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Review of

Sheumaker, Helen. 2007. *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pp. 250, black-and-white illustrations, index, endnotes and bibliography, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4014-6, \$45.00.

A lock of hair deftly sewn or glued into a prominent position on a mourning sampler or attached to a faded photograph immediately transforms that material artifact into something more personal, more alive than if it had stood alone, without the simple addition of hair. Most of us in the 21st century have an initial and involuntary reaction to stray bits of hair—they are seen as dirty and must be removed. While modern perceptions of hairwork focus almost entirely on its pursuit as an odd practice, bordering on the macabre, Helen Sheumaker¹ puts this into perspective in the first book-length treatment of hairwork. *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America* is at once an examination of the vastly overlooked and forgotten craft of hairwork, as well as an illuminating history that is both readable and engaging.

Though connected to European antecedents, American hairwork was created and popularized by men and women in the 18th and 19th centuries. Utilizing an array of evidence found in poetry, fiction, diaries, letters, newspapers, magazines and trade catalogues, Sheumaker has written an all-encompassing history of what many would call an art form. While such textual evidence provides interesting details and fascinating asides, Sheumaker's story of hairwork is made tangible by the many examples of hairwork that illustrate her text. These examples are in the form of hair jewelry, wreaths, albums, even a tea set—all of which still exist in a number of public museums and private collections.

Hairwork began as the trade of highly skilled craftsmen in the late 18th century. Gradually it reached its zenith in popularity among the middle classes in the mid-19th century. Sheumaker indicates that its popularity was supported by an industry of catalogue dealers of premade pieces, standardized patterns and prescriptive how-to books for hobbyists. Perhaps what is most revealing throughout Sheumaker's evocative retelling of hairwork is its dual nature. In the form of a marketable commodity, hairwork was perfected by skilled

jewellers—often men—and lovingly hand wrought as memory objects by amateurs—typically women, and typically homemakers.

In her prologue, Sheumaker ponders the interconnection between hairwork and sentimentality as it relates to both the wearer and to the individual whose hair was implemented into the piece. As Sheumaker writes: “material objects such as hairwork were sentimental because they physically represented a past emotional state and they provoked the necessary reflection upon that experience” (ix). Following this, the author focuses on hairwork from its earliest beginnings to the last remaining manufacturer in a series of interwoven chapters that reveal social, economic and cultural factors that influenced its existence.

All hairwork was created by hand, “whether those hands were professional artisans or skilled amateurs” (1). Yet, there were three key factors to remember about Americans who *owned* hairwork. First, those who kept hairwork were free white people. Africans who came to America's colonies as slaves did not have the financial resources or the cultural inclination to own worked human hair; nor would white, lower-class people have had the resources to purchase hairwork. Second, in order to pay an artisan to create worked hair, hairwork owners had some form of wealth or they were hobbyists of hairwork making. And last, since hairwork “was intended to represent a sincerity of self, those who possessed such goods placed a high priority on this idea” (1).

While most of the 18th-century hairwork that survives in museums and private collections was made by skilled professionals, amateur hairwork creations can be seen in hair embroidery, most likely because of the number of young women who attended “ladies' schools” where fancy embroidery was taught (2). Hair jewelry consisted of a variety of hair ornaments that ranged from brooches, rings and lockets, to shoe buckles.

Skilled miniature portrait artists often included hairwork. The hair was either glued into feather

plumes or woven into a basket pattern. In many instances, hair was infinitely more personal than just the painted likeness because it had come from the person's body and "it expressed, through its fanciful working, some otherwise fleeting attributes of character—the lightness and ease that came with familiarity, for instance" (15-16).

Though portrait miniatures were eventually replaced by more "modern" depictions, hairwork was kept in vogue throughout the 19th century through friendship, autograph and scrapbook albums. Verses were often accompanied by hairwork that was either applied as a simple lock of hair or woven into lace patterns (18, 26). In the company of expressive verse, hairwork memorialized an individual's relationships and emotions. It is not surprising that many of these albums were created and displayed by, and for, middle-class women. While lower-class women's lives revolved around the necessary production of clothing, woolens and quilts for the family, middle-class women could, by virtue of their position, concentrate on fancywork, including hairwork. Fancywork and hairwork go hand in hand for they both require discipline, not to mention their being forms of women's creative self-expression. Despite the fact that mass-produced hairwork became increasingly popular in the mid-to-late 19th century, amateur-made hairwork "was considered superior" because "hairwork made at home was understood to be not only of a woman's hand but of her heart" (61).

Sheumaker notes a number of prescriptive hairwork manuals written by female hairwork professionals. Their techniques for hairwork were easily understood by a female readership accustomed to similar techniques for fancywork,

specifically in the ways that hairwork and fancywork implemented flower shapes. Importantly, Sheumaker does not ignore the impact of men on hairwork, for she delves into the world of professional male hairworkers. Infinitely more interesting, however, is her discussion of how braided hairwork watch chains (in that the hair of family members was used to make the chains) reflected both men's sentimentality toward their family and the attention to their personal appearance, as well as the watch chain's ability to "represent [men's] embrace of the masculine role of provider and father" (137). Decidedly, it was the advent of pre-made hair vest chains from such companies as Montgomery Ward, A. C. Becket and Sears that spelled the end of hairwork despite the fact that people continued to make their own hairwork into the early 20th century (158).

Love Entwined is a thoughtfully and engagingly written book that includes many black and white illustrations and photographs. The author provides extensive notes for individual chapters as well as a selected bibliography with references to artifact and manuscript collections, in addition to primary and secondary sources. This likely will be considered the definitive text on the history of hairwork in America, to which material culture scholars and researchers, folklorists, costume specialists and cultural historians will turn for guidance and direction.

Note

1. Helen Sheumaker teaches American studies and public history at Miami University in Ohio.