

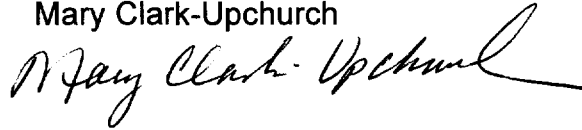
Ornamental Arts:
The Contribution of Samplers to the Study of Women's History

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Clark-Upchurch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

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Abstract

Women's education during the colonial and federal periods of American history gave rise to sampler-making, which, in the most recent decades, has become a credible art form. This examination of education's impact on the art of sampler-making is divided into nine chapters that can be grouped into three sections. The first section, comprised of the first two chapters, gives basic information on the use of ornamental arts in the education of women and on the various aspects of making a sampler. Section two, which includes the remaining chapters, takes an in-depth look at the schools, teachers, and sampler designs that came from New England during the late seventeenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. The final part of this thesis is the conclusion, which looks at how sampler-making was transformed into an art form and valuable collector's item when, before, samplers had been used primarily as an educational tool for women. Brought together, all these chapters serve to emphasize the significance of sampler-making in the development of women's history.

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Thank you also to my mother who constantly pushed me to do my best on this paper, and my grandmother who supplied me with old magazines and newspaper articles with information on cross-stitching.

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Chapter 1

Women's Education in Early America

Today, women can be anything they want to be or do anything they want to do. Most women naturally assume that they have the ability to get a job or get a good education while also having a family. These opportunities, available only within the past one hundred years, are taken now for granted. During the early American period, women were not given these choices. Only one real position was available to a woman--that of wife and mother. The thought of obtaining a higher education at a college or university was unthinkable for the majority of women during this time, and having an occupation outside the home was almost unimaginable. From the beginning of America until about the mid-1800s, any education a woman received was used primarily as a way of enhancing her expected role. Not surprisingly then, at this time, the sampler-making period was at its greatest height. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the emphasis placed on ornamental arts formed the basis of women's education, initiating a trend that would last well into the nineteenth century, when better educational standards for women finally became available.

During the colonial period of American history, the most important skill a woman could possess was the ability to run an efficient household. For that reason, women were expected to do the cooking, the washing, the cleaning, and certainly the sewing or mending. Just as boys were trained to become future farmers or businessmen, girls became apprentices to their mothers, learning all the skills necessary to become the best mother or wife that they could be. One of the most important skills was the ability to sew. In her book on women's education, Janet Wilson James supports this idea when she states, "The Puritans set their little girls to heavy plain sewing before they were six, being eager to keep them from the

sin of idleness as well as to raise capable wives.”¹

As women emigrated to America with their families, they brought with them their knowledge of needlework techniques. These skills were passed on to their daughters at an early age in the form of samplers. Thus, the original use for samplers, commonly referred to in this early stage as marking samplers, was for girls to practice their sewing stitches or combinations of stitches. These sewing stitches were worked on a long, narrow piece of fabric, which was then rolled up and stored in an area out of the way until it was needed for consultation. These “reference guides” were used then by women to mark household linens or clothing, most often with cross-stitched initials, for identification purposes. In fact, the term “sampler,” stemming from the Latin word *exemplar*, was initially defined as far back as 1530 in the Anglo-French dictionary, *Lesclaircissement de la Langue Francoyse*, as being “an example for a woman to work by.”²

As time passed, it became more common for mothers to send their daughters to coeducational dame schools instead of teaching them at home. These schools, which today would be considered the equivalent of kindergartens, were established in the homes of women, often unmarried or widowed, who needed an income. The education was limited, consisting primarily of the basics in reading and writing and the learning of numbers, although sewing and knitting were also included for those girls who did attend. Most often, this was a girl’s first encounter with any academic skills beyond being able to read the Bible.

Surprisingly, it was at some dame schools that boys occasionally learned needlework techniques as well as girls. For instance, Mary Eden, a dame school mistress from Salem, Massachusetts, was recorded as having “taught the boys to

¹ James, Changing Ideas About Women in the United States, 1776-1825, p. 14.

² Krueger, A Gallery of American Samplers: The Theodore H. Kapnek Collection, p. 8.

sew and knit to keep them quiet and orderly.”³ Even toward the end of the sampler-making period, when dame schools were declining in popularity, boys were still producing samplers. In 1823, a boy named John Scantlebury completed a sampler considered by several historians to rival even the best work done by some girls.

During the early eighteenth century, educational opportunities for girls began to dwindle as they got older. The next stage in a boy's education was the local common or town school, but these initially institutions did not encourage attendance by girls. The smaller a town was, however, the more likely it would be to allow girls to enroll in the local common school. Unlike the dame schools which were coeducational, the common schools conducted the education of girls and boys separately. Many teachers taught summer sessions when attendance by boys was low, or they conducted the girls' classes at certain hours of the day, either early morning or late afternoon. Regardless, the education girls received at the common schools was extremely limited and eventually led, in the nineteenth century, to the creation of female academies or seminaries, which focused primarily on the needs of educating women.

At the female academies, women's education was expanded to include such subjects as math, reading, writing, geography, and history, as well as many science courses. There was also a great focus on feminine accomplishments such as music, drawing, dancing, and ornamental needlework. As a result, although these academies provided a more advanced education than previously offered, they continued to support and emphasize above all the idea that women were merely ornamental objects fit only to be wives and mothers. As Margaret Fuller wrote in 1839 about the education provided at these female academies, “Women are now taught, at

³ Rettew, Behold the Labour of My Tender Age: Children and Their Samplers, 1780-1850, p. 17.

school, all that men are. They run over, specifically, even more studies, without being taught anything . . . Women learn without any attempt to reproduce [their learning in active life as men do]. Their only reproduction is for purpose of display.”⁴

Despite the low quality of education, the number of girls attending the academies grew rapidly. In response, many American educators and learned people spoke out against these schools, claiming that they produced women who were interested only in their outward appearances to the detriment of their moral and spiritual character, and who were ultimately unfit to actually be wives and, especially, mothers. Nothing states this more clearly than a poem that appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1858. Intended as a satirical comment on the state of women's academies, it stated:

With a spick and span new, superfine education,
 Befitting a maid of such fortunate station,
 Miss Mary Degai had just made her debut,
 From the very select,
 Genteel, circumspect,
 Establishment kept by--it can not be wrong
 Just to mention the name--by one Madame Cancan. . .
 But then what good rearing she gave to her pupils!
 They dressed like those elegant ladies at Goupil's
 One sees in the prints just imported from France;
 With what marvelous grace did they join in the dance!
 No Puritan modesty marred their tournure--
 Being modest is nearly as bad as being poor--
 No shudder attacked them when man laid his hand on
 Their waists in the Redowa's graceful abandon,
 As they swung in that waltz to voluptuous music;
 Ah! did we but see
 Our sisters so free,
 I warrant the sight would make both me and you sick!
 Thus no trouble was spared through these young misses' lives
 To make them good partners, and--very bad wives.”⁵

⁴ Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, p. 109.

⁵ Woody, *A History of Women's Education*, p. 111.

Social commentary such as this was only the beginning. By the mid-nineteenth century, the diligent efforts of reformers combined with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, from which technologies such as the sewing machine were created, brought about the end of ornamental needlework in women's schooling, opening the door finally for better women's education, especially in colleges and universities.

Ironically, while the academies encouraged very little actual learning, they did produce the finest collection of needlework ever completed. Between 1800 and 1835, at the point when academies were most popular, there were more samplers stitched than at any other time. Most of the recognized groups, such as those originating from the Balch school in Rhode Island or those stitched at Susanna Rowson's Academy in Massachusetts, are from this period and are found in most collections today. As a result, the samplers often produced at these academies are the only sources that provide information about women in American history, making them extremely important contributions to the study of American history overall. Samplers now are given a place of importance in history and as highly valued collector's items, positions they rightly deserve after centuries of being considered merely a frivolous art form.

Chapter 2 Samplers--The Basics to Understanding Early American Sampler-Making

As stated in the previous chapter, the art of sampler-making has been around for centuries. Eileen J. Bennett, a well-known scholar and sampler enthusiast, found that Egyptian embroidery from as far back as the fifth or sixth century, which occasionally displayed Christian symbols “worked in a darning stitch with silk thread on linen,” often closely resembled the common sampler format known today.⁶ Several centuries later, this art made it to America, although certainly by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was used primarily for the instruction of young girls with the intent of preparing them for their future domestic role. To get a full appreciation of the importance of samplers in the history of America and as an art form, it is first necessary to know the basics of what is involved in sampler-making. Therefore, it is crucial to look at several aspects of sampler-making--namely, the fabrics and thread used, the types of designs created and where they originated, and, finally, the types of stitches involved in the process of sampler-making.

The Background Fabric and Embroidery Thread

The most popular fabric used for sampler backgrounds, referred to simply as a *ground*, was unbleached linen, not surprising considering that in the 1640s at least two colonies, Massachusetts and Connecticut, “required that every family plant and raise flax or hemp.”⁷ It was from the dried stalk of the flax plant that linen was most often produced. The stalks were bundled together and soaked in water until the outer part was worn away. They then were dried and beaten with a flax brake, which separated the necessary fibers from the outer bark. These fibers were combed

⁶ Bennett, The Evolution of Samplers: A Four-Hundred Year History of Sampler-Making, p. 1.

⁷ Krueger, New England Samplers to 1840, p. 5.

through with hackling combs until they were soft and fine. Then, they were spun into the linen thread used for sampler-making.⁸ Although the fabric was usable, American linen was often rougher than English linen because of this homemade process. Therefore, an easier, but more costly way of getting linen was to import it, which several stores did, from countries like Holland, Russia, Scotland and Poland.

Linen was by no means the only fabric used. By the late eighteenth century, wool was used in several samplers. Eliza Whitman from Massachusetts worked her 1796 sampler in wool as did Maria Bolen, from Philadelphia, in 1816.⁹ One of the most significant reasons this fabric, called tammy or tannery cloth, was often chosen was that it produced a more even design than linen, giving it a more attractive appearance when the sampler was completed. However, there were several disadvantages to using tammy cloth as well, among those being that the fabric shrank quite easily, it curled up at the edges, and it provided a great source of food for hungry moths.¹⁰

Several other types of fabrics were used also, although still not as often as linen. These include tiffany, a lightweight fabric popular in the early nineteenth century, cotton, satin and linsey-woolsey, an olive-green ground made of a vertical blue-green linen with a yellow-green horizontal wool filler that appeared between 1798 and 1832.¹¹ Linsey-woolsey can usually be seen in samplers from areas in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. Satin was rarely used because it was the primary fabric for mourning samplers, in which the tombs, with their lengthy inscriptions, were often painted directly on the fabric. According to Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe in their book, *American Samplers*, "satin was

⁸ Cobb, *A Sampler View of Colonial Life*, p. 14.

⁹ Krueger, *A Gallery of American Samplers*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, p. 389.

¹¹ Krueger, *New England Samplers*, p. 5.

a better medium than anything else for the combination of paint and embroidery.”¹²

The embroidery thread followed the same pattern as the background fabric. It, too, was made from linen, wool and cotton, although the dominant fabric used was silk. Almost all samplers employed the use of silk, while only certain pieces displayed the use of the other fabrics. Linen thread, for example, was used primarily on whitework samplers during the seventeenth century.

The impressive quality of the thread, however, originated in its coloring. In the early years of sampler-making, most thread was dyed at home using natural sources. An article by Martha Genung Stearns titled “Family Dyeing in Colonial New England,” states:

Butternut bark made a beautiful brown; a certain moss made a tan brown. Alder bark made a seal brown. Birch bark a gun metal gray. Yellow-root, barberry bark and sassafras made yellow. It always took two things to make green; indigo and golden rod colored green, also laurel leaves and hickory bark. Black was one of the hardest colors to set; mercury or poison ivy made a pretty good black. Purple flag and elder berries gave lavender, but a fast lavender and purple was hard to get.¹³

In later years, these natural sources gave way to professionally dyed thread, although this came at a steep price. Cochineal, a red dye produced from cactus-eating insects of the same name, and indigo, a dark blue shade produced from the indigo plant, were among the most expensive dyes, although madder, created by using 70,000 dried female insects to produce its various shades of pink, was also quite expensive.¹⁴ Although there has been some fading from the passage of years, one can still see the effect of these beautiful colors, whether home dyed or professionally colored, in the sampler collections of today.

¹² Bolton and Coe, American Samplers, p. 390.

¹³ Krueger, A Gallery of American Samplers, p. 17.

¹⁴ Krueger, A Gallery of American Samplers, p. 17.

The Designs

Because they were simply records of stitches, when sampler-making first began in America, the majority of samplers had little or no designs. They usually resembled English embroideries as they were stitched upon the longer background fabric instead of the square shape that became popular as the years passed. In fact, in these early years, by the time a woman finished her sampler, it could range in length from about sixteen inches to twenty-nine inches.¹⁵

The first design to be stitched was the band design, begun in the seventeenth century. Basically, this consisted of row upon row of repeating patterns, the more popular ones being the Tudor rose, acorns, honeysuckle and carnations, strawberries, the trefoil, and fleur-de-lis.¹⁶ Most of these motifs, along with new ones such as the Indian pink flower, were eventually used in the borders of the pictorial type of sampler that gained popularity around 1725 as the band pattern gradually lost favor. The pictorial design is perhaps the most common form of sampler, often consisting of an alphabet, numbers, a verse, the girl's name, and the date in which it was completed, surrounded on at least three sides by a flowery border. Except for specialized samplers, such as mourning or map samplers, this design remained constant, although by the late eighteenth century, many samplers began including buildings, often the schoolhouses where certain designs were taught.

Motifs originated from several sources. Surprisingly, teachers and students often created their own designs. One such person was a student from Pennsylvania whose design, found today in the Schwenkfelder Library and Museum in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, was "drawn in ink, colored, [and] inscribed, Susanha Heebneren."¹⁷

¹⁵ Krueger, A Gallery of American Samplers, p. 18.

¹⁶ Krueger, A Gallery of American Samplers, p. 18.

¹⁷ Krueger, A Gallery of American Samplers, p. 20.

