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**AS THEY ARE FASHIONED SO THEY GROW:
SAMPLERY AND QUEBEC SAMPLERS**

Jennifer E. Salahub

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

August 1989

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ABSTRACT

As They are Fashioned so they Grow: Samplery and Quebec Samplers

Jennifer E. Salahub

The embroidered sampler is perhaps the most common form of domestic needlework to have survived, however this *survival* does not ensure its recognition by historians of art. Although samplers were signed, dated, and displayed they have consistently been relegated to a lower position within the hierarchy of the arts--and to a surprising extent a lesser role within the history of embroidery. The qualities associated with domestic needlework have often served to disenfranchise it from mainstream art, for it is seen as the work of amateurs--usually women--and it was executed outside of the professional sphere. In Britain samplery formed an integral part of a young woman's education from the eighteenth century and this has led to the misconception that samplers are solely the work of young school girls.

This thesis locates and identifies Quebec samplers within the history of the genre and distinguishes characteristics that are peculiar to these works. The Quebec samplers that form the nucleus of this research have been found within private and public collections and were embroidered prior to the twentieth century. Given the fact that Quebec boasts of the oldest school for young women in North America (1635) and that needlework was an

integral part of the curriculum it was at first surprising to discover that there were no samplers worked before the last quarter of the eighteenth century. However, contemporary political, economic, and social conditions serve to explain the paucity of samplers. Samplery is shown to be an English tradition that appeared only with the arrival of English-speaking settlers. The eventual, albeit belated, appearance of samplery within the curriculum of the Ursuline Convent at Quebec, the limited role that samplery played, and its final popularity are examined. Quebec samplers are shown to be an interesting juxtaposition of English and French traditions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research behind this thesis has taken place over a number of years and I have met and talked to numerous people and visited many institutions in my quest for samplers. I would like to acknowledge everyone who has provided me with leads, insights, encouragement and support. In particular I must thank the following: Laurier Lacroix whose suggestions, quiet belief and unending kindness gave me the confidence to continue; R. Bella Rabinovitch and our morning debates; Suzanne Steinberg who encouraged and listened patiently to my "insights;" Dennis Salahub who stated "It's only finished when you put your pen down."

My knowledge of samplers and samplery was heightened when I met Jacqueline Beaudoin-Ross of the McCord Museum for it was she who invited me to catalogue the museum's collection. Through Jackie I met embroidery historian Joyce Taylor Dawson who was always willing to help me with elusive details and information. In Quebec City Sister Gabrielle Dagneault o.s.u. showed me their collection of religious embroidery and samplers. The Montreal Museum of Fine Art, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Brome County Historic Museum and the DAR Museum in Washington were equally generous, providing access to their storage areas and records.

I am fortunate in my fellow graduate students and friends: Monique Saumier arranged visits to the Eastern Township historical societies and museums; Denyse Roy enthusiastically photographed

samplers in less than ideal situations; Hazel Powers visited the Ursuline Convent in New Orleans armed with my list of questions; Virginia Nixon gave me a sampler that sparked many of my ideas concerning Quebec embroidery.

I would also like to thank Concordia University's Catherine MacKenzie and Reesa Greenberg who introduced me to Feminist art history as this provided an unexpected thread of continuity for my research. I am grateful to friends at the University of Montreal who kindly saw me through the traumatic final stages of production--reformatting what I had believed to be a finished work.

Finally I must thank Dennis for the editing, formatting, and *needling* that brought this work to a conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

AS THEY ARE FASHIONED SO THEY GROW

The earliest known piece of literature dealing with the history of samplery appeared in 1709 in the form of an article entitled "An Essay on the Invention of the Sampler".¹ Unfortunately the article was not the result of any serious research, rather the essay formed part of a satirical journal whose writings were meant to parody the "useful transactions" that filled the London Royal Society's scholarly journal *Philosophical Transactions*.

Thus, in a quest for the most nonsensical and absurd topic the author who is identified only as "The Gentlewoman who wrote the Discourse" chose to write "An Essay on the Invention of the Sampler."² In this exposition the narrator chronicles an arduous search for samplers that takes "her" through the alleys of London. The successful, if from the "Gentlewoman's" stand point far-fetched, denouement is the location of a large chest of old linens which the owner, "valu's extremely for their Variety of Marking, saying, that, if he could not get a very large Sum for 'em, he would, after his death leave 'em to some publick Repository."³

¹*Useful Transactions in Philosophy, And other sorts of Learning, for the Months of January and February, 1708/9.* Cited by Edith A. Standen in "First Efforts of an Infant's Hand," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 17 (1958): 92.

²This subject was topical as contemporary critics on the state of education of women had focused on the role of needlework in the curriculum.

³*Useful Transactions in Philosophy, And other sorts of Learning, for the Months of January and February, 92.*

What was in 1709 a total flight of fancy has today become the subject of scholarly investigation, and the maligned "old linens" would undoubtedly fetch a "very large sum" and would certainly be a welcome addition to many a "publick repository." This renewed appreciation of embroidery parallels the interest in women's history and the proliferation of publications dealing with female artists and a female sensibility that is perceived to find form in the so called female media.¹ The 1980s have witnessed a burgeoning awareness of historic embroidered samplers in Europe and North America: prices have spiralled;² articles and books have been written;³ and exhibitions have been mounted.⁴

The embroideries that are today identified as samplers are described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as

...a beginner's exercise in embroidery; a piece of canvas embroidered by a girl as a specimen of her skill, usually

¹Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* which opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979 typifies these concerns. Chicago saw the exhibition as a means of exposing the secondary role women had been allotted in history, thus her selection of ceramics and embroidery was a self-conscious move to reiterate this message.

²In January 1987 an American sampler, dated 1788, sold for a record \$192,000. Rita Reif, "Needlework, \$100,000 and Up," *New York Sunday Times*, 15 March 1987: H-37.

³Selected publications include: Hyla Wulfs Fox, "Samplers," *Canadian Antiques & Art Review* August/September 1981: 46-55; Marguerite Fawdry, and Deborah Brown, *The Book of Samplers*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. Betty Ring, "Samplers and silk embroideries of Portland, Maine," *Antiques* Vol. CXXXIV, No.3 (1988): 512-525.

⁴Among recent exhibitions the following were accompanied by well illustrated catalogues. 1984--The Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted a travelling exhibition, organized by the Rhode Island Historical Society, *Let Virtue be a Guide to Thee*. In 1985--The Museum of Nova Scotia organized an exhibition *Record for our Time*. 1986--An exhibition of American and European samplers held in Florence at the Palazzo Davanzati, 'Imparaticci' = 'Samplers': *Esercizi di ricamo delle bambine europee ed americane dal Seicento all'Ottocento*.

containing the alphabet and some mottos worked in ornamental characters, with various decorative devices.¹

Whereas this definition appears to be all-embracing--for we not only have a description of the embroidery but we are told also that the embroiderer is a girl and that the sampler functions as a beginner's exercise--various problems become obvious when this criteria is applied to many embroideries historically identified as samplers. In fact samplers did not serve only as a beginners' exercises nor were they solely the work of young girls. In many cases the technical skill exhibited by the embroiderer and her age, often worked on the sampler, are at odds with this definition. Jane Lucy Wakeman (figure 17) was twenty-one when she finished her sampler in 1849. A study of the etymology of the word sampler reveals that this definition, although now commonly accepted, is limited when studied within the history of the genre.

Although this thesis is concerned with historic samplers made in Quebec before the twentieth century it is necessary to recognize the preconceptions regarding the sampler that are today popular. To this end I will briefly focus on the role of samplers within the 1980's--an *abecedary* of usage in art, advertising, and art criticism.² These preconceptions are reflected in the work of artists and advertising agents who appear to have re-discovered the sampler and the implied associations [women/home/hearth] that it connotes.

¹"Sampler", *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, (1971 ed) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

²The term *abecedary* was used in a promotional package supplied by Toronto's Royal York Hotel: "Maps & Sights," *Toronto at Your Fingertips: The Royal York* (June, 1988): 2. In this guide to the city the author announced he was "Presenting an abecedary of essential sights."

It is paradoxical that while American artists such as Judy Chicago and Barbara Kruger and Canadian artist Leslie Sampson, have chosen the sampler as the vehicle to reveal negative stereotypes in the history of women,¹ *Madison Avenue* has chosen to appropriate the same image to exemplify and inculcate the traditional ideals of home and hearth in their promotion of a diverse range of products.²

These biases are reaffirmed in contemporary art criticism. Ralph Pomeroy, in a review of works on paper and cloth by the artist Melanie Wygonik, states that the images "come perilously close to . . . good old American samplers." He feels "Wygonik's work reveals a very personal domesticity, a world of things privately experienced. It is highly decorative while being narrative too."³ When Robert Hughes reviewed the Whitney Biennial (1987) he placed Barbara Kruger's works among those promoting "media-based conceptual imagery" and describes them as "snootily virtuous samplers."⁴ Both critics, Pomeroy and Hughes, have summed up the contemporary viewer's expectations regarding embroidered samplers: virtuous, nostalgic, didactic, school-girl exercises.

Much of the confusion surrounding the role and appearance of samplers is a result of the dual nature inherent in the medium. As early as the sixteenth century samplers incorporated both a text and

¹For *The Dinner Party* Chicago chose a sampler format as the runner honouring Anna van Schurman [1607-1678], illustration in *Embroidering Our Heritage*. For Sampson's work see Heather Dawkins, "Cultural Politics: Social History and Embroidery," *Vanguard*, (September 1985): 10-12.

²These include *Campbell's Homestyle Chicken Noodle Soup* [*soupe "Grand-mère"*], *Kraft Real Mayonnaise* and Howard Johnson's advertising campaign "Away Sweet Away". All feature embroidered samplers or cross-stitched motifs and/or mottos.

³Ralph Pomeroy, "Review," *Arts Magazine* 56 (May 1982): 24.

⁴Robert Hughes, "Navigating a Cultural Trough," *Time*, (11 May 1987): 70, 74.

an image, thereby providing artists with a 'double-edged' vehicle. Is the iconic message being relayed to the audience supported by a text, or is the written message illustrated by an image? At times they do augment one another, while at other times they appear to be working at cross purposes. Both remain autonomous yet they are forced to reside within the same work. This dichotomy is again seen when one considers the function of a sampler as a juxtaposition of two elements. It is an object of display and at the same time an instructional tool, as well it is both a whole (that is complete) and a fragment (a model of a potential work).

Embroidered samplers are not revered as works of fine art, even when collected by art museums their standing remains tenuous. While signed and dated, even framed and hung like paintings, they are categorized by their medium and are found within textile or costume collections.¹ Despite this limited acceptance by traditional art institutions others, especially the auction houses and antique dealers, have begun to include samplers within the lucrative field of *folk art*. Yet this is a precarious position, for the connotations associated with folk art do not apply to samplers. The majority of these samplers were worked within institutions (schools) and would be better likened to academic work. In fact the embroiderers, usually females, who executed these works are associated with a

¹One quickly becomes aware that not only is the position of embroidery within the hierarchy of the "Fine Arts" a controversial one, the position of *historic* samplers within the field of embroidery remains equally ambiguous. Once again the connotations associated with sample (sewing exercise or practice) come to the forefront. Toni Fratto, "Samplers: One of the Lesser American Arts," *The Feminist Art Journal* (Winter 1976-1977): 11-15.

particular social group that could afford the instruction, time, and materials that went into these embroideries.

These problems have yet to be addressed. Instead, recent exhibitions have focused on samplers as historic records, as reflected in the sub-titles of various exhibitions: *Let Virtue be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830* and *A Record for Time: An exhibition of decorated family and individual records, memorials, tokens of friendship and embroidered memorials and samplers produced in Nova Scotia prior to 1900* and *Ohio Samplers: Schoolgirl Embroideries 1803-1850*.¹

While samplers continue to be appreciated as historical documents by demographers and genealogists, who use them to trace the biographical texts, scholars from other disciplines also study samplers. Embroiderers and textile historians are concerned with learning about stitches, materials and techniques. Social historians refer to samplers and their role in the formal education of women. Feminists reveal the parasitic destructive relationship between embroidery and women.

Scholars traditionally focused on samplers as a document thereby ignoring their other nature as a monument of art. Thus these embroideries are dismissed by art historians as artistically derivative. I will not discuss the concept of originality and its role in establishing the validity of a work of art. Suffice to say that this

¹The Ohio exhibition was held at the Warren County Historical Society Museum, from May 15 through July 3, 1988, Lebanon, Ohio. For more information regarding other exhibitions see page 2, note 5.

concern is at odds with art history of the 1980's and with the post-modern notions of re-assessment and appropriation.

It is obvious that the Quebec samplers, which date from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, developed from forms and traditions that were brought by English and French immigrants. Notably these samplers reveal a continuation of English narrative embroidery, a tradition fraught with whimsy and, paradoxically, sobriety. Although the images and motifs have been culled from a visual history that dates back to at least the sixteenth century Quebec embroiderers have re-interpreted these sources.

The majority of the artists remain unknown, however they are not anonymous; in most cases the embroideries are signed and dated. Despite the givens--names, dates, texts--there remain a number of unanswered questions concerning Quebec samplers. One of the most perplexing deals with a society that apparently accepted samplery only during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Considering the fact that Quebec schools were offering needlework as an integral part of the curriculum in the seventeenth century one would expect to find an abundance of samplers predating 1764 (earliest extant Quebec sampler), yet this is not the case. Therefore it is necessary to study the embroidery within the context of the history of Quebec in order to prove that Quebec samplery reflects a unique if contradictory heritage. While it will be shown that samplers are worked only after the arrival of the British the influence of French traditions will be examined.

As there has been no scholarship dealing with samplers in Quebec much of this paper is concerned with identifying and locating

these samplers and subsequently studying them within the history of samplery. Thus it was necessary to gather a large body of data from which to cull information. Basically my initial research followed two parallel courses: the first consisted of locating actual embroideries; the second took the form of a detailed literature search. While access to an original work of art generally implies logistical problems for the researcher it is usually possible to refer to photographic reproductions. This proved to be an impossible recourse as no samplers are on display in Quebec and none of the collections have been photographed. Thus it was necessary to obtain permission to visit storage areas of various museums.¹

The peripheral position of Canada and Quebec in Western art history combined with the ambiguous position of embroidery within the hierarchy of the visual arts has meant that Quebec embroidery remains an area of questionable inquiry. While this viewpoint is being challenged in England and America, the fact remains that the majority of Quebec museums and institutions have been recalcitrant in their attitude towards the active acquisition of embroidery.²

¹It was physically impossible to visit all the museums and historical sites within the province that might have samplers in their holdings. Those that responded to my written inquiries were helpful although many proved to be unaware or unsure of the existence of samplers. In many cases the samplers had not been catalogued. The museums that I visited were extremely generous in allowing me access to their records and collections. The smaller historical societies and museums were enthusiastic and I was allowed access to attics, basements and drawers in my quest for samplers.

²The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has an excellent collection of over one hundred twenty five samplers from various countries. The majority of these were donated in the mid 1950s and catalogued in 1982. Despite the wealth of material little has been done to promote the collection. The only exhibition to feature some of these works was in November 1938 when the Art Association of Montreal mounted *EXHIBITION OF SAMPLERS*. I have been unable to locate a catalogue or review of this exhibition.

Lack of expertise, limited finances and physical problems associated with the conservation and display of textiles have meant that many museums reject the idea of a textile collection as out of hand. Even more sobering was the fact that many of the textile holdings remain uncatalogued and thus do not appear in this thesis.¹

From the literature search I compiled three sets of historical documents: dictionaries and encyclopedias defining samplers (16th through 20th centuries); literature and records mentioning samplers (15-20th century); actual samplers and visual records including photographs of embroideries identified as samplers (4th through 20th century). These findings brought to light a number of issues to be considered.² The first confirmed my hypothesis that the sampler did fulfill divergent roles throughout history. The second established that by examining both the formal and the iconographical elements found in the early samplers I had prepared the ground work enabling me to identify the typical and specific elements found in Quebec samplers. The literature search also provided the means to trace many of the current problems in scholarship to their roots--

¹I have relied on a number of major collections of samplers for background material. Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts were consulted because of their large collections of English, French and American samplers (both have small holdings of Quebec samplers). Montreal's McCord Museum, the Ursuline Museum in Quebec City and to a lesser extent the Brome County Historical Society's collections were the focus of this work as they provided the greatest number of Quebec samplers. Finally fellow graduate students, my own students, friends, and family were marvelous in finding samplers in both private and out-of-the-way collections.

²Of equal interest, although not to be dealt within the context of this paper, was an obvious chronological relationship between the publication of literature dealing with embroidery and the publication of literature on women's rights.

writings of the nineteenth century.¹ Finally I was able to prove that although French embroidery techniques and motifs dominated religious embroidery throughout the province, samplery is a peculiarly English tradition that became popular only after the Conquest.²

As the body of my research became unwieldy I was forced to continually reorganize my data into an acceptable format and I appropriated a working title of my paper--*As They are Fashioned so They Grow*--from an 1829 sampler (Figure 1). Thus my research has been 'fashioned' into four chapters augmented by illustrations and an appendix. Initially I had planned for Chapter One to introduce the reader to the embroidered sampler by means of the definitive definition. This proved to be an impossible task as the word *sampler* is now used in a generic sense referring to a diverse range of embroideries. Instead, the reader is introduced to the sampler through the evolution of the art form via an etymological study of *sampler*.

¹The first historical survey text was published in England in 1841. The text, *The Art of Needlework*, was written by Elizabeth Stone and edited by the Countess of Wilton [Mary Margaret Egerton]. Since then a great deal has been written about embroidery, unfortunately as one becomes familiar with these texts and articles one becomes increasingly aware that much of the information is unreliable, or at best confusing. It is disconcerting to discover that these later authors unabashedly accepted Victorian ideals as accurate assessments of history and have unwittingly perpetuated myths long dismissed in other disciplines. The majority of these early texts are didactic taking the form of historical surveys, reference texts, books on design, and catalogues. Most reflect nineteenth century Positivism, or ideologies based on the Victorian veneration of the Medieval and Gothic past typified by the writings of John Ruskin [1819-1900].

²The location of samplers in English settlements as well as the incorporation of narrative elements and the preponderance of English texts favor the hypothesis that British, and by extension American embroidery traditions, had the greatest influence on Canadian works.

Chapter Two focuses on the symbiotic role of embroidery and education of young women from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century in England and France. In Chapter Three the belated appearance of samplery within the curriculum of Quebec schools is addressed. Both the limited role that samplery played within Quebec and the final popularity of the art form are examined.

In Chapter Four I identify and discuss the formal characteristics of specific Quebec samplers. By comparing these embroideries to previously discussed European and American works one becomes aware that a number of premises applied to those samplers simply do not apply to Quebec samplers. The chapter also addresses the problems associated with establishing, as works of art, artifacts that have been created within a society where originality and deviation are assiduously coupled with heresy.

Since the materials, techniques, and even nomenclature associated with embroidery remain virtually unknown to art historians, I have included an Appendix with a brief discussion of the media--ground, thread, and stitches. Key words have been highlighted for easier reference.

Unfortunately many of the Quebec samplers discussed in this thesis do not photograph well, nonetheless I have, wherever possible, incorporated illustrations (figures) within the text. As well as the photographs of Quebec embroideries I have included illustrations culled from a variety of sources. These are identified in the accompanying legends. A brief description and the present location of all samplers cited will be found in the footnotes.

Children like tender osiers take their bow
As they are fashioned so they grow
Julia Gray, 1826

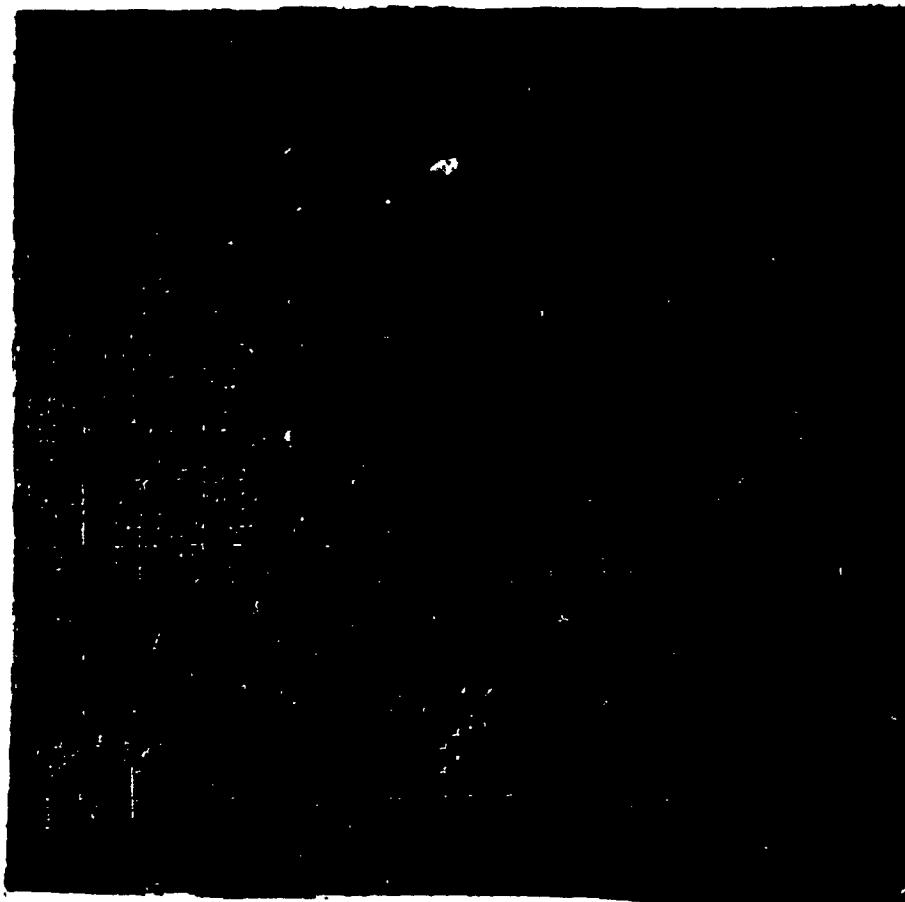


Figure 1

Sampler, Julia Gray, 1826 (McCord M21376)
Coloured silks in cross stitch on linen
43 x 44.5 cm
Photograph: Denyse Roy.

CHAPTER I
'BUT WHAT IS IT A SAMPLE OF?'
AN ESSAY ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE SAMPLER

Arachne first invented working with the
needle, which this mayd of Lydia first
learned from the Spiders, taking her first
samplers and patterns from them for
imitation

The historie of four footed Beastes 1658¹

Whereas the 1709 "Essay on the Invention of the Sampler" was written as a parody, such an exposition, had it been a serious attempt, would have served as a marvelous introduction to this thesis. Unfortunately this presupposes the existence of a given--the definition of *sampler*. Finding a comprehensive definition posed unexpected difficulties as research revealed that the appellation sampler, in use since the sixteenth century, has described a widely divergent range of embroideries. In order to avoid further confusion it is necessary to accept that *sampler* is in fact a generic title and to acknowledge that the embroideries that share this appellation do not necessarily serve the same function nor do they all take the same form.

Although Nelson Goodman was not dealing with embroidered samplers, he addressed similar misconceptions when he wrote of

¹Edward Topsell, *The historie of four footed Beastes*, Vol. I: *Beasts & Serpents & Insects* (1658, reprint ed., New York, N.Y.: Da Capo Press, 1967), 778.

"samples" in 1984. Referring to swatches of fabric from a sample [wallpaper or upholstery] book he stated that they are:

simply a sample--a simple sample. But what is it a sample of? Texture, color, weave, thickness, fibre content...; the whole point of this sample, we are tempted to say, is that it was cut from a bolt and has all the same properties as the rest of the material. But that would be too hasty.¹

Certainly with respect to an embroidered sampler it would be "hasty" or erroneous to assume, regardless of the nomenclature, that it is a *sample* of a finished or even projected design. Yet this is often the case. This dilemma is also evident in the French literature for the words commonly used to identify these embroideries, *abécédaires* and *marquoirs*, connote specific sub-categories of English samplery. For Goodman the "moral of the story is . . . that a sample is a sample of some of its properties but not others."²

It follows that much of the confusion surrounding the written history of the embroidered sampler can be traced to the fact that the object has often had two or more quite independent denotations at the same time. Embroidered samplers have fulfilled a variety of purposes serving as multiple and complex references, where the sampler performs several integrated and interacting referential functions.³

¹Nelson Goodman, "When Is Art," in *Art and Its Significance*, ed. Stephen David Ross, (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1984), 245.

²Ibid.

³Samplers have been seen as embroidered workbooks, and sketchbooks; they are accepted as examples or patterns for future projects; they are also regarded as proof of an individual embroiderer's progress. While many are unintentionally autobiographical others were created primarily as genealogical records. The ideology that fostered samplery can be seen to be based on educational and/or moral incentives. Samplers not only provide information (alphabets, geography, history) they inculcate moral lessons

A selective study of early dictionaries and encyclopedias reveals that although many unusual and even unique spellings of *sampler* exist, all are derived from a common Latin noun *exemplum*, meaning "something chosen from a number of things, a sample, an example to be imitated; a model, pattern; an archetype."¹ In *A Dictionary of Englyshe and Welshe* (1547)² the spelling is 'siampler', while in the *Antique Linguae Britannicae* (1632)³ we find 'siampl' 'siampler' and 'examplar' *Examplar*, frequently given as an alternative to *sampler* in early literature, is derived from the same root. Originally an adjective, by the sixteenth century it defined a person or thing which serves as a model for information or an example...

So when Cuthbert came to the church and monastery of Lindisfarne he handed on the monastic rule by teaching and examplar.⁴

Whether the model is the life of a Saint or an embroidery motif, it appears that it was the notion of the emulation of excellence that was implicit. Ironically many embroidered samplers are far from perfect, a cursory study of textile histories reveal that the earliest embroideries identified as samplers were not examples of excellence. In fact historians have identified a Nazca [Peruvian] embroidery

(religious or moralistic truisms) while promoting "feminine" ideals. Thus in form and function they are recognized as both decorative and didactic.

¹"Sampler," *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971 ed.

²"Sampler," *A Dictionary in Englyshe and Welshe* (1547), cited by Francis G. Payne, *Guide to the Collection of Samplers and Embroideries. National Museum of Wales* (Cardiff, Wales: National Museum of Wales and Press Board of the University of Wales, 1939), 22.

³John Davies, *Antique Linguae Britannicae* (1632) cited by F. G. Payne, 22.

⁴J. F. Webb and D. H. Farmer, trans., *The Age of Bede*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), 64. *The Life of Cuthbert* dates from c. 715 A.D.

constructed between 200 and 500 A.D. as a sampler by the "obvious disregard for visual clarity."¹

The majority of textile historians feel that embroidered samplers evolved as woman/man began to embellish the surfaces of textiles² and that their function would have been that of an *aide-mémoire* or model for information. In an era before the availability of paper, the *sampler* would have been a means of transmitting patterns from one artist to another as well as serving as a sketch book or potential source of inspiration.

While this description would fit the hypothesis that a sampler is a model for information or beginner's exercise, we would be hard put to explain the popularity of samplers after the availability of printed patterns or the fact that the embroideries identified as samplers display a strong sense of composition that belie a role as a mere exercise or sketch book. Few extant samplers pre-date the sixteenth century but this should not be taken to imply, as it was by Marius Huish, that samplers "had no infancy."³ Not only do we find numerous references in literature and other records proving that

¹Anne Sebba, *Samplers, Five Generations of a Gentle Craft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 6. Here the fact that the seventy-four motifs appear in various states of completion and overlap one another, supports the contention that a sampler's function was that of a sketch book rather than a school girl's exercise. Similar works also described as samplers, have been found in Chinese, Turkistan and Coptic burial graves of the sixth century.

²Although the earliest embroidered fragments have not yet been documented the oldest extant textile fragments date to stone age finds in Switzerland. Recent interest in textile science has provided historians with new data--in "Formation of Fossilized Fabrics-Focus of Textile Research Project" in *Chemical and Engineering News*, (September 10, 1984): 28-30 scientists found that silk making was already well developed in China by 1300 B.C. a millenium before the Han dynasty whose tombs were traditionally associated with mankind's oldest silks.

³Marius B. Huish, *Samplers and Tapestry Embroideries* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1913. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1963), 99.

samplers were a familiar part of the fifteenth and sixteenth century life in Europe, but a late 14th century Spanish panel painting (figure 2) provides us with what has been identified as an even earlier representation of a embroidered sampler¹.

On the left hand side of the panel eight young women, arranged in two rows parallel to the picture plane, present their handiwork to a larger figure. The subject matter has tentatively been identified by Betty Ring as the child Virgin, complete with identifying halo and embroidered (patterned) gown, bringing an embroidered square to the temple. It also could be interpreted as eight young students presenting their embroidery to an instructress. Interestingly the embroidery held by the Virgin is similar to the square seventeenth-century samplers. This once more brings into question the preconceptions of the viewer. Would a contemporary audience have recognized this *cloth* as a sampler or would they have seen the Virgin as the *sampler/exemplar* and the embroidery as an attribute reinforcing her position? Do we accept that this must be a sampler because we see the embroidery within the context of female education? Do our preconceptions lead us to accept that "all of the salient features of samplers indicate that they were part of a learning process and served as proof of a girl's completion of a

¹Betty Ring, *Let Virtue Be A Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830* (Providence: The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983), 24.

The first mention of a sampler is found in an accounts book dating from Tudor England. In the 1502 Privy Purse expenses of Elizabeth of York, Queen of Henry VII, we read:

Itm the Xth day of July to Thomas Fisse in reward for bringing of conserve of cherys from London to Windsor and for an elne of lynnyn cloth for a sampler for the Queen, viii d.¹

From this court record, and a 1509 inventory of the possessions of Spain's Queen Joan the Mad which lists fifty samplers², we observe that samplery was in the hands of the adult female aristocracy of Europe. It was this segment of the population that could afford both the leisure time and the cost of the materials associated with embroidery. This disclosure is reinforced in the writings of John Skelton (1460-1529). *The Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe* (c.1504) includes a tale of woe about the death of a sparrow (at the paw of Gib the cat). The narrative voice is that of Jane Scrope, a pupil of the Benedictine (Black) Nuns at Carrow Abbey near Norwich. A brief sojourn at a convent was the equivalent of a finishing school for young women.

I toke my sampler ones
Of purpose, for the nones,
to sewe with stytchis of sylke
my sparrow whyte as mylke,³

This passage indicates that embroidery was being taught by the nuns, as it was in France and would later be done in Quebec, and

¹Eight pence for approximately 45" of linen. Cited by M. Jourdain, *The History of Secular Embroidery* (London: Keagan Paul, Trench, Truebner & Co., 1910), 177.

²Cited by B. Ring, *Let Virtue Be A Guide to Thee*, 27.

