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Brooklyn
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p. 37

SUMMER 2025

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Photo by Matt Graves

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On the cover:

Melissa Dehncke McGill's Brooklyn Museum Sampler Throw was inspired by an eighteenth-century knitting sampler in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum. Photo by Matt Graves.

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Notions

Reading Between the Stitches

On the surface, samples and samplers are a window into historic needlework techniques. But they also provide tantalizing bits of information about their makers. Without the existence of these textiles, the lives of the girls who created them might have gone unnoted, as most historic paperwork documented only men's lives.

Often, samplers seem to hint at a mysterious backstory. Was the knitter adding every stitch pattern she could to her ever-growing knitting roll in anticipation of a move to a faraway place? Was a child from a poor background toiling away at darning stitches in the hope of employment? Was the lacemaker creating a collection of stitches so that traditional techniques would not be lost?

In these pages, discover the stories some samplers have to tell. Laurann Gilbertson presents sprang, a little-known thread manipulation technique that Scandinavian immigrants brought to the United States and Canada. And Lynne Anderson introduces us to the world of Mexican samplers, including the story of one refined young lady and her handiwork.

If you make any of the beautiful projects in this issue, please remember to include a tag or card with as much information as possible about not only the item but also yourself. A future admirer will appreciate the insight into the pattern, materials, and maker.

Happy stitching!

Pat

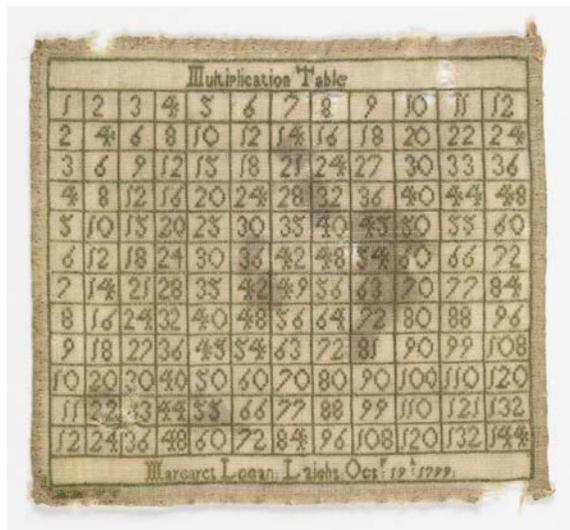


Photo courtesy of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

This multiplication table sample displays the maker's cross-stitch and mathematical skills. Multiplication Table Sampler: Margaret Logan Laight; green silk on an off-white wool ground; USA, 1799; 2003-14-2; Gift of Myra and William H. Mathers.

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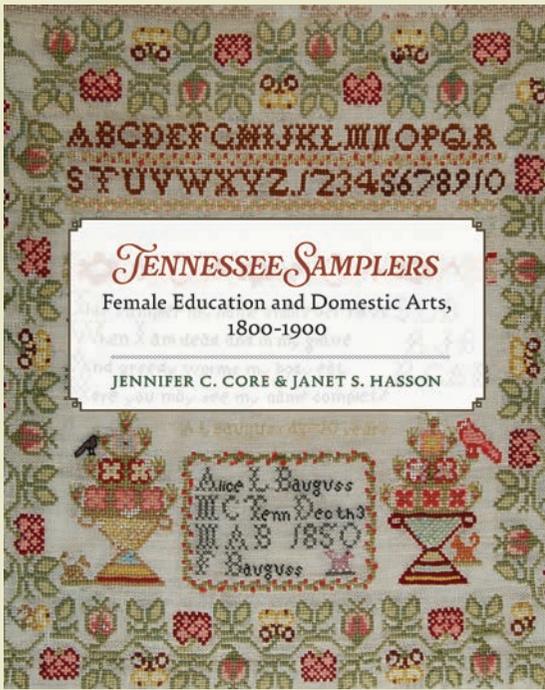
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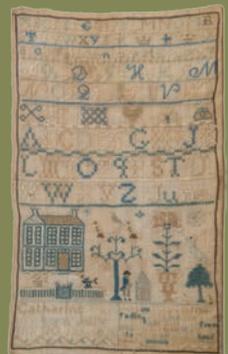
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Necessities



1 Mix It Up!

Add some excitement to your crochet routine with the Granny Square Card Deck by Claire Montgomerie, published by Search Press. The deck contains 50 unique cards, each with a picture of a finished square on one side and a chart to create it on the other side. Crochet an afghan or learn a new design with this fun set. searchpressusa.com

2 Mini Gems

Get your summer knitting on with cotton yarn from Purl Soho. Cotton Chirp yarn is 100% Peruvian Pima cotton, available in 25-gram skeins and a wide variety of colors (Ebb Tide bundle shown here). The DK-weight yarn works up quickly—perfect for a colorful summer dress or a picnic blanket. purlsoho.com

3 Forget the Buttonholes

Stud button sets from Jul Designs provide a decorative clasp without adding buttonholes. The stud sets are handcrafted from white brass and available in several designs (Ancient Geometry Circle shown). Slip the leather disk off the stud, slide the post between the stitches of your project, and replace the leather disk to hold it in place. Use as adjustable buttons or as a shawl clasp. juldesigns.com

4 Learn a New Craft

Have you ever tried punch needle? The Oxford Company makes it easy with a wide range of punch needles to get you started. The needles are available in several sizes (#10 shown) and two finishes (Symfonie shown). Prepare the fabric, thread the punch needle, and away you go! amyoxford.com

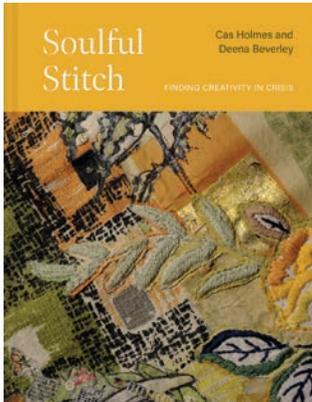
5 Cord Craze

Looking for a fast and easy way to work an I-cord? Cordsmith by Autumn is the tool for you. This handy implement is available in seven colors and two sizes: mini for yarns up to sportweight, and standard for sportweight through bulky. Cast on for a project, bind off an edge, or craft a quick cord with this ingenious three-hook tool. byautumn.com

Bookmarks



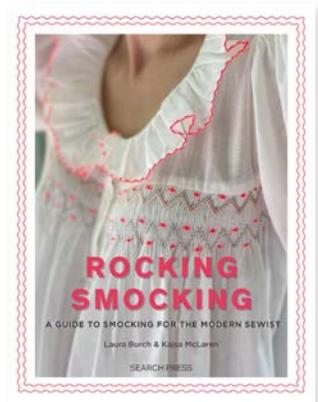
Approachable Techniques to Sample



Soulful Stitch:
Finding Creativity in Crisis
Cas Holmes and Deena Beverley
London: Batsford Books, 2024. Hardcover,
128 pages, \$26. ISBN 9781849949187.



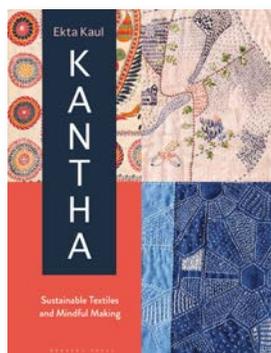
**Mosaic Chart Directory for
Knitting and Crochet:**
75 Geometric Designs
Anna Nikirowicz
Exeter, UK: David and Charles, 2024.
Paperback, 176 pages, \$26.99.
ISBN 9781446313862.



Rocking Smocking:
*A Guide to Smocking for
the Modern Sewist*
Laura Burch and Kajsa McLaren
Tunbridge Wells, UK: Search Press, 2024.
Paperback, 128 pages, \$19.95.
ISBN 9781800922235.



Nordic Hands:
*25 Fiber Craft Projects to Discover
Scandinavian Culture*
Anita Osterhaug
Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2023. Hardcover,
192 pages, \$34.99. ISBN 9780764366918.



Kantha:
*Sustainable Textiles
and Mindful Making*
Ekta Kaul
New York: Bloomsbury, 2024. Hardcover,
192 pages, \$28. ISBN 9781789940435.



Knitting Around:
Circular Designs & Techniques
Elizabeth Zimmermann
Pittsville, WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2024.
Paperback, 240 pages, \$33.
ISBN 9780942018417.

Studying Stitches

Samplers in the RSN Collection

ISABELLA ROSNER

Inside the late-seventeenth-century apartments at Hampton Court Palace sits a well-organized mountain of acid-free boxes. Peek inside these boxes and you will see more than a hundred samplers spanning nearly four hundred years. These samplers are in the collection of the Royal School of Needlework (RSN), the international center of excellence for the art of hand embroidery. The samplers are part of the RSN's large collection, which consists of many thousands of textiles (primarily embroidered ones) made across six continents over the course of a millennium. Samplers have been a part of the RSN's collection from the organization's very beginning 153 years ago.



Photos courtesy of the Royal School of Needlework Collection

A spot sampler from the collection of the Royal School of Needlework, London; circa 1630–1650; tent stitch, chain stitch, stem stitch, woven wheel, backstitch, and Elizabethan plaited braid stitch.

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SPOT SAMPLER

The oldest sampler in the RSN collection is a spot sampler dating to approximately 1630 to 1650. Spot samplers were made throughout the seventeenth century and are recognizable by their randomly placed motifs of geometric patterns and flora and fauna. The Royal School of Needlework spot sampler is small (approximately 9 × 4½ inches [22.9 × 11.4 cm] on its velvet mount) and, in fact, significantly more petite than most contemporary spot samplers. It is typical of other spot samplers in that it is worked upon a linen ground embroidered with silk and metal threads in a variety of stitches including

tent, chain, stem, woven wheel, and backstitch, as well as Elizabethan plaited braid stitches. It features a charming assortment of flowers in addition to acorns, oak leaves, and a single strawberry.

Though we do not know who made this spot sampler, we can guess it was likely a woman at home who was practicing her embroidery stitches and designs in preparation for embellishing collars, cuffs, or pin-cushions. Unlike other types of seventeenth-century samplers, spot samplers were not created by school-girls systematically learning and perfecting stitches during their needlework education; they were a means by which embroiderers could practice their stitches and designs over long periods of time and



Sampler, circa 1720, shown in the Grove Book (which houses textile pieces gathered by Georgina Grove in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries); stitches include cross-stitch, Algerian eye stitch, and satin stitch.

refer back to them when embarking upon embroidery projects. Spot samplers can be thought of as embroidery's answer to the sketchbook.

This spot sampler, like so many others, features diaper patterns (patterns with the same repeats in multiple directions) that are incomplete. This is not a sign of the sampler being abandoned or unfinished. Rather, it was typical for spot samplers to feature designs only partially filled in—stitchers would often fill in only one part of a repeating pattern to get a glimpse of how the finished design would look, while also being economical with their use of materials.

In one corner of the sampler is a patch that had been adhered to the original linen ground later. On the patch, which features the same handwoven and unbleached linen, is part of a motif of a strawberry bordered by a stylized diamond pattern. Did this

snippet of cloth come from another spot sampler? Why was it added to this piece, and when? Mysteries remain and continue to intrigue.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SAMPLER
FROM THE COLLECTION OF
GEORGINA GROVE

The spot sampler is not the only example of fragments when it comes to samplers in the RSN's collection. A circa 1720 sampler has been cut in half and is now housed in the Grove Book, a tome of textile fragments from around the world gathered by Georgina Grove in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Grove accompanied her husband, a brigadier general, on his vast travels, collecting textiles as she went. The oldest item in the RSN collection, a



This early-nineteenth-century wall pocket is embellished with a solemn verse, a heart, a leafy vine, and stars. The stitches include chain stitch, satin stitch, herringbone stitch, stem stitch, backstitch, straight stitch, cross-stitch, and buttonhole stitch.

Coptic weaving from the seventh or eighth century, was given courtesy of Georgina Grove and her textile treasure trove.

Among the many samplers Grove collected is one she has captioned “English Sampler. 18th century.” It is worked in silk threads on linen and has at the top a stylized alphabet. The sampler features bands of strawberries, flowers, acorns, and grapes. In its middle is the verse “Lord give me wisdom to direct my ways/I ask not riches nor yet length of days.” The sampler lacks a name and date of production, but thanks to a nearly identical sampler in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), we can glean information about who made it and when.

A sampler made by Grace Catlin in 1719, now in the V&A’s collection (T.22-1955), is almost an exact match to the RSN example and was clearly worked under the same instruction. Catlin was a London-area Quaker whose sampler is highly similar to those in other museum collections also made by London Quakers in the early eighteenth century. The Catlin sampler and anonymous RSN sampler have the same bands worked in almost all of the same colors. It

is clear from comparing the two samplers that the RSN example is the top half of a sampler; the bottom half is cut off and presumably lost forever, preventing us from learning the maker’s name. Though she is anonymous, we can guess that she, too, came from a well-off Quaker family in and around London and that she was in school in approximately 1720. It is likely she sat beside Grace Catlin, the two plying their needles together. Though we do not know our sampler maker’s name, thanks to the many interwoven connections between sampler makers and the work of their hands, we can place her in space and time.

WALL POCKET SAMPLER

Another sampler in the RSN collection has visual similarities to samplers in other public and private collections, but its shape and use of bright pink silk fringing sets it apart from its contemporaries. This teardrop-shaped sampler is a circa-1800 wall pocket, certainly made by a girl at a charity or orphan school. As suggested by its name, the sampler would have hung on a wall and held items such as a watch, coins, keys, or other small tokens.

The owner and user of the wall pocket would almost certainly not have been its maker. As was the case with many items worked at nineteenth-century charity and orphan schools, it is most likely that the wall pocket was made by a girl learning to stitch and that it was then sold to the public to raise funds for the school. Like many of these items for sale, the wall pocket sampler lacks a maker’s name or date.

Worked in silk threads on a silk ground, the sampler features stars, a heart, and a leafy vine. The object is framed by a border of shocking pink fringe, which was made by raveling the pocket’s dark pink lining, according to its provenance. In contrast to its energetic fringe, the sampler’s verses, written in positively minuscule cross-stitches, are deeply solemn: “Good God on what a slender thread/Hang everlasting things/The eternal state of all the dead/upon lif’s feeble strings” and “Infinite joy or endless woe/Attend on every breath/And yet how unconcern’d we go/Upon the brink of death.” Though this verse is almost shocking to modern audiences, its focus on mortality is typical of Georgian and Victorian samplers, huge numbers of which had inscriptions about fearing God or expecting death.

*[Map samplers] taught girls embroidery
and geography at the same time.*



Sampler, Mary Curtis, early nineteenth century; stitches include long and short stitch, backstitch, and chain stitch.

A EUROPEAN MAP SAMPLER

But that is not to say that every sampler maker in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Britain was stitching exclusively bleak text in tiny cross-stitches. By this time, sampler making had expanded rapidly to include a wide variety of sampler styles, including map samplers. These needlework exercises taught girls embroidery and geography at the same time.

While many British map samplers, which were primarily made in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, feature a specific map of England, Wales, and part of Scotland, one map sampler in the RSN collection depicts a map of Europe. The map is signed in the bottom right corner: “Mary Curtis Glasgow.”

It is rare for a map sampler to illustrate Europe, and in a sea of anonymous samplers, it is thrilling

to imagine that a teenage girl named Mary Curtis in Regency-era Glasgow sat stitching her neighboring lands of “Turkey” and “Little Tartary.” In map samplers, we can see embroiderers working to understand their literal place in the world in the face of an increasingly expanding British Empire.

PRACTICAL SKILLS SAMPLERS

While some sampler makers focused on the wide world beyond their classroom, others had to focus on more pressing matters, such as gaining employment after completing their education. The RSN collection includes several early-twentieth-century samplers, most of them over 10 feet long. These narrow samplers feature a wide variety of both necessary and decorative stitching skills a girl would need



Sections from Theodora Welch's prize-winning sampler, 1904; stitches include cross-stitch, straight stitch, darning stitch, pulled thread work, drawn-thread work, cutwork, chain stitch, backstitch, and satin stitch.

for a career in domestic service or the textile trades, including buttonholes, darning, smocking, hems, and cross-stitch in a variety of fonts.

These lengthy samplers, rolled and unfurled to show a potential employer one's skills, acted as stitched résumés. Though many of the RSN's early-twentieth-century samplers feature the names of makers, only one comes with a certificate. This certificate is a prize awarded to Theodora Welch of St. Jude's School in Herne Hill.

Theodora was awarded this prize in 1904 specifically for the skill of her needlework. And, 120 years later, Theodora's precious prize illustrates how highly valued expertise with a needle was. It also illustrates how much Theodora and her descendants valued the recognition of her talent, as this tiny certificate was cherished and protected as it moved through subsequent generations of her family.

Each sampler in the RSN collection has been cherished and protected, its linen kept safe from moths and its threads still bright after centuries. The samplers have come to the Royal School of Needlework over the course of more than 150 years so that their stories can be told in perpetuity. Through these small rectangles (or sometimes,

teardrop shapes) of fabric, we can learn about girls, their education, and how they gained their skills.

Although sometimes their names are lost, the stories they tell with their stitches remain. ❖

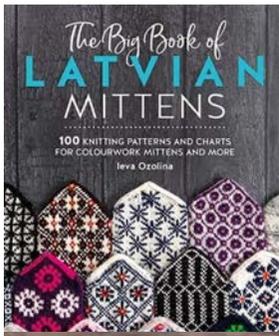
RESOURCES

To learn more about the Royal School of Needlework's

Collection and Archive, as well as the RSN's educational and other programs and activities, visit royal-needlework.org.uk.

Visit rsnstitchbank.org for videos, images, illustrations, and history of all the stitches in the RSN Stitch Bank, which aims to digitally conserve and preserve every stitch around the globe.

DR. ISABELLA ROSNER is the curator of the Royal School of Needlework, where she researches and cares for nearly five hundred years of needlework. Isabella was named a British Broadcasting Corporation/Arts and Humanities Research Council New Generation Thinker in 2023. Isabella hosts the successful *Sew What?* podcast about historic needlework and those often-anonymous girls and women who stitched it. She is also the research consultant at Witney Antiques in Oxfordshire, England.



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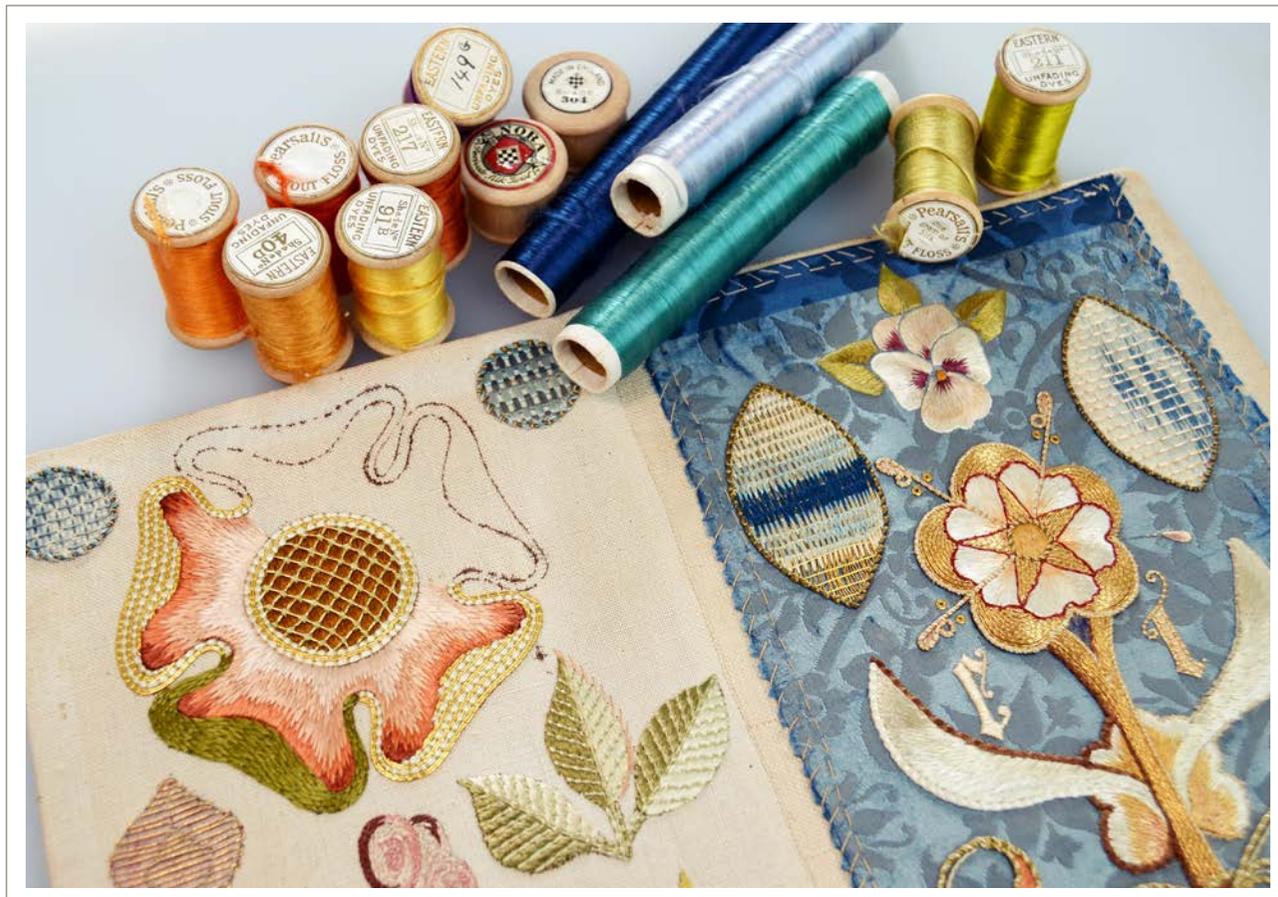
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Nimble Fingers and a Devotion to Detail

Samples and Samplers from Goldwork and Silk

RACHEL MIDGLEY



All photos courtesy of the Gawthorpe Textiles Collection

A student sample from the embroidery workroom at St. Mary's Convent in Wantage, UK, showing silk shading and goldwork embroidery along with reels of the type of fine silk floss thread that would have been used. Item no. 1139.

