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Statement about the lace tablecloth from the town of Hooglede.

This magnificent bobbin lace tablecloth was made to express the gratitude of the people of Hooglede, Belgium, for the aid they received during World War I. It has belonged to Millard Shaler, who was an American mining engineer, living with his family in Brussels when the war started. Mr. Shaler was involved with the food relief program from the very beginning. First, as a member and representative of the Comité National, started by Emile Francqui and Ernest Solvay, and then with Herbert Hoover's Commission for Relief in Belgium.

The words of thanks encircle the detailed image of the town's church, which is dedicated to Saint Joseph. These central elements are then surrounded by beautiful bobbin lace flowers that have connecting bars between the floral motifs. The outer border features depictions of the lion of Belgium and the warrior, in medieval armor, from the town's coat-of-arms. Encompassing the lions and the warriors are bobbin lace meshes done in various styles. The cloth is finished with a narrow edging of bobbin lace.

This lovely cloth not only expresses the gratitude of the town of Hooglede, but it also showcases the skills and talents of its designers and lacemakers. Above all, it radiates the pride and care that went into its creation.

It has been a privilege to be involved with Paul Brouha's quest to return his grandfather's tablecloth to Belgium. Mr. Brouha recently shipped it to me so I could make a few minor repairs. As I spread it out on one of my tables, I could feel the presence of the lacemakers, who knew that one hundred years later this cloth would still speak for them.

I wish that I could say in reply to them, "We see what you did. We see how you used elaborate and intriguing designs, stitches, and techniques. We see how your courage and determination shines in your work. We see how you created lasting beauty in the midst of a brutal war. And above all, we want you to know how grateful we are for what you have done for us."