

A Little Noted Chapter in the  
19th CENTURY CRAZE FOR  
CRAZY QUILTS

The late 19th Century crazy quilt work of silks, velvet, and satins, all elaborately embroidered, is frequently described as being made from the work baskets of the times. Mary Barton of Ames, Iowa, has marshalled some evidence that suggests another, probably larger, source of supply. As Mary has written me.. "should remember that the industrial revolution provided so many ready-made dresses that there were cutting scraps and remnants to be disposed of. If one thinks of crazy quilts owned by families of modest means, one must recognize that the girls and women of such families were not dressed in silks and satins, velvets and brocades. Their good dresses, one for winter and one for summer, were, for the most part, wool or fine lawn. But for a few cents it seems they could buy fancier cutting scraps.

Mary's study led her to the papers of Peterson's magazine. This publication in New York in 1842 as Lady's World of Fashion, but from 1849 to 1894, when it merged with Argosy, it was known as Peterson's. A review of the ads, editorials and pattern extras, which proliferated during the 1880's, turns up some interesting sidelights on sources of material and of embroidery floss as well as of stitches and pattern guides.

(Note: All references are to Peterson's unless otherwise indicated.)

MATERIALS

In April and May, 1883, this ad appeared in a small back page box:

**SILK PATCHWORK** made easy. Blocks of all sizes in 100 Elegant styles  
Send 4 3c. stamps for Samples. Gein Silk Co., New Haven, Ct

Also in 1883, this time November, YALE SILK WORKS, also of New Haven, ran an ad with bold heading:

**SILKS FOR PATCHWORK**  
In Endless Variety of Beautiful Styles. Send six 3c. stamps for samples. Yale Silk Works, New Haven, Ct

The April 1884 Yale ad headlined CRAZY PATCHWORK parenthetically identified themselves as "the originators of the Silk Patchwork Craze. The regular 1/2 inch ad became one inch in February 1886. In September 1884, the New York City firm, Importer's Silk Agency, and the Boston firm, Lyons Silk Co., ran identical ads

**FINE BLACK AND COLORED SILKS** In short lengths, none less than 1/2 yd., almost **GIVEN AWAY**  
To close out remnants, we will send 5 pieces, all one color or assorted, postpaid, for 35 cts., 10 for 50 cts., 25 for \$1. No pieces less than 1/2 yard, many much longer. Can be used successfully in making and trimming dresses and other garments. Stamps taken. This appears but once. Importers' Silk Agency, 23 Broadway, New York.

This proliferation, and stimulation of interest in crazy patchwork is confirmed y a glance at the Delineator for the same decade. For instance, in Jan. 18t\$5, the J.L. Patten firm(New York), offered:

**SILK** **PIECES FOR PATCHWORK.** 75 Pieces, nearly all different of elegant Silks and Velvets—makes a full yard. Sent, post-paid, for \$1. The best assorted one dollar package put up.  
We have a set of 35 Patterns for ornamenting the silk pieces, consisting of Birds, Butterflies, Beetles, Spiders and webs, Fans, Kate Greenway Figures, etc. They can be instantly stamped upon the silk and then outlined, embroidered or painted. Price for the set, with material for transferring, 40 cts. All the above, \$1.50. Address **J. L. Patten, 38 W. 14th St., N. Y.**

In November Delineator carried a 3/8 inch ad:

**CRAZY WORK**—BEAUTIFUL SATIN 50 square pieces all colors, post-paid, 15c, ex. quality. 30c. Lemarie's N. Y. Silk Mill, Little Ferry, N. J.

The most amusing ad among all uncovered is the one COMFORT, a magazine, placed in the Delineator Dec\_1891.

