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The Marketing of Mary Evans

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"I have a theory which cannot be proved," wrote the psychiatrist *cum* quilt expert, Dr. William Rush Dunton, Jr., (1868–1966) in his book *Old Quilts*. "An artist . . . made her living by making [Baltimore Album] quilts . . . [and she] acquired considerable local fame." This modest statement doesn't sound like the stuff of which myths are made, but in today's mercurial art world, watch—it may be happening. Mary who? Fewer people will ask that question this year than last, for the answer has been streamlined and packaged for popular consumption. Two books published in 1974 first tentatively suggested that Mary Evans might be just that needle artist whom Dr. Dunton sought. Today, fifteen years later, cautious speculation has given way to confident assertion. The word is out. Mary Evans was a "master quiltmaker," the "first professional quiltmaker."¹ Mary Evans supplied "prefabricated blocks for which she received payment" and signed "those blocks in standardized script with their donors' names."² Mary Evans seems to be the hottest selling quiltmaker of the mid-nineteenth century. Is it true? Did she really make the well more than a dozen quilts now popularly attributed to her in just half a dozen years? Here's the story—you be the judge.

Record quilt prices of five years ago look like bargains today as Americana prices escalate. On January 21, 1989, a Baltimore Album Quilt dated 1850 and described as "the work of Mary Evans . . . commissioned as a gift for Mary Updegraf by her wealthy family"³ sold at Christie's auction in New York for \$132,000. The same quilt appeared on the cover of E. P. Dutton's *Quilt Engagement Calendar 1984*. Thomas K. Woodard (of Thomas K. Woodard: American Antiques

and Quilts) told me that it had sold at the time of that publication for \$26,000, so the 1989 sale shows more than a five-fold increase in roughly five years. At Sotheby's January 1987 Americana auction, another classic Baltimore Album Quilt sold for \$176,000, and, according to its buyer, Frank J. Miele of Hirschl & Adler Folk, resold the same evening for "at least \$200,000." In 1988, a classic Baltimore Album Quilt dated 1848, and inscribed "To John and Rebecca Chamberlain," with the maker listed as "probably Mary Evans"⁴ sold for \$110,000. In 1972, the *National Antiques Review* had pictured that same quilt and reported that at the Pennypacker Auction House in Kenhorst, Pennsylvania, "it surpassed everything else in beauty, interest, and price—\$3,800."⁵ In sixteen years, then, this classic Baltimore Album Quilt had increased in price roughly 3,000%.

Often presented as gifts, many Album Quilts have survived in remarkable condition, no doubt treated as art rather than as bedding. Album Quilts, which became popular in the 1840s and remained popular for several decades, seem to reflect the general Victorian mania for collecting things. Like albums of all sorts, these quilts house collections on a theme and were made along the Eastern seaboard and, later, further west. In the Baltimore County area these Album Quilts emerged as a unique quilt genre because of their distinct artistic characteristics and their great numbers. As a writer and quiltmaker with a consummate interest in how, why, and by whom mid-nineteenth century Baltimore quilts were made, I frequently go to New York auctions and galleries to study these quilts on display.

January 21, 1989, was a Saturday quilt shoppers will remember. It was fur weather and antiques were in the air. Those who made the Christie's, Sotheby's, Winter Antiques Show⁶ circuit quickly caught a theme: all three were offering Baltimore Album Quilts attributed to Mary Evans. "It's her! It's another quilt by Mary Evans!" I heard exclaimed for the third time. I had been standing awhile at the top of Sotheby's main staircase, making notes on the quilt "attributed to Mary Evans, Baltimore, Maryland, mid-19th Century."⁷ When the young man added, "It's not as nice as the one that sold at Christie's this morning," I couldn't refrain from asking what the quilt at Christie's was like. He and his friend shared their catalog. The quilt in question was the Baltimore Album Quilt shown on

the cover of the *Quilt Engagement Calendar 1984*. "And the one at the Winter Antiques Show," I asked. "Oh, it was much fancier than this one, but here, take this extra ticket if you like, we have to catch our plane back to Dallas." I had a train to catch, too, but there would be other trains.

