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The Kezia D. Benton Quilt: A Life Uncovered

Molly Miles

The author researched a mid-nineteenth-century album-block quilt containing unusual inscriptions on its fifty-six blocks, including: "Commenced 1849 by Kezia D. Benton," "Ship Washington Irving Stewardess," "Valparaiso April 1851" and "Remodeled at Stockton 1876." The signature quilt, the work of one quilter, proved to be an important autobiographical and historical document. It records one woman's participation during a dramatic time in American history—the rush by Easterners to California for gold and settlement.

In 1991, while visiting the Monterey Bay area of California, I noticed a quilt draped over a table in an antique shop. Although the quilt's center was covered by a display of depression-era glassware, its fabrics appeared to be cottons of pale lavenders, rich browns, medium-toned greens, dark and light blues. The quilting was simple, an even quarter-inch from each seam, and around the four visible sides were pieced Album Block squares. The blocks were set edge to edge, with the small outside triangles of each block giving the overall illusion of intricate sashing. What caught my eye this day was not needlework but penmanship. A white rectangle with inked handwriting was in the center of each block.

The shop owner was unable to provide any information about the quilt or its maker, but the quilt itself revealed names, dates, and places: "Commenced 1849 by Kezia D. Benton" in one corner; "Canajoharrie 1850" along an edge; "Ship Washington Irving Stewardess," "Valparaiso April 1851," and "Remodeled at Stock-

ton 1876" all placed near the bottom.¹ The inscriptions looked as if the same hand had signed all the blocks.

Although the quilt did not come home with me that day, I could not forget the possibility this quilt had a story to tell. Five days later, I returned with a friend. When we examined the quilt together, she was startled to recognize the name "Canajoharrie," the town where she had grown up in central New York State. Looking more closely, she also recognized several familiar names of families who still live in the area. Thoroughly intrigued now, I purchased the quilt.

Once at home I took a closer look at the entire quilt (see figure 1). The direction of the handwriting indicated a top and bottom edge for this quilt. The quiltmaker had used cotton fabric and cotton batting throughout. She had hand-pieced fifty-six album blocks (seven blocks across and eight down) and worked the binding and quilting by hand. A glazed white fabric was used in each block's center and bordering triangles. The quilt was skillfully assembled so that all the corners and triangle points were accurate, even though the blocks varied in size from ten to ten and one-half inches square. The back was a common fabric, one with a white ground and tiny black dots. A brown printed fabric, not found elsewhere in the quilt, was used for the applied binding. The glazing on the white fabric and the unusual brightness of the other fabrics gave evidence that this quilt had been carefully stored and never washed. This quilt was not a practical household item. For the maker, it was an object a great deal rarer and very dear to her.

After diagramming block placement and transcribing the inscriptions, only two examples of placement seemed significant (see figure 2). First, the quiltmaker begins the quilt with the top left block "Commenced 1849 by Kezia D. Benton," as a person would do if writing a story (see figure 3). Second, "Father Benton" and "Mother Benton" occupy the center blocks, traditionally a location of honor or importance. The seemingly random arrangement of the remaining blocks suggests the quiltmaker placed them to balance the colors for eye appeal. Blocks with dates are not arranged in chronological order, and those with the same surnames are not grouped in a corner or placed in one row, but in random juxtapositions.

The earliest dates on the quilt are paired with towns found

Figure 1. Album quilt, 73" x 83," ca. 1849 to 1876, made by Kezia D. Benton Curtis (1822–1924). Collection of the author. Photograph by Reed Kaestner.

throughout upstate New York (Albany, Canajoharie, Cortland, Holley, Theresa, Watertown.) The Album Block, also referred to as Chimney Sweep, was a common pattern for quilts made in mid-nineteenth-century New York.² As Jane Bentley Kolter found during her study of friendship/album quilts, “a number of towns in central New York produced Chimney Sweep quilts with dark-ground printed textiles. These look so similar that one can imme-

Figure 2. A graph of the Kezia D. Benton Curtis album quilt illustrating inked inscriptions and their placement. Blocks made from identical fabrics are shown with identical lined backgrounds. Illustration by the author.

diately place them in that region.”³ Kolter also learned “coverlets made in New York and New Jersey feature a smaller block which does not exceed eleven inches on a side before it is seamed.”⁴ The Album Block pattern continued to enjoy widespread popularity throughout the century.⁵

Figure 3. Detail of block from quilt made by Kezia D. Benton Curtis illustrating her signature. Photograph by the author.