In 1991, a glittering treasure trove composed of over four hundred ecclesiastical embroidery samples, hand-drawn patterns, and swatches of fabric and thread was bequeathed to the Gawthorpe Textiles Collection by Miss Gwendoline Purchas. The items were left to the collection in memory of her friend Miss Dorothy Spittle, who had studied at the prestigious embroidery school that had been based at St. Mary's Convent in Wantage, United Kingdom.

The samples were created by Dorothy Spittle and other students as part of their training. They range from mounted samplers that show the end results of many hours of meticulous stitching to small experimental samples of different techniques, threads, or color schemes. The bequest to the Gawthorpe collection offers a tantalizing glimpse into the workroom of

an embroidery school that specialized in producing the finest-quality silk shading and goldwork.

Founded by the Honourable Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth (1886–1967) and located in Lancashire, United Kingdom, the Gawthorpe Textiles Collection is an internationally renowned collection of global textiles. Passionate about



needlework, Kay-Shuttleworth amassed over 30,000 textile items with the intent of educating the public, preserving old techniques, and inspiring new generations.

THE WANTAGE EMBROIDERY SCHOOL

The embroidery workroom at St. Mary's Convent was established by Sister Agnes Blencowe and Mary Ann Street in 1866. Sister Agnes was a pioneering reformer of English church embroidery and drew inspiration for the techniques from finely worked medieval embroideries while updating the designs to better suit mid-Victorian tastes. These influences can be observed in many of the Wantage samples, which blend the meticulous stitching of the masterworks of *opus anglicanum* with Gothic Revival or Arts and Crafts Movement aesthetics.

Under Sister Agnes's guidance, the workroom at St. Mary's became known for high-quality embroidery using silk floss and metal threads, and the school soon began taking commissions for church textiles and vestments as well as heraldic textiles



Above: Goldwork sampler showing a variety of patterns of padded and couched gold thread. Item no. 1147. Top: A selection of hand-drawn and painted paper patterns for embroideries from St. Mary's Embroidery School, Wantage. Many are annotated with notes about color, thread, and fabric choices. Items no. 2926, 2941, 2996, and 2997.



Above: A student sample of a partially worked pomegranate design in padded and couched gold metal thread. Item no. 1102. Top: Students' practice samples of faces (pictured, a bishop and two angels) and samples of the silk floss used to stitch them. Items no. 1165, 1115, and 1114.

and banners. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the embroiderers worked on textiles that would end up in churches, palaces, and grand houses, not just across Britain but all over the world, including in Zanzibar (Tanzania), Australia, and Newfoundland (Canada). Designs were often provided by well-known architects including Mary Ann Street's brother George Edmund Street, George Frederick Bodley, and John Loughborough Pearson, who all worked in the Gothic Revival style.

In addition to embroidery samples, the Purchas bequest also contains beautiful hand-drawn and painted designs for pieces commissioned from the school dating back as early as the 1870s. Some of the designs are incredibly detailed and show not just the outline of the shapes and motifs but also the placement of the stitches. The notes alongside the designs indicate that these are working drawings created as a guide for which stitches and threads to use.

Some are also annotated with details of the item the embroidery would be used for and the price

charged for the commission. A relatively simple design commissioned in 1879 for a burse and veil (items used to cover the ceremonial chalice for Communion) is priced at £4 and 4 shillings, which is the equivalent of around £300 (\$371 USD) in 2025. A more complex design for the same type of item appears on another sheet and is marked as double the price at £8 and 8 shillings. The meticulous and technical detail in these designs emphasizes the exacting standards for precision and attention to detail that were the hallmark of the embroideries created in the workroom under Sister Agnes and her successors.

STITCHING WITH OPULENT THREADS

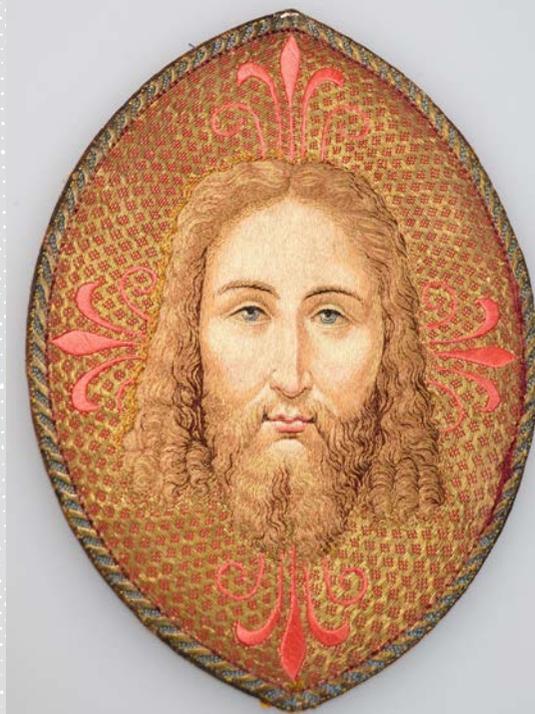
By the time Dorothy Spittle attended the school in the early twentieth century, its reputation for high-quality work was well established. Born in 1903, Dorothy was described as a delicate child who

Skillful Realism

The incredible talent of Dorothy Spittle can be seen most clearly in one particular student sample she produced: a leaf-shaped slip depicting the head of Christ on a golden background. Slips are small, self-contained embroidery motifs worked on one fabric and then cut out and applied to another fabric. Many of the student samples in the Purchas bequest appear to be in the form of slips, both finished and unfinished, so we can infer that it was a frequent practice in the workroom at St. Mary's.

This slip is such an accomplished piece that it must have been the culmination of several years of intense practice and may have been produced as part of a formal examination to display the best of Dorothy's skills.

Right: Slip depicting the head of Christ, worked by Dorothy Spittle while she was a pupil at St. Mary's Embroidery School, Wantage, UK. Stitched in silk floss using split stitch and couched gold thread. Item no. 1107.



Dorothy's education at St. Mary's instilled in her an amazing attention to detail and a meticulous approach to the direction of the stitch that she would continue to promote to her own students.

could not engage in the same outdoor pursuits as her siblings. Growing up, she spent much of her time indoors practicing embroidery.

The family lived in Wantage, and it was not long before her natural aptitude for the craft was spotted by a visiting cleric. She was promptly enrolled at the embroidery school at St. Mary's Convent, where she was able to truly hone her skills and develop her lifelong passion for church embroidery.

Embroidery samples from the school that were created by Dorothy and her fellow students show a practical and experimental approach used for learning and practicing new techniques. The collection contains many partially worked samples of goldwork made using couched and padded metal threads, and these offer us the chance to observe the careful preparation that went into creating such sumptuous results.

In one sample, the design of a split pomegranate has been drawn out in ink, and areas have been padded with long and short stitches in soft wool thread. The top and bottom of the fruit have been filled in using couched gold thread, and the couching stitches were worked in a deep reddish-orange color to enhance the warm tones of the gold. The center of the pomegranate has been partly worked, with the seeds first padded and then couched over with gold thread, to give this section of the design an almost embossed quality.

One goldwork sampler features a series of geometric shapes filled with several patterns of couched gold thread. Experiments with underlying padding can be seen, including some examples of *gaufrure* work, in which firm string or cord is stitched down first to make ridges forming trellis, basketweave, or scalloped patterns. There are also two diamond shapes where emerald-green thread has been used for the couching stitches, which have also been positioned to create a secondary pattern. In addition to adding detail to otherwise flat areas of couching, this technique can give the effect of a colorful metallic thread in place of just gold or silver.

Some of the collection samplers are neatly finished and mounted on boards or edged with cord. Labels attached to these show that they were loaned from the school, perhaps as educational resources or to demonstrate the quality of the work for prospective clients. One sampler, worked on rich green

silk damask, is described on the label as "Sample of stitches used in Ancient Embroidery."

It features a variety of stitches and motifs including several examples of *or nué*, another medieval technique in which colored threads are used to couch gold or silver thread, creating a colorful metallic picture or pattern. It is clear from the range of techniques across all the samples that students at St. Mary's were taught diverse types of embroidery and that the expected standard of finish was consistently high.

Dorothy Spittle left St. Mary's Embroidery School in the late 1920s, and not long after, she answered an advert asking for a temporary housekeeper that had been placed by a Miss Gwen Purchas. The Purchas family had a very ecclesiastical background, with Gwen's father, grandfather, and uncle all serving as reverends; Gwen had a passion for embroidery and other crafts, so Dorothy must have seemed the perfect candidate. The temporary job soon became a lifelong companionship, and Dorothy and Gwen would live together for the rest of their lives. They eventually settled in Denbigh, North Wales, so that Dorothy could more easily make the weekly trip to Liverpool where she had begun teaching embroidery classes at the cathedral.

Both Dorothy and Gwen would teach embroidery and craft classes for many years, and Dorothy also worked on her own embroidery commissions. Around 1960, she became heavily involved with the design and making of embroideries for Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. She was able to acquire some of the collection of samples from St. Mary's Embroidery School, possibly when the old Victorian style of church embroidery declined in popularity in the 1950s. These precious pieces from her former school were incorporated into her own collection along with antique embroideries and additional samples of her own work, which were used as references when teaching her own students.

We are not sure exactly how or when Dorothy Spittle and Gwen Purchas met Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth, the founder of the Gawthorpe Textiles Collection. However, we believe it is most likely that they met through Dorothy Spittle's involvement in designing and making a banner with the Girl Guides. We know that Dorothy and Gwen visited Rachel and her collection before Rachel's death in 1967 and that many years later, Gwen felt the collection was a fitting repository for the pieces Dorothy had left to her.



Sampler originally from the loan collection at St. Mary's Embroidery School, Wantage, UK, showing ancient embroidery techniques including *ornué*, which can be seen in the double-lozenge shapes on the far left and right sides of the sampler. Item no. 1150.

Dorothy's education at St. Mary's instilled in her an amazing attention to detail and a meticulous approach to the direction of the stitch that she would continue to promote to her own students. When she retired from teaching, the *Liverpool Echo* newspaper described her "nimble fingers and a devotion to detail"—attributes many embroiderers would be proud to be remembered by. The Purchas bequest samples now continue to educate and inspire present and future generations of embroiderers as part of the Gawthorpe Textiles Collection. ❖

RESOURCES

- Marsh, Gail. *19th Century Embroidery Techniques*. Guild of Master Craftsman Publications, 2008.
- Rogerson, L. "Gold at Gawthorpe." Press release for Goldwork Exhibition, May 1991.
- Schoeser, Mary. *English Church Embroidery, 1833–1953: The Watts Book of Embroidery*. 2nd ed. London: Watts, 1998.

RACHEL MIDGLEY is the curator of the Gawthorpe Textiles Collection and has worked at the collection for almost 15 years. Although she originally trained in costume design, the wide variety of amazing textiles in the collection has inspired her passion for all kinds of historical textiles including embroidery, patchwork, print design, and more.

Regina Repetita

A Box Top Embroidered in Queen Stitch

ELISABETH JENKINS BATY

Recently, while I was researching queen-stitch motifs on early samplers, I was drawn to a lovely early-seventeenth-century English spot sampler that is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I have always been charmed by spot samplers, with their motley assortment of stitches, motifs, and techniques. The prevailing theory is that spot samplers, unlike school-girl or marking samplers, were created as an “aide-mémoire” or personal pattern record for their makers.

Geometric motifs were commonly worked in a diaper pattern (a regular repeat in all directions), and they were frequently arranged in repeating square, rectangular, or lozenge forms.

By its very nature, queen stitch may be arranged in a vertical, horizontal, or diagonal fashion, allowing one to vary its orientation to add subtle dimension to the stitching. I have combined several floral and diaper motifs from the Met sampler to create this traditional queen-stitch design. In keeping with the original, I have varied the stitch direction on the floral motifs, which is noted on the accompanying chart.

MATERIALS

- ♦ Wichelt *Permin Linen*, 32-ct: #65I Ivory, 12" × 12" (30.5 × 30.5 cm)
- ♦ Treenway Silks *Harmony* 6-strand silk floss, 10 yd (9.1 m)/skein: 1 skein each of Greens: #211 Triumph Green, #953 Mint Julep, and #213 Celadon
Pinks: #42 Opera Velvet, #43 Harlequin, #13 Carousel, and #22 Ballet Slippers
- ♦ Tapestry needle, size 26
- ♦ All-purpose sewing thread
- ♦ Embroidery hoop, 8" (20.3 cm) (optional)
- ♦ Sudberry House *Betsy Box* #99521, Mahogany finish, overall dimensions 8" × 8" × 2 3/4" (20.3 × 20.3 × 7 cm)
- ♦ Small craft clips (optional)
- ♦ Acid-free mat board, white or cream, 1 piece 5" × 5" (12.7 × 12.7 cm)
- ♦ Pressing cloth and iron

Design Area: 4 3/8" × 4 3/8" (11.1 × 11.1 cm).

Finished Size: 5" × 5" (12.7 × 12.7 cm).

SPECIAL STITCHES

Queen stitch: This diamond-shaped stitch is composed of a bundle of 4 long straight stitches, each one



Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Embroidered Spot Sampler; English; Early-seventeenth century; Maker unknown; 57.122.29. From the collection of Mrs. Lathrop Colgate Harper, bequest of Mabel Herbert Harper, 1957.

couched in place with a tiny stitch at its midline. Each queen stitch is centered over 4 vertical and 4 horizontal fabric threads. A small, evenly spaced hole will appear in the fabric at the top and the bottom of each completed queen stitch because the 4 long straight stitches all share the same entry and exit points.

To embroider a queen stitch, stitch 1 long (slightly loose) straight stitch leg and couch it in place at the center with a small perpendicular couching stitch. Repeat (following the diagram on page 20) to make 4 legs total. The 4 legs of the queen stitch can be worked in any order (such as from left to right, or by alternating from side to side), but once a sequence has been established, work in that manner consistently throughout the rest of the project.



This sumptuous embroidery, which was inspired by centuries-old spot sampler designs, is made up of queen-stitch motifs embroidered in rich silk floss.

Stitch chart

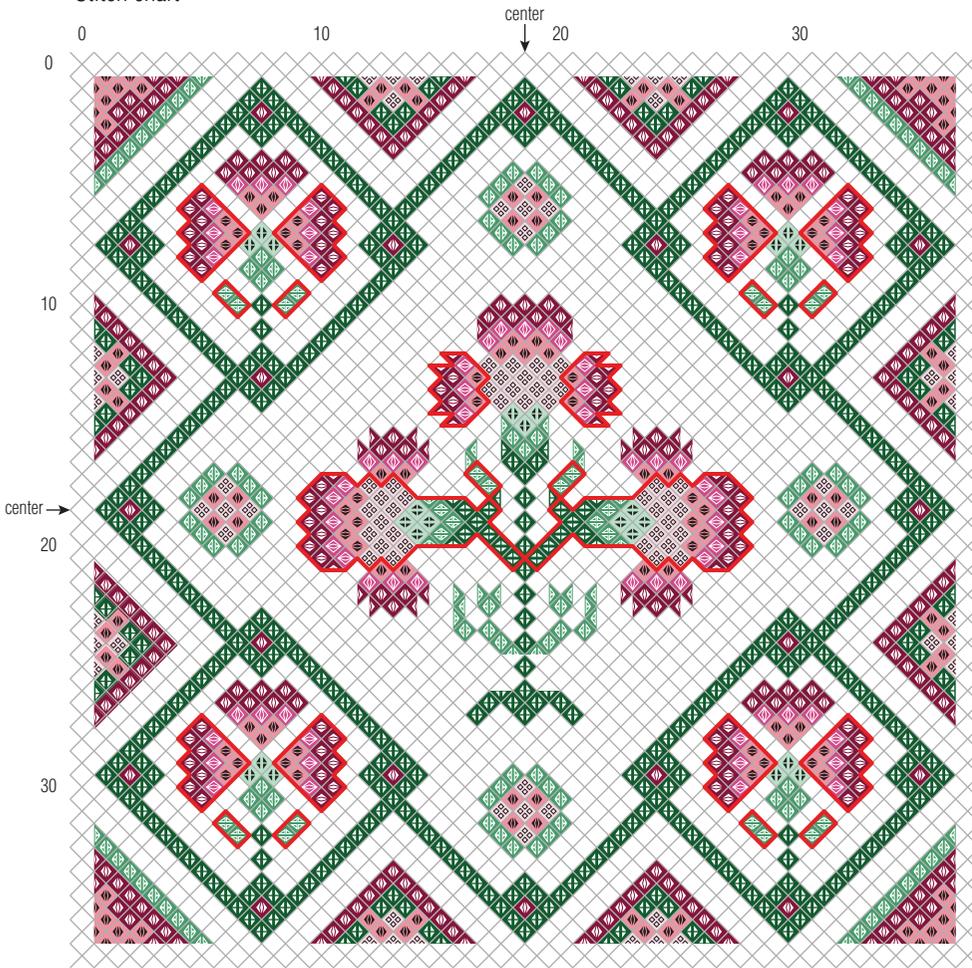


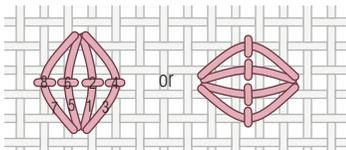
Chart may be reproduced for personal use.

Work stitches over vertical and horizontal threads.

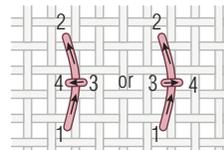
Key
Grid size:
36 × 36 queen stitches

-  #211 Triumph Green
-  #953 Mint Julep
-  #213 Celadon
-  #42 Opera Velvet
-  #43 Harlequin
-  #13 Carousel
-  #22 Ballet Slippers
-  rotate stitches

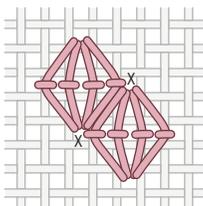
Queen stitch



Couching stitch

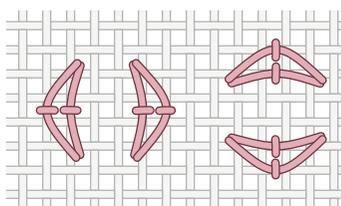


Adjacent stitches



X shared holes

Half stitches



When a motif is made up of a number of queen stitches, move from one queen stitch to the next in a diagonal progression to prevent the working thread from dragging across underneath the fabric and obscuring the carefully formed holes.

NOTES

Separate the strands of silk floss; use 1 strand of floss with a tapestry needle for all stitching.

The entire design is stitched using the queen stitch. The stitching for each queen stitch is completed in the upright, or vertical, orientation, with outlined areas on the chart in the horizontal orientation.

Work vertical half stitches with vertical legs and horizontal couching stitches, and work horizontal half stitches with horizontal legs and vertical couching stitches throughout the design.

When stitching an individual element such as a flower, it is best to start in the center of the motif and work your way out to the petal's edge. As maintaining even thread tension is critical with queen stitch, be careful not to draw the thread too tightly when forming the long straight stitches, or it may form an overly large eyelet at the north/south poles of the stitch.

INSTRUCTIONS

To prevent the raw edges of the linen from fraying, whipstitch the edges by hand using all-purpose sewing thread, or machine stitch the edges with an overlock or zigzag stitch.

If using a hoop, place the linen in the hoop and adjust the tension.

Using the photographs, pattern chart, and stitch diagrams as guides for color and stitch placement, embroider the design using full and half queen stitches.

FINISHING

Press finished work on the back side of the stitching using a pressing cloth and an iron set to low heat with no steam. Trim embroidery to 7" (17.8 cm) square. Center the stitching over the mat board, fold raw edges to back, and baste in place or secure with clips. Thread a needle with all-purpose sewing thread, and working from the back, begin lacing from one raw edge to the opposite, vertically and



Note the subtle interplay of light over the queen stitches that have been worked in different directions.

then horizontally. Adjust the stitching on the front so that it is centered, with an even border of linen showing on all sides. Once positioned, draw up the lacing threads on the back so that the fabric has the right degree of tautness, and secure with a tight knot. Insert the stitched piece into the box opening and secure the back-board swivel clips. ❖

RESOURCES

West, Deanna Hall. "A Stitch in Time: The Queen Stitch."

PieceWork, November 9, 2017. pieceworkmagazine.com/stitch-time-queen-stitch.

