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Quilt Documentation Projects, 1980-1989: Exploring the Roots of an National Phenomenon

Christine E. Humphrey

One of the most notable aspects of the 1980s' surge of interest in quilt history is the documentation of thousands of quilts by small groups throughout the United States—yet, it has been one of the least talked-about aspects of quilt history. This study examines the phenomenon of quilt documentation projects of the 1980s to gain a better understanding of the social and cultural factors that influenced the organizers and the participants. Organizers in thirty-six states initiated or completed statewide documentation projects by 1989. This study examines five of those statewide projects (the Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc., the Texas Sesquicentennial Quilt Association, the North Carolina Quilt Project, the Nebraska Quilt Project, and the Kansas Quilt Project), utilizing archival materials and local, state, and national media coverage to investigate the goals, objectives, and motivations of the project organizers and the project participants.

In 1985 a man drove 275 miles to Plymouth, North Carolina, to have his family's quilts documented by the North Carolina Quilt Project. In November 1985, the Kansas Quilt Project hosted nine Quilt Days documenting more than 1,300 quilts. In 1984 and 1985, the Texas Quilt Search Project coordinated some of their Quilt Days with the showing of the exhibition, "Kentucky Quilts: 1800–1900," featuring quilts documented in this country's first documentation project. Each of these events may



seem trivial, but they contribute to a phenomenon that has resulted in the documentation of more than 177,000 quilts owned by families, collectors, and museums in the United States.¹

This effort by small independent groups, which have come to be known as “quilt documentation projects,” is a significant part of the ongoing quilt revival. The quilt documentation projects began in 1981 with the Kentucky Quilt Project and continue today, as groups conduct initial or follow-up projects and as others continue with smaller regional or county-wide research. Between 1980 and 1989, a total of thirty-six statewide quilt documentation projects were either completed or in progress.² Makers and descendants of makers owned the majority of quilts documented by state projects. By the end of the twentieth century, almost every state in the United States and multiple other nations, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, had conducted some form of quilt documentation project. In fact, Australia conducted its first quilt documentation program in 1982.³ The overwhelming response from quilters and quilt owners within the United States surprised many of the project coordinators.

Considering the unanticipated level of public interest and participation in the quilt documentation projects, it is surprising that there is so little literature that examines them as a national phenomenon. Shelly Zegart reflected on the success of the documentation projects fifteen years after she co-founded the first project in Kentucky in 1981, but there is no other publication that focuses on these projects as an historical and cultural phenomenon. Perhaps those who are most familiar with quilt history feel there is no need to question the “how” and “why” of this documentation, because they were a part of it; perhaps others feel that there simply has not been enough time since the first projects began to gain a clear picture of the social and cultural foundation; for others whose focus is on the objects rather than the people documenting the objects, perhaps this topic simply is not of interest.

The last three decades of the twentieth century, however, have had a profound impact on the study of quilts, and we have just begun to study and understand the many facets of the ongoing quilt revival, which dates back to the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴ The documentation projects alone have provided access for quilt scholars to massive amounts of information on objects through their permanent archives. They also show sustained and concerted efforts by scholars and enthusiasts to expand the understanding of



quilts as manifesting social, cultural, political, economic, and technological histories above and beyond their functional role as bedcovers.

This essay proposes that these projects must be considered as a phenomenon that was successful because it happened at a time when scholars and the general public were interested in the history of the ordinary individual—an interest stimulated by new academic study of material culture, and women's and local history (driven in part by enthusiasm for the 1976 Bicentennial). This rising interest in material culture studies and micro-history intersected with popular culture in the quilt revival. Although initially a revival of traditional craft practices, one aspect of the quilt revival has been an emphasis on the gathering and publishing of information through the scholarly study of quilts, exploring them as integral parts of women's history. The quilt revival encompassed a new consideration of quilts as art or folk art, resulting in the commodification of quilts (as Nancy Bavor discusses in her essay in this volume). Thus, the confluence of these circumstances drove the interest in and success of the state quilt documentation projects. Supplementing media coverage (local, state, and national) with information found in organizational documents and project publications, this essay explores the ways in which project organizers responded to and capitalized on the social, cultural, and political climates of the day, and developed collaborations between scholars and enthusiasts to support their endeavors.

Five "Case Histories"

The sizeable number of quilt documentation projects initiated during the 1980s indicates a larger driving force than a simple interest in quilts. This study analyzes five projects (Kentucky, Texas, North Carolina, Kansas, and Nebraska) as representative of those that completed the documentation phase during the 1980s. Each one illuminates the challenges that organizers faced in trying to plan and implement a quilt study that would speak for the entire state's history, women, and quilting practices. The Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc. (KyQP)—the first state quilt documentation project—established the model for public documentation days and served as inspiration to many of the other projects. The Texas Sesquicentennial Quilt Association (TSQA) represents the group of projects in the 1980s that organized around celebrations of statehood and state heritage. The



North Carolina Quilt Project (NCQP) and Kansas Quilt Project (KsQP) exemplify projects with high levels of participation by the public in the quilt documentation process and underscore the skills required of those who organized and successfully implemented such ambitious projects. Finally, the KsQP and the Nebraska Quilt Documentation Project (NQP) demonstrate the growing involvement and cooperation between historians, folklorists, and quilt enthusiasts in the study of quilts, as well as the concern of documentation project organizers to develop a scholarly approach to the study of quilt history. The following sections very briefly outline the history, structure, and goals of each project in this study.

Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc.

No discussion of the documentation projects can begin without studying the Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc. In early 1980, Kentuckian Bruce Mann, a quilt dealer, decided that it was time to document the state's quilts because he believed that state heritage was being lost as the undocumented objects were being sold out of state without accompanying history by dealers like himself.⁵ Although Mann passed away before initiating his project, Shelly Zegart, Eleanor Bingham Miller, and Eunice Ray, with consultant Katy Christopherson, picked up the torch and organized the first statewide quilt documentation project, the KyQP.

Citing the need to document authentic, outstanding Kentucky quilts before families sold them to dealers who would take them out of state, these women created a plan for a project that would document quilts owned by Kentucky families and result in an exhibition and a catalog. They organized event days, called "documentation days," across the state, and, through publicity in local newspapers, they invited the general public to participate by bringing in their nineteenth-century Kentucky-made quilts. After conducting twelve documentation days between July 1981 and March 1982, at which approximately 1,200 quilts were documented, the organizers of the project published a catalog of a select group of quilts and organized an exhibition for the Louisville Museum of Natural History and Science. The Smithsonian Institution's Traveling Exhibit Service (SITES) traveled the exhibition across the United States and internationally. The success of the Kentucky project and the national attention it received inspired quilt enthusiasts in states across the country to conduct their own quilt documentation projects.⁶



Texas Sesquicentennial Quilt Association

Simultaneously, an organization of a different sort formed in Texas. Karey Bresenhan, Nancy Puentes, and Suzanne Yabsley founded the Texas Sesquicentennial Quilt Association (TSQA) in 1980. The TSQA's overarching goal was to document the contributions of women's quilting and organize an exhibition of the best quilts found for the celebration of the Texas Sesquicentennial in 1986.⁷ In the fall of 1984, the Texas Sesquicentennial Quilt Association became a recognized organization of the larger state Texas Sesquicentennial Organization.⁸ Documentation days began in February of 1983 and ended in March 1985.⁹ Bresenhan and Puentes published two catalogs, and the exhibition hung in the capital's rotunda for a week in 1986 during the year-long celebration of Texas' statehood.¹⁰ Although cautioned that they were unlikely to find any quilts worth recording because Texas had been a pioneer state and all of the good quilts remained on the East Coast, the TSQA documented about 3,500 quilts during the course of twenty-seven quilt documentation days.¹¹

