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**“DREADFUL FASHIONABLE”:
THE WORK OF MARY ANNE WARRINER,
RHODE ISLAND MILLINER
1835-1841**

by
Melinda Grace Talbot

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of Master of Arts with a major in Early American Culture

Spring 1999

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people helped me with this thesis from beginning to end. I owe my gratitude to Marguerite Connolly, under whose guidance this study was conducted, for her encouragement, unflagging enthusiasm, and careful editing of my work. I would also like to thank Charlie Hummel, whose class “The Colonial American Craftsman” inspired me to study an artisan and her work.

I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to study at Winterthur, where everyone has been wonderfully supportive of my work. I would like to thank the entire library staff in particular for their help with my research and photography.

I gratefully acknowledge curators at several museums who allowed me to view collection objects, including Lynne Bassett at Old Sturbridge Village, Linda Baumgarten at Colonial Williamsburg, Nancy Gedraitis at the Plymouth Antiquarian Society, and Susan Hay at the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design. Several scholars also gave me much-appreciated assistance, including Linda Eppich, Wendy Gamber, Nancy Rexford, Joan Severa, and Amy Simon.

Finally I would like to thank my parents, sister, and grandparents for their love and support. This work is dedicated to them.

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ABSTRACT

From 1835 to 1841, Mary Anne Warriner (1794-1849), a widowed milliner of Warwick, Rhode Island, recorded orders as well as local events in her daybook. The document provides a wealth of information about the production and consumption of women's dress in an early industrial community. This study explores Mary Anne Warriner's work, including her role as a businesswoman, arbiter of taste, and agent of fashion, as well as the goods she produced and services she provided.

The daybook contributes to an understanding of the role of women, fashion, and work in an early industrial community. Other period sources such as fashion illustrations, prescriptive literature, and photographs help illuminate the document and broaden an understanding of fashion and the millinery business. In addition, wills, inventories, genealogies, and local histories help set the scene for this study of the milliner and her community.

Among the few studies of a female artisan and her work, this thesis concludes that Warriner's business was part of a female economy made up of all classes of women. Her millinery was the site of exchange among women of not only goods and services, but information about local events as well as international fashion. The fashion economy in Warwick created, manifested, and perpetuated inequalities among women. At the same

time, however, it enabled Warriner to maintain her independence as a widowed woman, help support herself and her family, and influence the taste of her community, while earning respect from her peers based not only on her ancestry, but also her work.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On June 2, 1838, Rhode Island milliner Mary Anne Warriner wrote a typical bonnet order in her daybook: “Rebeckah Manchester white drawn silk bonnet made as I think proper by Teusday night.”¹ In a single line, Warriner provided a glimpse into the early nineteenth-century fashion business. The entry includes details about the bonnet’s desired color (white), form (fabric drawn over hooped ribs), material (silk), and the time allotted for its completion (three days, June second being a Saturday). Perhaps most interesting is what is missing from the entry: explicit instructions for finishing the bonnet. Rebeckah Manchester trusted Warriner’s judgment, perhaps more than her own, to make it in a “proper” manner. Some orders were more explicit; on June 25th of the same year, for example, Phebe Sherman requested a “white drawn silk bonnet trim with white with a pink edge pink flowers, a bunch outside ruffle on the crown last of next week about as large as Abby Johnson between 4 and 5 dollars.”² This entry describes a bonnet similar to that of Rebeckah Manchester, but more highly decorated with white and pink ribbon,

¹Mary Anne Warriner, daybook (1835-1841), MS, Doc. 163, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Library (hereafter cited as MAW), June 2, 1838, 145.

²MAW, June 25, 1838, 157.

bunches of flowers, and a ruffle on the crown. The phrase “last of next week” indicates that the client expected Warriner to have the order ready by the end of the following week. The entry also suggests an informal method of fitting, comparing the size of the requested bonnet to one that fit another client named Abby Johnson. Finally, it shows the leeway in price (between four and five dollars) the client allowed the milliner to make the bonnet up. Warriner’s daybook, in which she recorded her daily business transactions and accounts from 1835 to 1841, contains hundreds of entries like these, as well as orders for dresses, cloaks, caps, and other garments, providing a wealth of information about the production and consumption of women’s dress in the nineteenth century.

The daybook yields much information about the community as well. In the early nineteenth century, Warriner’s hometown of Warwick, Rhode Island, was a growing industrial town, and female mill workers as well as the wives and daughters of mill owners were all concerned with observing custom and fashion. Warriner must have gathered a great deal of information and gossip in the course of her daily interactions with clients. Much of this she carefully recorded in her daybook. The last forty pages in particular served as a record of the mundane (“Set the light coulered hen March 2, 1839 on 13 eggs hatched ten Chickens”³), as well as the extraordinary:

Drowned at a shore party Mrs Eliza Nichols Chace in company with M A Remington who was almost lifeless August 28 Wednesday having been married 3 months young & sprightly she little thought that the shadow of

³MAW, June 2, 1839, 383.

death was so near and the substance of it awaited her — in the midst of life we are in Death!⁴

Interspersed among the orders or scrawled in the margins are comments about daily events (“Thursday Jany 24 I went to Providence in stage very cold”⁵), as well as local milestones (“Susan Bently paid for led colored silk dress 1.58 to be married to Luther Brayton Sept 20 1840”⁶). Occasionally she even recorded her own milestones; on May 25, 1837 she wrote in the margin, “M A W aged 43.”⁷ Warriner knew most of her customers and wanted to remember important happenings in their lives. She was involved in these events not only as the maker of baby bonnets and grave clothes, but as a neighbor, churchgoer, and friend. Warriner’s business record, together with her comments and observations, reveal much about the role and status of women in general and women artisans in particular in an early industrial community.

Many years after her death, Warriner’s brother Simon Henry Greene remembered her as a “sterling” woman, whose “perceptions were vivid, and . . . mind was poetical and literary. She was somewhat aristocratic, and possessed much pride of ancestry.”⁸ A genealogy of the Greene family describes her as “a vivacious, talented woman, remarkably

⁴MAW, August 29, 1839, 390.

⁵MAW, January 24, 1839, 196.

⁶MAW, September 20, 1840, 347.

⁷MAW, May 25, 1837, 87.

⁸Henry Lehre Greene, Includes an autobiography of Simon Henry Greene addressed to the Rhode Island Historical Society, October 6, 1874 (MS, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence), 7.

gifted in conversation, but practical, thoughtful and gentle.”⁹ Who was Mary Anne Warriner? Although she was descended from some of the first settlers of Rhode Island and must have been a well-known businesswoman, her name is hardly mentioned in local histories except for genealogical purposes.

Warriner was born Mary Anne Greene on May 25, 1794 in Centreville, a section of Warwick, Rhode Island. Her parents were Abigail Rhodes (1768-1845) and Colonel Job Greene (1759-1808). Her father was one of the earliest industrialists in Warwick and her grandfather, Colonel Christopher Greene, was a well-known Revolutionary War hero. In 1813, she married Abner Morgan Warriner. Three years later, her husband died, leaving his young widow with a small son, born in 1814. Mary Anne Warriner never remarried. She supported herself and her son through her millinery business, probably living with her mother, who was also a widow. When she died, Warriner’s estate was worth \$5,535.47, a sizable sum in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Although some of this amount was undoubtedly inherited wealth, Warriner maintained and increased it through investments, business prowess, and hard work.

In his book *Making Furniture in Pre-Industrial America: The Social Economy of*

⁹Louise Bawnell Clarke, *Greenes of Rhode Island with Historical Records of English Ancestry, 1534-1902* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1903), 450.

¹⁰Warwick Probate Court Wills, 1845-1859, Microfilm, 310-311. The 1830 and 1840 Rhode Island Censuses both list three residents in the household of Abigail Greene. Abigail Greene, Mary Anne Warriner, and Job Greene Warriner fall within the age brackets noted. Rhode Island State Census, 1830, Microfilm, 266; Rhode Island State Census, 1840, Microfilm, 144-145.

Newtown and Woodbury, Connecticut, Edward S. Cooke, Jr. highlights the general need for scholars to examine the work of early American artisans:

[There is a] need to look more closely and analytically at craftwork during this time [the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries], understand its integral role in a community's economic and cultural activity, probe artisan's values and decisions in a period of economic intensification and diversification, uncover the multiple meanings of craft products, and develop a more complete sense of preindustrial production and its links to industrial manufacture."¹¹

These issues have been particularly overlooked in relation to female artisans. In the introduction to *A Needle, a Bobbin, a Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*, editors Joan M. Jensen and Sue Davidson write, "little attention has been given to [professional needlework's] significance in the lives of those who have performed it and in the social and economic systems of their times."¹² Unfortunately this has not changed much since the book was published in the 1980s, and the same can be said generally about women's work outside the home in early America. Perhaps the most significant study that has been written on this topic, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* examines working relationships among women

¹¹Edward S. Cooke, Jr. *Making Furniture in Pre-Industrial America: The Social Economy of Newtown and Woodbury, Connecticut* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

¹²Joan M. Jensen and Sue Davidson, eds. *A Needle, a Bobbin, a Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*, *Women in the Political Economy*, ed. Ronnie J. Steinberg (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), xi.

in an early frontier town economy.¹³ Although some work has been done on eighteenth and early nineteenth-century millinery businesses, particularly for the purposes of museum interpretation at sites like Colonial Williamsburg and Old Sturbridge Village, most of it remains unpublished.¹⁴ Most studies, including Wendy Gamber's *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*, focus on the better-documented late nineteenth century. Gamber's work is the most thorough examination of the subject, exploring the meaning of women's work and the influence of such factors as race, class, age, and marital status on the fashion business. Gamber writes that "despite recent interest in the history of small-scale enterprise, the stories of female petty entrepreneurs for the most part remain untold. With few exceptions, existing accounts . . . are at best cursory, at worst celebratory."¹⁵ While there are many studies of male artisans in early America based on extant objects and documents, Amy Simon's Master's thesis "'She is So Neat and Fits So Well': Garment Construction and the Millinery Business of Eliza Oliver Dodds, 1821-1833" is among the few studies that focus on the work and working

¹³Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

¹⁴See, for example, Jane C. Nylander, "Sewing for the Fashionable Family of the 1830s" (Unpublished paper written for Old Sturbridge Village); and Katherine Shawer, "Research Reports on Eighteenth-Century Milliners and Fashions" (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Research Report Series, 1989), Microfiche.

¹⁵Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*, Women in American History, eds. Mari Jo Buhle, Nancy A. Hewitt, and Anne Firor Scott, The Working Class in American History, eds. David Brody, Alice Kessler-Harris, David Montgomery, and Sean Wilentz (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 3.

relationships of an early-nineteenth century female craftsman.¹⁶ It is a straightforward study of a Washington, D. C. dressmaker based on period garments and Dodds' daybook.

Though successful, Mary Anne Warriner and Eliza Oliver Dodds were not exceptional. Although they may be described as entrepreneurs, they were part of the well-established fashion business, which, on the retail level, operated as a female economy, distinct from the whole economy, but integral to it.¹⁷ The survival of their daybooks, however, is unusual. Warriner's is particularly unique because of its conversational tone and references to people and events in the community. In addition to yielding information about business relationships, it provides insight into the fashion process in nineteenth century America. Studies of fashion have traditionally focused on period illustrations and surviving garments. For these reasons they do not necessarily reflect the range of garments being produced in local economies and do not address the role of fashion within a community. While several studies of the social and psychological aspects of dress have been written, they are based less on documentary evidence than theory.¹⁸ Beverly

¹⁶Amy Simon, " 'She Is So Neat and Fits So Well': Garment Construction and the Millinery Business of Eliza Oliver Dodds, 1821-1833." (M. A. Thesis, University of Delaware).

¹⁷Gamber, *Female Economy*, 3.

¹⁸See, for example, Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang, "Fashion: Identification and Differentiation in the Mass Society," in *Dress, Adornment, and the Social Order*, edited by Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), 322-346; Jeanette C. Lauer and Robert H. Lauer, "The Language of Dress: A Sociohistorical Study of the Meaning of Clothing in America." *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 10 (Winter 1979): 305-323; Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher, "Dress and Identity." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10 (Summer 1992):

Gordon's article "Meanings in Mid-Nineteenth Century Dress: Images from New England Women's Writings," and Lois W. Banner's *American Beauty* are two of the best studies of the fashion process in early America.¹⁹ These enlighten a study of Warriner's daybook and the information about local fashion that it contains.

While few daybooks survive, it was probably not unusual for a milliner to record orders, credits, and debits. Warriner was careful with her records, especially concerning money; however, she also relied heavily on her memory, using her own kind of shorthand such as, "trim . . . with that rose color at Draper [probably Nathaniel P. Draper's Providence drygoods store]."²⁰ Moreover, an entry like, "Joanna ever so much done to [her bonnet]," hints at the milliner's shortage of time or patience to write down the details of an order, her reliance on memory, and her ability to run a profitable business with most of the information in her head or communicated verbally to her helpers.²¹ For this reason, this study examines not only the information the daybook provides, but the underlying information it suggests. Clearly Warriner was literate; her laconism was perhaps based on a long tradition of women's work, both within the household and otherwise, that went unrecorded. Similarly, women's social networks were often linked by oral

1-8.

¹⁹Beverly Gordon, "Meanings in Mid-Nineteenth Century Dress: Images from New England Women's Writings." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10 (Spring 1992): 44-53; Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

²⁰MAW, May, 1839, 233; Draper was located at "7 West'r, 160 Benefit." *Providence Directory* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1838), 48.

²¹MAW, May 28, 1839, 243.

communication, including daily gossip and a common concern over family members' whereabouts and activities. In this light, what is included in the daybook is valuable, but what is missing can also be telling.

The daybook's entries span the years 1835 to 1841. Much of this study focuses on the years 1838 to 1840 in particular because the information recorded in these years is most complete. Similarly, although the milliner made and sold a variety of goods, including dresses, cloaks, stockings, gloves, and caps, this study focuses on her bonnet production. Bonnets were the single item most frequently ordered from Warriner, although there were many variations within that category. Bonnets are particularly interesting subjects of study because they were ubiquitous; both men and women wore head coverings outdoors almost all of the time in both city and country. Head coverings were relatively affordable and easily reworked according to the current trend or season. Because of this, they were often the most up-to-date garment a person might own and are therefore a good meter of fashion activity within a community.

While the daybook contains a wealth of information, other period sources such as fashion illustrations, prescriptive literature, and photographs help illuminate the document and broaden an understanding of fashion and the millinery business. In addition, wills, inventories, genealogies, and local histories help set the scene for this study of the milliner and her community.

The daybook itself is a folio with tan suede covers and hastily-tooled borders and spine. The laid paper pages are watermarked with a large figure of Britannia surrounded

by an oval border and countermarked with the date “1810.” The back cover has a handwritten inscription that appears to be three initials. Although the middle is nearly illegible, the first appears to be an “M” and the last a “W”—perhaps the initials of Mary Anne Warriner. Almost all of the entries were written in brown ink by the same hand, though a second, but similar, handwriting appears occasionally, particularly toward the end of the book. In one such entry written by this second hand the writer refers to “Mrs. Warriner,” suggesting that it was that of one of the milliner’s helpers.²² Warriner’s name appears infrequently in the daybook. It is only through her relationships with other people mentioned in the book, particularly her son Job Greene Warriner, that she can be identified and the book attributed to her.²³

The daybook’s spine is marked “WEAVE BOOK,” (figure 1) and the pages were all painstakingly ruled with columns labeled by hand with weave-related headings (figure 2). The book may originally have been intended to be used by one of the local textile mills, perhaps one owned by Warriner’s relatives. Appropriately, the book symbolizes the link between textile manufacturing and fashion in Warwick; many of Warriner’s best customers owed their wealth to the success of Warwick’s industrialization.

²²See “Mrs James Carr wants a drawn silk bonnet for her mother about the size of Mrs Warriner.” MAW, c. May 1, 1839, 220.

²³When I began this study, the daybook was thought to be anonymous. Through a long process of gathering names and determining relationships, it became apparent to me that Mary Anne Warriner was responsible for most of the writing in the book. The first clue was the result of a genealogical search for the parents of Job Greene Warriner, who turned out to be Mary Anne Warriner’s son. Further research, as well as passages in the daybook only confirmed this conclusion.

In addition to its obvious use as a business record, the daybook served several other functions. Warriner used it as many people used a family Bible to record births, deaths, and marriages. She also recorded daily events, local news, and the weather. Finally, pressed between the pages of the book are flowers she carefully preserved as well as pieces of silk that may have been either samples or scraps from a bonnet. Even a sewing needle and a common pin (figure 3) have become part of the artifact that is the daybook. The book represents the integration of work and community that characterized Warriner's life.

Most of the order book is legible. Warriner consistently misspelled certain words and used punctuation sparingly. For this reason, interpreting her syntax is often difficult. For the purposes of this study, original spelling has been preserved, but the notation of money has sometimes been standardized. Throughout the book, but particularly in the diary section at the end, which is not entirely chronological, the dates are vague and have been approximated for the purposes of this study. The pages of the book are not numbered and some are missing. Page numbers assigned reflect the existing number of pages.

