Uncoverings 2005

Volume 26 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Kathlyn Sullivan

The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Claire Somersille Nolan

The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City was made by Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret, slaves of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton at "The Knob" in Russellville, Logan County, Kentucky. Very few quilts identified as being made by slaves exist. Even fewer of these quilts possess documentation identifying the slave by name as is the case with this quilt. The data regarding this rare quilt and its makers adds valuable information to the body of facts concerning antebellum quilt history. This study verifies the date that this important quilt was made, proving that the quilt was made while the women were enslaved. This study also reveals the identities of Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret, illuminating the lifestyle of these slave quiltmakers after emancipation. This was accomplished using books, wills, censuses, a death certificate, and an account book.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City owns a spectacular silk Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt (see Figure 1).

According to a note from the donor, the silk Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt was made between 1837 and 1850 by Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret who were slaves of the Marmaduke Beckwith Morton family at "The Knob" near Russellville, Logan County, Kentucky (see Figure 2).[1] The slaves who made the quilt were identified only as Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret, as was the tradition during slavery. Makers of such a masterpiece should be more properly identified, so that future generations

Figure 1. The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt. Photo courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Roger Morton and Dr. Paul C. Morton, 1962. (62.144)

can fully appreciate the work of art and the background of the women who made it.

This study was undertaken to authenticate the date and to identify the makers of the quilt. This was done in two ways. One study involved analyzing the quilt's fabric, dye, technique, style, and pattern. The second method involved learning more about the identities of Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret using public documents and books about that period of time in Russellville, Logan County, Kentucky.

The quilt measures 88 ¼ x 87 ¼ inches. It contains sixteen 20½ inch square pieced Star of Bethlehem, also called Prairie Star or Harvest Star, blocks alternating with 11½ inch square plain blocks which are quilted

Figure 2. "The Knob," printed in *David Morton A Biography*, is depicted in a pre-Civil War pen and ink sketch and was destroyed by fire in 1890. Courtesy of Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.

and stuffed using trapunto technique. The top fabric is silk. Fewer old silk quilts exist than cotton or linen quilts, because silk is less durable than cotton or linen.[2] Fortunately, this quilt was well cared for and donated to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1962. The pieced blocks are made of printed and solid silk in many colors: peach, olive green, brown, bright blue, red, and black. The trapunto blocks and border are made of "changeable" silk of pink and green. The binding is lavender silk. The backing is pink cotton. The batting and trapunto work are comprised of carded cotton. The quilt is in very fragile condition.[3]

Indigenous wildflowers and ferns form the designs for the trapunto blocks. Diagonal lines of stitching in the background of the botanicals are quilted approximately one-quarter inch apart. The trapunto leaves are raised approximately three eighths of an inch. Stuffed work in certain parts of a quilt was not uncommon in the late 1840's.[4] Quilting in the pieced areas was done one quarter inch inside each small diamond. The smaller plain blocks and the border are quilted in crosshatch. The binding is approximately one-quarter inch on the front. The pieced diamonds comprising

the stars measure one and one half inches on one side and one and three quarter inches on the other. The quilting stitches are extremely even. The accurate hand piecing also displays the highest quality workmanship.

Dating the Quilt

The method for dating quilts, as outlined in *Clues in the Calico* by Barbara Brackman was used to date the quilt. Fabric, dye, technique, style, and pattern were examined for dating.

Fabric

Fabric is an important factor for determining the date of a quilt. The examiner needs to confirm that the fabric was available to the quilter at the place and time in question. Until the twentieth century when synthetic fabric was developed, the primary fabrics available in the United States were silk, cotton, wool, and linen. Silk and wool are protein fibers and cotton and linen are cellulose fibers.[5]

Imported silk was used in American quilts beginning in the eighteenth century. Manufacturers tried to grow silk in the North in the 1830's, but did not have success with the mulberry tree due to the cold climate. In the South, cotton growing and production were more lucrative than silk growing and production.[6] Generally, imported silk was less expensive and of higher quality than that produced domestically.

Silk made in the Shaker colony at South Union, Kentucky was of high quality, but it was expensive. The South Union Shaker community was about ten miles from "The Knob," where the quilt was made. Sericulture, which is the production of raw silk and the cultivation of silkworms for that purpose, was practiced in Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee from 1808–1815.[7] According to nineteenth century writers, the Shakers in South Union Kentucky introduced silk growing to the region.[8] In 1835, South Union Sisters "made 10 changeable ones [kerchiefs] out of the floss silk, thus saving all the cocoons."[9] The "changeable" or iridescent silk was made by using one color silk in the warp and a different color in the weft. The silk took on a variable appearance depending on the angle of view.[10] Before the Civil War, silk production at South Union was plenti-

ful enough to supply silk for sale.[11] Documentary evidence states that in 1859 Shakers in South Union sold silk handkerchiefs for one dollar each.[12]