My stopover at the Winter Antiques show was worth it. I recognized the quilt in America Hurrah's booth, this time from E. P. Dunton's *Quilt Engagement Calendar 1989* where its caption reads: "inscribed Ellenor [sic] and Elizabeth A. Gorsuch, ca. 1840, . . . many blocks . . . may confidently be attributed to the hand of Mary Evans." (Birth dates for Mary Evans are given variously as 1829 or 1830, making her ten or eleven years old in 1840. It is hard to imagine so young a child having made a piece of needle art of this magnitude, 108 inches x 108 inches in size, or in terms of time and materials.) The Gorsuch quilt was of Baltimore Album Quilt style and was labeled at the show as having descended in a Baltimore County family, with the date changed to "circa 1845." Such provenance alone makes it very valuable even without further specific attribution. "Sold," proprietor Joel Kopp replied to my fellow customer's query, "for a high five figure price. Over fifty and under one hundred."

The three Baltimore Album Quilts I saw offered that Saturday had all been advertised in print as "attributed to Mary Evans" or "made by Mary Evans—yet her name appeared on none of them. What is the origin of this attribution? The name "Mary Evans" was connected to the Baltimore Album Quilts in the mid-twentieth century by the quilt expert, Dr. William Rush Dunton, Jr., who had written "I have a theory which cannot be proved," and despite subsequent skillful research it remains unproven today. Her name doesn't appear on any Baltimore Album Quilts at all that we know of, yet it is this unproven attribution to Mary Evans which, unproven, is increasingly confidently asserted in the marketing of these quilts at the prices of upscale real estate. Thus, while the popularity of quilts as collectors' items is now well established, quilt authentication standards in the marketplace need to catch up.

Attribution to Mary Evans (for one unfinished appliqué block only) seems to have begun with a manuscript dated 1938 in "The Dunton Notebooks."⁸ In 1974, Patsy and Myron Orlofsky⁹ and Marilyn Bordes¹⁰ published the first tentative references to Mary



Figure 1. The basted-only “City Springs block” photograph from the Dunton Notebooks, attributed to Mary Evans by her descendants. The block resurfaced in 1990 and is now in the collection of the Maryland Historical Society. Photo courtesy of The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Evans by name. They cite “The Dunton Notebooks” as their source. I went to the Baltimore Museum of Art to read for myself the reference to Mary Evans in these fragile old documents. The Notebooks—albums of notes, photos, clippings, and drawings—convey, in Volume VIII, that Evans Bramble (identified by Dena Katzenberg in *Baltimore Album Quilts* as Arthur Evans Bramble, Mary Evans’s great-nephew) brought Dr. Dunton a set of seven quilt blocks.¹¹ One, a central medallion block depicting the City Springs, Dunton records through a photograph and a notation as “made by Miss Ford” (Mary Evans’s

married name). That attribution to her is contained in a seven-page written description of this set of blocks. The sophisticated City Springs block, which is only basted, is in the realistic, decorative, Victorian style uniquely associated with Baltimore.¹² By virtue of its being connected to Mary Evans through the "Notebooks," this block's style, a style which weaves through the Baltimore Album Quilts, has come increasingly to be thought of as Mary Evans's style.

If made during the heyday of the Baltimore Album Quilts, that City Springs block would have been begun one hundred or so years before being brought to Dr. Dunton. We won't ever know in detail what phrasing Mr. Bramble used to attribute this work to his great-aunt. But the passing of some one hundred years, one suspects, might cloud the Evanses', or any family's, recollection of exactly what Great-Aunt Mary's role in that block had been. Did Mary Evans design the elegant City Springs block herself? Or did she cut it out of fabric from someone else's design? Was her own work in this block at all, or had someone else cut and basted the motifs for Mary Evans to finish?¹³

One of the six accompanying blocks portrays a cleric and is labeled "John W. Hall," whom Dunton identifies in this article as the minister at the Caroline Street Methodist Church, just about three blocks from the portrayed City Springs. Both church and springs were in Mary's neighborhood.

Some of the other blocks in the set are already signed, though none "Mary Evans,"¹⁴ and the needlework, in Dunton's words, varies in quality from "quite beautiful" to "rather crude." Might this have been a group-made presentation quilt with young Mary helping with the sewing? Or had these blocks come in from friends as contributions to Mary's own, never-finished, Album Quilt? Was she in fact a professional seamstress or simply the designated sewer who had been brought the basted center block to appliqué and the other blocks to set together when all were finished? In any one of these suggested roles, the block connected to her might have descended in her family as "the work of" Great-Aunt Mary. In the end, while the City Springs blocks does clearly reflect a design style, we don't know for sure whether this style is Mary Evans's or that of another. And if it is Mary Evans's, we don't know whether she originated the style or was one of a number of people working in that style.

