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A Century of Fundraising Quilts: 1860–1960

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Until recently, comparatively little had been written about women's quiltmaking activities which made money either for themselves or for charitable causes. Fundraisers, which I am defining as those quilts made specifically for the purpose of soliciting money from individuals or groups, were virtually ignored in quilt histories written before 1970. *Quilts in America*,¹ published in 1974, pictures two quilts that probably were fundraisers, and identifies one as such in the caption beneath the photo. *America's Quilts and Coverlets*² also pictures two fundraisers and identifies them as such. *Three Hundred Years of Canada Quilts*³ pictures and describes one fundraiser in some detail and also indicates that many more have been made in Canada. *A People and Their Quilts*⁴ not only gives a typical description of the method used in making and raising money on a quilt, it also mentions several instances in which individuals and groups in Tennessee made and sold quilts, or did quilting, then gave the money to churches. Quilt catalogs have identified and pictured several fundraisers, and *Kentucky Quilts 1800–1900*,⁵ *Quilts and Carousels*,⁶ and *Nova Scotia Workbasket*⁷ contain brief discussions of fundraising quilts. Nancy J. Rowley's paper in *Uncoverings 1982*⁸ deals with fundraising quilts made for a specific purpose, "Red Cross Quilts for the Great War." My paper is an expansion of all these findings and will discuss what I have chosen to call "group fundraisers," those made by a group of people, rather than by individuals, as were some of the Red Cross quilts which both Nancy Rowley and I have located. All the quilts used for this paper have been identified as fundraisers either by oral or written documentation and, with two exceptions to be noted later, were made between 1860 and 1960.

The following is from "The History of Olive Hill Church," published in the *Holton (Kansas) Recorder* in July, 1927. This excerpt, about the fundraising activity of a small Methodist church, is what sparked my interest in fundraising quilts.

From the files of the *Holton Recorder*, W.E. Beighter has secured these items. In the issue of July 23, 1883, "The good people of Olive Hill have raised \$1600 in funds to build a church edifice."

June 4, 1884, "Olive Hill will have an ice cream supper June 16. They will sell the wheel quilt at that time, the proceeds will be used to finish the church."

If memory serves us right, this same wheel quilt was a design of a wheel in red on foundation of white for which names were solicited with 10 cents for placing the name on the tire, 25 cents on a spoke, and 50 cents on the hub. Much money was raised in this way, different ladies vieing with each other in securing the most names and money on their block. . . . Mr. Stauffer was the auctioneer who disposed of the wheel quilt which sold for twenty-five dollars to John Dix.⁹

Unfortunately, the quilt itself has not been located, but this writing is very representative of the written and oral accounts of the signature fundraisers that I have subsequently discovered. This account is also typical in that the quilt was made as a fundraiser by a group of church women. My research indicates that most fundraising quilts were made to benefit churches, with the funds being used in various ways, including the building of a new church.

Most of the signature quilts located were made using a circular or wheel design that has a center in which names are written, with more names radiating out from the "hub." Some of the wheels are appliqued and the names appear between the spokes and/or outside the tire. (#14, #16, #25) One circle is a pieced Sunburst; the names are embroidered in the center and on each of the diamonds of the "burst." (#4) Some of the circles are sunflowers and other flowers, and some are Dresden Plate or Friendship Ring.

Designs that are not circular include the Single and Double Irish Chain, the Glorified Nine-Patch, the Double T and Crown of Thorns. Beehives and Seagulls, composed of blocks embroidered with beehives and seagulls and names written in other blocks, is the



Fig. 1. A block of the fundraiser quilt made by the women of the First Methodist Church, Bartlesville, Oklahoma in 1915. Photo by Bryan Gammon.

newest quilt included in this paper, made in 1964. (#49) The oldest quilt was made about 1850 and is a red appliqued circle with white "petals" inside the circle. (#1)

