

MARY MUSGRAVE 1797 SAMPLER EAC-2003-11



Description: Filled with embroidery and eye catching colours that have kept their glow for the more than 200 years since the last stitch was executed, this little sampler, dated 1797, is the work of 10-year-old Mary Musgrave. Complete with three sets of alphabets, one set of numbers, names, date, a moral verse of the day and a pretty little deep rose and hunter green V-shaped zigzag border across the top with a similar, plain border in a light copper colour along the bottom, this almost square sampler reflects the late 18th Century style. Other colours include light mauve, antique gold, silver grey, khaki green and light and medium pinks. It appears to be stitched in silk floss on even weave linen, 28 threads to the inch, is hemstitched on three sides with the selvage on the right and it measures 21 centimetres wide by 17 centimetres high.

The top border gives the effect of a garland of flowers. It consists of 14 V-like shapes in hunter green. The sides of each V have three cross stitches and they share the top and bottom cross stitches; all are worked over two threads. Resting inside the V spaces, both top and bottom, are tiny deep rose diamond shapes resembling flowers made up of four cross stitches, all worked over two threads.

An upper case alphabet with letters A to Q, except for J, which is missing, fills the first band. It is underlined in two rows of alternating antique gold cross stitches, all over two threads, that appear like herringbone at first glance. The letters, all seven cross stitches or 14 fabric threads high, are embroidered in the following colours with no apparent order: deep rose, antique gold, hunter green, light pink and silver grey.

The second band consists of the remainder of the above-mentioned alphabet—R to Z except for U, which is also missing—plus the “and” sign (&) an eyelet, and numbers one to six. The latter, except for the five, are all seven cross stitches high; the five is eight cross stitches high. The six, while the same size as the others, begins two threads higher, so appears larger. The letter u is missing. Seemingly used at random, the colours are light mauve, silver grey, light copper and khaki green. These letters and numbers are underlined in a row of alternating three light mauve cross stitches followed by three silver grey cross stitches.

The third band displays a lower case alphabet with the letters a to w. As in the previous alphabet, letters are missing, here they are j and v. A further discrepancy is the fact that following what appears to be the lower case r, although the “arm” is only a tent stitch rather than a cross stitch, there is what appears to be a second r (a rare but not unique practise) that is one cross stitch higher, which is then followed by s, t, u, and w (King, pl. 35). The colours are a mix of mauve, deep rose, light copper, silver grey and hunter green. The entire band is underlined in a solid row of hunter green cross stitches two threads high, except where five cross stitches of the lower case g rest on the cross stitched row.

The fourth band also displays some curious inconsistencies. The remaining letters of the above alphabet, x, y and z, plus the “and” (&) and a tiny motif, perhaps meant to be a period, are followed by the name Mary Musgrave. However in both the alphabet and Mary, the y is cross stitched backwards and appears to be upper case, as are X and Z. In contrast, both lower and upper case letters are used after the capital M in both the Christian name and surname. For instance the r in Mary and the u, s, r, and e in Musgrave are definitely lower case, but the V is clearly upper case. Another oddity is the letter a in both Mary

and Musgrave: they look more like an upper case G than a lowercase a. Just as the lower case g in the previous band rested on the cross stitch line, so the g in Musgrave rests on this cross stitch line that is worked over two threads in deep rose. While pink is the predominant colour in this band, silver, deep rose and the two shades of green, also highlight the embroidery.

The fifth and final band displays an incomplete lower case alphabet—the letters j and q are missing—and a tiny little & squeezed up tight to the date 1797. All of the letters are worked entirely in pink, except for the letter m, which is in deep rose; the & and the date are hunter green. Although the letters are relatively narrow, somewhat crowded and for the most part stitched over one thread, they are not necessarily all the same size. For instance, the r, m, and n are over eight threads, the o, s, u, and v, over six. There are variations in the taller letters too, such as the k is over 15 threads, p over 14 and the l over 13. As mentioned above, the y is cross stitched backwards. Like the above others, this band is underlined in a row of pink cross stitch over two threads.

The lower portion contains the following verse, which unfortunately is partially deteriorated:

Contentment is - - - - tant Store De?ire
Whats fit and nothing more.

The verse covers almost two rows and is all cross stitched over one thread in light copper silk, except for the upper case C in contentment, which is cross stitched in hunter green and the upper case D, in khaki green. There are numerous differences in the size of letters, such as the e comprised of eight cross stitches, the s seven, the o six, but for all that, the verse is fairly easy to read except for the worn threads. The second row is completed with the word Mary, which begins with an upper case M in khaki green, while the remaining letters are in light copper. Interestingly, after stitching the y backwards in numerous places, the young embroiderer, working on her name, managed to cross stitch y correctly. The M is seven cross stitches high, each of which are over two threads while the cross stitches in the lower case letters are over one thread. The a and r are six and eight cross stitches high respectively, while the upper portion of the y is just four threads high. The second last row of embroidery reads as follows: "Musgrave her Work taught by Mrs". The upper case M in Musgrave is the same size as the one in Mary and is also worked in khaki green. However there are discrepancies throughout the other letters much like those mentioned above.

The final row, beginning on the left, includes the teacher's last name, Mus, approximately the same size as the letters above and cross stitched in light copper, followed by a well-executed silver grey eyelet. In the lower right corner is the word "age" cross stitched in lower case letters and the number 10; both

are stitched in light copper. The central space is decorated with a fairly large V-shaped zigzag design also embroidered in light copper. Each side of the V has eight cross stitches in addition to sharing top and bottom cross stitches.

History: This precious little sampler embroidered by 10- year-old Mary Musgrave in 1797, under the guidance of her teacher, Mrs. Mus, is one of numerous samplers donated to the Heritage Collection of the Embroiderers' Association of Canada by T.R.C. Caldwell of Saskatoon in 2003. (See family history in the Bibliography.) Although it appears to be a relatively simple, basic learning piece, probably worked in a classroom setting, it does demonstrate the style of the late 18th century. Albeit small, it is almost square, displays a top border and a partial, centred border at the bottom, includes three alphabets, all with distinctive elements of the time, a set of numbers and a verse that definitely identifies the era. In fact this little sampler, while somewhat frail, does indeed serve as a historic marker of samplers. While the verse is only partially legible, a similar verse on another 18th century sampler is perhaps indicative of Mary's thoughts: "Content is all we aim at with our Store, and having that with little need no more." (King, pl. 31).

Of special significance is the fact that this sampler was embroidered by an ancestor of the Caldwell family. While later members of the family were not embroiderers they did preserve and in fact enjoy the embroideries of their ancestors, which includes the above Mary Musgrave embroidery.

Materials: Even weave linen, 28 threads to the inch, and silk floss in the following colours: deep rose, hunter and khaki greens, light mauve, antique gold, silver grey, light and medium pinks.

Condition: When the sampler came to the Heritage Collection it was laced on cardboard and was very dirty. It was washed with Orvus, was well rinsed in distilled water and then pinned onto a blocking board to dry. It was then float mounted on washed natural linen and the accession number was added on the back. Consequently this meaningful little sampler has now been stabilized and is in fairly good condition, except for the fragmented threads due mainly to its age and wear over more than 200 years.