

Sampler of Lucia Alden Smith, c. 1793
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Personal objects left behind offer a glimpse into the life and skills of someone who lived in another century. Most household antiques are a mystery because we do not know who made them or owned them in the beginning. A child's sampler is a rare exception. This antique is signed and provides the identity of the creator. Once we have the name of the child, we can trace her through genealogical research and can sometimes piece together a personality. Pam Kezer Katz and her mother Pauline Kezer, our Board President, donated a sampler sewn by their lateral ancestor, Lucia Alden who lived in Duxbury long ago.

The enchanting sampler was sewn by 13- year- old Lucia Alden in the warmth of her home (probably at her mother's side) on Tremont Street in Duxbury. The coarse cloth, faded to light sienna over the centuries, backs the stitching. Numbers, letters and patterns appear in ordered rows from top to bottom. The middle features the cross-stitched signature of Lucia and includes her age. Rows of lower case alphabet, Roman numerals, symbols, and a row of vowels "AEIOUY" precede the signature line. Some of the threads are missing but the impression says:

"Lucia S. Alden her
Sampler Wrought in
the 13 year of her age"
"Know then this truth, enough for man to
know virtue alone is happiness below."¹

The work is embellished with diamond, pyramid and geometric shapes. Curls of white stitches create acorns, leaves and tree shapes sewn in mid tone moss and forest green. The young girl was clearly absorbed in the sentiment of church sermons and oblique reference to possible heaven and "below" in her earthly dwelling.² A later sampler done by Rachel Alden, age 9, says "my property" which was a bold statement for a girl of that century.³

Today, a cross-stitch sampler kit is purchased complete with instructions. Occasionally the result transcends the craft and becomes an artistic expression in embroidered fiber. Historically, this was not the goal. Most little girls who were old enough to hold a needle and thread were encouraged and taught the skill of sewing.

¹ Pope, Alexander, 1688 quote sewn into sampler by Lucia S. Alden, 1793, Alden House Historic Site, Duxbury, parlor.

² Sampler, Lucia S. Alden, 1793.

³ Sampler, Rachel Alden, Alden House Historic Site, parlor.

They created a sampler to include many different stitches needed later in creating their own clothing. They also learned how to sew a straight line.

As a young teenager, Lucia, exhibited the fine motor coordination to do a very good job and this is evident in the finished product. Some samplers also include family genealogical information such as births, marriages and deaths. If you own an antique sampler, look for lists of names sewn into the lines, you may learn something about your heritage that may not be recorded elsewhere.

Lucia S. Alden, was the first of ten children born to Judah Alden and Welthea Wadsworth.⁴ She was born in Duxbury on December 5, 1780. Judah “served throughout the entire Revolution rising from the rank of 2nd lieutenant to Major. He was a Minuteman in 1773.”⁵ The Alden family was engaged in the wars as well as participating in the local politics. Judah Alden and his father Briggs Alden held meetings in opposition to the Stamp Act in the Great Room at the Alden House just a few years before Lucia was born.⁶ Lucia was alive at a very pivotal time in history. She must have heard the war stories but did not know her father’s absences.

Lucia’s world was finite. Their farm had and grounds included the Alden House which Judah inherited from his brother Amherst. He left instructions to “provide a horse and chaise” so that their mother (Mercy Wadsworth Alden) “could ride to meeting as long as she shall live.”⁷ This truly exhibits the relationship between the family and local church. It was the center of their social life and included all family members. Lucia lived in a thriving village setting and traversed her the meadows of the farm and grounds we know today as the Alden House Historic Site in Duxbury.

When Lucia was just four years old, the town build the church in which she would later marry and spend the rest of her life as a parishioner. It was called the third meeting house and was voted by the town on February 2, 1784 and completed in 1785. The building which is in the same location as the fourth meeting house (the present First Parish Church, on Rt. 3A, Tremont St.) next to Duxbury Town Hall. The new church and the town citizens were at a crucial period of time where travel and ship building would transform their surroundings. “...new houses built, cottages of the prosperous moved into newly constructed...commodious homes, home-made

⁴ Woodworth-Barnes, Williams (Ed), *Mayflower Families Through Five Generations*, Descendants of John Alden, v. 16, part 3, p. 323, General Society of Mayflower Descendants, 2002, Plymouth.

⁵ Ibid., v. 16, part 3, p. 320.

⁶ Ibid., v 16, part 1, p. 440.