³John Skelton, "*Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe*" cited by Averil Colby, *Samplers* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1964), 144-45.

that Jane was using silk threads (at this time imported) to create an image of her albino sparrow. In *Garland of Laurell* (1523), Skelton, besides lauding his own virtues, includes *saumplers* amongst the activities of the ladies of the household of the Countess of Surrey:

With that the tappetis and carpettis were layd,
Whereon theis ladys softly myght rest,
The *saumpler* to sow on, the laxis to enbraid;¹

In 1530 a sampler is defined as "an exemplar for a woman to work by; an example" by John Palsgrave in his Anglo-French dictionary *Lesclarissement de la Langue Francoyse*.² This definition indicated what the object was--a reference tool, and who would use it--a woman. While allowing that sampler making was a common practice among European women this definition raises an interesting question. What of male embroiderers? Are we to understand that samplers were solely a female occupation? Certainly throughout their long history embroidered samplers are only mentioned within the context of non-professional, or amateur ,female embroiderers.

That embroidered samplers were valued items is reflected in contemporary wills. Elizabeth, Countess of Oxford (d.1537), made a special bequest of twelve samplers, leaving them to her two sisters "evinlye to be divided between them."³ Seven years later Isabel Fleming left her "best sampler" to her daughter. In 1546 Margaret Thompson of Frieston in Lincolnshire bequeathed " ... to Alys

¹Ibid., 145-46. Skelton also served at the court as tutor to young Prince Henry (Henry VIII). This citation refers to a number of needle arts including embroidery and the making of lace.

²Cited by A. Sebba, 6.

³Cited by A. J. B. Wace, "English Domestic Embroidery, Elizabeth to Anne" in *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club* 17, no. 1. (1933): 13.

Pychebeck my systers doughter my sawmpler wt semes."¹ These were not atypical bequests; samplers were commonly handed down through families and often display the skills of successive generations of embroiderers.

These references, although enlightening, provide us with little descriptive information about contemporary samplers and no dated examples have come to light. Typically we find tantalizing clues such as those found in the 1552 household inventory of Edward VI: "Item, XII samplers"; "Item, on[e] sampler of Normandie canvas, wroughte with green and black silk . . . and a book of parchment containing diverse patternes."² Not only is this an ambiguous reference to a pattern we can only assume that the embroidery is blackwork, and that Normandy canvas was a fine linen. Reginald Scot, writing in *The Perfect Platform of a Hop Garden* (1574) provides another insight into materials when he suggests a thrifty alternative for the even weave canvas or fabric that formed the base of a sampler: "The hopsackes that are brought out of Flanders, may be good samplers for you to work by."³

Perhaps the most revealing piece of social commentary involving samplers is found in the tale of *Phylotus and Emilia* (1581) by the Elizabethan author Barnaby Rich. In this narrative one reads of how a beautiful young woman, Emilia, comes to terms with her betrothal to an aged but wealthy man. She begins to list the advantages she

¹*Essex Review* XVII (1908): 147. cited by M. B. Huish, 14.

² Harley Manuscript No. 1419 entries pp 419 and 524, cited by M. Jourdain, 178.

³Reginald Scot, *The Perfect Platform of a Hop Garden*(1574) cited by A. F. Kendrick, *English Needlework* (London: A & C Black Ltd., 1933), 110. We must assume that these hopsacks were of a finer weave than the burlap we normally identify as hopsacking.

would have from such a union and includes such delights as servants and

. . . sondrie sutes of apparell . . . and this pleased her verie well. Then each day when she had dined she might go seke out her samplers, to peruse whiche would doe beste in a ruffe, whiche in a quaife, whiche on a caule ... and to sitte her doune and take it forthe little by little, and thus with her nedle to passe the after none ... and this likewise pleased her verie well.¹

Thus we are privy to the fact that Emilia has a number of samplers and she will "peruse" them for inspiration, we also know that she will embroider the various pieces of her wardrobe and that she saw needlework as an enjoyable pastime, one she would willingly return to every day.

There are also well known passages mentioning samplers in a number of Shakespeare's plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594) and *Titus Andronicus* (1588). In the latter, Philomela uses a sampler as the only available means to communicate her plight:

Fair Philomela she but lost her tongue
And in a tedious sampler sew'd her mind;²

Once again these passages provide information about samplery, we know that Philomela found the embroidery tedious, but we also know that she included a text. Yet what form did these embroideries take? Were they square as seen in Borrassa's panel painting (figure 2) or were they long and narrow? Were they multicoloured or monochrome?

¹Barnaby Rich, *Phylotus and Emilia*, 1851. Cited by D. King, *Samplers* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1960).

²William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, Act II, Scene 5.



Figure 3
 Eng. Spot Sampler Mid 17th C.
 (ROM 960.126.1)
 Coloured silks, silver and silver
 in plaited braid, rococo,
 back, eyelet, plaited and
 encroaching Gobelin, tent and
 Florentine on loosely woven linen.
 (58.4 x 32 cm)

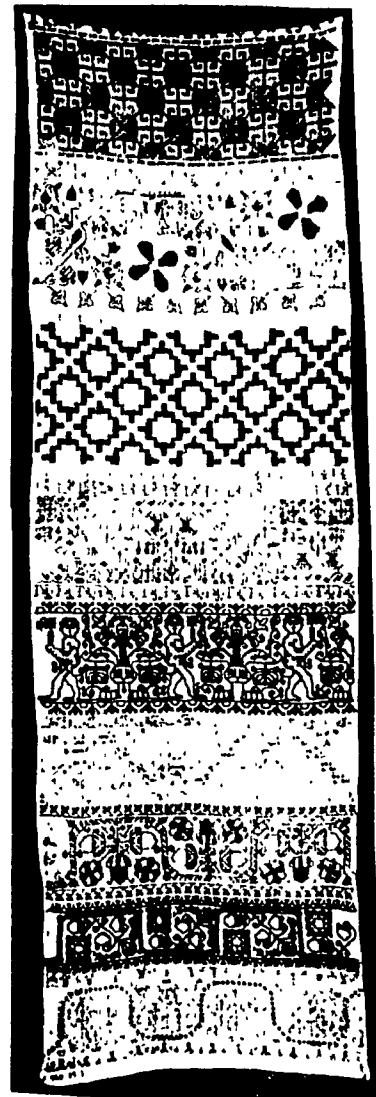


Figure 4
 Eng. Band Sampler Mid 17th
 (ROM 962.25.1)
 Coloured silks in running, gilt
 double running, Holbein,
 trellis, Algerian eye and
 two sided Italian cross
 stitch on linen.
 (62.2 x 19cm)

Published: K. Brett. English Embroidery, 14, 15.

In fact two specific types of samplers have survived from the sixteenth century, both long and thin, thus fully utilizing the narrow width (15-30 cm) of the linen ground. They have been designated *spot samplers* and *band samplers* (figures 3 and 4). As their names suggest they consist of either randomly placed motifs (spots) or horizontal bands of embroidery. The high cost of embroidery materials, such as fine linens and imported silk and metal threads meant most embroiderers would work a motif or band as an example/sample to ensure that they were familiar with a technique and pleased with the colours before attempting a final project.¹ When the ground became cluttered with motifs additional lengths of linen were often added. These early samplers were repositories for patterns, acting as reference tools, and were rolled on wooden or ivory rods for storage and easy access.²

While literary references abound, only one signed and dated sampler from this period has so far come to light.³ This embroidery, now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, (figure 5), is inscribed "Jane Bostocke 1598" and below this "Alice Lee was borne the 23 of November be/ing tuesday in the after noone 1596." The workmanship is exquisite with coloured silks, metal threads, seed pearls and black beads on unbleached linen. It has been executed using a complex variety of stitches and is composed of spot motifs--a

¹It is practically impossible to unpick an embroidered pattern, without marring the surface of the fabric.

²Averil Colby, *Samplers* (London: Batsford, 1964), 29.

³Donald King, "The earliest dated sampler," *Connoisseur* 149 (April 1962): 234-235.

dog carrying his lead, a reclining deer and a chained bear and border--and border patterns below. These sample borders and patterns are in various states of completion providing us with a unique guide to the popular contemporary stitches and patterns. It



Figure 5

Sampler, Jane Bostocke, 1598,

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Multicoloured silks, metal threads, seed pearls and black beads on unbleached linen. Worked in back, chain, satin, ladder, buttonhole, Algerian eye, cross, arrowhead, interlacing, pattern couching, coral and two-sided Italian cross stitch with speckling and French knots.

42.5 x 35.5 cm

Published: A. Colby, *Samplers*, 59.

is generally assumed that 'Jane Bostocke' made this sampler with the intention of giving it as a gift to 'Alice Lee'. Whether she in turn used it as a guide we do not know.¹

In the seventeenth century English sample-makers continued to emulate the earlier prototypes. They embroidered long and narrow lengths of linen with a wide variety of stitches worked with meticulous care. That embroidery remained in the hands of women of wealth is supported by the literature and by the continued popularity of imported silks and the gold and silver wrapped threads.²

In the inventory of the Countess of Leicester taken the "vii day of January, 1634" we find mention of "certain samplers divers parcells of curious needlework with much unwroughte silk ... item, two and twenty papers of sleeve silk, some workinge canvas."³ This reference is interesting not only for what it reveals, but more importantly for what it does not mention--the recent appearance and importance of printed pattern books.

While the earliest pattern books for lace making and needle-point appeared in Italy and Germany in the 1520s, these were

¹Some of these motifs, including the reclining deer, have been traced to a contemporary embroidery pattern books. The original source material for others has not yet been traced although their reappearance on later embroideries suggests a patternbook. The chained bear is found on a nineteenth century Canadian Sampler. M. Ladell, "Elizabeth and Jane: Their Work -- A chained bear reappears 200 years later", *Canadian Collector* 18 (November/December 1983): 42-43.

²Metallic thread was popular but expensive and difficult to work with. In 1582 John Hudson of Newcastle was selling sewing silk for L1 6s a pound while thin worsted yarn [crewel] sold for 3s 4d a pound. Cited by M. Fawdry and D. Brown, *The Book of Samplers* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1980), 16.

³Halliwell's Ancient Inventories cited by M. Jourdain *English Secular Embroidery*, 178.

limited in number and prohibitively expensive. It was only in the seventeenth century that pattern books became available in England. Considering the traditional function of the sampler--a record or pattern--one would assume that pattern books would make samplers obsolete. In fact in England the sampler gained in popularity!

For most of the seventeenth century spot samplers had continued to function as working documents and sketch books. The various naturalistic motifs were embroidered with excruciating detail using up to 20 shades of each colour for modelling. This concern for verisimilitude is also seen in contemporary paintings, prints and fashions and thus reflects the current appetite for scientific knowledge. This demand was fed by illustrated (printed) texts including those written for students of botany. The relationship between embroidery and botany is best exemplified in the French court of Henri IV (1553-1610) when the King provided the court embroiderers with a garden "between the Louvre and St. Germain l'Auxerrois [to grow] native and exotic plants to be used as motifs for embroidery."¹

Many of the images found on spot samplers were culled from publications intended for students of botany or gardening such as William Simpson's *The Second Book of Flowers, Fruits, Beasts, Birds and Flies, Exactly Drawn* (1650) or Edward Topsell's *Historie of four-footed beastes and Serpents and Insects* (1658). The majority relied on pattern books written specifically for amateur embroiderers such

¹Margaret Harrington Daniels, "Embroidery and Botany", *The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club* 19, (1935): 6. As well during this period many embroidery and gardening terms were interchangeable: the geometric 'knot' gardens and parterres or *compartiments e broderie*.

as Peter Quentel's *Eyn Newe Kunstlich Moetdeboeck alle Kunstner* (1529) (figure 6), Richard Shorleyker's *A Scholehouse for the Needle* (1624) or John Taylor's *The Needles Excellency* (1631).¹ In fact a study of this latter form of literature reveals that amateur needlework had become a minor cultural phenomenon.



Eyn newe kunstlich moetdelboech alle kunstner
 so brauchen fur sutzeller/wapenssteker, perlensteker, etc vnd ouch fur Jonseren vnd
 frauwe kunstlich vff das neuwes gefondē allenden gme die vff kunstē verstar habe.
 Gedruckt so Colen durch Peter Quentel. Im Jahr. M. D. XXIX. im Euuinaent.

Figure 6

Peter Quentel's *Eyn Newe Kunstlich Moetdeboeck alle Kunstner*
 Leipzig Germany, 1529
 Published: A. Sebba, *Samplers*, 16.

¹The definitive work on early pattern books, which were also known as Books of Exempla, is *Bibliographie der Modelbücher* (1933) by Arthur Lotz. A summary of this work can be found in: Margaret Harrington Daniels, "Early Pattern Books for Lace and Embroidery Part I" and "Part II" *The Bulletin of Needle and Bobbin Club*, 17 no.2 (1933): 3-18 and 21-39.

Whereas the dedications that preface the pattern books indicate that they were created "For the profit and delight of the gentlewomen"¹ by the second half of the century, records reveal that the age of the embroiderer had decreased. This is not evident in the work, for we do not find anything that could be described as a beginner's exercise. Rather, the embroideries prove that these young women reached a high level of technical achievement at a very early age. From existing documented work it appears that an embroiderer would complete a series of samplers each more complicated than the predecessor. Each sampler was worked in a progression of stitches, colours and techniques beginning with polychrome embroidery and climaxing in the white embroidery and cut work on a white ground. After completing the samplers the artist graduated to more complex projects.²

By the 1660's band samplers were no longer models for other embroidered projects in fact they "bore little or no relation to the varieties of embroidery in current practical use" and according to one historian "their only purpose was to serve as a technical exercise."³ Yet this allowed the embroiderer a great deal of freedom--and she began to pay more attention to pattern, colour and to the overall design. Typically one sees rows of repeating patterns based on

¹A *Book of Curious and Strange Inventions, called the first part of needleworkes* (1658). Dedication.

²The Victoria and Albert Museum has several pieces of work completed by Martha Edlin. Born in 1660 she finished a coloured band sampler in 1668; a cut and drawn whitework sampler in 1669; and an embroidered stumpwork cabinet in 1671. Both samplers include designs traced to sixteenth-century patternbooks. Leigh Ashton, "Martha Edlin: A Stuart Embroideress", *Connoisseur* (August, 1928): 215-33.

³Patricia Wardle, *Guide to English Embroidery: Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: HMSO, 1970), 15.

abstract floral motifs similar to those found in the early Italian pattern books. The most popular were the carefully articulated bands of strawberries, acorns and oak leaves, carnations, and honeysuckle. Here the colours, like the representations, are no longer naturalistic.

Therle Hughes, author of *English Domestic Needlework*, described this stylized embroidery as ". . . a formalistic un-English Style . . ."¹ and continued to bemoan the fact that even the human figure is barely recognizable. However this interpretation was at odds with contemporary viewpoints. For in 1640 in "Prayse of the Needle" the poet John Taylor wrote:

So that Art seemeth meerly naturall,
In forming shapes so Geometrical;²

While the formal characteristics of seventeenth century band samplers appear as a continuation of those established within the previous century, changes had taken place. The availability of printed patterns and pattern books had, in effect, negated the sampler's primary function as a reference tool. Whereas the spot sampler had all but disappeared by the end of the century the band sampler continued to gain in popularity. Externally retaining the same characteristics, it had in fact evolved from a pattern or reference tool to an indicator of a woman's social position. As it became an integral part of her education it had also begun to be

¹Therle Hughes, *English Domestic Needlework 1660-1860* (London: Abbety Fine Arts, n.d.), 156.

²John Taylor, "The Prayse of the Needle" Preface to James Boler, *The Needles Excellency a new booke wherein are divrs amirable workes wrought with the needle*, (London: James Baler, at the Signe of the Marigold in Paules Church Yard, 1631).

associated with younger woman. These were the traditions that were brought to the American colonies by the early settlers.¹

Samplers were associated with young ladies of wealth and position and were thus part of an elitist tradition, serving as visual proof of a genteel education.²

In the 1730s we witness a major change in the internal structure of the sampler as the horizontal rows become fewer in number and less prominent, often serving as divisions between motifs, alphabets, and text. By the mid-century both English and American samplery had become increasingly larger and squarer, like the shape of a painting or a page from a book.³ This was a preferred shape more suitable for display purposes and often featured an embroidered text and/or pictorial image.

While these changes were initiated early in the century it was the Industrial Revolution that was to have the most profound effect on the art form. Not only were the textile mills making new materials available to a wider market, they had, in part, created the market. With the Industrial Revolution the structure of society had changed and a new class had emerged triumphant--a wealthy middle class.

¹Unless there is physical evidence [text or image] establishing the location where a sampler was created questions are bound to be raised. Certainly historical records and geneological information [seen in recent exhibitions] provide one solution. Yet arguments can still be based on following issues: Was the individual born in Europe, yet worked here? Where were they educated? Did they complete works in more than one country? We know, for example, that many young girls travelled between the United States and Canada for their education.

²It is interesting to note that as private schools became more democratic, accessible to the bourgeoisie, the aristocracy withdrew their daughters, preferring to educate them at home.

³The wider looms and better production methods of the industrialized textile industry provided new grounds for samplers.

The women in these households found themselves with leisure time and relative wealth. They were a visible symbol of their husbands' and/or fathers' social position. As such, they were intent on emulating the upper echelons of society. Daughters were sent to newly established academies where they were assured of being taught the accomplishments that would guarantee them a patina of respectability. A partial list of embellishments appeared in an advertisement of 1772 in the *Virginia Gazette*:

. . . at which School is taught Petit Point in Flowers, Fruit, Landscapes, and Sculptures, Nuns Work, Embroidery in Silk, Gold, Silver, Pearls, or embossed, Shading of all Kinds, in the various Works in Vogue, . . . Catgut in different Modes, Waxwork in Figure, Fruit, or flowers . . . also the Art of taking off Foliage, with several other *Embellishments necessary for the Amusements of Persons of Fortune who have Taste* (italics mine).¹

Although educational reformers scoffed at such beliefs, the sampler had become a social determinate. Through embroidery young ladies received a proper education that would ensure a proper attitude. The incorporation of both a text and an image was seen as an ultimate proof of desirability--providing evidence of an education founded in literature and the arts.

As samplers were recognized as didactic tools new forms were developed--geneological, mourning and map samplers. Of these, map samplers proved to be the most popular for they combined the new interest in geography (a sop to reformers) and travel with other

¹*Virginia Gazette* February 20, 1772 cited by Betty Ring, "For Persons of Fortune Who Have Taste: An Elegant Schoolgirl Embroidery", *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 3, no.2 (November 1977): 1-13. For other examples see Chapter 2.

cultural interests associated with women, such as embroidery.¹ In a letter to Samuel Johnson dated 1777 Mrs Hester Thrale wrote "I saw Susan (at boarding school) . . . and took away a specimen of her Needle Work, a Map Sampler very cleverly done."²

By the end of the century (when samplers were finally being made in Quebec) the relationship between samplers and the education of young girls had been firmly established. In 1773 we read "... For instance, miss there, would be considered as a child, a mere maker of samplers."³ Samuel Johnson cites Pope stating "I saw her sober over a sampler, or gay over a jointed baby" thus placing samplery along with dolls in the hands of very young children.⁴

Both the 1797 *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Lanuage*,⁵ and the 1810 *Dictionary of the English Language*⁶ described a sampler/samplar as a "pattern of work; a piece worked by young girls for improvement". Embroidered samplers were

¹By the end of the century maps were printed on white satin and included lines of latitude and longitude. Embroiderers merely filled in data and outlined borders. Two maps of Europe in the ROM 1780-95 [970,118.1] and MMFA 1798 [952.Dt.67] have a number of similarities, and both refer to the Arctic ocean as the "Northern Ocean/Frozen Sea." A unique form of map/globe sampler was created in nineteenth century at the Westown School, Chester county, Pennsylvania. Several variations of silk covered globes exist, each meticulously embroidered with continents and oceans and couched with lines of latitude and longitude.

²Cited by Joan Edwards, *Sampler Making 1540-1940 in Joan Edwards' Small Books on the history of Embroidery*, (Dorking, Surrey: Bayford Books, 1983), 15.

³Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops To Conquer* (1773) Act II.

⁴"Sampler." Cited by Samuel Johnson [1709-:784] *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Luke Hansard and Sons, Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1810).

⁵"Sampler," John Walker [1732-1807], *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*, 2nd ed., (London: no publisher, 1797.)

"Example": copy or pattern; person fit to be proposed as a pattern.

⁶"Sampler," Samuel Johnson *A Dictionary of the English Lanuage*.

recognized as pedagogical tools; what had formerly been an exercise in embroidery skills was now a vehicle of instruction of another sort.

Samplers not only represented the various levels of attainment in a young woman's competence in embroidery and her position within society; they were now being used to inculcate filial obedience together with moral virtues. This was achieved through the practice of embroidery--impressing manners of neatness and persistence--and through the incorporation of edifying texts. It was during this period that religious texts, a result of the advent of Methodism with its passion for moralizing verses, first became popular.¹

Embroidered samplers created during the nineteenth century display a disconcerting variety of characteristics. Characteristics that reflect the dramatic social, economic, and scientific changes of the period. By this time governments had turned to education as a means of promoting cultural identification and it had become a public responsibility. The role of education was, after all, to "engender a *proper* appreciation and acceptance of one's place in society . . . ensuring social stability".² Although sewing continued to be considered a necessary subject for all young girls it is important to note that the division between plain and ornamental needlework re-established class divisions. The greatest number of extant

¹Many of the verses found on the Protestant English, American and Canadian samplers can be traced to Isaac Watt's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1720) and the *Hymns* (1730) of John Wesley and Dr. Doddridge. In some samplers entire sermons or chapters from the bible were worked--figure 17 and/or figure 21.

²"Education, History of", *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1985).

samplers date from the nineteenth century with the majority of these being alphabet or marking samplers.¹

Contemporary descriptions of samplers reflect the changes. John Walter's *English and Welsh Dictionary* (1828) describes a sampler as a "marking alphabet wrought by girls at school" while Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) states that a sampler is "a pattern of work; a specimen; particularly a piece of needlework by young girls for improvement." It is interesting to note that it is the nineteenth century description that today's audience calls to mind when called upon to describe a sampler.

From the definitions it is difficult to know if a sampler was regarded as a means to improve a young girl's character or her skill with the needle. We do find in contemporary literature that embroidery was seen as a natural occupation for Victorian women.

There is no occupation so essentially feminine, at the same time so truly ladylike, as needlework, in every branch.²

Embroidery had become the leitmotif of Victorian society and an unprecedented number of women took up the needle to provide a comfortable and tasteful environment for their families. In fact the nineteenth century saw the final democratization of embroidery, for it was during this era that the patterns and materials became available to the broadest spectrum of society. The embroiderer had

¹The rising standard of living meant an enlarged household and more household goods and everything, from sheets and towels to socks, was "marked" or initialled. Marking samplers or marquoirs were made up of embroidered alphabets and numerals, ranging from simple cross stitched letters to elaborate monograms.

²S. Annie Frost, *The Ladies' Guide to Needlework* (New York: Adams & Bishop, 1877; reprint, Lopez Island: R.L. Shep, 1986), 3.

access to "stores for the sale of fancy work, [that supplied] every variety of material carefully prepared for use, simplifying every branch of needlework."¹ These materials included stiffened grounds that would not stretch or lose shape, threads of all weights in an amazing range of colours, and even punched paper grounds that were available with printed mottos.

Encyclopedias written at the end of the nineteenth century categorized samplers, if they mentioned them at all, as "the work of school girls." Walter W. Skeat's *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (1879-1882), merely stated a sampler is "a pattern or sample" no longer associated with needlework. *The Dictionary of Needlework*, a popular reference text of 1882, turned the making of samplers into a formula:

To Make a Sampler: Take some Mosaic Canvas, of the finest make, and woven so that each thread is at an equal distance apart. Cut this 18 inches wide and 20 inches long, and measure of a border all around of 4 inches. For the border, half an inch from the edge, draw out threads in a pattern to the depth of half an inch and work over these incoloured silk; then work a conventional scroll pattern, in shades of several colours, and in TENT STITCH, fill up the remaining 3 inches of the border. Divide the centre of the Sampler into three sections. In the top section work a figure design...In the centre section work an Alphabet in capital letters, and in the bottom an appropriate verse, the name of the worker, and the date.

(2) An oblong square of canvas, more or less coarse, upon which marking with a needle in Cross Stitch or otherwise is learned. Common canvas usually measures from 18 inches to 20 inches in width. In this case, cut off a piece of about 4 inches deep from one

¹S. Annie Frost, 4.

selvedge to the other. Then cut the remainder along the selvedge into three equal parts, so that each strip will be about 6 inches in width. These strips must each be cut across into four parts, and this will make a dozen Samplers, 8 inches long and 6 inches wide respectively. This size will contain all the letters, large and small, besides numerals ...¹

As long as samplers were associated with school girl's art they were universally maligned, and as an art form were declared dead. Despite the fact that samplers had apparently reached an all-time low, there was a contemporary movement to reinstate embroidery into the realm of an art form. The proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement, under the guidance of such notables as William Morris (1834-1896) and Walter Crane (1845-1915), were intent on reviving the highest standards of craftsmanship, rejecting the machine-made product in favor of the hand-made object. They turned to a constructed ideal of Medieval workshops and guilds for validation of their subject matter and production methods.

This *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the time, also affected the acceptance of embroidery and its position within the arts, for the period witnessed the establishment of a variety of schools for *Art Embroidery*. These included the prestigious Royal School of Art Needlework established in 1872. Many of those associated with the education and teaching of embroidery wrote histories and all, including the founder of the Royal School, Lady Marion Alford, were unanimous in their desire to establish a sound pedigree for the fashionable "needle arts". In an attempt to separate traditional embroidery techniques from

¹"Sampler," S.F.A. Caulfeild and B. C.Saward, *The Dictionary of Needlework, An Encyclopedia of Artistic, Plain and Fancy Needlework* (London, 1822. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1972.)

contemporary practices (which included the ubiquitous marking sampler) historians turned to the past often irreverently dismissing whole centuries of embroidery. This served to diminish even further the importance of samplery.

In her text *Needlework as Art* (1886) Lady Alford dismisses three centuries of embroidery when she asked: "how high art can in a century [the sixteenth century] slip back into no art at all?" She also lamented the "utter want of beauty or taste in [the] whole effect."¹ In a similar vein in *Decorative Needlework* (1893) May Morris wrote that after the Middle Ages "...[embroidery] degenerates verging perilously upon the vulgar in its extravagances...to the actual ugliness and vulgarity of the XVIII century."² The nineteenth century fared even worse for it was seen as the epitome of poor taste and was particularly abused as "Modern work does not compare favorably with *any* period" (italics mine).³

The general consensus that samplery was not an art form--due to its association with young school girls--was not altered by the fact that samplers had become an integral part of the curriculum of the Art Needlework schools. Thus it is refreshing to find a little known reference to samplers as *Art* by none other than John Ruskin [1819-1900]. In his capacity as editor of *The Art Journal* he composed a list of the "six queenly and Muse-taught Arts of Needlework, Writing, Pottery, Sculpture, Architecture, and Painting." In these Ruskin identified the "samplers of our own lovely ancestresses" as works

¹Lady Marion Alford, *Needlework as Art* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886).

²May Morris, *Decorative Needlework* (London: Hughes and Co., 1893), 10.

³*Ibid.*, 10.

worthy of "a foremost place in any well organized museum."¹

However this was not to be acted upon. By the first quarter of the twentieth century samplery was seen as an activity of a bygone age, infused with a certain nostalgia:

Even the coarsest of old Samplers has that tinge of the romantic which the mere passing of time never fails to confer on anything made by man, and gives in abundance to anything made by a child.

Walter de la Mare²

During the first decades of the twentieth century reference texts continued to describe a sampler as "... particularly a small rectangular piece of embroidery worked on canvas or other material as a pattern or example of a beginner's skill in needlework, as a means of teaching"³ and "a piece of embroidery or needlework consisting of one or more patterns, formerly worked as a sample of a beginner's skill."⁴ Samplers worked during this period were completed within the context of domestic sciences or sewing classes and took the form of plain sewing samples, darning samplers, and the ubiquitous marking sampler. Mass produced embroidery patterns stamped on cotton ground and multicoloured skeins of mercerized cotton replaced the silks and linens of previous eras. Although some artists, including Edward Colonna (1862-1948), saw

¹Cited by M. Huish, 2 and 3. Ruskin placed limitations on the embroidery worthy of study to that of "the accomplished phase of needlework".

²Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), *Come Hither*; a collection of rhymes and poems for young people of all ages. London: Constable, c.1928.

³"Sampler", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (Cambridge: University Press), 1910, XXIV: 119.

⁴"Sampler", *Funk and Wagnell's New Standard Dictionary* 1913.

the potential of samplers as an art form their efforts did not meet with success.¹

In 1929 Averil Colby suggested that samplery was merely "one of the many enthusiasms [that] have come and gone in the history of England's needlework."² An impressive history spanning four centuries was seemingly dismissed as a whim and more surprisingly few appeared to question this view. In the 1979 *Macmillan Contemporary Dictionary* a sampler is described as a "decorative piece of needlework consisting of cloth embroidered with designs or letters."³ Little has changed since the late nineteenth century texts.

The 1980's have fostered a critical reading of the literature and a multi-disciplinary approach to research. I was encouraged to question not only the findings of earlier scholars, but to study these authors' sources and ideologies. In this chapter I have begun to answer Nelson Goodman's question--"But what is it a sampler of?-- and in so doing have unravelled a complicated sub-structure. Samplers are wrought with paradoxes: they have been identified as the work of women (1530) and that of young girl (1810); they are seen as a reference tool for a skilled embroiderer (1611) yet also as a

¹E. Colonna an exhibition of works by Colonna mounted by the Dayton Art Institute and seen in Montreal at the Chateau Dufresne [Jan-March 1984] contained a petit point sampler designed by Colonna in 1931 [fig. 94 in catalogue]. In 1931 he proposed an exhibition of his samplers (He designed the samplers, but his niece embroidered them) to the Newark Museum but they declined his offer. Martin Eidelberg, *E Colonna* (Dayton: Art Institute, 1983), 68. The 1930's witnessed a renewed interest in folk art and by extension samplers as seen in the flurry of publications and exhibitions. In Quebec Marius Barbeau had begun to write on embroidery and the Art Association of Montreal had received a large donation of samplers and organized an *Exhibition of Samplers* in 1938. 66.

²A. Colby, 19.

³"Sampler," *Macmillan Contemporary Dictionary* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. Ltd., 1979).

beginner's exercise (1910); they have even been allotted the role of an indicator of social station (1797) while during another period a moralistic/didactic exercise (1810). On only one point do most authors concur--a sampler may serve as a form of ornamentation.

CHAPTER II

"IF MY SKILL HAD BEEN BETTER"¹

EMBROIDERY, SAMPLERY, AND THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

The same characteristics were ascribed to both women and embroidery; they were seen as mindless, decorative and delicate - like the icing on the cake, good to look at, adding taste and status, but devoid of significant content.²

It is difficult to separate the history of embroidery, especially that of the sampler, from the history of women's education and the notion of a feminine sensibility. The symbiotic nature attributed to needlework and women can not be overlooked; like a delicate embroidery, the individual threads have become tightly intertwined and the ground too fragile to sustain indiscriminate probing.