Besides drawing their own designs, the teachers were responsible also for creating their own sampler pattern consisting of their favorite motifs. Eventually, these patterns came to identify specific schools, explaining the similarities between several samplers.

While many designs were drawn personally, other women looked to pattern books for their source of inspiration. One of the most widely utilized pattern books, employed primarily for its alphabet, was *The Instructor: or Young Man's Best Companion* by Englishman George Fisher, later reprinted for American audiences by Benjamin Franklin and David Hall in 1784. This book consisted of one chapter on the topic of embroidery labeled "The Family's Best Companion; with Instructions for Marking Linnen," with only one paragraph stating:

This [table of letters and numbers] is indispensably necessary and useful for the training up the younger sort of the female kind to the needle, it being introductory to all the various and sundry sorts of needlework pertaining to that sex: Therefore I have set down the alphabet in capitals, or great letters and small, likewise, the figures; that girls or young women, by often practice, may soon attain to perfection in marking on linen.¹⁸

This paragraph was followed by two pages depicting the designs for two upper and lower-case marking alphabets, as well as numbers from zero to nine, a small crown, and an ampersand.

The Stitches

Throughout the majority of the American sampler-making period, several styles of stitches appeared, although only a few were used most frequently. These included the cross-stitch, tent-stitch or petit-point stitch, satin-stitch, and eyelet stitch, the

¹⁸ Krueger, New England Samplers, p. 9.

foundation of even these being the cross-stitch and tent-stitch.¹⁹ All others such as the running, Oriental, chain, inverted buttonhole, back, and French knot stitches, as well as numerous others, experienced popularity at certain points in time. For example, the queen-stitch, although lasting until the end of the sampler period, only came into style around the middle to late eighteenth century and was used very rarely. Above all, though, cross-stitch was used to complete basic patterns, namely any type of lettering of which there was quite a bit. All other stitches were used primarily in the completion of designs.

By the late eighteenth century, sampler-making was no longer in vogue. It remained for historians at a later date to discover the beauty and necessity of discovering these pieces of art and using them to learn what life was like for women in early American history. By simply observing the basics of what goes into the making of a sampler, however, one can certainly get a glimpse of the magnitude of this study. Also important to observe are the samplers that originated during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. For instance, what were some popular motifs or designs on samplers, or where was sampler-making taught and who taught these girls? Sampler-making opens up a whole period of women's history that is often overlooked. By observing some highlights of the American sampler-making period, however, the significance of these historical artifacts becomes clearer, hopefully proving that samplers and the common, everyday women who stitched them, were important parts of America's history.

¹⁹ Bolton and Coe, American Samplers, p. 396.

Chapter 3 Highlights in Sampler-Making from Massachusetts

Massachusetts is often considered the leading producer of American schoolgirl embroidery throughout the almost two hundred year span of the sampler-making period. More recognizable groups are attributed to this state than from any other state in New England, and it can even claim to have the earliest sampler stitched in America. This is not surprising when one considers that, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Massachusetts was at the center of American life. It was the first colony to be settled and, from that time, it consistently maintained its position throughout the years as a leader in cultural, religious, and political affairs. Thus, Massachusetts took the lead in artistic production as well, as can be seen from the numerous samplers existing from this period. Because of this fact, to mention every school or every sampler produced would be impossible. However, some groups do stand out from the majority and these are the samplers that will be focused on in this chapter.

To discuss sampler-making in Massachusetts without first giving credit to the girl who stitched the first American sampler would be unthinkable. Lora Standish, who is credited with beginning the American needlework period, was the daughter of Myles Standish, one of the more well-known passengers on the Mayflower. When she created her sampler or even the exact dates of when she lived and died are unclear. Only through her sampler and occasional references by her father do scholars even have evidence that such a person existed. What little is known is that she was most likely a sickly child, barely reaching her teens before dying, only a few years before the death of her father in 1656.

Like many of the samplers produced in this early period, Lora's is based on the

popular style originating from England (Figure 1). The most noticeable aspect of her sampler is its length. Only in the early eighteenth century did samplers evolve into the typical square. Until then, most samplers were usually very long and very narrow. Lora's is twenty-three inches long and seven inches wide, and is comprised of stitches such as the Montenegrin cross-stitch, the Algerian eye, and the rococo stitch, all much more difficult to produce than the basic cross-stitching found on samplers today.²⁰ The designs are quite similar to those often produced during the late seventeenth century, with bands of acorns, roses, and carnations, as well as a band of intertwined S's, often referred to as the Stuart S. At the bottom is her signature, with an added vowel, and a short verse:

Loara Standish is my name

Lorde guide my hart that I may doe thy will
Also fill my hands with such convenient skill
As may conduce to virtue void of shame
And I will give glory to thy name.²¹

Lora's sampler can today be found in the Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where it has been housed since 1844 when it was donated by Lucius Alden, a descendent of Myles Standish.²²

Although there is no doubt that many other girls were producing samplers during the seventeenth century, no other recognized sampler of such importance appears until the eighteenth century, during the time when sampler-making became most popular throughout New England. Perhaps the most intriguing style to appear in Massachusetts at this time was the fishing lady embroideries, named by historian Helen Bowen in the early twentieth century. Eventually, the title came to represent all

²⁰ Davidson, Plimouth Colony Samplers, p. 4.

²¹ Davidson, Plimouth Colony Samplers, p. 6.

²² Davidson, Plimouth Colony Samplers, p. 6.

pastoral embroidery produced in Boston boarding schools during the mid-eighteenth century. Ultimately, however, several subgroups were created by historians to classify the various fishing lady samplers that were being stitched. These subgroups were usually based on identifying features such as needlework techniques, certain motifs or the fabrics and threads used.

The fishing lady samplers are quite self-explanatory because the central picture is of a lady fishing (Figure 2). Surrounding her are motifs that include birds, sheep, trees, flowers and, occasionally, buildings. The group that produced the most numerous examples is distinguished by the use of crewel, or loosely twisted yarn, worked in a tent stitch. Occasionally, the faces of the fishing ladies are either painted on or are made of applied paper. In another group, the fishing lady appears on a smaller scale but is more delicately stitched, and her dress is shown often as having vertical stripes on it. Yet another group is composed primarily of the reclining shepherdess, in which the woman sits at the foot of a tree while a shepherd stands beside her. Both are surrounded by a variety of animals. Despite the number of fishing lady samplers, however, there is absolutely no evidence of any teacher from whom these scenes could have originated, making this style extremely fascinating for historians to study.

A second group of samplers, the coat of arms or armorial embroideries, also flourished during this time (Figure 3). Like the fishing lady scenes, there is no clear point of origin for the coat of arms depictions, although there were several teachers known to have taught this type of embroidery. On April 7, 1755, Eleanor Purcell became the first schoolmistress to advertise the teaching of this style when *The Boston Evening-Post* ran her ad claiming that she could instruct young girls in the production of "Coats of Arms embroidered on Satten," and "Coats of Arms, and all

sorts of Flowers in Shell-Work."²³ Three years later, Jannette Day also began advertising her skill in armorial embroidery, although her school eventually was turned over to Ame and Elizabeth Cuming who continued her work. Eleanor Purcell and Jannette Day were only two of the teachers of the coat of arms style, but there were numerous others who continued this trend until the mid-1800s when needlework began to lose favor and more serious educational opportunities for women became available.

For many sampler collectors today, the discussion of coat of arms embroideries remains a touchy subject, primarily because they often resemble hatchments. According to Betty Ring, a noted scholar of sampler-making:

The word hatchment (derived from achievement) properly applies to a coat of arms painted diagonally against a black background on a square panel and hung from one corner. As a symbol of mourning, it was customarily placed above the entrance to the home of the deceased and later moved to the family's house of worship.²⁴

Coat of arms embroideries were never known to have been used in mourning rituals, usually stitched instead as a decorative display of a young woman's needlework skills. Most often, however, these samplers were worked in the common hatchment shape, and they were regularly worked on black silk, giving rise to the confusion concerning their purpose. Regardless of what collector's today might think about coat of arms embroideries, the style was immensely popular throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries at almost every notable ladies academy in Massachusetts, as well as throughout all New England.

Unlike the fishing lady and coat of arms embroideries, the final group of significant samplers can be attributed to an identified school from the Boston area,

²³ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers and Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850, p. 68.

²⁴ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 60-61.

Susanna Rowson's Academy. Susanna Rowson, although known for her school and the wonderful needlework produced there, is perhaps more well-recognized as an actress, playwright and novelist. For seven years, she and her husband, William Rowson, traveled throughout England and America making their money by acting, until 1797 when they finally settled in Boston. The following year, Rowson opened a boarding school, immediately becoming a respected and well-loved teacher by both her students and their parents. In a letter to her father, Eliza Southgate wrote that she was "under the tuition of an amiable lady, so mild, so good, no one can help loving her; she treats all her scholars with such a tenderness as would win the affection of the most savage brute . . . I have described one of the blessings of creation in Mrs. Rowson."²⁵

The samplers from Rowson's school often are difficult to assign because there is such a wide variety in motifs and patterns that were employed by the young girls studying there. Some examples have been signed and dated, so there is no doubt as to their point of origin, but many others can only be guessed at. Through detective work by several historians, a group of memorial embroideries has conclusively been attributed to Rowson's school. The similarity in the depiction of trees has linked samplers stitched by students Mary Lyman, Eliza Adams and Mary D. Brown, as well as a few unsigned pieces. A group of pictorial embroideries depicting Columbus and some Washington memorials also have been ascribed to Rowson's school.

Although several supplementary instructors were employed to teach students in such classes as music and drawing, many scholars believe that Rowson herself was ultimately responsible for the needlework classes. This can be supported by a poem from Elias Nason's collection of poetry titled *A Memoir of Susanna Rowson*. He

²⁵ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 88.

wrote:

. . .I knew
Some twenty years ago this lady's worth
As an instructress, when around her sat
Thirty fair misses ready at her beck
To draw the needle with the silken thread
Through the framed specimen of female art. . .²⁶

Susanna Rowson was surely at least overseeing the production of all her students in all their classes. Every year, she displayed her students' works in a public exhibition, awarding medals to those who excelled. Eventually, however, Susanna Rowson's health began to fail and in 1822, she relinquished her ownership of the school, giving it to her daughter, Fanny, and her niece, Susan, both of whom had attended the academy in their youth. She died two years later on March 2, 1824.

The number of samplers produced by young academy girls in Massachusetts during the early period of American history is impossible to completely cover in one single chapter. The state contributed the largest number of embroideries and some of the more fascinating ones as well from within New England. Representing the best in American schoolgirl art, they are most importantly the samplers coveted by collectors today.

²⁶ Giffen, "Susanna Rowson and Her Academy," *Antiques*, p. 438.

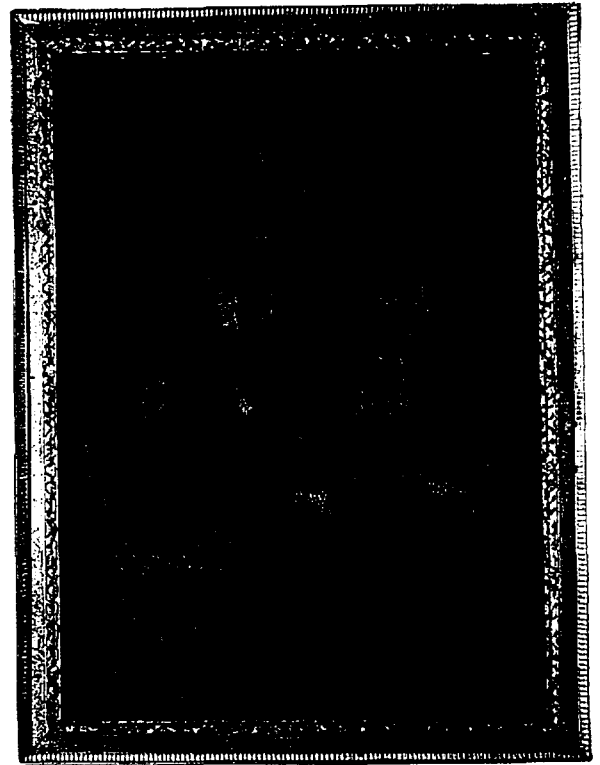
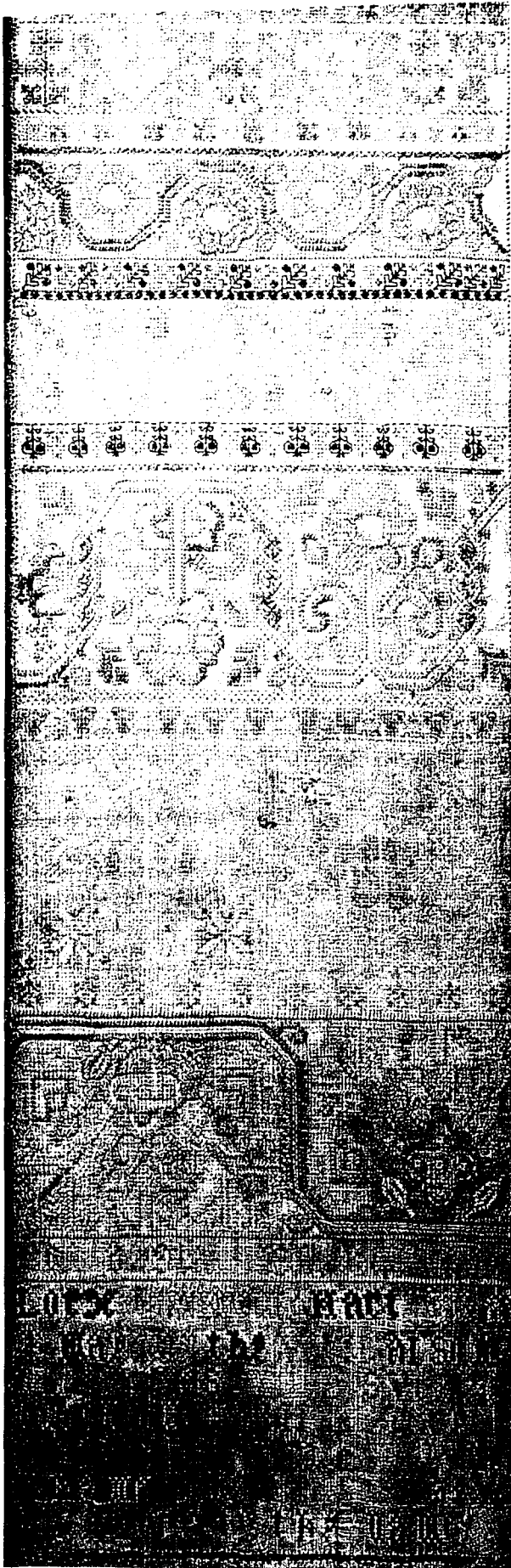


Fig. 2. Priscilla Allen's sampler, 1746.
A typical example of the fishing lady motif, it
is the only known sampler to name Boston as
its point of origin.
Winterthur Museum.

