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Design Influences on an Unnamed Regional Pattern with Descriptive Catalog of Known Examples

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Euphemia Evalina Mills was born in Iredell County, North Carolina, in 1837, the ninth of ten children born to William Mills and Elizabeth DeArmon Mills. Her granddaughter remembers Euphemia's girlhood home (no longer standing) as a two-story frame house with a wing in back and "flowers everywhere."¹ The family was one of many who farmed the sizeable piedmont "plantations" as farms were called. These early plantations were largely self-sufficient in producing the articles needed for daily life, and this certainly included clothing construction and quilts. At the crossroads store in present-day Shinnsville, North Carolina, (the area formerly called the "Mills Settlement,") the storekeeper will tell you, "They say to this day that when the Mills girls came to church, heads would turn to see what they were wearing as they were such fine seamstresses."² From the dress-making scraps and from newly purchased fabrics, Euphemia pieced quilts and made one very lovely applique quilt. She married late, following the War Between the States. In 1872 she died in childbirth, and her husband of two years, John Allison, took the surviving twin of her first pregnancy and went to live with her family where maiden aunts helped to raise the child. John packed up all of Euphemia's quilts and unquilted tops in a trunk and there they have remained, now in the loving care of her granddaughter. Family tradition says that her beautiful applique quilt was made before the Civil War, and indeed the fabrics, style, and "look" are of that time. This quilt in red and

Figure 1. Detail of quilt made by Euphemia Mills Allison, Iredell County, North Carolina, ca. 1860.

green with nine large squares of appliqued medallions and elegant double clamshell quilting is the one which sparked my interest in the unnamed pattern, when I saw it displayed in a local show in December 1985.

I had seen one other quilt of the design a few weeks earlier, in November 1985, during the first month of the North Carolina Quilt Project. When this fine quilt, made by Margaret Emma Poovey (1850–1925) of Lincoln County, and dated January 1877, was presented for documentation we were unable to identify the pattern. Later, at home, I combed my books and magazines as I was sure I had seen the design. There it was, in the Fall 1984 issue of *Ladies Circle Patchwork Quilts* in an article about the South Carolina Quilt History Project. And there it was—UNNAMED, so the search was on!

None of the examples in the search came with a name which might give a clue to the origin of the design, so I began to look instead at the elements which would have influenced its development. These elements would have been the ethnic groups in the area, the general

decorative styles of the period, and the quilting techniques of the period. One of the intriguing aspects of this quilt pattern is that it appears to have sprung from the piedmont area of the Carolinas and to have been made ONLY there. One late (1880) version was made in Missouri and a variation has been found in Texas. For the sake of discussion, it will be called **medallion applique** which describes the shape and the technique used to create it.

Euphemia's father, William Mills, had come to North Carolina in 1794, when his parents, Charles Nathaniel and Elizabeth Rial Mills, led a party of seven families (with their household goods and slaves) from St. Mary's County, Maryland³ into the beautiful rolling land between the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers. This was the land upon which Charles' older brother, John, had fought the troops of Cornwallis, and John had praised the land to his brother and the others. Thus the Mills family and their friends joined the tide of settlers into the Western sections of the Carolinas which had begun over fifty years earlier.

The first to come had been the Germans from Pennsylvania who followed the Great Wagon Road (site of the older Indian trade routes) from present-day New York through Pennsylvania and the Valley of Virginia, across the Blue Ridge near Roanoke, Virginia, and thence into the piedmont counties of North and South Carolina. The Germans were followed by the Ulster Scots, English, and a scattering of other nationalities.⁴

The Mills Settlement represented another element coming into the area: those of English ancestry who had settled the coastal areas beginning in the seventeenth century. As the population grew and land became more costly (and, after 150 years of tobacco farming, less productive) the younger sons and their families began to move south and west. In 1795, when Charles Nathaniel Mills purchased 600 acres in Iredell County, he and his friends brought to their farms their heritage of English farming skills, their customs, and their religion. They established the first congregation of the Episcopal Church in the county, and for a time they shared the use of a log church with the Lutherans and Presbyterians who had come before them. The English settlements along the coast relied on the labor of African slaves, and migrants to the piedmont brought their slaves with them. Thus we see

Figure 2. Map of North Carolina and South Carolina showing where known examples of medallion applique quilts were made.