ELISABETH JENKINS BATY is an architectural historian and a fiber/textile artist, living in historic Albemarle County, Virginia. Raised in Williamsburg, Virginia, her love of historic needle arts began as she worked for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation starting as a young child and continuing through adulthood. She is a lifelong needleworker and enjoys designing, teaching, and writing about all forms of needle and fiber arts, both historic and contemporary. You may follow her artistic pursuits through her design studio, *Cochineal & Indigo*.

Marking, Medallions, Mending, Motifs, and More

Westtown School Samplers

MARY UHL BROOKS



Photo courtesy of Chester County History Center, West Chester, PA

Mary Hill, age 13, entered Westtown just a few months after it opened in 1799, with that year marked along the left border. The spot and medallion sampler also includes the initials of her Westtown classmates and teachers.

Before young girls arrived at Westtown Boarding School after its founding in 1799 in Chester County, Pennsylvania, they were instructed to bring with them “a pair of scissors, thread-case, thimble, work-bag, and some plain sewing or knitting to begin with.”¹ In addition to instruction in reading, writing, grammar, spelling, arithmetic, geography, and science, girls were required to spend time in sewing class. This education for Quaker children at Westtown, both girls and boys, was intended to be useful, and that meant sewing for girls and surveying for boys in addition to other classroom work.



Mary Garrett of Willistown, Pennsylvania, stitched this darning sampler while she attended Westtown from 1815 to 1816.

Westtown School was founded by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) so that the children of Yearly Meeting members would be instructed in these practical, useful subjects while living in an environment wholly dedicated to their spiritual formation. This dual vision of education for Quaker children is evident in the sampler styles of the many known Westtown pieces.

Close to 300 Westtown-made samplers can be found today in private collections, in museums, and with descendants of the maker, or they are known and documented because a sampler changed ownership via auction or through a dealer. Almost 80 of those 300 known samplers are in the Esther Duke Archives at Westtown School, preserved as important pieces of the school's history. Key to Westtown's early years is the influence of Ackworth School in England, founded by the London Yearly Meeting in

1779 for Quaker children. Like Westtown School, it is still in existence today.

Given the close relationship of Philadelphia Quakers with those in England, much of Westtown was modeled on Ackworth, including the curriculum in the sewing school. And Westtown's first sewing teacher, Elizabeth Bellerby, had been a young student at York School for Girls, another English Quaker school with sewing instruction that included samplers. Elizabeth relocated to Philadelphia with her family in 1796. This English influence is evident in the various types of samplers made by girls at Westtown.

PRACTICAL REPAIR SKILLS IN STITCHES

What could be more practical than honing needlework skills used for mending? Darning samplers, rooted in eighteenth-century Europe and worked in many

locations including Ackworth School, were an exercise in mending. Working a darning sampler taught a girl how to replicate the weave of various fabrics, as seen in the patterned blocks stitched on the sampler.

Ackworth darning samplers were sewn in either white-on-white or with a variety of colored threads. A small cut was made in the ground fabric to be repaired with mending stitches. The stitches resulted in a cruciform, several of which were done on one sampler.

Only a few Westtown darning samplers exhibit this method of cutting the fabric before stitching. The more common Westtown darning samplers have five to seven patterned blocks stitched to mimic various twill weaves and a knitting stitch (useful for mending knitted stockings). Most were stitched on a plain-weave linen ground, nearly square in shape, with each side measuring approximately 8 to 10 inches (20.3 × 25.4 cm).

Undyed linen thread was used to stitch the patterned block, while the maker's name and school were stitched in blue or black/brown silk threads. However, there are a few extant Westtown darning samplers that had been stitched on a blue-green linsey-woolsey ground. It is likely that this fabric was on hand at the school for a short time, and a select few girls used it for their samplers.

MARKING SAMPLERS

Like many girls at the time, Westtown students stitched marking samplers, a practical lesson for several reasons. Stitching the alphabet reinforced literacy while also teaching a girl how to embroider letters and numbers, a skill she would need for marking household items made of fabric. It was common practice for women to keep track of linens—some of a family's most valuable items—by marking them with initials and numbers to prove ownership and identify pieces as part of a set for laundering and use.

Stitchers might practice several alphabets of different styles and sizes on a sampler, along with a set of numerals, and might occasionally add punctuation marks, ligatures, or diphthongs. (Ligatures are a combination of two letters into one character, and diphthongs are a combination of vowels into one sound.) Marking samplers were commonly stitched on 1/1 plain-weave linen using tent stitch, stem stitch, and cross-stitches. Most were worked in black or brown silk thread, but samplers in tan, two tones of blue silk, and polychrome silks also exist.

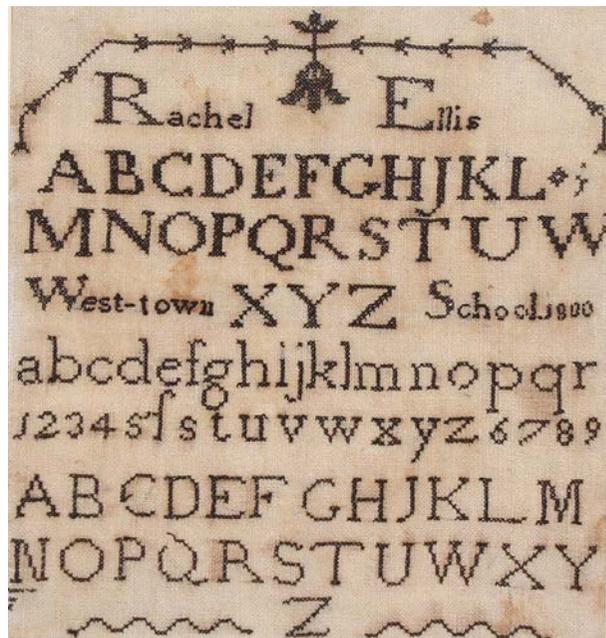


Photo by Terance Roberts, courtesy of Esther Duke Archives, Westtown School, West Chester, PA

Rachel Ellis was among the first students to enter Westtown in May 1799, arriving from Muncy, Pennsylvania, with her sister and brother. Her 1800 marking sampler includes a cut-corner border and bellflower.

A prominent element in Quaker marking samplers is the Roman-style alphabet for both upper- and lowercase letters. This plain, legible font appeared in schoolbooks for Quaker children. This font reflects the Quaker aesthetic of plainness, something that the school's founders hoped the students would adopt for their lives at both school and home.

Another design element that links early Westtown samplers with those from Ackworth School is a bellflower atop a border, which might be rectangular, a partial border with a cut corner, or an oval. This same bellflower motif is sometimes found on needlework from other locations, illustrating the influence of Westtown samplers and that of the teachers and students who carried their needlework home or may have taught elsewhere. Students came to Westtown School from Philadelphia and the surrounding areas in Pennsylvania as well as locations further afield such as Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia.

EXTRACT SAMPLERS

Extract samplers, so-called because only a portion of an author's longer literary work was stitched on the sampler, also linked Westtown, Ackworth, and

York School needlework. Quakers found inspiration in the prose and poetry of writers whose work expressed the importance of piety, sensibility, domestic happiness, country living, and everyday spirituality. These authors and their works were introduced to Westtown students, whose lessons included copying portions of the writings into a copybook to improve their literacy and spirituality.

In sewing class, girls stitched similar passages onto fabric. The long hours spent stitching these words, often in silence so that one might be fully open to a deeper connection with God, would etch onto a young girl's mind and heart these lessons of piety, humility, and other desired traits. While Ackworth students generally stitched verses inside a rectangle, Westtown extract samplers most often feature an undulating oval adorned with diamond leaves. The familiar bellflower is sometimes found on

extract samplers, but girls also used half of an eight-point star, a full eight-point star, or, later, a leafier, clover-like motif at the top.

Westtown extract samplers were generally created with cross-stitch and satin, stem, and tent stitches worked on a 1/1 plain-weave linen ground. The ground fabrics appear to have higher thread counts than those used for marking or darning samplers (also part of the Westtown sewing curriculum).

THE CONTROVERSY OVER ARCHITECTURAL SAMPLERS

Sewing instruction for a brief time included architectural samplers, as evidenced by the few silk views of the original schoolhouse that still exist. Only six needlework views of the school are known at present, and they generally date from the very

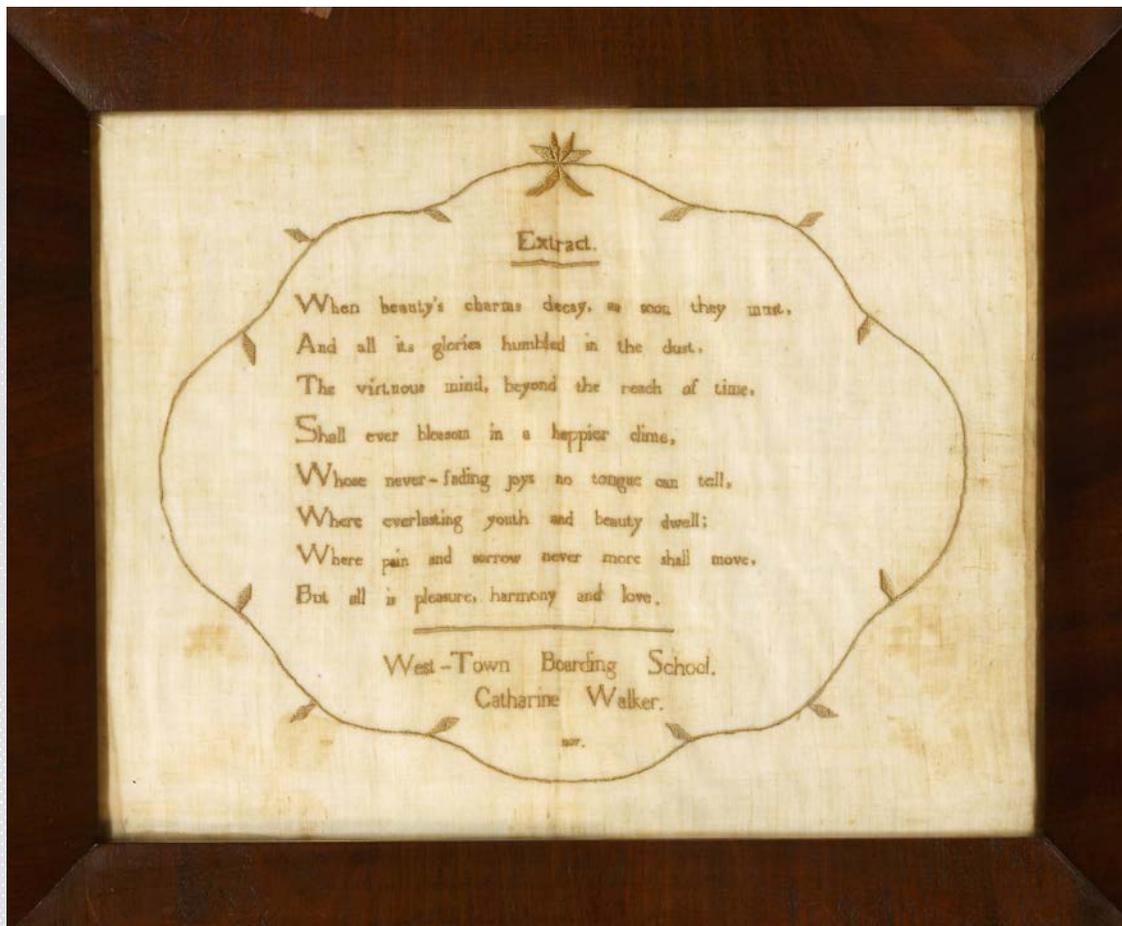


Photo courtesy of Chester County History Center, West Chester, PA

Catharine Walker of Egg Harbor, New Jersey, stitched this extract sampler in 1807. Her choice of verse is one often found on Westtown samplers.



Photo by Ed Cunicelli, courtesy of the author

This embroidered view of Westtown School by Mary Wily is unusual for its southeast view; most views included only the front (south) facade. Mary entered the school from Maiden Creek, Pennsylvania, at the age of 14. Private Collection.

early years of the school. The Acting Committee appointed by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to oversee the school noted in its minutes in 1804 that these views of the school were “very superfluous Needle Work . . . designed for the purpose of framing and Exhibiting as pictures. . . . [T]his kind of Employment appears to be contrary to the Rules adopted for the Government of the school and the original design of the Institution.”²

And so, it seems, this sampler style was no longer made at Westtown. But the practice of students creating similar watercolor views of the school did not cease, so why a concern about the needlework?

The intention of the girls to frame and exhibit these needlework views prompted the committee’s objection, one rooted in the Quaker discipline of plainness. The 1797 Rules of Discipline of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting advised Friends to “keep out of the world’s corrupt Language, Manners, vain and needless things and fashions in Apparel, Buildings and furniture of Houses, . . . avoid also

such kinds of stuffs, colours and dress, as are calculated more to please a vain and wanton, or proud mind, then [sic] for their real usefulness.”³

To the committee, making an architectural sampler for display would not cultivate a pious and humble spirit in a student. But with this clear guidance on plainness for the sewing school, how might the highly decorative, stylized medallion and spot motif samplers be understood as part of the sewing school at Westtown?

NONUTILITARIAN MEDALLION AND SPOT SAMPLERS

Any embroidery work would increase a girl’s proficiency in needlework, but the designs on the geometric medallion and spot samplers were not utilitarian in the way that those on a marking sampler were, nor were any spiritual lessons imparted as they were with extract samplers. These polychromatic samplers with an abundance of medallions and floral and animal motifs certainly could not be described as plain.

Sewing class disappeared from the curriculum in 1843, but the samplers remain as material evidence of the school's vision for Quaker children.

Like most Westtown needlework, this sampler style (shown on p. 22) is derived from the needlework traditions of English Quaker schools.

Girls at both Ackworth and York School worked medallion samplers as early as 1790. The style and its motifs were apparently consistent with Sarah Grubb's description of needlework at York School, a school founded by her stepmother, Esther Tuke, in 1785: "And whilst careful attention is paid to their improvement in necessary needlework & knitting, all that's thought merely ornamental is uniformly discouraged."⁴

The multitude of Westtown medallion and spot samplers are composed of medallions, cartouches, garland wreaths, and animal and floral designs in arrangements as numerous as the samplers themselves.

A center cartouche might surround a phrase such as "An Emblem of Love" or "Emblem of Innocence," but it is more common to find one or more of the following: the maker's name or initials, school name, and date.

It's important to note that variety is found even in the spelling of the school name, which appears as West Town School, West-town, West-town Boarding School or even Weston or Weston B School; Westtown School was not used consistently until the 1870s. Sets of initials found in a cartouche (other than those of the maker) or sprinkled among the medallions and motifs are often those of the maker's classmates or teachers at Westtown or perhaps family members, making these pieces a material remembrance of special people in the maker's life.

A strong interest in the natural world made the abundance of floral and animal motifs on Westtown and other Quaker samplers compatible with a Quaker's sphere of activity and spirituality, especially for Quaker youth, whose education was intended to broaden their knowledge of the physical world and its Creator. For Quakers, particularly for students at Ackworth School and then at Westtown, flowers and animals were appropriate familiar elements for inclusion on needlework.

The medallion and spot motif samplers were generally worked in cross-stitch on 1/1 plain-weave fabric. Based on examinations of four samplers, the thread counts of the grounds ranged from 29 threads per inch (warp) and 32 threads per inch (weft) to 58 (warp) and 60 (weft). There are a few known pieces worked on a linen/wool ground (linsey-woolsey), one with 23 (warp) and 29 (weft) threads per inch.

From the abundant body of Westtown samplers known today, it seems there was no prescribed order in which a student might make the different styles, nor did every girl make each style. Some girls made multiple samplers of the same style. Other activities in sewing class included constructing and embroidering silk globes, making and mending clothing, knitting a variety of objects including stockings and pin balls, and crafting other items such as thread cases and silk-covered pincushions. This work, too, was subject to review by the committee and teachers to ensure that students were adhering to plainness and usefulness in all needlework.

Sewing class disappeared from the curriculum in 1843, but the samplers remain as material evidence of the school's vision for Quaker children. The Westtown girls who stitched them might be amused to know that all these years later there is such deep interest in their needlework done in a classroom to reinforce useful skills and nurture spirituality. ❖

NOTES

1. *Information For Parents, and others inclining to send Children for Education to Friend's boarding school at West-Town*, April 11, 1799. Esther Duke Archives, Westtown School.
2. Minutes of the Acting Committee, May 11, 1804. Esther Duke Archives, Westtown School.
3. Rules of Discipline and Christian Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends for Pennsylvania and New Jersey (Philadelphia, 1797), 295, 305.
4. Sarah Tuke Grubb (Account of Ackworth School and York School for Girls), Allinson Family Papers, 1710–1939, Ms. Collection 968, Haverford College Quaker and Special Collections; later published as appendix to *Some Account of the Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb* (2012).

MARY UHL BROOKS was the archivist at Westtown School for 27 years before retiring in 2022. There she worked with varied items in the school's historical collection, including the extensive group of Westtown-made and other samplers. In 2011, she curated an exhibit at the Chester County History Center, *In Stitches: Unraveling Their Stories*, which combined pieces from Westtown School and the history center. In 2015, she authored a fully illustrated book, *Threads of Useful Learning: Westtown School Samplers*, which discusses this important collection of schoolgirl needlework in the context of Quaker history, faith, and education.

A Quaker-Style Medallion Sampler to Stitch

From Quaker Samplers

LESLEY WILKINS



Photos by Mark Davison, courtesy of Search Press Ltd.

Sampler 3 from Lesley Wilkins's book *Quaker Samplers* was inspired by traditional eighteenth-century samplers.

The following excerpt is shared with kind permission from Quaker Samplers. — Editor

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the art of sampler making was, for a young girl's education, a pastime and until the late eighteenth century it was only available for the richest or best in society circles.

ACKWORTH SCHOOL

In 1779 sampler making became open to those less privileged when a school in North Yorkshire, UK—Ackworth School—was founded by John Fothergill

with the intention of educating Quaker families who were less prosperous. From a first attendance of only 49 boys and girls, the school gradually increased to 310 students.

Both male and female pupils were taught writing and arithmetic by the schoolmaster, and the schoolmistress instructed the girls in reading, sewing, knitting and spinning. The boys also worked on the land and gardens and learnt various trades which would lead to apprenticeships.

The art of sampler making at Ackworth School lasted for 60 years, but came to an end without formal explanation by the 1840s. The style and design of the patterns which the pupils embroidered is a mystery to this day and their origin is still unknown. It is thought that the medallions themselves were used for teaching practical geometry—whole, halves and quarters. According to the school's lesson plan, students were given a piece of linen and asked to calculate how to fill the space with full, half and quarter medallions. The resulting elaborate octagonal motifs are today easily identified by sampler enthusiasts as Quaker. Apart from solving mathematical problems, there is no practical use for the medallions and no linens or costume embellishments have ever been discovered.

No evidence has been found to suspect the appointment of a new teacher who may have introduced the medallion patterns. It is unclear why Quakers, who followed plainness and simplicity in clothing and household items, worked such decorative patterns, many of which were stitched in colourful threads.

It has been noted that there was a similarity to German and Northern European medallion motifs used on samplers, but Ackworth samplers, which were dated earlier, were clearly produced first.

Sewing was an important part of the eighteenth-century curriculum for English schoolgirls, allowing them to earn a living once they had left, being employed as governesses, teachers or ladies' maids where the ability to do fine sewing was essential. The samplers produced by the girls of Ackworth, Westtown and other Friends schools in England, America and Europe developed a very distinctive individual style during the short time they were produced, and their beauty and mystery continue to fascinate enthusiasts to this day.

SAMPLER 3

Design size

105 × 112 stitch count

14.5 × 16 cm (5½ × 6¼ in)

MATERIALS

- ♦ Zweigart, 18-ct aida Oatmeal *Rustico* (using alternative fabric may affect the finished size)
- ♦ DMC *Six-Strand Embroidery Floss* (100% cotton): 2 skeins of dark green #520, 1 skein of light green #989
- ♦ Tapestry needle, size 24

NOTES

Use 2 strands of thread throughout.

This is a small sampler and is quick and easy to work.

USING THE CHART

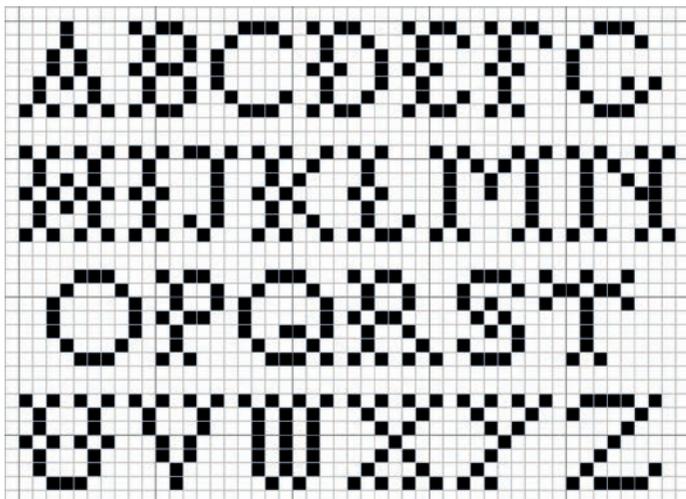
The most important part of the chart is the point at which you will place your first stitch. Quaker designs can be very intricate, so the centre point of the chart and fabric is where you should begin. If you start in the wrong place, you may find halfway through your work that you have run out of space, and hours of work will be wasted.

