

Uncoverings 1998

Volume 19 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Virginia Gunn



Uncoverings *1998*

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Cover: Velvet Crazy Quilt, embroidered 1912, 64" x 42"
made by Ida Stover Eisenhower.
Courtesy of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Museum, Abilene, Kansas

Cover photograph by R. G. Elmore
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Preface

The nineteenth seminar of the American Quilt Study Group will be held in Charleston, West Virginia, from October 16-18, 1999. Participants will hear and discuss the research papers presented in this volume, part of an ongoing series dedicated to preserving quilt history. Dr. Alan Jabbour, director of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, will give the invited keynote address, focusing on the Center and developments in quilt documentation and research on the World Wide Web.

While topics related to quilts and technology dominate discussion in quilt-related conversations and concerns in the late 1990s, the papers in this volume have their central focus on the people who make quilts. This is probably as it should be. While the internet and related technologies are changing the way we share information and do research, the heart of quilting is still the quiltmakers themselves and their relationships with families, friends, and extended communities.

Carol and Ronnie Elmore's study of the surviving quilts made by Ida Stover Eisenhower, mother of Dwight David Eisenhower, is a pioneer in-depth exploration of textiles related to presidents. Since objects with associational value have usually been among the first items to interest the museum world, it is surprising this has not happened sooner. Their study reinforces the fact that in the United States extraordinary leaders often grew up in quite ordinary circumstances where creative and caring people made a key difference in their lives.

Dorothy Osler's paper reinforces the importance of continued in-depth work on known topics. She builds on her own previous work and that of other British quilt researchers to shed new light on an important quilt design trade which was a long-standing tradition in the North East region of England. She conducted oral

interviews, analyzed extant textiles, and mined the printed sources to piece together this fascinating story of professional quilting designers. It adds to our knowledge of women's work and cottage industries as an international phenomenon.

Tracy Barron discovered an amazing quilt preserved in a family collection in Massachusetts. As a teacher of reading, she wanted to decode the messages written on this textile object and in the accompanying papers that had been preserved with it. She uncovered the tale of an interesting nineteenth-century woman and her support circle of friends, family, and mentors. This material-culture approach demonstrates how in-depth study of an artifact may reveal the culture in which the artifact was produced.

Heather Lenz's study of her grandmother's quilts provides us with a rich background on the whole process of quilting as it integrates with life. Heather's interest in the artifacts led her to spend long hours with her grandmother in order to understand and to learn the process of quilting. Heather wisely and instinctively settled on the best way to really understand process as well as product. Formally, this in-depth method would be called field work. The results allow us to share the folk wisdom of her grandmother Mary Sibley.

Judy Elsley's study of quilt detective novels should delight the numerous readers of this genre of literature. She helps us understand why this form of literature is so addictive and relaxing to read. With her training and experience in teaching English literature and with her interest in the place of quilts in contemporary culture, she is able to explain why quilts make a perfect vehicle for modern detective stories which have women as protagonists.

Jenny Yearous's work on the history of thread completes this nineteenth volume of *Uncoverings*. Jenny's study introduces an important topic and points out the need for more in-depth work on the materials and technology related to quilts. Her analysis of quilts in private collections and in the James Collection at the University of Nebraska led her to question published information on the dates that types of thread appeared, and suggested new guidelines. Her study reminds us that research is a continual process of discovery and revision.