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## The Nebraska Quilt History Project: Interpretations of Selected Parameters

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### *Introduction*

To date, there is little information on the quilting traditions of the midwest. In fact, there appear to be only five documentary sources generally available that are devoted to quiltmaking traditions of Nebraska. One relates the history that is associated with what may be the oldest domestically produced quilt in the state.<sup>1</sup> The second printed source is the published remembrances of a Nebraska quiltmaker.<sup>2</sup> The third source is a catalog published in 1974 of quilts exhibited at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in collaboration with the Lincoln Quilters Guild, Inc., (LQG).<sup>3</sup> The fourth is an historical overview of quilting as a Nebraska folk art.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the latest of these sources is the inclusion of a partial listing of the textile collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society in the recently published *Hearts and Hands*.<sup>5</sup> All of the aforementioned publications on Nebraska quilting provide information related to quite specific examples, rather than to an entire body of quilts made and/or used in Nebraska. Because of the limited amount of information available on Nebraska quiltmaking, additional study was needed.

### *Nebraska Quilt History Project*

In the initial planning stages of the Nebraska Quilt History Project (NQHP), the "potential influence of ethnic culture on quiltmaking" was a significant aspect in the determination of sites

chosen for data collection.<sup>6</sup> Funded by a planning grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, Dr. Ronald Naugle, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska, "sought to identify areas of the state most representative of the largest foreign-born populations in Nebraska in 1900," based on the census of that year.<sup>7</sup> It was determined that almost half of Nebraska's population was made up of first or second generation immigrants at the turn of the century.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Naugle identified "five groups of foreign-born [that] comprised more than one percent of Nebraska's population in 1900: Germans, Swedes, Czechs, Danes, and Irish."<sup>9</sup> He then "attempted to identify the county most influenced by or representative of each" ethnic group.<sup>10</sup>

Using this information, thirteen general areas were selected for the conducting of Nebraska Quilt History Days. (Figure 1 illustrates the locations of those sites.) The metropolitan sites of Lincoln and Omaha were excluded since it was felt that they were much too large to be successfully included in the initial survey of quilting traditions. (Data collection for these cities was underway, in 1988, and this data was not included in this study.)

Following the selection of possible sites based on ethnic populations, a proposal was presented by NQHP to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), to partially underwrite the project, provide for consulting scholars, training workshops, and necessary materials. A

Figure 1. Location of Nebraska Quilt History Day Sites.

grant of approximately \$18,000 from the NEA along with approximately \$30,000 in-kind monies eventually funded the project.<sup>11</sup> Concurrently, forms were developed for use in documentation of quilts and quilting, "modeled to some extent on successful projects in other states," and apparently influenced also by published proposed formats, with the aim of national consistency.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, selection of the final sites was done by Mrs. Frankie Best, Project Director, who contacted county Home Economics Extension Agents in the identified counties in search of possible local chairpersons who were "movers" in their communities.<sup>13</sup> Through her efforts and the efforts of the local chairpersons, the final sites and dates were selected, local volunteers were enlisted, facilities were secured, and the events were publicized.<sup>14</sup> The thirteen sites, their dates, the associated ethnicity, if any, and percentage of data gathered is listed in Table I.

Prior to the actual documentation, twenty members of LQG were trained to serve as the actual field collectors. The training consisted of intensive workshops in fieldwork techniques, technical aspects of documentation, dating of quilts, textile analysis, and folklore as an

Table I  
NEBRASKA QUILTS

DATE	SITE	ETHNIC GROUP*	% OF DATA (n=1,031)**
4/27/87	Ogallala		2.3
4/29/87	Benkelman		9.5
5/18/87	Scottsbluff		4.8
5/20/87	Chadron		5.9
5/22/87	Bassett		4.8
5/30/87	Dorchester	Czech	14.2
6/22/87	St. Paul	Danish	8.1
6/24/87	Kearney	Swedish	5.8
6/26/87	Red Cloud		9.5
7/20/87	Bancroft	German	6.8
7/22/87	Blair	Danish	14.5
8/28/87	Wahoo	Czech/German	8.8
9/11/87	Nebraska City		4.8

\*source: NCH planning grant report, Dr. R. Naugle.