The daybook must be studied as an artifact in its entirety, including the notes and other objects enclosed between its leaves. The book contains far more information than any transcription ever could. For example, differences in handwriting and ink color are often subtle, but potentially meaningful. They might indicate that a passage was added at a later date, that another worker was recording orders when Warriner was away, or that

Warriner herself was too hurried to write in her usual hand.

Between its lines, the daybook relates a story of women, fashion, work, and community. Warriner's business was part of a female economy made up of all classes of women. While men who were bankers, suppliers, or relatives of Warriner and her clients had indirect influence over Warriner's business, the principal players in the business were female producers and consumers. Her millinery was the site of exchange among women of not only goods and services, but information about local events as well as international fashion. Fashion in Warwick sometimes sparked competition. It created, manifested, and perpetuated inequalities among women. At the same time, however, it enabled Warriner to maintain her independence as a widowed woman, help support herself and her family, and influence the taste of her community, while earning respect from her peers based not only on her ancestry, but also her work.

This study explores Mary Anne Warriner's work, including her role as a businesswoman, arbiter of taste, and agent of fashion, as well as the goods she produced and services she provided. Chapter two provides background on Warriner's family and community, placing her within a local context. Chapter three examines the people and work that comprised Warriner's millinery business. Chapter four focuses on Warriner's bonnets in particular, as an example of the fashion items she produced. Finally, chapter five examines the fashion process in Warwick, including the inspiration for designs and their dissemination throughout the community. These are some of the most compelling stories the daybook has to offer.

Chapter 2

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The history of Warwick, Rhode Island is intertwined with the history of the Greene family. Mary Anne Warriner's ancestor John Greene was one of the first settlers of the town. He emigrated from Wiltshire, England to Plymouth Colony and moved to Providence in 1637. Soon after he followed Samuel Gorton to religious freedom in Warwick, his views being too radical even for Roger Williams' Providence. Greene was one of twenty-four men to whom King Charles II granted the charter of Rhode Island.¹

While most early Rhode Island settlers earned their living by working the land, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, farming no longer sustained the local economy. This was partly due to the poor quality of the soil, but also to inheritance laws that required land to be divided by all heirs. Many people preferred working in the textile mills that were being built by the end of the eighteenth century rather than continuing to struggle on small farms.² Rhode Island families that had gained their wealth from the

¹Rhode Island Historical Society, *Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, vol. 6 (Providence: Hammond, Angell & Co., 1867), 52; Oliver Payson Fuller, *The History of Warwick, Rhode Island, From Its Settlement in 1642 to the Present Time* (Providence: Angell, Burlingame & Co., 1875), 8.

²Joseph Brennan, *Social Conditions in Industrial Rhode Island: 1820-1860* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1940), 5.

shipping business were beginning to turn to industry, as well, after suffering losses from the Embargo Act and War of 1812. Historian Peter J. Coleman provides the following explanation of the suitability of Rhode Island to the textile industry:

The tiny state lacked the resources for heavy industry, but topographical and climatic conditions were ideal for lighter forms of manufacturing, especially for textile making. Power was readily available: narrow, swift-running streams, low waterfalls, and natural storage ponds abounded, particularly in the northern and western hill country. In many places it was sufficient merely to divert water into the mill race, and if a dam had to be built construction costs were low. Furthermore, the soft Rhode Island water did not require treatment before yarns and cloths could be washed or bleached, and dyes took easily. Finally, the Rhode Island climate was ideal for textile manufacturing. The high relative humidity kept fibers supple enough to be spun without breaking, and the comparatively even seasonal distribution of rainfall provided a steady flow of water for power and other purposes.³

Mary Anne Warriner's father Job Greene was the first person to build a textile mill in Warwick around 1794. In October of that year he acquired land and water power for that purpose and built a two-story mill forty feet long and twenty-six feet wide, with enough machinery to run one hundred spindles. The investors included William Potter, John Allen, James McKerris, and James Greene.⁴ The business did not turn out to be as profitable as had been expected. In 1799, half of it was sold for \$2,500 to William Almy and Obadiah Brown, who had financed Samuel Slater's operation in North Providence. The business was more successful under their direction, producing knitting cotton and

³Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963), 71-72.

⁴Oliver Payson Fuller, *The History of Warwick, Rhode Island, From Its Settlement in 1642 to the Present Time* (Providence: Angell, Burlingame & Co., 1875), 189.

yarn for warps.⁵ In 1801, Almy and Brown purchased all of Job Greene's rights to the spinning mill. In 1805, they bought the land, grist and saw mills, water-power, and the house built in 1785 (birthplace of Mary Anne Warriner) for \$5000.⁶ The business continued to flourish; in 1836, John Greene, a relative of Warriner, bought out Almy and Brown for \$55,000.⁷

Another of the early textile businesses in Warwick was the Greene Manufacturing Company. Dr. Stephen Harris (father of Cyrus Harris who married Mary Anne Warriner's niece, Abby Spaulding) was an original member of that business venture, which began operation at River Point in 1813. In 1818 the business came under Dr. Harris' exclusive control, and was very successful.⁸ Riverpoint was known to many as Greeneville because it was home to the Greene Manufacturing Company.⁹ Villages like Greeneville sprang up around various textile mills in Warwick, forming distinct sections of the town.

Mary Anne Warriner's brother Simon Henry Greene ran the Clyde Works, the largest finishing mill in Rhode Island. The business was capitalized at \$475,000 and

⁵Fuller, 190.

⁶Fuller, 191.

⁷Fuller, 195.

⁸Wilfred H. Munro, *Picturesque Rhode Island: Pen and Pencil Sketches of the Scenery and History of Its Cities, Towns and Hamlets, and of Men Who Have Made Them Famous* (Providence: J. A. & R. A. Reid, 1881), 236-237.

⁹Fuller, 237.

processed more than \$1,000,000 worth of cotton goods a year.¹⁰ As a teenager, Simon Henry Greene got his start in the textile business working for Mary Anne Warriner's husband Abner Morgan Warriner in Hartford.¹¹ In 1828, Simon Henry Greene and Edward Pike began a bleaching business on the lowest water privilege on the north branch of the river. The firm later expanded to include calico printing. In 1839, much of the works burned.¹² Mary Anne Warriner noted in her diary, "Fire at Greene and Pike Bleachery May 6 1839 Teusday at 3 Oclock burnt down in about 20 minutes loss 50,000."¹³ The business evidently recovered from the disaster. After Pike's death in 1842, Greene purchased the interest of his heirs and continued to run it together with his sons for many years under the name Clyde Print Works and Bleachery."¹⁴

In 1840, Warwick had \$1,128,000 in capital invested in 29 cotton mills employing 1,946 workers and producing \$967,000 worth of goods. Rhode Island in general had \$7,324,000 invested in 226 mills employing 12,086 employees and producing \$7,116,492 worth of cotton goods.¹⁵ In the same year, the population of Rhode Island was 108,830.

¹⁰Coleman, 128.

¹¹J. R. Cole, *History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island*. New York: W. W. Preston & Co., 1889), 1031.

¹²Fuller, 233.

¹³MAW, May 6, 1839, 383; on page 410 Warriner notes the same event, giving the date May 7, 1839, which was a Tuesday and was probably the correct date.

¹⁴Munro, 237.

¹⁵Coleman, 124.

The population of Warwick in 1840 was 6,726, up from 5,529 in 1830.¹⁶ According to these figures, 28.9% of Warwick's residents were employed by the cotton industry. 11.1% of the population of the state was employed in cotton manufacturing. Warwick in particular was a growing industrial town. The textile industry, which did not even include woolen production until the 1830s, had a large influence not only on the economy, but on the geography and social structure of the area. Warriner had the benefit of being identified with the class of mill owners rather than workers at a time when an ever widening economic gap was developing between the two groups. Warriner's patrons, including some of her relatives, however, came from both of these classes.

Early industrialization brought with it mixed blessings. March of 1839 must have been an upsetting time in Warwick. In the diary section of her daybook, Warriner noted two tragedies that took place within eight days of each other. On March 18, 1839, Christopher Bowman was killed while working in a textile mill:

Christopher Bowman mortally wounded by the shaft under the Picker at the Centreville woollen Mill and survived untill Wednesday evening buried at the Common burial ground at Centreville aged about 28 Ecclesiastes 9 Chap 12 verse "for man knoweth not"¹⁷

The next week, Warriner's relative and customer Freeloove Greene was also killed in a mill accident.

Freeloove Greene fell from a bridge in the cellar of old Mill or weaving shop at Centreville and after an absence of 5 or 6 hours was found in the

¹⁶Coleman, 220.

¹⁷MAW, March 18, 1839, 388.

wheelpit lifeless aged 49 years a member of the M[ethodist] E[piscopal]
Church in Centreville buried on Thursday in James Greene burial ground
sermon my M[oses] Fifield text Mark 13 Chap 35:36:37 “Watch ye”
therefore¹⁸

These tragedies must have hit hard, as thirty-six years later Oliver Payson Fuller included them in his otherwise celebratory *History of Warwick, Rhode Island, From Its Settlement in 1642 to the Present Time*.¹⁹ Warriner interacted with people of all classes in the course of her daily interactions with customers, fellow churchgoers, and neighbors. Tragedies like these would have affected the whole community. Mill accidents would have been frightening in the early industrial era, as the machinery was still unfamiliar to many people and safety regulations did not exist. Warriner no doubt reflected on her own mortality as she recorded the ages of the accident victims and the verses read at their funerals.

As quoted in chapter one, Simon Henry Greene described his sister Mary Anne Warriner as having “much pride of ancestry.”²⁰ In an era when mill workers wore fashion items worth several week’s wages, genealogy was particularly important to those who wanted to distinguish themselves from the masses. Several of Warriner’s ancestors were known throughout Rhode Island; the Greene family connection would have been a beneficial social and economic tie.

¹⁸MAW, March 26, 1839, 389.

¹⁹Fuller, 187.

²⁰Henry Lehre Greene, Includes an autobiography of Simon Henry Greene addressed to the Rhode Island Historical Society, October 6, 1874 (MS, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence), 7.

Warriner's grandfather Colonel Christopher Greene was a well-known Revolutionary war hero. He took part in the attack against Quebec, where he was forced to surrender. After spending eighteen months in prison, he was exchanged in 1777. He then defended Fort Mercer or Red Bank on the Delaware River against a German attack. Greene also led black troops from 1778 to 1780, and in 1781 he returned to the headquarters of General Washington. On May 13th of that year he was killed by a party of refugees near Croton Bridge in New York state.²¹ Greene was most remembered for bravery at Fort Mercer, for which Congress passed a resolution to present him with a sword. He died before the sword was delivered, and so it was presented to his son Job Greene, father of Mary Anne Warriner.²²

Job Greene was a member of both branches of the Rhode Island legislature and was Colonel of the Kentish Artillery, a military organization.²³ Mary Anne Warriner's mother, Abigail, was described in a genealogy of the Greene family:

[Abigail Greene was a] woman of uncommon judgment and energy, and was remarkably gifted in conversation. Her executive ability and powers of endurance were great, and she was most faithful in the discharge of her duties, esteeming no sacrifice too great, no labor too severe, which would establish and maintain the happiness of her family. She was guided by strong religious principles, and passed through the world with her faith clear, her hope bright, and her charity unspotted.²⁴

²¹Rhode Island Historical Society, 52-55.

²²Rhode Island Historical Society, 56.

²³Henry Lehre Greene, 3.

²⁴Louise Bawnell Clarke, *Greenes of Rhode Island with Historical Records of English Ancestry, 1534-1902* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1903), 276.

Mary Anne Warriner and her siblings were all born at the house built by their father at Centreville in 1785. Job Greene owned over five hundred acres of land lying on the westerly side of the north branch of the Pawtuxet River, from the bridge at Centreville down to the junction of the two branches of the Pawtuxet.²⁵ When he sold his residence and mills to Almy and Brown in 1805, he built a house on a tract of thirty acres west of his original residence in Centreville. This may have been the home of his widow Abigail Greene, daughter Mary Anne Warriner, and grandson Job Warriner during the time the order book was written.

The inventory taken upon the death of Job Greene in 1808 undoubtedly describes the house built by him in 1805 and its contents. After her husband's death, Warriner and her son most likely moved there to live with her mother. It would have been a comfortable residence for them, containing at least six rooms in addition to a cellar and garret. The inventory of Job Greene's estate identifies northwest and northeast bedroom chambers and a northwest bedroom below. The west room contained "1 bedstead, bed, under bed, Cord and Calico spread & Cartains" valued at \$39, a "high case of Draws Chest upon Chest" (\$18), a desk (\$5), a large looking glass (\$7), a toilet table (\$.33), a surveyors book (\$1), and "1 Cope Laws of Rhode island" (\$1.50). This was probably the equivalent of an eighteenth-century parlor. The house also contained a kitchen. The east room below contained a large mahogany table and two other tables, a looking glass, and eight chairs, and was probably used for dining. The east room had a spacious closet, as it

²⁵Clarke, 276.

contained a quill wheel and a woolen wheel at the time of the inventory. Room usages undoubtedly changed after Job Greene's death, and it is possible that Warriner carried on her business from the east room.²⁶ In her daybook, she mentioned that a client's work in progress was "in the closet [with her] name on it."²⁷ The link is by no means conclusive, but is worth considering.

Mary Anne Warriner had three siblings: Christopher Rhodes (1786-1825), who was a merchant who married a woman from Charleston, South Carolina, and died at a young age of scarlet fever in that city; Susannah (1788-1869), who married into the Spalding family, important manufacturers in Warwick; and Simon Henry (1799-1885), who was also an important local manufacturer and an antiquarian, particularly late in his life.

Mary Anne Warriner's husband, Abner Morgan Warriner, was born in Palmer, Massachusetts, on April 15, 1787.²⁸ From 1813 to 1814, he employed his young brother-in-law Simon Henry Greene manufacturing cotton checks (a patterned cotton textile) in Hartford, Connecticut.²⁹ Being a young man at his death on February 1, 1816, Abner Morgan Warriner died without a will. An inventory of his personal estate lists only his clothing, which included one pair of boots, one pair of shoes, two hats (one of which was

²⁶Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1791-1816, microfilm, 303-305.

²⁷MAW, c. July 30, 1835, 1.

²⁸Edwin Warriner, *The Warriner Family of New England Origin* (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1899), 62.

²⁹Cole, 1031.

paper), one “out Side Coat” worth seven dollars, two coats, one of which was worth seven dollars, three pairs of pantaloons, five pairs of stockings, one pair of socks, four waistcoats (one made of silk), four shirts, and one old great coat, altogether valued at \$35.55.³⁰ The type, value, amount, and variety of clothing described, particularly the silk waistcoat, would have suited a man who owned capital and had an interest in the textile industry. As he died at an early age, little else is known about Abner Morgan Warriner.

If her daybook is any indication, Mary Anne Warriner all but lost touch with her late husband’s family. She made only one reference to the Warriner family, “Dec 1 Sunday . . . I have written to Mrs R. Warriner Boston No 55 Portland Street.”³¹ In contrast, Warriner was very close to her siblings and their families. Her sister’s daughters Almira, Abby, Caroline, and Mary Ann Susan appear frequently in the pages of the daybook. Often they were used as models for fitting bonnets (for example, “size to fit M A Susan”³²), suggesting that they were often right at hand. Warriner seemed to be particularly fond of Abby. She noted Abby’s marriage on August 26, 1836 to Cyrus Harris, son of Dr. Stephen Harris and Eliza (Greene) Harris. She notes “Cyrus and A Harris went to house keeping at Greeneville Nov 22 Teusday fair weather 1836.” In her will, Warriner left her niece Abby,

³⁰Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1797-1816, microfilm, 463.

³¹MAW, December 1, 1839, 392. Mrs. R. Warriner may have been Mary Anne Warriner’s sister-in-law, Rebecca Rich Warriner, who married William Bostwick Warriner on June 30, 1808; Warriner, 95.

³²MAW, August 21, 1835, 4.

The Sum of One hundred Dollars to be expended in the purchas of a Silver cake basket or any other piece of plate of the same value, which she . . . may desire the said piece of plate to be marked as follows “Abby Harris from her Aunt Mary Ann Warriner” with the day and year of my decease annexed.³³

To her three other nieces, sisters of Abby, Almira, Caroline, and Mary Ann Susan, she left “the Sum of Twenty dollars each.”³⁴ She left each of her nephews “a plain heavy gold ring not exceeding in Value the sum of three dollars each.”³⁵

Most of Warriner’s estate was left to her beloved son, Job Greene Warriner. Job was born in Hartford in 1814. As a young man, he and his cousin Christopher W. Spalding used the upper story of a wool mill in Warwick to manufacture Kentucky jeans.³⁶ In 1838, Warriner recorded her son’s departure to the West:

Job G Warriner left here on Sunday morning for St. Louis Missouri Sept 16, 1838—carried with him about 30 letters of introduction from different individuals among them one from the Hon. N. Knight Phipp Allen Esq. Dr. Stephen Harris—I. L. Hughes Waterman & Arnold &c&c.³⁷

Clearly she was proud of him, as she laboriously listed his letters of introduction in her diary.³⁸ In the pages of her daybook, Warriner recorded the dates she received or heard of letters from him, where they were written and when postmarked. Twice she noted his

³³Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1845-1859, microfilm, 218.

