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The Quilts of the Chattahoochee Country Dancers

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The Chattahoochee Country Dancers (CCD) meet regularly in Atlanta, Georgia, to participate in traditional dance. Over a twenty-year period, members of this group have also made quilts to celebrate weddings and births. This study examines quilting as an incidental activity among a group whose members do not consider themselves quilters. Interviews with CCD participants revealed a high degree of communality and cohesiveness, and demonstrated ways in which quilting activity and the quilts themselves express the core values of the group. Display of the quilts at an annual festival continues to celebrate and reinforce the social networks that persist among a group of mobile, middle-class individuals. Although the Chattahoochee Country Dancers do not fit standard definitions of "folk" and "community," the author argues that the shared behaviors, experiences, and values expressed through their quilts support the members' own characterization of themselves as a community.

Studies of quilting among groups have focused largely on organized quilt clubs and guilds whose members meet at regular intervals for the express purpose of engaging in quilt-related activity.¹ The groups studied have ranged in scope from large statewide organizations to small groups of self-selected participants. Additional studies have described the activities of quilt groups formed within specific church congregations.² There have been few studies of groups for whom quilting is an *incidental* activity, that is, groups that do not think of themselves as quilters, do not meet regularly for this purpose, yet work together to produce quilts.³



The Chattahoochee Country Dancers (CCD) is a group of people who come together because of their love of music and dance. For over two decades, members of this group have also worked together to produce about forty quilts to celebrate weddings and births, or to show appreciation. Although one or two of the dancers also make quilts as individuals, the majority of dancers have not participated in any quiltmaking except for the group quilts, and they do not refer to themselves as quilters or quiltmakers. An examination of the quilt-related activities of the CCD can contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of quilts and quiltmaking generally in American life, not just among self-identified quiltmakers.

The Chattahoochee Country Dancers

The CCD was formed in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1975, as an offshoot of an international folk-dance group. It was one of a number of local groups that developed across the country during the late-twentieth century for the purpose of sponsoring English country dance and contra dance, forms of traditional social dance that developed in Europe in past centuries.⁴ Many early participants in the CCD considered themselves part of the counterculture movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Country dancing drew together like-minded individuals who valued participation in “home-grown,” participatory entertainment.

The primary teachers and callers of the fledgling Atlanta group were two women, Karen ter Horst and Lee Walters, who had attended regional dance activities such as those sponsored by the John C. Campbell Folk School, in Brasstown, North Carolina, and Berea College, in eastern Kentucky. In 1979, when Karen announced her upcoming marriage, Lee initiated the making of a quilt to present as a surprise at Karen’s wedding. In spite of the fact that none of the dancers—except Karen—knew anything about quiltmaking, the dancers made their first quilt. According to participant Susan Davis, that first quilt had no real overall plan: “It was just little muslin squares, and she gave them out to people in the dance group. We didn’t know what we were doing. We just sort of went by the seat of our pants.”⁵

Although quiltmaking was new to the dancers, several of them prac-



ticed other crafts. Handwork, creativity, and personal expression were values often shared by people who considered themselves part of the counterculture. Susan Davis described the group's willingness to try something new: "We were real folksy back then. People were interested in other crafts, Appalachian crafts. We had potters and we had weavers in the group."

The participants in the first wedding quilt were not consciously "starting a tradition." A short time later, however, two more dancers announced their engagement; and, once again, the dancers made a quilt for the couple. Through no conscious decision, the quilts became a part of the way dancers celebrated weddings, which always included music and dancing. Genise Spenlé recalled:

You know, the wonderful thing about these weddings was that everybody did it for each other. Susan and Scott were my callers, and the musicians were people from this community. And friends organized my flowers for the wedding, for the tables and other arrangements. Occasionally we'd need to buy flowers, but a lot of times we'd go out and pick the flowers out in the fields, and then do the arrangements. The food was always potluck, and these weddings were by and for the community. You just felt surrounded by the love of your entire community.

