

# REMEMBER ME: DISCURSIVE NEEDLEWORK AND THE SEWING SAMPLER OF PATTY BARTLETT SESSIONS

Stacey Dearing

In her diary entry for March 20, 1848, Patty Bartlett Sessions (1795–1892) recorded an unusual note: she had begun to work on her sewing sampler, an item she had not touched for thirty-eight years. She writes simply, “commenced to finish my sampler that I began when I was a girl and went to school.”<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, decorative embroidery samplers both showed a young woman’s mastery of needlework and indicated that she was prepared for a genteel marriage.<sup>2</sup> Since sewing samplers were

---

1. Patty Bartlett Sessions, *Mormon Midwife: The 1846–1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, edited by Donna Toland Smart (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 110. Some scholars refer to Sessions as simply Patty. Though it is sometimes more awkward, I have chosen to refer to her as much as possible by her surname, as is common scholarly practice when discussing authors. I also refer to her as Sessions, rather than Parry, her surname at the time of her death, because Sessions was her name when she sewed the sampler, and Patty Bartlett Sessions is the name scholars and critics universally employ. For simplicity, I refer to her husband as David rather than Mr. Sessions, though I appreciate that the nomenclature is not parallel.

2. Younger girls would create marking samplers, which were primarily used as reference tools for recording letters and stitches, while older girls would create more decorative, complex patterns intended for display in the family home. In *A Gallery of American Samplers: The Theodore H. Kapnek Collection* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), Glee F. Krueger notes that samplers were “originally a cloth used to practice stitches and stitch combinations” that would be kept

usually created by unmarried girls, in 1812 Patty Bartlett put away her unfinished sampler when she married twenty-two-year-old David Sessions.<sup>3</sup> While she had begun her sampler as a sixteen-year-old girl in Maine, Sessions did not finish her sampler until she was fifty-four years old and living in the Utah territory, where she had settled as an early member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which she joined in 1833.<sup>4</sup> For Sessions, as with many girls who learned embroi-

---

rolled up with other sewing materials (7). For more on when young women created sewing samplers see Jeanmarie Andrews, "Virginia Samplers," *Early American Homes* 29, no. 3 (1998): 14; Bianca F. Calabresi, "'You Sow, Ile Read': Letters and Literacies in Early Modern Samplers," in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, edited by Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 79–104; William Huntting Howell, "Spirits of Emulation: Readers, Samplers, and the Republican Girl, 1787–1810," *American Literature* 81, no. 3 (2009): 497–526; and Jennifer Van Horn, "Samplers, Gentility, and the Middling Sort," *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 40, no. 4 (2005): 219–48. For more on needlework as a class-inflected activity, see Van Horn, and also Maureen Daly Goggin, "An *Essamplaire Essai* on the Rhetoricity of Needlework Sampler-Making: A Contribution to Theorizing and Historicizing Rhetorical Praxis," *Rhetoric Review* 21, no. 4 (2002): 309–38; Beverly Gordon, "Spinning Wheels, Samplers, and the Modern Priscilla: The Images and Paradoxes of Colonial Revival Needlework," *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 33, no. 2–3 (1998): 163–94; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

3. Donna T. Smart, "Patty Bartlett Sessions (1795–1892): Pioneer Midwife," in *Worth Their Salt: Notable but Often Unnoted Women of Utah*, edited by Colleen Whitley (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 1–12. Patty and David married without her parents' permission, for which offense she was disinherited. Smart notes that though they later made up, her parents, Enoch and Anna Hall Bartlett, did, in fact, disinherit Patty Sessions, which "Patty later reported with a hint of bitterness" ("Patty Bartlett Sessions," 2).

4. In 1833, at the age of thirty-eight, Sessions joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was baptized in 1834, though her husband and three children, Perrigrine, Sylvia, and David Jr., did not convert until 1835. In the face of Mormon oppression, the family relocated west multiple times before

dery, the sewing sampler was a socially acceptable site of self-expression where opinions and feelings could be depicted and displayed.<sup>5</sup> Through samplers, women like Sessions were able to sew their own approbation or dissent without rendering themselves vulnerable to public censure. In other words, samplers function as a circumspect site for testing ideas as well as stitches and patterns.

Recently, scholarship on sewing samplers has become significantly more popular; each successive article encourages future scholars to both recover extant needlework and to more closely examine already discovered artifacts. In 1989, Rozsika Parker argued that scholars should read samplers as works of art rather than as mere crafts. Since then, scholars have increasingly analyzed needlework, including Sessions's sampler, as artistic works, discursive texts, and/or rhetorical objects.<sup>6</sup>

---

establishing a permanent settlement in the Utah territory. The Sessions family moved from Maine to Missouri to Illinois, then to the Salt Lake Valley in September 1847. Sessions finally settled in Bountiful, in the Utah territory. In total, Sessions moved her home seven times.

5. Because she finished her sampler so late in her life, Sessions's case is certainly unusual. It is not, however, unique. Aimee E. Newell documents at least 103 samplers created by women over the age of forty in the antebellum period. Focusing primarily on samplers from New England, she argues that middle-aged women took up their needles in response to industrialization and the changing roles for women in the nineteenth century; see Aimee E. Newell, *A Stitch in Time: The Needlework of Aging Women in Antebellum America* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2014). See also Aimee E. Newell, "'Tattered to Pieces': Amy Fiske's Sampler and the Changing Roles of Women in Antebellum New England," in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 51–68.

