

# Uncoverings 1981

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## *Special Presentation*

### Three Historic Quilts

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In my quest for quilts in Appalachia, I have traveled up the hollows and mountain sides, climbed into barn lofts, explored dusty attics and dank cellars, and found disappointment more often than treasures. But the treasures have been sufficient to keep me following every lead. Many of my treasures were abandoned long ago to rot in dirt and neglect. Often I can learn nothing of the maker. Three of these "found" quilts are presented here.

#### *An Album Quilt*

The larger category in which this quilt falls should be called the Special Occasion Quilt. These quilts were made as an expression of friendship, often called "variety" quilts. Many were Presentation Quilts, made as gifts for weddings, new babies, birthdays, farewell presentations, or as a gesture of high regard. Other quilts in the classification of Special Occasion may be Friendship or Freedom quilts, the latter being a gift to a boy at the celebration of his twenty-first birthday, when he was free to make his own decisions. (Actually, the quilt was for his future wife.) These seemed to go out of fashion in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Some Album quilts were fashioned from blocks donated by friends, each block a speciality of the maker and her very best work. These blocks and the whole quilt represented the height of good quilting. They were personal in design, often original with the maker, created in blocks or squares, each block a different design, from materials the creator selected. Some of the blocks were signed by the maker; many were not. There was usually no specific pattern, but most quilts I have studied seem to be made in squares with motifs such as flowers, fruit, trees or leaves, and cut-paper patterns.

Often, little is known about the maker of an Album quilt. Neither do we have any detailed accounts of how and when the quilts were put

together and quilted. There are some references in our literature to the “album parties” which seemed to be more formal than the usual “Quilting Bee.”<sup>1</sup>

Since these quilts were made for no practical purpose, they were used sparingly and protected as carefully as possible. The designs were too elaborate for the quilt to be considered a bed covering for warmth. This would explain their existence today in museums, restorations, and private collections.

In the Darien (Connecticut) Historical Society’s collection there is one such masterpiece created by Eunice Lockwood in 1845 when she was seventeen.<sup>2</sup> The Album quilt presented in this paper appears, like Eunice’s, to be a one-woman Album quilt—an inspiration to any twentieth century quilt maker.

The quilt consists of 25 blocks, each 14 inches square, with sashing 2½ inches wide and a border 10 inches deep. The quilt measures 102 inches square. Each of the blocks carries an appliqued floral design. Three of the designs have been repeated once or more times, so there are only 16 different designs in the quilt. The fabrics used are the same throughout: the blossom portions of the blocks are all red calico with a small yellow flower print, and the stems and leaves are all a yellowish green with an overprinted fine black grid. The sashing is of a printed strip design of gold colored braiding on a background of red. The border in the same gold and red is printed in a trailing vine and flower design.

The main body of the quilt is quilted in hanging diamonds design. The quilting does not go through the applique elements, although some of the large ones have some free-form quilting. The border is quilted in a sawtooth arrangement of alternating triangles with parallel lines in one direction in one triangle meeting at 90 degrees parallel lines in the adjacent triangles.

The history of this quilt is unknown. It was purchased in Williamsport, Pennsylvania at a public sale. It was probably made around the middle of the nineteenth century and appears to me—based on the size and number of the blocks, the quality of the fabric and the general style of the designs—to be closely related to Baltimore Album quilts.

### *New York Beauty*

Most of my information about the pattern known most often as the *New York Beauty* comes from *Quilter’s Newsletter Magazine*, April 1981, in an article by Louise O. Townsend—to whom I am greatly indebted for presenting such a wealth of background material.<sup>3</sup>



It is a strange coincidence that this is the very month I “found” this beautiful quilt.