This block was brought to Dunton with two completed quilts, both rather mundane square-patch variations. We are not told if they, too, were the work of Mr. Bramble's great-aunt, Mary Evans. What can safely be said is that, photographed in black and white, at least, they don't show the distinctive spark of an artist.

Katzenberg gives the birth/death dates for Mary Evans as 1829–1916 and cites the services in her book of Robert Barnes, genealogist. Dunton records what are presumably Evans Bramble's dates for Mary of 1830–1928. If Katzenberg is right, then Evans Bramble is wrong at least on this item in his facts about the block and its maker. One must also question why, if Mary were either an extraordinary needle artist or a prolific professional quiltmaker, her family had so little evidence about her quiltmaking activities. Mary Evans lived to be 87 years old by Katzenberg's dates or 98 years old by Evans Bramble's dates. By both reckonings she lived right into those early twentieth-century decades when Dunton himself was actively researching quilts. Yet the only evidence of quiltmaking activity to come out of all those years of adult life is an unfinished block said to have been begun when she was twenty.

While he records this block as made by "Miss Ford," William Dunton does not once suggest that she might be "the artist" whom he seeks as the maker of other Baltimore Album Quilts. In writing about this set of blocks he does reiterate his alternative theory that there may have been shops which sold patterns for these unusual designs. And Dunton's opinion of the possibility that Mary Evans may have been the artist in his theory? After having written about this "entertaining" set of blocks and Miss Ford in 1938, he left them and her out completely when, eight years later in 1946, he published his *magnum opus*, *Old Quilts*. Then again when, towards the end of his life, he compiled the files which "should go with the albums to the Baltimore Museum of Art . . . where [they] will be accessible to anyone who may be interested," he makes no mention of Mary Evans in all of the roughly two feet of alphabetized A to Z letter file boxes. He does, however, refer back once in those files to the City Springs block [with no attribution to Mary Evans]. In the manuscript section on "Naturalistic Appliqué," for his never-published *Quilt Dictionary*, he wrote: "There was also a large block made for a quilt which was never completed which showed a familiar sheltering, one

of the City Springs. . . . Unfortunately during the absence of the owners, their house was broken into and this fine piece has been lost. Fortunately I had secured a photograph of it previously."

William Rush Dunton's works, both published and not, portray a fascinating, industrious, exceptionally bright man who corresponded with the major figures [all women] of the early-twentieth-century quilt world. He studied and documented in minute detail quilts from Maryland and nearby regions. As a founding father of occupational therapy, he "acquired a penchant for needlework and quilts, the peasant art of America." He believed quiltmaking was "a valuable means of restoring healthy thought" for "nervous ladies," and he self-published his book, *Old Quilts*, "in order to record some of the interesting bits of knowledge connected with some quilts and register the quilts, so to speak." Writing about the quilt dated 1850 and made for Dr. John P. MacKenzie in that ornate, Victorian style which we now identify with Baltimore, he conjectured: "It is unfortunate that the maker of such a masterpiece of needlecraft should be unknown. . . . Evidently the woman was an artist as is shown by her sense of form and color and probably in a later period would have been a painter. I have a theory which cannot be proved but which seems plausible to me, and that is, that she made her living by making quilts." Manifesting that *he* was still looking for that "artist," despite having been brought "the work of Mary Evans" some eight years earlier, he immediately follows the 1946 presentation of his theory with an open invitation for help: "It is hoped that old letters or other records will give information as to the name and personality of this wonderful needlewoman."¹⁵ Further on he continued "I am of the opinion that these designs were probably sold at shops or that they were the work of one woman who practiced quiltmaking as a profession."¹⁶

In 1974, almost thirty years after the publication of *Old Quilts*, the Orlofskys wrote that "enterprising seamstresses may have supplied quilt block patterns much as needlepoint experts today. It is also believed that a professional needlewoman living in Baltimore, Mary Evans Ford, may have produced a number of these beautiful Baltimore Album quilts, . . . and as many as twenty-six."¹⁷

Seven years later in the Baltimore Museum of Art's catalog to the 1980-1982 traveling exhibition, *Baltimore Album Quilts*, Dena

Katzenberg again presented the theory of Mary Evans's role in the Baltimore Album Quilts.

