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Making an Impression: Butter Prints, the Butter Market, and Rural Women in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Pennsylvania

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Artifacts are so much more than the physical remnants of the past. They reveal information about their respective societies that may not be clear when consulting textual evidence alone. Object biographies emphasize the unique and focus on the individual object, such as a butter print, but are limited by the bias of survival and gaps in evidence. Life cycles focus solely on the generic, viewing the entire journey of the object, from the extraction of raw materials for its creation to its death.¹ When contextualized with historical documents, an object biography and life cycle analysis of an artifact communicates the cultural values of its makers and users. Such is the case with the sudden appearance of butter prints in nineteenth-century America. These deceptively mundane tools convey changes in dining habits, rural women's participation in local economies, and the transition to a consumer economy. The Leatherman butter print, on display at the Mercer Museum of the Bucks County Historical Society in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, offers invaluable insight into the opportunities that butter-making afforded women in the Philadelphia hinterlands during the 1800s.

¹ Karin Dannehl, "Object Biographies: From Production to Consumption," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 123-8.

Art historian Jules Prown's method of description, deduction, and speculation begins the investigation of an object with a thorough examination of its physical appearance.² To the Mercer Museum, it is object number 10257: a wooden butter print created by Abraham Leatherman in Bedminster, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, sometime between 1820 and 1850.³ When viewing the butter print, one is struck by how contradictory the object seems; it is neither ornate enough to have been a display item nor simple enough to have been purely utilitarian. The print's face is highly decorated with a design of leaves, hearts, and geometric shapes that would have required a considerable time investment to carve. It is worn smooth on the handle, indicating frequent use. Nearly the entire face of the print is elaborately carved, with a pattern of six leaves, four hearts, two larger circles, two larger triangles, and a border consisting of fourteen "V"-shaped carvings and sixteen smaller circles.

A deep description of the object enables scholars of material culture to deduce the circumstances of its existence. The choice of wood as a medium, rather than a more valuable material such as ceramic, brings attention to the intended use of the finished product; wooden butter prints were not likely status symbols or luxury goods. The materials chosen when creating an object represent the choices and values of the maker and user(s). Function, availability, economy, style, and tradition are typically the deciding factors in these choices.⁴ Butter prints were typically made of soft woods, such as pine or poplar. Soft woods would not only have been easier to carve, but pine and poplar were readily available in southeastern Pennsylvania, where butter prints were more prevalent than in any other region of the country. Maple was

² Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 7-10.

³ Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle, Accession Number 10257, "Half Round Butter Print," 1800/01/01-1899/12/31.

⁴ Robert Friedel, "Some Matters of Substance," in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, eds. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 43-4.

also used in the manufacture of butter prints in this region.⁵ Easy access to pine, poplar, and maple would have rendered them more affordable than imported woods. These species may also have been found to hold up better in the damp conditions present in dairying, or perhaps they imparted a desired flavor upon the butter. New wood, metal, lead-glazed earthenware, and copper were all materials to be avoided in butter-making, due to their leaching foul tastes or poison into the butter.⁶

The Mercer Museum lacks a detailed record of the butter print's accession, but they do know that it was made by Abraham Leatherman (1776-1850s) sometime between 1820 and 1850, before being donated by his great-granddaughter Amanda High Meyers (1850-1916), of Perkasio, Bucks County.⁷ It was common practice for craft shops to place maker's marks on their butter prints, and the lack of one on the Leatherman print supports the Mercer Museum's information that Abraham Leatherman made it himself.⁸ Abraham owned a sawmill as early as 1811, and likely would have had access to both hand- and machine-operated carving tools.⁹ Object analysis suggests that Abraham used both to create the butter print; the precise cuts in the finer details of the print's face imply the use of a gouge or chisel, while the smoothness and lack of tool marks on the handle suggest a lathe turner, a machine that rotates sections of wood as it carves them into cylindrical shapes.

⁵ Richard Flanders Smith, *Pennsylvania Butter Prints*, (Ephrata, PA: Science Press, 1970), 12; Use of maple from Mercer Museum, Butter Prints, 1800/01/01-1899/12/31.

⁶ Karen Parsons, "Making Meaning, Making Butter: The Material World of Chester County Farm Women, 1750-1800" (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 1993), 23-4.

⁷ Mercer Museum, Accession Number 10257, "Half Round Butter Print."

