

# How-To



## Recreating a 1920s San Francisco Hat *Lynn McMasters*

*A professional milliner takes a journey through the streets of early 20<sup>th</sup> century San Francisco in search of the historical roots of a hat she purchased at an antique shop, and on a quest to recreate it.*

With this Hat I hit a Trifecta!

I'm always on the lookout for period hats to reproduce. I found this wonderful hat in an antique shop in Moss Landing, CA, during a time when many of them were going out of business because of the economy. I was first drawn to the lace insert on the brim. When I looked closer, I saw that it was, in part, a wire frame with buckram edge and a soft shaped crown hat. How much better could it get? Well, it got better. When I looked inside. It had a San Francisco label with an address, 117-119 Stockton St., and "Mme. Irene." I decided that I needed to find out more about this hat.

### **The Address**

Now to follow the clue of the address, and see if I could narrow down the time period using that alone. My guess was that the hat was early 20th Century. I would need

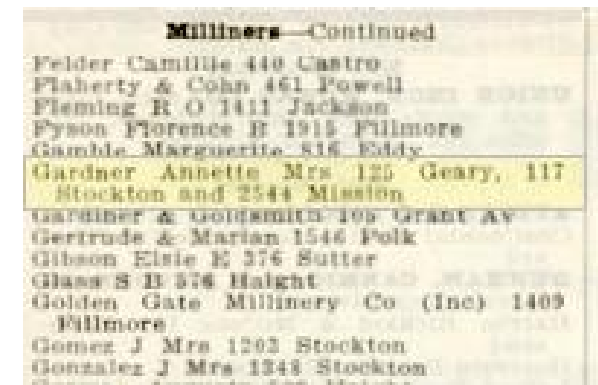


Hat discovered by the author in an antique shop.



Label inside hat showing maker and address.

to find city directories for San Francisco from the early 20th Century. Fortunately, these are now online. I checked 1910 thru 1930 and looked for Mme. Irene. I did not find a milliner by that name, but I did find a milliner at 117 Stockton. Her name was Annette Gardner.



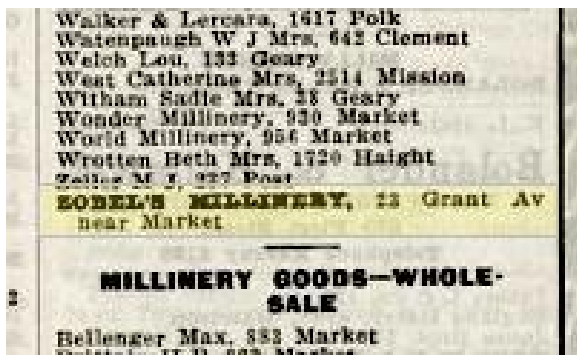
Listing from 1916 San Francisco city directory.

During this time period, there were only three milliners at that address. Annette had a partner in 1920 named Louise Sherrer. After a few years Annette left, and an F.S. Gardner showed up there in 1924-25. While I can never be sure, my only idea is that "Mme. Irene" was a brand name or the name of a line. It does sound French and Parisian millinery was the height of fashion. At least I have narrowed things down to 10 years. 1915 to 1925 is a fairly small window.

While looking through the city directories I was amazed that there were so many milliners listed for San Francisco, and

so many millinery suppliers mostly around Market Street. Here is a table so you can see the numbers. These shops most likely represent more than one milliner at each, so the numbers are quite large. (table right)

I got curious about one of the milliners that was always listed in bold text (below) while most of the others were not. This store was also the first to have a phone number.