³⁴Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1845-1859, microfilm, 218.

³⁵Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1845-1859, microfilm, 218.

³⁶Fuller, 202.

³⁷MAW, September 16, 1838, 420.

³⁸MAW, August 4, 1839, 413.

birthday (October 26) in her book, indicating not only how important he was to her, but how the act of writing in her book reinforced that relationship. Over the next few years, she received letters from him from St. Louis, Mobile, Fort Winnebago, Terre Haute, and Pittsburgh. She monitored news about him as only a mother could; on one occasion she wrote, "Heard today that Job has taken passage from Mobile to Providence." On the next line, her note "erronious report" barely hints at the disappointment she must have felt. In a similarly unimpassioned tone she noted his health on another occasion, "Job has a turn of bilious cholic Monday took 9 doses Morphine got relieved at 3 OClock."³⁹ His use of drugs would be his death; on February 22, 1850, the Rhode-Island Country Journal reported his obituary:

DIED . . . In San Francisco, Dec 24th JOB GREENE WARRINER, aged 35, formerly of Centerville, Warwick, and more recently of New York. The immediate cause of his death was an over dose of laudanum taken as a remedy for sickness.⁴⁰

Job died in California the year of the gold rush, less than a year after his mother's death.

Mary Anne Warriner died on January 30, 1849. The cause of her death is unknown. The rural supplement to the Providence Journal listed her obituary:

[Died] in Centreville, Warwick, widow of Mr. Abner M. Warriner, and daughter of Col. Job Greene, deceased, in the 55th year of her age.

Her funeral will take place this afternoon, at her late residence, at 1 ½ o'clock. Relatives and Friends are invited to attend.⁴¹

³⁹MAW, August 5, 1839, 407.

⁴⁰Rhode-Island Country Journal, February 22, 1850, 3.

⁴¹*Supplement to the Rhode-Island Country Journal*, February 2, 1849, 2.

Although she was a milliner for at least seven years, and probably longer, it is revealing that the newspaper identified her as a widow and daughter, rather than as the independent businesswoman she was. She was instead defined in relation to the men in her life. This is most striking since she was married to Abner Morgan for only two years before his death. She lived most of her life as a businesswoman in a largely female world. The obituary indicates the relative value of women's work and standards of propriety in the nineteenth century. Although the millinery trade was more lucrative and respectable than other needle trades, Warriner's family connections warranted higher regard, and were therefore used in her obituary.

The inventory taken upon Warriner's death lists her investments, credits, and household goods:

23 Shares in the American Bank Prov. a Value	
50 Dolls pr share	1150.00
7 Shares in the Union Bank Prov. per Value	
50 Dols pr share	350.00
Note against Simon H. Greene dated January 1st 1847	1700.00
Cash on Hand	177.60
Book account considered good	13.99
Due from Simon H. Greene	26.46
3 Bushels Corn @65cts	1.95
1 ½ Tons Hay 10.00	15.00
1 Bbl Cider	1.50
Lot of Crockery	10.00
7 large & 16 Small Silver Spoons	12.50
Sugar Tongs & Butter Knife	3.00
1 Centre Table & 1 Settee	4.00
8 Cane Seat Chairs & Carpet	12.00
1 Air tight Stove & Looking Glass	13.00
3 Window Blinds & Entry & Stair Carpet	2.25
1 Carpet & Clock	6.50
1 Franklin Stove 2.00—24 Chairs 6.00	8.00

5 Tables 7.50—2 light stands 1.50	9.00
1 Wash Stand Ewer & Basin	1.00
1 Bedstead, Bed & Bedding	15.00
3 Small Looking Glasses	1.00
15 yds Straw Matting	1.50
8 Beds & Bedding	30.00
1 lease Draws 6.00—1 Desk 1.50—2 Trunks 5.00	7.50
2 Carpet bags 2.00—2 Bedsteads 1.50	3.50
Crockery Stoneware &c	5.00
Wooden Ware Baskets Tubs &c	5.00 ⁴²

The list included supplies on hand in resalable condition, including corn, cider, and hay (indicating that she kept animals). The most highly valued objects were the beds and bedding; altogether, one bedstead, nine beds, and bedding were valued at \$45. She had twenty-three silver spoons, a pair of sugar tongs, and a butter knife. These were some of the only luxury items listed. Her household undoubtedly included other luxury goods such as teawares, as well as utilitarian kitchen wares, clothing, and the tools of her trade (although the tables, chairs, and looking glasses would have been useful in her business). Perhaps at the time of her death she shared these items with other household residents, and the objects were therefore excluded from the inventory.

Warriner had \$177.60 worth of cash on hand. Much of her wealth (\$1500) was invested in bank stocks. Her estate also included large amounts of money that she had loaned to her brother Simon Henry Greene, undoubtedly to be used as capital in his textile processing business. Being in the position to loan money, Warriner was an example of the way a woman could help determine the success of the local industrial economy, not as a

⁴²Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1845-1859, microfilm, 235.

consumer, but as a supplier of capital. Her involvement in her family's business also allowed her the freedom to benefit from its success. When her son left for the West, Warriner wrote him a check for \$200 from her brother's business: "Let I. G. W. have a check from S. H. Greene & Co. for 200 dols besides one hundred in cash making \$300 dols in all to go to the west."⁴³ Her inventory also listed "book account considered good" valued at \$13.99. This suggests that she was still in the millinery business at the time of her death. As a woman who had the ability to lend and invest large amounts of money, was her millinery business necessary for her livelihood? The amount of work she took on suggests that it was more than a hobby. Warriner's business was a source of cash which enabled her to participate in the wider economy of Warwick.

In her will, Warriner instructed her executor to "use and improve any share of the . . . pew Number Thirty Three in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Centreville."⁴⁴ The church was built in 1831 and the first pastor was Moses Fifield (1790-1859), who was also a school teacher, cashier at a local bank, and a friend and neighbor of the Greene family.⁴⁵ Like many early nineteenth-century New England towns, Warwick was affected by the Second Great Awakening, a period of widespread religious revivalism in New England and New York: "a Great reformation is going on in this and adjacent villages 27 individuals rose for Prayers on Friday evening including a number of children at Ishmial

⁴³MAW, September 17, 1838, 384.

⁴⁴Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, 1845-1859, microfilm, 219.

⁴⁵Cole, 969; Fuller, 199.

Wilcox.”⁴⁶ Warriner’s monitoring of her community in her daybook included even the most personal concerns, such as the states of people’s souls. She often praised people who died well: “Mrs. Barbara Wing wife of Freeman Wing died Oct. 2, 1838 with the dysentary leaving an evidence to all that the transition was a glorious one,”⁴⁷ or in one case, showing her surprise: “Wm Levally died of Centreville aged about 78 years with an inflammation in his Leg acknowledging that he had need of prayers and that he did himself pray which was very unexpected to many who knew him to have been a decided Atheist.”⁴⁸

Warriner’s surveillance of the community was part of her role as a female member of a well-established local family with power and influence over local social, cultural, and economic life. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich associates this mentality particularly with women: “Some part of [Martha Ballard’s] duty was to be aware of the activities of others. In this respect, her behavior corroborates the importance of affiliation in the psychology of women.”⁴⁹ Women were often unofficial record-keepers in their communities, reinforcing the ties between friends and neighbors.

Warriner’s associations with Warwick’s heritage, powerful families, and

⁴⁶MAW, c. January, 1838, 423.

⁴⁷MAW, October 2, 1838, 386.

⁴⁸MAW, October 21, 1837, 421.

⁴⁹Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Martha Ballard and Her Girls: Women’s Work in Eighteenth-Century Maine” in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 82.

prosperous industrialists must have benefitted her success as a businesswoman. She may have initially borrowed money from family members to start her business, but by the time the daybook was written, Warriner was in a position to loan large sums of money. Although she is missing from all accounts of early industry in Warwick, her wealth, including profits from her business, aided the success of her family's industrial ventures, making her relationship with men one of reciprocity rather than dependence.

Chapter 3

THE MILLINERY BUSINESS

The needle trades were among the few professions open to women in the nineteenth century, and were, in fact, dominated by women. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, needlework was done primarily by men. Women began taking over the trade in the eighteenth century, and by the nineteenth century, propriety kept men from the fitting rooms of milliners and dressmakers.¹ According to Wendy Gamber, “the sexual division of labor in the custom fashion trades created a ‘female economy’ in which the principal actors—proprietors, workers, and consumers—were women.”²

Fictional portrayals of milliners reveal attitudes toward working women in the nineteenth century. Milliners were usually portrayed as either working class women trying to gain respectability or genteel women forced into work by some calamity.³ Neither position was considered desirable over dependence on a well-employed husband.

¹It should be noted that although men still tailored riding habits for women in the nineteenth-century, Warriner made a habit (179, 197, 199). She did not seem to make any men’s clothes.

²Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy; The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 2.

³Gamber, *Female Economy*, 6.

Fictional female proprietors were rarely portrayed favorably, often made to look either villainous or ridiculous. In addition, writers often portrayed milliners as the cause of excesses in fashion, as they were shown inducing unsuspecting customers to purchase unnecessary trifles.⁴ In this way, popular writers reinforced nineteenth-century norms by portraying women's work outside the home as a last resort rather than an opportunity. One example is Joseph Holt Ingraham's "The Milliner's Apprentice; or, The False Teeth: A Story that Hath More Truth than Fiction in It," published in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1841. The protagonist, Caroline Archer, daughter of a highly respectable merchant, was forced into a millinery apprenticeship when her widowed mother's savings were lost after a bank failure. The milliner, Mrs. Carvil, described as a lady with "very little sense . . . and a very great deal of temper," is more concerned with her profits than her apprentice's well-being.⁵ Through her virtue and a number of serendipitous plot twists, however, Caroline is rescued from the disagreeable situation by a young man who recognizes her genteel qualities and marries her, securing both her financial future and that of her family.⁶

In reality, some women chose the millinery business over marriage. Most early-nineteenth century milliners and dressmakers were the single daughters of middle-class farmers or artisans who could afford the cost of apprenticeship.⁷ Unless their families

⁴Gamber, *Female Economy*, 16-19.

⁵Joseph Holt Ingraham, "The Milliner's Apprentice; or, The False Teeth: A Story that Hath More Truth than Fiction in It," *Godey's Lady's Book* 22 (Jan. 1841): 195.

⁶Ingraham, 194-206.

⁷Gamber, *Female Economy*, 11.

were very wealthy, unmarried women would need a means of supporting themselves. Given their ownership of land and involvement in local industry, Warriner's family probably could have afforded an apprenticeship. Although there is no indication that Warriner served a period of indenture, she obviously learned her skills from someone, perhaps a relative or friend. It is likewise uncertain whether Warriner chose the millinery trade because she was widowed, or if she had been trained before or during her marriage. As a woman from a reputable and successful family, she probably could have married again quite easily, but instead chose to be an entrepreneur. Considering the success of her business, marriage might not have been her best option: "Matrimony represented less a refuge than a gamble to tradeswomen who pondered it; those who married risked both their psychological autonomy and their economic security."⁸ Despite her family's wealth, Warriner did have to earn a living to take care of herself and her son. Her family's wealth was an important resource, however. She may have borrowed the capital needed to start her business from her family, and it would have been important for her to have cash reserves to back her up when her debtors did not pay in a timely fashion. A successful milliner often had family support, real estate, or other investments—her business was not her only economic resource.⁹ At the time of her death, Warriner had \$1500 invested in

⁸Gamber, *Female Economy*, 27.

⁹Mary Ann Poutanen, "For the Benefit of the Master: The Montreal Needle Trades During the Transition, 1820-1842." M. A. Thesis, McGill University, 1985. Microfiche. 57-58, quoted in Amy Simon, "She Is So Neat and Fits So Well": Garment Construction and the Millinery Business of Eliza Oliver Dodds, 1821-1833." (M. A. Thesis, University of Delaware), 80.

Providence banks, and must have relied on the income from these investments.

In 1844, the Providence directory listed thirty-four millinery businesses, all of which were owned by women. Two of these were run by partnerships between seemingly unrelated unmarried women. Of the thirty-six women in the millinery business, twenty-two were identified as “Miss.” Out of the remaining women listed as “Mrs.,” some were probably widows.¹⁰ In the late nineteenth century, widows were the second largest category of milliners after women who had never been married, and were commonly in their thirties and forties.¹¹ This statistic probably had not changed much since the first half of the century.

Businesswomen needed enough education at least to read, write, and cast accounts. By the mid-nineteenth century, almost all women in New England were literate, almost twice as many as in 1780.¹² Warriner was not only literate enough to keep her accounts, she sometimes recorded quotes from literary works and noted in her diary that she had loaned someone two books: “Self Condemned and David Dumps.”¹³ As quoted in chapter one, Warriner’s brother described her as a woman whose “mind was poetical and

¹⁰Benjamin F. Moore, *The Providence Almanac* (Providence: B. F. Moore, 1844), 57.

¹¹Gamber, *Female Economy*, 32.

¹²Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 15.

¹³MAW, October 21, 1839, 427.

literary.”¹⁴ Warriner may have been formally educated in school or may have been taught at home by family members. She used her education for business as well as pleasure.

Although she never referred to herself as such in the daybook, others would have undoubtedly called Warriner a milliner. Originally the word meant a native of Milan, but it came to be associated with the sellers of fashion items for which Milan was famous: bonnets and other accessories of dress. *The Ladies' Hand-book of Millinery and Dressmaking*, published in 1844, defined millinery as “the preparation of bonnets, caps, collars, and some other articles.”¹⁵ In *The Panorama of Professions & Trades, or Every Man's Book*, written in 1839, Edward Hazen defined a milliner as “one who manufactures and repairs bonnets and hats, for ladies and children. Her business requires the use of pasteboard, wire, millinette, silks, satins, muslins, ribands, artificial flowers, spangles, and other materials, too numerous to be mentioned.”¹⁶

Warriner might have also been referred to in the period as a “dressmaker.” Dressmakers often made bonnets in addition to other garments. Hazen noted, “This business [lady's dress-maker] is nearly allied to the foregoing [millinery business], and is,

¹⁴Henry Lehre Greene, includes an autobiography of Simon Henry Greene dated October 6, 1874 (MS, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence), 7.

¹⁵*The Ladies' Hand-Book of Millinery and Dressmaking* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1844), 10. *The American Ladies' Memorial* (Boston, 1850) and *The Ladies' Self-Instructor in Millinery, Mantua Making, and All Branches of Plain Sewing* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1845) are very similar variations of this text.

¹⁶Edward Hazen, *The Panorama of Professions & Trades, or Every Man's Book* (Philadelphia: Uriah Hunt, 1839). It is significant that Hazen uses only feminine pronouns to refer to milliners and dressmakers, indicating the female dominance of the trades.

therefore, often carried on in conjunction with it. This is especially the case, in villages and small towns, where sufficient business cannot be obtained in the exclusive pursuit of one branch.”¹⁷ This was true for Warriner, who made dresses and other garments in addition to headwear. In a large city like New York or Philadelphia, Warriner might have been able to dedicate her time to making just bonnets or just dresses and other garments; however, in Providence, one of the largest cities in New England in 1844, nine of the thirty-four millinery businesses were also listed under “Dress Makers.”¹⁸

In the nineteenth century, how-to manuals on dressmaking and millinery were being printed for a general audience. Although they may have appealed to a sense of thrift, they did not replace milliners and dressmakers. *The Workwoman's Guide*, published in London in 1838, claimed to include “instructions to the inexperienced in cutting out and completing those articles of wearing apparel, &c., which are usually made at home” as well as “explanations on Upholstery, Straw-plaiting, bonnet-making, knitting, &c.” This implies that bonnet-making was not usually done at home, although the book does provide basic patterns and instructions for anyone with the ambition to try it. The instructions provided by *The Workwoman's Guide* were general at best, and did not reflect current fashions: “Bonnets being . . . dependent in a great measure on the fancy and whim of the day, will only be treated of as to the general modes of making them up, and a few of the

¹⁷Hazen.

¹⁸Moore, 1844, 52.

very plainest shapes given.”¹⁹ Similarly, *The Ladies Hand-Book of Millinery and Dressmaking* provided only basic instructions, justifying its simplicity by stating,

Fashion is ever changing, so that to lay down invariable rules for any portions, and especially those which may be considered the ornamental ones, of female attire, is altogether impossible: still the general principles are invariable, and the alterations demanded by the fickle goddess who presides over the ladies’ wardrobe exhibits her power, not so much in the alterations of general costume as in an ever-varying attention to details; so that of most articles of dress it may be said, “Ever varying, still the same.”

The author attached a note to this statement that “The latest fashions can always be seen, however, at Mrs. DEUEL’S, 297 Broadway, — a lady of taste and judgment, who stands at the head of her profession.”²⁰ Was the book written by Mrs. Dueul? Manuals like these did not pose much of a threat against the millinery business, as an instruction book was no substitute for years of training and experience, and the same consumer impulses that drove people to purchase the books also sent them to the millinery shop. If anything, the information that readers obtained from these books might have helped them to communicate better with their milliners about both their options and the latest fashions. As a site of interaction and exchange among women, the millinery shop was in no danger of becoming extinct in the mid-nineteenth century.

