

## AMERICAN COLONIAL NEEDLEWORK

### PART II<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HE use of wools or crewels, in embroidery on cotton or linen continued throughout the eighteenth century. Some of the best examples of crewel work are upon a rather coarse hand-woven cotton material, and we have to remind ourselves that cotton was, during the eighteenth century, less common and more expensive than linen, and consequently chosen for fine work. Figure VIII shows a section of the upper valance of bed hangings. The colours are very charming, shades of pink and green, a little blue and a very effective touch of black. The crewels are still in good condition, though the linen shows much wear and many washings. The design suggests a date late in the eighteenth century, perhaps 1780-90.

The bedspread shown in Figure IX is a fine example of late work in crewel embroidery. The design is an elaborate and beautiful one, carried out in many colours. The border is particularly good. The center and corner designs, with the baskets done in gold colour and the flowers in brilliant colours, are quite natural in effect. The material is homespun cotton, and the lining of the same. The stitch is a fine chain stitch. Compare Figure I. There is a tradition that the design for this spread was brought from France about 1800, and this is quite possible. The work was done here, and must have taken many months. It is of a generous size, large enough for the double bed of the period.

<sup>1</sup>Part I. Club Bulletin Vol. 8, No. 2.



FIGURE IX.

BEDSPREAD IN CHAIN STITCH IN MANY COLOURS ON HOMESPUN COTTON.

*Two chair seats done in petit point* are shown in Figure X, A and B. A was worked in Connecticut between 1770 and '80, and B done in Brooklyn, N. Y., between 1810 and '20. The chair seats vary in design but not in technique, and it is quite certain that *petit point* was a favourite method for more than a century here.

The records make mention of needlework employed for wearing apparel, and fine quilting as well as embroidery was used on the garments of men and women during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for there are accounts of the wearers of elaborately ornamented coats, hoods, and petticoats being reprimanded by the church.

Very fine quilting on linen, silk, and satin was used in making coverlets with which all well appointed beds were furnished. Some of these belonging to the middle of the eighteenth century survive. They are quilted in a variety of designs and mostly with silk thread upon a woolen material which looks like fine mohair, and often interlined with a very heavy linen so that the quilting stitch went through both mohair and linen. These "rugges" or coverlets were of course heavily stuffed with wool.

Exquisite quilting, enriched with gold and silver threads and fine cords, was executed for "petticoats." Women especially versed in quilting were employed by the day to make petticoats and hoods, and were paid five shillings a day. The work on an elaborate petticoat cost five pounds or more, and these garments are often mentioned as special bequests in wills. Quilting remained in fashion for garments until after the Revolution, and in the late years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth it was done largely upon white material, linen and cotton, for counterpanes and pillow "shams" and also for bureau and table covers. These finely quilted and lightly stuffed counterpanes were the forerunners of the Marseilles spreads which were the accepted bed covering of the Victorian period. I have not myself seen any quilting in all white or with appliqué of chintz or other material which dates before 1800. There is much which dates as late as 1860.

The flowered waistcoats and dresses fashionable during the Revolutionary period and shown in many portraits painted here from 1770 to 1790, were done in French fashion, lovely delicate coloured silk embroidery in rococo patterns with flower sprays and other small details, upon white,

