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Reflections on Quilt History: Accomplishments and Challenges

Virginia Gunn

All of us here today have a personal AQSG journey story to tell, whether it is our first trip to an AQSG symposium, or our twenty-fifth, as it is mine.* While I reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of our organization, which is now over a quarter century old, I will sometimes refer to my personal journey. I hope it will inspire you to reflect on your experience with this group and what it means to you.

It took me awhile to discover quilting. My mother taught me to embroider before I started to grade school, and I won blue ribbons for my sewing in the 4-H contests at the county fairs. For eight years during the 1960s, armed with a B.S. in home economics, I taught sewing and textile crafts to hundreds of eighth- and ninth-grade Connecticut girls and adult classes in sewing and crewel embroidery. I also made dozens of dresses for myself, but I never thought of quilting. Each year the Stearns & Foster Company sent me a sample pillow kit packet with a square of Mountain Mist batting, urging me to introduce quilting in the classroom. I carefully saved each packet, but did not respond to their invitation.

I wrote my first paper on quilts in the spring of 1970 while working on a Master of Science degree in Applied Art at Syracuse University. Needing a research paper for a class called "Heritage of

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American Homes and Home Furnishings,” I decided to explore the history of quilts. I read all the books available from the top-notch university library. There were not many, but I found the classics: Webster, Finley, Hall and Kresinger, Peto, Dunton, Ickis, and Robertson.¹ Based on my scientific undergraduate training and with no knowledge of the influence of Colonial Revival literature, I am now happy to say I wisely concluded that Dunton’s book offered the most convincing evidence for the statements he made concerning historical chronology.

In 1971 my husband and I, with our new son, moved to Wooster, Ohio. I started a part-time job running the student-originated craft center at the College of Wooster. It was the hippy era. Crafts were in the air. No one in Ohio was interested in crewel embroidery. I taught myself macramé. Two years and another son later, I spotted a small three-sentence ad in the *Journal of Home Economics* for December 1973:

Immediate teaching positions open in textiles and clothing, housing and home furnishings, and institutional food service. Masters level and experience desired. Salary and rank commensurate with experience. Contact Head of the Department of Home Economics, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325.²

I showed it to my husband, Doug, who urged me to call. I cautioned that if it looked interesting, I might be tempted to try for it. He told me to go for it, and I called. After an interview, Dr. Joyce Sullivan offered me immediate part-time teaching and asked me to apply for a full-time position available for Fall 1974.

One of the classes I inherited at the University of Akron was a fairly new course called Needle Arts. I decided that I needed to include patchwork and appliqué in this class and proceeded to teach myself how to do it. I selected a pattern from the box of *Kansas City Star* patterns I had inherited from Doug’s grandmother and quickly discovered that they were not at all accurate! I then copied a design from a family quilt design onto graph paper to create an accurate pattern. Quilts, in my mind, were made from a variety of plain and printed cotton fabrics. The only possible combina-



tion in my fabric stash resulted in an intricate red and white Star block made of sturdy Indian Head cotton. Not totally understanding the process, I pressed the seams open, as one did for dressmaking. The results were not entirely satisfactory, even though I had matched every point perfectly. I decided I needed to consult some expert advice and headed for the Wayne County Public Library. The only how-to book I found on the shelves in 1975 was *Introducing Patchwork* by Alice Timmins, which offered instruction for the English paper-template method.³ I graphed another Star pattern and whipped together the templates covered with red, white, and blue fabric for a bicentennial pillow. This pillow won a ribbon at the county fair, although friends later told me the judges were all mystified by the method I had used to join the pieces.

I taught piecing and appliqué in the Needle Arts classes at the University of Akron for several decades, but during that time I made only a few small quilts. I needed to concentrate on research toward achieving tenure rather than producing creative works. In my efforts to accurately date American nineteenth-century photographs and costumes, I had discovered that most of the 1970s costume books were heavily based on European sources. I embarked on a project to learn to date American costume by studying images in the issues of *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* from the 1840s to the end of the century. While spending hours going through these books, I also copied everything about quilting and needlework that piqued my interest. This research resulted in several publications related to American costume, and it also reignited my interest in quilt history.

