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**AN EXCEPTIONAL SET OF COLONIAL AMERICAN CREWELWORK
EMBROIDERIES RETURNS TO OLD YORK**

York, Maine—The Old York Historical Society announced today that the Bulman Bed Hangings have been reinstalled in its galleries for the 2017 summer season, following a comprehensive two-year conservation project.

Created by Mary Swett Bulman (1715–1791) of York, Maine, in the 1730s, the textiles are considered to be the most complete set of colonial American crewel-embroidered bed hangings, consisting of four curtains, a head cloth, tester cloth, three outer valances, and three inner valances. The designs feature embroidered flowers, fruit trees, and animals, complemented by a lyrical poem by Isaac Watts, “Meditation in a Grove” (published in *Horae Lyricae*, 1706).

The embroideries came to the Old Gaol Museum (now Old York) in 1908, through relatives of the Swett family, and have been on almost continuous display ever since. Thanks to grants of \$35,000 from the Coby Foundation, Ltd., New York, \$10,000 from the Davis Family Foundation, Yarmouth, Maine, and \$16,500 from The Windover Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts, Old York has been able to have these important textiles conserved.

The conservation is part of a larger project to create a new and more comprehensive installation for them in the museum’s gallery. “This project ensures the long-term preservation of these exceptional textiles, and allows us to rediscover their story,” said Old York executive director, Joel Lefever. “We are grateful to the Coby Foundation, the Davis Family Foundation, and The Windover Foundation, for their generous support to preserve these important bed hangings, and for sharing our vision to ensure a quality installation,” Lefever continued.

A new installation space for the bed hangings was created in Old York’s Remick Gallery, including special platform featuring salvaged 18th-century floorboards. A reproduction bedstead was fabricated based on an original in the collection of the Warner House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and a reproduction counterpane (or quilt), inspired by one in Thomas Jefferson’s collection, was created by Natalie Larson, of Historic Textile Reproduction, Williamsburg, Virginia. Additional exhibit components, such as special lighting, casework, and interpretive materials, are planned and await funding.

“The Bulman bed hangings are a national treasure,” says Jane Nylander, president emerita of Historic New England, and advisor to the project, “and it is wonderful that Old York has secured funds to support needed conservation work, and ensure their long-term preservation.”

THE BULMAN BED HANGINGS

Mary Swett was born in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, and came to York, Maine, with her family when she was three-years-old. In 1730, at age fifteen, she married Alexander Bulman (1701–1745), a physician from Boston, at which time she likely began the embroideries, perhaps with the assistance of her mother and younger sisters. Stylistically the motifs used in the bed hangings are similar to crewelwork designs found in Boston embroideries, indicating that the patterns may have originated there. A set this extensive and artistically worked would have taken years to complete. Textiles in the 18th century had great value, and after Alexander Bulman died at Louisbourg, Nova Scotia, in 1745, the hangings were listed in his household inventory as “1 Sute wrought brown Holland Curtains,” with the same value as a 10-acre plot of land. Their survival as a set is extraordinary, as most embroidered bed hangings were separated and given to family members as mementos, or were altered over time.

THE CONSERVATION

Conservation work on the Bulman bed hangings was undertaken by Deirdre Windsor and her conservation team at Windsor Conservation Studio, Dover, Massachusetts. While the overall condition of the bed hangings was very good given their age, they had suffered from long-term exposure to light, dust, wood smoke, and other environmental contaminants typical of a home setting.

The two-year process included cleaning, physical stabilization, and the addition of a new archival hanging system designed to help support the textiles. Old repairs were removed, and the textiles were washed in filtered, deionized water with surfactant, rinsed, and dried flat. Physical repairs included localized patching of tears, areas where the original iron ink of the design had eaten away the fabric, and insect damage. Loose embroidery was secured and encapsulated in fine net as needed. The wool binding along the edges was abraded in areas and was repaired using custom dyed wool.

Although the original hanging system is largely intact, it was determined that the textiles would require additional support if they were to be displayed long term. Windsor Conservation devised a custom hanging system that allows Old York to authentically display the bed hangings, while stressing the original fabric as little as possible.

THE WORK CONTINUES

With the guidance of an advisory panel of renowned curators and textile experts, Old York intends to continue studying and documenting the embroideries in order to produce comprehensive interpretive materials. “This is a tremendous opportunity to bring together curators, scholars, conservators, craftspeople, and students, to learn more about these textiles and to create a more complete and dynamic public exhibition,” said Joel Lefever. “We hope to raise additional funds that will allow us to have a public symposium and—ultimately—a publication that incorporates all of the new information we have discovered about these important textiles.”

ABOUT OLD YORK

Old York is southern Maine's largest collection of historic properties, buildings and objects, and offers exhibits and programs throughout the year. For more information please visit <http://www.oldyork.org/>.

Old York is open to the public for its 2017 summer season, Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–5pm, and Sunday, 1pm–5pm.

ABOUT THE PROJECT FUNDERS

The Bulman Bed Hangings Project is supported by generous grants from The Coby Foundation, Ltd., New York, the Davis Family Foundation, Yarmouth, Maine, and the Windover Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts. Additional support is provided by Janet and F.G.E. Clarke, and Natalie Larson, Historic Textile Reproduction, Williamsburg, Virginia.

PRESS IMAGES

A selection of publicity images and captions are available upon request.

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