Weighted silk was popular in the 1880's and 1890's. This silk contains metals and is seen often in crazy quilts. The process added body and made the lightweight fabric easier to sew. Over time, however, the metals caused the silk to disintegrate.[13] The top of The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt was made from silk from the first half of the nineteenth century. This is most likely the case for three reasons. The first reason is that the silk in the quilt looks like the "changeable" silk kerchief on display at the Shaker Museum in South Union, KY. The second reason is that people living at "the Knob" at that time had access to purchased Shaker Colony silk. "The Knob" is only about ten miles from South Union. The third reason is that since the silk is in such good condition, it is probably not "weighted." The small diamonds show little wear. Only the yellow silk used in the third star from the left in the top row, has deteriorated. This is probably due to the dye and not the fabric, since this condition occurs in only one fabric. In *Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them*, Ruth Finley mentions that a similar situation occurred in her cotton Star of Bethlehem Quilt used in the frontispiece. A print with yellow dots backgrounded in red now contains holes about the size of peas where the yellow dots were.[14] The quilted and stuffed areas of the Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt also show little signs of wear although the fabric has faded. The changeable silk of pink and green shows primarily green now.

Solid pink cotton glazed fabric used for the backing, appears to be woven in a factory and not homespun. For the most part manufactured fabric replaced homespun in the nineteenth century. However, some plantations were still producing homespun of good quality. [15]

Cotton became commonplace in the second quarter of the nineteenth century,[16] due to textile inventions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793 and Samuel Slater developed the first cotton-spinning mill in America in 1798. The first cotton spun and woven on machines was produced in Massachusetts in 1814.[17] As mill woven cotton production increased, all-cotton quilts became more popular.

The type of silk fabric used in the top is consistent with the quilt being made in 1837–1850. During that period, the Shakers of South Union, Kentucky produced and sold changeable silk consistent with the silk in the trapunto blocks. South Union Shaker changeable silk is most likely the predominant silk used in the quilt. The solid pink cotton backing, which appears to be woven in a mill also, supports that date.

Dye

Natural dyes were used during 1837–1850. In 1856 a lavender dye was produced from coal tar as aniline dyes were discovered.[18]

The following are two Shaker dye recipes from the 1849 Dye Journal of Eldress Hester Adams:

> Pink Dye
> Buy at an Apothecary a saucer of Carmine which costs about 25 cents, with which you will find directions for using it. This is one of the most beautiful and convenient ways of renewing old silk handkerchiefs, ribbons, etc.
> A little stiffening of Gum Arabic in the dye, improves the looks.
> Balm Blossoms and also the blossoms of the bergamot plant, make a pretty pink dye. Cream tartar or oil of vitriol, sufficient to give it a slight acid taste, must be put into the water in which the articles are wet before dying. (Note: Carmine is red or purple pigment obtained from cochineal).[19]
>
> Green. For 4 lb. of goods.
> Take 5½ oz. of ground Fustic, 5 oz. of Alum, ⅔ oz. of Red Tartar, ⅔ oz. of gill of Chemic.
> Put your fustic into a bag; put into a convenient-size kettle of water, with the above ingredients; then boil well together 30 minutes and stir the bags, cool a little, then add your Chemic and not before.
> Stir up well and enter your goods, reel well for ten minutes then commence boiling and turning for 30 or until your color suits; rinse well and dry. The Chemic is made in this manner.
> To ⅔ of an oz. of Indigo add 4 oz. of Oil of Vitriol. Stir well together

for one hour, then let it stand and settle for 48 hours and it is fit for use. From an Englishman, Manchester, NH 1849[20]

These or similar dyes could have been used for the fabric in the trapunto blocks of the quilt. Pink dyed silk in the warp and green dyed silk in the weft or vice versa would create the changeable characteristic.

Technique

The pieced star blocks were constructed by hand, and four-layer trapunto was used for the trapunto style blocks in The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt.

American inventor Walter Hunt invented the first lockstitch sewing machine in 1834. This machine used an eye-pointed needle and oscillating shuttle. Another American inventor, Elias Howe invented a similar machine and patented it in 1846. American inventor Isaac Merritt Singer merged several patents into one sewing machine. In 1860, he successfully mass-produced the machines, making them affordable for more Americans.[21]

The choice of piecing technique (hand vs. machine) is valuable only to rule out a pre-1846 manufacture date if the item is machine pieced. Since The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt is hand pieced, this factor cannot be used as a basis for dating the quilt.