Red was the most common color used in the signature quilts, usually red on white, although one is white on red.¹⁰ (#13) Other colors used with white are orange, blue, old rose and gold. Only one quilt's description noted the significance of the colors, a 1911 quilt in Montgomery County, New York, which was settled by people from the Netherlands. It used orange, blue and white, the colors of Netherland's flag. (#20)

On no quilt yet discovered are the individual makers of the quilt identified as such. However, stories that accompany the quilts often do identify makers. Sometimes the names were embroidered by one person, and her name may be remembered. One quilt has the names of the women who quilted it quilted into the border, but this

also is a remembered fact only. (#31) In some cases the woman who was responsible for the signatures on a certain block may have her name in the hub, but that information is not noted on the quilt. An indication of how hard these mostly "anonymous" women worked obtaining signatures is given in an account in the Linden, Iowa, Methodist Church *Centennial*, 1882-1982. This was sent to me by Mary Barton, whose grandmother, Allie Lisle, is mentioned.¹¹

Names cost 10¢ to be embroidered by the women and Allie Lisle twisted most of the arms in town. When Martha Gilmore had the quilt, she listed all the names and put in some not there until all blocks were filled.¹²

There are 169 names on that quilt. (#28)

The number of names on a quilt may indicate that it was a fundraiser. Many quilts found have at least 150 names on them and a number have more than 400. Three quilts contain more than 1000 signatures, and, in two instances, names of churches and organizations as well as individuals. (#6, #9) The quilt containing the most signatures is the one called "The Refrigerator Quilt."

The Refrigerator Quilt was made by the Trinity Evangelical Church in Kansas City in 1935 and 1936. The purpose was to collect money to buy a kerosene refrigerator for Juanita and Wilbur Harr, who were going as missionaries to Nigeria. All the churches in the Kansas Conference of the Evangelical Church were contacted, and, as a result, there are approximately 1860 signatures on the Sunflower quilt. Enough money was raised to buy the refrigerator, cover freight costs and buy some kerosene. The quilt was then given to the Hars and they used it while in Africa and for many years after they returned. It now belongs to the daughter of Mrs. Arthur J. Brunner, the instigator and moving force behind this money-making project. (#43)

A number of fundraisers contain few or no signatures. For example, a Log Cabin made in 1866 in Missouri raised money to aid needy families of ex-Confederate soldiers. "Feed the Hungry" is written with sequins in the center of the quilt. (#3) The Kentucky Baptist Orphans Home quilt was constructed in blocks, although it was a Crazy Quilt, because churches, Sunday School classes, associations and individual members of Baptist churches were asked to contribute and put their names on a block. (#6) The Monroeville (Ohio) Town Hall Quilt, made in 1888, contains names and businesses of Monroeville merchants and had a central painted velvet

block picturing the town hall. (#8) Quilts made in Michigan (#39) and New York (#20) also have pictures of buildings as central blocks. Mary Conroy states in *Three Hundred Years of Canada Quilts* that she has seen several quilts which have a central panel of an embroidered church, school or other building.¹³

Two quilts, one made in Oklahoma and one in Kansas, contain few signatures and only the provenance of the quilts reveals that they were fundraisers. (#29, #41) Funds were raised in identically the same way for both, and both were made at about the same time by Methodist women's groups. Each woman pieced a block, choosing her own pattern, and she paid a penny for each pattern piece. The woman whose block contained the most pieces won the quilt. I am convinced that more of these quilts are still in existence, but no one remembers that they were fundraisers.

Funds were usually raised in two ways: first, individuals donated money so that their signatures would be on the quilt, and second, the finished quilt was sold or raffled. As was described in the account of the Olive Hill quilt above, the placement on the wheel sometimes determined the amount paid for a signature. The center was usually the highest, with 25¢ and 50¢ being a common amount paid for that space. Otherwise, 10¢ was the amount most often mentioned and 2¢ was the least amount I found. (#38) Usually from \$25 to \$100 was collected for the signatures. However, the 81 blocks for the Baptist Orphans' Home quilt (#6) sold for a minimum of \$18 each and, as a result, about \$5000 was raised in 1882.

