

Octagon House Museum – Hudson, Wisconsin

Research Guide: Textiles & Women's Work



Overview

In the 19th- and early 20th-century Hudson, textile production was a vital aspect of women's domestic labor, creative expression, and economic contribution. At a time when industrial manufacturing was on the rise, many women continued to sew, quilt, and embroider by hand, repurposing fabric scraps, exchanging patterns, and preserving both family and community memories. These handmade objects served both functional and symbolic roles: quilts provided warmth while recording kinship and community ties; garments reflected not only fashion but also craftsmanship, social standing, and personal identity.

Featured Objects

- Log Cabin Quilt (Object ID: 1947.0057)
Made by Cora J. Buell using cotton scraps from the Birkmose Store. No backing. Reflects her work as a dry goods clerk in Hudson.
- Zion Lutheran Signature Quilt (Object ID: 2003.7007.1)
White cotton quilt embroidered with names of 84 church members (1925–1928).
- Crib Quilt (Object ID: 2023.5.1)
Pieced cotton quilt with pink yarn ties and a ruffled edge. Made by Jenny Lee for her nieces.
- Linen Slip (Object ID: 2018.1.16)
Fine white linen slip with pearl buttons and tuck detailing. Belonged to the John A. Humbird family.
- Walking Wheel (Object ID: 1960.2304)
Wooden handmade spinning wheel called a "walking wheel" because the spinner had to keep going back and forth to keep the wheel moving & at same time spinning yarn. If she spun most of the day, she walked about twenty to thirty miles.

Names, Individuals, Places

- Jenny Lee
- Cora J. Buell
- Birkmose Store
- Zion Lutheran Church

Further Resources

- Abbott, Edith. *Women in Industry: A Study in American Economic History*. New York: D. Appleton, 1910; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Jensen, Joan M., and Sue Davidson, eds. *A Needle, A Bobbin, A Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview*. Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1981.

If you would like to make an appointment to view materials from our collections, please contact Octagon House Museum staff at 715-386-2654 or fill out an Inquiry Request on our website.