⁸ Paul E. Kindig, *Butter Prints and Molds* (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1986), 72.

⁹ Bucks County Historical Society, *Bucks County, Pennsylvania Tax Records, 1811*, Collection 102, Roll 1, 33.



Figure 1. Front, detail of butter print design. Abraham Leatherman, *Half Round Butter Print*, accession number 10257, 1820-1850. Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle. Photograph taken by author, September 14, 2014.



Figure 2. Reverse, detail of cracks in wood grain and evidence of use-wear. Abraham Leatherman, *Half Round Butter Print*, accession number 10257, 1820-1850. Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle. Photograph taken by author, September 14, 2014.

The Leatherman butter print is somewhat heavy for its size, but not unwieldy. Its weight is concentrated in the hemi-circular face, which would have better facilitated the butter-molding process. The handle allows the user easier maneuverability. The use-wear patterns and economical choice of material for this object suggest that it was intended for frequent everyday use, rather than being reserved for use only on special occasions or as a display item. Essentially, users invested in the design of their butter prints rather than the material, further emphasizing the focus on the finished stamped butter product and not the possession of the print itself. The elaborate design of the Leatherman print suggests that it was for an audience that demanded their butter be aesthetically pleasing, a mark of quality for consumers purchasing butter for private consumption.

Butter prints are one of several objects that have been associated with women who produced large quantities of butter to sell at the market.¹⁰ Abraham's wife Gertrude "Charity" Leatherman would have been the butter print's original user, and based on the family's holdings, she would have been able to make enough butter to have a surplus after the household's consumption. The Leatherman family owned seventy acres and four cattle in 1820 with a household of six in 1830, and ninety-seven acres and five cattle in 1852 with a household of seven in 1850.¹¹ An inventory of cattle owned in neighboring Chester County in 1789 reveals that the average dairy farm owned between seven and ten cows, a number that would not have changed much by 1820-1850.¹²

As dairying was not the Leathermans' primary source of income, four to five cows would have generated more than enough milk to feed a family of six or seven. Nineteenth-century recipes

¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Tax Records, 1811*, 19.

¹¹ Bucks County Historical Society, *Bucks County, Pennsylvania Tax Records, 1821*, Collection 102, Roll 1, 54; Bucks County Historical Society, *Bucks County, Pennsylvania Tax Records, 1852*, Roll 28, 79.

¹² James Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1972), 161, 198.

reveal that butter was a staple rather than a luxury good, and was used extensively in cooking just as it is today. Menus in housewife manuals suggested bread and butter be served with lunch almost daily, and it was frequently used to add richness to soups, sauces, gravies, vegetables, lean meats, and seafood. The most common application was in baking cakes, pies, and pastries. Butter was used year-round and in everyday dishes for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert.¹³ When served as a condiment, it was stamped or molded and placed onto a butter dish. During warm weather, water could be added to the bottom of the dish to keep the butter cool.¹⁴

Butter-making was a time-consuming process, from milking the cows, to churning, to the proper care and storage of butter.¹⁵ It could take up to an hour to milk six cows. Owning four or five at any given time, it would have taken Charity nearly this long to milk her cows as well. After the milking was finished, she would need to carry it in six-gallon pails from the barn to the house, dairy, or springhouse, which were anywhere from three hundred to five hundred feet away. By 1800, the average farm used a springhouse for their dairying needs, a building situated over running water and usually built into the side of a hill. Proximity to a spring allowed for fresh water to be diverted into troughs inside the building, where milk pans could be placed to cool.¹⁶ Prescriptive literature from the time recommends that:

A dairy should be placed near a running stream, or a well or pump. It should be under the shade of trees, in a situation where the fresh air is constantly passing through it. It should not be surrounded by other buildings. Your dairy should contain a number of shelves, so constructed that

¹³ Laura C. Holloway, *The Hearthstone; or, Life at Home. A Household Manual* (Beloit, WI: The Inter-State Publishing House, 1883), 396-545; Marion Harland, *House and Home: A Complete Housewife's Guide* (New York: Union Publishing House, 1889), 247-377, 389-442, 449-499.

¹⁴ Holloway, *The Hearthstone*, 547.

¹⁵ Kindig, *Butter Prints and Molds*, 14-6, 34-7.

