Uncoverings
2012

Volume 33 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Lynne Zacek Bassett

Textiles, Print Culture and Nation Building in the 1840s

Kathryn Ledbetter

This essay evaluates two rare and historically important textiles within the rapidly changing environment of print production and American identity-building efforts during the Mexican War era (1846-1848). A whole-cloth comforter in the Winedale Quilt Collection of the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin and a whole-cloth chintz quilt at the Winterthur Museum made from similar textile designs exemplify the ways artifacts encode symbolic and iconic myths of American ideals of freedom, ingenuity, courage, and nation-building. They also demonstrate the interdependent relationships that textiles, books, pictures, and printed objects of all kinds had with sensational newspaper reportage and political campaigns of the period. In displaying images copied from lithographs of one of the first American victories of the Mexican War on May 9, 1846, the Winedale comforter and the Winterthur quilt joined with other printed matter in articulating evolving notions of what it meant to be a citizen of the United States.

Textiles and the Quest for an American Identity

Textiles played an important role in creating myths of American identity during the 1840s. We can examine the ways such mythmaking occurred by tracing the path of print production shortly after a specific event during the Mexican War, the Battle of Resaca de la Palma, on May 9, 1846. Textiles from a whole-cloth comforter from the Winedale Quilt Collection of the Briscoe Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin and a similarly patterned whole-cloth chintz quilt at Winterthur Museum commemorate this early American victory of the war and celebrate the exploits of Mexican War heroes such as General Zachary Taylor. They feature reprints of popular lithographs published soon after sensational reportage of the battle began to appear in newspapers throughout the United States. Artists, lithographers, journalists, hack writers, book publishers, advertising copywriters, and manufacturers of "things" heavily disseminated stories and images of the war in a variety of forms recognizable to their contemporary "readers." Although many citizens felt that the war with Mexico was a blatantly aggressive political ploy to acquire territory, exaggerated stories of heroism dominated the public imagination, and the technology that produced images of all kinds quickly enabled people to own visual representations of patriotism in action. Textiles on these two quilts remain as testimonials to the desire in the 1840s for a uniquely American brand of hero.

The United States experienced an identity crisis during the first half of the nineteenth century. Population diversity and an incontrovertible association with European Old World traditions obscured a national American identity, a culture of its own.[1] Popular art, music, literature, and other printed matter from the period display attempts to create indigenous legends in patriotic folk songs, stories, paintings, and books. Beginning with the 1840 political campaign of William Henry Harrison, log cabins and raccoons appeared on a variety of promotional objects as symbols for the American pioneer spirit. Textile manufacturers in England and the United States participated in this phenomenon by producing commemorative bandannas, pennants, banners, scarves, kerchiefs, Berlin wool needlework patterns on canvas, and theme fabrics for use in quilts, clothing and household decoration.[2] These artifacts fed the national thirst for cultural identity with myths about colonial America, the war for independence, heroism in the Mexican War, westward expansion, and notions of the common-man experience.

The 1840s decade is particularly significant for quilt historians because it was a watershed moment in the evolution of the patchwork style into an American icon, a representative of domestic patriotism.[3] The Winterthur chintz quilt and the Winedale comforter were utilitarian objects, and their historical importance is in their textiles, rather than in the artistic achievement explored by Teri Klassen in her study of Mexican War-era quiltmakers of the 1840s. Klassen's quilters made elegant red, green, and white floral appliqué quilts in designs described as Polk's Fancy. These artisans identified themselves as patriotic citizens of the new republic by glorifying "the nation and domesticity simultaneously," with their beautiful quilts.[4] Patterns such as Whig's Defeat, Mexican Rose, Harrison Rose, Democrat Rose, and Pride of Iowa demonstrated women's desire to "support the prevailing social order" and "be recognized as active participants in society," as well as to show their support of the Mexican War effort.[5] Although Klassen's fancy quilts decidedly differ in construction and materials from the comforter and chintz quilt discussed in this essay, fancy and utilitarian quilts equally participated in patriotic expression.

Two Mexican War-era Textiles and the Technology of Print Production

The two Mexican War-era textiles featured on quilts from the Winedale and Winterthur collections are similar in that they display copies of different popular lithographs of the same battle scene at Resaca de la Palma on May 9, 1846. [Figures 1 and 2] Drab color patterns are similar in both quilts, but textile types differ. The Winedale comforter is composed of loose-weave cotton, and the Winterthur quilt is made from finer chintz fabric. Construction techniques also differ. The Winedale comforter is tied. Traditional, but unremarkable quilting attaches layers of the Winterthur quilt. Although the rough cotton weave of the Winedale comforter perhaps marks it as a more homely object than the Winterthur chintz quilt, both artifacts work in similar ways to articulate the heroics of General Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War.

