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Ford County, Illinois, signature quilt, ca. 1895



"What an amazing story quilts can tell" commented Patricia Dudek recently on the Quilts-Vintage and Antiques group on Facebook and this ca. 1895 signature quilt proved to have just such a story.

Found in the Abilene, Kansas, area, I bought this quilt in 1982 as a cutter. I "rediscovered" it in 2009 in a stack of quilts I hadn't looked at for a number of years. The only information the quilt gave me was the 32 names inscribed on it and the age of the prints which I judged to be from the 1890s. Curious, I began searching the 1900 census for some of the more uncommon names hoping to see a common state and county emerge. It took awhile but sure enough, Ford County, Illinois, became the focal point for the quilt. I eventually discovered that 21 of the names on the quilt are even buried in the same Ford County cemetery!

All but three signatures are beautifully written in ink and appear to be by the same hand while the remaining three are embroidered and in a different hand.

The blocks all have female names but the sashing in the center of the quilt has two men's names inscribed. One is the husband of the woman in the block immediately below and the other name was the school teacher in 1900 as well as the census enumerator. According to the census, he was James G. Lyston born in or about 1852 in Vermont but I cannot find him anywhere else in any year or any location.

I couldn't find six of the 32 names. Of the others, the oldest lady was born in 1838 and the youngest in 1876. One lady was married in 1894 and another in 1899 which places the quilt sometime between those two years. I've been unable to discover the reason behind the quilt's making. The names on it are as follows:

J. G. Lyston : James G. Lyston, born 1852 VT; school teacher in Gibson City & the enumerator for Drummer Twp. in 1900

W. C. Mottier : Wm. Clarence Mottier, b. 1863 OH; husband of Kittie Mottier on the block below his name

Emma Barr : b. Emma Bunney, 1870 IL; wife of Thomas Edgar Barr; both lived in Ford Co. past 1930

Mrs. Allie Barrow : b. Alwilda W. McVicker, 1859 IL; wife of Charles Frederick Barrow, & sister-in-law of Lulu Barrow

Lulu Barrow : b. Louetta Livingston, 1868 IL; wife of Lewis William Barrow, & sister-in-law of Mrs. Allie Barrow

Mrs. H. Baylor : b. Harriet M. Cassady, 1840 IL; wife of Darius Baylor; parents of Ella Baylor; neat red running stitch; different hand writing from the others, but same as Ella Baylor's

Ella Baylor : b. Sarah L. Baylor, 1868 IL; dau. of Mrs. H. Baylor

Mrs. Dan Beeler : b. Harriet Jane Stiger, known as Hattie, 1858 IL; wife of Daniel E. Beeler

Tillie Benson : b. Tilda Larson, 1863 SWEDEN; md. 1) Mr. Johnson, md. 2) Nels Benson

Mrs. R. Bonen : b. Johanna (unknown), 1850 GERMANY; wife of Richard E. Bonnen

Maggie Bulger : b. Margaret C. Gentle, 1847 OH; wife of John Bulger, & sister of Mrs. A. E. Mottier

Mrs. A. E. Mottier : b. Parthenia Ellen Gentle, 1838 OH; wife of Albert Emanuel Mottier, & sister of Maggie Bulger

Kittie Mottier : b. Catherine Cryder Trailor, 1865 IL; wife of William Clarence Mottier, & dau-in-law of Mrs. A. E. Mottier

Mamie Mottier : b. Mamie Victoria Rockwood, 1866 IL; wife of Walter Favor Mottier, & dau-in-law of Mrs. A. E. Mottier

Mrs. A. J. Cooper : b. Elizabeth Otto, 1839 PA; wife of Absalom J. Cooper

Marion DuSold : b. Marian Main, 1851 SCOTLAND; wife of George H. DuSold (divorced), & sister-in-law of Mrs. J. F. Main

Mrs. J. F. Main : b. Melissa Belle Funk, 1867 IL; wife of James F. Main, & sister-in-law of Marian DuSold

Minnie Gilchrist : b. Minnie A. Gilchrist, 1868 IL

Jennie Kofoid : b. Jennie Olson, 1862 NORWAY; wife of Andrew Mathias Kofoid

Mrs. J. M. Miner : b. Julia A. Southworth, 1848 OH; wife of John Mottes Miner; & mother of Addie Brotherton and Julia Miner

Addie Brotherton : b. Addie L. Miner, 1868 IL; wife of Campbell G. Brotherton, & dau. of Mrs. J. M. Miner

Julia Miner : b. Julia Franklin Miner, 1876 IL; dau of Mrs. J. M. Miner; Julia md. in Ford Co., Jan. 17, 1900

Elizabeth Ramsden : b. Sept. 1870 IL; adopted dau. of Robert & Margaret Jardine; Elizabeth md. in Cook Co., April 26, 1899

Mrs. M. J. Reynolds : b. Malinda J. Sumner, 1847 OH; wife of Thomas Reynolds

Mary Speedie : b. Mary Elizabeth Osborne, 1859 IL; wife of William Thomas Speedie

Emma Trigger : b. Emma Jane Kingdon, 1860 IL; wife of William Trigger

Julia Beadles : not identified

Lizzie Brotherton and Tillie Brotherton : not identified : no names in any Illinois census relate to either Lizzie or Tillie Brotherton

May Hamilton : possibly wife of Will Hamilton in McLean Co., 1900, next west of Ford : b. 1877 IL; different hand from the rest; embroidered; faded pink thread; tight running stitch

Laura Johnson : not identified

Ildria Pierce : not identified

These women lived, worked, and socialized in a multi-cultural community bringing together the traditions of a range of European faiths, customs, and heritage. Of the twenty-four women that have been identified, four were born in Sweden, Germany, Scotland, and Norway respectively. Fifteen were born in Illinois, one in Pennsylvania, while the rest were from Ohio. Although twenty women were American born, one or both parents of three of them were from England. Their birth years ranged from 1838 to 1876—three were born 1838-1840, three in 1847 and 1848, five in the 1850s, ten in the 1860s, and three in the 1870s.

Why was this quilt made? Easy assumptions include a fund raiser for a church, school, or organization, or maybe a memory quilt, possibly for the school teacher or a church pastor or for someone moving away, perhaps one of the unidentified names on the quilt. However, there are other possibilities such as localized social clubs or groups formed by the women that met for socializing, usually once a week. Newspaper accounts of these meetings found on NewspaperArchive.com often tell that the morning or afternoon was passed in making quilt blocks as the women chatted and sometimes a later accounting reveals how the ladies decided to either exchange the blocks or combine them into a quilt for presentation to someone or as a fundraiser.

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If you recognize, or are related to, any of the names on this quilt, you can contact me through the Contact Us page on this site. I would love to hear from you.