

AMERICAN QUILT STUDY GROUP

by Victoria Sears

Victoria Sears is not only a prize-winning quilt maker, but is actively interested in quilt history. She has attended all of the functions of the American Quilt Study Group and reported on the 1st meeting of the AQSG in the Fall 1980 JOURNAL.

Sixty quilt scholars gathered at the second annual seminar of the American Quilt Study Group, held at Dominican College, San Rafael, California on Oct. 23-25, 1981. The A.Q.S.G. is a grass roots organization of quilt historians that was formed in 1980, to share research in a retreat-like atmosphere. Ten research papers were presented, many accompanied by slides and quilts.

Julie Silber opened the seminar with an informal talk about the agonies and ecstasies she experienced while co-curating the 'American Quilts, A Handmade Legacy show at the Oakland Museum. Julie was candid about the complexity of co-curating with three others, and the tremendous technical and financial difficulties they encountered. She shared her feelings of triumph in producing a quilt show that united the quilts with the cycle of life, and attracted more visitors than any other show in the history of the Oakland Museum.

Lyn Bonfield's paper, "Quilts in Nineteenth Century Letters and Diaries", examined the production of cloth, clothing, and quilts in the home in 19th c. New England. In the women's own words, honed from diaries, letters and memoirs, we heard of the changes taking place in the women's lives as cloth and clothing moved from a home industry at the beginning of the 1800's to a factory based operation by mid-century. In her search of the diaries, Lynn came across the source of the now famous quote, "A women's work is never done.", as an entry in the diary of Martha Moore Ballard dated 1795.

Marilyn Davis presented the data she had gathered in a survey of 129 contemporary quiltmakers in her paper, "The Contemporary American Quiltmaker: A Portrait." The average quilter, she found, is 43 years old, married (77%), a working (78%) mother (72%), who has been quilting for 7 years and has completed 9 quilts. Most likely, she is quilting for creative expression (50%) and making the quilts for members of her family.

Judy Mathieson traced design sources for the Mariner's Compass pattern. Beginning with the 'wind roses' in the center of compasses on 17th c. sea charts, Judy documented the designs evolution and name changes up through the 20th c. quilt

literature. Judy's slide show juxtaposed sea chart compasses with antique and modern Mariner's Compass quilts. Having come full circle, Judy concluded by showing slides of 2 modern quilts using compasses from maps as design inspiration. The first Rose Compass by Ester Barnwell, was inspired by an article in a So. African magazine on old sea charts. The other, her own quilt in progress, uses the compass on an auto club map as a design source

Barbara Brackman's "Quilts at Chicago's World's Fairs stemmed from finding many claims in the literature that several different quilts had won the top prize at the 1893 World's Fair. Barbara wanted to resolve this matter and find out who really had won. While Barbara never found the answer to her original question, because no records had been kept, she did complete a tidy piece of research. She made an interesting comparison between the 1893 and 1933 World's Fairs held in Chicago, and what they reflected about the quiltmakers and their eras. She expounded upon the influence these two competitions had on quilting, and the subsequent popularity of quilt patterns that were the winners.

Flavin Glover's "Discovery: Cedar Heights' Quilt Collection" was a delight to the eye. Flavin spun a tale of discovering the Cedar Heights' quilt collection while on a pilgrimage of historic plantations in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley, Alabama. She presented beautiful slides and research of the mansion, the extensive quilt collection, and the matrons who had headed the household.

Katherine Koob used a double projector slide presentation to show her research techniques in "Identifying Quilts by Their Fabrics." Katherine took slides of antique quilts and made colored xeroxes of the fabrics in them. She then compared the xeroxes with salesmen's swatchbooks from various manufacturers of the late 1800's, kept in the Merimack Valley Textile Museum, N. Andover, Massachusetts. Using this technique, Katherine was able to determine the age and maker of various fabrics in the quilts and help assess when the quilts were made.

