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Drunkard's Path Quilts, T Quilts, and the W. C. T. U.

Were "Drunkard's Path" quilts meant to have a connection to the Women's Christian Temperance Union? Do blue and white quilts outnumber red and white quilts because blue was the "official" color adopted by the W. C. T. U.?

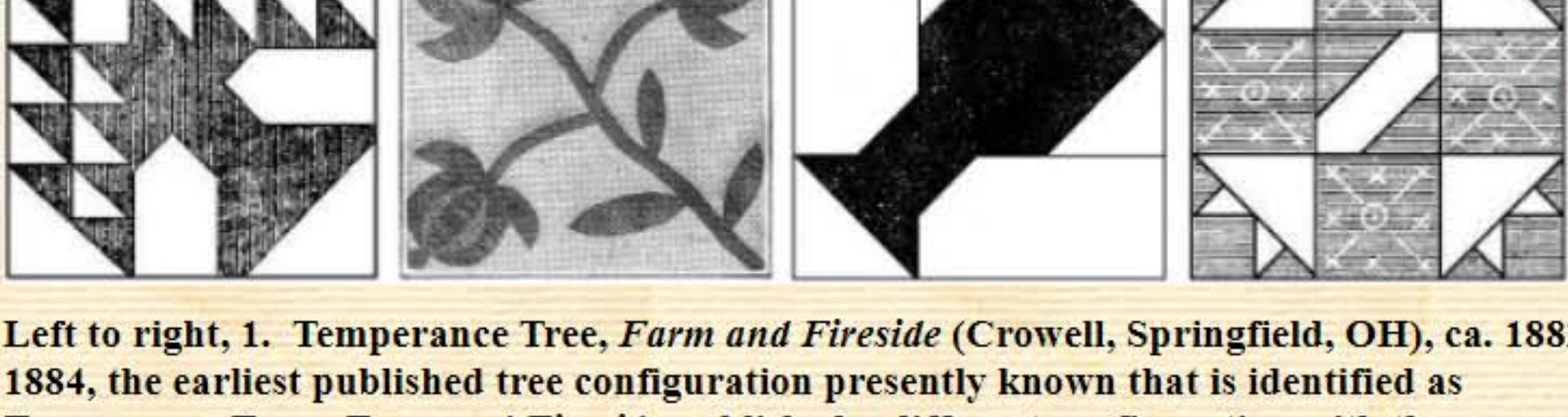
Why are there more quilt block designs based on the letter T than any other letter of the alphabet? Were they meant to signify "T for Temperance?"

The answer to both questions is no, there is no known *documented* connection, but a suggestive connection has been found for the Drunkard's Path name as well as seen in an 1892 reference detailed later in this narrative. Nothing has yet been found that *documents* either theory in the volumes of contemporary material that historians, including myself, have combed through for 19th century and early 20th century quilt history. Few quilts have been discovered made in any of the several "Drunkard's Path" configurations that support the theory. If anyone has such a quilt, or knows of such a quilt, please step forward as it would be an historical document of great interest to us all. The same request applies to quilts made in any of the many T designs that include a connection to temperance either on the quilt or with the quilt. I would like nothing better than to describe and illustrate quilts with such documentation here.

Three well-known W. C. T. U. quilts are illustrated together in Jacqueline Marx Atkins, *Shared Threads: Quilting Together--Past and Present* (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1994), 76-78. One is made in the nine patch pattern popularly known as Shoo Fly with a variety of silks in predominantly reds and blues, another is made up of large silk squares in a variety of browns with each square having an inked or stamped message, and the third is red, blue, and white (like 433c in Barbara Brackman's *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*) with Bible verses inscribed on the large white squares.

Several Temperance Tree designs have been published since the 1880s, but what was their significance in relation to the temperance movement? Two entirely different applique designs called Temperance Ball were published in 1923 by Carlie Sexton in *Successful Farming* (Des Moines, IA), January 1923, and by *Comfort* (Gannett, Augusta, ME), July 1923. What was their significance if any? These are the only occurrences for the word, temperance, in my database containing more than 19,000 documented entries that lists every known quilt design every time each has been published up to, but not exclusive to, 1970.

Another pattern that may or may not have a temperance connection is the pieced tumbler or goblet design. Mrs. E. C. Turner of Nunda, Illinois, asked readers of *American Woman* (Vickery & Hill, Augusta, ME), September 1906: "Has any one the quilt pattern called the 'tumbler'? I have watched for it a long time, hoping every month to see it? I saw a quilt pieced in this fashion when I was but a girl, and cannot remember how the bottom of the 'tumbler' was arranged." The April 1907 issue includes her letter of appreciation to "all who so kindly responded to my request for the 'tumbler' block," and the editor published the design in August. In 1930, the *Kansas City Star* published a similar design called the Goblet and repeated it in 1934 as Water Glass or W. C. T. U. Block.