6. See Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1989). For a history of the sewing sampler dating back to 400–500 BCE, see Laurel K. Gabel, "A Common Thread: Needlework Samplers and American Gravestones," *Markers: Annual Journal of the Association for Gravestone Studies* 19 (2002): 18–49. Scholars such as Parker, Ulrich, and Goggin initially engaged in recovery work, arguing that women's

Thus far, criticism of Sessions's needlework has largely fallen into two camps: first, Sessions's biographer, Donna Smart, reads the sampler alongside Sessions's extant diary, viewing the artifact primarily as a memento. Second, feminist scholars, including Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Aimee E. Newell, have employed a material culture framework to read the sampler as a discursive text recording Sessions's life and interests. This essay argues that, in addition to being a memento and serving as a repository of her interests and lessons, Sessions's sewing reveals how she adapted generic sewing patterns to create more personal and idiosyncratic expressions of self. Sessions's sampler, among other things, expresses her dissatisfaction with her marriage. After she and her husband David converted to Mormonism, he took two additional wives; he was married to Rosilla Cowen from 1845–1846, then to Harriet Teaples Wixom from approximately 1849 until his death in 1850. By manipulating marriage motifs, Sessions expresses her frustration with her husband's frequent absences, inattention, and plural wives. As a result, the sampler records some of the growing pains caused by polygamy in the early LDS Church. Moreover, the sampler—which depicts a hierarchy of values that prioritize hard work—also establishes the pride Sessions felt at being the primary source of income for her family. By focusing on the symbolism in Sessions's embroidery, this essay makes

---

textile artifacts were worthy of critical attention and consideration. Since then, scholars have begun to explore needlework in increasingly complex and interesting ways. For instance, multiple scholars have focused on the intersection of class and needlework, arguing that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, samplers became a status symbol, signifying the culmination of the elite, "finished" female education. See for instance, Howell, Ulrich, and Van Horn. Another branch of sampler scholarship by scholars such as Gabel explores how embroidery patterns influenced other artistic forms, such as gravestone designs. In contrast, other scholars focus on colonial revival samplers from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries; see, for example, Gordon, "Spinning Wheels," and Paula Bradstreet Richter, "Stories from Her Needle: Colonial Revival Samplers of Mary Saltonstall Parker," *Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings* 24 (1999): 212–32.

a case for recognizing the manifold interpretive possibilities posed by symbolic needlework. In other words, it is the sewing itself, not just the circumstances of its construction, that makes her sampler meaningful.

Many of the features of Sessions's sampler initially appear to be conventional motifs; however, this does not mean her sampler is without interesting significance. Many young women, including Sessions, employed well-known sampler conventions in order to compose meaningful embroideries. Common motifs on Sessions's sampler include borders, five lines of brightly colored alphabets and numbers in print and cursive, a couple dressed in wedding garb, flowers, trees, and animals, including a dog, horse, rooster, and deer or hart.<sup>7</sup> Samplers also typically include at least one verse, though two or more are common.<sup>8</sup> At the bottom center of Sessions's sampler is the primary "text," a verse in four lines:

The mind should be inured to thought  
The hands in skilful labours taught  
Let time be usefully employed  
And art and nature be enjoyed.<sup>9</sup>

---

7. See Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 405 for a description of the sampler. For more on common sampler motifs, see Mildred J. Davis, *Early American Embroidery Designs* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1974). Because it was so difficult to obtain supplies, pattern designs in early America differed from those in England. Davis argues that though patterns were heavily influenced by Europe, the fact that early Americans had "to make do with what was available" resulted in uniquely American designs with their own conventions and motifs (14, 18). For examples of American embroidery patterns, see also Mildred J. Davis, *Embroidery Designs 1780–1820* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971).

8. According to Ulrich, by 1730, 60 percent of samplers contained at least one verse that can often be classified as belonging to one of three categories: expressing thanks for education, glorifying God, and addressing future children (*Age of Homespun*, 441 and 116).

9. I have copied the spelling as it is on the sampler. Where it is unintelligible in pictures I have relied on the transcriptions provided by Ulrich and Smart. As noted, these transcriptions are not perfect, though for the most part they both

Though most samplers contain many of these seemingly generic motifs, each individual sampler nevertheless displays the preferences of the creator/author, and even the most apparently conventional samplers employ symbolism that can be read discursively (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Sewing Sampler of Patty Bartlett Sessions. Photo courtesy of Suzanne Brown Anderson.

While informed by and engaging with accepted conventions, the process of individualization makes samplers a site of self-expression. Sampler designs were influenced by the teachers of embroidery schools, where students like Sessions would copy motifs from a master set pro-

---

concur on wording and spelling. I have left errors in the spelling in the diaries so long as the meaning is clear. My edits to clarify meaning are in brackets.

vided by a teacher.<sup>10</sup> Despite relying on patterns, most girls chose the colors, pattern arrangement, and verse(s) to be included on a sampler.<sup>11</sup> As a result, samplers, as pieces displaying a student's mastery of a wide variety of stitches, can be compared to written essays displaying a student's mastery of course content. Like essays, each sampler will have similar component parts, yet will also still be a unique production of the student-author.<sup>12</sup> Thus, even the most seemingly generic verse, such as the second verse found on Sessions's sampler, "Patty Bartlett is my

---

10. Because Sessions's diaries from her youth have been lost, scholars and biographers have not been able to determine the school where Sessions learned embroidery. Such gaps in the record are all too common with sewing samplers. In "'On Needle-Work': Reassessing the Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers," *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 162 (2015): 89–99, Rosanne Waine notes how frustrating needlework can be to analyze because, as with other material objects, there are so many questions that cannot be answered as to authorial intention and provenance.

11. Because students worked with the same motifs, samplers can often be traced back to their school of origin. For instance, Van Horn creates a sampler genealogy by tracing pattern motifs as they appear in samplers over multiple generations, with the Galligher school as the origin point (229). For an exceptional example of two nearly identical samplers that nevertheless reveal self-expression and individualization, see Howell 514–15. For more on specific sampler schools, such as the Stivours School, see Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe, *American Samplers* (Boston, Mass.: Thomas Todd Company, 1921). For information on Mary Balch's school in Providence, Rhode Island, see Betty Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730–1830* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983), 112–17.

