

Uncoverings 2006

Volume 27 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Joanna E. Evans



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Cover illustration: Polk's Fancy quilt, circa 1850. Photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague. Collection of Teri Klassen.



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Preface

Participants in the twenty-seventh annual seminar of the American Quilt Study Group (held October 6–8, 2006, in Farmington, Connecticut) can participate in a rich variety of activities, study centers, and pre- and post-seminar tours. The seminar committee chose to emphasize local opportunities to study pre-1840 quilts in planning these extracurricular events. In addition, attendees at each year's seminar hear presentations of the research papers included in the year's volume of *Uncoverings*.

This year, a couple of authors address popular misconceptions about specific areas of quilt history. Loretta Woodard examines the circulation of quilt patterns among quilters in four Hawaiian communities. She contrasts the image of Hawaiian quilters closely guarding their patterns with evidence in personal correspondence, newspaper articles, interviews, and collections of ephemera that illustrate the dynamics of pattern sharing.

Nao Nomura and Janneken Smucker use a combination of fiber and fabric analysis, genealogy, and fieldwork in an Amish community in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, to examine the assumptions surrounding quilts in the Henry and Jill Barber Collection of Amish Quilts at the International Quilt Study Center. Prior to their study, it was thought that these quilts had been created during a so-called classic period of Amish quiltmaking before 1940. Nomura and Smucker identified quilts that initially appeared to fit the ideal of an Amish quilt made during this "classic period" but were actually made considerably later.

Several authors examine the quilts made by immigrants who, for the most part, started to quilt after traveling to the United States. Laurann Gilbertson examines the textile traditions of Norwegians who immi-



grated to the Midwest in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to looking at the transmission of patterns and other quilting information, she discusses the evolution in materials and techniques these immigrants and their descendants used. Gilbertson also observes some cultural retention in the quilts made by Norwegian Americans.

Ronda McAllen also observes some cultural retention in her study of quilts that were owned by Jewish German American immigrants who likely made a small but identifiable subset of Baltimore Album quilts around the time of the Mexican War. The quilts studied share similar motifs, fabrics, and construction techniques. McAllen compares and contrasts the quilts with Baltimore Album quilts that have been linked with Protestant quiltmakers.

Teri Klassen has completed an extensive study of a southern Indiana quilt pattern that also originated around the time of the Mexican War. Klassen located and studied five quilts sharing this distinct and unusual pattern, called Polk's Fancy by one of the quiltmakers' descendants; the pattern combines piecing and appliqué in the tradition of red-and-green quilts popular at the time. Klassen examines the commemorative aspect of the quilts and the roles the quiltmakers played. She shows how their English, Scotch-Irish, and German backgrounds influenced their quilts. In addition, she discusses pattern dissemination, use of sewing machines, and relations between coverlet and quilt designs.

Beverly Gordon provides new insights into crazy quilts through her investigation of them as expressions of "fairylane." She describes this sensibility, which was popular in the late nineteenth century in direct contrast to the severity of the industrial age. Sensuous crazy quilts made with lush and dazzling fabrics shared the aesthetics and icons of the fairylane ideal. Gordon draws on lavish quilts from the collections at the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to illustrate her conclusions.

Marsha MacDowell, Charlotte Quinney, and Mary Worrall teamed up to study a rare find. The KKK Fundraising Quilt of Chicora, Michigan, offers information about quilting, Klan activity, and a particular community in 1926. The quilt serves as a historical document of a troubling and often buried aspect of American history. Fortunately, through



the dedication to education of the family members who received the quilt, it was preserved for study.

A review of the endnotes following each article reveals how fortunate today's quilt researcher is to have a broad foundation of earlier work on which to build. This volume reflects the wide range of projects into which quilt researchers are delving. And increasingly, researchers are benefiting from the generous and thoughtful gifts to museums and study centers that quilt collectors and others interested in the field have made. Some of the early collectors gathered groups of quilts that simply could not be replicated today. Note that six of the seven articles in this volume are based on research on an individual quilt or collections of quilts in museums and study centers. Much of the research was supported by these institutions and affiliated universities.

At the same time, the authors of these articles also represent a wide range of backgrounds. From independent scholars, to graduate students, to faculty members, quilt researchers find the field open to all those with the passion and persistence to dig into the secrets revealed by the study of quilts and quiltmakers.