I discovered and subscribed to Joyce Gross's *Quilters' Journal*. There I found Sally Garoutte's stimulating 1978 article on crazy quilts, which she had written with help from her friends Cuesta Benberry, Carol Crabb, and Katy Cristopherson. I noted her statement that the crazy quilt was a well-recognized type by 1882, but "before that year, the documented record is still blank."⁴ With my immersion in women's periodicals, I believed I could fill in some of the blanks, and my presentation on "The Origin and Development of the Victorian Crazy Quilt" was accepted for the



American Association of College Professors of Textiles and Clothing (ACPTC) Central Region conference in Minneapolis in October 1982.⁵

As it turned out, 1982 was a significant year for several reasons. That year I decided to work on a Ph.D. in history. I was tenured, but with only a master's degree, I was in no position to move elsewhere if I ever wanted to. Research in the academic clothing and textile field was centered on hard science, which was not possible with the University of Akron's facilities, and on social-psychological research, which involved methods I found constricting for the kinds of problems I wanted to address and the types of questions I was asking. The History Department seemed to support the kind of research that interested me.

I needed colleagues in this new endeavor, and I looked for a group interested in research related to historical textiles. Fortunately, also in 1982, I came across another small, three-sentence advertisement in the *Quilters' Journal* that again changed my life. It read simply:

THE AMERICAN QUILT STUDY GROUP is involved in the development of the true history of quilts. We publish annually results of research. Send a legal-size SASE for further information. AQSG, 105 Molino Ave. Mill Valley CA 94941.⁶

I decided I would brave a trip to the unknown in California if my abstract on "Victorian Silk Template Patchwork in American Periodicals, 1850-1875" was accepted for presentation.⁷ It was accepted and in October, 1983, I arrived at the Santa Sabina Conference Center in San Raphael. There I found a group of wonderful people who were actually passionate about quilts, researching, and learning. In addition, these California people loved to talk and share, as well as drink wine with cheese and crackers. How could it get any better? Quiltmakers stitched as they listened to papers. Researchers took notes, as the papers would not be published until the following year. The presentations were all interesting and stimulating, and I was pleased to learn that I had answered a long-standing question of interest about the original source of



those template designs. While researchers had begun to network, I had been working alone in Ohio, just beginning to meet people like Ricky Clark and Penny McMorris. I was thrilled to discover what appeared to be an inclusive group with high standards of social/cultural history research. I had found a home where I could publish research that excited me.

In 1984 I was invited to serve on the board, which led later to the positions of AQSG president—the first to serve from outside the Bay Area—and editor of *Uncoverings* for a decade. In my first year on the board I volunteered to help redesign the membership brochure. With group effort we changed the purpose slightly. The original mission statement included this description: “A nationwide group interested in the *serious study of the history* of quilts, textiles, and the *women* who have made them.” We changed that statement to the following: “A nationwide group dedicated to uncovering the *accurate history of quilts*, textiles, and the **people** who made them” (emphasis added).

I also worked to change a policy statement that originally read: “We feel that there are no automatic experts in the field: that credentials are developed through study and accomplishment, *not through academic position or formal degrees*” (emphasis added). I successfully argued to delete the final phrase. After all, I had a formal degree and an academic position and I wanted to feel included too. We made other subtle changes. AQSG originally welcomed all persons interested in the *history of American quilting*. Soon AQSG welcomed all persons interested in the *history of quilting* (emphasis added). We recognized that quilting had global, not just American, implications.⁸

These changes in policy suited AQSG, a very special group. AQSG emerged as an independent grassroots group, not as a part of a professional, academic organization. Thus, from the beginning, it was more inclusive; one did not have to have specific academic credentials, education, or career to belong. Under the umbrella of history, it welcomed a wide variety of research topics. The publications produced by the fledgling organization in its first three years demonstrate the breadth of topics that it would contin-



ue to nurture. The slim blue books of short articles, *Uncoverings 1980, 1981, and 1982*, contain articles on the following topics: quilt patterns, quiltmakers, sub-cultural groups, specific states, types of quilts, fabrics used in quilts, the whole bedding context, design sources, literature related to quilts, specific quilts, museum collections, fairs and exhibitions, quilt collections, quilts in the context of homes, related textiles, quilts and art, international quilts, the passion for quilting. Anything was fair game and considered worthy if the research was credible, convincing, and well documented, but the central focus was on quilt history.