Left to right, 1. Temperance Tree, *Farm and Fireside* (Crowell, Springfield, OH), ca. 1882-1884, the earliest published tree configuration presently known that is identified as Temperance Tree. *Farm and Fireside* published a different configuration with the same name, February 1, 1885.

2. Temperance Ball, Carlie Sexton in *Successful Farming* (Des Moines, IA), January 1923. She wrote about the design: "Eighty-five years ago the Temperance Ball pattern was pieced for a bride's chest, in red and green and orange as were most of the quilts of that day."

3. Tumbler, *American Woman* (Vickery & Hill, Augusta, ME), August 1907.

4. W. C. T. U., *Farm and Fireside*, August 1, 1888. The text suggested one color with white and setting the blocks diagonally, but offered no information about the name.

Using The Quilt Index as the indicator (<http://www.quiltindex.org/search.php>), red and white "Drunkard's Path" quilts outnumber blue and white quilts almost two to one in the group attributed to the late 19th century and early 20th century. Will this statistic continue to hold true as more state project records are added to the Index? We don't yet know the answer.

Roderick Kiracofe effectively tackled the blue and white question in *The American Quilt* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1993), 127-28: "Some quilt historians have recently theorized that the popularity of the blue-and-white color combination was a result of the influence of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). This organization, dedicated to publicizing alcohol's threat to the family, was founded in Ohio and had as its colors blue and white. Many fine quilts in this color combination have been found in this area, and a number of them are made in the *Drunkard's Path* pattern. / As compelling as it may be to theorize about the connection between the WCTU and blue-and-white quilts, the truth is more likely to be that quiltmakers simply found the combination pleasing. Although the majority of existing examples come from the 1860s, there are later quilts that date from 1880 to 1920, with most of them from the last decade of the 19th century, as the colonial style became popular. As a writer* in an 1898 issue of *The Modern Priscilla* stated, 'Color harmony is the key-note to success [in patchwork], and simplicity the next most important consideration. . . . All things considered, [a] pretty indigo blue and white print and white muslin combine beauty with the coveted old-time air more effectively than any style of cotton patchwork.'" *Katherine B. Johnson, "New Ideas in Patchwork," *The Modern Priscilla* (May 1898):7.