¹⁶ Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 96-8.

water may flow over them, and under the pans of milk in warm weather. Fresh water should be supplied at least three times a day, if you cannot so arrange your dairy as to have running water always passing over the shelves.¹⁷

Springhouses also contained shelves to hold dairying tools and counters or tables to provide a workspace. Every component of the springhouse was to be kept meticulously clean, to avoid contaminating the dairy products: “shelves should be scalded at least every two days, and thoroughly scoured once a week. If milk is spilled on them, immediately remove it, as if left it will create a disagreeable taste and odor in the milk and butter. All the utensils used in your dairy should be scalded, scoured, and sunned every day if possible.”¹⁸ Chips in the finish, as well as scuffs, scratches, and cracks on the surface of the Leatherman print likely resulted from scrupulous cleaning methods that went hand-in-hand with dairying processes; frequent scourings, washings, immersions in water, and drying would have taken their toll on the wood over the years.

Churning involved six steps: 1) straining barnyard debris from the milk, 2) waiting for the cream to rise, 3) skimming the cream from the milk, 4) churning the cream into butter, 5) washing the buttermilk from the butter, and 6) packing the butter into a mold or butter box. It was during this last step that the butter would be printed. The process was physically demanding and taxing; dasher churns, the type most commonly associated with butter churning today, forced the butter-maker to either stand hunched over the churn or to sit and raise her arms above shoulder height as she repeatedly pumped the dasher into the cream. In optimal conditions, sixty to sixty-five degree weather, the butter would “come” in twenty minutes.¹⁹ Barrel churns made the work more comfortable, allowing butter-makers to stand and turn a crank that

¹⁷ Mary Mason, *The Young Housewife's Counsellor and Friend: Containing Directions in Every Department of Housekeeping* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1875), 38.

¹⁸ Mason, *The Young Housewife*, 38.

¹⁹ Mason, *The Young Housewife*, 39.

rotated paddles to churn the cream.²⁰ Barrel churns could be used to produce as much as thirty-eight pounds of butter per week and were utilized throughout the nineteenth-century, but the larger models could take as long as an hour and a half to make butter.²¹ Churning took even longer in the winter, when the cold made it slower for cream to rise and butter granules to form. Butter-makers would have churned every day while the weather was warm, and every other day during the winter.²²

After the butter had been churned, the buttermilk was drained away. The butter was then removed from the churn, worked with paddles, washed thoroughly to remove any buttermilk that remained, and salted; failure to properly rinse away the buttermilk soured the taste of the butter.²³ The finished butter was weighed and separated into one-half-pound or one-pound lumps. It was shaped into a ball and stamped with a print that had been dipped in cold water, so that the butter would not stick to it and mar the impression. The printed butter was then set aside in a cool place to harden.²⁴ Butter prints most commonly came in round half-pound or one-pound sizes; half-round prints were used either two at a time to make a full circle, or stamped, rotated, and then stamped again on two-pound balls of butter.

Half-round prints, such as the one owned by the Leathermans, were somewhat rare and mainly unique to the southeastern Pennsylvania area.²⁵ Weather conditions in the Philadelphia hinterlands created the ideal set of circumstances for dairying; adequate rainfall allowed pasture grasses to grow in abundance, while dairy products kept longer in the cooler climate. This area is encompassed in what William Townsend dubbed “the

²⁰ Parsons, “Making Meaning, Making Butter,” 21-3, 26-30.

²¹ Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*, 103-4.

²² Annie Bushong, “Dairy: Butter Making,” *Ohio Farmer (1856-1906)* 60 (Dec 24, 1881): 409.

²³ Holloway, *The Hearthstone*, 548.

²⁴ Willis P. Hazard, *Butter and Butter Making, with the Best Methods for Producing and Marketing It* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1877), 37.

²⁵ Smith, *Pennsylvania Butter Prints* 12; Kindig, *Butter Prints and Molds*, 61-3.

Dairy Zone” in 1839, which was “circumscribed between the parallels of 40 and 45 degrees north latitude,” within the “north lines of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, embracing the northern borders of the Mohawk Valley and stretching from Lake Erie in to New England.”²⁶ The combined presence of half-round prints and prime dairying conditions suggest that farm women in this region were producing extra butter to sell at the marketplace.

