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Quilted Gems by the Jewels of the Lawrence Family

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The Lawrence farmstead in Mesquite, Texas, provides a microcosm of the lives of Texas women and the environment in which they made quilts from 1890–1955. This study of 27 surviving quilts of the Lawrence women is unique because so much is known about these women and their quilting from family letters, photographs, household goods, quilts, and fabric scraps which survive intact on their farmstead. Questions such as what life was like on the farm and where the women acquired their quilting materials are examined, as are the techniques of combining scrap and new material to create a quilt. Inspirations for the Lawrence women included family tradition, homemaking classes in public schools, and the quilts exhibited at the State Fair of Texas.

Many myths exist about the women of Texas, tough women who survived in a land that was “hell on women and horses.”¹ Who were these women who were creating the nineteenth and early twentieth century quilts in Texas? What was life like on the windblown prairie of their family farmstead?

Many individual quilts exist, but few writers have documented a family of Texas quilters or a large body of their works.² A study of the quilts of the Lawrence family of Mesquite, Texas is of particular interest because family letters, photographs, household goods, and quilt scraps survive. All these materials exist in a collection owned by Historic Mesquite, Inc.,



a non-profit organization that manages the Lawrence family farmstead. This collection documents five women in an extended family whose needlework survives in the environment in which they created it, from the actual homestead itself, down to the spools of thread used in their quilting. It is unique to have the surroundings intact where many quilts were made³ as it is a microcosm from which the work of the quilters in North Texas can be examined.

In 1996, the City of Mesquite, through a gift-purchase arrangement, became the owner of over thirteen acres of the Lawrence farmstead.⁴ The site is now under the management of Historic Mesquite, Inc. (HMI), which has conducted an accessions inventory and is restoring the park. The organization consists of eighteen directors, which make up the working board, and has one city employee as administrator. Descendants of the Lawrence family serve on the board. The first-floor rooms of the Lawrence Farmstead opened to the public in 2005 to interpret life on the Texas blackland prairie⁵ from 1887 to 1930.

Mesquite is located in North Texas and is approximately thirteen miles east of downtown Dallas. Population records do not exist prior to the turn of the century for the community, but the 1900 census lists 405 people. Of that number approximately nine were part of the Lawrence farmstead (see Figure 1).⁶ The population steadily grew with a large influx of residents in the 1950s, as Mesquite developed into a convenient suburban area of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex surrounded by easy access highways. Between 1950 and 1970, 53,435 people moved into the community. By 1995, when the last Lawrence daughter died, 109,450 called Mesquite home.⁷

According to the documented history of the settlers of the Mesquite area, the Lawrence family, whose patriarch, John P. Lawrence, arrived from Maryland in 1845, became one of the larger property holders and, as such, was important in the overall picture of farming in North Texas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁸ John Lawrence was a member of the Mercer Colony, which had settled on land that would now be in the township of Sunnyvale, just east of Mesquite.⁹ In 1874, John gave his son, S. D. Lawrence approximately 640 acres of land on his twenty-first birthday. S. D. Lawrence began building his farmhouse, which grew to approximately 4,000 square feet, in 1874.¹⁰ The younger Lawrence still



Figure 1. The S. D. Lawrence house in 1900 with family members seated off the porch. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

owned over 400 acres in 1909, after losing land to railroad and road rights-of-way.

The Lawrence family earned its income from a variety of sources, including farming corn and cotton, raising chickens and cattle, land dealings, and at least some lumbering.¹¹ The three sons of S. D. Lawrence were also prominent in the community. John Lawrence became mayor of Mesquite; Hugh Lawrence was Mesquite's first volunteer fire chief; and, although he did not survive past the age of 25, Hill Lawrence's name was known in football circles. His untimely death was due to head injuries suffered in a game between Mesquite, his alma mater, and Terrell high schools. Alumni were eligible to enter games when a player was needed during those years.

S. D. Lawrence's first wife, Louisa Porter Lawrence, died in 1891, and in 1893, he married his second wife, Louisa Hill Walker Lawrence, born in 1867 in Missouri (see Figure 2).

The second Mrs. Lawrence, bore eight children, of which five were daughters. The couple named their daughters for semi-precious stones.



Figure 2. (*left*) Louisa Hill Walker Lawrence was S. D .Lawrence's second wife. Quilts found in the house would have come with her from Missouri to Mesquite, Texas.

Figure 3. (*right*) Opal Lawrence was the oldest daughter to remain on the farmstead as she never married. Her last will and testament gave the property to the City of Mesquite upon the death of her younger sister, Onyx. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

The first daughter, Ruby, was born in 1897; Pearl was born in 1900; Opal (see Figure 3) was born in 1902; Garnet (see Figure 4) was born in 1904; and Onyx (see Figure 5) was born in 1906.¹² Together they were known as “the precious jewels” of the Lawrence family.