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|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Cleveland Co. (1) | 7. Iredell County (1)(possible 2) | 13. Oconee Co. (1) |
| 2. Gaston Co. (1) | 8. Forsyth Co. (?) 1 | 14. Abbeville Co. (2) |
| 3. Lincoln Co. (1) | 9. Cabarrus Co. (?) 1 | 15. Saluda Co. (1) |
| 4. Catawba Co. (1) | 10. Raleigh, NC | 16. Newberry Co. (1) |
| 5. Wilkes Co. (1) | 11. Wilmington (1) | 17. Lexington Co. (6)(2 possible) |
| 6. Alexander Co. (1) | 12. Spartanburg Co. (1) | 18. Columbia, SC |

the coming together of the major ethnic groups which settled the piedmont Carolinas: German, Ulster Scots, English, and African.

In their introduction to *Carolina Folk*, George D. Terry and Lynn Robertson Myers state: "Cultural tradition and popular taste are strong elements in the formation of folk art."⁵ During the period which produced the **medallion applique** quilts, the use of medallion shapes abounded in popular culture, and these shapes are frequently found in architecture, woven coverlets, carpets, lace, crochet, other textiles, glassware, and furniture; indeed they are found almost any place one finds decorative arts.

Two architectural elements significant to this study are the various medallions and the “swag and tassel” (or “bow”) which one frequently sees translated into quilts. Medallions usually consist of plumes, feathers, acanthus leaves, or even tobacco leaves radiating from the center, forming a circular or “medallion” shape. Swags are sometimes depicted as feathers, or fruit with a bow or tassel at the joining of each swag. These two motifs were very popular during the Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival periods and are seen throughout the homes and public buildings of the Carolinas and elsewhere. Some of these buildings were designed by architect Robert Mills (no relation to Euphemia) who, after receiving his training under James Hoban, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Latrobe, returned to South Carolina where as State Architect and Engineer he was responsible for designing and building many of the fine public and private structures of the early nineteenth century.⁶ Many other buildings were built by master carpenter/builders who used English “builders’ manuals” or such books as *The American Builder’s Companion* by Asher Benjamin.⁷ In these manuals the craftsmen (many of whom were immigrants from Ireland and England) could find professional designs for woodwork, decorative plaster, and other elegant interior details desired by the owners of prosperous small plantations as well as coastal mansions. Perhaps some quilter saw a plumed medallion in her husband’s *Builder’s Companion* or in the manual used by an itinerant tradesman as he produced the finishing details for her new home. Indeed, such a ceiling medallion (ca. 1850) is found in the Johnson-Neel House, Iredell County, North Carolina, a few miles from Euphemia’s home.⁸

The same motifs found in architecture are found in many textiles such as jacquard coverlets, carpets, lace, crochet, and especially in the great English and continental whitework whole-cloth quilts with their feathers, plumes, circles, medallions, and swags.

The years immediately before the Civil War, when Euphemia Mills and her contemporaries began to make their **medallion applique** quilts, were a time of great development all over the rapidly growing and still new United States. These women living on piedmont plantations saw the coming of the first local newspapers and other periodicals, the first publicly supported schools and the founding of

many new colleges.⁹ And they participated, in their unique way, in the period which produced the very height of the great American applique quilts (including the beautiful and intricate Baltimore Album quilts) all of which reflect the general styles and fashions of the period.