This interdependence, so evident in the nineteenth century, can be traced to the Renaissance as it was then that the political, religious, philosophical and economic changes that were to have a profound impact on the history of embroidery took place. It was also during this period that professional embroidery came under the control of the male-dominated guilds while domestic or amateur embroidery became the exclusive property of women. Before the Renaissance both men and women were employed as professional

¹Sampler, Mary Richardson, 1782 (figure 10)

²Rosie Parker, "The word for embroidery was WORK," *Spare Rib* 37 (.975): 41

embroiderers,¹ they belonged to the same guild as painters and their works were linked by ritual functions rather than by media.²

Conversely, as embroidery gained in popularity and status,³ the role of professional female embroiderers diminished. This development is most obvious in England. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries women were members and even founders of guilds, nonetheless, by the fifteenth century it was the men who embroidered with the more prestigious gold thread.⁴ The impetus that produced the major change came in 1536 when Henry VIII (1491-1547) broke with the Catholic Church. In so doing he destroyed the greatest patron of English embroidery--the Church--at the same time dissolving the ecclesiastical workshops that had made English embroidery, *Opus anglicanum*, famous throughout the known world. As a result the embroidery guilds closed ranks and began to reorganize their inner structure. When Elizabeth I granted the guild

¹"From embroidery statutes of 1316 we know there were 260 members of the embroiderer's guild of Paris and that there were as many male as female members." Marianne Carlano and Larry Salmon, eds., *French Textiles: From the Middle Ages through the Second Empire* (Hartford, Connecticut: Wadsworth Atheneum 1985), 74.

²In Antwerp both embroiderers and painters were members of the same guild while in Austria the embroiderers with threads were associated with the Guild of St Luke while those working with pearls were members of another. In Belgium embroiderers were called *acu pictores* or painters with needles. Patricia Claburn, *Masterpieces in Embroidery* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1981), 7.

³R. Parker, 41. The value of embroidery was assured by "sumptuary laws" such as that passed in England in 1334 forbidding all persons below the rank of knighthood, or with less than an income of L200 a year, from wearing embroidered garments. Similar laws in France continued during the reign of Louis XIV. In 1664 only a select few were allowed to wear the *justaucorps à brevet* which was covered with gold and silver embroidery. See Madeleine Delpierre, "Un Album de modèles pour broderies de gilets" *Bulletin du Musée Carnavalet* 2 (November 1956): 1.

⁴Anthea Callen, *Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Astragal Books, 1979), 96.

a new charter (1561) it was established that Freemen (males) of the Broderer's Company held all positions of authority.¹

During the same period in France the professional embroidery traditions remained relatively stable. Sixteenth-century records reveal that the Paris guild had an equal number of men and women, all of whom had the same rights and salary. Like painting, tapestry, and sculpture embroidery was available only to the wealthy Church and nobility.² The demand for embroidery continued undiminished until the French Revolution, when its close associations with the aristocracy made it suspect.

Although embroidery "appeared to be following the same path as the other arts; sharing with literature the use of emblems, sharing with painting a concern with perspective"³ it was being disenfranchised. The notion of inspiration and ease of manner associated with the *Liberal Arts* was at odds with the perseverance demanded of the embroiderer. This notion is seen in contemporary literature including Baldassare Castiglione's widely read *The Book of the Courtier* (1528)

In painting . . . a single brush stroke made with ease and in such a manner that the hand seems of itself to complete the line desired by the painter, without being directed by care or skill of any kind, clearly reveals

¹For a discussion of the history of the Broderer's Guild see C. Holford, *A Chat About the Broderers' Company* (London: George Allen, 1910) and W.R. Letheby, "The Broderers of London and Opus Anglicanum" *Burlington* (April 1916): 74; and Bissett Lovelock, "Famous Early Broderers" *Embroidery* (Autumn 1951): 12-14.

²Professional embroidery in France was well organized. In 1778 there were 6000 professional embroiderers in the city of Lyon.

³R. Parker, 43.

that excellence of craftsmanship.¹

This description of the apparent ease is foreign to the practice of embroidery.² It was generally accepted that embroidery did not involve the intellect, the skill could be learned through patience and persistence. Thus it was deemed a craft or mechanical art. Even today the creative aspect is often diminished by the attention paid to the execution. While this accounts for its lowly position within the hierarchy of the arts--thread being seen as intrinsically less significant than paint--another factor was at work that would make amateur embroidery gender specific. The qualities (patience and persistence) that were integral to embroidery were seen to be characteristic of the female or *feminine* temperament and by extension in the hands of a gentlewoman (an amateur) embroidery was a natural accomplishment to be admired.

Domestic or non-professional embroidery was in the hands of the female aristocracy. Throughout Europe these women were being inspired by Royal example and by the growing availability of

¹Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* 1528, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 47. *The Book of the Courtier* was completed in 1516, published in Venice in 1528. It immediately received international renown and was translated into English in 1561 by Sir Thomas Hoby.

²Artists we now associate only with painting were, as late as the sixteenth century, closely tied to embroidery. According to Giorgio Vasari both Antonio del Pollaiuolo [c1432-98] and Sandro Botticelli [1445-1510] worked as pattern designers and/or embroiderers. In *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, Vasari states that Pollaiuolo 'created' the cartoons in 1446 for a set of vestments, two dalmatics, a chasuble, and a cope. However it took nineteen years and nine master embroiderers, including Paolo of Verona, to complete the project [1487]. Illustrated in *The Museum of The Opera del Duomo of Florence* (Florence: Editrice "Arte e Natura", 1982), 72-74. Vasari also credits Botticelli [c.1445-1510] with the development of the technique of couching gold threads. Although we may doubt Vasari's reliability (couching was known before Botticelli's time) the mention of embroidery supports the notion that embroidery and painting were equally regarded.

patternbooks and materials. In England Elizabeth I [1553-1603] was a noted embroiderer while the Italian Catherine de Medici [1519-1589] was credited with introducing a "variety of domestic needlework techniques to women of France."¹ As the century progressed a greater prosperity ensued with the new merchant class demanding a conspicuous display of wealth in the form of jewels and embroidery. This interest in needlework was met by the professional embroiderers and the burgeoning number of amateur embroiderers.

That gentlewomen were expected to embroider is reflected in the popular literature. The symbiotic relationship of embroidery and femininity was in a sense codified in *The Book of the Courtier*. Although written to provide young gentlemen with an exemplar it serves our purpose as Castiglione not only presents his audience with a male prototype, he also discusses the role of the *court lady*.

a woman ought to be unlike a man; for just as he must show a certain solid and sturdy manliness, so it is seemly for a woman to have a soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of womanly sweetness in her every movement, which, in her going and staying, and in whatever she says, shall always make her appear the woman without any resemblance to a man.²

As well he lists qualities a woman should forsake:

it is not seemly for a woman to handle weapons, ride, play tennis, wrestle, and do many other things that are suited to men . . . [rather she should] practice in a measured way and with that gentle delicacy that we have said befits her; . . . she ought to begin by letting herself be begged a little, and with a certain shyness

¹Carlano and Salmon, 86.

²Castiglione, 206.

bespeaking a noble shame that is the opposite of brazenness.¹

By the mid sixteenth century the relationship between embroidery and femininity was firmly established. "The appearance of subservience was well maintained by fancy needlework. It allowed women to posture prettily ... It was feminine and delicate and ornamental."² As a feminist theoretician has pointed out: "the position signifies repression and subjugation."³ Domestic embroidery, specifically the sampler, was incorporated, in varying degrees, into the formal education of young gentlewomen throughout Europe and would become the touchstone of a genteel education until the twentieth century.

Throughout European courts there was a greater concern that women should be educated befitting her station; she should emulate exemplary *feminine* ideals established by royalty, either secular or heavenly.⁴ A cursory study of the dedications that prefaced

¹ibid, 210.

²Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain and Fancy: American Women and their Needlework 1700-1850*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 15.

³Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), 10.

⁴The education of the Virgin was seen as an exemplar for women and household accomplishments were imbued with new significance. In the Pseudo Matthew *Protevangelium* of St. James ch. x, pp 6 & 7; *Apocryphal Gospels* Ante-Nicene Christian Library vol. xvi it is determined that a new veil for the Temple of the Lord is to be the handiwork of undefiled virgins and seven young girls, among them Mary, are brought to the temple. Mary at work spinning the purple and scarlet cloth or embroidering becomes a prominent theme in seventeenth century Italian, Spanish and Flemish religious art. A stone carving of the sixteenth century on the Choir screen at Chartres Cathedral represents *La Vierge qui Coud*. Frontispiece in Dorothy Gardner, *English Girlhood at School: A Study of Women's Education through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929). A painting by Francisco de Zurbaran [1598-1664] of *The Young Virgin* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [Fletcher Fund, 1927 27.137] shows a young Mary with embroidery.

sixteenth century needlework pattern books stressed the theme of embroidery as an important female accomplishment. Plain sewing was considered an inescapable occupation of all women--"a mortall enemy to idleness." On the other hand it was the costly and time consuming embroidery or fancy work "Which mighty Queens have grav'd in hand to take, / And high borne Ladies such esteeme did make."¹

Whereas young noblemen had received, throughout history, some type of formal education, their sisters, for the most part, were neglected. In her history of women's education, *Better than Rubies*², Phyllis Stock states that there are in fact two distinct meanings of *education*. The first is the development of the character while the second is instruction and the development of the intellect. She proves that, historically, education was primarily concerned with character training in the case of women, while for males the ponderation was behind the development of the intellect.³ Women were considered malleable and therefore in need of guidance. "A woman is a frayle thinge, and of weake discretion, and that may lightly be disceyved."⁴ To this end it was necessary to find an occupation suited to their needs and embroidery was to become an integral part of a w men's education for it supported a *feminine*

¹John Taylor, "In Prayse of the Needle" in *The Needle's Excellency* 1640.

²Phyllis Stock, *Better than Rubies: A History of Women's Education*, (Toronto: Longman Canada Ltd., 1978): Introduction.

³A parallel view of the educational practices in France is found in Linda L. Clark, *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), Chapter I.

⁴Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) *Of the lernyng of maydes* cited by Shirley Nelson Kersey, *Classics in the Education of Girls and Women* (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981), 10.

ideal. "[T]he exercise of the needle . . . is graceful in the Female Sex; and is well adapted to their constitutions and sedentary life."¹ And indeed most girls shew a vast aversion to reading and writing; but it is with the greatest pleasure they learn their needle-work."² The notion became a well accepted idea in Europe, succinctly stated by Lady Montague in 1753: "It is as scandalous for a woman not to know how to use a needle as for a man not to know how to use a sword."³

When Randle Holme published *The Academy of Armoury and Blazonry* in 1688 he included a section entitled "The School Mistris Terms and Things to Work With". By listing the following as necessities--a sam cloth or sampler--he lends credence to the consensus regarding the curriculum of female education.

Needles of several sizes	A Canvice cloth.
Cruel of all colours Slave silk,	Naples silk
Silk for sowing all colours	Fine white Alcomy Wyre
A tent Ising Glass,	Gum Arabic
A Samcloth, a cloth to sew on	

¹John Burton (1696-1771) an English scholar and clergyman, presented fourteen Sunday sermons to pupils attending a female boarding school. These were compiled and entitled: *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, Vol I London: J. Murray, Fleet-Street; and J. Evans, Pater-noster-row, 1793. 2nd ed. Cited by S. N. Kersey, 184.

²Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), *L'Emile* 1762. An English translation was available in 1763. *Emilius, or a treatise on education*, trans. Mr. Nugent (London: J. Nourse and P. Valliant, in the Strand, 1763), 190.

³Lady Mary Wortley Montague cited by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women Art and Ideology*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 61.

⁴Randle Holme [1627-1699], *The Academy of Armoury and Blazonry* cited by Therle Hughes, *English Domestic Needlework 1660-1860* London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 239. The author also attempts to define some basic sewing techniques such as Basting, Fine Drawing and Ravelling or Roveing. Although this work dates from 1688 it is believed to have been compiled in 1649. (Ising Glass: isinglass: mica).

Whereas the protagonists of women's rights in the seventeenth century had seen the need for female education they disagreed on the curriculum--in particular the role of embroidery. Beginning with Anna van Schurman (1607-1678) these authors, now often female, claimed that women were inferior to men only because of a lack of education not through a difference in nature. In her writings van Schurman stated "Woman has the same wish for self development as man, the same ideals, yet she is to be imprisoned in an empty soul of which the very windows are shuttered.¹" In 1694 Mary Astell (1668-1731) wrote *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694) where she advocated that women's schools be equal to men. Unfortunately Astell's argument was weakened when she maintained that religion was of particular importance to *ladies*, and advocated schooling solely within the realm of a religious education ²

Three years later Daniel Defoe acknowledged the need for female education in "An Academy for Women," a chapter of *An Essay upon Projects* (1697). While he admonishes contemporary society, stating: "I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous Customs in the world...that we deny the advantages of Learning to Women," he too sees the female role as an adjunct of man. "I would have Men take Women for Companions, and Educate them to be fit for it."³

¹Cited by Judy Chicago, *Embroidering our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980), 176. Chicago chose a sampler as a runner for the von Schurman place-setting.

²Mary Astell (1668-1731), *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (London: R. Wilkin, 1694) cited by S. N. Kersey, 96- 116.

³Daniel Defoe, *An Essay upon Projects* (Menston England: The Scolar Press, Ltd., 1969), 282 and 302.



Figure 7

Anonymous, "A Young Girl's Education"

German Print c. 1700

Published: *Imparaticci = Samplers*, 21.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this education relied heavily upon the female accomplishments. Those considered appropriate for the female temperament were the subject of John

Burton's (1696-1771) *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* where he lists the ornamentals as needlework (figure 7), drawing, music, and dancing.

The Works of Ingenuity and Elegance are particular [sic] becoming in your Sex, and that the Study of them ought to enter into Female Education as much as possible, all, I think, are agreed.¹

Turning to history for paradigms he looked to the reign of Elizabeth I [1533-1603] as a period when "productions of the needle were in high esteem."² Burton does not feel that this branch of education must supersede every other, nevertheless, he does state that "Needle Work ... is absolutely necessary in the female sex."³

Embroidery continued to be the mainstay of female education despite the progressive positions espoused by many eighteenth century scholars. The popular view concerning women and their education, and by extension their relationship to embroidery, is reflected in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Simply stated, Rousseau conceded that because men and women differ psychologically they need different motives for education. In *Emilius* (trans 1763) he tells an anecdote of a young girl learning to write, who upon seeing herself in a mirror and realizing how

¹John Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, cited by S. N. Kersey, 184.

²Ibid. Burton forstalls contemporary critics by stating: "modern ladies...ridicule these antiquated practices" yet these earlier paradigms, these "Ladies of Rank and fortune...paid much attention to the cultivation of their minds; and were better acquainted with ancient learning than the Women are at present."

³Ibid. He assures his audience that "You surely will not think it an humiliating employment, when I inform you, that the first Lady in this Kingdom, not only amuses herself with this art, but has also instituted a kind of Academy for its further progress and improvement."

awkward she looks, throws down her pen. It is only because her sisters refuse to mark (embroider her initials) her shifts and because she is "so vain and delicate" and will not share her clothing that she is obliged to renew her efforts and to learn to cypher.¹ Surprisingly this is not an admonition of vanity, rather it is a lesson in feminine traits and how to manipulate them to the educator's advantage.

On the other hand, feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) published a series of essays addressing the "Exterior Accomplishments," "The Fine Arts," and "Boarding Schools" under the title *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. In these she supported social equality, economic advancement, and political enfranchisement for women. She stated that only through the formal education of women would these desires be met. On the topical subject of boarding schools, which were the location where the majority of the elaborate and exemplary samplers were worked, she wrote: "I must own it is my opinion, that the manners are too much attended to in all the schools" and "accomplishments are most thought of."²

The divergence of opinion that had led Defoe, in 1687, to deplore the fact that girls spend their youth learning to "stitch and Sow [sic], or make Bawbles"³ continued into the next century and the new world. Seventy years later the same issue is addressed by Frances Brooke in her 1769 novel *The History of Emily Montague*. Only here

¹J.-J. Rousseau, 193-194.

²Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters with Reflection: on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life* (London: J. Johnson, 1787; reprint ed., New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), 24-29, 42-60.

³Daniel Defoe, *An Essay upon Projects* (Menston England: The Scholar Press, Ltd., 1969).

she is discussing the inequality of education and the specific problems it poses for Canadian women:

Tis a might wrong. thing . . . that parents will educate creatures so differently who are to live with and for each other. Every possible means is used . . . to soften the minds of women, and to harden those of men.¹

In 1787 Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia stated that it was "incombent [sic] upon us to make ornamental accomplishments yield to principles and knowledge in the education of women."² Despite the arguments against the ornamentals, the enthusiasm for teaching embroidery continued, fed by the popular literature: the novels, courtesy books, magazines and fashion books which all perpetuated the rigid parameters of the feminine stereotype.³ "[T]he function of the novel was explicitly educational and . . . its main business was to inculcate morality by example."⁴

Women were expected to be 'physically delicate, retiring, submissive, sentimental, passive and intuitive. They opted for lyricism; they day-dreamed, deferred to others, sat quietly at home embroidering, were always refined and tender.'⁵

As the eighteenth century progressed, commercial prosperity continued to crowd the ranks of the middle class with tradesmen and farmers who were united in the pursuit of social graces for their

¹Frances Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) (Ottawa: Graphic Publisher Ltd., 1931): 160.

²Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, 2 vols. (reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1974), I: 30.

³For an excellent bibliography see: Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970).

⁴J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London, 1982):9.

⁵Marian Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1982), 9.

daughters.¹ This placed a strain on existing educational institutions and, in turn, the demand for the accomplishments resulted in a rapid increase in the number of schools. At this point education was seen to be endowed with elevated class associations.

The majority of these schools were privately owned and the end product depended on the individual teacher's skills. Throughout the eighteenth century female education continued to reflect the widely held belief that women "as a rule, have still weaker and more inquisitive minds than men; therefore it is not expedient to engage them in studies that may turn their heads."² The curriculum tended to include English literature, a little geography, very little arithmetic and a smattering of French. At least half the time was spent devoted to the accomplishments which, besides embroidery, now included deportment. Young women were learning "all 'other parts of excellent well breeding' which included calligraphy, accountancy, housewifery, cookery, and a series of minor handicrafts in silver, straw, glass, wax, and gum, as well as fine embroidery, black work, white work, and work in colours."³

The status of embroidery soared. In the hands of a woman it denoted a leisured and talented individual while the opposite connotation also applied. If a young woman was unable to embroider she was undoubtedly a 'hoyden' or tom boy. The purpose of education was not to develop the mind, but rather to strengthen

¹It is ironic that during this period the aristocracy were removing their children from the private academies and educating them at home.

²Lupton, Kate, (trans) *Fenelon's Education of Girls* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1891.), 11.

³D. Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 213.

the moral character of future wives mothers, and thus teach them how to maintain control of a household. "Education should draw the outline . . . but the exertions of the individual must afterwards . . . fill it with the beautiful figures of the Graces and the Virtues."¹

The coming of industrialization and the rise of technology brought enormous changes to the relationship between women and textiles. As the traditional textile work (spinning and weaving) and women moved out of the home and into the factories a new ideology of domesticity developed. In the first industrial country, England, the perceived importance of an education for the broader spectrum of the population (the poor) was established. This began with the charity school and Sunday school movements. The education offered was more concerned with instilling in the pupils an acceptance of their social position rather than providing them with the means to better themselves. Hannah More [1745-1833], who with her sisters opened eight schools between 1790 and 1798, stated that average girls should be taught in such ways to "inculcate principles, polish taste, regulate temper, subdue passion...train self denial and instill a love and a fear of God."²

Conversely in France, where the spirit of Nationalism envisioned free public primary schools, disparities continued to exist between boys' and girls' education. In 1791 Talleyrand [1754-1838] proposed that girls be taught the "virtues of domestic life" and

¹Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, (Derby: J. Dewry for J. Johnson, 1797), 11.

²Hannah More, *Strictures on Female Education*, Vol. VII (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, in the Strand, 1818), 197. These schools offered French, reading, writing, arithmetic and needlework. For more information on Hannah More, see Kersey, 204.

"talents useful in the government of a family." He also felt that they should leave school at age eight.¹ The First Empire witnessed only one concession in the education of women which was the establishment of a school for the daughters of members of the Legion of Honour. Yet Napoleon despised the *faiblesse* of women's brains and therefore, rather than taxing what little intellect they had, he recommended that three quarters of the day be devoted to sewing and instruction of housekeeping.²

In theory, French girls were studying the same subjects as boys. In fact, girls spent more time devoted to religion and sewing than to the academic subjects prescribed by the law.³ Complicating the issue even further was the fact that teachers in France and Quebec were free to choose different texts with which to educate boys and girls. Girls' textbooks enjoined the young reader to "fortify her judgement and will in view of special obligations and the duties which awaited her in the family and society."⁴ It was assumed that women could only find self-fulfillment through serving others either in the role of wife and mother or within the church in the service of God.⁵

By training young women for their responsibilities, education was seen as a means of making them good wives and mothers. Not only was it considered necessary to give them newly demanded skills and discipline, it was hoped that schooling would ameliorate the social

¹Linda L. Clark, 7. 48.

²Ibid, 9.

³Françoise Mayeur, *L'éducation des filles en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 57-83.

⁴Linda L. Clark, 29.

⁵Annie Decroux-Masson, *Papa lit, Maman coud, les manuels scolaires en bleu et rose* (Paris: Denoel, Gonthier, 1979).

problems brought on by urbanization--vice, crime, and prostitution.¹ During the nineteenth century needlework served the same function in French schools as it did in English schools--it was a means of inculcating feminine ideals.

The major difference in attitudes towards embroidery was that the English system depended upon an established tradition of samplery and chose to develop its inherent qualities, while the French saw the sampler primarily as a means to master a variety of techniques. The English view is illustrated by a verse taken from a sampler of 1809. This not only puts voice to the concerns of nineteenth century society it reveals the unique and very public nature of English and American samplery:

A work like this performed for Public view
Young Ladies should with Elegance pursue
Your Teachers pains your Parents vast expence
Will be repayed by your strict diligence
Merit their Praise make this a Constant rule
Always to raise the Credit of the School.²

Self-control and decorum were goals of all nineteenth century educators. The theme appears in the text-books, on samplers and in popular magazines.³ Typically when the American cartoonist Thomas Nast (b. 1840) drew St. Nicholas making a list of good and bad children for the cover of the Christmas edition of *Harper's*

¹Phyllis Stock, 126-128.

²Betty Ring, *American Needlework Treasures, Samplers and Silk Embroideries from the Collection of Betty Ring*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), 50. An English sampler worked by Elizabeth Southgate, aged nine. In collection of Smithsonian Institution. No accession number given.

³For more information see Monica Kiefer, *American Children through their Books: 1700-1835* (Philadelphia: University of Penn. Press, 1948).

Weekly he portrayed 'good children' seated quietly, while 'naughty children' are shown playing!¹



Figure 8

Gillray, James. *Farmer Giles and his wife showing off heir daughter Betty to their neighbours on her return from school.* 1809.

Published: A Sebba, *Samplers*, 56.

¹Illustrated in Santa Claus's Mail in *The Christmas Drawings of Thomas Nast*, folio compiled by William Glover (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1970).

Contemporary ethics are visually mocked in James Gillray's (1757-1815) satirical cartoon of 1809 entitled *Farmer Giles and his wife showing off their daughter Betty to the Neighbours on her return from School* (figure 8) which features a sampler prominently displayed in the parlor. However this ridicule fell on deaf ears. The rising middle classes continued to demand an exemplary education for their daughters and embroidered samplers continued to be seen as a means to exhibit newly acquired skills. It was acknowledged that a young woman displayed admirable feminine qualities when engaged upon her embroidery. The qualities of patience and persistence combined with industry (the process of embroidering) produced a unique product. Whether this product was an exemplary needlework or a young lady is open to discussion.

In a Quebec sampler (figure 9) from the mid-nineteenth century the essential qualities ascribed to young women are given form: in two verses:

Virtue and wit with science join'd
Refine the manners form the mind
But when with industry they meet
the female character's complete.

Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain
but a woman that feareth the lord she shall be praised.

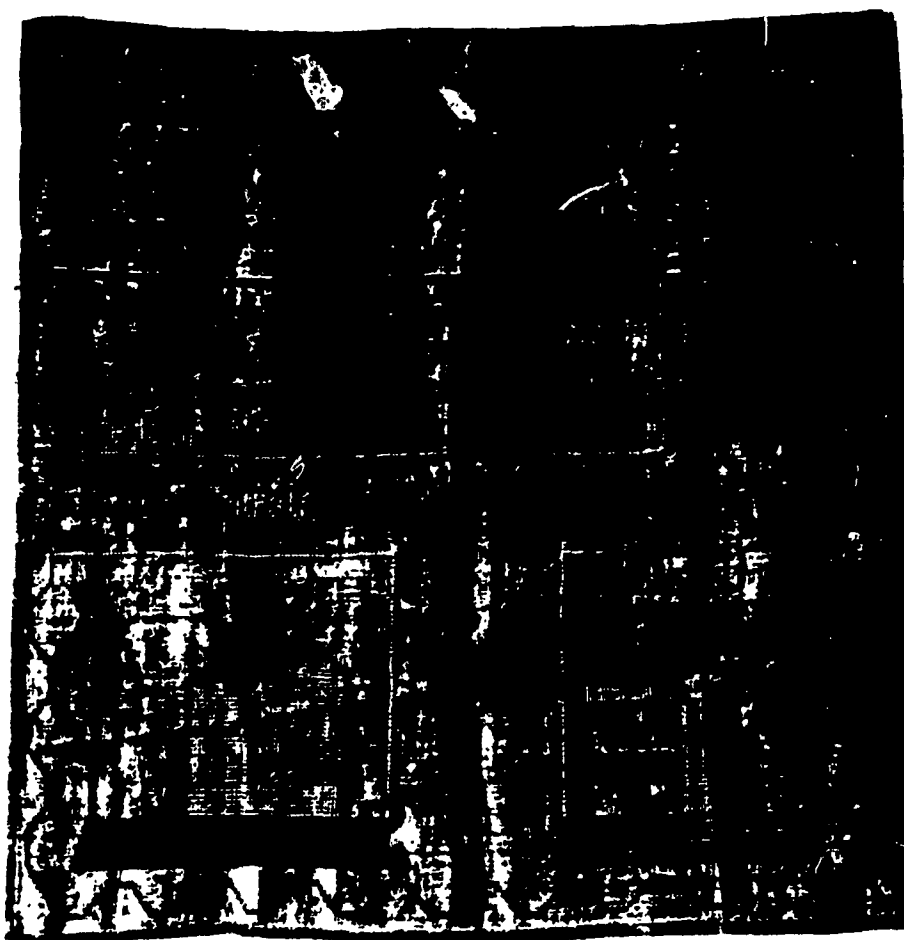


Figure 9

Quebec Sampler, anonymous, ca. 1850 McCord M4577
Coloured silk (various weights and ply) in cross
stitch on (dyed) mustard linen. 44 x 43 cm.
Photograph: Denyse Roy.

CHAPTER III

A DUAL HERITAGE: SAMPLERY IN QUEBEC

Like the osier, or willow branch, young women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were being manipulated and formed to fulfil the expectations of their society. That rote and example were the means to this end is substantiated in contemporary diaries, women's magazines and educational treatises. Nonetheless, this does not imply that all young women adhered meekly to their lot in life. Evidence abounds attesting to a "rebellious" spirit, especially in America, and one is not limited to contemporary literature for documentation. Ten year old Patty Polk of Kent, Maryland, leaves us with no doubts concerning her thoughts on embroidery when, in 1800 she stitched: "Patty Polk did this and she hated every stitch she did in it. She loves to read much more."¹

Although this embroidered instance of rebellion is unusual Patty Polk was not alone in her lament. We find references to the tediousness of embroidery in the diaries and the letters of young women throughout this period. What is unusual is the fact that Polly, like Shakespeare's Philomel, had the courage to stitch her thoughts in her embroidery, this in blatant disregard of contemporary mores. As mentioned previously an embroidered sampler was far more than an

¹E.S. Bolton and E. J. Coe *American Samplers* (Boston: The Massachusetts Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1921; reprint: New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 96

exercise in stitchery, it had become the touchstone of a proper and genteel English education. A *lady* would not be encouraged to deviate from an accepted path and one can only wonder at the consequences of such an action. The majority of young women were like Charlotte Palmer in Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Charlotte complied with the social conventions for she had completed "a landscape in coloured silks . . . in proof of her having spent seven years at a great school in town to some effect."¹

Education practices in North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed closely those of Europe and parallels can be found within the curricula of boarding schools in England and her colonies, and the convent schools of France and New France. Nevertheless, for the most part North America was a rural society and, as such, education was an informal process with the majority of children educated at home. It was only the larger communities that boasted of day and boarding schools, and all of these included the teaching of deportment and needlework.²

Contemporary advertisements in local newspapers attest to the popularity of the private schools and the importance of needlework:

Mr. Harris' Private School for Young Ladies, Etc., 1818 Mr. Thomas Harris, late teacher in one of the most respectable schools in Quebec, intends opening a school . . . in which the following branches will be taught, viz.: -- Reading, writing,

¹Jane Austen *Sense and Sensibility* ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., (Oxford, 1932), 160.

²Even progressive institutions, like Emma Willard's Seminary in Troy, New York, offered the "ornamentals." Emma Willard was one of first schools to introduce educational reforms including the study of mathematics in 1830. For more informatin on the teaching of the "ornamental branches" see Louise Boas, *Women's Education Begins: The Rise of the Women's Colleges*, (Norton, Mass: Arno Press, 1935).

arithmetic, English grammar and geography. The Young ladies will be superintended in the different branches of needle-work by Mrs Johnson in a separate apartment.

Kingston, September 1818.¹

Every attention will be paid to improve the manners, preserve fine health and promote comfort and happiness . . . A young lady is engaged to teach needlework in all its branches . . . Approved masters (if required) will be engaged to teach French, Drawing, Music and Dancing.

Montreal August 16, 1827.²

These schools attracted not only the daughters from the neighbouring areas but also young girls from distant locales. Records reveal that it was not an uncommon practice to send a young girl hundreds of miles to be educated. In 1771 Anna Green Winslow, age ten, travelled from Halifax to Boston where she attended school. From her diary we discern that she spent a good deal of time sewing.

Feb 10th. - I have not paid my compliments to Madam Smith, for, altho' I can drive the goos quill a bit, I cannot so well manage the needle . . . Wednesday - Very cold, but this morning I was at sewing and writing school, this afternoon all sewing.³

Likewise young girls came from afar to Quebec city. "Pupils have resorted thither from the United States, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward's Island."⁴

¹J.G. Hodgins, ed., *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1894-1910), vol. I, 131-2. cited in A. Prentice, *Family, School and Society in 19th Century Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 38-39.

²*The Montreal Gazette* August 16, 1827. This was taken from an advertisement placed by M. C. Crombie, conductor of the Young Ladies Academy.

³Alice Morse Earle, ed., *Diary of Anna Green Winslow of 1771* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894., 22 and 35.