A milliner or dressmaker was not simply a woman with typical needle skills dedicating most of her time to making garments for others—she was a highly-skilled

¹⁹“A Lady,” *The Workwoman’s Guide* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1838; reprint, Guilford, Connecticut: Opus Publications, Inc., 1986), 158.

²⁰*Ladies’ Hand-Book*, 9-10.

professional. Warriner possessed a wide range of skills used in the millinery and dressmaking business. First, she was capable of cutting and fitting garments. These tasks were the most highly skilled in the needle trades. Some women brought their fabric to Warriner for cutting, while others had her purchase it for them. In 1835, Warriner noted, "I am to cut S[arah] Fenner['s] dress on Saturday in 2 weeks . . . if she does not buy her cloth I am to get it."²¹ Three years later she charged Mrs. Christopher Arnold twenty-five cents for "cutting [a] dress."²² This was the typical amount that Warriner charged for cutting. The next year she charged L. K. Hull seventeen cents for cutting a dress.²³ Hull's dress may have been of a simpler cut or may have been for a child.

Some women were reluctant to cut expensive cloth, and probably prevented costly mistakes by bringing their work to a professional. A knowledgeable cutter would have the right tools for the job (a heavy pair of shears and possibly patterns) and would use the least amount of fabric possible by strategically laying out the pieces along the grain of the fabric to save money and achieve the best drape and fit of the garment. Furthermore, she would have the best knowledge of fashion, much of which depended on details such as the length of a seam or the width of a sleeve.

Warriner also fit clothing for customers, a task that required considerable skill and experience. Rather than designing the garments in the traditional manner by draping the

²¹MAW, October 28, 1835, 12.

²²MAW, June 4, 1838, 146.

²³MAW, May 1, 1839, 220.

fabric directly over her client's body, however, it seems that she often began by using a standard pattern and her client's basic measurements.²⁴ She would fit the garment to the woman after she basted the pieces together. For example, Warriner recorded an order for a "dress . . . to try on Teusday night . . . sleeve pattern just long enough."²⁵ Patterns will be discussed at greater length in chapter five; however, it should be noted that, although patterns saved time, in an age of corsets and close-fitting fashions, a proper fit was essential for a well-dressed appearance. Such a fit required expert tailoring after the garment was partially assembled. Some women had Warriner finish the garment, while others brought home the pieces and did the stitching themselves to save money. Stitching, particularly the long seams, was a time-consuming, but relatively low-skilled task. In large establishments it was performed by seamstresses, the lowest-paid group of needleworkers.

Labor was inexpensive compared to other costs entailed in acquiring a dress. In this entry from 1839, for example, Warriner itemized the cost of a woolen dress:

Mercy Clapp Dr to woolen dress	8.52
Cambrick 50¢ linen 25	.75
silk to cord 17¢ & thread 4¢	.21
2 skeins sewing silk 12¢ belt 3	.15
Making dress	1.17

²⁴Warriner may have occasionally used the traditional pin-to-fit method; in one case she referred to a "cloth measure" for a child. Perhaps she did not have a pattern small enough for the child. She also referred to a "string measure." In this case, she perhaps used a piece of string rather than a tape to take the measurements. MAW, February 2, 1841, 364.

²⁵MAW, April 21, 1838, 127.

Cape	.41
Belt	.06
	11.38 ²⁶

In this case, the price of labor “Making dress 1.17” was about ten percent of the cost of the dress. It is important to note, however, that woollen fabric was particularly expensive. The expense of the fabric might vary, but the cost of sewing would not change much except in relation to the complexity of the design. It is difficult to know how many hours of labor went into making a dress. Clapp ordered her woollen dress on March 18, 1839.²⁷ Warriner recorded the cost on April 12, 1839, probably when the garment was completed. Many other orders were being made up simultaneously, however, so it is impossible to tell how much time was dedicated to this dress, or how many people worked on it. One contemporary record indicates that a Massachusetts dressmaker received \$6.86 for eleven and three-quarters days of work (about \$3.50 per week) in 1847. This was more than three times the pay that a seamstress might earn, reflecting the hierarchy of needle trades that existed in the nineteenth century.²⁸

Like dressmaking, millinery work was highly skilled. In addition to sewing and fitting skills, milliners needed both a knowledge of fashion and the creativity to design sculptural bonnets. The woman who performed this highly-skilled work was often the proprietor of the shop. Those proprietors who would be successful needed not only

²⁶MAW, April 12, 1839, 209. Warriner’s calculations were not always correct.

²⁷MAW, March 18, 1839, 203.

²⁸Cited in Gamber, *Female Economy*, 12.

needle skills, fashion sense, and creativity, but also business skills and polished manners. They needed to appear gracious, fashionable, and well-dressed, as they interacted directly with clients, and were the best advertisement for their business. They worked with expensive materials like those listed by Edward Hazen above, and often retailed fashion accessories such as ribbons and gloves. Warriner sold bandboxes, stockings, and gloves, as well as fabrics and notions she purchased for clients on trips to Providence. As a dressmaker and milliner, Warriner would have been at the top of the needlework hierarchy in her community.

Along with his description of the millinery trade, Edward Hazen included an illustration (figure 4) of a milliner's shop with ladies trying on hats that would have been fashionable around 1835. The room looks more like a domestic interior than a shop, equipped with fashionable late-neoclassical furnishings. The furnishings are particularly well-suited to the millinery business, as there is a cheval glass on the left and two looking glasses on the wall in which ladies could view their finery. The center table has no chairs surrounding it, but rather is used for the display of hats on stands. The milliner attends to a customer while two women sew off to the side of the scene. If the space depicted is strictly commercial rather than part of the milliner's home, she has made every effort to present a comfortable and genteel setting for her clients.

The daybook yields few clues about Warriner's work space; it is uncertain whether Warriner conducted her business from her home or a shop. The daybook does not indicate that she paid any rent. Warriner did mention several stores in the daybook, but it

seems that she was referring to the businesses of her family and clients rather than her own. As discussed in chapter two, her mention of a closet suggests that she may have been working in her family's home. On one occasion, she noted that the flower she would use to trim a client's bonnet was "in the dressing table."²⁹ This evidence is inconclusive, however, as a shop, like the one depicted in the illustration in Hazen's book, could have been made comfortable with domestic furnishings. As listed in her inventory at the time of her death, Warriner owned a center table, probably similar to the one illustrated in figure 4, five additional tables, thirty-two chairs, and four looking glasses, all of which would have been useful in her trade.³⁰ It is entirely possible, therefore, that Warriner operated her business out of her home.

Making a living in any of the needle trades was not easy. In 1837, Harriet Martineau declared that "the lot of the needlewoman [is] almost equally dreadful, from the fashionable milliner down to the humble stocking-darner."³¹ Milliners and dressmakers made little profit for their long hours of work, particularly during the busy seasons. At age twenty-five in 1831, Esther W. T. Grout, daughter of a minister in Hawley, Massachusetts, tried to learn the milliner's trade in the hope that she would be able to support herself. When her health failed, she wrote, "'Perhaps [I] flattered myself too

²⁹MAW, c. April 15, 1839, 233.

³⁰Warwick, Rhode Island, Probate Court Wills, microfilm, 310.

³¹Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, vol. 2 (New York, 1837), 258, quoted in Elizabeth Anthony Dexter, *Career Women of America, 1776-1840* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Company, 1950), 163.

much with the idea of being able to bear my own expenses.”³² Social reformers worried about the health of needleworkers, particularly in England. The “Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dress-makers and Milliners” was founded in the effort to promote better working conditions for needle-workers, including a twelve hour work day, no work on Sundays, improved ventilation, health care, and savings plans.³³ In an American etiquette manual, Eliza Farrar made a dramatic plea for considerate treatment of needleworkers:

There is [a] topic intimately connected with dress, which involves very serious consequences to a suffering portion of the community. I allude to unreasonable exactions upon dress-makers, milliners, and seamstresses. The young belle, who is very desirous of having a dress made, in order to wear it on a particular occasion. Near at hand, urges her dress-maker to get it done at a certain time, little thinking of the aching sides, and throbbing temples, and smarting eyes, and toil-worn fingers, that must be overtasked and deprived of proper natural rest, in order to gratify her in this particular. She converses about it with the flourishing head of a fashionable establishment, and thinks not of the pale and lean girls who are to do the work, and lose a night's sleep to accomplish it. A peep behind the scenes would so touch the sympathies of a generous nature as to make the new dress lose all its importance, when viewed in connexion with the sufferings of those who are to make it.³⁴

The conditions described by these social reformers bear little resemblance to those probably borne by Warriner. Warriner was no doubt busy, particularly at certain times of

³²Diary of Esther W. T. Grout, Feb. 13, 1831 (Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Library Collection, Deerfield, Massachusetts), quoted in Cott, 39.

³³W[illiam] McIlwaine, *The Dress-Maker: A Prize Essay*. [London]: Aylott and Jones, 1846), 6.

³⁴[Eliza] Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend*. (New York: Samuel S. & William Wood, 1838), 135.

the year; however, she lived in a small community, knew most of her clients, and was even related to many of them. Her customers were usually generous with the amount of time they allowed her to complete their orders, often asking her to send word when it was finished (for example, “send word when she can have it”), or to complete it at her convenience (“as soon as we can”).³⁵ Occasionally she would note that someone needed the work to be done immediately, for example “is in a hurry for it”³⁶ Typically customers would plan to pick up their garments a week or two after placing the order. Warriner’s business was probably not as fast-paced as urban millinery establishments.

Similarly, Warriner’s business was not as anonymous as were urban shops. It was rare that she did not know her clients. It would be impossible to tell how often clients had to tell her their names, but in a few instances, Warriner did not know and did not ask. For example, in one case Warriner referred to a customer as “Stranger woman.”³⁷ Did Warriner forget the woman’s name or forget to ask? Was she too embarrassed to ask, or was it unnecessary for her to write it down because she was the only stranger? On another occasion, Warriner wrote, “A girl brought a bonnet to trace.” Above this she wrote, “Alice Underwood”³⁸ Did it take her a moment to remember or was she waiting for a clue? In a small community it might have been insulting not to recognize someone or

³⁵MAW, May 28, 1839, 244; MAW, Nov. 2, 1840, 352.

³⁶MAW, August 5, 1838, 171.

³⁷MAW, September 22, 1838, 173.

³⁸MAW, January 3, 1840, 293.

embarrassing to ask a person's name. Warriner's social network would have eventually produced the information she needed. The relationships between Warriner and most of her clients were stronger than those simply required by business alone, indicated by the fact that she often recorded not only orders but information about people's lives.

Just because Warriner's relationships with her clients were often personal, however, did not mean that there was no exploitation. Although there is no indication of conflict in the daybook, business relationships inherently involve transactions of power. In her book, *The Female Economy: The Milliner and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*, Gamber writes about the relationships between producers and consumers:

Tradeswomen and their clients created a peculiarly personal culture of consumption that thrived upon intimate—albeit frequently contentious—interactions, revealing relationships that were at once “sisterly” and ruthlessly exploitative. By placing dressmakers and milliners at the “service” of their customers, producer-consumer relations both confirmed existing class inequalities and created new ones.³⁹

Warriner's shop was a meeting place for women of different classes and the site of exchange of news not only about fashion, but also people. The millinery business was run by women for women, and therefore the shop was a female space; as late as 1900, a letter to the *Illustrated Milliner* explained, “women in villages consider the millinery store strictly a woman's public property where they can meet, exchange views, try on hats, and stay as long as they please. In fact, it is a kind of home place down town.”⁴⁰ The

³⁹Gamber, *Female Economy*, 4.

⁴⁰*Illustrated Milliner*, I (June, 1900): 30, quoted in Gamber, 104.

producer-consumer relationship nevertheless produced inequality. Did Warriner produce as much gossip as she received? Gamber discusses the “emotional labor” aspect of the producer-consumer relationship. As a service professional, Warriner probably had to listen to her clients’ troubles as well as to make their clothes. Probably not all of her clients would have reciprocated by listening to her news.⁴¹ Those of a higher class probably did not want to be reminded of her necessity to work for a living, while those of a lower class may have envied her entrepreneurial position. Warriner fell squarely within the middle class. Had she been married, she probably would not have had to work, and would have, in fact, brought money and family status to the marriage. She had the skills and ability to earn a comfortable living, and her business persona as well as her appearance must have reflected this station.

In her book, *The Gentleman and Lady’s Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment, Dedicated to the Youth of Both Sexes* translated to English from the sixth Paris edition in 1833, Elisabeth Celnart described the requirements of polite interaction between a shopkeeper and customer:

When a customer calls, the shopkeeper should salute him politely, without inquiring after his health, unless he be intimately acquainted with him. He then waits until the customer has made known his wishes, advances toward him, or brings forward a seat; then shows him, with great civility, the articles for which he has inquired. If the purchaser be difficult to suit, capricious, ridiculous, or even disdainful, the shopkeeper ought not to appear to perceive it; he may, however, in such cases, show a little coldness of manner.

The part which shopkeepers have to act is frequently painful, we

⁴¹Gamber, *Female Economy*, 103.

must allow; there are some people who treat them like servants; there are some *capricious fashionables*, who go into a shop only to pass the time, to see the new fashions, and who, with this object, make the shopkeeper open a hundred bundles, show heaps of goods, and finish by going out, saying in a disdainful tone, that nothing suits them. There are some merciless purchasers who contend for a few cents with all the tenacity of avarice, obstinacy and pride; however, under all these vexations, the shopkeeper must show constant urbanity. He waits upon such imperious purchasers with readiness, but nevertheless in silence, for he must be convinced that the more complying we are to people of this sort, the more haughty and difficult they show themselves.⁴²

It is significant that Celnart addressed this issue in a book directed to ladies and gentlemen. She included within that audience people who worked in service professions, qualifying Warriner and her colleagues as “ladies.” Although she insisted upon politeness, including tacit compliance with the whims of a customer, she did not require complete subservience, allowing “a little coldness of manner” on the part of the shopkeeper, and stressed that they should not be treated below their class “like servants.” Celnart allowed shopkeepers a large amount of dignity. Non-urban American communities like Warriner’s were no doubt more egalitarian than the scenes Celnart described; however, politeness and tact were essential to good business even, or perhaps especially so, among friends and neighbors.

Americans considered French customs and fashions to be particularly genteel, and for that reason some milliners and dressmakers imitated the manners of the country where most fashions originated. Edward Hazen wrote, “The fashions for ladies’ dresses are

⁴²[Elisabeth] Celnart, *The Gentleman and Lady’s Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment, Dedicated to the Youth of Both Sexes* (Boston: Allen & Ticknor, and Carter, Hendee & Co., 1833), 33-34.

chiefly procured from France, and the dress-makers from the country are, therefore, often preferred by fashionable ladies: sometimes, however, a dress-maker, having a French termination, will answer the purpose.”⁴³ Attitudes like these encouraged some milliners and dressmakers referred to themselves as “Madame” or “modiste” and to adopt French names.⁴⁴ Lois Banner stresses the irony of these false self-presentations:

Ironically, although dressmakers were pioneers among women workers and potentially important models of independent behavior for women, they remained votaries of fashion who often assumed false identities (such as French names and backgrounds) to indoctrinate American women into an overweening concern with physical appearance and dress.⁴⁵

Many women had better opportunities if they pretended to be someone they were not. Warriner did not need to adopt an artificial identity—her ancestry and economic standing were undoubtedly well-known and respected. It is significant, however, that her brother referred to her as “almost aristocratic.”⁴⁶ She may have affected manners that reinforced her authority over taste and judgment in dress.

The relationships between business owners and their patrons, many of whom were also neighbors and friends, were complex. Historian Edward S. Cooke, Jr. writes that making a craft product in a rural economy could be “a favor, a service, an obligation, or a

⁴³Hazen.

⁴⁴Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 29. See also Gamber, *Female Economy*, 107.

⁴⁵Banner, 32.

⁴⁶Henry Lehre Greene, 7.

payment.”⁴⁷ Although Warriner did business with a wide range of people, she recorded all transactions in a similarly formal manner, indicating that she expected family members as well as strangers to pay her for her work. She may have sometimes worked for her family or friends at no cost, but she did not record this work in her daybook.

Even among friends and family, or perhaps especially so, etiquette would have prevented a milliner from demanding payment.⁴⁸ In a small community, it must have been impossible and undesirable to separate one’s public, business persona from one’s personal life. The local economy could not have tolerated anonymity, but rather depended on highly complex systems of obligations and credit as well as cash. Although many people eventually settled their debts in cash, almost all of them depended on credit. Warriner frequently used the phrase “short pay” to refer to money still owed to her:

Sarah Sweet bonnet & cap	3.35
paid three dollars	3.00
short pay	.35 ⁴⁹

Some paid up front for an order: “Mrs. Merrill sent a bright half dollar to buy her a sinchan silk apron.”⁵⁰ The economy in Warwick was neither a cash economy nor one entirely built on credit or exchange. Some people paid with food products; for example,

⁴⁷Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *Making Furniture in Pre-Industrial America: The Social Economy of Newtown and Woodbury, Connecticut* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5.

