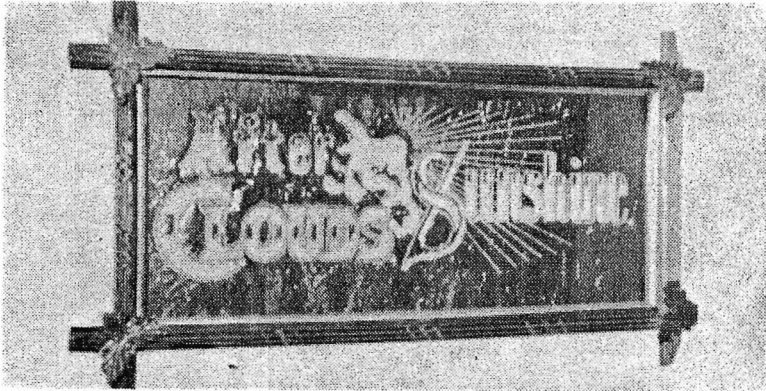


PIONEER ART



MOTTOES AND SAMPLERS

By Alice Baker

In those long ago days when women were do-it-yourself specialists in the making of the necessities of life, there was little opportunity for the creation of anything dubbed artistic. But women always yearned to do away with the stark simplicity of the pioneer home and somehow found time between their soap-making, candle-dipping, spinning, and weaving to make mottoes, wreathes, quilts and whatnots.

Mottoes were early attempts to bring color into even the log house. Today, people who have attics, still shelter such sentimental relics as "Home Sweet Home". The colors will be faded or softened but when one counts up the years since the maker laid aside her treasure, one is awed by the durability of the dyes that colored the yarns. Many yarns were home dyed; hickory nut shucks made lovely browns; blue vitriol a *fast* blue; combined with sienna an equally permanent green.

With her various colored yarns, on perforated card-board, the maker cross-stitched the letters which spelled out poems, Bible verses and mottoes. One motto highly cherished by the owner broke away from "Home Sweet Home" to spread the cheering thought "After Clouds Sunshine". In browns and yellows one sees an angry storm cloud through which the sun is bursting, the natural brightness of the sun augmented by an underlying layer of bright tinsel.

Samplers were also made by young girls in early days. Expected to be able to hem, darn, embroider and sew, each daughter of the family reached graduation when she could incorporate these in a sampler. Usually cross-stitched on linen canvas, with bright silk and wool yarns, a sampler included the alphabet, the numbers from one to ten, the maker's name, her birth date, and her age when she finished her sampler. She sometimes decorated it with birds, animals, flowers, trees and colorful silk and wool fruits.

Samplers were part of most folk art, coming from many European backgrounds. Fragile and delicate examples, varying from one ethnic background to another, may be seen in many museums.

(Ed. note: a delightful and fragile little sampler may be seen in the Pioneer Room of our museum made by "Eliza Wallace, 1806". The date indicates that it had been made before the Wallace family pioneered here.)