North Carolina Quilt Project

The North Carolina Quilt Project (NCQP) began with the Forsyth Piecers and Quilters Guild in Winston-Salem in 1983. The NCQP incorporated in March of 1985. By the end of 1986, the board of directors had organized and overseen more than seventy quilt documentation days, establishing the NCQP as one of the most numerically successful quilt projects. The North Carolina Museum of History became a co-sponsor of the NCQP early on and the repository for the resulting archives. According to the NCQP grant proposal for the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Inc., the purpose of the project was to "illuminate the ways in which quilts and quilting have been a part of life" in North Carolina.¹² The NCQP documented quilts and quiltmakers in North Carolina made prior to the Bicentennial of 1976.¹³ The documenters hosted seventy-three documentation days instead of the scheduled seventy due to the popularity of the project. Two documentation days, sometimes three, were held in different areas of the state on the same day. The end result was a permanent archive of more than 10,000 quilts, an exhibition, and the publication, *North Carolina Quilts*.¹⁴

Nebraska Quilt Project



The Lincoln Quilters Guild formed the Nebraska Quilt Project (NQP) committee in 1985 and developed a quilt documentation project unlike any of the others included in this study. Twenty-one members of the guild served as the NQP organizing committee and as the trained documenters. The project organizers, along with consultants from local universities and museums, studied Nebraska history, immigration, and demography to create a strategy that would target the rich immigrant history of Nebraska's settlement period prior to 1920. They identified thirteen areas to host quilt documentation days that would represent the major immigrant groups.

The committee held Quilt History Days in two phases following a pilot documentation day held in Lincoln in March 1987. The first phase, from April to September 1987, included quilt days held at thirteen locations in rural Nebraska representative of the ethnic heritage of the state.¹⁵ The second phase consisted of fourteen days held in the Lincoln and Omaha areas between March 1988 and May 1989 to represent the most populous regions of the state. In total, nearly 5,000 quilts were documented during the twenty-eight Quilt History Days. The first thirteen Quilt History Days held elicited 3,000 of the 5,000 quilts.¹⁶ The 1991 publication of the project's book, *Nebraska Quilts & Quiltmakers*, concluded the project and received the 1993 Smithsonian's Frost Prize for Distinguished Scholarship in American Crafts.¹⁷

Kansas Quilt Project

In 1986, Nancy Hornback and Eleanor Malone spearheaded the Kansas Quilt Project: Documenting Quilts and Quiltmakers (KsQP). The board of directors for the project included not only quilters but a nationally-known quilt historian, an authority on Kansas folklife and folklore, historians, a women's studies professor, and museum professionals.¹⁸ The KsQP, initially a five-year endeavor, took closer to eight years. They hosted seventy-two quilt documentation days over a sixteen-month period beginning in 1986, documenting 13,107 quilts by April 16, 1988. The KsQP records show a well-planned, organized, and executed documentation project. Like the North Carolina Quilt Project before it, there were often several Quilt Discovery Days happening in several locations on any given day. The board of directors then chose to conduct a period of extended research that included follow-up oral history interviews and in-depth research on selected



quilts or quiltmaker topics. They published their project book, *Kansas Quilts & Quilters*, in 1993.¹⁹

Publicizing the Documentation Days

Although it would make for an interesting article to discuss all of the intersections and divergences among these five groups in how they organized their projects, how they trained their documenting teams, or even how they funded their projects, the focus of this essay is about how the social and cultural milieu of the day both initiated the quilt documentation projects and offered stimuli to attract participation from the general public. The publicity for the projects are invaluable to understanding how organizers, the media, and the public perceived the projects, especially in the decade before the Internet made such publicity easy and common. Analyzing this publicity offers insight to the probable social and cultural influences motivating projects and participants.

Only rarely did paid advertisements appear in the print media for the projects. Instead, most of the publicity resulted from press releases sent out in advance and articles following up on the documentation days with personal stories from quilt owners. The pre-documentation day publicity contained mostly basic information about the individual project and the upcoming documentation day—date, location, time, number of quilts permitted (in states where there was a limit). Ranging from state to state, the newspaper coverage of the project usually consisted of much more than a simple listing in the local calendar of events. Typically, an article—ranging from fifty words providing the bare minimum of information, to a full-page spread—appeared on the coveted front page of an inside section of the newspaper.²⁰ Many of the documentation days received follow-up articles that included images of quilts documented, owners with their quilts, and stories about some of the most interesting pieces.

In Kentucky, publicity for the first ten Quilt Days was a mixture of information about the history of the KyQP, the reasons why documenting quilts was important, stories about quilting traditions in Kentucky history, and the proposed book. The story of Bruce Mann, his ambition, and his untimely death was an integral part of the newspaper coverage of the Quilt Days. Because he was a known figure in the antiques business and quilt world in Kentucky, journalists and the project organizers recognized



that he provided a human connection to the origins and reasons for the KyQP.²¹ One-quarter of the articles published in 1981 and 1982 mentioned Mann. The exhibition and the project were also publicized in *American Collector's Journal*, *Americana*, *Handmade*, *House Beautiful*, *Southern Living*, *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine*, *Quilt*, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, *Ohio Antique Preview*, *The Houston Post*, *The Arizona Republic*, and in Ruth Roberson's monthly quilting article for North Carolina's *News and Observer*.²²

In Texas, the amount of publicity and newspaper coverage of documentation days varied. In some places, such as Dallas, the Quilt Day received only a few lines in a tiny font at the bottom of the Arts & Entertainment Guide on the day of the event.²³ In Houston, where there were three documentation days, the amount of publicity in the newspaper depended on the sponsoring group. When the Quilt Guild of Greater Houston co-sponsored the documentation day, the Quilt Days were listed in the calendar, once with a picture and once without.²⁴ Quilt Festival (now International Quilt Festival) co-sponsored another day in November 1984, attracting visitors from all over the country. In this case, longer articles described the Quilt Day as part of the plans for Quilt Festival.²⁵ In other locations, documentation days coincided with the exhibition "Kentucky Quilts: 1800-1900" at local museums. Publicity for these days included information about both events.²⁶ Occasionally, newspapers wrote feature-length articles on current trends in quilting and incorporated a notice of the upcoming documentation day.²⁷

Publicity for the North Carolina Quilt Project was the most varied of the five projects. The staff of the NCQP provided the regional coordinators with press releases and informational flyers. A few communities hosting documentation days used the flyers in their newspapers; however, most of the publicity was in the form of articles announcing the general information about the upcoming day or summarizing events of completed days.²⁸ National magazines took note. Carter Houck, editor of *Ladies Circle Patchwork Quilts*, spent a few days traveling with organizer Ruth Roberson and wrote a feature-length article on the project.²⁹ *Southern Living* featured an article about the NCQP.³⁰ The NCQP saved 150 letters that they received in response to this article. There was even an article in the German magazine, *Deutsches Textilforum*.³¹

Broadcast publicity created a high level of awareness for the project throughout the state. Georgia Bonesteel, the quilt show host and North



Carolina native, did a special feature on the NCQP.³² On a national and international scale, Kenley Jones did a three-minute feature on the *NBC Nightly News* with Tom Brokaw, and the *Voice of America*, a radio show for overseas Americans, aired a segment. Jones' interpretation was a nostalgic one, noting that a quilt "reminds of us of the old days that we might want to bring back."³³

Most of the media coverage for the Nebraska Quilt Project was for the thirteen documentation days held between April and September 1987. The Quilt History Days were major events in the rural areas of the state and received more media attention in those locations than in Lincoln and Omaha.³⁴ The NQP seemed to have a talent for setting both a tone and an expectation for documentation days.³⁵ The NQP reminded each location that it was one of only thirteen that would have a documentation day. Suzi Schulz, writing for the *Red Cloud Chief*, commented, "The community of Red Cloud is honored..."³⁶ In many locations, there were often additional activities planned around the event. In Benkelman, the Dundy County Council of Home Extension Clubs sponsored a folk art display.³⁷ In Bancroft, the Senior Center offered food and local businesses donated the money needed to rent the hall for the documentation day.³⁸

