

FOLK COSTUME WORN BY ALPINE HERDSMEN OF SWISS TOGGENBURG
AND RESTORATION OF ORIGINAL EMBROIDERY MOTIFS

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PREFACE

In the past few decades industrialization and mass production have decreased the importance of handicrafts. The machine-made articles, welcomed by everybody because of the low prices, have brought about a change in the artistic tastes of people. The designs of ready-made goods, which are considered inferior, have taken the place of many traditional ornaments. This trend away from the use of traditional motifs has even affected people living in isolated rural areas. In Swiss Toggenburg, for instance, the women suddenly ceased to decorate the men's folk costume with the ancient embroidery patterns. Instead they adopted the tasteless new designs which had been popularized by manufacturers. Although the serious political situation of the two World Wars had a somewhat moderating influence upon the movement toward superficiality in design, the danger remains that century-old symbolic motifs of great beauty might be forgotten because many people consider them unfashionable.

This thesis is of general interest in so far as the influence of industrialization upon handicrafts and ornament has affected people all over the world. Since the author of this study is of Swiss nationality she wanted to choose subject matter for her thesis that would be of interest to

American as well as Swiss people. The restored embroidery designs will be particularly valuable to Swiss Toggenburgers who are interested in the preservation of their traditional costume designs. The information concerning the pagan symbolism of the motifs probably is of special interest to the American reader, because of the similarity between them and many of the familiar American Indian ornaments which are also symbolic of paganism and sun worship.

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Contemporary Toggenburg Vest



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Swiss people did beautiful embroidery work prior to the Machine-Age. Folk costumes for women as well as for men are among the many embroidery items of that era. The folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg is one of the many examples which give credit to the excellent taste and workmanship of the Swiss embroiderer who lived before the influence of industrialization was felt. During the development and improvement of the machines, however, the traditional embroidery designs gradually lost their popularity and were replaced by the new inferior motifs which were used on machine-made goods.

The change in embroidery designs was indicative of an over-all development toward superficiality in custom and tradition. The industrial revolution, as stated above, was one reason for this movement, but not the only one. The political security that Switzerland had enjoyed for many years is another reason why the people became careless about native customs. Folk costumes, for instance, were put aside and considered old-fashioned. If they were worn, it was merely to attract tourists. Credit must be given here to the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg who were about the only

Swiss still cherishing their folk costume. While the embroidery motifs of the Toggenburg folk costume were decreasing, other Swiss people had ceased to wear folk costumes at all.

The serious political situation of the First World War made Swiss people respect anew the customs and traditions of their forefathers. Slowly a counter-movement was brought forward. A few Swiss men and women formed an association to support native handwork and traditional design. A second association was founded to encourage research on authentic Swiss folk costumes so that they could be restored for contemporary use. This association publishes a periodical, and it was in one of these magazines that an article was written on the folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg.¹ The purpose of the article was to show the difference between the distinctive beauty of the traditional embroidery motifs and the poor designs that had taken their place after the industrial revolution. It is now the intention of the author of this thesis to revive some of the original embroidery ornaments for the vest of the folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg. The author hopes that this study may contribute to the adaptations of ancient designs for contemporary use, and that it will bring

¹ Albert Edelman, "Vom roten Bauernbrusttuch," Heimatleben, Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Trachtenvereinigung, (Nr. 2/3 1949), pp. 74-75.

to the attention of as large a group of readers as possible the beauty of the century-old embroidery motifs.

The investigations have been limited to the folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg. The main emphasis in the study has been placed upon the embroidery designs of the vest. Comparisons between this particular costume and other folk costumes of Switzerland would be interesting, but a study of this wider scope should be done in Switzerland itself where more authentic data would be available.

The bibliography is short in that literature on the subject is limited. Some information for the study has been attained through the author's parents who live in Switzerland and took up personal contact with people living in Toggenburg.

Literature on symbolic and traditional motifs of the Swiss Toggenburgers and on Swiss folk costumes in general is scarce because research in this field has been neglected. It is important to study available literature and documents on this subject matter to record historic costumes, embroidery designs and techniques.

CHAPTER II

LIFE IN TOGGENBURG

Toggenburg is a small section of the Swiss canton of St.Gallen.¹ The countryside is mountainous and unusually charming. Little farmhouses are scattered over the sloping hills. Alt-St.Johann, which is shown on Plate II, is a typical example of a Toggenburg village. Close to the church are the school-house, maybe two or three hotels, and a few stores. After school is over in the evening the boys and girls stop by the grocery to pick up a few necessities before they go back to their remote homesteads. During the summer the children ride to school on their bicycles. In the morning they enjoy driving down the steep slopes, but on their way home they have to push the bicycles up the winding roads. The children are familiar with each tree they pass and know well who owns the different properties. The older boys keep an eye on the growth of trees and grass and check which herdsman gets the most apples and whose grass has grown highest. During the tourist season the children might meet some foreigners, and they like to tell them the various names of the mountain peaks, how high each

¹ A Swiss canton corresponds with an American state.

Alt-St.Johann
A Typical Toggenburg Village

By courtesy of
HANS GROSS, PHOTOGRAPHER
St.Gallen, Switzerland



one is and how many hours it would take to climb one. Tourists enjoy spending their vacations in Toggenburg, where in summer they come for mountain climbing, and in winter for skiing. The visitor finds in Toggenburg the peace and quietness he misses so much in the noisy cities. No wonder the Alpine herdsmen prefer hard labour to a restless city life down in the valley. On the Alps the herdsmen and their families do not have the comforts which people enjoy in cities, but they would not want to trade places with the city dwellers. The Toggenburg herdsmen prefer to live close to their mountains where they have spent their childhood, and continue taking care of the land of their forefathers. The Alpine homesteads are dear to the owners because for many generations their ancestors have spent lifetimes of hard work on them. A marked difference can be noted between these modest Alpine herdsmen and the Swiss people living in the centers of trade and industry.

Switzerland is a comparatively densely populated country, but in the mountainous Toggenburg the inhabitants are few in number because of climatic conditions and the shortage of good productive land. In the twenty-five communities of Toggenburg there are only about 60,000 inhabitants. The lower communities use the water power of the rushing Thur River for industry. The Upper-Toggenburg, however, is inhabited almost exclusively by Alpine herdsmen. The average herdsman seldom owns more than three acres of

land. These few acres provide just about enough hay and grass for six cows. Each acre of land is laboriously tended, due to the fact that new agricultural machines cannot be used since the land is steep and hilly. The grass is cut by hand, and the hay is carried home on head and shoulders. All summer long the herdsmen are busy making hay to have enough fodder for the cows during the long winter months. If the summer months happen to be cold and rainy, however, the herdsman is forced to sell some of his cattle since he cannot afford to buy any fodder except what his land produces. He is dependent upon the weather and upon "luck in the stable", as the Toggenburger says. If one of the cows gets sick it is a great misfortune for the whole family. Hence the herdsman goes to church every Sunday with wife and children to pray for health and good weather so that they can all have enough to eat and warm clothes in winter.

