

QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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BETTY HARNED HARRIMAN

quiltmaker, quilt & textile collector. Born Sept 22, 1890. Died June 21, 1971 in Bunceton, Missouri. Daughter of Ben & Betty Bradley Harned. Attended William Wood High School & Warrensburg State College. Taught school until married to Colonel R.L. Harriman. Hotel manager for 50 years. Retired to Windmere Farm, Missouri. Other interests: gardening, dolls, church. Membership in: United Daughters of the Confederacy.





Betty Harriman gave this tea party for her niece and dolls. She later used the photo on her Christmas card. Date not known. Photo courtesy Suellen Meyer

BETTY HARNED HARRIMAN

by Suellen Meyer

Suellen Meyer is a quilt collector and quilt historian with particular interest in her own area (Missouri and Illinois) Her articles have appeared in QUILTER'S NEWSLETTER, NEEDLEWORK TIMES, QUILT WORLD and the ST LOUIS magazine. She lectured on Betty Harriman at Show-Me Quilt Symposium in Columbia, Missouri after extensive research with Mrs. Harriman's family.

Betty Harriman was the subject of the cover photo and featured article in the QJ Winter '78.

Not all of the great Mid-American quiltmakers created patterns. Some preserved the old. Betty Harned Harriman, of Bunceton, Missouri could - and did -, design original quilts, but her heart was tugged by the tattered, the worn, the historic quilts, ones that were in danger of being thrown away or given to the dog. To save them she made them again, often in century-old fabrics.

Betty, throughout her life, had a passionate interest in history, perhaps because so many historic places and names cropped up in her family stories. She could trace her family to Robert E. Lee, and by marriage, to George Washington. Her great grandmother, Clarinda Sibert, knew and liked the Marquis de Lafayette, who, family legend says, gave her a silver tea urn. Clarinda later married William Ball Bradley, moving with him from Maryland to Virginia where he owned land. There a son was born. Remembering Lafayette, who by then had returned to France, they named him Return Lafayette Bradley.

Betty's Paternal side also showed up in history books. Her father's grandfather designed a home,

"Federal Hill", for Judge John Rowan and his family in Bardstown, Kentucky. Years later when Stephen Foster wrote "My Old Kentucky Home" he immortalized both the house, which was later designated a Kentucky State Historical Shrine, and the culture it represented.

The Harneds, Ben and Betty, brought much of that grace and ease to their own home, a farm near Bunceton. There Betty, the second of their eleven children, was born on September 22, 1890. She grew up learning the laws of hospitality as well as the rules of fine sewing. Since her parents were prosperous and well educated, she also went to school. Her father served as an early member of the William Woods College Board of Directors in Fulton, Missouri. Her mother, at a time when women were supposed only to excel in housekeeping skills and to seek husbands, attended the school which later became Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. But with her 21" waist, size 2 foot, and gay disposition, she was certainly not a bluestocking.

She found her children delightful and saw to it that every one of them - including her seven daughters - attended college. Betty began her schooling in a tiny one room schoolhouse at the edge of her parents' farm, where she learned to read, to write and to figure. Eight years later, when she was ready for high school she had to leave home and move into Fulton, sixty miles away, to board at William Woods and

SPECIAL

QUILTER'S JOURNAL Winter '78 featuring Betty Harriman is available for \$1.50 which includes postage. Offer good until Sept 1, 1982 or while supply lasts.

attend its high school. (Public high schools did not become common in rural Missouri until after the widespread acceptance of automobiles, since most children didn't have horses of their own and the farm horses couldn't be spared from the fields.) Four years later she entered Warrensburg State College where she earned her teaching degree. While there she followed her mother's penchant for doing what she wanted whether or not society approved and played basketball.

When she graduated, she taught first in a one-room school in Bellaire, where she had 32 children in eight grades and later in Bunceton, where she had first grade only. There she met Colonel R. L. Hariman and married him in 1917. They lived in Bunceton until his death eight years later left her a thirty-five-year-old widow.