Newspaper coverage for Bancroft also presented the Quilt History Day as a "museum for a day," in which people who attended the documentation day could view the quilts as they were photographed. Also on view were quilts loaned for display purposes only and a slide show of quilts previously documented.³⁹ "Museum for a day" was such a popular aspect of the Quilt History Days that it caused some problems. In the newspaper coverage for Dorchester, Jan Stehlik of the NQP committee reminded attendees that the quilts would only be hung on the photography frames for as long as it took to photograph them.⁴⁰

Journalists and the documentation projects did not limit photographs in the newspapers to only quilts. Both the NQP and the KsQP used photographs of local quiltmakers with quilts that they planned to bring to a documentation day as part of their publicity.⁴¹ In the *Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, the article about the upcoming Quilt Discovery Day included a photo of three local women and the quilts they planned to take to the documentation day.⁴² Coverage for the Dodge City Quilt Discovery Day also included a picture of a local woman showing one of the quilts she planned to take to her local documentation.⁴³



The KsQP encouraged their regional coordinators with other suggestions as well. In her three-page checklist for regional coordinators organizing documentation days, Mary Rowan included publicity suggestions that showed up in later newspaper articles. One suggestion emphasized how the participant benefited from bringing a family quilt to the Quilt Discovery Day such as recording a family treasure for posterity, helping to compile information about Kansas quilt heritage, and reminding people that quilts with interesting stories might be included in exhibits and publications of the KsQP. An article in the *Lindsborg News-Record* demonstrates this: "Quilt Discovery Days being held statewide are not an exhibit or commercial event, but rather an opportunity for quiltmakers or owners to make a contribution to the recorded heritage of Kansas."⁴⁴

Analysis of the Social and Cultural Context

General themes emerge when reviewing and comparing articles about the individual documentation projects, as well as the content of their publicity. First, the quilt revival was already in full swing as the documentation projects developed in the 1980s, creating space to ask questions about the history of quilts and quilting and reflecting concerns about the transient nature of textiles. Second, the publicity reflected the growing academic interest in the use of objects such as quilts as historical documents and the understanding that both memory and objects have lifespans. Third, the publicity reflected the influence of the Women's Movement in emphasizing the importance of women's history and women's contributions. Fourth, the Kentucky Quilt Project's success inspired organizers in other states. And, finally, the publicity of the quilt documentation projects proved to be highly successful, with projects never having trouble attracting participants.

The Quilt Revival

By the end of World War II, the quilt revival of the first part of the twentieth century had ended, creating such a slump in quilting over the next two decades that it was declared all but extinct. By the late 1960s, however, large numbers of women had returned to quilting. Bonnie Leman, for example, began publishing *Quilters Newsletter Magazine* in 1969, and Carter Houck began editing *Lady's Circle Patchwork Quilts* in the 1970s.



Jean Ray Laury, noted quilt artist, teacher, and historian, published her first books on appliqué and quilting in 1966 and 1970 respectively.⁴⁵ During the 1970s and 1980s, quilters created guilds focused on the social aspects of quilting and the sharing of knowledge. In 1978, Ruth Janesick established the North Carolina Quilt Symposium, Inc., which became a supporter and funder for the North Carolina Quilt Project, as well as an umbrella organization for North Carolina quilt guilds.⁴⁶ In 1984, Suzanne Yabsley described the proliferation of quilt guilds in Texas.⁴⁷

The term “quilt revival,” for this essay, refers to the explosion of new quilters, the development of a multi-million dollar quilt industry by the mid-1980s, the formation of quilt guilds, the commodification of antique quilts as art or folk art, and the establishment of scholarly organizations dedicated to the preservation of quilts and quilt history. By the time the quilt documentation projects began in 1980 and 1981, the general public was familiar with quilts as objects of American heritage with social, cultural, political, or artistic value. Publicity for the quilt documentation projects often reflected one or more of these values.

Many quilt documentation project committees wrote of the rising interest in quilting during the 1970s as an influence on their projects. Karey Bresenhan and Nancy Puentes called it a “renaissance of interest.” Bresenhan cited the influence of the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s in which young people were looking for a simpler lifestyle, one of which was learning to make things by hand.⁴⁸ By 1982, quilting as an industry had become a “\$50 million to \$100 million business.”⁴⁹ It was more than just business, though. The first quilt museum, the American Museum of Quilts and Related Arts (now the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles), opened in San Jose, California in 1977. By the end of the 1980s, another three quilt museums had opened.⁵⁰ The documentation projects did not happen in a vacuum; they were a part of this much larger phenomenon.

The general public was aware of quilts. In Fort Worth, Texas, “Why Not Try Your Hand at Quilting,” was on the front page of the Home/Living section the day of Quilt Day. The article discussed quilting as a family tradition that had nearly died but was experiencing a revival with the help of quilt shops throughout the states. Journalist Raymond Teague interviewed Sandy Barker, co-owner of The Calico Cupboard. She said, “There has been a big comeback in the last five years, mainly because today’s woman was not left with a tradition.”⁵¹ Teague connected quilting with



the pioneer tradition and to continuing family traditions. He also noted that quilts are family heirlooms, which connect the current owner with his or her ancestors. He wrote, "Without these women, where would we be? How would we have kept warm all these years? What would we have of our ancestors to pack away or display?" All of the mythology and connections to past generations are wrapped up in those three sentences. The article continued with a description of how current generations can carry on the tradition in modern ways.

Shops formed that catered to quilters as hobbyists and professionals; quilt shows became a common way to display newly created quilts; and museums were exhibiting quilts in a variety of ways. New products making quilting easier and faster were sold at the new shops. Fabric companies began to cater to the quilters, giving attention to quality and fabric design. TSQA organizer Karey Bresenhan, for example, opened Great Expectations, a quilt shop, in Houston, Texas, in the early 1970s prior to co-founding Quilt Festival (now International Quilt Festival) in 1977 and the South/Southwest Quilt Association (now International Quilt Association) in 1979 with Nancy O'Bryant Puentes and their mothers. Puentes had also been a founder of the Austin Area Quilt Guild prior to becoming an organizer of the TSQA. Quilt shows, symposia, and conferences brought quilters together from larger geographical areas.

A number of committee organizers cited quilt exhibitions in their states as factors for their state's documentation project. Laurel Horton wrote that the South Carolina documentation project was a direct result of the excitement and interest generated by a 1982 quilt exhibition at the McKissick Museum. The museum organized the project as part of its commitment to documenting the state's folk art traditions.⁵² North Carolina's museums had three quilt exhibitions during the 1980s that attracted many non-quilters as well as quilters.⁵³

The museum exhibition that may have had the largest impact on the public perception of quilts was *Abstract Design in American Quilts*, curated by Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof in 1971 at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City. The press generated by that exhibition sparked art collectors to purchase quilts. Many people, including Holstein and van der Hoof, had already been collecting quilts, but the price of quilts skyrocketed after the exhibit. By the mid-1980s, good quality pre-1940 Amish quilts were becoming hard to find under \$1,500. According to collector David



Pottinger, Amish quilts had increased ten-fold in value since 1974.⁵⁴ Companies like IBM, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Esprit Corporation had quilt collections and displayed them in corporate headquarters.⁵⁵ In 1980, a quilt auctioned at Sotheby's went for \$10,000, and in 1984, a nineteenth-century Baltimore album sold through American Antiques & Quilts in New York City for \$26,000, a record for the time.⁵⁶

Many of the quilt documentation projects operated with the opinion that the purchasing of quilts and the removal of them from their homes caused a loss of history. In *People Magazine* on April 30, 1979, Suzy Kalter introduced the nation to the quilt dealer, Bruce Mann. Mann was traveling about 50,000 miles a year between Kentucky and both coasts. He was purchasing quilts made in Kentucky and selling them to celebrities. He told Kalter that quilts were "American folk art" and that they were "great investments."⁵⁷ The KyQP incorporated preservation of the heritage that was being lost as a primary reason for the project. Lucie Blodgett announced the KyQP with that exact concern: "The romance of quilts! So many threads of love and tragedy are stitched into the folds of family heirloom quilts that it is a crime to let them out of the family or out of the state."⁵⁸