The Toggenburgers look forward each year to the "Alpaufzug". This is a festival which takes place at the beginning of the summer. On this day all herdsmen take their cattle to a higher Alp to spend the summer there. At least that is the way it used to be. Nowadays most Toggenburgers only send the yearlings up to the "Summer-Alp" where another herdsman is in charge of them. This is the reason why it is sometimes impossible to buy milk, butter and cheese on a "Summer-Alp". The tourists are puzzled by

this situation, as they usually do not understand why dairy products cannot be purchased when they see cattle everywhere and while they are hearing the so-called "cowbells" ring. The herdsmen proudly wear their colorful folk costumes for the "Alpaufzug", in fact the finest ones they have are used for this occasion. And while they are leading the cattle in long rows up the steep mountain paths one can hear the echo of their yodelling all day long.

The farm wife is in charge of the neat little garden which is in front of every house. She plants a few rows of potatoes and some green vegetables for the family. Of course, whenever possible the women and children help with other outdoor work. Many boys and girls living in Toggenburg do not like school vacation since that means only extra work for them.

The houses in Toggenburg are provided with electric lights, but there is no running water in the kitchen. Each morning the water has to be brought in from the outside fountain. Usually close to the kitchen sink there is a wooden bench and on it are the copper kettles filled with water for cooking and washing. Generally meals are prepared on wood stoves and all the laundry has to be washed by hand. The bedrooms on the upper floors cannot be heated. Instead, each family member has a warm cherrystone bag to take to bed. The houses lack nearly all comfort or convenience, however, there is a charming quaintness about them. When

passing one of these homesteads, with the dark weathered shingles, the large red tile roofs, and the three rows of little windows, one feels like stopping to have a friendly talk with the family.

The Toggenburg residents spend their leisure time differently than the Swiss people who live in the cities. There are no theaters nearby showing sensational movies. These people probably have never seen an opera or a stage play. After the daily work is done, the family sits together in front of the house, watching the sun go down behind the Alps. Before they lock the stable they bring some salt to the goats and spend a few minutes talking to the animals. Maybe they sing, shaking cowbells to the melody. Plate III shows two Alpine herdsmen with their cowbells. They carry them hung on a wooden stick that they have put on their shoulders so that the weight of the heavy bells rests upon their whole bodies. The Toggenburgers also like to blow the Alphorn. This famous instrument is simply a hollowed tree trunk. They are sometimes as long as twelve to fifteen feet. Once in a while there is a dance on Saturday night for the young folks. On Sunday afternoon the community might gather around the schoolyard where the village band plays a few marches. These simple people enjoy little pleasures, but they are content and happy.

Now and then one can find a Toggenburg family making some extra money with the "home industry". The term,

Two Alpine Herdsmen Shaking Cowbells

By courtesy of
PHOTO SCHILDKNECHT



"home industry", refers to any craftwork that Alpine Swiss men and women do, whether it is woodwork, metalwork, weaving, embroidering or sewing. During the cold winter months when there is no outdoor work for the Toggenburg women, they are glad to spend their time weaving, embroidering, or sewing. It is somewhat tragic that since machines have made cheap mass-production possible the "home industry" has disappeared almost completely. Although industrialization has nearly destroyed this important income of the Toggenburg families, the vest shown in Plate I was made by a Toggenburg woman who still is engaged in "home industry."

By the turn of the last century almost all Swiss people ceased to wear folk costumes, but the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg have continued to wear their traditional costume. Living their own lives on the Alps, they do not care much about other people's fashion trends. The only change that indicated the general superficiality of the time was the substitution of new embroidery designs for the traditional motifs used as decoration of the costume.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOLK COSTUME WORN BY ALPINE HERDSMEN OF SWISS TOGGENBURG

Folk costumes are continuously influenced by the general fashion trends, develop slowly, and keep on changing from generation to generation. Julie Heierli, a Swiss author who made extensive studies of Swiss costumes, states that characteristic clothing worn by the farmer can always be traced back to world fashions of the past. A certain fashion that is in high vogue among the nobility can be found about fifty years later among the artisans and tradesmen of the cities, whence it is slowly passed on to rural people. The farmers change the style according to their own tastes and the costume remains in vogue from one to two hundred years.¹ The author would like to add that this statement is a somewhat vague generalization that Julie Heierli probably based upon the majority of historical European cases she studied. In regard to contemporary fashion of the farmers and rural people, Julie Heierli's assumption is no longer true because of the increased intercommunication. However, while studying the development of

¹ Julie Heierli, Die Volkstrachten der Ostschweiz, p. 9.

the folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Swiss Toggenburg it is valuable to keep in mind how conservative the European farmers were in their fashions.

At the beginning of the 16th century the Spanish Empire reached its zenith. As a result, we find the Spanish spirit and fashion in all European countries.² It was a very elaborate fashion. People spent a lot of money for expensive fabrics, laces and jewelry. The Swiss government, wanting to lead the light-hearted people back to a more serious and modest life, required that everyone wear dark costumes without jewelry to church and for mourning. Since church services were attended frequently and mourning costumes had to be worn not only in case of death within the immediate family but for the whole kinship as well, there was little opportunity left for dressing in fashionable costume.³

In the 17th century, France began to rule the fashion world. French influence caused some change in the clothing tradition of the Swiss people, but the new fashion was no less luxurious than the Spanish fashion of the preceding century. Expensive imported fabrics, brocades, damasks, fine linen, laces and furs were popular. The Swiss ruling

² Ibid., p. 10.

³ Ibid.

class wanted to prevent the ordinary citizen from dressing luxuriously, but the nobility itself wanted to enjoy all the fashion frivolities. The rulers divided the people into four groups and made specific clothing laws for each one of the four different classes, yet somehow the people managed to get around the laws. Portraits and paintings of the 17th century prove that the rules were not followed too closely; nevertheless, the clothing laws were continually renewed for about 150 years although in a progressively more liberal form.⁴

At the end of the 18th century most farmers living in the eastern part of Switzerland had not yet developed a typical fashion of their own and simply wore old-fashioned city clothes. The Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg, however, had already evolved their own style of dress.⁵

Mr. Ebel, a German doctor, traveled in 1789 across Switzerland. After his journey he wrote a detailed description of the costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen in Toggenburg. He must have been amazed by their extraordinary way of dressing. He writes:

It is worth while to describe this peculiar costume in detail. The men wear a short jacket, a vest, and long pants which go all the way down to the shoes. The pants are held up by broad

⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

suspenders. Without the latter the herdsmen would look like real 'without-pants-men' because the pants are worn so low that the bottom of the shirt-back nearly always shows. Some people say that they do so out of coquetry. This cannot be true, as I have seen old and serious men dress that way. Today when I went for a walk I noticed that the housewives and girls peeped through the windows and made fun of me. When I asked a woman for the reason she answered: 'You are too ridiculous.' She thought it very strange that I had my pants buttoned above the hips. I, on the other hand, found it peculiar that the pants of these men barely reached up to the hipbone. Custom and tradition have an unbelievable influence on our way of thinking.

Vest and jacket are made of a heavy cloth and differ in color from each other. The designs of vests and jackets vary somewhat but all of them have white metal buttons which are a special favorite of these men. The vest is always worn open so that the white shirt contrasts with the scarlet color of the vest. The long pants are made of good stuff. They call this fabric ticking. The soft yellow ticking looks from a distance like leather. The whole outfit is light and comfortable to wear and at the same time very dressy. The Alpine herdsmen do not like to be buttoned up in tight clothing. A lot of them go around without jacket. They simply wear the vest and have the shirt sleeves rolled up to show off their strong arms. Never in my life have I seen such muscular arms.

