Uncoverings 2007

Volume 28 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Joanna E. Evans

Analysis of a Late Nineteenth-Century Redwork Quilt Top

Lynne Shultis

In 2003, I acquired a signature album redwork quilt top with a date of October 6, 1893. The pictorial images, embroidered signatures, and inscriptions provide information about a music teacher and her relatives, friends, and students. By studying the data on the quilt and examining nineteenth-century parlor music, children's books, art needlework advice literature as well as census records, newspapers, and published research on Harmony Mills and Cohoes, New York, we may enrich our understanding of quiltmaking as practiced by immigrant mill-working families influenced by American popular culture.

This paper examines a richly embroidered redwork quilt top from Cohoes, New York, dated 1893. The images on the quilt, the inscriptions, and the embroidered names and initials represent an abundance of information about a music teacher, her students, her friends, and her relatives. This paper will explore popular music, children's books, art needlework advice literature, and immigrant culture in an upstate New York mill town to understand and interpret the significance of the quilt. The social and cultural influences resulting in the creation of this textile may enrich our understanding of quiltmaking as practiced by immigrant mill-working families assimilating into American culture at that time.

During the 1890s, many young women worked outside the home out of necessity; however, the ideal life to which they strove was influenced by the "cult of domesticity" of their mothers—that is, a woman's primary sphere and true calling was home and family. During the mid-nineteenth century, music and other artistic endeavors were considered essential to a genteel young woman's education, and the development of these talents was thought to enhance her ability to secure a desirable marriage partner.[1] Rural and working–class Americans also loved music, and the tradition of holding a dance or frolic after a quilting bee is well known.[2] By the 1890s the sheet music publishing business was flourishing, and the technology to record music was gaining acceptance by the public. At the same time, women continued to be influenced by the art advice literature to "with both head and heart render her needle useful in imparting attractiveness to the numerous belongings of home."[3]

A Brief History of Outline Embroidery Quilts

The fashion of using embroidery to decorate home objects came into vogue after the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where visitors saw beautiful needlework from all over the world. Of particular note was the exhibit by the Royal School of Art Needlework from Kensington, England, and artwork from Japan.[4] Ladies' magazines devoted articles to the Exhibition and reported on needlework arts displayed, thereby influencing thousands of women who could not attend the Centennial Exhibition in person. People became intrigued by exotic places such as the Middle and Far East, and nature was deemed a worthwhile subject for study, art, and embroidery.

Throughout the 1880s, art advice literature continued encouraging women to beautify their homes. The book *Needle-Craft: Artistic and Practical*, published by The Butterick Publishing Company in 1889, mused on the qualities that "earn for needle-work the adjective artistic" and concluded that "nowadays the value of beauty is gauged largely by its relation to utility, and any product of the needle which not only serves a useful purpose, but adds a touch of beauty to an otherwise plain object is rightfully considered artistic."[5]

Because creating "art" from embroidery was considered difficult, women were soon encouraged to create or copy designs onto fabric. In 1885, The Art Needlework Catalog, published by Brainerd & Armstrong Co., provided advice about design sources to its readers:

> Nursery books afford an almost exhaustless field to draw upon, either for ideas to illustrate by originally designing, or for the pictures themselves, which may be copied directly or adapted to the special object in view. Thus a set of finger bowl or tea doylies might represent the story of Old Mother Hubbard. Miss Muffet, Tom the Piper's Son, Miss Bo-Peep, and many other nursery celebrities may be transferred, in fashion more or less fanciful, to the corners of one's table linen, and thus become orderly and ornamental members of the domestic circle.[6]

Designs useful for outline embroidery could be found everywhere. In addition to children's books, magazines such as *Peterson's*, *Godey's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* published such designs, and pattern companies such as J. F. Ingalls, Charles Bentley, and Briggs & Co. offered individual patterns or sheets of patterns for sale. Quilters had the opportunity to select pictorial designs that had special meaning for them, much as we do today with memory quilts incorporating photographs.

The literature of the period instructed women to use one color of thread on their project but include different shades with "the darkest shade for the heaviest lines."[7] The preferred embroidery color after white was scarlet or Turkey red because of its ability to withstand laundering.[8] *Ladies' Manual of Fancy Work* also advised women to work designs "in the stem stitch, split stitch being used when the line is very fine."[9] In 1885, J. F. Ingalls advised women to begin with outline work "if embroidery is new to you" because designs were easier to complete than the shaded Kensington embroidery.[10] If women lacked faith in their embroidery abilities they could hire a teacher for $0.75 per hour or purchase samples of embroidery stitches or the entire finished product.[11]

Collecting signatures on quilts began in the early nineteenth century. People made signature quilts for many purposes but primarily as keepsakes to document established community relationships.[12] These

quilts were made for specific occasions such as a marriage or to show appreciation to a community leader such as a minister or teacher. Families took signature quilts with them as they joined the westward migration. As redwork continued in popularity into the twentieth century, the quilts evolved into successful fundraising projects for churches and war efforts, and outline embroidery quilts, through their embroidered images, captured a piece of a community's history or shared memories for a group of friends. Examples of such quilts can be seen in many state quilt documentation books.[13]

Description of the 1893 Killian/Davidson Study Quilt Top

The quilt top that is the basis of this paper was purchased at a general antique show in the Albany, New York, area. When first spotted, it was sitting in a pile of nondescript linens. Ripped and stained, it appeared to have been dropped in a mud puddle or used to mop up something, and then thrown in a corner so that it did not dry properly (see Figure 1). There are holes and, where it is stained, the fabric has disintegrated. The quilt top is captivating with its Victorian images, inscriptions, and signatures. As is typical of many outline embroidery quilts of late nineteenth-century vintage, most of the signatures are initials, but five people signed their names in full.

