

AN 1882 QUILT

Sometimes good information about quilt-making turns up where you least expect it. Recently I was looking through some old copies of the Virginia Historical Magazine (Vol. 23) and came across a series of letters from Lucy H. Johnston Ambler of Morven, Farmerville, VA to her step-cousin Sarah Steptoe Massie. The magazine editor, in introducing these letters, wrote: "These letters... have no historic importance. They are simply the letters of one gentle kindly Virginia lady to another; but incidentally they tell us more of real life than do many historic documents."

Lucy was twenty-two in 1822, a young wife and mother. On August 3rd 1822 she wrote to her cousin:

"My dear Sally

I am afraid you will think me very lazy for not answering your letter sooner but I have been very busy since that time and besides I have had company constantly. I have put a bed quilt in frame and you know that must be a tedious job. The quilt was commenced by Mr. Amblers mother and I think I am bound to finish it. Catherine and Elizabeth Ambler are staying with me and they occasionally assist me though not much. Besides this quilt I have another very serious job on hand which is working a spencer for myself which is a good deal for me to do as I do all the sewing for my family. John has no notion of walking yet owing to his laziness for he is sixteen months old and could stand alone three months ago.

The neighbors are going to unite and give a barbecue to General Marshall who is up from Richmond and I am told they are to have a dance as there will be an abundance of young ladies though I believe beaux are scarce...

I am sure I have beat you this year raising turkeys. I have twenty eight young ones and should have raised more but the hogs broke up two of my turkeys."

Although Lucy only mentioned her mother-in-law's quilt once (When was the quilt pieced? Or was it applique? What was it like?), I can't refrain from quoting from two more of her letters from 1823.

"You plead laziness for your long silence and I plead industry for mine. You do not know how industrious I am. I have now three children to work for and it keeps me quite busy I really begin to despair of ever getting even to my fathers again I wish you would prevail on Mr. Massie to bring you over this summer. We would be delighted to see you and I will learn you how to raise turkeys... It is unnecessary for me to make any apology for writing so bad a hand as I have written to you too often for you not to know that I cannot write more legibly.

Yours very affectionately,

L. H. Ambler

excuse mistakes as my child has interrupted me."

Somehow I feel like a contemporary of Lucy Ambler. If I were the Sally she wrote to, however, I would surely get over to see that quilt! I might even help her put it in. After all, it is a tedious job.

Sally Garoutte

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MICHAEL JAMES WINS

For the first time this year, a crafts category was added to the annual Artists Fellowship Program funded by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts. Six craftspeople from the 397 applicants were awarded \$3500 each. Nancy Guay and Michael James were the two winners in fiber. All Massachusetts crafts people over age 18 who are not enrolled as students can apply. Applications for next year's program will be available in September from the Artists Foundation, Inc., 100 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02116 (617/482-8100).