Learning to Make Quilts

When the Chattahoochee dancers started making quilts in 1979, during the early years of the quilt revival of the late-twentieth century, few books and classes were available. Consequently, the dancers developed quilting skills, techniques, and designs largely on their own. The quilts made within the group reflected changes in available colors and fabrics over time. The majority of the designs tended to be highly individualistic and personal, rather than conventional quilt patterns. Dancers frequently represented human figures, buildings, plants and animals, and landscapes in appliqué or embroidery. When dancers did use conventional patterns, they often chose those with dance-related pattern names, like "Wild Goose Chase," or those that visually suggested dance configurations, such as variations on the eight-pointed star.



The complex story of the recent quilt revival is beyond the scope of this paper. Even a cursory examination of some of the how-to books of the 1970s, however, reveals some of the motivations for making quilts during that era. Beth Gutcheon's *The Perfect Patchwork Primer* is an example of a popular and influential book that offered a selection of traditional designs and techniques along with suggestions for contemporary interpretations. This is the type of book that casual quilters could find in public libraries or bookstores. Gutcheon's philosophy mirrored the values of the counterculture of the era, values shared by participants in the CCD:

There is a strong backlash developing against the abstract quality of modern life, this confusion about the real value of our skills and our work and our time. . . . People are seeking activities that offer a direct, simple relationship between what they put in and what they get out, and are hunting for projects with a definite beginning and a definite ending. . . . And for many of us, when we want something pure and simple in our lives, the answer is to make things with our hands. . . . Working with your hands gives you a chance not only to create or restore an object, but also to restore and re-create yourself, for when you've finished you are not just the person who endlessly makes the coffee or treks to the laundromat or pays the rent or buys the baby's shoes—you are also the person who made the thing. You have added something new, something possibly beautiful, to the world and to your life. You are what you do.⁶

How to Make a CCD Quilt

For the CCD, the process of making a collaborative wedding quilt was set in motion by the informal announcement that an individual or couple among the regular group of dancers planned to marry. Someone, usually a close friend, volunteered to "organize" a quilt. According to Susan Davis:

We would always give everybody a packet. We'd have an organizing team, and there would be some people in charge of design, some people in charge of buying fabric, some in charge of figuring out how much fabric, and there would be cutting days. We were very organized, I thought.

The organizer distributed the packets among other dancers who



wanted to make squares. (The dancers themselves used the word “square” instead of “block” to refer to the typical basic, interchangeable unit of quilt construction.)

The organizer collected the completed squares and arranged them in a pleasing order, with advice from others on the team. The squares were sewn together into a quilt top, which was layered and placed in a quilting frame in someone’s home. Friends of the couple, women and men, participated in communal quilting activity over a period of time. The finished quilt was presented to the couple as part of the wedding celebration. The dancers went to great lengths to keep the quilt a secret from the intended recipients, no mean feat within a group whose members shared many interests and activities.

Sometimes the quilts were organized with a particular quilt pattern or around a theme. More often the individual participants tried to represent some aspect of the personality of the recipients or of their relationship with them. Jennifer McCarty organized the quilt made for the marriage of her friend Genise Grad and French native Bernard Spené in 1984 (see figure 1):

I tried to think of Genise and Bernard, mostly Genise, and I always loved going to her house which was so interesting and funky, and I said, well, we can’t do *muslin* backgrounds for her squares. Amish quilts had been getting a lot of attention then, so I thought, could we do black squares with jewel tones?

Ginger Pyron recalled, “We got the packet of fabrics for our square, and the instructions said ‘Now, remember, this is for *Genise*, so make it elaborate!’”

Genise enjoys telling people the stories of the individual squares on her quilt, including the depiction of her car made by Cis Hinkle, a well-known dance caller (see figure 2):

Bernard told me a story about this square. He came out of our house one morning—we were living together before we were married—and he saw Cis out there with a sketchbook, sketching. And he said, “Hi, Cis, what are you doing?” And she said, “Oh, well, your tree’s so pretty, I just thought I’d make a sketch of it.” She was out there sketching the car for her quilt square. I had this old round, red ‘67 Volvo that I drove around in. And it was such a recognizable car that people would wave at me.



