

CHAPTER 3

Profile of a Maryland Sampler

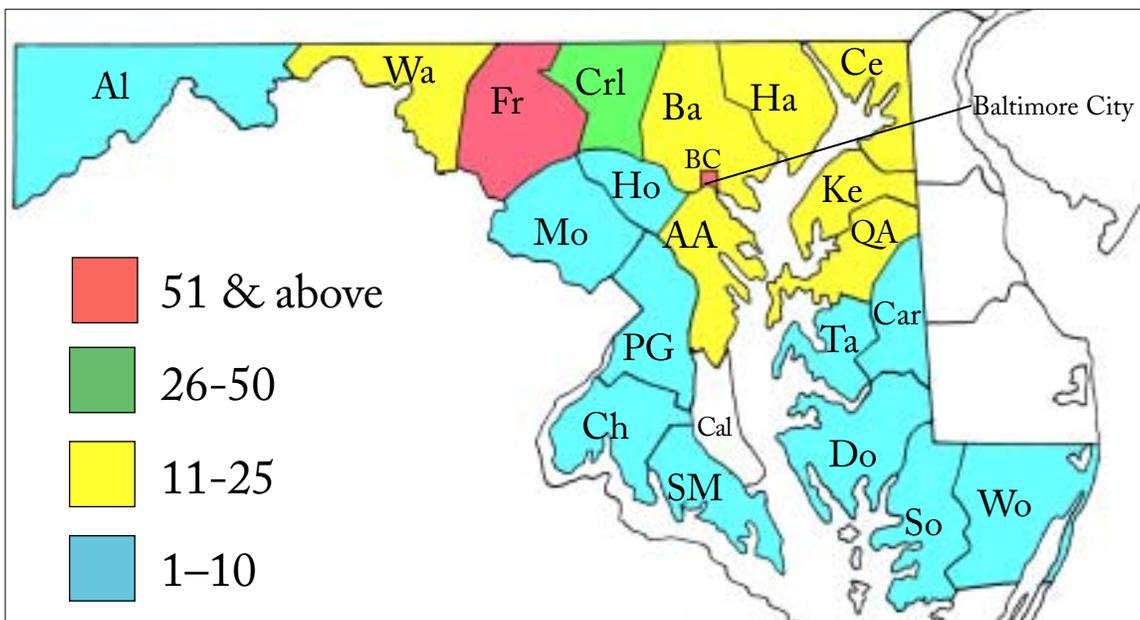


A DATABASE OF approximately 517 documented examples of samplers and pictorial embroideries, made either by girls in Maryland or by Maryland girls who attended out-of-state schools, provides some predictable but also some unex-

pected data about Maryland needlework and the young women who were responsible for its creation (see Appendix I).¹

Within Maryland, as anticipated by previously published examples, the great majority of samplers and pictorial embroideries, where

Map of Maryland Showing Distribution of Girlhood Embroideries by County, 1738–1860



Key to Counties:

Al: Allegany
AA: Anne Arundel
Ba: Baltimore
BC: Baltimore City
Cal: Calvert
Car: Caroline
CrI: Carroll
Ce: Cecil
Ch: Charles
Do: Dorchester
Fr: Frederick
Ha: Harford
Ho: Howard
Ke: Kent
Mo: Montgomery
PG: Prince George's
QA: Queen Anne's
SM: St. Mary's
So: Somerset
Ta: Talbot
Wa: Washington
Wo: Worcester

¹ At the time this book went to press, the database of Maryland needlework contained 670 entries. After considerable research and editing for consistency of entries by Susi Slocum, this number has been reduced to 481 samplers or pictorial embroideries documented as having been worked in Maryland and thirty-six examples documented as worked by Maryland girls in

schools out of state. In each case, the place where the sampler/embroidery was worked and not necessarily where the maker lived was used to determine origin. Entries were eliminated from the count for insufficient information or inability to confirm that the maker was a Maryland girl.