⁷ Woodworth-Barnes, Williams, v. 16, part 3, p. 320-321.

pine furniture was being replaced by mahogany,...horse trails were becoming roads where 30 years before, horseback was the mode of travel...⁸

The energy and bustle of economic prosperity swept through Duxbury. When Lucia was 8 years old a new minister took the pulpit. Dr. John Allyn left a "lasting impression on the town, original and imaginative mind, well-tempered with wisdom...a noted conversationalist...and boundless benevolence."⁹ He would later officiate at the wedding of young Lucia and Sylvanus and serve as their pastor for the next 37 years. They knew him well.

Unitarianism surged through New England at the turn of the century consuming most of the Congregational churches in its wake. A new way of thinking allowed "the direct guidance of the Spirit of Truth present in the individual mind, ever an invitation to free thought".¹⁰ This new individualism was transformative.

Rev. Allyn tutored and founded a boarding school. He gave lectures outdoors "holding classes under the trees while sitting in an arm chair."¹¹ Bradford's history of the church says "to the delight of the boys, Commodore Bainbridge came to the school".¹² We do not know whether Lucia attended this school or had any formal education. Typically, girls received their education in the home.

Sylvanus Smith was born in [Pembroke or Hanson], MA, 3 Aug 1779.^{13 14} He was the son of Joseph Smith and Lucia Wadsworth.¹⁵ The Smiths had a farm in Pembroke. Each night at 9:00 Sylvanus stood outside and blew a conch shell which could be heard three miles away at his father's farm.¹⁶ This lovely image of a forgotten, pastoral time is most compelling. Sylvanus became a sea Captain¹⁷ and traveled throughout the world.

⁸ Bradford, Gershom, Robert Walsh (epilogue), "History of the First Parish Church of Duxbury, MA", (second edition, first edition 1953), Women's Alliance of First Parish Church, pamphlet, Duxbury, 1987.

⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁰ Bradford, History of First Parish Church, p. 33.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹² Ibid., p. 34.

¹³ VR, Deaths, Duxbury MA, 1865, Death Record, www.ancestry.com : accessed Dec 2016.

¹⁴ Smith, Susan, Smith Memorial, p 100, 1895, www.archive.org.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Smith, Susan Augusta, "A Memorial of the Rev. Thomas Smith, Second Minister of Pembroke and his Descendants, a full Genealogical Record, 177-1895, pp 100-101, www.archives.org : accessed Jan 2017, [https://archive.org/details/memorialofrevtho00smitAvery & Doten Book and Job Printers, Plymouth, 1895](https://archive.org/details/memorialofrevtho00smitAvery%20DotenBookandJobPrinters,Plymouth,1895).

¹⁷ "Old Colony Memorial" newspaper, article, 26 Jul 1823, p. 1, Plymouth; American Antiquarian Society and News Bank; www.genealogybank.com : accessed 2016.

On February 2, 1804 Lucia Alden married Captain Sylvanus Smith “of Pembroke”.¹⁸ The ceremony was performed by Rev. John Allyn at the First Parish Church in Duxbury. Here she listened to sermons as Rev. Allyn was Pastor from 1788-1833, a total of 45 years. Lucia’s letters refer to Rev. Allyn and his wife Mrs. Allyn. We know that after the wedding the family remained in the church and continued their friendships with the Reverend and his wife.

The couple lived, worked and died on her father’s farm. She was “the loveliest woman and their life was very happy. They never had any children but he (Sylvanus) always called her ‘mother.’”¹⁹ Lucia became paralyzed several years before her death and Sylvanus tended to her. Sylvanus died in Duxbury on January 23, 1865 at the age of 85 years 8 months of “vascular disease, at least 3 months” and he is listed as a widower and as a farmer.²⁰ His estate was probated on 8 May 1865.²¹ There is no mention of his wife’s childhood sampler in the inventory.

The church records include Lucia’s baptism. Much later, another entry documents her illness, “Mrs. Smith wrote her name after she was rendered helpless in [] of an attack of palsy. She was carried into the church June 1st 1856 and partook of the communion.”²² Her signature is obviously distorted and the note an explanation.

When housework, meal preparation and gardening were finished, most women wrote letters to family and friends. This is another way for us to get to know Lucia. The letters are available at the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society’s Drew Archives. The writing includes sentiments about her “sailor boy” traveling to “Gibraltar” and other references to planned sea travel with husband Sylvanus.²³ He was gone a long time during each voyage. Her solitude was filled with friends such as neighbor Gershom Bradford’s daughter Sarah, who was the recipient of some of the letters. The young women kept each other company and strolled back and forth along Tremont Street in the comfort of their neighborhood houses, church and older relatives’ watchful eyes.