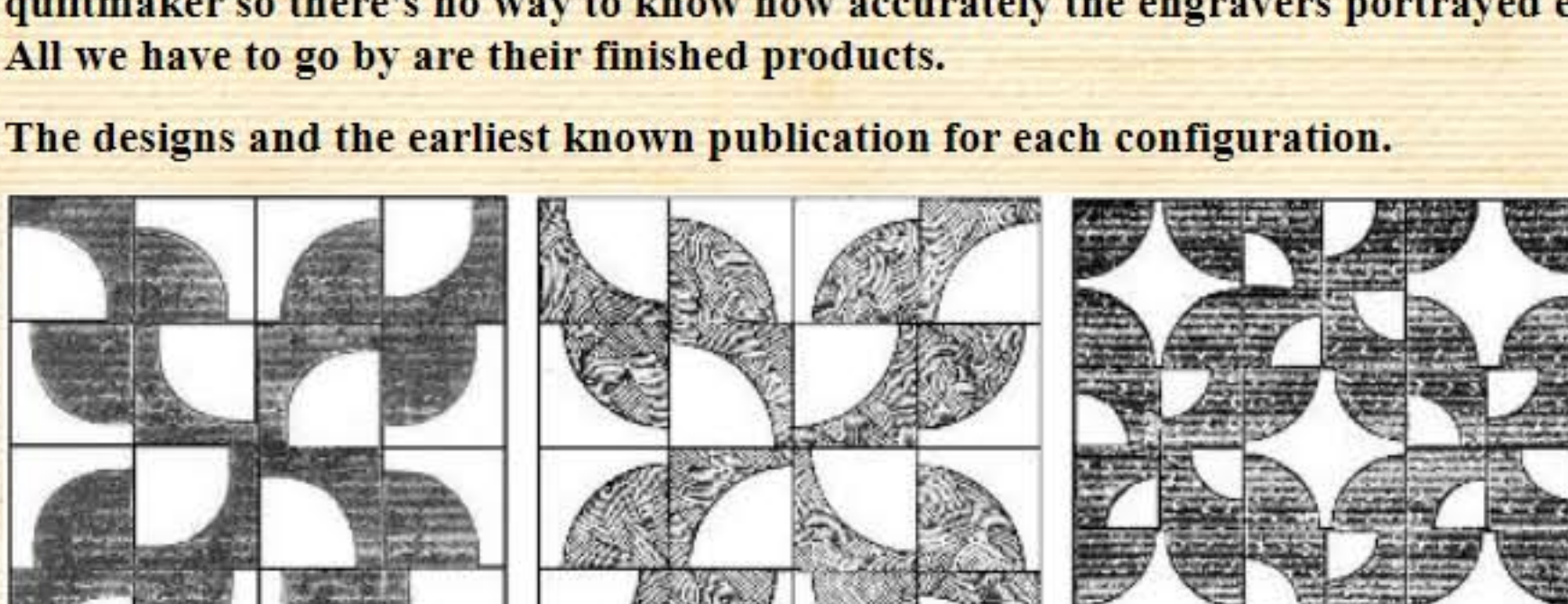
Sandi Fox illustrates a red and white "Drunkard's Path" quilt in *For Purpose and Pleasure: Quilting Together in Nineteenth-Century America* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1995), 111-13. Dated 1896 on one block, it is boldly inscribed "W. C. T. U. / Union Springs" across two joining borders. (See the 1892 reference detailed later in this narrative.) Believed to have been made in New York (Union Springs is a few miles southeast of Seneca Falls in western New York, site of the first national women's rights convention in 1848), it is today in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of the Betty Horton Collection. The quilt is illustrated online but is turned 90 degrees so that the W. C. T. U. inscription is in the borders on the right side of the photograph but isn't visible. (<http://collections.lacma.org/node/252175>) The blocks are pieced like the first engraving shown below except for five blocks that were stitched mirror-image as shown in the second engraving. Notice how those five blocks changed the configuration of the white areas they formed. The choice of this particular pattern and the 1896 date suggests the design may have been known by the name, Drunkard's Path, before the name was first published with the design in the Ladies' Art Company catalog (see the Robbing Peter to Pay Paul text that follows).

This undated blue and white W. C. T. U. quilt attributed to the Liverpool, Ohio, area is pieced in a pattern known as Pincushions and Cucumbers in the 1880s and 90s, and as Orange Peel, plus a variety of names after 1900. Names on the quilt include the town doctor and the shoe store merchant and his wife. It appears to be a fundraiser but no further details are known. (Photographs from Barbara Brackman's collection.)



A brief tutorial on the several configurations of the "Drunkard's Path" group of designs: Each block is made up of 16 smaller blocks, 8 with a dark quarter circle and 8 with a light quarter circle, forming a block with an X appearance when completed. The four patch in the center of each block forms a swastika-like design that can be flipped mirror image--either clockwise or counter-clockwise depending on the quiltmaker and her source for the design. Obviously these designs can be just as confusing for the engraver as they can be for the quiltmaker so there's no way to know how accurately the engravers portrayed each design. All we have to go by are their finished products.

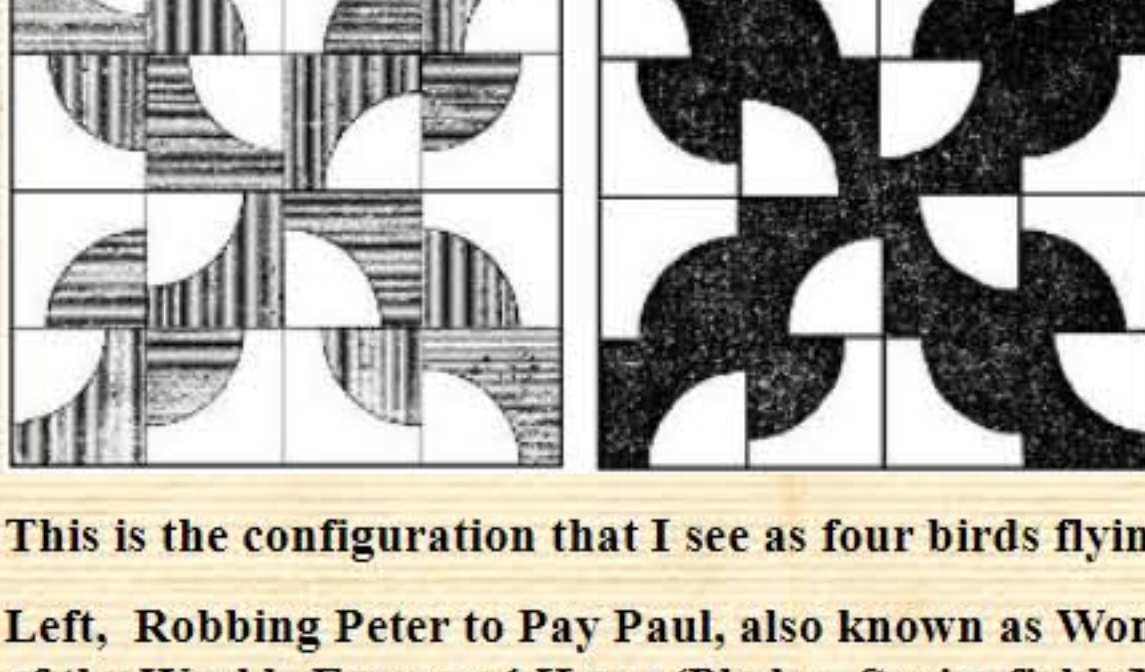
The designs and the earliest known publication for each configuration.