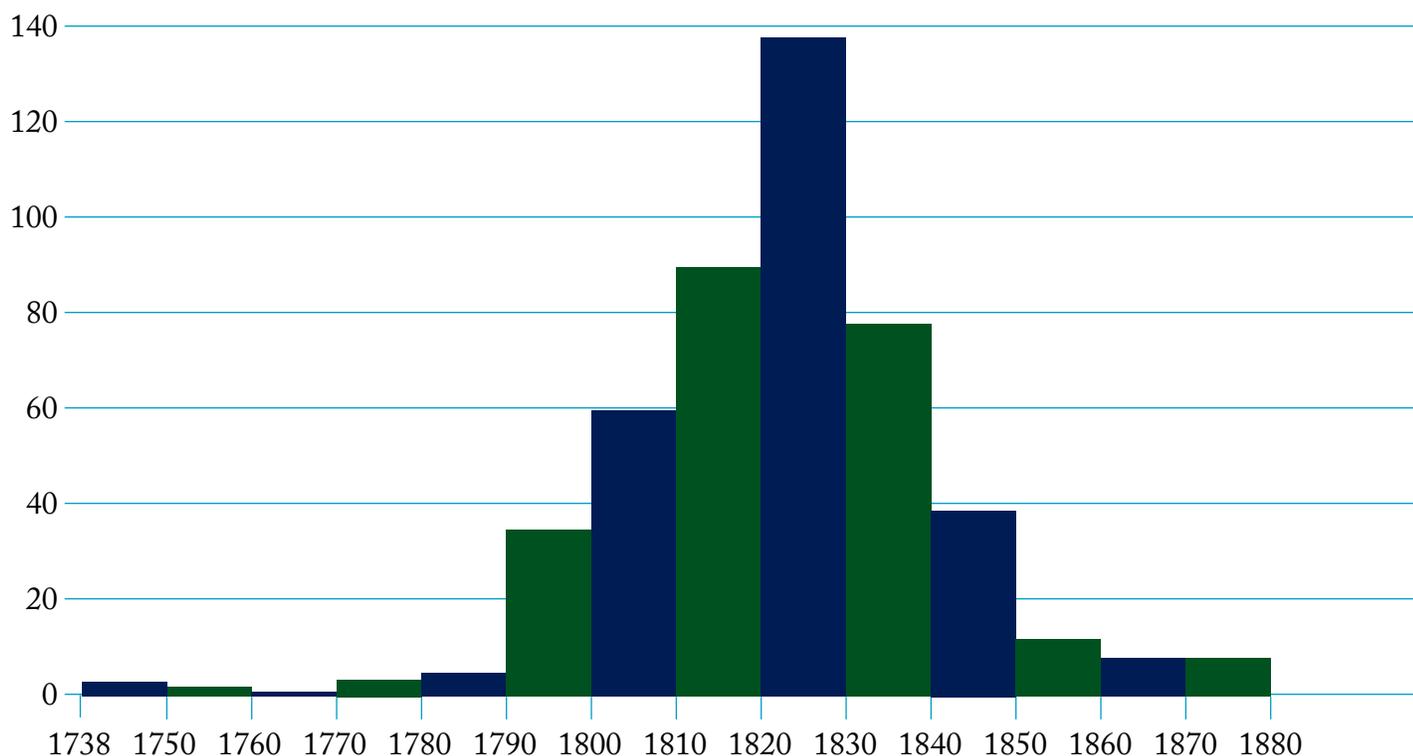
Table Showing Distribution of
Maryland Girlhood Embroideries by County, 1738–1860

