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The Baylis Stenciled Quilt

Diana Church

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the domestic art of painted and stenciled furniture, walls, floors and textiles came into vogue. Stenciled furniture, walls and floors have been located; however, numerous examples of stenciled textiles have not survived. To date, about thirty stenciled spreads have been located and only a handful of them are actually quilted. Thus far, only six can be linked with a particular quiltmaker.¹ The majority of these stenciled spreads date from 1825 to 1835, although one is dated as early as 1800 and those with geometric motifs were made as late as 1850. To date, these spreads have been found in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Maine and New Jersey.^{2,3} The Dallas Historical Society has a collection of 100 quilts and coverlets; one of these is a homespun cotton stenciled and quilted spread which was made by Caroline Lucinda Bayles⁴ of Natchez, Mississippi, c. 1823-1830.⁵

The design source of stenciled spreads originated from the popular fad of theorem painting which occurred between 1800 and 1840. Instructions in theorem painting, i.e., painting still-life pictures on fabric using stencil cut-outs, was transmitted by instruction books, itinerant teachers, or in classes at young ladies' academies.⁶ Although previous writers have said that most stenciled spreads were created by women in rural areas who presumably received instruction in theorem painting at young ladies' academies,⁷ perhaps the influence of itinerant teachers had more of an impact upon the spread of this craft to rural areas. The earliest book that refers specifically to theorem paintings is by J. William Alston, *Hints to Young Practitioners, in the Study of Landscape Painting*. It was published in 1804 in Edinburgh and re-printed in 1820 in London.

A look at the techniques involved will indicate that a sense of design, dexterity, patience, and concentration, were extremely important for the successful completion of a stenciled spread. First of all, the designer had to choose the motifs to be used on the spread. Then, she drew the design for the stencil on a piece of thick paper saturated in linseed oil or cloth dipped in beeswax.⁸ A different stencil was cut for each part of the design or each color to be used. For example, a rose with many petals and leaves would be executed not with a single stencil block, but with a different stencil for each of the petals, the stamen, the leaves, and the stem. After the stencil was made, the foundation material was cut to the desired size of the quilt block and stretched flat, preferably over some padding which would absorb the extra dye as it was applied. The quiltmaker arranged her stencil and then applied the dye paste one color at a time. I am not aware of any primary evidence which documents the making of dyes for stenciling, however other writers⁹ have suggested that colors could be prepared either using vegetable dyes or cakes of concentrated dyes which were purchased from a general store. Upon questioning the donor concerning any family traditions as to how the quilt was made, she indicated that family tradition was that the maker used garden fruits and vegetables to make the colors. The colors used in this quilt include purple-blue, dark green, yellow, red and accents of brown in a few areas. All of the colors are bright and clearly defined, except for the red areas which have faded to rose and various shades of pink.

In the earlier examples of stenciling, many forms were painstakingly put together to form a single motif and freehand strokes were often used to touch up various parts of the design. Irregularity in the positioning of the leaves on two identical flowers or a difference in the number of parts in a similar motif suggest that the theorem was completed at an early time period. By 1835, professional stencil cutters were producing patterns by the hundreds for theorem painters. Therefore, in the later examples, a single stencil for the entire motif is usually found.¹⁰

The stenciled quilt in the collection of the Dallas Historical Society is 70" x 92¼". The 14" squares were stenciled, pieced together on a diagonal, alternating the stenciled and plain squares, and then quilted. The quilt has a 5¼" border stenciled with a meandering vine and flower motif, quilted diagonally, and the edge is finished with a red cotton piping. It is constructed of "homespun" cotton on the front, a

Bayles Stenciled Quilt (M79.3). From the Collections of the Dallas Historical Society.

pieced "homespun" cotton back, and has a batt of hand-carded cotton.¹¹ The condition of this quilt could be rated as good; there is no apparent sign of laundering.

Repetitive design elements of the stenciled and alternating plain cotton squares emphasize elaborate floral and fruit arrangements in lattice-

work baskets, along with individual groups of stenciled roses and tulips. The individual arrangements of stenciled flowers have some repetition, but are generally individual variations of a similar arrangement, indicating the use of many units to achieve the stenciled effect. The stencil colors include blue, rose-pink, green and yellow. Various parts of the design were touched up freehand after the stencil was used, and the stems of each flower arrangement were individually drawn.

