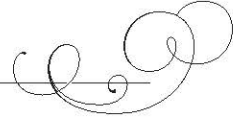


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The Godey Quilt: One Woman's Dream Becomes a Reality



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The Godey Quilt is a 1930s appliqué quilt composed of fifteen fabric portraits of men and women clothed in fashionable mid-nineteenth century attire. The dream of Mildred Potter Lissauer (1897–1998) of Louisville, Kentucky, this textile is a largely original design that is not representative of the majority of American quilts made during the early 1930s. Notable for the beauty and quality of its workmanship, the quilt's crafting was, in part, a response to the competitive spirit that reigned in quilting at the time. Significantly, the survival of the materials that document its conception, design, and construction enhances its significance and can be used to create a timeline of its creation. Reflecting Colonial Revival concepts and imagery, the Godey Quilt is a remarkable physical expression of that era.

Introduction

“Masterpiece” is a sometimes undeserved accolade, but in the case of the *Godey Quilt*, the description fits (fig.1). Begun in 1933 and completed the following year, it was the work of a purportedly novice quilter, Mildred Potter Lissauer of Louisville, Kentucky. For nearly all Depression era quiltmakers, the act of creation was important, allowing them to display their “skill and ingenuity in the design and the quilting.”¹ Yet, in many ways the *Godey Quilt* is uncharacteristic of the majority of quilts that date from the early 1930s. Unlike so many of her fellow quilters, Lissauer was a well-to-do Southerner who made her quilt solely for artistic and personal reasons. Not only that, the *Godey Quilt* was based on a largely original design during a time when patterns and kit quilts were widely available, promoted, and accepted. As a result, it had little in common with the majority of quilts from the period.

Highly publicized precedents for pictorial quilts composed chiefly of

Fig. 1. Mildred Potter Lissauer, *Godey Quilt*, 1933–1934. 102 x 91 3/4 inches. Kentucky Museum, Western Kentucky University (WKU), 1990.6.1.

figural elements existed in the 1920s and 1930s. Charles Pratt received acclaim for a series of pictorial quilts that included *Penn's Treaty* (1926) and *Ruth and Naomi* (1930); his work in turn influenced Emma Andres, whose *Lady at the Spinning Wheel* (1933) used 3,630 pieces of silk to depict one of the more recognizable images of the Colonial Revival era.² Several of the finalists in the 1933 Century of Progress Contest depicted American historical figures and events, including contestant Emma Mae Leonard who used eight figural blocks to illustrate a century of women's fashion in her entry, 1833–1933.³ Regrettably, the judges valued traditional patterns over

originality, and only two of the commemoratives reached the finals.⁴

Researchers have studied quilts from this era at length, but the *Godey Quilt* provides a rare opportunity to analyze an exceptional quilt using the materials associated with its conception, design, and construction.⁵

Rather than rely on period garments and images for inspiration, Lissauer adapted the romanticized images depicted on an extensive collection of printed materials, including newspaper and magazine advertisements and greeting and playing cards, for use as source material in drafting the appliqués on her quilt. Furthermore, fabric remnants left over from constructing the appliqués and foundation offer a rare opportunity for fiber analysis, and manuscript materials housed in Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University (WKU) open a window into the quilt-maker's interactions with others during its creation and provide insight into her background and personality. Accounts from newspapers and magazines and historic photographs present additional sources of information about what happened to the quilt between its completion in 1934 and its donation to the Kentucky Museum at WKU in 1990.

Mildred Potter Lissauer

Lissauer was the second of four children born to William J. (1860–1952) and Martha Woods Potter (1868–1963) of Bowling Green, Kentucky. From an early age she demonstrated an interest in sewing and clothing, noting in later years that “even as a small girl my dolls had huge and elaborate wardrobes.”⁶ Mildred may have learned her sewing skills from her mother, a quilter who was appointed Warren County Home Decoration Agent in 1917, or her aunt, Mildred Woods Bagby (1868–1947), a prize-winning quilter in her own right. A second aunt, Elizabeth “Bethie” Woods (1865–1967), also quilted. While she was away at college, Lissauer garnered attention for her fashion sense and sewing skills. Potter described her daughter's appearance in a letter to her son:

[Mildred] still paints her face, and wears the gaudiest colors. She wore a skirt of one color, and a waist of another, and shoes of another, and a hat of a thousand colors! . . . She says the teachers and every body [sic] at Cambridge told her she could make a fortune at dressmaking and designing. They paid her to copy some dresses she had made herself for them. . . . She is a case.⁷

Fig. 2. Mildred Potter Lissauer & Arthur Lissauer outside their residence in Louisville, Kentucky, 1930s. Courtesy of Department of Library Special Collections, WKU.

