

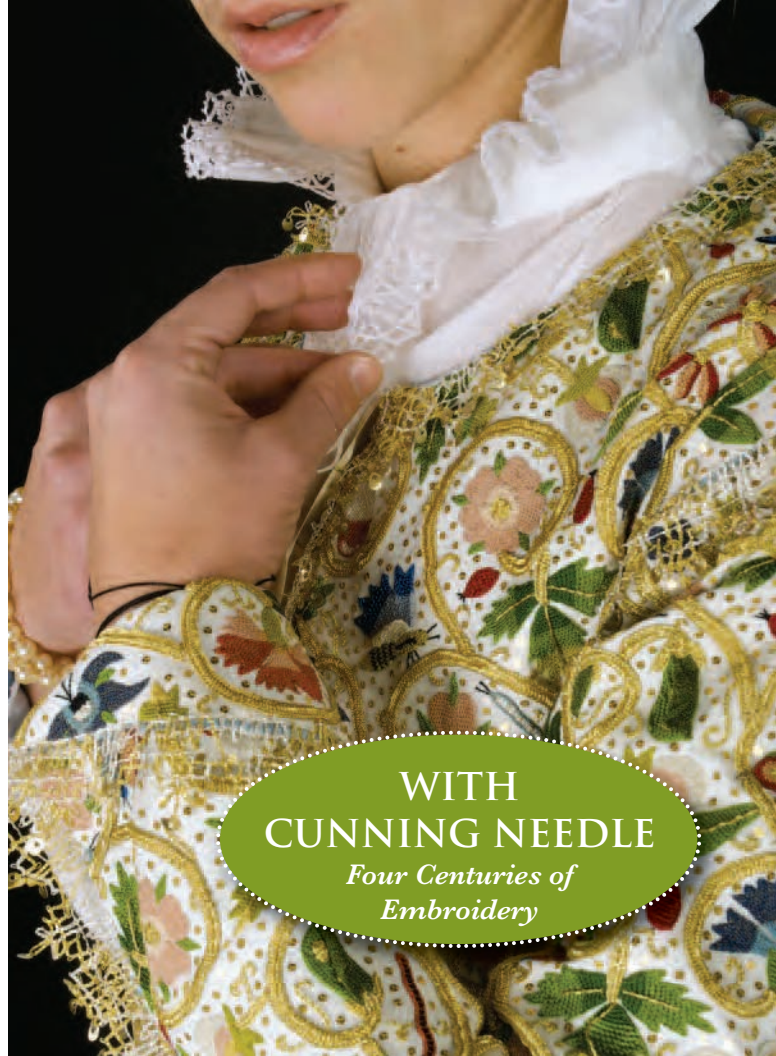
WITH
CUNNING NEEDLE
*Four Centuries of
Embroidery*



THE PLIMOTH JACKET PROJECT

An exciting and innovative project to accurately re-create a 17th-century embroidered woman's jacket began in 2006 at Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts. The process of designing and making what has become known as the Plimoth Jacket has shed new light on the materials and techniques used by the skilled embroiderers of the 1600s. The project has brought forward a new understanding of the use of published design sources and their adaptation for particular projects. It has also enriched our understanding of the skill of professional embroiderers, who so often remain anonymous.

With the Plimoth Jacket as the touchstone, this exhibition looks at design, materials, techniques, and makers of embroidery from the 1600s through the 1900s.



WITH
CUNNING NEEDLE

*Four Centuries of
Embroidery*



Not an exact reproduction, this jacket is based on two examples in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. One was chosen for its cut and construction and the other for the design of the embroidery. Both originals date to the 1620s.

In the 1600s this type of embroidery would have been done in professional workshops. By studying and re-creating such pieces, we can learn about workshop practices, embroidery techniques, and the technology for making threads and spangles (the sequins hanging from the lace). We can also look closely at the stitching to identify how many embroiderers might have worked on a project like this and whether they were highly skilled or simply apprentices.

More than 300 people spent some 3,700 hours creating this jacket. Some worked on the silk embroidery and gold plaited braid while others stitched on the “oes”—the term used in the 1600s for the round sequins. The lace was made by hand, and even some of the threads had to be re-created, as they are no longer available. The spangles were made using tools and techniques from the 1600s. Even the lining was hand-woven and dyed with natural indigo.

