

ORGANIZING A QUILT STUDY GROUP

by Elizabeth Mulholland

Ms. Mulholland is an avid researcher who believes "every community that has quilters and quilt collectors should organize and support a society to study American quilts." She hopes that more groups will form after reading the experiences of the Ithaca, N.Y. group.

Ithaca, N.Y. has a group formed to "study and enjoy American quilts" which formed in March, 1980. It meets once a month to hear a member or guest talk about some aspect of quilt history or quilt design. We have purposely put together a program of many different subjects to test not only our own interests, but those of the community, which, as in most university towns, has many artists and craftspeople.

Our first program was free and open to the public on the subject, "The Many Kinds of American Quilts." We set up 30 chairs and 130 people came, many of them clutching bulging brown bags. It was a spirited and funny meeting with everyone trying to get into the act, and quilts being passed over the heads of the audience so all could see and admire.

We passed out survey sheets with places to check future programs the audience would like, what programs they themselves would be willing to prepare, and what membership fee they would pay. The names and addresses gathered were used for future mailings.

Subsequent meetings were: "A Family's Quilt Inventory", "American Flower Quilts", "The Unfinished Quilt" (an inquiry into why we find so many quilt tops in shops and attics) "The Not So-Crazy Quilt", "Borders & Corners", "Quilt Collecting" (In a time of high prices what are the collecting possibilities?)

Each of these programs was freshly researched (not lifted from books or magazines) and was copiously illustrated with slides, pictures by opaque projector, and quilts. The audience always supplied many quilts on the announced subject, and they were invited to "Show & Tell".

The size of the audiences remained from 50-80 until we instituted a \$1.00 admission for non-members. It then dropped to a steady 40-50, most of them repeaters. We always have several new people and each month several join. The total membership is 44. The membership fee schedule is \$5.00 (Regular), \$3.00 (Sr. Citizens) \$2.00 (Students). We have a good age range with many younger people taking an active part. About 25% of the membership contributes time and effort to programs and

projects - the others loyally come to meetings and enjoy!

We have maintained a loose structure with several people being in charge of jobs rather than "officers" committed to a certain time. Some of the jobs are: coordinator, publicity person, program developer, membership-treasurer, & poster-maker. A steering committee meets once a month, it is always announced and any member may attend.

Money is always a problem in a new organization. We were fortunate to have a core group of six or seven who were willing to spend considerable time and some seed money to organize and produce THE GREAT ITHACA CLOTH MARKET, based on an idea in the QUILTER'S NEWSLETTER. People donated fabric of all kinds and associated material such as ribbons, lace, yarn, trimmings, etc. The core group bundled, priced, and set up a sale day. It is similar to library book sales. Our first year netted over \$300 and we netted over \$500 last

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APOLOGIES TO SALLY GAROUTTE AND OUR READERS

In the spring 1981 JOURNAL, Sally wrote an excellent article entitled "Doing Research Part II". Unfortunately we didn't pick up the part that was "continued". Many of you have asked "what happened"? For your convenience we will print the whole paragraph preceding the missing parts.

It is unlikely that another person would seek to go over that original material, but it must be possible. The person most likely to use the material again is the original researcher, looking for still more clues. At some later date she may want to contribute her collection of original data to an appropriate repository for the use of future generations, and therefore the data should be kept intact.

There are many good books of instruction for writing a research paper. Two standard works in paperback that I find helpful are:

Mary-Claire van Leunan, A HANDBOOK FOR SCHOLARS, Knopf, N.Y. 1978 (\$5.95) and Jacques Barzun & Henry F Graff, THE MODERN RESEARCHER (revised) Harcourt, Brace & World, N.Y. 1970

I have found only one book that is at all helpful for doing research about quilts or other aspects of material culture. Even this does not speak directly to our subject but it is excellently written, encouraging in tone, and easily available. It is:

Thomas E Felt, RESEARCHING, WRITING and PUBLISHING LOCAL HISTORY, Am. Assoc. for State and Local History, 1400 Eighth Ave South, Nashville, TN 1976 (\$6.00)

month. Now we can think of having guest speakers of renown and special exhibits.