During the 1920s, Lissauer's social life included parties, golf matches, and dances. By 1923, her appearance appeared to comport more with her mother's sense of style. "Mildred came home on July 13th . . . she looks fine, a little thinner, and does not use any paint any more [sic], which improves her very much. She made some nice dresses and looks fine and stylish, as usual."⁸

Mildred's 1926 marriage to William R. Grace (b. 1881) ended in divorce three years later, but her 1931 nuptials with Louisville, Kentucky, businessman Arthur "Artie" Lissauer (1888–1973) proved a success (fig. 2). Known to their social set as the "Duke and Duchess," the couple entertained frequently at their Louisville home, "Green Pastures," as well as at their second home, "Much Ado About Nothing," in Winter Park, Florida. In her later years, Lissauer's wardrobe included a fringed suede leather swimsuit embellished with rhinestones and feather boas that she color coordinated with the rooms in her Louisville residence.⁹

Lissauer received attention for her unique decorating style—cuspidors, halved and used as flower urns; a barn window repurposed as a picture frame; and cheese graters transformed into a chandelier.¹⁰ Her pride and joy perhaps was the prize-winning *Godey Quilt*. Finished in 1934, Lissauer gave it a place of honor in her Louisville home—a pantry converted into a bedroom furnished with early American reproduction furniture and two recommended, if historically inaccurate, hooked rugs (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. *Godey Quilt* displayed in a bedroom in Green Pastures, Lissauer's Louisville home, ca. 1939. Courtesy of Department of Library Special Collections, WKU.

Looking back, the quiltmaker was an upper-middle-class Southerner who came of age as America entered the Roaring Twenties. In terms of dress, deportment, and economic and social values, this decade was the most modern of times; yet many Americans looked back to our nation's perceived colonial past. As part of this trend, newspapers and magazines promoted traditional handicrafts, and in response, many women took up quilting.¹¹ What attraction did the craft hold for an ostensibly modern woman like Lissauer? The editors of *Needlecraft* offered one explanation:

Today's daughter may know her golf and her gears, her politics and her bridge, but she still proudly sews her fine seam. Her quilts are no longer just "comforters," household economies, they are made for their decorative value, and for the sheer joy of building beauty with a woman's tools.¹²

To understand why Lissauer made the *Godey Quilt*, it is necessary to understand the time in which she lived—the Colonial Revival era.

Colonial Revival Era

Exactly when did the Colonial Revival era happen? Early in the nineteenth century, the Picturesque movement praised the "simplicity and solidity" and "smallness and lowness" of many eighteenth-century structures.¹³ Later on, widespread social, economic, and industrial changes in the United States during and after the Civil War caused many Americans to regard pre-1850s America as a "romanticized pre-industrial world of diligent, skilled, and contented workers—a world very different from that of the Colonial Revivalists themselves, with its troublesome issues of urban growth and shifting social patterns."¹⁴ Some historians trace its beginnings to the Sanitary Fairs held to raise funds during the Civil War; many others believe that the Colonial Revival was an outgrowth of patriotic sentiments raised during the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876; and still others note the impact of the faux colonial architecture erected for the 1893 Columbian Exposition.¹⁵ Yearning for a time when society was more homogeneous, gender roles seemingly well-defined, and the economic climate more secure, many Americans sought comfort in the past by joining newly formed lineage-based organizations like the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (established 1889), the National Society

of the Daughters of the American Revolution (established 1890) and the National Society of the Colonial Dames (established 1891).

Many Americans held centennial teas, balls, and historical pageants, erected homes whose architecture reflected colonial themes, and/or furnished their interior spaces in the colonial style. Most did so, however, with little concern for historical accuracy. “For decorating and dressing, whether for an event or one’s colonial-style home, replicating the past was not necessary. Capturing the charm, visual appeal and spirit of the past was more important.”¹⁶

Books and magazines suggested Americans take up traditional handicrafts. In 1920 the editors of *Modern Priscilla* promoted a plan developed by The Society for the Revival of Household Industries and Domestic Arts to train returning World War I veterans in the arts of “flax-growing, hand-spinning and weaving of flax and wool, also quilting, candle-making, tatting, and other crafts” and encouraged their readers to contact the magazine about donating unused spinning wheels, looms, and other textile equipment.¹⁷

Seven years later, interest in the Colonial Revival and associated handicrafts remained high.

That ‘everything colonial goes, nowadays’ is not disputed . . . a most delightful atmosphere, redolent of the “good old colony days,” may be easily bestowed on the modern guest-chamber by the deft-fingered homemaker who looks well to the ways of her needle.¹⁸

The covers of ladies’ magazines frequently depicted women spinning, weaving, or embroidering in romanticized pre-Victorian settings. In promoting traditional crafts, these periodicals published, gave away, and/or sold needlework patterns, often depicting colonial themes, to current and potential subscribers. An offer in the July 1935 edition of *Needlecraft* was typical. Individuals who signed up for a two-year subscription received a hot iron transfer set that included sheets of initials and patterns for a five-piece bedroom set and for a twelve-piece living room set.¹⁹

Fresh approaches emerged in twentieth-century needlework. Designers incorporated new styles, like Art Nouveau and Art Deco, into many of their designs, and novel fabrics and untraditional colors became the norm.

... why should we always slavishly copy our grandmother's quilting patterns? Surely our twentieth century designer has as good a knowledge of color, a better understanding of our modern aversion to "plain sewing," and a whimsical and charming imagination which she dares to use even when working with so humble a medium as cotton cloth.²⁰

Improvements in manufactured kits, including the color-coded stamping of patterns sold by the Rainbow Quilt Block Company, made it easier for inexperienced stitchers to give needlework a try.²¹ Significantly, ladies' magazines did not critique kits as "paint-by-number" exercises as sometimes happened later in the twentieth century.²² Rather, they conveyed a message of enthusiastic endorsement for kits in all categories of needlework. As a result, these crafts were subtly modernized, and it became easier for women of all educational and social levels to practice needle arts.