Left, Double Wrench, *Ohio Farmer* (Lawrence Brothers, Cleveland, OH), September 21, 1889; clockwise, the second most common configuration found on the older quilts.

Center, Wanderer's Path in the Wilderness, *Farm and Home* (Phelps, Springfield, MA), June 15, 1888; counter-clockwise, the most common configuration found on the older quilts.

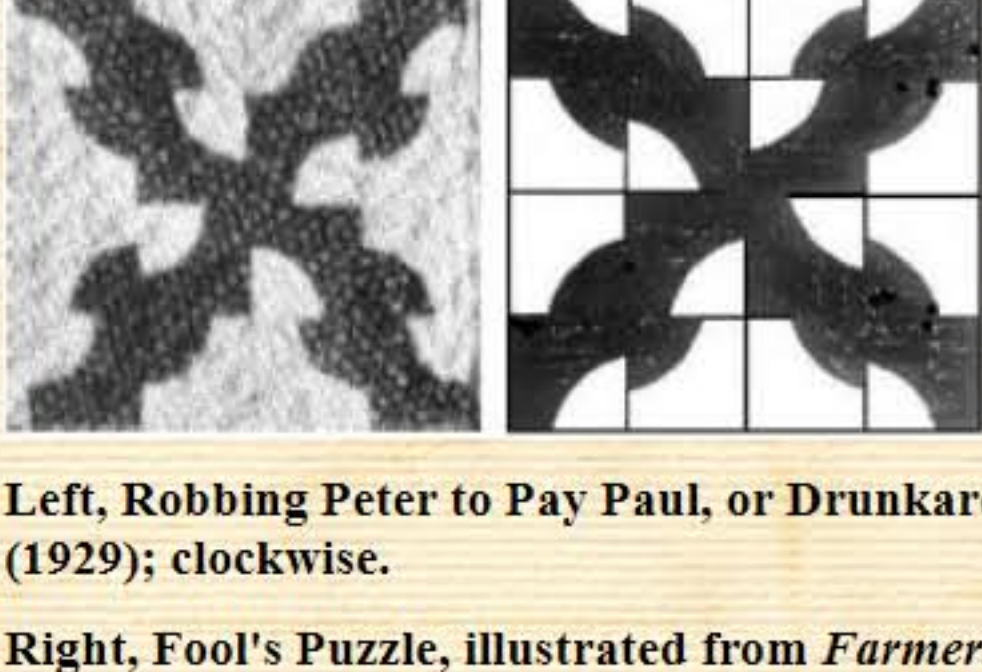
Right, Wonder of the World, *Farm and Fireside* (Crowell, Springfield, OH), June 15, 1884; counter-clockwise, the same configuration as the center design but illustrated in a different way.



This is the configuration that I see as four birds flying around each block.