The inheritance of butter-making equipment, such as churns and butter prints, represented a family’s continued ability to participate in the agricultural market. Husbands often willed these items to their widows upon their deaths and daughters received them among other domestic goods when they married, thus ensuring these women were able to survive when they were on their own or starting a new household.²⁷ Familial, feminine, and local identity can be created by the making, use, and inheritance of objects. As evidenced by historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s work on a late-seventeenth-century joined cupboard originally owned by a woman named Hannah Barnard, there is great significance in the passing down of objects and their ability to link the identity of an individual to future generations. Each butter print possessed a unique design that was chosen by the maker or user, becoming a signature of the particular woman using it. In this manner, a butter print’s design was similar to Hannah Barnard having her name painted on her cupboard; it allowed the user to claim ownership of the print and of the final butter product, as well as to her role as the “keeper of the household.” A well-ordered home was a sign of civility and a source of pride for housewives, requiring skill and the knowledge of the way things “should” be done in terms of

²⁶ Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820-1885* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 13-15; William W. Townsend, *The Dairyman’s Manual: Containing Some of the Most Important Processes from the Best Sources for Making Butter and Cheese* (Vergennes, VT: Rufus W. Griswold, 1839), 5.

²⁷ Parsons, “Making Meaning, Making Butter,” 37-41.

social norms and societal expectations.²⁸ The practice of printing one's butter may have also been a way for nineteenth-century women to tout their prowess in the domestic sphere, as was the case for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pastry cutters; the women using these tools had them inscribed with their names to express their culinary expertise in the then male-dominated field of pastry arts.²⁹ When selling butter at the market, the signature design printed onto butter also functioned as a brand, marking products sold by skilled makers as more desirable than others.

There were a number of motifs that appear consistently in butter prints crafted in southeastern Pennsylvania, including hearts, tulips, and wheat sheaves.³⁰ Joined furniture from the seventeenth- to nineteenth-centuries was often decorated with tulips, flowers, hearts, leaves, and other flora; these design choices could represent "assertions of self, emblems of love, symbols of fertility, markers of one woman's command of her household goods, or signs of everywoman's subordination to domestic duty."³¹ The Mercer's collections also contain prints marked with eagles, pineapples, cows, and thistles.³² Although the Mercer's records on these butter prints contain many gaps, the collection does provide a representative sample of the sizes and styles of prints utilized in southeastern Pennsylvania during the nineteenth-century. They range in size from one to seven inches, with the smaller prints likely used to print pats of butter intended for immediate household consumption. Many designs were similar and some motifs appear more often than others, but no two prints were identical.

²⁸ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Hannah Barnard's Cupboard," in *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 109, 111, 113-4, 117; Butter prints as unique designs, Kathryn McNerney, *Kitchen Antiques: 1790-1940* (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 1991), 164.

²⁹ Sara Pennell, "Mundane Materiality, or, Should Small Things Still Be Forgotten? Material Culture, Micro-Histories and the Problem of Scale," in *History and Material Culture*, 173, 186-7.

³⁰ Smith, *Pennsylvania Butter Prints*, 17; Kindig, *Butter Prints and Molds*, 244.

³¹ Ulrich, "Hannah Barnard's Cupboard," 110-1.

³² Mercer Museum, Butter Prints, 1800/01/01-1899/12/31.

The question remains as to the cause of the surge in popularity of butter prints in America in the nineteenth-century. Butter prints appeared in America around 1752, with most dating to the nineteenth-century. They were manufactured in factories until the 1876 Centennial celebration, and then individually crafted as late as the 1950s in Vermont.³³ The emergence of butter prints directly correlated with that of the butter market, where farm women sold the surplus butter that they had churned in order to bring additional income into the household; these women printed their butter while preparing it for sale. Thus, butter prints reflected dynamic changes in the influence that nineteenth-century Pennsylvanian women had in the domestic sphere and on the economy. The absence of an object from the historical record can serve as the subject of study in and of itself.³⁴ The dearth of butter prints in America before the mid-eighteenth-century suggests that there was not a great demand for butter at the marketplace at that time. In fact, butter was virtually absent from early colonial American cooking. Butter was not consumed during Lent or with meat dishes and was seldom mentioned in English culinary treatises until the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. In northern Europe, butter only began to gain popularity during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries.³⁵ It seems that this trend was eventually carried over to the colonies in the New World where it reached widespread popularity by the nineteenth-century.

Consumerism played a pivotal role in the sudden appearance of butter prints, driven by the position conveyed by status goods, trends in fashion and demand, and the meanings

³³ Kindig, *Butter Prints and Molds*, 89-95.