Embroidered Jacket

Made at Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts, and other locations; 2006–9

Silk, gold, silver on linen

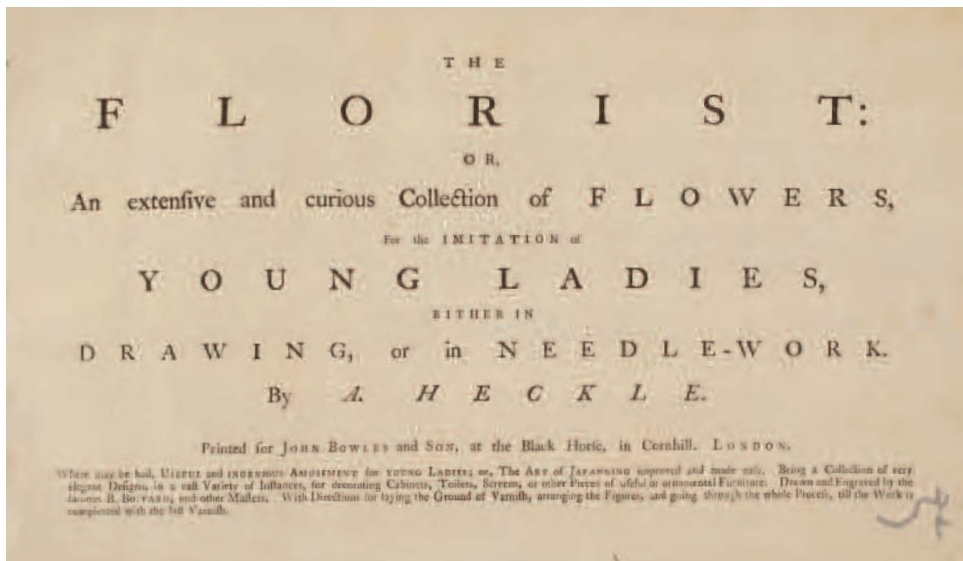
Lent by Plimoth Plantation

DESIGN

The choice of a design is fundamental for any form of embroidery. Designs of scrolls and flowers similar to those on the Plimoth Jacket were widely disseminated in books and as single prints. These published images followed fashions and by the late 1700s were available in both Europe and America. Professional artists, teachers, and embroiderers themselves copied or adapted such designs for their own use.



Printed for J. B. White at the Black Horse in Cornhill.



The most common method for applying an embroidery design to fabric was by drawing. Early scholarship on embroidery in America stressed the creativity of the designers and embroiderers, but both professional and non-professional pattern drawers were taught to copy and adapt designs.

The Florist; or, An Extensive and Curious Collection of Flowers for the Imitation of Young Ladies, either in Drawing or in Needle-work

By Augustin Heckle

London: Printed for T. Bowles, 1753

NC815 H44*: Printed Book and Periodical Collection, Winterthur Library

Many artists drew needlework designs as part of their professional practice and often worked in different media. Samuel Folwell (1763–1813), who designed and painted this picture, advertised himself as an engraver, miniature and fancy painter, hair worker, and teacher of drawing and painting “upon Sattin, Ivory or Paper.” This design is a copy of an engraving by Folwell that appeared in the *Philadelphia Repertory* on May 5, 1810.

A label on the back of the frame states that Sarah Skinner Ward (1796–1844) worked the picture at Miss Maltby’s School in Philadelphia. Between 1802 and 1816 city directories list a widowed Sarah Maltby living within a block of the Folwells’ Dock Street School, where Folwell’s wife, Ann Elizabeth Gebler, taught embroidery.

Calliope & Clio

Designed and painted by Samuel Folwell
Worked by Sarah Skinner Ward
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1810–13
Silk and tempera on linen
1991.46a Museum purchase





Silkwork memorial picture

Worked by E. S. Sefford

New England; 1800–1810

Silk, silver, and tempera on silk

1957.783a,b,c Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont

Engraved prints were widely distributed and were often the design source for silkwork pictures. In this instance, a print by Enoch Gridley after a painting by John Coles Jr. was copied onto satin and embroidered by E. S. Sefford.