When you have cut your fabric using the sizes given in the instructions, make sure you also leave at least 5 cm (2 in) extra all the way round. To find the centre of the fabric, fold it in half once, lightly pressing a crease mark on the centre fold, then fold the fabric in half again. This will leave a cross mark. Place a pin on this centre point and open out the fabric. The pin will be dead centre in the fabric and your starting marker.

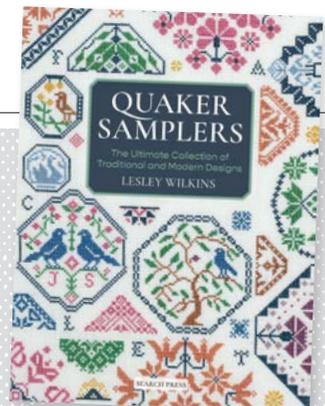
Mark the centre of the chart and where you will begin. Always go to the nearest square if it's an odd not even count.

Once the centre motif has been completed, work the surrounding patterns in any order until you reach the outer edges.

LESLEY WILKINS, from Derbyshire, UK, discovered embroidered samplers on a school visit to the V&A Museum in London when she was 10 and has been hooked ever since. She is an expert in the history of blackwork and embroidered samplers and has collected thousands of patterns from all over the world. For Lesley's patterns and projects, visit quakersamplerdelight.etsy.com.



Cross stitch is the main stitch I use, and this is indicated by squares on the charts.



Quaker Samplers

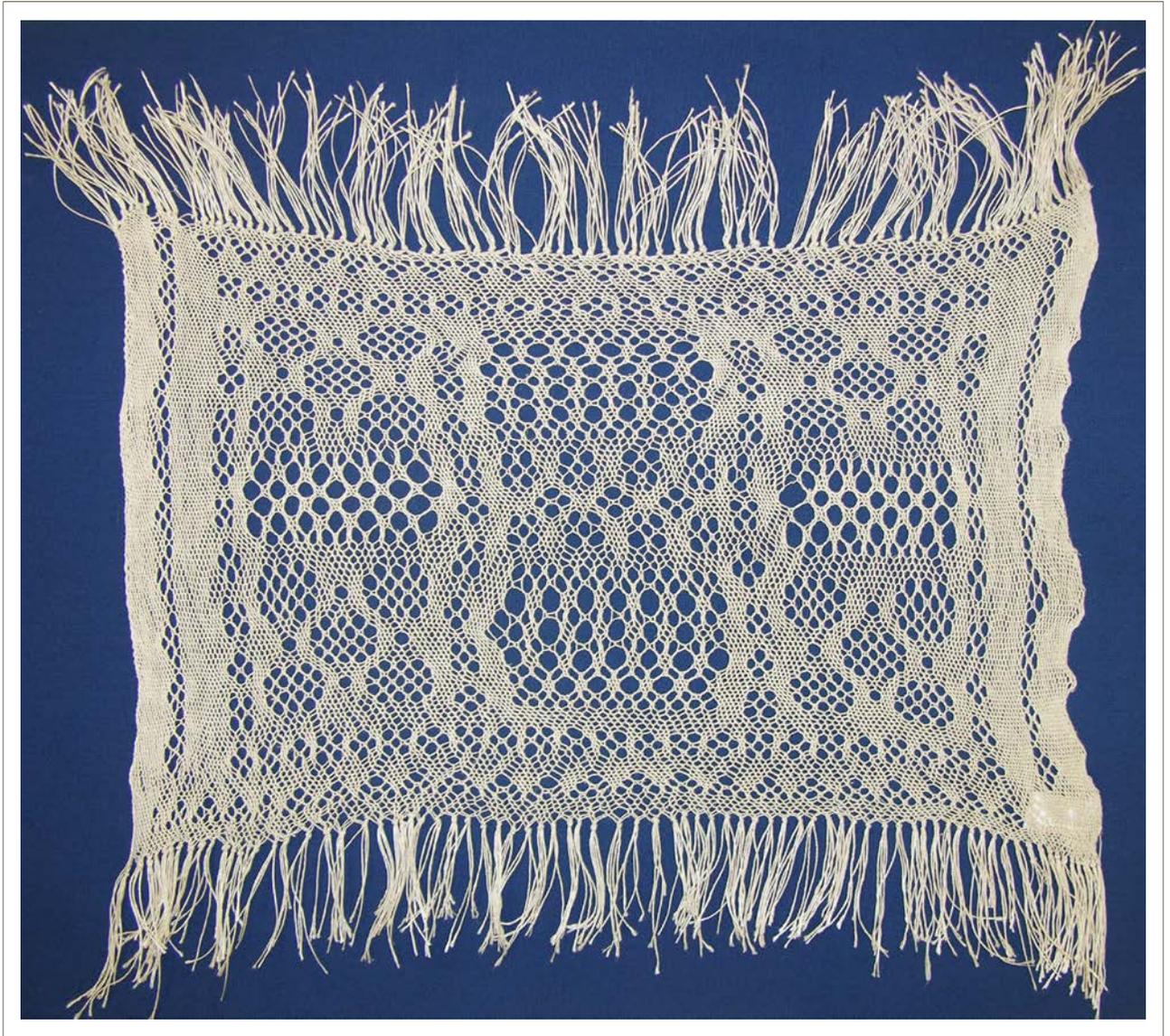
Lesley Wilkins
 Tunbridge Wells, UK: Search Press, 2024.
 Paperback, \$25.95.
 ISBN 9781800921801.

Samples of Sprang

A Scandinavian Intertwined Thread Technique

LAURANN GILBERTSON

Photos by the author and courtesy of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum unless otherwise noted



Sprang sampler made by Camilla Heiberg Støylen of Bergen, Norway. It was probably made from a pattern in a 1932 book on sprang. Camilla's sampler is 17.5 inches (44.5 cm) wide and 16 inches (40.5 cm) long, including fringe.

Sprang is one of several lace techniques used in rural Norway to create and embellish special textiles. Peter Collingwood describes sprang as a method of making fabric by manipulating parallel threads that are fixed at both ends. Adjacent strands or groups of strands are manipulated without the addition of any other threads to stabilize them.

Because the warp (made up of parallel threads) is fixed at both ends, usually in a frame, work done at the top of one end appears as a mirror image at the

bottom end. Weaver's shed sticks are inserted to hold the pattern in place while working the next row. Sticks can also be used to help manipulate the strands.

Once the sprang is completed, the resulting fabric will have two mirror-image patterns that meet in the center of the parallel threads. The work can then be finished in one of several ways depending upon whether the finished piece is to stay whole or is to be cut apart into two matching pieces of cloth. If cut, the methods to lock the pattern into place include the addition of a central thread perpendicular to the warp, looping or chaining the original parallel threads across the warp, or adding decorative stitches to stabilize the fabric. If the cloth is to be cut into two pieces, then a series of knots or fringes worked across the warp strands will hold the threads in place.

Sprang is believed to be an ancient and widespread technique. The oldest fragments have been found in Denmark, dated to 1400–1200 BCE during the Bronze Age. A sprang tube from 400–550 CE, likely a wool legging, was found in a bog in Norway. Tools for sprangwork, including a frame, were found on the Oseberg Viking ship from about 900 CE. A

piece of sprang in linen yarn has been found to have survived from the early 1300s, in southern Norway.

SPECIAL TEXTILES

TRIMMED WITH SPRANG

Sprang flourished in rural Norway in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as one of several lace techniques that were commonly used for trim on the ends of special textiles. These special textiles, often made of handwoven linen fabric, included runners that would be used in pairs on the coffin during a funeral. The textiles would be crossed on the top of the coffin to represent the Christian cross.

The equal-armed cross had even older meanings as the crossroads between north, south, east, and west, and as the crossroads between the earth and heaven, the human and spiritual worlds. Motifs embroidered on the cloths and sometimes the patterns worked in the trim reinforced the belief that the textiles could aid the deceased in their



Band of sprang. Brought by Kari Ivarsdatter Storvik from Lom, Gudbrandsdal, Norway, to Minnesota in 1867. This may have been used as trim on a Christmas cloth.



Towel or table runner with sprang trim. Made by Augusta Helberg in Lillehammer, Gudbrandsdal, Norway. It was sent as part of a large group of gifts from Norwegian museums to the collection now known as Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in honor of the centennial of Norwegian emigration in 1925.

transition to the spiritual world and thereby comfort the mourners.

A more common use for sprang-trimmed textiles was as Christmas cloths, which were traditionally hung up on Christmas Eve (December 24th) and taken down on the 20th day of Christmas (January 13th). These were long white linen or cotton cloths that were embellished with long bands of lace at one or both ends. The lace techniques often included sprang, a four-strand braiding technique called *fir-fletting*, and crochet.

The towels were hung in homes for festive decoration. They also represented the swaddling cloths in which the newborn Christ Child was wrapped according to the Bible. By hanging long white cloths in the home, residents symbolically welcomed the Christ Child and the Christmas season. The cloths might be hung at the window or over a tall floor clock.

In Valdres, in eastern Norway, the tradition was taken one step further. Handwoven wool and linen coverlets were hung over the window first before adding the white cloths. In many parts of rural Norway, coverlets with complex woven patterns were used as wraps for infants at baptism. Like the white cloths, baptismal wraps also symbolized the coming of the Christ Child.

A piece of sprang in the collection of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa,

might have come from one of these funereal or Christmas cloths. The piece is 15 inches (38 cm) wide. Kari Ivarsdatter Storvik (1822–1916) brought the piece of edging from Lom in eastern Norway to Minnesota when she came with her husband and four daughters in 1867. She was a spinner, weaver, and knitter and may have worked sprang as well.

SPRANG REVIVED

By the late nineteenth century, the use of ritual textiles was declining in rural Norway, which meant that knowledge of the lace techniques used to embellish them was also declining. Sprang might have been forgotten if not for the work of women who had the foresight to learn and teach the technique of sprang to preserve it.

One of these women was Augusta Helberg (1881–1947) from Trondheim. She went to work in Lillehammer as the housekeeper for a family that operated a creamery. While in Lillehammer in 1914, Augusta demonstrated sprang at Maihaugen, a museum focused on regional rural life, architecture, and fine handicraft.

Some of Augusta's work is now at Vesterheim, such as a cotton cloth with a 3½-inch-long (9 cm) band of sprang (excluding fringe) at each end. Carol James, who has been researching and teaching sprang for 20 years, said that both pieces of the trim were worked



Shed sticks used to manipulate the threads while working sprang, and Anna Grostøl's book *Sprang*.

at the same time. As pattern structures are worked, the crossings of the structures lean S-wise on one end of the frame and Z-wise on the other end of the frame. The trim on one end of the textile is worked in S and the other in Z. At 23¼ inches (59 cm), the finished textile is wider than traditional Christmas cloths, so this may have been intended as a more modern decorative towel or table runner.

There were many active women in Trøndelag County, where Augusta Helberg grew up and may have first learned sprang. Sprangwork seems to have been popular longer in Gudbrandsdal, the district that includes Lillehammer and Lom, where Kari Storvik lived.

Anna Grostøl (1894–1962) also deserves mention. A teacher, Anna documented and collected many textile techniques from many areas across Norway. In 1932, she wrote a book titled *Sprang*, which included instructions and patterns drafted from museum artifacts.

In the United States, Martha Brye (1864–1947) made a concerted effort to preserve the early textile handcraft that had been brought from Norway or made in her community of Coon Valley in western Wisconsin. Martha might have tried sprang or known someone who could make it because she had in her collection a copy of Anna Grostøl's *Sprang* and several thin, smooth sticks that could have been used to pick up patterns and sheds in sprang.

A NEW LIFE FOR AN OLD TECHNIQUE

One interesting piece that was made in Norway is a sampler that is now in the collection of Vesterheim Museum. The linen textile (shown on p. 31) was made by Camilla Heiberg Støylene (1869–1957) of Bergen, Norway. According to her son, “She was born and raised in Bergen, a daughter of an old merchant family. In her youth there was little educational opportunity for girls in Bergen, so she was sent to Växjö in Sweden to a well-known boarding school there. This was in the early [18]80s. We had two looms in our home and mother ‘let the shuttle fly’ for many years. We lived in . . . an eight-room house. We [were 12 children and] had two maids, so she found time to weave and engage in a multitude of activities.”

Camilla likely learned sprang in Sweden, but when making the sampler, she was probably caught up in the excitement in Norway in the early and mid-1900s for sprang. The sampler she made was based on the center portion of a wide border of sprang trim from Rindalen, Norway, that was offered as a pattern in Anna Grostøl's *Sprang* book. Camilla chose not to work the side borders, which featured hens and eggs. It appears that she may have been sampling the center portion before working the full width of textile in a finer yarn. Carol James observed that even without the hen and egg side borders, the central section represents some of the variety of stitches in sprang lace and could have served as a stitch sampler.

Camilla's skill in sprang is evident in a pair of bands for window curtains. She used three-ply cotton yarn when working the curtain trim, which is an impressive 69 inches (175 cm) wide. The sprang trim drops 8½ inches (22 cm) before it ends in fringe. Camilla's son remembered the curtains hanging in their home in Norway in the 1910s.

Ingeborg Husan Sjetne (1877–1963) of Hedmark,



Top: One of a pair of bands used to trim curtains. Made by Camilla Heiberg Støylen of Bergen, Norway, in about 1915. *Below:* Band made by Ingeborg Husan Sjetne of Hedmark, Norway, in 1952 as an entry in a textile exhibition.



Photo by Christian Grundseth, courtesy of Anno Museum, via Digitalt Museum

Photo of Ingeborg and Ole Sjetne, daughter Magnhild, and six sons. The photo was probably taken in 1934 when Magnhild returned home to Hedmark, Norway, from Minnesota for a visit, bringing along her three oldest children. Ingeborg Sjetne was a prize-winning sprang maker.

Norway, made a lovely piece of edging and entered it in a 1952 exhibition organized by her local chapter of the rural women's association. Her daughter, Magnhild Sjetne Skramstad, ended up with the textile. Magnhild was the only daughter and the only one of the seven surviving Sjetne children to emigrate.

A schoolteacher, Magnhild left Norway in 1927 for Canada. She and Olaf Skramstad married and then moved to Minnesota where Olaf worked as an engineer. Ingeborg may have sent the sprang to her daughter after the 1952 exhibition, or the family might have sent it to Magnhild after Ingeborg's death.

Textiles made of, or embellished with, sprang were special and unique, which meant they were saved and then passed along, even when in poor condition like the piece belonging to Kari Storvik. It is no surprise that some sprang ended up in the United States, brought by the maker or sent with a child or grandchild as a treasured memento. Speaking about the textiles that Camilla Støylen passed down, her son said, "Some articles are very old and were given to us as cherished heirlooms from relatives of yore." We are grateful that the inheritors have preserved these textiles for all of us to study and enjoy. ❖

NOTES

See *PieceWork's Knitting Traditions*, Spring 2013, for more on "The Storvik/Johnson Family of Norwegian Knitters." (All Access subscribers link: pieceworkmagazine.com/library/55785784.)

RESOURCES

- Collingwood, Peter. *The Techniques of Sprang: Plaiting on Stretched Threads*. New York: Watson-Guptill, 1974.
- Grostøl, Anna. *Sprang*. Oslo, Norway: Olaf Norlis Forlag, 1932. Reprinted in 1977 by Tanum-Norli.
- James, Carol. *Sprang Patterns and Charts Inspired by Samples in the Collection of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: author, 2022.
- . *Sprang Unsprung: An Illustrated Guide to Interlinking, Interlacing and Intertwining*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: author, 2011.

LAURANN GILBERTSON holds degrees in anthropology and textiles and clothing from Iowa State University. She has worked with the collection at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum for 33 years and is currently chief curator. She wishes to thank Carol James for explaining and illustrating the process of sprang here and for helping Vesterheim understand the sprang textiles in its collection. Patterns for all of the sprang artifacts mentioned in this article are included in *Sprang Patterns and Charts Inspired by Samples in the Collection of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum* by Carol James.

Brooklyn Museum Sampler Throw

MELISSA DEHNCKE MCGILL



Photos by Matt Graves unless otherwise noted

Each square in this lovely blanket is made from a different knitting pattern, reminiscent of the variety of stitch patterns in centuries-old knitting samplers.

Nineteenth-century knitted lace samplers were usually made from white or natural-color fine yarn or thread, which showed off the details of the stitches very clearly. Each sampler was a portable record of stitch patterns, and they were projects that could be added onto over the course of a lifetime.

The design for this throw was inspired by some of the stitches from a knitted lace sampler that is part of the Brooklyn Museum Collection. That sampler (which contains over 70 blocks of stitches) is 3½ inches (8.9 centimeters) wide and an amazing 15 feet (4.6 meters) long. Each block in this timeless throw will let you practice a new pattern; the openwork stripes between the rows of blocks and the garter stitch borders around the entire blanket add textural interest.

Although we are surrounded by a wealth of digital and written stitch patterns, the individual blocks in your finished throw could also be used as a learning tool to teach you how to “read” knitted textiles, in the same way that the knitters who came before us did.

MATERIALS

- ♦ Juniper Moon Farm *La Pampa* (100% organic wool), 131 yd/3.5 oz (120 m/100 g): #104 Smoke, 17 skeins
- ♦ Needles: size 10 (6 mm) for squares and size 10 (6 mm) 32" (80 cm) circular or longer for finishing or sizes needed to obtain gauge
- ♦ Cable needle (cn)
- ♦ Tapestry needle

Gauge: 13 sts and 20½ rows = 4" (10.2 cm) in average gauge from knit-and-purl stitch patterns Diamond, Diamond Brocade, and Chevron (see Notes).

Finished Size: 54" × 66½" (137 × 169 cm), after blocking.

Visit pieceworkmagazine.com/abbreviations for terms you don't know.

NOTES

All squares should measure as closely as possible to 13" (33 cm) in width and length after blocking. Exact gauge is not as critical as achieving a consistent square size.

Please visit LT.Media/Brooklyn-Throw for written-out instructions for each square.



The horizontal openwork rows that are knitted between the rows of sewn-together squares add stability and artistic detail to the throw.

STITCH GUIDE

S2kp2 (centered double decrease) Slip 2 sts as if to k2tog, k1, pass 2 slipped sts over—2 sts decreased.

Sk2p (left-leaning double decrease) Slip 1 st kwise, k2tog, pass slipped st over—2 sts decreased.

1/1 Left Cross Slipped (1/1 LCS)

Cable-needle method: Place slipped st on cn and hold in front, p1, then k1 from cn.

No-cable-needle method: Drop the slipped st to the front of the work, p1, then return the slipped st to the left-hand needle and knit it.

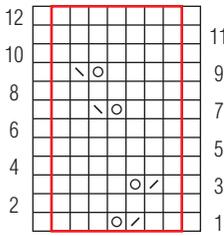
1/1 Right Cross Slipped (1/1 RCS)

Cable-needle method: Place 1 st on cn and hold in back, knit the slipped st, then p1 from cn.

No-cable-needle method: Wyb, sl the next st on left-hand needle to right-hand needle, and drop the slipped st to the front of the work. Return the st on the right-hand needle to the left-hand needle, then place the dropped slipped st on the left-hand needle in front of it. Knit the slipped st, then purl the following st.

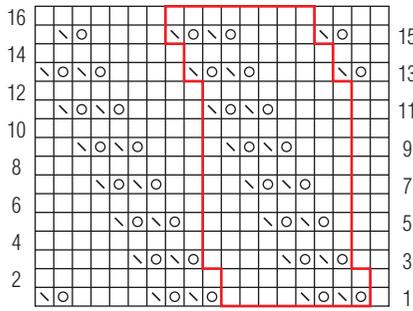
2/2 Right Cross (2/2 RC) Sl 2 sts to cn and hold in back, k2, then k2 from cn.