Charlotte Eckback noted of the first seminar, “Sally’s scholarship, Barbara Brackman’s sense of humor, and Lucy Hilty’s stitches will remain with me forever.” Jean Federico, then director and curator of the DAR museum, noted that Joyce Gross and Sally Garoutte were both “wonderful advocates for this study. Joyce being more hands on, organizing quilt shows, getting people to come; and Sally the more scholarly one wanting to make sure there was an opportunity to keep all that great research.” All were interested in documenting quilt history. They recognized Sally as the research expert and agreed on Sally’s choice of the historical style of documentation for research results. This choice freed the *Uncoverings* articles from the jargon of specific academic specialties developed through formal training, making it easier to be interdisciplinary and inclusive.

Our fabulous new brochure gives the mission statement we have used for the last decade: “AQSG establishes, sustains, and promotes the highest standards for quilt-related studies.” You may notice that this captures the open-minded view of the organization, which I fully support, but it no longer puts any particular focus on history. I always remember a sign a colleague kept on his door: “Don’t be so open-minded that your brains fall out.” I respect all disciplines and I value and use their contributions; but I have a personal preference for history and its established traditions of scholarship. I want to share with you why I believe we should keep history central to our mission. It is always risky to take a stand not everyone agrees with, but I am doing so buoyed by a letter Cuesta



Benberry wrote to me in 1998 after reading the published version of a presentation on history I gave at a conference at the Smithsonian. She complimented me and then said, “You’ve answered critics of our methodologies by explaining the differences between our goals and theirs, and doing so without denigrating their works, as some have done to ours.”¹⁰ Cuesta’s observations sum up the arguments I want to emphasize here.

Focus on History

Let’s consider why focusing on history was originally a wise choice for our group. Up until the 1970s, most history dealt with the feats of great men. Even the “new social history” focus of the twentieth century put more emphasis on men than women. The women’s movement would begin to address this bias, but most historians—including female historians—were trained to concentrate on verbal, written or oral, sources. Very few history scholars used material-culture artifacts as sources for their work, and none were particularly interested in textile arts. While Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Elizabeth Wayland Barber are deservedly credited for helping to change this, I believe AQSG did also.¹¹ In 1980, it would have been difficult to find a scholarly journal willing to publish an article on quilt history. Sally Garoutte and her colleagues wanted quilt history to be held to the highest standard, but they also wanted it published and available to interested readers. Rather than trying to influence the editors of existing journals, they decided to take on the task themselves.

Uncoverings 2008 is the twenty-ninth volume of our publication. To date, we have published 219 refereed papers and seventeen additional articles. Thanks to the work of Ricky Clark, the articles we publish are included in eight indexes. This demonstrates that the quality of our published articles is recognized as exemplary and insures that the research will be widely used, not only by all of us, but by graduate students and scholars from numerous disciplines and in numerous career paths. The research we have published has



provided and will continue to form a firm foundation for others to build on.

Just think, four decades ago, all the information published about American quilts would comfortably fit on one shelf. Today, my own quilt-related library fills at least four walls of floor-to-ceiling shelves, and I buy selectively! I focus strictly on history, rather than how-to, even though I recognize clearly that the hundreds of how-to books published since 1970 will be primary source material for analyzing the history of the past forty years, a task I will leave to future scholars.

Members of our organization have played primary roles in helping to build this literature. Articles that made their first appearance in *Uncoverings* often provided the foundation of research that made more popular works valuable. Since the beginning, when the little blue books had minimal room for visual enhancement, AQSG has returned copyright to authors after the initial publication and encouraged them to go farther with their research. Much of this information has later appeared with colored illustrations in popular periodicals or as full-length books. We have also established the forum to encourage all members in numerous other research and publication efforts. Our members, for example, provided leadership on most of the state and regional quilt projects that have made literally thousands of quilt artifacts available as sources to other researchers.