Two techniques of trapunto were used in the nineteenth century. In one technique stuffing is added before batting and backing, and in the other technique, stuffing is added after batting and backing. The first technique is also known as four-layer trapunto, where the motif to be stuffed is outlined in stitching. A back layer of loosely woven gauze is attached to the back of the trapunto block. The back layer is then cut, stuffed and resewn. The batting and backing are then added. The second technique is three-layer trapunto, where the top, batting, and backing are quilted first. The backing is then cut, stuffing added, and then resewn. In the first technique, holding the quilt to the light will reveal the seams on the inside. In the second technique, the seams will show on the backing.[22]

The four-layer trapunto technique is used in The Star of Bethlehem

Variation Quilt. No correlation has been shown for the type of stuffing technique and date. Therefore, the stuffing technique does not substantiate a date.

Style

In order to confirm the date of the quilt in question, it is useful to show that other quilters were making quilts in the same style during the same time period. Quilters, like other artists, are influenced by styles of the time period in which they work. Another fine example of stuffed quilting in Logan County, Kentucky during this time period is an all-white trapunto quilt made by Virginia Ivey in 1856. The quilt is in the Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution. The quilt represents the judging ring at the county fair and has the following inscription quilted around the inside of the ring: "1856 A REPRESENTATION OF THE FAIR GROUND NEAR RUSSELLVILLE KENTUCKY." The stuffed work depicts men, sheep, pigs, cows, horses with riders, and horses with buggies inside the judging ring.[23] Duke and Harding cite family correspondence which reveals that Virginia Ivey made two other quilts. In 1985 one of those quilts was found and Joel Kopp, a New York dealer authenticated it. The quilt displays trapunto and appliqué, and was made around 1850. The trapunto needlework depicts a Henry Clay statue and Andrew Jackson on horseback, in addition to animals and two embroidered cardinals. The J. B. Speed Museum in Louisville, Kentucky now owns the quilt, after private individuals purchased the quilt for the Museum. [24] Another important trapunto quilt in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art was also made in Kentucky. The quilt was made by Mary Walker Stith Jones in Breckinridge County, Kentucky c. 1815–1818. Besides trapunto, it features other needlework styles including embroidery and drawnwork in a sampler format. A male slave named Morley, owned by the Stith family, wove the cloth from homegrown cotton.[25]

The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt uses two styles of quiltmaking, which are piecing and trapunto quilting. The combination of these styles forms a secondary style, which was popular in the mid-nineteenth century.

The pieced style of quiltmaking has been practiced in America since the early eighteenth century.

The earliest known American pieced quilt is a geometric design in brocaded silk and velvet. It is believed to have been created in 1704 by Sarah Sedgewick Leverett (wife of John Leverett, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1673 to 1697) and her daughter Elizabeth. The lining is paper and includes parts of the 1701 catalog of Harvard University. The Leverett family owns this quilt.[26]

The trapunto style of quilting has been practiced in America since the eighteenth century. The style reached its peak of popularity in the 1790's with whitework quilts, but stylish quilters still practiced trapunto until the 1830's.[27]

Stuffing and cording occur in pieced, appliqued, and whole cloth quilts.[28] After the popularity of trapunto-only quilts subsided, quilters used stuffed work and cording in pieced quilts from 1830–1880.[29] Since the quilt in question combined trapunto with piecing, a table was constructed of dated (preferably date-inscribed) examples of this type of quilt. This evolution was confirmed by comparing quilts in the trapunto and pieced style, that had specific descriptions related to trapunto or stuffing.

The nineteen examples of trapunto and pieced quilts found in books were all dated in this period. They are:

Description	*Date*	*Location*
1812 Quilt	early 19th century[30]	Maryland
Central Medallion	c. 1800–1825[31]	Alabama
Double Nine Patch	c. 1825[32]	unknown
Stuffed Work Border Pinwheel Quilt	c. 1830[33]	unknown
Sunbursts Quilt	c. 1830[34]	Pennsylvania
Star of Bethlehem Quilt	c. 1835[35]	possibly Maryland
Pieced and trapunto quilt	c. 1840[36]	Missouri
Sunburst	1840[37]	Ohio
Trilobe Flower and Trapunto Clipper Ships	c. 1840–1850[38]	probably MA
Feathered Star	c. 1840–60[39]	Ohio

Sunburst Quilt	mid 19th century[40]	Maryland
Feathered Star	c. 1850[41]	Ohio
Lone Star	c. 1850[42]	Tennessee
North Carolina Lily variation	c. 1850[43]	unknown
Pieced Flower quilt with stuffed work	c. 1850[44]	New England
Peony (variation on Lemoyne Star)	c. 1850–1875[45]	possibly Missouri
Feathered Star	1865[46]	Tennessee
Sunburst	c. 1865[47]	Kentucky
Union Square Quilt	1866[48]	Indiana

Trapunto quilts of the nineteenth century were rare after the Civil War.[49] Since the pieced and trapunto style of quiltmaking was popular prior to 1850, this date is consistent with the date of 1837–1850 attributed to The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt. With the Emancipation Proclamation signed in 1863, and the thirteenth amendment which ended slavery in the United States ratified in 1865, one can conclude that the quilt was made while the women were enslaved.

