

# QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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NO. 23

## CUESTA RAY BENBERRY

*Born Cincinnati, Ohio on Sept 8; Mother, Marie Jones; Father, Walter Ray; Married George Benberry, 1951; One son, George Jr; One grandson, George III.*

*Educ: St Louis public schools, BA in Educ, Stowe College; MA Univ of Missouri, St Louis as Reading Specialist; Certified Librarian 1967.*

*Honors: "World Almanac Book of Buffs, Masters, Mavens and Uncommon Experts 1980"; Quilting Hall of Fame, 1983.*

*Organizations: YWCA, NAACP, Int'l Reading Assoc, Amer Fed of Teachers.*





Cuesta and  
her older  
brother,  
Walter

## CUESTA RAY BENBERRY

as told to Joyce Gross

*Since the early 1960s, Cuesta Ray Benberry has been quietly collecting, cataloging and researching quilt history. In those days, not many people knew her except by her yellow legal pad correspondence and the telephone. Today she is acknowledged as the foremost quilt historian in the U.S.*

*Nowadays friends and friends of friends send her material. Her list of correspondents reads like "Who's Who in the Quilt World" and we are indebted to her for the patient and thorough collecting, cataloging and researching.*

*And the wonder of it is, that Mrs Benberry still gets excited when she finds "a piece of a puzzle." I remember several years ago when she phoned me one Saturday night so excited I could hear her rapid breathing. She had just received pattern "C", a long sought Stearns & Foster pattern for which she and other pattern buffs had been searching for years. She carefully explained to me what it meant to the total Stearns & Foster history.*

*Then there was the time at the Continental Quilting Congress when we met for dinner after she had spent the afternoon at the Smithsonian. She exclaimed with her eyes shining and face beaming, "I felt like I had died and gone to heaven. There I was in the Smithsonian with their files and slides in my hands. I even found 2 or 3 slave-made quilts." She also admitted that when she was alone in her room that afternoon, she was so excited she did a little dance.*

*The material for this article was obtained from a tape recording of our conversation in Ms Benberry's St Louis home on March 12 & 13, 1983*

I always stood in the shadow of my older brother, Walter. He was brilliant! We found out he had an IQ nearly in the genius class when he took the city wide IQ tests for high school senior and the results were disclosed at graduation. Walter had received the highest score in St Louis.

Walter began to play the piano before he started school so my father asked a young woman at church who was a pretty good musician if she would come to our home to give my brother lessons. She said she would try and though Walter couldn't read, she taught him to read music. He was so small he had to stand up to put his foot on the pedal and by the time he went to school his piano playing always created a sensation.

Because of Walter's attitude toward me, there was no sibling rivalry between us in spite of the fact I was never allowed to make a mistake in school without a teacher making some comment like "Why don't you know that?" "Walter would have gotten that with no trouble" or "Why don't you get Walter to help you with your homework." Walter never did help me with my homework. He always said, "You can get this" or "You know you're smart enough to get this." "You know you're no dummy" or "I don't need to help you". All that gave me a feeling of confidence.

My folks didn't believe in forcing us into things so when they realized I had no interest or talent in music and couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, they didn't try to make me follow Walter's interest. But in my music class, boy oh boy, I caught it.

I liked high school and was a good student. I received a Gold Seal on my high school diploma which signified the recipient had maintained a B average in 3 major subjects, such as Math, Science, and English, for all four years.

The schools at that time were segregated but I lived in North St Louis, an integrated neighborhood. That was before WWII and there have been lots of changes since then. At that time it was a predominantly white neighborhood with a black settlement in it. We kids all played together and although there was a black church most of us went to the White Lutheran Church.

We all played together until we started to school and then the black kids went around to the black school and the white kids went to the white school on St Louis Ave.

Your family didn't explain that you were going to a segregated school. You just went. When I was coming up, St Louis was recognized as having one of the finest school systems in the country. The teachers were well prepared and well paid. The pop-

ulation of blacks was not as great in proportion as it is now and we had smaller classes and different attitudes. There might have been some dissatisfaction if parents felt that the kids were receiving an inferior education but they felt it was really a fine system.

When blacks came from segregated schools and tried to enroll in some colleges they were automatically forced to take an examination before they could enter or qualify. I don't think Walter had to take the exam when he enrolled at Northwestern. I had to take the exam when I enrolled in St Louis Univ but I sailed through it with no trouble. We thought that was because St Louis had such a fine school system. Certainly there were black people who had come from Mississippi and places like that who didn't pass.

We went to segregated school but in the neighborhood we all played together. There was a white Presbyterian minister who had kids and there was a white policeman named Bill. That was in the time when policemen used to walk the block. Bill was just crazy about the kids in the neighborhood and would bring his kids down from his home in the country on Saturday to play with us.