Family members and researchers believe Lawrence's second wife, Louisa Hill Walker Lawrence, her sister, Lizzie Walker (see Figure 6), who never married, and Louisa's daughters, Opal, Garnet, and Onyx, made the HMI collection's quilts as well as twenty-five other quilts dispersed among the descendants. Ruby and Pearl married, left the farm and probably took any quilts they made with them. The other three daughters stayed with their parents. According to the family, Garnet was hearing impaired with a resulting speech impediment. Opal and Onyx cared for Garnet throughout her life.



Figure 4. (*left*) Garnet Lawrence also remained on the farmstead, never marrying. Figure 5. (*right*) Onyx Lawrence Summers was the youngest of the Lawrence children and remained on the farmstead after marrying. She died two months after Opal passed away. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

In 1942, Onyx married Fowler Summers, who moved onto the farm with her.¹³ Six years later, Louisa Lawrence passed away. Garnet died August 31, 1981, twenty days after Fowler Summers passed away on August 11, 1981. At the end of their lives, the last two daughters, Opal Lawrence and Onyx Lawrence Summers, were still farming fifty-one acres of the original farmstead. Opal and Onyx died within two months of each other in 1995.

Between the death of the final Lawrence sister in 1995 and July 1996, when Historic Mesquite, Inc. took possession of the furnishings of the Lawrence Farmstead, the family removed furnishings including quilts for their personal use. Still the majority of the furnishings of the house, which had been occupied by the same family for over 120 years survives under the care of HMI.¹⁴ Few historic sites are as fortunate to receive original furnishings for a house museum, especially in the quantity HMI received. Twenty-seven quilts were donated to HMI, but twenty-five oth-



Figure 6. Louisa's sister, Lizzie Walker, was an influence on her nieces' quilting. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

ers were retained by the Lawrence family heirs. These twenty-five quilts are superior to those in the collections of HMI in that they survive in better condition, exhibit finer needlework and are visually stronger. They tend to be the best quilts, while the ones left in the collection are more utilitarian.



Those kept by the family include an early Mariner's Compass, late nineteenth century Basket quilts, an Ocean Waves quilt, a Pieced Star quilt, a Nine-Patch quilt, and Twenty-Five Patch quilt, and an early twentieth century Cross quilt.¹⁵ Many of these quilts retained by the Lawrence family heirs have bindings of striped fabric, cut on the bias, which took more fabric than binding cut on the straight of grain and was visually more attractive.¹⁶ Both sets of quilts indicate the family's affluence because of the new fabrics that were incorporated with scrap fabric in the majority of them.

Although considered prosperous in the Mesquite community, the Lawrences were frugal. Butcher knives in HMI's collection look more like ice picks due to the extensive sharpening they sustained. Meanwhile new knives in their original boxes remain unused. Documenters found tattered and faded work jackets on nails in the mud room of the house, yet new ones were packed away in family trunks. Items such as Christmas boxes with the gifts still in them, old wrappings, and giveaway bottle openers support the theory that the family lived simply.

The Lawrence family quilt collection in total dates from 1840 to 1960. The earliest quilt, circa 1840, is a Mariner's Compass, which decoratively hangs on the wall of the home of a Lawrence heir. The quilts in the HMI collection date from about 1870 to 1960. Because of the wide range of years represented in the quilts, the women obviously quilted continuously throughout their lives.

Both sets of quilts share some of the same fabrics. In the HMI collections, small yardages of fabric survive that have been found both in the quilts and in the dresses worn by the family. No examples of appliqué quilts were found either in this collection or among those that survive in the care of the Lawrence family heirs. All are pieced quilts except three Crazy quilts.

As all young ladies of the nineteenth century were taught to sew, either at home or at school, and as both the Lawrence family mother and her sister, Lizzie Walker, were of middle- to upper-middle class society, it is logical that they brought sewing skills to Texas from their home in Missouri. Three Crazy quilts and two pieced quilts, in the HMI collection date prior to the 1893 marriage of Louisa Walker to S. D. Lawrence.

These Crazy quilts date from the end of the nineteenth century. All



Figure 7. Members of the Mesquite Trade Excursion in front of the Hudson-Davis store (now McCullough's) in 1911. They eventually organized the first Chamber of Commerce. S. D. Lawrence, his brother Joe Lawrence, and son John Lawrence are in the photo. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

bear different initials, “LLW,” “SHW” and “LHW.” The one with “SHW” also has a date of 1888. These are typical Crazy quilts of the era, done with fine embroidery stitches and the usual variety of dark, wool fabrics. The “W” initial for the last name indicates that these were from S. D. Lawrence’s second wife’s family, the Walkers. “LHW” are the initials of Louisa Hill Walker (see Figure 8), “LLW” are for her sister Lizzie Walker and “SHW” appears to have been Lizzie’s and Louisa’s mother, Sarah Hill Walker.¹⁷ Although Crazy quilts were made for many years, the dark fabrics and relatively heavy embroidery employed in these quilts indicate an early style.