³⁴ Glenn Adamson, "The Case of the Missing Footstool: Reading the Absent Object," in *History and Material Culture*, 192-207.

³⁵ Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 9-10, 58-9; Bruno Laurioux, "Medieval Cooking," in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Albert Sonnenfeld. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 300.; Jean-Louis Flandrin, "Dietary Choices and Culinary Technique, 1500-1800," in *Food*, 416-7.

conferred upon objects by their users.³⁶ A change in the variety of obtainable goods in the early nineteenth-century explains why butter prints began to gain popularity; the greater availability of commodities created an increased need for additional income with which to purchase them. Improvements in transportation in the early nineteenth-century allowed for easier movement of agricultural products from rural areas to urban marketplaces. When cows provided extra milk or more butter was produced than their family required, rural women often sold their surplus printed butter at marketplaces in town or in nearby cities.³⁷

The scarce records of early nineteenth-century butter sales indicate increased consumer demand. Larger dairy farms sold several hundreds of pounds per year, while rural women not specializing in dairying could still earn extra income by selling their surplus; butter sold for seventeen to twenty-two cents per pound in southeastern Pennsylvania in 1845 to 1850.³⁸ Butter-makers operated in the marketplace much in the same manner as the cheese-makers in historian Sally McMurry's study, where they preferred to abide by community-accepted prices in place of haggling or attempting to undercut their neighbors' profits. Women selling better-quality butter could charge more for their product, but instead many chose to belong to a community of dairy-sellers rather than create animosity and uncertain market conditions by fiercely competing for higher profits.³⁹

The income from butter sales was often enough for rural families to afford to buy other commodities available at the marketplace, allowing them to participate in the urban economy of Philadelphia. The accounts of the Strawn family, who lived on a sixty-five-acre farm in Bucks County with seven cows, show that they produced butter in the following amounts from 1845 to 1850:

³⁶ Ann Smart Martin, "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework," *Winterthur Portfolio* 28 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 142-3.

³⁷ McNerney, *Kitchen Antiques*, 164.

³⁸ Mercer Museum, "Butter and Egg Book," Eli W. Strawn Collection.

³⁹ McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life*, 54-5.

1845	347.5 pounds
1846	320.5 pounds
1847	449.5 pounds
1848	461.5 pounds
1849	686 pounds
1850	864 pounds ⁴⁰

The Leathermans' holdings were similar in size to those of the Strawns and they likely produced butter in comparable quantities. The average household of eight consumed an estimated two hundred pounds of butter per year by 1850; after adjusting for the Leathermans' owning five cows instead of seven, this would have left an estimated thirty to four hundred pounds of surplus butter available for sale each year.⁴¹ Rural women selling smaller amounts of butter transported their product to the urban market using specialized pails or boxes containing compartments to store ice and keep the butter fresh. By the 1850s, these pails were known as "Philadelphia butter pails." Larger quantities of butter were sent to market in crocks or pots that could hold twenty to twenty-five pounds of butter, wooden tubs that held ten to eighty pounds, or firkins that could hold as much as one hundred pounds.

Butter-makers traveled to the market on horseback or in wagons and lined the city streets upon their arrival. Rather than returning home with cash at the end of the day, they would trade butter or any profits earned for commodities such as sugar, coffee, spices, tobacco, or textiles. Butter was also traded for services such as repairs, shoemaking, or in exchange for help on the farm.⁴² Most late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Philadelphia households did not own cattle, requiring them to purchase their dairy products. During the American Revolution, urban families slaughtered their cows for meat when food became scarce. Many opted not to replace them after the war's end, as rural families began to come into the urban marketplace to sell agricultural

⁴⁰ Mercer Museum, "Butter and Egg Book."

⁴¹ Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*, 83-5, 91.

