

If this review is about books—specifically two new studies related to the history of textiles and sewing—it is also about books, that is, bundles of raw silk, “white and glistening...containing an incalculable length of reeled fiber” (American Silk, p. 102). Like the books that provide raw materials for our intellectual activities, books of silk contain ever smaller bundles of material (mosses, then skeins) that must be opened, sorted, and graded; in time, the silk is reconfigured, woven and transformed by other makers into something new. The symmetry between the silk and scholarly enterprises is appealing, for obvious reasons—a small homonymic tidbit that is but one of the many small pleasures contained in the two works considered here.

American Silk is unusual in that it embodies the work of three scholars engaged in three separate projects arrayed in succession more so than formulated in collaboration. The book has three parts, each of which, in the neighborhood of ninety pages (mosses, if you will) discusses one element in the history of American silk: The Nonotuck Silk Company (1830–80) of Northampton, Massachusetts; the Haskell Silk Company (1874–1930) of Westbrook, Maine; and H. R. Mallinson & Company (twentieth century) of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Together, these case studies provide an overview of the silk industry in the United States. Senechal’s account quite usefully begins with the earliest attempts at sericulture in the future United States, including the settlement at Jamestown, where silk occupied some part of the colonists’ attention until the starving winter of 1609 focused their thoughts on more pressing matters (the silkworm, we learn, was also featured on Georgia’s colonial seal). The story of the Nonotuck Silk Company details early silk crazes, the Northampton Association of Education and Industry (a utopian community devoted to abolition), and the particular challenges of manufacturing serviceable silk
threads. As Field tracks the fortunes of the Haskell Silk Company, we learn about the opening of the Japanese market, small-town manufacturing, and the early production of silk fabric. Finally, Shaw traces the transition from fabric retailing to the modern fashion system, with its expanding role for marketing and advertising. In the end, as department stores moved their fabric units from prime real estate on the ground floor to second-story venues out of the consumer’s eye, we witness the beginning of the industry’s decline.

American Silk will be of interest to costume and textile historians, to be sure, but should also be consulted by curators and collectors, labor historians, and, especially, historians of technology, business, and invention. As Field explains, the Haskell Silk Company’s story (to take just one example) is as much about “entrepreneurship and manufacturing in turn-of-the-century small-town America as it is part of the records of silk manufacture in the United States” (p. 90). The expertise of all three authors infuses the text. Reading about the skills associated with reeling, we come to understand why Americans were unable to cultivate a stable workforce; we learn how firms used a variety of tricks to “plump up,” or “weight,” silk that is depleted by processing (silk loses about 25 percent of its weight when the gum is boiled off); and, since over-weighted silk easily rots and frays, we appreciate why the silk in museum collections and family trunks and attics is often in poor condition.

On the whole, the endeavor to tell the story of the silk industry through three case studies succeeds, but there are times when the reader is aware that the book is comprised of three separate essays rather than composed in a coordinated effort. While the authors make some attempt to cross-reference one another’s narratives, sometimes comments and interpretations presented in one essay seem at odds with those in another. For example, Field argues that a post–World War I, industry-wide aberration in the silk market had a devastating effect on American manufacturers, a factor hastening the decline of the Haskell Silk Company, while Shaw, who reports that H. R. Mallinson enjoyed a robust postwar prosperity, makes no reference to disarray in the industry or how Mallinson’s escaped it. The quality of the illustrations across the essays is uneven as well. But these infelicities are offset by the strength and richness of the discussion overall, which is filled with insights into textile questions large and small.

In Findings, Boston University archaeologist Mary Beaudry recovers “small finds,” artifacts all too often dismissed by her colleagues in
the anthropological trenches. In five chapters, Beaudry recontextualizes five categories of artifacts associated with sewing and needlework: pins, needles, thimbles, shears and scissors, and “findings,” that is, notions and accessories. A final, nine-page chapter, “Stitching Together the Evidence,” emphasizes a point Beaudry seeks to make throughout the work, that “sewing and needlework . . . took on many meanings depending on when and where it was done, by whom it was done, and why it was done” (p. 177). Even though sewing implements appear timeless, she insists, they are not; instead, each must be understood as possessing its own subtle and nuanced history.

*Findings* is filled with revelations that will change the way readers think about subjects they thought they already knew. Pins, for instance, are of no fewer than eight types, each with a different feature and purpose. Needles are equally specialized: glover’s needles “have a bevel and a triangular point with cutting edges that taper gradually to an extreme point” to ensure that the leather is cut but not torn; lace needles are long and fine with a grooveless eye; upholstery needles are blunt with a long eye to receive thick wool thread; and so on. The discussion of scissors and shears is similarly effective in alerting readers to seemingly small but significant differences that will change the way they understand these items when encountering them in the ground or in the archive.