**REMNNANTS FOR CRAZY PATCHWORK**

**SADIE'S SILKEN SHOWER OF SATIN SAMPLES**

ART in needle-work is on the advance. We know the ladies delight in odd pieces of silk and satin,—"CRAZY QUILT" making is VERY POPULAR. We are sure that all ladies will now delight in. Bright, handsome, odd-shaped, and pretty colored goods accumulate very fast at all BECKTIE FACTORIES; for years have been buried and over-run with remnants of many beautiful goods. We have thousands of pieces of silk and satin on hand which we are going to give you a big trade on. People at a distance have hard times getting the right assortment to put into sofa-pillows, quilts, etc., and we can help you out now. We are going to dispose of this immense lot RIGHT OFF. Our packages contain from 50 to 100 pieces of the best quality assorted goods, and we want to get a lot introduced into every house; then you can order as you like for your friends, and MAKE MONEY doing our work and helping yourself also. Remember these pieces are carefully trimmed, and especially adapted to all sorts of fancy, art, and needle work. Many ladies sell tidies, fancy pillows, etc., at a great price made from these remnants. Order one sample lot now for only 25c. It would cost many dollars bought at a store. **GRAND OFFER:** If you order our great assorted lot AT ONCE, we will give you, absolutely FREE, five skeins of elegant embroidery silk, all different bright colors. This silk is worth nearly the price we ask for the remnants but we know if you order ONE lot we will sell many in your locality, so make this liberal offer. Three lots for 50c., five for \$1.00. **BEST WAVE.** We send ONE of the above complete assorted lots FREE to all who send 25 cents for 6 months subscription to "COMFORT," the best Home Monthly now published, or if you send for more than one lot as above, "COMFORT" goes for one year.

**COMFORT PUB. CO., Box 985, Augusta, Maine.**

CRAZY QUILTS

On occasion ads bridged the gap from materials to:

MANUALS

For example, J.L. Patten of New York ran the following ad in Jan. 1885:

**CRAZY PATCHWORK.** We send ten sample pieces of elegant silk, all different, and cut so as to make one 12 inch-block of crazy patchwork, with diagram showing how to put them together, and a variety of new stitches, for 35 cents. We send a set of 35 Perforated Patterns, working size, of birds, butterflies, bugs, bees, spiders and web, reptiles, Kate Greenaway figures, flowers, etc., with material for transferring to the silk, for 15 cents.

Our book "How to Make Home Beautiful" teaches all the embroidery stitches, and a variety of Patchwork stitches. Price 15 cents. All the above \$1.00, postage 10c. J. L. Patten, 38 W. 14<sup>th</sup> St. N. Y.

This particular issue of Peterson's also carried a very carefully detailed set of instructions for making a tan block.

The increased size and frequency of ads for manuals on embroidery stitches paralleled that identified in silk remnant advertising. A number of times in Mass., Conn. and New York were offering aids to Kensington work. According to Webster's (1950 edition) "a kind of afternoon social party, esp. one at which serving and knitting are done".

**KENSINGTON OUTFIT WORTH \$8.80 FOR ONLY \$1.00**

This picture from Conn. Manufacturing Co. gives an idea of the basic outfit. From another ad the text runs, after a listing of some 136 patterns, "In addition to the above, we include a Book of Instructions, 1 Box White Powder, 1 Box Black Powder, 2 Best Pads, .1 Piece Stamped Felt with Needle and Silk to work it, also 5 DIFFERENT BOOKS OF FANCY WORK, 500 ILLUSTRATIONS..." and

then runs into finer and finer print. A lot for one dollar.

In September 1884, the J.F. Ingalls firm of Lynn, Minn. ran numerous ads for fancy needlework instruction, using such phrases as "Instruction for Patchwork" in bold eye-catching type and offering separate booklets on Crazy Patchwork for half the price of the full more extensive booklets. This ad also included an offer for one dollar of a stamping outfit. On the same page, T.E. Parker offered:

**STAMPING** for Embroidery. New Outfit. Full instructions for stamping on Felt, Satin, Flush, &c., so it will not rub.

55 Patterns for Kensington, Arrasene and Ribbon Embroidery, Bouquets, Sprigs, Figures for Crazy Quilts, Vines, Outlines, &c. Box powder, distributor catalogue and Our New Sample Book, showing nearly 500 of our choicest designs and 60 Alphabets, including The Owl, The Greenaway and the Spider's Web Alphabets. Price, \$1.00. Sample Book and instructions 20c. Our No. 2 Outfit, price, \$3.00, contains all above and 50 Extra Patterns of roses, daisies, golden rod, flowers, outlines, &c. worth singly \$5.00. With this outfit you can start business and make enough in one month to buy our \$2 outfit.

**T. E. PARKER, Lynn, Mass.**

By 1886 the 2 1/2 inch single column ad of Ingalls had given way to 4 in. double column ads.

That same year in Feb. T.E. Parker of Lynn, Mass. had included in its ad on stamping outfits and patterns, "a book of 150 Crazy Patchwork stitches". On the opposite page Farm and Household, published in Hartford, Conn., was offering to send a similar Kensington stamping outfit free to anyone sending 25¢ for, can you believe, "a 3 mo. subscription to the magazine."

