



This superlative example is currently undergoing conservation, made possible by the generosity of Tricia and John Nguyen. Part of the work involves creating a new, period-appropriate reproduction frame, and will be displayed in a new, more period-appropriate reproduction frame. Looking glass/mirror surround, English, 1660–c.1688. Polychrome silk embroidery, seed pearls, glass beads, metallic embroidery, point, off-white, satin-weave ground. Historic Deerfield. 57.138.



Detail of the mirror surround. Historic Deerfield. 57.138.

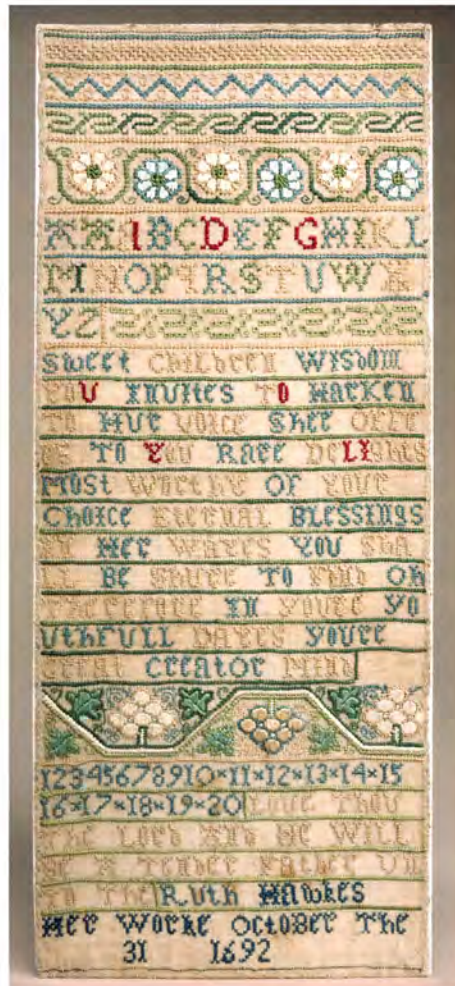
The Embroidered Era: Seventeenth-Century Needlework at Historic Deerfield

by David E. Lazaro

Just as one embroidery leads to another, so does one historical period in needlework link to a previous period.

Historic Deerfield's fashion and textile collection includes some twenty items dating to the seventeenth century. The earliest examples purchased by museum founders Helen Geier Flynt (1895–1986) and her husband, Henry Needham Flynt (1893–1970), all feature embroidered embellishments as the primary means of decoration. The couple's active early acquisitions in this category, strengthened over the years by subsequent gifts and purchases, were twofold. The seventeenth-century date referenced the period of the English settlement of Deerfield. Secondly, presence of these pieces in the Flynts' growing collection served as a springboard to the relatively more numerous and better-documented eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New England schoolgirl embroidery, including samplers and pictorial needlework, the couple would go on to collect.

Recent acquisitions, as well as two current conservation projects, have sparked a reappraisal of this important collecting focus for the museum. At a time when the creation of woven fabric designs through brocading looms was in its infancy in England, embroidered textiles and clothing were the primary means through which people in the seventeenth-century could decorate and embellish textiles for both the home and the body. Overwhelmingly English, with one rare Massachusetts example, these objects collectively inform twenty-first-century audiences about seventeenth-century aesthetics, needlework, and gender.



Sampler, Ruth Hawkes (born about 1682), English, 1692. Polychrome silk embroidery, off-white, plain-weave linen ground. Historic Deerfield. 57.057.1.



The use of crewel (two-ply worsted) thread, rather than silk, has sadly contributed to its degradation over time. Sampler, probably Hatfield, Massachusetts, area, ca. 1677. Polychrome worsted embroidery, unbleached, plain-weave linen ground. John W. and Chistiana G.P. Batdorf Fund. Historic Deerfield. 2003.39.



King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, English, 1675-1700. Polychrome silk embroidery, needlelace, and glass beads, seed pearls, off-white, satin-weave silk ground. Historic Deerfield. 58.219.