I remember an Italian neighbor who was so sweet and had always liked my mother. Her husband had a restaurant and tavern on the corner. When my mother died I remember she came down to the house crying. She brought a lot of food for all the people who would be coming in. It was an integrated neighborhood with a good kind of interaction.

My mother was a seamstress. She made clothes for us and coats for herself on one of those old Singer treadle machines. I have one quilt top - a red and white Broken Dishes pattern - that I have saved. It doesn't have a border but someday I am going to try to finish it.

My father was a railroad man. He wasn't home all that often because he had the Cincinnati to Atlanta run.

Daddy had brothers and a sister but they died young. His sister had one boy, my cousin Raymond who later came to live with us after his mother died. He is like a brother to me and lives here in St Louis. My mother was an only child so there was no big family there on either side.

My mother died when I was six and my Father had a series of housekeepers to take care of us. They were all real ding-a-lings. One woman, Miss Sylvester, she took the cake. She loved to sing church songs as she played our piano and always wore a sweater as she played and played.

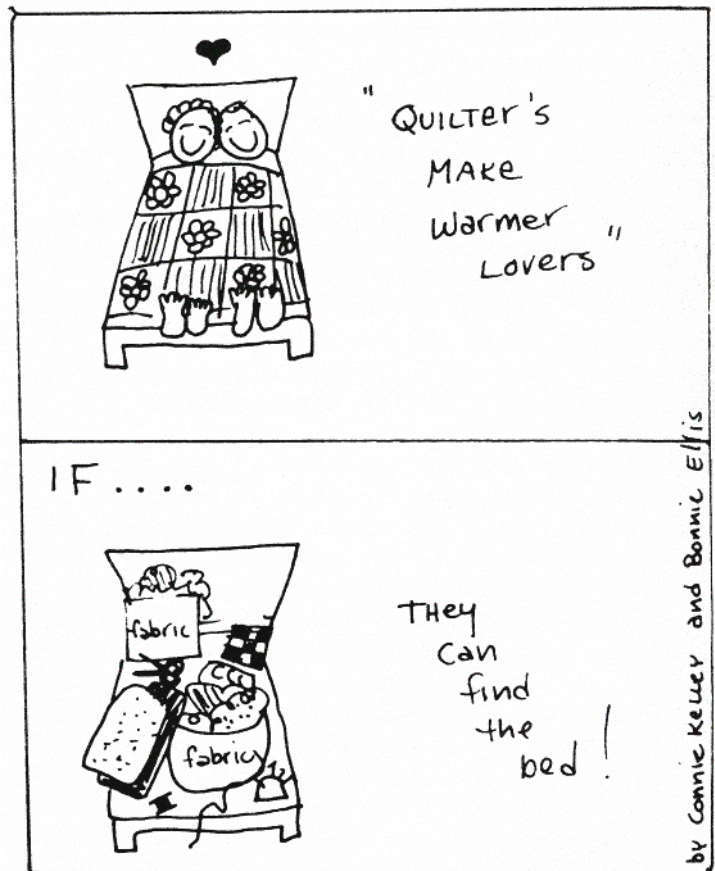
She used to wash our clothes just before we had to wear them. Then she would turn on the oven and put them inside to dry.

### WALTER & THE STREET CARS

While Miss Sylvester was in charge, we were running wild. She didn't know where we were. At that time St Louis had street cars with switches. Walter with his genius mind loved switches and after school he would follow the street cars with their switches to the River Front. There was an old car barn with tracks and old streets cars not far from our house where we loved to go.

The street cars had this metal thing on top and an overhead wire. God must have been with us because when we would go over to the car barn, Walter would be the conductor and the kids from the neighborhood would sit in the broken down seats. Then Walter or some other foolish kid would climb up on top and connect it which would cause the car to go 20 or 30 feet on the track. We were in the car barn or some place like that until it got dark and then we would go home to eat.

## DRUNKARD'S PATH



Published with permission from the MINNESOTA QUILTERS NEWS July 1983

Daddy would come in only maybe once a month. When Miss Sylvester knew he was coming she would tell us "Now if you tell your daddy this or that, then I am going to leave you and you will be all by yourselves". We were kind of small and we would cry and beg her, "Don't leave us Miss Sylvester." She had daddy fooled but my grandmother (we called her "Mother Dearest") came from Philadelphia and didn't stand for any nonsense.

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My grandmother, we called her "Mother Dearest" had been in Philadelphia long enough to have her English air about her. One day she came in unexpectedly.

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"Mother Dearest" was tall and, not fat, but kind of robust and very dignified. She had been in Pittsburg and Philadelphia long enough to have her English air about her. One time she came in unexpectedly.

