

The Power of Women's Temperance Movement Quilts

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Sewing for a cause is an old tradition. Women made quilts to raise money and consciousness both to promote the abolition of slavery and to promote women's rights. But the largest of all was the temperance movement.



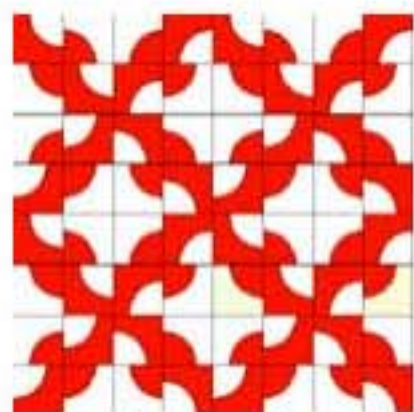
The Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874 and by 1907 the organization had 350,000 members. ¹ It appears that more quilts were made for this cause than any other.

Strong Women Against Strong Spirits

If you find an antique quilt with the letters W.C.T.U. in embroidery or ink you can be sure the quilt was made to promote the prohibition of alcoholic beverages. The quilt may include the names of members of a local chapter along with anti drinking slogans.

In the late 1800s women would pay a dime to get their name on what was sometimes called a "Crusader Quilt" ² probably based on the Woman's Crusade of 1873-74 in which anti drinking activity reached a peak with women taking direct action to close down saloons.

Temperance Colors and Patterns



Although any quilt pattern could be used to make a temperance quilt the Drunkard's Path and Temperance Tee are two blocks that are often associated with temperance quilts. Neither quilt was actually designed for this purpose and both have been called many other names. It appears they were block patterns that were renamed to fit the prohibition theme. As you can see from the Drunkard's Path block pictured here that the design makes one think of a drunkard's staggering walk. These quilts were often made in two colors of fabric, blue or red with white. Seen in contrasting colors the staggering path is especially clear.

Although other colors were used many temperance quilts were made in blue and white. "Blue and white became the union's colors: white for purity and blue for water, the purest beverage". ³ A member of the Blue Ribbon Army wore a distinctive blue badge to demonstrate commitment to temperance.

A "T" For Temperance or Teetotaler?

The word "temperance" implies use in moderation and indeed those who pledged temperance could still drink wine and beer. On the other hand a "teetotaler" forswore all alcohol. A "T" by a name on old meeting roles indicated a person who believed in total abstinence. Quilt designs recorded around the turn of the century with names like Double T, Capital T, Imperial T and Kansas T usually signified the temperance movement or the pride of being a teetotaler. ⁴ These blocks incorporated the letter T in various configurations. The block at the top of this page is made of 4 letter Ts.



These patterns have been used to earn money for the women's temperance movement or for family quilts made by the quilters to represent their belief in temperance or teetotaling. Fortunately some of the surviving quilts in these patterns have slogans and names on them so we can be sure of their purpose. In the case of unmarked quilts in these traditional temperance patterns we can only wonder if they were made for the temperance cause or if the pattern simply appealed to the quilter.

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Here are [Two Free Temperance Block Patterns](#)

New research indicates the patterns mentioned above may not have been used as much as earlier references have indicated. Read [Drunkard's Path Quilts, T Quilts, and the W. C. T. U.](#) to learn more.

References:

¹ p15, ["Hearts and Hands"](#) by Pat Ferrero, Julie Silber (Contributor), Elaine Hedges (Contributor),

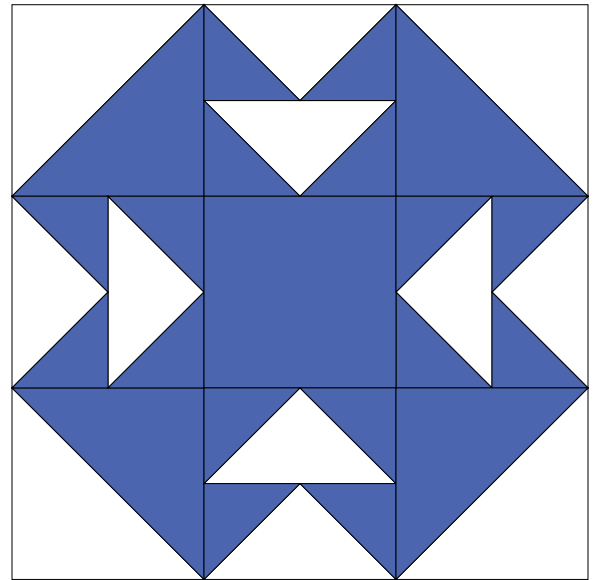
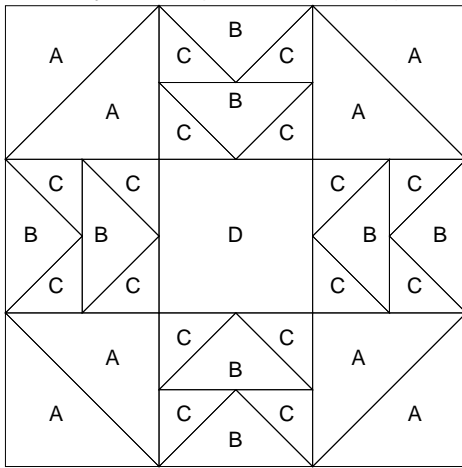
² pp40-41, ["The American Quilt Story"](#), by Susan Jenkins & Linda Seward

³ p76 ["Quilted all Day: The Prairie Journals of Ida Chambers Melugin"](#) by Carolyn O'Baggy Davis

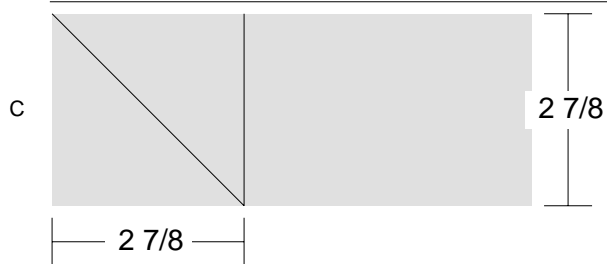
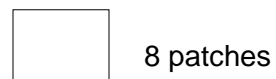
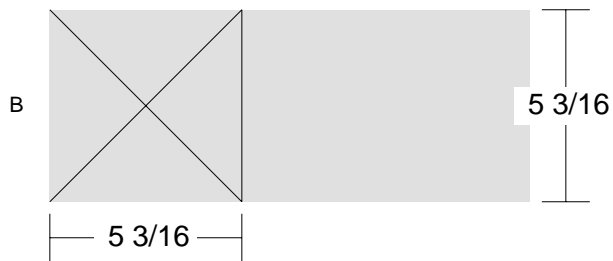
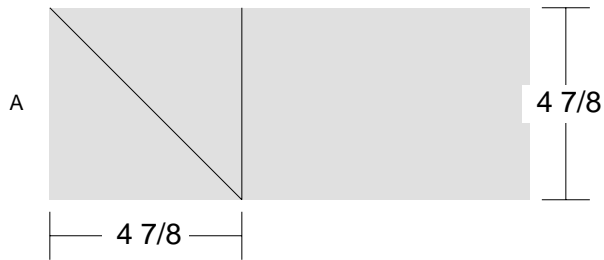
⁴ p33 & 34 ["Kansas Quilts and Quilters"](#) by Brackman, Chinn, Davis & Thompson

Temperance T

Key Block (1/5 actual size)



Cutting Diagrams





Solomon's Puzzle

Pattern for 12.00x12.00 block
Key Block (29/100 actual size)