From the beginnings of quilting in America, the influence of Old World skills and designs was evident: English “framed center style” influenced both pieced and *broderie perse* quilts and was translated by the Amish into the “diamond in a square.” Feather designs from the north of England appeared in many variations in America and are strongly associated with the Pennsylvania German folk design elements such as hearts, tulips, and the fylfot, which proliferate in American quilts. Also from the Germans, quiltmakers adapted the tradition of “scherenschnitte,” a process of folding and cutting paper into intricate designs. In the nineteenth century this technique was adapted to produce a great variety of motifs.

The **medallion applique** can be produced by folding and cutting, and several of the examples found were indeed cut from one piece of fabric. Others, with alternating colors, could have been folded and cut from two different colors, such as red and green, cut apart and rejoined to form the alternating red/green pattern. The variety of the execution of this pattern indicates its origin as a “folk” pattern rather than one which was published. No early published source has been found, and no early example has come with a name.

The great period of album quilts of Baltimore, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York is also the period when in the south, in one small area—the counties lying between the coastal plain and the Blue Ridge Mountains of North and South Carolina—this unique applique design appeared. When one considers that the elements of ethnic mix and popular style were not unique to the Carolina piedmont, it is even more mysterious that the **medallion applique** appeared *only* there. This pattern was used mainly by women of the plantations and in one case by a slave woman on a plantation in Gaston County, North Carolina (See Catalog, Part I #13). Perhaps the pattern spread from one county fair to another or from friend to friend, relative to relative. Perhaps itinerant peddlars, craftsmen, or shoemakers disseminated the design in their travels. The **medallion applique** appears to have been simply a regional fashion, popular for about forty years, then

fading with the coming of commercial designs and the rise in popularity of the crazy quilt as an expression of fancy work.

The **medallion applique** has much in common with the very popular **Prince's Feather** (or **Princess Feather, Star and Plume**) which appeared earlier and enjoyed widespread popularity from England to New England and the south for over a hundred years. If the **medallion applique** was ever meant to be representational of any object, it is most likely the plume (or feather). After seeing many examples of the design personally and through slides, my feeling is that the design is simply itself—that it is not meant to be a feather, lotus, or any literal object, but simply a medallion-shaped decorative motif.¹⁰

Perhaps in the future we will find a quilt of this pattern clearly labeled with the pattern name. Failing that, if at some time a name should be given to this design, I suggest that **Carolina Medallion** would be appropriate as this suggests both the location of apparent origin and the shape of the motif.

Catalog

The information for listings in Part I of the Catalog was gathered by the author through interviews and/or correspondence with quilt owners or from the published sources noted.

The information in Part II is from the South Carolina Quilt History Project, courtesy of Laurel Horton and the McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

Explanation of terms used in Catalog:

Lobes: The individual segments of the motif.

Slots: The curved openings near top of each lobe.

Serration: The indentations present along the tops and/or sides of lobes in some examples.

Pieced center: Some examples with alternating colors have centers formed by the points of the lobes and these points are *pieced* together, as is an eight-pointed star, then the whole is appliqued to the foundation fabric.

Catalog – Part I

1. North Carolina, Iredell County ca. 1860
 Euphemia Evalina Mills Allison (1837–1872)
 Red/green; green border
 Alternating colors; 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; center
 pieced.
 9 blocks ($26\frac{1}{2}$ " x $26\frac{1}{2}$ ") 86" x 94"
2. North Carolina, Catawba County ca. 1880
 Harriet Propst Whisnant (?) (1850–?, married 1868)
 Brownish-red (dark); sawtooth sashing of same fabric
 Cut from one piece; 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; solid
 center
 9 blocks (24") 74" x 74"
3. North Carolina, county unknown ca. 1880
 Maker unknown (found Farmstead Antiques, Davie County, North
 Carolina)
 Maroon on bright yellow (backing home-dyed walnut)
 Appliqued by hand and machine; cut from one piece; 8 lobes, smooth
 sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; open center.
 9 blocks ($20\frac{1}{2}$ " x $21\frac{1}{2}$ ") 82" x 66"
4. South Carolina, Lexington County ca. 1860
 Maker unknown
 Red/green; narrow red/green sashing
 Alternating colors; 8 lobes, smooth sides, serrated tops, 1 slot; center
 pieced.
 9 blocks 82" x 82" (approximately)
5. North Carolina, Wilkes County ca. 1850
 Margaret Jeanette McLean (1833–1919)
 Red; narrow red sashing; narrow red border
 Cut from one piece; 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; 5
 teardrop cut-outs in center.
 9 blocks ($21\frac{1}{2}$ " x $21\frac{1}{2}$ ") 70" x 70"

