Uncoverings 1994

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

Edited by Virginia Gunn

❖ ❖ ❖

Kit Quilts in Perspective

Anne Copeland and Beverly Dunivent

Despite a number of negative images imposed upon kit quilts, they have played an important role in quilt history. Quiltmakers have used kits to further their quilting skills and design knowledge, using designs sometimes copied from museum artifacts, private collections, and winners of national quilting contests. Documented examples illustrate that kit quilts have never lost their appeal to quiltmakers and quilt viewers. Kits have continued in popularity independent of the changes and trends that have occurred in twentieth-century quiltmaking. Kits have also been an important segment of the quiltmaking industry. Quilt entrepreneurs have used their quiltmaking and quilt designing skills to take their products from the cottage to the factory. The quilt kit industry has provided economically viable employment opportunities for many people, a movement that has been only partially documented.

Introduction

This study examines some of the prevailing twentieth-century attitudes about kit quilts. Although a number of negative images have been imposed upon kit quilts, kits seem to have played a more instrumental role in the entire quilt revival and the continued interest in quiltmaking than has been previously recognized. Throughout this century kits have never lost their popularity. They have contributed significantly to the quilting industry and they have been a valid medium for continuing artistry and design in quiltmaking.

Figure 1. Stamping powder from the first quarter of the twentieth century. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

Numerous people think of the commercial quilt kit as a fairly recent innovation, dating from the past two or three decades. Recent research, however, has provided evidence that quilt kits, in some form or other, have been in existence since the turn of the century.[1] The earlier quilt kits differed considerably from the kits of today. These kits were not pre-stamped; rather, they consisted of a background cloth, a perforated paper pattern, and stamping paste or stamping powder (see figure 1).[2] During the 1920s and 1930s, what most people have come to accept as a quilt kit, a sheet of cotton fabric stamped with appliqué placement marks and quilting lines, came into widespread use. The colored fabrics in the kit were stamped so that the quiltmaker could cut out the patches and appliqué them to the matching location on the sheet (see figure 2).[3] Another type of kit came with die-cut fabric pieces that were either appliquéd onto a foundation or pieced to make a patchwork quilt (see figures 3 and 4). These pre-cut pieces are often hard to recognize in a finished quilt. When one sees a large assortment of fabrics in a quilt, or a

Figure 2. Detail of Garden Poppies quilt kit, Bucilla No. 8971, circa 1940. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

Figure 3. Die-cut butterflies and the advertisement for them in *Home Arts Needlecraft Gift Book, 1936–1937.* Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

nicely color-coordinated quilt, one can always suspect a kit. Embroidered kit quilts, with their cross stitched x's, have been another popular type of kit (see figure 5). A fifth type of quilt kit, which is seldom seen, is the trapunto-style whole-cloth quilt kit. Some of these kits were marked with chalk, had wool battings, and came with cotton sateen for the tops.[4]

Kit quilts have been described by some as "paint-by-number" quilts, while others have likened them to boxed cake mixes and instant foods.[5] Carrie Hall lamented the proliferation of kit quilts in 1936, stating, "In the ready-cut quilts offered for sale are seen the effects of this hurrying age in which we live."[6]

Ethel Beam, in a 1956 issue of *House Beautiful,* wrote about

Figure 4. Die-cut Aunt Martha's Star quilt kit, circa 1960. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

one woman's experience with a quilt kit she had purchased while recovering from an illness in 1956: "I bought one of those 'packaged quilts'–precut, prestamped, complete with threads, and the like. It seemed like a suitable occupation for a convalescent, needing no thought and only a witless putting in of stitches. . . . I soon quit the project in disgust, because it was so ugly and without taste." The kit quilt, according to her, represented a loss in the art of quilting.[7]

Penny McMorris and Michael Kile, contemporary art historians, commented on the uncreative aspects of quilt kits:

> Quiltmaking was dying, however, for another reason. . . . During the Depression the quilting industry had turned this innovative me-

Figure 5. Detail of Williamstown quilt kit, Bucilla No. 3022, circa 1950. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

dium into a boring, mindless pastime. Professional designers made the creative decisions, leaving women with only the work of sewing the preordained quilts together. Companies printed patterns which determined size. Then, patterns were printed in color to, as 'Grandma Dexter' put it, 'assist the quilt maker in developing attractive color schemes.' It was not long before manufacturers were not only selecting designs and colors but cutting out the pieces and packaging the whole into kits they christened 'ready-cut' quilts.[8]