We had heat in the house but when Raymond was taking a bath and the heat wasn't sufficient, Miss Sylvester would put a heater in the bathroom. Raymond had hacked into the heater and had such a big sore on his backside he couldn't sit down. "Mother Dearest" came in, saw this woman with a sweater playing the piano, saw Raymond with the sore on his backside, Walter and I were nowhere in sight because we were probably at the car barn or someplace, and asked "Where are the children?"

Miss Sylvester said, "Oh they are around here someplace but they'll come home soon." "What do you mean they'll come home soon?"

#### THE END OF OUR "GOING WILD DAYS

Well, that was the end of our "going wild days". "Mother Dearest" decided to stay because "Somebody has to take care of these children. This woman is doing nothing!!

Miss Sylvester got fired of course but not before she warned us, "Your grandmother is going to be mean to you."

"Mother Dearest" was "not that strict but she was some strict." We had to report in the house right after school because we had chores to do. We were instructed, "You get those done and then you can sit and listen to the radio or something like that." When she came to the door to call us at 8 o'clock in the evening, we knew we had better be within calling distance and come in to go to bed.

#### CHATTANOOGA DAYS

I had two grandfathers in Chattanooga and we used to have such great times when we went there. My father was a proud man and never allowed us to ask for anything. He never let us ask for money - he called it begging and said, "You don't beg anybody for anything."

But when we went to Chattanooga these grandfathers, without our even asking for anything, would reach into their pockets and give us a dime or a quarter which was a huge amount of money in those days. That was so great Then when Daddy wasn't around, even if they had just given us a dime or a quarter, we could come back and ask them for something, and they would give us more. They didn't even ask "Why?" or "What are you going to do with it?" Boy that was so different for us.

Daddy's father, who was a blacksmith, didn't look like a black man. He had a very thin, straight, black hair and thin lips, sort of like the pictures of Indians in profile. He was supposed to have come from someplace in Central America. He was very soft spoken.

My daddy was soft spoken too. I don't think my daddy could holler. If he wanted you and you didn't hear him, he would just say it with more emphasis, "Q", "Q" like that.

My family call me "Q". George calls me "Q" but I always had a problem with my name. When I was in school and the teacher came to the name Ray, she would always begin to "ah, ah, ah" and the children would all holler "Cuesta, Cuesta." I have long since just answered to whatever people call me.

I've been called "Queste", "Queenesta" and now that I am going around to the symposia and my name is printed, I get "Chester", "Quester", and "Que Esta". Maybe I should start collecting these name variations.

We used to go to Chattanooga fairly often. My grandmother had a sister who lived there. Then after daddy's run got changed to the Chattanooga to Jacksonville run, he was stationed in Chattanooga so he would get to come home every month. We got down there quite often. (See page 7 for another story)

When I went to the Southern Quilt Symposium I was asking Bets Ramsey about different parts of town that I remembered. I have been up and down the incline at Lookout Mountain lots of times.

## I WANT TO BE A WRITER

As a child I wanted to be a writer. My father encouraged me from childhood and I used to write little stories. When he would come home from the railroad he would ask me what had I written and I would read them to him.

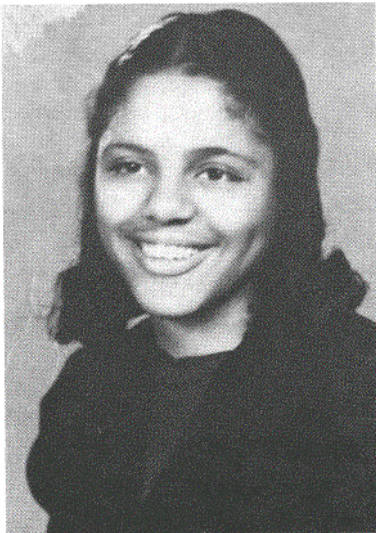
Then when I went to high school I did a little writing. I guess when I was taking English Literature we had to write. I remember the time each student had to select a a poem and write an introduction. I selected the poem "Abou Ben Adhem". The words still stick with me. I was listing who had benefited mankind and I used the phrase, "Jesus Christ was a humanitarian."

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The teacher came over to me and said to the class, "I want everyone to listen"

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The teacher shot up from his seat so fast he scared me. I was standing in front of the class and he came over to me to get everyone quiet. Then he said, "Read that again. I want everyone to listen." After that he took quite an interest in me.



I wrote little plays for the class and various things like that. I guess I wanted to be a writer but by the time I got married I didn't have any active interest in writing.

I liked history in grammar school and in high school too. When I was in college it was my minor and when I did graduate work at St Louis "U" that was going to be my major. I had accumulated quite a few hours before I left school when the baby was little.

When I went to college, history was straight from the history books but when I took graduate work, I did a lot of studying from primary sources of history. We were required to take a course in research as a prerequisite. Then I went into the primary and secondary type of research.

