

Christmas Household Textiles



With Price Guide



A Schiffer Book

Jeanette and Donald Michalets

Christmas Household Textiles



Jeanette and Donald Michalets



4880 Lower Valley Road Atglen, Pennsylvania 19310

Dedication

This book is dedicated to
Victoria Michalets
who has helped to make so many of our Christmases special for so many years
and to the memory of
Frank Michalets
who was such a loving part of it all.

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Other Schiffer Books by Jeanette Michalets:
Vera Textiles: Add Color to Everyday Fashions
(with Katherine Michalets)

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Acknowledgements

Christmas is a time of giving and receiving. We have discovered that writing a book about Christmas textiles is a time of giving and receiving, as well. We wish to thank those friends and family members who gave of themselves to help make this book a reality. We greatly appreciate their loan of Christmas textiles as well as their moral support. Many thanks go to Kirsti Hoffman, Shari Lautenbach, Karen Meer, Ellen Michalets, and Victoria Michalets. Thanks also to Katherine Michalets for love and encouragement, even though she was far away from home.



Introduction

Much of Christmas joy is tied up with sentiment and nostalgia. Advertising, books, movies, and music all play on our love for the Christmas season and the memories it evokes. Famous American artists such as Norman Rockwell and Tasha Tudor created art that specifically reflects the American ideal of Christmas, with its focus on family and the home. Movies such as *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Story* have been shown through the years to perpetuate this ideal. Family, friends, church, home, and hearth, these are the stuff of Christmas. Mix in some bright red poinsettias, fragrant balsam, and a jolly old elf in a red suit and . . . there you have it . . . the American Christmas.

Not only have these images been captured in the media, but they have become part of the textiles used in the home to celebrate the holiday. In many homes there is a favorite tablecloth, tree skirt, or wall hanging that has become a treasured part of Christmas holiday decorating. For them, it just would not be Christmas without Grandma's poinsettia-bedecked tablecloth, the gaudy tree skirt covered in sequins, or the table runner that an Aunt so lovingly embroidered.

My Christmas heirloom is a red and white felt Santa Claus mail pouch that my family used to store our Christmas cards before we taped them, one by one, above the living room door. After the cards were hung, the cheery Santa bag brightened a closet door all through the holiday season. Years later, I used it to decorate my first apartment after I was married.

Our collection has grown considerably since the early days of the Santa mail bag. I have added some colorful table runners from the 1930s and a favorite star-shaped doily. I purchased a 1960s round tablecloth and used it as a tree skirt. I began to collect poinsettia-trimmed handkerchiefs. Since beginning to write this book, our collection of vintage Christmas textiles has grown immensely. I never would have guessed there were so many variations on the poinsettia hanky, Christmas-themed tablecloths, or styles of Christmas aprons!

Most of the items shown in this book were found in antique shops during the months of November and December. While collectors may stumble across a few Christmas items throughout the year, the prime months for finding them are late in the year, December being the best time by far. Bargains may be had in January, as well; and at thrift shops, charity shops, and yard sales, Christmas textiles turn up throughout the year. It's a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

Christmas linens and handkerchiefs are also found

today at online auction sites, such as eBay. Generally, there are fewer bidders for these items over the summer months, and the items will sell for less cost than they will closer to the Christmas holiday. Online boutiques provide another source for Christmas textiles, as do estate sales, relatives, and folks who are downsizing their homes.

Pricing

Prices for vintage Christmas textiles are all over the map, as they are for many collectible textiles. It depends on who is selling a piece, where it is being sold, and what the buyer is willing to pay. The old adage still seems to hold true: an item is worth only as much as someone is willing to pay for it.

That said, it does help to have a guide to what dealers are charging for vintage Christmas textiles. I purchased all my textiles in the Midwest, in Wisconsin, and my pricing reflects that. One may expect to pay more on the east and west coasts than in the middle of the country. This seems to hold true for most antiques and collectibles. I based these prices on the items found at antique shops where I purchased most of my collection. For designer items, I used eBay as my guide, as it is difficult to find the nice designer pieces in antique shops. Most of the Tammis Keefe handkerchiefs and Vera tea towels I have were purchased from eBay sellers. I averaged the prices I paid to reach what I consider to be a reasonable middle ground.

