

# Uncoverings 2000

Volume 21 of  
the Research Papers of  
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Virginia Gunn



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## Preface

American Quilt Study Group members will gather on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus from October 13-15, 2000 to attend the organization's twenty-first annual seminar. Michael James, renowned art quiltmaker and now instructor in the university's College of Human Resources and Family Sciences, will deliver the keynote address "In the Beginning: Musings on the Birth of the Studio Art Quilt Movement."

Members will attend a dedication ceremony to celebrate the new location of the AQSG Research Library Collection, started by founder Sally Garoutte and augmented by members and friends for the past twenty years. Recognition will also be given to other charter members of AQSG.

A look back at twenty years of research accomplishments reveals that the studies contributed to the various volumes of *Uncoverings* have indeed proven to be seminal works undergirding quilt research. A look through the notes and bibliographies of most significant works related to quilt history demonstrate that articles first published in *Uncoverings* have provided the foundation for continuing research and interpretation. The authors contributing to this volume share important work that will add to the depth and breadth of quilt study as AQSG begins its third decade of work.

In the first two articles the authors demonstrate how careful analysis of verbal documents offers new insights about periods that have received little attention. Laurel Horton unraveled the complex context of a local quilting event that took place in Seneca, South Carolina, in 1910. Following the clues offered in a brief newspaper report she fo-



cuses attention on how women used quilts and quiltmaking in casual ways to achieve personal and social goals.

Xenia Cord used information from an unpublished handwritten eighteenth-century account book to reconstruct the fascinating story of William McCormick, a linen weaver from Virginia who worked in southwestern Pennsylvania during the Revolutionary War era. She discusses and interprets the importance of textiles and cooperative commerce on the early western frontier.

Phyllis Herda's extensive fieldwork in the islands of Tonga provides information that adds to our knowledge of quiltmaking's international aspects. She documents the ways Tongan women have expanded their traditional textile production to include quiltmaking. The study highlights Tongan quilts and their association with important life-cycle rituals from birth to death.

Lisa Gabbert used field study and folklore techniques to explore the relationships between artists and their chosen medium. Her study of a group of central Idaho quilters revealed the central, but under-acknowledged, role that the sensory aspects of fabric play in the fiber arts process. Her work suggests that the feel of the fabric provides an essential dynamic in quiltmaking.

Susan Price Miller makes an important contribution to our knowledge of twentieth-century quilt pattern designers with her careful study of Hubert Ver Mehren of Des Moines, Iowa. Her research gives long-overdue attention to the artist, entrepreneur, and marketing expert behind the well-known Home Art Studios business that provided quilt patterns and pieced quilt designs in the 1920s and 1930s.

Ethel Ewert Abrahams and Rachel Pannabecker collaborated to interpret quilts made from cigar ribbons, cigarette silks, and tobacco flannels during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Their study shows how turn-of-the-century quiltmakers creatively responded to the novel and aggressive marketing techniques used by the tobacco companies. An example of this interesting genre of quilts graces the cover of this volume.

The book ends with the keynote address that Marsha MacDowell, a recognized expert in folk art and then president of AQSG, delivered at the 1999 annual seminar held in East Lansing, Michigan. This thought-provoking speech called attention to the importance of oral



histories as sources of information and to the challenges oral accounts often pose for researchers.

Quilts continue to provide a wonderful window to understanding culture. They touch the lives of the folk as well as the elite, of men as well as women, and of diverse ages, backgrounds, and circumstances both in America and around the world. Quilt history is definitely alive and well.