6. Possibly South Carolina ca. 1850
 Inscribed "H. J. Ross" (Owner descendent of Ross-Smith-Akers families of South Carolina and Virginia.)
 Red; red/white sashing and border made of pieced diamonds.
 One piece; 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; center solid, formed by cut-away part. (Information from Memorial Hall Museum; Deerfield, Massachusetts)
 9 blocks 87" x 88"
7. North Carolina, Lincoln County January 23, 1887
 Margaret Emma Poovey (1850–1925) (signed and dated)
 Red/green; 2" single red sashing
 Alternating, applique tulip corner each block; 8 lobes, serrated sides and tops, 2 slots; center open circle with green, then red figures.
 9 blocks (27" x 27") 87" x 85"
8. North Carolina, Alexander County ca. 1880
 Anna Watts Eckerd (1828–?)
 Green/tan (fugitive red); green sashing, narrow red binding
 Alternating; 6 lobes, serrated side and smooth tops, 2 slots; center pieced.
 9 blocks (20½" x 20½") 75" x 75"
9. North Carolina, Cabarrus County(?), or Virginia ca. 1870
 Maker unknown (Ancestors of owner were from North Carolina and Virginia.)
 Red; border swag cut from one piece
 Cut from one piece; 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; center a cut-out open "star" with eight points.
 9 blocks 95" x 95"
10. North Carolina, Forsyth County (?) ca. 1880
 Maker unknown
 Red/tan
 Alternating; 8 lobes, serrated all around, 2 slots; center pieced flower applique where blocks meet.
 Number of blocks unknown overall size unknown
11. North Carolina, Cleveland County ca. 1870
 Roxanna Jones Hamrick (1854–1936)
 Brownish red/dark green
 Alternating; 6 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; center pieced.
 6 whole blocks, 3 half blocks overall size unknown

12. South Carolina, county unknown nineteenth century
 Sally Simmons Martin
 Narrow red sashing; green corner blocks
 Alternating; 8 lobes, smooth sides, serrated tops, one slot; center pieced.
 9 blocks overall size unknown

13. North Carolina, Gaston County ca. 1850
 Unknown slave
 Dark blue on white
 Cut from one piece; 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; round
 center formed by cut-away part. (Information courtesy Cuesta Benberry)
 Number of blocks unknown overall size unknown

14. Texas ca. 1900
 Annie Dallom Weinert (1853–1946)
 Green/brown
 Alternating lobes with "javelins," 4 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2
 slots; center yellow circle.
 9 blocks (21" x 21") 74" x 69"

15. North Carolina, Iredell County (?)
 Photograph in *Statesville Record & Landmark*, January 19, 1966, 9.
 Displayed at a DAR meeting. To date, unable to locate owner. Color
 unknown (black & white photo); Approximately 3" sashing and border;
 8 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 3 slots.
 Number of blocks unknown overall size unknown

16. Missouri, county unknown ca. 1880
 Maker unknown
 Red
 Cut from one piece; 6 lobes, serrated sides, smooth tops, 2 slots; (heavily
 quilted with feathers, feathered wreaths, and close diagonal quilting.)
 Number of blocks unknown overall size unknown

17. Canada, (old label reads: From a house in Ontario) ca. 1850
 Maker unknown
 Green on white, one large medallion with 8 lobes in center with applique
 border.
 Length 210cm. (Information courtesy Royal Ontario Museum)