Gridley was a portrait and general engraver working in New York City and Philadelphia. Coles, who advertised as a portrait, miniature, and heraldry painter, lived and worked in Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island. Sadly we have not yet discovered the identity of Miss E. S. Sefford.



Pater Patriae

Engraved by Enoch Gridley after a painting by John Coles Jr.

Boston, Massachusetts; 1800–1825

Ink on wove paper

1958.133a,b Museum purchase

Skillful artists—amateur and professional, male and female—often drew designs for quilts and embroidery for their friends. This design was done freehand in ink on a coarse linen. Only the name Elizabeth is inscribed on the back, suggesting that the design was drawn by someone other than the embroiderer. Look closely and you can see lines for another seat cover. The ink has bled through the linen ground, evidence that this unfinished piece was once intended to be one in a set of chair covers.

Crewelwork chair cover (unfinished)

Dedham, Massachusetts; 1730–65

Wool on linen

1991.39 *Museum purchase*





Today we expect artists' creations to be unique, but in the past young artists were trained to copy as a basis for learning their skill. Designs could be copied by tracing; by “pouncing” colored chalk through holes punched along the lines of the original design onto paper; or by drawing freehand. Sabrina Colbath copied or traced these designs first in pencil and then in ink. Sabrina was born in 1810 in Middleton, Strafford County, New Hampshire, but nothing else is known about her life. Her brother Jeremiah was a teacher and land surveyor before inheriting the family farm. He had a reputation as a scholar and published many articles on local history.

Needlework designs

Drawn by Sabrina H. Colbath
Middleton, New Hampshire; 1825–35
Ink and graphite on paper
2003.33.1, .2, .4, .6, .10, .11 Gift of Linda Eaton

Ann Warder (1824–66), who was bedridden for much of her life, put together an immense collection of personal and published designs for needlework. It is documented that she shared them with family and friends. Most of the designs were for canvaswork and were probably worked in the brightly colored, soft yarns known as zephyr or Berlin wools. This type of needlework has been criticized for being unoriginal, but it is part of a long tradition of using prepared patterns for embroidery.

Selection of patterns

Owned by Ann Warder

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1840–66

Ink, watercolor, cloth, paper

2004.71.80, .92, .102, .103, .110, .129, .134, .136, .139, .144

Gift of Van Tassel-Bauman American Antiques





The original owner of this box is unknown, but it may have been someone like Philena Moxley of Wenham, Massachusetts, who made a living by stamping designs on cloth for clients to embroider. The stamps themselves were made by professional artists and could be purchased by anyone wishing to embellish their own clothing and household items.

The box, which once contained a stamp, carries the name John D. Clapp. Clapp designed and manufactured embroidery stamps. He also stamped and embroidered patterns to order. A paper pattern found in the box has holes pierced through it. A cotton pad, covered in blue chalk, was used to “pounce” the pattern through those holes, thereby transferring the design.

Box and embroidery stamps

Probably Boston, Massachusetts; about 1890

Wood, metal

2006.20.1a,b, .2-.11 Gift of Jan Whitlock

MATERIALS

One of the challenges of the Plimoth Jacket project was finding accurate materials, specifically embroidery threads, since many are no longer being produced. The twist, ply, and quality of threads made of natural fibers have varied over time as styles and fashions have changed. Because of the recent revival of high-quality historic reproductions of early embroidery, a wider variety of threads is now available to embroiderers.



