

Rebecca Perit Lathrop

by Lynne Belluscio

I came into the office and picked up my messages. I had a call from the Smithsonian Institution. I had to call her back before 3:15. I didn't have a clue who she was, but I was curious and called her back.

"There's a sampler being auctioned on Ebay. Does Rebecca Hunt Perit Lathrop ring a bell?" "Sure -- she was the wife of our first mayor, Joshua Lathrop. How did you trace her to us?" "You have a portrait of her." "Yes. It hangs in the front hall of LeRoy House." (Most of our paintings are listed in the national register at the National Portrait Gallery so I suspect that's how she traced Rebecca to us.

As it turns out, she is a volunteer at the Smithsonian with the textile collection, specializing with samplers.) So I brought up Ebay and sure enough there was Rebecca's sampler being sold by someone on the West Coast. So I put in a bid, although I know that samplers can bring a pretty hefty price. Rebecca's sampler was in fair shape, but it didn't have any floral designs which would have driven the price up. It took several days before the auction ended and in the last hour I was on Ebay every second to make sure it would come back to LeRoy. I also e-mailed the seller to see if he knew anything about where it came from and whether there was any clue to how it got to the West Coast. He e-mailed to say that he had purchased it at an estate sale and he would try to find out anything he could. (So far, nothing has turned up.) So I waited until the sampler arrived.

It's not very big about 9 inches by 11. The homespun linen has turned brown and it didn't help much to have it sewn to an old poster. The old cardboard has acid in it and it leaches into the fabric. (The first thing I did when I opened the envelope was to very carefully cut the sampler off the old cardboard.)

Rebecca Hunt Perit was born July 31, 1789 – which was carefully cross-stitched into the sampler. And she "Marked this 1797

October 18th." Which means that she began the sampler when she was eight. The top two rows are the alphabet in capital letters followed by the lower case letters (missing J which wasn't part of the alphabet at that time.) Then she embroidered her name and her birth date and the date of her work.

She included another set of larger capital letters, although it appears that she either removed A through L or that she "marked" the letters with a very fine thread, to be worked later. The letters can be seen when you hold the sampler up to the light. At the bottom she stitched in black "Youths a soft scene but trust her not Her Airy minutes swift as thought Fly off the slippery sphere." I've tried to find out where the quotation came from, but haven't discovered the source. Unfortunately I haven't been able to successfully photograph the sampler so you will have to use your imagination.

Rebecca Hunt Perit was the youngest child of John and Ruth Webster Perit of Scotland, Connecticut. Her oldest brother, John Webster Perit was born in 1783 and the records indicate that her sister Mary was born the same year, so if the dates are right they were twins. Her other brother Peletian Perit was born in 1785. (Another curious note, is that this brother, Peletian, married Rebecca's husband's sister, Jerusha Lathrop making her brother also her brother-in-law.) Rebecca's mother was 34 when Rebecca was born. Her father was 52 and he died when Rebecca was only 4. (Rebecca's mother remarried Col. Christopher Leffingwell.)

In 1809 when Rebecca was 20, she married 22 year-old Joshua Lathrop. They had twelve children and adopted a daughter Helen. Their first two children, Thomas and Mary died as infants. Emily died when she was five. Jane died at the age of 23, unmarried. The other children included Mary, Thomas (the second son named Thomas), Rebecca, Lydia, Joshua, John, Ruth and Francis.



Joshua and Rebecca Lathrop, who were living in Norwich, Connecticut, arrived in LeRoy in 1824. Joshua arrived to help Jacob LeRoy with the development of the Triangle Tract. When the LeRois moved into the enlarged LeRoy House on East Main Street which had served as the Triangle Tract land office, Jacob wanted to move the land office out of his home. Joshua opened a land office in a small brick store on the corner of Church Street and East Main. (where the St. Mark's parking lot is now located). Joshua and Rebecca lived in a house located where the Baptist Church is now. The Lathrop homestead was surrounded by extensive gardens bordered with boxwood. Rebecca shared recipes with Charlotte LeRoy, her neighbor next door. Mrs. LeRoy wrote down "Mrs. Lathrop's Receipt for Cookies" and another for Loaf Cake and included them in her receipt book.

In 1834, when the Village of LeRoy was incorporated, Joshua Lathrop was elected to be the first "president" – now known as the Village Mayor. Joshua also took over the milling business of Jacob LeRoy when he moved back to New York City. Joshua died in August 1856. Rebecca died September 12, 1862 in her home. Her obituary recorded that "strength and brilliance marked her mind – wit and sound sense sparkled continually in her conversation . . ."

Somehow, Rebecca Hunt Perit Lathrop's small, precisely stitched sampler, crossed the country – perhaps packed in a box by one of her many descendents. It was sewn on the back of a poster for the Long Beach Button Club's third annual antique button show poster from March 1950. And in the spring of 2009, Rebecca once again, gazed down on her childhood sampler, two hundred and twelve years later.