In 1980 finding the sources necessary to do quality work in quilt history was a daunting challenge for researchers. A graduate student in the online History of Quilts class I taught for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in the summer of 2008, questioned why author Bets Ramsey, in her 1986 *Uncoverings* article, referred to her own personal slide collection to provide the evidence of botanical quilts in Southern collections.¹² Because historians always publish under their full name and cite the full names of people they quote, a practice central to objective historical scholarship, readers know exactly who these people are and can assess how their background impacts their research. Another student, who knew Bets, reminded the class that Bets was a pioneer in gathering



data on Southern quilts, as well as one of the founders of AQSG. Her own slides of quilts that she had personally seen were her concrete evidence that such existed. When AQSG was founded in 1980 there was no internet providing visual access to the thousands of quilts we can see at the touch of a button on the websites of the International Quilt Study Center, the Quilt Index, and well-known museums, as well as those of dealers, individual collectors, and eBay. When Bets's article appeared in 1986, only one state project, Kentucky, had published a book. Several more appeared in 1986 including the Tennessee book by Bets and Merikay Waldvogel.¹³ It is hard to remember how difficult it was to locate sources just twenty years ago.

The wealth of information available today, however, offers new challenges to contemporary researchers. Instead of struggling to find any material at all, one is challenged to sort through mountains of material. To do a good job of scholarship today, researchers must read dozens of publications before they can be sure they are making new contributions to knowledge and have taken all evidence into consideration. Scholars are supposed to do their homework to recognize those who came before. Now quilt scholars must do what previous historians have always done—to become familiar with the literature, the secondary works. While today's young scholars will find it much easier to access literature, they have the new challenge of needing to read and digest much before they can position their own study.

What one student called "time travel" is also a necessary part of producing good history. One has to try to understand what it was like to live in and experience the particular era one is studying. Where were people coming from at that time? What were they up against? What were they thinking about? What was life really like in the nineteenth century, before movies, cars, suburban shopping, and central heating? It may be even harder for people who have grown up in the information-explosion age to understand what life and thinking was like before the internet, cell phones, and text messages.

At various times, our historical focus has elicited criticism from



people who expect and favor a more theory-testing approach to research and the more rigid and traditional scientific model for presenting results: review of literature, methods, results, implications. Social scientists often believe that historical methods are less rigorous. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Each historical study is unique, designed to address a unique research question based on analysis and synthesis of all evidence that can be gathered from sources. Since the primary sources available for each study vary, the methods used to analyze and mine those sources vary with each study. Historians do not spend much time describing their methods because they focus on results and the supporting evidence in the sources, not on how they got the evidence. They are not worried about triangulation, since most use numerous methods to mine the potential of their sources. As historian Elizabeth Wayland Barber urged, in reflecting on her research methods, “The first step, in my experience, is to trick oneself into focusing on every part of the data. *Draw it, count it, map it, chart it, and if necessary (or possible) re-create it.*”¹⁴ In other words, use every method or approach you can think of to analyze and synthesize the information from the sources you uncover.

Doing history with objects or artifacts as well as words has called for additional ways of using material-culture sources. E. McClung Fleming’s 1974 article, “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model,” has been most useful.¹⁵ Fleming called for four levels of artifact study: identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation. In the documentation portion, you start with the object and find out everything you can about it. Then you evaluate its construction, rarity, design, etc., by comparing it with other objects of the same category or made during the same era. You do cultural analysis to determine how the artifact was shaped by the culture or how it reflects the culture that created it. And, finally, you explain why the study is of significance or value for people today.

Some try to turn Fleming’s advice into a rigid method for linear research, but it is a model, not a method; and it calls for



numerous methods and cyclical research to build cultural analysis on a firm foundation of well-documented artifacts. The model is very well suited to work hand-in-hand with the processes of analysis and synthesis that are central to doing history. Material-culture scholars start with the material—the artifacts—but they work toward understanding people and cultures.