Selling quilts to individuals outside the family or outside the state and the loss of associated information about the quiltmaker was of particular concern to the organizers in Nebraska. The first objective of the project outlined in the original proposal was to encourage families to keep their quilts or, "if that is not possible," to donate them to museums. Another stated objective was to encourage people who had to sell their quilts "to do so at fair prices." The organizers also wished "to stay the flow of Nebraska quilts on the back seat of dealers' vans to other parts of the country."⁵⁹ The possibility of dealers and collectors showing up at quilt documentation days was such a concern that NQP volunteers wore "identifying smocks" to the Quilt History Days.⁶⁰ One aspect of the newspaper coverage that was unique to the NQP was the consistent inclusion of a statement that personal information would not be made public. "The whereabouts of each quilt and the identity of the quilt owner will be guarded from the public," and "While the information and photographs gathered will be made public, the quilt owners' names and addresses will not be distributed without permission," were two statements conveying the intention of the project organizers to protect the quilts and personal information.⁶¹ All of the projects encouraged families to care for their quilts by handing out flyers on documentation days



with information on the proper ways to store and clean quilts. Although there is no evidence that Kentucky labeled the documented quilts, the other four projects in this study created fabric labels for families to add to the backs of their quilts with the project's documentation information and location of the archive.

At the same time that families were encouraged to hold onto their quilts, they were also encouraged to see them as collectible and valuable items. Consider this excerpt from a *San Antonio Express-News* story about the Quilt Day in San Antonio, Texas, in September 1984: "While you weren't looking, a recently recognized art form has crept out of the closet and into the gallery. The status of Grandma's homely old patchwork quilt may have been elevated to objet d'art and great-great-grandmother's could be a pearl practically beyond price."⁶² The article went on to tell quilt owners to bring their "quilted treasures" to the documentation day so that they could be analyzed, assessed, and recorded. Statements like the one above also went well with the promise that each quilt would be considered for the TSQA's exhibition in celebration of the state's sesquicentennial—not only was grandma's quilt a treasure, it could be a piece of art that got to travel the state.

Documentation Projects and Material Culture Studies

Part of the quilt revival was the new interest in studying quilts as both art objects and as historical objects with connections to women's history. The documentation projects recorded patterns, techniques, fabrics, and measurements in a consistent manner in hopes of determining whether or not regional styles or characteristics existed. They recorded the stories of the families and the makers in order to root the physical findings in personal stories and state histories. The documentation projects and the people who brought their quilts in for documentation were participating in the new social and cultural historical perspectives of the period both in academia and popular culture. Although the documentation projects of the 1980s often organized through non-academic organizations, many of them sought museums as co-sponsors and museum staff or university faculties to serve as advisors and trainers.

The documentation projects were part of a new scholarly interest in the study of objects, or "material culture," a component of popular culture studies, which historian Peter Burke notes had gained the interest



of academic historians in the 1960s.⁶³ This approach to history sought to include a broad spectrum of participants in understanding the development of the nation's political, economic, social, and cultural systems. Often referred to as bottom-up or grassroots history, historians studied middle and working class people, non-whites and minorities, women as well men. The New Cultural History of the 1980s and 1990s identified a myriad of possible subjects including dreams, food, and travel.⁶⁴ Material culture was an arena in which cultural historians began writing during the 1980s and 1990s as they studied the relationships of objects to attitudes. They began studying physical objects as symbols, representations, and texts of the world in which they were made.⁶⁵

Folklorists, too, began developing methodologies for studying material culture in addition to storytelling, music, and other folkways. Michael Owen Jones writes that folklorists began writing in the 1960s about the neglected field of material culture. During the 1970s and 1980s, folklorists wrote down methodologies and published papers on the study of artifacts. Material culture studies, he asserts, is cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary. By the late 1980s, scholars represented the fields of cultural geography, art history, American studies, popular culture studies, folklore, and many others. Jules David Prown defined material culture in 1982 as the “study through artifacts of the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time.”⁶⁶

From the 1960s through the 1980s, Americans celebrated their national heritage, their folk art, and general history at the local and national levels through acts of public commemoration and organized memory-building. From 1961 to 1965, the United States commemorated the Civil War. In 1976, the United States celebrated the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence; in 1986, the centennial of the Statue of Liberty was observed; and from 1988 until 1991, the bicentennial of the Constitution and related developments in United States history were commemorated.

In 1983, Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan asserted that the state and local history movement in the mid-twentieth century was sparked by a combination of factors, including a new interest in family and ethnic roots and ancestry, the American Bicentennial, and favorable legislation in the late 1960s and 1970s. According to their survey, only eight percent of America's historical organizations were founded by 1900. The largest



percentage, 53.2 percent, was founded between 1960 and 1981. Hogan and Phillips also noted that more than seventy percent of preservation organizations were organized after 1960.⁶⁷

The desires to celebrate national history and local history and the blossoming need to document the objects representative of those histories came together in the quilt documentation projects. The transient nature of objects and the memory of makers and owners became an integral part of the publicity of the projects. "Everyday history slips away—deaths, people moving away, memories becoming dimmer, records are lost. There is no better time than now."⁶⁸ Some quilt documentation projects focused on the need to document the state's heritage, while others focused on the need to document women's contributions to the state's history or the need to preserve a visual history of the state. Marsha MacDowell, the head of the Michigan Quilt project, wrote, "A quilt is a textbook of information... Personal or family history, art, community life, religious beliefs, and practices, business and political history, and more can be gleaned from these textiles, their makers, and their owners."⁶⁹

For the members of the Lincoln Quilters Guild, the lack of information about Midwestern quilts served as a major impetus for developing the Nebraska Quilt Project. Linda Ulrich, in an article for the *Sunday Lincoln Journal Star*, quoted Frances Best as saying, "We're not just looking for art, we're looking for history and meaning and sentiment."⁷⁰ The author of another article, "The History and Sociology of Quilting on the Plains," speculated that Nebraska's ethnic heritage shaped the quilting tradition. The author supported the NQP's idea that Nebraska quilts must be in some way unique because of "the blend of ethnic, occupational and cultural groups in the state coupled with the area's distinctive geographic conditions."⁷¹ Like the other projects in this study, the importance of preserving cultural heritage was a recurrent theme stressed in the NQP publicity about the project. It fit neatly into the overall personality of the period, in which the stories of individuals and groups began to take on new meaning.

States like Texas, Michigan, and Kansas timed their projects to coincide with statehood anniversaries. Participation in projects by the general public may have been related to pride in the state's heritage. Nowhere else was the connection between a state's celebration of its history and a documentation project more obvious than in Texas. Even before the TSQA had official recognition from the Texas Sesquicentennial Commission, the directors



used the name Texas Sesquicentennial Association to connect everything that they did to the 1986 celebration. Participation in the projects' documentation days was directly associated with a general pride in Texas history and Texas culture:

Quilt Day here is part of an overall statewide plan of activities sponsored by the Texas Sesquicentennial Association that will culminate in establishment of the Texas Quilt Archives, displayed in the capital in Austin, and a traveling exhibition of the 50 best antique quilts to be circulated in 1986, 150th birthday of Texas.⁷²

Documentation Projects and Women's History

In other states, the project made the connection more generally to state heritage and women's contributions to it. For example, what may have intrigued some participants in the KyQP is how the organizers presented the importance of quilting to women in the nineteenth century. The *Mountain Eagle* quoted the KyQP in identifying the purpose of the project as the need to document quilts as women's art:

Originally an article of warmth and comfort on the frontier, the quilt, while retaining this role, developed into a medium of art, communication, and celebration for women and a very few men... Denied many channels of expression and communication by tradition and domestic obligation, women of the era took full advantage of the social aspect of quilting. Quilting became as important to them as the quilts themselves were to their families.

The same article went on to state that quilts "provide nearly the only record left by pre-suffrage housewives and pioneers."⁷³ Although scholars have long known that diaries and journals and various other written records were left by some women, this statement may have resonated with the public.

