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A Family of Texas Quilters and Their Work

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The Texas hill country bears little resemblance to the popular idea of Texas. Unlike the flat dry plains of west Texas, or the low-lying humid lands in south Texas, the hill country in east Texas is a land of pine forests, gently rolling hills and spring-fed streams. Farms rather than cattle ranches predominate. In the 1800s and early 1900s cotton was the principal cash crop grown on these farms.

First settled in the 1830s, the hill country has a strong German background. Towns such as New Braunfels and Fredericksburg bear witness to the German influence. Neches in Anderson County, Kerrville in Kerr County, and Jacksonville in Cherokee County are all within this area.¹

In March 1983, I found a lovely old *Blazing Star* quilt in a shop in Dallas. The quilt seemed to call to me, so I paid the price and took it home. The shop owner mentioned that she had several other quilts from the same family for sale.

Later, after I purchased two more quilts from this family group, the shop owner gave me the name and address of the lady who had placed the quilts on consignment. Wanting to know more about the women who had made these quilts, I contacted the lady who was selling them, Mrs. Hilda Palmer of Kerrville, Texas.

Mrs. Palmer told me she had several more quilts at her home. The responsibility for so many quilts was more than she wanted; so, keeping the ones dearest to her mother, she placed the others up for sale. Mrs. Palmer had made only two quilts in her life, one a baby quilt for her daughters; and didn't consider herself a quilter.

This study came about when something very interesting in the stitching of one of the quilts was revealed by the sun as the back of the quilt was turned to the light. There in the stitchwork was the

word "Mollie," and the date "1871." There, as her living legacy, was a signature of a young woman, reaching across the years. One could sense the pride Mollie must have experienced as she put her name on her handiwork.

According to Mrs. Palmer, the women represented by these quilts were: her mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, great-aunt, and great-great-aunt. It is unusual that so many quilts, made by members of one family, still remained after such a long time.

There are sixteen quilts in the family group. They were made over a span of 70 years by five women. Four of these women were related by blood, the fifth by marriage.²

In general, the quilts are in very good condition and represent a variety of patterns. There are three applique quilts, ten pieced quilts and three in which the designs are both pieced and appliqued.


The first of the five women was Mary Jonathan "Mollie" McDow, born 1842 in Adairsville, Georgia, a small town northwest of Atlanta. She married Guilford McReynolds, a Confederate veteran, in 1872 and moved to Texas in 1875.³ They settled in Neches where Guilford went into the lumber business. They also farmed and raised poultry, eventually developing a new breed of chicken. Guilford also published a poultry magazine.⁴

Mollie died, childless, in 1897 and is buried in the old Neches City Cemetery.⁵

Four of the quilts in the group were her work; a green and brown Tulip, which is the one she signed; the Feathered Star; the Basket; and the Blazing Star.

After Mollie's death at 55, Guilford remarried, put his first wife's quilts away and used them very little, if at all. There were no children from Guilford's second marriage either; so upon his death and that of his second wife, the quilts became the property of Mary Abram "Abbie" Fuller, Guilford's niece and the fifth child of his sister, Tennessee Jane McReynolds Fuller.⁶

Tennie Jane, as she was called, was born in Alabama in 1847. In 1869 she married Abram J. Fuller. They, too, moved to Texas in 1875 and settled in Neches. Abram died in 1878, leaving Tennie Jane with four small children and pregnant with a fifth baby. To support herself and her children she took over the management of the farm and ran it, as well as the local cotton gin, in an age when few women were actively involved in business. Tennie Jane died in



*Fig. 1. Mary Jonathan "Mollie"
McDow McReynolds (1842-1897)*

*Fig. 2. Tennessee Jane McReynolds
Fuller (1847-1898)*



*Fig. 3. Mattie Fuller Andrews
(1871-1950)*

*Fig. 4. Vada Andrews Prathier
(1894-1977)*

1898 and is buried in the Neches City Cemetery. Before she died, Tennie Jane produced several quilts, among them a greenish-brown and red Tulip, the Mexican Rose, and the Chimney Sweep.

Two of Tennie Jane's daughters are represented in the collection as well.

Mattie Fuller, Tennie Jane's daughter and Mrs. Palmer's grandmother, was born in Alabama in 1871, but grew up in Neches. She married Terrell Graves Andrews in Neches in 1893, lived in Jacksonville, Texas most of her life and died in Dallas in 1950.⁷ She made

the Anna's Irish Tulip, the Double Wedding Ring and the Dutch Doll.

