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CC55-1107 Cross Stitch for Today's Home

Clara N. Leopold

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Cross-stitch is considered the oldest form of decoration with a needle--growing out of and controlled by the earlier art of weaving. Design for needle-work probably began with the small squares formed by crossing stitches at the junction of the woven textile fibers. The cross-stitch not only preceded all other embroidery stitches, but remained the only decorative stitch until weaving became so fine that interstices between threads were unnoticeable.

Decorative bands of cross-stitch come to us on shreds of linen found in the sepulchers of Egypt and in the burial grounds of the prehistoric races of South America. Textiles with elaborate and beautiful cross-stitch borders were wrought into the fibers which enriched Pizarro's shiploads of loot sent from Vicuna, Peru, to the court of Spain at the time of the wonderful and barbarous Conquest. All of the old Roman borders are found in cross-stitch in museum collections--and the old Roman borders are sometimes thought to be the best designs the world has produced.

Many of us think of the cross-stitch an as American colonial art; but our colonial ancestors simply brought with them the art which was already centuries old. Cross-stitch, even today, is perhaps one of the most widely used embroidery stitches in the world. There is scarcely a country in Eastern and Central Europe that has not worked out an individual and highly characteristic style of cross-stitch. The Swedish people have a particularly fine flair for beautiful cross-stitch design and are famous for their tapestries and hangings. The Chinese are especially skillful with very fine work on household linens. Sometimes it is the combinations of colors alone that identify the stitch as being Russian, Roumanian or Bulgarian. Or national identification may be in the reverse character of the work in which the design is left blank and the background is filled in to accent it with cross-stitches. This form is Italian and it is known as Assisi work. Our own Pennsylvania Dutch embroideries used cross-stitch with primitive boldness. The familiar Victorian sampler relied exclusively on this one stitch. The sampler pictured below is more than a hundred years old.

Although primarily angular, there is no other stitch that adapts itself to all sorts of decorative purposes or to threads of more varied textures. It may be done in wool, silk, linen or cotton; in large crosses, either closely covering the foundation material, or allowing glimpses of the background to show between the stitchery. But invariably the technique remains the same--two diagonal stitches of equal length which cross one another at right angles. The under thread is always laid down in the same direction, and all top threads are always laid down in the same direction, so that the surface of the finished work is uniform throughout.
Samplers are a very important part of the history of American colonial embroidery. While mothers were busy with crewel embroidery, their little daughters were occupied with samplers—a beginning as necessary as being taught to walk and to talk. In the infant schools of the early eighteenth century the little girls sat with a small spread of canvas over their laps—and sometimes sewed to their skirts by misdirected efforts. Each had a sewing box that held a tiny thimble and spools of green and red sewing silk.

Modern samplers and pictures suitable for a girl’s room, the reading center or for the living room.

Learning to do an A or a B in cross-stitch was the beginning household duty. The decorative and the useful were evenly balanced in sampler making. All this skill in lettering could be applied to the stores of linens in the way of marking; for cross-stitch lettering, done in colored threads, was a part of the finish for sheets, pillow cases, and fine toweling. The letters first practiced in cross-stitch opened the door to all future elaborations and were the vehicle of moral instruction as well. The Puritans recorded their first guides from Bible history and domestic life in carefully embroidered text, and their notions of pictorial art were in their cross-stitched illustrations.

The material upon which they worked was generally of canvas, either white or yellow, and this was of English manufacture. As all manufactured goods were of price, and money wasn’t plentiful, lettered samplers were often worked upon coarse homespun linens.

The stitch itself, sometimes called "Sampler Stitch," was so simple it was within the ability of an alphabet-studying child. To make an A in cross-stitch was to create a link between the baby mind and the letter. Each little future homemaker made her own sampler with her name and often the date for her age was a definite part of it. Examples have been found of work done by little seamstresses as young as four and five years old.

The sampler world as a real world in those days, full of youth and as living as youth of the world must always be.

TODAY’S CROSS STITCH

Yes, cross-stitch embroidery was done by our grandmothers, our great grandmother, and most of our ancestors down through the ages. And today we find it fully as fascinating and beautiful. It is a great favorite because it is easy to do and adapts itself
to many types of designs, threads and uses, all the way from a treasured picture on the wall to a simple border on a pillow case, towel or comfort protector.

