

The Prescott Girls - Study Guide

The Prescott Family and the Betsy Ross Connection

Family Ties Behind the Samplers

The needlework samplers connected to the Prescott, Johnson, and Canby families tell a story that stretches across generations. By studying the names stitched into the samplers and researching historical records, historians have been able to reconstruct how these families were related.

These family connections link the girls who stitched the samplers to one of the most famous figures in American history: **Betsy Ross**.

The Prescott Family

Rebecca Goodwin Johnson Prescott, often called **Beckie**, was born in **1827 in New Sharon, Maine**. She was the daughter of:

Warren Prescott – a schoolteacher

Rebecca Johnson Prescott – who also made a sampler preserved today

Beckie had two younger sisters:

- **Caroline Louisa Prescott**
- **Sarah Augusta Prescott**

After the death of their father in 1833, the family moved to Dresden, Maine, where they lived with relatives at the **Old Pownalborough Court House**.

The Johnson Family

The Prescott sisters' mother, Rebecca Johnson Prescott, came from the **Johnson family of Dresden**.

Several members of this extended family lived in the courthouse, including:

- **Thomas Johnson**, the Dresden postmaster
- **William Johnson**
- **Captain Rowland Johnson**, a sea captain

Because extended families often lived together in the nineteenth century, the Prescott girls grew up surrounded by relatives.

The Canby Family

The Prescott family later became connected to the **Canby family of Philadelphia**.

Beckie's sister **Caroline Louisa Prescott** later married:

William Jackson Canby

William was the **grandson of Betsy Ross**, the Philadelphia upholsterer traditionally associated with sewing the first American flag.

William Jackson Canby later became known as the family historian who recorded the stories about Betsy Ross that helped make her famous.

The Claypoole and Ross Families

William Jackson Canby's mother was **Jane Claypoole**, the daughter of **Betsy Ross and her third husband, John Claypoole**.

Through Caroline Louisa Prescott's marriage to William Jackson Canby, the Prescott family became connected to the descendants of Betsy Ross.

This connection links the Maine sampler makers to a family that played a small but memorable role in the story of the American Revolution.

Simplified Family Tree

Betsy Ross married John Claypoole

|
Jane Claypoole married Caleb Canby

|
William Jackson Canby

Captain John Johnson married Rebecca Goodwin

|
Rebecca Johnson married Warren Prescott

married
|
Caroline 'Louisa' Prescott

Why Family Trees Matter in History

Family trees help historians understand how people were connected in the past.

By studying family relationships, historians can learn:

- how families moved between regions
- how traditions and stories were passed down
- how historical artifacts stayed within families for generations

The samplers stitched by the Prescott and Canby families were preserved because descendants recognized their importance and kept them safe for more than two hundred years.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think families preserved objects like samplers for so many years?
 2. How can family trees help historians understand the past?
 3. Why might family stories change as they are passed down through generations?
 4. How might the Prescott girls have felt knowing their sister later married into the Canby family?
 5. What objects in your own family might help tell your family's history?
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Activity

Create a simple family tree showing three generations of your own family.

Include:

- parents
- grandparents
- siblings

Family trees help historians and genealogists understand how people and stories are connected across time.