

THE OKLAHOMA DIAMOND JUBILEE QUILT

by Dixie Haywood

Dixie Haywood (pictured at right) is a well known quilt teacher and lecturer as well as the author of THE CONTEMPORARY CRAZY QUILT PROJECT BOOK and CRAZY QUILTING WITH A DIFFERENCE. She and her husband Bob are familiar sights at quilt symposia and events throughout the United States. (Photo by jg)

The original Oklahoma Album quilt was pictured in QJ Fall '81 pg 14. The accompanying article told about the quilt being sponsored by the present governor's wife, Mrs George Nigh, in celebration of Oklahoma's Diamond Jubilee.

When Mrs. George Nigh, wife of the present governor of Oklahoma, saw the 50 year old Album Quilt in the State Historical Museum that was quilted in the Governor's mansion, she wanted to have a quilting bee in the mansion exactly fifty years to the date of the first one. She and her secretary came to my studio and asked me to help plan the quilt as a project for the legislative wives' group. Mrs. Nigh wanted to have each county represented by a block. (I was taken aback to find there are seventy-seven counties in Oklahoma and quipped that perhaps the first step should be county consolidation. I didn't know this is a very touchy issue in Oklahoma!) I worked out a quilt with seventy-six 12" blocks and a center 24" block for the county in which the capitol is located. With 4" borders, the size of the quilt is 104" x 128".

Mrs. Nigh's plan was to give the legislative wives from each county responsibility for a block. She is not a quilter and did not want to become involved with a quilt in a frame, so she chose the quilt-by-the-block technique. Since the design of each block would be determined by the person making it, we decided to unify the quilt with a light green background fabric and ask that the blocks be either applique, embroidery, or a combination of the two. (I recommended that pieced blocks be excluded for fear the size of the blocks might vary enough to make putting them together a problem.) I worked out a list of yardage and supplies that would be needed and gave Mrs. Nigh written directions that explained in detail the quilt-by-the-block method. May 12, 1981 was the date of the quilting bee. I was asked to come to explain and supervise the construction. "About fifteen" women were expected to attend; there were closer to fifty. Many were marvelous. One I especially liked was an embroidered portrait of Will Rogers (the patron saint of Oklahoma); another was



done by an elderly Indian woman from Caddo county with a traditional Indian dwelling superimposed on an oil well, representing the history of Caddo county from Indians to oil. As in most states, there is intense competition between the state universities. I thought Oklahoma State clearly won over the University of Oklahoma so far as the quilt blocks were concerned. The block from Payne county, where OSU is located, featured a historic campus building; Cleveland county's contribution was the OU logo made famous by their football team.

Not all the legislators' wives were in Oklahoma City during the session. Some women took more than one block, and the remaining were sent to the office of legislators whose wives were not present. That probably explains why Mrs. Nigh's plan that each block reflect something about the county it represented sometimes lost something in the translation. Two blocks were appliqued Scotty dogs, one was an ice cream cone and one was an apple. When I remarked that I didn't know that Oklahoma had an apple growing industry, the dour comment was, "It doesn't"! A couple of the blocks featured names; I assume they were the county's legislators, but didn't pursue it. Two blocks arrived unquilted, with drawings apparently done in black felt pen on the fabric.

After we arranged the blocks in position, I explained the construction method we were going to use and divided the women into teams to construct each row. A few of the blocks were not quilted; some were quilted by machine and some by hand. I found someone to embroider the felt pen creations. By the time luncheon was served, most of the rows were finished, although the last row was held up because two blocks had not been turned in.

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Emma Bull *cont from pg 10*

"The upper right hand corner consists of a Fan, each of the twenty-one splints being different in color from any of the others; the upper left hand corner is a Spider and Web, the lower left corner a 'Union Jack' -the commercial flag of Great Britain.

"On one side is one of the first log cabins built in Utah and above it the inscription, 'Home, 1847'. On the other side is the Pioneer Printing Press of Utah, also marked with figures '1847'. Near this is a Harp over the inscription and music, "Home, Home, Sweet, Sweet Home."

"Opposite the last named object is an Anchor and below this the 'Dipper,' or Seven Stars; on the other side are the Square and Compass, while near the lower edge are the letters 'E.G.B.' the initials of the lady whose nimble fingers worked this fine specimen of womanskill, and the year, '1893'. Over this is Mrs. Bull's Family Crest - a Stag with a rose in its mouth. Near this is a Segó Lily.

"There are also, in addition to what has been enumerated forty-one other embroidered pieces, among which are native Utah Birds, a Shell, Stars, Flowers, the Horn of Plenty, an Indian Tomahawk.

"The materials used upon this splendid specimen of handiwork are exclusively the best of silks - thread and fabric. The shades range all the way from the most subdued tones to the most brilliant

colors, and their arrangement, in order to preserve the features of harmonious blending and appropriate contrast, is very remarkable. The needlework is done with delightful precision; while the entire combination exhibits fertility of invention and prolific ideality

"We understand that Mrs. Bull intends placing this creditable artistic production in the World's Fair. It is to be hoped that she will also place it on exhibition here, that all who wish to do so may have the opportunity of inspecting it. Those who do so will not deem this description of it colored in the least degree beyond its merits."

Further information about Mrs. Bull was obtained from Tullidge's HISTORY OF SALT LAKE CITY in the Biographical Supplement. Emma Green was formerly of Birmingham and was the only member of the family to join the LSD church. She married Joseph Bull on October 28, 1954. In 1855 he was appointed on a mission to California and he was given permission to take his wife. However she did not accompany him.

His first born son was born after he left and he did not see the child until he returned in Jan 1958. Mr. Bull made many further trips to both coasts as well as England on newspaper business.

Emma Bull was a member of the early dramatics group as well a professional dressmaker.

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Following lunch, we started joining the rows together, made bias: and prepared borders. At the end of the day, the rows were joined in groups of two and the participants felt secure enough about the process to proceed on their own another day. Most of the women were not familiar with the block method before working on this quilt. Several were excited by the possibility of making a quilt for themselves this way. There was discussion that some of the blocks needed more quilting, an opinion I agreed with, but I saw the finished quilt when I judged the Oklahoma State Fair in Sept. and no additional quilting had been done.

The plan is to donate the quilt to the State Historical Museum after exhibiting it at Diamond Jubilee events. A comparison between the two quilts, made fifty years apart, is interesting. The new quilt has more blocks that relate to the State of Oklahoma

and with the large center block, seems more focused on the state. Some of the individual blocks in the new quilt are exceptional, but the overall quality does not compare with the 1931 quilt. This may not be due to a difference in skill as much as to the organization of the project. In retrospect, most of the problems would have been prevented if the people working on the blocks had been able to get together before starting their work. Many of those who made the actual blocks got their instructions second and third hand and some clearly did not understand that the blocks were to relate to the county and were to be hand quilted. In the final analysis, the quilt may be more symbolic of the State of Oklahoma than an example of the state of quilting in Oklahoma - a mixture of the magnificent and mediocre, held together by the threads of a common background.