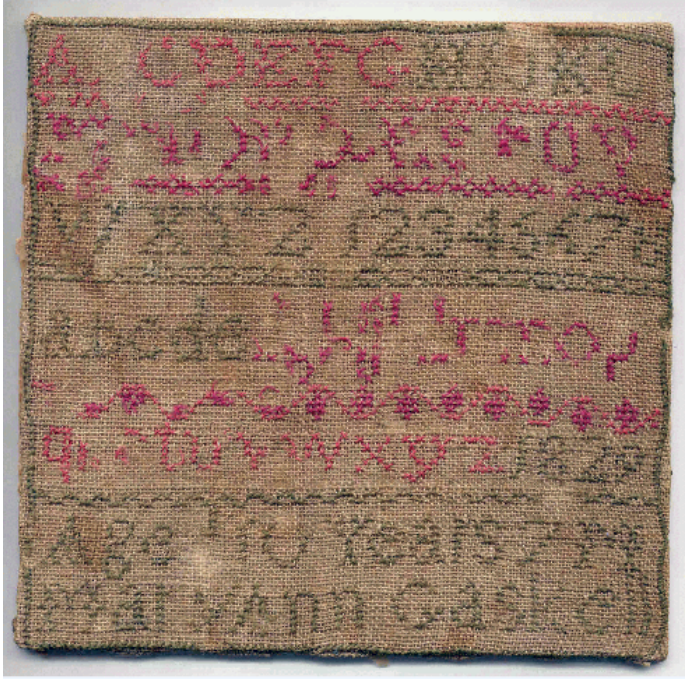


MARY ANN GASKELL SAMPLER
EAC-2003-9



Description: This basic little sampler, stitched some 175 years ago, is probably one of thousands that attests to the public school education offered young girls in the early 19th Century. It comprises two alphabets, upper and lower cases, numbers one to eight, the stitcher's name, age and the year she completed this embroidery. There is also a border and various cross stitch patterns that separate the bands of letters. The entire sampler is worked in cross stitch, each of which is over two threads. Embroidered in green and two shades of red wool on

loosely woven linen 24 threads to the inch, this sampler measures 20.25 centimetres wide and 20 cm high.

Because the sampler is now float mounted on linen fabric, it is not possible to see the back side of the sampler, but it would appear that it is simply hemmed. The hems vary in width from .5 cm to 1 cm. A green border is stitched in cross stitch, all over two threads around the entire sampler, sitting snug against the right side of the hem, two fabric threads from the bottom and left hemlines and four fabric threads from the top hem.

The first band includes the upper-case letters A to G stitched in a pinkish red, now seemingly faded, and H to L in an olive green. It would appear that all letters are seven cross stitches high. Unfortunately no stitching fibre in the letter B has survived and the upper portions of C and J are also missing. A zigzag row of faded red cross stitches, one up, one down and all over two threads underline the above letters.

All of the upper case letters in the second band appear to be stitched in a more vibrant red than the previous row and are worn considerably more. However it would seem that they were originally also seven cross stitches in height. The M and S are barely legible but the R, U and V are reasonably intact. The remaining

letters N, O, P, Q and T are missing many stitches. A small diamond cross stitch pattern in the same red tone underlines this band.

Interestingly, the third band, all stitched in green, is almost completely intact. It appears that only one thread has been broken in the number six. This band comprises of the remainder of the upper-case alphabet letters, W, X, Y, and Z. In addition there are the numbers one through eight. All letters and numbers have been carefully stitched, beginning and ending on the same fabric threads and all measuring seven cross stitches high. A cross stitch pattern, reminiscent of a cable, is worked in green wool and consists of three cross stitches on top with one cross stitch placed at either end and two fabric threads down; the three cross stitches on the bottom sit directly under the three on top.