COUNTY	1738–1783	1784–1820	1821–1860	Total dated samplers	Total dated & attributed samplers
Allegany	0	0	1	1	2
Anne Arundel	2	8	4	14	22
Anne Arundel area that became Howard County in 1850	0	1	6	7	8
Baltimore County	2	5	1	8	12
Baltimore Town & City	1	57	83	141	193
Calvert	0	0	0	0	0
Caroline	0	2	1	3	5
Carroll*	0	8	23	31	48
Cecil	0	5	8	13	14
Charles	0	2	1	3	5
Dorchester	0	0	0	0	1
Frederick	0	16	50	66	84
Harford	0	7	6	13	14
Kent	1	2	4	7	13
Montgomery	0	6	3	9	10
Prince George's	0	0	1	1	1
Queen Anne's	2	12	0	14	14
Saint Mary's	0	3	0	3	3
Somerset	0	0	1	1	2
Talbot	0	5	1	6	9
Washington	0	1	9	10	14
Worcester	0	2	0	2	2
Uncertain county location	0	0	0	0	5
TOTALS	8	142	203	353	481

*Numbers include samplers made in the part of Frederick that became Carroll County in 1837.



Number of Maryland Girlhood Embroideries by Decade



origin can be documented, were worked in Baltimore schools. Approximately 40 percent were stitched in Baltimore Town or City and another 3 percent in Baltimore County, followed by 18 percent in Frederick County and 10 percent in that part of Frederick which became Carroll County in 1837.² Anne Arundel County, including the part that became Howard County in 1850, accounted for about 6 percent, followed by Washington, Cecil, Harford, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties, each with 3 percent. Almost 5 percent of samplers or embroideries attributed to

Maryland girls were worked at schools in Pennsylvania—the majority at the Moravian Girls' School in Lititz.³

When the data above is broken down into three time periods—colonial, Federal, and antebellum—and limited to dated examples of Maryland needlework, two-thirds of all post-colonial Maryland samplers or embroideries were made in or near the population centers of Baltimore or Frederick Town, the seat of Frederick County.⁴ By 1830, Baltimore City, with 80,600 people, was the second largest city in the United States and dominated

2 The data from Frederick County is somewhat skewed by the large number of surviving examples from Saint Joseph's Academy.

3 See Patricia T. Herr, "The Ornamental Branches": *Needlework and Arts from the Lititz Moravian School between 1800 and 1865* (Heritage Center Museum of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1996), 60–79; and

Susanna Smedley, compiler, *Catalog of Westtown Through the Years . . .* (Westtown, Pa.: Westtown Alumni Association, 1945).

4 Eliminating non-dated examples and those few worked after 1860 reduced the count of documented Maryland samplers to 353.



the economy of the state; Frederick Town with 4,430 was ranked sixty-first.⁵ As Baltimore grew as a trading and manufacturing center with a port on the Chesapeake Bay, and Frederick developed as a processing center for the agricultural heartland of Maryland, the urban centers and surrounding countryside attracted the people and financial resources necessary to support teachers and sustain schools of varying sizes with a range of academic and/or ornamental offerings.

The earliest known Maryland sampler is dated 1738, and between that year and 1790 only twelve examples can be documented.⁶ After 1790 their numbers increase with each decade, reaching a maximum between 1821 and 1830, when approximately 29 percent of all documented Maryland samplers were made. And even though few schools, with the exception of Catholic-sponsored institutions, advertised instruction in needlework after 1830, it is surprising that 27 percent of Maryland samplers are dated or can be attributed to 1831 or later. The great majority of these later examples were worked in Baltimore City, Frederick and Carroll Counties, and farther west in Washington County.

Using information obtained from the database of Maryland needlework, it is possible to draw conclusions not only about the location of the embroiderers but also about their range in age. The information revealed by Maryland girls who stitched their ages, or whose ages

can be estimated from other information, indicates that the embroiderers varied in age from five to forty-three.⁷ Most of the samplers or embroideries were the work of young girls between the ages of eight and thirteen with ten being the most frequently recorded age.⁸ This particular range of ages is probably due to the teachers' prescriptions. For example, Baltimore schoolmistress Mrs. A. Brown noted in one advertisement that "for the benefit of introducing and maintaining a proper regulation in the progression of the classes, it is intended not to admit as a pupil, any young lady who is past twelve years of age, or younger than four." Mrs. Brown added that she intended to devote "a suitable portion of time . . . to Needle Work, to fit young Ladies for the occupation of a domestic life."⁹ To date, no samplers by Maryland four-year-olds have been discovered. Maryland embroiderers who attended schools elsewhere appear, from a small sampling, to have been older, fourteen being the most frequently recorded age. (see Appendix I)