Hanging Vines (Square 1)



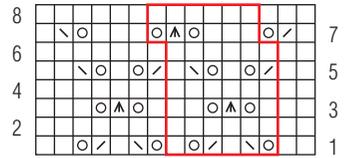
7-st repeat

Falling Stitches (Square 2)



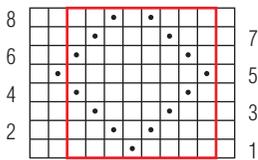
8-st repeat

Small Perforated Diamonds (Square 3)



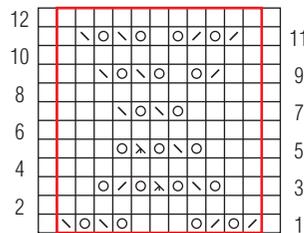
6-st repeat

Diamond (Square 4)



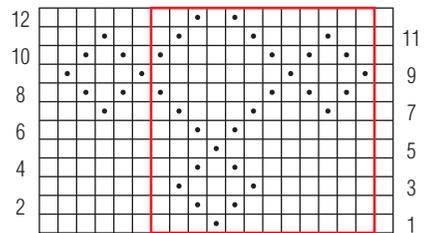
8-st repeat

Diamond Lace (Square 5)



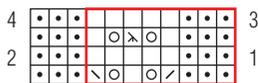
11-st repeat

Diamond Brocade (Square 6)



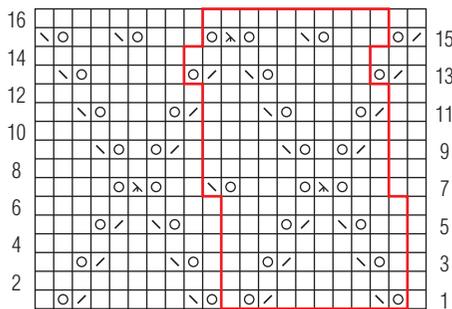
12-st repeat

Lacy Columns (Square 7)



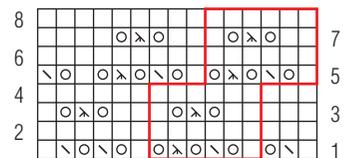
8-st repeat

Large Perforated Diamonds (Square 8)



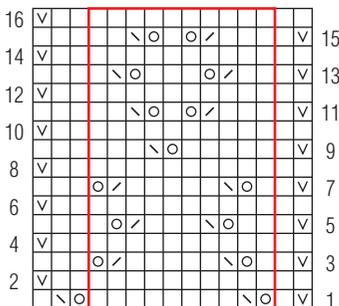
10-st repeat

Small Hearts (Square 9)



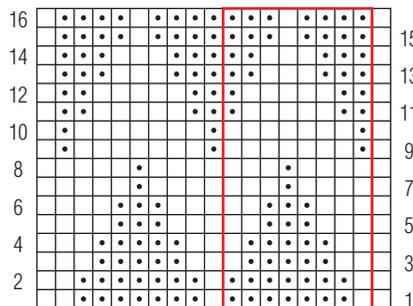
6-st repeat

Perforated Tulips (Square 10)



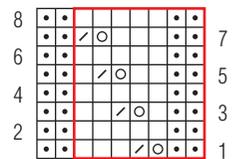
10-st repeat

Chevron (Square 11)



8-st repeat

Ladder (Square 12)



7-st repeat

INSTRUCTIONS

Please visit LT.Media/Brooklyn-Throw for written-out instructions for each square.

Squares

Square 1

CO 44 sts.

Work in Hanging Vines patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Square 2

CO 43 sts.

Work in Falling Stitches patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Square 3

CO 45 sts.

Work in Small Perforated Diamonds patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Square 4

CO 43 sts.

Work in Diamond patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 1 or Row 5 to finish with a full diamond or half diamond.

BO all sts in patt, matching the last row.

Square 5

CO 46 sts.

Work in Diamond Lace patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 1 or Row 7 to finish with a full diamond or half diamond.

BO all sts.

Square 6

CO 43 sts.

Work in Diamond Brocade patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 5 (if possible) to balance the patt.

BO all sts.

Square 7

CO 43 sts.

Work in Lacy Columns patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Key

 k on RS; p on WS

 p on RS; k on WS

 k2tog

 ssk

 yo

 s2kp2

 k3tog

 sk2p

 sl 1 kwise wyb on RS; sl 1 pwise wyf on WS

 repeat

 1/1 LCS; see Stitch Guide

 1/1 RCS; see Stitch Guide

 2/2 RC; see Stitch Guide

Square 8

CO 41 sts.

Work in Large Perforated Diamonds patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 8 or Row 16 to finish with a full diamond or half diamond.

BO all sts.

Square 9

CO 45 sts.

Work in Small Hearts patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Square 10

CO 45 sts.

Work in Perforated Tulips patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 8 or Row 16 to finish with a complete tulip.

BO all sts.

Square 11

CO 43 sts.

Work in Chevron patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Square 12

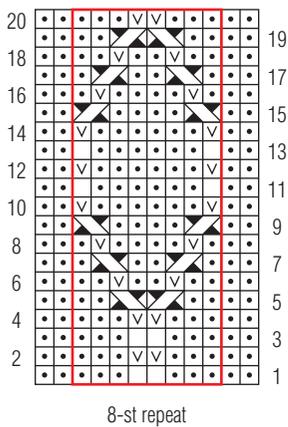
CO 44 sts.

Set-up row (WS): K2, *p5, k2; rep from * to end.

Work in Ladder patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

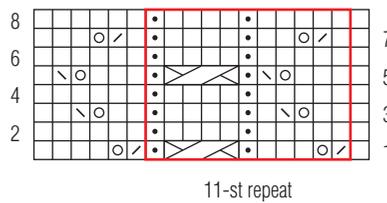
BO all sts.

Slipped Trellis (Square 13)



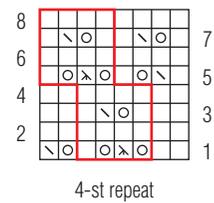
8-st repeat

Cables and Lace (Square 14)



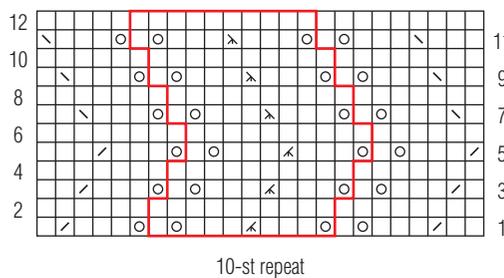
11-st repeat

Lace Diagonals (Square 15)



4-st repeat

Zigzag (Square 16)



10-st repeat

Square 13

CO 44 sts.

Set-up row (WS): K2, *k3, p2, k3; rep from * to last 2 sts, k2.

Work in Slipped Trellis patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 4 or Row 14 to finish with a full motif or half motif.

BO all sts.

Square 14

CO 51 sts.

Set-up row (WS): P6, *k1, p4, k1, p5; rep from * to last st, p1.

Work in Cables and Lace patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 2 or Row 6 of patt.

BO all sts.

Square 15

CO 44 sts.

Work in Lace Diagonals patt from chart until piece measures 13" (33 cm).

BO all sts.

Square 16

CO 44 sts.

Work in Zigzag patt from chart until piece measures about 13" (33 cm), ending with Row 6 or Row 12 of patt.

BO all sts.

FINISHING

Because of the different number of stitches and rows in the various stitch patterns, the squares will not be perfectly uniform. Wet-block them as closely to 13" (33 cm) square as possible, easing and stretching as necessary.

ASSEMBLY

Arrange the squares in four rows. For the blanket shown, the top row contains Squares 1–4 in that order from left to right, the second row is Squares 5–8, the third row is Squares 9–12, and the bottom row is Squares 13–16.

If necessary, rearrange your squares to place squares with similar heights in the same row, and mix and match the wider and narrower squares so all four rows are about the same width.

Sew the four squares of each row together, side by side.

Horizontal inserts

With RS facing, pick up and knit 175 sts across the top edge of the fourth row of squares (43 sts for each square and 1 st in each seam).

Row 1 (WS): Knit.

Row 2 (RS): *K2tog, yo; rep from * to last st, k1.

Rows 3 and 4: Knit.

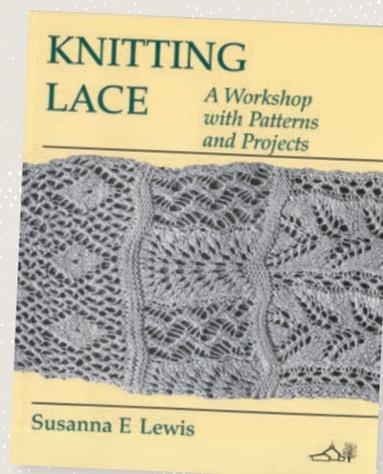
Row 5: Purl.

Row 6: Knit.

Rep the last 6 rows 2 times, then work Rows 1–5 once more, ending with a WS row. BO all sts kwise with RS facing.

Deciphering Nineteenth-Century Knitted Lace

Although the precise location and the date of origin are unknown, the 91-piece knitted lace sampler in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art is assumed to have been made in Germany or Austria in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Susanna Lewis undertook the vast job of dissecting and analyzing this fascinating knitted treasure. Not only was she able to reveal all the necessary techniques to enable lace knitters to duplicate each of the 91 historical motifs, but she also provided detailed instructions for lace knitting in general—from basic to advanced—through which we may glean a thorough understanding of lace construction, stitch movement, and lace charting. Without her efforts, knowledge about some of the minutiae of creating traditional knitted laces may have been lost.



Knitting Lace: A Workshop with Patterns and Projects
by Susanna E. Lewis. Originally published by Taunton Press in 1992; republished by Schoolhouse Press in 2009.



Photo courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum

Knitted Sampler, circa 1800; cotton, $3\frac{1}{2} \times 179\frac{1}{16}$ inches (8.9×457 cm); gift of Joseph F. McCrindle, 74.12.1.

Work two more inserts in the same manner across the top of the second and third rows of assembled squares.

Sew the top of each insert to the lower edge of the row of squares above it.

Top and bottom edges

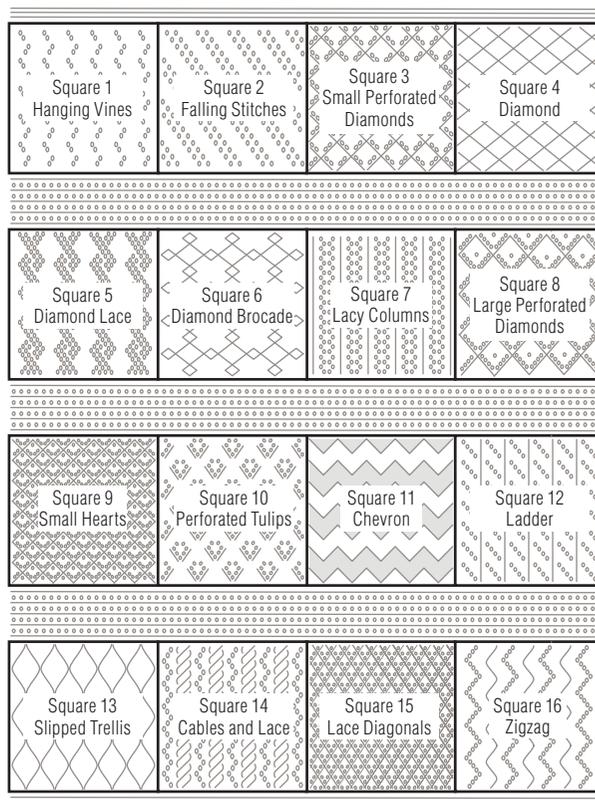
With RS facing, pick up and knit 170 sts across the top edge of the first row of squares (42 or 43 sts for each square). Knit 7 rows, beginning and ending with a WS row. BO all sts kwise with RS facing. Work the same garter st border along the bottom edge of the fourth row of squares.

Side edges

With RS facing, pick up and knit 210 sts along one side of blanket (about 41 sts for each square, 12 sts for each insert, and 5 sts each along top and bottom edges). Knit 3 rows. BO all sts kwise with RS facing. Repeat edge on the opposite side of blanket.

Weave in ends.

MELISSA DEHNCKE MCGILL is a knitting designer and a photographer. Melissa has been knitting and crocheting almost as long as she can remember. Her grandmother taught her to knit on a skein of bright pink acrylic yarn that she knitted over and over again. She remembers her German father teaching her to crochet.



The Brooklyn Museum Sampler Throw has 16 unique knitted squares separated by bands of openwork knitting, and garter stitch borders.

Joyful, Wonderful, and Useful

Samplers from Anna Næsgaard's Needlework Collection

ASTRID COLDING SIVERTSEN, BODIL KAPPEL SCHMIDT, LEA GEIGER,
AGNETE RASMUSSEN, ANNE JULIE BIBBY

Throughout her career, Anna Næsgaard (1885–1975) was influential in the textile education of girls in Denmark. Her personal collection contains hundreds of textile samples, some of which illustrate the educational methods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and others that illustrate the pure joy of working with textiles.

The Textile Museum in Herning, Denmark, is home to Næsgaard's needlework collection. Originally a teacher, she was repeatedly promoted and eventually became the inspector of textile education in the public school system of Copenhagen, playing a vital role in defining how the subject of needlework was taught to all girls in Copenhagen schools from the 1930s on.

The curriculum is described by the Danish word *håndarbejde*, which has the same meaning as the German word *handarbeit* and is similar in meaning to the English words needlework and textiles. In Denmark, this subject was taught exclusively to girls. During Næsgaard's lifetime, textile education focused on knitting, sewing, embroidery, mending, and similar crafts in a systematic manner.

FROM A RURAL BACKGROUND TO A WORLD TRAVELER

Anna Næsgaard was born in 1885 in Måbjerg near Holstebro in west-central Jutland, Denmark. Her parents were farm owners who had 13 children, although only 8 survived. Næsgaard grew up in a household with 7 brothers. Although later she admitted that she didn't much enjoy the textile education offered during her own schooldays, she said in a 1935 interview, "I have enjoyed needlework since I was a very small girl." At an early age, she helped her mother by mending the socks her many brothers wore out, but she quickly became interested in other types of needlework such as fancy embroidery.

At the age of 18, Næsgaard began studies to become a teacher but decided to interrupt her training to travel to North America for three years. During those years, she taught at a folk high school and worked as a governess with a family stationed in Panama. In 1911, upon her return to Denmark, she completed her teacher's training in Copenhagen. The same year, she was employed as a teacher in



Photos by Maja Theodoraki and courtesy of Museum Midtjylland unless otherwise noted

Objects from Anna Næsgaard's collection: embroidery samplers and a knitted sampler with different types of mending. The Tamari face powder box was used to hold extremely fine glass beads.

Copenhagen. In 1914, Anna married the psychoanalyst Dr. Sigurd Næsgaard, and they went on to have two children, Else (1914) and Ole (1921).

HER CAREER IN COPENHAGEN

Anna Næsgaard worked as a teacher for many years, teaching needlework. Having been promoted to vice-inspector at Hans Tavsgades Skole, the school where she worked, in 1928, she was asked to serve as secretary to a committee formed of vice-inspectors and teachers. The committee finished its work in 1933 and delivered a plan that defined how textile



Photograph of Anna Næsgaard as a young woman surrounded by objects from her collection. There is a knitting sampler with darned patches, and the embroidered sampler at the bottom left was made by Augusta Telkamp in 1839.

education would be carried out in the public schools of Copenhagen for years to come.

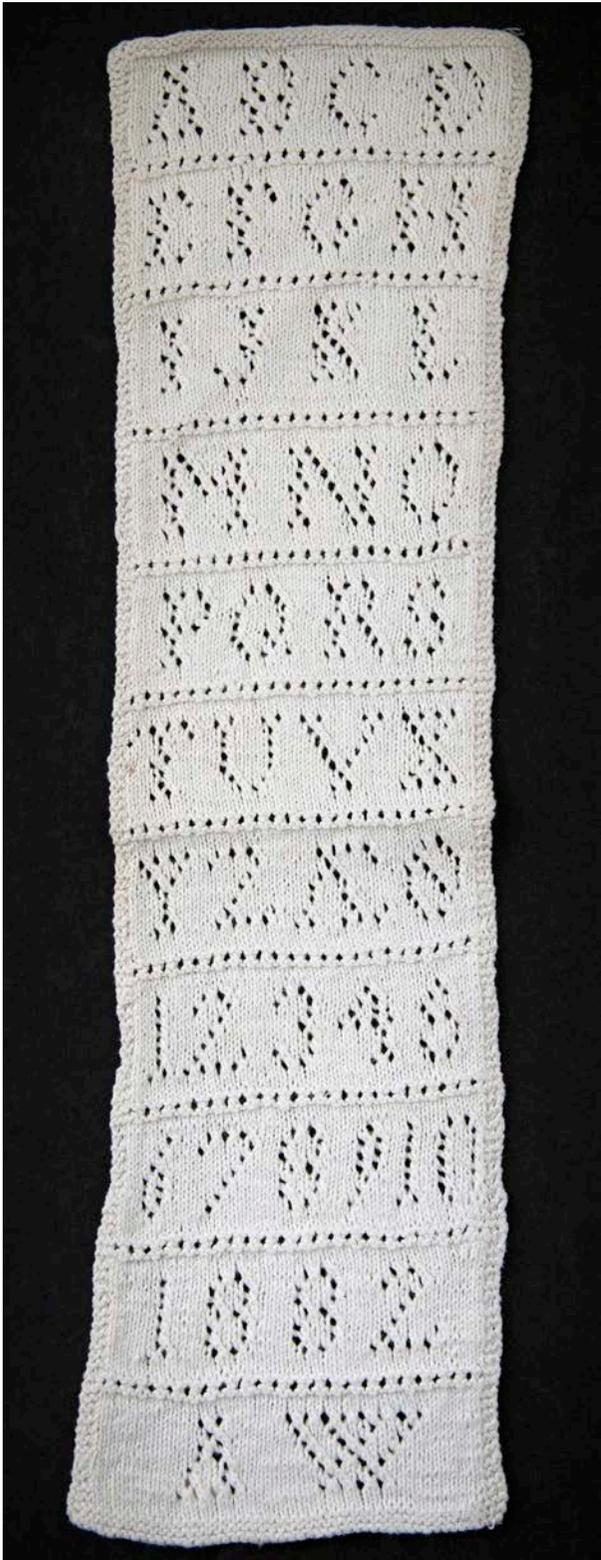
In 1935, she was promoted to a new position as inspector of textile education for all 60 public schools in Copenhagen. Her own description of her responsibility was that she was “to support the subject’s growth and be of help in any manner at all regarding planning textile education in the public schools.” As the inspector, Næsgaard oversaw a collection of textile works that were lent to teachers for inspiration, and she was also in charge of procuring materials for all the students’ work. A centralized source of inspiration and material supply ensured that all students at the same grade level did the same work.

Næsgaard served as inspector of textile education until her mandatory retirement in 1955, when she turned 70. Asked in an interview what she planned to do in her leisure time, she replied “On my honor, I will have to finish all the needlework sitting in my drawer.” Næsgaard was decorated by King Frederik IX in 1956 for her work, receiving the Order of Dannebrog, for which women had only been eligible since 1951.

In addition to maintaining the collection of textile works that was part of her professional responsibility, Anna Næsgaard also collected textiles privately, obtaining hundreds of objects. Part of her personal collection contains samplers and items that illustrated the needlework curriculum from Næsgaard’s professional years as well as older objects. Other parts of the collection reflect her pure enjoyment of needlework, also indicated in a 1955 interview when she said, “I think needlework is a joyful subject, a wonderful subject, a useful subject.” The entire collection contains examples of knitting, crochet, tatting, bobbin lace, mending, fine seaming, and many types of embroidery, and it was given to the Textile Museum in 1980 by her daughter, Else.

THE SCHALLENFELD METHOD
 Anna Næsgaard operated within a dogma of teaching textile skills that originated in Germany around 1850. Rosalie Schallendorf (1819–1864) founded a teacher’s college in Berlin, and her influence spread

For Schallenfled, the aim of textile education was double—encompassing the practical skills to be mastered and the formation of the student’s character.



Knitted alphabet and number sampler from Anna Næsgaard’s collection, 1882; 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 4 inches (37 × 10 cm); cotton; 2196 × 63.

through books and papers she wrote, as well as with the teachers who trained there. The Danish teacher Emilie West wrote a book in 1889 based on Schallenfled’s teachings and writings. West’s book, *Vejledning til methodisk Undervisning i kvindeligt Haandarbejde (Guidelines for the Methodical Teaching of Needlework for Girls)* was recommended by the Danish Ministry for Church and Education as preparation for the examination to become a textile teacher, and its ideas helped form curriculum until around 1970.

For Schallenfled, the aim of textile education was double—encompassing the practical skills to be mastered and the formation of the student’s character. She felt that girls should be educated to be able citizens (characterized by patience, accuracy, orderliness, and cleanliness) and that practical skills were equally important, as the girls would become mothers and housewives responsible for making and maintaining their family’s clothing and household textiles.

The Schallenfled method was characterized by a systematic approach. Students made samplers and samples of techniques to be mastered, using a progression from easy to difficult techniques. All students carried out the same tasks, and teachers gave instructions using printed boards or large-sized demonstration textile samples.

The sock samples (shown on p. 48) are a clear example of the Schallenfled method at work. Girls learned sock construction by knitting the different parts separately, mastering the necessary skills of knitting with four or five double-pointed needles, increasing and decreasing, and picking up and slipping stitches. Only after separately practicing different types of heels, different types of toes, and the decreases along the back of the leg were girls allowed to knit a whole sock.

Under the Schallenfled method, it was also customary to make so-called “Swiss samplers” showing all the techniques a girl had learned throughout her school years. Individual samples of sewn shirt details, underwear, mended patches, embroidery, and decorative seams were sewn together into one long piece that could have a length of several meters.

Such samplers were used as a reference when working independently and even later in life, at a time when written patterns were uncommon. The



Knitted lace sampler from Anna Næsgaard's collection, 1849; cotton; $45 \times 2\frac{2}{3}$ inches (114 x 6 cm); 2196 x 56.

same would be the case for knitted samplers, which required much skill but also required patience and persistence. As such, they played a role in forming the character of the young female knitters in addition to having practical value as pattern libraries.

KNITTED AND STITCHED SAMPLERS

Among the many items in Næsgaard's private collection are a knitted lace sampler, an alphabet sampler, and several samples used to perfect the knitting of socks. These objects exemplify the type of needlework that was expected of the girls enrolled in the Danish school system during the mid- to late nineteenth century.