Figure 1. Lora Standish's sampler, c. 1640-1650.
Pilgrim Hall Museum.

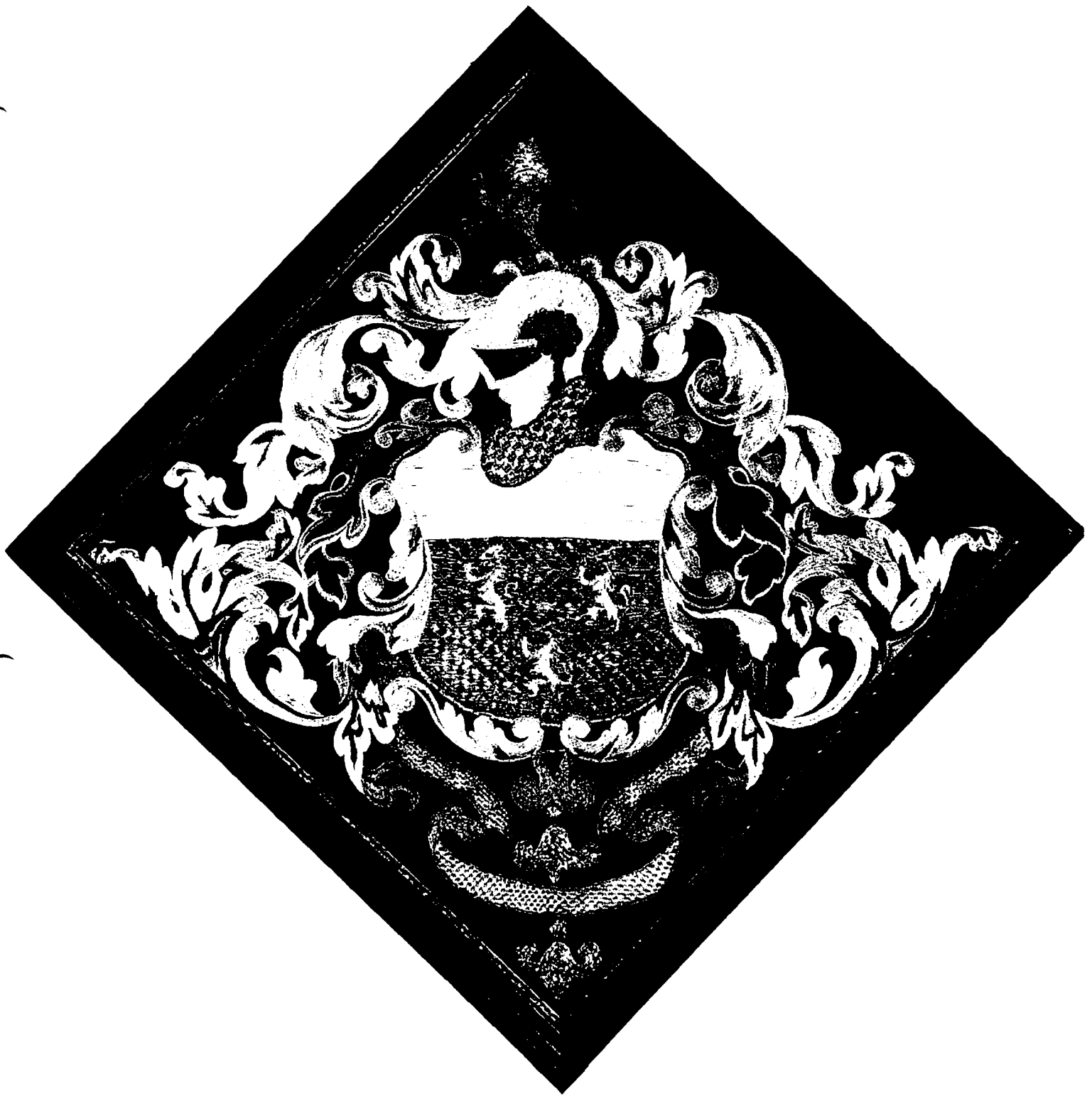


Fig. 3. Ann Grant's sampler, 1769.

Worked under the instruction of the Misses Cuming, who took over Jannette Day's school in Boston. Ann's sampler represents the majority of coat of arms embroideries originating in Boston.

Historic Deerfield, Inc.

Chapter 4 Philadelphia Samplers and Motifs

Pennsylvania, like Massachusetts, has offered the world much in the way of samplers. Evidence of this is rare in the eighteenth century, but throughout the nineteenth century, Pennsylvania was second only to Massachusetts as a leading contributor to the art of sampler-making. As early as 1682, girls from Philadelphia were attending schools to learn the necessary skills for domestic life. For many, this included ornamental embroidery. While credit has been given legitimately to the creators of these samplers, in many cases, historians and collectors can only guess at who the specific teachers were or at which schools certain designs and motifs were first used and became most popular. Regardless, within Philadelphia alone, several sampler styles have been identified, making the city one of the leading sampler producers of early American life.

Worked between 1725 and 1740, one of the most easily recognized groups, consisting of thirteen samplers, is based on its repetitive design of floral band patterns. Based on the popular styles of London, they included extended inscriptions, enclosed borders of Indian pinks, pine trees as end-of-line designs, and information on each girl's family. Not all of the girls completing these samplers used these exact designs, although they are all similar enough to warrant their placement in this group. For example, Sarah Logan, whose sampler is dated the earliest of the entire group, worked her border on only the top and bottom of her sampler (Figure 4). In nine of the thirteen examples, an acorn band pattern is used, and in a different group of nine, there is a diamond band pattern based on a German pattern book from 1529.²⁷

By observing the similarities among this group of thirteen, it is easy to understand how they all possibly originated from one specific teacher. Historians who

²⁷ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p.330.

study antique samplers have concluded that a woman named Ann Marsh was probably most influential in spreading this band-pattern design. Ann was taught by her mother, Elizabeth, also a schoolteacher and most likely the woman responsible for the thirteen samplers in this group. Ann probably was teaching alongside her mother by the time she was twenty and, after her mother's death, she continued to be "responsible for the education of the daughters of many prominent Philadelphians."²⁸

A second recognizable group to come out of the early colonial period used what is called compartmented verse. Becoming popular around 1750, it consists of nine or twelve squared-off sections depicting alternating floral bouquets and religious verses finished with an intricate floral border. The first of these to be identified belonged to Ann Flower and was worked in 1753, although Ann stopped stitching after she had completed only her name and the date. Other girls in this group are Susanna Head, whose twelve compartmented sampler worked in 1781 is considered one of the most elaborate, and Lydia Speakman, whose flower designs and lettering in her 1785 sampler are so similar to Susanna's as to make it obvious that they had the same teacher.

For this group as well, Ann Marsh is assumed to be the instructor based on a 1789 sampler by Mary Cooper who cited that Ann Marsh was indeed her teacher (Figure 5). Certain styles of lettering and specific stitches found on Susanna Head's sampler also point to Ann Marsh's instruction.²⁹ Considering, however, that Ann Marsh died two years before several of these compartmented samplers were done, it seems likely that this style was continued by other teachers in the Philadelphia area.

After the Revolutionary War, Pennsylvania motifs changed from flowery naturalistic designs to include more buildings, people and animals. One of the most

²⁸ Edmonds, Samplers and Samplermakers, p. 50.

²⁹ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 340.

well-known groups at this time dealt primarily with depictions of large mansion-like buildings and terraced gardens. The basic design was taught primarily by Mary Zeller, whose school for girls ran from about 1789 to 1808 (Figure 7). These samplers depict “tree-lined terraces” topped by either a black and orange castle, a Georgian mansion, or a large vase of flowers, surrounded by “airy, asymmetrical motifs that float in random arrangement above.”³⁰ Added to these most consistently are a milk cow, goat, stag and the Agnus Dei, or Lamb of God, taken from Johann Sibmacher’s pattern book of 1604.³¹

A similar pattern worked around this time adds strolling people wearing plumed hats. The mansions also become more of a scaled down red brick house, and the terraces evolve into simple country gardens. The first example of this appears around 1798, and there is evidence of this design lasting until about 1834. Another very similar style has been attributed to schoolmistress Hannah Keegan, although there are only two identifiable samplers in this group. They differ primarily in that the motifs surrounding the castle and terrace are more balanced and that the borders for these samplers are made of Indian pinks. The only conclusive evidence that these belong to a separate group from Mary Zeller’s is Margaret Hopple, one of the creators, stitched “Hannah Keegan’s School” at the top of her work.³²

One pattern that is distinctly Philadelphian in origin is the use of the American eagle. At the center of these samplers is a red brick building with an eagle floating above. In the foreground is an expansive lawn on which sit rabbits, cows, sheep and goats, with people apparently wandering aimlessly. Surrounding the eagle in the sky are eight-pointed stars, butterflies and angels holding cartouches, or ornamental

³⁰ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 361.

³¹ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 361.

³² Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 365.

frames, with the names of people associated to the maker inside. Overall, most of these examples are quite similar although some variations do appear like the 1825 sampler by Margaret Moss which features a banner held in the eagle's claws with *E Pluribus Unum* written across it.

The best guess historians have as to the instructor of this design is Elizabeth Brunnell, whose name, as well as that of her brother, appears in the cartouches of Maria Bolen's sampler of 1816 (Figure 9). The words "E Brunell School" is stitched two years later in Rebecca Skinner's sampler.³³ Other evidence that supports this is the similarity between the American samplers to an English sampler of Bidston Hill, which displays Elizabeth and Andrew Brunnell's names in cartouches carried by angels (Figure 8). According to Betty Ring in her book *Girlhood Embroidery*, it is most likely that Elizabeth Brunnell was simply an Englishwoman who emigrated to America during this period and chose to live in a boarding house, which explained the lack of documentation in city directories.³⁴

A final distinctive category from Philadelphia is one that consists of presentation samplers. The best description of this style comes from the earliest sampler worked by Ann Margaret Weaver in 1816 (Figure 6). The basic design is a central basket filled with either flowers or fruit with a bordered square or rectangle shape above it consisting of a verse. The most common of these verses, found on nine of the fifteen presentation samplers, appears with some variation as follows:

Jesus permit thy gracious name to stand
As the first efforts of a youthful hand
And while her fingers o'er this canvas move
Engage her tender heart to seek thy love.
With thy dear children let her share a part

³³ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 371.

³⁴ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 372.

And write thy name thyself upon her heart.³⁵

Surrounding the bordered verse are elaborate flowering vines.

The defining characteristic is the presentation wording at the bottom of the samplers. For instance, Ann's sampler is eloquently signed "Respectfully presented to Michael and Margaret Weaver by their affectionate daughter Ann Margaret in the 13th year of her age 1816."³⁶ Another girl, Eliza M. Kandle, used entirely identical wording but for her name, age and the date, 1839, in which it was completed. No specific teacher of this presentation sampler style has been identified for these fifteen examples, but the style remained popular until about 1839.

Although Pennsylvania as a whole contributed many schoolgirl samplers, throughout the sampler-making period, Philadelphia remained the leading Pennsylvania city in the production of this domestic art. As the largest city in the state, there was an availability of goods, such as thread, and an abundance of female academies that could not be found in other Pennsylvania cities. Thus, the output of samplers was most prolific in Philadelphia. The large number of Philadelphia samplers enables historians to make conclusions concerning the nature of education for girls in that city, ultimately furthering the study of women's education throughout all of America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

³⁵ Bolton and Coe, American Samplers, p. 319.

³⁶ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 374.

Fig. 4. Sarah Logan's sampler, 1725.

Worked when she was ten, Sarah's sampler is the earliest dated example of the band pattern design. It is made of silk on wool and measures 12" x 9".
Fairmount Park Commission, Loudon Mansion, Philadelphia.





Fig. 5. Mary Cooper's sampler, 1789.
Winterthur Museum.

Fig. 6. Ann Margaret Weaver's
Sampler, 1816.
The Valentine Museum,
Richmond, Virginia.





Fig. 7. Ann Heyl's sampler, 1789.

Ann's sampler is the earliest dated example attributed to Mary Zeller's school. The terraced gardens and black and orange mansions are most often attributed to Zeller, making samplers worked under her tutelage quite easy to identify. The Agnus Dei and the stag are both adapted from Johann Sibmacher's pattern book, *Newes Modelbuch In Kupfer gemacht*. Ann's sampler is silk on linen. Private collection.



Fig. 8. Bidston Hill sampler, 1795. Although an English sampler, the Bidston sampler resembles in many aspects the Philadelphia eagle samplers. While it is not clearly identified, the names Elizabeth Brunnell and Andrew Brunnell do appear in two cartouches as they do in several American samplers. Many of the motifs on the Bidston sampler can be also found on American samplers such as the cartouches, rabbits and floating designs. Cooper-Hewitt, National Museum of Design, Smithsonian Institution.

Fig. 9. Maria Bolen's sampler, 1816.

Worked in silk on wool, Maria's sampler depicts typical English styles except for the addition of the American eagle and the more random arrangement of the patterns. Although Maria does not specifically name Elizabeth Brunnell as her teacher, several other Philadelphia eagle samplers do.

Collection of Mrs. Theodore H. Kapnek, Sr.