Quiltmaking was an ongoing topic within the broader discussion of women's needlework during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In 1915 Marie Webster wrote, "City women, surrounded by many enticing distractions, are turning more and more to patchwork as a fascinating yet nerve-soothing occupation."²³ This interest continued into the 1930s. "Day by day the beauty of Colonial America is making its way into the modern home, and nothing is more eagerly pursued today than the antique quilts—the bright colored bed coverings that were the pride of our Grandmothers. The modern woman is enjoying the thrill of creating these same beautiful patterns with her own hands."²⁴

The boudoir look which began around 1910 also affected quilting trends. Associated with French designer Paul Poiret, boudoir fashion and furnishings consisted of clothing, quilts, and cushions made from luxurious fabrics that were often enhanced by the addition of monograms, crests, and elaborate, often trapunto, quilting designs.²⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, they were typically made in cottage industries in the Upper South and Midwest.²⁶ The Wilkinson Quilt Company of Ligonier, Indiana, was perhaps the earliest concern to capitalize on this trend with marketing that used phrases like "wonder-quilt," "exclusive design," and "Milady never tires of her Wilkinson Art Quilts."²⁷ In addition to whole-cloth quilts, these firms included appliqué quilts in their product lines.

Women could sew their own boudoir furnishings and attire, also. In September 1929 *Needlecraft* informed its readers that a set of six cushions

would “make charming boudoir-pillows.”²⁸ Fifteen months later, it promoted a “Trio of Sachets, Tuck-in-Pillow, and Dainty Lounging Coat,” all of which were made using Italian quilting or “trapunto.”²⁹ In 1931, kits for a “Heart-shape boudoir pillow” and a “Square boudoir pillow” underscored the continuing interest in the look.³⁰

Lissauer was undoubtedly aware of these and other contemporary trends. She saved clippings from *Vogue* and *Needlecraft*, and family photos document a wardrobe that was not that of a woman scraping by during the Depression. Her social circle and proximity to the nearby Eleanor Beard Studio in Hardinsburg, Kentucky, make it probable that she was aware of the chic textiles it sold, as well as similar items marketed by competing concerns. Additionally, her mother’s position as a county home extension agent implies some knowledge of current decorating trends. While there is no evidence that Lissauer was a quiltmaker prior to undertaking the *Godey Quilt*, her mother and aunts were experienced quilters, which likely piqued Lissauer’s interest.

Inspiration and Influences

Why make the *Godey Quilt*? While earlier manuscript materials document an interest in sewing, taking on this particular challenge required Lissauer to compete in a sphere where her mother and aunts had considerably more experience. Family lore recalls that the *Godey Quilt* was the result of Lissauer’s reaction to seeing a quilt made by a relative (fig. 4). Her first response was to remark, “I can do better than that.”³¹ Her second was to make the *Godey Quilt*. The likely inspiration was *Flower Baskets*, a quilt composed of ten baskets of two-toned pink and green flowers framed by an undulating swag-and-bud border, all appliquéd onto a pale oyster sateen foundation. Quilted in designs that include baskets of flowers and feather rosettes, it has the scalloped edge typical of appliqué quilts of this period. Who made it is unclear. One source identified Lissauer’s aunt, Elizabeth “Bethie” Woods, while others attributed it to her mother or her Aunt Mildred Woods Bagby. Given the preponderance of manuscript evidence regarding her quilting prowess, Bagby likely was the maker.

Stylistically, *Flower Baskets* dates from the late 1920s–early 1930s, but it is uncertain whether the design was original, based on a published pattern, or borrowed elements from two or more patterns. Similarities exist between this textile and other documented quilts of the period. Its swag-and-bud border treatment resembles that given to a *Rose of Sharon* quilt

Fig. 4. Attributed to Mildred Woods Bagby, *Flower Baskets* Quilt, late 1920s–early 1930s. 104 1/2 x 87 3/4 inches. Kentucky Museum, WKU, 1990.6.5.

advertised in catalogs published by the Wilkinson Quilt Company around 1916 and 1921 and one used for a *Forget-Me-Not* appliqué quilt marketed by Eleanor Beard.³²

Several finalists in the 1933 Century of Progress Contest featured quilts made with undulating swag borders and similar color profiles. A comparison of Bagby's quilt with *Louisiana Rose* by Celia Pardue Hyde of Crowley, Louisiana, is instructive.³³ The color of the appliqué work and foundation of both quilts matches this period's preference for "plain colors, especially the 'boudoir shades—flesh, peach, apricot, pink, blue and

orchid.””³⁴ Both also include quilted motifs that mirror the outlines of each textile’s respective appliqués, but Pardue handled the border in her quilt quite differently.