## I GET INTERESTED IN QUILT HISTORY

I think I really got started in quilt history by marrying into George's family. They were from the rural part of Paducah in western Kentucky. His mother gave me a quilt for our wedding and whenever I would go down there with George it seemed to me the whole little community was interested in quilts. Now I had seen quilts because my grandmother made them but she made what I call "under the spread" or utilitarian quilts. A woman in the neighborhood worked in a factory and would bring huge boxes of pieces which they would just piece randomly. They might look in a paper and cut their own pattern, but they never bought a pattern.

But when I went to Kentucky there was great interest. They knew the names of all these quilts and they called them by name. "Have you seen my new 'Cake Stand'?" or "Do you like my 'Catch as Catch Can'" I thought that was so great. Then they would pull them out of their trunks and talk about them. I really think that was the way I got interested.

I pieced a few blocks but I didn't do too well with the sewing. When I learned there were so many patterns I became interested in patterns.

In the 1960s there were a lot of little quilt magazines - not magazines by today's standards but rather little mimeographed journals which were basically pattern books. They also had lists of names of people who were interested in pattern collecting, quilt making or exchanging friendship blocks. The magazines served as sort of a coalescing agent to gather in quilt people. I got to know there were a number of people all over the U.S. who were interested in quilts.

There were several publications none of which lasted very long. What they did was to try to feature old patterns that were long since forgotten or had not been used in recent times. Those women were really very good at uncovering information about old quilts and old quilt patterns from old sources - old newspapers and magazines. They also sponsored Round Robins.

## THE SEARCH FOR SLAVE-MADE QUILTS

by Bets Ramsey

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*Bets Ramsey is a quiltermaker, historian and author who began writing a weekly quilt column for the CHATTANOOGA TIMES in Dec 1980. She is director of the highly successful annual Southern Quilt Symposium and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Quilt Study Group.*

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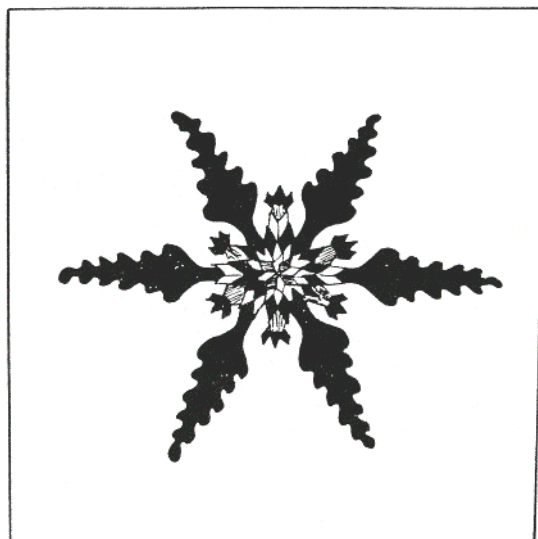


CUESTA BENBERRY Photo by Jean Mitchell

Cuesta Benberry is a remarkable woman. She is a warm, plumpish lady who greets you with a soft voice and establishes immediate friendship, but inside that motherly being lies a steel-trap mind. Ask her for anything about quilting and she can recall an obscure bit of information to answer the question. She has another rare quality: she answers letters, not with a hastily dashed off note, but long, detailed letters written on her familiar yellow legal pad.

My first efforts at collecting Tennessee patterns were mentioned in a letter to Cuesta and, almost by return mail, she sent back a fat packet of drawings, bibliography and explanatory notes. A few weeks later she sent additional material which she found in her files. She adds another note every now and then.

Those long, chatty letters go out from St Louis in all directions. They are written in between teaching school, keeping house for (husband) George and tending her enormous file of quilt information. This year Mrs. Benberry met for the first time Liz Rushing of Pacayune, Miss., a fellow pattern collector with whom she has been corresponding for over a dozen years! It was a joyous meeting for both of them.



Portion of slave-made quilt, Maury Co, Tenn, c 1860, Tenn State

Cuesta's personal focus is on the quilts of Afro-American women which deserve fuller documentation than has been given by earlier quilt historians. She is particularly interested in photographs and locations of slave-made quilts. She would be very grateful to receive information which would lead her to the sources of such quilts. If you write to her, Cuesta Benberry, 5150 Terry St, St Louis MO 63115, you will probably get a friendly thank you letter on her yellow legal pad stationery.

Cuesta surprised me one day by writing of childhood memories of summer visits to Chattanooga where her grandparents lived. You may share some of her memories. "My grandfather, Abraham 'Abel Ray, was a blacksmith and had his shop across from Scholze Tannery. He had a monopoly on shoeing the tannery horses and employed four or five men in the business. He and his wife, Essie, lived in South Chattanooga and I remember that behind their house was a wooded lot that ran back to the creek. The area was very rural then. My maternal grandfather, John Jones, lived on the west side. He had built a three-family brick house with a store which he ran. My mother, Marie Jones, graduated from Howard High School about 1917 or 1918... I spent many summers in Chattanooga and had so many friends there. I even bought my new school clothes there and took them back to St Louis because they would be "different" and no one would have the same thing. "I guess I was kind of vain."