History research is not done until it is written for others to read. With each research effort, the author must decide on the most appropriate way to organize and report the results of this particular study. The presentation needs to put forward the author's overall thesis, results, and conclusions, based on evidence from sources that are clearly cited for others to check. In history's tradition, the material needs to be organized in a logical way and written in language that can be clearly understood by any educated person. Historians believe what Robert Day, a trained biologist, told his fellow scientists:

You should not write for the half-dozen or so people who are doing exactly your kind of work. You should write for the hundreds of people whose work is only slightly related to yours but who may want or need to know some particular aspect of your work.¹⁶

Recently I have heard criticism that writing well-documented history is too difficult and tedious and, therefore, not worth the effort. I disagree. Documentation is the heart of the process. The historical researcher is obligated to provide access to the sources of evidence considered in detailed endnotes or footnotes. These references are not placed in the body of the text, where they would interfere with the presentation, but are available to amplify, clarify, or illustrate the statements made in the text. Careful citations are the sign of careful scholarship. They credit those who have gone before, and they help readers to easily locate sources they may want to use or to question. They are gifts to the next researcher, aiding the next level of research, and they are not to be taken lightly. They are central to quality research in history.



History Takes Time

Academics sometimes use the term “pubs” to refer to clever ideas that can be worked up over the course of a semester to get a quick publication. Historical studies are rarely referred to as “pubs.” They are usually the result of long and careful study, a lengthy search for every possible source. Historians cannot survey the general populace or their own students when they want to know about something that happened in 1910. They must look for published materials—letters, diaries, objects—any source that may provide clues to address their questions. This usually takes time. In talking about historical analysis at the “What’s American about American Quilts?” symposium, held at the Smithsonian Institution in 1995, I shared Elizabeth Wayland Barber’s thought-provoking comments on research projects:

I decided to spend two weeks hunting for data on the degree of sophistication of the weaving technology, to see at least whether people *could* have made ornate textiles back then. I expected to write my findings into a small article, maybe ten pages, suggesting that scholars ought to consider at least the possibility of early textile industries.

But when I began to look, data for ancient textiles lay everywhere, waiting to be picked up. By the end of the two weeks I realized that it would take me at least a summer or two to chase down and organize the leads I had turned up and that I could be writing a 60-page monograph. By the end of two more summers, I knew I was headed for a 200-page book. The “little book” turned into a research project that consumed seventeen years and yielded a 450-page tome covering many times the planned geographical area and time span. It finally appeared in 1991 as *Prehistoric Textiles*, from Princeton University Press.¹⁷

Historical studies often take time, and those involving quilts are no exception. Just ask people who have published articles how long they worked on their topics.

Historians usually work alone. They must wrestle with the information provided by the sources themselves in order to put all the pieces together, to sort out the contradictions, to decide on the commonalities, to abandon old “working hypotheses,” and to form new ones as additional evidence calls for a different interpretation.



How can you send someone else to look at the artifacts or to evaluate and read the sources? You can't. You must see the objects with your own eyes and process the information through your own brain, and always be open to finding new information that you did not expect but that may eventually prove important in the process.

There can be no “negative results” in the final presentation of history. You must keep working until you arrive at a satisfactory thesis. Historian C. V. Wedgwood summed it up: “Ultimately the understanding of the past, in so far as it is achieved at all, has to be independently achieved, by a sustained effort of the imagination working on a personal accumulation of knowledge and experience.”¹⁸

People who write history must be open to revision. It is one of the key elements of the discipline. New information may shed new light on old conclusions. The author writes the article with all the evidence available, but if a new source or new evidence is found, one must see if it supports the original conclusions or calls for revision. This may be done by the original scholar or by a later scholar. It is not surprising that we need revision. Having a study published makes others aware of the topic and of what they might have or know that is related to it. While I worked on my gingham study for a decade, I had never seen *The Gingham Book*, a brochure printed in 1928, that Kathy Murphy so generously sent me from her mother's collection after my presentation in 2007.¹⁹ When I wrote my paper on Civil War quilts in 1984, nothing had been published about quilts donated to the U. S. Sanitary Commission.²⁰ I thought at the time that all quilts donated through the Sanitary Commission were long gone, but my paper caused people to be aware of such objects. One afternoon, Jan Dodge called from California with the news that she had found a quilt with a Sanitary Commission stamp. I exclaimed, “You did?” “Yes,” she replied. “Where did you find it?” I asked. “In a box in my basement,” Jan answered. What a surprise. She brought this rare treasure to the next AQSG conference for me to see with my own eyes. The process of revision had begun. Now the information I discovered has become almost common knowledge.



