

Uncoverings 1996

Volume 17 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Virginia Gunn



Uncoverings *1996*

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Cover: Charm Quilt, circa 1870s, 82" x 83"
composed of 1152 small triangles
Maker unknown
Collection of Pat L. Nickols

Cover photograph by Carina Woolrich, donated by Pat L. Nickols

Color separations donated by Arizona Lithographers



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Preface



Volume 17 of the Research Papers of the American Quilt Study Group continues to focus on twentieth-century themes and on personalities in the quilt world. It also illustrates the continued interdisciplinary thrust of quilt scholarship, in which a wide variety of sources and methods are necessary to explore all facets of quilts, quilting, and quiltmakers important to well-rounded social-cultural history.

Cassandra Stancil Gunkel demonstrates that Nancy Riddick's legacy of quilts serve as family textile scrapbooks containing messages that reinforce the African American narrative tradition in preserving history. Gunkel used the oral history skills of her training in folklore to mine the rich sources of information preserved in Nancy Riddick's extended family.

Susan Price Miller's in-depth study of Carlie Sexton reveals the life and contributions of a heretofore neglected but influential quilt-pattern designer. Miller's portrait of Carrie Sexton reinforces the important links among the worlds of quilting, small business entrepreneurship, women's magazines, and farm periodicals during the quilt revival of the early twentieth century.

Jill Sutton Filo's research brings to light new information on the well-known pattern designer Ruby Short McKim, concentrating on the formative years of her life and work, with emphasis on her early series of quilt patterns. In McKim's life we again see the important links between art training and quilt design during the first half of the twentieth century.

Tracy W. Barron has studied the life and work of prize-winning author Rachel Field and highlights the strong influence of quilting

imagery in her work. This study shows that the world of quilting influenced the work of women writers a half century ago, just as quilt as metaphor continues to be a topic of interest to female writers today. It is also interesting to note further influence of Ruth Finley's pioneer quilt book.

Elizabeth Hoffman raises the question, "How should we study quilts?" Hoffman verbalizes the importance of using numerous methods to solve a particular research problem. She included a reconstruction of the quilting process as one of her means of gaining understanding pertinent to Oregon's Murder Quilt. While good historians have always used a variety of methods, they rarely discuss them. This essay, with its observation that in-depth research can raise as many questions as it answers, should stimulate further discussion on the topic of methods.

Rebecca A. Ries, a landscape architect, also stressed the importance of understanding the process of quilting. She used a technique called imaginative self-exploration to explore and understand the links between quilts, quilting, and landscape. Her study focuses on contemporary quilters who produce art quilts, again underscoring the links between art and quilts.

In the final paper, Pat L. Nickols utilized her charm quilt data base to reflect on a genre of quilts. She calls attention to the need to pull together and analyze material from published sources and state quilt project records, supplemented by new findings. Such comparisons can provide new insights on what is common in American quilts, and what is unique to sections of the country, continuing work on important topics identified at the 1995 Smithsonian conference.

All in all the quality of the current research bodes well for the continuing health of this path of scholarship. Attendees at the annual seminar, to be held October 4-6, 1996 in Scottsdale, Arizona, will enjoy a visual presentation of this research and a chance to discuss with the authors and with each other the implications and challenges of the current findings.