⁴² Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*, 109-111.

wares. Increasingly strict health ordinances in the city of Philadelphia restricted the possession of livestock. These circumstances meant that virtually all city residents purchased their butter from 1770 to 1850, rather than making it themselves. In 1850, over 121,000 people lived in the city of Philadelphia, consuming an estimated one-and-a-half million pounds of butter annually.⁴³

Butter was also exported from Philadelphia to foreign markets, creating an even higher demand. As early as 1770, Philadelphia exported more butter than any other colony, sending almost 50,000 pounds to the West Indies from 1770 to 1772. Lucrative trade networks were also established with ports closer to home, such as Quebec, Halifax, Savannah, and St. Augustine.⁴⁴ Estimates place the volume of dairy exports to Britain at four million pounds in 1850 and twenty-three million by 1860. In 1860 alone, farmers produced ninety million pounds. Whatever the quantity, the best quality butter was reserved for domestic consumption; a butter-making manual from 1877 claimed that “nearly the whole bulk of this enormous production is consumed at home. Only low grades of butter are sent abroad.”⁴⁵

Philadelphia’s growing demand for agricultural products, as well as their farms’ proximity to the city, created more opportunities for rural women in surrounding areas to sell their butter in the urban marketplace. Ulrich’s study of “a separate female economy” in late eighteenth-century rural Maine focused on women that traded goods with one another, but “left little trace in written records, things like ashes, herbs, seedlings and baby chicks.”⁴⁶ The butter trade would have functioned with similar results, affording rural women from southeastern Pennsylvania the

⁴³ Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds* 80-1; X. A. Willard, *Practical Butter Book: A Complete Treatise* (New York: Rural Publishing 1875), 6.

⁴⁴ Parsons, “Making Meaning, Making Butter,” 42-3.

⁴⁵ McMurry 59, *Transforming Rural Life*; Hazard, *Butter and Butter Making*, 47-8.

⁴⁶ 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), 84.

opportunity to create and participate in their own market of homemade goods. Women took part in every step of the process, from milking the cows, to making the butter, to taking it to the Philadelphia market, and selling it themselves from the backs of their wagons twice a week.⁴⁷ Women such as Charity now had greater roles as providers for their families, gaining greater independence in the domestic sphere by earning their own income. An increase in commercially available foodstuffs during the early nineteenth-century also led to more women working outside of the home in factories and in offices, thus having less time for domestic chores. These changing trends would have augmented the demand for premade domestic goods such as butter.⁴⁸

While the Mercer Museum does not have a record of the provenance of this particular butter print, the practice of female inheritance of movable goods allows one to assume that, like Hannah Barnard's cupboard, ownership of the Leatherman butter print passed from mother to daughter.⁴⁹ Using this information, along with U.S. census records, it was possible to trace the print's expected line of inheritance as follows: Abraham's wife Charity Leatherman (1780-1863), their daughter Anna Fretz Fry (1801-1898), Anna's daughter Rebecca High (1825-1907), and Rebecca's daughter Amanda High Meyers.⁵⁰ Abraham's descendants, and therefore the butter print, remained in the vicinity of Bedminster throughout their lives. Each woman would have likely inherited the print at the time of her wedding. Amanda married in 1875, and Henry Mercer did not start collecting objects for his museum until

⁴⁷ Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*, 87.

⁴⁸ Jean-Louis Flandrin, "From Industrial Revolution to Industrial Food," in *Food*, 435-6; Wallach, *How America Eats*, 144-5.

⁴⁹ Ulrich, "Hannah Barnard's Cupboard," 111, 132-3.

⁵⁰ Historical Society of Pennsylvania; *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records 1708-1985*, Reel 654; U.S. Census Bureau, *1790 United States Federal Census* (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010), Series M637, Roll 8, 237; *Ibid.* 1800, Series M32, Roll 36, 224; *Ibid.* 1830, Series M19, Roll 146, 96; *Ibid.* 1840, Series M704, Roll 446, 125; *Ibid.* 1850, Series M432, Roll 758, 253B; *Ibid.* 1870, Series M593, Roll 1314, 543B; *Ibid.* 1880, Series T9, Roll 1106, 542D; *Ibid.* 1900, Series T623, Roll 1385, 8A; *Ibid.* 1910, Series T624, Roll 1320, 13B.

1897, placing the museum's probable accession date for the print between 1897 and Amanda's death in 1916.⁵¹

Amanda and her husband David had three children, two of whom were daughters, yet she decided to donate the butter print rather than pass it on to either of them, breaking the line of succession. As there are no defects or cracks in the butter print that would have hindered its function, Amanda's decision to donate it suggests one of two possible scenarios: either she wanted to use a new butter print with her own signature design in her butter-making, or more likely, they now purchased their butter at the marketplace and the print was no longer considered a useful tool. The 1900 census lists David's occupation as a hotel keeper, with Amanda, their adult son Oscar, their adult daughter Elizabeth, Elizabeth's husband William, their teenage daughter Anna May, a servant, and a boarder all living together.⁵² With a household of eight and a hotel full of guests for whom to cook and clean, it seems unlikely that Amanda and her daughters would have had the time to churn and print their own butter. Additionally, the hotel was in town, providing easy access to the local marketplace where they could purchase premade butter.