If you run across a slave-made quilt, please help Cuesta in her search.

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*This article printed with permission was originally published on Aug 26, 1982*

## CUESTA'S CHOICE

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Especially for Cuesta Benberry  
Named into the Quilter's Hall of Fame, 1983

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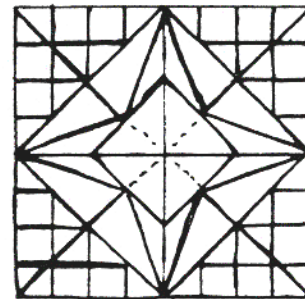
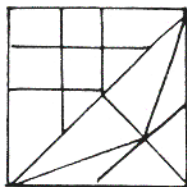
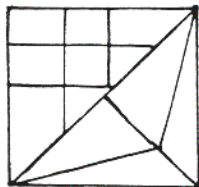
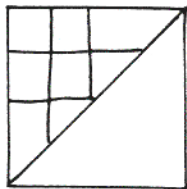
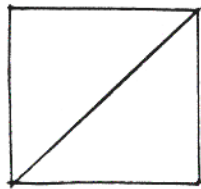
Cuesta's Choice block is pictured on the back cover behind Hazel Carter and Mrs Benberry. It was designed by Mrs Carter to honor "Cuesta for her many contributions to quilt pattern collecting and to quilt research." The following are her instructions:

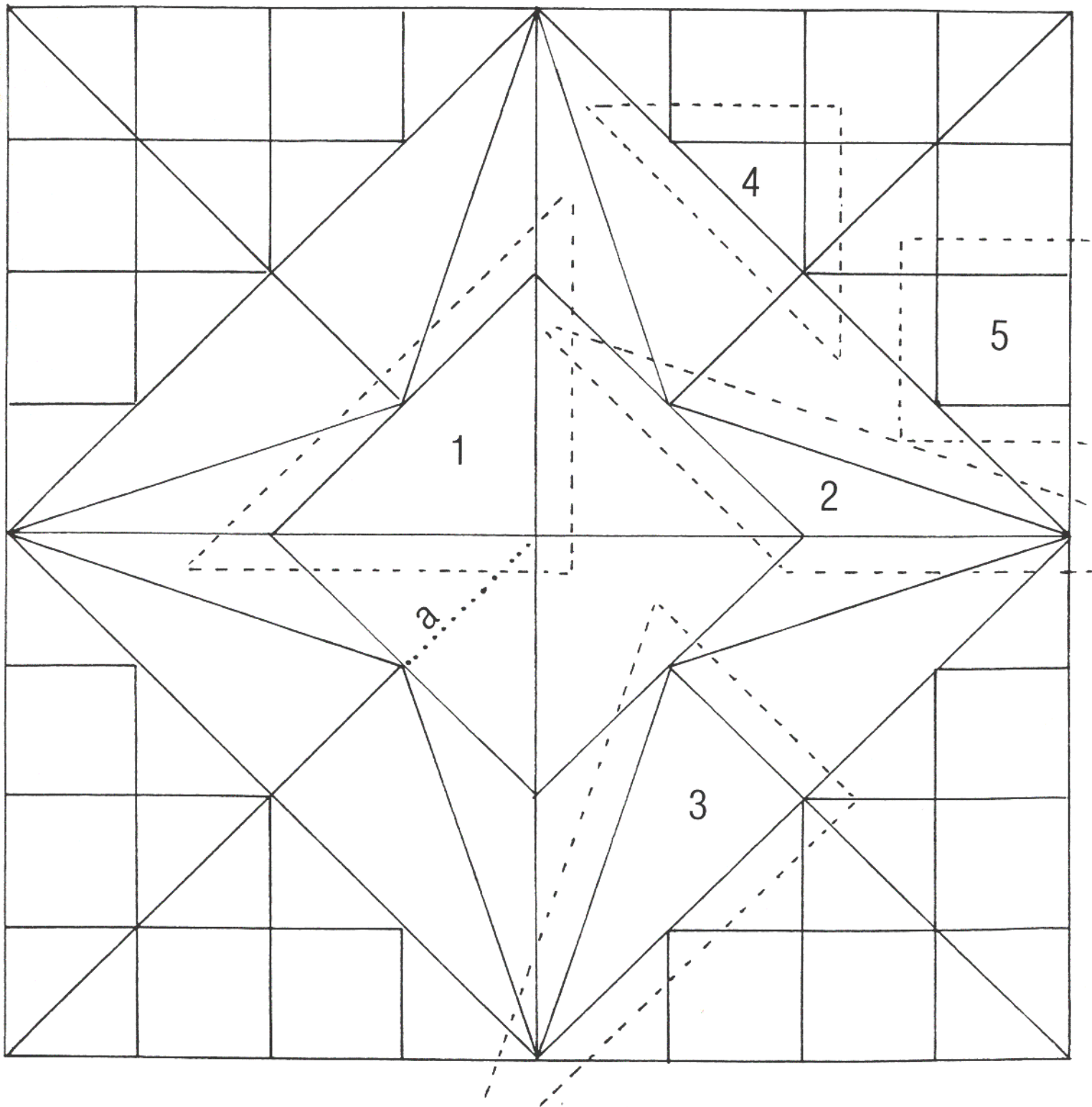
The pattern began as an exercise for a class. I set several restrictions for the design:

- 1 Draw one line through the square at any place within the square. No other line is to cross over that line.
- 2 Sketch a 4-Patch or 9-Patch on one side of the line.
- 3 On the opposite side of the line draw straight lines or curves.

After studying my sketchings one was selected and transferred (heavily drawn) to a folded (into fourths) piece of wax paper. Below is the design that was revealed.

It was as I collected the fabrics for the pattern that it was determined some of the squares should be broken down into triangles and it was at this point that I broke the original rule -- that the first line should not be intersected.





Pattern requires 5 templates. You have a choice of design -- instead of template 1, you can mark line a and make that template which would be 1/2 of template 1 .....remembering to add seam allowances.

This is an 8 inch block.



## Cuesta Benberry *Cont from pg 4*

### I JOIN A ROUND ROBIN

I read the magazines for a long time before I ventured to join an RR. I don't think the reluctance was because I was black. After all, I had been black all my life. It was more a lack of confidence in what I had to offer. I would read the notices, "Join the Nancy Cabot Round Robin" or "Join a Laura Wheeler Round Robin" and the women all sounded experienced. I wanted to join because I wanted to see what they had, but I knew you had to put in as well as take out and I didn't know what I had to contribute. All I had when I first started was the Ickes book and the McKim book. Later I bought the ROMANCE OF THE PATCHWORK QUILT.

After a time I joined a number of RRs and that is the way I got to correspond with a lot of different people from all over the country. I don't know how many RRs I belonged to.

The RR worked this way: A Nancy Cabot PR would be investigating the pattern of the Nancy Cabot quilt columns which came out of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE in the 1930s. If you had patterns of that source you could join the RR. Members would list the various patterns they wanted (called "wants") and the list would continue to the other members who would in turn list their wants. Each member would put in patterns from their collection which others had listed. Sometimes someone would put in patterns that you wouldn't know existed and when it got back to you there would be all those Nancy Cabot patterns.

When the RR reached 10 members the list would be sent out again (called a "flight").

Sometimes I would extract 20 patterns from one RR. With the number of RRs I belonged to and the personal exchanges, it got to be a real chore. You had to copy by hand (that was in the days of pre-photocopying) as many patterns as you wanted within the 5-7 day deadline. I prided myself on being accurate so sometimes I would stay up until 2 or 3 o'clock tracing and copying and then get up with George Jr in the morning.

Some of the women in the RE were real sticklers. They wanted every bit of the information text. They wanted to know "name of the pattern", "what was its original source" "when was this pattern published," and "was it a syndicated pattern". They wanted as much information about it as they could

possibly get and if you sent in patterns more than once without the complete information, they would strike your name from the list, take your patterns out and send them back to you. I was glad to have the association of different kinds. My first RR was an experienced group of women and a good training ground. They were a no-nonsense type of pattern collector and extremely strict about the rules.

There were other kinds of RRs. Mary Schafer of Flushing Michigan joined several block RRs. Mrs Schafer always put her name neatly in the seams so she became disenchanted that many of the blocks she received had the name written across the front in large black letters. I received many lovely blocks for my collection from her which she had originally planned to exchange. Joy Craddock who published DOWN ON THE FARM in Texas was a good friend of Mary Schafer and introduced us.

Mrs Craddock really knew about quilt patterns and quilt history. She was the one who really encouraged me to investigate quilt history. At the time I was into collecting patterns, but she wrote "You have all sorts of facilities there. You are in a large city with a great public library system, a number of universities with libraries so why don't you widen your horizons and start investigating quilt history"? I guess I was kind of leaning in that direction so I took her suggestion.