The top comprises fifty-six blocks arranged in seven columns and eight rows. With the exception of the blocks in the second column, all the blocks are squares that measure 11.5 inches on each side. In the second column, the squares measure 11 inches on each side. The material is sturdy cotton that may have been white one hundred years ago, but is now a cream color. The embroidery thread is cotton. On some blocks, the embroiderer used a heavier strand of thread. Under a magnifying glass the floss used on the images appears to have red pigment in it, although it is difficult to tell the original shade. In some blocks, it appears as if both red and pink threads were used to create the picture. The subjects are large and fill their allotted squares. No two blocks are alike.

The predominant embroidery stitch used to make the images is the chain stitch. Forty-two blocks (75%) used this stitch exclusively. Next

Figure 1. Killian/Davidson redwork quilt top, dated 1893. © Photo courtesy of Mark Schmidt.

in frequency is the stem stitch, with thirteen squares composed in this stitch. Block B7 has a combination of the featherstitch and the stem stitch, and block D4 has a very small herringbone stitch in the drum. (The letter and number used to label each block refer to the column letter and row number going from left to right and top to bottom.) Traces of herringbone stitches in red embroidery thread are found throughout the quilt, covering the seams that join the blocks. Because the published needlework advice of the time recommended the use of the stem stitch, the predominance of the chain stitch and variety of other embroidery stitches on this quilt is curious. The chain-stitch images have better

Figure 2. Block B7. Note the featherstitch embroidery in the skirt and tree trunk. Photo courtesy of the author.

stood the test of time, and there is a wide variety of quality in these images, with the stitch being very loose on some blocks and tight on others. The quality of the embroidery varies throughout the quilt, suggesting a wide range of abilities among the contributors. The block using the featherstitch is of very fine embroidery (see Figure 2).

Fifty-four of the fifty-six blocks are signed. The embroidery thread color used for the signatures is usually the same color as that of the subject of the block, but sometimes the thread appears to be a lighter

color—a pinker hue. With only two exceptions, the signatures were embroidered using the stem stitch, and this seems to be a deliberate design of the quilt. Usual placement of the signatures is either below the subject or, on rare occasions, within the subject.

In addition, thirty-six of the blocks contain an inscription or message (see Figure 3). The messages on this quilt top shout with good humor and anticipation. They project happiness and good wishes. The stem stitch is used to embroider all but two messages. Usual placement of the inscription is at the top of the square. The embroidery thread used to create the inscriptions appears to be the same color as that of the subjects. On some blocks, the thread may have been a lighter color, but fading makes this difficult to determine. The quilt blocks were sewn together by machine. To finish the borders, the edge was simply tucked under twice, so that the cut edge was not showing, and machine stitched. There is no evidence that this top ever had a back.

Sources of the Quilt's Patterns

Most of the quilt's embroiderers used multiple pattern sources. From a review of the sources available, twenty-five images on the quilt matched published patterns, and an additional six images, noted in parentheses, were similar to patterns found in Deborah Harding's *Red & White: American Redwork Quilts and Patterns* or *The Ladies' Home Journal.* While the Bentley's 1885 catalog appears to be the main source, J. F. Ingalls was used as well as *The Ladies' Home Journal.* In addition to obtaining patterns from catalogs or ladies' magazines, the quiltmakers could have traced or drawn designs from other published materials. The artist's palette design was used frequently in the literature of the period, and it appears in two designs on the quilt (see Figure 4).[14] It is likely that children's books or sheet music covers served as additional inspiration. The embroiderers also may have purchased patterns from the two "Stamping and Embroidery" businesses listed in the Cohoes Directory.[15]

The Davidson family used patterns from Bentley's or a similar catalog (blocks B3 and D7) and possibly children's books (blocks A3, A5, and F4). The image of a girl feeding a horse in Block A3 is very similar

Figure 3. Description of Redwork Quilt Top Blocks and Pattern Sources.

NOTE: Table notes can be found immediately following this article's text end notes.