Esther and Ahasuerus (pre-conservation), English, 1650–1675. Polychrome glass beads, off-white, satin-weave silk ground, ink, silk thread. Historic Deerfield.1352.



The earliest-acquired seventeenth-century needlework from the museum's collection, this pictorial needlework had previously been in the Viscount Leverhulme collection before going to auction in 1926. *Orpheus Charming the Animals*, English, 1650–1700. Polychrome silk embroidery, metallic (flat, purl, and frisé) embroidery, off-white, satin-weave silk ground and unbleached, plain-weave linen lining. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry N. Flynt. Historic Deerfield. 0257.

Pictorial needlework makes up the largest grouping of seventeenth-century textiles from the collection. Originally conceived for different purposes, these decorative examples most often came to the museum as framed pictures. They are characterized by a three-dimensionality of raised and padded motifs as well as detached embroidery and needlelace stitches that made these often-crowded compositions come alive. The additional expense of metallic and other reflective elements created a visual interest and charm that can be as captivating now as when they were new. These pictorial needlework

examples were produced by professional embroiderers and also by amateurs, who sometimes used kits or enlisted the services of professional designers.

Among the earliest textiles collected by the Flynts to decorate period house installations, these pictorial needlework pieces feature popular seventeenth-century themes, including mythology, nature, religion, and moral tales. The earliest-acquired example, *Orpheus Charming the Animals*, came into the collection in 1947. Later additions reflected Biblical stories, including *Esther and Ahasuerus*, executed in glass beadwork, and *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*.

The central figure of King Solomon may also feature on one side of a purse or sweet bag in the collection. One of the grandest examples of pictorial needlework is an embroidered looking glass or mirror surround, whose central design features both portraits and standing figures of Charles II and Catherine of Braganza. The standing figures may also represent Biblical or mythological subjects.

Elaborate, artistically composed examples like these could not have been undertaken without an embroiderer first mastering more basic, counted-thread stitching. Historic Deerfield's seventeenth-century textile holdings include two such items. A superbly preserved English marking sampler made by Ruth Hawkes and dated 1692 shows the kind of vertical band samplers popular into the early eighteenth century before the shift towards more square or rectangular shapes. Hawkes' silk example can be compared to a rare seventeenth-century American example made by Elizabeth White (1667–1736) of Hatfield, Massachusetts, that uses colored crewel threads on a linen ground. The skill and patience learned by young women such as Hawkes and White were also meant to be carried into adulthood as wives and mothers, where they might mark items of linen, including a rare woman's hood or cap dated 1684 with the initials "ME."

In addition to this hood, two other, seventeenth-century items of clothing include one pair and one single glove. Gloves were important accessories to fashion at this time, worn for different occasions. They were also given as gifts and tokens of love.

More information on these and other items in Historic Deerfield's collection can be found by visiting <https://museums.fivecolleges.edu>. Stay connected to the museum's fashion and textile collection through weekly social media posts #streetswatches #historicdeerfield. ■

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Time and age have worn away some of the design elements in this purse or sweet bag, which may depict the *Judgement of Solomon* on one side, and *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* on the other. English, 1600–1630. Polychrome silk embroidery, seed pearls, metallic (frisé) embroidery, white satin-weave silk ground, unbleached, plain-weave linen foundation, pink, plain-weave silk lining. Historic Deerfield. F.751.



Gloves, English or French, 1675–1725. Polychrome silk embroidery, white kid leather. F.655.



Hoods were worn by married or widowed women as indoor head coverings. They could also be worn underneath a more public, sturdier head coverings worn outdoors. Hood, "ME/1684," probably English, 1684. White, plain-weave linen with white linen thread. Museum Collections Fund. Historic Deerfield. 2019.28.



Future conservation may improve the appearance of this early survival of exquisite English embroidery. Glove, England (probably London), 1600–1625. Metallic embroidery (silver, silver gilt, sequins, frisé), polychrome silk embroidery, white kid leather. Gift in memory of Robert L. Frank, Jr., of Rochester, New York. Historic Deerfield. 2020.25.