### NIMBLE NEEDLE TREASURES

Dolores Hinson and I used to write long letters back and forth. Then when Pat Almy started her NIMBLE NEEDLE TREASURES, Mrs Hinson wrote to me, "Let's help her. Why don't you write for her?" I told her I had never written for a quilt magazine and she wrote back, "You write me all those long letters and it is just the same thing. I think she has a good idea because it is going to be different from the publications we have known. It is going to be more like a magazine rather than a pattern book with those little departments (Some of the earlier magazines had recipes and that kind of thing)

So I wrote to Pat Almy who wrote back to tell me she didn't want a magazine with just a number of patterns one after another. She wanted patterns that would relate to a particular article or theme. It was the kind of thing I liked so I started to write for her. At the time I was still working and the writing took a lot of time. She published a

quarterly so I began to write four articles in the summer when I wasn't under such pressure and then I could send them to her at the proper time. I asked her not to ever have more than two signed articles by me in any issue. She didn't like the idea very much but finally agreed. Most issues reflect that.

Mrs Almy received quite a bit of publicity and recognition in the beginning from an article that appeared in MS magazine. NY sources picked it and it reached a different group of people than would have normally known about NNT.

The NIMBLE NEEDLE TREASURES was in publication from 1969 to 1976. I knew Mrs Almy was seriously ill and I think there was also some financial problem in keeping the magazine afloat but I never knew exactly what happened. I know it was very popular because I received a lot of mail and phone calls asking about it when it ceased publication.

#### MY BLOCK COLLECTION

I have not seen the Carrie Hall block collection but I think my collection would pretty well match it. Many of mine are different from the one she has, because through the years my friends have just sent me made up blocks. Mary Schafer has been the largest contributor and they are probably the finest as far as being well made but I appreciate each one block because they were all sent with love.

It's been a long time since I counted them but I guess there must be 600 or so. When I went through them to see how many repeats there were, I was surprised to find how different they were. I might have two or three versions of a couple of patterns which is really interesting.

#### QUILT RESEARCHERS ORGANIZE

I certainly approve of the American Quilt Study Group. The people are venturing out to take a subject and try to research it. They are not depending on something that was written 50 years ago. Of course only time will tell whether the conclusions we reach today will hold water. I have given two papers at their meetings.

I also approve of the Quilters' Research Network. I think there is an advantage to getting the researchers together at these meetings because they react on each other and get new ideas. There is the possibility that you might even get some information because someone may know something about a topic in which you are interested who

doesn't plan to utilize it. Sometimes they can offer suggestions. When you meet and interact with others you get the benefit of their reaction to what you are doing and I think we need that kind of interaction.

I personally have been helped tremendously in my research by others. I think if I had not had as many quilt friends my research would not have been as complete.

There is a woman who is working in the same area as I am but she has basically gone the museum and historical society route. She was surprised at the number of slave-made quilts on which I had information. She wanted to know where I had found it and I told her it was a benefit I had received by having so many quilt friends.

#### QUILTS AS HISTORY

Quilts really deserve an accurate history and I do believe that history will become more important to the quilt world. I don't think we should lose sight of the fact that quilt making was the important thing about quilts. If people don't make quilts, we don't have anything to write about so in order of importance, quilting is the most important thing.

But I consider quilt history the support system necessary for this great art/craft. It is not that I want to take away the type of thing where people say, "Oh my grandmother made it." I think that is part of the charm of quilts. That shouldn't be taken away. But in addition we need this knowledgeable background so quilts stand as a recognized art or craft with a whole body of documented facts behind it.

I think we are going to get away from the idea that quilts are a "nice pastime" and I think historians are going to prove that quilts have a long history - maybe mostly women's history. Whole groups of American women such as the Amish, the Afro-Americans, the Pennsylvania Dutch and other ethnic groups have done unique things with quilts.

We should be involved in sort of a building process. Unfortunately a whole lot of what we are building on today is conclusions that are not valid because earlier writers did not have access to the knowledge we have today. Hopefully we will document the history behind the art/craft and do away with much of the anonymous, the folk tales and myths.

I think there are quilt researchers that are amongst the finest researchers in the country. People like Carol Crabbe who does such a marvelous job. She is a dedicated

Several tables had been arranged so that 25-50 antique quilts could be stacked up neatly with assistants close by to turn each quilt as the researcher photographed or took notes. Identical tables stood nearby with "tops " laid out on them. The variety of patterns and ages was magnificent; the condition and quality was remarkable.

Screens were positioned along one side of the room with panels of muslin or sheeting with antique blocks attached. If they were of the same pattern and had been intended for a quilt, they were arranged on the sheet to simulate a quilt. Sometimes the blocks were arranged by color and had a garment made of the same material hanging close by. This section was so full that some of the screens spilled out into the hallway where they served as a tiny preview to what was inside the whole room.