Chapter 5 Teachers and Samplers from Portsmouth and the Canterbury Region of New Hampshire

New Hampshire, while not producing quite the number of samplers as those coming from Massachusetts or Pennsylvania, offers several distinctive styles and motifs. Those samplers from the city of Portsmouth and the region around Canterbury near the Merrimack River have the most distinctive designs. In these areas specifically, the education of girls as well as boys was seen as pivotal. For that reason, there are excellent records of the teachers in these two areas, allowing for an almost conclusive identification of instructors and the specific sampler themes associated with them.

In the late eighteenth century, Portsmouth, which produced a number of wonderful samplers, offered a variety of schools for young girls. Despite the growing demand for female academies, the majority of them lasted only about a year before they were quickly replaced with the newest and supposedly best. While quite rare for schools to last longer, the more successful did last up to three or four years.

Advertising for pupils during this century flourished as did the schools. Several ads were placed in newspapers by Samuel and Amos Tappan during the early 1790s and continued being placed until 1802.³⁷ Originally, the two men operated separate schools, but by the mid-1790s, they had joined forces, bringing to Portsmouth an educational institution that they claimed taught all the appropriate subjects necessary for women. At an even earlier date, advertisements for several boarding schools run by women appeared in *The New-Hampshire Gazette*. Sarah Winkley announced the opening of her boarding school in 1765 and, nine years later, she still was promoting

³⁷ LaBranche and Conant, In Female Worth and Elegance: Sampler and Needlework Students and Teachers in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1741-1840, p. 3.

her instruction, with the help of her daughter Elizabeth Hill, in the "Working of Samplers, Pictures, Coats of Arms, &c."³⁸

Regardless of the number of schools offering female education, Portsmouth did not contribute a clearly identifiable group of embroidery until the early nineteenth century, when samplers attributed to the Young Ladies Academy first appeared. Opened in 1799 by the Reverend Timothy Alden, the Young Ladies Academy lasted until 1808, when it closed because of financial difficulties. Most often, the samplers produced at this school were worked on a yellow-green linsey-woolsey background. The upper part of the design consists of identical borders, alphabets and numbers that alternate with a cross-stitched X and dot. The lower portion, separated from the top by a crossband design, consists of a basket with the verse, "How Blest the maid whom circling years improve," along with the girls' names and ages.³⁹ Sally Blunt, whose sampler is dated 1804, varied hers by adding the year, and Mary Ann Hooker's 1805 sampler includes the letters NH for the state in which it was created.

The largest and most easily recognized group of samplers from Portsmouth, about thirty examples, appeared around 1818 and is attributed to two separate schools. The earliest of these samplers was completed by Priscilla Hall Badger who inscribed "Elizabeth S Smith's School Portsmouth April 28th 1818."⁴⁰ A little later, in either October of 1818 or 1819, Deborah Loughton worked a similar sampler in which she identified her teacher as Mary Ann Smith. Although no advertisements for their school appeared in newspapers, the sisters Elizabeth and Mary Ann Smith taught young girls from their house on Vaughan Street in Portsmouth until at least 1827.⁴¹ In the same vicinity was another school, also conducted by two sisters, Mary and Elvira

³⁸ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 232.

³⁹ LaBranche and Conant, *In Female Worth and Elegance*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 238.

⁴¹ LaBranche and Conant, *In Female Worth and Elegance*, p. 10.

Walden, that Caroline Vaughn and Adaline M. Ferguson mentioned in each of their samplers respectively.

Between the two schools arose the house and barn type sampler (Figure 10). The simple and balanced design consists of a house on the left with a barn on the right connected by a wooden picket fence. Added to this are birds, a birdhouse near the barn and either one, three or five trees. At the top of the sampler is an alphabet and numbers with a verse below that. At the Smith school, this verse was identical to the one used in Portsmouth, but at the Walden school, the verse beginning "Jesus permit thy gracious name to stand" was more popular.⁴² The entire design is completed by an arcaded strawberry border like that seen in Elizabeth Dore's sampler from 1822.

The closeness in age of the four women and their vicinity to each other is a likely explanation for the similarities between the two schools. However, the most realistic theory is that the girls all attended the same Portsmouth school, probably taught by George Dame, whose classroom in the Assembly Hall was only blocks from both the Smith and Walden homes. From there, they obtained the necessary skills of needlework, and creating the designs, teaching them later on to their own students. Regardless, their design remained popular until about 1840.

The Canterbury region of New Hampshire, made up of the towns of Canterbury, Loudon, Northfield and Sanbornton, also offered great opportunities for young girls to obtain educations in the late eighteenth century. Because the majority of samplers from this area are all quite similar, it seems only fair to assume that the design originated from one certain instructor or group of instructors teaching around the same time. In fact, according to the book *Lessons Stitched in Silk*, there is strong

⁴² Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 239.

evidence provided by these samplers that the women from this area made teaching a career thereby creating a series of “professional female teachers that spread out into surrounding schools.”⁴³

The Canterbury bird and basket design most likely originated within the Foster family, who settled in the area around 1760 (Figure 11). The Fosters were extremely influential in the realm of education during this period. The patriarch of the family, Asa, and his brother, David, were among those chosen in 1784 to divide the town of Canterbury into specific school districts. The women of the Foster family also contributed to the educational system of Canterbury by choosing to teach. Martha Foster, a granddaughter of Asa’s, was teaching around 1787 and, three years later, her sister Polly began teaching. Their cousins, Betsy and Nancy, went into teaching only a few years later. Thus, between 1787 and 1825, the Foster women dominated in the town schools, offering at least ten of their family members to the field of teaching.

Much work by historians has almost conclusively pin-pointed the initial designer as Hannah Wise Rogers, a teacher from Essex County, Massachusetts. She conducted a girls school from 1774 to 1784, described by the Reverend Augustine Caldwell in a town history as “a school for young ladies that was in great repute.”⁴⁴ In fact, similarities between the Canterbury samplers and those from Essex County are the vase and vine border, the use of a central basket or vase figure, and the paired leaves.

The journey of this design from Essex County to Canterbury is a simple one, and leads directly again to the Foster family. Before Hannah began teaching in Massachusetts, she married Samuel Rogers. The couple had two daughters, Mary and Lucy who married Foster brothers, Abiel and Jonathan respectively. Considering

⁴³ Garrett, Lessons Stitched in Silk: Samplers from the Canterbury Region of New Hampshire, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Edmonds, Samplers and Samplermakers: An American Schoolgirl Art, 1700-1850, p. 40.

that Hannah was their mother, one can assume that she taught her daughters the patterns she used in her school. When the two women moved with their husbands to the Canterbury region of New Hampshire, most likely they took the design with them to teach to their own classes. Lucy, in fact, was known to have taught in a Canterbury district school in 1788.⁴⁵

The earliest known example of the Canterbury design is a sampler worked by Mehitable Foster, the daughter of Asa Foster. It provides the prototype for the ones which follow. In the center is a rectangular sawtooth-bordered box filled with wording, usually alphabets, numbers, the maker's name, her age and the date. Between each of these are specialized decorations like dark and light alternating oak leaves or strawberry vines. Below, also in the center, is a large vase or basket having backward S handles, in which are placed various flowers and leaves. Most notable are the two paired leaves, one aspect that seems constant throughout all the samplers. On either side of the vase are identical birds with identical trees on their other sides. All of these, vase, birds, and trees, sit on "an undulating band of hillocks."⁴⁶ The finishing touch is the border consisting of lattice-patterned vases, much like the center vase, which is "overflowing with distinctive, double-plumed foliage and brightly colored flowers."⁴⁷

Through the influence of the Foster family, this sampler pattern also has been found in the nearby towns of Northfield and Loudon, although more and more changes occur the further away a town was from Canterbury. Most Northfield examples, for instance, add butterflies and a leopard, and experiment with different wording. The similarities, however, prove that the towns in the Canterbury region

⁴⁵ Garrett, Lessons Stitched in Silk, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Garrett, Lessons Stitched in Silk, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Edmonds, Samplers and Samplermakers, p. 40.

share between them a common community and culture.

The pervasive nature of the bird and basket, and house and barn designs throughout New Hampshire show the dominance of certain teaching styles during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. New Hampshire is perhaps the one state from which most of the samplers resemble each other so closely, making them easier for scholars and historians to identify and making the study of samplers from this region more exciting as each new discovery is made.

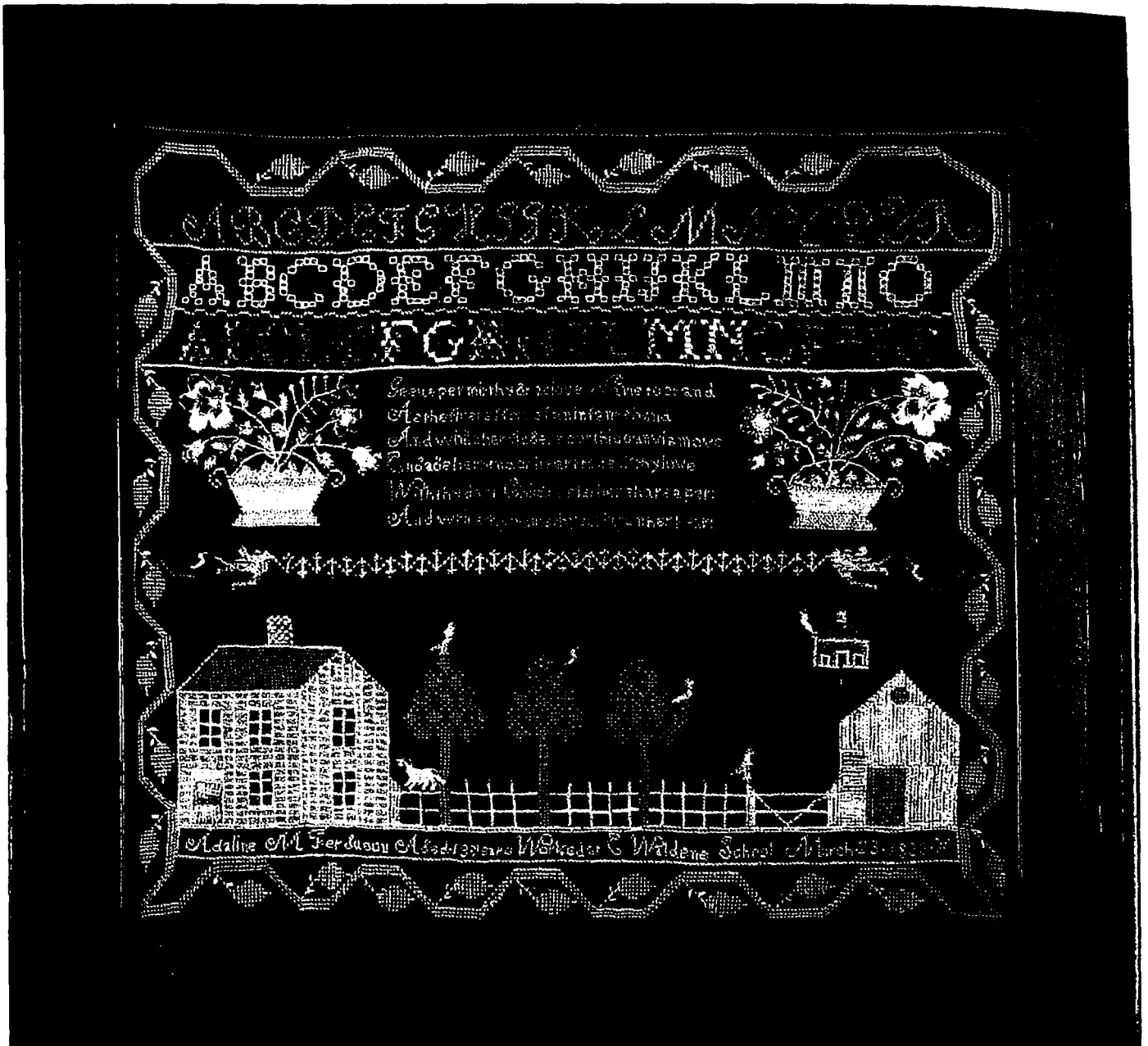


Fig. 10. Adaline M. Ferguson's sampler, 1822.

Adaline Ferguson worked her sampler at E. Waldens School when she was thirteen. No record has been found of an Adaline Ferguson in the Portsmouth directory, so her sampler is the only evidence historians have of her existence. Adaline's house and barn sampler, worked in silk on linsey-woolsey, is a perfect example of this popular Portsmouth style.

Collection of Betty Ring.