Mr. Godey’s Ladies and Spinning Wheels

The *Godey Quilt* was named for the resemblance its appliqués bore to the fashion illustrations in the popular nineteenth-century ladies’ magazine, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (fig. 5). Published from 1830 to 1898, this magazine printed advice on home management, dressing fashionably, and rearing children; it also regularly included handwork projects. Fashion plate engravings, a feature of most contemporaneous women’s magazines, became synonymous with Louis Godey’s publication, and the phrase “Mr. Godey’s ladies” entered the American vocabulary. Mildred’s knowledge of these figures likely resulted from their widespread reproduction on a variety of printed media in the late 1920s and early 1930s; a June 1933 entry in her

Fig. 5. Fashion plate engraving from the September 1862 edition of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Courtesy of Department of Library Special Collections, WKU.

mother's journal states, "Mildred started her "Godey's Ladies."³⁵

Given that Lissauer almost certainly sought to make a quilt that was both familiar and unique, her decision to draw on Colonial Revival imagery in general and Godey-type figures in particular for its design is unsurprising. "Beginning in the early years of the century but especially in the interwar period—a time characterized by a general atmosphere of self-conscious modernism—popular needlework, perhaps more than any other type of graphic medium, was filled with images of a romanticized domestic past, including spinning wheels, cozy cottages, cheerful flower baskets, and happy women in hoopskirts."³⁶ During these interwar years, the figures depicted in household needlework were typically clothed in fashions that "functioned as symbolic two-dimensional versions of dress-up costumes."³⁷ Presented in romanticized settings or engaged in domestic or small group activities, the figures on the *Godey Quilt* mirrored the approach in colonial costuming that "portrayed a consistently gendered vision" that was "always disproportionately female-identified."³⁸

Where did Lissauer find these images? Printed sources abounded. For starters, many pattern concerns used graphics of individuals clothed in "Early American" garb in their publications, and fictional characters, like Grandma Dexter and Grandmother Clark, became the corporate identity of thread, yarn, and pattern companies.³⁹ Locally, Louisville Bedding Company advertised its ready-made quilts using a catalog whose cover art was more Victorian than colonial in period.⁴⁰

Godey prints were a popular home decorating motif, and Lissauer saved a promotion from *Woman's World Magazine* that informed subscribers they could purchase five such prints for fifty-five cents. The magazine deemed these pictures suitable for framing or for creating all manner of decorative objects including waste baskets, lampshades, and candy and cigar boxes.⁴¹ In 1931, *Needlecraft* printed a feature promoting their use as lampshade embellishments.⁴²

While no direct proof exists, a *Needlecraft* article, "Delightfully Quaint Bridge-Table Ensembles," likely influenced the design of the *Godey Quilt*. Published in October 1930, the similarities between one of its playing covers [table cloths] and refreshment cloths [napkins] and the *Godey Quilt* are noteworthy. First, the color of the foundation fabric recommended for the table cover, "Sateen in that shade of yellow-pink we know as peach" echoed the peach-colored "Buty Chine" that Lissauer chose for the foundation of her quilt.⁴³ Second, the instructions' call for solid-colored fabrics highlighted by embroidered accents mirrors some of the

Fig. 6. This playing card is part of a collection of materials that influenced the design of the *Godey Quilt*. Courtesy of Department of Library Special Collections, WKU.

Fig. 7. A magazine illustration inspired this sketch which Lissauer used for the design of figural appliqué Row 2, #3. Courtesy of Department of Library Special Collections, WKU.

choices Lissauer made. “The body of the bonnet is orchid, laid in solid rows of outline-stitch. There is a facing of delicate yellow, done in the same manner, close to the face, and trim and ties of similar color. . . . With a nosegay of French knots and daisy leaves the little figure is complete.”⁴⁴ Third, the playing cover and two of Lissauer’s appliqués included trellis-like effects, and fourth and finally, the editors of *Needlecraft* and Lissauer both displayed an awareness of the same deck of Godey playing cards. The former described the playing cover as “decorated to harmonize with the Godey ladies, Abigail and Melissa,” and the latter saved nine playing cards whose backs were printed in one of three Lady Godey designs, including the two cards named in the article (fig. 6).⁴⁵

One year later, this same magazine published a feature on four “Silhouetted Ladies,” that Lissauer may also have seen.⁴⁶ Consisting of a handkerchief bag, cushion cover, hand towel, and tea cloth, it called for applying gingham cutouts onto the foundation and then adding embroidery highlights; this was simpler to make than the previous year’s bridge table ensemble. The kits, which included hot-iron transfer pattern, perforated stamping pattern, stamped foundation fabric, appliqué material, piping or binding, and embroidery floss, cost from eighty cents for the cushion cover to \$2.63 for the tea cloth.

Lissauer was familiar with the much-loved “Colonial Lady” motif. In its simplest form, it consisted of a woman depicted in profile dressed in a bonnet and oversize skirt and holding a parasol. *Colonial Lady Block 335* from the Rainbow Quilt Block Company was perhaps the most recognizable version, although many pattern companies published their own interpretations.⁴⁷ What were its origins? While some researchers suggest eighteenth- and nineteenth-century silhouettes as possible sources of inspirations, others have noted the appearance of the Sunbonnet Babies motif in 1900 and Marie Webster’s *Keepsake Quilt* in 1912.⁴⁸

A penciled notation indicates that Lissauer spent three hours a day for six months working on the appliqué designs. In developing her concept, she sketched approximately sixty figures onto paper, enlarging twenty-two of them to scale and transferring fourteen to cardboard (fig. 7). Dates on ten of the latter indicate Lissauer finished the sketches between May and September 1933. There is no correlation, however, between these dates and the placement of each appliqué on her quilt.

