

Uncoverings 1991

Volume 12 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Laurel Horton

Uncoverings
1991

Volume 12 of the Research Papers of the
American Quilt Study Group

edited by Laurel Horton

Copyright © 1992 by the
American Quilt Study Group.
All rights reserved.

Copyright note: This is a collective work.
AQSG holds the copyright to this volume and
any reproduction of it in whole. Rights to individual
articles are held by the authors. Requests for
permission to quote or reproduce material from
any article should be addressed to the author.

Published by the American Quilt Study Group
660 Mission Street, Suite 400
San Francisco CA 94105
Manufactured in the United States

Uncoverings is indexed by the
Clothing and Textile Arts Index and the
MLA International Bibliography

ISBN 1-877859-02-8

ISSN 0227-0628

Library of Congress catalog card number:
81-649486

Cover: NAMES panel made for Michael Kile
by Margaret Peters and Sally Collins, 1991.

Calligraphy by Joyce Lytle.

Fabrics courtesy of Concord and RJR.

Photograph by Sharon Reisdorf.

Cover design and production courtesy of
Kajun Graphics and The Quilt Digest Press.

Contents

<i>Dedication</i>	5
<i>Preface</i>	7

RESEARCH PAPERS

Lawrence Howe: <i>A Text of the Times: The NAMES Project</i>	11
Catherine A. Cerny: <i>A Quilt Guild: Its Role in the Elaboration of Female Identity</i>	32
Vista Anne Mahan: <i>Quilts used as Backdrops in Old Photographs</i>	50
William J. Riffe: <i>Brain Dominance and Quilters: A Small Group Study</i>	83
Pat L. Nickols: <i>Mary A. McElwain: Quilter and Quilt Businesswoman</i>	98
Clover Nolan Williams: <i>Tradition and Art: Two Layers of Meaning in the Bloomington Quilters Guild</i>	118
Valerie Wilson: <i>Quilting in Counties Antrim and Down: Preliminary Findings from the Ulster Quilt Survey</i>	142

STUDENT PAPERS

Caryn M. Kendra: <i>Hard Times and Home Crafts: The Economics of Contemporary Appalachian Quilting</i>	177
Kyle Emily Ciani: <i>The Machado Quilt: A Study in Multi-cultural Folk Art</i>	190
<i>Index</i>	209

Dedication: Michael Kile (1947–1991)

When I first met Michael Kile in Yellow Springs, Ohio, he had a quilt hanging on a wall of the house where he lived. His grandmother and mother had made the quilt. Quilts would hang on his walls and grace his beds for his entire life. As I got to know Michael and started buying quilts at farm auctions in Ohio, I learned that he had slept under quilts a child and even had a quilt on his bed at college. He and I took a trip to New York City in 1977 to visit a city he loved and to see quilts. We spent hours in Tom Woodard's shop looking at the most beautiful pieced Pennsylvania quilts. We couldn't believe how incredibly beautiful the 1850 to 1890 fabrics were, and we two "country boys" couldn't believe the "high" prices. We often said later we should have bought every one of them then, as prices have escalated over the years.

Returning to the Midwest, we made a concerted effort to look at quilts and learn more about them. Always the reader, and intrigued with the written word (He wrote two unpublished novels.) Michael devoured every book on quilts he could find. He took note of the fact that there were not that many from which to choose. We went to antique shops, show, and country auctions; we looked and studied and discussed what we saw. We practiced dating them; we tried to find out who had made them.

Slowly, we began to buy a few with the little money we had at the time. Not exactly knowing why, but just buying what appealed to us. Michael was very adamant about buying only those quilts which were in "mint" condition or as close to it as possible. When we eventually turned a passion into a business, his condition standards for the quilts would serve us well. We left Ohio in 1978, driving to San Francisco with a stack of quilts in the back seat of a Pontiac Tempest.

Both of us were fascinated and intrigued by the mysteries held in each quilt. We obtained as much information as we possibly could about each one. Michael wrote quilt descriptions for each quilt; the pertinent data with regard to pattern name, date, maker's name (if known), fabrics, and size. But Michael went on beyond that, sometimes two or three pages beyond that for a spectacular quilt. He always had something wonderful to write about them. I am convinced that some of our collectors bought quilts in order to get Michael's splendid quilt descriptions.

