgency that comes with paying someone by the hour. Yet when work was simply work, the extra touches needed to make a dress special often did not have the chance to bloom.

In contrast to “working out” in the customers' homes, when this dressmaker started her own shop she found the same customers approached their relationship with her quite differently. Some would come and spend all morning trying to decide on a design. Others wasted her time by taking in all she had to offer; then with her chic designs, off they went to another (presumably less expensive) dressmaker for the construction. Poor choices made by a customer were another dilemma. Does one tell the customer what would be more becoming or in better taste? Or does one give them what they want? (For example, while Miss Lauber thought the color of the fabric would be flattering on Addie, she never commented on what the overall effect would be when incorporating parts of three designs into a basque; she simply stated that she could accomplish it.) Other customers used the intimacy of multiple fittings as a chance to unburden all of their most personal problems. Topics that centered on husbands' deficiencies would have been embarrassing and inappropriate for the often-unmarried modistes. Other problems erupted when customers wanted something for a specific occasion but gave little time for the dressmaker and their employees to construct such a creation; the dressmaker was left with the choice of losing a lucrative commission or working long hours into the night for several days.

This anonymous dressmaker did not enjoy working with customers who presumed that a new style of dress would make them much younger or slimmer. Yet to her the most unpleasant type were young women who thought only of fashion and themselves. The easiest-to-please customers were those who wanted elaborately decorated dresses, as decorations would cover over any defects that manifested during construction. Her favorite customer had good taste and knew what she wanted: something simple that showed off the style and fit of the garment's design and construction. This was a chance to show off her skills and truly create a spectacular garment. Those who fully appreciated her skills inspired this dressmaker and made her more than 30 years of clothing construction worth all the effort.

Only years of experience helped with the task of collecting payment. The bane of unpaid bills was most pronounced in shops, where bills would be sent out after the customer received the garment. For some, money given by husbands for such services was frequently used for other household expenses. This dressmaker's creative approach was to consistently send the bill to the husband, or father, if present. She found this direct, non-negotiable policy most effective for prompt bill payment. Even with her tough policy, this modiste always had plenty of work. Her success can be measured in another way: she started with a staff of "two girls," and in 1908, after more than 30 years, her staff had blossomed to 52. While this long-term tenure and large enterprise was much greater than any experienced by our San Francisco needleworkers, they would have likely have suffered from similar problems.

Other needleworkers chose the sewing profession for its respectability and its flexible work schedule. Seamstresses often abandoned sewing work for better-paying jobs in order to save enough money to buy new ready-to-wear clothes. Then, once properly attired, these women would quit those jobs, with their greater restrictions, and go back to the needle (California Bureau of Labor Statistics 1887).

The Historian

Historians have conducted demographic studies of tailors, dressmakers, and seamstresses using city directories and other primary sources to paint broad pictures of these professions, primarily focusing on urban areas (e.g., Scranton 1994; Trautman 1979). Innovative research by Wendy Gamber (1997) has transformed these demographic studies into more personal portraits by combining descriptions in R.G. Dunn's mercantile agency's ledger entries for milliners and dressmakers. These entries could contain character references, family information, personal descriptions, notes on quality of work, and assessment of their credit risks. Gamber and other social historians have used these ledgers to focus on urban areas solely in the eastern United States: Albany for Lewis (2005); primarily Boston for Gamber (1997); and cities in North Carolina for Nicklass (2005). Gamber researched skilled, independent Boston women, mainly modistes, of predominantly working-class origin from 1860 to 1930. She found that dressmakers and milliners were among the highest paid professions for a woman during this period and one with considerable status within the community.

The typical Boston dressmaker was white, native-born, and unmarried or widowed; half of them lived beyond the structure of a nuclear family (Gamber 1997). Many of the women were second-generation Americans of Irish descent, but a consistent small group was of French heritage. On average, these women stayed in business for six years, with experience—and therefore age—an asset for a modiste, but not for a seamstress. In Albany, New York, Lewis's (2005) investigation of needleworkers between 1840 and 1885 found that home-based businesses were most common. She identified the typical 1880 dressmaker as white, widowed, foreign-born, and in her 40s. This

BEADS

Erica S. Gibson

More than 2,000 beads were recovered from 37 features from the West Approach Project; see Appendix E for descriptions, provenience, and selected photographs by bead analysts Karlis Karklins and Lester Ross. The majority were drawn beads, formed by pulling out a small amount of hot glass into a long slender tube and chopping it into desired lengths. The small circular beads made in this way were typically called ‘seed beads.’ Black seed beads were very popular during the latter half of the 19th century for use on ladies garments and accessories; when mounted on wire, they were formed to make brooches, decorative buckles for hats, and other decorative items. Colored examples were favored for Berlin work, a type of embroidery popular in the 19th century, and for creating beaded bags, lamp-globe veils, and watchbands, among other items. Ladies embroidered card cases, pincushions, and other accessories that were often donated to charity bazaars. When mounted on wire, they could be formed to create baskets, flowers, and other knick-knacks. Hexagonal, tubular beads—typically called “bugles”—were produced in Bohemia during the second half of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th. These thin-walled beads came in short, medium, and long sizes and had numerous decorative uses, many similar to the seed beads. Thicker ones were popular for tablemats, longer beads were frequently used for lamp fringe, while thinner varieties were employed in bell pulls, hanging baskets, decorative pillow tassels, and similar items.

Wound beads were formed by winding threads of hot glass around a wire that was then removed, leaving a slender hole. They were frequently used in necklaces and rosaries, which were strung on copper-alloy wire. Prosser-molded beads were manufactured using a method patented by Richard Prosser in 1840, where a powdered mixture of sand, feldspar, and calcium fluoride was pressed into a mold and then fired in an oven. The Prosser-molded beads recovered from the West Approach project were also of forms typically used for necklaces and rosaries. Mold-pressed beads were formed by placing heated glass in a two-piece mold. The majority of the recovered mold-pressed beads were black; they were customarily used for necklaces or

bracelets, though some of the faceted barrel beads may have been used as lamp fringe.

Blown beads were manufactured by blowing a bubble in a small gather of heated glass. As a result they were hollow and light and were often used for necklaces, earrings, hair accessories, and garments. Some were colored inside to give the appearance of pearls; others were silvered or otherwise colored and used in Christmas garlands.

Jonathan and Mary Peel and their children resided on Block 5 from shortly after their arrival to San Francisco in 1852 until Mary’s death in 1879; Privy 507, abandoned in the early 1870s, is associated with the family’s residence at 540 Folsom Street. The Peels kept a fashionable if eclectic household, decorating their home with vases, flowerpots, an ornamental fruit stand, and stuffed birds. This feature accounts for 35 percent ($n = 718$) of all beads recovered from the West Approach Project. The vast majority of these are drawn beads, primarily black, although



Drawn tubular hexagonal beads. Archaeologists recovered these short, thick multi-colored beads from the Taylor family deposit (Privy 1301) on Block 4. While these beads were too large to have been used in traditional embroidery, they might have been used for tablemats or lamp fringe. Several of these beads contain remnants of ferrous wire and were probably used to create three-dimensional items like baskets and flowers.

Beads by Feature

Block	Feature	Association	Date (ca.)	Drawn	Wound	Mold-pressed	Prosser molded	Blown	Wood	Amber	Bone	TOTAL*
4	Privy 1300	Samuel and Smith families	1885	82	2	8	0	1	0	0	0	93
4	Privy 1301	Taylor family	1870	72	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	79
4	Privy 1304		1895	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
4	Privy 1305	Fuchs and Cadigan families	1880	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
4	Privy 1307	Brown family	1870	20	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	23
4	Privy 1310	McSheffrey household	1870	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
4	Privy 1316	McEvoy family	1870	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
4	Privy 1318	Murphy family	1880	7	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	11
4	Privy 1322	Hurley and Conniff families	1890	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
4	Privy 1326	Amanda Scales and boarders	1875	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
4	Privy 1333	Dougherty family	1890	14	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	23
5	Privy 505	Mayne household, O'Connor family	1880	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
5	Privy 507	Peel family	1870	698	14	4	0	1	0	0	1	718
5	Privy 516	Mary Peel	1880	39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39
7	Privy 1	St. Mary's Hospital	1906	1	4	2	7	0	0	0	0	14
9	Privy 2	Silver Street Kindergarten	1885	3	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	11
9	Privy 6	Johnson family	1870	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
9	Well 6	Dent/Hannan households	1895	12	42	1	2	0	4	1	0	63
9	Privy 7	California Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies	1870	16	6	0	1	2	0	0	0	25
9	Well 8	Rowe household	1885	13	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
9	Privy 9	Usher household	1880	11	7	2	7	0	0	0	0	27
9	Cesspool 13	Henry Knoche Grocery Store	1885	37	13	5	0	2	0	0	0	57
9	Privy 17	Depression-era flats	1935	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
10	Privy 801	Sheridan family	1885	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	6
10	Privy 806	McIver and Martin families	1880	151	127	15	2	2	0	0	0	297
10	Privy 807	Gee family	1869	69	3	5	15	2	0	0	0	94
10	Privy 808	Schreiner, Johnson, Degnan, and McIntyre families	1880	45	11	2	2	4	0	0	0	64
10	Privy 810	Monahan family and tenants	1880	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
10	Privy 812	Towne/Hill household	1880	29	19	4	2	2	0	0	0	56
10	Privy 813	Moynihan household	1880	9	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
10	Privy 814	Aaron family	1875	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
10	Privy 849	Strauss/Ackerman household	1870	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
10	Privy 851	Metcaif family	1880	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
10	Well 853	Baker family	1870	8	9	1	0	0	0	0	1	19
10	Privy 857+	Dolan and Michelson families	1880	91	29	17	7	0	0	0	0	145
10	Well 866	McDonald and Tobin families	1885	14	1	11	1	1	0	0	0	28
11	Privy 1600+	Donnelly and Beal families	1880	37	29	6	1	0	0	0	0	73
TOTAL				1,503	370	91	53	18	4	2	2	2,046