\*\*Total may exceed 100% due to rounding.

academic discipline.<sup>15</sup> These “para-professionals” formed the pool of data collectors for all sites. Members from the trained group were used at each site in an effort to add consistency to the data.

#### *Data Collection and Summarization*

Briefly, the format of each Quilt History Day is outlined below. As the participants (quiltowners and/or quiltmakers) entered the facility on the day of the event, they were greeted and given printed information regarding the intent and purpose of the project. Next a registration number was assigned to each quilt, its overall measurements were determined, and informal questions regarding the provenance of each quilt were asked to assess cultural importance. The third step involved the Quiltmaker and/or Quiltowner forms, which were filled out individually by the participant. The fourth step, quilt analysis, was undertaken by the trained “para-professionals” preferably with the participant at hand to provide additional information as needed.

The final steps involved taking a full color slide of each quilt item with its assigned registration number and site name. The quilts were then returned to the participants along with a certificate of registration and a muslin numbered tag for the owner to sew on to the quilt, indicating inclusion in the project. Data was collected on 2,794 Nebraska quilts made up until the present day, although those quilts made in other states were included in the survey if they had been brought into the state prior to 1920. This date was thought to be a means of limiting outside influences while still allowing quilts made elsewhere to have an impact on quilting styles and motifs, for a time period approximating one generation. For this study, quilts made after 1940 were also excluded to allow for sufficient historical perspective for the analysis, and to avoid the difficult-to-identify man-made and synthetic fibers that grew in use following World War II.

Following data collection, the authors spent approximately 150 hours sorting and computer coding information from the forms. Numerical codes were assigned to the various responses. In particular, quilt pattern name was assigned a number for computer entry using Barbara Brackman's *An Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* or Judy Rehm's *A Key to 1000 Applique Quilt Patterns* to provide a consistent

means of identification of the quilts studied. Additional numerical codes were assigned as needed to the body of data to facilitate computer entry, sorting and analysis of data. From the entire body of 2,794 quilts, 1,031 remained for study after removing those brought into Nebraska after 1920, or made in the state after 1940.

This raw data was then key-punched at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Biometrics Center with funding provided by the American/International Quilt Association. Statistical summarization of the data and further sorting was done using an IBM mainframe computer, and a Statistical Analysis Systems, Inc. (SAS) software programming package.

### *Historical Setting*

Artifacts cannot be divorced from the culture in which they were made. Therefore, background information on Nebraska and social history set the stage for analysis and interpretation.

Thomas Jefferson's 1803 Louisiana Purchase added vast territory to the United States, including present day Nebraska.<sup>16</sup> The Great Plains were originally viewed as an uninhabitable desert, and were designated as a "permanent Indian frontier" until the mid-nineteenth century, by which time in search of fulfilling their "Manifest Destiny," Americans had begun to cross the plains by that time, for the settlement of the Pacific coast region.<sup>17</sup>

As Nebraska's population expanded following the 1862 Homestead Act, so too did its area of settlement.<sup>18</sup> By 1867 the Union Pacific Railroad had laid tracks across the state.<sup>19</sup> This connected Nebraska with eastern markets, for the sale of agricultural goods and made access to manufactured items from the East relatively easy—for those who could afford them. Farm equipment, furniture, as well as textiles, sewing machines, and women's magazines were soon available to the homesteader.

Although the highest number of homestead entries in Nebraska occurred in the mid-1880s, the settlement continued westward until after the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> By that time, Nebraska had very quickly acquired sufficient aspects of the national character to become a significant force in the areas of politics, prohibition, and economic debates.

Throughout the periods of settlement and growth, "their domestic roles and contributions were the central concerns of most plains-womens' lives."<sup>21</sup> Their domestic skills and talents were brought into Nebraska during settlement, flourished here and were transmitted as part of the so-called "cult of domesticity" of nineteenth century America.