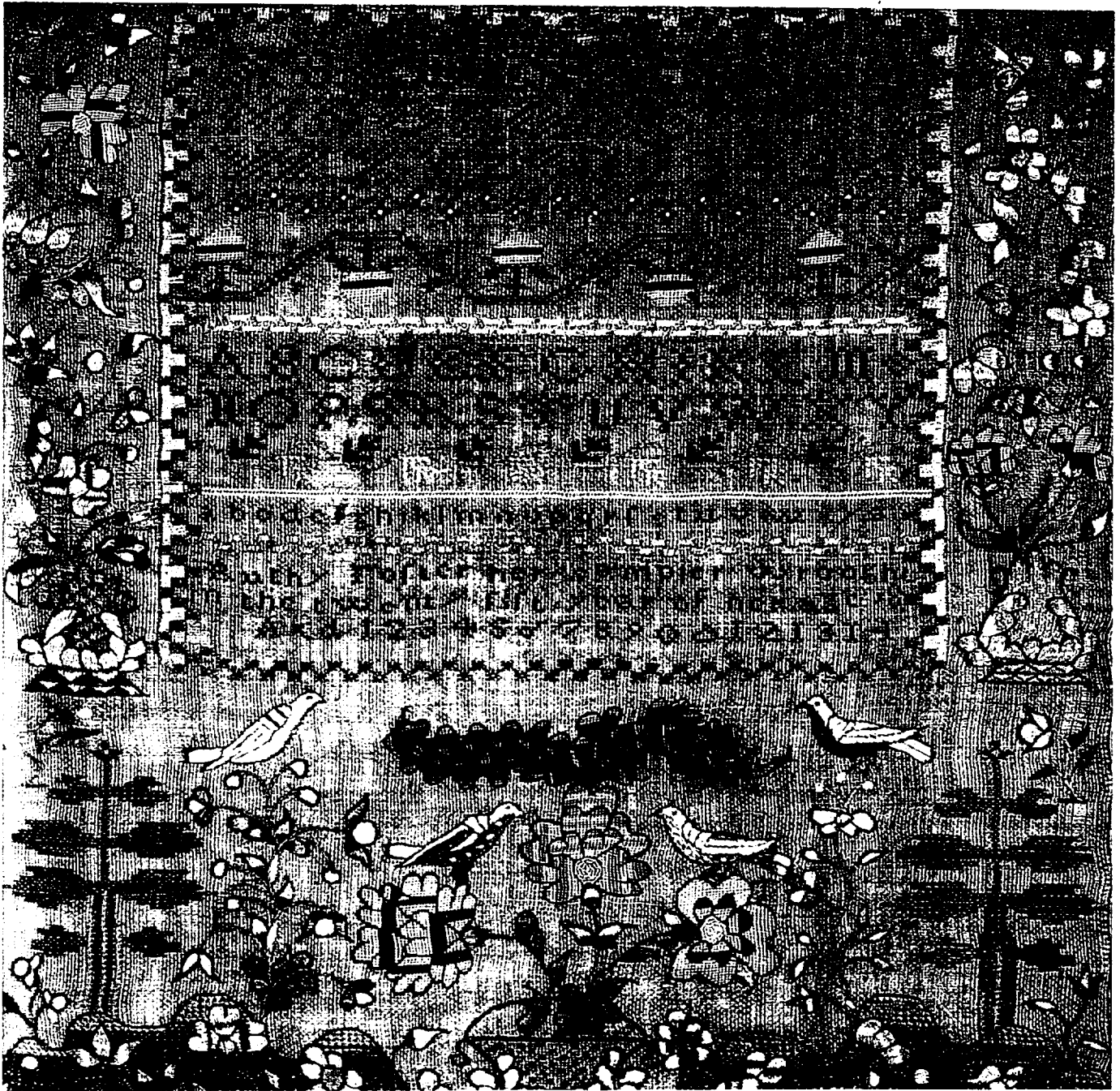


Fig. 11. Ruthy Foster's sampler, c. 1800.

A member of the Canterbury Fosters, Ruthy worked her sampler when she was twenty-one. Some historians believe that she was influential in her later years in spreading the bird and basket sampler design throughout the Canterbury region. Private collection.

Chapter 6 The Balch School of Providence, Rhode Island

Several schools were noted throughout New England for teaching the creative arts to young girls, but perhaps the most well-known was Mary Balch's Academy in Providence, Rhode Island. The teacher who created the design is not named in the majority of the samplers from this school, but by looking at recognizable motifs or stitching techniques, as well as the dates during which Mary Balch was documented as teaching, historians have been able to unquestionably identify this large group of samplers as originating from the Balch Academy. Girls were taught both plain sampler-work as well as silk embroideries during the approximately forty years the school was in operation, making it the producer of the largest group of schoolgirl needlework to be attributed to a clearly identified school during the early American period.

Mary Balch, or Polly as she was often called, began her school as a way of supporting her family after her father's death on April 11, 1776. She did this with her mother, Sarah, who some historians suggest was the original instructor while Mary was only her assistant. Betty Ring promotes this idea in her article "The Balch School in Providence, Rhode Island," when she states, "The originality of design of the students' needlework appears to have diminished about 1811, the year in which Sarah Balch died, which lends credence to the possibility that she was responsible for the interesting earlier patterns."⁴⁸ This also is supported by the discovery of a receipt recording a transaction between Sarah Balch and Henry Bowen in which she was paid with household goods in return for her instruction of his two daughters in 1786.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ring, "The Balch School in Providence, Rhode Island," *Antiques*, p. 660.

⁴⁹ Ring, Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830, p. 99.

Regardless of who the original instructor was of the Balch school, it was in full operation by March 1785, with Mary and her mother as joint teachers. At that time, the two women were teaching in a rented house belonging to Daniel Cahoon that was situated on Constitution Hill. While they were living in this house, they produced the most fascinating samplers, most worked by young girls from the Providence area, although some were stitched by boarders from out of town. Even in the humble surroundings, the Balch school gained much attention. An article appeared in the *Providence Gazette* on March 1, 1800, recognizing the school for its participation in a memorial service for George Washington, commenting:

A novel and pleasing spectacle was exhibited by a very numerous group of young Misses and Masters, from the schools of Miss Balch and Mr. Carey, appearing in the white robes of innocence, decorated with the appropriate insignia of grief, bearing emblematical representations and sprigs of evergreen.⁵⁰

This was the first mention of the Balch school in any of the Rhode Island newspapers.

With the changing face of education around the turn of the century, Mary decided that it was time to expand her school. The Rhode Island educational system was establishing public schools as well as coeducational schools with a focus on female education and how it could be improved. Two months after the publication of the *Gazette* article, Mary purchased a plot of land for \$750 from George Hopkins Burrough on the south side of George Street.⁵¹ One year later, in 1801, the newly-constructed Balch Academy opened with an expanded curriculum that included many of the basic academic subjects as well as music, dancing, and needlework classes. To announce the opening of the school, Mary placed this advertisement in the *Providence Gazette* on August 1:

⁵⁰ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, p. 100.

⁵¹ Ring, "The Balch School in Providence, Rhode Island," p. 662.

Boarding and Day School

MISS BALCH informs the Gentlemen and Ladies of Providence, and its Vicinity, that she has removed her **SCHOOL** from the North End of the Town, to her House, in George Street, where it will be opened the Second Monday in August. The Branches which have hitherto been taught, will be continued. She respectfully acknowledges the liberal Encouragement she has received; and as the most expressive Proof of her Gratitude will be a continuance of the unremitting Attention already paid to her Pupils, she flatters herself it will be the best Recommendation to future Patronage. Boarders will be received on reasonable Terms, and the healthy situation cannot fail to please.⁵²

From that point on, the Balch school was continuously the most prominent private educational institution in Providence. Mary taught both young boys and girls, as well adult women. She was able to board her students at the new building instead of having them live with friends or family as they had previously done while attending the school on Constitution Hill. At the most, she had between fifteen and twenty students living with her at one time, as well as her mother, her brother, Timothy, and her assistant, Eliza Walker. The number of her day students ranged between sixty and eighty at any given time. At the height of its popularity in 1821, the Balch school had an enrollment of one hundred thirteen students between six and twenty, all girls except for eighteen boys.⁵³ The students were taught the same academically in subjects like math, history and geography, although the ornamental arts such as embroidery, dancing or drawing were added to the education of the girls.

The fame of Mary Balch's Academy spread throughout the state, preventing any real competition from other schoolteachers in the area. Most schools opened during the forty year span of the Balch school remained in operation for about a year or two before they closed. Only one school belonging to Rhoda Remington offered the greatest competition, although it too was in business for just two years. On November 7, 1807, Mrs. Remington, the first real female rival of Mary's, ran an advertisement in

⁵² Ring, Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee, p. 101.

⁵³ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 185.

the *Providence Gazette*, which read:

Young Ladies' Academy

Mrs. Remington respectfully informs the Public . . . that she has taken a pleasant and commodious House in Weybosset-St. and . . . will open an Academy for the Education of Young Ladies, where they will be carefully instructed in Reading, Writing, Orthography, Composition, Geography, with Use of the Globes, and Maps; ancient and modern History, Belles-lettres, Drawing, Landscape and Flower Painting, Embroidery, Tambour, Print-Work on Sattin, Muslin-Work of every description, marking, plain Sewing, &c. &c. . .⁵⁴

Succeeding advertisements in the *Gazette* continued to embellish Mrs. Remington's abilities in the feminine decorative arts eventually winning her numerous students.

Mary Balch finally responded to Mrs. Remington's aggressive campaign in 1808 by placing her own notices in the *Gazette*, something she had not done since the announcement of the new location of her school. In almost every issue, there were new advertisements by both women promoting the various educational opportunities their schools offered. Finally, on November 4, 1809, the *Gazette* ran a notice stating that a Mr. and Mrs. Smith had taken over the Remington School. No reason was given or has ever been found as to why Rhoda Remington closed her school. Mary Balch, however, was influenced by her enough that she continued to put advertisements for the Balch school in the paper once or twice a year until 1826.

Mary Balch died on January 5, 1831, dividing her property among her brothers, Timothy and John, and her assistant and adopted daughter, Eliza Walker, who ran the school until about 1847, when she finally sold her share of the property back to Mary's family. After her death, Mary was often fondly described by her students as an indulgent, pleasant and encouraging teacher. The culmination of her life was summed up best by her brother, John, when he wrote in his Bible:

She was a Kind Sister, with tender feeling toward all in distress, or in difficulty of any Kind, and a pattern of all the amiable qualities of her sex. truly Correct in

⁵⁴ Ring, Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee, p. 107.

all her dealing & affairs. She Brought up many in her School & taught them the best Morals & examples of which there are now many to testify who are now Fathers and Mothers whose Children have also been instructed by her. we trust she is now reaping her reward in another and better world, where there is no pain, troubles or disappointments.⁵⁵

Mary Balch's greatest contribution to early American history is through the decorative arts. The group of samplers that represent her teaching is one of the most well-known and widely recognized throughout New England. Although several designs originated from her school, she is best-known for those samplers depicting prominent buildings around the Providence area, which, as Betty Ring claims, was "a practice that became popular in other cities during the nineteenth century but was unique to the Balch school in the eighteenth century."⁵⁶ The most popular of these buildings were the Providence State House, the President's House of Rhode Island College, the college's University Hall, the First Baptist Meeting House, and the First Congregational Church (Figure 12 and 13).

Also appearing regularly on Balch school samplers is the use of arches, usually surrounding the specifically stitched building. Most are formal arch designs although several depict a vine border around the building instead. Surrounding the whole picture, arches and building, is a highly stylized floral border depicting two vases on either side of the pattern with vines containing roses, pansies, carnations, lilacs or forget-me-nots. At the bottom of the pattern is a circular shape often containing the maker's name, the word "Providence," an alphabet, and the numbers one through nine. Between the arch and the building there appear verses such as "Teach us to number our days That we may apply our hearts to WISDOM," or "With Sheba's queen ye American fair, To adorn your mind bend all your care," although the

⁵⁵ Ring, Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee, p. 111.

⁵⁶ Ring, "The Balch School in Providence, Rhode Island," p. 660.

verse found on the majority of the samplers is the motto, "Let Virtue be A guide to thee."⁵⁷

While there are several variations of the Balch design, with people or animals added, the basic design remains faithful throughout most of the examples in this group. From the time Mary and her mother opened their school to the end of the sampler-making period in the mid-1800s, the Balch School style remained dominant throughout Providence. These samplers are evidence that Mary Balch had a gift when it came to teaching needlework to her students. Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe support this in their book, *American Samplers*, when they claim:

She certainly had by far a finer sense of what the art was capable of than any one who was in a like position . . . She had certain mannerisms and certain forms of design, of which each sampler contains one or two, so that they are very easy to identify, even though they are not marked, and they are never commonplace."⁵⁸

Mary Balch might not be remembered for her contribution to American education or commemorated as a renowned American woman, but she will most assuredly be memorialized for her contribution to early American decorative arts.

⁵⁷ Krueger, *New England Samplers*, p. 24-25.

⁵⁸ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, p. 369.

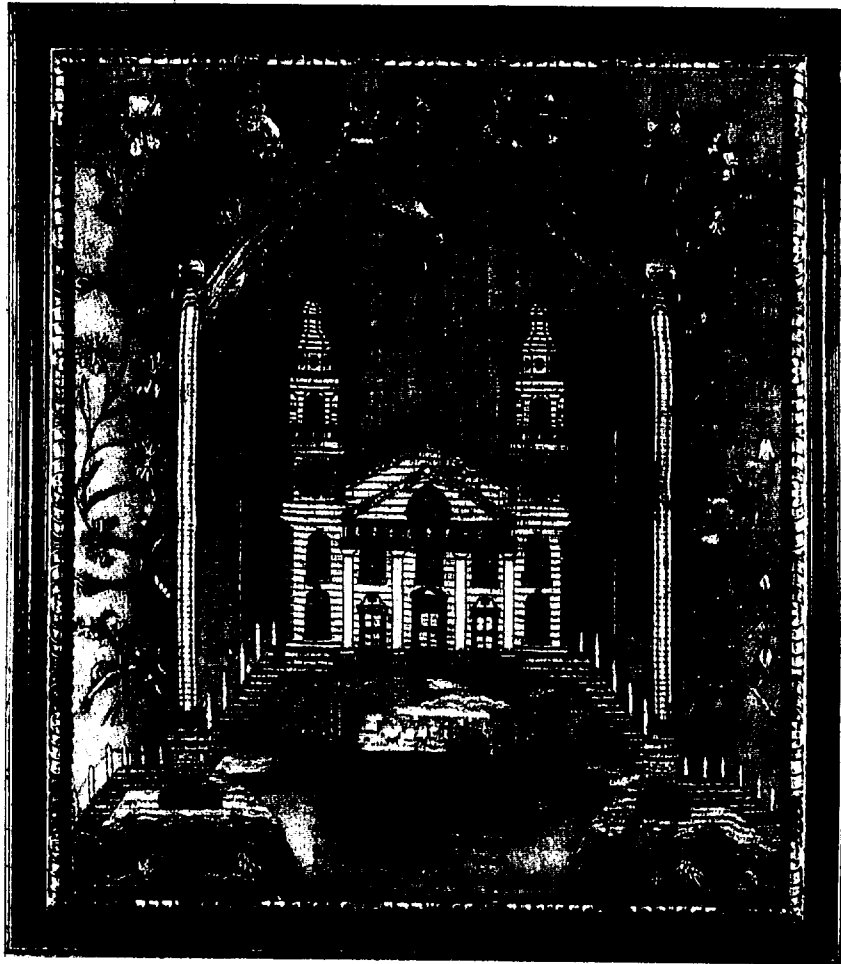


Fig. 12. Polly Spurr's sampler, 1796.