She turned to her Aunt Mildred for advice. Bagby responded, “12 x 15 . . . is a better proportion than 12 x 14. However if you have cut them 12 x 14 you could make them 11 x 14. The border should be the width of the

Fig. 8. This cloth portrait was based on an image in the July, 1930, issue of *Vogue* magazine. Kentucky Museum, WKU, 1990.6.1.

blocks.”⁴⁹ She also suggested appropriate fabrics for the appliqués. “Am enclosing flesh colors that I used for face and arms & hands. No I didn’t use Buty Chyne [sic] for patches as it does ravel.”⁵⁰

The “Lace-Ruffled Pantalet Days Quilt,” a subscription promotion Lissauer clipped out of a 1933 issue of *The Household Magazine*, likely in-

fluenced the design of several appliqués.⁵¹ First, one of her sketches reflects the basic silhouette and simple, large-scale print used in the magazine illustrations. Second, at least four of her figures were made from similar fabrics—solids and simple prints with the latter chiefly plaids and floral motifs. Third and finally, both projects made effective use of lace.

Lissauer was aware of a series of five articles on the history of fashion that appeared in *Vogue* between May 1929 and September 1934. She borrowed elements from drawings in the feature “1840s Costume” as source material for at least three of her figural appliqués.⁵² Lissauer rendered the “lady” in winter garb most faithfully, stitching her twice before ultimately framing one version and using the other effort on her quilt (fig. 8). The application of bouillon knots on both fabric portraits suggests ermine, but from the gold buttons fastening her wrap to its green and white striped lining, the figure placed on the quilt (Row 4, #1) is noticeably more elegant.

She often combined elements from multiple sources. The spinning/knitting figure (Row 1, #1) drew upon a graphic used with the “Piece Bag” column in *Needlecraft* from 1931 through 1936 and from an illustration on a bridge score pad (fig. 9).⁵³ In her pencil sketch, Lissauer kept the orientation of its elements the same as depicted in both image sources, but she reversed their direction in the finished appliqué. As with ten of the other portraits, a stylized braided rug, a traditional craft item associated with the Colonial Revival, helps anchor the figure to the quilt.

Fig. 9. This illustration from *Needlecraft* partially inspired the design of the appliqué of the knitting/spinning figure (Row 1, #1).

Fig. 10. This newspaper advertisement was a source illustration for the strolling couple in Row 2. Courtesy of *The Courier-Journal*.

Details from an illustration in the “1840s Costume” article and an un-sourced ad for roofing tiles were incorporated into another appliqué.⁵⁴ Lissauer kept the general stance of the figures in the fashion piece but added the pantaloons worn by the young girl in the ad and substituted its hoop for the tennis racket carried in the costume feature. Her atypical fabric choices—strong blues and reds in solids and large bold prints—may explain why she framed the completed figure rather than use it on her quilt. This “lady” was not donated to the Kentucky Museum but remains in the Lissauer family.

For an appliqué of a strolling couple (Row 2, #2), she borrowed the image of a festively dressed pair, complete with billowing muffler and lace

Fig. 11. Adapted from several design sources, this appliqué manifests the success of the collaboration between Lissauer and Rigsby.

pantaloons, from a holiday shopping advertisement for Stewarts, a Louisville area department store (fig. 10).⁵⁵ An ad for formal wear was the model for the man's cape, and a stencil-like greeting card inspired the woman's bonnet and profile orientation of both figures.⁵⁶

An appliqué in the third row (Row 3, #2) is another example of how Lissauer employed multiple design sources—in this case, the bouquets in

Fig. 12. Lissauer adapted the illustration on this card for the appliqué on the kneeler she placed before the “Shrine to Beauty” in her home. Courtesy of Department of Library Special Collections, WKU.

an ad for bridal gowns, an illustration of southern belles clipped out of *Vogue*, and a mailer advertising a sale in Louisville.⁵⁷ The figure stands before an embroidered wrought iron fence accented with climbing vines and flowers with the visual impact of her costume heightened through the skillful application of lace, ribbons, and embroidery (fig. 11).

A magazine illustration of a woman and begging dog inspired one of the more charming appliqués (Row 2, #3). Lissauer eliminated the flowers, reversed the orientation of the figures, and chose an orange plaid fabric consistent with the color palette used elsewhere on her quilt. Decorative touches include lace mitts made from straight and couching stitches, white satin ribbons, and red-orange buttons. A note penciled on the back of its accompanying cardboard sketch indicates the plaid fabric cost twenty-two cents per yard at Sears, Roebuck.

Lissauer masterfully adapted the strolling couple from a baby congratulations card into an appliqué (fig. 12).⁵⁸ First, she eliminated the

baby carriage used in the original artwork, then clothed the female figure in fabric suggestive of the garment worn in the illustration and dressed the man in more subdued attire. Next, Lissauer embroidered a wrought iron fence and climbing vines on a piece of the same sateen used for the foundation of the *Godey Quilt* and added a three-sided border of upholstery fabric. Finally, she stitched the appliqué to the sateen and covered a doorstep with the resulting textile. Lissauer used it as a “kneeler” before the “Shrine” or “Altar to Beauty” in her home.⁵⁹

In addition to the doorstep appliqué, Lissauer made at least five others that were not used on the *Godey Quilt*. She framed three of them and converted the remaining two into pillow covers. Two of the five were slightly different and less successful versions of appliqués that were incorporated into the quilt, but the others were unique designs. Lissauer perhaps felt the latter three were unsatisfactory artistically or technically, or did not complement her overall vision.

A Touch of Embroidery

Lissauer hired a professional seamstress, Ollie Rigsby (1888–1986) of Bowling Green, Kentucky, to embellish her “ladies” with embroidery. Although Lissauer was in charge, their correspondence reveals a surprising degree of give and take in which Rigsby, a self-employed contractor who was in the subordinate position, felt comfortable in helping set the terms of her employment and in guiding her client to make good decisions regarding the form the embroidery enhancements would take.