American cultural ideology of that period defined women's roles as guardians of society and culture. Needlework was regarded as "the consummate feminine skill," as illustrated in the following passage:

Girls were taught to sew before they were taught to read, and started on a four- or nine-patch quilt cover as soon as they could hold a needle. Coverlets, counterpanes, crocheted samplers, and most especially the elaborate patchwork or applique front pieces for quilts were the highest expression of the material culture of women.<sup>22</sup>

"The consummate feminine skill," as displayed in quilts and quiltmaking, is a rich resource for the researcher in the area of women's material culture.<sup>23</sup> Study of these artifacts can be used to further examine, expand on and interpret the often little-documented contributions of women to Nebraska and national cultural heritage.

### *Findings and Discussion*

Initial findings of the revised sample indicated that 77.2% (n=796) of the quilts were made in Nebraska. Additionally, 75 of Nebraska's 93 counties (80.6%) were represented in the data. This shows that a sufficiently representative sample of Nebraska's quilting traditions was collected to reliably generalize about them in terms of the state's quilts as a whole. Quilts ranged in date from 1792 to 1940, with approximately two-thirds (n=667, 64.7%) of the total quilts falling into the period 1890–1940. This is not surprising for it coincides with the similar time frame of Nebraska's settlement and development, and the years when quiltmaking was an important activity nationwide. Table II shows the distribution of dates by decade for the periods of settlement and early statehood, approximately 1860 through 1940. Quilt date was estimated by the data collectors and/or was determined from the artifact itself, if a marked date was present. Of the total 1,031 quilts, 92.1% (n=950) were assigned estimated dates and 7.5%

(n=77) were marked with dates by their makers.

The NQHP's quilts were found in general to have been made of

Table II  
NEBRASKA QUILTS 1860 – 1940  
FREQUENCY BY DECADE\*

DECADE**	FREQUENCY	% OF TOTAL (n=1,031)
1860s	9	0.9
1870s	18	1.7
1880s	43	4.2
1890s	60	5.8
1900s	138	13.4
1910s	100	9.7
1920s	192	18.6
1930s	447	43.4

\*Range = 1792 – 1940.

\*\*Based on 92.1% estimated date (n=950), 7.5% marked date (n=77).

plain weave fabrics of cellulosic fibers, constructed of pieced quilt patterns, and quilted rather than tied. The majority, 59.1% (n=690), of the quilts were made of ten or more different fabrics, while 28.2% (n=291) were fabricated using five or fewer different fabrics in the quilt top. It was hypothesized that these numbers may have a relationship to the frequencies of pieced pattern quilts and applique/whole cloth/embroidered quilts respectively, due to the type of quilt construction used. Pieced patterns *generally* lend themselves more easily to the use of larger numbers of fabrics than do applique or other methods of constructing quilt tops. To test this hypothesis a frequency table was constructed using quilt construction type and the number of fabrics in the quilt top. While 58.9% (n=473) of the pieced pattern quilts were found to have been made of 10 or more fabrics, applique quilts also had 10 or more fabrics present in 43.6% (n=42) of their total number. However, when applique, whole cloth and embroidered quilts were combined, five or fewer fabrics were found to be present in 48.8% (n=62) of those quilt types. These percentages, then, do *not* support the initial hypothesis that quilt construction type has some relationship to the number of different fabrics present in the



quilt top.

When examined by fabric constructions present in the quilts tops, the largest category were plain weave fabrics, (86.2%, n=889). Twill, pile, satin and figure weaves were each present in less than 9.0% of the quilts documented. These percentages are more meaningful when discussed along with those indicating the fibers present in the quilt-tops. Cotton was present in 84.6% (n=872) of the quilt tops. When cotton, cotton blends, and flax (linen) are combined, the total increases to 88.4% (n=911). The overwhelming majority of the quilts examined in this study contained plain weave fabrics comprised of cellulosic fibers. Cellulosic, or cotton plain weave fabrics typically include muslin and percale which are often used for background or sashing areas in quilts, and calicos and other printed plain weave fabrics which are often used in the constructed pattern areas or "design" portions of quilts. Printed cottons were relatively inexpensive and widely available throughout the time period 1890–1940, and were commonly used for both clothing and home-furnishing textiles.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the high frequency of cellulosic plain weave fabrics is indicative of the time period in which most of the quilts were dated.