The connection between material culture and the inclusion of women in the history of the state was palpable in the publicity of all of the projects. The importance of recording women's history, an outgrowth of both the New Cultural History and the Women's Movement, permeated the publicity. In North Carolina, newspaper articles and other print media often included



the goals of the project (such as preserving “irreplaceable heritage”) and information on the care and preservation of quilts.⁷⁴ They also often encouraged research into family history.⁷⁵ One article stated the purpose was to make a “permanent record of the folk art from scrap bags and the women who plied needles to warm their families and create heirlooms.”⁷⁶ This statement relies on images people already held about quilts, particularly that of women as creators. Yet another article referenced the relationship of women, history, and quilting: “Early quiltmakers had to deal with many forms of suppression... Their quilts became their voices, calling out for recognition.”⁷⁷ The NCQP consistently stressed the importance of providing genealogical information on the quiltmaker and stories about the quilts themselves as part of establishing quilts as important parts of women’s history.

Quilts as documents of family history became a way to remember the work that women did for their families. Quilt documentation projects provided a permanent home for the genealogical records that participants brought to documentation days. NCQP articles mentioned that the project would like to see written records or photographic records that documented quilts and quilting.⁷⁸ The quilt as representative of the maker was a point of pride for owners who expressed love for the women who made them, as well as respect for the skill. Ruth Roberson told the *Raleigh News and Observer* that “studying quilts tells us about the small events of our past.”⁷⁹ One man went without his wife to have the family quilts documented. He told the *High Point Enterprise* about the quilt that his mother had made as a gift in celebration of his marriage. Mary Kilgore, from that same documentation day, took her grandmother’s quilt simply because she was proud of it.⁸⁰ Pauline Davis told *The Smithfield Herald* that she had come because she “thought a whole lot of her grandmother.”⁸¹ Lula Gunter told the *Fayetteville Times* that she loved quilting and had since she was a little girl.⁸² Many other quilt owners and quiltmakers told stories about their pride in the work that had been done and about how pulling out the old quilts brought back memories. Kay Bryant, a regional coordinator for the NCQP, said that “the older ladies are just dying to tell those old stories,” and she thought the documentation days were successful because it gave women an opportunity to show off their work and gain attention.⁸³

In Kansas, Nancy Hornback and Eleanor Malone believed archiving the records would make them available to future generations of material culture and women’s history scholars. In Abilene, one article described the



day as “a chance to have data on an important piece of history preserved for future generations.”⁸⁴ Publicity in the *Ottawa Herald* reminded readers that “the history also provides a way of passing along information about quilts from one generation to the next.” “Quilts are a special piece of the history of Kansas women, and history will be recorded Saturday...”⁸⁵ The organizers for the KsQP were very successful with this tactic of appealing to the individual owner’s or maker’s desire to have a permanent record made of their family’s achievements to be passed on for future generations, thereby bringing together women’s history and state heritage.

The Kentucky Quilt Project Leads the Way

A discussion of influences on the quilt documentation projects as a group would be incomplete without recognizing the significance of the first project, the KyQP. Itself influenced by the quilt revival and the desire to document women’s history in the state, the KyQP and its success inspired the projects that followed. Florence Evans, a novice quiltmaker from California, wrote a letter in January 1983 asking the KyQP for advice on how to start a documentation project, and especially on how to get grants.⁸⁶ In a letter from November 1983, Karen O’Dowd requested information about a project in Michigan and an outline for a recommended procedure in addition to asking for a copy of KyQP’s book.⁸⁷ Ruth Roberson in March 1984 wrote that she wished a North Carolina museum had been included as a site for the traveling exhibition, and that she was poring over Kentucky’s book and hoping for a similar project in North Carolina.⁸⁸ These letters and articles from other parts of the country were a result of the success of the KyQP’s documentation efforts and subsequent traveling exhibition.

An article in *Quilting Today* in 1989 provided an exuberant view on the influence of Kentucky’s project: “The Kentucky Quilt Project has acted as a beacon lighting the way for all subsequent state quilt documentation projects.”⁸⁹ *Quilters Newsletter Magazine* in 1984 and *Lady’s Circle Patchwork Quilts* in 1983 published articles about the Kentucky Quilt Project.⁹⁰ *The Lady’s Circle Patchwork Quilts*, Spring 1983 edition, was dedicated to the story of Kentucky quilts. The articles included descriptions of both the Kentucky Quilt Project and the Kentucky Heritage Quilt Society. Authors of later documentation project books credited the KyQP as an impetus behind their projects. Of the thirty-six statewide documentation projects initiated during



the 1980s, ten of the projects gave the KyQP credit for motivating the organizers to conduct projects in their own states.⁹¹ An additional five sets of organizers credited the success of all of the quilt documentation projects prior to theirs as inspiration.⁹² For example, the Arizona Quilt Project organizers noted in their book *Grand Endeavors* that they had studied other projects—Kentucky, Texas, Missouri, and others—before finalizing plans for their project.⁹³ Kentucky's influence becomes clear, however, when looking at the publicity and even timing of documentation days in other states.

In an article written in the *Austin American Statesman* in May 1984, the day before Quilt Day in Austin, Texas, the paper made a direct connection to the Kentucky project. The journalist wrote, "Quilt Day is patterned after similar affairs held in Kentucky, which led to the quilt collection now touring the country under the sponsorship of the Smithsonian Institute."⁹⁴ Whether or not Texans cared about what the Kentucky Quilt Project had done or whether their quilts might possibly tour in an exhibition in Texas, the idea that the Smithsonian Institution had sponsored a traveling exhibition of quilts certainly gave credence to the idea of documenting quilts and pulling them out of closets, attics, and cedar chests. By connecting the Texas Quilt Search to an institution as reputable as the Smithsonian, that article may have helped attract the large crowd to Austin's Quilt Day, at which 246 quilts were documented. Helen Storbeck of the Kansas Quilt Project wrote for the Baldwin Ledger, "Two women, Eleanor Malone and Nancy Hornback, both of Wichita, got their heads together and decided if Kentucky could have a state project, Kansas could join the parade."⁹⁵

Conclusion

"A stitch in time—if the stitch is in an heirloom quilt—serves as a documentation of our heritage."⁹⁶ Playing on the old colloquialism "a stitch in time saves nine," the author of the article from which this sentence is taken captured the essence of how the early quilt documentation projects fit into the public and academic interests of the last quarter of the twentieth century. The preliminary discussion offered by this essay, based on five early state-wide quilt documentation projects, explores the cultural issues to which the quilt documentation projects as a whole responded. The pursuit of each quilt documentation project depended on two groups of people—the organizers and the participants. The renewed interest in quilting,



either grounded in its handmade nature or as a representation of American women's history, attracted the women and men who became quilt project organizers. Encouragement from the textile and craft industries for women to become quilters, museum quilt exhibitions (whether focused on quilts as art, folk art, or historical objects), and renewed interest in all things "historic" during the Bicentennial, all contributed to the growth of quilting and the study of quilt history. Simultaneous interest in material culture, women's history, and local history on the part of historians and folklorists led to academic participation in the documentation projects. "Micro" histories of individuals, groups, and regions grew in importance as a response to arguments concerning the complexity of history. Recognizing the scholarly potential of quilt documentation projects, historians and folklorists served as organizers, board members, or advisors. During the 1980s, museums, historical societies, and universities co-sponsored documentation projects, provided exhibition space, or provided repositories for a project's archival records.

Possibly of even more importance, the general public awakened to the potential value of their family quilts—historical, monetary, and aesthetic. Structured around public documentations and dependent upon the participation of communities large and small, the quilt documentation projects gathered information on quilts because the general public participated. The documentation project publicity centered on the position of quilts as tangible objects of history and heritage. For a general public that had been wrapped up in the social and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s, this documentation of their family's histories potentially served a natural next step. The Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement, among other cultural changes, had encouraged an interest in one's individual history, heritage, or story. Similarly, quilt documentation projects encouraged families to preserve their individual histories and material culture so that they could add depth to the broader histories of their states.