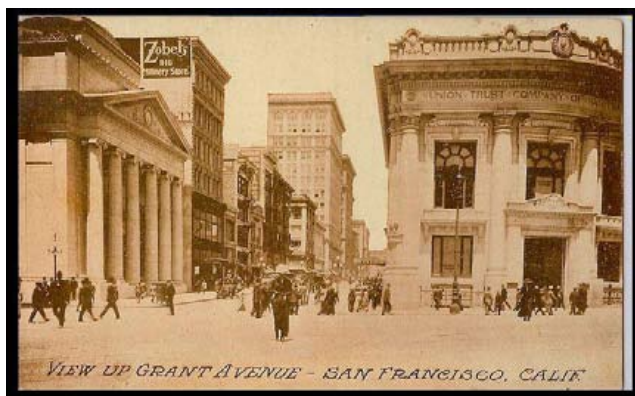


year	person	address	milliners in San Francisco	wholesale millinery suppliers	suppliers on Market Street	phone
1913			160	16	14	
1914	Mrs. Annette Gardner	121 Geary & 1703 Polk	149	19	16	
1915	Mrs. Annette Gardner	184 O'Farrell & 121 Geary	172	21	19	
1916	Mrs. Annette Gardner	125 Geary, 117 Stockton & 2544 Mission	148	16	16	
1917	Mrs. Annette Gardner	121 Geary	150	21	19	
1918	Mrs. Annette Gardner	117 Stockton	129	25	22	
1919		117 Stockton	122	21	20	
1920	Mrs. Annette Gardner & Louise Sherrer	117 Stockton	120	19	16	
1921	Mrs. Annette Gardner	117 Stockton	120	23	19	
1922	Mrs. Annette Gardner	117 Stockton	166	27	24	2M 1W
1923	F. S. Gardner	174 Geary	160	25	22	2M 1W
1924	F. S. Gardner	117 Stockton	160	28	24	2M 1W

Summary of information on milliners and millinery suppliers from San Francisco city directory, 1913-1924

Below is a photo so you can see just how large the store was. Some pictures of the insides of the [5 floor, millinery only store](#). (center) appear in "The Illustrated Milliner" Jan, 1910. (right) There is also a

short article with a great read that gives you an idea just how overwhelming this store with 100 employees would be to a modern shopper. The building still exists today as a



Exterior of Zobel's Millinery (building on left).



Zobel's 5th floor, millinery only store.



beauty salon (Cinta). I added a [Google street view](#) so you can see what it looks like today. 117 Stockton was less than two blocks from Zobel's at the site of the current day Union Square Macy's.

Milliners were not the only people making hats during this time period, there were also hatters and hat & cap makers. I wanted to get an idea of how many, so I checked the 1918 directory. There were 56 hat & cap businesses and 20 hat stores. Sometimes they are listed as both. One of the largest began business in 1849 when his first store was in a tent, J. C. Meussdorffer and Sons. The UC Berkeley Bancroff Library has some [information](#) about the history of this San Francisco pioneer.

### Dating the Hat

From the address, this hat is late Edwardian or late teens, but I wanted an expert opinion. So I asked [Barbara Trotter](#), who has been collecting, selling and dating hats for many years. She dated the hat to just after the First World War. It turns out, that the lining is the give away.

For women's hats in this time range, pre-WWI, linings looked like this one from an 1880s hat I own. (right) The milliner would have a cut out of lining fabric screened with their name, business



information, etc., glued or tacked into place, and the outside edge of the lining band would be sewn to the head opening. The other side of the band would need a casing with a drawstring to take up the extra fabric and fit it to the shape of the hat. (left)

After WWI, the screened fabric was cut into a circle and sewn to a bias cut band of fabric for standard head sizes. The band would be gathered or pleated to fit the circle (right). Standard sized lining units would be cut to fit the height of a finished hat and sewn in. A millinery supplier could make these for the milliner. This allows the linings to be a little more generic and produced in batches.

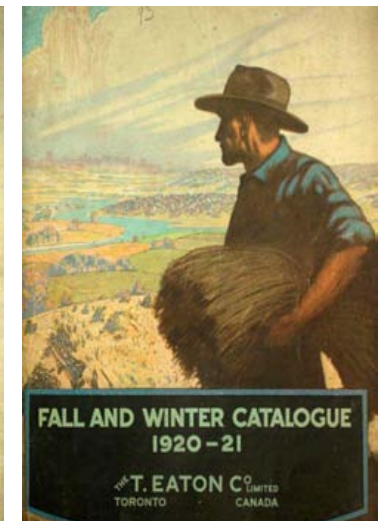
### What About the Style?