Figure 4. Block E7 with lily on an artist's palette. (Photo courtesy of the author.) A collection of children's books; note the artist's palette on the cover of the book in the center. Photo by the author with permission of Historic Cherry Hill Collections, Albany, NY.

to one found in the children's book *Our Picture Book*, which shows a girl feeding a donkey (see Figure 5).[16] The children's book *Under the Window* contains the Kate Greenaway image in block F4.[17] Esther Killian, "Essie" or "E.A.K.," used a design that appears in Bentley's 1885 to embroider block G7, which shows a girl holding a bird in her hand (see Figure 6), and the pond lily design inside an artist palette from Ingalls 1890 appears in block E7 (see Figure 7). She also may have used children's books as design inspirations for blocks C1, H3, and H6. "M.C." used the hairbrush and comb design found in the 1890 J. F. Ingalls catalog to embroider block C3, apparently went to another source for the oriental fans in block D5, and used Bentley's 1885 catalog for the tea set in block E5.

The table in Figure 3 includes a notation of the pattern source for each block.[18] While exact matches for several of the floral designs and bird patterns were not found, similar designs were located in Bentley's and Ingalls, suggesting that these designs were also from published stamping patterns. The publishers of the stamping patterns found on the quilt were all located in the Northeastern United States.

Although Briggs & Co. advertised in ladies' magazines such as *Peterson's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, their catalog was not a source of patterns for this quilt.[19] The Bentley's 1885 catalog, which illustrated

Figure 5. In block A3, a girl is feeding a horse. Note her position on the step, the hay she is holding, and the barrel on the floor. (Photo courtesy of the author.) Compare the quilt block to a similar image from the children's book entitled *Our Picture Book*. Photo by the author with permission of Historic Cherry Hill Collections, Albany, NY.

more than 2,500 embroidery patterns, did not have patterns for portraits of dogs, cats, or the many scene images displayed on the quilt top. In reviewing published ecclesiastical designs, none were found on the study quilt.

Nineteenth-Century Life in Cohoes, New York (1865–1890)

Before examining the quilt for meanings, it is important to know something about the embroiderers and the community in which they lived. The people who worked on this quilt were identified through census records. They all lived in Ward 1, Cohoes, New York, a village situated at the convergence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers about ten miles from where the quilt was purchased (see Figure 8).

At the time this quilt was made, the village's major employer was Harmony Mills, a manufacturer of printed cotton cloth, "wide and fine muslin," seamless bags, jute, and cotton batting (see Figure 9).[20] It is estimated that during its heyday in the mid-nineteenth century,

Figure 6. Block G7 shows a girl with a bird on her outstretched arm. A pattern from Bentley's 1885 shows the same scene. The Bentley catalog is in the collection of the Mann Library at Cornell University. Photos courtesy of the author.

Harmony Mills employed one out of every four residents in the city.[21] For a while, it was considered the largest complete cotton mill operating in the United States.[22] In 1893, the mill employed 3,240 people, used 6,350 looms, and produced 1,600,000 yards of cotton per week.[23]

The Harmony Mills complex was a close-knit and self-contained community within the village of Cohoes. Harmony Mills, in keeping with the tradition of the English cotton mills, cultivated a patriarchal attitude toward its employees and provided for their needs. The tenement housing was described as "spacious, with between four and ten rooms to an apartment."[24] Only employees of the firm were allowed to rent these apartments, at a cost of three to eight dollars per month.[25] These brick tenements are residences today and stand as a testament to the quality of their construction.

At various times during the nineteenth century, stores were provided for the convenience of the firm's employees. In addition, a nondenominational Sunday school operated from 1853 through the 1890s in the large meeting hall located over the main office of the company. David Johnston, superintendent of Harmony Mills, was personally

Figure 7. Block C1 and a very similar image from the children's book *Aunt Bessie's Stories for the Little People*, published in 1894. Photo by the author with permission of Historic Cherry Hill Collections, Albany, NY.

involved in running this Sunday school. The company provided an organ and a large library to the Sunday school, and the students gave musical performances for the community.[26]

The firm sponsored a baseball team, provided medical services to its employees, formed its own fire department and police force, and hired garbage collectors and sewer inspectors. The tenements had backyards for gardening, and lawns in the front (see Figure 10). Shade trees were planted along the sidewalks and streets, and the company employed a specialized workforce of carpenters, masons, plumbers, and laborers to maintain all its properties. At one point, five boarding houses were operated for the mill's unmarried staff.

There was, however, another side to the lives of the cotton mill employees. They worked long hours with dangerous equipment. The tenements were probably noisy—some overcrowding was reported. The lack of proper sewers before the 1880s created health hazards.[27] Mill positions offered steady employment, but wages were low compared with other industries in the area. To make ends meet, families took in relatives as boarders and sent their children to work in the mill;

Figure 8. Map of Cohoes, NY, showing the location of some of the quiltmakers' homes. Photo courtesy of the author. Map from the collection of the Troy Public Library, Troy, NY.

Figure 9. Postcard of Harmony Mill No. 3, Cohoes, NY, from the collection of the author. Photo courtesy of the author.

children often began to work at the mill as early as the age of twelve. There were labor disputes and strikes at Harmony Mills during the early 1880s when the cotton industry was going through a depression.

