

## **HATFIELD - MCCOY VICTORY QUILT**

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Very often when we speak of an historical quilt, we mean a very old quilt and/or a quilt associated with some distinguished political, civic, philanthropic, or humanitarian person.

Recently, I had the pleasure of seeing a true historical quilt. Oddly enough, it was neither old, nor related, in any way, to an esteemed figure or his family. Instead, this quilt dates from 1944, and was made by mountain folk in the remote Appalachian border regions of West Virginia and Kentucky. In the troubled days of World War II, the newspapers, news magazines, and radio newscasts were filled with reports of ominous happenings. Yet the making of this quilt was considered significant enough to warrant it a place in the foremost news journal of that time -- LIFE MAGAZINE.

What is the quilt?

It is the Hatfield-McCoy Victory quilt, made by America Hatfield and Rhoda McCoy in 1944. The quilt, in patriotic red, white and blue, has a large "V" for Victory center. There are two small stars centered in the V, plus four large stars, placed at the top and bottom of the quilt. Anderson "Devil" Arise" Hatfield and Harmon McCoy, ancestral patriarchs of the two clans, are represented by the large embroidered stars at the top. Anderson Hatfield, who joined the U.S. Navy, died and was buried in Egypt, and Woodrow McCoy are also noted by stars in the quilt. At the Peter Creek, Kentucky, home of Frank McCoy, a quilting bee was held when the Victory quilt was nearing completion. The event was such a momentous occasion that the neighbors of the Hatfields and McCoy's

composed a ballad to celebrate it. The ballad was called "The Victory Quilt."

*I've been down to the quilting, folks, A Victory quilt, they say; At Granny Hatfield's old log house Across on Tadpole way.*

*And Rhoda, Bud McCoy's good wife With Martha Hatfield, too, Made up the quilt of calico With old red, white and blue.*

*One big star stands for Devil Anse, Who Zed the Rebel clan; Another star--Harmon McCoy A faithful Union man.*

*Woodrow McCoy, another star, For many victories won, He was a proud and noble lad, America Hatfield's son.*

*The last big star, a Hatfield boy, Old Tolbert's pride was he; The small stars, Ace and Anderson Who fought across the sea.*

*This Victory quilt to honor them We'll place within a shrine, With Roosevelt's name and noble deeds On history's page to shine.*

For years, American pupils had studied social studies texts, dealing with customs and mores of regional areas. The books never failed to couple the Appalachian area with the Hatfield-McCoy feud. Countless texts, which dealt with the severe emotional trauma produced by the enmity of brother against brother, or neighbor against neighbor, that results when a nation is engaged in a civil war, offered the Hatfield-McCoy feud as the ultimate example.

We will grant this is an interesting, perhaps even colorful quilt story. Yet, what about it merits the term "historical"?

The Hatfield-McCoy Victory quilt is an artifact that is tangible evidence that the bloodiest family feud in the annals of American history, had, indeed, come to an end.

The infamous Hatfield-McCoy feud was a consequence of the Civil War. The Hatfields of West Virginia lived across the Tug Fork branch of the Big Sandy River from the McCoys of Kentucky. Anderson "Devil Arise" Hatfield joined the Confederate forces. Harmon McCoy, a Union soldier, was slain by these Rebel forces. Bitter feelings between the Hatfields and McCoys stemmed from that time. However, it was in the 1870's when the feud erupted into fierce violence. The catalysts appear to have been an angry dispute over the ownership of a hog, and, most of all, the ill-fated romance of Johnson "Johnse" Hatfield and Roseanna McCoy. Years of the most intense hatred and brutal murders followed. As news of these terrible acts of vengeance reached outside the local area, citizens were horrified. Government officials, at every level, seemed fearful and unable to stop the killings. Ramifications of these events reached inside the state houses of West Virginia and Kentucky. Even after the actual killings stopped in the early part of the 20th century, most people considered it an uneasy truce, subject to being broken at the slightest provocation.

In the period of World War II, the Hatfield and McCoy men marched off together to fight for their country. It has been suggested

that this represented a changed spirit between the clans. However, it seems this changed spirit is more clearly demonstrated by the making of the Victory quilt. There were no compelling reasons for the Hatfield and McCoy women to sit at the quilting frames, together, other than their voluntary spirit of cooperation, a longing for peace, a wish to honor the men of their families, past and present, and a desire to express their patriotism in some creative form. Making the Victory quilt fulfilled all of these desires.

The Hatfield-McCoy Victory quilt was donated to the Ohio State Museum by Jean Thomas, Ashland, Ky. in memory of her Ohio-born mother, Kate Smith Bell, who had six brothers in the Union Army. Jean Thomas, author of BIG SANDY, and a collector of Appalachian ballads, was well known in Hatfield-McCoy "country." She was called "Traipsin' Woman."

When Irene Goodrich, Columbus, Ohio, Marguerite Weibush, Russiaville, Indiana, and I were shown the Hatfield-McCoy Victory quilt by Ellice Ronsheim, Curator of Textiles, Ohio State Museum, we knew we were looking at an authentic Appalachian quilt, an interesting example of folk art, and a "slice of Americana." But most rewarding of all, we knew we were viewing one of America's true historical quilts. It was a rare privilege.

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