The Toggenburgers want their shirts to be snow-white. Some of the younger herdsmen are very particular about their yellow pants. They brush them up with the yolk of the egg to make the color always look new, and put on embroidered suspenders. This is their most beautiful outfit.

Long pants, a 'Futter-shirt' made of yellow ticking or heavy linen, and a round leather cap are worn on weekdays. The 'Futter-shirt' is a jacket, without buttons, made like an ordinary shirt with a neck opening in front. It can be put on like a shirt. All the boys I have seen today were dressed in this manner. Even adults go out that way if they do not have the money

for the Sunday outfit. During summer months people go barefooted and wear shoes and stockings only for mountain climbing.

The whole Sunday outfit is not worth even twenty florins, whereas one of the beautiful big cowbells with the leather straps costs more than one-hundred and thirty florins.⁶

Dr. Ebel's description is in agreement with oil paintings, contemporary to his time, which show Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg. Julie Heierli, however, questions the statement about the egg treatment of the pants made of ticking. She gives the following clarification: during the 19th century tight yellow leather knee pants became popular among the Alpine herdsmen. They were worn only for special events. The yolk of the egg was used to freshen the color of the leather. It is probable that the first leather knee pants had been worn prior to Dr. Ebel's writing, and it is possible that he merely did not realize the difference between the leather and the pants made of ticking.⁷

The pants were worn low on the hips, however, this is not only a local characteristic, but can be found in other localities as well. The expression "a pair of pants" is reminiscent of the time when trousers were so low on the hips that they really consisted of two separate parts which

⁶ Ibid., pp. 33-35.

⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

were merely held together by a belt. The extremely long legs of the pants were typical of the Toggenburg costume.⁸

The long suspenders of the low-slung pants naturally kept on sliding over the shoulders; so in order to hold them in place, a strap was added across the chest. This strap is still used on the contemporary costume even though the suspenders are now shorter in length, as can be seen on Plate IV. Originally the chest straps were made of a scarlet cloth and embroidered with fine straw, various colored woolen yarns or metal thread. Nowadays these straps are made of leather and embellished with metalwork.⁹

The herdsmen are well known for their cleanliness. Dr. Ebel refers to it by mentioning the importance of the snow-white shirt. Usually the shirt was left open in front, but sometimes it was closed with a double knot or a heart-shaped silver buckle. The long shirt sleeves were always and still are worn rolled back. The muscular arms about which Dr. Ebel writes are the pride of the herdsmen and indicate how hard the Toggenburgers have to work.¹⁰

The complete costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of the late 18th century consisted of shirt, linen pants, maybe an overshirt or a vest, a leather cap or a straw hat, the

⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

Farewell from the "Summer-Alp"

By courtesy of
PHOTO GABERELL



tobacco pipe and the tobacco pouch. Julie Heierli emphasizes that there was no coat. The fact that the Toggenburg herdsmen never used heavy coats, not even in winter, is the reason that no vests of the Toggenburg costume have a back made simply of lining material. The whole Toggenburg vest, including the back, is made of the heavy vest fabric.¹¹

Vests for men are ordinarily meant to be worn under a coat so that only the front of the vest can be seen, and in that case a lining material for the back of the vest is sufficient.

In 1819 the Zurcher artist Ludwig Vogel still painted the herdsmen in the pants of the preceding century. In one of his pictures he shows a Toggenburger with a handkerchief around his hips to hold the shirt together so that it would not slip out of the low pants. Today the handkerchief is merely used for a decorative purpose as it is worn around the waist since the pants are no longer low on the hips. The herdsman of Plate IV wears one of these decorative handkerchiefs, which are printed in rich colors with herdsmen, cows, and verses, and are produced extensively to sell to tourists as souvenirs.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹² Ibid.

A historical document of the year 1835 mentions the costume of the Alpine herdsmen. According to this writing the outfit for weekdays consisted of pants made out of ticking, a 'Futter-shirt', and a little round leather cap. For Sunday clothes the costume included yellow leather pants with overlapping white stockings, a snow-white shirt, a red vest, suspenders with a brass name, and a colored neckscarf held together in front by a ring. A jacket is mentioned for cold winter days.¹³

Yellow leather knee pants, as stated in this document, were only worn on Sundays because they were tight and stiff and hence uncomfortable to wear. Nowadays these peculiar leather knee pants are worn once in a while as a curiosity on some special occasion. For the contemporary Sunday costumes knee pants of the same design are still in use but the leather has been replaced almost entirely by yellow cloth¹⁴, as is illustrated on Plates III and IV.

An authentic painting of 1841 shows an Alpine herdsman in his Sunday outfit. His white shirt now has a collar with a neckscarf. The ends of the scarf are held together in front by a pin. Since the pants come all the way up to the waist, the vest is made shorter so that the printed handkerchief which is used as a belt can be seen. The

¹³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid.

scarlet color of the vest was changed to a bright red, the same bright red that is still used for the vests of today. The jewelry of the herdsman consists of an earring, a modest watch chain that hangs down on his right leg, a neckpin and shoe buckles made of silver.¹⁵

The essential items of the Toggenburg folk costume of the 19th century were the white shirt, the yellow knee pants, and the elaborately embroidered red vest. It is interesting to note that the contemporary folk costume, which is described in detail in Chapter IV, basically remains the same.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

CHAPTER IV

COMPLETE LIST OF THE ITEMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY FOLK COSTUME

The contemporary folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Swiss Toggenburg includes vest, pants, shirt, jacket, headdress, shoes, stockings and accessories. Each one of these items is discussed in the following pages in the sequence listed above.

Until the end of the 18th century the vest was made of a scarlet cloth, then later on the color was changed to a bright red. The scarlet vest did not have a collar. Since the vest was always worn open, the two upper front corners were rolled back and later became the revers. Because the herdsmen never used coats, not even in winter, there are no vests with a back simply made of lining material, as it is so often done on vests for men. During the 19th century a small mandarin style collar was added to the neckline. The small collar, the revers, the pockets, and the edge all the way around the vest are embellished with rich silk embroidery. Two rows of buttons are sewn on in front, one on either side of the vest. Originally the silver buttons were of ball shape. Nowadays they are more often flat,

square in shape, and chased.¹ Buttons and buttonholes serve merely a decorative purpose. That the vest is never worn closed is illustrated on Plates III, IV and V. Plate I shows a vest that the author ordered from Toggenburg to study material, embroidery design and workmanship.

The style of the former leather knee pants, which have no fly-opening, is preserved in the contemporary Sunday costume. Yellow cloth now replaces the leather. Examples of these yellow knee pants are shown on Plates III and IV. For working days long pants reaching down to the ankles are worn. They are made of brown half-linen.²

The Sunday shirt is usually worn without a tie and sometimes even without the detachable collar since the front of it is embellished with elaborate hand-embroidery representing the "Alpaufzug". How elaborate the shirt embroidery is can well be seen on Plates VI and VII. It takes many hours of intricate work to embroider an "Alpaufzug" and therefore only the best of material is used for this decoration. Once a shirt is worn out, the embroidery is carefully ripped off and then applied to a new one. For special events a little colored silk scarf is used instead of a tie. Its ends are held together by a brass pin

¹ Ibid., p. 39.