Thirty-six statewide projects began in the 1980s. Projects continue today. Fifteen years into these projects, Shelly Zegart wrote that the quilt projects were the "largest grassroots phenomenon in the decorative arts in the last half of the twentieth century."⁹⁷ Although most of the projects have published books or catalogs with histories of quilting in their states, there is still much to study and write about the projects themselves. This



essay could only address the intersections in the publicity of five. Would the findings hold up if compared to additional projects from the 1980s? Are the goals, motivations, publicity, or methodologies of projects from the 1990s different from those of the 1980s? How do regional and countywide projects differ from statewide projects?

Future research, in addition to including further analysis of the written documentation of the projects, should include oral history interviews with organizers, directors, and consultants for the projects. What motivated individual organizers? Who are they and how did they come to be interested in studying quilts? Oral histories should examine the relationship of the organizers with the projects, the quilting world, and with other artistic, political, and cultural movements. Since some documentation projects are ongoing, researchers could learn valuable information by studying the current projects through the organizers, documentation day workers, and public participants.

In thinking about quilt history as part of American history, other questions arise from this essay as well for future research or consideration. What has been the influence of regional quilt documentation projects on new efforts to document samplers and hooked rugs? How do the quilt documentation projects fit into other efforts to record and write grassroots history? What does the research of the quilt documentation projects add to our understanding of women's history at the state level? All of these questions demonstrate the complexity of the documentation project movement. The research for this essay serves as only a starting point for understanding the importance of the projects and the people who organized the projects.

Notes and References

- 1 In adding up the numbers provided in the books or on The Quilt Index, the number comes to just over 177,000 quilts. This number is only an estimate. Maryland, for example, has not provided information on The Quilt Index about their project. Other projects have continued documenting quilts and have not published their numbers yet.
- 2 See Appendix A for a full listing of the quilt documentation projects, their dates and parameters. Appendix B provides the number of quilts documented in each project. Not included in this number of projects are regional projects and the county-wide projects in Pennsylvania.
- 3 Shelly Zegart, "The Quilt Projects 15 Years Later," *Folk Art* 21, no.1 (Spring



- 1996): 31; Laurel Horton wrote the article "Rethinking Quilt Projects: A Folklorist's Perspective," *The Quilt Journal* 1, no. 1 (1992) detailing how folklorists and the documentation projects intersect.
- 4 Robert Shaw, *American Quilts: The Democratic Art, 1780–2007* (New York, NY: Sterling Publishing, 2009), 274, 277. Shaw officially dates the revival to the 1970s, but argues that "By the end of the 1960s, winds of change were blowing."
- 5 Bruce Mann, "The Old Kentucky Quilt Project," November 2, 1980, Kentucky Quilt Project records, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, KY.
- 6 Jonathan Holstein and John Finley, *Kentucky Quilts, 1800–1900* (Louisville, KY: The Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc., 1982).
- 7 Karoline Patterson Bresenhan and Nancy O'Bryant Puentes, *Lone Stars: A Legacy of Texas Quilts, 1836–1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 9, 11, 149.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Both catalogs by Karoline Patterson Bresenhan and Nancy O'Bryant Puentes: *Lone Stars: A Legacy of Texas Quilts, 1836–1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) and *Lone Stars: A Legacy of Texas Quilts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
- 11 Bresenhan and Puentes (1986), 21.
- 12 Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Inc. Grant Proposal, February 3, 1986, North Carolina Quilt Project records, North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, NC.
- 13 "Articles of Incorporation," North Carolina Quilt Project records, North Carolina Museum of History.
- 14 Ruth Haislip Roberson, ed., *North Carolina Quilts* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press in collaboration with the North Carolina Quilt Project, 1988).
- 15 These cities were Bancroft, Bassett, Benkelman, Blair, Chadron, Dorchester, Kearney, Nebraska City, Ogallala, Red Cloud, St. Paul, Scottsbluff, and Wahoo.
- 16 Vicki Miller, "Explore History of Nebraska Quilts," *UNL Bulletin Board*, December 2, 1988, 4–5.
- 17 Patricia Cox Crews and Ronald C. Naugle, eds., *Nebraska Quilts & Quiltmakers* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).
- 18 The Kansas Quilt Project Board of Directors included eight women. Eleanor Malone and Nancy Hornback were former presidents of the Prairie Quilt Guild. (Hornback went on to author books on quilt history.) Mary Madden was the assistant director of the Kansas Museum of History with a master's degree in American Studies. Barbara Bruce was a quilter. Mary Margaret Rowan was textile curator at Watkins Community Museum. Helen Storbeck received a Kansas Folk Arts Apprenticeship for quilting in 1987. Barbara Brackman was already a recognized authority on dating quilts and pattern identification. Jennie Chinn was Curator of Folklife for the Kansas State Historical Society and served as liaison to the project. Dr. Gayle Davis, associate professor of Women's Studies



- and American Studies at Wichita State University, served as a consultant to the project specializing in oral history research. Helen Storbeck, "Stitch and Chatter," *Baldwin Ledger*, October 2, 1986; "Kansas Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program: 1987 Apprenticeship Program," Kansas State Historical Society, http://www.kshs.org/research/topics/folkarts/folk_arts_apprenticeship.htm, accessed June 25, 2010; Nancy Hornback and Eleanor Malone to Jenny Chinn, February 6, 1986, Kansas Quilt Project records, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS; Jennie Chinn, "Kansas Quilt Project: Documenting Quilts and Quiltmakers," NEA Final Report, September 6, 1988, Kansas Quilt Project records, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- 19 Barbara Brackman, et al., *Kansas Quilts & Quiltmakers* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993).
 - 20 For examples of the longer articles see: "Tuesday is 'Quilt Day' in Whitesburg," *The Mountain Eagle*, October 13, 1981, and "Show It Off: Quilt Experts Want to Record a Hand-Stitched History of Kentucky Through Exhibit Project," *Kentucky Post*, November 3, 1981; "Sew Big: Nation's Largest Quilt Show," *The Houston Post*, Nov. 2, 1984.
 - 21 "Quilt Search at Paducah Art Guild Seeks 19th-Century Kentucky Style," *The Paducah Sun*, October 6, 1981.
 - 22 Dorothy West, "Kentucky Quilts," *Arts & Antiques*, May/June 1982; Jennifer Lane, "Art and History: 'Kentucky Quilts: 1800-1900,'" *Ohio Antique Preview*, March 1983.; Becky Homan, "How To See the Quilts," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*; "History Behind Exhibit of Quilts," *Houston Post*, February 10, 1983; "Textile Recognition," *Americana*, May/June 1983.; "Kentucky Quilt Project Exhibition," *American Collector's Journal*, March 1982; "Don't Miss Craft Shows & Exhibits," *Handmade*, March 1983; Ruth Roberson, "Kentucky Project Preserves State's Quilting Heritage," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1984.
 - 23 "Events: Quilt Day," in the "Guide," *Dallas Morning News*, March 8, 1985.
 - 24 "Quilting Bee at the Mall," *The Houston Post*, February 1, 1985; "Potpourri: Quilt Day," *The Houston Post*, August 24, 1984.
 - 25 "Sew Big," November 2, 1984.
 - 26 Martha Steimel, "Big Prize for Best Quilt Strictly a Square Deal," *Wichita Falls Times & Record News*, July 22, 1984; "Houston Quilt Expert to Evaluate Quilts," *Wichita Fall Times & Record News*, July 29, 1984.
 - 27 Raymond Teague, "Why Not Try Your Hand at Quilting?" *Forth Worth Star-Telegram*, November 10, 1984. A notice to the side of the article announced the documentation day at the local mall.
 - 28 Flyers were found in the archives for documentation days in Greenville on November 9, 1985, Lake Junaluska on November 16, 1985, Plymouth on April 19, 1986, and Fayetteville on November 23, 1985.
 - 29 Carter Houck, "One Project's Story," *Lady's Circle Patchwork Quilts*, August/September 1987, 35-37. "Quilters day planned in eastern North Carolina,"