The alphabet sampler (page 46) was worked over 48 stitches and knitted at a gauge of 53 stitches per 4 inches (10 cm). The last two sections that form the bottom of the finished sampler show the year 1882 and the initials of the knitter (AW). Sadly, we have no records showing who AW was.

The lace sampler shown above, worked at a gauge of 83 stitches per 4 inches (10 cm), makes the alphabet sampler look almost coarse in comparison. The first section shows the year 1849 followed by 14 different lace sections, each $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 inches (8 to 10 cm) long. A section with the initials FLT ends the sampler.

Næsgaard's collection contains two very similar lace samplers from 1835 and 1892, along with a small

handwritten notebook from 1942 in which lace patterns identical to those of the 1849 sampler are written out in shorthand, naming them tulle, diamonds, flames, tête-à-tête, etc. A small note stored with the 1892 sampler states that the girl who made it was born in 1880, so it is likely that FLT was around 12 years old when knitting her lace sampler in 1849.

A sock sampler (shown on p. 48) is one of many samplers mounted on cardboard pages and saved in a series of binders in Næsgaard's collection. The sock sections, in varying stages of completion, display techniques that were typical of the type that Danish schoolgirls would have been expected to learn. The top heel shown is a French heel, shaped with a wedge under the foot; the bottom heel is a Dutch heel, shaped with bands of stitches at the sides. Both the toe shaping and the French and Dutch heel shaping in the sampler are among the standard types that can be found in Danish reference books designed for housewives and published throughout the twentieth century.

A LIFELONG EDUCATOR

In the span of textile education between practicality and character formation, Anna Næsgaard clearly emphasized the practical and useful aspects of textile education. She probably drew on her own life experiences, mending her brothers' socks, her years as a governess in Panama, and tending to her own



Four sock samples showing different techniques; cotton; gauge of 40–50 stitches per 4 inches (10 cm); 2196 × 24.

family, when she stated in 1955 that textile skills were “something all girls will come to need, whether they marry or not.”

We do not know if Næsgaard managed to finish all the needlework that was sitting in her drawer in 1955. We do know that after retirement, she went on to teach both young and adult women in the evening school system of Copenhagen, and she was active in municipal redesign and repair workshops that were open to the public. Remaining active during old age, Anna Næsgaard died on the very day of her 90th birthday, in 1975, after only a few days of illness.

Upon receiving the Order of Dannebrog in 1956, Næsgaard submitted a personal statement of her life and work. This statement will be made available to the public in 2025, on the 50th anniversary of her death, and we hope it will shed some light on her views of the textile educational system that lasted a century. ❖

RESOURCES

Documents in the collection of Museum Midtjylland: a collection of newspaper and magazine articles and copies of documents, most only dated, without notes of source publication. Klindt, Louise. “Håndarbejde.” *lex.dk/håndarbejde*. Accessed October 12, 2024.

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West, Emilie: *Vejledning til methodisk Undervisning i kvindeligt Haandarbejde*. København: N. C. Roms Forlagsforretning, 1889.

The authors of this article are members of a textile work group under the auspices of the Textile Museum in Herning, Museum Midtjylland, Denmark.

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Boardwalk Mosaic Shawl

MARI TOBITA



Photos by Matt Graves

Simple short-row shaping, a band of openwork flowers, and a variety of mosaic colorwork patterns make this stunning crescent shawl enjoyable to knit and lovely to wear.

In her 1943 book *Mary Thomas's Book of Knitting Patterns* (Hodder and Stoughton, London) author Mary Thomas includes charts and an explanation for “slip-stitch knitting”—designs formed by slipping pattern stitches (unworked) from one needle to the next and knitting or purling them on the next row. However, it wasn't until the 1960s, with the publication of Barbara G. Walker's *A Treasury of Knitting Patterns* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1976) that the craze for mosaic knitting (named by Walker) became popular among American knitters. Walker went on to add mosaic knitting patterns to each of her three subsequent treasuries,

and in 1976 she published a book, *Mosaic Knitting*, that contains 380 of her original designs.

When I designed this mosaic shawl, I imagined myself walking along a boardwalk on the edge of the seashore on a breezy day. I wanted to create a sampler of mosaic knitting, so I arranged some of my favorite patterns to resemble a boardwalk made of wooden planks. I added a dainty openwork insertion in the middle as an accent, then bordered the shawl with solid and striped rows of garter stitch.

There are five different mosaic knitting designs in the Boardwalk Mosaic Shawl for you to practice reading the charts and understanding this imaginative technique. The patterns that make up this shawl are timeless, and the crescent shape of this fun-to-knit shawl means that it will wrap beautifully around your neck and shoulders but not be too cumbersome to wear on a summer evening.

For more information about Barbara Walker, please see *PieceWork* magazine Fall 2024.

M A T E R I A L S

- ♦ Rowan *Summerlite 4ply* (100% cotton), 191 yd (175 m)/50 g ball: 1 ball each of #438 Sand Dune (MC) and #437 Seashell (CC1); 2 balls of #429 Navy Ink (CC2)
- ♦ Needles: size 3 (3.25 mm) and size 4 (3.5 mm), 32" (80 cm) or longer circular needles or sizes needed to obtain gauge
- ♦ Spare needle: size 6 (4 mm) or 2 sizes bigger than larger needle for binding off
- ♦ Stitch markers
- ♦ Tapestry needle

Gauge: 26 sts and 56 rows = 4" (10.2 cm) in garter stitch using smaller needles, after blocking; 24 sts and 57 rows = 4" (10.2 cm) in Mosaic patts from charts using larger needles, after blocking.

Finished Measurements: 68" (172.7 cm) wide across upper edge and 13" (33 cm) high at tallest point in center.

N O T E S

The first 2 stitches and last 2 stitches of every row are worked in garter stitch throughout, with increases worked inside these edge stitches.

Because of the rapid increase rate, short-rows are periodically worked on the edge stitches to



This crescent-shaped shawl has symmetrical tapered ends.

prevent the edges from becoming too tight. It is not necessary to pick up and knit the wraps for these short-rows because the fabric is mostly garter stitch; simply knit each wrapped stitch as you come to it. Any gaps at the short-row turning points will be concealed in the "ditch" between the garter ridges; in the lace section, the turning-point holes become part of the openwork pattern.

Most of the shawl is worked using 2 colors that alternate every 2 rows. When changing colors, drop the old color to the front, then bring the new color up behind the old color into working position, without twisting the strands. In places where you need to carry the nonworking color up the selvedge for more than 2 rows, trap the carried strand against the edge of the work at the beginning of each RS row as follows: Hold the working color out to the right, bring the nonworking color up behind the working color and drop it in front, then continue with the working color. The nonworking strand has been wrapped counterclockwise around the working strand.

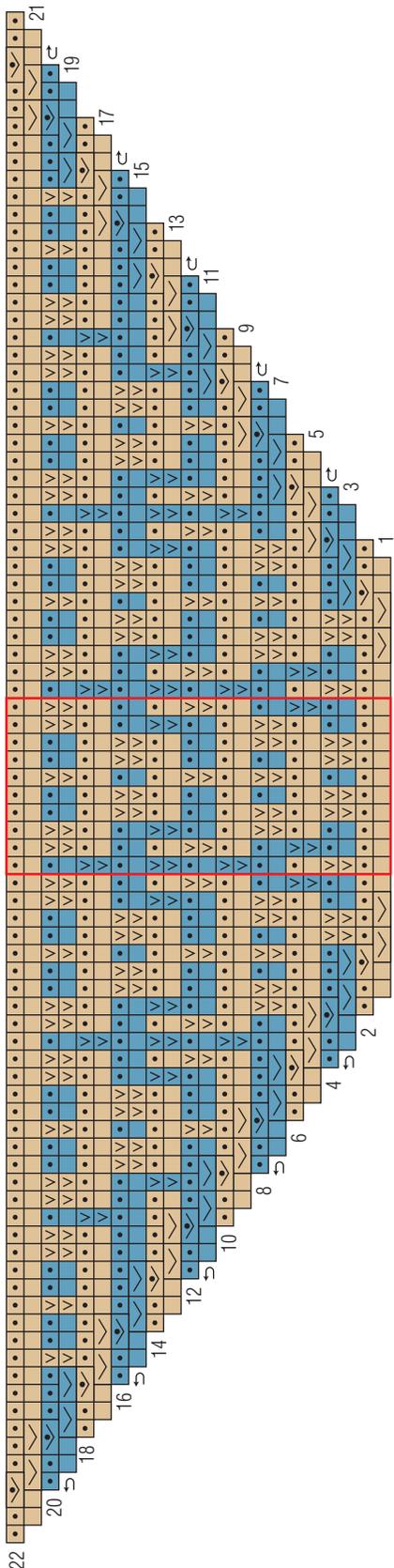
Visit pieceworkmagazine.com/abbreviations for terms you don't know.

I N S T R U C T I O N S

With CC1 and smaller needle, CO 9 sts.

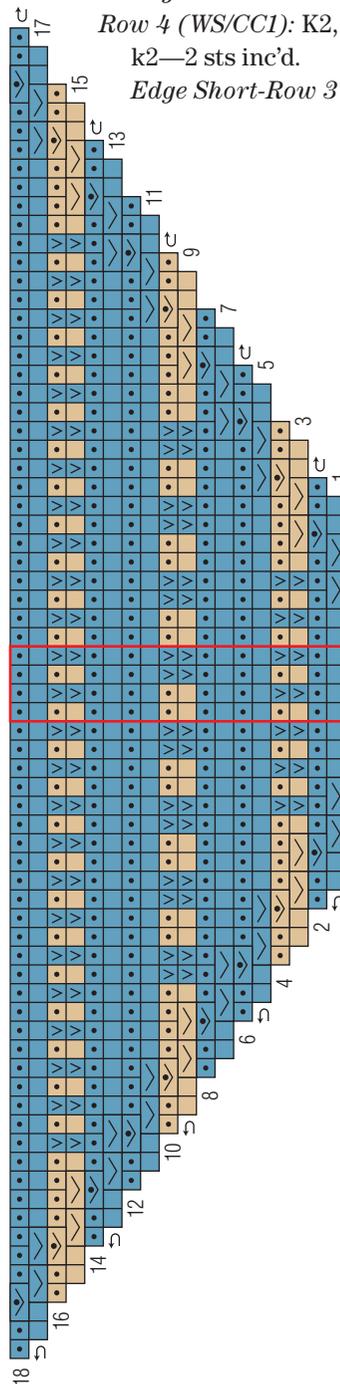
Set-up row (WS/CC1): K2, k1f&b, k3, k1f&b, k2—11 sts.

Mosaic Chart A



10-st repeat

Mosaic Chart B



4-st repeat

Row 1 (RS/MC): K2, k1f&b twice, k to last 4 sts, k1f&b twice, k2—4 sts inc'd.

Row 2 (WS/MC): K2, k1f&b, k to last 3 sts, k1f&b, k2—2 sts inc'd.

Row 3 (RS/CC1): K2, k1f&b twice, k to last 4 sts, k1f&b twice, k2—4 sts inc'd.

Edge Short-Row 1 (WS): Turn work, k3, wrap next st and turn work (W&T).

Edge Short-Row 2 (RS): K3.

Row 4 (WS/CC1): K2, k1f&b, k to last 3 sts, k1f&b, k2—2 sts inc'd.

Edge Short-Row 3 (RS): Turn work, k3, W&T.

Key

- MC
- CC1
- CC2
- knit on RS; purl on WS
- purl on RS; knit on WS
- yo
- k2tog
- ssk
- sl 1 kwise, k2tog, psso
- sl 1 pwise wyb on RS; sl 1 pwise wyf on WS
- repeat
- k1f&b on RS
- k1f&b on WS
- work Edge Short-Rows 1 and 2 at end of RS rows
- work Edge Short-Rows 3 and 4 at end of WS rows

Edge Short-Row 4 (WS): K3.

Rep Rows 1–4, including the 4 short-rows, 8 more times—119 sts.

Cut MC and CC1. Join CC2.

Using CC2 for every row, work Rows 1–4 once more, including the 4 short-rows—131 sts.

Mosaic Chart A

Change to larger needle and join MC.

Work Rows 1 and 2 of chart—137 sts.

Work Row 3 of chart, then work Edge Short-Rows 1 and 2 at end of row as shown by the arrow.

Work Row 4 of chart, then work Edge Short-Rows 3 and 4 at end of row as shown by the arrow—143 sts.

Cont in this manner, working Edge Short-Rows 1 and 2 at the ends of Rows 3, 7, 11, 15, and 19, and working Edge Short-Rows 3 and 4 at the ends of Rows 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20.

Cont in patt until Row 22 of chart has been completed—197 sts.

Mosaic Chart B

Cont working the Edge Short-Rows where indicated by arrows, work Rows 1–18 of chart—251 sts.

Cut CC2.

Lace Flowers Chart

With MC only, work Row 1 of Lace Flowers chart; this row begins as a multiple of 10 sts plus 11 and ends as a multiple of 9 sts plus 14—230 sts.

Cont working Edge Short-Rows where indicated by arrows, work Rows 2–10 of chart—256 sts.

Cut MC and join CC2.

Inc row (RS/CC2): K2, k1f&b twice, k2, k1f&b, *k8, k1f&b; rep from * to last 6 sts, k2, k1f&b twice, k2—288 sts.

Edge Short-Row 1 (WS): Turn work, k3, W&T.

Edge Short-Row 2 (RS): K3.

Next row (WS/CC2): K2, k1f&b, k to last 3 sts, k1f&b, k2—290 sts.

Edge Short-Row 3 (RS): Turn work, k3, W&T.

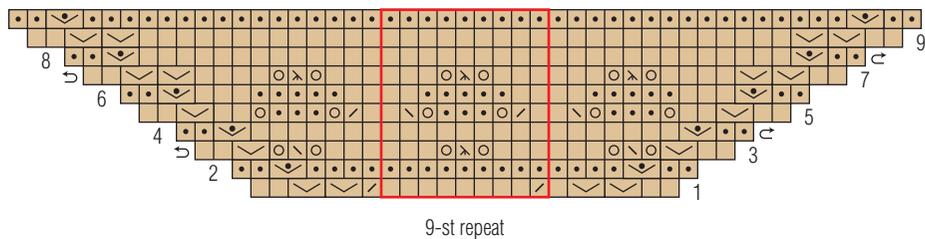
Edge Short-Row 4 (WS): K3.

Mosaic Chart C

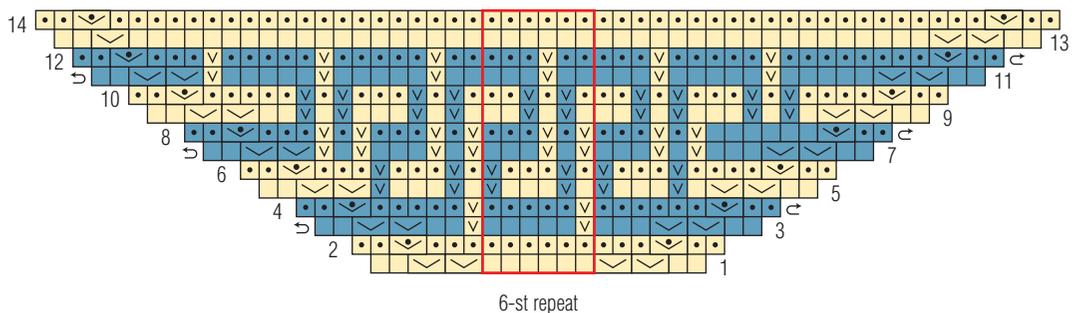
Join CC1.

Cont working Edge Short-Rows where indicated by arrows, work Rows 1–14 of chart—331 sts. *Note:* There is only one k1f&b inc at the end of Row 13.

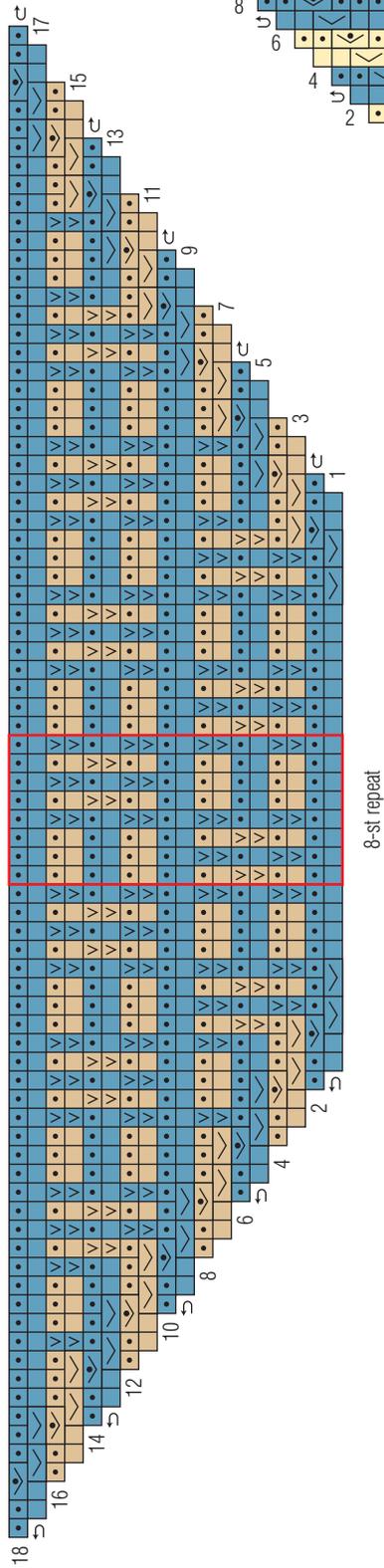
Lace Flowers Chart



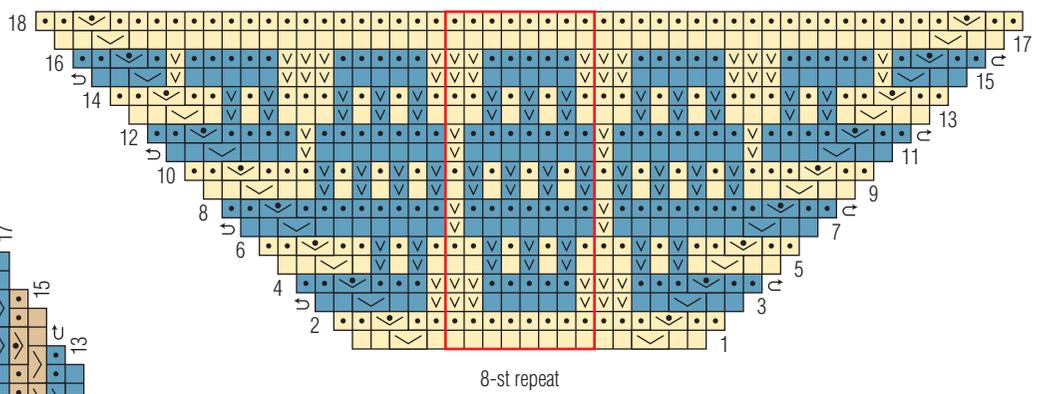
Mosaic Chart C



Mosaic Chart D



Mosaic Chart E



Mosaic Chart D

Cut CC1 and join MC.
Cont working Edge Short-Rows where indicated by arrows, work Rows 1–18 of chart—385 sts.

Mosaic Chart E

Cut MC and join CC1.
Cont working Edge Short-Rows where indicated by arrows, work Rows 1–18 of chart. *Note:* There is only one k1f&b inc worked at each end of every RS row—421 sts.
Cut CC1.

Change to smaller needle and cont to end with CC2.

- Row 1 (RS):* K2, k1f&b, k to last 3 sts, k1f&b, k2—2 sts inc'd.
- Edge Short-Row 1 (WS):* Turn work, k3, W&T.
- Edge Short-Row 2 (RS):* K3.
- Row 2 (WS):* K2, k1f&b, k to last 3 sts, k1f&b, k2—2 sts inc'd.
- Edge Short-Row 3 (RS):* Turn work, k3, W&T.
- Edge Short-Row 4 (WS):* K3.
- Rep Rows 1 and 2, including the 4 short-rows, 5 more times—445 sts.

Using size 6 (4 mm) spare needle, BO all sts purlwise.

FINISHING

Weave in all ends and block the shawl. ❖

MARI TOBITA was born in Japan and lives in New York City in an apartment filled with books and boxes of yarn. She has spent many years studying knitting and designing knitwear.

Expression in Small Stitches

Khamak Embroidery Samplers in Afghanistan

RANGINA HAMIDI



Photos courtesy of Schiffer Publishing

An Afghan woman working an original pattern of her own design in the tiny stitches that are characteristic of *khamak* embroidery.

Kandahar Treasure is a women's embroidery collective in Kandahar, Afghanistan, that supports the fine needlework of more than two hundred women artisans. This enterprise serves as the sole lifeline for these women as Afghanistan continues to struggle through yet another political and financial transition.



Each lozenge on this luxurious embroidery has been filled in with a different *khamak* design.

Kandahar Treasure supports its women artisans by promoting and marketing their fine hand-embroidered work while providing guidance for their everyday needs. In addition to the income the women make, Kandahar Treasure offers a safe place for women to gather, create, and innovate. Having the space to dream, to explore, and to create within boundaries is as important as having the ability to break all boundaries. The women of Kandahar continue to stitch opportunities of hope and resiliency within the many constraints they face.