Wool, silk, and synthetic fibers were each present in less than 9.0% of the quilt tops examined. While any of these fibers can be fabricated into any of these fabric construction categories, in the time period being examined wool fabrics were typically plain, twill, or small figure weaves, while the more expensive and fashionable silk fibers were most often made into pile, satin, or elaborate figure weaves to best show off their luster and richness, and were considered luxury fabrics. The presence of 1.6% (n=16) unidentified synthetic fibers is quite possible due to the early 1920s availability of acetates and rayons, but is of minimal impact in this study.

Table III illustrates quilt construction type which was determined by viewing the documentation slides. Quilts that had attributes of more than one category were designated by the major type of pattern construction used.

Pieced pattern quilts were the largest category of the six possible types, being 77.9% (n=809) of the total number examined. Once again, this is consistent with the time period under study and the fashionability of patchwork quilts at this time.

The second largest construction type, crazy quilts accounted for

Table III  
**NEBRASKA QUILTS**  
 QUILT CONSTRUCTION TYPE\*

QUILT TYPE	FREQUENCY	% OF TOTAL (n=1,031)**
Pieced Pattern	803	77.9
Crazy	100	9.7
Applique	96	9.3
Whole Cloth	16	1.6
Embroidered	15	1.5
Unique	1	0.1

\*As determined by viewing documentation slide.

\*\*Total may exceed 100% due to rounding.

9.7% (n=100) of the total data. Crazy quilts were found to be of two sub-types: either constructed in block fashion, or conceived as one overall piece. Block constructed crazy quilts made up 83.0% (n=83) of this type, while non-block constructions were present in 17.0% (n=17) of the quilts. Ninety-six (9.3%) of the quilts were placed in the applique category, while whole cloth and embroidered were 1.6% (n=16), and 1.5% (n=15) of the total respectively. The one remaining item, a quilted American flag, made up the final 0.1% of the construction types in Nebraska quilts.

Once again, to further examine the quilt construction types, frequency tables were used to identify the occurrence of the major fiber and fabric types by quilt construction category. Pieced pattern quilts were found to have been made of cotton fibers in 89.0% (n=715), and plain weaves in 89.1% (n=721) of the total 803 pieced quilts. Applique quilt constructions had cotton fibers present 92.7% (n=89) of the time, and plain weave fabrics present in 93.8% (n=90) of the 96 applique quilts in the study. For the 100 crazy quilts, the occurrence of silk (53.0%, n=53), wool (49.0%, n=49), and cotton fibers (39.0%, n=39), were relatively similar percentage-wise. By fabric construction type, the crazy quilts were found to contain 60.0% (n=60) pile fabrics, 48.0% (n=48) twill weaves, 47.0% (n=47) plain weave constructions, 35.0% (n=35) satin weaves, and 32.0% (n=32) figure weave textiles. Obviously, due to the innate nature of the crazy quilt construction method, the percentages exceed 100. The remaining quilts, those designated as whole cloth, embroidered or unique

were primarily found to be made of cotton fibers and plain weave textiles.

Two of the quilt construction type categories, pieced pattern and applique, can be further subdivided by their block designs. Table IV lists the top ten frequencies of pieced quilt pattern blocks, excluding alternating block patterns such as "state bird," "state flower," or "biblical scenes." These quilts (n=70) were grouped with this category because overall their visual impact was seen as being several parts combined to form a whole block, in much the same way as most pieced block patterns are a sum of their parts. All block pattern quilts, pieced or applique were assigned a pattern identification number based on a "most like" basis. (See *Data Collection and Summarization*.) Fifteen (1.9%) of the pieced pattern quilts, and twelve (12.5%) of the applique quilts could not be identified in the published sources.