The Winedale comforter's drab color palette includes brown, olive, gold, cream, peach and tan. It is hand-pieced, and tied with brown threads affixing red wool tufts. The cotton batting is coarse, thick, and heavily migrated. Three and one-half panels of identical cylinder-printed textile design provide the surface of one side of the comforter. The other side features this textile on each side of one inset panel of printed patchwork. The edges are turned in to the center with no binding. The fabric is cylinder-printed on loosely woven cotton and appears to be designed as a utility quilt. The stitches closing the knife-edge finish are crude, and the red wool ties attaching the layers contrast with the textile's color palette. The focal image of the commemorative fabric repeats every 13.5 inches and depicts a

Mexican War scene from the Battle of Resaca de la Palma on May 9, 1846. [Figure 3] In this scene, Captain May (on his horse) stops Mexican general Rómulo Díaz de la Vega from touching off a cannon. The United States Eighth Infantry is advancing on the right, American dragoons are charging into a ravine in the far left, the American troop encampment appears in the distant background, and Lieutenant Z. M. P. Inge of the Second Dragoons is the fallen hero, presumably lying on the ground in the lower left corner of the scene.[6] General Zachary Taylor is the "tiny figure" giving directions in the upper left corner.[7]

My study builds upon and revises statements by at least two scholars who claim provenance for the textile's image, Esther Lewittes and Herbert Ridgeway Collins. Their preliminary research claimed that the image was derived from a wood-engraved illustration found in a biography of Zachary Taylor titled *The Life of General Taylor*. However, the image is more likely copied from an earlier lithograph printed in 1846 by Sarony & Major, entitled *The Capture of General Vega (in the act of discharging a cannon) by the gallant Capt May of the U.S. Army, during the engagement of the 9th of May*. [Figure 4]

The inset panel on the reverse side displays a printed patchwork mosaic design of hexagons in the drab color palette of dark brown, orange, light to medium tan, and cream. [Figure 5] The pattern is configured in consistent identical rosettes of six hexagons around a center print, surrounded by twelve hexagons of geometric print designs in brown, tan, orange, and light tan. The coarse weave of this panel is consistent with that of the adjoining commemorative print panels. Patchwork prints became fashionable after the Centennial, flourishing between 1878 and 1900, particularly with whole-cloth quilt tops and backs.[8] However, the Winedale comforter serves as an earlier example of printed patchwork.

The origin of this textile's production is uncertain. Both English and American printers annually produced many commemorative fabrics for use in the United States. More sophisticated designs, better printing detail, more colors, and higher quality fabric sometimes appears in cylinder-printed textiles produced in Britain.[9] Cheap prints produced in England may not be registered for copyright protection, and American printers did not register patterns or conduct business according to modern practices until the 1870s. Florence M. Montgomery notes that English manufacturers provided the largest number of cylinder prints with patriotic subjects until the midnineteenth century, but she groups this Mexican War fabric in a section titled "American Plate- and Cylinder-Printed Textiles."[10] One convincing factor of its origins may be the close proximity of New England textile manufacturers and reproduction artists to lithographic and newspaper publishing firms in New York and Philadelphia, such as Sarony & Major and Currier & Ives, the two firms who produced the original prints copied for the textiles. Americans took pride in the expansion of domestic cotton printing; the surging industry produced a growing volume and variety of cotton fabrics during the 1840s, influencing the making of quilts and the establishment of the cotton patchwork quilt as an American icon. In the United States, cotton was a source of patriotic pride.

Knowledge of the printing technology that produced a textile offers clues about its historical and cultural significance. Cylinder printing is an intaglio method first begun in the United States in the Philadelphia area, and the cotton industry used this printing method throughout the nineteenth century.[11] Options for creating a design for cylinder-printed textiles varied. Normally, an artist (called a delineator) would draw a design directly onto a cylinder plate, and an engraver would then scratch or engrave the design into the plate with a burin. The plate would then be attached to the cylinder for printing textiles. The delineator could also trace the outlines of a lithograph onto a mother plate and then use the softer mother plate as a pattern to engrave the image design onto the harder metal cylinder plates with engraving tools. The metal plates would then be attached to a cylinder of about 15 inches in diameter.[12] It would be inked and rolled onto the fabric by means of compression forced by other cylinders against the inked plate. By 1846, separate cylinders could print different colors and apply background patterns as shown on the Winedale textile. Figure 6 shows unprinted strips (called "scrimps"), created when folds in the fabric caused uneven printing as the cylinder rolled the inked design over the surface. The coarse weave of the textile increased the bulk between the cylinder and the engraved printing cylinders, causing distortion of the pattern continuity. This occurs with varying noticeability at many points on the comforter's panels.