Figure 1. As part of her wedding celebration in 1984, Genise Spenlé received a quilt made by members of the Chattahoochee Country Dancers. Photograph by the author, 1998.

Claire Cain also took a clandestine research trip in order to commemorate Genise and Bernard's living room in her square. Inventing a pretext for her visit, she made surreptitious notes and sketches of the layout of the room. Her square depicts the couple surrounded by their furniture and accessories, including the two couches, the woodstove, and a rocking chair (see figure 3). Ginger Pyron's square illustrates the group's love of dressing up for special occasions: "This is inspired not only by the French husband, but by a French-dance-hall-



Figure 2. Detail of
Figure 1: Cis Hinkle
appliquéd a
representation of
Genise's car on her
square. Photograph by
the author, 1998.

Figure 3. Detail of
Figure 1: Claire Cain's
square shows Genise
and Bernard in their
living room.
Photograph by the
author, 1998.

girl costume that Genise wore to a Halloween dance." The square features dancing legs emerging from a can-can skirt, accompanied by the embroidered expression "Vive l'amour!" (see figure 4). Other squares refer to Bernard's French origin with a can of "Franco-American Matrimoni," a wine bottle labeled "Chateau Spenlé," and a *fleur de lis*. Jennifer's square of a quilt-covered bed floating in the night sky over an embroidered song title is admittedly a bit suggestive. She remembered: "Well, I wanted to do something French, of course, and I



always liked that old song ‘Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?’ And I thought of that, and so that’s what I did” (see figure 5).

Dancing and Quilts

Over time and through experience, the group established informal guidelines to facilitate the process of putting a quilt together and to ensure an attractive visual result. By the third or fourth quilt, it became customary for someone to plan a theme or color scheme so that the resulting quilt would have some sort of visual unity. The packets of fabric given out to participants included instructions, and indicated the finished size of the square and the deadline for completion. Participants typically embroidered their names or initials on their squares.

The range of skill levels evident in the finished quilts reflects one of the core values of the dance group. Just as novice dancers are welcomed onto the dance floor, given basic instruction in the dance figures, and then encouraged to “just get out there and dance,” technical expertise was not prerequisite to being invited to make a quilt square. In the same way that experienced dancers make a point of partnering new dancers, skilled needleworkers made themselves available to those who lacked skills. Dancers often explain this openness by remarking, “We were *all* new to this at one time,” and those who organized the quilts expressed similar inclusiveness. Although nearly all the organizers and the majority of participants have been women, from the beginning the group has encouraged the participation of men and of couples working together to make a square. While the desired size of the finished quilt limited the number of people who could contribute squares, when the time came for the layers of the textile sandwich to be quilted together, many more participants, men and women, could be involved.

The Chattahoochee Country Dancers have made at least forty quilts between 1979 and 2000. The exact number is difficult to ascertain because there was never a fixed structure governing the group’s quilt-making activity. Each quilt was organized independently, attracting different participants depending on the social networks of the recipients. According to Susan Davis, “What you ultimately had to end up



Figure 4. Detail of Figure 1: Ginger Pyron's square was inspired by a costume Genise wore to a Halloween dance. Photograph by the author, 1998.

Figure 5: Detail of Figure 1: Jennifer McCarty's square was inspired by a popular song of the 1960s, "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?" Photograph by the author, 1998.

being was a friend of somebody who could organize a quilt." Although some of the quilt organizers kept records of making particular quilts, and a number of dancers have snapshots of presentations or of people sitting around a quilting frame, there was no contemporary attempt to document the quilts, the quilters, or the process.