¹⁸ Vital Records, m/r, Lucia Alden “of Duxbury, Sylvanus Smith, “of Pembroke”, Duxbury, 1620-1988, www.ancestry.com : accessed Dec 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid., p 101.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Probate Record, Appointment of Joseph Wadsworth as Administrator of Estate of Sylvanus Smith, Plymouth County Probate File Papers 1686-1881, v. 119, p. 124-127.

²² Church Record, First Parish Church, Duxbury, Archives, original handwritten entry, 1 Jun 1856.

²³ Letter to Sarah Bradford, 1803, transcription, Duxbury Rural and Historical Society, Drew Archives.

For some women, loneliness was a frequent reality. “Duxbury I believe has taken a dose of *Laudinum* for it seems to be ... quiet nothing very bad or very good has taken place in a long time...”²⁴ Their husbands’ long absences at sea made it trying and they took solace in their community and passed time writing and sewing. In one letter to Sarah, she mentions both, “...your cap is begun but not finished perhaps I may finish it today...my sailor boy has left me for five or six months he is gone first to New York...you can judge my feelings at the separation for such a long time...praying Heaven to protect me and return him safely...”²⁵ Some women accompanied their husbands at sea. Lucia’s letters indicate that she thought of joining him.²⁶

Lucia wrote her will December 31, 1855²⁷ and she died February 2, 1858 three years later. She must have suffered a long illness because her will says “being weak of body but of sound and disposing mind and memory...”²⁸ Her will was filed a decade later in 1865. She left her property and “all that is in the house of every name and nature belonging to me” to her sister Mary Alden after Sylvanus’ death. In her inventory she lists all real estate including house and barn and “articles in west front room, east front room, etc...” but does not specifically mention her childhood sampler. The property belonged to Mary so that may be why Mary A. Alden (unmarried) and Sylvanus Smith remained on the property together – it was home.

Later, John Alden and his wife Mary known as “Aunt Polly” lived in the Alden House and ran the country store up the street and across the fields. Lucia’s will provided for the store and it’s removal, “if my brother John shall cease to occupy the store, I give it to my nephew John Alden, the son of my brother John with the land which formerly belonged to Sarah McFarland with the old barn and small building standing thereon, continuing about three quarters of an acre, said John shall move the store on said land and shall shingle and clapboard and paint the end of the house to which the store is now attached.”²⁹

The store belonged to Lucia Alden Smith and it was hers to control right down to the layers of paint. Storekeeper John and Aunt Polly later became famous in Duxbury as the purveyors of the store where people gathered and exchanged news. They continued on in the Alden House as did their next generation. Correlating the evidence in Lucia’s will, the date of probate and census records it is

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Will of Lucia A. Smith,

²⁸ Letters Testamentary, Citation, Decree, v. 114, p. 311, Will, v. 105, p. [], filed May 8, 1865. Lucia A. Smith, Dec. 31, 1855, PR, filed Plymouth, 1865

²⁹ Will of Lucia A. Smith, 1855, Plymouth Probate Court, filed 1865, v. 105, p. [], handwritten.

interesting that Mary Alden (unmarried) continued on after Sylvanus died as well. She may have owned the treasured sampler done by her sister.

Sylvanus died intestate and his estate papers list “Thomas Smith, half-brother of Hanson, Joseph Smith, nephew, Hanson, Jane B. Smith, niece, Hanson, Joseph Carver, nephew, Bridgewater, Mary Alden, niece, Bridgewater, Thomas Smith, nephew, E. Bridgewater and Agnes Keith, niece, Boston.”³⁰ His inventory includes many items such as “old harness, writing desk, one bed, silver watch”, etc. but no mention of his wife’s sampler. It is interesting to note that he left his two church pews, worth \$10, “pew no. 9, \$10, pew no. 34, \$5.00.”³¹ At the end of the papers his brother, Thomas Smith passes the administration of the estate to Joseph Wadsworth, “it would be inconvenient for me to attend to it.”³²

Following the census to 1870 and beyond, it interesting to note the locations of family and survivors. In 1870, Mary A. Alden, age 69 continued to live at the property in Duxbury. Lucia’s sampler and other personal effects could have remained in Mary’s possession. Personal items may not be documented if they are given as gifts. Lucia’s sampler is an outstanding example of an object created so long ago is enhanced through lineage research. Not only is it delicate and beautiful but we know Lucia well.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 124.

³¹ Ibid, p. 126.

³² Ibid, p. 127.