While historians often work alone, they do interface with numerous people. Wonderful surprises can happen to you. Several years ago Xenia Cord called. We had not been in contact for awhile and she asked, “What are you working on now?” I said, “Well, to tell you the truth I have been concentrating on coverlets rather than quilts lately.” She then shared, “I have some coverlets in my basement, lent to me by a gentleman down the street for a talk I gave. They’re made by a weaver named Hartman.” I immediately asked, “Did you say Hartman?” “Yes, Peter Hartman,” Xenia responded. Thrilled, I said, “He’s one of the weavers I am studying. He worked right here in Wayne County, Ohio.” And Xenia had the family’s photo album in her basement too!

In my coverlet study, I have learned a lot about the Germanic culture of Pennsylvania and Ohio, and the relationship between bedding, those coverlets, and the beautiful red and green appliqué quilts that emerged in the same era and environment. Quilts exist in context, not in a vacuum. When the quilt made by Elizabeth Hartman and the coverlets woven by her husband Peter Hartman were exhibited at the Wayne County Historical Society in Wooster, the photographs of the couple that Xenia provided added depth to the display.

These interchanges illustrate the importance of networking, so typical of AQSG, and central to the process of history. Historians need friends and colleagues, even as they must do their own work. Historian Lisa Wilson expressed the importance of one’s network to the practice of historical scholarship in the preface to one of her books. In addition to thanking her family and friends for their support, she thanked “colleagues on whom I counted for friendship as well as historical insight;” the staff at libraries and archives who “were helpful and generous with material;” colleagues and students who “read and commented on” draft chapters and final manuscript; a graduate mentor who “still finds time to critique my work and bolster my spirits;” and fellow graduate students who remain friends and continue to share their intellectual insights, and can provide tough criticism: “Their comments forced me to think, rework, and defend my findings. I thank them for their friendship



and their honesty.” And she conveyed grateful thanks for the insight of her editors who still found other ways to improve the manuscript.²¹ This breadth of support helps ensure the best research and is part of the history tradition. I think it is a perfect fit for where our organization wants to be.

As we submit manuscripts for possible acceptance, we need to remember that reviewers should be able to flag potentially worthy articles that still need work, and return them, with useful feedback, for revision and resubmission. Potential authors whose manuscripts are not accepted the first time should not give up. It takes numerous drafts to arrive at polished articles. As I tell my students, Alex Haley did seventeen drafts of the *Roots* manuscript before it became a prize-winning book and later a movie. We need to call on others and also offer help provided to others.

In 2008 Cindy Brick emailed to say that she wanted to send me a copy of her fabulous new book *Crazy Quilts*.²² I did not know why I deserved such a treat, but told her I would be honored to receive a copy. It arrived with three little sticky notes attached to the front cover on which Cindy wrote: “Virginia—years ago, you encouraged a fellow AQSG member to find out more about crazy origins. I have never forgotten your thoughtful comments, and your scholarship was invaluable. See what you think. I’d value your opinion.” Because I was going through a trauma in my life at the time, Cindy did not receive the immediate feedback I should have sent her. But I will say here tonight that she has completed a wonderful, aesthetically delightful contribution to the crazy quilt literature that Sally Garoutte initiated in 1978, and Cindy’s comments, of course, warmed my heart. Revisions should not be threatening. They should be celebrated, for they are part of the ongoing historical process as it is meant to work. A person’s work benefits from those who came before and will be built on by those who follow.