Quilts Displayed at Dances

During the second weekend in November, the CCD sponsors an annual dance festival. As soon as the Friday afternoon basketball league relinquishes the gymnasium at the Decatur Recreation Center, festival organizers take over the space and set up the stage and sound system for the band. Other volunteers string clothesline around the walls and hang the group quilts, which have been borrowed back for the occasion. By 8:00 P.M., the floor is filled with over three hundred gaily dressed dancers, ready to enjoy a weekend of music, dance, and friendship. During the weekend, dancers stroll around the gym to examine the quilts. Long-time dancers revisit familiar quilts and reminisce about the people who made the squares. New dancers express appreciation for the beautiful needlework and for the emotional ties and support that are evidenced in the inscriptions and designs. The CCD has held its festival in different venues over the years, and the annual display of the quilts defines an otherwise generic space as "home" to the dancers for the duration of the weekend. For a group that has no fixed physical location, the quilts mark the territory within which dancers celebrate a sense of homecoming, and they provide stimuli for narratives that support and reinforce group consciousness.

The Chattahoochee Country Dancers are not the only dance group that regularly displays quilts at special events. Quilts are hung at dance venues in other parts of the country to serve a number of functions.⁷ Since dances are often held in large halls or gymnasiums that create difficulties for the people responsible for the sound system, quilts serve an acoustic function. The same colorful quilts that soak up sound are also appreciated by the dancers for their beauty and visual interest. Dancers enjoy taking a closer look at patterns and stitches during breaks from dancing. Dance events are typically located in spaces that are owned by and shared with other community groups. Hanging quilts on the walls of a public space defines and marks the area as temporarily belonging to the dancers. For instance, one group places a clothesline of quilts across a large gym floor, blocking out a space just large enough to accommodate the expected number of dancers. Although blankets and bedspreads might work as well for these purposes, quilts carry connotations of "folkiness," "do-it-yourself," and



“making do with what you have.” Unlike other types of anonymous bedcovers, quilts are perceived as having personal connections and as being the work of human hands. Thus a display of quilts reiterates the shared values of face-to-face interaction, creativity, and beauty in everyday life. Through the evocation of these shared values, the quilt display simultaneously reinforces the group’s identity and provides a concrete embodiment of the prevailing ideology that defines the group’s behaviors.

Dance groups typically borrow quilts from dancers to hang in the halls, resulting in a random collection of quilts of various vintages and patterns. The quilt display at the CCD annual festival is unique, however, in the way in which the dance group itself has created a collection of quilts that documents and celebrates cohesiveness and communality among the participants. The quilts provide visual triggers for the exchange of narratives about the group, individual participants, and their shared history. Although each quilt is presented to the recipients as a gift, there is a more or less implicit expectation that, if circumstances allow, it should be loaned back for the festival.

Briar Rose Garland Dancers

By the 1990s, the popularity of contra dance swelled the number of people attending contra dances and included new participants who did not share in the social networks characteristic of the original group. Then, too, there were fewer marriages and births among the original population, who were approaching middle age. By the early 1990s, quilting activity had gradually shifted from the larger CCD group to the smaller Briar Rose Garland Dancers. Ginger Pyron referred to Briar Rose as a “community within the community” of dancers.

In addition to wedding and baby quilts for its members, Briar Rose dancers also made small “appreciation” quilts. An intricately designed and meticulously stitched piece was made for Lori Lewis when she and her husband moved to the island of Yap, in Micronesia, around 1984. The small quilt features images of dancers, dressed in white costumes, with garlands of flowing ribbons and flowers. A signpost on one side of the quilt indexes significant locations, including Yap; the



MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) Five Points station where Lori first saw the group performing, prompting her to join; and other locations in the Atlanta area where the group performed.

Claire and Jim Cain were already married when they became involved with the Chattahoochee Country Dancers, so they did not receive a wedding quilt. Around 1984, Briar Rose dancers expressed their thanks to Claire for her dedication and commitment by making an appreciation quilt depicting a single, large, appliquéd rose, resembling the group's logo. The participants embroidered their names on leaves in the border of the piece (see figure 6).