Thomas K. Woodard and Blanche Greenstein, New York quilt dealers, speaking of twentieth-century kit quilts, noted:

> All too often, . . . the resulting quilt lacks individual style and imaginative spark. Mail-order specialty-store patterns are sometimes stamped on muslin, with even simple quilting stitches indicated, and packaged in kits. One such offering in 1916, the Sunbonnet Kiddies crib quilt, included pieces stamped for cutting and embroidering, with the 'kiddies' dressed in outfits of pink, blue, yellow, purple, and heliotrope, with matching parasols. All aesthetic decisions were taken care of by the accompanying instructions, leaving no room whatsoever for the imagination.[9]

Although a number of negative images have been imposed upon kit quilts, a significant number of twentieth-century quiltmakers have found kits a valid medium for expressing artistry and design in quiltmaking.

The Continuing Popularity of Kit Quilts

In April 1993, Dorothymae and Harold Groves of Kansas City, Missouri, two prominent dealers of antique quilts and kit quilts, sponsored a major quilt show called "Floral Patterns on Parade."[10] Held at Kentucky Oaks Mall, Paducah, Kentucky, the show consisted primarily of quilts made from kits. The exhibit featured four kit quilts designed by Marie Webster, along with quilts made from kits once offered by Bucilla, Herrschner's, Ladies' Art Company, Lee Wards, Paragon, and the Rainbow Company. The large audience attending this show expressed high regard for the quilts on display. Even contemporary quiltmakers admired their designs and craftsmanship.

The popularity of the kit quilts is also evidenced in Woodard and Greenstein's book, *Twentieth Century Quilts: 1900–1950.* Twenty-three, or about 14 percent, of the quilts and quilted items featured in this book documenting this century's work are made from kits. Most of these were identified as such by the authors of the book.[11] The presence of these quilts is not surprising when one considers the large number of kit quilts that were available

Figure 6. Detail of full-page advertisement in the Spring–Summer 1964 issue of *McCall's Needlework & Crafts*. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

during this time period, and quiltmakers' lack of prejudice against them. Kits represented twentieth-century technology during a time in our culture when the assembly line was popular and there was little prejudice against repetitiveness.[12]

As further evidence of the continuing appeal of kit quilts, the authors have observed that quiltmakers are reproducing quilt designs that were once available as kits. The book *Great American Quilts*, for example, features a pattern and directions for the quilt, Trees and Garlands, by Nancy Smith, that was first produced as a kit quilt in the 1930s.[13]

Cuesta Benberry, eminent quilt historian and kit quilt author-

ity, spoke at the Quilters Hall of Fame Induction Luncheon held in Marion, Indiana, on July 17, 1993. She talked about the popularity of kit quilts, and pointed out that they had never really died out. Cuesta related the following account:

> I remember in the late 1950s traveling to a county fair in Southern Illinois where there were at least 40 or 50 quilts entered in the competition, but only three, I counted them, were made-from-scratch quilts. The rest were kits–embroidered or appliquéd designs or combined embroidered and appliquéd patterns. This was not an unusual happenstance for that time as I also visited large state fairs such as the Missouri State Fair, . . . Illinois State Fair, . . . Ohio State Fair, . . . Iowa State Fair and many smaller county fairs in various states. And frequently, the grand prize was awarded to a quilt made from a kit. . . . My point is to state that kit quilts continued to be made from the 1940s to the 1970s.[14]

Proof of Cuesta's thesis is readily seen in the numerous catalogs that offered kits for sale during the period from the 1940s to the 1970s, an era which has traditionally been viewed as a time when quiltmaking was largely on the wane. For instance, *McCall's Needlework & Crafts* Spring–Summer 1964 issue contained a full-page advertisement featuring Bucilla kits and other products (see figure 6).

In 1978, an issue of *Quilter's Newsletter* focused on the concern of a number of readers who had been having difficulty removing the stamp marks on their completed kit quilts. Bucilla and Rainbow Quilt Company offered instructions on various ways to remove the marks. Editor Bonnie Leman added a note requesting readers to add to the information given.[15]

As late as 1982, the Stearns Technical Textiles Company, in its Mountain Mist catalog, still offered precut quilt kits.[16] Today, die-cut appliquéd and pieced quilt kits are available from well-known companies such as Hearthside Quilts in Shelburne, Vermont, and Herrschner's, Inc. in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.[17] A number of smaller companies and cottage industries such as Advantage Graphic Designs, Busy Bee, and Calico Cupboard, also offer cut and "ready-cut" quilt kits.[18]

Early Quilt Kit Designers

Woodard and Greenstein believed that, "One of the most misunderstood aspects of the twentieth-century quilt revival is the significant role played by commercial enterprises that published catalogues, patterns and kits."[19] The importance of these enterprises and their influence on the quilting revival has been largely overlooked and unexamined.

