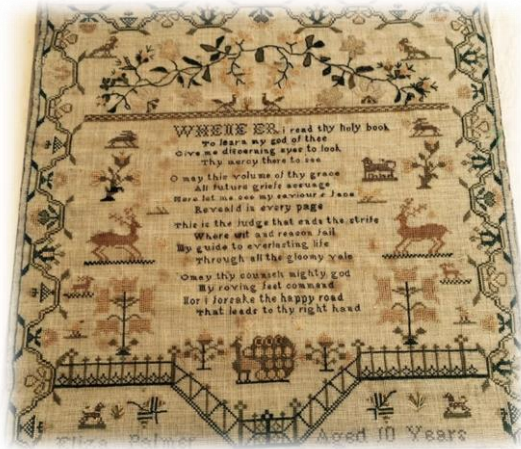


# *Eliza Palmer's Sampler*

Presented by *Cissy Bailey Smith*



Who was Eliza Palmer? When questioned, the seller told me that he had purchased Eliza's sampler from an estate sale in New York and said that he didn't have any information at all about it. Eliza tells us that she was 10 years old when she made the sampler but without additional details such as the year, where she was living, her teacher or school, or any family information it was not possible for me to locate her. I reviewed clues from the sampler to determine the most likely country of Eliza's origin and to estimate the period in which it was created.

## Clues:

- The sampler has a blue selvedge and that *can* be an indication that the linen was produced in England.
- English samplers frequently have a more formal, symmetrical composition than American samplers utilizing small motifs set evenly to the left and right of a central image (or verse) in mirror-image format like Eliza's.
- English samplers completed in the 1810-1840 time period were often stitched in muted greens, browns, and yellows like Eliza's.
- I discovered that the verse came from a hymn, *Laden With Guilt and Full of Fears*, by Issac Watts. He was born in England, lived 1674-1748, and wrote over 600 hymns. His writings were often placed on samplers in the hope of teaching moral behavior and religious piety.
- After hours in books and online finding the above information, I read a note on the M. Finkel & Daughter website that they would give sampler origination information to those who sent photos. I sent a photo of Eliza's sampler and Amy Finkel confirmed that it was definitely English from 1810-1830 and she wished that Eliza had dropped more clues so that we could identify her.

Unique Details: The graceful floral band across the top of the sampler was executed in Tent Stitch. There are a few Straight Stitches at the tips of the flower buds and the flowers are outlined with Stem Stitch. Whipped Back Stitch is an alternative to Stem if preferred.

Have you ever seen a fenced peacock on a sampler before? This was a new sight for me although I have often observed peacocks on many of my English and Scottish samplers. Eliza's was the first one I had seen locked securely behind a fence.

Symbolism: Based on information from the January-July 2016 Royal School of Needlework *Peacocks and Pomegranates* Exhibit, peacocks have long been used as motifs on embroidery in a wide range of cultures and they have several symbolic meanings. In the Christian world the peacock represents resurrection because of the annual renewal of the peacock's feathers and also symbolizes immortality based on an ancient belief that the peacock's flesh did not decay following its death. In the east the peacock symbolized nobility, protection, and integrity. A variety of cultures acknowledge the beauty of the peacock while understanding that when beauty is taken too far, it can transform into pride.

Why did Eliza place her peacock behind such a remarkable fence? Perhaps the verse gives us a hint:

When er I read they holy book  
To learn my god of thee  
Give me discerning eyes to look  
Thy mercy there to see  
O may this volume of thy grace  
All future griefs assuage  
Here let me see my saviors face  
Reveald in every page  
This is the judge that ends the strife  
Where wit and reason fail  
My guide to everlasting life  
Through all the gloomy vale  
O may thy counsels mighty god  
My roving feet command  
Nor I forsake the happy road  
That leads to thy right hand

The verse is all about the grace and mercy of God and staying firmly on the path to salvation and eternal life. Looks to me as if Eliza was determined to keep her feet from roving away from her Lord and she wasn't taking any chances with her peacock wandering off either.

With my warmest regards,  
Cissy Bailey Smith