By 1880, the immigrant Irish population of Cohoes had assumed most of the skilled mill positions, including weavers and mule-spinners (see Figure 11). Mule-spinners tended the large yarn-making machines. A majority of the weavers were women, while mule-spinners tended to be men. Children were employed in the spooling and warping functions. In 1873, the weaving room was described as follows:

> The noise in this vast apartment is perfectly deafening. And the effect upon a person unaccustomed to the scene is something like that experienced when standing on the bridge of the Niagara, or near a ponderous and mighty moving railway train....The weavers tend from three to five looms each, according to experience and ability.[28]

Using 1880 census records, it is estimated that 80–90% of the single heads of households in Cohoes were woman providers, usually in their forties, whose husbands had either left or, more often, had died.[29]

Figure 10. Photograph of a boarding house from a recruiting booklet produced by Harmony Mills, circa 1912, and now in the collection of the Cohoes Public Library, Cohoes, NY. Photo courtesy of the author.

With ready-made apartments and a steady income at Harmony Mills for themselves and their children, Cohoes attracted women heads of households in the nineteenth century and made it possible for them to live a life with some security.

Many people began working in the mill as young children, and the women continued working in the mills or teaching school until they married—typically around the age of thirty. This relatively late age of marriage is explained by the financial situation of the working class people of Cohoes. Low wages, the cost of renting an apartment from Harmony Mills, and the cost of buying food in the company store kept the workers at the mill or teaching school—contributing to the family income—until they achieved some financial independence. Irish men tended to leave the mill once they considered themselves able to support a family. When Irish women married, they typically stayed home, kept house, and raised their children.[30]

Information on the Quiltmakers

Although as many as seventeen different people contributed a block to the quilt top, research was completed only on the quiltmakers who signed their names in full (Esther Killian, J.M. (Josephine) Davidson,

Figure 11. Weaving Room from a recruiting booklet produced by Harmony Mills, circa 1912, and now in the collection of the Cohoes Public Library, Cohoes, NY. Photo courtesy of the author.

Clara Davidson, Mary Cannon, and Mary McMullen) and their families. An educated guess has been made on the identity of Lizzie F., another quilt signer.

Esther A. Killian, a music teacher, contributed the greatest number of blocks to this project.[31] The first block on this quilt top (block A1) was composed by Esther and has the inscription "Class, Listen Tis the Wood Bird Song" (see Figure 12). Her initials appear under the conductor in block D4, depicting the orchestra (see Figure 13).

Esther, the second to last child born to the large family of Martin and Margaret Crinnan Killian, was about twenty-four years old in 1893, the year the quilt was made. Martin and his wife were born in Ireland and probably immigrated to the United States as a result of the Irish potato famine of 1847. They first appear in the area's 1851 city directory as settled in West Troy, New York.[32] The Killian family's move to Cohoes around 1866 was probably due to the expansion of Harmony Mills. Martin Killian, a skilled bricklayer and stonemason, would have found ready work constructing the Mastodon Mill and the brick tenements that comprised Harmony Village. In 1866, Martin and his family were living on School Street in one of the tenement buildings near the construction site of this mill. Margaret was a housekeeper and bore

Figure 12. Block A1 shows a woman pointing a gun at a bird in a tree. Esther Killian's initials are embroidered on the block. Photo courtesy of the author.

twelve children.[33] She was approximately forty-two years old when Esther was born in 1868, and was forty-four at the birth of her last child, Ella, in 1871.

The Killian family was typical of the social and work pattern discussed earlier. At least five of the twelve children born to Martin and Margaret worked in Harmony Mills at some point. According to census records, daughter Margaret was working in the cotton mill by the age

Figure 13. In blocks D3 and D4, Esther Killian's initials are stitched under the conductor. "A Jolly Four" and the date "Oct. 6th, 1893" are also stitched across the blocks. The brass instrument is the Ophicleide, which was found in orchestras before 1860. It was the precursor to the tuba. Photo courtesy of the author.

of twelve, James was working as a spinner at the age of twelve, Patrick was a spinner by the age of fourteen, Anna was listed as a weaver at the age of twenty, and Bridget was employed at the cotton mill by the age of nineteen. Mary Killian, the oldest daughter, married at age thirty in 1880.[34] By 1892, only Patrick and Esther were reported as living at home. Patrick was employed as a mill operator, and Esther was a music teacher.[35]

The William Davidson family was also connected to the Harmony Mills; William was an overseer of the weaving room. The Davidson family must have played an important role in the lives of the Killians because three of their children contributed blocks to the quilt top. Esther Killian's older sister Anna, the weaver at Harmony Mills, likely worked for William Davidson before she married. Two of William's daughters, Josie and Clara, were signers of multiple blocks on the quilt top.[36] Josephine Davidson was one of fourteen students who graduated from the local high school in 1892, and she began teaching part time

that fall.[37] She was nineteen in 1893, the date on the quilt. That year, Clara was a fifteen-year-old high school student; Esther Killian probably taught her music.[38] Anna Davidson (probably Anna D on the quilt, block E2), an older sister to Josie and Clara, was twenty-one in 1893 and worked as a weaver at Harmony Mills.

There are two possibilities for the name Mary Cannon (block D2). One Mary Cannon was a mill operator living with her parents near Lizzie F. Baldwin and was twenty-two years old. It is possible she knew the Killians and Davidsons through church or work. Another Mary Cannon, a widow of about sixty years of age, lived on the towpath road not far from the Killian and Davidson households.