⁴⁸Gamber, *Female Economy*, 117.

⁴⁹MAW, May 19, 1838, 138.

⁵⁰MAW, c. April 16, 1836, 25.

“Mrs. Brown up above Washington[, Rhode Island] for 2.25 in a week or 2 is to pay in butter and eggs at 25 cents per pound,”⁵¹ “Making over bonnet for Miss Roby Bates is to pay in sugar,”⁵² “Mrs. Susan T. Wheelock whole bill is five dollars twenty five cents out of this we are to pay for the milk dont know how much.”⁵³ Some paid partially in food products:

Mary C. Andrews straw & trimming 1.00
By 35¢ in cheese 6 eggs .42
It leaves .58⁵⁴

In one case, Warriner notes that she “engaged to make a cap for Mrs. Remington as an exchange.”⁵⁵ This is intriguing, but there is no indication of what goods or services Mrs. Remington provided in exchange. Finally, sometimes people transferred debts: “Mrs. Button is to discount her bill with I Miller.”⁵⁶ This probably meant that one of the women would settle her debt with the other by paying the other’s debts to Warriner.

Often Warriner mentioned that a transaction would take place at the “store.” As there is no indication in the daybook that Warriner was running her business from a shop rather than her home, it is likely that these notations refer to either her family’s store, or

⁵¹Maw, September 30, 1837, 102.

⁵²MAW, February 2, 1841, 361.

⁵³MAW, April 14, 1838, 124.

⁵⁴MAW, June 5, 1837, 92.

⁵⁵MAW, April 21, 1838, 128.

⁵⁶MAW, c. June 14, 1840, 331.

perhaps the customer's store. For example, "Mrs. James Pearce bonnet made of the nicest brown silk by Thursday for 14 shillings am to take out of the store if she cant get the money."⁵⁷ This probably meant that Warriner would either get fourteen shillings worth of credit at their store or could actually go there and pick up the cash. She also mentioned that people paid at the store, "Waite & Hannah Matterson both to be paid at the Green Store paid at the store."⁵⁸ Complex systems of exchange involving cash, credit, goods, and services characterized Warwick's local economy.

Within this system, Warriner was often busy writing notes to herself. Sometimes she made mistakes and rectified them. Other times she lost track entirely ("Whole bill 4.12 I think"⁵⁹) or reminded herself not to make the same mistake again ("Dont forget Lucy Cottrell this time."⁶⁰) Much of this system was customary, and depended on trust and neighborliness. Sometimes she sent change via other people: "I sent pay by Amanda Mitchell to Harriet Briggs 75¢ in silver."⁶¹ In one case she enclosed change in the package with the goods, indicating that the person had paid up front: "[Sarah's black bonnet is] to

⁵⁷MAW, March 13, 1838, 120. Warriner used both dollars and pounds to refer to money, indicating that as late as 1840, Americans were still using British money systems.

⁵⁸MAW, September 4, 1836, 102.

⁵⁹MAW, May 28, 1839, 245.

⁶⁰MAW, c. June 2, 1836, 39.

⁶¹MAW, April 13, 1838, 125.

be sent in the band box with the straw one [bonnet] direct to Sarah Hopkin Exeter Post Office if there is any change send it in the box next week.”⁶²

Warriner might have relied on her memory for a number of things, but money was too important to risk forgetting. Sometimes she wrote her estimates down as she told them to her customers so she wouldn’t forget: “I told Mary Colvin I would make her a bonnet with a ruffle on the crown for 3.50 with 2 small bows without flowers or 3.90 with the prettiest flowers I have.”⁶³

Warriner often wrote in her daybook as people were talking to her: “Sarah Ann Card pink hood florence for 14/ bow on side and put something underneath either flowers yes flowers or tab shape like Alice Shippee in 2 weeks.”⁶⁴ Clearly Warriner was taking notes while Card was still deciding. The immediacy of this record-keeping process makes the daybook even more valuable for learning about the producer-consumer relationship. The language of the daybook says much about the immediacy of the transaction, relationships, and reliability of the source (that is, Warriner). The process of ordering a bonnet often took more than one consultation with the milliner. Sometimes people had not made up their minds or changed their minds, for example, “Diana Bennet . . . is to conclude about ribbon when she come up in a week from Thursday next,”⁶⁵ or “Amey

⁶²MAW, c. May 12, 1841, 372.

⁶³MAW, July 7, 1838, 160.

⁶⁴MAW, December 13, 1838, 186.

⁶⁵MAW, May 4, 1839, 224.

Dyer altered mind will have crape & ribbon like Rhoda Bennet.”⁶⁶ These entries show that Warriner wrote what information she had at the time. Though incomplete, they were immediate, and are therefore very reliable descriptions of the transactions as they developed, though they may not reflect the final outcome of the order.

Warriner’s emotions seldom show through her writing in the daybook. In one intriguing case, however, Warriner used a mocking tone: “Mrs King alter [as] fashionably as any [of] the girls ‘George says.’”⁶⁷ Presumably George was Mrs. King’s husband. In this entry, Warriner mimicked Mrs. King as she quoted her. Was Warriner making fun of a woman who (unlike herself) had to consult her husband about her dress or spending habits, or was she jealous that King had an indulgent husband? In reality, the person who held the purse strings in the family had a great deal of control over Warriner’s livelihood. A married woman might order a bonnet, but not be able to pay for it if her husband did not come through with the money. In this way the public and private spheres so often touted by historians as being separate, overlapped in very meaningful ways in the economy.⁶⁸ The tone of this entry may be mocking, but it is an indication of the inequality between the worker and consumer. Warriner probably would not have mocked Mrs. King directly to her face. The daybook serves not only as a business record, but occasionally as an emotional outlet, as well.

⁶⁶MAW, c. June 13, 1840, 330.

⁶⁷MAW, June 1, 1841, 382.

⁶⁸Gamber, *Female Economy*, 119-122.

Although the millinery business was in some ways independent from the whole economy, the two intersected at many points. For example, Warriner frequently recorded that men had driven her to Providence in the stage or delivered wood to her house. Warriner and Mr. Scott, the stage driver, kept a running account, sometimes in her favor, and sometimes in his. Mr. Scott's debits were for his wife's and possibly his daughters' purchases. He paid for them by providing Warriner with transportation to Providence at fifty cents each way, and with goods such as raisins and, in one case, a kettle.⁶⁹ Similarly, Warriner did business with N. Gardiner, who delivered meat on several occasions: "N. Gardiner whole bill for Cloak nine dollars had 1 leg veal of him."⁷⁰ The cloak was for Hannah Gardiner, probably his wife. Men often went to Warriner to settle their wives' debts, sometimes with goods and services, sometimes with cash: "Mr Isaac Babson for Elizabeth bonnet 3.70."⁷¹ Often Warriner paid her debts to them by making clothing.

Warriner also dealt with men like Conrad C. Ellery, who sold her supplies. In one instance she mentioned, "I owe C. C. Ellery for pink gross de nap [gros de naples, a fabric] 1 ½ yds at 75¢ 1.12."⁷² A few pages later, enclosed between the leaves of the daybook, were scraps of silk and the inscription, "CONRAD C. ELLERY, DRY GOODS DEALER, 6, ARCADE, PROVIDENCE" (figure 5). It is important to note that Ellery

⁶⁹MAW, January 10, 1839, 192; MAW, July 16, 1840, 342.

⁷⁰MAW, January 22, 1838, 117.

⁷¹MAW, June 2, 1838, 145.

⁷²MAW, January 10, 1839.

Fifteen of the thirty-four millinery shops in Providence were located there.⁷¹ Warriner no doubt stopped by these shops to look at the new fashions. Across the street from Ellery was Leander Draper's dry goods business at 7 Arcade.⁷² Warriner or her customer must have shopped there on at least one occasion, as she recorded that the customer wanted "that drab ribbon at Ware's."⁷³ Warriner probably also patronized Nathaniel P. Draper's dry goods store in Providence, as a customer made a similar request for a ribbon from Draper.⁷⁴ Other names Warriner mentioned that probably referred to stores include Brastow, Richards, and R. Aborn.⁷⁵

May was a busy month for Warriner's business. Once in May of 1838 and several times in May of 1840, Warriner turned to Milton Sumner for a supply of ready-made bonnets, which she probably trimmed and sold. Although information in the daybook does not indicate from where Sumner was obtaining these bonnets, it is likely that he was collecting them from the cottage straw industry that was widespread in New England in the nineteenth century. In 1810, Rhode Islanders turned out at least 7000 straw bonnets.⁷⁶

⁷¹Moore, 1844, 57.

⁷²*The Providence Directory* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1838), 132.

⁷³MAW, May 15, 1841, 375.

⁷⁴Draper was located at "7 West'r, 160 Benefit." *Providence Directory* (1838), 48; MAW, May, 1839, 233.

⁷⁵MAW, April 17, 1840, 302; MAW, June 13, 1840, 329; MAW, September 18, 1835, 9.

⁷⁶Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963), 105.

collecting them from the cottage straw industry that was widespread in New England in the nineteenth century. In 1810, Rhode Islanders turned out at least 7000 straw bonnets.⁷⁸ According to the state census in 1840, \$66,427 in capital was employed in the manufacture of hats, caps, and bonnets: .6% of state's total industries. When textile manufacturing, the primary business in Rhode Island, is excluded from the total, the hat, cap, and bonnet industry claimed 2.5% of capital invested in manufacturing in Rhode Island.⁷⁹

The two bonnets that Warriner purchased from Sumner in 1838 were relatively inexpensive at \$1.75 each.⁸⁰ Those she bought in 1840 were more expensive at \$5.25 to \$6.25 each. Perhaps the latter bonnets were trimmed. Because she took inventory repeatedly, it is unclear how many bonnets Warriner purchased in 1840, but the daybook indicates at least ten. A typical entry involving Sumner's bonnets does not indicate whether Warriner was making a profit from the sale of these bonnets: "May 2 I took a bonnet of M Sumner at 5.25 Friday I owe him now twelve dollars for 2 bonnets I have sold Dorcas Dawley and Betsey Bentley and have 2 left they will be 11.25."⁸¹ Perhaps it

⁷⁸Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963), 105.

⁷⁹Benjamin F. Moore, *The Providence Almanac and Business Directory* (Providence: B. F. Moore, 1843), 72.

⁸⁰MAW, May 13, 1838, 134.

⁸¹MAW, May 2, 1840, 305.

was worth it to Warriner to be able to please her customers rather than make them wait during the busy season.

Warriner also purchased or exchanged goods or services for supplies from other women. For example, in May 1838 a Mrs. Dorrance provided Warriner with a supply of straw braid:

15 yds dunstable of Mrs. Dorrance
9yds more at 3 cents .27
20 yds more at 1 1/4 cents .25⁸²

During that year Warriner purchased a total of seventy-nine yards of various types of straw braid from Mrs. Dorrance. She probably paid her in cash, as the daybook does not indicate that Mrs. Dorrance purchased anything from Warriner. Although Warriner sold many straw bonnets and was certainly capable of working with straw, she probably did not braid straw herself, as it was a time-consuming and low-paid task. She could afford to have people like Mrs. Dorrance do it for her.

Warriner could not have performed all of the work recorded in the daybook alone. Like most milliners, she had helpers, almost all of whom were family members. She often used the word “we” to refer to herself and those who would help her prepare an order; for example, “Adeline Babson white frock to make next week as we conveniently can” and “trim as we think best.”⁸³ “We” might have included Warriner’s mother, Abigail Greene. It probably also included Warriner’s nieces. She often referred to her helpers as “the

⁸²MAW, c. May 18, 1838, 154.

⁸³MAW, May 3, 1838, 131; MAW, May 28, 1838, 143.

girls.” The names of Warriner’s nieces Almira Greene, Abigail, Caroline Eliza, and Mary Ann Susan Spalding appear frequently in the book. In 1840, they would have been 30, 24, 21, and 13 respectively. Mary Anne Susan was not married when the daybook was written.⁸⁴ Almira and Caroline never married.⁸⁵ Perhaps they supported themselves with the skills they undoubtedly learned from their aunt. Abigail married Cyrus Harris in 1836. She is the only niece who regularly placed orders with Warriner. Perhaps this was because, as a married woman, she did not have as much time to spend working with her aunt, and instead became a customer. Henry Rhodes and Christopher Waterman Spalding were the brothers of the girls. They are also mentioned in the daybook as helpers: “Send it down by Henry or Christopher.”⁸⁶ They were not, however, the regular fixtures that the girls were in the daybook. The girls may have spent large amounts of time with their aunt, and probably lived close by. Warriner frequently used them as models for sizing bonnets and other garments. She would note, for example, that she should make a bonnet “about to fit M A Susan.”⁸⁷ Warriner also used her mother as a model (“bombazine bonnet to fit Mother”), further suggesting that they were living together.⁸⁸ Often the girls would make

⁸⁴Mary Anne Susan Spalding married Benjamin Congdon Allen in 1856 and named her daughter Emma Warriner after her aunt. Louise Bawnell Clarke, *Greenes of Rhode Island with Historical Records of English Ancestry, 1534-1902* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1903), 450.

⁸⁵Clarke, 450.

⁸⁶MAW, October 8, 1839, 202.

⁸⁷MAW, July 8, 1839, 267.

⁸⁸MAW, February 13, 1840, 296.

deliveries or carry messages to customers: “Nancy Bentley Alpine Dress Bodice waist send her word when I get it ready by the girls next Saturday.”⁸⁹ Warriner’s nieces occasionally traveled. For example, in August of 1839, Warriner wrote, “Almira left here this morning for Newyork.”⁹⁰ Almira undoubtedly returned with news about the latest fashions—information that would have benefitted her aunt’s business.

One of the girls was probably responsible for the second handwriting that occasionally appears in the daybook. One entry in this hand reads, “Mrs James Carr wants a drawn silk bonnet for her mother about the size of Mrs. Warriner.”⁹¹ As the writer of this entry referred to Warriner as “Mrs. Warriner,” she may not have been a member of the family; however, a formal relationship between a niece and an aunt was not unusual.

Only one person who might have been working for Warriner was not a close relative. In 1840 she noted, “Mrs Jones has worked 9 ½ hours.”⁹² Unfortunately she does not say how much she paid her or what work she did. It may not have had anything to do with the millinery business, as Warriner occasionally recorded household expenses in the daybook. On two occasions, Warriner lent Joseph Jones small amounts of money (three and four dollars, respectively).⁹³ His connection to Warriner was probably through Mrs.

⁸⁹MAW, April 30, 1838, 130.

⁹⁰MAW, August 18, 1839, 426.

⁹¹MAW, May 1, 1839, 220.

⁹²MAW, January 3, 1840, 293.

⁹³MAW, January 11, 1840, 294; MAW, March 5, 1841, 363.

Jones. Usually Warriner lent money only to family members. She may have been related to the Jones family, but it is more likely that she was giving Mrs. Jones work and lending Mr. Jones money out of charity.

As a skilled artisan, Warriner was an important resource in the community; however, propriety and other social constraints would have circumscribed her freedom and restricted her power within the community. The implications of class on her business were complex. In one respect, she reinforced the status of her wealthy clients not only by providing them with fashions worthy of their station, but also by performing labor for them. Not all of her clients were more prosperous than she, however. Warriner also performed labor for working women who either lacked the time or skills to construct proper headdresses for themselves. Her business also incorporated women of all ages. Her success probably depended on the contributions of her nieces, while they were at the same time learning a trade that may have supported them in their maturity.⁹⁴ Personal and economic relationships among women revolved around class, skill, and the availability of resources. In the complex economy of the early industrial community of Warwick, economic relationships extended far beyond the point of sale.

⁹⁴In a similar way, midwife Martha Ballard depended on her nieces' help. See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Martha Ballard and Her Girls: Women's Work in Eighteenth-Century Maine" in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

Chapter 4

THE BONNETS

Bonnets were an essential part of women's dress in the 1830s and 1840s. Not only did they shade the face from the elements, but they also framed the only part of the body (aside from the hands when they were not gloved) that was visible when a woman was fully dressed. Warriner custom made fashionable bonnets in a variety of shapes, colors, and materials to suit her individual clients' preferences and tastes.

The informality of Warriner's daybook defies a precise statistical analysis, as she frequently omitted important information, instead committing it to memory. For example, she would write a customer's name and the word "bonnet" along with the price. We are left to guess whether the bonnet was straw or silk, trimmed or plain, new or reworked. Warriner often recorded orders several times if she was still waiting for payment. In addition, some of the words she used had multiple meanings; "florence" could refer to either lightweight silk taffeta or straw braid.¹ Despite these limitations, however, the daybook does yield a wealth of information about the types of bonnets Warriner was producing.

¹In one case, for example, Warriner made a "Florence braid" bonnet lined with "Florence" silk. MAW, c. March 8, 1839, 202.