⁴*The New Guide to Quebec*, no bibliographic notation given 12.

The first convent school in North America was established in 1635 at Quebec City by the Ursuline Order.¹ This was a teaching order, based in Tours and Amiens, famous throughout Europe for the quality of its embroidery. The founder of the Quebec convent, Mère Marie de l'Incarnation [1599-1672] was a noted embroiderer from Tours.² Although the sisters were hoping to convert and "gallicize" the natives they were also determined to provide the daughters of the first settlers with a *proper* education. The curriculum was established according to the rules of the order, and included the training of the girls in all areas of sewing and needlework.³ From extant embroideries and existing documentation in the archives of the Quebec convent we have a partial understanding of the education of women and the role of embroidery under the French Regime.⁴

Marius Barbeau, in his seminal work on embroidery, *Les Brodeuses*, informs us that at the Ursulines Convent "Les arts d'agrément étaient alors de prime importance ... et la broderie formait l'apanage de trois sur cinq des Mères de la fondation," of the

¹Before the end of the seventeenth century there were twenty four schools in Lower Canada, with the bulk, fifteen, in the major towns of Quebec, Trois-Rivières, or Montreal.

²Soeur Gabrielle Dagneault, o.s.u., "La broderie d'art chez les Ursulines", *Musées* (Septembre, 1981) 15-20. Adele Coulin Weibel, "Ursuline Embroideries of French Canada", *The Art Quarterly* X (1947): 32.

³Marie de l'Incarnation, *Lettres spirituelles et historiques*, ed. Dom Aibert Janet, (Paris, 1929-1936):n.p. Information in a letter to her son dated at Quebec, September 1, 1668.

⁴Jean Perrel, "Les Ecoles de filles dans la France d'ancien régime, in *The Making of Frenchmen: Current Directions in the History of Education in France, 1679-1979*, ed. Donald N. Baker and Patrick J. Harrigan. (Waterloo Ontario: Historical Reflections Press, 1980), 75-83.

arts "la broderie fut le plus important, pour sa qualité hors pair et en raison des revenus qu'elle procurait à la communauté."¹

During the initial period the sisters were dependent upon the ships from France for their supplies which included embroidery materials. The imported coloured silk threads and the metal wrapped yarns were very costly and as a result the order was often forced to work in less fine wools on homespun linens. They supplemented their income by weaving and accepting embroidery commissions from the various religious institutions in New France.² While extant embroideries from this early period are practically non-existent, as a fire in 1686 destroyed the chapel, surviving inventories document the history of many magnificent embroidered altar frontals and vestments made by the Ursuline sisters and their students.³ A cryptic notation in the archives of the Hôtel-Dieu Québec is the earliest references (1640) to small embroideries with texts. It is impossible to guess the actual form the "2 Petits tableaux des noms de Jésus et Marie de broderie" took however we do know that they were hung on a wall, presumably to assist devotion.⁴

Very little embroidery executed within the convents was of a secular nature, for the same ships that brought the materials for the ecclesiastical embroidery also brought the contemporary

¹M. Barbeau, *Saintes Artisanes I - Les Brodeuses*, Montreal: Edition Fides, 1943, 15

²D. Burnham *The Comfortable Arts*, (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1981), 55, plate 37. An unusual altar frontal worked in wool and a small amount of silk on home spun and hand woven wool.

³Marchand, Thérèse. "La Collection de Broderies historique des Ursulines de Québec." Québec: M.A. Thesis, Université Laval, 1984.

⁴These are from an "Inventaire général des biens meubles appartenants à la paroisse Notre-Dame de Recouvrance de Kébec, 1640". [tiroir 2, carton 99a, no 6, p.5].

embroidered fashions and accessories demanded by the wealthy. Few of these are found in Quebec collections, and while it is possible that these costumes may have returned to France with the 'first families' after the Conquest it is probable that they were simply recycled until they disintegrated.¹ As well it was not unusual in French society to bequeath one's embroidered household goods to the Church, where they would be cut and reassembled as vestements or "a parament for the altar".²

As in France the major emphasis in the education of young women was on religious training, nonetheless, a great deal of time was spent on acquiring domestic skills. All girls were taught the fundamentals of plain sewing and darning. A workbook, with the handwritten title *Livre de couture ancienne*, from 1830 gives us an idea of the form many of the workaday nineteenth century *samplers* took.³ This sampler-book contains meticulously sewn miniature garments and household items: shirts, petticoats, nightgowns, pinafores, collars and pillow cases and even a tiny silk pieced, *grandmother's garden* quilt. Each item has been worked in a variety of *functional* stitches: hem stitch, eyelet stitch, button hole

¹Clothing would be recut and refashioned until finally it might be used in a catalogue. A Catalogne (coverlet) is made with a cotton warp and a weft of rag strips of cotton, wool, or linen cloth. Embroidered fabrics were likely used in house furnishings or remodelled. If they contained gold or silver they were burned to obtain the precious metals.

²M. Carlano and L. Salmon eds. *French Textiles: from the Middle Ages through the Second Empire* (Hartford, Connecticut: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1985) 95. In the will of 3 June 1628, a Brittany Noblewoman, Anne Molé, left a "set of bed hangings...to make a parament for the altar."

³Sewing sampler, hand written title on cover--*Livre de couture*, Eugenie Pouleot, 1830. Ursuline 3.4N1.1. This is an exercise book with heavy paper to which the various miniature items have been sewn. Most of the sewing has been worked in white cotton thread on white linen.

stitch, back stitch, and running stitch. As well there are several examples of embroidery--broderie anglaise--that. Older students were taught dress-making and tailoring and some decorative embroidery techniques.

An important domestic skill acquired by young girls at school was marking. This was an integral part of household management, and students were expected to be able to embroider monograms or initials on household linens and undergarments. The French nomenclature for sampler--*marquoir* and *abécédaire*--reflects the popularity of this form of embroidery. Samplers worked within the French institutions (Europe) typically combine the functional (plain sewing or darning and embroidered alphabets) with only a limited amount of decorative motifs (simple geometric forms).

An unsophisticated variation of a *marquoir* worked by a seven year old French student at the Ursuline Convent in Quebec continues this tradition and includes a single alphabet, numbers, initials, and verse. It is signed and dated "Emilie Dechène. 1825." Like marking samplers worked in France it has been embroidered in one colour--brown silk, and includes no motifs. Only one kind of stitch, a simple cross stitch, has been use to embroider the text:

Dans le tintamarre du / Monde on n'entend po/-int la voix dieu.
Il faut / du silence et de la soli-/tude pour conferer avec / lui --
Le silence est l'an-/ge gardien de la vraie / devotion et
recollecti-/on.¹

¹Sampler, Emilie Dechène, 1825, Ursuline Convent 3.4N.2.9 Emilie Dechène was eleven when she completed this sampler. Later she entered the novitiate and was professed in 1836: Mother Emilie Dechène of St. François Borgia, she was a niece of Mother Mary Louisa McLoughlin of St. Henry. *Glimpses of the Monastery: Scenes from the History of the Ursulines of Quebec during Two Hundred Years 1639-1839*, 2nd ed (Quebec: L.J. Demers & Frère, 1897), 363..

In a sampler created four years later we see the influence of English prototypes in a variation of a band sampler. This long and narrow (43.2 x 19.7 cm.) sampler was worked by Elisabeth Forrester in 1829¹ and contains seventeen registers of lettering and as many rows of simple embroidery separating these bands. The embroidery is multicoloured wool and linen on linen and the text reads:

Elisabeth*Forrester Age
thirteenth Years 1829*
May Modesty and virtue
adorn her walk through life²

Especially interesting is the fact that this sampler has the remains of penmanship exercises sewn as stiffening to the back. Here we read popular maxims as they had been copied again and again by Elisabeth Forrester: "Sin and sorrow are inseparable" "Goodnefs with . . ." "Poor man want many things but covetous . . ." Although the written exercises are only available as fragments both the text of the sampler and the 'lines' allow us insights into education practices of this period. By rote and example Elisabeth, and her generation, would be taught the moral qualities to follow--the lessons of life.³

Despite the importance of domestic embroidery in the curriculum of the Quebec city convent it is the more prestigious religious embroidery that is best known. This form of embroidery incorporated the traditional skills brought from France. Selected

¹Samplers in the Brome County Historical Society Museum will be recognized as being in the collection of (BCHS).

²Sampler, Elisabeth Forrester, 1829 (BCHS 87-40). Like another long and narrow sampler by Margret Russel [collection of author] this embroiderer has miscalculated and several letters extend beyond the embroidered border of cross stitches.

³The fact that the sampler was backed shows it was displayed, not merely rolled and put away.

students and novices were encouraged to work together on large ecclesiastic projects using the traditional techniques brought from the motherhouse in France.¹ "Within the order itself, embroidery was practiced from the beginning on a scale and of a quality which can only be termed highly skilled and professional."²

During the same period that the Ursulines were founding their convent schools and embroidering magnificent altar frontals for the Catholic Church, the Puritan lawmakers of Massachusetts were serving their God by passing sumptuary laws (1634) against "excess in dress". These forbade, among other things, the use of silver, gold, silk, lace, and "embroider'd or needlework'd capps and bands".³ This attempt to suppress vanity and legislate morality reveals the contemporary attitudes toward embroidery--it was considered suspect. Where plain sewing was a necessity, embroidery could be interpreted as "excess."⁴

Unlike their French neighbours to the north, the English speaking colonists brought with them a strong tradition of secular/domestic embroidery and samplers continued to be exceedingly popular. Despite questions of excess, embroidered samplers continued to be made although they now epitomized the Protestant work ethic, with

¹The most noted pupil of the Ursulines was Jeanne Le Ber (a pupil from 1664-77) who became a noted embroiderer. She created richly ornamented altarpieces and ornamental vestements that can be seen in the collection of at the Order's Maison Saint-Gabriel in Montreal.

²Joyce Taylor Dawson, "Embroideries of the Ursulines of Quebec," *Canadian Collector*, (Sept/Oct, 1980):42.

³Gretchen Woelfle "Hester Prynne and Embroidery as Sin," *Women Artists News* (Dec 1980-Jan 1981): 7-8.

⁴Contemporary portraiture reveals that embroidery was still fashionable amongst the wealthy, and records reveal that the wealthy were seldom prosecuted. A portrait of 1670 *Mrs Freake and Baby Mary* displays the intricately embroidered skirts and lace collars that relieve the black costume.

both the production and the product serving as didactic exercises. The finished object was seen as proof of an exemplary life style, as well as a device for displaying religious and moralistic verses. Ironically even the most elaborately embroidered samplers preached against the dangers of vanity.

May spotless innocence & truth
my every action guide
and guard my unexperienced youth
from arrogance and pride.¹

Before the Revolution (1776) the American colonies emulated Britain's fashions and were encouraged to purchase finished goods from the homeland. English embroidery patterns and materials were sold and copied extensively. School texts were imported and thus Colonial children were provided with English exemplars.

The political unrest and the establishment of boycotts in the pre-Revolutionary period had an immediate effect on fashion and by extension embroidery. Women were asked to give up imported goods and produce their own fabrics and fashions thereby striking a financial blow to England. This continued through the late 1780's when even the adoption of English styles was seen to undermine the moral independence of the newly created Republic.

While every girl who received some form of schooling in the eighteenth century learned plain sewing and worked a marking sampler only the more fortunate advanced to fancy work or silk embroidery. Although British and American embroidery followed parallel paths during most of the eighteenth century, the American

¹Verse found on a number of samplers worked at Miss Balchs' School in Providence Rhode Island. ca 1796.

Revolution and the 'spirit of individualism' can be recognized in the American samplers. These changes are manifested in a greater degree of originality or spontaneity not seen in contemporary British samplers.

For the first time the embroidery--the variety of stitches and techniques--is seen "as a subsidiary interest" secondary to the message (figure 10).¹ English embroidery historians shuddered at the freedom allowed American school girls:

It may be said . . . that the actual needlework is on the whole much coarser than in England, and though the designs are often more amusing, as examples of stitching they fall very short of the work of our own ancestresses.²

Yet these effects are varied and exciting showing a greater concern with the overall figure/ground relationship. Samplers had ceased to be a record of stitchery techniques, rather they are being manipulated by the artists to attain specific effects. These stitches, seen in Mary Richardson's work (figure 10) could serve no other purpose, they are too fragile to wear well on clothing or household furnishings, they are indeed self-referential.

Although some samplers present a personal interpretation of reality most embroiderers turned to others for inspiration. Embroideries created in the American academies emphasize the narrative elements with much of the image field taken up by representations of popular biblical stories, contemporary personages

¹Mary E. Jones, *British Samplers* (Oxford: Pen in Hand, 1948), 13.

²Leigh Ashton, *Samplers: Selected and Described with an Introduction by Leigh Ashton*, (London: The Medici Society, 1926), 14.

and events, pastoral scenes, and architecture relying on professional pattern makers or engravings for inspiration.¹

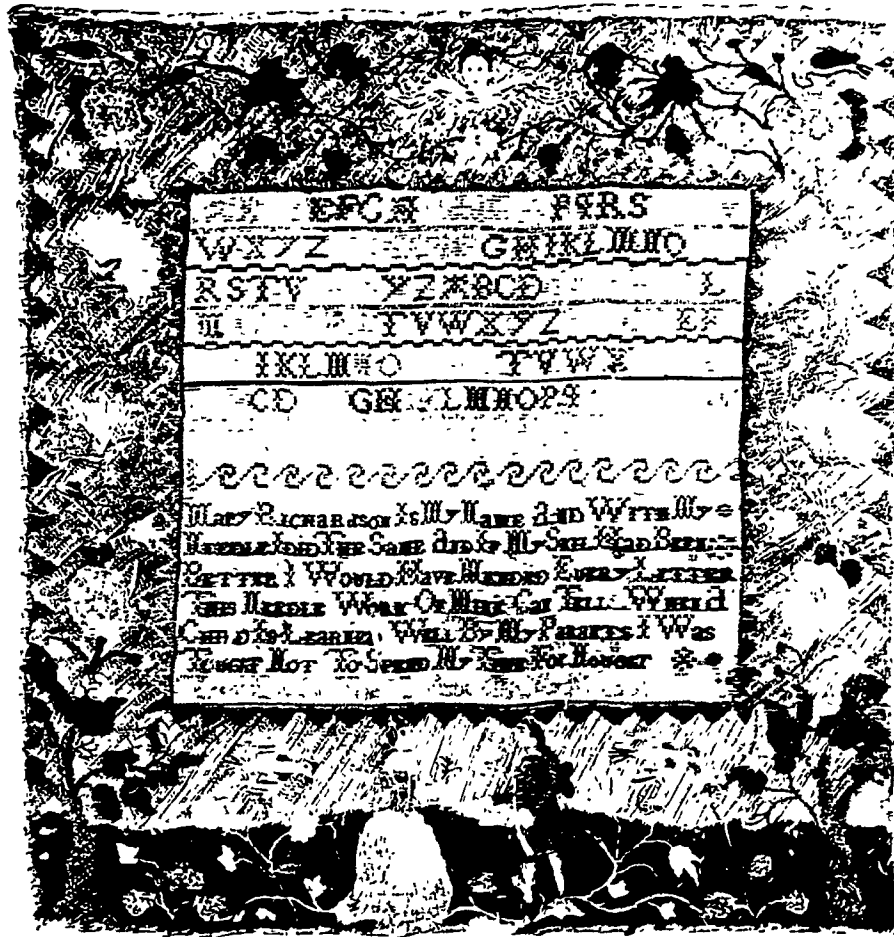


Figure 10

Sampler, Mary Richardson, Miss Sarah Stivours School
Salem Massachusetts, 1783 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)
Coloured silks on linen in cross stitch, satin, french knots, back
stitch, running stitch. 50 x 51 cm.
Published: J. Grow and E. McGrail, *Creating Historic Samplers*,
Plate III

¹Nancy Graves Cabot, "Engravings as Pattern Sources," *Antiques* (December 1950): 476-481.

Trade between Europe and America remained active between 1794 and 1807 but the advent of the Napoleonic wars gave rise, once more, to a series of blockades and embargoes. Beginning in 1808 and continuing until the spring of 1815 the United States was once again isolated from European fashions.¹ American domestic embroidery blossomed in this state of isolation. Private academies flourished and many of the silk pictorial samplers created during this period can be identified through iconic and formal elements to specific schools and teachers.²

Whereas American samplery developed and flourished in the eighteenth century, in Quebec the art of samplery was practically non-existent. Despite the fact that needlework had been an integral part of the curriculum of the Ursuline convent since 1639 the oldest convent sampler dates only from the 1780s.³

There are two plausible theories as to why no samplers predating the conquest have been found. Both possibilities reflect the cultural/geographical situation in Quebec. The first accepts the possibility that samplers were made in Quebec by the daughters of the founding families, but concludes that these embroideries

¹For more information on this theme see: Howard Mumford Jones, *American and French Culture 1750-1848* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: U. of North Carolina Press, 1927); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: U of North Carolina Press, 1980); Charles Sherrill, *French Memories of Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915)

²Several of these exceptions and therefore identifiable embroideries include the "Fishing Lady" pictures of the Boston area, the rippling silk stitches of Salem Massachusetts c. 1750-90, and the Rhode Island Samplers c. 1760-99. Usually the incorporation of a text, albeit verse, alphabet or embroidered signature identifies a work as a sampler as opposed to a *silk pictorial embroidery*.

³The first dated English sampler--1598; the first dated American sampler--1643; first dated Canadian sampler--1764.

deteriorated or were returned to France with the personal belongings of the displaced French.¹ This hypothesis also depends on the corollary that there was little trade with the English speaking--Protestant neighbours. Religious and political differences would have kept social interchanges at a minimum, and the exchanges of embroidery patterns and techniques an improbability.²

The second theory, which is here favoured, suggests that samplers were made in Quebec only after the English occupation.³ This would agree with the premise that although needlework was an integral part of all young women's education, samplery is an English tradition. This would explain the late appearance of the Quebec samplers, the English language texts, and the fact that samplers are only found in communities that have had an English speaking heritage or population.⁴

What must now be considered is the impetus that brought about the acceptance of samplery within the curriculum of the French convents and how these works differ from those created elsewhere. As well it is interesting to speculate as to why samplers continued to

¹However in *The French Canadians: 1760-1967* Vol. 1 page 50 Mason Wade states that the "French soldiers and officials, and some hundred of the colonial noblesse, . . . were the only portion of the elite to emigrate . . . 130 seigneurs, 1000 gentlemen and bourgeois, 125 notable merchants . . . 25-30 doctors . . . remained in Quebec."

²During this period much of the North/South communication between the countries took the form of unfriendly raiding parties. While the first weavers in Quebec were in fact hostages from the Albany area it is unknown if any embroidery took this unorthodox route.

³Although embroideries identified as samplers have been made in France these are typically technical exercises displaying the embroiderer's ability or references for future projects.

⁴Many were found in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, an area settled by the United Empire Loyalists. Others are found in larger cities where there were substantial numbers of English families.

be worked in Quebec long after they had disappeared from the curricula of American and English schools.

As previously stated, needlework created within the Quebec city Ursuline Convent before the Conquest can be loosely divided into two categories: plain sewing and religious embroidery. This latter category includes the acclaimed vestments and magnificent *parements* or altar frontals. Contemporary guide books and journals praise the religious embroidery, but also indicate that needlework was an important part of the curriculum, and many visitors remarked on the skill of the young students at the convents. The Finnish naturalist Peter Kalm wrote in 1749 of the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal: "leur mission est d'élever les jeunes filles dans la religion chrétienne . . . [and] les ouvrages à l'aiguille."¹

The arrival of the English created a number of major difficulties for the sisters.² Perhaps one of the more threatening dilemmas, in the day-to-day survival of the Order, was the fact that all trade with France had been halted. Not only could they not expect to find the materials needed to sustain the needs of a Catholic Religious institution, but they had little hope of establishing credit from British merchants. Out of these worries a new form of embroidery developed--embroidery with moose-hair.³

¹Peter D. Kalm, *Diary* (1749) cited by Marius Barbeau, *Saintes Artisanes I--Les Brodeuses*, 19.

²Obviously major changes had taken place: the convent had been commandeered as a hospital; the school had been closed. Novices were no longer being accepted into the order. As well questions about their religion and very existence were foremost in their minds. Yet day to day survival was necessary and here we find an immediate effect on embroidery.

³The seminal publication of hair embroidery is Geoffrey Turner, *Hair Embroidery in Siberia and North America* (Oxford: 1955). Due to the high cost and scarcity of embroidery materials the sisters had utilized local substitutes,

Obliged by the state of penury ... to seek some means of subsistence, our Mothers had recourse in particular, to a delicate species of embroidery, commonly called bark work. This pretty and novel species of "painting with the needle." in which dyed moose-hair replaces the usual shades of silk, and the soft, leather-like outer bark of the white birch-tree is used instead of rich tissues of brocade or velvet, was much admired and sought for by English ladies and gentlemen, who had not come over to Canada with empty purses.¹

The practice of visiting the Ursuline's school developed into an established tradition with travellers admiring and purchasing the fancy work made by the students. In a journal of 1791 we read a discourse on embroidery executed with the dyed hair of the original (moose). "It is so short that it must be put through the Needle for every stitch which makes it tedious".² Fifty years later in *The New Guide to Quebec* we know that at the Convent:

At present [1849] three hundred and sixty-eight are receiving a superior education. It (the convent) contains a Superior, fifty Nuns, and six novices, who give instruction in reading, writing and needlework. They are very assiduous in embroidery and other ornamental works.³

Nonetheless, despite the abundance of documentation, inventories and educational records relating to embroidery there is a paucity of information concerning samplers in Quebec. In my reading I could find no mention of samplery being worked at the Ursuline Convent

of which moose hair was the most favoured, for minor commissions. By the end of the eighteenth century the convents augmented their income by selling their handiwork, and as the number of visitors increased [in the nineteenth century] so did the assortment of mementos. Margaret Swain, "Moose-hair embroidery on birch bark", *Antiques* (April 1975): 726-729.

¹A.M.D.G. *Glimpses of the Monastery: Scenes from the History of the Ursulines of Quebec during Two Hundred Years 1639-1839* 2nd ed. (Quebec: L.J.Demers & Frere, 1897), 292.

²Mary Quale Innis ed., *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary*, (Toronto: 1965), 43.

³*The New Guide to Quebec*, 1849, 12.

before the nineteenth century. According to Marius Barbeau, ". . . les abécédaires (samplers, en Nouvelle-Angleterre), vers 1810, devenaient ; à la mode. On en conserve encore de fort jolis, en points à marquer".¹ In fact, unknown to Barbeau, there is a small abécédaire worked in wool on coarse linen that predates this estimate by some thirty years. This sampler, which is part of the Ursuline collection dates from the 1780s.²

Like many marking samplers made at Francophone institutions the alphabet consists of twenty four letters--there is neither a J nor a W.³ As well as the single uppercase alphabet there are several small religious symbols--crosses. Because the green worsted wool with which the letters are worked is badly deteriorated it is difficult to decipher the name of the embroiderer. Thus the sampler has been attributed to Verite Falard by one author and Marguerite Falardeau by another.⁴

The Ursulines were instrumental in establishing schools in Upper Canada as well as a number of American locations including New Orleans (1727) and Georgetown (1798).⁵ In all of these the same

¹ M. Barbeau, 15.

² Sampler, Verite Falard, Ursuline Museum, unaccessioned. 16 x 12.8 cm. Illustrated in Joyce Taylor Dawson, "Embroideries of the Ursulines of Quebec" *Canadian Collector* (Sept/Oct 1980): 40, fig.3.

³ A tiny sampler by Hortance Fortier, Ursuline Convent 3.4N2.8 [5 1/8" x 4 1/2"] also omits the J and W

⁴ Joyce Taylor Dawson, 40; Hyla Fox, *Antiques: An Illustrated Guide for the Canadian Collector* (Toronto: Methuen, 1983), 128. Yet another interpretation is that the surname is Fafard.

⁵ The Georgetown [Visitation] Convent was established in a circuitous fashion in 1798. The founding sisters were of the order of the Poor Clares of Tours who were expelled from France during the Reign of Terror. They arrived in America intent on starting a school, but their difficulty with the English language convinced them to turn to the Ursulines in New Orleans where they stayed two years [1796-98]. In 1798 they moved to Washington and opened a

insular attitude toward embroidery prevailed. Once again the sisters were determined to provide young girls with a solid education that included religious instruction and functional sewing skills. If and

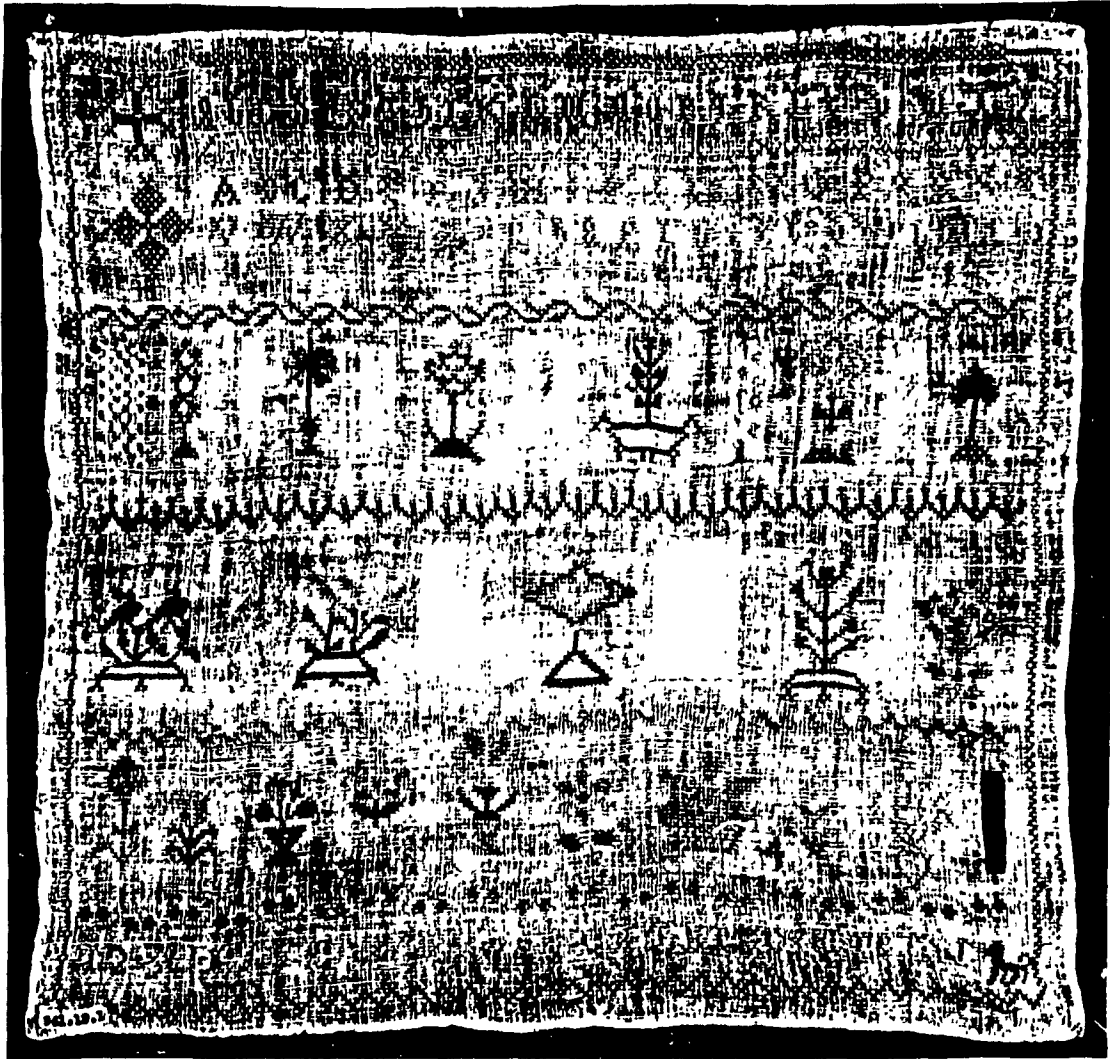


Figure 11

Sampler, Charlotte du Plessis, France. mid 19th C.

(Royal Ontario Museum 941.13.1)

Coloured silk on linen (32.3 x 33.6 cm)

Between the cross stitched motifs there are meticulous areas of darning.

Photograph: Royal Ontario Museum.

school at Georgetown, they later took the vows of the Visitation and in 1816 established an order in the United States.

when samplers were worked they served only as exercises in skill (figure 11). There is not the concern for narrative content found on English and American samplers. When samplers were made geometric motifs tend to be scattered and worked in monochromed silhouettes very similar to early spot samplers.¹ Although there are eighteenth and nineteenth century embroideries by students of the New Orleans school, there are no samplers in the collection.² "Girls were sewing, not with the idea of learning to mark linen, but with the goal of serving God as He ought to be served."³ In fact the earliest known sampler made in an American Convent, is from Georgetown's Visitation and it dates from 1810,⁴ again underlining a resistance to mainstream academic embroidery. In the Visitation sampler religious texts, in English, are situated on either side of a stylized representation of the monstrance (here a cross surrounded by a flaming oval). Besides the meticulous alphabets (including J and W) and numerals the embroiderer has included a stylized border of strawberries and a row of pine trees with birds resting on their points.

¹This is seen on a French sampler "Fait al [sic] la paix de Jesus" by Charlotte du Plessis. ROM 941.13.1

²Correspondence with Sister Joan Marie Aycock, o.s.u. Ursuline Convent Archives and Museum, New Orleans, La., November 27, 1987.

³Heather Palmer of Alexandria, Virginia. Her research for an article on Southern embroidery has been completed, although at this time unpublished. Personal correspondence, January, 1988.

⁴Sampler, Eleanor Durkee, 1810, Philadelphia Museum. Correspondance: Gloria Seaman Allen, Curator DAR, Washington D.C. February 24, 1986; November 19, 1987; Conversation and visit to DAR, July 18, 1988.

This work can be compared to a later undated and unfinished sampler in the Quebec city Ursuline collection.¹ Stylistic similarities are evident: both present a tri-part composition typical of British or American work however, the motifs have been rendered as flat monochromatic silhouettes typical of French samplers. In the Quebec sampler the alphabet ends with an X, as the embroiderer has obviously miscalculated the space. In both the texts are written in English and exude a Catholic air--in the Quebec work the embroiderer addresses the Virgin:

Virgin mother ever meek In our
behalf to Jesus speak That from our
hearts all sin effaced We may through
you be mild and chaste.

While samplers were eventually incorporated into the curriculum of the American convents they continued to appear outside of mainstream embroidery. Not only are there formal differences in these and other samplers worked "within the walls" we also find overt Catholic iconography and texts. By studying these works we begin to recognize an important component--French embroidery traditions.

The Convents were respected institutions and travellers credited the nuns with the fact that more French speaking women than men in North America appeared to be literate². Education in New France remained in the hands of the Church although the English traditions

¹Sampler, anonymous, ca. 1850, Ursuline Convent, 3.4N2.4. Illustrated in Joyce Taylor Dawson, "A Note on Research in Progress: The Needlework of the Ursulines of Early Quebec," *Material History Bulletin* 5 (Ottawa: Spring, 1978):76, fig. 3.