The whole-cloth chintz quilt at Delaware's Winterthur Museum is featured in Linda Eaton's book, *Quilts in a Material World*.[13] The quilt appears in the drab color palette of brown, blue, olive, and ochre on white and features three and one half panels with an image (repeating every 15 inches) of Zachary Taylor sitting on a white horse and pointing forward as if to lead his troops into battle. The focus scene is framed between a bed of flowers at the bottom and columns of palms at each side. The edges are turned front to back and whip-stitched. The quilt is hand-quilted in scallop patterns with tan cotton thread at five to six stitches per inch. The textile is cylinder-printed and features dotted patterns in the floral frame, a technique produced on inexpensive chintzes by the 1830s using separate cylinders. Winterthur owns 22 yards of well-preserved 24.5-inch selvedge-to-selvedge panels of this fabric, allowing us to see the vivid blues that once enhanced the quilt [Color Plate 4], especially when we place the quilt beside the preserved fabric panel. [Color Plate 5] The other side of the quilt features printed blue stripes crossed with a lacy brown pattern.

The image on the Winterthur quilt adapts three Currier & Ives lithographs. Lewittes correctly identifies sources for Captain May leading the charge on the Mexican cannon, the advance of the dragoons on the right, and the positioning of wounded soldiers on the ground as a pastiche of images from two Currier & Ives lithographed prints: 1) *The brilliant charge of Cap't May./ at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma 9th May 1846. In which gallant exploit he captured the whole of the enemy's cannon & took General La Vega prisoner of war* and 2) *Gen'l Taylor at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma. Capt. May receiving his orders to charge the Mexican batteries May 9th 1846.* The blue color once evident at the top of the textile's image replicated the water featured in both of the colored lithographs. The central figure of Zachary Taylor is copied from an 1847 Currier & Ives portrait entitled *Major General Zachary Taylor. "Rough & Ready."*[14]

Marketing Patriotism: The Mexican War

An informed study of the language of textiles containing images such as those displayed on the Mexican War-era quilts from Winedale and Winterthur requires a full understanding of the ways print culture embodies history. Whether they appear on textiles, pottery, or paper, visual representations of patriotic events are inseparable from the mythology a culture chooses to create about itself. Vividly portrayed images of the early victories of the Mexican War rapidly became translated as proof of American courage and strength in this first war fought on foreign soil.

After annexing and awarding statehood to Texas in 1845, the United States, under President James K. Polk, initiated a war with Mexico to enable westward expansion. Mexico would not acknowledge the recent independence of Texas, nor its claims to a new boundary at the Rio Grande. In October, 1845 Polk positioned Zachary Taylor and his troops at the Nueces River to protect the US from Mexican invasion and tried to purchase parts of Texas, New Mexico, and California from the Mexican government for $25 million, but Mexico refused. By May 3, 1846, fighting began at Matamoros, followed by hard combat between the US cavalry and Mexican troops at Palo Alto. On May 9, 1846, Taylor and 2,200 troops soundly defeated 3,700 Mexicans at Resaca de la Palma (near the town currently known as Brownsville, Texas), thanks to the capture of Mexican artillery commander General de la Vega by Captain May and his dragoons.

The Mexican War was the first to have full-time war correspondents, and they sometimes participated in the conflict. Robert W. Johannsen notes that "Americans were better informed about their war than any people in wartime had ever been."[15] Innovations in printing presses for rapid production of papers in greater bulk enabled the mass circulation of news during the 1840s. Newspapers such as the *New York Herald* depended upon southern newspapers for their reports; telegraph lines stopped at Richmond, Virginia, and reporters from New Orleans dailies became well known for providing the rest of the world with news about recent developments. George Wilkins Kendall and Christopher M. Haile from the New Orleans *Picayune* and James L. Treaner (called "Mustang") from the *Delta* provided rapid dispatches and vivid descriptions for mass circulation by penny press newspapers throughout the country. The penny press was more progressive and competitive than regular newspapers; their eyewitness accounts arrived more quickly than official reports from the government. Many of these accounts characterize what Shelly Streetby calls "grotesque sensationalism."[16] In some instances, artists accompanied reporters to the battle scenes where they quickly sketched drawings, which later became paintings, which might then be freely copied by other artists to be engraved, lithographed, colored, cheaply printed, and sold by East Coast print sellers and book dealers. Ron Tyler notes that "Some artists among the first troops in Mexico rushed back to the United States to publish illustrated books and portfolios of scenes even before the brief war concluded in 1848."[17] The lack of authority in this free exchange was democratic, but unreliable. However, most Mexican War pictures were not, and did not need to be, factual. They merely needed to reflect a suitable degree of heroics.

