

UNIQUE GERMAN SAMPLER EAC- 98-10



Description: This large, colourful sampler was undoubtedly a prized work of the young embroiderer just learning her stitches; it is indeed a special embroidery in the Heritage Collection of the Embroiderers' Association of Canada. Fashioned on hand-woven even weave white cotton with a 25 thread count, it features a deep blue, red and white woven border and is approximately 42 centimetre square. In brief, the sampler entails eleven different techniques and patterns worked in rows, one complete alphabet, one set of numbers from one to nine plus zero and one row of ornately stitched letters which appear to have been chosen at random. All of the above are embroidered

in various coloured wools. Centred below are two names, one beneath the other—Arbeits-Schule and Zazenhansen. At the very bottom and centred are the initials and date as follows: 18 R.M. 08. In the bottom right corner there is a 4 cm square of a particular technique worked in an olive green wool and in the left corner another four cm square showing a different technique in red wool.

It is unfortunate that the age of the embroiderer was not stitched on the sampler, but it is likely that this embroidery was meant to record her recently learned stitches. The first two rows of embroidery show a running stitch embroidered over two threads with two threads in between the

stitches. Both rows are worked in black with two threads separating the rows. The next two rows are backstitch embroidered in red over one thread with no spaces between the stitches, but two threads between the rows. Next are two more rows of backstitch in black over two threads and with two threads in between each stitch. The second row is worked so that the backstitch is immediately below the non-embroidered threads in the above row. Tent stitch embroidered in red over two threads comprises the next two rows, which are separated by two threads. The next two rows feature black tent stitch over two threads with two threads between each stitch and two threads between the rows. The next three rows are in red, white and black and worked in cross stitch over two threads with no spaces between the stitches or the rows. Interestingly, while the stitches on the front appear as horizontal rows, in actual fact, according to the back, the cross stitches have all been worked in vertical lines, one below the other.

The next four elements show the cross stitch being used in various patterns. Three cross stitches in light brown all over two threads move up and down on a slant creating "v" formations. Below is a row of cross stitch in medium brown with all stitches worked over two threads in a repeat pattern, somewhat reminiscent of a Greek key. The third pattern of cross stitch is worked in a light blue and is remindful of a scroll. There are seven "scrolls" on either side of a prominent black design in the centre of this row.

This black design, which is not nearly as elementary as the previous stitching, includes a solid row of cross stitch across the top which, according to the back, is also worked on the vertical even though it is a horizontal line of cross stitch with each stitch worked over two threads. Moving down 12 threads, the bottom of this design is comprised of seven scallops of cross stitches; each cross stitch is worked over two threads. Flower-like motifs in the centre of each scallop consist of eight cross stitches, two on top, two on the bottom and two on either side, all of which are worked over two threads, leaving two centre threads in each motif not stitched. The 12 rows of thread in between the top of this element and the bottom scallops are worked in vertical rows of cross stitch over two threads. The cross stitch technique is fashioned and pulled in such a way as to create interlocking diamond shapes with holes in their centres, in effect somewhat like a Greek cross.

The final rows of stitch techniques comprise two rows of cross stitch worked in black over two threads and having two threads in between each stitch. The bottom row of crosses is placed in between the crosses in the upper row. The top row is fashioned vertically, one stitch at a time, while the second row is made horizontally with each cross being completely made before moving onto the next.

One relatively large alphabet and a set of numbers one to nine plus zero make-up the next two rows of this intriguing sampler. The alphabet, all in upper case, is missing only the I and each of the letters consist of nine vertical crosses, all of which are worked over two threads. The colours of the various letters include light tan, pink, green/gold, light blue, medium brown, bright red, red/brown and bright blue. The numbers are all worked in black cross stitch. Each cross is over two threads and the numbers are 16 threads or eight crosses high.

Following the alphabet and number band is a second group of ornately stitched letters. They are somewhat difficult to identify, but could be the following: A, B, E, F, I, K, O, M, S, H. Although these letters appear to be selected at random, the highly decorative, precise stitching suggests that they may well convey some meaningful message if the viewer understood the significance of each letter. They are embroidered in medium brown, wine, green/gold, bright blue and pink wool.