Lizzie Walker, the maker of at least one Crazy quilt, remains somewhat of a mystery. The inventory of garments and other items from a trunk labeled with her initials confirm that she was a larger woman who remained in contact with her family and chewed tobacco. Postcards from across the country and Canada document her travels. Surviving evidence



Figure 8. Crazy quilt, circa 1890s with “LHW” for Louisa Walker. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

indicates that she suffered from some sort of physical deformity, which possibly contributed to her unmarried state. As evidenced by her correspondence, she had a lively mind. It is uncertain how much time she spent in Mesquite with her sister, but her Mesquite nieces did write to her often and many of her letters survive that were written while she was in Mesquite.

The Lawrence daughters began their needlework early in life as documented by the doll clothes and mini-quilts stored in the farmstead attic.¹⁸ The young Lawrence girls practiced and developed their hand-sewing skills by making clothes for their dolls. Some of the dolls survive with factory-made clothing while others sport simple, hand-sewn clothing, the



Figure 9. Double Nine Patch, circa 1890–1900. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

products of novice seamstresses. The dresses were small, requiring few seams, and the motivation to dress their play dolls surely encouraged the development of their sewing skills.

An evaluation of the quilts made by these women shows that all were hand-quilted and all had cotton batting (see Appendix for a complete listing the HMI Lawrence quilts). Most of the quilts were hand-pieced, but a few were constructed with both hand and machine piecing. While some were finished with red striped binding cut on the bias, the majority had the quilt backing turned to the front. Eight of the HMI quilts are pieced with light or white grounds. These include the Eight Point Pieced Star, circa 1870–80 (see Plate 1); Double Nine Patch, circa 1890–1900 (see Figure 9); Mosaic or Ann and Andy, circa 1900; Churn Dash, circa 1890 (see Figure 10); Crosses and Losses with Onyx's name embroidered in red at one end, circa 1900–1925; Ocean Waves, circa 1915 (see Figure 11); and the two Wild Geese variations, circa 1940 (see Figure 12). Louisa Hill Walker may have brought the Eight Point Pieced Star and the Churn



Figure 10. Churn Dash, circa 1890. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

Dash quilts with her for her marriage to S. D. Lawrence in 1893. The others would have been made at the Mesquite farmstead. Although the fabrics for the blocks could be considered scrap fabrics, a certain amount of disposable income was required to secure matching white ground for the background of the quilts. Many of the quilts employ identical fabrics. Although the quilts have a scrap look to them, the surviving pieces of unused fabric in the collections lead to the conclusion that these were not scrap fabrics from old clothing, but instead were new fabrics left over from fabric cut for clothing.

By far the largest group of quilts that survives in the collections of Historic Mesquite, Inc. are utility quilts with a scrap look to them, but which have one unifying fabric used for the sashing and borders. There are six quilts in this group. They include a string pieced Lemoyne Star, circa 1910 (see Figure 13); three Twenty-Five-Patch quilts; and two



Figure 11. Ocean Waves, circa 1915. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

Square-Set-on-Point quilts, circa 1925–1940, one of soft pastel fabrics and the other of dark plaids (see Figure 14).

Three quilts are whole cloth of printed fabric and are considered utility quilts for everyday use. One is circa 1900; the second is circa 1935–1945; and the third, circa 1940. They were intended for warmth, not to display fine quilting skills and two are tied rather than quilted.

Six of the quilts appear to have been made strictly of scrap fabric and are done in patterns designed to use many fabrics. These include four One Patch quilts, circa 1875–1900; a late 1920s in poor condition; a circa 1930s with “Onyx” embroidered on the back corner; and a circa 1940s;



Figure 12. Wild Geese variation, circa 1940s. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

a Charm quilt, circa 1935–1955; and a string pieced Kaleidoscope quilt, circa 1940–1950. Most are relatively late in the work of the Lawrence women and date from the 1940s and early 1950s. None of the quilts appear to have employed feedsack fabric, although one String-Pieced quilt had flour sacking as the foundation on a few of the blocks.

The quilts are made of fine materials, generally tightly woven cotton fabric, which survived hard use. Those pieced with light backgrounds employed a variety of fabrics, to good effect, combining them with fine new fabrics. Even the early Depression era quilts of printed fabrics show a sense of style and employ the same fabric throughout for the sashings and borders, a sign that these were not strictly scrap quilts.

