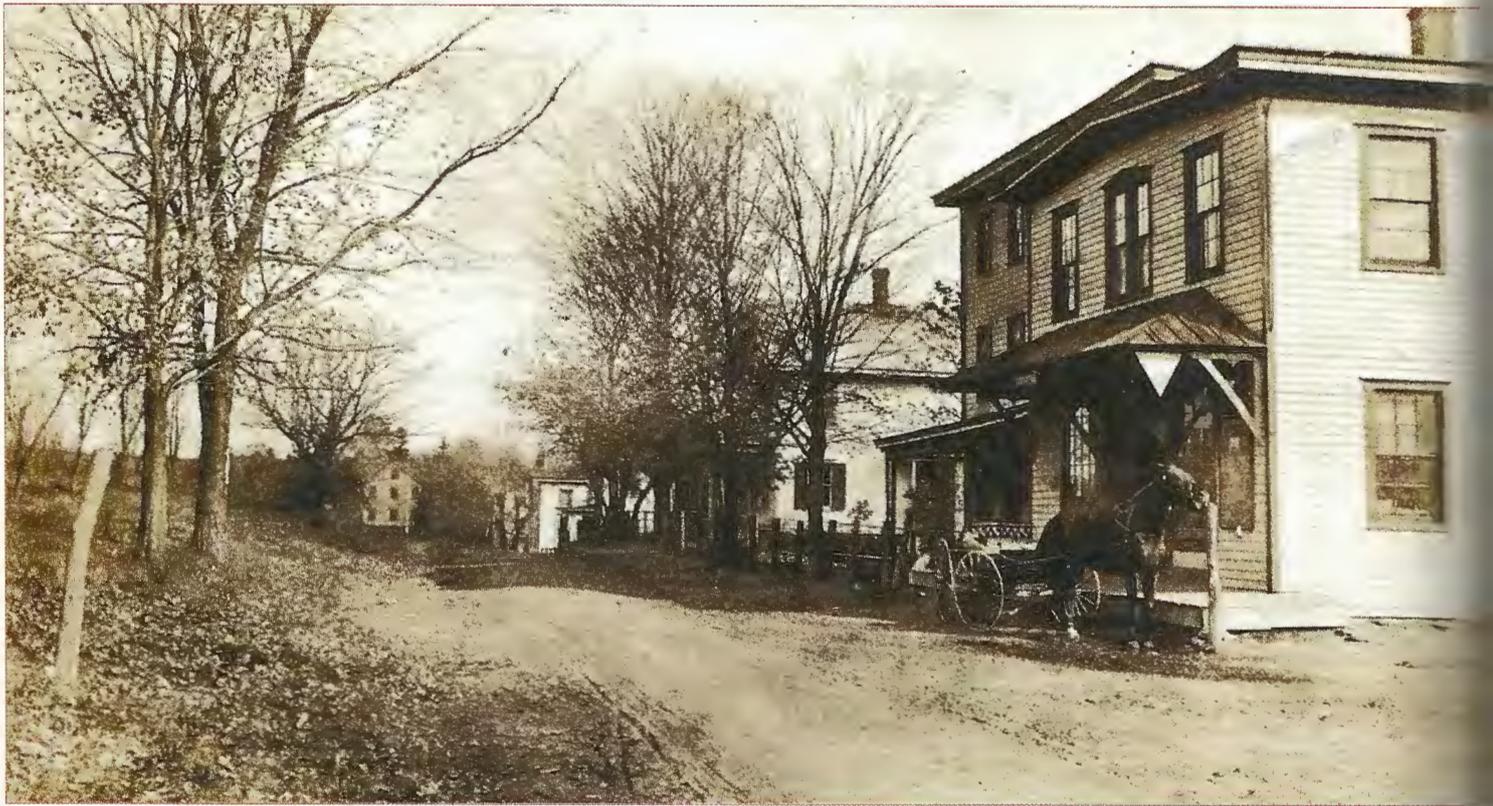


The Family Store

NICOLE H. SCALESSA



ABOVE: Ketcham's Store in Mountainville, New York.

Photographer and date unknown. Collection of the author.

INSET: Diamond Dyes display cabinet from Ketcham's Store in Mountainville, New York.

Collection of the author.

Photograph by the author.

ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES as a child is sitting at the top of the narrow steps in our apartment kitchen looking down at the family store through a small hinged window. My job was to alert my mother when a customer arrived. Ketcham's Store has been a fixture of Mountainville, New York, ever since my great-grandfather Charles Ketcham founded it over a century ago. Selling everything from newspapers and candy to kerosene, the store thrived during my early childhood and remained a central meeting place for locals, but as those locals and their descendants died or moved on and the area became a bedroom community for people wishing to commute from "country" homes into New York City, the need for the store dwindled; it closed its doors to the public in the early 1990s.