The signer Lizzie F. (blocks G1 and H4) is most likely Lizzie F. Baldwin who taught at the West Harmony School. Lizzie could have known Esther through teaching or through Josie Davidson, who taught in the same school district.[39] In city directories and census records, Lizzie always used her middle initial "F," which matches the signature on the quilt. Lizzie F. Baldwin was twenty-nine in 1893.

Mary McMullen, William (her husband), and John (her son) were living at the same address as the Killian family according to the 1892 census and were probably boarders. Mary, a housewife, signed blocks F1 and probably G6 and H1. She was thirty-nine. Eighteen-year-old John signed block D6.

Selection of Images

It appears that Blocks D3 and D4 were deliberately placed in the center of the quilt. These blocks depict a brass band, and Esther Killian's initials are placed under the conductor figure. In addition, the personal message "A Jolly Four" is stitched over both blocks with a date to memorialize a shared experience. Block B4 depicts two owls under an umbrella, and the inscription is "Two little girls in blue." Block C5 shows a turkey on a platter with fork and knife, and the inscription reads "guests." Blocks F3 and F4 are both from the children's book "Under the Window," illustrated by Kate Greenaway. The inscriptions imply friendship and may be reminders of special events in the quilters' lives. Block G3 shows a boy dressed in a contemporary style, blowing a

Figure 14. Block H4, signed by "Lizzie F." Baldwin, bears a work-apron motto presented in the same manner as in the 1885 Bentley's catalog, which is in the collection of the Mann Library, Cornell University. Photo courtesy of the author.

bubble. The inscription reads, "Boys wanted at the Musical Circle." Many blocks in row H could have meaning relating to family life. Block H2 shows a girl putting her doll to bed. Block H4 shows a daisy and the inscription "I know I'll be married some fine day," (see Figure 14). Block H5 shows an old couple walking to church and the inscription reads "Love's Sorrow." The last block in row H (block H7) shows a spray of roses and the inscription reads, "Last Rose of Summer." In addition, there are two blocks showing tea sets (blocks B2 and E5). Block E5 is especially interesting because the inscription states, "A peep at the future," (see Figure 15). Block A4 expresses the sentiment to "forget me not," and block A2 shows a girl with the inscription, "What will you take for me?"

Finally, Block A6 has a bottle and fan with the inscription "Ouija," which refers to a board game first marketed in 1890 that purported to tell the future. In each of the sixteen blocks, the images were selected for their relation to the inscription. Many of the inscriptions seem to suggest special events in the artists' past, or events that they were looking forward to in the future.

Music in Nineteenth-Century America

America's musical life evolved throughout the nineteenth century. Although musical performances were still imported from Europe, Americans began to perform music composed in the United States.

Figure 15. The tea set in block H2 is labeled "A Peep at the Future." Photo courtesy of the author.

Circumstances became more hospitable to the arts as the country became more settled and people had more time for entertainment and musical instruction. Because the radio had not yet been invented, music was dispersed to different communities through minstrel shows, troupes performing light opera, brass bands, and published sheet music.[40]

By the 1840s, parlor songs, composed specifically for mass appeal, became popular. They were performed in the homes of working-class

and middle-class Americans, and at private social occasions,[41] as skits, charades, and light operas. The words were often sentimental; the music was attractive and easy to perform on the piano. Petra Meyer Frazier, in her analysis of parlor songs, divided them into categories based on subject. She found nine categories of songs, including songs about mother, home, love, and emigration; sacred songs; laments; songs that were patriotic; comic songs; and songs inspired by novels.[42] By 1860, about ninety publishers were employed distributing sheet music from the Eastern seaboard to the Mississippi.[43] The 1870s were a musical time of simplicity and straightforwardness. Although Stephen Foster died in 1864, his songs were still very popular. The beauty of African American spirituals became appreciated, and icons of contemporary living, such as railroads, became suitable topics.[44] Composers in the 1880s continued writing sentimental and humorous songs. John Philip Sousa, toward the end of the decade, achieved renown as a composer of the march.[45] An operatissimo called "Diamonds and Toads" published in 1875 suggests using "The Last Rose of Summer" referenced on quilt block H7.[46] Parlor songs were taught in schools and students "performed parlor pieces during receptions for parents and other visitors. Members of the music classes at girls' seminaries were expected to demonstrate their accomplishments before the local townspeople."[47] Later in the century, music classes typically composed of young people between the ages of eight and twenty[48] would perform at music conventions as a final accomplishment before the class disbanded.[49] The songs written in the 1890s continued to be simple and expressed uncomplicated thoughts. The waltz became popular as dancing became more common.[50] The 1890s also saw increased use of the phonograph.[51]

Young girls and women made up a large part of the American mass audience for popular music.[52] *The Ladies' Home Journal* and other women's magazines of that time period included articles on voice and playing a musical instrument, especially the piano (see Figure 16). In 1891, *The Ladies' Home Journal* ran competitions for subscriptions to the magazine, and the prize was a free music education.[53] Reading *The Ladies' Home Journal* leaves the impression that many young women dreamed of having a career in music. In 1891, one article advised women with these ambitions to "submit yourself to a thoroughly good

Figure 16. Music lesson advertisement from the November 1890 edition of *The Delineator*. Photo courtesy of the author.

teacher," "be careful with diet...avoid sweets of all kinds," and do not "overwork the voice in practice for fear of straining it."[54] An 1892 article by Marie Roze discussed the "great many young women who possessed fair voices and were ambitious to earn their living on the stage in opera, or in concert."[55] In spite of these many great ambitions, it was found that when women married, they tended to give up playing music.[56] Music had accomplished its role in assisting with courtship rituals; women turned to domestic chores and responsibilities after marriage.