Silkwork picture

Made by Margaret Rourke

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; about 1754

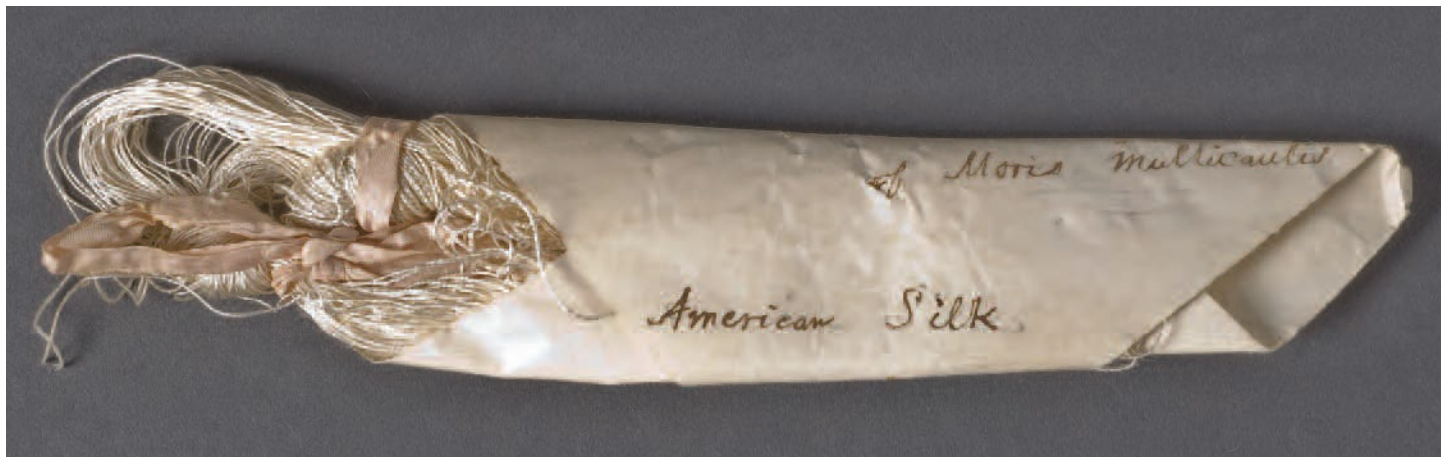
Silk, glass beads on silk

1987.135 Gift of Mr. William L. Wool, Jr. in memory of Bessie P. Childs

SILK

China and Japan are well known for their raising of silkworms and production of silk threads. Large commercial production was also successful in Turkey, Italy, and France. In the 1700s and early 1800s smaller quantities of silk were produced in many parts of North America, including Georgia, South Carolina, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Worked in Philadelphia almost certainly using imported silk threads, this picture by Margaret Rourke is one of a group of beautifully embroidered, flowering-tree silkwork pictures made by young women at schools in the city. In later life, Margaret Rourke Callender (1745–1819) was remembered as having excellent eyesight. According to a family history, at the age of seventy—and without eyeglasses—she embroidered a muslin cap for a grandchild.



Historian John Fanning Watson (1779–1860) collected objects associated with the early history of Philadelphia, including this skein of silk thread. In the 1700s, numerous individuals grew mulberry trees and raised silkworms. The best known today is Susanna Wright (1697–1785), who lived in what is now Columbia, Pennsylvania, and produced silk that was woven into dress fabric in London and presented to Queen Charlotte by Benjamin Franklin. Watson, who credits Wright with dyeing silk thread as well, also collected samples of silk by Catherine (1761–1808) and Martha (1769–1811) Haines of Germantown, outside Philadelphia.

Skein of silk thread

Pennsylvania; 1770–1800

Silk thread in wove paper

1958.102.14 *Museum purchase*

In the 1820s a new type of wool yarn for canvaswork and embroidery became highly fashionable. Known as zephyr (referencing a gentle breeze) or Berlin wool (for the city where it was dyed such bright colors), it was made from woolen, rather than worsted, wool. Worsted wool is combed, aligning the fibers to make a stiffer yarn; woolen fibers are carded to make them soft. Worsted crewels are generally 2-ply (two strands twisted together), while the zephyr wools are mainly 4-ply and sometimes 8-ply. You can see the quality of the zephyr wool clearly in the flowers of this cushion cover.

Cushion cover

Norristown, Pennsylvania; 1856

Wool on wool

2003.50 *Museum purchase with funds provided by Mr. Samuel Pettit in memory of his wife, Sally Pettit*





Round table mats

Made by the Deerfield Blue & White Society
Deerfield, Massachusetts; 1896–1926

Linen on linen

2011.26.5-.7 *Gift of Judith Coolidge Carpenter
Herdeg in memory of Ethel Warren Coolidge
and Louise Coolidge Carpenter*

The Deerfield Blue & White Society, founded in 1896 by Margaret and Ellen Whiting, created fine embroideries in contemporary and historic styles as part of the movement to revive traditional crafts. Most popular were their blue and white table mats, with motifs copied from historic bed hangings and bedcovers from the late 1700s. Because the originals were often badly damaged by moths, members of the society used linen thread dyed with natural indigo to obtain the appropriate color blue.

