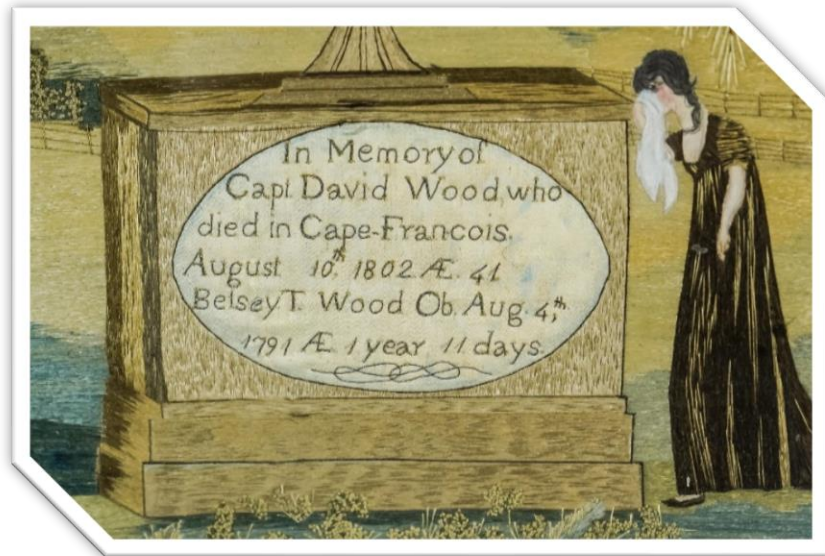


Handout for : *The Art of Mourning: A Closer Look at Early 19th Century Falmouth Cousins*

Saturday April 13 10:30am

**Rachel Lovett, Executive Director,
Falmouth Historical Society**

The upcoming lecture will delve into the intriguing narrative behind four pieces of mourning art samplers from the Falmouth Historical Society's collection. Remarkably, though these artifacts were donated independently, recent investigations have unveiled that they were concurrently crafted by a group of cousins. This discovery not only enriches the stories these samplers tell but also illuminates the potential of museum collections as vital resources for genealogical research and can serve as pivotal links to our past, piecing together family histories and connections that time has obscured.



Mourning art samplers hold a significant place in the cultural tapestry of early America, serving as tangible expressions of grief and remembrance during times of loss. These intricately crafted textiles, typically created by young women, offered a means of processing and commemorating the passing of loved ones, reflecting the prevailing attitudes towards death and mourning in colonial and antebellum society. During the 17th and 18th centuries, needlework played a central role in the education of young girls, teaching them essential skills such as embroidery and sewing while also imparting moral and religious lessons. Mourning samplers emerged as a distinct genre within this tradition, featuring somber motifs and inscriptions that conveyed the sorrow and solemnity of loss. Common motifs included weeping willows, urns, gravestones, and epitaphs, symbolizing themes of mortality, resurrection, and eternal rest. The practice of creating mourning samplers reached its peak in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, coinciding with periods of widespread bereavement due to high infant mortality rates, epidemic diseases, and the hardships of frontier life.

Mourning samplers were typically stitched with black silk or wool thread on a background of linen or silk fabric, lending them a somber and austere appearance befitting their solemn purpose. Many samplers also featured elaborate borders, decorative motifs, and intricate stitching techniques, showcasing the skill and artistry of their creators. They were often displayed prominently in the homes of grieving families, serving as tangible reminders of lost loved ones and inviting reflection on the transient nature of life. While the practice of creating mourning samplers gradually waned in the 19th century with changing attitudes towards death and mourning, these poignant artifacts continue to provide valuable insights into the experiences and emotions of early American women. Preserved in museum collections and private estates, mourning samplers serve as enduring reminders of the universal human experience of loss.

To learn more about the Falmouth Historical Society's collection and programs visit www.museumsonthegreen.org **This year the museum is going admission free** for our general tours thanks to the Highland Street Foundation. Museums hours Monday/Tues/Friday/Saturday 10am to 2pm.