Even before she began school she fell in love with cloth. In fact, neither her family nor her friends can remember her before she began sewing. By the time she was six she was designing clothes for her dolls, and shortly thereafter she completed a doll quilt. The Christmas she was six, her mother made the present which delighted her most, as apron with pockets for her thread, a thimble and a snub-nose scissors. Mrs. Harned employed a dressmaker year round to sew for her family; Betty, assuming the role of miniature dressmaker, turned the scraps into doll dresses and quilts.

She completed her first full-size quilt, a Rose of Sharon in 1920. She bought the rose and green cotton sateen for it at Joe Pollard's fine dry goods store in Bunceton, for 75¢ a yard. "Only a millionaire would spend so much money for fabric for a quilt

back then," she said. Convinced that this was the finest quilt top in America, she sent it to St. Louis Fancy Work Company to be quilted.

Eager to make more quilts, she sought patterns everywhere. One day early in her marriage some close friends dropped by. Betty invited them in, settled them in her



living room, and provided them with tall glasses of iced tea. As she did so, she glanced out the west window, excused herself, and disappeared. When she didn't return, her friends looked for – and found her happily ensconced on the porch swing sketching all the patterns of the quilts her neighbor had airing. She made most of them, too.

Betty had an uncanny ability to sketch any pattern she saw. Whether the quilt was hanging on a line, folded on a table, draped over a chair, or crumpled in a corner, she could reproduce the design in perfect proportion. This talent enabled her to duplicate quilts that were otherwise inaccessible.

Once she and her brother-in-law toured George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. Like most quilters she had an insatiable curiosity and was determined to see the attic. The guides assured her – in vain – that no one was allowed in the attic. But even they could not withstand her; finally they allowed her to stand at the threshold and scan the area. She saw – just as she knew she would – a quilt crumpled up in the corner. Her brother-in-law snapped a picture of the room with his pocket camera. Satisfied, Betty declared they could leave. When she had the photograph developed, the entire quilt stood about an inch tall. Working from

this tiny image, she drafted the pattern and made one of her favorite quilts, the Laurel.

After Col. Harriman died in 1925, Betty began the series of moves that eventually led her to her beloved East Coast. First she worked as a dietician at Carson-Newman, a women's college in Jefferson City, Tenn. Then she entered hotel management in Harriman, Tenn., quickly working her way into the top level of management. As the executive housekeeper, she was responsible for interior decorating, room conditions, hiring and firing of staff, and maintaining standards.

One of her guests owned a chain of hotels on the East Coast. He was so impressed with the high standards she maintained that he offered her a job visiting each of his new hotels to be sure that it was properly staffed and operated. For a while she traveled extensively, stopping for a bit in Sarasota, Florida, and Durham, North Carolina before coming to Newport News, Virginia, where she fell in love with Old Point Comfort, a hotel which catered to military officers and their wives. There she stayed until she retired in 1960.