*Totals include one bead each carnelian, clay, and shell from Well 8, Privy 857+, and Well 6 respectively



Wound beads. Though wound beads were often used in necklaces, these large navy beads (ranging from 1/2" to 1" in length) would have been far too heavy to have been worn. The various shaped beads were probably from a beaded curtain that would have served as a room divider or door partition in the McIver/Martin households on Block 10 (Privy 806).

nearly 100 are colored. This wealthy family could easily have afforded lavish beading for women's garments and accessories. The colored beads may have been used for additional accoutrements, home decoration, or philanthropic enterprises. Several wound beads, again mostly black, were recovered as well. One, a square-faceted bead strung on ferrous wire, may have been from a necklace. A translucent, rose-wine-colored, blown-glass bead was probably from a Christmas garland. Interestingly, although the Peels were a Protestant family, they appear to have had at least two rosaries: one made of bone beads, the other of light-gray, wound-glass beads on copper-alloy wire.

In 1880 the widower Murdock McIver, a Scottish rigger and stevedore, lived at 125 Perry Street on Block 10 with his children: two boys and five girls, two of whom worked out of the house as seamstresses. During the same period, Abraham Martin, a Jewish merchant, and his wife lived with their children—two boys and two girls—at 127 Perry Street. Privy 806, associated with the McIver and Martin families, contained almost 300 beads, the second largest quantity from the West Approach Project. Of the 151 drawn beads, almost 100 were colored. Some of these are appropriate

for lamp fringe, while the rest were probably used for other decorative purposes. The seamstresses might have been adorning beaded bags and the like to accessorize ladies' attire. More than 80 percent of the 127 wound beads were large, ovoid and round beads in shades of navy blue that may have been used for a beaded curtain. A wound black bead on copper-alloy wire was most likely from a rosary.

The fragment of an opaque-black, mold-pressed portrait bead, and several spacer beads, were recovered from Privy 812, Block 10. The cameo-like oval bead is 1 inch in width and greater than 1 inch in height and, along with the plainer rectangular spacer beads, has two parallel perforations from one side to the other. The portrait bead fragment depicts the torso and chin of a woman draped in a toga-like garment and was probably a part of a necklace or bracelet. Also on Block 10, a series of graduated, translucent white, globular beads with a yellow-metal cap were recovered from Privy 857/858. This necklace might have adorned any of the women from the Dolan



or Michelson families who resided there in 1880. A mother-of-pearl rectangular pendant was also recovered from this feature. A wound, opaque, robin's-egg-blue glass bead was probably part of a rosary. The single clay bead remains a mystery.

The three stone beads recovered were all necklace components: two amber beads from Privy 1318 (Block 4) and Well 6 (Block 9), and a carnelian bead from Block 4, Privy 1333. The four wooden beads, also from Well 6, were most likely part of a child's toy or an abacus. This deposit, filled around 1895, was associated with the households of James Hannan and Theodate Dent. The combined presence of several Chinese dishes—a medium bowl, a tiny cup, and a lid—and a variety of toys in Well 6 does not resolve the question of the use of wooden beads.

The thousands of beads recovered from the West Approach Project represent an impressive variety of bead types and varieties, many of which have been previously unrecorded. Their

tightly dated late-19th-century deposits and associations help to fill in a void in bead studies, which have typically concentrated on earlier sites. Exceptions include the I-880 Cypress Freeway Replacement Project in Oakland, California and the Metropolitan Water District in Los Angeles. Beads recovered from these two projects are comparable both in type and date with the West Approach assemblage, with a few notable exceptions. Three large, barrel-shaped, translucent-white beads—called “crackled whites”—were recovered from Pit 3382 (Cypress). While smaller ones have sometimes been found in North America, these large ones are typically found in eastern and southern Africa. Another unusual bead, an opaque red on transparent-green seed bead from Privy 156 (Cypress) was a trade bead that went out of general circulation in 1840, much earlier than the deposit. The bead may have come from an item embroidered by Native Americans for the tourist trade (Karklins 1998).

dressmaker was the head of her own household and, along with her family, took in at least one boarder, thus operating two small business ventures at once. Lewis also found that countless dressmakers remained single longer than other women, while they worked many years at this skilled trade. Often family members were employed to help when needed. Nicklass's (2005) insights into North Carolina's working women were divided into two time periods: antebellum and postbellum. The average antebellum business woman operated for 9.6 years, while in the turbulent and unstable economy of postbellum society, women averaged 3.6 years, with 81 percent in business for two years or less (Nicklass 2005:161, 163). In Colorado, Trautman (1979) found that more than half of the dressmakers and seamstresses worked in Denver, which also had the highest percentage of those from foreign or mixed parentage. In contrast, tailors were about half native and half foreign-born. In 1880 most Denver dressmakers worked out of their home, with eight working for department stores, and four of the five seamstresses also worked for a department store.

The biggest deterrent to a successful enterprise was unpaid customer bills. When clothing and money were exchanged at the same time, payment was more often assured, but at dress shops such as Miss Denny's and the anonymous dressmaker's, bills were sent out after the garments were received. When customers did not pay in a timely manner, collection became a delicate matter, because word-of-mouth referrals and the customer's apparel were a walking advertisement of the dressmaker's abilities. The busiest times were from March to June and September to December, as demands for new or remodeled fashions were cyclical. At these points, many delinquent bills could devastate a business.

Social historians have also focused on technological trends. In 1860 no Boston dressmaking shop owned a sewing machine, but 10 years later 95 percent of those in the business used them for at least a portion of their sewing tasks (Gamber 1997:137). The introduction of the sewing machine (see sidebar) and availability of an array of drafting pattern systems made it possible

for less-talented dressmakers and even seamstresses to produce more presentable garments with greater ease. In contrast, a proficient dressmaker would have draped and pinned the fabric to a client, developing the fit and style as she worked. As many American women embraced factory-made garments, those who could afford to sought out a more customized wardrobe, especially for garments for special occasions. Selecting the fabric from a dry goods store, purchasing trim from a fancy goods store, and selecting a dressmaker and a suitable style engaged the consumer in the selection and creation of a garment to a degree that purchasing ready-made clothes could not provide.

In contrast to a strictly woman's perspective, Scranton's (1994) work on needleworkers in Philadelphia focused on the transitional period of 1890 to 1930, when small cottage industries dominated the men's tailoring trades after the initial surge in factory output. Eastern European Jews dominated the tailoring industry, although those with Irish surnames were frequently detected throughout the clothing factories. In 1890 there were about as many men's custom clothing firms as there were women's dressmakers, but they employed twice as many workers and garnered three times the income (Scranton 1994:247). By a few years later, more woman-owned and -operated shops had closed—a product of the depression of the early 1890s and the increased reliance on ready-to-wear merchandise.

Others historians of needleworkers have focused on individuals and their clothes. Miller (2003) profiled African American dressmakers from the South and the central to northern Midwest by combining their life stories with discussions of their creations. She found that this profession often provided the income necessary for women to pursue other dreams. Most famous in the late 1800s was Elizabeth Keckley, who used her skills as a talented dressmaker (along with her business sense) to buy herself out of slavery; while operating her own dressmaking establishment, she became the personal dressmaker for Mary Todd Lincoln during her tenure as First Lady. Yet even with all this skill, recognition, and success, she died in a poorhouse (Miller 2003:5–13).

Art historians at the Cincinnati Museum focused on selected dressmakers associated with the spectacular gowns and outfits in their collection (Amneus et al. 2003). Their history is linked with the growth of Cincinnati and with similar themes discussed above by other historians. Further afield, but also relevant to this research was Severa's (1995) perspective of presenting the changing fashions of American clothing from 1840 to 1890s. Her descriptions of clothing shown in old photographs of predominately working- and middle-class people from the northern Midwest, combined with advice offered by dressmakers and local farm journals, provides commentary on how everyday people lived and dressed. Severa's well-trained eye spotted several remade dresses and confirmation of the increase in ready-to-wear garments in the photographs.