The general store was part of the life of countless rural communities throughout the United States; it was often the first commercial establishment to be opened after an area was settled. In contrast to the



church and school, the store offered an informal meeting place; in winter, people tended to congregate around the warmth of the centrally-located stove. The coal stove in Ketcham's, with its small windows made of thin sheets of mica, attracted my curiosity, and I was scolded more than once for attempting to touch its beautiful glowing fixtures. Those times by the stove are among my happiest memories of winter in Mountainville, as I received my preschool education sitting among the retired folks discuss-

ing articles in the *Cornwall Local* and other area news.

When I was a little older, I filled my summer days selling candy and ice cream to my friends, delivering milk to Mrs. Barnes, the elderly blind woman down the street, and sorting the Sunday papers so that the funnies were wrapped neatly around the outside of each copy. The shelves and cabinets grew increasingly bare as the store's trade diminished, but I just saw the bare spaces as more space to play in and tuck away small toys. Now, as a needlework historian, I treasure the store's Clark's



Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton writing desk from Ketcham's Store in Mountainville, New York. Collection of the author. Photograph by the author.

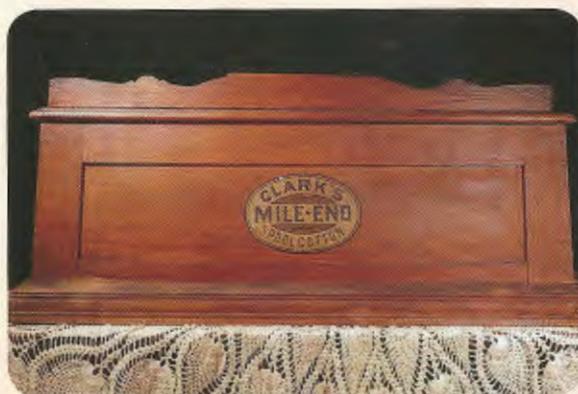
Mile-End Spool Cotton writing desk and Diamond Dyes display cabinet, which I inherited and now enjoy displaying in my own home.

Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton Company

The Clark family established their first cotton works in 1812 in Paisley, Scotland, and began exporting thread to the United States about 1820. In 1846, John Clark invented the first spooling machine (previously, thread had been sold in hanks or skeins) and built his first spool cotton mill in his hometown of Mile-End, near Glasgow. The convenience of spooled thread quickly captured the interest of the American public.

The Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton company name is artistically printed on the four front drawers of the writing desk that once stood on the long wooden counter in Ketcham's Store. It is possible that the desk was constructed like the display cases of Clark's competitor J. & P. Coats: from the by-products of the firm's spool factory. Unlike the J. & P. Coats cases, the Clark piece was intended as a desk rather than a merchandise display cabinet. Such promotional products were often distributed by regional salesmen, or agents, to retailers who purchased a significant quantity of merchandise from them.

The increasing consumption of cotton thread in the mid-to late nineteenth century due to the growing popularity of the



sewing machine prompted George A. Clark, son of John Clark, to establish a branch of the company in Newark, New Jersey, completing construction of the factory in 1866. His brother William signed on as a partner and assumed leadership of the company upon George's sudden death in 1873. In the next ten years, William more than doubled the original size of the facilities.

The early Clark's spools contained a three-cord thread intended for handwork that proved to be too wiry and stiff for machine use. A more suitable thread for machine sewing was then developed; its thickness was unchanged, but it consisted of six strands, each half the size of a single strand of three-cord thread.

In 1896, the Coats' and Clarks' interests were consolidated; the companies retained their separate identities while working through a single selling agent, The Spool Cotton Company. The complete integration of the two firms into the Coats and Clark Company did not occur until 1952. For more information, visit coatsandclark200years.com/time-line.html.

—N. H. S.

The back of the Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton writing desk from Ketcham's Store in Mountainville, New York. Collection of the author. Photograph by the author.

Before the late nineteenth century, most commercial connections were local, and brand names were not yet a part of the consumer culture. Brand loyalty emerged on the heels of the Industrial Revolution as products such as Clark's thread and Diamond Dyes grew in populari-

ty and began to be marketed in creative ways, including providing rural store owners with promotional materials and point-of-sale displays. These needlework notions fit right in among the other dry goods and hardware stocked to meet the daily needs of a small rural community.

Diamond Dyes

Diamond Dyes were manufactured and distributed by Wells, Richardson, & Company of Burlington, Vermont, established in 1872. The company had an early and strong grasp of the importance of branding and spent \$150,000 in 1881 on advertising their many products.

Diamond Dyes were sold by dry-goods retailers and druggists in small white envelopes stored in labeled pigeonholes in a display case with an eye-catching front door and sliding back panels for the proprietor's access. The display cabinet that first appeared on the counter of Ketcham's Store in the late 1880s had been supplied free in exchange for an order of \$30 worth of assorted merchandise or a five-gross lot of dyes. It was accompanied by sample cards and full-color instruction books that fit perfectly in the cabinet's larger side slot beside its fifty-four smaller envelope compartments. A few slots retain their paper labels today: among them are "fast pink," "fast maroon," and "fast scarlet." The case's most striking element is the decalomania, or chromo-transfer-print, lithograph on tin inlaid on the front door. Popularly known as the *Evolution of Woman*, the lithograph illustrates a woman's life from birth to death around a diamond emanating the colors of the rainbow. The image portrays a common theme of the period, seen also in the 1850 Currier and Ives print *The Life and Age of Woman*.