Beaudry’s point here is significant: scholars in a variety of disciplines tend to treat both the artifacts and the skills of sewing and needlework as homogeneous and undifferentiated. Her *Findings* will make it far more difficult for future scholars to be so careless. Indeed, one wishes that Beaudry could have had more space in which to develop her analysis. Because each chapter must account for the archaeological record, it tends to begin in prehistory (sometimes as early as Paleolithic sites) and carry the story forward into the nineteenth century, creating a bird’s eye view that often feels too removed. One wants more information about precisely when particular innovations in form or function occurred and why. But each of those projects could be a separate book in itself, and Beaudry does not need more details to be persuasive; in fact, her purpose may be better served because her readers are left wanting more. Specialists will lay the book down knowing that, depending on the nature of their own scholarship, they will need to know (for example) the history of the thimble; all other readers will certainly understand that even an object as humble as a pin fits form to function and manifests innovation and change over time.
Marla Miller, Associate Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, researches and writes about women’s labor history in the early republic. Her book *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* appeared in 2006.


Robert Morris’s fascinating, compact text examines an underappreciated aspect of our national pastime: the playing field. Disregarding ballpark structures, Morris addresses playing surfaces and their surrounding landscapes. Through the Murphy brothers, John and Tom, the author investigates how innovative groundskeepers’ craftsmanship and maintenance affected the baseball diamond’s evolution.

Unfortunately, Morris did not find enough material fully to reveal the lives of the idiosyncratic artisans at the center of his story. Their Irish backgrounds, rural influences, and fiery dispositions drew popular attention in their day, when Irish-American players dominated baseball, but what attracted the brothers to their vocation remains a mystery. Morris compensates for his biographical shortfall with an entertaining discourse about land use in postbellum America, specifically how ball-playing lots were developed and standardized.

Before the specifications of playing fields were regularized, each ballpark was adapted to its natural terrain and the home team’s playing style. With urban land at a premium, franchises looked for inexpensive acreage near population centers that was accessible to pedestrian and trolley traffic. These sites, however, were often undeveloped. Some were low lying and easily flooded; others were in need of serious grading. Approaching each impediment as a challenge to making ballgrounds functional and affordable, groundskeepers cleared trees, grew and cropped grass, removed infield pebbles, improved drainage, and leveled the playing surface. Treating early ballgrounds in Pittsburgh and New York in particular, Morris shows how the Murphy brothers applied their skills and imagination to such problems, thus becoming pioneers in establishing standards and practices that later generations of groundskeepers would adopt.

The most engaging pages in the book deal with the Murphys’ talent in adapting playing fields to the “small ball” tactics of teams managed by John McGraw in New York and Ned Hanlon in Baltimore. In city
His The Canterbury Tales ranks as one of the greatest poetic works in English. He also contributed in the second half of the 14th century to the management of public affairs as courtier, diplomat, and civil servant. Be on the lookout for your Britannica newsletter to get trusted stories delivered right to your inbox. Stay Connected. Facebook Twitter YouTube Instagram Pinterest Newsletters. The Lake Poets believed that poetry could be written only under mystical inspiration. They tried to express their feelings and thoughts through the most simple, artless poetic language, using the short but forceful words and constructions of everyday speech. William Wordsworth (1770–1850) is one of the domineering figures of British Romanticism. Refusing to follow any poetic conventions and rules, he had his own vision of what a poetry should be. Coleridge was a man of genius distinguished for the influence of his thinking about literature as much as for his innovative verse. Coleridge's critical work was highly influential, and helped to introduce German idealist philosophy to English-speaking culture. http://leopoldclassiclibrary.com/book/coleridges-literary-criticism. Picnic on the moon. First published in 1999. Subjects. African American men, Poetry, Poetry (poetic works by one author). Edit. Picnic on the moon. poems. This edition published in 1999 by Leapfrog Press, Distributed in the U.S. by Consortium Book Sales and Distribution in Wellfleet, Mass, . St. Paul, Minn. Edition Notes. Genre. Poetry. Classifications. Dewey Decimal Class. This led to his success as both an actor on stage and a playwright, and his name was published on the title page of his plays. Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none." - Quote by Shakespeare. Shakespeare was noted both for poetry and plays, with both mediums serving different needs; the plays were related to the theatrical fashion that was on trend while his poetry served to provide storytelling in erotic or romantic ways, culminating in a canon of work that is as diverse in language as the issues of human nature that the works portray. English poet Geoffrey Chaucer wrote the unfinished work, 'The Canterbury Tales.' It is considered one of the greatest poetic works in English. Who Was Geoffrey Chaucer? In 1357, Geoffrey Chaucer became a public servant to Countess Elizabeth of Ulster and continued in that capacity with the British court throughout his lifetime. According to some sources, Chaucer’s father, John, carried on the family wine business. Geoffrey Chaucer is believed to have attended the St. Paul’s Cathedral School, where he probably first became acquainted with the influential writing of Virgil and Ovid. In 1357, Chaucer became a public servant to Countess Elizabeth of Ulster, the Duke of Clarence’s wife, for which he was paid a small stipend enough to pay for his food and clothing.