An unfinished quilt block, one of a set of seven with pencil lines, and basted appliques, was brought to the attention of the quilt expert, Dr. William Dunton, by Arthur Evans Bramble. Bramble informed Dr. Dunton that the blocks were the work of his great-aunt, Mary Evans. . . . This piece established some of the hallmarks of Mary Evan's works: triple bowknots, prominent white roses, figures with inked features, the use of rainbow fabrics to indicate contour, a sure sense of formal design, and compositional skill. Such careful elegant work on so many quilts leads to the conclusion that a professional quiltmaker was at work. The author has identified over a dozen quilts which she considers to be the sole work of Mary Evans, and numerous individual blocks on other quilts.¹⁸

Katzenberg herself, later in her book is quite tentative about Mary Evan's possible authorship, as when she wrote of catalog quilt #14, "There is some reason to believe that the artist of the most proficient work on the Baltimore Album quilts can be identified as Mary Evans."¹⁹ Ms. Katzenberg's research has unearthed a rich trove of information pertinent to Baltimore Album Quilts, but on the attribution to Mary Evans it seems not to be conclusive.

In 1983, my first book on these quilts, *Spoken Without a Word* was published.²⁰ It mentions the Mary Evans hypothesis as a subject treated in *Baltimore Album Quilts* by Dena Katzenberg, but concentrates on the thesis that these Album Quilts reflect Victorian use of symbols. In 1987, Schnuppe Von Gwinner's book, *The History of the Patchwork Quilt*, was published. In the chapter titled "Friendship and Album Quilts," it states: "Mary Evans and Achsa [sic] Godwin [sic] Wilkins of Baltimore were so talented and famous that they sewed whole album quilts and also individual blocks for others commercially."²¹ This statement is not footnoted. Dunton is not listed in the bibliography but Katzenberg's *Baltimore Album Quilts* is included. *Baltimore Album Quilts* cites Dunton's *Old Quilts* for four out of six of Katzenberg's notes on Achsah Goodwin Wilkins (1775-1854), including the quote referring to her quilting activity.

Also in 1987, the book *Hearts and Hands* included a statement of Mary Evans's role in these quilts:

We now know from the meticulous research of Dena Katzenberg that many Baltimore album quilts were made with some or all of the blocks designed by professional quiltmaker Mary Evans. . . . The entrance of a professional like Baltimore resident Mary Evans into quilting was a new departure. . . . Mary Evans's procedure [was] . . . supplying pre-fabricated blocks for which she received payment (and also . . . signing those blocks in a standardized script with their donors' names).²²

By 1987, had new evidence turned up to confirm these conclusions? The footnote to the above quotation refers the reader back to the pages in *Baltimore Album Quilts* from which we have already quoted.²³ Yet it is these subtle shifts of *theory into fact* which may have set the tone for the confident attribution in January 1989 of Baltimore Album Style Quilts to Mary Evans. An evolution from hypothesis to postulate in the marketplace, parallel to that in the scholarship, is manifested by the repetition of the same set of three paragraphs describing Mary Evans's work being repeated in three consecutive Sotheby catalogs for three different Album Quilts. Sotheby's credits Julie Silber, co-author of *Hearts and Hands*, and Linda Ann Reuther for those paragraphs. Those excerpts reflect that book's confident view of Mary Evans's role in the authorship of Baltimore Album Quilts. The actual attributions for these three quilts and their publication sequence, are as follows: sale #5680, lot #1463 (January 1988), "Probably Mary Evans; sale #5755, lot #143 (October, 1988) no specific attribution is given in the notation "Variously signed," but the bulk of this quilt's description consists of discussion of Mary Evans; and, finally, for sale #5810, lot #1106 (January, 1989) the stated authorship is "attributed to Mary Evans."

Attribution to Mary Evans became markedly less ambiguous in the early winter of 1989, following a slower quilt market in the fall of 1988. "Quiet Time for Quilts, Caused by discriminating buyers who will settle only for the best," pronounced the title of an article by Frank Donegan in *Americana* magazine that year. He quoted Nancy Druckman, Sotheby's folk-art specialist as saying, "We're finding out that these [Baltimore Album Quilts] may not be as rare as we thought. A couple of \$100,000 prices show you just how unrare something is."²⁴ Perhaps the irony of the story is that to this day the record high-selling quilt, a Baltimore Album Quilt signed by Sarah Pool and Mary J. Pool, sold by Sotheby's in January 1987, was not

attributed to Mary Evans. Her name was not even mentioned in the catalog description although, by January 1989 standards, much of that quilt could have been attributed to her hand. The majority of its blocks are in the ornate, highly realistic, Victorian style associated with her name.