Mattie's sister, Mary Abram or Abbie, was the child born to Tennie Jane four months after her husband's death. In memory of her husband she named the little girl Mary Abram and called her "Abbie."⁸ Abbie was something of a family pet and stayed at home with her mother, marrying only after her mother's death. She moved to Palestine, Texas, county seat of Anderson County, and in 1916, married John Blanton of Neches. They moved to Dallas where she was living at the time of her death in 1962. Since she had no children, all the quilts in her possession passed on to her niece, Vada, the daughter of Mattie Fuller Andrews.⁹ Abbie made the pink and green Goose Tracks and the Texas Tears.

Vada Andrews, Hilda Palmer's mother, was born in Jacksonville, Texas in 1894. She married the Reverend Hugh Bryant Prather of Weatherford, Texas in April, 1912.¹⁰ The Friendship quilt was a wedding present to them from his family and contains the names of several of his relatives.

Vada died in Dallas in 1977. According to Mrs. Palmer, her mother made only a few quilts, turning instead to crochet and tatting as a creative outlet. The last quilt Vada made was the Grandmother's Flower Garden completed in 1938. Her other quilts are the Dresden Plate and Fruit Basket. The latter was made from a Ruby McKim pattern she ordered by mail in the late 1920s or early 30s.

THE QUILTS

1. Blazing Star—made by Mollie McReynolds, ca. 1870s.

Total size: 75" by 90". Star size: 14½". Border: 8½". Border block: 2¼".

This quilt is hand pieced of forest green, gold, reddish brown and white cotton solids. There are twenty stars set in rows of four across and five down. The border is four rows deep in a checkerboard pattern of forest green and white. The quilt shows attention to detail in the piecing and quilting. The hand quilting is fine, with each diamond in the star's outline quilted. There is fine cross-hatch, or Xs, in the border block. The quilt is bound in a brown, hand-sewn binding. This binding is somewhat frayed. The corners of the quilt are rounded. The quilt

back is a red and white plaid fabric. It also has a very thin cotton batting. Unfortunately, the quilt has several stains, although it shows no evidence of hard use. The fabric of the back is very fragile.

2. Baskets, made by Mollie McReynolds, ca. 1870s or 80s.

Total size: 66" by 76". Block size: $8\frac{3}{4}$ ".

Hand pieced and quilted of assorted cotton calicoes, this quilt is composed of thirty basket blocks and twenty solid blocks. The baskets are set within white squares which are set on point and alternate with squares of a reddish-pink print. The quilting is done in an all-over waves pattern. This is also known as fan or shell quilting in other parts of the country. There is no evidence of wear and no obvious fabric deterioration. The baskets are of different cotton solids, plaids and prints in colors of dark blue, gold, maroon, tan, red, brown and light blue. The gold is the same fabric used in the Blazing Star. A blue print from the Chimney Sweep appears in one basket, evidence of trading of these fabrics among family members.

3. Tulip, bearing the signature in stitching: "Mollie 1871."

Total size: 66" by 85". Block size: $17\frac{1}{2}$ ". Inner sash: 2". Outer sash: 3".

This quilt is composed of green figured calico, a brown cotton solid, (probably red once) and white. There are twelve blocks set three across and four down. The quilting is done in the waves pattern. The quilt is bound in a black and tan print. This binding is not original. The original binding underneath is the green calico used in the tulips. The quilt shows severe fabric deterioration on the back and has several rips around the edges where hands have pulled through the quilt. This quilt is almost identical to the Tulip made about the same time by Tennie Jane Fuller, Mollie's sister-in-law.

4. Feathered Star, made by Mollie McReynolds, ca. 1800s-90s.

Total size: 76" by 94". Block size: 18". Sashes: $4\frac{1}{2}$ ". Side Borders: $6\frac{1}{2}$ ". Top and bottom borders: $4\frac{1}{2}$ ".

This quilt is hand pieced in a variety of cotton prints, plaids and solids. Several prints used in this quilt also appear in the Baskets quilt and Chimney Sweep. The borders and sashes are a red and black cotton print. There are eight khaki and four gray block backgrounds. The quilt contains a great deal of red, navy



Fig. 5. Tulip, made by "Mollie" McDow McReynolds, date inscribed in quilting, "1871."

and mustard yellow prints. The tan binding is machine sewn. The corners are rounded. The quilting is in the waves pattern, but the design of the rows are grouped in lines of three, with a one inch space between groupings. The quilt is in very good condition, with no evidence of hard wear.

