

SAMPLERS by Miss Edith Winn Misc. acc.931.23.2 Soc. Paper read 10/25/30

Many of us today in looking at the old time samplers express with wonder the capabilities of the children of the former times, but we do not realize possibly the tears that were shed before the samplers were completed. The following inscriptions found on one shows that all girls were not fond of sewing. "Patty Polk did this and she hated many stitches she did in it. She loves to read much more."

The earliest definite mention made of a sampler is in 1502 when Elizabeth of York paid eight pounds for an "ell of linen cloth for one," although the English poet, Skelton in 1498 remarked that "ladies are making samplers" and Shakespeare gives us the following words in *Midsummer Nights Dream* "We, Hermes, like two artificial gods Have with our needles created . . . one flowers Both are samplers, sitting on one cushion." Chaucer, who died in 1400 refers to samplers also.

Toward the middle of the 16th century, however, we find the sampler growing in popularity since it seemed to be a new form of relaxation and the craze of embroidery had gotten an upper hand. "In 1586 Catherine de Medici was petitioned to put a stop to it, on the plea that 'mills, pastries, woods and all the revenues are wasted on embroideries, insertions, trimmings, tassels, fringes, needlework, etc. new diversities of which are invented daily.

The question as to where the patterns were obtained is one of importance, but the general feeling of the collectors is that they came from Italy, since many of the designs show Italian influences. As early as 1527 a book of patterns was printed by Peter Quiental (?) although no copy has been preserved. But in 1701 a similar book "gives borders and common pieces, some few of which, at least, are derived from those included in the book of patters for various kinds of needlework" published by Peter Quiental.

The very earliest samplers were always done on Linen bands by skilled needlewomen and were used references for making various stitches in intricate embroideries; later linen eight inches wide was used. As the looms were not constructed to make wider linen these samplers were long, the upper half always devoted to the use of floral and geometric designs, while the lower half was used for drawn work and artwork. Some were worked in the convents and were ecclesiastic, while others were worked by the "royalty" and were really "Exampers" since no names and dates were used.

By the end of the 17th century we find the samples broader and shorter than those of the one preceding, less interesting, and the elaborate embroidery had completely vanished. In America all the samplers at this time were worked in New England. During the 18th century the samplers became square and acquired borders. The English samplers contained verses, alphabets, numerals, and a heterogeneousness of design. The American samplers had more form and coherence than the English, and the samplers made in Penn. At this time shows a Dutch influence to some extent. The American samplers done by the child contained sample alphabets with borders of strawberry, acorn, or Greek frets (?), while those worked by the older girls contained more complicated designs such as the Indian Perils (?), rose, and the tree of life." These samplers were doubtless worked at the finishing sch9ols while those worked by the children were a product of the Dana ? School. Let one say a word here of the educations of the children of the colonies. The Dance ? School was usually kept in an empty room in an ordinary dwelling house in the littlest boys and girls by a woman who had the room and so-called knowledge to spare. After leaving the Dame (?) School the boys were went to the public school while the girls were left without any further means of education other than the finishing school. These

schools were kept in the homes too and most everything but academic subjects were taught. Most of the ads for these schools offer embroidery and needlework as one of the attractions.

The 19th century samplers are most common. The English samplers of this period still abound in small figures and objects which were not well adapted to needlework. The American samplers were the reverse and patterns were as scarce. That aid was gotten from older members of the family or from friends. Usually the designs were drawn but sometimes paper patterns were basted onto the material and torn off after the pattern was worked. During this century public buildings and churches were very popular as designs, especially on the samplers worked in the vicinity of R.I. The architecture was modified to suit the whim of the maker or to meet the exigencies of the embroidery, but we must not be too critical so long as these scenes to bear a sufficient resemblance to the original, or are labelled.

One sampler depicts the College of William and Mary in Virginia and it seems very appropriate that this college should appear on a piece of needle work as one of its officials appointed in 1761 was a stocking mender and received a salary of twelve (12) pounds a year. During the 18th century verse had been added to the sampler especially verse of religious nature also selections from the Bible. No sampler was complete around the latter part of the 18th century without one or the other. One pious verse found on one sampler follows: "Lord let the Sunshine of thy Face / So clear my Eyes and Cleanse my Heart That being seasoned with thy grace. My soul may taste how sweet thou art. "

And here is a version of the Ten Commandments which has been found worked on a sampler: Adore no other gods but only me. Worship no God by anything you see. Revere Jehovah's name, swear not in vain. Let Sabbaths be a rest for beast and me. Honour thy parents to prolong thy days. Thou shall not kill nor murdering quarrels raise. Adultery shun, in chastity delight. Thou shall not steal not take another's right. In bearing witness never tell a lie. Covet not what may damnify."

About the middle of the 18th century, some school conceived the idea of using Adam and Eve and the apple, probably as a subject of religious enlightenment. Two samplers have been found which are identical and depict the tree bearing huge apples, Adam accompanied by a goose, and Eve a rabbit, while the serpent resembles a fat angle-worm embracing the tree. Many other samplers show Adam and Eve dressed in various costumes.