In considering the whole group of quilts, there appears to be a shift from the early finely pieced and quilted quilts to the later more utilitarian quilts. According to family members, the Lawrence women's financial situation did not change after their father died in 1934. It did, however,



Figure 13. String Pieced Lemoyne Star, circa 1910. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

take a downturn before he passed away due to some legal problems encountered with John Lawrence, S. D. 's son.¹⁹ Such a downturn might have affected the women's sewing, with more scraps introduced for quilting. The effects of the Depression at about the same time made scrap quilts very popular. Whatever their financial situation, it never became so bad that the Lawrence women worked outside the home, other than taking



Figure 14. One of two Square Set on Point quilts, this one with dark plaids, circa 1925–1940. Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

school census records from the late 1940s into the 1950s. They did, however, work the farm.²⁰

Another contributing factor to the shift of types of quilts made after 1930 may have been that the older generation, Louisa Walker Lawrence and Lizzie Walker, were more interested in piecing fine quilts than Opal, Garnet and Onyx were. Additionally, the advancing age of Louisa Walker Lawrence—she was sixty-three by 1930—might also be a contributing factor as quilters tend to make simpler quilts as their eyesight and finger dexterity fail with age.

The latest Lawrence quilt in the HMI collection is a Kaleidoscope or Spider quilt, circa 1940–50. By 1960 the Lawrence women appear to have stopped quilting. Family members recall that late in their lives Onyx and Opal made clothing for their family members, particularly for the children. Many of the leftover scraps from these garments are in the HMI collection.²¹ Surviving examples show that the women were also skilled in other forms of needlework, such as embroidery, crochet and liquid embroidery, which were more popular than quilting in the 1940s



through 1980s.²² Bureau scarves and hand towels that are adorned with embroidered transfer patterns survive in the collections of HMI. Interior photos of the farmstead show these scarves in use on furniture.

Opal, Garnet, and Onyx took up the “liquid embroidery” craze with zeal when it became fashionable in the 1960s and at least 100 pillowcases adorned with the material survive in pristine condition in the collection. The needlework and liquid embroidery work seem to end in the 1970s but clothing patterns for themselves and for their niece and great-niece survive up to about the 1980s. This and the fact that no post-1960s quilts survive supports the family recollection that, although they did not quilt or do other decorative needlework in their later years, they continued to sew clothing while they worked the farm, raised cattle, and sold eggs from their own chickens.²³

This switch to other needlework styles and sewing instead of quilting is typical of the experiences of other American women. Some put away quilting as their labors turned to war efforts around World War II. Although recent scholarship notes that accounts of the number of women who found time to quilt are very close to the level of the 1930s,²⁴ no patriotic quilts were among the surviving Lawrence quilts. About the same time, cheap blankets became readily available.²⁵ By the time of the quilt revival during America’s Bicentennial celebrations in 1976, Opal, Garnet and Onyx were elderly and do not appear to have participated in the revival. No quilts from that time have been found.

While it is of interest to have a large group of quilts linked to quilters in one family, this collection is even more interesting since the environment in which the majority of these quilts were made survives. Questions about the source of their fabric, needlework training, and pattern inspiration can be examined. Few other collections of quilts can be documented in this detail.

Records of Lawrence family purchases are within the HMI collection, which provide information about their fabric buying habits. The Lawrences patronized stores such as Hudson-Davis and Co., only about a mile from the Lawrence property in downtown Mesquite, and Humphreys and Vanston, which started out as a hardware store, and was “at one time the largest retail business in the area” as it stocked many items farmers might need.²⁶



One 1881 invoice from R. S. Kimbrough General Merchandise store lists bolts of fabric, needles, and thread. The Lawrence household purchased thirty yards of calico between February and December of 1881 from this establishment. The Kimbrough store was located in downtown Mesquite, about a mile from the Lawrence Farmstead. Constructed of wood, this store burned in 1903²⁷ and no known photographs exist.

Since Mesquite was created as a railroad station, access to goods by rail was also likely. The post office, created in March 16, 1874, was one of the larger ones in North Texas and, as such, the mail system provided a means for distribution of goods, particularly soft goods such as cloth. The Tennessee Hotel and two local stables served as resting spots for traveling salesmen who visited area stores and sold goods to the farming community.²⁸ The recent book, *Mama Learned Us to Work*, discusses how farmwomen in the South traded vegetables they grew and chickens and eggs they raised in exchange for merchandise carried by these salesmen.²⁹ The Lawrence women would have also traded goods they raised on their farm for such merchandise.

From the sales tags found on yards of cloth in the collection, it is known that, at least from the 1930s forward, the Lawrence family purchased goods from distant Dallas stores such as Woolworth's. Catalogs were also sources of fabric for rural quiltmakers, but no specific catalogs survive that could support that theory regarding the quilting habits of the Lawrence women. However, one daughter who married yet remained in the family home, Onyx, and her husband, Fowler, ordered farm equipment parts and other hardware from Sears Roebuck and Co. Such items were still in stamped crates when donated to HMI.³⁰ Other items that survive in the collection bear tags from Neiman-Marcus and other high-end establishments, such as Sanger Brothers, which document the relative wealth of the Lawrence family.