Crewelwork curtain

Upper Connecticut River Valley, Massachusetts; 1730–80

Wool on fustian (linen and cotton)

1958.60.4 *Gift of Henry Francis du Pont*

COTTON

Once an exotic and expensive commodity, cotton became less expensive and more widely available with the invention of the cotton gin and the mechanization of cotton spinning and weaving.

In the early 1800s, embroidered cotton was highly fashionable for clothing and accessories. It continued to be used for fine handkerchiefs and infant and children's clothing into the 1900s.

Whitework handkerchief

Europe; 1880–1920

Cotton on cotton

1969.2944 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*





This rare bedcover was embroidered in cotton on muga silk by professional embroiderers in India. It was owned by a member of the Ashburnham family, most likely Sir John Ashburnham (1602/3–71), who served as Groom of the Bedchamber to King Charles I. Hand-spun cotton thread was exotic and highly prized at the time.

Muga silk is produced from a wild silkworm (*antheraea assama*) indigenous to northeastern India. It is golden and glittery rather than white and shimmery like silk from the common silkworm (*bombyx mori*).

Counterpane (detail)

India; 1600s

Cotton on muga silk

1968.46 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Stockwell

METAL THREADS

Gold and silver threads are still made in small quantities using traditional techniques. The most common type starts with gold or silver wire, which is drawn down to get the appropriate diameter and then flattened and wrapped around a thread core.

Professional embroiderers used lizardine, silk-wrapped purl, and other threads to create this sweet bag and knife sheath. Lizardine is made from a flat metal strip twisted around a form to make a coil. Purl is similar but is rounded and often wrapped with fine silk.

Sweet bags and knife sheaths were fashionable accessories worn by wealthy women. They were often given as gifts. These have a history of ownership in the Norris family, Philadelphia merchants whose ancestors are said to have been members of the court of Queen Elizabeth I.



Sweet bag and knife sheath
England; 1600–1630
Silk, gold, silver, linen
1958.102.17, .18 *Museum purchase*



Embroidered stomachers were a focal point of a woman's dress, fitting within the front opening of the bodice. They could be the work of professional embroiderers, but this example was probably made by the wearer.

Stomacher

England; 1720–30

Silk, metal, cotton

1960.97 *Museum purchase*



Like stomachers, elaborately embroidered aprons could be made professionally or by the wearer. Schoolgirls from prominent families were taught the techniques of embroidering with gold and silver thread.

Apron

England; 1730–40

Silk with gold and silver on silk

1987.84 *Gift of Irwin & Susan Richman*

TECHNIQUES

As fashions have changed over the centuries, so have the people who embroider, the objects they embellish, and the styles of embroidered decoration they create. The basic stitches, however, have remained fairly constant. Through the Plimoth Jacket project, a number of techniques that had fallen out of use were re-learned and are now being practiced by a growing number of fine needleworkers.





Pattern darning is a form of plain sewing that was used to repair clothing and household textiles, but the technique was also featured on highly decorative samplers that proclaimed the skill of the makers.

Darning sampler

England; 1716

Silk on linen

1961.357a,b Gift of Mrs. Giles Whiting

A related technique, called needle-weaving, was used to decorate this large bedcover and is also found on other crewelwork from Connecticut.

Bed rug

Worked by Mary Foot (1752–1837)

Colchester, Connecticut; 1778

Wool

1960.594 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*





Canvaswork, worked in tent or cross-stitch, is a technique that has been practiced since the 1500s. It was worked on loosely woven linen until the 1800s, when a stronger, stiffer cotton canvas became available. The finished work needs to be carefully blocked before framing, as the tension of the stitches tends to pull the finished piece out of shape.

Canvaswork chimneypiece

Made by a member of the Whipple family
Salem, Massachusetts; 1748
Silk and wool on canvas
1965.1609a,b *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*



Canvaswork portrait of Henry Clay

Designed after a painting by John Neagle
Worked by Agnes D. Jackson
Rockaway, New Jersey; 1850
Wool on canvas
2001.14a,b *Gift of Ruth Gardiner Rathburn Pitman*



Lace can be made in two ways. Bobbin lace is made by winding threads onto bobbins and twisting them together. Because bobbins were often made of bone or ivory, this type of lace is often called bone lace. Needle lace is made with a needle and thread and is worked over a foundation of outline stitches using detached buttonhole stitches that are not worked through the ground fabric.