Worked under the instruction of Mary Balch, Polly's depiction of the First Congregational Church of Providence was stitched in silk on linen. Polly's sampler is a typical Balch school depiction of a prominent Providence building. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

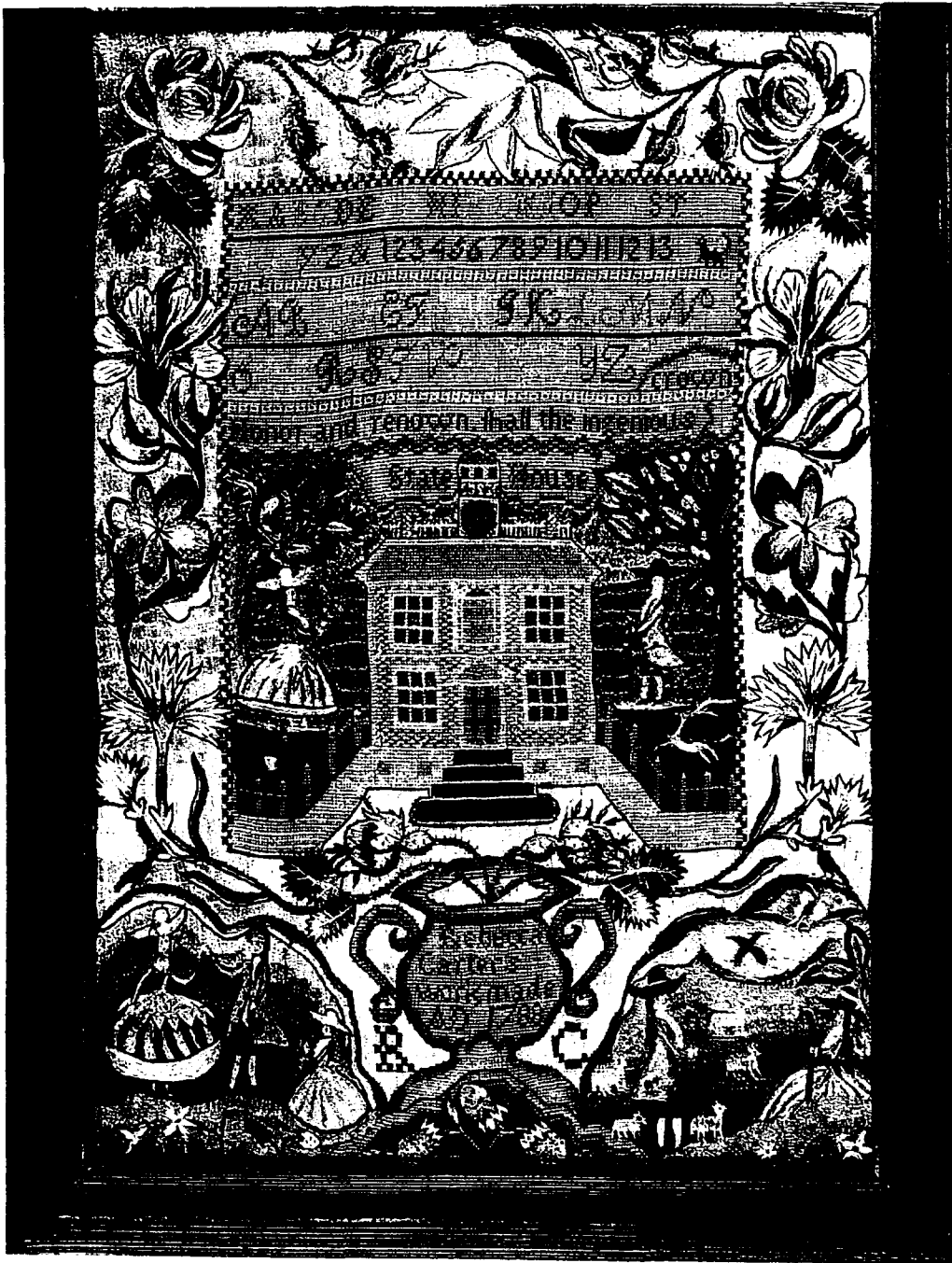


Fig. 13. Rebecca Carters' sampler, 1788.

Another sampler produced at the Balch school, Rebecca's work depicts the Providence State House, built in 1762. It was worked in silk and metallic threads on linen. Real hair is used for each of the seven figures. Private collection.

Chapter 7 The Contribution of the Quakers and Moravians to Sampler-Making in American History

Most samplers discovered today often are identified by regional similarities that originated from the traditional designs of a person's European homeland. For instance, German immigrants settling in Pennsylvania usually created samplers based on motifs adopted from home. The Quakers and the Moravians deviate from this pattern, however, creating instead their own designs that became standard on almost all their samplers no matter where a settlement was established. These groups produced some of the finest examples of needlework in American history based on their religious backgrounds.

During a time when educational opportunities for girls were rare, the Quakers and the Moravians maintained a progressive attitude toward schooling young women. The Quakers especially promoted an equal educational standard for boys and girls, beginning a trend toward higher education for women that continued and flourished throughout the following centuries. Initially exclusive to children from outside their faiths, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, both religious groups opened their doors to children who were not Moravians or Quakers. This occurred as their reputations for fine schooling grew, attracting more and more children, mostly girls, from outside their religious settlements.

The Quaker contribution to early decorative arts is perhaps the most interesting to observe. Each school established by the Quakers followed the same guidelines as set forth by George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, which included "plainness, pacifism, and confidence in God-given inspiration."⁵⁹ Basic subjects such as reading, writing, and ciphering were taught as long as they did not contradict these standards.

⁵⁹ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 285.

With the creation of the Ackworth School in 1779, conformity became expected throughout all levels and branches of Quaker education, even in the area of sampler-making. Built in Yorkshire, England, the Ackworth School was important as the basis upon which American Quaker schools were established.

Almost all the samplers produced at American Quaker schools display major motifs which originated at Ackworth, although the designs gained most of their popularity as they spread throughout the New England states. The consistency among Quaker samplers of various states can be explained by looking at the closeness of Quaker communities. Even those settlements physically separated by state boundaries were connected by their religious ties, so extensive travel between the different groups was still quite frequent. As Betty Ring states in her book, *Girlhood Embroidery*, "There was . . . much travel between Quaker communities, and it is evident that America's most prominent Quakers were acquainted with each other."⁶⁰ Quaker instructors were able to travel easily between the various communities as well, taking with them the sampler designs they favored and teaching them to the students in their new communities.

In almost all American Quaker schools, there were three sampler designs that came to be used most often. The first of these motifs is the usage of both upper- and lowercase Roman alphabets. Although this motif did not become popular in America until after 1800, the designs for the alphabets were nonetheless widely published all throughout the seventeenth century. Another motif found regularly on Quaker samplers is a geometric medallion or half-medallion shape so popular that it lasted as a design for more than thirty years (Figure 14). With the variety of designs produced and used throughout the sampler-making period, this thirty year span

⁶⁰ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 290.

becomes quite impressive for that single pattern. However, the most important and most common motifs found on Quaker samplers are small cross-stitched floral sprigs, which cultivate the ideas of pacifism, plainness and God-given inspiration. Some of the more pervasive of these flowers are roses, rosebuds, lilies of the valley, irises, Indian pinks, and Johnny-jump-ups (Figure 15).⁶¹

One of the first major schools to be established in America by the Quakers was the Westtown School in Chester County, Pennsylvania (Figure 18). Owen Biddle, a prominent Quaker in that area, suggested its creation in an outline he published for the Yearly Meeting of 1792 titled "A Plan for a school . . . similar to that at Ackworth, in Yorkshire, Great-Britain, varied to suit Circumstances of the Youth Within the Limits of the Yearly-Meeting for Pennsylvania and New Jersey."⁶² Biddle's plan was agreed upon by attendants at the Meeting and, seven years later, on May 6, 1799, the school opened its doors to Quaker children, immediately becoming the most well-respected boarding school among all Quaker educational institutions.

The one area in which Westtown students excelled at was needlework. Education for girls was the same as it was for the boys who attended the school, although only girls were required to spend at least one-third of their time in the sewing room. Like most Quaker needlework, the samplers produced at the Westtown School were of three styles. The first was a practical marking sampler, which allowed students to practice their alphabets and often was their first attempt at embroidery. Another type included a basic design that displayed a pious verse surrounded by a simple border, usually the vine-and-leaf pattern, the most common Westtown border throughout the 1820s and 1830s (Figure 16).

The final type produced at the Westtown School was the darning sampler. Like

⁶¹ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 291.

⁶² Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 388.

marking samplers, these were also one of the first needlework tasks for girls, allowing them to practice the various sewing stitches they would need later as adult women (Figure 17). Darning samplers were not very popular in early America, which explains why most examples of this type belong to Quaker schools, since the Quakers stressed domestic skills in all forms of needlework. The mastery of this skill was supported by the discovery of a notation from Westtown claiming “a piece twelve by eight inches must be so perfectly darned that the mending can scarcely be distinguished from the original material.”⁶³

During the years the school was in operation, the Westtown School offered the best education for young Quaker children. Within its first year, there were at least one hundred boys and one hundred girls attending classes at the institution. When the students left, they often went into the teaching profession themselves, like John Comly and his wife Rebecca Budd. Opened sometime during the 1830s, their Pleasant Hill Boarding School was fashioned after Westtown where Comly had taught and which Budd had attended as one of the first students. Others showed their appreciation and respect for the school by adding it to sampler designs (Figure 19). Three of the major Quaker sampler variations in New Jersey in some way display the school surrounded by different borders and verses. It was quite logical to use the school as a subject, as Betty Ring claims, “since it was an impressive structure housing a much respected institution that many Quaker children aspired to attend.”⁶⁴

At the same time the Quakers were offering advanced educational opportunities, the Moravians established their most prestigious schools in both Pennsylvania and North Carolina. The first and largest of these schools was the Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Originally started in 1742 in

⁶³ Edmonds, Samplers and Samplermakers, p. 115.

⁶⁴ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 480.

Germantown, Pennsylvania, it was moved to its permanent location in Bethlehem in 1749.⁶⁵ The second most well-known Moravian school, established in 1746, was the Lititz Moravian Girls' School, in Lititz, Pennsylvania. Still in existence today and known as the Linden Hall School for Girls, it opened in Warwick Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but was moved in 1766 to Lititz. The third and final major Moravian boarding school was the Salem Female Academy in Salem, North Carolina, founded in 1772.

The Unitas Fratrum, or Moravian Church, is one of the oldest Protestant denominations throughout the world, with its origins in the European countries of Bohemia and Moravia.⁶⁶ After centuries of religious persecution, the Moravian Church, through the work of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, found a home in America where it ultimately flourished. Settling first in Savannah, Georgia, in 1735, the Moravians quickly spread into Pennsylvania, although there were many other settlements throughout New England.

In the area of education, the Moravians had very little competition during this period, except for the Quakers. They put great emphasis on education, often requiring church leaders to have an excellent knowledge of academics as well as training in a special craft like art, music or needlework. One such teacher was the writer Comenius, who was credited as the first to develop a children's picture book, *Orbis Pictus Sensualium*, published in 1658.⁶⁷ He also was important in Moravian educational history because of his support for the education of both boys and girls, which eventually became the basis of Moravian education. Almost two centuries later, in the mid-1900s, Dr. Byron Horne, a Linden Hall headmaster, claimed, "Teach a boy

⁶⁵ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 434.

⁶⁶ Herr, *The Ornamental Branches: Needlework and Arts from the Lititz Moravian Girls' School Between 1800 and 1865*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Herr, *The Ornamental Branches*, p. 13.

and you educate one man, teach a girl and you educate a family,” clearly showing that girls’ education continued to be an extremely important aspect of Moravian educational institutions even in the twentieth century.⁶⁸

The embroideries originating at these schools were largely pictorial, incorporating needlework stitches with paint, ribbon, silk chiffon and chenille among other items. Moravian teachers traveled with ease among the three major schools, so embroideries from these institutions share the same elaborate characteristics, although the actual designs vary between the various New England regions. At the Bethlehem school, the most recognizable embroidery design was the mourning embroidery, depicting very specific willow leaves and chain-stitched borders that were used exclusively by girls attending this seminary (Figure 20). The Lititz school embroideries commonly depicted figures of people, churches and angels (Figure 21). By adding such extras as crepe or ribbon work, the girls at all three Moravian schools were able to set their extremely advanced samplers apart from the basic samplers being produced throughout the majority of New England.

Both the Quakers and Moravians offered wonderful educational opportunities to young girls during a time when advantages for them were few and far between. The samplers produced by these girls are special primarily because they belong to a group that cannot be labeled by any specific region. They cross regional boundaries, making them truly some of the more valuable examples of domestic art collected today. They also offer a fascinating study on how religion affected the education of women during the early colonial and federal periods of American history, making them even more important as historical artifacts.

⁶⁸ Herr, The Ornamental Branches, p. 13.

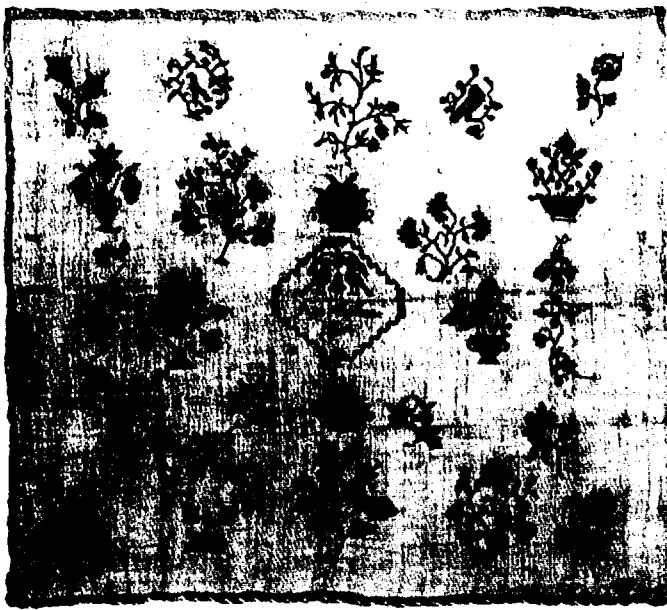


Fig. 14 and 15. Ann Haines' sampler, 1804. The medallion shape and cross-stitched flower sprigs in Ann's sampler are two of the more common motifs found on Quaker samplers. Wyck Charitable Trust, Philadelphia.