As part of the Bucks County Historical Society, the Mercer Museum's collections consist of objects relating to pre-industrial America and to the local history of Bucks County and the Delaware Valley. Historian and archaeologist Henry Mercer amassed nearly 30,000 objects in an effort to record a simpler way of life that was increasingly replaced by commercial and machine-made goods. He built the Mercer Museum in 1916, whose archives and collections were arranged in a system that he himself

⁵¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *1900 United States Federal Census*; "Mission & History – Mercer," accessed Dec. 12, 2014, <http://www.mercermuseum.org/about-the-museums/mission-and-history-mercerc/>.

⁵² U.S. Census Bureau, *1900 United States Federal Census*, 8A; "Amanda High Meyers," last modified August 22, 2012, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Meyers&GSfn=Amanda&GSbyrel=all&GSdyrel=all&GSst=40&GScty=2249&GSctry=4&GSob=n&GRid=95793761&df=all&>.

designed.⁵³ This focus on homemade objects, in addition to its location near her home, sheds light on why Amanda would have donated the butter print to the Mercer versus another museum. Close inspection of the print revealed possible wax residue accumulated in the design face and cracks in the grain, demonstrating that steps were taken to clean the object and extend its lifetime. This was likely part of preservative measures taken by the museum that were performed after the accession of the print. The Mercer's records do not explicitly mention any other donation by Amanda to the museum, but their collections do contain an iron axe head dating between 1800 and 1820 that belonged to Abraham Leatherman. One Abraham Poulton purchased it from Jonas G. Leatherman, son of Abraham Leatherman, for twenty-five cents, and it was formally accepted into the Mercer's collection in 1916.⁵⁴ Perhaps this axe harvested the wood used to create the butter print.

Utilizing the methods of both object biography and life cycle allows for gaps in the evidence to be supplemented by physical description and historical texts, placing the butter print into context while avoiding exceptionalism. The butter print appears exceptional today in its historical significance and aesthetically-pleasing carving, yet the quantities of prints that survive and lack of primary source information suggest that such an object may have been considered too common to warrant mentioning in the historical record. Oftentimes, household tools such as butter-making equipment disappeared into generalized categories like "lot of woodenware" or "lot of earthenware" in probate inventories.⁵⁵ Though probate inventories and historical accounts seldom mention butter prints by name, the significance of these tools becomes clearer when they are placed in historical context.

⁵³ "Mission & History – Mercer"; "Mercer Museum Collections," accessed Dec. 10, 2014, <http://www.mercermuseum.org/collections-and-research/mercercollection/>.

⁵⁴ Mercer Museum, Accession Number 04944, "Side Ax Head," 1800/01/01-1899/12/31.

⁵⁵ Parsons, "Making Meaning, Making Butter," 26.

When viewed in conjunction with available primary source documents and texts, material culture paints a clearer picture of stories that otherwise would have remained buried in the past. An approach that considers description, deduction, and speculation enables the object's materiality to speak to the socioeconomic environment during its creation and paves the way for historical inquiry. Butter prints are evidence of the progressive changes that took place in southeastern Pennsylvania during the nineteenth century, representing revolutions in traditional gender roles and consumerism. Though butter-making was a lengthy process, between the need for painstaking cleanliness and the time commitment involved in any dairying task, the butter market became a source of independence for rural women. The ability to earn their own income paved the way for them to enter the workforce, whether by operating as entrepreneurs in the female economy or in seeking employment in factories and offices.

The appearance of butter prints in the material record speaks to farm women's increasingly important role in the home and in the marketplace, as well as to the expanding urban economy. In this aspect, butter prints were evidence of a shift toward greater financial independence for women, fostering their ability to negotiate transactions and create trade networks in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. The inheritance of such tools would have ensured the continued ability to participate in this economy, providing financial stability and independence from generation to generation. This was the reason that a seemingly mundane object such as Charity Leatherman's butter print would have been deemed valuable enough to be passed down from mother to daughter for three generations.