²François Duc de la Rouchefoucault-Liancourt, *Tour Through Upper Canada*, (Toronto, n.d.) 199. His tour took place in 1795.

began to infiltrate the curriculum.¹ The appearance of samplery in Quebec dates to the arrival of the English in Lower Canada. The influx of English directly following the Conquest was limited to the British garrison and their families. Although small in number they were not without immediate influence on the Ursuline school. In 1761 the annalist of the Ursuline convent recorded: "All the winter we have had a certain number of boarders, and as many day-pupils as we could accomodate.' The lists of the former show thirty-seven boarders, among whom English names begin already to appear."²

The Quebec Act of 1774 permitted the French-Canadians to retain their language, civil law, religion and schools. The first major change to the status quo took place during the Loyalist uprisings when American colonists, faithful to British crown, travelled North and settled in Quebec. The later immigration of the Scots and Irish to the Eastern Townships created 'pockets' of English speaking communities whose tradition demanded that a young lady work a sampler. Even when the English began to open schools within the province many parents continued to send their daughters to the convents. "The latter [English] are naturally very gentle and docile, but it is sad not to be allowed to bring them up in our holy faith. The day-pupils are numerous, and would be more so if we had more nuns to teach them."³

¹In 1761 the convent elected Mother Esther Wheelwright of the Infant Jesus became Mother Superior. Although an American by birth she had been taken hostage by Indians and later rescued and raised by the Ursulines. Her family in Boston continued to communicate despite distance that separated them.

²*Glimpses*, 294-295.

³*Glimpses*, 295.

Certainly a convent education was highly regarded for in 1786, when the former Governor and his family returned to Quebec city, Lady Dorchester set about arranging for the education of her daughter:

Lady Dorchester signified her desire that her daughter should take lessons in French and in embroidery from the nuns. Accordingly . . . the young Countess was admitted daily for the space of two or three hours, her mother accompanying her in order to perfect herself in the French language.¹

Although only a select few women were destined to a life of leisure, such as that traditionally associated with embroidery, all were concerned with propriety and looked for the signs of a familiar life upon their arrival. We are fortunate that we are able to see this period in Quebec through the attitudes and prejudices of another British Gentlewoman--Lady Elizabeth Simcoe (1766-1851). Like many travellers of the period Lady Simcoe kept a diary of her journeys, which included Lower and Upper Canada. In 1791 she wrote:

You cannot think what a gay place this [Quebec City] is in winter...indeed I think there are more amusements & gaiety here than a winter at Bath affords & that you would not expect in so remote a Country.²

While expressing surprise at the amenities offered in this 'remote' country she had unhesitatingly accepted the presence of embroidery in the curriculum of young woman (both native and European). Mrs. Simcoe acknowledges that the students show "works of good taste," a

¹*Glimpses*, 313.

²Mary Quayle Innis, ed. *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary*, 48 & 50.

contemporary requirement for any educated woman, for "A young lady is nobody, and nothing without accomplishments."¹

Accomplishments retained a place of importance in Quebec schools and the embroidered sampler gained in popularity as English-speaking families demanded traditional educations for their daughters. As demands increased during the nineteenth century new schools were established. Newspaper advertisements provide limited information about these schools. We do know that a Mrs. Dunlevie's opened a Seminary for Young Girls on the 8th of May in 1848 on St Ursule-Street. From the advertisement prospective parents knew she offered tuition in both English and French and included *Plain and Fancy Needlework* as part of the curriculum.² However we are fortunate in having records concerning the curriculum, the teachers and students of the Ursuline convent in Quebec city.

While English students had been attending the Quebec convent since the late 1760s it was not until 1800 and the arrival of Mothers Mary Louisa McLaughlin of St. Henry (1780-1846) and Elizabeth Dougherty of St. Augustine (1780-1814) that regular English classes were undertaken. One can posit that the sisters' upbringing must have had a certain influence on their teaching and their students.³

¹Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education* vol. 2 (New York: George F. Hopkins, 1801), 119.

²"Mrs Dunlevie will open her SCHOOL on the 8th of May, in the house No 37, St. Ursule-Street, the property of Mr Justice Panet." *Morning Chronicle* Quebec City, 28th April, 1848.

³Needlepainting, in the American tradition is first seen after 1800. An example "painted with chenille and silk embroidery" was worked by Flora McDonald, a pupil at the convent between 1803-07. Illustrated in J.T. Dawson, "A Note on Research in Progress: The Needlework of the Ursulines of Early Quebec," *Material History Bulletin*, 5(Spring, 1978): 76, fig. 4.

In the annals of the convent it was noted that Mother St. Augustine excelled "in painting, drawing, and embroidery."¹ Mother Elizabeth Dougherty had been born in New York, and, at the age of eleven or twelve accompanied her parents to London. She was well-educated, and would most assuredly have completed an embroidered sampler as part of her education.

In 1822 the Ursulines admitted English-speaking Irish Catholics to the school, although they were obliged to attend during the lunch hour, when the French pupils were absent due to overcrowding of class rooms. Mother Cecilia O'Conway of the Incarnation arrived in Quebec in 1823 with her "natural taste for sciences" and an "uncommon skill in all varieties of fancy work and embroidery." She was instrumental in welcoming these students and in 1824 an "Irish class was definitively organized, and opened to the scholars at the same hours as the French Canadians."²

Samplers created by young girls from Irish families in Quebec are indistinguishable from their contemporaries' works. One of the few documented works from an 'Irish' family is a house sampler created circa 1830 by Margaret Payne. Beside the red brick house and beneath two flowering trees is a bee hive and bees. Is this a record of an orchard in the Eastern townships or is it perhaps her first home in Ireland?³

While samplers were to become an accepted part of the curriculum of the Ursuline convent they continued to be seen as a

¹*Glimpses*, 360

²*Glimpses*, 371, 372.

³Sampler, Margaret Payne, ca. 1830, BCHS 74.43.

didactic tool rather than an indicator of social status. This is further supported by the less prestigious materials used in samplers. Of the wealth of embroideries held by the museum fewer than fifteen have been identified as samplers.¹ Interestingly these samplers appear to consistently ignore contemporary embroidery practices, for even when silk pictorial embroidery was being produced at the convent we do not find samplers worked in this manner. The most popular form of Victorian embroidery--Berlin woolwork--is poorly represented and made a late appearance on samplers worked at the convent. Despite the availability of the material, *The Stanstead Journal* advertised Berlin Wool "with canvass and patterns for working" in 1845,² there are only two Berlin work samplers in the collection. These date from mid-century and are made up of various patterns and colours in wool on linen and are very similar to the early spot samplers as they are exceedingly long and narrow. Sister Gabrielle Dagneault, o.s.u. posits that these were made by novices, and served as references for younger students.³

The samplers that form a part of the Ursuline collection at Quebec are unique in that their provenance is assured. The fact that these samplers are so few in number can also be explained. Already

¹These include the Book of Sewing (3.4N1.1); the two wool pattern samplers (3.4N2.2 and 3.4N2.3); a long white wool knitting sampler (3.4N2.13); an unfinished marking sampler (3.4N2.11) and seven samplers (alphabets, religious texts and geometric motifs, dating from 1815 to 1909).

²*RockIsland Stanstead Journal* December 18, 1845. "P. Hubbard, Stanstead...offers school books, writing paper...and Berlin Wool, with canvass and patterns for working."

³Conversation July 26, 1988. Sampler, unsigned, wool on canvas, mid-nineteenth century. Ninety patterns, 101.5 x 12.7 cm Ursuline Convent, Quebec. 3.4N2.3 Sampler, Maria John_____, wool on canvas, mid-nineteenth century, 127 x 18.4 cm.

discussed is the low priority given samplers within the convent's curriculum--the Ursuline convent in New Orleans has no samplers in their collection. In addition it would have been usual for students to take their embroideries when they left the convent. Nevertheless there are a number of possible reasons why these works remained at the convent: embroideries were undoubtedly given to the sisters by grateful pupils; embroideries were left uncompleted or unclaimed when students died; some of these samplers were the work of students who remained within the order; finally it is possible that some students conveniently 'forgot' their less successful needlework.

Samplers produced in Quebec present a dual nature--determined by both a French and an English heritage. From the English we see the initial impetus or demand for samplers, the use of numerous coloured silks, the interest in narrative or pictorial images. This is also re-interpreted through American attitudes towards embroidery which imparts a whimsy to imagery. From the French we see a return to the sampler as a didactic tool displaying functional needlework skills--marking, plain sewing, and darning--as well as religious indoctrination (figure 11). It is possible to further subdivide the body of samplers by language group depending on written text or even the omissions in the alphabets.

Without a provenance it is difficult to know which samplers now found outside of the Ursuline collections were created "inside the walls." Samplers attributed to English schools within the province usually reflect the English traditions with a greater interest in narration and a lesser concern with technique. British and American

authors equate the demise of the sampler with the standardization of embroidery within the public school system stating that:

by the end of the 1820s, the schoolgirl needlework era was drawing to a close. . . . Finally between 1835 and 1840, the teaching customs of five centuries virtually ended when ornamental needlework . . . ceased to be of primary importance in women's education."¹

However in Quebec samplers continued to be enthusiastically worked into the last decades of the nineteenth century, well beyond this demarkation. Perhaps the continued popularity of samplery in Quebec can be attributed to the fact that the convent schools were the last to give up their embroidery traditions. These highly regarded institutions allowed few changes in the way needlework was taught. These schools for girls and young women only reluctantly gave up embroidery with its connotations of femininity and domesticity. Their counterparts, the public schools, emulated these practices and in so doing continued to teach samplery. Whatever the reasons, Quebec samplery appears to have expanded and carried on, at the very least one generation beyond its British and American predecessors.

By the 1880s the innovations earlier introduced in England and America were available in Quebec. Punched card, penelope canvas, cotton canvas, zephyr wool, novelty yarns, aniline dyes, coloured graphs, and instruction manuals were sold by Canadian merchants. Canadian subscriptions to English and American women's magazines meant that patterns and techniques were not limited by geographic boundaries and Quebec embroiderers followed with enthusiasm the

¹B. Ring, *American Needlework Treasures*, 97.

"projects" published in these journals. While British and American educators dismissed the sampler as perfunctory, young women within Quebec continued to execute samplers as part of their formal education.



Figure 12

Sampler, Allie McGinnis, Quebec, 1881
 BCHS 81-8
 Coloured wool on penelope canvas.
 38 x 42cm.

Three samplers (figures 12, 13, 14) worked within one family in the 1880s are important as they record and sum up the changing

attitude towards samplery within Quebec. The first two samplers were worked in 1881 at the Christieville School (Eastern Townships, Quebec). In her sampler (figure 12) the elder sister, twelve year old Allie McGinnis, worked an upper case alphabet, a lower case alphabet, numbers from 1-11, and a series of simple bands. Her pièce de résistance was an elaborate red Gothic alphabet that fills over half the cotton canvas.



Figure 13

Sampler, Inez McGinnis, Quebec 1881
 BCHS 81-8
 Coloured wool on penelope canvas
 40.5 x 40.5 cm. 103

The same year her eleven year old sister, Inez, embroidered a very similar sampler (figure 13). Obviously the same model was used for the upper and lower case alphabets. However Inez chose to include a motto--*In God we trust*--leaving space for only a few numbers (1-4). Both samplers were worked in wool on penelope cloth. The major difference is that the younger sister has included a technically simpler alphabet in script.

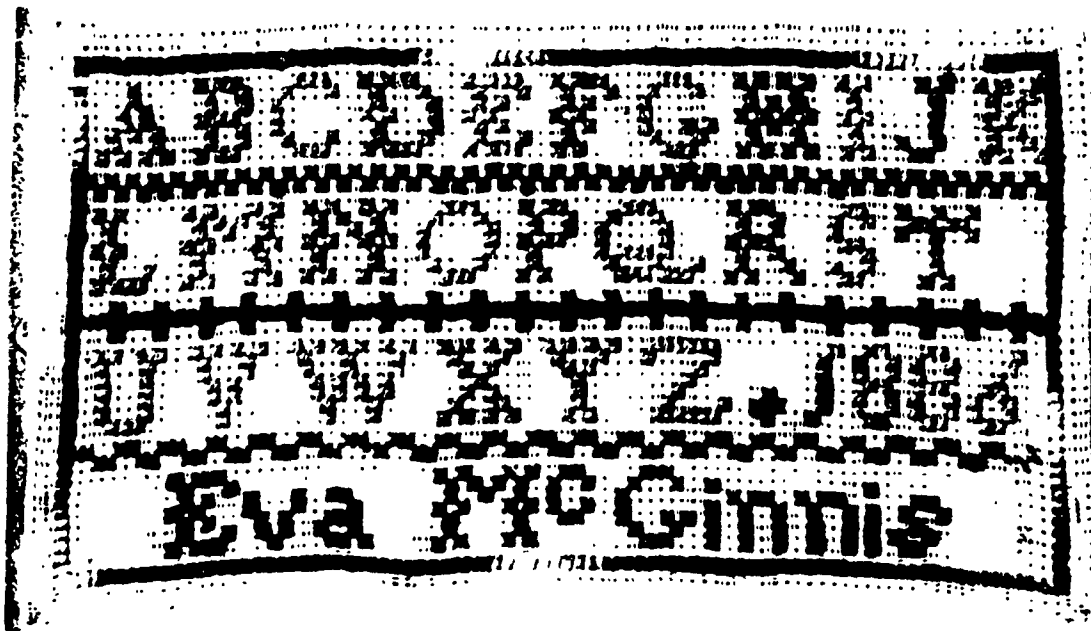


Figure 14

Sampler, Eva McGinnis, Quebec, 1886.

BCHS 81-8

Coloured and variegated wool on penelope canvas

14 x 25 cm.

The third sampler from the family, worked in 1886 by Eva McGinnis, reveals a major change has taken place. This is a much smaller work (figure 14), its appearance that of an afterthought. There is only one alphabet, there are no numbers, no mottos, and no motifs. The only new element is the use of variegated yarn in the cross stitched border. There are similarities between this and the other two samplers: all have used wool on canvas; each has worked the same upper case alphabet; and once more each letter is embroidered in an alternate colour.

In these and similar works we witness the final phase of Quebec samplery. The availability of machine embroidery, and imported hand embroidery (Chinese and Indian) as well as the popularity of the home sewing machine meant a decline in the demand for domestic needlework. This combined with changing expectations regarding feminine behavior (women were demanding suffrage, rational dress, higher education and were beginning to enter the work force) meant that the role of embroidery in the education of women was being questioned. Within the public schools embroidery was being replaced by domestic sciences with a greater emphasis on plain sewing and finishing of machine made garments. While samplers made during the last decade of the nineteenth century do vary in quality many are indeed exercises. The three McGinnis samplers are typical: they do not show any particular skill, nor are they aesthetically pleasing. Rather they spell out the end of samplery as an art form in Quebec.

CHAPTER IV

'AND OF THY TALENTS TAKE GREAT CARE': QUEBEC SAMPLERS

When attempting to describe the formal aspects of samplers one becomes aware of an important difference that separates this form of embroidery from traditional pictorial art.² The presence of letters, numbers and/or text encourages the viewer to "read" a sampler in much the same way one would read a page of a book--from the top to the bottom. This is diametrically opposed to a formal reading of representational works which allows for a progression from the foreground, usually the lower section of the work, to a distant higher view.

In fact many of the concerns associated with mimesis do not apply to samplery. Seldom do we find attention being paid to perspective. Samplers retain a two-dimensionality, often described as a decorative quality, with little or no concern for foreground, middle ground, background or planes. Nor is there any interest in proportion or scale. This often results in remarkably whimsical tableaux: impossibly huge birds perch precariously on small cone-shaped conifers; fantastic flowers bedeck baskets and sprout from

¹Line taken from Jean Stevenson's sampler (figure 23).

²Pictorial embroidery had by the seventeenth century, begun to be admired for its own sake. It was executed in tent stitch, flat silk stitch and stumpwork and framed or used to decorate household furnishings. Popular subject matter included the seasons, senses, and elements as well as busts of monarchs scenes from the Old Testament. See P. Wardle, "English Pictorial Embroidery of the 17th century" in *Antiques International*, ed. P. C. Wilson (London: 1966), 267-278.

unexpected sources; minute unidentifiable zoomorphic monsters meander along 'roads' of stitchery or float uncomfortably in space; and heraldic beasts stand guard over an assortment of shrubs, trees, fruits, and crowns.

In addition, the use of non-descriptive colours, while allowing the embroiderer an unparalleled degree of freedom, means that the viewer is often confounded by the unfamiliar: turquoise angels, blue deer, and green dogs. To add to this confusion we have variegated yarns that provide a shaded effect, often at odds with the form.

Paradoxically, given the above facts, the majority of nineteenth century samplers display a strong sense of stability. This has been attained through the use of framing devices, strong vertical axes, horizontal registers and bi-lateral symmetry. As the sampler evolved and became more narrative/didactic the overall patterning, seen in the early band and spot samplers, gave way to a more centralized image. Nonetheless there is usually more than one center of interest.

Before attempting to discuss individual Quebec samplers it is necessary to establish a comprehensive understanding of the formal qualities of the sampler. Samplers, like paintings, are two-dimensional art forms, notwithstanding the fact that the stitches may physically create a tactile, three-dimensional surface. As well samplers have been framed and displayed in the same manner as paintings. Nonetheless, embroiderers have seen fit to work the body of the sampler within an embroidered framework.

Besides re-affirming its pictorial qualities there is a practical reason to create an embroidered border. Fabrics fray, and this line

of stitching deters any unravelling of the ground. At the same time, the embroidered frame serves to delineate the image field, and, essentially determines and emphasizes the ground to be worked. Because a simple hem stitch would achieve the same results the importance of such an elaborate framing device must be acknowledged.¹ These borders vary from simple lines and rows of geometric motifs to schematized bands of meandering flowers and wide borders of naturalistically rendered flowers and foliage.

In all cases the borders are worked very close to the edges of the fabric.² This means that the wooden frame covers a narrow section of the needlework. A parallel can be seen in sixteenth and seventeenth century landscape gardening and gardening books which indeed served as sources of patterns. Certainly sixteenth century writers and poets noticed the correlation between gardening and embroidery and Jane Bostocke's sampler (figure 5) is crowded with patterns similar to the knots and mazes found in contemporary gardening books. In a reference to gardening Thomas Campion, in Philip Rosseter's *A Book of Airs*, 1601, stated "All is work and nowhere space."³ Both the gardener and the embroiderer worked

¹Some embroiderers have created physical frames using silk ribbons finished with silk rosettes in the corners. For illustration see Betty Ring, *American Needlework Treasures* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Museum of American Folk Art, 1987), 48. This use of ribbon and rosettes is used on wool "spot" sampler in Ursuline convent Quebec. 3.4N2.2.

²Although historic embroideries are fragile and damaged by light, if they are to be displayed it is best to frame them by "floating" the sampler on a background so the edges can be seen. This is the practice of many conservationists however individuals and even museums continue to cover the 'offending' areas (ragged edges and parts of border) with a mat.

³Cited by Thomasina Beck, *Embroidered Gardens* (New York: A Studio Book, The Viking Press, 1979), 6.

their 'ground' in the same manner defining and redefining the elements through the use of 'ornamental borders'.



Figure 15

Title Page of the 1636 edition of *The Needles Excellency A New Booke wherein are diuers Admirable Workes wrought with the Needle*.

Published: A. Sebba, *Samplers*, 32

The title page of *The Needles Excellency* (1631) places three women (*Wisdome*, *Industrie* [sewing] and *Follie*) in the foreground, while behind them trelliced plants form a wall around a garden (figure 15). Here the creators of the embroidered fashions, the trellices, and even the parterres of knot work appear to have used

the same references for inspiration. Like the sampler, the garden is a self contained unit, an enclosed area that has a clearly delineated edge. This, in turn, is re-defined by an inner frame or privet hedge. Within this frame one finds enclosed spaces, each an oasis--a formally organized garden of Eden.

Before beginning a sampler, the embroiderer must consider the organization of the various elements of her embroidery. This usually means locating texts and larger motifs/images along a vertical axis.¹ These in turn are framed by smaller motifs placed heraldically on either side of the central form. As well as this reliance on bi-lateral symmetry it is common to find the image field divided into levels with the largest most complex or 'heaviest' elements at the bottom.² Thus we are encouraged to read down through the self-contained units; from decorative alphabets and numbers worked in counted stitches to a moralizing verse or text and finally at the base we reach the figurative work.

The formal organization of samplers is limited: the image field is organized in a variety of ways, from the informal to the formal; from the allover pattern to central image. Sixteenth century spot samplers with their random motifs, lack of frame, and general air of confusion appear the most haphazard; especially when compared to a sampler

¹Already the embroiderer has begun to count: the number of threads each letter or motif will cover; the number of yarns in the ground; the number of spaces separating the motifs. Physically mark the central axes in order to centre the texts and motifs.

²The order of execution varies, as witnessed by the unfinished samplers. After completing a frame many began with the lettering and then the motifs. Others, reversed this process. Originally the stitches and techniques became more complex toward the base of the embroidery traditionally culminating with a pictorial element. This is often the most demanding section, and for the embroiderer and the audience the most entertaining.

made up only of lines of monochrome lettering or written text. This latter form of embroidery presents a single uniform texture with no specific focal point. Band samplers and *abécédaires* may also present an all-over pattern despite the fact that various colours and small motifs are worked within the registers.

Samplers containing both text and images frequently incorporate horizontal registers. An evolution of band samplers, these embroideries are often divided by content. Thus, the most common organization is a tri-part (1:1:1) division with equal space given to the alphabets/numbers, verse and image/motifs. This is seen in English samplers and predominates many of the Quebec samplers (figure 16).¹ Variations include Sarah Leak's sampler (McCord) which is organized into five registers. Here texts are placed above and below three bands of stylized motifs.² An 1886 sampler reveals yet another relationship of text to image. Edith Hort's sampler of 1886 (MMFA) presents a 1:2 configuration. The upper third consists of embroidered alphabets while the lower two thirds is packed with motifs--flora and fauna and unusual "pieced quilt" forms.³ Although the motifs have been arranged symmetrically along a central vertical axis their sheer quantity (over seventy) negates any feeling of order.

¹Sampler, Mary Ann Cushen, 1803, McCord; Samplers, Julia Gray 1826 and 1829, McCord.

²Sampler, Sarah Leak, aged eighteen, 1803, McCord, M.974.119.1.

³Sampler, Edith L. Hort, 1888, MMFA 960.Dt.7 The motifs include roses executed in a shaded stitch typical of Berlin work, stylized crowns, flowers and birds, naturalistic trees and books, and vine wrapped crosses. The eight point star, hearts and quilt blocks are unusual. The sampler, that appears to have been worked in pastels has been displayed which accounts for the fading. The fine technique and the numerous motifs especially the crosses indicate that this sampler was completed at a Convent.

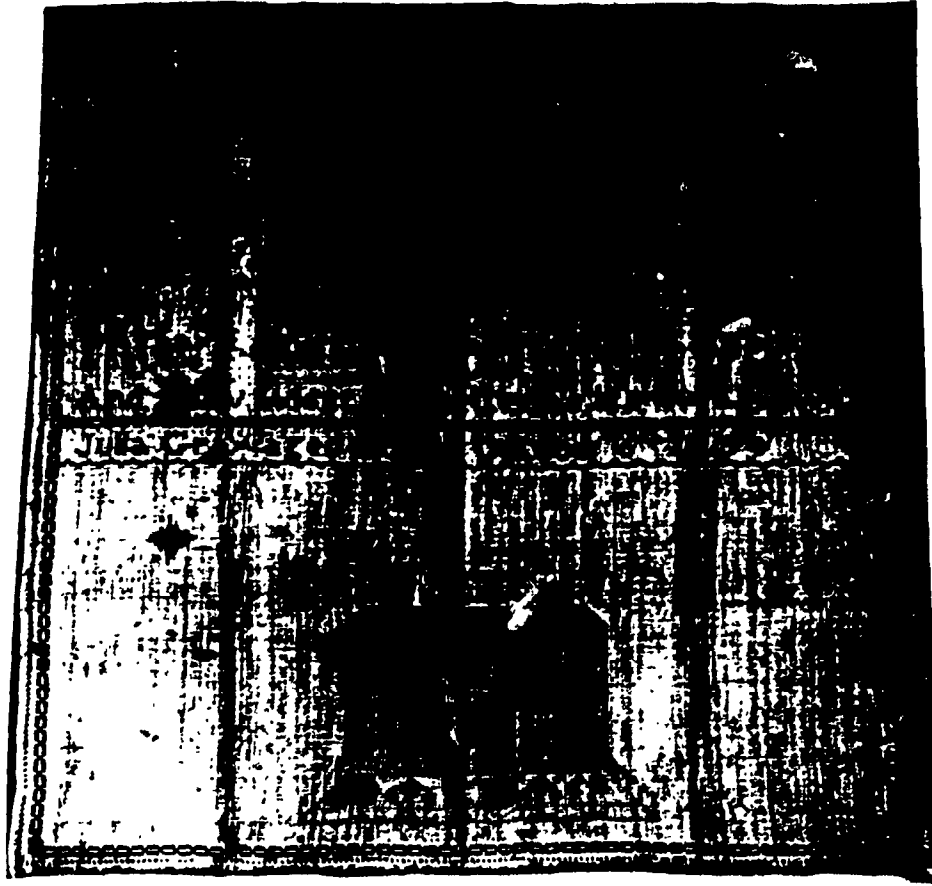


Figure 16

Sampler, Julia Gray, Quebec 1829.

McCord Museum M21377

Coloured silks in Algerian eye, rococo, cross stitch and drawn thread hem-stitch on bleached linen.

(43 x 44cm)

Photograph: Denyse Roy

The majority of Quebec samplers containing motifs or images have been created using a central axis and bi-lateral symmetry however several appear to defy this underlying structure. Jane Lucy Wakeman's sampler (figure 17) of 1849, [McCord] displays an initial concern with symmetry and horizontal registers, however, she has embroidered images and texts on almost all of the available ground, thereby creating a busy all-over pattern.



Figure 17

Sampler, Jane Lucy Wakeman, (?) 1849

McCord M 973.77

Coloured silks in cross stitch and Algerian eye stitch on wool tammy cloth (identified by blue warp threads)

(32 x 32.5cm)

Photograph: Denyse Roy

While the formal organization of Quebec samplers, such as Julia Gray's work (figure 16) and Jane Lucy Wakeman's work (figure 17), can be described as permutations of the horizontal registers it must be noted that the individual segments demand the viewer's attention. Although related by the technique and the embroidered

frame each section is fully independent of the other.¹ The borders, the texts and the images must be read/interpreted individually, and motifs from one level should not be seen within the context of another.

Because of the reliance on existing models and social mores every sampler, although unique, can be situated within a formal and/or historical context. Although they share certain formal qualities, the choices regarding colours, patterns, materials, and techniques reflect the individual's education, aesthetic sense, and social position.

After studying a large number of samplers it becomes increasingly apparent that we are faced with a limited vocabulary of images, culled from a modicum of sources. In an era like ours, when originality is often the sole criteria for a work of art this is a difficult premise to accept. Yet art historians can turn to similar instances where works of art were based solely on extant models. During the Medieval period the scriptoriums of monastic workshops copied existing illuminations; "the most important of these books, however, were those master copies or exempla, intended for dissemination throughout the empire."² That they were copied is evident as one examines the extant works where the same images appear or are reinterpreted.

Both illuminated manuscripts and samplers rely on a rectangular format to display a combination of text and an image. Both are concerned with illuminating, flourishing or embroidering the image

¹This is most dramatically seen in the remaining "pieces" of samplers that have been physically divided amongst family members.

²Joachim Gaehde and F. Mutherich, *Carolingian Painting* (New York: George Braziller, 1976), 8.

field. Both were created by artists working within rigidly structured, insular, societies. Finally in both cases derivation and originality were assiduously linked to rebellion and non-conformity. These works relied on, and at the same time existed as, paradigms for others to study; didactic lessons made more palatable through their beauty.

Of the Quebec samplers found in public and private collections the most common are those composed primarily of text (alphabets, numerals and verses) as opposed to those with pictorial images and motifs. Although alphabets formed an important component of samplers from the sixteenth century, it was the practice of embroidering identifying initials and dates on all items of clothing and household napery that gave rise to the marking sampler.

The finest marking samplers are European and date from the eighteenth century although they remained in vogue in Europe and North America throughout the nineteenth century. Traditionally these samplers consisted of numerous alphabets and numerals, worked in a diverse range of fine stitches, suitable for marking and/or monograms. However, as the century progressed a change took place and the materials and techniques became less refined and ironically less suitable for marking. Many of these later samplers, including those found in Quebec, have been embroidered in worsted wool on loosely woven grounds. This would, therefore, have been a futile exercise in marking as both linens and fashions would require a fine thread and tiny durable stitches.

In France, where narrative samplers had never been popular, the needleworker's concern with the work-a-day function of embroidery

is reflected in the samplers. Even their nomenclature is much more specific, and French samplers, known as *abécédaires* or *marquoirs* display motifs, borders, and scripts in keeping with the household duties of marking and monogramming. A sampler worked at an Ursuline convent in France in 1840 (figure 18) exemplifies these and other domestic concerns of the embroiderer.¹

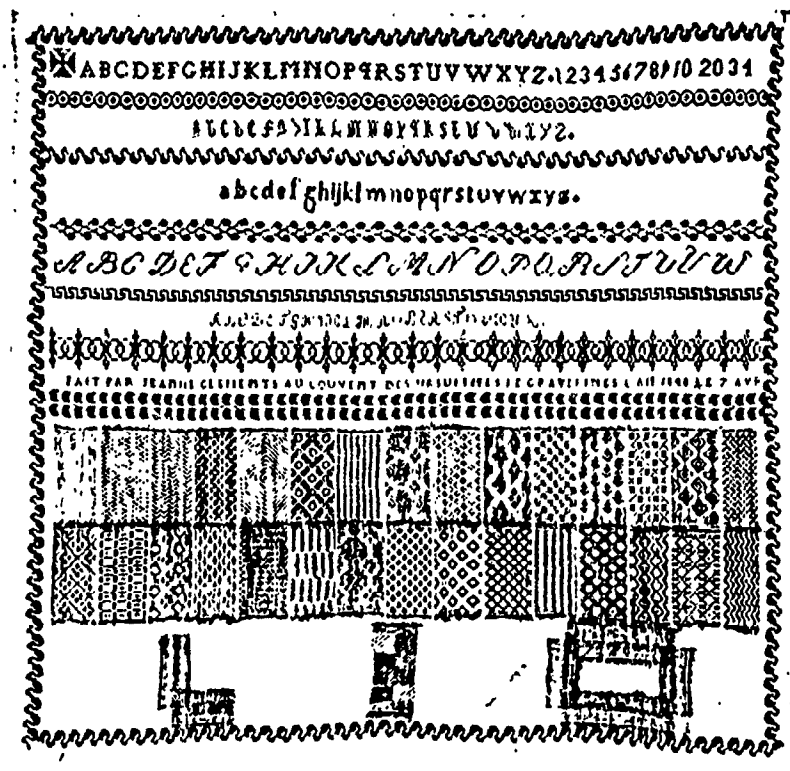


Figure 18

Sampler, Jeanne Clements, France, 1840

(Royal Scottish Museum 1959.57)

Red and white cotton in cross and darning stitches on cotton ground.