It took me three days to make the lady. I think I could count on making one in two days and it would be steady work, making one come to \$6.00. This one I have already made is \$5.00 and 15¢ for mailing. . . . I could not afford to give up my “monogram” work for less, as it keeps me busy.⁶⁰

Lissauer had a strong sense of what her quilt should look like and was not hesitant in letting Rigsby know this. Perhaps the most useful document in their correspondence is a two-page letter outlining her directions for eight appliqués.

Please don't mind if I am very explicit, but I have my vision of this quilt in my mind so clearly that I couldn't stand it if it didn't

Fig. 13. Lissauer used delicate embroidery enhancements to transform the appliqué modeled after this bridge tally cover into a figural portrait that reflected her vision.

turn out just that way. . . . I have tried to make it as clear as possible, but if there is anything I have left out, please call on me to straighten you out before you go ahead, as I am very anxious that they look like the vision I have been carrying around in my mind for months.⁶¹

Lissauer also expressed confidence in Rigsby's abilities, writing that she was "sending along a few blocks that need those artistic touches that only you can give. . . . I hope you realize that it is a great big compliment

Fig. 14: Lissauer specified the embellishments Ollie Rigsby added to the “flower box ladies” appliqués in row 5. Kentucky Museum, WKU 1990.6.1.

to you when I trust you to work on these quilt blocks over which I have labored so earnestly. I would not trust them to anybody else in the world.⁶²

She was quite specific about her vision for the figure of a girl playing a piano (Row 1, #2) which was based on a bridge tally cover (fig. 13). “I have cut out the body of the piano from black broadcloth which I want you to pad with cotton and place in the right spot to fit on the legs. . . . Make it the exact size of the drawing too. I also want pink roses around her neck as illustrated in the drawing.”⁶³ Rigsby’s response, complete with stitch diagrams, was, “got your things and think I understand [sic] then if I don’t will let you know. I guess you mean flowers around the neck of dress like embroidery flowers other words [sic] Satin stitch [diagram] is it, instead of wrap stitch [diagram] like this.”⁶⁴

Lissauer sometimes sent illustrations with her instructions. For the spinning wheel appliqué (Row 1, #1) she wrote, “I am enclosing the magazine picture . . . I copied so that you may see the details—how they are carried out.”⁶⁵ Her notes concerning the ladies with flower boxes (Row 5, #1–#2) included an image and the following directions:

I want you to fill in the flower boxes so that they don’t look so bare. I am pinning a picture of a lady with a flower box behind her to show what I mean. . . . On the ground under the boxes, I want a few sprigs of flowers and grass just as many as I have indicated under the lady from *Vogue*. As you will see, one of these ladies already had part of the sprinkling under foot.⁶⁶ (Fig. 14.)

Their exchanges when the two women disagreed were informative. Regarding the spinning wheel, Lissauer wrote,

On block #1 I want you to embroider the spinning wheel in black yarn—just exactly like the picture on cardboard. On the wheel part use two fine lines outside of the solid ring and two fine lines of black yarn inside of it. Work all parts—legs cross pieces and all—(except the wool in a bunch) in black. Make all this very well padded so that it will stand out and look rich.⁶⁷

Rigsby responded by advising Lissauer to rethink her approach. “You said make spinning wheel in black yarn but, my dear child, it would be impossible to embroider these fine lines that close together in yarn. However I don’t want to spoil your ‘Vision.’ Let me know.”⁶⁸

Lissauer wanted to add a signature to the *Godey Quilt*, but the two women differed over how it should look.

Your letter came too late, however after you get your 'ladies' if you think it will not be too late, send me another piece & I will do the name over. I like the one I made better tho' because this last one would not look as hand-made. The line all around the name would look like it had been cut out & put on.⁶⁹

Ultimately, Rigsby won this battle and did not frame the signature with a decorative linear border. The final version included the text, "Mildred Potter Lissauer/Her Quilt/1934," and one of three spools of thread depicted in Lissauer's drawing.⁷⁰

The two women discussed the merits of the ruffle Lissauer planned for her quilt, with Rigsby maintaining that the "[border] ruffle would de-tract from the art of the ladies. It will be more 'artful' just quilted beautiful with-out [sic] the ruffle."⁷¹ Lissauer initially acceded to Rigsby but saved an underskirt made of matching Buty Chine in a box of fabric remnants. She eventually won the argument as an article published in a local magazine fourteen years later indicated that the quilt was displayed on a bed with a ruffled underskirt made from a petticoat.⁷²

Towards the end of the project, several letters imply Lissauer's growing impatience. Registered mail receipts indicate that she sent appliqués to Rigsby on December 29, 1933; January 6, 1934; and February 1, 1934. The exact date of the latter's response is unknown, but several letters imply it was after the first of the year. "I am so sorry I haven't written you before but I haven't had time. I have been going with my tongue out ever since before Xmas. Don't worry over your "Ladyses" [sic] for I have them & I think I can mail them to you about the first of the week."⁷³ Another letter documents the payment received by skilled needleworkers: Rigsby charged \$5 for embroidering highlights on the spinning wheel; \$2 for the piano; \$1 for the two fences; \$2 for the flower boxes; \$2 for stitching the name; and 50 cents for the thread.⁷⁴