The plain cotton squares were quilted with 16 stitches per inch. The quilting patterns included a variety of flower and fruit designs combined with a prince's feather motif. Rose, tulip, and hyacinth designs dominate; however, each square is individually composed and does not have a symmetrical counterpart within the overall design. The variety of motifs and textures found in the plain cotton squares complement the elaborately stenciled blocks.¹²

The characteristics of this stenciled quilt obviously placed its construction between 1825 and 1835. However, since all previous stenciled spreads had been found in northern states, a confirmation of southern provenance required further research. The donor, Mrs. Margaret Lorraine Kincaid Lutz, provided the first clue - according to family tradition, the quilt was made by her grandmother while attending a convent school near Jackson, Mississippi.¹³ Through genealogical research and numerous letters of inquiry, the Mississippi provenance has been substantiated. Research indicates that both economic and cultural influences contributed toward the making of this particular quilt.

By 1639, the Bayles and Platt families of England had emigrated to Connecticut. About 100 years later, these two families had moved to Long Island, New York and their children, Samuel Bayles and Phoebe Platt were married in 1731 at the First Presbyterian Church. Presbyterianism remained the active faith of the Bayles family throughout future generations, with several sons choosing to enter the Presbyterian ministry.¹⁴

Eleven children were born in the Samuel Bayles family prior to Phoebe's death in 1755. Samuel Bayless had moved to Morristown, New Jersey in 1744; however in 1762, he moved one more time to Deer Creek, Harford County, Maryland. By 1770, Samuel Bayles owned a tract of 800 acres called 'Mary's Lot', which was previously part of Baltimore County.¹⁵ This land or a portion of it remained in the Bayles family until 1912, just as the name of 'Platt Bayles' continued through several generations of their descendants.

In Maryland, as early as 1780, the land was becoming less productive because of the continuous planting of a single crop, tobacco.¹⁶ As a result, many planters and farmers found that they either had to change occupations, or move west toward new territories and virgin land. In 1783, after the peace treaty was signed between England and America, there was a great rush toward the new frontier of Kentucky. The population of Kentucky increased at a rate of 8,000 to 10,000 people per year; they came from Pennsylvania, Maryland and the Carolinas, with a large number of settlers arriving from Connecticut, New Jersey and New York.¹⁷

In the particular instance of the Samuel Bayles family, their oldest son Platt owned three farms in New Jersey and held the position of Quartermaster-General under General George Washington. The other five sons all served as soldiers in the Maryland Militia during the Revolutionary War.¹⁸ By 1800 the family had started to move west. One of the youngest sons, Daniel, and two of the grandsons, Benjamin and Platt, had emigrated from Harford County, Maryland to Mason County, Kentucky.¹⁹ In Kentucky, they found rich virgin land for sale at cheap prices and access to a water transportation system which carried agricultural goods to New Orleans and the markets of the world.

Platt Bayles, the grandson of Samuel Bayles, was born on June 18, 1775 in Harford County, Maryland.²⁰ Little is known of his childhood, however sometime prior to 1799, he moved to Kentucky. On August 26, 1799 he married Anne Pool in Mason County, Kentucky.²¹

Platt's occupation is unknown; however, in 1804, he indentured Shadrack Davis for sixteen years to 'learn the art of hatter.'²² Perhaps Platt was a merchant who decided to leave Mason County with his wife and five children in order to move to Natchez, Mississippi in 1810,²³ and take advantage of new business opportunities. In an 1812 almanac, three hatter shops were listed as part of the business and professional community of Natchez.²⁴

By the time the Platt Bayles family arrived in Natchez, the town had passed the frontier stage of its development. French settlers were at Natchez as early as 1699. The later Spanish occupation established a valuable trade linkage with New Orleans. River traffic on the Mississippi had increased substantially by 1790, and Kentucky led other states in the number of vessels docking in Natchez. Data on the origins and population of Natchez indicates that 52% of its population arrived between 1802-1817. During that time period, Natchez received the

majority of its citizens from the states of Virginia (33%) and Maryland (22%); with 14% of the settlers from these states living in Kentucky prior to their residence in Natchez, Mississippi.²⁵

The Natchez Territory was becoming known as the heartland of the cotton kingdom. Planters who had moved to the area for its tobacco production in the 1780s began liquidating their unprofitable tobacco operations and converting to the large-scale cultivation of cotton.²⁶ They were interested in producing large amounts of cotton for shipment to Europe and the textile mills of the northern states.

