

What can be more romantic than a Double Wedding Ring Quilt? Although this pattern is often thought of as a twentieth century quilt it appears to have evolved from a very old design.

The motif of two interlocking rings goes as far back as the fourth century when it was used to decorate Roman cups. These cups were made of glass decorated with connecting metal rings.



Another early example of interlocking rings is found in the gimmel ring. These rings were popular in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. They consisted of rings that could be interlocked. During the engagement one was worn by the man and the other by the women. When they married the two rings were fitted together to be worn by the wife.

It is thought this style of ring came to America through Germanic people who settled in Pennsylvania in the late 17th century. This pattern of interlocking rings was seen on coverlets, ceramics and other decorative objects in early America.

Of Romantic and Mythical Stories

The Double Wedding Ring pattern was first published by Capper's Weekly in 1928. This Topeka, Kansas publication added a bit of mythical romance to go with the pattern by writing, "When some good but unknown man conceived the idea of a double wedding ring ceremony it gave his wife an equally good idea. She worked two circles into a double wedding ring quilt." ¹



friendship knot

Another delightful myth was published in a 1932 brochure which connected the Double Wedding Ring quilt to the Civil War. The publication offered this story of how the pattern came to be named. It seemed a grandmotherly woman had made a great many quilts. One was particularly special and she was saving it for her niece's wedding. Sadly the wedding had been delayed because the potential groom had been wounded in the war and spent several years away in the hospital. He finally came home

and a wedding was planned but he had no rings for the wedding. When the bride to be told her beloved aunt that the rings would have to wait, the older woman said, "My child, I'll furnish the rings. You shall have my favorite quilt and we will call it the Double Wedding Ring." ¹

All that I've written so far is fascinating, but still simply myth and speculation. The facts, as in most quilt patterns, are hard to trace.

True Origins Lost in a Maze of Names

A quilt made much like the Double Wedding Ring is in the Shelburne Museum, dated 1825-50. This quilt is titled Pincushion; see an example to the right.² But the actual Double Wedding Ring pattern appears to have been rarely used until the 1920s. Part of the difficulty in tracing the earlier use of this pattern is the fact that over time it was made under around 40 different names. Just a few are; Rainbow, Around the World, Pickle Dish, Coiled Rattlesnake, Endless Chain, King Tut and Friendship Knot; see the example above to the left. The great variety of names illustrates how differently the pattern was visualized in various periods and regions. In reading an early diary or letter we might easily find the pattern under another name. We can't be sure if the writer was really referring to a Double Wedding Ring like pattern or not.



pincushion quilt

It appears that in early quilts of this pattern the pieces of the rings were first sewn together then appliquéd on solid fabric. Around the beginning of the 20th century women began to sewing it together as a pieced quilt. Whatever the method it was a difficult quilt to make. Carrie A. Hall wrote down her this opinion on the Double Wedding Ring in her 1935 book, "Real quilt enthusiasts delight in this all-over pattern but it is hardly the design for the novice to undertake." ³ Because of this difficulty the double wedding ring pattern was a popular one for cheater fabric. A women could decorate her bed with a quilt in which the only sewing required was quilting the layers together.

The Quilt That Brought Romance to the Great Depression

Throughout the 30s and 40s the Double Wedding Ring quilt had become quite common. Several newspapers and magazines published patterns and articles about it. Kits were sold with the fabrics precut. Even fairs got into the enthusiasm about this pattern sometimes putting Double Wedding Ring quilts into a special category.

It has been suggested that the popularity of this pattern during the depression era was due to the fact that many scraps could be used. This reasoning doesn't make sense though as a good deal of solid fabric had to be purchased for the background of the wedding ring. An exception to this might be the nine-patch variation of the wedding ring; see the example to the right. This pattern included scraps in the centers instead of the outer ring.



9 patch variation wedding

The Double Wedding Ring was usually made up for good or special occasion use. I can't imagine children being allowed to jump on or even play on a bed topped by this lovely quilt. In an interview with an elderly woman telling about her cotton sack quilts she explains about one exception to her usual use of sacks for fabric. "Now that Wedding Ring quilt over there. It's domestic. That's not made from sacks. That's material from dresses. You could buy dress material for eight cents a yard. You could make a dress for eighty five cents."⁴

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References:

¹ ["The Romance of Double Wedding Ring Quilts"](#) by Robert Bishop, pp 5 & 6

² ["Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns"](#) by Barbara Brackman, p 58, pattern 301

³ ["The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt"](#) by Carrie A. Hall & Rose G. Kretsinger, p 101

⁴ ["Soft Covers for Hard Times"](#) by Marikay Waldvogel, p 71

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