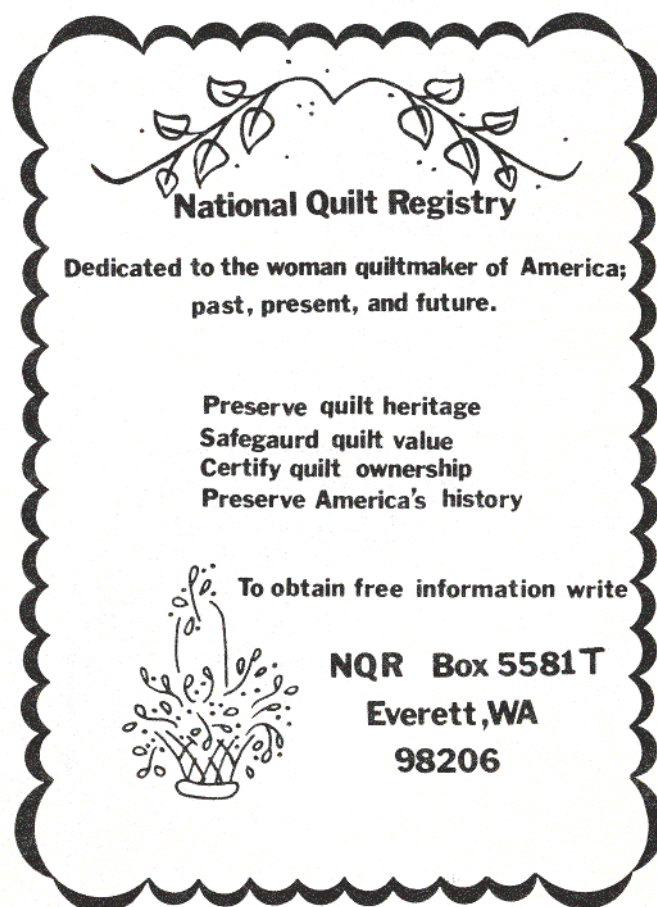
In 1954 Newport News barricaded itself against Hurricane Hazel. Betty, having checked on the security of the hotel, was on the 8th floor when the storm hit, breaking off all the electrical power. Her thoughts flew to her quilts stored in three trunks in the basement. Working her way down eight flights of darkened stairs, she found a flashlight and commandeered two bellboys to help her carry the trunks up to safety. She said later that the guests had legs and could take care of themselves, but her quilts were helpless. Several of these quilts still carry the stains of Hurricane Hazel.

While she lived in the East she continued making the quilts she had begun in her childhood, but added a passionate interest: collecting. As she studied, she developed a new appreciation for old quilts and textiles. She haunted house museums and antique shops and maintained a flourishing correspondence with New England antique dealers who alerted her to quilts, fabrics, and embroideries, many of which she bought. Describing Betty's quilt selection, Mary Schafer, an old friend who lives in Flushing, Michigan says, "I think she bought quilts that took her fancy. She seemed to like any quilts of antique textiles - English prints, copperplate, roller prints, linsey - woolsey, homespun, resist prints, oil-boiled chintz, etc. She liked historical prints, quilts and quilt patterns from historical places. If the article had the above qualities, poor or worn condition was not an important consideration."

Betty had a keen eye for the rare, seldom buying ordinary pieces. Once she picked up a red-and-white copperplate chair cover which she sent to her sister Myrtle to take to the Smithsonian to be identified. "You really have something here," Myrtle wrote her after showing the textile to Miss Grace L. Rogers, the Associate Curator of the Section of Textiles. Indeed, she did, for she had discovered a panel with the printed inscription "R. Jones 1761." Florence Montgomery, referring to a pattern with classical ruins and hunting scenes printed by Robert Jones of Old Ford, England, now in the Winterthur collection, describes it as "the earliest dated copperplate-printed textile"; it too is dated 1761. No wonder that Miss Rogers of the Smithsonian was so excited.

Myrtle wrote, "Miss Rogers at Smithsonian said you really had something in the piece of material - very, very rare - said they couldn't find enough of that particular material to even make good studies of it. She wanted a piece about 2 inches square to just study the fibers - but of course said if you would give Smithsonian enough for a display piece that you would greatly add to the textile display and study.

"Well, she acted like she wanted to start down to see you right away."



She gave the chair cover to the Smithsonian in 1957 - but kept another R. Jones piece for herself. Also red-and-white, this chair cover draws a pastoral scene: a man playing a recorder sits on the edge of a well in the center of the picture. Before him stands a woman, her back to the viewer, her face towards the man. Around them lie sheep, rams and a farm dog. Barely visible in the shadows on the well is the inscription, R. Jones 1761.

