

Uncoverings

1984

Volume 5 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Sally Garoutte

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Nancilu B. Burdick: <i>Talula Gilbert Bottoms and her Quilts</i>	7
James M. Liles: <i>Dyes in American Quilts Made Before 1930</i>	29
Dorothy Cozart: <i>A Century of Fundraising Quilts: 1860-1960</i>	41
Laurel Horton: <i>South Carolina's Traditional Quilts</i>	55
Sandra M. Todaro: <i>A Family of Texas Quilters and their Work</i>	71
Tandy Hersh: <i>18th Century Quilted Silk Petticoats Worn in America</i>	83
Suellen Meyer: <i>Characteristics of Missouri-German Quilts</i>	99
Louise O. Townsend: <i>Kansas City Star Quilt Patterns: 1928-1949</i>	115
Virginia Gunn: <i>Crazy Quilts and Outline Quilts: Popular Responses to the Decorative Art/Art Needlework Movement, 1876-1893</i>	131
Merikay Waldvogel: <i>Quilts in the WPA Milwaukee Handicraft Project, 1935-1943</i>	153
Index	169

Introduction

Sandra Metzler

Researchers of American quilting history often begin their long search for information with the profound inspiration of only a single quilt, a panel of quilted petticoat, a faded pinky-brown fabric scrap or a brittle hand-scrawled note with one unknown woman's retrospections of her life and her art. Something tangible that somehow speaks to the quilt historian spurs that person's curiosity for understanding of the times and of themselves, even if it takes a lifetime of questioning. Since 1980, the American Quilt Study Group has taken great pride in supporting through publication quilt researchers and their invaluable work, with the satisfaction that each year's *Uncoverings* will add more significant pieces to the greater body of women's history.

Depending upon the original inspiration, American quilting traditions are approached by researchers from a valid variety of ways, but ever cognizant of the importance of the "quilt context." As one reads through the studies herewith, one senses the "assemblage" of social, cultural and temporal factors at play on the maker and object. Virginia Gunn's essay, for example, illustrates how Crazy quilts and Outline quilts were the popular responses by needleworkers to the decorative art/art needlework movement of the late nineteenth century. Focusing on one family and their quilts in a specific region over several generations, however, is the subject of Sandra Todaro's research. Narrowing even further, Nancilu Burdick examines through primary sources one specific quiltmaker, Talula Bottoms, and her life's work of over one hundred quilts—a felicitous and excellent example of documentation.

Still in light of the social context of the times, Tandy Hersh searches for eighteenth century quilted petticoats in her study while also raising the issue of skilled needlewoman or professional as maker. Fundraising quilts by "anonymous" women and their social

need and existence through time is presented by Dorothy Cozart, and Merikay Waldvogel studies the WPA Milwaukee Handicraft Project and the quilts produced during times of hardship. In a broader approach, James Liles discusses the textile dyes available to quiltmakers throughout time, suggesting how those dyes may have influenced the products preserved today.

Louise Townsend's comprehensive survey of quilt patterns appearing in the *Kansas City Star* newspapers will help define "Midwest" quilts as a cultural region with its own quilt history assemblage. Indeed, perhaps some of the most exciting research results now being discovered are these regional overviews. Missouri-German quilts, for instance, are shown by Suellen Meyer to be reflective of the people and their culture in all physical respects. In addition, quilts of South Carolina have been grouped by several distinct cultural and geographical regions by researcher Laurel Horton: the Piedmont, the Sandhills, the Coastal Plains and the Sea Islands.

Thus, with the cumulative results of these studies and others year after year, we will piece together the fascinating regional quilting traditions of America. It is the hope of the American Quilt Study Group that the readers of *Uncoverings* will enjoy and cherish their heritage and perhaps themselves be sparked to seek out some of the many other unanswered questions in the history of American quilting and the people who made them.