Thrift stores are wonderful places to shop, too, especially in the month of December. Prices there are usually quite reasonable. Yard sales are another good source for Christmas linens, especially for shoppers who enjoy the hunt. You may search many yard sales and find nothing, then one day hit the mother lode! To me, this thrill is what hunting for vintage Christmas textiles is all about. Prices are usually quite low at yard sales, sometimes a third of what they would be in an antique shop.

Estate sales are another source that can be found by watching for their advertisements in local newspapers. You often must arrive very early to get the best items.

Family members may also be a source for Christmas linens. When downsizing their homes or apartments, they may wish to part with things they no longer use; and the price is usually right!

All the values given for the items shown in this book are approximate, and should be used only as a guide. The author and publisher do not assume responsibility for losses incurred by the reader while buying or selling vintage Christmas textiles.



What Makes it Vintage?

What constitutes “vintage” is a hot topic of discussion among dealers and collectors these days and everyone seems to have a different opinion! It has been my experience that in the world of textiles and clothing, many dealers consider vintage to mean textiles that date from no later than the 1970s. Some dealers, however, consider even clothing from the 1980s to be vintage, since such clothing is being collected by young buyers. Many of the current fashions shown in magazines are reminiscent of the 1950s – 1980s, with a big emphasis on new interpretations of the styles from the 1960s and 1970s.

For the purpose of this book, I am designating textiles as *vintage* if they are pre-1980. I have included a very few items in the book which date from about 1980, but nearly all the items in the book are older. The oldest textiles in this book date from the late 1920s or early 1930s. The bulk of items are from the 1940s -1960s.

Reader will note that not all the items have an approximate date of origin. There are some items that are just too difficult to date by decade and rather than put a wide range of dates, say ca. 1940s-1960s, I have omitted the data for that item. Many Christmas themes were used over a period of decades and it is not always easy to pinpoint the particular decade of origin. Also, most of the textiles in this book were used and no longer have original tags or packaging to help date them. I have employed my own judgement based on knowledge of use of color, fabric, and motif to date the items in this book. My dating is based on educated guesses and is not infallible.

That said, there is certain criteria that I use to date Christmas textiles. Since very little has been written previously about dating vintage Christmas linens, I have used my own observations as a guide. Certain colors and motifs were popular during various decades of the 20th century and this use of color and design extended all the way from advertising and fashion to the fabrics of the decade.

Christmas Colors

When it comes to color, the 1920s and 1930s have a look all their own, which was reflected in the Christmas cards of the era as well as in the textiles. The colors were pure, bold, and dramatic, unlike those of any decade to follow. True red, blue, and yellow were popular on Christmas cards, in the art of children’s books, and on textiles. Shades of blue were especially popular and many Christmas cards of the era featured midnight blue backgrounds, often made of foil, as well as blue poinsettias and blue sailing ships.

The color pink was popular in the 1950s and early 1960s and it shows up in the textiles of that era, from pink poinsettias to pink Christmas trees! Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the colors changed again. Avocado green was sometimes used rather than true, *Christmas green*, and some of the reds had an orange hue.

Christmas Design Motifs

Popular design motifs changed over the decades as well. Many of the designs in the 1920s and 1930s were Art Deco in nature; however, I have found that the Christmas cards and the textiles of that era often harkened back to an earlier day, with their use of people in Colonial dress and village scenes complete with cozy houses, horse-drawn carriages and dogs. Sometimes, the designs of the era mixed the Art Deco with the colonial to produce something entirely new.

The 1940s brought on a traditional look. Traditional Christmas icons decorate the textiles of this time period. Candles, holly, wreaths, pine boughs, poinsettias, and my favorite—bells—are employed liberally on tablecloths, runners and tea towels dating from this period. Occasionally, nearly all of these elements were used in one tablecloth!

The 1950s and 1960s spawned some innovative designers, such as Tammi Keefe, Vera (Vera Neumann), and Robert Darr Wert, whose Christmas designs looked very little like their forerunners. Tammi Keefe, especially, lent a playful air to her work. Her handkerchiefs are whimsical and non-traditional. Her Santa Claus is more than jolly; he is animated and almost mischievous. Her reindeer and her angels have attitude. In addition, her use of color is often different from what had come before and her handkerchiefs often incorporate script in the design. (See the chapter sections on designer handkerchiefs and designer tea towels to learn more.)