I went to an online source for Eaton's Catalogue. Eaton's was the Sears & Roebuck of Canada, and in their pages you will find what was in style for a more mass market. It was not low end, but it brought city fashion to mail order. Eaton's is a good source for late 19th and early 20th Century consumer goods. Not every year is [online](#) and searchable, but there are 13 catalogues between Christmas 1897 and Fall-Winter 1920-21.



Band gathered to fit, standard lining cut to fit and sewn in.

I looked through the pre-war 1913 catalogue and nothing looked quite like my hat. But, I did find some very similar hats in the 1917 Spring-Summer and the 1920-21 Fall-Winter catalogue. (below) The 1917 hat



with the transparent brim has very similar proportions. The crown is straw, but of course this was a Spring-Summer catalogue. In the 1920-21 catalogue I found many more hats that looked like this hat. First, a transparent brim velvet hat and then two hats with shirred crowns. (below)



Two hats from 1920-1921 Eaton's Spring-Summer catalogue.



The large brimmed hat with the shirred crown was exciting, because it states that the shirred crown style is new for that year. Silk pile *Paon* is a velvet fabric with short pile and a tightly woven, often cotton tabby weave ground. This fits my hat. I'm not sure I will be able to get this type of fabric. I either have to use cotton velvet to match the density and length of the pile, or go with modern silk velvet, which has rayon pile and a much less densely woven silk ground.

I think that narrowing down a date of 1918-20 with all the information I have now, is the best I can do. I don't think I could say it's 1920, because San Francisco style could have been a little ahead of what was showing in a catalogue. San Francisco was called "the Paris of the West" for a reason.

I got a little more information on the lace insert from Erin Alego of Lacis in Berkeley. It had originally been a strip, not a circle, of metallic silver thread machine made Chantilly lace. When made by hand this style of lace can properly be called bobbin lace but this was machine made. The lace was clipped to get it into the circular shape. The hat will be part of their [2014 exhibit](#) on fabric manipulation.

If I want to recreate this hat, I need to take a very close look at how it was put together. I don't want to take it apart, so I will have to take an educated guess at a couple things. But, with a close up lens and a tape measure I should be able to come up with a pattern and a method of attack. (images at right)



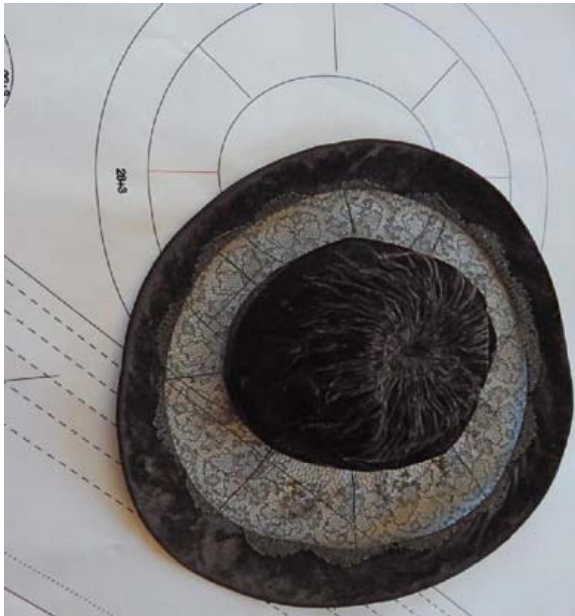
Studying details of how the hat was put together.