Pattern

Pattern date of first appearance and date of popularity are useful facts to determine the date of a quilt.

"A Chronological Index to Pieced Quilt Patterns" 1775–1825 by Barbara Brackman lists seven examples of the Star of Bethlehem pattern.[50] The pattern number listed in *An Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* by Barbara Brackman is 4005. The earliest example is the frontispiece in *Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them* by Ruth Finley who owned this quilt in 1929.[51] Although Finley called it her Revolutionary Quilt, it has no date inscription and is probably 1810's. A similar Rising Sun or Star of Bethlehem quilt made by Mary Totten was attributed to 1810.[52] A Sunburst or Rising Sun quilt possibly made by Mary Totten was attributed to the first half of the nineteenth century.[53]

Six of the 885 date-inscribed quilts in *Clues in the Calico* used The

Star of Bethlehem pattern. The earliest date-inscribed Star of Bethlehem Quilt was made by the niece of Mary Totten, with a date of 1835.[54]

The pattern dates of first appearance of c. Revolutionary War (date attributed) and 1835 (date inscribed) are consistent with the 1837–1850 date of The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt in this study. The Star of Bethlehem pattern has been popular since the 1775–1825 time period. The Star of Bethlehem pattern is still popular today. Other names for this pattern are Lone Star and Radiant Star. The fact that this pattern had been popular for decades of quiltmaking shows that it could have been produced during 1837–1850 time period

Study of fabric, dye, technique, style, and pattern explains the supplies and designs available to Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret. However, study of the quiltmakers themselves gives insight into their lifestyle. This information describes daily activities accomplished despite problems and hardships that they faced during slavery. Their lives after slavery remained extremely difficult. These women were never fully emancipated due to the contexts of Reconstruction and the restrictive Jim Crow laws. Learning about their lives during these hard times provides further understanding into the lives of black nineteenth century quiltmakers.

The lives of their husbands and other family members were similarly difficult and cannot be separated from those of the quiltmakers. They were very supportive wives, who were fully involved in family life. Their husbands were originally owned by interesting historical figures, Reverend John Littlejohn and Major Richard Bibb.

Eve, Mother of Ellen and Margaret (c.1805- c.1860–1870)

Slave owner William Jordan Morton brought Eve to Logan County, Kentucky from Virginia, when he and his family emigrated in 1815.[55] William Jordan Morton wrote a will dated December 23, 1826 in which he bequeathed his slaves to his children. Eve and her infant child, Ellen, were to be given to Henry P. Morton, the eleventh of his twelve children with Martha Pryor.[56]

Instead Eve and Ellen became slaves of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton, William Jordan Morton's tenth child with Martha Pryor.[57] They lived

at "The Knob," the Morton family seat, near Russellville, Kentucky.[58] The reason for this transfer of ownership is unknown. To his credit "Marse Marmaduke" was known as a kind master.[59]

Eve's children were Dick, Joe, Ellen, John, and Margaret.[60]

The 1850 slave census for M. B. Morton in Russellville, Logan County, Kentucky, lists a black female aged forty-five.[61] This is probably Eve, since the forty-five-year-old is the oldest female slave listed on that census. She appears to be the most senior slave woman. This information indicates that Eve was born in 1805. Eve died before 1870, as she is not listed in the 1870 census in the household of Marmaduke or her daughters.

Morton family members spoke very highly of Eve and her accomplishments. David Morton, son of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton, and prominent minister of the Methodist church, contracted to install a memorial stained glass window at Paine College in Augusta, Georgia in honor of Eve. After his death in 1898, his sons carried out his wishes.[62] Dr. Morton spoke about Eve in a public speech:

> I have had three mothers: my own, whom I never saw, or at least cannot remember to have seen; my stepmother who was a benediction to me as long as she lived and of whom my recollection has been ever most holy since she went away; and my black mammy, Aunt Eve, who nursed me as baby and scolded me as a little child.[63]

Dr. Morton said that Eve encouraged his religious sentiments by telling him of his baptism:

> I was often told of it by my old "black mammy," to whom I am indebted for the first nourishment that I ever received and for many other things that no words can tell. She was a strong Baptist, but a firm believer in infant baptism. If she was inconsistent in this-why, she was inconsistent.[64]

Eve's son, Dick Morton, was a childhood playmate of David Morton. When David Morton died, Dick Morton and his cousin Ned Morton, dug the grave and buried David (see Figure 3).