This family was strongly patriarchal.³¹ S. D. Lawrence ran the farm, handled business transactions, and traveled to and from Dallas frequently. Many gift items in the HMI collection provide evidence that Mr. Lawrence often brought his wife and daughters fabrics and trinkets from his travels into Dallas. Before the 1930s, he would have used the Interurban line, which is documented by the punch tickets found in family trunks. After that Mr. Lawrence probably took the Texas and Pacific Railroad



from Mesquite into Dallas. Mr. Lawrence did not drive his own vehicle.³² The women of the household handled the typical farmstead chores of the time, such as cooking, raising chickens, cleaning and needlework, and gradually took on more farm chores while he traveled away from the farmstead on business.

Influences on the Lawrence women that would have impacted their quilting include needlework books and patterns, their level of education, the travel they did, quilts they saw at exhibitions (including the State Fair of Texas), and quilters with whom they connected, such as those at the church they attended.

The documentation of the collections³³ provided insight into the sources for quilt patterns and ideas available to the Lawrence women. From throughout the women's lives, dozens of needlework books and patterns were found. Sometimes multiples of the same pattern or publication survive, particularly for the patterns from the 1950s. A progression in purchasing from the family-owned stores to later "five & dime" establishments is evidenced by price tags remaining on the items. For instance, the Mesquite store tags mentioned earlier disappear in the collection as more Vogart patterns surface with tags from Moses, Woolworth's, and the Kress Co. Prices were competitive at 29 cents. Recipes, advice books, and homemade patterns that can be matched to surviving clothing pieces are also in the HMI collection. Unfortunately few quilting patterns or books survive in the HMI collections. This may indicate that Louisa Walker Lawrence and Lizzie Walker were using paper patterns traced from friends and family that were later discarded. The simple quilts made later would not have required extensive patterns or templates as many were of the one block style.

Education also influenced the women's quilting skills. The Lawrence girls received at least a high school education, as Opal, Garnet, and Onyx's diplomas are among the papers and letters from the farmstead. Schools in Mesquite were teaching domestic science classes in the 1920s and students were taught in a lab-type setting.³⁴ Thus, in addition to the sewing instruction they received at home, as documented by the handmade doll clothing, they also received more formal education in sewing at school.

Travel broadened their horizons. The family was mobile. Mr. Law-



rence worked in Dallas when not on the farm.³⁵ He also traveled to more distant places as recorded by the surviving souvenirs from various events and countries in the collection. Mrs. Lawrence, according to correspondence found in the family collection, traveled between Mesquite and her family home in Missouri, as did her sister, Lizzie. Not much is known about the travels of the sons, but the daughters did travel somewhat. Opal, according to family interviews, traveled to Niagara Falls, New York after graduating from high school in the 1920s.³⁶ This was clearly important and unusual since the family continues to repeat this story today. Opal's steamer trunk contained several road maps of New England, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

In addition to the above influences, the Lawrence family women were exposed to the quilts on exhibit at The State Fair of Texas. Julie Mahaffey states "farmers were also interested in what others were doing and also the latest in farm advancements. An ideal place to acquire this information was at The State Fair of Texas in Dallas . . . Livestock and crops, as well as home products prepared by the ladies, were exhibited."³⁷ Across the country, fairs were important venues for the distribution of information and public celebration. Sydney Smith, Secretary of the State Fair of Texas noted that, "Statistics for 1910 show that there is a permanent investment of . . . 45 million dollars in the development of Fair enterprises [across the country] with an annual attendance of over 6 million people . . . What a tremendous influence institutions of this character must have exerted in the up building of the American Commonwealth, educationally, commercially and socially."³⁸

The Fair, held for the first time in Dallas in 1886, included a quilt competition by 1887.³⁹ The Fair site, just thirteen miles away, was accessible from the Lawrence farmstead via public transportation. Many of the 1,000,000 visitors each year⁴⁰ took advantage of such transportation to get to the annual event.⁴¹ The HMI collection includes tickets for the Interurban to Dallas, a 1920 Fair ticket and a third place culinary ribbon won there. Not only did they attend, but they competed in the Creative Arts division where both cooking and quilting expertise were on display in the same building.

Only limited photographic evidence survives to indicate what quilts were exhibited at the State Fair. The Ladies' Textile and Fine Arts Building,



Figure 15. The interior of the Women's Building at the State Fair of Texas. Courtesy State Fair of Texas Archives.

which opened in 1910 (see Figures 15 and 16), exhibited Ladies' decorative, plain and fancy sewing.⁴² The categories in which quilts could be exhibited provide information about what the women of the Lawrence family would have seen. In 1900⁴³ there were four basic divisions where competition quilts were exhibited: Old Ladies' Work, Plain Sewing, Fancy Sewing, and the Children's Department.⁴⁴ Old Ladies' Work was limited: "Competitors in this class must be over 60 years of age,"⁴⁵ born in 1840 or earlier. The Old Ladies' Work Class featured quilts in four categories: Quilt, calico; Quilt, worsted; Quilt, silk; and Quilt, Crazy or Japanese.⁴⁶ Plain Sewing had two areas of quilt competition: Quilt, patchwork, calico; and Quilt, patchwork, worsted.⁴⁷ The Fancy Sewing Class had three categories for quilts: Infant's Crib Quilt, silk; Quilt, silk; and Quilt, Crazy or embroidered.⁴⁸ The Children's Department Class was open to boys and girls sixteen years and under at the time of the Fair and awards were given for two quilt categories: Quilt, patchwork, calico, not quilted; and Quilt, Crazy work or Japanese.⁴⁹