Cross Stitch decoration on household articles

Done on fabric, cross-stitching varies in size from the minute work of the Chinese Mission children to the rather large size we now use for making rugs. Chinese cross-stitch is less than 1/16 of an inch high and wide, and is done on the finest lawn or linen. To try to duplicate that is scarcely worth the effort or the attendant eyestrain. But what is characteristic of Chinese cross-stitch (a solid filling of a particular area) is the keynote to all good cross-stitch embroidery. It isn't the cross itself that is important, but rather the solid filling effect of closely worked, evenly spaced stitches. No matter how small or large the individual cross may be, it should never stand out alone.

Cross-stitch is worked on material that has an even weave so that the stitches are even. You count the threads to build your design. However, if the material is of an uneven weave or too fine for the counting of threads, a special stiffly starched canvas is basted over the material and the design worked through both the canvas and the material. Articles shown in above illustration were made by this technique.

Cross-stitch canvas comes in various sized meshes. The size of the mesh determines the size of the finished design. To know how large the finished piece will be, count the number of squares per inch in the canvas over which design is to be worked. For example, if the design counts 100 squares each way and is worked over canvas eight meshes to the inch, the finished design will be 12 1/2 inches square; but over canvas ten meshes to the inch, the finished design will measure 10 inches, etc. After the design is finished, the canvas is drawn out thread by thread, and your design is left.

**HOW TO APPLY CANVAS**

Select a canvas size that will give you the finished design size you want.

**Steps:**

1. Place canvas over the part of material to be embroidered
2. Be careful to have the threads of canvas running parallel with the threads of material
3. Pin canvas to material
4. Baste canvas to material
5. Mark center lines vertically and horizontally with basting thread if design is large
6. Cross-stitch design through both material and canvas
7. Remove bastings
8. Pull out threads of canvas one thread at a time, first one direction and then the other. If hard to pull and material is washable, wet the canvas and then pull threads
HOW TO CROSS STITCH

Cross-stitch is done by making two stitches of equal length crossing each other in the middle. In perfect work all the stitches of the same color that slant in the same direction in a row are worked first, then the stitches in the opposite direction are worked.

STEP I - Draw your needle through the material at the upper left hand corner leaving an end of the thread about one-half (1/2) inch long on the wrong side, which will be caught in by the stitches as you continue to embroider. Then, keeping your thread to the left, insert needle into the next square in the row above, and draw it out through the square directly below; this forms your first slanting stitch.

STEP II - Always keeping your thread to the left, repeat Step I until all stitches on that row are finished.

STEP III - Now you are ready to complete the cross on your return trip. Your thread now must be kept to the right. Insert needle through the top of the next stitch, and bring it out through the bottom of the last stitch. Continue doing this until you have one stitch left uncrossed.

STEP IV - Insert your needle as if to cross last stitch, but bring needle out in the square below your last cross-stitch. You are now ready to start your second row.

STEP V - To complete first slanting stitch of second row, insert needle through the point where the first two (2) upper crosses meet, and bring it out directly below. Continue this to the end of row, and return to complete the crosses.

To fasten a thread when work is completed, bring it through to the wrong side and run it under two or three finished stitches, and cut off.
PATTERNS
Suitable for 4-H Club Home Living Projects

Try this simple design in your favorite color on a dresser scarf and matching pillow cases.

For more variety in color, this border can be made in two colors. Make all squares marked "x" first in one color. Then add squares marked "o" with another color.

A more elaborate coloring and wider border is this one:
- x - green
- o - rose
- / - light yellow

These silhouettes with only the small frame, shown around the lady, make a dainty decoration on handkerchiefs and towels, or for a picture, using 16 to 20 meshes to the inch. On larger articles, design can be applied 8 to 10 meshes to the inch, finishing with the more elaborate frame shown around the gentleman.
When you have mastered the borders and silhouettes shown on page 5, you are ready for something more complicated. Mottoes are always popular. Here is one that would add charm to any girl's room. You might also like to create your own design and motto, and add your initials and dates.

A REAL FRIEND IS A GREAT TREASURE

x - Black
● - Red
○ - Orange
v - Blue
I - Rose
■ - Dark Brown