40.5 cm x 42.5 cm.

Published: N. Tarrant, *The Royal Scottish Museum Samplers*,

¹Illustrated in Naomi E. A. Tarrant, *The Royal Scottish Museum Samplers* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1978), fig 85.

Plate 85.

Here we find five meticulously worked alphabets and various simple borders suitable for embroidering household linens. As well, there are thirty-four darning sections, a common feature of Continental samplers. This red and white embroidery is an exercise in symmetry framed on four sides by a simple geometric border. The only line of text, which separates the marking and darning, identifies the embroiderer, the location, and the date: "FAIT PAR JEANNE CLEMENTS AU COUVENT DES URSULINES DE GRAVELINES L'AN 1840 LE 7 AVR.¹

In British, American and Canadian marking samplers of the early nineteenth century we witness a steady decline in both the varieties of alphabets and assortment of stitches. By the mid-nineteenth century samplers had become so popular that teachers, not versed in embroidery, referred to manuals for sewing instruction (figure 19). It is not uncommon to find samplers with only a single upper and lower case alphabet worked in ubiquitous cross stitch. Variations do exist with the embroiderer repeating each letter a specified number of times. The more promising students often incorporated a larger and more elaborate alphabet--Gothic or Italic--worked in Eyelet or Algerian eye stitch (the same stitch known by two names).

¹It remains a matter of speculation as to the meaning associated with specific dates found on samplers. As it is impossible to complete a sampler in a single day is it likely the day she began or finished the work. If it is the day of completion, my preference, then the majority of Quebec sampler makers appear to have finished their embroideries in the Spring. Perhaps a reminder of Canadian winters.



Figure 19

"The Needle Drill" from *A Manual for Teaching Plain Needlework in Schools* (1862).

Published: M Fawdry and D. Brown, *The Book of Samplers*, 82.

Upon first sight of a sampler it is the meticulous work, the variety of colours and the texture of the numerous alphabets that attracts the viewer's attention. Perhaps it is an identifiable text that holds one's interest or even, in some cases, the almost hypnotic repetition--AA BB CC--that retains one's interest. Whatever the initial attraction careful scrutiny of even the most unpretentious sampler reveals a great deal about the period and the embroiderer. It is impossible not to commiserate with the unidentified embroiderer whose lofty

intentions are belied by her finished sampler.¹ Beginning an embroidered alphabet with 19 A's followed by 12 B's she slowly digressed to a more reasonable single repeat of each letter.

The earliest Quebec marking samplers follow English models and usually contain the greatest number of stitches and the most varied of alphabets, and many include verses. In 1829 Elizabeth Forrester worked a long and narrow (43.2 x 19.7 cm.) sampler, that contains seventeen registers of lettering and as many rows of simple embroidery separating these bands.

In an unfinished sampler, attributed to Mary Jane Farrell circa 1845 we see a physical change has taken place.² The embroidery is wider and the verse is no longer worked as part of the bands, rather it appears below the lines of lettering. Although in poor physical condition this sampler is worthy of note because it contains one of the most popular verses found on samplers, and proves the availability of and reliance on patterns.³ In this verse we see once more that moral virtues are sought through the exercise of embroidery. Titled "LINES" it reads:

Jesus permit thy gracious name to stand
As the First efforts of an infant's hand
And while her fingers oer this canvass move
Engage her tender heart to seek thy love
With thy dear children let her Share apart [sic]

¹ McCord Museum M 15491. Unsigned sampler ca. 1845

² Sampler, Mary Jane Farrell, Kingston Ontario ?, c. 1845. (McCord M17427). Coloured silk in Algerian eye, crossed corner, and cross stitch on loosely woven linen. (Small area of unrelated wool flame stitch in lower corner) (52.5 x 38 cm.)

³ This popular verse is found on English, American and Canadian samplers. Bolton and Coe, 319, state that the earliest instance recorded on an American sampler was 1793. They also note that the verse was written by Rev. John Newton, the Rector of St. Mary's Woolnooth, London. No date is given.

And write thy name thyself upon her hea[rt]

In 1863 "Sarah A. Sapey Aged 6" repeated the first four lines of the same verse and included schematized flowering plants and hearts as well as a basket of fruit, two diamond shaped trees (each tree supporting a bird--like a Christmas angel--at the very top) and two dogs sporting collars. It is likely she chose the motifs from an embroidery patternbook. The unevenness of the embroidery, which is worked only in cross stitch, is seen throughout the work.¹ Sarah's difficulties are most prominent in the verse where the letter "S" proves to be Sarah's nemesis. Unlike many of her contemporaries Sarah has attempted to mend her errors and as a result of the unpicking and re-embroidering they have become more obvious in their confused and messy state. Although she has framed her sampler with a simple line of cross stitches she has included a small passage of meandering strawberries as a horizontal band.

Usually the subject matter found on samplers is based on contemporary religious and social indoctrination. Whereas the Lords Prayer, the Ten Commandments and even verses such as "Jesus permit thy gracious name", "Self Government", "Virtue" and "Modesty" are self explanatory a small percentage remain obscure. What for instance, did Jane Lucy Wakeman, aged 21 have in mind when she meticulously embroidered (figure 20) "Air Hatch" on her sampler of 1849?²

¹Sampler, Sarah A. Sapey, 1863, McCord Museum M972.82

²Sampler, Jane Lucy Wakeman, 1849, McCord Museum M973.77.

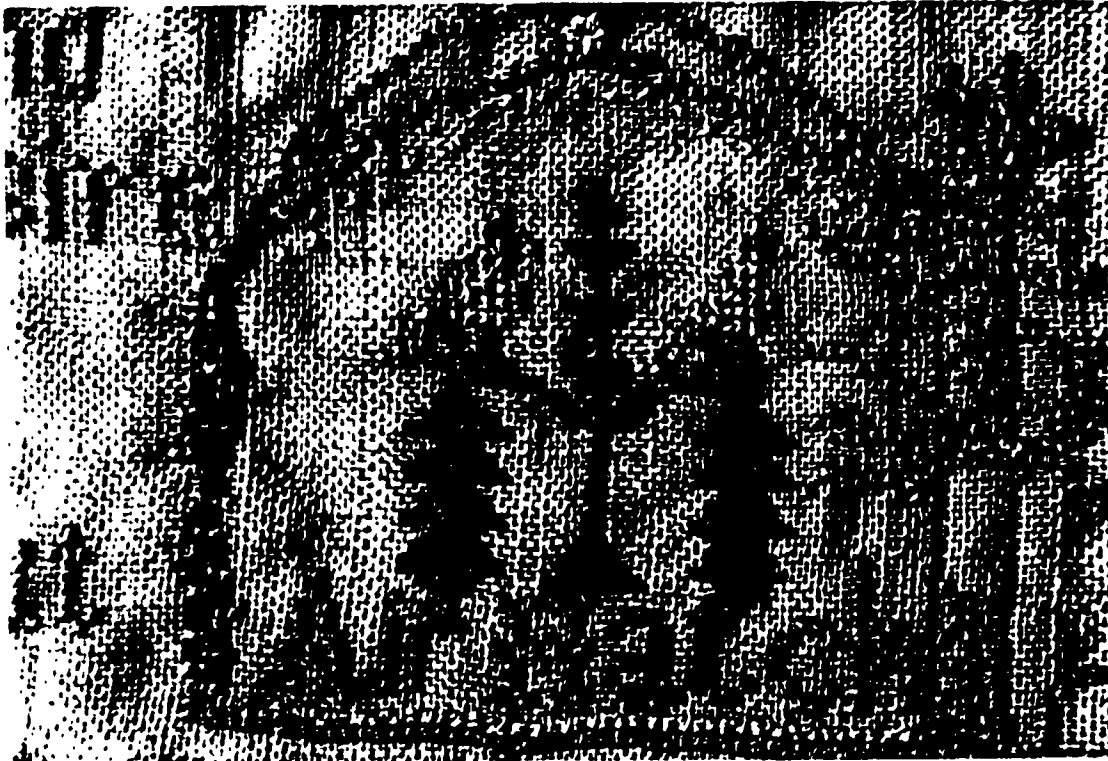


Figure 20

Sampler, Jane Lucy Wakeman, 1849 Detail of Figure 17
(thread count 53 x 51 per inch)

Photograph: Denyse Roy

Although Quebec samplers with texts are the most common, the second group, those that incorporate or feature pictorial motifs as well as texts are the most familiar to the public for it is in this category that we find the familiar house samplers. Like the texts

these images contain multi-layered meanings and must be identified and interpreted. Popular symbols such as the cross or representations of bible stories need little explanation, yet other motifs are not so obvious. Were they chosen for their religious content? Was the religious symbolism even recognized?

Is it a personal iconography? For example, did Willie Lewis "aged 10 yrs" choose to include, along with other symbols, the arrow, anchor, lion, and key in his sampler (BCHS) because they were not overtly feminine; or were they merely chosen from a pattern book that presented innumerable small motifs. It is also possible to argue that he was already aware, in 1880, of the religious significance of these symbols: anchor (hope); keys (St. Peter); arrow (St. Sebastian) especially in view of the fact that William P. Lewis was to spend his life dedicated to the Anglican church.¹

Equally fascinating, but more difficult to prove, would be a solely Christian interpretation of specific motifs. For instance the meandering strawberry or carnation motif occur on the borders of many samplers and art historians have successfully argued that these flowers--found on sixteenth century embroidery and even earlier paintings--are symbolic of Christian virtues. Nonetheless, it is difficult to assess whether nineteenth century embroiderers had access to this knowledge.² Although dictionaries of Christian signs

¹Sampler, Willie Lewis, BCHS, 79-55. Samplers made by boys are atypical and this is the only example of one worked in Quebec. William P. Lewis [1870-1965] grew up in Iberville; graduated from McGill and Montreal Diocesan College in 1895; appointed Canon of Lachine's Christ Church Cathedral 1959. Information from the Brome County Historical Society Records.

²Elizabeth Haig, *Floral Symbolism of the Great Masters* (London: 1916), 269. The strawberry is described as a "very perfect fruit with neither thorns nor stone...flowers are of the whiteness of innocence and its leaves almost of the

and symbols were becoming popular during this period it is more likely that the symbolism would have been drawn from personal experience or perhaps the more popular flower dictionaries.¹ For the most part a variety of patterns would have been readily available and the embroiderer was free to interpret those she found appealing. Perhaps a private symbolism exists and we are not meant to be privy to the details.

Fortunately this uncertainty is not the case in what I have identified as the earliest known (1764) Quebec sampler (figure 21)² as here the symbols and text complement one another. In this embroidery a number of the stylistic characteristics that appear peculiar to Quebec samplers are already in evidence. The materials are coarser than those used in Europe³; the images are more whimsical; the symmetry is slightly askew; the technique haphazard; letters are reversed (N and S) and remain uncorrected; spacing is inconsistent; and spelling questionable.

sacred trefoil form and since it grows upon the ground, there is no possibility of its being the dread Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge." The Carnation, Pink, Dianthus [Divine Flower] has similar meaning as the Rose in Christian symbolism.

¹Florigraphy "Language of flowers" was a popular nineteenth century pastime. The first text published in France in 1818 *Le Language des Fleurs* by Mme. Charlotte de la Tour [Louise Cortambert] met with enormous success and was immediately followed by English dictionaries. Florigraphy was at the height of fashion in England in the mid century and remained popular for a longer period in America. From Kate Greenaway's *The Language of Flowers* 1884 we discover the following. Carnation: Deep Red - Alas! for my poor heart; striped - refusal; yellow - disdain; pink - Woman's love.

²This sampler, in a private Montreal collection, was brought to my attention by Jacqueline Beaudoin-Ross of Montreal's McCord Museum. It had undergone no conservation or restoration work when I examined it and several of the motifs and one section of text are impossible to discern without a magnifying glass.

³The ground appears to be hand spun and hand woven. The threads of various weights and ply of silks.

The sampler (Private collection) was completed in 1764 and contains rather badly faded and discoloured sections. The wide variety of stitches is consistent with its early date and include cross, tent, satin, florentine, stem, and chain stitch as well as French knots. These have been worked in various weights of coloured silk threads on linen.

The image field is divided equally into two horizontal oval elements. The upper oval, which is slightly off centre, contains a text and the lower level various religious and secular motifs. These are separated by what appears to be an unembroidered band but is in fact a badly faded panel that reads "*La couronne du Roi*". In the heavenly upper level, the oval contains the Lord's Prayer *Notre Père* surrounded by a crown of thorns, the iconography a visual representation of the *couronne du Roi*.

The lower section reiterates the oval shape through the angles created by the angels and the pyramid-shaped evergreens. In this lower section two registers of figures and motifs have been placed heraldically along a vertical axis. In the upper level, forming the top of the oval, two angels pull back a curtain revealing a monstrance/cross on an altar. Beneath each angel a tiny lion turns its head to stare out towards the viewer.

Below the religious images we find more secular imagery. Directly under the cross one sees a large flower in a tiny basket supported by a table. To the immediate left of the flower is a white swan and cygnet which face their counterparts on the right--a black bird and her young. These in turn are framed by flowering vines. Above the

birds but separated from the lions by a narrow border are two indistinguishable *fleur de lys*.



Figure 21

Sampler Mary St eepy, Quebec, 1764.

Private Montreal Collection

Coloured silks (twist and floss) in satin, stem, tent, square, lazy daisy, and cross stitch on linen.

(29 x27 cm)

Photograph: McCord Museum

The lower section of the oval is contained by the two conifers that appear in the bottom corners of the sampler. Although the tree on the left has an irregular contour the conventional pyramid shape prevails. On this evergreen the branches are in danger of breaking under the weight of an enormous bird and squirrel, while on the right-hand tree a bird, although huge, appears more surefooted than its counterparts.¹

Under the trees at the base of the embroidery is the final confirmation that this is indeed the realm of the natural world: at the left an embroidered name and date-- "mary/ st_eepey / 1764"; at the right, under the branches of the opposite tree--a crown. Has the embroiderer found it necessary to augment her message "la couronne du Roi" by including what appears to be secular crown?

Where the French text and the religious motifs might lead one to assume that this is a work by a French Catholic embroiderer the inclusion of the final verse of the prayer as well as the name Mary make one question this hypothesis.² Added to this are the formal concerns, specifically the interest in the naturalistic narrative details, that identify this sampler as part of the English tradition. It is probable that she was a daughter born of a mixed (French/English) marriage. Whether she worked it at home under the tutelage of her

¹The squirrel is typical of French [France] embroidery as it appears as a monochrome silhouette; while the bird, with its elaborate plumage, worked in polychromed satin stitch is much more naturalistic and thus reflects English or American tastes.

²The MMFA has an 1810 English sampler [952.D1.73] that contains not only the Lord's Prayer but features two angels similar to the Quebec sampler. A similar pair of angels appear in a house sampler worked by "Jessie Greaves 1857" from the Lennoxville Museum.

mother or at a convent using her own materials and ideas is unknown.¹

Another sampler, created in Montreal in 1771 shows less concern that the text be augmented by the image. This embroidery was worked in red and green silk on a linen ground by Elizabeth Judah.² In this embroidery (Gershon and Fenster Gallery of Jewish Art) we witness once again the taste for English embroidery traditions for this sampler was worked by a young Jewish girl.³ Although some samplers worked by Jewish girls in America incorporate the Hebrew alphabet the majority share the popular vocabulary of mainstream embroidery. They do not, of course, include specific Christian allusions or quotations. Elizabeth incorporated several bands of schematized embroidery within the main body of the sampler. A register of pine trees and baskets divides the text while a meandering floral border of alternating carnations and roses frames the top and two sides of this square embroidery.⁴

The Central portion of this embroidery is a biblical text, the major section essentially a poetic interpretation of Exodus Chapter XX. Similar renditions of the Ten Commandments exist on both English

¹Although we do not know where Mary went to school records in the archives of the Quebec Ursuline Convent show that in 1761 there were English students among the boarders. *Glimpses*, 294-95.

²Elizabeth was born into a prominent Montreal Jewish family. The sampler is in the Gershon and Rebecca Fenster Gallery of Jewish Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma. An illustration appears in an exhibition catalogue: *The Jewish Museum/Museum of American Folk Art, The Jewish Heritage in American Folk Art* (New York: Universe Books, 1984), 33.

³In 1639 when Jasper Mayne comments that school mistresses had taken over the practice of teaching needlework in his book *The Citye Match* he states "Your school mistress, that can expound, and teaches/ To knit in Chaldee, and work Hebrew samplers." cited by Averil Colby, 118.

⁴This calls into question the hypothesis that embroiderers were aware of traditional Christian iconography.

and American samplers once again stressing the popularity of English samplery traditions.¹

EXODUS CHAP XX

Thou shalt not have more gods than [me]
[before] no image bow thy knee
Take not the name of god in vain
Nor dare the Sabbath day profane
Give both thy parents honour due
Take heed that thou no murder do
Abstain from words and deeds un/clean
Nor steel tho thou art poor and mean
Nor make a wilful lie, nor love it
What is thy neighbours, dare not co/vet
With all thy soul love G-d above
And as thyself thy neighbour love²

The border appears to have caused some difficulties as the corners are irregular and the bottom edge has been left unfinished. This is emphasized in the lower left corner where the border turns in on itself and is abandoned to be replaced by another more stylized honeysuckle [?] pattern. Although the motifs she does complete are exquisite, this work could not be seen as an exemplar of technique, for there are too many aborted passages. At the bottom, outside the embroidered frame we read: "Elizabeth Judah finished this work __,6 1771 __."³

Green and red embroidery was favoured by both English and North Americans during the eighteenth century. A number of

¹This interpretation has been attributed to the Reverend Isaac Watt's [1674-1748] *Divine Songs for Children*. Bolton and Coe, 304. In a sampler dated 1802 the only variation is seen in first two lines which read 1. Thou shalt have no God but me / 2. Before no Idoll bow thy knee.

²Words appearing in square brackets are missing where ground or threads have deteriorated.

³An underline-dash _ approximates each letter/numeral that is indecipherable.

similarly coloured English band samplers survive in Canadian collections. The Royal Ontario Museum has a fine example dated 1737¹ and another is in the Brome County collection. This latter embroidery of red and green linen on linen has been signed and dated "Isabella / Reid*Betty*McGregor* / Parkhill*May*13*1766*"². That Quebec embroiderers had access to similar works or patterns is evinced by the number of samplers in the collections that exhibit a family likeness. Although the Quebec samplers from the nineteenth century are embroidered in red and green there are visible differences. Unlike the European embroideries they do not have the rows of stylized flowers nor are they worked in linen threads, rather coarse worsted wool form letters and numbers on the rough handspun linen grounds. The only dated work among those in the McCord's collection is a fragment of an English sampler that reads "KK*AGE*14*1772."³

The majority of samplers in Quebec collections date from the nineteenth century, and of those there are none with identifiable "Canadian" themes. None contain human figures, so there can be no Wolfes or Montcalms. The impending weight of Confederation was not an issue with Margret E. Norton (figure 28) when she completed her sampler in "Montreal Juneth12* / 1867."⁴ Only the snow flakes

¹Band sampler, 1737, ROM 968.203.2

²Sampler, Isabella Reid and Betty McGregor, 1766, BCHS, 67-91. Both examples (RCM and BOMC) are worked in red and green and gray bands. Similar use of cross stitch, outline stitch.

³McCord Museum Collection. The fragment that remains has been intentionally cut and it is possible that it was the basis of a family dispute and was divided among remaining family members. This is not unfortunately an uncommon occurrence.

⁴Sampler, Margret E. Norton, 1867, McCord Museum, M.974.55.

could be regarded as "Canadian content". In her sampler (figure 22) Lilius Molson mentions that on July 21, 1877 she was on board the S.S. Nooya but there is no image to support this statement.¹

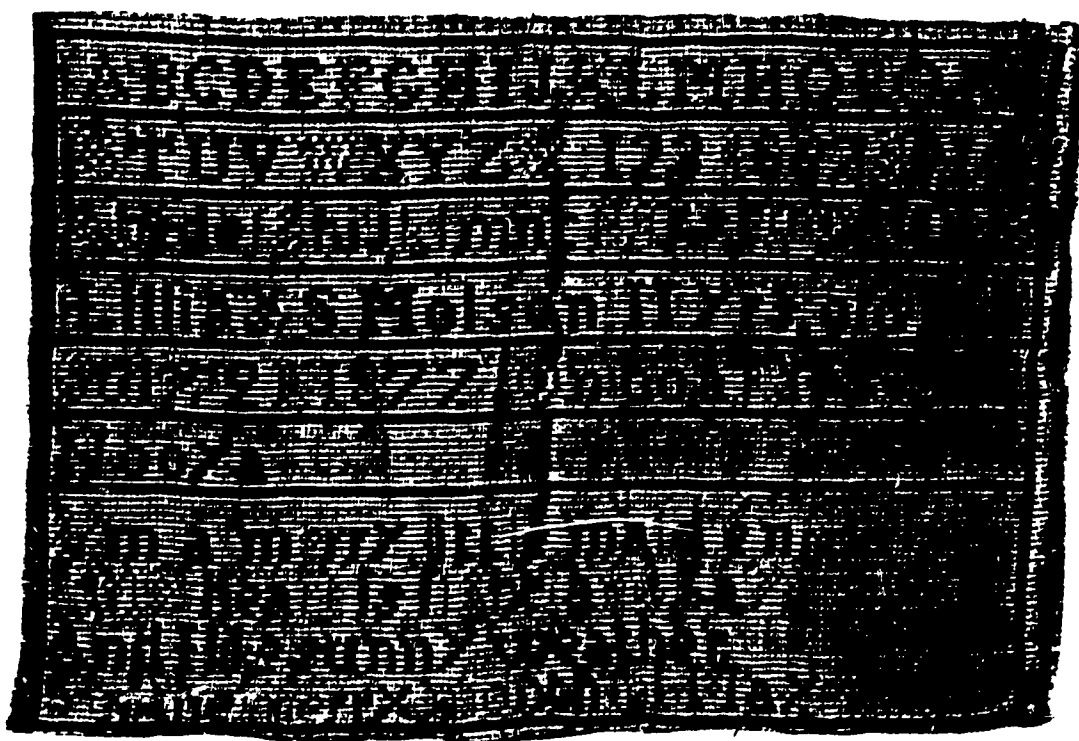


Figure 22

Sampler, Lilius S. Molson, Quebec, 1877

McCord M19727

Coloured wool in cross stitch on penelope canvas
(27 x 40 cm)

Photograph: Denyse Roy

¹Sampler, Lilius Molson, 1877, McCord, M.M19727. The Molsons started the first steamship line and the S.S. Nooya was their pleasure craft. It was the first private steamship on the St. Lawrence.

When we do find an identified embroidered landscape completed by a student at the Ursuline Convent in Quebec City it is disconcerting to read the label: *NEW YORK FROM WEEHAWK*. This is an embroidered picture not a sampler and was completed in 1847 by Mary Connolly after an aquatint engraving published in New York in 1823.¹

Quebec samplers do not provide us with recognizable landscapes, however, there are a number that include familiar architectural structures--houses. While not common, samplers displaying houses do comprise the most visible of thematic groups. Houses were first seen on English samplers in the mid-eighteenth century and continued to be a popular motif through the mid-nineteenth century. According to Bolton and Coe the first house on an American sampler appeared in 1766.² This popularity is reiterated in an Italian exhibition catalogue *'Imparaticci' = 'Samplers'* (1986) where a chapter cataloguing the recurring decorative motifs reveals that the majority of houses appear on works by British and American embroiderers. (The exhibition included no Canadian samplers.)³ To

¹Collection: Betty Ring, *American Needlework Treasures*, 105. Although this vista is American it must be noted that prints were rare and the same images were worked in convent schools in New York and Quebec. In another case, the same subject--"A dog, a Cat and a Cottage"--were embroidered in wool on cotton canvas by "Miss Zoe Van Antwerp. Ursuline Convent N. Y. 1850" [Private coll.] and "par M. L. Masse. Couvent de Berthier 1844" [McCord]. The former is cited by Robert Bishop and Patricia Coblentz, *The World of Antiques, Art and Architecture in Victorian America* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd, 1979) 324. Illustration 404. The latter is in the McCord Collection. Both have been worked on canvas, but the Quebec embroidery has been cut from its ground and appliqued to a moiré background.

²Bolton and Coe, 28.

³Maria Fossi Todorow, introduction, *'Imparaticci' = 'Samplers': Esercizi di ricamo delle bambine europee ed americane dal Seicento all'Ottocento*. In the chapter entitled "Motivi decorativi ricorrenti" there is a sub-heading entitled: Casa. Although houses appear on several continental samplers they

date none of the houses on Quebec samplers have been identified as specific buildings yet even so they do provide us with insights into the period.¹

In Quebec "house samplers" were popular from 1800 to 1860 although houses also appear infrequently in later embroideries. The majority of the edifices are located in the central panel where they are placed on a mound or hillock, or even anchored by a sturdy fence to a small rectangle of cultivated lawn. Unlike the palatial structures of Britain or the elegant residences of the American colonies Canadian embroideries present houses of a less pretentious style. All appear to be country homes, none is set within the context of an urban environment. Thus these samplers reflect an interdependence on two notions: the eighteenth century idea of gentility and femininity and the nineteenth century belief in the family unit centered around the home.²

The most elaborate house wrought on a sampler in a Quebec collection is a three storey Georgian house with two wings and impressive forecourt (figure 23).³ The architecture⁴, the early date

are only very small embroidered motifs or silhouettes whereas in English, American, and Canadian embroideries when the house is included it becomes a central image.

¹Scholars have identified specific buildings in selected American and English samplers. In other cases the building has been identified by the embroiderer

²The cultural and social history of the notion of 'home' as separate from 'house' is argued successfully by Witold Rybczynski in *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (Markham Ont:Penguin Books, 1987). In essence the author posits that where the idea of home is foreign to the French it is all important to Northern Europeans especially the English: *Home is where the Heart is; A Man's Home is his Castle; There's no place like Home; Home Sweet Home*. This would account for the popularity of house/home on samplers and go far in explaining the connotations that are inherent in this image.

³Sampler, Jean Stevenson, 1802, McCord, M942.3.

⁴Certainly historians agree that there were no similar structures in Canada at this time.

(1802), and the large format and the appearance of crowns makes it likely that the work is British.¹ However there is no documentation proving that this is the case. From the embroidered text we know that that it was completed by Jean Stevenson the year she wed, 1802. One could argue that her age (probably around twenty) would explain both the quality of the embroidery and the elaborateness of the design. Further with the increased immigration from Britain and the United States many young women arrived in Canada already versed in the ornamentals and therefore it could have been embroidered in this country!²

In this large embroidery the grey stone house occupies the upper half of the linen ground. It is separated from the lower section by a forecourt or semi-circular lawn and drive. There is no attempt at foreshortening. The house is presented frontally, like an architect's rendering, while the lawn is seen from a bird's eye perspective as a massive flattened semi-circle or 'basket-handle arch'. A tiny cottage appears on either side of the lawn, and since this sampler celebrates her wedding one hopes that this alludes to fact she was marrying to the manor house. Mirror images of the stylized peacocks, birds, baskets of flowers, hearts, crowns, and flowering shrubs appear above the wings of the main house and on either side of the framed text which, given the occasion, rather solemnly admonishes the viewer to:

¹An English sampler of 1821 in the Philadelphia Museum Collection, contains the same border of carnations, similar flowering shrubs, crowns and initials. Sampler, M. Bartlemor. PMA 69-288-136.

²Further research is necessary before these suppositions can be considered seriously.

Redeem the mispent time that's past
Live each Day as it were thy last
And of thy talents take great care
For thy last Day thyself prepare
Live Mindful of Death

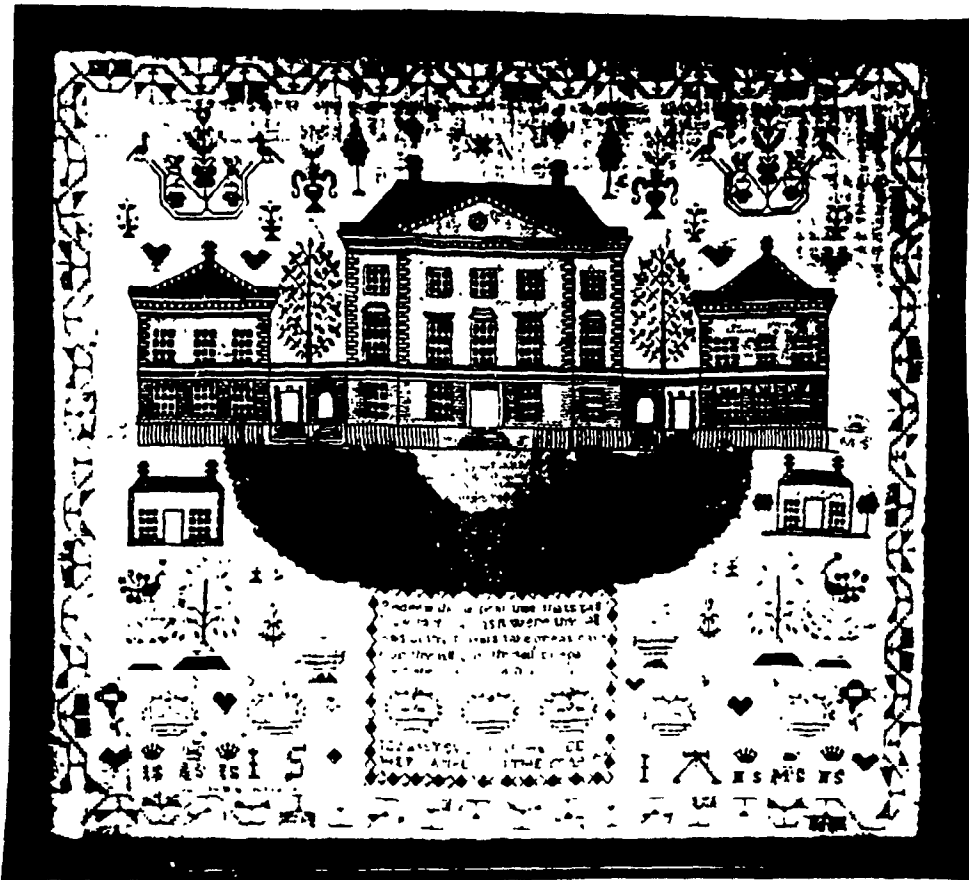


Figure 23

Sampler, Jean Stevenson, (England/America) 1801
McCord M942.3
coloured silk and silk chenille on linen
Photograph: Denyse Roy

Monograms and initials placed beneath crowns, undoubtedly refer to family members. These are included along the lower edge of the

embroidery and beside the house. The image field is framed with a meandering pattern of stylized carnations. Here again there are problems with the corners, which suggests the embroiderer copied her design from a band sampler or a pattern that was not meant to be turned.