The increasing confidence of Mary Evans attributions for two of the three quilts offered for sale on January 21, 1989 of this year has left a paper trail. From the 1988 publication of E.P. Dutton's *Quilt Engagement Calendar 1989* to January, 1989, the wording changed on the attribution of the Gorsuch Baltimore Album Quilt: "Many blocks . . . may confidently be attributed to the hand of Mary Evans"²⁵ became "Baltimore Album Quilt, made by the master American Quiltmaker, Mary Evans, circa 1845, for Eleanor [sic] Gorsuch, Baltimore County, Maryland."²⁶

Similarly with the Updegraf Album Quilt offered by Christie's, the attribution to Mary Evans had also metamorphosed, though a bit more slowly. In the *Quilt Engagement Calendar 1984*, a description credited to Thomas K. Woodard concerning the Updegraf quilt's attribution reads, "It is quite probable that the quilt is the work of Mary Evans." Some five years later, in *The New York Times*, Rita Reif wrote: "An 1850 Baltimore Album Quilt by Mary Evans, the master quilt maker who created pieced coverlets with patriotic and nostalgic references between 1840 and 1860 is to be auctioned at Christie's."²⁷ Her article continues, "'She was the first professional quilt maker,' said Jan Wurtzburger, a Christie's folk-art specialist. [Can one assert that anyone was the *first professional quiltmaker*? We have evidence of bed quilts going back to the fourteenth century in Sicily—and has not the profession of seamstress in all its specializations been permitted to women for centuries?] 'This quilt has all the special hallmarks of her style—the triple bow knot, reticulated baskets, white appliquéd roses, intricate stitching and a careful and deliberate selection of the squares.'" Note that there is reference here to Mary Evans' intricate stitching and reticulated baskets though neither appear in the City Springs block.

Based on my own experience in examining needlework closely, I'd say that the three quilts attributed to Mary Evans and offered for sale in New York that January Saturday contained work by at least three different women. What is the same in all three quilts is

the dominant pattern style: ornate, realistic, decorative, Victorian. But one style does not mean just one maker. What of the evidence from quilts done in the classic Baltimore Album style today? Some are as breath-taking in the mimicked fabric use and refined needlework as the vintage quilts they replicate. What, beyond age and period fabric, would distinguish these similarly styled quilts from the originals? Would we always be able to assess whether one person or more than one made a quilt of a uniform style? Again, the present aids our understanding of the past. In the March 1989 issue of *Country Living* magazine, Mary Roby reviewed the replica of the Metropolitan's Baltimore Album Quilt, ca. 1849, attributed in *Baltimore Album Quilts* to Mary Evans.²⁸ "It took a year for 30 quilters to complete . . . the quilt's top; . . . [more than] six women completed the quilting in five months." And what was the quality of the work having been done by so many people? "Meticulous uniform quality," the article concludes.

To set forth the pivotal differences in style and needlework among the three "Mary Evans" quilts offered for sale on that January Saturday would require an entire chapter. In short, the quilting of the Sotheby quilt has fewer stitches per inch than the Gorsuch quilt, and both quilts have at least one discolored block suggesting a different foundation fabric or a different age than the surrounding blocks. All three quilts have certain motifs in common. Cornucopiae, for example, are found in each, but the blocks differ significantly from quilt to quilt in those elements of style which might separate one maker from another. These elements include fabric use and ink embellishments, how much of the block is filled and in what shape, and how compact the bouquets are, and how much white space shows. How are we to know if Mary Evans made some or all of the blocks in any one of these three quilts?

Katzenberg concludes "Such careful elegant work on so many quilts leads to the conclusion that a professional quiltmaker was at work." Yet it is just that "conclusion" that has raised questions among scholars and quiltmakers. That Mary Evans made so many Album Quilts from start to finish just isn't consistent with what contemporary quiltmakers are learning about them. Many of us are making quilts in the classic Baltimore Album style, reproducing classic patterns or designing our own in this style, and keeping track of the hours

we spend. I recorded about fifty sewing hours for an ornate Victorian style block like "Silhouette Wreath,"²⁹ and a bit less for the simpler "Ruched Rose Lyre." Professional quiltmaker Donna Collins, the speediest appliqué artist I know, reproduced the classic Baltimore Album Quilt block portrait of a Maryland Manor House³⁰ in about forty sewing hours, while Cathy Berry reported up to sixty hours to appliqué an intricate block such as "Red Woven Basket of Flowers."³¹