12. There were once more than four hundred embroidery stitches commonly employed in needlework, suggesting that even "generic" samplers could exhibit a wide range of diverse stitches and that samplers, indeed, could display a needleworker's mastery of the craft. Goggin observes that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, samplers included thirty-six different stitches on average, though by the nineteenth century only about twenty stitches appeared in each sampler. The number of stitch types continued to decrease until the cross-stitch became the dominant stitch in samplers; the decrease in types of stitch reflects the changing cultural role of samplers, as they were used less often as private tools and more commonly as decorative objects (Goggin, "Essai," 324).

name and with my needle wrought the same A.D. 1811,” is unique in every rendition as each student will stitch her own name.<sup>13</sup> Sessions’s sampler, is of course, unusual in that her identifying verse continues with a mid-life update: “1848 recommence again this 54th yr of my age.” The sampler is also marked with her married name, “Patty Sessions.” While Sessions’s sampler is certainly exceptional because she continued the project later in her life, the needlework was already discursive when she began the project at sixteen.

The seemingly conventional imagery in samplers is, in fact, what allowed women like Sessions to encode potentially subversive messages in a manner that is, nevertheless, circumspect. Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle, and Sue Carter Wood observe that needlework enabled women to compose messages that were “deeply controversial, or in direct conflict with authority” in a form that would be legible only to viewers who are extremely familiar with the symbolism in play.<sup>14</sup>

---

13. Goggin asserts that such identifying verses began to appear in samplers in the mid-seventeenth century: “The first of these shows up on a 1655 sampler . . . on which the needle worker embroidered ‘Ann Fenn is my name and with my hand I made the same’” (“*Essai*” 321). That Sessions’s verse, almost two hundred years later, is so similar suggests that the wording of these verses had become generic and conventional.

14. Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle, and Sue Carter Wood, “The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternative Discourses of Power,” in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 15. See also Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700–1850* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977). Swan argues that needlework “allowed [women] to express themselves in an almost completely male-dominated society . . . and, indeed, in many instances [needlework is] the only concrete evidence of their endeavors” (12). See also Merry Cox, “Foreword,” in *Sampler Motifs and Symbolism*, edited by Patricia Andriele and Lesley Rudnicki (East Aurora, N.Y.: Hillside Samplings, 2003). Cox argues that samplers provide a “glimpse of the past,” including information about early modern women which is largely absent from official, published texts. A note on terminology: Pristash, Schaech-



Sessions's sampler exemplifies this argument, as the possible messages she encoded in the marriage scene continue to resist definitive interpretation. The discreet indications of female voice that can be gleaned from sewing artifacts reveal, as Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald argue, that women throughout history have used any "available means" to "invent a way to speak in the context of being silenced and rendered invisible as persons."<sup>15</sup> Often lacking the authority to publish or speak publicly, women marked household linens in order to reveal their ownership of those items and to confirm their existence to posterity.<sup>16</sup> By viewing sewing pieces as discursive texts, we find that women have never been completely silent. Where there are gaps in female histories, alternative texts such as sewing samplers can fill the void.

### Sewing Symbolism and Discursive Multiplicity

Though Sessions's sampler has been the focus of some critical attention, by considering the symbolism in play I suggest an alternate interpretation of her embroidery to that which is currently dominant—i.e., that the sampler is primarily a memento recording things Sessions enjoyed.<sup>17</sup>

---

terle, and Wood argue that needlework functions as "epideictic rhetoric" or a "rhetoric of display" that "highlights the skill or artistry of a speaker over the development of an argument that will convince its audience" (14–15). In other words, needlework is always already rhetorical. See also Maureen Daly Goggin, "Stitching a Life in 'Pen of Steele and Silken Inke': Elizabeth Parker's circa 1830 Sampler," in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 31–49; in this text Goggin refers to needlework and other sewing textiles as "text/iles" (36). In contrast, I choose to simply refer to needlework artifacts as texts to indicate their rhetorical nature.

15. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, eds., *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2001), xvii.

16. See Ulrich, *Age of Homespun* for more information on marking.

17. Not all Sessions scholars engage with the sampler. See for instance, Elizabeth Willis, "Voice in the Wilderness: The Diaries of Patty Sessions," *The Journal*

Because the meaning of symbols is often slippery across time and cultures, it can be difficult to establish a definitive meaning for a given embroidered image. Furthermore, as Patricia Andrle and Lesley Rudnicki observe in their compendium of American and European sampler symbolism, over time “general awareness of symbolism may have diminished. With the proliferation of designs in pattern books and those motifs copied from other samplers, it is questionable whether or not the sampler maker was aware of the significance of a motif or if it was used for merely decorative purposes.”<sup>18</sup> Despite these challenges, however, scholars can and should interpret symbols on samplers. The fact that this genre of sewing is formulaic suggests that the symbolism would have been known by many sewing instructors, who would have passed on the knowledge to female students. Andrle and Rudnicki trace the meaning of many dominant sampler motifs back to biblical symbolism, suggesting that devout Christian needleworkers, such as Sessions, would have been familiar with the meanings ascribed to particular motifs. Indeed, part of the purpose of Andrle and Rudnicki’s book is to make the symbolic code of embroidery legible to modern needleworkers so that they may choose “symbolism appropriate to the theme that they are employing or the occasion they are commemorating with their sampler.”<sup>19</sup> Given

---

*of American Folklore* 101, no. 399 (1988): 37–47. In this piece, Willis does not reference Sessions’s sampler at all, instead focusing exclusively on Sessions’s diary. In other cases, parts of the sampler have been interpreted in ways that, I contend, are not fully supported by a close examination of the text. For example, Smart transcribes the first line of the verse as “The mind should be *inbred in thought*” rather than “The mind should be *inured to thought*” (“Patty Bartlett Sessions,” 11, emphasis added). Two meanings are thus ascribed to the verse: Sessions’s original wording, *inured*, suggests that thought must be learned or endured—that it is something a mind becomes habituated or accustomed to. Smart’s misquoted wording, *inbred*, suggests that thought is inherent or natural.

18. Patricia Andrle and Lesley Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs and Symbolism* (East Aurora, N.Y.: Hillside Samplings, 2003), 10.

19. Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 10.

that these authors see the discursive potential of modern samplers, it is reasonable to believe that samplers from earlier centuries are likewise intentionally employing symbolism to convey a theme or message. By drawing on Andrie and Rudnicki's sampler symbolism dictionary, on Hope B. Werness's *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art*, and on the nineteenth-century language of flowers, I interpret the symbolism on Sessions's sampler, and I argue that the consistency in her choice of symbols corroborates my reading.<sup>20</sup> However, I also acknowledge that, as with any discursive texts, there are multiple possible interpretations of Sessions's work. Thus, rather than offering a definitive interpretation of the sampler, I encourage further scholarly engagement with this, and other, embroideries.

I argue that Sessions's sampler conveys a sense of her priorities and feelings in adulthood and that her rhetorical choices regarding motifs, size, and color show how she manipulated the form to temper her messages. Many scholars, including Smart, have argued that the images depicted represent things Sessions enjoyed and that "some of her passions are expressed in the laden fruit trees, flowers, and animals that decorate the center section."<sup>21</sup> The main verse has also drawn significant critical attention; Smart focuses on the verse, positing that it "even more passionately describes her philosophy and, in truth, what made Patty work."<sup>22</sup> Newell pushes this interpretation further, noting that the verse "seems to reflect her older stage of life, cherishing the

---

20. Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art* (New York: Continuum, 2004). For more on the language of flowers, see Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995) and Marina Heilmeyer, *The Language of Flowers: Symbols and Myths* (New York: Prestel, 2001).

21. Smart, "Patty Bartlett Sessions," 11. Ulrich and Newell also assert that the sampler functions as a memento. While I agree with this claim, I also think that the sampler deserves a closer reading to explore what the text is memorializing.

22. Ibid.

value of industry and counseling an appreciation of hard work, art, and nature.”<sup>23</sup> While I agree with Smart and Newell that Sessions likely enjoyed the images depicted, the motifs and text on the sampler also suggest deeper possible meanings.

For instance, the verse reveals a great deal about Sessions’s personality and priorities throughout her life. The first line of the verse, “the mind should be inured to thought,” suggests that intelligent thinking is a learned activity, not natural to all human beings equally but something that should be sought. The next two lines, “the hands in skilful labours taught / let time be usefully employed,” argue that hard work is important; this straightforward message is unsurprising, as Sessions was, indeed, an incredibly hard worker. Shortly after her marriage to David, Sessions began taking in weaving work to supplement the family income; before long “she had all the weaving she could do ‘fetched from ten to twelve miles.’”<sup>24</sup> With her weaving skills Sessions was able to create “a lasting home industry, one that provided a lifelong means of income and self-fulfillment.”<sup>25</sup> Sessions was also industrious in other fields. In addition to her knitting, midwifery, and weaving she raised her family, gardened, and sold fruits and vegetables. Sessions was widely known as a midwife;<sup>26</sup> legend has it she delivered a reputed three to four thousand babies.<sup>27</sup> Once in Utah, she raised an orchard and several gardens on her

---

23. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 163.

24. Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 404.

25. Donna Toland Smart, “Introduction,” in *Mormon Midwife: The 1846–1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, edited by Donna Toland Smart (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 10.

26. While accompanying her midwife mother-in-law, Rachel Stevens Sessions, on a delivery, Sessions realized that the frail Rachel was not going to arrive at the birth in time, so she ran ahead and delivered the baby, thus beginning her career as a midwife. See Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 404.

27. Smart notes that based on the available records, it is unlikely that Sessions delivered nearly that many babies. “Since by actual count of her diaries in the

property. She both employed, and sold produce to, her neighbors. She was a shrewd businesswoman and a wise investor. Smart summarizes Sessions's business acumen, arguing that she was "an economic producer" and that she "was an industrious member of her community's workforce, harder working, more productive, and more successful than many of her male contemporaries."<sup>28</sup> Sessions's pride in her work ethic is written on her sampler for visitors to see.

However, the verse on the sampler reveals that hard work and learning were not Sessions's only priorities. She also valued leisure activities. The last line of her verse, "and art and nature be enjoyed," emphasizes pleasure rather than work or learning. Through this line Sessions suggests that appreciating art and nature is important but that such luxuries should come after learning and work—hence its place in the final line of the verse. The hierarchy she has created provides a means of interpreting her priorities: learning, work, fun. The verse may also explain why she chose to complete her sampler: after working hard for thirty-eight years and building a new home in Utah, she wanted something artistic to enjoy that would commemorate her life, celebrate her values, and decorate her home.

The verse is not the only part of the sampler that portrays Sessions's values; the animals depicted supplement the verse by highlighting Sessions's work ethic, faith, and pride in a socially acceptable—even humble—manner. First, the horse represents "masculinity; vitality; pride" or "ardor."<sup>29</sup> From what we know of her history, Sessions clearly

---

years between 1848 and 1866 she delivered 484 babies (223 girls, 207 boys, 25 miscarriages, and 29 not identified as to sex), and considering even omissions and errors, a figure near 4,000 seems unlikely. Of course, prior to 1846, Patty had practiced midwifery for thirty-four years, so how can we know for sure?" ("Patty Bartlett Sessions," 258 n. 2).

28. Smart, "Introduction," 6 and 10.

29. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 39. Werness corroborates this interpretation, arguing that the horse is "generally a symbol of power, social status,

possessed a strong power of endurance. Fueled by her religious passion, she established seven homes as her family moved progressively west with the Mormons. She also provided for her family through her midwifery, orchards, and weaving. Sessions's ardor, strength, and vitality were defining features that allowed her to care for her family. In addition to the pride and strength represented by the horse, the rooster represents "vigilance [and] pride."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the dog represents "loyalty and protection."<sup>31</sup> These qualities can be understood as maternal, especially considering her protective role as a mother. Furthermore, her sense of loyalty to her husband is especially relevant, as she stood by him despite his neglect. Because three of the main animals depicted represent pride, we can infer that the images were chosen intentionally. Sessions used the animals to display her sense of honor for her accomplishments in a socially acceptable manner through needlework.

