

## A Study of Fabrics

### Part I – LINEN

The list of fabrics carried by Bear Threads Ltd. is quite long. Remember Heirloom Sewing is not just Swiss Batiste dresses for babies and little girls. Bear Threads Ltd. carries an extensive range of 100% cotton fabrics as well as 100% natural fiber fabrics not seen in this country in many years; some never. These include printed Swiss pique and batiste, damask, faille, poplin, Swiss broadcloth and flannel, just to name a few. This selection will certainly give the customer a variety of weights, textures, and colors, as well as tailored and dressy fabrics from which to choose for their adult garment, or home decorating project. If you are sewing by the traditional methods by hand, you will need to use the finest 100% natural fiber fabrics. The unique 'hand rolled edge', the #1 technique used in a hand sewn garment, requires natural fibers vs. the polyester fibers that 'spring back'. Your time is a great investment already, so a few more dollars to sew with the BEST is certainly justified. Conversely, if sewing by machine, many customers will have spent much for a state of the art sewing machine, searched for the finest laces and embroideries; therefore a few extra dollars on the finest fabrics makes only the best of both SENSE and CENTS.

We will begin our fabric study this month with LINEN. Linen is a textile made from the fibers of the flax plant, *Linum Usitatissimum*. Flax is the plant; linen is product from flax. The term, linen, cannot be used except for natural fiber flax. Among the properties of linen are rapid moisture absorption, fiber length of a few inches to one yard, no fuzziness, does not soil quickly, having a natural luster and stiffness.

Occasionally you hear references to linen as cambric. Cambric is a soft, white, closely woven cotton fabric calendared by rollers to achieve a high glaze. This calendaring results in the cotton resembling linen. The original cambric was made in Cambrai, France (hence the name) and used for church embroidery and table linens. Today linen cambric is generally synonymous with handkerchief linen.

Linen textiles appear to be some of the oldest in the world. Their history goes back many thousands of years. Fragments of straw, seeds, fibers, yarns, and various types of fabrics which date back to about 8000BC have been found in Swiss lake dwellings. Dyed flax fibers found in a prehistoric cave in the Republic of Georgia suggest the use of woven linen fabrics from wild flax may date back even earlier.

Flax is grown in many parts of the world, but top quality flax is primarily grown in Western Europe. In very recent years bulk linen production has moved to Eastern Europe and China, but high quality fabrics are still confined to niche producers in Ireland, Italy and Belgium.

Bear Threads Ltd. has introduced a fabric combining the best of Linen and Cotton. It is called Bearlin and is woven of 52% Irish Linen and 48% Swiss Cotton. Even though it is a blend of two natural fibers, because it is a BLENDED fabric it does not wrinkle as much as would a 100% Linen or 100% Cotton.

Bear Threads Ltd. has also added a group of Swiss embroideries that are stitched on the Bearlin fabric. They are, as all fine Swiss embroideries, stitched with Swiss Cotton thread.

Sheila Nicol

## *"Mary Marston"*

"Mary Marston" is the newest smocking plate from Peanut Butter-n-Jelly Kids. The dress is a smocked bishop with an eyelet overlay, using Chery Williams Bishop dress pattern.



Bear Threads' exquisite fabric Bearlin, a Swiss Cotton and Irish Linen blend, is the background for the embroidered edges and insertions.



The wider of the 2 available widths was used for the collar and the bottom ruffle, the narrow edge was used for the sleeves. The insertion just above the ruffle was attached with matching pink entredeux.



The ruffle on the bottom of the sleeve was also attached with matching pink entredeux.

### Preparing a Bishop Overlay Dress

The first thing to consider when doing this type of bishop is the weight (thickness) of the fabric. When you are going to overlay another fabric on top of the bishop you will need to consider the fullness of the pattern first. The Chery Williams bishop pattern is great for overlays, as the pattern is already not as full as some.

Cut the bishop out, with the back on a selvage (my favorite way) or just not on a fold. French seam shoulder seams finishing with a 1/8" seam.

Secondly, take a fabric softener sheet and wipe the underside of the area that will go thru the pleater, do the seams a little extra. This will relax the weave of the fabric a bit and allow the needles to penetrate without breaking or tearing the fabric.

Measure across the top of your bishop from center back to center back, this will give you the length of your eyelet overlay. Use a small rolled hem for each end. Run the fabric softener sheet over the overlay for the same reason as above.

Third, use 505 temporary spray adhesive on the back side of your overlay. This spray works well so as not to gum up your needles and light enough to not mess up your fabrics (don't use on silks or 100% polyester taffetas).

Start 1/4" from center back line and gently smooth and lay your overlay to the right side of your bishop. Roll tightly on your dowel and pleat.

Smock and finish as per pattern instructions or your favorite method!

*Anna Marie Phelps, designer*

*Peanut Butter-n-Jelly Kids*