



## RESTORATION OF AN OSCHWALD COMMUNITY EMBROIDERY

*Is this just a nice piece  
of old embroidery?*

*Or is it much more than that?*

For museum curators and art restoration experts, cleaning and restoring pieces of art or artifacts may involve elaborate and expensive efforts. The idea is to try to restore the work to make it appear as much as possible as it did when it was first created.

Such is the case with this 10” x 14” piece of embroidery that has been kept in **The Art Studio** of Sister Karlyn Cauley SDS. It had been given to her in 1989 by one of the older Salvatorian Sisters living at St. Mary’s Convent in St. Nazianz, Wisconsin, but without any explanation of its origins. It was simply seen as “a nice piece of old art.” When she first received it, Sister Karlyn had the piece remounted on an acid-free background and reframed, then stored it away with other art pieces in one of the closets of The Art Studio. But years later, this needlework would turn out to be much more than just “a nice piece of old art!”

When the archivist from the Society’s Belgian Province - Johan Moris - came to the United States for a month in the summer of 2011, he spent some time in the USA Province Archives, the Sisters’ Archives, and he also visited The Art Studio with Salvatorian historian, Father Dan Pekarske SDS. Johan was telling Sister Karlyn, Father Dan, and Barbara Braatz, who also works in The Art Studio, about his wife’s interest in antique needlework. Sister Karlyn remembered the old embroidery piece she had stored in the closet and brought it out for Johan to see. When he saw it, he got very excited and exclaimed, “I think I know that piece! It is based on one of the drawings that **Father Ambrose Oswald** (*founder of the village of St. Nazianz and the Oswald Community*) had in his book of ‘mystical writings!’”

Now realizing that this “nice piece of old art” had far greater significance and was linked to the founding of the village of St. Nazianz, even before our Salvatorian community’s presence there, Father Dan, Johan and Sister Karlyn agreed that this embroidery should be professionally restored, a written appraisal should be done, and it should be reframed in an appropriate conservation manner. Johan said that he would do some further research to translate the “Old German Script” into English.

After Johan returned to Belgium, he was sent a high resolution photo of the embroidery by email, and later he sent back the results of his research and a translation of the words:

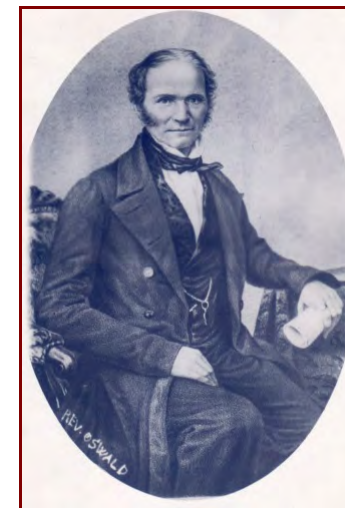
**“HE COMES FROM ZION  
TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE.  
WITH THE SWORD OF HIS MOUTH  
HE SLAYS HIS FOES.”**

*(Reference to Revelation 19:15)*

The drawing that had been this needlework’s inspiration was indeed in Father Ambrose Oswald’s book *“Mystische Schriften.”*



Father Dan said that it was important that any further deterioration of the embroidery be stopped because of the age of the fabric. He estimated that the needlework had probably been done in the late 1800’s, as one area of the embroidery shows what looks like the original St. Ambrose Chapel in St. Nazianz, which had been built by the Oswald Community. That, in itself, was a good indication that the work was done here in the United States, rather than in Germany before the Community came here in 1854 and established the village of St. Nazianz.



*Fr. Ambrose Oswald*

Sister Karlyn and Father Dan decided that the fabric cleaning, restoration and appraisal would be done by *Landmarks Gallery* in Milwaukee, as they had previously done other restorations for The Art Studio and their work was excellent. The restoration of the embroidery was finished in October 2011, and it was appraised as having a present value of \$1,700. The newly-restored needlework revealed more vibrant colors after the cleaning and a few more details could be seen in the background. There now appears to be an additional building to the right of the Savior.

Just a nice piece of old embroidery? Certainly not! Now we know that it is much more than that!

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Discovering some of the “hidden treasures” in our art studios and Archives is always exciting and worth sharing, especially when it turns out that the historical value and importance of these works is greater than we had known before. Restoring a piece of the past helps preserve our history so that others in the far distant future can enjoy it as much as we do.