

Biggs Museum of American Art

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Documenting Delaware's Needlework Samplers at the Biggs Museum *June 15, 2013*

Dover, DE – June 7, 2013 – The Biggs Museum of American Art and the University of Delaware's *Sampler Archive* invite the public to bring their antique American samplers to its upcoming "Sampler ID Day" at the Biggs Museum on June 15, 2013, so they can be registered, documented, and photographed.

Three Sampler Identification and Documentation (ID) Days are scheduled: June 8 at the Delaware Historical Society in Wilmington, June 15 at the Biggs Museum of American Art in Dover, and July 18 at the Lewes Historical Society in Lewes. People living in Delaware and neighboring communities are encouraged to participate in this new statewide initiative, funded in part by the Delaware Humanities Forum.

Volunteers Needed – June 15, 2013

In addition, volunteers are needed at the Biggs Museum to help facilitate the Sampler ID Day. Persons interested in volunteering to help document the samplers and the histories of their makers and ownership are needed to help at the Biggs Museum.

No prior knowledge about historic samplers is necessary as many volunteer opportunities involve simply asking people to tell what they know about the sampler maker or the sampler's family history. Volunteers also are needed to record this information while it is related by the sampler owners.

Persons with knowledge of sampler making also are needed to help document the physical characteristics of the samplers that will be seen at the events. This is an exciting opportunity to closely inspect samplers from private collections brought for documentation. Volunteer training sessions will be provided to familiarize volunteers with the project's methods and materials.

Photographers familiar with SLR Digital Photography (shooting RAW files and jpgs simultaneously) also are needed to make each day a success.

About Samplers

Antique samplers are the product of needlework instruction provided to girls and young women in America up until the middle of the 19th century. Although samplers are diverse in shape and color, they were most often stitched using silk or wool thread on a piece of linen fabric. Girls frequently stitched rows of alphabets and numbers, and sometimes a verse or two. It was traditional in America for girls to sign their needlework projects with their names, and sometimes these stitched signatures also included details such as age, location, and even the teacher or school. In addition, samplers often display decorative elements such as colorful motifs, bands, and borders. More difficult pictorial embroideries were stitched by older girls using silk thread on silk fabric, and often depict scenes from the Bible or classical literature.

The *Sampler Archive Project* is a national effort to develop an online searchable database of information and images for all known American samplers and related schoolgirl embroideries from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Launched with two years of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to the University of Delaware's Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, the *Sampler Archive* is under development, and will make its online public debut in early 2014. Recent additional funding from the Delaware Humanities Forum is supporting the project's efforts to locate, document, and photograph historic samplers and related embroideries in Delaware's public and private collections. Because this includes family heirlooms that may have been passed down from generation to generation, the public is encouraged to bring their antique samplers to one of the three Sampler ID Days scheduled for this spring and summer.

Event Details

- *Who:* Anyone in Delaware and neighboring communities
- *What:* Sampler ID Day
- *Where:* Biggs Museum of American Art, 406 Federal Street, Dover, DE 19901
- *When:* June 15, 2013
10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Morning hours are for individuals with appointments.
Afternoons are for both appointments and drop-ins.
- *Why:* An opportunity to talk with experts about your sampler, have it documented and photographed, and submit it for inclusion in the *Sampler Archive*.

NOTE: Due to the time it takes to document and photograph these wonderful historical objects, appointments are **required** for anyone bringing **three or more** samplers to a

Sampler ID Day. Call 1-877-909-2525 or email samplerID@samplerconsortium.org to make appointments.

The *Sampler Archive Project* and its initiative to locate and document Delaware's schoolgirl embroideries are supported by a large number of organizations. In addition to the Delaware Humanities Forum, these include the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture at the University of Delaware, the Center for Advanced Technology in Education (CATE) at the University of Oregon, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Sampler Consortium (<http://samplerconsortium.org>).

For more information, or to make Sampler ID Day appointments:

Phone: 1-877-909-2525

Email: SamplerId@samplerconsortium.org

Website: <http://samplerarchive.org/ID.html>

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Photos and captions available for download in hi-res online at:
<http://samplerarchive.org/photos>



Mary Orr, Brandywine Hundred, New Castle Cty., 1835. Courtesy of M. Finkel & Daughter



Katherine Wallace, Wilmington, c. 1818. Courtesy of the DAR Museum



Hannah McIntier, New Castle Cty., 1790. Winterthur Museum Collection. Photo courtesy of University of Delaware