IN CONTROL WITH A NEEDLE

Afghan women wake each morning surrounded by boundaries. Viewed as liabilities in this deeply patriarchal society, women remain dependent on men. At home, the walled compound encloses women's daily activities.

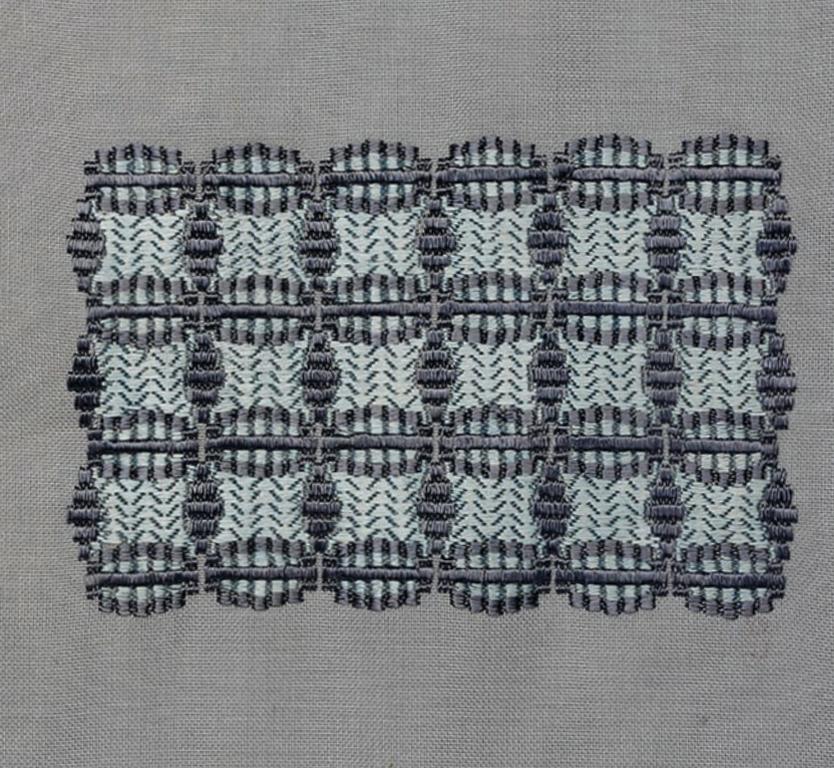
They leave only when their fathers, brothers, husbands, fathers-in-law, or sons allow. Most have been denied access to schooling or income-earning opportunities outside the home. On the street, women's

voluminous burqas shroud their identities from male scrutiny; they are not even allowed to speak audibly in public.

By remaining out of sight and conducting themselves in a quiet manner, women are thought to bring honor and dignity to their household and lineage. Yet their voices are ignored, and autonomy for women does not exist. These constraints are especially observed in Kandahar, the southern bastion of the Taliban.

Like the boundaries in their daily lives, embroidered boundaries enclose the fine decorative filling stitches of Kandahari women's *khamak* embroidery. And embroidery is the one sphere of women's lives that men do not control. Its precision, delicacy, and beauty stand in stark contrast to the imperatives of a typical Afghan woman's life.

Though the *khamak* technique is basically simple satin stitch, the way it is employed in Kandahari textiles is unique and stands with the finest embroidery techniques the world has known. Across generations of Kandahari families, *khamak* textiles are shared as expressions of love—sister to brother, mother to child, wife to husband, daughter



This *khamak* embroidery design (*left*) was inspired by the pattern on the underside of these sandals (*right*).

to parents. By adorning the body and decorating the home with *khamak* textiles, Kandahari women honor their families and express pride and identity with their Pashtun culture.

ARTISTRY AT THEIR FINGERTIPS

Khamak is one of the simplest embroidery techniques and yet one of the most challenging. The simple satin stitch is used to create pattern boundaries, intricate motifs, and complex repetitive background-filling patterns, all done by meticulously counting the threads of the base plain-weave fabric.

There are no books illustrating the myriad patterns of traditional *khamak*. Instead, women learn from their mothers, sisters, aunts, or other older relatives who reside in and around their compound. Girls begin to learn at the early ages of six or seven. They begin by creating sample patterns. Using colored yarns, they practice satin stitch on a large scale, and as they learn, their stitches become finer and finer and their motifs more complex.

Even though no books document *khamak*, women have samplers of a sort to guide them. These are not the meticulously and artistically designed samplers common to Colonial North America or Western Europe. These guides reside in family textiles that can be copied with precision or used as a basis for new designs. Traditional *khamak* is limited to geometric motifs only. The base fabric is woven of vertical warp and horizontal weft threads, so the counted

satin stitches of the traditional designs must follow this grid.

While many women become technically proficient embroiderers, with the ability to precisely copy an existing design, only a smaller number exhibit the initiative and creativity for design innovation. The women of Kandahar have grown up in a culture where men tell women what to do in all aspects of their lives. The women have not been encouraged to break out from these demands. For a woman to flex her imagination represents a small but brave step.

For those embroiderers who create new designs, inspiration arises from many sources. Looking at old *khamak* pieces sparks interpretation into new motif configuration. A flower motif might be cut in half and the halves rearranged for a more contemporary look. Playing with color—going from a monochrome of white on white to adding new colors—creates a different look, and people see it as a new design.

Embroiderers also find inspiration in everyday objects around them—prayer rugs and carpets, the textured underside of women's plastic sandals, a decorative glass pitcher, or designs on printed fabrics sold in the market. One woman recalled a design she created from her chemistry class at school, back when school was allowed for girls. The molecular structure sparked the idea to create the boundaries for a new embroidery design.

To help the women who embroider for Kandahar Treasure, lead artisans within the organization have created several samplers of the motifs and

*Like many things in Afghanistan, khamak embroidery
has also had its taste of transformation.*

backgrounds that it produces. These samplers provide a clear and efficient way of communicating with its network of artisans. The women now proudly pick and choose motifs from samplers they have created for themselves when they are designing textiles to fill an order. Of course, these artisans always have their eyes open for new ideas, inspiration, and designs!

Folklore about learning khamak prescribes that once a girl completes a sampler, she should then float it down a stream of water. The clearness of the water is said to contribute to continued clarity and ease in the girl's khamak stitches. Other interpretations suggested "your stitches will be like running water—smooth and flowing constantly" or "by throwing the work in running water, you will continue to improve."

Like many things in Afghanistan, khamak embroidery has also had its taste of transformation. The once communal society built on trust and sharing has transformed itself into a more capitalistic and competitive society today. Wars, destruction, and outside political interference have added fuel to the fire.

Women surrounded by boundaries have also been impacted by this transition and outlook. But unlike

men, these wise women have learned to compete in the global capitalistic market by organizing themselves, while keeping their skill of traditional embroidery within the boundaries that keep them safe. ❖

RESOURCES

Portions of this story were excerpted from *Embroidering Within Boundaries: Afghan Women Creating a Future* by Rangina Hamidi and Mary Littrell. Schiffer Books/Thrums Books, 2017.

For more information about Kandahar Treasure, visit kandahartreasure.com.

RANGINA HAMIDI emigrated with her family from Soviet-controlled Afghanistan to the United States as a young girl. As an adult, she has chosen to work in empowering women in her home country. As founder and president of Kandahar Treasure, Rangina has been one of the leading voices for Afghan women. Before the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2019, she served as Minister of Education in the national government. Rangina holds a master's degree from the Thunderbird School of Global Management and was awarded the Sandra Day O'Connor Justice Prize in 2023.



A young girl's beginning sampler shows a variety of *khamak* stitches in progress.

“De mano de”

The Making of a Mexican Sampler

LYNNE ANDERSON, PHD



One of three common styles of Mexican schoolgirl *dechados* (columns, concentric bands, and spot motifs), this concentric band *dechado* was made by Anacleta Galves and dated November 12, 1869; Mexico; Silk on linen; 16 x 15 inches (40.64 x 38.1 cm); Collection of the author.

The Virgin Mary was the role model for girls and young women of the Catholic faith in early Spanish America. She was idolized as the perfect young woman, and educational efforts for girls were designed to foster the feminine traits she symbolized—obedience, modesty, and religious piety. One of the ways that a young girl was tasked with emulating the Virgin Mary was in the making of a sampler, known as a *dechado*. Needlework skills were considered an essential component of female education, and embroidering a *dechado* was a culminating achievement, one aligned with the values that the church hoped to cultivate.

FROM THE WORDS OF A MAKER

This does not mean that creating a dechado was a spiritual, or even enjoyable, activity for Spanish American girls. Concepción Lombardo de Miramón (1835–1921), daughter of a prominent Mexican lawyer and member of a politically important and militarily well-connected family in Mexico City, included a fairly detailed description of the dechado-making process in her memoir. At the age of 12, she and her younger sister attended a small private school run by the “señoras Peñarrojas,” and needlework was an important part of the curriculum. It is painfully clear from Concepción’s description that her experience embroidering a dechado was both physically and emotionally demanding. A loose translation reads:

The needlework that we were taught by those teachers was extremely difficult but of great merit. Each of the girls had to make a dechado. This was made on a white fabric, more or less 80 centimeters (31½ inches) square. . . . It began with making a hem on the fabric and it had to be a hem using a specific stitch (*dobladillo de ojo*). That is where the first tears and punishments began. This was followed by cross stitch (*lomillo*) that had to go all around the fabric and then we had to copy different motifs in cross stitch (*dibujos en lomillo*), some more difficult than others. The rows in drawnwork (*calados*) in both linen thread and silk were next, followed by rows of needle lace (*randas*) worked in various ways. Then there was the white work (*bordados en blanco*). In the end it was a true mosaic. . . . I still have my dechado . . . and although it gives me a certain satisfaction to see my work, I also remember with horror the punishments and tears it cost me. I finished with this inscription: Worked by (*Lo labro*) Conchita Lombardo. For the second name [which should be] *Lombardo*, my readers will note the poor orthography of my teachers.¹

This passage from Concepción Lombardo’s memoir provides insight into the needlework terminology used by teachers in nineteenth-century Mexico, as well as the order in which embroidery stitches and techniques were taught. Manuals for needlework instruction available to teachers in Mexico around the same time suggest this sequence was



Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Virgin Mary, shown embroidering with a sewing pillow (*almohadilla*) on her lap. *Almohadillas*, such as the one shown in this picture, were still in use by young girls embroidering *dechados* in Mexico hundreds of years later. *The Young Virgin*; Francisco de Zurbarán (Spanish, Fuente de Cantos, 1598–1664, Madrid); circa 1632–33; oil on canvas; 46 × 37 inches (116.8 × 94 cm); 27.137; Fletcher Fund, 1927.

more or less accepted as standard—instruction began with relatively easy techniques such as hem-stitch and cross-stitch and then moved on to more complex techniques that involved drawn-thread work and needle lace.² With these references as a guide, it is often possible to “read a dechado,” figuring out which parts were embroidered first and the order the girl followed as her teacher’s expectations became more demanding.

COMPOSITIONS AND DESIGN

Dechados made in the geographic region that is now Mexico vary greatly in appearance, influenced by a variety of factors. The socioeconomic status of the young girl’s family, the location of the school (urban versus rural), the needlework skills of the teacher, and the historic period in which the sampler was made are a few of the most important factors.

These variables would have had an impact on a dechado’s color, size, format, and materials.

Mexican samplers were frequently stitched with bright and bold colors, sometimes with no apparent color scheme or predetermined palette. The number

of colors was often determined by the availability of thread and the economic status of the girl's family. For example, dechados stitched with silk thread in a multitude of colors were most often produced by girls with elite status living in urban areas. Dechados embroidered by girls living in rural areas or from more impoverished circumstances might have a reduced palette of only three or four colors.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, most dechados were made with silk thread on a linen ground. As formal education expanded into the rural areas of Mexico, girls from a broader array of socioeconomic levels had access to instruction outside the home. This led to dechados made of more diverse (and often less costly) materials such as wool or cotton thread on a cotton ground. When options for female secondary education emerged, some girls and young women were given the opportunity to learn more advanced embroidery techniques such as needle painting, producing spectacular samplers stitched in silk on a silk or satin ground.

Despite the diversity in color and materials, an analysis of existing samplers from Mexico reveals that most dechados followed one of three primary formats: columns, concentric bands, or spot motifs. Some dechados, however, are a mix of two or more of these formats—with a column on one side, for example, and randomly placed spot motifs on the other.

THE DECHADO OF MARIA DOLORES PALMA Y MONTERO

The oldest format, and one that was popular throughout the centuries during which Mexican girls made samplers, is a dechado composed of one or more columns of horizontal decorative bands. In 1826, for example, a young embroiderer named Maria Dolores created a dechado with three columns. Above the columns, she stitched a couple of alphabets, an eclectic array of motifs, and a signature in which she revealed her full name, date, school, location, and the name of her teacher—making it one of the most complete signatures found on a Mexican sampler.

In Spanish it reads:

*De Mano de Doña Maria Dolores Palma y
Montero*

*Enero 2 de 1826 en la Amiga de la Calle de las
Capuchinas Mexico*

Bajo la direccion de Doña Josefa Garibai

Translated to English it says:

*By the hand of Lady Maria Dolores Palma
y Montero*

*January 2 1826 in the Amiga of the Street of
the Nasturtiums Mexico*

Under the direction of Lady Josefa Garibai

Because Maria Dolores used the honorific “Doña,” we know that she was a young lady from an elite family in the Mexican social hierarchy. This status is further supported by her use of two last names—that of her father (Palma) and her mother (Montero)—and also her access to expensive needlework materials. In addition to telling us who she was and when she signed her dechado, Maria Dolores indicated she received instruction at an *amiga*, a small private day school usually run by an upper-class older woman, often someone who was unmarried or recently widowed.

The curriculum at an *amiga* depended on the knowledge and skills of the teacher but usually included reading, writing, religion, and needlework. Although an *amiga* was a popular school choice for Mexican families wanting to educate their daughters, the quality of instruction varied greatly. The *amiga* that a girl attended was often selected because of its proximity to her family's home or because there was some connection to the teacher—“una amiga” (a female friend) of the family.

According to her dechado, Maria Dolores attended school at an *amiga* located on a street called Calle de las Capuchinas. This street was located a few blocks south of the Metropolitan Cathedral in the historic center of Mexico City, and it is highly likely that Maria Dolores lived within walking distance. The last part of Maria Dolores's signature reveals her teacher's name, Doña Josefa Garibai, who was also a woman with high social standing.

“READING” A DECHADO

By examining Maria Dolores's sampler closely, it is possible to determine the order in which she embroidered the numerous decorative bands that make up her three-columned dechado. We know that she started with the most basic of the needlework techniques, cross-stitch. A close look at her dechado reveals that the entire right-hand column is composed of horizontal bands worked in cross-stitch and also long-armed cross, which together comprise



Mexican *dechado* in the column format, made in 1826 by Doña Maria Dolores Palma y Montero of Mexico City, Mexico; Silk on linen; 25¼ × 28¾ inches (64.1 × 73 cm); Private collection.

the technique known in nineteenth-century Mexico as *lomillo*. The simplest decorative bands in cross-stitch are at the bottom of the right-hand column, indicating that this is where Maria Dolores started. She then worked her way up the column, with each band presumably demanding more skill. It is possible to see that the cross-stitched bands in the right-hand column become gradually wider and the patterns gradually more complex, and therefore probably also more difficult.

While embroidering her *dechado*, Maria Dolores undoubtedly supported her work with a sewing pillow laid across her lap. Known as an *almohadilla*

in Mexico, the pillow would have enabled Maria Dolores to expose one small section of fabric at a time and pin it to her pillow so it could be pulled taut while stitching. As she completed each set of bands, Maria Dolores would have repositioned the fabric on her sewing pillow so that another section would be exposed and could be embroidered.

A close examination of her right-hand column reveals that Maria Dolores probably repositioned her fabric onto the sewing pillow five or six times, each time exposing less than 5 inches of fabric—enough to embroider about three decorative bands. This suggests that her sewing pillow may have been



Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Unlike the other two popular types of Mexican schoolgirl *dechados* (columns and concentric bands), spot motif samplers such as this satin stitch embroidery *dechado* were less rigid in layout. Spot motif *dechado* by Maria de Jesus Escarsega, dated 1861; Mexico; Silk on linen; 22³/₄ × 22³/₈ inches (57.8 × 56.8 cm); 2011.578.5; Gift of Alfred L. Bush, 2011.

6 or 7 inches (15.2 to 17.7 cm) in height, with a width slightly larger than the width of one embroidered column, or about 10 to 11 inches (25.4 to 27.9 cm).

After completing the right-hand column, Maria Dolores would have received instruction on a new set of stitches, and her work appears in the middle column. At the bottom are several bands of backstitch (*punto atrás*) and then several bands of backstitch combined with a bit of satin stitch (*punto satén*). This is followed by larger and more elaborate bands showcasing Maria Dolores's increasing competence

with satin stitch. Again, the order of embroidering the middle column was from the bottom up, not the top down.

On the last and final column, Maria Dolores was tasked with two types of drawn-thread work, both techniques referred to as *calados* in Spanish. She again started at the bottom and demonstrated a multistep technique known to Mexican embroiderers as *calado inglés*—incorrectly referred to as the “Aztec stitch” in the United States.³ Maria Dolores completed five bands using this visually appealing

technique, beginning with the relatively simple design of parallel diagonal lines and ending with two bands showcasing her skill with complicated bird motifs.

For the top two decorative bands in this column, Maria Dolores practiced an openwork technique that required her to create patterns in needle lace, known in Spanish as *calado de filigrana* or *randas*. Again, she completed a relatively simple pattern with diagonal lines before attempting a more demanding design with bird motifs. Maria Dolores may have been planning a third and final band using the needle-lace technique but seems to have instead opted for a few motifs in cross-stitch.

At the top of her dechado, Maria Dolores demonstrated that she could embroider the Spanish alphabet, in both upper- and lowercase letters, before adding the informative signature discussed above. And sometime before, during, or after her work embroidering three columns of decorative bands, she stitched a variety of motifs, mostly in cross-stitch (referred to as *dibujos en lomillo* by Concepción Lombardo). Some of the motifs on her dechado appear frequently on Mexican samplers but rarely on those of other nations. This is especially true of the double-headed eagle and the stag with flowers emerging from his mouth.

The examination of a carefully wrought textile such as the dechado embroidered by Maria Dolores Palma y Montero allows us to learn from the artifact itself, bridging the gap of time and place. Although the role of needlework instruction in nineteenth-century Mexico was influenced by many factors and changed over time, its place in the educational curriculum for girls and young women lasted well into the twentieth century. Because this overlapped with expanding literacy, there was also an increase in published needlework guides and patterns, thus democratizing access to the richness of Mexico's needlework traditions. We are fortunate that so many of these embroidered treasures have survived, allowing us to "read" the girls' dechados and "meet" their makers.

The author wishes to acknowledge and express her utmost appreciation for the research expertise and collaborative input of Dr. Alejandra Mayela Flores Enríquez, Mexico's foremost scholar on the history and role of embroidery in the lives of nineteenth-century women in Mexico. ❖

NOTES

1. The passage is taken from Concepción Lombardo de Miramón, *Memorias de Concepción Lombardo de Miramón* (México: Biblioteca Porrúa de Historia, 2011), 4. This translation appears in Lynne Anderson and Alejandra Mayela Flores Enríquez, "Dechados y Bordados: Girlhood Embroideries from Mexico," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 2025 (accepted for publication).
2. María Ana Póveda, trans., *Manual de las señoritas, ó Arte para aprender cuantas habilidades constituyen el verdadero mérito de las mugeres* (Madrid: Imprenta que fue de Fuentenebro, 1827).
3. There is no connection between what has been incorrectly referred to as the Aztec stitch and the Indigenous people of Mexico known as the Aztecs. Use of the term misrepresents and exoticizes an embroidery technique that is foundational to the needlework instruction provided to girls in Mexico during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a technique that is derived from European needlework traditions, not those of Indigenous America.

RESOURCES

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- Anderson, Lynne, Alejandra Mayela, and Flores Enríquez. "Dechados y Bordados: Girlhood Embroideries from Mexico." *Winterthur Portfolio*, 2025 (accepted for publication).
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Arraiolos

Hand-Embroidered Rugs From Portugal

SARAH PEDLOW



Photos by the author

Nineteenth-century wool thread on burlap *Arraiolos* rug from the Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva Foundation, Lisbon.

Embroidered *Arraiolos* rugs are a lesser-known treasure of Portuguese textile heritage. The rugs, crafted in a small village in the Alentejo region southeast of Lisbon, embody centuries of tradition, skill, and adaptation. The development and preservation of this craft are intertwined with history in Portugal, particularly the history of Muslim communities and their displacement. The *Arraiolos* rug tradition documents one history of migration, craftsmanship, and cultural exchange. Understanding the evolution of the rugs is to embark on a journey through the layered textures of Portuguese history, economy, and artistry.

THE ORIGINS

The origins of the Arraiolos rug are unknown, yet the prevailing theory links them to Muslim artisans who fled Lisbon during the forced conversions of 1496. These artisans, who once enjoyed considerable prestige in Lisbon, were part of a larger Muslim community that flourished under Portuguese rule. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, rug makers were highly regarded, and their craft held a privileged position. Some were even granted tax exemptions and allowed to travel abroad to acquire the materials necessary for their work, such as dyes, fiber, and tools. This elevated status underscores the importance of the craft not only as a cultural product but also as a significant economic force within Portugal at the time.