Catalog – Part II

1. South Carolina, Saluda County ca. 1862
Friendship Quilt by Marilla Rider Wyse and group for Allen Malancthon Wyse.
Album with three blocks of medallion (all are red/green alternating)
 - a. 12 lobes; 1 slot plus open center of lobe; round yellow center.
 - b. 8 lobes; 2 slots, serrated sides, smooth top; round yellow center; yellow under slots.
 - c. 8 lobes; 3 slots, serrated edges, round tops; center pieced.
2. South Carolina, Abbeville County ca. 1864
Martha Clark McCaslan Lindsay (1842–1920)
Green on white; green border
8 lobes, smooth edges, serrated tops, 1 slot; pieced center.
9 blocks (approximately 15") 92" x 86"
3. South Carolina, Abbeville County ca. 1870
Mary Elmira Tribble McAdams (1840–1917)
Album: 2 of 9 blocks are medallion
Red/green; swag and tulip border
Alternating; 8 lobes, smooth sides, serrated tops, 1 slot; center pieced.
9 blocks, (approximately 25½") 88" x 88"
4. South Carolina, Lexington County (?) ca. 1870
Temborah Rauch
Red/faded green/ narrow red print sash; wide print border
Alternating; 8 lobes, serrated all around, 2 slots, yellow under slots of red lobes; center pieced.
9 blocks size unknown
5. South Carolina, Lexington County ca. 1870
Mary Clark Smith (?–1900)
Orange/green; red/brown sash and border; scalloped edge; white binding
Alternating; 8 lobes, smooth all around, 2 slots; center pieced.
9 blocks size unknown

6. South Carolina, Lexington County ca. 1870
 Group album quilt for wedding of Mary Cummins Derrik and
 J. Silas McCarthy
 Green/brownish red
 Alternating; 8 lobes, serrated all around, 2 slots; green center with little
 points out to each lobe.
 One block of album 90" x 72"

7. South Carolina, Lexington County ca. 1880
 Eudocia Hendrix
 Red/green solids; red/green/white triple border
 Alternating; 8 lobes touching, serrated all around, 2 slots; pieced center.
 Number of blocks unknown 75" x 75"

8. South Carolina, Lexington County ca. 1880
 Shelley & Ida Ellison album quilt
 Green; single green sash and border
 6 lobes not touching, 1 slot, serrated all around.
 One block of 20" album (approximately 14") 86" x 70"

9. South Carolina, Lexington County ca. 1885
 Louisa Ritchie Craft (1841–1910)
 Red/green; wide single border of print stripe
 Alternating; 8 lobes touching, smooth all around, 2 slots; center pieced.
 9 blocks 101" x 95"

10. South Carolina, Oconee County ca. 1880
 Thode family
 Red/green; triple sash and border of green and white
 Alternating; 8 lobes touching, smooth sides, serrated top, 1 slot; center
 pieced.
 9 blocks 87" x 84"

11. South Carolina, county unknown ca. 1880
 Maker unknown
 Red solid/green print; cording between blocks, narrow red border added
 later.
 Alternating; 6 lobes, detached, serrated edges, smooth tops, 2 slots,
 center pieced.
 25 blocks (approximately 14½" x 14½") 76" x 73"

12. South Carolina, Spartanburg county ca. 1890
 Mary Elizabeth Tuck (1855 – ?)
 Red and white; 5 lattice strips and corner block forming checkerboard;
 double border
 One piece; 8 lobes detached, smooth all around, 2 slots; center round,
 formed by cut-away.
 9 blocks 86" x 80"
13. South Carolina, Newberry County ca. 1870
 Sarah Catherine Neel
 Fugitive red/green; single 14" print border
 Alternating, 8 lobes, serrated all around, 2 slots; center pieced.
 9 blocks 97" x 95"
14. North Carolina, (New Hanover County) ca. 1880
 Alcaine Elizabeth McCollough Ellison (1850 – ?)
 Red/green; print border
 Alternating; 8 lobes touching, serrated all around, 2 slots; center pieced.
 9 blocks size unknown