M.B. Morton, grandson of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton, served

Figure 3. Dick, David, and Ned Morton. Courtesy of Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.

as managing editor of the *Nashville Banner* for over thirty-eight years, starting in 1898. He was awarded the title of Managing Editor Emeritus of the *Nashville Banner* on April 8, 1937. He talks of Eve in his book, *Kentuckians Are Different*:

> The Morton family was more attached to Aunt Eve than any other Negro. My grandmother died early and her sister who later became the wife of M.B. Morton, and Aunt Eve reared my grandfather's children. My father had a great affection for Aunt Eve, as did all of us. He used to tell a story to illustrate how Eve looked after the children. On one occasion he and another boy had climbed up on the fence and the other boy, who was larger than he was teasing him. Aunt Eve came by and saw the situation, picked up a plank and knocked the other boy off the fence, saying: "How dare you mistreat that motherless child?" This was a frequent question among Negroes of that time. They considered a motherless boy or a motherless girl needed attention and affection and would never allow them to be mistreated in any way.[65]

M.B. Morton also speaks of Eve's physical attributes and describes her as a hard worker: "Aunt Eve was not black. She was medium sized, very healthy and strong, and did a great deal of work, most of which was voluntary. She evidently had a strain of white blood in her veins, but all her children were black."[66]

He also mentions the intelligence of Eve's children compared to Eve's cousin Jennie's children: "Most of Aunt Jennie's children ranked below Eve's children in intelligence and very few of them could count to a hundred. As a rule they could count about sixty."[67]

He talks about his affection for Eve, her daughters and granddaughter: "Among the Negro women who were slaves of our family my favorites were: Aunt Eve, Margaret, Ellen and her daughter Luan."[68]

He describes Eve's superb character:

> I knew Aunt Eve, and in fact all the Negroes that I have mentioned, as a small boy. Aunt Eve was considered practically perfect in character. She was faithful, truthful, affectionate, and stood like the rock of Gibraltar for what she considered right. I believe she was a member of the Baptist church. Marmaduke B. Morton was a Methodist, but most of his Negroes were Baptist. All Negroes of that period who were church members belonged to the white churches and all churches had a gallery for the Negroes. They partook of the sacrament just as the whites did, and a few of them remained with the white churches after "freedom."[69]

Ellen, Daughter of Eve (1826–1899)

Ellen Morton, the first child of Eve Morton was born in 1826 (see Figure 4).[70] Ellen bore two daughters named Evaline and Luan. Evaline, the eldest, was born in 1852.[71] The 1850 slave census for M. B. Morton lists a twenty-three year old black female.[72] This is Ellen.

Ellen was keeping house and her daughter, Evaline, was a washerwoman according to the 1870 census. Evaline could read.[73] Ellen's husband, Moses Littlejohn, was listed as head of household. Also living in the household were grandsons, George, seven years old, and Dick, five years old.

In 1880, Ellen was widowed and living with Marmaduke Beckwith Morton. She cared for him at "The Knob," until his death in 1887.[74] Ellen's grandchildren, Dick Morton, fifteen years old, George Littlejohn, ten years old, Matt Littlejohn, eight years old, and, Neely Littlejohn, seven years old also resided at "The Knob" under Ellen's care.[75] Ellen and the children are identified as servants. Dick Morton and Matt Littlejohn attended school in 1880. Dick, Matt, and George could read. George could also write.[76] The 1880 census lists James H. Bowden as head of household. James was a prominent Kentucky lawyer who married Nannie, daughter of Marmaduke Morton. Marmaduke was listed as a boarder.[77]

Figure 4. Workers at "The Knob." Two of the women are most likely Ellen and Margaret. Perhaps the tall man fifth from the left is Moses. Courtesy of Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.

James H. Bowden and Nannie Bowden witnessed Ellen's will, dated December 8, 1899. In this will, Ellen bequeathed to her grandchildren, Dickey Morton and Nellie Littlejohn, "all the property, real personal and mixed."[78] Ellen died later that month in December 1899. Her will was recorded on Monday January 1, 1900 by the Logan County Clerk, M.B. Morton, a descendant of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton.[79]

M.B. Morton describes Ellen as a seamstress in *Kentuckians Are Different:*

> Ellen remained with my grandfather throughout slavery and afterward until he died. She was as expert a house-servant as anybody ever saw and was a good seamstress. Her daughter, Luan, was not much older than I but she always petted me and would go fishing and bring me the fish she caught and do other things that are always grateful to a young boy.[80]

Margaret, Daughter of Eve (c. 1832–c. 1900–1910)

Margaret Morton was born about 1832. The 1850 slave census for M.B. Morton lists a black twelve-year-old female slave. This slave would be Margaret, since she is the next youngest after the twenty-three-year-old slave, who is Ellen.[81] The age twelve should really be seventeen or eighteen, since Margaret is listed as 37 in the 1870 census and 48 in the 1880 census.

