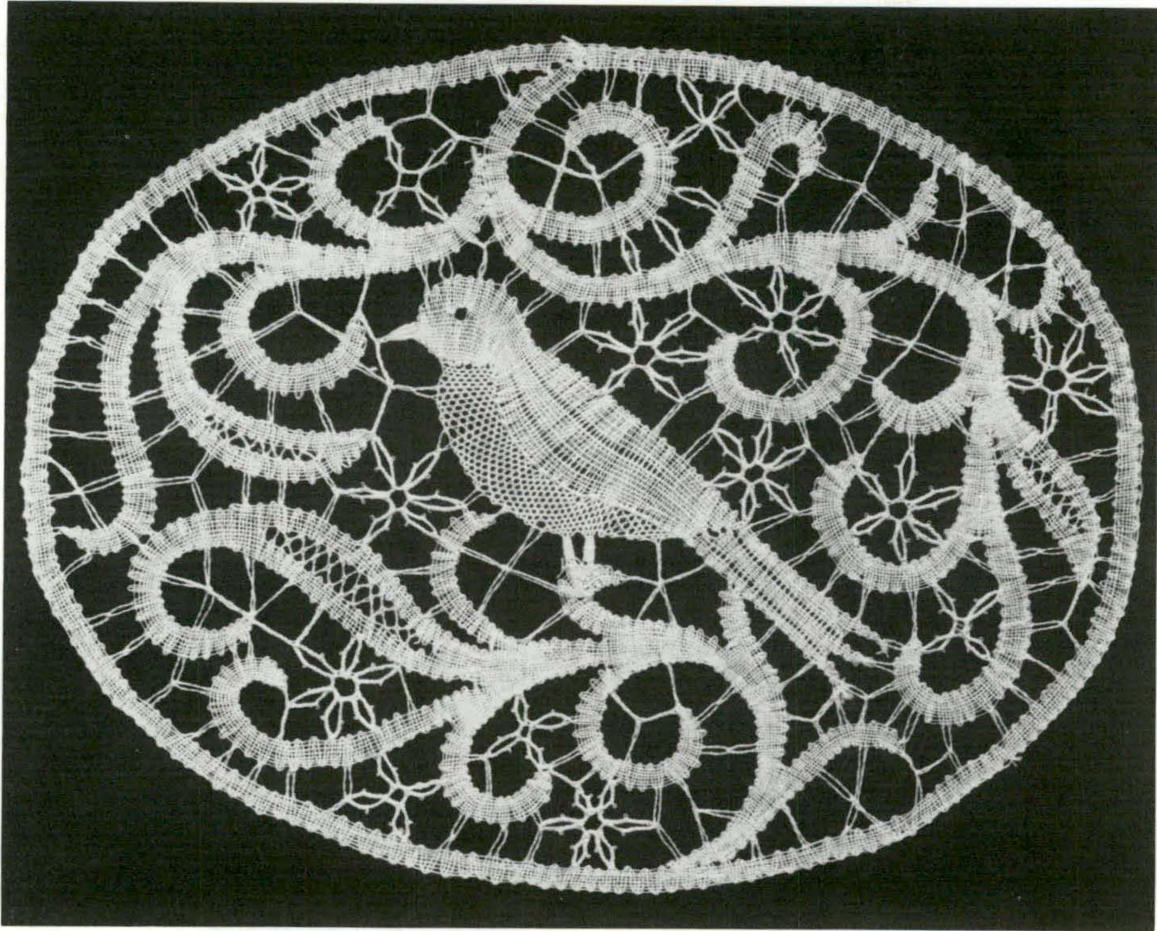


Editor's Choice



— State Historical Society of North Dakota Collections

Sister Rosalia's Lace

by Christopher Martin

Sister Rosalia Haberl, from the Franciscan convent in Hankinson, North Dakota, is a ninety-two-year-old nun whose skill in making traditional bobbin lace was recognized in 1988 with a National Heritage Fellowship award given by the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. She is North Dakota's first recipient of the distinguished award, given to only about ten people each year for excellence in folk crafts and music.

Bobbin lace has become a rare folk art due primarily to the tremendous amount of time it requires. Sister Rosalia, who can easily carry on a conversation while manipulating several bobbins, spends three or four full days on her larger doilies. To make bobbin lace, fine linen thread stored in wooden bobbins is guided around pins stuck into a xeroxed pattern. As many as one hundred bobbins may be used on a particular piece.

In addition to the traditional circular, oval, and rectangular patterns learned in her youth, Sister Rosalia now incorporates birds, butterflies, and flowers in her creations. Friends in Germany, where Sister Rosalia was born, send her new patterns. Sister Rosalia used to make

decorative lace edgings for religious vestments but, as styles have changed, now makes religious symbols only for special clergy, such as bishops and monsignori.

Sister Rosalia was born in the small town of Schonsee, Bavaria. While still a young girl, known then by her baptismal name of Maria, she attended a government-sponsored Royal Bobbin Lace school after her regular school hours. In European countries even today, folk arts are taught in schools to fill the demand for crafted objects for the tourist industry. The school where Sister Rosalia learned, however, closed in the 1960s because local girls could find better paying wages in nearby factories.

With increased recognition in the last two years, Sister Rosalia fondly notes a backlog of orders that she will probably never finish — "If I live that long," she says in a thick German accent. Through a formal apprenticeship, Sister Rosalia recently taught difficult knotting techniques to Phyllis Klosterman of Wyndmere, North Dakota, an advanced bobbin lace instructor who will share Sister Rosalia's art with the next generation of North Dakotans.