Community bands were a source of pride and performed at all the official town functions, such as parades, evening concerts, and political events. Kenneth Kreitner documents this pride in his article "Jacob Guth in Montrose: A Town Band in Central Pennsylvania 1888–1897."

> For almost a century, from before the Mexican War to after World War I, the amateur town band was arguably the most influential musical institution in the United States. There were thousands of these bands in towns and even the smallest villages all over the country, and for most of the people in those towns the band was the biggest, most prestigious, most spectacular music they ever heard.[57]

By the late nineteenth century, communities tried to support a band and every home aspiring to be "genteel" harbored a piano.

Music References on the Quilt Top

The quilt top documents piano tunes and parlor songs that would typically be played in the home. Of the thirty-six messages embroidered on the quilt, twenty-two have been identified as nineteenth-century parlor songs or piano tunes. These tunes and songs, many of which have slipped from today's public consciousness, were very popular in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century America. These pieces were likely taught by Esther Killian and performed by her students. See Figure 17 for a table of the songs and tunes identified from the quilt, with the name of the composer, date published, and classification.[58] Some tune titles on the quilt differ from those in published sources. For example, "Leona's Polka" is alternately spelled "Leonore Polka," and

Figure 17. Tunes and songs inscribed on the redwork quilt top, arranged by date of publication.

"Where the Fairies Dwell" is also known as "Tell Me! Where Do Fairies Dwell." "Imp's Revels" is an inscription on quilt block F6, and a tune by that name has not been located in the sources reviewed. However, it could be referring to "Fairies Revel," a waltz by Albert Beuter published in 1883.

As can be seen from the table in Figure 17, the subjects of the songs are love, home, farewell, and death. In addition, two songs, "Where Do Fairies Dwell" and "Come, Silver Moon," address fanciful subjects. All of the songs typify the sentimental style of writing popular at the time. These songs and tunes may memorialize a school concert given on October 6, 1893, which was a Friday night. Although no record of this concert has been found, minor entertainments such as this would not have been reported in the newspaper.[59] Some of the songs imply leave-taking. It is possible that, taken with the other inscriptions that capture good wishes for a happy home life, song titles such as "Till We Meet Again" and "Forget-Me-Not" served to send a wish to this quilt's recipient that the upcoming parting is temporary.

The piano tunes selected for inclusion on the quilt top are dance music of moderate difficulty. This is in keeping with other research into nineteenth-century piano music played in the parlor. Parlor songs, with their simple melodies and words, were played to show the musician's talent to best advantage. Tunes played on the piano, on the other hand, were expected to be more difficult than parlor songs and were considered a statement of musical taste.[60]

Conclusion

When the signers—relatives, friends, and music students—came together to make this quilt top, they were continuing a quilting tradition. The quilt inscriptions strongly suggest that the person for whom the quilt was made was making a change in his or her life. Although the identity of that person may always remain a secret, I think the quilt was likely made for Esther Killian. Despite searching census, church, and cemetery records, and writing to complete strangers with the last name of Killian or the last names of her married sisters, I can find no trace of Esther after 1892. This quilt is all that remains. Examination of the data

on the quilt illuminates a point in time when Cohoes, New York, was a prosperous village because of the thriving textile mills. Many of the young people who worked on the quilt were at the threshold of a new phase in their lives. In producing this quilt top, these quiltmakers were influenced by their families, art needlework advice literature, music of the day, and prevailing fashion to celebrate an achievement of someone important to them.

Notes and References

1. Petra Meyer Frazier, *American Women's Roles in Domestic Music Making as Revealed in Parlor Song Collections: 1820–1870* (Denver, CO: University of Colorado, 1999), 113.
2. Pat Ferrero, Elaine Hedges, and Julie Silber, *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women & Quilts on American Society* (San Francisco: The Quilt Digest Press, 1987), 48.
3. John Q. Reed and Eliza M. Lavin, *Needle-Craft: Artistic & Practical* (New York: The Butterick Publishing Co., 1889), 13. Collection of Museum of Play®, Rochester, NY.
4. Virginia Gunn, "Crazy Quilts and Outline Quilts: Popular Responses to the Decorative Art/Art Needlework Movement, 1876–1893," in *Uncoverings 1984,* vol. 5, ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley, CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1984) 134.
5. Reed and Lavin, 13.
6. *Art Needlework* (New York: Brainerd & Armstrong Co., 1885), 71. Collection of Museum of Play®, Rochester, NY.
7. Ibid., 71.
8. Reed and Lavin, 231.
9. *Ladies' Manual of Fancy Work* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1883), no page number. Collection of Museum of Play®, Rochester, NY.
10. J. Fred Ingalls, *Ladies' Book of Fancy Work and Instructions for Stamping* (Lynn, MA: J. F. Ingalls, 1885), no page number. Collection of Museum of Play®, Rochester, NY.
11. Charles E. Bentley, *Bentley's Catalogue of Novelties in Art Needlework, Etc.*, (New York: Chas E. Bentley, 1885), 201. Collection of Alfred Mann Library, Cornell University.
12. Ricky Clark, "Mid-19th Century Album and Friendship Quilts 1860–1920," in *Pieced by Mother: Symposium Papers,* ed. Jeannette Lasansky (Lewisburg, PA: Paulhamus Litho, Inc., 1988), 77.