By 1898, the Ladies Art Company offered blocks and finished items. A person could order presewn quilt blocks for 35 cents to $1.50, while the price for a complete quilt ranged from $25.00 to $45.00, depending on the complexity of the pattern. By 1922 the firm offered stamped kits for $5.00 (see figure 7).[20] At that time, the company, which had begun as a family operation with the children helping when they came home from school, employed fifty or more people designing patterns, stamping cloth for kits, and producing instruction pamphlets on a wide range of needle arts.[21]

A lesser known but significant influence on the early quilting industry was the Wilkinson Quilt Company of Ligonier, Indiana, which began as a cottage industry in 1908 from the home of two sisters, Ona and Rosalie Wilkinson. The Wilkinson Quilt Company grew steadily, moved into a factory, and was incorporated in February of 1914.

The sisters referred to their quilts as Wilkinson Art Quilts, and sold them by mail order, through specialty shops, and at various summer and winter resorts, as well as through special representatives. The Wilkinson Quilt Company created quilts and other quilted products of a very high quality. By 1927 the company employed one hundred employees who made hand-quilted, trapunto-style wool blankets, robes, and colonial-style appliqué quilts, as well as whole-cloth quilt kits.[22] Today one of the fine sateen whole-cloth trapunto-style quilts hangs in the library of Ligonier, Indiana, as a visual testimony to the high quality of the kits produced.[23]

Marie Webster founded another influential kit quilt company, The Practical Patchwork Company, in 1921 with the help of

Figure 7. 1922 issue of *Quilt Patterns, Patchwork and Appliqué,* by Ladies Art Company, St. Louis, MO. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

two close friends, Ida Hess and Evangeline Beshore. The company marketed both kits and finished quilts using Marie Webster's designs. It sold kits and patterns all across the country and even overseas, by mail order, and through department stores like Chicago's Marshall Fields, as well as in specialty outlets like Mary McElwain's famous Quilt Shop in Wisconsin.[24] It also sold its products in stores such as the Lewis Levy Appliance Company in Ligonier, Indiana. Here Ruth Levy had a corner in the store where she sold Marie Webster kits along with embroidered goods and notions.[25] Many of Marie Webster's designs were also sold as completed quilts. She had these quilted by residents of the Emily Flinn Memorial Home in Marion. During the Great

Quilt Revival of the 1920s and 30s, the Flinn Home could not keep up with the burgeoning demand for quilts. Practical Patchwork began using the services of fund-raising church groups in Kentucky, Michigan, Kansas, and various parts of Indiana, from Van Buren to Nashville.[26] Present evidence supports the idea that the Kentucky quilting group was most likely the Eleanor Beard Inc. cottage industry. A number of national advertisements by Eleanor Beard, in sources such as *House Beautiful* magazine and *Needlecraft–The Home Arts Magazine,* stated specifically that Eleanor sold Marie Webster Quilts, and some of the ads were illustrated with Webster Quilts.[27] It is clear that the Practical Patchwork Company made a significant contribution during the 1920s and 1930s to the economy in parts of the United States that were otherwise economically strapped.

Mary McElwain, who lived in Walworth, Wisconsin, decided to operate a quilt cottage industry as a component of a full-scale quilt service organization. In her Mary McElwain Quilt Shop she carried completed quilts and comforters, a large inventory of paper patterns, cotton and wool batting, waxed thread, needles, quilter's notions, percale sheets, pillowcases, and fabrics. McElwain hired a number of women to complete the appliquéd and pieced quilts and to prepare some appliqué quilts by basting them only. The women also stamped the cloth, cut out the patches, and sent out others in kit form.[28]