The Archaeologist

Archaeologists combine written records with those patterns of artifacts recovered from discrete features to create a more focused portrait of a household or business. This research compares public trends with household preferences and idiosyncrasies. The West Approach needleworkers provide an impressive sample with which to explore those employed in the needle trades in 19th-century San Francisco. The remarkable preservation of fabric encountered in privies and wells for this project is unprecedented. The remains of at least 139 garments were recovered from the four features associated with Wolf Samuel's tailoring operations, dressmakers Mary and Ida Briggs Shore, dressmaker Annie McDonald, and seamstresses Mary and Carrie McIver. Buttons accounted for an additional 167 garments. Additionally 11 new scraps left over

from garments made by these needleworkers and 80 remade garments contribute to a remarkable sample of 397 garments associated with these needleworkers' operations. Comparing the fabrics, scraps from new and remodeled garments, and various sewing implements with the remains from the rest of the archaeological assemblage associated with these needleworkers could provide a greater understanding of the business, the household, and these people's economic contribution to their family.

There are only four professional needleworker households with sewing-related assemblages in the West Approach sample; this minimizes the possibility of such a broad comparison. Four other such households have been archaeologically studied in the region—one from another area of San Francisco and others from Oakland and Sacramento, but data are not always comparable. While a preliminary analysis suggests that adjusted minimum numbers of items from West Approach features are more than two times as high as all but one of the features from other projects; the exception is the robust assemblage associated with tailoress/seamstress Hannah Driscoll Schram from the Central Freeway Project in San Francisco, but differences in the data collection and data presentation (St. Clair and Dobkin 2006:Tables 5I, 5J, and 13) do not allow comparisons. Dressmaker Virginia Cook's assemblage from Sacramento (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1992) dates to 1908, considerably more recent than the other collections, which range from 1868 to the mid-1880s.

Assessment of scraps and quality of fabrics, coupled with a look at the decorative button sample, allows for an enhanced interpretation of the variety of dressmaker, seamstress, or tailor clientele and the services provided. Tools of the trade—such as straight pins, thimbles, and so on—ranged from a high of 1-1/2 percent to much less than 1 percent of the total MNI, except for Mary and Ida Shore's collection, whose huge assortment of straight pins and other items tops out at almost 28 percent. Yet even the average counts and percentages represent a quantity not often recovered from other households.

As the only tailor in our sample, Wolf Samuel's Tar Flat business would have consisted of altering and reshaping men's clothes, along with providing new everyday clothes for his working-class customers. The low proportion of decorative buttons (13%) is consistent with working- and middle-class men's attire. The few fancy buttons represented can be attributed to the women that lived in the home, with possibly a few for men's dressier vests. Wolf's tailoring shop provided for his family, but did not yield sufficient income to purchase a home or move out of Tar Flat until the earthquake and fire forced the move. The Samuel family's inexpensive fabric occurred in similar quantities as that of the McIvers, but the sisters' much lower proportion of expensive fabrics suggests that the tailor had a more diverse clientele and a better income.

The unusual preservation of more silk than wool documents the Shores' endeavors to create and redo a variety of wool and silk garments, indicating a diverse group of customers from the working and middle class. Refitting and shaping a garment can be problematic, as newer fashion shapes did not always hang well or accommodate the current shape of the wearer (Severa 1995), especially when using the challenging fabric of silk. The Shore women were quite prolific in sewing silk and seem to have had a prosperous enterprise; if their customers paid on time, their financial rewards should have been satisfying. Their economic contribution to their brother-in-law's household likely sustained the family when its head and youngest son were out of work, and during the period that John Usher sought to reinvent himself.

In contrast, Annie McDonald's sewing-related assemblage yielded one of only two sewing-machine-oil bottles, along with a thimble and a wooden spool that once held thread. The

combination of machine-sewn and hand-sewn artifacts is consistent with the changing technology available to professional sewers during the mid- to late 1880s and suggests that this talented dressmaker worked regularly and charged enough for her skills to buy a sewing machine on time. These artifacts are associated with Annie McDonald's early years prior to opening her own shop, to a time when she likely went to work at her clients' homes; the remains reflect her trying out new styles and sewing techniques when sewing her own clothes at home. Most of her sewing-related implements were likely moved when she opened her shop. The percentage of decorative buttons in her collection is consistent with that of the Shores, who cut all kinds of buttons from garments before disposing of them. Unlike the Shores with their fine silks and wool, all of the fabric remains recovered from Annie McDonald's assemblage were of everyday quality.

The sister seamstresses Mary and Carrie McIver had the lowest percentage of clothing represented and, enigmatically, the greatest percentage of both inexpensive fabric and decorative buttons. Many options were available for young women starting off in the seamstress trade. The large quantity of clothing and sewing-related artifacts suggests that at least one of the sisters did her work at home. The high ratio of buttons to minimum number of garments would be consistent with clothing being thrown out by a family, or with the common practice of dismantling clients' old garments, then using the pieces to make the client an individualized clothes pattern. If the latter was the case, then buttons would have been cut off the garment and either tossed out or thrown into a button box; sets were often strung on a length of thread to keep them together for future use. Mary's and Carrie's seamstress skills would have garnered the lowest pay of our group, and their business would have been more prone to seasonal variability and meager returns. But even this low income would have been some help to their family's domestic operations.

The ample evidence for clothing construction detailed in the fabric left behind in West Approach features overshadows the samples from other northern California needleworkers from this time period. Archaeologists must often rely on buttons, a few straight pins, or a single needle or thimble, allowing few insights into the types of work these women undertook. The white-chalk pencil left by Hannah Driscoll Schram was likely used for pattern alteration and fitting, which suggests that as she altered premade patterns in her home business, she continued to use the skills she had learned while working in a shop as a tailoress. There are no fabric remains, however, to fill out this picture. Her occupational change from tailoress to seamstress in the city directory may signal the point when Hannah started working on her own.

Archaeologists concluded that because the Driscolls lived beyond their means, their daughter had to work as a seamstress (St. Clair 2006:70). While this is a common conception about the value of needlework, it is contrary to the investment that the family made as their daughter apprenticed to a dressmaker. Such ventures were typically unpaid or minimally paid labor, while some apprentices paid to gain the experience. Frequently, apprentices were used to run errands and do basic sewing without learning the skilled techniques of fitting (Gamber 1997:70, 131, 149). More likely, Hannah Driscoll's apprenticeship was seen as a long-term investment toward future economic return. As a seamstress, her wages would have been low and constituted only a small contribution to the family's income as she gained more experience.

Further afield, archaeological investigations with discrete features associated with needleworkers have been limited, with features only documenting the business life of needleworkers. In Virginia City, Nevada, dozens of straight pins and beads found by archaeologists, are probably associated with a dressmaker, Mrs. Margaret A. Andrews. She operated a small dressmaking shop at 18 North G Street for less than 18 months until her death

at the age of 35 in 1873 (Schablitsky 2002:219–222). She and her husband lived several blocks away from the shop, and few artifacts were recovered that could elaborate on her customers and creations.

In New York City, archaeologists investigated the working-class residents of the Five Points Neighborhood. Among those studied were the many tailors, clothiers, and secondhand-store operators on that block between 1870 and 1900 (Yamin, ed. 2000). The associated features contained many scraps of cloth, some of which were quite shoddy, along with military buttons. One feature was interpreted as the remains of a business that converted soldiers' uniforms into civilian wear. Another feature, designated H, appeared to be remains from Polish-born Mendel Myer's 1850s to 1860s clothing operation. Recovered sewing-related artifacts consist of 226 packages of straight pins, 1,000 single pins, 50 thimbles, 222 hook-and-eyes, along with 200 new scraps, small rolls of twill tape, fragments of seam binding, and numerous basic men's buttons. This suggests that Myer's operation was either run on an industrial level (Yamin, ed. 2000:129–132), or that he was a merchant tailor, who sold sewing supplies as an adjunct to his tailoring operations.

A variety of professional sewing work is exemplified in the present collections. The Shores and Annie McDonald appear to have reaped the most from their needle skills. The most unusual archaeological finds, thanks to the impressive fabric preservation, were the array of men's and women's garments that were refashioned and altered for continued use. Each custom-made garment has its own story to tell, whatever perspective is taken: whether you created the garment, cut or sewed it, wore it, breathed new life into it, admired it in a photograph, displayed it in a museum, or rediscovered it within a sealed archaeological feature.

Touch the fabric one more time. Feel the silk or wool between your fingers and those unwavering silk stitches to begin to understand the complex relations that created it.

SEWING IMPLEMENTS FROM THE SOUTH OF MARKET NEIGHBORHOOD

Mary C. Beaudry

Excavations of household deposits in the South of Market neighborhood recovered vast quantities of domestic refuse, as well as artifacts that seem to indicate in-home production of various sorts, including participation by men and women in the needle trades (see Psota, this chapter). The items that I examined had been cataloged as either sewing-related or unidentified, and almost all items that I recognized as sewing tools or accessories are typical implements used by the home sewer for everyday domestic purposes; only a few are of the sort one would expect at commercial premises or at homes where professional needleworkers plied their trade. Only one pair of scissors was recovered, and it was not among the materials presented to me for study. A close examination of scissors, if more had been available, would have been a useful way to learn more about the nature of sewing work at these sites (cf. Beaudry 2006:115–136). I did not study glass bottles that once held sewing-machine oil, either, but several examples were found, and these are unmistakable evidence for use of sewing machines versus hand sewing.