² Ibid.

Toggenburg Boys

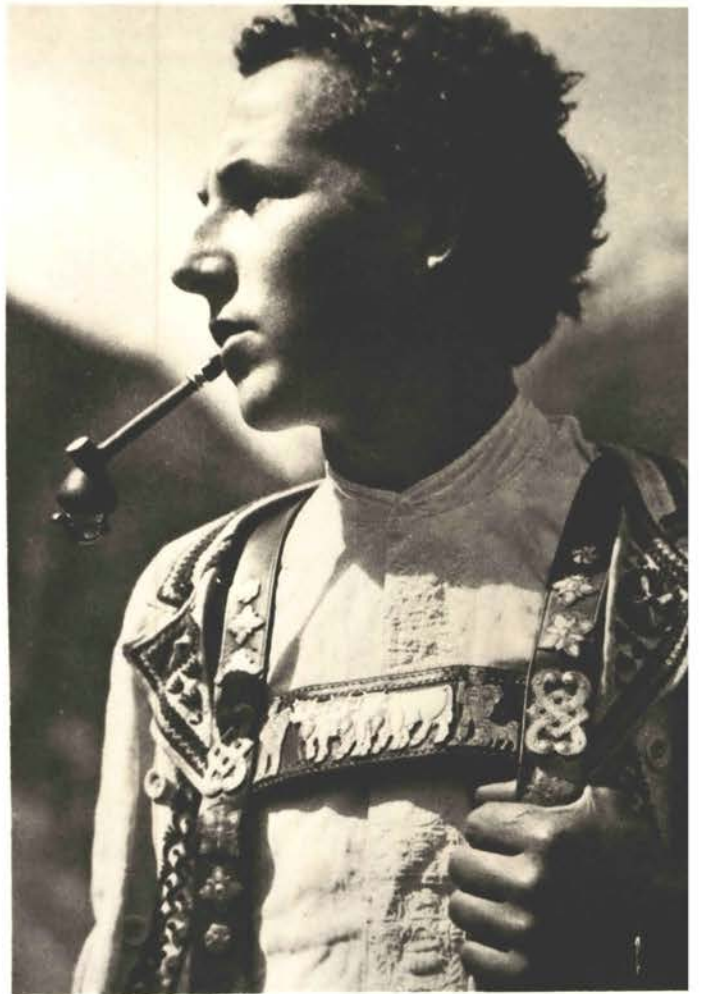
By courtesy of
the association
"SCHWEIZERISCHE TRACHTENVEREINIGUNG"



Plate VI
Alpine Herdsmen in Sunday Shirt

Plate VII
Shirt Embroidery Representing
the "Alp-Aufzug"
(See text Chapters II and IV)

By courtesy of
the association
"SCHWEIZERISCHES HEIMATWERK"



decorated with cows, dogs, farmhouses, trees and herdsmen. Long sleeves are always worn rolled up, not to show off the muscular arms but for comfort.³

A white jacket is worn on cooler days. It is decorated with embroidery in rich colors. Although the jacket has buttons and buttonholes on the front opening, it is never worn closed but always left open, as is the vest.⁴ The jacket shown on Plate V has no collar whereas the Alpine herdsmen of Plate VI wears a jacket with a lay-down collar.

In the past little round leather caps or stocking caps were worn to work. They are no longer popular. To the contemporary Sunday costume belongs a black felt hat. Its edge is less broad and the hat itself less high than originally. The hat is adorned with artificial flowers, a silver filigree buckle and colored ribbons.⁵

The overall shape of the hat can be compared with the felt hats generally worn by modern men, although it is somewhat more squat in proportion, as is illustrated by Plates III and IV. The felt is of heavy quality. The author considers the artificial flowers, which are sometimes used as a means of decoration, as bad taste and prefers the hats adorned with natural Alpine flowers.

³ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

Shoes and stockings are only worn for long walks or on Sundays. During the week the herdsmen for the most part go barefooted.⁶ Examples of shoes and stockings are shown in Plate VIII. The heavy low-cut shoes seldom can be seen without silver buckles. The stockings are knitted of white cotton yarn in pretty patterns. The stockings overlap the yellow pants under the knees where they are held in place by a leather band embellished with silver buckles.⁷

The accessories worn by the Alpine herdsmen include the following described items. The tobacco pipe is decorated with fine silver-work, that can be seen on Plate VI. A leather tobacco pouch which sometimes has a bottom made of fine brass-work is used with the pipe. Another favorite item is the earring with the little cheese-spoon hanging from it, which is illustrated on Plates III and IV. The dangling cheese-spoon is so long that it almost reaches its wearer's shoulder. The cheese-spoon, which is made of gold, is the emblem of the Alpine herdsmen. Only one earring is worn, on the left ear, and the right ear is left free. On weekdays a less elaborate flat metal plate takes the place of the dangling earring. Neckpin and suspenders are decorated with motifs such as cows, dogs, trees, and farmhouses.

⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷ Ibid.

Shoes with Buckles
and
Handknitted Stockings

By courtesy of
the association
"SCHWEIZERISCHES HEIMATWERK"



The herdsmen shown in Plates III and IV wear neckpins, and a pair of elaborately embellished suspenders can be found on Plate VI. The pocket watch with its beautiful silver chain is also an important accessory. The chain is supposed to be hung around the neck, but it is often simply put into the pocket. The Alpine herdsmen like to wear a collection of coins dangling from their chain. This used to be done in earlier days by the noblemen. Some chains have as many as thirty coins attached to them. They weigh up to five pounds and are of considerable value with all the new and old coins, emblems, and watch keys.⁸ The accessory which is the best known item of the Toggenburg costume among foreigners and Swiss people other than Toggenburgers is probably the handkerchief which the herdsmen wear around the waist. These handkerchiefs are printed in rich colors with herdsmen, cows, and verses, and are often sold to tourists as souvenirs.

The contemporary folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Swiss Toggenburg, consisting of vest, pants, shirt, jacket, headdress, shoes, stockings and accessories, remained in its basic form the costume of the 19th century. However, the embroidery motifs of the vest underwent a change that is significant.

⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

CHAPTER V

TRADITIONAL AND NEW EMBROIDERY MOTIFS OF THE VEST

The red vest is the most elaborate item of the folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Toggenburg, and special attention was always given to the decoration of the vest. The revers, the collar, the pockets, and the edge all the way around the vest, are embellished with rich silk embroidery. The sun-wheel, the whirl-flower, and the spiral, which are shown on Plate IX, are the traditional embroidery motifs. Some other motifs that had been popular until the turn of the last century are stylized flowers, such as the tulip of Plate IX, leaves, branches, and the tree of life.¹

The sun-wheel symbolizes the origin of all life, and is supposed to bring happiness. Many different variations of the sun-wheel can be found on the embroidered vests. The circle, which represents the sun-wheel, may be subdivided into four, six, eight, or twelve parts. Some sun-wheels are shown with a Christian cross in the center. The subdivision into four parts represents the four seasons of the

¹ Albert Edelmann, Vom roten Bauernbrusttuch, p. 3.

