



## “SCHOOLGIRL SAMPLERS: THE ART OF EMBROIDERY”

Exhibit coming to the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum

One delicate stitch at a time, American schoolgirls up through the mid-1800s learned the alphabet, numbers, and the virtue of industriousness by carefully sewing decorative samplers. Examples of these lovely lessons in needlework can be seen at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum from Jan. 16 through Feb. 22, 2012.

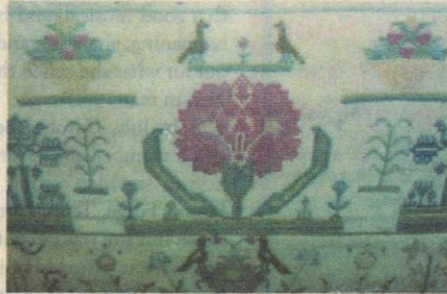
Already well known for its beautiful quilts, coverlets, and hooked rugs, the Museum's textiles collection will be temporarily expanded to include these images collected by the Tennessee Sampler Survey as well as actual rare vintage American and Tennessee samplers.

The Tennessee Sampler Survey (TSS) is a nonprofit collective of textile experts and enthusiasts whose mission is to document, preserve, and present Tennessee's needlework heritage prior to 1900. TSS has located over 225 samplers and verified 160 to be authentically Tennessean. Large-scale photographs of many of TSS's samplers will be on display in the Museum's exhibit. The expanded size of the images will allow visitors to better see and appreciate the variety of stitches used by the young women who created each piece. In addition to TSS's photographs, visitors will have the opportunity to view actual American samplers, including some very special ones from Tennessee.

“Schoolgirl samplers are a rare and beautiful example of the intersection of artistry and practicality,” said Ashley Rush, the Museum's executive director. “Young women not only created exquisite and unique works of art, but the motifs and phrases they stitched, also allowed them to study spelling, geography, and morality, as well as the needlework techniques prized in well educated young ladies of the time.”

Many young women from middle and upper-class backgrounds created samplers as part of their experience at various female academies, where decorative stitching was considered an “ornamental art” along with music, drawing, and painting. Academies also taught spelling, pronunciation, geography, rhetoric, philosophy, and other subjects suitable for a refined young lady's academic experience.

Between the ages of 6 and 10, girls would have created a marking sampler, which consisted of rows of letters and numbers worked in cross



stitch. As their skills advanced, some would have moved on to create more elaborate samplers. These beautiful works of art utilized a variety of embroidery techniques such as eyelet, four-sided, and rice stitches. Advanced samplers often depicted Biblical or classical images and included short poems or philosophical statements. The young woman might also include her name, hometown, and the date of completion.

In some areas of the South, including portions of rural Tennessee, young women learned the art of sampler embroidery at home on the plantation. Some slaves were also taught the fundamentals of marking so that they could stitch family names onto clothing and linens, which were often among the most prized and expensive portion of a wealthy family's estate.

“This exhibit features a variety of samplers, from highly intricate works of art to charming attempts at learning the craft,” said Lisa Chastain, the Museum's curator. “It's particularly exciting to be able to share the Tennessee Sampler Survey's collection with our visitors, since for so many years historians were not aware of the existence of many samplers created here in our state. However, the TSS has done an excellent job of searching out and documenting these beautiful pieces of our history. Visitors will enjoy the TSS images as well as the additional samplers that are part of the exhibit.”

Since winter has always been known as the time that ladies had more time to stitch, whether it be for those items needed for clothing and household, or for teaching or as art, today, clubs and organizations of ladies still meet to share and stitch or sew. It is also a perfect time to enjoy this beautiful exhibit of rare and exquisite art that will capture your heart and for some, bring back memories of precious stories told of times past.

Make plans to visit McMinn County Living Heritage Museum sometime Jan. 16 through Feb. 22, 2012 and let these ladies and representatives of TSS know how much you enjoy the exhibit. The museum is located at 522 West Madison Ave. in Athens, Tenn., and you can visit their website at [www.livingheritagemuseum.com/](http://www.livingheritagemuseum.com/) and “like” them on Facebook for all their latest news. Story information provided by Ashley Rush, the Museum's executive director.