In 1939, Mary McElwain published *Romance of the Village Quilts,* a thirty-five page booklet containing her philosophy, some history, and a description of her products. She later used this booklet as a catalog, offering her customers patterns as well as quilt kits. Some of McElwain's kits were designed by Marie Webster, while other designs in the book are purportedly those of Mary herself. Her customers came from surrounding towns, including Chicago, which was eighty miles away, to visit her shop. In 1933 she served as one of the judges for the Sears Century of Progress Quilt Contest at the Chicago World's Fair, chosen because of the respect given her by customers, workers, and vendors.[29]

The entrepreneuring women who produced and sold kits were

not stereotyped housewives trying to earn money. They were, as often as not, well educated, and a number of them were artists and writers. Mrs. Scioto Danner, a prime example, taught school before she became involved with the business of producing and selling quilt kits. Following a period of ill health and a failed marriage, she had made a Double Wedding Ring quilt that her mother sold for $25.00 and later she made a Double Tulip design that sold for $45.00, the only quilts she was ever to make completely by herself.[30]

Mrs. Danner remembered how she switched to making kits: "The following year [March, 1930] I had a display at Innes Store in Wichita. I was selling only finished quilts. So many people asked me for my designs that I took orders and came home and cut patterns by hand for those who wanted them so badly." In 1934 she published her first catalog which included five kits.[31] Then, in 1936, ill health forced her from her business until 1958 when she published *Book Three* of her catalog and began filling orders again. During those years, Mrs. Danner operated an extensive cottage industry, filling orders for tops, kits, and finished quilts.[32]

Almost all of the quilt kit designers had their own characteristic styles that eventually became associated with their names. Anne Orr was one such quilt artist. Quilt designs based on the concept of cross-stitch work became one of her trademarks, although, in reality, they represented only 15 percent of her total quilt designs.[33] Anne Orr offered her first stamped cloth kit for a Poppy quilt with a matching bedside rug in January 1932. It sold for $1.50. The stamping of the cloth eliminated the need to trace the flower and stem pattern pieces; more importantly, the stamping eliminated the problem of finding fabric to produce the proposed color gradations. Throughout the years, Orr's prices varied according to the size and style of the quilt, but never rose above $9.00 for a kit of stamped and ready-to-cut fabric.[34]

An unknown number of Orr's quilt kits were sold through *Good Housekeeping.* Three of her quilt kits were featured in three different issues of *House Beautiful:* Autumn Leaf, French Wreath, and Forget-Me-Not.[35] Her Autumn Leaf quilt design consisted

of multitudes of leaves formed from various scraps with a delicate, meandering stem or vine. The Autumn Leaf design found its way into the *Sears Century of Progress in Quiltmaking* booklet in 1934.[36]

Orr's success as a designer was unmatched–on one single day in 1917 it is said that she received 500,000 requests for her own brochure.[37] Anne Orr was described in a feature story in *The Nashville Banner* as a pathfinder in the field of professional opportunities, in practical art.[38] While serving as the art/needlework editor of *Good Housekeeping,* she still found time to manage the Anne Orr Studio of Nashville, which employed at least one hundred women for many years. During this time, she also authored more than seventy books and pamphlets, many of which were translated into French and Spanish. Merikay Waldvogel, quilt historian, states, "Her impact on quiltmaking through her writing and judging of contests was certainly significant, but as a successful business woman at a time when it was not common for women to do such things, she was a pioneer."[39]

Ruby Short McKim was another important person associated with quilt kits and quilt patterns. A designer/illustrator schooled at Parson's School of Art, she turned to designing quilt patterns for the *Kansas City Star* and for *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine, of which she was the art/needlework editor.[40] In 1931, Ruby and her husband Arthur, owners of the McKim Studios, published *101 Patchwork Patterns,* a book which continues to be regarded as a standard to this day.[41] The McKim Studios also offered kits and designs through mail-order catalogs called *Designs Worth Doing.* Ruby Short McKim is best known for her unusual Art Deco inspired patterns, though in fact, as was the case with Ann Orr, they represented only a small portion of her work.[42]

Rise of the Quilt Kit Companies

The rise of the larger quilt kit companies, in the 1930s, was largely due to the success of the earlier cottage industries, as well as to the interest generated by the numerous county and state fairs

and expositions that were taking place across the United States. The Sears Century of Progress Quilt Contest at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, with its 25,000 entries, took place at the peak of the quilt revival, providing a considerable impetus for the quilt industry. Sears and other companies sold patterns and kits of the first three prize-winning quilts. Legacies from this fair are the many copies of the prize-winning quilts. The most widely copied quilt, both as a kit and pattern, seems to have been Autumn Leaf, which was a regional winner.[43]