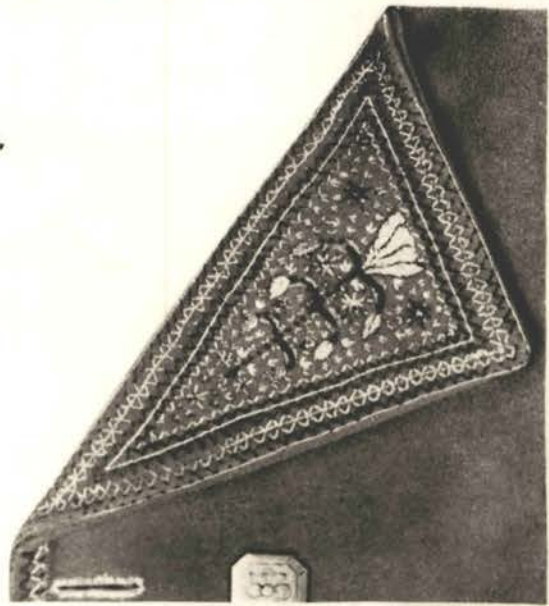
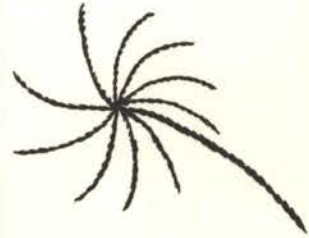
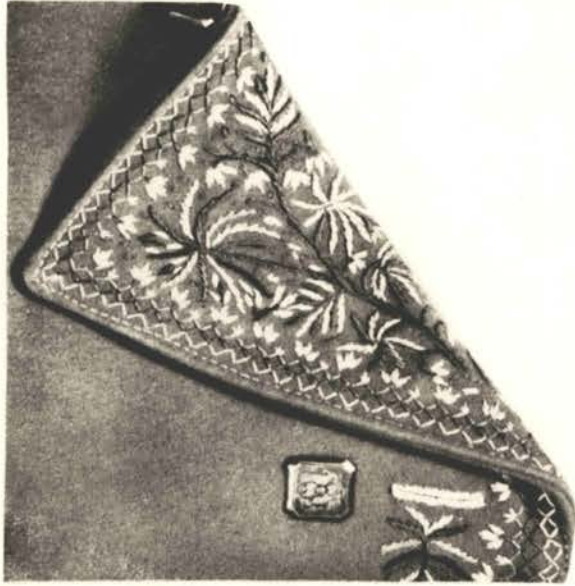
Traditional Vest Embroideries

Top: Sun-Wheel with Spiral

Middle: Whirl-Flower

Bottom: Tulip

By courtesy of
ALBERT EDELMANN



year. If the sun-wheel consists of twelve parts it refers to the twelve months. The sun-wheel with eight subdivisions is a symbol of an ancient pagan dance which was devoted to the sun. The Toggenburg boys used to do this dance for a long time without knowing its origin and its symbolic meaning. Eight boys danced in a circle, four of them having the red vest on, while the other four wore only the snow-white shirt. It is also interesting to note that in some European areas the grass is still cut in circles reminiscent of ancient pagan custom. By cutting in circular movements sun-wheel motifs are created, and these circles are completed with either four or eight grass cuts. Still another contemporary tradition exists that dates back to the early pagan symbolism of the sun-wheel. In one particular part of Switzerland springtime is announced each year by the swinging of burning wooden plates. In preceding centuries the "sun-wheel swinging" was popular in many areas, including Toggenburg.²

In Swiss excavations of early dwellings a dresspin was discovered that is decorated with the sun-wheel motif. The pin is believed to be more than three thousand years old. The preceding date indicates that the sun-wheel has been an important motif for many centuries.³

² Ibid., p. 3.

³ Ibid.

The whirl-flower and the spiral are two other ancient motifs which are symbolic of the sun. The whirl-flower has been found on several eighth century marble plates of a Swiss cathedral.⁴ The sun-wheel, whirl-flower, and spiral have the circle in common. Their original symbolism has been forgotten for many generations. Nevertheless, they have been continuously used as means of decoration because of their simple beauty.⁵

During the last few decades these ancient motifs suddenly ceased to be popular, and new motifs took their place. The roots of this change in the decorative forms can be found in the last century when industrialization and mass production started to spread. The manufacturers which sought to sell their products in the cities as well as in rural areas easily won the hearts of the people with their low priced articles. The old motifs, however, were not suitable for mass production, and the manufacturers sought to develop designs that were entirely new for the consumers. New decorative motifs had to be found, and some Alpine Swiss flowers seemed to be exactly what the manufacturers desired. True copies of the flowers could soon be seen on all kinds of Swiss souvenirs. The new designs were printed on scarves and handkerchiefs, painted on wooden spoons and boxes, or

⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

embossed in leather belts and purses. The "Edelweiss" became the most popular of all the floral motifs. The word "Edelweiss" means "pure white", and is the name of a flower that grows upon high rocks in the Swiss Alps where no other vegetation is possible. The plant is shown on Plate X. Every year some ambitious tourists who try to climb the rocks and pick the "Edelweiss" slide during their adventure and fall to their deaths. People are impressed by these accidents. When the "Edelweiss" started to appear on manufactured goods they could be sold easily, and it did not matter how tasteless the beautiful flower looked on the souvenir. Few people realized that although the Alpine flowers are beautiful out in nature they appear crude when used as a decorative motif in a naturalistic manner. Many foreigners and even some Swiss people began to think of the "Edelweiss" as an emblem of Swiss patriotism or as the symbol of Toggenburg. Craftsmen, too, changed their decorative motifs according to the new fashion to please their customers. The Toggenburg wives lightheartedly put the traditional embroidery designs aside to place whole rows of clumsy "Edelweiss" on the vests of the men's costumes. Finally, some twenty-five years ago, a few Swiss men and women got together to counteract this general development. They formed an association to support true handwork and revive traditional design. To bring back the authentic embroidery motifs for the vest of the Toggenburg folk

"Edelweiss"

By courtesy of
PHOTO GABERELL



costume is only one of the many goals for which they are striving. The contemporary political situation seems to support them in their work; the instability in world affairs makes Swiss people appreciate folklore and makes them turn back to the traditions of their forefathers. On the other hand, there is the ever increasing industrialization which definitely points away from tradition. Nevertheless, when the author received the vest which was ordered for the study from Toggenburg, she was happy to see that the main embroidery motif of the revers is the sun-wheel. (The ordered vest is shown on Plate I). The "Edelweiss", however, is still in high vogue. The illustration of Plate IV, for instance, is taken from a recent publication and shows a vest embroidered with the "Edelweiss." In fact, among the many recently published post cards and calendars that the author collected and studied she could not find a single representation of a vest ornamented with one of the traditional embroidery designs.