Newspaper reports of the initial victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma soon reached readers back home, making General Taylor an instant hero. Captain May became a favorite son of newspaper editors. The New Orleans *Courier* described May as a "most singular being" on horseback: "With a beard extending to his breast, and hair to his hip-bone, which, as he cuts through the wind on his charger, streams out in all directions, he presents a most imposing appearance. His gait on foot is awkward, and that of his horse (an immense one) is the rack of the Canadian pony."[18] Yet another description of May appears in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* on June 9, 1846:

> He is over six feet high, wears his hair long, so that it nearly reaches his hips; his beard falls below his sword belt, and his moustache is unshorn. He is a splendid rider . . . It will interest some of your fair readers to hear that he was crossed in love some years ago. Since that time he has never allowed his hair or beard to be touched by a barber . . . [In charging] May is in advance of them all, on his noble black steed, standing up in the stirrups, his head bent forward, his long hair streaming out behind like the tail of a comet, and his whole appearance viewed from the head, looking like one of those celestial visitants.[19]

These descriptions appear to have influenced the artist who created the original drawing of May reproduced in the Resaca de la Palma series of lithographs, because the "streaming" long hair and his favored standing-in-the-saddle position on a horse are clearly evident in the images on both the Winedale comforter and the Winterthur quilt.

Massive public celebrations followed reports of Taylor's victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and the war became the subject of America's first media frenzy. Biographies appeared only months after the battles in a rapidly advancing storm of mythological hero production. Johannsen describes the scene as a "war mood that approached hysteria" in the weeks after the Battle at Resaca de la Palma: "Merchants advertised the sale of Palo Alto hats and Palo Alto root beer, while Palo Alto houses, Resaca de la Palma saloons, and Taylor taverns sprang up almost overnight":

> Heroes were molded and cast in the battle reports, the dispatches of newspaper correspondents, the soldiers' letters, and the plethora of publications which the conflict generated. Their stories were told and retold until they became independent of reality. Their deeds were celebrated in poetry and song and were reenacted on the stage. When they were martyred, they were mourned with striking intensity. The first encounters with the enemy in May 1846 produced the war's first heroes and virtually every engagement after that added to the list.[20]

Many of these heroes became notable for their role in the Civil War, including Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, and Jefferson Davis. The war took on such proportions in the news that it seemed to some that the newspapers created the war; Ulysses S. Grant recalls in his memoirs that "the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma seemed to us engaged, as pretty important affairs; but we had only a faint conception of their magnitude until they were fought over in the north by the Press and the reports came back to us."[21] Minute details of every succeeding skirmish up to the last battle in 1848 made the war seem personal and close to a country hungry for heroes, as depicted in Figure 9. In this popular lithographed copy of a painting by Richard Caton Woodville, first exhibited in 1848 and entitled *War News from Mexico*, all eyes and ears at the American Hotel are attuned to the reading of newspaper reports from Mexico. The scene shows how news and excitement about the Mexican War united Americans of every class, race, and sex.[22]

The war was a defining moment in America's identity. It proved that the United States could wage war on foreign territory, garner respect from countries abroad, and inspire a unifying, patriotic pride. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo resolved the war in 1848, resulting in the Mexican cession of 338,681 acres at the cost of $16,295, or 5 cents per acre.[23] The United States now had a vastly larger Texas, with its new boundary at the Rio Grande. Other expansions soon occurred in Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, Wyoming, and California, just in time for the California Gold Rush of 1849. Many people opposed the war as unconstitutional territorial aggression and disagreed with expansive notions of Manifest Destiny. However, this commentator in the Washington *Daily Union* (March 16, 1848) expresses the alternate view: "It is true that the war has cost us millions of money, and, what is far more precious, the lives of some of our noblest citizens. But what great advantages has it not obtained for us? It has covered us with glory. It has extended our fame to the remotest corners of the earth . . . it will extend the area of freedom to the Southern Pacific."[24] Sensational news reportage from the front, beautifully lithographed battle scenes, sound victories, and new land for settlers created an unprecedented patriotic response.

Mapping the Terrain of Print Production

A proper understanding of nineteenth-century print culture should consider all artifacts as sharing the same shock of current events, the same moment of production, the same opportunities in innovative technology, and the same pool of values. Quilt historians especially benefit from this awareness when examining clues about origins and dating of images such as those copied on textiles of the Winedale and Winterthur quilts. Because lithography was the most commonly used method of producing cheap illustrations for a mass readership during the 1840s, an acquaintance with its history is thus essential in identifying what that print genre meant in context with the wider culture of the era. The Mexican War was the first to be portrayed in lithographic prints for a broader audience. Although it was also the first to be photographed, photography was still in its early stages of development and not widely used. Most of the prints to come out of the war were lithographs. The history of nineteenth-century illustration records a relentless search for technology that would enable faster, cheaper production for images for mass circulation, and easier, faster ways to print images in color. Printmakers after the 1820s met this demand with lithography, a cheap, quick, durable method of meeting reader demands for pictures. It was easy to correct in case of last minute updates, making this method ideal for sensational news reportage.