Centred and 22 threads below the above lettering, the hyphenated word "Arbeits-Schule" is embroidered in red cross stitch worked over two threads; both upper and lower case letters are used. The capital A is 20 threads or 10 crosses high as is the S except that the S seemingly is misplaced, resting two threads above those of the A, it is automatically two threads higher than the A.



Some 24 threads below, the name "Zazenhausen" is stitched in black cross stitch over two threads. Using both upper and lower case letters, the embroiderer fashioned the Z 18 threads or nine cross stitches high while the small letters are six crosses high. The h is the same height as the capital Z.

Centred and another 24 threads below the above name are the date and initials as follows: 18 R.M. 08. The initials, stitched in red, are 12 crosses high, each of which is worked over two threads. The date, in blue cross stitch over two threads, is eight crosses high.

The four centimetre-square of technique in the lower right hand corner is worked in olive green wool. On first glance it appears to be closely embroidered vertical rows of chain stitch, but from the backside it is obvious there are a few surprises here. In fact, the first row of stitches are cross stitch worked four threads apart in a vertical fashion. The next row is a horizontal chain with the yarn coming up through the fabric three or four threads below the cross (the wool threads are somewhat matted making it

difficult to see), looping around the cross and going down in the same place it came up before moving across to the next cross stitch. From then on, horizontal rows of chain stitch are worked, always looping into the above chain and securing it at the bottom. The rows move left to right and right to left. The chain stitch, appearing as vertically stitched rows when they are horizontal, has held its shape reasonably well, but it is impossible to say for sure how many rows are stitched due to the tight tension of the stitching and the wearing of the wool. It is also difficult to count the rows on the backside.



In the left hand corner there is a four centimetre-r square of vertical running stitch worked in red wool. The first vertical row on the left hand side consists of 11 stitches, each over two threads with two threads in between the next stitch. Alternating rows are then worked in between the stitches of the previous rows. Accordingly, the respective alternating rows each have 11 and 10 vertical stitches. There is a little wear in this square with a few stitches missing.

History: This delightful sampler with its bits of intrigue was donated June 10, 1998 by Ellen Basler of Regina, to the Heritage Collection of the Embroiderers' Association of Canada. The parents of Ellen had received the sampler from a neighbour friend, Mrs Karl Oswald, some time between 1948-1950, when both families lived in Winnipeg on Redwood Avenue. The Oswalds, who babysat Ellen's older brother a few times, retired to a small farm outside of Richer, MB in the 1950s. During the next decade, they were able to have a few pigs, cow and horse but in the late 1960s, Mrs Oswald passed away and Mr Oswald died in the early '70s. Their only child, a son, had died many years before at a very young age in a motorcycle accident.

Ellen says she knows that Mr Oswald came to Canada as a 'draft dodger' – "he had been drafted once in the old country and when they were going to call him up again he left." It's known that they were in New York in 1922 because Ellen has a souvenir copy of *Midsummer Night's Dream* that they bought in that city.

While the sampler remains somewhat of a mystery with regard to its creator and especially the meaning of the above mentioned ornately designed and stitched letters*, the style of the latter is similar to those in one of the old

pattern books discussed in *Sampler & Antique Needlework, Volume 31*. The article in the magazine is titled Small Pattern Books: Unfolding a Piece of Needlework History and the illustration on page 9 that bears close resemblance to the embroidered letters is the fifth example from the left on the bottom row. It would appear reasonable that the illustration and the stitching may be closely related, in that the article identifies some of the pattern books as German, dating to the early 1800s, thereby coinciding with the date of this German sampler. It is possible that the embroiderer had access to one of these early pattern books or an embroidered sampler fashioned from such a book.

Materials: hand woven wool with decorative red, blue and white woven border, olive green, bright red, light tan, blue, green/gold, medium brown and black embroidery wool.

Condition: Fairly Good. Some colours have run due to laundering; some stitches are missing in the e of Schule, the date 08 and in the running stitch square in the lower left corner. There are also a few soil and stain marks, as well as some wearing in the selvage edge in the upper right corner.

*Possibilities were reviewed with two German theologians in hopes that they could bring some meaning to the last row of letters that are stitched so purposefully. Neither could offer any information, although both agreed there was a good chance that the letters might well represent some secular or spiritual significance.

Editor's note: A web search of "Zazenhausen" comes up with a city that seems to be a suburb of Stuttgart. Could this be a school sampler?