Along with the New York place names, another group of blocks, “Ship Washington Irving Stewardess,” “Ship Steward,” “Shipmate Annie,” “Shipmate Europea,” “Shipmate Josie,” obviously refer to a ship or a voyage. The blocks “Valparaiso April 1851” and “California 1869” further imply an ocean voyage around Cape Horn, a route many Easterners took in the mid-nineteenth century to the gold fields in California.⁶

I began my formal research with the block “Ship Washington Irving Stewardess,” first telephoning whaling museums in Massachusetts and then writing letters to maritime museums on the East and West coasts. Within a week, The Boston Society in Boston, Massachusetts, sent a copy of a passenger list for the packet ship

Washington Irving.⁷ Of the twenty-seven listed passengers, only the entries "B. Curtis" and "K. Curtis" matched a surname on the quilt. A block inscribed "Bradner Curtis" is located near the center of the quilt. The passenger list also gave sailing dates and ports. The *Washington Irving* left New York City on December 9, 1850, sailed around Cape Horn, made a stop in Valparaiso, Chile, and arrived in San Francisco, California, on July 1, 1851.⁸ On the quilt is the block "Valparaiso April 1851."

A month later, the next significant record was found while researching the block "Stockton 1872." At a genealogy library in Los Angeles I found a book on the history of San Joaquin County in California which listed in its index pages a Bradner Curtis. Here I learned that Bradner Curtis was born in New York and in 1849 he married Miss Kezia Benton of Canajoharie, New York. Together they had sailed to California by way of Cape Horn. The biography revealed that after working three years in the Sonora gold fields, Kezia and Bradner Curtis moved to Stockton, California, to farm and raise a family of one daughter and three sons.⁹ This narrative verified dates and place names, and identified names and family relationships on the quilt. Working from this biography, more was discovered about Kezia and Bradner Curtis in census rolls, church registers, court documents, and other public records. I wrote letters of inquiry to historical societies, quilt historians, and genealogists. I visited towns, libraries, and cemeteries to learn as much about this quilt and its inscriptions as I could.

One of the first questions to be answered was this: did Kezia D. Benton sign her own block "Commenced 1849 by Kezia D. Benton," and if so, did she inscribe all the other blocks. The same sepia-toned ink (a stable ink that has not damaged the fabric) was used on each block. I compared the handwriting on her block (see figure 3) to each of the other blocks and found all inscriptions to be the same height and smoothness of stroke. Letters such as B, C, E, J, M, r, S and z are scripted in the same manner throughout the quilt. I have judged the inscriptions to be in Kezia's hand by comparing the quilt handwriting to her name on signed court documents. Her 1849 signature as Kezia D. Benton on the quilt has the same formation of the letters K, z, and D as her signature Kezia D. Curtis in 1881 on Bradner Curtis's will.¹⁰

My research leads me to conclude that this quilt expands the definitions used to describe signature quilts. Signature quilts (which include Album, Friendship and Presentation quilts) are group projects where each block is made or signed by a different person.¹¹ A Signature quilt was also usually made to commemorate a single occasion, such as a marriage or a birth.¹² Presentation quilts are the work of many hands and take the form of a testimony from the group.¹³

Kezia's quilt was instead created over a period of decades and each signature was the work of her hand only. Kezia Darwin Benton Curtis compiled a memoir of her youth, her courageous ocean voyage, and her new life as a California pioneer, on the fifty-six quilt squares.¹⁴ This quilt is her autobiography in cloth of part of her life.

A Girlhood in Upstate New York

Kezia's story begins in the rolling uplands of the Mohawk River valley. Dutch, English, and Palatine Germans immigrated to this central New York area in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ In the early 1800s this was a region known for fertile land that sustained family farms, agricultural brokers, fulling-mill workers, tanners, loggers, and sawmill workers. River traffic provided a livelihood for boat builders, dry-dock laborers, merchants, and innkeepers.¹⁶ The Mohawk River was the principal waterway moving goods east to Albany, where it enters the Hudson River, which flows south to New York City. In 1825 the Erie Canal was completed, connecting Hudson River commerce to Lake Erie and the westward settlements beyond.¹⁷ Inscribed on the quilt is the town Canajoharie that lies along the south bank of the Mohawk River in Montgomery County, and here Kezia was born December 20, 1822.¹⁸ She was the second child and second daughter born to Hylan and Cynthia Benton.¹⁹

On her quilt Kezia placed her own father and mother in the two center blocks (see figure 2). Her father Hylan Benton, identified as "Father Benton," was born in Montgomery County, New York, in 1799.²⁰ As a boy he came with his parents to Ames, New York, a

Figure 4. Illustration of the Benton and Curtis genealogy. Quiltmaker is indicated by an oval. Family members included on the quilt are indicated in boxes. Illustration by the author.

small farming community three miles south of Canajoharie. When he was a young man he served in the War of 1812.²¹ Hylan Benton became established as a farmer raising livestock and harvesting a variety of grains such as wheat and oats.²² Hylan Benton died in Canajoharie on February 3, 1882. Kezia's mother, Cynthia Hodge Benton, is identified on the quilt as "Mother Benton." She was born in New York State in November 1795.²³ In 1820, Cynthia Hodge married Hylan Benton in Canajoharie and together they raised a family of seven children.²⁴

Kezia attended her early school years at the Canajoharie Academy.²⁵ Even today, a school stands at the same site on a high hill overlooking the town and the Mohawk River beyond. The block "Cortland 1848" suggests that Kezia may have considered a career as a schoolteacher. Did she record an opportunity to further her education at the Cortland Academy in Homer, Cortland County, New York?²⁶ It is possible, and perhaps such education was cut short when she was called home to care for her family.