Lithography was invented by Alois Senefelder in 1796 when, not having the money to buy paper, he used a stone to write his mother's laundry list. The planographic process had the advantages of speed and durability for producing greater numbers of prints per stone, making it less costly. A lithograph is printed by an oil- and water-based process from a design drawn directly onto a flat stone. Philadelphia firms began using lithography in 1818–1819, but it was not until the 1830s that the first important American lithographic firm, Currier & Ives, was formed.[25] Napoleon Sarony was one of the more talented artists at Currier & Ives; in 1846 he partnered with James Major to form the lithographic firm Sarony & Major. Although lithographic firms competed in the same market, they often shared artists and lithographers. Sarony's lithograph of Captain May at the Battle of the Resaca de la Palma is similar to several lithographs produced by his former employer Currier & Ives, but there was no sense of ownership with images.

In his book *Currier & Ives: America Reimagined*, Bryan F. Le Beau reports that Currier & Ives did not usually copy paintings by well-known artists, preferring to hire staff artists for $15–$18 a week to draw the pictures, or copy, or change drawings from freelance artists. A staff of trained female colorists worked in the shop, applying one color per person in assembly-line fashion. Lithographs were often reworked and reissued in response to current public interests, and newspaper descriptions provided by war correspondents often sufficed for an artist's rendering. Artists often used European battle prints as models for the soldier uniforms and battle scenes in Mexican War prints and tried to highlight acts of heroism. The firm offered prints published in a book or sold separately, perhaps in a set with wrappers or loosely sewn together to be bound in a book at a later time. Sometimes buyers could purchase lithographs already mounted and ready for framing. Currier & Ives published a total of 70 lithographs of Mexican War scenes, which they shipped, advertised in large catalogs, sold in their storefront, and marketed on the streets through print hawkers who worked on commission, peddling prints from pushcarts throughout New York City.[26]

According to Le Beau, the Currier & Ives Mexican War prints "shaped the thinking of the young men who volunteered for the Union and Confederate armies, and they later came to think such pictures were inadequate, misleading, or even lies."[27] However, the firm "printed what the people wanted to see":

> Currier's prints emphasized and glorified, and did not simply report, victory and acts of heroism. They provided a series of heady triumphs over a foreign power for a nation increasingly worried about, and insecure in, its growing sectionalism. As in prints of wars past, the enemy is not

> taken lightly but indeed is shown, and often described in captions, as fighting valiantly, which only made American victory all the sweeter.[28]

From the beginning of his publishing business in 1834, Nathaniel Currier was deeply engaged in creating an American identity and, along with textile printers and quilters, he used his tools to create a history symbolized by images of heroic wartime exploits, pioneers and westward expansion, and nostalgic home life.

In this rapidly changing environment, images quickly migrated and mutated from one publishing format to another. War images from the 1840s had many layers of reproduction. Copyright laws did not extend to newspapers, journals, or printed images because they were considered ephemera–therefore not important enough for legal status. Collins, Lewittes, and others claim that the Winedale comforter's commemorative textile reproduces a wood-engraved illustration printed in a book titled *The Life of General Taylor,* published by Lindsay and Blakiston in 1847.[29] Collins claims that the textile is "derived exactly" from an image printed in this book between pages 102 and 103, titled "Capture of General La Vega by Captain May." [Figure 10] Differences between the fabric and book images may not be easily apparent upon first glance. However, the most obvious detail from the textile image that is missing from the wood engraved book illustration is a soldier placing an American flag in front of the cannon. [Figure 11] He is somewhat less noticeable because his uniform color blends into the background. Lieutenant Inge's body is conveniently moved by the artist farther away from the cannon wheel, to the left, to make room for the soldier. Once that adjustment is realized, we can see many other differences: uniforms, weapons, troop formations in the distant, horse color, and, of course, the added decorative floral frame around the textile's focal image. These details are not necessarily important for my purposes here, having already noted that artists often changed iconic pictures to suit current purposes. However, the addition of a common soldier placing an American flag in front of the Mexican artillery while the battle rages around him begs further exploration.