The rise of the larger quilt kit companies was helped by the efforts of popular women's magazines which sold quilt kits, as well as offering them as premiums in the first half of the century. The July 1932 issue of *Needlecraft, The Home Arts Magazine,* for example, carried an illustration of a Star and Diamond block and an ad offering sufficient blue and white stamped material to make twenty-five blocks as a premium for anyone getting three new subscriptions (see figure 8).[44]

Aided in part by the media and in part by the growing demand for the kits, companies such as Aunt Ellen, Bucilla, Franks, Gold Art, Herrschner's, Jack Dempsey, Lee Wards, Marvil Art, Progress, Vogart, Wonder-Art, and others continued to operate successfully.[45] These companies, employing numerous people, created a clear and positive impact on the economy of the times. The kits offered by the companies through their own catalogs were also distributed through large mail-order houses such as Sears Roebuck & Co. and Montgomery Wards. They could also be found in the popular five-and-dime stores such as Ben Franklin, McCrory's, and Woolworth's.[46] The companies' kits were offered for sale by smaller magazines such as *Aunt Martha's Workbasket* and by "prestigious magazines" like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal.*[47] Small retailers also kept some in stock.

The rather low cost of the kits made it possible for people at all economic levels to obtain them, which in turn increased the demand for more kits. The commercial aspect of quilting, the fruits of which we are able to enjoy today, continued to grow and develop, long before the revival of the 1970s.

The quilt kit companies' influence on quiltmaking has been

significant. During an era of difficult economic times, this industry provided work for many families. In this way livelihoods were provided while quiltmaking itself was being promoted. Judging by the number of kits that are still seen today, we can assume that a fairly extensive labor force was in existence. In addition the kit companies also provided a creative outlet for women designers during a time when business opportunities for women were limited.

Figure 8. Advertisement from *Needlecraft, The Home Arts Magazine,* July 1932. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

A Valid Medium to Learn Quiltmaking Skills and Artistry

Throughout this century, quiltmakers have used kits to further their quilting skills and design knowledge. In the first half of the century, quilt kits provided a means for quiltmakers to learn skills that otherwise may not have been available due to the lack of quilt guilds and quilting classes and the scarcity of well-written instructions. The quilt kits may also have influenced trends in color coordination by the choices of fabrics that designers and manufacturers provided, in a time when following a trend was considered more desirable than being individualistic.

According to eminent quilt historian Joyce R. Gross, Dr. Jeannette Dean-Throckmorton was one of the quiltmakers who used kits, especially for her appliqué quilts. Jeannette graduated from the Keokuk Medical School in Iowa in 1907, and began quilting the same year.[48] An example of her work, Blue Iris, can be seen in *Twentieth Century Quilts: 1900–1950* by Thos. K. Woodard and Blanche Greenstein. The authors acknowledge that "the skill required to execute quilts of this quality is of the highest level."[49] Gross noted that, "Dr. Jeannette made many pieced quilts, but she became best known for her elaborate appliqué quilts with stuffed and corded work."[50]

Mary Schafer, whose work has been brought to light by Gwen Marston and Joe Cunningham, also developed her quilting skills through the use of quilt kits. Mary did a considerable amount of needlework–knitting ties, tatting lace edgings for embroidered linens, and sewing clothing. While purchasing needleworking supplies at Smith Bridgeman's department store in downtown Flint, Michigan, in the 1940s, she first saw quilts displayed in the art and needlework department, where the completed quilts hanging on the walls advertised kits. In 1949, Mary purchased one of the kits. After reading the kit instructions, Mary was astounded by the amount of time and effort it would require. Thinking that she would never be able to do all the work required, she returned the kit. Other than seeing occasional references to quilt patterns in needlework magazines, the kit remained her

only contact with quilts until 1952 when her son joined the United States Army.