CHAPTER VI

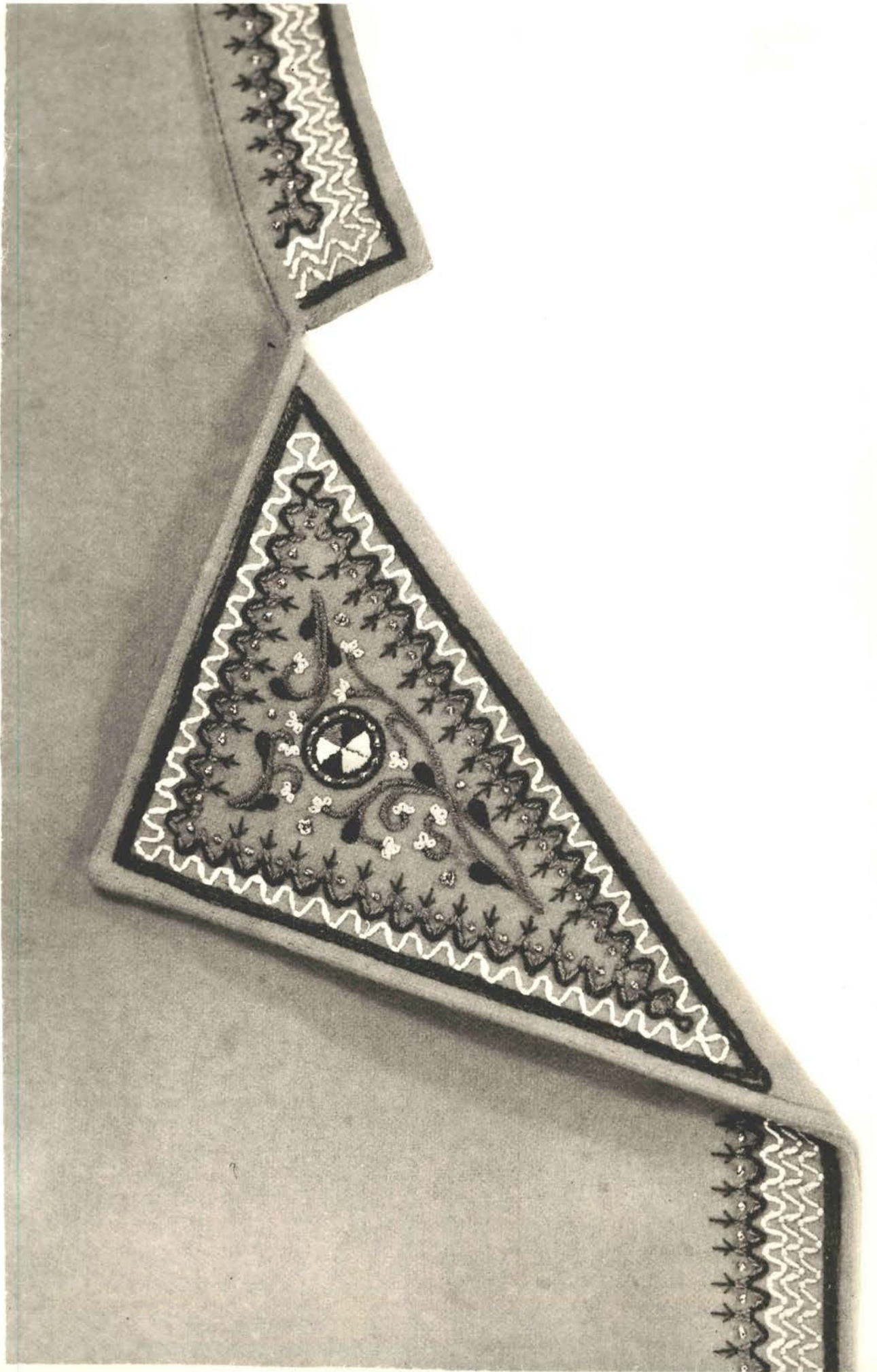
THREE RESTORED EMBROIDERY DESIGNS

The three embroidery patterns restored by the author are shown on Plates XI, XII, and XIII. The motifs are based upon traditional embroidery designs of Toggenburg vests. For the central ornaments of the revers the sun-wheel, as on Plate XI, the whirl-flower, as on Plate XII, and the tulip, as on Plate XIII, have been chosen. The designs for the borders are variations of zigzag lines. By studying pictures of Toggenburg vests of the last century the author found the borders invariably composed of zigzags in one form or another and followed therefore the same principle.

The material that the author has used for her embroideries was ordered from Toggenburg. The fabric of the vest is a red wool broadcloth that is slightly napped both on the right and the wrong side. The thread used for the embroidery is a buttonhole twist. The rich colors of the twist add considerably to the effectiveness of the decoration. The main colors are two different tones of green, two different tones of yellow, dark red and white. Pink, brown, and red, have been used for a few details. This color combination corresponds with vest embroideries of the last century except for the blue hues which, according to a