Bonnets typically had several parts, including a brim that framed the face; a crown, sometimes fitting close to the head, sometimes perching at an angle on top of the head to accommodate a high hairstyle or simply to follow the fashion; a “cape,” made of fabric, straw, or ribbon, which shaded the neck; strings, which were tied under the chin and held the bonnet in place; and trimmings which could include ribbons, bows, ruffles, flowers, feathers, or other decorations. Both straw and fabric bonnets were often stiffened with wire to help them hold their shape. Warriner frequently mentioned a “tab” in association with a bonnet or being sold on its own. These were made of fabric, ribbon, lace, or straw and sometimes included ribbon or other decorations. It is unclear what Warriner meant by this term, and it is not a word that other writers of the period used.

Warriner made bonnets in a variety of shapes, including bonnets with angled crowns and flaring brims, as well as close or cottage bonnets with straight top lines and deep brims that obscured the face. Stylish during the 1830s, flared bonnets were most popular among Warriner’s customers. They often gave her precise instructions on how extreme they wanted their bonnets to look; for example, Maria Franklin must have been insistent when she asked Warriner to make the brim of her bonnet to flare, as Warriner wrote it twice and underlined it each time: “made to flar to flar.”² Mary Perry preferred a more moderate design “not very flaring nor too straight.”³ Bonnet shapes did not change much between 1836 (figure 6) and 1839 (figure 7); however, by the late 1830s, bonnet

²MAW, May 18, 1838, 154.

³MAW, May 24, 1840, 319.

brims developed a drooping curve at the chin so that, when tied, the brim almost completely encircled the face.

According to the *Ladies Hand-book of Millinery and Dressmaking*, "Amid the variety of shapes for bonnets, the straight cottage form may, in our opinion, claim the pre-eminence: they will always, more or less, be fashionable, being general favorites."⁴

Cottage bonnets were particularly popular in the 1840s, but Warriner also made them in the 1830s. In 1840, Godey's *Lady's Book* described the cottage form:

The hats are getting smaller, and a more becoming shape. The front and crown seems all of one piece, and towards the back the form gradually slants, so the back of the crown is even lower than the bonnet. These little bonnets set very round and comfortable to the face; they are very long at the sides; the trimming is as simple as possible or quite the contrary. Some have flowers and lace, others only a trimming of the material.⁵

The late 1830s and early 1840s were a period of transition in bonnet fashion. A Godey's fashion plate (figure 8) from 1840 shows three figures. The child in the center wears a cottage bonnet with a straight horizontal top line, while the woman on the right wears a wide drawn bonnet and the woman on the left wears a bonnet that flares dramatically around the face.

Another style Warriner made during this period was the Quaker bonnet; for

⁴*The Ladies' Hand-Book of Millinery and Dressmaking* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1844), 12.

⁵*Godey's Lady's Book* 20 (August 1840): 90. In this quote, the words "hat" and "bonnet" were used interchangeably. Warriner sometimes did the same. For example, in this case the "hat" to which she referred was a cottage bonnet: "fashionable . . . hat . . . cottage form." (MAW, May 30, 1840, 322.)

example, “Hannah Spencer blue black silk Quaker bonnet white to line . . . nice . . . broad plait over the crown.”⁶ Although not all of the women who ordered Quaker bonnets from Warriner were necessarily Quakers themselves, the style was named for a sect that called for modesty and simplicity in dress. Quaker bonnets were often made of black, grey, or fawn silk, sometimes with contrasting linings, and the crown was pleated to the brim. Aside from their pleats, Quaker bonnets were very plain. An inscription written in the Winterthur Library’s copy of *Ornament, or the Christian Rule of Dress*, written by Mary Torrey in 1838, reveals the Quaker disapproval of excess ornamentation: “This Book was written by my Sister Mary Ide Torrey in reply to some criticisms made to her because she wore a Bow Ribbon on her Wedding Bonnet. These criticisms were made by a sort of Quaker Lady in Providence R. I./ From A. W. Ide July, 1900.” None of Warriner’s Quaker bonnets were trimmed with ribbons or flowers, and were therefore relatively simple and inexpensive. Warriner evidently had a pattern for Quaker bonnets, as she mentioned that Mary Spencer would need hers “deeper at ears than pattern.”⁷

When recording an order, Warriner often noted the woman’s usual hairstyle so she could design and fit the bonnet properly. Fashionable hairstyles corresponded to bonnet designs, and vice versa. For example, entries such as “does her hair very low,” and “short hair ties it in her neck this week” could well have been reminders to shape or fit the bonnet

⁶MAW, May 25, 1840, 320.

⁷MAW, June 8, 1840, 327.

accordingly.⁸ Doubtless for the same reason, she also noted if the client had “a great deal hair,” “much hair,” or “very little hair.”⁹ In one case, Warriner noted that “Mrs Widow Brayton wears false hair in front.”¹⁰ At a time when framing the face with curls was fashionable, Mrs. Alexander Walker, author of *Female Beauty, As Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress*, written in 1840, explained that “those who are much occupied and whose hair will not at any time remain in curl, are sometimes compelled to wear a false front.”¹¹

Warriner made several types of bonnets, including straw, cloth-covered, and drawn. Straw was by far the most popular, although by the 1840s, it was only appropriate in the spring and summer, and then only in the morning. Cloth-covered and drawn bonnets were considered more formal, and were generally more costly than straw.

Warriner sold several varieties of straw bonnets, including Italian types known as Tuscan, Florence, or Leghorn; English Dunstable; and braids named for the number of strands from which they were made, most often 11 braid. Florence and Leghorn bonnets were smoother and thinner than English, as the Italian plaits were sewn side by side,

⁸MAW, July 9, 1838, 160; MAW, July 23, 1835, 2.

⁹MAW, March 31, 1840, 298; MAW, July 31, 1840, 343; MAW, April 20, 1839, 212.

¹⁰MAW, November 1, 1837, 105.

¹¹Mrs. A[lexander] Walker, *Female Beauty, As Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress* (New York: Scofield & Vorhies, J. and H. Langley, 1840), 255.

whereas the English plaits were overlapped.¹² Tuscan braid was not in fact braided, but rather woven on a loom using straw as the weft. Italian straw bonnets were generally the most expensive. New Englanders, however, made imitations of all of these types of straw products and called them by their traditional names. For this reason, without being able to examine Warriner's bonnets, it is impossible to know where the straw braid originated.

Figure 9 shows a fine straw (possibly leghorn) bonnet fashionable in the late 1830s. The bonnet is trimmed with a decorative straw border at the edge of the brim and plaid silk ribbon wrapped around the crown and tied in a bow on the inside of the brim. The brim is stiffened with buckram and, like the cape, is lined with lightweight cream-colored silk (figure 10). The crown is lined with muslin. Figure 11 shows a bonnet fashionable in the 1840s made of a fancy straw braid.

Warriner sometimes "pieced out" straw bonnets. Piecing out may have involved laboriously sewing rows of straw together to form the parts of the bonnet, or may simply have meant assembling and tailoring the bonnet for the customer. Warriner and her helpers probably did not spend much of their time braiding large quantities of straw, however. As noted in chapter three, Warriner was purchasing straw braid from Mrs. Dorrance, and probably others. According to an article in *Harper's Magazine* in 1864, it would take about three hours to sew twenty-five yards of medium width braid, the

¹²Jean Davis, *Straw Plait*, Shire Album 78 (Aylesbury: Shire Publications Ltd, 1981), 19.

quantity required for a bonnet.¹³ Bonnets were smaller in the 1860s than they were during the period of the daybook; bonnets of the 1830s and 1840s would have taken even longer to make.¹⁴

Fabric bonnets were made on stiff foundations such as pasteboard, stiffened muslin, willow (a combination of wood and cotton fibers), or buckram (figure 12).¹⁵ Figure 13 shows a bonnet made of silk over a stiff buckram foundation with milliner's wire around the edge to help keep its shape. The bonnet is trimmed with striped silk ribbon around the brim and over the crown, and is lined with muslin (figure 14). Warriner covered and lined bonnets with a variety of silk or silk blend fabrics, including florence, lutestring, velvet, figured silk, sheered silk, satin, and, bombazine. She may have also purchased prefabricated bonnet foundations; however, there is no indication of this in the daybook. The *Ladies' Hand-book of Millinery and Dressmaking* provided basic instructions for covering foundations, which could be made at home or purchased from a milliner:

Detach the crown from the front, and shape the material by the pattern, tack the lining and the outside to the front and cord, or otherwise secure the edges. Then make the crown, covering the top first; then put on it the piece of the material that is to go round, in a proper manner, and secure it

¹³“Straw Bonnets,” *Harper's Magazine* 29 (October 1864), 581.

¹⁴“Straw Bonnets,” 580.

¹⁵Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy; The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 179-80; “A Lady,” *The Workwoman's Guide* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1838; reprint, Guilford, Connecticut: Opus Publications, Inc., 1986), 158.

at the top by a single or double row of cord, fit it as tightly as possible to the frame you had before prepared, and fasten it on at the back.¹⁶

Edward Hazen, who did not claim to be an expert on any of the trades he described, provided an equally useful description of bonnet-making:

The first part of the process of making a hat, or bonnet, consists in forming a crown of millinette; which operation is performed on a block, of a suitable size and shape: and to this is applied pasteboard, or millinette, edged with wire. The foundation having been thus laid, it is usually covered and lined with some of the materials just enumerated [satins, muslins, ribands], and finished by applying to it the trimmings required by the fashion, or by the individual customer.”¹⁷

These commonsense directions would have been no substitute for a demonstration or lesson in bonnet-making from an experienced milliner. They do, however, give us a basic understanding of how cloth bonnets were constructed.

Drawn bonnets were made from pieces of fabric gathered onto hooped ribs usually made of cane (figures 12 and 13). *The Ladies' Hand-Book of Millinery and Dressmaking* recommended using 1 1/4 yards of muslin, a printed cotton cloth, or two yards of silk or satin. The book provided basic instructions for sewing channels for the ribs and assembling the bonnet. Written in 1844, *The Ladies' Hand-Book* reported that “drawn bonnets have been much worn, and are not likely to be soon out of favor; they are well adapted for summer, and have an exceedingly neat appearance if proper pains are taken in the construction of them; they have also another advantage—they may be made of almost

¹⁶*Ladies' Hand-Book*, 16-17.

¹⁷Hazen.

any material, and look well either in silk or satin.”¹⁸ Drawn bonnets followed the fashions in shape just as straw and silk bonnets did; figure 15 is a detail of a *Godey’s* fashion plate from 1839 that shows a dramatically flared drawn bonnet. An original drawn bonnet shown in figure 16 has a straighter top line. It is similar to one worn by the woman on the right in the *Godey’s* fashion plate of June, 1840 (figure 8).

Warriner produced many drawn bonnets. The daybook also indicates that she converted calashes (or collapsible ribbed bonnets popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for protecting elaborate hairstyles) into more fashionable drawn bonnets: “Mrs Austin brought green calash to make drawn bonnet like Aunt Marys put the white lining in find ribbon to cross over use the old strings if there is any left.”¹⁹

Warriner’s bonnets were typically priced between \$3 and \$8, depending on the complexity of the design as well as the cost of materials. Many customers asked her to incur “as little expense as possible,” or to make the bonnet “as cheap as it can be afforded to look well,” while a more extravagant customer told her, “Price no object wants it nice.”²⁰

Altering bonnets comprised much of Warriner’s millinery business. The most common method of altering a bonnet was to update its shape and add new trimmings, such

¹⁸*Ladies’ Hand-book*, 12.

¹⁹MAW, May 30, 1836, 30.

²⁰MAW, June 3, 1839, 248; MAW, April 29, 1839, 219; MAW, May 30, 1839, 247.

as seasonable flowers and fresh ribbons. In one case, Warriner charged a customer 62 ½ cents for the labor it took to alter a straw bonnet, a considerable sum, but far less than the price of a new bonnet.²¹ Warriner often used part or all of an old bonnet to make a new one. Customers pinched pennies by “[making] the old lining do again,” or “[bringing] an old lining” for Warriner to “use . . . if [it was] large enough.”²² Warriner’s work often included replacing broken or stained bits of straw and altering bonnets by adding or removing rows of straw braid. Enlarging a bonnet probably involved unraveling the end of the straw braid and adding additional straw. In one case, Warriner took a short cut by adding on a whole section of preassembled straw: “put on a flare instead of plaiting it on.”²³

Warriner also revived bonnets that had become faded or dirty. *The Workwoman’s Guide* provided instructions on turning bonnets: “The bonnet is picked to pieces, and the plat turned, so that which was inside is then outwards, the bonnet should be cleaned well before being unpicked.”²⁴ Warriner regularly “whitened” old straw bonnets for her customers. Whitening, or bleaching, consisted of fumigating them with sulphur.²⁵ The

²¹MAW, April 28, 1839, 218.

²²MAW, July, 1838, 155; MAW, June 3, 1839, 248.

²³MAW, February 13, 1839, 198.

²⁴*Workwoman’s Guide*, 290.

²⁵R. Griffin, *The Book of Trades* (Glasgow, 1835): 152.

Workwoman's Guide provided instructions for another variation of bleaching, but, like dyeing, this was probably done by a professional rather than in the home.²⁶

In the 1830s and 1840s, bonnets were frequently trimmed with combinations of ribbons, feathers, flowers, and other ornaments. Some bonnets were trimmed with the same fabric from which they were made.²⁷ Warriner did not specifically mention trims except for ribbon, flowers, and fabric. She frequently trimmed bonnets with artificial flowers in “bunches” or “wreaths.” A newspaper advertisement from the *Massachusetts Spy* illustrates the availability of artificial flowers to tradesmen like Warriner in the 1830s:

ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS — CHEAP

Benjamin Jacobs, Jr.,

No 44 Washington-street, a few doors north of State-street, Boston, offers for sale an extensive assortment of Artificial Flowers at 50 per cent discount from his former prices, being about relinquished this part of his business. Among which are Cap Flowers, in bunches and wreaths; Bonnet (flowers) (in bunches and wreaths).²⁸

Warriner attached flowers to the inside of the brim as well as to the crown. One daybook entry is particularly descriptive regarding the use of flowers and other trims: “Harriet Spencer wants a drab bonnet with a ruffle on edge tucked in bunches not too flaring flowers pink . . . large gay flowers inside and out something near 5 dols in 2 or 3 weeks send word if sooner ribbon not to go round crown not long wreath but a bunch outside to

²⁶*Workwoman's Guide*, 281.

²⁷*Workwoman's Guide*, 158.

²⁸*Massachusetts Spy*, March 31, 1830, quoted in Jane C. Nylander, “Bonnet Trimming,” (Unpublished paper written for Old Sturbridge Village, n. d.).

fall over a little.”²⁹ Figure 17 shows a brightly trimmed bonnet with a variety of flowers. Changing flowers to suit the season was a common way to make an old bonnet appear fresh and stylish.

Despite the fact that the most common color of Warriner’s silk bonnets was “drab” (probably a greyish brown), contrasting flowers, ribbons, and other trimmings must have made her bonnets colorful confections. Occasionally Warriner used descriptive terms such as salmon, rose, pea green, fawn, cinnamon, pearl, lilac, blue black, straw, ashes of roses, lead, apple green, cherry, and melon to describe the colors of bonnets and their trimmings. These colorful terms may have been used as trade names by retailers or manufacturers. Customers often chose white for bonnet linings, but some were more colorful, such as one that was described as “apple green.”³⁰ Frank Howard, author of *The Art of Dress* wrote, “The proper and skilful [*sic*] management of a bonnet-lining is perhaps one of the most difficult in the art of dress.”³¹ He went on to explain how to use color and the shape of a bonnet to flatter a woman’s face. He also gave advice about the use of contrasting and harmonizing colors of bonnet trimmings.³² *The Ladies Hand-book of Millinery and Dressmaking* recommended shaded silks for young women and “silks of a light and

²⁹MAW, June 29, 1839, 264.

³⁰MAW, c. August 14, 1835, 4.

³¹Frank Howard, *The Art of Dress* (London: Charles Tilt, 1839), 31.

³²Howard, 30.

undecided color” for adults.³³

Warriner sold colored straw bonnets as well, and may have done some of the dyeing herself. Jean Davis, author of *Straw Plait*, claims that straw dyeing was impractical until aniline dyes came into use in the 1850s because of the impermanence of the color.³⁴ Several books from the period, however, provide directions for dyeing. For example, *The Workwoman's Guide* (1838) provided a recipe for dyeing straw black, and William Tucker's *The Family Dyer and Scourer* (1830) gave recipes for dyeing straw black or brown.³⁵ John W. Parker's *The Useful Arts Employed in the Production of Clothing* (1844) provided directions for coloring straw blue, yellow, red, and black.³⁶ Dyeing was a time consuming task that could not have easily been learned from a book. These manuals, like other books written on craft topics, must have been more informational than instructive to a general audience. Warriner may have used them, as she occasionally dyed various garments for her customers: “Mrs Joseph Merrill left one dollar for coloring dress.”³⁷ Warriner frequently mentioned “colored straw” bonnets in her daybook, but unfortunately she did not indicate what color they were. She may have dyed bonnets

³³*Ladies' Hand-book*, 11-12.

³⁴Davis, 9-10.

³⁵*Workwoman's Guide*, 281-282; William Tucker, *The Family Dyer and Scourer*, from the 4th London edition (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey and A. Hart, [1830]), 112-114.