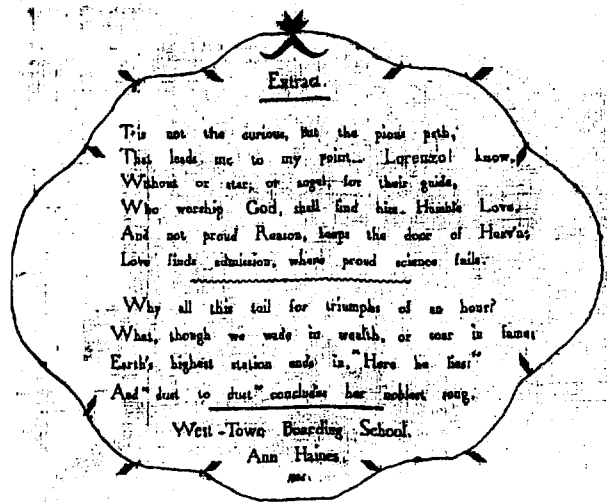
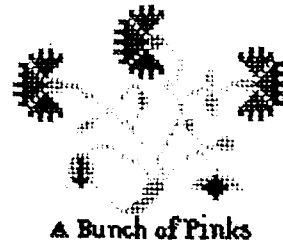


Fig. 16. Ann Haines' sampler, 1806. One of the more basic designs worked at the Westtown School, Ann's sampler displays a typical religious verse surrounded by a vine-and-leaf-border. Wyck Charitable Trust, Philadelphia.

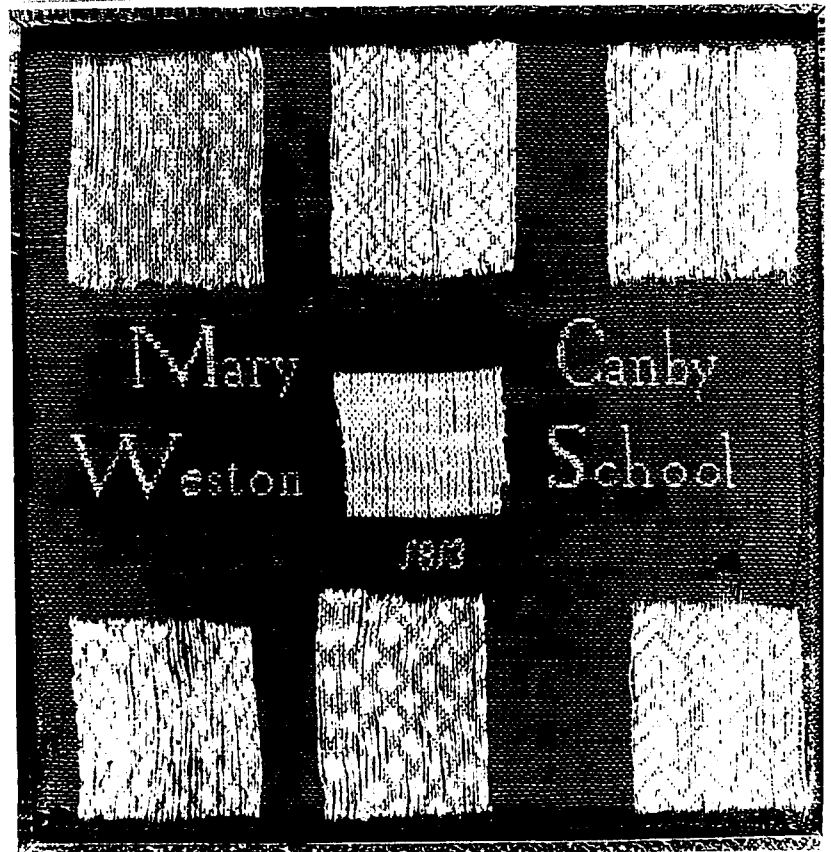


Fig. 17. Mary Canby's sampler, 1813. A common darning sampler from Westtown. It uses cross-stitch, pattern darning and chain stitch to simulate knitting. Westtown School.

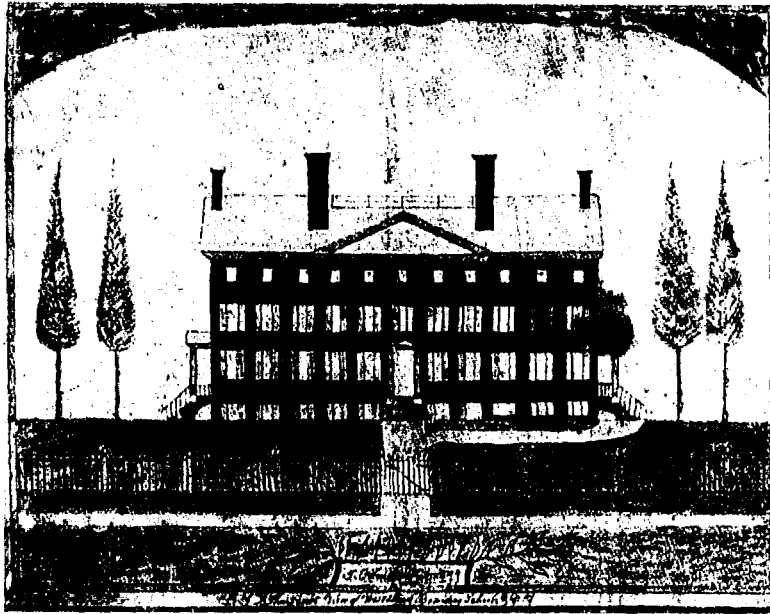


Fig. 18. A front view of the Westtown School drawn by Thomas Clark, who attended the school at age sixteen from July 1805 to March 1806. Westtown School.

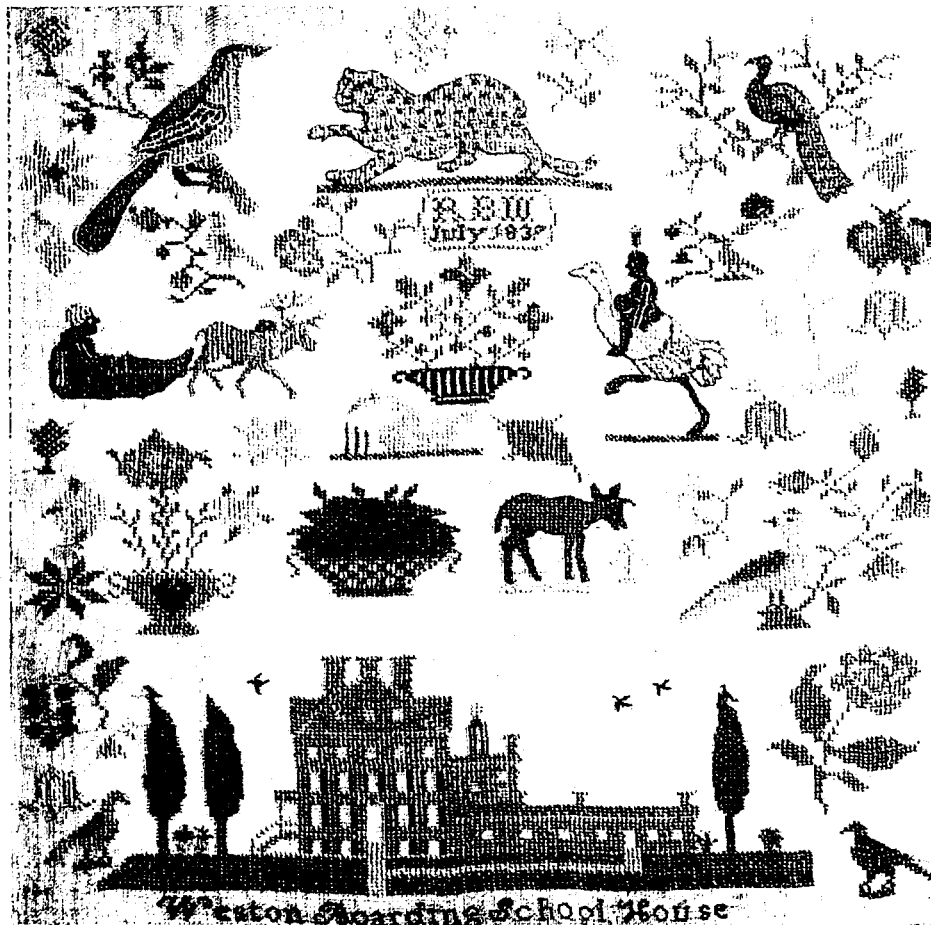


Fig. 19. Sampler by R B M, 1837. Because of its reputation for excellent schooling, the Westtown School was often depicted in Quaker samplers as a sign of respect. This side view of the school as stitched by R B M is an accurate depiction according to historians, and is probably based on earlier watercolors such as Thomas Clark's. Collection of Margaret B. Schiffer.



Fig. 20. Eliza Boller's sampler, 1813.

One of the more popular designs at the Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, this mourning embroidery by Eliza was worked in silk, chenille, spangles, paint and ink on silk, and measures 29" x 24". She attended the school from April 1810 to March 1813. Allentown Art Museum



Fig. 21. Nancy Dunlap's sampler, 1823.

Nancy's mourning embroidery stitched at the Lititz Moravian Girls' School follows the same pattern as those samplers from the Bethlehem school. However, specific characteristics, such as the angels and the church in the background, set the Lititz embroideries apart from the Bethlehem embroideries. Nancy's sampler is worked in silk, chenille, spangles, metallic thread, paint and ink on silk.

Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Donald M. Herr.

Chapter 8 Common Sampler Designs Found Throughout New England

Most samplers found in collections today are placed in groups separated by regional boundaries. For instance, Pennsylvania contributed the compartmented verse and banded pattern designs. In New Hampshire, the bird and basket, and house and barn samplers originated and flourished. Some motifs and designs, however, were so popular that they were used throughout New England, although, once again, there were regional characteristics that singled out the various schools teaching the designs. The most common of these were the religious samplers containing either biblical verses or depictions of Adam and Eve. Other groups include the very elaborate mourning and map embroideries, as well as genealogical samplers.

In 1837, a Presbyterian minister wrote, "Religion seems to almost have been entrusted by its author to her [woman's] particular custody."⁶⁹ This view regarding women and their responsibility concerning the spread of religion was prevalent throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Women were expected to be virtuous and pious, thereby being the best possible source of inspiration for their children. For this reason alone, although both boys and girls were taught about religion and the Bible, it was emphasized more often in the education of little girls.

This becomes most apparent when observing the numerous samplers coming from this early period. In their book, *American Samplers*, Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe cited at least two hundred and forty-one examples of religious verses, both Old Testament and New Testament, stitched between 1636 and 1830.⁷⁰ One of the most widely used religious sources after the Bible was the 1706 hymnal,

⁶⁹ Rettew, *Behold the Labour of My Tender Age*, p. 26.

⁷⁰ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, p. 297-328.

Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children, written by Isaac Watts, which included his interpretation of the Ten Commandments.

Even more prominent than the religious verses were the depictions of Biblical scenes. In New York and Boston, a common pattern during the eighteenth century portrayed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. For New York, this was the most enduring pattern, worked well into the nineteenth century with very little change as shown by Judith Van Pelt's 1833 Adam and Eve design. In the center is the Tree of Knowledge with Adam on the left side and Eve on the right reaching her arm up to the tree for the fruit, while the serpent is coiled around the trunk of the tree. Judith included on her sampler the quotation, "Abraham, Abraham, here am I," which is found on several others, like Elizabeth Burket's 1783 sampler, although the quote was not part of the original pattern.⁷¹

A second distinctive group of Adam and Eve samplers appeared in Boston around the same time as the New York samplers, and was considered to be the first significant style to appear in this area. Although there are several sampler examples that have been found showing this design, a specific teacher has not been conclusively identified. The original design was based on a sixteenth century English band pattern, although it eventually changed from row upon row of flowery motifs to include rows of alphabets and numbers interspersed with bands of flowers or geometric shapes. All that is known about the original American pattern was that it was taught between 1724 and 1744, and was definitely copied by succeeding teachers, proven by noting the dated samplers as well as by looking at the variations in designs.⁷²

The Boston Adam and Eve samplers remain consistent from example to

⁷¹ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 297.

⁷² Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 38.

example for the most part, although there are slight variations in appearance as the image is copied through the years (Figure 22). The top half is covered in the alternating alphabets and flower band patterns, while the lower portion depicts the central religious scene. In the center is the tree containing extremely large and blatantly obvious pieces of fruit. Both Adam, on the left, and Eve, on the right, have their arms up holding their respective pieces of fruit as if they have just plucked them from the tree. The arms not holding the fruit are placed in front of their stomachs looking, as Bolton and Coe describe, "as if already each felt the result of the coming indigestible meal."⁷³ Adam and Eve are both covered discretely by huge fig leaves. The final touch is the serpent which is curled around the tree appearing to be staring directly at Adam.

Although the Adam and Eve depictions were the most prevalent design, other religious figures were stitched, like Cain and Abel or Abraham and Isaac, allowing for a wide variety of religiously-based samplers. Unlike the religious samplers of colonial America, however, the mourning and map embroideries remain almost entirely consistent throughout the various states, with only minor changes depending on the schools. Both of these sampler styles were highly elaborate and quite difficult, ultimately representing the culmination of a girl's educational needlework experience. Most examples were silk on silk embroideries, often combined with painting or ribbon-work.