Bobbin lace

United States; 1800–1830

Cotton

1965.2383 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*



Needle lace sampler

Worked by Sarah Keen

Chester County, Pennsylvania; 1762

Linen

1958.2013, 1965.684 (frame)

Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont



Tambour embroidery is worked on material that has been stretched taut by two wooden hoops. The technique is said to have been brought to France from India in the 1700s and was soon adopted by both professional and domestic needleworkers.

Tambour petticoat (detail)

France; 1700–1750
Wool on linen

2010.15 *Museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis du Pont Collectors Circle*

Fragment (detail)

India; 1700–1800
Silk on cotton

1969.1246.1 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*

Tambour hook

England; 1780–1820
Bone, iron

1980.20 *Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Sittig*

Named for the 2-ply worsted wool yarn used to create it, crewelwork was practiced in New England but rarely survives from other parts of the American colonies. The American versions are not as densely worked as their British counterparts and include stitches that require less embroidery thread.

Fine needlework like this was most often done within wealthy Connecticut families that owned slaves, allowing women enough leisure time to undertake such projects.

Crewelwork side curtain

Connecticut; 1750–1800

Wool on fustian

1957.44.1b *Museum purchase*

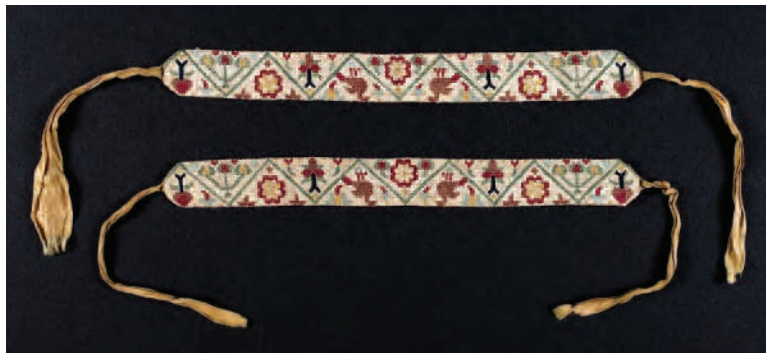




Pocketbook

Worked by, or for, Beulah Biddle
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1783
Silk on linen, silver
1958.2943 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*

Queen's stitch is one of the most complex and time-consuming stitches. Each unit is made up of four or five vertical stitches crossed in the center by a tiny horizontal stitch. It is found on samplers from the 1600s through the early 1800s and was often used to make gifts such as these garters and pocketbook.



Pair of garters

Worked by, or for, Mary Washington
Virginia; 1753
Silk on linen, wool
1965.2082.1, .2 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*



MAKERS

In the 1600s, embroidered women's jackets were produced in professional workshops. Relatively little is known about the men and women who engaged in this trade in England.

Although much research has focused on schoolgirl work, decorative needlework was practiced by women of all ages and ethnicities, and even by many men. This section includes the work of professionals as well as those who embroidered for pleasure rather than profit.



Before the early 1900s, samplers were made by young girls as part of their education. There are two young women named Sarah Collins who might have created this example. Both were the daughters of wealthy landowners. Samplers made in America in the 1600s are quite rare, but clearly American girls were as skillful and as well educated as their contemporaries in Britain.

Sampler

Worked by Sarah Collins

Probably Salem, Massachusetts; 1673

Silk on linen

1987.1a,b Museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis du Pont Collectors Circle

Sophie Bailly (1807–92) was the daughter of Joseph Bailly, a successful French fur trader, and Angelique McGulpin, a French/Native American woman who was also known as Bead-way-way. Sophie was adopted by Madelaine Marcot Framboise, whose sister Therèse was a teacher at the Protestant mission school on Mackinac Island, where Sophie worked this sampler.

Sophie was twenty-one years old when she worked the sampler and may have been a teacher rather than a student. She did teach at various Catholic schools in the region before marrying Henry Graveraet, a lawyer, who, along with one of their sons, was killed in the Civil War.