The soldier who places an American flag at the forefront of the Winedale textile image does not appear in any other scene the image is copied from, and the added detail invites the reader to speculate about the delineator's intent in this revision. Soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Resaca de la Palma were angered when Captain May was credited for the victory. They claimed that the Mexican artillery was actually taken by the company bugler. Thus the implication in the textile's revision of Sarony's lithograph is that the common man is the silent hero in his flag-bearing role, meeting all foreign threats for his country, regardless of danger to his life. Here the common man deserves public acclaim instead of the officers because of his humble courage. This contrasts with the romantic stories that newspapermen spun about Captain May, whose wild, long hair conjures a starkly more violent image than the boyish soldier placing the flag in front of the Mexican artillery. This detail gathers public memory of all newspaper and book images produced during that historical moment and joins with other material artifacts in producing myths of courageous American individuality. The Winedale comforter's textile is clearly not "derived exactly" from the book illustration. However, the book, the lithograph, and the textile are alike in their relationship to the ideology they reproduce in the much larger print culture evolving during the Mexican War era.

Lindsay and Blakiston's wood-engraved book illustration is a poorly copied version of the larger, earlier lithograph engraved and widely distributed by Napoleon Sarony and his partner Henry Major. Yet the layers of artifice continue. Sarony's image shares many features with another lithograph produced by former employer Nathaniel Currier, titled "Capture of Genl. La Vega by the Gallant Capt. May at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma May 9th 1846," one of four Currier versions of the same battle scene, including two adapted for the Winterthur whole-cloth chintz quilt. Currier's lithograph of the same scene is very similar to Sarony's in the positioning of May's horse, cannon, and surrounding conflicts. Currier's artist probably created his image from a comfortable studio at the firm in New York after reading local newspaper reports copied from New Orleans penny press papers. When we compare the Sarony and Currier lithographs, the wood-engraved book illustrations, and the textile images, we begin to understand how nineteenth-century print culture freely adapted iconic visual property as needed in each instance of reproduction.

The book illustration is part of a sparsely detailed, anonymously authored, cheap printing aimed at a market hungry for myths. The author of *The Pictorial Life of General Taylor* is unnamed, probably because the book's more important purpose is to cash in on the public interest in Taylor and other Mexican War heroes. The text is probably partially lifted from other sources, making its author an "everyman" of sorts, a simple carrier of ideas. This is not a literary tome, nor is it a biography. Very little of Taylor's life is revealed in the book, as frankly explained in the preface:

> The splendor of the military achievements in which his has been the guiding arm, has caused an enthusiasm which is contagious; and raised a grateful tempest of praise, which would cover great faults, if there were any gross faults to conceal in his military character, or in his public life . . . In truth, we know little of him, except as a soldier, and have therefore forborne [sic] to attempt any relation of his private history; nor is such matter necessary to our purpose.[30]

The image facing the title page of this book shows "Old Rough and Ready" (as he came to be called) Zachary Taylor casually attired in a straw hat, vest, and wrinkled, unbuttoned uniform jacket. [Figure 12] Johannsen reports that his costume was soon "so well known that he became the "old man in the plain brown coat."[31] Taylor's humble style and war heroics became the theme for portraits, statuettes, poems, music, and books. Women wore straw bonnets called "Rough and Ready straws," and men wore "Rough and Ready" boots.

A loyal Whig newspaper editor commissioned a second edition of the Taylor book, re-titled *The People's Life of General Zachary Taylor with a Biography of Millard Fillmore*, as a campaign biography for Taylor's run for the presidency in 1848. The letterpress and publisher are identical to the *Pictorial Life* of 1847, except a biography of Taylor's vice-presidential running mate, Millard Fillmore, is tacked onto the end and new title page illustrations are added to the front. The biography thus evolves from a war product to a campaign artifact heavily engaged in the national project of myth-making in its self-important claims: "The history of Millard Fillmore, our candidate for Vice President, affords a useful lesson as showing what may be accomplished in the face of the greatest obstacles, by intellect, aided and controlled by energy, perseverance and strict integrity, in a public and private capacity."[32] The description of Fillmore fits the public need for American heroes who are resourceful, independent, moral, and persevering. In contrast to the first edition's title page image of "Old Rough and Ready" Taylor, the *People's Life* title page depicts Taylor stiffly uniformed and sitting on a powerful white horse that is uncharacteristic of Taylor's regular ride, "Old Whitey." This image is a crude copy of the same 1847 Currier lithographed portrait of Taylor that is featured in the textile of the Winterthur chintz quilt (*Major General Zachary Taylor. "Old Rough & Ready"*). The title of this new edition, *The People's Life*, reflects the notion of Taylor as America's possession: he is one of our native heroes, combining American ideals with notions of Napoleonic glory. The next image is titled *General Taylor Never Surrenders*, accentuating patriotic pride in warriors such as Taylor, who demonstrate courage under fire for the ultimate purpose of justifying westward expansion and Manifest Destiny. A minor publisher of religious and educational books, Lindsay and Blakiston took advantage of the war fever and political impetus to issue books that they would repeatedly reissue for other audiences. The back cover of *The People's Life* advertises yet another edition of this book with another title and marketed toward another group, that of young readers. The ad claims that the book's images are "mostly from original designs." However the only original element of the eight designs included in the book is the way a copy artist adapted another copy.