Many of the quilts sold at an auction, which might have been held after an ice cream social or a box or pie supper, or sometimes in connection with a bazaar. Clemmie Pugh of Monterey, Tennessee, gave \$10 at an auction for the Dresden Plate she helped make, and she said later: "Why, I wouldn't take anything for this quilt. They's so many of them that's dead and gone."¹⁴ I believe that this is the reason why so many of these quilts and their stories are still extant. Several times I heard or read a remark very similar to Clemmie's made by other informants.

Two quilts have amounts of money written on the quilt. One is the "tithing quilt," made about 1860. Each member of the congregation inscribed his or her name around the Oak Leaf applique, and after each name was the sum of money that the individual gave to the minister, 10¢, 15¢ or 25¢. (#2) The other was made by women of the First Christian Church of Adrian, Missouri, in 1911. Each




Fig. 2. Quilt made in 1931 by the women of the First Methodist Church of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Typical of the 'embroidered wheel' fundraisers of the 1920s and 30s. Photo by Bryan Gammon.

hub contained the name of the person who collected the money for that block and the amount of money collected. (#21)

Some quilts were raffled. However, this method of fundraising was opposed by some churches or some ministers. In the centennial history of the church in Linden, Iowa, cited above, written by Ruth Ketelson, appears the following:

In 1928 in Redfield Rev. Nightengale helped the board decide that the "church would not allow any quilt to be raffled off in the name of any department of the church." Since he was also our minister I doubt if any "raffling" was done here either.¹⁴



Fig. 3. Detail of Figure 2.

Bonnie Carden recalls the women's experience with a raffle at the Andersonville (Tennessee) Methodist Church. "... we began to get criticism from other members that this was a form of gambling. That was the first and last time we ever raffled a quilt."¹⁵ Of course there were ways of eluding such criticism. One was to give something like a stick of gum in return for the money; if they bought something, they wouldn't be gambling. Another way was to call the money a "donation." Sometimes tickets were handed out in return for a donation, and one such occurrence resulted in my favorite fundraising quilt story. The quilt was probably made in 1944, during World War II. The Women's Missionary Union of a Baptist church in Clark County, Missouri, made a quilt, putting the names of each woman and man then in the Armed Forces in the center of an album block. The only one killed in World War II whose name was on the quilt was Raymond S. Grinstead. In 1946 it was decided to raffle the quilt. During the meeting at which the quilt was raffled, several people announced that they had purchased tickets in Ray's

honor. They had put Ray's father's name on the tickets, and perhaps others did the same. At any rate, when the drawing took place, Ray's father's name was on the winning ticket. This quilt, and the story, are still cherished by the Grinstead family. (#48)

What happened to the quilts after the money was raised? Of those not auctioned or raffled, two were given to bishops, one Methodist (#3), and one Church of the Latter Day Saints. (#49) Several were given to the minister of the church in which the quilt was made, and one was given to the woman who collected the most names. (#20) One was bought by the church and presented to the president of the sponsoring organization because she did so much work on it. (#27) At least one person regretted that the quilt her group made had been raffled. She told me that the woman who won the quilt had only one ticket, and then she didn't take care of the quilt and it was worn out long ago. (#47)

In an attempt to determine the areas of the United States where quilts were most often used for fundraising, I compiled a list of all the fundraisers found, almost 100 of them, not just the 49 used in this paper. The findings were inconclusive but interesting. Two were not made in the United States but in Canada, one in Nova Scotia, and one in British Columbia. Most of those found were made in the Midwest, but that is probably because I live in that area, one proof being that I found five in my home county, Garfield County, Oklahoma, although only three of those were made in Oklahoma. Fifteen were made in Oklahoma and two of those were made in the same town, Bartlesville, by two generations of women from the same Methodist church. (#27, #37) Fourteen were made in Kansas, eight in Missouri, eight in Ohio. Altogether quilts were found from twenty states, plus the two from Canada. Few were found that were made west of Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska.¹⁶ Determining periods of time in which the making of fundraisers was most popular was equally inconclusive. Although the dates tend to cluster around the 1880s and 1890s and the 1920s and 1930s, I found fundraisers in every decade from the 1850s through the 1960s, except for the 1870s.