The final animal on the sampler, the deer or hart, signifies another aspect of Sessions's life that she was proud of: her faith. However, because Sessions worked on her sampler at two different points in her life, pre-marriage and in her post-marriage middle age, the deer has multiple

---

and nobility, as well as being linked with war, physical prowess, and bravery" (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 220). While these terms are not explicitly related to pride, they are all largely character aspects that someone would be proud of.

30. Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 23. Werness notes that cocks "connote watchfulness, courage, virility, prescience, and reliability. Negative symbolism includes pride, arrogance, and lust" (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 89). The existence of negative symbolism suggests another element that may be in play in Sessions's sampler, i.e., that she was crafting a warning against being overly prideful.

31. Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 27. If the dog had been depicted as chasing the deer (with or without hunters), this would have represented the soul pursuing evil (Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 27). Sessions's dog and deer face each other from opposite sides of the sampler. According to Werness, "Christian iconography linked the dog with imagery of the Good Shepherd, and the dog became an EMBLEM [*sic*] of the faithful and morally vigilant clergy" (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 139). Though Sessions was a layperson, she was certainly vigilant in her faith.

possible meanings. In needlework deer often represent the “wisdom of God: gentleness; pride and manliness; solitude” and “Christ as the love of God on Earth.”<sup>32</sup> In Sessions’s sampler, all of these interpretations are legitimate possibilities. First, religion was always important to Sessions. Before she converted to Mormonism she belonged to the Methodist Church, which she joined at the age of twenty-one in 1816. As with her family’s later conversion to Mormonism, Sessions was the first in her family to convert. Given her passion for religion, she very likely intentionally included a depiction of God’s wisdom, or of Christ, in her sampler. Second, “solitude” seems logical, as Sessions was often separated from her husband. Especially after the couple arrived in the Utah territory, David would either stay out tending the crops or would live primarily with one of his plural wives. As a result, Sessions was often lonely—a message that is reinforced by her marriage imagery in the center of the sampler. Third, initially seeming least likely, “pride and manliness,” is also a legitimate interpretation of the deer. There are two ways pride and manliness can be interpreted: that she was hoping to find a proud and manly husband, or that she was expressing her own pride in her accomplishments. As she began sewing before her marriage, Sessions might have imagined the deer as representing the ideal qualities she hoped to find in her future husband. However, Sessions may also have been aware that her motivation, in addition to her intellectual and spiritual strength, made her an exceptional person.

Sessions’s pride and sense of her own significance were not without cause. Her life was certainly remarkable, as she was one of the earliest settlers in the Utah territory and was friends with key Mormon figures such as Brigham Young and Joseph Smith.<sup>33</sup> She was also viewed as

---

32. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 37. Werness further explains that “In the Old Testament, the hart pants for water just as the soul longs for God; stags symbolize the soul thirsting for salvation” (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 131).

33. Smart argues that Sessions records her friendship and meetings with key Mormon figures such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young with pride in her

exceptional by the Mormon community, as she fulfilled a prophecy two days after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. In her diary she records,

put Lorenzo Youngs wife Harriet [Harriet P. Wheeler] to bed with a son [Lorenzo Dow, Jr.] the first male born in this valley it was said to me more than 5 months ago that my hands should be the first to handle the first born son in the place of rest for the saints even in the city of our God I have come more than one thousand miles to do it since it was spoken.<sup>34</sup>

The prophet may have been making a safe bet; after all, is it really surprising that Sessions, a popular midwife, would deliver the first Mormon baby in the Utah territory? Nevertheless, the diary clearly shows that Sessions felt the import of the prophecy and of her role in it. She may, therefore, have worked a sense of pride into her sampler, regardless of her age, when she stitched the deer.

Though the dog, deer, and horse represent masculinity, pride, and ardor, because she stitched the animals in shades of brown the potentially boastful messages are tempered; though Sessions was expressing ideas that can be interpreted as conceited, her color choices indicate that she was, at worst, circumspectly violating social norms. The color brown signifies “humility, poverty [and] renunciation.”<sup>35</sup> Sessions’s apparent awareness of sampler conventions and symbolism allowed her the space to compose a text that is full of pride, yet, because of the medium and color choices, the tone of the sampler is modest rather than arrogant. The argument could be made that the color choice is insignificant, as all of the animals are, in fact, brown in real life. However, not all of these animals are, necessarily, brown. The dog, horse, and rooster could have been realistically depicted in several other colors. By choosing to

---

diaries. Her importance in the community can be seen through the conference several key Church leaders convened in her home in 1836 to discuss plans for the “gathering of the Saints” (Smart, “Patty Bartlett Sessions,” 3).

34. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 99. Brackets inserted by Smart.

35. Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 24.



stitch the animals in brown, Sessions softens the imagery to render it more socially acceptable. Though she privileges images that convey her sense of loyalty, pride, and vitality, Sessions is, as we will see with her manipulation of marriage motifs, careful to ensure that her sampler is never too radical or rude.

### Anti-Marriage Motifs: Polygamy and the Young Couple

Perhaps the most interesting image in the sampler is, as Ulrich notes, the young couple. Because the sampler provides little direction for the eye, the viewer's gaze is initially drawn to the center of the piece: the husband. The young man is placed in a garden setting full of lively animals and colorful plants. With his bride dressed in white just to his left, this appears to be, as Ulrich notes, "pastoral embroidery," but it is not, as she suggests, "a celebration of conjugal happiness and rural life."<sup>36</sup> The female figure towers over her male partner, suggesting that the power in the relationship is held by the wife, not by her husband.<sup>37</sup> If we assume the two figures represent Sessions and her husband David, the emphasis on the female figure seems appropriate considering what is known of their relationship. Through the marriage imagery on her sampler, Sessions expresses her profound dissatisfaction with her husband's behavior.

---

36. Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 405.