Betty kept the rarest textiles uncut, but others she bought to make into quilts. Living in Virginia where she was surrounded by early quilts, she often stumbled upon important ones which were too worn to display. The most important of these she determined to duplicate. On one of her visits to Wakefield, George Washington's reconstructed birthplace, she discovered a Tree of Life quilt. Badly deteriorated, it had once been a showpiece. The fabric itself had worn away, revealing the cotton batting. Betty sketched the pattern before going home to ransack her trunks of early fabrics and fringes. She found an early chintz from which she made the base of the tree, limbs, branches and leaves. Another early chintz supplied birds and flowers to embellish the tree. From a roller-print chintz she made the laurel leaf inner borders and the outer sawtooth and band borders. She finished it with hand-tied fringe. The

Wakefield Historical Society accepted the quilt in 1967, retiring the worn one.

By this time Betty herself had retired and was living in Bunceton, Missouri, at Windmere Farm, her family home. In 1971 the Historical Society, impressed with Betty's ability and knowledge, invited her to come, as the official guest of the state of Virginia, to supervise the redecorating of Wakefield. Unfortunately, she had died just months earlier. Her younger sister Hulda, thinking of the stir Betty would have caused, chuckled, "They would have known Mrs. Harriman was there." Betty's family so appreciated the honor paid to her that they gave Wakefield one of her favorite quilts, the Laurel that she had reproduced from the snapshot of Mt. Vernon's attic.

When not making quilts or finding fabrics, Betty was studying them. She bought books and patterns everywhere, amassing a library present-day quilters envy. She bought patterns from all the legendary sources - Ann Orr, Ladies Art, Marie Webster, and Mary McElwain - which she combined with her own sketched-off patterns, antique cloth block samples, and actual cloth blocks from worn quilts. Mary Schafer says, "When she liked a particular quilt, she would ask to buy it. If it were not for sale, she would ask permission to take a pattern. If that was denied she would sketch it, and if circumstances prevented her from sketching it, she would sketch the pattern at her first opportunity from memory." In her books she marked the quilts she had made or planned to make. She preferred elaborate applique or pieced quilts with hundreds of pieces, the smaller the better.

The tops she did not quilt herself she sent to St. Louis Fancy Work or gave to a woman near Bunceton for quilting. She was never satisfied with the amount of quilting, always adding some herself, usually another line around the motif. She liked close quilting and stuffed work, either in the quilting or in the applique. She used the quilting line, not sashing, to separate the motifs.

She had other determined views about quilts. Quilts, she thought, should have borders, not just bands of fabric, but interesting ones that carried out the motif. Workmanship should be excellent: pieced points should match exactly; appliqued curves should lie flat. Colors should be strong; quilts should have a hefty dose of red and green, as she believed pastels "Deadened" the room. Reproductions should be true: the textiles should duplicate the

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Betty Harriman *cont from pg 6*

originals and, if that weren't possible, new fabrics should be treated with tea or bleach to closely resemble the antique. Quilting designs should be in the spirit of the quilt and there should be a great deal of quilting, "close quilting", as she called it. Batting and fabric should be 100% cotton. (She once said, "I lived too long - they stopped making cotton.")



She held her standards to the last. Her final quilt, in 1971, was the Freedom Quilt a reproduction of one originally made to commemorate a man's twenty-first birthday. Its blocks are complex applique scenes: two red birds holding a cherry in their mouths hover over a tree branch; an eagle perches on the U.S. flag; a basket of lattice-work holds heart-shaped flowers and stuffed cherries; and in the center block stands Major Ringold's monument framed by flags, guns and a dove. Every day Betty spread this quilt out on her bed. Turning on her tensor lamp, she pulled it close to the quilt, picked up her large magnifying glass and worked through it to get her stitches right. Her eyes might threaten to betray her, but her standards held firm. When she took the last stitch, she patted the quilt and said, "This is my \$1500 quilt."

Though that was her last complete quilt, she always had many tops in various stages. In fact, she never finished a quilt without first starting another; it made her sad to finish and she liked looking ahead. Besides, she loved to cut and delighted in hundreds of tiny pieces.