The categories open for quilts changed over the years. Those outlined above remained in place until 1924 when the plain and fancy sewing classes were combined into the department of quilts, but the five categories remained except that the Infant's Crib quilt, silk, had been replaced by Quilt, cotton, appliquéd. In 1929 men were allowed to enter



Figure 16. Cover of 1908 Annual Catalogue for the State Fair of Texas showing the exterior of the Ladies' Textile and Fine Arts Building at the State Fair of Texas. Courtesy State Fair of Texas Archives.

the competition.⁵⁰ These categories remained in place until 1931 when a distinction was made for Quilt, quilting done by exhibitor.⁵¹

Although no evidence supports that the Lawrence quilts were entered, they would have fit in the Quilt, Patchwork, Calico division. It is interesting to note that in 1939 a Yo-Yo quilts category was added to the State Fair of Texas quilt competition.⁵² The Lawrence collection includes several stacks of rounded materials used for Yo-Yo's which were not made up.

Another influence, although possibly minimal, on the quilting of the Lawrence women may have been quilting done by the women of the church they attended. Although Lawrence is a family name on an early parishioner roll for Mesquite's First Baptist Church congregation, the daughters became involved in the life of the First United Methodist Church in Mesquite.⁵³ Opal was one of the first female "stewards." She also served in the nursery for over fifty years. Onyx served as secretary to an early evening circle. Opal, Garnet, and Onyx stopped attending Sunday School after Louisa passed away in 1940.⁵⁴ To date no documen-



tation has been found on the type of quilts made by the women of this church.

Since the complete environment in which these quilts were created survives, it is appropriate to consider questions such as when they would have had the time to quilt. Before the death of S. D. Lawrence, the women would have quilted as part of their normal household activities. Once he died and they took over the running of the farmstead, it is difficult to pinpoint when they would have worked on their craft. It is also at about this point that the quality of the quilts seems to decline. In a newspaper article written about Opal and Onyx in 1988, Opal alludes to the fact that they had kept the farm going many years.⁵⁵ She and Onyx were still delivering and selling eggs to their Mesquite customers a week before Opal passed away in September 1995.

The quilts that date after S. D. Lawrence's death in 1934 tend to be the utility and scrap quilts. They probably worked quilting into their routine as it had been before they took over all of the farmstead responsibilities and possibly did needlework in the evening and on Sunday afternoons after church.

The family home, which is built in a modified cross plan, was designed to provide comfort and light in the North Texas climate. The Lawrences enjoyed maximum air circulation and natural light from the large, airy rooms and ceiling-to-floor windows, which would have allowed the quilters to work until sunset without artificial light.

The quilts of the Lawrence women are a microcosm of the quilting being done in North Texas from the late nineteenth century into the middle of the twentieth century. Over four dozen quilts made by these women survive. Their quilts were influenced by many factors over the years including their rural location on the blackland prairie. Their mother's family, relative wealth, education, travels, and an ability to receive goods all probably had some effect on their quilting activities. No doubt, the family's frugality contributed to the survival of so many quilts.



Notes and References

1. Alice Marriott, *Hell on Horses and Women*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953.)
2. No statewide quilt documentation and few pieces of scholarly research have been done on Texas quilts. What exists includes the books done early in the revival of interest in quilts during the last quarter of the 20th century. These include *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art* by Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Allen, which is a rich oral history of quilters from West Texas and the Southwest, all more than 300 miles from Mesquite, Texas; *Texas Quilts, Texas Women* by Suzanne Yabsley in 1984 and *Lone Stars: A Legacy of Texas Quilts, 1936–1936* in 1986 by cousins Karoline Patterson Bresenhan and Nancy O'Bryant Puentes. While these document Texas quilters, neither focuses on the work of one family of quilters nor do they evaluate a body of work.
3. The authors of this paper had the unique opportunity to research these materials when they accessioned all the materials left by the family to Historic Mesquite, Inc. and catalogued the objects for the collections of Historic Mesquite, Inc. A research trip to the homes of most of the heirs of the Lawrence family in May 2004 provided the opportunity to see the quilts and other household furnishings which were retained in the family and underscored both the quality of the quilts made by the Lawrence women and the fine furnishings with which they surrounded themselves.
4. Contract of Sale, City of Mesquite, co-executors, Lawrence estate, 1996.
5. The “blackland prairie” is a term used for the land in North Texas that is level to rolling plain which supports prairie-type vegetation, such as corn and soybeans.
6. The number of household members is approximate because it is unknown whether the Lawrence household had any servants or hired hands living with them on the property. In 1900 those family members known to be living in Mesquite on the Lawrence farmstead were S. D. Lawrence and his wife Louisa, their daughter Ruby and newborn Pearl and sons Hill, Hugh and Eddie and two sons from S. D. Lawrence’s first family. It is unclear whether the daughter from the first marriage, at the age of 21 was still living with them or had married and moved out.
7. City of Mesquite Development Services, Planning and Zoning.
8. Max McCullough, *A Stake in the Prairie*, Chap. II: Peters and Mercer Colonies, Mesquite Historical Committee, Taylor Publishing Co., Dallas, TX, 1984, 27.