After her son left home, Mary found that despite her other needlework, she still had free time for other projects. She returned to Smith-Bridgeman's to purchase another quilt kit called Rhododendron which was made by the Progress Company. As the first quilt she made, Rhododendron helped Mary define her idea of how to make quilts. Contrary to her fears, the work posed no special problems for her. The numbered appliqué pieces were precut and the quilting lines were marked with dots. Although she lacked a frame, Mary proved she did not need one by basting together the three layers and quilting in her lap. The quilt, still in existence today, is elegant, symmetrical, and has an artful border. After finishing her Rhododendron kit quilt in six months, she purchased another appliqué quilt kit, Poppy Wreath. With the completion of the second quilt, Mary considered quilting one of her domestic arts.[51]

Time after time we have seen that kit quilts have served as a design inspiration for quilt makers. For instance, in the 1930s, E. Buckner Kirk designed the quilt kit Elephant's Child, based on Rudyard Kipling's *Just-So Stories.* The kit appeared in women's magazines for $5.00. Quiltmaker Minnie Bjork of Minnesota could not afford to buy the kit so she drew the pattern herself from the photograph in a magazine. She used plaids for her elephants and a cotton sateen for the background. She later entered the quilt in the Traverse County Fair in Wheaton, Minnesota and won first place.[52]

Emma Mary Martha Andres of Prescott, Arizona, was inspired by magazines and newspapers that brought the world to her in her small hometown where she worked in her father's cigar store. While previous generations of quilters relied on more direct handing down of ideas and patterns from mother to daughter, twentieth-century quilters found a wealth of inspiration from periodicals such as *Woman's World.* Miss Andres ordered a Tiger Lily quilt kit from this publication in 1931. Thus began her love affair with quilting, which produced a number of outstanding

pieces including one which received a merit award in the 1933 Sears Quilt Contest.[53]

Amelia (Millie) Clegg also utilized a kit quilt as the inspiration for one of her quilts. Clegg was related through marriage to the family that owned the Wm. E. Wright Company, a firm which pioneered the idea of seam bindings and tapes that came in packages rather than on a spool. Her quilt, which is documented and illustrated in *New Jersey Quilts: 1777 to 1950*, was redesigned by her sister Gladys from the original kit which Amelia did not like.[54]

If some quilt kits were redesigned by their makers, they represented a small percentage of the total quilt kits put together. Judging from the kit quilts in existence today, most makers of kit quilts executed them as they were presented by the manufacture. The success of these designs may explain why some people think of kit designs as mundane and nothing more than "prettied-up" versions of familiar designs, such as those of the Pennsylvania-Dutch.

Occasionally, large needlework companies like Paragon and Bucilla obtained prominent museums' permissions to faithfully reproduce authentic antique Pennsylvania-German quilts. The antique quilt collection of distinguished preservationist Florence Peto provided the source of designs for several quilt kits. Appliquéd and cross-stitch quilt kits advertised as Pennsylvania-Dutch quilt adaptations include Provincial, Remembrance, Memory, and Flowering Hearts by Paragon, and American Calico by Bucilla.

One of Paragon's most successful quilt kits, American Glory, copied a circa 1850 Pennsylvania-German summer quilt in the Titus Geesey Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The museum obtained the original quilt in 1955, and Paragon's kit first appeared in a 1961 article in *Good Housekeeping* magazine. Needlework and department stores prominently displayed a made-up block of the center eagle. The American Glory kit gained a kind of credence not usually accorded a quilt kit when photographs of it appeared as editorial illustrations, instead of

Figure 9. Duck appliquéd child's kit quilt, circa 1930. This quilt first appeared in *Farmer's Wife*, June 1934, as Ducky Coverlet. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

advertisements, in magazines and books. Although traditionally the life of a particular quilt kit was often no more than a dozen years, American Glory survived, partly because of renewed in-

terest fueled by its patriotic motif at the time of the nation's Bicentennial celebration.[55]

The Pennsylvania-German style quilts were not the only designs reproduced. Other highly respected quilts housed in museum collections also served as a source of inspiration for a number of quilt kit designs. Paragon's The Cherry Tree is a replica of the original in the Art Institute of Chicago, while the original of the Friendship Quilt rests in the Shelburne Museum. Bucilla's Liberty design, reissued in anticipation of the 1976 Bicentennial celebration, is a replica of a quilt in the Smithsonian Institution.[56]

Knowledgeable private collectors also provided sources of design inspiration for kit quilts. Florence Peto's collection yielded an antique Whig Rose first offered in replica by *American Home* magazine in 1947 and later as a cross-stitch quilt kit by Paragon. An album quilt from Peto's collection also reappeared as a cross-stitch Baltimore Bride kit by Paragon. Paragon's Calico Sunflower, Rose of Sharon, and May Basket kits were derived from the same source.[57]

Since as early as the first quarter of the century, quilt kits designed specifically for children have had wide appeal (see figure 9). The themes include nursery tales, animals, and circuses, as well as Sunbonnet Sue and Overall Sam.[58] Other designs have been influenced by play equipment, toys, children's books, cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and Casper the Friendly Ghost, as well as the western theme.[59] Quilt kits designed with the baby or child in mind can be pieced, appliquéd, or embroidered (see figure 10). We see continued evidence of this popularity in the number these quilts featured in quilt books and magazines as well as at quilt shows that we visit.