³⁶John W. Parker, *The Useful Arts Employed in the Production of Clothing* (London, 1844), 165-166.

³⁷MAW, June 4, 1838, 146.

herself, however it is just as likely that she bought the straw or the bonnets already dyed. She also referred to selling figured and speckled straw bonnets. The former may have been a type of braid, while the latter may have been either an unusual variety of straw or a manner of dyeing bonnets.

Warriner's customers demanded a wide range of bonnet styles and types. To meet this demand, she needed a variety of skills. She would have had to adapt these skills to an art that changed more rapidly than perhaps any other media. Often restricted by customers' requests and the materials available to her, Warriner must have been a flexible and resourceful worker, often pushing the limits of old bonnets and materials to reinvent a product as fashionable and attractive as possible.

Chapter 5

TASTE AND FASHION

Mary Anne Warriner's millinery establishment was a local source of fashion information and a clearinghouse where ideas from various people and sources converged. New bonnet designs undoubtedly reached Warriner in a number of ways, such as fashion illustrations, travelers' accounts, and actual garments brought from other places. Some customers came to her with specific instructions; however, their ideas were often based on garments they had seen friends and neighbors wearing, some of which had undoubtedly been made by Warriner. Many of Warriner's customers trusted her taste and judgment, sometimes more than their own. Part of the services she provided was ensuring that her clients would be as fashionable as anyone in the community.

A love of fashion and taste for finery was not restricted to the upper classes. Working class women often spent large portions of their income on clothing. In an age when female mills workers made no more than a few dollars a week, a bonnet would have cost a week's wages or more.¹ In 1826, traveler Anne Royal wrote about the desire for fashion that drove some women to exhaustion:

¹Joseph Brennan, *Social Conditions in Industrial Rhode Island: 1820-1860* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1940), 50.

I have known young ladies supporting themselves to sit up til 12 o'clock at night, to complete a suit of clothes, the proceeds of which was to purchase a fine cap, or a plume of feathers, to deck herself for church. Hundreds of those females thus maintain themselves in a style of splendor; no ladies in the city dress finer. A ten dollar hat, a thirty dollar shawl, with silk and lace, is common amongst the poorer class of females.²

Author Beverly Gordon explains how widespread adherence to fashion blurred the lines between classes:

[The mid-nineteenth century] was a time of rapid and far-reaching social change, incurred by unbridled industrialization and urbanization. Status was no longer ascribed as much as achieved, and proper dress was the outward sign of such achievement. In this newly mobile and liquid society, individuals had to be vigilantly conscious of their presentation of "self"—their social personae. Dress was costume; it functioned as the *sign-vehicle* that conveyed information about the person who wore it. Dress formed the *front* that projected a desired image to the world at large.³

According to costume historian Joan Severa, "it is evident that upper and lower social levels alike—if we exclude the extremely wealthy and the desperately poor—knew about and observed, and at least conservatively accepted, French fashion introductions within one year or less."⁴ Even mill girls working in Lowell, Massachusetts during this

²Anne Royall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the United States* (New Haven: Royall, 1826), 261, quoted in Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 20.

³Beverly Gordon, "Meanings in Mid-Nineteenth Century Dress: Images from New England Women's Writings" *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10 (Spring 1992): 45.

⁴Joan Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), 4.

period pored over issues of *Godey's Lady's Book*.⁵

Fashions changed rapidly in the nineteenth century. With each new issue of *Godey's* magazine there was a new color or accessory in fashion. By the 1820s and 1830s, dress in both city and country was based more on changing fashions than on tradition.⁶ While some styles were long lasting, fashionable variations were virtually endless. For example, straw bonnets were worn throughout most of the nineteenth century, but the shape and decoration varied widely even from year to year. For this reason, people were concerned not only with what was proper, but what was most current. Although people frequently had their bonnets altered to suit the fashion, considering that people wore their bonnets on a daily basis, they had to choose them carefully.

American milliners and dressmakers were not responsible for designing new fashions. Most new women's fashions in the nineteenth century originated in France, and milliners and dressmakers merely adapted these styles to suit American tastes. Eliza Farrar, author of an advice book called *The Young Lady's Friend*, recommended that Americans "mistrust all extravagant French models, and, by modifying our copies of them, escape being made ridiculous, at the will and pleasure of a *marchand des modes* of

⁵Banner, 19.

⁶Banner, 26.

Parisian dress-maker.”⁷ The appeal of French associations was strong, however, and as mentioned in chapter three, some milliners adopted French names and manners.

Fashion illustrations were available to women in Warwick in the 1830s and 1840s from sources such as *Godey's Lady's Book*, which reprinted French plates, although occasionally it took up to a year before the fashions reached America.⁸ Published in Philadelphia beginning in 1830, *Godey's Lady's Book* was the most widely read women's magazine throughout much of the nineteenth century, having a circulation of ten thousand in 1839 and forty thousand by 1849.⁹ Warriner may have also had access to other English and French periodicals; however, the plates would have been similar to those published in *Godey's*.¹⁰

Only the wealthiest milliners traveled to Europe to see the latest fashions first hand. Warriner probably never went that far afield for her fashion information, but must have picked up the latest fashions on her frequent trips to Providence. She may have also seen new fashions when she went on vacation, such as her trip to Connecticut and New York in 1837:

Job Caroline and myself left here for Stonington [“August” crossed out]
Commencement day Brown University Sept 6 Wednesday the Saturday
after went to Long Island and staid 2 weeks returned to New London on

⁷[Eliza] Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend* (New York: Samuel S. and William Wood, 1838), 99.

⁸Severa, 3.

⁹Cited in Severa 3.

¹⁰Severa, 3.

Sunday and Monday to Stonington on Wednesday Sept 27 home again after a very delightful journey.¹¹

Travelers could also bring new fashions to remote locations where fashion news was slow to arrive. In the late 1820s British visitor Mrs. Basil Hall wrote about how grateful a milliner in Louisville, Kentucky, was for the information she gained from Hall's daughter Eliza and Eliza's nurse, Mrs. Cownie:

Mrs Cownie and her little charge turned into a shop in search of something they wished to purchase. This proved to be a milliner's shop, and the old lady was so delighted with Eliza's frock . . . that she begged Mrs. Cownie as the greatest favour to let her see more of her dresses. Mrs. Cownie very good-naturedly returned home for three of the Child's prettiest frocks, and nothing could exceed the admiration, not only of the milliner, but of the numerous ladies whom she sent for to see these beautiful things. . . . Patterns were taken [from them]. . . . They had seen Basil and me walk past and the next petition was the loan of my bonnet to copy, a bonnet which I got the beginning of last summer, but the milliner says that a thing being made from an English pattern or what is worn by anyone well known gets sale so much better and sooner than on account of intrinsic value. . . . The visit ended by her requesting Mrs. Cownie to help herself to a pair of gloves as a compensation for her trouble, which she refused, altho' she allowed Eliza to accept a little parcel of barley sugar kisses."¹²

Similarly, some of Warriner's customers brought in new styles that they wanted her to copy. For example, Mahala and Martha Rice ordered black bombazine bonnets "Made like [the] bonnet [they] brought."¹³

¹¹MAW, September 1837, 421.

¹²Elizabeth Anthony Dexter, *Career Women of America, 1776-1840* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Company, 1950), 170.

¹³MAW, March 28, 1836, 22.

It was not uncommon for milliners and dressmakers to pick apart bonnets or other garments in order to make a pattern from them. Warriner was no exception. In 1840 she noted, “a girl brought in a bonnet to trace.”¹⁴ Warriner made a number of references to patterns in her daybook, sometimes calling them by name; for example, twice she referred to bonnets made by the “Abbotts pattern.”¹⁵ Perhaps this was a pattern made from tracing a bonnet belonging to someone named Abbott. Warriner also refers to an “E Anthony pattern.”¹⁶ Eliza Anthony had purchased several bonnets from Warriner within the previous two years; perhaps Warriner had made a pattern for Anthony from one of her old bonnets, and used it to fit her, as well as other clients. Warriner used the patterns to aid her in designing bonnets to fit her customers. She would sometimes note their sizes in relation to the pattern; for example, “front not as large a[s] pattern.”¹⁷

Warriner also made use of patterns named after a particular style or place. In October of 1838, Warriner made a bonnet by the “Victoria Pattern.” Queen Victoria ascended the English throne in 1837. By 1838, Americans were naming their fashions after the monarch. In May of that year, *Godey's Lady's Book* illustrated a Victoria bonnet

¹⁴MAW, January 3, 1840, 293.

¹⁵Warriner made several references to patterns for several types of garments, including dresses and cloaks. This discussion is limited to bonnets. MAW, May 20, 1836, 32; MAW, c. June 27, 1836, 47.

¹⁶MAW, October 22, 1840, 350.

¹⁷MAW, March 18, 1839, 203.

in its monthly fashion plate.¹⁸ The fashion had evidently spread to Warwick by the following October, when Warriner made the bonnet herself. Warriner also mentioned a “Newyork” pattern. Perhaps she obtained this from a trip to New York or from a traveler who had brought it for her. In 1840, Phebe Ann Wood and Nancy Johnson ordered identical bonnets, requesting that they be “made by the newest pattern.”¹⁹ Patterns would have been a key way that fashion was brought to the community and spread by the milliner.

Warriner used samples as well as patterns to help fit her customers. As mentioned above, Warriner’s own bonnets as well as those of her family members often served as examples of her work for clients to examine and try on. Warriner may have also had other samples on hand; for example, Emeline Whitman ordered a “drab silk bonnet like sample.”²⁰ Sarah Card ordered a bonnet “like one of these samples.”²¹ Perhaps these were bonnets Warriner had made to sell ready-to-wear. Warriner also had samples of materials such as ribbon; one customer requested “striped ribbon something like sample or green where this is part purple.”²² Samples would have served as evidence of the

¹⁸*Godey's Lady's Magazine*, 18 (May 1838), plate.

¹⁹MAW, April 22, 1840, 303.

²⁰MAW, May 28, 1839, 243.

²¹MAW, December 16, 1840, 358.

²²MAW, August 12, 1839, 273.

milliner's taste and skill, and would have served as a point of reference to aid communication between the milliner and her client.

Eliza Farrar believed it was almost an obligation for women with good taste and judgment to set an example for their communities: "In this country [America], where there are no dashing duchesses and elegant countesses to lead the ton, any lady of sense and taste may set a pretty fashion, and thus do her friends and neighbors an acceptable service."²³ Church was one of the greatest fashion clearinghouses. People dressed their best for weekly church meetings, and went not only to worship, but to see and be seen. A woman wrote of her childhood in nineteenth-century rural Connecticut:

In our town you never dressed up much to make calls; parties were few and small. . . . In church everyone saw your clothes, that was where you wore your best. . . . we could sing out of the hymnbooks looking right at the notes and tell whose ruffle was cut in the new way and how Abby Norton's sleeve was set.²⁴

Rarely do we get such a straightforward explanation of the fashion process as that written by S. Hodges, wife of a mill owner in Oxford, Massachusetts, who wrote to her daughter Kate who was away at school in 1864:

I will send you a new straw hat as soon as I find out if there are any new fashions. Hattie Stevens' new one was the old style, trimmed with her old feather and strings that she has worn *Summer and Winter for a year*. Her only new dress for the summer is a black and white check with sash. . . . I think checks in that style are rather *passea* [*sic*]. Hattie got her a check bonnet still of course to match her dress and she was terribly sorry she got

²³Farrar, 103-104.

²⁴Bertha Damon, *Grandma Called It Carnal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1938), 202, quoted in Banner, 19.

either of her things in that style as they have become so common. I think I should get you a straw, by and bye [*sic*], don't you think that best. I imagine I can direct a milliner how to fit one so it will fit your head.²⁵

How much she liked the person who was wearing the fashion item undoubtedly influenced her opinion; as outlined above, association was a powerful force. In one instance, Mrs. Hodges criticized a neighbor's hat, saying "I can assure you she looks like a little witch in it."²⁶ This declaration must surely have been based on more than the hat. Mrs. Hodges took her fashion cues from people she admired. In 1860, for example, she told her daughter that she would send her "velvet for your neck" because she had seen "Julie Butler at a party wearing something like it."²⁷ The same year she sent Kate a hat that was "like what the young ladies in Worcester wear."²⁸

Evidence suggests that simply observing what other people wore was the most common way that fashion spread among women in Warwick. Warriner's daybook entries often refer to clothing worn by various people; for example, "Mrs A E Watson pink silk Hood like Susan Sprague as soon as we can."²⁹ Perhaps Warriner translated customers' requests into her own kind of shorthand by inserting the name of someone who had a

²⁵M. E. Hodges, May, 1864, Letters 1860-1865 (Hodges Family Collection, Archives, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts), quoted in Gordon, 46.

²⁶June 14, 1860, Hodges Collection, quoted in Gordon, 46.

²⁷April 23, 1860, Hodges Collection, quoted in Gordon, 46.

²⁸May 11, 1860, Hodges Collection, quoted in Gordon, 46.

²⁹MAW, January 5, 1839, 191.

similar garment, but some entries, like this one, suggest that her customers used the same method to communicate their requests to Warriner:

Isabella Relf ~~purple~~ lavender silk like Amey Watson only more flaring small head 2 bunches inside one outside by 3rd July next Teusday bonnet to be three dollars twenty five cents 3 ½ without the outside flowers not to exceed 50 ribbon between flowers inside likes that of Caroline Hopkins for outside about 2/ one shilling for ruffle on crown.³⁰

According to the daybook entries, there was no one person whom Warriner's clients seemed to imitate most frequently. Warriner herself was probably the most influential trend-setter. The daybook reveals that she owned a whole array of bonnets that were on hand for people to examine and try on. At various times, Warriner referred to an old velvet bonnet, a florence braid bonnet, an open work bonnet, a drawn bonnet, a mourning bonnet, and a silk bonnet.³¹ In the course of the day book, she also revealed that she had a cape, a black cap, a gown, a hood, a double collar, and a waist.³² Figure 18 shows Mrs. R. B. Dickinson, a milliner from Northampton, Massachusetts, dressed in her finery in 1846. Like Dickinson, Warriner probably made an effort to appear as fashionable as possible to serve as a role model for her community.

³⁰MAW, June 25, 1838, 157.

³¹See, for example, MAW, May 8, 1839, 227; MAW, September 8, 1840, 345; MAW, May 7, 1838, 132; MAW, c. September 13, 1839, 278; MAW, November 29, 1840, 355; MAW, April 17, 1840, 302.

³²See, for example, MAW, August 26, 1839, 275; MAW, April 13, 1840, 300; MAW, December 5, 1840, 356; MAW, January 23, 1839, 194; MAW, November 26, 1838, 181; MAW, October 13, 1839, 282.

Although Warriner frequently used her own bonnets and those that had not yet been picked up as both samples and measures of fit, customers also referred to bonnets they had seen people wearing in the community—some of which were undoubtedly made by Warriner. Some of the newer fashions may have taken some getting use to; Warriner wrote that Rebeckah King, who was ordering a (rather expensive) ten-dollar straw bonnet, “likes Dawleys more as she sees it.”³³ In this kind of a fashion system, competition was important. The Dawleys were apparently the people to emulate: “Sarah Pearce florence braid, for 9 or 9.50 as nice as can be got for that . . . similar to Sarah Tatems[?] or something as pretty . . . as nice as the Dawleys if it cost more.”³⁴ It is significant that Pearce was willing to exceed her budget to keep up with the Dawleys. The Dawleys had indeed paid dearly for their bonnets. Just a week before, Mary and Amey Dawley had ordered florence braid bonnets costing six or seven dollars not including the lining, trimming, or labor. Mary Dawley had requested single crape lining and was still deciding about ribbon, but liked light green. These would have been lavish bonnets, but there is no indication that their shape was new. The richness of the decoration was perhaps more important than the fashion; the cost of the bonnet may have been more important than the style.

It was not uncommon for sisters to order the same bonnet designs. Amey Dawley ordered the same bonnet as her sister Mary (although she said she would, “send word if

³³MAW, c. April 7, 1841, 366.

³⁴MAW, June 6, 1839, 249.

she dont want one too alike theirs”).³⁵ Rhoda Cranston, too, wanted her hat to be made, “just like her sister.”³⁶ This desire for similarity may be in part due to limited exposure to other fashions, but it seems that some relatives enjoyed the associations demonstrated through dress. This may have been particularly true during mourning, when families tended to stay close together. In 1840, for example, Phebe Ann, Alice Ann, and Almira Spencer ordered mourning bonnets “all of a size and alike.”³⁷ One key element of fashion was the tension between differentiation and conformity.³⁸ While most women wanted to be as fashionable as they could afford to be, they probably did not want to appear in a bonnet identical to one of their friends’ or neighbors’; however, blatantly copying one’s sisters was probably more acceptable.

A knowledge of fashion was among the skills a milliner was expected to possess. Although many customers like Isabella Relf had very specific requests, others trusted Warriner more than themselves to produce a tasteful, suitable, and fashionable garment. Frequently customers instructed Warriner to make something “fashionable,” “stylish,” or “new fashioned.”³⁹ Others asked her to use her judgment to make something “tasty,” “as I

³⁵MAW, May 29, 1839, 245.