She had moved back to Bunceton in 1960 when she retired. There she immersed herself in quilts, cutting, sewing, studying, lecturing, and showing quilts. She did not drive however, and so eventually stopped giving lectures though she continued to

show her quilts to the many people, often strangers, who came to visit.

By the time of her death in 1971 she had collected over 100 quilts (the earliest 1780) and had made more than 80. (Some estimates say she made over 100.) She made quilts for her own pleasure, for the church to auction, and for family members. One October Hulda, her younger sister, admiring a Federal Eagle quilt in a magazine, mentioned she'd like a quilt like that. That Christmas, barely three months later, Betty gave her the eagle quilt.

While the focus of Betty's life was quilts - one of her sisters says, "She loved quilts more than anything, even people" - she found time for much else. People frequently came to her for support, understanding, and advice. Since she was not afraid of anything - not old age, nor poverty nor death - she had strength to share.



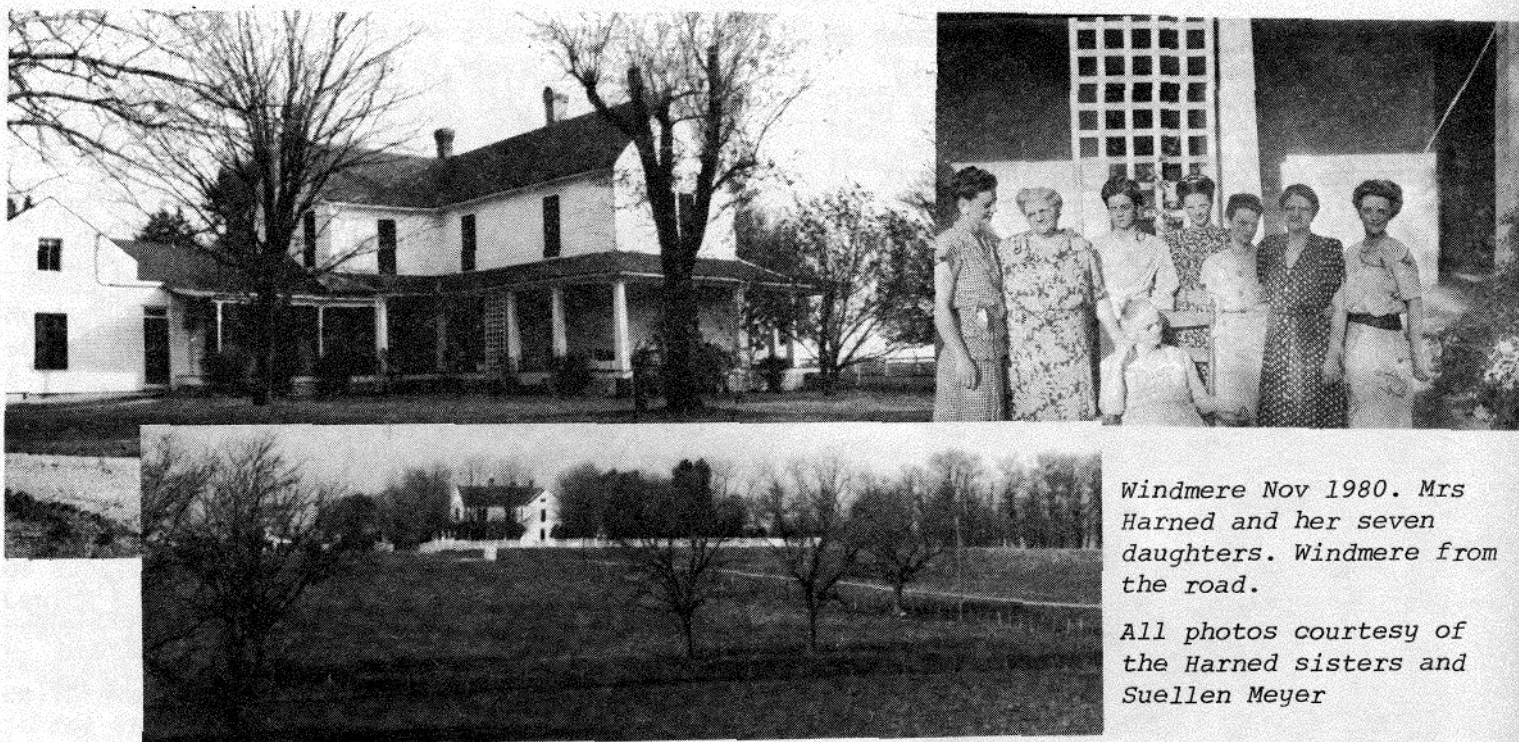
1958 - Betty Harriman stands in front of Hotel Chamberlin.