Conclusion

The role and importance of the quilt kit industry has been largely overlooked and misunderstood. While quilt kits have long been derided as mere "paint-by-numbers" projects that leave little

room for creativity, this study concludes that the quilt kit played a more significant role than has been previously recognized.

Kit quilts have enjoyed a continuing popularity, independent of the changes and trends that have occurred in twentieth-century quiltmaking. We have observed this through quilt shows exhibiting these quilts and through the numbers of such quilts published in magazines and books and advertised in current catalogs.

The quilt kit gave rise to an industry that offered women an

Figure 10. Detail of an unfinished embroidered child's quilt. The background is pre-quilted and stamped for embroidery, circa 1950. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

Figure 11. Poppy kit quilt, circa 1940. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

opportunity to become entrepreneurs and to be recognized for their creative efforts. This industry provided economically viable employment opportunities for many people–from quilt designers to assembly workers–a movement that has been only partially documented.

With regard to continuing the artistry and design in quilt-

Figure 12. Detail of Daisy kit quilt, circa 1930. Collection of Beverly Dunivent.

making, the kit quilt provided quiltmakers with an education that was often unavailable elsewhere. Kits provided quiltmakers with the means to develop skills in various aspects of quiltmaking in areas or locations lacking guilds, workshops, and well-written instructions. Some of the kit designs were copied from works in museums and private collections, enabling people far from the sources to see such masterpieces for the first time. Quiltmakers were also tempted to begin quiltmaking by the ease of making a beautiful and color-coordinated quilt (see figures 11 and 12). Often people who first made the kits went on to make other quilts, and a number of those quilts won awards.

The kit quilt stands today as a visual reminder of an interesting facet of quiltmaking. It deserves recognition and further research.

Notes and References

1. Cuesta Benberry, "Quilt Kits: Present and Past - Part II" *Nimble Needle Treasures* Vol. 6 No. 4 (1974), 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Susan Jenkins and Linda Seward, *The American Quilt Story* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1991), 99.
4. Toni Morehead, "The Wilkinson Art Quilt–Echo from an Age of Elegance," *Heritage Country* 12 (Fall/Winter 1991), 30.
5. Merikay Waldvogel, *Soft Covers for Hard Times* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1990), 14.
6. Carrie A. Hall and Rose Kretsinger, *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1936), 17.
7. Ethel Beam, "Streamlining the Art of Quilting," *House Beautiful*, August 1956, 74.
8. Penny McMorris and Michael Kile, *The Art Quilt* (San Francisco: The Quilt Digest Press, 1986), 38.
9. Thomas K. Woodard and Blanche Greenstein, *Crib Quilts and Other Small Wonders* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 14.
10. AQS Show and Guide, *The Paducah Sun,* 22 April 1993, 20.
11. Thomas K. Woodard and Blanche Greenstein, *Twentieth Century Quilts: 1900-1950* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988).
12. Xenia Cord, during her workshop, "Identifying 20's & 30's Kit Quilts," Paducah, Kentucky, 23 April 1994.
13. Carol L. Newbill, ed. *Great American Quilts 1994* (Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, Inc., 1994), 24; Cyril I. Nelson and Carter Houck, *Treasury of American Quilts* (New York: Greenwich House, 1982), 161.
14. Cuesta Benberry, talk given before Quilters Hall of Fame luncheon, Marion, IN, 17 July 1993.
15. *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine,* No. 98 (January 1978), 12.
16. *Mountain Mist Catalog* (Cincinnati, OH: The Stearns Technical Textiles Company), *Hearthside Quilts* catalog (Shelburne, VT: Hearthside Quilts Co., 1993); *Herrschner's Inc.* (Stevens Point, WI: Herrschner's, Inc., 1992).
18. Leslie Roth, *Advantage Graphic Designs Quilt Kits* (Grass Valley, CA: Advantage Graphic Designs, 1993); *Calico Cupboard* (Rumney, NH, 1993); *Busy Bee Catalog* (Decatur, GA: Busy Bee Co., 1993).
19. Woodard and Greenstein, *Twentieth Century Quilts,* 18.