These two small appreciation quilts made by Briar Rose differ in structure from the wedding and baby quilts. Lori Lewis's is compiled of separately constructed sections, but these are irregularly shaped rectangles rather than identically sized, interchangeable squares. The images are closely related in subject matter—all conveying aspects of the garland dancers' experience—such that there appears to have been substantial coordination both in the selection of images and in the way they are combined into a whole. The appliquéd rose made for Claire Cain demonstrates the ability of a number of participants to work collaboratively on a single design, constructed as an undivided unit. The intricate details in these two pieces reflect the high degree of cohesiveness and coordination developed among members of a performing dance troupe.

Community, Group, Folk?

Although the Chattahoochee Country Dancers have participated together in dance and quiltmaking activities over a period of over twenty years, scholars in the social sciences tend to be cautious about the terms they use to describe such shared behaviors. Contra dancers, in Atlanta and elsewhere, frequently refer to their "communities," but scholars do not use this term casually. Folklorists and others more often use the term "group" as a more flexible designation.⁸

Folklorists typically study the traditional behaviors of individuals within recognizable "folk" groups. Such folk groups are often identi-



Figure 6. The Briar Rose Garland Dancers presented Claire Cain with an appreciation quilt, featuring a version of the group's logo around 1984. Photograph by the author, 1999.

fied as sharing ethnic heritage, living in geographic proximity, or having particular occupational or religious affiliations. The majority of American folklorists and ethnographers are white, middle-class, and educated. The folk groups they study are usually identified as exotic, recognizably different from "us" in some way. Therefore, some researchers have resisted the notion that white, urban, middle-class, middle-aged Americans can constitute a *folk*.

In order to eliminate some of the difficulties in the notion of *folk*,



Dan Ben-Amos has offered a definition of folklore as “artistic communication in small groups.” Ben-Amos further identified two conditions that must hold “for the folkloric act to happen”: the participants “have to be in the same situation and be part of the same reference group.”⁹ This idea represents a shift from defining a group by its shared characteristics (such as ethnicity, kinship, or social class) to a definition based upon regular social interaction. This also leads to the notion that “the group is a product of interaction rather than its precursor.”¹⁰

The Chattahoochee Country Dancers came together to create an environment in which they could pursue a shared interest in contra dance. Dancers need a large open space with a wooden floor, musicians who are willing and able to provide appropriate music, and callers who can teach and coordinate the activity during dance events. Ginger Pyron recalled:

Our first dance hall was a log cabin in a small city park; we had a wide front porch for sitting and a springy wooden floor for dancing. Although our dancers, our callers, and our musicians were all more or less beginners, we had found something we loved, and we said to each other, “I want to do this forever.”¹¹

Groups are not static. Group membership and behavior change in response to internal and external stimuli. After several years in the city park, the CCD lost its lease and relocated to a building occupied by a branch of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, called the First Existentialist Church. (“And we’ve been looking for the second one ever since!” quipped Susan Davis.)

Ginger Pyron described what happened when the group moved into the building known familiarly as the E Church:

It was an old stone church with massive front steps, tall windows, and a large, suspended wooden floor. In the congenial “aging hippie” neighborhood of Candler Park, our group swelled rapidly to twice its size, with lots of newcomers and enthusiastic strangers.¹²

While the move offered the group the opportunity to sponsor more frequent dances, the growth in numbers also changed the nature of the dance instruction and the types of dances performed. Ginger recalled: “Suddenly our callers were faced with a large, noisy group; we



had to learn to use a sound system; and we had to abandon most of our English historical dances in favor of easier contras, squares, and circles."¹³ At this time, teams of Morris dancers and garland dancers became very important, offering experienced dancers opportunities to learn and perform highly choreographed dances in a more formal style. The teams made costumes modeled on historic English dance attire, held regular practices, and performed frequently, in Atlanta and elsewhere. Although many dance team members also continued to attend the local contras, there was occasionally some competition for dancers and musicians among the various groups.

Networks and Relationships

Groups are not homogeneous. Not all members participate equally in shared interactions. Individuals may occupy positions anywhere from the center to the margins of a particular group, and their experiences and perspectives vary widely based on the level of their participation. Social scientists have developed a variety of models for examining the social networks that link individuals within groups.