Much research remains on this and all aspects of quilt fundraising. Countless women made and sold quilts, or quilted for others to help with their families' finances. Thousands of women's organizations earned money for their churches or other organizations by making quilts and/or quilting and donating the money received,

and, indeed, this is still a popular method of fundraising. For about twenty years the Mennonite Central Committee has been holding huge auctions all over the United States, selling quilts and other hand-made articles to raise money for overseas relief. This paper is only an introduction to the subject.

QUILTS, in order of date made:

1. Applique quilt, friendship, made in Akron, Ohio, c. 1850, *America's Quilts and Coverlets*, p. 193.
2. Applique quilt, Oak Leaf, made by members of E.J. Metzler's congregation, probably in Pennsylvania, c. 1860, *America's Quilts and Coverlets*, p. 160.
3. Log Cabin (Straight Furrows), made for a Methodist Episcopal Church bazaar in Missouri in 1866, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
4. Pieced quilt, Sunburst, made by members of Mason Methodist Society, Bethel, Maine, in 1880. Letter from Nancy Halpern, September 12, 1983.
5. Pieced quilt, friendship, made by members of Holy Trinity Church, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 1881-82, *Nova Scotia Workbasket*, p. 68.
6. Crazy Quilt, made by various Baptist groups in Kentucky in 1882. *Kentucky Quilts 1880-1900*.
7. Method unknown, wheel quilt, made by Olive Hill (Kansas) Methodist Church in 1884. Letter from Bill Shaklee, January 22, 1983.
8. Crazy Quilt, made by a group of Monroeville, Ohio, women in 1888. *Quilts and Carousels: Folk Art in the Firelands*, p. 22.
9. Embroidered quilt containing names, ads, and a picture of the Garland Street Church, made by the Ladies' Aid Society of the Garland Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Flint, Michigan in 1888. Collection of Sloan Museum, Flint, Michigan. *Flint Journal*, February 18, 1968, page unknown.
10. Pieced and appliqued slumber throw, also painted and embroidered, made by members of Trinity Lutheran Church, Findley, Ohio, in 1890, collection of Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
11. Embroidered quilt, signature, made in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1893. *Quilts in America*, p. 241.
12. Crazy Quilt, made by Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Altoona, Kansas, in 1894. *Lyon County Historical Society Catalog*, Emporia, Kansas, 1983, page unknown.