One professional quiltmaker, Sylvia Pickell, kept a meticulous log of the hours it took her to make "Immigrant Influences: Album of Heritage."³² She spent 896 hours on handwork plus 200 hours on design, research, and drawing. Thus 1,096 hours went into making a quilt of 72 inches square, which is a bit less than half the square footage of the Baltimore Museum of Art's classic Baltimore Bride Quilt (104 inches x 104 inches) inscribed "To Miss Elizabeth Sliver" and attributed in the Baltimore Museum catalog to Mary Evans. Sylvia Pickell has demonstrated that a professional seamstress needs a year or more of forty-hour weeks to make one classic Baltimore Album Quilt of about 104 inches square. Therefore, a single individual (even one a bit faster than Sylvia) might conceivably create one quilt in the best of this style per year. Yet the equivalent of well over a dozen quilts by now have been popularly attributed to one woman, Mary Evans, in roughly a six-year period (1846-1852). Even presuming that one such quilt could be produced in a year, to produce six such masterpiece quilts in six years might be compared with writing six doctoral dissertations in six years in terms of the sheer intensity of creative effort involved.

Thus, while we cannot prove that Mary Evans made a given quilt, we can prove that one quiltmaker alone could not have made even the "more than a dozen" Baltimore Album Quilts attributed to her by Dena Katzenberg in roughly a six-year period. The important point is that if quilts aspire to art, then we need also to strive for the standards of authentication required in fine arts. No one would spend upwards of six figures on a painting by a famous artist without careful authentication. Yet comparably priced quilts have been sold on the most casual of assertions that they are made by Mary Evans with little or no documentation.

Baltimore Album Quilts deserve to be treated with as much respect

as famous paintings. This respect requires reserving judgement in the absence of positive proof. Increasingly, cautious scholars, for example, are careful not to call a quilt a Baltimore Album Quilt unless "Baltimore" is inscribed on it or unless its provenance from that city or county is documentable. If these proofs are lacking in a quilt that seems in all other respects to fill the bill, they call it a "Baltimore-style Album Quilt." We need this kind of responsible standard in both scholarship and in the marketplace.

At least four equally ornate and complex Baltimore Album Quilts are supposed to have been made in about a two-year period from 1849–1850. These are the Metropolitan's Baltimore Album Quilt, recorded in *Baltimore Album Quilts* as "ca 1849;" the Baltimore Museum of Art's Album Quilt inscribed "To Miss Elizabeth Sliver" and "Baltimore, 1849;" the Baltimore Album Quilt inscribed to Dr. John P. Mackenzie and dated "February, 1850;"³³ and Christie's Updegraf family quilt dated 1850. All four are attributed to Mary Evans. The first three attributions are by Dena Katzenberg, the last, by Christie's. Could Mary Evans, or any one person have made these four quilts in so little time?

The most eloquent effort to fix Mary Evans's authorship to specific quilts is *Baltimore Album Quilts* by Dena Katzenberg. The argument there, however, is all circumstantial. The most potentially concrete evidence proposed is that "One signature of a Mary Evans Ford has been discovered on a 1909 application for admittance to the Aged Women's Home. Analysis of that handwriting suggests that it could have belonged to the person credited with almost half of the finest inscriptions on the quilts."³⁴

I conferred with the personnel in the Documents Laboratory of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to find out if it was possible to ascertain if the signatures, written some sixty years apart, could have been done by the same hand. The question posed was: Could the classic Album Quilt inscriptions substantiate Mary Evans Ford's authorship? "Who knows?" one handwriting expert summed up. "You're never going to get a positive identification. I don't know anyone who would even give a leaning under these circumstances." One expert said, "When we do handwriting comparisons we don't like to deal with writing that is over five years apart."³⁵

To sum up, "The Dog that Didn't Bark," convinced me that the

Mary Evans attribution in its present form was questionable. Dunton, of all people, was closest to Evans Bramble's attribution of the basted City Springs block to his Great-Aunt Mary. Whatever conversation passed between Dr. Dunton and Mr. Bramble, Dunton found that set of blocks "entertaining" but seemingly nothing more. The fact that that dog didn't bark when it should have for Dr. Dunton, served for me, as in Arthur Conan Doyle's detective story of the same name, as pivotal evidence.

The fact may remain, however, that theories about who made these quilts "cannot be proved" as Dr. Dunton wrote almost half a century ago. No matter who made the classic Baltimore Album Quilts, they are nonetheless national treasures. These heirlooms bind us to our past, give us continuity in the present, and offer us hope for the future. We may not ever be able to affix specific names with certainty to these quilts' design and manufacture. We can learn more about them, though, and in the process learn more about our culture and our past. By so doing we can help attain for these quilts, the work of so many earnest hands, their due regard.

