

Uncoverings 1983

Volume 4 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Sally Garoutte



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Second printing 1998.

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Published by the American Quilt Study Group
35th & Holdrege, East Campus Loop
Lincoln, Nebraska 68504-0737
Manufactured in the United States

Uncoverings is indexed by
America: History and Life
ARTbibliographies
Bibliography of the History of Art
Clothing and Textile Arts Index
Historical Abstracts
MLA International Bibliography
Sociological Abstracts

ISBN 1-877859-09-5
ISSN 0277-0628

Library of Congress catalog card number: 81-649486

Cover: Detail of English Template Pieced Quilt, 1860,
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Foreword

Occasionally people want to know *why* quilts are important or *why* they have had such an impact on the lives of women, or *why* they have persisted throughout the other undertakings of our nation—and even now are being made by more women than ever before. History alone will not answer such questions. History has different questions to ask: what happened; when and where did it happen; who did it; how did she do it? In a society of open inquiry, history has no thesis, but is a record from which we gain understanding of the past and find a context for our present. If this record has large gaps in it, our understanding will also be faulty.

Aristotle observed that “the statements of history are singulars,” whereas those of poetry are universals. It is exactly those “singulars” of history that the individual researcher goes out to find. The small and singular bits of the record—carefully gathered from wherever time has scattered them, meticulously inspected for authenticity, and willingly offered for public sharing—will in due time fill those massive gaps in our understanding of the lives of women and the nature of their arts.

As is true for all historians, quilt historians find their subjects from some individual and personal urge deep inside themselves. Often they do not even know what led them to a particular investigation. Samuel E. Morrison, one of our nation’s foremost historians, wrote: “America was discovered accidentally by a great seaman who was looking for something else... History is like that, very chancy.”

Women’s history is similarly “very chancy.” We find what we find where we find it. But that the prize of adding to the other half of American history is worth pursuing, the papers in this volume demonstrate very clearly. The American Quilt Study Group is again pleased to be the vehicle for presenting these enlightening bits of the record for the better understanding of where we have come from and where we are now.