



Quilt, No. 29-4-46

She Wrote Their Names in Calico

Nearly One Hundred Years Ago

IT WAS a proud young Deborah who set her Joseph's name above her own on her heirloom quilt. Thriftily she saved her bits of blue and white calico and with ingenuity contrived her patchwork alphabet. Her daughter's daughter should inherit a real Wildman quilt-not just a pretty patchwork coverlet anyone's grandmother might have made! Long Deborah worked and puzzled and cut and planned to make her letters and adapt the 'wild geese' piecing to fill in the discrepancies - and very well she succeeded with the limited equipment at her hand.

The modern worker who borrows Deborah's idea for a patchwork name quilt starts out with a geometrical plan thus avoiding odd sizes in the border and uneven spacing. Of course, if one is unfortunate enough to have a name of more

than eight letters to deal with, it is practically impossible to make a name quilt, as the thing would have to be large enough for a giant's bedstead! A quilt for the standard size double bed will care for just eight letters of this size and the borders. Less than eight letters is perfectly easy to arrange, as one can fill the spaces with a block of "wild geese". If the word "and" is to be used between the two names, only seven letters are possible in the first line. The initials only may be used.

A combination of unbleached muslin and blue, pink, or yellow print makes an excellent choice for a present day quilt. Strips of the muslin of uniform width are used between the letter squares, which are pieced up in the print and muslin.

Each one of the seven narrow strips which make up a letter block should be pieced together before these strips are joined. The border is made in strips, not squares, and is put on after the centre of the quilt is all pieced together.

Deborah's coverlet was quilted "by eye", as her fancy dictated. As the whole design is a straight line affair, it would seem best to keep the quilting very simple - filling in the spaces with curlicues doesn't really improve the quilt. One might run a row or two of quilting around each block, or quilt the plain strips between in one inch squares. The triangles in the border might be quilted with cows of tiny stitches run parallel to each side about a quarter inch apart

Wyn Reddall has been researching pieced lettered quilts. They were found most frequently in N.Y. State but occasionally in New Jersey and Connecticut. The patterns for the letters are the same as those used in American samplers from 1600s and 1700s, each block representing a cross-stitch. The letters are seven units high and the width varies according to the letter.

Mrs. Reddall has found seven such quilts dating from 1833-1891. We are delighted she is sharing this information. She requests that readers who have knowledge of additional pieced lettered quilts share the information with her do the JOURNAL.

The quilt shown above is also pictured in color in Orlofsky's QUILTS IN AMERICA, pg 216, plate #74. The caption reads, "The Wildman Quilt, pieced, cotton, Castile, New York, 1833, 80' x 72" A variety of blue and white roller-printed calicos have been used to create this unusual quilt." It is now owned by the N.Y. State Historical Assoc. Cooperstown, N.Y.

Mrs. Reddall's paper with her complete research will be in the soon to be published PAPERS FROM SEMINAR 1980 of the AMERICAN QUILT STUDY GROUP. For information on the papers or the American Quilt Study Group, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Sally Garoutte, 105 Molino Mill Valley, CA 94941