

*Activities & Projects*

The Urge to Embellish



*Updating the Traditional*

**The Object:**

Emma White (née Voight)

**Knitted Wedding Stockings, 1878**

white cotton thread

Anonymous Gift

ISM Collection

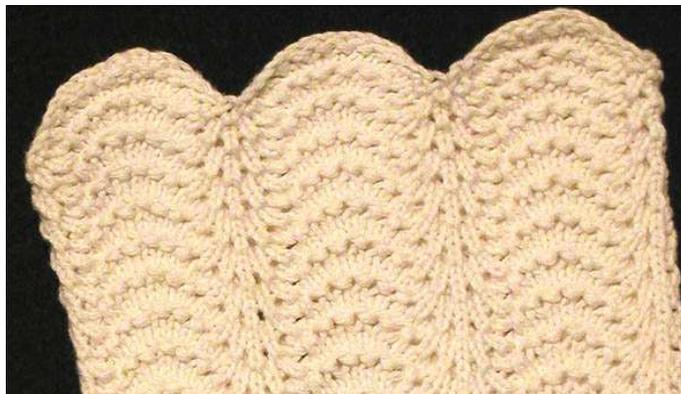
Emma White, from the Joliet, Illinois, area, hand-knitted these stockings for her wedding day. The undulating, ribbed pattern topped by a traditional feather-and-fan or “old shale” pattern provided considerable ornamentation to simple articles of clothing. This embellishment would have been made for private, not public, eyes since the long skirts of the period would have completely covered the lovely patterns.

Girls and young women were encouraged to make items for their trousseau or wedding trunk. They knitted garments, crocheted doilies, sewed and embroidered tablecloths and napkins, embroidered pillowcases and table runners, and sewed their wedding costume. After the wedding, these stockings probably went into storage for years, perhaps with plans for a daughter to wear them at her wedding.



**Project Includes:**

- Story of the Wedding Stockings, 1878
- Feather & Fan Stitch
- Today’s Fashions
- Materials & Tools
- Knitting the Warmers
- Knitting Journals
- Knit Samplers



*Close-up of the stocking’s upper section that features Feather & Fan stitch. This stitch works better in the body of a leg warmer rather than at the top edge, which need elasticity to hug the thigh or calf.*

## Today's Fashions

Contrast the tradition of knitting stockings with customs of today. Women usually do not make fine stockings, they buy them. Hosiery is usually plain, sheer, or sometimes printed with patterns.

Although knitting is popular again, the stocking-like items that are knitted today are socks up to knee-length and leg warmers. Leg warmers are used in cold weather, for skating, for dancing indoors, and for making a fashion statement.

They are often made of wool, in one of several weights of yarn (sock, sport, worsted), and in bright colors. Washable yarns are good for today's lifestyle.

## Feather & Fan Stitch

**The leg warmers are knitted with 2x2 ribbing, stockinette stitch, and feather and fan stitch.**

**Learn this stitch online by tutorials:**

*Video instruction:*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7U7Mfbbrffg>

*Printed instructions:*

(from About.com: [http://knitting.about.com/od/stitchglossary/g/feather\\_fan.htm](http://knitting.about.com/od/stitchglossary/g/feather_fan.htm))

These versions of the stitch result in an open-work look on row 3 (see image right), which may be too breezy in cold weather. If you want a more solid-fabric result, as in the original stockings, bring the yarn-over over the needle first instead of under the needle to the front (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row of your 4 feather and fan sequence) and knit through the front of the loops in row 4.

Also to mimic the original, instead of knitting the whole of row 4, purl above the stitches you decreased, and knit above the stitches you increased. That interrupts the ridge line that row 4 forms on the front of the work.

Adjust the width (or circumference) of the leg warmer to a multiple of eighteen stitches, so the feather and fan design will show smooth full scallops all around the leg.