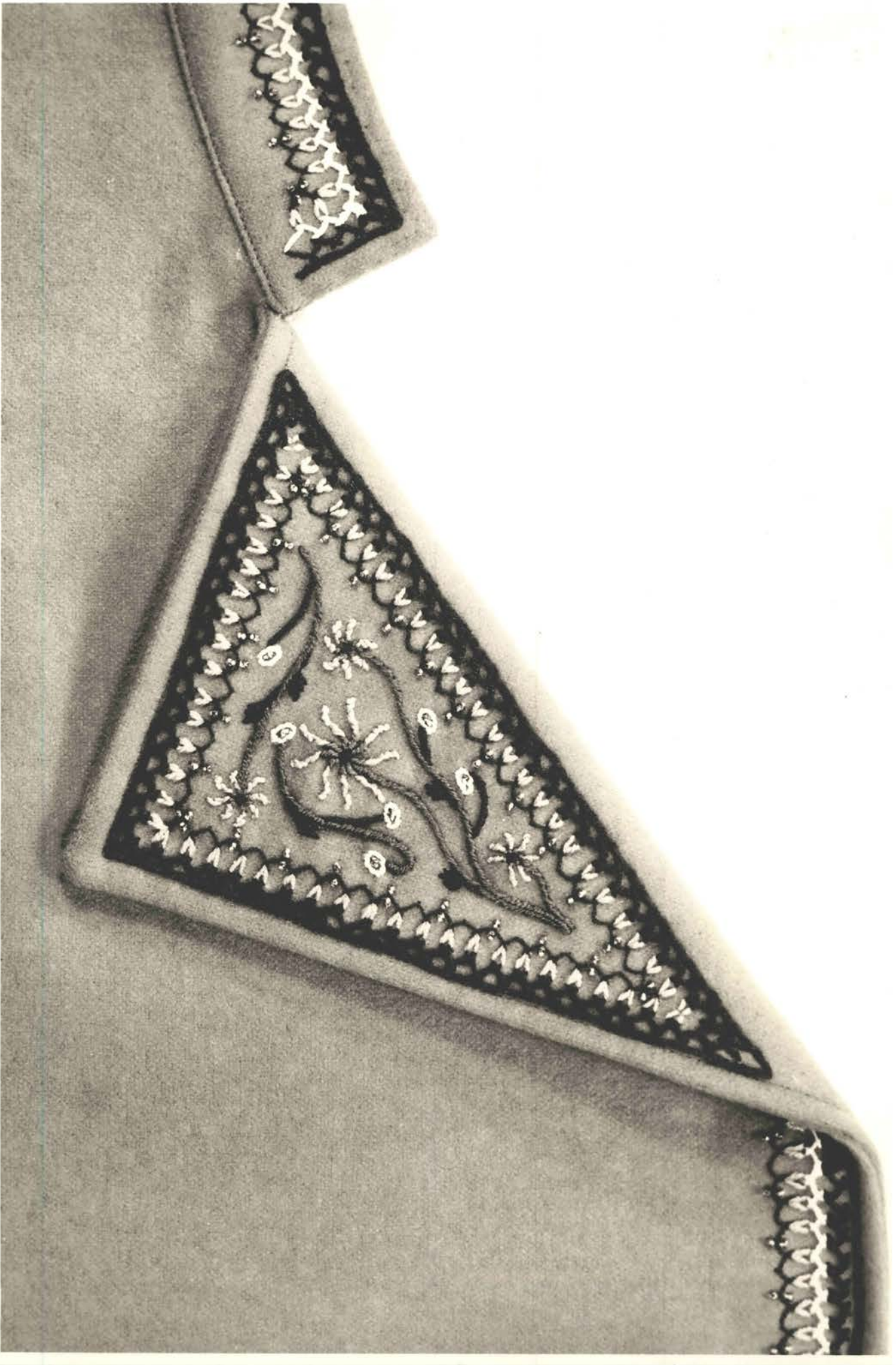
Restored Embroidery Design: Sun-Wheel

By the author



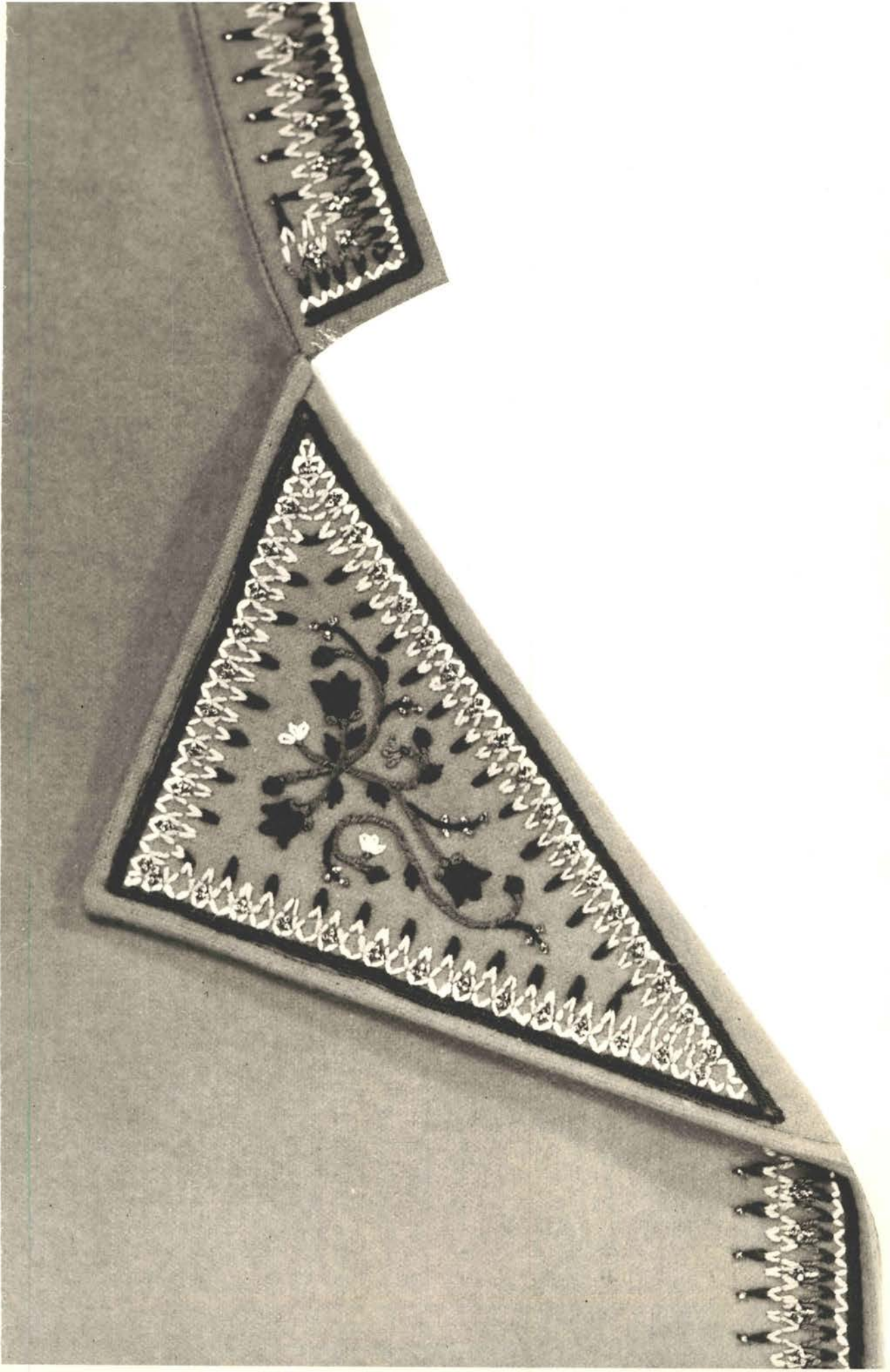
Restored Embroidery Design: Whirl-Flower

By the author



Restored Embroidery Design: Tulip

By the author



statement of Albert Edelman, used to be popular in the past.* The little steel beads blend in beautifully with the rich colors and give the embroidery an even more elaborate quality, but the majority of pictures which the author studied show vest ornamentations without beads. The author used the beads for all of her three embroidery designs, however, the steel beads can well be left off on the three patterns if a somewhat less elaborate effect is preferred.

The steps taken in making the vest embroideries were: (1) designing the ornamentation, (2) tracing the design on organdy, (3) basting the organdy to the material of the vest, (4) embroidering, (5) ripping the organdy off, thread by thread, and (6) applying the steel beads.

The ornamentations were designed on paper patterns in actual shape and size of revers, collar, and front section of the vest. Special attention had to be paid to the corner treatments of the triangular revers. Since each one of the three corners constituting the triangular revers of the vest consists of a different angle than its two partner corners, all three of them had to be treated individually. In order

* Albert Edelman, Vom roten Bauernbrusttuch, p. 6: "The colors (of historic vest embroideries) appear today as subtle hues because they are faded. When ripping off the lining material of the vests one discovers on the protected backside of the embroideries brilliantly colored silk thread. White, and bright yellows and greens, navy and sky-blues were the main colors used for these historic vest embroideries."⁶⁹

to obtain the three corner treatments of the revers relatively alike, the border ornamentation was drawn on a straight strip of paper which was then folded in the various angles of the three corners.

To transmit the designs from the paper to the organdy, the loosely woven fabric was placed on top of the paper designs. Through the porous texture of organdy even the most intricate lines of the paper patterns are visible, and hence the designed ornamentations can easily be traced to the organdy.

The organdy has to be basted to the vest material so that the wrong side of the organdy faces the right side of the wool broadcloth, and because the organdy is easily pulled out of shape during embroidering the basting stitches have to be short.

On Plates XIV, XV, and XVI, the embroidery stitches for each one of the three restored designs are listed and explained in illustrations. For the restored sun-wheel design the following embroidery stitches have been used: Satin-Stitch, Outline-Stitch, Lazy-Daisy-Stitch, "Wave-Stitch", "Variation of Zigzag-Stitch", and "Crowfoot-Stitch". The stitches used for the restored whirl-flower design are: Outline-Stitch, Satin-Stitch, Catch-Stitch, "Mesh-Stitch", and "Loop-Stitch", and the decorative stitches of the restored tulip design are: Satin-Stitch, Outline-Stitch, Lazy-Daisy-Stitch, "Zigzag-Stitch", and a combination of

Stitches Used for the Restored Sun-Wheel Design

a) Satin-Stitch, used for sun-wheel and leaves.



b) Outline-Stitch, used for the stems of the flowers and to outline sun-wheel, leaves and border.



c) Lazy-Daisy-Stitch, used for the little flowers.



d) "Wave-Stitch", used for border.



e) "Variation of Zigzag-Stitch", used for border.



f) "Crowfoot-Stitch", used for border.