The 1970s brought an emphasis on nature and the home. The colors reflected earth tones, especially avocado green and gold. Once again, hearth and home were emphasized.



Materials and Condition

Most of the textiles in this book are made from cotton in some form: pure cotton, cotton linen, cotton felt, and terrycloth. If an article is not cotton, it is designated as “synthetic.” This may indicate an item made from nylon, polyester, or another synthetic material. Since most of the items do not have their original tags, a judgment call was made of their compositions, and they are identified as “synthetic.”

Most of the items shown in this book are in good-to-mint condition. For the sake of pricing, the standard of *good used condition* is used, meaning the item is basically free of defects such as tears, stains, runs, and color fading. The reader may note that a few items do have some stains or fading, but for the basis of pricing the item they are judged as being in *good used condition*. Some of the handkerchiefs are a bit thin and worn from repeated use and laundering, but this only adds to their charm.

Fabric Care

Christmas linens are relatively easy to care for. Being mostly cotton, they are machine washable and may be dried in a machine dryer. Felt items should not be washed, for they will be ruined. Delicate items should be laundered on gentle or hand-wash settings or be washed by hand in a sink. Most tea towels and handkerchiefs can be ironed on the cotton setting of an electric pressing iron, but do test the item on a cooler setting when you start. Be mindful of not scorching or tearing delicate lace trim.

Textile items should be stored flat, and the best ones should be placed between sheets of acid-free tissue paper. It is especially important to store handkerchiefs flat, since over time folded creases become almost permanent and yellowing will occur along fold lines. The same caution holds true for tablecloths, table runners, and tea towels. Store your textile items where they are safe from moths, mice, and other pests.

Keep brightly colored textiles out of the sun, and if you frame a piece use acid-free glass and hang it where the sun won't cause damage.

Using Your Textiles

There are many ways to use vintage Christmas textiles. I use a favorite round tablecloth as a tree skirt, for example. This tablecloth dates from about the 1960s and features colonial people and horse-drawn sleighs. It is trimmed in white fringe. I like the cheery look of it, especially on the days before it gets buried under gifts. The nice thing about a cotton tree skirt is that it can be cleaned in a washing machine after the holiday. One cannot do that with felt.

I also enjoy displaying some of my favorite tea towels in my dining room on a linen rack. The hard part is deciding which ones to display! It is fun to rotate my collection each year. Tea towels can be hung in the kitchen for use or just to be admired, it is your choice. Also, they can be placed down the center of a table, as a runner, or on a computer keyboard as protection against dust.

Festive aprons also can be worn or displayed. A small ladder hung on a wall makes a great display rack for aprons. Simply tie the aprons to the rungs in an eye-pleasing manner organized by color, material, or design. Small aprons can even be strung across a large window as a Christmas curtain.