The two highest frequencies of the pieced pattern quilts were **Grandmother's Flower Garden** (n=57, 7.1%), and **Double Wedding Ring** (n=49, 6.1%). The large numbers of quilts dated in the 1890–1940 time period seems to be reflective of the percentages of these two pieced patterns. Barbara Brackman has noted that **Double Wedding Ring** and **Dresden Plate** enjoyed great popularity in the second quarter of this century.<sup>25</sup> The **Dresden Plate** pattern (n=16, 2.0%) and its variation **Sunflower** (n=11, 1.4%) accounted for 3.4% (n=27) of the total pieced patterns. With the exception of "**Postage Stamp**" quilts which were in vogue in the 1930s, the remainder of these ten patterns which "seem to be as old as piecing," are designs associated with the late nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> These ten patterns include: **Log Cabin** variations (4.0%, n=32); the basic **Nine Patch** (3.5%, n=28) and its relative the **Double** or **Triple Irish Chain** (3.1%, n=25); **Lone Star** (2.7%, n=22) which included the earliest pieced pattern quilt, dated 1817; "**Signature Block**" variations similar to Brackman's number 2813 (1.6%, n=13) both signed and unsigned; the **Lemoyne Star** (1.4%, n=11); and **Grandmother's Fan** (1.4%, n=11).

For the applique quilts, which due to their non-geometric nature were difficult to identify, the largest group were **Butterfly** variations (14.9%, n=14) similar to Rehmel's numbers 848, 849, 850, and 853. The second largest group of applique patterns were **Sunbonnet Sue** variations (Rehmel number 733), which were 7.3% (n=7) of the total

96 applique quilts. This pattern is indicative of the fad for juvenile and children's quilts which peaked in the 1930s, according to Brackman.<sup>27</sup> This percentage is indicative of the time period when most of the Nebraska quilts were made. Only 10 (1.0%) of the total 1,031 quilts examined were identified as samplers containing two or more pieced or applique block patterns.

The methods of securing the various layers in the quilts, in

Table IV  
NEBRASKA QUILTS  
PIECED PATTERNS — TEN HIGHEST FREQUENCIES\*

BRACKMAN NUMBER**	PATTERN NAME	n	% OF TOTAL (n=803)
160	Grandmother's Flower Garden	57	7.1
303	Double Wedding Ring	49	6.1
2573	Log Cabin	32	4.0
1601	Nine Patch	28	3.5
2283	Double/Triple Irish Chain	25	3.1
4005	Lone Star	22	2.7
2276	"Postage Stamp"	19	2.4
3488	Dresden Plate	16	2.0
2813	"Signature Block"	13	1.6
1282	Lemoyne Star	11	1.4
3305	Grandmother's Fan	11	1.4
3489	Sunflower	11	1.4

\*Does not include "state bird," and other alternating block pieced pattern-like constructions which were placed in this general category, (n=70).

Names in quotation marks are the authors' designation.

\*\*Refers to Barbara Brackman's *An Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*.

descending order of occurrence were: traditional quilting (n=744, 72.2%), and tying (n=105, 10.2%). The remainder included 88 items (8.8%) which were neither quilted nor tied (including unfinished tops), and 83 (8.1%) quilts for which the method was not determined at the data collection site and could not be determined by viewing the documentation slide. When a frequency table was used to compare the items that were quilted or tied by the various construction types,

the majority (77.8%,  $n=625$ ) were quilted pieced pattern quilts. Tied pieced patterns accounted for 7.2% ( $n=58$ ) of the data. Applique constructions had quilting 89.6% ( $n=86$ ) of the time, while 3.1% ( $n=3$ ) were tied. Among the crazy quilts 39.0% ( $n=39$ ) were tied and 6.0% ( $n=6$ ) were quilted, while 40.0% ( $n=40$ ) did not have any determinable means of holding the quilt layers together. The remaining whole cloth, unique, and embroidered quilts were quilted 75.0% ( $n=12$ ), 100.0% ( $n=1$ ), and 73.0% ( $n=11$ ) respectively. Additionally, four (25.0%) of the whole cloth quilts were tied, while none of the embroidered quilts employed that securing method. The remaining quilts either did not have a means of securing the various fabric layers, or were uncompleted quilt tops or quilt blocks.