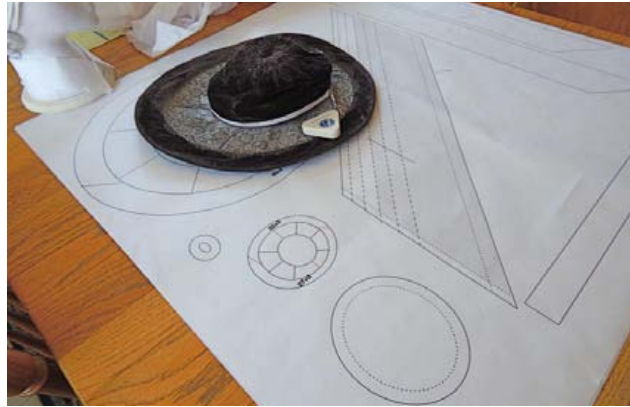
## Creating a Pattern

**The buckram brim.** Because the brim is flat, a pattern is easier than with some hats. The head opening on this hat is off center, in two directions, and the solid buckram part of the brim changes widths. Besides taking measurements and using them to draw out a pattern, the hat can be superimposed over the printed or drawn pattern to check if it is right. (below)

**The wire frame.** The spokes of the wire frame can be seen thru the lace, and the head opening can be seen from the wrong side of the hat. If you lift up the lining a bit, you can see that there is another wire the same size and shape of the head opening wire about 1/2" above. This is standard in wire frame hats, and so is having 8 spokes ([Millinery](#) by Jane Loewen, 1925 Chapt. 1).



Pattern taken from hat measurements.



Crown pattern showing rows of shirring.

The milliner could have bought this type of skeleton frame pre-made for them, but I'm not sure this one was bought. A standard wire frame brim would have a wire on the outside edge, and I can't feel one. I think the spokes might have just been sewn in place over the buckram, and that is why the angles of the spokes are a little off.

**The crown pattern.** There is a diagonal seam that runs from one side to the center back near the crown tip. So a measurement of the distance around the crown, and the distance from the head opening to the crown tip plus the distances between the rows of shirring is all that is needed to create the pattern for this. The shirring is hand done and seems to be about an 1/8" running stitch. (above)

The crown does have interfacing. (top right) It appears to be in the shape of the gathered crown. I will have to make something by shaping lightweight buckram or crinoline over a crown block. (center and bottom right) The lining is made of an oval



Inside of crown showing interfacing.



Shaping buckram or crinoline over crown block.





Using pattern to make linking.

in the center and a bias piece that matches the crown pattern. I'm going to use the same pattern piece but only the bottom two thirds (the gray shaded area, above).

***Bias fabric band at base of crown.***

This was an interesting thing I had never seen on a hat. There is a roll of fabric at the

base of the crown. It looks like large piping but it is not. It also has a straight seam in the center back of the hat while all the other pieces in the hat have an angled seam. That is to say, all the pieces that make up this hat are cut on bias and joined together along the straight of grain. But this one was cut on bias and joined along the bias. (bottom left)



**Construction**

***Cutting the fabric pieces.*** I used my paper pattern for the crown but used a quilt ruler for the bias strips for the brim and because I was not trying to save fabric I cut the upper and lower fabric in one long piece so I would only have one seam on each. I also decided to use cotton velvet for my first try at this hat as I knew it would be less of a challenge (images at right)



Cutting the fabric.

**Crown.** Making the crown will be simple. I just need to transfer the gathering lines, sew the center back seam, sew and gather the lines and sew the button to cover the center hole created when the top gathering line is tight. At the last minute I remembered that I have a [Read Smocking Pleater](#). I decided to use that for my gathering stitches. It's fairly simple to use, you place the needles where you want them and thread them, (first image below) then run the fabric thru. I then stretch out the gathers, pulled the stitches in the seam

allowance out and sewed the center back seam. I then put it on the head block and gathered the stitches.

The only drawback of using the pleater is that the stitches are a little too close and it is not possible to gather the first row down as small as I wanted so, I ended up covering a button and sewing that to the tip instead of a smaller oval of fabric. (top right) When this was done I could fold up the seam allowance and trim the shaped crinoline interfacing. (bottom right)



Read Smocking Pleater to make crown. Place and thread needles, then run fabric through (top left to bottom right).



Crown on head block with covered top button. (above)  
Crinoline interfacing folded and trimmed (below)

**Buckram section of the brim.** One of the most difficult things to figure out is the covering of the buckram. It looks like piping is on the outside and inside edges. There is no pile left on the fabric of the apparent



piping. But after looking very closely at the edge, I think it was from the same fabric as the rest of the hat. So, if it were separate piping, there would be a total of 6 layers of fabric and the thickness of the buckram, just back from the edge. It does not seem that thick to me, so I figured it had to have been done another way.