In a 1985 letter to me, Sally Garoutte wrote, “I’m still amazed that there are new things to be finding out about quilts. It just goes to show how pervasive they have been in American life.”²³ Sally also wrote, “Historical research never ends. We come to an understanding of our history only through small steps continually taken. Each



research paper is a small step, and each one is a challenge for someone else to go a little further. The enterprise of quilt history is a continuing process.”²⁴

Some of us here have lived through a period that is now ripe for historical research, the last four decades of the twentieth century. This is the period we should all be thinking about, one where oral history can really complement published sources. I recently bought two books at a book sale sponsored by the local chapter of the American Association of University Women. One was another copy of the Quilt National 1983 catalog, where quilt artist and juror Michael James wrote:

When I first became interested in quilts and in making them, I decried the fact that as late as the third quarter of the 20th century quilts were still viewed as “women’s pastime,” as “needlecraft,” as second-rate art. Others joined in berating the chauvinisms that had kept quilting isolated from other modern art forms. With surprising speed we seem to have turned heads and changed attitudes, and in the bargain, I think we’ve created a monster.

Now, in the 1980s, *all* quilts seem to be art, and *all* quilters are artists. Quilters everywhere are seriously “expressing” themselves with needle and thread, merrily rolling along toward the 21st century as they see themselves creating a new legacy for future generations. I’m inclined to jump off the bandwagon at this point and take a more critical view of the situation. What I encounter as I look around at quilting in 1983 is much less innovation than imitation.²⁵

Both of these quilting threads, innovation and imitation, identified by Michael played important roles in the impact of quilting during the following decades. They both deserve historians’ serious analysis. The second book I bought was about studio artist and furniture maker Wendell Castle. Its authors wrote a call for research that applies perfectly to the art quilt part of the Studio Craft Movement:

The maturation of the Studio Craft movement in America has created a strong need for scholarship in the field. Although recent publications . . . have begun to address the history of this movement, much



work is still needed to document the careers of the leading artist-craftsmen as well as the numerous craft fairs, galleries, and exhibitions . . . that have provided exposure for these artists, and the patrons, both public and private, who have had the insight to support the work in spite of resistance from the art world. The history of the movement and its participants also needs to be critically examined within the larger context of twentieth-century art in order to document conclusively the important exchange of ideas that has occurred among contemporary painters, sculptors, architects, and craftsmen.²⁶

Members of AQSG and quilt history scholars have accomplished a lot in almost thirty years. Still there is much left to be done. History takes work, but if the topic is meant for you, it is fulfilling, exhilarating work, not drudgery. Women's—and men's—lives are complicated. Many worthwhile things call us, but we hope and plan for time to do our research. We cannot help it; we find it interesting and challenging. And when scholars from other disciplines, who do not understand the value and worth of history, make snide comments, I remember Sally's statement in that short ad run that convinced me to join our organization: "AQSG is involved in the development of the true history of quilts." And then I recall the words of historian C. V. Wedgwood: "All sciences are devoted to the quest for truth; truth can neither be apprehended nor communicated without art. History therefore is an art, like all the other sciences."²⁷

My wish is that we will continue to focus on history with a mind open to all quilt-related studies, and that we will continue to build the nurturing network that supports the creation and dissemination of quality history, as times continue to change, as new topics and challenges emerge, and as new generations of scholars join us.

As we all participate in this twenty-ninth gathering of AQSG, may we celebrate the new research papers and the dedication and discipline that went into them, and enjoy the friendship and inspiration that pours forth when we are surrounded by people who are passionate about quilts and their history.



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8. These changes are noted in early brochures published between 1982 and 1985.
9. Charter members shared memories for section "Celebrating 20 Years of Quilt Scholarship," in the brochure for the American Quilt Study Group's Twenty-First Annual Seminar, October 13–15, 2000, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
10. Letter from Cuesta Benberry to Virginia Gunn, April 22, 1998. Response to Virginia Gunn, "Methods of Analysis and Closing Remarks," published in *What's American about American Quilts?*, proceedings of symposium at Smithsonian Institution, March 18–19, 1995, Session 6, 1–21.
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15. E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," in *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 9, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974): 153–73.
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23. Sally Garoutte, letter to Virginia Gunn, October 28, 1985.
24. Quotation published in AQSG membership brochure with permission from *Quilters Hall Of Fame Newsletter*, 1994.
25. Michael James, portion of "The State of the Art," in *The Quilt: New Directions for an American Tradition, Quilt National '83* (Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1983), 6.
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27. Wedgwood, *Sense of the Past*, 96.