

Uncoverings 1994

Volume 15 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Virginia Gunn



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Cover: *Star of Bethlehem*, made by a member of the
Shorter family, Eufala, Alabama, circa 1850.
Collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art, 1992.40.

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Preface

The refereed papers in this fifteenth volume of *Uncoverings* add significant material to a decade and a half of scholarship sponsored by the American Quilt Study Group. The authors presented their accepted papers at the 1994 Seminar held October 21 to 23 in Birmingham, Alabama.

Noted quilt artist Nancy Crow opened the seminar with a keynote address entitled "What's Happening in Quilting Today?" This slide lecture on new directions in the world of quilts as art set the tone for a stimulating conference. Her presentation featured the studios, workplaces, and important new works of leading artists who produce contemporary quilts.

Attendees also enjoyed the wonderful exhibition, *Made in Alabama: A State Legacy*, which had just opened at the Birmingham Museum of Art. The *Star of Bethlehem* quilt on the cover of this volume is an example of the well-chosen artifacts which helped viewers understand the place of quilts in nineteenth-century Alabama decorative arts and culture.

The exhibits, the keynote lecture, and the research papers presented at the conference all pointed to new directions in quilt study. The six papers included in this volume exemplify new approaches that contribute to increased understanding of our rich heritage of textile material culture.

Fawn Valentine does a superb job of examining a portion of the data collected by the West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search. While acknowledging the challenges of using state quilt project findings, she combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to analysis and provides a fresh look at the relationship between aesthetics and ethnicity in her case study of Scotch-Irish quilt-makers.

Merikay Waldvogel examines and analyzes the sizeable col-

lection of quilt ephemera gathered by Mildred Dickerson of Birmingham, Alabama during the 1960s and 1970s. Merikay's insightful findings provide new knowledge of the activities and networks of the quilt pattern collectors who preserved key sources of immense value to today's scholars.

Jennifer Goldsborough documents the intensive and lengthy research that underpins important exhibits of art in the late-twentieth century. She shares the team process that unearthed important new findings about the long-studied Baltimore Album Quilts. Her paper highlights the study and work that makes ground-breaking exhibits like *Lavish Legacies* possible.

Sunny Falling-rain's paper is an important contribution to the growing body of works on quilts as cultural metaphors. Her cogent argument that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be interpreted as a literary crazy quilt, a device that enables the author to effectively deal with a difficult subject, provides food for thought.

Anne Copeland and Beverly Dunivent focus their team efforts on quilt kits. They effectively demonstrate that quilt kits have had an important role in the story of American quiltmaking, one that is often overlooked by the contemporary culture which values originality over craftsmanship. Their paper calls attention to a neglected area of study and reveals numerous topics that deserve attention.

Kathleen Curtis Wilson's in-depth study of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills of Cedar Bluff, Virginia highlights woven coverlets, another important form of textile bedcoverings, and helps place quilted textile art in cultural context. She adds significant findings on the connections between myth and merchandising that underlie much of the promotion of textiles in the industrial age.