37. In 1848, when Sessions finished her sampler, she was David's only wife. Sessions's struggles with polygamy unfortunately did not end after David's death. In December of 1851, Sessions married her second husband, John Parry, who eventually took a younger second wife named Harriet. Smart summarizes Sessions's feelings toward her husbands, arguing "Patty's attitude toward her husbands was respect, devotion, and acceptance of their faults. Although she felt 'bad' that she had not been consulted earlier about their taking plural wives . . . she dismissed that complaint with merely a mention" ("Patty Bartlett Sessions," 7). As the sampler shows, however, Smart's interpretation does not fully capture the complexity of Sessions's feelings about David's polygamy.

One reason that the male figure may be smaller than the female figure is that David, among other flaws, was frequently absent. As a result of these absences Sessions might, unsurprisingly, not have viewed him as the most significant—and therefore the “largest”—person in her life. For example, in 1848 David lived with Sessions for about half of the months of May and June, spending the rest of the time away at the family farm. She records in her diary on May 13: “Mr. Sessions come home from the farm been gone a week goes again to morrow.”<sup>38</sup> He returns a few days later, staying from May 18 through May 30. He then leaves for the farm again “to keep the crickets off of the crop.”<sup>39</sup> He did not return until June 22, and though the date of his departure is not listed, he clearly left again, as Sessions notes his return on July 1.<sup>40</sup> While David was gone, Sessions carried a considerable workload. She was left alone to care for her daughter-in-law, Mary Sessions, and the grandchild Mary had recently birthed. On Tuesday, May 9 she writes, “I now have to take care of Mary and her babe and do the rest of the work her breasts very sore and her babe very troublesome I have been up 2 and 3 times a night with it ever since it was born.”<sup>41</sup> She also had to worry about a leaking roof, repeated frosts destroying her garden, and lost cows. In addition to all this, Sessions delivered thirteen babies in May and June.<sup>42</sup> Considering her heavy workload, it is likely that Sessions considered herself to be the keystone holding the household together while David was away seeing to the crops.<sup>43</sup> Sessions’s pride in

---

38. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 112.

39. *Ibid.*, 113.

40. *Ibid.*, 114–15.

41. *Ibid.*, 112.

42. *Ibid.*, 112–15.

43. It is also significant to note that though she married John Parry in 1851, he did not live with her consistently either. Once she arrived in the Salt Lake Valley Sessions maintained her own independent home. Smart observes in her introduction to Sessions’s diaries that “both of Patty’s husbands died at her

her ability to manage on her own, without David's presence, is expressed through the prideful imagery on the sampler, as well as through the size disparity between the human figures.<sup>44</sup>

Not only was Sessions's marriage complicated by her husband's long absences, but David's polygamy also caused considerable conflict. Though Sessions was a devout Mormon, she was nevertheless unhappy when her husband took plural wives.<sup>45</sup> David married his second wife, Rosilla Cowen, on October 3, 1845. In her diary, Patty Sessions records the emotional fallout that occurred after David married Rosilla.<sup>46</sup> At first, Rosilla remained behind in Nauvoo with Patty's adult son Perrigrine and his wives, while David and Patty travelled to the Salt Lake Valley. Rosilla travelled later with Perrigrine's family, arriving in Utah on June 22, 1846,

---

home, where they seemed to gravitate when they were ill" ("Introduction," 25). Sessions provided a living for herself, and her husbands often turned to her for physical, spiritual, and financial support. While she may have loved and been loved by her husbands, Sessions's marriages resist conventional gender norms; though she was committed to her husbands, she had complicated relationships with them.

44. While some might speculate that David may simply have been shorter than his wife, suggesting the depiction is factual, it is also possible that the size difference between the two figures is symbolic. Either way, the depiction was intentionally composed by Sessions.

45. Sessions was one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, though the arrangement appears, in this case, to have been largely symbolic. In her diary she writes, "I was sealed to Joseph Smith by Willard Richards March 9 1842 in Newel K Whitneys chamber Nauvoo for ^time and all eternity^ Eternity and I and if I do not live to attend to it myself when there is a place prepared I want some one to attend to it for me according to order Sylvia ^my daughter^ was present when I was sealed to Joseph Smith" (*Mormon Midwife*, 276). Historian Richard Abanes argues that Sessions's note that her daughter was also present means that Sylvia was also sealed to Smith and that they were both his wives. See Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 194.

46. Though, as I have noted, I prefer to refer to Sessions by her surname, I have opted to use her first name in this section for clarity.

four months and ten days after Patty and David.<sup>47</sup> In her diary, Patty expresses at best mixed feelings toward Rosilla. She writes, “I came home found Perrigrine and family and Rosilla there we was glad to see each other. . . . I feel as if I should be happy but alas they are not and sorrow fills my heart.”<sup>48</sup> The construction of this entry is interesting for a few reasons. First, Sessions identifies her son, his children, and his wives as family, thus isolating Rosilla. Then, when expressing her unhappiness, she separates herself from her feelings. Rather than being “but alas I am not” happy, she writes “alas they are not” happy, presenting her feelings as though they belong to someone else. By distancing herself rhetorically, Sessions is able to isolate the feelings that bring her into conflict with her husband, as he presumably loves Rosilla and is happy to see her. Sessions’s unspeakable feelings seem to be expressed through the size of the couple in her sampler instead.

Sessions’s unhappiness upon Rosilla’s return is understandable; suddenly her husband, whom she had to herself for four months, was spending most of his time with Rosilla. To add insult to injury, Rosilla did little of the housework, leaving Sessions to pick up the slack.<sup>49</sup> However,

---

47. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 34 n. 16, 56.

48. *Ibid.*, 56.

