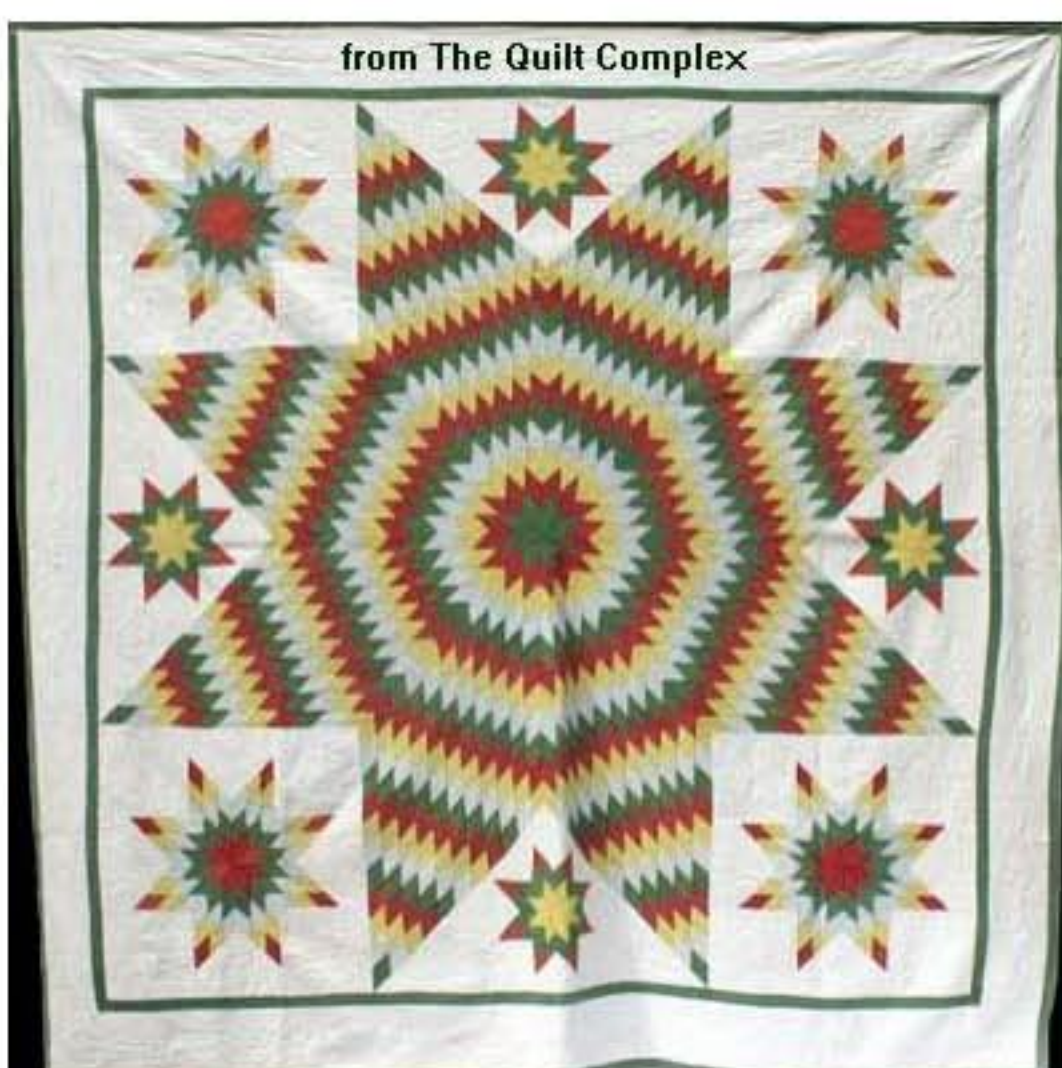


by Kimberly Wulfert, PhD. Quilt Historian

The Lone Star quilt block is likely one of the most recognizable quilt patterns to Americans. It is also one of the oldest patterns, along with the Mariner's Compass, Orange Peel, Job's Trouble and Irish chain. But this is a pattern known by many names. There are variations of it with 6 points, 8 points (the most common design) or even more.

Various Lone Star quilt pattern names are given to the pattern with a large central star, made up of diamond shaped fabric to form the star points from the center out. Often the colors are chosen and placed to form what appear to be concentric circles radiating around the center. It is placed in the center of the quilt top and can be appliquéd down to the background or pieced in. Sometimes other tiny stars are placed in the large blank areas surrounding the star, or flowers may be appliquéd in those areas.



Varied Names Over Time & Space

This old multi-pieced star block is known by many names. The Mathematical Star was an early name used in England and along the Eastern U.S. seaboard, especially near Baltimore. The Star of Bethlehem is a well-known name for it all around the country and is still used today. Other names for the same pattern are the Star of the East, Morning Star, which is what Native American's call it, and Lone star, which is the name given to this pattern by Texan quilters because they are called the lone star state.



But this same Star pattern, when made much smaller so that many cover the surface of the quilt, is known by other names such as Blazing Stars, and when these points are touching, is called Touching Stars. When a large lone star is placed inside of a curved set of similar diamond shape blocks that encircle it and form half-stars, and then it is called a Broken Star.

The Amish liked the large central Star pattern, as did the southern states, across the US. The Central states made their fair share, but it seems more were made closer to the last quarter of the 19th century and in to the 20th century's first two quarters. I personally haven't seen this pattern in quilts from the upper New England states and could not find any pictured in the Vermont book, "Plain and Fancy", or in "The Empire State", NY's state project book. Many seem to come out of Pennsylvania. In "Lest I shall Be Forgotten," which studied quilts near Philadelphia in the Montgomery County documentation project, it states the Rising Star is typical of regional quilts of this design and are primarily found in the northern part of the region. In "Texas Quilts, Texas Treasures" there is a Lone Star burial quilt pictured and made of black and white diamonds on a black background. This quilter made one for each grandchild which they were to be buried in it when their time came. In the meantime, the quilts were used to cover the body of other family members, as they lay in wait for their pine coffin to be built.

A Difficult Pattern Mastered by Few

Although many quilts seem to have been started using a variation of this pattern, often the large star by itself, not yet placed onto a background or pieced into one, is found in antique shops. Or just the top is found for sale, because when it is laid flat, the center pouches up, or the sides are cock-eyed and the corners are crooked. Intermediate to advanced skills were needed to make these often hand-pieced stars because each and every tiny diamond has bias edges and the triangles and corners are set in with the "Y" seam.



The Rising Star quilt at the Smithsonian is an example of this style and is pictured in many books, including "The Empire State." Interestingly, it was used as the document piece for the first reproduction fabrics that the museum produced in conjunction with the fabric company, RJR, in the earlier 1990s.

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