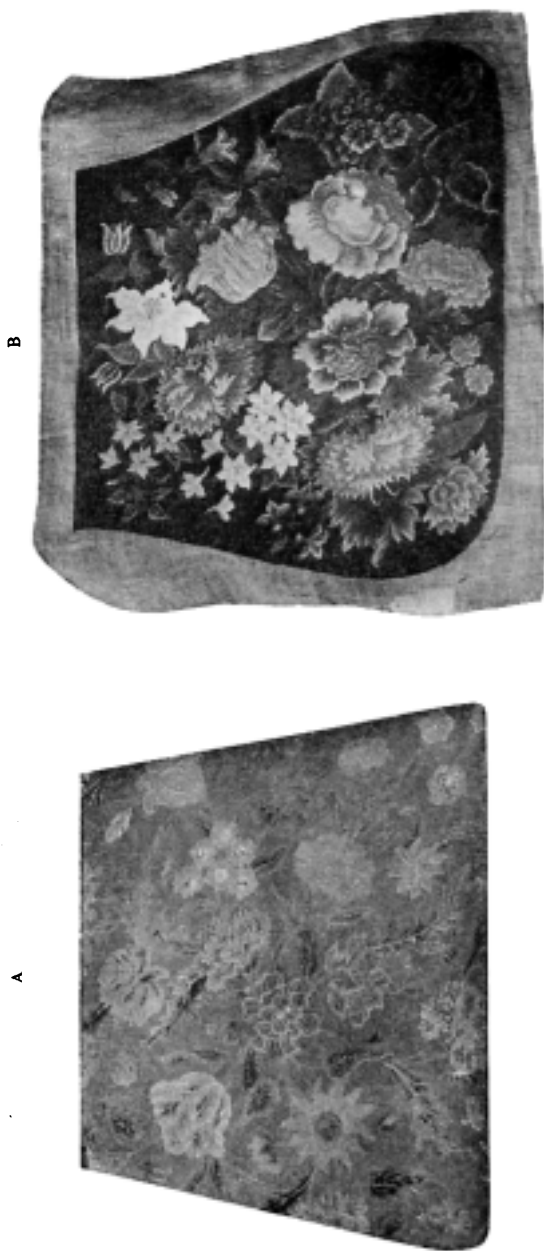


FIGURE X.  
TWO CHAIR SEATS; A, MADE BETWEEN 1770-80; B, 1810-20.

blue, pink, brown, maroon, and black satin. It was not unusual for a bride to embroider her wedding dress, or to present her bridegroom with a beautiful waistcoat. Figure XI shows this delicate embroidery in silk upon silk. It was originally intended for the front of a gown, and illustrates quite well the type of decoration much used between 1775 and 1800.

Needlework pictures, that is small designs intended for framing, were much used before the days of the *Mayflower*. That they were made here is quite certain, for frequent mention occurs in inventories. They are described variously as: "Ye needlework picture over ye mantle tree"; "Ye picture in wool on ye parlour wall"; "Abraham and Isaac in needlework"; etc. etc. Scenes from the Old Testament furnished the designs for the greater part of such pictures from the sixteenth through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. Hundreds of so-called memorial pictures were done here between 1790 and 1830, and even later. They were worked by some member of a bereaved family and show the tomb or monument variously inscribed, and often surrounded with the weeping willow and arbor vitæ. These pictures are usually done upon white satin in coloured silk, and chenille is frequently used to give massive effects in tree trunks and foliage. The stitches are satin stitch, seed stitch and outline. They are framed in gilt, the glass having a design painted upon it in black and gold, and sometimes the family name is added below the picture. Figure XII shows a memorial picture which is inscribed: "In memory of the illustrious Washington." A great many of these Washington memorials were made and hung in patriotic households for some years after his death in 1799. In the picture illustrated the face, hair, arms and hands are delicately drawn in sepia. Water colour is used for tinting. Sometimes the face and hands are painted in water colour, and in some pictures the entire figure is painted and the rest of the picture embroidered. There is every reason to believe that designs for memorial pictures, as well as for other pictures in needlework, were to be purchased. A careful study of many examples shows that the fabric was outlined with a delicate pencil or ink, not stamped as is the custom to-day. That latitude was given to the worker for individual additions, is quite possible, and the memorial designs always left the panel in the monument blank. I have made no particular



FIGURE VIII.



FIGURE XI.

FIG. VIII. VALANCE FOR BED HANGING, LATE 18TH CENTURY.

FIG. XI. FRONT OF A GOWN, SILK EMBROIDERY ON SILK, LATE 18TH CENTURY.

mention of the familiar sampler, great numbers of which survive that date, largely after 1800. Such thorough study of these samplers has already been made and illustrated that it seems unnecessary to refer to them.

Only a slight allusion can be made to the needlework of the Colonies in such a brief article.

The crewel and *petit point* of the seventeenth century furnish much of interest in design and technique. The eighteenth century affords a wide variety of articles and stitches, and records show that homes were much enriched with bed hangings, coverlets, chair covers, table carpets, cushions, cupboard cloths and wall pictures.

As we have noted that the stitches employed were the same for long periods, and also the fabrics for needlework, it is evident that in attempting to date pieces a knowledge of the history of design is of the greatest importance, and as a design was sometimes employed long after its proper period it is often difficult to place an exact date, but one thing should be noted—that no example is earlier than its *latest* characteristic.



EMBROIDERY PRESERVED IN LIBRARY AT HARTFORD, VERMONT.

MADE IN 1765 BY EREPTA WILD, AGE 9 YEARS.



EMBROIDERED MEMORIAL PICTURE INSCRIBED:  
"IN MEMORY OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS WASHINGTON."