

## Knitting

Knitted textile production allowed women another way to participate in their household economy. Most women could knit serviceable garments from any yarn not designated for weaving—for example, much of the worsted yarn produced locally was knit into stockings. Laurel Ulrich describes young New England girls working at home, knitting goods only for themselves and their families, while they were more likely to spin at a neighbor's "as part of an exchange of work."<sup>40</sup> For Pennsylvania women, too, hand knitting was likely to be more a domestic activity than spinning, but both were female jobs. In contrast to spinning, however, men were also knitters, but they worked on a piece of equipment called a *frame* that facilitated the commercial production of knit goods (mostly stockings). The division of labor with framework knitting also resembled that of other European textile traditions: Women used simple knitting needles to work by hand, while men operated knitting frames to make goods for the market.

When knitting needles appear in inventories, they always belonged to women, further underscoring the female association with hand knitting. As we have seen, throughout the eighteenth century, the skill was among the desirable assets of female slaves and servants.<sup>43</sup> Women in a family and those who worked for them could readily incorporate it into their daily activities. Because a ball of yarn and knitting needles were easily portable, one could carry a project about, working on it when time allowed, perhaps while waiting for a baby to be born, minding a child, or visiting a neighbor. The metal or wooden needles could be imported, purchased nearby, or made oneself. Local retailers sold large quantities of British-made metal needles, although after the 1760s this seems to have declined.<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, an individual could whittle needles out of wood or perhaps obtain them from a local blacksmith or wire mill.

<sup>16</sup> A few "stocking weavers," or "framework knitters" as they were also called, operated in Chester County throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Working in the 1720s and 1730s, John Camm practiced his craft with the help of an indentured servant who learned the trade so well that, drawing on Camm's good reputation, the servant later sold stockings that he falsely claimed were the work of his master.<sup>48</sup> Like the weavers in Chester County, Camm combined his artisan skills with farming.<sup>49</sup> Later in the century, when land was more difficult to obtain, stocking knitter John Graves had only a house and a garden lot and devoted more of his time to his craft, using three stocking looms that comprised 15 percent of the value of his personal estate at his death.<sup>50</sup> His surviving account book shows that Graves knit stockings made predominantly of linen but also of cotton, wool, and silk, for the most part with yarn provided by his customers. Graves' formal records indicate that he made about