

I love to find unusual quilt history to tell you about. Tile quilts made in the last part of the 19th century are certainly unique.

What is a Tile Quilt?

This style quilt has also been called Stonewall or Stone Wall indicating a stone wall made of various shaped stones. Other names refer to streets or pavement. In the most basic form they are made up of odd sized shapes appliqued on a background leaving a narrow space of the background fabric between the pieces. Triangles and other geometric shapes are common but some of the shapes are more free form. The result looks like a tiled decorative piece with grout between the appliqued pieces.



from the Quilt Complex

How Were They Made?

The close up photo to the right gives you an idea of how they were made. In this case the quilt was made in individual squares than sewn together. But you need to be aware there were great variations in them. There appears to have been no set rules. Click to see one of the most fascinating, [the Hattie Burdick quilt](#). Note the kittens, flowers and other motifs that were cut out of printed fabric and appliqued onto the quilt.

A Crazy Quilt Connection?

Quilt Historian, Barbara Brackman suggests that "...these cotton tile quilts may be the predecessors of silk crazy quilts which are dated a few years later." One can see the similarity. The main difference is that the abstract pieces are separated by the strips of background instead of being sewn right against each other. They also lacked the decorative embroidery often seen in crazy quilts.

Or was the Style Brought From England?

Although surviving American quilts in this style date in the last quarter of the 19th century Kimberly Wulfert has observed, "English quiltmakers would appliqued irregular shapes and printed motifs onto strips of fabrics on whole cloth size pieces, in center panels of medallions and into pieced blocks." The earliest she found was dated 1810. There were interesting variations in these quilts and you can read more about them by following the "New England Quilt Museum" reference link below. You will also find a great picture of this style quilt there.

History and Patterns in a Book



Recently a new book has been published, "Tile Quilt Revival: Reinventing a Forgotten Form". The introduction of this book gives a short history on tile quilting along with photographs of examples. It explains that this style of quilt appeared primarily in New England, especially Connecticut.

Viewing the pictures I found it interesting how these quilts vary from the very organized to seemingly disorganized. I say "seemingly" as it must have taken careful planning to make any of these quilts. One quilt shown in the book is named "The Streets of Boston" and one can imagine it as an abstract map of the city.

The rest of the book includes ideas, instructions and some patterns for making your own tile quilt. As you will be able to see there are a great many ways you could go about this. You might want to reproduce one of the early tile quilts. But if you are in the mood for something new and different you will find ways to make everything from elegant to playful tile quilts.

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Thank you to [The Quilt Complex](#) for giving permission to display the example of a tile quilt shown above. Visit their site to discover the services they provide to museums, collectors, dealers, individuals and quilt guilds.

References:

"Barbara Brackman, The Quilt Detective: Clues in Pattern, 2007, digital newsletter."

"[Tile Quilt Revival: Reinventing a Forgotten Form](#)", Carol Gilham Jones and Bobbi finley

[New England Quilt Museum's Collage Collection](#) by Kimberly Wulfert

This article includes a picture of a tile quilt and the history of this style.