Sampler

Worked by Sophie Bailly
Mackinac Island, Michigan; 1828
Silk on linen
2010.30a,b Museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis
du Pont Collectors Circle





The Lombard Street School, where Olevia Rebecca Parker worked this canvaswork picture at the age of fourteen, was a public school for children from Philadelphia's African American community. Canvaswork, sometimes called Berlin wool work, was commonly taught in schools in the mid-1800s.

Education was important to Olevia's family and the free black community in Philadelphia. Olevia married Joseph Brister, a dentist, and their son James studied dentistry. He was the first African American to earn a degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Their daughter, named Olivia, became a teacher.

Needlework picture

Worked by Olevia Rebecca Parker
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1852
Wool, cotton

2009.12.1a,b Museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis du Pont Collectors Circle

This sampler was made as a gift to celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of Henry Francis and Ruth Wales du Pont in 1941. It incorporates objects from their collection as well as personal references: Henry Francis was sometimes known as “Tiger.” The Eleanor Roosevelt who worked the sampler was married to the son of President Theodore Roosevelt. Born Eleanor Butler Alexander (1880–1960), she and Mrs. du Pont were school friends.

Sampler

Worked by Eleanor B. Alexander Roosevelt

United States; 1941

Wool and silk on linen

1970.563a,b *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*





Made by a mother and daughter, both named Katurah Reeve, this embroidered bedcover commemorates a tragedy that befell a ship belonging to their son and brother, Selah Reeve. On October 25, 1819, the sloop *Patriot* was discovered “with her colors half mast—union side down,” badly leaking with almost all hands incapacitated by yellow fever. The crew was rescued, but the ship was lost.

The design is an accurate depiction of a three-masted ship frequently used for coastal trade. Note that two of the flags are upside down, the international code for distress.

Embroidered bedcover (detail)

Worked by Katurah Strong Reeve and daughter Katurah Reeve Van Duzer

Newburgh, New York; 1820

Cotton

1966.139 *Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Stockwell*

Whitework embroidery was highly fashionable in the late 1700s and early 1800s and remained popular for children and infants' clothing into the 1900s. Women in Scotland, Ireland, England, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, India, and elsewhere worked in their homes to satisfy the huge demand for “sewed,” “worked,” or “flowered” cottons used for making clothing, shawls, collars, caps, and other accessories. This type of “outwork” was poorly paid except at the highest levels. During the second half of the 1800s, hand work was eclipsed by the large quantities of whitework produced more quickly and cheaply by machine. The embroidery at the hem of the child’s dress was done by machine.



Shawl (detail)

Worn by a member of the Ten Eyck family
New York; 1800–1825

Cotton

2000.17.2 *Museum purchase with funds
provided by the Henry Francis du Pont
Collectors Circle*



Baby cap

Worn by a member of the Sitgreaves or Bowman family
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1820–40

Cotton on linen

1976.253 *Museum purchase*



Child's dress

Possibly worn by a member of the du Pont family; 1850–70
Cotton

1969.4685 *Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont*

Warren Opie, born in 1835, decorated, and possibly made, his best summer uniform while serving on the steam frigate *Susquehanna* as it traveled from Norfolk, Virginia, to Japan. Sailors often decorated their best uniforms, which were worn on shore leave. Opie chose patriotic symbols for his uniform but embroidered his sea bag with names and images that reminded him of his home and family.

The *Susquehanna* was one of four ships commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry on his travels to Japan between 1850 and 1854. Opie perhaps took part in the ceremony as Commodore Perry delivered a letter from United States President Millard Fillmore to the Emperor of Japan as part of the effort to open trade between the two countries. The letter was carried in procession by a ship's boy—the rank held by Opie.

Summer uniform of an enlisted sailor

Worn by Warren Opie

Burlington, New Jersey; 1850–54

Linen, silk, wool

1967.933a,b Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont

Sea bag

Owned by Warren Opie

Burlington, New Jersey; 1850–54

Linen, silk, wool, cotton

1967.932 Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont





Embroidered silks were popular and profitable exports from China in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Tradition of ownership tells us that this bedcover was probably brought back as a gift for a member of the Rupert or Grubb family of Delaware. Made in a professional workshop, this style of embroidery was popular in Europe as well as North and South America.

Embroidered bedcover

China; early 1800s

Silk, cotton

2007.22 Museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis du Pont Collectors Circle

NOTES

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