A year of changes was ahead for Kezia as the block "Canajoharie 1849" suggests. Kezia's mother had become ill and Kezia was the only available daughter to care for her. Kezia would also be taking over the responsibilities of keeping house for her father and brothers because eldest daughter, Myra Benton Seeber, was raising her own family 150 miles to the north in Jefferson County.²⁷ The youngest daughter, Cynthia Benton, was only twelve years old in 1849.²⁸ By including in her quilt a block made with fabric from her "Mothers Last Apron," Kezia would always have with her the bittersweet memories of her mother's final days. Cynthia Hodge Benton died of an undetermined illness on August 3, 1849, as recorded on her headstone in a Canajoharie hillside cemetery.²⁹

According to custom, after her mother's death, Kezia was free to marry. "Commenced 1849 by Kezia D. Benton" would indicate preparations for her marriage to Bradner Curtis on September 23, 1849. One source states that the two met while at the Cortland Academy.³⁰ It is more likely they first knew of each other as cousins. Kezia's father, Hylan Benton, and Bradner's mother, Clarissa Benton Curtis, were brother and sister (see figure 4). Kezia's pending marriage would be an occasion to make a quilt and an oppor-

tunity to record the members of her family and those of her betrothed's.

"Myra Benton," born January 25, 1821, is Kezia's older sister. Myra Benton married in the early 1840s. Her husband, "Daniel Seeber," is also on the quilt. In 1846 Daniel and Myra Seeber lived near Lake Ontario in the small community of Theresa, Jefferson County, New York.³¹ Of their six children, only their first child, "Benton Seeber," born in 1842, is recorded on the quilt.³² Kezia's three brothers are placed around the center blocks of the quilt. "Byron E. Benton" was born September 23, 1825. After four years in the gold fields of California, he returned to New York in 1854. Soon after his return, Byron E. Benton married "Sabrina Curtis" in Orleans County, New York.³³ "Hylan Benton," born in 1828, also went to California for the employment offered in the gold fields.³⁴ "Milton J. Benton" is Kezia's third brother, born June 16, 1830.³⁵ Mary, sixth child born to Hylan and Cynthia Benton, is absent on Kezia's quilt, probably because she died in infancy around 1836.³⁶ Kezia's youngest sibling on the quilt is "Cynthia Benton," born March 1837.³⁷

Kezia's husband, Bradner Curtis, was born January 9, 1825 in Williamson, Wayne County, New York. He was the second of nine children born to Alpheus and Clarissa Curtis.³⁸ On the quilt Kezia remembers Bradner Curtis's two sisters, "Jane Curtis" and "Sabrina Curtis." Sabrina Curtis married Kezia's brother Byron E. Benton (see Appendix).

Kezia placed names of friends and neighbors throughout her quilt. At the top left corner of the quilt are the blocks "Fred Burton" and "Kate Casler Burton." Frederic M. Burton, born in 1819 in Montgomery County, followed the profession of carpenter or a boat builder. His wife, Catherine, born in Montgomery County in 1825, was a contemporary and presumably a friend of Kezia.³⁹ Remembered in the blocks "Dr. Sherman" and "Mrs. Sherman" are Jonathan and Catherine Sherman, neighbors two houses away from Kezia's parents in 1850.⁴⁰ As a physician living so close to the Benton's, Dr. Sherman may have attended Cynthia Benton in her final illness and brought comfort to her family.

The identity for the block "Aunt Phillipa" is found with Kezia's sister, Myra Benton Seeber. In 1850, Henry Seeber and his wife

Philipda lived next door to Daniel and Myra Seeber in Theresa, New York.⁴¹

Two identified blocks on the quilt are associated with Bradner Curtis's mother (see figure 4). Clarissa Benton Curtis had a son, Charles Champlin, from an earlier marriage.⁴² In 1855 this son Charles, and his second wife "Jeanette Champlin," lived next door to Clarissa and Alpheus Curtis in Clarendon, Orleans County, New York. Charles Champlin's son from his first marriage is remembered on the quilt as "Little Willis." He was born in 1849.⁴³ Janette Champlin and Little Willis are united on the quilt by the use of an identical brown geometric fabric in their blocks.⁴⁴