Stitching It Together

Lissauer affixed the completed appliqués to six fourteen-inch-wide panels made of peach-colored Buty Chine and added an eighteen-inch-wide border of matching fabric on three sides. She likely chose this material on the

recommendation of her Aunt Mildred but, possibly, she was also familiar with Ruby Short McKim's endorsement of Buty Chine as a "a permanent luster satine [sic] of finest quality" . . . "the finest materials certainly do make the loveliest quilts."⁷⁵

When Bagby learned that her niece was having troubles getting the appliqués to lie flat, she wrote, "I am distressed to hear about the bad luck you are having with your quilt. . . . Was it the figures or the Butychynne [sic]. Be sure to bring it down and let me see it as I hear it is a gem. . . . We will discuss what can be done when you come."⁷⁶ She also recommended that her niece keep her "iron hooked up for you must press, press, press!!"⁷⁷

Lissauer's final act was hiring someone to quilt her masterwork. This was an era when "the labor in quilting was commonly divided, with one woman piecing or appliquéing the top and another woman or group of women quilting it."⁷⁸ Carrie A. Hall recommended women "turn it over to an experienced quilter, for a beautiful quilt may be made or marred by the quilting."⁷⁹ Anne Orr would arrange for a quilter who would "adapt the quilting pattern to the design of each quilt. . . . Our prices [\$10 to \$18] depend on the closeness of the quilting lines and elaborateness of design for the work is perfectly done on all quilts."⁸⁰

In the 1930s, the authorship of quilts made with outside help was a non-issue. Women could purchase finished blocks and/or completed quilts in various price ranges from pattern sources such as Anne Orr, Carlie Sexton, and Marie Webster's Practical Patchwork Company. The Mary A. McElwain Quilt Shop of Walworth, Wisconsin, hired local women as well as Kentucky quilters to "cut, baste, or sew sample blocks of appliqué or piece work, quilt, and bind quilts."⁸¹ Wealthy women ordered ready-made colonial boudoir quilts and spreads and modernized appliqué quilts from the Wilkinson Quilt Company, the Eleanor Beard Studio, and other cottage industries in the Upper South and Midwest.⁸² With such ready precedents, Lissauer would have had few reservations concerning the ethics of engaging someone to complete her vision.

Lissauer considered several options before selecting a quilter. She attended Louisville's local elimination competition for the 1933 Century of Progress Contest held March 19th in the Crystal Ballroom of the Brown Hotel and compiled a list of eight quilters.⁸³ Seven were Kentuckians—three from Louisville, one from Pewee Valley, two from Horse Cave, and one from Hodgenville. The eighth hailed from Pekin, Indiana.

Early the following year, F. H. Eads, the Merchandise Superintendent

at Sears, Roebuck & Company, Louisville, sent Lissauer a list of “quilters whose work was better than the average and whom you may wish to write to.”⁸⁴ Two of the eight (Mrs. Sudie Holbert of Hodgenville, Kentucky, and Miss Clara C. Johnson of Pekin, Indiana) were on both lists. Lissauer made several additions: Miss Frances Clements (Klemenz) of Louisville, who won the Louisville competition with her *Bleeding Hearts* quilt; the A. M. Caden Shop in Lexington, whose co-owner, Margaret Rogers Caden, won the National Contest with her entry, an *Eight-Point Combination Feather Star* quilt; and the Regina Shop and Alice Lace Shop in Louisville.

By today’s standards, the cost of hiring a quilter during the Colonial Revival era seems negligible. In 1915 Marie Webster wrote that the usual determining factor was the number and cost of the spools of thread required, although in some areas it could run as high as five dollars per spool.⁸⁵ Eighteen years later, Martha Woods wrote Lissauer that a local Bowling Green woman charged \$1.25 a spool.⁸⁶ The next year, her journal recorded that she had “got my 1st pink quilt back from Quilter (Mrs. Campbell) \$7.00 including lining” but also noted that she paid three dollars for a “Blue nine patch quilted by a colored woman—July—1934.”⁸⁷ This deflation in wages likely was a result of the hard times created by the Depression, but the race of the second quilter may also have increased the disparity.

Interestingly, Lissauer did not hire Rigsby. Quilting was perhaps outside the seamstress’s normal line of work; Rigsby may have had more needlework than she could handle at that moment; or she may have earned more doing other types of fine needlework. Certainly, her embroidery work for Lissauer seemed to pay more than quilting did. She advised Lissauer to “get somebody that will keep it clean, as they go. That will be the beauty of it. If you and I & had it by ourselves we could kill the bear.”⁸⁸

Several individuals helped with the quilting. Her husband reportedly sketched the design on the foundation, and Lissauer hired three women affiliated with the Regina Shop to do the actual quilting.⁸⁹ Quilted doves (two separate designs) and bouquets (single design) alternate with the appliqués, and flowering branches enhance the border. The latticework design that covers the remainder of the quilt was carefully laid out to create oval settings for the appliqués and the quilted doves and bouquets. The stitches average 1/32 of an inch, with cording inserted between the rows, giving the quilting a three-dimensional effect. A notation indicates three women worked nine hours a day, five days a week for six months—a total

of 3,240 hours.