Making Connections between Quilts and History

Museums and research collections such as those at Winedale and Winterthur provide quilt historians with opportunities to touch the past. We owe a debt of gratitude to philanthropists such as Winterthur's Henry Francis du Pont who collected fabrics with patriotic images, and Texas philanthropist Ima Hogg, who purchased the Winedale comforter for use as a bedcover in her period-reproduction of historic buildings near Round Top, Texas (now called Winedale Historical Complex). The comforter is among more than 400 quilts in the Winedale Quilt Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, a growing resource for quilt and quilt history study.[33] Winedale is administered by the Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. The Briscoe Center partners with the non-profit Alliance for American Quilts to document and preserve America's quilts heritage. Winterthur Museum has one of the world's finest collections of printed textiles. Curator Linda Eaton reports that they are upgrading their entire holdings to provide online access to the collection soon, with constant upgrades planned for the future.[34] In addition to benefitting from the efforts of collectors such as Ima Hogg and Henry Francis du Pont, researchers today have unprecedented opportunities to make connections between museum objects and history due to the expansion of online collections information, as well as online facsimiles and transcriptions of historic documents.

As scholars become more aware of the interconnections of various material objects, and the importance of understanding objects to understanding cultural history, they will become more aware of the integral role of quilts in the shaping of American identity during the 1840s. Translating the vocabulary of a printed textile's language requires studied interpretation guided by knowledge of history, technology, popular culture, and ideological concepts current with the quilt's origins. Mexican War era quilts of the 1840s thus represent the forces of cultural change and technological development that ultimately resulted in the United States' unique character.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to Katherine Adams, Quilt Curator of the Briscoe Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin, for her enthusiastic support of this project and for introducing me to the Mexican War-era comforter. I also thank Linda Eaton, the John L. & Marjorie P. McGraw Director of Collections and Senior Curator of Textiles at Winterthur Museum for generously sharing information about related textiles held in their collection. Many thanks also to Lynne Bassett and Laurel Horton for nursing this essay along toward publication.

Endnotes

1 See Henry Steele Commager, "The Search for a Usable Past," in *Historical Viewpoints, Volume One: to 1877* (New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1970), 164-79.

2 For more information and examples of these various political and historical artifacts, including quilts, see Esther Lewittes, "The Mexican War on Printed Cottons," *Antiques*, October 1941, 212-15; Florence M. Montgomery, *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850* (New York: Viking Press, 1970); Herbert Ridgeway Collins, *Threads of History: Americana Recorded on Cloth 1775 to the Present* (City of Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1979); Katy Christopherson, *The Political and Campaign Quilt* (Frankfort, KY: The Kentucky Heritage Quilt Society and the Kentucky Historical Society, 1984), 4-13; Mary Schoeser and Celia Rufey, *English and American Textiles from 1790 to the Present* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989); Julie Powell, "Quilted Ballots: Political and Campaign Textiles," in *On the Cutting Edge: Textile Collectors, Collections, and Traditions*, ed. Jeanette Lasansky (Lewisburg, PA: Oral Traditions Project of the Union County Historical Society, 1994), 27-33; Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World* (New York: Abrams, 2007); and Arlesa J. Shephard, "Quilts for McKinley: Women's Involvement in Politics," in *Uncoverings 2008*, ed. Laurel Horton (Lincoln, NE: American Quilt Study Group, 2008), 137-57.

3 My statement about quilts as artifacts of American identity-building during the 1840s is prompted by my study in progress on the subject, drawn in part from work by scholars of American history, literature, and textiles—many of whom I consulted for this essay, including Lynne Bassett, Bryan F. Le Beau, Laurel Horton, Shelley Streetby, and Teri Klassen.

4 Teri Klassen, "Polk's Fancy: Quiltmaking in the Mexican War Era," in *Uncoverings 2006*, ed. Joanna E. Evans (Lincoln, NE: American Quilt Study Group, 2006), 85.

5 Ibid., 78.

6 Lewittes, 214.

7 Collins, 124.

8 Deborah E. Kraak, "Patchwork Prints in America 1878 to 1900," in *Uncoverings 2011*, ed. Laurel Horton (Lincoln, NE: American Quilt Study Group, 2011), 153.