The numerous blocks commemorating close family members and friends are clues to Kezia's bond with other women in her social circle. The block "Home Circle" indicates the importance of friendship for Kezia. The term refers to a popular phrase used in hymns, poems, and stories during the mid-nineteenth century. It conveys the religious idea of an unbroken circle; even though some family members may move away, the family remains united through faith. Its use in poems also implies that even though some family members die, the Home Circle extends into heaven where the family will again someday be reunited.⁴⁵ Home Circle also refers to a group of friends who meet to do religious or charitable work, such as packing boxes for missionaries, raising funds for a town's library, or making clothes for the poor.⁴⁶ Fourteen blocks have individual names of women, perhaps indicating that Kezia commemorated their work together in Home Circle or longed to rejoin the Home Circle with her friends. The surnames of these women include Dygert, Mallette, Seeber, and Slingerland, names that have long been established in the Canajoharie area and are still found there today.⁴⁷

Some place and date inscriptions seem to record visits to relatives. The blocks "Theresa 1848" and "Watertown 1844" illustrate the earliest of these journeys. Both towns are in Jefferson County, New York, where her older sister Myra Benton Seeber lived.⁴⁸ The block "Albany 1850" may record a visit to her father's relatives who lived in that area.⁴⁹

"Holly 1850" signifies the first home for Kezia and Bradner Curtis.⁵⁰ Holley, New York, located only eleven miles south of Lake

Figure 5. Possible route Bradner and Kezia Curtis took from New York to California with the *Washington Irving*. Illustration by the author.

Ontario in Orleans County is the town where Bradner was employed as a plowmaker by his uncle. This uncle, "Hiram Curtis," owned a successful foundry for many years. His wife, "Mary Curtis," is also inscribed on a quilt block.⁵¹ Kezia and Bradner Curtis lived in Holley for about a year before sailing to California.

The Sea Voyage to California

“TAKE NOTICE. Ho! FOR California!” reads a January 16, 1849, broadside sign from Canajoharie, New York.⁵² Even before Bradner Curtis married Kezia D. Benton, interest in “forming a company to proceed to California and mining for GOLD” was circulating in the Northeast.⁵³ The young couple must have decided their opportunities were better sought in the West. Kezia may have been supportive because two of her brothers were already in California working in the mining trades.⁵⁴

Like most of their fellow Easterners heading to the gold fields, Kezia and Bradner chose the rigorous sea voyage around Cape Horn instead of the perilous overland route by covered wagon (see figure 5). Yankees had been sailing on long voyages in pursuit of whales and trade goods for a long time, so “to them, a sturdy ship seemed infinitely more sensible than an overland trek through mountains and desert wilderness inhabited by hostile savages.”⁵⁵ On December 9, 1850, Kezia and Bradner Curtis sailed with the three-masted packet “Ship Washington Irving” on a voyage that was to last 209 days, or eight months (see figure 6).⁵⁶

The sometime harsh conditions and the boredom of the journey on the *Washington Irving*, or similar vessels sailing to California around Cape Horn, are well documented by travelers of the time, giving insight to what the lengthy voyage was like for the young pioneers. A few years before Kezia and Bradner Curtis sailed, Ralph Waldo Emerson took a voyage on the same *Washington Irving*. He wrote of his experience:

The confinement, cold, motion, noise and odor are not to be dispensed with. The floor of your room is sloped at an angle of twenty or thirty degrees and I waked every morning with the belief that some one was tipping up my berth. Nobody likes to be treated ignominiously, upset, shoved against the side of the house, rolled over, suffocated with bilge, mephitic and stewing oil . . . The wonder is always new that any sane man can be a sailor.⁵⁷

Then there were the storms. The experience of one gold rush voyager may have mirrored that of Kezia and Bradner:

Figure 6. Ship *Washington Irving*. Built by Donald McKay in 1845, East Boston, Massachusetts. This 751 ton packet ship brought Bradner and Kezia Curtis to California by way of Valparaiso, Chile, a journey that was to last from December 1850 until July 1851. Watercolor drawing in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

A gale commenced on Tuesday at noon and lasted till Friday, and we were tossed about in fine order We could neither stand nor sit and of course must lie down You can't keep hold of your things—they will move off. And you can no more walk . . . than you can fly. Down, down you slide till you land against the wall and there you are fast at last and must try it over again.⁵⁸

During their voyage, Kezia and Bradner twice crossed the equator and navigated the iceberg strewn waters around Cape Horn. The trip would have exposed them to a variety of new and exotic sights, such as “flying fish, swarms of birds, strange aromas, and brilliant sunsets and sunrises.”⁵⁹

It was common practice on these voyages to make a stop somewhere in South America, either on the Atlantic side in Rio de Janeiro

or on the Pacific side after rounding the Horn. Stopping to gather provisions of fruits and vegetables was the key to a scurvy-free voyage.⁶⁰ Kezia recorded on her quilt what must have been an exotic port of call, the month spent by the *Washington Irving* in "Valparaiso April 1851."⁶¹

The lengthy voyage, and perhaps the assistance she received, caused Kezia to remember the crew in the blocks "Ship Washington Irving Stewardess" and "Ship Steward." Unfortunately, the actual names of these and other crew members will remain unknown because the original records of this voyage were destroyed in a maritime building fire.⁶² The fabric chosen for these blocks are identical prints: blue leaves in a tangle of white stems on a brown ground.

