

1905 NORWEGIAN SAMPLER EAC-2004-4



Description: Although 100 years have passed since this very fresh, clean looking sampler with its bright blue and red stitching was embroidered; it has stood the test of time amazingly well. Some fading is apparent, less in the red than in the blue threads, but it's all very minuscule. Meanwhile, the stitching has remained intact with only a few frays or breaks in the thread. Definitely organized, this sampler consists of seven bands with three alphabets, numbers, the stitcher's name, date and small motifs all stitched in red matt cotton threads. Various cross stitch patterns all embroidered in blue matt cotton underline the different bands. It is stitched on a white, somewhat open, evenweave cotton fabric with a count of 28 threads to the inch. Measuring 38.3 centimetres wide by

33.4 centimetres in height, this colourful embroidery, with its subtle references to the Norwegian history and culture, is completely edged in the buttonhole technique worked over four fabric threads in red thread.

Decorating the first band are upper case, old, ornate letters A to N; the letter I is not included, as was the case in early alphabets. All of the letters are cross stitched in red cotton, each of which measures 24 fabric threads high, except for the H, which is 26 threads in height plus it is designed with a “tail” that reaches down to the next row of stitching. Aside from a frayed thread in the letter G, all stitching is secure. The letter J seems to have been the most troublesome for the embroiderer, as several stitches are only worked over one thread. A tiny diagonal pattern in cross stitch worked over four fabric threads, with each cross stitch two threads high and embroidered in blue cotton, underlines this band.

The remaining letters of this very ornate upper-case alphabet, O to Z, fill the second band. The U and V are both stitched, which might be considered unusual. The decorative Z is reminiscent of the number three and it has a broken thread. Interestingly, this elaborately styled alphabet resembles the letters in an illustration of alphabets that dates as early as 1850 (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 31, p. 9). Because the embroidery is so similar to what is shown in the literature—only the letter Q is different—it suggests that the embroiderer stitching in the 20th Century may have had access to a 19th Century pattern book, or that she copied the alphabet from an earlier embroidery. A diamond-shaped pattern comprising of three single cross stitches on all sides, that are worked in blue cotton over two threads, underlines the second band. Each “diamond”—six cross stitches in height from the lowest to the highest point—covers 12 fabric threads.

Lower-case 19th Century styled cross stitched letters a to s, somewhat less ornate than the band above, enhance band three. Although several of the letters such as a, e, m and o are 18 threads high, others such as the c, which sits two threads below all the letters, have various discrepancies. The small or circle portions of “long armed” letters such as d, k and p are also 18 threads high. Perhaps one of the strangest irregularities in this band of very legible letters is an overly long shaft with a bit of a “thorn” on the top and another closer to the bottom, which is placed between the r and the s. Appropriately it is known as the “long s” and was always the first s to be used in a word with more than one s (Nesbitt, p. 40, 61). Underlining these letters is a complete row of blue cross stitches in a carefully executed Greek key design. The bottom and top portions have six cross stitches over two threads and the back of the “key” consists of four cross stitches all told. While the c, m, long s and s all show some fraying, nothing is major.

The lower case letters t to z followed by a period and the numbers one to 10 embellish the fourth band, all of which are embroidered in red cotton. The u, w, 3 and 0 each have a frayed thread but again nothing serious. The letters are all stitched in cross stitch over two threads and are 18 fabric threads high except the t, which is placed two fabric threads above the others and thus is four threads higher due to the extended stem. Both the y and z have curlicue tails that reach into the next band. Interestingly, the numbers are stitched in an italic style with single rows of cross stitch, thereby appearing very simple and much smaller than the above ornate alphabets with double rows of cross stitch. It is relatively rare that embroiderers include numbers one to 10—one to nine or even fewer are far more common. Perhaps one reason for this distinction is that the italic numbers on this sampler resemble numbers in a 19th Century embroidery book, supporting the theory that they may have been copied (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 31, p.9). An undulating cross stitch vine decorated with floral and leaf designs all stitched in blue underlines this band, which rests immediately below the half way mark of this thoughtful and somewhat puzzling sampler.

A second upper-case alphabet, considerably smaller, simpler and therefore easier to read than the one above, relates well to the 20th Century and so-called modern world. Single rows of cross stitch form the letters A to T, all of which are 14 fabric threads or seven cross stitches high. Unlike the old Q that is remindful of a P printed backwards, the Q in this alphabet is an up-to-date version—an O with a tail.

At this point the embroiderer undoubtedly took a moment to determine which seemingly was the “lesser of two evils”: Stitch the remaining letters, U to Z in red, as was the colour scheme, or do these few letters in blue and finish out the underlining in a blue cross stitch pattern. Few would argue with the embroiderer who chose blue letters followed by a cross stitch pattern of squares all in blue. Interestingly, the eye tends to register the blue letters as underlining before recognizing them as individual letters so the colour scheme is not disturbed. The letters U to Z are the same size as those above, seven cross stitches high. Only the W has one small break in the thread. The cross stitch squares comprised of three stitches across and three rows deep, are surrounded by two fabric threads on all sides and framed in blue borders of cross stitch over two threads with the respective borders sharing common sides.