Certainly this is a marvelous example of silk embroidery on linen, yet there is an awkward element created by the use of chenille yarn. Whereas the house is obviously more important it is the expanse of brown and ochre lawn that attracts the eye. Here the weight of the individual thread, the physical depth created by the technique, the mass of colour and the curved shape seem at odds with the fineness and geometric precision that distinguish the rest of the embroidery.¹

A Quebec sampler which displays a different attitude towards a home was completed two years later by Mary Ann Cushen (figure 24).² Here we have a combination of points of view: close and distant. We see both the front and side of a small two storey pink house with mullioned windows. Although the house occupies a position of importance, the lower central section of the sampler, it is the border that holds our attention. This is an elaborate, and technically perfect, meandering border of stylized flattened yellow roses and pink rose buds. Interestingly each corner contains a naturalistic rose bud and calyx supported by a stem with two finely veined leaves, oddly these are not the leaves of a rose bush.

¹Because this work is still within its original frame I have not had access to the reverse side, which would allow me to see if the colour has changed.

²Sampler, Mary Ann Cushen, 1803, McCord, (Recent Acquisition)

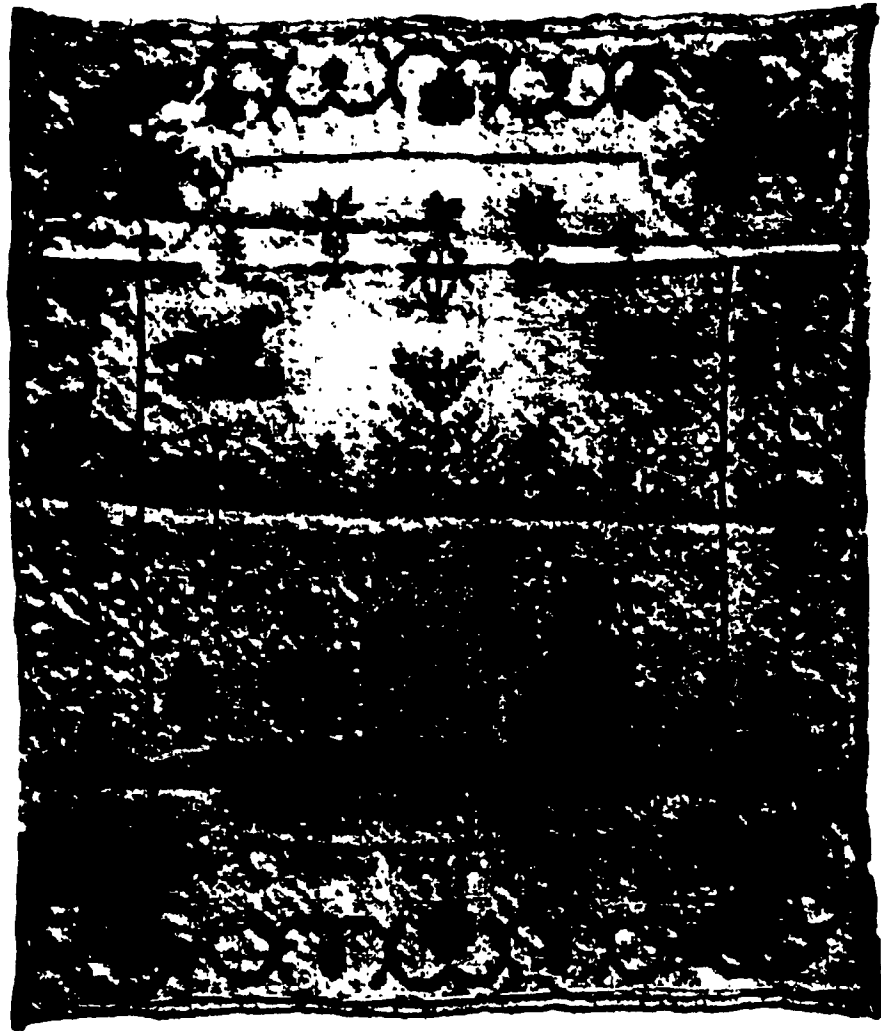


Figure 24

Sampler, Mary Ann Cushen, 1803

McCord M85.10.01

Multicoloured silk Linen

Photograph: Denyse Roy

The artist's concern with naturalism of the rose buds is at odds with the stilted motifs found in the upper section of the central field of the sampler. Once again we see that a vertical axis has been created through the use of mirror images. The axis is defined by a bird resting on a flowering plant, below this a flowering shrub, and finally, at the bottom the pink house. In the uppermost register a tiny schematized conifer and a pink flower appear on either side of

the bird and plant. Below two blue birds with yellow wings stand in nests facing one another. Stylized flowering plants and small trees appear on either side of the shrub. None are anchored to a ground and thus appear removed from the securely planted pink house.

A line of blue stitches separates the border from the central section of the embroidery and divides the text "MARY ANN CUSHEN FIND THIS PIECE / IN HER 11 YEAR IN THE YEAR 1803". This same blue line defines the border of the grassy surface which supports the pink house. The house is approached by a U-shaped path that leads from the front gate, around a conical shaped tree, to the front door.¹ Perhaps the care taken in representing the fence and gate means that this was, indeed, a particular house.

The house remained a popular subject and became a familiar image on Quebec samplers. As in England most girls were required to work at least one other sampler before attempting the more complex house sampler. The McCord Museum has two samplers worked by Julia Gray. In 1826 at age eight Julia Gray completed the first. It (figure 1) consists of upper and lower case alphabets, numbers 1-19, and the verse:

On Children

Children like tender osiers take their bow
As they are Fashioned so they grow²

¹The appearance of these two trees appear to reflect the eighteenth century fashion for topiary.

²Sampler, Julia Gray, 1826. McCord Museum M21376. While some verses were likely inventions of the embroiderers, such as Polly Polk, the majority were culled from school texts, which included hymnals and the bible. This particular verse appeared in an American school text:

Her second sampler (figure 16), is signed and dated "Julia Gray aged 11 years October 6th 1829." It contains an elaborate alphabet worked in Algerian eye stitch, suitable for monograms, no numerals and a verse:

Self Government

May I govern my passions with absolute
sway
And grow wiser and better as life weas away.¹

Once again, we see a lack of concern for perspective as both the front and side of the house rest on a single foundation line. Yet, orthogonals are present, if imperfectly so, rendering the white picket fence that surrounds the beginnings of a garden. A path leads from the front stoop to a closed gate. The position of the shutters, some opened, some closed, on the centrally planned house have been carefully noted. Although Julia signed this work it was never completed and one wonders if more autobiographical information would have been included.

Another unfinished and undated sampler (figure 9) worked in various weights of silk and wool on mustard coloured linen contains the images of two houses.² Once again the embroidery is divided into three registers: the top third contains alphabets and numbers 1-9; the middle section includes two verses and an unfinished basket of flowers; the lower section the houses. Although the intention of the artist appears to have been to create two similar houses only one is completed. Thus where each of the two houses should be shaded

¹Sampler, Julia Gray, 1829, McCord Collection M.21377.

²Sampler, ca. 1850, McCord, M4577.

by a tree the house on the right is accompanied only by the trunk and is perched upon a partially completed hillock. While the houses are identical in form the embroiderer has chosen to complete one in a blue outline with red windows and the other in red with blue windows. Only the left house presents a solid white facade, suggesting clapboard. A house of a different sort is found on a brilliantly coloured sampler (figure 25) worked by Mary McLean.¹ This undated sampler is an interesting puzzle because of the conflicting messages encoded in it. Initially one notices the shape--long and narrow--reminiscent of the earlier band samplers. As well it contains nine rows of letters divided by assorted bands and lozenges of embroidery. These rows take up approximately two thirds of the sampler. The lower third contains randomly placed embroidered motifs, including a house, and the artists name in an intricate red and gold frame. Nevertheless, the brilliant colours [aniline dye] combined with a sense of aesthetics that can best be described as *horror vacui* places this sampler within the reign of Victorian taste ca. 1870.

¹It is possible that the surname is McLear.

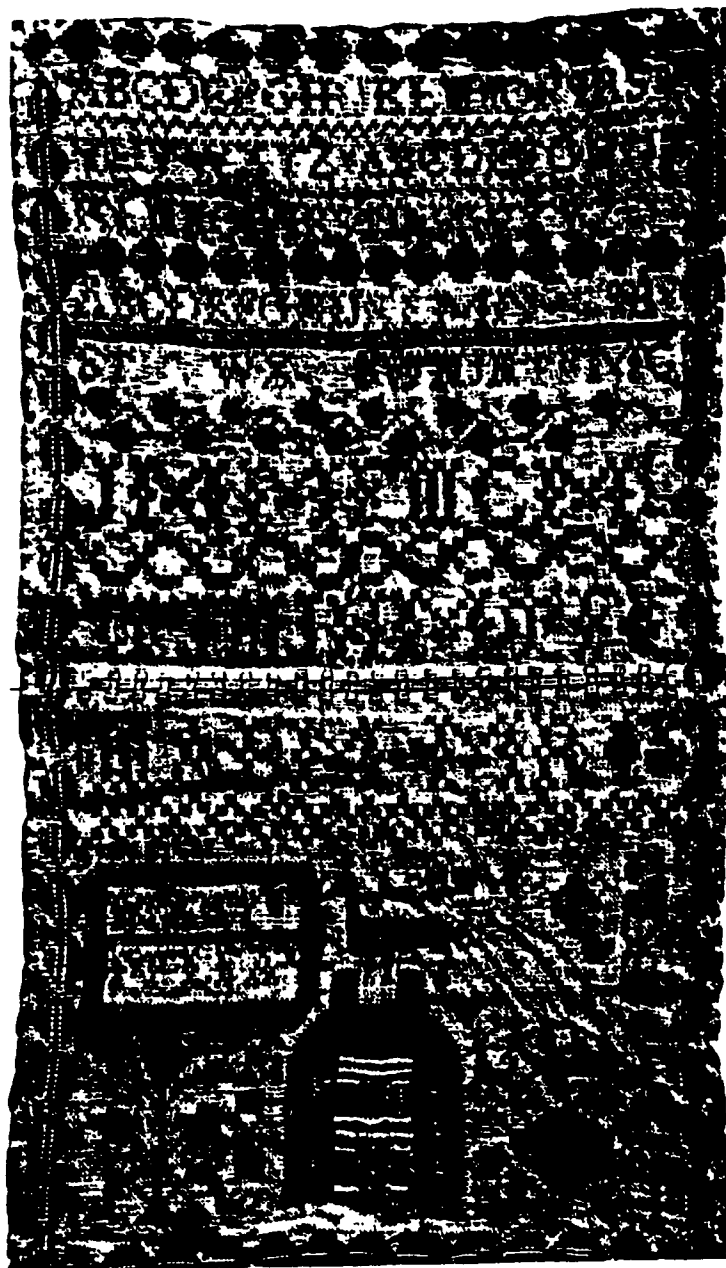


Figure 25

Sampler, Mary McLea[n] ca. 1870

McCord Museum M984.160.2

Coloured silks on linen

Photograph: Denyse Roy

The house, worked in a variety of stitches and conflicting colours, is not placed on a ground line. However, its position, centrally located above the bottom edge of the geometric border provides a

'foundation'. Unlike the earlier house samplers this one provides the viewer with conflicting information and thus appears much more naive in its execution. The central portion of the building appears to be only two stories in height while main body of the house supports three floors of windows; or perhaps we are seeing the front and both sides simultaneously. Adding to a sense of whimsy is a gigantic peacock that hovers above the roof while a tiny blue deer with orange spots appears over its back. An hour glass, tea pot and cups, birds, flowers, hearts, beasts, initials and numbers fill the remaining spaces.

Perhaps a silk embroidery of a sphinx created in 1826 by Mary Bint can be considered to contain the most 'exotic' image found on a sampler in the Quebec collections which were examined (figure 26). The sphinx is the only 'foreign' motif on this sampler, but its appearance marks the contemporary fascination with "Egyptian taste".¹ Once again, the physical division between the image and text is typical of pictorial samplers. A single uppercase alphabet and the numbers 1-4 are worked above a verse which reads:

No glittering ornament or show
Will ought avail in grief or pain
Only from inward worth can flow
Delight that ever shall remain²

¹Richard G. Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments and Meaning, 1808-1858*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978)

²Sampler, Mary Bint, 1826, BCHS, 73.14.

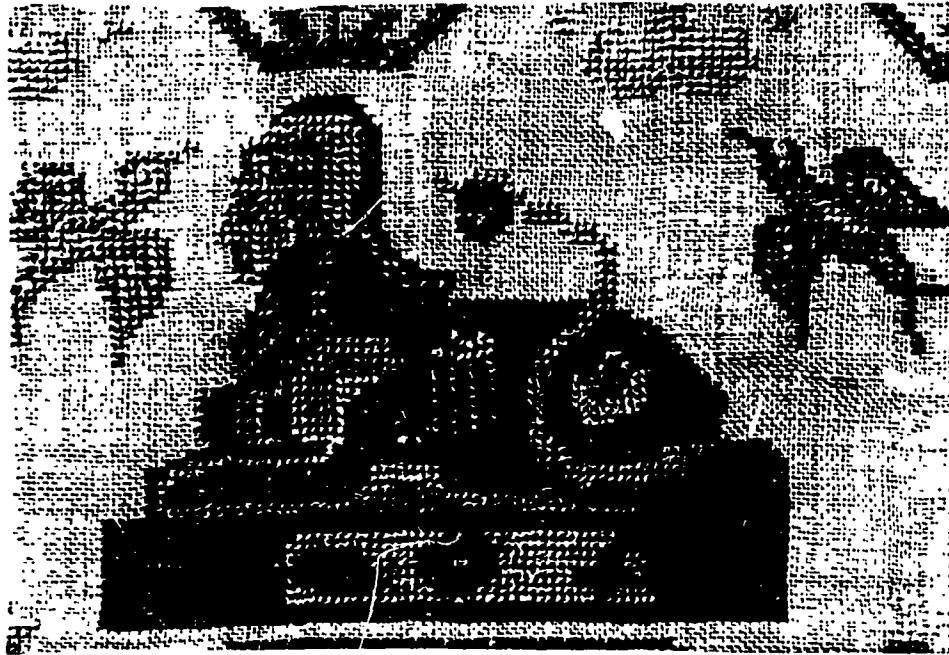


Figure 26

Detail, sampler, Mary Bint, Quebec, 1826
Brome County Historical Society 73-14
Coloured silk on wool tammy.

Separating the motifs from the text is a meandering band of cream and gold flowers. The central image the sphinx, facing left, is rendered in various shades of browns, ochres, and creams and rests majestically on a platform. To either side we see symmetrically paired motifs: butterflies, swallows, dogs, and flowers. Below the Sphinx, in a simple embroidered frame we read, "Mary Bint/Aged 13 Years/December 26th 1826". The sampler is framed by an unusual embroidered border of what appear to be linden flowers. Whether the sphinx is a reference to the "glittering ornament or show" mentioned in the text is not obvious. Nevertheless, it is a record of the eccentric subject matter that would appeal to Victorian needleworkers.

The diversity of available materials and multiformity of samplery in Quebec is reflected in the variety of samplers created throughout the mid-century. Framed samplers continued to be popular and two works made in Montreal in 1840 (figure 27) and 1867 (figure 28) show that the same form remained very much in vogue. These embroideries contain a number of similarities in composition despite the twenty-seven years that separate them. The earlier sampler by "Esther * Matthew / September * The /17th * 1840 * Montreal," has been worked in fine wool on linen.¹ The later work by "Margret E Norton */ Montreal June th 17*/ 1867," is embroidered in coarse worsted wool on widely spaced penelope canvas.² In both we see horizontal, as opposed to vertical, formats and each contains a framed text within the upper half of the sampler. While the earlier embroidery is framed by geometric lozenges and diamonds the 1867 work is enclosed by more traditional meandering bands of flowers.

Inside the embroidered frames the various motifs have been rendered in a flat un-naturalistic manner. Both samplers include a number of common images that appear to have been culled from the same source, and it is possible both were made at the same school. These flattened and stylized flowers and plants have been arranged symmetrically and in most cases appear as mirror images to the left and right of the central flowering plants. Esther has included two butterflies in her work while Margret has embroidered two multicoloured birds and two dogs. Neither include a verse and only the 1867 sampler contains an alphabet (A-W).

¹Sampler, Esther Matthew, 1840, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 976.Dt.1.

²Sampler, Margaret E. Norton, 1867, McCord, M974.55.

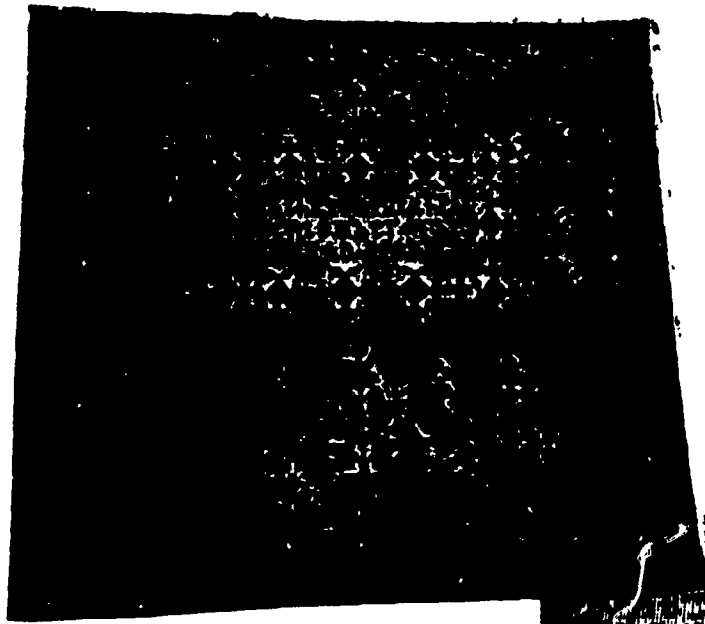


Figure 27

Esther Matthew, 1840 Montreal
MMFA 976.Dt.1
Coloured wool in cross stitch on linen
47 x 43 cm

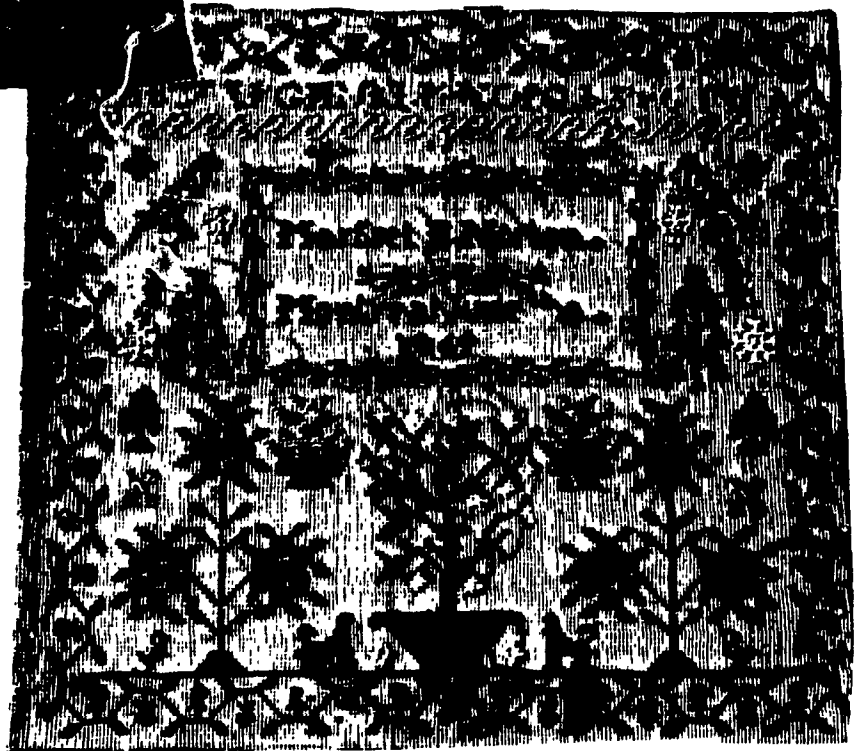


Figure 28

Margaret E. Norton, 1867.
McCord M987.55
Coloured wool in cross
stitch on penelope canvas
40.5 x 44 cm.

At practically the same time that Esther and Margret were making their academic samplers to be framed two unknown embroiderers were creating more prosaic works. The two samplers

(BCHS) typify the ubiquitous marking samplers that were being maligned, during this period. Although worked an ocean and twenty-three years apart the similarities between the works are obvious. The earlier work, an English embroidery of 1843 (Hailsham School), and the Canadian work of 1866 (A.M.H to J.H) are similar formally.¹ Both are worked horizontally in a single colour on linen. Both contain an upper case and lower case alphabet, numbers and a date. While the one "credits" the school the other served as a gift "A.M.H. to J.H." The only difference is that the earlier work provides two variations of 'm' and 'n' and writes the lower case 's' as 'f' while the Canadian work acknowledges both 's' and 'f'.

Quebec embroiderers throughout the nineteenth century had access to the most recent publications on materials and patterns, nonetheless they chose to ignore American and English ideologies concerning the education of women and the role of embroidery. Instead they were content to appropriate an existing art form in order to perpetuate traditional values. Despite this air of conservatism, the finished works are not merely slavish copies, rather they display the idiosyncrasies that are peculiar to much of Quebec art. Through the study of these samplers and the context in which they were made we are able to gain greater insights into both the social conditions and the production of art within Quebec.

¹Sampler, Hailsham School, England, 1843, BCHS. Sampler, AMH, Quebec, 1866, BCHS.

CONCLUSION

The acceptance of samplery in Quebec gained impetus on the arrival of English settlers during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. From this period the art form continued to grow in popularity within the communities that supported an English population. Samplers were worked both at home and in schools and as the demand grew samplery became an integral part of the curriculum of the convent schools. Considering the already established traditions of French embroidery it is somewhat surprising that samplery did not flourish. In fact, in Quebec, samplers were not utilized as models of the intricate stitches and techniques nor were they used to inculcate specific ideologies. Instead of being associated with the prestigious religious embroidery, samplers were relegated to the secular milieu which stressed their work-a-day nature. At the same time the English were searching for the familiar, a thread that would connect them with their past. In their samplers embroiderers referred to and interpreted earlier ideals which in their naivety often led to unexpected results. Due to their unique status as amateurs these embroiderers were allowed a freedom not seen in the embroideries worked by professionals.

There are obvious difficulties comparing Quebec works with those made in Europe and the United States as the educational opportunities, availability of materials and the established class

structures found in the larger centres mean that there are greater quantities of extant works to choose among. By comparison the number of Quebec samplers is remarkably small, nevertheless if one were to look for and attempt to label common traits in samplery three attitudes come to mind--*fastidiousness, iconoclasm* and a *make-do* approach. European (French and English) embroiderers have left us an *exemplary* record of their accomplishments. These embroideries are fastidious records of limitations and expectations associated with a young woman's life. They embrace centuries of traditional attitudes towards women, their social position, and class structure. This is manifested in the excruciating attention given to details where tiny cross stitches have been worked up to 1225 times per square inch (or 196 times per square cm.). Even areas that are not seen--the reverse--reveal no loose ends or threads carried from one letter to another.

In the second case the archetypical American samplers created in the Eastern academies express their makers' willingness to be iconoclastic in both the choice of text, as in Polly Polk's case, or stitchery as seen in the flowing self-referential stitches of Mary Richardson (figure 10). These embroiderers must be admired for their desire to break existing codes and create new and unexpected works of art.

In the final instance we witness a make-do approach. In Quebec we see a desire to conform, as witnessed by the popularity of samplery, while conversely there appears to be a reluctance or inability to do so. Despite the desire to adhere to established patterns there is a feeling of weariness or lassitude, as if the energy

required to create these works is unavailable--perhaps being expended elsewhere.

This is most apparent in the materials used in the production of samplery where many of the supports are irregular hand woven canvases and the various threads remnants of skeins. In the hierarchy of Quebec embroidery samplery was never given the consideration afforded religious embroidery. Although incorporated into the curriculum, samplery was merely tolerated. While the French demand for functional embroidery is acknowledged and the English/American interest in narration is evident, the Quebec embroiderer, unlike her American counterparts, did not embellish the old nor try to subvert the established forms.

This was due in part to the lack of direct contact with the traditions of samplery as well as a difference in the social class of women who undertook these works. In Europe and the United States samplery was part of the curriculum of the leisured upper class girls and women whereas in Quebec the spectrum was broader. The new aspiring middle class of English settlers in Quebec attempted to replicate the memory of an education provided in England and the United States for the elite. Once samplery was accepted the genre underwent very few innovations. Even the popularity of "American embroidery" seen in needlework pictures produced by students in Quebec city in the 1840s is not reflected in the contemporary samplers.¹

¹At some time during the 1830's Mother Cecilia O'Conway of Incarnation's widowed sister, Mrs. O'Madden, visited the Quebec Ursuline convent. She had a needlework shop in Philadelphia which catered to latest tastes in embroidery; during the three months that she stayed in Quebec she taught the young

Quebec samplers appear to exhude an almost lackadaisical air. We find that mistakes are common: letters have been omitted from words and alphabets; names break through borders¹; borders are often irregular, failing to join at the corners. Obviously the supervision of these embroiderers has been relaxed, these samplers are no longer seen primarily as exemplars of correct behaviour and attitudes. In an otherwise exemplary sampler of 1829 (figure 16) Julia Gray embroidered:

May I govern my passions with absolute sway
And grow wiser and better as life weas away.

In 1853 Anna Timmis (figure 29) finished her alphabet with "X Y & C" and includes the word **END**.² Ironically it is these irregularities that are the key to recognizing and identifying Quebec samplers.

In studying Quebec samplers it is difficult not to continually look to external referents and thus feel the Quebec works fall somehow short of their goals. Nonetheless one cannot help but look at each work as a unique autobiographical statement that reflects the myriad components of contemporary society. These embroideries provide an essential thread for understanding this society. Samplers, like their artistic counterparts, offer us both a fascinating monument and document of their time.³

boarders contemporary American taste in embroidery. This can still be seen in the needleworked pictures that were produced during the 1840s and 1850s. See Joyce Taylor Dawson, "Embroideries of the Ursulines of Quebec," *Canadian Collector* (Sept/Oct, 1980):39-43.

¹Counted cross stitch demands careful planning, many of these embroiderers appear to have run out of room at the end of lines and thus we find sudden changes in scale, alphabets cut short and names running through borders.

²The last two digits of the date have been unpicked

³Panofsky, Erwin, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline" *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955): 1-25

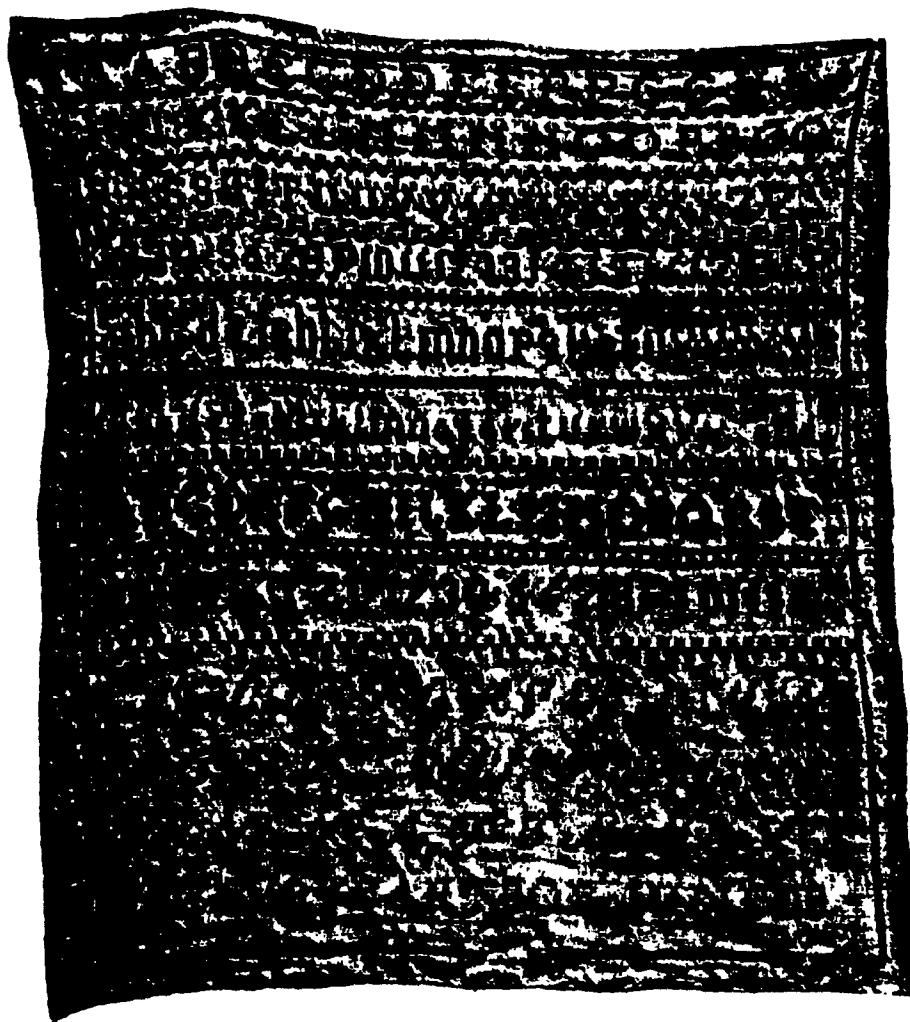


Figure 29

Sampler Anna Timmis, 1853
McCord Museum M974.119.2
Coloured wool in four sided stitch, cross stitch, on linen
(32.5 x 30 cm)
Photograph: Denyse Roy

APPENDIX

MATERIALS OF SAMPLERY

Embroidery is the decorative attachment of needle-worked stitches to a previously made foundation . . . several notable features of embroidery help explain its popularity . . . embroidery stitches can be worked by one person for self-enjoyment or by a group of people for commercial gain. Stitches are easy to learn, the necessary equipment is technologically simple and quality depends more on the embroiderer's innate and acquired skills than on expensive materials.¹

An unexpected problem revealed by the literature search was that historically there has been little regard for a consistent nomenclature of embroidery. Whether discussing the history, techniques or the works I found discrepancies within the terminology. This proved to be especially disconcerting when trying to compare French and English texts as authors are equally generous in their appellation and names are non specific.² In fact it was only with the widespread popularity of journals for women, such as England's *The Lady's Magazine* and America's *Godey's Lady's Book*, with their numerous embroidery projects, that a semblance of a recognized vocabulary was developed, and even this differs from country to country.³ As embroidery is not a familiar medium to the

¹Milton Sunday and Gillian Moss, *Western European Embroidery in the Collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum* (Washington D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 3.

²A single stitch is referred to by various names (Bargello, Florentine and Flame describe the same stitch).