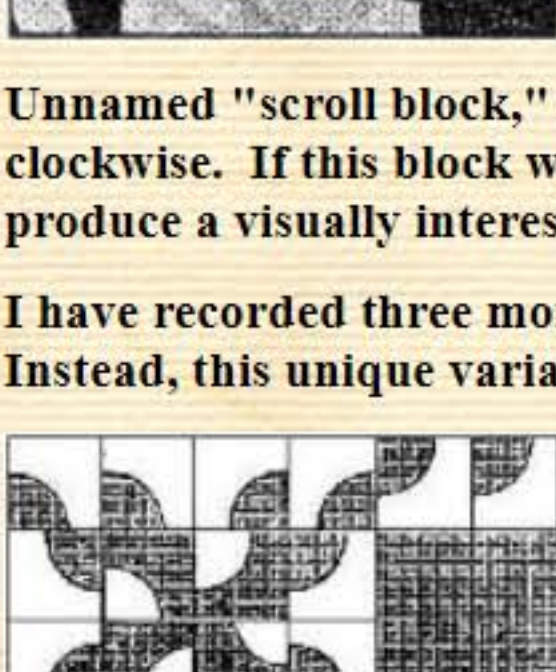
Left, Robbing Peter to Pay Paul, also known as Wanderer's Path in the Wilderness, or Way of the World, *Farm and Home* (Phelps, Springfield, MA), March 15, 1890; clockwise configuration (scanners don't do justice to engravings with fine lines placed close together). This is the configuration that the Ladies' Art Company (St. Louis, MO) first assigned as No. 154 Robbing Peter to Pay Paul in their catalog in 1895-1897, then replaced 154 with an entirely different design several years later but retained the same name, and instead assigned the *Farm and Home* design as No. 220 Drunkard's Path, the earliest known appearance in print for this name that also illustrates the design. Checking GoogleBooks for 19th century temperance publications, I found that the phrase, drunkard's path, was commonly used in those publications as early as 1832 but only in reference to a man who was drunk. Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer published *History of the Woman's Temperance Crusade* in 1878. Several years later (exact year unknown), Henry Brockstedt, founder of Ladies' Art in 1889 and originally a book publisher in the 1870s and 80s, reprinted Mrs. Wittenmyer's book. While the word, drunkard, appears 32 times in its pages, the phrase, a drunkard staggering home, is the closest to the phrase, drunkard's path. However, it is not a leap to understand why Ladies' Art christened the Robbing Peter design as Drunkard's Path--the Brockstedt family had likely read that phrase many times in other temperance literature. It's also possible that an early customer sent the design to the Brockstedts identifying it as Drunkard's Path.

Right, Solomon's Puzzle, Nancy Cabot, *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1933; counter-clockwise configuration.



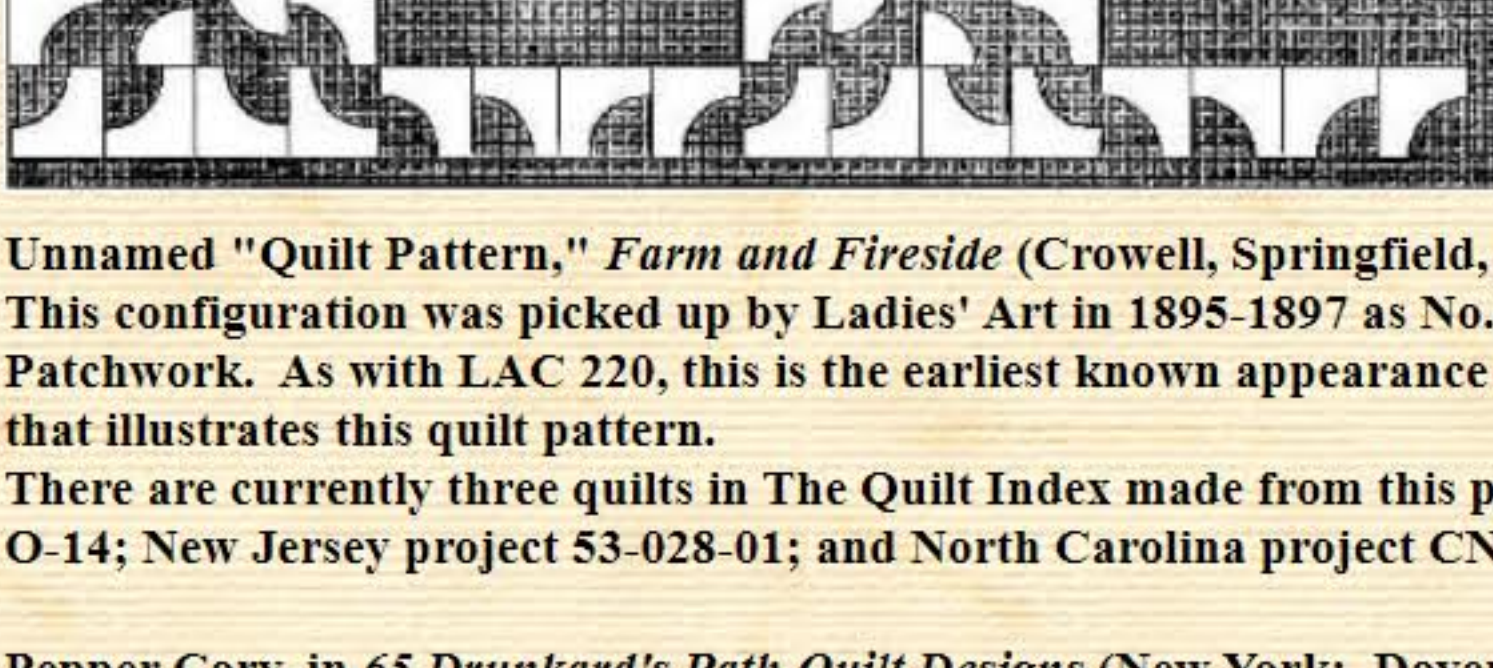
Left, Robbing Peter to Pay Paul, or Drunkard's Path, Ruth Finley, *Old Patchwork Quilts* (1929); clockwise.

