



**Therese de Dillmont**

# THERESE de DILLMONT AND HER ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NEEDLEWORK

By

Ruth P. Hellmann

## *Introduction*

There have been published in the last few years many books on a wide variety of decorative and plain needlework. These for the most part have been specific for one kind or other of the various uses of the needle taken in its comprehensive meaning.<sup>1</sup> It is then of interest that nearly 100 years ago Thérèse de Dillmont was able to master all the basic forms of needlework sufficiently to write and illustrate an encyclopedia covering their techniques and designs which "still remains a reliable text-book and a valuable source of reference."<sup>2</sup>

## *Her Life*

Surprisingly not much is known about Mlle. de Dillmont's early life. She was born, the last of five children, on October 28, 1846, in Wiener Neustadt and christened Theresia Maria Josefa Dillmann von Dillmont.<sup>3</sup> Her father, Ferdinand, a minor nobleman<sup>4</sup> from Kronstadt in Siebenbürgen (Transylvania) followed a military career, becoming after 20 years' service a Professor of Fortification and Civil Architecture in the Imperial and Royal Military Academy of Wiener Neustadt.<sup>5</sup> He married a local girl, Franziska Schwendenwein (1814-1894) in 1838 and retired three months before Mlle. de Dillmont's birth to a country estate, "Dillmonthof", near Wiener Neustadt, where he died in 1857. Subsequently her mother moved to Vienna with the children.

In 1864, when Mlle. de Dillmont was eighteen years old, her mother applied to Emperor Franz Josef (1830-1916) for assistance in educating her daughter to become a "a governess and teacher."<sup>20</sup> Franz Josef approved the petition with his signature, but where Mlle. de Dillmont studied is not known.

As daughters of a nobleman, Mlle. de Dillmont and her sister, Franziska, may have had tutors and perhaps attended a private girls' institute where needlework would be a major subject. She undoubtedly showed an early interest in and aptitude for needlework.

While living there, she and her sister could have attended the well-known and highly regarded Imperial and Royal School of Art Needlework.

If so, they would have been contemporaries of such noted people as Emilie Bach (1840-1890),<sup>6</sup> future director of the School and herself a writer of pamphlets on needlework, as well as Tina Frauberger<sup>7</sup> and Luise Schinnerer<sup>8</sup> who were already studying the Coptic textiles recently brought from archaeological excavations in Egypt and would decipher the method for making the double plaiting called "sprang".

In Vienna, Mlle. de Dillmont and her sister opened an embroidery studio probably to sell thread and material and perhaps to give elementary instruction in needlework. Franziska stayed in Vienna where she published under the name of Fanny von Dillmont, two small pamphlets on crochet work.<sup>9</sup> She died there in 1920 and was buried in the cemetery of the Military Academy, Wiener Neustadt.

Mlle. de Dillmont,<sup>10</sup> on the other hand, moved to a small estate in Dornach, a village close to Mulhouse in Alsace.<sup>11</sup> Records which would have given her reasons for the move and the date along with other pertinent information have been destroyed in the various wars. Perhaps she had friends there or family connections or perhaps she wanted to be near the well-known thread manufacturer, Dollfus-Mieg et Cie. (DMC)<sup>12</sup> whose products she undoubtedly knew while still in Vienna. She must have already been well-known as an expert needlewoman either in Vienna or through a studio which she operated in Dornach, for it is a matter of record that on October 26, 1884, she entered into a business arrangement with DMC which would prove mutually beneficial;<sup>13</sup> she was helped financially, and DMC was able to begin their needlework library based on albums she would produce under the trade name of *Thérèse de Dillmont* - the "House of Thérèse de Dillmont" became an associate of the thread manufacturer whose products it used. "Tenui filo magnum textitur opus."

#### *Her Work*

Among her first efforts in writing were a number of albums giving designs for the more popular types of needlework and the methods for working them.<sup>14</sup> Included in these were two of special interest. "Ouvrages nouveaux de Style Ancien" by Emilie Bach (Director of the Royal School), was edited by Mlle. de Dillmont and perhaps provided an inspiration for her. Also "Motifs de Broderie copte" (Motifs for Coptic Embroidery) written by Mlle. de Dillmont reflected her continued association with the textile research being carried out in Vienna as well as the popular interest in this form of art needlework.

Soon, however, she realized the great need for a complete work, one that would be useful as reference for the expert needlewoman but would also enable a novice to learn the techniques for herself. Still under the

aegis of DMC and with the knowledge she had been gathering through years of research and practice, she began her Encyclopedia. Her work when completed in 1886 was published in both German and French in a large format (8<sup>o</sup>) and shortly afterward in English and Italian translations in a small size (16<sup>m0</sup>) with which we are familiar. The acceptance was immediate; within 25 years it had sold over three quarters of a million copies.