The fourth band features the lower-case alphabet with the letters a to e stitched in green and varying in height from four cross stitches to six. Only one thread in the lower portion of the d is broken; deterioration in this segment is barely noticeable. However in contrast, the remaining letters in the band, which are probably f to p, are stitched in the more vibrant red and are not really legible at all. From the few odd stitches still visible, it would seem there is a good possibility that at least two letters in the latter grouping, f to p, were not stitched and certainly the space is very limited. This band is underlined in a scallop comprising three stitches on the top and three on the bottom with three also on the sides, all of which are embroidered in the more faded pinkish red. Cross stitch ovals that consist of one cross stitch at the top and one at the bottom, with two rows of three cross stitches each in the middle, hang and sit alternatively in the scallops. These are stitched in the more vibrant red and there is noticeable deterioration throughout the entire row.

Continuing with her pinkish red fibre, the embroiderer completed the lower-case alphabet letters q to z and again, much of this area has suffered wear. The x and y appear intact, the q, t, u and z each have one broken stitch, the v and w each have at least two broken threads and the r and s are not really legible. In contrast, the rest of the band, which entails the date of 1829 stitched in green, has remained intact. All of the numbers are seven cross stitches high, except the nine, which is six. A V-shaped green cross stitch pattern comprising two cross stitches on the top and two on the bottom, which underlines the band of letters and numbers has lost most of the stitches in two V-shapes, but the rest are very secure.

In the remaining portion, the young stitcher included the following statistics: Age 10 Years 7 M, all of which is embroidered in green on the upper line of this space. The bottom line reads, Mary Ann Gaskell, which is also in green wool. There is very little apparent wear: one thread in the letter e in age is missing,

two cross stitches at the top of the zero in ten are missing and on the bottom line, the A in Ann and the K in Gaskell are each missing two cross stitches.

History: Mary Ann Gaskell embroidered this sampler that was donated to the EAC Heritage Collection by TDR (Bob) Caldwell of Saskatoon in September 2003. Due to the fact that there were two Mary Ann Gaskells in the family, the stitcher and Bob's great grandmother (1852-1908), the former was simply identified at the time of the donation as a direct ancestor of the donor (See notes of Caldwell history in the Bibliography.) This embroidery has been handed down from one generation to another, always remaining within the Caldwell family and looked upon with interest, since it was first created in 1829.

There are at least two interesting aspects about the history of this little sampler. First, the sampler's numerous elements such as the border, alphabets, numbers, name and age plus its square shape all suggest that this is undoubtedly a school project (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 1, p.28; Vol. 12, pp. 18-19; Grow, McGrail, p.25). However, perhaps as much as anything, this little sampler seems to reveal the numerous variables and uncertainties in home spinning and dyeing even, as late as the early 1800s. Certainly the noticeable deterioration of the red wool, as opposed to the green, which shows only a few broken stitches, suggests perhaps a difference in the fleece that was used or in the respective dye baths. The temperature of the bath, the difference in mordants, and how long the wool remained in the bath as compared to what would be the correct amount of time, would all help to make a difference in the longevity of the wool. In addition to the obvious wear of the red fibre, the latter also appears to have faded much more than the green (Bath, p. 210, Olsen note). Indeed, there is much to be learned from this little 19th Century sampler. Not only does it speak about the schooling of young girls in the early 1800s, but it also provides insight into the deterioration of materials, probably due to home dyeing practises and the differences in the quality of fleece during this era.

Materials: Linen, 24 threads to the inch, two shades of red and one of green wool.

Condition: This sampler was in poor condition when it was donated to the EAC Heritage Collection. There was noticeable deterioration in the stitching and it had been laced onto a piece of cardboard by Arlington Art Gallery in Saskatoon, possibly in the 1940s or earlier. The lacing was covered with brown paper that was heavily glued. Once received into the Heritage Collection, this little sampler, thanks to the conservation treatments offered by Janice Routley, was stabilized. The sampler was carefully removed from the cardboard, washed in Orvus and rinsed several times with the final rinse being distilled water. It was then decided that further washing was necessary as the piece was so dirty. The glue washed out easily, the sampler was float mounted on natural linen and the

linen was laced onto acid free mat board. There was very little loss of stitching due to washing. Although the sampler is stained and the stitching has deteriorated considerably, it will now remain intact as it is for many years to come.



Gaskell Sampler in original condition showing lacing and gluing of paper on the back.



Sampler in present condition after washing and float mounting.