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9. "Making History: Lawrence clan going strong at family farm," *Mesquite News*, 25 September 1988.
10. Karl Stundins, *S. D. Lawrence Farmstead*, National Register of Historic Places research.
11. "Making History," 25 September 1988.
12. Lawrence family genealogy documents.
13. Marriage license, March 21, 1942.
14. Donation agreement, co-executors of Lawrence estate and Historic Mesquite, Inc., 2002.
15. The quilts were dated by co-author, Marian Ann Montgomery, Ph.D. based on her education and almost 20 years of working with quilts in museums and private collections.
16. Quilts documented May 14, 2004 on a visit to the homes of the heirs in Glen Rose, Texas.
17. Letter, Lizzie Walker to Mrs. Ruth Hardesty, Mrs. Etta Durham and Mrs. S. H. Walker, dated Aug. 28, 1909. Louisa Walker Lawrence's father's name was J. W. Walker.
18. Curatorial inventory, August 2002.
19. Interview with Hope Lawrence Sheppard, niece of the Lawrence women, November 2002.
20. Ibid.
21. An oral interview with Linda Shaw, great-niece-in-law of the Lawrence women, and Brenda Whittle, family friend, on May 14, 2004, indicated that toward the end of their lives, the Lawrence women did very little needlework. They reported that they never saw them making quilts or embroidering materials after the late 1960s. They were avid television fans—enjoying sports, hockey, and football. The Dallas Cowboys' season schedule was always posted in their home, but during visits the women cooked and visited. At this point they sewed for themselves and family members, and patterns and fabric survive in the collections of Historic Mesquite, Inc.
22. Physical inventory, conducted June-July, 1996.
23. "Making History," 25 September 1988.
24. Sue Reich, "Quiltmaking that Saw Us Through the War Years," *Blanket Statements*, Winter 2005, 3.
25. Coleman, Penny, *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in World War II* (NY: Crown Publishers, 1995), 46–49.
26. Julie Mahaffey, *A Stake in the Prairie*, Chap. V: Mesquite, 1887–1905, 83.
27. Ibid., 86.
28. Ibid.



29. Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 49–105.
30. Physical inventory, conducted June–July, 1996.
31. Sheppard interview.
32. Ibid.
33. Documentation of the artifacts given by the Lawrence Family heirs to Historic Mesquite, Inc. was conducted by the authors during the Summer and Fall of 2002.
34. Oral interview, conducted November 22, 2004, with Rita Crump, former Home Economics teacher, Mesquite Independent School District, and current school board member, on her research into district records.
35. Artifact documentation.
36. Oral interview with Lawrence Shaw, great-nephew of the Lawrence women, November 2002.
37. Mahaffey, 80.
38. Sydney Smith, *History Dallas Fair Enterprise*, manuscript 1910, State Fair of Texas Archives, 3–4.
39. “Mrs. Georgia Crockett: Hall of Fame Winner,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 13 October 1970.
40. Summary of State Fair Attendance Figures, manuscript document Dallas Public Library State Fair of Texas Clipping File. The Fair attendance numbers vary. During times of war or economic difficulties the numbers declined. By 1927 attendance was 1,000,000. The Depression years saw some decline in these numbers but by 1938 the attendance figure was again near 1,000,000. Nancy Wiley, *The Great State Fair of Texas; An Illustrated History*, (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co., 2000), 56, 62, 68, 80, 85, 87, 89, 93, 95, 97, 99, 106, 114, 133, 136, 137, 139, 149.
41. “Little Sisters Take Dallas Excursion,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 4 October 1969.
42. “Historical Summary State Fair of Texas,” manuscript January 1958 in the Texas State Fair clipping file of the Dallas Public Library, 2.
43. The earliest annual catalog, or premium list to survive, dates from 1900. The premium books list all the categories in which premiums (cash prizes) would be awarded and quilts are listed.
44. State Fair of Texas Annual Catalog/ Dallas September 29–October 14, 1900, 44–51.
45. Ibid., 44.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., 46–47.