- The Perquiman's Weekly*, April 9, 1987, illustrates the importance of the *Lady's Circle Patchwork Quilts* article by detailing Carter Houck's trip with Ruth Roberson through North Carolina.
- 30 "Calling All Quilts," *Southern Living*, September 1986, 40.
 - 31 "North Carolina Quilt Project 1986," *Deutsches Textilforum*, February 1986.
 - 32 Ruth Roberson to Fellow Directors, October 15, 1986, North Carolina Quilt Project Records, North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, NC. Georgia Bonesteel attended the documentation day in Wilkesboro.
 - 33 Kenley Jones, "North Carolina Quilt Project," NBC Evening News, January 9, 1986.
 - 34 I found only three articles about the NQP in the Omaha and Lincoln newspapers: Linda Ulrich, "History Big Part of Nebraska Quilt Project," *Sunday Lincoln Journal*, January 11, 1987, with coverage about the upcoming project; "Reflections of Nebraska Culture: Guild Will Collect Histories of Quilts and the Quilters," *Omaha Sunday Journal-Star*, February 15, 1987, with coverage that included dates for the thirteen Quilt History Days in rural Nebraska; and Kathryn Cates Moore, "Researchers Record Quilter's Statement," *Lincoln Journal-Star*, April 29, 1988, with coverage of success of the project and some initial findings as well as listing of the six public Quilt History Days in Lincoln during May and June 1988.
 - 35 Vernon Whetstone, "'Quilt History Days' Coming to Benkelman," *Benkelman Post and Chronicle*, March 25, 1987; Mark Thiessen, "Blair 1 of 13 Cities Hosting Quilt Documentation Show," *Blair Pilot Tribune*, July 18, 1987.
 - 36 Suzi Schulz, "One of Thirteen Quilt History Days To Be Held Here," *Red Cloud Chief*, June 11, 1987.
 - 37 "Display of Folk Art Planned on April 29," *Benkelman Post*, April 22, 1987.
 - 38 "Bancroft to Host Quilt Show," *Bancroft Blade*, July 16, 1987.
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- 48 Bresenhan and Puentes (1986), 11, 18.
- 49 Claudia Ricci, "Homespun Madness: Crazy Quilts Now Are Fetching Crazier Prices," *Wall Street Journal*, October 11, 1982, Western Edition.
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- 53 Roberson, *North Carolina Quilts*, xii. The exhibitions were: "Bits of Fabric and Scraps of Time" (1983), "Cold Night Beauties" (1984), and "A Garden of Quilts" (1985).
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- 60 Proposal outline provided to guilds, "Nebraska Quilt Project," 1.
- 61 "Bassett to Collect Quilt Histories," *Rock County Leader*, April 30, 1987; Mark Thiessen, "Blair 1 of 13 Cities."
- 62 Loydean Thomas, "Grandma's Quilts Slip from Closet to Gallery," *San Antonio Express-News*, Sept. 28, 1984.
- 63 Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 18.
- 64 Ibid., 30–31.
- 65 Ibid., 68–69.
- 66 Michael Owen Jones, *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1987), 1–12; Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17, no.1 (Spring 1982): 1–20.
- 67 Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan, *A Culture at Risk: Who Cares for America's Heritage?* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 27, 79. According to Phillips and Hogan, the favorable legislation included the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the 1976 Congressional mandate that state humanities councils established by the National Endowment for the Humanities "become mini-NEHs."
- 68 "Wanted: 500 Quilts," *Hoxie Sentinel*, August 6, 1987.



- 69 Marsha MacDowell and Ruth D.Fitzgerald, eds., *Michigan Quilts: 150 Years of a Textile Tradition* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1987), ix.
- 70 Ulrich, "History Big Part of Nebraska Quilt Project."
- 71 "The History and Sociology of Quilting on the Plains," *Blair Pilot-Tribune*, July 18, 1987.
- 72 Martha Steimel, "Houston Quilt Expert to Evaluate Old Quilts," *Wichita Falls Times*, July 29, 1984.
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- 74 Maxie B. Dixon, "Ideas Have Changed on Value of Quilts," *Enterprise*, February 12, 1986.
- 75 "N.C. Quilt Project," *Spectra*, Nov./Dec. 1985.
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- 77 Eleanor Powell, "'They really do tell something': Quilts Mean Important History," *The Mount Airy News*, October 8, 1985.
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- 80 Tommye Morrison, "Quilts: Project is Preserving State's Colorful Past," *High Point Enterprise*, September 28, 1986.
- 81 Calvin Edgerton, "They're Turning Quilts Into Historic Documents," *The Smithfield Herald*, July 29, 1986.
- 82 Mark Price, "Quilt Project Patches Together Bit of North Carolina History," *The Fayetteville Times*, January 29, 1986.
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- 85 "Quilt Discovery Day Saturday," *Ottawa Herald*, July 14, 1986.
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- 89 John Koloski, "The Kentucky Quilt Project," *Quilting Today*, October/November 1989, 12.
- 90 Members of the Kentucky Quilt Project, "The Kentucky Quilt Project: Big Dreams! Big Results!," *Quilters Newsletter Magazine*, June 1984, 16,18; Carter Houck, "Louisville—Where the Action Is," *Lady's Circle Patchwork Magazine*, Spring 1983, 6-13. The Spring 1983 issue had multiple articles about quilting and the quilt projects in Kentucky. "Louisville—Where the Action Is," provides the most background for the project.
- 91 Projects that made special note of the Kentucky Quilt Project's influence were: Boise Basin Quilters Guild Registration Project (Idaho), Iowa Quilt Research Project, Kansas Quilt Project, Nebraska Quilt Project, The Heritage Quilt Project of New Jersey, North Carolina Quilt Project, Ohio Quilt Research Project, Texas Quilt Registry, Texas Quilt Search Project, Vermont Quilt Research Project, and Wisconsin Quilt History Project.
- 92 The five projects that gave more general credit to the group of quilt documentation projects were: Arizona Quilt Project, California Heritage Quilt Project, Florida Quilt Heritage Project, Indiana Quilt Registry Project, Inc., Oklahoma Quilt Heritage Project.
- 93 Helen Young Frost and Pat Knight Stevenson, Preface to *Grand Endeavors: Vintage Arizona Quilts and Their Makers* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing, 1992).
- 94 Eleanor Morris, "Bring Favorite Quilt for Expert Perusal," *Austin American Statesman*, May 5, 1984.
- 95 Helen Storbeck, "Stitch and Chatter," *Baldwin Ledger*, October 2, 1986.
- 96 "Sew Big," *The Houston Post*, Nov. 2, 1984.
- 97 Zegart, "The Quilt Projects," 36.



Appendix A

Quilt Documentation Projects Organized by State

Information compiled from the quilt documentation project books and The Quilt Index, January 2014

Project Name	State	Year Started	Year Completed	Type	Parameters
Alabama Quilt Search Project	Alabama	1987	ongoing	State	pre-1945
Alaska Quilt Survey	Alaska	1992	1998	State	
Arizona Quilt Project	Arizona	1986	1988	State	pre-1940
Arizona Quilt Documentation Project	Arizona	1995	ongoing	state	
Arkansas—Arkansas Quilter's Guild	Arkansas		1987	State	cut-off date 1940
California Heritage Quilt Project	California	1983	1986	State	cut off date 1945
Colorado Historical Documentation	Colorado	1985	ongoing	State	none
The Connecticut Quilt Search Project	Connecticut	1991	ongoing	State	“pre-1950; includes quilts from 26 historical societies, museums, and private collections”
Delaware Quilt Documentation Project	Delaware	2006	present	State	
Florida Quilt Heritage Project	Florida	1984	1987	State	none
Florida: Sunshine State Quilter's Association	Florida	2009	2012	State	none
Georgia Quilt Project	Georgia	1988	ongoing	State	none
Hawaiian Quilt Research Project	Hawaii	1990	2001	State	pre-1960
Boise Basin Quilters Guild Registry Project	Idaho	1988		State	none
Illinois Quilt Research Project	Illinois	1986	1991	State	pre-1950
Illinois Quilt Research Project	Illinois	1994	ongoing	State	



