



People often ask me about a pattern's history. How I wish there were a magical place where I could go to find answers to all your quilt pattern history questions, but the truth of the matter is that it's not so easy.

Patterns Shared Woman to Woman

To understand the dilemma we have to go back to before quilt patterns were commonly published. Women created patterns on their own or borrowed them from friends. A woman in the city might carefully copy a new pattern on paper and mail it to her sister who lived out on a remote homestead.

Pattern Books of Cloth

Stacks of quickly sewn blocks can be found in attics and estate sales. These were probably a woman's collection of patterns copied from friends. They were essentially pattern books in cloth.

The Confusion of Names

Sometimes the pattern that was shared had a name that was passed on to others. Other times the quilt maker just gave her quilt a name she liked. Meanwhile another woman might have designed a different pattern and decided to name it exactly the same as the first woman. As a result we have identical quilt block patterns with many different names. The star quilt to the right is a great example. I found over a dozen different names for it. But we also find many differing quilt patterns with the same name.



Patterns in Publications

Even after patterns were published in magazines and newspapers much of this confusion continued. Although quilt publications did help standardize many patterns sorting it all out was a tremendous job. Barbara Brackman set out to do just that in her book *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* which includes drawings of over 4,000 quilt blocks with their names. She used only quilt patterns and names that have been documented in magazines, newspapers for other such sources.

You are probably thinking that all you have to do is buy or borrow the book. Surely you can find that exact name for the pattern that Aunt Bessie made for your grandmother back in 1920. Sadly, I must tell you that the pattern may be in the book but it might have two or three names. Or you may not be able to find it at all. Remember many quilt patterns and pattern names have been passed from woman and woman and were never documented in a publication.

So when you are looking for the pattern name and history of a family heirloom quilt you may not be able to find the information you seek especially if it is an antique quilt. Vintage quilts are more likely to have been published in a magazine or newspaper but that still doesn't always tell us who first designed the pattern.

The Challenge

In spite of this muddle of information I intend to take on the challenge of finding and sharing information on patterns and their history. I suspect that on some I will be able to find a little, on others the information will be sketchy and most will be lost in the mists of the past. But like many of you I am curious about quilt patterns and will enjoy pouring through books and websites to see what I can find for you.