13. Applique quilt, Spiked Circles, made by members of a Methodist Church in Ohio. Date unknown but the minister to whom it was presented, Charles H. Stocking, born in 1842 and died in 1926. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
14. Applique quilt, wheel design, made by a Baptist church in the South in 1898. *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, December 11, 1983, pp. E3 and E4.
15. Embroidered quilt, State Flowers, made by church women in Oklahoma in the early twentieth century. *A Century of Quilts from the Collection of the Oklahoma Historical Society*, an unpagged catalog, (n.d.)
16. Appliqued quilt, Wheel, made by the women of Asbury Methodist Church near Breckenridge, Oklahoma, in 1902. Telephone interview with the mother of the owner, Marva Shaklee Brix, September 8, 1984.
17. Appliqued quilt Hawaiian design, made by the Ladies' Aid Society of the Mt. Herman Church of North Allen Creek, Americus, Kansas, c. 1900. Phone interview with niece, Dorothy Alexander, of the woman who bought the quilt, September 16, 1984.
18. Pieced quilt, Double T, made by United Evangelical Church women of Montour Falls, New York, in 1902. *Lady's Circle Patchwork Quilts*, No. 17, p. 53.
19. Pieced quilt, Crown of Thorns, variation, made by women of Mission Methodist Church, Mission, British Columbia, 1910. *Three Hundred Years of Canada Quilts*, p. 77.
20. Quilted with names written in indelible ink, spinning wheel design, made by Caughnawaga (New York) Chapter, DAR, in 1911. *Quilts from Montgomery County, New York*, Montgomery County Historical Society, Fort Jackson, N.Y., 1981, quilt number 37.
21. Embroidered quilt, Wagon Wheel, made by the women of the First Christian Church of Adrian, Missouri, in 1911. Letter from Mrs. John Ramsey, granddaughter of Chester Moudy, who won the quilt, September 19, 1983.
22. Embroidered quilt, pattern not indicated, made by women of Alpine School District #153, Tillman County, Oklahoma, in 1914. *Orbit Magazine*, May 8, 1977, p. 22.
23. Crazy Quilt, made by women of Presbyterian Church, Keystone, Nebraska, c. 1919. Letter from Mrs. Willard Wendt, September 23, 1983.
24. Embroidered quilt, pattern not indicated, made by the Ladies' Aid Society of the Keystone (Nebraska) Methodist Church, c. 1915. Letter from Mrs. Willard Wendt, September 23, 1983.
25. Applique quilt, Wheel, made by women of Bartlesville (Oklahoma) Methodist Church in 1915. Interview with Ruth Montgomery, September 7, 1984.

26. Embroidered quilt, circular pattern, made by Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Church (Shamburg, Iowa), in 1924. Letter from present owners, Forest and Glola Richardson, son and daughter-in-law of Arthur Richardson, who purchased the quilt originally, September 15, 1984.
27. Pieced quilt, Nine Patch, variation, made by "The Calendar," a women's group of the Plymouth Congregational Church, Lawrence, Kansas, c. 1920. *The Lawrence Journal World*, 1977, page unknown.
28. Pieced quilt, Streak of Lightning, made by Ladies' Aid society of Linden (Iowa) Methodist Church in the 1920s. *Centennial 1882-1982*, p. 8.
29. Pieced quilt, friendship, made by Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Church, Aulne, Kansas, c. 1924. Interview with present owner, Mrs. Ed Klein, daughter of the woman who won the quilt, July 28, 1973.
30. Pieced quilt, Double Irish Chain, made by the women of Rupe's Grove Church, Atchinson County, Missouri, in 1923. Letter from present owner, Mrs. Henry L. Knock, September 23, 1983.
31. Embroidered quilt, Friendship Ring, made by the ladies of the Second Baptist Church of Williamston, South Carolina, in 1923. South Carolina History Project, Laurel Horton, Guest Curator, McKissick Museums.
32. Applique quilt, Wheel, made by Baptist women's group near Colby, Kansas, in 1924. Telephone conversation with Enola Gish, August 23, 1963.
33. Embroidered quilt, Friendship Ring, made by ladies of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Pelzer, South Carolina, in 1927. South Carolina Quilt History Project, Laurel Horton, Guest Curator, McKissick Museums.
34. Crazy Quilt, made by LGAR, Garfield Circle #22, Emporia, Kansas, in 1928. *Lyon County Historical Society Catalog*, Emporia, Kansas, 1983, (unpaged).
35. Embroidered quilt, Friendship Ring, made by Division 10, Central Christian Church, Enid, Oklahoma, in 1929. Interview with present owners, Mr. and Mrs. James Henderson, son and daughter-in-law of original owner, July 10, 1983.
36. Pieced quilt, Single Irish Chain, made by Town Circle, First Congregational Church, Austinburg, Ohio, in 1930, *Quilts and Carousels*, p. 22.
37. Embroidered quilt, Wheel, made by women of First Methodist Church, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, 1931. Interview with Mary Lou Holli-man, daughter of original owner, September 7, 1984.
38. Appliqued and pieced quilt, Dresden Plate, made by a church in Rowan County, North Carolina in the late 1930s. Letter from Laurel Horton, June 28, 1984.