9 Schoeser and Rufey, 74.

10 Montgomery, 343.

11 "The first cylinder machine was imported by Mr. Siddell from England, and in 1809 was put in operation by water-power about eight miles from Philadelphia, enabling one man and two boys to print daily 10,000 yards of cloth. In 1822 the engraving of metallic rollers for calico printers was commenced in Philadelphia

by Mason & Baldwin, who took out letters patent in 1827 for biting figures on steel cylinders. Large print works were erected in 1823 at Lowell, and about the same time at Taunton, Massachusetts, and Dover, New Hampshire…; and other places. In 1826 about 60,000 yards were printed weekly in New England; and in the year ending April 1, 1836, the quantity of calicoes printed in the United States was 120,000,000 yards." *Manufactures of the United States in 1860 United States. Census Office. Manufactures of the United States in 1860 Book Covers. Manufactures of the United States in 1860 compiled from the original returns of the eighth census, under the direction of the secretary of the interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1865), 23. Available at http://archive.org/stream/cu31924096440940; accessed April 4, 2012.

12 I am grateful to Gwendolyn Hustvedt for insights about copying methods. In an email to me on December 15, 2011, she suggested that "Craft skills, rather than artistic skills would be required" for this work, as well as "a steady hand and a good eye." See also Michael Twyman, *Lithography 1800-1850: The Techniques of Drawing on Stone in England and France and Their Application in Works of Topography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). In an email to me on December 19, 2011, Twyman confirmed that lithography was also used in printing on textiles, pottery, and other items, but the cotton-printing industry preferred intaglio and relief methods, although there were no quality issues with printing colors on cotton using lithography.

13 Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 173. Eaton informs me that she is also planning to discuss this quilt in her forthcoming revision of Florence Montgomery's landmark book of textile history, *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850.*

14 These and other Currier & Ives lithographs noted in this essay are easily viewable with a simple search for "Zachary Taylor lithographs" or "Mexican War" on Google Images, http://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi.

15 Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 11-12.

16 Shelley Streetby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 60.

17 Ron Tyler, *Prints of the West* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 78.

18 Reprinted in the *Boston Courier*, June 1, 1846, n.p.

19 Quoted in Lewittes, 214.

20 Johannsen, 11-12, 113.

21 Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (1952), Report, ed. E. B. Long (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 16.

22 The lithograph made from Richard Caton Woodville's painting sold 14,000 copies.

23 Peter Wolf, *Land in America: Its Value, Use and Control* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 38-39.

24 "Democrats Hail a Glorious Achievement," in *The American Spirit: United*

States History as Seen by Contemporaries, 2nd edn., ed. Thomas A. Bailey (Boston: Heath, 1968), 285.

25 Nathaniel Currier (1813-1888) and James Merritt Ives (1824-1895) founded the lithographic firm Currier & Ives, which operated in New York City from 1834 to 1907.

26 Rick Stewart, "Artists and Printmakers of the Mexican War," in *Eyewitness to War: Prints and Daguerreotypes of the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1989), 19.

27 Bryan F. Le Beau, *Currier & Ives: America Imagined* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 66.

28 Ibid., 65.

29 The full book title of reference is actually *The Pictorial Life of General Taylor, the Hero of Okee Chobee, Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterey, and Buena Vista, with Numerous Illustrative Anecdotes and Embellishments.*

30 *The Pictorial Life of General Taylor…* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1847), iv.

31 Johannsen, 116.

32 "Biographical Sketch of Millard Fillmore," *The People's Life of General Zachary Taylor… Also, a Biography of Millard Fillmore* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1848) 221.

33 Some of the quilts from The Winedale Quilt Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin are viewable online in the Quilt Index, www.quiltindex.org, a joint project of The Alliance for American Quilts, MATRIX: The Center for Humane Arts, Letters and Social Sciences Online at Michigan State University, and the Michigan State University Museum. The index record for the Winedale comforter is W2H22.72. Unfortunately, because of Ima Hogg's eclectic taste and methods of collecting, we have little information about most of her quilts, according to curator Katherine Adams. We know that she bought quilts at auction houses in New York City, as well as from antique stores while driving through Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. We have little information about specific dealers or provenance of the quilts. The Winedale Historical Complex is one of three important Texas properties saved by "Miss Ima." She donated the Complex to the University of Texas in 1967 as a museum and conference center. For more information about Ima Hogg, see http://www.famoustexans.com/imahogg.htm. For more information about the Dolph Briscoe Center, see www.cah.utexas.edu/collections/quilt_history.php.

34 Fortunately for textile researchers, Eaton is also producing a revised edition of Florence M. Montgomery's 1970 landmark study, *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850*. The new edition is forthcoming within the next two years from W. W. Norton. Personal conversation with Linda Eaton at Winterthur, January 2012.