I looked at the seams very carefully. There are two places where the bias strips that cover the buckram are joined on both the upper brim and the lower brim (this saves a lot on fabric). The seams in the piped edge match the seams on the lower brim exactly. This means that the same piece of fabric covered the under brim and the piped edge. It would be impossible to have them match if they were not the same piece of fabric. This was difficult to understand, unless the piped edge was part of the buckram base, so, I took another look at the entire edge. It felt more like wire than piping cord, and I found an area where I can feel an overlap in the wires of about 1.5". Now I would have to figure how I was going to have this work.

I experimented with scraps of buckram, wire, mull and fabric. I decided sewing the wire onto the buckram and then mulling the buckram just to the edge of the wire/buckram interface could do it for a start. Then, stretching the under brim fabric over this (with the seam allowances wrapping over to the top), and basting it to the form (along both the outside and the inside edges of the buckram circle) between



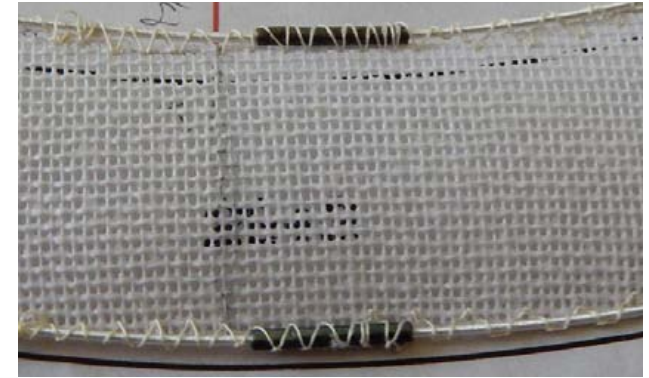
Step 1: cut out the buckram.

the wire and the buckram to hold it in place. I then went back and machine stitched it in with a fine stitch. This would create a dent between the wire and the rest of the brim and it looks like piping.

For the upper brim, I would first have to sew the outside edge, attach the ends of the wire frame spokes to the seam allowance of the brim fabric, and then whipstitch the inside edge along the inner circle just back from the wire. The attachment of the lace will cover this by about 1/4", more where the scallops are wider. I follow these steps;



Step 3: cut mull from brim pattern add to wired buckram.



Step 2: sew millinery wire to edges; finish with wire joiners.

1. Lay the buckram over the pattern to transfer the lines, and cut the buckram out.
2. Sew millinery wire to both the inside edge and the outside edge using wire joiners.
3. Cut two pieces of mull from the brim pattern with no seam allowances, and use spray glue to add the mull to the wired buckram.
4. Stretch the brim fabric over this to mark the seam.



Step 4: stretch brim fabric over buckram to mark seam.





Step 5: sew seam on upper and lower brim fabric pieces.

5. Sew the seam on both the upper and lower brim fabric pieces at the marks and then re-stretch and pin the lower.
6. Baste and sewed the fabric to the brim between the wire and the buckram about 1/8" in from the outside edge, and repeat this with the inside edge.



Step 7: stretch seam allowance over edge and sew.

7. Stretch the seam allowance of the upper brim fabric just over the edge and sew it on with a curved needle close to the dent created by stitching the lower brim fabric between the wire and buckram.
8. Flip the upper brim fabric to the upper brim.

**Preparing the lace.** I chose a gold metallic machine made Chantilly like lace. It was twice as wide as I needed so my first step was to cut the two halves apart down the center. I will save the other half for a fan.



Metallic gold machine made Chantilly like lace.

To make a straight piece of lace into a circle I first attached it to the paper pattern line for the inner edge of the buckram. (top right) Then carefully cut, wherever necessary, so that it fits the shape of the brim, and lays flat. In the vintage hat, cut sections of the lace are joined with a few small surgeon or butcher's knots per cut, and with the ends trimmed off close to the knot.