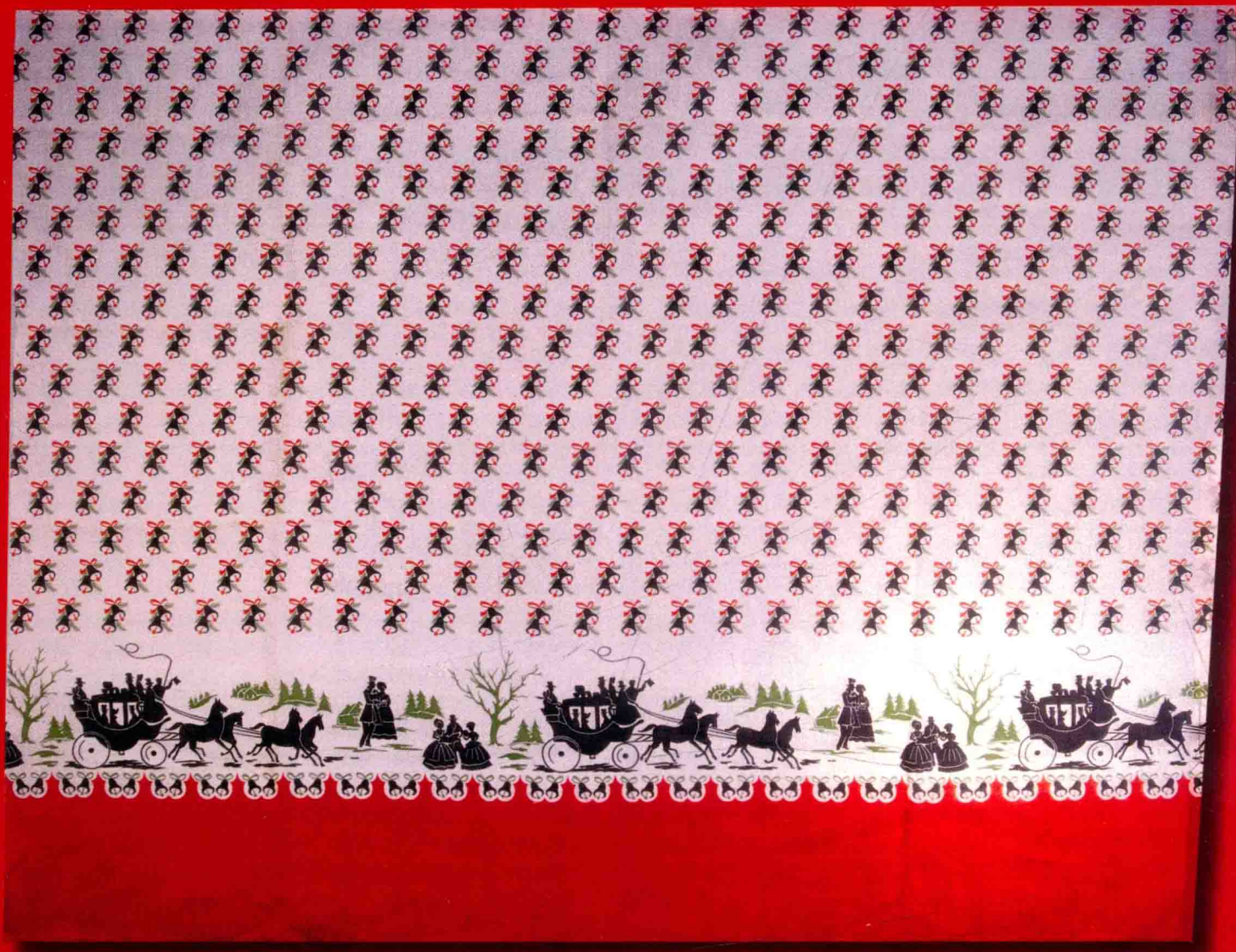
Tablecloths may be used on tables throughout the house as well as in the dining room. Rotate them on your kitchen table and use small ones on side tables and under tabletop Christmas trees and decorations.

If you have a glass-covered coffee table, you can display handkerchiefs under the glass. A collage can be made from handkerchiefs alone, or they can be mixed with vintage Christmas cards. A glass-topped dressing table is another place to show off hankies. Try putting handkerchiefs on a bathroom shelf. Lacy handkerchiefs or those with poinsettias can be placed under perfume bottles and displayed in baskets. The same may be done in the dining room by tucking lace-trimmed hankies into long-stem glasses or glass baskets. Hankies can also be used as doilies on a buffet table.

Just imagine all the wonderful things you can make from fabulous vintage Christmas fabric. Some designs never go out of style. If you love to sew, consider making a holiday quilt from vintage Christmas handkerchiefs. A Christmas quilt can be created with many patterns of the same type or with a variety of holiday patterns. Magazines and craft books often provide instructions for making holiday quilts. With a little imagination, the possibilities are endless!

One of the great benefits of vintage Christmas linens is their ability to be fun to collect and a pleasure to use. Happy hunting!

PREPARATIONS



Lightweight cotton fabric with a colonial scene. \$10-12.

Tea Towels

Dishing It Up

There are so many terrific tea towels, certainly something to suit every taste. I am partial to their cheery, mid-twentieth-century motifs. And they launder so well in the washing machine. I would like to say I have a favorite, but it is difficult to pick just one!