The range of items that were examined included common straight pins and safety pins; thimbles; a wide array of turned and carved bone implements (handles, spools or reels, possible needlecases) and fragments of implements that were parts of sewing sets; wooden thread spools; glass darning eggs; bone handles that likely came from awls or stilettos; and a few miscellaneous items (Table 5.4). Many of the unidentified objects I inspected are not, in my opinion, sewing tools; safety pins are not discussed further, because I consider them not sewing tools but clothing fasteners. Those materials I recognized as sewing related are discussed below by block and by feature in an attempt to place items found within the same deposits into a contextual framework. Throughout the discussion, I have drawn upon information compiled in my book, *Findings* (Beaudry 2006), and have not cited sources for my identifications. Following the descriptions of individual assemblages are some general remarks about the sewing tools from all of the features in the South of Market neighborhood.

BLOCK 4 – FOLSOM, BALDWIN, AND FREMONT STREETS

412 Folsom Street: Privy 1301

Finds in the privy at 412 Folsom Street were associated with the Irish Catholic Taylor family. They were deposited after the 1868 earthquake (in other words, they represent cleanup after the quake, which seems to have precipitated the Taylors' move away from this address). Robert Taylor was a porter for an import firm.

Unmistakable evidence of home sewing and clothing repair presented itself here in the form of an opaque white glass darning egg, several straight pins, and a thimble. The straight pins are all of copper alloy; one is a lillikin (a small pin of fine wire gauge), one a large white (>2 in. long), and three are middling or short whites (all-purpose ordinary pins about 2 in. long) but of fine, as opposed to common, wire gauge. Only the large pin would have served for pinning heavy fabric. The copper-alloy thimble is deep-drawn with regular knurling and a motto band lacking a motto; the rim portion is missing. There is quite a bit of wear on the crown of this fairly ordinary, adult-sized thimble.

Table 5.4. Artifacts Associated with Sewing

Block	Feature	Association	Date (ca.)	Sewing-related Artifacts
4	Privy 1301	Taylor Family	1868	Darning egg, 5 straight pins, thimble
	Privy 1300	<i>Samuel Family/Smith Family</i>	1885	4 straight pins, stiletto or awl
	Privy 1310	McSheffrey Family	1875	14 straight pins, spool holder
	Privy 1318	Murphy Family	1880	Crochet hook
	Privy 1305	Fuchs Family/Cadigan Family	1880	1 straight pin, button blank
	Privy 1303	Thompson Family	1880	Reel or spool holder
	Privy 1307	Brown Family	1870	Child's thimble
	Privy 1326	Amanda Scales and boarders	1870	24 straight pins, thimble, spool holder, awl or stiletto
	Privy 1322	Hurley Family/Conniff Family	1885	2 straight pins
Privy 1333	Dougherty Family	1890	1 straight pin, knitting needle guard, child's thimble	
5	Privy 507	Peel Family	1870	7 straight pins
	Privy 515	Fegan Brothers Household	1880	1 straight pin
9	Cesspool 13	Henry Knoche Grocery Store	1885	5 straight pins, tailor's thimble, thimble, awl or stiletto, crochet hook
	Privy 7	California Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies	1870	4 crochet hooks
	Privy 1	Silver Street Kindergarten	1885	Crochet hook, spool holder, straight pin
	Well 6	Hannan Family/Dent Family	1895	13 straight pins, darning egg, 3 spool holders, thread spool, thimble, child's thimble, sewing box
	Privy 2	Johnson Household	1885	3 straight pins, spool holder, sewing clamp, crochet hook
	Privy 9	<i>Usher Household</i>	1880	175 straight pins, 4 needles, 28 thread spools, 2 pattern tracing wheels, thimble case, card or type-weaving disk, spool holder, awl or stiletto, bone thimble
10	Well 853	Baker Family	1870	6 straight pins, crochet hook
	Well 866	<i>McDonald Family/Tobin Family</i>	1885	2 sewing machine oil bottles, thread spool, 2 thimbles, spool holder
	Privy 851	Metcalf Household	1878	Thimble

Table 5.4. Artifacts Associated with Sewing (continued)

Block	Feature	Association	Date (ca.)	Sewing-related Artifacts
10	Privy 808	Schreiner, Johnson, Degnan, and McIntyre families	1882	40 straight pins, thimble, spool
	Privy 801	Sheridan Family	1888	Child's thimble
	Privy 857/858	Dolan Family/Michelson Family	1880	20 straight pins, toy thimble, spool rod, crochet hook
	Privy 807	Gee Family	1868	34 straight pins, darning egg, thimble, needlecase
	Privy 806	<i>McIver Family/Martin Family</i>	1880	4 straight pins, spool, awl or stiletto, thread spool
	Privy 812	Towne Family/Hill Family/Malony Family	1880	Thread reel, needlecase
	Privy 810	John Monahan Family/Thomas Griffin Family	1880	Sewing machine oil bottle
11	Privy 1600/1601	Donnelly Family/Beal Family	1880	19 straight pins, 2 thimbles, 11 thread spools, darning egg, tatting shuttle

Italics indicate households with a known needleworker

416 Folsom Street: Privy 1300

For 26 years this address was rented by a tailor, Wolf Samuel, a Polish Jewish émigré who lived there with his family in a portion of the house shared with the Smith family, whose household head, Leonard, was an engineer from Pennsylvania. Wolf Samuel ran a tailor shop out of the premises. It is therefore no surprise that several scraps of textiles were recovered from the privy, filled in the mid-1880s, although there were only a few artifacts related to sewing. After their move, Samuel trained his son Jacob in his trade, and later his daughter Bessie became a seamstress.

Fragments of three copper-alloy straight pins were found, two of them middlings or short whites and one a lillikin. A single iron straight pin was found; it is of the middling variety, which is a bit unusual because iron pins are not common finds (they rust, making them undesirable for everyday sewing); they tend to be larger than the one recovered and of fairly heavy wire gauge.

Of the three turned bone objects found in the privy, only one (1444-99) appeared to be related to sewing. It is a turned bone tubular handle, with tooled decoration on the finial end, and is very possibly, a handle for a stiletto or awl.

9 Baldwin Street: Privy 1310

Here the contents of the privy filled ca. 1875 are linked to the Irish McSheffrey family, whose head of household was a laborer. From the privy fill came 14 copper-alloy straight pins, a mix of lillikins and middlings, or short whites. A single bone object is a tapered, turned tube with exterior screw threading at its surviving end. It resembles other finds from elsewhere in the neighborhood that have been identified as connector rods or shafts from reels or spool holders;

such rods would have had disks that screwed onto each end, the removable ends facilitating the placement of a spool of thread onto the rod where it could spin readily as the thread was pulled.

11 Baldwin Street: Privy 1318

Privy 1318, associated with the Irish Protestant Patrick Murphy family (Murphy was a laborer), was filled ca. 1880. Murphy's 20-year-old daughter, Rosy, was a sewing-machine operator turned dressmaker by the 1880 census. The feature produced a single sewing item, a turned bone handle fragment; the exterior has ribbing and a narrow end with internal threading. It appears to be the handle for a fitted crochet hook or similar implement (e.g., a tambour hook).

13 Baldwin Street: Privy 1305

The French Protestant Fuchs family lived at this address, sharing the premises with the Irish Catholic Cadigan family. Mr. Fuchs was a carpenter, Mr. Cadigan a stevedore. Privy 1305 was filled ca. 1880 and produced a single iron straight pin of middling size (1 in. long) and a flat bone disk with center hole—a button blank that would have been covered with fabric when used on clothing.

13 Baldwin Street: Privy 1307

Privy 1307 is associated with the occupation of this address by the family of John Brown, an Irish laborer. From this privy came a very corroded and fragmentary copper-alloy thimble; it is very small and is likely to have been a child's thimble.

21 Baldwin Street: Privy 1303

The privy here was filled in around 1880; its contents have been associated with the household of Irishman William Thompson, who was a blacksmith. The only sewing-related item here is a cylindrical, turned bone tube that appears to be part of a fancy reel or spool holder; it is threaded at one end, where it screws into a flat disk that has four attachment holes drilled into it (Figure 5.4). This sort of reel holder would have been one element of a turned and carved bone sewing set.



Figure 5.4. Bone reel or spool holder (Privy 1303).

240 Fremont Street: Privy 1326

Amanda Scales, boardinghouse keeper, lived at this address with her tenants. A privy filled in the early 1870s produced evidence of Mrs. Scales's (or her boarders') sewing activities. Among these finds were 24 common pins, a thimble, and several bone objects that may have been parts of sewing implements.

The straight pins are all of copper alloy and are of varying lengths and overall sizes, in other words, an assortment of lillikins, middlings, and long whites, or large pins. The thimble is a deep-drawn, copper-alloy thimble of adult size; it has a folded rim with gadrooning and a motto band; it is too corroded to determine whether a motto is present.

Among the bone items is a disk (1573-176), flat on one side and convex on the other, with a small threaded hole in the center of the flat side. Although it might be a decorative boss for a needlework box, it is more likely one end for a spool or reel, as it closely resembles other spool ends found in the neighborhood. Another bone disk (1573-161) is perfectly plain and flat; it is not a button but might have been a button blank, or, alternatively, a game piece such as a tiddlywink.