20. Nancy J. Martin, *Threads of Time* (Bothell, WA: That Patchwork Place, Inc., 1990), 99.
21. Woodard and Greenstein, *Twentieth Century Quilts,* 20.
22. Toni Morehead, 30.
23. Frances Fisel, Ligonier, Indiana, telephone interview with Beverly Dunivent, 13 November 1993.
24. Rosalind Webster Perry and Marty Frolli, *A Joy Forever: Marie Webster's Quilt Patterns* (Santa Barbara, CA: Practical Patchwork, 1992), 35.
25. Dorothy Perry, interview with author Beverly Dunivent, Quilters Hall of Fame annual meeting, Marion, Indiana, 17 July 1993.
26. Rosalind Webster Perry, *The Quilters Hall of Fame Celebrates Marie Webster* catalog (Marion, IN: The Quilters Hall of Fame, Inc., 1992), 3.
27. Cuesta Benberry, "Marie Webster: A Major Influence on Quilt Design in the 20th Century," *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* No. 224 (July/August 1990), 34.
28. Cuesta Benberry, "Cottage Industries," in *Uncoverings 1986,* ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley, CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1987), 91.
29. Pat L. Nickols, "Mary A. McElwain: Quilter and Quilt Businesswoman," in *Uncoverings 1991*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1992), 105.
30. Helen M. Ericson, "Who Is Mrs. Danner," *Lady's Circle Patchwork Quilts,* No. 52 (June/July 1987), 26.
31. Scioto Imhoff Danner, *Mrs. Danner's Quilts* catalog #1 (El Dorado, KS, 1934).
32. Ericson, 49.
33. Merikay Waldvogel, "The Marketing of Anne Orr's Quilts," in *Uncoverings 1990,* ed. Laurel Horton, (San Francisco, CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1991), 7.
34. Ibid., 17.
35. Ibid., 19.
36. Waldvogel, *Soft Covers for Hard Times,* 23.
37. Woodard and Greenstein, *Twentieth Century Quilts,* 20.
38. Waldvogel, *Uncoverings 1990,* 10.
39. Waldvogel, *Soft Covers for Hard Times,* 37.
40. Louise O. Townsend, "Kansas City Star Quilt Patterns," in *Uncoverings 1984,* ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1985), 117.

41. Ruby Short McKim, *One Hundred and One Patchwork Patterns,* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962).
42. McMorris and Kile, 36.
43. Barbara Brackman, "Quilts at the Chicago's World's Fair," in *Uncoverings 1981,* ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley, CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1982), 70.
44. Advertisement in *Needlecraft–The Home Arts Magazine,* July 1932, 20.
45. Cuesta Benberry, "Quilt Kits: Present and Past - Part I" *Nimble Needle Treasures* Vol. 6 No. 2 and 3 (1974), 1.
46. Benberry, talk given before Quilters Hall of Fame luncheon.
47. Martin, 99.
48. Joyce R. Gross, "Four Twentieth Century Quiltmakers," in *Uncoverings 1980,* ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley, CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1981), 32.
49. Woodard and Greenstein, *Twentieth Century Quilts,* 50.
50. Gross, 34.
51. Gwen Marston and Joe Cunningham, *Mary Schafer and Her Quilts,* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1990), 4.
52. Nancyann Johanson Twelker, *Women and Their Quilts* (Bothel, WA: Patchwork Place, 1988), 80.
53. Woodard and Greenstein, *Twentieth Century Quilts,* 23, 56.
54. Rachel Cochran, ed., *New Jersey Quilts: 1777 to 1950,* (Paducah, KY: American Quilter's Society, 1992), 42.
55. Cuesta Benberry, "The Nationalization of Pennsylvania-Dutch Patterns in the 1940's–1960's," in *Bits and Pieces, Textile Traditions,* ed. Jeannette Lasansky (Lewisburg, PA: The Oral Traditions Project of the Union County Historical Society, 1991), 85.
56. Benberry, talk given before Quilters Hall of Fame luncheon.
57. Benberry, "Quilt Kits: Present and Past - Part I," 1.
58. Carter Houck, *The Quilt Encyclopedia Illustrated* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 94.
59. Cochran, *New Jersey Quilts,* 217.