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48. Ibid., 47.
49. Ibid., 51.
50. State Fair of Texas Premium List Dallas October 12–27, 1929, 115.
51. State Fair of Texas Premium List Dallas October 11–26, 1930, 115.
52. State Fair of Texas Premium List Dallas October 7–22, 1939, 104.

Appendix. Lawrence Family Quilts in the Collections of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

Identification	Circa Date	Size	Piecing Method
#1 Eight Point Pieced Star	1870–1880	81" x 87 ½"	Hand pieced
#2 AS Churn Dash	1890	64" x 78 ½"	Hand pieced
#3 BJ Ocean Wave	1915	73" x 83"	Hand pieced
#4 BU Crazy Quilt	Dated 1886 LLW initials	73" x 84"	Wool thread, mostly wool
#5 Crazy Quilt	Dated 1888	68" x 79"	Wool thread, mostly wool
#6 Crazy Quilt	Dated 1886 and 1887 Initialed LHW	65 ½" x 78"	Wool thread, mostly wool
#7 BR Foundation Pieced String Quilt Top	1940–50	69" x 74 ½"	Machine pieced
#8 BD 25 Patch	1925–35	65" x 85"	Machine pieced
#9 BK 25 Patch	1915	67½" x 82½"	Hand and Machine pieced
#10 BC 25 Patch	1925–50	63" x 84 ½"	Hand pieced
#11 BF Economy Patch or Square on Point	1925–40	67" x 85"	Hand pieced Dark plaid fabrics



- 53. *A Stake in the Prairie*, Appendix: A Survey of Churches, 237.
- 54. Sheppard interview.
- 55. “Making History,” 25 September 1988.

Quilting or tied	Binding	Batting
Hand quilted	White straight grain binding	Cotton
Hand quilted	Red stripe fabric used on bias	Cotton
Hand quilted	Pink Border Print	Cotton
N/A	Not bound or backed	N/A
N/A	Not bound or backed	N/A
N/A	Not bound or backed	N/A
N/A	Silk and rayon rectangles and squares. Some sewn on flour sack foundation. Not bound or backed.	N/A
Hand quilted	Blue stripped backing turned to front	Cotton
Hand quilted	Blue stripped backing turned to front	Cotton
Hand quilted	Floral pink backing turned to front. “Onyx” written on tag.	Cotton
Hand quilted	Plaid backing turned to front	Cotton



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Identification	Circa Date	Size	Piecing Method
#12 BH Economy Patch or Square on Point	1925–1940	76" x 80"	Machine pieced Pastel floral fabrics
#13 One Patch	1925–1940	66 ½" x 86"	Machine pieced
#14 BP One Patch	1920s	64" x 74"	Hand and Machine pieced
#15 BM One Patch	1930s	65 ½" x 84"	Machine pieced
#16 BI One Patch	1920–40	66 ½" x 74"	Hand and Machine pieced
#17 AZ Nine Patch	1910	68" x 79"	Hand pieced
#18 BN Double Nine Patch	1890–1900	62" x 74 ¼"	Hand pieced
#19 BW Flock/ Wild Geese Variation	1940s	71 ½" x 80"	Hand pieced
#20 Mosaic/ Wild Geese Variation	1910	68" x 78"	Hand pieced
#22 AY Crosses and Losses	1900–1925	65 ½" x 78"	Hand pieced. Signed in red embroidery "Onyx"
#23 BA Whole cloth utility quilt	1900–1920	79" x 78"	N/A
#24 BB Whole Cloth Quilt	1940	77" x 64 ½"	N/A
BL Whole Cloth Quilt in black fabric	1935–50	84 ½" x 84"	Machine pieced
No tag Lemoyne Star every other star point is string pieced	1910	77" x 86"	Hand pieced
CZ Charm quilt or Pyramid quilt	1935–1950	86" x 66"	Machine pieced
#27 Kaleidoscope or Spiderweb Quilt Top	1940–50	89" x 57"	Machine pieced, some on newspaper



Quilting or tied	Binding	Batting
Hand quilted	Straight of grain floral fabric used in blocks	Cotton
Hand quilted	Blue stripped backing turned to front	Cotton
Hand quilted	Blue stripped backing turned to front	Cotton
Hand quilted	Front and back turned under, "Onyx" embroidered on back corner	Cotton
Hand quilted	Blue stripped backing turned to front	Cotton
Hand quilted	Muslin backing turned to front	Cotton
Hand quilted	Blue print backing brought to front	Cotton
Top only, not quilted	N/A	N/A
Hand quilted	White dotted binding cut on the straight of grain	Cotton
Hand quilted	Red stripe fabric on bias	Cotton
Tied	Front and back turned under	Cotton
Tied	Front and back turned under	Cotton
Hand quilted	Front turned to back	Cotton
Hand quilted by the Mesquite Quilt Guild	Grey and white floral plaid cut on the straight of grain	Cotton
Hand quilting with machine quilting on gingham and hexagon fabric edging which was added later		Cotton
N/A	N/A	N/A