A third disk (1573-174) may be another spool end or part of a piece of costume jewelry. A rather crudely made, worked, bone handle (1561-106) has a rectangular cross section with chamfered edges; it holds the remains of a ferrous shaft, indicating it was the handle for a whittle-tang tool, such as a knife or an awl or stiletto; it is highly polished from use and appears to have been intended for heavy use. The final bone item (1573-206) is another turned and carved bone handle, relatively small, with a J-shape. It resembles several other "J-shaped" bone handles found throughout the collection that probably are not parts of sewing tools but might be handles for button or glove hooks or for pipe scrapers or some other, as yet unidentified, tool. (See sidebar J or L-shaped Handles/Tools.)

242 Fremont Street: Privy 1322

At the time Privy 1322 was filled in the late 1880s, this address was occupied by the households of Michael Hurley, an Irish laborer, and James Conniff, an Australian Catholic fireman. Two straight pins were recovered from the privy fill; they are either copper-alloy middlings, or short whites, of relatively fine wire gauge.

236 Fremont Street: Privy 1333

Privy 1333, filled in the early 1890s, is associated with the Irish William Dougherty family; William was a longshoreman.

Items of bone found in the privy included a very fine-pointed, turned bone object that may have been a stiletto, or possibly part of a personal hygiene kit. A second object is a small, tubular bone object with holes opposite one another at the open end of the tube; the intact hole shows wear. This is almost certainly a knitting-needle guard.

One copper-alloy straight pin was found, a middling of fine wire gauge, as was a thimble. The thimble is deep-drawn, of copper-alloy, and has a rolled rim and band with no motto. It is tall and narrow but small, a child's or pinky thimble.

BLOCK 5 – FOLSOM AND CLEMENTINA STREETS

540 Folsom Street: Privy 507

Privy 507, filled ca. 1880, is associated with the English Protestant family of merchant Jonathan Peel. Here the only sewing-related items were seven copper-alloy straight pins in assorted sizes.

49 Clementina Street: Privy 515

The privy at this address is associated with a pair of Irish longshoremen, the Fegan brothers. It yielded one copper-alloy straight pin and a J-shaped bone or ivory handle of unidentified function.

J OR L-SHAPED HANDLES/TOOLS

Mary C. Beaudry



A J-shaped handle with flat “foot” at one end, Privy 1326

Several examples of small J-shaped handles were found in deposits throughout the South of Market neighborhood. One found in Privy 1326 (Block 4) is a relatively small, turned and carved bone handle. It has interior threading at one end of the shaft, which is incised with diagonal lines and hatching within ringed bands, and the terminus is a flat “foot” shape. This object is nearly identical to Item 1007-255 found in Privy 812 (Block 10). Item 1007-255 has balusters and cordons as well as diamond-shaped cross-hatching at its screw-thread end; the other end is carved into a stylized, flat “foot” with carved lines and is highly polished from wear. A single turned and carved J-shaped handle, made of especially dense bone or perhaps of ivory, was also found in Privy 515 (Block 5). The long portion ends in a foot shape; the interior threading at the end of the short portion would have held the working end of the tool (a possible scraper, awl or stiletto, or perhaps a button hook). The flat foot shape on these three J-shaped handles tends to support their use as pipe tools, with tamper (foot) at one end and scraper at the other.

Well 6 (Block 9) also produced a long, slender, J-shaped object of turned and carved bone; one end is hollow with internal threading, the other is carved into the shape of what appears to be a duck’s head.

A L- or J-shaped bone object was found in Privy 1333 (Block 4). It has exterior threading on

the short end, while the long portion is a hollow long leg. This item is worn, although some hatching can be seen; it has a hole cut on a slant near the polished/worn end. It is possible that the holes were for a ribbon or lacing, or chain, from which the implement might have been suspended.



Privy 808 (Block 10) yielded a small L-shaped turned bone handle with internal threading at one end and its terminus carved into a probable dog’s head (1026-245). This might have served as the handle for some sort of masculine implement, such as a pipe scraper.

The purpose of these “J” or “L” shaped bone tools remains unclear but the number of examples found in the collection, suggest that they were handles for some small tool that was in common use. Until intact parallel examples can be found, it is impossible to identify the purpose of these little handles with certainty.

BLOCK 9 – THIRD, SILVER, AND PERRY STREETS

423 Third Street: Cistern 13

The cistern behind the Henry Knoche Grocery Store was filled in the mid-1880s. It produced several bone objects, including a possible tailor's thimble, a metal thimble, and five straight pins.

Item 297-250 is a hollow, turned bone handle, polished from use; it is most likely the handle of an awl or a stiletto. Item 302-33 is a narrow, tapered shaft missing its tip at the narrow end; it appears to be a small-gauge crochet hook, from which the hook has broken off; it also appears to have been reused in some manner. An item initially cataloged as a possible tailor's thimble (301-164) resembles a bone ferrule more than a thimble, being too small in diameter to accommodate any but the smallest of fingers; it does not widen at the base like most thimbles, and shows no sign of use as a thimble.

The copper-alloy specimen (297-233) is a badly corroded, large adult thimble, deep-drawn with rolled rim; it has ferrous corrosion, which suggests it had a steel core. This was a sturdy thimble for heavy use.

64 Silver Street: Privy 1 and Privy 7

This address was the home of the California Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies, associated with Privy 7, filled ca. 1870, and later the location of the Silver Street Kindergarten, linked to Privy 1, filled in the mid-1880s.

From Privy 1 came an intact, turned bone crochet hook (179-26), 4-1/2 in. long. It is slender with a tiny hook, hence it was used with very fine yarn or thread for making doilies, baby clothes, and the like. Its terminus—the end opposite the hook—is carved into a pyramidal shape; it is highly polished from use. It very closely resembles Item 302-33, found in Cistern 13 at 423 Third Street.

Another bone item found in Privy 1 is a turned bone cylinder (171-119) that tapers at each end; it is possibly the connector rod for a spool, but it is fragmentary and lacking any diagnostic elements. A threaded peg or rod of turned bone that fits into a disk with internal threading (two items that fit together: 180-22) is part of a spool or reel holder. Also found was a single copper-alloy straight pin, a tiny lillikin.

Privy 7 contained four bone crochet-hook fragments from two fine-gauge crochet hooks and two small wooden thread spools.

12 (41) Perry Street: Well 6

This well is associated with the families of James Hannan and Theodate Dent and was backfilled in the middle 1890s. James worked as a boilermaker; his son, John, worked as a clerk at the California Notions and Toy Company. Theodate was a widow with two grown children.

This feature contained a number of sewing tools and accessories, including an opaque white glass darning egg; three bone disks (201-77, 292-130, and 293-185—the latter two are identical and probably from the same object, but missing their connector rod) from spool or reel holders; a large wooden thread spool; 13 assorted copper-alloy straight pins (lillikins and short whites); a small, flat piece of bone in the shape of an oval (probably an inset or appliqué for a sewing box or other small box); and two thimbles.

Both thimbles are of copper alloy, deep-drawn, but one (293-182) has a steel core and a plain rim; it is 18th-century in form but manufactured using 19th-century techniques. It is of base metal but would have been quite elegant in its day, and it seems likely it was made in Europe, possibly France, not in England or America. The second thimble (206-116) is fragmentary and very small; it is a child's or pinky thimble.

14 (39) Perry Street: Privy 2

This privy is associated with the household of a California seaman named Johnson; it was filled in the mid-1880s. It contained three copper-alloy straight pins, all of them large (long whites); a turned bone disk with one convex side incised with a circular decoration and a flat side with a threaded center hole, seemingly part of a spool holder; a turned bone peg, with one rounded end with a horizontal slit (a possible tuning or tightening peg or a thumbscrew for a carved bone sewing clamp); and a tapered, turned bone rod that may have been a pen holder or possibly the shaft of a crochet hook.

16 (37) Perry Street: Privy 18 and Well 8

Privy 18 was filled ca. 1873; its contents are associated with the household of Mississippi insurance agent Ebenezer Shaw. No sewing implements were identified. (A single bone item—a narrow, tapering tube with a rounded knob at one end—appears to be the tip for a parasol rib for a small and delicate parasol.)

Well 8 is associated with the household of the Rowe family from New Jersey; its household head was a shipwright, and the well was filled ca. 1887. From this well came a large, deep-drawn, copper-alloy thimble with a rolled rim gadrooned with diamond shapes; it had a plain band with no motto. Also found was a single wooden thread spool of relatively large (1-1/4-in. tall) size.

20 (35) Perry Street: Privy 9

At this address, Privy 9, filled ca. 1881, was associated with the John Usher household; Usher was a sailmaker from Maryland. John's sister-in-law and her daughter, Mary Shore and Ida Briggs Shore, lived with the family and worked as dressmakers. Indeed, more evidence for a wide range of sewing activities came from this address than any other in the neighborhood. Psota (this chapter) discusses the abundance of clothing fasteners and garment fragments that indicate that the Shores probably devoted most of their efforts to altering and remaking clothing.

In the Usher deposit, four needles were found; these were very fine or medium-to-fine sewing needles, not of steel but copper-alloy. They were likely intended for everyday home sewing (certainly not for work with canvas). A very large number of copper-alloy straight pins ($n = 175$) and one steel straight pin came from this deposit; they are highly assorted in size, though all but the longest are very fine wire gauge. This ample evidence of sewing, indeed, of dressmaking, is reinforced by the presence in the assemblage of 28 wooden thread spools in a variety of sizes.