A profusion of names and descriptions, dozens of variations of the pieced work and quilting, indicate (according to Townsend) that the pattern was widespread and derived its name from the location of its making. It has been called Sunrise, Crown of Thorns, Rocky Mountain Road, Split Rail (Tennessee), Great Divide (Arkansas and Texas), and Springtime in the Rockies.<sup>4,5</sup>

The colors in the different versions are remarkably consistent. Most of them are red and green on a white background, with an occasional addition of orange or yellow. In some old examples, the original green has faded to blue or tan while the red remains bright. The major design element is a square block with a quarter-circle section at each corner and a band of dogtooth (i.e., long narrow) triangles along the arc. The quarter-circle and band of triangles are usually red, although concentric bands of different colors may be included in the quarter-circle. Joining the blocks is sashing made up of more dogtooth triangles—usually green. The square area where the sashings meet is usually filled with some variation of a star or sunburst design.

In the quilt presented here, the quarter-circles are pieced of three concentric bands: centrally, a shawl-print calico with a strong yellow background, next a flower sprig on a pink background, then a plain red calico band followed by plain red triangles. The sashing consists of a straight strip of green calico with lines of small black dots, edged on both sides with a band of red triangles. The joining squares contain a pieced red and green 12-point star with a yellow center. The full border is a repeat of the sashing, with stars at the corners. There are four large blocks in this quilt, set on the diagonal and surrounded by eight half blocks to fill in the square. The result is dynamic, with the sashings forming a great diagonal grid and the circular elements, like huge propellers behind, almost pushing the grid out of its frame!

The quilting for the most part follows and emphasizes the piecing. In the plain white centers of the blocks, however, are quilted with three parallel lines of stitching four heart-shaped leaves connected by stems. The circular elements are surrounded by five concentric lines.

This quilt was made by Elizabeth Love Patrick in 1866. She was thirteen years old when she witnessed the burning of her home in Sharon, South Carolina by General Sherman’s army marching back north from the battle of Savannah. Elizabeth was fifteen when she made this quilt. Her great-granddaughter, Mrs. Dorothy Robinson, present owner of the quilt, says that the design represents the explosions of the Civil War.

*Broderie Perse*

Broderie (imitating embroidery) Perse (Persian) is a form of needlework resembling decoupage since it is the cutting apart of fabric patterns and rearranging them into new applique forms.

In some of the earliest forms printed birds, flowers, trees, etc. were cut from Indian palampores and applied onto a plain background. In later examples fabric was sometimes used for its color rather than its original printed designs, with the quiltmaker exhibiting remarkable ingenuity in design development.

All of these quilts were made of printed cotton or linen, and in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries such fabrics were imported and quite expensive. By spacing the small pieces out over the background cloth, the quiltmaker could make a little go a long way. But only women with time and patience could make such quilts. Often Broderie Perse was used in the center of a medallion quilt, with outer borders being pieced work or plain strips of fabric.

The quilt shown here is a combination of direct cut-outs and creative use of other printed fabric. The major tree and vine elements as well as the sawtooth border are all from the same blue floral print, while the flower and bird elements are from one or more other prints and take their design from the print on the fabric.

The quilting is unusual. Although in evenly spaced straight lines overall, the quilt has been divided into triangular quarters with a giant invisible X and the two side quarters are quilted in one direction while the top and bottom quarters are quilted in a ninety degree direction. The stitching is fine and even overall.

The quilt was made in Huntersville, North Carolina by Ida Hunter sometime around 1840. Mrs. Hunter called it her Bird of Paradise quilt, and left instructions that it should go to the eldest child of each generation. Some of the later owners have been Mrs. John Wilson of Caldwell Station, Mrs. M.C. Hunter of Huntersville, Olin Wilson Hunter of Huntersville, Olin Reed Hunter and Catherine Louise Hunter, both of Charlotte.

## References:

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2. Carter Houck and Myron Miller, *AMERICAN QUILTS AND HOW TO MAKE THEM*, Scribner's, New York 1975, p. 53

*Album quilt and detail*

*Elizabeth Love Patrick's New York Beauty quilt and detail*

*Ida Hunter Broderie Perse quilt and detail*



3. Louise Townsend, "Great American Quilt Classics; New York Beauty," *QUILTER'S NEWSLETTER MAGAZINE*, Vol. 12, no. 4, April 1981, pp. 10-12
4. Yvonne M. Khin, *COLLECTOR'S DICTIONARY OF QUILT NAMES*, Acropolis Books, 1980
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