**Feather & Fan sequence of 18 stitches:**

Row 1: knit

Row 2: purl

Row 3: \*k2tog (x3), yo k1 (x6), k2tog (x3)\*  
repeat across row

Row 4: knit



*Close-up of knitted legwarmer showing two sequences of feather and fan stitch.*

Measurements:

2x2 Ribbing – 1 3/4”

stockinette stitch – 1”

feather and fan stitch – 12” approx. –  
each f&f is 4 rows of knitting

stockinette stitch – 1”

2x2 ribbing – 1 3/4”

Adjust for calf length.

## Leg Warmers in Progress

The tension or gauge was 5.5 stitches to the inch and 7 rows to the inch on #5US needles with sport-weight wool yarn. For this pattern, if you can determine your gauge with the needle size you want, you can knit the sections in lengths according to your wishes or calf length and circumference.

Two leg warmers were knitted simultaneously on two needles. You could also use double-pointed or circular needles.

A seam is sewn down the back with a crochet hook through the cross of the outer stitch on each side at every second stitch. (See Debbie New's *Unexpected Knitting* instructions on seaming.)



## The Urge to Embellish

Get the Urge to Embellish on your project! Embellishment can be embroidery, crochet, beads, buttons, or ribbons and fringe.

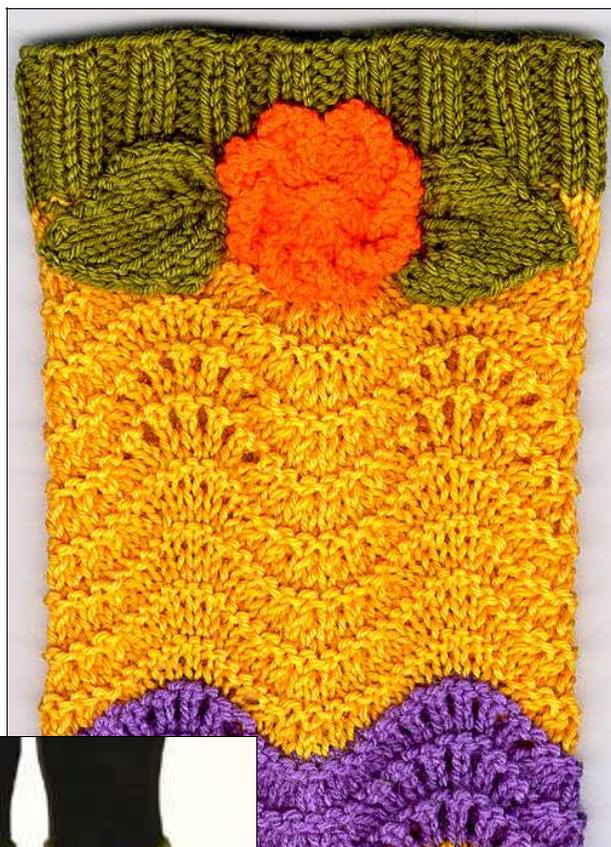
Our sample leg warmers have a flower and two leavers appliquéd on them. The idea came from browsing through Nicky Epstein's *Knitting Over the Edge* book, page 95 and 97.

Things to consider when embellishing:

Does the embellishment enhance the design overall, not overpower it, weigh it down?

By contrast, the embellishment should not be so timid as to look just added on, or spindly against the background.

Repeated motifs make a stronger statement, but also weigh down the leg warmers' body, which may interfere with function.



Here is a model sporting the legwarmers. They are warm, yet airy because of the feather and fan stitch.

## *Learning Standards for Teachers*

In the Victorian Era, women knitted their own stockings or hired a seamstress to make them. Today we usually purchase stockings designed and made commercially by machine. The function of both items may be similar or even identical. The care required and the time required to make them differ greatly.