5. Chimney Sweep, made by Tennie Jane Fuller, ca. 1870s-80s. Total size: 68" by 78". Block size: $9\frac{1}{2}$ " and $10\frac{1}{2}$ ". Sashes: $2\frac{3}{4}$ ". Top and bottom borders: $5\frac{7}{8}$ ". Side borders $8\frac{3}{4}$ ". This small hand pieced and quilted piece is made of various

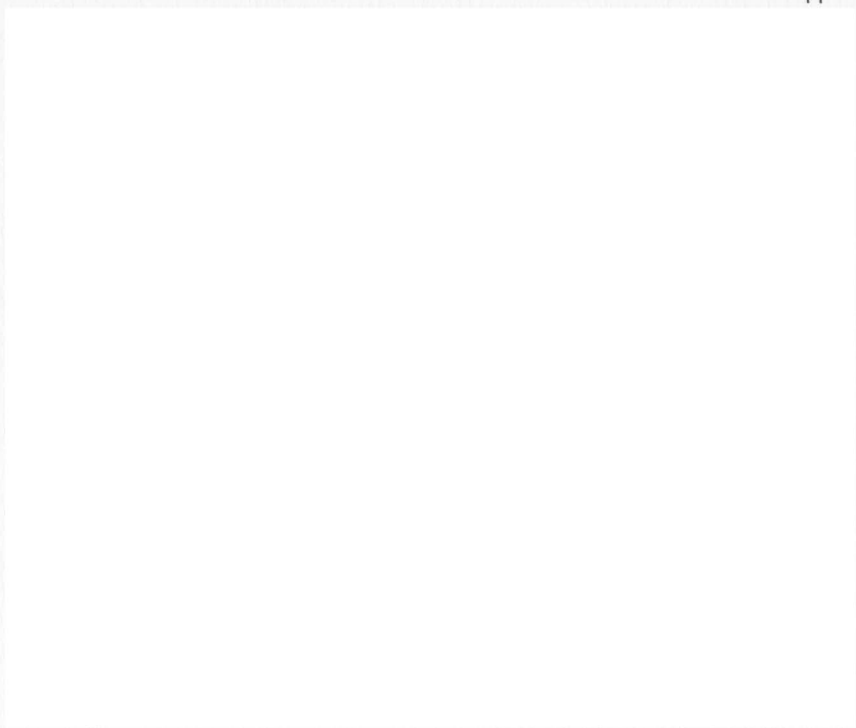


Fig. 6. *Chimney Sweep*, made by Tennessee Jane Fuller, ca. 1870–1880.

shades of blue prints with one green print block, one khaki solid block and two tan print blocks mixed in. The twenty blocks are cotton prints with muslin centers. The quilting is done in the waves design. This quilt, too, is in excellent condition with no signs of wear.

6. *Tulip*, made by Tennie Jane Fuller, ca. 1870s.

Total size: 70" by 90".

The family name for this quilt is "Diamond Tulip." It is pieced of red and green cottons on a white background. There are twelve blocks in the piece, three across and four down. This quilt is in excellent condition, even though the green has faded somewhat to a greenish-tan. The sashes and borders are composed of red and green strips in the order: red-green-red. The corner blocks of each sash are small nine-patch red and green blocks. The

quilting is very fine and the quilt is closely quilted in an almost stippled effect. The binding is hand sewn of the greenish-tan cotton.

7. Mexican Rose, made by Tennie Jane Fuller, ca. 1870s.¹¹

Total size: 75" by 83".

This lovely old quilt is one of three applique quilts in the group and is, by far, the oldest. The family name for this quilt is "Daisy" and it is made of red, yellow, white and brown cottons. The brown may have been green originally. There are six full and three half rose groups. Family history places the quilt in the late 1870s or very early 1880s. The border treatment is the same as on the Tulip also made by Tennie Jane. Each rose consists of four six-petaled red flowers. The flowers have yellow centers on stems which are now brown. The stems each bear two small brown leaves and meets on the diagonal in the yellow center. Four large brown leaves emerge from the center and point to the four points of the compass. The background and backing fabric is white cotton. The quilting is very fine. It follows the design and fills the white background areas with outline and cross-hatch. The quilt is in excellent condition. The set of the borders is unusual, as are the half roses along one side.

8. Anna's Irish Tulip, made by Mattie Fuller Andrews, ca. 1930s.

Total size: 70" by 80".