The 1870 census shows Margaret lived at "The Knob" with her family. Her occupation was cook for the household. She lived with her husband, Thomas Bibb, and their four sons, Henry, thirteen years old, Ambrose, nine years old, Richard, four years old, and Dan, three years old. Henry's occupation is listed as waiter. Ambrose attended school that year and he could read and write.[82]

In 1880 Margaret and Thomas Bibb resided away from "The Knob." They lived with Mariah Morton, a twenty-six-year-old widowed relative.[83]

M. B. Morton talks about Margaret's occupation in *Kentuckians Are Different*: "Margaret was our cook for a number of years."[84]

In 1900, Margaret and Thomas lived with their son Daniel and his

family. Daniel was the only surviving child out of ten children born to the couple.[85] In 1910, Thomas lived with Daniel and his family. Since Thomas is listed as a widower, Margaret must have died between 1900 and 1910.[86]

Moses, Husband of Ellen (1810–c.1870–1880)

Moses Littlejohn, husband of Ellen Morton was born in 1810 in Virginia.[87] Reverend John Littlejohn stated in his will dated May 11, 1836 that Moses be set free at the age of thirty-five in accordance with the will of William Adams, Fairfax County, Virginia.

Reverend John Littlejohn was a Methodist circuit rider. President James Madison entrusted him with the Declaration of Independence and other important government documents during the War of 1812 when the British Army advanced on Washington, DC. President Madison sent these documents by wagon to Reverend Littlejohn, who was then both Methodist preacher and sheriff in Loudoun County, Virginia.[88]

Reverend Littlejohn died in May 1836.[89] His son John W. Littlejohn, executor of the will, died in 1837. There is no mention of the freedom of Moses Littlejohn in John W. Littlejohn's 1837 will.[90] It is unclear whether Moses Littlejohn attained his freedom in 1845 on his thirty-fifth birthday, as originally stipulated in Reverend Littlejohn's will, or in 1837 upon the death of John W. Littlejohn.

In 1850, Moses was a free man. Moses lived in "that part of Russellville lying in District No. 2"[91] He lived with the family of a merchant named George S. Vick. Moses was a wagon driver and could not read or write.[92]

In 1866, after the Civil War, Moses, Ellen, and the children were a farm family. Ellen bought a spotted pig from Marmaduke Beckwith Morton for three dollars. She paid in cash installments of two dollars, then one dollar.[93]

In March 1866, Moses performed $25.50 worth of work for Marmaduke. Moses was paid $8.00 cash during the month. Moses owed Marmaduke $20.25 for nine days use of a steer and plough. Therefore, Moses carried a balance owed of $2.75 into the next work month.[94]

In April 1866 Moses settled the $2.75 owed. He sowed seed, ploughed

gardens, sowed clover seed, righted up fences, for a total of $14.50 earned. Moses also received $3.50 for the use of a mule and plough, amounting to an $18.00 credit. Again Marmaduke charged Moses for the use of steer, three dollars for a pig, and for the use of a mule and plough. Moses owed a total of $18.15. He paid fifteen cents cash to Marmaduke to settle the debt.[95]

In May 1866 Moses again worked for Marmaduke. Marmaduke credited Moses one dollar for one day planting corn. He credited Moses two dollars for two days harrowing corn on the twelfth and thirteenth of May. He credited Moses twenty-five cents for feeding on Sunday the fourteenth of May. Marmaduke settled the debt in full by the second of June for $2.25.[96]

In 1870 Moses lived with his family in Russellville Corporation, Logan County, Kentucky. He was sixty years old and his occupation was job worker.[97] Moses died before the census in 1880, since Ellen is listed as widow.[98]

Thomas, Husband of Margaret (1829-1912)

Thomas Bibb was born in 1829 in Kentucky[99] and was owned by Major Richard Bibb until Major Bibb's death in 1839. In 1829 Major Bibb liberated 29 of his slaves, and sent them to Liberia,[100] a colony established in 1822 by the American Colonization Society. [101] He arranged for the remaining slaves to be freed upon his death and provided land for them. The slaves were settled on two tracts of land, both called "Bibb Town." One tract was six miles northwest of Russellville, and the other was near Homer in North Logan County.[102] Major Bibb's son, Jack Bibb, is famous for being the first person to cultivate Bibb lettuce.[103]

In *Kentuckians Are Different,* M. B. Morton talks fondly of Thomas and tells the story of how Thomas alerted the family that a monster snake was a few feet from the door to their house. M. B. Morton's father then shot the snake.[104] In 1870 Thomas lived with Margaret and their four sons at "The Knob" and worked in the garden.[105] In 1880 he lived in Russellville with Margaret and Mariah and worked as a laborer.[106]

In 1883 Thomas worked for Marmaduke. On the tenth of July Marmaduke credited him with one dollar and on the seventeenth of July

Figure 5. Roger Morton (top) and Paul C. Morton (second from top), donors of the quilt, in 1908. Courtesy of Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.