Project Name	State	Year Started	Year Completed	Type	Parameters
Indiana Quilt Registry Project	Indiana	1987	1989	State	none
Iowa Quilt Research Project	Iowa		1988	State	cut-off date 1925
Kansas Quilt Project Documenting Quilts and Quiltmakers	Kansas	1986	1988	State	
Kentucky Heritage Quilt Society Quilt Registry	Kentucky	1981	ongoing	State	
"Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc."	Kentucky	1980	1982	State	"19th Century quilts (made 1800_1900), Kentucky quilts with provenance"
Louisiana Quilt Search/ Louisiana Regional Folklife Program	Louisiana	1987	ongoing	State	pre-1945
Maine Quilt Heritage*	Maine	1987	ongoing	State	pre-1960
Maryland Association for Family and Community Education Quilt Documentation Project	Maryland	1988	1989	State	1634-1934
MassQuilts: The Massachusetts Quilt Documentation Project	Massachusetts	1994	ongoing	State	pre-1950
Michigan Quilt Project	Michigan	1984	ongoing	State	none
Minnesota Quilt Project	Minnesota	1987	ongoing	State	cut-off date 1976
Heritage Quilt Search Project	Mississippi	1995	1997	State	made prior to 1946
Missouri Heritage Quilt Project	Missouri	1983		State	cut off date 1900
Quilts of Missouri	Missouri	2011	ongoing	State	



Project Name	State	Year Started	Year Completed	Type	Parameters
Montana Historic Quilt Project	Montana	1987	ongoing	State	none
Nebraska Quilt Project	Nebraska	1985	1989	State	cut-off 1920
Quilt Preservation Project and historical societies	Nebraska	1991		Other	documented quilts in Nebraska museums
Nevada State Heritage Quilt Project	Nevada	1987	ongoing	State	
New Hampshire Quilt Documentation Project	New Hampshire	1988	ongoing	State	
The Heritage Quilt Project of New Jersey	New Jersey	1988	1991	State	pre-1950
New Mexico Heritage Quilt Search	New Mexico		1987	State	pre-1945
New Mexico Quilt Documentation Project	New Mexico		1985	Other	
New York State Quilt Project	New York	1987	1989	State	cut off date 1940
North Carolina Quilt Project	North Carolina		1985	State	pre-1976
North Dakota Quilt Research Project	North Dakota	1986	in process	State	pre-1969
Ohio Quilt Research Project	Ohio	1984	1991	State	none
Oklahoma Quilt Heritage Project	Oklahoma	1984	1988	State	cut-off 1940
Oregon Quilt Project	Oregon	2009	ongoing		
Rhode Island Quilt Documentation Project	Rhode Island	1990	1997	State	includes 18 collections from institutions
South Carolina Quilt Project	South Carolina	1983	1985	State	“3 counties, cut-off date of 1970; 3 counties were meant to represent the state as a whole as organizers considered SC to be divided geographically into 3 distinct regions”



Project Name	State	Year Started	Year Completed	Type	Parameters
South Dakota Quilt Documentation Project	South Dakota	2010	ongoing	State	pre-1970
Quilts of Tennessee	Tennessee	1983	present	State	made prior to 1930
Texas Quilt Heritage Society Project	Texas	1984		State	
Texas Quilt Search Project	Texas	1980	1986	State	focused on quilts made prior to 1936 but documented quilts made through 1986
Utah Quilt Heritage Corporation	Utah	1988	1994	State	no parameters although book includes only those made prior to 1950
Vermont Quilt Search	Vermont		1988	State	made prior to 1941; prior to 1960 according to The Quilt Index
Virginia Quilt Research Project	Virginia	1985	ongoing	State	pre-1976
Quilt Heritage Washington State	Washington	1988	ongoing	State	pre-1970
West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search, Inc.	West Virginia	1990	ongoing	State	made before 1940 located in the state or taken to another state but made in W.VA
Wisconsin Quilt History Project	Wisconsin	1988	ongoing	State	pre-1950
Wyoming Quilt Project	Wyoming	1994	1995	State	

* Information pulled from Documentation Project website: www.mainquilts.org/mainequiltheritage.htm, accessed January 15, 2014.



Appendix B
 Number of Quilts Documented and Number of Documentation Days by Project
 Information compiled from the quilt documentation project books and The Quilt Index, January 2014

Project Name	State	No. Documentation Days	No. Quilts Documented
Alabama Quilt Search Project	Alabama	18	3000
Alaska Quilt Survey	Alaska	17	1530
Arizona Quilt Project	Arizona	27	2774
Arizona Quilt Documentation Project	Arizona		800+
Arkansas_Arkansas Quilter's Guild	Arkansas	10	
California Heritage Quilt Project	California	32	3300
Colorado Historical Documentation	Colorado	70	10,000+
The Connecticut Quilt Search Project	Connecticut	20	3200
Florida Quilt Heritage Project	Florida	43	5000
Florida: Sunshine State Quilter's Association	Florida		700
Georgia Quilt Project	Georgia	73	8500+
Hawaiian Quilt Research Project	Hawaii	78	1200
Boise Basin Quilters Guild Registry Project	Idaho	10	660
Illinois Quilt Research Project	Illinois	30	15,809
Illinois Quilt Research Project	Illinois		3000
Indiana Quilt Registry Project	Indiana	23	8400
Iowa Quilt Research Project	Iowa	26	2558
Kansas Quilt Project: Documenting Quilts and Quiltmakers	Kansas	73	13,107



Project Name	State	No. Documentation Days	No. Quilts Documented
Kentucky Heritage Quilt Society Quilt Registry	Kentucky		741
Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc.	Kentucky	12	1000
Louisiana Quilt Search/ Louisiana Regional Folklife Program	Louisiana	30	2500
Maine Quilt Heritage*	Maine	63	2600
Maryland Association for Family and Community Education Quilt Documentation Project	Maryland	24	2417
MassQuilts: The Massachusetts Quilt Documentation Project	Massachusetts	279+	5922+
Michigan Quilt Project	Michigan	75+	9000+
Minnesota Quilt Project	Minnesota	38	4000+
Heritage Quilt Search Project	Mississippi	19	1769
Missouri Heritage Quilt Project	Missouri	19	800
Montana Historic Quilt Project	Montana		2000+
Nebraska Quilt Project	Nebraska	28	3000
Nevada State Heritage Quilt Project	Nevada	19	3000
New Hampshire Quilt Documentation Project	New Hampshire	16	1000+
The Heritage Quilt Project of New Jersey	New Jersey	32	2619
New Mexico Heritage Quilt Search	New Mexico	22	950
New Mexico Quilt Documentation Project	New Mexico	96 interviews	1000
New York State Quilt Project	New York	45	6000+



Project Name	State	No. Documentation Days	No. Quilts Documented
North Carolina Quilt Project	North Carolina	72	10,106
North Dakota Quilt Research Project	North Dakota	32	3521
Ohio Quilt Research Project	Ohio	51	7000
Oklahoma Quilt Heritage Project	Oklahoma	19	4000+
Rhode Island Quilt Documentation Project	Rhode Island	16	889
South Carolina Quilt Project	South Carolina	37	2600
South Dakota Quilt Documentation Project	South Dakota	20+	807+
Quilts of Tennessee	Tennessee	30	2020
Texas Heritage Quilt Society Project	Texas	18	1800
Texas Quilt Search Project	Texas	27	3500
Utah Quilt Heritage Corporation	Utah	26	2200
Vermont Quilt Search	Vermont	20	1100
Virginia Quilt Research Project	Virginia	30	3412
Quilt Heritage Washington State	Washington	100	7500
West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search, Inc.	West Virginia	45	3830
Wisconsin Quilt History Project	Wisconsin	47	7000+
Wyoming Quilt Project	Wyoming		2300

* Information pulled from Documentation Project website: www.mainequiltheritage.htm, accessed January 15, 2014.

