

## HUTTERITE SAMPLER EAC- 91-3-LL



**Description:** This large, beautiful Hutterite sampler displays elements seen in other traditional Hutterite embroideries of this type. A total of 27 alphabets that differ in size, structure and unusual choices of letters are worked in cross stitch, covering most of the sampler; four sets of numbers follow, three of which are one to nine plus zero and one set that just includes numbers one to nine. The name "Rebecca G." plus two animals, birds and human figures, which are all very tiny, complete the row with numbers. The final alphabet, exhibiting large, highly ornamental capital letters concludes approximately 4.5 centimetres from the hemline. Motifs along the bottom include hearts, various floral, bird and geometric designs. One other design, a coal oil lamp, is tucked into the last alphabet row after the N where there is not enough space for the R that consequently starts a new and final row of alphabets. Two sets of initials—A G and P G—in decorative squares and a family name Erinnerung, framed in an embellished rectangle, are also in the bottom area. Considerably larger than the

Hutterite samplers at the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg, this sampler measures 47 centimetres by 66.75 centimetres.\*

It is fashioned on a machine-hemmed, evenweave linen tea towel with a count of 48 threads to the inch. All of the above alphabets and motifs are hand embroidered over two threads, while the outside border is stitched over three threads. Almost all of the sampler is embroidered in bright red floss, now faded; a partial row of an alphabet was stitched in a once-bright pink, which is also used for part of the name Rebecca, as well as most of the motifs along the bottom. Some of the latter are stitched in red and pink. There appear to be some other discrepancies within the reds and pinks in the motifs suggesting that fading was minimal in this area or that there was a different thread used in some cases. The third colour that provides contrast, although used sparingly, is green. It highlights various segments of the motifs and is used to work part of the leaf decorating the letter R in the last alphabet. The remaining portion of that leaf is embroidered in a compatible light blue. These few stitches are the only blue in the sampler, possibly used because the embroiderer ran out of green, or maybe the light was not sufficiently bright to clearly identify the colours. All the threads have faded over the years, but because this sampler is not mounted, it is easy to see the threads on the back side, which are much brighter and would be close to the original colours.

Interestingly, the red used for the last alphabet has remained a bright, true red except for the A and B, and a portion of the back of the C, which are the same faded colour as the entire sampler. At first glance, the threads on the back of the sampler all appear to be the same bright reds, which could mean that somehow the latter three letters have faded. On closer inspection of the back side with a magnifying glass, however, it is easy to see that the main portion of the sampler, the alphabets, has been worked in an inferior red that appears somewhat matted now and even just a little lighter than the red thread used in the last alphabet, which still looks like new from both the right and wrong sides.

This brighter red thread that has not faded also ornaments part of the letter K on the right hand side in the seventh row of alphabets. The K is seemingly out of place, in that the next line, still in the same alphabet, reverts back to J, then L, continuing through to P but missing Q, U, V and Z and then surprisingly, ending with a B, not quite as ornate as the B at the beginning of this alphabet. The above variations are fairly typical of almost all the alphabets that either are missing letters, including P and Q, or have included the same letter twice. At least one other alphabet also ends with the letter B. Other alphabet omissions in this sampler, which may also be found on some Hutterite samplers, are the letters C, F and T. Other noteworthy

exceptions within the alphabets are what might be best identified as two groups of letters—14 in one and 13 in the other—that are not all recognizable. Both begin with a letter best identified as U; one ends with B and the second group with a W. The most amazing thing about these groups of letters, stitched in a very early style and therefore not readily recognizable, is that they are exactly like the letters shown on one of the antique pages of old booklets in the article, *Small Pattern Books: Unfolding a Piece of Needlework History* discussed on page nine in Volume 31 of *Sampler & Antique Needlework*. Very tiny geometric forms finish the row of the first group of letters. Purposefully stitched, these letters in their particular groups beg the question, what do they represent? Still another group of letters—BEGHIRS, all finely stitched in a block style near the top of the sampler and easily spotted – appear significant in some way too. Could these letters symbolize some spiritual or cultural belief?

**History:** This unique sampler, both from a cultural and an embroidery point of view, belonged to Leonida Leatherdale's estate and was donated to the Embroiderers' Association of Canada and subsequently the Heritage Collection. Aside from being identified as a Hutterite sampler, there is no further information or history pertaining to this embroidery. Thankfully, it does seemingly follow Hutterite traditions so we can say with some certainty that this is probably a Hutterite sampler. The elements discussed above that would identify it as a Hutterite sampler are: (1) It is stitched on linen tea towelling; (2) There are many alphabets stitched at the top of the sampler with motifs decorating the bottom section; and (3) There is a family name that is decoratively "framed". In addition, the unusual lettering found in this sampler and discussed above, is similar to some sequences of letters embroidered on the Hutterite samplers in the Manitoba Museum.

However, there are also the following non-Hutterite differences about this sampler: (1) It is stitched primarily in red rather than in many different bright colours; and (2) not only is it much larger than the most but the length of the linen has been used as the width of the sampler.

It is difficult to date this work. While the many alphabet styles, ranging from likenesses of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century German designs and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Great Latin to the 1930s Flat Face, provide a variety of historic/stitching studies, they are most likely designs chosen at random and reveal no clues as to when this piece was created. It is also probable that the motifs were "made to record patterns", as is stated about the Hutterite samplers in the museum. While some images have symbolic meanings—the heart represents love and piety, the peacock immortality, the horn of plenty fruitfulness, and birds, generally suggest the spiritual rather than material things—they bear no relevance to the date of this embroidery. However, it is important to

note, that because the groups of letters mentioned above closely resemble those in the magazine article (top row, third example from the left, page nine, Volume 31, *Sampler and Antique Needlework*), it is almost certain that the embroiderer had access to either an old pattern book or a sampler created from such a booklet. Interestingly, the article alludes to many of these old booklets having been printed in the early 1800s and being of German origin, which is part of the Hutterite heritage. Because the Hutterites did not immigrate to Canada until 1918, this sampler might well have been in the process of being created, with the newer thread and final alphabet being stitched after the family settled in Canada. One thing is certain: this sampler is a cultural treasure, reflective of Hutterite values.

\*Six Hutterite samplers dated between 1872 and 1941 from the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg have been used as reference points.

**Materials:** Evenweave linen fabric 48 threads to the inch, red, pink and green embroidery floss and sewing thread.

**Condition:** This finely stitched sampler is in good condition for the most part, especially considering the fact that it may be at least 80 years old. Unfortunately, there are a few small stains within the first four rows of stitching, by far most of the embroidery is very intact and looks extremely good except for the fact that it has faded.