I backed my lace with fine nylon net (if I could get silk I would) and stitched my



Attach lace to pattern line for inner edge of buckram.



Back lace with fine nylon net and stretch lace together.



Sew line of stitches over head opening and trim.

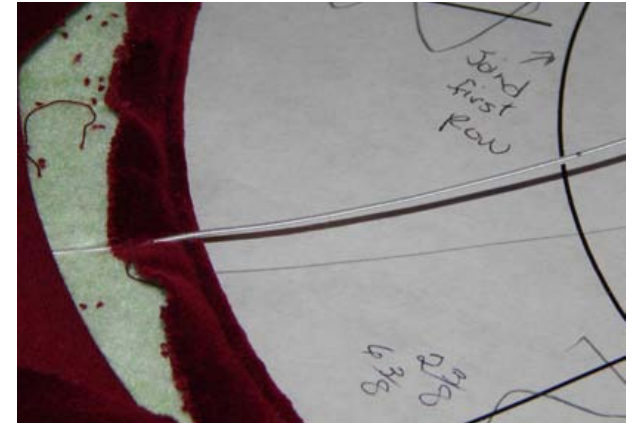
lace back together over this. (center right) It does not really show in the final product. If I had more skill at splicing lace I would skip it. When all the sections of the cut lace were sewn down to the net, I pinned it back on the paper pattern, sewed a line of stitches over the head opening line, and trimmed the lace to leave a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " seam allowance. (bottom right)

**Wire frame.** I cut two lengths of wire to match the head opening line on the pattern and joined them with wire joiners. After I spent so much time splicing my lace I chose to have only 7 and not 8 rays so that they could match the lace which had 7 repeats of the design. These 7 pieces of wire need to be long enough to match the pattern plus 4". I glued the 7 wires over slashes I made in the brim seam allowance and mull. Then bent into a right angle at the head opening line. One of the head opening wires is slipped down over the right angle bends and the 7 wires were wrapped around the head opening wire where they cross. The second head opening wire needs to slip down over the ends and stop  $\frac{1}{2}$ " up from the first head opening wire. (images at right)

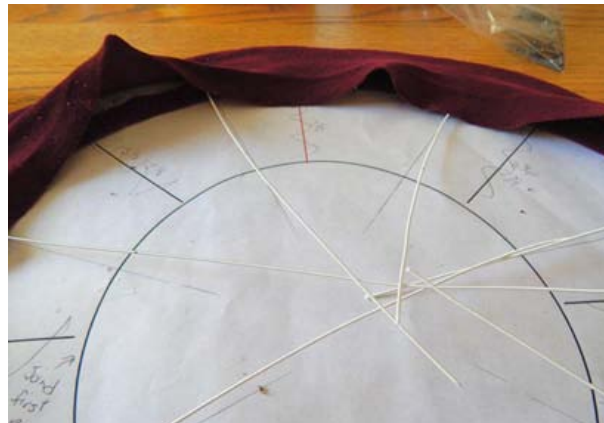
The ends of the 7 wires were folded back over the second head opening wire and then wrapped around to anchor it in place and the extra is cut off. (images next page) The thread on modern millinery wire is fairly easy to scuff and break, so I like to add tape, or something non-skid to pad my pliers (plumber's tape works well), and I glue the ends so it can't unravel.



Length of wire matching head opening with wire joiners.



Glue wires over slash in brim seam allowance.



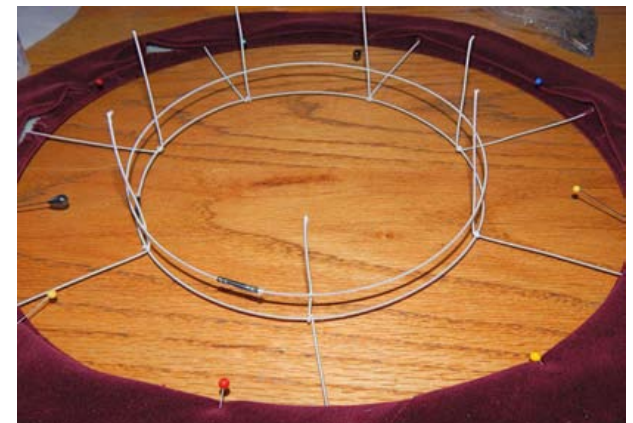
Wires must be long enough to match pattern plus 4".