Two interrelated features of social networks are *density* and *multiplexity*. In dense networks, an individual's friends also know each other; in sparse networks, one's friends are not known to each other. A multiplex relationship is one in which two individuals interact with each other within a variety of contacts; a single-stranded relationship is based on having only one factor in common.¹⁴

The quilt made for Karen ter Horst includes examples of the dense and multiplex relationships among the participants. Two squares depict costumed international dancers; while others include references to Morris dancing, shaped-note singing, and musical instruments. There are two references to Karen's job as a teacher at Paideia, an alternative school where a number of dancers worked, and one to the New Morning Food Co-op. Susan Davis recalled that the country-dance group was so small in the beginning that they all knew each other in many contexts.

Some social relationships existed before a shared interest in dance, while others developed through mutual participation in activities to



support the dance group. In addition to the highly visible roles of callers and musicians, many volunteers are necessary to transport and set up sound systems, manage finances, maintain the dance space, and provide refreshments. Working together to create the circumstances in which they could share their love of music and dance provided repeated opportunities for the dancers to form lasting interpersonal relationships and a sense of communality.

Innovation and Conflict

Group membership does not mean that all social interactions are unanimous or harmonious. In practice, much of the “artistic communication” among group members may come about as ways to address conflicts within the group or threats from within or without.¹⁵ Susan Davis recalled a creative solution to one situation in which a quilt organizer had distributed packets of fabric for a particular quilt and received back something entirely unexpected:

The colors for the quilt were lavender, black, and rust, and somebody made a rooster out of red, green, yellow, and brown. We didn’t know what to do. It would have ruined the quilt. It would have stuck out like a sore thumb.

The square was made by a couple who had just moved to the Atlanta area and had organized the mixed-gender Morningstar Morris team. The couple who were to receive the quilt were part of the mixed team, but the man also danced with the all-male Magnolia Morris team. Susan Davis alluded to the touchy situation of the gender issue and described her solution:

If you know anything about Morris dancing, you know that it becomes ideological. And we have no idea why they did that rooster, so I made another square for the other Morris team. From that square and the rooster square I made two pillows to go along with the quilt. I never mentioned it, and we just acted like that’s what we meant to do! Here’s this quilt and here are these great pillows!

Although this was a unique situation, there were other diplomatic



decisions involving the quilts. Squares submitted by inexperienced needleworkers were sometimes too large or too small, and inexperienced stitches sometimes required additional sewing to reinforce the needlework. Organizers have had to negotiate between the exuberance of personal expression and the desired unity of the completed quilt, and the negotiation itself became a skill. Genise Spenlé observed, "Susan has covered up more awkward social situations than you can imagine!"

When faced with behavior that does not conform to the established norms, the group must respond. In the case cited above, the multicolored rooster was deemed inappropriate for inclusion in the quilt itself, and making pillows provided a workable solution. Other types of non-normal behavior, however, may be found acceptable and may even become incorporated into the accepted norms. Genise Spenlé remembered the first square she made for a group quilt (see figure 7):

I was new to the dance community, so I needed a lot of help. I have an art background, but I wasn't part of that craft tradition. I don't know how to sew either. It was my first time sewing anything. I didn't know what other people did. So all the turrets on my castle's towers had black sequins. And I found out that it wasn't quite what everybody was doing. But everyone was very supportive, and I received a tremendous amount of compliments and support, and they made me feel that my square was wonderful.

Other dancers readily acknowledge the great influence of Genise's square on the quilts that followed. Ginger Pyron observed: "Genise's sequins changed the whole direction of the quilt effort!" Dancers started adding buttons, ribbons, metallic thread, and small found objects. One quilt even included a small music box that plays "Love Me Tender" when squeezed.