Mourning or memorial embroideries were perhaps the most common of these four sampler motifs. They were worked by schoolgirls throughout the nineteenth centuries from Maine to North Carolina. Initially inspired by the death of George Washington, memorial embroideries eventually came to represent all that was

⁷³ Bolton and Coe, American Samplers, p. 14.

elegant and sophisticated during the 1800s. The majority of these mourning pieces honored relatives who had been dead for months or even years, so their aim was not to depict sadness but to provide, according to Betty Ring, “an opportunity for individual combinations of favorite decorative motifs which were at the time being lavishly employed on wallpapers, fabrics, ceramics, enamels, and countless other articles.”⁷⁴

The most basic mourning scenes depicted a central monument topped by an urn with one woman, sometimes more, standing beside it apparently weeping into a handkerchief (Figure 24). Usually there were willow trees, although there were often also large deciduous trees as well. This appears most consistently in two recognizable groups of embroideries originating from Albany, New York. One is attributed to the artist and engraver Henry W. Snyder, while the second group belongs to a source historians have yet to identify. Other states in which exceptionally-stitched groups of memorial embroideries appear were Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Only a few of these can be positively attributed to certain teachers, like the Balch school in Providence, Rhode Island, or Mrs. Saunders’ and Miss Beach’s Academy in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

By 1815, mourning embroideries had reached their peak in America. Many girls continued to stitch these elaborate pieces, but the proportion of needlework began declining as they became more and more a painted art form. One of the latest pieces completed was done by Eliza Davis of Charles County, Maryland, in 1826. This piece is considered extremely rare by collectors for two reasons. The first was its Maryland origin, which is noteworthy because the state produced only a small number of embroideries throughout of all New England. The second reason was that Eliza’s sampler was stitched in a Catholic school, and there were fewer Catholic schools

⁷⁴ Ring, “Memorial Embroideries by American Schoolgirls” *Antiques*, p. 571.

than Protestant institutions at this time.

At the same time mourning embroideries enjoyed great popularity, stitching map samplers became fashionable during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For many instructors, allowing students to stitch maps of certain regions enabled them to teach geography as well as embroidery in one class. Map samplers were even allowed at many Quaker schools although they were considered ornamental work and not the plain work usually encouraged.

The earliest map samplers originated in Maryland around 1798. The basic pattern was derived from Samuel Lewis' map of 1795, which, according to Betty Ring, was the most widely copied and plagiarized map of that time.⁷⁵ However, the largest and most easily recognizable group of map samplers to have been discovered originated in Pleasant Valley, New York. The majority of these samplers showed the two hemispheres, but there were several other depictions as well, including the state of New York, the United States, all of North America, and the Western Hemisphere all by itself (Figure 25). Almost all of these examples were dated and signed by the students.

Unlike the map samplers from Maryland, the Pleasant Valley examples have been almost conclusively attributed to a boarding school run by three related women, Ann Shipley, her niece Agnes Dean, and her daughter-in-law Phebe Shipley, all members of the Society of Friends. On June 7, 1803, their advertisement ran in the *Poughkeepsie & Constitutional Republican* claiming that their boarding school, opened that day, would teach young girls "reading and plain sewing, grammar, writing, arithmetic, and most kinds of needlework, geography, working maps, the use of globes, &c."⁷⁶ These women were well-educated, from prosperous families, and

⁷⁵ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 500.

⁷⁶ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 313.

were acquainted with the most influential Quakers from England and America, making them ideal for opening and maintaining a model Quaker school. It ran until about 1824, which was when the final map sampler was produced by a young girl named Lucy C. Berry.⁷⁷ All three of the founders had by that time moved to New York City, leaving the school to an unnamed instructor.

A final important motif used throughout the sampler-making period was the genealogical sampler (Figure 23). The popularity of these samplers lasted through almost this entire period, from 1730 to 1850. A young girl named Ann Robins was credited by many historians as creating this style when she produced a sampler in 1730 that included the names of her parents and grandparents as well as her own.⁷⁸ The samplers could be either very conventional, with basic cross-stitched patterns, or they could be highly stylized, mixing the more difficult embroidery stitches with such techniques as ribbon-work. Often, they combined the family register with biblical passages, although many included the family names on their completed mourning embroideries as well.

The primary function, no matter how they were displayed, was to record the births, deaths and marriages of a girl's immediate family. Some were completed at the time the sampler was put on display, while other girls continued adding family member's names throughout the years. In her article "The Genealogical Sampler," Estelle Harris claims that ultimately these family registers were "as historically acceptable as the records of the family Bible."⁷⁹ Oftentimes, names were copied directly from the family Bible onto the sampler itself.

From the beginning of the sampler-making period to its eventual demise in the

⁷⁷ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, p. 316.

⁷⁸ Harris, "The Genealogical Sampler," *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, p. 721.

⁷⁹ Harris, "The Genealogical Sampler," p. 713.

mid-1800s, various embroidery styles and motifs were created and used by young girls. Some designs remained particular to a certain region or religious group, but several became popular throughout the country. This ability to endure throughout the New England states is what makes these four motifs--religious, mourning, map and genealogical embroideries--so valuable today as collector's items. They truly are some of the more beautiful and interesting samplers to survive from the early part of American history.

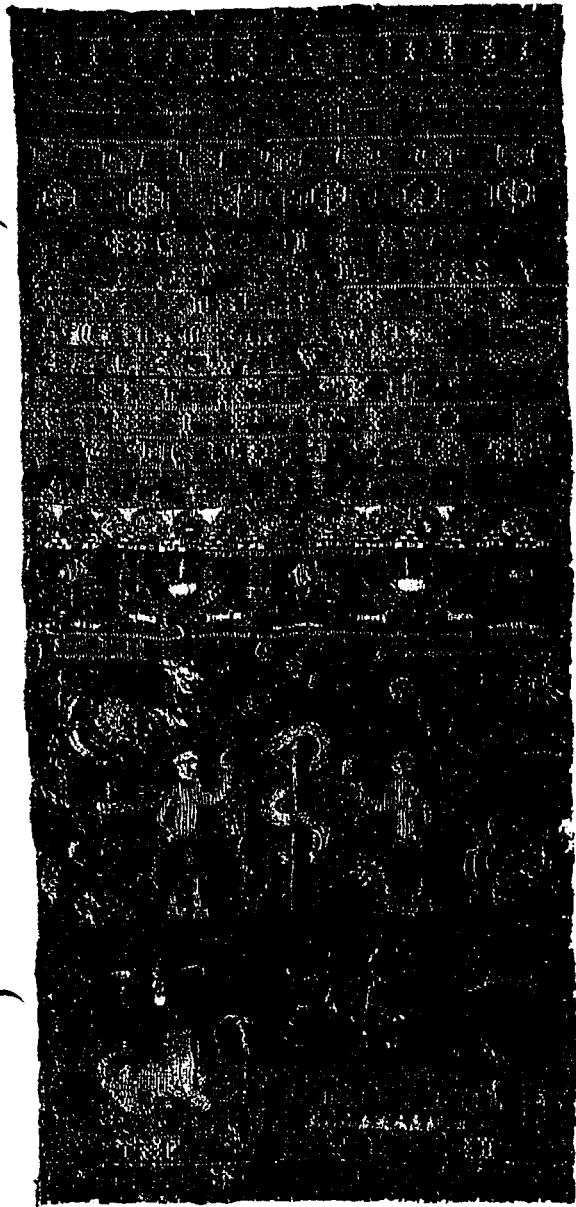


Fig. 22. Martha Butler's sampler, 1729. Martha's sampler is typical of most Adam and Eve designs. The top half is similar to the band pattern style, while the bottom half of the sampler depicts Adam and Eve plucking the forbidden fruit. In most samplers preceding Martha's, Adam and Eve were uncovered, but Martha chose to add fig leaves to her work. Cooper-Hewitt, National Museum of Design, Smithsonian Institution.

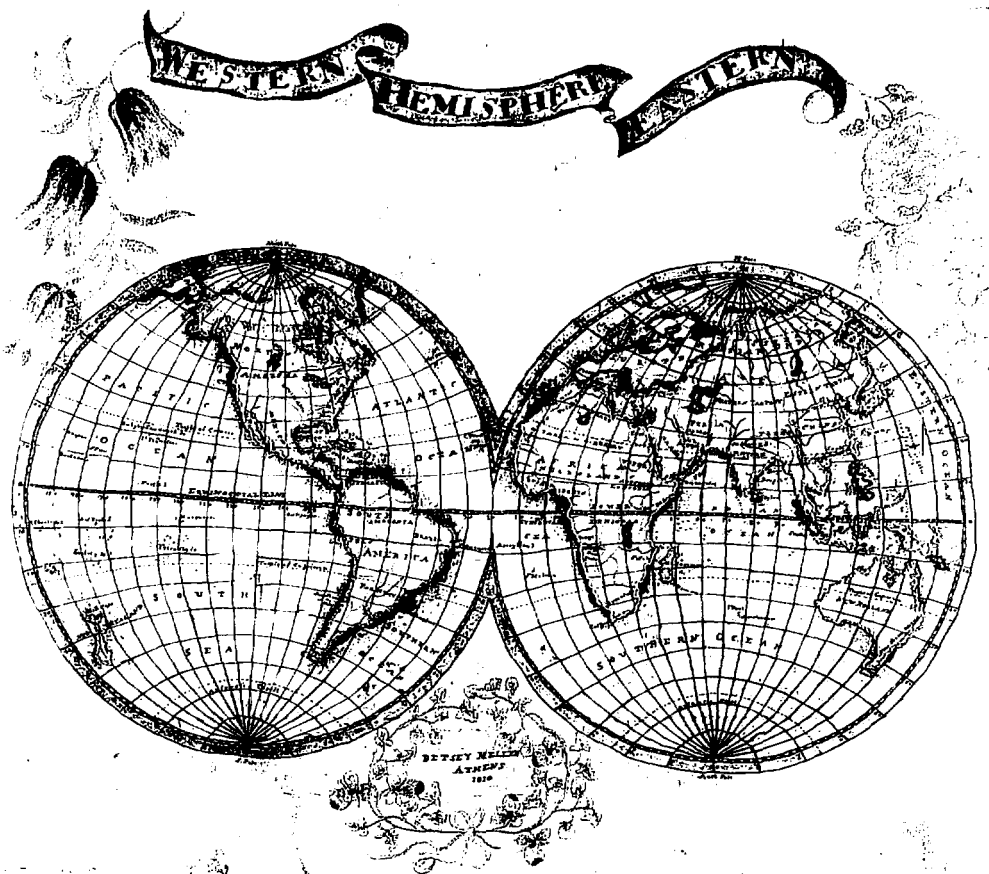


Fig. 23. Susan Garfield's sampler, c.1825. Made in Boston, Susan's sampler nonetheless represents the basic family register made throughout America during the sampler-making period. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. James F. Miller.



Fig. 24. Catharine Lansing's sampler, 1801. Catharine's Albany mourning sampler was worked in black and brown silk, pencil and ink on silk. Her representation has an urn, weeping willows and a crying woman that are all common to most mourning embroideries. Collection of Betty Ring.

Fig. 25. Betsey Mellen's sampler, 1810. Betsey's sampler depicts the two hemispheres, the most popular pattern found at the Pleasant Valley School. She worked her embroidery with silk, chenille and paint on silk. Staten Island Historical Society.



Conclusion: American Samplers in the Twentieth Century

The end of the sampler-making period came during the mid-1800s as more and more Americans demanded better education for women. The newer educational standards finally succeeded in erasing the teaching of ornamental arts as primary subjects. Although occasionally taught in the classroom, subjects like dancing, drawing and sewing were relegated to the utilitarian topic of "domestic sciences."⁸⁰

As embroidery as a school subject declined in popularity, interest in needlework pieces as historical artifacts and collector's items grew. For historians, samplers offer clues crucial to understanding the place of woman in American history. Today, the study of women's history cannot be considered complete if historians and teachers ignore this intrinsic aspect of the lives of women. By covering women's education in early America and the emphasis placed on ornamental arts, the strides women have made since the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries are even more enhanced, making their contribution to the country's history as a whole more astounding and significant.

Samplers also are important in the world of collecting. Betty Ring claims several reasons for the fascination with collecting samplers when she writes, ". . . the majority were worked by children aged six to fourteen years, and they were usually signed and dated; also they were never created to be sold, had seldom been altered, and were consistently genuine."⁸¹ Men and women both collect schoolgirl embroideries and, in most cases, entire collections or even a few single pieces can be worth vast amounts of money.

Some of the more interesting collections of samplers originated in the United

⁸⁰ Ring, Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee, p. 243.

⁸¹ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 543.

States throughout the twentieth century. Alexander Wilson Drake's collection of at least three hundred and three samplers was considered once the best collection in the country. His samplers were shown throughout the country in cities like Indianapolis in 1905, Washington in 1908, and Cincinnati in 1909, before they were sold in 1913 at the American Art Galleries in New York.⁸² Another assortment of extremely well-known samplers belonged to Theodore H. Kapnek. Within a ten-year period during the mid-1900s, he acquired one of the most extensive collections of any sampler enthusiast. When he died, the pieces in his collection exceeded all price barriers previously set for antique embroideries. Five were sold for \$20,000 each. One hundred and seventy-two lots consisting of artifacts from Kapnek's collection sold for more than \$641,000.⁸³

Of course, since the mid-1900s, these prices have been surpassed by pieces from several other major collections. In June 1987, a sampler stitched by Ruthy Rogers around the year 1789 sold at Skinner's for \$198,000. This single piece of schoolgirl embroidery holds the auction record for any early American sampler.

Samplers are fascinating to study. In the beginning, they were simply used to teach girls to sew. Now, because of their beauty and historical significance, they are considered very precious and certainly very valuable collectors' items. The art of sampler-making itself has changed as well. What was once an educational instrument has become a purely decorative hobby. Pictures of animals and flowers dominate in cross-stitching patterns. Whimsical designs like Monopoly boards or Coca-Cola signs can be found at any arts and crafts store. The significance of samplers is that they have been in existence for an extremely long time. They offer glimpses into the pasts of ordinary people and give historians information that helps

⁸² Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 544.

⁸³ Ring, Girlhood Embroidery, p. 548.

— to fully develop American history. Often forgotten, but nonetheless extremely important, samplers make a truly significant contribution to the study of women's history and American history as a whole.

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