Our program on crazy quilts led to a small Christmas exhibit of crazy work open to the public for a week. Besides quilts we displayed clothing, pillows, dolls, wreaths and ornaments. This event brought us into contact with several textile groups in town for they were all invited to exhibit and attend the opening. While the newspapers were uninterested, we had good radio coverage and very good attendance. Our exhibit this coming Christmas will be "Starry Skies", and the preceding program will be about star quilts.

Ideas for future projects include: a station wagon tour of the small villages to show quilts, a Quilt Tag Auction (to establish consistent local prices) and next spring, an "April Airing" (a quilt show on clothes lines in our downtown park). Upcoming programs are on American Quilt History, "Care of Quilts", "Fabrics in Quilts", "Piecwork & Applique Around the World" and "Men Quilters".

We felt it was important to clearly explain to the quilting groups how we differ from them. We have carefully stayed away from any technique programs. Many of us belong to one or more of these groups, so we were able to gradually show we were not invading their turf. Now we fully cooperate: one of the guilds is doing a big show this fall and we are providing a Resources Room to answer questions about pattern names, etc. and will have lots of books and other materials.

Our current project is a master list of good quilts in the Ithaca area which will help us prepare programs and shows and assist those researching our regional quilts.

We spent weeks trying to decide a name more attractive than the Ithaca Quilt Study Group. We made a list, first of our own favorite designs: "Delectable Mountains", "Lone Star", etc. Then we added those which pertained to Ithaca: "Rocky Glen", "Lady of the Lake", "Mohawk Trails". We finally chose "Flying Geese" because it is a generally recognized quilt pattern, has good design possibilities for logos etc., is a name that the public would quickly get to know (this has proved to be true), but mostly because Ithacans love flying geese - we pile into the streets when the first geese fly over in the spring and wave them "bon voyage" from our gardens in the fall. We have a relatively rough winter here, so geese mark the limits. We don't dread winter though - it is a good time for quilting and now for research!

CARLIE SEXTON HOLMES

Barbara Bannister's Book List 1977 was a Memorial Edition to Mrs. Sexton. The following is an excerpt:

"Carlie Sexton was born in Pella, Iowa Nov 4, 1877. She died Jan 29, 1964 at Wheaton Ill. Her parents, Frank and Emma Sexton died before she was five years old and she was raised by her mother's sister, Mrs. W.C. Raney.

"In the 1920's Miss Sexton was well known as an authority on quilts and conducted a quilt pattern business from Des Moines. In 1925 she married H.A. Holmes and settled in Wheaton, Ill. She wrote articles for and sold patterns to such magazines as Penn Farmer, Successful Farming, Better Homes & Gardens, Farm & Ranch, Wallace's Farmer and others. She also lectured on quilts at exhibits at Marshall Fields, Carson, Pirie & Scott, and various women's clubs in and around Chicago. She had a charming personality, was interested in people, gardening and quilts. She will be deeply missed by her friends."

On the following two pages is reprinted a pamphlet published by Carlie Sexton (1932) The pamphlet is from the collection of Lucile and Ben Taylor, quilt collectors and lecturers from Fairfield Iowa.

Of special interest are the illustrations of quilts hung on clothes lines. Mrs. Sexton offered a \$2.00 prize for the best picture of quilt displayed on a clothes line. Lillian Walker won it. (See JOURNAL Spring 1981)

Another interesting item is the penciled notation under the woman's figure on the cover of the pamphlet, "Mrs. Alice Walker at Mediapolis." In another pamphlet there are similar notations identifying neighbors and quilts from Mediapolis

In a letter to Mrs. Taylor dated 1/10/60 Mrs. Sexton wrote, "I spent a night in (Mrs. Walker's) in Mediapolis... I think I was born under an old quilt. I use them on my beds -poster beds I have."

In a letter to Maxine Teele (ca 1960) "

Every year my sister in Des Moines and I drive down to Pella for a day. We get Halland cookies, bologna and coffee bread -carry it to old West Market Sq sit and enjoy the day. It is fun for the people down there still walk and say 'Hi' when we meet.

"I spent a night and a day with Mrs. Walker when Wendel was a boy... A memorable outing. Later, on a River trip my husband and I took we side-tracked to the little town and walked past the home - The big square house.

"Glad you liked my little books - they have gone far and wide."