Shared experiences with her fellow travelers during the long and arduous sea journey must have impressed the young voyager. Kezia acknowledges three shipmates on her quilt: "Shipmate Annie," "Shipmate Europea," and "Shipmate Josie." The three shipmate blocks are made from identical blue and white print fabric, however the twenty-five listed passengers did not reveal a match to these blocks.⁶³

In the California Mines

Kezia and Bradner Curtis arrived in San Francisco on July 1, 1851.⁶⁴ Kezia's brothers, Hylan Benton and Byron Benton, met them at the docks to escort the new emigrants to Tuolumne County in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada range.⁶⁵ Here Bradner began working in the Sonora mines around Mormon Gulch and Tuttletown, and he later started a trading camp.⁶⁶ Kezia's quilt reflects a nearly two-decade lapse in her memoir after her arrival in California. Her busy life as a miner's wife, a mother, and eventually a farmer's wife surely explains why she did not return to the quilt for so many years.

While Bradner Curtis pursued mining, building one of the first sluiceways on the Creek at Columbia, Kezia, like other women in the gold fields, took over the task of operating the trading camp. Her work included baking pies and pastries, which were rapidly

bought up by the miners and Indians.⁶⁷ Kezia's experiences may have been similar to that of another miner's wife, Luzena Stanley Wilson, who wrote:

I bought two boards . . . with my own hands I chopped stakes, drove them into the ground, and set up my table . . . when my husband came back at night he found, mid the weird light of the pine torches, twenty miners eating at my table. Each man as he rose put a dollar in my hand and said I might count him as a permanent customer . . . I shortly after took my husband into partnership.⁶⁸

The first of four children, Belle Kate, was born to Kezia and Bradner Curtis in Tuttle town, Tuolumne County, California on October 10, 1852.⁶⁹ It is said that Belle Kate Curtis was the first white child born in the Sonora mining area.⁷⁰

Kezia and her family stayed in the Sonora area until about 1854. During this time, they earned enough money to acquire a farm in California's San Joaquin Valley.⁷¹

A Life of Farming in the West

In 1854, Kezia and Bradner Curtis moved to Stockton, California, where they purchased a 320-acre ranch.⁷² The San Joaquin River connects Stockton, at the north end of the San Joaquin Valley, to San Francisco Bay. One of the first important cities to be settled in this fertile region, Stockton served as a supply and transportation center for the mines in the nearby foothills.⁷³ Like so many who came seeking their fortune from gold, Kezia and Bradner Curtis settled instead into a life of growing grains and raising their family.

Stockton, California, became the permanent home for Kezia and her growing family. By 1859, Kezia and Bradner Curtis's daughter, Belle Kate, had three brothers, all of whom were born in Stockton. Frank B. Curtis, born in June 1855, was followed by Forest Curtis, born in July 19, 1857. The youngest son, Fornia Stockton Curtis, was born two years later on May 26, 1859.⁷⁴ It is reasonable to conclude that the couple named Fornia for their newly adopted home state and city, Fornia, being derived from Cali-FORNIA, and

Figure 7. The house at 1239 North Center Street, Stockton, California (right) where Kezia D. Benton Curtis lived at the time of her death in 1924. She lived with her daughter, Belle Kate Curtis Jackson. Kezia's son, Fornia Stockton Curtis, lived next door at 1229 North Center Street (left) with his family. Photograph by the author.

the middle name for Stockton, California. Kezia did not add her children to her quilt. This further indicates that the quilt mainly commemorates Kezia's early life in New York and her journey west.

Only two other blocks mention her life in California. The block, "California 1869," does not appear to be connected to any significant historical event, yet it could memorialize an event in Kezia's personal life. It is possible the block indicates the family's move from the ranch to the city of Stockton, which took place between 1860 and 1870.⁷⁵ The block "Remodeled at Stockton 1876" represents the final chapter of this memoir of Kezia's life. Perhaps the nation's Centennial in 1876 inspired Kezia to bring her decades long story to an end. By this time their children were grown, and Kezia and Bradner Curtis had become comfortable, if not prosperous, farmers.⁷⁶ Finally, Kezia had the time to sew the fifty-six blocks into the quilt she had planned long ago. She arranged the blocks with her mother and father in the important central position, and

surrounded them with family members. She placed her friends and the blocks remembering her adventurous sea voyage throughout the rest of her quilt.