Although there is no record of what Regina Shop President Marguerite Kleinjohn (1892–1977) charged, the materials Lissauer saved allow us to speculate as to who might have quilted her textile. The list compiled during her visit to the local Century of Progress Contest includes two women affiliated with the Regina Shop: the aforementioned Frances Klemenz and Mrs. Minerva L. (Palmer) Graham. Lissauer also added Klemenz's name to the bottom of the list provided by Sears Merchandise Superintendent Eads.

Sharing Her Vision

After the turn of the twentieth century, many Americans became interested in quilting and quilting competitions.

Not only does it serve as a stimulus to those who look forward to the fair and put into their art the very best of their ability in order that they may surpass their competitor next door, but it also serves as an inspiration to those who are denied the faculty of creating original designs, yet nevertheless take keen pleasure in the production of beautiful needlework.⁹⁰

In the depths of the Depression, quilt exhibits and contests offered Americans outlets to channel their creative energy and provided some respite from the country's economic troubles. While batting manufacturers used these events to promote their products, department stores sponsored them as a way to drive foot traffic onsite. Several competitions in the 1920s and 1930s attracted hundreds of entries and thousands of visitors, but "the granddaddy of all quilt events in the first half of the twentieth century was undoubtedly the Century of Progress competition, sponsored by Sears, Roebuck in conjunction with Chicago's 1933 Exposition."⁹¹ The 495 entries in the local elimination contest in Louisville were among the nearly 25,000 quilts submitted nationwide.⁹²

In May 1934, Lissauer's mother suggested her daughter enter the *Godey Quilt* in a contest in Topeka. "Speaking of prizes, the Household magazine [sic] advertises a quilt show in the latter part of June and fifty dollars is given for the best quilt. . . . Would you risk sending it?"⁹³ Her materials provide no indication that Lissauer participated in this contest, but a letter written fourteen months later suggests it was recently entered in a

competition. “I am glad you brought home the bacon with it. Surely none could have been prettier or had half so much work on it.”⁹⁴ The *Godey Quilt* garnered repeated attention, including an honorable mention at the 1939 National Home Show Quilt and Coverlet Exhibition in Louisville. A local newspaper noted that it was valued at the almost unheard-of figure of \$5,000 and had never been exhibited without winning a prize.⁹⁵ Another article began with the headline, “Dream Designing of Highland Woman Materializes in an Exquisite Quilt.”⁹⁶ In 1945 *House Beautiful* published a photograph of it; three years later the bed cover rated a mention in an article in the *Louisville Courier-Journal Magazine*.⁹⁷

Lissauer publicly acknowledged that she had received assistance, noting, “the [quilting] designs were sketched on by my husband and then were stitched and stuffed by professional quilters.”⁹⁸ There is no indication, however, that she identified the quilters by name, nor does Rigby’s contribution appear in known media reports. Still, her willingness to credit the contribution of other individuals was somewhat at odds with a general outlook that valued the act of appliquéing or piecing a quilt over the process of quilting it. Taken to its extreme, this point of view was perhaps best represented by the willingness of Margaret Rogers Caden, of Lexington, Kentucky, to enter and take credit for the quilt that won the National 1933 Century of Progress Contest, even though she had done no work on it.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Much of the historical value of the *Godey Quilt* lies in the opportunity it affords for a case study into the mindset of its creator and her quilting process: “I like to create something in the back of my head and then go to work to make it come true. That’s exactly what happened with this peach-colored satin quilt. I had to dream it before it materialized into what you see.”¹⁰⁰ Rarely do the materials that influenced the design of a quilt survive beyond its creation. Existing manuscript materials housed in Library Special Collections, WKU, help uncover the quiltmaker’s upbringing and family life, as well as provide details about the quilting process itself. Significantly, this documentation also encompasses the period after the quilt was crafted. Taken together, this information helps researchers understand the “how” and the “why” of the *Godey Quilt*.

Made solely for artistic and personal reasons, the *Godey Quilt* differs in many ways from most quilts crafted during the early 1930s. A figural

quilt, it was based on a largely original design in an era when the marketing and commercialization of patterns and kits had reached such a level of national acceptance that originality was not as highly valued as in the past. This was certainly true for the 1933 Century of Progress Contest, whose finals featured large numbers of quilts made from kits and published patterns and which did not award any prizes to quilts that represented the competition theme. Manifesting the era's interest in America's colonial past, the quilt's appliqués were inspired by illustrations published in newspapers, magazines, and other printed materials—images that were instantly recognizable to many Americans. While there are other known examples of figural quilts from this period, relatively few of them feature images adapted so literally and so broadly from the Colonial Revival era.

With its peach-colored foundation, the *Godey Quilt* more closely resembles the upscale appliqué and whole cloth quilts produced for the cottage industries of the Upper South and Midwest than it does the vast majority of appliqué quilts that date from this period. Many of Lissauer's color choices, such as Nile green and orchid, were mainstream, and she constructed her appliqués from a mix of the solids that dominated appliqué work and the prints that piecework increasingly favored. Still, the subject matter of the appliqués and level of detail Lissauer achieved through the selective application of laces, buttons, and decorative embroidery stitches set her quilt apart.

In 1990, Lissauer donated the *Godey Quilt*, doorstep, four unused appliqués, her research materials, photographs, and the *Flower Baskets Quilt* to the Kentucky Museum, at WKU, where it remains one of this institution's most treasured acquisitions. Eight years later, Lissauer passed away at the age of 101. She was a true original, who in her unique way became a standard bearer of the Colonial Revival Movement.

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