Right, Fool's Puzzle, illustrated from *Farmers Mail and Breeze* (Arthur Capper, Topeka, KS), February 23, 1907, but first published unnamed in *American Agriculturist* and *New England Homestead*, August 24, 1895, and probably *Orange Judd Farmer*, same date; counter-clockwise.



Unnamed "scroll block," *Farm and Fireside* (Crowell, Springfield, OH), November 11, 1911; clockwise. If this block were made centrally, and set together with imagination, it could produce a visually interesting quilt with white circles scattered across the surface.

I have recorded three more variations published in later years that will not be included here. Instead, this unique variation will be the last one illustrated.



Unnamed "Quilt Pattern," *Farm and Fireside* (Crowell, Springfield, OH), October 1, 1891. This configuration was picked up by Ladies' Art in 1895-1897 as No. 243 Drunkard's Patchwork. As with LAC 220, this is the earliest known appearance in print for this name that illustrates this quilt pattern.

There are currently three quilts in The Quilt Index made from this pattern -- Iowa project O-14; New Jersey project 53-028-01; and North Carolina project CN65.

Pepper Cory, in *65 Drunkard's Path Quilt Designs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 8, found that "the best-known name for the Drunkard's Path in England was Rob Peter to Pay Paul." (GoogleBooks)

In the U.S., an amazing list of names have been found in contemporary literature for the "Drunkard's Path" designs. Listed in the order of their appearance: Wonder of the World in 1884, Wanderer's Path in the Wilderness in 1888, Double Wrench in 1889, Robbing Peter to Pay Paul and Way of the World in 1890, unnamed in 1891, Chinese Puzzle in 1894, and finally Drunkard's Path in 1895-1897. Added to these are Solomon's Puzzle, Fool's Puzzle, and Old Maid's Puzzle in 1896, Coral Pattern and Wandering in the Wilderness in 1897, Wandering Jew in 1898, Chain and Mother's Favorite in 1901, Compensation in 1902, Cactus in 1903, Wandering Path of (or in) the Wilderness in 1904, World's Wonder in 1906, I Will and I Won't in 1913, also Borrows and Lend the same year. Country Wife's Puzzle and Devil's Puzzle were published ca. 1905-1915, and seventeen additional names since 1926.

The state projects are recording even more names: A red and white quilt documented by the Iowa project (H-173) was called Crooked Road by the maker because she didn't want to call it Drunkard's Path. A red and green quilt documented by the North Carolina project (DD52) was called Indian Hatchet, and a blue and white quilt (FA59) was called Devil's Crossroads.

Three years before the Ladies' Art Company first illustrated the design that we associate with Drunkard's Path quilts, the name was included in an offer by Louisa P. Zoller, Lotwith, Fulton County, New York, in *Hearth and Home* (Vickery & Hill, Augusta, ME), March 1892: "I have several different quilt patterns, such as 'Masonic Square,' 'Necktie,' 'Drunkard's Path,' etc., and will send pattern to any of the *Hearth and Home* readers who will pay the postage." Fulton County is east of Seneca Falls and Union Springs in western New York suggesting that it was indeed the Temperance Movement that originated the name but not the design.

