

Friendship quilts bring to mind dear friends and beloved relatives showing their care through a quilt.

Signature Quilts: The Humble and Proud

There are two distinct kinds of autograph quilts. Single pattern quilts are often referred to as "friendship quilts" while the more formal quilts made of different blocks are called sampler album quilts.

Although both carried on the same tradition of signed remembrances, they were quite different. Sampler album quilts were made up of several unique intricately pieced or appliquéd blocks. A friendship quilt was usually made of several blocks from the same pattern. These blocks could be quickly made from fabric scraps.



In her Clues in the Needlework newsletter Barbara Brackman wrote, "Many of the blocks in the early album quilts made between 1840 and 1860 featured elaborate ink signatures and small drawings and verses. By the time of the Civil War, album quilt inscriptions had become shorter and were more likely to include only the block maker's name, and perhaps his or her hometown or date."

Most 19th century signatures were written with indelible ink while in the 20th century they were often embroidered. Occasionally one person chosen for her beautiful handwriting would inscribe all the signatures. Some regional

signature quilts were inscribed in the fraktur calligraphy used to document important events by the Pennsylvania Germans.

Signed Quilts for Raising Money

Not all signature quilts were friendship quilts. Some were made to raise funds for various causes from missionary work to supporting troops during a war. The finished quilt may have been auctioned off or people may have paid a fee, often ten cents, to have their name placed on a block in the quilt.

Various ways of Assembling and Signing

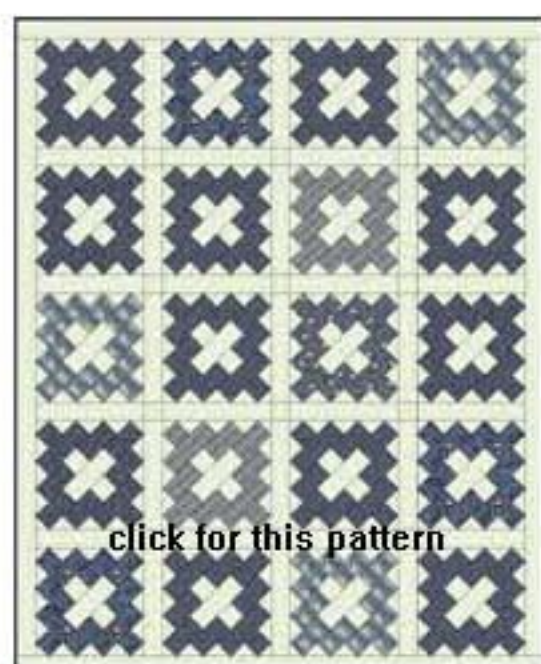
We tend to visualize a woman making and signing her block to be later sewn together into a friendship quilt. Although this was a common practice there were other ways a friendship quilt could be created. Sometimes a single person collected bits of fabric from others, made a block from each person's contribution then signed each block with that person's name. Many quilts included only names of women but others included the names of children and men as well.

These quilts were made by sewing together readily available fabric or scraps of old clothing. The making of these quilts was in the reach of almost any women no matter her financial circumstances.

Friendship quilts took time collecting fabric or blocks from each person, piecing them and then quilting the layers. Individual blocks on a quilt may have been made over several years and sometimes they were not put together into a quilt until years later. No matter how they were made they all had the same purpose, to record memories of cherished friends and family members.



Friendship Quilts: A Way of Connecting for Women



Imagine living in a time when families were large and women worked hard all day. A woman had to finish necessary sewing to provide clothing for the family before she could bring out her quilting fabric. Much of what we buy without a thought today had to be produced at home. Social time with family and neighbors was a highlight in a woman's life. What could be more fun than gathering together to quilt? The top would already have been pieced and the layers put together on a frame. Everything would be ready for the women to add their fine stitching.

The quilt might be a special one with signatures of friends and family. These friendship quilts served as a precious memory not only to women who stayed in one place all their life but also for those who moved on to hardships in westward lands. These pioneer women would only have occasional letters to connect them with friends and relatives. Many a lonely woman living out on an isolated homestead cherished her friendship quilt. It reminded her of the time when she lived among family and friends. In addition illness and war took dear ones away forever. Their name on a quilt became a precious remembrance.

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Thank you to Karolyn Jensen for permission to use the red signature block.

[Click to enjoy the delightful writing on this block!](#)

References:

["Clues in the Calico"](#) by Barbara Brackman

["For Purpose and Pleasure: Quilting Together in Nineteenth-Century America"](#), by Sandi Fox

["Quiltmaking in America: Beyond the Myths"](#), Laurel Horton (Editor)

["Remember Me: Women and Their Friendship Quilts"](#), by Linda Otto Lipsett

Barbara Brackman, *The Quilt Detective: Clues in the Needlework*, 2005, digital newsletter.

Webpages:

["Researching Signature Quilts"](#) by Karen Alexander

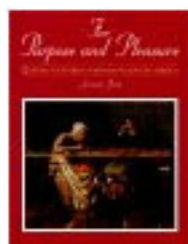
Be sure to read this if you have a signature quilt and want to learn more about it.

["Antique Signature and Album Quilt Types"](#) by Kimberly Wulfert

["Friendship Signature Quilt Top, Signed and Dated, 1910 - 1916"](#) by Kimberly Wulfert
This article includes close up pictures showing an interesting variety of ways a quilt could be signed as well as an invitation to help locate the people who have signed it.

Quilt Styles Index

Related Books



[For Purpose And
Pleasure : Quilting
Together in Nineteenth-
Century America](#)



[Remember Me: Women
& Their Friendship Quilts](#)

from Amazon.com

Karolyn Nubin Jensen gave me permission to use this signature block. Minard is her family name and by a serendipity series of events this and several other blocks make their way across the country and into Karolyn's hands.

It is an especially intriguing block. The little blessing before the signature is quite typical but the bit about wedded bliss below the name leaves me wondering why Fanny included this. There must be a wonderful story behind her reason for using that saying.

May God's mercy preserve thee
His power protect
His goodness upholds thee
His wisdom direct
Fanny Minard
March the 6 1857
Domestic happiness oh thou gem
so often sought but seldom found