13. See Ladies Aid Society quilt in The Indiana Quilt Registry Project, *Quilts of Indiana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 83; Red Cross quilt in *Nebraska Quilts & Quiltmakers,* eds. Patricia Cox Crews and Ronald C. Naugle (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 127; Friendship quilt in Minnesota Quilt Project, *Minnesota Quilts: Creating Connections with Our Past* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 2005), 153; and Temperance quilt in *Down by the Old Mill Stream: Quilts in Rhode Island,* eds. Linda Wellers and Margaret T. Ordonez (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000), 276.
14. *The Ladies' Home Journal* used the artist's palette in advertising stamping patterns, May, 1885, page 9. The implication was that embroidery was considered art.
15. City Directory for Troy, West Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1892, 549. The Art Needlework establishment, S. Mairs, designed as well as sold stamping patterns.
16. *Our Picture Book* (Philadelphia: Sunshine Publishing Co., n.d.).
17. "Under the Window" in *The Kate Greenaway Treasury*, ed. Edward Ernest (New York: The William Collins & World Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), 105.
18. In making this table, I reviewed original catalogs published by the Brainerd & Armstrong Co. (1885); J. F. Ingalls (1885 and 1890); Charles Bentley & Co. (1885); Briggs & Co. (1884, 1885, 1886); *Ingalls' Home and Art Magazine* (1892); *Needle-Craft: Artistic & Practical* published by The Butterick Publishing Company (1889); *Ladies' Manual of Fancy Work* (1883); *Home Beautiful* (1887); and James G. Johnson (1890). These documents are in the collections of the Museum of Play®, Rochester, NY. In addition, issues of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, 1884–1894; bound *Peterson's Magazine*, 1875–1884; and sporadic issues through the mid-1880s were reviewed. I also examined many children's books published during the 1880s and in the collections of Historic Cherry Hill. Finally Deborah Harding has published many patterns and their sources in her book *Red & White: American Redwork Quilts and Patterns* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000), and this was also a resource.
19. Briggs & Co., (New York, NY: 1884, 1885, 1886).
20. Joel Munsell, *The History of Cohoes, New York,* (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 1877), 243.
21. Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855–*1884 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c1978), 48.
22. Munsell, 211.

23. City Directory for Troy, West Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1893, advertisement for Harmony Mills, 367.
24. Edward J. Clark, "An Economic History of the Harmony Mills of Cohoes, New York" (Master's Thesis, Siena College, 1952), 26.
25. Ibid.
26. For example, the *Cohoes Daily News*, October 2, 1893, reported that a concert performed by the Harmony Mills Sunday School was held for the community on October 1, 1893.
27. Walkowitz, 107.
28. Diana S. Waite, "Number 3 ("Mastodon") Mill 1868 and 1872, Harmony Manufacturing Company, Cohoes," *Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology,* 26 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), 100.
29. Walkowitz, 113.
30. Daniel J. Walkowitz, "Working-Class Women in the Gilded Age: Factory, Community and Family Life Among Cohoes, New York, Cotton Workers," *Journal of Social History*, 5, no. 4 (Summer, 1972): 477. This article provides an analysis of the 1880 New York State Census Records for Cohoes, NY. Only eight percent of Irish women between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were married while forty-four percent of Irish women between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine were married.
31. New York State Census, 1892, Albany County, City of Cohoes, First Ward, Third Election District.
32. City Directories for Troy, West Troy, and Cohoes, New York were researched from 1845 to 1927.
33. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 and 1860, Rensselaer County, City of Troy or West Troy. 1870 and 1880 Census, Albany County, City of Cohoes, New York, First Ward.
34. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 and 1880, State of New York, Albany County, City of Cohoes, First Ward.
35. New York State Census, 1892, Albany County, City of Cohoes, New York, First Ward, Third Election District.
36. Josie Davidson signed quilt blocks C4 and probably A3, A5, and B2. Clara Mae Davidson signed quilt blocks B3, B5, D7, and F4.
37. *Cohoes Daily News* (July 1, 1892).
38. New York State Census, 1892, Albany County, City of Cohoes, New York, First Ward, Third Election District.
39. Josephine Davidson is listed in the teacher list to be paid, *Cohoes Daily News*, December 8, 1892.
40. Nicholas E. Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 22.