Figure 6. Morning Star Quilt made at "The Knob" and handwriting on the back of the photo. Courtesy of Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.

Marmaduke credited him with $1.75. On the twenty-fourth of July Marmaduke credited him with another forty cents. Thomas contributed ten cents cash and Margaret paid $1.75 cash to pay her note at the Morton store with this $5.00 credit.[107]

Thomas died in Logan County on March 4, 1912 at the age of eighty-three. Thomas' youngest son Dan, who served as informant, provided information for the death certificate.[108]

Roger and Dr. Paul C. Morton

The donors of The Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt were brothers Roger Morton and Dr. Paul C. Morton. They are great grandsons of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton, grandsons of David Morton, leading minister of the Methodist Church, and sons of Dr. Daniel Morton. Dr. Daniel Morton moved from Kentucky to St. Joseph, Missouri and became a doctor.[109]

Roger and Paul were raised in St. Joseph (see Figure 5). Photographs exist of a Morning Star Quilt, made at "The Knob," in the Morton Collection at the Shaker Museum. This quilt could also have been made by Ellen Littlejohn and Margaret Bibb (see Figures 6 and 7). Uncle Dan, who is mentioned in writing on the back of one picture, could be Dr. Daniel Morton, who is father of the donors and grandson of Marmaduke Beckwith Morton. Location of this quilt, which appears also to be silk, is unknown.

In the following passage in *American Quilts and Coverlets* by Amelia Peck, Roger Morton describes how he learned of the makers of the quilt and its provenance:

> The history of this quilt was told to donor Roger Morton by his uncle. Roger Morton quoted his uncle's remembrances in a letter he wrote to the Museum when he donated the quilt: "The actual work was done by

Figure 7. Another view of Morning Star Quilt made at "The Knob" and handwriting on the back of the photo. Courtesy of Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.

two slave women who were skilled seamstresses and were considered a cut above the other help about the place who did the more menial work. These women, Aunt Ellen and Aunt Margaret, as we were taught to call them, remained with the family after emancipation and died at "The Knob." As near as I can determine the quilt was made between the years 1837–1850."[110]

Conclusion

Ellen Littlejohn and Margaret Bibb who designed and constructed the Star of Bethlehem Variation Quilt were extraordinary women. They constructed an exceptional piece of artwork in addition to their many responsibilities as the slave women of the Morton Family. Their lives after emancipation were equally difficult. They were wives who had to

cook, clean, raise children and grandchildren, work in the fields, and face economic and social hardship. Against these odds, they were able to carve out time to create an exceptional work of art. This quilt was perhaps their only form of artistic expression. Their work and life stories are inspiring.

Notes and References

1. Amelia Peck, *American Quilts and Coverlets* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Dutton Studio Books, 1990), 192.
2. William Rush Dunton Jr., M.D., *Old Quilts* (Catonsville, MD: by the author, 1946), 264.
3. Peck, 192.
4. Dunton, 271.
5. Norma Hollen and Jane Saddler, *Textiles*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), 16, 28.
6. Ibid, 24.
7. Johnathan Jeffrey and Donna Parker, *A Thread of Evidence: Shaker Textile*

Industries at South Union, Kentucky (South Union, KY: Shaker Museum at South Union, 1996), 7.

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 13.
10. Ibid.
11. Beverly Gordon, *Shaker Textile Arts* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983),42.
12. Jeffrey and Parker, 8.
13. Barbara Brackman, *Clues in the Calico* (Charlottesville,VA: Howell Press, 1989), 41.
14. Ruth Finley, *Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lipincott Company, 1929), 25.
15. Brackman, 39.
16. Ibid., 42.
17. Ibid., 49.
18. Nan Thayer Ross, *Purple on Silk* (New Gloucester, ME: United Society of Shakers, 2003), 54.
19. Ibid., 56.
20. Ibid., 61.
21. *Funk and Wagnall's New Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Sewing Machine."
22. Brackman, 112–113.
23. Patsy and Myron Orlofsky, *Quilts in America* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1974), 189.
24. Deborah Harding, "Quilts America's Folklore," *America's Glorious Quilts*, eds. Dennis Duke and Deborah Harding (Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., 1987), 71–72.
25. Peck, 180–181.
26. Laura Fisher, "An American Tradition," *America's Glorious Quilts*, 15.
27. Roderick Kiracofe, *The American Quilt* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1993), 65.
28. Brackman, 112.
29. Kiracofe, 66.
30. Doris M. Bowman, *The Smithsonian Treasury American Quilts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 89.
31. Kiracofe, 59.
32. Carleton L. Safford and Robert Bishop, *America's Quilts and Coverlets* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1972), 112.
33. Stella Rubin, *Miller's Treasure or Not? How to Compare and Value American* Quilts (London, UK: Octopus Publishing Group, 2001), 130.
34. Orlofsky, 322.