A teacher guided the choice of embroidery type and decoration based on her own ability, the student's level of needle education, the availability of design sources, and the fashion of the times. Approximately 55 percent of documented Maryland samplers have alphabets, 44 percent have verses, and many display both throughout the period of study. Twenty-eight percent depict buildings—usually brick houses—commencing in 1791, while at least

5 In 1830 Hagerstown, in western Maryland, was ranked seventy-seventh and Annapolis, the state capital, was ranked ninetieth. From 1850 on, Baltimore was the only city in Maryland to rank in the top one hundred population centers in the United States. Campbell Gibson, *Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790–1990* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998).

6 Using genealogical information available for the embroiderer, several undated samplers can be assigned date ranges or "circa" dates. With the inclusion of undated examples, only fifteen Maryland samplers are known to have been made prior to 1790.

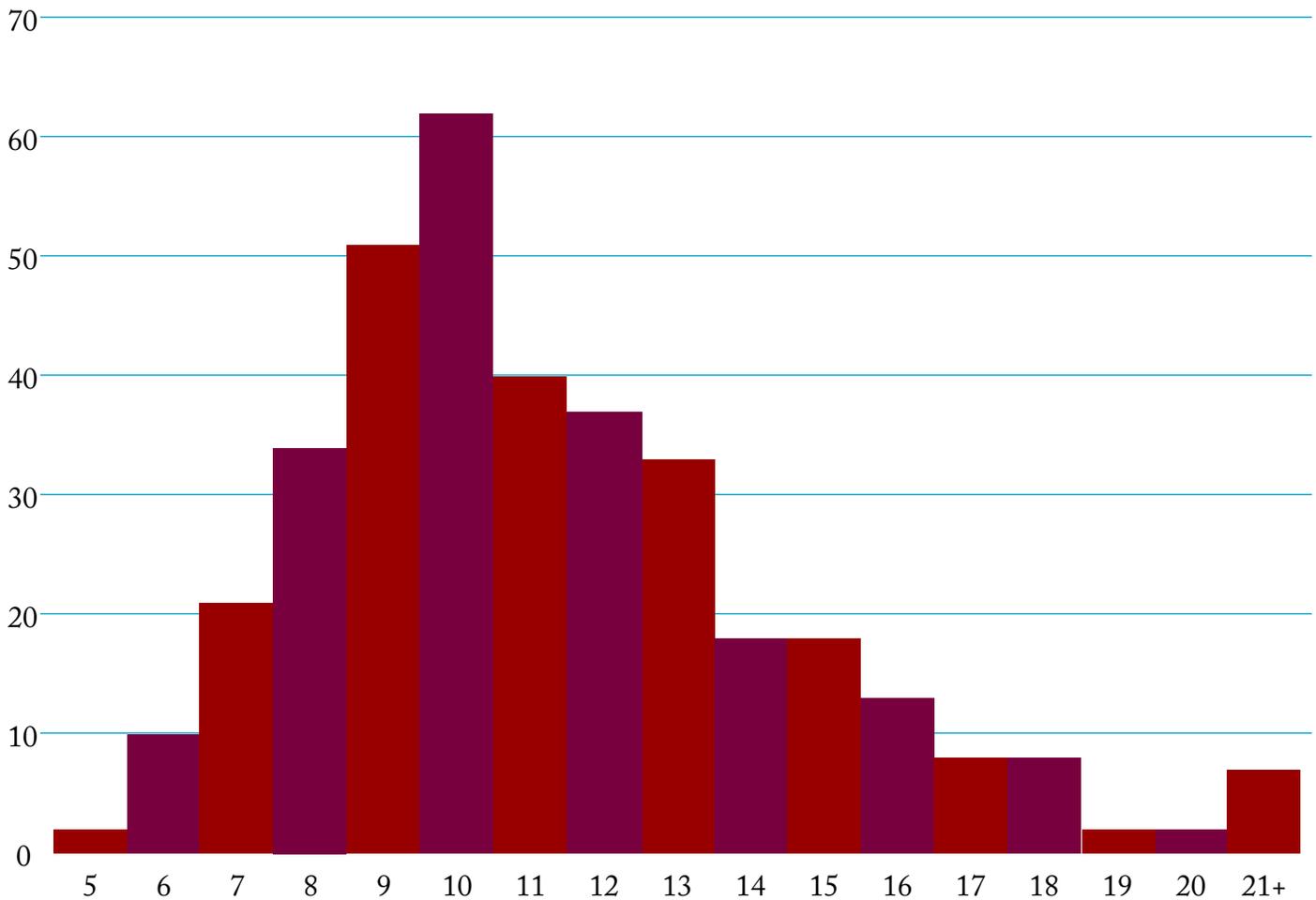
7 One Maryland sampler was the work of a man, William Levington (Levington is discussed in chapter thirteen.) Names like "Julian" are less clear but are presumed to be a form of Julia Ann.