Santa peers through a green wreath. Border of candy canes and ornaments. "Noel" is printed above the wreaths. Ca. 1960s. \$13-18.



Santa totes his pack on this linen dish towel. Ca. 1960s/1970s. \$13-18.



Santa's Coming to Town

Could St. Nick get any jollier?



Jolly Santas and pretty poinsettias. Ca. 1960s. \$13-18.

A jolly Santa rides in his sleigh on this towel with the look of cross-stitch. Tag reads: *Parisian Prints. All Pure Linen. Ca. 1970s. \$13-18.*

Noel . . . Noel . . .

Printing the word “Noel” and other holiday greetings on tea towels was fashionable in the 1950s and ‘60s. Not all of these towels share these sentiments, but they are all bright and cheery.



Terry towel. Red, green, and yellow towel features a Christmas tree and fireplace. Border of ornaments and candy canes. “Noel” in red letters. Ca. 1960s. \$12-15.



Bell and poinsettia motif on this terry towel, along with the word, “Noel”. Ca. 1950s/1960s. \$12-15.



Red birds sing, “Noel Noel” on this colorful terrycloth towel with a sleepy Santa and a clock. \$12-15.



Red and green ornaments adorn evergreen boughs tied with red bows on this linen towel. Ca.1950s/1960s. \$13-18.



A pair of wreaths are garnished with fruit. Linen. \$13-18.



This festive tea towel has it all: reindeer, candles, Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and poinsettias. Cotton linen. Ca.1950s/1960s. \$15-25.



Red candles in old-fashioned lanterns. Tag reads:
Fallani & Cohn. All linen. Ca. 1950s/1960s. \$15-20.



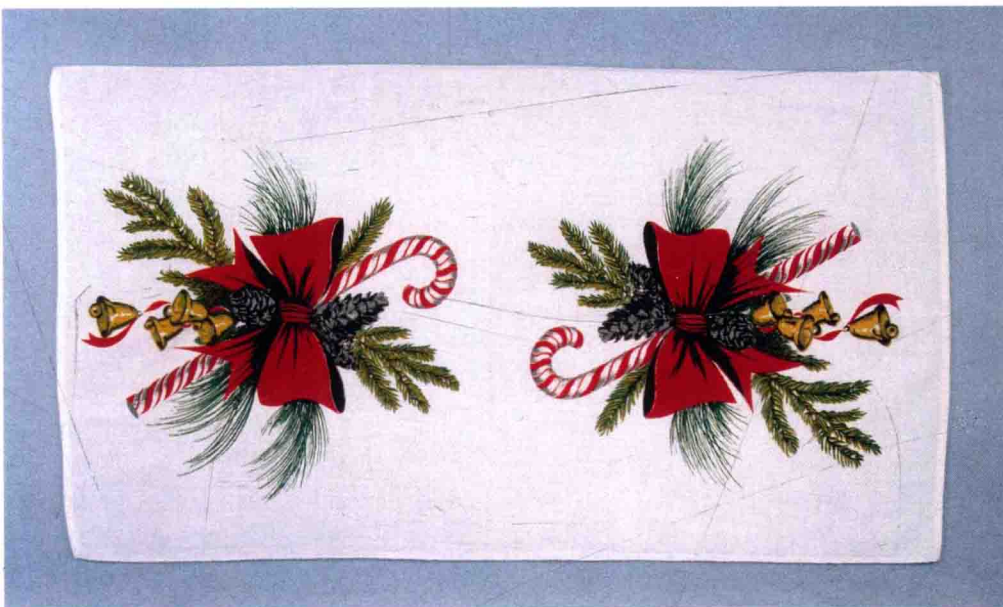
This delightful towel features a Christmas Pudding recipe. Sheriff
 Textiles. Ca. 1970s. \$15-20.



Green holly leaves and red berries. Signed, "Marge French". Screen printed by *Kay Dee*. Linen. Ca. 1960s/1970s. \$15-20.



Deep red poinsettias. Hand printed by *Kay Dee*. \$13-18.



Candy canes, bells, and bows. Ca. 1950s/1960s. \$13-18.



Deep red poinsettias surrounded by a gold border. \$13-18.