

Friday Grind 7/29/22

**Handkerchief 'hanky/
hankie' History
Price and Steve Furtaw
are responsible for this
research.**



It was Price's 'Music Moment' about Fannie Crosby who composed "Blessed Assurance" suggested by Steve that triggered this antiquated practice memory.

In my lifetime, two women named 'Fannie' have crossed my path and Fanny DeMarsh was a neighbor when I was young and she taught me how to crochet. It began with the trim on hankies. It was still a time when if you sent a birthday card it might include a hand trimmed hanky that one made. She taught me how to place a butterfly at one of the corners. The needles used for this activity were those very tiny ones.

Most women my age probably all have one distinct memory surrounding their grandmothers: hankies. In our grandmothers' day, no self-respecting lady of any gentility ever left her house without a hankie tucked into her purse, a dress pocket or in her décolletage. Goodness knows, one couldn't be seen putting a finger anywhere near one's nose without a hankie. And it looked oh so demure for a woman to dab a slight tear from her eye with an exquisitely embroidered lace handkerchief.

The actual history of the handkerchief begins as far back as Classical Greece and the Roman Empire. The handkerchief was first mentioned in literature by the poet Catullus around 77 B.C. William

Shakespeare also wrote about a hankie that made the rounds in "Othello."

During Classical Greek times, perfumed cloths were used by the wealthy. These were used to mask the smell of perspiration, either on the owner or on someone seated nearby. In the Roman Empire, women of rank carried silk or cotton handkerchiefs. Roman games were signaled to begin when a lady's handkerchief was dropped; handkerchiefs were also waved by spectators at those games to show approval.

A handkerchief used during the Middle Ages was a sign of wealth. A knight-in-shining-armor would wear a lady's handkerchief to publicly show he had her favor. During the Renaissance, the handkerchief was made from silk, cambric or linen. These "napkins," as they were called, were used by both men and women, and were often embroidered with fine silk and featured exquisite lace.

During the 16th century, the European handkerchief was also very showy; it had layers of lace or fringed edges and was meant to be shown off as a fashion statement rather than be something useful. During the 1700s, the handkerchief was considered a necessity by the wealthy to have at the tragedies in the French theater. In the 19th century, ladies carried handkerchiefs in their hands instead of hiding them away in bags or purses. They were so common that everyone carried a "hankie" everywhere they went. During the Victorian era, this public practice made it possible for a young woman to make romantic signals across a room to a young man with her handkerchief, unbeknownst to

the prying eyes of “Grand-mama” or the governess.

After Kleenex became available in the 1930s and 1940s, the cloth handkerchief lost popularity but no one convinced Fannie DeMarsh that hankies had gone out of style. To her dying day, she carried a substantial hankie in her purse for nose-blowing but kept a frilly, lacy one in her pocket for show.

While helping to clear out an estate recently, I was given a box full of old hankies. Some were just stamped with a design but most were embroidered with pretty little roses or other floral motifs. They all reminded me of my neighbor and her genteel ways. Then I found one that had a butterfly corner on line and it is the design she taught me. (pic above)

Jack shuddered as he spied the box of hankies, which brought back less than pleasant memories. When he was a little boy, it was quite common for a lady in the family, usually the grandmother, to make sure that young children were, literally, “spit and polish” clean. After a meal, out came “Granny’s” hankie, which was spit upon and then the youngster in her grip was given a “spit bath” until the child’s face met with the grandmother’s approval. Jack’s memories of that are all too vivid.



Upon spying those hankies, my husband grumbled, “Oh, how I hated those spit baths, but what made it worse was that Grandma always had to fish that

hankie out of her bra before she could use it!” Other grandma’s kept one

in her apron. Always, grandmother’s would wear an apron.

Can you imagine how scratchy that butterfly was on your nose?



Mrs. DeMarsh was a very devout Christian so I wonder if she deliberately taught me how to crochet the butterfly that signifies new life! I wonder also

it that was why I wanted a butterfly bush in our flower garden. While we crocheted under the cherry tree her husband, Joe, would go downtown Youngstown by the 13 Indianola Bus to watch the Dow Jones Ind. stock market on-going updates on chalkboards. The DeMarsh family was the first in our area to have a TV and they never objected if kids sat on their porch and simply watched. Oh my, I don’t think the two newest pastors in Richmond would have a clue about any of this.

Well folks: at least I didn’t share about Mr. Rogers, The Little Prince, or The Velveteen Rabbit today, my usual go to’s. Tis the last weekend in July already and I know some are already thinking of ‘Good Old Days’ that always falls the weekend after Labor Day. Parade Day is September 11 in Richmond and on that day we have a combined worship at Trinity Lutheran. First United Methodist, First United Church of Christ and Trinity Lutheran share worship on Good Old Days Weekend. Plan your calendar accordingly.

Happy 90th Birthday to Lucia Marshall on August 6. The Handkerchief history about way back came from google.

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