### **Illinois Art Standard**

**State Goal 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.**

**B. Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.**

**Early High School: 27.B.4b:** Understand how the arts change in response to changes in society.

### **National Art Content Standard 4:**

**Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures**

Achievement Standard:

*Proficient:*

- Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art
- Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places
- Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making

*Advanced:*

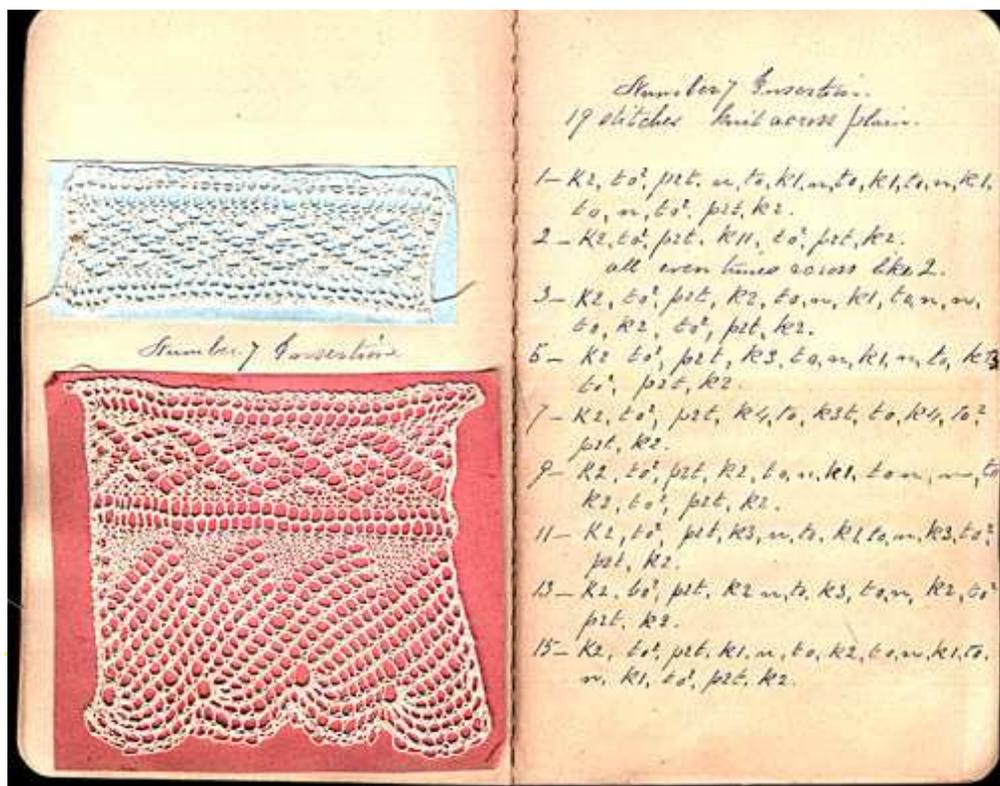
- Students analyze and interpret artworks for relationships among form, context, purposes, and critical models, showing understanding of the work of critics, historians, aestheticians, and artists
- Students analyze common characteristics of visual arts evident across time and among cultural/ethnic groups to formulate analyses, evaluations, and interpretations of meaning

## Things To Do on Your Own

### Handwritten Patterns

Before the age of plentiful printed knitting patterns with instructions, knitters kept their own hand-written knitting journals with grids and instructions. Here are two pages of such a document. On the left are two samples of lace knitting. On the right are the handwritten instructions for the 15 rows of the 19-stitch pattern

Perhaps you can start a knitting journal to track your creations and creative process.



### Knit Samplers—A Record of Your Stitches

Knit samplers were popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were narrow (4 inches) samples of knitting stitches (several inches of each stitch) that kept a record of which stitches the knitter knew. She could refer back to the sampler to look for an interesting stitch to use when knitting something. Through the knitter's lifetime of knitting, the sampler could reach many feet in length.

You might like to start a knitting sampler with your Feather & Fan stitch. With an 18-stitch pattern cycle, you could have a sampler of 36 stitches in width.

*Left:* Curator Jim Zimmer with the knit sampler he started in 2004.

*Right:* Close-up of the sampler, showing the Feather and Fan stitch at the top.

