

# Uncoverings

## 1987

Volume 8 of  
the Research Papers of  
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Sally Garoutte & Laurel Horton

## Preface

The essays in this volume contribute to our growing understanding of the importance of quilts and quiltmaking in human life. One of the recurrent themes here is the motivations of quiltmakers, both past and present. Three essays discuss the creation of quilts as patriotic responses to nineteenth-century events, including commemorative quilts inspired by the Australian Centennial Celebration, and gunboat and linsey quilts sparked by the American Civil War. Two other authors address aspects of contemporary quiltmaking, from a comparison of two quilt groups in southern California to the hoopla surrounding a national contest.

Quiltmakers everywhere are intrigued by the little-known origins of the patterns they use. Although pattern research is not an easy task, two essayists have compiled supporting evidence on the early development of particular designs: one, the popular yo-yo; the other, an unusual pattern found only within a small region.

Another theme of this volume is the nature of quilt research itself. One paper describes the inclusion of quilts in an early published folklore collection, while another describes a recent, successful state documentation project. In response to requests for information on conducting research, a panel of four participants discussed their approaches at the 1987 Seminar, and those presentations are included in this volume.

Many people have noted that there are as many different ways of making quilts as there are quiltmakers. Perhaps it is also safe to say that there are as many different approaches to quilt research as there are researchers. Each investigator brings to the work a different set of tools and experiences that guide and influence the direction of study. In spite of the different approaches, careful researchers share a dedication to accuracy.

The authors of this volume hope that our work will inspire and encourage others as we have been inspired and encouraged by the work of Sally Garoutte.

Her pioneering work on Marseilles quilt history is quite often cited as the sole authoritative reference on that topic. The first article that *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* published on Seminole patchwork was written by Sally in 1974. Her discovery of a Log Cabin-type wrapping on an ancient Egyptian mummy confirmed that design's ancient antecedents. Sally's *Quilters' Journal* interviews with Marguerite Ickis and Georgianna Brown Harbeson introduced our generation to those illustrious women, who had only been known to us as authors' names engraved on books. Perhaps her most valuable work was a series of penetrating essays on textile history that are monuments to her expertise in research and writing.

In addition to her writings, Sally's highly professional and exacting editing of *Uncoverings* has brought to those slim volumes critical acclaim as the finest examples of quilt scholarship being published today. Writing research papers for *Uncoverings* fostered an entire cadre of excellent quilt historians in the 1980s. Sally's role has been a large one in the acknowledgment of quilt history as a scholarly discipline, rather than merely the interweaving of quaint, charming, and slightly condescending tales of little old ladies sewing scraps.

We can describe versatile Sally Garoutte in many ways: textile expert, printmaker, researcher, quilt historian, quiltmaker, quilt collector, author, editor, archivist, feminist, and civil rights activist. Without doubt, she was all she needed to be to guide the American Quilt Study Group to its present prominent position.

We mourn her loss, and celebrate her life.

Cuesta Benberry

## Sally Jeter Garoutte (1925–1989)

It does appear that Sally Garoutte, a founder of the American Quilt Study Group and its first Executive Director, was destined to become one of the late twentieth century's premier quilt researchers and historians. Possessed of a towering intellect, an incisive questioning mind, and an insatiable desire for accurate information based on proven fact, Sally had qualities eminently suited for concentrated research. In the early 1970s, she made numerous trips around the country visiting quiltmakers, quilt collectors, quilt cooperatives, quilt exhibitions, historical societies, antique shops, libraries, and art, textile, and old house museums, always gathering data for her rapidly expanding files.

During Sally's initial visit to St. Louis, I recall being impressed both by her huge notebook of textile samples and photographs and by the clarity of her thinking. I remember most vividly a conversation we had. Early in the present quilt revival there was much discussion of the resemblance of pieced quilts to trendy Op Art. Sally earnestly questioned, "How can that be? Quilts came *first*. So Op Art resembles quilts, not vice versa." She never changed. Popular ideas and generally accepted concepts were never too sacred to escape Sally Garoutte's close scrutiny and examination.

Sally's writings, based on her investigative studies, are a significant legacy that have brought new insights to quilt history. Largely due to her research, we now know, despite long-held beliefs, that crazy quilts were not the first type of quilts made in colonial America. Sally's discrete classifications of the various types of crazy quilts have been so widely accepted that the theories have almost become a part of the public domain. Several authors have subsequently used the classifications, apparently unaware that Sally was the original author.

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