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3. "The Market," *Art and Antiques* (January 1989): 46.
4. *Sotheby's Catalog* (Sale # 5680): lot # 1463.
5. *National Antiques Review* (February 1972): 21.
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7. *Sotheby's Catalog* (Sale #5810): lot #1106.
8. "The William Rush Dunton, Jr. Notebooks," uncatalogued collection, Baltimore Museum of Art.
9. Patsy and Myron Orlofsky, *Quilts in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).
10. Marilyn Bordes, *12 Great Quilts from the American Wing* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974).
11. "Dunton Notebooks." Album VIII, 128. The text of the seven-page manuscript, dated 1938, follows:

Back around 1850 there seems to have been a fashion of making quilts of an unusual character for presentation to some favored man or woman, often a clergyman. It was natural for the ladies of the congregation to show their regard by making a quilt to commemorate his incumbency.

Among the quilts which I have met which are associated with churches or are of this presentation type perhaps the most entertaining is not a quilt but merely the makings as the various blocks have not been joined. One of these was made by Mary Evans Ford (1830-1928) when she was twenty years old, or in 1850, a member of the Caroline Street Methodist Church, not far from City Springs Square, Pratt and Eden Streets, Baltimore, Maryland. This was once a good residence section as is proved by the [blank] room in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, but is now a settlement of rather low class foreigners and there are few remnants of past grandeur now existing. Before this invasion began the house in which Miss ["Evans" crossed out] Ford lived was acquired by the church to be used as the parsonage.

Miss Ford evidently had an attachment to the neighborhood for what was evidently intended to be the large central block of the quilt has in its centre a view of the park with the pavilion which covered the spring or "fountain," done in shaded browns which gives a high light effect to the supporting pillars and also to the trunks of the trees which flank

it. The foliage of these is in various shades of green and blue. To the right a woman in a blue dress bears a brown pail on her head. To the left a very blonde lady is sitting on a bench beside a brown clad man. In front is a white rail fence with a brown and tan gate. Between the pillars of the pavilion pencil lines indicate tree trunks and a distant fence. This central scene is surrounded with a wreath of flowers with triple red bows above and below and triple lavender bows to right and left. In each corner are sprays of flowers. In the upper left is a rose of white mousseline, leaves of three shades of green and a brown stem. In the upper right corner are three brown and yellow pansies with leaves of two shades of green. In the lower right corner is a pink and red rose, two red and pink rosebuds, leaves of three shades of green and a brown stem. In the lower left corner are three blue flowers with yellow centres, presumably morning glories, with leaves of shades of green. The wreath effect is formed of the above mentioned bows with festoons of flowers between them. These show great variety including white mousseline and red roses, pansies, primroses and other flowers. The maker was an artist with a wonderful flair for color harmony and of the value of light and shadow so that her perspective is exceptionally well handled. The piece is unfinished as all pieces to be appliquéd are basted on the white ground but the effect is quite beautiful. The muslin is 72 threads to the inch.

Accompanying this which was to have been the centre of an album quilt were six eighteen inch blocks some of which are signed. The most striking is that depicting the minister which is unsigned. At the bottom a flat shaded brown vase with a broad base from which extend on each side a curving spray of mixed flowers, white mousseline and red roses, tulips, pansies, moss rose buds with inked hairs and other flowers. Between these sprays stands the figure of the minister with black coat, brown pants, and black shoes. His white vest shows slightly and this, his shirt, collar and tie are indicated by inking. His head and face are partly inked and partly painted. The collar of his coat is broad and is appliquéd separately. His right arm extends down and the painted hand is holding a red edged open book marked "Hymns." His left hand (painted) rests on a tan and yellow book marked "Bible" which is on a red table. Above his head is an inked eagle with a scroll on which is "John W. Hall."

Dunton then goes on to describe the remaining blocks in the set: One with "quite a conglomeration of symbols [some he describes are shared by both Odd Fellows and Masons] and the name, "Nathaniel Lee" inscribed thereon; a "horn" (cornucopia) of "rather ungraceful" flowers and leaves, a heart of "angular leaves" outlined inside and out with a row of quarter-inch berries, and a cutwork square with a "a coarse red rose" on each side and parallel strips of small hexagons intertwined

by rosevine. He concludes with subsequent history concerning the City Springs Square and its neighborhood in Baltimore.