Figure 2 illustrates length and width simultaneously, in inches by decade during the period 1860–1940. Quilts less than 42 inches long or wide were omitted from the data set, and mean length and width from frequency of response by decade was used to plot the graph. In the late nineteenth century, “quilt sizes were between six feet wide and seven-and-a-half feet square . . . [and] when rectangular in shape, the length was six to ten inches longer than the width.”<sup>28</sup> The quilts in the Nebraska study reflect this trend. While there is some fluctuation in the sizes until the 1910s, the overall rectangular size remains relatively constant. However, in the 1920s and 1930s there is an increase in size to approximately six-and-a-half by seven feet, which again is in agreement with other researchers’ findings.<sup>29</sup>

Where available, demographic information was collected on the makers of Nebraska quilts. This data is summarized in Table V, and indicates percentages of known quiltmaker gender, educational background, place of residence, occupation, religious preference, and parents’ ethnic background. Many quilts were brought to the Quilt History Days with only scant information, if any, available on their makers. Therefore, the unknown/no answer frequencies are quite high.

It can be determined from the results that the largest number of the makers of Nebraska quilts were female (61.7%,  $n=636$ ), with a grade school (1st – 8th) education (29.1%,  $n=301$ ), and they resided in rural areas (34.2%,  $n=353$ ). Coincidentally, the 1940 U. S. Census reported that the median years of schooling completed for white

females in Nebraska was 9.8, and also described the state as being 60.9% rural and 39.1% urban by population.<sup>30</sup> However, of the known information for education and residence, the largest groups percentage-wise are reflective of the Census information.

Three hundred and forty-one (33.1%), the largest group of the quiltmakers were described as being house/farm/ranchwives, but the variety of occupational responses included: teacher/educator (5.6%, n=58), seamstress/milliner (3.0%, n=31), secretary/clerical worker (1.0%, n=10), with the remainder including housekeeper, retail sales,

Table V  
MAKERS OF NEBRASKA QUILTS

DEMOGRAPHICS	FREQUENCY	% OF TOTAL (n=1031)
<b>Gender:</b>		
Females	636	61.7
Males	4	0.4
Unknown/No Response	391	37.9
<b>Educational Background:</b>		
Grade School	301	29.1
High School	94	9.1
College	74	7.2
Unknown/No Response	562	54.5
<b>Place of Residence:</b>		
Country	353	34.2
Town	179	17.4
City	27	2.6
Unknown/No Response	472	45.8
<b>Occupation: (Top Six)</b>		
House/Ranch/Farmwife	341	33.1
Teacher/Educator	58	5.6
Seamstress/Milliner	31	3.0
Secretary/Clerical	10	1.0
Housekeeper/Hired Girl	8	0.8
Retail Sales	8	0.8
<b>Religious Affiliation: (Top Five)</b>		
Methodist	179	17.4
Lutheran	131	12.7
Catholic	44	4.3
Christian	32	3.1
Presbyterian	26	2.5
<b>Father's Nationality: (Top Five)</b>		
German	67	6.5
English	44	4.3
Irish	15	1.5
Czech	14	1.4
Danish	9	0.9
Dutch	9	0.9
<b>Mother's Nationality: (Top Six)</b>		
German	61	5.9
English	38	3.7
Czech	14	1.4
Norwegian	11	1.1
Irish	9	0.9

midwife, nurse, farmer, bookbinder, beautician, postmaster, home economist, and farmer's helper (all less than 1.0%). The variety of professions listed, and the time frame when most of the quilts were made, suggests that the traditional value placed on needlework in the nineteenth century continued to some degree well into the twentieth century despite growing employment outside the home.