After her husband's death in 1881, Kezia lived for many years with her daughter, Belle Kate Jackson, and next door to her son Forna (see figure 7). At the age of 101 and one-half, Kezia died at home July 18, 1924.⁷⁷ Her obituary in the *Stockton Daily Independent* honored her as one of the founding pioneers of her community.⁷⁸ Kezia is buried, with her husband Bradner, in a family crypt made from Sierra Nevada granite in the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Sonora (see figure 8). They rest in the place where Kezia and Bradner Curtis began a long and successful life together in California.

Conclusion

With ink and cloth, Kezia Darwin Benton Curtis recorded her American journey, from a childhood in the Northeast to life as a pioneer in the West. Designed to remember friends, family, and events, her quilt recounts personal moments now uncovered for others to see and understand. Other chapters of Kezia's life remain to be told, perhaps by her descendants, or as may be revealed through discovery of other resources, such as photographs, letters, a diary, or other needlework.

Appendix: Additional Information on the Siblings of Kezia D. Benton and Bradner Curtis

By 1870, Myra Benton Seeber and her husband, Daniel Seeber, had moved to California. They settled in the Sierra Nevada county of Tuolumne where he was employed as a carpenter and she kept house.⁷⁹ Myra Benton Seeber died at the age of 83 on November 7, 1904 in Oakdale, California. Daniel Seeber died in 1896 of "la grippe" in Tuolumne County. Benton Seeber, the only child of Myra and Daniel Seeber recorded on the quilt, died in 1911 in Quartz, Tuolumne County, California.⁸⁰

Byron E. Benton was already in California when Kezia and

Figure 8. Grave of Bradner and Kezia Curtis at the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Sonora, California. Photograph by the author.

Bradner Curtis arrived in 1851.⁸¹ Byron returned to New York to marry Bradner Curtis's younger sister Sabrina Curtis in 1854. Sabrina Curtis was born August 23, 1836, in Williamson, Wayne County, New York. The couple traveled west to Tuolumne County, California, staying until the early 1860s when, once again, Sabrina and Byron Benton return to Canajoharie. In 1868, they made a final move to settle in Iowa. Byron and Sabrina Benton had five children.⁸² Their only daughter, Rosy L. Benton, received a medical license from the College of Medicine and Surgery in Chicago in 1890.⁸³ Byron E. Benton died March 3, 1905 in Rockwell City, Iowa.⁸⁴ Records indicate Sabrina Curtis Benton died at the home of her daughter in Rockwell City, Iowa, on March 30, 1902.⁸⁵

The biographical sketch of Bradner Curtis mentions Kezia's brother Hylan Benton living in California in 1851.⁸⁶ I have found no other information on Hylan Benton.

Milton J. Benton spent four years in California running a saw-

mill and mining. When he returned to Canajoharie in 1859, he purchased one hundred acres of farmland next to his father for raising livestock and grain. On December 20, 1860, he married Asenath Walter of Waterford, New York. They had three children and made Canajoharie their permanent home. Milton died December 20, 1903, after a lifetime of working the same fields as his father.⁸⁷

Cynthia Benton lived in her father's home until the early 1850s.⁸⁸ The 1855 census shows her living with her sister Myra Benton Seeber in Theresa, New York.⁸⁹ In 1857, Cynthia Benton married another New Yorker, Ebenezer M. Stoddard. They eventually followed Kezia and Bradner Curtis to California. Cynthia and Ebenezer Stoddard settled in the San Joaquin Valley town of Merced, only fifty miles south of the city of Stockton where her sister Kezia made her home. The Stoddards became the parents of seven children.⁹⁰ Cynthia Benton Stoddard died in Merced on November 22, 1917.⁹¹

Jane Curtis, the sister of Bradner Curtis, was born July 1, 1826, in Williamson, Wayne County, New York. On February 27, 1849, Jane Elizabeth Curtis married Francis Drake Bennett in Clarendon, Orleans County, New York. Over the next thirty-four years Jane and Francis Bennett lived in New York, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Kansas. They were the parents of three children. Jane Curtis Bennett died February 4, 1904, in Plainville, Kansas.⁹²

Notes and References

1. Quotation marks are used to denote inked inscriptions on the quilt, to distinguish them from the actual people and places discussed in this paper. Also, the correct spelling for "Canajoharrie" is Canajoharie. The correct spelling for "Holly" is Holley.
2. Heather Palmer, letter to the author, 17 October 1994.
3. Jane Bentley Kolter, *Forget Me Not: A Gallery of Friendship and Album Quilts* (Pittstown, NJ: The Main Street Press, 1985), 59.
4. *Ibid.*, 27.
5. Palmer.
6. Joseph Robert Conlin, *Bacon, Beans, and Galantines: Food and Foodways on the Western Mining Frontier* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 53.