12. While the Baltimore Album Quilts have multiple recognizably realistic representational blocks (buildings, flowers, birds, baskets, etc.), the style attributed to Mary Evans is more realistic even than they. In particular, this realism is conveyed through fine, artistic drafting of these objects, and through skillful use of printed fabrics to depict a realistic botanical or zoological or architectural detail.
13. Dunton himself long investigated questions raised by the set of seven blocks, as he did so many subjects touched upon by these quilts. His 1938 description of the seven blocks reflects research into the demographics of the City Springs area and the evolution of the Baltimore water system. Two years later, the 1940 letter quoted in Note #14, above, shows that Dunton was still researching the identity of John W. Hall whose name and whose portrait, apparently, appear in one of these seven blocks. Page seven of this Album VIII article gives us yet another clue about John Hall: "It is known that he assisted at laying the cornerstone of Grace Church." Early histories of Baltimore repeatedly note the laying of various cornerstones in the first half of the nineteenth century as "presided over by the Masons" and attended by "Masonic ritual." Both this reference and the notation of Masonic and Odd Fellow symbols in one block of this same set of blocks raise the question of how these blocks, and the Baltimore Album Quilts as a genre, may relate to fraternal orders. There is some reason to believe that pursuit of this question by scholars may shed more light on who was working in the style attributed in *Baltimore Album Quilts* to Mary Evans, and why there are so many blocks in that style in a short period of time. For more on this subject, see *Baltimore Beauties and Beyond, Studies in Classic Album Quilt Applique, Volume I—Pattern Companion* (Lafayette, CA: C & T, 1990).
14. Dunton notes no signature on the basted Springs block. However, after describing it in detail, he writes "Accompanying this which was to have been the centre of an album quilt were six eighteen blocks some of which are signed. He notes the signatures: "Mrs. Catherine A. Boyd," "Margaretta Stansbury," and "Mrs. Ann M. Bruscup."
15. William Rush Dunton, Jr., *Old Quilts*, (Catonsville, MD: privately printed, 1946), 41.
16. *Ibid.*, 118.
17. Orlofsky, 239.
18. Dena Katzenberg, *Baltimore Album Quilts* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1981), 61-62.

19. *Ibid.*, 98.
20. Elly Sienkiewicz, *Spoken Without A Word, A Lexicon of Symbols with Twenty-Four Patterns from the Baltimore Album Quilts*, (Washington, D.C.: published by the author, 1983). The author's second book, *Baltimore Beauties and Beyond, Studies in Classic Album Quilt Appliqué, Vol. I* (Lafayette, CA: C & T, 1989), 26-27, 102-104, initiates the question of the Mary Evans attribution.
21. Schnuppe Von Gwinner, *The History of the Patchwork Quilt, Origins, Traditions and Symbols of a Textile Art*, (Munich: Keyser Book Publishing, 1987), 138.
22. Pat Ferraro, Elaine Hedges, Julie Silber, *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women & Quilts on American Society*, (San Francisco, Quilt Digest Press, 1987), 34-36.
23. *Baltimore Album Quilts*, 61-62.
24. Frank Donegan, "In the Marketplace: Quiet Time for Quilts," *Americana*, (Fall, 1988): 64.
25. *The Quilt Engagement Calendar 1989*, Cyril I. Nelson, comp. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), illustrated May 7-13.
26. America Hurrah Antiques, full page ad, *Winter Antiques Show Catalogue* (January 1989): 45, in *The Magazine Antiques* (January 1989): unnumbered advertising page; and in *The Clarion* (Winter 1989): 7.
27. Rita Reif. "Auctions."
28. This replica was made by the East Bay Heritage Quilters. The estimates were provided by Adele Ingraham and Janet Shore.
29. *Baltimore Beauties, Volume I*, Colorplate # 24.
30. *Baltimore Beauties, Volume II*. (Lafayette, CA: C & T forthcoming late 1990).
31. *Baltimore Beauties, Volume I, Colorplate* © 35.
32. *Baltimore Beauties, Volume I*, Photo 31.
33. Dunton, 31-43; Roxa Wright, "Baltimore Friendship Quilt," *Woman's Day Magazine* (Fall 1965): 52, 53, 90.
34. *Baltimore Album Quilts*, 62. Further discussion of signatures is found on page 68-69.
35. Bill Carter of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Press Department, co-ordinator, with FBI Documents Laboratory personnel, interview by the author, Washington, D.C., February 28, 1989.