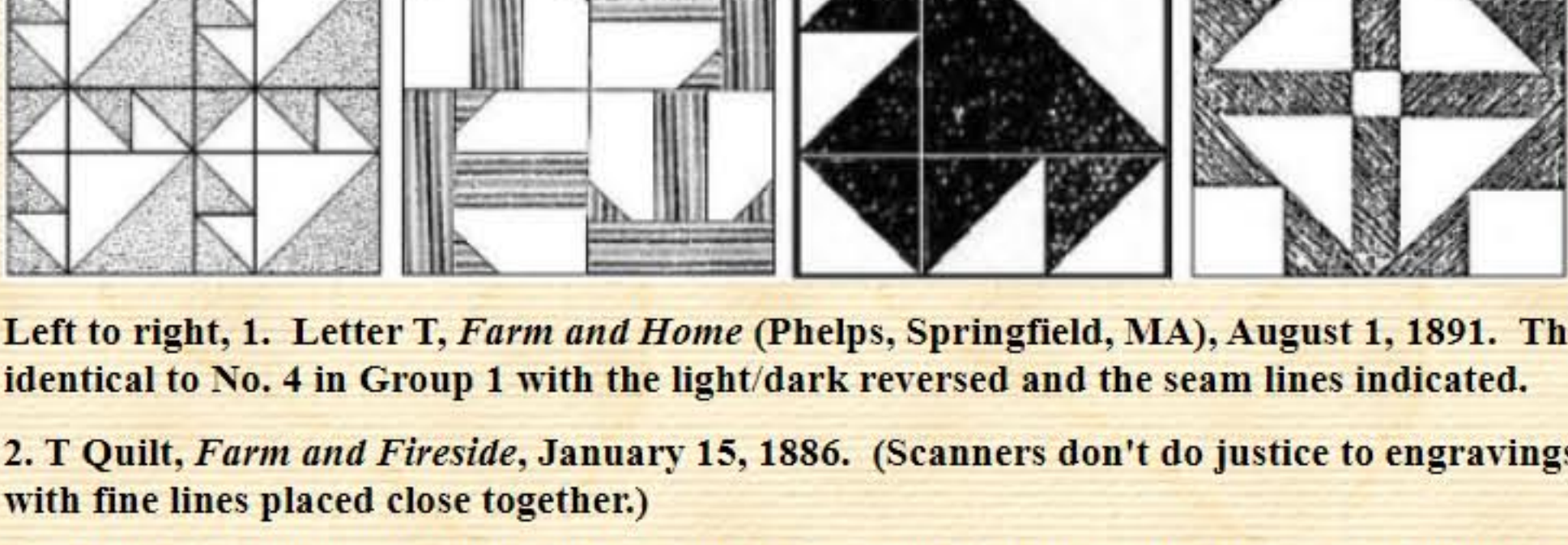
The "Drunkard's Path" name did not become pervasive until the 1920s and 30s. Today the name's commonality has pushed the more romantic and suggestive names into near oblivion.

The Many T Quilt Designs.

There are more quilt block designs based on the letter T than any other letter of the alphabet which has caused speculation in recent years that they signified "T for Temperance" among quiltmakers. However, no quilts have yet been discovered made in any of the multitude of T configurations that support the theory either inscribed on the quilt or with accompanying documentation. If anyone has such a quilt, or knows of such a quilt, please step forward as it would be an historical document of great interest to us all. I would like nothing better than to describe and illustrate quilts with such documentation here.

Information supporting the temperance theory has not yet been found in the volumes of contemporary material that historians, including myself, have combed through for 19th century and early 20th century quilt history. The designs that were published with accompanying text never mentioned the temperance movement or the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In fact, many needlework editors seem to have avoided the subject altogether such as Mary E. Bradford (*Hearth and Home*, Augusta, ME) and Nancy Cabot (*Chicago Tribune*) to name just two. Even magazines that were primarily made up of reader contributed material, such as *The Household* (George E. Crowell, Brattleboro, VT), and published quilt related discussions including exchanges of T designs, never mentioned temperance on pages devoted to needlework subjects. Perhaps temperance was just too political a subject, but if that was not the case, then it seems logical to assume that T quilt designs were simply an interesting design and nothing more. Perhaps quiltmakers, designers, and columnists just enjoyed experimenting with how many ways a basic design could be configured. But that's conjecture on my part. Instead, we want documentable proof, and none has yet been found to connect T designs to the temperance movement.

Following are twelve engravings of T designs published in the 1880s and 90s. Two details stand out about them as a group--except for one or two, the names are not particularly imaginative, and there's not a "Temperance T" among them. There are several more designs in my collection of 1,000+ vintage quilts that have no known published source (which I will eventually photograph), and, of course, many more variations on this theme will be published after 1900 and temperance is not linked to them either.

