

The hallmark of the Victorian Era was change and quilters were as eager to try something new as anyone else.

### Why the American Victorian Era Came a Bit Late

We tend to think that the Victorian Age would be the years of Queen Victoria's rule from 1837 to 1901. But cultural changes occurring in Britain during this time took a while to make their way across the sea to the United States. Add to this the distraction of the Civil War and it is understandable why such a time lag occurred. Historians place the Victorian Era in America from about 1876 to 1914. As life settled down after the war between the states Americans were ready to embrace change. One new found interest for quilters was the making of Crazy Quilts.



### Crazy Quilting a New Quilt Making Fad

When we think of quilting at the turn of the century the first thing that comes to mind is the [Victorian Crazy Quilt](#). Although originally Crazy Quilts were made by upper class women with the money for expensive materials before long other women got in on the fad and found ways to make their own Crazy Quilts. Some were made from fancy clothing of the day that had been discarded or passed on to less affluent relatives. Women soon adapted the Crazy Quilts to be used for such fabrics as flannels, denims and other cottons. These quilts did not always have the decorative stitching and instead were often simply pieced.

### Trends in Everyday Quilts and Comforters

While the Crazy Quilt represented something of a peak of lavish embellishment in Victorian quilts we find that rural and other less affluent women were making quilts or comforters that were simple and functional. For many quilting was more a matter of saving pennies than art. These women were making something necessary for their household and needed to make them as efficiently as possible.

As a result there was a trend toward fewer quilting stitches per inch and many women simply tied their quilts. The batting used was much thicker so that one comforter could serve where 2 or 3 thinner quilts would have been needed. A farm woman could quickly sew up a quilt top with her sewing machine then tie the layers together, an economical alternative to buying blankets. These comforters (also called a comfort or comfortable) were made with both wool and cotton.



### The Not so Great Mass Produced Cottons

Traditional cotton quilts were still being made and cheaper mass-produced fabric made them quite affordable to make. Unfortunately, as a result of the competition to sell fabric at a low price, the quality of cottons decreased. Low thread counts and poor prints became common. Yet the abundant availability of fabric brought about some new styles in quilting as women tried to use as many different fabrics as possible in [Charm Quilts](#) that included 999 different prints and in postage stamp quilts using a great array of different fabrics to make an entire quilt of one inch squares.

### Even More New Quilt Styles

Other unique quilt styles popular during this period were embroidered [redwork quilts](#) and the stuffed [biscuit or puff quilts](#). The Victorian Era brought us some extraordinary quilt styles while the classic pieced quilt continued to be made.

### A Return to Traditional Quilting

During last years of the 1800s and into the 1900s the Arts and Craft Movement in America inspired people to go back to the old ways of bygone days. William Morris designed the Morris Chair to be functional with simple beauty. He also influenced both Europe and America to reject the cluttered opulence found in homes of the Victorian Era in the latter 1800s. Instead he inspired a simpler home décor including handcrafted furniture and beautiful decorative art including pottery and glass, all made by hand. Although traditional quilts were made all through the Victorian era as the Arts and Crafts movement gained prominence there was a resurgence of quilters making traditional patterns all by hand.



### [NEXT > Depression Era Quilts: Cheer in Fabric and Color](#)

Copyright 2007 Judy Anne Breneman

The Star of Bethlehem above was made by Mary Catherine Hall Dungan in 1915. It is shown with permission from her great-great granddaughter, Sherri Stapleton.