Sally Garoutte traced "California's First Quilting Party." She began with a simple entry in Johann Sutter's NEW HELVETIA DIARY dated Jan. 29, 1846, "All the people attended a quilting at Mrs. Montgomery's." By combing records, Sally discovered that Sarah and Allen Montgomery migrated to California in 1844. with the ill-fated Stevens Murphy Party

that had become snow-bound in the Sierras. The question of where Mrs. Montgomery obtained the cloth for the quilt puzzled Sally, because the records stated that the Montgomerys' wagon of fabrics had been abandoned in a snowstorm and was looted before it could be retrieved. While studying the correspondence between Sutter and Thomas O. Larkin, the Customs Officer at Monterey, Sally discovered the probable source of the fabric was Star of the West, a smuggling ship that crashed on the coast, spilling its precious cargo of English cottons into the sea.

Mary Katherine Jarrell's "The Quest for the Historical Appalachian Quilt" told of her search to locate the fine old quilts of Appalachia. In a style reminiscent of Lenice Bacon, Mary Katherine told of her travels up the hollows and dirt roads of Appalachia, exploring dusty attics and dank cellars and finding her treasures abandoned to rot in dirt and neglect. She brought 3 fabulous quilts along and told us about their histories and makers.

Dorothy Cozart, a teacher of American folklore presented "Women and Their Quilts as Portrayed in American Literature." Dorothy began with the earliest fictionalized writing with a quilting bee as the theme. G.S. Arthur's "The Quilting Party" which appeared in GODEY'S LADIES BOOK, Sept., 1849. One of the most delightful stories Dorothy uncovered was George Washington Harris' MRS. YARDLEY'S QUILTING, an irreverent tale written in the Eastern Tennessee dialect of 1850.

He describes a "Missis Yardley" as follows:

"Yu see quilts wer wun ove her speshul gifts; she run strong on the bed-kiver question. Irish chain, star ove' Texas, sunflower, nine dimunt, saw teeth, checker board, an' shell quilts; blue, an' white, an' yaller an' black coverlids, an' callicker-cumfurts reighed triumphan' 'bout her hous. They wer packed in drawers, layin' in shelves full, wer hung four dubbil on lines in the lof, packed in chists, piled on cheers, an, wer everywhar,..... "

Dorothy presented a search of the literature and delighted us with quotes from stories and poems up through modern literature.

Imelda Degraw, curator of Textiles and Quilts for the Denver Art Museum, delighted us with a slide show of her museum's quilt collection. She explained various aspects of the museum's system for collecting, storing and showing their quilts. As an added bonus, Imelda discussed her present role as a Juror for the National Endowment for the Arts in their 1981 Grant Fellowships.

The American Quilt Study Group's Seminar '81 was an intimate week-end, full of good research and quilt sharing. Sixty quilt historians indulged their passion for quilting in an intense exchange of ideas and friendship. For info about the group or the Third Seminar to be held Nov 5-7, 1982 in San Rafael, Calif. send stamped self addressed envelope to Sally Garoutte, 105 Molino Aye, Mill Valley, CA 94941

ON THE BOOK SHELF

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CARE OF TEXTILES AND COSTUMES - A Handbook for the Non-Specialist. Harold F. Mailand. Paper, 23 pgs.

Although the title for this pamphlet is "A handbook for the non-specialist", it is directed toward the museum or collector with sufficient room and resources. I particularly liked the checklist of 10 suggestions for handling textiles. If we all went by these guidelines much would be done to protect quilts and other textiles. First on the list is: Wash hands before handling textiles. All of the rules are sensible and practical.

Other topics considered and taken up are "Climate control", "Lighting", "Mildew", "Insects and Rodents", "Cleaning", "Storage" (the type recommended are for the most part impractical for the average collector.

There is an excellent description with diagrams for making a muslin sleeve.

There is a good source list for supplies including an address to obtain Ovrus, the recommended detergent for washing textiles, and a bibliography. A book recommended for those with quilt collections or those handling textiles.

Order from the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1200 W 38th St., Indianapolis, IN 46208. Or it may be ordered from the Textile Booklist Box C-20, Lopex WA 98261 for \$4.00 plus \$1.00 shipping.

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The JOURNAL is looking for Leaflet #11 from the Laurel Wreath Quilt which was published by the DETROIT NEWS in the 1930s. According to Cuesta Benberry it is a Florence LaGanke pattern. We have the other 24 leaflets and would like to complete our set. A zerox copy would be welcome.