7. The Boston Society, letter to the author, 28 August 1991. A packet-ship, or packet-boat, is a vessel that keeps regular intervals of service between two ports for the transportation of cargo, mail, and passengers.
8. Louis J. Rasmussen, *San Francisco Ship Passenger Lists*, vol. II (Colma, CA: San Francisco Historic Records, n.d.), 170.
9. George H. Tinkham, *History of San Joaquin County California with Biographical Sketches of The Leading Men and Women of the County* (Los Angeles, CA: Historic Record Company, 1923), 381.
10. Petition for Letters of Administration, *In the Matter of the Estate of Bradner Curtis*, 18 April 1881, filed in the official records of the Superior Court, County of San Joaquin, State of California.
11. Barbara Brackman, *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* (McLean, VA: EPM Publications, Inc., 1989), 147.
12. Kolter, 60.
13. Jacqueline Marx Atkins, *Shared Threads: Quilting Together—Past and Present* (New York, NY: Viking Studio Books, 1994), 51.
14. Standard Certificate of Death, 18 July 1924, filed in the official records of the Office of the San Joaquin County Recorder, State of California.
15. Judith H. Dern, telephone conversation with the author, 2 November 1998.
16. *History of Montgomery and Fulton Counties, N.Y.* (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1979), 96 - 97.
17. *Cobblestone, The History Magazine for Young People, The Erie Canal 3* (October 1982), 4-6.
18. Standard Certificate of Death, Kezia Darwin Curtis.
19. The name Kezia comes from the Hebrew "cassia," a name for an herbal bush found in Mediterranean regions (Robert Boro, A.S.L.A., telephone conversation with the author, 11 November 1998). The name is also found in the Old Testament; Kezia is the second daughter of Job, as stated in AV Job 42: 14.
20. State of New York, 1855 Census, County of Montgomery, Town of Canajoharie.
21. Virgil D. White, *Index To War of 1812 Pension Files Volume 1: A-I*, transcribed (Waynesboro, TN: The National Historical Publishing Company, 1992), 154.
22. State of New York, 1855 Agricultural and Domestic Manufactures, Agricultural Statistics, County of Montgomery, Town of Canajoharie.
23. Author's visit to Prospect Hill Cemetery, Canajoharie, NY, October 1992; hereafter cited as Cemetery, Canajoharie, NY.
24. Washington Frothingham, *History of Montgomery County* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1892), 12.
25. Tinkham.
26. Seymour Dunn, "The Early Academics of Cortland County," *Cortland*

- County Chronicles*, vol. 1 (Cortland, NY: The Cortland County Historical Society, 1957, reprinted 1970), 57.
27. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Federal Census, State of New York, Jefferson County, Town of Theresa, hereafter cited as 1850 Census, Theresa, NY.
 28. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Federal Census, State of New York, Montgomery County, Town of Canajoharie, hereafter cited as 1850 Census, Canajoharie, NY.
 29. Cemetery, Canajoharie, NY.
 30. Tinkham.
 31. 1850 Census, Theresa, NY.
 32. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, State of California, Tuolumne County, transcription from Tuolumne County Historical Society sent to author, 20 March 1992.
 33. Obituary of Byron E. Benton, *Rockwell City (Iowa) Advocate*, 9 March 1905.
 34. Tinkham.
 35. Frothingham.
 36. Cemetery, Canajoharie, NY.
 37. 1850 Census, Canajoharie, NY.
 38. Francis D. Toepfer, letter to the author, 11 October 1994.
 39. 1850, 1860, 1870 Census, Canajoharie, NY; 1855 State Census, Canajoharie, NY.
 40. 1850 Census, Canajoharie, NY; 1855 State Census, Canajoharie, NY.
 41. 1850 Census, Theresa, NY.
 42. War of 1812 Widow's Pension Request by Clarissa Curtis, State of Iowa, County of Black Hawk, 24 October 1878.
 43. State of New York, 1855 Census, Orleans County, Town of Clarendon.
 44. After locating Bradner Curtis's father, Alpheus Curtis, on the 1855 census for Clarendon, New York, three more quilt blocks could be identified. Living with her parents, Alpheus and Clarissa Curtis, are "Jane Curtis" Bennett and her husband Francis D. Bennett. Living at the next farm are "Jenette Champlin" and six-year-old "Willis" Champlin. The census record further identifies three of Bradner's six brothers (Phlander Curtis, Andrew J. Curtis and Mortimer Curtis.)
 45. Palmer.
 46. Rev. W.R. Cochrane, D.D., *History of Francestown, N.H. From Its Earliest Settlement April 1758 To January 1, 1891* (Nashua, NH: Published By The Town, 1895), 408.
 47. Judith H. Dern, conversation with the author, 24 August 1991.
 48. 1850 Census, Theresa, NY.
 49. Gary Boyd Roberts, *Genealogies of Connecticut Families From The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 1, Adams-Gates (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 118. The Benton family