49. Rosilla was sick for a period in late July and early August 1846. After she recovered, she refused to work or even to eat with the family even though she could. Over a two-week period in August, Sessions records multiple times that she tried to convince Rosilla to eat with the family, but she notes with evident frustration, “Rosilla wants to cook and eat by herself I will not let her when she can eat with the rest of us and is well” (*Mormon Midwife*, 62). Over a week later she writes, “we have had another talk with Rosilla she says she will not receive any advice from me she will do as she pleases & she will not come into the tent nor eat with us again” (*Mormon Midwife*, 62). Ultimately, even David got exasperated by Rosilla’s behavior, which contributed to her decision to leave Utah and return to Nauvoo in December. The rift between David and Rosilla hinged, in large part, on her refusal to work. Sessions records on 5 October 1846 that “I make her many ofers [*sic*] and so did he but she said she would not except [*sic*] of any for she would not come in to the tent nor go to

what seems to have bothered Sessions the most was that David treated her harshly and largely abandoned her in favor of Rosilla. In a series of entries from early July 1846, Sessions records her agonizing treatment after Rosilla's arrival. She writes, "Thursday ^9^ I have slept but little [*blotted out*: Mr Sessions has said many hard things to me] I feel as though my heart would burst with grief."<sup>50</sup> Sessions's misery continues for several days, and she notes every day that David was hard on her and that she was barely able to eat or sleep. On Saturday and Sunday, July 11–12, she records with difficulty, "I [*blotted out*: slept alone]^ eat my breakfast but I am so full of grief that there is no room for food and I soon threw it up I can only say I feel bad [*blotted out*: lay alone part of the night] Sunday 23 I feel some better he has promised to treat me well [*several entries stricken out and ink changes color*: I lay alone]."<sup>51</sup> Despite David's promises, he and Rosilla did not begin to treat Patty well. For example, on Sunday, August 2, 1846 she records how David and Rosilla stranded her after inviting her to accompany them to the river. In her diary she recalls, "Mr Sessions took Rosilla and ^asked^ me to go to the river then took her and waided [*sic*] across the river left me on this side was gone 2 or 3 hours."<sup>52</sup> In light of such treatment, Sessions's frustration and pain are certainly understandable. After months of struggling with Patty, Rosilla apostatized and returned east in December of 1846. However, even when Rosilla finally left, things were not instantly better for Patty. On November 29, David stayed with Rosilla one last time; when he returned the next day, Sessions writes that he "did not speak

---

work any where else he then told her she must suffer the consequence for he was not able to maintain her in idleness and he should say no more to her" (*Mormon Midwife*, 63).

50. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 58. Brackets and notes inserted by Smart.

51. *Ibid.* Brackets and notes inserted by Smart.

52. *Ibid.*, 60.

to me when he came home.”<sup>53</sup> Three days later, on December 3, Rosilla left for Nauvoo.<sup>54</sup> Sessions does not specify if David was speaking to her again, though at the very least we know someone informed her of Rosilla’s departure. Regardless of when David and Patty got back on speaking terms, her sampler, completed almost two years later, shows she had not forgotten how David and Rosilla had treated her.

Indeed, the marriage imagery at the center of the sampler depicts a tumultuous relationship at best. Though the scene appears to be Edenic, and though the nature imagery surrounding the couple seems to create an elegant pastoral scene, the motifs on the sampler suggest Sessions was still dealing with the aftermath of David’s marriage to Rosilla. For instance, the orange tree, a classic marriage motif, represents “virginity because it bears fruit and flowers at the same time. It represents the virgin as both virgin and mother.”<sup>55</sup> If sewn before her marriage, the virginity imagery represents Sessions’s “ripeness” for matrimony: She was ready to bear children—the fruit of her union. If sewn later in her life, the virgin mother imagery is still appropriate, especially after David married Rosilla. After his second marriage, David did not share Sessions’s bed regularly, leaving Sessions feeling lonely. Shortly after Rosilla arrived in Utah in 1846, Sessions writes on August 1, “I still feel very lonsome [*sic*],” and her feelings of loneliness continued to grow as David withdrew from her.<sup>56</sup> Sessions notes David’s hurtful inattention again on November 4, 1846, a few weeks before Rosilla leaves forever, writing that “he has lain with her three nights [...] I go to bed know not

---

53. *Ibid.*, 67.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 52. According to Heilmeyer in *The Language of Flowers*, “oranges are associated with the bride at a wedding,” and the plant’s white flowers “are symbols of virtue, chastity, and innocence” (88).

56. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 60.

what to do.”<sup>57</sup> Sessions may have considered herself to be in a pseudo-virginal state, already a mother but no longer sexually desired. She thus becomes a virgin-mother figure, nurturing her children, grandchildren, and community, but lacking any passionate consummation. Sessions may have felt isolated both in her sexual roles and in her familial roles. As a result of her tumultuous relationships, the orange tree motif may have continued to resonate with her over the nearly forty years she carried and created her sampler.

In addition to the orange tree, Sessions manipulated many other marriage motifs, suggesting that her marriage was problematic both before and after David married Rosilla. Indeed, what is most surprising about the couple on the sampler, besides their sizes, are the things they are not doing. If they were holding hands, or were holding a wreath between them, the figures would represent a bride and groom, marriage, and marital fidelity.<sup>58</sup> Yet the couple is clearly not holding hands, and the wreath is above them and off to one side rather than being held between the couple. In fact, the wreath is almost as large as the male figure and looms oppressively over his head. Similarly, if the male figure were holding a dove, it would likewise indicate marital fidelity.<sup>59</sup> In Sessions’s sampler, however, the dove is depicted as flying away from the couple, suggesting that the fidelity she expected to find had departed. Rather than depicting the female figure as a dutiful bride holding her husband’s hand, her hands are empty at her sides, and next to her is a flowering plant, which represents “the symbol of life; Mother Earth [or] Mother Nature.”<sup>60</sup> Though the female figure is clad in white, suggesting a virgin bride, this is not a typical marriage scene.<sup>61</sup> By rearranging standard

---

57. *Ibid.*, 65.

58. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 32.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 24.

motifs, Sessions uses her sampler to reveal the flaws in her marriage. Perhaps unable to speak openly about her dislike of polygamy, or about her dissatisfaction with her husband, Sessions turned to sewing as a tool for communicating transgressive truths.

