

# Uncoverings 2010

Volume 31 of  
the Research Papers of  
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Laurel Horton



# *Uncoverings 2010*

Volume 31 of the Research Papers  
of the American Quilt Study Group

*Edited by Laurel Horton*

*Presented at Minneapolis, Minnesota  
October 14–17, 2010*

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Cover illustration: Cover of the Spring 1928 issue of *McCall Needlework and Decorative Arts*, featuring a child's "Picture Patch Quilt," a transfer pattern designed by the Patchcraft Corporation (McCall pattern no. 1633).  
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 *Preface*

On the occasion of thirty-first annual American Quilt Study Group Seminar, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 14–17, 2010, our organization takes the opportunity to reflect upon our coming of age. Surveying the contents of the thirty previous annual volumes of *Uncoverings*, one is struck by the sheer diversity of the subject matter of the articles. Early skeptics questioned whether there was really enough material of interest related to quilts to justify such a publication, but it soon became clear that quilts and quilting intersect with multiple aspects of human life and culture.

Our published research papers have dealt with topics spanning past centuries as well as the activities of contemporary practitioners. Our authors include academically trained scholars from a wide range of disciplines as well as self-trained researchers. We have published reflections on American traditions broadly as well as studies particular to a region or local community. And, because American quilting has developed in a global context, we have welcomed research on international exchanges and influences, past and present. The current volume, our thirty-first, continues to reflect the impressive diversity of subjects, as the authors introduce their discoveries and interpretations.

Virginia Gunn's meticulous search through decades of McCall publications reveals for the first time the extent of this company's



role in the quiltmaking revivals of the twentieth century. This article provides additional pieces to the puzzle of twentieth-century patterns and companies. The fact that the activities of such a prolific publisher could vanish from public memory within a generation, however, offers a sober reminder of the fragility of ephemeral information, whether recorded on paper or online.

In a quest to understand the colorant Prussian blue, Anita Loscalzo combed obscure volumes of scientific and technical literature, textile history, and manufacturers' records and samples. She presents the results of her research in a remarkably clear and accessible narrative, guiding us through the emergence of modern chemistry and describing the historical context within which the popularity of this brilliant pigment arose and declined.

Nao Nomura offers an insightful discussion and analysis of the Japanese discovery of American quilts in the late twentieth century and, subsequently, the ways Japanese quiltmakers have created a hybrid cultural form uniquely their own. The author's familiarity and experience with both cultures greatly enriches her understanding—and ours. We come away knowing more about Japanese quilts, but we also learn about perceptions of American culture.

Pamela Weeks purchased an unusual 'potholder' quilt at auction, precipitating a decade of research for similar items in publications, museum collections, and online catalogs. Her findings reveal this technique to be associated with both a particular geographic region and a significant historical period, suggesting that other such localized phenomena may await discovery and exploration.

Jonathan Gregory looks at three organizations providing quilts to families of American service personnel killed in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, giving us a look inside these contemporary movements. From interviews with project participants, he explored the layers of meaning embedded in both the quiltmaking experience and in the quilts. As with so many other research projects, the more he looked, the more he saw that had not been immediately obvious.

Finally, because the 2009 Seminar in San Jose brought us back to our California birthplace, Jane Przybysz was invited to speak



about the emergence in the 1970s of various organizations and movements related to quilts and fiber arts in the San Francisco Bay area. As she looked into what had appeared to be a straightforward convergence of local cultural expressions, she found a much more complex labyrinth of educational cross-currents, influential individuals and institutions, and trendy fashion statements. The published version of her oral address offers her preliminary discoveries as part of an ongoing research project.

Such is the nature of our work. We start with a question, but instead of answers, we find more questions. A simple subject under scrutiny expands from a single thread into a tangled web of competing motivations, chance encounters, and multiple meanings. For those who might still think of a quilt as an uncomplicated household object, we offer this volume detailing the authors' explorations beneath the deceptively simple surface.