Quilts and panels were hung around the room as exquisite samples of antique art. Tables held "swatch books", bits of textiles - color coded and dated - for researchers to use as comparisons and examples of quilt fabric of years ago. In addition to the swatch books were plastic shoe boxes which displayed more textile samples arranged for easy study and use. Thirty boxes like these held thousands of fabric swatches, each attached to 3 x 5 cards with pertinent information noted.

Work tables were set up in both rooms so that all materials could be studied with plenty of room to spread out and take notes.

Additional textile examples and related material were displayed. These included clothing, political panels and trims, single printed blocks, commemorative scarves, and even some foreign textiles. All the textiles were cotton, most pertained specifically to quilts or were intended for utilitarian purposes. The samples of clothing and related textiles, as well as the swatches themselves, were invaluable in dating quilts.

Nearly everyone who came into the rooms, whether for an hour or all three days, had one complaint. The amount of time the study area was open was too limited to fully utilize the marvelous collection. One textile researcher commented, "This is so mind boggling, you need time to get over your shock before you can settle down to work. I need weeks rather than days to look at everything."

What that researcher (and perhaps many others) did not know is that the whole area is mainly the work of one woman. Most of the quilts and tops, the collection of samples, books, periodicals, blocks, fabric swatches et al belong to Mary Barton of Ames. This shy, quiet woman has collected and catalogued for years, adding blocks, quilts and swatches which she systematically and meticulously studies, dates, and catalogues.

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Author's note: The scope of this collection and lack of time for "at conference" study brings up a serious problem which researchers nation-wide need to address. Many private collections are unavailable to the general public. Others might be available if researchers can find out who collectors are and where their materials may be studied. Museums are, at best, a second choice when compared to archives that focus on quilt textiles and related documents. What quilt researchers and historians must do is to share their sources through the JOURNAL, the Quilters' Research Network, or the American Quilt Study Group. Through cooperation historians can find the missing pieces to their own puzzles and help other researchers discover their missing pieces.

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### **Cuesta Benberry** *Cont from pg 13*

researcher. I think she is researcher's researcher ... not for name or recognition but just for the love of researching goes in and digs to come up with the greatest information.

Shirley Conlon is another one. She has done wonderful work with her quilt bibliography. She told me the last time I talked to her that she had over 600 periodical and book listings now. That doesn't include newspapers or peripheral type of things like films. I certainly hope that her bibliography gets published because it would be such a great reference to quilts.

I foresee that in another ten years quilts will be looked at differently and with the kind of respect and recognition that is due them.



### HALL OF FAME '83

Cuesta Benberry, noted quilt historian, was inducted into The Quilter's Hall of Fame on Nov 5, 1983 at the Fifth Continental Quilting Congress in Arlington, Virginia.

The initial presentation, made Oct 27, 1979 at the Quilting Congress, honored Lenice Ingram Bacon, William Rush Dunton, Ruth Ebright Finley, Jonathan Holstein and Marguerite Ickes.

Honorees for 1980 were Averil Colby, Anne Orr, Florence Peto, Grace Snyder, Bertha Stenge; 1981, no honorees; 1982, Jean Ray Laury, Bonnie Le-man.

Mrs Benberry was "selected for her tireless contributions to two important aspects of the world of quilting; history research and pattern collecting. Her skill and dedication in documenting each of these key areas not only records history but acquaints and inspires those who follow with all of the various facets of quilting. Thanks to the talents and energies of people like Cuesta Benberry, the knowledge of quiltmaker and quilts will not go unnoticed and unrecorded.

### CUESTA BENBERRY'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I thank the Continental Quilting Congress and the Selection Committee for awarding me this signal honor. I believe this award means that contemporary quilt researchers are being recognized for making worthwhile contributions.

For a very long time the history of quilts has been characterized by romantic and charming narratives. That's not all bad. For certainly, the story of quilting is inextricably intertwined with the lives of the quiltmakers and the customs and mores of the times in which the quilts were made. In the main, quilt history is a unique personal history. I do hope the field of quilt research will not be dominated by over zealous quilt researchers, who in the name of debunking myths, proceed to destroy the quilt mystique. We should not turn quilt history into a pale imitation of the dull, dry academic model. Our history is different in character and process. It is essential that the record will reveal that quilt history is as unique as the quilts and the persons who made them. What I see as the quilt investigator's obligation is the expansion and enrichment of quilt information undergirded by accuracy and truth, set in a frame of serious scholarship.

Some of the pressing concerns quilt researchers should have, include:

1. the overwhelming anonymity of early quiltmakers of the 18th & 19th centuries.
2. the anonymity of quilt source information.
3. the development of quilting in this huge country of ours - county to county, state to state and region to region.

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*A souvenir booklet honoring Mrs Benberry pictures her Afro-American quilt along with the story behind the quilt is available for \$2.50 pp from The Continental Quilting Congress, P.O. Box 561, Vienna, VA 22180*

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