The remains of two pattern-tracing wheels (208-416 and 209-281) were found; both are cast copper-alloy handles terminating in forked ends, into which the wheels would have been riveted. One is round, the other square in cross section; the former is small and delicate, the latter, large and sturdy. Both are missing their wheels.

Also found was a carved-and-pierced bone thread barrel or thimble case (209-229; Figure 5.5); part of a sewing set; and a pierced, small rectangle of bone that may have functioned in card- or tape-weaving in some way. Another bone sewing implement is a carved thimble (270-

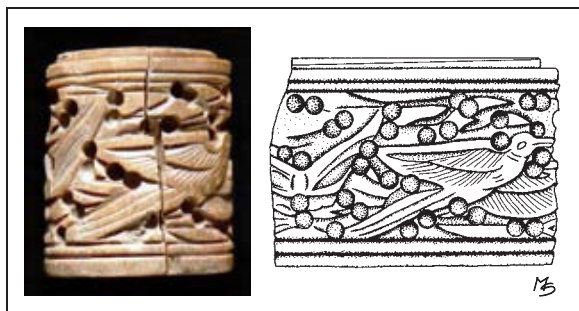


Figure 5.5. Bone thread barrel or thimble case. This item is ornately carved with birds and leaves, and has a recessed rim for a lid (Privy 9; approximate scale 1:1; illustration by M. Stoyka).



Figure 5.6. Bone thimble and vegetable ivory (or bone) handle (Privy 9; approximate scale 1:1).

32), with regular knurling on its crown and body; it has a plain band around its base and cordoning around the rim and was intended for adult use (Figure 5.6). Bone thimbles are rare finds at historical sites; this example would have been more expensive than ordinary copper-alloy thimbles. Another object (208-331) may be of bone, though it could be of vegetable ivory; it is a turned tapering rod that may be a lace bobbin but more likely is a handle for an awl or stiletto (Figure 5.6).

The assemblage of sewing items left by Mary and Ida Briggs Shore in the Usher deposit is a rich one, made up for the most part of very practical objects suitable for dressmaking/clothing alteration well beyond what would have been called for in home sewing. There are also a few objects, like the bone thimble and reel holder, that show special attention by an individual in selection of sewing accessories that were attractive as well as practical.

BLOCK 10 – SILVER AND PERRY STREETS

108 Silver Street: Well 853

This well, filled ca. 1872, has been associated with the Stephen Norris Baker family, whose head of household had moved to San Francisco from New York and was a policeman and wharfinger. The well fill contained seven intriguing bone objects and six common straight pins. All of the straight pins were of copper alloy, with one example each from assorted sizes: short white, fine-gauge short white, fine-gauge middling, regular-gauge middling, long white, and lillikin. Most of these could have been used for sewing purposes.

The bone items are a bit more problematic because most are fragmentary and hence difficult to identify. One slender, turned bone rod (1258-93) has an acorn terminus; the point is missing but it closely resembles bone crochet hooks found elsewhere in the South of Market neighborhood. The portion recovered is about 3-1/4 in. long and has a diameter of 3/16 in.; if this was a crochet hook, its hook would have been of a very small size, for fine work with fine thread or yarn, for making baby clothes, hairnets, doilies, and similar delicate items. Two items (1258-92, cap, and 1257-144, tube) seem to be part of a very small pin case or other container. The small cap screws onto the hollow tube; the cap has a threaded interior at one end, the tube a threaded exterior. The maximum length of these two items when screwed together is less than 3/4 in., shorter even than most pins, so it is not clear that this tube and cap had anything to do with sewing. Two bone items I examined (1257-141 and 1258-111)—a flat disk with beveled edge, and a thin, rectangular plate—seem to have once served as decorative appliqué, the flat plate possibly having been a bit of bone veneer. Another bone item that I did not see (1263-46) is described as a hollow can or short tube with a round ball finial, with small holes on either side of the open end. Such an

item could very well have been a knitting-needle guard, though the description readily fits tips for parasol ribs. The final bone item from this deposit is a narrow spoon or scoop (1257-129), possibly a marrow or salt spoon or even a caviar spoon; the bowl is marked with letters that are only partly legible (ADA...S), probably Adams. It is not likely to have been employed as a sewing tool of any sort.

112 Silver Street: Well 866

At the time that the well at 112 Silver Street was filled, ca. 1884, the home was occupied by the McDonald family from New York and the Tobin family from Ireland. The McDonald household included Miss Annie McDonald, who was a dressmaker who worked outside of the home in dressmakers' shops, eventually running her own shop (see Psota, this chapter). The deposit nevertheless contained abundant evidence of in-home sewing, including two sewing-machine-oil bottles, each embossed with the name of a different supplier (Singer and Spem, respectively), a small wooden thread spool, and two thimbles.

Both thimbles are of copper alloy and manufactured using the deep-drawn technique, and both are adult size. One has a folded rim (1268-138), the other a rolled rim (1270-101), and both have bands with no motto. The former example is sturdier than ordinary copper-alloy thimbles because it has a steel core, indicating it was for heavy use; it is very worn, especially on the sides (this results when the sewer needs to push large needles through heavy fabric, the sides of the thimble providing more leverage for this purpose than its crown). Psota (this chapter) notes that some heavyweight wool fabric was also found in this feature. The heavily worn thimble indicates that Miss McDonald engaged in considerable handwork despite owning a sewing machine.

Other items from the well that might be sewing related include a 1-in.-long tube of white improved earthenware (1268-127), which may have once been part of a multi-element sewing stand or spool holder, and a small rectangular bit of bone that looks like one end of a thin, polished box of some sort; the latter may well have been a gaming piece.

114 Silver Street: Privy 851

At this address, a privy filled in the late 1870s is associated with the Metcalf family, headed by a German sea captain. The privy contents included a single copper-alloy thimble (1154-72), deep-drawn with rolled rim and a band lacking a motto; it is an adult-sized thimble. The only other possible sewing item from this feature is a bone disk (1166-32), about 1-3/8 in. in diameter, with a flat front and slightly convex back that is scored with concentric rings; the disk has threaded sides, indicating that it could have been a lid that screwed into something. It would be very difficult, however, to screw this into anything because there is nothing providing leverage for this action. The piece is highly worn on one side and hence is possibly a well-used gaming piece.

120 Silver Street: Privy 808

Privy 808 was filled around 1882; the house at 120 Silver Street was occupied at this time by a number of families from different parts of Europe. The Schreiners were from Saxony, and the head of household was a barkeeper; the Johnsons and McIntyres were from Ireland, heads of households were a laborer and a steward, respectively; the Degnan family was from Denmark, and its head of household was a saloonkeeper.

From this deposit came seven intriguing carved bone objects, 40 common straight pins, and a thimble. The adult-sized thimble (1026-356) is made of copper alloy, deep-drawn, with a

plain rim; it has a band with no motto. Of the 38 copper-alloy straight pins, 37 are of normal or middling size and one is a tiny lillikin only 1/2 in. long and of very fine-gauge wire. There are two iron wire straight pins, both of the sort known as “long whites” — these are longer than the copper-alloy pins and meant for heavier tasks than ordinary sewing.

The bone objects include a solid carved bone handle terminus from a glove or button hook, or, less likely, the end of a lace bobbin; a turned bone spindle with cordoning and a tapered point is too fragmentary to identify with certainty; two slender turned bone “rods,” one with rouletting, that might be parts of handles of delicate sewing implements; a very small, pear-shaped turned bone tubular hollow peg that is more likely to be a decorative finial or a tip for the rib of a small parasol than part of a sewing tool; and a pair of matching bone disks with domed fronts and flat backs with recessed circles around a center hole, each with ferrous corrosion in the hole (1026-249). The bone disks may well be the ends of a small spool; the corrosion suggests a missing connector rod of iron. The majority of 19th-century bone spools have turned bone connector rods with threads at either end that the spool ends screw onto, iron being likely to rust and spoil the thread. This intriguing collection of turned bone objects is too fragmentary to permit much interpretation, but such items are for the most part feminine in character and represent if not sewing then attention to clothing and dressing oneself.

142 Silver Street: Privy 801, Pit 802

Privy 801 and Pit 802, in the lot behind the house at 142 Silver Street, were both filled in the late 1880s, when the Joseph Sheridan family lived here. Sheridan was an Irish Catholic teamster. The only sewing item found here was a small, deep-drawn copper-alloy thimble with rolled rim. This is a child’s thimble; it has a plain band lacking a motto. Such thimbles were mass-produced and inexpensive; one of this size would have been used by a youngster learning to sew.

109–111 Perry Street: Privies 857 and 858

Here Michael and Jane Dolan, Irish Catholics, shared a house with the Michelson family (Jacob and Aletta) from Norway. The privies were filled around 1880.

From the privies came seven bone items, some of which appear to be parts of sewing tools, a thimble, and 20 common copper-alloy straight pins (these were not available for me to measure). The thimble is a deep-drawn, copper-alloy, miniature thimble (only 1/2-in. tall) with a rolled rim and band without motto. Such a small thimble was either a toy, for doll play, or would have been used by a child learning to sew using thimbles on both index finger and pinky. It is seems unlikely that such a thimble figured in any way in productive sewing, though it would have served didactic purposes.