35. Peck, 30–31.
36. Duke and Harding, 51.
37. Kiracofe, 99.
38. *An American Sampler Folk Art from the Shelburne Museum* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 151.
39. Kiracofe, 128.
40. Bowman, 92.
41. Cyril I. Nelson and Carter Houck, *Treasury of American Quilts* (New York: Greenwich House, 1982), 101.
42. Safford and Bishop, 102.
43. Nelson and Houck, 181.
44. Ibid., 11.
45. Kiracofe, 131.
46. Bets Ramsey and Merikay Waldvogel, *The Quilts of Tennessee* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986), 61.
47. Jonathan Holstein, *Kentucky Quilts* 1800–1900 (New York, Pantheon Books, 1982), 57.
48. Orlofsky, 119.
49. Merikay Waldvogel, "A Collector's Clues for Dating Quilts" in *Quilt with the Best*, ed. Carol Cook Haygood (Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, 1992), 66.
50. Barbara Brackman, "A Chronological Index to Pieced Quilt Patterns 1775–1825" in *Uncoverings 1983*, ed. Sally Garoutte (Lincoln, NE: American Quilt Study Group, 1984), 110.
51. Finley, 50.
52. Orlofsky, 32.
53. Ibid., 67.
54. Florence Peto, *Historic Quilts* (New York: The American Historical Company, Inc., 1939), 13–14.
55. M. B. Morton, *Kentuckians are Different* (Louisville, KY: The Standard Press, 1938), 12.
56. William Jordan Morton, will dated December 23, 1826, proved January 1, 1827, Logan County Clerk, Russellville, KY.
57. Edward Coffman, *The Story of Logan County*, (Nashville, TN: The Pantheon Press, 1962), 151.
58. Bishop E. E. Hoss, *David Morton A Biography* (Louisville, KY: Board of Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1916), 40.
59. Morton, 79.
60. Ibid., 13.
61. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Slave Census, Logan County, KY.

62. Hoss, 9.
63. Ibid., 8–9.
64. Ibid., 21.
65. Morton, 12–13.
66. Ibid., 13.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 24.
69. Ibid., 13.
70. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Slave Census, Logan County, KY.
71. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
72. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Slave Census, Logan County, KY.
73. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
74. Coffman, 151.
75. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ellen Littlejohn, will dated December 8, 1899, proved January 1, 1900, Logan County Clerk, Russellville, KY.
79. Ibid.
80. Morton, 24.
81. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Slave Census, Logan County, KY.
82. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
83. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
84. Morton, 24.
85. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
86. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
87. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
88. *Roadside History a Guide to Kentucky Highway Markers*, compiled by Diane Wells (Frankfort, KY: The Kentucky Historical Society, 2002), 68–69.
89. John Littlejohn, will dated May 11, 1826, proved May 23, 1826, Logan County Clerk, Russellville, KY.
90. John W. Littlejohn, will dated August 1, 1837, proved August 28, 1837, Logan County Clerk, Russellville, KY.
91. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
92. Ibid.
93. Morton Farm and Expense Account Book, Morton Collection, Shaker Museum at South Union, KY.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.

97. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
98. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
99. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
100. Morton, 139.
101. *Funk and Wagnall's New Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Blacks in the Americas"
102. Morton, 142.
103. Wells, 121.
104. Morton, 211.
105. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
106. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880 Federal Census, Logan County, KY.
107. Morton Farm and Expense Account Book.
108. Thomas Bibb, Certificate of Death, Kentucky State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics.
109. Coffman, 154.
110. Peck, 192.

Plate 1. Eight Point Pieced Star, circa 1879–80 (see page 44).
Courtesy of Historic Mesquite, Inc.

Plate 2: Double Wedding Ring Quilt, Ohio (see page 136). Courtesy of Eve Wheatcroft Granick.

Plate 3. *Corona II: The Solar Eclipse*, 1989, 76 inches by 94 inches, by Caryl Bryer Fallert (see page 194). Museum of the American Quilter's Society, 1996.01.07.

Plate 4. Detail of *Abundance*, 2003, by Diane Gaudynski (see page 194). The quilt measures only 27 inches by 29 inches. Courtesy of *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine*.