8 For samplers marked "in the . . . year of her age" the maker was recorded as one year younger unless genealogical research proved otherwise. For example, a maker in her twelfth year was recorded as eleven years old.

9 *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, August 17, 1811.



Number of Maryland Girlhood Embroideries by Age of Maker



13 percent featured floral designs from 1738 on. Six percent have Quaker motifs, alphabets, or date styles, starting in 1800, but there were no Quaker schools in Maryland of long duration. Six percent are mourning or memorial samplers or embroideries, mainly worked at Saint Joseph's Academy in the 1820s and 1830s, yet one memorial is dated 1746. Two percent are family records or genealogical samplers, popular from the early 1790s into the 1850s, and another 2 percent feature a map of Maryland, dated between 1797 and 1816.

Two verses seem to have been preferred by

Maryland embroiderers or their teachers and account for 9 percent of all verses stitched on samplers. The verse beginning, "Teach me to feel another's woe/ To hide the fault I see," from Alexander Pope's (1688–1743) *The Universal Prayer*, was used from 1798 to 1852.¹⁰ This work was first published in 1738 with later editions in 1795 and 1811. In 1843 and later, it was appended to Pope's "Essay on Man." The source for "Jesus permit thy gracious name to stand As the first efforts of an infants hand" has not been identified, but the verse was popular between 1815 and 1835.¹¹

10 In online transcriptions of the "Prayer," the second line of this verse reads, "To right the fault I see." On Maryland samplers, the embroiderer usually stitched, "To hide the fault I see."

11 Bolton and Coe recorded the first use for these two verses in 1787 and 1793, respectively. Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe, *American Samplers* (1921; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 319.



Unlike samplers from Ohio, for instance, which boldly proclaim their location, only 7 percent of embroiderers stitched “Maryland” or its abbreviation on their samplers, starting with the earliest embroidered map, dated 1797 and continuing through the 1860s.¹² In 1783, Mary Sterett was the first known sampler maker to note “Baltimore” as her home, and overall more than 15 percent stitched “Baltimore,” an affirmation of the city’s dominance as the center for embroidery instruction. As with other southern sampler makers, fewer stitched the name of another town or county, or the name of a teacher or school. Elizabeth Dennis may have been the first to do so when she indicated that she attended “Mrs. Smith’s school” in about 1799.

The information retrieved from a database of more than five hundred entries has been used to make general statements about the distribution of Maryland girlhood embroidery over time and place, the popularity of certain designs and techniques, and to confirm that it was primarily the work of school-age girls. It also provides a broader context for individual examples. Each sampler or pictorial embroidery is also the unique work of a young woman—a small piece of fragile textile that has been preserved long after the needleworker and her teacher have faded from memory. Each one has its own story.

12 Sue Studebaker, *Ohio Is My Dwelling Place: Schoolgirl Embroideries, 1800–1850* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