Mlle. de Dillmont probably edited two more albums, "Le Tricot" and "Le Crochet".<sup>15</sup> But her life's work was accomplished. She died in Baden-Baden on May 22, 1890,<sup>16</sup> four months after having married a businessman from Vienna, Joseph Friedrich Scheuermann,<sup>13</sup> perhaps a victim of a flu epidemic raging at that time. Originally buried in Baden-Baden, she was transferred to the Dillmont family vault in Wiener Neustadt in 1909.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Changes*

Following editors,<sup>17</sup> while preserving the essential features as established by Mlle. de Dillmont, have succeeded through many editions in keeping the *Encyclopedia* up to date by various means. Some chapters were expanded to meet changing tastes. In some cases a catch-all chapter that had included more than one technique was divided and sections enlarged. The 614 pages with 16 chapters grew to close to 800 pages and 20 chapters. At the same time nomenclature was changed to reflect a change in usage. Eventually some of the more time-consuming examples were replaced by less demanding but always artistic substitutes.

Through these editions and several additional translations the title page has remained essentially the same, always giving the name of Th. de Dillmont in her capacity as "editor", even after her death, and the DMC Library's emblem. However there have been changes in the corporate name of the organization concerned with the production and marketing of the book. These names include "House of Thérèse de Dillmont", "Comptoir Alsacien de Broderie, anc't Th. de Dillmont", "Société Anonyme d'Industrie Textile". In 1927 DMC established as a subsidiary "Editions Th. de Dillmont" which is at the present time given as the publisher.

#### *The Encyclopedia*

The lasting value<sup>18</sup> of the *Encyclopedia* which Mlle. de Dillmont produced can be attributed to a number of remarkable features. Perhaps the most important is the detailed development of each technique, from the equipment necessary, through the basic units, to advanced artistic designs. In addition, these descriptions are accompanied by over 1,000 engravings

all taken from models prepared specifically for this work, which illustrate each step so clearly that in many cases they can be used without explanation. This is a great asset since many stitches and sometimes even patterns are known by different names in different countries or in different times. It is rather curious that the Encyclopedia which is so valuable as a reference for these units has no index. The table of contents, while complete, is only a substitute.

Of equal value to the method of instruction is the comprehensiveness with which regional and cultural techniques were researched, analyzed and described. The Encyclopedia serves not only as a record of these cultural attributes but also as a means for making them known to other societies. In addition, while frankly advertising the DMC products, the listing of colors and types of thread to be used in making each design not only helps the novice but assures that the final needlework will faithfully reproduce in fineness and coloration the original which served as model.<sup>19</sup>

Mlle. de Dillmont did not write a "How to" book; she does not tell how to make a sweater. But she does teach how to sew a fine seam, how to execute artistically hundreds of patterns in dozens of techniques and does suggest ways to use them. The *Encyclopedia* she wrote is for the serious worker who wants a sound foundation in the art of needlework. It may be a classic.

## NOTES

1. While basically "needle" refers to a thin rod with a point at one end and a hole in the other through which to pass a thread to be used in sewing in whatever way, it has become a comprehensive term to indicate an instrument of whatever form used to manipulate thread, in this way including knitting needles, crochet hooks, both netting and tatting shuttles and even bobbins. - Caulfeild and Saward *ENCYCLOPEDIA* (Dover Reprint 1972) v. 2, p. 354. Also Irene Emery, *PRIMARY STRUCTURES of FABRICS*, (1966) p. 246.
2. Sylvia Groves, *HISTORY OF NEEDLEWORK TOOLS and ACCESSORIES*, (1966) p. 126.
3. Information re Mlle. de Dillmont's family was obtained through private communication from the Municipal Administration of the City of Wiener Neustadt, November 18, 1974, and from the Austrian State Archives, April 8, 1975.
4. Her ancestor, Sebastian, according to family tradition, came into the Old Austrian hereditary dominions from the Walloon region of Belgium sometime before the beginning of the 18th century during the reign of Ferdinand III. By mid-century the family was settled at Kronstadt in Siebenbürgen (now Brassov in the Transylvania part of Roumania). Her great, great grandfather, Ferdinand Dillmann, became a member of the Hungarian nobility under Emperor Karl VI as the Imperial and Royal Fiscal Inspector of Tolls at the Tabor [Gate] in Vienna on August 23, 1717 with the designation "von Dillmont". - Brünnner, *Genealogisches Taschenbuch der Adelligen Häuser*, v. 8 (1883) p. 125 f.  
  
At this time Austria and Hungary were united, the ruler being the Emperor of Austria and the King of Hungary. Until World War I all government institutions were designated Imperial and Royal.
5. The Academy occupied a 12th century castle which had been converted by Maria Theresia in 1752.
6. Sophie Pataky, *LEXIKON deutscher FRAUEN der FEDER*, v. 2, Berlin (1898) p. 475.
7. Peter Collingwood, *THE TECHNIQUES OF SPRANG*, New York (1974) p. 35-36.