Aniline dye was discovered in 1856 by eighteen-year-old William Perkin. Perkin's mauve, the first synthetic dye derived from coal tar, led to an array of brilliant colors. The controlled chemical structure of the dye allowed for the consistency for which commercial dyers and textile manufacturers strived. Mauve soon became one of



the most popular shades in fashion. As early as 1858, one year after Perkin's patent application, *Godey's Lady's Book* began including mauve in its fashion forecasts; the April 1861 issue contains the earliest known knitting pattern to suggest mauve wool.

The successes of the laboratory, however, were not easily reproduced in the dye plant, where owners pushed for cheap mass production at the expense of quality products. The inferiority of the resulting dyes was soon evident as garments faded, fabrics decomposed, and colors migrated from fabric to wearer. By contrast, Wells, Richardson, & Company prided itself on its investment in research, maintaining its own chemical laboratory and staff of chemists, and Diamond

Dyes advertised itself as the dependable source for "Fast Colors for Domestic & Fancy Dyeing" throughout the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries.

In 1887, Diamond Dyes began offering aniline dyes, also known as direct cotton dyes, one envelope of which would color "one pound of cotton, linen or mixed goods." Superior in fastness to the earlier basic dyes intended for wool, silk, or cotton, direct cotton dyes opened the market for Diamond Dyes to become the ubiquitous brand for dependable home dyeing. A staff of four traveling salesmen covered Vermont, New Hampshire, and northern New York, and the company established its own printing and advertising departments in its building in Burlington. In 1890, the company expanded its product line to include acid dyes intended for animal fibers, eliminating the need for the unreliable basic dyes which had dominated the market only three years earlier.

—N. H. S.

The interior of the Diamond Dyes display cabinet from Ketcham's Store in Mountainville, New York. Collection of the author. Photograph by the author.

At a time when branding at the national level was in its infancy, forward-looking dry-goods retailers such as Charles Ketcham saw the advantage in branding their own business as well as the importance of building brand recognition for their merchandise through relationships with wholesale agents. Product display cabinets, desks, sample cards, and instruction books showcased by rural store owners in the late nineteenth century allowed companies to establish widespread connections outside urban centers while initiating advertising methods and principles that have continued into the twenty-first century. ❖

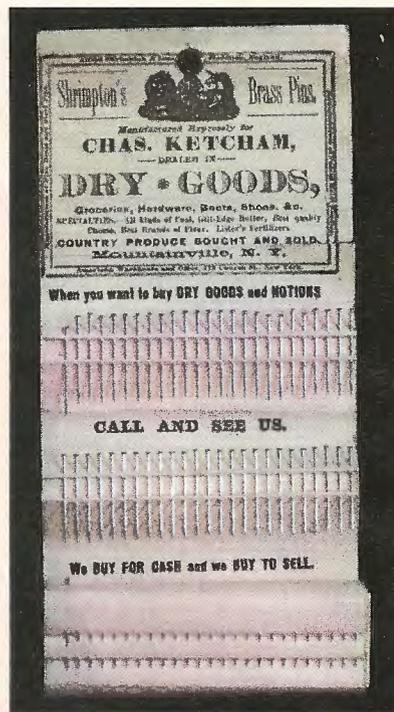
ABOUT THE AUTHOR. *Nicole H. Scalessa is a needlework historian and author who is inspired not only by her family history but also by the rich collections at the Library Company of Philadelphia, where she has worked for fifteen years. She is the author of Historic Reflections in Crochet (Library Company of Philadelphia, 2001) and several articles in serials, including PieceWork, PieceWork's Crochet Traditions, and Chain Link and is a contributor to the historical introduction in Donna Kooler's Encyclopedia of Sewing (Little Rock, Arkansas: Leisure Arts, 2009).*

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Promoting Ketcham's Store

Charles Ketcham himself saw the value in advertising, promoting Ketcham's Store with advertisements printed on long sheets of Shrimpton's Brass Pins:



Chas. Ketcham Dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware, Boots, Shoes, &c. Specialties - All kinds of Coal, Gilt-Edge Butter, Best Quality Cheese, Best Brands of Flour, Lister's Fertilizers. Country produce bought and sold. Mountainville, New York.

When you want to buy dry goods and notions call and see us.

We buy for cash we buy to sell.

We buy direct and we buy in quantities.

You will always find our stock complete.

We sell at one price and that the lowest.

We treat you courteously.

A satisfied customer is our best advertisement.

Our constant aim is to give you the best goods at bottom prices.

We make your interests ours.

Your child will be served as cheaply and politely as yourself.

A comparison of our styles and prices will convince you that you should trade with us. Chas. Ketcham.

—N. H. S.

A sheet of Shrimpton's Brass Pins bearing an advertisement for Ketcham's Store. Collection of the author.

Photograph by the author.