Bend wires at right angle at head opening line.



Slip head opening wire over right angle bends.



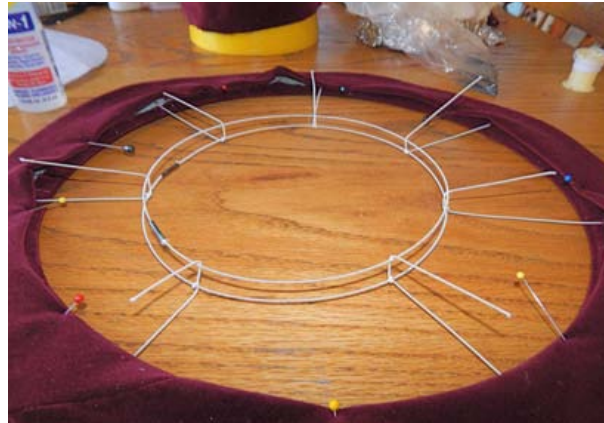
Slip second head wire over ends, stopping  $\frac{1}{2}$ " up.

**Adding the Lace.** Now that the wire frame is secure inside the fabric covered brim the seam allowance for the upper brim can be folded under and whip stitched to the edge. The prepared lace was pinned to the inside edge of the brim and the seam allowance for the head opening clipped so that the lace can slip down over the wire frame. I sewed the lace to the brim edge with a curved needle. (images at right)

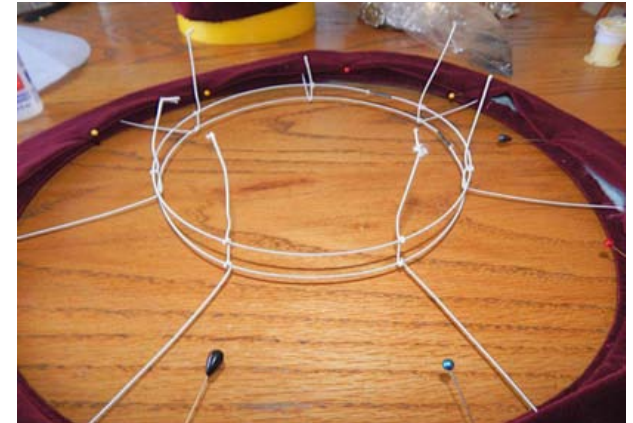
**Adding the Crown to the Brim.** First the bias fabric band needed to be wrapped around the wire frame collar and trimmed to length plus seam allowance then joined at the center back and folded in half long ways. This was sewn onto the base of the crown, to the wireframe around the head opening, with the cut edges up. Then the seam allowances of the fabric crown were folded up, pinned and then slipped over the collar of the frame. (images next page)

After this picture was taken I decided that the crown was too tall so I unpinned it, turned the seam allowance over a little more, and repinned it before sewing it down. I used an invisible stitch to sew the crown to the bias at the crown base. The interfacing buckram crown can be slipped into the hat at this point. It was anchored to the wire frame, then the lining was tacked in.

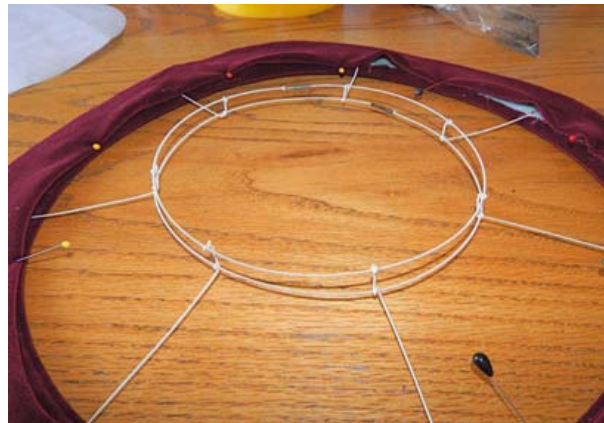
**Decoration.** I decided to add a combination of 3 vintage feather ornaments two black and one brown and a color matched ostrich ornament I made myself. Eaton's catalog has many feather ornaments popular at this time. (images next page)



Fold back wires over second head opening wire.