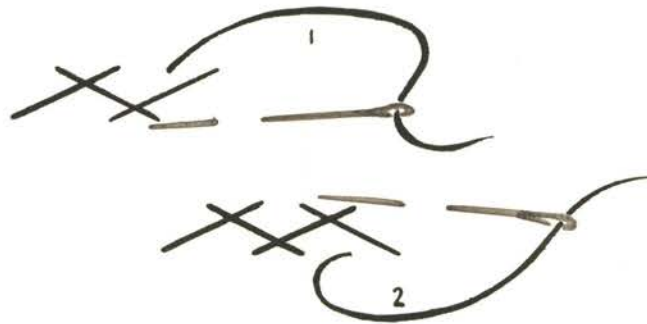


Stitches Used for the Restored Whirl-Flower Design

a) Outline-Stitch, used for the whirl-flowers, for the little circular flowers, for the stems of the flowers, and to outline the border; for illustration see Plate XIV, stitch b).

b) Satin-Stitch, used for the leaves; for illustration see Plate XIV, stitch a).

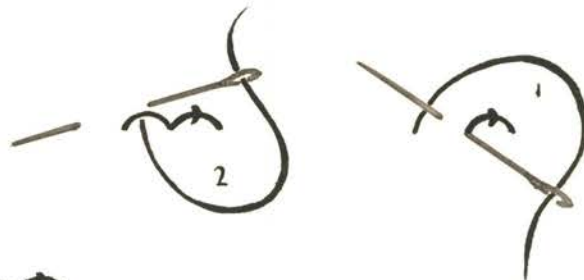
c) Catch-Stitch, used for border.



d) "Mesh-Stitch", used for border.



e) "Loop-Stitch", used for border.



Stitches Used for the Restored Tulip Design

a) Satin-Stitch, used for tulips, leaves and buds; for illustration see Plate XIV, stitch a).

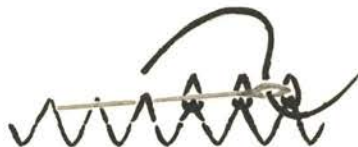
b) Outline-Stitch, used for the stems of the flowers and to outline tulips, buds and border; for illustration see Plate XIV, stitch b).

c) Lazy-Daisy-Stitch, used for the little flowers and for the calyx of the tulips; for illustration see Plate XIV, stitch c).

d) "Zigzag-Stitch", used for border.



e) Combination of "Variation of Zigzag-Stitch" and "Mesh-Stitch", used for border; for illustration of "Variation of Zigzag-Stitch" see Plate XIV, stitch e); for illustration of "Mesh-Stitch" see Plate XV, stitch d), but instead of picking up the fabric the embroidery thread is picked up as shown below.



the "Variation of Zigzag-Stitch" and the "Mesh-Stitch". The quotation marks indicate terms that are not authentic names of embroidery stitches. Investigations revealed that some of the most common embroidery stitches are not listed in the needlework books. On the other hand, when asking women who do embroidery work for the names of certain decorative stitches, one will find that one and the same stitch is often referred to by several different names. Because of this difficulty in the terminology of embroidery stitches some of the names used in this thesis to refer to embroidery stitches are not authentic but simply the author's choice. The work sketches of the Plates XIV, XV, and XVI, do not show the actual size of the various stitches so that the illustrations be clearer.

After embroidering the organdy has to be separated from the wool broadcloth. Each warp and each weft thread of the organdy is pulled out individually, thus leaving the embroidery on the face of the red broadcloth. Care has to be taken that the embroidery twist is not pulled into loops during this process.

When applying the steel beads to the fabric a thin sewing thread may be employed. This makes the use of a finer embroidery needle possible which can be easily pushed through the little holes of the beads. Since the thread used to apply the beads to the fabric is not well visible, the change in thread does not affect the quality of the

embroidery design, however, a strong enough thread should be chosen which does not allow the beads to be pulled off too readily.

CHAPTER VII

IN CONCLUSION

The vest of the folk costume worn by the Alpine herdsmen of Swiss Toggenburg is decorated with rich silk embroidery. Before the machine-age the embroidery motifs used for the Toggenburg vest were traditional ornaments. Some of these ornamental forms can be traced back to ancient times and are reminiscent of early pagan symbolism. People living in Toggenburg during the last century no longer knew of the symbolic meaning of these designs, but the motifs continued to be used because of their distinct beauty. After the industrial revolution, however, the traditional ornaments lost their popularity. They were suddenly considered old-fashioned since ready-made articles with new designs were produced in great quantities. Among the new designs one finds true copies of Alpine Swiss flowers. These flowers are so beautiful and rare out in nature and so dear to the Swiss people that even the most tasteless imitations of them were welcomed. Few people realized that these naturalistic floral designs lacked beauty. Even the few craftsmen who went on doing handwork, in spite of the cheap mass production, were forced to adopt the new inferior designs because they were their customers' favorite

ornaments. The women in Toggenburg, too, ceased to use their traditional designs and, to keep up with the times, they placed whole rows of embroidered "Edelweiss" on the vests of the men's folk costume.

The trend away from traditional designs reached a climax before the First World War. The serious political situation that followed had a somewhat moderating influence upon the movement. Handwork began to be encouraged, and research was begun on ancient and traditional motifs so that they could be restored for contemporary use. However, while some Swiss people are trying to revive handwork and original design, industrialization with its superficiality in ornamentation is increasing. The danger remains that traditional designs might be lost and forgotten. It is important to record motifs of historic embroideries before they deteriorate, and to remind the few people who are in possession of these valuable historic documents not to discard them but to preserve the embroidery items as a family treasure or to give them to a museum.

It would be interesting to compare the Toggenburg motifs which are reminiscent of Swiss pagan symbolism with the symbolic ornaments of pagan tribes such as the North and South American Indians, and with the motifs of other cultures where paganism was practiced in past eras. It is very probable that one could find surprising similarities in the symbolic ornamental forms in the remotest areas.

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BIOGRAPHY

Claire Sturzenegger was born at Zurich, Switzerland, May 20, 1928. After completing her grade school and high school training in Zurich she enrolled in the "Arbeitslehrerinnenkurs des Kantons Zurich" where she received the teacher certificate for handicrafts in April 1949. The same spring she left Switzerland to come to the United States. She worked one and a half years as governess in Boston and Chicago. A graduate fellowship made it possible for her to enter the School of Home Economics of Oklahoma A. and M. College.

TYPIST PAGE

THESIS TITLE: FOLK COSTUME WORN BY ALPINE HERDSMEN OF
SWISS TOGGENBURG AND RESTORATION OF
ORIGINAL EMBROIDERY MOTIFS

AUTHOR: CLAIRE STURZENEGGER

THESIS ADVISER: DR. WATHENA TEMPLE

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