³*The Lady's Magazine* was published between 1770 and 1832 while *Godey's Lady's Book* was published in Philadelphia between 1830 and 1898. Both contain

art historian, I have included a discussion of the problems inherent to the medium.¹

Initially one must recognize that a major difficulty facing art historians is determining what physical changes have taken place--to what extent the sampler has changed--since its creation.² Colours may have faded, darkened, or changed completely--many of the blues were originally greens. Motifs swim in shadows caused when the dye, used to colour the threads, bleeds into surrounding ground. In some samplers the lettering or motifs have faded while the canvas has darkened making the two indistinguishable. Marvelous silk embroideries are so fragile that they appear to dissolve as the weighted silks shatter.³ Whole areas of embroidery and/or the foundation are missing where yarns have rotted, been eaten or been destroyed by pests or fungus.⁴ In some samplers later additions or "corrections" have taken place--most commonly dates that would establish the maker's age have been upicked (figure 29)!

Although one assumes that the intention of the artist was to create a readable text, her interest in pattern and colour often appear at odds with such a goal. In Lillias S. Molson's sampler of

articles pertaining to fashion, social position and needlework and both were available in Quebec.

¹Key works appear in **boldface**.

²This does not preclude samplers that have been cut or reused; the McCord has a drawstring bag (M6593) made from two samplers. Both are in poor condition having lost much of the wool embroidered lettering.

³In order to create a heavier or richer feeling fabric or thread the manufacturers added metallic salts to the dye. The disadvantages are now obvious--weighted silks crack and split, they are weakened in sunlight, and they stain easily.

⁴In a number of samplers where the warp and weft are of different fibres (ie. linen and wool) one element has partially disappeared leaving the embroidery clinging to the remaining yarns.

1877 (figure 22) we find an emphasis on the variety of colours available in the worsted yarn. In this sampler each line of the text is worked in a specific hue: blue, brown, yellow, and magenta; and each letter of every word a different shade. This is further complicated if **variegated** or shaded yarns are used (figure 14).

Another difficulty is seen when spacing between letters and/or words is irregular. It becomes easy to assume a relationship that may or may not have been intended. The viewer is faced with an onerous task as samplers prove to be, yet once more, an exercise in patience and persistence as one laborously spells out the inscribed maxims and identify illusive images. This becomes easier as one becomes familiar with the vocabulary of embroidery.

While the materials of samplery--**ground, thread, stitches--** have been discussed throughout the text, this chapter will deal with each element in more depth. As an embroiderer I know that one of the attractive features of making a sampler is that the background is left un-embroidered. This means that there is no tedious background stitchery. All of one's effort is spent on designing and working the images and text. Nonetheless the negative space--**ground/foundation** is an integral part of the work and must not be dismissed. In 1597 English essayist and statesman Francis Bacon (1561-1626) discussed this relationship within the context of aesthetics--pleasure for both the eye and heart:

Wee see in Needle-worke, and Imbroideries, It is more pleasing to have a Lively Worke upon a Sad and Solemne Ground; than to have a Dark and Melancholy worke upon a Lightsome Ground: Judge therefore of the Pleasure of

the Heart, by the Pleasure of the Eye ¹

Despite this view, the majority of extant samplers have been worked on a "lightsome ground" of bleached or natural canvas. Perhaps this is because working on a light ground is easier on the eyes as stitches are clearly delineated. This combination is seen in early spot and band samplers (figures 3 & 4). Coloured grounds were popular with embroiderers however there are very few extant samplers worked on dyed foundations.² Only the McCord Museum had a coloured Quebec sampler--mustard yellow--in their collection (figure 9).

Samplers are most often worked on a foundation constructed using a tabby or plain weave. This is the simplest of all weaves as each weft or filling yarn passes alternately over and under one warp yarn. Each warp passes alternately over and under each weft yarn.³ Depending on the thread count (the number of yarns per inch or centimeter) and the size of the yarn, a fabric is described as having a tight (figure 26) or loose (figure 28) weave. By counting the yarns that make up the grid, embroiderers are able to create the geometrically precise stitches that are synonymous with counted stitches and samplery. Ideally there will be an equal number of yarns in both the warp and weft or the motifs and patterns will appear somewhat distorted. This uniformity is impossible in hand spun and hand woven fabrics of the pre-industrial age, however with

¹Francis Bacon, "Of Adversitie" *Essays* "Essay V", p.17. Written 1597 published 1625.

²Glee Kruger has documented American samplers in mustard, light blue-green, teal blue, dark gray and black while in New Brunswick and Ontario collections there are samplers worked on a dark olive-green ground. See G. Kruger, *New England Samplers to 1840* (Sturbridge Mass. Old Sturbridge Village, 1978), 5.

³The lengthwise yarn wound on the loom is the warp, the crosswise or filling yarn the weft.

the development of mechanized looms a consistent thread count was assured.

Traditionally the most popular ground for samplery has been linen. Undoubtedly, this is due to its strength, durability, and availability. Made from flax, it is a strong fibre with a slight luster, and its natural colouring varies from light ivory to dark tan or gray. The choicest fibres are the palest as these require little or no bleaching and will accept a variety of dyes.¹ The earliest samplers, such as Jane Bostocke's work (figure 5), were worked on finely woven unbleached linen. When such a fine linen is found in English or American samplers it is generally thought that the whole cloth (finished yardage) was imported from Belgium or Ireland as these countries have the most favourable climatic conditions for growing flax. Although linen was produced in England and North America, the flax was of a poorer quality--the linen coarser and the cloth darker in colour. In North America various attitudes to the production of linen cloth existed concurrently. In the seventeenth century the American colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut required each family to raise flax or hemp for home production of cloth. During the same period in New France it appears that the settlers were dependent upon imported cloth.² Self-sufficiency, which included the production of textiles occurred only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when poor economic conditions made home production a necessity. Many Quebec samplers have been worked on

¹Marjory L. Joseph, "Natural Cellulosic Fibers" in *Introductory Textile Science*, 4th ed. (Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 21-49.

²Harold B. Burnham, *Handweaving in Pioneer Canada* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1971), 4-6.

home spun and woven grounds. Linen remained a popular ground for both embroidery and plain household linens, although it was not considered a suitable (warm) fabric for Canadian winters. In 1827 a storekeeper wrote to his supplier in Scotland "flax does not answer this climate, it must be all wool or wool and cotton."¹

Technical advances in manufacturing, coupled with the popularity of samplers in the eighteenth century, resulted in new fabrics designed specifically for samplers. Linen was still in common use, however, this was a period in which the softer woolen grounds were gaining favour. By the mid-eighteenth century, a fine woolen cloth called tammy equalled linen in popularity. Tammy normally had a loom width of 12-15 inches and is recognizable by the (now) yellowish colouring and the blue threads in the selvedge (figure 17). Although conspicuous in English samplers (it was made in Northern England and in Scotland) tammy foundations are relatively rare in America.² Because wool is susceptible to moth damage, many eighteenth and nineteenth century samplers are in a worse state of preservation than their much earlier linen counterparts.

Very few samplers were worked on silk grounds because of the fineness of the weave, however satin was popular for map samplers and embroidered pictures. In some cases counted embroideries were worked on canvas³ and then appliqued to more fragile or finer

¹Roderick Matherson's Letter Books, 1815-1821 cited in Ruth McKendry *Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1979), 19.

²G. Kruger, *A Gallery of American Samplers, The Theodore H. Kapnek Collection* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), 15.

³The term canvas is here used to describe any even weave fabric suitable for counted stitch embroidery.

grounds. In the nineteenth century a widely spaced tabby fabric stiffened with gum was introduced. Known as **tiffany cloth** it was described in *The Dictionary of Needlework* as "A thin description of semi-transparent silk textile, resembling gauze."¹ Due to its sheerness the travelling thread on the reverse side of the embroidery creates a shadow-like effect behind the embroidery.²

Cotton grounds were rare before Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793, and are seen in only two English samplers of the 1790s.³ Nevertheless, by the 1830s specially manufactured cotton grounds were in common use (figure 11). Factories provided stiffened (sized or gummed) fabrics with regularly spaced threads that were universally identified as **canvas**. These ranged from the coarsest cotton canvas to the finest silk **mosaic canvas**. By the mid-nineteenth century there were four standard sizes available. From the coarsest to the finest, they were numbered twenty-one, twenty-nine, thirty-four and forty; these were references to the number of threads per inch. Although most embroiderers covered two threads with each stitch, it was not uncommon for sections, or even whole samplers, to be worked in the finest stitch possible. Thus is possible to encounter works with 1600 stitches in a single square inch!

Manufacturers were quick to introduce new features that would aid the aspiring embroiderer. **English Penelope Canvas (1835)**

¹S. F. Caulfeild and B. C. Saward, "Tiffany" *The Dictionary of Needlework. An Encyclopedia of Artistic, Plain and Fancy Needlework* (London: 1882; reprint, New York: Dover, 1972).

²In several English samplers in the MMFA collection the embroiderers have not carried the threads from one motif or letter to another, creating in effect an almost reversible work.

³Anne Sebba, *Samplers: Five Centuries of a Gentle Craft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 59.

was, and remains, extremely popular (figures 12, 13, 14). Penelope canvas was described as a stiff canvas that had:

strands [that] run in couples, vertically and horizontally, thus forming squares containing four threads each. It is less trying to the eyes...there is little counting...larger squares...¹

These strands could be separated so both coarse and fine stitches could be worked on the same foundation. Another 'improvement' that aimed to simplify counting was the insertion of a blue yarn at intervals of five or ten warp threads.² In the late nineteenth century basket-weave grounds, fabrics constructed using two or more yarns in both the warp and weft directions was sold as foundations for embroidery.

Perhaps the most ingenious grounds were developed in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, ironically paralleling the diminished production of samplers. By 1870 it was possible to buy a special type of punched card (perforated card work). This "card [was] pierced with minute holes at regular intervals, some of it fine enough to require the finest cambric needle, while others are coarse enough to require double Berlin wool or chenille."³ It was welcomed enthusiastically by embroiderers and was available in various colours including silver-faced and gold-faced sheets and was also available printed with moralistic verses or truisms. This variety of fancy articles were popularly known as mottos.⁴ A less common,

¹"Penelope Canvas", S. F. Caulfeild and B.C. Saward.

²This canvas was developed primarily for Berlin wool work, for in this technique the background is also embroidered.

³S. A. Frost, 121.

⁴Two embroideries on card in the ROM collection: Motto, J. P. Calder, 1887, ROM 971.324.2. Coloured wools on silver perforated card. "Cling to the Cross", attached to the frame is a note which reads "Worked by Dr. J. P. Calder

but similar, product was available in 1880 when Messrs Biggs of Manchester (England) introduced a new machine-perforated type of felt called **batswing**.

In both of these materials the difficulties associated with traditional grounds had been broached: counting was simplified; edges would not fray; the ground would not stretch; patterns could be printed directly on the foundation; they could be quickly and easily embroidered using coloured wools, chenille, silks, cottons or beads. Even a neophyte was guaranteed success!

This rush by industry to popularize embroidery materials and techniques was perhaps furthered by the appearance of the home sewing machine in the late 1850s--early 1860s. Ironically the time saved on plain sewing allowed women to do more hand sewing in the form of ornamental needlework. Nevertheless, despite the general interest in embroidery late nineteenth century historians saw little of merit in contemporary embroidery. Instead they demanded a return to earlier techniques and materials and nostalgically referred to the illustrious past where embroidery followed

...an aesthetic path...reserved exclusively for gifted dames who enjoyed ample leisure, and who had commanded unlimited means for obtaining costly materials...¹

While the "costly materials" of previous eras included the needles as well as the linens and wools it was the silk and gold and silver threads that captured and inspired the imagination of the needleworker. Where earlier embroiderers were faced with a

Bridgewater Feby 15th 1887." 33 x 38cm. Sampler, Maggie Band, late 19th C. ROM 974.354 Made in Thorold Ontario, wool on punched card. 21.5 x 13cm.

¹cited by Louise Ka.r, "Berlin Wool Work" *Antiques* (July 1927) in B. Ring ed. *Needlework: An Historical Survey* (New York: Main Street, 1975), 41-45.

limited choice of materials the embroiderer at the end of the nineteenth century had an almost excessive palette from which to choose. There were various types and weights of threads ranging from coarse to fine, lustrous to dull, and strong to fragile. An embroiderer could choose to work with wool, linen, cotton or silk threads depending on the desired results.¹

The majority of the Quebec samplers examined were worked in silk and/or wool on linen. Those incorporating wool were less refined than those made of silk as the hard-twisted worsted fibres available at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century were rough and came only in a limited range of weights and colours.² It was not until the introduction of the softer *zephyr* or Berlin wools (1835) that wool embroidery once again gained a strong following.

For variety and beauty of shading it stands unrivalled;
and the peculiar weaving of the thread enables the
worker to split it into any degree of fineness
required.³

These long haired soft yarns accepted any form of dye more readily than their predecessors and produced clear colourful yarns that could be worked up quickly.

¹Embroidery with cotton thread appears to have been associated with functional embroidery or darning samplers (figure 11) for it "is used principally in the trimming of undergarments." S. Annie. Frost, *The Ladies' Guide to Needle Work Embroidery, Etc* (New York: Adams & Bishops, 1877; Reprint Washington: R. L. Shep, 1986), 5.

²Although embroidery supplies were imported a number of Quebec samplers contain a combination of hand spun and woven linen grounds and/or hand dyed and spun yarns were used.

³S. A. Frost, 40.

Prior to 1856, only natural dyestuffs were known and insects, plants, mollusks, and minerals were the only sources of relatively durable permanent colours. While improvements in dyeing had been made in the first half of the century with the natural dyes appearing brighter and clearer it was with the introduction of synthetic dyes that the colour range became unlimited. In 1856 William Henry Perkins accidentally discovered a lavender dye made from aniline a coal tar product. This new colour--mauve--was the first of the synthetic dyes that flooded the market. Aniline dyes were brighter than their predecessors and despite the fact that they were relatively unstable (fading in sunlight) and fugitive (colours ran if washed) they were greeted with enthusiasm. The new dyes included viridian, scarlet, and violet and were applied to wools, cottons, linens and silks. Embroideries (figure 25) worked in these colours are easily recognized.

Of all fibres available silk remains the most popular because of its sheen, fineness, and colour.¹ Although it was the most expensive to produce it was considered worth the expenditure and the majority of narrative embroideries and samplers were worked totally in silk. There are samplers where combinations of wool and silk have been worked. Packages of silk thread had long been available in various colours, weights, and plys and depending on the manufacturer various grades. In 1899 a manufacturer of embroidery materials felt it necessary to warn its public:

¹Because there was little control over the dyeing process threads from different dye lots differed considerably and thus it was necessary to obtain a sufficient amount of thread before beginning a project.

The best worker cannot do herself justice if compelled to use a silk which splits or frays in spite of all her care; or one whose luster is quickly lost...rendering her work dull and lifeless.¹

Of the various kinds of silk thread available, two forms are commonly found on samplers--twist and floss. Twist is created by **plying** or twisting two or more fibers/strands together, thereby creating a firmer and stronger thread that will wear well and will withstand the strain of complicated stitchery (figure 23). **Floss** is softer and less durable as the silk filament has not been plied. Rather, they have been placed side by side forming a uniform silky thread associated with long smooth stitches--such as satin stitch (figure 24). Although the threads were traditionally used as intended--as floss or twist--there are instances when the embroiderers re-interpreted the medium. In a series of embroideries attributed to the Sarah Stivour School of Salem Massachussets the twist has been unravelled and placed diagonally across the canvas. These elongated **satin stitches** create a shimmering effect not found in such quantity in any other known embroideries (figure 10).

In this case the stitches are *self referential*. Since they cover such long distances, and are not couched (using tiny stitches to anchor the threads) they could not be used on household furnishings or costumes as they would be easily pulled and destroyed. Thus the

¹The Brainerd & Armstrong Company, *Embroidery Lessons with Colored Studies -1899-* (New London, Connecticut: Brainerd & Armstrong, Co.,1898), 6. Agents for the product in Canada were Corticelli Silk Co., St. Johns Quebec. From the introduction we know that this pamphlet was published by the manufacturers of the "famous 'Asiatic' Wash Silks" and these were available at "nearly all Art Societies and leading dealers in Art Embroidery materials, as well as from teachers of Art Embroidery who have Art Rooms throughout the United States."

stitches and, by extension, the samplers are neither references for embroidery techniques nor future projects.

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed a renewed interest in traditional embroidery materials including metal threads, beads, spangles and hair for embroidery. As well Victorian women made use of new raw materials in their fancy work including "irridiscent beetle wings from India, fish scales, feathers, beads...and ribbon."¹ One of the most popular yarns was **Chenile**, a fuzzy novelty yarn, which had first appeared at the end of the eighteenth century but which became extremely popular during the nineteenth century (figure 23).

Perhaps the embroidery technique that best exemplifies the Victorian era is **Berlin wool work**.² It was certainly the most popular form of pictorial embroidery and employed counted stitches. However, unlike the sampler, the background was also embroidered. Berlin work satisfied two purposes. It served as decoration for functional objects (Bell pulls, pin cushions, chairs and ottomans) and it was created to be framed and hung on walls. What distinguishes Berlin work from earlier canvas work were the patterns resembling graphs. Each square represented the crossing of a warp and weft thread and in each was a coloured dot designating the colour of thread to be stitched in that location. An embroiderer used zephyr or Berlin wool to copy the intricately shaded pattern (figure 30) onto canvas.

¹Anne Sebba, 136.

²"Berlin wool work" is the correct terminology although "Berlin work," and "tapestry work" are also found in contemporary literature.



Figure 30

Hand painted pattern, Berlin Woolwork c. 1860-1870
28 x 23"

Published: M. Vincent, *The Ladies' Work Table*, 53.

Berlin wool work was introduced in Germany however the patterns and wool yarns spread quickly to England (c1830) and North America. Louise Karr states that by 1840 there were fourteen thousands patterns available.¹ Berlin work heralded a renewed interest in wool embroidery and samplers reflect this popularity in the choice of motifs, the appearance of tent stitch (figure 31e) and the use of wool on canvas.

Berlin work, and by extension embroidery and samplery, was further promoted in contemporary literature as epitomizing good taste. Patterns were published in contemporary journals and were hailed as a means "for genius to exert itself...not in glaring arabesques, but in landscapes and portraits."² Even if the coloured graphs appeared to leave little room for personal interpretation the embroiderer was continually reassured that hers was an artistic effect:

...embroidery covers the largest and most varied of all fancy work, while comprising the most elegant and artistic effects. In colors it is truly needle-painting, since the combination and shading require the taste and skill of an artist to design and execute. Flowers, birds and arabesque patterns with infinite varieties of groups are the favorite patterns, and are supplied in all fancy stores where they are stamped upon the material.³

The most popular feature of woolwork--a single simple stitch--was to invoke the wrath of the greatest number of critics who saw in Berlin work the demise of embroidery as an art. For the growth in popularity of Berlin work meant the rapid diminishment of the

¹L. Karr, 45.

²Louise Karr, 44.

³S. Annie Frost, 5.

variety of stitches in current use. An effort to catalogue the former vast vocabulary of embroidery is seen in Mary Thomas's *Dictionary of Embroidery Stitches* (1934) where the author showed that "it has been possible to collect 305 stitches every one different, every one giving some new and delightful effect."¹ For the most part embroidery stitches are concerned with "delightful effects" and do not try to imitate other art forms. "It is a means of enriching a surface by working onto it coloured silks, wools, cottons, and gold or silver thread, and other extraneous materials."² However there were periods when other media were emulated. In the eighteenth century printed engravings were meticulously copied using fine black thread or even hair to create the delicate lines. In the nineteenth century Victorian women were intent on imitating the brushwork of oils in their "needle paintings."³ In these cases the threads were manipulated in such a way that one is not aware of the medium--embroidery.

Unlike these two forms of embroidery, in samplers the illusion of "a window on the world" has been broken and the embroiderer is encouraged to take advantage of the medium-- the threads and the stitches. During their lengthy history samplers have been valued as records of the different stitches and we see how individual artists have manipulated stitches and interpreted patterns.⁴ Even the

¹Mary Thomas, *Mary Thomas's Dictionary of Embroidery Stitches* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1934), v.

²S. F. Caulfeild and B. C. Seward, "Embroidery."

³Copies of notable paintings in European collections were available as patterns for the needleworker by mid-century.

⁴In some cases it is the stitches that serve to locate the origin of a sampler. Plaited braid work in metal-wrapped silk is found only in seventeenth century English samplers while the unravelled twist silks (mentioned above)

ubiquitous cross stitch can be used to create a flat or shimmering surface. For just as a skilled artist can make a mosaic dance with light by setting the tesserae at various angles, the embroiderer can alter the surface tension of the embroidery through her application of stitches. With a thread and needle one can create a variety of moods: the refined eyelet stitches, the tightly twisted french knot, the nervous herringbone, or even the seductive satin stitches.

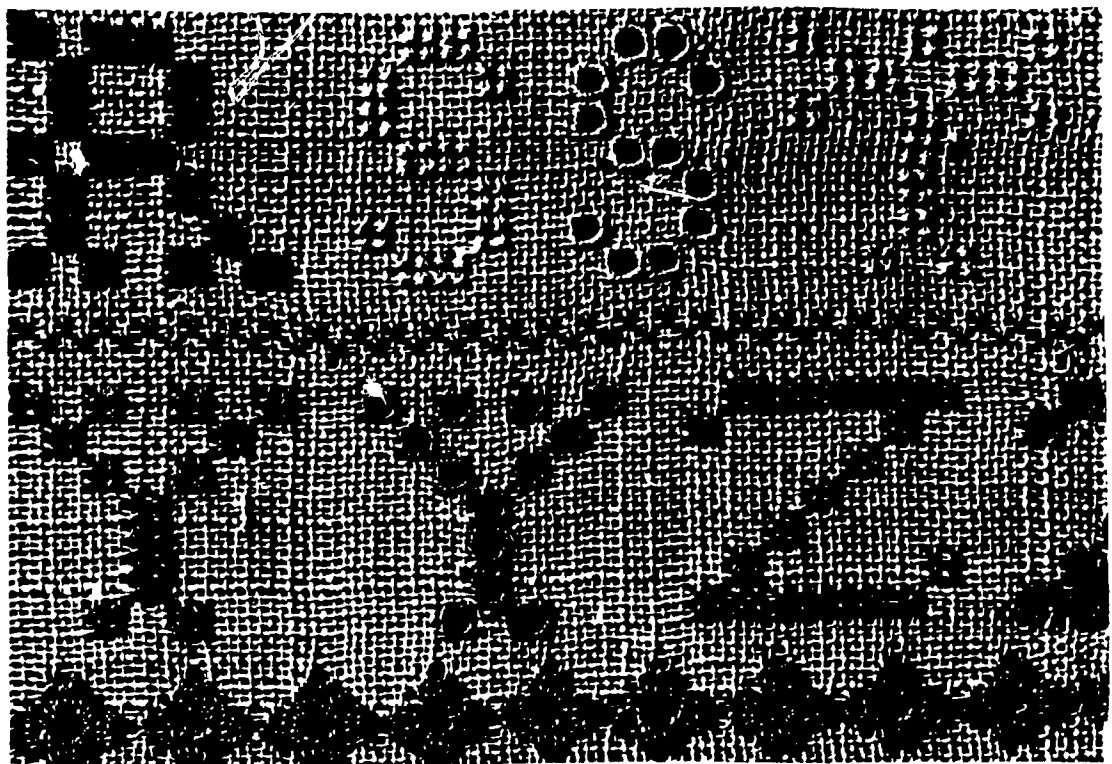


Figure 31

Detail of figure 16, Sampler, Julia Gray, 1829.

Algerian eye, cross, Rococo and four cornered cross stitch on linen. Thread count 12 x 12 per cm.

Photograph: Denyse Roy

See figure 32 for diagrams of stitches.

are seen only in America. Conversely French knots, Florentine and Roumanian stitches have no specific ties to these countries.

In Quebec samplery there is a preference for counted, as opposed to uncounted or free-style, embroidery. Counted stitches, such as cross stitch, are worked over a pre-determined number of warps and wefts of the foundation (figure 30) while free-style stitches, such as the satin stitch are worked across the fabric at the choice or whim of the embroiderer.¹ In a sampler with a low thread count the individual stitches are clearly visible, and can be easily discerned (figure 28). When we do see free-style embroidery in Quebec samplery it is confined to naturalistic rendering of narrative elements or floral borders (figure 10).²

As the nineteenth century progressed, and education was democratized, plain (practical) sewing became an important feature within the curriculum. Unfortunately public school teachers were expected to be versed in all subjects and needlework was often taught by uninspired teachers who relied on printed manuals as their "exemplars." In a text published in England in 1849, *Plain Needlework in all its branches*, step by step directions and techniques are set out for the teaching of specific stitches: Back stitch, chain stitch, darning stitch, basting stitch, herring-bone stitch, marking stitch, overcast stitch, button-hole stitch and oeillet-hole (eyelet) stitch. All of these are practical sewing stitches and were to be practiced and worked on a series of samplers:

These 12 stitches are first taught and practiced upon Third-Class

¹Although most stitches can be used in either counted or uncounted work the familiar cross stitch is always a counted stitch. Once again names are confusing: Upright golbein and satin are, in fact, the same stitch--the former refers to the uncounted stitch and the latter the counted stitch.

²The majority of religious embroidery (ie. Ursuline altar frontals) created within the province has been worked in free-style embroidery.

Sampler, and then they are all done upon the Second-Class Sampler...[where] the Alphabet, figures, Etc. are to be done...according to the pattern to which each girl is to add the Initials of her Christian name and Surname, and the Year in Figures.¹

This is not a long list, yet, it is in keeping with the variety of stitches found on marking samplers/marquoirs produced during the nineteenth century. Despite the decline of samplery in Europe and America embroidered samplers continued to be popular within Quebec. In private schools embroidery became an extracurricular activity, one which required a small fee, nonetheless even here the variety of stitches declined. Most Quebec samplers contain only a few of the following stitches: running, stem, satin, Algerian eye (eyelet), Rococo (Queen), chain, buttonhole, half cross, cross and four cornered cross stitch. Paradoxically, while intricate stitchery is not found on samplers it was being worked on religious embroideries and embroidered pictures.

Nineteenth century embroiderers were in a much different position than their ancestors. They did not have to rely on the work of family and friends for inspiration nor were they obliged to painstakingly copy complicated stitchery onto samplers for future reference. Instead they were invited to turn to how-to manuals, periodicals and manufacturer's publications for both inspiration and instruction. The term *work*, synonymous with embroidery before the nineteenth century had been augmented by the word *fancy*. By the end of the century, 1899, an embroiderer was assured that "the art of blending various hues has in some measure been reduced to

¹M. Fawdry, D. Brown, *The Book of Samplers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 88.

certainty."¹ If a woman encountered any difficulty with her embroidery, she was encouraged to write to the manufacturers where she was assured that:

[A] lady may secure a sample of any stitch by ordering it...and enclosing 10 cents in stamps for each stitch. This makes it possible for a beginner to obtain an actual worked sample of any stitch...and by studying or picking the sample to pieces, she will readily see how to make the stitch herself.²

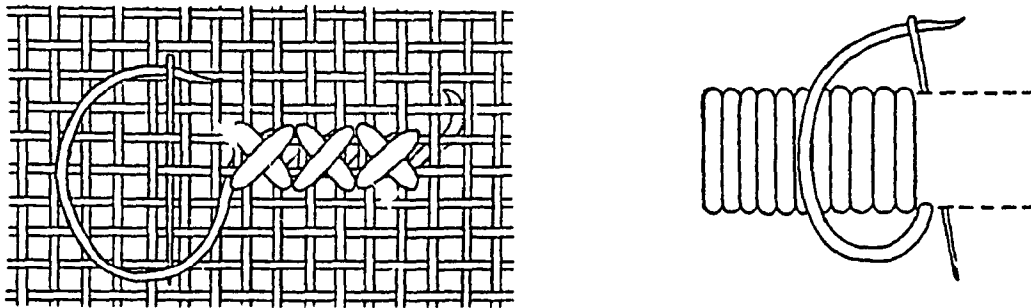


Figure 32a

Diagrams of popular stitches found on Quebec Samplers

a. Counted cross stitch

b. Satin stitch

¹Brainerd & Armstrong Co., 10.

²Brainerd & Armstrong Co., Introduction.

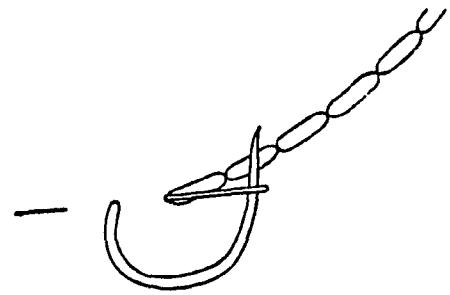
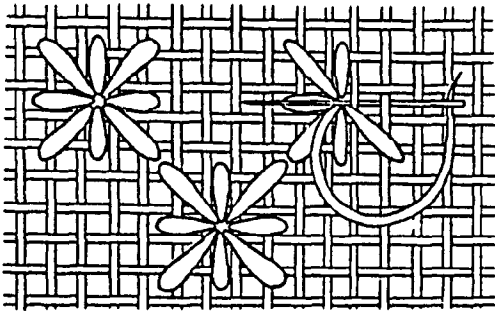
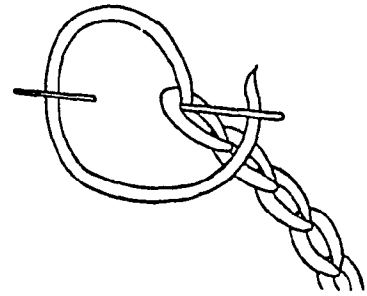
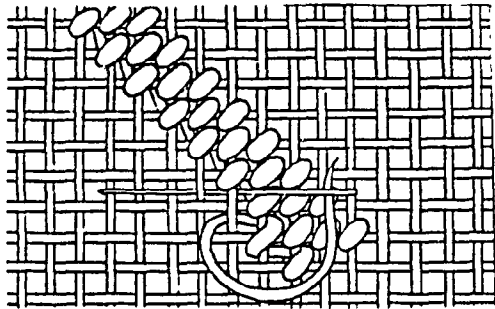
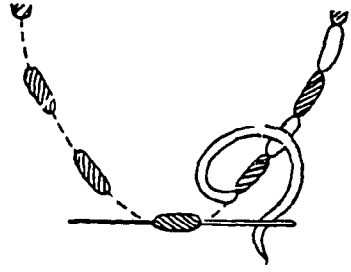
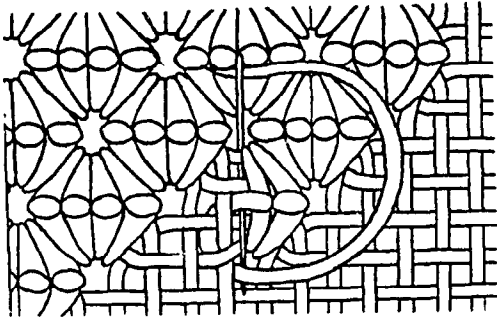


Figure 32b

- c. Rococo (Queen) stitch
- e. Tent stitch
- g. Algerian eye (eyelet)

- d. Double running stitch
- f. Chain stitch
- h. Back stitch

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