The bone items include a thin rectangular plate (1213-17) that may have served as a decorative appliqué for a sewing box or other item; a turned bone rod (1213-16) with threading at one end that is very likely to have been a connector rod for a spool that would have been part of a carved bone sewing set; and a 3-1/2 in. long bone tube (1211-15), carved in a vaguely South Pacific style, very worn along the center of the shaft that may have served as a handle for a fitted crochet or tambour hook. The presence of these items along with numerous fancy clothing fasteners and seven scraps of textile prompt Psota to infer that either Jane Dolan or Aletta Michelson was a dressmaker working out of her home. It is difficult to support this conclusion upon examination of the limited assemblage of sewing tools and accessories.

115 Perry Street: Privy 849

This Perry Street address was home to the Strauss and Ackerman households, who were German Jewish émigrés; the heads of households were, respectively, a butcher and an upholsterer. The privy was filled in the early 1870s. The only sewing tool that came from this feature is a tapered, turned bone handle carved with deep vertical ridges, about 2 in. long (1155-83); it has a ferrous core. This was probably a whittle-tang handle for an awl or a short stiletto. While it could very well have been a handle for a small glove or buttonhook, it is the right size for an awl. Awls and stiletos were very common elements of sewing kits and would have been necessary implements for upholsterers, who dealt with exceedingly heavyweight fabrics.

123 Perry Street: Privy 807

At 123 Perry, Ferdinand Gee, a Prussian Catholic master mariner, lived with his family. Someone in this household, perhaps Ferdinand's wife Isabella, did a great deal of home sewing, as indicated by the presence in the privy, filled ca. 1868, of an opaque white glass darning egg, a bone needlecase, 34 common straight pins, and a thimble (see Psota, this chapter, for discussion of the buttons and textiles from this feature).

Of interest is that the majority of the straight pins ($n = 31$), all of which are of copper alloy, are very small, either lillikins or short middlings; only two are short whites or middlings and one a long white. Hence the pins were mainly for delicate work.

The thimble (995-133) is of very good quality; it is a deep-drawn, copper-alloy thimble that appears to have a steel core and perhaps even some silver content (it has more than one type of corrosion product and is heavier than ordinary thimbles); it has a plain rolled rim and elaborate knurling, consisting of square indentations on the crown with a rosette pattern in the center, round indentations on the sides, and a wide band with delicately etched squares, some etched with tiny vertical lines (Figure 5.7). There is a square cartouche on the band, the usual place for a monogram or a size mark, but in this instance the cartouche is blank. It has traces of gilding and is of small to medium size. A thimble such as this cost considerably more than the ordinary thimbles that constitute the vast majority recovered elsewhere in the neighborhood.



Figure 5.7. Copper-alloy thimble (Privy 807; approximate scale 1:1).

Isabella Gee, presumably the owner of the fancy thimble, also possessed a nicely turned and carved bone needlecase. A portion of the body of the case was found; it consists of a tube with decorative carving at one end and interior threading into which a closure would have fit.

125–127 Perry Street: Privy 806

This address was home to the Scottish Murdock McIver family; Murdock McIver was a stevedore. Abraham Martin, an English Jewish merchant, also lived here with his family. Privy 806 was filled ca. 1880. Carrie and Mary McIver were seamstresses, and their activities seem to be reflected by fragments of over 50 lightweight garments of the sort seamstresses would typically work on (Psota, this chapter). There are only a few sewing implements from this deposit: portions of a spool from a carved bone sewing set; a bone handle with a whittle-tang that may have been an awl or stiletto (or table cutlery); a cylindrical bone handle that might be for a sewing tool or for a parasol; four straight pins (middlings and long whites), and a single wooden thread spool.

The spool fragment consists of two parts, a disk and a rod; both are threaded, and the rod portion or post screws into a hole in the back of the bone disk (1011-480). There are decorative holes drilled into the convex (outer) side of the disk. This seems to be a fragmentary element of just one piece of a hand-carved and pierced bone sewing set (I discuss these further in my concluding section). Such sets were popular in Victorian times for home sewing; they were ornate and decorative and not suited to the long, hard use expected of a seamstress's tools. But owning one would have been a clear sign that a woman took pride in her sewing.

129 Perry Street: Privy 812

The privy at 129 Perry was filled in around 1880; at this address lived the families of Charles Towne, a railroad clerk from Massachusetts, and John Hill, a Canadian machinist, as well as the family of John Maloney, who was a stock dealer from Ireland. From the privy came seven bone items, a hard rubber handle, and a wooden handle.



Figure 5.8. Bone thread reel or spindle (Privy 812; approximate scale 1:1).

Among the bone objects were a disk (1007-259) and a tubular rod (1007-262; Figure 5.8) that might be elements of a spindle or thread reel, though if this is so they were not from the same reel. The bone rod is cylindrical and elaborately turned with many ribs and cordons, with screw threading at one end; the other end is tapered and shows much wear. Another bone tube (1007-271), 2-1/2 in. in length, was identified by the cataloger as a possible stamp; it has a tapering baluster shape (from 1/2 to 1/4 in. in diameter) with a center knop, and a square top with floral cutouts on its surface and cutouts on each of its four sides (a diamond shape, a heart, an eye, and a fourth indistinct image). The business end is tapered and worn and may possibly have been tenoned into another object. Of interest on this unidentified implement is a tiny etching, in stick-figure style, of a running deer with large antlers; this carving does not seem to have been done when the object was manufactured but at a later date (Figure 5.9). This bone implement is probably not a sewing tool but it is intriguing nonetheless.

A turned bone handle (1007-255) has a turned baluster shape, embellished with twisting diagonal incisions in the convex center area; it has ferrous corrosion at one end, suggesting that it is a ferrule of some type or a handle for a whittle-tang implement; the end lacking iron staining has interior screw threads, indicating that something was fastened into it. It seems likely it is a handle from something like a large button hook (e.g., a boot-button hook) that would have had a long, hooked iron rod at the business end and a screwed-in decorative finial or a hook for hanging the tool up at the other end. It is possible, though not likely, that this was a handle into which a very large crochet hook might have been screwed, but it would be exceedingly awkward to use for crocheting.

The wooden handle (1007-263) is nearly 4 in. long and has a hollow copper-alloy lining; it is carved at one end and has a cordon at the other. This, too, is more likely to have been the handle for a buttonhook or other implement not related to sewing. The hard black rubber object (1007-155) lacks both ends, as only the shaft is present; it is long (about 3 in.) and slender and tapering. Since it lacks its working end, it is impossible to identify what sort of handle this was.

Other bone items are more readily identifiable as sewing accessories. Item 1007-240 is a very fragmented turned and carved bone needlecase, carved on one side with a female figure and on the other side with a spread-eagled figure with its arms and legs wrapped around the cap. A

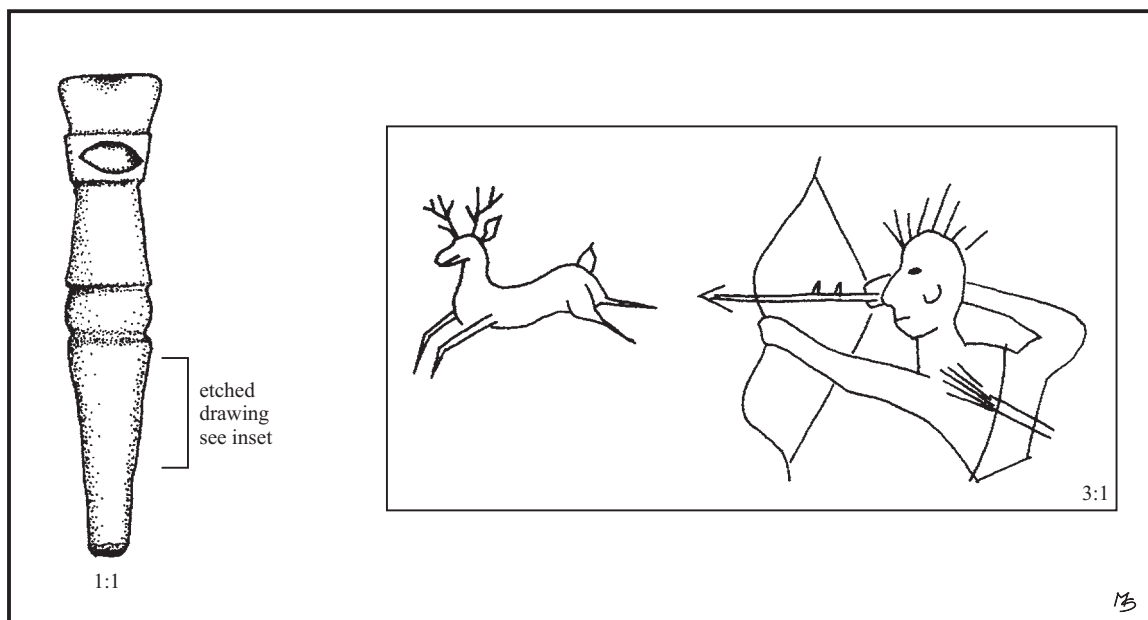


Figure 5.9. Unidentified bone object with etched drawing of a hunting scene. Object is shown at 1 to 1 scale, while the drawing is enlarged to 3 to 1 (Privy 812; illustration by M. Stoyka).

small turned bone tube (1007-258) in the shape of a bowling pin is difficult to identify; it seems possible that it was part of a small needlecase, because is too small to have served as a handle.

