

The History of Crochet

By Comfort for Critters

I've been crocheting on and off, ever since my Irish mom taught me when I was nearing seven years old. None of my sisters were ever interested in learning to crochet, but I was just fascinated from the start. I've always wondered how this craft got started, so I'm glad to be able to share a bit of the history of the art of crochet!

Though historians speculate that crochet evolved from practices in Arabia, South America and China, the earliest evidence of it turns up in 18th century Europe. Various memoirs, written as far back as the late 1700's, mention crocheting and hint at its popularity in the region.

The first published crochet patterns came about 20 or so years later, in an 1824 Dutch magazine. There are numerous printed references to it in the mid-1800's, so by then it was certainly popular.

Early crochet hooks ranged from primitive bent needles (with a cork handle) to expensively crafted hooks. The expensive versions were made from ivory, brass, silver or steel - adorned with a fancy handle. I get the feeling they were used more to display one's place in society, than being a sturdy tool, but I'm really just speculating!

Crocheting also played some interesting roles throughout history. When the Great Irish Famine hit Ireland around 1845, crochet work was introduced as a way out of poverty. The production of crocheted lace became a way of making money for the destitute workers. At the time, "Irish Crochet" was introduced, and Irish Lace became popular in America and Europe. It appears this lace was made in quantity until World War I.

Clothing featured crocheted patterns through the end of the 1800's. In the early 1900's the patterns became more elaborate in texture and used more complicated stitching. After World War II, there was a bit of a resurgence in crochet, especially in the US. Numerous home goods (doilies, potholders, and yes, blankets!) were crocheted with new designs, thicker yarn and bright variegated colors. In the late 1960's and early 1970's (when I learned!), a new generation got involved and the traditional "granny square" became popular again!

Now, as we start out the 21st century, there has been a revival of interest in crochet, along with many "do-it-yourself" endeavors. More pattern books are being printed and the variety and types of yarn produced is just amazing to behold! You can even see frequent appearances of crocheted items by designers on the reality show Project Runway! I haven't seen it myself, but since I'm usually looking down at the blanket I'm working on, and not at the TV, I may have missed it. Happy crocheting!

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