Questions have been asked about the spider design. In December 1880, the Editor's Table in its column, Editorial Chit-Chat, commented:

IN ART-EMBROIDERY the latest things are the spider-web embroidery. Select the cover of your cushion in silk or satin, and then draw a spider's web with a spider sufficiently large to be placed in one corner, and extend to or a little over the middle of the cushion, the more exactly like a spider's web the better. Then with fine gold thread work the web, both the circular lines and those radiating from the centre. The spider is embroidered in brown silks, but the gold threads are only carried over the satin with a necessary stitch here and there. The idea is said to come from Japan. The prettiest cushions of this kind are white satin and dark green satin, both of which show off the gold thread.

con't page 11

## CRAZY QUILTS

Ten months later, in October 1881, they stated:

The "Spider Design" is one that is very popular. In our December number for 1880, we gave directions for doing this design; but as many persons have not that number, we repeat the directions here; and we also accompany them with this extra embellishment. Select, first, the silk or satin, and then draw a spider's web, with a spider sufficiently large, as in the illustration, to be placed in one corner, and extend to, or a little over, the middle; the more exactly like a spider's web, the better. Then, with suitable thread, work the web, both the circular lines, and those radiating from the center. The spider is embroidered in solid silks, but the other threads are only carried over the satin with a necessary stitch here and there. The idea is said to come from Japan. The prettiest backgrounds are white satin and dark green satin, with the web worked in gold thread.

Another quote from Peterson's Editorial Chit-Chat supports the burst of interest in crazy work in the decade of the 1880's:

"Crazy Patchwork is the latest "craze" in constructive needlework, as we said in our January number, where we gave an original design for a fan pattern in crazy patchwork. In our "worktable", this month we give a design for a scarf for a music stand ornamented in crazy patchwork. This craze is used for quilts, sofa pillows, chair seats etc, and we have even seen a lambrequin for a bedroom and a table cover. For a lambrequin or table cover, an additional border of plush should be added, to give a more decided effect. As we have been asked how to make patchwork patterns, we give here the directions: First cut out your blocks, using paper muslin, or any soft old cambric, and be careful that the blocks are perfect squares. Then with any shaped piece, begin near the centre, and baste it on carefully. Then take another, and turn in the edges and baste it onto the piece already laid upon the foundation, then cover all the seams with feather stitch embroider, using a bright gold color, or all colors may be used indiscriminately, so using up bits of silk. After the seams are covered, put in bits of embroidery where the pieces are large enough to admit use of a single flower or butterfly design. Other places may be ornamented by point-russe stitches, such simple ones as we often give. Use a variety of colors, and if making a lambrequin or table cover, add spangles at the points of the long stitches. This adds much to the brilliancy of the effect, but is not suitable for a quilt. After the blocks are all made, join them by stitching securely, also covering the seams with feather-stitch. Make a border by using 5 or 6 rows of narrow solid-colored silks. Sew these upon a foundation, making a striped border of several colors. (See for example, Plate 142, The Quilt Engagement Calendar 1977 K.D.C.) Line the quilt with soft silk old or new, and put a layer of wool wadding between."

Floss ads were fewer in number but one or two should be noted for the flavor of the times. Preeminent must have been the Eureka Silk Co. of Boston, which, billing itself as "The Standard Silk of the World", ran ads in the early 1880's picturing just the spool and the slogan. By May 1884 they had added a 1/2 inch of type:



In January 1885 the price had gone to 10 cents. In May of 1884 the Yale Silk Works also offered embroidery floss for sale, "silk, assorted colors, 20 a package, 6 packages \$1."

Further evidences of the increasing "mania" is reflected in the Ladies Art Co. ads in The Delineator during the 1890's which offered "Satin and Plush Remnants for Crazy Patch". Their catalog (8th revised edition, 1898) carried an ad for: "SILK REMNANTS ...for Crazy Patch AND FANCY WORK ..Art Needlework is one of the most fascinating home employments. The making of pretty Crazy Quilts, Sofa Pillows, etc. is one of the most pleasing forms of fancy work. The great difficulty has been to get the many & bright colored silk pieces. We have overcome this difficulty for our lady friends by buying up the Silk Remnants in a number of large Necktie Factories, Silk Mills, etc., where large quantities of Silk are handled ...We send them by mail or express, all charges paid by us: One-half pound \$1.25.. One pound \$2.20 Three pounds \$5.50"

One wonders why these clues to the Crazy Quilt craze have not been mentioned elsewhere in quilt literature. One reason may be that the bound copies in library collections have, for the most part, omitted the ad pages. And then in many of us there is that supercilious attitude, "those are only ads". So we owe a debt of thanks to Mary Barton's curiosity about the fine print for further answers to one of those unending why's of quilting.

---Kathryn D. Christopherson  
Louisville, Ky.