As early as 1808, textile mills were manufacturing cotton cloth in the Baltimore, Maryland area²⁷; whereas, a textile mill was not built near Natchez, Mississippi until 1842.²⁸ Once manufactured textiles could be purchased locally instead of through the expensive European markets, they became the preferred textile, commonly replacing the usage of homespun cloth for clothing and household goods.

The planters of Mississippi experimented with several genetic strains of cotton trying to reduce loss from various diseases before trying Mexican cotton. This particular type of cotton was found to be suitable for large-scale production in 1820; by 1825, Mississippi was the primary exporter of raw cotton to Europe and the northern states.²⁹ Cotton was a dominant factor in the lives of Natchez citizens during the first quarter of the 19th century.

By 1810, the economic and social structure of Natchez was dominated by men who were prominent in the agricultural, professional and commercial vocations. The affluent merchants and professionals often owned extensive cotton acreage, and a number of the planters lived in Natchez where they could take part in the pleasures of Natchez society.³⁰ A symbol of their life style can be found in the architecture of the homes which they built for their families. By 1790, Natchez could boast of eleven spacious mansions within the city; between 1808 and 1820 many homes were built in the Georgian style³¹ by men who were beginning to amass large fortunes. By 1830, the Greek Revival influence had reached Natchez along with a great emphasis upon imported furnishings from Europe. Lavish balls were given by both planters and members of the wealthy, aristocratic families of Natchez.³²

The upper middle class of Natchez was composed of merchant capitalists who owned their own establishments and could afford a comfortable but not opulent life-style. They also invested their profits in

cotton or land, further tightening the link between the economic fortunes of Natchez and the surrounding countryside.³³

Platt, his wife Anne and their five children had migrated to Natchez along with other Maryland and Virginia families in 1810. About a year later, on February 8, 1811 their last child, Caroline Lucinda Bayles, was born in Natchez.³⁴ Nine months later, on November 13, 1811, Platt Bayles purchased two one-half acre lots adjacent to the City of Natchez for the sum of \$600.³⁵

The interdependence of the planters and merchants of Natchez was highly influenced by the cycle of cotton prices. For instance, in 1801 cotton prices had averaged 44¢ per pound; however between 1809 and 1815, prices had fallen sharply to a low of 8¢ per pound in 1811.³⁶ Unknowingly, the Bayles family had arrived in Natchez during a depressed business cycle, which eventually influenced their personal circumstances. Four years after their arrival, on February 4, 1814 they mortgaged Lots 1 and 4 at a value of \$1,500 for a period of six years, only to have Lot 1 and a house sold at a Sheriff's Auction a month later on March 12, 1814.³⁷ The reason for mortgaging the property or the Sheriff's sale is unknown; apparently they kept Lot 4, as no mention was made of its sale on the same date.

Probably after the sale of their Natchez property, the Bayles family moved to Wilkinson County, Mississippi since they were included in the census records of Wilkinson County for 1816 and 1820, with 1 slave listed in 1816 and no slaves in 1820.³⁸ A few years earlier, the census enumerators of Wilkinson County had counted 157 looms, 216 spindles, 1 cardingmill, 7 spinningmills, as well as the production of 44,860 yards of cotton cloth for export.³⁹ This suggests that the Bayles family was still surrounded by a cotton economy. Platt was inducted into the Masons of Woodville, Mississippi and thereby considered a member of the upper class society in this county.⁴⁰

By the summer of 1823, the Bayles family was living in Natchez again, perhaps to arrange for the education of their two daughters, Caroline who was 12, and Marie who was 14. Unfortunately, a yellow fever epidemic engulfed Natchez, and on July 29, 1823 Caroline's mother died.⁴¹ Platt now had to arrange for the care and education of his two daughters; it seems plausible that he may have wished to educate them in a boarding school or convent due to the death of his wife.