Not being satisfied to just sell quilts, Michael was always searching for other venues for creative energy. We curated exhibitions and lectured for quilt guilds where we met contemporary quilt-makers. Many of those quilt friends loved to come to our house/gallery to see the latest "finds" from a buying trip. Michael stayed current with the quilt literature and believed there was still something lacking. He felt what was missing was a quality publication which would bridge the antique and contemporary quilt worlds, a place where excellent articles by the leading people in both quilt arenas could be presented, as well as showing the finest examples of antique and contemporary quilts.

Two friends in Los Angeles had started a small publishing company with relative ease and we thought, "Why not us?" There would be many times in that first year where we would look at each other and wonder *whatever* had we gotten ourselves into! Michael's love of writing naturally had him working with the writers and content. I felt like I got the fun stuff, doing design and choosing quilts; however, Michael was doing exactly what he loved. He called in his friend Harold Nadel (who just happened to have been his college English professor) to edit that first book. The *Quilt Digest* was born.

Michael had a vision to produce the best books about quilts, be they about the history, the latest in the art quilt movement, or how to make them and choose the fabric. As the list of books published by the Quilt Digest Press attests, Michael achieved his vision.

Rod Kiracofe
1991

Preface

As this volume is edited quilts are in the national news. The Museum of American History has sold the rights to reproduce several quilts from its collection to a company which is contracting the reproductions to be made in China. This move has created a controversy on several levels. There are those who applaud the availability of affordable reproductions, others who consider the particular quilts to be national treasures and their reproduction to be a "selling out" of American values, and others who would have preferred that the quilts, if reproduced, should be the work of American craft cooperatives.

It is difficult to imagine a parallel controversy surrounding the reproduction of any other type of American expression. As Catherine Cerny states in her paper in this volume, a quilt is a "key symbol" which "represents the contribution of a group of women to the home life of a historic America, expresses the priority that women have given to family and social relatedness, and *evokes powerful emotions* from quilter and nonquilter, from women and men." This emotive power is the the issue that fuels both sides of the current controversy.

Powerful emotions also figure in Lawrence Howe's research on the NAMES Project, a movement which ironically and poignantly touches all of us in the quilt world through the death last year of Michael Kile, collector, author, publisher, and a former member of the AQSG Board of Directors. In appreciation for Michael's work, we dedicate this volume to his memory.

Two concepts related to the emotional content of quilts are *tradition* and *art*, concepts which recur in several of the papers this year. Clover Williams discovered that the quiltmakers she worked with use these terms to make distinctions within contemporary quilt-making. William Riffe contributes to the dialogue from a very different perspective through his research on brain dominance. Most

quiltmakers are familiar with the dichotomy expressed by the opposition of *tradition* and *art*, but from the discussion surrounding these papers when they were presented at the 1991 AQSG Seminar, the application or interpretation of the concepts is not a clear-cut issue.

Two new worlds of quilt research are introduced in this volume. Valerie Wilson provides us with the initial results of the Ulster quilt survey, the first opportunity most Americans have had to understand the "familiar yet different" quilting traditions of the northern counties of Ireland. Closer to home, Vista Mahan presents her long-awaited study of quilts in old photographs. AQSG members over the past few years remember Vista's discovery of this overlooked subject and her requests for copies of such photographs.

Pat Nickols adds to our knowledge of important figures of quiltdom with her biographical study of Mary A. McElwain, a designer and businesswoman, whose influence forms part of the web of related quilt enterprises of the early twentieth century which we are only now beginning to explore.

Finally, AQSG is proud to include two student papers in this volume. Kyle Ciani presents an investigation into the design influences of a single significant quilt, while Caryn Kendra has researched the economic contexts influencing quilting in the southern mountains. Our organization has provided opportunities for these new researchers to participate in the sharing of some of the vast informational resources represented by our membership, and to benefit from the guidance and attention pursuant to preparing their work for publication.

While previous volumes of *Uncoverings* have frequently included the works of academic scholars in a variety of fields, this year's volume may establish a new record for diversity. Scholars in American studies, home economics, organizational psychology, folklore, and history join those who are self-trained in quilt research. We join equally, because at this point the field of quilt research is so new that we are all on the cutting edge, teaching ourselves and each other things that are not yet taught through any formal instruction. We have formed a powerful and empowering network which con-

nects us to each other, to the sources of our information, and to those who benefit from our research.

The diversity represented by our membership and by our publications reflects the many realms which are touched by quilts, quilt-makers, and textiles. Perhaps no other subject is connected to so many different fields of study. Yet, because the quilt is such a powerful "key symbol," it functions as the unifying theme to which all our work relates.

Laurel Horton
Editor