The family name for this quilt is Dutch Tulip. It is hand pieced of a sea green and three shades of pink cotton solids. There are fifteen tulip blocks in six rows. They alternate with solid green blocks in a pattern of three tulips-two solids on one row, then, two tulips-three solids on the next. The background for the tulip blocks is pale pink. The stems and leaves are green with the tulip flower being composed of a medium and dark pink. There is a double row of outline quilting around the flowers and along the inner block edges. The rest of the quilt is done in cross-hatch quilting set $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches apart. The quilt is sun faded along the right side. Mrs. Palmer said it was used as a bedspread in a room with western exposure. The quilting is very good and the fabric is in good condition, despite the sun faded areas.

9. Dutch Doll, made by Mattie Fuller Andrews, ca. late 1920s.

Total size: 64" by 80".

This quilt is made of pieces of Mrs. Palmer's first grade dresses

and was made for her by her grandmother. It is now in the possession of her daughter. There are thirty dolls set in five rows of six each. The dolls are appliqued to lavender blocks. The backing fabric is also lavender. The figures are outlined in a black buttonhole stitch and the background is done in a fine cross-hatch. This quilt shows signs of wear.

10. Double Wedding Ring, made by Mattie Fuller Andrews, ca. 1932.

Total size: 76" by 92".

This quilt is machine pieced of 1930s cotton prints and solids. The hand quilting is done in outline stitching around the rings and in curved lines within the rings. The background fabric is a vibrant green. There are twenty rings. The binding is machine sewn of the same fabric as the background and backing fabrics. This quilt is in excellent condition with no signs of use or wear.

11. Goose Tracks, made by Abbie Fuller Blanton, ca. 1920.

Total size: 70" by 80".

This hand pieced and quilted creation is the only one in the group in which an intentional mistake can be detected in the piecing. One corner has one of the tracks turned upside down. There are twenty blocks of pink and green solid "tracks" set in white. The borders are composed of pink-white-green strips with pink corner squares. The quilting is done in an outline pattern. This quilt, too, is in near perfect condition.

12. Texas Tears, made by Abbie Fuller Blanton, ca. 1920s.

Total size: 67" by 80".

Hand pieced and quilted in an outline pattern this quilt is composed of pink solids and a pink and white rosebud print. The backing is the same rosebud print. The condition of the quilt is very good. This pattern is also known as Job's Tears.¹²

13. Friendship Quilt, made in April 1912.

Total size: 70" by 82".

This quilt is the only one in the collection made for one of the ladies instead of by one of them. It was made in Weatherford, Texas, a small town west of Fort Worth, in April 1912 by the family of Rev. Hugh Bryant Prather as a wedding gift for the minister and his new wife, Vada Andrews Prather.¹³ This quilt is in excellent condition because, according to Mrs. Palmer, it was stored by her mother and never used. The fabrics are red cot-

ton, muslin and a variety of prints. The pattern is an embroidered album patch. Names are embroidered on the muslin centers of each block. The sashes are red with muslin corner blocks. There are a total of twenty signed blocks in the piece.

14. Dresden Plate, made by Vada Andrews Prather, ca. 1935.

Total size: 66" by 82".

This quilt is hand pieced of assorted 1930s dress prints on a green background. The hand quilting around the twenty plates is predominately outline quilting, with some simple decorative quilting done between the plates. There is evidence of some fabric deterioration on two plates due to sun exposure. The quilt is in generally good condition despite the fading along one side.

15. Fruit Basket, made by Vada Andrews Prather, ca. late 1920s–early 1930s.

Total size: 72" by 82".

This quilt was made from a pattern ordered from a ladies magazine in the late 1920s, and was possibly a kit quilt. There are 28 baskets containing thirteen types of appliqued fruit, decorated with embroidery. The fruits depicted are: apples, peaches, lemons, oranges, cherries, bananas, pineapples, grapes, strawberries, limes, figs, quinces, and three colors of plums. The background fabrics are tan and dark brown cotton. The baskets are made of a medium brown cotton and done in block form, set on point. Quilting designs consist of outline and cross-hatch. The fabrics of this quilt are in good condition, though one side is slightly sun faded.

16. Grandmother's Flower Garden, made by Vada Andrews Prather, ca. 1938.

Total size: 76" by 85".

This lovely quilt is composed of multicolored cotton print flowers set in a white background. Each hexagon in the flowers is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch across. The borders are composed of three shades of lavender with the darkest shade also used for the quilt back. The sides and bottom of the quilt are finished in a zig-zag motif. Mrs. Palmer says this was the last quilt her mother made and was intended for use as a bedspread. However, it was never used.

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