### Conclusion: Filling the Silences

Sessions's sampler reveals her hierarchy of life priorities, displays her conflicting sense of pride and humility, and reflects her troubled relationship with her husband. Yet we cannot know for certain when she stitched each element. Though Newell makes an interesting argument that the top of the sampler was sewn when Sessions was a girl and that everything under her note about recommencing the sampler in 1854 came after, there is no concrete account detailing which elements Sessions stitched at any time, or any changes she may have made to the original pattern.<sup>62</sup> As a result, we cannot, for instance, argue that when she began her sampler the male figure was larger than the female and that she changed it later. Such a reading is insupportable. Nor can we argue that she added particular images later in her life rather than when she originally started the project as a teenager. Whatever the date of any actual motif, we can conclude that in 1848 when Sessions completed her sampler, she approved of the images. The gendered imagery, evidence of religious fervor, her sense of pride in her exceptionalism, and her critique of her marriage were intentionally part of her final product. Sessions intelligently, knowingly, and subtly manipulated standard sampler conventions to create a representation of her life on the linen.

Yet, despite her avid pen and prolific needle, Sessions is often still silenced through misrepresentation by the scholars who are attempting to recover her voice. Overlooking Sessions's needlework texts completely, most scholars focus exclusively on her journal, which, while an important text, does not convey the full narrative. For example, Elizabeth Willis

---

62. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 161–62.



argues that “although it would be impossible to define the precise impulse that led Patty Sessions to end her journal, hers is clearly a gradual shift toward speechlessness” because her diaries end several years before her death.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, many scholars interpret the end of Sessions’s diary as the end of her life.<sup>64</sup> However, the diary and extant needlework function as complementary documents recording Sessions’s life even after she stopped writing.

Unfortunately, little is known about the last four years of Sessions’s life besides a family anecdote about her final days: she knitted socks but made so many dropped stitches and errors that her family members unwound the yarn each night. Sessions therefore knit the same yarn over again each day.<sup>65</sup> Newell argues that her family unraveled the yarn because they “respected her work” and realized that highly flawed projects would be very difficult and frustrating for Sessions to knit.<sup>66</sup> Even if her family’s gesture of undoing was well founded, it is, at the very least, editing and revising the Sessions archive. I contend that her family’s actions actually function as an all-too-common act of textual erasure. Because socks are less likely to be kept as family heirlooms, especially poorly knit ones, Sessions is effectively silenced. Because women often worked, and composed, in media that was functional rather than fancy, many artifacts do not survive because they wear out or are discarded after their purpose is fulfilled. Yet Sessions was not consumed by silence; she simply changed mediums, privileging knitting over writing. Considering Sessions’s sewing as readable text allows us to find her voice even after her diaries end. Sessions’s diary and needlework are two forms of writing that worked toward the same goal: to record her life.

---

63. Willis, “Voice in the Wilderness,” 46.

64. Ulrich inadvertently misdates Sessions’s death as 1888, the year her diary ended, not the actual year of her death in 1892 (*Age of Homespun*, 407).

65. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 10.

66. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 35.

After her death, Sessions's son Perrigrine found one last piece of needlework hidden inside *W. Beach's The Family Physician*, a medical book from Sessions's personal library.<sup>67</sup> The loose cross-stitch reads "Remember Me." Here is an insight into Sessions's motives for writing her diaries and finishing her sampler that should not be overlooked: to be remembered. This second embroidery suggests that Ulrich, Newell, and other scholars are not far off the mark; Sessions's sampler is a memento, or what Newell calls a life review, but it was also an intentionally constructed text incorporating a variety of messages.<sup>68</sup> Placed in the context of her life, needlework, and writing, Sessions's sampler shows her hope for the future but also reflects pieces of the disappointing reality of her marriage.

As discursive texts, samplers provide valuable and often unequaled insights into female experiences, opinions, and thoughts. Through Sessions's sampler, we can see how needlework can both reinscribe and resist cultural norms, and how sewing, as Maureen Daly Goggin notes, has always "been a significant cultural practice of meaning-making."<sup>69</sup> Girls and women expressed their opinions about life, marriage, politics, religion, and the world through samplers because they were unable to write about such things more explicitly elsewhere. Because samplers were viewed by a limited audience, women could incorporate images, texts, and ideas that may have been considered subversive if composed or published in a more public form.

Reading Sessions's sampler allows scholars to glimpse how women have historically composed needlework while also exposing how they negotiated the perceived limitations inherent to employing genteel, domestic skills rhetorically. After all, needlework compositions, which were largely confined to domestic spaces, could only reach a limited audi-

---

67. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 394.

68. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 164.

69. Goggin, "Essai," 312.

ence and were required to function within specific generic constraints. Yet the fact that these texts would not be widely distributed is what made them safe sites of expression for women. Because sewing samplers and other needlework would be safely restricted to the sewing kit or the sitting room, women could freely express their thoughts—whether mundane reflections on piety or critiques of their spouses—without the risks publication entails. In other words, while women have historically used needlework as a medium through which to express sentiments they could not speak or publish in other forms, all needlework is not, necessarily, overtly subversive, nor were all women engaged in needlework attempting to disrupt social and gender norms. Rather, sewing offered women a space for self-expression that, no matter the content, would still be considered appropriate. In this case, Sessions recorded her dissatisfaction with her marriage in her sampler, and the form of the composition mitigated the subversive potential of the text by reinscribing it within domestic spaces and practices. Sessions did not seek to upset Mormon values, nor did she seek to upend conventional gender norms. She did, however, wish to express her feelings about herself, and her husband, through needlework. By using her sampler as more than a memento or a tool of learning, she created a beautiful discursive artifact that could express her feelings and be appreciated by future generations. Her sampler offers unparalleled insights into how Sessions sought to construct meaning out of her life and reveals how needlework enables women to express themselves. Ultimately, her needlework has been rhetorically effective, as scholars do, indeed, remember her.