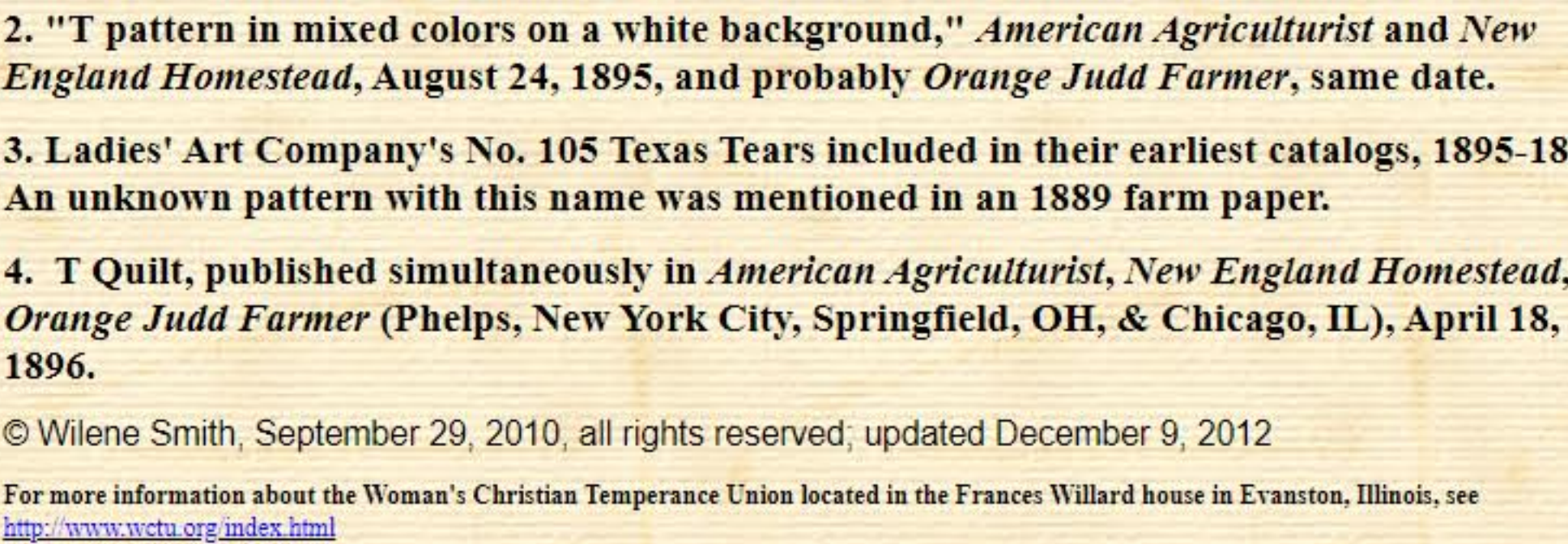


Left to right, 1. Double T, *Farm and Fireside* (Crowell, Springfield, OH), September 1, 1882.

2. Capital T, *Farm and Fireside*, February 15, 1883. Note white center square.

3. Double T, *Prairie Farmer* (Chicago, IL), June 12, 1886. Same as Capital T but center square is dark.

4. T Pattern, *Farm and Fireside*, published either March 15, 1883, or May 15, 1883 (correct date has not yet been confirmed).



Left to right, 1. Letter T, *Farm and Home* (Phelps, Springfield, MA), August 1, 1891. This is identical to No. 4 in Group 1 with the light/dark reversed and the seam lines indicated.

2. T Quilt, *Farm and Fireside*, January 15, 1886. (Scanners don't do justice to engravings with fine lines placed close together.)

3. T Pattern, *Prairie Farmer*, October 23, 1886. This is actually 1/4 of No. 4 in Group 1 and No. 1 in this group.

4. unnamed, one of four designs headlined "Some Pretty Patchwork," *Farm and Home*, January 1, 1889.

Left to right, 1. The Four T's, *Farm and Home*, October 15, 1890.

2. "T pattern in mixed colors on a white background," *American Agriculturist* and *New England Homestead*, August 24, 1895, and probably *Orange Judd Farmer*, same date.

3. Ladies' Art Company's No. 105 Texas Tears included in their earliest catalogs, 1895-1897. An unknown pattern with this name was mentioned in an 1889 farm paper.

4. T Quilt, published simultaneously in *American Agriculturist*, *New England Homestead*, and *Orange Judd Farmer* (Phelps, New York City, Springfield, OH, & Chicago, IL), April 18, 1896.

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For more information about the Woman's Christian Temperance Union located in the Frances Willard house in Evanston, Illinois, see <http://www.wctu.org/index.html>

Note: This page will always be "under construction" as we continue to search for quilts in one of the Drunkard's Path configurations and any T design that have documentable connections, not suggestive connections, to the temperance movement.

Addendum: An interesting question was found as a space filler on page 143 of the April 9, 1885, issue of *The Youth's Companion*: "Why is the letter T like Easter? Because it is the end of Lent." Could this be a clue to the popularity of T designs in quilts? In what other ways would the letter T relate to the Bible or to religion in general?