8. Luise Schinnerer, ANTIKE HANDSRBEITEN, Vienna (1895?). Introduction by Alois Riegl.
9. Pataky, LEXIKON, v. 1, p. 155-156.
10. Mlle. de Dillmont never used the name Dillmann professionally and preferred "de" to "von". Even though Mulhouse was under German rule after the Franco-German War (1870-1871), the social and cultural inclination was toward Paris.
11. Dornach was incorporated into Mulhouse in 1914. - E. Meininger, HISTOIRE de MULHOUSE, Mulhouse (1923) p. 139.
12. Founded in 1746 for the printing of calico by Samuel Koechlin, a financier, Jean-Jacques Schmalzer, a technician and Jean-Henri Dollfus, a designer, the company which was originally known as Koechlin, Schmalzer et Cie., went through organizational changes and expansions becoming in 1802 the Dollfus-Mieg et Cie. involved in spinning and weaving as well. In 1841 they began the manufacture of threads for sewing and embroidery, which would become so important that, by the beginning of the 20th century the weaving would be dropped.
13. Private conversation with Mr. Hassenforder, business editor of "Editions Th. de Dillmont", Mulhouse, Alsace, September 19, 1974.
14. Eight by Th. de Dillmont were listed in the 1886 edition of the Encyclopedia as being available from *La Maison Th. de Dillmont, à Dornach (Alsace)*. In addition to the above:

*Albums de Broderies au Point de Croix*

*La Broderie sur Lacis*

*Alphabets et Monogrammes*

*Le Macramé*

*Le Filet-Richelieu*

*La Broderie au Passé*

*La Soutache et son Emploi*

15. These were advertised in later editions of the Encyclopedia over her name.
16. Communication from the Office of Vital Statistics, Baden-Baden, West Germany.
17. Mlle. de Dillmont was followed by *Alice Morawska* whom she hired in 1887. She retired in 1939.  
*Hélène Dostal* who had studied with a student of Luise Schinnerer in Vienna, 1935 - 1943, and after an interruption of 21 years due to the war, was rehired in 1964 and retired 1975.  
*Hélène Lerdung* - Hired 1968 -
18. Margaret Brooke in comparing over 50 books on lace gave the Encyclopedia the highest rating - "invaluable". (LACE IN THE MAKING WITH BOBBINS AND NEEDLE, London, 1923.)
19. Emilie Bach described these advantages in the introduction to her OUVRAGES NOUVEAUX DE STYLE ANCIEN, Dornach (n.d.).
20. Information received from Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Wien, Nov. 6, 1975.



## APPENDIX 1

### Chapters in the Encyclopedia - 1886? (French edition)

	Page
1. La Couture . . . . .	1
2. Le Racommodage . . . . .	17
3. Les Jours sur Toile . . . . .	25
4. Jours sur Toile et Points Damassés . . . . .	55
5. La Broderie . . . . .	79
6. Broderie au Passé et Broderie d'Or . . . . .	109
7. Tapisserie et Broderie sur Toile . . . . .	133
8. Le Tricot . . . . .	179
9. Le Crochet . . . . .	237
10. La Frivolité . . . . .	357
11. Le Macramé . . . . .	377
12. Le Filet . . . . .	431
13. La Dentelle Irlandaise <sup>x</sup> . . . . .	475
14. Dentelles Divers . . . . .	511
Bobbin Lace . . . . .	511-545
Needle Lace . . . . .	546-558
15. Ouvrages de Fantasia . . . . .	559
(includes cords, crochet sur métier, point Turc triangulaire, point Gobelin, appliqué, soutache, Chinoise, etc.)	
16. Recommandations Divers . . . . .	595 to 614

x. Underwent a name change and became "dentelle Renaissance" as part of the chapter "Les Dentelles à l'Aiguille" in later editions. They were made with what were known as "lacets anglais" - English tapes.

## APPENDIX 2

### Chapters in the Encyclopedia - 1913 (French edition)

	Page
1. La Couture à la Main . . . . .	1
2. La Machine à Coudre et à Broder . . . . .	23
3. La Raccommodge . . . . .	31
4. La Broderie sur Blanc . . . . .	39
5. La Broderie sur Toile . . . . .	81
6. La Broderie sur Soie et Velours . . . . .	149
7. La Broderie d'Or . . . . .	169
8. La Broderie-application . . . . .	187
9. La Tapisserie . . . . .	199
10. Le Tricot . . . . .	229
11. Le Crochet . . . . .	289
12. La Frivolité . . . . .	387
13. Le Macramé . . . . .	411
14. Le Filet . . . . .	463
15. Les Jours sur Toile . . . . .	515
16. Les Dentilles Brodées . . . . .	551
17. Les Dentelles à l'Aiguille . . . . .	595
18. Les Dentelles aux Fuseaus . . . . .	643
19. La Garniture des Ouvrages . . . . .	681
20. Recommandations Divers . . . . .	725 to 742
English edition . . . . .	789