



Who's Who In Crochet

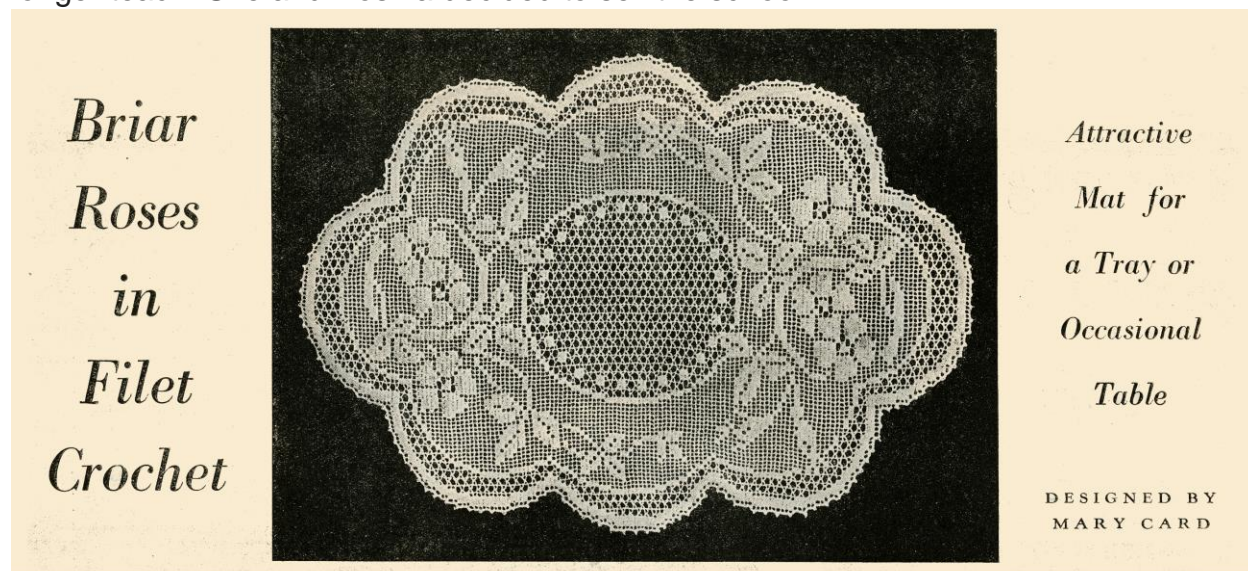
A focus of interest on those that have inspired crochet

Mary V. Card, Crochet Designer 1861-1940

By Nancy Nehring

Mary Card was an Australian crochet designer with an international following. She published in Australia, the United States and England and lived in each of these countries at some time during her career. Filet crochet was her specialty improving both design and pattern writing. She is best known for her Linen Crochet, Giant Charts, and extensive use of lacets in filet crochet.

Mary was born in 1861 in Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia, the eldest of ten children of David Card and Harriet Watson-Wooldridge. She attended private elementary and secondary schools in Melbourne. She completed her education about 1880 at the National Galley School of Design, a school for serious artists but one that also served as a finishing school for young women. Mary became a schoolteacher and in 1889 she and her sister Rosina opened their own school staffed largely by family members. The school was a success, but Mary was gradually losing her hearing and by 1903 could no longer teach. She and Rosina decided to sell the school.



Needlecraft The Home Arts Magazine October 1933 page 6, Needlecraft Publishing Co

At 42 years old, Mary was in search of a new career. She evaluated her skills in light of her deafness. In a 1917 interview¹, she summed it up thus 'finally, I sifted it down to this: I could write, but not well enough to earn a living; I could draw, but understood only the elements of design; and I could do most kinds of needlework. There was, plainly, not a living in any of these singly, but a happy thought occurred to me to combine them and



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become a professional designer and teacher of needlework through the press.... Writing and teaching were already second nature. I had only to decide what branch of needlework I would take up; Irish crochet was just coming into one of its periodic revivals, so I decided on crochet.'

She sent her first original design to the United States, to the Ladies' Home Journal, the largest women's magazine in the world at the time, which solicited outside submissions. It was accepted at once and published in May 1909. Publication at the time consisted of a small photo, two lines of description and no instructions. Nevertheless, it was immediately popular and the magazine asked for more designs publishing all that Mary supplied.

Due to slow correspondence (a letter could take a month or more) and a desire to publish in her native country, Mary submitted patterns to New Idea (later Everylady's Journal), an Australian magazine published locally in Melbourne, in 1910. These patterns differed from the ones in Ladies' Home Journal in that the photos were larger, more detailed and accompanied by detailed instructions. Demand was so great that reprints of her most popular designs were produced in book form beginning in 1914. Mary temporarily abandoned publication in America.

Many of Mary's patterns, especially those for large items like center pieces and tablecloths, were in a style she called Linen Crochet. These were basically elaborate crocheted edgings, insertions and motifs mounted on linen. The idea was that using linen for background was faster than crocheting. Mary gave detailed instructions on how to measure, cut and hem the linen and attach the lace crochet.

Everylady's Journal published Mary's first filet crochet pattern in August 1912. A small graph was accompanied by 114 rows of square-by-square written instructions. Such instructions were difficult to follow, and Mary worked to make them better. By 1916, she had developed her Giant Charts. Filet patterns were charted onto a 10 squares/inch grid with a heavier guideline every inch, a method we still use today. The same charting method was used for large and small patterns. Small patterns could be published in a magazine but Mary's large, elaborate center pieces and, later, tablecloths were published as separate patterns available by mail order.

Mary worked to improve design in filet crochet also. She began making extensive use of lacets in her filet designs. Lacets make larger spaces than open blocks and can



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therefore be used to create depth, shadow and definition around a design motif. Mary incorporated several different lacets in her work each producing a different effect.

While Mary waited out World War 1 in Australia, she made plans to expand her market into the United States and England after the war. Late in 1917 she moved to New York city, living near her brother Arthur who was a singer there. Just a few months later in February 1918 she was already being introduced in Needlecraft magazine, Augusta, Maine, as a new contributor. This began a long-term association with Needlecraft which published over 80 of Mary's designs in the magazine between 1918 and 1933 and published her books and Giant Charts in the United States.

Sometime in the mid 1920s Mary moved to Barkham, England. Barbara Ballantyneⁱⁱ speculates that Mary relocated because she did not like living in a city. More likely, Mary was carrying out the last phase her marketing plan. She had established herself in the United States and established a long-term relationship with a publisher that would continue to promote her and her work just as she had done in Australia.

In England, Mary followed the same marketing strategy that she had used previously. She became a designer for Weldon's magazine, perhaps their chief designer (details are sketchy as Weldon's never disclosed the identity of its designers). She chose Pearson & Co. to publish her Giant Charts.

Mary worked in England for the rest of her career. She continued to send material to Australian and American publishers, sometimes submitting the same designs to all three countries, through the mid 1930s when her output began to decline. In poor health, she returned to Australia in early 1940 and lived with her sister Harriet until her death in October 1940.

Bibliography and References

ⁱ First published in Everylady's Journal, 6 July 1917. Reprinted in Card, Mary 1917, Mary Card's Crochet Book no 4, T Shaw Fitchett, available online at

<https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-39679561>

ⁱⁱ Ballantyne, Barbara, 2002, Mary Card Australian Crochet Lace Designer, Ballantyne (self-published)