As with any form of traditional behavior, innovations perceived to enhance or further the values of the group may be incorporated into the accepted rules, while those considered potentially destructive or damaging are rejected or discouraged. These rules are not written, and participants may not realize that they exist. But when faced with a new situation, group members have an instinctive response as to whether the new behavior fits with what has been done before or "would stick out like a sore thumb." One value expressed through the



Figure 7. Genise Spenlé sewed black sequins on the turrets of her square depicting an old English dance called “Newcastle” in a quilt made in 1981. This innovation had a marked influence on the quiltmaking style of the Chattahoochee Country Dancers. Photograph by the author, 1999.

quilts and on the dance floor is a tolerance for individualistic behavior as long as it is not disruptive. For example, energetic dancers may express themselves during a dance by performing high kicks, spins, dips, or vocalizations. These actions are tolerated unless they endanger other dancers or severely inhibit the progress of the dance figures. Only reluctantly do dancers request an offender to tone down the physicality of his/her dancing.



Mobility

One characteristic of contemporary middle-class American society is mobility. Because most definitions of folk groups include the necessity of some form of face-to-face communication, scholars sometimes argue that the participants in groups such as the CCD are too unstable in population to be considered a true community or folk group.¹⁶ It is certainly true that many CCD dancers have moved away from the Atlanta area, taking their quilts with them. Some of these dancers, however, have maintained contact by returning for the annual festival or by sending their quilts for display. Lori Lewis continued to make quilt squares even after she moved to Yap, and still sends her Briar Rose appreciation quilt for the festival from her present home in Maine. Mobility also means that dancers travel around the country to attend dance events, and friendships are maintained, to some degree, across great distances. In November 2000, an Atlanta couple attended for the first time a dance event in Portland, Oregon, and reported meeting twelve dancers they already knew from various parts of the country.

Sometimes the mobility of dancers is referenced through the quilts. Ginger Pyron was involved with CCD during its early years before moving to Nashville to attend graduate school. She participated in the first quilt long distance, embroidering a pair of dancers with the inscription "Tennessee Waltz" (see figure 8). The square made by Lee Walters for the same quilt acknowledges short-term mobility. It depicts a passport to London, Paris, and Amsterdam, commemorating a 1977 trip with other dancers. A quilt made for the marriage of Philip Foster and Diann Weatherly contains numerous references to the couple's long-distance romance and to their travels together. Squares include a map of the interstate linking their homes in Birmingham and Atlanta, as well as representations of a trip to Zimbabwe and their honeymoon in Hawaii.

Conclusions

Whether the Chattahoochee Dancers qualify as a *bona fide* community or folk group could be endlessly debated by scholars. The CCD is composed of individuals who are educated, middle-class, and mobile, and



these characteristics do not fit a classic definition of a *community*. The behavior of the group, however, supports their own claim to the concept. They participate in dense, multiplex social networks; they have developed traditions that have continued for over two decades—traditions that emerged unselfconsciously rather than as deliberate attempts toward community-building; and they respond to innovations and conflicts by referring to a central core of shared values.

The quilts made within this group of dancers have gradually developed a distinctive character, reflecting the sum of individual contributions as well as influences from the larger contemporary quiltmaking culture. Participants share a sense that both the quiltmaking process and the growing body of finished quilts represent material evidence of the sense of togetherness the participants feel toward each other and toward the group as a whole. Dancing is a meaningful physical activity for these people, but once the music stops and the floor empties, only fleeting memories remain. By making quilts, these groups of dancers create tangible representations of their emotional attachments and shared commitments. The quilts are highly visible and significant symbols of a sense of communality that extends beyond the dance floor. As Susan Davis observed:

It's a circular thing. The quilts add to the community, but if we didn't have a community, we couldn't have made the quilts. And the quilts were part of making the community, too.