³⁶MAW, May 27, 1839, 241.

³⁷MAW, July 10, 1840, 340.

³⁸Penelope J. Corfield, “Dress for Deference and Dissent: Hats and the Decline of Hat Honour,” *Costume* 23 (1989): 66.

³⁹For example, see, MAW, November 26, 1838, 181; MAW, July 6, 1840, 338; MAW, c. May 25, 1837, 87.

think proper,” how “I think pretty,” how “I think best,” or how “I please.”⁴⁰

While one woman asked Warriner to make her bonnet “dreadful fashionable,” not everyone wanted to be on the cutting edge.⁴¹ In 1850, author Lydia Maria Child wrote to her friend Anna Loring about a bonnet she wanted to have remade “into modern shape, without being made one atom smaller. . . I have a great dislike for bonnets that go off from the face much, or from which the face obtrudes.” Child knew the milliner would want to make the bonnet fashionable, so she instructed Loring what to tell the milliner “if the fashions [were] against” her.”⁴² Farrar warned readers not to permit their milliners to get carried away at the expense of practicality:

When, at midsummer, your milliner shows you the last Paris fashion in a bonnet, and you see that what ought to shelter the face from the sun, is so formed as to leave it entirely exposed, do not lend your countenance to anything so irrational; but call your ingenuity to invent a modification of it, which shall combine shelter with beauty.⁴³

One of Warriner’s customers requested a bonnet that was “middling fashionable.”⁴⁴

Perhaps she did not want to stand out in the crowd, or thought herself too old to be wearing the newest fashion. Fashionableness was a consumer option; once again, Mrs. King specified that she wanted a bonnet as fashionable “as any of the girls[’—]” George

⁴⁰MAW, September 19, 1835, 9; MAW, February 28, 1838, 119; April 30, 1838, 129; May 7, 1838, 133; May 8, 1838, 134.

⁴¹MAW, Jan. 9, 1841, 360.

⁴²Gordon, 47.

⁴³Farrar, 103.

⁴⁴MAW, June 8, 1839, 250.

says.’”⁴⁵ George probably associated fashion with youth and wanted his wife to look and feel youthful. On one occasion, the patron did not specify how she wanted the product; Warriner wrote, “I presume make it fashionable.”⁴⁶ Unless the customer requested otherwise, Warriner probably made things in the newest styles. This would be the best advertisement for her work, and would signal others that it was time for their old bonnets to be remade or replaced.

“Puffs” (probably loops of ribbon) may be an example of a trend that swept the community. The first reference to puffs came on May 30, 1839: “Sarah H. Dyer line rose florence make pretty close bonnet in 2 weeks nothing inside tied round crown 2 puffs.”⁴⁷ On June 3, 1839, Sarah Ann and Susan Shearman requested “white ribbon puffs” on a silk bonnet adding “price no object, wants it nice.”⁴⁸ The same day, Mrs. Champlain requested “satin puffs.”⁴⁹ The next request came a few weeks later, when Amy Matterson ordered “white gauze puffs inside.”⁵⁰ The next day Abby Vaughan asked Warriner to “puff some

⁴⁵MAW, June 1, 1841, 382.

⁴⁶MAW, April 30, 1836, 27.

⁴⁷MAW, May 30, 1839, 246.

⁴⁸MAW, June 3, 1839, 247.

⁴⁹MAW, June 3, 1839, 248.

⁵⁰MAW, June 24, 1839, 260.

of the ribbon inside.”⁵¹ The next request did not come until August.⁵² Between that time and the last use of the word, around June 1, 1840, the term was used five times. While this is not an overwhelming amount, it is significant that the term comes into usage, and disappears as quickly as it developed.

Milliners were not only expected to know the latest fashions, but also to be able to adapt these fashions to suit their clients. Clients frequently asked Warriner to make their bonnets “becoming.”⁵³ Warriner sometimes recorded physical descriptions of clients that may have aided in making bonnets becoming; for example, she described one client as having a “large head and face.”⁵⁴ She also noted one client was a “tall dark girl.”⁵⁵ Perhaps these descriptions aided her designs. When recording one bonnet order, Warriner wrote, “the front will become her better to have 1/4 inch smaller than E. Anthony pattern.”⁵⁶ This shows not only that she was using patterns, but that she was thinking of the client’s features as she designed the bonnet.

In addition to using her own eye for design, Warriner could have sought advice on this matter from a variety of sources. Books such as Frank Howard’s *The Art of Dress*

⁵¹MAW, June 25, 1839, 261.

⁵²MAW, August 12, 1839, 273.

⁵³See, for example, MAW, March 19, 1838, 120.

⁵⁴MAW, May, 1838, 135.

⁵⁵MAW, September 5, 1839, 277.

⁵⁶MAW, October 22, 1840, 350.

were written for the purpose of teaching this art. Although these books were addressed to a wide audience, they would have been particularly useful for milliners like Warriner. In plate IV (figure 19), for example, Howard illustrated the adaptation of a garment to complement physical features:

When the face is round, the cap or bonnet should come so far forward as to cover part of the cheeks; and should the lower part of the face be broad, this defect may be entirely concealed by bringing the corner of the bonnet in a sloping direction towards the point of the chin. When on the contrary the face is thin, the cap or bonnet should be so worn as to display as much of the cheeks as possible. A wide-fronted bonnet will be found to add considerably to the effect of this arrangement.⁵⁷

Howard also recommended:

Tall ladies should be careful not to increase their height by the adoption of elevated masses, whether bonnets, caps, or in the mode of arranging the hair. Ladies of low stature, on the contrary, are permitted to take advantage of such accessories, and when managed with taste and skill, it is surprising how much may be gained in this manner.⁵⁸

In her very similar book *Female Beauty, as Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress*, Mrs. Alexander Walker provided similar advice: “Avoid extravagantly large head-dresses. The frame must never be larger than the picture, otherwise that which ought to be an accessory becomes the principal object. It is the same with a head-dress of too much volume; it buries the face. Too much elevation and too

⁵⁷Frank Howard, *The Art of Dress* (London: Charles Tilt, 1839), 29.

⁵⁸Howard, 28.

much breadth of head-dress are equally ridiculous.”⁵⁹ Walker and Howard addressed a wide variety of subjects, including color theory and fabric choice.

Olive Watson told Warriner that she wanted a bonnet that was “becoming & suitable and fashionable.”⁶⁰ Customers depended on Warriner to know what was considered proper or “suitable” for each person and occasion. For example, Mrs. James Carr ordered a “drawn silk bonnet for her mother . . . [in a] suitable color.”⁶¹ Warriner would have considered the age of Carr’s mother, the season, the style of the bonnet, and the type of silk she would use when selecting a proper color. Women could turn to etiquette manuals as well as a trusted milliner for advice about the suitability of bonnet designs. In regard to age, for example, Mrs. Alexander Walker specified that “Drawing-room plumes, even marabouts, les esprits, toques d’assemblée, dress berrets, long veils of tulle or blonde, embroidered all round and thrown over the bonnet, are confined as a head-dress to married ladies. Young ladies may adopt every other.”⁶² *The Ladies’ Hand-Book of Millinery and Dressmaking* provided information about the suitability of color in regard to age: “For young persons, bonnets look well made of shaded silks; but for adults, silks of a light and undecided color are, we think, most elegant.” Ultimately, however, the

⁵⁹ Mrs. A[lexander] Walker, *Female Beauty, As Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress* (New York: Scofield & Vorhies, J. and H. Langley, 1840), 362. Howard and Walker contain similar passages.

⁶⁰MAW, May 13, 1839, 231.

⁶¹MAW, May 1, 1839, 220.

⁶²Walker, 382.

author admitted that “good sense” or judgment was the most useful design tool:

No doubt, in the choice both of material and of color, considerable deference must be paid to the prevailing fashion. It is well to avoid the two extremes into which some people are very apt to fall. The one is an entire disregard to the prevailing taste, and the other a servile submission to its tyrannic sway. A medium course is the only sensible one, and, in this, good sense will dictate how far to go and where to stop.⁶³

Consideration of the time of day and the season also played an important role in the selection of bonnets. In the 1830s, straw hats and bonnets were considered suitable for morning and walking, while fabric bonnets were more proper for the afternoon and the promenade.⁶⁴ Fashions changed, however, and by the 1840s, straw was suitable only in the morning from April to September.⁶⁵ Walker instructed that “velvet plush and satin, are the basis of the winter dress; and silk and muslin of the summer costume.”⁶⁶ Even the flowers used to trim the bonnets changed with the season:

In spring, bouquets of blue bells, poppy, jonquille, narcissus, &c. should be used; and the flowers should be changed as the season produces new ones. . . . During winter, there is some difficulty in this respect. Even then, however, bouquets of the early spring, such as violets, lilac, and the flowers already mentioned are not worn: roses alone suit all seasons. Mixed bouquets are not in good taste.⁶⁷

⁶³*Ladies' Hand-Book*, 11-12.

⁶⁴Fiona Clark, *Hats*, The Costume Accessories Series, ed. Aileen Ribiero (New York: W. W. Preston & Co., 1889), 22.

⁶⁵Clark, 27.

⁶⁶Walker, 381.

⁶⁷Walker, 381-382.

Several customers specified that they wanted bonnets that would be suitable for more than one season: “Mrs Eliza Bateman drawn bonnet not fawn nor green fashionable for summer & winter.”⁶⁸ In May of 1839, Lucretia Spencer ordered a bonnet, noting that if she could not have it “by next week certain[,] . . . she dont want it this summer.”⁶⁹ Clearly Spencer wanted the bonnet to wear to a certain occasion, and did not figure that she would get much use out of it during the remainder of the season.

Sometimes customers made specifications about the formality of their bonnets. One customer requested that the bonnet be “not very dressy,” while another told Warriner that she could not “get it too dressy.”⁷⁰ Perhaps the second was planning to wear the bonnet to a formal occasion, such as a wedding. Several times Warriner specified that the customer intended to wear a garment to a wedding, and probably kept this in mind while she was working. For example, “Mary Lewis light silk hat stylish for wedding.”⁷¹ During the 1830s and 1840s, people usually wore their best clothes on their wedding day, and therefore a specific “wedding bonnet” would not have been ordered.

Warriner received many orders for mourning bonnets, and she would have known what guidelines women in the community would have been expected to follow during a period of mourning. Most surprising, perhaps, is that women in mourning followed not

⁶⁸MAW, December 12, 1837, 105. See also MAW, April 13, 1840, 300; and MAW, July 23, 1839, 271.

⁶⁹MAW, c. May 23, 1839, 239.

⁷⁰MAW, c. May 27, 1837, 88; MAW, June 26, 1840, 336.

⁷¹MAW, November 1, 1840, 351.

only prescribed colors and styles, but also more rapidly changing fashions. Phebe Ann, Alice Ann, and Almira Spencer ordered identical “fashionable mourning bonnets.”⁷² Mrs. Essex indicated that she wanted her mourning bonnet to be “becoming,” suggesting that it was important to her to be attractive even when she was in mourning.⁷³

All of the mourning bonnets that Warriner produced were made of fabrics such as bombazine, alpine, crape, or pressed crape for veils. In one order, Warriner noted, “trim with ribbon instead of crape,” indicating that crape was probably the usual trim.⁷⁴ Only twice did Warriner specify the color of the bonnet (black), but black was probably chosen for all mourning bonnets by default.⁷⁵ Mourning bonnets may have shaded the face more than other bonnets; one customer ordered a silk bonnet “made pretty close [in the] shape of a mourning bonnet.”⁷⁶ Figure 20 shows a black mourning bonnet trimmed with crape in a remarkable state of preservation. It is in the “close” or “cottage” style that was popular throughout the period of the daybook, but particularly in the 1840s. Customers often ordered veils along with their mourning bonnets. Twice Warriner specified the length of the veil; one was to be 1 1/4 yards or longer, the other 1 yard.⁷⁷ A low-brimmed shape

⁷²MAW, July 10, 1840, 340.

⁷³MAW, June 10, 1839, 252.

⁷⁴MAW, August 10, 1837, 100.

⁷⁵MAW, c. May 20, 1839, 236.

⁷⁶MAW, May 7, 1838, 133.

⁷⁷MAW January 23, 1839, 195, MAW, April 13, 1840, 300.

and a veil would have presented a modest appearance considered appropriate during mourning. The cost of mourning bonnets was consistently about \$2.25 or \$2.50. They were probably less expensive than ordinary bonnets because they were not as heavily trimmed in the interest of decorum.

Etiquette books provided information about proper mourning behavior. Elisabeth Celnart, for example, explained that “full mourning is worn for a father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, husband, wife, brother, and sister. It is divided into three periods. For the first six weeks following, we wear only woollen garments; in the six weeks following, we may wear silk, and the three last months mingle white with the black.”⁷⁸ The guidelines for widows were more specific:

In the first three months of mourning for her husband, a woman wears only woollen garments; the six first weeks, her head-dress and neck-kerchief are black crape or gauze; in the six following weeks, they are white crape or linen. The next six months, she dresses in black silk; in winter, gros de Naples; in summer, taffetas. Head dress, white crape. The last three months, she wears black and white, and the last six weeks, white only.⁷⁹

A footnote in the second American edition of Celnart’s book, however, indicates that Americans did not observe all of the same customs as the French. Americans did observe different customs for full and half mourning: “Abby Johnson Florence white lutestring small bow flowers short white wreaths ribbon between long wreath in 2 weeks trim dove

⁷⁸[Elisabeth] Celnart, *The Gentleman and Lady’s Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment, Dedicated to the Youth of Both Sexes* (Boston: Allen & Ticknor, and Carter Hendee & Co., 1833), 210.

⁷⁹Celnart, 210-211.

collar half mourning.”⁸⁰ Celnart explained that “half mourning is worn for uncles, aunts, cousins and second cousins. The first fortnight we wear black silk, and the last week, white mixed with black.”⁸¹

The Ladies' Hand-Book of Millinery and Dressmaking, an American source, provided more specific information about the proper appearance of mourning bonnets:

Mourning bonnets are made of black silk and trimmed with crape, or, if for deep mourning, covered with crape. In trimming mourning bonnets, the crape bow and strings are generally broad hemmed, the double hem being from half an inch to one inch broad. For very deep mourning, the front of the bonnet has a fall or veiling of crape, half a yard deep and a yard and a half long, having a broad hem at the lower edge. The upper edge, being drawn up to the size of the front, is either inserted between the covering and the lining, or is set in along the upper edge and covered with a fold of crape.⁸²

Based on this information, it seems that Warriner's clients were wearing bonnets that would be acceptable not only in Warwick, but within a broader American culture, as well.

When a customer purchased a bonnet from Warriner, she went away with the confidence of knowing that she had bought something tasteful, suitable, and becoming. Warriner was not just a needleworker, but also a designer who changed her work to suit changing fashion, individual preferences, and her customer's appearance. This, perhaps even more so than neighborliness or long-standing business relationships, was what kept people coming back.

⁸⁰MAW, September 17, 1839, 279.

⁸¹Celnart, 210.

⁸²*Ladies' Hand-Book*, 18.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

If it were not for the chance survival of her daybook, Mary Anne Warriner would have been all but forgotten to history. Her nearly anonymous record book was not intended for historians, but rather for her own use and that of the small circle of people who were close to her. The community it describes is not a microcosm of early America, and Mary Anne Warriner does not represent all nineteenth-century milliners. The document does, however, contribute to our understanding of the conception, production, and consumption of women's dress in one early industrial New England town, and the role and status of a particular female artisan in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Warriner's millinery was the site not only of economic exchange, but the sharing of ideas and information about fashion and the community. Warriner, a woman with prominent ancestry and considerable wealth, interacted with women of all classes in the course of her work. While fashion brought these women together, it could also set them apart; fashion served to differentiate between women of various means. For Warriner it offered an opportunity to maintain her independence and serve as a resource for the women in her community.

Warriner facilitated the fashion process in her community. She gained much of her

livelihood by being both a figurehead of fashion and an image maker for her customers. Her daybook reveals much about the culture of dress in Warwick. Yet, through the lively pursuit of fashion that surrounded her, Warriner remained remarkably quiet, rarely revealing her opinions or emotions in her daybook. The daybook chronicles only a small part of her thoughts and activities. Likewise, it tells the stories of only those members of the community whose lives intersected with Warriner's, and even then, their words only reach us through the filter of Warriner herself. This study is only the first step toward an understanding of fashion, women's work, and community in Warwick.

Mary Anne Warriner was not defined by her work alone. She was also a daughter, widow, mother, sister, and aunt. She was a reader, neighbor, churchgoer, traveler, housekeeper, debtor, and creditor. She was also a writer. The writing in her daybook reveals not only the repetition of her business, but also her joy at receiving a letter from her son, and her appreciation for the peace of a winter night; on New Year's Eve 1836, Mary Anne Warriner sat up past midnight writing in her book, "Friday Leap year morning 12 Oclock 10 minutes a beautiful clear moon shiny night no snow on the ground very calm & now to bed."¹

¹MAW, 17.

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