39. Embroidered quilt, friendship, made by members of Methodist Church, Baldwin, Kansas, in 1939. *Kansas Quilt Symposium 1978*, catalog, Lawrence, Kansas, p. 77.
40. Appliqued and pieced quilt, Church Quilt, made by women of a Baptist church in Tennessee in 1935. *A People and Their Quilts*, p. 95.
41. Pieced quilt, friendship, made by Women's Missionary Society of the First Methodist Church, Hollister, Oklahoma, in the 1930s. *Orbit Magazine*, May 8, 1977, p. 23.
42. Pieced and appliqued quilt, friendship, made by the women of the Methodist Church in Keefer, Oklahoma, in the 1930s. *Nimble Needle Treasures*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1975, p. 28.
43. Appliqued quilt, Refrigerator Quilt, made by women of Trinity Evangelical Church, Kansas City, Kansas, in 1935 and 1936. Letter from present owner, Lois Brunner, December 19, 1983.
44. Pieced quilt, I T or It, made by a senior class at Homestead, Oklahoma, High School in early 1930s. Interview with Ann Warkentin, September 8, 1984.
45. Appliqued quilt, Sunflower, made by women of Congregational Church, Drummond, Oklahoma, c. 1940. Interview with several of the church members.
46. Appliqued quilt, original flower, made by women of Furman Baptist Church, Furman, South Carolina, in 1941. South Carolina Quilt Project, letter from Laurel Horton, Guest Curator, McKissick Museums.
47. Pattern unknown, made by Golden Circle Club, Ashley Community, Grant County, Oklahoma, c. 1943. Interview with one of the club members.
48. Pieced quilt, album block, made by the Women's Missionary Union of a Baptist Church in Clark County, Missouri, c. 1944. Letter from Rosie Grinstead, September 14, 1984.
49. Embroidered quilt, Beehive and Seagull, made for Bishop Earl W. Walker by members of a ward of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. *Utah Folk Art*, B.Y.U. Press (n.d.).

Notes and References:

1. Patsy and Myron Orlofsky, *Quilts in America*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), p. 241.
2. Carleton Safford and Robert Bishop, *America's Quilts and Coverlets*, (New York: Weathervane Books, 1974), p. 161 and p. 193.
3. Mary Conroy, *Three Hundred Years of Canadian Quilts*, (Toronto: Griffin House, 1976), pp. 60-61, 84, 95, and 77.
4. John Rice Irwin, *A People and Their Quilts*, (Exton, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 1983), pp. 95, 13316, 82, 142, 193.
5. John Finley and Jonathan Holstein, *Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900*, (Louisville: Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc., 1982), pp. 60-63.
6. Ricky Clark, *Quilts and Carousels: Folk Art in the Firelands*, (Oberlin, Ohio: FAVA, 1983, p. 22.
7. Marlene Davis, Joan Creelman, et. al., *Nova Scotia Workbasket*, (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1976), p. 68.
8. Nancy J. Rowley, "Red Cross Quilts for the Great War," *Uncoverings* 1982, (Mill Valley, California: American Quilt Study Group, 1983), pp. 43-51.
9. *Holton* (Kansas) *Recorder*, July, 1927, page unknown.
10. When this paper was read at the 1984 AQSG Seminar, Virginia Gunn, explained in answer to a question, that so many of these quilts used red because it was the color most sure to be colorfast.
11. Letter from Mary Barton, received May 16, 1984.
12. Ruth Ketelson, *Centennial 1882-1982*, Linden, Iowa, 1982, unpublished manuscript, p. 8.
13. Conroy. p. 77.
14. Irwin, p. 95.
15. Ketelson.
16. Since presenting this paper I have received information about fundraising quilts in Colorado, Pennsylvania, California, and Missouri. I would also refer the reader to Suzanne Yabsley, *Texas Quilts, Texas Women*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A. and M. University Press), pp. 28, 72 and 85.