41. Ibid., 21.
42. Frazier, 189–90.
43. Tawa, 102.
44. Sigmund Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music in America* (New York: Random House, 1948), 176.
45. Ibid., 214.
46. M.T. Caldor, *Social Charades and Parlor Operas* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, 1875), 31.
47. Tawa, 29.
48. Tawa, 44.
49. Tawa, 31.
50. Spaeth, 253.
51. Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 468.
52. Ken Emerson, *Doo-dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 44.
53. *The Ladies' Home Journal* (December 1891), 33.
54. Ibid., 12.
55. *The Ladies' Home Journal* (November 1892), 10.
56. Frazier, 95.
57. Michael Saffle, ed. *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1998), 256.
58. I am indebted to Mr. Paul Mercer, Senior Librarian at the NYS Library, the librarians at the Library of Congress, American Memory Project website, and librarians at Brown University who searched their holdings for "Ripples of the Alabama" and the librarians at the University at Albany. Their help was greatly appreciated.
59. No wedding date has been found to date for any of the quilt's participants prior to 1897. Josephine Davidson married around 1904, but by that date Esther Killian might not have been living. Esther Killian is not mentioned in her father's obituary notice in 1896 or when his estate was probated, leading me to conclude that she died before then. Clara Davidson and Lizzie Baldwin never married.
60. Frazier, 90.

Table notes for Figure 3 (on pages 104–105).

a. Ingalls, *Ladies' Book of Fancy Work,* no page number given.
b. *Bentley's,* 79.
c. Harding, 88.
d. *Bentley's,* 81.

e. Ibid., 102.
f. *The Ladies' Home Journal,* (November 1888), 24. *American Periodical Series, Period III.* Collection of University at Albany, NY.
g. *Bentley's,* 124.
h. *The Ladies' Home Journal,* (December 1886), 16.
i. *Ingalls 1890 Catalogue of Perforated Stamping Patterns* (Lynn, MA: J. F. Ingalls, 1890), no page given. Collection of University of Maine.
j. *Bentley's,* 59.
k. Deborah Harding states that *Our Country Home* was a source of patterns for village scenes, 98.
l. *Ingalls 1890 Catalogue,* no page given.
m. Ibid.
n. *Needle-Craft,* 270–71.
o. *Ibid.,* 268–269.
p. *The Ladies' Home Journal* published oriental fan patterns in their February, 1889, issue, page 22.
q. *Bentley's,* 66.
r. *The Ladies' Home Journal* used the artist palette in advertising stamping patterns, May 1885 issue, page 9.
s. *Bentley's,* 34.
t. Harding lists a similar pattern found in *Peterson's Magazine,* 1887, 79.
u. *Ingalls 1890 Catalogue,* no page given.
v. *Bentley's,* 38.
w. "Under the Window," in *The Kate Greenaway Treasury,*" ed. Edward Ernest (New York: The William Collins & World Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), 105.
x. *Bentley's,* 104.
y. Ibid., 79.
z. Ibid., 67.
aa. Ibid., 59.
bb. Harding shows a similar elk or deer portrait, page 96.
cc. *Bentley's,* 46.
dd. Ibid., 92.
ee. Ibid., 120.

Plate 1. One-Patch quilt top. This top, with its diamond grid arrangement of squares, features a wide variety of gingham fabrics and one Art Deco style print that indicates a circa 1930 date. Author's collection.

Plate 2. The Soldier's Quilt (81" x 62"), 1865. Scraps of wool military uniforms, cut into more than 9,000 half-inch squares by a soldier. Photo by Alex Newbury courtesy of Gawthorpe Hall archive.

Plate 3. Watercolor sketch of maple leaf (c. 1900), by Rose Good, Kretsinger Collection, Lyon County Historical Museum, Emporia, Kansas. Photograph by Jonathan Gregory.

Plate 4. Pennsylvania Beauty quilt top detail (c. 1931), Rose Frances Good Kretsinger, cotton, appliquéd, 71 x 70 inches, Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas. Gift of Mary Kretsinger.

Plate 5. Quilt Q119. Amaranth appliquéd quilt with six images of single plumes growing from plants. Made by sisters Martha Newby Billhymer and Jane Newby Hobbs, White River Township, Hamilton County, Indiana, 1858. Cotton. 85"x 67." Collection of Mary M. Clemans. Photograph courtesy of Marilyn Goldman, co-author, *Quilts of Indiana: Crossroads of Memories.*

Plate 6. Quilt Q279. Quilt made by Mary Black. Nine images of four unusual split plumes with several circles, flower centers, and decorative appliqué border. Mary Black (American), Princess Feather Quilt, 1854. Denver Art Museum, Neusteter Textile Collection. Gift of Mrs. Scioto I. Danner, 1971.191. Copyright Denver Art Museum.

Plate 7. Pidgeon Family Quilt, circa 1850. Photograph by Barbara Tricarico. Private Collection.

Plate 8. Sandy Spring Quilt, circa 1860. Photograph by Neil Steinberg. Courtesy of the Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, Maryland.