Religious affiliation responses indicated that where known, the majority were Methodist (17.4%,  $n=179$ ), Lutheran (12.7%,  $n=131$ ) or other Protestant groups, while 4.3% ( $n=44$ ) were listed as Catholic. These responses reflect the ethnic concentrations in the state. Methodist and Lutheran religious preferences are associated generally with those of German and English ethnic backgrounds, while Catholicism is associated often with those of Irish and Czech descent. Germans, English, Irish, and Czech ethnic backgrounds were the most listed responses for fathers' and mothers' ethnic background. Danish, Dutch and Norwegian nationalities were listed for approximately 1.0% of the quiltmakers' parents. The remainder were smaller percentages of various ethnicities, or unknown. For the most part, these figures are reflective of Dr. Naugle's planning study results (see *Nebraska Quilt History Project*) with the exception of those of Swedish extraction. Although one quilt documentation site was held in an area designated as containing Swedish settlement (Kearney), this group was not represented in the top five groups as expected. This result may be in part due to sampling error, as the other groups were accounted for in the data approximately as expected. The influence of American mobility since the 1940 cut-off date plays a part in these ethnicity results as well.

### *Interpretations and Conclusion*

Beyond the facts and figures about Nebraska quilts and their makers, some generalities need to be restated in order to make "sense" of all of the various statistics recounted here. A "typical" Nebraska quilt from this study was made in the period 1890–1940, and constructed in the pieced pattern method, using ten or more different cotton plain weave fabrics. It was quilted, and would be approximately 78 by 88 inches in size. The most favored pieced pattern block styles were **Grandmother's Flower Garden**, **Double Wedding Ring**, **Nine-**



**Patch** or **Double/Triple Irish Chain**, and the variations on **Dresden Plate** and various star patterns. Crazy quilts and applique styles were approximately equal in popularity. Block-based crazy quilts, and the appliqued **Butterfly** and **Sunbonnet Sue** variations were the favored designs of these construction types. Very few whole cloth, embroidered, or sampler quilts were found in Nebraska.

The general description of a typical Nebraska quilt appears to have much in common with quilts studied in neighboring states. Preliminary reports from the Kansas quilt survey indicate that the largest percentages of the quilts made there were also dated in a similar time period (1900 – 1950), and the rankings of Kansas's most favored pieced patterns were similar to those found in the Nebraska study.<sup>31</sup> Bettina Havig's Missouri quilt study indicated remarkably similar percentages of pieced and crazy quilts, as well as the number of quilts that were signed and/or dated.<sup>32</sup> Her percentage of applique quilts was almost double that of the NQHP study, which may reflect the earlier settlement of Missouri.<sup>33</sup> In another Missouri study focusing exclusively on the 1930s, Rebecca Blanchard found that **Grandmother's Flower Garden**, **Double Wedding Ring**, and **Dresden Plate** patterns "were especially popular" and indicated finding a proportion of pieced pattern and applique quilt construction types that was similar to the Nebraska percentages.<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that although both of the Missouri studies were much smaller than the Nebraska sample, and although the Kansas project collected data on more than ten times as many quilts, there are many similarities between the findings of the four studies.

The typical maker of a Nebraska quilt in this time frame could be described as female, with a grade school education, residing in the country (rural), and probably a housewife with Protestant religious affiliations, and most likely of German or English ethnic descent. The makers of Nebraska's quilts made important contributions to the cultural heritage of both state and nation. From the results of this study, it can be inferred that Nebraska quilters followed the prevailing fashions in quilting during the time period examined rather than being strongly influenced by ethnic or cultural sub-group traditions. Their use of primarily pieced construction methods, a variety of fabrics typical of the period, and pieced patterns found to be

representative of the times, indicates that they followed not only the trends and fads of the area, but of the nation as well.

Additionally, while there is only scant information on many of the makers of these quilts, the extant physical characteristics of the quilts themselves can tell us today about the materials and style choices available to Nebraska women. The way in which those materials and fashions were combined by individuals to create quilts that were both beautiful and practical expressions of their talents, indicate the importance Nebraska quiltmakers placed on their needlework abilities—the “consummate feminine skill.” Quiltmaking was an important activity for Nebraska women, much as it was for the nation. During the period of settlement and development, despite the difficulties and hardships which they must have faced, Nebraska women found time for quiltmaking because it was a productive and apparently rewarding means of providing bedding and beauty for their families.

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#### *Notes and References*

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