In order to verify where Caroline was educated and confirm that

theorem painting or stenciling classes were part of the curriculum, a search of the enrollment records and survey of classes offered in convent schools and girls' academies was made. Correspondence with archivists at the Ursuline Academy in New Orleans, who operated the only Catholic boarding school in Louisiana from 1823-1830 found that a student by the name of Bayles was not enrolled. Similar inquiries to the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland, Natchez, Mississippi, and Nazareth, Kentucky met with the same results; apparently Caroline was not enrolled at a school which was affiliated with the Catholic church in Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, or Maryland.⁴²

Aubrey Lucas notes that in the wealthy Natchez area and its surrounding counties a concentration of comparatively wealthy families could be found who were well educated and highly cultivated; their sons and daughters were educated by tutors or academies which emphasized the classics and English grammar.⁴³ Due to the emphasis upon culture and education, private academies were established in the Natchez District as early as 1801 and were numerous by 1820. "The academies of the 1800s met a definite educational need by providing learning through private means at a time when it was felt that formal schooling was not the responsibility of the state." (Lucas, page 357)

A survey of the twenty-four academies chartered in southern Mississippi from 1801 to 1822 found that six academies were located in Natchez; the curriculum included a basic education along with an introduction into classical learning.⁴⁴ The most prestigious girls academy of the time period was the Elizabeth Female Academy of Washington County, Mississippi which took in seventy boarding students after it was chartered in 1819. This school was under Methodist sponsorship and its curriculum included classes in Latin, French, English, History, Composition, Chemistry, Geography, Astronomy, Geometry and Trigonometry.⁴⁵ The enrollment records of the Mississippi academies are no longer available.⁴⁶ A comparison of the courses offered by these academies with the extensive education given at the most prestigious academy, the Elizabeth Female Academy, suggests that classes in needlework, painting or the fine arts were not offered.

Thus, the questions remain: how did Caroline acquire the skills to complete a stenciled quilt, where did the influence of this particular set of patterns come from and did an itinerant teacher arrive in Natchez. As the grand-daughter of a Revolutionary War veteran whose

family was one of the Susquehannah Hundred in 1776, the cultural traditions of Maryland were a part of her heritage. As the family land and wealth diminished due to poor agricultural conditions, her father Platt Bayles chose to migrate to Natchez, Mississippi. His daughter, Caroline, was born into a society where cotton was king, and a life of elegance and culture were appreciated.

The Orlofskys suggest that individuals who were isolated from the major cultural centers often chose stenciling as a substitute for elaborate embroidered spreads or block-printed textiles.⁴⁷ The Bayles Stenciled Quilt is an artifact of two cultures, both of which stressed the importance of elegance and refinement. Through her skill in painting and quilting this delicate floral arrangement on fabric, Caroline Lucinda Bayles combined the ideals of her Maryland heritage with the values she encountered in Natchez, Mississippi.

By 1830, Caroline had left Natchez and was living with her brother John in Mason County, Kentucky.⁴⁸ On November 7, 1833 Caroline Lucinda Bayles married Paschal W. McGlasson,⁴⁹ the son of a wealthy Virginia planter who had sold his plantation, Morven, in 1819 and immigrated to Kentucky.⁵⁰

Paschal and Caroline McGlasson had four sons and three daughters. They lived in Kentucky until 1852.⁵¹ During that year, they moved from Mason County, Kentucky to Shelby County, Missouri and continued to reside in Missouri during the Civil War.⁵² Caroline Lucinda Bayles McGlasson died on October 19, 1894 in Missouri;⁵³ the stenciled quilt was given to her eldest daughter, Phoebe Ann McGlasson Kincaid who was the grandmother of the donor. Phoebe Kincaid took the stenciled quilt with her to Colorado in 1900; it was inherited by her son Walter Kincaid who lived in Illinois, and passed on to his daughter, Margaret Lorraine Kincaid Lutz who lives in Dallas, Texas. Because of her interest in preserving the quilt and its southern heritage, Mrs. Lutz donated this special stenciled quilt to the Dallas Historical Society in 1979.⁵⁴

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