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Figure 8. Ginger Pyron made a square “Tennessee Waltz” for Karen ter Horst’s quilt in 1979. Although Ginger was attending graduate school in Nashville, she continued to participate in CCD activities. Photograph by the author, 1999.

of Folklore, ed. Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 166–77; Joyce Ice, “Splendid Companionship and Practical Assistance,” in *Quilted Together: Women, Quilts, and Communities*, ed. Joyce Ice and Linda Norris (Delhi NY: Delaware County Historical Association, 1989), 6–24; Kristin M. Langellier, “Contemporary Quiltmaking in Maine: Re-fashioning Femininity,” in *Uncoverings 1990*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1991), 29–55; Kristin M. Langellier, “Show-and-Tell as a Performance Event: Oppositional Practice in Contemporary Quiltmaking Culture,” in *Uncoverings 1992*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1993), 127–47; William J. Riffe, “Brain Dominance and Quilters: A Small Group Study,” in *Uncoverings 1991*, 83–97; Lorre M. Weidlich, “The Sunday Friends: The Group and Their Quilts,” in *Uncoverings 1997*, 67–93; Clover Nolan



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2. Debra Ballard, "The Ladies Aid of Hope Lutheran Church," in *Uncoverings 1989*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1990), 69–80; Valerie S. Rake, "A Thread of Continuity: Quiltmaking in Wayne County, Ohio, Mennonite Churches, 1890s–1990s," in *Uncoverings 1999*, ed. Virginia Gunn (Lincoln, NE: American Quilt Study Group, 1999), 31–62; Susan Stewart, "Sociological Aspects of Quilting in Three Brethren Churches in Southeastern Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Folklife* 23/3 (1974): 15–29. Although the quilt group may be seen as secondary to the primary reference group of the church, the quilters in these studies nonetheless meet regularly for the purpose of quiltmaking.

3. Laurel Horton, "An 'Old-Fashioned Quilting' in 1910," in *Uncoverings 2000*, 1–25; Kristin Miller, "Innovative Group Quiltmaking in an Isolated Coastal Community in British Columbia, Canada: Out of the Mainstream," in *Uncoverings 1993*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1994), 62–96.

4. Paul Jordan-Smith, *For As Many As Will: Deciphering the Folklore of Contra Dance and English Country Dance Events* (Ph. D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), chapter 1.

5. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from a recorded group interview conducted by the author on March 7, 1998, at the home of Susan Davis and Scott Russell, in Atlanta, Georgia. Also present were Ginger Pyron, Genise Spenlé, and Jennifer McCarty. Over time, individual memories of events and chronology have faded, and the group interview allowed participants to reconstruct memories more fully. Quotations have been edited for clarity at the request of the participants.

6. Beth Gutcheon, *The Perfect Patchwork Primer* (New York: David McKay Company, 1973), 17–18.

7. The author, in collaboration with Paul Jordan-Smith, has documented the display of quilts at dance events in Alaska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington State.

8. During the 1998 meeting of the American Folklore Society, Burt Feintuch served as a discussant for a panel entitled "Emergent Communities—Traditional Music and Dance." Dr. Feintuch disputed the suggestion offered by panelists that participants in contra and social dance activities, to cite the session abstract, "are self-consciously constructing themselves as Community." Dr. Feintuch cited his own experience as a musician playing for similar dance events in denying that groups of dancers express behaviors and characteristics that would allow them to be classified as "communities." In response to Dr. Feintuch's comments, Laurel Horton and Paul Jordan-Smith presented a paper, "Envisioning the Dancer's World," at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, Memphis, TN, October 1999, in which they argued that certain dance groups, such as the CCD, can indeed be defined as communities, citing the group's quilts as physical evidence. For an overview of folkloristic thought on this subject, see also Dorothy Noyes, "Group," in *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (Fall 1995): 449–478. The essays in this special JAF issue, entitled *Common Ground: Keywords for the Study of*



Expressive Culture, constitute a valuable resource for the examination of core concepts in the academic field of folkloristics.

9. Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, ed. Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 12–13.

10. Noyes, 453.

11. Ginger Pyron, "An Informal History of the Chattahoochee Country Dancers," typescript for oral presentation at 15th Anniversary Dance Festival (November 1990).

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Noyes, 457.

15. Ibid., 463.

16. See note 8 above.