- came from England in the mid-1600s to settle the town of Guilford, Connecticut. By the late 1700s, Kezia's great grandfather Edward Benton (1740-1794) had moved his family to Albany, New York.
50. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Federal Census, State of New York, Orleans County, Town of Murray. On current roadways, Murray, New York, is four miles north of Holley, New York.
 51. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1860 Federal Census, State of New York, Orleans County, Village of Albion, Town of Barre.
 52. Broadside sign dated 16 January 1849, Canajoharie, New York, in the collection of The Canajoharie Library and Art Gallery, Canajoharie, NY.
 53. Ibid.
 54. Tinkham.
 55. Conlin, 53.
 56. Tinkham. The ship *Washington Irving* was a 751-ton packet built in 1845 by Donald McKay at his shipyard in East Boston, Massachusetts. This packet was originally built for trans-Atlantic service from Boston, Massachusetts, to Liverpool, England. See Richard C. McKay, *Some Famous Sailing Ships and Their Builder Donald McKay* (Riverside, CT: 7 C's Press, Inc., 1988), 36-41. The *Washington Irving* was sold around 1852 for Australian service until it was wrecked about 1868 off the coast of India. See *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping* (London, England: Wyman and Sons, 1870), n.p.
 57. Alexander Laing, *The American Heritage History of Seafaring America* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, n.d.), 226.
 58. JoAnn Levy, *They Saw The Elephant: Women In The California Gold Rush* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 31.
 59. Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold, The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 58.
 60. Conlin, 82.
 61. Tinkham.
 62. Louis J. Rasmussen, *San Francisco Ship Passenger Lists*, vol. I (1965, reprint Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), author's foreword.
 63. Rasmussen, vol. II. The passenger list shows one person with the first initial A and one woman named Anna Baner. Three passengers have the first initial E; a passenger with the name Europea is not on the list. One woman is named Eliza Fulton. One person had the initial J. On the list are two women named Josephine: Josephine Barnola and Josephine Robinson. The name Josie is not on the list.
 64. Ibid.
 65. Tinkham.
 66. Ibid.
 67. Ibid.

68. Levy, 102.
69. Certificate of Death of Belle K. Jackson, 31 December 1942, filed in the Official Records of the San Joaquin County Recorders Office, State of California.
70. Tinkham.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Rohrbough, 162; Charles Howard Shinn, *Mining Camps, A Study In American Frontier Government* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 130.
74. Record of Baptisms 1891–1908, Saint John's The Evangelist Episcopal Church, Stockton, California.
75. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1860 Federal Census, State of California, San Joaquin County, O'Neal Township; U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, State of California, San Joaquin County, Second Ward of Stockton.
76. At the time of Bradner's death in 1881, they owned substantial farmlands, livestock, equipment, cash, and other assets. See: Decree of Distribution, *In the Matter of the Estate of Bradner Curtis*, filed in the Official Records of the Superior Court of the State of California, County of San Joaquin.
77. Standard Certificate of Death, Kezia Darwin Curtis.
78. Obituary of Mrs. Kezia Darwin Curtis, *Stockton (California) Daily Independent*, 19 July 1924.
79. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, State of California, Tuolumne County, transcription from Tuolumne County Historical Society sent to author, 20 March 1992.
80. Transcription of historical records from the Tuolumne County Historical Society, letter to the author, 12 March 1992.
81. Tinkham.
82. Obituary of Mrs. Byron E. Benton (Sabrina Curtis Benton), *Rockwell City (Iowa) Advocate*, 3 April 1902.
83. Iowa State Library, Medical Division, telephone conversation with the author, 11 July 1994.
84. Standard Certificate of Death, Byron E. Benton, 3 March 1905, filed in the official records of the Office of the Iowa State Board of Health, State of Iowa.
85. Obituary of Mrs. Byron E. Benton (Sabrina Curtis Benton), *Rockwell City (Iowa) Advocate*, 3 April 1902.
86. Tinkham.
87. Frothingham.
88. 1850 Census, Canajoharie, NY.
89. 1855 Census, Theresa, NY.
90. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1900 Federal Census, State of California, Merced County, Town Merced, Township Number Two.

91. John Outcalt, *History of Merced County California* (Los Angeles, CA: Historic Record Company, 1925), 783; Francis D. Toepfer, letters to the author, 26 August 1994 and 11 October 1994.
92. Francis D. Toepfer, letters to the author, 26 August 1994 and 11 October 1994.