The genealogical samplers did not come into common use until late in the 18th century, although one has been found which bears the day 1730. Harriet Van Wart in 1822 embroidered a most elaborate family record on a 30 " square. She gives the names of her grandparents both paternal and maternal, her parents, and those of her thirteen brothers and sisters, with dates of births and deaths, all without abbreviation. Chain-stitching in human hair separates the groups of data. A sampler of 1756 bears an eagle and was the forerunner of our country's symbolic emblem, which came into frequent use on samplers during the 19th century.

The earliest American samplers were worked in New England, but from 1750 on we find the girls in the Southern coast states had taken up the fad. Considering the fact that most of the samplers were made in the states bordering on the sea, it seems strange that ships and boats do not appear more frequently. The sampler traveled west and in 1839 we find one depicting a church in a Missouri town.

The oldest sampler in America is that worked by Loara Standish, the daughter of Miles Standish. It was worked in England but we claim it as ours since the Standish were early settlers. This may be seen at Plymouth in the Pilgrim Memorial Hall. The first sampler made in America to have been preserved is that of Anne Gower, the first wife of John Endicott, Governor of Massachusetts. It is a fine specimen of needlework and ???. Loara Standish sampler is better done, and has intricate designs. Likewise a maxim appears which is the first to appear on any samplers.

An idea common to those who are not students of samplers is that only children were the makers; this is not so. Many women were producers although the average age is thirteen years. One worked by a woman of sixty has been preserved, also one worked by Mary Smith, who was six in the year 1704 (?). Samples worked by boys have also been found.

Two varieties found commonly in England but never popular here are those containing darning stitches and embroidered maps. The darning stitch samplers have the Germans as originators and their influence did not reach to our country. The second variety is that of embroidered maps. These were very common in England and were evidently stamped and then embroidered. The few found of American origin include maps of New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts and New York. The one depicting the map of New York gives also statistics and valuable information, namely that the population of New York State in 1829 was 1,392,812 and that Long Island is the most important island belonging to the State of New York, 140 miles in length and from 10 - 15 miles broad, contains three counties and numerous flourishing towns, population 87,000. This girl also gives this bit of history "Lake Erie is the celebrated scene of Perry's victory over a British fleet Sept 10, 1813, and Lake Champlain is celebrated for the victory gained by (indecipherable) over a British fleet of far superior force, Sept. 1814."

At one period samplers assumed the role of mourning pieces. These portray willow trees overshadowing elaborate monuments and the name of the departed member or members of the family. Satin was largely used for these pieces, and watercolor was sometimes introduced. Soon after 1832, a general deterioration is noticed in the quality of workmanship, and the number produced and the "reign of the genuine samplers" came to a timely end. The reason for this being that girls were receiving more education, thus taking up more of their time and the introduction and craze of a new needlework taking place, namely "Berlin Wool Work."

A few words should be said concerning the materials used for samplers – at first narrow linen bands were used, those giving way to linen only eight or nine inches in width. Later linen brought from the continent was used as the looms there were adapted for weaving a wide fabric. During the latter part of the 19th century we find the English using mustard colored linen and in the middle of the 18th century tammy ? cloth was used in England as well as America. This was a wool resembling mohair, more evenly woven than mohair, more evenly woven than linen, but not particularly adaptable to being hauled down to the future generations for it had the qualities of shrinking, curling, and produced food for moths. Doubtless many fine examples have been lost by this means. The linen used by the people on this continent was much coarser and rougher; our linen was sometimes colored. Birdseye and cotton were both used a little, but evidently were not entirely satisfactory. The canvasses, Canary and Penelope were used in the 19th century as well as bolting cloth, but that too was a good rendezvous for moths so again many good examples were lost.

The thread was all home dyed whether linen, wool, cotton or silk and of course the resulting colors were dependent upon the taste and skill of the dyer. The colors were from the native herbs -- dogwood, indigo and saffron, and red was obtained from the cochineal insect.

Some of the silk threads have a kinkiness showing that it must have been twisted into hanks and then indecipherable from those. A great many of the samplers done in Essex County show the use of the kinky silk and the fact has been deduced that the silk came from the Orient, since Essex County contained many ports for foreign sailing ships. The effect of this kinky silk was very attractive; it was always used in the long stitches and in coulling. After 1800 we find that chenille was used and this gave a more elaborate effect than the other threads had done.

There are many curiosities among these works of art. Let me mention two. Hannah Robinson in 1818 embroidered what might be called a "missionary sampler, in which every prospect pleases man, fortunately being omitted."

In 1821 we find Lucinda Brooks sampler took the form of a marriage certificate. On one side we find the name and age of the bride and groom -- Lucinda Brooks aged 16, and Ruben Dade aged 22. On the other side these words: "May the cares that bind the covetous never disturb our peace. May we yield therefore to one another and be equally yoked together in the command of God. May neither of us seek basely to throw an undue weight on the other's shoulders. Suffer no interference from any other to interrupt our harmony. We are connected for life, nothing can separate our fate in this world. Oh, let nothing divide our affections. May we regard each other with the fullest confidence, the least spark of suspicion from either might forever blast the comfort of both. There can be no harmony where there is no faith."

Many contain verses such as follows: Mary Jackson is my name. America is my nation. Boston is my dwelling place. And Christ is my salvation." Each and every one contains something of interest and the more we see, the more we marvel. In writing this paper, I have found Mrs. C. K. Bolton's work entitled "American Samplers" both helpful and entertaining. In closing I will quote her: Long live this happy sampler-land, a delightful refuge for the imagination in times of stress and worry!