cont

FIFTH ANNUAL MARY SCHAFFER QUILT EXHIBIT

Medallion quilts will be featured at the Fifth Annual Mary Schaffer Quilt exhibit at the Whaley Historical House in Flint, Michigan, July 9,10,11, July 16, 17, 18 and July 23,24,25 1982 from 1-5 pm. Adm \$2.00

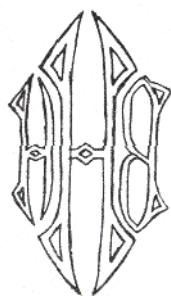
For a catalog of the show or further info send a stamped self addressed envelope (legal size) to Gwen Marston, 624 E Kearsley, Flint, Michigan 48503
Ed note: Mrs. Schaffer wrote to tell us she is again making a raffle quilt for the exhibit in the Tea Leaves pattern. The catalog will have a photo of a medallion quilt she calls Countryside which she adapted from a quilt in the Winterthur Collection.



Windmere Nov 1980. Mrs Harned and her seven daughters. Windmere from the road.

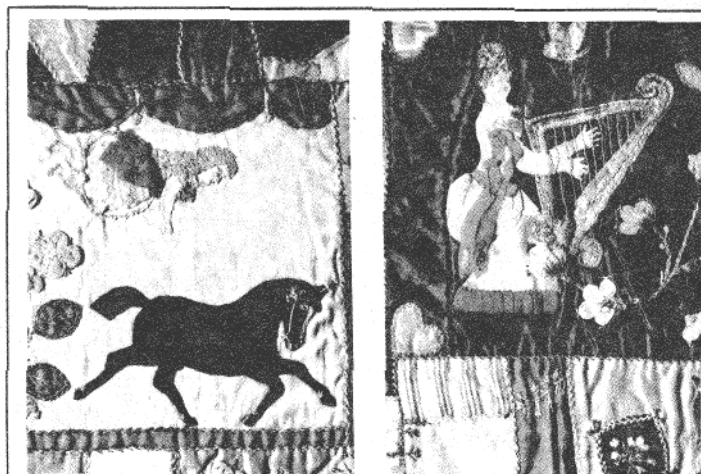
All photos courtesy of the Harned sisters and Suellen Meyer

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She loved history and was not only her family historian, but also the historian of her local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She enjoyed vegetable and flower gardening, spending a good bit of each day tending them. She cherished birds and put many of them in her quilts. She collected dolls, dressing them in period costume, and made others of personalities like Barbra Streisand. She became interested in china painting, and taught herself the proper technique, taking the redware into Bunceton to be fired. She never did anything half-way. And since she wasn't afraid of failure, once she decided to do something - she kept on until she succeeded.

But most of all, she loved the peace of Windmere Farm! She once came down to breakfast, telling her sisters, "I had such a nightmare. We had to move to a smaller house. Never was I so glad to wake up." This woman who had lived in apartments and hotels for 35 years never again lived in a small home. One June 21, 1971 she tended her vegetables, came into the house, settled her -self in her sewing chair, pulled a quilt top onto her lap, and five minutes later died.



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