Wrap wires around to anchor in place.



Cut off extra wires.



Pin prepared lace to inside edge of brim.



Clip seam allowance for the head opening.



Sew lace to brim edge with curved needle.

## The Finished Hat

As a first try it came out very well. (images next page) When I make another I would change only a couple things. I would use a double layer of buckram because I did have some stretching with the single layer. I would also do the pleating by hand so I could get a tighter gather of the first row. I will use modern silk velvet or try to find some Paon (below). It has much more luster than cotton velvet even though it is more of a challenge to sew with.

Regular 1.50 a Yard	<b>1.00</b>
<b>PAON VELVET</b> a Yard	
Paon velvet used for millinery and trimming purposes—comes in shades of coral—red—gray — wine — rose — sky—Copenhagen blue—light brown—henna and white—1.50 values.	
<b>DOLLAR DAY—a yard .....1.00</b>	

Ad from Spokane Spokesman-Review, [Nov. 29, 1921](#).

*Lynn McMasters learned to sew with help from her mother, aunt and grandmother. At first it was doll clothes then it was real clothes then it was home decorations. She took it a little farther and started making patterns for period clothing and hats for porcelain dolls. After that it was period costumes and hats for real sized people, which lead in the end to a line of period hat patterns. Her [website](#) is her portfolio: you can see a decade and a half of work and order patterns there. She loves to pass skills on by teaching and writing articles like this one.*



Wrap bias band and trim to length plus seam allowance.



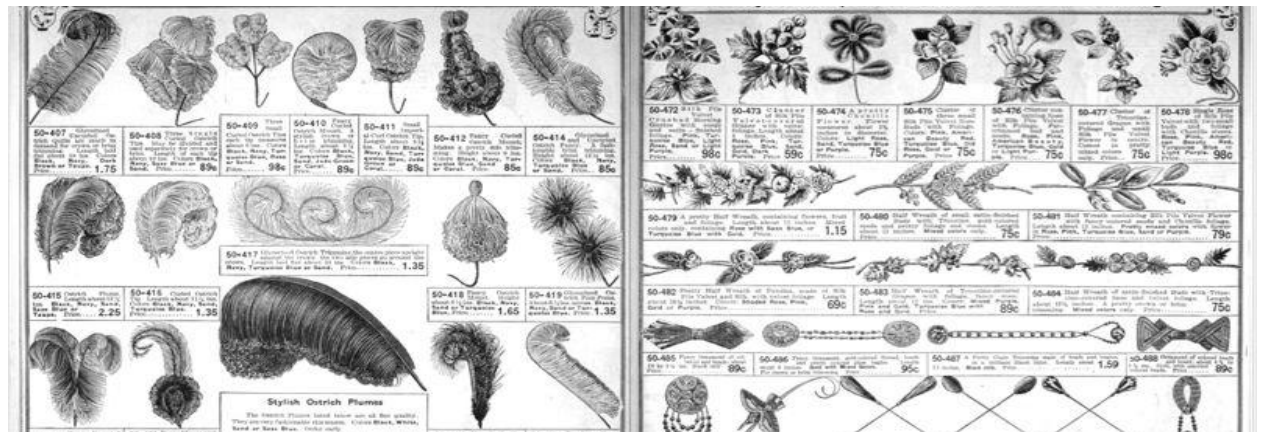
Sew onto base of crown to wireframe, cut edges up.



Fold up crown seam allowance, pin, and slip over frame.



Add vintage feathers and color-matched ostrich plume.



Eaton's catalog has many feather ornaments that were popular at this time.

## Four Views of Reproduction 1920's San Francisco Hat