Thankfully, the embroiderer recorded her name, Gudrun Emilie Delvigen, carefully centring it in the second last band. Stitched all in red thread, the first letter of each of the three stitched names, G, E and D, is embroidered in the old 19th Century printing style, with the remaining lower-case letters in each name

stitched in an unadorned, modern design. Three rows of cross stitch all over two threads that are enhanced with a diamond shape every fifth cross stitch comprises the last underlining row and is embroidered all in blue thread.

Dates are always important, and the year this embroiderer created her sampler, 1905, is extremely significant. It well deserves the central spot in the last band of this most interesting sampler. Stitched all in red, the date is flanked on either side by three small, similarly stitched geometric motifs, also embroidered in red, that alternate across part of the row to make a total of eight on the left side, as opposed to seven motifs on the right.

History: Janice Routley, a charter member of the Regina Stitchery Guild and an appointee of the Embroiderers' Association of Canada Board of Directors to oversee the Heritage Collection, purchased this sampler in Regina in 2002 from a person who had bought it in a Regina antique store. Later she donated it to the EAC Heritage Collection. There was some consideration about the sampler having a German origin, but research has proven that it is, without a doubt, Norwegian.

Not only is it Norwegian, it is embroidered in red and blue threads, the colours of the Norwegian flag, and dated 1905—the year Norway gained its independence from Sweden! Certainly it is a well-planned, carefully stitched sampler that suggests it was worked with a purpose in mind. Is this one of the ways the Norwegian embroiderer celebrated her country's freedom? Is there any chance that this sampler also marked the founding of the new Canadian provinces—Saskatchewan and Alberta—which were also formed in 1905?

It would seem the sampler was designed with some thought given to bridging the old and the new. For starters, the ornate alphabets in the first four bands that date to the mid 19th Century and include the old fashioned “long s”, contrast sharply with the newer, plainer letters of the 20th century seen in the fifth and sixth bands. Perhaps the embroiderer's name, Gudrun Emilie Delvigen is the most significant clue in defining this historic work. Possibly in an attempt to blend the past and the present, the embroiderer stitched both the ornate upper case and the modern lower-case letters in her name. Queried at the outset about the embroiderer's name, Lutheran Church members—German and Scandinavian traditionalists—stated without hesitation that the name was not German but could be Scandinavian. Several gave valid explanations as to their reasoning; others were relatively sure it was Norwegian (St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Winnipeg, MB).

The Internet found no Delvigen names in Canada or the United States but did offer close possibilities. Worth investigating was the name Delviken, with only one different letter. In addition, the Internet identified only three Delviken households

in all of Canada: one is located in Saskatchewan and the other two in British Columbia. Are they related to each other as well as to the embroiderer and, if so, why were the names spelled differently, one with a g the other with a k? Two interesting ideas surfaced during a talk with Norwegians who are knowledgeable in their language customs. It seems that while Delviken, meaning small bay, is grammatically correct with the adjective before the noun, Delvigen does not follow the same rule, giving the impression it might be misspelled or have been changed over the years. (Carlson) Even more telling is the fact revealed by an older Norwegian person who continues to speak the language and readily explained that “in old Norsk the g and the k were interchangeable” (Anderson).

To determine exactly who Gudrun Emilie Delvigen was and where she would have been living at the time she embroidered her sampler, it was necessary to talk to all three Delviken families who are all related. Previously unaware of a Gudrun in their family and not at all knowledgeable in the ways of embroidery, the Delvikens were nevertheless captivated by the information revealed in the sampler. They do keep in touch with their family in Norway, which apparently is not overly large and, as far as they know, the only Delviken family in all of Norway. Two of the Canadian Delvikens, upon learning about the sampler and its embroiderer, immediately emailed their Norwegian relatives to ask about Gudrun. While to date there is no confirmation as to who Gudrun Emilie Delvigen would be in relation to the Delviken families, it is certainly possible that she is an early relative. Family members believe the odds are such that it is just a matter of time before this mystery will be solved. They have promised to forward to the EAC Heritage Collection any information that is forthcoming from their genealogy search.

With regard to where Gudrun Emilie Delvigen was living in 1905, it does seem reasonable to suggest Canada, on the basis of her alphabets. Even the old letters are those used in the German/English languages as opposed to the Scandinavian or Norwegian alphabet that has three very different and unusual letters. One example is the letter that looks like a combination of a and e with no space between. If the embroiderer had been living in Norway, it is likely that she would have stitched her Norwegian alphabet (Anderson).

If this reasoning seems acceptable and there is just cause to believe the embroiderer was in all likelihood living in Canada, then this sampler is indeed a significant historic work. Not only does this sampler celebrate Norway's independence, but perhaps by design more than chance, it also marks the founding of two Canadian provinces—Saskatchewan and Alberta, both formed in 1905! In fact, it may be said that Gudrun Emilie Delvigen was an embroiderer who, in keeping abreast of the times, created an embroidered sampler that will be forever meaningful.

Materials: White evenweave cotton, 28 threads to the inch, blue and red matt cotton thread.

Condition: The condition of this sampler is remarkably good, especially considering that it was stitched in 1905. There are a few small breaks in both the red and blue embroidery cotton. Seemingly, the only wear in the fabric is at the very top where it appears the buttonhole edging became worn and was re-worked over eight threads, instead of four, for approximately 1.5 centimetres, thereby pulling the fabric threads askew. There is also a slight yellow stain at the top and two or three other tiny marks suggesting age.