Notes and References

1. Interviews with Emma Kennerly Boyd, September 5, 1986, January 16, 1987; Mamie Houston, *The Mills Family in America* (Mooresville, N.C., unpublished manuscript, 1953).
2. Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Shinn, Shinn's Store, September 6, 1986.
3. St. Mary's County lies between the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers in Southern Maryland and was the site of the first landing, in 1634, of English settlers and first capital of Maryland.
4. For an excellent concise history of these migrations see Ralph Lee Smith, *The Story of the Dulcimer* (Crying Creek Publications, 1986).
5. George D. Terry and Lynn Robertson Myers, "Introduction," *Carolina Folk: The Cradle of a Southern Tradition* (Columbia, S.C.: McKissick Museum, 1985), vi.

6. Blanche Marsh, *Robert Mills: Architect in South Carolina* (Columbia: R. L. Bryan, 1970). The Irishman, James Hoban, had lived in Charleston and later designed buildings in the new Federal City, including the Capitol and the White House. Mills worked as a draftsman for Hoban on these projects.
7. Asher Benjamin, *The American Builder's Companion* (1827; reprint, New York: Dover, 1967).
8. *Iredell County Landmarks: A Pictorial History of Iredell County*, published by the Iredell County American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, ca. 1976, reprint 1982, p. 55.
9. H. G. Jones, ed., *North Carolina Illustrated*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 50–328.
10. For another opinion, see *Ladies Circle Patchwork Quilts* (July 1988), 4.

Appendix

The **medallion applique** and related designs in print:

1. Bishop, Robert, William Secord, and Judith Reiter Weissman: *Quilts, Coverlets, Ruggs and Samplers*. New York: Chanticleer Press, 1982.
p. 169 **Snowflake**, Ohio, ca. 1865, a blue on white 8-lobed figure, heavily quilted with feathered wreaths, etc.
2. Conroy, Mary. *Canada's Quilts*. Toronto, Canada: Griffin Press Ltd., 1976.
p. 57, a quilt having one large central motif similar to the **medallion applique**. An old label attached to this green on white quilt reads: "from a house in Wingham, Ontario."
3. Horton, Laurel. "Downhome and Uptown: A Patchwork of Carolina Textiles." *Carolina Folk: The Cradle of a Southern Tradition*, ed. George D. Terry and Lynn Robertson Myers. Columbia: McKissick Museum, 1985.
p. 48, **Medallion applique** (see Catalog Part II, #2).
4. Merriam, Mary and Suzanne L. Flynt. *Quilts: A Loan Exhibition at Memorial Hall Museum*. Deerfield, Mass.: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, 1985.
p. 9, fig. 9, **Snowflake**, ca. 1840.
p. 8, fig. 6, cutwork, ca. 1850, figure and border very similar to many jacquard coverlets.
5. *Ladies Circle Patchwork Quilts* (Fall 1984): 12, 13. Examples from the South Carolina Quilt History Project. Patterns similar to the **medallion**

applique; *Ladies Circle Patchwork Quilts* (Winter 1982): 10, shows a medallion-shaped figure in nine blocks plus a swag border by Elizabeth Foster (b. 1806); *Ladies Circle Patchwork Quilts* (Fall 1983): 30, nineteenth century quilt.

6. Texas Heritage Quilt Society. *Texas Quilts—Texas Treasures*. Paducah, Ky.: American Quilter's Society, 1986.
 p. 84 a quilt made by Annie Dallom Weinert, ca. 1900, using the lobe form of **medallion applique** with crossed javelins.
7. Kirkpatrick, Erma Hughes. "Garden Variety Applique." *North Carolina Quilts*, ed. Ruth Haislip Roberson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
 p. 87, pl. 3–19 *Cucumber* by Nancy Shaffner (1834-1906).
 p. 90, pl. 3–21 medallion applique by Emma Poovey, signed and dated 1877.