However, with King Manuel I's edict that mandated the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews and Muslims, many of these artisans were displaced. Some fled to North Africa or neighboring Castile (which later became Spain), while others sought refuge in southern Portugal, particularly in Arraiolos. The region of Alentejo, known for its diverse population and relative tolerance, became a haven for these displaced communities.

Arraiolos, Portugal, with its sheep-rearing and wool-processing traditions, provided the perfect environment for these artisans to continue their craft. The mystery of how the embroidered technique of the Arraiolos rug developed—distinct from the knotted rugs of Spain—remains unsolved, but it seems clear that the integration of local skills and resources played a crucial role in the craft's evolution.

RUG MAKING AS

A DOMESTIC INDUSTRY

Rug making in Portugal, particularly in Arraiolos, was a domestic industry, passed down through generations. The records of the time, however, are sparse. Although references to Spanish knotted rugs exist, no documentation of the specific designs or patterns used by Muslim rug makers in Lisbon has survived. What we do know is that these artisans brought their knowledge and skills to Arraiolos, where they adapted their techniques with local people and materials.

The earliest reference to Arraiolos rugs comes from 1598, when a rug from the area, possibly valued at over \$50,000 in today's currency, was listed in the inventory of a wealthy farmer's possessions. By the



Although the motifs are lovely, the original red background of this *Arraiolos* rug (from a church in the center of Arraiolos, Portugal) has faded to yellow.

seventeenth century, the craft had flourished into a cottage industry, with production expanding to meet both local and international demand. The rugs of this period were characterized by their intricate designs and the use of high-quality materials, including handwoven linen as the base fabric and rich wool dyed with natural materials such as madder, cochineal, and brazilwood.

THE DECLINE: INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE LOSS OF QUALITY

By the eighteenth century, Arraiolos rug making had become an established industry. At its height in 1797, the industry employed over three hundred people in the village. However, by the nineteenth century, the golden age of Arraiolos rugs began to fade.

The quality declined as cheaper materials and faster production methods were introduced. Handwoven linen, which had been the traditional base fabric, was replaced by hemp and later by jute. Artisans began to work more quickly, reducing the number and density of stitches and thus the overall quality of the finished product. This shift from

craftsmanship to mass production reflected broader economic trends across Europe, where industrialization often came at the cost of artisanal traditions.

Several factors contributed to the decline. The Napoleonic invasions of the early nineteenth century disrupted trade and displaced many artisans, further weakening the industry. By 1816, the number of rug makers in Arraiolos had halved, and by the end of the century, the craft had nearly disappeared altogether. Another significant blow was the crisis in the brazilwood supply, a key ingredient in producing the vibrant red hues that had become a hallmark of Arraiolos rugs. As brazilwood became more difficult to source and more expensive, artisans were forced to use inferior dyes, leading to less vibrant and durable colors.

REVIVAL EFFORTS AND THE MODERN RENAISSANCE

The revival of Arraiolos rug making in the late nineteenth century can be attributed to the efforts of a local Portuguese artist who recognized the cultural and artistic value of the tradition. In 1897, José Queiroz initiated a movement to revive the craft, contacting collectors and enthusiasts to generate interest in the rugs. Arraiolos had “[fallen] between a practice of honed skill and a homespun approach based on common folk art.”

Whole families would contribute to the craft, preparing the wool and making rugs, saddles, and bridles in the late nineteenth century. The efforts of Queiroz led to the establishment of workshops in Évora, where young orphan girls and impoverished women were trained in the technique. These workshops helped preserve the craft, providing much-needed employment for women and girls.

The early twentieth century saw a resurgence in appreciation for the rugs, culminating in an exhibition at the Convento do Carmo in Lisbon in 1917. This event helped solidify the place of Arraiolos rugs in Portuguese cultural heritage, leading to the development of family businesses that continue to produce the rugs. Today, the village of Arraiolos is home to numerous workshops, where artisans continue to produce rugs using traditional techniques. Walking through the village and gazing up at the hill, one can see the walls of the fourteenth-century castle that still stand, a reminder of the centuries that surround this ancient craft.



A local teacher spends her summers stitching *Arraiolos*. The texture of the long-armed cross-stitch is evident in the solid ivory background.

MOTIFS AND MATERIALS

The motifs and designs of Arraiolos rugs reflect the country's history of exploration and colonization. From the fifteenth century onward, Portugal was a hub for international trade. Three major influences can be seen in the motifs: Ottoman Turkish rugs with their geometric patterns, Persian rugs from the Safavid Empire with curvilinear designs and figurative elements, and Indian rugs from the Mughal Empire, which were heavily influenced by Persian styles. These motifs were incorporated into the local designs, creating a wide range of styles. In the twentieth century, artisans added modern floral and geometric designs.

The materials used in Arraiolos rugs have also evolved over time. Originally, the rugs were made

Natural dyes, such as madder, cochineal, indigo, and brazilwood, were traditionally used to create the rich colors seen in older rugs.

with three-ply wool sourced from Portuguese sheep. Today, artisans sometimes use a combination of Portuguese wool and wool from other sources such as New Zealand.

Natural dyes, such as madder, cochineal, indigo, and brazilwood, were traditionally used to create the rich colors seen in older rugs. However, by the nineteenth century, synthetic dyes began to replace these natural materials, further contributing to the decline in quality. Despite these changes, many modern artisans have returned to using traditional methods and materials, reviving the rich color palettes of the past.

THE ARRAIOLOS STITCH

Known as the Arraiolos stitch, the long-armed cross-stitch has been in use on the Iberian Peninsula since the twelfth century. Originally called the “plaited Slav stitch,” it is used for all elements of the design, from motifs to borders. The stitching is done horizontally, vertically, or diagonally in either direction, with the horizontal stitch serving as the foundation.

In the seventeenth century, artisans began using the stem stitch to outline motifs before filling them in with the Arraiolos stitch. This method required greater precision and significantly more time, sometimes taking four to five times longer than the simpler

method. As a result, this technique eventually fell out of use, though it has seen a revival in recent decades.

To make a rug, one begins by stitching the line that separates the border from the central area. Once the border is complete, the central medallion or smaller motifs are outlined and filled in, followed by the background. Authentic Arraiolos rugs are distinguished by their mitered corners, visible by the turned direction of the stitches on the reverse side.

The use of a blunt tapestry needle and the “sewing method” of stitching—in which the needle is scooped under the fabric and pulled through in a single movement—allows the artisan to work quickly and efficiently. Once a rug has been finished, the maker either adds a fringe made on a loom or turns the excess fabric under and hems it.

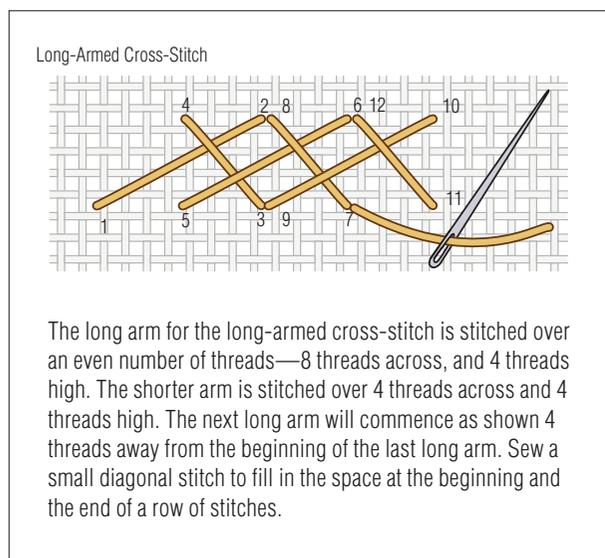
LEARNING THE CRAFT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

During a recent cultural textile tour in Portugal, my group and I had the opportunity to learn the basics of Arraiolos embroidery from one of the handful of artisan businesses in the village. The owner of the business learned to stitch as an adult and taught her daughter at the age of five. Her daughter hasn’t stopped embroidering since, working in her mother’s shop, established 45 years ago.

Sitting in a small shop surrounded by vibrant rugs, we were taught by a woman in her forties who had been stitching since childhood. She is the youngest person embroidering for the business. Like many artisans in the region, she supplements her income with part-time work, as rug making alone is not enough to sustain a livelihood. Her love for the craft drives her to stitch, and she would do nothing else if she could.

As I took my seat on a stool covered with an Arraiolos rug—later learning it was the shop cat’s favorite spot—I felt a deep connection to the centuries-old tradition. Another woman in the store was working, restoring a rug during her summer break from teaching preschool, for the love of the craft. Tourists wandered in and out, admiring the work, while a young boy joined us, eager to learn the stitch. There was a sense of community and continuity as we all worked together contributing to the practice of this ancient tradition.

Pulling out stitches and starting over, we laughed over the seemingly simple stitch. Turning the corners





Tour participants learning to stitch *Arraiolos* in a family-owned shop in the namesake Portuguese town.

of the design was particularly challenging. The satisfaction of filling an area or navigating the pattern of a curving line correctly was a joy. As we chatted, I marveled at the resilience of this craft, revived and continued by a love of stitching, pattern, color, and heritage.

In the shop, the rugs around me became more than mere objects for sale. They represented a deep connection to history, culture, and community. Through

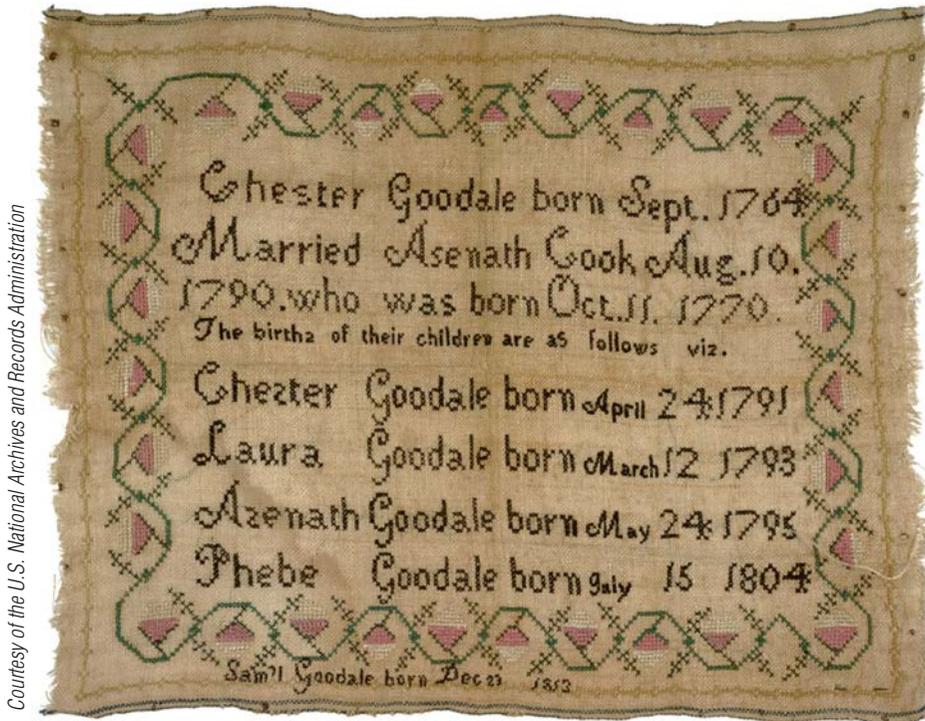
the *Arraiolos* rug, one can trace threads of migration, craftsmanship, and cultural exchange that have shaped Portugal's rich heritage. ❖

SARAH PEDLOW is an American artist and the founder of ThreadWritten cultural embroidery workshops and travel tours. She lives in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Find her work at threadwritten.com and sarahpedlow.com.

Post-War ID

A Surprising Use for Samplers

PAT OLSKI



In 1840, Laura Goodale presented her genealogical sampler as proof so that she and her mother could continue to receive pension benefits after the death of her father, Chester. Laura Goodale's sampler, circa 1809. (Records of the Veterans Administration, RG 15.)

In the 1970s, staff at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) were in the process of creating microfilm records from Revolutionary War-era pension documents when they came across a number of embroidered samplers in the files.

Many girls stitched personal information such as name, birthdate, age, and hometown into their samplers. But these textiles did not just provide evidence of girls' sewing skills, patience, or artistic talent. At one time, they were also considered a valid form of identification.

Beginning in 1836, widows or surviving adult children who could prove that their husbands or fathers had engaged in military service were eligible to apply for government pensions. Of course, they also had to provide proof of their relationship to the late serviceman. In the absence of consistent records, the federal government accepted other forms of proof.

If a claimant was unable to produce old military records or did not have witnesses to testify on their behalf, they sometimes had to resort to less official ways of providing proof of marriage or parentage such

as family registers, baptismal certificates, and sometimes embroidered needlework samplers.

It is interesting to imagine how those widows or adult children must have felt when they had to cede the treasured work of their hands as proof of their identity and lineage in order to receive the money they needed to survive. They probably felt relief that they could provide proof, but they almost certainly also felt wistful about relinquishing their samplers.

I was thrilled to stumble across this unusual information about samplers in an article by Jennifer Davis Heaps for *Prologue* magazine (Fall 2002, vol. 34, no. 3), a publication of NARA.

For more information, visit archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/fall/samplers-1.html.

PAT OLSKI is the editor of *PieceWork* magazine.

PIECEWORK Retail Shop Directory

ARIZONA

Fiber Creek
Suite 123
1046 Willow Creek Rd
Prescott, AZ 86301
(928) 717-1774
fibercreekprescott.com

CALIFORNIA

Lacis Museum of Lace & Textiles
2982 Adeline St
Berkeley, CA 94703
(510) 843-7290
lacis.com

COLORADO

Lambspun of Colorado
1101 E Lincoln Ave
Fort Collins, CO 80524
(800) 558-5262
lambspun.com

ILLINOIS

Fine Line Creative Arts Center
37W570 Bolcum Rd.
St Charles, IL, 60175
(630) 584-9443
fineline.org

IOWA

Blue Heron Knittery
300 W Water St
Decorah, IA 52101
(563) 517-1059
blueheronknittery.com

KENTUCKY

LSH Creations
1584 Wellesley Dr.
Lexington, KY 40513
(859) 321-7831
lshcreations.com

MASSACHUSETTS

WEBS - America's Yarn Store
75 Service Center Rd
Northampton, MA 01060
(800) 367-9327
yarn.com

MICHIGAN

The Hen House Quilt Shop
211 S Cochran Ave
Charlotte, MI 48813
(517) 543-6454
thehenhousemi.com

TAWAS BAY YARN CO

1820 East US 23
East Tawas, MI 48730
(989) 362-4463
tawasbayyarn.com

MINNESOTA

Ingebretsen's
1601 E Lake St
Minneapolis, MN 55407
(612) 729-9333
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(320) 252-2996
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pressway
Branson, MO 65616
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www.ceciliassamplers.com

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Columbia, MO 65202
(573) 825-6130
hillcreekyarn.com

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Camas Creek Cottage
139 Main St
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 755-YARN
camascreekcottage.com

Beads Yarns & Threads

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Missoula, MT 59801
(406) 543-9368

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Hastings, NE 68901
(402) 462-2490
theplumnelly.com

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Spinning Room of Altamont
190 Main Street
Altamont, NY 12009
(518) 861-0038
spinningroom.net

Fiber Kingdom

137 E Broadway
Salem, NY 12865
(518) 854-7225
fiberkingdom.com

NORTH CAROLINA

Studio 256
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Wadesboro, NC 28170
(704) 507-1160
Studio256.online

OREGON

Acorns & Threads
4475 SW Scholls Ferry Rd
#158
Portland, OR 97225
(503) 292-4457
acornsandthreads.com

Little Hawk Yarns

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Roseburg, OR 97470
(458) 262-0046
www.littlehawk yarns.com

PENNSYLVANIA

ChickenKnitz
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Harmony, PA 16037
(724) 473-4900
<https://chickenknitz.com>

Needle & Thread Design

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Gettysburg, PA 17325
(717) 334-4011
needleandthread.biz

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LoftyFiber
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Easley, SC 29640
(864) 810-4747
loftyfiber.com

TENNESSEE

Walther Handmade
316 Trenton Street
Harriman, TN 37748
(865) 432-1044
www.waltherhandmade.com

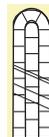
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Needlepoint Joint
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Ogden, UT 84401
(801) 394-4355
needlepointjoint.com

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thestitchersmuse.com

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georgeweil.com

The Handweavers Studio and Gallery

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London N7 7NS
020 7272 1891
handweavers.co.uk

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Miniature Needlepoint Sampler

ANNELLE FERGUSON

Miniature needlework enthusiast Annelle Ferguson created this charming chart, based on a historical 1750 sampler from Massachusetts, for the May/June 1998 issue of *PieceWork*. Although Annelle originally designed this pattern to be stitched on 48-count

silk gauze, you could easily stitch the charted design on larger-thread-count linen or on Aida cloth. In fact, the individual elements could also be used as a pattern for other crafts such as needlepoint, beading, or stranded knitting.

ANNELLE FERGUSON's interest in miniatures has not diminished since she was a contributor to the May/June 1998 issue of *PieceWork*. She continues to research antique needlework and to create fine adaptations on silk gauze. Visit her website at ministitches.com.

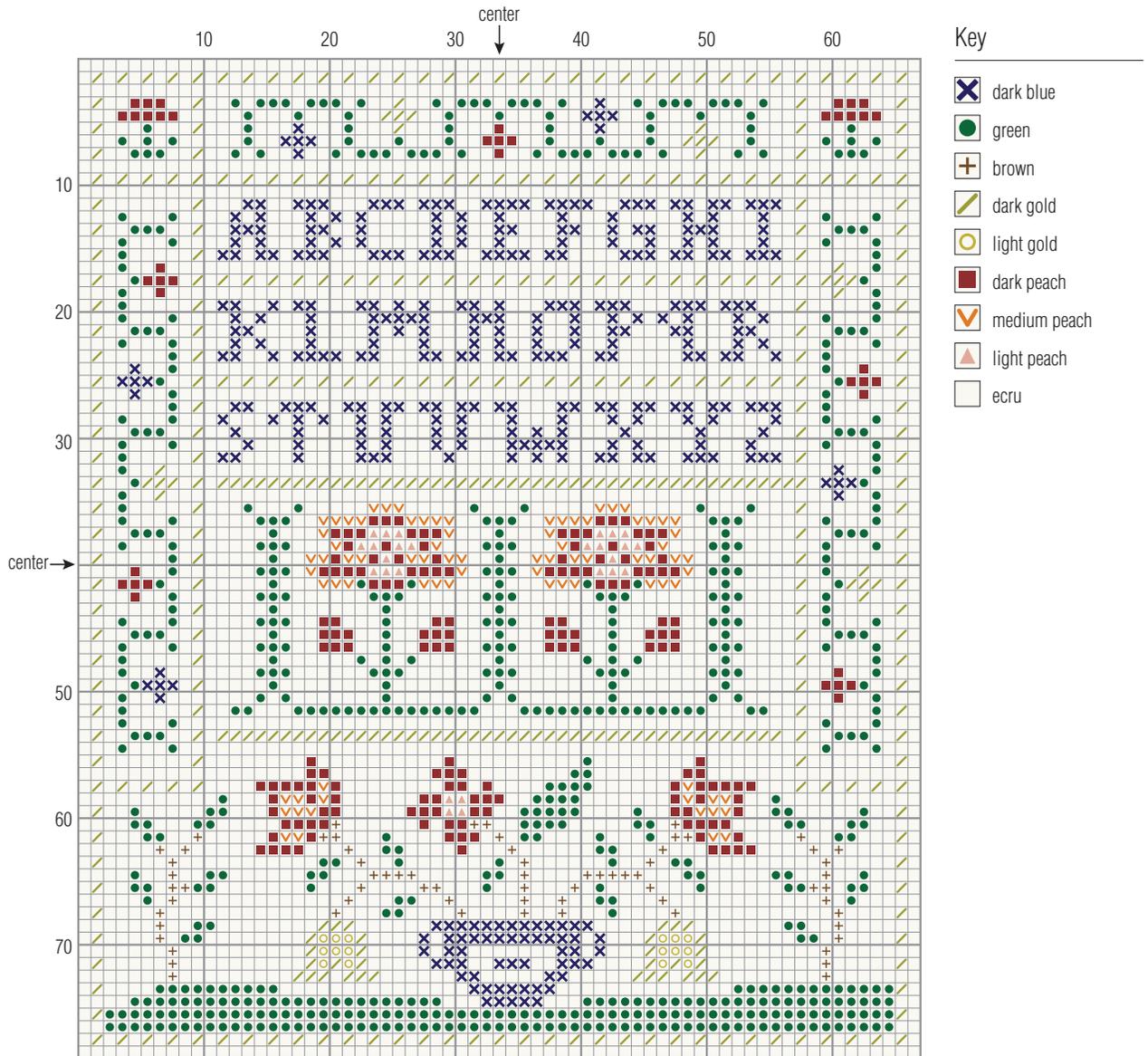


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Grid Size: 67 W x 79 H