133 Perry Street: Privy 813

A single bone handle was found in the privy at 133 Perry Street—the home of Mary Moynihan and her family. Mary was a washerwoman and an Irish Catholic; the privy was filled in the late 1870s.

The turned bone handle (987-17) is long and slender; one end is tapered, the other recessed to receive a collar or ferrule. It has a ferrous core, indicating that it could have been a handle for a whittle-tang implement, such as an awl or a stiletto, although the long, tapering shape more closely resembles a pen holder, into which an iron nib would be fitted, or a the handle for an artist's small paintbrush.

137–139 Perry Street: Privy 810

No sewing tools were found in Privy 810, filled in the late 1870s, but a single sewing-machine-oil bottle provides evidence that someone in either the John Monahan or Thomas Griffin household owned a sewing machine. No textiles or buttons were found here.

BLOCK 11 – PERRY STREET**207–209 Perry Street: Privies 1600 and 1601**

Two privies at this address—Privies 1600 and 1601—have been associated with the Donnelly and Beal families, the former household headed by an Irish blacksmith, the latter by a Scottish gold miner. Both privies were filled in the 1880s.

Sewing items from Privy 1600 included 17 common straight pins, 2 thimbles, 11 wooden thread spools, and 1 wooden and 3 hollow bone tubes. The tubes may have been handle elements for sewing tools but could well have been for any number of other purposes—mouthpieces for musical instruments, dollhouse furniture, and so on. One flat, decorative bit of bone or horn that I examined appeared to be a bit of inlay, possibly for a sewing box; there were also four safety pins. All of the copper-alloy straight pins ($n = 13$) were of fine-wire gauge and of middling length; seven of these had a dark coating similar to that applied to pins used in mourning; the iron straight pins ($n = 4$) were all large pins of the sort known as corkins, or blanket pins.

The two thimbles are both of copper alloy, deep-drawn, and with rolled rims. One specimen (1654-246) is very large (0.8 in. high with a basal diameter of 0.7 in.); this is a heavy-duty thimble for use by a man or woman who needed to stitch canvas or other dense fabric. The other thimble (1655-254) is of normal adult size (about 0.6 in.); it is gilded and exceedingly worn on the crown, indicating that it was extensively used.

This indication of heavy use comes as no surprise when one notes the 11 wooden thread spools from this deposit; this represents purchase of mercerized or pre-waxed thread already handily stored on commercially produced spools. This represents a fair amount of thread (for example, a contemporary spool 1-3/4 in. tall and 1-1/2 in. maximum diameter can hold about 275 yards of thread), and some of the spools were large enough to hold heavy-duty thread of the sort one would need for heavy textiles requiring the use of the large, sturdy thimble described above. One spool, the large thimble, and some of the straight pins appear burned, as were many of the other artifacts from this deposit.

Privy 1601 produced evidence of clothing maintenance in the form of a white glass darning egg, of sewing in the presence of two common straight pins (of iron wire, middling size), and of fancy work represented by a tatting shuttle (Figure 5.10). The white glass egg would have been used for darning socks, evidence of household thrift and of a skill most women and girls were

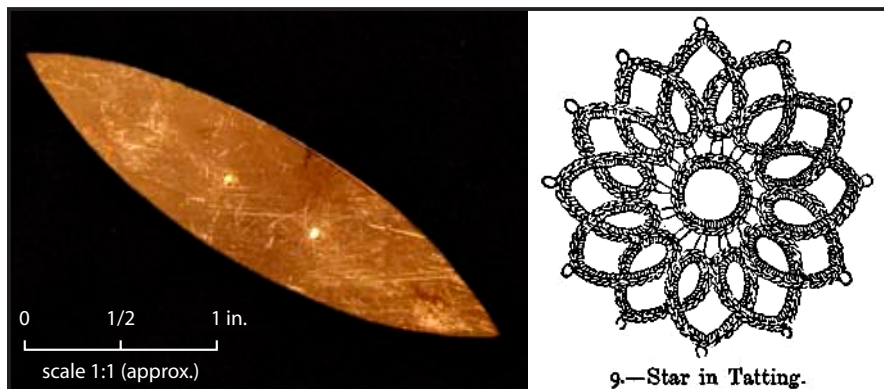


Figure 5.10. Tatting shuttle (Privy 1601) and tatting example from *Beeton's Book of Needlework* by Mrs. Isabella Mary Beeton, 1870.

expected to possess well into the 20th century. The darners were relatively inexpensive items. The tatting shuttle is likewise not a fancy item; it is made of hard rubber instead of bone or another material used in more expensive shuttles. It represents not clothing maintenance but production of a looped,

lace-like items such as hair nets, relatively delicate bags or purses, trim for women's clothing, doilies, antimacassars, or many other sorts of items popular in Victorian times.

DISCUSSION

Several general observations can be made about the overall assemblage of sewing-related items from features excavated in the South of Market neighborhood. First, in all but a couple of cases, there is less evidence for sewing activities than one might expect, given the ubiquity of home sewing until well into the 20th century. But deposits from a few households indicate that some families specialized in alterations and remaking clothing for others, so it is possible that busy working people turned to others for clothing maintenance more often than expected. More telling in this regard than the sewing implements themselves are the textiles and clothing fasteners found in most deposits (Psota, this chapter).

The majority of the sewing items are fairly ordinary and inexpensive: pins; thimbles; handles for stiletos or awls; wooden thread spools; bone crochet hooks; and glass darning eggs. These were all mass-produced items readily available for purchase, probably right in the neighborhood. A single tating shuttle represents the participation of at least one female in the popular home art of tating—there was a huge craze for this in Victorian times. While most tating shuttles were made of bone, ivory, or other more valuable materials, the Perry Street shuttle is made of inexpensive, hard, black rubber, though it may have given the appearance of being made of jet or gutta percha, both more expensive materials. There are several bone objects that might have served as knitting-needle guards, but, surprisingly, no knitting needles or other knitting accessories were found at any of the properties; knitting would likely have been done almost universally within and outside the home.

Other items, while far from luxurious, represent a bit greater financial outlay. While none of the thimbles found were made of precious metal, such as silver, and none were silver-plated, there were several thimbles with steel cores, one with traces of gold gilding, and a single bone thimble from the Usher household. There were also many carved-and-pierced elements of bone sewing sets.

Hand-carved and pierced bone sewing sets were very popular in Victorian times and presumably were imported in large numbers from sources in Asia and the Pacific (Rogers 1983:127–129); it is far from surprising that such items should be fairly common on sites in San Francisco (and, based on personal observation to date, less so on sites in the eastern U.S.). A set usually consisted of a clamp or vise that could be fastened to a table or other surface with a screw-threaded finial screw, a cotton or thread barrel, a needlecase, a thimble holder, and spools. The various elements of these sets (lids, thumb screw, spool rods and ends, needlecase and cap) were threaded to effect closure or, in the case of the clamp, a tight grip. What the archaeologist most commonly sees are disparate bits of such sets (lids, spool ends, thumb screws, etc.) that have become separated from whatever they originally threaded into and hence are relatively difficult to identify. There are several examples of reel or spool holders in the collection, a possible thimble case or cotton barrel, and a couple of needlecases. One suspects that in San Francisco, people could purchase items of this sort from nearby shopkeepers, though they were also available by mail order and at large import houses that carried a wide array of objects from “the Orient” (see Hosley 1990). Such items represented a bit of extra outlay for attractive sewing accessories, but

they were nevertheless relatively reasonable in price: they are not high-end, fancy, or expensive items.

At least two categories of objects call for further, in-depth research. The number of wooden thread spools present in deposits throughout the neighborhood is sufficient to suggest that a study of these items as a class of object might reveal more about them, in terms of what sorts of threads would have come on spools of various sizes. Such a study would complement the detailed analysis of textiles and garment fragments from the features. Although only one pair of scissors is present in the current collection, other collections might benefit from a study of scissors found in association with sewing implements, textiles, and clothing fasteners, enriching our understanding of the sorts of sewing (tailoring, dressmaking, alterations, and everyday clothing maintenance) that took place within the home or in home-based shops.

In sum, sewing tools and accessories from the South of Market neighborhood are what one would expect to find in a working-class neighborhood. For the most part, the implements would have been relatively inexpensive and intended for practical use in activities such as darning and clothing repair. There is also a fair amount of evidence, bolstered by finds of textiles and clothing fasteners, for in-home sewing as a household income strategy—sometimes in a formal, “professional,” manner; at other times informally. Finds of sturdy awl handles and large adult thimbles draw our attention to men’s participation in sewing activities, and the presence of several small, child’s thimbles reminds us that the skills of sewing were imparted to girls, and often to boys, at a very young age, and that youngsters may have contributed in some ways to such household operations as clothing maintenance.